REVIEW

From: *Prof. DSc NIKOLAY HRISTOV STEREV*;
Department of "Industrial Business", UNWE – Sofia;
scientific specialty: 3.8 Organization and Management of Production (Industry); 05.02.18 Economics and Management (Industry)
Author of the dissertation: *PLAMEN IVAYLOV RUSKOV*
Topic of the dissertation: "*THE DIGITAL CRM TRANSFORMATION IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS – STRATEGIES, PRACTICES, CHALLENGES*"

1. Relevance of the problem

Undoubtedly, the topic of the dissertation can be defined as relevant in the contemporary conditions of transformation of every element of business from physical to digital, including the processes related to marketing and customer management. In this direction, the dissertation submitted for review examines issues related to substantiating the economic efficiency of this transformation in one of the main elements of contemporary business marketing: customer relationship management and customer value management. At the same time, the need to implement and manage digital marketing tools is not questioned from the point of view of business processes, but from the point of view of creating a personalized "experience", and they support the visualization of the future product in a digital environment.
In accordance with the author's motivation presented in the Introduction of the dissertation, as well as in its overall content, it can be assessed that the doctoral student has presented and substantiated, with appropriate author's theses, the need to develop a digital marketing and management strategy for customer relationship management in a digital environment: e-CRM.

2. General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation on the topic "*THE DIGITAL CRM TRANSFORMATION IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS – STRATEGIES, PRACTICES, CHALLENGES*", submitted by PLAMEN IVAYLOV RUSKOV, is structured into an introduction, 6 chapters, and summaries and conclusions. With this structure, the dissertation has a volume of 199 pages, of which 183 pages are the main body and 16 pages are appendices, and a total of 128 literature sources have been used, including 115 in English and 13 in Bulgarian. The dissertation is illustrated with a total of 32 figures and 13 tables. Additionally, 5 appendices with a total volume of 16 pages are presented, which improve the understanding of the work done by the doctoral student.
In structural and content terms, the dissertation presented by *PLAMEN IVAYLOV RUSKOV* is balanced, with the following structural elements presented:

- First, the introductory part contains the main elements reflecting the author's motivation for the research, and the main elements of the entire dissertation are set out: object, subject, aims and tasks; main hypotheses and research tasks; research methods. The reasoning behind the structure of the work itself is also presented.

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- Second, the first chapter addresses the main issues related to the subject of the dissertation, namely: clarifying the essence and content of the concepts: CRM, e-CRM, CVM and others. The evolutionary development of these concepts is examined, from the understanding of sales at the beginning of the last century to the present moment and the use of marketing tools in a digital environment and the Internet space. An important emphasis is also placed on the different types of CRM systems, which is related both to the understanding of this element in the management concept of business and to the use of different tools in creating and implementing the business's CRM strategy.
- Third, the emphasis in the second chapter of the dissertation is placed on digitalization and digital transformation. Quite reasonably, the issues begin with clarifying the theoretical differences/common features between: digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. The theoretical guidelines presented and the achievements of other authors are a good basis for subsequently considering the possibilities for transforming CRM strategies into their "digital twin" – e-CRM strategies. On this basis, the author has chosen the achievements of one of the leading consultants in the field of strategic management: McKinsey, in order to present his reasoned position regarding the process and stages of digital transformation through which the transition from CRM to e-CRM strategies should be carried out.
- Fourth, in the third chapter the author's position regarding the main subject element stands out: the digital transformation of CRM strategies, as the author gradually defines the objective need for digital marketing, the use of digital tools for digital marketing and digital customer relationship management (e-CRM). On this basis, the author makes an initial review of the capabilities of businesses to carry out the digital transformation of CRM strategies in a real environment.
- Fifth, following the business practice related to the regional transformation of business from local to international through gradual digitalization and digital transformation of business, the doctoral student presents the main strategic guidelines related to the introduction and use of a CRM strategy by business.
- Sixth, the fifth chapter of the dissertation presents the main methodological guidelines of the dissertation research. In an indisputable manner, the author substantiates the main research questions, the choice of objects of observation, and develops the main architecture of the research conducted. Additional information on the architecture of the research is presented in the Appendices, which represents added value to the understanding of the methodological aspects of the research conducted. A positive assessment in this chapter is also deserved by the author's reasoning for the toolkit he used to conduct the dissertation research in the last two sections of the chapter.
- Seventh, in the last, sixth, chapter the author presents the main results of the author's research conducted by him. It is worth noting the fact that there is not only a presentation of the results, but also an analysis of the applied data obtained. This allowed the author to pay special attention to testing the main author's hypotheses. It should be noted that the chapter ends with the author's interpretation of the results: a "discussion of the results", through which he derives the main guidelines for carrying out the digital transformation from a CRM strategy to an e-CRM strategy in

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real business.

- Eighth, the dissertation ends with main summaries related to the main results of the dissertation. These summaries, and a positive assessment must be given for this, are based on interim conclusions presented at the end of each chapter, which make it possible to assess the results achieved by the doctoral student at interim stages.

