



TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA

ACTA TECHNICA NAPOCENSIS

Series: Applied Mathematics, Mechanics, and Engineering
Vol. 69, Issue Special I, February, 2026

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION: A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE FROM ROMANIAN SMES

Cristina Terezia DRESAN, Raul Ionut RITI, Andra Emanuela PLESA CHIOREAN,
Laura BACALI

Abstract: *The rapid spread of digital technologies and the constantly shifting needs of consumers are changing daily life and considerably impacting how businesses function and innovate. Small and medium-sized companies must therefore continually alter both their business models and their offerings. This study explores how Romanian SMEs use marketing strategy orientation and customer insights to drive business model innovation. To gather data, a structured questionnaire was distributed to SMEs across various industries. Findings suggest that, in contrast to popular belief, business model innovation cannot be directly predicted by marketing strategy orientation or customer insights alone. Instead, complex, nonlinear relationships emerge, influenced by possibly other organization and environmental factors. The study highlights the limited strategic integration of customer insights and underdeveloped marketing capabilities as barriers to practical business model innovation in the surveyed SMEs. These results contribute to theory by challenging linear norms in mainstream business innovation models and supporting a more context-sensitive approach tailored to different business contexts. The study also provides sound practical advice for SME managers and policymakers by emphasizing the necessity of enhancing marketing capabilities and customer insight systems as key facilitators of successful business model transformation.*

Key words: business model innovation, business models, customer insights, marketing strategic orientation, SMEs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have created environmental uncertainty and threatened organizational viability in an already increasingly shaky global economy [1]. In response to external disruptions and evolving internal conditions, companies are increasingly required to rethink their business models. Meaning the underlying logic, structure, and processes through which they create, deliver, and capture value [2]. This re-evaluation often leads to business model innovation (BMI), which involves adjusting core components of the model, particularly the mechanisms of value creation, delivery, and capture, as well as the interconnections among these elements [3].

The need for BMI usually comes from shifts outside the company, especially as customers increasingly expect instant, tailored, flexible

experiences. Because of this, small firms see BMI as a way to stand out while staying agile. Fast-paced digital innovations also force SMEs to rethink how they operate in order to discover new ways for growth [4]. Shifting how value is built, shared, and collected helps these businesses match user demands more closely - opening doors to new ideas [5].

Small businesses usually depend on quick responses, original ideas, or strong client ties to innovate [6], so focusing on customers supports business model innovation. Putting user demands, choices, or actions first helps small firms adjust how they create, offer, or gain value - while building flexibility or consistent output [7]. This customer focus, central in marketing, means recognizing and acting on what buyers want; it now shapes strategies in markets driven by users [8].

In the context of ongoing business transformation, marketing has evolved beyond

its traditional promotional function to become a pivotal strategic lever in guiding customer-oriented change. It operates dually, first, as a sensing mechanism that systematically captures and interprets customer insights, and second, as a shaping force that actively informs the development of new value propositions, distribution channels, and modes of customer engagement [9]. However, despite the growing interest in BMI, the role of marketing, particularly customer-centric strategies, remains underexplored in academic literature. Most recently existing studies have mainly focused on technological or operational drivers of BMI [10], with limited emphasis on how marketing contributes to the transformation of business models [11].

In the Romanian context, there is limited research on BMI in SMEs, despite their significant role in economic development through employment, innovation, and growth [4]. This study examines BMI through a customer-centric marketing lens in Romanian SMEs, addressing a gap in the literature. It explores how SMEs use customer insights and marketing strategies to adapt and innovate their business models, offering valuable theoretical and managerial insights given their unique constraints and needs. Thus, the main research question guiding this investigation is: *How do SMEs integrate customer-centric marketing strategies to innovate their business models?*

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Business model innovation in SMEs

The process of reinventing how a business generates, provides, and acquires value is known as BMI [12],[13]. It is increasingly recognized as a source of sustained competitive advantage and superior performance, often complementing or even replacing traditional strategy [14]. Unlike product or process innovation, BMI encompasses the reconfiguration of how companies create, deliver, and capture value, providing SMEs with a more resourceful approach to address resource limitations, respond to market fluctuations, and leverage emerging technologies.

BMI is not merely reactive but a proactive driver of performance and differentiation.

