

Abstract

The habitation thesis entitled "*Emerging Business Models: Consumer Behaviour and New Product Development in the Digital Age*" synthesises the key professional, academic, and scientific achievements attained following the conferral of the doctoral degree in Management. In doing so, it delineates a research trajectory situated at the intersection of business models, consumer behaviour, and new product development, set against the backdrop of the profound digital transformations that increasingly shape the contemporary environment.

Enterprises face competitive pressure towards the reconfiguration of their business models in order to integrate digital technologies and develop new products and services under high uncertainty. Within this context, consumers are emerging as increasingly active agents in innovation processes. Accordingly, the thesis advances an integrated approach to the relationship between firms, the innovative products and services they develop, consumers, and the organisational transformations arising at the level of the firm's own business model.

The first line of inquiry addresses **business models**, examining the manner in which firms create, deliver, and capture value, together with the impact exerted upon them by innovation, digitalisation, and sustainability. A key role in the thesis is the research on "Hidden Champions" of Romania (the 2013 and 2026 editions): companies such as Gliga Instrumente Muzicale, Grapefruit, Electra, Sanodor, and Romsoft which, despite limited public visibility, hold competitive positions within clearly delimited niches, drawing upon local resources, technical expertise, export orientation and product and service quality.

The analysis of business models also includes the moral hazard in the Romanian healthcare system and the managerial decision-making in public hospitals. Both papers extend the business-model analysis to the public health sector. The investigation into the impact of innovation upon a small travel agency, together with the comparative study of the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) in SMEs from Romania and the United Kingdom, enhance our understanding of how SMEs adapt their structure, processes, and value proposition to the competitive environment.

The second line of research, **consumer behaviour**, explores the need to understand consumers and design better the products, services, and business models in order to help companies transform and be successful. The thesis includes an analysis of dietary behaviour during the winter holiday season, the use of digital technologies to support sustainable consumption within the automotive industry, the acceptance of digital transformation in Romania, and students' perceptions of technologies and learning spaces in the e-learning context. The results of these studies argue that consumer decisions are shaped by psychological, social, technological, and contextual factors, and that the adoption of innovation is contingent upon perceived benefits, the amount of effort required, social influence, and consumer's trust in technology. Particular attention is devoted to students as users of educational technologies, and the need of the teaching process to be transformed and adapted to contemporary generations of students.

The third direction, **new product development**, emphasises the need for customer involvement, Design Thinking, and use of Quality Function Deployment (QFD) in order to identify and translate consumer needs into concrete product attributes. The hands-on “Design Thinking” workshop delivered within the DAAD project “Voice of Business” in Namibia highlights the role of prototyping, user understanding, and iterative testing, whereas QFD enables the alignment of customer requirements with technical and managerial decisions.

Beyond its scientific contributions, the thesis presents the main **professional and academic achievements**. The candidate’s academic career commenced in 1990 at the “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași and encompassed a succession of teaching positions, advancing to the rank of Associate Professor, within the Department of Engineering and Management. He taught several subjects such as the Management of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), Consumer Behaviour, Quality Management, and Research Methods, focusing on their practical application in companies (business plans, feasibility studies, quality-improvement projects, and bachelor’s and master’s theses).

His managerial positions included: Director of the Centre for Continuing Education and Training — CETEX, Vice-Dean responsible for research and international relations, and manager of the ERASMUS+ Capacity Building project REILEAP. He also received recognition through prizes and distinctions such as EUROINVENT 2022 Diploma of Excellence, PROINVENT 2018 Diploma of Excellence and Gold Medal, and the PROINVENT 2017 Special Prize, as well as by membership in relevant professional organisations.

The final part sets out the **career development and progression plans** by continuing research on three axes: integration of digitalisation, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and stakeholder engagement into the transformation of business models; the adoption of innovation and the sustainable behaviour of consumers in their interaction with digital technologies; and customer involvement, prototyping, and Design Thinking in new product development.