

MARKETING IDENTITY:
METAVERSE IS
THE NEW UNIVERSE

**MARKETING
& MEDIA**
IDENTITY
2022

**METAVERSE
IS THE NEW
UNIVERSE**

ÜCM FMK

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MARKETING IDENTITY METAVERSE IS THE NEW UNIVERSE

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(eds.)

Conference Proceedings
from the International Scientific Conference
25th – 26th October 2022
Trnava



Trnava
2022

MARKETING IDENTITY

METaverse IS THE NEW UNIVERSE

International Scientific Conference, 25th – 26th October 2022, Trnava, Slovakia

The international scientific conference held annually by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava has become a traditional event supported and attended by renowned mass media communication theorists and researchers as well as by media and marketing professionals.

The aim of the conference is to discuss the latest knowledge and trends in the field of marketing communication and to create a space for sharing and disseminating up-to-date scientific knowledge and practical experience in the fields of marketing, media studies and communication sciences while outlining the importance of innovations and supporting the critical dialogue between scholars affiliated with academic institutions and professionals with practical experience. The annual international conference Marketing and Media Identity (formerly called New Trends in Marketing and re-named in 2013 to Marketing Identity and again re-named in 2022), which was held for the 18th time. The conference took place on 25th and 26th October 2022 in Trnava. It was attended by nearly 100 participants.

The main theme of the conference was concisely expressed by its subtitle: Metaverse id the New Universe. Marketing and Media Identity has always tried to react to the latest trends in marketing communication and media production.

More information on the Marketing and Media Identity conference, programme schedules, deadlines and photo galleries related to previous years are available at:

Conference website:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	9
Section 1	10
Omnichannel Marketing in Furniture Sector and Covid-19	11
<i>Peter Cyprich</i>	
Consumer Ethnocentrism as a Factor in the Perception of Online Shopping? Some Evidence from Slovakia.....	19
<i>Marián Čvirik</i>	
(Approaching) the Sound of the Metaverse (Searching Unique Sonic Elements of the Metaverse and Defining the Sound Identity).....	27
<i>Tomáš Farkaš</i>	
Neo-Acceptance of Hallyu as a Result of Changes in the Film Industry: K-Pop in Europe and on Slovak Radio	38
<i>Bianka Francistyová, Ján Višňovský</i>	
Patent Medicine in the History of Advertising - Parallels and Connections with the Covid-19 Pandemic or Which False Reports about the Coronavirus are Still Believed in the 21 st Century	49
<i>Dáša Franić, Ján Višňovský</i>	
Critical Thinking and Its Application in Virtual Reality.....	61
<i>Alexandra Gažicová</i>	
Events in the Metaverse	70
<i>Sláva Gracová, Martin Graca</i>	
Brands, Products and Advertising in Metaverse.....	82
<i>Michal Halaška, Pavel Vavruška</i>	
The Concept of Consumer Confidence in Electronic Commerce and Its Impact on Consumer Behavior In a Post-Pandemic Market.....	104
<i>Jakub Horváth, Richard Fedorko, Radovan Bačík</i>	
Analysis of Public Engagement with NFTs	115
<i>Peter Horváth, Filip Sekan</i>	
Wind's Howling: a Brand in the Digital World.....	125
<i>Dinko Jukić</i>	
From Disruption to Algorithmization of Political Communication in Digital Public Spheres.....	135
<i>David Klimeš</i>	
“Non-Existing” Podcast Genres.....	142
<i>Patrik Kolenčík, Zora Hudíková</i>	
Factors Influencing the Purchasing of “Green Products”	159
<i>Petra Koudelková</i>	
Impact Of The Covid-19 Pandemic On Marketing Communication Of Brands On Social Sites.....	169
<i>Peter Krajčovič, Dáša Franić</i>	

The Importance of Influencer Marketing in the Context of Electronic Commerce.....	181
<i>Štefan Král, Mária Tomášová</i>	
Data Visualization in the Metaverse Environment	192
<i>Michal Kubovics</i>	
Effective Political Communication with Generation Z through Social Media.....	203
<i>Lucia Kučerová</i>	
Communication Challenges of Audit Reports	215
<i>Václav Kupec, Martin Smetana</i>	
How Covid-19 Influenced Shopping Behaviour and Lifetime Value of Customers on E-Shops	225
<i>Daniel Kvičala, Martin Klepek</i>	
Business Model Canvas Applied in City Conditions – City Model Canvas.....	232
<i>Lenka Labudová</i>	
Politics, Media, and Youth.....	242
<i>Ján Machyniak, Marek Chovanec</i>	
Cortana in the Context of Metaverse: A Case Study of the Digital-Game Character’s Marketing Potential	255
<i>Zdenko Mago</i>	
The Use of Eye-Tracking Technology in Sports Marketing	267
<i>Daniel Opelík, Jan Šíma</i>	
Syrian Civil War as Hard News in Media Space	279
<i>Nataliya Panasenko</i>	
The Logic of Journalistic Activism in Contemporary Media Practice	292
<i>Hana Pravdová, Zora Hudíková</i>	
Framing of Events and Elements of Tabloidization in the Political Report of Slovak Online Newspapers.....	301
<i>Monika Prostináková Hossová, Ivan Janiga</i>	
The Conversion of University Education in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Ambivalent Nature of Online Learning.....	313
<i>Ondřej Roubal</i>	
Sport X Esport: Spectator Motives in the Czech Republic.....	324
<i>Tomáš Ruda</i>	
Local and Regional Elections 2022 in the Media: Completeness of Information and Objectivity	332
<i>Daniel Šmatlánek</i>	
Short Video Marketing as a New Trend in E-Commerce	344
<i>Mária Tomášová, Štefan Král</i>	
Metaverse Opportunities from the Perspective of Consumer Segments	353
<i>Lucie Vavrušková, Radka Bauerová</i>	
The Potential of Student Television Beyond Current Trends	367
<i>Matúš Višváder, Zora Hudíková</i>	
Beyond Streaming: Fandom and Virtual World Experience.....	378
<i>Karolína Vodičková</i>	

Section 2: Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development (VEGA č.1/0606/21)	388
Trends in Consumer Decision Making Research.....	389
<i>Tamás Darázs</i>	
The Position of Neuroeconomics and Neuromarketing in the Universe of Consumer Neuroscience.....	398
<i>Tamás Darázs</i>	
The Interactive Relationship between Marketing Communication and Consumer Purchase Behaviour in a Retail Environment.....	408
<i>Tomáš Fašiang</i>	
Changes in Consumer Behavior in the Face of Reputation Issues of Selected Brand.....	415
<i>Jana Galera Matúšová</i>	
Change in Brand Communication Reflecting Changes in Consumer Behavior under the Influence of External Indicators.....	423
<i>Jana Galera Matúšová</i>	
The Need for Innovative Changes in Marketing Communication Intended for Consumers.....	432
<i>Denisa Jánošová</i>	
The Role of Mobile Marketing in Course of the Buyer Decision Process of Generation Z.....	438
<i>Daniela Kollárová, Miriama Koliščáková</i>	
Preferences of Young Consumers Towards Customer Loyalty Programmes in the Context of the Dynamics of Development.....	451
<i>Daniela Kollárová, Andrii Kushnarevych</i>	
Neuromarketing: The Future of Understanding Consumer Behaviour.....	462
<i>Alena Kusá, Patrícia Beličková</i>	
Marketing Analysis of the Mobile Communications Market in the Czech Republic.....	472
<i>Alena Kusá, Ladislav Pátík</i>	
Target Groups in Regional Marketing.....	486
<i>Lenka Labudová</i>	
Online Shopping, Services and Advertising in the Post-Covid Changes.....	494
<i>Jana Přikrylová, Ladislav Pátík</i>	
Editorial Policy	510

PREFACE

The Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava is a scientific and educational institution in the field of mass media, marketing, and digital games. Annually, we organize several conferences that focus on the above-mentioned areas. However, the year 2022 brought several changes and we decided to create a joint conference.

The conference bears the name *Marketing and Media Identity*, and it covers several topics, be it marketing, the world of media, or the virtual world of digital games. It is these areas that directly affect the digital world, and the subtitle of the conference is *Metaverse is the New Universe*.

The world has been exploring a new environment, the Metaverse environment, which is no longer just an environment of digital games. It has become an environment for shopping, business, and entertainment, or even helps in the field of healthcare. The Metaverse is a new world that offers humanity new opportunities to explore without having to travel anywhere or for something.

That is why the conference was focused on this new world, the world of new possibilities and discoveries that Metaverse offers. The proceedings cover many areas of the Metaverse world, its possibilities, and the new discoveries it offers.

Conference Organizing Team

Section 1

OMNICHANNEL MARKETING IN FURNITURE SECTOR AND COVID-19

Peter Cyprich

Abstract:

This study deals with the identification of the frequency of use of the omnichannel marketing approach in selected companies in the furniture sales industry on the Slovak market. The use of information and communication technology applications with innovative and ubiquitous technologies creates research challenges. The rapid expansion and acceptance of omnichannel practice during COVID-19 offers research opportunities that can address aspects of user-consumer behavior and interaction. Omnichannel is one of the key concepts in the field of marketing. This form of communication needs to be adapted to key factors that can act internally or externally, but society and the individuality of the consumer determine the final decision of each purchase made. The paper uses the concept of methodological mix by using qualitative and quantitative methods. This study is based on primary and secondary data obtained through interviews with representatives of furniture companies and secondary sources from official statistics (*Google Analytics, Statistical Office of The Slovak Republic*) and internal statistical tools. The names of the companies and the protagonists in the key study have been anonymized. The research deals with selected companies in the furniture sector that operate on the Slovak market.

Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. COVID-19. Marketing Communications. Marketing. Omnichannel.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that came with it have significantly affected consumers around the world. Slovakia was no exception, we experienced three lockdowns in two years, almost all brick-and-mortar stores closed, services and cultural events were not available. The marketing communication of companies moved more significantly into the online space, and consumers were forced to buy products over the Internet. Despite the change in stereotype, customers reached for brands they knew well from the pre-Covid period. The main goal of the research was to analyze the success of the omnichannel approach in the marketing communication of the selected company in furniture sector of Slovak market, which decided to change its marketing approach during the first lockdown. We carried out the research through the analysis of internal statistical tools and in-depth interviews with representatives of the marketing departments of selected companies operating in the segment. Due to the protection of the company's data, internal data on the company's financial management are anonymized.

1 Hybrid Marketing

Agility has become a basic attribute of many companies during the pandemic, which brings with it the possibility to create a marketing communication strategy in-house, therefore without the involvement of a marketing agency or external experts. Hybrid models of marketing, which offer extended options aimed at target customers with regard to their individual needs and structure, gained more significant representation. In the pre-Covid period, companies used classic and digital marketing approaches to reach consumers in online and offline environment. Currently, however, both environments are intermingled, and although it is easy to determine which environment the consumer comes from, it is very difficult to analyze which environment significantly influenced him enough to make a decision in the purchasing process for the actual purchase of goods or services.

Two-way communication has its beginnings with the expansion of the Internet. Changes in marketing paradigms have gone through contrasts on the axis of static vs. dynamism, no interaction vs. collaborative, one-way communication vs. dialogue and other specifications. In hybrid marketing, customer experience is the fundamental key. Online and offline marketing channels combine synergistically to create the best possible impression on the customer and help him decide to buy a specific targeted product or service. Hybrid marketing monitors the customer's purchasing behavior and, in communication with him through these marketing channels, continues, rather than restarts, individual steps. The hybrid form does not create differences between online and offline marketing, but optimizes the platforms and takes into account the overall path to a successful purchase.

Among the most common hybrid marketing approaches are multichannel and omnichannel approaches. Multichannel interaction is characterized by researchers as *“complex and dynamic: consumers switch between communication channels to get the best offers and good service throughout the purchase process.”*¹

Thus, the moment of decision itself is key in purchasing behavior. In many cases, users (not yet consumers) visit the websites of relevant companies in order to evaluate and compare products, but later they can visit a physical store and buy the goods in person – or they can also use the available applications of information systems directly in the physical store and order the goods book online. The important thing is that in this case the users made the decision in the online environment. However, it can also be the other way around, when the customer comes to the store and, after trying on and physically inspecting the goods, buys them online; in this case, the offline environment was crucial. Other scientists emphasize not only the decision-making phase, but also the process itself. The use of smartphones blurs the difference between online and offline environments, the physical store functions as a showroom, and therefore sellers should take into account consumer behavior, which they called free-riding behavior.² This is one of the main arguments why it is important to measure the frequency of use of the omnichannel approach.

2 Omnichannel Marketing

In the perspective of evaluating the situation, omnichannel marketing seems to be more suitable for the Slovak marketing market. During the pandemic (and not only during it, but for the past few years), consumers are interacting with multiple channels, sometimes even multiple channels at the same time. Experts have labeled this type of marketing communication as omnichannel.³ Even older perspectives of this approach label omnichannel with the use of all available communication channels at the same time.⁴ Here there is a clear difference between omnichannel and multichannel approach, since multichannel admits the parallel use of multichannel communication – not at the same time.

¹ See: DIJK, G. et al.: Consumer Behaviour in MultiChannel Retail Environments: Consumer Movement Between Online and Offline Channels. In XU, L. (ed.): *5th American Marketing Association Academy of Marketing Joint Biennial Conference 'Marketing: Building Business, Shaping Society'*. Dublin, 2005. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<http://oro.open.ac.uk/21527/>>.

² CHIU, H. C. et al.: The Challenge for Multichannel Services: Cross-channel Free-riding Behavior. In *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 2011, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 269.

³ BRYNJOLFSSON, E., RAHMAN, J.: Competing in the Age of Omnichannel Retailing. In *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 2013, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 24.

⁴ ORTIS, I.: Unified Retailing – Breaking Multichannel Barriers. In *IDC Retail Insights Report*. Framingham : Needham IDC, 2010, p. 1.

However, it should be noted that, according to experts, the omnichannel approach has evolved from the multichannel approach. The use of information and communication technology applications with innovative and ubiquitous technologies creates research challenges in retail channels that are only complementary to online marketing – physical stores or call centers, among others. Already in 2014, scientists described the omnichannel approach as *not new*, but at the same time confirmed that it became effective in practice only with the mass expansion of technologies and consumers' interest in them.⁵ There are many key values of the omnichannel approach: the design of the overall structure of the omnichannel approach,⁶ strategies that correspond to changes in product mix and customer attitude,⁷ customer experience,⁸ evaluation criteria of internal settings⁹ or fulfillment and guarantees.¹⁰

Important parameters of the omnichannel approach are the frontend (so-called responsive design), the backend (data in the background) or integrated marketing communication. The rapid expansion and acceptance of omnichannel practice offers multiple research opportunities that can address aspects of user-consumer behavior and interaction. Omnichannel marketing appears to be a likely answer to the new challenges that have resulted from the pandemic effects. For example, this opinion is supported by Srivastava and Yadav, who clearly consider omnichannel to be a likely pillar of consumer behavior in the future.¹¹ Srivastava is also one of the first researchers to address the implication of an omnichannel strategy in a pandemic context. According to him, “*there is an urgent need to take into account this change in the product mix and formulate strategies to maximize both online and offline customers.*”¹²

3 Key Study and In-depth Interview from the Furniture Sector During COVID-19

The pandemic has stimulated the emergence of new trends in international trade. As a recommendation, they offer further development of methodological approaches to the study of the consumer's purchase journey and the characteristics of e-commerce.¹³ Therefore, researchers are currently looking for answers to new challenges, for example: what is the

⁵ LAZARIS, CH., VRECHOPOULOS, A.: Human-computer vs. Consumer-store Interaction in a Multichannel Retail Environment: Some Multidisciplinary Research Directions. In FUI-HOON, F. (ed.): *HCI in Business. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*. New York : Springer, 2014, p. 340.

⁶ HAJDAS, M. et al.: The Omni-channel Approach: A Utopia for Companies? In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Service*, 2022, Vol. 65, Article 102131.

⁷ ABRUDAN, I. N. et al.: Omni-channel Eetailing Strategy and Research Agenda. In SROKA, W. (ed.): *Perspectives on Consumer Behaviour*, 2020, p. 263.

⁸ KAUTISH, P., SHARMA, R.: Managing Online Product Assortment and Order Fulfillment for Superior E-tailing Service Experience: An Empirical Investigation. In *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 2019, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 1162.

⁹ PRABHURAM, T. et al.: Performance Evaluation of Omni Channel Distribution Network Configurations Using Multi Criteria Decision Making Techniques. In *Annals of Operations Research*, 2020, Vol. 288, No. 1, p. 437.

¹⁰ MELACINI, M. et al.: E-Fulfilment and Distribution in Omnichannel Retailing: A Systematic Literature Review. In *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 2018, Vol. 48, No. 4, p. 392.

¹¹ SRIVASTAVA, P. R., YADAV, Y.: Retail Post-COVID Growth Strategy – Is Omni Channel the Way? In *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 3.

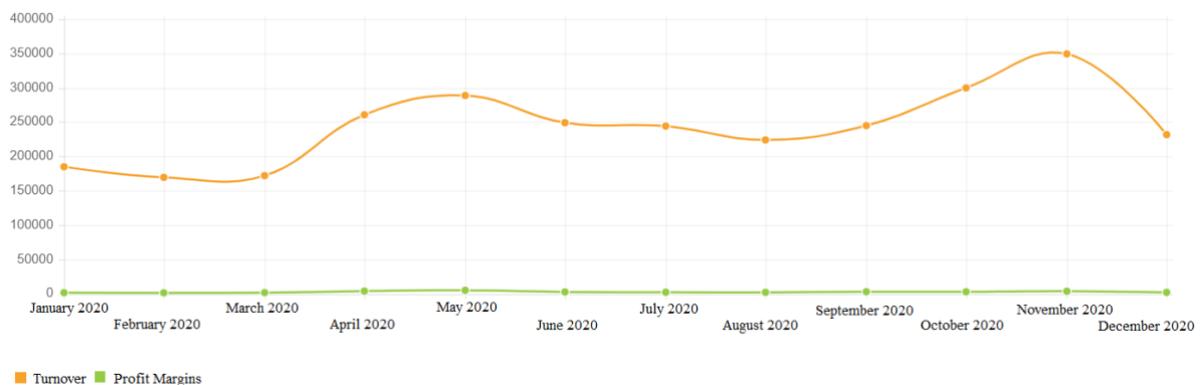
¹² SRIVASTAVA, P. R. et al.: An Intelligent Omnichannel Assortment Model to Manage Webrooming: An Optimization Approach. In *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 2022, Vol. 30, p. 2.

¹³ DUMANSKA, I. et al.: E-commerce and M-commerce as Global Trends of International Trade Caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Department of International Economic Relations, Khmelnytskyi National University, Ukraine. In *WSEAS Transactions on Environment and Development*, 2021, Vol. 17, p. 387.

essence of e-commerce or what effect does the pandemic have on the main trends in the e-commerce sector. There is no doubt that the restrictions of state institutions in the area of closing operations as one of the measures against the spread of the coronavirus had a significant impact on the change in consumer behavior and on the rapid growth of the e-commerce area. According to the *EVO* survey, the amount of online shopping increased by 41% during 2020.¹⁴ According to the same survey, the number of visitors to shopping centers has decreased by 20-45%, depending on the country. In this period, the transformation of international trade is influenced by the development of technologies, the blurring of borders between countries when purchasing goods via the Internet, and changes in consumer behavior. This is evidenced by the growing influence of the Internet on global economic processes. Today's consumer can quickly find a targeted assortment, identify the characteristics of individual products, read reviews of other consumers, choose the method and time of delivery and immediately pay via computer or mobile phone.

The company, which has brick-and-mortar stores in the furniture sector in all major regional cities of Slovakia and also operates an electronic store, generated a turnover in the online space in the amount of 2.205.689 EUR during 2019. During the first three months of 2020, the e-shop had a turnover of 526.381 EUR, of which almost 40% of sales were generated by brick-and-mortar stores. During the second quarter of the same year (that is, during the first lockdown), they increased the turnover to 798.332 EUR, while brick-and-mortar stores were closed during these months. Already after the first days of restrictions, when it was clear that the lockdown would last for a few weeks or months, the company proceeded to apply an omnichannel approach. As a result of the new approach, it was necessary to incorporate technical comments on the website and to innovate the communication strategy on the social network.

Turnover and Profit Margins



Graph 1: Sales and profit margins.

Source: internal data from Shoptet.cz, *Shoptet.cz*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.shoptet.cz/>>.

During the unexpected closing of brick-and-mortar stores, the company moved communication with consumers to the online space, especially through newsletters and social networks, thus eliminating the risk of losing customers due to the impossibility of shopping in the offline space. According to the company's CEO, they identified changing consumer behavior and paid more attention to responsive design on mobile devices, website frontend and social media communication. The analysis of purchasing behavior from the analytical tool *Google Analytics* showed that the number of users coming to the website from social

¹⁴ REDMAN, R.: *Online Grocery Sales to Grow 40% in 2020*. [online]. [2022-12-09]. Available at: <<https://www.supermarketnews.com/online-retail/online-grocery-sales-grow-40-2020>>.

networks, as well as revenues from organic traffic, increased when comparing the years 2019-2021. This channel was mainly influenced by the active blog and design improvements, including speeding up page views, as these are significant factors from the point of view of search engines when placing keywords in the overall positions.

Table 1: Visit overview from selected channels in Google Analytics.

Year	Traffic – social networks	Organic traffic	Direct traffic	Overall
2019	99 761	498 070	71 564	1 747 721
2020	192 363	488 755	81 862	2 415 152
2021	134 774	279 377	82 928	2 440 239

Source: own processing, 2022

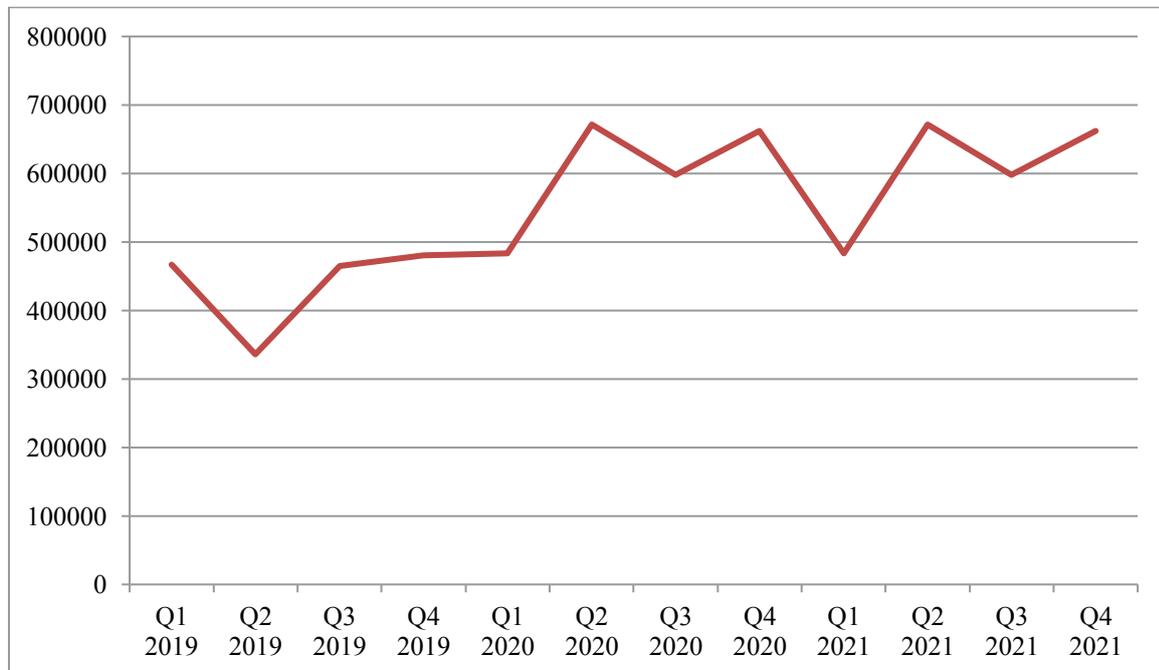
The Table 1 shows that there was a significant increase in traffic from social networks in 2019 and 2020, which is a consequence of improved communication with consumers through this channel. This fact is also illustrated by the onset of the first wave of COVID-19 and the introduction of the first lockdown:

Table 2: Overall traffic of selected months in Google Analytics.

Period	February 2020	March 2020	April 2020	May 2020
Overall traffic	159 498	149 688	214 290	261 497

Source: own processing, 2022

It is clear that the significant increase in traffic is related to restrictions, as consumers were forced to shop only in the online space. The remarkable year 2020 in the watched channels fell behind the high attendance of the previous year, especially in the months when the measures to clear up the COVID-19 eased. The company responded to the losses in individual channels by increasing the number of ads in search engines and in PPC ads, thanks to which the overall traffic grew.

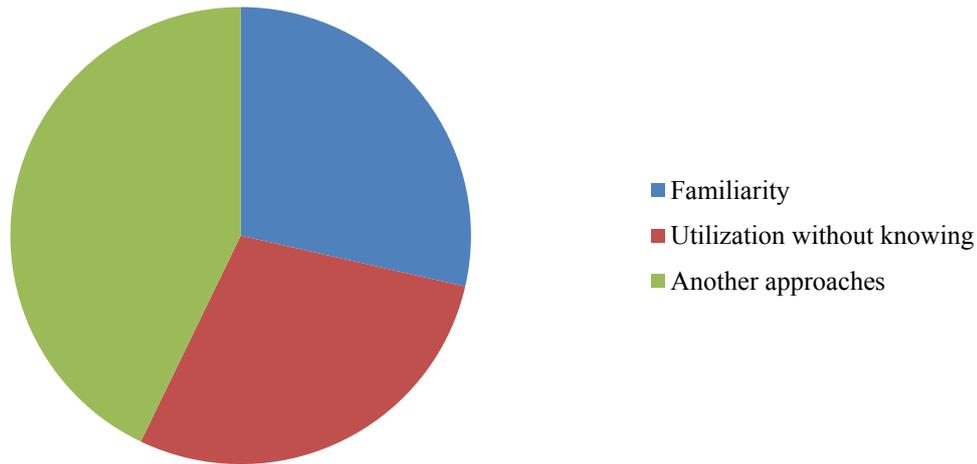


Graph 2: Overall long-term traffic in Google Analytics.

Source: own processing, 2022

The research also included eight in-depth interviews, which we conducted with representatives of the marketing department of selected companies. The research includes companies: *Decodom*, *Ekoltech*, *Sanas*, *Mojnabytok*, *Wolfcraft*, *Asko*, *Selyz* and *Drewmax*. It emerged from them that:

- two companies know the omnichannel approach and actually use it
- two companies use this approach, but without knowing the omnichannel theory
- three companies define their strategy as multichannel and other forms of marketing.



Graph 3: The use of omnichannel marketing.
Source: own processing, 2022

Regarding the issue of approaching customers online, the respondents mentioned four marketing channels: organic traffic, social networks, paid advertisements and a website. In the field of digital marketing, all companies communicate through the mentioned channels, although three of the approached companies do not use the newsletter and two companies are not familiar with remarketing. Changes also occurred in the offline segment. Two representatives said they started reaching customers through radio advertising, three companies stopped publishing a regular paper catalog with products and kept it only in online form. The marketing specialists of the approached companies tried to reorient to hybrid marketing during the COVID-19 period, and this change helped several companies generate record profits.

From the data sources of a company that did not use omnichannel marketing, we can interpret a less significant growth compared to a company that implemented an omnichannel approach in its strategy even before the first lock-down. The data were obtained during in-depth interviews.

Table 3: Visit overview from selected channels in Google Analytics.

Year	Traffic – social networks	Organic traffic	Direct traffic	Overall
2019	34 582	112 636	21 170	302 421
2020	45 155	118 470	22 396	355 780
2021	43 256	122 798	21 702	348 294

Source: own processing, 2022

Conclusion

Forms of hybrid marketing, especially the omnichannel approach, offer customers new possibilities of communication with manufacturers or sellers, and companies have started to use them in a targeted manner, especially during lockdowns. The research showed that companies that implemented forms of hybrid marketing were able to generate high sales during the pandemic due to the impossibility of visiting brick-and-mortar stores. Despite the fact that companies use channels and approaches of classic and online marketing, they address consumers through selected channels mainly because their competition also communicates through them. All selected companies use digital marketing, they differ in the communication channels that specific companies use and where they reach their customers. Omnichannel approach was used by only half of the approached companies, of which a quarter consciously. From the specific case of sales and turnover statistics, it also emerged that the company, which introduced an omnichannel approach shortly after the introduction of the first lockdown, generated record profits thanks to regular and multi-level communication with consumers. Although companies saw the most significant changes during the first year of the pandemic in 2020, and not a single company reported higher turnover in the following year compared to 2020, statistics showed that sales in the online environment were higher in 2021 than in the years before the pandemic. This points to the fact that Slovak consumers prefer online shopping before visiting brick-and-mortar stores in the field of furniture.

If the onset of the economic crisis or food crisis known from the past was slower and gained media attention gradually, the coverage of the pandemic was immediate and caused an immediate change in consumer purchasing decisions. This made it impossible to use the old formulas about how unexpected events affect the whole process after the outbreak of the pandemic. The pandemic crisis was unique in its reach (globally), media coverage and public interest in the topic. Government regulations that introduced mandatory social distancing continue to have an enormous impact on previously preferred consumer channels in the purchasing process. Old axioms ceased to apply and the possibility of new researches opened up, how consumer behavior, purchasing decisions and consumer motivation have changed. Since the pandemic has brought a drastic change to retail sales and the furniture sector without exception, a company that currently uses only one channel, by being able to use an omnichannel approach, to gain new experiences and give you a better experience in the purchasing process.

Acknowledgement: This study was created with the support of the project APVV-18-0257: Incubator of Multimedia Digital Production: Reciprocal Transfer of Science, Art and Creative Industries.

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CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM AS A FACTOR IN THE PERCEPTION OF ONLINE SHOPPING? SOME EVIDENCE FROM SLOVAKIA

Marián Čvirik

Abstract:

Consumer ethnocentrism represents an important concept in the era of globalization, economic and political crisis of the home country that we are experiencing these days. The aim of the presented article is to (1) measure consumer ethnocentrism, (2) investigate the preference between online and offline shopping and (3) investigate the possible influence of consumer ethnocentrism on preferences in online or offline shopping. In our work, we use a number of scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, scientific abstraction) as well as methods of inductive and descriptive statistics. Based on the primary survey, it can be assumed that the level of consumer ethnocentrism is below average. At the same time, we demonstrated that consumer ethnocentrism does not affect the preference for online or offline shopping behaviour. The reason may be that the method of obtaining products is not crucial, as in both cases it may be a matter of supporting domestic production. In the future, it would be appropriate to examine the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on domestic and foreign distribution channels.

Key words:

Consumer Ethnocentrism. Online Purchases. Online/Offline Preference. Offline Purchases. Slovakia.

1 Introduction

Consumer ethnocentrism is a concept that is gaining more and more attention. The main idea of ethnocentric tendencies was identified at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Sumner's work *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*¹ can be mentioned as one of the first professional works focused on ethnocentrism. In this publication, the author characterizes ethnocentrism as "*the technical name for this view of things in which one's group (referred to as in-group) is the center of everything, and all others (referred to as out-group) are scaled and rated with reference to it*"². It was not until 1987 that the concept of ethnocentrism was linked to consumer behaviour, on the basis of which a generic view of consumer ethnocentrism was identified and characterized³. The authors conceived their characteristic of consumer ethnocentrism in general, but applied to the American market "*the beliefs held by American consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products. The authors clearly define in-group and out-group. In-group is considered domestic, and out-group is understood abroad. They consider consumer ethnocentrism as a belief that buying foreign products is wrong.*"⁴ Akdogan et al. have a similar opinion, which concluded that the purchase of foreign goods considers it harmful from the point of view of consumers with a high degree of consumer ethnocentrism; because it damages the domestic economy (and all economic aspects) and seems unpatriotic.⁵ On the

¹ See: SUMNER, W. G.: *Folkway: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*. Boston : Ginn and Company, 1906.

² SUMNER, W. G.: *Folkway: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*. New York : Cosimo Classics, 2007, p. 13.

³ See: SHIMP, A. T., SHARMA, S.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: Construction and Validation of the CETSCALE. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1987, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 280-289.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 280.

⁵ See: AKDOGAN, M. S. et al.: The Effects of Consumer Ethnocentrism and Consumer Animosity on the Repurchase Intent: The Moderating Role of Consumer Loyalty. In *Emerging Markets Journal*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 1-12.

contrary, non-ethnocentric customers compare the properties and parameters of products, look for differences and finally choose the best one.⁶

Scientific and technical progress is also reflected in marketing theories, while it is increasingly accepted in the minds of consumers as an information source for decision-making needs⁷ but also for online shopping.⁸ The boom in online shopping was also significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore increasingly relevant to investigate the possible impact of acceptance of online purchases in the context of consumer ethnocentrism. It can be assumed that consumers with high consumer ethnocentrism will not accept online shopping as much because they are more traditional⁹, more dogmatic¹⁰ and less worldmindedness.¹¹

The aim of the presented article is to (1) measure consumer ethnocentrism, (2) investigate the preference between online and offline shopping and (3) investigate the possible influence of consumer ethnocentrism on preferences in online or offline shopping.

On the basis of the stated goal and professional literature, we created research questions:

RQ1: How can the degree of consumer ethnocentrism be characterized?

RQ2: What are the preferences in the context of online (or offline) purchase perception?

RQ3: How can the influence of consumer ethnocentrism on online (or offline) shopping preferences be characterized?

H1: There is a relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and online shopping preferences.

2 Methodology

The population was defined as “consumers with Slovak nationality over the age of 15”. As can be seen from the above, two key factors (parameters) defined the population, namely nationality and age. Nationality represents a key element that follows from the very essence of the investigation of consumer ethnocentrism. In the context of the age determinant, it was an ethical aspect, and at the same time, it can be assumed that consumers over 15 years of age have a certain general intelligence, create purchasing preferences and have (certain) financial resources of their own.

⁶ See: SHIMP, A. T., SHARMA, S.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: Construction and Validation of the CETSCALE. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1987, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 280-289.

⁷ See: TATE, W. L. et al.: Global Competitive Conditions Driving the Manufacturing Location Decision. In *Business Horizons*, 2014, Vol. 57, No. 3, p. 381-390.

⁸ See: PHARR, J. M.: Synthesizing Country-of-Origin Research from the Last Decade: Is the Concept Still Salient in an Era of Global Brands? In *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 2005, Vol.13, No. 4, p. 34-45.

⁹ See: BALABANIS, G., MUELLER, R., MELEWAR, T. C.: The Relationship Between Consumer Ethnocentrism and Human Value. In *Journal of Global Marketing*, 2002, Vol. 15, No. 3-4, p. 7-37.; See also: SHARMA, S., SHIMP, T.A., SHIN, J.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: A Test of Antecedents and Moderators. In *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1995, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 26-37.

¹⁰ See: CARUANA, A., MAGRI, E.: The Effects of Dogmatism and Social Class Variables on Consumer Ethnocentrism in Malta. In *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 1996, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 39-44.

¹¹ See: ČVIRIK, M.: Which Factors Influence Consumer Ethnocentrism? The Case of Slovakia. In *DOKBAT: Annual International Bata Conference for Ph.D Students and Young Researchers*, 2019, p. 208-216.

The 167 respondents took part in the survey, but due to the mentioned limitations, it was necessary to purify the sample. The base for the primary survey was 158 respondents. The sample consisted of 42% (n = 67) men and 58% women. The youngest respondent was 16 years old and the oldest respondent was 81 years old. The average age of the respondents was 35 years.

In the presented article, we use a number of scientific-philosophical methods at all levels of problem solving. At the same time, we also use marketing research methods focused on primary research and statistical methods for the needs of evaluating the obtained quantitative data. As part of statistical methods, we use elements of descriptive statistics (for the purpose of describing the characteristics of the sample) and inductive statistics (for the purpose of generalization). In the work, we focus on two aspects, namely consumer ethnocentrism and the perception of preference in the sense of online or offline purchases.

We used the CETSCALE tool developed by Shimp and Sharma¹² to measure consumer ethnocentrism. The authors propose a tool consisting of 17 statements as an original tool for measuring consumer ethnocentrism. However, at the same time, they present an alternative that contains ten (10) statements and achieves equally high reliability and validity. The reason for this reduction is mainly practical, while the goal is not to burden respondents and to use maximum efficiency. At the same time, it was proven that the measurement of consumer ethnocentrism using CETSCALE17 and CETSCALE10 brings identical results with identical factors, so we can talk about a substitutional tool.¹³ It is for this reason that we will also use CETSCALE10. Since it is an adaptation of a foreign tool, it is necessary to verify its reliability. To verify reliability, we used estimates of reliability, namely Cronbach's α and Guttman's λ_6 . We recorded the results in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability rate estimate for CETSCALE10

CETSCALE10	Cronbac's α	Guttman's λ_6
Only those products that are unavailable in the Slovak Republic should be imported.	0.815	0.838
Slovak products, first, last, and foremost.	0.821	0.839
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Slovakian.	0.797	0.826
It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Slovaks out of jobs.	0.791	0.827
A real Slovak should always buy Slovak - made products.	0.783	0.812
We should purchase products manufactured in Slovak Republic instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	0.803	0.837
Slovaks should not buy foreign products, because this hurts Slovaks business and causes unemployment.	0.798	0.829
It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Slovak products.	0.817	0.836
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	0.805	0.833
Slovak consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Slovaks out of work.	0.799	0.831

Notes:

* Cronbach's α for tool = 0.819 (CI 95% = <0.773 – 0.858>).

** Guttman's λ_6 for tool = 0.850 (CI 95% = <0.809 – 0.890>).

Source: own processing, 2022

¹² SHIMP, A. T., SHARMA, S.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: Construction and Validation of the CETSCALE. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1987, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 280-289.

¹³ ČVIRIK, M.: Suitability of Measuring Consumer Ethnocentrism Based on CETSCALE10 and CETSCALE17 in Slovakia. In *International Journal of Interdisciplinarity in Theory and Practice*, 2022, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 14-18.

In general, it is recommended that the coefficient estimate value be above 0.750. As can be seen in Table 1, the instrument can be considered reliable.

To investigate the perception of online shopping, we created a simple online tool (7 statements), while the respondents responded to the statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree). The seven levels were chosen to capture the high sensitivity of the responses.

3 Results and Discussion

In the next part, we will focus on fulfilling the set goal. Due to the complexity of the goal, we will proceed within the formulated research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1: How can the degree of consumer ethnocentrism be characterized?

The measurement of consumer ethnocentrism was carried out on the basis of CETSCALE10, while the respondents responded to the statements using a five-point Likert scale (0 – strongly disagree, 4 – strongly agree). In Table 2 we present the average values and standard deviations of individual statements.

Table 2: Results of CETSCALE10

CETSCALE10	Mean	St. dev.
Only those products that are unavailable in the Slovak Republic should be imported.	2.4	1.3
Slovak products, first, last, and foremost.	2.5	1.0
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Slovakian.	0.8	0.9
It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Slovaks out of jobs.	1.3	1.1
A real Slovak should always buy Slovak - made products.	1.0	1.0
We should purchase products manufactured in Slovak Republic instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	2.5	1.1
Slovaks should not buy foreign products, because this hurts Slovaks business and causes unemployment.	1.6	1.1
It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Slovak products.	2.4	1.0
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	1.9	1.2
Slovak consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Slovaks out of work.	1.1	1.0

Source: own processing, 2022

As can be seen from Table 2, statements 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 are below the average level of the scale (2 points). Statements 1, 2, 6, 8 are above the average value. It can be noticed that statements focused on patriotism and defence of the country are rated above average, which may be a consequence of the economic and political situation in Slovakia.

Certainly, consumer ethnocentrism can be measured based on the instrument as a whole. From the above, it can be concluded that higher values represent a higher degree of consumer ethnocentrism. At the same time, it can be stated that the results will range from 0 to 40 points. The average measured value of consumer ethnocentrism was 17.4 points (standard deviation was at the level of 6.7 points). The median was at the level of 16 points and the mode at the level of 17 points. The minimum measured value was 8 and the maximum 36 points. Based on the given information, we rate consumer ethnocentrism as below average.

RQ2: What are the preferences in the context of online (or offline) purchase perception?

To investigate the perception of online shopping, we created seven statements that contrast the advantages and disadvantages of online shopping versus traditional brick-and-mortar stores in the context of consumer perception. The statements had both negative and positive concepts, so it is important to adjust their evaluation. The direction of the rating was set so that a higher rating indicates a preference for online shopping. We recorded the mean values and standard deviations in Table 3.

Table 3: Preference for on/off-line purchases

CODE	Perception and preference on/off-line	Mean	St. dev.
Q1	Prices are lower on the Internet than in a traditional store.	5.3	1.3
Q2	Complaint processing is easier in a brick-and-mortar store.*	2.9	1.5
Q3	Online shopping is dangerous.*	4.8	1.5
Q4	With online purchases, the goods are available more often.	5.1	1.3
Q5	The brick-and-mortar store has the advantage of having a trained salesperson to advise me.	3.3	1.7
Q6	It is better to buy in a brick-and-mortar store because I can try the goods on.*	2.6	1.4
Q7	Online shopping takes less time.	5.5	1.6

Note: * reverse ranking (higher value means higher propensity to online).

Source: own processing, 2022

As can be seen from the results in Table 3, the preference for brick-and-mortar stores is mainly in the possibility of trying on goods. It should be noted that this fact is already registered by some e-shops focused on clothing, which offer the possibility to try the product and, in the case of the wrong size, return it and order the correct size. In general, it can be concluded that there is a strong preference for online shopping based on the investigated factors. It can be assumed that the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to e-shop preferences.

RQ3: How can the influence of consumer ethnocentrism on online (or offline) shopping preferences be characterized?

H1: There is a relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and online shopping preferences.

To investigate the existence of relationships between the investigated variables, we chose correlation analysis. Considering the nature of the data, we chose Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient. We verify the correlation analysis on the basis of inductive statistics. We recorded the results in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of correlation analysis

CODE	SUM CET 10		
	Correlation Coefficient Kendall's tau b	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Q1	-0.10	0.119601	158
Q2	-0.08	0.159001	158
Q3	-0.13*	0.033236	158
Q4	-0.18**	0.002917	158
Q5	-0.12*	0.046448	158
Q6	-0.09	0.126076	158
Q7	-0.14*	0.020148	158

Notes:

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: own processing, 2022

It can be stated that the influence of consumer ethnocentrism is significant with statements Q3, Q4, Q5 and Q7 (Table 4). Thus, the results indicate that there is an effect of consumer ethnocentrism and perceived safety of online shopping, product availability, perceived need for staff and speed of purchase, while a weak negative relationship was identified in all the investigated factors. In other words, ethnocentric consumers tend to evaluate the investigated factors more negatively in the framework of online shopping preference. There can be several reasons. It should be noted that ethnocentric consumers are more conservative¹⁴, dogmatic¹⁵ and prefer traditions¹⁶, which may cause a negative correlation. Consumer ethnocentrism can thus be understood as a certain barrier in online shopping.

4 Conclusion

The presented article focuses on the issue of consumer ethnocentrism as a possible factor affecting the perception and preference of shopping in e-shops or brick-and-mortar establishments. The article is supported by primary research.

The main objective represents three key areas, namely (1) measuring consumer ethnocentrism, (2) investigating the preference between online and offline shopping, and (3) investigating the possible influence of consumer ethnocentrism on preferences in online or offline shopping.

Based on CETSCALE10, a low level of consumer ethnocentrism was demonstrated, which is at the level of approximately 43.7%. This value can be interpreted as below average. Many studies conducted in Slovakia point to a similar level of consumer ethnocentrism.¹⁷ When examining the perception and preference of shopping in e-shops or brick-and-mortar stores, the respondents largely preferred e-shops based on the investigated factors.

Brick-and-mortar stores in the minds of respondents still have the advantage of being able to try the product. Examining the influence of consumer ethnocentrism as a factor affecting individual factors of perception, we found the existence of a weak negative relationship within the evaluation of online shopping safety, product availability, perception of the need for staff and speed of purchase, while a weak negative relationship was identified in all the investigated factors. In other words, ethnocentric consumers tend to evaluate the investigated factors more negatively in the framework of online shopping preference.

The results represent an important source of knowledge for managers, marketers, but also for the national economy as such. It is necessary to realize that consumers who are more consumer-ethnocentric prefer to use brick-and-mortar stores. It is therefore possible to recommend the preservation and support of brick-and-mortar establishments that sell a significant number of

¹⁴ See: THOMAS, D. R.: The Relationship Between Ethnocentrism and Conservatism in an "Authoritarian" Culture. In *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1974, Vol. 94, No. 2, p. 179-186.

¹⁵ See: CARUANA, A., MAGRI, E.: The Effects of Dogmatism and Social Class Variables on Consumer Ethnocentrism in Malta. In *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 1996, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 39-44.

¹⁶ See: SHIMP, A. T., SHARMA, S.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: Construction and Validation of the CETSCALE. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1987, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 280-289.

¹⁷ See: ČVIRIK, M.: Consumer Ethnocentrism: Comparison of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In *Acta Universitatis Agriculturae et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis*, 2021, Vol. 69, No. 2, p. 259-266.; ČVIRIK, M.: Spotrebiteľský etnocentrizmus v generačnom kontexte. In *Studia Commercialia Bratislavensia*, 2018, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 5-14.; ČVIRIK, M.: Which Factors Influence Consumer Ethnocentrism? The Case of Slovakia. In *DOKBAT: Annual International Bata Conference for Ph.D Students and Young Researchers*, 2019, p. 208-216.; SEDLÁKOVÁ, J. et al.: Spotrebiteľské správanie sa mladých slovenských konzumentov vplyv etnocentrizmu a pôvodu potravín. In *Acta Oeconomica et Informatica*, 2007, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 45-48.

domestic products. It can be assumed that consumers with a high degree of consumer ethnocentrism will continue to prefer brick-and-mortar stores to online shopping, even if they are aware of the advantages of online shopping.

Acknowledgement: This study was prepared in the framework of research project: "I-22-104-00 Ethnocentrism and its influence on consumer behaviour: measurement, determinants, strategic and intervention options".

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(APPROACHING) THE SOUND OF THE METAVERSE (SEARCHING UNIQUE SONIC ELEMENTS OF THE METAVERSE AND DEFINING THE SOUND IDENTITY)

Tomáš Farkaš

Abstract:

Metaverse is a term that has been on display for quite some time now. The only problem is there is currently no stable definition of it whatsoever. The most likely explanation for this is probably the fact that it exists on so many different platforms and in so many forms it is simply impossible to create one that would fit them all. Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the level of evolution of the metaverse right now (this paper is written in November 2022) – it is still far away from fully developed and for some scientists, it is still mainly an idea. Nevertheless, there is a great number of actual “worlds” (different platforms) that can be visited and some companies (such as Meta) are investing huge amounts of money into technologies solely focused on one particular metaverse variation. One of the biggest difficulties concerning the definitions is that metaverse is usually compared to digital games. Creators and researchers directly involved in this world refuse this, however, claiming that although some of the visual (and interactive) aspects remain the same (or very similar), the metaverse is NOT digital games. Although it is difficult to explain certain aspects of this phenomenon, the main goal of this paper is to look into *auditive* elements of the metaverse, possibly discerning and separating the common features and identifying the *unique* ones – such as “sound identity” and potential uses of audio inapplicable in traditional digital games. Also, there should be a clear statement made – this paper’s focus is not the definition of some of the more complex terms linked to the metaverse, such as NFTs, etc. The main focus of this article is to present the general definitions of the metaverse and link them to audio, sound design, and other auditory elements, creating a ground for further examination of relationships between those.

Keywords:

Definition. Digital Games. Implementation. Metaverse. Modulation. Sound Design. Sound Identity. Uniqueness. Voice.

1 The Definitions and the Audio so Far

To define the auditive aspects of the metaverse is to understand the metaverse’s limitations (and unique elements) compared to digital games. But before delving deeper into the aspects of sound design, we should try to frame at least a little bit of the definition of the metaverse. This word has been heavily circulating the internet and news for the past few years and as an idea, it has been here for decades.¹ As Matthew Ball boldly states, the term has no consensus definition or consistent description.² Although it was first meant as a general term describing possible uses of VR devices³ (such as Oculus headset) for social interaction and the next level of experiencing the internet, recently it was increasingly more linked to Meta corporation (former *Facebook*) with Mark Zuckerberg stating that this “virtual environment” will be accessible from all kinds of devices and headsets, including those that aren’t built by *Facebook*⁴. Their own

¹ Author’s note: Just as many of the modern technological ideas, it was first presented in science fiction books and movies, such as Neal Stephenson’s 1992 novel *Snow Crash* or *The Wachowskis Matrix* series. Some of the ideas related to this topic, however, could be actually found *thousands* of years ago.

² BALL, M.: *The Metaverse – And How It Will Revolutionize Everything*. New York : Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1923, p. 30.

³ Author’s note: Off course, virtual reality is not the only way how metaverse can be experienced – we can use our keyboards, mouses and 2D screens the same way we would do playing any digital game.

⁴ WAGNER, K.: *Zuckerberg Says Facebook’s Future Lies in Virtual ‘Metaverse’*. [online]. [2022-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/zuckerberg-says-facebook-s-future-lies-in-virtual-metaverse-1.1634175>>.

metaverse platform called *Horizon Worlds*⁵ was first introduced in late 2021 and was met with many controversies, ending up a huge financial failure so far (average users staying as long as one month and leaving, lack of basic online safety and moderation..). Of course, if we wanted to describe how metaverse usually looks like (and how people usually imagine it), we would have to bring up online experiences, that have been here a much longer time ago. An online multimedia platform (as described officially online) *Second Life*⁶ was released nearly 20 years ago, in 2003. Although it is probably one of the oldest virtual worlds of this kind, it shows a striking resemblance to today's metaverse worlds, such as once mentioned *Horizon Worlds* or *Decentraland*⁷, which we will speak about later. If we were to compare these, an unprepared and inexperienced eye would most likely not see any differences. You are allowed to create your custom avatar and even buy your own piece of land in *Second Life*, build homes and interact with other people⁸, just like you can do in more recent metaverse worlds. Similar platforms include *Minecraft*⁹ and *Roblox*¹⁰, although these could be more clearly described as digital games as well.

If we look at these names, we can see a common attribute: the shared experience of many people at once, in the same place, even with the aspect of a shared economy. In all of the older platforms/games we just mentioned, nearly all of the content is created by the users themselves (or by companies that bought a piece of land for their online versions of shops). But can we call them metaverse as well? We can draw comparisons with other phenomena or media to describe how it is not always easy to define some things. Just like in cinema, for example, at the beginning of its journey, there were certain movies made, resembling *genres* not heard of before. In 2022, we all would be probably able to define a horror movie. But before the 1930's when iconic movies like *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* were released, it was not that easy. Cinema was just at the time of the birth of many well-known genres. The movies were scary, they had horror iconography, ghosts even, but nobody called them "horrors". There are more examples like this, concerning digital games, as we will show later.

So, the short answer to the previous question is "yes". From a certain perspective, platforms like *Second Life* can be considered ancestors of today's visions of the modern metaverse. One of the important things to take into consideration, however, is the owner. When we look at *Meta's Horizon Worlds*, we can see a huge corporation owning everything (which is one of the main aspects of the criticism of this version of the metaverse). But there is also a much bigger world of metaverse platforms created by others, where the opposite is true. Some of the biggest metaverse platforms¹¹, such as *Decentraland*, *The Sandbox*¹², or *Otherside*¹³, are built on the so-called blockchain and an idea of the internet slowly transitioning to *web3*¹⁴. That basically means that the users really own everything they create or buy. Using the possibilities of the

⁵ META PLATFORMS: *Horizon Worlds*. [Digital Game]. California : Meta Platforms, 2021.

⁶ LINDEN LAB: *Second Life*. [Digital Game]. San Francisco : Linden Lab, 2003.

⁷ MEILICH, A., ORDANO, E.: *Decentraland*. [virtual world]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://decentraland.org/>>.

⁸ Author's note: And many more things – buy items, clothing, or even special dance moves for your avatar.

⁹ MOJANG STUDIOS: *Minecraft*. [Digital Game]. Stockholm : Mojang Studios, 2011.

¹⁰ ROBLOX CORPORATION: *Roblox*. [Digital Game]. San Mateo : Roblox Corporation, 2006.

¹¹ Author's note: As shown in the current ratings at opensea.io.

¹² BORGET, S., MADRID, A.: *The Sandbox*. [virtual world]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.sandbox.game/en/>>.

¹³ YUGA LABS – BORED APE YACHT: *Otherside*. [virtual world]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://otherside.xyz/>>.

¹⁴ Author's note: *Web3* is an idea of the next version of (decentralised) internet, where users and content creators own everything and are not subordinate to bigger companies (like *YouTube* or *Meta*). This topic however is much more complex and is not a focus of this paper.

blockchain (a kind of shared digital ledger that facilitates the process of recording transactions and tracking assets in a business network) is one of the defining aspects of the metaverse. The problem is that most of the popular platforms use different kinds of currency, systems, and even visuals. This fragmentation of different platforms is probably one of the main reasons why people struggle with a definition of the metaverse. Another reason is the fact that most platforms so far really resemble traditional digital games. If we remember our comparison to *Second Life* or *Roblox*, it is not hard to think of many other *MMORPG*¹⁵ games that look just like metaverse platforms existing nowadays. In fact, we don't have to think of online gaming at all. Most digital games are their own small metaverses – we can immerse ourselves in them, create our avatars, explore the worlds, visit the shops to buy items (like weapons and armor), and even talk to NPC characters. The biggest difference to be drawn is that in games, there are specific rules of gameplay and game mechanics the player has to obey in order to be able to enjoy them. Another thing to be pointed out is the fact that when we turn off the game – it simply stops existing¹⁶. Of course, this is different in online game worlds, which are usually persistent (at least until the developer decides to stop it, or goes bankrupt), but the idea of metaverse starts to show itself slowly when drawing differences to digital games. In those, we are mostly focused on gameplay aspects. In the metaverse, we should see a simultaneous network of virtual worlds, a tool for experiencing the next level of social interaction and meetings, education, and even shopping. One very important idea related to the metaverse is that every person will have the same custom avatar (a virtual representation of her/himself) that could be used across the different platforms, which coins the fact that the metaverse is strictly connected to real-life – so forget to be a deliberate “bad guy”, just like some of the digital games offer. In the metaverse, you represent yourself and not an imaginary character.

1.1 Drawing Comparison to Digital Games via Gameplay Mechanics and Audio Elements

When we look at our attempt to define the metaverse so far, there is a space for another analogy with digital games, that is going to help us understand it more – and it is related to sound (finally). There is a particular era of the evolution of sound in digital games in which the technology was fragmented just like the metaverse is now. During the early 1980s, when game audio was still at the beginning of its journey, game consoles used different sound chips for generating sound effects and audio for personal computers was still far from what we consider a standard now¹⁷ and mostly used PC Speaker (or “beeper”). The problem caused by this was, that many games sounded different on different machines – there was simply no standardized technology, that would allow all the developers and programmers to create games, that would sound the same on every machine. In fact, some of the sound chips (such as *TIA*, used in *Atari 2600*) had both audio channels different, resulting in problems with the tuning of different instruments. When porting games from a specific console to a different one (or to a PC), programmers and sound designers had to produce the audio from the scratch and were often even forced to exclude some of the sound effects, simply because the other platform was not able to produce them or had too little audio channels. One of the solutions that solved a big part of this problem was the coming of *MIDI*¹⁸ technology and mainly one of its extensions called *General MIDI*. It was first presented by Roland corporation in 1991 and it was based on the idea of a specific order of different instruments that could be used for creating music and sounds. It specified the tuning of sounds (middle C note being exactly 440 Hz), standardized the use of audio for computers and game consoles, and allowed musicians to finally be able to create more sophisticated music without the need to understand programming. This technology

¹⁵ Author's note: *MMORPG* – Massively multiplayer online role-playing games.

¹⁶ Author's note: Or at least stops functioning and changes back into the data files being stored on disc.

¹⁷ Author's note: Sound cards were sparse and *RedBook* audio standard was just starting.

¹⁸ Author's note: *MIDI* – Musical Instrument Digital Interface.

then evolved into even more sophisticated variations (such as *iMuse* software allowing huge advancements in adaptive music in games), pushing the evolution of sound in digital games further.

This example clearly shows us why it is not easy to talk about the metaverse in general terms. The technology is still being developed and there is no standardized process for working with it. Many of the techniques that are used by modern sound designers for digital games were slowly coming to the adult age just a decade ago. Game engines like *Unreal* or *Unity* allow complex sound implementation of 3D audio sources, loops, dynamic/adaptive sound systems, and procedural/generative audio. Even more options are presented when pairing these engines with middleware¹⁹ software like *FMOD*²⁰ or *Wwise*²¹. In modern digital games, it is easy to create complex dynamic audio engines allowing for realistic sounds of cars or even spaceships, sound attenuation and occlusion, evolving randomized atmospheres, and adaptive sounds and music, that reshape themselves based on different parameters (day/night cycle, exploration/battle, different states of fight, amount of zoom in strategy games, level of player's health, distance from the enemy, or even parts of the body we create our main characters²² from). There are also new technologies coming that are used to solve many other problems with audio. For example, data-driven granular synthesis is capable of producing endless realistic randomized sounds (replacing conventional looping) of rain, liquids, or even foley, using just small bits of recorded audio.

The main issue here is that since most of the metaverse platforms so far are browser-based and the general idea is that users should be able to enter them from many different places and devices (notebooks, smartphones, tablets..), it is not easy (if not impossible) to implement all of the above-mentioned techniques. Many of these methods require a lot of disc space and computing power, which is simply not yet available on smaller devices. Another important thing is that VR technology in general (as a supposed way to experience the metaverse in full effect) is not an easy task to process even for some of the modern computers and gaming consoles right now. It requires a lot of processing power, a powerful graphics card, and also a suitable VR headset, that would not wear its users down or make them feel sick after an extended time of use.

It is important to mention, however, that all of these problems appear mainly because we still tend to perceive the metaverse from the perspective of digital games. If we start talking about it from a different perspective, many of these issues disappear or reveal a more suitable perspective in which we can analyze them. Matej Gyarfáš²³, founder & partner at *Better – Virtual Architecture* (a Slovak company focused on creating architecture in virtual reality and metaverse), defines metaverse as a network of 3D worlds, functioning in real time, where users meet, communicate, entertain themselves, educate, shop and more. An important part of his definition is that the metaverse exists both in the physical and virtual world, it can be entered via VR or AR (augmented reality), but also via traditional 2D interfaces. It is based on a virtual

¹⁹ Author's note: Softwares used to create complex audio-events and sound systems, that are implemented to digital games, expanding the possibilities of working with dynamic sound.

²⁰ FIRELIGHT TECHNOLOGIES: *FMOD*. [middleware]. Firelight Technologies, 1995.

²¹ AUDIOKINETIC: *WWISE*. [middleware]. Montreal : Audiokinetic, 2006.

²² Author's note: Older games like *Creatures* and *Spore* used generative audio that adjusted to what kind of alien creatures player made from different body parts offered by game, even adapting their voice manifestations.

²³ GYARFÁŠ, M.: *So What Is Metaverse Again?* [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/matej-gyarfas/recent-activity/shares/>>.

economy (mostly using cryptocurrencies and digital goods such as *NFTs*²⁴) and consists of many 3D websites, social networks, and e-commerce. Developers and creators, such as Matej Gyarfáš, usually tend to emphasize the difference between creating an avatar in digital games and the metaverse. A virtual identity should ideally be constant across different virtual worlds, which will be an important notion later in this paper, and has much deeper options for visual customization than traditional digital games²⁵.

Some of the points of this definition could be applied to certain aspects of digital games, but again, only from a very specific perspective in which we tend to perceive these phenomena as similar. For example, in *Death Stranding*²⁶, players are obliged to use *Monster* energy drinks, the *Uncharted 3*²⁷ protagonist eats and drinks way too many *Subway* products, and *Super-Mario* from *Mario Kart 8*²⁸ racing game can drive a *Mercedes Benz*. The difference here is, that the player doesn't own these products nor is she/he able to buy them with any kind of real currency (unless talking about very specific platforms like *Second Life*). It is small details like this, that create the perception of digital games and metaverse platforms to coincide. Some metaverse platforms even officially claim to be a mix of *MMORPG* games and web3-enabled virtual worlds²⁹, creating something like metaRPG, just like the Otherside platform. But the deeper we look into the details, the more we see the real differences. Right now, many big companies are investing in the metaverse, creating their own spaces and buildings where people are allowed to enter and see/buy their products. Popular artists like *Snoop Dog* are building their places to visit and even attend events and live concerts. All of this and many other things distinguish current metaverse platforms from traditional digital games. If we think about it, it perfectly portrays what metaverse is "supposed" to be in usual definitions – the next generation of internet and social media. You can enter an exhibition of your favorite artist in virtual reality, and find her/his art literally hanging on the walls (just like you'd find in a real-life gallery). Clicking on it, you reveal all the details – the price of the art (at that moment, you are interacting with *NFT*) and an option to promptly move to a webpage where you are allowed to buy it (whether it is a global platform dedicated to *NFTs* like *opensea.io*, or some of the personal pages of that particular artist found on *Instagram*, *Facebook* and everywhere else).

Where does the sound fit in all of this? Unfortunately, we can draw another analogy to other media. Just like in cinema and digital games, the sound was always "coming later" than the visual aspects. Right now, most of the developers and creators are focused on creating visually appealing platforms, simply because it has always been like that. People are attracted to visual elements, often forgetting how big is the importance of sound in all media. But should we use the word "unfortunately"? This time for a change, it is a good thing to use another notion related to digital games. Most sound designers working in the field tend to follow a similar logic, which says "the sound design should be created as subordinate to what the game actually needs". That means, that even though there are many complex ways how to work with sound design (some of which we mentioned before), it doesn't mean we should use them all. Some game genres simply don't need adaptive music and some even don't need music at all. Some games require high-quality voice-over artists and some can be perfectly immersive without using voice at all,

²⁴ Author's note: *NFT* – Non-fungible token, it represents an unique asset (physical or digital), that can be bought by an user with crypto wallet. It can be anything from painting, music, sculpture to buildings etc.

²⁵ Author's note: Although, some online digital games, such as *Black Desert Online*, offer unbelievably vast options for avatar customisation.

²⁶ KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS: *Death Stranding*. [Digital Game]. Tokyo : Kojima Productions, 2019.

²⁷ NAUGHTY DOG: *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*. [Digital Game]. Santa Monica : Naughty Dog, 2011.

²⁸ NINTENDO EAD: *Mario Kart 8*. [Digital Game]. Kyoto : Nintendo EAD, 2014.

²⁹ *Otherside*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <otherside.xyz>.

relying completely on text-based dialogs. From this perspective then, what *is* the sound that the metaverse needs?

2 What Sound Does the Metaverse Need and the Search for Uniqueness

If we want to hear the current state of the sound in the metaverse, it is simple and hard at the same time. For example, in *Decentraland*, it is as easy as creating a guest avatar (without the need of creating a real account) and going exploring using just your computer, screen, mouse, and keyboard. Similarly, you can explore platforms like *AltSpace*³⁰ (another VR platform, similar to *Second Life* and some modern metaverse platforms). Some other platforms, however, don't let you in just like that. Some of these (like *The Sandbox*) require the creation of an account and virtual wallet and others don't let you play unless you buy a specialized headset (such as *Meta's Horizon Worlds*).

What we can hear while exploring so far, however, is lacking the sound we would usually expect from average digital games. In games, there are traditional categories of sound elements used throughout many genres – atmospheres/background/ambient noises, diegetic sounds made by a player (foley, steps, objects manipulation..), artificial sounds made by weapons/spells, creatures, and many layers of dynamic/adaptive audio that fits the specific game. In contrast, most sounds users hear in many of the metaverse platforms are just footsteps (sometimes even those are excluded), voice chat, and somewhat reduced ambiances based on the traditional looping method. Of course, there is also music playing in some parts. The biggest problem is, as it seems, the sound implementation limitations. The fragmentation of platforms as well as their differences in how they operate (what kind of code are they running on, what kind of mechanics they incorporate..) is preventing developers to use standardized tools like game engines and middleware. For example, many areas in *Decentraland* use music and background ambiance but don't make any use of attenuation options available in digital games. In reality, that means that music can start playing abruptly as soon as the user walks over a trigger box and stop playing just as suddenly. Some other limitations presented in building metaverse platforms are the lengths of sounds that can be implemented. In *Second Life*, for example, the users are allowed to implement short sound effects, that must be shorter than 10 seconds. In *Decentraland*, users are allowed to implement sounds that can be longer and looped, but still, these can be heard only in the specific parcel they are linked to (or to an object). Extended audio options are missing. It is yet another striking resemblance with the 1970s and 1980s era of digital games – audio in these times had to be short, extremely compressed, and had to take a minimum of space – and we are talking about tens of kilobytes (kB) in this context.

Of course, this does not apply to all of the metaverse platforms. Many of them make use of sound and music on different levels and many of the obtainable *NFTs* (such as architectonic solutions from Better and other virtual builders) has sound already implemented in them (in the form of a complex audio layer specifically designed for that particular item). But still, there is no sign of *NFTs* in the form of sounds (at least not comparable to an extent of available music for sale) and major discussion is usually centered around visual presentation and mechanics of the platforms. There are, however, a few technologies, that are pushing toward much more complex audio solutions for the metaverse. Not all of them are specifically focused on audio, but some are most likely going to directly influence thinking about the sound of the metaverse.

³⁰ MICROSOFT: *AltSpaceVR*. [VR platform]. Washington : Microsoft, 2015.

2.1 Unique Sounds of the Metaverse and Emerging Concepts – Voice, Identity, and Immersion

In this part of the paper, we are going to consider some of the most important aspects of the metaverse from the perspective of the audio elements. Several concepts are emerging from what we wrote so far, suggesting the importance of sound and its implementation in metaverse platforms. We are making these suggestions based on the fact, that the metaverse in its full form (which is, of course, still not existent) is supposed to be a completely immersive experience. That means that the level of sound implementation needs to be much higher than now. If we were to choose one audio element over all the others, it would probably be the *human voice*. If we stick to the neutral definition of the metaverse (the one avoiding the digital game’s perspective), the main purpose of it is human interaction, communication, and socializing. All of these terms more or less directly involve the human voice. Voice itself represents one of the most important elements to be considered if we want the experience to be close to what “ideal” metaverse definitions present. The reality, however, is the same as with other platforms created for online communication and it is as simple as it can get – if we have a cheap microphone, no advanced visuals can save us from disastrous voice quality coming from our avatar. From a certain point of view, this is, of course, not a terrible issue – the most important thing is to actually understand what is being said. With advancing graphical solutions of many platforms, however, there is a chance for a creation of a huge quality gap between sounds and visuals. In the metaverse, *we* are the sounds and it was proven many years ago, that there is a very specific relationship between sound and image – in cinematography, as well as in digital games. This relationship shows us, that it is easy to connect (or synchronize) bad image quality (or video) with a good and complex recording/sound design and it is going to be perceived positively. But it *does not* work the other way around – if we make a beautiful, visually appealing video and synchronize it with bad-quality audio (or even set the synchronization wrong), the audience is most likely going to notice and have a very unpleasant experience. The same happens with games: if the sound design or audio implementation is done wrong (lack of sound/missing sounds, audible or repetitive looping, abrupt cuts in audio, etc.), the idea of an immersive experience ends up in ruins, often even resulting in players stop playing and uninstalling the game forever.

With this in mind, we can clearly see where this could lead in the context of the metaverse. Several new VR headsets are being developed right now, that use much more advanced tracking technology. Some of them (such as *Meta Quest Pro*) use technology, that is capable of tracking the whole face and rendering it in high quality and real-time as our avatar’s face. The technology is still being developed (so far the avatars in *Horizon Worlds* are cartoon-like but with limited real-time facial expressions), but it is only a question of time – not mentioning other “players” on this field, who are yet to reveal their new takes on VR headsets (for example, *Apple* announced their own headset for 2023). That means the advancements in microphone and headphones technology should at least be on par with visual technology. Pairing a hyper-realistic avatar face with poor voice quality would probably result in an immersion-breaking experience. Another thing to be considered when talking about voice is spatial positioning, which has seen some advancements recently, with users being able to convincingly localize other users around them (however, the metaverse is probably yet to fully embrace advanced technologies like *HRTF*³¹ tracking, used in digital games and so on).

One more important thing to consider is the idea of *identity*. If we are to use customized avatars in future variations of the metaverse, they are necessarily going to be connected to our virtual

³¹ Author’s note: *HRTF* – Head-related transfer function, resulting in realistic positioning of audio, making players to be able to localize sound sources just as they would in real life using ears.

representations. That means that our virtual identity is going to be much more important than it is now.³² Our voice and communication skills are going to be much more important compared to today's standards. With using the voice comes also its modulation options. There are companies already today (such as *Voicemod*³³), offering so-called "Voice Avatars", providing exactly what comes to our minds when we read that: a means to modulate (change) our online voice to a completely different voice. Users are allowed to choose one of the premade presets but are also able to create their unique voice avatar,³⁴ To put it into a broader perspective, technologies like this are likely going to change a lot of things in the future, not to mention the fact that there are other companies out there, developing A.I. systems able to "learn" the voices of celebrities or even politicians (which opens up one huge separate and difficult topic of its own). Other companies (like *Ready Player Me*³⁵) are currently working on an API³⁶, that is going to allow users to create their custom avatars which can be used *across many different platforms*, although this was a subject of discussion just a few years ago (some believe it is unlikely there is going to be one single and consistent digital identity possible, simply because of the decentralized nature of metaverse³⁷). What that means is, that some of the so-called "futuristic" ideas linked to the metaverse are much closer than it seems. The uniqueness of the avatar then will be considered not just from the perspective of its visual representation, but also the sound and quality of its voice (and most likely also her/his communication skills). *Sound identity* is, therefore, one of the most important things to be considered in future discourses of the metaverse.³⁸ This notion could be traced to the theory of cinematography, linking its nature to Michel Chion's idea of "voco-centrism"³⁹, which clearly shows that the human brain and hearing are based around voice and its specific frequencies.

A similar way of thinking could be applied to companies and brands as well – just like brands today have their own "jingles" and logos, recognized all around the world, they should consider their sound identity in virtual reality. With this comes the simple idea of how some of the companies' products could be represented in virtual worlds. Some of the companies are already using so-called digital twins in the metaverse – 3D digital copies of their products, that can be viewed by users. This idea seems to be *Microsoft's* concept of the *Metaverse* currently⁴⁰, focusing on so-called *Mixed Reality* – a mix between VR and AR. With the use of *binaural* and *ambisonic* audio, this could (and probably will) lead to completely realistic representations of real-life objects. Binaural microphones have been in use for many decades and can achieve perfect spatial recordings, resulting in a faithful representation of spatial aspects, especially when paired with headphones. This way, the so-called digital twins would not be only visual, but also sonic representations of a specific product (let it be a kitchen robot, coffee machine, new model of a car, or a toy for children). Ambisonic microphones (such as *Sennheiser AMBEO VR Mic*) are already being used in VR applications. They can record sound in more directions

³² Author's note: In current era of *Web2.0*, an online identity is abused most of the time, with people creating fake profiles and not caring much about how they represent themselves online.

³³ *Voicemod*. [online]. [2022-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.voicemod.net/>>.

³⁴ Author's note: So far *Voicemod* offers the cross-platform compatibility with *VRChat*, *Roblox*, *Animal Crossing*, *Second Life* and other platforms.

³⁵ *Ready Player Me*. [online]. [2022-11-22]. Available at: <<https://readyplayer.me/>>.

³⁶ Author's note: *API* – Application Programming Interface.

³⁷ BALL, M.: *The Metaverse: What It Is, Where to Find it, and Who Will Build It*. [online]. [2022-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.matthewball.vc/all/themetaverse>>.

³⁸ Author's note: Of course, there are many more aspects to the voice than just its quality or modulation. One of the main issues to be solved is how to make the metaverse not ending up just like a standard facebook status conversation with people "screaming" with caps locks and harrasing others. That is but for another debate.

³⁹ CHION, M.: *Voice In Cinema*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 6.

⁴⁰ CLEMENS, A.: *Metaverse For Beginners. A Guide To Help You Learn About Metaverse, Virtual Reality And Investing In NFTs*. Michigan : Independently Published, 2022, p. 22.

(starting with 4 channels or audio) and their recordings are capable of flawless sonic representation of a whole 3D space (in sense of 360 degrees in all directions, not just horizontally). Most of them come with dedicated software/decoding apps, that allow them to be easily implemented in VR apps – with standard head tracking capabilities of modern VR headsets, users are literally immersed in the environments because the audio adapts (changes volume and frequencies) according to where they turn their heads. This offers the means to create not just digital twins of specific objects/products, but also whole areas, buildings, theatres, or galleries.

With other advanced technologies being born right now, new requirements are going to appear. VR haptic gloves (like *Sense Glove*⁴¹), among other techs, are slowly being developed, allowing users to actually *feel haptic feedback* in their hands while handling objects in a VR setting. Using some of the advanced VR headsets, some people even claim to “feel” touching objects in virtual reality without specialized gloves, suggesting there is a similar relationship between our hands, eyes, and brains as there is when talking about so-called phantom sensations. With this in mind, it suddenly feels appropriate to talk about *foley effects* in the metaverse and the actual *sonic feedback* from the items. Sound and movement were always tightly connected in our brains and leaving users to handle and move things in virtual reality without the appropriate sounds would create a lot of confusion.

3 Conclusion

As we’ve shown in this paper, there are many unique audio elements relevant in the context of the metaverse, that should be taken into consideration in the future. Suggested notions (sound identity, voice quality and modulation, haptic/sonic feedback...) are only a few among many others that will most likely take shape in the following years. The idea that the metaverse is not digital games, however, should be discussed carefully, because not only it is clearly visible that these two still have much more similarities than differences, but some definitions explicitly state that gaming aspects are going to be very important elements of the metaverse. Many of the listed limitations will probably be solved in the coming years. Platforms like *Otherside* in their present form claim to be capable of managing more than 10 000 players in a single place interacting simultaneously (using natural voice chat technology). This platform is supposed to be able to handle more than half a billion operations per second (compared to tens of thousands of operations per second in standard online worlds), which also suggests that audio implementation is probably soon going to be much closer to what advanced digital games technologies and engines offer today.

Many of the technologies that are used (or being developed) today and that are directly linked to audio were not discussed here, simply because that could take a completely separate research paper. For example, technologies like *Atmoky* are solely focused on hyper-realistic spatial audio in the form of an audio engine for the metaverse. So far, live concerts were a common thing within metaverse platforms, mixing 3D virtual places with streamed audio and video, making it as close to being on a real music concert as it could. But with technologies like *Atmoky*, spatial audio is making huge leaps towards hyper-realism, separating sound sources and placing them in a 3D environment, just like the mixing and mastering engineer would do when doing their job in a traditional stereo sound format. Many advanced methods of implementing audio

⁴¹ *Sense Glove*. [online]. [2022-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.senseglove.com/>>.

are on their way into the metaverse as well, like realistic occlusion⁴² effects and natural sound attenuation.

With many technological advancements on their way and the metaverse being still in an early development stage, we can only assume what form will it take in several years, especially when considering that some of its elements (like auditive aspects) are slightly underdeveloped. Nevertheless, we should accept the idea, that the metaverse from the futuristic predictions is closer than it seems.

Acknowledgement: The study is a partial outcome of the scientific project KEGA 023UCM-4/2020: The development of digital game studies and design.

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⁴² Author's note: Filtering sound or music realistically according to the placement of the user against the sound source. If the user is standing outside of the building in which music is being played, she/he would hear filtered, low-passed sound with less intensity.

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NEO-ACCEPTANCE OF HALLYU AS A RESULT OF CHANGES IN THE FILM INDUSTRY: K-POP IN EUROPE AND ON SLOVAK RADIO

Bianka Francistyová, Ján Višňovský

Abstract:

This study addresses the issue of the limiting underpinning of the definition of Korean popular music, when, the fact that K-pop loses the suffix “Korean” by replacing the language in which this music is sung is neglected in most scholarly works. On the other hand, the aspect of using English allowed K-pop to break into the Western market that was waiting for this move. This was made possible by the greater racial diversity in the film industry, which became markedly more pronounced after 2014. The paper also points to the growing tendency of European percipients to adopt popular trends from America, and therefore the acceptance of K-pop is more likely now than when Hallyu arrived in Europe in 2010. Slovak radio stations give little space to K-pop. The reason is that Slovakia is not yet ready to accept the music style en masse, and therefore Slovak radio stations are unlikely to start broadcasting more music from South Korea. In the paper, the authors identify all Slovak radio stations where a Korean song has been played at least once, or one of the performers is considered to be a South Korean musician. The aim of the study is to identify Korean music production on Slovak airwaves with an emphasis on the space given to solo artists, groups and collaborations with Western musicians. Last but not least, the paper also presents the possible consequences for K-pop in the case of the Americanization of this musical style and the use of Western templates, structures or compositions.

Key words:

Airplay. Europe. Hallyu. K-pop. Radio Broadcast. Slovakia.

Introduction

Radio is a medium that gives space to old classics or new, hitherto unknown songs. However, in today’s globalised age, it is necessary to mention that radio also gives space to songs that the listener may not immediately understand. We can talk about speed in interpreting or singing the lyrics or the language itself, which is foreign to the listeners. Despite the fact that nowadays anyone can listen to a music streaming platform, they often use the radio because, as A. Brník, Ľ. Bôtošová and M. Kapec argue, presenters can add originality and novelty to even an ordinary song through interesting facts, thus making it more attractive to listeners even if it is a song in an unfamiliar language.¹ If we look at the radio in the Slovak media environment, we must note that although most of the songs come mainly from Western artists, we can also hear songs from the East. On Slovak radio stations it is mainly K-pop, which comes from South Korea. Many authors have tried to define it in their works. For example, M. J. Russell describes K-pop as a musical mania that came from South Korea and enthralled fans all over the world.² J. B. Choi and R. Maliangkay describe Korean music as fast-paced, with most often a jaunty beat. The songs are modern R&B-style, having a heavy beat and rap bridging into different sections with random English phrases.³ Although both definitions capture different aspects, either in terms of popularity or the nature of the melody, that aptly describe K-pop, it is not a complete grasp of the whole issue. The problem, and also an issue

¹ BRNÍK, A., BÔTOŠOVÁ, Ľ., KAPEC, M.: *Rozhlasová tvorba a prax*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 45.

² RUSSELL, M. J.: *K-Pop Now! The Korean Music Revolution*. North Clarendon : Tuttle Publishing, 2014, p. 4.

³ CHOI, J. B., MALIANGKAY, R.: Introduction: Why Fandom Matters to the International Rise of K-pop. In CHOI, J. B., MALIANGKAY, R. (eds.): *K-pop – The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. New York, London : Routledge, 2015, p. 3.

that has not yet been adequately covered, remains that the definitions do not point to the fact that K-pop is globalizing and morphing into mere popular music that drops the “Korean” label. It is this fact that points to the phenomenon that K-pop is gradually becoming.

First of all, it is necessary to mention that the success of K-pop has gone through several phases: from cultural proximity to the global market. As per B. R. Park, Hallyu came to Europe in 2010, where a year later it had a success in the form of the first successful K-pop concert by artists under the management of *SM Entertainment*⁴, but it was not until 2012 that K-pop became widespread in Slovakia. B. Francistyová and L. Škripcová mention that the general public came into contact with K-pop only thanks to PSY’s *Gangnam Style*.⁵ From Europe, K-pop crossed over to North and South America, where it has been popular ever since. Although the success of Korean popular music in Europe has waned, it has not disappeared completely, as we are witnessing the return of K-pop to Slovak airwaves. This is mainly due to the success of *BTS* and *Blackpink*, but we have also heard other groups or solo artists on the radio. It was the success of K-pop in America that brought it back to Slovak radios. We suppose that nowadays the position of America is more and more strengthened in accepting something new, or not so globally known, such as K-pop. This confirms the assumption that it is America that can dictate the trends that are later appropriated in Europe. We can cite the fact that although K-pop had a boom in Europe around 2010, it was not popular in America, and so the general public’s interest in the genre has waned in Europe. In 2017, *BTS* had its first success in America and the market was more open to other groups or artists from South Korea. However, there was not much interest in K-pop in Europe during this period, and this can be seen through the results in various music awards or through statistics from the social media site *Twitter*⁶, which attracts a large number of fans of Korean popular music, suggesting that European countries do not have large numbers of K-pop fans.⁷

As we have already mentioned, K-pop is also present on Slovak airwaves, but it is an almost negligible number of songs that listeners can listen to. There are several reasons for this. First of all, it is the very nature of radio itself, and therefore its genre classification. Therefore, it is understandable that if a radio station aims to broadcast classical music, as is the case with *Radio Devín*, or if a radio station aims to broadcast a specific musical genre, as was the case with *Radio Rock FM*⁸, there is no opportunity to broadcast Korean popular music, whose genres we classify as dance, pop or hip-hop. Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that the national or multi-regional radio stations play what is popular among the general public. However, the listenership to different songs can also be monitored through streaming services such as *Spotify*, *Deezer*, etc. At the moment, we cannot consider K-pop as music that has a

⁴ PARK, B. R.: *편견과 혐한 뚫은 창의 열정... 대중문화 전방위로 영역 확대* (*Pyeon Kyeon Gwa Hyeom Han Ddulh Un Chang Ee Yeol Jeong... Dae Jung Mun Hwa Jeon Bang Wi Ro Yeong Yeok Hwak Dae*). (*Creativity and Passion that Break through Prejudice and Hatred... Expanding the Field to All Areas of Popular Culture*). [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available on: <<https://www.khan.co.kr/culture/culture-general/article/201810042001005#csidxd6d9b9c68c3341bb39d033785851bcd>>.

⁵ FRANCISTYOVÁ, B., ŠKRIPC OVÁ, L.: Prienik a úspech K-popu na západnom trhu. In BRNÍK, A. a kol. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2021. Home Officetainment*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2021, p. 10. [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available on: <https://fmk.sk/download/Megatrendy-a-Media-2021_Home-Officetainment.pdf>.

⁶ See: KIM, Y. J.: *#Kpop Twitter Reaches New Heights with 7.8 Billion Global Tweets*. [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available on: <https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/insights/2022/-kpoptwitter-reaches-new-heights-with-7-8-billion-global-tweets>.

⁷ Authors’ note: Although there is not a huge fanbase of K-pop in Europe (in general) compared to other continents, France is one of the countries, where success of Hallyu has not waned yet.

⁸ Authors’ note: To the date September 20th 2022, the radio is not available. From a long-term perspective, the radio has never broadcast a K-pop song.

general popularity in Europe, rather we can talk about exceptions. Therefore, it is important to note that for this reason, Slovak music playlist creators may not include Korean songs on purpose, despite the fact that they are popular among fans of the genre. Another reason may be language. For example, although the songs that we classify as K-pop are popular, they are not in English, and this may be a reason why they are not included in playlists, even though streams for songs by *BTS*, for example, are high. If we look at the English-language song *Permission to Dance* by *BTS*, the initial statistics released a week after the song's release show that the song had over 15 million streams and 1.1 million airplay impressions⁹, which are calculated by the number of radio station plays and the size of the listening group. Although this is interesting data in terms of K-pop, it failed to influence Slovak playlist makers to include the song in their playlists, even though it was in English. There may be several internal and external reasons for this. One of them is the fact that although the song in question had success, it was not stable on the music charts. Here we could argue whether it is the influence of the fans on the ranking of the music tracks that may cause Slovak radio stations to distrust the real interest in a given media product. Another reason could be the incomparable popularity of the song compared to *Butter*, which was released in May 2021, and which is so far the most watched music video on *YouTube* in the first 24 hours.

Aside from the issue of streaming Korean popular music, we also need to keep an eye on the eventual evolution of K-pop. Initially it was music that had purely Korean lyrics, then as M. J. Russell mentions, these lyrics were supplemented with random English words¹⁰, but nowadays we are seeing a trend of using English lyrics in songs released by Korean groups or soloists. If we look at the Korean songs released during the pandemic, we find that more and more performers took the opportunity to sing in English. This is quite understandable, as it is primarily a Hallyu reaction to entering the American market. However, the given reaction is slow, as the first success was recorded by *BTS* in America back in 2017. Of course, we must also mention other K-pop songs that have been released in English, such as *Big Bang's With U* from 2008. The given fact suggests that although there were songs in English even during Hallyu 2.0, they have not yet managed to reach the global market. This is mainly because Hallyu had not yet arrived in Europe at that time, but was trying to reach out to the Middle East. The failure was therefore expected. On the other hand, we can look at *The Boys* from *Girls Generation*, who released an English version of what was originally a Korean song in 2011, when we are already talking about Hallyu 3.0. This song gained popularity among fans, as indicated by Hallyu successes in Europe, such as the first successful concert of K-pop groups under the management of *SM Entertainment*, which includes *Girls Generation*. At this point, we can speak of successfully targeted marketing to Europe, but the success was not as long lasting as it was with K-pop in Japan, where Korean songs were resung to Japanese. They were released and that is still practiced today.

The real question is why the success of K-pop in Europe was not the same as it was in Japan, for example. Although there are many thoughts on the reasons, we could point to the fact that Europe does not have just one official language, although we could talk about the official languages of the European Union, which include English. This is one possible reason why the great success of K-pop English songs has come only in America, and although there have been successful attempts in Europe as well, the popularity has not sustained. Looking at

⁹ See: TRUST, G: *BTS Blasts Onto Hot 100 at No. 1 With 'Permission to Dance,' The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber Bow at No. 3 With 'Stay'*. [online]. [2022-09-20]. Available on: <<https://www.billboard.com/pro/bts-permission-to-dance-number-one-hot-100>>.

¹⁰ RUSSELL, M. J.: *K-Pop Now! The Koran Music Revolution*. North Clarendon : Tuttle Publishing, 2014, p. 4.

Hallyu 4.0, when success is noticeable mainly due to social media, American playlist makers often did not include K-pop among the music broadcast. The playlist creators themselves knew that K-pop was booming in America, but K-pop had not yet reached the level of success of “homegrown” artists and therefore was not given enough space. However, this comes with new songs in English, where K-pop is no longer collaborating with Western artists who have tried to ride the wave of their success on social media, but is a standalone in the global marketplace. Among other things, with the advent of Hallyu in the global market, we can speak of continuing changes in the media landscape based on the acceptance of diversity in media representation, which is not only about people, although we find the origins in greater racial diversity in the film industry, but also in media products. This is what has helped K-pop in America and subsequently in Europe, where there is a tendency to adopt trends from America.

1 Objectives and Methodology

The aim of the paper is to identify Korean music production on the Slovak airwaves with an emphasis on the space given to solo artists, groups and collaborations with Western musicians. The research sample is selected among all Slovak radio stations that broadcast via frequency or online. For data selection, we use quantitative content analysis, which has been further characterized by J. Hendl as a reliable, researcher-independent method of data collection that can be done quickly in a relatively short time.¹¹ The sample we will work with is each broadcast of one of the Slovak radio stations, which we specify in Table 1. The basic premise of the deliberate sampling is that each of the singled out radio stations has at least once played a Korean song, or a song sung by a Korean performer, group, either alone or in collaboration with Western performers. In this paper, we work with each radio station’s broadcasts from 2012 onwards, or from the date of inception if the radio station started broadcasting later.

Table 1: List of Slovak radios that played (at least) 1 k-pop song.

<i>BB FM Rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Aetter</i>	<i>Rádio SiTy</i>
<i>BestSound</i>	<i>Rádio Beta</i>	<i>Rádio Slovensko</i>
<i>Bratislavské rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Expres</i>	<i>Rádio Snina</i>
<i>Dobré rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Frontinus</i>	<i>Rádio Šírava</i>
<i>Europa 2</i>	<i>Radio GO DeeJay</i>	<i>Rádio Šport</i>
<i>Europa 2 Movin’</i>	<i>Rádio Hit FM</i>	<i>Rádio Štart</i>
<i>FIT Family rádio</i>	<i>Radio Kiks</i>	<i>Rádio Topoľčany</i>
<i>FRESH Rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Košice</i>	<i>Rádio Viva</i>
<i>Fun rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Liptov</i>	<i>Rádio X</i>
<i>Fun rádio Dance</i>	<i>Rádio Max</i>	<i>Rádio_FM</i>
<i>Fun rádio Danubius</i>	<i>Rádio Melody FM</i>	<i>Rock Arena</i>
<i>Fun rádio Letné hity</i>	<i>Rádio One</i>	<i>SKY rádio</i>
<i>Fun rádio Novinky</i>	<i>Rádio Paráda</i>	<i>Slobodný vysielateľ</i>
<i>Fun rádio Running</i>	<i>Radio Party</i>	<i>Trnavské rádio</i>
<i>Fun rádio TOP 20</i>	<i>Rádio Patria</i>	<i>tvojeRADIO.sk Dance</i>
<i>Chillibeat Radio</i>	<i>Rádio pre Život</i>	<i>tvojeRADIO.sk PopHits</i>

¹¹ Compare to: HENDL, J.: *Kvalitatívny výzkum*. Praha : Portál, 2005, p. 46-49.

<i>INRO</i>	<i>Rádio Regina Stred</i>	<i>WOW rádio</i>
<i>Kiss Rádio</i>	<i>Rádio Regina Východ</i>	<i>WOW rádio Nitra</i>
<i>PLAY Radio SK</i>	<i>Rádio 9</i>	<i>Záhorácke rádio</i>
<i>Rádio Rebeca</i>	<i>Rádio Regina Západ</i>	

Source: own processing, 2022

We can achieve the primary objective outlined above by setting 4 sub-objectives that further describe the issue. The sub-objectives are as follows:

- to find out how many K-pop songs are played on Slovak radio stations;
- to find out whether the songs by Korean artists are more played than those in which they collaborate with other Western artists;
- to identify whether songs by groups or soloists are more frequently played on Slovak radio;
- identify which Slovak radio station provides the most space for K-pop.

Based on the research questions set and the nature of the quantitative content analysis, we will make 2 assumptions that will be verified or falsified after the analysis. The assumptions we set are as follows:

A1: The more often K-pop is played on Slovak radio stations, the more often songs with English lyrics are played.

A2: The more K-pop songs are aired on Slovak radio, the more often they are songs by groups.

In this paper, we will not distinguish whether the main performer in the collaboration is a Korean or a foreign performer, and therefore the songs in question, although they may not be explicitly in the typical K-pop style, will also be considered K-pop. Songs that are the result of a collaboration between Korean performers and foreign performers will be treated as collaborations, but collaborations between Korean performers will not.

2 Results

In this paper we included 59 Slovak radio stations in which we identified the K-pop songs played. There were 24 in total (Table 2), and the results show that K-pop songs outnumber those in which Korean artists collaborate with foreign artists (Figure 1). The results indicate that K-pop songs (58%) have a higher frequency on Slovak radio than songs in which Korean performers collaborate with Western performers (42%). There were 37,144 K-pop or K-pop collaborations played on Slovak airwaves by September 22, 2022, with listeners more likely to listen to K-pop alone (Figure 2). The ratio between K-pop (67%) and K-pop with collaboration (33%) also corresponds to the results in Figure 1.

Table 2: List of songs that have been broadcast at least once on Slovak radio.

Group	Song	Group	Song	Group	Song
<i>BTS</i>	<i>Dynamite</i>	<i>Blackpink ft. Selena Gomez</i>	<i>Ice Cream</i>	<i>Blackpink</i>	<i>Lovesick Girls</i>
<i>BTS</i>	<i>Don't Leave Me</i> ¹²	<i>MONSTA X ft. Steve Aoki</i>	<i>Play It Cool</i>	<i>Jungkook ft. Charlie Puth</i>	<i>Left and Right</i>

¹² Authors' note: The song is sung in Japanese but since it's not a result of collaboration with Western artists, we consider this song as a part of K-pop.

BTS	<i>Fake Love</i>	Blackpink	<i>Ddu Ddu Ddu Ddu</i>	Lisa	<i>Money</i>
BTS ft. Benny Blanco, Snoop Dogg	<i>Bad Decisions</i>	Blackpink ft. Lady Gaga	<i>Sour Candy</i>	Lisa ft. DJ Snake, Ozuna, Megan Thee Stallion	<i>Sg</i>
BTS ft. Halsey	<i>Boy With Luv</i>	Blackpink	<i>Kill This Love</i>	PSY	<i>Gangnam Style</i>
BTS ft. Coldplay	<i>My Universe</i>	Blackpink ft. Cardi B	<i>Bet You Wanna</i>	PSY	<i>Gentleman</i>
BTS	<i>Permission To Dance</i>	Blackpink	<i>How You Like That</i>	PSY ft. CL	<i>Daddy</i>
BTS	<i>Butter</i>	Blackpink ft. Dua Lipa	<i>Kiss And Make Up</i>	PSY ft. SUGA	<i>That That</i>

Source: own processing, 2022

NUMBER OF AIRED SONGS

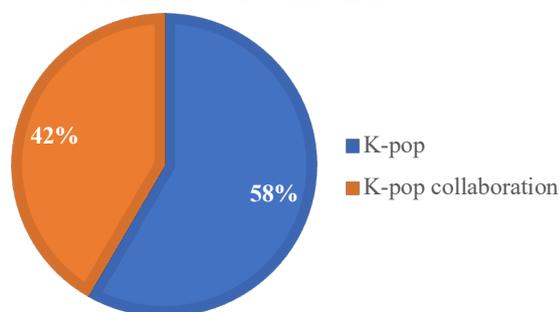


Figure 1: Number of songs broadcast on Slovak airwaves

Source: own processing, 2022

NUMBER OF ALL SONGS PLAYED (2012-2022)

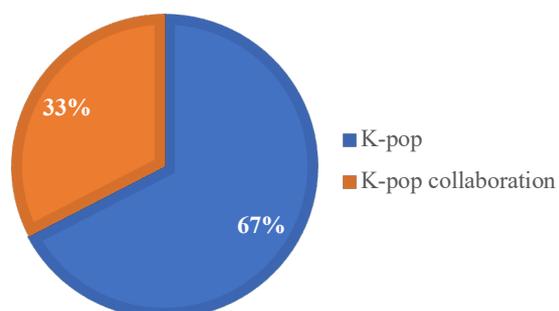


Figure 2: Number of songs broadcast in Slovak airwaves

Source: own processing, 2022

The difference in the proportion of all songs broadcast by solo artists and groups is indeed different (Figure 3). Approximately every fourth song among the 24 songs belongs to a solo artist, in Slovak airplay we are talking in particular about the artist PSY, who had his first success in Slovakia thanks to the song *Gangnam style*. The number of songs by soloists is 7 (29%) and by groups 17 (71%). It was the success of PSY that managed to change the proportion of all songs broadcast (Figure 4), as there were more songs from soloists (53%) than from groups (47%) up to 22nd September 2022. Although there were fewer songs from soloists (7) than from groups (17), it was songs from soloists that were more frequently broadcast.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL SONGS

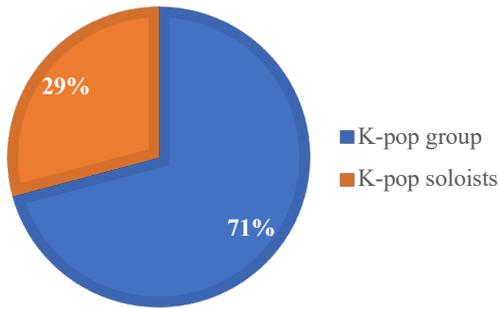


Figure 3: Ratio of k-pop songs by groups and soloists
 Source: own processing, 2022

RATIO OF ALL AIRED SONGS

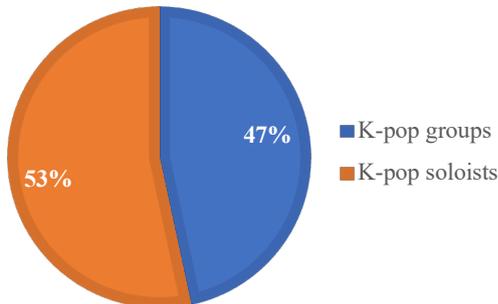


Figure 4: Proportion of all aired songs by groups and soloists (2012-2022)
 Source: own processing, 2022

3 Evaluation of Results and Discussion

3.1 Assumptions

As mentioned earlier in the paper, we have set 2 assumptions that we will verify or falsify in this section:

- *A1: The more often K-pop is played on Slovak radio, the more often songs with English lyrics are played.* Since we included all songs on which performers collaborate with foreign artists as songs with English lyrics, we found that only 33% of the aired songs have English lyrics (see Figure 2), and therefore **we did not confirm Assumption 1**. The hypothesis could not be confirmed due to the uneven ratio between the broadcast songs of soloists and groups. This is mainly due to the fact that the most played solo songs in our country have their origins in 2012, but songs from groups, or songs on which K-pop groups collaborated with foreign artists, start after about 2017.
- *A2: The more K-pop songs are aired on Slovak radio, the more often they are songs by groups.* Although the number of songs from Korean soloists is smaller than that from groups, this is not reflected in the frequency of all songs broadcast. From 2012 to 22nd September 2022, Slovak radio broadcast 17,333 songs by Korean groups and 19,811 by soloists. It is those numbers that **falsify Assumption 2**. Most of the solo songs were from artist PSY, who had success in 2012 and again in 2013. The solo songs section is dominated by *Gangnam Style* and *Gentleman*, which were aired in a total of 18,023 out of the total number. The most played song among the groups is *My Universe* by *BTS* ft. *Coldplay* with a count of 6,139.

3.2 Results and Findings

The aim of this thesis was to identify K-pop on Slovak airwaves, with an emphasis on solo artists, groups or collaborations with Western artists. There were 24 unique K-pop songs aired in Slovakia from 2012 to 22nd September 2022, with a total of 37,144 songs aired on Slovak radio. We found that the most played song was PSY's *Gangnam Style*, but it should be noted that the song in question was the first K-pop song to be played on radio in Slovakia. It has been played on the radio since 2012, which actually reduces the significance of the most played K-pop song in this territory. For an example, take the song *Butter*, which was released in 2021. It was played 3,703 times on Slovak airwaves in less than 2 years. On the other hand, we must note that the song *Butter* is in English, as well as *Permission To Dance* or *Dynamite*, and this helped the K-pop group to get on Slovak radio stations whether collaborating with Western artists or not. In total, 10 of the 24 songs we worked with are the result of collaborations between K-pop and Western artists. This is not a significant difference between the two variables, but there are more preferred or more played songs by K-pop groups or solo artists in Slovak airplay that do not collaborate with Western artists. We can also point to the fact that songs by groups that collaborate with Western artists are more represented on Slovak radio than songs by soloists that do not. However, this is not reflected in the results, because it is the soloists who are more played than the groups. Based on all the findings, we have come up with perhaps the most interesting result of the research, which is the ranking of Slovak radio stations according to how many K-pop songs they give space to (Table 3). Most often these are local radio stations, but listeners can also listen to K-pop on multi-regional radio stations.

Table 3: Ranking of Slovak radio stations by number of unique K-pop songs

Order	Radio station	Number	Order	Radio station	Number	Order	Radio station	Number
1.	Rádio Paráda	15	21.	Dobré rádio	3	41.	Rádio X	2
2.	Rádio Aetter	13	22.	Fun rádio Letné hity	3	42.	Slobodný vysielateľ	2
3.	FRESH Rádio	9	23.	Rádio Košice	3	43.	tvojeRADIO.sk Dance	2
4.	Rádio Expres	8	24.	Rádio One	3	44.	tvojeRADIO.sk PopHits	2
5.	Europa 2	8	25.	Radio Party	3	45.	WOW rádio Nitra	2
6.	Rádio SiTy	8	26.	BestSound	2	46.	Rádio Štart	2
7.	Rádio Liptov	7	27.	Europa 2 Movin'	2	47.	Fun rádio TOP 20	1
8.	Rádio Beta	7	28.	Fun rádio Dance	2	48.	Rádio Rebeca	1
9.	FIT Family rádio	6	29.	Fun rádio Danubius	2	49.	Radio Kiks	1
10.	Rádio Snina	6	30.	Fun rádio Novinky	2	50.	Rádio Melody FM	1
11.	Rádio Viva	6	31.	Fun rádio Running	2	51.	Rádio pre Život	1
12.	SKY rádio	6	32.	Chillibeat radio	2	52.	Rádio Regina Stred	1
13.	WOW rádio	6	33.	INRO	2	53.	Rádio Regina Východ	1
14.	Fun rádio	5	34.	Kiss Rádio	2	54.	Rádio Regina Západ	1
15.	Rádio Frontinus	5	35.	PLAY Radio SK	2	55.	Rádio 9	1

16.	<i>Trnavské rádio</i>	5	36.	<i>Radio GO DeeJay</i>	2	56.	<i>Rádio Šírava</i>	1
17.	<i>Záhorácke rádio</i>	5	37.	<i>Rádio Hit FM</i>	2	57.	<i>BB FM rádio</i>	1
18.	<i>Rádio Patria</i>	4	38.	<i>Rádio Max</i>	2	58.	<i>Rádio_FM</i>	1
19.	<i>Rádio Slovensko</i>	4	39.	<i>Rádio Šport</i>	2	59.	<i>Rock Arena</i>	1
20.	<i>Bratislavské rádio</i>	3	40.	<i>Rádio Topoľčany</i>	2			

Source: own processing, 2022

Conclusion

Korean popular music has been given space on Slovak radio, but we cannot speak of a balanced ratio to Western and Korean production, as 24 songs is not much and in relation to the number of K-pop songs produced annually it is a fraction of the total number. On the other hand, we can highlight the willingness to often play songs that listeners don't understand or perhaps don't know. In Slovakia, as many as 59 Slovak radio stations have created space for K-pop, and if we speak in terms of the dual system in Slovakia, both types of broadcasters have provided space: public (5) and private (54). How K-pop songs are selected by individual radio stations can only be determined by comprehensive research of individual radio stations. Currently, questions are being raised regarding the manipulation of music charts, through the re-streaming of songs, the creation of playlists on music streaming platforms that contain the same song multiple times. However, the question is whether this is actually manipulation, since the listener has to listen to the song. Of course, this is an unnatural style of listening to music, but it is not illegal, and it would therefore be advisable to keep an eye on the issue, especially for K-pop fans, where the phenomenon is a trend and the most common phenomenon.