Market and entrepreneurial orientation jointly strengthen BMI, improving product outcomes and, in innovative SMEs, export performance, highlighting its role in internationalization [15]. In developing countries, SMEs leverage BMI to digitally transform operations across value creation, delivery, and capture [16], demonstrating its strategic relevance amid technological and market volatility. Open innovation and digital transformation further drive BMI, requiring cultural and structural adjustments to enhance agility and stakeholder value [17],[18],[19].

Research points to BMI's clear effect on SME success in various industries and settings [20],[21]. Viewing it as a dynamic practice, BMI supports competitive advantage - especially when firms work with outside actors to bypass internal limits amid shifting market conditions [22]. Updating and refining business models regularly helps companies respond to changing user demands in today's tech-driven environment [23]. Combined, this evidence shows BMI functions as a repeated cycle, delivering sustained value over time.

2.2 Customer-Centricity as a Strategic Orientation

In today's business environment, customer-centricity has become a key strategic orientation, placing the customer at the center of value creation, delivery, and capture and requiring shifts in strategy, structure, and culture [24],[25]. It involves continuously adapting business plans, products, and services to meet customer demands [26], supported by technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics, which improve satisfaction and strengthen competitive advantage [27].

Recent research shows that customer-centricity goes beyond meeting immediate needs; it involves building lasting relationships, fostering loyalty, and generating insights that guide innovation [28],[29]. This requires embedding customer focus into core operations and decision-making, not treating it as rhetoric [29]. Customer-centric strategies improve retention, satisfaction, and cost efficiency [24], while aligning company goals with customer needs strengthens loyalty, supports brand

engagement, and enhances agility and innovation in dynamic markets [28],[30].

Customer focus extends beyond private firms to government agencies, where understanding citizen behavior and providing flexible, tailored services improves satisfaction and engagement [31]. This approach also reinforces BMI, enabling firms to drive collaborative, value-driven innovation and adapt to market and digital changes [30]. Customer-centricity provides organizations of all sizes with a dynamic capability, helping them respond to challenges, foster innovation, and maintain performance in dynamic markets [32].

2.3 Marketing's role in business model innovation

Marketing is now seen more as a key force behind business model innovation, going beyond just advertising. Instead of limiting itself to promotion, it helps design, adjust, and explain how companies operate [33],[34]. Even though its impact is sometimes overlooked, marketing can offer longer-lasting advantages compared to new products - mainly due to its intricate nature and low replicability. Because it turns company value into actual customer needs, marketing shifts focus from mere sales to defining how firms generate, deliver, and retain value [33].

Recent studies extend this view to the digital environment, stressing how digital marketing must keep pace with tech advances - this alignment lets businesses grasp customer journeys more clearly while customizing engagement so that promotional efforts match broader aims [34].

Small businesses and companies adapting to change rely heavily on this evolving function. Studies indicate marketing connects organizations with their clients, boosting interaction through shared understanding [35],[36]. Furthermore, it builds flexibility in smaller enterprises, increasing openness to external inputs - this proves critical amid instability, since quicker reactions are possible, networks grow wider, while inventive changes spread across operational areas [37].

Taken together, these views suggest marketing plays a key role in BMI, working across both strategy and daily operations. While

linking company strengths with customer understanding and new technologies, it shapes how businesses build or refresh their business models..

2.4 Hypothesis development

Customer insights play an essential role in customer-focused strategies, especially when markets shift quickly. Instead of standard methods, companies now use tools like automatic data processing, frequent feedback checks, or direct interaction - turning old-style research into a way to generate value. These steps help businesses grasp what customers want, predict future choices, and then adjust products accordingly [38].

Researchers point out that combining AI with tailored approaches improves how customer information is gathered and processed, which supports quicker, user-focused methods [39]. Similarly, companies applying these insights adjust internal practices and mindset to increase service quality while building a lasting advantage over rivals [27]. For SMEs in Romania, dealing with limited resources and shifting markets, making smart use of consumer knowledge becomes essential - allowing sharper responses to demands, clearer distinction from others, along with fresh solutions. Therefore, based on this evidence, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H1: Using customer insights has a positive effect on BMI in Romanian SMEs.

As highlighted in the current literature, marketing encompasses more than promotional functions. It serves as a critical driver in shaping, adapting, and communicating business models by translating them into value propositions and aligning them with customer needs and technological advances [33],[34]. Marketing supports SMEs in becoming more flexible and data-driven, enabling them to create value, identify unmet needs, and adapt their business model, including how they deliver value and generate revenue [35],[36],[37]. This active and integrative role shows how marketing can proactively shape BMI, making it an essential factor in promoting innovation at all levels. Based on this, we propose the hypothesis that:

H2: A strong marketing strategy orientation has a positive influence on BMI in Romanian SMEs.

Combining what customers want with strategic planning boosts BMI effectively. A focus on lasting customer value, along with teamwork across departments, supports durable and profitable models, yet studies show marketing often plays only a passive part in this process [11]. When companies use customer feedback wisely, marketing becomes more relevant, sparking changes in how business models work [40]. In fast-moving digital markets, joint creation powered by artificial intelligence and large-scale data helps organizations spot trend shifts early while adjusting faster [30]. As a result, blending market understanding with outward-looking strategies leads to smarter, adaptable, and user-centred BMI approaches. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: A significant portion of the variation in BMI in Romanian SMEs can be explained by using both customer insights and a marketing strategy.

Based on the discussion above, the conceptual model guiding the research is illustrated in Fig.1 below.

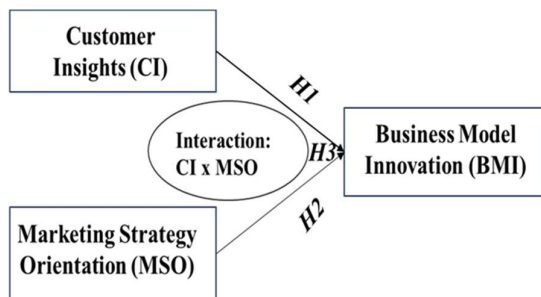


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

To answer the research question, the study employed a quantitative research design. The objective was to empirically test three hypotheses derived from the literature review by collecting standardized primary data via a structured questionnaire.

The study used a non-probability purposive sampling method. This was due to time

constraints and the need to collect data from various groups of SMEs. To maximize the response rates, the data collection process was done both online and in person. The questionnaire was distributed through email, social media platforms, and during field visits to SME owners and managers. In two months, a total of 116 responses were collected, out of which 103 were considered valid after screening for completeness and consistency.

To create the questionnaire, validated constructs were used and adapted to the specific context of the study. The study included items measuring customer insights usage and marketing strategy orientation as independent variables, with BMI serving as the dependent variable. These variables were measured using multiple items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1- "Strongly Disagree" to 5 - "Strongly Agree". The sample characteristics are illustrated in Table 1. Similar to other studies, three control variables were included: the firm's age, size, and operating industry [41].

Table 1

Respondents' characteristics (N=103)			
Variable	Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Age	<5 years	32	31.1
	6–10 years	32	30.1
	11–20 years	31	30,1
	>20 years	9	8.7
Size	Micro	41	39.8
	Small	48	36.6
	Medium	14	1.6
Industry	Agriculture	3	2.9
	Construction	9	8.7
	Consulting	4	3.9
	Education	4	3.9
	Healthcare	3	2.9
	Hospitality	12	11.7
	IT & Software	2	1.9
	Manufacturing	33	32.0
	Retail	20	19.4
	Transportation	13	12.6

Construct validity was supported through a clear operationalization of items derived from relevant literature and pre-tested with a small group of SME managers/owners for clarity and relevance. To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each of the main constructs. A reliability threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was considered acceptable [42]. The results

demonstrated satisfactory internal reliability: $\alpha = 0.781$ - CI (5 items); $\alpha = 0.701$ -MSO (5 items); $\alpha = 0,812$ – BMI (6 items).

Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26), were the methods of analysis of the respondents' views.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The items in the questionnaire were coded into SPSS. The following subsection will present the results of the exploratory study and hypothesis testing.

4.1 Descriptive results

The descriptive statistics results reveal a moderate overall engagement with customer insights among the surveyed SMEs. The highest average score ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.153$) indicates that the surveyed firms most frequently gather customer feedback, although variability is relatively high. On the other hand, customers actively involved in co-creating offerings had the lowest score ($M = 3.21$), suggesting that customer participation in innovation developments is limited.

