



REVIEW

of a doctoral dissertation

authored by **Radostina Hristova Prodanova**,

full-time PhD student,

Doctoral Programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”,

Professional Field 3.9 Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna

on the topic: “*Management of the Online Reputation of Hotels in Varna Municipality*”

Scientific Supervisor: **assoc. prof. Georgina Georgieva Lukanova, PhD**

Review prepared by: Prof. Velina Ivancheva Kazandzhieva, PhD

University of Economics – Varna, Professor in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism,

Scientific Specialty “Economics and Management” (Tourism),

validated in the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID)

Academic Staff Register, section “Habilitation Academic Staff with Scientometric Indicators”,

member of the Scientific Jury for the procedure, appointed by Order No. RD-06-81/06.04.2026

The present review has been prepared pursuant to Decision No. 2 adopted at the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 30.04.2026.

1. Information about the PhD Candidate. Radostina Hristova Prodanova is a graduate of the University of Economics – Varna, where she obtained a Bachelor’s degree in “Economic Informatics” and a Master’s degree in “Economics of Trade”.

Her professional development is related to tourism practice, management, and commercial activities. Her professional experience includes work in a tourism office, the hotel industry, and commercial organizations, where she has held positions related to organizational, economic, and managerial activities. The practical experience she has accumulated contributes to the formation of an in-depth understanding of the processes in tourism and hospitality.

In her teaching activities, PhD candidate Prodanova has participated in the instruction of the courses “Franchising in Hospitality and Catering” and “Service Management in Tourism” at the University of Economics – Varna. She has conducted seminar classes in both full-time and part-time forms of study. All doctoral examinations have been passed with excellent grades.

2. General Presentation of the Dissertation. The dissertation comprises 190 pages and is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and three



appendices. The exposition is characterized by logical consistency, good structuring, and a clear distinction between the theoretical, analytical, and applied aspects of the research.

The first chapter examines the theoretical aspects of reputation and its online dimensions in hospitality. The essence and characteristics of reputation, the distinction between image and reputation, and the importance of reputation for organizations are consistently clarified. Special attention is devoted to user-generated content (eWOM) and content created by hotels themselves. The chapter analyses the main principles and specifics of online reputation management through hotel websites, social media, and review and booking platforms. A positive highlight is the developed conceptual model for evaluating online reputation management in hospitality.

The second chapter has an analytical character and is devoted to the state of the online reputation of hotels in Varna Municipality. A general overview of hospitality in the municipality is presented, followed by an analysis of current online reputation management practices in review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media. The analysis is focused on a real empirical environment, which gives the research applied orientation and practical significance.

In the third chapter, the PhD candidate proposes guidelines and recommendations for improving the management of the online reputation of hotels in Varna Municipality. The proposed recommendations cover the main communication channels – review and booking platforms, hotel websites, and social media profiles – and are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of online communication and the competitiveness of hotel enterprises.

The dissertation is characterized by the relevance of the researched topic, a very good logical structure, and an attempt to combine theoretical foundations with the practical application of the results in the field of hospitality. The dissertation and the related publications are the personal work of PhD candidate Prodanova. Copyright requirements regarding the cited sources have been observed, and no unauthorized use of foreign texts without proper citation has been identified.

3. Assessment of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation. The dissertation complies with the requirements of Article 56 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna. The dissertation presents scientific and scientifically applied results related to the study of online reputation management in hospitality, which possess contribution-oriented and practically applicable character.



PhD candidate Prodanova demonstrates profound theoretical knowledge in the researched field related to reputation, online communication, user-generated content, and the management of the digital presence of hotel enterprises. The dissertation reveals the candidate's ability to conduct independent scientific research through the systematization and critical analysis of scientific literature, the development of a conceptual model, and the implementation of an empirical study focused on hotels in Varna Municipality.

The dissertation is presented in a logically structured format and volume corresponding to the specifics of the scientific specialty and the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". All mandatory structural elements are present. It should be emphasized that the dissertation develops a scientifically applied solution to a real practical problem related to the management of the online reputation of hotels in a digital communication environment. The proposed analyses, models, and recommendations for improving online reputation management have practical significance for hotel enterprises in Varna Municipality and may be applied in managerial practice.

