

SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT

By Assoc. Prof. Ivanka Vasileva Lulcheva, PhD
Agricultural University-Plovdiv, Department of Tourism

for the dissertation work of **Radostina Hristova Prodanova**, PhD student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics - Varna

on the topic: "**Online reputation management of hotels in Varna Municipality**"

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", scientific speciality "Economics and management (tourism)"

1. Reason for writing the opinion

OrderNo. RD-06-81/06.04.2026, of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna and the decision of the Scientific Jury of 30.04.2026.

2. Candidate details

Radostina Hristova Prodanova is a PhD student at the Department of Tourism Economics and Organization of the University of Economics - Varna. From the presented creative biography it is evident that she has teaching activities in the field of tourism and hospitality. Her scientific interests are focused on digital marketing, online reputation, consumer behaviour, and management of hotel enterprises.

3. General presentation of the dissertation work

Radostina Prodanova's dissertation is dedicated to the extremely topical topic of online reputation management of hotels. In the context of digitalization and the growing importance of consumer reviews, online reputation is becoming a key factor for the competitiveness of hotel enterprises. The author correctly identifies the lack of comprehensive research that would simultaneously cover review and reservation platforms, corporate websites and social media, and directs her research to fill this gap. The object of the study is the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna. The subject of the study is online reputation itself and the tools for its management. The aim of the dissertation is to investigate online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna, to identify the factors influencing it and to define guidelines for improvement. To achieve it four research tasks are solved. Three main hypotheses are formulated and tested empirically.

The research methodology includes content analysis of three groups of digital channels (Booking.com, corporate websites and Facebook) for 89 hotels of three, four and five star categories in Varna municipality, as well as statistical methods. Such a combined approach ensures high reliability of the results.

4. Structure and content of the dissertation

The volume, structure and content of the dissertation work of Radostina Prodanovais are in compliance with the requirements of Art. 56 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna. The dissertation is with a total volume of 198 pages, illustrated with 58 tables and 44 figures. The list of references includes 284 titles, which demonstrates excellent knowledge of the topic.

Chapter One presents in-depth theoretical foundations of reputation, online reputation and its management in the hospitality industry. A conceptual model for assessing online reputation management has been developed, which integrates all these elements and serves as a framework for the empirical study. Chapter two contains the empirical analysis. Three independent studies follow: The first study (platform Booking.com) found that hotels with higher star ratings had higher ratings and were more active in responding to reviews. The second study (corporate websites) revealed that higher-rated hotels and those with higher ratings were more likely to publish eWOM content (reviews, awards) on their websites. The third study (Facebook) showed that higher star ratings did not lead to statistically significant differences in social media reputation management. The third chapter formulates detailed and practically applicable guidelines for improving online reputation management across all three channels. Recommendations include maintaining up-to-date content, actively and personalized response to reviews, integrating dynamic ratings into websites, regular publication activity on social media, use of video content, introduction of direct bookings and satisfaction surveys.

The conclusion summarises the results, partially confirms the hypotheses and outlines the contributions of the dissertation. The abstract (34 pages) correctly reflects the content of the work and the main achievements.

5. Publications and participation in scientific forums

The PhD student presents four publications on the topic of the dissertation: one report and three articles. The publications are related to the main issue of the dissertation research and meet the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. No plagiarism or incorrect use of other people's work was detected in the materials provided for the defense of the dissertation.

6. Scientific and applied scientific contributions of the dissertation

The dissertation contains both scientific and practical contributions:

As a significant scientific contribution, we can point to the developed conceptual model for analyzing and evaluating online reputation management, which integrates the three main digital channels – review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media. The model has value for future research in the field.

The following contributions of a scientific and applied nature can be mentioned:

- A comprehensive empirical analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in Varna Municipality has been carried out, identifying the main characteristics, problems and gaps. It has been established that hotels most actively use booking platforms, but insufficiently use their own websites and social media to build reputation.

- The relationship between star rating, customer satisfaction, and reputation management on platforms and websites, but not on social media, has been confirmed – an important conclusion for practice.
- Specific, actionable guidelines and recommendations have been formulated to improve online reputation management in each of the three channels, aimed at increasing consumer trust and stimulating direct bookings.