Although marketing is acknowledged as a strategic element ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.073$), its function is not deeply ingrained in every aspect. Notably, the ability to adapt to evolving customer needs ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.763$) suggests a moderately strong responsiveness, nevertheless, not a proactive marketing orientation. More importantly, the use of data-driven marketing tools scores lowest ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.757$), suggesting a significant weakness in digital marketing capabilities. In addition, there is a lack of data-driven customer targeting as evidenced by the underdeveloped customer segmentation and personalization practices ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.610$).

In terms of BMI, the findings show that the SMEs surveyed had a moderately uneven degree of transformation across essential business model components. The highest mean score is for introducing new ways to interact with customers ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.162$).

However, areas such as changing revenue models ($M = 3.19$) and adopting new

activities/processes to support operations ($M = 3.04$) lag slightly behind, both with high standard deviations (>1.2), indicating inconsistency in implementation. Notably, the adoption of new partnerships or networks ($M = 3.28$) shows moderate engagement, possibly reflecting resource limitations or a still-developing culture of collaboration.

The correlation analysis of the surveyed SMEs reveals critical interrelations between customer insights, marketing strategies, and BMI. The customer insights variables (CI1–CI5) exhibit strong internal consistency, with co-creation participation (CI4, $r = 0.418$, $p < 0.01$) and structured insight processes (CI2, $r = 0.697$, $p < 0.01$) significantly correlated with regular customer feedback (CI1).

Strong correlations were observed between marketing strategy orientation variables (MSO1–MSO5); for instance, marketing as a strategic business component (MSO1) has a moderate correlation with analytics-based marketing solutions (MSO3, $r = 0.304$, $p < 0.01$) and marketing-led strategy (MSO2, $r = 0.538$, $p < 0.01$).

A highly interconnected network is revealed by the BMI (BMI1–BMI6) variables. Revenue model shifts (BMI2, $r = 0.343$, $p < 0.01$), new partnerships (BMI3, $r = 0.297$, $p < 0.01$), operational changes (BMI4, $r = 0.339$, $p < 0.01$), new customer interactions (BMI5, $r = 0.496$, $p < 0.01$), and value proposition adjustments (BMI6, $r = 0.608$, $p < 0.01$) are all significantly correlated with redefining target segments (BMI1). These strong correlations suggest that business model components evolve cohesively rather than in isolation.

Nevertheless, notable distinctions arise from this analysis. For instance, marketing as a strategic component (MSO1) shows weak and sometimes negative correlations with customer insight measures (e.g., $r = -0.077$ with CI1), suggesting possible gaps in leveraging customer feedback within a broader marketing strategy. Likewise, structured insight processes (CI2) negatively correlate with revenue model changes (BMI2, $r = -0.204$, $p < 0.05$) and operational innovations (BMI4, $r = -0.215$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the investigated SMEs with deep focus on customer insights may adopt a

more measured or selective approach to specific business model changes.

4.2 Regression analysis results

To investigate the impact of marketing strategy orientation (MSO) and customer insights (CI) on BMI in Romanian SMEs, several linear regression analyses were conducted. According to the findings, MSO did not significantly predict BMI ($F(1, 101) = 0.013$, $p = 0.911$). The model showed a very weak and non-significant linear relationship, explaining almost none of the variance in BMI ($R = 0.011$, $R^2 = 0.000$, adjusted $R^2 = -0.010$).

Similarly, a regression study examining the relationship between CI and BMI found a very weak, non-significant relationship ($F(1, 101) = 0.502$, $p = 0.480$), with CI accounting for only 0.5% of the variance in BMI ($R = 0.070$, $R^2 = 0.005$, adjusted $R^2 = -0.005$).

A combined regression model including both CI and MSO as predictors of BMI was also tested. This model was not statistically significant, $F(2, 100) = 0.257$, $p = 0.774$, explaining only 0.5% of the variance in BMI ($R = 0.072$, $R^2 = 0.005$, adjusted $R^2 = -0.015$).

These results suggest that neither MSO nor CI, individually or combined, significantly explain variation in BMI among the Romanian SMEs in this study. Consequently, the data do not support hypotheses H1, H2, or H3.