Nowadays, various media content is shared all over the world. It is impossible to set boundaries as to where and to whom all this content can reach. It is the same with K-pop, which has come a long way from cultural proximity to more distant countries, where it has seen great success. Although it is also present in the Slovak media environment, namely in radio broadcasting, it does not have enough background and cultural understanding here to be accepted by the masses. When Korean music production reached Europe, it won the hearts of many fans and the general public. However, more than 10 years have passed since then, and success has remained only among fans. In the meantime, Hallyu has made its way to more distant parts of the world, more specifically to America, where it continues to be a success to this day. There may be several reasons for the short-lived success of K-pop in Europe: language, otherness – 'Asianness', racial difference or lack of space in the media, but nevertheless, interest in K-pop has returned. We assume that the reason for this is the popularity of Hallyu in America.

After 2015, more attention began to be paid to racial diversity even in American productions usually watched by mainstream audiences. As J. Radošinská, Z. Kvetanová and L. Rusňáková write, there is currently a gendered segmentation of global film audiences, although we can also classify audiences according to other sociodemographic criteria. We suggest that the acceptance of non-Caucasian superheroes in American productions has influenced the racial acceptance of these actors in Europe. We know that all media industries, namely music and film, are closely intertwined, and therefore it is very likely that racial acceptance in America

allowed K-pop to re-emerge among the general public in Europe as well. This has once again brought Hallyu to the attention of non-fans, but this time with English songs, of which there are more than when Hallyu was in its 3.0 phase. The question is what the future of K-pop will be after its success in America. If we compare the success of songs in which Korean artists sing in English and those in which they sing mostly in Korean, we can see that Korean songs are unlikely to achieve the success of English songs. This can have 3 possible consequences:

1. if Korean performers continue to sing in Korean, interest in K-pop in Europe will again decline and fans will remain loyal listeners of the genre;
2. if Korean performers choose to sing in English and try to use Western templates, standards and structures in their song writing, they will lose the 'Korean' label;
3. if Korean performers choose to sing in both English and Korean, that is, to release albums of Korean songs and individual singles in English, there may be a conflict between the genres and ideologies of the songs they have been working with. This can result in the loss of previous fans who may switch to other Korean artists, but also an increase in new fans who like the diversity.

The above assumptions are pessimistic, but very realistic, being aware of the rapidly changing trends, interests but also socio-cultural aspects. Of course, acceptance will increase, but Europe and more specifically Slovakia will not be able to accept Korean language songs for a long time yet. The reason for the boom around *Gangnam Style* was not the lyrics, but the catchy melody and dance. Although the song *Gentleman* has a strong presence on Slovak airwaves, the whole success was based on *Gangnam Style* because the same template was used. In the same way, we can also look at PSY's *Daddy* song, which was no longer destined to become a success like *Gangnam Style* or *Gentleman* was. Its radio play was short-lived even though it reused the same template as *Gangnam Style*. This was due to the loss of a sense of novelty and freshness, compared to other songs from the West. K-pop is known for its distinctive features that are not identical to Western music production, although one might argue the point today when many contemporary Korean songs are produced by Western composers and influenced by Western elements. On the other hand, however, it is Korean music society that oversees the sound and the various aspects that a Korean song should fulfil in order for it to be considered K-pop in the true sense of the word. It would be interesting to address these features in future research that focuses on the definition of K-pop, as short definitions of the nature of the music do not adequately describe the genre.

Acknowledgement: The study was elaborated within the research project supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV) No. APVV-21-0115, titled 'Hypermodern Media Culture – Film and Television Production as Mirror of Sociocultural Phenomena of the 21st Century'.

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PATENT MEDICINE IN THE HISTORY OF ADVERTISING - PARALLELS AND CONNECTIONS WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OR WHICH FALSE REPORTS ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS ARE STILL BELIEVED IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract:

The study focuses on the topic of advertising history and patent medicine and its connection with the global situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic during the last two years. The intention of the authors is to point out the development of this type of advertising and its parallels in the context of the pandemic of the 21st century. In the first part, it explores an interesting period during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the USA – the so called “era of patent medicine”. The aim of this part is to explain the reason why these products originated, what kind of products they were, what was typical for their promotion and to highlight the impact of this product category on advertising. In the second part of the study, the authors describe the phenomenon of patent medicine in advertising in the context of the pandemic situation caused by the coronavirus. Restrictive measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus and lockdowns have caused people to reduce social contact and start working and learning from their homes. The digital space has become not only the primary source of information, but also a space for the spread of conspiracy theories and hoaxes. During the pandemic, we witnessed a massive wave of misinformation, and identifying false messages and hoaxes by recipients became a serious problem. In a questionnaire survey on a sample of 204 respondents, the authors of the study were interested in their opinion on fake news related to coronavirus and other medical topics that have recently appeared in the media and resonated with the public.

Key words:

Advertising. Hoax. Misinformation. Pandemic. Patent medicine.

1 Introduction

Fake news and otherwise distorted content have been around since time immemorial. They became more widespread after Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, which was one of the preconditions for the emergence of journalism. However, untruths and misinformation appeared even before the advent of newspapers and magazines, when their predecessors – newsletters and pamphlets – carried unverified and often fabricated information. With the development of the cheap six-copy press, particularly in the United States in the first half of the 19th century, news that we would nowadays describe as fake became a common feature of newspapers. This phenomenon came to the fore prominently during the last decade of the 19th century, and the historiography of journalism refers to this stage as the period of yellow journalism.¹

Communication expert Krajčovič stated that although fake news has existed much longer than social networks themselves, it is social networks and social media that have contributed significantly to its massive spread among users. The phenomenon of fake news is also becoming topical in the context of the development of the phenomenon of the so-called ‘underground wave’, which is a way of using various technologies, including social networks and social media, to obtain information from their users themselves instead of using official sources. However, recognizing whether or not it is fake news is often a problem even for experienced

¹ VOJTEK, J.: Dejiny amerického novinárstva v periodickej tlači. In VOJTEK, J. et al.: *Dejiny svetových novinárstiev (anglického a amerického)*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2010, p. 203.

users of the Internet and social networks.² These facts were markedly reflected in the information about the coronavirus and gained momentum in the context of the development of a vaccine against the infection and the subsequent vaccination and the massive campaign recommending it.³ Although the pandemic has gradually receded into the background, the situation in Ukraine has once again witnessed another wave of infodemia, which has required a more vigorous response from the competent actors, including in the form of legislative changes. The study deals with the issue of patent medicine, the promotion of which has been associated with the dissemination of misleading, unverified and often even life-threatening information about these ‘medical’ products. Often based on conjecture, rumours and fabricated effects, the use of such products has had negative impacts on people’s health. Here, too, we can see some parallels with the coronavirus pandemic in the 21st century, when the public faced a wave of infodemia about coronavirus and vaccination.

2 Patent Medicine: The Reasons for Its Emergence and Its Communication

Patent medicine is an essential part of the history of advertising in the United States. It had its greatest heyday at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. There is an explanation for this timing. Between 1861 and 1865, the Civil War, also known as the North versus the South, raged in the United States. It was a conflict between the northern and southern parts of the USA, the causes of which lay mainly in the significant economic differences between the two parts. While the North was more economically advanced, more industrialized, the South was predominantly focused on agriculture.⁴ The reason for the worst conflict in U.S. history was also due to different views on the topic of slavery, as in the South slaves, mostly blacks, worked on plantations and were traded like any other commodity. The war took the lives of more than six hundred thousand people, and thousands more were wounded. What is important to note, however, is that the worst killer was not the war itself, but various diseases such as malaria, pneumonia, and dysentery. Soldiers often lived in terrible conditions, without adequate or indeed any food, which only fueled the spread of disease. The military doctors did not have enough medicines, so they used various preparations, which, however, often contained a large proportion of addictive substances or a high alcohol content.⁵ The war left serious long-term health effects on many of its direct participants, and many continued to take these “medicines” after the war was over. This was also one of the reasons for the rise in popularity of patent medicine.

As Sivulka⁶ further notes, Americans many times had no choice. Settlement westward caused many to live in areas where there were no doctors and so when health problems arose others reached for products of this type as they had no other medicines available. This is confirmed by Minar⁷, who argues that the late 19th century was characterized by dynamic industrial and transport developments and changes. People were settling the remote reaches of the endless

² KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Sociálne médiá a falošné správy v čase pandémie Covid-19. In BRNÍK, A. et al.: *Megatrendy a médiá 2021: Home Officetainment*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2021, p. 60.

³ Compare to : PRAVDOVÁ, H., IMRECZE, A.: Crisis of Communication Practices in the Covid Era. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity. COVID-2.0*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 493-494.

⁴ MENDELOVÁ, D.: The Birth of American Advertising. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 7.

⁵ SIVULKA, J.: *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*. Boston : Wadsworth, 2012, p. 34-35.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 34-35.

⁷ MINÁR, P.: *Dejiny reklamy: Čím sú pre súčasnú reklamu inšpiratívne čarovné elixíry, hadie oleje a iná „patentovaná medicína“?* [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/blogy/2019104-cim-su-pre-nas-inspirativne-carovne-elixiry-hadie-oleje-a-patentovana-medicina>>.

Americans and knew that the nearest doctor was miles away, and this in an environment of still very poor transport accessibility (railways were still being built). Therefore, they needed something that would help them medically both preventatively and acutely and without having to travel anywhere.

Another factor influencing the spread of patent medicine was the fact that Americans at this time knew very little about human physiology, biochemistry, or endocrinology. They were simply looking for quick solutions to their health problems. They did not have the same confidence in doctors as they do today. Also, hospitals, when they were available, were often seen as places where people went to die.⁸ Patent medicine originally meant medical preparations that were guaranteed by the government because of their exclusivity. However, miracle cures and coloured bottles promising instant relief were not patented. Many manufacturers, especially small family-run businesses, used mainly plant extracts combined with alcohol or other addictive substances to produce ‘medicine’. These were rather ‘quack’ preparations, which often had the wrong proportions of ingredients and had different effects, and could even cause death. There were no standards or regulatory measures to determine the ratio of the different ingredients in the preparations. As a result, these preparations had questionable effects, and the contents of individual medicines were often secret.⁹

Thus, the term patent medicine is mainly used to refer to products such as elixirs, tonics, and ointments that were available on the market in the U.S. in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but for the most part had no proven efficacy and their safety was also questionable.¹⁰ By the mid-19th century, the production of such medicines had become one of the most important industries in America. As mentioned earlier, many preparations contained large doses of alcohol, which some described as “therapeutic”, and therefore they were comfortable with the use of such preparations. Worse still, some of them contained morphine, cocaine or opium, and even some sources state that the substances included kerosene, mercury or radioactive substances.¹¹ However, they offered, or so their manufacturers claimed, quick, convenient and cheap relief from a variety of ailments: arthritis, depression and mental illness, indigestion, liver problems, lack of hair growth, and they were popular with women to relieve pain during menstruation. Children were given medicines to aid their growth, digestion, or improve their blood counts.¹² It was not uncommon for preparations to be given to quite small babies. Parents did want to help their children with colic or other ailments, but many times the use of these preparations had literally tragic consequences. Medicine was available for almost any ailment or illness. Preparations were publicly traded and easily claimed to cure or prevent any disease, from the aforementioned problems to tuberculosis, venereal disease, and cancer.¹³ However, what was the real and biggest problem was that these so-called medicines were not even patented, let alone really having any real healing effects.

⁸ *Quack Cures and Self-Remedies: Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://dp.la/exhibitions/patent-medicine/1860-1920/?item=1289>>.

⁹ *History of Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.hagley.org/research/digital-exhibits/history-patent-medicine>>.

¹⁰ *Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patent%20medicine>>.

¹¹ MEIER, A. C.: *15 Curious Quack Remedies from the Age of Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/85554/15-curious-quack-remedies-age-patent-medicine>>.

¹² *Quack Cures and Self-Remedies: Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://dp.la/exhibitions/patent-medicine/1860-1920/?item=1289>>.

¹³ *History of Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.hagley.org/research/digital-exhibits/history-patent-medicine>>.

Medicines promised to cure any health problems. This was not only written on the packaging of the products, but advertising also worked with such claims. As the industry flourished with these products, advertising immediately responded. Newspapers and magazines were full of advertisements for products providing instant relief and quick help. Some publishers did not want to publish and advertise miracle elixirs, so manufacturers had to find other ways to publicize and present their products. Outdoor advertising and painted messages in the form of leaflets began to be used. The language used in advertising communication was unrealistic, promising something that was not possible.¹⁴ Advertising exaggerated, gave products qualities they did not have, used superlatives that were not supported by evidence or otherwise verified. For example, *Parker's tonic* brought back excellent health and strength, treated coughs and asthma by rejuvenating the blood, also provided cures for rheumatism, nervousness and kidney problems. All this was promised by the advertising visuals.

In Figure 1 we see an advertisement for another strength-restoring remedy from the prairies, the effects of which were known to the ancient Indians. It was intended to cure rheumatism, liver problems, indigestion, and all blood problems. The headline at the bottom of the advertisement is interesting, saying that just as the sun is certain to melt ice, so is this preparation certain to cure.



Figure 1: *Sequah's Oil & Prairie Flower* – demonstration of the promotion of patented medicine.
 Source: MEIER, A. C.: *15 Curious Quack Remedies from the Age of Patent Medicine*. [online]. [2022-08-04]. Available at: <<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/85554/15-curious-quack-remedies-age-patent-medicine>>.

So, as we can see, more than 100 years ago we were already experiencing the practice and dissemination of fake news, false information and so-called disinformation. Of course, criticism did not take long. Some doctors, but also pharmaceutical companies, criticised patent medicine. They claimed that these preparations did not cure diseases, rather the opposite. Moreover, they supported the fact that people did not seek proper treatment that could be effective. Another argument was that these products caused addiction to alcoholic and other intoxicants.

The advertising for these products therefore often had an aggressive tone and could be described as deceptive and misleading. These were unethical methods of promotion which, of course, contributed to the bad image of advertising in general. The public began to perceive advertising as a dishonest business, not to mention trust or respect advertising as a profession.¹⁵ On the

¹⁴ MENDELOVÁ, D.: The Birth of American Advertising. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 15.
¹⁵ TUNGATE, M.: *Adland: A Global History of Advertising*. London : Kogan Page, 2013, p. 30.

other hand, the power of advertising can be seen in the example of patent medicine. By 1900, total sales of patented medicines in the US reached \$75 million.¹⁶

Of course, this was mainly due to the fact that there were no government regulations or laws to regulate the sale or actual promotion of such medicines. However, this changed in 1906 when – the US Congress passed the *Pure Food and Drug Act*, which was supported by then President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919). The Act required labels to be printed with the substances that each drug contained, a significant step in public health. However, it was also the first law ever to regulate certain forms of advertising. Thus, advertising gradually became more regulated and professionalised, and other measures requiring truthfulness and honesty in advertising were gradually passed, gaining momentum with the spread of electronic media, especially television.¹⁷

Using the phenomenon of so-called patent medicine, our aim was to show how misinformation and untruths could be disseminated even in the past, when electronic and especially Internet media were not available. It is all the more possible to observe how quickly and with what impact misinformation is spread nowadays, especially with the use of Internet media.¹⁸ However, other facts should not be forgotten. Medical topics have always been extremely popular with the public and have been a particularly popular subject of discussion, and this is no different today. The difference with the past, however, is that the impact of their dissemination via the Internet, especially social media, is enormous.¹⁹ Not only the serious media, but also news agencies and non-governmental organisations are tackling this problem and responding to it in the form of various legislative and governmental measures, whether national or multinational.

3 Infodemia: The Fake News Pandemic at the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic

When the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic hit the world in 2020, society and media discourse also began to talk about a pandemic of fake news, misinformation, hoaxes, half-truths and propaganda. In his study, the Dutch media theorist Deuze stated: *“It is perhaps also not surprising, from this point of view, that most of the debates and discussions about the pandemic do not just concern the virus and its impact, but focus especially on the roles of expert information provision, news coverage, government communications, and social media. It is clear that the coronavirus pandemic is a mediatized event as much as it is a virus that infects millions of people around the world.”*²⁰

There are hundreds of disinformation and hoaxes about the coronavirus. One of the first false reports about the coronavirus to spread on social media was that wearing face protection due to inhalation of carbon dioxide slows reflexes and dulls the senses. Another unconfirmed piece of

¹⁶ PRESBREY, F. S.: *The History and Development of Advertising*. New York : Doubleday, 1929, p. 16.

¹⁷ VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Televízia v Spojených štátoch amerických: história, fakty, súvislosti*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2014, p. 32.

¹⁸ VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Introductory Chapter: Journalism Facing Both Pandemic and ‘Infodemic’. In VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (eds.): *Fake News Is Bad News: Hoaxes, Half-truths and the Nature of Today’s Journalism*. London : IntechOpen, 2021, p. 2.

¹⁹ ĐUKIĆ, M., SIĆ, D.: Regulation of Fake News and Hate Speech on Social Networks. In ĐUKIĆ, M. (ed.): *Movements European Realities New Developing Trends*. Osijek : Academy of Arts and Culture J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, 2021, p. 53-54.

²⁰ DEUZE, M.: The Role of Media and Mass Communication Theory in the Global Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 14.

information was that the virus was artificially created in laboratories. The United States blamed China for its escape from the laboratories, while Russian and Iranian officials in turn blamed the Americans. Other hoaxes claimed that the coronavirus was spread by 5G networks and killed by alcohol, or that testing was a hidden method of creating a gateway of infection to the brain, or that the coronavirus did not exist at all.²¹

Equally, the development of the coronavirus vaccine and its administration has triggered a further wave of misinformation, spread primarily through social media, which has resulted in lower uptake of vaccination in some countries. Back in January 2021, the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic set up a web portal *www.slovenskoproticovidu.sk* to provide information on vaccination, vaccines, their benefits, but also possible side effects. The website also introduced the personalities who decided to support the information campaign with the central theme “vaccine is freedom”. Publicly known authorities, including the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, took part in the campaign. The Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic also joined the fight against vaccination hoaxes through its *Facebook* account, which has more than 220,000 followers to date.²² A massive pro-vaccination campaign was carried out in all media. Social media, especially social networks, are an extremely effective means of spreading falsehoods and hoaxes and a prerequisite for their further spread. There are several reasons for this. Social networks are an extremely popular medium among the young and middle generation, who use them not only as a tool for disseminating information, but also as an information source. The level of critical thinking and the willingness to verify information from multiple sources is relatively low, which makes the recipient prone to trust misinformation and conspiracies and spread them – whether consciously or unconsciously – further. According to the *Globsec Voices of Central and Eastern Europe survey* of June 2020, 56% of the population in Slovakia believes conspiracy theories and disinformation reports. Slovakia ranked the worst of all the countries surveyed, behind Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary.²³

The European Commission and its executive bodies, but also the Member States, are aware of the need to combat fake news and hoaxes. The European Commission has stated that the coronavirus pandemic has been accompanied by a massive wave of false and misleading information and attempts by foreign actors to influence the debate in the European Union. Misleading health information, dangerous hoaxes with false claims, conspiracy theories and consumer fraud are putting public health at risk, it said.²⁴

In the past period, the European Union institutions have produced several strategic documents defining the basic contours of action against disinformation at the European level, including *Tackling Online Disinformation: a European Approach and Action Plan against Disinformation*. These responded, in particular, to Russia’s disinformation campaigns and propaganda against the European Union, which are framework documents that identified concrete steps to preserve democratic values in Europe. At the same time, they serve as a starting point for the development of strategic documents for dealing with disinformation, in particular the *European Democracy Action Plan* and the *Digital Services Act*.

²¹ KAČINCOVÁ PREDMERSKÁ, A.: Koronahoaxy. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., GRACA, M. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 48-49.

²² *Official Facebook Page of Ministry of Health of Slovak Republic*. [online]. [2022-08-18]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=ministerstvo%20zdravotn%C3%ADctva%20slovenskej%20republik>>.

²³ HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe – Perceptions of Democracy & Governance in 10 EU Countries*. Bratislava : Globsec, 2020, p. 46-47.

²⁴ *Tackling Coronavirus Disinformation*. [online]. [2022-08-19]. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation_en>.

As regards the Slovak Republic, in 2021 the Government adopted the *Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic*, according to which the strategic security interests of Slovakia include the readiness of the state and society to respond effectively and in a coordinated manner to hybrid threats, including disinformation, and ensuring a functional cyber, information and communication security system. The Strategy responds to the need to face both global and local security challenges and threats. The number and scale of subversive and coercive activities by various actors using disinformation and propaganda to disrupt or manipulate decision-making mechanisms in the state, to influence public opinion in their favour and to destabilise the political situation, including by covertly supporting various extremist, paramilitary and political movements aiming at disrupting the existing constitutional order and the functioning of public institutions, is increasing. The public is exposed to the increasing spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories that can endanger human health, disrupt the cohesion of society or provoke public violence and social unrest. Hybridisation is most pronounced in the targeted dissemination of propaganda and disinformation against the democratic system and the anchoring of the Slovak Republic in NATO and the EU. In the fight against disinformation and propaganda, the Slovak Republic will focus on the establishment of a coordinated national mechanism for increasing resilience to disinformation and information operations. The aim is to strengthen structures and decision-making processes for early identification, assessment and response to disinformation, as well as the implementation of systemic measures. The Slovak Republic will support the development of critical thinking, especially among young people, and will use best practices and recommendations of international organisations as well as expert NGOs in the field of countering disinformation and propaganda.²⁵

The *National Security Agency* shut down the disinformation website *Main News* in early March 2022. It did so in accordance with the amendment to the law on cyber security and on the basis of the documents provided and evaluated by the state security forces.²⁶ The website remained non-functional until the present day. The blocking institute was introduced by an amendment to the cyber law adopted as part of measures related to the situation in Ukraine.

The level of critical thinking and the willingness to verify information from multiple sources is relatively low, which makes the recipient prone to trust misinformation and conspiracies and spread them – whether knowingly or unknowingly further. In his research, Krajčovič focused on whether Slovak Internet users had encountered hoaxes related to COVID-19, whether they were able to identify these messages and how they affected them. The results showed that almost 80% of the 429 respondents had encountered fake news about the coronavirus. According to the survey, only half of the respondents (52%) were able to detect hoaxes, 38% of the respondents did not know that they were reading fake news report and 10% of the respondents did not know that they were reading a hoax at all. They only found out later. The survey also showed that almost half of the respondents (47%) were concerned after reading the hoax.²⁷ Based on the survey results, we can assess that Internet users have a problem with decrypting fake news in the digital space and we expect this situation to get worse.

²⁵ *Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky 2021*. [online]. [2022-08-05]. Available at: <https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4263_210128-bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf>.

²⁶ *Legal Act on Cyber Security No. 287/2021 Coll.*, from 1st August 2021. [online]. [2022-08-10]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2021/287/>>.

²⁷ KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Dezinformácie a médiá v čase pandémie. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., GRACA, M. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 58-59.

4 Research Design: Misinformation about Coronavirus and Respondents' Perception of It

This study presents a thematically delimited selection of the results of a questionnaire survey conducted in January 2022, the objectives of which were to find out how respondents perceive fake news, which information they consider to be fake, from which sources they draw information, through which channels they most often come into contact with fake news, and what they focus on when identifying information. The aim was also to define which fake news the respondents believe most often and what the socio-demographics of such respondents are.

Information was collected through an electronic questionnaire created on the *Google* platform, which consisted of 28 questions. Within the identification questions, we collected the respondents' gender, age, highest educational attainment, social status, and the region in which they live. Metric questions focused on respondents' information sources, perceptions of their credibility, and an assessment of whether respondents could identify fake news. We were interested in the respondents' opinion about the prevalence of fake news related to coronavirus in Slovak society:

1. mandatory testing of the Slovak population against COVID-19 served to chip the population,
2. the vaccination is intended to chip the population,
3. vitamin B17 deficiency is to blame for the cancer,
4. the Roma receive medicines free of charge in pharmacies and are favoured.

The questionnaire, which was completed by a total of 204 respondents between 5th January 2022 and 31st January 2022, was distributed via the social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram* and the *Choose Info Facebook* account. Due to the fact that the survey was not representative, its results cannot be generalized. However, it provided interesting information on how respondents perceive fake news and whether they are inclined to believe it.

Regarding the structure of the sample, out of 204 respondents, 139 were women and 65 were men. Most respondents were in the 18 to 24 age group (42.6%). The second largest group was those aged between 25 and 34 (31.4%), followed by those aged between 35 and 44 (8.8%) and those aged between 45 and 54 (8.8%). The 55-64 age group accounted for 3.9%. Respondents aged 65 and over made up 2.5% of the sample, and those aged under 18 (2%) also took part in the questionnaire.

Secondary education with a high school diploma was attained by 37.3%, first degree by 27.5%, second degree by 26.5% and third degree by 2.9% of respondents. The highest level of education attained was primary education by 2.5% of respondents and secondary education without matriculation by 3.4% of respondents.

In terms of economic status, 40% of respondents were employed. This was followed by students (35.8%) and self-employed (13.7%). Almost 5% of respondents indicated that they were on maternity or parental leave, 3.4% were retired, 2% were unemployed and one respondent did not want to answer the question. In the Banská Bystrica region were 33.8% of respondents, in the Trnava region 20.6% of respondents and in the Bratislava region 17.2% of respondents. 8.3% of respondents live or reside abroad. 5.4% of respondents indicated that they live or stay most often in the Žilina region. 4.4% of the respondents indicated the Prešov region. This was followed by the Trenčín Region, the Nitra Region (3.4%) and the Košice Region (2.9%). One respondent did not answer this question.

Which Misinformation about Coronavirus Do We Believe?

The report that the mandatory testing of the Slovak population against COVID-19 was used to chip the population is trusted by 5 women (3.59%) and 1 man (1.54%). The results show that this false report is trusted more by women than by men. Most of the women who identified the fake news as definitely or rather true are in the age group of 18 to 24 years. All female respondents have attained secondary education with a high school diploma. Those who indicated that they trusted the fake news live mostly in the Banská Bystrica region (50%) and abroad (50%). All respondents indicated that they acquire information through the Internet – 50% of them acquire information through news portals and 50% through social networks. Most of the men who identified fake news as definitely or more likely to be true are in the 65 and over age group. 100% of them have completed secondary education with a high school diploma, and all of them who indicated that the information is definitely or rather true live in the Banská Bystrica region.

Respondents get their information via the internet and social networks. We found that this fake news is trusted by both young people and respondents who are older. In the age category 18 to 24, we observed that 33.33% trust the fake news, and at the same time 33.33% of men and women who are over 65 consider this news to be more likely or definitely true. Most people are from the Banská Bystrica region and reported their highest educational level to be secondary school with a high school diploma.

The false report that vaccination is used to chip the population is trusted by 6 women out of 139 respondents (4.32%) and 2 men out of 65 respondents (3.08%). The results show that this false report is trusted more by women than men. Most of the women who identified the fake news as definitely or rather true are in the age group of 18 to 24 years. Secondary education with a high school diploma was attained by 50% percent of them and equally 50% of the female respondents had completed primary education. All respondents (100%) who trusted this false report were from the Banská Bystrica region. They also all stated that their main source of information was the Internet. 50% of them get information through news portals, and also half of the respondents said that they use social platforms for this purpose.

Based on the information we have gathered, we would argue that more women than men trust the false vaccination and testing messages that have emerged in the wake of the global pandemic. Through our analysis, we found that more women in younger age groups believe the fake news about chipping. We identified a representation of consent in all age groups except the 35 to 44 age group. The majority of respondents who agreed with the statement stated that they lived in the Banská Bystrica region and had achieved a university degree with a high school diploma (37.5%).

The claim that the incidence of cancer is caused by vitamin B17 deficiency was trusted by 7 women out of 139 respondents (5.04%) and 0 men out of 65 respondents (0%). The results show that this false report is trusted more by women than by men. The possibility that it is more likely to be true was only indicated by women. Most of the female respondents who trust this fake news are between 35 and 44 years old. Fifty per cent of them have completed secondary education with a high school diploma, and half of the female respondents said that they have completed a first degree in higher education. All of them live in the Banská Bystrica region. The respondents stated that they get their information via the Internet. At the same time, 75% of them indicated that they search for information through news portals and 25% of them indicated that they search for information through social platforms. Not a single respondent indicated the possibility that this information is definitely true.

37 women (26.62%) and 6 men (9.23%) trusted the false report that Roma receive free and favoured medicines in pharmacies. The results show that this false report is trusted more by women than by men. Most of the women who identified the fake news as definitely or rather true were in the age group of 25 to 34 years. Secondary education with a high school diploma was attained by 40% of female respondents. 26.67% of the female respondents had completed first degree and the same percentage was observed among the female respondents who had completed second degree. Fake news was trusted by 6.66% of female respondents who had attained secondary education without matriculation. The largest number of respondents who identified the report as probably or definitely true live in the Banská Bystrica region (46.66%). In the age category 25-34 years, all female respondents who trusted this false report indicated that they most often get their information through the Internet. At the same time, 80% of them said that they search for information on social networks and 13.33% answered that they get it from news portals. Among those who indicated that the fake news was definitely or more likely to be true, the highest proportion of men were in the 18-24 age group (50%) and had attained a first-level university degree. 66.66% of them live in the Bratislava region and 33.33% in the Nitra region. All respondents in this age group stated that they most often get their information from the Internet. At the same time, 66.66% of them stated that they get information through social networks. Among the responses, we noted that respondents get information through press releases. This option was indicated by 33.33% of them. We found that more women than men trusted the fake news about favouring Roma. At the same time, the results showed that this fake news is trusted by people with the highest attainment of secondary education with a high school diploma, as well as by respondents who have attained first and second level university education.

5 Conclusion

In the context of the coronavirus, fake news began to emerge almost immediately after its confirmation. The place of their spread was mainly social networks and the Internet.²⁸ The most frequent were information related to the use of medicines, information about the origin of the coronavirus, information about various preventive measures and ways to protect oneself from the virus, news about schools opening early or about the return of dolphins to Venice, among many others.

Although our research was not representative and the results cannot be generalised, it has yielded interesting and, compared to other similarly oriented research, discussion-worthy results. For example, respondents believe that Roma receive free medicines in pharmacies and are favoured. 21% of the respondents trust this statement. The results showed that more women than men trusted it. These were women in the age category of 25 to 34 years, most of whom had secondary education with a high school diploma and live in the Banská Bystrica region. As far as men are concerned, this fake news is mainly believed by young men aged 18 to 24, who have attained a first degree and most of them live in the Bratislava region.

However, a significant difference from the past can be seen in the impact and influence of fake news on the recipient and society as a whole. Whereas previously fake news was spread by word of mouth or in printed form and generally did not cross community boundaries, nowadays it spreads almost unrestrictedly in the digital space and its impact on the individual, the community or society as a whole is clear. These messages have spread mainly in the social

²⁸ KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Sociálne médiá a falošné správy v čase pandémie Covid-19. In BRNÍK, A. et al.: *Megatrendy a médiá 2021: Home Officetainment*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2021, p. 62.

networking environment through sharing in private groups, but also among friends and through private messaging. Users discussed them, commented on their content and often, knowingly or unknowingly, spread them further.²⁹ This has been evident not only during the coronavirus pandemic, the subsequent testing and vaccination, but also today, when we are witnessing not only the disinformation digital war during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine³⁰, but also other battles being fought on other ‘fronts’. We will see how the media, national governments, multinational entities, NGOs, recipients and other actors deal with this pandemic of fake news, hoaxes, disinformation and propaganda.

Acknowledgement: This project received funding from the European Commission under the call CEF-TC-2020-2 (European Digital Media Observatory). Reference: 2020-EU-IA-0267.

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²⁹ LEVAK, T.: Disinformation in the New Media System – Characteristics, Forms, Reasons for its Dissemination and Potential Means of Tackling the Issue. In *Medijska istraživanja: znanstveno-stručni časopis za novinarstvo i medije*, 2020, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 33.

³⁰ PRAVDOVÁ, H., IMRECZE, A.: Communication from the Aspect of Interdisciplinary Approaches. In ČÁBYOVÁ, E., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity. New Changes, New Challenges*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2021, p. 509.

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CRITICAL THINKING AND ITS APPLICATION IN VIRTUAL REALITY

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Abstract:

Virtual reality has huge potential for education. On the other hand, its expansion has certain risks, especially regarding abuse in favor of individual opinion groups. The aim of this paper will be to show how critical thinking can be applied within this field. This aspect can significantly contribute to distinguishing true and false information in the virtual space and at the same time not violating the right of others to free opinion. However, regulation, which is not always at a sufficient level, also plays an important role in this regard. We see this phenomenon especially on social networks. We will present initiatives that deal with critical thinking in Slovakia, but also selected initiatives from abroad. Some tools to limit disinformation media are already in use in Slovakia, but these are rather ad hoc solutions and not systemic changes. The paper will therefore also focus on state interventions and the introduction of elements of critical thinking into the educational process and within the whole Slovak society.

Key words:

Critical Thinking. Disinformation. Legislative Adjustments. Opinion Groups. Social Media. Virtual Reality.

1 Introduction

Critical thinking is something like a theory, strategy, method, or process for grasping knowledge. It is a complex phenomenon that covers several abilities and skills. The goal is to learn to deal with information through this analytical model. It is important that we know how to search or filter relevant information, build arguments and think about possible weaknesses and strengths. When preparing for a debate, we must think about possible counter-arguments and prepare for them, thereby learning to perceive the problem from multiple perspectives. Critical thinking calls for interdisciplinarity and knowledge from different fields is integrated here. In this process, we also perceive different points of view, we have the opportunity to put ourselves in certain situations and social roles.¹

Part of critical thinking is also the ability to distinguish correct arguments from incorrect ones. When we assess arguments and their correctness, we are also affected by various errors in reasoning, which are related to the internal mechanisms of our mind, but also by argumentative fouls that can be deliberately set on us by someone else. Errors in reasoning include, for example, confirmation bias, which is characterized by the fact that we tend to believe things that match our previous beliefs and fit our ideas. So we see what we want to see. Another cognitive distortion is the “halo effect”, which consists in the fact that, based on the first impression we have of someone/something, we also assess its other characteristics and create a general evaluation of the given person/thing according to it. An argumentative foul is, for example, a personal attack where, instead of valid arguments, a person uses insults and evaluates another person instead of making a correct argument about the issue. There are many people living in our society with different opinions, but we have to realise common decisions and we should strive for mutual understanding. This is connected with the knowing of the opposite opinion, of course if it is presented by quality media. This then offers us a more comprehensive view of the matter, and we can form a less pronounced opinion, which will be more objective – although opinions will probably never be completely objective. Reading news

¹ KAHNEMAN, D.: *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London : Penguin Books, 2012, p. 34.

in other world languages can also help us in this case.² The need to educate critically thinking individuals is not new, but it has become a prominent problem due to the unrestricted access to information through rapidly developing technologies and the significant democratization of information and news creation. In the 1990s, the requirement to educate critical thinking people was explicitly declared and there were recommendations to carry out selection for filling job positions not on the basis of ability tests, but on the basis of tests identifying the level of critical thinking.³

The importance of critical thinking is increasing with the continuous expansion of the social networks and internet media space. The fact is that the regulation of information disclosure on these platforms is not regulated enough, which brings confusion and chaos. Penalties for spreading false claims and hoaxes are weak, so their authors do not have to worry about sanctions or other punishments. After revealing the truth, it is sufficient just to delete the hoax and the matter is closed. However, the original message is often shared by thousands of people and thus automatically enters social circulation. Secondary sharing is thus not limited in any way. There are many such examples in Slovak conditions and we see them on a daily basis. These are ordinary internet/social networks users, but also political representatives, civic activists, famous personalities, etc.

2 Methodology

The research problem is the absence of a sufficient framework for regulating the spread of false news and the low level of knowledge of the population about distinguishing true and false information. It is clear that this state has deeper causes and they have been highlighted in the last two years when we have had to deal with the coronavirus pandemic and in recent months also with the war conflict in our close neighborhood. We will try to evaluate the trends of thinking of Slovaks in the given period and highlight the causalities resulting from the acting of disinformation media. In the article, we mainly use the analysis method, while the basis for us are relevant sources from the field of critical thinking, virtual reality and news services. In addition, we use findings from research by the *Slovak Academy of Sciences*, which focused on the level to which Slovaks trust pro-Kremlin narratives justifying or defending the involvement of Russian troops in Ukraine. It was conducted in March 2022 on a sample of 900 respondents. We then compare the results with our own research of selected media, which we conducted during September 2022. Through the interpretation of the findings, we try to clarify the possibilities of involving elements of critical thinking in the educational process of young people, but also lifelong education of different population groups of different ages. An important aspect in this regard is also the Reuters report, which evaluates the trust of the country's residents towards the media. An essential document for the concept of the article is the *Action Plan for the Coordination of the Fight against Hybrid Threats* for the years 2022 – 2024 and the *Cyber Security Act*, which in its updated version gives the *National Security Authority* the right to block the content of websites that are evaluated as harmful to Slovakia's national interests. Any activity that causes or may cause a cyber security incident, fraudulent activity, theft of personal or sensitive data, serious misinformation and other forms of hybrid threats is called malicious activity.

² KOZÁROVÁ, N., GUNIŠOVÁ, D.: *Stratégia rozvoja kritického myslenia vo vyučovaní pedagogiky*. Nitra : PF UKF, 2020, p. 9.

³ For more information see: BERNARD, R. et al.: Exploring the Structure of the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal: One Scale or Many Subscales? In *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 2008, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 15-22.

3 Results

As we mentioned, the *Slovak Academy of Sciences* survey showed relatively unfavorable results about the state of critical thinking among Slovak citizens. The scientific team from the Institute of Experimental Psychology conducted a survey on a sample of 900 respondents in March 2022. The obtained data showed that 22 percent of the respondents believe the reports justifying the involvement of Russian troops in Ukraine. To a large extent, it depends on the content of specific messages. The lowest trust was in the news that the war in Ukraine is staged and actors and actresses are paid to film it (11%), or that Ukraine is developing nuclear or other radioactive weapons (13%). On the contrary, more than a quarter of people believe the often repeated reports, for example, that Russia is trying to disarm and denazify Ukraine through military intervention in Ukraine (28%), that the war in Ukraine was deliberately provoked by the Western powers and that Russia was only responding to their provocation (34%), or that genocide was committed against Russian minorities in the east of Ukraine (27%).⁴ The explanation lies primarily in the value orientation of people. The findings show that trust in pro-Kremlin narratives justifying the involvement of Russian troops in Ukraine goes hand in hand with sympathy for Russia. People trusting some statements of Russian government officials or pro-Kremlin media blame the war in Ukraine on the USA and Ukraine, and on the contrary, they deny that Russia bears responsibility for this conflict. We also see a higher trust in pro-Kremlin narratives among people who are convinced that we were better off in Slovakia under the former regime than we are now, and at the same time they prefer a society ruled by one strong and authoritarian leader over today's liberal democracy principles. All these results illustrate the well-known fact that people tend to trust such information that fits with their opinions and worldview, and are more sceptical of news that contradicts their worldview.⁵

An interesting finding was also that trust in pro-Kremlin narratives about the war in Ukraine was especially high among people who were also convinced of the truth of some conspiracy theories about the disease COVID-19. While it is to some extent possible that some specific personal and psychological characteristics make people more susceptible to receiving such content, the large overlap between trust in pro-Kremlin narratives and conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19 is likely also a consequence of the fact that these claims tend to spread through the same information channels – for example, through the same groups or profiles on social networks. These information channels are obviously popular in Slovakia and have a major influence on public opinion. The analyzes also pointed to the fact that factors such as age or gender do not play a fundamental role in trusting pro-Kremlin narratives about the war conflict in Ukraine. Such reports are not exclusively subject to people with a lower level of education or analytical thinking.⁶ It clearly follows that the need for education in critical thinking affects not only high school and university students, but essentially the entire population in Slovakia. In this view, not only the state, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, but also the media play an important role. The problem is that nowadays society is very polarized and the media is not a very trustworthy institution according to many citizens. Another reason is the fact that the news in the last two years has mostly been negative. The younger and less educated part of the population avoids the news because it is difficult for them

⁴ GÁLIKOVÁ, K.: *Prokremel'skej propagande dôveruje vyše pätina Slovákov a Sloveniek*. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <https://www.sav.sk/?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=10256>.

⁵ ŠROL, J., ČAVOJOVÁ, V.: *Mesiac od vypuknutia vojny na Ukrajine: Ako nás zasahuje prokremel'ská propaganda a dezinformácie o vojne?* [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/blog/2788260/mesiac-od-vypuknutia-vojny-na-ukrajine-ako-nas-zasahuje-prokremelska-propaganda-a-dezinformacie-o-vojne/>>.

⁶ GÁLIKOVÁ, K.: *Prokremel'skej propagande dôveruje vyše pätina Slovákov a Sloveniek*. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <https://www.sav.sk/?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=10256>.

to understand its content. It often happened that even scientists, doctors or analysts were questioned. The mentioned growth of social networks and the increase in the volume of news in virtual space also contributed to this. Moreover, the level of interest in the information varies depending on the specific state.

Surveys conducted in selected countries during April 2022 showed that interest in the news has increased significantly since the beginning of the war (for example, in Poland or Germany). At the same time, however, tendencies of selective avoidance of the news were also noted, mostly due to the negative nature of the news. Confidence in the media in Slovakia reached a new negative record – it fell to 26%. With that, our country, together with the USA, took the last place out of the observed 46 countries. In the case of Slovakia, this is the lowest value since 2017. Low trust stems, among other things, from Slovaks' belief that the media is not independent. 74% of Slovaks think that the Slovak media is significantly influenced by political circles, while in the case of the influence of powerful businessmen on media outputs, this proportion rises to 75%. Slovaks are also gradually turning away from television and print media as a news source, and the share of social networks, on the contrary, is growing. They consume news mainly on the *Facebook* and *YouTube* platforms. However, *Instagram* dominates the 18-24 age group. The ranking of the most popular social networks is completed by *Whatsapp* and *TikTok*.⁷

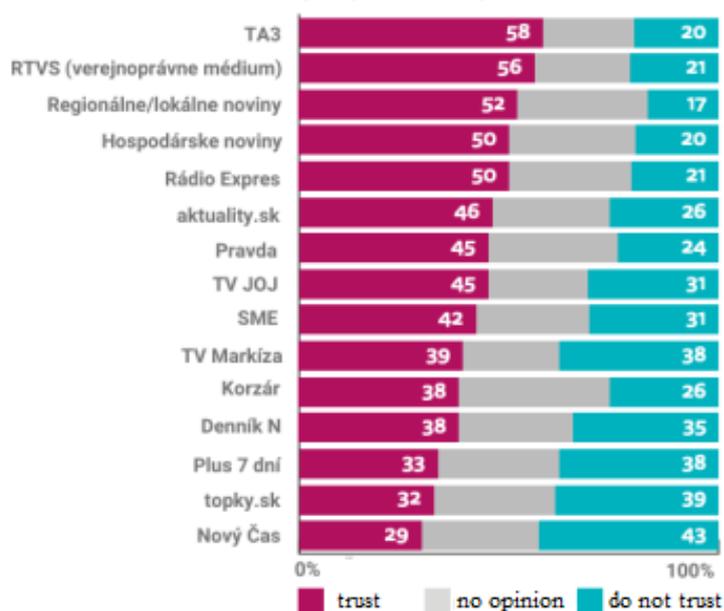


Figure 1: Rate of media confidence

Source: CHLEBCOVÁ HEČKOVÁ, A., SMITH, S.: *Slovakia*. [online]. [2022-10-03]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/slovakia>>.

The different presentation of information and its distortion also appear to be problematic, which also results from our research during September. This has a significant impact on the development of critical thinking in society. We compared the results of a survey related to the preferences of the population in the victory of Russia/Ukraine in their mutual conflict. Two surveys produced two different results, to which public opinion reacted immediately. In the first, the majority of Slovaks wished for the victory of Russia rather than Ukraine in the ongoing

⁷ JAKÁBOVÁ, M.: *Správa Reuters: Dôvera v spravodajstvo klesá, najmenej veria médiám Slováci*. [online]. [2022-10-08]. Available at: <<https://infosecurity.sk/domace/sprava-reuters-dovera-v-spravodajstvo-klesa-najmenej-veria-mediam-slovaci/>>.

war conflict. This resulted from a survey realized by the *Slovak Academy of Sciences*, *MNFORCE* and *Seesame* at the beginning of September. A fifth of them answered that they wanted a Russian victory, and more than half of the respondents wanted a Russian victory overall. About a third of Slovakia's population wants a victory for Ukraine, and about a fifth of all residents want a clear victory for Ukraine. However, the answers were measured on a ten-point scale, so it is very important how the results are interpreted. An opinion split was in public opinion just in this context. A surprise is the attitude of people around 30 years old, who have the most pro-Russian attitude of all age groups. An intuitive explanation could be that this is a generation that no longer has a tangible experience with the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968.⁸ On the other hand, this trend is socially dangerous and shows another reason for a deeper implementation of critical thinking in the education of all population groups. It is also related to knowing own history, because these events took place relatively recently – only 60 years ago. We can see that a significant part of young people does not have sufficient information about the context and circumstances that accompanied the functioning of the communist regime. Today they believe that Russia is the only country that can ensure world balance and stability.

The second survey was carried out by *Globsec* with the cooperation of *Focus agency*. It was conducted between 21st and 27th of September on a sample of 1,009 respondents through personal interviews. The question was: “How would you like the war in Ukraine to end?” We assume that this survey is responding to the first one. Following the level of publicity and misinterpretations associated with the first survey, they decided to conduct the second survey, also in view of the changes in the development of the war situation. In this case, the structure of the possible answers was simpler and this was also reflected in the results. However, the Ukrainian successes at the front and the retreat of Russian troops from the acquired positions could also contribute to the change in opinion. According to the survey, 47% of Slovaks want the victory of Ukraine and 19% of respondents want Russia to win.⁹ As is evident, public opinion in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war can change essentially within weeks. However, there is a lack of stable tendencies that would emphasize the desire for a democratic solution and condemnation of Russian aggression against a neighboring state. For the correctness, we must state that all the media we followed published the results of both surveys, or emphasized their comparison. We analyzed the outputs of televisions *TA3*, *RTVS*, *Joj* and *Markíza*. The subject of research was reports in the main news program (broadcast from 18:30 and 19:00) during the first week of October. *Joj* and *Markíza* even addressed this topic twice in a given week. In addition to the tolerance of pro-Russian narratives, the research results reveal another phenomenon – the disinterest of a large number of residents, especially in the age category under 35. They testify to a large degree of apathy in society. Approximately one third of citizens do not care about the result or do not want to comment it, which is a very high number given the extent of the conflict's impact on the Slovakia's security and the fact that it takes place in our immediate neighborhood. This decline is often attributed to the shift away from television and print media as a news source and the growth of social media. Slovaks receive news more and more on the *Facebook* and *YouTube* platforms. *Instagram* dominates the 18-24 age group. The ranking of the most popular social networks is completed by *Whatsapp* and *TikTok*.

⁸ *Väčšina Slovákov by si želala, aby vojnu vyhralo Rusko, tvrdí prieskum. Ukázal, ako odpovedali voliči OLANO aj Smeru.* [online]. [2022-10-13]. Available at: <<https://www.ta3.com/clanok/245958/vacsina-slovakov-by-si-zelala-aby-voynu-vyhralo-rusko-tvrdi-prieskum-ukazal-ako-odpovedali-volici-oano-aj-smeru>>.

⁹ *Slováci si vo vojne želajú častejšie výhru Ukrajiny.* [online]. [2022-10-13]. Available at: <<https://www.postoj.sk/115695/slovaci-si-vo-vojne-zelaju-castejsie-vyhru-ukrajiny>>.

The sources of information just mentioned are the most threatened by non-regulation and manipulative tactics. This is used by e.g. disinformation websites. We found that the number of which has more than doubled since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Their circulation increased to thousands of readers per day, and through their content they could spread lies and unverified information with impunity. Therefore, state institutions had to react to the European trend and prepare measures to eliminate their influence. They must have the means to prevent the spread of illegal content, which purposefully angers society, destabilizes it and can ultimately endanger the security of country. A fundamental step was the creation of a law to combat disinformation, which was created by the *Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (MIRDI SR)*. In short, electronic service providers will be responsible for controlling and managing harmful content on the internet. If they do not fulfill their obligations, they can be sanctioned. The seat of the electronic service provider is not decisive. The state authority as a regulator in this field also has the possibility to initiate the prevention of the illegal content spread towards the electronic service provider. The legislation is inspired by German example.¹⁰ The aim is not to dictate what is right and what is wrong, but to help develop the critical thinking of citizens and increase their interest in analysis and verification of the information they receive. Hybrid and information war is also a type of conflict, and Slovakia is one of the targets of these paramilitary operations by Russia. On the other hand, the boundaries of constitutional freedoms (in this case, especially freedom of opinion) are not precisely defined in advance and in the form of some flat pattern. Any interference with this freedom must be necessary for the purpose of realizing an important public interest. *National Security Authority (NBÚ)* became the main regulator in this field and has the right to block content deems dangerous. The first cases included well-known conspiracy websites as *hlavnespravy.sk*, *armadnymagazin.sk* or *infovojna.bz*. Precisely defined, they are not cancelled, they are blocked on the territory of the Slovak Republic, based on the administrative decision of *NBÚ*. Cancellation means that the content is deleted, but in this case is not deleted, it is just not available from the territory of the Slovak Republic.

Obviously, critical thinking cannot be enforced by legislation. However, especially in the last year, state institutions in cooperation with the non-profit sector are trying to implement its tools in schools and universities, but also among the general public. In July 2021 *MIRDI SR* announced a call through which it wants to support the fight against disinformation and the improvement of digital skills in schools and in state institutions. It is designed to increase information literacy and digital skills, to acquire the skills needed to work with information such as critical thinking, media literacy, the ability to analyze information sources, but also to become familiar with digital tools and techniques in the fight against the spread of disinformation. Supported projects should be aimed at education, creation of educational materials, realization of workshops not only at schools, but also within various professional groups. They should be aimed directly at high school and university students, their teachers, state administration employees and the public. Civic associations, foundations, interest associations of legal entities, non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services, non-governmental organizations, legal entities authorized to do business activities, entrepreneurs, primary schools, secondary schools or universities can apply.¹¹

¹⁰ VLASATÁ, A.: *Slovensko chce začať účinne bojovať s hoaxami aj na Facebooku. Takto to má vyzerat'*. [online]. [2022-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.startitup.sk/slovensko-chce-zacat-ucinne-bojovat-s-hoaxami-aj-na-facebooku-takto-to-ma-vyzerat/>>.

¹¹ *Ministerka Remišová: Boj proti dezinformáciám a informačnú gramotnosť podporíme novou výzvou v hodnote 120-tisíc eur*. [online]. [2022-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.mirri.gov.sk/aktuality/digitalna-agenda/ministerka-remisova-boj-proti-dezinformaciam-a-informacnu-gramotnost-podporime-novou-vyzvou-v-hodnote-120-tisic-eur/index.html>>.

4 Discussion

An optimal example is to follow up on the above-mentioned projects with other activities. Several conditions must be met for the successful implementation of critical thinking aspects:

1. Active involvement of the state, its institutions and bodies that have the task of regulating public space.
2. Involvement of schools and educational institutions in spreading awareness about threats in the online space, media and on other information platforms.
3. To include teaching about critical thinking aspects in the curriculum, at least in high schools and universities.
4. Active participation of the non-profit sector, civil associations, organizing workshops, trainings, lectures, etc. on this topic.
5. Self-education of the largest possible number of residents.

A good example of cooperation between the state, private sector and public is the implementation of hackathons. This new tool is gaining attention, currently focused on by *MIRDI SR*, which will hold a series of 18 such events over the coming months. The first of them took place in the recent days. 12 teams consisting of 40 experts, students and enthusiasts from the field of IT met at the two-day event in Bratislava. The three best solutions from the hackathon received the prize money, and their authors were also awarded by the Prime Minister Eduard Heger and Deputy Prime Minister Veronika Remišová. Based on the point evaluation of the seven-member expert jury, the winning solution of the hackathon became the “Infomentor” project, whose goal is to develop an educational application to increase media literacy and support critical thinking of young people. At the same time, *MIRDI SR* will offer the authors of the best projects a discussion on the possibilities of implementing the proposed solution.¹²

The topic of critical thinking reached such a high level that even the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, actively participated in it. In cooperation with her team, she created a series of educational videos about social networks and critical thinking, which should help to learn about the functioning of social networks, to better understand the work of journalists or scientists, or to perceive errors in our thinking. Five parts are available for now. The first deals with how social networks select the content you see on them. Knowing more about the environment in which discussions most often take place today may go a long way toward making them less shouting and more understanding. The second part discusses basic journalistic habits and their common use on social networks. The third part presents how the scientific methods work and why a single study summarized in an article with a tabloid headline may not be enough to know the true state of scientific knowledge. The fourth part talks about the addictive nature of social networks and their impact on mental health. The fifth and so far the last part presents the forms of discussion and the art of discussing in a hostile environment.¹³ The involvement of all the mentioned actors is a clear signal that this issue currently has a high priority. With the cooperation of all the actors mentioned above, it is possible to increase the level of critical thinking in our society. However, it is likely that in such a polarized

¹² *Vicepremiérka Remišová: Prvý hackathon proti hoaxom a dezinformáciám má svojho víťaza – projekt vzdelávacej aplikácie na podporu kritického myslenia mladých ľudí.* [online]. [2022-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.mirri.gov.sk/aktuality/inovacie/vicepremierka-remisova-prvy-hackathon-proti-hoaxom-a-dezinformaciam-ma-svojho-vitaza-projekt-vzdelavacej-aplikacie-na-podporu-kritickeho-myslenia-mladych-ludi/index.html>>.

¹³ *Mysli s hlavou štátu.* [online]. [2022-10-17]. Available at: <<https://www.prezident.sk/page/mysli-s-hlavou-statu/>>.

environment, this process will take longer than one or two electoral terms. However, as we have already stated, schools and universities are also an important part of this process, which should capture knowledge about distinguishing true and false data just during student age.

5 Conclusion

Conflicts (recently especially military ones) are, in addition to real battles in the territory, also accompanied by fighting online, in the form of sharing a lot of propaganda and disinformation, which have been quietly mixed in with real news. If fake news and disinformation were a problem before, in the current situation it is even more important to be able to recognize the truth of individual information that flows to us daily from a number of sources. Articles, posts, statuses, tiktoks and stories, all with so much information that only refined critical thinking and a few good tools will help us sort through. Although we are slowly moving to control and limit the spread of disinformation, there are still many online sites, forums and channels where such information is constantly being spread. Disinformation websites should be avoided. By visiting and reading them, we expand their reach and help earn money from displaying ads. Fake news does not have to be long internet articles, they can also be in the form of funny pictures, short posts or videos. Therefore, our society should take only information from verified sources as true. Social media and their algorithms mostly only recognize the metrics of individual posts, based on which they move them on. The greater the engagement from users, the more the algorithm will move them forward. Sometimes posts with a high number of likes, comments and shares may appear to be credible because we rely on verification from people who have interacted with the post before us, but we can't rely on that. The creators of fake news and disinformation posts know well how this algorithm works. Therefore, they are created exactly in such a way that they get shares and online support very easily. The success of all disinformation messages rests on a common foundation, which aims to evoke emotion and fear. These are emotional, shocking and intimidating headlines that compel people to read on and convince the reader of their truth. Such reports often mix true facts with false ones to make them difficult to verify and at the same time convince the reader that they already know the information themselves. Therefore, it is crucial that there is sufficient regulation on these platforms and possible sanctions to deter these creators from further similar activities. In a situation where a huge amount of information passes through us every day, it is difficult to be oriented in what is happening. But the situation demands that our information and decision-making are not influenced by false information. There are a few things you can do to combat misinformation – first and foremost, try to think critically.

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EVENTS IN THE METAVERSE

Sláva Gracová, Martin Graca

Abstract:

Many various events were cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was caused by restrictions which were made by government to protect health of people and society. Events and other parts of life were moved to online world. Migration from offline to online was quite smooth. Main problem, that occurred, was that there were not many platforms which could provide organizing events online. After two years of global pandemic these technologies improved, and they now provide more opportunities and tools for making truly immersive and engaging experience in online world when organizing and event. Current trend is making event in virtual reality – specific into Metaverse. In this study, we will analyze current condition of events in Metaverse. We will define basic terms and we will introduce reasons for increasing number of events in Metaverse from accessible research. We will also analyze selected types of events which can be found in Metaverse and define basic terms. At the end we will try to bring prognosis of the next event evolution in the virtual reality and possibilities and limits of the virtual world in Metaverse.

Key words:

Events. Hybrid Events. Metaverse. Platforms. Virtual Reality.

1 Metaverse

The Metaverse term becomes more popular in 2020 and it was frequently mentioned technological term in the next area. It was mentioned first time in Neal Stephenson novel *Snow Crash* in 1992 as a three-dimensional virtual world inhabited avatar of real people.¹ We can find many definitions. Some of them say, that Metaverse “*is based on the convergence of technologies that enable multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects and people such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Hence, the Metaverse is an interconnected web of social, networked immersive environments in persistent multiuser platforms. It enables seamless embodied user communication in real-time and dynamic interactions with digital artifacts.*”²

Daniel Terdiman published an article *Meet the Metaverse, your new digital home* in 2007. He assumed that in 2016 the Internet will be an all-encompassing digital playground where people will be immersed in an always-on flood of digital information. Whether wandering through physical spaces or diving into virtual worlds. That was the general picture painted in a draft report obtained by *CNET News.com* that summarizes the conclusions of several dozen pundits who met at the first *Metaverse Roadmap Summit* May 2006 to prognosticate the “pathway to the 3D Web”.³

Metaverse became more actual when Jensen Huang, the CEO of *Nvidia*, the nation’s most valuable semiconductor company, in 2021 said, that is out to create the Metaverse, what Huang

¹ JOOYOUNG, K: Advertising in the Metaverse: Research Agenda. In *Journal of Interactive Advetising*, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 141-144. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15252019.2021.2001273>>.

² MYSTAKIDIS, S.: Metaverse. In *Encyclopedia*, 2022, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 486. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/2/1/31/htm>>.

³ TERDIMAN, D.: *Meet the Metaverse, Your New Digital Home*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.cnet.com/culture/meet-the-metaverse-your-new-digital-home/>>.

describes a virtual world that is a digital twin of ours.⁴ Another significant move was when *Facebook* changed its name into *Meta*. They did not change just the name, they also came with new infinity logo, focused also on Metaverse. Mark Zuckerberg said that *Facebook* will now be just a related company as *Instagram* or *WhatsApp*.

The name change, which was announced by Zuckerberg during the company's virtual reality and augmented reality conference *Facebook Connect*, aligns with its growing focus on the Metaverse, which refers to efforts to combine virtual and augmented reality technologies in a new online realm.⁵ Metaverse should be a place, where people will interact with each other, work and make content. New world has potential to help people unlock new creative, social and economic opportunities.⁶

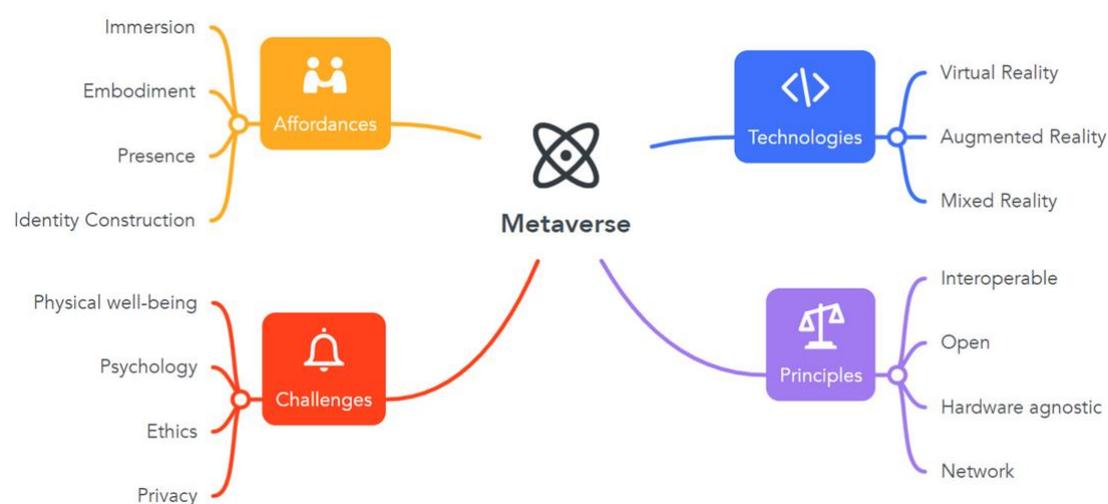


Figure 1: Metaverse technologies, principles, affordances and challenges

Source: MYSTAKIDIS, S.: Metaverse. In *Encyclopedia*, 2022, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 494. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/2/1/31/htm>>.

In connection with Metaverse we also talk about *MetaSocieties* as a company, which expands human life into virtual world. “*MetaSocieties in Metaverse has become an extremely important and indispensable part of human’s work and life. The MetaSocieties running in the virtual cyberspace can effectively break the space, time, and economic restrictions of humans, and create a new way of life, work, and communication for humans in real societies.*”⁷ We assume that *MetaSocieties* and real societies will function parallelly in the future. It means that every human, business and city will have virtual human, virtual business and virtual city in *MetaSocieties*. Metaverse should be a place where the real and virtual world will combine into one and where people can also have real life in all areas.

⁴ SHAPIRO, E.: *The Metaverse Is Coming. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang on the Fusion of Virtual and Physical Worlds*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://time.com/5955412/artificial-intelligence-nvidia-jensen-huang/>>.

⁵ MURPHY KELLY, S.: *Facebook Changes Its Company Name to Meta*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/28/tech/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-keynote-announcements/index.html>>.

⁶ MIŠKERIK, M.: *Odborník na IT A. Aleksiev: Spoločnosť Meta má všetko, čo potrebuje na vytvorenie nového sveta*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.trend.sk/technologie/odbornik-it-aleksiev-spolocnost-meta-ma-vsetko-co-potrebuje-vytvorenie-noveho-sveta>>.

⁷ WANG, F. et al.: *MetaSocieties in Metaverse: MetaEconomics and MetaManagement for MetaEnterprises and MetaCities*. In *IEEE Transactions on Computational Social Systems*, 2022, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 4. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/9697993>>.

2 Methodology

The main topic of this article is to analyse current state of organising events in Metaverse and also to analyse types of events. We will present some types of events and their abilities and their cons. In continuity of this article, we will work with available data, specifically with research done on internet users older than 18 years in the USA. This data will serve us for the illustration of interest in connection to Metaverse and of attendance on events in Metaverse. Our main goal is to describe main cons, pros, and limits of this space in connection in organising events. Based on mentioned data, we will try to formulate an estimation of future development. This presented study contains basic characteristic of Metaverse as a relative new term. The main benefit is to define events in Metaverse and indicate categories and types of these events.

3 Events in Metaverse

*“A Metaverse event is an activity held in a virtual environment rather than a physical one. In other words, instead of going to a concert hall, stadium, or auditorium, you attend the event via a device in your home.”*⁸ In this decade, organizers perceive more than before the technological progress, which brings many changes when we organize events. The movement that came probably because of COVID-19 is becoming a huge part of this and it’s causing increase in organizing events in Metaverse. We can divide events into several categories. It’s the same in Metaverse. In 2022, were classified few categories Metaverse Events:

- **Metaverse Concerts/Entertainment Events:** On the Metaverse, participants can create their avatars and get a sense of being present in the venue for real. And like in any live concert, they can interact with each other – groove, laugh, and sing along.
- **Metaverse Gaming Events:** Instead of simply streaming games or watching someone play, imagine being able to join the game and interact with gamers on an equal footing. While on the organizer’s front, Metaverse gaming events unleash incredible earning opportunities.
- **Metaverse Trade Show:** Possibility of connecting exhibitors with buyer all over the world. Exhibitioner can get somebody’s attention, support generating new customers and build new selling way.
- **Metaverse Graduation Ceremonies:** Platforms like *MootUp* access lifelike avatars for users to communicate 1:1 via video conferencing, chat, and video calls, unlocking an immersive experience for the students, teachers, and parents attending the graduation ceremony.
- **Metaverse Award Functions:** Event organizers need not have to book large spaces to accommodate the guest list. They need a 3D model where all the glitz and glamour can suffice. Attendees can create their avatars, chat with others, take pictures leveraging photo booths, and move freely, building connections. Organizers can enable live Q&A and chat sessions, platform integrations, and polls to maximize audience engagement and attention.
- **Metaverse Job Fairs:** Employers can access a larger candidate pool, screen the top ones and engage with them. Corporations can also provide training, leveraging the interactive powers that a 3D environment unlocks.
- **Metaverse Product Launch:** The product launch anticipation is for real. Brands can capitalize on it in the Metaverse because, with innovation and creativity, the sky’s the limit.

⁸ NEVILLE, C.: *Events in the Metaverse: How They Change the Industry*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://events.com/blog/events-in-the-metaverse-how-they-change-the-industry/>>.

Businesses can showcase live or pre-recorded demos of your product, upload walkthroughs, tutorials, and testimonials, and let your attendees place orders directly on the website.⁹

Within our analysis we will focus on corporate events, concerts and entertaining events. All of them have certain specifics that had to be work in when we go into virtual world. When we organize virtual event, we can choose from two types:

- **Metaverse event** – interactive meeting that takes place within an online platform. Metaverse events are not limited to one location. Participants can join from anywhere in the world.
- **Hybrid event** – they offer personal contact and online space. Organizations have to coordinate two types of programs. In-person guests are attending a networking session, virtual attendees will need to engage in a different activity.¹⁰

3.1 Concert in the Metaverse

“A Virtual Concert is a performance that takes place in the Metaverse or a virtual world in which a virtual avatar’s likeness is projected onto a virtual stage within virtual reality, synced to pre-recorded music.”¹¹ Concerts in virtual space have their pros and their limits. They offer several advantages in contrast to classical concert which is watched in the crowds. One of them is an absence of travelling. You do not have to go anywhere. All you need to do is play the concert in your living room. It can save your time. On the other hand, the atmosphere from the real concert, where are present thousands of people, is not the same in the Metaverse. We do not have technologies for that. Main benefit for singers and bands is that Metaverse offers endless possibilities for them. They just have to engage their creativity. Space, avatars, clothes, and everything else can be change in a second. The capacity in the place is not limited. In Metaverse, concerts can be watched by unlimited audience.

Concerts

Justin Bieber had a concert on the *Wave* platform in the virtual world of Metaverse towards the end of 2021. The performance lasted 30 minutes. He sang songs from his *Justice* album via his avatar. Bieber’s avatar is not as vivid as the real person, it can cover up some shortcomings in traditional concerts, such as the singer’s tone and image. It was his premiere debut in Metaverse.

⁹ SHREYA: *What Are Metaverse Events? – Ideas and Best Practice*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://taggbox.com/blog/metaverse-events/>>.

¹⁰ *Metaverse Events: Ultimate Guide in 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.party.space/blog/the-ultimate-guide-to-metaverse-events/>>.

¹¹ CHEN, H.: *Virtual Concert in The Metaverse: The Future of the Musical Industry*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.eventx.io/blog/virtual-concert-in-the-metaverse-the-future-of-the-musical-industry>>.



Figure 2: Justin Bieber's Metaverse concert

Source: COINYOUPIE: *Justin Bieber's First Metaverse Concert Surprised the World*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://coinyuppie.com/justin-biebers-first-metaverse-concert-surprised-the-world/>>.

Travis Scott is another singer who sang live in virtual space. More than 12 million of people have watched his concerts via online game *Fortnite*. His performance lasted around 10 minutes and he presented himself as fully-animated avatar that was constantly changing throughout the concert. *“As Scott moved from song to song, his virtual avatar changed – first into a cyborg, then a fluorescent spaceman. The landscape shifted and crumbled around players on an enormous scale.”*¹²

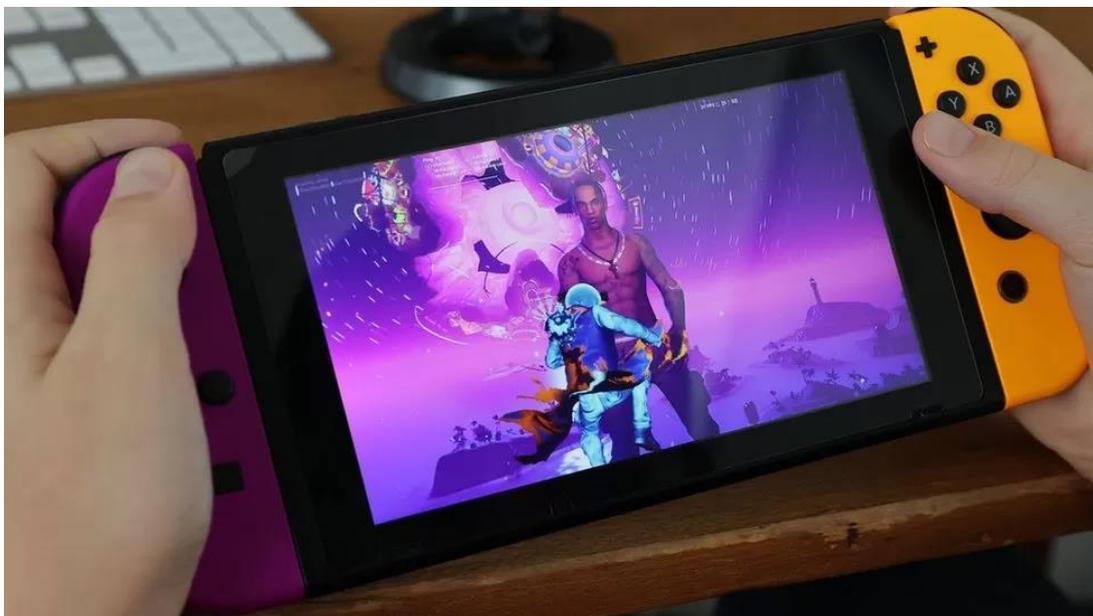


Figure 3: Travis Scott's concert in Fortnite

Source: TIDY, J.: *Fortnite's Travis Virtual Concert Watched by Millions*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52410647>>.

¹² TIDY, J.: *Fortnite's Travis Virtual Concert Watched by Millions*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52410647>>.

Virtual concerts bring up many new challenges on various platforms. From creative to marketing ones. Singers can promote their albums for not just their known audience. The concerts can be watched by audience that came to virtual world for online gaming and the concert was promoted in their background. There are many challenges which can be experienced by singers but also by the audience in Metaverse. At the end, they can gain totally different experience as on real concert.

3.2 Company Events in the Metaverse

During the COVID-19 there was an increase of company video-calls. They called with their employees, customers and suppliers through *Zoom*, *Google Meet* or *Microsoft Teams*. And also after restrictions these video-calls tools are still used in many companies. The main limit of videocalls is in situation, when there is higher number of users. For example, when are 15 people on the videocall, you cannot see their faces on the screen. They are becoming anonymous. Their attention is lacking when the call is long, because they have many impulses. They can also procrastinate, work on other assignments or they can be online. Companies are trying to eliminate some of the written lacks by moving these calls into Metaverse. Main advantage is that it's providing us more interactivity, bigger space, that is not limited with the screen. Everybody can attend Metaverse calls, meetings or parties.

Gather

Gather is a virtual space which offers us to create various types of events. The visuality is like 2D games from 90's. In this virtual world we can create rooms, which users can talk to each others in groups or create a big room, that will be used for lectures. The principle of this platform is simple. You just have to attend this room with your avatar and start to talk to another avatars. If you come closer to other avatar, the web cameras will show up. Of course, you can share files, content. If you need to give lecture in bigger room, people will meet up as avatars and are ready to listen, interact to each other or they can leave to another room. You can send them to other room if you want to set them aside to smaller groups when you are solving a problem or having a teambuilding. The main advantage of *Gather* is the interactivity and innovation in comparison to regular videocalls tools. The disadvantage can occur after long time using this platform.



Figure 4: Gather Virtual Events

Source: WANG, P.: *Why the Metaverse Matters*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.gather.town/blog/why-the-metaverse-matters>>.

Microsoft Mesh

Microsoft is working with mixed reality in Metaverse. *Mesh* is enabling use of holographic collaboration in teams. After you put on Headset you can see other team members and work on your project thanks to Holoportation. For example, when you create 3D models which are displayed the same way as hologram. “Holoportation can mimic the real presence. It allows for projecting yourself as a photo-realistic self to interact as if you are present there in person. Thanks to modern technologies, users can engage with eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions.”¹³

Main advantage of *Mesh* is the reality Mix, Holoportation, virtual cooperation and ability to connect from anywhere. The disadvantage is that *Mesh* is working exclusively in the *Microsoft Teams* platform, and you also have to buy another hardware as *HoloLens2*. That’s why it is quite expensive for companies to have it. Therefore, *Mesh* is more for the public to create and communicate in small development teams.



Figure 5: Microsoft Mesh

Source: Own processing, 2022. See also: *Microsoft Mesh*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/mesh#OneGDCWeb-Banner-dwowqma>>.

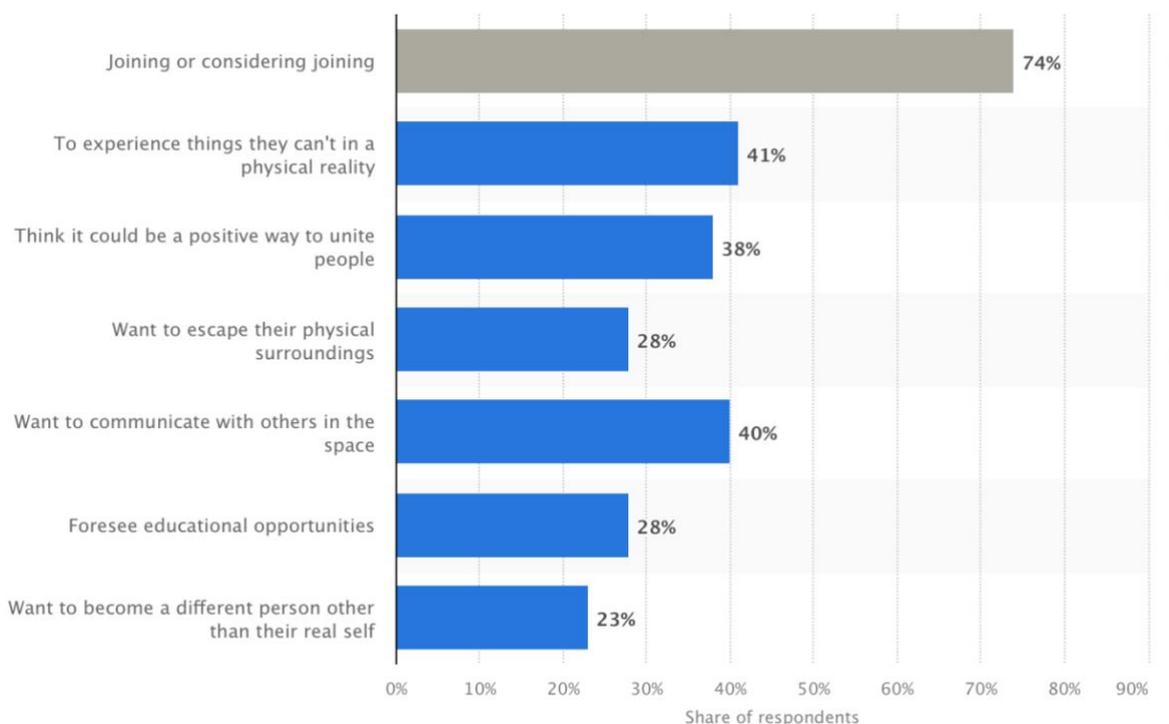
4 Discussion

When we do this research, we can ask ourselves, why the amount of events has increased in Metaverse? As we said earlier, one of the main reason for organizing events in the virtual space is the worldwide pandemic COVID-19. Other reasons can be the possibilities which Metaverse is offering in the event sphere. We can expect that there will be higher growth in organising Metaverse events in the future. It’s proved by available data from USA research on 1000 respondents older than 18 years. This research was done in December 2021. According to this research:

- 74% of adults in the United States said they would join or were considering joining the Metaverse.
- 41% of people wanted to join to experience things that aren’t possible in a physical reality.
- 40% are interested in communicating with others in the space.
- 38% think it would unite people in a positive way.

¹³ MILYUTIN, Y.: *How to Choose a Metaverse for Company Events in 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://learn.g2.com/metaverse-events>>.

Table 1: Share of adults in the United States joining or considering joining the metaverse for various reasons as of December 2021



Source: STATISTA. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288048/united-states-adults-reasons-for-joining-the-metaverse/>>.

These statistics clearly represent that the public is primed for these experiences, which effectively bring together all of these interests into one virtual adventure, and the rising number of Metaverse events in 2022 should come as no surprise.

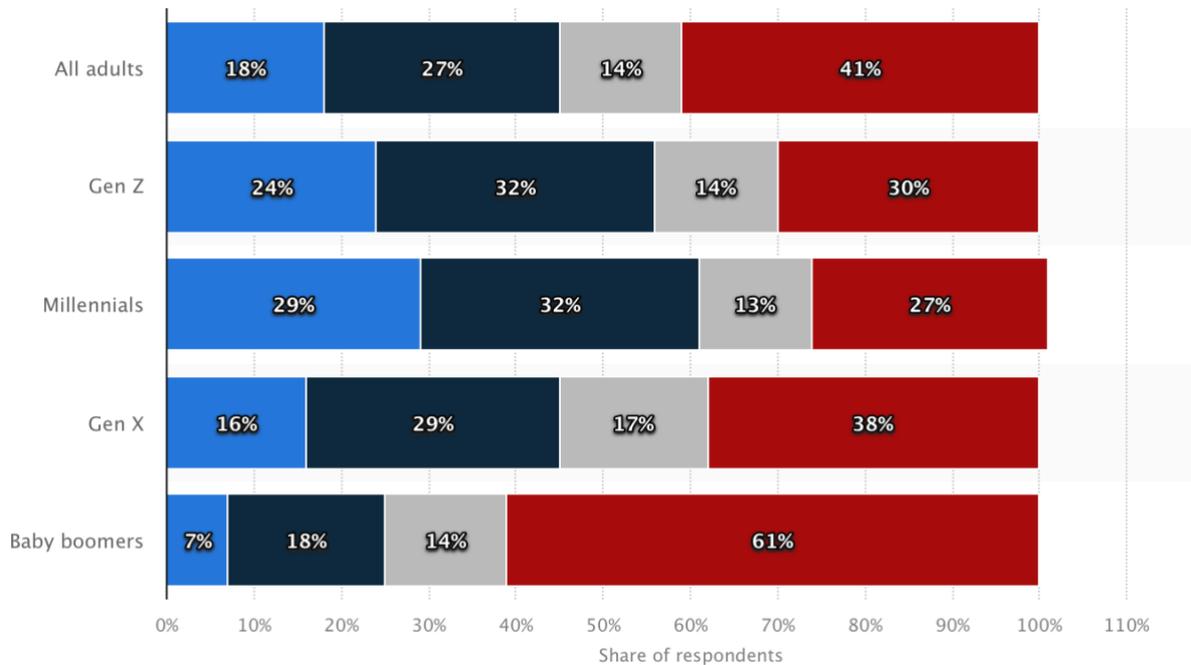
Another part of this research was focused if adult people have interest on visiting musical event in Metaverse. This research was made in 2022 on 40 000 respondents. It was not focused on any other types of events. According to results, which we can see in Table 2, these types of events interest just 45% adult respondents. If we split this sample onto particular generation, we get diversely results:

- Baby Boomers generation, as the oldest part of population has the least interest at this type of event. Those are people born between 1948-1963. It's just 25%.
- The X generation, people born between 1964-1978 have more interest, it's 35%.
- Milenials born between 1979-1991 have showed the biggest interest, around 61%.
- The Z Generation had 56%, people born after 2000.

We were working from *Eduworld* portal, when we split generations.¹⁴ Experts didn't come to an agreement in this topic.

¹⁴ KOČÍNKOVÁ, M.: *Aká je generácia Z?* [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://eduworld.sk/cd/jaroslava-konickova/10542/vychovne-pristupy-ktore-pomahaju-vychovat-dieta-s-dobrym-srdcom>>.

Table 2: Share of internet users in the United States who would be interested in virtually attending a live music event in the metaverse as of March 2022, by generation



Source: STATISTA. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1302440/us-adults-virtually-attend-live-music-event-metaverse/>>.

Around 74% of adults is considering joining to Metaverse (in USA), 45% people seem interested to join musical event in Metaverse. These possibilities would be use by people that have around 43 years and less, so people in productive age and also young ones, which do not have problem using newest technologies. They approach new technologies as common part of their life. Mentioned research represents actual situation and its conclusions cannot be generalized on Slovakia. It is showing us actual state and interest about Metaverse in USA and possible state in other European countries and in Slovakia.

5 Conclusion

We have characterised events, types of events in Metaverse in presented study. On the basis of picked example, we analysed actual state in relative new environment. Apart from analyse we presented the results of research in USA, which helped us to know actual state and interest on joining the Metaverse and attendance musical events. It's clear that Metaverse offers endless possibilities in this area. Organising online event, because of COVID-19 and also how to develop and extend to another areas. Everything has their pros and cons.

When you visit any type of event in Metaverse, you gain advantages:

- In the Metaverse is that there are no limits on attendance.
- Metaverse environment can be expanded to allow more attendees to enter.
- Attendees can create their own fully customizable avatars and then move about different rooms as they choose, talking and gathering with other guests worldwide.
- Whereas physical events require significant investments of time and money in reserving the space, seating, food, and decor, the Metaverse involves none of this.
- Virtual venues allow global audiences to attend without concern about travel expenses, extensive planning, and possible interference from traffic and weather.

- There is far more opportunity for people whose family obligations, such as caring for a child or parent, might have prevented them from attending an event in a physical space.
- Traditional events can sometimes be limiting for people who are deaf or have significant hearing loss. These guests can now communicate freely with anyone else in the room through the use of closed captioning or sign language. Likewise, people whose physical mobility is restricted can easily travel around the virtual space as they please.
- Language barriers don't exist in a Metaverse event. With real-time translation, you can speak to anyone from any country in the world regardless of whether you have a shared language.

Technological specifics of virtual world bring many other advantages. Virtual events in the Metaverse can be more immersive than attending events in person. In a real-life experience, you are often limited to a certain view or angle. However, virtual reality goggles allow for a 360-degree view of a high-definition, 3D environment.

Wearing haptic gloves or using game controllers also allows you to interact with the people and things around you. Because you're likely not to get tired, you can move about for as long as you like, exploring different aspects of the event and meeting as many people as you want.¹⁵

Other various sources present similar advantages, for example:

- Social media can also be used as a great engagement tool – use event hashtags, encourage attendees to post images of their highlights from the event, and get creative with other ways to build a sense of community through social channels.
- Experience with multiple or single content. As with physical events, virtual events have the ability to run multiple content streams simultaneously. This allows different speakers to host sessions at the same time and attendees to choose which sessions they want to watch. If this is not required for your event, then working with multiple materials is best.¹⁶

Along many advantages, Metaverse also brings many disadvantages and limits when organizing events:

- Difficulties in engaging. Engagement has become one of the most sensitive issues for online events. The vast majority of participants in online events often or always solve extraneous tasks while watching and listening to the content. It is also much easier to disconnect from a broadcast than to get up and leave the first row of the hall.
- The online format highlights all the shortcomings of speeches – monotony of speech, inaccuracies, inconsistency in speakers' reports, and lack of quality content. The conclusion naturally arises that, in order to keep the attention of participants, it is necessary to increase the value of the content, give out information in a more concentrated way, squeeze highlights out of each report, and prepare for questions.¹⁷

We refill the disadvantages with another ones:

- Physical presence on events and having contact with live people is irreplaceable in online world.
- You can communicate with other attendance but in reality, you can feel lonely.

¹⁵ NEVILLE, C.: *Events in the Metaverse: How They Change the Industry*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://events.com/blog/events-in-the-metaverse-how-they-change-the-industry/>>.

¹⁶ *Metaverse Events: Ultimate Guide (2022)*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.party.space/blog/the-ultimate-guide-to-metaverse-events/>>.

¹⁷ *Metaverse Events: Ultimate Guide (2022)*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.party.space/blog/the-ultimate-guide-to-metaverse-events/>>.

- When you attend an event, sometimes you have to travel there so you can discover new places, countries and cultures.
- The sound experience is limited with our technology, you cannot replace a real music at concert.
- Smell and taste cannot be reproduced.
- The technological equipment and connection to internet can be limited or unavailable for someone.

The list of pros and cons can be even longer. New technologies always bring new challenges which can we overcome but overall, progress takes time. The Metaverse concept is extensive, and it strikes on different restrictions and limits. For example, price accessibility of component for virtual reality is not accessible for everybody now. On the other hand, it shows us that we can easily and effectively adapt on online world. Also, in areas which were not used as much online as now. The main evidence is the number of events that were organized online during COVID-19. The future can bring completely different use for Metaverse as is it now and we can just guess that one's it will look like in *Ready Player One*¹⁸ film. We will parallelly function in physical world and in virtual world as avatars.

Acknowledgement: "This article was supported by the Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure, project name: "Addressing the societal threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic", project code: 313011ASN4, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund."

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¹⁸ SPIELBERG, S. (Director): *Ready Player One*. [Blu-ray]. Los Angeles : Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018.

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BRANDS, PRODUCTS AND ADVERTISING IN METAVERSE

Michal Halaška, Pavel Vavruška

Abstract:

Metaverse has gained traction in the tech world in recent years. The major technology companies are investing significant sums of money in the creation of the metaverse whose main feature will be the fusion between the virtual world and the physical world using augmented and virtual reality technologies. It is expected that virtual worlds will provide companies with new opportunities in ways of conducting business, interaction with brands, products advertisement, etc. Although the technology and infrastructure do not yet exist to allow the development of new immersive virtual worlds at scale, researchers are increasingly examining the transformative impact of the metaverse across many industries such as, e.g., marketing, education, healthcare, etc. In this research, we focus on marketing research, consumer brands, their marketing activities, and advertisement possibilities provided by selected metaverse platforms. Firstly, a systematic literature review on marketing research in metaverse was conducted with a focus on *Scopus* and *Web of Science* databases. Secondly, we performed a content analysis utilizing categories representing a range of marketing concepts, including: consumer brand, product, metaverse platform, and advertising options provided by selected metaverse platforms. Thus, the result of this research is an analysis of the state of marketing research within the metaverse. Furthermore, we analysed the utilization of metaverse from the perspective of selected consumer brands on one side and the advertisement options provided by selected metaverse platforms.

Keywords:

Advertisement. Brand. Metaverse. Product. Virtual World.

1 Introduction

In recent years, major technology companies such as, e.g., *Meta*, *Nvidia*, *Google*, *Apple*, etc., started to invest an enormous amount of money in the metaverse. It is estimated that in 2026, 25% of people worldwide will spend at least 1 hour a day in the metaverse for digital activities, including shopping, social interaction, and entertainment. The growing enthusiasm for the metaverse suggests that consumers will increasingly accept a dematerialization of their extended-self, leading them to ascribe greater value to virtual objects.¹ However, it is not clear whether the possessions will be similar to those of the physical world. Thus, it is necessary for brands to think about the impact of metaverse on consumer behaviour. In year 2021, *Roblox* floated on the stock market, popularizing the concept of metaverse described as sustainable, shared 3D virtual spaces. The *Roblox* platform has 8 critical features of the metaverse: identity, friends, immersive, anywhere, low friction, variety of content, economy, and safety. Similarly, *Nvidia* released Omniverse as a virtual working platform for the metaverse, and social company *Facebook* changed its name to *Meta*, reflecting its growing ambitions towards the metaverse.² The metaverse is spreading its influence in a way that is completely unique from previous global culture influences. The global metaverse market should grow to 280 billion US dollars by 2025.³ In fact, significant real-world market value investments have already been made in alternate digital spaces like, e.g., *Decentraland* or *Second Life*. According to Lee and Kim, companies and platform developers have to develop business models which play various roles within the metaverse ecosystem such as, e.g., connection of values created in metaverse to real

¹ PETIT, O. et al.: Consumer Consciousness in Multisensory Extended Reality. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 1.

² WANG, J. et al.: Metaverse, SED Model, and New Theory of Value. In *Complexity*, 2022, Vol. 2022, No. 1, p. 1.

³ JEON, J. E.: The Effects of User Experience-Based Design Innovativeness on User-Metaverse Platform Channel Relationships in South Korea. In *Journal of Distribution Science*, 2021, Vol. 19, No. 11, p. 85.

world, changes to the way people use internet, the way they communicate, and the way they work.⁴

Metaverse is a new type of internet application and social form that combines virtual and physical world. Internet technology through the metaverse concept expands the possibilities of interaction, access to information, and consumption, bringing opportunities and challenges to companies and their marketing teams.⁵ Even though the focus of this research is on marketing activities, metaverse is going to impact many other areas such as education, healthcare, gaming industry, management, manufacturing, retailing, etc. In metaverse, people can engage in social activities such as discussing an issue, collaborating on a project, playing games, and learning from experiencing or solving some problems.⁶ Many companies have begun to adapt the metaverse to increase brand appeal and engagement. In 2018, VR technology was used by more than 170 million people, 62% of which said they felt engaged with a brand experiencing VR, and 71% of consumers believe that brands using virtual reality are forward thinking in e-commerce.⁷

The concept of metaverse is constantly evolving and developing. It is essentially impossible to predict future developments in this area, as it is still in its early stages. However, the development of the metaverse has to go through three progressive stages: digital twins, digital natives, and co-existence of physical-virtual reality.⁸ At the first stage, digital twins focus on the ability to perceive and mirroring the properties of physical entities or characteristics of human society. In the second stage, digital natives concentrate on native content related to the real world. In the third stage, the metaverse will become a long-lasting self-sustaining virtual world that can interconnect multiple virtual worlds within and blend with the real world. Although the direction of building metaverse has gone through different stages after decades of development, social activities in the virtual world have always been considered the core element of the metaverse. Metaverse is based on VR (virtual reality), AR (augmented reality) and MR (mixed reality) technologies which enable multisensory interaction with virtual environments, digital objects, and people. In recent years, Metaverse has begun to use other emerging technologies such as blockchain, cryptocurrencies, artificial intelligence, web 3.0, etc. Further supporting technologies are network and computing technologies and video game technology. Park and Kim provide a detailed description and analysis of all the technologies involved in the development and use of metaverse (e.g., head-mounted displays, motion input devices, scene and object recognition, motion rendering, agent persona modelling, language and multimodal interaction, etc.).⁹

⁴ LEE, U. K., KIM, H.: UTAUT in Metaverse: An “Ifland” Case. In *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 2022, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 624.

⁵ See: DE BRITO SILVA, M. J. et al.: Avatar Marketing: A Study on the Engagement and Authenticity of Virtual Influencers on Instagram. In *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 2022, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 1-19. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13278-022-00966-w>>.

⁶ HWANG, G. J., CHIEN, S. Y.: Definition, Roles, and Potential Research Issues of the Metaverse in Education: An Artificial Intelligence Perspective. In *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, 2022, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 1.

⁷ MEKSUMPHUN, K., KERDVIBULVECH, C.: A New Study of Needs and Motivations Generated by Virtual Reality Games and Factor Products for Generation Z in Bangkok. In BENNOUR, A., ENSARI, T., KESSENTINI, Y., EOM, S. (eds.): *Intelligent Systems and Pattern Recognition, Communications in Computer and Information Science, Springer International Publishing*. Cham : Springer International Publishing, 2022, p. 35. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08277-1_3>.

⁸ WANG, J. et al.: Metaverse, SED Model, and New Theory of Value. In *Complexity*, 2022, Vol. 2022, No. 1, p. 2.

⁹ PARK, S. M., KIM, Y. G.: A Metaverse: Taxonomy, Components, Applications, and Open Challenges. In *IEEE Access*, 2022, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4230.

In this article, we focus on marketing research, consumer brands, their marketing activities, and advertisement possibilities provided by selected metaverse platforms. First, a systematic literature review on marketing research in metaverse was conducted with focus on *Scopus* and *Web of Science* databases. Secondly, we performed a content analysis utilizing categories representing a range of marketing concepts, including: consumer brand, product, metaverse platform, and advertising options provided by selected metaverse platforms. We postulated three research questions: RQ1) what is the current state of marketing research in the field of metaverse; RQ2) how do consumer brands use metaverse; RQ3) what advertising options are provided by selected metaverse platforms. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In section 2, we provide a literature review of metaverse concept. In section 3, we present the methodology of the research. In section 4, we provide a systematic literature review of marketing research in metaverse and content analysis content analysis utilizing categories representing a range of marketing concepts, including: consumer brand, product, metaverse platform, and advertising options provided by selected metaverse platforms. In section 5, we present results of the research and finally, we conclude.

2 Literature Review

There is no single definition of metaverse. Dionisio et al. define virtual world as persistent online computer-generated environment where multiple users in remote physical locations can interact in real time for the purpose of work or play.¹⁰ According to Owens et al., metaverse is a three-dimensional virtual world where people interact with each other and their environment, using the metaphor of the real world but without its physical limitations.¹¹ Nevelsteen defines virtual world as a simulated environment where: many agents can virtually interact with each other, act and react to things, phenomena and environment; agents can be zero or many human(s), each represented by many entities called “virtual self” (avatar), or many software agents; all actions/reactions/interactions must happen in real-time shared spatiotemporal non-pausable virtual environment; the environment may consist of many data spaces, but the collection of data spaces should constitute a shared data space, one persistent shard.¹² According to Díaz, metaverse is an immersive, three-dimensional, virtual and also multi-user online environment, which allows people to relate to each other, socially and economically, regardless of their location, using computer tools such as personified agents and simulation.¹³ Lee and Kim identified main components of metaverse mentioned in each definition as follows: avatar, world, synchronicity, interactivity, immersion and realism, social collaboration and permanence.¹⁴ Yang et al. provide a different perspective on metaverse as a complete and self-consistent economic system, a complete chain of the production and consumption of digital items composed of four parts: digital creation, digital asset, digital market, and digital

¹⁰ See: DIONISIO, J. D. N., BURNS III., W. G., GILBERT, R.: 3D Virtual Worlds and the Metaverse: Current Status and Future Possibilities. In *ACM Computing Surveys*, 2013, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 1-19. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cs_fac>.

¹¹ See: OWENS, D. et al.: An Empirical Investigation of Virtual World Projects and Metaverse Technology Capabilities. In *ACM SIGMIS Database: The DATABASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 2011, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 74-101. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1015&context=isqafacpub>>.

¹² NEVELSTEEN, K. J. L.: Virtual World, Defined from a Technological Perspective, and Applied to Video Games, Mixed Reality and the Metaverse. In *Computer Animation and Virtual World*, 2017, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 18.

¹³ See: DÍAZ, J. E. M.: Virtual World as a Complement to Hybrid and Mobile Learning. In *IJET*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 22, p. 267-274. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://arxiv.org/abs/1511.08464>>.

¹⁴ See: LEE, U. K., KIM, H.: UTAUT in Metaverse: An “Ifland” Case. In *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 2022, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 613-635. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/0718-1876/17/2/32>>.

currency.¹⁵ The development of the economic system in metaverse can be challenging as traditional economists have not encountered it yet (e.g., transaction volumes in metaverse systems are much higher than those in the physical world due to the features of digital products and markets). Yang et al. mention differences between the economy of the metaverse and the conventional economy can be summarised as follows: 1) identity determines values instead of the undifferentiated labour in the conventional economy, 2) marginal benefits will increase in metaverse instead of diminishing marginal benefits of production in the physical world, 3) marginal costs of products will decrease, compared with the physical world, and 4) transaction costs in metaverse tend to zero, which will incur frequent transactions.¹⁶ However, a new definition of metaverse is needed due to growing proportion of social activities enhanced with neural-net methods and contents, mobile-based always-on access to connectivity with reality using virtual currency. According to Park and Kim, there are three main differences between the novel and earlier metaverses: first, the rapid development of deep learning, which dramatically improves the accuracy of vision and language recognition, and the development of generative models enables a more immersive environment and natural movement.¹⁷ Second, metaverse previously served based on PC access and had low consistency due to time and space constraints, while now it is possible to access metaverses anytime, anywhere due to the mobile devices that can connect to the internet at all times. Third, the program coding can be done in the metaverse world, and it is more bonded to real life with virtual currency.

Davis et al. or Owens et al. define a metaverse technology as a set of following capabilities: communication (e.g., language variety, channel expansion, communication support, feedback, etc.), rendering (e.g., personalization, vividness, etc.), interaction (e.g., interactivity, mobility, and immediacy, etc.) and team process (e.g., process structure, information processing appropriation support, etc.).¹⁸ In a technological sense, metaverse is considered a new connection platform for web 3.0. Thus, it is expected that it will fundamentally change the way people communicate, interact, create value, and generate economies. Metaverse allows real-time interaction, communication, and content creation by users. However, unlike some of their gaming counterparts, which are quest-oriented, virtual worlds in metaverses are created by their users.¹⁹ According to Dionisio et al., content creation by users is one of the crucial attributes of metaverses.²⁰ Moreover, it should be up to users to determine the purpose of residing in these worlds. Thus, developers of these platforms should provide no narrative which is to be

¹⁵ See: YANG, Q. et al.: Fusing Blockchain and AI with Metaverse: A Survey. In *IEEE Open Journal of the Computer Society*, 2022, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 122-136. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://arxiv.org/abs/2201.03201>>.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ PARK, S. M., KIM, Y. G.: A Metaverse: Taxonomy, Components, Applications, and Open Challenges. In *IEEE Access*, 2022, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4230.

¹⁸ See: DAVIS, A. et al.: Avatars, People, and Virtual Worlds: Foundations for Research in Metaverses. In *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 2009, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 90-117. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol10/iss2/1/>>; See also: OWENS, D. et al.: An Empirical Investigation of Virtual World Projects and Metaverse Technology Capabilities. In *ACM SIGMIS Database: The DATABASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 2011, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 74-101. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220627731_An_Empirical_Investigation_of_Virtual_World_Projects_and_Metaverse_Technology_Capabilities>.

¹⁹ STEURER, M. E.: A Webshop for Digital Assets in Virtual Worlds Supported by a 3D Object Representation. In PALEOLOGU, C., MAVROMOUSTAKIS, C., MINEA, M. (eds.): *Sixth International Multi-Conference on Computing in the Global Information Technology (ICCGI 2011)*. Wilmington : Iaria Xps Press, 2011, p. 171-176. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/full-record/WOS:000456651700029>>.

²⁰ See: DIONISIO, J. D. N., BURNS III., W. G., GILBERT, R.: 3D Virtual Worlds and the Metaverse: Current Status and Future Possibilities. In *ACM Computing Surveys*, 2013, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 1-38. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/2480741.2480751>>.

followed, and there are no system-defined goals or quests. Instead metaverses should allow for wide range of activities including play, information seeking, team interaction, and commerce.²¹ The metaverse is sometimes understood as a virtual world that can be customized and freely explored through multimedia techniques. Metaverse needs to be able to provide users with a more realistic experience and rich activities, which require more advanced technologies to support metaverse construction and user centric exploration.²² As such, every component of metaverse should place the human user at its core. Therefore, the key to exploring the metaverse is to provide a good experience for users. However, it is not enough to rely on multimedia technologies. According to Hwang and Chien, there are three features that make metaverse quite different from conventional VR and AR technologies: shared, persistent, and decentralized.²³ These features of the metaverse are going to be enabled by artificial intelligence technologies.

According to Díaz's metaverse definition, users observe and explore virtual worlds through interactions via their avatars in different ways (e.g., text chat, voice chat, limited forms of gestures, etc.).²⁴ These avatars then organize communities in a virtual space, creating digital virtual social networks, forming, and in turn being formed by this culture. Thus, these virtual worlds are grounded in creative endeavor, which is one of the crucial reasons to stay in the metaverse. Much of this creativity is manifesting itself through terraforming (the shaping of virtual geography), virtual architectures and vehicles, virtual artwork, and most importantly as a proliferation of design artefacts for users' avatars. Even though virtual worlds imitate a real world, avatars usually have additional capabilities like flying or teleportation for far distanced places. Avatars are defined as graphical representations of human subjects in virtual space. Nevelsteen adopts the definition of an avatar as a virtual entity within the virtual world that each user identifies with.²⁵ Davis et al. mention three concepts of interest: representation (characterizes appearance of avatars and their environment), presence (is viewed as the sense of being in an environment) and immersion (is viewed as a degree to which people perceive that they are interacting with their virtual environment rather than with their physical surroundings).²⁶ Much research has been conducted on the interaction channels of virtual avatars. There has been much attention on non-verbal expressions such as the gaze, the facial expression, and gestures of an avatar. For example, minute movements of the pupil add a sense of immersion and social presence. Studies found that participants perceived a higher level of social presence when communicating via richer media than through a text-based medium.²⁷

²¹ See: DAVIS, A. et al.: Avatars, People, and Virtual Worlds: Foundations for Research in Metaverses. In *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 2009, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 90-117. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol10/iss2/1/>>.

