

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Ing. Dušan Mladenović, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Through the Lenses of Information Seeking, Sharing, and Forwarding

Reviewer

Paulo Duarte Silveira, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal

This habilitation thesis presents a relevant topic in the marketing field. With particular reference to information flow within electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), as regards information seeking, information sharing, and information forwarding, the candidate provides context to the domain of digital consumer engagement. The investigation is based on six articles in reputable journals (mainly papers #1 and #3), evidence of good theoretical and practical results. The leadership of the candidate in these projects emphasizes his capacity for independent, innovative scholarship. As detailed below, the main strengths of the document are: a) Theoretical Contributions, b) Empirical and Practical Contributions, and c) Methodological Rigor. On the other hand, the main weaknesses found are d) Theoretical Frameworks, e) Empirical Limitations, and f) Emerging Trends.

a) Theoretical Contributions

The thesis offers an interesting approach by integrating established theories (i.e., MRT, S-O-R Model, and CLT) into novel applications in the eWOM framework.

It is worth mentioning that the metaWOM concept is very novel and is still being developed.

b) Empirical and Practical Contributions

The thesis provides several contributions of interest to practitioners for how businesses can leverage eWOM to effectively manage their online reputation and maximize consumer engagement. The analysis of eWOM behaviour, for example, how customers responded to crises such as COVID-19, was thoroughly presented in the study.

It also identifies pragmatic ways through which firms could adopt advanced technologies such as AI and blockchain to enhance the effectiveness of eWOM.

It also discloses nuances to the field, such as the potential role of an understanding of SEO in augmenting the reach of blood bank services, thereby providing greater depth to the practical usefulness of eWOM studies.

c) Methodological Rigor

Sophisticated methods are employed, including PLS-SEM and bibliometric analyses, in order to extend the findings with greater reliability and depth.

Systemic literature reviews provide a strong foundation for conceptual and empirical advances.

d) Theoretical Frameworks

Not all papers have a direct relationship with eWOM, since some of them have an indirect (but implicit) relation to the main theme of the thesis. It would be more captivating (and better storytelling) if all the papers would flow “organically) and have a very direct relation to eWOM.

Moreover, the interrelations between the three pillars of eWOM (seeking, sharing, and forwarding) are not fully discussed; hence, the synergies possible among these aspects are not fully realized.

Although comprehensive, the theoretical frameworks could be enhanced by incorporating other behavioural theories, including the Theory of Planned Behavior, to complement the analysis.

e) Empirical Limitations

For instance, some empirical investigations, such as the study of tourist motivations in paper #5, involve very small samples, and their generalizability is uncertain.

The regional emphasis, in terms of country sites (Czechia, and Serbia), reduces the international validity of the findings.

f) Emerging Trends

Although the meaning of metaWOM is still undefined, it has not yet been clarified and presented in terms of its practical aspects in the Metaverse, i.e., hypothetical situations and examples.

Greater emphasis on current trends, such as AI-based personalization and virtual reality, could augment the importance of the research.

As a final and global evaluation, the habilitation thesis is an important, proficient, and timely contribution to marketing/eWOM. It is an illustration of the academic maturity of the candidate, and his capability for conducting independent, high-quality research.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

- Given that the purpose of the habilitation is twofold - 1) demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research and 2) lecturing/teaching in an area - how would the lecturing/teaching benefit from this specific project?
- In a very specific manner, what does the candidate propose to improve its classes?
- It seems a bit that the studies/papers were conducted separately, and, in the end, a "glue" (information flow eWOM) was found to justify them as a whole. Was that the case?
- Why did the candidate choose the selected sectors/industries (ie, tourism, health) and regions in the papers?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Through the Lenses of Information Seeking, Sharing, and Forwarding* by Ing. Dušan Mladenović, Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Business Management.

Date: 13th January 2025

Signature: