

Comparing CEM and CRM: A Literature Review

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Abstract—Despite the increasing interest given to Customer Experience Management (CEM) in both the literature and organizations, there is still confusion surrounding the concept. Moreover, CEM is often confused with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and the relationship between both is unclear. Given the recent rise in CEM software on the market, as well as the already well-established CRM software available, it is important to understand what the differences are, if any, between CEM and CRM to guide the future development of software packages. This paper reviews the literature on both CEM and CRM and analyzes definitions of both concepts to identify if there are major similarities and differences between them. We find that while they are different, they do share important similarities. It would thus be more convenient and efficient to develop CEM software in collaboration with CRM software.

Keywords—customer experience management; customer relationship management; literature review.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today’s fast-changing environment, organizations must multiply their efforts to gain and, more importantly, sustain a competitive advantage. To that end, Customer Experience Management (CEM) is increasingly adopted. Indeed, some believe that customer experience is nowadays what allows organizations to differentiate themselves from their competitors [1].

Despite the growing enthusiasm surrounding CEM, confusion on the topic remains in the literature. First, the concept at the heart of CEM, i.e., “customer experience”, remains unclear. Indeed, the concept is defined in multiple ways in the literature. While some authors speak of a subjective response from the customer to an organization [2], others speak more of a sum of interactions with the customer [3]. Second, researchers and practitioners do not agree on what CEM is and often confuse it with customer relationship management (CRM). Indeed, the relationship between CEM and CRM is still unclear [4]. While CEM is at times considered to be part of CRM [5], the opposite is rather suggested at other times [6]. With all this confusion, it is still not possible to determine what really differentiates the two concepts. Are they really different, or is CEM simply an upgraded version of CRM? If they are different, do they intersect, and if so, in what capacity?

Very little research has been conducted to clarify the relation between both concepts. To that end, Homburg, et al.

[7] have made, to our knowledge, the most important contribution to date. They propose four dimensions in which CEM and CRM differ, i.e., cultural mindsets, strategic directions, firm capabilities, and primary goals. While they propose a valuable starting point, more work must be done to clearly identify all similarities and differences between both concepts. Indeed, recent studies on CEM recognize that CEM has still not been sufficiently differentiated from CRM [4].

The confusion surrounding CEM and CRM is exacerbated when looking at the CEM software solutions that have recently begun appearing on the market. Indeed, CEM software solutions mostly allow for the collection and analysis of customers’ feedback. These functionalities could be helpful for part of CEM, as well as part of CRM. In fact, the differences between CEM and CRM software solutions that are currently on the market are not easy to identify, as both types of solutions seem to provide a very similar set of functionalities, leaving us wondering what the added value of acquiring a CEM tool is for a firm that already uses a CRM tool. Of course, CEM software is only at its early stages and will develop further in years to come. However, to develop CEM software efficiently and effectively, it is essential to understand the relationship between CEM and CRM. Indeed, if both concepts are different and do not intersect, it makes sense to develop standalone CEM software solutions. However, if one concept is the extension of the other, then it would be more efficient to build on existing CRM software. Understanding their relationship would also allow for better integration between both software solutions.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to determine, by analyzing definitions of CEM and CRM, whether the two concepts are distinct and to identify what are the main distinctions between them, if any. In the next sections, we present the methodology, we discuss our results and, lastly, we conclude with future research avenues.

II. METHODOLOGY

To reach our research objective, we conducted a literature review on both CEM and CRM. The steps of the review process are presented in Figure 1.

