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Trends Affecting CRM Processes of Large Industry Companies

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Abstract: ***Business processes in industrial companies are subject to constant change, which is why especially those companies must try to stay up to date in order to counteract the negative effects of these changes. The aim of this study was to research which developments, influencing factors and trends affect the Customer Relationship Management business processes of large industrial companies. With the help of a qualitatively oriented systematic literature research of practical studies 13 important influences were identified. The result shows that a strong customer centricity is developing in industrial companies, which will change future business processes and IT-supported business systems today and in the future. This study can serve as a starting point for further research in industrial companies that plan to modify or transform business processes.***
Keywords: Business Processes, CRM, Trends, Changes, Industry

I. INTRODUCTION

Many given framework conditions will change in the coming years and literature often refers to a so-called “VUCA” world to express an environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity [1]-[3]. In order to survive in this world, companies must adapt [4]. Therefore, they are counteracting the influence of VUCA by making their business processes more flexible or adapting them [5]. This also applies to Customer Relationship Management business processes, for which an Illustration with its most essential components has been created based on various sources [6]-[8] that is shown in Figure 1. In this article, developments, influencing factors and trends that affect and change these business processes were identified. It explicitly outlines the most important influencing factors for the CRM business processes of large industrial companies in practice and at a high altitude. With regard to company size, there are many different classifications of company size clusters [9]. Quantitative criteria such as the number of employees and annual turnover can be used to differentiate between small, medium-sized and large companies [10]-[13]. For this article the definition of the German Institute for SME Research (large companies employ more than 499 people and generate more than EUR 50 million in turnover) was selected [14]. There are already many studies that deal with business-to-business CRM and future trends. These can be found, for example, in the topics Relationship Management and Relationship Quality in B2B [15], CRM tools and their future trends and developments [16], recent trends and technologies in marketing [17], general trends, challenges, and innovations in CRM [18] or in specific research areas such as the future of B2B sales with Generative AI [19] or strategic use of social media in B2B marketing [20]. However, the most important developments, influencing factors and trends that affect the CRM business processes of large industrial companies from a practical perspective now and in the future have not yet been highlighted and are to be worked out in this paper.

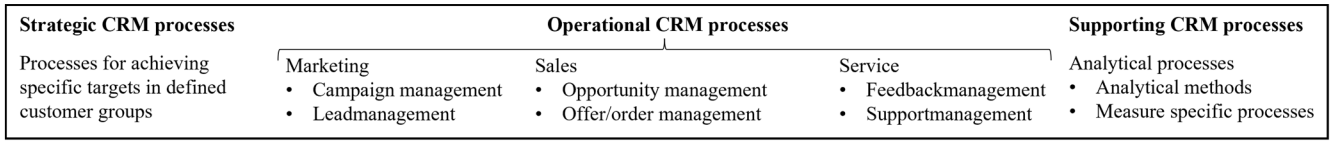


Fig. 1 high level components of CRM business processes (own research)

II. RESEARCH APPROACH

The aim of this study was to understand which developments influence CRM business processes in big Industrial companies. In order to be able to approach the topic, suitable studies from practice were screened. Only those studies were selected in which the study participants were, without exception, practitioners and a large proportion of the participants in the studies came from industry. In addition, the majority of the companies surveyed were to follow the definition of size mentioned above. This process was limited to studies published in English and German language from years 2019 to 2024 which identified a total of 14 studies [21]-[34].

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The studies and surveys reflect the issues that are currently or will be of most concern to CRM managers and employees in the companies' addressed and were thoroughly screened. Changes and trends that influence the CRM processes of industrial companies were included in a list and noted according to their frequency of occurrence. Only those that occurred three or more times were analysed. The research approach identified 13 trends and developments that will very likely influence Customer Relationship Management business processes in big industrial companies. The trends and changes were described with the aid of further specialist literature in order to draw a picture of the most important trends and changes.

