

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Teodora Milcheva Lazarova

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of
associate professor at VUZF

in the field of higher education 3. *"Economic, social and legal sciences", professional direction
3.8 Economics*

In the competition for "Associate professor", announced in the State Newspaper, issue 5 of
17.01.2025, Ivaylo Petrov Iliev from 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 "Social, economic and
legal sciences", professional direction 3.8. "Economics", scientific specialty "Marketing (Strategic
marketing and innovations in marketing)".

The only candidate to participate in the announced competition was Dr. Ivaylo Petrov Iliev.

The set of materials on paper and electronic media presented by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev is in
accordance with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of VUZF and includes
the following documents:

- Main habilitation thesis - monograph, reviewed by two habilitation persons;
- List of publications;
- Curriculum vitae in European format;
- Copy of diploma No. 503 / 26.06.2020 for awarding the educational and scientific degree
"Doctor", issued by the University of National and World Economy.
- Summaries of publications in Bulgarian and English;
- Certificate of fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position
of "Associate Professor";

- Certificate of original scientific contributions in the presented works;
- Certificate of teaching activity over the last three calendar years.
- Other documentation, in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of VUZF.

The candidate Dr. Ivaylo Iliev has submitted 16 scientific works: 1 habilitation work (monographic study), 1 book based on a defended dissertation work, 1 study, 1 chapter of a collective monograph, 12 articles. Two of the articles are in English and one is published in a scientific publication, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information Scopus and Web of Science.

Three of the submitted articles are not reviewed and are not included in the final assessment for the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements under the Law on the State Administration of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation: "Local Self-Government and Program Budgeting" (2018), "Digitalization of Processes in the Public Network" (2019), "Main Characteristics of Network Management in the Public Sector" (2020). These publications are included in the abstract of Ivaylo Iliev as a basis for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Dr. Ivaylo Iliev is a Doctor of Public Administration, having obtained his scientific degree from the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) with a dissertation on the topic "Alternative Approach to Management and Evaluation of Public Programs". He has completed a Master's degree in Public Finance and a Bachelor's degree in Finance at the same university. His academic training was supplemented by training at the Software University (SoftUni), where he studied network and web technologies - knowledge of increasing importance in the digital economy and business education.

Dr. Iliev has valuable teaching experience at various universities:

- At the UNWE, he teaches courses in welfare economics and budget policy;
- At VUZF, he teaches strategic marketing, digital marketing and fundamentals of marketing.

In parallel with his academic activities, Dr. Iliev has significant management and entrepreneurial experience, mainly in the fields of e-commerce, digital branding and strategic management. He is actively involved in international online business and is the CEO of several successful brands operating on the Amazon platform.

This practice allows him to acquire:

- In-depth knowledge of digital platforms and marketing tools;
- Expertise in strategic management, design and implementation of business strategies;
- Understanding of international markets and growth opportunities through e-commerce;
- Skills that enrich the learning process with real business cases and perspectives.

Combining his academic training with real-world experience from the business environment, Dr. Iliev:

- Presents practically oriented examples that connect theory with current business situations;
- Prepares students for the challenges of digitalization, innovation and strategic planning;
- Acts as a mentor in areas such as business development, public policy, marketing and digital transformation.

Dr. Iliev's interdisciplinary profile – combining knowledge in economics, public management, digital technologies and marketing – establishes him as a valuable lecturer and consultant. He is well-positioned to contribute to academic programs oriented to the contemporary needs of the public and private sectors.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activity

The monographic work of Dr. Ivaylo Iliev, entitled *"Strategic Marketing in the Conditions of Digitalization"*, is a work consisting of 153 pages of main text, accompanied by a list of figures and tables, as well as a bibliography. In support of the study, 6 sources in Bulgarian, 113 sources in English and 7 websites were used. The main focus of the monograph is the influence of digitalization on marketing. The author analyzes how digital technologies change classic

marketing strategies, emphasizing the transition from traditional models to digital platforms. Special attention is paid to:

- the impact of digitalization on consumer behavior;
- the change in market analysis approaches;
- new opportunities for creating value for the customer.

The study highlights the need for business organizations to adapt to digital transformation in order to maintain their competitiveness in the dynamic market environment. The author traces how the implementation of digital tools and platforms changes the business environment and market segmentation processes, as well as the importance of data analysis and artificial intelligence in making strategic decisions. A significant part of the monograph is dedicated to the role of branding in the digital environment. The author explores the mechanisms for creating and maintaining strong brands online, emphasizing the importance of brand identity, as well as building emotional and psychological connections between brands and consumers through digital communication channels.

The monograph examines in depth how digitalization is changing consumer expectations and behavior, emphasizing the need for personalized and value-oriented marketing. Special attention is paid to the different dimensions of value - functional, psychological and financial, which are important for both consumers and businesses.

The author identifies key challenges facing organizations in the modern digital environment:

- increasing competition;
- issues related to the protection of personal data;
- the need to adapt to rapid technological changes.

In addition, key opportunities are outlined, such as:

- expanding access to global markets;
- higher consumer engagement;

- implementation of innovative marketing approaches.