Additional nonlinear relationships were checked [43]. About 17.2% of the variance in BMI was explained by the first model, which included squared and direct CI variables ($R^2 = 0.172$). The model as a whole was getting close to statistical significance ($p = 0.053$). Only CI1_squared (feedback collection) among the predictors had a statistically significant positive effect on BMI ($p = 0.046$), indicating that regular feedback collection could help with innovation. The second model was not statistically significant ($p = 0.639$) and explained a smaller share of variance ($R^2 = 0.079$) based on MSO variables. The only metric that showed a significant negative correlation with BMI ($p = 0.046$) was MSO2_squared, which may suggest that the benefits of some structured marketing strategies are waning. Overall, the results indicate that MSO, at least as the surveyed companies currently use it, has little explanatory

power, even though CI practices may contribute to BMI.

5. DISCUSSION

The present research set out to examine the relationship between CI, MSO and BMI in Romanian SMEs. While prior literature strongly suggests that both CI and MSO are key enablers of BMI [33],[34],[40]. The empirical evidence gathered through this exploratory study exposes a more nuanced and, in some cases, contradictory reality within the Romanian SME context.

5.1 Limited predictive influence on business model innovation

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the regression results show that neither CI nor MSO significantly predict BMI. These findings stand in contrast to the assumptions underpinning H1 and H2, both of which were not supported. This divergence from existing theory raises essential considerations about contextual limitations and implementation maturity within the investigated SMEs.

Even though research highlights how useful customer insights can be for new ideas, this analysis finds that small businesses do gather opinions, yet rarely apply them in a planned way to drive real change. Instead of strong links, some data show weak or even inverse relationships - for example, between organized input and shifts in income strategies - which implies information is often collected on demand or at surface level, failing to connect with broader efforts to innovate.

Regarding MSO, a similar discrepancy was discovered. The poor average scores on marketing orientation variables (e.g., MSO3: adoption of data-driven marketing tools, $M = 2.73$) and their weak correlations with BMI imply that marketing functions in surveyed Romanian SMEs frequently remain tactical rather than strategic, despite marketing's acknowledged role as a strategic driver of innovation. In contrast to assumptions based on service-dominant logic, this limits marketing's capacity to support business model transformation.

5.2 Nonlinear relationships

While linear models did not confirm significant effects, nonlinear analyses revealed partial support for theoretical claims, particularly regarding the intensity of customer feedback collection (CI1). The significance of the squared term (CI1²) indicates that sustained and deep engagement with customer feedback may promote BMI, consistent with Mitchell et al. (2020), who emphasize the role of iterative learning cycles in integrating customer insights for innovation. Conversely, the negative impact of the squared term for structured marketing strategy (MSO2²) points to diminishing returns or rigidity linked to formal marketing approaches in the SME setting.

This study questions the idea that structured marketing always drives innovation, highlighting potential tensions between formal marketing processes and the flexibility SMEs require. The observed nonlinear effects suggest a complex interaction that warrants further investigation. Consequently, hypothesis H3, proposing a positive interaction between CI and MSO on BMI, was not supported in linear terms.

5.3 Implications for research and practice

Organizational maturity and resource constraints are responsible for the discrepancy between theoretical predictions and empirical results. Despite having the intention to be customer-oriented and marketing-led, many SMEs in the sample have modest scores on strategic and data-driven capabilities, suggesting that their capacity to carry out this intent is lacking.

Descriptive data shows shortcomings in customer segmentation strategies and digital marketing tools, which reflect more concerns about digitalization gaps in Eastern European SMEs [44]. The marketing strategy's ability to inform BMI is still limited in the absence of a strong digital infrastructure and analytical skills.

These results theoretically point out the necessity of modifying prevalent BMI models to fit the needs of SMEs in transition economies. The results of this study imply that the relationships between CI, MSO, and BMI may be nonlinear, dependent on organizational capabilities, or moderated by outside variables

like industry dynamics, resource availability, and digital readiness. Western-centric frameworks often assume that these relationships are linear and direct.

In practice, this research points to structured customer understanding alongside improved digital marketing abilities as key for effective BMI. To boost innovation, firms should focus on specific development actions - like adopting CRM tools, using segmentation techniques, or designing personalized campaigns [45], which hold value for Romanian decision-makers and small business initiatives.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined the relationships among business model innovation (BMI), marketing strategy orientation (MSO), and customer insights (CI) in Romanian SMEs, a context that has received little attention in transition economies. The results indicate that CI and MSO do not have straightforward, linear effects on BMI; instead, their influence is complex and contingent on firm-specific and contextual factors. Limited digital marketing capabilities and the weak integration of customer feedback constrain their potential to drive major business model transformations in the surveyed SMEs.