²² See: ZHAO, Y. et al.: Metaverse: Perspectives from Graphics, Interactions and Visualization. In *Visual Informatics*, 2022, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 56-67. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2468502X22000158>>.

²³ HWANG, G. J., CHIEN, S. Y.: Definition, Roles, and Potential Research Issues of the Metaverse in Education: An Artificial Intelligence Perspective. In *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, 2022, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 4.

²⁴ See: DÍAZ, J. E. M.: Virtual World as a Complement to Hybrid and Mobile Learning. In *IJET*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 22, p. 267-274. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://online-journals.org/index.php/ijet/article/view/14393>>.

²⁵ NEVELSTEEN, K. J. L.: Virtual World, Defined from a Technological Perspective, and Applied to Video Games, Mixed Reality and the Metaverse. In *Computer Animation and Virtual World*, 2017, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 17.

²⁶ See: DAVIS, A. et al.: Avatars, People, and Virtual Worlds: Foundations for Research in Metaverses. In *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 2009, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 90-117. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol10/iss2/1/>>.

²⁷ PARK, S., KIM, S. P., WHANG, M.: Individual's Social Perception of Virtual Avatars Embodied with Their Habitual Facial Expressions and Facial Appearance. In *Sensors*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 17, p. 3.

2 Methodology

A systematic review of the literature focused on *Web of Science* and *Scopus* databases. In both databases, a query with the term “METAVERSE” and revealed 1075 articles on the subject of metaverse as our intention was to conduct as wide a search as possible. The results from the query were filtered to remove non-English articles and duplicates. After that, we systematically analysed the titles, key words, and abstracts to filter out articles that were not related to marketing research. If it was not clear from title, keywords, and abstract that the paper deals with marketing research, we analysed the text of the paper. Then we analysed the text of the papers and their references to extend missing research that was not included in *Web of Science* and *Scopus* databases. We achieved a final set of 22 articles that fall within the area of marketing research and metaverse.

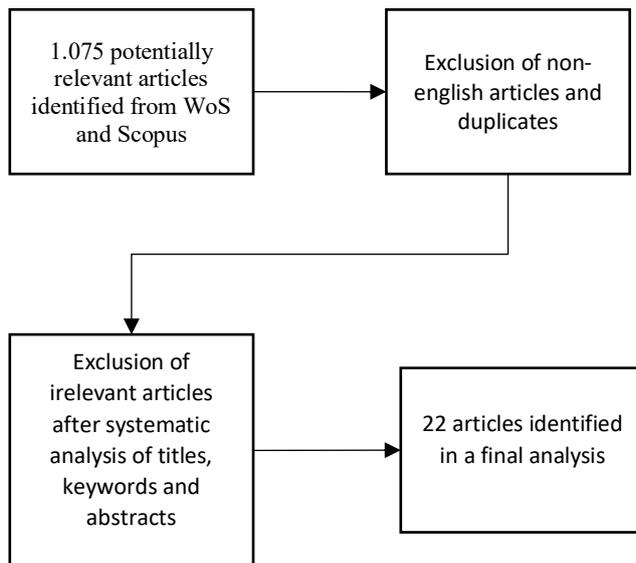


Figure 1: Process for selecting the final papers for analysis.

Source: own processing, 2022.

After systematic literature was conducted with focus on marketing research within metaverse. We performed a content analysis utilizing categories representing a range of marketing concepts including consumer brand, product, metaverse platform, and advertising options provided by selected metaverse platforms. The main criteria for including consumer brands in content analysis were popularity and brand awareness. The assumption behind this criterion was that popular and familiar consumer brands will be present in the metaverse market and the most innovative. The main criteria for inclusion of metaverse platforms were popularity and familiarity of metaverse platforms. Specifically, we performed a content analysis of web sites that were dedicated to the selected consumer brands and metaverse platforms.

3 Systematic Literature Review

The theory of consumption values (TCV) explains why and how consumers decide to acquire a specific product or brand from a range of available selections.²⁸ There are five types of generic consumption values that influence consumer choice and behaviour: functional, social,

²⁸ TAN, T. M. et al.: How Do Ethical Consumers Utilize Sharing Economy Platforms as Part of Their Sustainable Resale Behavior? The Role of Consumers' Green Consumption Values. In *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 2022, Vol. 176, No. 3, p. 1-2.

emotional, conditional, and epistemic. TCV was applied in a variety of marketing contexts, including digital marketing, tourism marketing, social marketing, green and sustainable marketing, educational marketing, and second-hand P2P platforms.

According to Petit et al., the way in which marketers stimulate the consumer's senses undoubtedly plays an essential role in determining how sensory information will be consciously perceived by the latter. The lack of varied sensory inputs, relative to the physical world, has long been a limitation to consumer consciousness. Therefore, marketers can choose which sense to stimulate, and if they want to make these stimulations congruent with the consumer's physical and/or digital environment, or even to make them completely incongruent.²⁹ Future research is needed to understand how best to stimulate the consumer's senses to adapt to different contexts and make them more conscious of their experiences. According to Shen et al., for better adoption of immersive technology in virtual commerce applications, the discoveries in user behaviour literature need to be effectively transformed into the design artifacts (broadly defined as a construct, a model, a method, or an instantiation) of application design research and development.³⁰

Extended reality (ER) applications are found in the three major areas of consumer marketing: communications and advertising; retailing; and creating or enhancing the consumption experience.³¹ Virtual marketing can involve virtual presentations of physical products, retail space design and analysis, consumer behaviour research, and virtual experience quality measures. There is a decreasing success of known forms of advertising due to the increasing resistance of audiences. Thus, advertisers have to move towards newer and more innovative forms of advertising. Advertising in virtual worlds is a newer form of reaching recipients. For a digital marketing campaign to be successful, the essential and most important aspect is to connect with the right audience. With AI powered advertising, it can be simple and straightforward for marketers to target the right audience. AI tools can gather information, analyse the data, and predict future behaviours. With these data, marketers can target advertisements according to the interest and predicted consumption patterns of the audience. Moreover, advertisements can be enhanced with Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), thus collecting more information from the customers, and AI can eventually utilize the data for a more engaging and personalized advertisement experience.³² Nowadays, consumers spend through experience because they value the identity of the brand when making final purchase. Thus, consumers have the desire to shop with a variety of experiences. In the era of marketing 4.0, it is necessary that consumers directly experience brand or product and understand the concept and characteristics of the brand and product.³³ According to Dozio et al., knowing the emotional reaction of a consumer when interacting with a product could help a company to understand whether the product will be successful on the market.³⁴ The ability to

²⁹ PETIT, O. et al.: Consumer Consciousness in Multisensory Extended Reality. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 5.

³⁰ SHEN, B. et al.: How to Promote User Purchase in Metaverse? A Systematic Literature Review on Consumer Behavior Research and Virtual Commerce Application Design. In *Applied Sciences*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 23, p. 2.

³¹ WAGNER, R., COZMIUC, D.: Extended Reality in Marketing – A Multiple Case Study on Internet of Things Platforms. In *Information*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 6, p. 278.

³² DWIEDI, Y. K. et al.: Setting the Future of Digital and Social Media Marketing Research: Perspectives and Research Propositions. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2022, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 20.

³³ See: JEON, J. E.: The Effects of User Experience-Based Design Innovativeness on User-Metaverse Platform Channel Relationships in South Korea. In *Journal of Distribution Science*, 2021, Vol. 19, No. 11, p. 81-90. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO202131659495625.page>>.

³⁴ DOZIO, N. et al.: A Design Methodology for Affective Virtual Reality. In *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 2022, Vol. 162, No. 1, p. 2.

distinguish emotions well depends on the stimuli that stimulate these emotions. These stimuli can be enriched through AR and VR technology.³⁵ This can be very well used in human-computer and brain-computer interface systems to improve the quality of user interfaces, entertainment, well-being, medical, and rehabilitation, etc. Recent uprising in artificial intelligence also helps contribute to smarter, more realistic, more responsive, and smoother experiences, bringing the virtual and real worlds closer together.³⁶

In recent years, advertisers resort to moments of leisure and fun for consumers to experiment with the presence of their brand. Therefore, a more emotional relationship can be created with the public, who demand not only products from them, but also a philosophy of life that is known through brand values. To do this, companies use a variety of formats and media when creating this content.³⁷ Based on their results, non-intrusive advergaming can be carried out and branding can be improved, especially among audience under 30 years of age.

AR Marketing

AR marketing represents a novel, potentially disruptive, subdiscipline within marketing. More specifically, similar to the advent of the world wide web accompanied by online marketing, search engine optimization, and social media, AR-infused marketing activities can be positioned within AR marketing. According to Chylinski et al., AR marketing is still in the early stages of mainstream adoption.³⁸ However, emerging applications of AR marketing suggest a distinct marketing approach that aligns the technology with customer's experience of situated cognition. Unlike attitude-based marketing, where traditional media (e.g., print, audio, video, etc.) communicate attributes of a product or service in the hope that such impressions shape customer behaviour in a specific decision context, AR marketing offers digital affordances that affect the customer's perception of the decision context directly. Therefore, AR marketing shifts the focus of marketing from attributes of a product or service to affordances of the situation in which value is experienced through engagement. Chylinsky et al. in their work classify types of AR marketing affordances according to embedded, embodied, adaptive, and shared experiences and illustrate how the various types of AR marketing experiences can be valuable to customers.³⁹

Rauschnabel et al. define AR marketing as the strategic integration of AR experiences, alone or in combination with other media or brand-related cues, to achieve overarching marketing

³⁵ DAŞDEMİR, Y.: Cognitive Investigation on the Effect of Augmented Reality-Based Reading on Emotion Classification Performance: A New Dataset. In *Biomedical Signal Processing and Control*, 2022, Vol. 78, No. 1, p. 2.

³⁶ See: MEKSUMPHUN, K., KERDVIBULVECH, C.: A New Study of Needs and Motivations Generated by Virtual Reality Games and Factor Products for Generation Z in Bangkok. In: BENNOUR, A. et al. (eds.): *Intelligent Systems and Pattern Recognition, Communications in Computer and Information Science, Springer International Publishing*. Cham : Springer International Publishing, 2022, p. 29-42. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08277-1_3>.

³⁷ See: BONALES-DAIMIEL, G., MARTÍNEZ-ESTRELLA, E. C., LIBERAL ORMAECHEA, S.: Analysis of the Use of Advergaming and Metaverse in Spain and Mexico. In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 2022, Vol. 80, No. 1, p. 155-178. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiO5NuWvfT7AhXWuKQKHQZdDa4QFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fnuevaepoca.revistalatinacs.org%2Findex.php%2Frevista%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F1802%2F4039&usq=AOvVaw3nIxK3wRUOgTNDAtxT-yoJ>>.

³⁸ See: CHYLINSKI, M. et al.: Augmented Reality Marketing: A Technology-Enabled Approach to Situated Customer Experience. In *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 2020, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 374-384. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1441358220300306>>.

³⁹ See: CHYLINSKI, M. et al.: Augmented Reality Marketing: A Technology-Enabled Approach to Situated Customer Experience. In *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 2020, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 374-384. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1441358220300306>>.

goals by creating value for the brand, its stakeholders, and societies at large, while considering ethical implications.⁴⁰ AR marketing could be used for extension of customer journey within pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases, as well as between offline and online touchpoints which goes beyond solely utilitarian aspect.⁴¹ According to Rauschnabel et al., AR marketing should take advantage of the following: 1) combine benefits of the reduced reality (e.g., interactivity or accessibility) with benefits of normal reality (e.g., unlimited space, 3D, natural interaction with objects); 2) embedding virtual information in a specific situation and consumption context; and 3) AR content should be treated as a new category of products.⁴²

Smink et al. examined three underlying processes (spatial presence, perceived personalization, and perceived intrusiveness) that could explain the persuasiveness of AR apps.⁴³ They showed that spatial presence and perceived personalization can explain positive persuasive responses toward AR apps. For the app that augmented the user's face with virtual products, perceived personalization enhanced purchase intentions, while perceived intrusiveness had negative persuasive consequences. For the app that showed virtual products in one's surroundings, spatial presence enhanced purchase intentions, and no negative persuasive consequences were found. According to Javornik et al., it is well documented that experiences have a strategic importance for luxury brands, which can reach new heights due to AR's unique capacity characteristics to intertwine the virtual and the physical, meaning that luxury consumers can immerse themselves in virtually enhanced experiences. Javornik et al. define two strategic approaches that are deployed to enhance brand experience through AR: ephemeral elevation and auratic amplification.⁴⁴ Moreover, AR can also play a role in areas such as the product mix, where it can be used to virtually extend products.⁴⁵

According to Kowalczyk et al., marketing research on AR characteristics focused primarily on five characteristics: interaction with virtual products, processing quality, information about displayed products, quality of virtual product presentation, and handling of personal information.⁴⁶ In their study, they explore the relative advantage of AR-based over web-based

⁴⁰ See: RAUSCHNABEL, P. A. et al.: What Is Augmented Reality Marketing? Its Definition, Complexity, and Future. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2022, Vol. 142, No. 3, p. 1140-1150. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296321010043>>.

⁴¹ See: JAVORNIK, A. et al.: Strategic Approaches to Augmented Reality Deployment by Luxury Brands. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 136, No. 11, p. 284-292. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353669037_Strategic_approaches_to_augmented_reality_deployment_by_luxury_brands>.

⁴² RAUSCHNABEL, P. A. et al.: What Is Augmented Reality Marketing? Its Definition, Complexity, and Future. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2022, Vol. 142, No. 3, p. 1140-1145. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296321010043>>.

⁴³ See: SMINK, A. R., VAN REIJMERSDAL, E. A., VAN NOORT, G., NEIJENS, P. C.: Shopping in Augmented Reality: The Effects of Spatial Presence, Personalization and Intrusiveness on App and Brand Responses. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 118, No. 1, p. 474-485. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320304586>>.

⁴⁴ See: JAVORNIK, A. et al.: Strategic Approaches to Augmented Reality Deployment by Luxury Brands. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 136, No. 11, p. 284-292. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353669037_Strategic_approaches_to_augmented_reality_deployment_by_luxury_brands>.

⁴⁵ RAUSCHNABEL, P. A. et al.: What Is Augmented Reality Marketing? Its Definition, Complexity, and Future. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2022, Vol. 142, No. 3, p. 1140-1145. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296321010043>>.

⁴⁶ See: KOWALCZYK, P., SIEPMANN, C., ADLER, J.: Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Consumer Responses to Augmented Reality in e-Commerce: A Comparative Study. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 124, No. 1, p. 357-373. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320307220>>.

product presentations. They show that system characteristics of system quality and product informativeness are perceived as higher for web- than for AR-based product presentation, while no differences exist in terms of interactivity and reality congruence. Since websites offer additional information, they are better suited to satisfy the information demand of potential customers. Therefore, identifying the required information would help improve AR apps. Reality congruence does not differ significantly, which means that products on the AR app are perceived as equally realistic as product pictures shown on the mobile website. However, AR-based product presentations are superior to web-based product presentation in terms of affective consumer responses (especially with regards to immersion and enjoyment).

VR Marketing

The VR concept has been well-known for decades. However, its popularity has only recently been increasing due to availability of affordable and powerful consumer-grade VR head-mounted displays (HMDs). HMDs offer the most immersive VR experiences due to their advanced technical capabilities, such as high-quality image rendering and various peripherals that allow freedom of movement in the virtual environment.⁴⁷ Studies in the field of VR tend to apply the SOR (Stimuli-Organism-Response) framework. This framework presents stimuli (as atmospheric cues) that influences consumers' emotional and cognitive states (organism), which, in turn, result in approach or avoidance behaviour (e.g., intention to stay, revisit, purchase or not). According to Bousba and Arya, existing studies provided evidence of a positive association of AR/VR-based gamification with brand loyalty, brand attitude, brand awareness, brand engagement, brand involvement, brand love and buying impulse.⁴⁸

VR marketing is particularly effective because of its ability to enrich consumer experiences, e.g., product appraisal, store visits, etc., and render more valuable consumer experiences. Therefore, VR marketing can be an ideal platform for experiential marketing. van Berlo et al. show that HMD VR technology allows product appraisal outside a traditional consumer learning context by demonstrating that consumer learning processes can be facilitated within a gamified HMD VR environment.⁴⁹ Moreover, brands in HMD VR environments can elicit clear emotional responses independent of the emotional response elicited by playing the VR game. A customer interaction with brands through VR technology is heavily dependent upon their environment, brand campaigns that employ VR technology offer completely synthetic and vivid worlds that can exceed the bounds of a physical reality environment. These branded VR experiences enable customers to be fully immersed with environments they can interact with. VR marketing campaigns offer experiences that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries that restrict other marketing communication in the real world. These campaigns can enable interaction with living or synthetic others, increasing the extent to which the experience is related to the self. According to Regt et al., VR marketing campaigns offer experiences that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries that restrict other marketing communication in the

⁴⁷ DINCELLI, E., YAYLA, A.: Immersive Virtual Reality in the Age of the Metaverse: A Hybrid-Narrative Review Based on the Technology Affordance Perspective. In *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 2022, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 1.

⁴⁸ See: BOUSBA, Y., ARYA, V.: Let's Connect in Metaverse. Brand's New Destination to Increase Consumers' Affective Brand Engagement & Their Satisfaction and Advocacy. In *Journal of Content, Community and Communication*, 2022, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 276-293. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.amity.edu/gwalior/jccc/pdf/june-2022-19.pdf>>.

⁴⁹ See: VAN BERLO, Z. M. C. et al.: Brands in Virtual Reality Games: Affective Processes within Computer-Mediated Consumer Experiences. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 122, No. 1, p. 458-465. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320305774>>.

real world.⁵⁰ Prior literature on the underlying mechanism of being transported in a narrative ad and processing the information indicates that easy-to-navigate 360-degree ads are more likely than a narrative ad in standard video format to result in narrative transportation. However, currently little is known about the customer outcomes that arise from the engagement of the customer brand in VR context. Regt et al. show that branded VR experiences produce string emotive and memorable events that contribute positively towards the lasting brand perception and attitude.⁵¹ The opportunity for future research in HMDs is to provide a richer and personalized user experience (e.g., invoking emotions and sense through interactive AI agents and customized virtual environments, collecting and utilizing rich behavioural data from users for personalized experiences, innovative VR marketing campaigns that offer an immersive experience). Dincelli and Yayla identified five focal affordances of immersive VR: embodiment affordances, navigability affordances, sense-ability affordances, interactivity affordances and create-ability affordances.⁵²

Retail

In traditional retailing, the key elements of product atmospherics (e.g., smell, taste, touch) are prevalent, and the customer has the opportunity to trial a product, which can increase consumer confidence when the customer is not familiar with the product.⁵³ From the retailers' point of view, e-retailing offers many opportunities and challenges. First of all, e-retailing may reduce the investment required or change the nature of the capital investments. Instead of focusing on the management of hard assets, great emphasis is now being placed on building the IT and knowledge infrastructure that will facilitate the transacting channel. Collecting, storing, and using customer data becomes of critical significance and is considered a core function. As a result, the required skills and competencies are different from traditional retailing, for which traditional logistics, store locations, people selection, and their management are key attributes of the success of retailers. In e-retailing the focus is shifted towards IT-enabled logistics (often referred to as e-supply chain management), which improves order processing, customer relationship management, and interconnectivity. Such a shift needs to be underpinned by a creative, innovative, and open-minded senior management that encourages experimentation with new technologies and will not hesitate to use them in order to gain competitive advantages.

Although people prefer to shop online rather than buying by themselves, they still want to see the product themselves. That is why many brands have started using AR and VR technology to make the online shopping experience more convenient and drive faster purchase decisions.⁵⁴ Companies have the opportunity to better engage potential customers by presenting products to them in a highly immersive virtual reality shopping environment. However, it is not clear

⁵⁰ See: DE REGT, A., PLANGGER, K., BARNES, S. J.: Virtual Reality Marketing and Customer Advocacy: Transforming Experiences from Story-Telling to Story-Doing. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 136, No. 1, p. 513-522. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296321005579>>.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² DINCELLI, E., YAYLA, A.: Immersive Virtual Reality in the Age of the Metaverse: A Hybrid-Narrative Review Based on the Technology Affordance Perspective. In *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 2022, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 4.

⁵³ See: BOURLAKIS, M., SAVVAS, P., FENG, L.: Retail Spatial Evolution: Paving the Way from Traditional to Metaverse Retailing. In *Electronic Commerce Research*, 2009, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 135-148. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10660-009-9030-8>>.

⁵⁴ MEKSUMPHUN, K., KERDVIBULVECH, C.: A New Study of Needs and Motivations Generated by Virtual Reality Games and Factor Products for Generation Z in Bangkok. In BENNOUR, A., ENSARI, T., KESSENTINI, Y., EOM, S. (eds.): *Intelligent Systems and Pattern Recognition, Communications in Computer and Information Science*. Cham : Springer International Publishing, 2022, p. 35. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08277-1_3>.

whether customers will adopt such fully immersive shopping environments. According to Peukert et al., a highly immersive shopping environment positively influences a hedonic path through telepresence, but, surprisingly, they negatively influence a utilitarian path through product diagnosticity.⁵⁵ They explain this effect through low readability of product information in the VR environment and expect VR's full potential to develop when the technology is further advanced.

At the consumer level, VR gaming constitutes the most advanced use of VR. Retail applications of VR have also attracted many organizations to create innovative shopping experiences for customers. Research in the retail mainly compared the hedonic (e.g., an enjoyable realistic shopping experience) and utilitarian (e.g., efficient product search) uses of VR in the shopping context. The immersive qualities of VR increase presence and enjoyment from the hedonic perspective mainly due to interactivity and sense-ability affordance, but they have a marginal effect on usefulness from the utilitarian perspective. This is problematic, since the utilitarian effect has a larger effect on shopping orientation and intentions than the hedonic effect. This may be related to technical limitation for interacting with products intuitively as in real life and limitations related to sense-ability. Similarly, Bogicevic et al. demonstrate that destination marketing through VR technologies induces higher elaboration of mental imagery about the experience and a stronger sense of presence compared to both the 360-degree preview and images preview, thereby translating into enhanced brand experience. This extends support to existing arguments that highly immersive virtual environments evoke a stronger sense of presence.⁵⁶

According to Chodos and Stroulia, while web-based retail stores leave much to be desired with regards to enablement of real use of product consumers' are considering. Thus, an online shopping environment that would bring the user to their real-world use of the product would be beneficial for both the consumer and the retailer.⁵⁷ Virtual worlds hold future importance for marketers. They become interactive, collaborative, and commercial platforms with a huge potential for virtual e-commerce as virtual worlds offer flexibility in brand building, new product development, testing, and advertisement.⁵⁸ Virtual commerce is the commercial activity conducted in an immersive virtual environment and can be considered one of the latest developments in e-Commerce.⁵⁹ From a technological perspective, virtual commerce consists of e-commerce infrastructures, such as electronic product catalogues and electronic payment, and adopts immersive technology to create new environments for commercial activities. Immersive technology consists of computer software and hardware that stimulate the five senses of humans (i.e., vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) in simulated environment to create perception of being there, i.e., sense of presence. Collaborative virtual

⁵⁵ See: PEUKERT, C. et al.: Shopping in Virtual Reality Stores: The Influence of Immersion on System Adoption. In *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 2019, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 755-788. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07421222.2019.1628889?journalCode=mmis20>>.

⁵⁶ BOGICEVIC, V. et al.: Virtual Reality Presence as a Preamble of Tourism Experience: The Role of Mental Imagery. In *Tourism Management*, 2019, Vol. 74, No. 10, p. 59.

⁵⁷ CHODOS, D., STROULIA, E.: Second Life Gift Registry: Bringing Retail Web Applications into the Metaverse. In *Proceedings of the 2008 IEEE Congress on Services – Part I*. Washington : IEEE Computer Society, 2008, p. 199-206.

⁵⁸ See: GAJENDRA, S et al.: Communication and Online Business Opportunities in Virtual Environment: Second Life. In *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 2012, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 223-241. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262316413_Communication_and_online_business_opportunities_in_virtual_environment_Second_Life>.

⁵⁹ SHEN, B. et al.: How to Promote User Purchase in Metaverse? A Systematic Literature Review on Consumer Behavior Research and Virtual Commerce Application Design. In *Applied Sciences*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 23, p. 1.

environments/metaverse present opportunities for retailers to enhance social experience, responsive service, and creative co-production opportunities compared to traditional 2D environments, and thus provide better service quality.⁶⁰ According to Hassouneh and Brengman, who analysed retailers in *Second Life*, much attention was put into store designs. The retailers tried to differentiate themselves using creative designs and taking care of the store details in order to make shopping experience as beautiful, real, and rewarding as possible. Many 3D virtual retailers had more common with traditional stores than with 2D webstores.⁶¹

To adopt immersive technology in virtual commerce applications, the discoveries in user behavior literature need to be effectively transformed into the design artifacts (broadly defined as a construct, a model, a method, or an instantiation) of application design research and development. Therefore, research on virtual commerce applications concerning the two directions of consumer behaviour research and application design can follow the design science guideline proposed in. Consumer behaviour research empirically evaluates the consumer behavioural responses (e.g., level of acceptance and purchase intention) impacted by certain design artifacts, while research on application design develops and evaluates design artifacts to engage users and promote user consumption through the patterns discovered from consumer behaviour studies.⁶²

To promote purchase, application design research should seek to improve the boundary factors, as they characterize the fundamental effects of immersive technologies on consumer purchase in virtual commerce. Shen et al. identified the research gaps in virtual commerce research from these perspectives: (1) dominant design artifacts and boundary factors covered in the included papers, (2) characteristics of design-factor mappings, (3) promising design artifacts or boundary factors that were ignored, and (4) the latest trends in ICT related to virtual commerce.⁶³ Synchronizing technological innovation and product form design is important because the underlying technological change and the outer product form jointly determine the perceived novelty that a product innovation presents to customers. According to Jeon user experience-based design innovativeness could be broken down into five dimensions: identity, novelty, attractiveness, usability and interaction.⁶⁴

According to Pizzi et al., consumer behaviours and perceptions measured through VR are reliable predictors of those in physical stores. This takes A/B testing to a whole new level of scope, cost, and time saving. Moreover, they found that hedonism and utilitarianism are viable in a VR setting and lead to overall comparable outcomes in terms of store satisfaction.

⁶⁰ See: GADALLA, E., KEELING, K., ABOSAG, I.: Metaverse-Retail Service Quality: A Future Framework for Retail Service Quality in the 3D Internet. In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2013, Vol. 29, No. 13-14, p. 1493-1517. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263462914_Metaverse-retail_service_quality_A_future_framework_for_retail_service_quality_in_the_3D_internet>.

⁶¹ See: HASSOUNEH, D., BRENGMAN, M.: Retailing in Social Virtual Worlds: Developing a Typology of Virtual Store Atmospherics. In *Journal of Electronic Computer Research*, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 218-241. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282886962_Retailing_in_social_virtual_worlds_Developing_a_typology_of_virtual_store_atmospherics>.

⁶² SHEN, B. et al.: How to Promote User Purchase in Metaverse? A Systematic Literature Review on Consumer Behavior Research and Virtual Commerce Application Design. In *Applied Sciences*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 23, p. 2.

⁶³ SHEN, B., WEIMING, T., GUO, J., ZHAO, L., QIN, P.: How to Promote User Purchase in Metaverse? A Systematic Literature Review on Consumer Behavior Research and Virtual Commerce Application Design. In *Applied Sciences*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 23, p. 19.

⁶⁴ See: JEON, J. E.: The Effects of User Experience-Based Design Innovativeness on User-Metaverse Platform Channel Relationships in South Korea. In *Journal of Distribution Science*, 2021, Vol. 19, No. 11, p. 81-90. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO202131659495625.page>>.

Therefore, it appears that through VR, retailers can target consumers adopting utilitarian shopping orientation, as well as those adopting hedonic shopping orientation.⁶⁵

Jeon et al. focused on effects of user experience-based design innovativeness (UXBDI) in user-metaverse platforms. The research found that metaverse platform will be more likely to perceive user-metaverse identification and commitment. Attractiveness and interaction were confirmed to increase user-metaverse platform identification and commitment. The results indicate a clear and significant correlation of attractiveness and interaction with improved user-metaverse platform relationships.⁶⁶

Avatar Marketing

Much research has been conducted on the interaction channels of virtual avatars. There has been much attention on non-verbal expressions such as the gaze, the facial expression, and gestures of an avatar. For example, minute movements of the pupil add a sense of immersion and social presence. Studies found that participants perceived a higher level of social presence when communicating via richer media than through a text-based medium.⁶⁷

In general, the more similar the illustration of a virtual avatar is to the user, the more immersive their experience is. However, a very realistic but imperfect depiction of a user may lead to negative feelings. The consensus is that behavioural realism is more critical than visual realism in eliciting believability. Brito Silva et al. analysed avatar marketing as a brand endorsement strategy.⁶⁸ They found that the main element to generate connection between avatars and followers, conferring credibility and authenticity, is the congruence of their posts with their lifestyle, personality, and narrative of their personal stories. Moreover, they reveal that avatars are effective endorsers who generate engagement through a spectrum of strategies ranging from humanization to robotization/metaverse. According to Park et al., users felt that their avatars are more similar to them, if they embodied their habitual expressions. Furthermore, users felt that avatars that embodied their appearance were more familiar than avatars that did not. Thus, designers should be aware of how people perceive individuated virtual avatars in order to accurately represent the user's identity and help users relate to their avatar.⁶⁹

Virtual Currency

Together with content creation comes a working economy that allows users to buy, sell, and even trade these objects.⁷⁰ An important factor for economy in a virtual world is a virtual

⁶⁵ See: PIZZI, G. et al.: Virtual Reality, Real Reactions? Comparing Consumers' Perceptions and Shopping Orientation across Physical and Virtual-Reality Retail Stores. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2019, Vol. 96, No. 7, p. 1-12. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563219300603>>.

⁶⁶ See: JEON, J. E.: The Effects of User Experience-Based Design Innovativeness on User-Metaverse Platform Channel Relationships in South Korea. In *Journal of Distribution Science*, 2021, Vol. 19, No. 11, p. 81-90. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO202131659495625.page>>.

⁶⁷ PARK, S., KIM, S. P., WHANG, M.: Individual's Social Perception of Virtual Avatars Embodied with Their Habitual Facial Expressions and Facial Appearance. In *Sensors*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 17, p. 3.

⁶⁸ See: DE BRITO SILVA, M. J. et al.: Avatar Marketing: A Study on the Engagement and Authenticity of Virtual Influencers on Instagram. In *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 2022, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 1-19. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13278-022-00966-w>>.

⁶⁹ PARK, S., KIM, S. P., WHANG, M.: Individual's Social Perception of Virtual Avatars Embodied with Their Habitual Facial Expressions and Facial Appearance. In *Sensors*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 17, p. 1.

⁷⁰ See: STEURER, M. E.: A Webshop for Digital Assets in Virtual Worlds Supported by a 3D Object Representation. In PALEOLOGU, C., MAVROMOUSTAKIS, C., MINEA M. (eds.): *Sixth International Multi-Conference on Computing in the Global Information Technology (ICCGI 2011)*. Luxembourg City : Iaria Xps

currency that is linked to real currency and can be exchanged allowing avatars to buy (like e.g., Linden Dollar in *Second Life*, Open-Metaverse-Cent from *OpenSimulator* based virtual worlds), sell and trade with virtual objects for real money. A key component for making the open metaverse a real virtual world is the commerce aspect, which requires payment system.⁷¹ Requirements for payment system in virtual world can be divided into functionality, trust, and cost. Recently, Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) have become the centre of attention in the cryptocurrency market. Unlike traditional cryptocurrencies, coins are all equivalent, indistinguishable, and ‘fungible’. NFTs are defined as pure digital assets that cannot be exchanged like-for-like.⁷²

4 Results of Content Analysis

Table 1 presents results of content analysis of consumer brand and their products in the metaverse. As can be seen, out of 21 selected companies, only three are not directly involved in metaverse virtual worlds. It can also be seen that most of the consumer brands involved in metaverse are focusing on customer experience.

Table 1: Consumer brands and their products in the metaverse

Consumer brand	Presence in metaverse	Metaverse platform	Description
<i>Nike</i>	Yes	<i>Roblox / NIKELAND</i>	<i>NIKE</i> community meetings, sporting activities with <i>NIKE</i> branding. The company has resorted to protecting its logo and slogans in preparation to sell virtual goods before joining.
<i>Samsung</i>	Yes	<i>Decentraland / Samsung 837x</i>	A range of <i>Samsung</i> products available for viewing. Currently, there is the possibility of various social activities. The <i>Samsung 837x</i> is a faithful replica of a real store in the US
<i>Hyundai</i>	Yes	<i>Roblox / Hyundai Mobility Adventure</i>	Introducing the concept of metamobility (connecting the real and virtual worlds through robotics), showcasing mobility options, the <i>S-Hub</i> transit centre of the future or taking a ride in an <i>S-AI</i> vehicle.
<i>Coca-Cola</i>	Yes	<i>Decentraland / OpenSea NFT</i>	The creation of the <i>Coca-Cola Friendship Loot Box</i> (featuring a <i>Bubble Jacket</i> , the iconic 1956 fridge, or a visualiser of the sound of a bottle opening and pouring) on Friendship Day, where branded NFTs can be used to customize an avatar. The next step was to bring drinks through the <i>Coca-Cola Zero Sugar Byte</i> .
<i>Sentosa</i>	Yes	<i>Animal Crossing</i>	The virtual island was created due to the pandemic and the lockdown. This option allowed visitors to escape real life and visit a virtual resort. This gives visitors the opportunity to buy specific goods, experience yoga, or even parties.

Press, 2011, p. 171-176. [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at: <https://online.tugraz.at/tug_online/voe_main2.getVollText?pDocumentNr=247390&pCurrPk=64635>.

⁷¹ See: KAPPE, F., STEURER, M.: The Open Metaverse Currency (OMC) – A Micropayment Framework for Open 3D Virtual Worlds. In BUCCAFURRI, F., SEMERARO, G. (eds.): *E-Commerce and Web Technologies, Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing*. Berlin, Heidelberg : Springer, 2010, p. 97-106. . [online]. [2022-10-30]. Available at:

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221017330_The_Open_Metaverse_Currency_OMC_-_A_Micropayment_Framework_for_Open_3D_Virtual_Worlds>.

⁷² VIDAL-TOMÁS, D.: The New Crypto Niche: NFTs, Play-to-Earn, and Metaverse Tokens. In *Finance Research Letters*, 2022, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 1.

<i>Gucci</i>	Yes	<i>Roblox / The Sandbox</i>	With the help of <i>Gucci Garden Archetypes</i> , visitors can experience the vision and philosophy of the creative director. Utilizing a “treasure hunt” and a hierarchical approach to NFT. During the hunt, exclusive prizes include pieces designed by Creative Director Alessandro Michel and Wagmi-san.
<i>Vans</i>	Yes	<i>Roblox / Vans World</i>	With <i>Vans</i> , visitors have the opportunity to try skateboarding in a virtual world without the possibility of real injuries.
<i>Atari</i>	Yes	<i>Decentraled / Atari Casino</i>	<i>Atari</i> is attempting a comeback with the help of exclusive NFTs that feature vintage pieces from historical games. Following on from the NFTs, it is creating a virtual casino that includes classic games such as Poker and Roulette, but also <i>Atari</i> -specific games such as <i>Pong</i> . In 2022, there are plans to create a real casino from the virtual world.
<i>Adidas</i>	Yes	<i>OpenSea</i>	Using the metaverse, <i>Adidas</i> is trying to break through not as a shoe brand but to become a leading force in the world of athletics, streetwear, music, and pop culture in general. It also seeks to promote creativity itself. In the NFT world, it finds collaborations with <i>Gmoney</i> , <i>Punks Comic</i> , and <i>Bored Ape Yacht Club</i> .
<i>Ferrari</i>	No	<i>Fortnite</i>	<i>Ferrari</i> allowed <i>Fortnite</i> players to be the first to test out the new <i>Type 296 GTB</i> to raise awareness of the new car. Following this success, <i>Ferrari</i> is attempting to enter the metaverse.
<i>The Walking Dead</i>	Yes	<i>Sandbox</i>	The point of this option for a TV series is to allow fans to continue to experience stories with their favourite characters after the end. This gives players themselves the opportunity to experience finding food, hiding, and surviving.
<i>Louis Vuitton</i>	Yes	<i>Louis the Game</i>	This brand represents NFT to celebrate 200 years of dedication to fashion. It all takes place in the fashion house <i>Louis the Game</i> , where, in the form of the mascot, <i>Vivienne</i> , fans walk through the various heritage fashion houses and collect “candles” as keys to progress.
<i>Wendy’s</i>	Yes	<i>Horizon Worlds / Wendyverse</i>	<i>Wendy’s</i> enters the world of the Metaverse with the help of an in-game character in <i>Fortnite’s Food Fight</i> mode, where the mission is to destroy frozen meat. The next step was to open a virtual restaurant with a basketball court where people can meet.
<i>Domino’s</i>	Yes	<i>Decentraland</i>	It was not <i>Domino’s</i> idea, but the developers themselves who allowed players to order pizza in the metaverse, thus connecting both the virtual and real worlds.
<i>Balenciaga</i>	Yes	<i>Fortnite</i>	<i>Balenciaga</i> presents its NFT collection, which includes a range of clothing, bags, and accessories that players can purchase to outfit their characters. It is also possible to model the banner that is placed in the game.
<i>Burberry</i>	Yes	<i>Roblox / Blankos Block Party</i>	This company is part of the video game. Its first ever NFT collection consists of wearable pieces and characters adorned with <i>Burberry</i> logos.
<i>Disney</i>	Yes	-	<i>Disney</i> is implementing a real-world virtual world simulator in its theme parks. The idea is to offer augmented reality attractions without any add-ons in its theme parks, where visitors track their mobile phones, allowing for the personalized generation and projection of 3D effects onto various objects in the park.
<i>Apple</i>	No	-	<i>Apple</i> is toying with the idea of entering the metaverse. But it wants to create its “own” platform as a “better universe” compared to the others.
<i>Microsoft</i>	Yes/No	-	<i>Microsoft</i> is looking to enter the world of the metaverse, particularly by leveraging its purchase of <i>Activision Blizzard</i> and linking existing platforms such as <i>Microsoft Teams</i> .

<i>Dolce & Gabbana</i>	Yes	<i>Decentraland / DGFamily</i>	<i>Dolce & Gabbana</i> has joined the metaverse with the official launch of <i>DGFamily</i> , where NFT allows members to offer exclusive perks on events and promotions across the brand's collection.
<i>McDonald's</i>	No	-	<i>McDonald's</i> wants to enter this portfolio of brands. They are registering patents to enable them to offer "virtual food and beverage products" as well as "downloadable multimedia files containing artwork, text, audio and video files, and unmistakable tokens". <i>McDonalds</i> also wants to offer online retail services with virtual goods.

Source: own processing, 2022.

Table 2: Selected metaverse platforms and provided advertisement possibilities

Metaverse	Description	Advertising Option
<i>Roblox</i>	<i>Roblox</i> is an online gaming platform for children and adults. Games are created by other users and are accessible to anyone. One of the most unique features of this platform is the ability to dress your avatar with accessories from real brands like <i>Burberry</i> .	Image advertising, sponsored experience, Discover page.
<i>Decentraland</i>	Built on blockchain, <i>Decentraland</i> can be used to host conferences, play games, and trade virtual products on marketplaces. Socializing with other members is as easy as in real life.	Billboards.
<i>Second Life</i>	In this world, the user can be anything they want and experience endless adventures.	Media, in-store posters, advertising using the created world.
<i>The Sandbox</i>	The use of Ethereum blockchain, the possibility of selling, buying, and trading land and its real monetization.	Billboards.
<i>Hypernation</i>	Hypernation supports a democratic and just economy and focuses on creating utopia. This world draws on a lot of information gleaned from the blockchain industry, analyzes why it works, and optimizes it to make life perfect.	

Source: own processing, 2022.

Table 2 presents results of content analysis of metaverse platforms and provided advertising opportunities. Consumer brands are following the contemporary research in metaverse and marketing and providing experience to their customers through gamification and virtual events. However, the platforms themselves are still following web 2.0 approach towards advertising and providing very limited tools.

5 Conclusions

Defining the metaverse is a paradoxical task because it has not yet fully been realized. Thus, one could summarize the marketing research on metaverse as being "tactical" rather than strategic or even visionary. Marketing is one of the most researched topics in the area of metaverse. However, literature offers little guidance on how marketing activities could be done strategically to create favourable customer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. The basic business model is mass customization, which enables customers to use the internet to view and choose a suitable option from trillions of pre-configured variants via electronic commerce sites. This staple scenario means that consumers order online from a wide variety of options and receive the products they purchase. Business processes begin with research and development projects, where a product and its configurations are designed. However, so far marketing

research is far behind this vision. We believe that for better adoption of immersive technology in virtual commerce applications, the discoveries in user behaviour literature need to be effectively transformed into the design artifacts (broadly defined as a construct, a model, a method, or an instantiation) of application design research and development. In the future, advertising has to take advantage of immersiveness and interactivity of metaverse.

Table 1 presents results of content analysis of consumer brand and their products in the metaverse. As can be seen, out of 21 selected companies, only three are not directly involved in metaverse virtual worlds. It can also be seen that most of the consumer brands involved in metaverse are focusing on customer experience. Table 2 presents results of content analysis of metaverse platforms and provided advertising opportunities. Consumer brands are following the contemporary research in metaverse and marketing and providing experience to their customers through gamification and virtual events. However, the platforms themselves are still following web 2.0 approach towards advertising and providing very limited tools. There are several limitations to our research: first, content analysis does not provide a complete list of consumer brands and metaverse platforms; second, our systematic literature analysis was focused solely on metaverse and marketing research, however, there is plenty of research on technologies used in metaverse which has significant consequences on marketing research.

Acknowledgement: Publication of this paper was supported by the Student grant competition project SGS/18/2022: “The opportunities of using the metaverse in the implementation of product sales and marketing communication”. The support is gratefully acknowledged.

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THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN A POST-PANDEMIC MARKET

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Abstract:

E-commerce is gaining in popularity across industries faster than expected. Its popularity has been also fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, the number of people shopping online has skyrocketed. Even though the shift towards e-commerce threatens the existence of local brick-and-mortar retail stores, it points to a bright future for online shopping. The aim of this paper is to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in online shopping confidence between men and women. Statistical analysis was performed in the SPSS 22 program. Due to the nature of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, and the Mann-Whitney U-test were used. More than half of the respondents are confident in shopping via the Internet, and the existence of statistically significant differences in the level of consumer confidence between genders was confirmed.

Key words: E-Commerce. Consumer Behavior. Confidence. Post-Pandemic Market Environment.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is much more than just a health crisis, as it has significantly affected whole societies and economies. It can be said that COVID-19 has changed the way we work, communicate, and shop more than any other disruption in this decade.¹ The analysis of economic data on sales shows that this dramatic situation has had a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviour of consumers. According to a study conducted by the Nielsen Company, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way consumers spend and the overall consumer behaviour.² The sale of necessities skyrocketed as consumers prioritized the most basic needs, including food, hygiene products and cleaning products. As Italy was the first country in Europe to have a hands-on experience with COVID-19 (from March to April 2020), the behaviour of consumers changed drastically. Consumers tended to focus on the purchase of essential goods, especially those deemed to prevent the spread of the virus, such as protective equipment and disinfectant gels.³ The pandemic has completely changed consumption patterns, e.g., reduced sales of some product categories (e.g., clothing) and higher sales of other product categories (e.g., entertainment products).⁴ The perceived risks of COVID-19 can negatively influence the behavioural intentions of consumers,⁵ and lead to changes in people's behaviour and consumption patterns.⁶ In a pandemic context, the perceived risk and the threat of contagion changed consumer behaviour, giving rise to a greater preference for the use of technologies to

¹ DESPIN, T.: *Knock-on Effects of COVID-19 on Consumer Behavior and How Businesses Can Prepare for Them*. [online]. [2022-05-11]. Available at: <<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/350457>>.

² NEXCESS: *The Basic of Using Social Media for Marketing Your eCommerce Business*. [online]. [2022-02-11]. Available at: <<https://www.netsolutions.com/insights/voice-search-for-ecommerce/>>.

³ See: CANNITO, L. et al.: Temporal Discounting of Money and Face Masks During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Hoarding Level. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021, Vol. 12, p. 120-135.

⁴ See: DEGLI ESPOSTI, P. et al.: Sharing and Sustainable Consumption in the Era of COVID-19. In *Sustainability*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 58-69.

⁵ See: TROISE, C. et al.: Online Food Delivery Services and Behavioural Intention. In *British Food Journal*, 2012, Vol. 123, No. 2, p. 664-683.

⁶ See: BREWER, P., SEBBY, A. G.: The Effect of Online Restaurant Menus on Consumers' Purchase Intentions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 9, p. 122-135.

socially distance themselves from other people.⁷ Consumers' online shopping behaviour is evolving at a rapid pace, online payment methods are becoming more common, more people are shopping via mobile phones, and, ultimately, consumers are more willing to use e-commerce than they used to be. Globally, more than four out of five consumers bought goods online in 2020. Online shopping has become second nature to many people in recent years and shows no signs of slowing down. E-commerce is gaining in popularity across industries faster than expected. Its popularity has been also fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, the number of people shopping online has skyrocketed. Even though the shift towards e-commerce threatens the existence of local brick-and-mortar retail stores, it points to a bright future for online shopping.⁸ Figure 1 shows that 2020 saw a significant increase in online shopping across Europe, with many consumers from different countries reporting that they have started to shop online more due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, most of the same countries saw an increase in the number of people who said they shopped online more because of the crisis. In Spain, for example, more than half of consumers surveyed said they shopped online more often in 2021, an increase of around eight percent compared to the previous year.

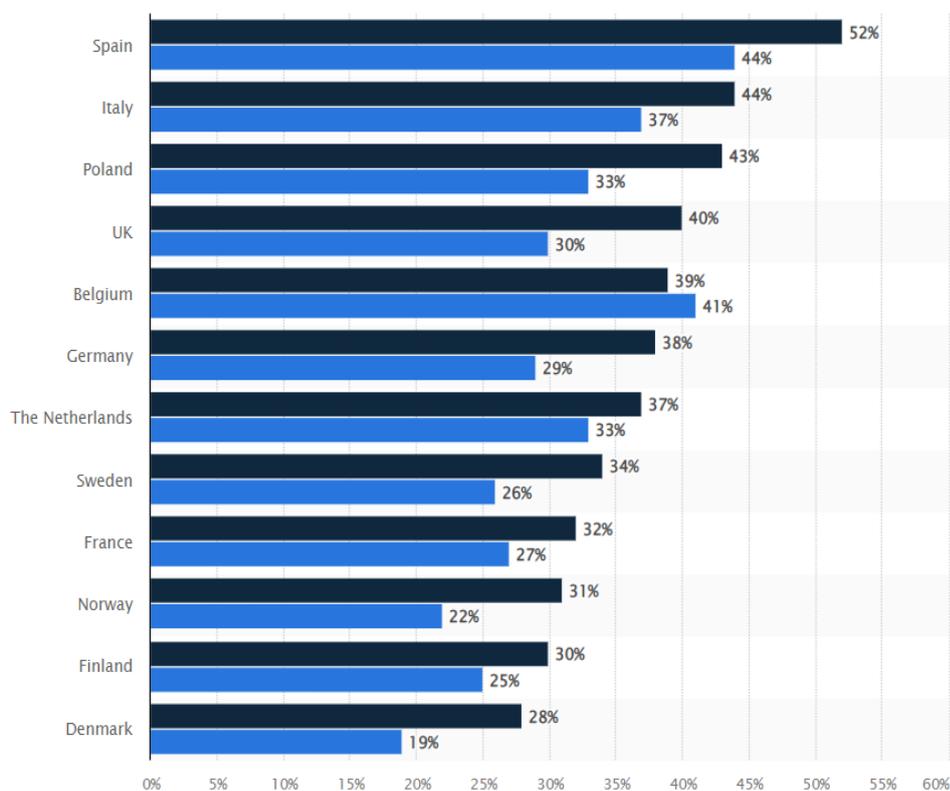


Figure 1: Online shopping habits in the EU for 2020

Source: Statista 2020

China is by far the largest e-commerce market in the world, as indicated by statistics published by the Digital Market Outlook portal. Last year, e-commerce sales in the country reached 1.3 billion US dollars and this figure is expected to increase to almost 2 billion US dollars by 2025. This would mean that in 4 years' time, almost every second dollar could be spent on e-commerce in China. Sales generated in China make up most of the Asian market. However,

⁷ See: KIM, S. S. et al.: Preference for Robot Service or Human Service in Hotels? Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 8, p. 89-103.

⁸ STATISTA: *Digital Shopping Behavior*. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/markets/413/topic/984/digital-shopping-behaviour/#overview>>.

other markets on the continent are already growing faster than the Chinese market. However, China's growth remains above the world's average. In Europe and the US, e-commerce is expected to grow by 35% to 42% in five years, which is below the global average of 47%.⁹ In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many consumers flooded the Internet in the search for products they couldn't get in-store. By July 2020, global retail e-commerce sites hit a cumulative record of 22 billion monthly visits.¹⁰ Consumer behaviour refers to the acquisition, use and disposal of products.¹¹ For marketing, it is important to emphasize the complex approach, the links between predispositions, consumer reactions and stimuli that together influence consumer purchasing behaviour. In short, it can be said that marketing follows the course of the purchase decision and its outcome.¹² Knowledge of consumer behaviour is not only important in attracting new customers, but it is also very important in retaining already existing customers. When a customer is satisfied with a particular product, he will repeat the purchase. Marketing should therefore be done in such a way as to convince customers to buy the product again and again.¹³ However, this can only be achieved by understanding and paying attention to the purchasing behaviour of the consumer.¹⁴ Schiffman¹⁵ sees a consumer as an end user of a product. The word consumer is derived from the word “consume” which means “to use”. Therefore, the word consumer refers to a person who buys a product or service for his own use or consumption.¹⁶

Table 1: Main differences between customer and consumer

Basis for comparison	The customer	The consumer
Meaning	Buyers of products or services	End user of products or services
Repeat sales	The customer can also be a business entity that buys goods for resale	No
Purchase	Yes	Not necessary
Purpose	Resale or consumption	Consumption
The price of the product or service	Paid by customer	The consumer does not have to pay them
Person	An individual or an organization	An individual, family, or group of people

⁹ BUCHHOLZ, K.: *Where E-Commerce is Growing Fastest*. [online]. [2022-09-03]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/chart/22729/e-commerce-sales-growth-by-region/>>.

¹⁰ BUMP, P.: *Do Consumers Actually Shop Directly on Social Media Platforms*. [online]. [2022-03-08]. Available at: <<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/do-consumers-shop-directly-on-social-media-platforms>>.

¹¹ See: JENČOVÁ, S., LUKÁČOVÁ, M., JUSKOVÁ, M.: Fraud Intra-Community Transactions Vat and Negative Impact on the State Budget. In *Journal of Management and Business: Research and Practice*, 2020, Vol 12, No. 1, p. 37-42.

¹² BARČÍK, T.: *Strategický marketing*. Praha : Ústav práva a právní vědy, 2013, p. 58.

¹³ See: ONDRIJOVÁ, I., RATNAYAKE-KAŠČÁKOVÁ, D., TOMKOVÁ, A.: Analysis of Mutual Differences of Neuromarketing Attributes in the Context of Achieved Customer Education. In *Journal of Management and Business: Research and Practice*, 2020, Vol 12, No. 2, p. 21-28.

¹⁴ RICHTEROVÁ, K. et al.: *Spotrebiteľské správanie*. Bratislava : Sprint 2, 2015, p. 103.

¹⁵ SCHIFFMAN, L., et al.: *Consumer Behaviour*. 6th Ed. French's Forest, NSW : Pearson Australia Group Pty, 2013, p. 94.

¹⁶ See: ŠTEFKO, R. et al.: Descriptive Study of the Perception of Effectiveness of Marketing Tools in the Context of Dental-hygienic Health Services. In *Journal of Management and Business: Research and Practice*, 2018, Vol 10, No. 2, p. 5-17.

Source: own elaboration according to SAJI, J.: What Does Consumer Preference Actually Mean? [online]. [2020-05-30]. Available at: <<https://medium.com/@jessicatreesasaji/what-does-consumer-preference-actually-mean-5ae6a3c93055>>.

2 Methodology

The main goal of this paper is to find out if there are statistically significant differences in confidence in online shopping between men and women.

Based on the set goal, the following research question is formulated:

- Are there statistically significant differences in consumer confidence in online shopping between men and women?

Based on the above research question, the following research hypothesis is formulated:

H: There are statistically significant differences in consumer confidence in online shopping between men and women.

The research carried out for the purposes of the paper can be defined as primary, interdisciplinary and quantitative. The inputs to the analyses were obtained through the implementation of primary research using a questionnaire. Data collection via an electronic questionnaire took place in May 2022. The link to the electronic questionnaire was distributed via the relevant Facebook pages and e-mail (private database of the authors). The research sample was selected based on availability and willingness of participants to participate. The research sample consists of 421 respondents.

Statistical analysis was performed in the SPSS 22 program. Data analysis process was divided into two parts. The first part points to the rough findings of the research and descriptive statistics. The second part of the analysis examines deeper relationships through inductive statistics. Due to the established hypothesis and the nature of the data, the second part made use of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test and the Mann-Whitney U-test. The statistical analysis was carried out in the SPSS 22 program. The object of research are respondents of the following generations:

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents by generation

C	Centennials (2001-2009)
Y	Millennials (1984-2000)
X	Generation X (1964-1983)
S	Generation S (1963 and earlier)

Source: own elaboration according to Young

Regarding the age groups, the paper follows the methodology of Miles Young¹⁷ from Ogilvy & Mather, which imposes the following classification: Generation C, or Centennials, are currently between the ages of 13 and 21, Generation Y, or Millennials, are currently between the ages of 22 and 38, Generation X, or Baby Boomers, are currently between the ages of 39 and 58, and Generation S, or Snow Flakes are currently 59 and older.

¹⁷ YOUNG, M.: *Ogilvy o reklamě v digitálním věku*. Bratislava: Svojtka & Co, 2017, p. 68.

Table 3: Representation of respondents by generation

	Number	%	Cumulatively %
Generation C	42	9.9	9.9
Generation Y	151	35.9	45.8
Generation X	173	41.1	86.9
Generation S	55	13.1	100
In total	421	100	

Source: own elaboration

The largest age group of respondents was Generation X (respondents born between 1964 and 1983 (N=173; 41.1%)). Generation Y (1984 – 2000) was represented by 151 respondents, or 35.9% of the research sample. Generation S (born 1963 and earlier) was represented by 55 respondents (13.1%). The youngest group of respondents, Generation C (2001-2009) was represented by 42 respondents (9.9%).

The research sample consisted of 421 respondents, of which 270 (64.1%) were women and 151 (35.9%) were men. The gender composition of the research sample reflects the fact that women are generally more willing to fill in questionnaire surveys. As the respondents were selected based on availability and willingness of respondents to take part in the research, certain disproportions compared to the general population in Slovakia were expected.

The same applies to disproportions in terms of regions of the Slovak Republic which was caused by narrowly focused research sample (the questionnaire was primarily filled out by respondents from the author's private database primarily residing in Košice (N=147; 35%) and Prešov region (N=65; 15.4%). Together they made up almost half of the respondents.

3 Results

This chapter presents research results in easy-to-read tables using descriptive statistics.

Table 4: Representation of respondents based on gender

	Number	%	Cumulatively %
Men	151	35.9	35.9
Women	270	64.1	100
In total	421	100	

Source: own elaboration

The gender composition of the respondents is as follows: N=270; 64.1% are women and N=151; 35.9% are men.

Table 5: Confidence in online shopping

	Number	%	Cumulatively %
1 – I strongly disagree	23	5.5	5.5
2 – I do not agree	23	5.5	11.0
3 – I partially disagree	58	13.8	24.8
4 – I neither agree / neither agree	63	15.0	39.8
5 – I partially agree	99	23.5	63.3
6 – I agree	113	26.7	90.0
7 – I strongly agree	42	10.0	100
In total	421	100	

Source: own elaboration

Most respondents are confident in shopping online (N=254; 60.2%). 63 respondents (15%) took a neutral stance towards online shopping while 104 respondents (24.8%) do not have confidence in online shopping.

4 Verification of the Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis was formulated in the introductory chapter of the paper. The hypothesis was verified in this subchapter. The verification process provides a probabilistic model of accepting or rejecting a presumed proposition.

H: There are statistically significant differences in consumer confidence in online shopping between men and women.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics – consumer confidence in online shopping – men

N	151
Average	4.318
Median	5.000
Std. deviation	1.6467
Skewness	-.376
Kurtosis	-.651
Range	6.0
Minimum	1.0
Maximum	7.0

Source: own elaboration

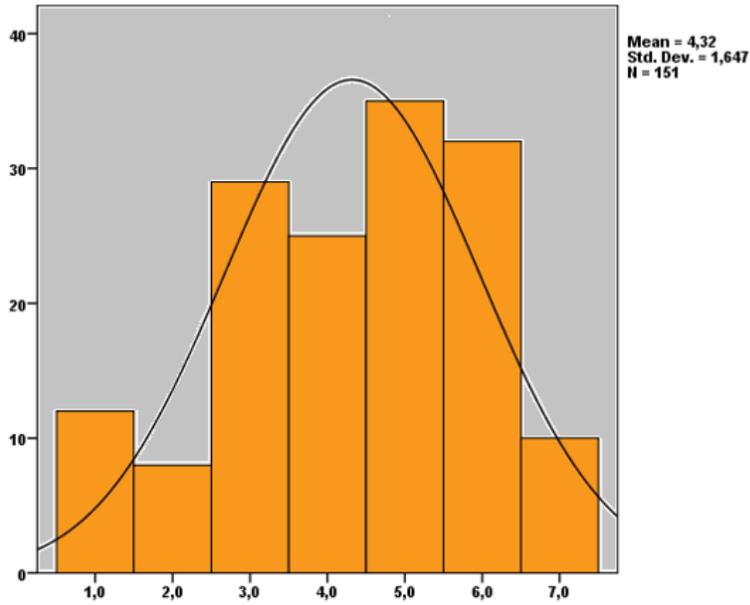


Figure 2: Descriptive statistics – consumer confidence in online shopping – men
Source: own elaboration

Table 7: Descriptive statistics – consumer confidence in online shopping - women

N	270
Average	4.852
Median	5.000
Std. deviation	1.5759
Skewness	-.712
Kurtosis	-.201
Range	6.0
Minimum	1.0
Maximum	7.0

Source: own elaboration

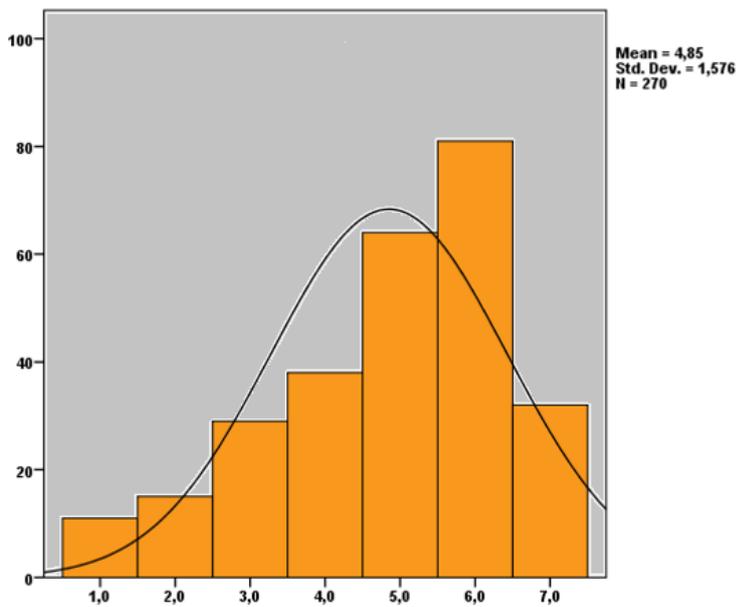


Figure 3: Descriptive statistics – consumer confidence in online shopping – women
Source: own elaboration

The results in Tables 6 and 7 and Figures 2 and 3 show that on a scale from 1 - the lowest confidence to 7 - the highest confidence, the average value for men is 4.32 points, while for women it is 4.85 points.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was used to obtain information about the normality or abnormality of the data distribution, as this information was necessary to verify the hypothesis.

Table 8: Test normality

Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Male	.171	151	.000
Female	.193	270	.000

Source: own elaboration

The aim was to find out whether there are statistically significant differences in the level of consumer confidence in online shopping between men and women. To do so, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used taking into account the tests of normality of the data distribution and the nature of the variables.

Table 9: Level of confidence in online shopping RANKY

Gender	N	Mean Rank
Male	151	185.10
Female	270	225.49
In total	421	

Source: own elaboration

Table 10: Mann-Whitney U-test

	Level of confidence in online
Mann-Whitney U	16473.500
Wilcoxon W	27949.500
Z	-3.333
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

Source: own elaboration

Based on the results presented in Tables 9 and 10, it can be concluded that there are statistically significant differences between men and women in the level of consumer confidence in online shopping. The results show that women are more confident in online shopping than men. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed hereunder is confirmed.

5 Conclusion

E-commerce is the process of buying, selling, transferring, and exchanging products, services and information through computer networks and the Internet. E-commerce and the use of the Internet in various industries benefit both consumers and businesses, as it enables faster, easier, more convenient, and more flexible provision of goods and services. In addition to providing goods and services, the Internet also serves as an important promotional tool. Internet has become an important communication tool for businesses. Today, online communication tools

are inexpensive, provide instant international reach, offer great real-time feedback, and are able to reach millions of people for whom the Internet is the centre of virtually all communication. The respondents could be categorised into the following age groups: Generation C, or Centennials, are currently between the ages of 13 and 21, Generation Y, or Millennials, are currently between the ages of 22 and 38, Generation X, or Baby Boomers, are currently between the ages of 39 and 58, and Generation S, or Snow Flakes are currently 59 and older. Almost half of these respondents are residents of the Košice and Prešov regions. The data collection took place in May 2022 and the research results can be generalized primarily to the population of the eastern Slovakia. The research made use of a questionnaire survey, primary sources, and mathematical and statistical methods. The results obtained confirm the importance of modern electronic trading tools and their use in practice.

Based on the research discussed hereunder, it can be concluded that online shopping is important for most respondents (64.7%). Of these, 42% of respondents belong to generation Y. Most respondents (67%) intend to shop online soon. 50% of them are women. 60.2 % have confidence in online shopping. As much as 67.2% of respondents have positive experience with online shopping. The hypothesis formulated hereunder assumed the existence of statistically significant differences in the degree of consumer confidence in online shopping regarding gender. This difference, and thus the hypothesis, was confirmed.

Most respondents (61.1%) feel safe when shopping online. Of these, only 11% belong to generation S. 60.6% of respondents influence organic content in search, e.g., Google when shopping online. 43.2% of them are women. 56.1%, or 236 respondents influence paid search content when shopping online. Most respondents (57.9%) are influenced by organic content on social networks when shopping online. Similarly, 56.2% of respondents influence paid content on social networks when shopping online. In this case, 47% are women.

Acknowledgement: This article is one of the partial outputs under the scientific research grant 1/0694/20 - VEGA "Relational marketing research - perception of e-commerce aspects and its impact on purchasing behaviour and consumer preferences "

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ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH NFTS

Peter Horváth, Filip Sekan

Abstract:

Prior to the widespread adoption of blockchain-based technology, methods for protecting digital assets and establishing their ownership remained vulnerable to manipulation. The invention of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), which are tokens that represent digital assets and have proof of ownership inherent in them, is the result of decades of research and developments in blockchain technology. The fact that each token is unique and distinguishable from another has increased asset security and reinforced unique ownership. As more uses for NFTs are found throughout time, this cutting-edge technology grows and continues to draw public attention. Since 2021, Non-Fungible Token (NFT) use has grown quickly, making it one of the most widely used applications in the Fintech industry and the predicted rise of Web3 is likely to expand their significance. This paper aims to analyze public engagement with NFTs using data from *Google Trends* and *Opensea Marketplace*. The data obtained through these platforms is used to measure the strength of the relationship between these variables, through the Pearson correlation formula. To perform a huge amount of data, quantitative methods has been used. Our goal is to find out how strong a given relationship is based on research results and thus define the public's relationship with NFTs.

Keywords:

Blockchain. Correlation Analysis. Google Trends. NFT. Non-Fungible Token. Ownership.

1 Introduction

Given the physical distance imposed by the authorities, the pandemic crisis caused by COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of digital technologies in sustaining economic activity. Consumers and businesses have adapted quickly, and the result was the gradual adoption of new information technology at various levels, both personal and corporate. New forms of investment and payment have emerged as a result of technological progress, including cryptocurrencies, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), which allow creators of digital material to profit from their labor. Blockchain technology has transformed organizational, economic, and environmental performance of the commercial world. Integral part of blockchain system are cryptocurrencies representing a digital system of payments, characterized by transparency, decentralization, and high security. The most recent digital trend is non-fungible tokens (NFT) that certifies the ownership of particular goods, such as music, photos, films, and pieces of virtual worlds, using blockchain technology. There is also the potential to increase the use of NFTs in the field of intellectual property. Using blockchain technology, it is possible to track changes in patent ownership in this industry. Additionally, by using blockchain technology, these digital tokens present new opportunities for innovators to change the face of entrepreneurship.

As a new technology, we assume that public is interested in and engage with it. In this context, the main aim of this paper is analysis of public engagement with NFTs. We consider as the best way to perform analysis by quantitative methods. To find out people interest, we will measure and look for some association between the observed variables and estimate the strength of this relationship. The paper is organized as follows: the next section focuses on definition of NFTs and its brief history. The third part of the paper presents the methodology, how we retrieve the data and how we calculate them to get output as well as which kind of methods we set for analysis. The fourth section describes the results of the empirical analysis and discussions, while the last part of the paper includes the conclusion.

2 Definition of NFTs

NFTs as a new technology that has evolved as a result of the blockchain's ability to decentralize power have the potential to upend both Web 2.0 and traditional business models. NFT serves as an external enabler of entrepreneurship and inspires individuals and groups to use their imagination and creativity to pursue novel entrepreneurial actions that both utilize and transform NFT. We can define Non-Fungible Token as “*a unique digital identifier that cannot be copied, substituted, or subdivided, that is recorded in a blockchain, and that is used to certify authenticity and ownership (as of a specific digital asset and specific rights relating to it)*”.¹

In order to clarify and conceptualize NFTs, we divide the term non-fungible token into two parts (non-fungible and token) and define each separately. The concept of fungibility describes an object's equivalence or distinguishability. Money, for example, is a classic example of a fungible asset. 20 euro bill has the same value as the other 20 euro bill. If we go deeper, 20 euro bill has the same value as the four 5 euro bills, or 21 euro coins, or any other combination of currency worth 20 euro. Assets such as stocks and commodities are also common examples of fungible goods because they are freely interchangeable and replaceable, making them fungible. On the other hand, non-fungible products are distinct from fungible in that they cannot be replaced with by something else. To put it simply, while non-fungible goods are unique and cannot be unilaterally switched out for another, fungible items are interchangeable and mutually exchangeable.² Paintings, concert tickets, and other non-fungible goods are only a few instances of non-fungible items found in the real world. Even while two paintings may appear to be similar, their levels of rarity may differ significantly. Similar to this, front-row concert tickets are substantially more expensive than back-row seats.

Regarding a term token, it is a virtual representation of an asset's ownership. There are two types of tokens in digital world: fungible (like Bitcoin, where any bitcoin may be exchanged for another) and non-fungible (e.g., a property deed).

While it is impossible to take into account every variant and standard, there are a few commonly acknowledged and fundamental traits that are present in the majority of NFT implementations. First is uniqueness. It is possible to create a finite number of tokens using NFTs, each of which can be uniquely identified. Well-known example is the 10,000 distinct NFTs that *CryptoPunks*, *Bored Ape Yacht Club* or other projects released. Second is rarity. This trait in NFTs can take many forms, including artificial, numerical, and historical rarity. Artificial rarity describes the NFT's individuality as revealed by its code or the details of its issue. We can once again use the well-known *Cryptopunks* to better comprehend this idea. Only 1.75% of all *Cryptopunks*, as measured by their issuance, have a Medical Mask feature. When we compare this to the 24.59% chance of having an Earring, we can conclude that if all else is equal, a punk with a Medical Mask will always be rarer than one with an Earring. Numerical rarity is closely related to Artificial rarity and, as such, is relatively simple to grasp. We can take the case of a well-known musician who issues 100 NFTs of their most recent music album in digital format. The 100 copies that have the artist's “digital signature” and can be proven to be their owners will logically be more expensive and rarer than listening to the album on *Spotify*. It's helpful to think of this as the difference between owning a physical album signed by the artists and one that isn't. The historical rarity of an NFT refers to its historical significance. This manifests itself in a variety of ways. For instance, the fact that *Cryptopunks* were some of the first generative

¹ *NFT*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/NFT>>.

² CHOCHAN, U. W.: *Non-Fungible Tokens: Blockchains, Scarcity, and Value*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3822743>.

NFTs ever issued adds to their appeal. They are unique in that regard. Additionally, given that blockchains preserve an unchangeable history of ownership, some NFTs may be historically valuable due to their previous owners, who included famous organizations or people. Third trait is ownership. Some aspects that may be very important in the context of NFTs backed by real-world tangible assets are evidence of ownership of the underlying assets, the possibility of fractional ownership, and provenance monitoring of assets. Fourth trait is immutability. This is a feature of all blockchain-based tokens. Absent a vulnerability of the underlying blockchain system, the tokens and the data stored on them are very hard to tamper with and its result is substantial transparency. The last trait is programmability. Many people consider that this is an important differentiator between NFTs and real-world assets. NFTs can be programmed in the same way as programmable software can, enabling artistic or commercial expression as well as, for example, ensuring that artists earn residual payments or moral rights over the duration of a work rather than just after the first sale. Furthermore, experimental applications demonstrate how NFTs, like a mortgage, can be used as collateral for a wide range of *DeFi* (Decentralized Finance) applications.³

Table 1: Use Cases of NFTs

Use Cases	Examples
Collectibles	NFTs may be utilized to produce new types of digital collectibles, such <i>CryptoPunks</i> or <i>Bored Ape Yacht Club</i>
Gaming	It includes tradeable in-game objects and items
Art	This concept has launched with the art marketplace Rarible, where artist can monetize their work, protect copyright and receive royalties from each sale.
Virtual Assets	It means the ownerships real estate in virtual worlds as <i>Decentraland</i> or <i>Sandbox</i>
Real – World Assets	Tokenization of real-world assets that can be traded. OpenLaw has already created a system for trading real estate through the ERC-721 token standard. E.g. <i>Nike</i> company patented a system to tokenize shoes.
Identity	NFTs can protect and control personal information, like birth dates or medical histories

Source: LAU, K.: *Non-Fungible Tokens. A Brief Introduction and History*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://assets.ctfassets.net/hfgyig42jimx/6A8K5H6VrTydTDuEFHXQ5P/3cca896ad77bd967859a7a1256a5a91f/Crypto.com_Macro_Report_-_Non-Fungible_Tokens.pdf>.

NFTs are frequently purchased and sold using cryptocurrencies, and they share several similarities with cryptocurrencies in many ways. NFTs and cryptocurrencies are both built and tracked on blockchains, and they have a large customer and community base in common. As was already mentioned, cryptocurrencies, on the other hand, are fungible, which means interchangeable, whereas NFTs are unique and thus non-fungible. The majority of users create and purchase NFTs on dedicated NFT marketplaces, such as *Opensea*, *Deadrare* or *Magiceden*. A typical NFT is created or “minted” on a blockchain, then auctioned off or sold at a fixed price on an NFT marketplace before being “stored” in the buyer’s digital wallet. Annual sales estimates for the NFT market range from around \$17 billion to more than \$44 billion. According to several market research companies, sales increased significantly in 2021 but decreased in 2022. Some well-known NFTs have sold for millions of dollars, although according to one survey, just 1% of NFTs sell for more than \$1,594 and 75% of NFTs are sold for less than \$15. Furthermore, one study discovered that the top 10% of NFT buyers and sellers conduct as many transactions as the remaining 90%.⁴

³ KOSTOPOULOS, N. et al.: *Demystifying Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.eublockchainforum.eu/sites/default/files/reports/DemystifyingNFTs_November%202021_2.pdf>.

⁴ BUSCH, K. E.: *Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at:

By 2022, the majority of NFTs will be used to buy digital collectibles like digital artwork or imitations of other digital goods. NFTs' supporters think they will have a broader range of uses, such as representing real-world objects, providing digital identities, or allowing only members to attend events, services, online communities, as digital copies of tangible objects like a car title or a property deed. Table 1 shows the potential use cases of NFTs. We can see that scope and purposes of NFTs are diverse and have a wide range of affordances.

2.1 A Brief History of NFTs

The philosopher, cultural critic, and essayist Walter Benjamin fought with the evolution of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* about a century ago. While imitation and replication of art have always been imperfect – by apprentices, students, studios, and forgers – new technologies have increased the speed and fidelity of reproduction. The meaning of “originality” and “authenticity” were called into doubt as a result of this evolution, which also caused the replicated work to lose its original’s “aura”. In the digital reproduction era of today, every digital asset may be perfectly duplicated with just a few clicks or lines of code.⁵ Such reflections began to spread practically from the beginning of the web, i.e. from the 90s of the 20th century. Several experts wondered how to ensure that property rights are respected in the digital world. Over the past thirty years, there have been several attempts to improve property rights in the digital world, such as copyright or watermarks, but they have not been fully successful. Practically since Bitcoin’s inception, various initiatives have gradually come in regarding the creation of a certain modality of digital ownership and monetization that would be part of the blockchain. A paper titled *Overview of Colored Coins*, published in December 2012 by cryptographer and the head of the *Israeli Bitcoin Association* Meni Rosenfeld, described a way to take use of Bitcoin’s “fungibility” by setting aside a specific amount of coins for specific uses. It was suggested that adding “specialty” to coins by separating them from the rest could aid in the formation of niche applications on the Bitcoin blockchain. This case demonstrated the potential of non-fungible assets on the blockchain.⁶

In 2014, the first NFTs were developed, uniting art and technology fields together. Their goal was to establish authenticity and ownership on a blockchain in order to assist artists in managing and safeguarding their works.⁷ The year 2017 was the milestone in terms of NFTs because of two important facts. First, it was created the ERC-721 token standard in the Ethereum blockchain, using mainly by NFTs. Second, two first known NFTs projects were launched, namely *CryptoKitties* and *CryptoPunks*. In light of these projects, NFTs gained wider interests and awareness in 2017. *CryptoPunks* is a collection of highly pixelated, randomly produced (i.e., computer-generated) portraits that combines art with collectibles. Since initially distribution for free, first resales ranged from \$1 to \$30 and went up to \$1 million for individual portrait. *CryptoKitties* is a game that involves collecting, buying, and selling unique digital portraits. It was the first project based on ERC-721 Standard. Both projects helped to established monetization model for digital content using NFTs. For example, digital art portrait called *Everydays: The First 5000 Days* was sold for more than \$69 million.⁸

NFTs exploded in popularity in the beginning of 2021. This phenomenon was brought on by several interrelated variables, including as the profitable market for cryptocurrencies (such as

<<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47189>>.

⁵ KOSTOPOULOS, N. et al.: *Demystifying Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.eublockchainforum.eu/sites/default/files/reports/DemystifyingNFTs_November%202021_2.pdf>.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ DASH, A.: *NFTs Weren't Supposed to End Like This*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/nfts-werent-supposed-end-like/618488/>>.

⁸ BEEPLE: *Everydays: The First 5000 Days*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/beeple-first-5000-days/beeple-b-1981-1/112924>>.

Bitcoin, Ethereum, and Dogecoin), prevailing tendencies in pop culture, and recurrent spikes in speculative stock market movements. High market volatility, which encouraged investors to aggressively look for speculative assets on which to capitalize, contributed to the appeal of developing digital assets. These factors combined to boost the NFT market.

3 Methodology

The main topic of the paper is to analyze public engagement with NFTs. As we have already mentioned in theoretical part of the paper, the NFTs are nowadays primarily focused on monetizing digital art and collectibles. Therefore, we would like to find out the connection between searching trends representing by *Google Trend* data and NFT trading volume defining a volume in selling NFTs. The development of big data provides a new tool for measuring several variables and therefore become more widespread among researchers. Internet search data has just recently been used as a source of data. Web searches offer a comparatively quick and straightforward approach to gather information about public opinion or interest in a given problem. *Google Trends* has been heavily used in scholarly research on search engines as a predictor of activity. It is a free tool produced by *Google* that enables users to get reports on the evolution of the popularity of search phrases using the *Google Search* engine. In other words, this tool collects data about how much a given phrase was searched for at a certain time. Therefore, main output is time series data. Due to the fact that its reports may be used to measure public interest in any subject, *Google Trends* has gained popularity in the scientific literature during the past ten years. Importantly, this data is regularly updated and accessible.

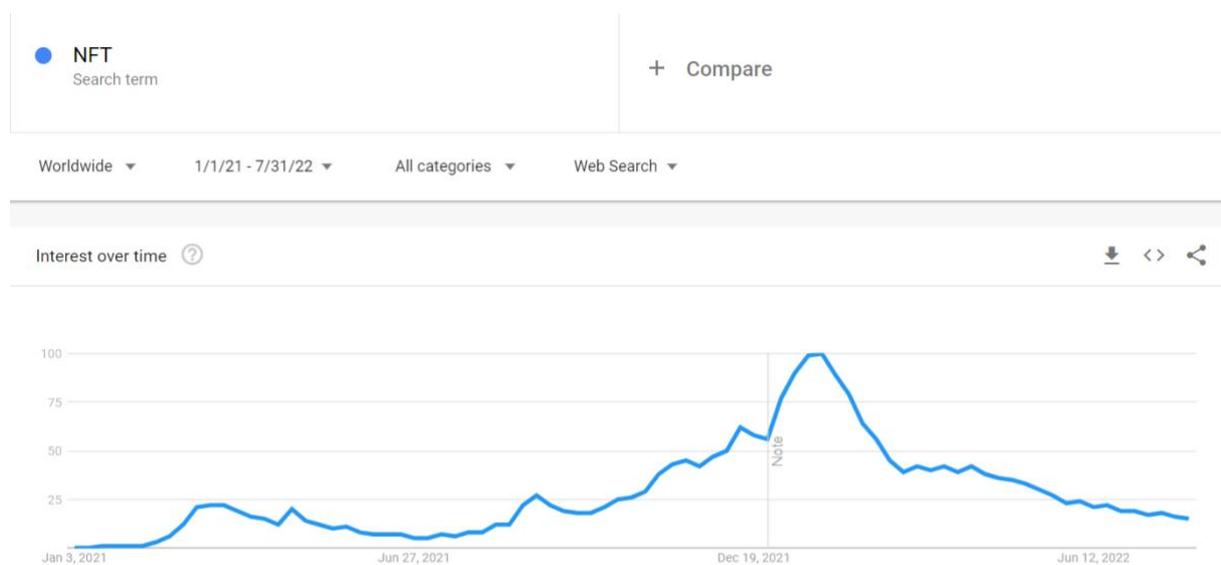


Figure 1: Number of keyword searches via Google Trends – measurement worldwide

Source: *Google Trends*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2021-01-01%202022-07-31&q=NFT>.

We collect *Google* search activity for the keyword “NFT” from *Google Trends* between 1st January 2021 to 30th July 2022. The *Google Trends* platform’s data is retrieved in .csv format and normalized for the chosen time frame. According to *Google Trends*, the correction process is as follows: “Search results are normalized to the time and location of a query by the following process: Each data point is divided by the total searches of the geography and time range it represents to compare relative popularity. Otherwise, places with the most search volume

would always be ranked highest. The resulting numbers are then scaled on a range of 0 to 100 based on a topic’s proportion to all searches on all topics. Different regions that show the same search interest for a term don’t always have the same total search volumes.”⁹ Since the retrieved data contains week interval frame, we translate it to a monthly interval frame by using mean. We also collect *Opensea* monthly trading volume in cryptocurrency Ethereum. We choose *Opensea* because it is the largest platform for trading NFTs. Moreover, for better transparency, we use data volume in cryptocurrency Ethereum (ETH abbreviation) rather than in dollars. Trading volume data are retrieved from web portal *www.dune.com*, where users can download *Opensea* data in many selected ways. Searching period is the same as in previous variables, from 1st January 2021 to 30th July 2022. Data are aggregated into months intervals.

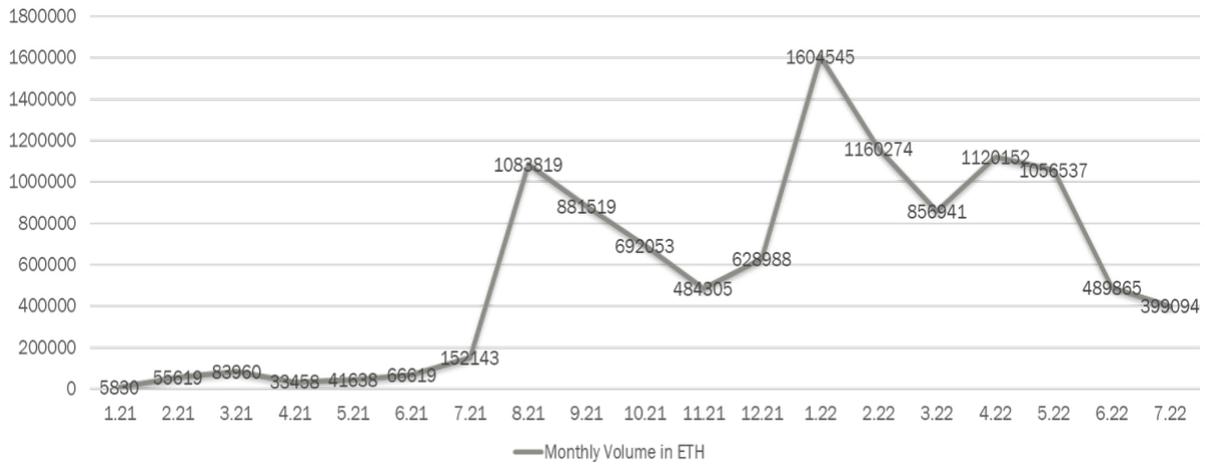


Figure 2: Opensea Monthly trading Volume in ETH
Source: own processing, 2022

To identifying the association and trends between observed variables and to estimate the strength of their relationship, we select to perform correlation analysis using Pearson Correlation method. We can define correlation as a measure of association between two variables, where either (1) as the value of one variable rises, the value of the other rises as well (positive correlation), or (2) as the value of one variable rises, the value of the other variable falls (negative correlation). Therefore, in correlated data, a change in one variable’s magnitude is linked to a change in another variable’s magnitude, either in the same or the opposite direction.¹⁰

For the measures the degree of association of variable, it should be considered interval variables with normal distribution of data. We use for calculations the degree of relationship so called Pearson’s mathematical formulation:

$$R = \frac{n(\sum XY) - (\sum X) \cdot (\sum Y)}{\sqrt{n(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2} \sqrt{n(\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2}}$$

R = Correlation coefficient
 n = Number of observations

⁹ *FAQ about Google Trends Data.* [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://support.google.com/trends/answer/4365533?hl=en>>.

¹⁰ SCHOBER, P., BOER, C., SCHWARTE, L.: Correlation Coefficients: Appropriate Use and Interpretation. In *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, 2018, Vol. 126, No. 5, p. 1763. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323388613_Correlation_Coefficients_Appropriate_Use_and_Interpretation>.

x = Measures of Variable 1

y = Measures of Variable 2

Σxy = Sum of the product of respective variable measures

Σx = Sum of the measures of Variable 1

Σy = Sum of the measures of Variable 2

Σx^2 = Sum of squared values of the measures of Variable 1

Σy^2 = Sum of squared values of the measures of Variable 2¹¹

To convert the correlation coefficient into descriptors like “weak”, “moderate”, or “high” association, a few methods have been proposed. For description the outputs, we use a conventional approach to interpreting a correlation coefficient. It defines weak correlation between 0,10 and 0,39, moderate correlation between 0,40 and 0,69 and finally strong correlation between 0,70 and 0,89. On the opposite sites can be also calculated so called negligible correlation (0-0,10) or very strong correlation (0,90-1). Finally, correlation can be the maximum value of 1 in terms of positive correlation, and minimum value of -1 in terms of negative correlation.¹²

4 Results and Discussion

The result of the correlation analysis performed through the Pearson correlation is $R = 0.76$, which, based on the correlation theory, implies a strong correlation. On the basis of that we state there is a strong association between the amount of trading volume in *Opensea* and people’s interest in NFTs through search connections. This means that when one of these two variables rises, so does the other variable. At the same time, when one variable decreases, the same is done with the other variable.

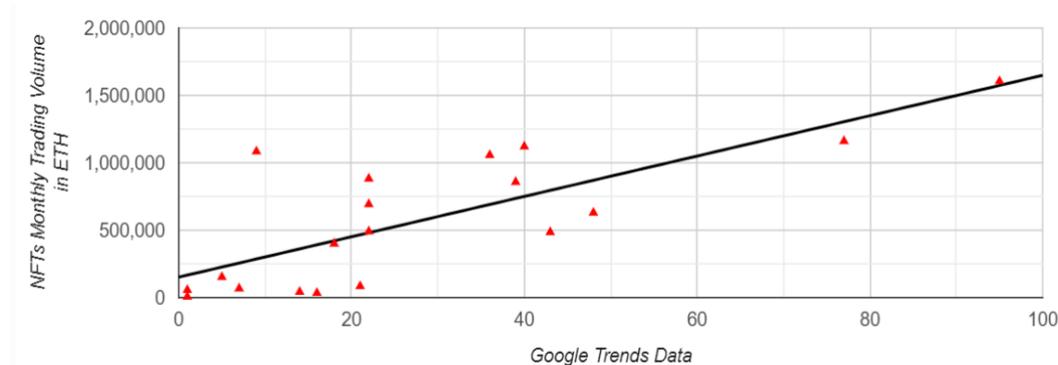


Figure 3: Scatter Plot using Pearson formula

Source: own processing, 2022

When we examine it through charts, we can see in chart number one that January 2022 saw the most interest in *Google* searches for the term NFT. In addition, possible upward trends in search were also in December, August and around March 2021. Chart number two shows us monthly trading volume of NFTs in *Opensea* marketplace. The largest trading volume was recorded in

¹¹ SENTHILNATHAN, S.: *Usefulness of Correlation Analysis*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334308527_Usefulness_of_Correlation_Analysis>.

¹² SCHÖBER, P., BOER, C., SCHWARTE, L.: Correlation Coefficients: Appropriate Use and Interpretation. In *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, 2018, Vol. 126, No. 5, p. 1765. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323388613_Correlation_Coefficients_Appropriate_Use_and_Interpretation>.

the month of January 2021. In addition to this month, the upswing was especially seen in the months of March, August, and December 2021. When we compare the months mentioned in both charts, we can see that they are the same. Therefore, we can deduce the following from the findings of a paper:

Firstly, people engagement in NTFs is strongly influenced by trading volume of NFTs. The higher the trading volume, the higher the chance that more people who have invested in NFTs can profit from trading. It means that as trade volume rises, people become increasingly interested in learning more about the idea of NFTs. These conclusions are understandably appealing to more and more people who are interested in. On the other hand, people's interest also declines as trade volume declines because there is a smaller probability of investment yielding a profit. Secondly, these findings provide information about the characteristics and status of NFTs today. People have NFTs associated primarily with high-risk trading and investments, which understandably include cryptocurrencies field. The original NFT idea as a new technological element that aims to address property rights in the digital environment is thus pushed into the background. Thirdly, there isn't a current, ongoing, sustainable public interest. Looking at chart number one, we can observe that public interest has significantly decreased over the past measurable number of months. The reputation of the NFTs concept has certainly been damaged also by financial scams, which are regular not only in the cryptocurrency area, but also in NFTs. In addition, interest has also plummeted due to the huge quantity of low-quality "cash grab" projects. The emerging financial crisis has further exacerbated this lack of interest. After such negatives, it is understandable that interest quickly declined. Overall, we may draw the conclusion that NFTs are not now associated with a groundbreaking technical concept that intends to advance and enhance the problem of property rights in both the digital and physical worlds.

5 Conclusion

The NFTs sector has been rapidly expanding the last years, mainly in the sector of monetizing of digital art. The new technology as a blockchain or cryptocurrencies enjoy high popularity in recent times. Therefore, we focus on analysis public interests in NFTs as a new technology idea. This paper aimed to investigate association between public engagement through *Google* search activities and NFTs monthly trading volume. We discover that there is a substantial link between the observed variables. This measurement supported the assumption that people are only interested in NFTs when they see an opportunity to make money from them. On the other hand, our findings do not call into question the technological contribution of the NFTs concept. There is a presumption that public interest will increase once more if the technological development of NFTs improves in other areas that would be more advantageous and secure for a society.

The authors are also aware of the limitations of this research. Important limitation that we must acknowledge include the fact that there are only a few research papers dealing with NFTs. Due to the fact that this is a relatively new technological invention, not much scientific literature has yet been created within the framework of research. Second, the timeframe selected is relatively limiting including 19 months. This timeframe seems sufficient, but for better representativity would be better longer period, mainly in cryptocurrency field, where NFT belongs. On the other hand, as we mentioned NFT is relatively new tool, so there is understandably less data to compare. Third limitation relates to measured *Google* data. We retrieved data from whole world, what can cause misleading in terms of data collection. The use of NFTs is not

approximately proportionally the same across countries of the world, but there are visible diametrical differences. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the research is invalid, but for the future research is the option to delimit the sample based on its geographical location. The last limit includes chosen statistical indicator. For better applicability and generalizability of the findings would be better to use more statistical indicators, for example add a measurement causality. The study's limitations open up possibilities for subsequent research, which would then allow for the execution of comprehensive statistical analysis.

Despite these limitations, our paper is one of the first scientific attempts to measure relationship between statistical indicators relating NFTs. Existing studies so far have focused mainly on the definition of NFTs, its history, and relationship with cryptocurrencies. Therefore, results and methodology of the paper can serve as an idea for other researcher dealing with this kind of topic.

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- SCHOBBER, P., BOER, C., SCHWARTE, L.: Correlation Coefficients: Appropriate Use and Interpretation. In *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, 2018, Vol. 126, No. 5, p. 1763-1768. ISSN 0003-2999. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323388613_Correlation_Coefficients_Appropriate_Use_and_Interpretation>.
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WIND'S HOWLING: A BRAND IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Dinko Jukić

Abstract:

The paper explores the role of the brand in the digital world. The brand concept is viewed according to Kapferer's identity prism. We discuss how postmodern brands can be a symbolic resource for building, communicating, and maintaining identity. This study focuses on aspects of marketing in digital games and seeks to answer the question how brands use digital worlds. The paper presents the phenomenon of game from the aspect of marketing and media literacy. The concept of game studies was observed according to Huizinga's game theory and Fink's construct of the game world. The paper presents the division of the brand in the digital world based on the creation of the brand and the appearance of the brand in the digital world. Four types of brands that appear in the digital world are analysed: brand in the game, game as brand, protagonist as brand and publisher as brand. Brands are viewed from a symbolic aspect, representing the identification of consumers who want reality in the digital world, and this enables the existence of real brands. It is based on the hypothesis that the digital world reflects reality, so the brand announcement is understood as a reflection of reality. The research is based on relevant, primary sources of digital games that, through semiotic analysis, show the role of brand and media.

Key words:

Brand. Customer. Digital World. Game. Image. Symbol.

Introduction

One of the most important ways to create the meaning of the brand for consumers is through personification¹ and symbols.² The starting point of the brand is its added value. In this sense, the strength of the brand is in the consumer's mind,³ in the added value that the consumer attributes to the brand. Therefore, the meaning of the brand is determined by the consumer, not the brand manager.⁴

The postmodern consumer strongly depends on the symbolic meaning of the brand. Digital games represent a paradox of worlds. They were created in the real world and represent a fictional one. Through digital media, reality is created from lived reality. This means that digital games clearly show that media reality cannot be viewed as a less valuable reality.⁵ Social reality is a construction of media reality,⁶ which tells us that it is part of reality. Being a part of reality, it represents certain symbols⁷ that users of digital reality adopt.

The topic of this study is about questioning the relationship between the digital world and the brand. The symbolism of the brand in the virtual world is explored as a form of parasocial interactions between the consumer and the brand. It assumes that the brand, in its symbolism

¹ HUANG, H. H., VINCENT-WAYNE, M.: The Role of Imagination and Brand Personification in Brand Relationships. In *Psychology & Marketing*, 2014, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 44.

² ROSENBAUM-ELLIOTT, R., PERCY, L., PERVAN, S.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 177.

³ SOLOMON, M. R., MARSHALL, G. W., STUART, E. W.: *Marketing: Real People, Real Choices*. New York : Pearson, 2018, p. 274.

⁴ SOLOMON, M. R. et al.: *Consumer Behaviour, a European Perspective*. London : Prentice Hall, 2009, p. 37.

⁵ BAACKE, D.: *Medienpädagogik*. Berlin : De Gruyter, 1997, p. 5.

⁶ BAUER, T. A.: *Medij za otvoreno društvo*. Zagreb : Sveučilišna knjižara, 2007, p. 83.

⁷ BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London : Sage, 2017, p. 28-31.

and metaphor, arouses the imagination, creates a positive image⁸ and brand relationship.⁹ Also, the paper analyses Huizinga's game theory¹⁰ and Fink's construct of the game world¹¹ from the aspect of Kapferer's identity prism¹² and proposes four categories of brands in digital games. The purpose of this research is to improve the understanding of how customers see brand in digital world.

The intertextuality in the title *Wind's howling* refers to two key ideas: an allusion to the main protagonist of the digital game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*,¹³ Geralt of Rivia, and to the metaphor of the wind in Slavic mythology.¹⁴ The digital anti-hero is a typical representative of the brand in the digital world, and the metaphor of the wind is a hint of the change to come. This change can mean the development of digital brands in the world of digital games or the development of the digital world in a semiotic sense. Also, the chapters in this study are a symbol of the meaning of the digital game and the digital world, which can be interpreted as an homage to the identity of the digital brand.

1 Endure and Survive

Digital culture is a social phenomenon. Its beginnings appear as a modern man's response to information. Parallel to the development of digital culture, the understanding of the audience is changing and the phenomenon of the interactive audience is emerging.¹⁵ We understand interactivity in the context of digital games as the ability of the user to influence the form or content of the media.¹⁶ But we can also experience the medium as what transforms experience into knowledge.

From a psychological point of view, digital games have a clear structure, clear rules, and include tasks that players solve. The appeal of digital games is enhanced using realistic images and sounds, historical events, real brands and celebrities from sports, society, music, or literature. Learning through game¹⁷ narration is a key element in digital games because it creates an environment with which the learner identifies.¹⁸

Starting from Huizinga's theory of play, play is not only fundamentally important for man, but also crucial in developing man's emotions, creativity, and imagination. From the point of view

⁸ KELLER, K. L.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Harlow : Pearson, 2013, p. 76-79.

⁹ HUANG, H. H., VINCENT-WAYNE, M.: The Role of Imagination and Brand Personification in Brand Relationships. In *Psychology & Marketing*, 2014, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 44.

¹⁰ See: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo ludens: o podrijetlu kulture u igri*. Zagreb : Naprijed, 1992, p. 9-30.

¹¹ See: FINK, E.: *Igra kao simbol svijeta*. Zagreb : Demetra, 2000, p.74-83.

¹² See: KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171-197.

¹³ CD PROJEKT RED: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. [Digital Game]. Warsaw : CD Projekt, 2015.

¹⁴ See: BELAJ, V.: *Hod kroz godinu*. Zagreb : Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2007, p. 143-160. See also: KATIČIĆ, R.: *Gazdarica na vratima: tragovima svetih pjesama naše pretkršćanske starine*. Zagreb : Ibis grafika, Matica hrvatska, 2011, p. 205-208.; KATIČIĆ, R.: *Vilinska vrata tragovima svetih pjesama naše pretkršćanske starine*. Zagreb : Ibis grafika; Matica hrvatska, 2014, p. 81-84.; KATIČIĆ, R.: *Naša stara vjera: tragovima svetih pjesama naše pretkršćanske starine*. Zagreb : Ibis grafika, 2017, p. 77-82.

¹⁵ MCQUAIL, D.: *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London : SAGE, 2005, p. 406.

¹⁶ BAKKER, P., SÁDABA, C.: The Impact of the Internet on Users. In KÜNG, L., PICKARD, R. G., TOWSE, R. (eds.): *The Internet and the Mass Media*. London : SAGE, 2008, p. 88.

¹⁷ ŠKRIPCOVÁ, L.: Media Literacy in Digital Games. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 136-138.

¹⁸ JUKIĆ, D.: Marketing Semiotics in Digital Games: Myth's Analysis in The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 15.

of the sociology of culture,¹⁹ play is essential for the creation of culture. The whole civilization is designed as an expression of play and meaning. The concept of place and duration starts from the assumption that every digital game has certain boundaries of time and space. Each game in its essence represents a spiritual creation.²⁰ According to Huizinga's theory, man is played for pleasure and relaxation, but he can also play above that level: for the sake of beauty and sublimity.²¹

According to Fink,²² the game is opposed to the seriousness of life. The game is based on showing realities in images, shapes and meaning. Experienced moments are transformed into digital forms. From this aspect, we understand the observation of digital games as culture because, not only are they a product of a cultural object,²³ but human action in the digital game itself is also a kind of game.²⁴ According to Fink,²⁵ the play implies the possibility of a complete understanding of man because it contains a significant amount of information. In this sense, play implies man's freedom because through the act of playing, man realizes himself. That is why Fink claims that play is an action that becomes apparent in its gesture of meaning. It fills the empty time and turns into the reality of the apparent paraphrase of serious life.²⁶

Philosophical concept of the "game of the world" is a speculative formula that does not express a phenomenon but indicates a path of thought.²⁷ In that sense, anything that is real is possible, but not necessary.²⁸ The reality thus understood is the modality of the being of things. However, then the question arises how and in what sense is the game defined as unreal? The behaviour and action of the game is just like other human activities. All activities are real.²⁹ The theory of culture is the study of the relationship between the components of a way of life.³⁰ The game is based on the handling of certain creations, on the depiction of reality in images, shapes and meaning.

The digital world, therefore, represents one "variant" of the world in which consumers live. It is an oxymoronic space that knows the market, society, culture, and media. Images created in the digital world circulate within cultures³¹ and represent signs.³² Such signs are inseparable because culture, in the anthropological sense, represents the process of human behaviour, values and ideas that are common to groups. This means that consumers in the digital world create signs that are connected to the world in which they live.

Consumers in the digital world do not react directly in mutual interactions, but their reactions are based on meanings. This understanding of consumers in the digital world, i.e., gamers in

¹⁹ SKLEDAR, N.: *Čovjek i kultura*. Zagreb : Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, 2001, p. 167.

²⁰ HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo ludens: o podrijetlu kulture u igri*. Zagreb : Naprijed, 1992, p. 16.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 24.

²² FINK, E.: *Igra kao simbol svijeta*. Zagreb : Demetra, 2000, p. 4.

²³ GRISWOLD, W.: *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London : Sage Publications, 2013, p. 15-23.

²⁴ HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo ludens: o podrijetlu kulture u igri*. Zagreb : Naprijed, 1992, p. 14.

²⁵ FINK, E.: *Igra kao simbol svijeta*. Zagreb : Demetra, 2000, p. 76-81.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 83.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 74.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 76.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 78.

³⁰ EAGLETON, T.: *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 63-64.

³¹ STURKEN, M., CARTWRIGHT, L.: *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford : Oxford University press, 2004, p. 315.

³² BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacija i zbilja*. Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2001, p. 12-16.

digital games, starts from the assumption of symbolic interactionism.³³ In the dialectic of semiotics, the union of the signifier and the signified seems incomplete and delayed.³⁴

According to the understanding of symbolic interactionism, consumers exist in a symbolic environment and brand meanings are determined by the interpretation of these symbols and social consensus. The consumer therefore interprets his own identity when encountering new situations.³⁵ Two types of self-concept have been widely used in consumer research:³⁶ a) real self-image and b) ideal self-image. Actual self-image refers to the overall way a person sees themselves, while ideal self-image represents an individual's perception of what they want to achieve. In contrast to the aforementioned terms, social self-concept represents the image we want others to have of us.

Social self-concept represents the totality of thoughts and feelings that an individual refers to himself as a subject and an object.³⁷ This means that this social self-concept includes the self as a subject or "I", the process of active experiencing and the self as an object or object of knowledge, i.e., the content of experiencing. A brand is no longer just an indicator of a consumer's self-image but can play an active role in creating that image. Consumers have several permanent self-images, and these self-images or perceptions of their "self" are very closely related to personality because consumers tend to buy brands that fit their self-image.

For Mead, the self is organized into two phases: "I" and "me".³⁸ The first refers to the unorganized response of the organism to the attitudes of others and a part of the personality that the person is not aware of, while the second is the internalized organization of other people's attitudes, a part of the personality that we are aware of. "Me" is an organized set of attitudes of others that a person adopts, and "I" is what reacts to the attitudes of others.³⁹ Mead sees play as a situation from which an organized personality emerges.⁴⁰ Through play, the attitudes of others are organized into a kind of unity that controls the individual's reactions. In this sense, the game leads to the "generalized other", i.e., to the group that gives the individual unity. We can apply the same to the brand theory, where the consumer develops positive impressions towards brands through the brand personality construct.