4. Identification and Evaluation of the Scientific and Scientifically Applied Contributions of the Dissertation. Four contributions are outlined in the dissertation abstract. They are directly related to the research objective and to the developed research problem in the field of online reputation management in hospitality.

First, the contribution related to clarifying the essence of online reputation in hospitality, defining its specific characteristics, structural elements, and main stages of management should be highlighted. A very good attempt has been made to systematize and conceptually define the key characteristics of online reputation in the context of the digital environment and the hotel business.

A significant contribution is also represented by the developed conceptual model for analysing and evaluating online reputation management in hospitality. A positive aspect is the integrated approach through which the main digital communication channels – review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media – are encompassed. This enables a more comprehensive consideration of online reputation management and creates opportunities for the practical applicability of the model.

The conducted empirical analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in Varna Municipality also possesses scientifically applied character. The analysis identifies



major characteristics, problems, and deficiencies in managerial practices, thus contributing to a better understanding of the specifics of the hotel sector in the studied destination.

Practical significance is also demonstrated by the contribution related to the formulation of guidelines and recommendations for improving the management of the online reputation of hotels. The proposed solutions are aimed at more effective use of digital communication channels, increasing consumer trust, and stimulating direct bookings, thereby enhancing the applied value of the dissertation.

The identified contributions correspond to the subject, objective, and tasks of the dissertation and demonstrate an effort to combine theoretical analysis with the practical applicability of the obtained results.

5. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums. The results of the dissertation have been disseminated through publication activity related to the researched topic. The PhD candidate presents a total of four independent publications related to the dissertation topic – one publication in a conference proceedings volume from an international scientific conference and three scientific articles.

The publications examine various aspects of online reputation in hospitality, including the evaluation of hotel online reputation, the analysis of customer reviews and hotel responses to negative comments, the comparative analysis of different categories of accommodation establishments, and the influence of hotel operating periods on customer satisfaction. Some of the publications focus on hotels in Varna and Burgas, which demonstrates consistency and thematic relevance to the subject of the dissertation research.

The publications are directly related to the dissertation and reflect major aspects of the conducted theoretical and empirical research. This provides sufficient grounds to conclude that the dissertation results have received the necessary scientific dissemination and academic validation.

The materials submitted for the procedure indicate that the requirements of Article 57 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the internal regulations of the University of Economics – Varna for admission to a dissertation defense for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” have been fulfilled.

The PhD candidate has been duly enrolled and granted the right to public defense within the statutory period. A dissertation and dissertation abstract meeting the requirements for



structure and content have been submitted. A positive opinion has been adopted by the primary academic unit in which the dissertation, the dissertation abstract, and the report on the fulfillment of the required doctoral credits were discussed.

Based on the submitted publications and procedural materials, it may be concluded that the PhD candidate fulfills the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in accordance with the applicable regulations.

6. Established or Non-Established Plagiarism in the Dissertation and the Dissertation Abstract. Upon review of the dissertation and the dissertation abstract, no evidence of plagiarism has been identified. The cited sources have been properly referenced and included in the bibliography. The established standards of scientific ethics and academic integrity have been observed. No unauthorized borrowings of texts, ideas, or results have been identified that could call into question the authorship or originality of the dissertation.

7. Critical Remarks and Recommendations. As an internal reviewer during the discussion of the dissertation at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism, I made remarks and critical comments that have been properly reflected by the PhD candidate in the present version of the dissertation.

I would recommend that future publications include comparative analyses with other tourist destinations in Bulgaria and with international practices. The analysis could also be expanded by incorporating the influence of new digital technologies, booking platform algorithms, and the role of artificial intelligence in online reputation management in hospitality.

It is advisable for the PhD candidate to continue her future scientific research in the field of digital marketing and online reputation management by further developing and validating the proposed conceptual model in a broader practical context.

The recommendations made are constructive in nature and do not call into question the qualities and contribution-oriented character of the dissertation.