These findings highlight the need to move beyond idealized frameworks and adopt a context-sensitive understanding of SME innovation processes, particularly in emerging markets. To improve performance, SMEs could focus on strengthening digital marketing competencies, systematically integrating customer insights into strategic decision-making, and fostering cross-functional collaboration to support more agile and innovative business models.

The study is not without limitations. The reliance on self-reported data, linear analytical methods, and the exclusive focus on Romanian SMEs, may restrict broader applicability. Unmeasured factors like leadership, organizational culture, or digital maturity could also influence the observed dynamics.

To really move things forward, researchers should dig deeper. Talking directly with small

businesses might reveal how they truly use what customers tell them. Comparing different areas could show that what works in one place doesn't necessarily work elsewhere. Moreover, using structural equation modelling, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, or other system-oriented methods can untangle how gathering intelligence, organizational structure, and business model impact innovation - giving us a fuller picture of how smaller companies grow.

7. REFERENCES

- [1] Akbar, M. A. (2024). Customer-Centric Strategies: Navigating the Dynamics of Marketing Management for Competitive Advantage. *Advances in Business & Industrial Marketing Research*, 2, 96–109.
- [2] Albats, E., Podmetina, D., & Vanhaverbeke, W. (2021). Open innovation in SMEs: A process view towards business model innovation. *Journal of Small Business Management*.
- [3] Bouwman, H., Nikou, S., & de Reuver, M. (2019). Digitalization, business models, and SMEs: How do business model innovation practices improve performance of digitalizing SMEs? *Telecommunications Policy*, 43.
- [4] Bujang, M. A., Omar, E. D., & Baharum, N. A. (2018). A review on sample size determination for Cronbach's alpha test: A simple guide for researchers. *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 25, 85–99.
- [5] Chang, H. (2022). Research on innovation of enterprise marketing model based on "Internet +." *Academic Journal of Business & Management*, 4.
- [6] Chang, H. H. S., Knight, G., & Fong, C. M. (2024). Marketing Capabilities, Strategy, and Performance in International Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Journal of International Marketing*, 32, 21–37.
- [7] Dash, M. K., Sahu, M. K., Bhattacharyya, J., & Sakshi, S. (2023). Customer-Centricity: The Quest for Customer Focus. In *Customer-Centricity in Organized Retailing* (pp. 9–23). Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.
- [8] Einhorn, M., & Löffler, M. (2021). Transformation of Customer Insights. In *The Machine Age of Customer Insight* (pp. 5–18). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- [9] Fang, T. M., Ahmad, N. H., Halim, H. A., Iqbal, Q., & Ramayah, T. (2024). Pathway towards SME competitiveness: Digital capability and digital business model innovation. *Technology in Society*, 79, 102728.
- [10] Fathiya Putri Zahra, & Suharto, Y. (2024). Innovative Business Models for Design Service Providers: Enhancing MSME Digital Transformation. *Journal Integration of Management Studies*, 2, 205–210.
- [11] Foss, N. J., Schmidt, J., & Teece, D. J. (2023). Ecosystem leadership as a dynamic capability. *Long Range Planning*, 56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2022.102270>
- [12] Geissdoerfer, M., Vladimirova, D., Fossen, K. Van, & Evans, S. (2018). Product, service, and business model innovation: A discussion. *Procedia Manufacturing*, 21, 165–172. Elsevier B.V.
- [13] Hughes, J., Chapnick, D., Block, I., & Ray, S. (2023). What is Customer-Centricity, and Why Does It Matter? *California Management Review*, 8–26.
- [14] Ibarra, D., Bigdeli, A. Z., Igartua, J. I., & Ganzarain, J. (2020). Business model innovation in established SMEs: A configurational approach. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6.
- [15] Kafetzopoulos, D., Samara, E. T., & Theodorakioglou, Y. (2024). Multiple organizational capabilities for effective business model innovation and increased performance. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 27, 2925–2943.
- [16] Kalinin, A. (2023). Using the Principle of Customer-Centricity in Public Administration: Agenda for Implementation. *Public Administration Issues*, 7–25.
- [17] Keiningham, T., Aksoy, L., Bruce, H. L., Cadet, F., Clennell, N., Hodgkinson, I. R., & Kearney, T. (2020). Customer experience driven business model innovation. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 431–440.
- [18] Kergroach, S. (2021). SMEs Going Digital: Policy challenged and recommendations. In *OECD Publishing*. Paris.
- [19] Kim, S., Bowen, M., & Wen, X. (Hannah). (2019). The ultimate co-creation: leveraging customer input in business model innovation. *AMS Review*, 9, 339–356.
- [20] Klimanov, D., & Tretyak, O. (2018). Linking Business Model and Marketing Research for Successful Business Model Innovation. *Global Fashion Management Conference, 2018*, 930–934.
- [21] Korayim, D., Shaik, A. S., Agarwal, R., Nijjer, S., & Sasso, P. (2025). Entrepreneurial orientation and sustainable business model

