

## 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**

Assoc. Prof. Hongfei Liu, PhD

**Reviewer's home unit, institution**

Southampton Business School, University of Southampton

The habilitation thesis submitted by Dušan Mladenović consists of an introductory chapter plus six stand-alone research articles, which all have been published already. By dividing electronic word of mouth as a three-dimension concept (e.g., eWOM sharing, eWOM seeking and eWOM forwarding). Three of the papers deal with the eWOM sharing perspective, two papers emphasise on eWOM seeking and one paper focuses on eWOM forward. Figure 1 is very informative to highlight the theoretical sanitation of eWOM phenomenon in the modern age. Dušan is the lead author in all papers included, which demonstrates his expertise in such area. There is a statement enclosed in the thesis, which clearly indicates that Dušan contributions to all four papers are substantial.

Let me first say that it was a pleasure to read the habilitation thesis as Dušan has an excellent writing style and in all papers, it is very clear what the goals and results are.

Given the polished nature of the papers, it is no surprise to me that they all have been published in suitable and highly esteemed international peer-reviewed journals. This is a laudable achievement at this stage of his career and will allow him to become a well-cited and established scholar. It is also a good strategy to essentially use one theoretical phenomenon to establish a series of studies on different perspectives.

In all six papers, Dušan clearly states the relevance, the exact question of interest, the setting and limitations, the data used, the methodology applied, the results uncovered and the conclusions drawn. The first two papers both rely on quantitative methods to understand the impact of digital media in health management. The quantitative nature of his approach fits well with the increasing digital inclusion among the public. The first paper uncovers specific problems faced during the COVID time. The details of the insights gained through his conceptualisation and analysis are unique, while at the same time it displays the modern use of digital media.

The second paper addresses examined model includes ten hypotheses and was tested on data from 57 blood banks. The dataset is unique and focuses on the digital revolution in the healthcare sector. Meanwhile, the findings reveal the importance of online visibility and search engines for connecting blood banks with potential donors. The results provide invaluable inputs to marketers, managers, and policymakers.

Paper 3 highlights the situation when eWOM meets metaverse and developed the concept of metaWOM. With the development of non-transferable tokens (NTTs). The differentiation across WOM, eWOM and metaWOM is particularly important in the digitalisation of the modern marketplace. More importantly, the future research directions highlighted by also highlights the directions of research and practices.

Paper 4 focuses on the knowledge sharing on social media. Focusing on the massive evolution of computer-mediated communication, this paper focuses on the knowledge sharing among individuals. Through the interpretation and explanation, the research highlights that there are different ways in which knowledge is shared across social media with different types of challenges. This highlights a series of future investigations in social media research.

Paper 5 focuses on the timely topic and try to understand the motivation of writing online reviews in the post-vacation stage. Motivations related self-motivated and others-motivated are both highlighted from the findings. Additionally, the differences are also identified in different genders. The implication is very timely and important when the public faces the health crisis and challenges again like COVID-19.

Paper 6 focuses on a regional perspective and interprets consumer engagement with WOM communication in Czechia. Against WOM exists in both online and offline environments, the findings indicate that offline context is preferred as trust and social ties positively affect WOM. However, homophily as an important element has a negative impact. Additionally, in the WOM engagement, individual differences, such as age, gender, and education are reported to influence consumers' propensity to engage in WOM.

#### **Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:**

To conclude, Dušan Mladenović has (co-authored six excellent papers that make significant contributions to existing literature in marketing in the digital age. He showcases his deep understanding of various strands of existing literature as well as his competence in applying a broad set of methods. All six papers are characterized by deep reflection and a solid understanding of focused phenomena.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

- Based on the first two papers: what would be practical recommendations that you can formulate for marketing practitioners to assist the process of consumer' information seeking?
- Were most of the findings of the first two papers focusing on information seeking unsurprising to you? If any, what was the most surprising finding to you?
- Regarding the paper 3-5: I was intrigued by the new concept that you introduced about metewOM. Beyond the definition, can you name one or two problems that cannot be addressed by the current eWOM literature but could be addressed though the theoretical lenses of metaWOM.

- In paper 5, the contextualisation is very practical. Imagine there was another global pandemic or crisis, can you name a few suggestions for the practitioners to keep in mind when they communication with the individuals in such setting?
- Paper 6 focuses on the information forwarding through regional lenses. Against the increasing internationalisation of business practice and the research findings, what is your suggestion for the new businesses that want to enter the consumer market in Czechia?

## **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: December 16th, 2024

Signature: