



STANDPOINT

Вх. № PA20-440/13.03.2026г.

by **Bistra Konstantinova Vassileva, PhD, Professor from the University of Economics-
Varna**

on a dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree PhD
in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,
professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty „Marketing“

1. General information.

This standpoint was prepared by Bistra Vassileva, PhD, Professor from the University of Economics-Varna, appointed as a member of the scientific jury according to the Order of the Rector of the University of Varna No. RD 06-26/28.01.2026. The decision to prepare a standpoint was taken on the first meeting of the scientific jury on 10 February 2026 at 9:00 o'clock.

The author of the dissertation is Andrey Andreev Kostov with the topic of his dissertation “Opportunities for positioning brand extensions among generation Z”.

2. General presentation of the dissertation (in accordance with the requirements of Article 27, Paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria)

The dissertation is dedicated to a current and significant problem in the field of contemporary marketing, namely the use of brand extensions as a tool for building and developing brand value in the context of the digital economy and changing consumer patterns. Particular attention is paid to Generation Z as a specific consumer group, characterized by high digital engagement and active participation in interactive digital environments, including video games.

Structurally, the dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references and appendices in a total volume of 292 pages, of which 218 pages are the main text (three chapters), 6 pages are the conclusion, 13 pages are the references and 9 appendices in a volume of 46 pages. The bibliography includes 197 information sources in Bulgarian and English. The dissertation contains 28 tables and 34 figures. The appendices present the surveys



with which the empirical studies were conducted and the results of the statistical analyses. The author uses and cites the scientific literature correctly in the dissertation.

The topic of the dissertation fully corresponds to its content and is of increasing relevance in the modern global world. Globalization, the dynamic development of digital platforms and low barriers to entry into the market allow an increasingly large number of business entities to build brands, which necessitates the search for innovative approaches to their positioning. Over the past decade, video games have transformed into a global cultural and economic industry and have established themselves as a strategic communication and brand environment, especially for generation Z.

The object and subject of the dissertation, the main research thesis and the research objective are defined correctly. The object of the study is brand extensions as a strategic tool in brand value management, and the subject of the study is the perception of in-game assets as a tool for positioning brand extensions among Generation Z in Bulgaria. The formulated research tasks specify the set goal, namely, to assess the potential of branded content in video games as a tool for positioning brand extensions aimed at generation Z. The author has justified the main limitations of the study, which demonstrates good knowledge of the subject of study.

The presentation is systematic, well-reasoned and demonstrates good knowledge of the contemporary scientific literature on the researched issues.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums: compliance with the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at UEV.

According to the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at UEV, the doctoral student's publications and participation in scientific forums must meet the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree PhD, according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, if the dissertation work is not published as a monograph.

According to the reference-declaration submitted by the dissertation student for the fulfillment of minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree PhD in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, according to Art. 26 of ZRASRB, he has published 3 independent scientific articles, published in non-



refereed journals with scientific review with a total of 30 points for the indicators in Group D, which corresponds to the minimum national requirements for awarding the ONS "doctor".

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation (compliance with the requirements of Article 34, paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna), opinion on the correctness of the dissertation abstract and the lexical and stylistic characteristics of the dissertation.

The dissertation work structurally consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references and applications. The chapters are balanced in terms of volume and structure. The author chooses the traditional approach to scientific research, starting in Chapter One with a thorough and extensive review of theoretical propositions in the field of brand extension and positioning. A characterization of Generation Z from the perspective of cohort theory is presented. Chapter One ends with a summary of the theoretical propositions on the positioning and functioning of brand extensions in digital ecosystems. In Chapter Two, the author has analyzed the market aspects of video game consumption in Bulgaria among Generation Z. The author has studied the practices of using in-game assets as carriers of brand value. The chapter ends with an algorithm developed by the author for categorization and evaluation of brand assets in video games. In Chapter Three, a methodological tool for evaluation and presentation of in-game assets for the purposes of positioning brand extensions among Generation Z is presented. A model for evaluating a brandable in-game asset in a video game for the purposes of positioning a brand extension is developed.