- innovation through technology transfer. A study of SMEs leadership in knowledge-based economies. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 29, 789–813.
- [22] Marolt, M., Lenart, G., Maletič, D., Borštnar, M. K., & Pucihar, A. (2016). Business model innovation: Insights from a multiple case study of Slovenian SMEs. *Organizacija*, 49, 161–171.
- [23] Massiera, P. (2024). How do adaptive market experimentation, open marketing and strategic flexibility contribute to small firms' business model innovation in the context of a crisis? *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 31, 1302–1326.
- [24] Matosas-López, L. (2024). The importance of customer relationship management systems to business management and marketing strategies. In *The Impact of Digitalization on Current Marketing Strategies* (pp. 131–145). Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.
- [25] Merín-Rodríguez, J., Dasí, À., & Alegre, J. (2024). Digital transformation and firm performance in innovative SMEs: The mediating role of business model innovation. *Technovation*, 134.
- [26] Miller, K., McAdam, M., Spieth, P., & Brady, M. (2021, July 1). Business models big and small: Review of conceptualisations and constructs and future directions for SME business model research. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 131, pp. 619–626. Elsevier Inc.
- [27] Morton, F., Benavides, T. T., & González-Treviño, E. (2024a). *Taking Customer-Centricity to New Heights: Exploring the Intersection of AI, Hyper-Personalization, and Customer-Centricity in Organizations*. 23–41.
- [28] Morton, F., Benavides, T. T., & González-Treviño, E. (2024b). Taking Customer-Centricity to New Heights: Exploring the Intersection of AI, Hyper-Personalization, and Customer-Centricity in Organizations. In *Management and Industrial Engineering* (pp. 23–41). Springer, Cham.
- [29] Mulyana, M., & Azka, M. (2022). Market Sensing Capability and Customer Relationship Management on Marketing Performance: Role E-Marketing Strategy. *Jurnal Manajemen Indonesia*, 22, 279–288.
- [30] Osterwalder, A., & Pigneur, Y. (2010). *Business model generation: a handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- [31] Pardo-Jaramillo, S., Gómez, M. I., Muñoz-Villamizar, A., Lleo-de-Nalda, Á., & Osuna Soto, I. (2025). Towards sustainable organizations through purpose-driven and customer-centric strategies. In *AMS Review*.
- [32] Pati, R. K., Nandakumar, M. K., Ghobadian, A., Ireland, R. D., & O'Regan, N. (2018). Business model design–performance relationship under external and internal contingencies: Evidence from SMEs in an emerging economy. *Long Range Planning*, 51, 750–769.
- [33] Pucihar, A., Lenart, G., Borštnar, M. K., Vidmar, D., & Marolt, M. (2019). Drivers and outcomes of business model innovation-micro, small and medium-sized enterprises perspective. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11.
- [34] Rabetino, R., Kohtamäki, M., Foss, N. J., Rahman, N., & Huikkola, T. (2025). Microfoundations for business model innovation: Exploring the interplay between individuals, practices, and organizational design. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 42, 704–736.
- [35] Robertson, T. S. (2017). Business model innovation: a marketing ecosystem view. *AMS Review*, 7, 90–100.
- [36] Roni, S. M., & Djajadikerta, H. G. (2021). Data Analysis with SPSS for Survey-based Research. In *Data Analysis with SPSS for Survey-based Research*. Springer Singapore.
- [37] Saebi, T., Lien, L., & Foss, N. J. (2017). What Drives Business Model Adaptation? The Impact of Opportunities, Threats and Strategic Orientation. *Long Range Planning*, 50, 567–581.
- [38] Sjödin, D., Parida, V., Palmié, M., & Wincent, J. (2021). How AI capabilities enable business model innovation: Scaling AI through co-evolutionary processes and feedback loops. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 574–587.
- [39] Stahl, L., Magnoni, B., & Coetsee, G. (2017). The Business Case for Customer Centricity. *Cgap*, 40, 4.
- [40] Tahiri, S. (2022). Business Model Innovation through customer co-creation – a literature overview. *International Journal of Applied Research in Management and Economics*, 5, 61–73.
- [41] Teece, D. J. (2010). Business models, business strategy and innovation. *Long Range Planning*, 43, 172–194.
- [42] Tuominen, S., Reijonen, H., Nagy, G., Buratti, A., & Laukkanen, T. (2023). Customer-centric strategy driving innovativeness and business growth in international markets. *International Marketing Review*, 40, 479–496.
- [43] Urbany, J. E., & Dapena-Baron, M. (2024). The pursuit of customer centricity. *AMS Review*,

