

TRAKIA UNIVERSITY
STARA ZAGORA

REVIEW

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Nadka Stefanova Kostadinova, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, habilitation in professional field 3.8. Economics, in scientific specialty Economics and Management (agriculture, management accounting)

Order of the Rector of the "D.A.Tsenov" Academic University, Svishtov No. 1304/11.12.2024 and a decision of the Scientific Jury, taken at the first meeting held on 13.12.2024.

Author of the dissertation: Nikola Ilichov Ilchev, d020420200 - SA "D.A.Tsenov", Svishtov, Department of "Commercial Business" - for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.8. Economics, under the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Trade)".

Topic of the dissertation: "ADAPTING A BUSINESS MODEL FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE TRADE IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT"

Brief information about the doctoral program and the doctoral student

The doctoral program was opened by the Department of Commercial Business at the D.A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov. The dissertation has been discussed and is being sent for defense by the same department.

Doctoral student Nikola Ilichov Ilchev graduated from the Higher School of Economics with a Bachelor's degree in Fire Safety and Civil Protection, a Master's degree in Firefighting Equipment and Automation, and a Master's degree in Entrepreneurship and Economics at the Chernorizets Hrabar University of Applied Sciences. Since 2016, he has been the founder and head of Ewebra OOD, which conducts training and some of the largest and most significant e-commerce events in the country and Eastern Europe.

I. General presentation of the dissertation work

1. The subject of the research is business models for trade in food and beverages in a digital environment and the possibility of their implementation in an enterprise developing mainly traditional trade.

2. Volume - the dissertation submitted to me for review has a total volume of 179 standard pages and consists of: introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references, list of figures, list of tables, appendices.

The information in the dissertation is visualized with 29 figures and 12 tables.

3. The structure (introduction, three chapters, conclusion) and content of the dissertation work are in accordance with the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

4. Literature used - The bibliographic list includes 91 sources, of which 17 are in Cyrillic (in Bulgarian and internet addresses) and 74 are in Latin.

II. Assessment of the form and content of the dissertation

Relevance of the study – in the modern world, the economy and society are fundamentally changing as a result of digitalization. It stimulates labor productivity, entrepreneurship, innovation and, in general, economic growth. The online sales market (including food and beverages) is significantly expanding its scale. A large part of consumers of goods make purchases online. As a result, merchants are looking for opportunities to digitize sales technology.

The research **object** was correctly selected - companies that offer food and beverages in offline and digital environments, in order to compare their activities, draw a summary and recommendations necessary for adapting a hybrid business model.

The subject of the study is business models for trading in food and beverages in a digital environment and the possibility of their implementation in an enterprise developing mainly traditional trade.

The research thesis is a logical consequence of the topic of the dissertation - the transformation of a certain business model for offline food and beverage retail requires restructuring of basic processes in order to simultaneously move to a digital environment, which can also improve customer interaction.

The purpose and objectives of the dissertation are adequate to the subject and object of research, based on theoretical interpretation and specific

determination to adapt an appropriate hybrid business model of offline activity, parallel to functioning in a digital environment.

The research methodology used, encompassing various methods and approaches, is appropriate for the purpose and objectives of the research and has been applied correctly.

I believe that the dissertation correctly sets out the restrictive conditions of the study, as the study was conducted in a specific territory - mainly in the city of Ruse and settlements in the region, with a specific scope of activity of the basic enterprises (trade in food and beverages only to end consumers), with a fixed time scope.

The dissertation is presented in three chapters, achieving a good balance in terms of their volumes and also of their individual paragraphs. A classical approach to structuring a dissertation is adopted with distinguishable and logically linked theoretical, methodological-analytical and project parts, which in their entirety represent a self-completed study.

Chapter one provides an in-depth review of the theoretical foundations of the online food and beverage market. A basic interpretation of the market and the main characteristics of food and beverage are presented. The specifics of buyer behavior when shopping online, as well as consumer preferences, are examined. Commercial practices and processes in the trade of food and beverage in a digital environment are precisely presented. It is rightly noted that the food and beverage market is strongly oriented towards the online space, with digitalization being key to increasing efficiency and transparency in the supply chain.

Chapter two presents a methodological basis for business models for food and beverage trade. The relevant factors of this trade in a digital environment are precisely systematized. An in-depth analysis of the main characteristics of a business model for food and beverage trade in a digital environment has been carried out, as this model has been adapted to a specific company through a survey conducted by the author on the satisfaction of consumers of an offline retail outlet. The doctoral student correctly notes that innovation and adaptability of the business model can significantly increase competitiveness and optimize the costs of delivery, warehousing and packaging.

Chapter three presents practical aspects of adapting a business model for offline food and beverage trade in a digital environment. The doctoral student proposes an improved business model for the researched company for offline trade, adapted for a digital footprint. An overview and SWOT analysis of the company's status are carried out, and a number of global practices in the trade of food and beverage in a digital environment are also examined. Three business

model scenarios have been independently developed and schematically presented by the doctoral student.

Each chapter of the dissertation ends with adequately summarized conclusions.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, the doctoral student presents summarized theoretical statements, results achieved in the study, which prove the thesis of the dissertation.

I believe that the dissertation is an original and in-depth scientific study, the personal work of the author. The doctoral student has complied with the rules of scientific ethics when citing the literary sources used. The computational procedures and the statistical processing of the empirical data have been carried out correctly. The dissertation is very well illustrated and visualized.

The abstract is presented in a form that meets the requirements, reflecting the content of the dissertation in a volume of 36 pages. The reference for contributions correctly reflects the results achieved by the author.

All this gives me reason to believe that the dissertation contains scientific and applied scientific results and is dedicated to a current and significant problem. The dissertation submitted for review is evidence that the doctoral candidate has acquired very deep theoretical knowledge on the researched issues and has acquired the ability to conduct independent scientific research.

III. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work.

The dissertation contains scientific and scientific-applied contributions. I believe that they can enrich the existing theoretical knowledge and methodological statements in the possibilities for increasing the efficiency of sales of food and beverages in a digital environment. I highlight as an original contribution the adapted business model for trade in food and beverages, adapted for an offline retail outlet. I accept the reference for the contributions in the dissertation work.

The doctoral student has published the main results of the research on the topic of his dissertation in 2 independent articles and 2 independent scientific reports, one of which is in a foreign language, in non-refereed journals with scientific review.

In the submitted reference-declaration for the fulfillment of minimum national requirements for awarding the ONS "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, with 30 points required, I consider the 40 points presented by the doctoral student.

IV. Critical notes, questions and recommendations for the dissertation

I have questions for the doctoral student:

What are the main reasons why electronic purchases of food and beverages are not so popular in Bulgaria?

What knowledge, skills and abilities should be acquired that will help create business models in a digital environment in the food and beverage trade?

My remark to the doctoral student is that in the literature used, it would be clearer to present first the literature used in Cyrillic in alphabetical order, then in Latin also in alphabetical order, after that – the used regulatory framework and Internet sources. The remark made does not diminish the merits of the dissertation.

I recommend that the doctoral student, in his future scientific activity, publish his research in specialized, refereed and indexed scientific journals.

V. Summary conclusion and opinion

The dissertation work of doctoral student Nikola Ilichov Ilchev on the topic: "Adaptation of a business model for food and beverage trade in a digital environment" is a completed independent scientific study dedicated to a current economic problem. The set goal and objectives of the study have been successfully fulfilled.

I believe that the dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the State Administration of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation. I will vote with conviction for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Nikola Ilichov Ilchev in the professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Trade)".

10.02.2025

Reviewer:...

St. Zagora

(Prof. Dr. ~~Nadka Kostadinova~~)