The abstract is written in accordance with the requirements and adequately reflects the key moments of the content of the dissertation and the results of the conducted empirical research. In the abstract, the author has presented the relevance of the topic, object, subject, main research thesis, aim and tasks of the research, its methodology and limitations, as well as the contributing moments. The content and main parts of the dissertation are presented correctly.

The dissertation candidate demonstrates good knowledge of specialized terminology and uses it professionally. The style of the presentation is scientific and analytical, using specialized terminology typical of marketing research. The abstract correctly reflects the main points, structure and results of the dissertation work.



5. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation.

I accept the contributions of the dissertation presented by the dissertation candidate in the following two directions: scientific and scientific-applied. The theoretical contribution is expressed in the further development of research in the field of brand extension through the analysis of the creation of brand value in the context of video games as an interactive digital environment. The conceptual contribution is related to the introduction of the concept of "digital carriers of brand value", which offers a new framework for the interpretation of video games as a medium for building and transferring brand value. The methodological contribution is expressed in the development of an author's methodology for content analysis of branded elements in video games, allowing for a quantitative and comparative study of the correspondence between the brand, the game context and the genre characteristics. The development of an original evaluation model (OMIBI) for a preliminary assessment of the potential for positioning brand extensions in video games, which can assist marketing specialists in making strategic decisions, is a practically applied contribution.

6. Detected or undetected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract.

In my work on the dissertation and the abstract, I did not find direct borrowings from authors and materials in the scope of global marketing interventions and positioning strategies. I conclude that I have not detected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract.

7. Critical notes and recommendations.

Along with the undeniable scientific merits of the dissertation, some critical remarks and recommendations can be made:

1. The author could expand the comparative analysis of various digital platforms beyond video games, for example, social virtual environments and metaverses.
2. International comparative data can be added to the empirical part to allow for a broader generalization of the results.
3. Future research could examine in more depth the role of artificial intelligence in analyzing and predicting the effectiveness of brand extensions.

These notes do not diminish the scientific value of the dissertation but are rather of a recommendatory nature.



8. Questions to the dissertation student.

- (1) What are the main risks in integrating brand extensions into video game environments and how can they be minimized from a brand strategy perspective?
- (2) How could the developed evaluation model be adapted for other forms of digital branded content outside of video games?
- (3) What are the prospects for using artificial intelligence in analyzing consumer reactions to brand extensions in virtual environments?

The questions asked are constructive and aim to stimulate a fruitful scientific discussion during the defense.

9. Conclusion.

The findings and conclusions made in this standpoint allow me to give a positive assessment and vote "YES" for awarding Andrey Andreev Kostov the educational and scientific degree PhD in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty „Marketing“.

Varna

12 March 2026

Standpoint prepared by:

/ Prof. Bistra Vassileva, PhD/

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

OPINION

Бх. № ПД20-300 / 20.02.2026г.

From: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Yordanova Dimova, Department of Economics, New Bulgarian University – Sofia, professional field 3.8. “Economics” Scientific specialty “Marketing”

Regarding: dissertation work of doctoral student **Andrey Andreev Kostov** for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in scientific specialty 3.8. Economics, doctoral program “Marketing”

1. General information.

The opinion was prepared on the basis of Order No. RD-06-26/28.01.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna on the formation of a Scientific Jury for the acquisition of the ONS "Doctor" in the professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Marketing", according to a procedure announced by the University of Economics - Varna.

Author of the dissertation: **Andrey Andreev Kostov**

Topic of the dissertation: **"Possibility for positioning brand extensions among generation Z"**

2. General description of the dissertation.

In accordance with the requirements of Art. 27, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the dissertation is presented in a form and volume corresponding to the specific requirements of the primary scientific unit. On the other hand, the presented dissertation meets the requirements of Art. 56, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna.

Regarding the descriptive characteristics of the dissertation, the following information can be presented: it consists of 292 pages, including: title page and table of contents - 4 pages, lists of tables, figures, appendices and abbreviations - 4 pages, introduction - 8 pages, first chapter - 75 pages, second chapter - 65 pages, third chapter - 70 pages, conclusion - 6 pages, used literature - 13 pages, appendices - 46 pages. The dissertation contains 28 tables, 34 figures and 9 appendices, which are an integral part of the work. The used literature includes 197 sources in Bulgarian and English.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums.

In connection with the possibility of defense and the requirements of Art. 35, para. 1 item 1.4 of the Regulations for the Development of the University of Varna, which are related to publications and participation in scientific forums, the doctoral student has presented two scientific articles and one report.

The two articles are in English and reflect the essential aspects of the doctoral research, with a specific reflection of the methodology used to prove the various hypotheses set out in the dissertation. The report is no less important as a specified publication, because it contains a presentation and analysis of the innovative implementation of the specific photogrammetric technology for the purposes of brand positioning, which enriches the different view of the research that was made in the dissertation itself.

The non-duplication and the concentrated view of screening the importance of the presentation of the dissertation in the specified publications show the ability of the doctoral student to synthesize scientific information and to structure his view of the research approach that he has applied in various types of scientific publications.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation.

To assess the dissertation on the topic: "**Possibility for positioning brand extensions in generation Z**" in structural terms, it is necessary to examine the degree of systematicity and expedient structuring of the overall study. The presented dissertation is categorically of a high degree of systematicity, scientific maturity and compliance with the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Varna.

Excellently consistently arranged and presented - introduction, three chapters, conclusion, used literature, conclusion.

The stated main purpose of the dissertation, which is to assess the potential of branded content in video games as a tool for positioning brand extensions aimed at generation Z, has been fully achieved.

A completely positive assessment can be given to the research thesis of the dissertation, which states that for Generation Z, the perceived effectiveness of brand extensions in a video game environment is significantly determined by the degree of similarity and semantic compatibility between the brand extension, the game world and the method of positioning through a branded in-game asset.

The doctoral student has a very good research perspective in the application of a developed conceptual model for a preliminary assessment of this similarity, which can assist organizations in the process of making strategic decisions about the appropriateness of integrating a specific brand extension into a specific video game as part of the positioning strategy.

After the logically consistent presentation of the introduction, the three chapters follow, which are undoubtedly conceptually linked.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, the theoretical basis of the study is built, examining brand extensions as a strategic tool for growth and transfer of brand value in the context of digital transformation.

The second chapter systematizes and presents the methodology of the study and justifies the logic of the research approaches used. The characteristics of the Bulgarian video game market are examined and the algorithm developed by the author for the analysis and evaluation of brandable in-game assets, applied to a selected sample of video games, is presented.

The third chapter presents a methodological tool for the evaluation and presentation of in-game assets for the purposes of positioning brand extensions among Generation Z.

All three chapters contain theoretical statements, on the basis of which analyses and research statements are made.

The innovative view of the doctoral student regarding the structure of the developed evaluation model for brand integration in video games (OMIBI), created in response to the growing complexity of positioning brand extensions in interactive and multi-layered digital environments, is impressive. The model is conceptualized as a modular and adaptive

management framework, oriented towards supporting strategic decisions, by uniting theoretical statements from brand management, generational theory and interactive marketing into an applicable analytical tool.

At the heart of OMIBI are six key constructs that encompass the full process of integrating a brand extension into a video game – from the symbolic and thematic similarity between the brand and the game world, through the perception by users and the gaming community, the strategic and positional correspondence with the parent brand, to the impact on the gaming experience, the economic justification and reputational risks, as well as the expositional and interactive parameters of integration.

The abstract reflects the main points of the dissertation work and is prepared entirely in compliance with the requirements necessary for this type of documentation. No discrepancies were found between the abstract and the dissertation text.

The style used in the dissertation is consistent, and the language is correct and professional. Complex interdisciplinary concepts are explained clearly and understandably.

5. Identification and evaluation of the scientific and scientifically applied contributions in the dissertation work.

According to the information presented by the doctoral candidate, the following scientific contributions have been identified:

*The theoretical contribution of the dissertation consists in enriching research in the field of brand extension through an analysis of the creation of value of brand extensions in a video game context, characterized by high interactivity and active user participation. In this regard, the concept of "digital carriers of brand value" (DCBV) is introduced, which offers a new theoretical framework for the interpretation of video games as carriers of value of brand extensions.

*The methodological contribution is related to the development and application of an author's methodology for content analysis of branded elements in video games, based on a systematized set of indicators and analytical applications.

*The practical and applied contribution of the dissertation is the development and operationalization of an evaluation model for brand integration in a video game, intended for a preliminary assessment of the potential of positioning brand extensions in video games at the stage of conceptual planning and development of the game asset.

I fully accept that the scientific and scientific and applied contributions have been achieved and are real, but I believe that they could be further developed in more detail, which would be more visible to theorists and practitioners in subsequent publications of the doctoral student.

6. Plagiarism found or not in the dissertation work and abstract.

No plagiarism has been found or established in the dissertation work and abstract, which is two reasons to fully accept the presented research as original and proves the qualities of the doctoral student in terms of the real possibilities to build a quality scientific work.

7. Critical notes and recommendations.

I have no critical remarks towards the doctoral student. I believe that the dissertation is an original research and has all the merits to be a starting point for acquiring the ONS "doctor".

8. Questions to the dissertation candidate.

I have the following question for a doctoral student:

1. In what way, in your opinion, can the application of AI influence the opportunities for positioning brand extensions among generation Z?

9. Conclusion.

In conclusion, the presented dissertation work on the topic: "**Possibility for positioning brand extensions in generation Z**" has an interesting goal and objectives, which have undoubtedly been achieved and clearly scientifically - justified presented.

Based on the above and in accordance with legal requirements, I can conclude that the doctoral student **Andrey Andreev Kostov** possesses the necessary and required qualities for acquiring the ONS "doctor".

Based on this, I propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to doctoral student **Andrey Andreev Kostov** in the **professional field 3.8. Economics, doctoral program "Marketing"**.

18.02.2026

Prepared the opinion:

/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Dimova/

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679



SCIENTIFIC OPINION

Вх. № PA20-299/20.02.2026r

for **acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor"** according to an announced procedure by the University of Economics - Varna with the order of the rector RD 06-26/28.01.2026.

From: Associate Professor, Doctor, **Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov**,
New Bulgarian University - Sofia, professional field 3.8 *Economics* (specialty:
Marketing - Brand Management)

For: acquisition of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.8 *Economics* (specialization: Marketing), University of Varna, candidate **Andrey Andreev Kostov**.

Topic of the dissertation: *"Opportunities for positioning of brand extensions among Generation Z"*

1. General overview of the dissertation (according to the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the R. Bulgaria):

- The dissertation of the candidate Andrey Kostov has a net volume of 283 standard pages, divided into an introduction, three separate chapters, a conclusion and 9 appendices related to the research conducted. The list of sources used is composed of 197 titles, mainly in English.

- In essence, the study covers, and focuses separately, on several current topics in marketing - successful approaches to branding and positioning, strategic decisions for brand extensions, consumer behavior, specifically both in the context of enhanced consumer experience as a branding philosophy in a highly digitalized economy and within Generation Z, and last but not least, the marketing ecosystem and interactive interaction between brand and consumer in a gaming environment are commented on and studied. The theoretical part is rich and examines the subject of the study from different perspectives and at its different levels, and



the research part offers the results of several studies conducted by the author - quantitative, qualitative and on secondary data.

- The topic is dissertable and fully meets the needs for accumulating valuable knowledge in the field of marketing, brand management and the peculiarities of consumer behavior, specifically in Bulgaria and in the gaming industry.

2. Publications and participation in scientific forums: compliance with the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Varna (to meet 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 R. Bulgaria), if the dissertation has not been published as a monograph:

The candidate has submitted a reference with three publications related to the main work – two in English and one in Bulgarian. The publications are sufficient to cover the legal requirements, as well as to demonstrate the author's knowledge and skills in presenting scientific information.

3. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation work (compliance with the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics - Varna), opinion on the correctness of the dissertation abstract and the lexical and stylistic characteristics of the dissertation work:

- The dissertation has an appropriate structure, and the content unfolds logically, according to the set goal and the tasks associated with it.

- The abstract is correctly prepared and reflects the content of the dissertation without neglecting important information from it.

- The language of the content is professional, it is clearly evident that the candidate handles terminology correctly, forms his own concepts, and easily maneuvers among the interrelationships in the matter of branding and consumer behavior.

- The candidate has demonstrated a remarkable general knowledge of the topic, on the basis of which he has been able to appropriately integrate the specific technical, marketing, psychological and generational dimensions of the subject of the study.

- The dissertation author did not allow for passages with unclear or ambiguous content, nor unnecessary repetitions of information; moreover, the text is engaging, highly informative



and appropriately argued, without being burdened by too much data or additional (unnecessary) explanations and deviations, as a result of which the author's thought is followed without any particular effort.

4. Identification and evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation work:

- The theoretical contribution of the thesis consists in enriching the research in our country in the field of brand extension through the analysis of value creation through the development of such (appropriate) extensions; in this context, the candidate introduces the concept of "digital brand value carriers" (DBVC), with which he proposed in the second chapter a new theoretical framework for the interpretation of video games as value carriers for brand extensions from a wide range of sectors;

- The practical contribution, in turn, refers to the development and operationalization of an evaluation model for brand integration in a video game proposed by the author in the third chapter, intended for preliminary assessment of the positioning potential of brand extensions in video games at the planning and development stage of the game (communication) asset.

5. Plagiarism detected or not in the dissertation and abstract:

No plagiarism was found in either material, the sources are correctly and appropriately cited and referenced, and their list corresponds to the references in the text.

6. Critical notes and recommendations:

- The dissertation is of sufficiently high quality to leave no room for critical remarks of essential importance, but I would still draw attention to Table 2-2 (p. 116). It was constructed by the author without being based on specific data, and even more so on such data that form an objective picture of how the channels selected by him work in the struggle for attention and influence on the Bulgarian consumer. The same applies to the grading that the candidate proposes along the columns of the table – it is highly generalized, since it does not take into account the peculiarities and dynamics of the action of the listed channels (for example, according to age group, time slot for consumption of a given media, the influence of “noise” in the channel, etc.). I also do not accept definitions such as “passive viewing” of television (since there is no such act of perceiving information, and on the other hand - a huge part of the perceived information passes through the visual channel), and it is not clear what should be understood by “detailed” targeting. In this regard, if we take another of the included channels -



"outdoor advertising", in reality it could also be more "precisely" targeted not only by context, especially "location", but also by "time" - for example, a billboard of the brand "Christmas Stolen" near a store of a retail chain in the weeks before the start of the Christmas holidays. Usually, TV also channels the brand's communication well by placing advertisements in specialized channels, during certain programs, in a certain time period, etc.;

▪ In terms of recommendations, it would be useful for both the narrower professional and wider public to have access to some or all of the information from the dissertation through a larger publication in the future. As I have already indicated, the text is sufficiently appropriate in style and does not require too much editing to reach interested readers.

7. Questions to the PhD candidate:

▪ Can it be said that placing a brand extension in a video game helps move faster from one specific phase of the consumer funnel to another?

▪ Since the survey among the marketing professionals indicates (Fig. 3-17) that there is resistance to branding activities in video games, if you had the opportunity to convince decision-makers in an organization to support this approach, what three key questions/benefits would you address to demonstrate its effectiveness?

8. **Conclusion:** After reviewing the content of the dissertation (thesis), the abstract and the accompanying materials, I confidently express my POSITIVE assessment, and propose to the members of the esteemed scientific jury that the candidate Andrey Andreev Kostov be awarded the SED "Doctor" from the University of Economics – Varna, in the professional field 3.8 *Economics, Specialty - Marketing.*

18 Feb. 2026

Sofia

Signature:.....

/Assoc. prof. D. Trendafilov, FMD/

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679