

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Daniela Ilieva, VUZF

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

for the academic position of "**Associate Professor**"

at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance

in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic Marketing and Innovations in Marketing)"

In the competition for "Associate Professor" announced in the State Gazette, issue 5 of 17.01.2025 and on the website of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, Dr. Ivaylo Iliev from UNWE/VUZF participated as a candidate.

1. General presentation of the received materials

By order No. 152 of 13.05.2025 of the Rector of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of 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 professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic Marketing and Innovations in Marketing)".

Only one candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition:

Dr. Ivaylo Iliev, UNWE/VUZF.

The set of materials on an electronic medium submitted by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of VUZF and includes the following documents:

- Curriculum Vitae (CV);
- Diploma for the educational and scientific degree of "doctor";
- List of publications and full texts of the main scientific works;
- Reference for scientific contributions;

- Reference for scientific metrics/ indicators;
- List of citations;
- Monograph “Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization” (2025);
- Additional scientific publications, including a book, articles, studies and participation in scientific forums;
- Official note on academic workload.

The candidate Dr. Ivaylo Iliev has submitted a total of 16 scientific papers (4 in English, 12 in Bulgarian), of which 1 study, 1 monograph, 1 book and 13 research papers. All of them are accepted for review.

2. Brief biographical data (of the candidate)

Dr. Ivaylo Iliev was born on 26.02.1991. He graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree in finance and public finance at the University of National and World Economy, and in 2020. is defending a doctoral dissertation on the topic "Alternative Approach to Management and Evaluation of Public Programs". He is currently a university lecturer at VUZF and UNWE. In his teaching activities, he integrates innovative approaches and current examples from business and e-commerce.

His professional career includes management positions in Bulgarian and international companies. He was the CEO and co-founder of several retail and online brands, including Feya Naturals, Vehadi Wellness and Heka Naturals. In his role as CEO and marketing manager at Amazon-media, Dr. Iliev has gained significant experience in the field of strategic brand positioning, digital platforms and customer behavioral analysis. He has a solid practical and technological profile - he completed additional training in .NET and web development at Software University (SoftUni). He is proficient in project management, digital communications and web technologies, which makes him a modern lecturer and researcher in the digital economy.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

Dr. Iliev has accumulated pedagogical experience in higher education. His lectures are focused on strategic and digital marketing, budget policy, public finance and welfare economics. He works actively with students and graduates and participates in the development of curricula and materials.

The training he provides is in line with current trends in the digitalization of management and marketing practices.

Assessment of the candidate's scientific and applied scientific activities

The habilitation thesis "Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization" represents a current and interdisciplinary study. The monograph is of high practical and theoretical value. His additional monograph "Public Networks - an Approach to Managing Public Administration" examines new management paradigms and has a scientific contribution to the field of public management. In general, the presented scientific works demonstrate methodological maturity, they have been published in peer-reviewed and indexed publications, as evidence of scientific contribution are the 8 attached citations, as my personal reference, I found several more.

Contributions (scientific, applied science, applied) and citations

Main contributions included in the habilitation thesis

The monograph "Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization" (2025) is a comprehensive and interdisciplinary work in which the candidate:

- formulates a new conceptual framework for strategic marketing in the digital era;
- develops a model for digital marketing planning, including market analysis, brand positioning and digital channels;
- analyzes the impact of artificial intelligence, influencer marketing and social networks on consumer behavior and business strategies;
- presents empirical analyses of international e-commerce companies;
- proposes original strategic solutions for the development of online commerce and customer engagement.

The thesis has a clear scientific and applied nature, reflecting current trends in the digital economy and marketing.

Thematic and applied contributions in other works:

1. Network management and public administration:

- A comprehensive theoretical framework for network management in the public sector has been developed;
- Types of public networks, management mechanisms and strategic guidelines for decentralization have been systematized;
- Models for effective interaction between public, private and civil structures have been formulated, as well as criteria for assessing network performance.

2. Digitalization and micro/small business:

- Research on the challenges facing SMEs has been presented, as well as practical guidelines for sustainable growth;
- Digital strategies for micro and small enterprises and guidelines for using digital channels for business development have been developed.

3. Marketing innovations and technologies:

- Models for integrating AI and machine learning in marketing have been formulated;
- The role of innovation hubs and startups in creating new marketing trends has been studied;
- Ethical frameworks and practical guidelines for implementing personalized AI marketing strategies have been developed.

4. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The scientific works and habilitation work of Dr. Ivaylo Iliev reflect a clearly expressed personal contribution both at the theoretical and applied levels. All publications and both monographs are independent, which emphasizes his individual commitment to research and independence in scientific work.

The candidate's personal contribution is expressed in:

- the formulation of author's concepts and models, including strategic approaches to digital marketing and network management;
- integration of interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of economics, marketing and public management;
- linking theoretical research with real practical cases and business applications;

- application of modern research methods, including data analysis and synthesis of international experience.

In summary, Dr. Iliev's contributions are up-to-date, applicable, methodologically sound and of clear economic and social significance. They fully meet the criteria for the academic position of "associate professor".

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

The materials presented by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev are of the required volume, well-structured and meet the requirements of the procedure. However, a few remarks can be noted, more as recommendations aimed at future improvement of the candidate's scientific and teaching activities.

I would recommend a more prominent scientific focus. Some of the publications examine topics that extend between different scientific fields - economics, public administration, marketing, digitalization. This expands the applicability of the research, but creates a feeling of relatively broad, not sufficiently in-depth specialization. It is recommended that in the future he focuses on building a clearly outlined scientific school and deepening along a selected thematic line.

Given the candidate's language skills, international visibility can be significantly increased by publishing in more refereed foreign journals with an impact factor, participating in international conferences and collaborating on projects with foreign universities and research units.

All submitted works are independent. More active participation in collective research projects and co-authored publications is recommended, which would contribute both to broadening the scientific perspective and to easier integration into the academic community.

6. Personal impressions

I do not know the candidate personally and have no personal impressions.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law and the relevant Regulations of VUZF.

The candidate in the competition has presented a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the PhD. The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received national and international recognition, some of which have been published in journals and scientific collections published by international academic publishing houses. His theoretical developments have practical applicability and are directly oriented towards academic work. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Dr. Ivaylo Iliev are undoubted.

The results achieved by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev in the educational and scientific research activities fully comply with the Regulations of VUZF for the application of the Law.

After familiarizing myself with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific, scientifically applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Academic Council for the election of Dr. Ivaylo Iliev to the academic position of "associate professor" at VUZF in the professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic Marketing and Innovations in Marketing)"

20.05.2025

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Daniela Ilieva