THE POTENTIALS OF CRM APPLICATION
IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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Purpose: The interest in the possibility of CRM application in the public sector has begun to emerge again recently with the development of e-government. In this paper, we show the optimistic support to the application of the CRM implementation in the public sector.

Design/methodology/approach: In this study, we attempted to explore the potentials of CRM application in public sectors by reviewing the existing literature on the traditional CRM concepts as well as in the context of government over the last decades.

Findings: CRM has not been utilised commonly by governments due to the number of complexities that needed to be more investigated and fixed by resolutions. A number of researchers have figured out the big gaps between private and public sectors which lead to difficulties in apply CRM in public services.

Social implications: This paper would be the initial foundation for our coming empirical research to get more insights into this area as we do believe that the implementation of CRM in the public sector is an emerging research potential that is valuable and significantly beneficial to the scientific innovation relating to government operation.

Originality/value: The paper reviewed existing findings to provide a better understanding of the field and figured out the main potentials of CRM in promoting government reputation, engaging citizens to the operating system, and improving the quality of service delivery in the public services system.

Keywords: Customer relationship management, CRM application, public sector, government.

Category of the paper: Conceptual paper, Literature review.

1. Introduction

In the constant development of society and community, good governance is recently recognised by the residents of a country through their satisfaction with the quality of life as well as their interaction with the government, especially in public administration works. In the traditional definition, the term "satisfaction" refers to the evaluation of customers about

how good a product or a service meet their expectations (Soudagar et al., 2011), which is commonly used in private sectors (business, service industries). Regarding specialised definition, satisfaction is defined as "the number of customers, or percentage of total customers, whose reported experience with a firm, its products, or its services ratings exceeds specified satisfaction goals" (Farris et al., 2010). Consumer satisfaction based on the habits of the innovation development in companies and in public services too. This habit is an expectation in the industry 4.0. (Eisingerné et al., 2019). Public services have become one of the most important concerns of governments across the world. According to Al-Khouri (2012), governments constantly effort to find themselves obliged more than ever to get closer to their residents by developing their governing systems that meet the resident's expectations. With the more modernised society and the highest quality of life than ever, people are having higher demands in any aspects of their life. More particularly, people tend to expect the service in the public sector to be as convenient and good as the way that, for the most part, they have enjoyed in the private sectors. Tembo (2012) stated that with today's international vision, a progressive government is the one that always sticks to its citizens on the path of progress harmonising their needs and requirements, together with providing a willing ear to hear their voices. The most important thing to do for good governance is to put a strong focus on enhancing the role of civil society as well as improving daily citizen demand. In order to achieve this goal in good governance, governments need to not only place their residents at the heart of government's work but also fundamentally change the governance system to the way of citizen centric. In other words, it is necessary for governments to push themselves to deliver high quality services; simultaneously, integrate governmental services with the key strategy of citizen-centric service. This strictly demands an efficient government working system that is concentrated on managing the relationship between the residents/ citizens and the government (Al-Khouri, 2012).

Over the past decades, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has been increasingly become an interest in both practice and research and developed into an area of major significance. With the central focus on building a strategically long-term and mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and customers (Siragher, 2001), the CRM has been regarded as a powerful and a holistic strategic approach and successfully applied by private/ business sectors to optimize customer relationships as well as to create shareholder value. By adopting the CRM model, the decision makers in the companies are able to improve an customer based marketing strategy. Eisingerné et al (2014) examined the decision making process in a special consumer behaviour group, in stepfamilies. But she realised, neither the small and middle size companies nor the public sector use CRM methods to understand this special consumer behaviour group. (Eisingerné et al., 2014). It could not be denied the significance of the CRM recently in its contribution to the more efficient operation in business sector around the world. This has led to a fact that CRM has grabbed more attention for further research on its extended application in recent years, not only within in private sector, but also

in the public sector domain. As mentioned by Schellong (2005), the rising interest about the possibility of CRM's application in public sector began to be emerged a decade ago with another used relevant term Citizen Relationship Management. Since then, many CRM research and publication mainly driven by the private industry have shown the opportunities for the CRM to work well in the public sector. In this paper, we would like to show the optimistic support to the implementation of the CRM in the public sector, particularly in the governmental system of operation. With this goal, the paper reviews existing literature to provide a better understanding of the field for relevant future research.