The structural integrity and logical connection of the individual structural elements of the dissertation are well presented and defended through a clear and understandable conceptual framework. At the same time, the overall concept on which the dissertation research is built can be rated highly. The grounds for the high rating are:

- The object: the telecommunications sector in Bulgaria, with a focus on mobile services for private B2C customers under conditions of digital transformation and customer interactions, is correctly defined;
- The subject: the strategies for digital CRM transformation in the telecommunications sector with the limitations: application of artificial intelligence and short audio-visual content in a real digital consumer journey, as well as customer behavior, consumer experience, consumer conversion, etc., are also well argued in the methodological and applied chapters of the dissertation, and the subject can be assessed as appropriate.
- The main aim: to investigate and evaluate the digital CRM transformation implemented through generative components of artificial intelligence, and the expanded 20 tasks are precise, clear and logically linked to the leading 5 research hypotheses;
- The doctoral student's five main hypotheses are precise and can be tested through the methodological toolkit selected and described in the fifth chapter.

3. Assessment of the scientific and applied-scientific results obtained

The main results that stand out in the review of the dissertation can be summarized in the following more significant ones:

- The theoretical and methodological foundations of the digitalization of CRM strategies and the digital transformation from CRM to e-CRM strategies in the telecommunications market of B2C customers have been analyzed. In doing so, comparative analysis has been successfully used to compare the consumer experience and consumer behavior between traditional CRM strategies and digital e-CRM strategies.
- The main elements and features of the digital transformation of business from CRM to e-CRM strategies have been identified, and an appropriate adaptation for international companies has been proposed, based on the specifics of customer engagement and customer behavior in different markets.
- Applied models have been systematized for using the tools of digital marketing and managing digital communications, related to an assessment of the impact of artificial intelligence through generatively created audio-visual content, which is aligned with the main object: B2C customers of telecommunications companies.
- On the basis of the applied analysis, as well as the analysis of existing theories and practice in the

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field of digital transformation, the author has proposed a fully substantiated system of recommendations for improving the digital transformation of international companies in the field of e-CRM strategies.

The indicated theoretical and practical results are present and clearly highlighted both in the content of the dissertation submitted for review, and in the additional materials presented: abstract, articles and papers. They are the personal work of the author and are the basis for deriving the scientific and applied-scientific contributions achieved by the doctoral student.

4. Assessment of the scientific and applied-scientific contributions

The content of the dissertation allows a high assessment of the doctoral student's competence with regard to the theory, methodology and applied aspects of the chosen topic.

The materials presented for review: the dissertation, the abstract and the publications on the topic of the work, fully confirm the scientific and applied-scientific contributions contained in the dissertation.

With regard to the scientific contributions, confirmation exists for:

- On the basis of critical analysis, the author's formulations covering the digitalization and digital transformation of CRM strategies have been systematized, and on this basis the benefits of the digital transformation from CRM to an e-CRM strategy have been derived and defined.
- An innovative author's model has been proposed, reflecting the digital transformation of business from CRM to e-CRM strategies, and an appropriate adaptation for international companies has been proposed, based on the specifics of customer engagement and customer behavior in different markets.
- An author's methodology /experimental model/ has been proposed for studying the impact of artificial intelligence through generatively created audio-visual content, which is aligned with the main object: B2C customers of telecommunications companies.

With regard to the applied contributions, confirmation exists for:

- The author's model for digital transformation proposed by the doctoral student, based on the assessment of the impact of artificial intelligence on customer experience and consumer behavior in a digital environment, has been tested in practice. On this basis, recommendations have been made for developing and implementing generatively created audio-visual content with the help of artificial intelligence with a view to creating personalized CRM communication aligned with consumer attitudes and behavior in a digital environment.
- The main advantages of generatively created content in e-CRM communication have been systematized, which leads to an increase in the operational efficiency of the e-CRM strategy compared to traditional CRM communication.

The stated contributions are of high significance for theory and for practice, and they could be assigned to the following two groups:

- enrichment, specification and refinement of existing scientific and applied knowledge on the subject of the dissertation research;
- application of existing methods for solving a specific problem for a precisely defined object, with formulated conclusions and recommendations for practice.

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5. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions

Regardless of my overall positive opinion and high assessment of the achievements in the dissertation, as well as the fact that no significant omissions or inaccuracies are found in the dissertation, the following questions and remarks can be noted:

- What organizational and managerial changes would the doctoral student propose to real business so that the model and architecture proposed by him can be successfully applied in a real business environment and the business can move from purely technological thinking to strategic management of processes /pp. 164-165/

6. Conclusion

The proposed dissertation by *PLAMEN IVAYLOV RUSKOV* on the topic "*THE DIGITAL CRM TRANSFORMATION IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS – STRATEGIES, PRACTICES, CHALLENGES*" fully meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and the Regulations for its implementation.

My overall assessment is that the dissertation represents an independent, completed author's research, in which the research tasks have been successfully fulfilled and the main aim has been achieved. In doing so, the main theoretical and applied results of the dissertation, as well as the real scientific and applied-scientific contributions identified in it, allow a high overall assessment of the dissertation to be given.

Bearing in mind the characteristics of the dissertation listed above, as well as the contributions indicated in it, I fully and with conviction recommend that the esteemed members of the ***SCIENTIFIC JURY*** give a HIGH ASSESSMENT for the work done by the doctoral student and award *PLAMEN IVAYLOV RUSKOV* the educational and scientific degree DOCTOR in professional field: 3.8 Economics, doctoral program: World Economy. International Economic Relations.

Date: 07-10-2026

Reviewer: ……..

/Prof. DSc Nikolay Shterev/

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