- 14, 298–307.
- [44] van Tonder, C., Hasanefendic, S., Bossink, B., Schachtebeck, C., & Nieuwenhuizen, C. (2023). Internal organizational factors driving digital transformation for business model innovation in SMEs. *Journal of Business Models*, 11, 86–109.
- [45] Visser, M. (2024). Digital transformation, strategy and business models. In *Digital Marketing Fundamentals* (pp. 30–72). Routledge.

Inovarea modelului de afaceri centrat pe client : o perspectivă de marketing din partea IMM-urilor românești

Rezumat: Răspândirea rapidă a tehnologiilor digitale și nevoile în continuă schimbare ale consumatorilor modifică viața de zi cu zi și influențează semnificativ modul în care funcționează și inovează afacerile. Prin urmare, întreprinderile mici și mijlocii trebuie să își adapteze constant atât modelele de afaceri, cât și oferta. Acest studiu investighează modul în care IMM-urile românești utilizează orientarea strategiei de marketing și informațiile despre clienți pentru a stimula inovarea modelului de afaceri. Pentru colectarea datelor, a fost distribuit un chestionar structurat către IMM-uri din diverse industrii. Rezultatele sugerează că, spre deosebire de credința populară, inovarea modelului de afaceri nu poate fi prezisă direct doar pe baza orientării strategiei de marketing sau a informațiilor despre clienți. În schimb, apar relații complexe și nonliniare, influențate posibil de alți factori organizaționali și de mediu. Studiul evidențiază integrarea strategică limitată a informațiilor despre clienți și capacitățile de marketing subdezvoltate ca bariere în calea inovării practice a modelului de afaceri în rândul IMM-urilor analizate. Aceste rezultate contribuie la teorie prin contestarea normelor liniare din modelele mainstream de inovare a afacerilor și susțin adoptarea unei abordări mai sensibile la context, adaptată diferitelor medii de afaceri. Studiul oferă, de asemenea, recomandări practice solide pentru managerii de IMM-uri și factorii de decizie, subliniind necesitatea de a îmbunătăți capacitățile de marketing și sistemele de colectare a informațiilor despre clienți ca facilitatori cheie ai transformării eficiente a modelului de afaceri.

Cuvinte cheie: inovarea modelului de afaceri, modele de afaceri, informații despre clienți, orientarea strategică de marketing, IMM-uri

Cristina Terezia DREȘAN, PhD student, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Department of Management and Economic Engineering, Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Robotics and Production Management, cristina_dresan@yahoo.com.

Raul Ionuț RITI, PhD student, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Department of Management and Economic Engineering, Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Robotics and Production Management, Raul.Riti@mis.utcluj.ro

Andra Emanuela PLEȘA CHIOREAN, PhD student, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Department of Management and Economic Engineering, Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Robotics and Production Management, chiorean.andra@yahoo.com

Laura BACALI, Prof. Dr., Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Department of Management and Economic Engineering, Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Robotics and Production Management, Laura.Bacali@mis.utcluj.ro