2. A Review on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

According to Dowling (2002), CRM had derived from the two distinctive origins: One is from the United States which was stimulated by technology development associated with customer-based technology solutions; And another is from Scandinavia and Northern Europe where to aim to strengthen the marketing strategies in connection with the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group. The later one was established for developing knowledge of the nature and impacts of building trust-based and long-term relationships between businesses and customers. This scholar explained the reasons for the constant evolvement of CRM over the decades is because it is built fundamentally based on understanding customer demands and solve the problems or deliver benefits that bring about apparent costumers' value. At the same time, it could not be denied the vital role of information technology in the concept of CRM since it is regarded as the most important instrument designed for supporting customer relationships, rather than to drive this. Dowling (2002) emphasised that this help develop the deep and meaningful relationships between business-to-business or business-to-customer where all of the firm' actors and involving people are well engaged.

As analysed through academic works of literature regarding CRM's origin, there are two main streams of research for forming the theoretical foundation of a CRM concept which are the strategic stream in the connection with relationship marketing and the technological stream associated with the information systems (Agrebi, 2006; Triki, and Zouaoui, 2011). The term of CRM is basically clarified by leaning main these two terms: relationship marketing and customer management. Accordingly, Relationship marketing (RM) is a more strategic design for stimulating the long-term interaction and engagement of customers as well as customer loyalty. This is created to stimulate deep and strong connections between business and customers through the open communication approach in order to provide customer with really useful information that directly meets their demands and interests. Frow and Payne (2009) stated that this approach has advanced the word-of-mouth activity in business and resulted in

the willingness from the customer's side to support the organisation by giving their information and that is the reason why most of the organisations utilise and practice aspects of the RM. On the other hand, according to Al-Khouri (2012), whilst CRM is known as the integration of processes including different functions in customer relationship, customer management is more focused on tactical aspects of CRM implementation only relating to managing customer interaction; for example, sales force automation, sale campaign and call centre management (see more details at the figure 1 proposed by Frow, and Payne, 2009).

In fact, the definitions and descriptions of the term CRM are defined by varying authors and therefore used varied greatly amongst organizations. In general meaning, the focal concept of CRM is to establish a long-term and value-added relationship between businesses and customers. As viewed from a business strategy perspective, CRM is concentrated to deal with how an organisation can increase the shareholder value thanks to building superior customer relationships by the combination between information technology and marketing strategies (Glazer, 1997; Payne, 2005). From a business perspective, CRM is determined as a business strategy in which the use of technology is multiplied and applied in every single process in business in order to build up the retention and customer loyalty overtime (Crosby, and Johnson, 2001; Smith, 2001). Furthermore, CRM also represents for methodologies, technologies, and e-commerce capabilities used by companies to manage customer relationships (Stone, and Woodcock, 2001).
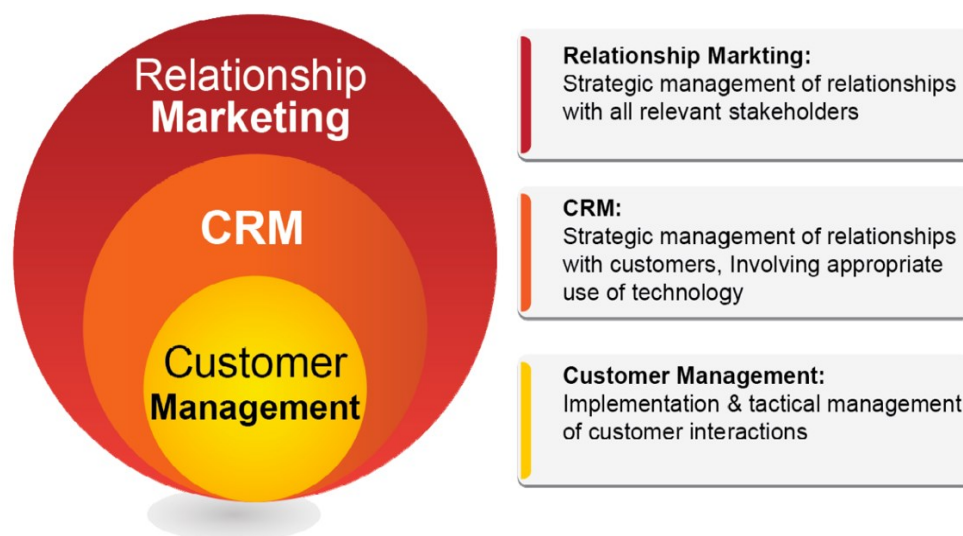

Figure 1. Relationship marketing, CRM and customer management Source: Frow and Payne (2009).

From these different perspectives of CRM definitions, it could be seen clearly that there are main three key dimensions in the term of CRM. The initial dimension is business strategy concentrated on the customer in which CRM is established basically based on managing customers such as acquiring information on different aspects of customers with the aim to build beneficial relationships. However, Al-Khouri (2012) claimed that this dimension might overlook a comprehensive commitment of the organisation's staff and the management that is

also essential for the best service to customers as well as satisfying their needs, then directly impacting on the effectiveness of CRM. The second dimension associated with CRM definition is the business process which enables the interaction between a business and customers. According to Mendoza et al (2007), any direct and indirect interaction between a business and its customers should be assessed and analysed as the business processing. Thirdly, the factors of technology and management are mainly involved in the CRM. With this dimension, one part is focused on technology capabilities that help organisations strengthen efficiency in communicating with customers, understanding customer behaviour as well as responding to customers with more accurate information (Chen. and Popovich, 2003). In addition, with the assumption that CRM has always changed to comprehend the organisation and people, the other part of this dimension cannot deny the continuous corporate change in culture and processes in CRM. Apart from the main three dimensions in defining CRM, the strategy has played the critical role and cannot be missed in any terms of CRM (Newell. 2003; Starkey, and Woodcock, 2002; Crosby, 2002; Yu, 2001). Accordingly, Roberts-Witt (2000) emphasised that the CRM strategy must determine the "what" and "how" elements in a businesses' aim for building a "single integrated view of customers" and maintaining the 'customer-centric approach' to satisfy their customers' needs. Furthermore, the CRM strategy needs to consider the needs and behaviours of customers to the business so that the stronger relationship between business and customers is built together with public value is created (Coltman et al., 2003).

Competitive environment and competitors definitely make necessary efficiency and strategy or the so-called management whose goal is not merely to control. (Gyenge, Buresch, and Kozma, 2013). Nowadays it is not enough to think in corporate level, because of the organization and planning of supply chains have become a strategic area, the companies' presence in the supply chain play an important role in their growth and expansions. Supply chain management provides many advantages to companies connected to the chain. Due to organizational techniques and a high degree of coordination, work sharing and capacity utilization improve (Kozma, 2017).

3. The complexity in Customer Relationships Management in Government

Improving the relationship between governments and their residents has become a priority of governments. Furthermore, administrative capabilities and practices have been often proposed for debates and discussions about governmental obligations to the citizens. Yet, the public administration, which is regarded as one of the most important roles in how a government exerts the power within its society, is often overlooked in the classical references to this vital relationship (Schellong, 2005). As argued by Blanchard, Hinnant and Wong (1998) that the philosophical foundations of the administrative component of the public sector are

