

**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

**BUSINESS AND TOURISM FACULTY**

**Tourism and Geography Department**

**Domain: *Business Administration***

**Doctoral School: *Business Administration***

# **HABILITATION THESIS**

**Business administration and  
consumer behavior in tourism  
in the context of digital technologies**

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# ABSTRACT

The habilitation thesis entitled "*Business administration and consumer behavior in tourism in the context of digital technologies*" presents the scientific contributions of the candidate obtained after being granted a doctorate, proving the originality, timeliness and relevance of academic and research performance in Business Administration. According to the requirements of Order 5229/2020 from August 17, 2020 about the organization and conduct of the process of obtaining the habilitation certificate, the thesis briefly presents the main scientific results published after obtaining the doctorate, the evolution of academic, scientific and professional career and the main directions for its development, as well as the candidate's ability to coordinate research teams and facilitate learning and research. Thus, the thesis is structured in three parts that include the details regarding these aspects, followed by the reference list.

The first part deals with the topicality of the theme for the *Business Administration* domain, the one in which the habilitation is pursued. "*Business administration and consumer behavior in tourism in the context of digital technologies*" is an extremely current topic with a major potential to influence the performance of companies. McKinsey & Company (2021a) mentioned a correlation between the "technological endowment", namely capabilities, talent, leadership and technological resources and the economic results obtained by a company. Beyond this effect, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, consumers preferring these channels, and companies changing their business models and basic practices to cope with the new conditions (McKinsey & Company, 2021a). The importance of technology and digitalization in the strategic agility of a tourism organization has been mentioned in the literature (Melian-Alzola et al., 2020). The ability of companies to adapt to new technologies has allowed them to manage the effects of the pandemic crisis and continue to offer value to tourists (Sigala, 2020). For example, some organizations or authorities have used applications to inform tourists about expanding capacity and respecting social distance (Badcock, 2020), virtual reality to offer tourists the opportunity to "travel" even in this extremely restrictive period (Itani and Hollebeek, 2021) or robots to reduce tourist interactions with employees or improve hotel cleanliness (Kusmann, 2020; Pillai et al., 2020).

Consequently, businesses face a growing need for technology and digitalization, and the changing consumer behavior becomes a topical issue in the field of business administration in general, and tourism in particular. The way in which tourists make decisions and how they behave in the new context marked by technological changes and health problems generated by the pandemic is becoming a significant area of research. It is crucial to understand behavioral patterns and their changes due to the fact that many human activities take place online, and digitalization has led to a dramatic change in tourist requirements (Johnson and Bharadwaj, 2005). The interest in examining how technologies affect the way tourists experience destinations is not new (Cohen et al., 2014), but in the new restrictive conditions generated by the pandemic, this research approach becomes more challenging and interesting. Digital technological solutions such as various applications, augmented and virtual reality, or the use of robots are becoming relevant to businesses, and their acceptance and effect on tourist behavior are current topics in the field of *Business Administration*.

The second part of the thesis presents the scientific achievements of the candidate, being divided into three subsections detailing the contributions by areas of specialization, namely (1) consumer behavior in tourism, decision making and the use of new technologies, (2) business administration, competition and strategy and (3) communication and emotion management. The thesis describes 5 articles published in Clarivate Analytics indexed international journals, with AIS over 0.15 and a notable number of citations, as well as several other papers published on the announced topics.

The first article described is “*Virus tinged? Exploring the facets of virtual reality use in tourism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic*”, published in 2021 in *Telematics and Informatics*, a Clarivate Analytics indexed journal in Quartile 1 (red zone) in the field of Information Science & Library Science (AIS 1,347), having the candidate as the first author. The article examined the use of virtual reality in tourism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic based on an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Assuming that tourists would prefer less risky experiences and see virtual reality as a substitute for traditional travel, the authors organized an 'within-subjects' experiment, which proved that the intention to use virtual reality in tourism has increased under the COVID-19 effect. The conceptual model demonstrated that this intention was influenced by the perceived ease of use, the perceived usefulness and substitutability of virtual reality, all mediated by people's interest in using virtual reality in tourism. The results have a significant impact in the field, proved not only by their appearance in a top international journal but also by the number and quality of citations obtained. In just a few months since its publication, this article has 19 Google Scholar citations and 7 in Clarivate Analytics indexed journals, two of which are in Quartile 1.

The thesis continues with the brief description of the article "*The Influence of New Technologies on Tourism Consumption Behavior of the Millennials*". It analyzes how new technologies influence the tourism consumption behavior of the Millennials (generation Y) in Romania, the results being based on a quantitative survey-type research. According to the authors, the paper was the first to link the importance given to images, videos, online assessments in the travel decision-making process by Millennials tourists and the degree to which they are willing to publish online information about travel in this form. This article has also a significant contribution to the field, as evidenced by their appearance in an international journal with an AIS score above 0.15 and a significant number of citations in articles published in internationally listed journals, including 18 indexed in Clarivate Analytics in the red, yellow and gray categories.

The second part of the thesis also contains the presentation of three other articles published in the *Amfiteatru economic*, an international journal with an AIS score over 0.15, respectively the titles "*Competition Policy in the European Film Industry Focused on Consumers' Interests - A Romanian Perspective*", "*Facets of the Economic and Financial Crisis Impact on Strategic Planning in Travel Agencies*" and "*Principles and best practices in successful tourism business incubators*" which support the specialization in business administration, competition and strategy. Finally, the communication and emotion management specialization area is confirmed by the description of two books published as the sole author and the mention of some articles published in journals indexed in several databases.

The third part of the thesis describes the university career of the candidate and the future development directions in several important directions. A few general objectives, followed by some objectives regarding the didactic activity and objectives regarding the research activity are identified and reported.

The ability to coordinate research teams and to support learning and research was mentioned in the habilitation thesis. Several arguments to support this ability of the author are represented by the research projects that she coordinated and which materialized in articles published in prestigious journals, with an impact in the analyzed field. A first example dates from the period when the author studied in the United States and participated in a research requested by the executive committee of the golf tournament The Chrysler Classic of Greensboro. The author of this thesis played an important role in defining the research elements and creating the research tool and coordinated a team of 12 students for the administration of the questionnaires and the primary analysis. The data obtained was used by the tournament management to achieve their strategic objectives, but also had scientific value and has been discussed in an article published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary*

*Mathematics*, a Clarivate Analytics/ISI indexed journal at this time. More recently, other notable examples are the articles “*The Influence of New Technologies on Tourism Consumption Behavior of Millennials*” and “*Virus tinged? Exploring the facets of virtual reality use in tourism as a result of the “COVID-19 pandemic”*” which have been published in Clarivate Analytics (ISI) indexed journals with AIS over 0.15 and which have a significant number of citations. These were written in teams coordinated by the habilitation candidate, demonstrating her ability to coordinate research teams, to facilitate learning and research.

Therefore, the 5 articles selected for the habilitation thesis and all the details included in its three sections demonstrate the author’s ability to identify current research topics, to materialize them in studies with scientific and practical relevance, to coordinate research teams and to generate influential scientific results in the pursued academic field of study, but also interdisciplinary. These can develop the doctoral studies in *Business Administration* domain and can contribute to the activity of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

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