



Вх. № *PA 20-40 / 12.01.2026*

## REVIEW

of a dissertation for awarding the ESD of Doctor  
in PF 3.8. Economics,  
Doctoral Program Marketing

### 1. General information

**Reviewed by:** Assoc. Prof. Svilen Venkov Ivanov, PhD, Marketing Department, University of Economics – Varna

**Ground for submitting the review:** participation in the Scientific Jury by Order, No RD-06-166/07.11.2025 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna and Decision of the Scientific Jury of 17.11.2025 in a hybrid format

**Author of the dissertation:** Radina Plamenova Jašek

**Dissertation topic:** Identity of fluid brands in a digital environment

### 2. Dissertation data

Radina Jašek was born on 03.09.1988 and, according to the provided CV, she currently works as a translator from German at Translingua Europe Ltd., Sofia, Bulgaria. She has worked as a volunteer at the Plovdiv 2019 – European Capital of Culture Foundation, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and this work of hers is the basis for conducting the research and writing her dissertation. Radina Jašek has extensive professional experience in the field of marketing. She was a full-time PhD student at the Department of Marketing in the period September 2014 - June 2016, after which she was expelled with the right to defense. According to the decision of the Department of Marketing, Jašek has met the Minimum National Requirements necessary for the defense of a dissertation, and the submitted manuscript with a decision of the Department is sent for defense after two discussions and an author's report on the changes made to the initial version is provided.

### 3. General presentation of the dissertation

The dissertation has a total volume of 238 pages and is structured into an introduction (7 pages), three chapters (167 pages), a conclusion (4 pages), a list of references (21 pages) and appendices (35 pages). The dissertation contains 34 tables, 13 figures and 12 appendices. The bibliography includes 323 sources (39 of which are online) in Bulgarian and English.



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

The dissertation is written on a topic that has the potential to become significant, in view of two necessary conditions. The first is a clear derivation of a specific author's definition of "fluid brand" and outlining the field of possibilities for its application in practice. The second one is related to the relevance of brand management in territories, such as settlements, historical and geographical regions, as well as individual countries. The idea of the author of the dissertation, although not fully refined, to consider the fluid brand as "numerous variations and designs of the distinctive elements of the brand (e.g. logo) for a limited period of time without changing the main characteristics and messages of the actual brand" (p. 4) is undoubtedly interesting. It positions the brand over time, although it encounters difficulties with distinguishing its individual elements from the point of view of the two main groups – static and changing. On the other hand, reducing the fluid brand mainly to variations of the logo of the traditional brand raises many important questions, some of which are not answered in the dissertation.

**The introduction** of the dissertation sets out relatively clearly, albeit with some contradictions, the framework of the research, its goals, tasks and describes the possibilities for applying the results obtained. The defined main goal of the dissertation includes two related, albeit different, goals. The first is "on the basis of theoretical analysis to develop and test a model for the identity of a fluid brand in the context of destination cities". The satisfaction of the residents of the town of Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv to make recommendations for improving the identity of future fluid brands with the title of "European Capital of Culture" in Central and Eastern Europe. As can be seen, both objectives are ambitious, but the constraints formulated raise the question of whether the objectives can be fully met. The problem is related to the too narrowly defined subject of the study, namely "the satisfaction of the citizens of the city of Sofia, Plovdiv from the visual identity (logo) of the brand "Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019" (p. 8). This means that when designing empirical research, it is mainly based on a study of the perceptions of the brand logo, on the basis of which it would be difficult to draw conclusions through which to fulfill the set ambitious goals. In fact, the author's request "... Through statistical methods in the digital environment to propose and test a theoretical model for a fluid brand" raises the interesting question whether and to what extent it is possible to derive and test a model of a fluid brand at all, based on the reception of logo variants.

Specific expected contributions have also been formulated in relation to these objectives. Although not quite clearly defined, two main requests of the author can be distinguished. The first is to create "a theoretical model for the identity of a fluid brand "Brand Chromosome", which carries elements of innovation... by combining methods and approaches from different scientific fields (branding, genetics, design)". The second request is related to "building and testing a methodology for the evolution of a classic brand into a fluid brand destination and criteria for its success in a digital environment".

In **Chapter One**, in three separate paragraphs, an in-depth review of literature sources related to the positioning and design of fluid brands, as well as visual identity is made. Special attention is paid to brand destinations as a specific form of fluid brand, as well as to the influence



of stakeholders in the formation of brand identity that the literary review can be perceived as a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the goals and objectives set out in the introduction. At the end of the chapter, an adapted conceptual model of "brand DNA" is proposed (p. 62), which distinguishes between "fluid elements" and "constant elements" of the brand in accordance with the formulation adopted by the author of the dissertation. Based on this model, the author also deduces a figure of a "brand chromosome" (p. 63), in which he projects "fluid" and "constant" elements of the brand identity. Undoubtedly, in theoretical terms, this concept is of interest, although it leaves open questions related to its practical application in the design of brand identity. The stated interdisciplinary nature of the study also remains in question, especially when it comes to its relationship with genetics.

In the **second chapter** of the dissertation, a comparative analysis and the author's methodology for studying the identity of fluid brands "European Capital of Culture" are presented. The author links the analysis with the development of cultural tourism in Europe, focusing on the potential benefits for certain cities from the transformation of the "European Capital of Culture" into a specific brand, which have been designated as the Capital of Culture in different periods, based on secondary data. In the third paragraph of the chapter, a methodology for examining the identity of the brand "Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019" is proposed. The methodology includes the use of in-depth interviews with experts and a survey among Plovdiv residents.

Within the framework of the proposed and conducted in-depth interviews, five criteria have been outlined, on the basis of which it can be determined whether a brand "European Capital of Culture" is successful or not. The author points out that the main task of the survey is to establish whether and to what extent citizens' satisfaction with the new logo of Plovdiv 2019 is determined by their preferences for the use of the old or new logo, its color and the presence or absence of fluid elements in a digital environment (pp. 122-123). At the end of the paragraph, the author describes the statistical procedures used in the analysis of empirical data and defines four research hypotheses. They tie the fluid brand identity to the impact of four elements of visual identity – design, logo, style and presentation. An author's "Scheme for synthesizing the key factors and turning a classic brand into a fluid brand" (p. 128) is also proposed, as well as a design of this process, consisting of five separate steps.

The **third chapter** presents the main results of the empirical studies. At the beginning of the chapter, the opinions (and stories) of the respondents from the in-depth interviews about the design and communication of the elements of the visual identity of the studied brand are presented. In the second paragraph, an analysis is made on the basis of the collected empirical data from the survey. The author of the dissertation comes to the conclusion that the design, logo and style of the brand have a positive impact on the identity of the fluid brand (p. 164). Based on the results of the regression analysis, the author points out that it is necessary to focus on the stylistic elements of the fluid brand identity, as well as the need to revise the logo and strengthen the design elements (p. 168).

In the last paragraph, based on the results of the analysis of the collected empirical data, the author of the dissertation formulates three recommendations for improving the identity of fluid brands "with the title of "European Capital of Culture". These recommendations are



related to "planning a digital campaign with fluid logo elements", "optimizing the rules for black and white and color manifestation of the fluid brand" and "implementing a communication strategy for different stakeholders and digital platforms" (p. 174). At the end of the paragraph, specific recommendations are made to "strengthen the identity of the fluid brand" (p. 175), resulting from the analyses of the empirical data made in the preceding paragraphs. Based on them, the author makes claims that "the thesis of the dissertation is confirmed", pointing out that "the implementation of a fluid brand in the digital brand strategy of "Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019" improves the perception of identity by different groups of internal stakeholders", pointing out that "there is an opportunity for a long-term positive effect in the field of culture, tourism and investment."

In the **conclusion**, the author summarizes what he has done in the dissertation, and to a certain extent exceeds what has actually been done. The formulations used for the results fully coincide with the goals and objectives specified in the introduction, thus creating a framework for the dissertation. At the end, practical recommendations are formulated for future cities "European Capitals of Culture" in Eastern and Central Europe.

The **bibliographic reference** shows the extremely serious attitude of the author to the problem he has researched, as it includes over 300 scientific publications and sources of secondary data related to the topic.

The **language, style and structure** of the dissertation have the characteristics of a monographic work. A large part of the goals and **objectives set** have been achieved and fulfilled in whole or in part.

The **abstract** corresponds fully to the dissertation.

From what is stated in this part of the review, it can be concluded that the author of the dissertation has scientific knowledge and has formed his own view on the topic of fluid brands. The design of research tools and the collection of empirical data related to the objectives of the research show that the dissertation student is able to plan and conduct an independent scientific study, which fulfills the conditions for acquiring a PhD degree, set out in the regulatory framework.

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

In the abstract, the dissertation indicates **four contributing moments**, of which **one and partially two can be confirmed**.

It can be assumed that the author offers his own definition of "fluid brand", as well as that he offers his own conceptual model "Brand chromosome".

According to the second contribution, the author presents and tests a methodology for checking the applicability and success of the idea of a fluid brand in future host cities. At the same time, the dissertation proposes a design and procedure for conducting in-depth interviews with experts and of collecting empirical data on perceptions of logo variants as part of visual identity through survey research. This can hardly be defined as an author's methodology. Rather, there is a design and presentation of the results of a survey to test the perception of visual elements of a brand of cities – cultural capitals.



In this third contribution, I cannot find any contributions, but rather conclusions in connection with the study of the perception of the logo of a particular brand.

The fourth contribution can be considered in terms of its practical value, although it appears more like a potential than an actual one.

#### 6. Publications and participation in scientific forums

On the basis of the documents provided, I establish **compliance** with the quantitative requirements under Article 35, paragraph 1, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna and with the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor, pursuant to Article 2b, Paragraph 2 and Paragraph 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

#### 7. Plagiarism in the dissertation and abstract whether or not it was found

The check of the dissertation and the abstract did **not establish** plagiarism.

#### 8. Critical remarks and recommendations

The title of the dissertation is broadly formulated enough not to necessarily create expectations that a specific project for building and evaluating a fluid brand will be developed and presented. However, the value of a scientific work can be found not only in the answers it gives, but also in the questions it poses. From this point of view, the idea of creating a methodology for designing fluid brands in a digital environment hides sufficient potential. This idea creates prerequisites for the search for specific applications and the creation of a methodology and process for building and managing fluid brands.

A critical moment in the dissertation is the linking of the perception of elements of the visual identity of the brand with the request to evaluate the success of the fluid brand in a digital environment. As well as reducing the objectives of the survey only to the study of subjective judgments and perceptions of respondents about the variants of logo, font and color. This, on the other hand, leads to the equating of the brand with only part of the elements of its visual identity. In this way, a different context from the presented survey results is created.

It would be much better if the goals and objectives of the study were reduced to what was actually done. Namely – a study of the perception of elements of the visual identity of a fluid brand by its target audiences. In this sense, the conclusions reached should be used mainly for recommendations in relation to the need to redesign or preserve these elements based on the reception of stakeholders. Apart from this, the question remains open to what extent the analysis after the fact of elements of the visual identity of a brand, part of already conducted campaigns, has predictive value and can be used in other conditions and in other brands.



## 9. Questions to the Dissertation

In connection with the established discussion points in the dissertation, two more important questions can be raised through which the dissertation can express its position more clearly:

*First question:* In addition to studying the perception of the elements of a brand's visual identity, what should data be collected for in order to test the impact of a fluid brand, and not just its visual identity?

*Second question:* If the dissertation student has to develop a fluid brand of a candidate city for the European Capital of Culture, what data groups should he collect in advance in order to design a really applicable "brand chromosome", on the basis of which the project proposal will be developed?

## 10. Conclusion

A dissertation can be defined as a scientific study on a significant issue related to the concept of fluid brands in a digital environment. There are also contributing moments, developed conceptually by the author of the dissertation, which can enrich the practice of managing brands of cities as attractive tourist destinations.

The dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, which is why I propose to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to make a positive decision for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the Doctoral program "Marketing" to Radina Plamenova Yashck.

09.01.2026

Prepared the review:

(Assoc. Prof. Svilen Ivanov, PhD)

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

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## REVIEW

**By: Prof. Dr. Hristo Ivanov Katrandzhiev**

Professional Field: 3.8 Economics, Academic Specialization "Marketing", Department of Marketing and Strategic Planning, University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Sofia

**Regarding:** a dissertation submitted for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor (PhD)" in Professional Field 3.8 Economics, Doctoral Programme "Marketing".

**Grounds for issuing the review:** Order No. RD-06-166/07.11.2025 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna.

**Author of the dissertation:** Radina Plamenova Yashek

**Title of the dissertation:** Identity of Fluid Brands in a Digital Environment

### 1. General Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation submitted for review has a total volume of 238 pages and includes: an introduction (7 pages), three main chapters (167 pages), a conclusion (4 pages), a list of references (21 pages) and appendices (36 pages). The main text is illustrated with 34 tables and 13 figures. A total of 323 sources have been used in the study, including 10 sources in Cyrillic, 274 in Latin script and 39 online sources.

The selected dissertation topic is topical and of high scientific and practical significance, as it focuses on the identity of fluid brands in a digital environment. The emphasis on cities-destinations holding the prestigious title "European Capital of Culture" is of interest to a wide range of stakeholders. The relevance of the research is determined by the fact that the concept of fluid brands is still insufficiently studied in the context of urban destinations. The analysis of these cities provides an opportunity to reveal the processes of shaping, adapting and communicating their visual identity under conditions of a dynamic digital environment and intensified international competition.

The object of the study is the brand "Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019", while the subject of the study covers the degree of satisfaction of Plovdiv residents with its visual identity (logo), examined through the prism of applying the concept of a fluid brand.

The aim of the dissertation is, on the basis of a theoretical analysis, to develop and test a model for the identity of a fluid brand in the context of cities-destinations, as well as to propose specific guidelines for improving the identity of future fluid brands holding the title "European Capital of Culture" in Central and Eastern Europe. The aim as formulated, as well as the five research tasks defined, can be characterized as clear and precisely structured.

The research thesis formulated—namely, that the implementation of a fluid brand within the digital brand strategy of “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019” contributes to improving perceptions of the brand identity of “Plovdiv 2019”—predetermines the theoretical-methodological and applied nature of the dissertation.