Mead claims that the concept of his "I" can only develop if the individual becomes an object to himself. To achieve this, he must see himself from the point of view of others. People imagine how others see them, then they think about how others judge the image they see of them, and based on these two processes, they build a judgment about themselves. Aaker⁴¹ confirms very similarly when he talks about the concept of a brand as a symbol. Symbols are more meaningful if they involve a metaphor, with the symbol or a symbol characteristic representing a functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefit.

³³ RITZER, G.: *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*. Beijing : Peking University Press, 2004, p. 56.

³⁴ BITI, V.: *Pojmovnik suvremene književne teorije*. Zagreb : Matica hrvatska, 1997, p. 365.

³⁵ SOLOMON, M. R. et al.: *Consumer Behaviour, a European Perspective*. London : Prentice Hall, 2009, p. 148.

³⁶ FOXALL, G. R., GOLDSMITH, R. E., BROWN, S.: *Psihologija potrošnje u marketingu*. Jastrebarsko : Slap, 2007, p. 54-57.

³⁷ See: MEAD, G. H.: *Um, osoba i društvo sa stajališta socijalnog bihevorista*. Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2003, p. 166-172.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 198-202.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 132.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 153.

⁴¹ AAKER, D. A.: *Building Strong Brands*. New York : Free Press, 1996, p. 84-85.

The relationship between the images consumers have of themselves and what they own, conditionally speaking, confirms the consumer's self-image.⁴² In this sense, digital games, its characters, and the brands that appear in them represent a way of confirming the gamer's image of his extended "self". In such a case, ownership becomes an extended image of the gamer on a symbolic level, a status level, and a real level. We can show this on the example of a gamer who, wanting to "improve" his "self", changes his "self" by introducing customized means (clothing, jewellery, physical appearance). Therefore, we can conclude that the digital world offers the gamer the opportunity to try out different personalities, i.e., identities. From the aspect of consumer behaviour, such a way of "changing" one's "self" opens the possibility of developing digital brands, digital consumers, and the digital market.

2 Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted

Postmodern culture is full of fictional characters.⁴³ Consumers buy brands because of their symbolic meaning. This means that the primary role of the product becomes secondary. In this sense, brands become carriers of messages, ideas, and meanings. This mythical structure of the brand can be woven into the subtext of the product. The brand then takes over the role of the medium, and the consumer takes on the meaning through the brand symbol. Consumers choose products that are consistent with their self-image,⁴⁴ and reject those that are in disagreement with it.⁴⁵ In other words, brand purchase decisions are emotional.⁴⁶ With such a purchase, the consumer builds an image of himself.⁴⁷ However, it is important to emphasize that brand loyalty occurs as a reflection of brand image, not actual value.⁴⁸

Consumer does not make consumption choices solely from product's utilities but from their symbolic meanings. The function of the symbolic meanings of brands operate in two directions, outward in constructing the social world: social-symbolism, and inward towards constructing our self-identity: self-symbolism.⁴⁹ In this sense, social-symbolic meanings of brands can be used to communicate with other people when we want to present ourselves as we want others to see us. The self-symbolic meaning of brands is what their usage communicates to us about who we are or want to be. In particular, the message that PlayStation sends: "This is for the Players", or in the form of a metaphor: "Play has no Limits", represents elements of fantasy. It is precisely these elements of imagination and daydreaming that are changes in the consumer's consciousness.⁵⁰

The role of the brand as a particular simulation of reality opens the space to the creation of consumer desires. Virtualization of reality tends to emulate, and consumers want a reality

⁴² See: SCHIFFMAN, L. G., KANUK, L. L.: *Consumer Behavior*. New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 111-117.

⁴³ SOLOMON, M. R. et al.: *Consumer Behaviour, a European Perspective*. London : Prentice Hall, 2009, p. 33.

⁴⁴ See: MEAD, G. H.: *Um, osoba i društvo sa stajališta socijalnog biheviorista*. Zagreb : Jesenski i Turk, 2003, p. 242-248.

⁴⁵ FOXALL, G. R., GOLDSMITH, R. E., BROWN, S.: *Psihologija potrošnje u marketingu*. Jastrebarsko : Slap, 2007, p. 55.

⁴⁶ MILAS, G.: *Psihologija marketinga*. Zagreb : Target, 2007, p. 41.

⁴⁷ See: SOLOMON, M. R. et al.: *Consumer Behaviour, a European Perspective*. London : Prentice Hall, 2009, p. 144-152.

⁴⁸ MILAS, G.: *Psihologija marketinga*. Zagreb : Target, 2007, p. 48.

⁴⁹ ROSENBAUM-ELLIOTT, R., PERCY, L., PERVAN, S.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 48.

⁵⁰ SOLOMON, M. R. et al.: *Consumer Behaviour, a European Perspective*. London : Prentice Hall, 2009, p. 145.

simulation. Digital games are not a text to read but a dream to be dreamt.⁵¹ Brand experience in digital games has a strong influence on purchasing decisions.⁵² In this sense, the self is conceptualized as something that the consumer actively creates. According to Thompson,⁵³ it is self as a symbolic project which the individual must actively construct into a coherent account of self-identity. This means that there is always a social dimension to a brand. The symbolic meanings of our possessions may portray essences of our individuality, or reflect our desirable connections with others, and symbolic consumption helps us to categorize ourselves in society.⁵⁴

Therefore, the digital world is correlated with the brand and digital games because they are connected through the joint creation of cultural objects.⁵⁵ Advertising helps in creating, modifying, and transforming cultural meanings for the consumer, but also represents cultural meanings taken from the consumer's world. This dialectical relationship drives a cyclical flow of symbolic meanings derived from culture and transferred into the semiotic world.⁵⁶

Consumers do not react to the product, but to the brand, to the sign represented by that brand. The concept of sign is observed here in accordance with de Saussure's theory.⁵⁷ The sign combines the term and the acoustic image into one. The sign denotes the whole, while the word signifier denotes the term, and the word signified denotes the acoustic image. A key distinction in semiotic analysis is between the signifier and the signified. In this sense, the signifier is denotative communication, a simple expression, while the signified is connotative communication, that is, it creates associations in the consumer. This can also be observed from the aspect of the mythic structure,⁵⁸ where we understand the myth as a communication system, i.e., a brand message.⁵⁹

In this sense, myth is a way of marking, it is a form and as such represents the message of a certain statement. Myth does not determine the subject of the message, but the way in which that message is expressed. This means that myth in digital games has purely formal boundaries. Therefore, digital games can become a myth because each message can change from a closed existence to a meaning. In other words, two important approaches in creating a brand metaphor and a brand as a symbol derive from personification and brand semiotics. As an example of such a meaning, we can mention the protagonist Nathan Drake from the series *Uncharted*,⁶⁰ who represents a postmodern pastiche of Indiana Jones, Goethe's romantic hero and a modern

⁵¹ JUKIĆ, D.: To Brand or Not to Brand: The Perception of Brand Image in the Digital Games Industry. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 26.

⁵² BARNES, S., MATTS SON, J.: Brand Value in Virtual Worlds: An Axiological Approach. In *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 204.

⁵³ THOMPSON, J. B.: *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 1995, p. 210.

⁵⁴ ROSENBAUM-ELLIOTT, R., PERCY, L., PERVAN, S.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 51.

⁵⁵ GRISWOLD, W.: *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London : Sage Publications, 2013, p. 72.

⁵⁶ ROSENBAUM-ELLIOTT, R., PERCY, L., PERVAN, S.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 53.

⁵⁷ SAUSSURE, F.: *Tečaj opće lingvistike*. Zagreb : ArTresor, 2000, p. 98.

⁵⁸ JUKIĆ, D.: Marketing Semiotics in Digital Games: Myth's Analysis in The Walking Dead and Heavy Rain. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 15-16.

⁵⁹ See: BARTHES, R.: *Mitologije*. Zagreb : Pelago, 2009, p. 141-181.

⁶⁰ BLUEPOINT GAMES, NAUGHTY DOG: *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection*. [Digital Game]. Santa Monica : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2015.; NAUGHTY DOG: *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. [Digital Game]. Santa Monica : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2016.

young man who builds his identity by travelling through exotic regions. From a digital brand perspective, the entire *Uncharted* digital world is marked by brand identity elements.

Consumers form beliefs about brand attributes and benefits in different ways. The definition of customer-based brand equity, however, does not distinguish between the source of brand associations and the manner in which they are formed; all that matters is their strength, favourability, and uniqueness.⁶¹ In this sense, we present brands in digital games through four categories: a) brand in the game, b) game as brand, c) protagonist as brand, and d) publisher as brand (see Table 1).

Table 1: Brand categories in digital games

Categories	Example
Brand in the game	<i>Nike, BMW, Everlast</i>
Games as brand	<i>Assassin's Creed, God of War, The Witcher</i>
Protagonist as brand	Lara Croft, Kratos, Geralt
Publisher as brand	<i>CD Projekt, Naughty Dog, Ubisoft</i>

Source: own processing, 2022

The first category are real brands. Users find them in the digital world and games. Those in the digital world serve to increase the reality in digital games, but also as an increased experience and satisfaction with the game itself. From a marketing perspective,⁶² brands in the digital world are an ideal form of advertising because users want to see them. The second category are digital games that have become brands because of their recognition, uniqueness, and originality. These are digital games that are recognizable at all levels of brand identity, and consumers perceive them through visual, auditory, symbolic, and metaphorical elements. The third category is the digital game protagonists who become so recognizable that they represent the entire digital game, as well as themselves. Such a digital brand, based on the main character, is a carrier of meaning that can be transferred to other digital games or media, such as Lara Croft appearing in the film. The fourth category is the publisher brand, that is, the corporate brand that represents, symbolizes, and associates not only digital games, but also corporate culture, corporate communication and even the community of gamers.

It is important to emphasize that brand categories can overlap, i.e., in digital games they can appear in two or more categories at the same time or that one category is reflected in another. It is also possible to create a new brand in the digital world, which then takes on the characteristics of the game as a brand or appears as an advertisement within another game. In the 2008 digital game *Prince of Persia*, there are parts of the game that are clearly associated with the promotion of *Assassin's Creed* and the main character Altaïr. An example can be used when the main character from the game becomes a brand and appears in other games as an association with the publisher, game and genre, which is the case in the digital game *Soulcalibur V* where Ezio Auditore da Firenze from the *Assassin's Creed 2* series appears, or the appearance Geralt of Rivia in the game *Soulcalibur VI*.

We can find this form of advertising in the form of hidden messages or meanings, i.e., “easter eggs”. Easter eggs, according from Mago,⁶³ can be considered as a text from both the communication related as well as the ludological points of view, they might be analysed based

⁶¹ KELLER, K. L.: *Strategic Brand Management*. Harlow : Pearson, 2013, p. 77.

⁶² See: KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing Management*. Hoboken : Pearson, 2012, p. 260-265.

⁶³ MAGO, Z.: Easter Eggs in Digital Games as a Form of Textual Transcendence (Case Study). In *Acta Ludologica*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 55.

on intertextual relationships. Allusions in digital games are manifestations of intertextuality and intermediality. Allusion refers to the fact that the text invokes another text or corpus of texts that influenced the author. The goal is to point out allusive techniques, but also the muted meaning of allusion outside the given context, the decoding of which is realized with media, ludological and cultural knowledge stored in the quotes.

All this points to the observation of the brand as a symbol. A memorable symbol can provide cohesion and structure to a brand identity and make it much easier to gain recognition and recall.⁶⁴ Elevating symbols to the status of being part of the identity reflects their potential power. Aaker distinguishes three types of symbols: a) visual imagery, b) metaphors, and c) the brand heritage.⁶⁵ These differences belong to brand identity, more precisely brand as a symbol. Digital brand is the vision that drives the creation of games under brand name. That vision, the key belief of the brands and its core values is called identity.⁶⁶

In this sense, brand identity is its essence because a brand is not just a name, label, or visual sign of a product. Brand identity is a set of elements by which the brand becomes recognizable. The basic elements that create brand identity, i.e., those that identify and differentiate the brand, are included in the hexagonal prism of identity. To build a digital brand, one must first build a brand identity that will demonstrate the value of the brand to clients.

Conclusion

Brands are much more than a product or service: they are symbols. Choosing symbols requires a clear definition of what the brand means. Consumers develop a relationship with a brand through symbolic value, adding personified human qualities to brands, but also developing a special relationship between the message and the sign. However, the brand's deepest value must be reflected in the external features of the brand's identity, and this is what the producer and consumer immediately recognize. This is also a paradox because only through knowing the brand identity, i.e., through fulfilling all six characteristics of the brand identity prism, can the identity elements be shaped, changed, and modified. In fact, brand identity defines what must stay and what is free to change.

In this sense, brands can be understood as living organisms. The syntagma of the brand as a living organism is a flexible area in which it is allowed to change and modify, that is, to adapt the elements of the brand's identity on the market. This is the reason some digital brands can drastically change their identity but remain the same at their core. An example is Lara Croft, who is associated with Tomb Raider, and who adapted to contemporary cultural theories. It is the same with Nathan Drake as a kind of variant of the postmodern protagonist who lives his dream.

This dream is the core of each brand's symbol. The dream of a better "me", the dream of a more beautiful "me" and the dream of a stronger "me", is a dream that spreads through the digital world and dreamer consumers who live out their dreams through interaction with digital games. Such dreams are useful to everyone, even if they remind us of de la Barca's play *La vida es sueño*.

⁶⁴ DOYLE, C.: *A Dictionary of Marketing*. Oxford : University Press, 2011, p. 49.

⁶⁵ AAKER, D. A.: *Building Strong Brands*. New York : Free Press, 1996, p. 79.

⁶⁶ KAPFERER, J. N.: *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London : Kogan Page, 2008, p. 171.

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STURKEN, M., CARTWRIGHT, L.: *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford : Oxford University press, 2004.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. [Digital Game]. Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2015.

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NAUGHTY DOG: *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. [Digital Game]. Santa Monica: Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2016.

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FROM DISRUPTION TO ALGORITHMIZATION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERES

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Abstract:

This theoretical study describes disruption of public spheres as a significant trend that is changing the quality of political communication. The effort of political strategists to digitally connect various civic and electoral groups and fulfil more communication goals is becoming increasingly apparent. The study examines how politicians try to attract (1) the algorithmic citizen, (2) create non-mass-media communication aggregates, and (3) thus become an algorithmic political force. It shows how these phenomena works in very new ways in political communication. Digital campaigning can effectively connect different groups and offer them new opportunities for communication participation. Parties transform into algorithmic political forces, themselves becoming a medium. Unlike previous ages of political communication, an algorithmic citizen can completely separate himself from building consensus in the mass media and fall victim to pre-arranged political contact. Digital campaigning thus creates large and well-connected politically active masses of communication, but it is also a threat to the rest of rationally-critical public spheres.

Key words:

Algorithm. Media. Political Communication. Public Sphere. Social Media.

1 Introduction

Previous ages of political communication have always been in some way connected with a rational-critical debate with an ever-expanding yet limited approach to public debate. The Habermasian ideal type of public sphere¹ has always somehow assumed that there is a formation of public opinion, which means some possibility of aggregation. This assumption could be made because, although the public sphere was to be accessible to all residents regardless of their characteristics, in reality, this ideal type always described more or less powerfully communicatively hierarchical situations that limit or influence the approach to the debate. Brumler and Kanavagh defined three ages of political communication that are based on this implicit hierarchy.² In the first age, political communication was subordinate to solid and stable political institutions and beliefs. In the second, the parties increasingly adapted their communications to the news values and television. In the third age, political communication was reshaped by five trends: “*Intensified professionalizing imperatives, increased competitive pressures, anti-elitist populism, a process of “centrifugal diversification”, and changes in how people receive politics.*”³

The third age thus presupposes a considerable loosening of communication hierarchies, including the weakening of the Habermasian ideal type of rational-critical communication, yet they implicitly relate to this ideal. Twenty years later, it is clear that this relationship must be abandoned if the fourth age of political communication is to capture our current situation

¹ See: HABERMAS, J.: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 1991.

² BLUMLER, J. G., KAVANAGH, D.: The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. In *Political Communication*, 1999, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 211.

³ BLUMLER, J. G., KAVANAGH, D.: The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. In *Political Communication*, 1999, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 209.

faithfully. Brumler himself claims this.⁴ Breakthrough political and communication cases, such as the US presidential election in 2016 and the Brexit referendum, have shown that the driving force behind political communication is not professionalization or competition in a clearly defined media field. Citizens have moved to quasi-information and fragmented-information niches.⁵ “Many celebrate the Internet for its potential to connect people, but one also could argue that the Internet enhances disconnection and segmentation. As citizens bypass traditional political organizations and use digital media to issue demands, we are observing public spheres of growing discordance, uncertainty and contradictory expectations up to the level of plain populism.”⁶

The political information environment between the media, politics, and citizens still exists, but it is no longer based on the common but the different. Instead of a centripetal movement towards the communication center, we remain in small groups on edge. The centripetal movement is prevented by losing the communication structure, which has traditionally been filled by the mass media and created common discussion fields through their professional routines.

Brumler himself tried to define the fourth age of political communication in 2016. He explained four essential features of the new stage. The first is “bifurcated efficacy”: “People may experience high levels of efficacy as a result of being able to communicate with each other, but unless they are dedicated activists, they can rarely connect their discourses, feelings and ideas to the institutions of governance. Secondly, there is the buffeting of elite-mass relations by stronger crosscurrents than previously experienced.”⁷ Although there are more efforts to grasp the fourth age of political communication,⁸ this work will focus on some completely new features of the fourth age of political communication: (1) algorithmic citizen, (2) non-mass-media communication aggregates, and (3) algorithmic political forces.

2 Algorithmic Citizen

The algorithm is a precise guide on how to solve the selected problem. We most often associate the word with programming, but this has changed dramatically recently. We hear more and more about algorithms connected with the advent of social networks and the transformation of the media and public sphere in general. The online world has offered technology companies unparalleled knowledge of their customers and the associated opportunity to distill the most exciting offer from their behavior with an algorithm. The goal is to stay on the page for social networks as long as possible and watch your ads. At the e-shop, a chain of recommendations for a suitable next purchase. The media can keep the reader, listener, or viewer with the most exciting content and even force it to pay for it. In a political campaign, it is the ability to target a selected group or even an individual.

⁴ BLUMLER, J. G.: The Fourth Age of Political Communication. In *Politiques de Communication*, 2016, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 24.

⁵ VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy? In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 12.

⁶ PFETSCH, B.: Dissonant and Disconnected Public Spheres as Challenge for Political Communication Research. In *Javnost – The Public*, 2018, Vol. 25, No. 1-2, p. 60.

⁷ BLUMLER, J. G.: The Fourth Age of Political Communication. In *Politiques de Communication*, 2016, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 28.

⁸ See: MAGIN, M. et al.: Campaigning in the Fourth Age of Political Communication. A Multi-Method Study on the Use of Facebook by German and Austrian Parties in the 2013 National Election Campaigns. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2016, Vol. 20, No. 11, p. 1698-1719.

However, this hyper-targeting has more and more critics. O’Neil described this, how big data increases inequality and threatens democracy.⁹ He gives many examples from the American environment, where at first, the introduction of automatic data sorting seemed like a clever saving of time and streamlining of decisions. Gradually, however, it turned out that one algorithm discriminates against some mortgage applicants. The other sends police officers preferentially to black locations. The third prevents selected groups from making a financial loan. Another in the media supports a heated debate, the spread of misinformation, or the inability to consensus. Bucher shows the inevitability of sideways and winning in what we consider to be worthless machine decisions.¹⁰ If the algorithm evaluates something as more advantageous, it constantly goes this way and improves with machine learning.

The use of algorithms and their manipulation in the digital environment of political campaigns is already documented by several works. Keller and Klinger have shown that the number of social bots is growing during election time, which significantly affects the quality of political information environments and questions the validity of quantitative content studies.¹¹ The issue of bots was also addressed in connection with the Brexit referendum,¹² the US presidential election,¹³ and many other key election moments. In such an environment, the algorithmic citizen quickly becomes a victim of the echo chamber¹⁴ and gains very distorted ideas about the offer of political actors and the distribution of views in society on the problem.

Unlike previous ages of political communication, an algorithmic citizen can completely separate himself from building consensus in the mass media and fall victim to pre-arranged political contact.¹⁵ Another activity in searching, liking, or tweeting seals this pre-prepared political communication around itself.

3 Non-mass-media Communication Aggregates

With the advent of social media, the traditional mass media did not lose only a large part of the political information environment. Significantly, it lost its dual role, when in addition to offering political information, it also had a significant influence on their selection, framing, and the formation of public consensus. According to Van Aelst et al.,¹⁶ we are moving towards the declining quality of news. Instead, it is not a question of deteriorating quality of information but a complete change in consumption by an algorithmic citizen.

⁹ O’NEIL, C.: *Weapons of Math Destruction*. New York : Broadway Books, 2016, p. 200.

¹⁰ BUCHER, T.: *If... Then*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 149.

¹¹ KELLER, T. R., KLINGER, U.: Social Bots in Election Campaigns: Theoretical, Empirical, and Methodological Implications. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 171.

¹² See: BASTOS, M. T., MERCEA, D.: The Brexit Botnet and User-Generated Hyperpartisan News. In *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 2017, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 172-185.

¹³ See: BESSI, A., FERRARA, E.: Social Bots Distort the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Online Discussion. In *First Monday*, 2016, Vol. 21, No. 11, p. 1-14. See also: HOWARD, P. N., WOOLLEY, S., CALO, R.: Algorithms, Bots, and Political Communication in the US 2016 Election: The Challenge of Automated Political Communication for Election Law and Administration. In *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 2018, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 81-93.

¹⁴ DUBOIS, E., BLANK, G.: The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 729.

¹⁵ LITT, E., HARGITTAI, E.: The Imagined Audience on Social Network Sites. In *Social Media + Society*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 2.

¹⁶ VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy? In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 8.

Zúñiga and Weeks describe it as news-finds-me effects: “*Citizens may perceive they don’t need to actively seek news because they will be exposed to news and remain well-informed through their peers and social networks.*”¹⁷

So the whole structure of media coverage, as we knew it, is changing. Mediatization was based on the vital role of mainstream media¹⁸ in society as the significant intermediaries for access to social knowledge. This position gives the press the ability to condition all of society’s spheres.¹⁹ Mediatization holds that mainstream media significantly influences societies and democracies. The citizens’ perceptions and knowledge of politics are highly mediated. Thus, the event representations created by the media and disseminated through news outlets could have effects on citizens’ perceptions of politics. However, digital communication creates new public spheres, which have their dynamics, but which can also be completely independent of the attractiveness of the communication center, i.e., the mainstream mass media.²⁰

Therefore, besides focusing research on citizens consuming political information outside the mass media, there is a need to research how understanding and agreement are formed over political news in different digital communication groups. Bennet and Pfetsch propose to focus on the transformation of classical processes that we have hitherto attributed to the mass media,²¹ such as gatekeeping, framing, indexing, or agenda-setting.²²

All these processes are taken over to some extent by non-media communication groups. Their longevity can be assessed according to whether it changes into a communication aggregate, i.e., whether it can transform individuals’ political attitudes into an articulated group’s articulated consensus. That this consensus can often be robust is shown by conspiracies such as Pizzagate, Qanon, the genocide against the Rohingyas, or political phenomena such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro – all this was not caused by the algorithms of social networks. Still, they undoubtedly helped to aggregate the individual parts of the conspiracies to spread and strengthen further uncontrollably.

4 Algorithmic Political Forces

The emergence of algorithmic citizen and non-mass-media communication aggregates allowed new algorithmic political forces to emerge in political communication. A digital campaign can hyper-target individuals or small groups, but it can also use consensus-building outside the mass media. The parties thus become an algorithmic political force themselves.

We can see a significant increase in skepticism about these tendencies within a few years. A series of major political events led scientists to examine the threat of conspiracies: “*The break-away of populist movements and their tendency to create their own conspiracy theories and*

¹⁷ GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, H., WEEKS, B., ARDEVOL-ABREU, A.: Effects of the News-Finds-Me Perception in Communication: Social Media Use Implications for News Seeking and Learning about Politics. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2017, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 105.

¹⁸ ESSER, F., STRÖMBÄCK, J.: *Mediatization of Politics*. London, New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 4.

¹⁹ HEPP, A.: *Cultures of Mediatization*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 29.

²⁰ KLINGER, U., SVENSSON, J.: The End of Media Logics? On Algorithms and Agency. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 12, p. 4653.

²¹ BENNETT, W. L., PFETSCH, B.: Rethinking Political Communication in a Time of Disrupted Public Spheres. In *Journal of Communication*, 2018, Vol. 68, No. 2, p. 247.

²² NEUMAN, W. R. et al.: The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data. In *Journal of Communication*, 2014, Vol. 64, No. 2, p. 193.

attack frames in their own communication venues further strengthens disconnection in the public sphere, posing serious threats to democracy.”²³

In algorithmic political forces, they can also completely detach themselves from the plan of mainstream political and media discussion and successfully target voters and create an alternative communication aggregate for them. Kreiss, Lawrence and McGregor suggest that, in addition to political information content, always examine the communication struggle for political identity ownership.²⁴ Political candidates try to adapt their voters to their program and appearance and claim exclusive representation of their chosen political identity.

Instead of enthusiastic techno-optimistic texts on the possibilities of social networks and catastrophic warnings against their abuse, studies are now emerging that can already balance the successes and failures of algorithmic political forces.²⁵ There are already other algorithmic counterbalances against algorithmic political forces – these are state concepts of how to counter the communication interference of foreign states in internal affairs. Typically it is about influencing elections or the state agenda.²⁶ Striving for political change or, conversely, preventing it can be programmed. Instead of a political ideology that demands or rejects the political change, an algorithm takes it over.

5 Conclusion

The study describes a new structure of political information environments. It shows a departure from the third age of political communication by which Brumler and Kanavagh described the situation at the turn of the century.²⁷ Political information environments are now determined by dissonant public spheres and fragmented information niches.²⁸

The definition of the fourth age of political communication is in debate; this work deals with three main features: (1) algorithmic citizen, (2) non-mass-media communication aggregates, and (3) algorithmic political forces. An algorithmic citizen can completely separate himself from building consensus in the mass media and fall victim to pre-arranged political communication to an unprecedented extent, thus becoming programmable in his reactions to political information.²⁹ Non-media communication aggregates are made possible by the onset of digital disruption and, above all, by two decades of social network development. The result is no longer an active and conscious search for political information or an assessment of the media’s credibility, but the assumption that political news will find you in some form. Zúñiga

²³ PFETSCH, B.: Dissonant and Disconnected Public Spheres as Challenge for Political Communication Research. In *Javnost – The Public*, 2018, Vol. 25, No. 1-2, p. 63.

²⁴ KREISS, D., LAWRENCE, R. G., MCGREGOR, S. C.: Political Identity Ownership: Symbolic Contests to Represent Members of the Public. In *Social Media + Society*, 2020, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 1.

²⁵ LANGER, A. I., COMERFORD, M., MCNULTY, D.: Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers: Understanding the Differences in the Role of Social Media in the Campaigns for the Scottish Independence Referendum. In *Political Studies*, 2019, Vol. 67, No. 4, p. 834.

²⁶ BJOLA, C., PAPADAKIS, K.: Digital Propaganda, Counterpublics and the Disruption of the Public Sphere: The Finnish Approach to Building Digital Resilience. In *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2020, Vol. 33, No. 5, p. 638.

²⁷ BLUMLER, J. G., KAVANAGH, D.: The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. In *Political Communication*, 1999, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 209.

²⁸ VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy? In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 12.

²⁹ LITT, E., HARGITTAI, E.: The Imagined Audience on Social Network Sites. *Social Media + Society*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 9.

and Weeks describe it as “news-finds-me effects”.³⁰ Parties transform into algorithmic political forces, themselves becoming a medium. Maintaining digital attention becomes a rare asset in political communication, which politicians strive for through thoughtful digital communication.

Indeed, the current digital campaigning can effectively connect different groups and offer them new opportunities for communication participation. It often creates large and well-connected politically active masses of communication. But rather than a rationally-critical public sphere, these new digital publics are a return to “refeudalization” and “representative publicity”³¹ because its primary purpose is only to represent the monarch’s absolute power.

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³⁰ GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, H., WEEKS, B., ARDÈVOL-ABREU, A.: Effects of the News-Finds-Me Perception in Communication: Social Media Use Implications for News Seeking and Learning about Politics. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2017, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 105.

³¹ HABERMAS, J.: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 1991, p. 137.

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“NON-EXISTING” PODCAST GENRES

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Abstract:

The popularity of the auditory media channel is once again reaching a very high level. Overall, innovations in media and technology have redefined the auditory media channel and created the space for the emergence of a new media product – the podcast. As a relatively young auditory format compared to the century-old radio broadcast, the podcast is not yet very well characterized in theory. It is still shaping its new and new forms attractive to the listener. Despite the considerable popularity of the podcast, there is not yet a workable genreology that is applicable to podcasting for both theory and practice. . The present study attempts to answer the questions of why we need podcast genres, how we currently cope with the absence of podcast genres, what could be the basis for a podcast genreology, and how it could be optimally handled and a new genre system for podcasts could be devised on this basis.

Key words:

Podcast. Radio. Genres. Audio. Sound.

1 Introduction

We use the distinction of genres in everyday life, when we can quite accurately choose what kind of film we want to see in the cinema, based on our knowledge of the genres. A similar principle works – if we like a musical artist who works within the confines of a certain genre. We can reach for other music of the same genre with some probability that we will also like another artist of the same genre. We use genre labels for radio or television broadcast content, newspaper, magazine or online texts, as well as other media formats (e.g. reportage, documentary photography, portraiture, etc.) J. Mistrík understands “*genre as a matter of form, conditioned by the content, the subject of the statement and the relation of the percipient to the text.*”¹ J. Findra defines genre as “*a model that is an immediate invariant framework for the production of actual texts.*”² A. Tušer describes genre as “*...a specific form of reflection of reality, which has established features and is embedded in the consciousness of both the creators and the addressees.*”³ Tušer also describes genre as an abstract concept that is not tangible, but its form as a reflection is tangible, visible, audible.⁴ It means, the genre is not the media product, but the genre characterizes the media product. According to J. Mistrík, the genre is characterized by length, internal structure, frequency of connecting expressions, stylistic progression, subtitle, extra-linguistic means, theme, etc.⁵ G. Burton and J. Jiráček argue that genres are based on so-called “*secondary codes*”⁶, and that genres stereotype content, making the message of that content more readable. They explain that if the cover of a magazine has the face of a smiling woman on it, the reader⁷ immediately knows that it is a magazine for women and that the message of this cover would, in verbal form, sound something like this: “this is a magazine for women – pay attention to this cover. Read what’s inside – these are women you might be interested in.” All the above experts implicitly agree that the role of genres is to anchor narrative practices, making communication between creator and recipient more effective and understandable.

¹ MISTRÍK, M.: *Žánre vecnej literatúry*. Bratislava : SPN, 1975, p. 7.

² FINDRA, J.: *Štylistika slovenčiny*. Martin : Osveta, 2004, p. 210.

³ TUŠER, A.: *Ako sa robia noviny*. Žilina : EUROKÓDEX, 2010, p. 81.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ MISTRÍK, M.: *Moderná slovenčina*. Bratislava : Mladé letá, 1988, p. 224.

⁶ JIRÁČEK, J.: *Úvod do studia médií*. Brno : Barrister & Principal, 2001, p. 76.

⁷ Authors’ note: The reader from our socio-cultural and geopolitical background.

According to Velas, journalistic genres serve for “*more effective communication between the creator and the addressee because they rely on the existing genre awareness.*”⁸

The specific features of the genres are therefore also absolutely fixed and the classification of a media product into the category of a given genre is determined by them.⁹ However, genres can also have overlaps into other genres in certain features. A frequent case where a work deviates from genre is when the work crosses over into another genre. A typical example might be romantic comedy, where the comedic elements are enriched by the work’s direction into romantic overlaps – these give the story a seriousness, a balance between the serious and the comic. This balance can help the viewer to relate the film’s reality to the viewer’s real life. Because of the depth that this gives to the film, it is possible for the viewer to empathise more with the film’s characters and thus have a more intense cinematic experience. We are also familiar with genre overlaps in the ‘genreology’ of radio broadcasting. Among such ‘genre hybrids’ we can find, for example, the art-documentary programme. In the case of this genre, the creators complement the interpretation of facts with artistic practices aimed at the recipient’s experience. A. Tušer therefore stresses that genre dominance is significant in creating or defining a genre. The genre, i.e., the form of how to inform the addressee in the best possible way, how to educate him/her in the most convincing way or how to entertain him/her in the most effective way, is determined according to which group of elements or which features prevail in the media speech.¹⁰

The genre characteristics of radio broadcasting is crucial in the case of our study, because podcast broadcasting has inherently evolved from radio broadcasting. Radio and podcast are thus quite closely linked. Compared to other forms of auditory content, podcast production is still relatively young. The origins of the podcast date back to the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, but its gradual rise and implementation among mainstream media production has only been happening in the last 10 years or so. In contrast, the origins of public radio broadcasting date back to the 1920s with the establishment of the first public radio station, KDKA. Theorists and practitioners in the field of radio production (compared to theorists and practitioners in the field of podcasting) have had considerably more time to define and firmly grasp a theory, along with which also comes a firmly defined genre categorization of media content. The field of podcasting is still evolving intensively. In the 2 years that we have been continuously researching the podcast issue, we have not encountered a universally valid, comprehensively defined podcast ‘genreology’. In academic circles, published articles are always only about a specific genre group. We find a more comprehensive genre structure only on distribution platforms, where the categorization of podcasts is based on their experience and on practice. In the following chapters, we will characterise the different radio genres according to recognised Slovak and foreign authors. We then look at the ‘genreology’ of podcasts as it is used in practice – that is, on individual podcast platforms. We will choose the platforms that are most listened to and characterize how content is categorized within those platforms. The aim of our study is to provide

⁸ VELAS, Š.: *Teória a prax novinárskych žánrov II*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2000, p. 3.

⁹ Authors’ note: As an example, film-noir is a genre with very distinctive storytelling practices. Some of the characteristics of this genre are fairly well-defined – a rugged protagonist in love with his femme fatale, rain, and a dark atmosphere. Other traits can be described as fluid, because even without them or with their variation we can characterize the film as a film-noir. Among the fluid features of this genre we could include its black-and-white visuals since the films of this genre were made in an era of predominantly black-and-white films. It is not, however, its fixed characteristic. In *Sin City*, for example, the black-and-white visuals are complemented by elements of colour that give the film its distinctive image. However, despite the violation of the black-and-white convention, we can speak of a film-noir genre.

¹⁰ BARTOŠEK, J., TUŠER, A.: Teoreticko-praktické východiská mediálnej tvorby. In TUŠER, A. et al.: *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Žilina : EUROKÓDEX, 2010, p. 39.

a theoretical basis for researching and defining podcast genres based on a collection and comparison of radio genres defined in current radio theory and used in current radio practice. A well-defined genreology should serve theorists in media studies and mass media communication, enabling them to base their research on functionally defined theoretical pillars. We also see the overlaps of a good podcast genreology in the pedagogical process, where educators would be able to rely universal and functional knowledge in the field of this newly emerging audio format. Thirdly, we assume that if podcast genreology were set up in a user-friendly way, it would also be able to be applied in podcast practice – as we write above in the text – it would ‘streamline’ the communication between creator and listener. This aspect, i.e. the overlap into podcast practice, could also be helpful in relation to the economics around podcasts. In television, the different genres and formats have been defined for years. As a result, creators are familiar with the theoretical background of television in relation to genres, and there are also fixed prices for individual performances in relation to a given genre or format (or the difficulty of performance in relation to a given genre or format).

2 Categorisation of Radio Content into Genres

Like other media industries, auditory communication uses the categorization of media units into genres. In radio terms, genre is quite narrowly defined. Experts in the field of auditory media Hudíková and Habiňáková divide the media content of radio broadcasting into three basic categories, which they then subdivide into subgenres. The three basic categories they further describe are:

- a) news,
- b) publicistic radio production,
- c) artistic production.¹¹

Lehoczká and Chudinová see it similarly. However, they did not elaborate the division of radio broadcasting as such. In their division, they focused specifically on radio journalism. They categorize radio journalism in two ways, standardly used in journalism theory, firstly trichotomously:

- a) news genres,
- b) analytical genres,
- c) art-documentary genres.

And secondly, in a simpler dichotomous way:

- a) news,
- b) publicistic radio production.¹²

As Jenča argues, there are multiple perspectives on the categorization of content into genres¹³. As we will show later, the optics of viewing the issue, the criteria for dividing media products into genres, the specific categorization of individual genres into categories, and the features of individual genres can often differ markedly among scholars in radio theory. On the other hand, however, there are several overlaps in the genre categorization of radio among experts. At the same time, Jenča adds that genre categorisation should be taken as an open-ended process. In the following subchapters, we will analyse the perspectives of leading authors in the field of

¹¹ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 54.

¹² LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 38.

¹³ JENČA, I.: *Rozhlasové spravodajstvo*. Bratislava : X Art, 2004, p. 84.

radio theory on the topic of categorisation of radio media products. The different categorizations will be compared with each other. The information that we will subsequently synthesize will serve as an informational “bridge” from which to analyse the state of podcast genre categorization in practice.

2.1 Radio News in the Context of Radio Genres

News forms an important part of classical radio broadcasting and therefore, as a category of auditory media content, it appears uniformly in all three of the above-mentioned divisions. News in radio broadcasting is generally understood as a journalistic form that serves to inform the public about important information (this is information that is important within the macro-dramaturgy of a given radio). The nature of radio news genres is signaling, due to the principle of auditory perception, which is more amenable to the perception of shorter, more concise material. The content of news is essentially made up of news which concisely and succinctly presents topical or unfamiliar topics to the public. In the table below, we list the features of news coverage by individual author (with the years of publication of the cited publications):

Table 1: Signs of radio news genres according to theoretical experts

D. McQuail ¹⁴ (1999)	Z. Hudíková, E. Habiňáková ¹⁵ (2018)	V. Lehoczká, E. Chudinová ¹⁶ (2005)
- timeliness	- emergency	- clarity
- Unexpectedness	- truthfulness	- clarity
- predictability of type	- objectivity	- brevity
- fractional nature	- brevity	-simple linguistic devices
- volatility	- clarity	
- conspicuousness	- timeliness	
- notification	- professionalism	
- influence by values		
- Interesting fact		
- factuality		

Source: own processing, 2022

As we can see, there is some overlap between the most recent publication dealing with radio theory and the other publications (shown by the colour correspondence), and thus some features are found in several authors. In other features, individual authors differ and thus describe news as a genre (among themselves) with slight variations. Interestingly, the feature “objectivity” is mentioned only by Hudíková and Habiňáková, despite the fact that a higher degree of objectivity is one of the main features that distinguish news from publicistic radio production or more artistic genres. On the other hand, the authors mention a feature – “professionalism”, which can be understood in rather broad contexts. In the text, belonging to this feature, they explain this feature in more detail as the professionalism of the journalist’s performance in terms of content and form.

2.1.1 Subgenres of Radio News

As noted above, the categorisation of media content in radio broadcasting has several levels. As with each genre, there are defined features that characterise each sub-genre. Individual experts in the field of radio journalism characterize the following sub-genres as follows:

¹⁴ MCQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teórie masovej komunikácie*. Prague : Portál, 1999, p. 59.

¹⁵ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 66-67.

¹⁶ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 37.

Table 2: Radio news sub-genres according to theoretical experts

Z. Hudíková, E. Habiňáková ¹⁷ (2018)		V. Lehoczká, E. Chudinová ¹⁸ (2005)	
Sub-genre	The most important signs	Sub-genre	The most important signs
Radio report	Clear, concise content, details of sources	Audio report	“sound recording, telephone call, transmission, etc.”
Extended report	Radio news enriched with professional commentary (close to publicistic radio production)	Reportage report	Brings personal insights of the author, authentic sounds, respondents
Audio report	Authenticity, from the scene, authentic sounds	Telephone message from correspondent, editor	Informative statement by an authorised person over the telephone
Reportage report	Reporting element in the form of audio background recording, uses authentic sound that has great informational value, commentary directly from the scene of the event	Audio response	Response from specific affected persons
Report	Presentation of paraphrased or quoted socially or politically relevant material, with journalistic intent	Poll	A collection of public views, bringing new information to the content
News broadcast	Broadcasting directly from the scene of the event, the announcer (recorded in the studio) merely announces the beginning and end of the media product	Informative speech before the microphone	Authentic testimony, live/pre-recorded
News briefing	Monologic presentation of facts about a current phenomenon, concise, clear, precise and consistent.	News talk	Author’s questions + interviewee’s answers, always starting with the author’s question
Interview	Dialogical presentation of actual facts, information, opinions or statements of the respondent (politician/expert/responsible or competent)	Operative interview	Without preparation in the field, with the recipient
		News interview	The author is ready, he has an intention, the author expects specific information
		News broadcast	From the place of the event, stating the beginning and the end, the author is ready
		Report	Direct quotations, informative elements outweigh evaluative elements
		News audio montage	Montage of authentic sounds, snippets of performances, variety
		Press review (only some authors advise here)	Application of print into radio form

Source: own processing, 2022

¹⁷ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 66-67.

¹⁸ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 37-38.

As was the case with the individual features of news coverage, there is some set overlap between the authors' theories. The individual overlaps are highlighted by colour – the same colours signify the overlap in a given feature between the experts; grey and white do not mean anything in this context, they only serve to improve the visual orientation in the table. The two groups of authors agree on the category “Reporting” both in its name and in the features they use to describe it. Another overlap between the two pairs of female authors is in the “Interview” category. However, while Hudíková and Habiňáková describe the interview as a separate category, Lehoczka and Chudinová divide the interview into two categories: the News Interview and the Operative Interview.

2.2 Publicistic Radio Production in the Context of Radio Genres

The second category is publicistic radio genre. Since the authors Lehoczka and Chudinová state that they consider analytical-documentary genres (analytical genres) to be publicistic radio genre¹⁹, we can say that publicistic radio production occurs in all three divisions in the same way as news. “...the basis of creation in the publicistic radio production genres is above all an effort to penetrate into the depth of the given reality and its essence. In this genre group we also start from information as the basis of journalistic production, but information is only the starting point, the decisive moment becomes analysis, explanation, attitude, opinion, point of view.”²⁰ K. Orbán characterises publicistic radio production genres, as those that “...inform, penetrate into the depth of the problem, analyse, explain, generalise current phenomena and influence the opinions and attitudes of the audience.”²¹ Publicistic radio production can be found in the form of radio montages and programme units. The radio montage works with pre-existing recorded material and thus does not bring the most up-to-date information. By combining individual pre-prepared elements, new relationships are created which create a dramatic effect. If the individual elements have a homogeneous structure, we speak of a programme package. In both cases, it is true that in media products (as opposed to news media products) the information itself is its starting point. The latter is further analysed, explained. Often in publicistic radio production, the attempt is also to influence the recipient's opinion.²² This means that publicistic radio production is more opinionated and less objective compared to news reporting. We list the characteristics that define publicistic radio production in the table below along with the authors:

Table 3: Signs of genres of publicistic radio production according to theoretical experts

V. Lehoczka, E. Chudinová ²³ (2005)
penetration into the depth of a given reality and its essence
revealing connections
evaluation of the event, analysis of the facts
to address the differentiated interests of the listener.

Source: LEHOCZKA, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 47.

2.2.1 Sub-genres of Publicistic Radio Production

Radio publicistic production is divided into two basic categories into which the various sub-genres can be classified. In order to keep the analogy between news and publicistic radio

¹⁹ LEHOCZKA, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 35.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ ORBAN, K.: Rozhlasová tvorba. In TUŠER, A. et al.: *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Žilina : EUKÓDEX, 2010, p. 166.

²² HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 86.

²³ LEHOCZKA, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 47.

production clear, we will hereafter describe these two categories and refer to their individual subgroups as sub-genres. All the authors whose publications we have analysed in the context of radio genres agree on the basic division of radio publicistic genres into two basic categories, namely, analytical-type publicistic radio production genres and emotional-visual-type publicistic radio production genres. The analytical type genres are mainly factual and logical in nature. They seek to influence the rational side of the listener.²⁴ “*The means of expression here are primarily of a factual, conceptually logical nature, which results from the dominant focus on rationally influencing the listener.*”²⁵ In contrast, publicistic radio production of emotional type is characterised by the fact that the author tries to have a stronger impact on the listener’s feelings. He uses artistic-documentary elements in language, composition, direction and interpretation.²⁶

Below are two individual tables of genre breakdowns for analytical and than emotional type of publicistic radio production from several authors (in that order).

Table 4: Analytical sub-genres of publicistic radio production according to theoretical experts

Z. Hudíková, E. Habiňáková ²⁷ (2018)		K. Orban ²⁸ (2010)		V. Lehoczká, E. Chudinová ²⁹ (2005)	
Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre	Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre	Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre
Radio commentary	Author explains, evaluates, and generalises a given topic from the point of view of a wider social context and takes a standpoint	Radio commentary	Follows up on a specific relevant report, explains the phenomenon	Comment	Explains the phenomenon in a broader context, explores the phenomenon, offers a monologic conclusion,
Radio appearance	Immediate reproduction of a current event, engages the listener in current events	Publicistic interview	Broader context, questions follow up – makes a point	Note	Explores a topical issue from a narrow point of view, witty punchline
Note	Subjectively oriented analysis, the author’s attempt to connect emotionally and intellectually with the recipient on a topic	Radio dispatching	Remote interview, authentic account of the scene of the event	Gloss	Like a memo but more fictional, uses irony, sarcasm,
Analysis	Important is the explanation of an issue through conversation	Radio discussion	Exchange of information between participants, used to form an opinion	Review	Analysis of an event enriched by the author’s point of view, especially in the field of art and culture
Review	A form of analysis, examines an issue from a particular perspective, the subject is	Lecture	Educates, uses similes and descriptions	Speech	Personal experience of the author, monothematic monologue

²⁴ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 86.

²⁵ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 36.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 66-67.

²⁸ ORBAN, K.: Rozhlasová tvorba. In TUŠER, A. et al.: *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Žilina : EUROKÓDEX, 2010, p. 166.

²⁹ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : Trnava : FMK UCM, p. 37-38.

	philosophical and artistic areas				
Report	Immediate reproduction of a current event, engages the listener in current events	Analysis	Combination of several elements (commentary, reflection...) challenging to process and deliver	Judge	Insight into court case, draws conclusion from criminal event, uses descriptions,
Reflection	Subjectively oriented analysis, the author's attempt to connect emotionally and intellectually with the recipient on a topic	Review	Form of analysis – critically assesses a particular work, may use examples	Publicistic interview	Informs and analyzes about a current topic, in a broader context, draws a point of view
Radio Interview	Important is the explanation of an issue through conversation	Radio reportage	Direct witnessing of an event, creates a sense of participation	Radio. discussion	Discusses multiple experts with different opinions, on a current topic
Radio discussion	Analysis of the current phenomenon with experts in the field			Radio Analysis	In-depth analysis of an event or phenomenon, offers a holistic picture of the issue
Discussion (the so-called “radio platform/podium”.	Several opinion groups participate in it, collective analysis of the issue,			Publicistic programme	Uses audio-documentary elements and original text, discusses complex issues
Expert discussion	Specific topic, multiple perspectives, broadens knowledge, moderator-led			Talk show	Dynamism, variety, moderator personality, originality, point of view, rigorous analysis of fact

Source: own processing, 2022

Equal colours of given features in the table mean that we consider a given sub-genre to be an overlap in categorizations. Neither grey nor white mean anything in this context, they only serve to better orient the table. The table shows that there are clear similarities and even correspondences between sub-genres. The authors agree on the classification of “reviews” among the genres of analytical-type publicistic radio production, not only in nomenclature but also in the characteristics of this sub-genre. However, there are several sub-genres that are included in only one group of authors, such as Talk show. Here, too, some form of overlap in characteristics can be found, the difference arising in the criteria of the sub-genre set by the experts. For example, although there are a number of similarities between the talk show and the radio interview, such as dialogicality or factuality, not all features are identical. While in the case of the talk show, the authors highlight that the personality of the presenter is important, this is not indicated in the case of the radio interview. Therefore, we can conclude that the different optics of the theorists in question may lead to the definition of sub-genre categories with some variations.

Table 5: Emotional and artistic sub-genres of publicistic radio production according to theoretical experts

Z. Hudíková, E. Habiňáková ³⁰ (2018)		K. Orban ³¹ (2010)		V. Lehoczka, E. Chudinová ³² (2005)	
Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre	Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre	Sub-genre	Characteristics of the sub-genre
Glossary	A phenomenon explained from only one perspective, uses irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, metaphors, criticizes society	Fayeton	Documentary-image method, satire, humour, topicality	Fayeton	Documentary-visual representation of an actual phenomenon
Essay	Topics are usually high-intellectual, high-professional, in-philosophical areas, tries to stimulate thinking	Line	Less descriptive, tied to the action	Line	Close to a short story, authentic sounds
Streaming	Several hour block of spoken word, interviews, papers, music, live, spot script	Fitcher	Complex, uses many means of expression, montage art of the highest degree	Broadcast reportage	Reproduction of a current event, interviewees' statements, facts
		Sound Scene	Dialogical treatise on social issues	Artistic-publicistic programme	Integrated journalistic unit in which reportage forms the main plane of depiction of the actual event.
		Wordsmith	A journalistic genre split off from the fejtoon. Over time it acquired a satirical-critical, smiling character	Fitcher	
		Narration	Emotional description of experiences, topicality, rich intonation		

Source: own processing, 2022

2.3 Artistic Content of Radio Production

The third category within the distinction of radio broadcasting content includes various artistic and artistic-documentary genres. As mentioned above, a ternary categorisation of radio genres can be found in the publications *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production* by Hudíková and Habiňáková, as well as in the publication *Fundamentals of Radio Journalism Theory* by Lehoczka and Chudinová. However, the fundamental difference is that in the former publication

³⁰ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 66-67.

³¹ ORBAN, K.: Rozhlasová tvorba. In TUŠER, A. et al.: *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Žilina : EUKÓDEX, 2010, p. 166.

³² LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 37-38.

the whole radio broadcasting is categorised, in the latter publication the authors only categorise the journalistic content. Hudíková and Habiňáková refer to the third category as artistic broadcasting, Lehoczská and Chudinová refer to their third category as the category of artistic-documentary genres. Thus, not only the name, but also the optics and criteria of division differ. While Lehoczská and Chudinová describe the category as publicistic radio production of an artistic-documentary nature, Hudíková and Habiňáková's text shows that they include here all content of an artistic nature, from music to various dramatic genres. In the table below, we present the features of artistic broadcasting genres according to Hudíková and Habiňáková and the features of artistic-documentary genres according to Lehoczská and Chudinová:

Table 6: Artistic radio production sub-genres signs according to theoretical experts

Hudíková a Habiňáková (2018) ³³	Lehoczská a Chudinová (2005) ³⁴
features of the genres of artistic broadcasting	features of the genres of artistic broadcasting
they combine diverse components in various combinations – poetry, prose, journalism, documentaries (including audio) and music – into a single whole	suitable for events with emotional context
through specific means and procedures, a new reality is created in which the original building blocks of the session (both material and artistic) are transformed, thus acquiring a new quality	complex facts with emphasis on both rational information and emotional context
convey information and knowledge about current phenomena, events, problems and related contexts in a rational and emotional way.	rich emotional microcosm of the human being
art forms are created directly for radio or the original work is presented without modifications, with partial or more significant modifications	spontaneous expression
the radio word and working with its nuances arouse the imagination, add action to the plot and create images of a visual nature; this also involves working with rhythm, pauses, intonation, the colour of the voice and its modulation.	specific radio composition
an important role is played by sound, which interprets specific meanings or emotionally enhances the imagery of linguistic devices; music obscures distracting sensations and enhances the emotional experience because it can support what the words present – joy, enthusiasm, sadness, etc.	emotional and pictorial elements in the production

Source: own processing, 2022

As we can see in the table, the features reported by the two pairs of authors are quite different. The reason is that Hudíková and Habiňáková describe artistic content in radio in general, while Lehoczská and Chudinová describe publicistic radio production genres with artistic means of expression. This is also why there are differences between the features the authors use to describe artistic genres. The authors Hudíková and Habiňáková focus the features mainly on the specificity of artistic radio genres, which distinguishes them from other genres. Often the authors describe imagery as a by-product of artistic genres – (the spoken word in artistic genres) arouses the imagination, or (sound design) “emotionally enhances imagery”. However, even in the authors we can see that there are some similarities between the artistic content of radio broadcasting and radio publicistic production. In fact, like radio publicistic production, artistic content also deals with topical issues, conveys information and affects the emotions of the listener. The authors Lehoczská and Chudinová also refer to imagery in the sign “emotional and

³³ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 101.

³⁴ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 55.

pictorial elements in creation”. In this sign there is some overlap between the pair of authors also at the level of the scope of the work – because Lehoczká and Chudinová also claim that certain elements of the artistic content have an emotional effect on the listener. In this respect, the authors also follow up with a second feature, where they describe that the action of this genre takes place on both a rational and emotional level. The fourth feature mentioned by Lehoczká and Chudinová is ‘spontaneous speech’. Since speech in radio production is linked exclusively to the spoken word (because mimicry, gesture and posturing are not mediated except by verbal description in radio production), we can say that Hudíková and Habiňáková say exactly the opposite about the spoken word in artistic content. They argue that the spoken word has a dramatizing effect and is imaginative. However, this disagreement stems mainly from the fact what criteria the pair of authors set for themselves when classifying radio genres (we list the criteria earlier in this paragraph).

In the table below, we show how the two pairs of authors categorized the different artistic genres:

Table 7: Artistic radio production sub-genres according to theoretical experts

Z. Hudíková, E. Habiňáková ³⁵ (2018)		V. Lehoczká, E. Chudinová ³⁶ (2005)	
Sub-genre	The most important signs	Sub-genre	The most important signs
Radio play	It awakens the imagination, has a story, creates a new dramatic reality in the listener’s imagination, allows a quick transition from one place or time to another, or an arbitrary transition from real reality to fiction and vice versa; it uses work with voice, rhythm, pauses, intonation, tone of voice, modulation; music enhances the emotional experience; sound effects orient the listener and enhance the imagery of the words	Fayeton	Documentary – pictorial representation of an actual phenomenon
Fitcher	Processes topical issues, uses methods that affect both rationale and emotion, has a specific way of presenting facts	Line	Close to a short story, authentic sounds
Music	In an autonomous form in the form of independent songs	Radio reportage	Reproduction of a current event, interviewees’ statements, facts
Verbal works -- fiction, non-fiction, art-documentary and literary strips	Also as an important element or complement of spoken word programmes combines disparate components into a single whole; through specific means and procedures, a new reality is created in which the original building blocks of the session (both factual and artistic) are transformed into a new quality	Artistic-publicist programme	Integrated journalistic unit in which reportage forms the main plane of depiction of the current event

³⁵ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 66-67.

³⁶ LEHOCZKÁ, Z., CHUDINOVÁ, H.: *Základy teórie rozhlasovej žurnalistiky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2005, p. 37-38.

Artistic works -- poetry tape, radio short story, reading for continuation, radio dramatisation	It is presented in various forms -- monological, dialogical or dramatized; music is an important part of the session; in the creation of such a work, the epic text is transformed into a dramatic form, often it is also an update of the original work	Ficher	Rational and emotional impact, blending of documentary and fiction
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Source: own processing, 2022

Both pairs of authors divide radio genres according to a different principle. While Lehoczká and Chudinová focus exclusively on radio journalism, Hudíková and Habiňáková work with radio broadcasting as such. Therefore, they also add music to the artistic category. As is clear from their text³⁷, they mean autonomous music, which usually permeates radio broadcasts, but they also describe purposeful music, which is purposefully used in various radio programmes to illustrate the atmosphere, enhance the emotional impact or artistic experience. In contrast, Lehoczká and Chudinová, in their category of art-documentary genres, describe genres that are journalistic, but make extensive use of various means of artistic expression. Both pairs of authors consider ficher as artistic content, and also both of them, in describing it, claim that it uses both methods of rational and methods of emotional type of influence on the listener. Lehoczká and Chudinová, however, as mentioned in section 4.2.1 *Sub-genres of radio journalism*, consider the ficher as a journalistic genre, in which they agree with Orban. The other categories of artistic genres are mentioned differently by the authors. Hudíková and Habiňáková also characterise the so-called artistic production, in which they include genres such as poetry bands or artistic readings, which, unlike fiction, already bear exclusively the characteristics of art-oriented genres. Another such exclusively art-oriented genre is the radio play, which they also include in their categorisation of artistic genres.

2.4 Genre Categorisation of Podcast

The recipient does not need to know radio theory in order to choose a particular genre or format that would suit them. He simply listens to his favourite station and, if he does not like the media product, turns off the radio or tunes to another station where new content is already “waiting for him”. The choice of preferred radio content is quite intuitive for the listener. Since the listener does not need to have knowledge of radio genre categorisation to select content, “...*some theorists argue that genre categorisation is only indicative for practice.*”³⁸ However, this may not be true of radio’s “little brother” – the podcast.

If a podcast listener wants to choose his or her content, he or she first chooses the platform on which to listen to the content. Thus, in the analogy between radio and podcast, there are podcast platforms at the level of radio stations. The most fundamental difference between podcast and radio is the essence of the podcast concept – i.e. ‘audio on demand’ (=audio content on demand). “Audio on demand” means a wider choice of preferred auditory content in a specific real-time format compared to traditional radio broadcasting. Thus, the advantage of a podcast in the context of genres is that the listener can compare his preferences – as a set of features and compare them with a specific genre – which can also be characterized as a set of features. With some correspondence between one’s own preferences and the features of a particular genre, one could thus narrow down the choice of preferred content and thus more easily arrive at the matching content.

³⁷ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HABIŇÁKOVÁ, E.: *Radio Broadcasting and Radio Production*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 101.

³⁸ JENČA, I.: *Rozhlasové spravodajstvo*. Bratislava : X Art, 2004, p. 84.

Podcast does not yet have a time-tested and theoretically well-developed categorization of genres like radio. The naming of the different genres is based on user experience – as podcasts are usually listened to using different streaming platforms (*Spotify, Google Podcast, Apple Podcasts, Deezer,...*). Professionals in this field cannot yet rely on a universally defined theory, the categorisation of individual podcasts between different streaming platforms therefore varies markedly. Currently, there are many podcast platforms. To select the most relevant categorizations of podcast channels, we set out to determine which platforms are the most listened to because they have the greatest reach. We also assume that the most successful podcast platforms have content categorized based on preference surveys or other more professional criteria. The platforms that creators most often refer to when promoting their media products include *Spotify, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts*, and, in the Slovak environment, the podcast platform *Podmaz*. We don't have a list of the most used podcast platforms in Slovakia today, but we did manage to find a list of the fifteen most used podcast platforms in the U.S. 2019 – 2020 for users aged 18 and older on *statista.com*.³⁹

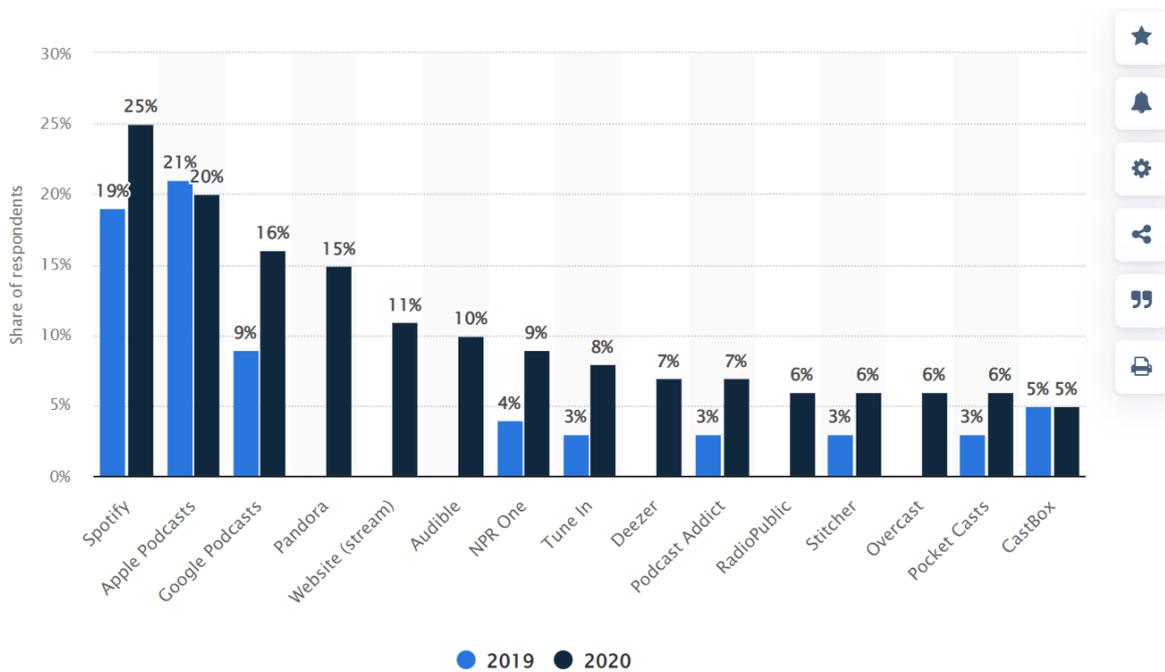


Figure 1: Popularity of podcast platforms with US listeners over 18

Source: *Most Commonly Used Apps for Listening to Podcasts Among Podcast Listeners in the United States in 2019 and 2020*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/943537/podcast-listening-apps-us/>>.

The top three most listened to platforms in 2020, according to that statistic, were – *Spotify, Apple Podcasts* and *Google Podcasts*. The fourth is podcast platform *Pandora*, which has been in the market since 2020. The fifth most popular way to listen to podcasts is directly on the podcast producers' websites. In the table below, we can see how each platform categorizes its content into genres, how they characterize their genres, what the overlaps between the categorizations are, and how they differ.

³⁹ *Most Commonly Used Apps for Listening to Podcasts Among Podcast Listeners in the United States in 2019 and 2020*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/943537/podcast-listening-apps-us/>>.

Table 8: Podcast content categorisation according to leading podcast platforms

Content segmentation on <i>Spotify</i> – category (genre) ⁴⁰	Content segmentation on the <i>Apple Podcasts</i> platform – category (genre) ⁴¹	Content segmentation on <i>Google Podcasts</i> – category (genre) ⁴²
Stories	Arts	Society & Culture
Educational	Business	Comedy
Music	Comedy	News & Politics
Lifestyle & Health	Education	Sport & Recreation
Business & Technology	Fiction	Education
Arts & Entertainment	Government	Business
Sports & Recreation	History	Technology
Comedy	Health & Fitness	Arts
News & Politics	Kids & Family	Health
Videogames	Leisure	TV & Film
	Music	
	News	
	Religion & Spirituality	
	Science	
	Society & Culture	
	Sports	
	Technology	
	True Crime	
	TV & Film	

Source: own processing, 2022

As we can see in the table, the concept of categorizing the content of podcast platforms is purely based on the topic that the podcast channel handles. To clearly, graphically mark the overlaps between the categorizations of each platform, we have devised a system similar to the one we used when we analysed the genres of radio broadcasts earlier in the text. We have marked *Spotify* as the primary platform (since it is the most listened to), and the other two as secondary platforms. We have marked each primary platform category with a different colour. If a particular category topic on the secondary platform is the same as a category topic on the primary platform, we have marked it with the same colour as the one on the primary platform (e.g. Comedy = Comedy -> both marked in light blue). We chose this approach because of topics like “Business and Technology”. While in the case of *Spotify*, both subtopics are categorized under one category, *Apple Podcasts* have separate categories for both “Business” and “Technology”. This is similar to *Spotify*’s “News and Politics” category. *Apple Podcasts* have separate categories called “Government” and “News”. *Google Podcasts*, however, are identical to *Spotify* in this respect, using the same “News and Politics” category. The two categories in which all three platforms completely match are “Education” and “Comedy”. Also of interest are “Stories” on the *Spotify* platform and “Fiction” on the *Apple Podcasts* platform. We assume that there will be direct overlap between these categories – that is, that the same podcast channels can be found in them and that the two categories share the same features. However, we will only verify this in our planned research, which will focus on examining individual podcast channels, their traits, and the traits of the genres/channels to which they are assigned. Another interesting category published only on the *Spotify* platform is the Video Games category. In conclusion, while both *Spotify* and *Google Podcasts* use a 10-pieces division of their content into categories, *Apple Podcasts* use up to a 19-pieces division. While it is more precise to divide content into multiple categories, there are some podcasts that may be on the edge between two

⁴⁰ *Spotify Podcast Categories*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://open.spotify.com/genre/topic-grid/>>.

⁴¹ *Apple Podcast Categories*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.podcastinsights.com/itunes-podcast-categories/>>.

⁴² *Google Podcast Categories*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://podcasts.google.com/>>.

categories with their content, so placing a podcast channel into a specific category can be quite confusing and may also make it difficult for the recipient to navigate when searching for an interesting topic.

3 Conclusion

As we have shown in the previous chapters, the categorisation of a podcast into genres takes place in practice for the three most listened-to platforms solely at the level of the topic they cover. Thus, the categorisation of podcasts so far is based solely on the content of the podcast episodes. In contrast, the breakdown of radio media products is based on both the content side and the formal side of radio media products. As we have noted, the different radio genres serve to enable creators to produce more comprehensible media content based on their knowledge of them. This is because if a creator were to overuse the subjectivising elements of publicistic radio production style in news formats, it would reduce the credibility of a given programme. Or, if the news block included parody-type emotional music as a background, this could be suggestive, thereby influencing the perception of the news being presented, which is not acceptable in the news industry. We overline that the set of features that a given work may contain is intended to help the recipient to easier receive the media content. However, it is sufficient for the recipient to be oriented at the level of the basic division – news, publicistic radio production, artistic broadcasting. There is no need for him to know the more detailed divisions. This is evidenced by the official labelling of the different elements of broadcasting in the RTVS programme offer.

<p>03:00 - 03:03 Spravodajstvo</p> <p>Správy</p> <hr/> <p>03:04 - 03:05 Servis</p> <p>Zelená vlna</p> <hr/> <p>03:13 - 03:15 Publicistika</p> <p>Zdravotné sestry</p> <p>Štátne verzus súkromné zdravotnícke zariadenia</p> <hr/> <p>03:23 - 03:26 Šport</p> <p>Šport</p> <p>Slovenská 21-tka v baráži ME23 proti Ukrajine</p> <hr/> <p>03:30 - 03:31 Servis</p> <p>Zelená vlna</p>	<p>08:35 - 08:43 Publicistika</p> <p>Ranný hosť</p> <p>Miroslav Kleban o výstave Schiller – Foltýn 1920 – 1924; (Ne)formálne príbuznosti vo Východoslovenskej galérii v Košiciach</p> <hr/> <p>08:47 - 08:55 Publicistika</p> <p>Ranný hosť</p> <p>Miroslav Kleban o výstave Schiller – Foltýn 1920 – 1924; (Ne)formálne príbuznosti vo Východoslovenskej galérii v Košiciach</p> <hr/> <p>09:00 - 09:05 Spravodajstvo</p> <p>Kultúrne správy Rádia Devín</p> <p>Na Slovensku jediný spravodajský blok výlučne z oblasti kultúry a umenia.</p>	<p>08:01 - 08:04 Spravodajstvo</p> <p>Hírek - Správy</p> <hr/> <p>08:06 - 08:09 Šport</p> <p>Sport - Šport</p> <hr/> <p>08:10 - 08:15 Publicistika</p> <p>Reggeli - Raňajky</p> <p>Eutanázia szakmai értékelése</p> <hr/> <p>08:20 - 08:25 Publicistika</p> <p>Reggeli - Raňajky</p> <hr/> <p>08:30 - 08:32 Spravodajstvo</p> <p>Hírek - Správy</p> <hr/> <p>08:40 - 08:45 Publicistika</p> <p>Reggeli - Raňajky</p>
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Figure 2: Excerpt from the Slovak radio programme of 23. 06. 2022

Source: *Rozhlasový program, Štvrtok, 23. 06. 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.rtv.slovakia.sk/radio/program?date=2022-06-23>>.

The *RTVS* programme offers only 4 basic information for each time block – the name of the programme, the programme’s broadcast interval, the programme’s genre or category and in some cases a basic description of the programme. In the picture above we can see that the programme does not offer any naming of the sub-genre, in the labelling it only sticks to the basic dichotomous division into news and publicistic radio production. In some cases, the programme does not even mention genres as such, but rather thematic categories – such as sport and service -. Thus, the same naming convention is used when presenting the programme to the recipient as is used for a podcast. Thus, a deeper division of auditory genres is not used in communication with the external environment, even in the case of radio broadcasting. We suggest that overwhelming the listener with too much detailed information could be counterproductive. The creators of podcast platforms, where podcasts are categorised by topic, seem to have a similar philosophy. Unlike radio, however, podcasting has not yet worked out a more specific division of media content, which could be particularly helpful to creators who could rely on the relevant features of a given podcast sub-genre. In radio practice, this has proven itself over the years. It would also facilitate professional teaching, not only in mass media and journalism schools, but also in courses for enthusiast podcasters. At the same time, this young, under-researched subject is also a challenge to theorists of mass media studies. In exploring the issue, many questions still arise, e.g. about the overlap between the genres of radio and podcast production, the principles and limitations of using podcast production in radio broadcasting and vice versa, cultural differences in podcast production, or the overall perception and evaluation of podcast production by professionals and laypeople alike. We will try to get answers to these and other questions through our further research, in which we will address this issue.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PURCHASING OF “GREEN PRODUCTS”

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Abstract:

This paper focus on the issue of sustainability. Sustainability is nowadays trend, and many customers tend to purchase ecological or green product. But is it true? The purchase process consists of several steps and many determinants enter here. So, what does a Czech consumers decide based on? That is, according to what he judges that the product is a green product. Do Czech consumers really buy green products or is it just their declaration to “reap the reputational benefits associated with being seen as generous.” Methodology is based on a questionnaire survey and individual depth interview. There were 310 relevant responses from the Czech Republic in the quantitative part (questionnaire survey) and fifteen interviews. The research results show that determine of “green/sustainable” products are labels such as eco product, bio product, fair trade, and others. Among other things, Czech consumers are significantly influenced by price. The results confirm the previous scientific outputs, extending them to another country – the Czech Republic. The results can also be suitable for managers and marketing specialists who set the price policy in the company or who are responsible for the area of sustainability.

Key words:

Corporate Responsibility. Green Marketing. Green Purchasing. Marketing Communication. Sustainability.

1 Introduction

Currently, there is a growing interest in the so-called sustainable lifestyle and a large majority of society calls for a behavioral shift¹. We can see interest in this topic several decades earlier, when the first professional studies dealing with green products and a sustainable lifestyle were created.² Kotler refers to this behavior as pro-environmental consumer behavior (PECB) and says that PECB includes the purchase or environmentally responsible products, sustainable products, green products, products with biodegradable packaging or waste³. According to Cleveland et al, this group also includes carbon neutral products or products made from recycled material.⁴

Rising emphasis that companies place on increasing green marketing and with this linked green advertising should influence the increase in customer’s environmental interest⁵ and green purchasing. American Marketing Association (AMA) defines green marketing as a marketing

¹ DUARTE R., M., MAINAR, A., SÁNCHEZ-CHELIZ, J.: The Impact of Household Consumption Patterns on Emissions in Spain. In *Energy Economy*, 2012, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 179.

² See: FREEMAN, L., DAGNOLI, J.: Green Concerns Influence Buying. In *Advertising Age*, 1990; See also: BHATE, S., LAWLER, K.: Environmentally Friendly Products: Factors That Influence Their Adoption. In *International Journal of Environmental Education and Information*, 1997, Vol. 17, No. 8, p. 457-466; FISK, G.: Green Marketing: Multiplier for Appropriate Technology Transfer? In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1998, Vol. 14, No. 6, p. 657-676.

³ KOTLER, P.: Reinventing Marketing to Manage the Environmental Imperative. In *Journal of Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 75, No. 4, p. 132.

⁴ CLEVELAND, M., KALAMAS, M., LAROCHE, M.: It’s Not Easy Being Green: Exploring Green Creeds, Green Deeds, and Internal Environmental Focus of Control. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 2012, Vol. 29, No. 5, p. 295.

⁵ DANDE, R.: The Rise of Green Advertising. In *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 10, p. 2.

strategy for products that are presumed to be environmentally safe⁶. Similar conception mention Hawkins and Mothersbaugh⁷ in their work. Another study explains that green marketing is a strategic process involving stakeholder assessment create long-term relationships with customers while preserving, promoting natural environment in running a company.⁸ Many businessmen have already adopted eco-marketing tools such as eco-labels, eco-branding, and eco-advertising to highlight environmentally friendly features⁹. Green Marketing seeks to satisfy the needs of a consumer who has a preference for eco-friendly products and services.¹⁰ This paper deals with factors influencing Czech customers during the purchasing process of “green and/or sustainable products”. It also tests how these respondents judge whether it is a green/sustainable product or not.

1.1 Factors Influencing a Purchase Behavior

According to the theory of Kotler and Keller, the purchasing decision is a process consisting of five stages (problem recognition, information search, an alternative assessment, purchase decision, post-purchase behavior¹¹). It is known from research that customers often emphasize that companies are sustainable. Furthermore, it is evident that customers declare an interest in purchasing organic, ecological, or green and/or sustainable products¹² (Ipsos, 2022). In most cases, however, the declared interest is not in agreement with the figures reported by the companies. Belk states that the difference between intentions and behaviour is due to many situational factors with different effects (see figure 1).

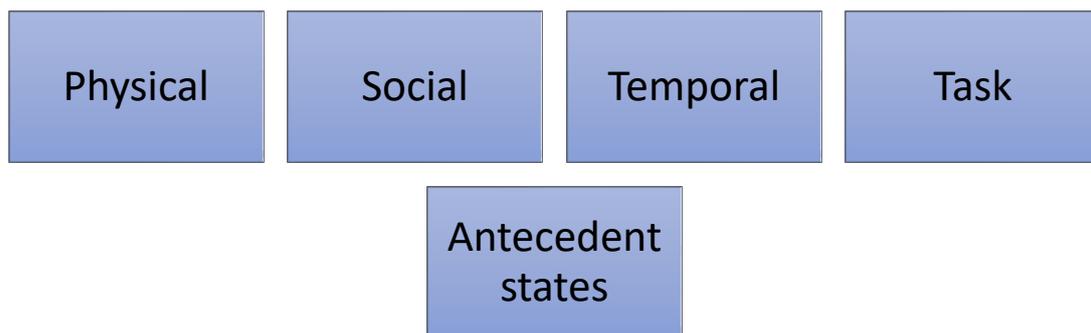


Figure 1: Contextual Factors Affecting a Purchase Behavior according to the Belk

Source: BELK, R. W.: Situational Variables and Consumer Behaviour. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 159.

⁶ DWIPAMURTI, I. G. A. N., MAWARDI, M. K., NURALAM, I. P.: The Effect of Green Marketing on Brand Image and Purchase Decision (Study on Consumer of Starbucks Café Ubud, Gianyar Bali). In *Journal Administrasi Bisnis (JAB)*, 2018, Vol. 61, No. 3, p. 58.

⁷ MOTHERSBAUGH, D. L. et al.: *Consumer Behavior: Building Marketing Strategy*. New York : McGraw-Hill Education, 2020, p. 59.

⁸ HULT, G. et al.: *Marketing*. South Wester : Cengage Learning, 2012, p. 21.

⁹ CHEN, L., WU, Q., JIANG, L.: Impact of Environmental Concern on Ecological Purchasing Behavior: The Moderating Effect of Prosociality. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 5, Article 3004, p. 3. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/5/3004/htm>>.

¹⁰ LEE, Y. K.: The Relationship Between Green Country Image, Green Trust, and Purchase Intention of Korean Products: Focusing on Vietnamese Gen Z Consumers. In *Sustainability*, 2020, Vol. 12, No. 12, Article 5098, p. 4. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/12/5098>>.

¹¹ KOTLER, P., KELLER, P.: *Manajemen Pemasaran*. Jakarta : PT. Indeks, 2007, p. 156.

¹² Češi a CSR: rezonuje fěrově chování k zaměstnancům i důraz na životní prostředí. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.ipsos.com/cs-cz/cesi-csr-rezonuje-ferove-chovani-k-zamestnancum-i-duraz-na-zivotni-prostredi>>.

On the other hand, Berman, Silver and Zhang grouped factors influencing ecological purchasing into three main groups¹³. These factors also state Chen et al in their paper¹⁴:

- 1) Personal factors based on consumers' psychological perceptions, including ecological knowledge, ecological emotions and ecological values and attitudes.¹⁵
- 2) Product-marketing factors as: green-electric cars, organic food, green cosmetics, green furniture: these products are attractive for green purchasing¹⁶.
- 3) Social factors can influence social norms of consumers.¹⁷

Interesting view on environmental purchasing offers model by Carrington et al. Authors note that that situations are important in understanding the which suggests that pro-environmental consumer behaviour intention – behaviour gap. Their model suggests that implementation of plans mediate the link between behaviour and intention.¹⁸

Another fact that we must not forget is that people try to engage in prosocial behavior. exhibit pro-socially. One of the main reasons why people engage in prosocial behavior is “to reap the reputational benefits associated with being seen as generous”¹⁹. There are some academic studies dealing with prosocial behavior.²⁰ For example, Stern²¹ stated that ecological purchasing is prosocial behavior. Important information is that prosocial behaviour is voluntary, and it is based on moral psychology²². The fact that people want to reap the reputation benefits associated with being seen as generous is probably one of the reasons why the declared interest in buying green products is lower than the actual amount purchased.

¹³ BERMAN, J. Z. et al.: Why Do Consumers Make Green Purchase Decisions? Insights from a Systematic Review. In *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 2020, Vol. 17, No. 18, Article 6607, p. 3. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/18/6607>>.

¹⁴ CHEN, L., WU, Q., JIANG, L.: Impact of Environmental Concern on Ecological Purchasing Behavior: The Moderating Effect of Prosociality. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 5, Article 3004, p. 4. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/5/3004/htm>>.

¹⁵ KAISER, F. G., WOLFGING, S., FUHRER, U.: Environmental Attitude and Ecological Behavior. In *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 1999, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 4.

¹⁶ XU, X. et al.: Consumer's Intention to Purchase Green Furniture: Do Health Consciousness and Environmental Awareness Matter? In *Science of Total Environment*, 2020, Vol. 704, No. 96, Article 135275, p. 3.

¹⁷ SUN, Y., WANG, S.: Understanding Consumers' Intentions to Purchase Green Products in the Social Media Marketing Context. Asia Pac. In *Journal of Marketing and Logistic*, 2019, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 104.

¹⁸ See: CARRINGTON, M. J., NEVILLE, B. A., WHITWELL, G. J.: Why Ethical Consumers Don't Walk Their Talk: Towards a Framework for Understanding the Gap between Ethical Purchase Intention and Actual Buying Behavior of Ethically Minded Consumers. In *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2010, Vol. 97, No. 1, p. 143.; GRIMMER, M, KILBURN, A. P., MILES, M. P.: The Effect of Purchase Situation on Realized Pro-environmental Consumer Behaviour. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2016, Vol. 69, No. 5, p. 1584.

¹⁹ BERMAN, J. Z. et al.: Why Do Consumers Make Green Purchase Decisions? Insights from a Systematic Review. In *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 2020, Vol. 17, No. 18, Article 6607, p. 4. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/18/6607>>.

²⁰ See: CHEN, L., WU, Q., JIANG, L.: Impact of Environmental Concern on Ecological Purchasing Behavior: The Moderating Effect of Prosociality. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 5, Article 3004, p. 4. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/5/3004/htm>>; KAISER, F. G., WOLFGING, S., FUHRER, U.: Environmental Attitude and Ecological Behavior. In *Journal of Environmental Psychology*,

1999, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 4.; XU, X., WANG, S., YU, Y.: Consumer's Intention to Purchase Green Furniture: Do Health Consciousness and Environmental Awareness Matter? In *Science of Total Environment*, 2020, Vol. 704, No. 96, Article 135275.; SUN, Y., WANG, S.: Prosocial Behavior, and Reputation: When Does Doing Good Lead to Looking Good? In *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 2022, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 104.

²¹ STERN, P. C., DIETZ, T.: The Value Basis of Environmental Concern. In *Journal of Social Issues*, 1994, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 69.

²² CHEN, L., WU, Q., JIANG, L.: Impact of Environmental Concern on Ecological Purchasing Behavior: The Moderating Effect of Prosociality. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 5, Article 3004, p. 6. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/5/3004/htm>>.

Another aspect leading to a lack of green purchases can also be a limited supply of products, as was the case, for example, in the Middle East.²³

2 Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this study because of methodology triangulation²⁴.

Concerning qualitative research, we have conducted 15 individual deep interviews with customers (randomly selected: 5 students, 7 workers and 3 pensioners, mixed gender) from 4 regions of Czech Republic (Praha, Brno, Ostrava and Plzen). The qualitative research helped us to get insight and draft the later quantitative questionnaire.

Longfield says that individual deep interview “is a method of gathering information from individuals about their behavior, opinions, feelings and experience. They allow you to better understand the thinking of the target groups and to clarify a certain one phenomenon from the perspective of the segment.”²⁵

Qualitative research was conducted as the first part. The main goal of this part was to find out how consumers judge whether a company is sustainable or responsible.

RQ1: What are factors according to which consumers decide whether a brand is sustainable or not?

The questionnaires were distributed throughout the Czech Republic to ensure the reliability of the research. The research was conducted in the spring of 2022 and the questionnaires were distributed throughout the Czech Republic among women and men from 18 to 65 years of age. There were 176 woman and 134 men. The questionnaire consisted of 7 sections and contained 45 questions in total.

In this case, the questionnaire survey followed by individual dep interviews (IDI).

The questionnaire is not part of this paper. Since this paper deals with only a certain part of the research, the results relevant to this article are presented here. Total of 310 relevant responses were collected.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to verify how much individual factories are considered when purchasing and what else is important for consumers when making a purchase decision. There was stated following research question:

RQ2: What else is important for consumers when making a purchase decision?

²³ NEJATI, M., SALAMZADEH, Y., SALAMZADEH, A.: Ecological Purchase Behaviour: Insights from a Middle Eastern Country. International. In *Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development*, 2011, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 426.

²⁴ BERGER, A. A.: *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Los Angeles : Sage, 2016, p. 130.

²⁵ LONGFIELD, K.: *In-Depth Interviews in PSI/AIDSMark Social Marketing Research Tool Kit*. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/93308272/14-Research-Toolkit-Ch6-in-Depth-Interviews>>.

3 Results

3.1 Qualitative Research

The research showed that customers consider a company to be sustainable if it informs about it, for example, on the website or on the product packaging. The determinants of sustainability are most often considered to be:

- Bio products
- Ecological products
- Fair trade
- Local products
- Recycling/recyclable products

Below is a selection of a few responses:

R1: I judge it by whether there is any sustainability information on the package, for example organic certificate, fair trade picture and so on. It needs to be recycled.

R2: I only buy from companies that I know and know are sustainable. But I can because I don't care about the price.

R3: I'm probably looking at the packaging, it must be recyclable. I pay attention to local products and organic food.

R4: for me, sustainability is about taking care of nature, so they have organic and recyclable products

R5: I think it's organic products and local products. It goes without saying that I can recycle the packaging from this product.

As it turned out, respondents confused the terms recycled and recyclable. Mostly in both cases they meant "recyclable".

As part of the interviews, we were also interested in what else can fundamentally influence consumers' purchasing decisions. 12 respondents stated that the most important aspect of purchasing is the price. Even 5 respondents mentioned that in many cases they do not understand at all why companies increase the prices of green and/or sustainable products. 2 respondents said that they are willing to pay a higher price and one said that he/she buys green products rarely that he/she cannot judge whether the price is adequate or not.

3.2 Quantitative Research

First, it was tested whether people look for brands that they know behave responsibly or sustainably (it can be just information on the product packaging).

Table 1: Crosstab: Gender * CSR_SUS Crosstabulation
Count

		CSR SUS			Total
		NA	yes	no	
Gender	woman	10	90	76	166
	man	14	60	60	134
Total		24	150	136	310

Source: own processing, 2022

Table 1 shows that this fact plays a greater role in women than in men. Here we see a very interesting phenomenon, that half may prefer brands with these activities and half do not. And another 14 respondents state that they do not know.

If one looks individually at the important indicators of what consumers consider to be the key factors of sustainability or responsibility, then they too clearly copy the distribution of the first table.²⁶

Table 2: Crosstab: Gender * ecology Crosstabulation
Count

		Ecology(bio)			Total
		NA	yes	no	
Gender	woman	10	102	64	176
	man	14	62	58	134
Total		24	164	122	310

Source: own processing, 2022

Although women are more likely focusing on ecological or bio products, it is again almost identical to the table 1. When shopping, roughly half respondents emphasize whether a product is organic or ecological as is shown in table 2. Women more often include cosmetics and drugstores (not just food) in this category (bio and ecological).

Table 3: Crosstab: Gender * Fairtrade Crosstabulation
Count

		Fairtrade			Total
		NA	yes	no	
Gender	woman	10	98	68	176
	man	14	68	52	134
Total		24	166	120	310

Source: own processing, 2022

The distribution of respondents in the case of Fairtrade is also very similar (see table 3).

Table 4: Crosstab: Gender * Local_Product Crosstabulation
Count

		Local Product			Total
		NA	yes	no	
Gender	woman	8	138	28	176
	man	12	78	42	134
Total		20	216	70	310

Source: own processing, 2022

When it is about local products, the share of both men and women who take this fact into account when purchasing products rises significantly (see table 4).

It is interesting to look at the correlation of sustainability/responsibility and price as is shown in table 5.

As can be seen, all 140 respondents who consider sustainability and responsibility to be important also consider price to be important. Of this group, only 10 respondents said that they

²⁶ Author’s note: On the basis that consumers were confused about the terms recycled and recyclable, these terms were not used in the quantitative research.

do not take price into account. This is an important moment because he says that consumers consider several factors when making a purchase, and price is one of the important ones. If it is a product with sustainable packaging, Czech customers can pay an extra fee for this packaging between 10-30 cents according to the sort of product. It is generally accepted that customers are often willing to pay a “premium price” for a green and/or sustainable product.²⁷ However, as part of the interviews, it was found that price is essential for consumers.

Table 5: Crosstab: CSR_SUS * Price Crosstabulation
Count

		Price			Total
		NA	yes	no	
CSR_SUS	NA	16	6	2	24
	yes	0	140	10	150
	no	0	122	14	135
Total		16	268	25	310

Source: own processing, 2022

Table 6: Could the packaging affect the purchasing decision of Czech Customers

	I find out what materials the product is made of	I buy products in recyclable packaging	I buy a product when the packaging looks recycled.
Yes	52	51	139
No	255	109	168
Sometimes/don't know	3	150	3

Source: own processing, 2022

Table 6 shows further information regarding to the purchasing behaviors of Czech customers.

4 Discussion

From the available literature, we know that the buying process is composed of several parts and is influenced by many factors, whether it is the groups of factors described by Berman, Silverand Zhang (personal factors, social factors, product marketing factors) or contextual factors according to Belk (physical, previous state, tasks, social, time).

Therefore, a decrease in green and/or sustainable products in consumers' shopping baskets can also be expected. The research further answers the questions:

RQ1: What are factors according to which consumers decide whether a brand is sustainable or not?

As we can see there are above all these factors: bio product, ecological products, fair trade, local products and recycling or recyclable products.

²⁷ *Češi a CSR: rezonuje férové chování k zaměstnancům i důraz na životní prostředí.* [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.ipsos.com/cs-cz/cesi-csr-rezonuje-ferove-chovani-k-zamestnancum-i-duraz-na-zivotni-prostredi>>.

In addition to the above, very important are certification marks, as indicated by various studies. The marketing department can work very well with these attributes and thus reduce the negative effects of inflation.

Another factor with a big impact is the price (*RQ2: What else is important for consumers when making a purchase decision?*) The price is the factor that must not be overlooked. Considering the ever-increasing inflation in the Czech Republic (18% inflation in October 2022) it is quite likely that price will be the main deciding factor when purchasing green and/or sustainable products.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the information found has practical uses for managers who deal with sustainability. For example, the fact that people often judge the sustainability of a company by its packaging is an interesting practical finding. The popularity of local products is also a certain impulse for purchasing managers and marketing specialists. Factors that are essential for Czech consumers in the purchasing process are those that must be used by marketers. However, it is important use them ethically, without greenwashing, which we can often see in commercial communication.

This research also has its limitations. One of them is the relatively small number of qualitative research respondents. However, it is considered to repeat the research over time to obtain a certain time series, which is important during the growing crisis and war in Ukraine. This will also lead to an expansion of the qualitative research sample. Another extension of research can be focused on price sensitivity. Here, it will be investigated what percentage price increase Czech consumers are willing to accept. Very interesting should be tested the making decision of sustainable purchasing as a part of the decision-making process for important purchases. Last but not least is possible to compare situation in Czech Republic with the situation in Slovakia, country with similar history.

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IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF BRANDS ON SOCIAL SITES

Peter Krajčovič, Dáša Franić

Abstract:

The paper deals with the analysis of communication of selected brands on Facebook while observing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of their followers. The authors analyse the development of the number of followers, the structure and the number of posts as well as the total number of interactions from 2020 to 2021. The impact of the pandemic is observed in three outbreaks while focusing on four brands evaluated by Kantar Brandz: two most valuable brands in 2021 and two brands that reported the highest increase in their value on a yearly basis. The results of the analysis are subject to statistical calculations by the methods of descriptive statistics and the analysis of the variance of various categorical variables. At the same time, they also follow the possibilities of using and studying data from social sites as well as current trends and their evolution on the market.

Keywords:

Brand. COVID-19. Facebook. Marketing Communication. Social Media.

1 Introduction

Companies, organisations, brands, consumers. We all live in challenging, turbulent and rapidly changing times. What applies today is different tomorrow. The dynamism and especially the major events of the last three years (the pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, economic problems associated with rising costs of living and inflation) have triggered major changes in various areas. During the coronavirus pandemic, consumer behaviour, preferences and values began to change significantly. As stated by Kollárová and Koliščáková: “*numerous surveys by various types of institutions (banks, price comparators, delivery companies, universities, research agencies, etc.), whose partial results have been publicized and are available to the public show that Slovak consumers changed their buying and media habits during the pandemic. Some of them were short term changes, mainly due to lockdown.*”¹ In the same way, companies or various institutions had to deal with the changing situation on the market. The coronavirus pandemic has affected and impaired the functioning of every single entity. Currently, they are once again facing other challenges, which are connected with the conflict in Ukraine and overall economic, social and political instability.

All this also affects the marketing and communication activities of brands, which had to adapt their communication to new, unexpected and hitherto unknown situations. We notice a change in the approach, but also in the content of communication, which is also confirmed by other analyses: the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting confinement of the population and emergency status adopted in many countries, have dramatically changed the way of life across the globe. Many brands, now unable to produce and market their products or offer their services, are focusing on their communication and social responsibility.² Another significant fact is that consumers took up online shopping during the pandemic, with global e-commerce growing by

¹ KOLLÁROVÁ, D., KOLIŠČÁKOVÁ, M.: Changes in Preferences in Consumer Behavior of Generation Z During the Covid-19 Pandemic. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A.: *Marketing Identity: New Changes, New Challenges*. Trnava : FMK UCM, p. 327.

² See: DIAS, P., PESSÔA, C., ANDRADE, J. G.: *Brand Communication on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perceptions of Users and Brands*. Tampere : IAMCR Tampere, 2020.

more than 27% in 2020 alone³, which also contributed to the fact that the relationship of consumers to individual brands has also changed, to which companies had to respond adequately.

In the article, the authors analyse the communication of brands on Facebook and the impact of the pandemic on the development of the number of followers, the structure and number of posts, and the total number of interactions during the years 2020-2021. The authors also raise the question of the connection between the growth of brand popularity on the social network and the growth of brand value. Four strong brands were selected for the analysis, namely: Amazon, Google, Tesla and TikTok. These are brands that, considering their year-on-year growth and market value, belong to the most valuable brands in the world or have experienced significant growth. As Matúšová states⁴, the strongest brands have existed for several centuries, while the most important characteristics of brands include brand recognition, its uniqueness and originality, brand memorability, differentiation from competitors and brand image.

The use of social media for marketing communications is a common practice. Many brands are using social networks to communicate with their customers and customers are using social networks not only to stay in contact with their friends or family but also to follow the brands' profiles. As mentioned by Andangsari et al.⁵ with the rapid development of communication technology and the rapid popularization of intelligent devices, social media has changed the lives of modern people. And we can add, that the principles of marketing and communication, too.

According to Evans and Krauthammer⁶ social media allows users to connect through information sharing on the home page, an important channel for people to create, share, and exchange information through online communities and interpersonal networks. Walters and Horton⁷ add that social media provides new opportunities for social interaction among customers through chat, instant messaging, posting, and online comments.

2 Methodology

The communication of four brands was analysed by Kantar Brandz evaluation on Facebook. The brands were selected according to the position in the Top 100 most valuable brands in the world. As part of the analysis, we focused on the development of the number of followers, posts and the total number of interactions for the period of 2020-2021 while examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of followers of selected brands. The brands were divided into two groups: the most valuable brands in 2021 (Amazon and Google) and the brands

³ DUBBELINK, S. I., HERRANDO C., CONSTANTINIDES E.: Social Media Marketing as a Branding Strategy in Extraordinary Times: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Sustainability*, Vol. 13, No. 18, 2021, p. 1.

⁴ MATUŠOVÁ, J.: *Komunikačné stratégie vybraných značiek v rôznych štádiách ich životného cyklu*. Trnava : IM UCM, 2020, p. 15.

⁵ ANDANGSARI, E. W., GUMILAR, I., GODWIN, R.: Social Networking Sites Use and Psychological Attachment Need Among Indonesian Young Adults Population. In *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2013, p. 135.

⁶ EVANS, P., KRAUTHAMMER, M.: Exploring the Use of Social Media to Measure Journal Article Impact. In *AMIA. Annual Symposium Proceedings/AMIA Symposium*, 2011. [online]. [2022-12-19]. <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3243242/>>.

⁷ WALTERS, N. T., HORTON, R.: A Diary Study of the Influence of Facebook Use on Narcissism Among Male College Students. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 52, 2015, p. 326.

that reported the most significant increase in value compared to the previous year (Tesla and TikTok)⁸.

The global profiles of the above brands on Facebook were analysed. The data was obtained through Facebook's CrowdTangle. The descriptive statistics and the analysis of variance of several categorical variables were used for the data analysis itself. Table 1 shows the statistical characteristics of the file.

Table 1: Statistical characteristics of the file

<i>Number of followers (AMAZON)</i>		<i>Number of followers (GOOGLE)</i>		<i>Number of followers (TESLA)</i>		<i>Number of followers (TIKTOK)</i>	
Mean	28981056,5	Mean	30851298,01	Mean	72006,5690	Mean	20186452,21
Standard Error	9976,58460	Standard Error	49006,42107	Standard Error	1687,58207	Standard Error	165356,2583
Median	29040711	Median	30934687	Median	66072	Median	20198686
Mode	29093729	Mode	#NEDOSTUPN	Mode	8452	Mode	#NEDOSTUPN
Standard Deviation	269737,034	Standard Deviation	1324987,178	Standard Deviation	45627,1762	Standard Deviation	4470739,086
Sample Variance	7275806770	Sample Variance	1,75559E+12	Sample Variance	208183921	Sample Variance	1,99875E+13
Kurtosis	1,27793774	Kurtosis	-1,191010966	Kurtosis	1,26003904	Kurtosis	-1,175598007
Skewness	0,25750385	Skewness	-0,285481572	Skewness	0,13802757	Skewness	-0,109934441
Range	881118	Range	4252545	Range	141305	Range	14731999
Minimum	28500265	Minimum	28384311	Minimum	8425	Minimum	12393780
Maximum	29381383	Maximum	32636856	Maximum	149730	Maximum	27125779
Sum	2118515231	Sum	22552298845	Sum	52636802	Sum	14756296562
Count	731	Count	731	Count	731	Count	731
Confidence Level (95.0%)	19586,2201	Confidence Level (95.0%)	96210,33571	Confidence Level (95.0%)	3313,09315	Confidence Level (95.0%)	324630,5439
lower quartile	28738455	lower quartile	29933740	lower quartile	31522	lower quartile	16593601
upper quartile	29209933	upper quartile	32136671	upper quartile	108115	upper quartile	24291880
IQR	471478	IQR	2202931	IQR	76593	IQR	7698279
1,5IQR	707217	1,5IQR	3304396,5	1,5IQR	114889,5	1,5IQR	11547418,5
outliers	1178695	outliers	5507327,5	outliers	191482,5	outliers	19245697,5
	29209981		32136719		108163		24291928

Source: own processing, 2022

⁸ KANTAR BRANDZ: 2021 *Most Valuable Global Brands: Infographic*. [online]. [2022-12-19]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/-/media/project/kantar/global/campaigns/brandz/brandz-infographics/kantar-brandz-global-2021-infographic.pdf>>.

3 Results and Discussion

Amazon was ranked by Kantar Brandz⁹ as the most valuable brand in the world in 2021. Its value reached \$ 683,852,000 and compared to 2020, it reported a 64% increase. According to Kantar Brandz, Google was the third most valuable brand in the world in 2021. Its value reached \$ 457,998,000 and compared to 2020, it saw a 42% increase. The brands Tesla and TikTok reported the highest increase, with Tesla up 275% and TikTok up 158%. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused a decline in many industries or losses due to anti-pandemic measures, these are examples of successful brands that, on the contrary, have reported a considerable boom in their business activities.

Amazon had a total of 29,379,555 followers as of 31st December 2021. During the monitored period, it reported a 3.09% increase which represents 879,300 new followers. Graph 1 shows the development of the number of followers and the rate of their increase for the period 2020-2021.

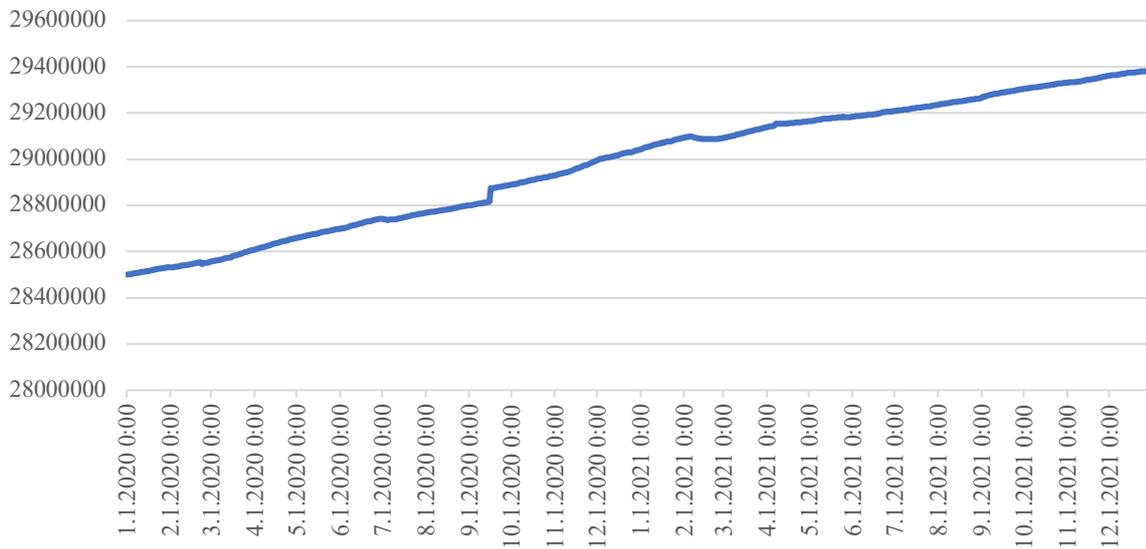


Figure 1: Development of the number of Amazon followers on Facebook from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

It is interesting to see that during the observed period, the brand published only 294 posts, which is an average of only 0.4 posts per day. We assume that this can be explained by existence of various profiles on Facebook through which the brand communicates. Table 2 shows the structure of posts in terms of their types.

Table 2: Structure of Amazon posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	live stream	YouTube videos	other videos	SUM
105	13	1	170	3	1	1	294

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

⁹ WALTER, D.: *KANTAR BRANDZ: 2021 Most Valuable Global Brands*. [online]. [2022-12-19]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/campaigns/brandz/global>>.

Videos reported the highest number of interactions, with more than 810,000 in total, followed by photos with almost 486,000 interactions. The total number of interactions reached more than 1,360,000 during the monitored period. Table 3 shows more detailed results.

Table 3: Rate of interactions of Amazon posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	live stream	YouTube videos	other videos	SUM
35.81%	3.34%	0.10%	59.71%	0.22%	0.56%	0.25%	0.9999

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

Google had a total of 32,629,403 followers as of 31 December 2021. During the monitored period, it saw an increase of 14.96%, which represents 4,250,000 new followers. Graph 2 shows the development of the number of followers and the rise for the period 2020-2021.

