NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Economics

Doctoral Program in Marketing

REVIEW

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Yordanova Dimova, New Bulgarian University, Field 3.8 Economics

Subject: Conferral of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field of 3.8 Economics (Marketing); Candidate: Plamen Ivaylov Ruskov.

Dissertation Title: "Digital CRM Transformation in International Business – Strategies, Practices, and Challenges"

1. Significance of the research problem from a scientific and applied-scientific perspective.

The topic of the dissertation presented by doctoral candidate Plamen Ruskov is highly relevant, timely, and of great practical significance. In the era of global digitalization and rapidly evolving markets, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is undergoing a fundamental evolution. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and modern technology stacks (such as Large Language Models – LLMs) into international business is a critical factor for corporate competitiveness. The doctoral candidate has rightly focused his research on the intersection of strategic management, digital transformation, and consumer behavior in a digital environment. The significance of the research problem is indisputable from both scientific and applied-scientific standpoints, enriching both theory and practice.

2. Precisely formulated goals and objectives of the dissertation.

A careful analysis of the goal and the associated objectives reveals that they are clearly, correctly, and accurately formulated, and that the doctoral candidate has diligently adhered to them throughout the development of the dissertation. The text is original and reflects the author's own work, offering a clear analysis of the specific issues and aspects under consideration. The formulated objectives are relevant to the stated goal and are arranged in a logical sequence.

3. Degree of familiarity with the state of the problem and appropriateness of the literature used.

The work is excellently balanced and possesses a distinct academic structure. It comprises six chapters, a conclusion, and five specialized appendices, spanning a total of 189 pages (up to the start of the bibliography).

• The introductory section correctly defines the scope, object, subject, goals, objectives, and leading hypotheses of the study, demonstrating clear preliminary methodological preparation.

• Chapters I and II establish a solid theoretical foundation, examining the evolution of CRM environments, the concept of Customer Value Management (CVM), and the conceptual distinctions between "digitization," "digitalization," and "digital transformation." The examination of these processes through the lens of leading global models (such as the McKinsey framework) is particularly valuable.

• Chapters III and IV shift the focus to digital transformation in international business. The study analyzes e-marketing strategies, e-CRM systems, and the specific technological context in Bulgaria during the most recent period (2025–2026). It examines various types of international business strategies (global, multi-local, transnational, etc.).

It is evident that the doctoral candidate possesses a thorough understanding of the research problem, and the extensive and diverse literature utilized aligns perfectly with the subject matter of the dissertation.

4. Accuracy in citing a representative number of authors.

The citation of a representative number of authors is accurate, demonstrating the doctoral candidate's excellent familiarity with a wide variety of sources and their ability to analyze and integrate them into the dissertation.

5. Presence of a well-founded and developed theoretical research model.

One of the work's greatest strengths is its empirical focus. In Chapter V, the doctoral candidate demonstrates a high level of proficiency in research methodology. A scientifically controlled field experiment was conducted using a three-group model (Universal Control Group, Control Group A,

and Experimental Group B). The innovative architectural design of the technology stack for the AI solution employed is particularly impressive:

• Level 1: Cognitive modeling and scenario generation (LLM Layer);

• Level 2: Audio-visual synthesis; • Level 3: UX integration and behavioral triggering (Interaction Layer).

This approach demonstrates that the work is not merely a theoretical overview but is grounded in actually implemented advanced technologies.

6. Alignment of the selected research methodology and methods with the stated aim and objectives of the dissertation.

In the final chapter, the doctoral candidate subjects the collected data—which fully align with the dissertation's aim and objectives—to descriptive and comparative analysis. Key business metrics are evaluated, such as:

• Resource efficiency, production costs, and time-to-market.

• UX (User Experience) metrics and user engagement.

• Conversions within the digital funnel (E-commerce Funnel). Statistical verification of the established research questions and hypotheses was conducted with precision, lending a high degree of credibility to the final conclusions.

The five included appendices hold independent practical value for both academia and industry. They contain detailed meta-prompts and operational methodologies for leading generative AI platforms: Claude, ChatGPT, HeyGen, ElevenLabs, and Kling. This transforms the dissertation into a ready-to-use manual for digital CRM transformation.

7. Evidence of the author's own contribution to the collection and analysis of empirical data.

The dissertation clearly highlights the doctoral candidate's personal contribution to the collection and analysis of empirical data. Based on the presented content, the candidate identifies the following contributions, which I fully endorse:

1. Theoretical enrichment: Refinement of the terminology and differentiation between digitalization and comprehensive digital CRM transformation within the context of international business.

2. Methodological contribution: Development of an innovative three-group experimental model for studying consumer behavior via AI-generated content.

3. Scientific-applied contribution: Demonstrated optimization of business metrics (Time-to-Market and conversions) through the implementation of a multi-layered AI architectural stack.

4. Practical contribution: Creation of ready-to-implement prompt engineering models (the appendices to the work) for businesses in Bulgaria.

Description of contributions:

The scope and diversity of these contributions are closely linked to the credibility of the dissertation. The content, structure, and focused analysis of the subject matter demonstrate that the candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge regarding the key issues analyzed in the dissertation, while simultaneously proving their capacity for independent scientific research.

The study highlights the doctoral candidate's significant personal contribution, demonstrating innovative thinking, a capacity for critical analysis, and the ability to offer proposals and recommendations for improving corporate operations based on a comprehensive overview of the field's critical issues.

The dissertation abstract meets all requirements regarding both structure and content.

Impact of the dissertation on the external environment.

The dissertation's positive impact on the external environment—in both theoretical and practical terms—is undeniable. The process of digital CRM transformation in international business clearly indicates the strategies, practices, and challenges companies must address, as well as the methods for their implementation.

The doctoral candidate demonstrated an excellent approach in identifying problem areas; the research led to the formulation of recommendations and proposals for enhancing corporate operations through unconventional and innovative CRM strategies.

Personal qualities of the author (if known to the reviewer).

I have known the doctoral candidate personally since their time as a student. He distinguishes himself through his sense of responsibility, discipline, critical thinking skills, and ability to draw

precise and clear conclusions; furthermore, he excels at formulating recommendations for improving corporate operations.

Opinions, recommendations, and comments.

I recommend that the doctoral candidate publish his dissertation as a monograph so that it may be accessible to a wider audience and interested stakeholders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on this review, it can be determined that the dissertation presented by doctoral candidate **Plamen Ivaylov Ruskov** titled "Digital CRM Transformation in International Business: Strategies, Practices, and Challenges"—is a soundly developed doctoral-level research work that indisputably demonstrates the candidate's excellent qualities. Based on this conclusion, I propose that the members of the esteemed scientific jury award him the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the field of Economics (specialization: Marketing), and I will firmly vote in favor of this decision.

October 5, 2026 **Reviewer:**

Sofia /Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Dimova/