For the empirical testing of the proposed conceptual model of a fluid destination brand identity, in-depth interviews with experts in the respective field were conducted, as well as survey research among residents of the city of Plovdiv. In processing and analysing the collected data, methods such as abstract-logical analysis, descriptive statistics, semantic differential, analysis of variance (ANOVA), factor analysis and regression analysis were used.

I positively assess the well-argued choice of the object and subject of the research and consider that the research aim has been successfully achieved. The formulated tasks have been accomplished, and the main research thesis has been convincingly substantiated. The sources used have been selected purposefully and interpreted correctly.

## **2. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums**

A total of five scientific publications have been produced on the dissertation topic, including four single-authored works and one co-authored publication. Among them, one article stands out as being published in a scientific journal indexed in the internationally recognized Scopus database, as well as four scientific papers included in proceedings of reputable national and international scientific conferences.

The analysis of the submitted documentation and accompanying materials provides grounds to conclude that the research activity of the doctoral candidate Radina Plamenova Yashek, expressed through her publication output and participation in scientific forums, not only meets but exceeds the regulatory criteria established in Art. 57, item 4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, as well as the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, laid down in Art. 2b of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

## **3. Assessment of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation**

The analysis of the dissertation shows that the author demonstrates the ability for critical reflection, systematization and in-depth analysis of existing scientific sources on the topic under consideration. Within the theoretical part, the main components of fluid brands—both their stable and their variable elements, their positioning, as well as the essential characteristics of fluid brand identity in a digital environment—are clearly distinguished and convincingly presented. In addition, the role and influence of stakeholders in the process of shaping the identity of tourism destination brands are analysed. In this context, a conceptual model for the identity of a fluid brand in a digital environment has been developed, representing the author’s interpretation and adaptation of the model by Chapman and Tulien, presented in the first chapter of the dissertation. On the

basis of the above, a general conclusion can be drawn that the candidate for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” possesses in-depth and systematized theoretical knowledge in the selected research topic.

A substantial contribution of the dissertation is the comparative analysis of the visual identity of cities holding the title “European Capital of Culture”. The identified positive and negative effects, as well as the outlined challenges faced by cities with this status, contribute to a fuller understanding of the specifics and dynamics of their brand identity. The proposed methodology for studying the identity of the brand “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019” is characterized by a clearly structured logical sequence of stages and a well-argued choice of combined research approaches. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, the study enables an in-depth analysis of brand identity, which contributes both to the empirical validation of the proposed model and the formulation of practically applicable conclusions and recommendations presented in the second chapter.

The results obtained from the conducted in-depth interviews and quantitative empirical studies provide a basis for drawing generalized conclusions and guidelines aimed at improving the presentation of future host cities by integrating and applying elements of a fluid brand within the framework of the “European Capital of Culture” initiative. The applied analytical methods correspond to the formulated research aim and the stated tasks, which further confirms the methodological robustness of the study.

The dissertation is distinguished by a very good structure, clarity of exposition and adequate visualization of results, and may therefore be considered a reliable theoretical and empirical basis for future scientific research in the field.

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with established academic requirements, contains all necessary structural elements and sufficiently and accurately reflects the content and main emphases of the dissertation.

#### **4. Identification and Evaluation of Scientific and Scientific-Applied Contributions in the Dissertation**

As a result of the conducted research, four scientific contributions have been identified, which in their essence combine theoretical-methodological and practice-oriented aspects and can be recognized as significant.

#### **5. Established or Non-Established Plagiarism in the Dissertation and the Abstract**

As a result of the conducted review, no indications of plagiarism have been identified in the dissertation or the abstract of Radina Plamenova Yashek. The presented theoretical generalizations, analytical procedures, empirical studies, as well as the formulated conclusions and recommendations may be regarded as the outcome of the author’s independent research work.

#### **6. Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

My recommendation to the doctoral candidate is to continue her research in the same direction, building on her analysis not only with regard to brand identity, but also with respect to other dimensions (attitudes, emotions, etc.).

## 7. Questions to the Doctoral Candidate

What is the greatest challenge in measuring and analysing the identity of fluid brands in a digital environment?

## 8. Conclusion

The presented dissertation constitutes an independent, original and in-depth scientific study focused on researching a topical and socially significant issue. The content of the dissertation clearly identifies theoretical-methodological and practice-oriented contributions, and the study fully complies with the regulatory requirements established in the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as with the Regulations for its implementation at the University of Economics – Varna.

Based on the overall assessment, I give a positive opinion on the dissertation and propose that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Radina Plamenova Yashek in the field of higher education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, Professional Field 3.8 “Economics”, Academic Specialization “Marketing”.

15 January 2026

Sofia

Signature:

/Prof. Dr. H. /

