



REVIEW

by Prof. Dr.Sc.Maria Stamatova Vodenska, MVBU

Scientific specialty 01.08.14 Geography of recreation and tourism

Subject: Dissertation on the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor", in professional field 3.9. Tourism

Author of the dissertation work: Mila Zdravkova Gaidarska

Topic: Innovative marketing approaches for the development of tourism

I. Aggregated data on the applicant's scientific output and activities

1. Information about the PhD student

Mila Zdravkova Gaidarska has been a Doctoral Student in independent form of training at the International Higher Business School since February 2020. By profession she is a digital marketing specialist. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics and two master's degrees in Finance and Banking and Digital Marketing. She speaks Russian and English.

2. General characteristics of the thesis submitted

The thesis presented is in a volume of 246 pages and is structured in introduction, three chapters, conclusions, 2 applications, a list of the sources used - 163 names, materials of 3 interno-international organizations and 6 Internet sources. The text is illustrated by 18 tables, 23 shapes, 20 formulas.

The topic chosen by the PhD student is relevant in view of the need for innovative approaches in the modern development of tourism, its importance for the country's economy and the new conditions of pandemic in the world. An additional argument is the fact that in Bulgaria their application in the field of tourist services is relatively limited

The **purpose** of the dissertation study is clearly and precisely formulated.

Five tasks are set to achieve it. They are dominated by various analyses – analysis of the tourist business, analysis of the marketing of the tourist brand in a digital environment, analysis of the peculiarities of the graphic design and analysis of the possibilities for marketing positioning of the tourist brand on social networks.

The **objective of research**, in my opinion, is properly formulated.

The **subject matter** of the study is also formulated in accordance with the aspects of the study actually carried out.

The **doctoral thesis** could be shorter and more focused, giving a clearer idea of exactly what the PhD student is advocating.

The **two research hypotheses** formulated are, in fact, a description of what the PhD student did.

The **main methods and approaches** used in the scientific study are indicated.

Since tourist marketing is only part of the tourist business, the PhD student quite correctly begins **Chapter One** (Theoretical aspects for realization of the innovation potential of the tourist business) with the essence and peculiarities of the tourist business. The first subparagraph provides an overview of the tourist business and its various sectors (places of accommodation, transport, intermediary activity, tourist product, etc.), as well as its place in the economy of the country. Special attention has been paid to the clients of the tourist business,

Presented is a fairly detailed analysis of the main and specific factors for the development of tourism in general. The importance of wages and incomes in general as a factor for tourism development is underlined. Entrepreneurship and information technology are analysed as the main specific factors, examined with the necessary detail and depth.

In point 1.3. (Features of the innovation activity in tourism) a comprehensive analysis of the peculiarities of the innovation activity in tourism and the factors for its development, the specifics, principles and peculiarities of the innovation activity and the essence of the innovative management is carried out. Quite rightly, the PhD student has paid more attention to the cluster approach as a potential for innovative tourism business. A number of regional cluster profiles in Bulgaria, as well as the values of competitiveness indicators in neighboring countries - Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey - have been examined. On the basis of this analysis, it is concluded that it is most appropriate to apply a specific cluster approach to the management of the innovation activity of the tourist business.

On the basis of the above analyses and conclusions, a "System for assessing the innovation potential of tourism" is presented, which I believe is one of the significant **contributions** of the PhD student, along with highlighting the cluster approach as the potential for developing an innovative tourism business. The concept of "tourist information clusters" has been introduced, and the system of indicators presented by the PhD student allows with relatively high accuracy to assess the level of potential of a region in the field of tourism.

In general, in this chapter the PhD student shows a very good knowledge of the theory, and in particular the specifics of the cluster approach as the potential for an innovative tourist business.

In **Chapter Two** (Methodological features of marketing in tourism and survey), a study of the nature and specifics of marketing in the tourism business is carried out; the methodology of marketing research is considered in two directions – main approaches and stages in these studies; innovative methods for developing a competitive product are presented. The approaches for examining the consumer's behavior of tourist products were analyzed, and finally an online survey conducted personally by the PhD student of consumer behavior when choosing a tourist product in a digital environment is being presented.

It is pointed out that the constant increase of the role of tourism in the global economy determines the necessity and relevance of the introduction of innovative marketing approaches in tourist practice. The pandemic situation

worldwide leads to significant changes in tourist supply and demand, which in turn significantly increases the role of marketing in these new conditions.

The PhD student has systematized the innovative methods for developing a competitive product, analyzed consumer behavior and the methods for its research, as well as the phased process of consumption. As a result of the analyses thus carried out as a doctoral **contribution**, typologies of users are made according to certain criteria. A matrix of a new tourist product is also presented.

At the end of this chapter, the PhD student has presented her own empirical study of consumer behavior when choosing a tourist product in a digital environment.

Chapter Three (Possible innovative marketing components in the tourism business) looks at different approaches in marketing that would lead to innovation of the tourist business. An attempt has been made to regionalize tourism on the basis of the cluster approach. Here the PhD student has entered deeper into the nature of the tourist cluster, presenting it as a kind of economic institution.

As innovative marketing components the digitization of the marketing environment of the tourist brand, the main approaches and processes in digital branding, the peculiarities in the use of graphic design and advertising image, as well as the marketing positioning of the tourist brand on social networks are also considered.

As a **contribution** of Mila Gaidarska in this part of the dissertation work the presented models for determining the effectiveness and profitability of advertising and marketing on social media by calculating coefficients and indicators, and in particular the graphic model of indicators of advertising effectiveness can be noted.

As a **contribution** of the PhD student, the main 9 steps and their consistency in developing a successful marketing strategy can be accepted.

The **conclusion** of the dissertation reflects the most important results drawn following the study. It is not noted whether the research hypothesis has been proven.

II. Critical notes and recommendations to the PhD student

I have no critical notes or recommendations to the PhD student other than those made above in the text.

III. The author's version is in a volume of 50 pages and sufficiently reflects the basic work. Presents in synthesized form the problems studied and the results obtained.

IV. Scientific contributions

I fully agree with the 5 scientific contributions formulated by PhD student Mila Gaidarska in her dissertation, namely:

1. A structural-logical scheme reflecting the relationship between digital and visual aspects in marketing innovation has been proposed.
2. A nine-step algorithm has been developed in order to develop a successful marketing strategy.
3. The need for a transition to an innovative cluster is a justified approach to the organisation and management of regional tourism structures in Bulgaria.
4. On the basis of an online survey, a factual study has been conducted that enriches the theory of consumer behaviour when selecting a product in a digital environment.
5. In order to determine the degree of innovation of the brand, a matrix revealing the relationship between the branding strategy and the innovation of the tourism business is proposed.

There are other, more specific contributions that I have noted above in the review.

V. The publications of PhD student Mila Gaidarska on the subject of the dissertation work are 4 in number. By volume and content, they meet the quantitative and qualitative criteria and the requirements for necessary publications in the defence of thesis works for the award of the ONS "Doctor".

VI. Conclusion

On the basis of the above, I believe that there is presented a complete independent scientific study with substantial practical and applied contributions, the author has shown an in-depth knowledge of the theory and methodology in

the field of her choice, there is a complete empirical study, the mastery of the basic methods of processing and analysis of primary and secondary information has been proven. Taking all this into account, I propose that the honorable members of the scientific jury vote positively for the giving to Mila Zdravkova Gaidarska of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.9. Tourism.

Sofia, 10.02.2022

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(Prof. Dr. Maria Vodenska)