III. RESULTS - TRENDS AND CHANGES THAT INFLUENCE FUTURE CRM PROCESSES

The relevant developments which were worked out through the chosen research approach can be divided into four categories: Influence of technological trends on CRM processes/systems, increased demands on CRM systems, changing customer demands and changes with regard to sales channels/forms of marketing and are shown in Figure 2 for an overview.

x = receives attention in screened practical studies and further literature

Changes and Trends affecting CRM processes of in industry companies:	Representative studies for changes in the CRM processes of in industry companies: [21] Deloitte: Legler 2019	[22] Trovarit AG: Sontow et al. 2023	[23] itdesign GmbH: Felten et al. 2020	[24] Böcker Ziemen & Adito: Böcker 2022	[25] Sana Inc. 2021	[26] Ostfalia Hochschule: Frenzel 2023	[27] ECC KÖLN: Heinick et al. 2023	[28] BVIK e.V.: Thaler et al. 2023	[29] PwC: Heiner et al. 2020	[30] Fachhochschule Luzern: Uhl 2020	[31] Ernst & Young: Friedrich et al. 2020	[32] McKinsey: McClatchy et al. 2023	[33] SimonKutcher: Sands/Mayer 2023	[34] HubSpots: Kinnear et al. 2023
A. Impact of tech trends on CRM systems/processes														
Growing digitalization and automation	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Increased e-commerce and hybrid processes	x	x	x		x				x	x	x	x		
Rise of predictive/data analytics and forecasting models	x		x							x	x	x		x
Use of AI in marketing/sales processes	x	x	x						x	x	x			x
B. Increased demands on CRM systems														
High demands on compatibility and integration of the CRM	x	x	x	x		x			x					x
Stronger requirements regarding data protection and compliance		x		x		x			x	x				
Demand for more flexibility and agility		x	x	x										
C. Changing customer demands														
Higher customer expectations									x			x		x
Increasing personalization of interaction with the customer	x								x	x		x	x	x
Mapping the customer journey map in CRM	x	x	x	x					x	x		x		
D. Changes in sales channels/forms of marketing														
Increased emergence of platforms and digital marketplaces	x				x		x		x	x		x		
Establishment of social selling								x	x	x	x	x		x
Changes in sales/distribution channels		x		x			x		x			x	x	x

Fig. 2 Influencing factors and changes in the CRM area with an impact on business processes (own research)

A. Impact of tech trends on CRM systems/processes

Digitalization and automation will continue to have a major impact on CRM processes in the future [35]. Johannsen und Katzengruber state that Digitalization has reached the sales organizations in many B2B companies a long time ago and although CRM software providers such as Salesforce, SAP, Oracle, Adobe and Microsoft have understood the importance of the link between customer information and the sales cycle, their application is still rudimentary in most companies [36]. In addition to digitalization, the automation of CRM processes continues to be important, as it offers many advantages. Chakravorti cites, for example, customer involvement or more time to improve the customer experience and mentions: "It is important to realize that to get maximum benefits from automation the processes themselves need to be effective and efficient in facilitating the customer journey and in achieving CRM goals" [37]. The study “Degree of digitization in B2B marketing” conducted by the German Industry Communication Association, whose target group included B2B marketers from industrial companies, found that the proportion of those using marketing automation is still below 50%.

They attribute this to a lack of necessary know-how in the team or insufficient data quality in the underlying CRM systems, which, according to the study, are not yet fully equipped, although professional data management is the basis of any digitalization and automation of communication processes [28].

Increasing e-commerce and hybrid processes will be part of the CRM processes of industrial companies in the future and there are good reasons for the rise of e-commerce, both in B2C and B2B as the considerable transparency, efficiency and cost advantages of the internet make digital advertising and sales channels equally attractive for suppliers, providers and buyers [38]. Traditional sales and e-commerce would also complement each other in the context of hybrid sales/hybrid selling. According to a global study from Salesforce, the line between physical and digital retail is blurring. According to it, 51 percent of the manufacturing companies surveyed are increasingly replacing the classic “in-store experience” with digital experiences [39]. Kümin emphasizes the importance of equipping sales employees with the right content and tools to address buyers in a meaningful way and provide them with the right information. As an example, he cites so-called digital sales rooms, which aim to replicate the personal interaction and engagement of traditional sales conversations in a digital space [40].

