

R E V I E W

by prof. Dr. Mariana Mateeva Petrova

on a competition for the academic position "associate professor", area of higher education

3. Social, economic and legal sciences scientific direction 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic Marketing and Innovations in Marketing)"

at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance

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

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.**

The set of materials 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 "PHD";
- 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";
- Additional scientific publications (book, articles, studies and 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 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". 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: 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 scientific research and applied scientific activity

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 monograph "Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization" is of high practical and theoretical value. The book "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.

The work for awarding the ONS "Doctor" is not repeated, for which a separate report is submitted by the candidate.

A. 50 Points - Dissertation paper for awarding educational and scientific degree "Doctor"(PhD)

B. 100 Points - Habilitation thesis (monograph)

Г. 250 Points:

75 points: Published book based on a defended dissertation work for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" or for the award of a scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"

30 points: Articles and reports published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information

110 points: Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes

15 points: Studies published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes

30 points: Published chapter of a collective monograph

65 points Citations

All submitted works are independent.

Iliev, I. (2025). Creating Brand Equity Through AI-Driven Personalization Strategies // София (online издание), ISSN: 2815-391X

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".

4. Basic scientific and applied scientific contributions

The presented publications are aimed at the study of current theoretical and applied problems in the field of management and economics. The problems developed in them can be grouped in the following directions:

The monograph "Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization" 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:

- linking theoretical research with real practical cases and business applications;
- the formulation of author's concepts and models, including strategic approaches to digital marketing and network management;
- 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".

I accept authorship claims for scientific and scientific-applied contributions formulated in the abstracts. They correspond to the theme of the competition. Summarizing the specific evaluations for the works, I believe that Ivaylo Iliev, PhD, is aware of the criteria established in science for the presence of scientific usefulness in them. I have no doubt about the candidate's personal contribution to the peer-reviewed publications, expressed in deep research, creative thinking and further development of theory and methodology in the areas in which he works. I value the scientific and applied contributions in the presented scientific production as personal contributions to modern science.

I highly appreciate the candidate's scientific and applied scientific activity. The presented scientific production is logically connected, scientifically substantiated and empirically confirmed.

5. Critical notes and recommendations

I do not report significant errors and inaccuracies in the publications submitted for review, but I can note the following recommendations for improving future work:

1. The author's scientific research should continue in the future on the investigated problem and their results should be published in international publications c **IF/IR**, for which the candidate has extensive practical experience and scientific potential.
2. Participation in international conferences, and preferential publication in English, with the aim of greater recognition in scientific circles and popularization of scientific research.
3. More active participation in collective research projects

6. Personal impressions

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

CONCLUSION

The submitted materials for the competition meet the requirements of the Law for development of academic staff in Republic of Bulgaria /LDASRB/, the Rules for the implementation of the LDASRB, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law and the

relevant Regulations of VUZF for the terms and conditions for occupying the academic position associate professor in professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic Marketing and Innovations in Marketing)".

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 critical remarks made do not detract from the materials presented by the applicant, but are intended to refine the assessment.

On the basis of the above, I give a positive assessment and strongly recommend to the honorable scientific jury to propose 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)"

06.06.2025

Reviwer:

/ Prof. Mariana Petrova, PhD/