8. Questions to the PhD Candidate

- A conceptual model for analysing and evaluating online reputation management in hospitality has been developed in the dissertation. In your opinion, what are the main limitations of the model and how could it be adapted for application in different types of tourist destinations or hotel categories?



• In the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence and automated algorithms in digital platforms, how do you expect approaches to online reputation management in hospitality to transform in the coming years?

9. In conclusion, I consider that the dissertation entitled **“Management of the Online Reputation of Hotels in Varna Municipality”** complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the internal regulations of the University of Economics – Varna concerning the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.

The dissertation contains scientific and scientifically applied results with contribution-oriented character and demonstrates profound theoretical knowledge and the ability to conduct independent scientific research. The dissertation is distinguished by the relevance of the researched topic, a good logical structure, and the practical applicability of the obtained results.

Based on the presented assessments and findings, I give a **positive evaluation** of the dissertation and propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury *award Radostina Hristova Prodanova the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”*.

11 May 2026

Varna

Signature: 

Prof. Velina Iv. Kazandzhieva

Member of the Scientific Jury

REVIEW

of a dissertation for the award of the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor"

Field of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Professional Field: 3.9. Tourism

Scientific Specialty: Economics and Management /Tourism/

under a procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna

1. General Information

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Statev Statev, PhD

Grounds for preparing the review: Order No. RD-06-81 of 06.04.2026 issued by the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna and a decision of the Scientific Jury meeting held on 30.04.2026.

Author of the dissertation: PhD candidate Radostina Hristova Prodanova, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Georgina Lukanova, PhD.

Title of the dissertation: "Management of the Online Reputation of Hotels in the Municipality of Varna".

2. Information about the PhD Candidate

Radostina Hristova Prodanova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the doctoral program "Economics and Management /Tourism/" at the University of Economics – Varna. She was assigned to the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" for a three-year period from 2020 to 2023 and was subsequently granted the right to defend her dissertation within a five-year term as of 03.02.2023. During her doctoral studies, the candidate successfully passed all doctoral minimum examinations, published three articles /two in Bulgarian journals and one abroad/, and one conference paper published at a significant Bulgarian scientific forum. She successfully fulfilled all tasks included in her individual study plan and completed the program within the prescribed period.

Radostina Hristova Prodanova obtained a Bachelor's degree in "Economic Informatics" from the University of Economics – Varna in 2001. Four years later, in 2005, she earned a Master's degree in "Economics of Trade", again from the University of Economics – Varna.

The professional experience of Radostina Hristova Prodanova includes nearly eight years in the tourism sector, where she held managerial positions in hospitality companies and in a company engaged in intermediary activities /travel agency/. Outside the tourism sector, she has worked for 14 years in managerial positions requiring creativity, teamwork skills, adaptability, and strong economic expertise.

The presented circumstances and attached documents demonstrate that the requirements of Articles 19, 23, 25, 26, 27, and 28 of the Regulations of the University of Economics – Varna have been fulfilled, and Radostina Hristova Prodanova is eligible to defend her dissertation.

3. General Presentation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, references, and appendices. The total volume of the dissertation is 198 pages, including: 1 title page, 2 pages of contents, 6 pages of introduction, 164 pages of main text, 4 pages of conclusion, 16 pages of references, and 13 pages of appendices. The main text contains 58 tables and 44 figures.

The following more significant aspects should be highlighted in the overall presentation of the dissertation:

Relevance: The focus of the dissertation by PhD candidate Radostina Hristova Prodanova is the formation of tourism demand based on online published information. Emphasis is placed on the relationship between high “online reputation” and increased occupancy, financial profitability, and competitiveness. The long-term effect of such a relationship is manifested, for tourists, in high trust and customer loyalty, and for the tourism establishment, in achieving monopolistic competition advantages.

Research Aim and Objectives

The dissertation has a clearly defined and concise research aim, namely: through theoretical and empirical analysis, to examine the management of the “online reputation” of hotels in the Municipality of Varna, to identify the factors influencing it, and to determine directions for its improvement. Four research tasks have been formulated, following the logic of the dissertation structure and contributing to the achievement of the research aim.

The subject and object of the study are logically derived from the research aim. The research thesis consists of three components – the first component /architectural/ is related to the quality of the material and technical base of the tourism establishment; the second component /economic/ reflects the projection of the interaction between tourism demand and tourism supply in the digital environment; and the third component /managerial/ addresses the content aspect of corporate websites and the control of published information on the topic in social networks. The validation of the thesis is carried out through the testing of three working hypotheses.

Research Methodology: To achieve the aim of the dissertation and fulfill the related tasks, a combined research approach has been successfully selected and applied, including general scientific methods and specific empirical methods /including description, analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction/. Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software /including Pearson’s χ^2 test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and independent samples t-test/. The limitations of the study are adequately and correctly identified and fully correspond to the dissertation content.

Bibliography: A total of 284 sources were used in the dissertation, including 267 literature sources and 17 internet sources. The information sources used in the dissertation are divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include empirical data independently collected and analyzed by the author within the framework of the study. The secondary sources include scientific articles and publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors related to “online reputation”, “digital marketing”, and hospitality, statistical data from the National Statistical

Institute, as well as analytical reports and market analyses from international platforms and specialized organizations such as ReviewPro, TripAdvisor Insights, and other publicly available studies in the field of hotel business. The overall impression is that contemporary sources predominate, appropriately selected, correctly interpreted, and properly cited.

4. Assessment of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation.

The structure of the dissertation corresponds to the stated aim and research objectives.

The first chapter, entitled “Theoretical Aspects of Online Reputation Management in Hospitality”, consists of three main sections.

The first section, “Nature and Characteristics of Reputation”, examines the theoretical features of the concept of “reputation”. A chronological overview of interpretations of the concept in scientific literature over the years is presented. The influence of “reputation” on organizational activities is highlighted, and the main directions of its impact on competitiveness, stakeholder trust, financial results, ability to attract investments, formation of loyal customers, and resilience in crisis situations are identified. Emphasis is placed on “corporate reputation”, with its main characteristics outlined. The relationship between the concepts of “image” and “reputation” is also examined.

The second section, entitled “Nature and Characteristics of Online Reputation”, analyzes the main scientific approaches to online reputation, examining its conceptual characteristics and the factors determining its development in the digital environment. The influence of the internet environment on market equilibrium formation is traced, with demand gaining predominance. The main scientific approaches to “online reputation” are analyzed. The first component identified is the so-called “eWOM” /Electronic Word of Mouth/, with its valence, textual content, volume, length, and visual elements explained. The results of leading scientific studies regarding their impact on consumer behavior, booking intentions, prices, occupancy, and hotel financial results are systematized. A comparison between “eWOM” and traditional “Word of Mouth” is also made. As a second component of “online reputation”, the informational content created for the hotel – text, images, and video – is examined, together with the specifics of its distribution across different digital channels: corporate websites, social media, and review and booking platforms. It is emphasized that each of these channels performs different functions and implies a different type of mass communication – from formal and informative representation on corporate websites to more informal and engaging content on social media profiles.

The third section, entitled “Management of Online Reputation”, examines the theoretical foundations and general principles of online reputation management, as well as its specific manifestations in the main digital channels of hotel organizations /including corporate websites, social media, and review and booking platforms/. In the concluding part of the section, a conceptual model for evaluating online reputation management in hospitality is developed. The model is based on the interaction between tourists and hotels in the digital environment and takes into account the influence of external factors such as digitalization, technological platforms, and competitive environment, as well as internal factors related to both tourists and hotels.

The second chapter, entitled “Analysis of the Online Reputation of Hotels in the Municipality of Varna”, presents empirical information regarding the tourism potential of the Municipality of Varna. Following the statistical overview, three independent studies analyzing different aspects of online reputation management in hotels are presented. These studies are interconnected and build upon one another, each examining a different perspective. In terms of content, the studies may be systematized as follows:

- Study No. 1 – analysis of online reputation on review and booking platforms and the practices for its management;
- Study No. 2 – analysis of the content of internet-based hotel pages as a tool for online reputation management;
- Study No. 3 – analysis of social media as a tool for online reputation management.