Companies have realized that the correct handling of customer data holds great potential. "The explosion of customer data and the increasing ease of access to multiple sources of such data have led to the realisation that these data are treasure troves of customer-related information" [41]. Analysing customer data can help companies to predict the next purchase or provide reasons for potential customer churn and also can be used to suggest the next best product, service or solution to customers with the help of analysis methods such as diagnostic/predictive result analyses [42].The use of these analysis methods is already of great importance for CRM processes today and will remain so in the future [43],[44]. A study of almost 200 managers in B2B sales conducted by Ernst & Young shows that digital tools are used more frequently in B2B sales, particularly in large companies. Data analytics is already frequently used in the companies surveyed (in operation in 47% of the companies surveyed) and will be used even more in the future (16% plan to). It is striking that companies often do not see any potential applications for other technologies (e.g. blockchain 57%, virtual reality 55%, robotic process automation 52%, dynamic pricing 50%) or are not even aware of the technologies (e.g. process mining 30%, chatbots 27%) [31].

Finally, Artificial Intelligence will also influence CRM processes: "AI is not only storing and collecting data, but also about analysing, managing, and interpreting facts in managing Customer Relationship Management [45]. A global study conducted by SugarCRM surveyed 800 managers from a wide range of industries in B2B sales, marketing, service and IT to find out which new priorities will emerge in the field of CRM in the coming months and years. The respondents saw the use of AI as by far the highest priority for increasing the added value of customer relationship management [46].

B. Increased demands on CRM systems

The demands on CRM software are increasing due to the growing integration with marketing automation and the inclusion of legal, social, technical and analytical trends [47]. One of the future characteristics of CRM systems is the requirement for compatibility and integration into the existing IT landscape which means to choose a tool that can be seamlessly integrated into existing technology landscape which means that it should be compatible with other systems [48]. Acceptance by the company's users is of great importance for the introduction or further development of CRM software in an organization [49]. The “Digitalization in Sales” study, in which sales managers and employees from companies primarily active in the mechanical engineering sector took part, examined, among other things, which influencing factors play a central role in the acceptance of CRM systems in B2B sales. 75 percent of those surveyed were of the opinion that the greater the compatibility of a CRM system with existing IT systems, the more likely it is to be accepted by employees [26].

CRM systems store and manage customer data such as contact information, purchase and communication history, preferences and interactions across multiple touchpoints [50]. Data protection plays a particularly important role when dealing with customer data. Harms describes that one of the biggest challenges for European companies is compliance with data protection regulations, in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which applies in the European Union [51]. The GDPR sets strict rules for the processing and storage of personal data and can result in significant fines for non-compliance [52]. Therefore, companies must ensure that their CRM practices and systems are fully GDPR compliant. The fact that data and information security is an important factor is also strengthened by a study conducted by Trovarit AG, which surveyed 219 IT managers, CRM administrators and users on current topics and future trends in the CRM environment. From the participants' point of view, “data and information security” was the most important trend in the CRM environment, with around 75 percent of participants rating it as very or fairly relevant [22].

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Finally, flexibility plays an important role in the area of CRM processes. Buttle und Maklan describe that flexibility is an important requirement for CRM systems by pointing out that customers do not always follow predefined processes, but that flexible applications are needed that offer the user various alternatives without strict process specifications [53]. The CRM Report 2022 study by Böcker Ziemen and Adito, in which 260 participants from various industries, mainly large companies, took part in an online survey, identified “flexibly customizable standard platforms” as the optimal CRM solution, which was confirmed by the high approval rating of 96 percent of respondents [24].

C. Changing customer demands

In a time when customer behaviour is changing more strongly and dynamically than ever before, companies must adapt quickly to the new expectations of customers [54]. The high quality of service offered by many online retailers in particular has led to a significant increase in customer expectations [55]. In a comprehensive online survey conducted by Google and Roland Berger, which questioned 2745 sales executives in German industrial goods companies, it became clear that companies will need to adapt to changing customer demands in the future. 66 percent of the respondents agreed, either partially or fully, with the statement that the next generation of buyers will place new demands on digital sales [56].

Changes can also be observed with regard to the personalization of interactions with customers. Companies have learned to address their customers in a personalized way, which in return has led to customers becoming accustomed to this [57]. Other sources argue that suitable personalization is even a prerequisite for a purchase: "Customers want almost everything personalized. They don't buy bundles of products; they want to acquire precisely the part of the package they want" [58]. A global study by McKinsey found that companies that use “highly personalized marketing and sales interactions” are more successful. The study also showed that half of the participants in the survey who had invested in personalization tools were able to increase their market share and 77 percent of the companies surveyed that use direct one-to-one personalization also recorded an increase in market share [32].

