

OPINION

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Teofana Dimitrova, PhD, Department of Marketing and International Economic Relations, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

Regarding: Dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, professional field 3.8 Economics, doctoral program “Marketing”.

Basis for the Preparation of the Opinion: Participation as a member of the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation, in accordance with Order No. RD-06-166/07.11.2025 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna.

Author of the Dissertation: *Radina Plamenova Jashek*

Title of the Dissertation: *Identity of fluid brands in a digital environment*

1. GENERAL PRESENTATION OF DISSERTATION

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

The study addresses a topical and significant subject devoted to the identity of fluid brands in a digital environment. The focus on destination cities that hold the prestigious title of “European Capital of Culture” is of both scholarly and practical interest to a wide range of stakeholders. The significance of the study stems from the fact that the concept of fluid branding remains relatively under-researched in the context of urban destinations, while the analysis of these cities makes it possible to reveal the mechanisms of building, adapting and communicating their visual identity in conditions of a dynamic digital environment and intensified international competition.

The object of the research is defined as the brand “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019”, while the subject of the study encompasses the satisfaction of the residents of the city of Plovdiv with its visual identity (logo) through the implementation of the fluid brand concept.

The goal of the dissertation is, on the basis of a theoretical analysis, to develop and test a model for fluid brand identity in the context of destination cities, as well as to formulate specific recommendations for improving the identity of future fluid brands holding the title “European Capital of Culture” in Central and Eastern Europe. I find the goal thus formulated, as well as the five research objectives set, to be precisely and clearly defined.

The research thesis advanced – that the implementation of a fluid brand within the digital brand strategy of “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019” improves perceptions of the identity of the “Plovdiv 2019” brand – determines the theoretical, methodological and applied nature of the dissertation.

To test the proposed conceptual model of a fluid destination brand identity, in-depth interviews with experts in the field and survey research among residents of the city of Plovdiv were conducted. The analysis of the collected data employed abstract-logical analysis, descriptive statistical methods, the semantic differential method, analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as factor and regression analysis.

I positively assess the well-argued *choice of the object and subject* of the research and accept that the *research goal* has been achieved. The *research tasks* have been fulfilled, and the *main thesis* has been confirmed.

The *literature sources* are well selected and correctly applied.

2. PUBLICATIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN SCIENTIFIC FORUMS

Five publications related to the topic of the dissertation have been reported, including four single-authored works and one co-authored publication. Of these, one article has been published in a journal indexed in the prestigious scientific database Scopus, and four scientific papers have been published in the proceedings of reputable Bulgarian and international conferences.

Based on the submitted documents and materials, it can be concluded that the publications and participation in scientific forums of the doctoral candidate Radina Plamenova Jaschek fully meet, and even exceed, the requirements set out in Article 57, item 4 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, as well as the minimum national requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, in accordance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

3. EVALUATION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER

From the reading of the dissertation, it is evident that the author is capable of interpreting, systematising and analysing the existing literature on the subject. In this regard, the elements of fluid brands (constant and fluid) and their positioning are demonstrated, as well as key aspects of the identity of fluid brands in a digital environment, and the nature and influence of stakeholders in the formation of destination brand identity. A conceptual model for the identity of a fluid brand in a digital environment has been developed (representing the author’s adaptation of the Chapman & Tulien model) (Chapter One). The general conclusion that may be drawn is that the candidate for the award of the PhD degree possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge of the selected research field.

A particularly good impression is made by the comparative analysis of the visual identity of cities designated as “European Capital of Culture”. The outlined positive and

negative effects, as well as the challenges faced by cities holding this title, contribute to a more profound understanding of the specifics of their brand identity. The developed methodology for researching the identity of the brand “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019” is distinguished by logical coherence between the individual stages and a well-argued selection of mixed research methods. It allows for an in-depth analysis of brand identity through the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which contributes to the validation of the proposed model and to the formulation of applicable conclusions and recommendations (Chapter Two).