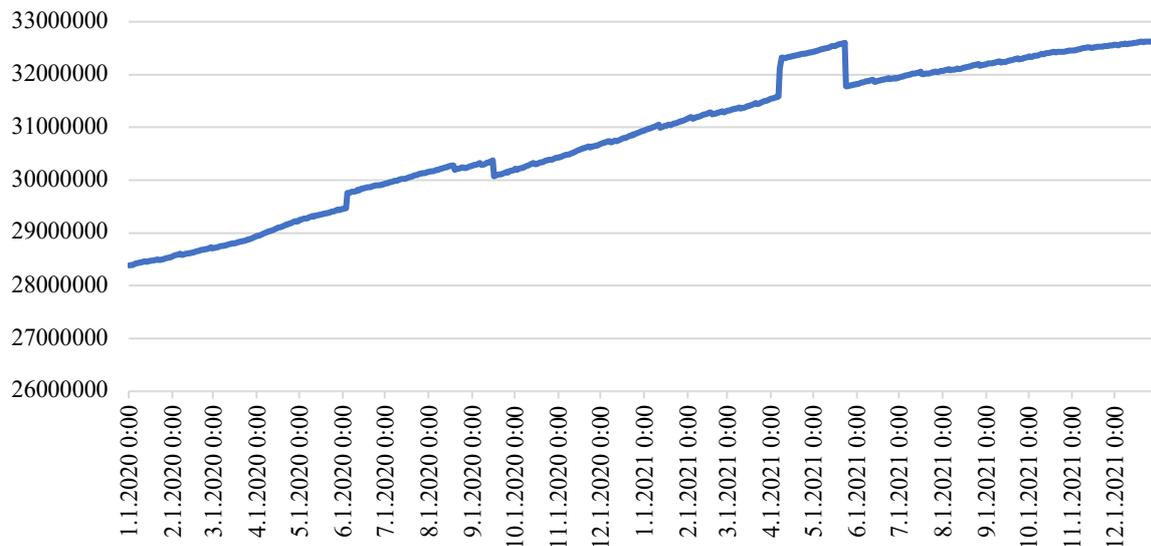


Figure 2: Development of the number of Google followers on Facebook from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

During the monitored period, the brand published a total of 869 posts, which is an average of 1 post per day. Table 4 shows the structure of posts in terms of their types.

Table 4: Structure of Google posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	live stream	YouTube videos	SUM
135	208	6	508	1	11	869

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

Videos had the highest number of interactions, with a total of more than 654,800, followed by shared links (links) with more than 204,000 interactions. The total number of interactions reached more than 1,040,000 during the monitored period. Table 5 shows more detailed results.

Table 5: Rate of interactions of Amazon posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	live stream	YouTube videos	SUM
16.50%	19.58%	0.31%	62.80%	0.20%	0.62%	1.0001

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

Tesla had a total of 149,730 followers as of 31 December 2021. This is the smallest number of followers among the analysed brands, but during the monitored period it achieved an increase of 1,676.58%, which represents approximately 141,300 new followers. Graph 3 shows the development of the number of followers and the rate of their increase for the period 2020-2021.

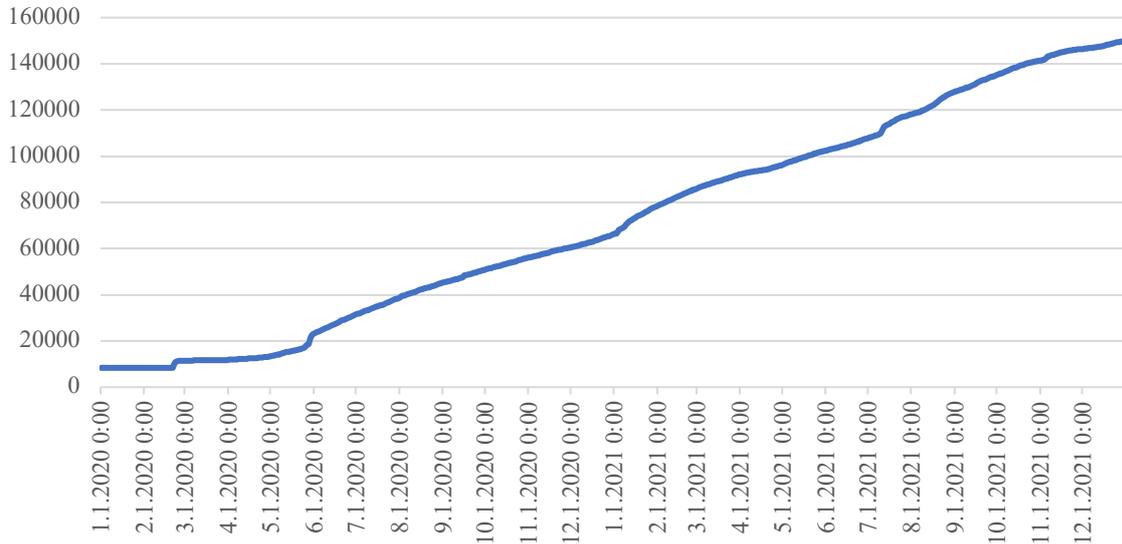


Figure 3: Development of the number of Tesla followers on Facebook from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021
 Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

During the monitored period, the brand published only 29 posts. Table 6 shows the structure of posts in terms of their types.

Table 6: Structure of Tesla posts ‘by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	videos	SUM
23	6	29

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

Photos achieved the largest number of interactions, a total of more than 64,800. The total number of interactions reached more than 76,500 during the monitored period. Table 7 shows more detailed results.

Table 7: Share of interactions of Tesla posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	videos	SUM
84.72%	15.28%	100.00%

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

TikTok had a total of 27,125,779 followers as of 31 December 2021. During the monitored period, it reported an increase of 118.87%, which represents more than 14,760,000 new followers. Graph 4 shows the development of the number of followers and the rate of their increase for the period 2020-2021.

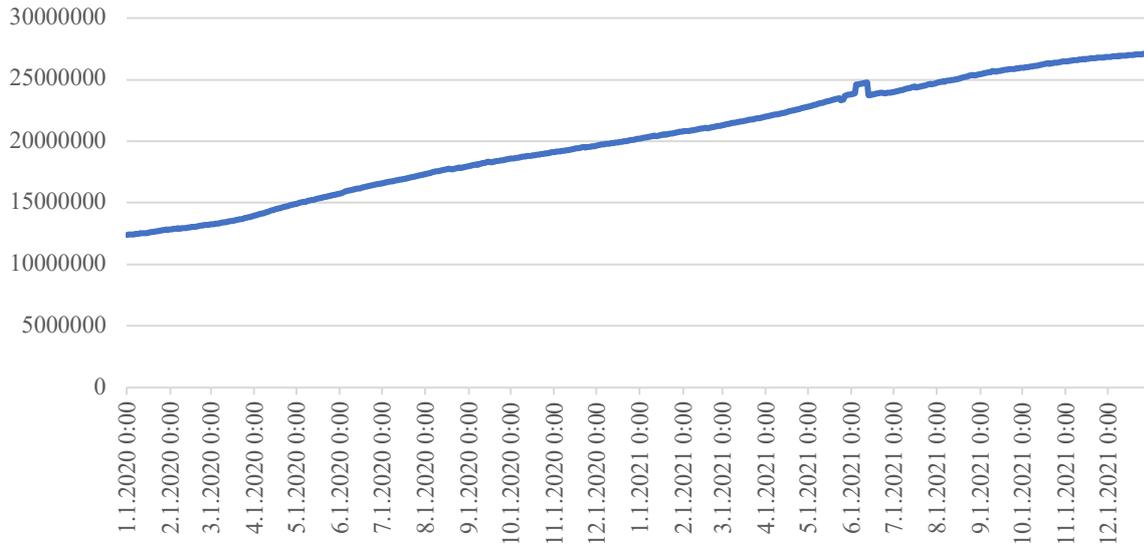


Figure 4: Development of the number of Facebook followers of TikTok from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021
Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

During the monitored period, the brand published 1,138 posts. Table 8 shows the structure of posts in terms of their types.

Table 8: Structure of TikTok posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	SUM
333	11	4	790	1138

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

Videos achieved the largest number of interactions, 1 more than 3,540,000. The total number of interactions reached more than 3,750,000 during the monitored period. Table 9 shows more detailed results.

Table 9: Number of interactions of TikTok posts by their types from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021

photos	links	statuses	videos	SUM
5.42%	0.15%	0.06%	94.37%	100.00%

Source: own processing, 2022 (data: CrowdTangle)

As part of the analysis, we focused in more detail on examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of followers. We compared the period of the pandemic in three outbreaks: 1st outbreak (with its peak in early spring and early summer 2020), 2nd outbreak (with its peak in the months of October - December 2020) and 3rd outbreak (the period from the end of July to the end of December 2021).

Using the analysis of variance, we verified whether the number of followers differs in individual periods of the pandemic, or whether the factor of “the pandemic period” has a significant effect on the number of followers of posts on social networks.

The following hypotheses have been identified:

H0: The average number of followers is the same in individual periods of the pandemic.

H1: The average number of followers is not the same, at least in two outbreaks the number of followers is significantly different.

Tables 10-13 show the results of the analysis.

Table 10: Results of the one-factor analysis of variance (Amazon)

SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
1. wave	101	2893220833	28645750,82	2081443333		
2. wave	92	2664554768	28962551,83	2245755225		
3. wave	157	4602084663	29312641,17	2042992970		
ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	2,78719E+13	2	1,39359E+13	6613,332372	5,2992E-277	3,02174463
Within Groups	7,31215E+11	347	2107247729			
Total	2,86031E+13	349				

Source: own processing, 2022

The results of the analysis showed that we reject the null hypothesis (H0) since $p \leq 0.05$. In general, we can say that the average number of followers in the individual periods of the pandemic is not the same.

Table 11: Results of the one-factor analysis of variance (Google)

SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
1. wave	101	2948241915	29190514,01	90854102590		
2. wave	92	2811311083	30557729,16	45133249147		
3. wave	157	5082743557	32374162,78	31751096493		
ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	6,44991E+14	2	3,22495E+14	6167,074483	7,0656E-272	3,02174463
Within Groups	1,81457E+13	347	52293103701			
Total	6,63137E+14	349				

Source: own processing, 2022

The results of the analysis showed that we reject the null hypothesis (H0) since $p \leq 0.05$. In general, we can say that the average number of followers in the individual periods of the pandemic is not the same.

Table 12: Results of the one-factor analysis of variance (Tesla)

SUMMARY				
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
1. wave	101	1529467	15143,23762	21523804,12
2. wave	92	5363730	58301,41304	18317944,4
3. wave	157	21435497	136531,828	96586928,13

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	9,69602E+11	2	4,84801E+11	8907,029465	6,1118E-299	3,02174463
Within Groups	18886874141	347	54429032,11			
Total	9,88489E+11	349				

Source: own processing, 2022

The results of the analysis showed that we reject the null hypothesis (H0) since $p \leq 0.05$. In general, we can say that the average number of followers in the individual periods of the pandemic is not the same.

Table 13: Results of the one-factor analysis of variance (TikTok)

SUMMARY				
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
1. wave	101	1486651993	14719326,66	7,39759E+11
2. wave	92	1783258343	19383242,86	2,204E+11
3. wave	157	4098243885	26103464,24	5,22901E+11

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	8,31279E+15	2	4,15639E+15	8213,145465	5,9689E-293	3,02174463
Within Groups	1,75605E+14	347	5,06066E+11			
Total	8,48839E+15	349				

Source: own processing, 2022

The results of the analysis showed that we reject the null hypothesis (H0) since $p \leq 0.05$. In general, we can say that the average number of followers in the individual periods of the pandemic is not the same.

4 Conclusion

In the paper, we analysed the communication of four brands on Facebook and studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of followers. We compared the obtained data with the brand value and tried to demonstrate a possible connection between selected data from Facebook and the brand value. It is obvious that the connection of these data cannot be interpreted as a correlation, but data from social networks can serve as a significant source of information reflecting a certain trend or development in specific areas.

As part of the analysis, we focused on two groups of brands. The first group consisted of the two most valuable brands in the world, which ranked first (Amazon) and third (Google) in the Kantar Brandz ranking for 2021. The second group consisted of brands that recorded the most significant rise in their value compared to 2020 (Tesla and TikTok). The goal of the analysis was to compare whether this trend is also reflected in communication on social networks and whether an increase in the value is reflected in the increase in the number of followers. We can consider this as one of the prerequisites for our interest in a brand based on following its profile. We also examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of followers.

Several interesting findings emerged from the results of the analysis. In general, we can state that the average number of followers in individual periods of the pandemic is not the same. Individual outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic have had an impact on the number of followers. From the point of view of tracking the rate of growth, we can observe an increase in the number of followers in all four analysed brand profiles. We observe the most significant increase in the case of Tesla, by more than 1,600%. Overall, however, this brand has the smallest number of followers among the analysed brands. The largest increase in followers in absolute terms can be observed for TikTok, which recorded an increase of more than 14,760,000 followers.

However, an interesting finding is the number of posts published within individual profiles. In general, we can note a very low intensity of publishing posts, but this may be due to the fact that we analysed the global profiles of brands, while several of them communicate through other profiles. For a comprehensive analysis, it would be necessary to examine these profiles as well, which, however, goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, from the point of view of further investigation, it is interesting to compare the individual indicators and focus on the individual profiles of these brands.

However, the results of the analysis pointed to a possible connection between the growing popularity on social networks and the growing brand value. In this context, we can also point out some interesting studies aimed at the brands and their communication on social networks or during the crisis. According to the Farhang et al.¹⁰ while brands are mostly viewed as drivers of sustained competitive advantage and profitability, their protective role in crisis times is noteworthy. The findings results of Paruthi et al.¹¹ corroborate brand relationship quality and consumer community identification as critical drivers of consumer engagement on the online platforms. Another study by Chen et al.¹² revealed that customer motivation with information seeking, entertainment, and social interaction significantly impacts customer brand experience. The results of Islam et al.¹³ revealed that both self-brand image congruity and value congruity significantly affect consumer engagement. A positive effect of consumer engagement on brand loyalty was also observed.

Consumer-brand engagement on social media is a widely studied research topic with high relevance for marketing practitioners. However, as pointed out the Martínek¹⁴ the discipline is affected by a conceptual divergence and limited understanding of applicable research methods.

¹⁰ FARHANG, M., KAMRAN-DISFANI, O., ZADEH, A. H.: Brand Equity and Stock Performance in Time of Crisis: Evidence from the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 2022, Vol. Ahead-of-print, No. Ahead-of-print. [online]. [2022-12-19]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPBM-01-2022-3830/full/html>>.

¹¹ PARUTHI, M. et al. Engaging Consumers via Online Brand Communities to Achieve Brand Love and Positive Recommendations. In *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*, 2022, Vol. Ahead-of-print, No. Ahead-of-print. [online]. [2022-12-19]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SJME-07-2022-0160/full/html>>.

¹² CHEN, X., et al.: Examining Customer Motivation and Its Impact on Customer Engagement Behavior in Social Media: The Mediating Effect of Brand Experience. In *SAGE Open*, 2021, Vol. 11, No. 4. No Pagination. [online]. [2022-12-19]. <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21582440211052256>>.

¹³ See: ISLAM, J., RAHMAN, Z., HOLLEBEEK, L. D.: Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities: A Solicitation of Congruity Theory. In *Internet Research*, 2018, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 23-45. [online]. [2022-12-19]. <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IntR-09-2016-0279/full/html>>.

¹⁴ MARTÍNEK, P. A.: Mapping Methods of Research on Consumer Engagement with Brands on Social Media: A Literature Review. In *Methodological Innovations*, 2021, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 22.

Acknowledgement: The contribution is an output of the project FPPV-31-2022 Research of the environment of social networks in the context of marketing communication and its current trends.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING IN THE CONTEXT OF ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

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Abstract:

As digitization progresses, consumers are moving online. This shift may be a driving force behind the declining turnover of brick-and-mortar stores. The paper presents an overview of the current state of influencer marketing as a key part of the marketing strategy. Online shopping attracts more and more people and this trend can be expected to continue in the future. Marketers and brands need to innovate their marketing strategies. In this regard, influencer marketing appears to be a key element. Sellers use influencers to increase brand awareness and boost consumer interest in the brand. The market value of global influencer marketing has more than doubled since 2019, with *Instagram* considered the most effective platform. Consumers build virtual relationships with influencers and find them trustworthy. Therefore, influencers can change consumers' decisions in favour of a given brand, product or service. This knowledge can help businesses with their marketing strategies (planning and implementation).

Key words:

Electronic Commerce. E-Commerce. Influencer Marketing. Influencer. Online Shopping.

1 Introduction

With the development of the Internet and digital technologies, consumer behaviour has also changed. Before making the actual purchase, consumers search for information, opinions and experiences of other users with products and services they are interested in. That's why sellers nowadays opt for using social media platforms in their marketing mix so as to reach out to their target audience in a more direct way. The most important platforms to do so are *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and *TikTok* as these allow for sharing visual messages (visuals are known to achieve the highest level of engagement).¹

2 Meaning of Influencer Marketing

One of the most innovative forms of marketing nowadays is influencer marketing. Sellers make use of influencer marketing to promote their products, services or brand as a whole. The person of an influencer plays a key role in influencer marketing. This is a person who owns an account on a selected social media platform and has a certain number of active followers. In essence, influencer marketing means using an influential person to promote brand's goods or services to a wide audience that follows the influencer on the chosen social media platform. By working with influencers, sellers are able to increase awareness of a brand, product or service, acquire new customers, boost interest in buying, and reach a wider audience much easier than with traditional marketing method. An influencer can be a publicly known person who is considered by his/her followers to be an expert in a certain field. The job of an influencer is to influence people's perception of a certain thing and, consequently, their purchasing behaviour. An influencer does not have to be just a well-known personality – it can also be a person who is trustworthy, has a wide audience and can present products, services or brands in a way that people find attractive.²

¹ HASSAN, A., SHARMA, A.: *The Emerald Handbook of ICT in Tourism and Hospitality*. Bingley : Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020, p. 131.

² *Influencer Marketing*. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://visibility.sk/blog/slovník/influencer-marketing/>>.

An influencer can provide consumers with a credible positive or negative review of a brand's product or service, which typically includes information about the price, availability, and whether or not the product could be purchased online. Influencers are able to present products in such a way that consumers/followers often don't even know they are consuming an ad. Influencers differ not only in the number of followers, but also in content they produce and originality. Given the above, influencers could be categorized into several categories. An expert is an influencer who has knowledge in a certain specific field. Thanks to this expert knowledge he/she gained trust of his/her followers. A trendsetter specializes in introducing new products to the market, as he/she is able to influence trends and consumer behaviour. A blogger uses a blog or a personal website as his/her platform, and usually specializes in one area or field (informs consumers on newsworthy things in his/her articles). A celebrity is a well-known person, such as an actor, singer or athlete, who has a large fan base. Consumers are often attracted to a celebrity-promoted brand, product or service because it is recommended by a well-known personality. An ambassador is an influencer who is the face of a selected brand that provides him/her with products or services for free or at a discounted price. The ambassadorship lasts for a longer period of time as the influencer is expected to promote information about the brand, product or service on a regular basis. Micro-influencers are also an important group. Micro-influencers, although they do not have a large number of followers, can reach a specific audience.³ There exist also so-called nano-influencers. These have less than a thousand followers, but are generally regarded as an industry expert or topic specialist. This might be preferred by businesses that offer very specific products or services. YouTubers and podcasters are also popular these days. YouTubers present content on *YouTube* through videos, and podcasters present content through audio recordings.⁴ Children's influencers, whose accounts on social media platforms are managed by their parents, are also coming to the fore, as are animal influencers and virtual computer-generated influencers. Cooperation with influencers can take various forms, for example affiliate marketing, sponsored content or so-called unboxing. In affiliate marketing, influencers provide their followers with a special code that they can use when purchasing the product or service promoted. Sponsored content means paid posts on social media platforms, while with unboxing the brand provides the influencer with free products or services, which he/she then tests and gives followers reviews afterwards. However, there is a rise in the number of so-called fake influencers, i.e. profiles with a high number of purchased followers without any activity. When choosing influencers, business entities must evaluate not only the size of the audience the influencer is able to reach but also activities the influencer carries out, i.e. the number of likes or comments.⁵

When choosing a suitable platform for an influencer marketing campaign, businesses study the chosen influencer, his/her statistics and whether his/her followers match their target audience. Many influencers have accounts on several social media platforms, which allows them to reach a larger target audience. When planning cooperation with influencers, the business entity must evaluate criteria such as target audience, budget, charisma, previous results and the influencer's ability to reach the target audience. When searching for a suitable influencer, businesses can also use various digital tools that provide them with clear statistics on the influencer's activity and followers (e.g. *BuzzSumo*, *Klear*, *Hypeauditor*,...). Businesses can also use digital tools

³ KRAMÁROVÁ, M.: *Influencer Marketing: Everything You Need to Know Before You Get Into It*. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.ecake.sk/influence-marketing/>>.

⁴ *Influencer*. [online]. [2022-09-28]. Available at: <<https://visibility.sk/blog/slovník/influencer/>>.

⁵ *What is Influencer Marketing? Is It Suitable for You?* [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://digitalpartner.sk/co-je-influencer-marketing-je-pre-vas-vhodny/>>.

such as *Traackr* to manage and evaluate influencer marketing campaigns.⁶ In this digital age, influencers often have a decisive influence on consumers and can shape their opinions, decisions and behaviour through their online channels and content they share on social media platforms. Consumers largely attribute a higher level of credibility to what influencers show and say through social media platforms. All these factors contribute significantly to building relationships and deepening trust in a given seller or brand.⁷

3 Meaning of Electronic Commerce

Electronic commerce, or e-commerce is a form of trading that is carried out in the online environment where the Internet represents a single platform that connects the seller and the buyer.⁸ E-commerce has eight unique features that have an impact on how businesses operate, challenge traditional business thinking, and help explain why interest in e-commerce is growing. These include the following:

- interactivity – technology that enables two-way communication between the seller and the buyer,
- personalization and customization – targeting marketing messages to specific individuals based on their preferences and past purchases,
- social technology – creation of user-generated content, e.g. on social networks,
- universal standards – a set of uniform standards that are shared by all nations of the world,
- global reach – business transactions that are not limited by cultural, regional or international borders,
- richness – complexity and rich content of messages for a wide audience (video, audio and text messages),
- ubiquity – availability at any time, anywhere and to anyone regardless of geographical location,
- density of information – a large amount of high-quality information is available to all market participants, both sellers and buyers.

These unique features of e-commerce indicate many new possibilities for marketing and sales strategies, as there is a powerful set of interactive and personalized information that can be delivered to a segmented target audience.⁹

The issue of electronic commerce represents a broad field of knowledge, and its importance cannot be denied. E-commerce entities often face the challenge of distinguishing themselves from the competition and winning the battle against competition in the online environment. One way is to build a positive reputation, as a company with a good reputation can attract the attention of consumers and win them over before the competition. Building a positive reputation

⁶ BANNISTER, K.: *Influencer Marketing Tools for Finding and Analyzing Influencers*. [online]. [2022-09-28]. Available at: <<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/find-influencers-marketing-tools/>>; See also: *What is Influencer Marketing? Is It Suitable for You?* [online]. [2022-09-28]. Available at: <<https://digitalpartner.sk/co-je-influencer-marketing-je-pre-vas-vhodny/>>.

⁷ HASSAN, A., SHARMA, A.: *The Emerald Handbook of ICT in Tourism and Hospitality*. Bingley : Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020, p. 131.

⁸ TAN, S.: *Ecom Hell: How To Make Money In Ecommerce Without Getting Burned*. San Francisco : Ecom Hell, 2013, p. 42.

⁹ See: LAUDON, K. C., TRAVER, C. G.: *E-commerce 2020 – 2021 – Business – Technology – Society*. UK : Pearson Education Limited, 2021, p. 52-56.

is a long-term process and requires a lot of attention.¹⁰ In today's dynamic and interactive business environment, the nature of customer relations is changing dramatically. Salespeople are losing their dominant influence and consumers, along with other stakeholders, are playing an increasingly active role in building trust and relationships.¹¹ Strong customer relationships are more important than ever to a company's strategy and performance, especially as a result of trends driving the global business world. These include the transition to service-based economies, intensified competition worldwide, emerging markets growth, aging population, oversaturation with advertising and, above all, enormous digitization.¹² All activities carried out in the process of electronic commerce are inevitably related to uncertainty. This perceived uncertainty has a negative impact on consumers' purchase intentions and is one of the main obstacles to making an online purchase.¹³ Although the Internet has allowed retailers to reach new markets and new consumers, retaining them and gaining long-term trust and loyalty have become a challenge.¹⁴ Long-term relationships bring advantages not only to sellers (repeat purchases, increased sales, referrals and support) but also to consumers (no need to search for new information, reduced risk of buying an unfamiliar product or service).¹⁵

Consumers are shifting towards the digital world also due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of shopping. Many businesses have established e-shops and started to be active online and on social networks. These changes were already taking place before the pandemic hit, but the pandemic boosted the transition even more. As a large number of consumers spend a lot of time on the Internet and social networks, social media platforms have become the most commonly used means of communication.¹⁶ In today's digital era, social media also act as a medium used by many marketers to promote and introduce their brands, products and services to consumers. Currently, social media are irreplaceable in digital marketing as the speed of sharing information with the public is unmatched and the costs incurred are lower when compared with traditional methods. Therefore, influencer marketing has become a crucial tool in reaching large audiences, raising awareness without being overly repetitive and build and maintain long-term relationships and trust.¹⁷ The main reasons why brands choose influencers to present their products or services are mainly trustworthiness,

¹⁰ See: FEDORKO, R., BAČÍK, R., KERULOVÁ, V.: The Analysis on the Importance of the Reputation Management in Relation to E-commerce Subjects. In *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 48–56.

¹¹ See: BRODIE, R. J.: Enhancing Theory Development in the Domain of Relationship Marketing: How to Avoid the Danger of Getting Stuck in the Middle. In *Journal of Services Marketing*, 2017, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 20-23.

¹² PALMATIER, R. W., STEINHOFF, L.: *Relationship Marketing in the Digital Age*. London : Routledge, 2019, p. 77.

¹³ See: HORVÁTH, J., et al.: Identification of Uncertainty Factors in the Consumer Behaviour of the New Generation of Customers at the E-commerce Level. In *Journal of Tourism and Services*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 12, p. 168-183.

¹⁴ See: BANDARA, R., FERNANDO, M., AKTER, S.: Explicating the Privacy Paradox: A Qualitative Inquiry of Online Shopping Consumers. In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2020, Vol. 52, p. 1-9.

¹⁵ See: COCKAYNE, D.: Redefining B2B Relationship Marketing: Insight from Postmodern Alibaba. In *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 2016, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 49-66.

¹⁶ See: ČARNOGURSKÝ, K., ILAVSKÁ, V.: Influencer Marketing in Brand Building. In MADŽÍK, P., JANOŠKOVÁ, M. (eds.): *Conference Proceedings from International Scientific Conference "The Poprad Economic and Management Forum 2021: Current Trends and Challenges in Organizations Management"*. 2021, p. 238–245.

¹⁷ See: KASMAN, K., HAMDANI, Z.: The Effect of Zoom App Towards Students' Interest in Learning on Online Learning. In *Dinasti International Journal of Education Management And Social Science*, 2021, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 404-408.

authenticity and reliability. Users of social media feel that influencers are their “friends” as influencers share personal facts and intimate stories in posts or stories.¹⁸

4 Recent Trends in Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has become one of the most popular and also most effective forms of digital marketing. Millions of Internet users scroll through social platforms daily for entertainment, inspiration or product recommendations. It therefore comes as no surprise that marketers use influencer marketing to promote brands, products and services. With the rise of influencer marketing, the number of companies and service providers in influencer marketing is also growing. Influencer marketing companies grew globally by 26% to 18,900 in 2021 (Figure 1).¹⁹

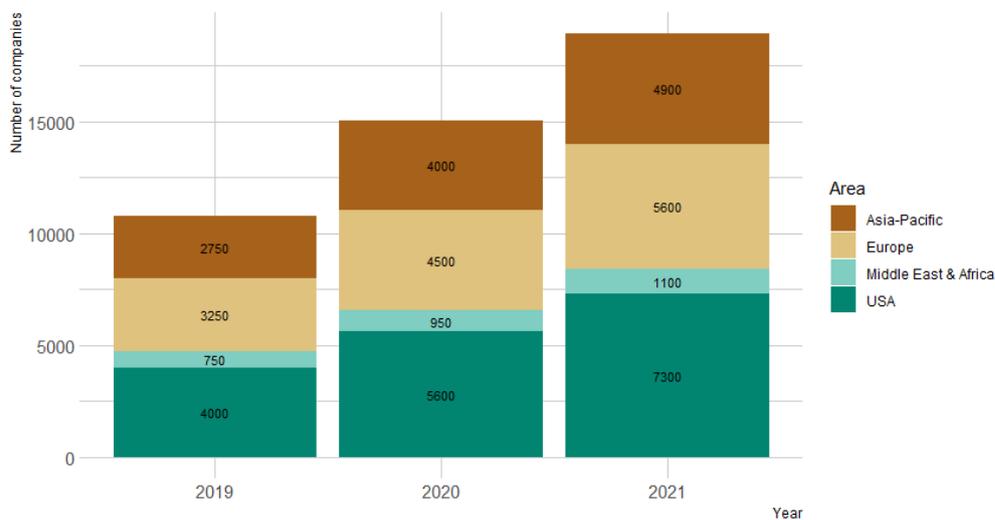


Figure 1: Number of companies offering influencer marketing related services
Source: own elaboration using Rstudio program, 2022

The market value of global influencer marketing has more than doubled since 2019 and was valued at approximately 13,8 billion USD in 2021. In 2016 it was worth 1,7 billion USD, in 2022 it was worth as much as 16,4 billion USD (Figure 2). As the support and involvement of influencers in marketing campaigns continues to grow, the size and value of social media allowing for influencer marketing increases every year. The collaboration between brands and creators is increasingly profitable and brings benefits to all stakeholders involved, be it businesses, influencers or consumers themselves.²⁰

¹⁸ See: DJAFAROVA, E., RUSHWORTH, C.: Exploring the Credibility of Online Celebrities’ Instagram Profiles in Influencing the Purchase Decisions of Young Female Users. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017, Vol. 68, p. 1-7.

¹⁹ SANTORA, J.: *Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics/?fbclid=IwAR0EXI0ZXK6sVtVTT91-GxhF79X7KIEREvS7rooAtMUVbgggt6IE37dmQIY>>.

²⁰ *Influencer Marketing Worldwide – Statistics & Facts*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing/#topicHeader__wrapper/>.

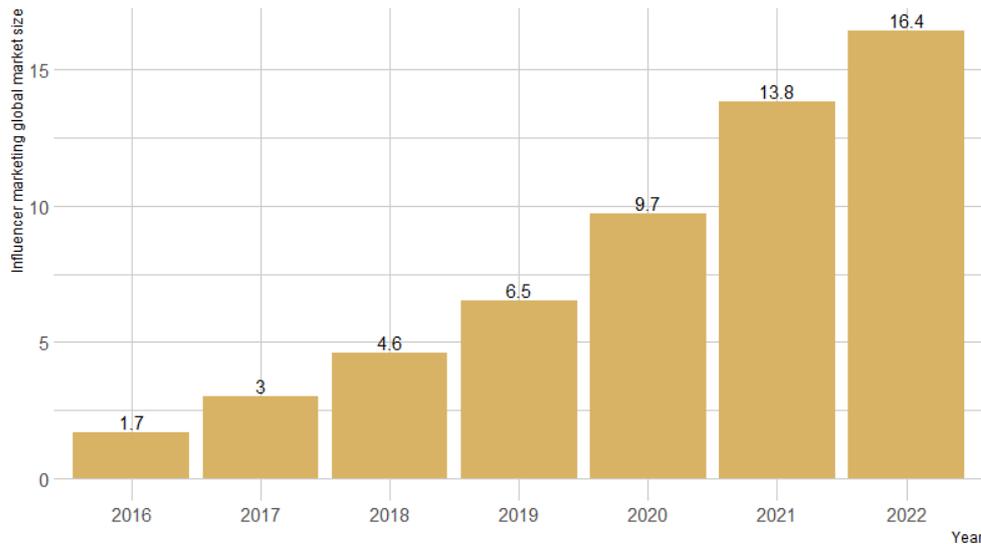


Figure 2: Influencer marketing global market size (in Billion USD)
 Source: own elaboration using Rstudio program, 2022

Figure 3 shows the way different channels were used for the purpose of influencer marketing campaigns in 2020 and 2021. The leading influencer marketing platform is *Instagram*, where businesses can reach potential partners directly through in-app messages. *Instagram* offers a variety of formats that influencers can use to create content and promote a brand, product or service – from photos and tags to stories and reels. Websites of brands are accessible from the platform – this highlights the platform’s increased focus on brand collaboration. In 2020, there were more than six million brand-sponsored influencer posts on *Instagram*, making *Instagram* a 2 billion USD business. *Instagram*’s popularity has reached new heights in 2021, and most brands have chosen *Instagram* as their preferred platform for influencer marketing campaigns, despite having fewer monthly active users (around 1,3 billion) than *Facebook*. *YouTube* is a platform for online video content. Marketers find *YouTube* a very attractive advertising place as millions of users use the platform. In 2020, *YouTube* influencer marketing spending was estimated to be 6,6 billion USD worldwide, up from 5,5 billion USD in 2019. *YouTube* differs from other social networks mainly in the length of its videos, with some creators embedding promotional content into 30 or 60 minutes long videos. The average price for a sponsored *YouTube* video can reach up to 7,000 USD. *TikTok* is a relatively new social media platform, but it has quickly become a popular marketing channel. This is evidenced by app download data, audience reach and influencer content engagement rates, especially among Gen Z users.²¹ *Facebook* is an excellent social media platform for implementing an influencer marketing campaign thanks to its 2,89 billion monthly active users. *Facebook* provides the opportunity to reach a wide target audience. Many influencers find running a marketing campaign on *Facebook* almost as effective as on *Instagram*. *Facebook* boasts a wide range of analytics tools through which brands can track influencer’s performance and see how much impact a campaign is having. Businesses can also track the reach and engagement rates of *Facebook* pages and posts, and better understand target audience demographics and consumer behaviour.²²

²¹ *Influencer Marketing Worldwide – Statistics & Facts*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing/#topicHeader__wrapper>.

²² BARKER, S.: *The Ultimate Facebook Influencer Marketing Guide for 2022*. [online]. [2022-09-30]. Available at: <<https://shanebarker.com/blog/facebook-influencer-marketing/>>.

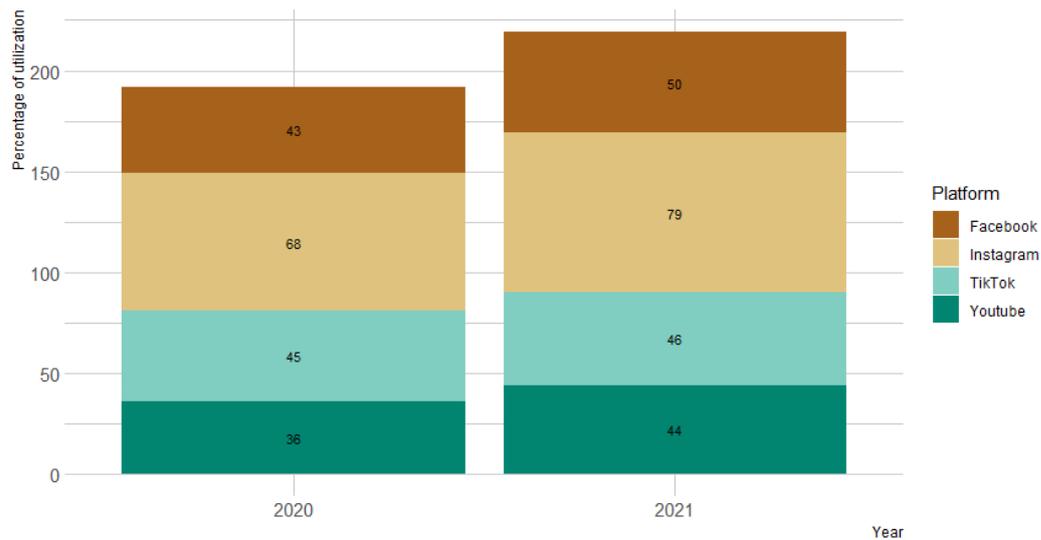


Figure 3: Influencer marketing campaign channel utilization
 Source: own elaboration using Rstudio program, 2022

The most mentioned brand on *Instagram* in 2021 was *Zara*, with a reach of more than 2 billion people and more than 300,000 mentions. It was followed by *Instagram* itself, *Shein*, *H&M* and *Nike*. The channels with the most mentions or views on *YouTube* in 2021 are related to gaming and shopping. *Steam* took the top spot with over 76,000 mentions and over 1,1 billion views, followed by *Aliexpress*, *Flipkart*, *PlayStation* and *Etsy*. *Netflix* was the most watched brand on *TikTok* with more than 10,000 mentions, followed by *FashionNova*, *McDonald's*, *Starbucks* and *Adult swim*.²³ According to a survey of global Internet users aged 16-54 conducted in the 4th quarter of 2020, 33% of respondents aged 18-25 said they follow brands they have bought from or are considering buying from on social media, while 36% of Millennial respondents said the same. Within regard to trust, the strongest relationship was demonstrated between Generation Z women and advertising on social media. On the other hand, Millennial women consider ads on social networks to be the most interesting.²⁴

Table 1 offers an overview of influencer marketing-related facts and statistics as published by the *Digital Marketing Institute* in 2021.²⁵

Table 1: Influencer marketing-related facts and statistics

70% of teenagers trust influencers more than traditional celebrities	
86% of women use social media to get shopping advice from influencers	
49% of consumers base their shopping decisions on influencer recommendations	

²³ SANTORA, J.: *Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics/?fbclid=IwAR0EXI0ZXXK6sVtVTT91-GxhF79X7KIEREvS7rooAtMUVbagggt6IE37dmQIY>>.

²⁴ See: BAČÍK, R. et al.: Perceiving the Advertising in Gender-generational Characteristics. In *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 44–57.

²⁵ 20 Surprising Influencer Marketing Statistics. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/20-influencer-marketing-statistics-that-will-surprise-you>>.

Influencer marketing campaigns earn up to 5,78 USD for every 1 USD spent	
Influencer marketing helps brands get better customers	
57% of fashion and beauty companies engage in influencer marketing	
Big brands plan to increase spending on influencer marketing	
82% of people trust information on social media when making a purchase decision	
Marketers spend up to 100,000 – 500,000 EUR on influencer campaigns	
41% of <i>Twitter</i> users made their purchase decision based on a tweet	
The trend of couples in influencer marketing is growing	
The popularity of <i>YouTube</i> is constantly growing	
60% of consumers were influenced by social media or a blog while shopping	
Twitter influencers increased consumer purchase intent 5,2 times	
71% of marketers believe that influencer partnerships are beneficial for business	

Source: own elaboration, 2022.

It's extremely difficult for brands to build the same level of trust that influencers possess. As many as 4 in 10 Millennials say their favourite influencer understands them even better than their friends. 78% of women are active on social media (they prefer *Instagram*), while up to 86% of women have made purchases thanks because of influencers' posts on social media, claiming they provided them with genuine and inspiring content. Not only are 49% of consumers dependent on influencer recommendations, but 40% have purchased a chosen product or service after seeing it on *Twitter*, *YouTube* or *Instagram*. If consumers are convinced and trust an influencer's recommendation, they are likely to make a purchase. In order to support influencers, the *TikTok* platform launched the Fund for *TikTok* Content Creators in 2020. The fund started at 200,000 EUR and is expected to grow to 1 billion USD in the US over the next three years. The goal is to build a pool of influencers who will earn through brand collaborations and sponsorships. It has been found that 71% of marketers plan to increase their spending on influencer marketing, with the majority preferring to work with micro-influencers. Influencer marketing is becoming the fastest growing marketing channel for brands, surpassing organic search, paid search and e-mail marketing. Businesses even earn an average of 5,78 USD for every 1 USD spent on influencers, with some earning as much as 18 USD, which could be described as a significant return on investment. *Instagram* and *Twitter* are the most effective social media platforms in terms of promotion. In the fashion and beauty industry, up to 57% of

businesses use influencers in their marketing strategy, with another 21% planning to include influencer marketing into their marketing strategy in the next year. Businesses focus primarily on Generation Z and Millennials as these generations use social media the most. *Twitter* influencers now have the ability to greatly influence followers' purchasing decisions, resulting in a 61% increase in brand likeability and a 64% increase in purchase intent. The newest trend, "star couples" also has a big influence on the purchasing decisions of consumers these days. These star couples are, for example various reality shows contestants (e.g. *Love Island*) or couples from the *Royal Family*. The aim of the influencer marketing analysis is to find out which social media platforms are the most suitable for brand promotion. The most influential social media platform is *Facebook*, followed by *YouTube* and *Twitter*. *Twitter* influencers stand behind a 5.2x increase in purchase intent, compared to a 2.7x increase when tweets were tweeted by specific brands. Influencer marketing campaigns should be part of the long-term marketing strategy of marketers, as almost 75% of marketers consider them very useful and beneficial for business.²⁶

5 Conclusion

The importance of influencer marketing is growing steadily, whether it is due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen a lot of people flocking to the Internet, or due to technological progress and digitization and the related changes in consumer behaviour. Influencer marketing currently represents one of the most significant innovative ways to influence consumer purchasing decisions by creating quality content without too high marketing costs. The aim of the paper was to emphasize the importance of influencers and provide an overview of the current state of the issue and future trends. Consumers build a certain virtual relationship with influencers and consider them trustworthy. This allows influencers to influence opinions, decisions and behaviour of their followers in favour of a given brand, product or service. Since sellers aim at building and maintaining long-term relationships with consumers, they should select their communication strategy very carefully. It can be assumed that the trend of influencer marketing will continue well into the future. Therefore, marketers should include influencers in the communication and marketing strategy so as to promote their brands, products and services, as well as to create and maintain long-term relationships with consumers.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported the scientific research grant VEGA 1/0694/20 Relational marketing research - perception of e-commerce aspects and its impact on purchasing behaviour and consumer preferences and research grant VEGA 1/0488/22 Research on digital marketing in the field of tourism with an emphasis on the principles of sustainability in the post-pandemic market environment.

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²⁶ 20 *Surprising Influencer Marketing Statistics*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/20-influencer-marketing-statistics-that-will-surprise-you>>.

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DATA VISUALIZATION IN THE METAVERSE ENVIRONMENT

Michal Kubovics

Abstract:

Currently, data is the driving force of any marketing or business activity in general. Their collection is very important, especially in the context of deciding on the further direction of business entities. Another thing is the visualization of data, which has been on the rise recently, precisely because of a better perception and understanding of the context in the data. By combining data visualization and the metaverse environment, we get a powerful tool that clarifies the data on the one hand and supports a simpler and more effective perception on the other. The work focuses on the possibilities of using tools that can visualize data in the metaverse environment. Based on the analysis of the available tools, data was collected regarding data visualization in the metaverse environment, and based on the analysis of the obtained data, findings were identified in the form of a view of the issue and the interrelationships of the individual tools were described. The main findings in the subject point to the possibilities of data visualization in the metaverse environment through specific tools. The findings will help further research as well as the commercial sphere in knowing the tools that enable data visualization in the metaverse environment.

Keywords:

AR. Data Visualization. Data Visualization in VR and AR. Metaverse Environment. VR.

1 Metaverse

Digital devices have undergone massive development since their inception until today. In connection with the Internet, these devices became connectable to the network, which enabled further development. The reduction in production costs led to the spread among the general population and the sharing of information across the entire digital network.¹ Another innovation was the subsequent progress from digital technologies,² which was transformed into the emergence of the metaverse. This was preceded by the creation of technical means. Devices that allow working with virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and display (HMD)³ had to be created.

1.1 Characteristics of Metaverse

Metaverse is a space that includes the enhancement of digital reality in the form of transformation into a physical representation of the world. The metaverse does not exist in the true sense of the word, but there are a series of devices that are able to simulate a similar understanding of the basic nature of the metaverse.⁴ Therefore, it is possible to lean towards the statement that the metaverse is currently a broad-spectrum term denoting any place where people, companies or various other entities can be and together form a virtual place.

¹ ZHAO, Y. et al.: Metaverse: Perspectives from Graphics, Interactions and Visualization. In *Visual Informatics*, 2022, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 58.

² KUSÁ, A. et al.: Testing of Standardized Advertising Slogans within the Marketing Communication of Sustainable and Local Foods in Order to Reveal Consumer Preferences. In *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 2021, Vol. 5, Article 703223, p. 3.

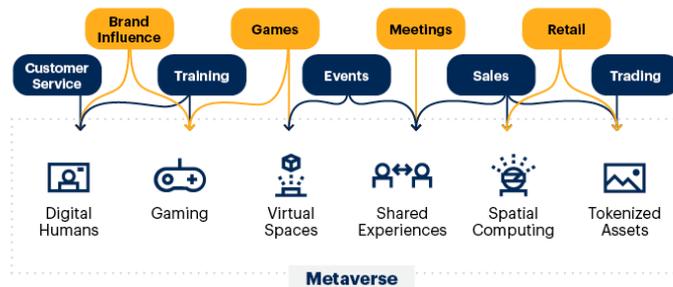
³ XU, X., MANGINA, E., CAMPBELL, A. G.: HMD-Based Virtual and Augmented Reality in Medical Education: A Systematic Review. In *Frontiers in Virtual Reality*, 2021, Vol. 2, Article 692103, p. 2.

⁴ DWIVEDI, Y. K. et al.: Metaverse Beyond the Hype: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Emerging Challenges, Opportunities, and Agenda for Research, Practice and Policy. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2022, Vol. 66, Article 102542, p. 4-6.

1.2 Virtual Data Visualization

Normal data visualization works with the variable X and Y. The fundamental difference is the extension to dimension Z when visualizing in the metaverse.⁵ For data that can be displayed two-dimensionally, the procedure is similar. For more complicated data, the third dimension is very suitable and enables additional display options.⁶

Opportunities in a Metaverse (Now and in the Future)



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Gartner

Figure 1: Possibilities of use in the Metaverse.

Source: WILES, J.: *What Is a Metaverse? And Should You Be Buying in?* [online]. [2022-12-03]. Available at: <<https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/what-is-a-metaverse>>.

Virtual worlds are not new, they are fully developed in the gaming segment. The expansion of the metaverse is therefore potentially possible to more mass markets or the main goal is to reach a large number of users.⁷ The metaverse has so far been defined mainly in literature and film. Currently, the metaverse is widespread in the field of video games and entertainment. Nowadays, the metaverse is often considered a vehicle that mediates entertainment. Several uses are also within the framework of assistance for certain segments, such as healthcare or construction, where the modeling of 3D elements and their manipulation is important. Although authors differ in defining what a metaverse is. Several authors agree that this is an unachieved goal of creating a unified world that can be used through devices that are usually head-mounted and affect auditory and visual perception.⁸

The data visualization environment in the metaverse environment hides a sophisticated solution, since various methods are used in data visualization, for example filtering and comparison, the setting and optimization of data display can be significantly simpler and better

⁵ SCHNETTLER, M.: *How the Metaverse Will Advance Data Visualization Techniques*. [online]. [2022-12-12]. Available at: <<https://medium.com/mlearning-ai/how-the-metaverse-will-advance-data-visualization-techniques-976537621a7c>>.

⁶ CHARVÁT JANECHOVÁ, J., AUGUSTÍNOVÁ, N.: Social Responsibility of the Company and Its Impact on the Reputation and the Employer's Brand. In *DOKBAT 2021 – 17th International Bata Conference for Ph.D. Students and Young Researchers*. Zlín : Tomas Bata University, 2021, p. 130. [online]. [2022-12-12]. Available at: <<http://dokbat.utb.cz/proceedings/>>.

⁷ WIEDERHOLD, B. K.: Ready (or Not) Player One: Initial Musings on the Metaverse. In *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2022, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 1.

⁸ FEREDOOONI, N. et al.: Incorporating Situation Awareness Cues in Virtual Reality for Users in Dynamic in-Vehicle Environments. In *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, 2022, Vol. 28, No. 11, p. 3865.

grasped by users. Also, real-time 3D imaging is an advantage, which can communicate information faster and more effectively to its recipient. Currently, data visualization is important for displaying big data. For this reason, a lot of visualized data is often visible in the output. The just mentioned problem is solved by data visualization in the metaverse environment.

It is important to emphasize the benefits offered by the metaverse. This is imaging that is in 360 degree. Another benefit is the intuitive control, which is inspired and transformed from the real world.⁹ Another extension is the Internet connection, which offers establishing contact and sharing the same content with other people. The strongest essence of the metaverse, which enables future development in the field of data visualization, is precisely the ability to see a large amount of data at the same time.¹⁰ Another element is the efficiency of data perception, which is within 3D models of displaying elements.

They consider the explicitly unfavorable mediation of big data by means of 2D graphs to be problematic.¹¹ In the metaverse environment, data can be visualized through 3D graphs, which are easier to grasp perceptually, and on the other hand, data can be visualized in the metaverse through the real frequency of given elements, which can be displayed through a 3D model.

The following examples describe the use of individual 3D models in the metaverse environment. The applications of the worlds are in the form of simulation of waste recycling, where the goal is achieved through gamification in the form of raising awareness and educating in the field of environmental science.



Figure 2: Jede Dose zählt – VR simulation 1

Source: VRISCH: *Jede Dose zählt – VR simulation*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMPZsFVBG9Y&ab_channel=vrisch>.

The following example is a data visualization of the US election. The example points to the possibility of creating a visualization that directly reflects a better perception for the recipient thanks to less burden on the recipient’s imagination and the creation of a better picture of individual values.

⁹ LEE, U. K., KIM, H.: UTAUT in Metaverse: An “Ifland” Case. In *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 2022, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 614.

¹⁰ YANG, B. et al.: Application of Digital Twins and Metaverse in the Field of Fluid Machinery Pumps and Fans: A Review. In *Sensors*, 2022, Vol. 22, No. 23, Article 9294, p. 20.

¹¹ LEE, P. et al.: All One Needs to Know about Metaverse: A Complete Survey on Technological Singularity. In *Virtual Ecosystem, and Research Agenda*, 2021, Vol. 14, No. 8, p. 3.



Figure 3: An example of data visualization in the metaverse 2

Source: GOSSETT, S.: *Is VR the Next Frontier in Data Visualization?* [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://builtin.com/data-science/ar-vr-data-visualization>>.

The following example deals with the 3D display of the x, y and z axis, where it is possible to adjust the scale operationally and better absorb and understand the relationships between the variables. It is also possible to observe that the 3D model has a physical side and also observes reflections and shadows. A given 3D model would take a longer time to produce in the real world, whereas in a metavesa environment it is possible to use artificial intelligence or machine learning.

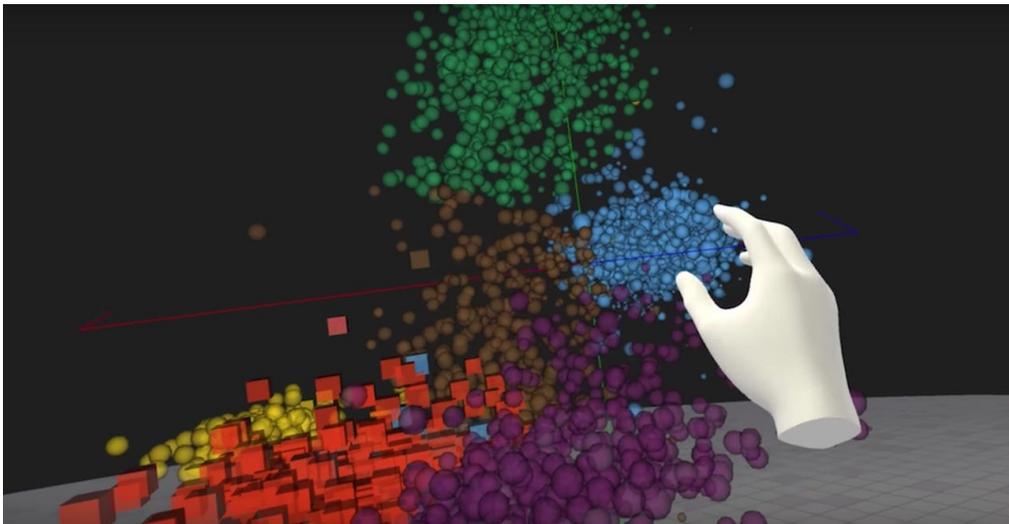


Figure 4: An example of data visualization in the metaverse 3

Source: NICHOLS, G.: *Data Visualization Via VR and AR: How We'll Interact with tomorrow's Data.* [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://www.zdnet.com/article/data-visualization-via-vr-and-ar-how-well-interact-with-tomorrows-data/>>.

2 Methods

The goal of the paper was to define an overview of available data visualization options in the metaverse environment, based on theoretical principles and analysis of available sources. The research was carried out with the help of search tools in the environment of scientific and practical sources. Methods such as analysis and deduction were used in the output. As part of

the methodology, qualitative methods are used in the contribution. It is mainly about analyzing the available resources and defining the resulting selection of data visualization tools in the metaverse environment. Individual selection criteria are whether the given tool works in the metaverse environment, whether the tool is at least in beta version and whether the tool visualizes various broad spectrum data. As a result, we can talk about the selection, which was realized by the available selection, if a suitable tool was found during the search, it was subjected to three selection criteria, so it was subsequently included in the selection.

3 Results

The following is a table with a comprehensive overview of tools that enable data visualization in the metaverse environment.

Table 1: Aspects of data visualization in VR

Tool name	Source information web
<i>3data.io</i>	3data.io (https://store.steampowered.com/app/551960/DatavizVR_Demo/)
<i>BadVR</i>	badvr.com
<i>Ulysses</i>	vrulysses.com
<i>Immersion Analytics</i>	immersionanalytics.com
<i>Virtualitics</i>	virtualitics.com
<i>Nanome</i>	nanome.ai
<i>Kineviz</i>	kineviz.com
<i>VR-viz</i>	vr-viz.netlify.app

Source: own processing according to *Who's Offering Data Visualization VR?* [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://datavizcatalogue.com/blog/whos-offering-data-visualization-vr/>>.

3data.io

3data.io is dedicated to creating metaverse worlds that are focused on business purposes. For example, in the form of a company visit via a VR or AR headset. The mentioned company introduced the *datavizVR* tool, which enables data visualization in the metaverse environment. The mentioned software enables data visualization, which is shown in the following figure.

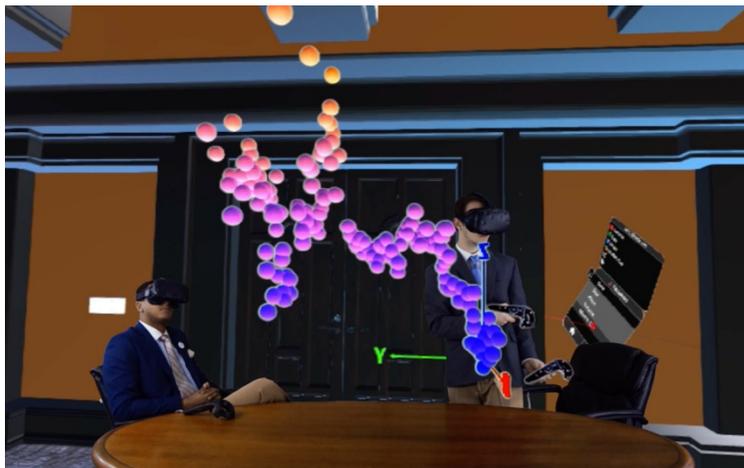


Figure 5: 3Data.io

Source: *DatavizVR Demo*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <https://store.steampowered.com/app/551960/DatavizVR_Demo/>.

BadVR

It is a company that has created a solution in the form of a system that transforms big data into visualization that is effective in perception. The system enables very clear data visualization.

The attributes that dominate are simplicity, speed, accurate and efficient way of delivering data visualization to the end user.

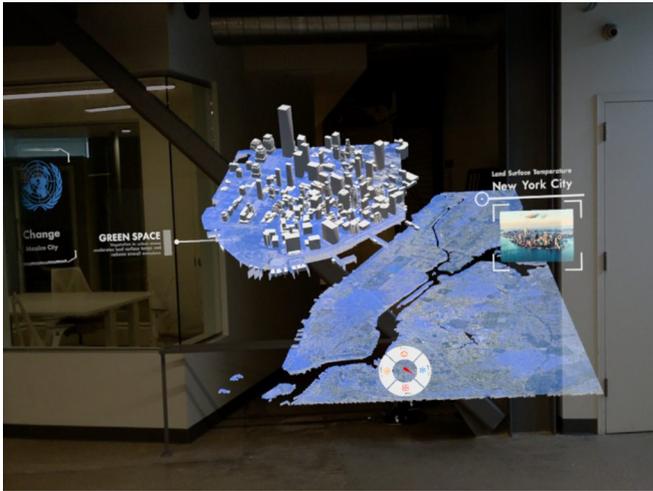


Figure 6: BadVR

Source: *Tech Showcase: BadVR Expands the Immersive Data Experience in AR/VR*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://govshop.com/blog/blogs/psfeditorial/2020/11/02/tech-showcase-badvr-expands-the-immersive-data-experience-in-ar-vr/>>.

Ulysses

It is defined as a metaverse that provides real-time data visualization that reflects data generated in devices such as cloud solutions and shows the vulnerabilities of said architectures. In an environment that has a 3D display of the mentioned data, it is possible to clarify the mentioned problem much faster and possibly come up with improvements.

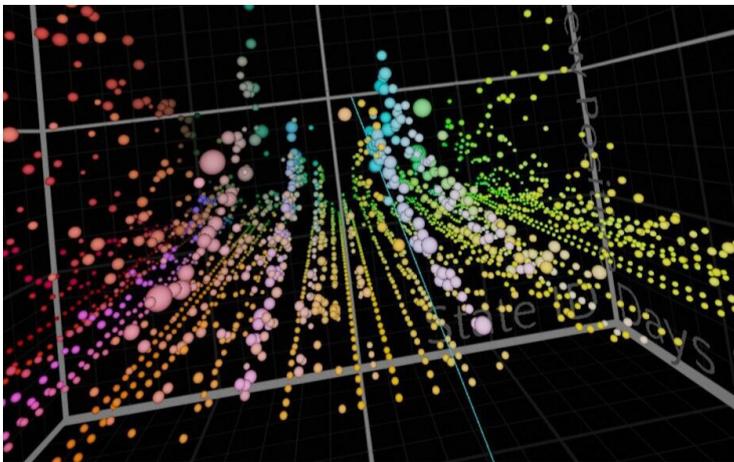


Figure 7: Ulysses

Source: *Ulysses. VR Data Explorer*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://www.vrulysses.com/download-ulysses>>.

Immersion Analytics

It is a tool that is aimed at simplifying the perception and understanding of big data, which mainly came from the business environment. At the same time, the aforementioned big data required the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in the previous period. Through the metaverse, however, it is possible to display up to 18 dimensions at the same time. The data is thus much more understandable and the demands on perception are reduced.

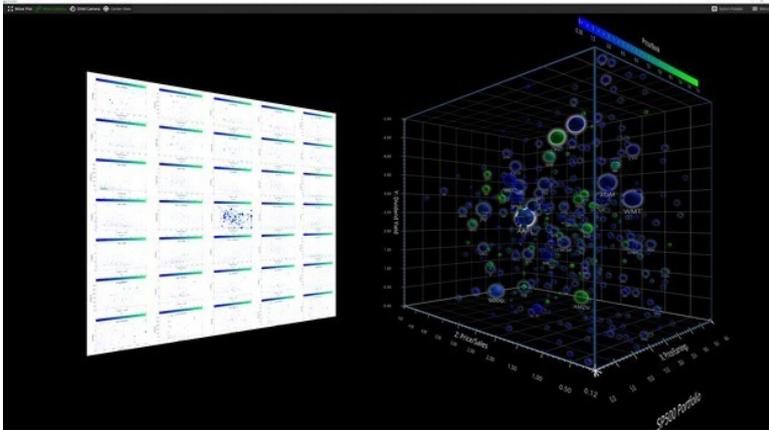


Figure 8: Immersion Analytics

Source: *Immersion Analytics Releases v2022.1 & Metaverse Platform for Enterprise ISVs*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://www.immersionanalytics.com/immersion-analytics-releases-v2022-1-metaverse-platform-for-enterprise-isvs/>>.

Virtualitics

The specificity of the mentioned tool is precisely in the intelligent processing of data into 3D objects, where lighting, controllability, logical units and complex relationships between variables are key. Finding connections through visualization in the metaverse is easier in complex data. An important predisposition that amplifies and connects all elements is a trusted artificial intelligence that converts big data into a visual form.



Figure 9: Virtualitics

Source: *Virtualitics Acknowledged for AI-Driven 3D Technologies That Break New Ground in Data Analysis*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/virtualitics-acknowledged-for-ai-driven-3d-technologies-that-break-new-ground-in-data-analysis-301659687.html>>.

Nanome

It specifically deals with the metaverse that deals with the chemistry segment. Specifically, it is one of the most effective tools for drug design. In the metaverse environment, cooperation is faster, where experts from all over the world can work collaboratively on the project of a new or updated medicine. It is the same with simulations, applicability and the discovery of new possibilities for the use of medicines.



Figure 10: Nanome

Source: Nanome. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <<https://nanome.ai/>>.

Kineviz

The project from *Kineviz* is focused on data analysis, modeling and visualization, which is fast, efficient and flexible compared to the competition. At the same time, the *GraphXR* system is defined, which manages to solve problems in the form of a changing scenario and unpredictable situations. Wide use especially in segments such as medicine, journalism and manufacturing. It is also applicable for students, agencies and startups.

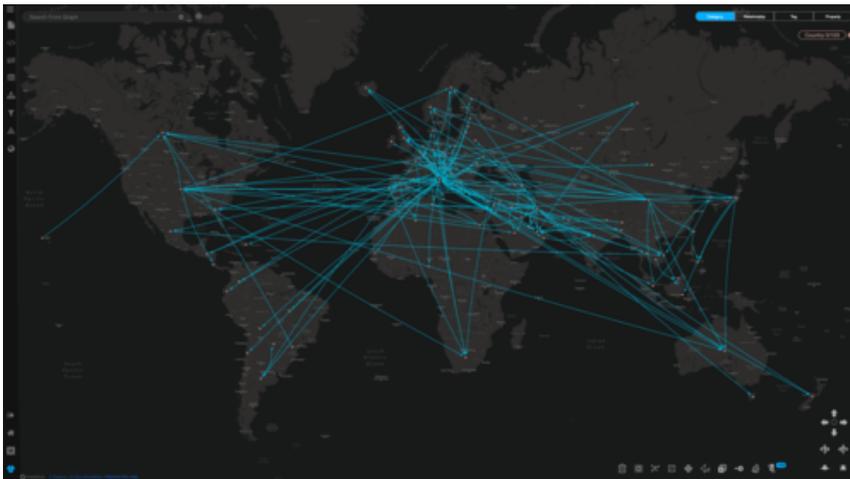


Figure 11: Kineviz

Source: Kineviz. *Total Visual Immersion*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <kineviz.com>.

VR-Viz

VR-viz is a combination of individual components that together generate and create 3D visualizations in the metaverse environment. The output can also be generated in the webVR environment. The project is freely available as an open library for anyone interested in creating data visualizations in 3D.

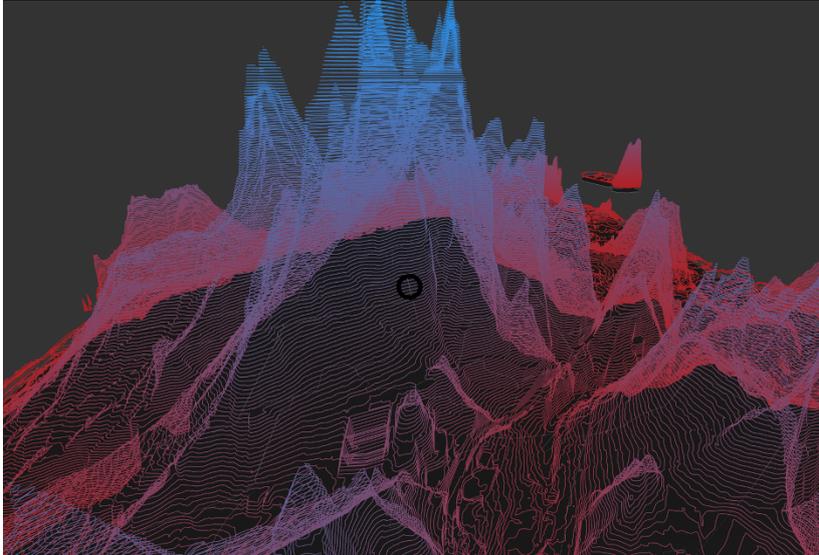


Figure 12: VR-Viz
 Source: *VR-Viz*. [online]. [2022-12-08]. Available at: <vr-viz.netlify.app>.

4 Discussion

Individual tools for data visualization were selected in the paper. In doing so, it is important to note that the mentioned tools are part of the metaverse. The analysis of available tools that allow visualization in the metaverse environment brought interesting findings, as there are currently several listed tools. Specifically, eight tools were found, namely *3data.io*, *BadVR*, *Ulysses*, *Immersion Analytics*, *Virtualitics*, *Nanome*, *Kineviz* and *VR-viz*. In the end, a greater number of tools are the essence, but it remains precisely to follow the trend of data visualization. The tools do not have major deviations in data visualization; it is primarily a matter of graphic processing of 3D models and the width of data visualization settings. More robust systems offer better setup options. As a result, we can see both simpler and more complex tools that arise as smaller projects of companies dealing with presentation in the metaverse environment. In conclusion, we can say that the future of the metaverse and data display is very similar to the physical world, but with the difference that it is much less expensive or anything that can be visualized and transformed into 3D can be displayed and manipulated. The above gives a predisposition to easy creation and modification in every possible state.

5 Conclusion

In the output, the goal was fulfilled in the form of defining data visualization options in the metaverse environment. The results provide an overview of the tools that allow data visualization in the metaverse environment. In the introduction, there are propositions from which the study of the topic of data visualization is based. Subsequently, the theoretical starting points and research to date are explained. The review of secondary sources is completed by research methods. Subsequently, the results and the conclusion are defined. The given summarization of the tools allows it to be a support point for further investigation and the definition of new possibilities for investigation.

Acknowledgement: The research was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA, No. 1/0458/21) under the project entitled “Management of the “groundswell” concept by business entities in promotion of environmentally-friendly products in times of technology interference”.

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EFFECTIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION WITH GENERATION Z THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Lucia Kučerová

Abstract:

Social media has become a communication tool and information source in political communication. Politicians publish their statements, ideas and opinions here, thus gaining the opportunity to profit from the use of social media as tools to communicate directly with (potential) voters. The age cohort that grows up in the era of social media and, according to several researches, uses it as a primary source for obtaining information is generation Z. To what extent social media is used as an agitation tool for political representatives to communicate with generation Z, that is the subject of our paper. The paper does not represent exact research conclusions, but a theoretical view of the issue of the mutual relationship of social media and political communication with regard to generation Z. The aim of the paper is therefore to point out the basic characteristics of this age cohort and subsequently to outline ways of addressing them in the social media environment. At the same time, the theoretical article can become useful in terms of content when discussing effective political communication in the social media environment and draw attention to the connections that need to be investigated in this area in the future.

Keywords:

Generation Z. Political Communication. Political Marketing. Social Media. Social Networks.

1 Introduction

For an exact definition of the mutual relationship between social media and political communication, it is necessary to define the terms in isolation first. The interdisciplinary nature of political communication and social media significantly determines the theoretical framework of the entire paper, so we will try to define both concepts at the very beginning. Political communication is difficult to briefly define, so we would like to point out different understandings of this term. Different authors look at the same term differently with their research lens, therefore in the scientific discourse the problem of a clean, comprehensive definition of this term arises. For example, Wolton¹ states that the term political communication was first used in connection with the study of government communication towards the public. Subsequently, it gradually developed with other elements and today it also includes the study of the role of communication in politics in the broadest sense from politicians and the media to public opinion polls to political marketing and advertising. McNair² in his publication *An introduction to political communication*, right at the beginning warns, that any book on political communication should begin by acknowledging that it is a difficult term to define, because both parts of it (politics and communication) themselves have many definitions. Schulz³ also draws attention to the enormous scope, ambiguity and problem of a comprehensive understanding of the term, and in an attempt to define the term, he created a lists points that political communication analyzes, namely the political content in the media; actors and agencies involved in this content; the impact of that content on the audience; the influence of the political system on the media system and and the influence of the media

¹ WOLTON, D.: Political Communication: The Construction of Model. In *European Journal of Communication*, 1990, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 10-11.

² MCNAIR, B.: *An Introduction to Political Communication*. New York : Routledge, 2011, p. 3.

³ SCHULZ, W.: Political Communication Scholarship in Germany. In *Political Communication*, 1997, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 225.

system on the political system. Petrová⁴ also claims that there is no universally accepted definition of this term, even though a number of theorists have already tried to define it. However, if we wanted to summarize the experts' claims into a single definition of the term political communication, we could (though somewhat overexposed) say that political communication is the process of communication between political representatives and (potential) voters through a certain medium or, in an even narrower sense, all forms of communication, carried out by political actors in order to achieve specific goals.⁵ After clarifying the terminological concept of political communication, we took a closer look at the concept of social media. Marshall McLuhan, as an important media theorist, came up with the theory that human society is determined by the type of media technology through which it perceives information. He even held the opinion that the form of the media is more important than the content that the given media presents. His well-known theory "the medium is the message" was based on this. For this reason, we also consider the channel through which political communication is distributed to be significant. While reading and searching for articles and publications devoted to social media in political communication, we encountered terminological ambiguities in the case of different definitions of social media and social networks.

Murár⁶ considers the most appropriate definition of social media from Kaplan and Haenlein⁷, who describe social media as a group of Internet applications, built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Definitions of social media that we have encountered overlap with the definition of several experts, or with confusion with social networks. Scott⁸ defines social media as a tool that gives people the opportunity to exchange their opinions, ideas and make connections. According to him, the main difference that makes them different from traditional media is that anyone can create content through social media. At the same time, he also observes the frequent confusion of the terms social media and social networks. He defines social media as a superordinate term that includes the various media that people use to communicate online and associate or to establish various contacts. While he defines social networking as a part of social media that is distinguished by the fact that people on this type of social media create their own accounts/profiles. Similarly, social networks are also defined as a part of social media by Janouch⁹, who calls them places where people meet to create a circle of friends or a community with common interests. After clarifying the two main concepts, in the contribution we devote ourselves to a narrower definition of political communication in the social media environment, with regard to generation Z.

Since the effectiveness of political communication in the social media environment will also be the subject of our dissertation, we consider it appropriate to direct our contribution to the generation Z. According to experts, this is a generation that uses social media to a large extent, and as a researcher who is part of this generation, it is interesting for us to delve into studies dealing with political communication through the lens of this cohort.

⁴ PETROVÁ, B.: Politická komunikace. In EIBL, O., CHYTILEK, R., (eds.): *Teorie a metody politického marketingu*. Brno : CDK, 2012, p. 254.

⁵ GILLOVÁ, K., HLADÍKOVÁ, V.: Vybrané etické aspekty politickej komunikácie v priestore sociálnych sietí. In BRNÍK, A. et al.(eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2021: Home Officetainment*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2021, p. 29.

⁶ MURÁR, P.: *Marketing na Twitteri*. Bratislava : Web Support, 2011, p. 14.

⁷ HAENLEIN, M., KAPLAN, A.: Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. In *Business Horizons* 2010, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 63.

⁸ SCOTT, M. D.: *Nové pravidlá marketingu a PR*. Bratislava : Eastone books, 2010, p. 38.

⁹ JANOUC, V.: *Internetový marketing*. Brno : Computer Press, 2014, p. 302.

2 Generation Z

The company *Sprout Social*¹⁰ divided the age range of generation respondents into generation Z (18-24 years old), generation Y, or the so-called millennials (25-40 years old), generation X (41-56 years old) and baby boomers (57-74 years old). The collective of authors¹¹ presents a similar division, but based on years, namely the veteran generation (1925 – 1946), baby boomers (1946 – 1960), generation X (1960 – 1980), generation Y (1980 – 1995), generation Z (1995 – 2010) and the Alfa generation (2010+).

While studying publications and professional articles, we encountered different descriptions of generations in terms of age range. Since the subject of our post is Generation Z, we focused on the various age ranges of this generation only. Most experts (Zemke, Filipczak, McCrindle) agreed that Generation Z begins with the year 1995 and ends with the year 2010. However, there are also other, different approaches perceiving this cohort. For example, TapScott limits Generation Z to the years 1998-2008, La Velle and Smith lean towards the years 1993 – 1999¹², and Madden¹³ believes that the years 1995-2009 are the most correct range for Generation Z. The American Pew Research Center states that Generation Z begins with the population born in 1997, citing political and economic factors that influenced the previous generation of Millennials. McCrindle limits the age range of generation Z to the years 1995 – 2010 and at the same time adds that marketers and some studies mention other age ranges (for example, from 2000), but they do not have the necessary sociological or demographic justification for this.¹⁴

2.1 Generation Z and Social Media

However, all the above-mentioned authors are inclined to the fact that the unequivocal features that distinguish generation Z from other generational cohorts are global connectivity and the associated growing up in the era of social media and engagement in society such as environmental, political and value issues. For example, according to the Pew Research Center¹⁵, Generation Z will be the one to help shape the political landscape the most. A similar view is held by McCrindle¹⁶ in his publication *The ABC of XYZ*, where he states that one of the primary differences between generations Y and Z compared to other generations is the fact that these generations are becoming more environmentally and politically aware. He also calls Generation Z “digital integrators” because he considers them to be fully educated in the field of technology and digital interaction across the world, and for that reason he also sees them as the only truly global generation. Tari¹⁷ also mentions other names for generation

¹⁰ *How Different Generations Use Social Media and What This Means for Your Business*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/guides/social-media-use-by-generation/>>.

¹¹ ZEMKE, R., RAINES, C., FILIPCZAK, B.: *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*. New York : American Management Association, 2013, p. 214.

¹² VITELAR, A.: Generation Z and the Use of Social Media for Personal Branding. In *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 262.

¹³ MADDEN, C.: *Hello Gen Z: Engaging the Generation of Post-Millennials*. Sydnes : Hello Clarity, 2018, p. 24.

¹⁴ MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations*. New Wales : UNSW Press, 2011, p. 14-18.

¹⁵ DIMOCK, M.: *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>>.

¹⁶ See: MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations*. New Wales : UNSW Press, 2011, p. 14-18.

¹⁷ TARI, A.: Z generáció. In: BENCSIK A. et al.: Y and Z Generations at Workplaces. In *Journal of Competitiveness*, 2016, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 90-102.

Z, such as the Google generation, iGeneration, Digital Natives or Zoomers. Like other authors, Tari sees Generation Z as a generation that was born into the world of digital media and that feels comfortable there. Madden¹⁸ adds that members of Generation Z use social media to access information, but she also points to the generation's shorter attention span. Forbes magazine¹⁹ also perceives generation Z as the most technologically savvy and at the same time adds that it is the first truly global generation. Even Žúborová states in her publication *Genyz* that this is a generation with different social awareness, political values and so-called "protagonists of technological progress."²⁰ Kopecký²¹ also states that the so-called digital natives, as an age generation that has already been born into the digital world, is an important aspect of modern public relations and, in addition to being engaged in communication on the Internet for a long time, its communication also has special features.

Based on the sources mentioned above, Generation Z is characterized by technological proficiency and use of social media. This theory is also confirmed by various researches, for example the Global Web Index Agency, also known as GWI, conducted a survey to reflect generational differences in the use of social media. The research showed that Generation Z spends the most time on social media, almost three hours a day on average, followed by Generation Y, which spends 2 hours and 38 minutes on social media a day. At the same time, the research showed that the three most used social media by generation Z are YouTube, Facebook and Instagram (Figure 1).

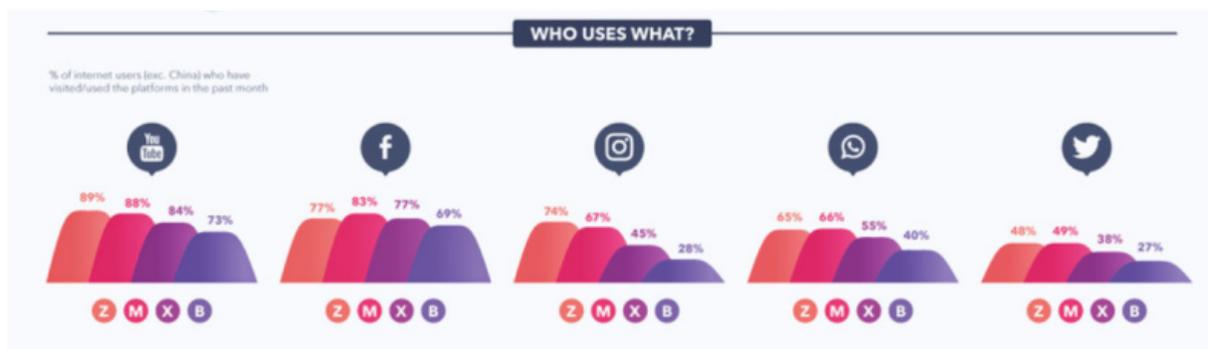


Figure 1: The most used social media by age

Source: Global Web Index. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/10/social-media-use-by-generation/>>.

Data Reportal's²² research within the age range for Generation Z shows that the most popular social media is *Instagram*, followed by *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*. The company *Sprout Social*²³ from the USA, which claims that generation Z is the most important generation in the field of social media in the long term, because they are the only ones who have lived almost their entire lives online and do not know the time without the Internet as much as other generations. At the same time, the study points out that 66% of users from generation Z or the

¹⁸ MADDEN, C.: *Hello Gen Z: Engaging the Generation of Post-Millennials*. Sydney : Hello Clarity, 2018, p. 123.

¹⁹ DILL, K.: *7 Things Employers Should Know About The Gen Z Workforce*. [online] [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2015/11/06/7-things-employers-should-know-about-the-gen-z-workforce/?sh=3ca9dc15fad7>>.

²⁰ ŽÚBOROVÁ, V.: *GEN YZ. Generácia budúcnosti*. Bratislava : Policy Institute, 2018, p. 62.

²¹ KOPECKÝ, L.: *Public relations. Dějiny – teorie – praxe*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 205.

²² *Global Social Media Stats*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/social-media-users/>>.

²³ *How Different Generations Use Social Media and What This Means for Your Business*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/guides/social-media-use-by-generation/>>.

so-called Zoomers states that social media is an everyday part of their lives. The above mentioned studies and researches worked with foreign respondents.

Slovak surveys reflecting the use of social media based on generations were conducted in 2021 by Go4insight²⁴. The survey found that more than 78% of Gen Z respondents are on social media several times a day, the most of any age group. The most used social media in Slovakia for generation Z (Figure 2) are *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Instagram*.

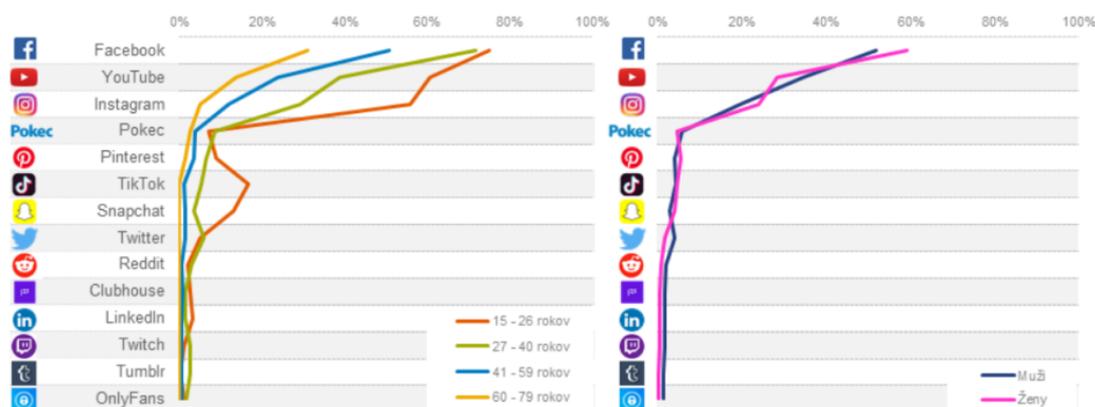


Figure 2: Use of social media in Slovakia in 2021 by age

Source: Go4Insight. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.go4insight.com/post/ko%C4%BEko-slov%C3%A1kov-je-na-soci%C3%A1lnych-sie%C5%A5ach>>.

3 Political Communication in the Social Media Environment (Not Only) with Generation Z

According to Svetlík et. al.²⁵, although the professional public pays more and more attention to social media, the deficit in the number of researches devoted to the topic of social media integration into communication is quite noticeable. For the third decade now, social media have been in the center of attention of scientists dealing with political communication.²⁶ Macková²⁷, in researching social (author's note: the author writes about new media, which also includes social media) media in political communication, she states that scientists dealing with political communication have had the main research goal of new media in this area for the third decade. According to her, politicians themselves came abroad relatively soon after the spread of social media to use them for political profit, and social media are changing the form of political communication. Klus sees this situation in the same way in his article on political communication, where he states that *“the mass availability of information technologies, but also internet connections, especially since the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, have significantly changed the possibilities offered by political*

²⁴ Kol'ko Slovákov je na sociálnych sieťach? [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.go4insight.com/post/ko%C4%BEko-slov%C3%A1kov-je-na-soci%C3%A1lnych-sie%C5%A5ach>>.

²⁵ SVĚTLÍK J. et. al.: *Reklama. Teorie, koncepty, modely*. Rzešov : Vysoká škola informatiky a managementu, 2017, p. 285.

²⁶ BENNETT, W. L., IYENGAR, S.: A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. In *Journal of Communication*, 2008, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 724.

²⁷ MACKOVÁ, A.: *Nová média v politické komunikace*. Brno : Masarykova univerzita, 2017, p. 35.

marketing.”²⁸ Social media they provided new forms of political communication for addressing voters at low costs and without the interference of the news media. They thus became a direct and fast channel for many-to-many communication – between voters and politicians.²⁹ Tar states that “*the Internet and various communication platforms known as social media or Web 2.0 have influenced not only the communication habits of individuals, but also political campaigns, which have moved exclusively from the environment of traditional media to the online environment of the Internet.*”³⁰ It is necessary to draw attention to these words on the clutch as well. The effectiveness of the use of social media (not only) in political communication is indeed related to the correct targeting and grasping of this mix of communication tools, but above all it is necessary to perceive them as another, not as the only, tool for communication in politics.

Social media is becoming a strong competitor to traditional media because it can spread news before it is actually published or broadcast in traditional media. Within minutes, millions of people³¹ around the world can share a single post and spread it before it reaches the media as an article/report. It is thus obvious that social media play an increasingly important role in political communication. The online presence³² of politicians is an essential part of today’s political campaign strategy.

Pinterič³³ states that, for example, *Facebook* as a social medium is very practical from a political point of view, to gain sympathy, create a group of supporters and allow them to feel that they are in direct interaction with a politician. Profiles of politicians on social networks are becoming an increasingly used resource information, not only for (potential) voters, but also for journalists themselves, who use them as a source of information. Sometimes, however, politicians’ social media becomes the primary (if not the only) source. For example, according to Smith and Rainie’s³⁴2008 research, 39% of Americans with an Internet connection had access to unedited political information, speech, and debate. Based on their research, they conclude that politicians rely more on their own interpretation of information by voters than on interpretation through traditional media. According to Scott³⁵, for example, the campaign of former US President Barack Obama, which was targeted specifically at social media and the Internet, was an example of how political marketing is done on the Internet. This is evidenced by research by Pew Internet³⁶, which found that social media, such as blogs and social networks, played a key role in the 2008 US presidential election. For

²⁸ KLUS, M.: Politický marketing v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky a Českej republiky. In ŽÚBOROVÁ, V. (eds.): *20 rokov transformácie: Postavenie politickej komunikácie v Českej republike a na Slovensku*, Trnava : UCM, p. 111.

²⁹ CWALINA, W. a kol.: *Political Marketing. Theoretical and Strategic Foundations*. New York : Routledge, 2015, p. 237.

³⁰ TAR, M.: Využívanie moderných online prvkov v politickej komunikácii. In *Global Media Journal*, 2014, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 40.

³¹ NUR'IZZAH, S.: *Social Media and Public Relations*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at:<https://www.academia.edu/35242159/Social_Media_and_Public_Relations>.

³² MURCHISON, A.: Changing Communications? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in the 2011 New Zealand General Election. In LACHAPELLE, G., MAAREK, P.: *Political Parties in the Digital Age*. Oldenbourg : De Gruyter, 2015, p. 107.

³³ PINTERIČ, U.: Politická komunikácia pod vplyvom informačných a komunikačných technológií. In ŽÚBOROVÁ, V. (eds.): *20 rokov transformácie: Postavenie politickej komunikácie v Českej republike a na Slovensku*. Trnava : UCM, 2012, p. 35.

³⁴ TAR, M.: Využívanie moderných online prvkov v politickej komunikácii. In *Global Media Journal*, 2014, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 44.

³⁵ SCOTT, M. D.: *Nové pravidlá marketingu a PR*. Bratislava : Eastone books, 2010, p. 128.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 128-129.

example, the research showed that 52% of voters who had a profile on one of the social networks used this profile for political expression.

Another research by the pair of authors Haradakis and Hanson³⁷ showed that the Internet was the most used source of political information among respondents in the age category of 18-25 years during the 2008 presidential election. According to Ondrášik³⁸, the first year in Slovakia when social media was used in political communication was 2009, when the presidential elections, elections to the *VÚC* and elections to the EP took place. According to Ondrášik, the *SaS* party was the first party to establish *Facebook* in Slovakia.

According to Owen³⁹, social media has radically changed the way journalists and politicians have worked. They made it easier for politicians to communicate with voters, transformed the political and media system and redefined the role of journalists in political communication. As he mentions on the example of Donald Trump, until recently the media served as a mediator of information from the politician to the voter, but today voters just need to follow their politician on social media and get information directly from him. Lebedová⁴⁰ also points out that the Internet has fundamentally expanded the means of communication and expanded the possibilities from which the audience can draw information. Politicians thus began to address their audience directly, without any journalistic intervention.⁴¹

Jiráček and Köpplová already outlined in the publication *Mass media* from 2009 that the development of internet media as a tool in political communication is very fast and, in addition to electronic elections in some countries, has also brought “a whole range of activities that are part of political communication: addressing voters, targeted campaigns and so on.”⁴² Social media are undoubtedly changing the view, structure and process of political communication. According to Poláková⁴³, the condition for effective communication is an environment that enables independent interaction between individual social subjects.

Among the basic characteristics of Generation Z is the digital reception of media contents, and thus that they receive information almost exclusively from the Internet. Political parties should therefore adapt their communication to this generation, because it is a generation of new voters.⁴⁴ For example, Adobe⁴⁵ looked into why generations spend time on social media in their 2019 study and found that Generation Z cited sharing photos and news as the most

³⁷ HARADAKIS, P., HANSON, G.: Campaign 2008: Comparing Youtube, Social Networking and Other Media Use Among Younger and Older Voters. In HENDRICKS, J., KAID, L.: *Techno Politics in Presidential Campaigning: New Voices, New Technologies and New Voters*. Oxford: Routledge, 2011, p. 77.

³⁸ See: ONDRÁŠIK, B.: Využívání webu a sociálních sítí v politických kampaních na Slovensku. In JAŠŠOVÁ, E., SEČÍK, I.: *Masmédiá a politika: Komunikácia či manipulácia?* Bratislava: VEDA, 2014, p. 238-246.

³⁹ OWEN, D.: *The New Media's Role in Politics. The Age of Perplexity: Rethinking the World We Knew*. Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2018. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/books/the-age-of-perplexity/>>.

⁴⁰ LEBEDOVÁ, E.: *Voliči, strany a negativní kampaň*. Praha: SLON, 2013, p. 25.

⁴¹ BLUMLER, J. G.: Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted. In *Communication Theory*, 2015, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 438.

⁴² JIRÁK, J., KÖPPOVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Praha: Portál, 2009, p. 355.

⁴³ POLÁKOVÁ, E., SPÁLOVÁ, L., HOFLEROVÁ, E.: *Efektivní sociálně-mediální komunikace*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2008, p. 143.

⁴⁴ HRDINA, M.: Technologie není apolitická: poznámky ke studiu politické komunikace v nových médiích. In *Media Studies*, 2013, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 296.

⁴⁵ *Why Do Different Generations Use Social Media?* [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.marketingcharts.com/digital/social-media-110652>>.

common reason. For our research, it is important to point out that the possibility of “engaging in political discussion” was mentioned by 18% of the respondents of Generation Z, which is the most among all other generations. Involvement in political events through social media is also confirmed by studies by the *Politico Institute*, which found in 2020 that the most used sources for obtaining information about politics are social media – *Youtube*, *Instagram* and *Facebook* (Figure 3).

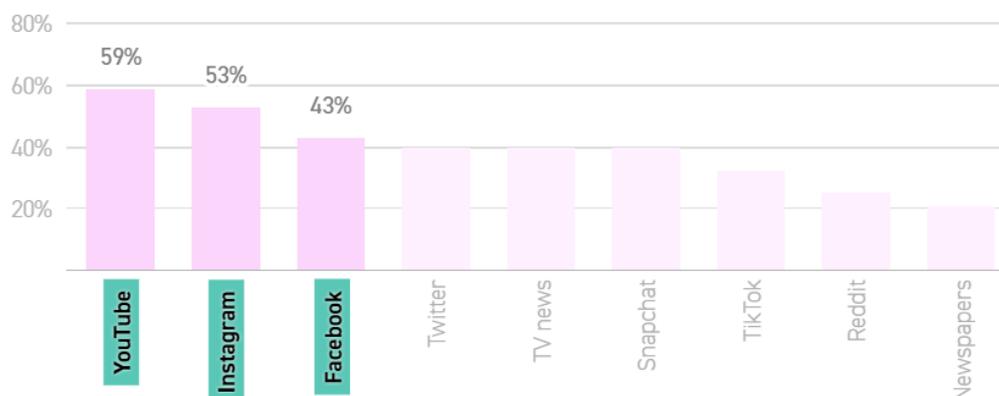


Figure 3: Generation Z and research of political informations

Source: *Politico*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/11/gen-z-politics-2020-poll-takeaways-426767>>.

Similar results were obtained in October 2020 by the *Institute of the Tallo*⁴⁶ group of educators. The research showed that 86% of respondents follow political information and social media is the predominant source of this information. Although media websites took the first place, *Instagram* came in second and the third source of political information was the social network *TikTok*. Based on the aforementioned research, we can see that social media is an important communication channel that Generation Z uses to a large extent. According to Macková, “primary voters can be a suitable target group for parties’ online marketing strategies, because the Internet makes it possible to address new markets – young people who reject old forms of communication.”⁴⁷ At the same time, as Ondrášik⁴⁸ claims, the basic condition for the effective use of social media as a tool in political communication is the number of connected potential voters. That is why it is a great benefit in political communication to use social media as a communication channel and thus win new potential voters.

4 Conclusion

Social media has become a tool with a considerable ability to influence first-time voters and young people in general, since first-time voters mostly look for the answer to the question of whom and why to vote on social networks⁴⁹ which “become the civil society of teenage

⁴⁶ *The New Era of Politics According to Gen Z*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://tallo.com/blog/politics-according-to-gen-z/>>.

⁴⁷ MACKOVÁ, A.: Nové komunikační nástroje. In EIBL, O., CHYTILEK, R. (eds.): *Teorie a metody politického marketingu*. Brno : CDK, 2012, p. 314.

⁴⁸ ONDRÁŠIK, B.: Využívání webu a sociálních sítí v politických kampaních na Slovensku. In JAŠŠOVÁ, E., SEČÍK, I.: *Masmédiá a politika: Komunikácia či manipulácia?* Bratislava : VEDA, 2014, p. 237.

⁴⁹ PACHEROVÁ, S.: *Prvovoličov bude menej, nestihli dorásť*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/prvovolicov-bude-menej-nestihli-dorast-fc5-/sk-volby.asp?c=A120111_1808>

culture.⁵⁰ Thus, social media is an effective but at the same time specific tool of political communication. The selection of information in this environment is carried out by the users themselves, and thus they mostly only get access to information that confirms their attitudes and opinions, which confirms the fact that social media can in themselves be effective in political communication, but the countless amount of information that (potential) voters get on the Internet, they are not able to effectively evaluate and absorb. Bokša⁵¹ calls this process the spiral of technopower, which arises from information absorption confronted with innovations in technology. We can only hope that by eliminating ethical problems, regulating the disinformation space and, last but not least, regulating the public's lack of critical thinking, social media will become an effective tool for full-fledged information sharing for everyone.⁵² At the same time, it is likely that political entities that do not use social media as an effective tool for political communication and do not communicate with young voters will have trouble staying in the visible political spectrum in the future.⁵³ Voters have transformed into consumers who are looking for immediate profit and, in parallel, their loyalty to political parties is disappearing. Politicians must therefore look for new forms of communication and strive more for the support of voters.⁵⁴ Just as it is important for political parties to engage in communication on social networks, it is important for education to emphasize critical thinking and media literacy of generation Z so that they can adequately select (not only) political information received in this environment.

For this reason, we consider it important that researchers across different disciplines also deal with the given area. Kyška⁵⁵ gives three reasons why it is necessary to reflect on the role of social media in political communication, firstly because social media have become part of the media space, secondly they are a tool of public discourse, and last but not least, they have for the researcher in the field of political sciences value as a source of primary information. It is therefore necessary in research to pay adequate attention to the issue of the young generation of voters and their political involvement in the social media environment. The scientific contribution had the ambition to be beneficial in terms of content when discussing the effectiveness of political communication in the social media environment and also to sharpen the discussion about the effectiveness of this communication for generation Z.

Acknowledgement: This theoretical study was created with the support of the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency (KEGA 041UKF-4/2021) entitled Digital influencers – educational levels of critical thinking development and engagement of the Z generation.

26_sk-volby_p58>.

⁵⁰ VRABEC, N.: *ON-LINE GENERÁCIA: informácie, komunikácia a digitálna participácia mládeže v informačnej spoločnosti. Súhrnná správa o výsledkoch výskumu*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <http://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/7_vyskummladeze/spravy/davm027/on_line_generacia_publicacia.pdf>

⁵¹ BOKŠA, V.: Vybrané aspekty politickej komunikácie na sociálnej sieti Facebook. In *Політичні партії і вибори: українські та світові практики*, 2018, p. 291.

⁵² KUČEROVÁ, L.: Sociálne médiá a ich rola v prostredí žurnalistiky. In HORECKÝ, J., SOCHOROVÁ, L.: *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu*. Brno : Právni institut, 2021, p. 221.

⁵³ POLAČKOVÁ, A.: Diskurz o vzťahu: politika – mládež. In DUDINSKÁ, I., DANČIŠIN, V. (eds.): *Kríza v politike – politika v kríze?* Prešov : Univerzitná knižnica Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 2012, p. 384.

⁵⁴ HURTIKOVÁ, H.: *Farming televízneho spravodajství a jeho účinek na formování politických postojů veřejnosti*. Brno : CDK, 2016, p. 196.

⁵⁵ KYŠKA, R.: K vybraným aspektom metodológie prieskumu sociálnych médií z pohľadu politických vied. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 68.

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COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES OF AUDIT REPORTS

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Abstract:

Our society is undergoing developments that affect the world around us, and it is therefore an important current and scientific task to address its interdisciplinary implications and themes. The field of communication, which is now an integral part of auditing, is undoubtedly one of those important interdisciplinary topics. However, the fulfilment of professional audit objectives and, above all, the subsequent communication of audit results through audit reports are uneasy. In fact, audit reports are the only and unique element that literally sells the audit, which places high demands on audit reports. Therefore, there is an elementary application problem of the question about the form of communication of audit reports, which affects the acceptance of audit results/audit findings by organisations' stakeholders. Therefore, the research objective of the present paper is to propose communication of audit reports that use modern communication approaches and suggest innovative improvements. Methodologically, the objective is primarily approached through literature research, content analysis of time series and synthesis of findings, which enables the discovery of linkages within the monitored processes, including their correlations. The recorded results demonstrate the increasing quantity of reports being published. As a reflection on the results, specific recommendations for the visualisation of audit reports and their modern on-line distribution are constructed. The above-mentioned communication and its suggestions subsequently expand the degree of effectiveness of audit report communication, which primarily helps the respective organisations' stakeholders. The application of modern visualisation approaches secondarily helps to effectively implement audit results/audit findings within the complex management of organisations.

Key words:

Audit. Communication. Information. Management. Report. Visualization.

1 Introduction and Review of Literature

Our society is undergoing development, continuous changes and currently also an industrial revolution.¹ This revolution, titled Industry 4.0, can be defined as the use of intelligent resources and information technology to digitalise the environment.² This process can be specified as a society-wide change of basic paradigms,³ mainly through methods of data digitalisation.⁴ It is a complex technological transformation,⁵ reflected in our society, to which we need to respond adequately. The given developments affect the world around us, and it is therefore an important current and scientific task to address its interdisciplinary implications and themes.

¹ KUPEC, V. et al.: Audit of Museum Marketing Communication in the Modern Management Context. In *International Journal of Financial Studies*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 1.

² SANIUK, S., GRABOWSKA, S., STRAKA, M.: Identification of Social and Economic Expectations: Contextual Reasons for the Transformation Process of Industry 4.0 into the Industry 5.0 Concept. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 2.

³ JAFARI, N., AZARIAN, M., YU, H.: Moving from Industry 4.0 to Industry 5.0: What Are the Implications for Smart Logistics? In *Logistics*, 2022, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 1.

⁴ MARTÍNEZ-OLVERA, C.: Towards the Development of a Digital Twin for a Sustainable Mass Customization 4.0 Environment: A Literature Review of Relevant Concepts. In *Automation*, 2022, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 198.

⁵ GAJDZIK, B.: Frameworks of the Maturity Model for Industry 4.0 with Assessment of Maturity Levels on the Example of the Segment of Steel Enterprises in Poland. In *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 2022, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 1.

The field of communication,⁶ which is now an integral part of human society,⁷ is undoubtedly one of the important interdisciplinary topics. The term “communication” is derived from the Latin expression “communis” – “common”⁸ or the term “communicare” – “to share.”⁹ The evolution of communication and information sharing reflects the classical model of Shannon – Weaver,¹⁰ as viewed by Příkrylová et al.¹¹ Communication is an important part of auditing, which can be defined as an aid to management and,¹² consequently, to organisations. “It helps an organization accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes.”¹³

Audit,¹⁴ therefore, helps¹⁵ the organisations’ management: “The aim was that fraud, deceit, and misrepresentation could be discovered, punished, and eventually corrected in order to avoid future fraudulent situations like the ones that had occurred.”¹⁶ However, the fulfilment of professional audit objectives¹⁷ and, above all, the subsequent communication of audit results through audit reports¹⁸ are uneasy. In fact, audit reports are the only and unique element that literally sells the audit.¹⁹ This places high demands on audit reports. Audit reports contain highly sophisticated material, tend to be extensive and have a complex communication structure.²⁰ This has an impact on the entire audit process.

Therefore, based on the literature research and introduction to the complex issue, an elementary application problem (P1) arises – the form of communication of audit reports has an impact on the acceptance of audit results/audit findings by organisations’ stakeholders. Hypothetically speaking – direct communication of audit reports equals direct rectification of audit findings. Therefore, the research objective (A1) of the present paper is to propose audit report communications that use modern communication approaches and suggest innovative improvements. The presented research outputs follow the scientific projects *Marketing*

⁶ CHATURVEDI, P. D., CHATURVEDI, M.: *Business Communication: Concepts, Cases and Application*. New Delhi : Pearson, 2011, p. 11.

⁷ KUPEC, V.: Generation Snowflake Communication Audit. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: COVID-2.0*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 342.

⁸ KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

⁹ CHANDLER, D., MUNDAY, R.: *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 58.

¹⁰ KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

¹¹ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

¹² KUPEC, V.: *Audit Essentials*. Praha : VŠFS, 2021, p. 6.

¹³ RAMAMOORTI, P.: *Internal Auditing: History, Evolution, and Prospects*. Altamonte Springs : The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2003, p. 13.

¹⁴ KUPEC, V. et. al.: Conceptual Comparison of Internal Audit and Internal Control in the Marketing Environment. In *Sustainability*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 12, p. 1.

¹⁵ KUPEC, V.: A New Concept of the Marketing Communications Diagnostic Audit. In ČÁBYOVÁ, E., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: New Changes, New Challenges*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2021, p. 426.

¹⁶ PETRAȘCU, D., TIEANU, A.: The Role of Internal Audit in Fraud Prevention and Detection. In *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 2014, Vol. 16, p. 491.

¹⁷ MOELLER, R. R.: *Brink's Modern Internal Auditing*. New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁸ BASU, S. K.: *Auditing: Principles and Techniques*. Kolkata : Pearson Education, 2006, p. 285.

¹⁹ DVOŘÁČEK, J.: *Interní audit a kontrola*. Praha : C. H. Beck, 2003, p. 122.

²⁰ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

2 Material and Methodology

The material of the present research is an audit report. “A report is a statement of collected and considered facts, so drawn up as to give clear and concise information to person who are not in possession of full facts of the subject matter of report.”²³ The audit report is the result of analytics and summarises the auditors’ opinion on the audited area.²⁴ “An auditor’s report is, therefore, a written statement of the auditor, containing his independent professional opinion about the truth and correctness of accounts and financial statements examined by him and other specific information, which the auditor submits to his client at the conclusion of audit.”²⁵ This specification is verified by professional theories²⁶ and also field differentiation (see Figure 1).