Mapping the customer journey map in CRM is extremely important and will become increasingly important in the future. It is now more important than ever to move away from product and sales orientation towards focus on the market and to put the customer at the centre [59]. Companies achieve a customer-centric approach primarily through the use of methods such as customer journey mapping which is a form of data analysis that aims to understand the entire customer behaviour and experience throughout the entire process of purchase preparation, the actual purchase and, if applicable, after-sales [60]. The customer journeys of B2B businesses are much more complex than those of B2C businesses and can go through a large number of touchpoints [61]. The "CRM-Study 2020", which surveyed a total of 832 top decision-makers, CRM project managers and users from various industries, business areas and company sizes, found that there is a great need for action with regard to establishing the customer journey in CRM systems. Only seven percent of companies stated that they had fully mapped the customer journey in the CRM system and 32 percent at least incompletely. However, 47 percent of companies do not take the customer journey into account in their CRM systems and 14 percent of companies have not yet developed a customer journey at all [23].

D. Changes in sales channels/forms of marketing

Digital marketplaces and platforms are an important part of the digital services sector [62]. Lombriser und Abplanalp describe how digitally supported platforms would also offer industrial companies new opportunities and cite digital marketplaces for processing transactions as an example [63]. A study conducted by ECC KÖLN with Creditreform and Intershop among wholesalers and product manufacturers revealed that 40 percent of larger companies already operate their own marketplace and 48 percent are planning to set one up. The main reason cited by 88 percent for having their own marketplace was to tap into new sources of revenue [27].

Rich describes that some strategic trends that have emerged over the last ten years will continue to have a major influence on today's sales strategies in the future and cites social selling as one such trend. He also attributes positive characteristics to social selling compared to traditional sales approaches [64]. Social selling is about deepening relationships and finding and attracting new contacts for your business and engaging with them via social media (and other digital platforms). It allows salespeople and companies to find their target audience, connect and build a relationship with them, nurture them and then move on to a company's 'normal' sales process [47]. In future, social media will be increasingly used in B2B sales which will have an impact on current and future CRM processes [65]-[67].

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A study by Oktopost, which surveyed 200 CMOs from primarily large companies in sectors including industrial automation, manufacturing, services and insurance, describes how social networks are now far more than just a tool for increasing brand awareness. The B2B marketing managers surveyed see it as a versatile marketing tool, with 93% of CMOs stating that social media has either a great or very great influence as part of their overall marketing strategy [68].

In the B2B business, changes can be observed with regard to companies' sales/distribution channels. Winkelmann und Spandl observe a trend that continues unabated in the direction of multi-channel sales [38]. Although managing an omnichannel approach can be a challenge for companies, as digitalization increases transparency and customers demand greater consistency between channels [42], current studies in B2B business show a clear trend towards an omnichannel approach. PwC and Salesforce, for example, come to the conclusion that omnichannel is "not just a buzzword, but the foundation for B2B sales" and will continue to gain in importance in the future [69]. According to McKinsey, omnichannel is important for market share growth, with B2B customers favouring an omnichannel approach "regardless of their industry, country, size or stage of customer relationship" [70].

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this work, developments, influencing factors and trends that affect and change CRM business processes of large industrial companies in practice and at a high altitude were identified. Although the influencing factors identified should not be weighted, it is noticeable that the aspect of growing digitalization and automation is a particularly important goal for companies, which is reflected in the large number of mentions. In addition, the consistent support of processes through IT is of great importance. Be it platforms on which industrial companies offer their products, solutions and services or the digital mapping of the customer journey in the CRM system, many companies will not be able to be successful in the future without a corresponding transformation of the IT landscape. Furthermore, the focus in industry is on the customer, who will place higher demands on companies in the future and expect a tailored offering. It is striking that the point of sustainability for sales processes is not included in the list. With the same methodology, this point will probably be much more strongly represented either in Product-Lifecycle-Management processes (for example in the development or discontinuation of products) or in Supply Chain Management in production and logistics processes.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

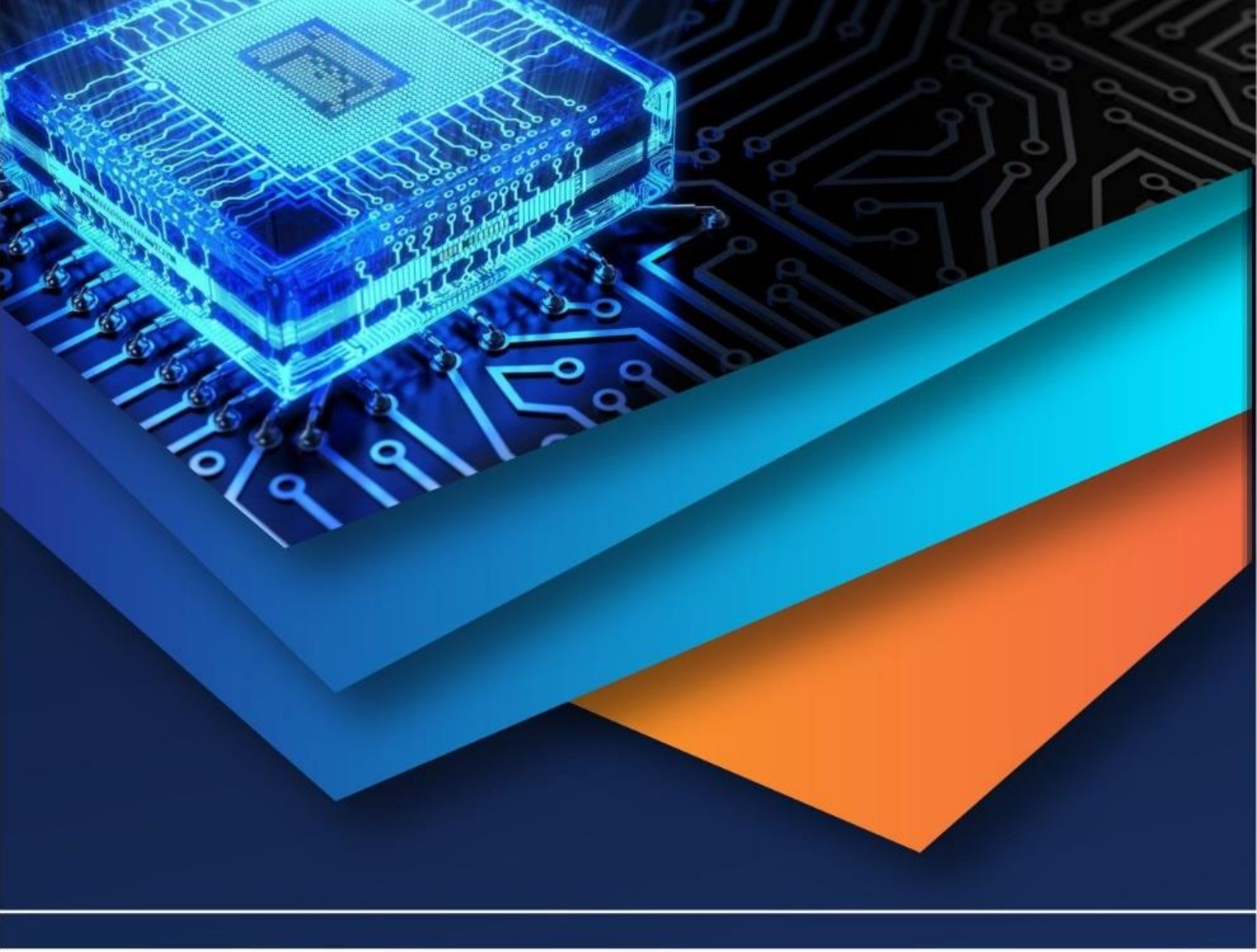
The changes identified are mapped at a very high level, which provides a good starting point for further investigations in the area of large industrial companies. However, if you want to classify companies more precisely, much greater differentiation is required. For example, the aspect "Stronger requirements regarding data protection and compliance" affects industrial companies worldwide, but there are stronger or weaker manifestations of this influence in different regions of the world. Industrial companies in Europe are subject to different laws [71] than those in China [72], the US [73] or other countries [74], for example. In addition to this geographical differentiation, there can also be major differences within the group of large industrial companies. The aspect of "Increasing personalization of interaction with the customer" will most likely be stronger for a supplier of individual customer-specific machines than for a mass manufacturer that produces identical products in stock. In this paper, four categories and 13 specific changes were identified that will have an impact on large industrial companies today and in the future, but not which measures the companies will take in response. In practice, different companies react differently to various external influences. The influences identified will also have a stronger or weaker impact on certain areas of the company. For example, it would be interesting to find out how the IT landscape of the affected companies will have to change in order to cope with the changes.

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