Theoretical contribution

Among the main contributions of the monograph is the theoretical framework proposed by Dr. Iliev, which integrates classical marketing principles with modern digital strategies. This framework offers a structured model for understanding and analyzing digital market dynamics. The in-depth analysis of digital branding and user experience enriches the scientific literature and demonstrates successful approaches to building strong brands in an online environment, emphasizing the creation of emotional and psychological value.

Applied Aspects

The monograph includes practical examples and case studies based on real e-commerce companies that demonstrate how strategic marketing functions in a digital context. These examples are a valuable resource for both the academic community and practicing specialists.

Perspectives and Future Analysis

Dr. Iliev's work not only analyzes the current state of digital marketing, but also lays the foundations for predicting its future development directions. Particular attention is paid to the role of artificial intelligence and big data as drivers of transformation in marketing practices, which contributes to their faster implementation in the real business environment.

The book “*Public Networks – An Approach to Public Administration Management*”, based on the doctoral dissertation of Dr. Ivaylo Iliev, presents an in-depth analysis of the possibilities for implementing network management in the public sector. The research includes practical models applicable in key public spheres such as education, healthcare and social services. The conclusions drawn in the book are particularly significant in the context of the ongoing processes of decentralization and modernization of public administration. The volume of the publication is 122 pages, using 139 sources – 5 in Bulgarian and the rest in English.

The other scientific works with which Dr. Iliev participated in the competition reflect his research activity in recent years. They cover interrelated topics in the field of public administration, digital transformation, strategic marketing, as well as the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

His research offers an in-depth look at:

- the evolution of public administration through network management;
- the role of program budgeting for the effective functioning of local government;
- the need for strategic financial planning that links public spending with measurable and socially significant results.

Dr. Iliev formulates specific strategic guidelines for improving coordination between state institutions, the civil sector and business, aimed at achieving more effective and open governance. In the field of digital transformation of public administration, the author emphasizes the significant impact of new technologies on the efficiency of administrative processes and on citizen engagement. In his publications, he argues for the need for new management models and the development of technical and digital competencies necessary for modern governance. Special attention is paid to the structural and behavioral changes that accompany the digitalization process.

Another important emphasis in Dr. Iliev's research work is aimed at the development and digital adaptation of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Bulgaria. In a series of applied analyses, he examines:

- the challenges faced by MSMEs;
- the opportunities for improving access to finance;
- the role of digital marketing;
- the processes of business internationalization.

Dr. Iliev's scientific publications dedicated to the application of artificial intelligence and machine learning in marketing also deserve special attention. In them, he formulates a strategic approach to the ethical and effective use of these technologies, with his proposals aimed at both the academic environment and the practical business context.

His scientific contributions are distinguished by the following key characteristics:

- development of integrative conceptual frameworks that successfully connect theoretical models with practical application in management and marketing;

- focus on digital transformation, viewed not simply as a technological, but as a strategic and organizational process;
- analysis of real problems and challenges in the Bulgarian social and business environment, with the proposed solutions having universal applicability;
- empirical validity of the conclusions through the use of studies, practical cases and comparative analyses.

This approach solidifies Dr. Iliev as a researcher who manages to combine innovative thinking with applicability, providing benefit to both the academic community and organizations seeking orientation in the conditions of a rapidly developing digital environment.

4. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

The monograph by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev represents a modern and in-depth study on strategic marketing in the context of the digital age. It successfully combines theoretical foundations with specific practical applications, offering innovative ideas that are of interest to both the scientific community and marketing professionals. The author's focus on digital transformation, brand building and consumer behavior is complemented by a broad view of the challenges and new opportunities that the modern marketing environment offers.

The remaining publications by Dr. Iliev complement the main topic by presenting working strategies and tools applicable in the conditions of intensive technological and managerial changes in both the public and private sectors.

Based on the content and scope of the submitted works, I believe that they are the result of the author's independent research activity and meet the thematic requirements of the announced competition. The interdisciplinary approach applied by Dr. Iliev clearly demonstrates his potential as a researcher in areas such as modernization of public administration and strategic marketing in the context of digitalization.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

A certain thematic overlap is noticeable in some of the publications, especially in the areas of network management and digital marketing. In the future, Dr. Iliev could focus his efforts on more targeted interdisciplinary research that integrates management, marketing and digital

transformation in light of global challenges such as sustainable development, artificial intelligence and consumer behavior research. Such topics would not only enrich his scientific profile, but would also enhance the international relevance and visibility of his scientific activity. I recommend that Dr. Iliev expand the empirical base of his research through larger-scale quantitative and qualitative studies. This will contribute to increasing the analytical value and practical applicability of his research.

6. Personal impressions

I know Dr. Ivaylo Iliev from our joint work at VUZF. Dr. Iliev always completes his assignments on time. The feedback from students is positive and I believe he will be a valuable addition to the university's teaching team.

7. Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Holding Academic Positions at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance. The candidate in the competition has presented a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the ONS "doctor". The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions. His theoretical developments have practical applicability, and some of them are directly oriented towards academic work.

The results achieved by Dr. Ivaylo Iliev in academic and research activities fully comply with the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Holding Academic Positions at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance. After reviewing the materials and scientific papers submitted in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific, applied scientific 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 Petrov Iliev to the academic position of "Associate Professor" at VUZF in the professional field 3.8. "Economics".

13.06.2025

Reviewer:

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