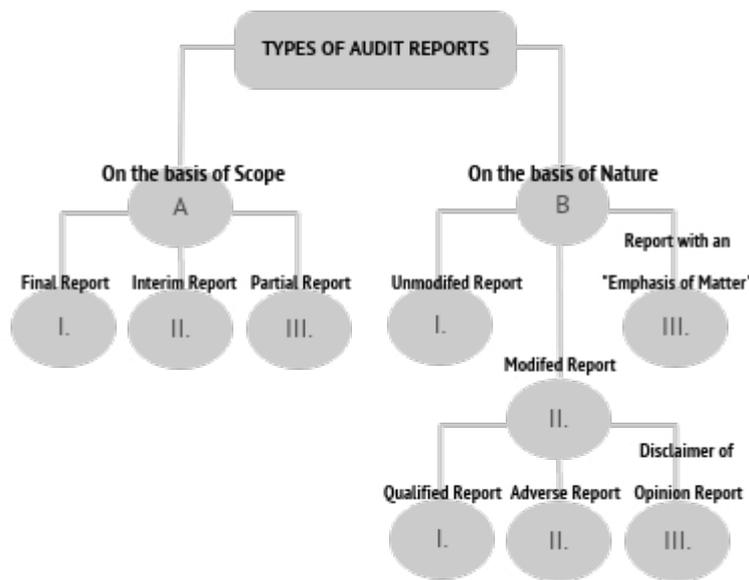


Figure 1: Types of Audit Reports

Source: MEHTA, B. K.: *Advanced Auditing*. Chaibasa : SBPD Publishing House, 2020, p. 115.

The audit report is subject to many professional requirements – clarity and accuracy are essential elements.²⁷ “The report supplies brief and accurate information.”²⁸ The audit report should be, among others, clear and simple to avoid primarily ambiguous interpretation of its

²¹ KUPEC, V.: Marketing Communication and Generation Z in the Context of Business Management. In MAGÁL, S., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Critique in Media, Critique of Media*. Trnava : UCM, 2016, p. 290.

²² KUPEC, V.: Audit of a Buyer’s Selective Attention in the Online Environment. In PETRANOVÁ, D., ČÁBYOVÁ, L., BEŽÁKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Online Rules – part II*. Trnava : UCM, 2017, p. 126.

²³ BASU, S. K.: *Auditing: Principles and Techniques*. Kolkata : Pearson Education, 2006, p. 285.

²⁴ DVOŘÁČEK, J.: *Interní audit a kontrola*. Praha : C. H. Beck, 2003, p. 122.

²⁵ BASU, S. K.: *Fundamentals of Auditing*. Noida : Pearson Education, 2009, p. 9.

²⁶ CAMERAN, M., CAMPA, D., FRANCIS, J. R.: The Relative Importance of Auditor Characteristics Versus Client Factors in Explaining Audit Quality. In *Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Finance*, 2022, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 751.; See also: HEGAZY, M. A. A., EL-HADDAD, R., KAMARELDAWLA, N. M.: Impact of Auditor Characteristics and Covid-19 Pandemic on KAMs Reporting. In *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 2022, Vol. 37, No. 7, p. 908.

²⁷ DVOŘÁČEK, J.: *Audit podniku a jeho operací*. Praha : C. H. Beck, 2005, p. 76.

²⁸ MEHTA, B. K.: *Advanced Auditing*. Chaibasa : SBPD Publishing House, 2020, p. 106.

content.²⁹ “It is essential, therefore, that the wording of an opinion is precise, brief and without reference to any matters which may be contained in other section of the audit report, such as highlighting specific information contained in the financial statements, as such reference might be interpreted as a qualification in the mind of the reader when none is intended.”³⁰ These requirements can be complemented by other approaches.³¹

These requirements can be primarily met by data visualisation. “Visualization is a familiarized term which is meant for representing data in the form of graphics using pictorialism which is pictorial of design.”³² Such a visualisation provides information that enables a complete picture of the content outcomes,³³ as illustrated by other findings.³⁴ “The most popular data visualization types are dashboards and infographics, which use charts, tech, and images to communicate the data’s message. Data visualization is closely related to information graphics.”³⁵ Data visualisation is therefore the optimal way to share information,³⁶ especially in combination with modern and on-line channels.³⁷

Therefore, the research objective (A1) of the present paper is to propose audit report communications that use modern communication approaches and suggest innovative improvements. Methodologically, the primary approach to fulfilling the objective is a literature research,³⁸ which enables a detailed understanding of the current state of the selected knowledge.³⁹ Another method is then a content analysis of time series,⁴⁰ which enables the comparison of audit report data of the selected organisation.⁴¹ And the final method comprises knowledge synthesis,⁴² which enables the discovery of linkages within the monitored processes, including their correlations.⁴³ All these methods in application symbiosis will subsequently allow to fulfil the research objective (A1), to present suggestions and innovative improvements.

²⁹ KAŠPAROVSKÁ, V. et al.: *Řízení obchodních bank: vybrané kapitoly*. Praha : C. H. Beck, 2006, p. 249.

³⁰ WILD, K., CREIGHTON, B.: *GAAP 2000: UK Financial Reporting and Accounting*. London : Springer, 1999, p. 1029.

³¹ CHRISTENSEN, B. E., GLOVER, S. M., WOLFE, C. J.: Do Critical Audit Matter Paragraphs in the Audit Report Change Nonprofessional Investors’ Decision to Invest? In *Auditing A Journal of Practice & Theory*, 2014, Vol. 33, No. 4, p. 71.

³² DIVYA ZION, G., TRIPATHY, B. K.: Comparative Analysis of Tools for Big Data Visualisation and Challenges. In ANOUNCIA, S. M., GOHEL, H. A., VAIRAMUTHU, S. (eds.): *Data Visualization: Trends and Challenges Toward Multidisciplinary Perception*. Singapore : Springer, 2020, p. 34.

³³ HANINGTON, B., MARTIN, B.: *Universal Methods of Design Expanded and Revised: 125 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Develop Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions*. Beverly : Rockport Publishers, 2019, p. 256.

³⁴ DALE, K.: *Data Visualization with Python and JavaScript: Scrape, Clean, Explore*. Sebastopol : O’Reilly Media, 2016, p. 32.

³⁵ HALAWI, L., CLARKE, A., GEORGE, K.: *Harnessing the Power of Analytics*. Cham : Springer, 2022, p. 38.

³⁶ URSYN, A.: *Perceptions of Knowledge Visualization*. Hershey : IGI Global, 2014, p. 293; See also: KUMAR, V., RAM, M.: *Predictive Analytics: Modeling and Optimization*. Oxon : CRC Press, 2021, p. 129.

³⁷ AGRAWAL, N., ANAND, A.: *Social Networks: Modelling and Analysis*. Boca Raton : CRC Press, 2022, p. 1.

³⁸ MACHI, L. A., MCEVOY, B. T.: *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. California : Corwin, 2012, p. 3.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ SEURING, S., GOLD, S.: Conducting Content-analysis Based Literature Reviews in Supply Chain Management. In *Supply Chain Management*, 2012, Vol. 17, No. 5, p. 544.

⁴¹ GAVORA, P.: Obsahová analýza v pedagogickom výskume: Pohľad na jej súčasné podoby. In *Pedagogická orientace*, 2015, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 371.

⁴² BRYMAN, A., BELL, E.: *Business Research Methods*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 18.

⁴³ Ibidem.

3 Results and Recommendations

The results of the content analysis show an increasing quantity of reports being issued (see Chart 1). The research detail even shows that the number of pages of audit reports has more than doubled in the last almost two decades. This trend has consequently an impact on overwhelming stakeholders with the amount of information they have available. To improve this situation, elements of visualisation can be applied, as confirmed by expert studies.⁴⁴ According to them, the human brain has an enormous capacity to absorb and process visual perceptions, which lays the foundations on which modern data visualisation is built.⁴⁵ “*Data visualization is the study of representing data by using a visual or artistic approach rather than the traditional reporting method.*”⁴⁶

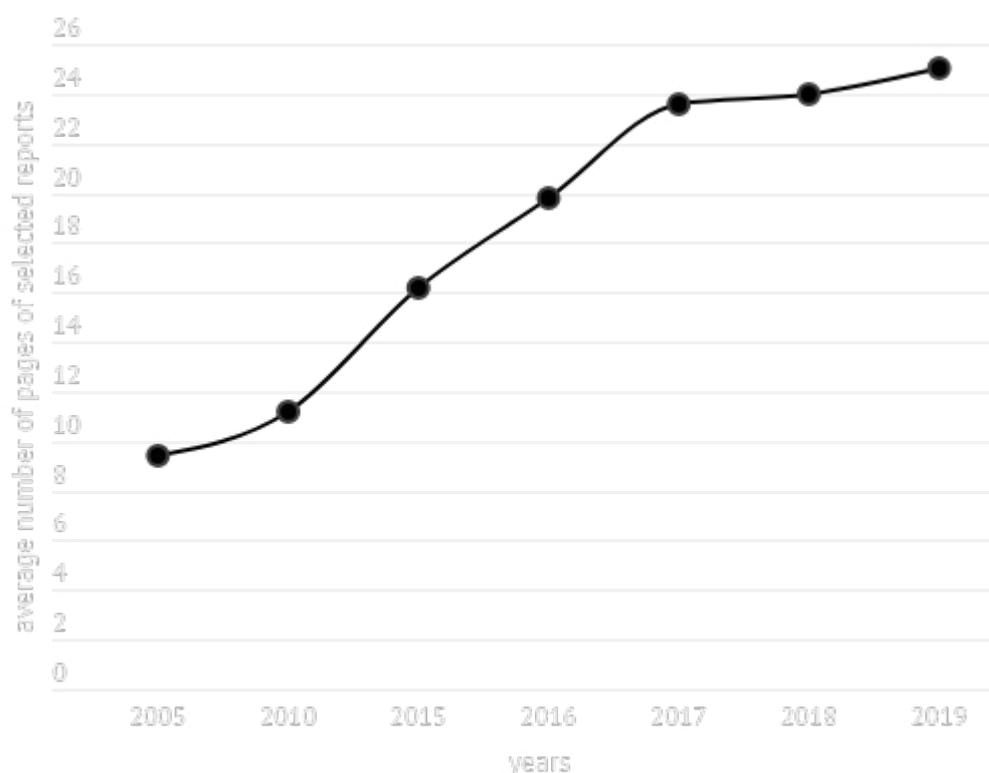


Chart 1: Development of the number of audit report pages

Source: Author's own research, 2022

As a reflection on the results, recommendations for the visualisation of audit reports are given below: 1. Use numbers to provide summarised information; 2. Do not use details that unnecessarily overwhelm the reader; 3. Highlight information that is important to the reader; 4. Use pictograms that visually complement the text; 5. Use trends that provide historical context; 6. Use text boxes that add needed detail; 7. Do not use anything that is not consistent with the trends; 8. Less (information) is more, so important information does not fit; 9. Apply interactivity that connects off-line and on-line; 10. Keep learning to communicate and, most importantly, listen (see Chart 2)!

⁴⁴ ŽÁČKOVÁ H., JUCOVIČOVÁ, D.: *Neopozornost, hyperaktivita a impulzivita*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2017, p. 106.; See also: ŠVAMBERK ŠAUEROVÁ, M.: *Techniky osobnostního rozvoje a duševní hygieny učitele*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2018, p. 177.

⁴⁵ GEMIGNANI, Z. et al.: *Efektivní analýza a využití dat*. Brno : Albatros Media, 2015, p. 21.

⁴⁶ HALAWI, L., CLARKE, A., KELLY, G.: *Harnessing the Power of Analytics*. Cham : Springer, 2022, p. 38.



Chart 2: Recommendation for visualisation of audit reports

Source: Author's own research, 2022

Unfortunately, currently neither a positive nor a negative correlation can be demonstrated between the increasing number of pages of audit reports (see Chart 1) and a direct involvement of audit stakeholders. However, it can be hypothesised that reports need to be innovated to reflect modern communication trends in visualisation and distribution. However, if the distribution of audit reports is dominated only by its printed form, the implementation of audit results/audit findings is logically limited. Therefore, to increase the reach of audit reports among stakeholders, it can be recommended to use modern communication channels, which are social networks in the concept of current theories.⁴⁷

*“A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organization) and a set of the dyadic ties between these actors.”*⁴⁸ In this case, there must be a professional symbiosis of visualisation and distribution of audit reports. The information or more precisely modern communication of these reports must also adapt to modern distribution. It is not possible to use social networks to distribute large-scale information and texts intended for printed audit reports. Audit reports must be visually adapted according to the above recommendations in order to be distributed on-line. Therefore, an important recommendation comprises an application of interactivity that extends visual trends.

⁴⁷ HUČKA, M., FRANEK, J., ČVANČAROVÁ, Z.: *Základy podnikání a podnikatelský proces*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2021, p. 82.

⁴⁸ AGRAWAL, N., ANAND, A.: *Social Networks: Modelling and Analysis*. Boca Raton : CRC Press, 2022, p. 1.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to discuss the above proposed theses in a professional manner and to place them in the broader context of professional theories. This relates to an interdisciplinary conception of audit report⁴⁹ communication, which seeks primarily to find the intersections between auditing, audit reports⁵⁰ and modern communication,⁵¹ and hence visualisation.⁵² “Data visualization is a modern scientific concept, which in a way is an upgradation of the visual representation of quantitative data that used to be in the form of early mapping techniques, applied thematic analysis, statistical prediction and plotting.”⁵³ Data visualisation in this context undeniably helps to increase the information permeability of audit results/audit findings towards stakeholders.

However, the degree of effectiveness of the audit reports’ communication proposal, which can be estimated by expert assessment, may be debatable. However, the necessary assessment is sufficiently based on the following quantitative calculation: if it is possible to calculate with the historical number of audit reports / without visualisations/ (x), which were distributed only in printed form (t), it is clear that the current number of audit reports / with visualisations/ (y), which are distributed systematically in printed form (t) and in electronic form (e), in addition, using social networks ($e\text{-web}$), ($e\text{-tw}$), ($e\text{-yt}$), it is clear that the current modern communication of audit report(s) is, at least from a quantity perspective, more effective than the historically used communication (x), see sample 1.

$$x_t \leq y_t + y_{e\text{-web}} + y_{e\text{-tw}} + y_{e\text{-yt}}$$

Formula 1: Efficiency in communication of audit reports

Source: Author’s own research, 2022

Subsequently, the potential limits of the communication proposal as well as the possible options for this communication can also be discussed. The proposed recommendations for the visualisation of audit reports, the construct of which is universal and therefore may not cover all possible aspects of modern communication,⁵⁴ which has its own specifics, may pose certain limitations. Therefore, the above suggestions should be applied with professional detachment and the application should be modified appropriately to capture the unique specifics of audit reports.⁵⁵ The potential possibilities of visualising reports towards the future can then be in a visionary perspective viewed in a wider integration of off-line and on-line data and the digitisation of the audit report form.⁵⁶

The research objective (A1) of the present paper was to propose audit report communications that use modern communication approaches and suggest innovative improvements. This

⁴⁹ KUPEC, V. et. al.: Conceptual Comparison of Internal Audit and Internal Control in the Marketing Environment. In *Sustainability*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 12, p. 1.

⁵⁰ BASU, S. K.: *Auditing: Principles and Techniques*. Kolkata : Pearson Education, 2006, p. 285.

⁵¹ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

⁵² DIVYA ZION, G., TRIPATHY, B. K.: Comparative Analysis of Tools for Big Data Visualisation and Challenges. In ANOUNCIA, S. M., GOHEL, H. A., VAIRAMUTHU, S. (eds.): *Data Visualization: Trends and Challenges Toward Multidisciplinary Perception*. Singapore : Springer, 2020, p. 34.

⁵³ KUMAR, V., RAM, M.: *Predictive Analytics: Modeling and Optimization*. Oxon : CRC Press, 2021, p. 129.

⁵⁴ KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

⁵⁵ MEHTA, B. K.: *Advanced Auditing*. Chaibasa : SBPD Publishing House, 2020, p. 106; See also: KAŠPAROVSKÁ, V. et al.: *Řízení obchodních bank: vybrané kapitoly*. Praha : C. H. Beck, 2006, p. 249.

⁵⁶ RÉKLAITIS, K., PILELIENĖ, L.: Principle Differences between B2B and B2C Marketing Communication Processes. In *Management of Organizations: Systematic Research*, 2019, Vol. 81, No.1, p. 73.

objective was achieved. However, the proposed communication does not have greater ambitions to replace proven communication approaches in audit reports.⁵⁷ The above communication and its suggestions expand the level of effectiveness of audit report communication. Audit reports conceived in this way primarily help the relevant stakeholders. The application of modern visualisation approaches secondarily helps to effectively implement audit results/audit findings within the complex management of organisations.

Acknowledgement: The result was created in solving the project “Digital Audit and Risk Management in Industry 4.0” (7427/2021/02 IGA VŠFS) using objective oriented support for specific university research of the University of Finance and Administration. Special thanks to Ing. Milena Ivakinová for expert help.

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⁵⁷ RAMAMOORTI, P.: *Internal Auditing: History, Evolution, and Prospects*. Altamonte Springs : The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2003, p. 13.

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HOW COVID-19 INFLUENCED SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR AND LIFETIME VALUE OF CUSTOMERS ON E-SHOPS

Daniel Kvičala, Martin Klepek

Abstract:

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies around the world have experienced a turbulent change in purchasing behaviour, influenced by, among other things, pandemic-related restrictions. As a result, the number of companies operating in the online environment has increased and therefore the number of e-shops has also increased. There has also been an increase in the need for customers to shop online, which opens up the possibility of exploring the change in shopping behaviour and the lifetime value of customers. The aim of this paper is to compare customer shopping behaviour at selected e-shops as well as the change in customer lifetime value before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and the end of key restrictions associated with it, respectively. The research will be conducted on the basis of empirical data, hence the real customer behaviour of specific e-shops from several product categories will be examined.

Key words:

Customer Lifetime Value. Customer. E-shop. Online Shopping. Purchase Behaviour.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immeasurable consequences in every aspect of people's lives and companies' operations. Among other things, it has resulted in the banning or restriction of the movement of people and the operation of a substantial number of companies. However, after the pandemic was mitigated, exactly the opposite situation occurred and thus unexpected and also largely unwanted movement again for people and companies. From a pandemic period full of negative news and unexpected events, we have moved into a period affected by war, which, like COVID-19, has caused a number of undesirable consequences for society and the market. We are moving from what you might call rapid growth in an already dynamic e-commerce growth market to a period of crisis. We are moving from reckless shopping to necessary investigation.¹ E-shops must move swiftly from often ill-considered decisions and activities to actions based on analysis under the threat of bankruptcy. Companies have moved from postponing certain activities to catching up on neglected activities related to customer understanding and product optimization. It is now essential to move away from operations to a strategy that will help manage or even survive the tough times that are inexorably approaching. Moving away from guesswork to empirical data is crucial. We are forced to make these moves and many others under the weight of the current situation.

Academics and companies now face the new challenge of navigating this period, which can be made easier if they work together to analyse and extract the insights needed to make marketing decisions. In addition to the new challenges related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the advent of meta also brings new challenges. Considering that when using this technology, companies must spend significant resources to implement related activities, companies should place even more emphasis on tracking the lifetime value of customers to be able to grow in the long term. The fact is that e-shoppers collect a huge amount of data and academics in turn have the skills and knowledge to process and interpret it. One area that can be analyzed is customer buying behavior, which is also the subject of this article. Specifically, shopping behavior, sales

¹ SHETH, J.: Impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Behavior: Will the Old Habits Return or Die? In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 1, p. 283.

and CLV (customer lifetime value) will be analyzed using data collected from 6 e-stores. The aim is to compare the values of these variables before, during and after the pandemic in order to quantify to some extent the impact of the pandemic and to gain insights that could contribute to the preparation for the next period.

1.1 Unpredictable Changes in E-commerce Market and Consumer Behaviour

One of the biggest drivers of change in the e-commerce market has been the effects of restrictions on the movement and operation of stores, restaurants and other entities. This is because a significant part of the business contact between companies and customers, and therefore shopping, has moved from offline to online. This has increased both the volume of sales of e-shops and their total number, which has been on the rise in the long term even without this intervention.² The absence of shopping in bricks-and-mortar stores and the use of a range of services has significantly limited the shopping options of customers.³ They have had to buy both surplus and essential products online despite possible barriers, reluctance or mistrust towards e-shops. This has increased the number of people shopping online by those who were previously reluctant to do so because they simply had no other option in many cases. However, with the re-opening of bricks-and-mortar stores and offline services, the number of shoppers and the total volume of transactions made online has again declined.⁴ This has reduced overall demand, which may pose a significant threat to some e-shops. The already complicated situation is made worse by the consequences linked to the war conflict in Ukraine. In order to quantify realistically the consequences of the pandemic and the other factors mentioned, it is essential to gain insights by analysing e-shopping data. This is the only way to reliably assess the change between periods and the current state of the market by looking at metrics describing customer buying behaviour. These will be presented in more detail in the methodology section. It is with this knowledge that companies can prepare for the next period.

1.2 Measuring Customer Purchase Behaviour on E-shop

Customer buying behaviour can be expressed by different variables. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus only on metrics associated with the behavioural dimension of purchase behaviour and thus only analyse data describing real customer actions on the web. The basic metrics depicting purchase behaviour include the number of purchases and the sales volume over a given period, and consequently the average order value.⁵ In addition to behaviour, e-shops also need to know the value of their customers and how it evolves over time. For this purpose, the method of calculating customer lifetime value (CLV) is very often used.⁶ There are several ways of calculating it, ranging from a very simple procedure where the total sales generated by the e-shop customer are added up to more complicated models using, among other things, inflation or interest rates and their development over the duration of the customer's business relationship with the company. In practice, probably the most commonly used method of calculation works with the costs incurred to complete the transaction in addition to sales, which include, for example, advertising costs or costs associated with processing the order and delivering it to the customer.

² BOND, C.: *7 Of The Weirdest Products People Have Been Buying During The Pandemic*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/weird-purchases-coronavirus-pandemic_1_5f319e7bc5b6960c066ae37c>.

³ See: NAEEM, M.: Do Social Media Platforms Develop Consumer Panic Buying During the Fear of COVID-19 Pandemic? In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2021, Vol. 58, No. 1, Article 102226.

⁴ See: PRENTICE, C., CHEN, J., STANTIC, B.: Timed Intervention in COVID-19 and Panic Buying. In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2020, Vol. 57, No. 1, Article 102203.

⁵ BUTTLE, F.: *Customer Relationship Management*. Oxford : Elsevier, 2011, p. 16.

⁶ See: HALLOWELL, R.: The Relationship of Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty and Profitability. In *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 1996, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 27-42.

Another group of metrics is associated with specific customer behavior on the site. These include, for example, the average number of visits per transaction, which can also be expressed as a customer's conversion rate. Metrics such as average session duration, which can indicate the customer's interest in the products offered or the relevance of the e-shop in the context of the customer's needs, or the average number of pages visited per session, which has a similar meaning, are also used. These metrics will also be analysed as part of this article.

2 Methodology

The data is composed of transactional data obtained from the *Google Analytics* platform. It contains a total of 270,000 transactions, 600,000,000 CZK in sales and a total of 15,000,000 e-shop visitors (these are not unique visitors). The length of the study period is 43 months from March 2019 to September 2022, of which 24 months were affected by the pandemic and related measures. The period under review is divided into three parts – March 2019 – February 2020, March 2020 – February 2022 and March – September 2022. The metrics tracked are sales, CLV, average purchase value (APV), number of visits per transaction, average session duration, and average number of pages visited per session. The data was processed using the *Google Data studio* tool (Fig. 1), which also created the infrastructure for importing data from *Google Analytics* (GA), processing it according to the specified parameters and also visualization. This infrastructure can be used for any e-shop using GA, where you just need to change the data source (GA account of the e-shop) and the subsequent steps related to data processing will be done automatically. This has created a tool that can be used for further research as well as for practical purposes of any e-shop almost worldwide. This is because the data in GA is standardized across all users of the platform.

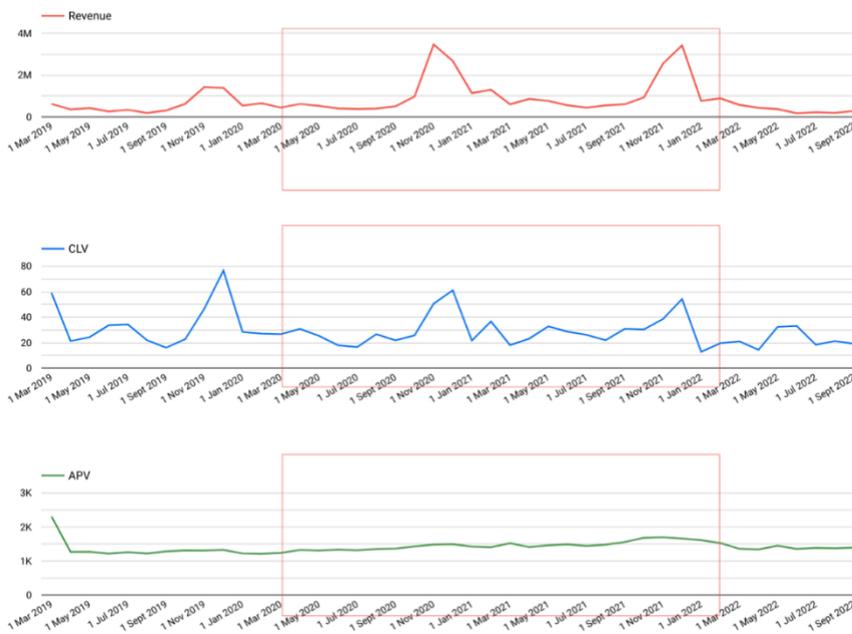


Figure 1: Google Data studio preview

Source: own processing, 2022

The research involved 6 B2C e-shops from different product categories. None of the e-shops offer essential or daily use products. These are selling gift items (1), sports equipment (2),

leisurewear (3), fitness equipment (4), mountain bikes (5) and dietary supplements (6). All these e-shops operate without a brick-and-mortar store and use multi-channel online communication. Further information about the e-shops or their customers was not available for the research. All e-shops also use the *Google Analytics* platform to track customer behaviour on the e-shop, from which the data has been exported so that all data is of the same nature.

During the implementation phase of the research, dashboards were first created in *Google Data Studio*, for which the settings for data collection and visualization were defined. Thus, for each e-shop, an overview of the development of sales, CLV and APV is available in the form of a graph. The metrics number of visits per transaction, average session duration and average number of pages per visit are also displayed in the same format (Fig. 2). In terms of revenue and CLV, a formula has also been created to calculate the change between periods. Specifically, the pandemic period will be compared to the previous period, this period will also be compared to the post-pandemic period, and finally the after and before periods have been compared. This would provide an overview of the evolution of the metrics in question and the effect of the pandemic on their values.



Figure 2: Google Data studio preview 2
 Source: own processing, 2022

Subsequently, these reports were copied for each e-shop. It was then enough to connect the data source to the individual reports, i.e. to link *Google Data Studio* with the GA accounts of individual e-shops. All further calculations and visualizations in the form of graphs were done automatically.

3 Results

Results will be presented by each reporting period in terms of CLV and revenue metrics. An overall overview is available in Table 1. During the pandemic period, CLV increased for 4 e-stores – 2 by 37%, 4 by 35%, 5 by 68% and 6 by 8% compared to the pre-pandemic period. In

terms of sales, an increase of 69% on average was registered for all e-shops. In the second observation period, i.e., the post-pandemic period and during the pandemic period, CLV increased for 3 e-shops, where except for No. 4 they were the same e-shops as in the previous period. On average, the change in CLV was 47% and for e-shop 6 it was even 133%. In terms of sales, 4 e-shops experienced a decrease, namely 1 by 70%, 2 by 47%, 4 by 63% and 5 by 29%.

Table 1: Summary of the results

E-shop	COVID vs PRE		POST vs COVID		POST vs PRE	
	CLV	Revenue	CLV	Revenue	CLV	Revenue
1	-15	+81	-22	-70	-34	-46
2	+37	+42	+3	-47	+33	-25
3	-21	+19	+62	+82	+29	+115
4	+35	+131	-40	-63	-19	-15
5	+68	+79	+21	-29	+103	+28
6	+8	+60	+133	+93	+152	+210

Source: own processing, 2022

A comparison of the last two periods showed a similar situation as in the previous case, where 2 e-shops (the same as in the previous case) registered a decrease in CLV 1 by 34% and 4 by 19%. E-shops 5 and 6, on the other hand, registered an increase of more than 100%. The sales comparison subsequently showed a decrease in the case of half of the examined entities – 1 by 46%, 2 by 25% and 4 by 15%. E-shops 3 and 6 registered a substantial increase in sales compared to the already relatively high increase in the previous period, namely 115% (3) and 210% (6). In terms of customer behaviour on the e-shop and average order value, no significant difference was shown for any of the e-shops across the whole period under study. The authors therefore consider further work with these metrics to be unprofitable.

4 Discussion

As indicated by the general information on the development of the market situation during the pandemic period, the volume of purchases and therefore sales grew in the case of all surveyed entities, with an average increase of 69% and the highest reaching up to 131%. However, in terms of customer profitability or CLV, such a dramatic increase was not demonstrated, with two e-shops showing a decrease of 15% (1) and 21% (3). It is therefore suggested that these e-shops were caught in the growth of costs associated with the transaction. Overall, sales grew substantially more than this by CLV. Here, then, sales growth does not necessarily imply profitability growth. In some cases, there was even a decline in CLV with sales growth 1 and 3 in the first period, so here the pandemic had a negative impact on CLV. However, overall, all other cases except these two showed an increase during the pandemic period. Here, therefore, it can be argued that COVID-19 had a rather positive impact in terms of the metrics observed. However, a drastic change occurred with the onset of the after COVID period when compared to both the pandemic time and the first period. Specifically, 4 e-shops registered a decrease in both sales and CLV compared to both periods.

5 Conclusion

The first conclusion is the fact that 4 out of 6 e-shops dropped sales by an average of about 50% after the pandemic. Currently, there is no known estimate of the further development of the market, but this declining trend can serve as a warning and a basis for planning further activities. Specifically, e-shops should consider the size of future inventories as well as the length or frequency of supply cycles. In this way, they could react flexibly to the current situation and avoid a situation where they would not achieve an adequate return on investment or, on the contrary, insufficient inventory volume and loss of potential revenue. Another, and this time positive, phenomenon is the growth in CLV for 4 out of 6 e-shops in all periods under review. The reason for this growth may be due to the reduction in acquisition costs and therefore the increase in the efficiency of acquisition activities. Hence, firms should try to maximize sales in case of growing to achieve the highest profitability. The third conclusion is the recommendation and strong appeal to work with data, to continuously evaluate and interpret it with respect to the current situation and to plan future activities. Platforms such as Google Analytics, which continuously collect data and provide an aggregated view of both historical and real-time data, can serve this purpose. For even easier data collection and also data visualisation, Google Data Studio can be used, which provides a wide range of reporting options and their subsequent application to any e-shop, provided that it uses the Google Analytics platform.

The limitations of the research for the generalisation of the results are the limited number of product categories of e-shops, the absence of costs spent on customer acquisition and e-shop operation, the lack of knowledge of the general purchasing behaviour of the included customers or also the comparison of the different seasons, when demand and willingness to buy generally increases during the Christmas period.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported by SGS/12/2022 Predicting customer lifetime value for e-shops.

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BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS APPLIED IN CITY CONDITIONS – CITY MODEL CANVAS

Lenka Labudová

Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to present the implementation of the canvas business model in urban conditions using a concrete example. At the beginning of the paper, we will look at the concept of smart city and planning in terms of cities from a theoretical point of view. In the next sub-chapter, the business model canvas and its individual parts are described in the original version, then we describe its transformation into regional conditions. The Business Model Canvas is a strategic management tool to quickly and easily define and communicate a business idea or concept. We present the City model canvas, as we call it in terms of cities, on the example of a specific aim. Innovative solutions in regional conditions are features of a smart city. Slovakia lags behind in building smart cities. The use of innovative solutions that increase the quality of life of citizens should be a regular part of urban development.

Key words:

Business Model. Marketing. Planning. Regional Marketing. Smart City. Strategy.

1 Smart City and Planning

Cities are challenged with increasing population growth and need to implement smart solutions to become more resilient to economic, environmental, and social challenges posed by ongoing urbanization. The Smart City BMC (SC-BMC) canvas model provides a practical framework that supports developing and communicating a more holistic and integrated view of a smart city business model. It also supports creatively innovating toward more sustainable value creation. As a framework, the SC-BMC bridges sustainable value creation for business model development and smart city innovation.¹

Smart cities can use business models to evaluate what value they offer citizens by integrating ICT into their infrastructure and services. The City Model Canvas (CMC)-based on the Business Model Canvas for firms-shows the elements that city councils should consider during the design, delivery and assessment of smart services, including the smart service's expected economic, environmental and social impacts.²

A city's strategy sets its overall objectives and goals, such as 'sustainability' or 'inclusive growth' and articulates in broad terms how those objectives will be reached. The business model articulates in a more structured way how to reach those objectives through specific actions. As an element of the city strategy, the CMC can be used dynamically over time as the smart city strategy evolves. The city model canvas recognizes that the public services that cities offer are continuously evolving to adapt to citizens' needs and to the changing urban environment, so city managers need a model to assess those dynamics holistically. Furthermore, this framework is useful, and necessary, because it raises the focus from the particular individual business models of the many firms and organisations involved in smart services to the holistic level of city.³

¹ GIOURKA, P. et al.: The Smart City Business Model Canvas – A Smart City Business Modeling Framework and Practical Tool. In *Energies*, 2019, Vol. 12, No. 24, p. 1.

² KRISTA, T. et al.: Creating Business Models for Smart Cities: A Practical Framework. In *Public Management Review*, Vol. 22, No. 5, p. 726.

³ KRISTA, T. et al.: *Report on the Business Models of the Lighthouse Cities (Horizon 2020: REPLICATE Project Reports No. 2.2)*. Barcelona : ESADE Business School, 2017, p. 11.

Smart cities are the result of a combination of investments made in resources (human, social, creative, infrastructural, technological and business capital) that encourage sustainable economic growth under the conditions of a strong management and governance system.⁴

The need for city business models, however, is less clear. The cities – steered by their city councils – also need a framework for articulating the logic of how they will create value for and with their citizens in the long term. This value encompasses economic prosperity, personal health, educational and professional opportunities, vibrant communities, and affordability. It also includes the assumption that these goals should be achieved in a way that is environmentally sustainable so that the cities can be resilient in the face of the current and future environmental challenges of climate change. In this context, the City Business Model is defined as the logic of how a city can create and deliver value through the development of smart services that are economically and socially viable, while reducing the city’s overall environmental footprint.⁵

2 Methodology

In this post, we will look at the use of the business model canvas in regional conditions. The authors of the Business Model Canvas methodology are business theorists and entrepreneurs Yves Pigneur and Alexander Osterwalder. Their intention was to remove the complexity of extensive business models and slim them down into one clear document that answers all important business questions, but at the same time fits on one page of paper. “*Long-term business plans often tend to fail,*”⁶ Osterwalder summarized the essence of his concept. The result is the Business Model Canvas, which has become a stepping stone to the success of many startups. However, it is also used by companies such as *Microsoft*, *GE* or *Mastercard*.

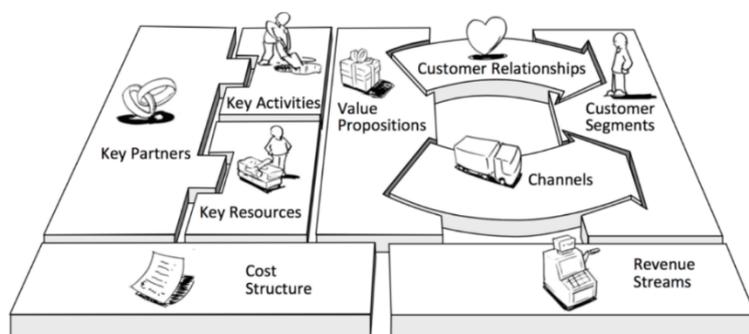


Figure 1: Business model Canvas

Source: RASKOPA, N.: *How to Use Osterwalder’s Business Model Canvas in Ecommerce*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://www.promodo.com/blog/how-to-use-osterwalders-business-model-canvas-in-ecommerce/>>.

The Canvas business model consists of 3 key areas:

1. Things that make money
2. Things that cost money
3. The mission

⁴ SCHIAVONE, F. et al.: Business Model Innovation for Urban Smartization. In *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 2021, Vol. 142, p. 210.

⁵ KRISTA, T. et al.: *Report on the Business Models of the Lighthouse Cities (Horizon 2020: REPLICATE Project Reports No. 2.2)*. Barcelona : ESADE Business School, 2017, p. 10.

⁶ ŠIMÁK, M.: *Mapa k vášmu úspechu na jednej strane. Vytvorte si Business Model Canvas*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<http://www.sbagency.sk/mapa-k-vasmu-uspechu-na-jednej-strane-vytvorte-si-business-model-canvas#.Y1-msnbMI2x>>.

In the first part **Things that make money** are:

Market and Customer Segments

Segments are the different groups of people or organizations your enterprise aims to reach and serve. This includes users who might not generate revenues, but which are necessary for the business model to work. Questions to ask: For whom are we creating value? Who are our most important customers, clients, or users? For market and customer segments, the separate model was created, called Value proposition Canvas.

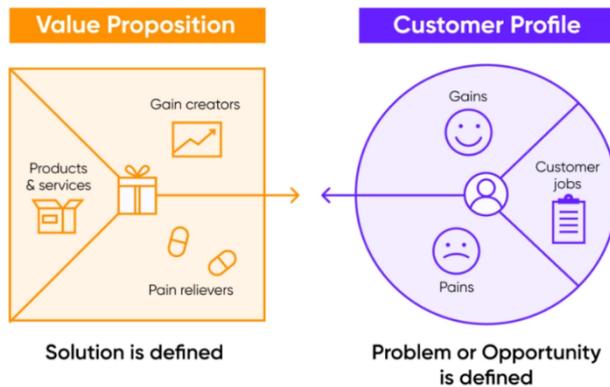


Figure 2: Value proposition canvas

Source: KANTSIR, S.: *Value Proposition Canvas*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://cieden.com/value-proposition-canvas-customer-segment-explained>>.

This model allows answering fundamental questions about creating value for customers and achieving a problem-solution fit and, as a result, product-market fit. The canvas can either be applied during the initial research phase of a new product or the refining stage of the existing one. If company aims to create a product that brings real value that customers and users would need and like, they should understand why people should use it beforehand. The canvas consists of two main blocks:

- customer segment – this is where a problem is defined,
- product segment – this is where a solution is defined.

The Customer Profile is a part of the Value Proposition Canvas that focuses on none other than customers and helps understand and analyze what they do on a regular basis, how they want to be perceived in society, what they worry about, and what delights them.

Customer Relations

Customer relationships describe the types of relationships company establishes with specific Customer Segments. Questions to ask: What type of relationship does each of our Customer Segments expect us to establish and maintain with them? Which ones have we established? How costly are they? How are they integrated with the rest of our business model?⁷ Types of customer relationships can be: Transactional; Long Term; Personal Assistance; Dedicated personal assistance; Self-service; Automated services; Communities; Co-creation; Switching costs.

⁷ *Customer Relationship in Model Canvas*. [online]. [2022-10-07]. Available at: <<https://www.strategyzer.com/business-model-canvas/customer-relationships>>.

Channels

The purpose of Channels is to provide the ways and means to communicate and deliver value to the customer. Hence, there are two types of channels: communication and distribution. Communication Channels are the means of getting the messages out to potential customers and influencers. From a marketing perspective, it means 'seeding' potential customers in the market with exposure to ideas about the products and services. From a selling perspective, it means directly engaging with customers through the most efficient and effective means. Distribution Channels are the means of getting the products and services to the customers. They can be physical or virtual, or a combination, as required. They can be directly for the business, or through intermediaries.⁸

Revenue Streams and Pricing Model

Each customer segment that company develops, provides one or more revenue streams, each of which needs to be considered. It's a lot of work, analyzing each revenue stream to make sure that it is being properly compensated for the provided value. But without revenue, clearly, a business cannot succeed. Questions to ask: How do we earn money? For what value are our customers willing to pay? How much does each revenue stream contribute to overall revenue? What other benefits are we getting?⁹

In the second part **Things that cost money** are:

Key activities

Key activities include the actions that are imperative for a business to work. Basically, these are the essential tasks that the company must carry out in order to achieve its business purpose. Typical key activities practiced by most organizations are in the areas:

- Research and development (new product research, new product development, updates of existing products, quality checks, innovation);
- Production (product selection and design, production process selection, correct production capacity, production planning, production control, quality and cost control, inventory control, machine maintenance and replacement);
- Marketing (strategy, market research, product development, communications, sales support, events);
- Sales and Customer service.

Key Partners

A key partner can simply be defined as any entity a business needs to rely on to achieve its value proposition. In the Business Model Canvas, the Key Partners section lists external companies, suppliers, or parties an organization does business with to perform key activities and deliver customer value. A relationship between two or more key partners can be classified as strategic alliances, joint-ventures, co-opetition, buyer-supplier.

Key Resources

Key resources is one of the building blocks of a business model. It essentially describes the most important assets needed by the business. Without this component, a company cannot create, deliver, and capture value. In general, there are four types physical resources, financial resources, intellectual resources, human resources.

⁸ REILING, J.: *Supportin Channels in Business Model Canvas*. [online]. [2022-10-07]. Available at: <<https://bethestrategicpm.com/supporting-channels-in-the-business-model-canvas/>>.

⁹ DIEFFENBACHER, S. F.: *Revenue Streams*. [online]. [2022-10-07]. Available at: <<https://digitalleadership.com/blog/revenue-streams/>>.

The questions you need to ask when determining the key resources:

- What key resources do you need to create a value proposition for each identified customer segment?
- What key resources do you require for the marketing and distribution of your products or services?
- Which key resources do you need to enhance customer relationships?
- What key resources do you need for each of your revenue streams?¹⁰

Cost Structure

The amount of money your business spends on operations, your main costs, and how cost-driven are you, refers to all the ways a business approaches paying its bills. Such costs take many forms: the fixed cost of building rental, the variable cost of hourly wages, the sometimes unpredictable costs of repairs or disaster response. How a business prepares for fixed and variable costs, overhead expenses, production supplies, and any number of other concerns must be completely reflected in its cost structure.¹¹

In the third part **The mission** are:

Value Proposition

The value proposition provides a unique combination of products and services which provide value to the customer by resulting in the solution of a problem the customer is facing or providing value to the customer. This is the point of intersection between the product company makes and the reason behind the customer's impulse to buy it. A product can have a single value proposition or multiple value propositions. Elements of the value propositions are: newness, performance, customization, design, brand, price, accessibility, usability.¹²

3 Results

In the previous chapter, we looked at the Business Model Canvas primarily in connection with its main use in the business environment, or the environment of startups. In this chapter, we will look at the use of the analyzed model in the urban environment.

Cities also need business models because their role in the ever more complex value creation ecosystem of public services is currently changing. The increased complexity of the challenges that cities face and the plurality of stakeholders means that governments are resorting to new models of collaboration and co-production in the design and delivery of services. City governments and local service providers are, therefore, no longer the only parties responsible for delivering value to their residents, but instead, have become one of several actors charged with this.¹³ We call the transformed Business Model Canvas in city conditions - City Model Canvas.

¹⁰ *Key Resources*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.allianse.com/key-resources-business-model-canvas-block/>>.

¹¹ DIEFFENBACHER, S. F.: *Cost Structure*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://digitalleadership.com/blog/cost-structure/>>.

¹² LUENENDONK, M.: *Creating Value Proposition*. [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.cleverism.com/business-model-canvas-creating-value-proposition/>>.

¹³ OSBORNE, S. T.: Delivering Public Services: Time for a New Theory? In *Public Management Review*, 2010, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 2.

1. Mission achievement: What is the ultimate goal that the city seeks to achieve?

6. Key partnerships <i>Who can help the city deliver the proposed value to the beneficiaries? Who can access key resources that the city council does not have?</i>	7. Key activities <i>What must the city council do to create and deliver the proposed value?</i>	2. Value proposition <i>What specific problems does the proposed service solve or alleviate?</i>	4. Buy-in & support <i>Whose buy-in is needed in order to deploy the service (legal, policy, procurement, etc.)?</i>	3. Beneficiaries <i>Who will directly benefit from the proposed services?</i>
	8. Key infrastructure & key resources <i>What key resources does the city council have to create and deliver the value?</i>		5. Deployment <i>How will the city solve the problems of the Value proposition specifically?</i>	
9. Budget costs <i>What costs will the creation and delivery of the proposed services entail?</i>		10. Revenue streams <i>What sources of revenue for the city do the proposed services provide? What other sources of revenue does the city have?</i>		
11. Environmental cost <i>What negative environmental impacts can the proposed services cause?</i>		12. Environmental benefits <i>What environmental benefits will the proposed services deliver?</i>		
13. Social costs <i>What are some of the potential social risks that the proposed service entails? Who is most vulnerable as a result?</i>		14. Social benefits <i>What social benefits will the proposed services bring about? For whom will these benefits materialise?</i>		

Figure 3: City Model Canvas

Source: KRISTA, T. et al.: *Report on the Business Models of the Lighthouse Cities (Horizon 2020: REPLICATE Project Reports No. 2.2)*. Barcelona : ESADE Business School, 2017, p. 20

In order to ensure its maximum use and implementation in practice, some areas were added, others transformed to regional conditions. For a better practical understanding, the City Model Canvas is described in connection with an example in the city of Trnava, Slovakia, implemented on a specific target.

1st step – Mission achievement – What is the ultimate goal that city needs to achieve?

The mission statement is a short declaration of the overall aim that the city wants to reach. It should be precise, concise and meet SMART attributes.

In 2023, the Trnava city wants to reduce the number of cars used by its residents for transportation to work in the city by 20%.

2nd step – Value proposition – What specific problems does the proposed service solve or alleviate?

The value proposition is the central element of the City Model Canvas as it is of the BMC. It states what benefits are created by the organisation. In the case of the CMC for smart cities, the value proposition states the benefits that are expected from smart services. The value proposition should address specific identified needs or ‘pain points’ felt in the population and provide a clear picture of how those needs will be addressed by the CMC model. Typically, there should be at least one value proposition for each type of beneficiary identified.¹⁴

A reduction in the number of cars would positively affect the traffic situation in the city – traffic jams, primarily in the morning and afternoon hours, which residents complain about.

¹⁴ KRISTA, T. et al.: *Report on the Business Models of the Lighthouse Cities (Horizon 2020: REPLICATE Project Reports No. 2.2)*. Barcelona : ESADE Business School, 2017, p. 23.

3rd step – Beneficiaries – Who will directly benefit from the proposed services?

In the CMC, this element asks the city to identify exactly who is positioned to benefit directly from the value proposition. Direct beneficiaries in the CMC include those audiences for which the city strategy or specific project proposes to solve specific needs or problems.

The city residents commuting to work outside the city of Trnava and within the city, who for some reason have to use a car for transportation. Citizens of the surrounding villages who visit the city, for example in the morning due to a doctor visit.

4th step – Buy-in & support – Whose buy-in is needed in order to deploy the service (legal, policy, procurement, etc.)?

This element refers to the individuals, groups or entities (such as firms, NGOs or other governmental organisations) whose acceptance of the proposed project is necessary for its successful implementation.

In order to achieve the goal, it is necessary to make public transport services more efficient and connected with cycle paths (in the competence of the city), to increase the number of available electric scooters (currently under the umbrella of the company STIER), electric bicycles (currently under the umbrella of the company FREEBIKE). Promote alternative transport options (within the competence of the city).

5th step – Deployment – How will the city solve the problems of the Value proposition specifically?

It states how the value proposition will be delivered to the customer or beneficiary segment.

Strengthened public transport links in the morning and afternoon, complete cycle paths connecting strategic areas of the city, increase the number of electric scooters and electric bicycles.

6th step – Key partnerships – Who can help the city deliver the proposed value to the beneficiaries? Who can access key resources that the city council does not have?

This block refers to the partners that will enable the city to produce the value. Key partnerships can range from loose relationships between organisations to exclusive contracts for a particular purpose.

The companies mentioned in point 4, ambassadors in the promotion of the solution, projects at the national and European level (possibility of subsidies).

7th step – Key activities – What must the city council do to create and deliver the proposed value?

These are the activities that need to be undertaken for the business model to be effective. Just as firms will focus on business activities, the key activities of Smart Cities must include the governance of the smart city strategy and a primary activity will be a thorough stakeholder management.

Negotiate with companies.

Launch a communication campaign to promote transport alternatives and their advantages.

Meeting with the city citizens (invitation to the meeting of the city council).

Proposals of a traffic analyst to make urban public transport more efficient.

Inspiration from already implemented projects in other cities/countries.

8th step – Key infrastructure & Key resources – What key resources does the city council have to create and deliver the value?

The key resources are not only the financial and physical assets it can use, but also political and strategic resources that it can deploy in favour of certain policies.

In previous years, the city considered building cycle paths with an emphasis on communicating the benefits of this type of transport.

The current mayor supports these decisions.

Trnava is located in an area with good accessibility to the surrounding villages and natural sites.

There are many students using this type of transport in the city during the school year.

9th step – Budget costs – What costs will the creation and delivery of the proposed services entail?

The economic cost structure refers to the costs the city will incur when implementing smart city services.

The costs of completing the road infrastructure for bicycles

More e-scooters and e-bikes will mean a higher amount for services

10th step – Revenue streams – What sources of revenue for the city do the proposed services provide? What other sources of revenue does the city have?

This refers to all sources of income that the municipality will have from smart services and will include any revenue generated from user fees or other types of levies that will be required in exchange for smart services.

E-bike and E-scooter user payments

Potential grants

11th step – Environmental cost – What negative environmental impacts can the proposed services cause?

The main objective of this line is to compare how the strategy planned in one sector generates more environmental benefits than negative impacts.

The impact of increased electrical consumption

12th step – Environmental benefits – What environmental benefits will the proposed services deliver?

This element 'seeks to extend the concept of value creation beyond purely financial value'.

Reduces of gas pollution and noise pollution

13th step – Social costs – What are some of the potential social risks that the proposed service entails? Who is most vulnerable as a result?

The social impacts element refers to negative costs that the smart city strategy can have on a city's residents and communities. The challenge here for the city is to define what social impacts to consider and how these should be measured.

In places where cycle paths have not been completed, it can be a problem for people to transport by e-scooters and e-bikes

Some citizens see the increase in e-scooters and e-bikes as a threat to pedestrians

14th step – Social benefits – What social benefits will the proposed services bring about? For whom will these benefits materialise?

The social benefits element focuses on the positive social value creating aspects of the Smart city strategy. These should be those elements that specifically derive from the smart city interventions but can include indirect benefits.

Positive health impact from emissions reduction

Access to areas which were not available before (or only with car)

4 Conclusion

Cities feel more and more pressure from citizens, entrepreneurs and visitors. All target groups increase the demands they place on the region in which they live, do business or other activity. They begin to take an active interest in the way of managing the territory and its parts. We cannot forget the feeling of pride and patriotism associated with the city. Municipalities are beginning to be under close scrutiny and their activities are assessed more critically than in the past. The reason may also be the possibility to compare different localities and their use of resources and the potential of the territory. Cities are therefore forced to look for ways to effectively analyze their decisions, taking into account all aspects of the given territory. Inspiration can be found in the business world, where planning and strategic decision-making have become an integral part of competitiveness. Every company is based on a certain business model. It can be considered as the basis of the company. Its task is to ensure its functioning. Long-term plans and documents began to transform into more usable forms that contain the most important attributes related to the enterprise itself, a specific goal or decision. An example is the described business model canvas, the practicality of which can be used not only in the business sphere but also in the regional one. “*Smart cities need to develop business models to guide the transition and governance of a ‘smart economy’ and ‘smart society’, which is one that is increasingly reliant on ICTs to promote growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusion.*”¹⁵ The role of cities and regions in the current constantly changing environment has become to follow the latest trends, innovations and implement them in their decision-making. The city model canvas presents 14 steps summarizing the impacts and reasons for the decision within the competence of the city. It can anticipate possible facts that could be forgotten during the planning process and that could represent a problem in the future. It is an example of a successful transformation of a business model into regional conditions.

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¹⁵ See: KRISTA, T. et al.: *Report on the Business Models of the Lighthouse Cities (Horizon 2020: REPLICATE Project Reports No. 2.2)*. Barcelona : ESADE Business School, 2017.

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POLITICS, MEDIA, AND YOUTH

Ján Machyniak, Marek Chovanec

Abstract:

The media influence the public opinion and moods in society almost constantly. However, nowadays, politics is becoming known to younger and younger people through the media. In today's society, the problem of the relevance of individual media and also of individual information often resonates. More and more, not only young people receive information uncritically, and thus the real potential and purpose of the media in modern societies and modern democratic states is gradually disappearing. Mass communication means should primarily serve to bring public policy closer to the people. Various means of disseminating information, on the one hand, fulfill their purpose, but on the other hand, they (un)intentionally help spread various false information or half-truths. The purpose of this contribution is to point out precisely the connection between the media and politics in the context of possible consequences for the current generation of young people. In this theoretic-empirical paper, we analyze two interesting projects, that took place in the Slovak republic.

Key words:

Media. Social Media. Politics. Public Policy. Youth.

Introduction

The whole world is connected by means of mass communication, which spread various information regarding political, but also non-political matters. People spend a lot of time watching different media, whether looking for different information or entertainment. This time spent watching various media has increased even more during the global pandemic related to the COVID-19 disease because people were locked at their homes more often. Nowadays, access to television and radio broadcasts is easier than ever before, so many young people also get information about political events. It can even be argued that such information reaches them regardless of whether they are interested in it. The current generation of young people grew up surrounded by media and various digital technologies. In some cases, global and Slovak politics are even medialized by young people themselves, who set up various portals and pages on which they inform about current events. In the same way, the politicians themselves want to be visible, so they appear in various types of media, often in social media as well. Within them, they have created their own profiles, which are helping them to connect with the widest possible public. One of the main attributes of media as such is interactivity. We can perceive this feature of the media as their connecting element with young people, but also with politics as such. Already in 2011, Vojtech Bednář claimed that information technology and media have adapted to such a form, that they can be used not only by experts but also by the general public. Already in that year, the media were considered a very developed general communication platform. However, 11 years have passed since then, so we can say that the media as a means of mass communication are at even higher level, and access to information of various kinds is even easier.¹

1 Media and Politics

Most of the time, the media is considered the main source of information not only for voters but also for younger groups of the population. Overall, their form is changing, from print media, through radio and television media, to new types of media utilizing the Internet. Today's

¹ See: BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Marketing na sociálních sítích*. Brno : Computer press, 2011.

modern society is confronted with a large amount of information that requires increased attention on the side of the recipient. Naturally, a person does not have time to find out and verify the information he receives in professional literature or various studies, so the media is often the only source of information.

The relationship between the media and politics is natural, and these two areas practically cannot exist without each other. Politics is understood as a service to society, with the help of which various actors manage the country, and the media should inform the public about their activities as regularly as possible. Since these two areas cannot exist without each other, their “relationship” requires that they constantly work together and that mutual understanding reigns between them. Political life is depicted by the media in a way that corresponds to media communication. In a way, the media is the main and sometimes the only source of information about the activities of politicians trying to win the favour of citizens. Politicians must adapt to the so-called media logic, and thus the way in which the media convey and process their outputs.²

When examining the relationship between the media and politics, it is necessary to start from the assumption that it is a space of regular dynamic interactions between the three components. These components are the political institutions of the state, the mass media, and the recipients of media content, who are oriented toward global social life and politics in general. However, the interactions here do not consist only of political communication. All these three components interact with each other, which leads us to consider that the media also has a political influence. According to Denis McQuail, we distinguish four models of the position of the media in the process of creating public policy:

- the pluralistic model,
- the dominant model,
- the mobilization model,
- the market model.³

We see the most striking contradiction between the pluralistic and the dominant model. We can consider the pluralistic model as a kind of “watchdog”. It perceives the media as a space in which different opinions and ideologies meet and are confronted, the main task of which is to ensure the observance of the principles of democracy in the political process. Competition between individual media is an important factor here. However, it does not guarantee the diversity of information and media outputs. The dominant model can be considered precisely the opposite, as it admits the connection of the media with political or economic elites. In the extreme case, the media within this model can be considered as subordinate institutions that must systematically create different media profiles controlled by power, interest, or economic groups. Thus, the individual media are no different from each other and their main tasks consist of consolidating the distribution of political forces and maintaining political consensus.

The model of the values of the elites has a similar subjectivity, according to which media coverage corresponds to the interests and worldview of the ruling elite, capital owners of specific media, or leading representatives of the government. We consider the third, namely the mobilization model, to be the opposite of this model. This model states that media employees who are separated from the governing processes based on public opinion polls call for changes in society. This acts as a driving force for the mobilization of citizens, which then push the

² See: MULLER, K.: *Politická sociologie*. Prague : Portál, 2008.

³ See: McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 1999.

government to establish various changes in social life. This model expects significant citizen participation in the public policy-making process.

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In terms of the role of the media, the market model is closest to the first, the pluralistic model. The motive of financial profit is also considered here, which is a key factor in the competition between individual media. This is because financial gain takes precedence over agreeing or disagreeing with the presented topics. In practice, however, we can see those individual models overlap. It is a consequence of the current political culture, of a specific regime, or the overall culture of a specific environment.⁴

In her work, Roberta M. Berns holds the opinion that the media as such have influence on socialization. She justifies this by claiming that they influence a person’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour. She adds that the media can change experiences, and thus the empirical factors in the lives of citizens.⁵ It follows that the media can change, strengthen, or disrupt various aspects of citizen’s decision making, especially when choosing various political preferences and interests. Radim Marada assumes that the media should more strongly address the segment of less educated and underprivileged citizens without additional alternative information sources. However, they feel more competent in watching advertisements than in political matters.⁶

According to Michal Kořan, the media have the ability of shaping the public attitudes and opinions in general. He justifies this by the fact that the media determine the priority of topics that citizens consider important. Outside of our experiences, the media is a window to the world, and each of us consider the media to be one of the most important and significant sources of

⁴ See: MULLER, K.: *Politická sociologie*. Prague : Portál, 2008.

⁵ BERNS, R. M.: *Child, Family, School, Community, Socialization and Support*. Wadsworth : Cengage learning, 2011, p. 320-322.

⁶ MARADA, R.: *Kultura protestu a politizace každodennosti*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2009, p. 191.

information. Thus, the cognitive map of the world is largely influenced by the media, especially by the selection of various topics and the way they are reproduced and displayed.⁷

It is understandable that the media also play an important role in the election process. According to Jan Kubáček, they cause the so-called wagon effect. This effect is primarily associated with pre-election polls. A media-known candidate, who is often considered the winner by the media in advance, is understandably also one of the most popular candidates and is often the outright winner of specific elections. In this case, the influence of the media is so strong that if a candidate gains an advantage over other opposing candidates, voters are willing to change their preferences and express their support for him in the elections, even if they often do not know him. The reason for the change in voters' preferences is often the fear of social isolation, hence when their preferred candidate is not supported by the major part of society, they often succumb to media pressure and reorient themselves to a more popular candidate. This wagon effect can also be explained by the fact that voters believe in the correctness of polls. However, citizens have a high level of trust only in media polls, not polls of the candidates themselves.⁸

The fact that media can change and generally influence the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of people was also used by different regimes or different politicians. As an example, we can use Czechoslovakia before the year 1989, where there was an information monopoly. In other words, the media was centrally controlled and was considered one of the most important control tools of the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.⁹ The media were used for the benefit of people's democratic propaganda, they were purposefully censored and there was a large system of authorization procedures. We can consider this system as a filter that separated the information that could reach the public from those which were undesirable for the regime. After the revolution, the so-called plurality of media created suitable conditions for the formation of citizens' own opinions. In this way, the media were gradually formed from institutions that only published news to public opinion makers by pointing out different political topics and giving space to different political directions.

The political importance of the media has even been recognized since the end of the 19th century when the literacy of the population began to manifest massively. The importance of the media as a political actor grew significantly at that time, and the media as such became an important part of the political process in a certain sense.¹⁰ We know three basic factors that helped this development. It is mainly a decline in the meaning of the so-called "primary" agents of political socialization, such as family and social class, which shaped political sympathies a long time in advance and rarely underwent any significant change. People's decision-making in modern politics depends on specific problems and the politics of the proposed solutions. Ultimately, this means expanding the influence of the media as the main mechanism of action. The second factor is the process that helped to significantly increase the importance of mass media. The dramatic rise of mass media has resulted in society relying on media far more than ever before. Increasing the credibility of the media in the eyes of society was also largely related to this. The third factor is the fact, that the economic power of the media has increased significantly, so no government can afford to overlook it.

⁷ KOŘAN, M.: *Česká zahraniční politika v zrcadle sociálně-vědního výzkumu*. Prague : Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2009, p. 136-137.

⁸ KUBÁČEK, J.: *Slovník politického managementu a volebního marketingu*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 72.

⁹ See: VODIČKA, K., CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky: historie a současnost*. Prague : Portál, 2003, p. 45-69.

¹⁰ HEYWOOD, A.: *Politologie*. Prague : Eurolex Bohemia, 2004, p. 225.

2 The Influence of the Media on Society and the Young People

According to Irena Reifová, in today's world of traditional and new communication technologies, children and youth are one of the most numerous and attractive target groups for the media industry. At the same time, however, they are also the most vulnerable and threatened group. Even this fact does not dispute the reality that the media and various new means of communication are important tools of socialization. In modern times, the media are a source of various information, knowledge, experiences, and games. The problem with the media is no longer the abundance of information and different sources, but orientation in the vast selection of media, the choice within this selection, as well as its impact on the recipients. In this case, Reifová describes the mass media as one of the most powerful social actors involved in defining, interpreting, creating, and constructing reality.¹¹

The label mass media means that they reach a large number of people, thus having an enormous power in constructing reality. Various news from various topics that resonate in society are reaching us through the press, television, or the Internet. Television offers many series, films, and shows to its viewers, but ultimately also multiple channels from which they can choose. Public television has a legal obligation to be an educational resource for everyone, thus offering programs for all age categories. At present, however, especially young people but not only them, prefer mobile phones, laptops, or tablets with Internet capabilities. Content that may not be the most appropriate now has an ever-increasing reach. The same can be said about the print media, where the tabloids in particular are characterized by pursuing famous personalities, searching for scandals and exposing them, and writing about various, often irrelevant topics. Such types of media are especially known to modify and distort the reality according to their own needs. The constructed reality is thus created on the basis of a selection of events, topics, and actors.¹²

Martina Kašiarová reminds that the media are instruments of power, that have the potential ability to exert their influence in a variety of ways. They present events in such a way that the recipients of the information may often have difficulties deciding what to believe. If young people do not search or if they do not have access to another view of a specific event, they may believe everything they read or see on the Internet or on the television, even if it is not true. In this case, one can clearly see how the manipulation of human information processing takes place, as the media use various means, by which they bend reality.¹³

The concept of manipulation is closely related to the fact that the media have various degrees of influence on people. The author Martin Brestovanský explains this term as psychological violence, i.e., an insincere and unclear choice of information and linguistic means, the intention of which is to influence people's opinions and moods, thus gaining the opportunity to control their behaviour.¹⁴

We recognise the following manipulation methods and effects:

¹¹ See: REIFOVÁ, I. et. al.: *Slovník mediální komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 2004.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ KAŠIAROVÁ, M.: Podmienky a variácie presvedčania v bulvárnych periodikách. In RUSNÁK, J., BOČÁK, M. (eds.): *Médiá a text II*. Prešov : Prešovská univerzita, 2008, p. 86-91. [online]. [2022-10-19]. Available at: <<https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/bocak1/subor/10.pdf>>.

¹⁴ BRESTOVANSKÝ, M.: *Úvod do mediálnej výchovy*. Trnava : Trnavská univerzita, 2010, p. 67. [online]. [2022-10-19]. Available at: <http://www.prezitu.wbl.sk/01_uvod_do_medialnej_vychovy.pdf>.

- **Agenda setting function** – way of organizing information. Based on this, information recipients determine how important or less important the particular information is. As an example, we can use the front pages of various magazines or newspapers, where a specific journal will state the topics with which it wants to attract and convince potential readers to buy a given issue. It is also interesting to see how the information is organized in the reliable press and how it is in the tabloids. Reliable media mostly put important economic and political news on the front pages, on the contrary, tabloid media arrange topics and information according to the interests of the recipients, not according to their importance and seriousness.
- **The spiral of silence** – the opinion of the majority dominates the society and people with the opposite opinion are also silently leaning towards it.
- **Third person effect** – the people who consider themselves the most resilient are actually the most susceptible to manipulation.
- **Hidden persuasion** – according to Brestovanský, it is a way of presenting information that is considered a clear fact that everyone should understand.¹⁵

Manipulation occurs for several reasons, namely:

- the need to fill the content of the daily or weekly press with new and attractive information,
- increase interest in buying a specific periodical,
- determine and adjust the topics that people expect,
- clear and understandable content.¹⁶

As such, the media influence not only the adult audience, but young people as well. It is even possible to claim that the influence of the media on young people is much stronger than on adult recipients. Along with the effects of the media, the effects also apply to the actions of the media. Media effect refers to ascertaining the actual impact of media, mostly with reference to a specific response to certain types of content offered. The impact must therefore be understood as a more permanent action. However, despite various surveys, it is very difficult to reliably demonstrate the influence of the media and their effects on an individual or society.¹⁷

The influence of the media is mainly reflected in the effects caused by their content on the recipients. Media effects can be divided into planned and unplanned. Planned effects are a manifestation of the author's deliberate manipulation of the content of a specific article or various reports on television. Reifová characterizes unplanned effects as a change in the thinking or behaviour of an individual recipient or audience, that occurs in response to the reception of specific media content, while its author or media organization did not intend these changes.¹⁸

Characteristics of media effects according to Denis McQuail:

Planned short-term effects:

- individual responses – to influence people in such a way that there is a positive response on their part, for example, to buy a product that a specific media draws attention to,
- learning the news – daily acquisition of news and knowledge from the media,
- media campaign – effects of political campaigns on electoral behaviour.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ See: VÁGNER, I.: *Televizní správy – psychický nátlak?*. Prague : Argo, 1997.

¹⁷ See also: JIRÁK, J., KÖPPLOVÁ, B.: *Media a společnost*. Prague : Portál, 2007.

¹⁸ See: REIFOVÁ, I. et. al.: *Slovník mediální komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 2004.

Planned long-term effects:

- dissemination of news and information – news about current events in the society,
- spread of progress – new technologies,
- spread of innovations,
- knowledge distribution.

Unplanned short-term effects:

- individual reaction – how a specific message affects an individual, i.e., the same message can have a different effect on a juvenile audience and a different effect on an adult recipient,
- collective reaction – in larger events, such as various natural disasters, there is a collective reaction – the reaction of almost entire society.

Unplanned long-term effects:

- socialization – inclusion of an individual into society,
- social control – with negative news and its consequences, the media offer a deterrent example to viewers, especially by pointing out various punishments for such actions,
- coverage of the event – refers to the role that media play in cooperation with various institutions during and after various important events,
- defining reality and constructing meaning – the way the information is presented, the media also determine how it sounds,
- institutional change – often it is the media that influence various institutions and their operation,
- cultural change – even within different cultures, media influence their mutual changes.¹⁹

Reflections on the long-term indirect influence of the media were mainly driven by the investigation of the processes by which an individual integrates into society – the process of socialization. Psychologist Albert Bandura had a theory of social learning, which later resulted in a pattern theory and the theory of the social construction of reality, which can be considered particularly significant in this regard. The media participate in the socialization of the individual mainly by providing him with a huge amount of information and a whole range of different sources.²⁰

The basic idea of social learning theory is that everything an individual needs for his own development cannot be learned by direct observation alone. Many things must be learned from various indirect sources, which include the mass media. This theory also says that a person's attention is focused on media content that is important in his life, his personal interests and needs. This theory mainly applies to an individual's daily affairs, such as appearance, food choices, clothing style, or many other personal trends. In this case, however, the mass media is not the only source of social learning, and its influence also depends on other sources, such as parents, teachers, friends, etc.²¹

Nowadays, it is widely known that the Internet has come to the leading position in viewership, closely followed by television and radio, and somewhere at the end there is only a minority of people who prefer printed media, such as magazines, newspapers, or books. It is understandable, as one of the leading characteristics of today's time is the development of technology, as we are already surrounded by robotic vacuum cleaners, automatic household

¹⁹ McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 2002, p. 368.

²⁰ See also: JIRÁK, J., KÖPPLOVÁ, B.: *Media a společnost*. Prague : Portál, 2007.

²¹ See: McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 2009.

lighting, or other achievements of technology, but it is also a significant factor in upbringing and development of children and youth, where it is possible to observe so-called mental passivity in some individuals. It is known that this technological convenience is the reason why parents often give their children a more interesting, flashing tablet instead of a classic storybook and devote 15 minutes of their time to read it, thus gaining more time for themselves. However, they often do not realize that at that very moment their child may be watching a certain advertisement, which may not be suitable at all due to his age and ability to recognize and subsequently assess its content. Specific inappropriate content can subsequently have an inappropriate effect on the development of the child and his formation assessment in the future, whether psychologically or mentally. Parents should therefore realize that they are the main and most important tool in the medial education of children. They decide not only in what form the children receive information, but also what they should be protected from and, obviously, what should be recommended to them. It is therefore important that parents pay increased attention to the media that reach their children daily, and not underestimate its influence.

The media can be a socializing agent just like the family. The family is the main model that lays the foundation of personality. Within the family, the educational activities of parents take place, it determines the lifestyle and value orientation of its members. The first introduction to the media usually takes place in the family and is influenced by its habits and needs. It should be remembered that these habits are subsequently transferred to the future life of the individual. However, it is also possible to prevent bad habits, for example by limiting the time spent with the media, choosing the appropriate type of media, communicating together in the family, or creating a suitable environment.²²

Learning about and understanding the media increases the basic equipment for successful communication and raises the quality of media literacy. This term expresses a certain point of view with which an individual is able to approach the media, or the ability to live with the media. It helps in orientation in the selection of media products that create an environment where an individual moves. Media literacy is the ability to distinguish, understand, analyze, and critically evaluate different media and the information they provide. It is generally desirable to have media literacy. Therefore, in recent years, media education has become a part of general education.²³

Due to the fact, that young people spend a significant part of their time in the Internet environment, this environment is the place where they experience their worries and joys. For adolescent young people, it is mainly about establishing various contacts, joining various collectives, and finally – finding their own identity and their own opinion on political matters as well.²⁴

At this point, we allow ourselves to draw attention to the practical level of the mutual relationship between media and politics in the context of young people or youth. In this way, we draw attention to two projects, the results of which are interesting in our domestic environment. The first of them is the project *Mladí proti fašizmu*, which has the goal of using the media to inform young people about various political issues, especially about extremism.

²² HELUS, Z.: *Dítě v osobnostním pojetí. Obrat k dítěti jako výzva a úkol pro učitele i rodiče*. Prague : Portál, 2004, p. 63-68.

²³ See: MIČIENKA, M. et. al.: *Základy mediální výchovy*. Prague : Portál, 2007.

²⁴ ŠEVČÍKOVÁ, A.: *Děti a dospívající online: vybraná rizika používání internetu*. Prague : Grada, 2014, p. 31.

Its goal is to bring young people closer to the threats of totalitarian regimes, extremism, and hatred in general. The project also draws attention to the need to preserve democracy and freedom in society.²⁵ The intention of the initiative is also to draw young people's attention to the opposite face of fascism and extremism.²⁶ The domain *www.mladiprotifasizmu.sk* became the platform of this project. In addition to the fact that the website explains the basic terms of the given issue, various historical realities of the Second World War are also added to the website, which are intended to help people understand the catastrophic consequences that fascism had. On this website, we can also find the life stories of people who survived various fascist and nazi practices, such as concentration camps. The articles are published in the form of blogs, where the political systems are explained in more depth.²⁷

The project also points to the ways of spreading posts on the relatively popular social network *Facebook*. The posts that have the greatest impact are precisely those which incite violence or spread hatred. *Facebook* displays such posts to a huge number of people and evaluates them as the most relevant and best – often caused by the large group of extremist parties and movements supporters who share or comment on such posts. It is the extremists who are the loudest part of society, and that is why it often seems that a large part of society leans towards such opinions.

The initiative tries to interest young people at a time when they are not yet interested in politics and reach them before the extremists do. According to the initiative, it is important to have a discussion on these issues and explain what the real situation is. In society, the phrase “fascists are not discussed” is often heard, but the prevailing opinion in the initiative is that, on the contrary, they should be discussed – even publicly and with an emphasis on the claims of their opponents, which are verified to be true.²⁸

The social networks of this project have also become an information portal that communicates domestic and foreign political information through various online media. The concept is based on short and clear messages, which are summarized in a few sentences. Posts on the platform are divided into two groups, namely:

- informative – more extensive contributions,
- brief – contributions that explain the facts briefly and clearly.

Entries with certain buzzwords are aimed precisely at attracting the attention of the young recipient. When this is successful, young people often start following the page and subsequently become interested in more comprehensive informative posts, thus developing critical thinking and forming an opinion about a specific situation.²⁹ According to the initiative, it is important to use the platforms most used by young people for spreading such information.³⁰ Recently, the social network *TikTok* has come to the spotlight, so the initiative started to add their

²⁵ *Mladí, o.z.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<http://www.ozmladi.sk>>.

²⁶ MACH, M.: *O projekte.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<http://www.mladiprotifasizmu.sk/o-projekte/>>.

²⁷ MACH, M.: *Ako mladým ľuďom vysvetliť, že extrémistické strany nie sú ideálne riešenie?* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<http://www.mladiprotifasizmu.sk/ako-mladym-ludom-vysvetlit-ze-extremisticke-strany-nie-su-idealne-riesenie-/>>.

²⁸ CHOVANČÁKOVÁ, K.: *Marek z Mladí proti fašizmu: situácia je v otázke LGBT čoraz horšia. Vyzerá to tak, že sa vydávame cestou Poľska.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.startitup.sk/marek-z-mladi-proti-fasizmu-situacia-je-v-otazke-lgbti-coraz-horsia-vyzera-to-ze-sa-vydavame-cestou-polska/>>.

²⁹ ŠUCHOVÁ, M.: *Marek Mach: Keďže sa na školách nepodporuje kritické myslenie, je ľahké ľuďom vtĺcť niečí názor.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.heroes.sk/marek-mach-rozhovor/>>.

³⁰ CHOVANČÁKOVÁ, K.: *Marek z Mladí proti fašizmu: situácia je v otázke LGBT čoraz horšia. Vyzerá to tak, že sa vydávame cestou Poľska.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.startitup.sk/marek-z-mladi-proti-fasizmu-situacia-je-v-otazke-lgbti-coraz-horsia-vyzera-to-ze-sa-vydavame-cestou-polska/>>.

contributions there as well, in the form of shorter or longer videos.³¹ The founder of the project says that the mainstream media spreads information in a form that is not attractive to young people. That is why he tries to inform the young recipient briefly, clearly, and with the help of visual material in his project.³²

The second interesting initiative, in the context of this issue, is a survey carried out by Rada mládeže Slovenska. The quantitative survey conducted by this association in the online space was related to media literacy. The survey was conducted in October 2018 and 1,000 respondents between the ages of 15 and 24 took part in it. The respondents were selected in regard to their age, gender, size of their place of residence, and the region they come from. The survey was conducted throughout the whole Slovak Republic. The *FOCUS* agency conducted this survey for the Rada mládeže Slovenska.

The survey shows that most respondents look for information mainly on the Internet, for example, blogs, Internet diaries, or posts on social networks. On the other hand, the fewest respondents said that they search for information on various printed media, or for example on Wikipedia and similar projects.

Only 16% of all respondents stated in their questionnaire, that they do not verify information using other sources at all. The other 84% of respondents verify information from other sources either sometimes or almost constantly. In the case of this question, the research sample was reduced to 842 respondents, most of whom stated that they verify the available information mainly by talking to parents or friends. Similarly, popular sources of the verification of information are various TV shows, contributions of various media within social networks, or contributions of social network users themselves. The survey shows that the least popular sources of the verification of information are various radio shows, printed news – such as daily paper, discussions with teachers, or teaching at school.

The opinions of respondents interviewed about the media vary, but the prevailing opinion is that no media and news have the 100% trust of the respondents. Several respondents expressed that they do not search for information about what is happening in the world, thus they are not interested in news and journalism. What is interesting about this data is the proportion of respondents who are inclined to such an opinion, as almost 50% of them held this opinion. More than 50% of the young people interviewed stated, that if they receive information from a reliable source, there is no need to verify it further, and also that they only trust certain specific media. In the section about the opinion on the media, there was also a point about trust in traditional or alternative media, where the majority of respondents expressed their trust in traditional media, but the trust of young people in alternative media is striking – more than a third of all respondents stated that they mainly trust the alternative media.

Interestingly, 65% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 stated, that they understand their privacy on social networks and always consider who will see their posts or activity. Up to

³¹ ŠTEFKOVÁ, S.: *Mladí proti fašizmu – miesto online komunity v súčasnej slovenskej spoločnosti*. [Master Thesis]. Bratislava : Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského, 2021, p. 37. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://opac.crzp.sk/?fn=detailBiblioForm&sid=ECC3D3F0B3159C4F3916E2027BE4&seo=CRZP-detail-kniha>>.

³² HOPKOVÁ, D.: *17-ročný bojovník proti fašizmu povedal, čo si myslí o Ficovom smere*. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/690141/17-rocny-bojovnik-proti-fasizmu-povedal-co-si-mysli-o-ficovom-smere/>>.

63% of young people declared that they regularly reserve time for activities where they turn off all devices with access to media in order to take a break from them.³³

Conclusion

As such, mass media plays a big role in everyone's life. They have a slightly greater role in the lives of children and young people, as they are more malleable and susceptible to influence. Every person encounters some type of media – even at the youngest ages, when their parents read them a fairy tale or put a tablet or mobile phone in their hands. Already from that period, the child captures information or perceptions. In addition to the fact that the media fulfills the role of a socialization actor to some extent, it is necessary for the parent to adjust or even take over this function of the media. In the latter case, parent must choose the specific medium so it does not offer inappropriate content to the child. Subsequently, when the child becomes a young person and starts attending primary or secondary school, in addition to the parent, the educational institution also plays a part in the role of socialization. In addition to the parental protective hand over the media traps, the school itself should also start teaching the children about what is suitable for them and what is not. It is more than necessary that the teaching of media education begins as soon as possible and the young people learn about media literacy. In the same way, the media also influence the political opinion of young people. From the pubescent age, young people begin to perceive the political situation around them. Their political opinion is mainly influenced by the media, which offer various more or less interesting political topics from different political directions. It is striking that around a third of young people trust alternative media predominantly. This is also why it is more than necessary to deepen media literacy among young people. It is also necessary for young people to be informed about political events and world events on various communication platforms – which was also the reason why the project Youth Against Fascism was created. All in all, it is necessary to start prevention against extremism and hatred even before young people become interested in politics.

Acknowledgement: This contribution was developed within the framework of the KEGA project entitled Creation of teaching texts and teaching aids for the subject Civics from the point of view of education for democratic citizenship and critical thinking. The registration number of the project is 005UCM-4/2021.

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³³ *Mladí a médiá*. [online]. [2022-11-02]. Available at: <https://archiv.mladez.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Prezentacia_mladi-a-media.pdf>.

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CORTANA IN THE CONTEXT OF METAVERSE: A CASE STUDY OF THE DIGITAL-GAME CHARACTER'S MARKETING POTENTIAL

Zdenko Mago

Abstract:

The current direction of the media industry, considering the development of the social-media-communication sphere, frequently leads to the concepts of a metaverse, and not only implicitly, as shown by M. Zuckerberg's initiative with *Meta*. The social network *Second Life* and the virtual worlds of some recent digital games indicate how a metaverse could look but no blueprint for success concerning such a task exists so far. However, digital games and their elements seem to have a significantly important role in creating metaverses. The study focuses on a non-playable character from the *Halo* games series and currently also the *Windows* operating system virtual assistant, *Cortana*, as a possible unique all-interconnecting asset during eventual future *Microsoft* efforts to build its own metaverse. Utilizing an intrinsic explorative-evaluative case study, the study aims to determine aspects of the marketing potentiality of *Cortana* within the competitive struggle related to ongoing metaverse trends.

Key words:

Cortana. Digital Games. Gamification. Halo. Media Industry. Metaverse. Virtual Assistants.

"The difficulties that challenge us made the evolution of humans."
- E. Karaarslan, Journal of Metaverse Editor-in-Chief

1 Introduction

Like everything, the media industry is also evolving, however, such evolution is often slower due to caution not to undermine its own market position, to cause a share collapse, a loss of viewers or subscribers, etc. Slightly faster development can occur mainly because of two reasons. The first is that media organizations are forced to promptly react, or even adapt themselves, to the consequences of events with a global impact; an example of which is the recent rapid move to streaming services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,² which has significantly changed the paradigm of current film and TV production. The second case occurs when a media subject decides to take a risk with an innovative approach that will prove itself to be highly profitable, whereupon competitors instantly try to imitate this success by applying the same strategy. That is of the case with movie universes, which, after the success of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (MCU), began to appear more frequently, e.g., the *DC Extended Universe* (DCEU), *Sony's Marvel Universe* (SMU; also known as *Sony's Spider-Man Universe* – SSU), and many others, even outside the superhero thematic.³ In an accelerated form, it is observable in the mobile game market. Games adapt their visual presentation on digital distribution platforms, even if their gameplay remains unchanged, to reflect current pop-culture trends (e.g., the game *Among Us*, the *Netflix* series *Squid Game*) and benefit from

¹ KARAARSLAN, E.: Foreword. In *Journal of Metaverse*, 2021, Vol. 1, No. 1. No pagination.

² See: VLASSIS, A.: Global Online Platforms, COVID-19, and Culture: The Global Pandemic, an Accelerator Towards Which Direction? In *Media, Culture & Society*, 2021, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 957-969. See also: RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: *Globalizovaný filmový priemysel*. Praha : Wolters Kluwer, 2020.

³ Cf. RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018.; MAGO, Z.: Reflection of Marvel's Spider-man Games in the Context of Current and Upcoming Media Trends. In PROSTINÁKOVÁ HOSSOVÁ, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Home Officetainment*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2021, p. 551-562.

their popularity.⁴ A borderline example of the media industry development concerns the latest hype around the concept of the “metaverse”.

The metaverse originates from the idea of virtual worlds in the fictional cyberpunk novels of the 80s and 90s (e.g., W. Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, N. Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*), an audiovisual appearance of which was later elaborated by sci-fi movie production (e.g., *Matrix*, *Ready Player One*).⁵ Currently, it is understood as “*the post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multiuser environment merging physical reality with digital virtuality [...] based on the convergence of technologies that enable multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects and people*”.⁶ In 2021, M. Zuckerberg shocked the world when he decided to rebrand *Facebook* into a new form titled *Meta*, intended to become the foundation for building the metaverse.⁷ After that, the metaverse stopped being just an imaginary concept of the future depicted by popular culture but a reality that many other media subjects will have to face very soon in some way.

Since mainly pop-cultural products have provided any ‘relevant’ descriptions of metaverses, their visualization is often portrayed by a 3D shared computer-generated online space simulating the real world,⁸ similar to the virtual worlds of digital games.⁹ However, the most representative concept probably still remains the social network *Second Life* launched in 2003, that adopted principles of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (3D environment, avatars) but without objectives to achieve, which actually defines a game.¹⁰ However, the digital games *Roblox*¹¹, released in 2006, and *The Sandbox*¹², released in 2012, are already closer to the metaverse than anything else today, mainly thanks to the blockchain and non-fungible tokens (NFTs) trend.¹³ In general, this indicates that the principles and elements of digital games might have a significantly important role in creating metaverses, so already having some similar usable assets might be an invaluable competitive advantage. One such asset could be *Microsoft’s Cortana*, originally a non-playable character (NPC) of the worldwide successful gaming series *Halo*¹⁴, now also the virtual assistant of the *Windows* operating system. The study aims to determine *Cortana’s* marketing potentiality as a possible unique all-interconnecting asset during eventual future *Microsoft* efforts in building its own metaverse.

⁴ See: MAGO, Z.: Fake-vertising and Mobile Games: Case Study of ‘Pull the Pin’ Ads. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 132-147.

⁵ SPARKES, M.: What Is a Metaverse. In *New Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 251, No. 3348, p. 18.

⁶ MYSTAKIDIS, S.: Metaverse. In *Encyclopedia*, 2022, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 486.

⁷ HEATH, A.: *Mark Zuckerberg on Why Facebook Is Rebranding to Meta*. [online]. [2022-08-18]. Available at: <<https://www.theverge.com/22749919/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-meta-company-rebrand>>.

⁸ See: DIONISIO, J. D. N., BURNS III, W. G., GILBERT, R.: 3D Virtual Worlds and the Metaverse: Current Status and Future Possibilities. In *ACM Computing Surveys*, 2013, Vol. 45, No. 3, p. 1-32.

⁹ Separate metaverses are currently forming even around some digital games, e.g., *Fortnite*, *The Sandbox*, or *Roblox*. See: NARIN, N. G.: Content Analysis of Metaverse Articles. In *Journal of Metaverse*, 2021, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 17.

¹⁰ See: JOHNSON, P.: *Second Life, Media, and the Other Society*. New York : Peter Lang, 2010.

¹¹ ROBLOX CORPORATION: *Roblox*. [Digital Game]. San Mateo : Roblox Corporation, 2006.

¹² PIXOWL: *The Sandbox*. [Digital Game]. San Francisco : Pixowl, 2012.

¹³ See: HIRSCH, P. B.: Adventures in the Metaverse. In *Journal of Business Strategy*, 2022, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 332-336.

¹⁴ BUNGIE et al.: *Halo (series)*. [Digital Game]. Redmond : Xbox Game Studios, 2001-2021.

2 Methodology

Based on the aim of the study, we formulated a research question: What marketing potential does *Cortana* have for eventual further utilization by *Microsoft*? The study implements a method of intrinsic explorative-evaluative case study,¹⁵ combining an exploration of the comprehensive *Cortana* discourse including mythological (i.e. exploring the fictional character origin), structural, cultural, practical points of view, and subsequently an evaluative phase to determine *Cortana*'s marketing potential (i.e. marketing strengths and weaknesses), taking into account current competition and the impacts of involved stakeholders. The case study partially utilizes approaches of SWOT analysis¹⁶ and analysis based on Porter's Five Forces model,¹⁷ whose standard procedure, however, could not be implemented due to some abstract-predictive aspects of the case settings and direction (e.g., an analysis of competition around metaverse would be just hypothetical), and the unavailability of internal data related to the given case. The analysis of *Cortana* is divided into three sections:

- 1.) **A digital-game character.** The section includes an analysis of the digital-game character *Cortana* to identify its essential internal attributes and determine its gamer-related audiences.
- 2.) **A virtual assistant.** The section consists of analysing the virtual assistant *Microsoft Cortana*'s attributes and user-related audience, as well as its competitiveness concerning other available virtual assistants as both possible competition and substitutes.
- 3.) **A TV series character.** The section's analysis is focused on attributes of the fictional TV series character *Cortana* and its viewer-related audience.

3 A Case Study of Cortana

3.1 A Digital-game Character

Cortana is originally a fictional NPC that first appeared in *Microsoft's* game *Halo: Combat Evolved*¹⁸ in 2001 as artificial intelligence (AI) with a female-looking full-body holographic projection and voice¹⁹ (Figure 1). Serving as Master Chief's virtual assistant providing him with intelligence background, IT systems mastering (including alien ones), and other abilities, she has become an essential part of the entire *Halo* franchise storytelling, even though she appears only in games in which Master Chief is the main protagonist.²⁰

¹⁵ See: STAKE, R. E.: *The Art of Case Study Research*. London : Sage, 1995.; YIN, R. K.: *Case Study Research and Applications*. 6th ed. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2018.; HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní metody a aplikace*. Praha : Portál, 2005.

¹⁶ LEIGH, D.: SWOT Analysis. In PERSHING, J. A. (ed.): *Handbook of Human Performance Technology*. San Francisco : Pfeiffer, 2006, p. 1089-1090.

¹⁷ See: PORTER, M. E.: *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors: With a New Introduction*. New York : The Free Press, 1998.

¹⁸ BUNGIE: *Halo: Combat Evolved*. [Digital Game]. Redmond : Microsoft Game Studios, 2001.

¹⁹ Remark by the author: For this reason and for simplifying comprehensibility in this contribution, we refer to *Cortana* as 'she' and 'her'.

²⁰ MAGO, Z.: *Cortana: (Un)finished Journey from NPC to Virtual Ambassador?* In *Acta Ludologica*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 137.



Figure 1: The evolution of Cortana's appearance in Halo games 2001-2021

Source: *Evolution of Cortana 2001-2021*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/5k02GPhyfWQ/maxresdefault.jpg>>.

Within the *Halo* world, Dr. Catherine Halsey created AI Cortana by ‘flash cloning’ her brain in 2549. She was integrated into Master Chief’s armour as an AI companion to aid the Spartans, the elite UNSC augmented soldiers, in the war against the Covenant. The conflict escalated after the discovery of a ring-shaped artificial world called *Halo* – a superweapon capable of destroying all life in the galaxy, but a sacred installation, according to the Covenant’s religious prophecy, which must be activated – and Cortana held data about the *Halos* including activation index.²¹ However, the following events were subsequently notably influenced by the significance of the relationship between Master Chief and Cortana, which gradually increased into a kind of platonic romance, overcoming even loyalty to the UNSC.²²

As NPC, Cortana is often omitted from the female digital-game protagonists’ rankings, but she is undoubtedly one of the most important female characters in the history of digital games. “*She is smart, witty, and one of the strongest female characters in games.*”²³ The practical usability of her assets and even herself later transcended digital games in several ways.

The exclusive publisher of *Halo* games, *Xbox Game Studios* (formerly *Microsoft Game Studios*), is owned by *Microsoft*, so games are available to play on both *Xbox* and PC platforms, and supporting cross-platform play since November 2020 by releasing *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*²⁴ on *Xbox Series X*, shortly after its releasing on PC. The number of PC gamers reached almost 1.75 billion in 2020, forecasting to 1.8 billion in 2022.²⁵ The number of monthly active users of *Microsoft Xbox Live* increased from 39 million in January 2016 to 100 million in December 2020.²⁶ In January 2022, *Xbox Game Pass* provided access to all *Halo* games (earlier titles as a part of *The Master Chief Collection*) and recorded 25 million subscribers

²¹ *Cortana*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://halo.fandom.com/wiki/Cortana>>.

²² DELICANA, Y.: *Is Master Chief in Love with Cortana (& Why)?* [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://fictionhorizon.com/how-many-people-are-playing-halo-infinite/>>.

²³ CRUCE, A.: *Top 10 Female Video Game Characters of All Time*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://whatifgaming.com/top-10-female-video-game-characters-of-all-time/>>.

²⁴ 343 INDUSTRIES: *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*. [Digital Game]. Redmond : Xbox Game Studios, 2014.

²⁵ CLEMENT, J.: *Number of PC Gaming Users Worldwide from 2008 to 2025*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/420621/number-of-pc-gamers/>>.

²⁶ CLEMENT, J.: *Number of Monthly Active Users (MAU) of Microsoft Xbox Live from Fiscal January 2016 to December 2020*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/531063/xbox-live-mau-number/>>.

worldwide.²⁷ By August 9, 2022 on *Steam*, *Halo Infinite*²⁸ and *Halo: The Master Chief Collection* (*Halo 5: Guardians*²⁹ has never been added to *Steam*) have approximately 3,637.8 active players based on the 30-day average,³⁰ with an all-time peak of 272,586 users playing *Halo Infinite* shortly after its release.³¹

3.2 A Virtual Assistant

In 2014, *Microsoft* introduced its own Bing-based multilanguage text- and voice-enabled virtual assistant named *Cortana*. The name was originally intended as a development codename, but after some leaks, *Halo* fans launched a petition to keep the name Cortana, directly and permanently linking this new *Microsoft* service with its gaming universe flagship. In addition, Cortana's personality could be fully customized according to her game version, creating linked positioning: "*Cortana was always there for Master Chief in the Halo games, and now she's always there for you*".³² *Microsoft Cortana* has gradually been integrated into the *Windows 10* system, joining the next-generation of virtual assistants like *Google Assistant*, *Apple Siri* and *Amazon Alexa* (Figure 2).³³

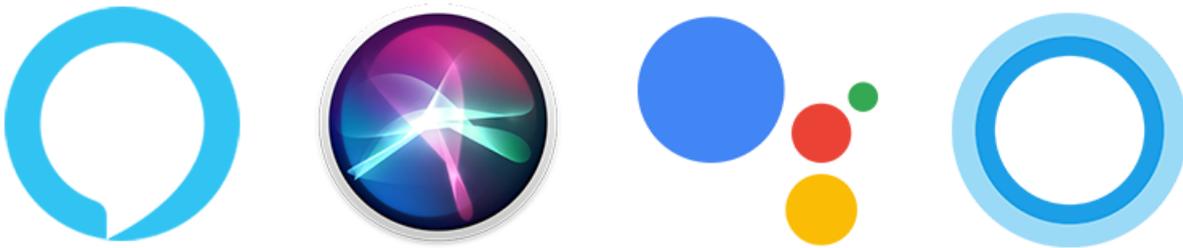


Figure 2: Virtual assistants' icons (in order): Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri, Google Assistant, Microsoft Cortana
Source: CHEEDALLA, V.: *Google vs. Siri vs. Alexa vs. Cortana: Which Reigns Supreme?* [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://medium.com/techtalkers/google-vs-siri-vs-alexa-vs-cortana-which-reigns-supreme-faf7143ccbca>>.

Like other virtual assistants, *Microsoft Cortana* is female (considering the voice), in accordance with the tendency (even a stereotype) to feminize representations of artificial intelligence,³⁴ just like current virtual influencers and brand ambassadors.³⁵ However, unlike others, the assistant can draw on the benefits of both the popularity of *Halo* games in which the Cortana character appeared, and her gaming attributes. Not only there already is a 3D full-body appearance

²⁷ CLEMENT, J.: *Number of Xbox Game Pass Subscribers Worldwide 2020-2022*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1276183/xbox-game-pass-subscriber-count-global/>>.

²⁸ 343 INDUSTRIES: *Halo Infinite*. [Digital Game]. Redmond : Xbox Game Studios, 2021.

²⁹ 343 INDUSTRIES: *Halo 5: Guardians*. [Digital Game]. Redmond : Microsoft Studios, 2015.

³⁰ *Halo*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://steamcharts.com/search/?q=halo>>.

³¹ *Halo Infinite*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://steamdb.info/app/1240440/graphs/>>.

³² WARREN, T.: *The Story of Cortana, Microsoft's Siri Killer*. [online]. [2022-05-20]. Available at: <<https://www.theverge.com/2014/4/2/5570866/cortana-windows-phone-8-1-digital-assistant>>.

³³ For more information, see: HOY, M. B.: Alexa, Siri, Cortana, and More: An Introduction to Voice Assistants. In *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 81-88.; KĚPUSKA, V., BOHOUTA, G.: Next-generation of Virtual Personal Assistants (Microsoft Cortana, Apple Siri, Amazon Alexa and Google Home). In CHAKRABARTI, S., SAHA, H. N. (eds.): *2018 IEEE 8th Annual Computing and Communication Workshop and Conference (CCWC 2018)*. Las Vegas : IEEE, 2018, p. 99-103.; MEHROTRA, R. et al.: Hey Cortana! Exploring the Use Cases of a Desktop Based Digital Assistant. In *CAIR'17: First International Workshop on Conversational Approaches to Information Retrieval at SIGIR 2017*. Tokyo : ACM, 2017, p. 1-5. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://rishabhmehrotra.com/CAIR17-cortana.pdf>>.

³⁴ Cf. COSTA, P., RIBAS, L.: AI Becomes Her: Discussing Gender and Artificial Intelligence. In *Technoetic Arts*, 2019, Vol. 17, No. 1-2, p. 171-193.

³⁵ 10 of the top 15 virtual influencers for 2022 by *Influencer Marketing Hub* are clearly identified as female. See: MOLENAAR, K.: *Discover The Top 15 Virtual Influencers for 2022 – Listed and Ranked!* [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://influencermarketinghub.com/virtual-influencers/>>.

prepared for possible later extension (for example, in the context of building a metaverse), but the US localized version of the application is also voiced by J. Taylor, the same voice that *Halo* games players all around the world have been familiar with as Cortana for more than 20 years.³⁶ In addition, the *Windows* application launch icon adopted a form of a circle, or rather a ring, referring to the fundamental identification feature of *Halo* games – the *Halo* installations shape. Considering the implementation of this characteristic symbol, the personality of the gaming character with the same voice actress to increase interest as well as the overall engagement in interacting with the operating system’s in-built ‘non-game’ virtual assistance service,³⁷ *Microsoft Cortana* actually meets the criteria to be able to be considered as gamification.³⁸

As a virtual assistant, *Cortana* has generally met with mixed reviews from both users and surveys. According to the survey by A. S. Tulshan and S. N. Dhage in 2018, concerning users’ evaluation of voice-based recognition, contextual understanding, and human-free interaction of then available virtual assistants, *Cortana* came third with 35%, after *Google Assistant* (59.80%) and *Siri* (41.64%).³⁹ In an evaluation of the correctness and naturalness of virtual assistants, *Google Assistant* showed a higher rate in both categories on average, but the statistical analysis revealed no significant differences.⁴⁰ Due to innovations, including AI-powered solutions in *Microsoft 365*, *Cortana* has been transformed. Since 2020, *Microsoft* ended support for her third-party skills, and *iOS* and *Android* apps,⁴¹ reducing an overall awareness of this assistant, as well as her further development, resulting in reports that *Microsoft* actually ‘killed’ *Cortana*.

Although the global market share of *Windows* decreased from 90.96% in January 2013 to 76.33% at the end of May 2022, it is the most widespread operating system for desktop PCs worldwide,⁴² with 1.4 billion users.⁴³

3.3 A TV Series Character

In 2022, the Cortana character also appeared in a live-action TV series adaptation of the high-successful gaming franchise, titled *Halo*,⁴⁴ at *Paramount+*. Even though Cortana was this time not just again voiced but also portrayed by J. Taylor, shortly after the first trailer release, the

³⁶ BARNES, A., JONES, D.: 20 Years Of Halo: Combat Evolved. In *Retro Gamer*, 2021, No. 227, p. 27.

³⁷ MAGO, Z.: Cortana: (Un)finished Journey from NPC to Virtual Ambassador? In *Acta Ludologica*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 138.

³⁸ Cf. DETERDING, S. et al.: From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining “Gamification”. In LUGMAYR, A. et al. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments, MindTrek ‘11*. Tampere : ACM, 2011, p. 9.; HUOTARI, K., HAMARI, J.: “Gamification”: From the Perspective of Service Marketing. In TAN, D. et al. (eds.): *CHI 2011 Workshop Gamification: Using Game Design Elements in Non-Game Contexts*. Vancouver : ACM, 2011, p. 3. [online]. [2022-05-22]. Available at: <http://gamification-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/CHI_2011_Gamification_Workshop.pdf>.

³⁹ TULSHAN, A. S., DHAGE, S. N.: Survey on Virtual Assistant: Google Assistant, Siri, Cortana, Alexa. In THAMPI, S. et al. (eds.): *Advances in Signal Processing and Intelligent Recognition Systems (SIRS 2018)*. Singapore : Springer, 2018, p. 199-200.

⁴⁰ LÓPEZ, G., QUESADA, L., GUERRERO, L. A.: Alexa vs. Siri vs. Cortana vs. Google Assistant: A Comparison of Speech-Based Natural User Interfaces. In NUNES, I. (ed.): *Advances in Human Factors and Systems Interaction (AHFE 2017)*. Cham : Springer, 2018, p. 248-249.

⁴¹ *Changes to Cortana in 2020 and 2021*. [online]. [2022-05-25]. Available at: <<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/changes-to-cortana-in-2020-and-2021-2d04871e-f576-7080-58b4-7c37131c3baf>>.

⁴² *Global Market Share Held by Operating Systems for Desktop PCs, from January 2013 to June 2022*. [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/218089/global-market-share-of-windows-7/>>.

⁴³ COPEMAN, A.: *Windows Now Has 1.4 billion Users, But How Many Are on Windows 11?* [online]. [2022-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.techadvisor.com/article/745681/windows-now-has-1-4-billion-users-but-how-many-are-on-windows-11.html>>.

⁴⁴ KILLEN, K., KANE, S. (Created by): *Halo*. [VOD]. New York : Paramount+, 2022.

game series' fan base raised waves of criticism concerning Cortana's new, more human-shaped design, and demanded her redesign; similar to what fans managed to achieve with the *Sonic the Hedgehog* film adaptation in 2020. K. Wolfkill, *343 Industries* executive producer and head of transmedia, considered those negative attitudes as ridiculous because, in games, they were changing Cortana's design for every game – it always depended on the possibilities of current technology and the subsequent adaptation of Cortana to the environment. In the live-action TV series, “[s]he has to feel like a real AI, a real hologram, and be a character that real people are acting against”⁴⁵.

While the show finally acquired a mostly mixed rating of 61-70% according to *Metacritic* and *Rotten Tomatoes*, the audience score of 48-52% was a result of conflicting reviews – significantly positive and negative,⁴⁶ similar to the rating of individual episodes. It indicates that a considerably large part of the audience has relatively strong ties to the original gaming series, so an overall reception is affected by their expectations tinged with desires based on gaming experience. Despite that, *Halo* set a new viewership record for the series premiere globally on *Paramount+* in its first 24 hours of release, which means that show had to have surpassed 4.9 million viewers.⁴⁷

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Metaverse is a current trend in society that all major media-related companies will have to face in some way in the near future. Since there is no concrete vision of what a metaverse could look like in real, the basis is represented by concepts from fiction, the common aspect of which is a 3D-generated virtual world. Elements of digital game design can play a crucial role in the process of creating a metaverse. For *Microsoft*, such game currency could be Cortana from the *Halo* franchise, which has been cross-medially utilized for a long time, and which already interconnects the fundamental pillars of the company – game entertainment, hardware, and operating system.