The first step consisted of searching the literature to find relevant studies. We used the database ABI/INFORM and searched the four following expressions: “customer experience management”, “CEM”, “customer relationship management”, and “CRM”. To ensure that we could find as many relevant studies as possible while limiting the scope of

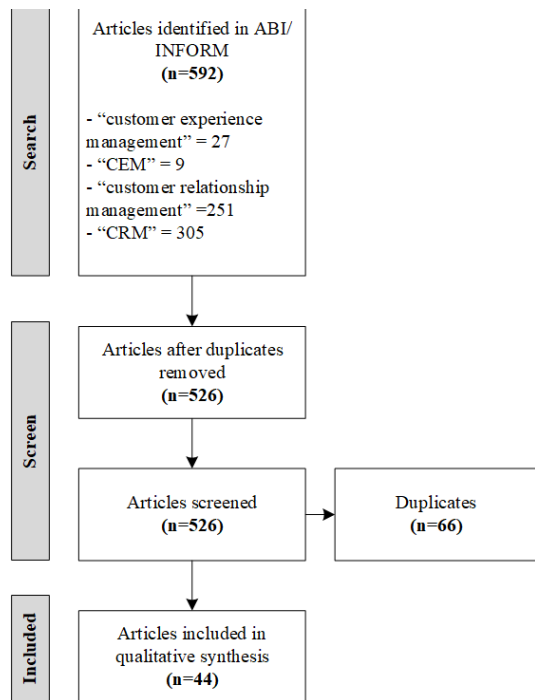


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the review process.

the search, we searched only in the title. We also limited our search to peer-reviewed academic papers written in English. We found 526 studies as the result of the first step.

The second step was the screening of the 526 identified studies. Since we wanted to identify definitions and that a definition could be found in any section of the studies, we read in full all studies identified in the previous step, paying special attention to sections such as the introduction, the background/review of the literature, and the results.

In the third step, we extracted all definitions of customer experience, CEM, customer relationship, and CRM. As a result of this step, we found 18 definitions of customer experience, 19 definitions of CEM, and 34 definitions of CRM. No definitions of customer relationship were found.

Lastly, we conducted a qualitative analysis, which was subdivided into three steps that are presented in the next section.

III. RESULTS

Having now extracted all the definitions found in the literature, our qualitative analysis was divided into three steps that are each presented in the following paragraphs. First, we analyzed the definitions related to CEM. Second, we analyzed the definitions related to CRM. Third, we compared the elements that stood out from our analysis to highlight the similarities and differences between CEM and CRM.

A. Customer experience management

We found 19 definitions of CEM, as well as 18 definitions of the concept at the heart of CEM, i.e., customer experience. Because of paper size constraints, we only present a subset of the definitions of customer experience found in Table I. Those definitions, together, illustrate the elements that stood

out during our analysis. The same applies to the definitions of CEM and CRM, presented in Table II and Table III respectively. Please contact the authors for the list of all definitions and references included in the analysis.

The first noticeable element in the definitions of customer experience is that the emotional and sensorial aspect is put forward in most definitions. Second, customer experience encompasses the whole customer journey that includes all touchpoints between an organization and the customer. Third, not only are direct interactions influencing the customer experience, but indirect interactions, such as word-of-mouth or online reviews, also influence the customer experience. Fourth, considering the definitions as well as the three previous elements, the customer experience is highly subjective. Indeed, the same interaction could generate different emotions for different customers.

TABLE I. DEFINITIONS OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer experience definitions	References
[...] holistic in nature involving the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to any direct or indirect contact with the service provider, brand or product across multiple touchpoints during the entire customer journey.	[8]
[...] the evolvement of a person’s sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral responses to a firm or brand by living through a journey of touchpoints along prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase situations and continually judging this journey against response thresholds of co-occurring experiences in a person’s related environment.	[9]
[...] internal feelings of customers when facing various interactions with firms, whether direct (e.g. usage, service consumption and purchase) or indirect (e.g. online reviews, word-of-mouth and advertising)	[10]
The customer’s sensorial, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and social responses to a firm’s offerings during the customer’s entire purchase journey.	[4]
[...] a multidimensional concept focusing on customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social response to a business offering and performance.	[11]
[...] events that engage individuals in a personal way.	[12][13]
[...] a customer’s subjective responses that are the result of interacting with an organization. It covers all interactions, e.g. purchasing, searching, consuming and seeking product or service support.	[14]
[...] a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company or a part of its organization, which provokes a reaction.	[12][15]
[...] the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representatives of a company’s product, service or brands and takes the form of word-of mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews and so forth.	[15][16]
[...] the cognitive and affective outcome of the customer’s exposure to, or interaction with, a company’s people, processes, technologies, products, services and other outputs.	[17]
[...] the internal feelings of customers when facing various interactions with firms, whether direct (e.g. usage, service consumption and purchase) or indirect (e.g. online reviews, word-of-mouth and advertising).	[18]