uncommonly discussed, with some exceptions. In the meanwhile, residents of a government have experienced the direct impacts of public policies and governance structure of their government through daily interaction with the public administration, specifically in the health care sector, taxation and other public services bodies. Therefore, improving public services is not a new idea when the term of New Public Management emerged in the late 1970s as a normative model that was focused on the role of public administrators, public services and their goals (Denhardt, and Denhardt, 2003). Accordingly, the "customer driven" government was caught the attention of public servants as well as researchers. However, the New Public Management somehow was restricted one-side understood and only emphasised on the possibilities of economic controlling, at the same time, disregarded the service processes and their target group – the citizens (Lenk, and Traunmüller, 2002). In the 1990s, the customer approach in public services was increasingly raised by the government's attention (Swiss, 1992; Kaboolian, and Kelman, 1993; Barnes, 1995). According to the notion of customer approach, the citizen's role in public services is deconstructed as a consumer and this led to emerging more concerns by many academia at that time (Carroll, 1995; Hood, 1996; Box, 1999). Regarding the concerns, Box (1999) figured out that with repositioning citizens as customers, the relationship between government and citizen is therefore redefined from an interactive political engagement to a passive commercial transaction. Furthermore, Barnes (1995) also argued that offering the citizens more options in experiencing the public services would be beneficial; Yet, the main objective should be focused on gaining mechanisms that help improve citizen's voice options in public services. Once again, reconsidering the role of the citizen in public services has been transformed into a newer term called citizen-centric approach since the 2000s. Since then, this approach was suggested to be the focal foundation for government work. Al-Khouri (2012) emphasised that in order to conscientiously manage the relationship of citizens with the government, the paramount thing needed to be done by the government is managing the ever-changing roles of the citizens.

In the private sector, the management of customer relationships is generally relatively simpler. To be more specific, by focusing on a business objective of higher revenue generation driven by higher customer satisfaction, the customer and their demand of a private firm to some extent is more obviously defined; And hence, the products or services are processed for customer delivery. The nature of the customer relationship between government and citizen is much more complex with the engagement of a government in which the citizen is regarded as part of the government, at the same time, as a customer. As claimed by Tembo (2012), the term of citizen itself is dynamic since one citizen can simultaneously play multiple roles in a society like a resident, an employee and a service provider that in themselves include a complex network of formal and informal interactions. This complexity in nature would be not only difficult to disentangle, but also more challenging for taking the specific citizen relations into account when it is surrounded by other multiple external relations, interests, and influences (Tembo, 2012). In public services, delivering services by government across the various roles

and relationships with the citizen are intensively demanding in the combination with the high expectations by the citizen. As a result, meeting these high demands and expectation, along with ensuring the citizens' satisfaction to public services have become more challenging to the government. In other words, identifying clearly the customer role of citizens within their multiple interactions with the government is the real problematic issue that should be taken into account in customer relationship management in the public sector. Moreover, the public services system has been known as a structure including high standards, strict regulations and policy and the presence of multiple legacy systems which lead to the long procedure of response to customers. This results in the consequence that the simple process of widespread data collection becomes more complicated and more challenging to approach. In addition, the customer channels in public services need to be approachable and actively responsive to the public at any time that still goes beyond the original CRM system. It is also concerned that any governmental work itself has always stuck to a plethora of rules, policies, regulations as well as standards which makes the functions of CRM implementation all the more challenging.

4. Why should CRM be applied by Governments?

4.1. Boosting government reputation through CRM

Although the majority of research in reputation focused on private sectors, especially in the fields of business/enterprise, it does not mean that the concept of reputation is restricted to them. As stated by Fombrun (1996) and Davies et al. (2003), reputation could be relevant across many different types of organisations and even to countries and individuals. Having the same perspective, Passow et al. (2005) identified the similarities between private and public sectors in which a public sector also has staff, a vision and a strategic concept, and depends on resources and supportive behaviour. Furthermore, social responsibility in public organisations are more significant than in private organisations. In general, the function of public sectors, to a large extent, can be similarly compared with the management system of private sectors (Passow et al., 2005). Regarding the concepts discussed, the government reputation is assumed as the aggregate of stakeholders' images of government. Furthermore, Fombrun (1996) claimed that the reputation of an organisation represents the healthy relationships established with its stakeholders. To be more specific, the researcher explained that the quality of the relationship between an organisation and its customers shapes the image of the organisation, which is developed by the engagement of customers, at the end, the image contributes to building the reputation of the organisation. This assertion therefore enables the consideration of CRM application in the aspect of reputation.