The results obtained from the in-depth interviews and the quantitative surveys make it possible to draw generalised conclusions and recommendations for improving the performance of future host cities through the integration and application of fluid brand elements within the framework of the “European Capital of Culture” initiative (Chapter Three). The methods of analysis used are appropriate to the stated research objectives and tasks.

The dissertation is very *well structured and clearly illustrated* and can undoubtedly serve as a *reliable basis for future research*.

The abstract contains all necessary elements, is correctly prepared, and adequately reflects the content of the dissertation as a whole.

4. IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING SCIENTIFIC AND SCIENCE-APPLICATION CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE DISSERTATION PAPER

I accept the four scientific contributions formulated in the dissertation, which are of a theoretical-methodological and practical-applied nature.

5. DETECTED OR UNDETECTED PLAGIARISM IN THE DISSERTATION PAPER AND IN THE ABSTRACT

I do not identify any elements of plagiarism in the dissertation or the abstract of Radina Plamenova Jaschek. I consider the theoretical analysis and synthesis, the conducted research, as well as the conclusions and recommendations to be her own original work.

6. CRITICAL REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I have no significant critical remarks that need to be noted. I would recommend that the author continue their research in the examined field, expanding its scope to include other city destinations.

7. QUESTIONS FOR THE DISSERTATION STUDENT

Which of the practical conclusions should be taken into consideration if the doctoral candidate were assigned the task of participating in a team responsible for developing a brand strategy for a city destination designated as a “European Capital of Culture”?

8. CONCLUSION

The submitted dissertation represents an original, independent and in-depth scientific study of a topical and significant problem. It contains clearly distinguished theoretical-methodological and practical-applied contributions and meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations at the University of Economics – Varna. The practical value of the dissertation is further enhanced by the author’s personal experience gained through voluntary work at the “Plovdiv 2019 – European Capital of Culture” Foundation in the field of digital marketing and social media content creation.

Therefore, I give my **positive assessment** of the dissertation paper, and I recommend to the Scientific Jury to **award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Radina Plamenova Jaschek** in the professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty “Marketing”.

15.01.2026
Plovdiv

Signature:

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

Assoc. Prof. Teofana Dimitrova, PhD



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Вх. № 220-2011 / 17.12.2025

STATEMENT

on dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.8
"Economics", scientific discipline - "Marketing"

candidate: Radina Plamenova Yashek

1. General information:

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Vladimir Sashov Zhechev PhD, scientific discipline "Marketing", head of the Department of Marketing at the University of Economics-Varna (UE-Varna).

Regarding: participation in an academic jury (ordinance № RD-06-166/07.11.2025) of the rector of UE-Varna and first meeting of the scientific jury held on 17.11.2025. The above stated ordinance was issued based on a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Management (Protocol №27/29.10.2025).

Author of the dissertation: Radina Plamenova Yashek.

Title of the dissertation: Identity of Fluid Brands in Digital Environment".

2. General presentation of the dissertation work (according to the requirements of Art. 48, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria):

The research topic in the dissertation is very relevant considering the development of destination brands from cultural and economic points of view. The study is limited to the city of Plovdiv, which reduces the validity of the recommendations (in terms of scope and time). The effects of building fluid brands manifest themselves over time, and the study does not cover a very long period. Despite this finding, the author outlines the applicability of the work in the conclusions. The poorly balanced structure of individual chapters and paragraphs is noticeable.

The introduction outlines the role of fluid brands in branding context. The relevance and significance of the researched matters are clarified (including from viewpoint of the growing interest in Eastern Europe) and the need for targeted actions to build destination brands is highlighted. The main framework of the dissertation research is set (aim, objectives, subject, object, thesis and limitations) and the approaches and methods of the research are examined. The limitations set largely justify the expectations from the results presented further.

Chapter 1 attempts to conceptualize fluid brands in the context of classical branding. In this context, brand destinations are placed and the role of stakeholders in the process of identity building is elucidated. The author's fluid brand model "Brand Chromosome" is also presented,



in which constant and fluid elements are considered.

Chapter 2 offers a comparative analysis of the host cities of the title "European Capital of Culture". Here, the inclusion of strategic elements that include a fluid brand identity is also argued. This chapter also presents methodology for studying the brand identity of "Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019" in several phases. Success criteria are examined and 4 hypotheses are formulated.