Now that we have a good understanding of what is a customer experience, we analyzed the definitions of CEM. A sample of the definitions found in the literature is presented in Table II.

First, we noticed that a lot of emphasis is put on customer experience. Indeed, many define CEM simply as the management of customer experience, without delving into what the “management” entails. The activities required in CEM are mostly overlooked. Second, there is no consensus regarding what CEM entails, as it is defined as a cultural mindset, a strategy, a process, a discipline, a methodology, and/or capabilities. Third, the goals of CEM include sustaining a competitive advantage and customer loyalty.

B. Customer relationship management

While we found many definitions of customer experience in the literature– in fact almost as many as for CEM– we did not find a single definition of customer relationship. Indeed, in the CRM literature, there is not much emphasis on the customer relationship. The emphasis is rather on the actions that an organization must undertake to manage this relationship.

TABLE II. DEFINITIONS OF CEM

CEM definitions	References
[...] the management of the customer-firm relationship along the customer journey, from need generation to post-purchase	[19]
[...] the name given to the ‘Total Customer Experience’ strategic management process in a firm, which involves the firm’s efforts to improve the quality of interactions with consumers in consistent and effective encounters.	[20]
[...] the cultural mindsets toward CEs, strategic directions for designing CEs, and firm capabilities for continually renewing CEs, with the goals of achieving and sustaining long-term customer loyalty.	[9]
[...] the process of strategically managing a customers entire experience with a product or company. It represents the discipline, methodology and/or process used to comprehensively manage a customer’s cross-channel exposure, interaction and transaction with a company, product or service.	[11][12][13][21]
[...] the evaluation of important experience of the customers satisfaction with organizations.	[22]
[...] a strategy for retailers to design customer experience in a way that creates value both to the customer and the firm. [...] a strategic approach including continuous processes of competitive advantage creation through blending rational and emotional experiences and effective management of touchpoint cycle.	[12]
[...] the discipline of managing and treating customer relationships as assets. The goal is to transform your satisfied customers into loyal customers and loyal customers into advocates of your brand.	[15]
[...] the managing of customer’s perception and their rational, physical, emotional, subconscious and psychological interaction with any part of the organization.	[12][15]
[...] the discipline, methodology and/or process used to comprehensively manage a customer’s cross-channel exposure, interaction and transaction with a company, product, brand or service.	[16]

When examining the definitions of CRM that were found, several elements stand out. First, while the literature on CRM is far more developed than the literature on CEM, the concept of CRM is still not clearly defined. Indeed, it is defined in a variety of ways, such as a culture, a set of practices, a strategy, and even processes. Second, while this was not the case with CEM, CRM at times refers directly to the technological tool that supports the management of customer relationships. As a matter of fact, some authors point out that distinction [23]. Third, understanding customers and improving interactions with them is at the heart of CRM. Fourth, CRM has many objectives, such as increasing customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and profit.

C. Comparison of CEM and CRM

Now that we have a better understanding of both CEM and CRM, we were able to compare both concepts to identify the similarities and differences between them. We found four main similarities. First, the customer is central to both CEM and CRM. Indeed, both are focused on understanding the customer and improving their interactions in one way or another. Second, both CEM and CRM are iterative. Whether we want to manage the customer experience or customer relationship, we must do so in an ongoing manner. Third, they both have similar goals, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, some definitions of CEM relate to CRM and vice versa. For instance, Das and Hassan [24] define CRM as: “the full set of activities managed through administering the customer engagement, establishing long-term business relationships and enhancing customer experience [...]”. Thus, according to this definition, the activities that enhance customer experience would constitute a part of CRM. Other examples include CEM being defined as “the management of the customer-firm relationship along the customer journey [...]” [19] or as “the discipline of managing and treating customer relationships as assets” [15].

TABLE III. DEFINITIONS OF CRM

CRM definitions	References
[...] a business strategy designed to help organizations understand and anticipate the needs of its potential and present customers.	[25]
[...] as the combination of technology and business process which seeks to understand a firm’s customers in the angle of who, what they are like and what they do.	[26]
[...] a modern and developed tool for data mining of customer’s data which is supported by using of various communication points in system and create comprehensive point of view from customers.	[23]
[...] the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives.	[27]
[...] building a customer-oriented culture by which a strategy is created for acquiring, enhancing profitability and retaining customers. that is enabled by an IT application; for achieving mutual benefits for both the organization and the customers.	[28][29]
[...] the full set of activities managed through administering the customer engagement, establishing	[24]

long-term business relationships and enhancing customer experience, which is maintained through client service and connections with consumers.	
[...] a comprehensive strategy and process that enables an organization to find, acquire, retain, and nurture profitable customers by creating and maintaining long-term relationships with them.	[30]
[The] strategic use of information, processes, technology, and people to manage the customer’s relationship with your company (Marketing, Sales, Services, and Support) across the whole customer life cycle.	[31]
[...] an enterprise approach to understanding and influencing customer behaviour through meaningful communication in order to improve customer acquisition, customer retention, customer loyalty and customer profitability.	[31][32]
[...] a strategy focusing on the development of a sustainable relationship with customers, through customer data management, resulting in the acquisition, retention and increase of customers, while enhancing customer satisfaction in an ongoing manner.	[33]
[...] a core business strategy, which integrates internal processes and functions, and external networks, to create and deliver relevant value to targeted stakeholders, i.e. to ensure service excellence which results in increased student retention, loyalty, and satisfaction.	[34]
[...] a business strategy that improves an organization’s competitive advantage. It is the process of relationship building between a company and its customers that enhances lifetime value and increases profitability.	[35]
[...] a tool that centralizes a customer or client information -data- and its interactions with a firm, in order to provide better services, improve operations, retention, loyalty and convert leads into sales.	[36]
[...] identifying a company’s best customers and maximizing the value from them by satisfying and retaining them.	[37]
[...] a culture of business conduct of a company involving the integration of human activity, processes, and technologies —all with the aim of establishing a symbiosis of company requirements with those of user requirements, i.e. company profitability merged with customer satisfaction.	[38]
[...] a complex set of interactive processes that aims to achieve an optimum balance between corporate investments and the fulfilling of customer needs in order to generate maximum profit.	[39][40]
[...] the alignment of business strategies, organizational structure and business culture, based on customer information and information technology, in order that all contacts with clients meet their needs and achieve business benefit or profit.	[41]
[...] the processes that enable firms to manage effectively a portfolio of profitable and sustainable relationships with key customers in order to maximizing value for both shareholders and customers.	[42]
[...] an integrated information system which is used to plan, schedule and control activities before and after sales in the organization and with the goal of making customers capable of interacting with the organization through various tools such as website, phone, social media, etc.	[43]
[...] a philosophy, a comprehensive strategy which describes the process of acquiring, retaining and partnering with selective consumers to create superior value for both the business and the consumer.	[44]
[...] a customer-focused business strategy that dynamically integrates sales, marketing, and customer care service in order to create and add value for the company and its customers through increased satisfaction and loyalty.	[45]

Nonetheless, we also did find important differences between CEM and CRM. First, the emphasis on emotions that are prevalent in CEM is not present in CRM. Second, while CRM focuses solely on direct interactions between an organization and its customers, CEM is also interested in indirect interactions (e.g., social media), as well as in interactions between the customers and the organization’s competitors. Third, while a portion of the CRM literature is interested in CRM software specifically, this is not the case with CEM. However, we could argue that this is simply because the development of CEM software only started very recently. Fourth, CEM’s focus is on the customer experience, while CRM’s focus is rather on the activities required to manage the customer relationship. Indeed, the definitions of customer experience are very detailed and some authors, when defining CEM, simply add “the management of...” to what could be considered a definition of customer experience. In contrast, we found no definition of customer relationship. Finally, the main difference concerns the scope of CEM and CRM. For the former, the unit of analysis is the whole customer journey, while for the latter, the unit of analysis is the interaction between the organization and the customer, which accumulates over time, building a relationship.

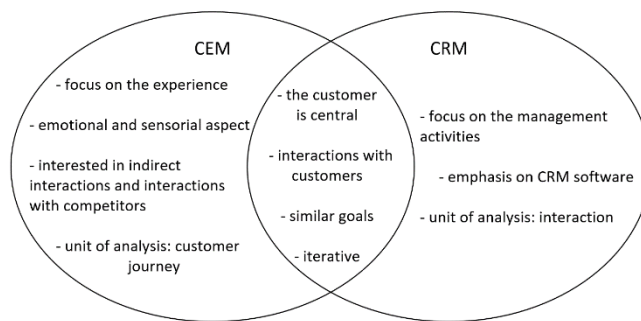


Figure 2. CEM vs CRM.

We summarized the similarities and differences in Figure 2. Following our analysis, we can acknowledge that CEM and CRM are indeed different. However, as illustrated in Figure 2, both concepts intersect with one another. Considering that CEM and CRM share important similarities, we believe that both concepts and, ultimately, software supporting both CEM and CRM, are complementary. Therefore, it would be preferable to develop CEM software in collaboration with CRM software, rather than in silos as it seems to be currently the case in the industry. For instance, we found that the interactions with the customers are central to both concepts. CRM software tools already propose powerful functionalities to keep track of all the interactions that an organization has with each of its customers. CEM software tools can therefore benefit from these already existing functionalities. Building on CRM software functionalities is also helpful in avoiding the duplication of relevant information in CEM tools and CRM tools. CEM software development efforts should therefore be focused on elements that distinguish CEM from CRM. For instance, we should investigate how CEM software could best capture the emotional and sensorial dimensions of customers’ interactions.

IV. CONCLUSION

We conducted a literature review to determine whether CEM and CRM are really distinct concepts and to identify the main similarities and/or differences between them. We found 18 definitions of customer experience, 19 definitions of CEM, and 34 definitions of CRM. We conducted a qualitative analysis to highlight the main similarities and differences between CEM and CRM. Our analysis showed that CEM and CRM are indeed different, the main difference being their unit of analysis. Even though they are different, we also found significant similarities that should be taken into account in the development of CEM software. Indeed, the development of emergent CEM software could benefit from building on existing CRM software, which is already mature, rather than trying to build new software from scratch. Moreover, CRM and CEM software should be closely integrated, as they both share some activities.

This literature review revealed two promising research avenues. First, further research should be conducted to specify the differences between CEM and CRM, especially from a process standpoint. Indeed, knowing what activities they both have in common could be especially useful for the development of CEM software as well as for the integration of new CEM software with existing CRM software. Second, we identified a gap in the literature regarding CEM software specifically. Indeed, while we found a considerable number of academic studies on the topic of CRM software, we did not find studies on CEM software. Future research should take an interest in the topic, both in analyzing the new CEM software coming on the market, and in exploring how best to go about developing such software.

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