The application of CRM systems in the public sector is regarded as a strong initiative for strengthening the proximity between government and citizens (Neff, and Kvandal, 2001). Heek (2001) also supported this statement by arguing that the relationship between government and citizen goes beyond the needs of public service and this relationship should be promoted by the implementation of new technologies and strategies along with the constant development of society. There is a fact that public sectors have also put their efforts to establish customer-focused strategies in order to improve the reputation of the government and eliminate the traditional view that governmental services are inefficient, bureaucratic, and waste taxpayers' money (Bannister, Remenyi, and Batista, 2003). The previous section has determined that improving the relationship between government and citizen requires a stronger customer-focused orientation, better strategic day-to-day management and operating activities together with the more effective communication with citizens, especially more focusing on the recognition of customers' needs and preferences. Once the relationship is enhanced, the reputation of the government is certainly promoted. This part again emphasises the importance of the meaning of "customer" embraces different stakeholders in CRM which are considerably addressed on Corporate Reputation theory: employees and consumers (Bannister, Remenyi, and Batista, 2003). There have been many studies on the impact of the direct interaction between the customer and the employees of an organisation on the perception of customers to the organisation as well as on the external image of the organisation. Accordingly, a study conducted by Davies et al. (2003) claimed that a positive image can be built when employees of an organisation who directly faced and deal with customers are empowered to respond to customer needs and when they feel trusted to run the business. In the meanwhile, as mentioned by Johnson (2000) that organisations in the information age could not only concentrate on efficiency, but only on other aspects involving employee relationship management. Specifically, an innovative business paradigm would include business initiatives towards their employees such as establishing trustiness and openness, enhancing participatory management and team building, and importantly empowering individuals.

It is a fact that in order to develop the reputation of a business or a government, there is one mutual thing that all fields of business need to do is focusing the development strategies. In the area of business, Corporate Reputation Management and Customer Relationship Management are the two elements that any business must not miss when running a business. Although there are differences in origins and business approaches, these two elements have a main common significant aspect which is the development of customer-focused strategies (Bannister, Remenyi, and Batista, 2003). Accordingly, these strategies are oriented for improving not only customers' satisfaction and loyalty, raise financial performance, but also organisational operating performance and from that building a positive organisational image. A number of previous studies figured out some typical aspects relating to building a reputation from both Corporate Reputation theory and CRM aspects and linked them to government context. It could not deny some strong arguments claimed by Davies et al. (2003)

that multiple stakeholders need to be considered as the main tenets of CRM. The system of CRM consists of all interaction channels of customers and combines all this data for analysing and resulting in a single customer view as well as creating a consistent level of service across channels. It was emphasised that CRM is not only about "electronic" service delivery or online interactions since one of its premises is the improvement of organisational capability for delivering seamless services to customers regardless of the point or meaning of interaction. From this clarification, studies conducted by Davies et al. (2003) focused on the multiple interactions and employee engagement for building the reputation of an organisation, especially regarding the government context. They strongly stated that CRM solutions can support governments to improve the reputation through allowing them to track a customer through a number of interactions among is the channels of contact and also enabling the development of joined up services. As the same as the business system, CRM can provide seamless coordination between all customer-facing functions in the public sector.