To be able to determine the marketing potential of *Cortana* for eventual further utilization by *Microsoft*, we implemented a method of an intrinsic explorative-evaluative case study with partial utilization of approaches of SWOT analysis and Porter's Five Forces model.

As a fictional female digital-game character, Cortana has attributed the role of a pop-culture heroine⁴⁸ whose biggest internal strengths – “personalit” and “design” – come just from her game origin. Cortana's game-based personality, which can be derived from her actions throughout the *Halo* games story (e.g., intelligent, loyal, self-sacrificial), reflects *Microsoft*'s corporate values (respect, integrity, and accountability) and, at the same time, represents the company's mission (especially innovation and AI).⁴⁹ Maintaining the personality, which has

⁴⁵ RUSSEL, B.: *Why Cortana Has Been Redesigned for the Halo TV Series, According to the Show's Creative Team*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.gamesradar.com/halo-tv-series-cortana-new-design-explained/>>.

⁴⁶ See: *Halo*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.metacritic.com/tv/halo>>; *Halo (2022-present)*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/halo>>.

⁴⁷ ANDREEVA, N.: *'Halo' Sets Premiere Viewership Record For Paramount+*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://deadline.com/2022/03/halo-premiere-viewership-record-paramount-plus-1234987267/>>.

⁴⁸ Cf. MALÍČEK, J.: Hľa, popkultúrny hrdina (Typológia popkultúrneho hrdinu). In MALÍČEK, J., MALÍČKOVÁ, M., ZLATOŠ, P. (eds.): *Zborník o populárnej kultúre : Popkultúrny hrdina vo virtuálnej realite*. Nitra : UKF, 2008, p. 13-26.

⁴⁹ See: *What we value*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/about/values>>.

already gained the players' sympathy, notably affected the *Microsoft Cortana* virtual assistant response-ability creation approach. *Cortana*'s design includes two important assets: a) the voice of J. Taylor, which is the voice of Cortana in all *Halo* franchise (with the exception of the short films *Halo Legends*⁵⁰), and the US localization of the virtual assistant; b) the full-body appearance also enables implementation in the 3D-environment, including virtual reality.

These *Cortana* elements are already created, been evolved, and were long-term tested and approved by the audience, i.e., instantly ready for any further usage, in line with gamification. It is a considerable advantage against other virtual assistants like *Alexa* or *Siri* regarding the immediate options for future development. At the same time, it guarantees competitiveness if *Microsoft* decides to create *Cortana* as a modern AI-based virtual influencer or brand ambassador, which is actually the next logical step considering up-to-date marketing communication approaches. In the world of virtual ambassadors, *Cortana*'s additional competitive advantage would be her rich character mythology, and long-term built awareness.

Halo is one of the most famous and successful game franchises in general.⁵¹ It has been building a fan base for over 20 years, so Cortana is not only familiar to generations of *Halo* players across two decades but to millions of PC and *Xbox* players as well since *Halo* is *Microsoft*'s flagship game. The overall awareness was boosted by the introduction of *Cortana* as a virtual assistant, gradually expanding the audience to regular *Windows* users. A recently released live-action TV series from *Paramount+* production finally significantly contributed to maintaining awareness, expanding the audience further by millions of viewers.

It is also worth mentioning user participation that will become an important characteristic aspect of the metaverse, following the example of the games *Roblox* and *The Sandbox*. In relation to the case study, fans actively contributed to *Microsoft*'s decision to keep the name *Cortana* for its virtual assistant or, although unsuccessfully, demanded the modification of Cortana's appearance in the TV series. Another example of participation, in accordance with participatory marketing,⁵² and also the evidence of the rooted mutual connection of *Microsoft* as a brand with *Cortana*, is the fan art depicting the holographic integration of *Cortana* in the latest *Microsoft* game console *Xbox Series X* (Figure 3).

⁵⁰ O'CONNOR, F., CHOU, J. (Directors): *Halo Legends*. [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Home Video, 2010.

⁵¹ For example, see: HORTON, R.: *17 Game Franchises with the Best Lore*. [online]. [2022-11-11]. Available at: <<https://www.thegamer.com/game-series-best-deep-lore-backstory-history-details/>>.

⁵² Cf. ZÁHORA, Z.: Hráči digitálních her jako součást marketingu nových médií. In BÁRTEK, T., BUČEK, D. (eds.): *Herní Studia. Sborník z CONference 2013*. Brno : Flow, 2014, p. 108-125.



Figure 3: The evolution of Cortana's appearance in Halo games 2001-2021

Source: *What Do You Think about This? Halo Cortana Hologram Edition Xbox Series X?* [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <https://www.reddit.com/r/xbox/comments/hfo862/what_do_you_think_about_this_halo_cortana/>.

In conclusion, with a familiar personality, 3D full-body appearance, and voice taken from the *Halo* games benefiting from gamification; with experience as a virtual assistant; with general global awareness across generations of gamers, PC users, and TV viewers, a strong fan base with propensities to participate, and a relatively tied perception of connection with the *Microsoft* brand; *Cortana* already has everything *Microsoft* needs to create its own fully integrated virtual brand ambassador like Lil Miquela or Bejby Blue, who could eventually introduce as well as provide guidance for *Microsoft*'s metaverse in the future. That makes *Cortana* an invaluable marketing asset compatible with the idea of the metaverse, even a competitive struggle advantage, which *Microsoft* should not underestimate.

Acknowledgement: The study was elaborated within a national research project supported by the Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA) No. 1/0283/20, titled 'Synergy of the Media Industry Segments in the Context of Critical Political Economy of Media'.

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THE USE OF EYE-TRACKING TECHNOLOGY IN SPORTS MARKETING

Daniel Opelík, Jan Šíma

Abstract:

One of the modern technologies used in neuromarketing is “eye-tracking” – technology that allows for tracking the movements of the human eye. The output of the measurements are heat maps, highlighting the places where the user has been looking for the longest time. These can be used, for example, to optimise the layout of elements on a web page. The technology itself is not ground-breaking today. What is new, however, are the possibilities that the development of this technology provides. Eye-tracking today is not limited to tracking eye movement on a screen. It can also be used in the field. For example, it is possible to test the distribution of attention between watching a football match and banner ads around the pitch. The aim of this paper is to present specific possibilities for using eye-tracking technology in the field of sports marketing, and to present current findings from a review of published studies. A systematic review was used to collect the widest possible range of empirical studies and to achieve the above objective. The results of the study show that the current trend and the technological capabilities of the equipment are leading to an increasing use of eye-tracking technology in field conditions, especially at the sports venues themselves.

Key words:

Advertising. Eye-Tracking. Marketing. Sponsorship. Sport. Technology.

1 Introduction

“Cristiano Ronaldo puts on his Nike football boots and Manchester United Adidas shirt and plays a Premier League game broadcast by Sky Sports.” One short sentence lists the most valuable sports brands from different walks of life. And their popularity is by no means accidental. It stems partly from the well-chosen marketing strategies of the respective companies.

Major sports events in particular tend to contain targeted advertising which moulds our purchasing decisions and helps companies build their brands. Such advertising has given rise to the term “sports marketing”.

1.1 Sports Marketing

With the ever-increasing popularity of active and passive sports, sports marketing plays an important role in the functioning of both professional sports clubs and sporting service providers. One of the earliest definitions of sports marketing came from Mulin, Hardy and Sutton¹, who define the term as encompassing all activities designed to accommodate the needs and wishes of sports enthusiasts through an exchange process. The three authors also highlight two lines along which sports marketing has evolved, namely: marketing sports products and services directly to consumers, and marketing consumer and industrial products or services through sporting events.

Sports marketing can also be defined in broader terms compared to the above definition. Nová et al. define sports marketing as using sport in any form as a vehicle for selling goods and services.² This particular marketing style does not therefore refer to the use of any single

¹ MULLIN, J. B., HARDY, S., SUTTON, W. A.: *Sport Marketing*. Champaign : Human Kinetics, 2007, p. 11.

² NOVÁ, J.: *Management, marketing a ekonomika sportu*. Brno : Masaryk University, Faculty of Sport Studies. 2016, p. 133.

strategy, but primarily to the use of sport and the sporting environment in promoting marketing activities. According to this author, sports marketing does not restrict itself to professional and elite sports, but also encompasses university sports, little leagues or recreational sports.³

Šíma et al. divide marketing concepts in sports into two groups: (1) comprehensive marketing concepts for sport organisations; and (2) specific marketing concepts.⁴ The first group includes all marketing activities pursued by sports organisations. The other concerns the sale of advertising and sponsorship in sports. Sponsors do not necessarily have to originate from the sports business. They may merely harness the popularity of sports to raise their profile. The goal is to ensure that people recollect the name of a company or its specific products through athletes or teams. In this setting, athletes or teams act as influencers with a direct impact on the target audience. It is this other area of sports marketing that is the focus of this paper.

1.2 Modern Technology in Sports Marketing

Gay defines modern technology as a set of scientific and technological discoveries and inventions, including new knowledge that are in some way relevant to society and are (or will be) put into practice.⁵

State-of-the-art 21st-century technology is already an integral part of our daily lives. This includes mobile phones, tablets, e-book readers and even virtual reality headsets. We live in times where we are, so to speak, besieged by digital devices. Many of us cannot imagine our lives without them. People born in the new millennium are the first generation to be entertained from early childhood by toys (digital devices), the inner workings of which they often understand better than their parents. The pace of technology development is accelerating. Owing to fast access to information, modern technology is also the ideal work instrument. As society and modern technology progress, for some professions these devices become indispensable.⁶

With the development of technology, its applicability has been beneficial in a large number of fields. It is therefore little wonder that the world of sport is also benefiting from technological breakthroughs. The introduction of technological upgrades has not only brought significant advantages, but in many cases has revolutionised the world of competitions. Barbu presents the most important technological breakthroughs in sport and lists not only their advantages but also their disadvantages.⁷ Those advantages and disadvantages are divided into several categories depending on whether they concern (1) athletes, (2) officials, (3) spectators, or (4) sports in general.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of technology in sport.

For athletes	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Better performance – marginal gains make the difference	Invades privacy
Better medical care results in fewer injuries or faster recovery from injury	Blurs lines between personal and professional time

³ NOVÁ, J.: *Management, marketing a ekonomika sportu*. Brno : Masaryk University, Faculty of Sport Studies. 2016, p. 134.

⁴ ŠÍMA, J. et al.: *Sportovní marketing: (vybrané kapitoly)*. Prague : VŠEM, 2013, p. 5.

⁵ GAY, C. M.: *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal*. Westmont : InterVarsity Press, 2018, p. 12.

⁶ FRANČOVÁ, K.: *Moderní technologie a jejich vliv na zrak*. [Bachelor Thesis]. Prague : ČVUT, 2020, p. 18.

⁷ OMOREGIE, O. P.: The Impact of Technology on Sport Performance. In *Proceedings of INCEDI 2016 Conference 29th-31st August*. 2016, p. 5.

Feedback from coaches is more focused, objective and helpful	Availability and cost – make sport and success exclusive to wealthy people and countries
Improves kit, is more comfortable, more efficient and safer	Tempts athletes and coaches into cheating or unfair practices
Part of a team, not isolated	Puts the sole focus on winning, not on athletic endeavour
For officials	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Supports a team-oriented approach so there is less pressure on individuals	Slows down the game
Information can be shared easily and quickly and stored over time	Not available at all levels of competition
Decisions and scoring are more reliable and accurate	No longer trust people’s decisions
There is increased confidence and trust in officials	Undermines respect for officials’ knowledge and expertise
	Undermines honesty, integrity and the spirit of fair play
For spectators	
Advantages	Disadvantages
More engaged in the sport	Detracts from actual play
More informed about rules, players etc.	Reduces the atmosphere at live events
Have a direct link to athletes	Reduces interest in grass roots events that aren’t supported by technology
	Increases spectator/broadcaster costs
	Enables trolls to attack individual athletes
For sport generally	
Increases participation	Detracts from intensity of physical activity
Promotes new and alternative opportunities	Reduces emotional well-being that comes from escaping digital pressures/routines
Encourages less-wealthy sports to promote themselves	Increases costs for sports and participants
Leads to more coverage and revenue	Sponsors are more interested in technology than sport or athletes
Adds glamour	
Improves safety	

Source: OMOREGIE, O. P.: The Impact of Technology on Sport Performance. In *Proceedings of INCEDI 2016 Conference 29th-31st August*. 2016.

Aspects of sports marketing can be found in all of these categories. The remark “promotes new and alternative opportunities” is a significant generalisation. Just as modern technology makes it possible for athletes to improve their performance, for referees to sharpen their decision-making, and for fans to be more involved in the competitive action, it also enables managers to make better decisions. Thanks to modern technology, sports managers can obtain the information they need, share it quickly and store it in the long run. This increases the reliability and accuracy of managers’ decisions.⁸

1.3 Eye Tracking

Modern technology allows managers in and out of sports to assess the impact of their decisions and monitor the extent to which their marketing objectives have been attained. In marketing, so-called “eye-tracking” technology is used for this very purpose.

⁸ OMOREGIE, O. P.: The Impact of Technology on Sport Performance. In *Proceedings of INCEDI 2016 Conference 29th-31st August*. 2016, p. 10.

Eye-tracking is technology used to track movements of the human eye. Sensors can track not only in which direction a certain person is looking, but also how far they have focused their vision. A thorough history of eye-tracking research is provided by Wade and Tatler.⁹ The authors report that the origins of eye-tracking technology can be traced back to the 19th century and to Bell, who first ascribed eye movement control to the brain, classified eye movements, and described the effect of eye movement on visual orientation. During the 20th century, other methods were developed to allow objective measurement of eye movements. However, these were rather costly and laborious and required the researcher to directly observe and catalogue the behaviour of individual participants. This severely limited the speed of research.¹⁰

Advances in science and technology have, however, gradually improved the technology, and today eye tracking is more accessible and user-friendly for both participants and researchers. Video-based eye trackers can determine the direction of gaze with a high degree of accuracy by measuring the position of the corneal reflection of an infra-red light relative to the pupil.¹¹

In marketing, eye tracking has appeared relatively recently, but it has proved a useful tools in several areas. For instance, it is used in online advertising, where it allows comparisons to be made as regards the placement of specific advertisements. However, its main application concerns evaluating the layout (placement of elements on the page), navigation and overall graphics. Eye tracking has made a significant contribution to website usability. *Heat maps* are a common output of eye-tracking testing, highlighting the places on the page that the user has been viewing the longest. A screenshot of the page is then overlaid with a semi-transparent gradient depending on the length and repetition of the view. This usually concerns aggregated data from multiple users. Evaluating the outcomes of eye tracking, therefore, may not seem like an overwhelming task, for example, it suffices to notice that a certain image attracts more attention than it should, or that navigation is neglected.¹²

Carter and Luke provide an overview of the use of eye-tracking technology in various scientific fields. They explain how the technology works and what types of data it generates, and provide guidance on which specific device to choose depending on the purpose.¹³ The conference paper enriches this study with the environment of sport, specifically sports marketing.

2 Methods

The aim of the paper is to present the current possibilities of using eye-tracking technology in sports marketing practice. The objective was achieved through a systematic literature search supplemented with interviews with practitioners who use this technology in their work.

According to Fink, a systematic literature search can be characterised as “*a systematic, explicit and repeatable process designed to identify, evaluate and synthesise the results produced by*

⁹ WADE, N., TATLER, B. W.: *The Moving Tablet of the Eye: The Origins of Modern Eye Movement Research*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 23.

¹⁰ CARTER, B. T., LUKE, S. G.: Best Practices in Eye Tracking Research. In *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 2020, Vol. 155, No. 1, p. 49.

¹¹ CLAY, V., KONIG, P., KONIG, S.: Eye Tracking in Virtual Reality. In *Journal of Eye Movement Research*, 2019, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 78.

¹² CARTER, B. T., LUKE, S. G.: Best Practices in Eye Tracking Research. In *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 2020, Vol. 155, No. 1, p. 49.

¹³ Ibidem.

researchers, academics and practitioners.”¹⁴ It is characterised by a clearly defined objective, a research question, a well-described search procedure, defined selection criteria and a well-described procedure for the qualitative evaluation of the texts analysed.¹⁵

The research question was phrased as follows: “*What are the current possibilities for using eye-tracking technology in sports marketing?*”

Google Scholar, a freely accessible web search engine that indexes full texts or metadata of scholarly literature across different publication formats and disciplines, was used to search for relevant literature. Three keywords were used to filter the texts – “eye-tracking”, “sport” and “marketing”, and a time filter “since 2018” was applied so that the search engine only generated literature that had been published in the last five years. A total of 5,890 links were found. Considering the focus of the work, 5,456 texts were subsequently discarded as not meeting the set criteria. After reading 434 texts in their entirety, a further 329 publications were eliminated, mostly those zeroing in on other than purely marketing objectives. A total of 105 studies were included in the systematic search.

Two experts from a marketing agency that offers its clients services using eye tracking-powered research were involved in the ensuing discussion. These two experts also had experience in sports. Together, we discussed the results of the search and assessed the quality of the studies retrieved. The technical possibilities of devices and their possible use in sports marketing practice were assessed. Selected examples of the use of eye-tracking technology are presented in the following chapter.

3 Results

This chapter presents the results of the conducted study, or rather the possibilities and ways in which eye tracking is used in sports marketing. At the beginning of this section, it should be noted that eye tracking underwent substantial evolution before it became what it is today. This was partly made possible by a boom in possible ways of using the system in a sports environment. Today, it is no longer necessary to work with eye tracking on the computer only; eye movement research may now also be deployed in real-life situations.¹⁶ There are, in principle, two basic set-ups which are used in marketing or sports marketing: Screen-Based Eye Tracking and Eye-Tracking Glasses.¹⁷ Both basic systems can be applied in sports marketing, the key factors being the specific situation and the need for research. Each of these two systems comes in a number of variants.¹⁸ In this chapter, therefore, instead of dividing them along the lines of the data acquisition methods employed, we will discuss ways of working with human eye movement that can be used in sports marketing.

¹⁴ FINK, A.: *Conducting Research Literature Reviews: From the Internet to Paper*. Los Angeles : Sage, 2014, p. 3.

¹⁵ JESSON, J., MATHESON, L., LACEY, F. M.: *Doing Your Literature Review: Traditional and Systematic Techniques*. Los Angeles : Sage, 2011, p. 12.

¹⁶ DISCOMBE, R. M., COTTERILL, S. T.: Eye Tracking in Sport: A Guide for New and Aspiring Researchers. In *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 2015, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 53.

¹⁷ ZAHMATI, M., AZIMZADE, M., SOTODE, M. S.: Using Eye Tracking Technology to Investigation the Impact of Celebrity Athlete Endorsement on the Attention to Advertising. In *Journal of Advanced Sport Technology*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 62.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 65.

3.1 Sports Events

The first means of use involves eye-tracking technology in the context of sports events, which are now resurfacing following the pandemic. When it comes to sports events, the system can be used directly in the field, i.e. outside laboratory conditions. In this case, various visuals and product offerings can be explored using eye tracking. In a sports environment, these include leaflets, scoreboards, banners on the sidelines, and even product placement.¹⁹ It almost goes without saying that at sporting events, it is essential that eye-tracking be used to establish not only whether the fans notice the marketing activities at all, but whether the latter are sufficiently visible, legible and memorable. Broad-spectrum communication during sports events can foster a direct association with the brand being promoted.

3.2 Sponsorship and Advertising

Today, sponsorship, currently also referred to as partnership, is an integral part of sports. Every sports club faces the need to find its own sponsors in order to provide for the needs of the activities it pursues. Consequently, fighting for sponsors or convincing them of the benefits of the proposed partnerships is part of the management activities of most sports organisations. It is the sponsors who then require information on the extent to which the prospective objectives of the partnership have been attained, how effective the partnership has been and whether it has paid off.²⁰ To this end, sponsors request data in the form of recall or recognition. The data can be provided to the sponsor, for example, by the sponsored sports organisation. As a result, the sponsoring organisation can then make sound and informed management decisions in an efficient and systematic manner and on the basis of relevant data. Precisely the use of such information obtained by eye tracking may help mould the most appropriate possible management decisions aimed at meeting the goals of the organisation.²¹ The importance of evaluating the return on investment for any sponsorship venture is an integral part of management work, and eye tracking allows for more sophisticated methods of such evaluation.²²

A number of authors refer to dual measurement, which tends to appear in the context of sponsorship and eye tracking. This involves fans on the one hand, i.e., the interest in finding out who the sponsorship (in its many different forms) has reached out to, and, on the other hand, the medium and specific message that has contributed the most to reaching out to potential customers, fans or other stakeholders. Where the latter is concerned, the involvement of eye tracking is rather promising.²³ Indeed, the technology makes it possible to identify the media the fans have been viewing, both at the sports event or game itself in real time or online. Eye tracking can be used to obtain data on the eye movement of fans within the stadium, as well as data on the eye movement of fans at home in an online/virtual environment. Of course, it should be noted that the eye-tracking methods used in those two scenarios are slightly different, but the results of both methods give an accurate picture of what was most attractive item to the fans in terms of media space.

¹⁹ RONFT, S.: Psychologische Prozesse der Werbewirkung im Sport-und Veranstaltungsbereich. In *Eye Tracking in der Sport-und Veranstaltungsbranche*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 17.

²⁰ JENSEN, J. A., WHITE, D. W.: Trends in Sport Sponsorship Evaluation and Measurement: Insights from the Industry. In *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 7.

²¹ OPELÍK, D., KAPRÁLKOVÁ, M.: Analýza rozhodovacích problémů ve sportu. In ŠTĚDRŮŇ, B. et al.: *Manažerské rozhodování a sport*. Prague : Karolinum, 2021, p. 25.

²² BORONCZYK, F., RUMPF, C., BREUER, C.: Determinants of Viewer Attention in Concurrent Event Sponsorship. In *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 13.

²³ RONFT, S.: Psychologische Prozesse der Werbewirkung im Sport-und Veranstaltungsbereich. In *Eye Tracking in der Sport-und Veranstaltungsbranche*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 21.

Another argument in favour of the use of eye tracking in sponsorship is the fact that almost 90% of perceptions are taken in and absorbed visually.²⁴ This very phenomenon is the subject of a separate study entitled “*Determinants of Viewer Attention in Concurrent Event Sponsorship*”, which analyse visual elements and their effectiveness in sponsorship independently. The results of the eye-tracking study suggest that marketers should pay more attention to colour and the overall printed (off-line) visual elements of media outputs in order to achieve greater differentiation from the surrounding environment or from surrounding graphic elements. In such a case, the viewer is in a better position to visually absorb and remember the sponsor’s contribution (graphics).²⁵ A number of other studies have been conducted in sports marketing using eye tracking to examine the influence of articulation on the effectiveness of sports sponsorship.²⁶ This only attests to the large space for application for eye tracking when it comes to sponsorship in sports marketing.

A specific part of sponsorship concerns representation of partnerships in the online environment, specifically in the context of television broadcasting. Due to the large amounts of money spent on sponsorship and subsequent promotion of sponsors through TV broadcasting, a number of studies have been conducted on the methods of effectively targeting the appropriate groups of potential customers. Yet very few studies have examined the visual attention of the viewer, or sports fan if you will. Studies show that the effectiveness and attention-grabbing power of sponsorship visuals and graphics are highly dependent on the placement of graphic elements.²⁷

Yet another intriguing issue in the context of TV broadcasting is the use of eye tracking in sports betting. In sports betting, investigations have been made into how many people pay attention to the disclaimer stating that what they are about to embark upon amounts to gambling. It has been confirmed that less than half of them focus on the message contained in the disclaimer, regardless of whether they are regular bettors or non-bettors.²⁸

3.3 Printed Media

Even though many activities have moved to the online environment in these turbulent and fast-changing times, companies and various organisations still find print advertising efficient and suitable. For this reason, these advertising formats should be further studied and given attention in research. Two important phenomena stand out when considering print advertising (posters, banners, etc.): the number of advertising messages or partners of a given organisation/event and the length of eye fixation per marketing appeal.²⁹ The possibility of conducting eye-tracking surveys implies that in print advertising, it is possible to work effectively with a number of marketing messages, including the effective placement thereof for subsequent appropriate long-term eye contact. This assertion is supported by the results of another study, which suggest that

²⁴ KÖHLER, R., BRUHN, M.: Neuroökonomie als Interdisziplinärer Ansatz für Wissenschaft und Praxis. In *Wie Marken Wirken*. München : Verlag Franz Vahlen, 2010, p. 19.

²⁵ BORONCZYK, F., RUMPF, C., BREUER, C.: Determinants of Viewer Attention in Concurrent Event Sponsorship. In *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 17.

²⁶ DOS SANTOS, M. A., SÁNCHEZ-FRANCO, M. J., GASCÓ, V. P.: The Effect of Articulated Sports Sponsorship on Recall and Visual Attention to the Brand. In *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 496.

²⁷ BREUER, C., RUMPF, C.: The Viewer’s Reception and Processing of Sponsorship Information in Sport Telecasts. In *Journal of Sport Management*, 2012, Vol. 26, No. 6, p. 528.

²⁸ LOLE, L. et al.: Are Sports Bettors Looking at Responsible Gambling Messages? An Eye-tracking Study on Wagering Advertisements. In *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 2019, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 503.

²⁹ DOS SANTOS, M. A., MORENO, F. C., CRESPO-HERVÁS, J.: Influence of Perceived and Effective Congruence on Recall and Purchase Intention in Sponsored Printed Sports Advertising: An Eye-Tracking Application. In *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 624.

sponsors positioned in the poster's area of action receive more attention.³⁰ Research like that may help an organisation benefit greatly from the correct positioning of their own message or logo.

3.4 Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrities are widely used in marketing to attract customers, as their familiar faces give a better image to selected organisations or help them get closer to the customer. Sports and sports celebrities are no exceptions. A variety of brands use sports celebrities to promote their products or services.³¹ In many cases, the celebrities are well known all over the world. A typical example from the world of sports is the use of famous professional football players. These players are also celebrities in the advertising world where eye-tracking tools can be used.

Several studies have been conducted in recent years to analyse the role of celebrities in marketing using eye-tracking technology. Eye-tracking technology will allow us to perceive the issue of appropriate use of a celebrity in a selected advertisement.³² In many cases, however, the adverts will tend to divert attention from the product, logo or message, thereby creating the risk that the potential customer will focus too much on the celebrities themselves. In many cases, a celebrity's face is one of the places where people most fix their vision.³³ In sports it is highly likely that potential customers will focus too much on their favourite athlete and ignore the ad altogether. Of course, the effect can also go in the opposite direction. This can also be demonstrated through the global/local dilemma regarding the use of a celebrity. The question is to what extent it is more profitable to use a local celebrity over a global one.³⁴ Even this aspect can be addressed with the help of eye tracking, which may help select the optimal solution for your own advertising activity in cooperation with a sports celebrity.

3.5 Online Platforms and Media

Online media are an indispensable part of marketing activities in the 21st century. They include websites, search engines, e-shops, social networks, web analytics, online advertising and social entertainment, including e-sports.

As published studies demonstrate, in sports the most frequent objects of eye-tracking research are web interfaces, i.e. search engines such as Google.com or others, and websites themselves. In the case of websites, the primary focus is on the user interface and user-friendliness.³⁵ An eye-tracking powered examination of websites primarily helps create a more user-friendly web

³⁰ DOS SANTOS, M. A., MORENO, F. C., FRANCO, M. S.: Congruence and Placement in Sponsorship: An Eye-tracking Application. In *Physiology & Behavior*, 2019, Vol. 200, No. 1, p. 162.

³¹ VORÁČEK, J., ČÁSLAVOVÁ, E.: Effects of Sports Personalities in Marketing Communication on the Purchasing Preferences of Generation Y. In *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kinanthropologica*, 2019, Vol. 55, No. 2, p. 110.

³² NISTOREANU, P., PELAU, C., LAZAR, L.: Product Versus Celebrity – An Eye-Tracking Experiment for the Determination of the Attention-catcher in Advertising. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 1082.

³³ ZAHMATI, M., AZIMZADE, M., SOTODE, M. S.: Using Eye Tracking Technology to Investigation the Impact of Celebrity Athlete Endorsement on the Attention to Advertising. In *Journal of Advanced Sport Technology*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 68.

³⁴ LI, Y., LIU, B., XIE, L.: Celebrity Endorsement in International Destination Marketing: Evidence from Eye-Tracking Techniques and Laboratory Experiments. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2022, Vol. 150, No. 1, p. 559.

³⁵ HURTIENNE, J. et al.: Design for Intuitive Use-Testing Image Schema Theory for User Interface Design. In *DS 42: Proceedings of ICED 2007, the 16th International Conference on Engineering Design, Paris, France, 28.-31.07. 2007*, 2007, p. 833.

interface and a logical, customer-friendly menu and structure.³⁶ In today's world of digitisation, this aspect is necessary for an organisation to sustain itself in the market in the face of competition. An appropriate web interface set-up on all available types of devices (computer, laptop, mobile phone, etc.) is an integral part of a suitable marketing strategy. A number of contemporary authors have stressed the necessity for modern digital agenda, especially with regard to e-shops.³⁷

In the context of online platforms and media, eye tracking can of course be used to examine not only websites, but also advertising on social networks or the layout and design of profiles, for example on Instagram or Facebook, where there is yet another opportunity to optimise them based on the eye movement of fans or customers.

4 Discussion

In the digital era, marketing agencies are required to develop new business models and marketing strategies if they want to remain competitive. Modern technology can help them significantly in this regard. As Barbu points out, not only ownership but also the ability to handle technology can help organisations gain a significant advantage in the marketplace.³⁸ The competitive advantage or the competitive edge then allows them to build brand loyalty while increasing the organisation's revenue. One example of this is the use of eye tracking in the field of sports products. This may help identify more suitable packaging or production processes, the optimal colour and combinations of colours, legibility and font size, and much more. The use of eye tracking can help sports companies to succeed in competitive, and in some cases even hyper-competitive markets, and not only in markets for the leisure time of individuals.

Sport is one of the most popular activities people have ever engaged in. Athletes are global role models and owing to improvements in technology, sports broadcasting is now a global affair. As Šíma notes, professional sport has never been such a global phenomenon as it is today. In a world almost entirely connected by digital infrastructure, national borders and the distances between clubs and their audiences are becoming less important. Football fans can watch all the competitive games of their favourite teams on TV or the internet, regardless of whether the games take place thousands of kilometres away, even on other continents.³⁹ But the viewers are not only watching the game itself. They also become consumers of the advertising content shown during the games, both on the pitch in the form of banners, and through virtual advertising incorporated into the broadcast itself. Eye-tracking technology can identify exactly how much attention viewers are paying to these ads.

In addition to watching sports games, fans share other information with their clubs on their websites or social media profiles⁴⁰. Here too, users pay different types of attention to different links and comments. Without having to "click", "like" or comment on them, eye tracking can determine the type of attention. The technology is therefore becoming an important tool that allows marketing agencies to better understand customer behaviour and target their marketing

³⁶ SCHRÖER, C.: Eye Tracking in der Sportsponsoring-Forschung. In *Eye Tracking in der Sport- und Veranstaltungsbranche*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 33.

³⁷ FUNCK, D.: Die Digitalisierung von Kundenbeziehungen im Mittelständischen Einzelhandel. In *Digitales Management und Marketing*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2021, p. 410.

³⁸ OMOREGIE, O. P.: The Impact of Technology on Sport Performance. In *Proceedings of INCEDI 2016 Conference 29th-31st August*, 2016, p. 10-13.

³⁹ ŠÍMA, J.: *Ekonomika evropských profesionálních fotbalových klubů a soutěží*. Prague : Ekopress, 2019, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

activities accordingly. Nowadays, the use of eye-tracking methods is more than essential. However, it is not the limit. Eye tracking can also be combined with other research methods. A number of authors recommend combining eye-tracking experiments or research with qualitative or quantitative methods that are commonly used in the scientific community, as well as with newer methods, typically other neuromarketing activities.⁴¹ These include, for instance, brain activity investigation using EEG.⁴² When trying to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the behaviour of consumers, fans or other research subjects, the most effective way is to combine eye tracking with another method of research.

Finally, it should be noted that there are many areas in sports where eye tracking could be, but currently is not actively used. For example, the sports retail segment, where eye-tracking methods can be used to evaluate the POP or POS of a marketing activity. Tourism is a very good example of the use of eye tracking.⁴³ This segment of the economy has seen an increase in the number of eye-tracking studies, applications and practical implementation in recent years.⁴⁴ Sport and sports marketing could take inspiration from such implementations.

5 Conclusion

The times we are currently going through and the digitised world present a number of major opportunities, but also threats for sports organisations. As a result, it is imperative that we start taking full advantage of the technology available and hopping on the imaginary wave of modern marketing trends to keep our businesses competitive. Appropriate technology – such as eye tracking – can be of great assistance in this venture.

The previous chapters have clearly shown that the potential for the use of eye-tracking technology in the sports industry is immense. We therefore need to start using this technology more, and always in response to the specific needs of individual organisations. We should not abandon our existing research methods, but rather combine them with the possibilities of eye tracking. Various combinations of such methods can generate interesting results for sports organisations, which can then be turned into a competitive advantage in the market environment.

The high potential, as shown by the investigation, lies in the use of eye-tracking in sport in many segments or situations. Primarily, the use of eye-tracking in sports retail stores, then in sports events and, above all, in sponsorship. The area of sponsorship, where sports organisations compete for sponsors, is a very important area where eye-tracking services can be used. This use within the sports segment can serve to increase the efficiency and ability of the sports industry to achieve greater profits and prosperity.

Acknowledgement: This work has been supported by the Cooperatio Program, research area Sport Sciences – Social.

⁴¹ SCHRÖER, C.: Eye Tracking in der Sportsponsoring-Forschung. In *Eye Tracking in der Sport-und Veranstaltungsbranche*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 34.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 35.

⁴³ NONG, S. Z., FONG, L. N.: *Eye Tracking in Tourism*. Berlin : Springer, 2021, p. 28.

⁴⁴ SCOTT, N. et al.: A Review of Eye-Tracking Research in Tourism. In *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2019, Vol. 22, No. 10, p. 1257.

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SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AS HARD NEWS IN MEDIA SPACE

Nataliya Panasenko

Abstract:

Studying the war phenomenon has centuries-old tradition. Any large war in the history of mankind did not remain traceless: collisions, disputes, and fights were carefully described and analysed by scholars of different times. Theoretical and practical studies of war are multidimensional and numerous. This phenomenon is widely reflected in media. Using diachronical approach the author tries to find out why this war started and why it still lasts; makes the analysis of media texts highlighting different aspects of war: political, military, economic, social, and ecological. As far as media texts on this topic contain unpleasant information (death, bombing, disaster, famine, refugees, etc.) these journalistic messages can be considered as pieces of hard news, which has such specific features, as conflict, timeliness, proximity, and surprise. The analysis of the illustration materials is based on the English texts published during war conflict in Syria. These publications reflect opposite points of view of journalists, thus present different sides of the conflict.

Key words:

Conflict. Confrontation. Emotional Journalism. Hard News. Media Text. Military Conflict Aspects. War.

1 Introduction

Conflict in Syria started in 2011 and in the course of time turned into the Civil War. Diachronical approach to the events, which have taken place since 2011 gives possibility to trace the causes of this conflict and stages of its development. Some attention is paid to the essence of war, approaches to its study as a socio-political phenomenon, basic components of war and its types.

There is enough information on this topic in media space. How objective is it? What techniques are used by the journalists to attract the attention of the readers to this topic? Hard news must always be fresh, otherwise it will not be sold out. We must bear in mind, that there are different ways of presenting information. When news appears people take it as media reflection. When time passes people incline to the opinion that this event was presented like media transformation. In the course of time, it becomes obvious that it was a trick, a media myth presented like a real fact.¹ To arrest the readers' attention to this topic some journalists find a fake news as a good means.

2 War and Conflicts: Definitions, Types, Causes

The topic of conflicts, wars, confrontation has always occupied an important place in the consciousness of people; war exposes the truth of worldly being and it can be said without exaggeration that *“the history of the humanity as a whole and the history of each individual civilization is the history of war”*.²

¹ PANASENKO, N., GROCHALOVÁ, P., GROCHALOVÁ, L.: ‘War’ as a Piece of Hard News in British and Slovak Media. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 6, p. 96.

² ВЕНЕДИКТОВА Л. Н.: *Концепт “война” в языковой картине мира (сопоставительное исследование на материале английского и русского языков): Автореферат дисс. ... канд. филол. наук.* Тюмень : Тюменский государственный университет, 2004, p. 9.

Before we proceed to the topic of our discussion, I find it reasonable to specify different understandings and interpretations of this term. It has direct and figurative meanings. In its primary meaning, war is an organized armed struggle between states or classes. Figuratively war is a condition of hostility between people or groups of people, like war between mafia clans or war of opinions.³

There are different approaches to the treatment of this socio-political phenomenon. Ukhova⁴ considers WAR as a concept and names its following aspects: 1) **social** (antagonistic form of social relationship of people) and **socio-political** (war as armed conflict); 2) **physical** (physical collision of objects); 3) **social and economic** (war as competition); 4) **linguistic** (quarrel, dispute); 5) **psychological** (intrapersonal fight, ideological fight). Some of them can be taken into account while making the analysis of the war in Syria.

Venediktova⁵ treats the WAR concept as a frame with a complex multi-layered structure. This structure is presented by notions directly associated with war: conflict, fight, opposition; military operations; war and its types; military equipment and arms; participants of war; interpersonal relations of the people who are involved in war; result of war and its consequence.

Ukhova claims that the phenomenon of war is designated by linguistic consciousness through a large number of lexemes, which form eight distinct groups: armed conflict, confrontation, conflict and opposition, quarrel, battle, action, competition, and campaign.⁶ Treating WAR as a concept the scholar enumerates its structural and actional parameters.⁷ The first group includes **people** (combatants, battlers, fighters, victims of war, etc.), **locatives** (war seat, home front, enemy's camp, etc.), and **war weapons** (war machine, etc.). The second group is connected with taken **actions** and in fact can be considered as stages of war or its possible scenario: war preparation, its beginning, military actions, and outcome of war.

Earlier we identified types of war that are marked with the help of numerous adjectives, which form specific classes: a) characterizing the war itself either **positively** (sacred, liberation war, just...) or **negatively** (unjust, senseless, predatory, dirty, colonial...); b) **characterizing the duration and level of war** (fruitless, global, long-lasting, local, overnight war, lost, protracted war...), c) **burden of war, its character and consequences** (cruel, brutal, savage, terrible, dreadful, fierce, severe, grim, rigorous, violent...); d) **logical (scientific) definitions of war** (nuclear, imperial, bacteriological, sea, partisan...)⁸ Venediktova⁹ mentions the following types of war: ideological, civil, world, cold, colonial, chemical, aerial, just, war of liberation, and nuclear. We see that this classification is based on different principles: instruments and weapons used in war, its assessment, location, and some others.

³ УХОВА Т. В.: Концепт *war* как фрагмент англоязычного лингвокультурного сознания. In *Вестник Сибирского государственного аэрокосмического университета им. академика М. Ф. Решетнева*, 2006, Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 167.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 167.

⁵ ВЕНЕДИКТОВА Л. Н.: *Концепт "война" в языковой картине мира (сопоставительное исследование на материале английского и русского языков): Автореферат дисс. ... канд. филол. наук.* Тюмень : Тюменский государственный университет, 2004, p. 9.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 168-169.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 169.

⁸ PANASENKO, N., GROCHALOVÁ, P., GROCHALOVÁ, L.: 'War' as a Piece of Hard News in British and Slovak Media. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 6, p. 91.

⁹ ВЕНЕДИКТОВА Л. Н.: *Концепт "война" в языковой картине мира (сопоставительное исследование на материале английского и русского языков): Автореферат дисс. ... канд. филол. наук.* Тюмень : Тюменский государственный университет, 2004, p. 10.

Explaining the reasons of war, Wright writes that war arises because of the changing relations of numerous variables – technological, psychic, social, and intellectual.¹⁰ The most detailed analysis of the causes and conditions of war and international conflict belongs, I guess, to Rummel¹¹ who presents the results of his thorough work in five volumes. Among numerous reasons of war conflicts he offers, I have chosen most important. He claims that the reasons for war conflicts are specific. In his opinion, International Conflict Behavior is **caused by**: opposing interests and capabilities (specific sociocultural differences and similarities between the parties), contact and salience (awareness), significant change in the balance of powers, individual perceptions and expectations...; is **aggravated** by sociocultural dissimilarity, cognitive imbalance, status difference, coercive state power; is **inhibited** by: sociocultural similarity, decentralized or weak, coercive state power; is **triggered** by: perception of opportunity, threat, or injustice, surprise. In addition to the general causes of Conflict Behavior, violence (including war) is caused by at least one party having an authoritarian or totalitarian regime and confidence in success. War is a particular type of intense violence; it generally causes, aggravates, and inhibits violence. In addition, war is uniquely aggravated by power parity and class conflict.

Analysis of the reasons of war and military conflicts inevitably leads us to media space, because all these reasons and motives must be verbalized and visualized.

3 Journalism of Rational and Emotional Type

Journalism of the emotional type or literary journalism is becoming more and more preferable amongst journalists since we live in an era, where it is evidently more challenging to keep media audiences captivated. Emotional journalism is very closely connected with emotions and emotional features and stylistic devices employed by journalists in the text can affect the reader's emotions¹². Though basic subdivision of journalism is analytical (rational) and emotional¹³, some scholars argue. Repková¹⁴ states that this kind of division may be misleading to the audience; hence, it is mixing fiction with fact. Primarily, she claims that emotions can as well be rational; they all depend on the individual's perception of a certain situation. Secondly, **universal genres** reject the use of fiction fragments, which can be often found in the **belletrist genres**. In her opinion, all news should contain human interest, conflict, and anecdotes to make them newsworthy¹⁵.

Journalism of **rational type** includes brief news item, press report (parliamentary, of court proceedings, etc.), articles purely informational in character, investigative reportage, editorial,

¹⁰ See: WRIGHT, Q.: *A Study of War*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1964.

¹¹ See: RUMMEL, R. J.: *Understanding Conflict and War*. Beverly Hills : Sage Publications, 1981.

¹² See: PANASENKO, N., PETROVIČOVÁ, I.: COVID-19 Reflected in Emotional Journalistic Texts. In *Studia Anglica Resoviensia*. Rzeszów : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2022 (In Print).

¹³ See: PANASENKO, N.: Functional-semantic Types of Speech in Journalistic Messages. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Critique in Media, Critique of Media: Conference Proceedings*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2016, p. 54.; PRAVDOVÁ, H.: Creation of Journalistic Messages I. In PETRANOVÁ, D., ČÁBYOVÁ, E. (eds.): *Media Relations II*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2011, p. 70.

¹⁴ REPKOVÁ, T.: *Making of a Professional Newspaper in an Emerging Democracy*. Paris : World Association of Newspapers, 2011, p. 131.

¹⁵ See: PANASENKO, N., PETROVIČOVÁ, I.: COVID-19 Reflected in Emotional Journalistic Texts. In *Studia Anglica Resoviensia*. Rzeszów : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2022 (In Print).

analysis, polemics, review and reflection, journalistic research.¹⁶ Publicistic journalism of rational type is characterized by explicit evaluation, mainly logical-notional and factual presentation, which makes it different from the publicistic journalism of emotional type.

3.1 Hard News as a Journalistic Message of Emotional Journalism

Hard news can be primarily characterized as an important event or issue that directly affects and may somehow cause a disruption in the everyday lives of people. In the *Encyclopædia Britannica* we find the following definition of hard news: “Traditionally, so-called hard news relates the circumstances of a recent event or incident considered to be of general local, regional, national, or international significance”.¹⁷ Describing subgenres of news Turow¹⁸ writes that the reporter of the real-life news event should divide news broadly into four subgenres: hard news, investigative reports, editorials, and soft news. Though his classification is very popular and we have used it several times,¹⁹ the principle of uniting so different journalistic genres is not clear. If emotional journalism is meant, then more types should be mentioned. If considered as different functional semantic types of speech,²⁰ then these messages are different: hard news and soft news are mainly based on description, investigative reports have analytical character and include reasoning, whereas editorials are a good example of the first person narrative; its text of emotional character belongs to so called contaminated types.²¹

Turow²² describes hard news as the first-hand reportage of a battle, the coverage of a congressional bill’s passage, and the details of a forest fire. He writes that news workers use four guidelines when they try to decide if it is or is not hard news. An event that fits only one of these guidelines will probably not be considered hard news. Additionally, the more of these guidelines are applied to an event, the more likely news workers are to cover it. These guidelines include four items: **timeliness**, **unusualness**, **conflict**, and **proximity**. He explains these items in the following way. **Timeliness** means that a hard news event must have happened recently – typically within the past day or so. A murder that happened yesterday might deserve coverage. A murder that happened last year would not, unless new information about it has been released or discovered. A nice illustration of it is the Skripals’ poisoning, which we analyzed in 2018.²³ Now it is totally forgotten and is seldom mentioned in media. To attract the reader’s attention hard news must be **unusual**. Then it will be better sold out. **Conflicts** – struggles between opposing forces – often lie at the center of hard news stories. Conflicts may be physical or

¹⁶ PRAVDOVÁ, H.: Creation of Journalistic Messages I. In PETRANOVÁ, D., ČÁBYOVÁ, E. (eds.): *Media Relations II*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2011, p. 70.

¹⁷ *Hard News*. [online]. [2022-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/hard-news>>.

¹⁸ See: TUROW, J.: *Media Today. An Introduction to Mass Communication*. London : Routledge, Taylor & Francis group, 2011.

¹⁹ See: PANASENKO, N., KRAJČOVIČ, P., STASHKO, H.: Hard News Revisited: A Case Study of Various Approaches to the Incident at the Primary School Reflected in the Media. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 112-128.; PANASENKO, N., GREGUŠ, E., ZABUZHANSKA, I.: Conflict, Confrontation, and War Reflected in Mass Media: Semantic Wars, their Victors and Victims. In *Lege Artis. Language Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 2018, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 132-163.

²⁰ See: PANASENKO, N.: Functional-semantic Types of Speech in Journalistic Messages. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Critique in Media, Critique of Media: Conference Proceedings*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2016, p. 52-67.

²¹ PANASENKO, N., GREGUŠ, E.: *Media Text in the Mirror of Linguistics*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer ČR, 2022, p. 79.

²² See: TUROW, J.: *Media Today. An Introduction to Mass Communication*. London : Routledge, Taylor & Francis group, 2011.

²³ See: PANASENKO, N., GREGUŠ, E., ZABUZHANSKA, I.: Conflict, Confrontation, and War Reflected in Mass Media: Semantic Wars, their Victors and Victims. In *Lege Artis. Language Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 2018, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 132-163.

verbal, causing semantic wars.²⁴ **The closeness of the incident**, as Turow names it, or **proximity**, which is a better term for it, can mean geographically close (physically near to the audience), or it can mean psychologically close.

As far as war is a typical hard news in mass media,²⁵ let us consider it on the case study of war in Syria and with the help of examples demonstrate how its causes and aspects are reflected in media space.

4 Syrian Civil War in the Space of Media Text

Before proceeding to the object of my research, I would like to tell a few words about war in media space and the attitude of journalists to it. As Erofeeva claims²⁶, modern market media gravitate towards the bright and intensive embodiment of the theory of “black mirrors”. Negative and denial as opposed to positive and creative, death as a life antonym, darkness and evil against the sun, light and good are the main hooks of the media’s so called “black square”, which allows them to attract and keep the attention of the audience. Thus, war, violence, and death are in demand and, alas, are favourite topics of mass media. Another important thing is the position of the journalists highlighting this topic. Shah²⁷ speaks about the dilemma of journalists and wartime coverage. With military conflicts, reporting raises an interesting dilemma for some; on the one hand, the military wish to present various aspects that would support a campaign, while on the other hand, a journalist is supposed to be critical and not necessarily fall in line.

To make my research objective I stick to the principle *audiatur et altera pars*, which in Latin means “listen to the other side”, or “let the other side be heard as well”. I have chosen media texts from known and reliable sources, which present different sides of the conflict: **BBC**, **Politico**, **CNN**, **Al-Monitor**, **Syrian Observer**, and two videos from **Fox News**, in which Tucker Carlson, an American television host, conservative political commentator and author expresses his opinion on the war in Syria. The media texts are of different character. Some **CNN** journalists prefer to present events as the time-line giving only facts since the very beginning of the war (March 2011) until now, upgrading the information.²⁸ A **BBC** journalist²⁹ has chosen the style of questions and answers covering such topics, as: *Why has the Syrian war lasted 11 years? How did the Syrian war start? How many people have died? Who’s involved? How has the country been affected? Who is in control of the country now? Will the war ever end?* Some materials from it will be presented below.

²⁴ See: PANASENKO, N., GREGUŠ, E., ZABUZHANSKA, I.: Conflict, Confrontation, and War Reflected in Mass Media: Semantic Wars, their Victors and Victims. In *Lege Artis. Language Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 2018, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 132-163.

²⁵ See: ЖЕЛТУХИНА М. Р., МАГОМАДОВА Т. Д.: Метафорические модели в рамках метафорического моделирования “ПОЛИТИКА” – “ВОЙНА” в английском, немецком и русском медиадискурсе XXI века. In *Когнитивные исследования языка*, 2015, Vol. 21, p. 218-224.

²⁶ ЕРОФЕЕВА И. В.: Концепт “Война” в современном медиатексте: репрезентация традиционных моделей. In *Учёные записки Забайкальского Государственного Университета. Серия: Филология, история, востоковедение*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 61, p. 73.

²⁷ SHAH, A.: *War, Propaganda and the Media*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/157/war-propaganda-and-the-media>>.

²⁸ *Syrian Civil War Fast Facts*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/27/world/meast/syria-civil-war-fast-facts/index.html>>.

²⁹ *Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

4.1 Causes

If we come back to Rummel's numerous reasons of war conflicts,³⁰ we will see that most of them can be applied to the situation in Syria. I mean such reasons, as opposing interests and capabilities aggravated by sociocultural dissimilarity and triggered by the threat or injustice. As far as there are two opponents in the war conflict, each side gives the explanation of it meeting the interests it represents. These are different opinions of the causes of war.

BBC: *"A peaceful uprising against the president of Syria 10 years ago turned into a full-scale civil war. The conflict has left half a million people dead, devastated cities and drawn in other countries. Even before the conflict began, many Syrians were complaining about high unemployment, corruption and a lack of political freedom under President Bashar al-Assad. When the Syrian government used deadly force to crush the dissent, protests demanding the president's resignation erupted nationwide"*.³¹

CNN: *"March 2011 – Violence flares in Daraa after a group of teens and children are arrested for writing political graffiti. Dozens of people are killed when security forces crack down on demonstrations.*

March 24, 2011 – *In response to continuing protests, the Syrian government announces several plans to appease citizens. State employees will receive an immediate salary increase. The government also plans to study lifting Syria's long standing emergency law and the licensing of new political parties"*.³²

President Assad has given a wide ranging interview to *The Syrian Observer*, a daily online news service covering Syrian political and civil society news. He indicates, that "[t]he restrictions the EU and the US imposed against Syria initially targeted ordinary Syrians so that they would blame the government for their woes and eventually rebel mentions" and says that "The events in the world in general, in the region and in Syria, after the Turkish invasion have brought Syria front and center once again."*³³

4.2 Political Aspect

Before we proceed to the analysis of the political aspect of military conflicts, let us consider what policy is. One of understandings of politics is this: politics is the theory and practice of the struggle for power, coming to power, its retention and use. Policy-practitioners are doing just that, while policy-theorists are developing the methodology of these actions. The work of mass media can be seen as a theoretical manifestation of political struggle.

The Syrian civil war is now mentioned in *Wikipedia*, where it is described like this: "(it) is an ongoing multi-sided civil war in Syria fought between the Syrian Arab Republic led by Syrian president Bashar al-Assad (supported by domestic and foreign allies) and various domestic and foreign forces that oppose both the Syrian government and each other, in varying combinations".³⁴ Political aspect of any war conflict means the support of this or that side by

³⁰ See: RUMMEL, R. J.: *Understanding Conflict and War*. Beverly Hills : Sage Publications, 1981.

³¹ *Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

³² *Syrian Civil War Fast Facts*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/27/world/meast/syria-civil-war-fast-facts/index.html>>.

³³ *President Assad Interviewed*. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://syrianobserver.com/interviews/54185/president-assad-majority-of-syrian-people-support-their-government.html>>.

³⁴ *Syrian Civil War*. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war>.

other states: “A number of foreign countries, such as Iran, Russia, Turkey, and the United States, have either directly involved themselves in the conflict or provided support to one or another faction. Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah support the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Armed Forces militarily, with Russia conducting airstrikes and other military operations since September 2015.”³⁵

Another important feature of the political aspect is that the events in Syria can be considered as part of the so called the Arab Spring, “a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s.”³⁶ It started in Tunisia and later involved Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain where the rulers were deposed and other countries (Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Sudan) where numerous street demonstrations took place.³⁷ In the middle of 2012 the wave of protests faded but resulted in Civil Wars (Syria and Libya), state crises (Egypt and Yemen), and the rise of Islamic State. Long-awaited hopes for the changes in the governmental policy and the end of corruption have not been justified. The Arab Spring led to the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, one example of which is the creation of the so-called Islamic state.

Political interference may bring positive results in solving war conflicts. As *Politico* writes, “Ankara and Moscow have agreed that Syrian Kurdish fighters will withdraw from territory near the Turkish border and plan to conduct joint patrols in northern Syria. Syrian Kurdish fighters will have 150 hours from noon on Wednesday to withdraw from areas near the border.”³⁸

Tucker Carlson criticizes the government of the USA for its involvement into the conflict: “Starting a new war overthrowing Assad’s regime in Syria would result in chaos, many thousands would die, in fact we might likely see the genocide of one of the last remaining Christian communities in the Middle East.”³⁹ (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: Tucker Carlson on Fox News

Source: Fox News Host: *We Tolerate Saudi Atrocities in Yemen, So Why Not Assad’s in Syria*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/2018-04-11/ty-article/fox-news-host-u-s-bombing-syria-could-lead-to-genocide-of-christian/0000017f-dc4f-d856-a37f-fdcf2c7f0000>>.

³⁵ *Syrian Civil War*. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war>.

³⁶ *Arab Spring*. [online]. [2022-10-03]. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Spring>.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ WEISE, Z.: *Turkey and Russia Agree on Kurdish Withdrawal, Joint Patrols in Syria*. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-russia-kurdish-ypg-syria-putin-erdogan/>>.

³⁹ Fox News Host: *We Tolerate Saudi Atrocities in Yemen, So Why Not Assad’s in Syria?* [online]. [2022-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/2018-04-11/ty-article/fox-news-host-u-s-bombing-syria-could-lead-to-genocide-of-christian/0000017f-dc4f-d856-a37f-fdcf2c7f0000>>.

In one of his interviews, he says that “the same advocates for war today were wrong about Syria a year ago. They were wrong about WMDs in Iraq. They were wrong about rebuilding Iraq. They were wrong about moderate rebels in Libya and Syria.”⁴⁰

If we have a look at the map of Syria now (see Figure 2), we will see that “the government has regained control of Syria’s biggest cities, but large parts of the country are still held by rebels, jihadists and the Kurdish-led SDF.”⁴¹

Who controls what in Syria



Figure 2: The map of Syria in March 2022

Source: *Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

This map vividly illustrates various war aspects evoking a set of questions:

- **political** – Who controls the territory?
- **military** – Who supports jihadists and Islamic state and supplies them with weapons?
- **economic** – Who gains profits from oil smuggling in Syria?
- **ecological** – How does this oil smuggling destroy the Euphrates basin?
- **social** – What is the fate of 2.8 million displaced people, including a million children who live on the territories not controlled by the government in dire conditions or in camps?

4.3 Military Aspect

In Kalmykova’s opinion⁴², war has four obligatory features, the first of which is “**armed**,” that is, war implies the use of any weapon. “**Struggle**” is the second feature of war: any war means a struggle, a confrontation with something or somebody. The third feature of war is “**adversaries**”, because most often the opponents are states, then nations, classes, and groups. The last, the fourth, feature of war is “**battle**”, that is, the armed clashes and military operations.

⁴⁰ BISHOP, T.: *Why Tucker Carlson’s Monologue about Syria is So Important?* [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://mises.org/power-market/why-tucker-carlsons-monologue-about-syria-so-important>>.

⁴¹ *Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

⁴² КАЛМЫКОВА Е. Л.: Понятийные признаки концепта “Война” и их вербализация в поговорках (на материале лексикографических источников). In *Вестник ЮУрГУ. Серия: Лингвистика*, 2011, Vol. 22, No. 239, p. 101.

These and other features form the military aspect of the Civil War in Syria. I would have added to this list “**supporters**” of this or that side, because military assistance and financial support can considerably influence the course and duration of war conflict. As it is marked by a **BBC** journalist, military, financial and political support for the government and opposition done by Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States was a key factor in the intensification and continuation of the fighting.⁴³

The results of using arms in the battles is the death of either of combatants or of civil people. As far as death inevitably accompanies war conflicts, it has many names; very often metaphorical ones.⁴⁴ **BBC**⁴⁵ refers to the UN report, which says that “*at least 350,209 civilians and combatants were killed between March 2011 and March 2021, but it has warned that it is an “undercount of the actual number”*”.

4.4 Economic Aspect

During war and after it state economy gains the status of wartime economy. It means that some enterprises are destroyed; working population is killed or left the country joining the columns of refugees.

How are things with Syria? As it is presented on the **BBC** web site, in the past two years the humanitarian crisis has been compounded by an unprecedented economic downturn, triggered by strict US sanctions, the Lebanese economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. The Syrian currency lost close to 80% of its value in 2021 and hyperinflation, which was close to 140% at the start of 2022, caused prices of basic goods to skyrocket. The poverty rate has reached an unprecedented 90%⁴⁶.

4.5 Social Aspect

War conflicts bring destruction of common way of life, ruined houses, illnesses, and famine. UN reports that on February 2022, 14.6 million people inside Syria were in need of some form of humanitarian assistance; about 5 million classified as being in extreme or catastrophic need. More than 12 million people are struggling to find enough food each day – a 51% increase since 2019 – and half a million children are chronically malnourished⁴⁷.

Facing famine and misfortunes, thousands of people leave Syria and move to Europe. As **Politico** writes, “*Hundreds of asylum seekers made their way to Turkey’s borders with Greece and Bulgaria on Friday after Turkish officials signalled they would no longer stop migrants from entering Europe*”.⁴⁸ Not everyone can leave their country; many people for some reasons stay and they also suffer: “*The UN estimates it will need \$3.4bn (£2.7bn) to help the 13.5 million people who will require some form of humanitarian assistance inside Syria in 2017. Almost 85% of Syrians live in poverty, with more than two-thirds of the population in either extreme or abject poverty. More than 12.8 million people in Syria require health assistance and*

⁴³ *Why is There a War in Syria?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

⁴⁴ See: UBERMAN, A.: Death in Metaphorical Language. In *Lege Artis. Language Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 2016, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 171-211.

⁴⁵ *Why Has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ BARIGAZZI, J.: *EU Diplomats Fear Escalation in Syria More Than Refugee Surge*. [online]. [2022-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-diplomats-fear-escalation-in-syria-more-than-new-refugee-surge/>>.

more than seven million are food insecure amid rising prices and food shortages. Households spend up to a quarter of their income just on water. Some 1.75 million children are out of school."⁴⁹

4.6 Ecological Aspect

Of course, war changes and even takes away lives of many people, brings pain⁵⁰ and destruction. But the ecological consequences of it can't be neglected. On the news website *Al-Monitor* there appeared information presented by Mohammed Hardan under the title "Oil Smuggling in Syria Worsens Pollution in Euphrates River."⁵¹ *Al-Monitor* is based in the USA; it provides reporting from and analysis about the Middle East, mainly from Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Ethiopia, Iran and other oriental countries. The author writes that "[t]he residents living near the Euphrates River in northeast Syria are suffering the consequences of water pollution mainly caused by oil spills resulting from smuggling operations between the areas held by the Kurdish forces and the Syrian government."⁵² This river is the main drinking water source in some provinces of Syria; its pollution led to the death of fish, birds and animals living in the area of the Euphrates and evoked the spread of "respiratory and digestive diseases, as well as cancers, in addition to premature births, miscarriages and birth defects in newborns".⁵³ People are recommended to boil water but it is not always possible.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on an analysis of various aspects of the military conflict in Syria, which turned into a Civil War, only preliminary conclusions can be drawn in this paper. Why are they preliminary? The events of the Syrian Civil War, alas, have not yet ended. The war continues, although from time to time its intensity decreases or intensifies. The most important element of this war is that it is not just civil in nature, but such a war where other states (USA, Turkey, Israel, Russia and others) constantly intervene in the clashes of various national forces, as well as various international non-national organizations, for example, various Islamic communities and groups, often contradicting each other. All these forces have their own goals and interests in this war and therefore there is no need to talk about any final results of this struggle. This incompleteness manifests itself absolutely in all aspects of the hostilities mentioned above.

All the disasters of war persist and the suffering of the population not only does not stop, but becomes a way of life. Media that have covered the events of this war over the years express the points of view of those states and those political, religious and ethnic groups that are participants (Kurds, for example) or in fact the beneficiaries of this war.

Therefore, as a rule, these media cover these events quite subjectively and biased, that is, in essence, they are one of the tools of the participants in this war. I would like to urge journalists

⁴⁹ *Why is There a War in Syria?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>>.

⁵⁰ See: UBERMAN, A.: The Contrasted Frames: PAIN in English and Polish. In UBERMAN, A., HREHOVČÍK, T. (eds): *Text – Sentence – Word. Studies in English Linguistics II*. Rzeszów : Wydawnictwo UR, 2016, p. 96-107.

⁵¹ HARDAN, M.: *Oil Smuggling in Syria Worsens Pollution in Euphrates River*. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/08/oil-smuggling-syria-worsens-pollution-euphrates-river#ixzz7cfluf8I>>.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem.

from serious media to objectively cover events in Syria, which could to some extent contribute to the end of this terrible tragedy.

*Notes: Citations from the media texts marked by *, have the following comment on the web site: This article was edited by The Syrian Observer. The Syrian Observer has not verified the content of this story. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this article lies entirely with the author.*

Acknowledgement: The study was elaborated within a national research project supported by the Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA) No. 1/0283/20, titled 'Synergy of the Media Industry Segments in the Context of Critical Political Economy of Media'.

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THE LOGIC OF JOURNALISTIC ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA PRACTICE

Hana Pravdová, Zora Hudíková

Abstract:

The authors address the issue of journalists' activism in contemporary media practice. They do not examine it from the aspect of evaluating journalistic ethics. They point out the existence of this phenomenon in several contexts, as well as in a historical context. They ask whether journalists' activism can be considered a pathological phenomenon, whether it is related to the social situation and media ownership, and whether journalists' activism is a consequence of a change in the approach to the production of journalistic genres. In the search for answers to the formulated questions, the authors also reflect on the historical context of the development of journalism, the development of society on a European scale and the views of theorists on the mission of journalists as well as on their work with facts. They raise the question of objectivity and subjectivity within the production of journalistic genres. Based on facts and arguments, they argue that journalists' activism in contemporary media practice is the result of a synergy of multiple social factors and editorial practices, and is governed by its own logic.

Key words:

Commercialization. Finance. Journalism. Journalistic Activism. Journalistic Genres. Ownership. Post-journalism.

Introduction

The work of journalists has been the object of criticism from the beginning of the history of journalism, both by experts and the general public. The greatest wave of criticism can be seen in the second half of the 19th century, when the reading public's resistance to the practices of the tabloid press was growing. According to J. Vojtek, the news media began to prefer entertaining or even vulgar topics, ethical principles were not observed, and the treatment of facts was one-sided. Journalism was subordinated to commercial principles.¹ However, the history of journalism shows that the commercial principle and the interests of media owners also influence to a large extent the choice of topics and their treatment in the so-called serious or opinion-forming media. In this context, J. Habermas points to the origins and development of the crisis of the public sphere in the 20th century. In his view, the space for democracy narrowed, the civil public became part of the commercial sphere. Civil society began to disintegrate. The civil public turned into a mass media audience as the discursive character of the civil society disappeared and its critical reflection on the exercise of political power diminished. In the past, the press was able to empower people to reflect on matters of faith. In the second half of the 20th century, however, recipients no longer deliberate because their opinions are shaped by the media. Opinion-forming media are not independent. Their content is made up of politicians and interest groups who hold economic and symbolic power. Commissioned content is created by professionals, i.e. press unions, journalists, PR specialists. They shape public opinion, offer topics that are in line with the media owners and the interest groups allied to them.²

This critical reflection on the state of journalism has also led to a turn in the perception of the media and the journalists working in it. The media began to lose its reputation as the

¹ VOJTEK, J.: *Dejiny amerického novinárstva v periodickej tlači*. In VOJTEK, J. (ed.): *Dejiny svetových novinárstiev*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2010, p. 202.

² See: HABERMAS, J.: *Strukturální přeměna veřejnosti*. Prague : Filosofia, 2000.

watchdogs of democracy in both the professional and lay public. In the media research discourse in the second half of the last century, the view began to emerge that the media were no longer the watchdogs of democracy. Figuratively speaking, the media began to be described as watchdogs of the interests of the corporate media and its owners.³ Along with the criticism of the media, a discussion about the roles of journalists, the ethics of journalistic work, and the criteria of journalistic work began to develop. The sociology of media began to deal with the broader socio-cultural influences on the work of journalists, media economists began to ask questions about the search for an optimal model of media financing or an efficient strategy in the media market, etc. The work of journalists has come to the attention of ethics and review boards, researchers and politicians. The latter felt ignored or over-criticised by the media. We are aware that it is not possible to look for the causes of this situation and analyse them in detail on the scale of a scientific study. Our ambition is to highlight the relevant circumstances and facts that affect the work of journalists. We start from the assumption that journalists are often wronged because it is not in their power to change the system of functioning of the media. Journalists have only the role of one of the wheels in this system. On the other hand, however, it is clear that journalists also bear a certain share of responsibility for the current state of journalism. In this study we argue for this position. We rely on the claims of relevant authors to reflect on the state of contemporary journalism. On the basis of the argumentation, the use of methods of logical analysis and the phenomenological approach, we formulate clear conclusions.

1 Post-journalism as a Way of Conceptualising the World

According to the generally accepted ideal, the traditional role of journalism has been to report on current events and to reveal the causes, connections, and relationships that are related to these events.⁴ At the same time, the authors of the concepts of the theory of journalism underline several significant attributes, characteristics and principles of professional journalistic work. They are the need to maintain objectivity, detachment and impartiality in reporting and analysing phenomena and events. The selection of topics suitable for publication should be guided by their social importance and relevance. Authors of published communications should also be guided by the journalist's code of ethics and follow higher principles, such as the search for truth or a sense of social good based on valid value and normative schemes. However, at the end of the last century and in the first two decades of the new century, a critical discourse is opening up in judging the standard of journalism. There are many reasons for critical views of the work of journalists. Among the most serious and frequent are changes in the way of reporting, the hybridisation of journalistic genres, the lack of distance between journalists and the events they cover, bias and partisanship, the questionable selection of topics suitable for publication, and the tabloidisation of news and journalism. The phenomenon of hybridization of journalistic genres can also be added to the package of criticism. The consequence may be the mixing of news genres with attitudinal journalistic genres and thus the beginning of a process of devaluation of news values. This

³ Note: These critical views have taken shape since the beginning of the 20th century. They can be reflected in the representatives of the Frankfurt School, later in the representatives of the Birmingham School, etc.

⁴ See: DEFLEUR, L. M., BALLOVÁ-ROKEACHOVÁ, S.: *Teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Karolinum, 1996.; JACZ, E. a kol.: *Malá encyklopédia žurnalistiky*. Bratislava : OBZOR, 1982; JIRÁK, J., KÖPPOVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Prague : Portál, 2009.; MCCHESENEY, R. W.: *Problém médií. Jak uvažovat o dnešních médiích*. Český Těšín : Grimmus, 2009; TRAMPOTA, T.: *Zpravodajství*. Prague : Portál, 2006.; TUŠER, A.: *O novinářství, Publicistika, Štúdie, Rozhovory*. Bratislava : EUROKÓDEX, 2012.; VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Problematika štruktúry a kompozície v novinárstve*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012.

undermines genre purity and distinctiveness, as well as changing the genre awareness of the recipients. B. Osvaldová identifies the culprit as the trend of simplifying the perception of text and image. On the one hand, however, she does not consider hybridisation to be a serious fault, as it enables the recipient to understand the content better. On the other hand, however, she points to oversimplification, which leads to the trivialisation of the offer and the impossibility of explaining or uncovering hidden contexts.⁵

A separate chapter is the activity of journalists in politics, business or various interest groups. J. Jiráček and B. Köpplová point to the self-confidence of activist journalists and their consciousness of their own symbolic power. They are aware of their media influence on the audience, their ability to influence the decision-making of voters or consumers. The goal of activist journalists may be to influence decision-making that is close to the media house owner, the publisher, the advertiser, or some related interest groups. The aim may be to put pressure on the political scene to evolve in a direction that suits the journalists themselves.⁶

The crisis of journalism is usually associated in the discourse of media research with the changed conditions for journalists' work, with the oligarchization of the media environment, with the competitive struggle of media for recipients, but also with the general mental attitude of people in society. According to several authors, the mental attitude of people in society is shaped by the ideals of consumerism, the desire for different kinds of entertainment pleasures, information overload and the desire for a comfortable life offered by media models. Such a society, together with the media, produces superficial, indifferent, selfish individuals, incapable of critical thinking, unable to sort out the essential from the irrelevant, the true from the false, the moral from the immoral, etc. They are concerned only with their own needs and life goals, they are interested in career advancement or the desire to keep a job, they are afraid of the threat of losing consumerist conveniences, of being ostracized for disagreeing with the majority view, they are terrified by the threat of real poverty, and therefore they focus only on their own benefit.⁷

The concept of post-journalism according to D. Altheide and P. R. Snow best describes the transformation of the media creators' approach to working with information. The new media logic reflects social changes, which is reflected in the particular form and content of journalistic communications. Journalists focus on form, content is secondary as it follows form. Journalistic production is subject to logic, for which the appeal of the article or piece is paramount, not its true reflection of reality. Journalistic production has lost its sense of critical approach, of personal distance, of factual and factual representation of events.⁸ Reports on various celebrities, scandals, curiosities, information about the intimacies of famous people are preferred. B. McNair points to the trend of infotainment, which has turned public service

⁵ OSVALDOVÁ, B. (ed.): *Žurnalistika v informační společnosti. Digitalizace a informatizace žurnalistiky*. Prague : Karolinum, 2009, p. 110.

⁶ JIRÁK, J., KÖPPOVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Prague : Portál, 2009, p. 349.

⁷ See: JAMESON, F.: *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham : Duke University Press, 1991.; POSTMAN, N.: *Ubavit se k smrti. Veřejná komunikace ve věku zábavy*. Prague : Mladá fronta, 1999.; LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Říše pojímavosti. Media a její účel v moderních společnostech*. Prague : Prostor, 2010.; LASCH, CH.: *Kultura narcismu. Americký život ve věku snižujících se očekávání*. Prague : Triton, 2016.; KORTEN, D.: *Keď korporácie vládnu svetu*, Košice : VIENALA, 2001.; BAUMAN, Z.: *Tekutá modernita*. Prague : Mladá fronta, 2002.; PRAVDOVÁ, H.: *Determinanty kreovania mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2009.; RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Mediálna zábava v 21. storočí. Sociálno-kultúrne aspekty a trendy*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2016.

⁸ See: ALTHEIDE, L. D., SNOW, P. R.: *Media World in the Postjournalism Era*. Hawthorne : Aldine de Gruyter, 1991, p. 39-45.

news into a commercial service. Indeed, news has always been a loss-making industry and it was only in the 1980s that it began to turn into a profitable area. Profit began to be made by making information entertaining.⁹ According to J. Bartošek and A. Tušer, infotainment simplifies, complements, modifies, dramatizes or completely changes authentic events and statements about them.¹⁰ There is a preference for reporting on the misdeeds of politicians or celebrities who are not favourites of editors. This category of people becomes the condemned, i.e. the main objects of interest of the media lynch mob.

However, journalists working in the newsroom systems of media outlets do not have it easy. They work in a competitive environment and this force them to learn specific practices. R. W. McChesney points to this fact of deteriorating working conditions for journalists. In addition, he analyses the reasons for the degradation of journalistic coverage of politics. He sees the cause in the corruption of journalists, the destruction of investigative journalism.¹¹ According to him, the main cause of the degradation of journalism is the commercialisation of the media environment, competition and the desire of media houses to maximise profit and minimise production costs. Journalists are forced to work at a fast pace and chase new information because it is a commercial commodity. This situation creates superficial reporting, recycling of information, and prioritization of content that is in the interest of advertisers and select interest groups. According to R. W. McChesney, such modes of journalism are much cheaper and more convenient. They do not require heavy journalistic processing and guarantee that journalism does not come into conflict with political and economic power.¹² Post-journalism in relation to the way of reflection on the social environment is therefore seen as a particular way of conceptualising the world. It is based on the dynamics of the vast amount of information flowing, on simplicity to the point of triviality, on genre hybridization, on the preference for subjective assessment of events, as well as on the legitimization of rumors and fake news in journalistic production.

2 Sources of the Logic of Journalistic Activism

The post-journalistic way of producing news and journalistic content reflects the above-mentioned characteristics of the media and social environment. They are not a flattering reflection of the image of contemporary journalism. That is why the eminent theorist and journalist A. Tušer appeals to journalists to observe elementary principles in the journalistic treatment of topics and events. The principles of journalistic work have clear attributes. According to him, news genres should have attributes such as timeliness, professionalism, truthfulness, promptness, brevity, clarity.¹³ The question remains, however, whether his personal professional principles and recommendations to journalists on how to write reflect practices that are ingrained in contemporary media practice. Clearly, the principle of timeliness and responsiveness cannot be questioned. The reason is simple. The value of information is measured by its timeliness and the flexibility of the journalist to discover and convey it. In fact, the competitive environment among the media will not allow newsrooms to publish out-of-date news. Similarly, the attributes of brevity and clarity cannot be questioned because they are symptomatic of the current post-journalistic era. The simplicity of

⁹ MCNAIR, B.: *Sociologie žurnalistiky*. Prague : Portál, 2004, p. 123.

¹⁰ BARTOŠEK, J., TUŠER, A.: Teoreticko-metodologické východiská mediálnej tvorby. In TUŠER, A. (ed.): *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Bratislava : EUROKÓDEX, 2010, p. 27.

¹¹ MCCHESENEY, R. W.: *Problém médií. Jak uvažovat o dnešních médiích*. Český Těšín : Grimmus, 2009, p. 67.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 26-36.

¹³ TUŠER, A.: *Ako sa robia noviny*. Bratislava : SOFA, 1999, p. 128.

information guarantees its comprehensibility. These qualities, as well as the qualities of journalistic expression, will be appreciated by every recipient. This is despite the growing voices of critics who claim that the simplicity of information leads to its trivialisation. The problem, however, is the veracity of the information. The veracity of information is usually judged by comparing it with two independent sources. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that rumours and false information do arise in the media. Misleading sentences may sound like this, for example: “We have learned from an unnamed source that...”, “There is allegedly a relationship between...”, “He is allegedly responsible for...”, “It is alleged that there has been...” The production of the reports is also based on the subjective assessments of the authors in what are called evaluation reports. The author of the news text reacts to the interpreted facts and formulates his opinion about them.¹⁴

The situation is different in the case of attitudinal journalistic genres. It should be stressed that journalistic genres have emerged and evolved on the basis of social order. This fact is very precisely explained by the linguist J. Mistrik. He notes that at a time of great social change at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century, journalistic genres played a very important role in explaining and commenting on events.¹⁵ Journalists presented their positions on political and social issues in a legitimate way. Journalistic genres were created and formed to explain, analyse and comment. Journalists’ personal positions were in demand by the reading public because they were critical of the governmental power at the time of the revolutionary movements that resulted in the constitution of parliamentary democracies. J. Vojtek points out that historically, fiction journalistic genres were the first to form, using metaphors, analogies, similes, etc. The reason was purely pragmatic. In this way, the editors avoided censorship by the state authorities. In the course of the 19th century, analytical journalistic genres and criteria for the creation of news genres were born and established.¹⁶ In this context, we emphasize that journalistic genres in which journalists analyze events reflect a social order. They are written by authors who collect information about an event, select it according to the degree of relevance, and try to find out the causes, consequences and connections. They know more about events than readers, listeners or viewers can possibly know. This entitles them to make judgements based on reasoning, methods of logical analysis on the basis of which they formulate their observations, reflections or conclusions. We underline that this is a legitimate process within journalistic work. Every author of a journalistic text has the right to express his opinion and attitude on the basis of the analysis of an event. The journalist’s right to express his or her opinion is also a convenience in a pluralistic, democratic society, which guarantees freedom of expression and the media.

On the other hand, questions are raised about either bias or lack of fairness in the handling of facts in the work of journalists. Indeed, positional journalistic genres require different practices than news genres. A prerequisite for mastering the methodology of creating positional journalistic genres is the ability to think logically, to be able to argue correctly and to convince the reader, listener and viewer of the correctness of the assessment of an event on the basis of both truthful and logical reasoning. In this context, several questions arise. To what extent are the conclusions of journalists true on the basis of logical reasoning, the facts presented and the chosen argumentation and subsequent conclusions? To what extent is information that does not fit into the journalist’s argumentation scheme withheld? What space is offered to both sides of the conflict and in what order? Of course, it would be wrong to assume that these are the issues that shape and characterize the post-journalistic era. In our

¹⁴ TUŠER, A.: *Ako sa robia noviny*. Bratislava : SOFA, 1999, p. 96.

¹⁵ See: MISTRÍK, J.: *Štylistika*. Bratislava : Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 1989, p. 466-477.

¹⁶ See: VOJTEK, J.: *Repetitóriium anglického a amerického novinárstva*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2011.

view, they are only one of a number of its significant features. Moreover, the problem of objective argumentation has confronted journalistic production since its beginnings. The argumentation of journalists has always been influenced by their subjective attitudes, political or religious beliefs, but also by the social environment, including the editorial systems in which they operated. This was the case in the era of the partisan press, as well as in the current era of multi-platform media, when, for example, the editorial boards of online media espouse the values of liberal, left-wing or conservative political parties.¹⁷ It is questionable to talk about journalistic activism in this case. We are of the opinion that journalistic activism can only be spoken of in certain cases. When journalists misappropriate the basic principles of journalistic work, when their emotions win out over the facts, when they manipulate information so as to deliberately influence events in society, or when they pursue their own self-interested goals, when they ignore the ethics of journalistic work. Other forces that inspire or compel journalists to activism must also be considered. The reasons may be different. On the one hand, it is the conviction of one's own truth with conscious disregard for inconvenient facts and arguments. On the other hand, it is the reconciliation of journalists with the editorial line. It is the pragmatic attitude of journalists who want to keep their jobs and therefore conform to the majority editorial view. In this case, according to J. Jiráček and B. Köpplová, self-censorship necessarily occurs. They describe it as a social-psychological mechanism based on socialisation, conformity to the environment and fear of possible sanctions.¹⁸

A particular problem in the current media practice in Slovakia with an impact on journalistic production is the freedom of media creators and media. The issue of freedom is related to the commercial nature of the operation of media systems. In this context, A. Remišová points to the economic interests of media and their owners. She argues that the consequences of economic interference limit media freedom.¹⁹ However, this fact is not a novelty. N. Chomsky and E. S. Herman, through their analysis, reveal the principles of the functioning of the contemporary media industry.²⁰ They define media filters, where they include media ownership, advertising and advertising, choice of sources, negative feedback and the way the dominant ideology is promoted. The ownership filter allows individuals or corporations to control the media agenda. The advertising filter is the most effective censor. The financial dependence of the media on advertisers obliges the media to great conformity to sources of financial revenue. Economic dependence also applies to public service media. The latter are dependent on the decisions of political government structures. These factors are indicative of the limited possibilities for journalists to reflect truthfully on social and political events and to apply objective investigative journalism. In other words, investigative journalism has become captive to the financial interests of media owners and managers. Journalism in general has found itself in the grip of the media's struggle for financial gains and in the grip of journalists' fear for their jobs. In the light of the above arguments, it is necessary, in our view, to reflect on the sources of the logic of contemporary journalistic activism. On the one hand, we characterize them as a form of journalistic failure. On the other hand, however, we draw attention to the objective causes of this state of affairs.

¹⁷ Note: For example, the controversy between the commentators of the conservative multimedia platform *Standard* and the commentators of the liberal-progressive multimedia platform *Denník N* operating in Slovakia. We underline that we consider such an exchange of views to be a privilege of pluralistic democratic societies.

¹⁸ JIRÁČEK, J., KÖPPLOVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Prague : Portál, 2009, p. 367.

¹⁹ REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2010, p. 203.

²⁰ See: CHOMSKY, N., HERMAN, E.: *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York : Pantheon, 2002.

Conclusion

Post-journalism is a term that expresses a change of discourse within journalistic production. According to this term, form comes to the fore at the expense of content. Journalistic production is subordinated to a logic for which the appeal of the article is paramount, rather than a true reflection of reality. Journalists have lost their sense of critical approach, but also of personal detachment, of factual and factual representation of events. The most serious and common shortcomings of journalism include changes in the way news is reported, hybridisation of journalistic genres, lack of distance from the events covered, bias and partisanship. The selection of topics for publication according to their relevance is also debatable; the tabloidisation of news and journalism as well as the hybridisation of journalistic genres are the norm. The activism of journalists in the field of politics, business or in favour of various interest groups is also evident. Journalists are aware of their symbolic power, their media influence on the audience, their ability to influence the decisions of voters and consumers. Journalists – activists create so that their production is conventional to owners, publishers, advertisers, or other interest groups. In addition, the crisis of journalism and the post-journalism era are usually associated with the changed conditions for journalists to work, with the oligarchization of the media environment, with the media's competitive struggle for recipients, but also with the general mental attitude of people living in an experiential society. In our opinion, however, one can speak of journalists' activism only in certain cases. For example, when journalists misappropriate the basic principles of journalistic work, when their emotions win over the facts, when they manipulate information so as to consciously influence events in society, or when they pursue their own self-interested goals, when they ignore the ethics of journalistic work. In this context, however, it is also necessary to uncover other forces and circumstances that inspire or compel journalists to activism. On the one hand, it is the conviction of one's own truth with conscious disregard for inconvenient facts and arguments. On the other hand, it is the reconciliation of journalists to an editorial line of opinion to which they submit because they want to keep their jobs. However, it must be stressed that journalists have a legitimate right to express their opinions, to convince the recipients of the correctness of their judgments and conclusions. This is, in fact, the fundamental mission of journalists. This mission must remain sacrosanct; it is a requisite of freedom of expression and liberal parliamentary democracies. However, the above premises of the study are indicative of the failure of journalists because they distort the mission of journalism. The aforementioned premises also testify to the changed social and cultural environment, the mental set-up of the society, the pragmatism of journalists and their resignation to the ideal of objective journalism.

Acknowledgement: This paper was elaborated within the research project supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV) No. APVV-21-0115, titled 'Hypermodern Media Culture – Film and Television Production as Mirror of Sociocultural Phenomena of the 21st Century'.

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FRAMING OF EVENTS AND ELEMENTS OF TABLOIDIZATION IN THE POLITICAL REPORT OF SLOVAK ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract:

In the text, we start from the assumption that the current Internet environment forces the media to work more and more with elements of tabloidization in order to attract the audience. At the expense of quality journalism, the reader gets market-oriented journalism, which in a certain sense ceases to be the watchdog of democracy and its goal only becomes profit. The aim of the presented text is to examine the presence of elements of tabloidization and the way events are framed in journalistic political reporting published in 2021 on selected news portals. The goal is to determine the presence of the investigated phenomena in serious and tabloid media and subsequently find similarities and differences in their reporting. We decided to examine the news on the political content on the basis of foreign research and theories that approximate the framing of news. We evaluate the data obtained through quantitative content analysis and then interpret it with regard to the comparison of the analyzed portals. The paper presents partial results of the defended diploma thesis.

Key words:

Tabloidization. News Framing. Online Media. News. Journalism. Tabloid and Quality Press. Content Analysis.

1 Introduction: Online Journalism and Online News

The main difference between traditional and online journalism lies in where journalistic works are created and where journalistic units are published. While in traditional journalism, the entire printout of a newspaper or magazine with individual journalistic contributions forms a functional entity. Online journalism exists in the Internet environment and in electronic form. Radošinská and Višňovský understand the term online journalism as the publication of journalistic units in their various forms on the Internet. The main difference between traditional and online newspapers lies in the electronic form of publishing and making products available to the public.¹ An important element defining online journalism is its interactivity, global reach and the possibility of immediate information updates. Švecová includes among the basic characteristics of online journalism (according to Bednář and Ondrášik): the real time element, interactivity, immediate comparison with the competition, linking of information through hypertext, blending of forms, attractive, dynamic and clear design, accuracy and immediate correction of errors, and specialized pages and projects.²

When we talk about online news, we find some differences from news in traditional print media. However, the essence of news as such remains unchanged - its goal is to inform the public about current events, while the principles of objective, balanced, up-to-date and impartial information to the audience should be preserved. Existing differences are the result of journalists adapting to the demands of online news readers and to the medium itself - the Internet, e.g., a more significant degree of hybridization of genres, the multimedia nature of journalistic speech, the way journalistic texts are constructed, etc.

¹ RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Aktuálne trendy v mediálnej kultúre*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 99.

² ŠVECOVÁ, M.: *Webová žurnalistika: žurnalistické žánre*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 57-63.

2 Tabloidization in Serious Reporting

The typology of the periodical press most often defines the division of the press based on periodicity, content focus and territorial impact. In the Anglo-Saxon environment, the press is classified into individual categories based on the nature, selection and form of information processing. Anglo-Saxon specialist literature then classifies newspapers into tabloids and serious ones, the so-called broadsheet and tabloids.³ In connection with the aforementioned division of the press (but also the online form of printed media) into tabloid and serious media, we encounter the phenomenon of the so-called tabloidization.

The serious press is characterized by the appearance of more information-saturated *hard news*, the predominance of news texts over journalistic, more stylistically demanding texts, a deeper analysis of the communicated information and a more unified or compact visual page of the periodical.⁴ The tabloid press is characterized by the predominance of the so-called *soft news*, a light-hearted way of informing, the presence of infotainment, but also a violation of news attributes (e.g. the presence of the author's subjective opinion, presenting information taken out of context).⁵ Hvížďala states that while the serious press emphasizes information, analysis and context, in the case of tabloid media it is about working with topicality, tension and emotions.⁶

If we talk about tabloidization, we are talking about the penetration of elements and features of the tabloid press into the serious press or news. Bastos reports that at the beginning of the new millennium, tabloid journalism experienced a huge boom, which led to a more visually attractive treatment, a reduction of text and a preference for large photographs and headlines. The priorities of journalism have gradually changed. The news service providing information about sports or the life of famous personalities began to prevail over the one dealing with important problems of global proportions. Entertainment replaced ordinary information and human-interest news began to dominate media content. All these facts caused the term tabloidization to become established in the academic environment.⁷ Other phenomena also contributed to the development of the tabloid aspects of the media. Indeed, tabloidization is closely related to other concepts such as infotainment and sensationalism, which are terms associated with market-oriented journalism and media that are looking for ways to make their content more attractive. Among the related concepts, the author also includes the trend of scandalization, which suppressed the boundaries between the private and public spheres and strengthened readers' interest in the personal lives of politicians. On the contrary, interest in their professional achievements is in the background today. The media has thus created a public space in which politics is indistinguishable from entertainment.⁸

³ KAČINCOVÁ PREDMERSKÁ A.: *Fenomén broadsheet vs. tabloid a ich uplatnenie v domácej (slovenskej) mediálnej praxi*. In PETRANOVÁ, D., SOLÍK, M., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2017: Budúcnosť médií I. – Budúcnosť mediálnej terminológie: Budúcnosť vplyvu médií*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 185.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 186.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 189.

⁶ HVÍŽĎALA, K.: *Co je bulvár*. In OSVALDOVÁ, B., KOPÁČ, R.: *Co je bulvár, co je bulvarizace*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Karolinum, 2016, p. 52.

⁷ BASTOS, T. M.: *Digital Journalism and Tabloid Journalism*, 2016, p. 3. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://deliverypdf.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=491127091069067001020084102075030026050022003031066092066124100071089072018112025085031117013039017027026070065127124003101065016071057082007065115118113105000083096095075052097082005126070109117094001097031088071110006119125072125017070090101088103002&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE>>.

⁸ TRAMPOTA, T.: *Defining the Tabloid: Czech Perspective*. In *Communication Today*, 2010, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 15. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <https://www.communicationtoday.sk/wp-content/uploads/CT-2_2010-2.pdf>.

When it comes to defining the term tabloidization, Osvaldová understands by it: “(...) *economic changes in the behaviour of the media, primarily the process of marketing media organizations, commercialization of media activities and unification of media products.*”⁹ According to Osvaldová, the result of these changes is the minimization of differences between serious and tabloid periodicals.

The dominance of tabloid periodicals in the recipient market causes serious media to try to get closer to them. According to Osvaldová, this strategy is a mistake. In the case of mass printing, it is assumed, that the recipient accepts the use of tabloid attributes voluntarily. A different situation occurs when the reader expects serious news. However, instead of relevant information, the medium deceives him with tabloid content.¹⁰ In an effort to win the reader over to their side, the media considered to be a quality press began to use elements typical of tabloids. Newsrooms are in a fight for the recipient's attention under constant time pressure. As a result, they have no room for creating more complex journalistic units and prefer *soft news*.

3 Framing Events in the News

According to Chong and Druckman, the basic premise of the theoretical concept of framing events is the fact that it is possible to look at the problem from several angles and subsequently interpret the facts into several values or considerations.¹¹ Trampota adds that the media approach reporting on events differently. The processing of a topic always depends on the given medium. While in one media outlet, certain characteristics may be emphasized or omitted, in another manifestation, this may not be the case. In this context, he emphasizes that the choice of the thematic framework for the topic has a significant impact on its perception by the recipients.¹² Since framing makes it possible to identify trends, compare the coverage of an event in different media and at the same time, provides guidance on how to proceed when researching media content, its use is increasingly common in scientific fields focused on communication. In communication, it further “organizes everyday reality”, thus giving meaning to the ongoing topics. At the same time, it helps promote a certain narrative of political problems.¹³ The political aspect is pointed out by Semetko and Valkenburg, who claim that the selected frames influence the perception of political problems or institutions. For example, the citizens of the European Union state their opinions on European issues or institutions depending on how the problem is formulated in the survey question.¹⁴ In terms of nature and content, De Vreese divides news frames into two categories: issue-specific and generic. As their names suggest, the difference between the two frameworks lies in their scope. The first category

⁹ OSVALDOVÁ, B.: *Bulvarizace a etika v českých médiích*. In OSVALDOVÁ, B., KOPÁČ, R.: *Co je bulvár, co je bulvarizace*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Karolinum, 2016, p. 11.

¹⁰ OSVALDOVÁ, B., KOPÁČ, R.: *Co je bulvár, co je bulvarizace*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Karolinum, 2016, p. 7-8.

¹¹ CHONG, D., DRUCKMAN, J. N.: Framing Theory. In *Annual Review of Political Science*. Vol. 10, p. 104. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>>.

¹² TRAMPOTA, T.: *Zpravodajství*. Prague : Portál, 2006, p. 122-123.

¹³ CHONG, D., DRUCKMAN, J. N.: Framing Theory. In *Annual Review of Political Science*. Vol. 10, p. 106. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>>.

¹⁴ SEMETKO, H.A., VALKENBURG, P. M.: Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News. In *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2020, p. 94. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227670569_Framing_European_Politics_A_Content_Analysis_of_Press_and_Television_News>.

applies only to specific topics and events, while the generic framework is of a more general nature and can be identified in the treatment of different topics or in different contexts.¹⁵ In this paper, we focus on political content and choose to work with generic frames that discuss it - issue and game meta-frames. These are used by academics, for example, in research related to news coverage of elections. They were also used in their research by Strömbäck and Van Aelst, who coded these meta frames, which are based on the dominant frame.¹⁶ Other frames were examined by their presence in the text. They gradually analyzed the horse-race, news management, governing, political strategy, human interest and politicians as individuals framework. The first four belong to the category of strategic subframes, while the authors classify the last two as personalized subframes.

4 Methodology

The main goal of the conducted research is to determine the presence of tabloidization and framing phenomena in serious and tabloid media, to compare their occurrence with each other and to find common features in information. Using the example of reporting on domestic and foreign politics, we try to answer the question to what extent the mentioned concepts are present in the reporting of both types of media and to what extent they overlap in their use, but also what the framing of politics in selected newspapers is. We have singled out politics thematically for several reasons. According to the theorists we refer to in our work, the media has created a public space in which politics is indistinguishable from entertainment. The trend of scandalization has strengthened the interest in reading news about the personal lives of politicians by suppressing the boundaries between the private and public spheres. Editors also favour gossip and scandal when reporting on domestic and international politics. Furthermore, research conducted by Strömbäck and Kaidova has shown that the media in democracies around the world tend to frame news about politics as a game rather than a problem to be solved.¹⁷ As part of our research, we are also trying to figure out our partial goal, which is to answer the question whether selected media in Slovakia have the same framing.

For the implementation of the research, we choose the method of quantitative content analysis, which we implemented based on the coding book.¹⁸ Sedláková states that the main task of content analysis is to report on huge data sets. It can thus find application in the event that the goal of the research is, for example, the mapping of a certain topic within the media, or a mutual comparison of the representation of this topic in different types of media.¹⁹

¹⁵ DE VREESE, C. H.: News Framing: Theory and Typology. In *Information Design Journal + Document Design*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2005, p. 54. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://claesdevreese.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/devreese_2005_2.pdf>.

¹⁶ See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., VAN AELST, P.: Exploring Some Antecedents of the Media's Framing of Election News: A Comparison of Swedish and Belgian Election News. In *The International Journal os Press/Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010, p. 41-59. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240730595_Exploring_Some_Antecedents_of_the_Media's_Framing_of_Election_News_A_Comparison_of_Swedish_and_Belgian_Election_News>.

¹⁷ See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., VAN AELST, P.: Exploring Some Antecedents of the Media's Framing of Election News: A Comparison of Swedish and Belgian Election News. In *The International Journal os Press/Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010, p. 41-59. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240730595_Exploring_Some_Antecedents_of_the_Media's_Framing_of_Election_News_A_Comparison_of_Swedish_and_Belgian_Election_News>.

¹⁸ Remark by authors: The coding book can be obtained on request in the Slovak language.

¹⁹ SEDLÁKOVÁ, R.: *Výzkum médií. Nejužívanější metody a techniky*. Prague : Grada, 2014, p. 291.

For the successful fulfillment of the goals set, we define following research questions and hypotheses. Several analytical categories are associated with each of them. In the approach of selected media to news, we are interested in which meta frame dominates and the occurrence of personalized subframes - elements of tabloidization.

RQ 1: Which meta frame is dominant in informing policy? (game/issue meta frame)

H 1: Selected media frame news about politics as a game rather than a problem.

RQ 2: What is the representation of the investigated elements of tabloidization in the selected media? (hard/soft news, personalized subframes politicians as individuals and human interest, number and type of visual elements)

H 2: Tabloids work with elements of tabloidization more often than serious newspapers.

The object of our investigation is one newspaper of a serious nature and one newspaper of tabloid type. We focus on the content on their news portals. For the analysis, we choose the journals with the largest number of real users, based on media monitoring carried out by the association for Internet advertising IAB Slovakia. As of March 1, 2021, the tabloid newspaper *Plus JEDEN DENŤ* (“Plus One Day”) – was visited by 812,000 users and the serious newspaper *SME* had 729,000 users.²⁰ In both journals, we examine by genre only the domestic and foreign news sections, content thematically related to politics. The period that defines the investigation is the year 2021, and therefore the outputs published in this year. The unit of measurement is the political article that was published in the mentioned sections in the previous year. In order to maintain the highest possible degree of representativeness, we select the research sample by random selection (random sample) via the random.org site, which allows us to generate random days - a total of seven days from 2021, from which we subject to analysis all politically tuned articles from the given day and from the given sections. We will carry out this step using the archive that the selected media offer on their websites. We include the article in the coding book if it refers to political representatives through the cover photo, caption or lead paragraph. The unit of measurement is the article, while we examine news genres.

5 Results

5.1 Characteristics of the Analysed Diaries

The *SME* newspaper is a serious newspaper that was founded in 1993. The registration of the news portal and its own domain came in 1996. The printed version of the *SME* newspaper is published six times a week. It provides the reader with an overview of domestic, foreign, economic, cultural and sports events. In the news, it presents the reader with information about political events of local or national importance, including cases and conflicts. In the case of foreign news, newspapers focus on international political events and personalities, covering important moments directly from the scene. It is published by the *Petit Press* media house, which, in addition to the *SME* journal, also includes other titles such as the regional newspaper *MY*, the monthly magazine written in English called *Slovak Spectator*, the economic magazine *Index*, *Historic Revue*, *SME ženy (women)* and the *Korzár*.²¹

²⁰ *Dáta IABmonitor online*. [online]. [2022-03-01]. Available at: <<https://monitor.iabslovakia.sk/>>.

²¹ *Petit Press: Denník SME*. [online]. [2022-03-01]. Available at: <<https://www.petitpress.sk/ponukane-tituly/dennik-sme/>>.

The News and Media Holding publishing house characterizes the daily newspaper **Plus JEDEN DEŇ** as a newspaper intended for people who are interested in events from all areas of social life. The reader can find there events of a domestic and foreign nature, whether from the political or show business field. The publishing house also attracts readers to content related to regional events and civic economy.²² In addition to the daily newspaper, the largest Slovak media company also publishes the weekly magazines *Plus 7 dní* or *Nový Čas pre ženy* (for women), or the economic magazine *Trend*.²³

5.2 The Results of the Work – Analysis of the Reporting of *SME* and *Plus JEDEN DEŇ* Newspaper Portals

In total, we examined 228 journalistic speeches - 158 articles published in the *DOMOV (HOME)* and *SVET (WORLD)* sections on *sme.sk* and 70 articles published in the *SPRÁVY (NEWS)*, *ŠOUBIZNIS (SHOW BUSINESS)*, *REGIÓNY (REGIONS)* and *KRIMI (CRIMES)* sections on *pluska.sk*. In selected newspapers, we analysed articles from seven days of the previous year selected by a random generator - 27.1.2021, 27.2.2021, 13.3.2021, 14.6.2021, 30.6.2021, 16.9.2021 and 31.10.2021. In the coding book, we differentiated coverage of domestic and foreign politicians. While in *SME*, information on international political topics was dominant, number of articles from the domestic environment clearly dominated in *Plus JEDEN DEŇ*.

5.2.1 Dominant Meta Frame in Selected Political Articles

When investigating this question, we took the same approach as Strömbäck and Van Aelst investigated *game* and *issue frameworks*. *The game frame* is dominant if the following elements can be found in it: the article focuses on the tactics or strategy of a political campaign; to fight for a voter; to render a politician; on winners and losers; to political power; for election polls; works with sports and military terminology; he approaches politicians as ordinary people rather than as those who come with a certain political agenda. On the contrary, *the issue frame* dominates when the subject of the news content is articles about political problems and the positions the politician takes in them. Furthermore, it can be news relevant to the position and conditions of the problem, what someone did or said with regard to the given issue, and what is the position of politicians in policy making.²⁴ If it was not possible to recognize the dominant metaframe, we marked the option “cannot be determined”. The considerable predominance of the *issue framework* and the greater number of analyzed articles by *sme.sk* caused the framework, which deals with the framing of political reports from the perspective of policy making, to gain 59% and the portrayal of politics as a *game* to only 32%. However, the difference between the selected media in the use of these frameworks is considerable. The framing of news as a *game* slightly prevails in domestic *pluska.sk* news. On the contrary, the portrayal of politics as a problem is significantly dominant in the examined articles of the domestic and foreign sections of *sme.sk*, where it is represented by 68%.

²² *News and Media Holding: Plus JEDEN DEŇ*. [online]. [2022-03-01]. Available at: <<https://www.newsandmedia.sk/produkty/print/plus-jeden-den/>>.

²³ *News and Media Holding*. [online]. [2022-03-01]. Available at: <<https://www.newsandmedia.sk/>>.

²⁴ See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., VAN AELST, P.: Exploring Some Antecedents of the Media’s Framing of Election News: A Comparison of Swedish and Belgian Election News. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010, p. 41-59. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240730595_Exploring_Some_Antecedents_of_the_Media's_Framing_of_Election_News_A_Comparison_of_Swedish_and_Belgian_Election_News>.

Table 1: Share of game and issue frameworks

	Denník SME		Plus JEDEŇ DEŇ		Total
	Home section	Foreign section	Home section	Foreign section	
Game frame	16	27	27	4	74 (32 %)
Issue frame	52	55	22	5	134 (59 %)
Not possible to judge	2	6	7	5	20 (9 %)

Source: own processing, 2022

5.2.2 Representation of the Investigated Elements of Tabloidization in Selected Media

When determining soft and hard messages, we worked with the definition of Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky. In their work, *hard news* is defined as news whose emphasis is on policy making, economic and social aspects. Due to their short lifespan, it is necessary to inform about them immediately. Their importance persists over a longer period of time, allowing for accompanying commentary and analysis. They are factual in nature. *Soft news* is news that can be published at any time, because their dissemination is not socially important. This type of news is gossip, scandals, sensations from the environment of well-known personalities, which do not have any fundamental consequences for society. They are mostly related to a specific event, they do not follow any social trend. Instead of factual nature, subjectivity, variety and unconventionality come to the fore. It also includes human interest articles.²⁵ Our analysis shows, that even though, the theory indicates an increasing number of *soft news* in serious media, in the examined *sme.sk* this type of news has minimal representation (8%) and *hard news* still significantly prevails. An interesting finding is the greater number of *hard news* reports in tabloid news, although in this case, the difference between the two types is very close (53% to 47%).