These contributions have high value both for research in the field of digital marketing in tourism and for hotel managers who can use the recommendations to optimize their online reputation.

7. Critical notes and recommendations

In my overall high assessment of the dissertation work, I would recommend to the PhD student Radostina Prodanova to continue working on the research issues, such as in future developments, it would be useful to include smaller accommodation facilities (hostels, family hotels, apartments) to get a comprehensive picture of the sector. I recommend that the results be published in international journals with an impact factor. These remarks do not diminish the scientific value of the work and do not change my positive assessment.

8. Conclusion

The dissertation work of Radostina Hristova Prodanova represents a complete, original and up-to-date scientific research with a clearly expressed scientific and practical focus. The author demonstrates excellent knowledge in the field of digital marketing in the hospitality industry, skillfully applies modern research methods and formulates applicable recommendations. The achieved results confirm two of the three hypotheses and provide valuable information for hotel managers. The personal contribution of the doctoral student is evident.

The above gives me reason to give a positive assessment and to vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD" to Radostina Hristova Prodanova in the professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific speciality "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

19.05.2026

Plovdiv



/ Assoc. Prof. Ivanka Vasileva Lulcheva, PhD /



OPINION

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

Вх. №

PA20-851/19.05.2026г

From: **Assoc. Prof. Lyubka Mincheva Ilieva, PhD**
Department of Tourism Economics and Management,
D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov,
Scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Regarding: dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 3.9. Tourism, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Author of the dissertation: **Radostina Hristova Prodanova**

Title of the dissertation: **“Online Reputation Management of Hotels in the Municipality of Varna”**

Grounds for submitting the opinion: participation as a member of the Scientific Jury for the public defense of the dissertation in accordance with Order No. RD 06-81/06.04.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna and decision of the Scientific Jury dated 30.04.2026.

I. General Information

Radostina Hristova Prodanova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)” at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna by Order No. RD 17-404/14.02.2020. Her academic supervisor is Assoc. Prof. Georgina Lukanova, PhD. The doctoral student was dismissed with the right to defend her dissertation by Order No. RD 17-17/30.01.2023. The required documents and declarations have been submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the University of Economics – Varna.

II. General Presentation of the Dissertation

The submitted dissertation has a total volume of 211 pages and includes an introduction, exposition in three chapters, conclusion, list of references and appendices. The main text contains 58 tables and 44 figures. The bibliography includes 284 sources, of which 267 are literary sources and 17 are internet sources.

The object of the research is the management of the online reputation of hotels in Varna Municipality in review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media. The subject of the research is the online reputation of hotels and the tools for its management.

The aim of the dissertation is, through a theoretical and empirical analysis, to examine the management of the online reputation of hotels in Varna Municipality, to identify the factors influencing it, and to determine guidelines for its improvement. In order to achieve this aim, specific research tasks related to the theoretical analysis of online reputation, the development of a conceptual model for its management and the implementation of empirical studies in different digital channels have been formulated.

The topic of the dissertation is relevant and significant, as the management of online reputation is becoming a key factor for the competitiveness of hotel enterprises under conditions of digitalization and the growing influence of online platforms and social media on consumer behaviour.



III. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums

The publications and scientific activities of the doctoral student were examined for compliance with the quantitative requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna and the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. Compliance with these requirements has been established.

Four publications related to the dissertation topic have been presented, with a total of 40 points achieved under Group G indicators, compared to the required minimum of 30 points. The publication activity demonstrates consistency and sustained interest in the researched topic.

IV. Evaluation of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation and the Abstract

The structure of the dissertation is logically sound and complies with the requirements of Art. 56, para. 1 and para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna. The sequence of the exposition ensures a good connection between the theoretical, analytical and applied parts of the research.

The theoretical part demonstrates good knowledge of the scientific literature related to reputation, online reputation and the specifics of its management in the hotel industry. The author successfully systematizes the existing scientific concepts and develops a conceptual model for evaluating the management of online reputation in the hotel industry.

The empirical part is based on an in-depth study of hotels in Varna Municipality through analysis of review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media. The obtained results are processed and analysed through an appropriate statistical toolkit and are visualized through tables and figures. The research methods used – theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, correlation analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), χ^2 analysis and statistical data processing through SPSS – are adequately selected and applied in accordance with the objectives and tasks of the dissertation.