Chapter 3 contains the most important results of the study. The conducted in-depth interviews are analyzed, validity tests are performed and factor analysis is applied. Results of non-parametric tests and significance tests are also presented. At the end of this chapter, some applied aspects, conclusions and recommendations for improving the identity of fluid brand destinations with the title of "European Capital of Culture" are discussed.

The conclusion presents a summary of what has been accomplished in the dissertation, taking into account the implementation of the set aim and objectives. Practical recommendations are also addressed, within which the relevance of the idea of a fluid brand can be tested for future host cities.

The bibliography demonstrates the author's very serious attitude towards the researched domain. 323 sources are cited, which contribute to a good understanding of the terminology and practice. Among them one can find multiple contemporary sources in the field of branding and numerous references to the extant literature on fluid brands which is impressive.

The language, style and structure of the dissertation bear the characteristics of a monographic work. No attempts for unregulated use of scholarly texts have been identified. The text introduces many concepts, but some of them are schematic presentations without establishing logical connection.

The dissertation abstract reflects the main points of the dissertation work in a synthesized but precise manner. Radina Plamenova Yashek declares 1 article in co-authorship and 4 independent scientific conference proceedings papers, presented at scientific events in Bulgaria and abroad, which meets the quantitative requirements under Art. 57, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics-Varna.

Within the framework of the presented work, it can be concluded that the author covers the topic of the dissertation competently. There are occurrences where analyses of research areas go beyond the scope of the study. The methodology could have highlighted the contributing moments more clearly, since it is an event of 6 years ago, which had been prepared even earlier. On this basis, results are derived that can be useful for future positioning of



destinations. In this sense, the time lag could have been more clearly argued with the authentic contributing moments.

3. Identification and assessment of scientific and applied contributions in the dissertation:

The author has made four contributions:

1) Through a systematic analysis of specialized literature and in the context of new technologies, a definition of a fluid brand has been designed with indicators for measuring its identity through a dynamic conceptual model "Brand Chromosome" proposed by the author.

2) A methodology has been developed and tested, providing a framework for how the applicability and success of the idea of a fluid brand can be tested for future host cities.

3) Evidence is provided for developing a brand identity "European Capital of Culture" through the implementation of a fluid brand.

4) The review and comparison of the visual identity and brand elements of cities with the title of "European Capital of Culture" for 2019-2025 creates prerequisites for continuity, affirmation and preservation of the identity of cities - "European Capitals of Culture" as successful and developing fluid brand destinations.

I consider the second and fourth contributions to be correctly defined and reflecting the value of the work. The first contribution is partially achieved, since despite the many cited references, I believe that the stated characteristics of a fluid brand can be related to most modern classic brands. The third contribution is partially achieved in view of the fact that the experience from previous editions is used by the prize winners in subsequent years.

4. Critical remarks and recommendations

1) The significance of the topic could have been emphasized even more clearly, and not only in terms of future value for researchers and the business community.

2) The main text places a major emphasis on the logo. It is good to consider what other elements are involved in building a fluid brand and whether the logo alone exhausts the range of related activities within the process. This would be particularly important for future research.

3) For any future research, I recommend that the candidate consider ways to approach destination brands in a more individualized manner in the process of positioning them (taking into account the subsequent effects of building a fluid brand).

5. Questions for the doctoral candidate

1) What is the role of internal branding in positioning a destination? What would be the



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key activities to be undertaken by future candidates for the European Capital of Culture?

6. Conclusion

Based on my familiarization with the submitted dissertation on the topic: „*Identity of Fluid Brands in Digital Environment*“, as well as the scholarly works, their significance, the scientific and applied contributions contained therein, I find sufficient grounds to give a positive assessment and to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the doctoral program "Marketing" to Radina Plamenova Yashek.

