

FROM CUSTOMER ORIENTATION TO SOCIAL CRM. NEW INSIGHTS FROM CENTRAL EUROPE

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Abstract: *In the context of the gradual virtualization of social relationships, the traditional form of relationship management has begun to change. Original concept of customer relationship management (CRM) based rather on face-to-face and offline communication in the physical environment is converting into social CRM (SCRM), where the contact through social networks and relationships within online communities. Therefore, the paper aims to analyse SCRM in medium and large businesses based on the primary research.*

Research sample (N=81) includes medium and large enterprises operating in the Czech Republic. The findings showed that sampled firms perceived the digital marketing as slightly more important than the traditional type of marketing. More than nine-tenth of companies considered CRM to be a significant marketing tool for their own practice. Subsequently, SCRM was perceived as significant by approximately two-thirds of respondents. Czech enterprises practice rather investigation of external online communities and contributing to them than building their own internal online community. Finally, the social sites are in this process used rather for short-term communication with the customer than for the purpose of self-promotion or data mining. Furthermore, some differences were found in approach to digital marketing, CRM, and SCRM between consumer oriented and business oriented organizations.

Keywords: *Customer Relationship Management, Social CRM, Social Media, Business Intelligence, Czech Republic.*

JEL Classification: *M310, M15, C8.*

Introduction

Historically, from 1980s, the customer relationship management (CRM) became a reality as the customer orientation started to dominate in various areas of business. Agrawal [1] defines CRM as a toolset for guiding sales team and supporting engineers and other specialists in developing sales prospects, creating appropriate business proposals, dealing with customer objections, and providing post-sales customer support.

The original concept of the customer relationship based on loyalty, quality and personal approach was typically conducted face-to-face and mainly in physical environment of the retail store. Traditional CRM focuses on management solutions for dealing with customers through channels such as web sites, call centres, and brick and mortar locations. However, with the advent of information and communication technologies and their spread across society and business, the relationship management tools were changed. Social CRM (SCRM) encompasses the dynamic community of customers who communicate through social media – an environment in which control of the relationship has shifted to the customer, who has the power to influence others, in his or her social network. [3] [4].

Moreover, the CRM or SCRM system plays a significant role not only as a management approach, but also as an information system. This system is, next to, for example, data warehouse, knowledge management, decisions support systems and other systems, part

of the information systems that are components of business intelligence (BI) concept [24]. Many authors classify customer relationship system as one of the resource systems of BI [5] [25].

Although, SCRM can be considered as a very effective marketing approach, primarily for customer acquisition, we know just a very little about its application in business sector [15]. Research studies investigating businesses of Central European post-communist countries focus rather on traditional CRM approach [7] [22] [25] than SCRM. This research gap together with higher involvement of social media in Czech society are among the reasons why this study aims to identification of the SCRM practices of Czech enterprises.

1 Review of the Literature and Research Questions

1.1 Digital Marketing, CRM, and SCRM significance

Adequately to the growth of competition and increase of supply over the demand, the marketing principles are more intensely applied in the market economy. However, the principles remains stable, marketing principles are applied in the market environment adequately to the growth of competition and increase of supply over the demand, Nevertheless, these principles remain the same, marketing tools change [20]. We live in a digital or even already post-digital age. Digital marketing itself is defined by [31] as a sub branch of traditional marketing that uses modern digital channels primarily for communicating with stakeholders (e.g. customers and investors) about brand, products and business progress. The more customer oriented definition is than provided by Digital Marketing Institute where it refers to “the use of digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationship with them” [33, p. 94].

The tone and the orientation of the latter definition underlines the importance of marketing itself for CRM as well as the importance of digital marketing for social CRM. Despite the similarity of the approaches, there are some specific differences among them, too. While the marketing focuses mainly on creation of appropriate communication to establish a long-term customer relationship, the CRM was traditionally more involved in setting of the methodologies, organizational processes and – in a technical view – the information systems enabling acquiring and retention of the customers and the building relationship [17],[6]. Obviously, there is a valid parallel for the digital marketing and social CRM, too.

Medium and large enterprises are implementing the digital marketing and CRM approaches to varying extents, reaping a range of performance benefits and facing a range of challenges. Moreover, the significant regional differences were found in the application of digital marketing and CRM practices in small and medium enterprises. While some countries are more concerned with technical issues of implementation, others with organizational barriers [16],[9]. Additionally, there was just a little research performed in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, the research question 1 (RQ1) is formulated as: *What significance is assigned to the digital marketing, CRM and SCRM approaches by Czech enterprises?*

1.2 Integration of Social CRM in the enterprise

With the social media advent, the customer is no longer limited to a passive role in the relationship built with a company. Mobile devices providing more information about competitive products available anywhere and also enable customers to express

and distribute their opinions to large audiences. Therefore, the companies are likely to find it increasingly difficult to manage the messages that customers receive about their products/services [34]. Companies have started to focus on data collected from tools as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, and other relevant media. They try to engage such tools or communication ways into their daily sales process [30]. In addition, SCRM has a positive impact not only on getting a new customer, but it also influences the number of sales. Today's integration of social media into the CRM is to be essential for customer acquisition in the future [32]; [30] and this resulted into emerge of SCRM. The term of social CRM was firstly introduced by Greenberg [10]. In his other work [11] Greenberg also addresses the full definition of SCRM; it is a “philosophy and a business strategy, supported by a technology platform, business rules, workflow, processes and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted and transparent business environment. It’s the company’s programmatic response to the customer’s control of the conversation.” Malthouse et al. [21] conceptualize social CRM as being composed of two dimensions: a CRM dimension and a social media dimension. The CRM dimension comprises the three basic components of the traditional CRM process: relationship initiation (acquisition), maintenance (retention), and termination. Consequently, the social media dimension is initiated when the customers become active participants in the relationship and get the opportunity to engage with the firm. When a user generates content related to a specific brand, he or she is *engaging* with the company.

For most companies, though, the deployment of a social CRM program is still in its early stages, execution is patchy and concerns about ROI remain [3]. Therefore, the RQ2 investigated this situation in Czech businesses: *To what extent are the social media used in the enterprise CRM systems?*

1.3 Online Communities use and creation

Online community plays a significant role in the relationship between the customer and organization, thus more significant in SCRM. Lawrence Ang [2] even suggests to reject the term social CRM and rather use the term “community relationship management” instead. The growing presence of online communication and consequent creation of myriad of online communities is the contemporary trend. Such a method of communication, transferred into the business world, means that customers are feeling: (1) free of the barriers of physical and offline world, and (2) more anonymous. Vice versa, a sense of duty is reduced. [26]

Virtual community arises on the basis of various factors. One of the reasons or incentives is to create community for customers by the firm itself. Frequently, this approach is taken by the organization to strengthen customer relationships [28], or to increase the perceived value of the product that comes from a connection to the community of users [23]. Virtual communities are part of an emerging way of using technology for strategic, social and informative interface between companies and customers. Building consumer confidence through such communities helps companies to gain competitive advantage based on information gathered from these groups and by communicating with them [29] [14].

Obviously, companies can access the virtual communities in different ways. They can make their own online community, proactively manage them, or just use data from these online social communities for their own CRM system. Therefore, the RQ3 is formulated as: *What is the way how the enterprises approach online communities?*

1.4 Information capture and use

With the progress of online communities, customer referrals and overall customer behaviour realized online, the new opportunities for data collection emerged. [15].

Wimalchandra et al's [35] study underlines significance of various external data sources (mainly common and informal communication with customers) that helps firms improve their internal product quality control procedures. Nowadays, an increased use of information technology to collect customer data can be observed [19]. Today's successful companies regularly measure not only the total number of customers or sales volume, but also calculate their current value, lifetime value, customer retention and many other indicators of customer satisfaction. Nowadays, the traditional methods as suggestions and complaints records, customer satisfaction surveys, mystery shopping, or lost customer analysis [18] can be transferred and measured on the Internet. Therefore, we formulate RQ4: *How the customer information is captured and used in the enterprise?*

2 Methodology

2.1 Construction of the questionnaire

The majority of studies dealing with social media and CRM practices [30],[13],[15] considered the questionnaire consistently the main effective research method. The questionnaire construct was partially taken from studies of Harrigan and Miles [13], and Jayachandran et al. [15] and it was partially adjusted to the Czech business environment. Moreover, such approach enabled the possibility of international comparison of findings. The questionnaire design aimed at current level of company's identification with digital marketing, CRM and SCRM approaches. Questionnaire comprised of fifty questions divided into six main sections: (1) significance assigned in the organization to traditional, modern marketing, digital marketing, CRM and SCRM; (2) building a relationship with the customers; (3) use and creation of online communities; (4) use of social media in CRM; (5) information capture and use; and (6) categorical organizational data. Majority of questions used the five-level Likert scale (with the options 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree).

2.2 Research sample and data

The sample consisted of 81 enterprises with more than 250 employees operating their business in the Czech Republic. In the first step, the organizations were asked by the interviewers, bachelor students studying the economic field of study, to fill out an online questionnaire. If necessary, the second step, a follow-up communication between the interviewer and the organization was used to improve the response rate. Pre-test was conducted on a nonprobability sample of respondents before the distribution of questionnaire during January 2015 was realized. Researched companies concentrate their business on either B2C market (32.1 %), B2B market (14.8 %), or on both of the markets (54.3 %). Marketing specialists (29.6 %), managers (25.9 %), social media specialists (22.2 %) and other employees (22.2 %) were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

The data were processed with SPSS 17 statistical software. As a normality test showed that all the data have a normal distribution, the Student t-test calculations were applied to find statistically significant differences in the results.

3 Results

3.1 Significance attributed to digital marketing, CRM and SCRM

The research showed that the respondents perceive the importance of traditional and digital marketing similarly. Digital marketing with use of ICT (49.4% “strongly important”) is considered to be just a slightly more significant than the traditional type of marketing without use of ICT (45.7% “strongly important”).

Respondents’ replies stressed out the importance of CRM as more than 90% of them stated that CRM is rather or strongly important for their company. In addition, according to the findings the SCRM can be considered as an integral part of customer relationship management concept of Czech businesses; almost two-thirds (64.2%) of addressed companies selected rather important or strongly important option. Detailed results on significance in all relevant categories are available in table 1.

Tab 1: Significance of traditional and digital marketing, CRM, SCRM

N=81		0 I don't know	1 Unimportant	2 Rather unimportant	3 Rather important	4 Strongly important
Role of traditional marketing	<i>Abs.</i> <i>Rel.</i>	2 2.5%	3 3.7%	10 12.3%	29 35.8%	37 45.7%
Role of digital marketing	<i>Abs.</i> <i>Rel.</i>	2 2.5%	4 4.5%	8 9.9%	27 33.3%	40 49.4%
Role of CRM	<i>Abs.</i> <i>Rel.</i>	0 0%	1 1.2%	6 7.4%	21 25.9%	53 65.4%
Role of Social CRM	<i>Abs.</i> <i>Rel.</i>	5 6.2%	10 12.3%	14 17.3%	28 34.6%	24 29.6%

Source: Author

Furthermore, the comparison between the subgroups of enterprises with focus either on business market (B2B) or consumer market (B2C) was done; enterprises with focus on both markets were not analysed in detail. Findings showed that researched aspects have higher significance for B2C enterprises. B2C organizations considered all the roles as more significant, especially the role of digital marketing, the role of CRM and the role of SCRM. Among the digital marketing and social media tools the companies mostly use the website (97.5%), social networks (87.7%), email marketing (61.7%), other forms of promotion and PPC campaigns, promotion context, or banners (61.7%). E-newsletters (23.5%) and blogs (23.5%) were also used.

3.2 Social media use in the enterprise CRM systems

For CRM purposes, the companies likely take such social data as a feedback for their marketing campaigns as the highest approval of respondents got the assertion ‘Social media enables our CRM system to analyse responses to marketing campaigns’ (3.79). The second important advantage of social media is to customize organizational communication directly to individual customers (3.62). Slightly lower approval rate was found with assertions that social media enable provision of cross sell/up sell opportunities (3.43) and support of the sales force in the field with customer information (3.40). Interestingly, options of customer retention rate (3.14) and customer lifetime value (3.10) calculations have got lower level of agreement approaching a neutral opinion. Obviously, the social sites are still used rather

for short term feedback and communication than for long term marketing planning or calculations.

Tab 2: Use of social media in the CRM system

N = 42 ¹	In total		B2B focus		B2C focus	
	Mean ²	SD	Mean ²	SD	Mean ²	SD
Social media enables our CRM system (continued in a row)						
..to analyse responses to marketing campaigns	3.79	0.976	3.80	1.304	3.82	1.168
..to customize our communication to customers	3.62	1.103	4.00	1.000	3.82	1.168
..to provide sales force cross sell/up sell opportunities	3.43	1.309	3.00	1.581	3.73	1.104
..to support sales force in the field with customer information	3.40	1.251	3.20	1.483	3.73	1.104
..to calculate customer retention rates	3.14	1.072	2.40	1.340	3.27	0.905
..to support marketing planning and budgeting	3.10	1.100	3.20	0.837	3.09	1.136
..to calculate customer lifetime value	3.00	1.269	2.40	1.342	3.36	0.924

Source: Author

¹ Only respondents from organizations with social site presence answered

² Mean calculated from values on Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree; 2=slightly disagree; 3=neutral; 4=slightly agree; 5=strongly agree.

In general, some differences among B2B and B2C organizations in social media use were found. At first, there is a higher level of agreement with all assertion on the side of consumer oriented businesses, which implies an assumption that these organizations use social media more in their CRM systems. At second, the B2C organizations use social media more for customization of communication to customers and analysing of marketing campaign responses. However, none of these variations between B2B and B2C organizations were found as statistically significant. Detailed results of all answers are summarized in table 2.

3.3 What is the way how the enterprises approach to online communities?

The opinions gained in the area of use of online communities for building customer relationships showed that organizations access to customers via multiple media networks and channels (mean value 3.70).

Tab 3: Approach to online communities in relation to organizational CRM

N = 81	In total		B2B focus		B2C focus	
	Mean ¹	SD	Mean ¹	SD	Mean ¹	SD
We do track customers across more media/channels	3.70	1.219	3.17	1.528	3.50	1.068
We have a strategic approach to managing online communities	3.53	1.256	3.00	1.537	3.39	1.023
Other online customer communities are central to our marketing	3.46	1.107	3.42	1.444	3.39	1.169
We use communities to have conversations with our customers	3.43	1.193	2.92	1.565	3.39	.941
We build our online communities with our customers	3.42	1.192	3.17	1.586	3.58	1.137
We use these communities to promote ourselves to customers	3.40	1.211	2.83	1.642	3.58	0.987
Customers use these communities mainly to make positive comments and reviews	3.15	1.119	2.75	1.215	3.12	1.211
Our online customer communities are central to our marketing	3.12	1.249	2.58	1.443	3.15	1.156
We participate in relevant customer-owned communities	3.10	1.147	2.83	1.403	3.08	1.129
We monitor and act on interactions between customers in these communities	3.10	1.310	2.42	1.240	3.12	1.306
Online communities are a way of engaging with our customers	3.02	1.183	2.42	1.379	3.00	1.095
These communities allow us to involve customers in product/service development	2.89	1.183	2.08*	0.900	2.85*	1.046
We proactively manage interactions in these communities	2.86	1.339	2.08*	1.165	3.08*	1.262

Source: Author

¹ Mean is calculated from values on Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree; 2=slightly disagree; 3=neutral; 4=slightly agree; 5=strongly agree.

* Significant difference on 95 % level; Student t-test for B2B and B2C organization comparison was used

In addition, the companies argue that the strategic approach to managing online communities is taken (3.53). Interestingly, when the respondents stated that the company is thinking strategically, at the same time they rather disagree that customer relationships are proactively managed by the company (2.86). Moreover, the results revealed that rather other customer online communities (3.46) than own online customer community (3.12) are central for the organizational CRM systems.

Generally, the use of communities lies in the conversation with the customers (3.43); however, just slightly lower rate of approval was then detected in the use of community

for the self-promotion (3.40). Detailed findings on the approach to online communities are provided in table 3.

Regarding the market orientation, the results are consistent to the previous findings. B2C organizations declare higher agreement rate in majority of researched aspects. The biggest difference was found in assertion “We use these communities to promote ourselves to customers”; while B2C organizations have the highest average rate of agreement 3.58 there, the B2B organizations reached only 2.83 average agreement value. In assertions that “communities allow to involve customers in product/service development” and “proactive management of interactions among the communities” the statistically significant difference between business and consumer oriented organization was found. In both cases the consumer oriented organizations have reached higher scores.

3.4 Capture and use of the customer data

When examining the way of customer data collection and consequent use of them was found that companies gather such information on ongoing basis (3.83). In addition, the enterprises in the sample integrate information received from different business functions (3.51). Findings also showed that integration of information from different communication channels is still quite common (3.33). However, the lower level was found in integration of internal customer information and customer information from external sources (3.19) and the merging of information relevant for individual customer (3.16).

Regarding to metrics, the respondents agreed rather with measuring the value of each customer’s referral (3.23) than for assessment of lifetime customer value (3.10). Summary of all findings relevant to the research question is provided in table 4.

Tab. 4: Capture and use of the customer data

N = 81	In total		B2B focus		B2C focus	
	Mean ¹	SD	Mean ¹	SD	Mean ¹	SD
We collect customer information on an ongoing basis	3.83	1.170	4.08*	0.793	3.38*	1.267
We integrate customer information from the various functions that interact with customers	3.51	1.142	3.42	1.165	3.23	1.177
We integrate customer information from different communication channels	3.33	1.214	3.33	1.497	3.00	1.200
We use customer information to measure the value of each customer's referrals to other customers	3.23	1.121	2.67	1.155	3.31	1.192
We integrate internal customer information with customer information from external sources	3.19	1.205	3.17	1.193	2.85	1.190
We merge information collected from various sources for each customer	3.16	1.199	3.17	1.193	2.92	1.294
We use customer information to assess the lifetime value of our customers	3.10	1.366	2.50	1.314	3.08	1.440

Source: Author

¹ Mean is calculated from values on Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree; 2=slightly disagree; 3=neutral; 4=slightly agree; 5=strongly agree.

* Significant difference on 95 % level; Student t-test for B2B and B2C organization comparison was used

B2C organisations rather integrate customer information from the various functions where they interact with the customers, they work more with customer's referrals to other customers, and also they assess the lifetime of their customers more. On the other hand, the B2B organizations collect information more regularly.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The presented paper brings several new insights into four main areas of interest aiming at: significance assigned by sampled organization to traditional and digital marketing, CRM and SCRM; use of social media for organizational CRM; use of online communities for building a relationship with the customer; and customer information capture and use.

Results showed that researched companies consider digital marketing as slightly more important than traditional one without use of ICT. Moreover, CRM practice seems to be natural part of firm's marketing in more than 90 % of sampled companies. Interestingly, almost two third of the companies considered SCRM approach as significant. Furthermore, remarkable difference between organizations conducting their business on either business or consumer market exists. The latter organizations considered all the researched marketing roles as more significant for their business success, particularly the roles of digital marketing, CRM, and SCRM.

Social media are in organizational CRM systems of Czech medium and large enterprises used primarily for provision of feedback to conducted marketing campaigns and customized communication. On the other hand, the social media are less used for support of marketing

planning and budgeting or calculation of customer lifetime value. It can be assumed that consumer oriented businesses use social media in their CRM systems more frequently and mainly for customization of communication and monitoring of marketing campaign success.

Sampled medium and large organizations accessed online customer communities via multiple media networks and channels. Despite the respondents argue that organizations “take a strategic approach to managing online communities”, at the same time, they rather disagree with assertion that “companies proactively manage customer relationships in online communities”. The consumer focused organizations use these communities for “involvement of customers in product/service development” and “proactive management of interactions” significantly more than their business oriented counterparts.

Customer information is collected on a regular basis. In addition, organizations also integrate information received from different business areas or channels. A high level of agreement was found in assertions connected to the management of customer’s referrals and lifetime customer value. Consumer oriented organisations in comparison to business oriented ones integrate more the customer information from various functions where they interact with the customers, they also work more with customer’s referrals, and assess the lifetime of their customers. On the other hand, it was statistically proved that business oriented organizations collect information more regularly.

Although the research presents several inspiring findings, it has also some limitations. Questionnaires were filled out online solely, thus, the research does not include testimonies of respondents that dislike this approach. Furthermore, rather quantitative data were gathered and only smaller sample of respondents reduced to Czech business organizations was obtained. Therefore, the following research should also address these problems.

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