4.2. Citizen Engagement Becomes Easier and More Accessible

As claimed by Andreassen (1994) that public services are homogeneous in which the difference in market segments is not reflected. Consequently, it would be beneficial to governments when their system can understand the segments with regard to factors influencing customer satisfaction level and the technology of CRM certainly can help governments deal with this. Specifically, CRM's solutions regarding segmentation tools can group customers according to established common patterns. By doing this, public departments are able to interact with a greater number of citizens aiming to different groups or segments needs and preferences. In addition, Berman (1997) proved his excellent argument that the reputation of a government could be improved through clarifying to its residents to understand what the government does and how it serves the interests of the public; At the same time, engaging customers into decision-making processes and more concentrating on public satisfaction by the improvement of organisational performance. Specifically, Berman explained that by applying the CRM approach, the initiative regarding public services such as public information channels, inputting channels for listening to citizens could be comprehended and the quality of public services are improved through the received inputs by citizens. This operating system would bring about a more responsive and proactive public organisation in pursuing community wide goals and enable the citizen's involvement in public policy making. Kell (1993) also addressed these aspects by focusing on obtaining citizen's feedbacks, taking actions upon the feedback to make improvements, sending the improvements back to the public through direct communication, and receiving citizen feedbacks again (see Figure 2). For adding to this argument, Moore (2003) showed that the focal point of public engagement is based on unrecognized assets, gifts, and capacities of citizens in order to discover their motivation to act, simultaneously, capture the government's resources for supporting citizen's activities. Furthermore, the development of trust needs to be also based on considering the sense of belonging that serves the emotional needs of individuals (Berman, 1997).
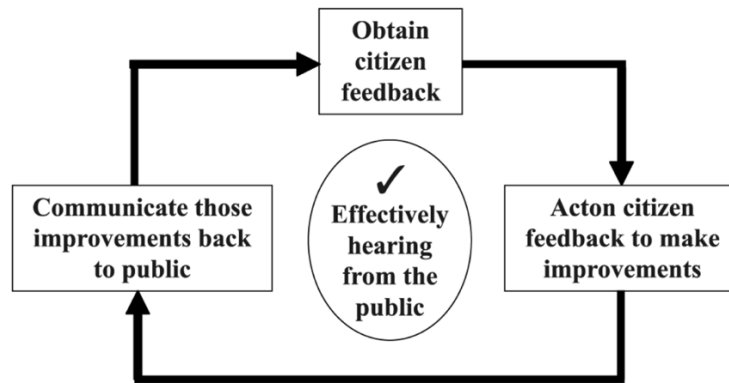
Figure 2. Effectively hearing from the public Kell (1993).

4.3. Improve the efficiency and the processing time of public service delivery

Services in public sectors have become more sensitive in terms of requirements, preferences and expectations of the citizens which are considered as the prioritised target of governments in comprehending and reforming their policies. Phala (2007) mentioned that citizens are now more engaged with the government in showing their points of view or the manner of choice which has shown a profound transformation in the service structure of the governments. In this sense significant elements in management such as access, speed of response and delivery, service quality, consultation, privacy, being treated with dignity and respect have become the vital foundation of managing the relationship between the government and citizens; In other words, managing the customer relationship in the public sector. According to Silva and Batista (2007), the strategic and practical aspects of CRM can strongly drive the organisational change towards customers. Practically, organisations can adjust or comprehend their operational procedures in order to improve the quality of their services to customers through a broader and integrated manner. The general concept of CRM function in public services is that CRM rearranges systems in a place in which all channels of interaction with customers are combined to provide a consistent level of service across channels as well as a single customer view (Dean, 2001). It is no doubt that CRM has recently become popular in the public sector in a number of countries around the world, especially in developed countries such as Singapore, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and other European countries where the application of CRM is somehow presented as the key element of the e-government system. One of the most important measurements for the effectiveness of CRM implementation in the public sector must be the practical efficiency of public services delivery when CRM is applied and its real impact on citizen quality of life. Silva and Batista (2007: 601) emphasised that "As a matter of practice, CRM implementation enables a series of different organizational capabilities".

There was an inspiring example of service quality improvement with applying CRM in Italy reported by the European Commission (2017). Specifically, the City Council of Milan launched a new project named "Complaint Front Office for Service Quality" which used the CRM integrated with other operation channels in April 2015. This project was regarded as

a breakthrough of reorganising the back offices and rationalising in the number of civil servants engaged in the service. According to the results of the project, after more than 1 year of project running (from April 2015 to August 2016), all 33,000 information requests submitted to the system by citizens were responded with shorter processing time. The Integrated CRM provided access to the Planning and Control Department to the citizens' requests in which staff were able to analyse and categorise the requests then continued to deliver the requests to the departments receiving the complaints to consider improving the services they are responsible for. By doing that, the Communication Department, the CEO office, the IT Department and the Planning and Control Department have involved and contributed to determining the specific framework for claim lodging (European Commission, 2017). This implementation was evaluated as an impressive track record and quick response to the citizens regarding the improvement of public services' quality.

