

Review

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Professional Field 3.8 "Economics," Academic Specialty "Marketing"

Regarding: Competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette issue no. 56/02.07.2024, Professional Field 3.8 Economics (Marketing – Brand Management), Department of Economics, New Bulgarian University (NBU)

Candidate in the competition: Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov

The review has been prepared based on participation as a member of the academic jury for the competition, in accordance with Order Z-RK-349/26.09.2024, issued by the Rector of NBU. The candidate in the announced competition is Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitar Ivanov Trendafilov, a full-time lecturer in the Department of Economics at NBU.

I. Evaluation of Compliance with the Minimum National Requirements and the Requirements of New Bulgarian University

The submitted documents indicate that the candidate in the announced competition, Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov, meets all requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor," in accordance with Article 24 (1) of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria:

- Holds a doctoral degree;
- Has held an academic position as an assistant or chief assistant for no less than two years;
- Has submitted a published monographic work that does not duplicate the works submitted for obtaining the doctoral degree. He has also presented other original research works and publications that do not repeat the works presented for the doctoral degree;
- Has met the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff;
- There is no proven plagiarism or inaccuracy of the scientific data presented in his research works, as established by the legally prescribed process.

Based on the document "Minimum Requirements for the Scientific, Teaching, and/or Artistic-Creative Activities of Candidates for Academic Positions by Professional Fields, in Compliance with the Regulations on the Development of Academic Staff and the Requirements of New Bulgarian University," it is evident that the candidate meets (groups A, B) or exceeds (groups G, D) the minimum national requirements of the Regulations on the Development of Academic Staff (Article 1a, paragraph 1), and also exceeds the additional minimum requirements of NBU (groups Zh – I) for the academic position of "Associate Professor." Quantitatively, the candidate has achieved a total of 815 points, which is nearly 1.5 times the minimum threshold of 570 points.

II. Research Activity and Results

1. Evaluation of the Monograph

Chief Assistant Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov is participating in the competition with his habilitation thesis: Trendafilov, D. (2023) "The Mobile Consumer", NBU, Sofia, 2023, 190 pages, ISBN 978-619-233-153-5. Scientific reviewers: Associate Professor Dr. Nadezhda Dimova (NBU) and Associate Professor Dr. Alexander Hristov (UNWE).

The monograph presented for review spans 190 pages and offers a comprehensive, multi-faceted exploration of a well-defined, complex problem. It features extensive content, a thorough bibliography, accurate citations, and a balanced, logical structure. The author writes in a polemical style that is accessible, engaging, and persuasive. Relevant examples (case studies) are carefully selected to illustrate theoretical reflections in an optimal way.

In the introduction, the author specifies the aim of the study: to examine the "phenomenon of the mobile consumer from several perspectives." To achieve this goal, a series of objectives is set: to synthesize the latest information on topics such as digital marketing, consumer interests, and experience, to present specific indicative solutions implemented in practice over the last two decades, to consolidate results from various studies, and, based on them, to propose a different approach to profiling the mobile consumer.

The monograph is logically structured, allowing for a thorough and in-depth examination of the research problem.

Chapter 1, "The Moving Target," outlines the socio-economic context in which the characteristics/profile of the mobile consumer are examined. Based on a substantial selection

and analysis of academic publications and empirical studies, it traces how "consumers, technologies, and companies are transforming the essence of marketing." The ways in which technology has irreversibly impacted consumer behavior are analyzed, setting the stage for subsequent chapters. The expert viewpoints, comments, and recent study findings presented in this chapter provide a foundation for understanding the emergence and nature of the mobile consumer.

Chapter 2, "Consumer 4.0 Maintenance," presents a concise yet detailed overview and comparative analysis of the defining characteristics of two "digitized" generations—Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z. These generations are emphasized as they currently (and in the near future) form the majority of the global workforce and dominate market activity as consumers. This chapter's most significant contribution is the attempt to explain the consumer behavior of these generations, based on the values, perceptions, attitudes, and lifestyle traits identified by the author. The chapter concludes with a framework for adjusting marketing approaches and tools tailored to their consumer behavior. Notably, a PESTEL analysis is provided on key factors that, according to the author, influence Millennial behavior in Bulgaria (pp. 70–72).

Chapter 3 addresses one of the most critical aspects of consumer behavior from a marketing perspective: consumer experience. The author successfully analyzes a broad range of theories and models, synthesizing his perspective on the topic.

Chapter 4 discusses another relevant aspect of the mobile consumer: "multichannel engagement." Despite the author's arguments, I maintain that the contemporary ("mobile") consumer is more accurately described as "omnichannel" rather than "multichannel," contrary to the author's thesis.

Chapter 5 extends the discussion of consumer experience and attempts to visually illustrate current practices in "constructing" consumer experiences. These have been enabled by technological market evolution, which has led to changes in consumer habits. This chapter combines theoretical models derived from marketing practices over the past 10 years with a case study approach, comparing the strategies of two giants in the global sports industry, Nike and Adidas. The comparative analysis is professionally conducted, with appropriate conclusions drawn.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of empirical research results on smartphone and tablet usage, conducted with the assistance of Market Links in September 2018 and 2019 (nationally

representative). The territorial scope of the study is limited to the Bulgarian market, focusing on the age groups discussed in Chapter 2—Millennials and Generation Z. The data is correctly analyzed.

Chapter 7 identifies notable marketing trends, as well as some manifestations of consumer experience organization in the digital age, which the author considers worthy of attention.

Contributions of the Monograph

I consider the following to be the scientific, methodological, and practical contributions of the monograph:

- A theoretical understanding of the "mobile consumer phenomenon" is developed and systematized, based on a precise selection of global theoretical and empirical studies and leading practices.
- An interdisciplinary approach is applied to explore and conceptualize the "mobile consumer" from various perspectives.
- An attempt is made to explain the consumer behavior of Generations Y and Z, based on the values, perceptions, attitudes, and lifestyle traits identified by the author. A framework is proposed for adjusting marketing approaches and tools aligned with their consumer behavior.
- The PESTEL analysis of the main factors influencing Millennial behavior in Bulgaria, along with the findings from the empirical study on smartphone and tablet use in Bulgaria, has practical relevance and can be applied in marketing management practices.

Critical Remarks

In reading the monograph, several questions and critical notes arise:

First Critical Note: This is a formal observation—almost all figures (schemes, diagrams, models, etc.) in the monograph are in English, directly taken from the respective sources (correctly cited). While this is a formal note, it affects the overall readability of the book's content.

Second Note: I suggest expanding on the notion of what constitutes the "mobility" of the modern consumer. In addition to the aspects identified by the author (p. 12), I would add another aspect of the mobile consumer—the increasing dynamics of switching between different brands within the same category due to factors such as greater awareness, higher demands, the search for a more satisfying experience, decreased emotional attachment, and

more aggressive competition. Here, mobility refers to higher levels of customer "churn" or lower retention/loyalty levels, posing a significant challenge for modern marketing.

Third Note: I encourage a discussion on the topic explored in Chapter 4, "Multichannel or the New Convenience." In the introductory paragraph, the author references the "multichannel approach as a response to increased consumer satisfaction through convenience." The chapter focuses on multichannel marketing as a characteristic of modern marketing. However, I believe that "omnichannel" and the omnichannel consumer are the central figures in contemporary marketing. Understanding the distinctions between these two concepts can explain why multichannel marketing has existed (and continues to exist) long before the widespread adoption of digital technologies and channels, primarily serving different customer segments. Omnichannel, however, integrates multiple channels, including digital ones, for the same customer segment, allowing consumers to "move across" them to achieve "new convenience" or a more satisfying experience with the brand, regardless of the channel used.

Fourth Note: It would be interesting and beneficial to conduct a comprehensive study on the values, perceptions, and consumer behavior of Millennials in Bulgaria, using or adapting methodologies from foreign (global) studies on the topic, as analyzed in the monograph. Developing an original methodology would also be advantageous.

While other specific questions arise in reading the monograph, as I have often stated, a scholarly work can be positively evaluated when it provokes thought, generates ideas, and invites discussion.

My overall evaluation of the monograph is positive.

2. Evaluation of the Additional Publications Submitted Following the Appointment as "Assistant Professor"

For this competition, Assistant Professor Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov has presented a well-balanced portfolio containing a diverse range of scholarly publications, including: a habilitation work - monograph (1); a published book based on his defended dissertation for the academic degree of "Doctor" (1); an article in a scientific journal that is peer-reviewed and indexed in world-renowned scientific databases (1); articles and reports published in non-peer-reviewed journals with scientific reviewing or in edited collective volumes (9); and other publications – standalone university textbooks (2). Structurally, articles comprise the largest

relative share, one of which is published in an international scientific database. All publications, except one, are in Bulgarian, and one is co-authored.

Thematic Scope of the Submitted Publications

The scholarly works submitted in this competition can be categorized into the following two research areas:

- Marketing Management, including consumer behavior and customer experience management (1 monograph, 5 articles, and 1 scientific report).
- Brand Management, including semiotic research on brands and specific aspects of brand building (1 book, 1 article, 3 reports, and 1 standalone textbook).

It should be noted that, despite the formal distinction between these research areas, there is a close connection and complementarity between the publications within each. Content analysis of these works reveals consistency in scientific exploration, a sustainable and profound scholarly interest in the specified fields, and ongoing development and enrichment over the years. The publications demonstrate a clear research focus that enables depth and comprehensiveness in the investigation. They are distinguished by the relevance of research issues, originality, and scientific accuracy.

The existence of the Research Program, adopted by the Departmental Council of the Department of Economics on May 18, 2021, brings a structured approach to the research activity of the candidate in this competition and guarantees sustainability over time.

3. Citations by Other Authors

The submitted documents show that one of the candidate's publications (Trendafilov, D., "The Brand as Economic Value and Sign: Positioning as an Instrument for Creating Market Distinction," in P.P. Trifonas (ed.), *International Handbook of Semiotics*, Springer, London, 2015) has been cited twice in scientific journals that are peer-reviewed and indexed in world-renowned scientific databases. There are also six citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review, and two citations in non-peer-reviewed journals. The quantitative evaluation of citations for the candidate in this competition indicates that the total of 100 points in this category (D) doubles the required minimum of 50 points, allowing for a positive assessment.

III. Teaching and Educational Activity

Assistant Professor Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov's teaching activities can be highly rated in terms of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria. The following points support this assessment:

- Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov has been a full-time lecturer in the Department of Economics since 2015, with substantial academic experience in teaching marketing and branding. His courses, both in-class and extracurricular, at different educational levels at New Bulgarian University (NBU), are well-aligned with the scope of this competition. His teaching load over the past five years (both in-class and extracurricular) exceeds the university's required standards. Five of these courses are conducted in English. Since the 2018/19 academic year, Dr. Trendafilov has been part of the teaching staff for joint programs with the University of Sheffield (since 2021, the University of York). Based on the above, we can conclude that his teaching experience and academic expertise align well with the academic field of the competition.
- The two textbooks developed by Dr. Trendafilov (Retail Marketing and Management. Lecture Course, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, 2017, 155 pages; and Building and Establishing a Brand, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, 2022, 449 pages), as well as his scholarly publications, which are thematically aligned with the courses he teaches, are valuable resources for the educational process and enhance the quality of student learning.
- Dr. Trendafilov has been among the initiators and organizers of the Early Fall School of Semiotics in Sozopol (2015-2019). From 2018 to 2022, he mentored NBU student teams who won awards in the annual National Marketing Olympiad, organized by the University of National and World Economy, the University of Economics – Varna, and NBU.
- Dr. Trendafilov's high regard among students is evidenced by excellent student evaluations (above 5 out of 6) concerning their satisfaction with his courses. His skills are further demonstrated in supervising independent projects, theses, and student internships (as an academic mentor in the "Student Internships" Project I and III under the Operational Program "Human Resource Development") and in his roles as program consultant for the Bachelor's Program in Marketing and the Master's Program in Marketing Management, among others.

- His use of interactive teaching methods, development of case studies suitable for student learning, textbooks, personalized work with students, integration of research results into the teaching process, and proficiency in English contribute to Dr. Trendafilov's standing as one of the most respected lecturers at NBU.

I assess Dr. Trendafilov's teaching and educational activity as fully meeting the requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at NBU.

IV. Administrative and Public Activities

Alongside his teaching and research, Dr. Trendafilov has been actively involved in NBU's academic life. Since his appointment as a full-time faculty member, he has held various administrative and leadership roles, including:

- 2015-2017: Program Consultant for the Bachelor's Program in Marketing and the Master's Program in Marketing Management.
- 2015-2017: Member of the Course Accreditation Committee for courses acquired abroad or from other Bulgarian universities under the Faculty of Business Administration.
- 2018–2024: Vice-Rector for International Affairs, responsible for strategic and infrastructure partnerships with foreign universities and consortia.
- 2018-2024: Member of the Academic Staff Development Committee.
- 2018–2024: Member of the Rector's Council and Academic Council at NBU.
- 2018–2024: NBU representative on the Management Board of joint programs with the University of York / City College – Thessaloniki.
- 2020-2023: Institutional Coordinator at NBU for the establishment of a university network as part of the European Commission's "European University Initiative," funded by the "Erasmus+" program (ERUA: "European Reform University Alliance").

V. Personal Impressions of the Candidate

I have known Dimitar Trendafilov since 2014 when I was part of the academic committee that awarded him the degree of "Doctor" after successfully defending his dissertation on "Semiotic Studies of the Brand." Although my contact with him has been irregular, I can state that he is an intelligent and well-read individual, precise and responsible in his interactions. As a

colleague, he is ethical, responsive, highly engaged in academic life, and respected by both his colleagues and students.

VI. Opinions, Recommendations, and Comments on the Candidate's Work and Achievements

The self-assessment report shows that Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov has participated in educational projects. While these contributions are significant for the academic institution's development, I believe that his scientific potential should also be directed towards developing and leading or participating in university, national, and international research projects. This is particularly relevant given Dr. Trendafilov's good contacts within the academic community, both domestically and internationally.

Some critical remarks were noted in the evaluation of the monograph, which I hope Dr. Trendafilov will address during the final meeting of the academic committee.

Conclusion

Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov's accomplishments in research and teaching, along with his administrative experience and public engagement, meet the legal and institutional requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at NBU.

Based on the above, I recommend that Dr. Dimitar Trendafilov be appointed to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field of 3.8. Economics (Marketing – Brand Management) at NBU.

Prof. Dr. Galina Mladenova

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