Date: 16.12.2025

Signature:

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



OPINION

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) following a procedure announced by the University of Economics - Varna

1. General information

- prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Lyubomir Dimitrov Lyubenov, DSc, University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev"
- grounds for writing the review: order № RD-06-166/07.11.2025 of the Rector for the appointment of a scientific jury and decision of the scientific jury
- author of the PhD thesis dissertation: Radina Plamenova Jašek
- topic of the PhD thesis dissertation: Identity of Fluid Brands in a Digital Environment

2. General overview of the of the PhD thesis dissertation

The PhD thesis dissertation consists of 238 pages, of which: an introduction - 7 pages, main text (three chapters) - 167 pages, a conclusion - 4 pages, a list of references - 323 bibliographic sources. It includes 34 tables, 13 figures, and 13 appendices. The correct formulation of the structure of the PhD thesis dissertation facilitates the research on its topic.

The introduction correctly justifies the significance, relevance and prospects of the identity of fluid brands in a digital environment. The object and subject of the study, research hypothesis thesis, goal, tasks, research methods, main limitations, sources of information and approbation are well formulated. The scientific criteria are specific and clear, which ensures the quality of the PhD thesis dissertation.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Presented are 5 publications (1 scientific article and 4 scientific reports), which in terms of volume and thematic focus meet the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD). They are related to the topic of the PhD thesis dissertation, and represent a successful research attempt.

The publications related to the PhD thesis dissertation comply 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, as well as with the minimum national requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD), according to article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. I am not aware of the PhD thesis dissertation being published as a monograph, which I recommend.

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

Undoubtedly, the chosen topic of the PhD thesis dissertation and the its results determine the well-argued relevance and significance of the studied models for fluid brand identity in a digital environment. The positive results of the study justify the approval in principle as possessing the necessary qualities of a PhD thesis dissertation for obtaining an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD), as well as the alignment between its topic and content. The abstract of the PhD thesis dissertation reflects in a summarized form the main results of the study and gives a good idea of the theoretical and applied contributions of the author.



5. Identification and evaluation of scientific, and the applied and scientific contributions in the PhD thesis dissertation

The detailed familiarization with the PhD thesis dissertation allows the formulation of specific positive results and contributions, the most important of which are:

- a definition of a fluid brand with indicators for measuring its identity is derived using a dynamic conceptual model called "Brand Chromosome" proposed by the author.
- a methodology has been created and tested that provides a framework for how the applicability and success of the fluid brand idea can be tested in additional host cities.
- the analysis of empirical data establishes that the logo as part of the "European Capital of Culture" brand should be simple, but with a profound message, to which the dynamic visual identity of the fluid brand contributes.

6. Plagiarism detected or not detected in the PhD thesis dissertation and its abstract

Although the main university unit has checked the PhD thesis dissertation for plagiarism, and the author has declared in writing that the PhD thesis dissertation is entirely the author's product and that no other publications and developments were used in its development in violation of copyright, I also do not detect plagiarism in the PhD thesis dissertation and its abstract.

7. Critical notes and recommendations

Identity is not only visual and sonic logos are also key to the recognition of fluid brands in a digital environment, and they can be used in conjunction with visual fluid brand elements. Please indicate the perspectives in this area in the context of the topic of the PhD thesis dissertation.

8. Questions to be addressed by the PhD candidate

Plovdiv is associated with the Rose Valley, although it is not located in it, since Karlovo is part of the Plovdiv region and many rose growers operate there, and the city Plovdiv is the gateway to the Rose Valley. Should the EU legally protected intellectual product (IPR) "Bulgarian Rose Oil", which is one of the characteristic symbols of Bulgaria with history of more than three centuries of and international popularity, be treated as part of the identity of the studied fluid brand in a digital environment?

9. Conclusion

The stated positive results of Radina Plamenova Jašek's PhD thesis dissertation on the topic "Identity of Fluid Brands in a Digital Environment" provide sufficient grounds for an overall positive assessment of the scientific potential and opportunities for research activity. This allows me to vote reasonably and unequivocally positively for awarding Radina Plamenova Jašek the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.8 "Economics", doctoral program "Marketing".

Date: 06.01.2025

Review prepared by:

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(Assoc. Prof. L. Lyubenov, DSc)