One of the most typical areas that CRM implementation has proven its effectiveness and significant contribution to the improvement of service delivery is the educational sector, especially in higher education institutions around the world. Nowadays, higher education institutions could be regarded as human-oriented companies that produce highly educated people (EspoCRM, 2020). In other words, higher education institutions are complex organisations including diverse stakeholders such as students, academic and non-academic staff, regulatory bodies, government and other universities as the partners; and the goods that higher education institutions provide to their customers are not tangible products or services, but knowledge (Seeman, and O'Hara, 2006). However, a study on CRM adoption in higher education institutions conducted by Rigo, Pedron, Caldeire and Araujo (2016) claimed that the most important stakeholders of the institutions are definitely students. In this line, the success of a higher education institution is tightly bound to the students' satisfaction in which maintaining the strong relationship between the institution and students is the key to enhancing the efficiency and performance in education as well as improving the education quality of the institution. Therefore, CRM strategy has continued to have a huge potential for implementation in the education area of public services with the specific strategy for CRM solution created by the requirements of all stakeholders including the professionals, academic and non-academic staff, higher management level apart from the IT solution.

In recent years, a large number of universities or higher education institutes around the world have been implementing CRM systems as an effective initiative for their service delivery quality. As studied by Seeman and O'Hara (2006), the development and implementation of CRM were examined in a higher education institution and the findings showed by implementing CRM in a state community college. Accordingly, the research findings showed that the higher education institution significantly enhanced their quality of the university service, increased student loyalty, retention and satisfaction with the college's programs through the student-centric focus to improve customer data and process management. In reality, several feedback on the effectiveness of utilising CRM system in higher education institutions has been provided by the institutions adopting it. Feedback claimed by a representative of the Stockholm School

of Economics showed that one of the greatest advantages of the CRM system is helping the University to focus on the right recruitment activities and enhancing communications with both prospective and current students. Hence, utilising a CRM system has been considered as a great improvement for our recruitment and admissions processes (Knasys, 2015). Westminster University has also applied the CRM system for a long time and the representative of the University mentioned that our CRM service has been successful with the effectiveness of the digital event management system. The CRM allows them to maximise the productive online data/information process provided by students in any events. At the same time, the University is able to offer improved user experience while also harnessing better quality data for the university's marketing efforts (Knasys, 2015).

Conclusion

In this study, we attempted to explore the potentials of CRM application in public sectors by reviewing the existing literature on the traditional CRM concepts as well as in the context of government over the last decades. It is no doubt that there have been many studies conducted to explore the high potentials of CRM function in the government, and in public services in particular. However, CRM has not been utilised commonly by governments due to the number of complexities that needed to be more investigated and fixed by resolutions. A number of researchers have figured out the big gaps between private and public sectors which lead to difficulties in apply CRM in public services. However, It could not also deny a fact that along with the emergence of e-government, CRM solution has recently become popular in the public sector in a number of countries in the world, especially in developed countries where e-government have been applied commonly and CRM is somehow presented as the key element of the e-government system. There has been a number of shreds of evidence showing that CRM implementation has contributed to promoting government reputations through improving the vital link or relationship between government and citizen. Furthermore, the CRM system also helps directly engage citizens in the operating system as well as in the process of policy decision making of the government, and certainly improve the quality of service delivery in the public services system. The implementation of CRM in the public sector would be still regarded as big concerns to many governments due to the complex concept government as well as the big difference in structure between the private and public sectors. Therefore, the efficiency of CRM implementation in governments needs to be supported by empirical evidence by future research aimed at studying CRM and its application in the government context. In this line, this paper would be the initial foundation for our coming empirical research to get more insights into this area as we do believe that the implementation of CRM in the public sector is an emerging research potential that is valuable and significantly beneficial to the scientific innovation relating to government operation.

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