Together, the three studies build a comprehensive picture of the way hotels in the Municipality of Varna use their digital channels to shape and manage their online reputation. It may be concluded that the PhD candidate demonstrates very good skills in conducting independent empirical research and strong analytical abilities for formulating substantiated conclusions and evaluations.

The third chapter, entitled “Guidelines for Improving the Management of the Online Reputation of Hotels in the Municipality of Varna”, formulates recommendations for improving the management of online reputation based on the results of the conducted empirical studies. The recommendations **reflect the specifics** of the examined digital channels and outline opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of online reputation management within them.

The in-depth knowledge of the topic, the precise logical connection between the theoretical considerations and the conclusions from the empirical study, as well as the awareness of best practices in the examined field, enable the PhD candidate to formulate substantiated recommendations for **maintaining high quality** in hotel services within the Municipality of Varna.

The conclusion summarizes the fulfillment of the research tasks and highlights the contributory aspects of the dissertation. Structurally and substantively, the dissertation fully corresponds to the stated research aim and objectives. A good logical consistency between the structural elements has been achieved. The style of presentation is concise and precise, using clear scientific language.

The abstract accurately and comprehensively reflects the content of the dissertation submitted for review.

5. Scientific and Applied Contributions.

The submitted statement of contributions contains four contributory points. Following the analysis of the dissertation, I confirm the stated contributions, which complies with Article 6, Paragraph 3 of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The theoretical contribution of the dissertation focuses on the concept of “online reputation” in hospitality – its structure, characteristics, and the main stages of its management are examined in depth.

The methodological and applied contribution is related to the development of a conceptual model for analyzing and evaluating online reputation management in hospitality, integrating the main digital channels – review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media. The development is based on a comprehensive empirical analysis of online reputation management in hotels within the Municipality of Varna.

The practical and applied contribution of the dissertation consists in guidelines and recommendations for improving hotel online reputation management, aimed at more effective use of digital communication channels, increasing consumer trust, and stimulating direct bookings.

6. Publications Related to the Dissertation.

PhD candidate Radostina Hristova Prodanova has submitted a list of four publications related to the dissertation, including three articles and one conference paper. The publications are closely related to the dissertation topic, reflect substantial parts of the dissertation, and provide sufficient public visibility. The volume of the candidate's scientific publications and the nature of the journals and forums comply with the requirements and procedures for acquiring the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor".

According to the submitted report on compliance with the minimum national requirements under the Regulations for the Implementation of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the candidate meets the required number of points for obtaining the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor".

7. Critical Remarks and Recommendations.

No substantial theoretical, logical, or methodological errors can be identified in the dissertation submitted for review by PhD candidate Radostina Hristova Prodanova. Some inaccuracies typical of this type of work are present, mainly of a technical nature.

I would recommend that the PhD candidate continue her diligent work together with her academic supervisor with a view to developing academic courses for the needs of training in Professional Field 3.9 "Tourism", which would enrich the "digitalization" direction in the curricula of the University of Economics – Varna.

8. Questions to the PhD Candidate.

1. Is the presented model for managing the online reputation of hotels universally applicable to municipalities with tourism potential different from that of the Municipality of Varna?

2. In § 2.3 of the dissertation, it is stated that according to the research hypothesis adopted in the dissertation, there is a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation establishment, customer satisfaction, and the management of online reputation through corporate websites. What additional factors could be added to those mentioned, and what types of significant factors could potentially have a negative impact on online reputation?

9. Conclusion.

Based on the positive evaluation of the dissertation, as well as the scientific and scientific-applied achievements of the PhD candidate. I propose that the respected members of the Scientific Jury adopt a positive decision to award the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management /Tourism/", to PhD candidate Radostina Hristova Prodanova.

18.05.2026

Veliko Tarnovo

Reviewer:

/Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Statev, PhD/