The practical orientation of the dissertation is highlighted through the formulated guidelines and recommendations for improving the management of the online reputation of hotels in review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media.

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with the established requirements and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation, its structure, research thesis, methodology and the main contribution-related findings.

The lexical and stylistic characteristics of the dissertation meet the requirements for a scientific study. The exposition is consistent, terminologically precise and distinguished by a good academic style.

V. Scientific and Applied Research Contributions

I accept that the following more significant scientific and practical contributions can be identified in the dissertation:

1. The main theoretical concepts related to the essence, characteristics and factors shaping online reputation are systematized and summarized, while the specifics of its management in the contemporary digital environment in the hotel industry are clarified.
2. A conceptual model for analysing and evaluating the management of the online reputation of hotels has been developed, based on an integrated approach covering review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media.
3. A comprehensive empirical analysis of the management of the online reputation of hotels in Varna Municipality has been carried out through the combination and comparison of



data from different digital channels, allowing the formation of an overall assessment of the researched process.

4. Relationships between the characteristics of accommodation establishments, customer satisfaction, activity and popularity in social media, and the effectiveness of online reputation management have been identified and analyzed.
5. Practical guidelines and recommendations for improving the management of the online reputation of hotel enterprises have been formulated, aimed at increasing their competitiveness, customer satisfaction and sustainable market positioning.

VI. Findings Regarding Plagiarism

No evidence of plagiarism has been identified in the submitted dissertation or the abstract. The citation of the used literature sources is correct and complies with academic standards.

VII. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Along with the positive aspects of the dissertation work, some notes and recommendations can be made:

1. In certain parts of the exposition, some descriptiveness can be observed, which could be reduced in favour of a more in-depth analytical approach.
2. I would recommend that future research expand the comparative analysis by including other European winter destinations.
3. A promising direction for future research would be a more in-depth study of the role of digital marketing and social media in shaping the image of tourist destinations.

The above remarks do not diminish the scientific and practical value of the dissertation.

VIII. Questions to the Doctoral Student

In order to stimulate the discussion during the defense, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the main challenges facing hotel enterprises in managing online reputation under conditions of increasing influence of artificial intelligence and automated systems for generating and analysing user-generated content?
2. In your opinion, which are the most effective mechanisms for stimulating customer engagement and encouraging the publication of authentic online reviews by hotel guests?

IX. Conclusion

The doctoral student fulfils the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The submitted dissertation complies with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, and contains scientific and applied research findings and contributions relevant to the researched topic.

Based on the above, I give my **positive assessment** of the dissertation work and I propose that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury vote **“in favour”** of awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in field of higher education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)” to **Radostina Hristova Prodanova**.

15.05.2026
Svishtov

Opinion prepared by:
/Assoc. Prof. Lyubka Ilieva, PhD/



STATEMENT

From: Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD;

University of Economics – Varna;

Scientific specialty: “Economics and Organization of Tourism Department”

Regarding: Dissertation thesis for acquiring the scientific degree

"**Doctor**" in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences. Professional field: 3.9. Tourism. The scientific specialty: "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at the University of Economics - Varna

Author of the dissertation: Radostina Hristova Prodanova

Dissertation topic: "Online reputation management of hotels in Varna Municipality"

Grounds for submission of the statement: participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation according to Order No. RD 06-81 of 06.04.2026 of the Rector of the University of Varna

1. Information about the PhD Student

The PhD student studied at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism, Faculty of Management of the University of Varna under the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" in accordance with the decision of the Faculty of Management, Protocol No. 8 / 30.01.2020 and Order No. RD 17-404 / 14.02.2020 of the Rector of the University of Varna. The training was carried out in a regular form during the period 03.02.2020-03.02.2023. The PhD student was expelled with the right to defense in accordance with the decision of the Faculty of Management, Protocol No. 41 / 26.01.2023 and Order No. RD 17-17 / 30.01.2023 of the Rector of the University of Varna

2. Summary of the presented dissertation work

The volume of the dissertation is 198 pages. It is distinguished by a correct structure, which includes all the mandatory elements of a scientific research work: 6 pages of introduction, 164 pages of main presentation, 4 pages of conclusion, 16 pages of used literature and 13 pages of appendices.

The dissertation has a clearly defined object and subject of the study. The object of consideration is the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna in review and reservation platforms, corporate websites and social media, and the subject of study is the management of the online reputation of hotels.

The research goal is to study the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna through theoretical and empirical analysis and to determine guidelines for its improvement. The goal is correctly specified in four research tasks.

The author demonstrates knowledge of the available literature on the topic and has used a sufficient set of information sources. The list of used literature lists a total of 284 titles, of which 267 are literary and 17 from the Internet.

The interpretations and conclusions in the presentation are illustrated and argued with 58 tables and 44 figures.



The author uses appropriate research methods to achieve the scientific goal by combining description, analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, which allows systematization and interpretation of existing theoretical statements and empirical data related to online reputation management in the hospitality industry.

The content of the dissertation proves the achievement of the set scientific goal.

The first chapter systematizes the main theoretical approaches and definitions of corporate and online reputation in the scientific literature. The features of online reputation are discussed. The main components of online reputation are distinguished - content created by users and content created by organizations. The author's model for assessing online reputation management in the hospitality industry is presented.

Chapter two is dedicated to the analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna. The results of three independent studies are presented, through which the main aspects of the management of the online reputation of hotels are analyzed. The first study assesses the online reputation in the review and booking platforms and the practices for its management. The second study is dedicated to the analysis of the content of hotel websites as a tool for managing online reputation. The third study analyzes social media as a tool for managing online reputation. With the three studies, the author successfully presents the overall picture of the way in which hotels in the municipality of Varna use their digital channels to form and manage their online reputation.

The third chapter formulates guidelines for improving the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna, based on the results of the empirical research. The recommendations reflect the specifics of the studied digital channels and outline opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of online reputation management in them.

The style of expression in the text is precise. The author is familiar with the conceptual apparatus of tourism theory, as a result of which the text is written in scientific language.

The dissertation fulfills the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria as well as complies with the requirements of Art. 56, para. 1 and para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Economics- Varna

3. Evaluation of the scientific and applied scientific results

The dissertation contains significant scientific and applied contributions in three main areas:

First, the theory of the essence of online reputation in the hospitality industry has been upgraded and a conceptual model for the analysis and assessment of the management of online reputation of hotels has been developed. The model integrates the main digital channels - platforms for reviews and reservations, corporate websites and social media.



Second, based on empirical studies, the management of online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna has been analyzed and assessed, identifying the main characteristics, problems and gaps.

Third, guidelines and pragmatic recommendations have been formulated for improving the management of online reputation of hotels. The shared ideas are aimed at more effective use of digital communication channels, increasing consumer trust and stimulating direct reservations

4. Assessment of the dissertation publications

Radostina Prodanova presents 4 independent publications on the topic of the dissertation – one report and three articles. The presented publications reflect significant results of the dissertation work and provide it with sufficient publicity.

5. Evaluation of the abstract

The presented abstract in Bulgarian and English summarizes the content of the main structural parts of the dissertation work and meets the regulatory requirements.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

The dissertation would have benefited if, in the author's conceptual model for assessing online reputation management in the hospitality industry (Fig. 15), in the group of internal factors of influence, the component "channels and distribution strategies" was interpreted as part of the overall strategic marketing mix of the enterprise in accordance with the other three marketing strategies - product, price and communication.

I would recommend that doctoral student Radostina Prodanova expand her research work on the topic of the advantages and disadvantages of using AI in the management of online reputation of hotels.

For the purpose of a worthy defense, I offer the following question to the attention of the doctoral student: can the organizational and managerial structure of the hospitality enterprise be considered as an internal factor of influence on the management of online reputation of hotels?

7. Conclusion

No plagiarism has been found in the dissertation work and in the abstract. The doctoral student fulfills the requirements under Art. 57, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna and meets the minimum national requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria

I give a positive assessment and vote for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)" in the professional field 3.9 Tourism to Radostina Hristova Prodanova.

14.05.2026 / Varna

Signature:
(prof. S. Marinov, PhD)