Table 2: Share of hard news and soft news in news coverage

	Denník SME		Plus JEDEŇ DEŇ		Total
	Home section	Foreign section	Home section	Foreign section	
Hard news	68	74	31	6	179 (79 %)
Soft news	2	11	25	8	46 (20 %)
Not possible to judge	0	3	0	0	3 (1 %)

Source: own processing, 2022

²⁵ LEHMAN-WILZIG, S. N., SELETZKY, M.: *Hard News, Soft News, 'General' News: The Necessity and Utility of an Intermediate Classification*. In *Journalism*, 2010, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 38-39.

Following the example of Strömbäck and Van Aelst's study, we also investigated personalized subframes, which aim to make the content - otherwise objectively written political reports - more attractive and reach a larger audience. The first examined subframe is politicians as individuals. The subframe is found in the text when politicians are perceived as people with different characteristics, character or behaviour. The fact that they participate in the creation of public policies is suppressed.²⁶ When defining the human interest subframe, we work with the definition of the authors Ho Cho and Gower. Regarding this sub-frame, the article focuses on individuals and their feelings, experiences or traits, giving the event a “human face” - it is presented from an emotional point of view and therefore forces the audience to consider the issue as serious and urgent. The result can be an emotional reaction that affects rational thinking or evaluation of the given problem.²⁷ Personalized subframes were coded based on presence, meaning that both could appear in the article at the same time. We observed a focus on politicians as individuals in 40% of the examined texts at pluska.sk. The human-interest frame appeared in the majority of articles - 53%. The representation of personalized subframes in the examined *sme.sk* articles is considerably lower and reaches 11, respectively 18%. If frames are present, they are mainly in outputs published in foreign news.

Table 3: The presence of personalized subframes

	Denník SME		Plus JEDEŇ DEŇ		Total
	Home section	Foreign section	Home section	Foreign section	
Politicians as individuals					
Yes	3	14	20	8	45 (20 %)
No	67	74	36	6	183 (80 %)
Human interest					
Yes	3	25	28	9	65 (29 %)
No	67	23	28	5	163 (71 %)

Source: own processing, 2022.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Evaluation of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the interpretation of the obtained data and the results of the investigation, we approach answering the research questions and evaluating the established hypotheses:

RQ 1: Which metaframe is dominant in informing policy? (game/issue metaframe)

Considering the foreign studies that talk about the growing share of the *game framework* in political reporting, we were interested in how the domestic media approach politics. While the

²⁶ See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., VAN AELST, P.: Exploring Some Antecedents of the Media’s Framing of Election News: A Comparison of Swedish and Belgian Election News. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010, p. 41-59. [online]. [2022-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240730595_Exploring_Some_Antecedents_of_the_Media's_Framing_of_Election_News_A_Comparison_of_Swedish_and_Belgian_Election_News>.

²⁷ HO CHO, S., GOWER, K. K.: *Framing Effect on the Public's Response to Crisis: Human Interest Frame and Crisis Type Influencing Responsibility and Blame*. In *Public Relations Review*, 2006, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 420.

analysed articles of the *Plus JEDEN DEŇ* tabloid used *the game frame* more often than *the issue frame*, the situation was the opposite in the case of *SME*. The serious periodical, moreover, published reports on policy-making to a significantly greater extent than those focusing on political struggle, which ultimately tipped the sum total of *the issue frame* in its favor.

H 1: Select media frame news of politics as a game rather than a problem.

Although *the game frame* was strongly present in the news, the established hypothesis was only partially confirmed - *the game frame* prevailed only in the tabloid *Plus JEDEN DEŇ*. We reject the hypothesis.

RQ 2: What is the representation of the investigated elements of tabloidization in the selected media?

(*hard/soft news, personalized subframes politicians as individuals and human interest, number and type of visual elements*)

The results reveal that typical popular press elements make it into the coverage of the selected serious media, but their share is still marginal. *Soft news* plays only a minimal role in *SME*'s selected political reporting. On the other hand, they have a significant presence in *Plus JEDEN DEŇ*. It is interesting that hard news prevailed in both media, which may not be surprising, because the investigated political reporting deals with socially important topics and is therefore inherently one of the “harder” types of news. We also explored personalized subframes where theory suggested that news personalization is more typical of tabloid news. This time, our expectation was confirmed for both subframes. If the investigated frameworks have already appeared in the *SME* news, it was mainly in a form of articles published in the foreign section.

H 2: Tabloids work with elements of tabloidization more often than serious newspapers.

The published number of *soft news* in the boulevard is considerably higher. This fact is reflected in the other investigated categories – personalized sub-frames, as articles with an emotional dimension and reporting on politicians as individuals are found more often in the selected *Plus JEDEN DEŇ* news. Emphasis on graphic representation is also typical for the examined content of the selected tabloid media, which is confirmed by the fact that each examined article is accompanied by a visual element. And since elements of tabloidization prevailed in all investigated categories, we confirm the hypothesis.

6.2 Discussion

The first differences between the selected media are visible from the results of the investigation of individual frames. Whether it's *game and issue meta frames* or personalized subframes. When determining the dominant meta-frame, the policy-making informing frame gained the main position in the content of serious news coverage. *Plus JEDEN DEŇ*, on the contrary, selected news that focused on the political struggle, although the difference between the two frames was minimal in this medium. Even the results of personalized subframes do not seem more unambiguous in this regard. The presence of news with an emotional dimension in the selected tabloid media received only a narrow majority. We observed this framework especially in the composition of the headline and lead paragraph, which are often tuned into a more emotional form, thereby gaining the potential to reach more readers. Similar to the choice of news with a possible overlap into the privacy of politicians, human interest also had a marginal representation in *SME*. On the other hand, we observed articles in which politicians are perceived as individuals in 40% of *Plus JEDEN DEŇ* news articles. We can find an overlapping only in the more frequent application of the human interest framework, although the ratio in their use is considerably different for both.

We analysed the presence of *hard* and *soft news* in the journals at the same time. The theory told us that serious periodicals are subject to market-oriented journalism, and therefore they are forced to reach more often for the tools of the tabloid media. However, the share of *soft news* in *SME* news is negligible and almost absent. We consider it an interesting finding that “soft” reporting did not win the majority even in *Plus JEDEN DEŇ*. In their case, however, it is again only a very narrow predominance of *hard news*.

To sum it up, the phenomenon of tabloidization is clearly present in political reporting. The tabloidization itself is strengthened by digitization and the existence of newspapers in the Internet environment. In the online environment, the journalist has only a short time to address the reader and, at the same time, fights for the attention of users on social networks with practically unlimited competition. Journalist thus comes under competitive circumstances and time pressure and therefore has no space for more thorough text preparation. The editor is thus forced to reach for a simpler genre and, instead of a well-written text, attract the reader, for example, with a visually attractive photo or a misleading headline. The consequence of these changes is market-oriented journalism and the perception of news as a commodity to be sold. The role of journalists as watchdogs of democracy is disappearing and the differences between the two types of media are blurring. Despite the growing influence of tabloidization and related phenomena in the media environment, based on the results of our research, it is not possible to accurately identify this trend in the online coverage of selected Slovak newspapers. However, the results of our research reveal that the selected media reported in accordance with the original journalistic theories.

Acknowledgement: The study was elaborated within a national research project supported by the Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA) No. 1/0283/20, titled ‘Synergy of the Media Industry Segments in the Context of Critical Political Economy of Media’.

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THE CONVERSION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE AMBIVALENT NATURE OF ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global event of the last two years, fundamentally affecting the economic, political, cultural and social life of the majority of the world's population. As a result of the Coronavirus crisis, education systems have also undergone an involuntary transformation, having to adapt from conventional models of contact education to an alternative of distance education in a relatively short time frame and without much preparation. At the same time, this has sparked interest of sociologists and psychologists to empirically observe the effectiveness of the conversion of university education. The available empirical evidence confirms the resilience of universities and their ability to adapt quickly to new methods of knowledge transfer. At the same time, distance learning models appear to have accelerated in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis. Distance learning faces major challenges in the form of technological, psychological and social dimensions as conditions for its further strengthening and promotion in university education systems. Empirical studies also point to the typically ambivalent nature of distance education forms. Both technological, psychological and social challenges are characterised by a combination of subjectively perceived benefits and drawbacks. The starting point may comprise the introduction of hybrid forms of learning, maximising the benefits and minimising the drawbacks of distance education.

Key words:

Academics. Ambivalence. COVID-19. Distance Education. Online Learning. Students. University.

1 Introduction

In March 2020, contact education experienced an unprecedented reduction in global scale. Education systems of all types and forms around the world have adapted to online forms of distance knowledge transfer and validation as a result of the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic. This situation has initiated research interest to identify, describe, understand and explain the various circumstances and processes associated with such a radical and sudden change of massive scale. In the last two years, the first empirical studies have appeared, referring to a range of topics, problems and issues in the field of educational policy, pedagogy or psychology and sociology of education. In particular, case studies illustrating the specific situations and conditions of online education at different universities in different parts of the world are predominant. However, these individual research contributions often do not operate in isolation, but rather co-create a relatively comprehensive perspective on the transformation of education at the time of COVID-19 pandemic, from which more universal principles, general rules and trends in the functions and effectiveness of online education can be derived.

Osborne and Hogarth¹ empirically observe various factors of differences between online and conventional face-to-face teaching. They focus on differences in students' expectations and experiences with the realities of online teaching. Based on their own findings and related empirical evidence from similar investigations, they suggest strategies and methods (e.g., appropriate setting for combining asynchronous and synchronous study instruction) to motivate students to actively participate in virtual learning and facilitate interactivity. Kohnke and

¹ OSBORNE, S., HOGARTH, K.: Mind the Gap: The Reality of Remote Learning during COVID-19. In *Accounting Research Journal*, 2021, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 331-332.

Moorhouse² have conducted quantitative research on one of the main universities in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Baptist University), in which they analysed in detail the experience of 9 selected teachers with teaching by video-conferencing. They have concluded that these experiences sharply polarise the sample of respondents into optimists and sceptics of distance education. Optimists consider video-conferencing an effective form of knowledge transfer, full of positive effects, while sceptics approach this communication platform very critically as a necessary evil. On the basis of sociological findings at University of Science and Technology in Bydgoszcz in Poland Modrzyński, Zajdel and Michalcewicz-Kaniowska note similarly ambivalent attitudes towards online learning.³ On the basis of an exhaustive questionnaire survey within student and academic population of this university, on one hand, they have identified significant future potential of online learning, while on the other hand also critical attitudes towards, for example, the impossibility to apply the full scope and quality of practical and laboratory exercises or a clear resistance to online learning completely displacing conventional face-to-face teaching. Kawasaki, Yamasaki, Masuoka, Iwasa, Fukita and Matsuyama⁴ at the Hiroshima University reached similar result in an experimental investigation to compare the effectiveness of a nursing course taught by methods of *emergency remote teaching* and *conventional face to face teaching*. The experiment was carried out by comparing a sample of 46 female students attending a traditional face-to-face course and 56 female students attending a virtual course. Again, the high potential of online learning and its comparable effectiveness to face-to-face learning is confirmed. However, there are again findings in terms of the ambivalent nature of online form of education, where the non-contact form of teaching very fundamentally limits the practical training of manual nursing skills. An extensive sociological survey was carried out at the University of Latvia by Baranova, Nimante, Kalnina and Olesika.⁵ The data collection took place in two phases; first in the spring of 2020 and then in the same period one year later. Their survey included a total of 2,248 students across 13 faculties and focused on student reflection on a number of different dimensions of their own experiences of online learning. It showed that, in both the first and second phases of the survey, the forced conversion from conventional face-to-face to virtual learning was positively received by the majority of students and generally rated as high quality and useful.

The aim of this contribution is to explain the process of adaptation of universities to online forms of distance education during the Coronavirus pandemic with the help of a critical review of current sociologically oriented, theoretically and empirically focused studies. At the same time, the aim is to describe the causes and contexts of the forced conversion of traditional forms of face-to-face education to distance education and to present an argument that strengthens the thesis of the ambivalent nature of distance education. In this study, I draw not only on the available sociological evidence on the circumstances of distance education in the period of 2020-2021, but also on my own pedagogical experience in a university setting during the period of the widespread and involuntary introduction of online learning.

² See: MOORHOUSE, B., KOHNKE, L.: Thriving or Surviving Emergency Remote Teaching Necessitated by COVID-19: University Teachers' Perspectives. In *The Asia – Pacific Education Researcher*, 2021, Vol. 30, No. 3, p. 279-287.

³ MODRZYŃSKI, P., ZAJDEL, M., MICHALCEWICZ – KANIOWSKA, M.: Conditions and Potential for Remote Student Teaching. In *European Research Studies Journal*, 2020, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 860.

⁴ KAWASAKI, H., et al.: Remote Teaching Due to COVID-19: An Explorations of Its Effectiveness and Issues. In *Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2021, Vol. 18, No. 5, Article 2672.

⁵ BARANOVA, S. et al.: Students' Perspective on Remote On-Line Teaching and Learning at the University of Latvia in the First and Second COVID-19 Period. In *Sustainability*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 21, Article 11890.

2 Adaptation of Universities to Distance Education During the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic

The COVID-19 disease pandemic is a global scale event and a source of hardly predictable leapfrogging changes, especially in the spheres of social and economic structures of life and a number of accompanying power, political, cultural or technological changes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, national governments have introduced variously restrictive, blanket epidemiological measures and related legislative regulations over the past two years, dramatically limiting social contacts and physical mobility of the population. Especially in 2020, these measures have been very noticeable and continue to varying degrees of intensity in 2021. At the beginning of 2022, the Czech Republic is preparing for a sixth pandemic wave related to the Omicron virus variant. No pandemic measures have been announced so far by the Czech government for the autumn of 2022, although the number of people testing positive exceeds the 1,000 infected threshold on a daily basis.

In the Czech Republic, as in other European countries, the first government measures were implemented in March and April 2020 in response to the obvious and rapidly deteriorating pandemic situation. On 13 March 2020, these government measures of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic are also applied to the education system.

Not only universities in various parts of the world, in a rapid sequence of events and without the possibility of preparing systemic changes in the organisation of teaching, are transforming standard contact teaching based on intensive regular face-to-face meetings between teachers and students to distance forms of online teaching.⁶ Globally, an estimated 200 million university students have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.⁷ The European University Association's (EUA) emphasizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all student populations.⁸ UNESCO publishes ongoing monitoring reports on the current status of the global education system affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. As of December 2020, a total of 877,622,671 of the global student population has been reduced in education due to school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (as of 27 January 2022, 54,037,980 students are similarly affected globally, which is approximately 3.4% of all learners globally).⁹

It is not only the area of education itself that is restricted, but also any other physical contact students have with the school in the interrelated areas of learning support, counselling, libraries or catering. Universities are thus undergoing a radical transformation of communication and collaboration systems at various levels of the relationships among the university management, academics, administration and students in the so-called first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic in the middle of the 2020 summer term. The adaptation of schools at different levels of the education system in the Czech Republic has been inconsistent, with different schools

⁶ KHLAIF, N. Z., SALHA, S., KOURAICHI, B.: Emergency Remote Learning During COVID-19 Crisis: Students' Engagement. In *Education and Information Technologies*, 2021, Vol. 26, No. 6, Article 7034.

⁷ FARNELL, T., SKLEDAR MATIJEVIĆ, A., ŠKUNANEČ SCHMIDT, N.: *The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education: A Review of Emerging Evidence (NESET Report)*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://nesetweb.eu/en/resources/library/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-higher-education-a-review-of-emerging-evidence>>.

⁸ BÜHRMANN, A. D., BUNESCU, L.: *Approaches in Learning and Teaching to Promoting Equity and Inclusion*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://eua.eu/resources/publications/959:approaches-in-learning-and-teaching-to-promoting-equity-and-inclusion.html>>.

⁹ *Global Monitoring of School Closures by COVID-19*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>>.

responding in different ways, some introducing online learning more quickly, others more slowly; the extent of online learning provided and especially its form and the overall approach of schools to providing alternatives to contact learning have been also varying. They began to introduce their own innovative elements and systemic approaches with varying degrees of creativity and application of different communication platforms and distance learning tools. Thus, students in different types of schools have been exposed to a diverse environment of the nature of distance education, emerging spontaneously and at a rapid pace of changes and without the possibility of preparation, even in those schools that have had little or no experience with these forms of education so far.

Some schools preferred a much greater emphasis on self-study and communicated assignments, lecture presentations, other study materials and specialised resources to students at various intervals for the purposes of self-study. However, as suggested by some of the recent sociological surveys, self-study has been experienced negatively by students in the form of feelings of increased workload, stress and frustration.¹⁰ Other schools have variously combined self-study and continuous assignment and checking of study tasks with the parallel introduction of online lectures, often only for some selected subjects of the curriculum, due to insufficient infrastructure of technological equipment of IT tools, including technical background and possibilities for online learning in the home office environment. It should be emphasised that the availability of IT technology in the business network was already very limited at this time due to the rapidly increasing interest in IT equipment not only in schools but also in companies, widely introducing home office and an overall intensifying digitalisation of corporate communication, requiring adequate equipment in the form of cameras, microphones, laptops, etc.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of the educational process in universities was rather ambiguous, with elements of improvisation, spontaneity, more or less creative measures, hybridisation of teaching combining different methods of online learning, sharing of study materials, self-study and examination becoming apparent. The transition to distance learning worked awkwardly at Czech universities in the spring wave of the 2020 pandemic, serving more as an involuntary pilot to prepare schools for what was expected at the beginning of the following academic year. Unfortunately, these sceptical expectations were completely fulfilled and the entire academic year 2020/2021 was conducted in a continuous mode of online teaching at all colleges and universities in the Czech Republic, without any or continuous contact teaching (except for the limited possibility of face-to-face testing in December 2020 and January 2021).

The second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic was reflected in the involuntary implementation of continuous online education throughout the academic year, a situation historically unprecedented in the Czech (probably not only that) educational space. Expectations of an improvement in the situation in the next academic year were sceptical at this time and it was assumed that the distance form of study would continue.

Fortunately, in the academic period 2021/2022 and, for the time being, 2022/2023, universities in the Czech Republic and most other European countries are returning to traditional full-time teaching models. This has been made possible not only by higher vaccination rates in European populations, but also by the spread of a new and less health-destructive Omicron virus variant.

¹⁰ *Vysokoškolská studenti během první vlny pandemie koronaviru.* [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <https://www.soc.cas.cz/sites/default/files/soubory/tz_20200924_vysokoskolsti_studenti_behem_prvni_vlny_pandemie_koronaviru.pdf>.

Nevertheless, universities have maintained their established distance learning infrastructures and provide, to varying degrees, online options alongside face-to-face teaching. Thus, from conventional teaching before the Coronavirus crisis and the subsequent conversion to distance learning, many universities are combining the two forms in various ways this academic year.

3 Major Challenges of Distance Education

Distance forms of online education, however, face several major challenges following its global and enforced introduction into the university education system.¹¹ The first is a technological challenge. This requires the availability and reliability of internet connectivity and sufficient provisioning of universities' technology and communications infrastructure. However, not all universities meet these requirements, especially in economically less developed regions. The technological challenge is not only a question of the capacity and level of equipment and preparedness of universities, but also a matter of the economic means of students and their families. Insufficient internet coverage or financial unavailability of information and communication tools constitutes to form one of the main constraints. Furthermore, the technological pillar of distance education is potentially restricted by low levels of digital literacy. Especially for the older generation of academics, the transition to digital forms of education is more complicated. This often results in conservative attitudes and an increased reluctance to abandon traditional forms of teaching.

The second challenge is pedagogical. This includes, in particular, the possibilities to provide sufficient quality learning materials in interactive form and an effective use of multimedia teaching tools. However, this requires a certain level of digital literacy. It is interactivity through multimedia tools that is a prerequisite for engaging students in learning and enhancing their awareness of active participation in the learning process. At the same time, a challenging pedagogical task comprises motivating students and keeping their interest in collaboration. Educators should therefore provide students with the widest possible opportunities for feedback and ensure a reliable and fair system for verifying the knowledge and skills acquired.

The third challenge is social. The home study or teaching environment should provide plenty of space, quiet and comfort. Material conditions and general facilities should be adequate for the needs of distance education. A more significant barrier of a non-material type, however, is the necessary absence of face-to-face social contacts. It is the lack of physical contact that is experienced as one of the most significant criteria for critical evaluation of distance learning.¹² There is a social and psychological need for sharing emotions, physical contact and informal personal conversation.

I assume that online teaching can be promoted and implemented in the future at universities on a much larger scale and intensity, independently of epidemiological measures limiting contact teaching. It may even become a preferred and sought-after platform for information transfer, knowledge sharing and validation in the academic environment and student population. According to Duffin¹³ prior to the 2016 Coronavirus pandemic, the U.S. university population already empirically demonstrates a strongly positive attitude of nearly 81% of university

¹¹ FERRI, F., GRIGONI, P., GUZZO, T.: Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emergency Situations. In *Societies*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 4, Article 86.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ DUFFIN, E.: *E-learning and Digital Education – Statistics & Facts*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/topics/3115/e-learning-and-digital-education>>.

students towards digital learning technologies as an effective learning platform to improve their academic performance. Similar studies support the assumption that participants in online courses achieve comparable or better learning outcomes as compared to participants in face-to-face courses.¹⁴ According to current sociological research conducted at the University of Lithuania, the proportion of students convinced that online learning can provide them with a complete education has increased significantly year-on-year, while in 2020 54% of university students represented this view, in 2021 it was 84% of respondents.¹⁵ The significant level of preference for online learning in the later phases of study among the university student population during the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic is further confirmed by Roubal's empirical study¹⁶. Other empirical studies also identify positive attitudes towards online learning on the part of academics and students, which contributes to the belief in the growing potential for stronger and more sustainable anchoring of online forms of learning in the university environment in the future.¹⁷ Indeed, it can be assumed that some schools, which gained the first major experience with the widespread introduction of online learning during the first and especially the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, will be motivated to further strengthen and petrify it in their curricula. This may lead (and in many schools has led) also to greater efforts to expand distance education curriculum offerings and applications for accreditation.

The trend of limiting contact teaching in favour of distance learning is also reinforced by ecological arguments. At the same time, there is ample factual data available in the professional discourse on the negative ecological impacts of contact teaching and, on the contrary, the environmentally much friendlier teaching based on digital platforms. *"In a country such as the United Kingdom, taking into account factors such as residential energy consumption, campus expenses and travel between residence and university, an online teaching model could help to reduce an estimated 88% of energy consumption and 83% the of carbon footprint"*¹⁸. Versteijlen, Salgado, Groesbeek and Counotte state *"the student travel related emission value of a face-to-face model is about 1500 kg CO₂ and the value of an online model about 25 kg CO₂ per student per year."*¹⁹ Similar environmental and ecological arguments in the era of pushing through the Green Deal can make a major contribution to further strengthening online learning, not only in university settings.

4 Ambivalent Nature of Distance Learning

Sociological studies monitoring the circumstances of online learning in various universities around the world often imply its ambivalent nature. The university student population often experiences virtual learning as simultaneously effective, beneficial and comfortable, but also

¹⁴ PAUL, J., JEFFERSON, F.: A Comparative Analysis of Student Performance in an Online vs. Face-to-Face Environmental Science Course from 2009-2016. In *Frontiers in Computer Science*, 2019, Vol. 1, Article 7.

¹⁵ BARANOVA, S. et al.: Students' Perspective on Remote On-Line Teaching and Learning at the University of Latvia in the First and Second COVID-19 Period. In *Sustainability*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 21, Article 11890.

¹⁶ ROUBAL, O.: The Identification of University Students with Online Teaching in the Second Wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In PROSTINÁKOVÁ HOSSOVÁ, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media 2021. Home Officetainment*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2021, p. 343.

¹⁷ MODRZYŃSKI, P., ZAJDEL, M., MICHALCEWICZ – KANIOWSKA, M.: Conditions and Potential for Remote Student Teaching. In *European Research Studies Journal*, 2020, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 861.

¹⁸ JARILLO, P. M. et al.: Challenges of Online Higher Education in the Face of the Sustainability Objectives of the United Nations: Carbon Footprint, Accessibility and Social Inclusion. In *Sustainability*, 2019, Vol. 11, No. 20, Article 5580.

¹⁹ VERSTEIJLEN, M. et al.: Pros and Cons of Online Education as a Measure to Reduce Carbon Emissions in Higher Education in the Netherlands. In *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 2017, Vol. 28, p. 82.

unreliable, complicated and preventing an authentic experience and sharing of emotionality determined by the reciprocity of physical contact.²⁰ According to Sadeghi²¹ one of the main benefits of distance learning for students comprises:

- 1) The possibility to study anytime and anywhere. In particular, space limitations disappear and open up opportunities for international students to participate in studies.
- 2) Financial savings. Distance education minimises or completely eliminates financial costs for accommodation and transport. At the same time, meals at home are potentially cheaper.
- 3) The need for commuting disappears. Distance learning allows you to connect from anywhere with an internet connection. This eliminates the need to commute between home, campus and school. You can study online from your home, work and other places with an internet connection. This means not only financial savings related to transport, but also time savings.
- 4) Flexibility and choice. Distance learning allows students to be much more flexible with their timetable, consultations and examination dates. At the same time, some universities provide off-line video recordings of lectures, available at any time and particularly useful for those students who, for various reasons, could not attend online courses.

In addition to these benefits, we identify various disadvantages of distance education.

- 5) Potential for distraction. Distance learning is characterised by significant risks of loss of concentration, distraction and procrastination. It is a more demanding type of study, requiring student motivation and a degree of self-discipline.
- 6) Technical equipment. Distance learning requires adequate technological equipment, including a computer, necessary applications, web cameras and a stable internet connection. Interaction between students and teachers depends here on technical equipment and its reliable functioning. It is the failure of this technology or an unreliable internet connection that is the real threat complicating the distance learning process.
- 7) Lack of social interaction. Virtual contacts can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness and burnout. Lack of personal interaction acts as a negative factor reducing psychological well-being. The personal experience of physical interactions cannot be adequately substituted by virtual contacts in terms of their nature and meaning. At the same time, opportunities for practical training, laboratory or experimental exercises or (non-)verbal training in communication and presentation skills are lost.
- 8) The problem of acceptance of distance learning graduates by employers. Many potential employers are still prejudiced against education achieved by distance form. Some employers still prefer graduates of conventional education over distance education graduates when hiring for professional positions.

Similar attitudes towards distance learning are well illustrated, for example, in a study by Polish authors.²² They empirically identify positive and negative determinants of online learning among students and academics. Both study populations simultaneously rate the convenience of learning from home positively, while at the same time finding online learning uncomfortable in terms of potential health risks generated by prolonged sitting behind a computer and headaches. Another positive determinant, according to the respondents, comprises saving time by commuting to school, while at the same time too much time spent behind a computer is identified as a negative determinant.

²⁰ BIJEESH, N.: *Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.indiaeducation.net/online-education/articles/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-distance-learning.html>>.

²¹ SADEGHI, M.: A Shift from Classroom to Distance Learning: Advantages and Limitations. In *International Journal of research in English Education*, 2019, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 83-84.

²² MODRZYŃSKI, P., ZAJDEL, M., MICHALCEWICZ – KANIOWSKA, M.: Conditions and Potential for Remote Student Teaching. In *European Research Studies Journal*, 2020, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 860-862.

Against the backdrop of similar empirical studies, theoretical backgrounds and our own pedagogical experience, we can consider the following positive and negative dimensions of distance learning, not only for students but also for academics, in a more general way.

The first possible positive aspect is financial and time saving. Online lectures allow teaching without the personal presence of teachers. Especially at the various regional branch schools, this reduces the financial costs of transferring teachers and their possible accommodation. Non-economic benefits are also evident in the form of time savings in eliminating the transfer of academics between study centres. Online lectures are then conducted centrally for larger numbers of students in joint study groups, which also means pressure on teaching time and a partial reduction in the financial costs of the implemented teaching. The potential for financial savings can be seen not only on the side of universities, but also on the side of students, and partly also on the side of academics. Distance learning conducted from home means significant financial savings on transport. Furthermore, students do not only find savings in transport costs, but also in accommodation costs. In addition, distance learning students can take advantage of online lectures from their places of work and have the flexibility to set up study and work commitments. They do not have to take holidays, which contact teaching sometimes requires. In addition, there is an option for universities to provide students with video recordings of lectures, allowing students unlimited access to those courses they are unable to watch online due to time constraints.

Conversely, a negative determinant here may be the financially costly investment in digital infrastructure and communications equipment from the perspective of universities. What is paid for is not only technical equipment in the form of computers, laptops, cameras, microphones, but also the licensing of communication platforms. However, investments in technical equipment are also expected on the part of individual students and teachers. Various hidden costs are assumed, ranging from energy consumption to the need to purchase various technological and communication equipment. Studying and teaching from home at the same time may not provide nearly as much space, comfort and quiet. The capacity of home study or teaching is also limited by the fact that it is often combined with home-office or online study by other household members.

The second positive determinant is a personalisation of study. From the students' point of view, the potential for availability of teachers outside lecture/practice times and the possibility of individual use of digital connectivity outside of standard timetable and consultation times is increasing. This enables students to make better and more frequent use of supplementary consultations and to draw on additional support from academics in a variety of one-to-one consultations and the provision of study materials from the comfort of home and without the need to commute.

The absence of physical contacts and face-to-face meetings, which are usually assessed as irreplaceable and difficult to compensate for virtual contacts, remains a negative aspect here. It is not only the mutual need for physical contact between students and academics, but also the need for both groups to meet together. The possibility of sharing experiences, affirming social bonds and experiencing interpersonal relationships is absent.

The third positive determinant becomes the improvement of one's own digital competences and skills. This not only facilitates the emotional acceptance of digital forms of learning, overcoming prejudices, but also motivates the further deepening and broadening of these skills to discover the potentials of this form of knowledge sharing.

Negative aspects include the unreliability of the digital connection, technical problems, unavailability of the Internet connection or its continuous interruption. At the same time, the willingness and possibilities to improve digital competences are sometimes limited, especially among older academics who prefer conservative and proven teaching methods and forms of communication.

5 Conclusion

In a very short time frame, the Coronavirus pandemic has forced a global transformation of university education forms and the conversion of contact learning to a digital environment. Available empirical studies referring to the forced and relatively rapid transformation of universities from conventional face-to-face teaching to virtual online connectivity environments in 2020 and 2021, rather reinforce the belief in the resilience of universities, the adaptability and flexibility of academic and student populations in different parts of the world. Universities have had to cope not only with the transformation of a form of teaching, but also with the subsequent and related complex of study activities in the form of consultations, management of qualification works, knowledge validation and many other complementary study services. However, a number of universities already had distance forms of education in place to varying degrees and extent, and often applied them as parallel forms of teaching to conventional teaching for many years before the Coronavirus crisis. This has made it easier for many universities to manage this forced transformation faster, smoother and, in many ways, more successfully. The events of the last two years have only further accelerated the digitalisation of education and confirmed its relevance. Attitudes towards distance learning are not clear from students and academics. They are typically ambivalent in nature, combining simultaneously its benefits and drawbacks. While the most frequently repeated advantages of distance learning include time and financial savings, as well as the flexibility of studying, on the contrary, the absence of physical contact and interaction, associated with feelings of isolation, can be considered the most significant disadvantage.

Sociological studies predominantly suggest a more general trend to accept and develop online learning as a suitable and effective learning platform, but in combination with traditional contact learning methods and approaches. At the same time, these studies point to certain trends of hybridisation of learning, where the advantages of conventional and distance learning are combined in different ways.

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SPORT X ESPORT: SPECTATOR MOTIVES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Tomáš Ruda

Abstract:

The motives of traditional sport and eSport spectators are compared in this study. Approximately 600 people participated in the survey for this study which was inspired by the research on the topic of eSports vs. Sports: A Comparison of Spectator Motives¹. The results indicate a close connection between the motives for watching regular sports and eSports. Although eleven common motives between traditional sports and eSports are shown in this study, only four are confirmed. The common motives include excitement, social opportunities, drama, and family bonding. The most important spectator motives for traditional sports are an interest in sports, social opportunities, and vicarious achievement. In eSport, the most important spectator motives are acquisition of knowledge, skill of the athletes, and a shared motive for social achievement. This study does not confirm the results reported in previous studies.

Key words:

Customer Behaviour. Entertainment. Gaming. Popularity. Spectator Activity.

1 Introduction

There are two groups of participants in sports: active participants (players) and passive participants (spectators)². This study focuses on spectators who can act either individually or in a group (e.g., family). People have been fascinated by watching sports since time immemorial. It is obvious that mainstream media provides significant coverage of sports³, but the study of Hampel⁴ presents that coverage of eSport is increasing rapidly in mainstream media as well.

The importance of eSport is also visible from the point of view of revenues generated by this sector (Table 1). The trend shows that income from eSport continues to rise and it is developing very dynamically with similar components to traditional sports (e.g., managers, players, endorsement fees, player transfer fees, and even scholarships). In the past, Fink, Trail and James⁵ or Trail and Anderson⁶ devoted their studies to spectator motives in sport.

Table 1: eSport revenues 2020 – 2021

2020	2021	2022
996 m USD	1136 m USD	1384 m USD

Source: TRISTAO, H.: *The Esports Audience Will Pass Half a Billion in 2022 as Revenues, Engagement, & New Segments Flourish*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/the-esports-audience-will-pass-half-a-billion-in-2022-as-revenue-engagement-esport-industry-growth>>.

¹ PIZZO, A. D. et al.: eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 115.

² NOVOTNÝ, J.: *Sport v ekonomice*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2011, p. 28.

³ FUNK, D. C., PIZZO, A. D., BAKER, B. J.: eSport Management: Embracing eSport Education and Research Opportunities. In *Sport Management Review*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 10.

⁴ HAMPEL, J.: Sport vs. eSport: motivy sledovanosti z pohledu fanoušků. [Bachelor Thesis]. Prague : Fakulta tělesné výchovy a sportu, Charles University in Prague, 2022, p. 35.

⁵ FINK, J. S., TRAIL, G. T., ANDERSON, D. F.: Environmental Factors Associated with Spectator Attendance and Sport Consumption Behavior: Gender and Team Differences. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 11.

⁶ TRAIL, G. T., JAMES, J. D.: The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption: Assessment of the Scale's Psychometric Properties. In *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 2001, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 117.

For comparison, Table 2 shows the income of traditional sports. Here it is necessary to note that the income in 2020 was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the actual income was considerably lower than the planned income of 139 billion USD⁷. This fluctuation was not as significant in the eSports sector.

Table 2: Traditional sport revenues 2020 – 2022

2020	2021	2022
73 bn USD	355 bn USD	501 bn USD

Source: *Worldwide Sports Market Revenue*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/370560/worldwide-sports-market-revenue/>>.

In terms of income, traditional sports cannot be compared with eSports (Table 2). Traditional sports still earn exceptionally more revenue, and it cannot be assumed that the percentage importance of eSports vs. traditional sports will change fundamentally in the future.

Table 3: eSport Audience

2020	2021	2022
435 m	489 m	532 m

Source: TRISTAO, H.: *The Esports Audience Will Pass Half a Billion in 2022 as Revenues, Engagement, & New Segments Flourish..* [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/the-esports-audience-will-pass-half-a-billion-in-2022-as-revenue-engagement-esport-industry-growth>>.

Table 3 shows that eSports viewing is growing. Comparison with traditional sports is difficult in this context, as data from Africa, West Asia, and Oceania are missing in the global context. Even so, in this context, we can compare the attendance of the four main sports in the USA for the year 2021, when approximately 170 million spectators visited a game⁸. Ruda and Matějček⁹ state that spectator motives are also very important for sponsors. Their study focuses on the sport of ice hockey. Šíma¹⁰ and Voráček¹¹, share the same opinion regarding the sport of football.

Spectators' motives are carefully addressed by Pizzo et al.¹², who list fifteen main motives for watching sports in their study.

- 1) Interest in sport – First and foremost, I consider myself a fan of sport.
- 2) Vicarious achievement – I feel a sense of accomplishment when my favourite player wins.
- 3) Excitement – I find sport matches very exciting.
- 4) Interest in player – The main reason I attend [sport] matches is to cheer for my favourite player.
- 5) Aesthetics – Successful plays and strategies performed by the players are an important component of sport being enjoyable.
- 6) Social opportunities – Sport matches give me a great opportunity to socialize with other people.
- 7) Drama – A close match is more enjoyable than a blowout.

⁷ *Worldwide Sports Market Revenue*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/370560/worldwide-sports-market-revenue/>>.

⁸ *ESPN*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.espn.com/mlb/>>.

⁹ RUDA, T., MATĚJČEK, M.: Aspects of Motivation for Sponsorship of Professional Ice Hockey in the Czech Republic. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: *Marketing Identity 2018, Digital Mirrors II*. Tmava : FMK UCM, p. 238.

¹⁰ ŠÍMA, J.: *Ekonomika evropských profesionálních fotbalových klubů a soutěží*. Prague : Ekopress, 2019, p. 102.

¹¹ VORÁČEK, J.: *Public Relations ve sportovních organizacích*. Prague : Karolinum, 2012, p. 44.

¹² PIZZO, A. D. et al.: eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 114.

- 8) Role model – Sport gamers inspire me.
- 9) Entertainment value – Watching sport is great entertainment for the price.
- 10) Wholesome environment – I value the wholesome environment evident at sport matches.
- 11) Family bonding – Attending sport matches gives me a chance to bond with my family.
- 12) Acquisition of knowledge – I can increase my understanding of strategy by watching sport matches.
- 13) Skill of the athletes – The superior skills are something I appreciate while watching sport.
- 14) Physical attractiveness – I enjoy watching players who are physically attractive.
- 15) Enjoyment of aggression – I enjoy the aggressive behaviour of the players.

Similar research has not yet been carried out in the Czech environment; therefore, this study aims to compare attendance motives for traditional sports compared to eSports.

2 Methodology/Methods

The study collects data in two venues. Two football matches played in Prague were chosen for the traditional sport. The first match was between Sparta Prague and Liberec in July 2022, and the second took place in September 2002 between Slavia Prague and Zlín. The questionnaire was distributed before and after the match. A total of 300 paper questionnaires were gathered. The questionnaire was inspired by a study by Pizzo and the collective¹³. For eSports, the National Championship of the Czech Republic in Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (November 2022) was selected, where the survey was conducted among 100 spectators. The Hyundai National Championship Qualifier in FIFA (November 2022) was also selected, where a total of 200 questionnaires were collected. The sampling was based on availability and willingness of the respondents to talk to the researcher. The questionnaire contained fifteen questions aimed at measuring the motives of spectators’ participation in sports events and used the Likert Scale of 1 to 7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Another five questions dealt with demographic information. Spectators under fifteen years of age were not included in this survey.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics

		Overall		Football		Counter Strike/FIFA	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Age	15-18	86	14,3	12	4	74	24,6
	18-24	145	24,1	86	28,6	59	19,6
	25-34	215	35,8	103	34,3	112	37,3
	35-44	90	15	47	15,6	43	14,3
	45 and over	64	10	52	17,3	12	4
Gender	Male	447	74,5	213	71	234	78
	Female	153	25,5	87	29	66	22
Income	Less than 20k CZK	105	17,5	6	2	99	33
	20-35k CZK	153	25,5	79	26,3	74	24,6
	35-50k CZK	233	38,8	156	52	77	25,6
	Over 50k CZK	109	18,1	59	19,6	50	16,6

¹³ PIZZO, A. D. et al.: eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 112.

Education	Grade School	71	11,8	3	1	68	22,6
	High School	239	39,8	156	52	83	27,6
	Bachelor degree	156	26	80	26,6	76	25,3
	Master degree	126	21	58	19,3	68	22,6
	Ph.D. or higher degree	8	1,3	3	1	5	1,6
Employment	Full-time job	194	32,3	116	38,6	78	26
	Part-time job	118	19,6	52	17,3	66	22
	Homemaker	2	0,3	2	0,6	0	0
	Student	255	42,5	117	39	138	46
	Unemployed	15	2,5	12	4	3	1
	Other	16	2,6	1	0,3	15	5
Total		600		300		300	

Source: own processing, 2022

According to table 4, both groups consisted of approximately 75% male respondents. In conformity with the sample, the population that attends traditional sports is older than the one that participates in eSports which corresponds with the study of Pizzo et al.¹⁴. At the same time, it can be observed out that many students are engaged in eSports (46%), while traditional sports are followed by fewer students (39%). It is also interesting from the point of view of income, where 52% of respondents in traditional sports have incomes around the average salary of the Czech Republic (approx. 39,000 CZK), and another 20% have incomes higher than 50,000 CZK. In contrast, eSports spectators have a lower salary; roughly half of the respondents have a salary below the Czech average.

3 Results

The overall results of the research are shown in Table 5, which presents the average values of the spectators' responses and the standard deviation. The table shows the results separately for traditional sports and eSports.

Table 5: Spectators motives – differences between traditional sport and eSport

Motive	Football		Counter Strike/FIFA	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Interest in sport	5.31	1.83	4.22	1.68
Vicarious achievement	6.13	1.12	4.58	1.94
Excitement	4.43	1.73	4.12	1.72
Interest in player	5.23	1.66	4.29	1.88
Aesthetics	3.12	1.73	4.79	1.71
Social opportunities	6.11	1.17	5.78	1.90
Drama	4.31	1.70	4.22	1.92

¹⁴ PIZZO, A. D. et al.: eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 117.

Role model	4.23	1.81	5.23	1.43
Entertainment value	4.11	1.66	4.98	1.56
Wholesome environment	4.54	1.58	4.35	1.73
Family bonding	4.67	1.78	4.67	1.71
Acquisition of knowledge	3.56	1.81	6.11	1.23
Skill of the athletes	5.16	1.71	5.96	1.38
Physical attractiveness	4.12	1.56	3.16	2.15
Enjoyment of aggression	4.96	1.71	3.23	1.96

Source: own processing, 2022

Table 5 shows the three most important motives and the three least important motives for both traditional sports and eSports. On initial review, there is no connection between the top three motives. The most important motives for traditional sports are interest in sports, social opportunities, and vicarious achievement. The only motive that is mutual for both groups is social achievement. The other two motives important in eSports are acquisition of knowledge and skill of the athletes. Simply put, eSports spectators often focus on learning and possibly improving their gaming skills, and at the same time, by watching the individual performances of the best players, they can compare their performances with top gamers. In traditional sports, this result is rather different, and the explanation seems simple. When playing eSports, the observer has a much more realistic opportunity to get close to the top players. In an elite traditional sport such as football, the observer’s perception is often more limited, and although an observer can opine on how to play better, they are aware that their skills would be far from sufficient for participation in an elite sport.

Conversely, traditional sport shows the lowest values in entertainment value, acquisition of knowledge, and physical attractiveness. The second and third reasons are understandable. Given that most football viewers and the vast majority of the research sample is male, it cannot be assumed that physical attractiveness is an important motive for watching a football match. In the case of acquisition of knowledge, it can be assumed that the spectator is either convinced that they understand the sport perfectly and there is no need to improve their skills or, on the other hand, they are aware of complex tactics and their own shortcomings. In both cases, this motive is not significant. The most surprising answer is related to entertainment value. In general, it can be assumed that a spectator will consider watching football as great entertainment for the price paid. This may be related to the entrance fee, as it has recently increased by several tens of percent in the Czech Republic. However, this area opens up opportunities for further investigation.

eSport shows the lowest interest in excitement, physical attractiveness, and enjoyment of aggression. Here, too, the occurrence of physical attractiveness can be explained in the same way as in traditional sports. On the contrary, excitement and enjoyment of aggression are surprising. The latter motive could be at least an average value due to the nature of the combat game Counter Strike, where the content of aggression is part of the game itself. The motive of excitement is also surprising here, when again at least average values could be assumed. The perception of fun and the perception of gaming as exciting cannot be precisely explained. Here, too, there is room for further investigation.

Table 6: Spectators motives – similarities between traditional sport and eSport

Motive	Football – CouterStrike/FIFA
	Difference
Interest in sport	1.09
<i>Vicarious achievement</i>	1.55
Excitement	0.31
Interest in player	0.94
<i>Aesthetics</i>	-1.67
Social opportunities	0.33
Drama	0.09
Role model	-1
Entertainment value	-0.87
Wholesome environment	0.19
Family bonding	0
<i>Acquisition of knowledge</i>	-2.55
Skill of the athletes	-0.8
Physical attractiveness	0.96
<i>Enjoyment of aggression</i>	1.73

Source: own processing, 2022

Table 5 contains the differences in respondents' answers for individual groups (traditional sport vs. eSport). Motives with a very similar weight between the monitored constructs are shown in bold. Spectators behave similarly in the areas of excitement, social opportunities, drama and family bonding, where the respondents gave the same answer on average. On the contrary, there are motives where spectators do not agree. Significant differences in the motives vicarious achievement, aesthetics, acquisition of knowledge, and enjoyment of aggression were found.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This survey uses findings from existing research, such as sports consumer motivation presented by Fink, Trail and Anderson¹⁵, or Trail and James¹⁶ in traditional and electronic sports contexts. Overall, the results show that spectators of traditional sports and eSports have similar motives for sports consumption. Another already implemented study with which the results can be compared is eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives¹⁷ In this research, fifteen motives were chosen that can lead sports and eSports fans to watch. The study in the Czech

¹⁵ FINK, J. S., TRAIL, G. T., ANDERSON, D. F.: Environmental Factors Associated with Spectator Attendance and Sport Consumption Behavior: Gender and Team Differences. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 10.

¹⁶ TRAIL, G. T., JAMES, J. D.: The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption: Assessment of the Scale's Psychometric Properties. In *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 2001, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 118.

¹⁷ PIZZO, A. D. et al.: eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 116.

Republic shows similarity only among four motives: excitement, social opportunities, drama and family bonding. The rest of the motives have a greater difference, so there is no possibility to confirm the results of previous research with this survey conducted in the Czech Republic.

A study by Trail & James and Pizzo states that physical attractiveness is an important and common motive for both traditional sports and eSports. This study confirms a similar result for physical attractiveness; however, in both cases, this motive had rather lower values, thus rather refuting the importance of this motive.

This study has several limitations. First, the survey was only conducted on two soccer matches and two eSports tournaments. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret the results with caution and not apply them to the entire population of the Czech Republic. Rather, it is an initial study that should lead to the creation of hypotheses for further investigation. A similar investigation can take place in parallel in other traditional sports and at the eSports championship of the Czech Republic in 2023. Comparing these results will lead to a deeper understanding of this topic.

The second shortcoming is the comparison of only traditional football and computer games. For further investigation, it is necessary to examine the environment in multiple sports and eSport. This enhancement is necessary to increase external validity of the results.

The third weakness stems from the nature of the survey and is a limitation of the Pizzo study itself which motivated this survey. The limit of 15 motives does not allow for consideration of other potential variables that can motivate spectators to participate in sports events. In this area, it would be possible to conduct several qualitative interviews with spectators, where the researcher could identify additional motives that this study does not address.

This survey is rather quantitative in nature. Further studies should focus on the qualitative aspect of the issue, mainly the attributes of the viewers of individual games, and compare results with this data. Another opportunity could be the frequency of visits and its continuity with the motives of attendance. These areas could further be monitored from the perspective of media representations of traditional sport compared to eSport and the influence on consumer perceptions of traditional sport and eSport.

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LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS 2022 IN THE MEDIA: COMPLETENESS OF INFORMATION AND OBJECTIVITY

Daniel Šmatlánek

Abstract:

Elections, as a basic tool for the functioning of democracy, inevitably bring with them an election campaign and media attention. Part of the election campaign and preparation for the elections is also informing about the candidates, election programs or competences of the elected body. In 2022, the elections to the self-governing bodies of regions and cities and municipalities will be held, and therefore it is quite interesting to follow the coverage of these elections in the Slovak media. As part of the contribution, we focus on the content analysis of Slovak media reporting. Local and regional elections in Slovakia could be described in professional terminology as “second order elections”. The article analyzes and evaluates whether the Slovak media’s reporting on local government elections reflects this theory, and thus whether the media inform only marginally and do not provide enough space for local government elections. Likewise, it is relatively interesting to observe the extent to which the media devotes its space to competences, especially in elections to the bodies of self-governing regions, where the level of public awareness is at a low level.

Key words:

Election. Local. Order. Politics. Regional. Second.

1 Introduction

The issue of the relationship between the media and politics is quite extensive. Politicians try to directly and indirectly influence media information, and the media often serve as creators of public opinion. Nowadays, most media readers are moving to the online space. Opinion-forming journals are published not only in printed form but also in electronic form. Before the elections, the media are carriers of information but also of the pre-election campaign towards the public. In countries with a parliamentary form of government, the media are most active before the parliamentary elections, which are the most important in the governance process. But do the media play an adequate role in other types of elections? The article deals with the content, scope, objectivity and importance of elections to self-government bodies covered in the media. In this case, the media should also play the role of a teacher towards citizens, especially in the case of complicated elections, such as the 2022 elections in Slovakia. This year, representatives of both levels of self-government are being elected in Slovakia, and therefore we assume that private media will also devote part of their space to explaining the election process.

1.1 Media’s Role in Politics

Journalism plays a constructive role in democratic societies. Through contacts with social, cultural and political elites, it is involved in all important public events and guided by the interests of its audiences. The main task of journalism is basically to inform about current events, people or circumstances of public importance or interest based on objectively processed information from reliable sources.¹ This paper is therefore about providing objective information on elections to self-governing bodies in the pre-election period. In addition to the election rules, they should not impose their views on individual candidates and should provide adequate space regardless of the political affiliation of the candidates. However, since it is not possible to process all information in such a way as to fully reflect reality, the selection must be guided by certain intelligence values; that is, a combination of what the audience will be

¹ McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 1999, p. 25.

interested in and what will be significant and important for society at the same time. When creating news content, a journalist should therefore follow certain rules that either are given to them by law or are an established practice of journalistic ethics since the beginning of journalism. McQuail highlights four core publishing values that journalists should adhere to. This includes truth, freedom, solidarity, order, and togetherness.²

Truthfulness is understood in today's journalism as neutral, reliable, verifiable reporting supported by expert analysis and interpretation.³ The main criteria of truthfulness are reliability, credibility, balance, comprehensibility, relevance, integrity, authenticity, personal truthfulness, courage and transparency. Truthfulness is also often associated with the idea of news objectivity, in which, although it is the dominant ideal of journalistic practice, we find certain limits associated with the above-mentioned criteria. According to McNair, solidarity relates to the concept of diversity, which should ensure equal access to the media for all.⁴ Its value is often accentuated by the danger of concentration of ownership and monopolies. The basic and fundamental condition of public communication is then the value of freedom. We can look at news objectivity either as an unattainable ideal or as a state that can be achieved through the routine work of a journalist. According to Reifová, achieving complete objectivity is essentially impossible because decisions about what to watch are subjective and subject to all sorts of influences. Among the basic arguments of the unattainability of objectivity, Reifová advises the news selection process (gatekeeping), placing the news in a broader reference framework that provides them with evaluative meaning, omission or deletion of information, and external and internal production pressures.⁵ Individual attributes of the causes of non-objectivity are also visible in the media before the elections. For example, Theodor Glasser argues that objectivity is an ideology and a form of bias against the press and its role as a "watchdog" and that it stifles independent thought and removes the original responsibility of the journalistic craft.⁶

Like Glasser, McNair points out that media coverage of political issues is always biased, subjective rather than objective, and mostly partisan rather than impartial.⁷ Media and political objectivity could be understood as an important element of democracy because it helps the media to report on political issues accurately, fairly and independently. Objective ethics has gradually evolved into a set of denoting practices and conventions, which, when present in a journalistic work, provide the audience with support for its truthfulness.⁸ Among these practices, Šaradín advises the explicit separation of fact from opinion, the inclusion of all opposing political parties, and the substantiation of the journalistic narrative by citing reliable authoritative sources.⁹ Given the importance of the media in political processes, there are certain expectations for the press regarding quality, fairness and balanced representation. According to Bucy and Grabe, this is one of journalism's biggest obligations to society; because it has the task of providing true and balanced information that will support citizens in their decisions about the choice of political leaders.¹⁰

² McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 1999, p. 72-73.

³ McNAIR, B.: *An Introduction to Political Communication*. London : Routledge, 2003, p. 32.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁵ REIFOVÁ, I. et. al.: *Slovník mediální komunikace*. Prague : Portál, 2004, p. 18.

⁶ GLASSER, T.: Objectivity Precludes Responsibility. In *The Quill*, 1984, Vol. 72, No. 2, p. 14.

⁷ McNAIR, B.: *An Introduction to Political Communication*. London : Routledge, 2003, p. 41.

⁸ O'NEIL, P. H.: *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*. Boulder Colorado : Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 6.

⁹ ŠARADÍN, P. et. al.: *Politické kampaně, volby a politický marketing*. Olomouc : Periplum, 2007, p. 22.

¹⁰ BUCY, E., GRABE, M.: Taking Television Seriously: A Sound and Image Bite Analysis of Presidential Campaign Coverage, 1992–2004. In *Journal of Communication*, 2011, Vol. 57, No. 2, p. 661.

Objectivity represents a clear journalistic distance from the opinions expressed in political debates. Objectivity determine that opinions are not confused with factual reporting. McNair gives the example of the BBC, which ensures the principles of impartiality by giving equal space for the expression of all political parties on every political topic.¹¹ The previously mentioned concept of bias is closely related to the concept of objectivity. Bias can be perceived as something that brings its own standard for evaluation, because it assumes that it is possible to observe certain deviations from a given standard within media contents. It is therefore a kind of distortion in the media announcement, whether it is caused by conscious distortion, unconscious omission of a certain aspect, value orientation of the author or mutual inspiration between the media, the so-called structural bias.¹² Burton and Jiráček then distinguishes four types of this bias; it is a division into intentional or unintentional, open or latent, whether it is ideological political contractual or unintentional selective bias, and last but not least, whether it is propaganda or ideology. However, as stated by Burton and Jiráček, bias is difficult to detect and prove, because all media texts are to some extent conditioned by the culture of the communicator and bias always depends on who and from what position point out that something is biased. The bias, which is thus inevitable to a certain extent, is why the media try to weaken it by certain means, by which they want to achieve the impression of neutrality and balance.¹³

One of the ways in which the state tries to prevent the influence of private interests on media output is the existence of public media, which in most countries coexist alongside private commercial media. Public service media, as they are often referred to, serve to fulfil the public interest. The mission of public service media is defined directly in the law, which also establishes the functioning of individual media in each country and defines the demands placed on public media. In Slovakia, separate laws establish public media. The main requirements placed on public media include the provision of unbiased news, serving the interests of society, communication representation of ethnic and national minorities, support of cultural and legal awareness, education, entertainment and more. The mass media in the form of print, radio, television and the Internet are the most common means for citizens in our society to obtain information about the election campaign. While the election campaign is intended to mean political competition and pre-election struggle in a broader sense, election campaigning should be understood as an intended and targeted part of an active election campaign purposefully directed for political parties, coalitions and candidates.¹⁴

In election campaigns, the mass media play a key role as mediators informing voters about what is happening on the political scene. The primary authors of the election campaign are political parties, but it is necessary to realize that from their political programs, declarations, statements of their representatives, their political activities and events in political structures, the media creates its own product and constructs its own image of reality, which is subsequently presented publicly and may differ from reality. During the pre-election campaign period, different media fall under various obligations, which can be classified according to time into individual phases according to the gradual climax of the campaign or also according to the regulation of individual media from the point of view of their nature as private or public entities. In election campaigns, mass media play a key role as mediators informing voters about events on the political scene. The primary authors of the election campaign are the political parties, but it should be noted that from their political programs, declarations, statements of their representatives, their political activities and events in political structures, the media create their own product and

¹¹ McNAIR, B.: *An Introduction to Political Communication*. London : Routledge, 2003, p. 55.

¹² BURTON, G., JIRÁČEK, J.: *Úvod do studia médií*. Brno : Barrister & Principal, 2008, p. 56.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 162.

¹⁴ JABLONSKI, A. et. al.: *Politický marketing: Úvod do teorie a praxe*. Brno : Barrister and Principal, 2006, p. 11.

construct their own image of reality, which is subsequently presented to the public and may differ from reality. The media, which generally means print, radio, television and media based on the digital processing of data transmission (Internet, etc.), are the dominant means of communication, and therefore, when communicating with the public, politicians cannot do without cooperation with the media.¹⁵

Relations between the media and political actors are defined by many factors and circumstances. In most democratic countries, there is a certain legal and institutional framework. In Europe in particular, politicians usually have the authority to adjust the basic framework of the functioning of the media in society. Laws define public and private media, regulate licensing, control and regulatory authorities, general business conditions in the media market, regulation of advertising and many other areas. The relationship between the media and the political sphere is very complicated because, in addition to formal institutions and constitutional, legal and personnel rules, it is also defined by tradition, unwritten rules and customs, so it is largely determined by cultural and historical tradition. The form and character of relations between the world of politics and the media depends on knowledge, experience, style and culture of representatives of both parties. In some countries, the functioning of the media system is based only on the constitutionally guaranteed right to information and freedom of speech and those unwritten rules and customs.¹⁶

1.2 Second-order Election Theoretical Framework

Second-order election theory belongs to political science concepts that describe a group of elections of lesser importance. In a substantial part of the research so far, theories of second-order elections have been demonstrated in elections to the European Parliament. In addition to elections to the bodies of the European Parliament, however, this concept was also used in the case of elections to other bodies, such as in local government elections. In the paper, we primarily focus on the specific aspect of coverage of election information in opinion-forming media. This is one of the indicators documenting the presence of second-order elections. As Gyarfásóva and Henderson say: “*European Parliament elections are second-order because they are considered to be less important by voters, political parties or media than the “real” first-order elections, i.e. national parliamentary or presidential elections because “less is at stake”.*”¹⁷ There, we can conclude that second-order election could be observed by checking out the campaign within media in pre-election period.

The first elections to the European Parliament in 1979 provided very broad empirical material, which deserved closer attention of two political scientists, Reif and Schmitt.¹⁸ Some features that seemed to be different from national elections characterized the new type of election. The essence of their concept is the division of the national electoral arena into primary and secondary. Primary elections are those that are considered more important from the point of view of the functioning of the system. These are primarily elections that are of key importance for the distribution of power in the state, i.e. elections to national parliaments in parliamentary systems and presidential elections in presidential (semi-presidential) systems. The criterion for identifying primary elections is their impact on the formation of the decisive component of the executive branch of power. The direct election of the president in a system where they hold only a representative and symbolic function (e.g. Slovakia) cannot be considered a primary

¹⁵ MOHL, S., BAKIČOVÁ, H.: *Žurnalistika*. Prague : Grada, 2005, p. 42.

¹⁶ JABLONSKI, A. et. al.: *Politický marketing: Úvod do teorie a praxe*. Brno : Barrister and Principal, 2006, p. 42.

¹⁷ GYARFÁSOVÁ, O., HENDERSON, K.: Slovakia and the Turnout Conundrum. In *East European Politics*, 2018, Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 86.

¹⁸ REIF, K., SCHMITT, H.: Nine Second-order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results. In *European Journal of Political Research*, 1980, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 30.

election. The same could be applied within the framework of asymmetric bicameralism, where lower chamber is politically more powerful than the upper one in most cases. Therefore, lower chamber election is more important than creating the weaker part of the parliament- upper chamber. Second-order elections are represented by all other “less important” elections (e.g. European, regional, municipal elections, upper house elections, by-elections). In connection with the interconnectedness of individual types of elections, K. Reif presented six dimensions through which second-order elections should be examined.¹⁹

The most significant difference between primary and second-order elections is that less is played in second-order elections, so there is less at stake. Based on the results of second-order elections, there is no change of government; voters decide on less important topics, in the case of European elections, they elect a body that is distant from them. The consequence showed up in a lower voter turnout, simply because voters do not consider the election important. In the worst case, thanks to a lacklustre election campaign, they may not know about the elections at all.²⁰

Another effect noted in second-order elections is the higher success of small and new parties. Since there is “less at stake” in the elections, the voters resign themselves to strategic voting, which they would apply in primary elections. Instead of choosing a large party in charge with a real chance to participate in the government and implement its program, the voter prefers a small party that can better represent their opinion. Electoral research also showed that depending on the electoral cycle, or on the date of second-order elections, there is a loss of support for the governing party. The most significant drop-in support is recorded in the middle of the election period, when, on the contrary, preferences of the opposition rise significantly. Many voters thereby express their dissatisfaction with government policy and use their vote as a warning to the government. Towards the end of the election period, support for government parties is growing again.²¹

Even though primary and secondary elections show significant differences, the fact that national aspects are reflected to a certain extent in the secondary arena cannot be ignored. As already mentioned above, it features the “less is at stake” factor. Reif and Schmitt refer to the fact that second-order elections are held for political bodies at various institutional levels of politics, some of which may approach national elections in their importance. The authors of the theory also dealt with formal differences in the institutional setting, especially in the area of the electoral law.²² Voter turnout, for example is influenced by legal setting as some countries use obligatory voting. Second-order elections can also differ by a different electoral system, in this regard, Reif and Schmitt hypothesize that the more they differ from the traditional electoral procedure of primary elections, the lower the turnout.²³ This can be observed in a situation where the voter is used to the majority voting system for a long time and subsequently moves to an environment where the proportional system is used. The authors see the regionalization and personalization of the electoral system, when the country is divided into several small

¹⁹ REIF, K.: Reflections: European Elections as Member State Second Order Elections. In *European Journal of Political Research*, 1997, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 118.

²⁰ ŠARADÍN, P.: *Teorie voleb druhého řádu a možnosti jejich aplikace v České republice*. Olomouc : Univerzita Palackého, 2008, p. 37.

²¹ FREIRE, A.: Second Order Elections and Electoral Cycles in Democratic Portugal, 1975-2002. In *South European Society and Politics*, 2004, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 59.

²² HOBOLT, S., WITTRÖCK, J.: The Second-order Election Model Revisited: An Experimental Test of Vote Choices in European Parliament Elections. In *Electoral Studies*, 2011, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 38.

²³ REIF, K., SCHMITT, H.: Nine Second-order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results. In *European Journal of Political Research*, 1980, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 32-34.

constituencies, which brings the candidate closer to the voters, as a positive influence on voter turnout. Enabling preferential voting can also result in an increase in voter turnout. The form of the election campaign of the candidate entities can influence the outcome of second-order elections. While primary elections enjoy the media and public attention, second-order elections campaigns compete with other political events and issues. That is why political parties must spend more money to reach voters and attract their attention. In general, the less effort and financial resources political parties put into an election campaign, the less turnout can be predicted. For many political parties, on the other hand, it is strategically more advantageous having election campaigns not drawing too much attention, especially for those with a solid core of voters. If we want to analyse the results of second-order elections, we must consider the change in the popularity of political actors, in other words, research on second-order elections cannot be carried out, without primary elections taking place. Changes in the support of political parties can fluctuate due to economic or political developments in society, so it does not have to be only a connection with second-order elections. In order to clearly identify second-order choices, it is necessary to include previous first-order choices in the analysis.²⁴

The correct interpretation of the results of second-order elections cannot be done without monitoring changes in the social and cultural dimension. The success of political parties is often based on the support of various socio-economic and cultural groups. Together with the emergence of the theory of second-order elections in 1980, the principles and basic features of a new type of election were presented in comparison with the differences with national elections.²⁵ These assumptions served several political scientists as suitable background material for their further development and refinement. Four years after the publication of this theory, i.e. after the second European elections, Reif verified the hypotheses of the text from 1980. The analysis of the results of other European elections confirmed the initial assumptions, and at the same time another important variable was included, and it election cycle issues. The concept includes the term post-election euphoria, which is the period right after the elections, when the support of the governing party is the strongest, then starts to decline and is the lowest just before the next election. According to Reif, the most important variable that affects the results of the second-order elections is the time that has passed since the primary elections.²⁶ As P. Šaradin states, different authors perceive the issue of election cycles differently, but they mostly lean towards the following periodization:

- honeymoon (the period up to 12 months after the parliamentary, when there is not necessarily a decrease in the votes of the governing parties, on the contrary, they can get the same or more votes),
- mid-term (the period between the 13th and 36th months after the elections, when the governing parties significantly loses support, it is usually the lowest in this period) and later term (the period from the 37th to the 48th month after the election, i.e. just before the next national election, when support for the government parties increases again).

Although the theory of second-order elections was built primarily on the analysis of the results of the European elections, it can also be applied to other types of elections, provided several assumptions are met. For the research to be considered relevant, the observed elections must take place within the same political system and the same actors must participate in the political

²⁴ See: EHIN, P., TALVING, L.: Still Second-order? European Elections in the Era of Populism, Extremism, and Euroscepticism. In *Political Studies Association*, 2021, Vol. 41, No. 4, p. 467-485.

²⁵ KOEPKE, J., RING, N.: The Second-order Election Model in an Enlarged Europe. In *European Union Politics*, 2006, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 335.

²⁶ REIF, K.: Reflections: European Elections as Member State Second Order Elections. In *European Journal of Political Research*, 1997, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 118.

competition.²⁷ At the same time, it is necessary to consider other variables that are directly derived from the theory, namely the electoral systems of the monitored elections, but also institutional, social, economic, cultural, national and other factors.²⁸

2 Methodology

In the presented paper, we deal with the relationship between media and politics. To be more specific, we track the relationship of the pre-election campaign to the 2022 municipal elections on media coverage through opinion-forming media. The paper is based on theory of second-order elections. Several indicators confirm or disconfirm the presence of second-order elections. One of these indicators is also the media's interest in the presentation of candidates or elections as such. The theory of second-order elections consists of several conditions, but in our paper, we focus only on the media coverage of the local government elections in 2022. For the purposes of this paper, we decided to follow the three largest opinion-forming national newspapers, which are published both in print and electronic form. These are the daily newspapers *Pravda*, *SME*, and *Denník N*. The newspapers were chosen based to the latest survey that determines the ranking.²⁹ We did not include tabloid media in the research. Research is also limited in time, for the period from 1.9.2022-20.10. The beginning of this period is associated with the most intensive period of the pre-election campaign and information about the elections. Based on the theory of second-order elections, we compare the number and content of pre-election articles in these media. We put the information into a comparison with the period before the last parliamentary elections in 2020. Data collection was carried out through the study of documents, which is one of the relevant academic methods for obtaining the necessary data, as well as through standardized observation. In the study, we draw data from articles that represent the secondary processing of already prepared materials. The materials used for this data are in the form of articles in the largest opinion-forming media, which we consider relatively relevant data in terms of content. Content analysis of these data is the method that dominates our paper. For a successful content analysis, it was necessary to take several preparatory steps, such as sample selection. This sample was limited to the selected time and in the selected media to the particular topic of the elections. We also set categories where we focused both on the quantitative element in the form of the number of articles as well as a qualitative view of the form of these articles. The role of comparison should be seen as rather important in the study.

Based on this comparison, we present conclusions that relate to a partial view of the presence of second-order elections. In the paper, we also set two research questions, which are as follows: To what extent do the three largest opinion-forming media inform about the elections to self-government bodies in 2022? The second question is put as follows: Based on the scope and content of the information, is it possible to point out that in terms of media coverage, these are second-rate elections?

²⁷ ŠARADÍN, P.: *Teorie voleb druhého řádu a možnosti jejich aplikace v České republice*. Olomouc : Univerzita Palackého, 2008, p. 55.

²⁸ CABADA, L.: Volby do evropského parlamentu jako volby druhého řádu?. In CABADA, L. (ed.): *Reflexe voleb v nových členských zemích EU ze středovýchodní Evropy 2010*. Prague : Oeconomica, 2010, p. 14. [online]. [2022-10-15]. Available at: <<https://oeconomica.vse.cz/vydane-publikace/seznam-vsech-vydanych-titulu/sborniky-2022-az-2009/cabada-ladislav-volby-do-evropskeho-parlamentu-jako-volby-druheho-radu-reflexe-voleb-v-novych-clenskych-zemich-eu-ze-stredovychodni-evropy-112010/>>.

²⁹ *Pravda je opäť najčítanejší mienkotvorný denník na Slovensku*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/564564-pravda-je-opat-najcitanejsi-mienkotvorny-dennik-na-slovensku/>>.

3 Results

As we have already mentioned earlier, for the purposes of this article we have chosen the pre-election period starting after September 1, due to the summer vacations and the significantly subdued political activity and therefore also the campaign. Due to the huge amount of information, we focused on the most important posts related to several areas. Several pieces of information published in *Denník N*, *SME* and *Pravda* overlapped. Therefore, we do not report duplicate messages in the results. Part of this evaluation is not only the number of news published in the media we examined, but also the content of these articles and the overall coverage of the topic of the joint elections of 2022. In order to be able to correctly evaluate the extent of media attention in the opinion-forming media that we have determined, it is necessary to confront these results with the previous elections at the national level. This is the principle that is commonly used in determining whether it is a second-order election. It is also necessary to fulfil the conditions of the same state and electoral period. Due to the huge range of media reports before the parliamentary elections, we only focus on the range that was dedicated to the 2020 parliamentary elections. In some cases, elections at the level of local government or elections to the European Parliament are also compared with presidential elections. Since Slovakia is organized as a parliamentary form of government, we chose to compare it with the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The total number of published articles devoted to elections in the monitored newspapers reached the number 197. This number includes news, information and articles dealing with both local and regional elections. There is a significant disproportion between the individual newspapers in the number of published news, as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Number of reports on the topic of Local and Regional Election 2022

Newspaper	SME	Pravda	Denník N
Number of reports	144	27	26

Source: own processing, 2022

There is a relatively evident disproportion of news devoted to elections in individual newspapers. Undoubtedly, the largest space was devoted to this topic by the newspaper *SME*. From the selected three largest opinion-forming media, this newspaper devoted more than 73% of all news published during the biggest election campaign. On the one hand, we see a significant disproportion of given space between *SME* and the other two, but on the other hand, we positively evaluate the fact that all media have created separate sections dedicated exclusively to these elections. The difference between the individual newspapers is obvious and somewhat surprising, but it should be emphasized that the *SME* newspaper has been the most intensively devoted to the topic of elections for a long time. The content of the reports as well as their objectivity are quite difficult to evaluate, but the differences can be observed especially when comparing the content of *Denník N* and *Pravda* reports. The fundamental difference can be seen mainly in the preference of news in favour of liberal candidates in the case of *Denník N* and conservative candidates in the case of *Pravda*. This fact is based on the differences between the readers and the target group of these newspapers.

We noticed a significant disproportion of articles from as for municipal and regional elections. This fact also documents the situation that if the elections to the regional self-government bodies were held separately, it would have significantly increased the possibility that they would be second-order elections. These specific circumstances fundamentally distort the situation. Out of the total number of 197 articles, up to 157 were about local elections and only

the remaining 40 related to regional elections. The percentage representation of both elections in individual media was approximately the same.

We also looked at individual media reports from the point of view of objectivity and completeness of information. Despite the fact that the public media in particular are obliged to educate and explain the principles of elections, we believe that the most widely read opinion-forming media should partially fulfil a similar role. As of the nature of reports, we divided them into several categories. Reports that are devoted to selected candidates in elections for various reasons, reports that are devoted to election rules, reports that point to corruption or clientelism or possible problems with morality, ethics or the law, reports that are devoted to curiosities, speculations or peculiarities and others. We can therefore divide almost 200 articles into the following categories.

Table 2: The Nature of Reports

The nature of report	Number
Reports on candidates	116
Reports on election rules	28
Reports on corruption, clientelism or problems with morality, ethics or law of candidates	15
Reports on curiosities, speculations and peculiarities	23
Other	15

Source: own processing, 2022

As it is obvious from the table, the most of reports were associated with candidates' campaign in the pre-election period. The opinion-forming media devoted some of their space to reports explaining the election rules. This approach can be evaluated positively, even more when such merged election appeared for the first time in history of Slovakia. The need for explaining on how to vote was crucial and therefore we value the position of researched media and their attitude. Some of the reports caught our attention because of their specific subject matter. One of the articles describes how those tested positive for coronavirus will be able to vote.³⁰ *Denník N* as the only newspaper published an article on women candidates and therefore confirmed its liberal position. The article also warn that if there a woman occur as a candidate, in most cases she run with support of right-wing extremist party.³¹ Several reports were made on poor local government options, which are closely related to existence of large number of small municipalities.³² If are to about evaluate the existence of second-order election we have make a comparison to previous national (parliamentary election). We counted the number of all reports in *Pravda*, *SME* and *Denník N* in the same time before the election. In total, there were 423 reports in those journals. The importance of parliamentary election is perceived even in media more significantly. Even though the number of reports is more than twice bigger, there is not clear proof about the significantly lower importance of self-government election 2022. In conclusion we answer the research questions. The answer to the question on the extent of information we point out, that the space that was given to joint self-government election was big enough to cover all the important topics. There was an urge to provide enough information

³⁰ *Voliči v izolácii pre COVID-19 budú môcť hlasovať do špeciálnej urny.* [online]. [2022-10-12]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/642132-volici-v-izolacii-pre-covid-19-budu-moct-hlasovat-do-specialnej-urny/>>.

³¹ KEREKES, D.: *Pozrite sa, kto z vašich susedov kandiduje do župy. Ženy musíte hľadať lupou, navyše v krajnej pravici.* [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/3051298/pozrite-sa-kto-z-vasich-susedov-kandiduje-do-zupy-zeny-musite-hladat-lupou-navyse-v-krajnej-pravici/>>.

³² OTRIOVÁ, J.: *Obec má 39 obyvateľov, starosta kosi aj odhrňa sneh. Stačilo, končím, vraví.* [online]. [2022-09-30]. Available at: <<https://korzar.sme.sk/c/23011915/obec-ma-39-obyvatelov-starosta-kosi-aj-odhrna-sneh-stacilo-koncim-vravi.html>>.

on the way of voting as it was more complicated with this election. All the three newspapers informed their readers sufficiently and covered various issues related to election. As for the second question, we are not positive enough, whether this election meet the criteria of the second-order election. Therefore, we are inclined to the opinion that these are not second-order elections from the point of view of media coverage. We are fully aware of the fact, that more indicators come to play in order to evaluate that correctly. Nevertheless, as for the media interest in the election 2022, we do not call them as the second-order election.

4 Discussion

However, the results regarding the content of the articles in the media, as well as their total number, must be seen in the context of the joint elections to self-governing bodies. The importance of elections thus automatically increases. When discussing, it is necessary to clarify when it is possible to talk about the fact that the elections are so-called secondary. There are quite a lot of indicators that confirm or refute this, and in our article we only deal with media coverage of the elections and do not point to voter turnout. The concept of second-order election was mostly used in connection with elections to the European Parliament, but in some studies, it was applied to elections of self-governing bodies. In the discussion, it should be added that the concept of joint elections of political actors to local and regional self-government bodies relatively distorts the real situation. This statement is quite well proven when looking at the number of reports devoted to local and regional elections. A significant majority of reports related to elections to local self-government bodies, and only a minimum related to regional self-government. We can therefore imagine that if the elections to self-governing bodies were held separately, in the case of regional ones, we could talk about a second-order election.

5 Conclusion

The issue of second-order elections has been appearing in the political science literature for decades. It is evident that the weight of individual types of elections differs significantly, especially when it comes to individual specific types of elections such as elections to the European Parliament or to self-governing bodies. We dare to say that if there was no fundamental change and the holding of joint elections to self-government in 2022, we could call the elections to self-governing regional bodies as second-order elections. However, this claim is limited to only one of the indicators, namely the media one. The space that was set aside in the pre-election campaign for reports on self-governing regions would clearly document the secondary status compared to the previous parliamentary elections. Given that we are evaluating local and regional self-government elections as a whole, we cannot and have not concluded that they can be labelled as a second-order election. We are aware of the limitations of this study, which only addressed a few aspects of second-order choice theory. The combination of local and regional elections in the future will probably not give room for the claim of a lesser importance of these elections. We positively assess the role of the media, especially the newspaper *SME*, which devoted significant space to various topics related to the elections. Therefore, if the current legislation remains valid in the future and we re-elect local and regional politicians together, the theory of second-order election will remain relevant especially for elections to the European Parliament.

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SHORT VIDEO MARKETING AS A NEW TREND IN E-COMMERCE

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Abstract:

The short video trend is growing in popularity. It is preferred by more and more users. This trend also shows the rising power of social media videos as they provide an excellent opportunity for marketers to communicate with the target audience. The future of short videos in marketing is bright, as marketers do not have to invest a lot of money or commit to a content strategy, as doing so is often financially demanding. The paper outlines theoretical knowledge in the field of video marketing, in particular short video marketing. The second part of the paper focuses on the biggest short video platforms, namely *YouTube*, which is among the top-rated video streaming platforms and is the second most visited website (focusing on the *YouTube Shorts* feature) and *TikTok*. The concept of short videos is constantly evolving, the competition is getting stronger, and therefore it is difficult to predict with certainty which platform will work best in the future. The future, however, seems to be open to the trend of short videos. The aim of the paper is to point out the importance of the newly developing marketing trend – short video marketing.

Key words:

Short Video. Social Networks. Tiktok. Video Applications. Youtube Shorts.

Introduction

The short video trend has been growing in popularity, especially in recent years. A short video is viewed by users as intuitive, convenient and effective. Short video marketing aims at stimulating the sensory organs. Recording short videos is now very easy thanks to smart technology. Use of video applications is becoming one of the most common leisure activities. That is why many national and international studies focus on this topic. Short video formats are gaining in popularity not only with users but also with advertisers. The length of short video is usually less than 5 minutes. The video content is usually adapted to the fast-paced lifestyle, it is refined and rich in content. As many users watch videos on their mobile phones, more and more videos are shown vertically. Thanks to various artificial intelligence tools, videos are more interesting and entertaining than ever before. Companies have also begun to actively employ online marketing tools and now communicate with their customers through various online channels. Marketers are mainly interested in what people think and what opinions they share with their “friends”. People look for the opinions and reviews of others and only then they make their purchasing decision.¹ The rapid development of a new form of short videos opened the door to the short video marketing.

1 Short Video Marketing

The format of short videos varies. Information load, visual side and easy availability are the biggest advantages of short videos. They can either entertain or educate and spread information. The cornerstone of short videos is authenticity, the feeling of being natural and contemporary. Such kind of videos are most often found on APP platforms and have specific features, in particular short production cycle, high degree of personalization, low production costs,

¹ See: FEDORKO, R., BAČÍK, R., KERULOVÁ, V.: The Analysis on The Importance of the Reputation Management in Relation to E-Commerce Subjects. In *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 48–56.

transmission in real time, current topics, etc. The author has a lot of creative freedom and targets videos on the specific platform or group of users.² Douglas Kellner believes that media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. Images shared in the media form culture through symbols, myths and resources that are shared by most people worldwide. In a certain way, they influence everyday life and fuel the separation from one's own identity by controlling free time, shaping political ideas and social behaviour.³

Short video marketing in the narrower sense of the word refers to all types of marketing activities that are found on platforms specializing in the creation of short videos. This paper focuses on short video marketing in the narrower sense of the word, as it focuses on specialized platforms, primarily *TikTok* and *YouTube Shorts*. However, there are several other platforms that also specialize in this form of content. Short videos spread very quickly. For this reason, brands are eager to capitalize on that and get into the subconscious of consumers when promoting their products and services. As a result, short videos became a popular marketing tool. The characteristic features of short video marketing include the following⁴:

- form fragmentation;
- personalization;
- content decentralization.

Form Fragmentation

Most short videos are played on mobile devices, as these are most adapted to play vertical videos. People tend to watch them out of boredom, either while walking or relaxing, etc. The content of the videos is a reflection of the fast way of life. This form of videos is easier to understand and in this busy time, people tend to respond more to short and explosive content. This fact is fuelling the growth of video applications.⁵

Personalisation

Short video platforms based on big data and artificial intelligence collect user data with one aim – personalize content to users' preferences. Thanks to personalization, users see content tailored to their interest so as to keep them hooked and longing for more content. All in all, short videos are all about attracting users. Personalised content makes marketing more effective. Personalisation is based on so-called back-end. Back-end is a part of a computer system or application that the user does not have direct access to and that is usually responsible for storing and handling data. Back-end marks each user based on what the user does the most, i.e. what types of videos the user prefers and shares this information with marketers, so that merchants can send the most interesting videos directly to the given users through the distribution mechanism of the platform. Marketing managers should take into account not only the gender but also generational characteristics as one without the other does not yield the desired results.⁶

² DAI, Z., FEI, H.: Social Media Information Credibility Based on User Perception and Cloud Computing System. In *Mobile Information Systems*, 2022, No. 9, p. 2.

³ See: KELLNER, D.: School Shootings, Crises of Masculinities, and the Reconstruction of Education: Some Critical Perspectives. New York : Springer, 2013, p. 497-518.

⁴ GRANOVERTER, M. S.: The Strength of Weak Ties. In *American Journal of Sociology*, 1973, Vol. 78, No. 6, p. 1374-1375.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 1375.

⁶ See: BAČÍK, R. et al.: Perceiving the Advertising in Gender-generational Characteristics. In *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 44–57.

Content Decentralisation

Unlike *Weibo* and *Twitter*, short video platforms typically use a decentralized content creation mechanism. Short video platforms are constantly looking for new and interesting content. The point is that the user who can create the most engaging video will get the most views. The PGC+UGC content production mode, i.e. the combination of content generated by professionals and content generated by users, means that users are enticed to create a video while watching it.⁷ In this way, user engagement is increased, thus helping to maintain user enthusiasm while ensuring quality outputs. Creating short form videos takes little time and requires only simple filming props. This type of videos can be made by anyone. Therefore, anyone can become popular. All it takes is to have a good idea.⁸

2 Short Video Distribution Mechanism

The short video marketing distribution recommendation mechanism is based on the theory of selective exposure. This is different from the concept of selective exposure (this mechanism works with selectivity in contrast to the social media use habits). Selectivity is related to selective exposure theory. As stated by Levy, “selectivity is the process of randomly selecting media-related alternatives” and thus is more broad-spectrum and covers on multi-content formats. On the other hand, some researchers see selectivity as habitual content preferences that limit exposure to other types of content and usually include more entertaining videos in one batch.⁹ The most popular platform based on short video marketing is *TikTok*. *TikTok*'s distribution mechanism is not only able to tag different users according to their interests, but it can also detect the user's interest, and therefore can continuously push similar videos to users. However, this mechanism takes into account the fact that user interests identified by the mechanism do not necessarily correspond to their needs. The mechanism pushes videos to users in batches. This method, the so-called back-end measures the engagement rate – the video completion rate, as well as the number of likes, comments, shares and forwards. The number of likes is considered the most critical indicator in this regard. The system pushes content to a small number of users. If the 10% of the interactions threshold is reached, the push is evaluated as accurate and the system automatically expands the video's reach. If the 10% interactions threshold is reached again, the video's reach will continue to expand. The more videos a user watches, the more accurate content they can get. By repeatedly watching engaging short videos users feel happier. This mechanism is exactly what brands wish to exploit.¹⁰

3 TikTok vs. YouTube Shorts

TikTok

The world of video streaming platforms has been primarily dominated by *YouTube*. However, *TikTok* with its vertical video content arrived and stirred the pot. The social media platforms are now focusing on fulfillment of the viewers' imaginations with short videos and scrolling

⁷ XIAO, Y., WANG, L., WANG, P.: Research on the Influence of Content Features of Short Video Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intentions. In *4th International Conference on Modern Management, Education Technology and Social Science (MMETSS 2019)*. Netherlands : Atlantis Press, 2019, p. 416.

⁸ MOON, J.W., KIM, Y.G.: Extending the TAM for a World-Wide-Web Context. In *Information & Management*, 2001, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 227–228.

⁹ KNOBLOCH-WESTERWICK, S.: *Choice and Preference in Media Use: Advances in Selective Exposure Theory and Research*. London : Routledge, 2014, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 328.

videos, known as swift. The short video format allows marketers to increase brand awareness and thus improve their video marketing strategy. Currently, *TikTok* ranks among the largest social networks in the world. The following map shows revenues through *Google Play* and *IOS* services (Figure 1). *TikTok* saw a global quarterly revenue decline in the second quarter through *Google Play* compared to the previous quarter.¹¹

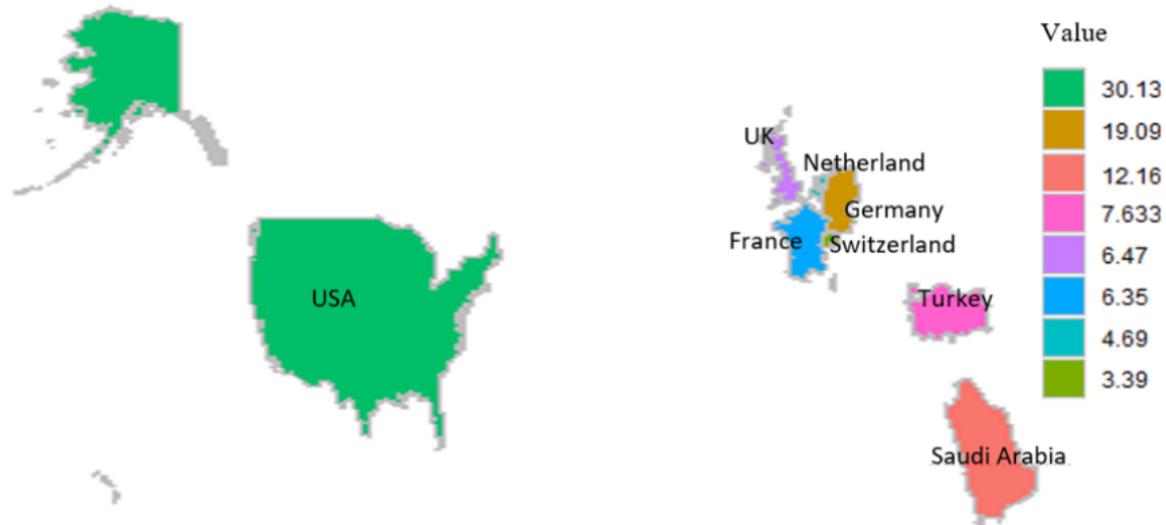


Figure 1: *TikTok* revenue via *Google Play* and *IOS* (in Million USD)
Source: own elaboration according to kaggle.com, 2021.

The company's revenues remain substantial. These are mainly revenues from *Google Play* and *IOS* services. The most profitable market is the USA with 14.4 million US dollars being paid through the *Google Play* service, which makes up as much as 18% of the company's revenue. Germany came second with revenues of 13.37 million US dollars. As for the company's profits from the *IOS* system, the USA leads again with revenues of more than 15.6 million US dollars. *TikTok*'s top 3 revenue locations are USA, Germany and Saudi Arabia.

From 2020 to September last year, the social video application saw a 45% increase in its active users.¹² In 2021, *TikTok* recorded 1 billion active monthly users.¹³ In August 2021, women made up the majority of content creators on *TikTok* – 53.79%, while men made up 46.21% of the total number of content creators on the platform over the monitored period.¹⁴ According to Insider Intelligence, the *TikTok*' revenue should triple in 2022. *TikTok* has created a creator fund with an initial investment of 200 million USD.¹⁵ The biggest competitors of *TikTok* are

¹¹ WING H. L.: *TikTok GP and IOS Revenue*. [online]. [2022-09-03]. Available at: <<https://datasetsearch.research.google.com/search?src=0&query=tiktok%20revenues&docid=L2cvMTF0MThibWQzXw%3D%3D>>.

¹² WING H. L.: *TikTok Creator by Gender*. [online]. [2022-09-03]. Available at: <https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/laiwingho/tiktok-creator-by-gender?fbclid=IwAR3kWpQSK6-2HQwjlLvLUKOev0f0gKlswQN_WwxnjKQsykJPJMM4QTBbP1Y>.

¹³ CECI, L.: *Mobile App Usage – Statistics & Facts*. Statista. [online]. [2022-09-17]. Available at: <https://www.grammarlywin.life/?_=%2Ftopics%2F1002%2Fmobile-app-usage%2F%23BRlqSwAU4g2d8kqo2XZMvdIQZyWx2aom&fbclid=IwAR0tJQIsdsN8inYomaH8D5teeGS0e_kk9Bo1VXQ6ZQoixaMFkcYOvIashw#dossierKeyfigures>.

¹⁴ WING H. L.: *TikTok Creator by Gender*. [online]. [2022-09-03]. Available at: <https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/laiwingho/tiktok-creator-by-gender?fbclid=IwAR3kWpQSK6-2HQwjlLvLUKOev0f0gKlswQN_WwxnjKQsykJPJMM4QTBbP1Y>.

¹⁵ WISE, J.: *YouTube Shorts Statistics 2022: How Many People Use It?* [online]. [2022-09-14]. Available at: <<https://earthweb.com/youtube-shorts-statistics/>>.

currently *Twitter* and *Snapchat*. However, *TikTok* is ahead of them, as its global advertising business increased by 175% in 2021 to 3.88 billion USD. The company’s revenue is projected to reach 11 billion USD by the end of 2022.

Table 1 provides an overview of the 10 most followed accounts on *TikTok* in 2021.¹⁶

Table 1: Top 10 most followed accounts on *TikTok* in 2021

Nick	Author	Followers	Likes (in Million)	Field of interest
@khaby.lame	Khabane Lame	149.5	2411.1	Social media personality
@charlidamelio	Charli D’Amelio	146.9	11142.3	Dancer and social media personality
@bellapoarch	Bella Poarch	91.6	2182.1	Singer and social media personality
@addisonre	Addison Rae	88.7	5768.0	Social media personality and dancer
@willsmith	Will Smith	72.0	494.1	Actor and film producer
@zachking	Zach King	69.4	888.5	Social media personality
@kimberly.loaiza	Kimberly Loaiza	67.7	4153.7	Singer and social media personality
@tiktok	TikTok	65.2	278.9	Social media platform
@cznburak	Burak Özdemir	62.7	1177.4	Social media personality
@domelipa	Dominik Lipa	58.8	3471.5	Social media personality

Source: own elaboration according to socialblade.com, 2022

The largest share of platform users are US residents, their share of the company’s income will make up more than half of the company’s revenue by the end of the year.¹⁷ Users spend an estimated 45 minutes per session on *TikTok*.¹⁸ The growth of the most downloaded application for watching short videos, *TikTok*, slowed down on a global level quarter-on-quarter (in the 2nd quarter of 2022) and fell by 37%. Life before the Internet is unimaginable for many. Generation Y uses the Internet in almost every aspect of their lives, whether it’s finding trusted sources for writing term papers, ordering food, watching TV, or meeting new people in cyberspace.¹⁹

YouTube Shorts

YouTube is one of the most popular streaming platforms with 2 billion monthly active users. In June of this year, it recorded 1.5 billion registered users. According to the reports published by *YouTube* in June 2022, *YouTube Shorts* records 30 billion views per day (Figure 2).²⁰

¹⁶ *Top 50 Most Followed TikTok Accounts (Sorted by Followers Count)*. [online]. [2022-09-08]. Available at: <<https://socialblade.com/tiktok/top/50/most-followers>>.

¹⁷ DOUGLAS, C.: *TikTok Ad Revenues to Surpass Twitter and Snapchat Combined*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/newsroom/index.php/tiktok-ad-revenues-to-surpass-twitter-and-snapchat-combined/?fbclid=IwAR3o106g1LGQwLfcR_ycpigG9DXYjPNDFKh1ofMML7yLbBkwXZRz3vFb7T8>.

¹⁸ DIXON, S.: *Average Time Spent per Session on Selected Short-form Video Platforms Worldwide as of March 2021*. [online]. [2022-09-18]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1237210/average-time-spent-per-session-on-short-form-video-platformsworldwide/?fbclid=IwAR2JTIH5LP7Dd8brJvKvoELyslpOkGC62DZ3buOvvmuCsH9BhOdt20zvsw>>.

¹⁹ See: HORVÁTH, J. et al.: Identification of Uncertainty Factors in the Consumer Behaviour of the New Generation of Customers at the E-commerce Level. In *Journal of Tourism and Services*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 12, p. 168-183.

²⁰ CECL, L.: *YouTube Shorts: Global User Engagement 2022*. [online]. [2022-09-17]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1314183/youtube-shorts-performance-worldwide/?fbclid=IwAR04dy9BeOeH FfvFF5oq1fEqdkLY4hP13MbLYG avq9Ch0VLhCSx1q0MOCY>>.

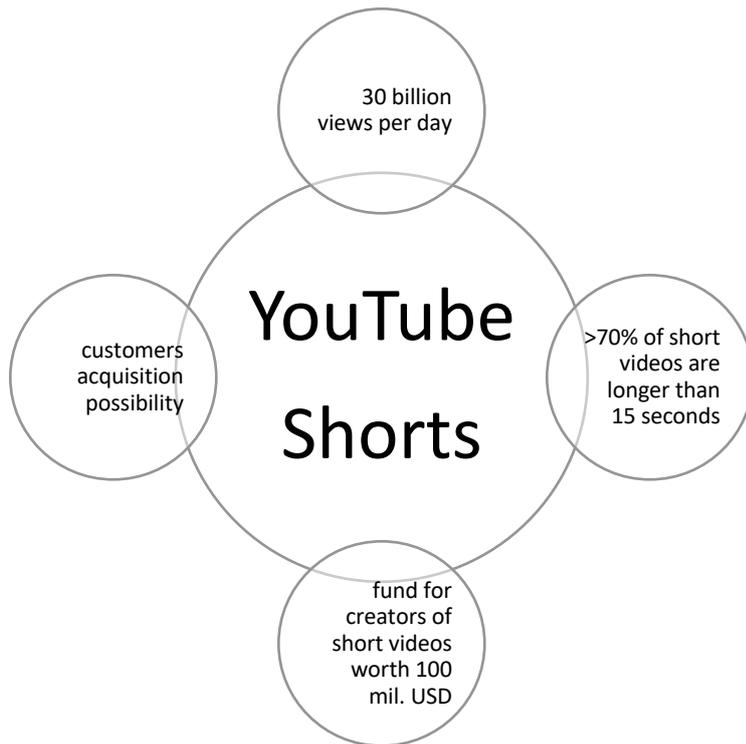


Figure 2: YouTube Shorts statistics
Source: own elaboration, 2022

YouTube launched its *YouTube Shorts* platform in reaction to *TikTok*'s increasing popularity. *YouTube* initially rolled out the feature in India and later that year in March it rolled the feature out in America and 26 other countries. The feature is currently only available in the mobile interface. A big advantage of the newly created Shorts feature is that users do not have to sign up to use it. It is enough to include Shorts from *YouTube* in the marketing strategy, and it will save companies or individuals on fees. The most popular short videos on *YouTube* are shown in Table 2. The top 10 most watched videos are dominated by videos recorded in 2021, which indicates that short videos are gaining a momentum, users like the new video format, and that video creators have learned how to create attractive content. The length of the videos varies from 13 to 52 seconds.²¹ According to *EarthWeb*, more than 70% of short videos on *YouTube* are longer than 15 seconds. When short videos were introduced in 2020, the maximum length of video was just 15 seconds. Later on, after introducing the feature, the length extended to max. 60 seconds. *YouTube* has decided to support the work of its authors with an amount of 10 to 10,000 USD per month.

Table 2 provides an overview of the most popular short videos on *YouTube Shorts*.²²

²¹ CHILLINGWORTH, A.: *Everything You Need to Know About YouTube Shorts*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <https://www.epidemicsound.com/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-youtubeshorts/?_us=adwords&_usx=11390336108_&utm_source=google&utm_medium=paidsearch&utm_campaign=11390336108&utm_term=&gclid=CjwKCAjw4c-ZBhAEEiwAZ105RQYxf3Pc3pRNOg39wIOuTNp1zyUSdpTm4Bdd1J2H4YBh3TevacPzBoCTBEQAvD_BwE>.

²² *The Most Popular Short Videos on YouTube Shorts*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/vqVipTFRyCg>>.

Table 2: The most popular short videos on *YouTube Shorts*

Date	Views	Name of author	Length (in seconds)
23.07.2019	1.1 mld.	dollarbill	28
21.12.2021	743 mil.	dednahype	52
26.11.2020	608 mil.	Brandon B	16
02.03.2021	590 mil.	Topper Guild	32
19.09.2020	590 mil.	Collins Key Shorts	15
21.01.2021	573 mil.	Xavier Mortimer	19
11.04.2021	558 mil.	5-Minute Crafts FAMILY	35
13.02.2021	514 mil.	Austin Sprinz	25
26.03.2021	506 mil.	Satisfying Cakes	38
20.03.2021	432 mil.	Viral Block	39

Source: own elaboration according to YouTube, 2022

The maximum length of a short video on *YouTube* is 60 seconds. Videos often have music in the background. The options for short videos are the same as for regular videos on *YouTube*, they work on the advertising principle. The short videos monetization option will be introduced in 2023. The criteria are strict (for example to gather 10 million views on a video in 90 days). Authors who meet the given conditions can earn up to 45% of advertising revenue from their videos.²³ Statistics show that daily video views on *YouTube* doubled after the addition of *Shorts* to 6.5 billion views per day. In the middle of the last year, *YouTube* surpassed the reference value of the daily average with 15 billion views as at that time the feature was available in more than 100 countries of the world. Apart from *Shorts*, *YouTube* is known for its yet another short video format, which is stories. The stories are 15-second clips that disappear after seven days. The biggest difference between stories and shorts videos is that short videos feature can be used by all users regardless of the number of subscribers, while stories, even though launched already in 2017, are available to users with more than 10,000 subscribers. In order to boost the appeal of short videos, *YouTube* has introduced monetization model for short-form video creators.²⁴

Conclusion

Short video applications shape people’s life in various ways. Vertical videos with high-definition elements and music are a great way to spread content. In many cases, a short video can have a very positive impact on website traffic. We are becoming less of a society of readers and more of a society of watchers as consumers prefer watching videos. The average consumer would rather watch a video than read a text ad. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of this fact and marketers should adapt their marketing mix to reflect this. Considering the number of *YouTube* users, it could be assumed that short videos have a lot of potential. *YouTube* attracts more people compared to other streaming platforms. However, the fact that a user does not have to create a *YouTube* account should be taken into consideration when making comparisons. Some visitors are not regular users and, therefore, any statistics should be taken with a grain of

²³ CHILLINGWORTH, A.: *Everything You Need to Know About YouTube Shorts*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <https://www.epidemicsound.com/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-youtube-shorts/?_us=adwords&_usx=11390336108&utm_source=google&utm_medium=paidsearch&utm_campaign=11390336108&utm_term=&gclid=CjwKCAjw4c-ZBhAEEiwAZ105RQYxf3Pc3pRNOg39wIOuTNp1zyUSdp-Tm4Bdd1J2H4YBh3TevacPzBoCTBEQAvD_BwE>.

²⁴ See: MILLER, M.: *YouTube for Business: Online Video Marketing for Any Business*. USA : Pearson Education, 2009.

salt. It is clear that even when compared to the competition, *YouTube* is the most popular video streaming platform there is. Following a thorough examination of the issue, it could be stated that *YouTube* will remain a strong player.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported the scientific research grant VEGA 1/0694/20 Relational marketing research – perception of e-commerce aspects and its impact on purchasing behaviour and consumer preferences and research grant VEGA 1/0488/22 Research on digital marketing in the field of tourism with an emphasis on the principles of sustainability in the post-pandemic market environment.

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<https://www.epidemicsound.com/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-youtubeshorts/?_us=adwords&_usx=11390336108_&utm_source=google&utm_medium=paidsearch&utm_campaign=11390336108&utm_term=&gclid=CjwKCAjw4c-ZBh AEEiwAZ105RQYxf3Pc3pRNOg39wIOuTNp1zyUSdpTm4Bdd1J2H4YBh3TevacPzBoCTB EQAvD_BwE>.

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METaverse OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSUMER SEGMENTS

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Abstract:

With the development of new technologies, their usage possibilities are gradually developing. The metaverse environment is one of them. It is envisaged that the metaverse will be a suitable combination of the physical and online worlds, with virtual reality providing a unique space for many different activities. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities of the metaverse from the perspective of general consumers and to investigate whether the popularity of different activities varies according to selected segmentation factors. This is focused on presenting suitable domains within the new market opportunities for companies that are considering expanding their activities into the metaverse. Using a questionnaire survey, data was collected from 525 respondents. These data were obtained through Ipsos and its online respondent panel. The results of the survey show a strong consumer interest in the possibility of traveling in the metaverse and learning new skills in this environment, in particular. The results indicate that there is interest in both fun and educational activities. The results suggest that there is a different preference for virtual reality from the perspective of the consumer segment. It was found that there are mainly generational differences, but also differences in terms of educational attainment, gender, size of place of residence or frequency of use of the Internet and social networks. The findings of this study can serve as a map of potential market opportunities for companies considering entering the virtual world.

Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. Metaverse. Segmentation. Virtual Environment. Virtual Reality.

1 Introduction

Despite the fact that the metaverse has been talked about a lot recently as an interesting business opportunity, the concept of the metaverse itself has been known for quite a long time, longer than some companies might assume. Originally, the term metaverse dates back to the last century, specifically in 1992 when author Neal Stephenson used it in his novel describing life in a virtual environment. We can already find interesting and diverse activities that occur in the metaverse. Currently, we can find activities within the metaverse that fall into the financial sector, healthcare, education, business, advertising, or smart manufacturing.¹ Metaverse may take a future position mainly in the field of finance and financial transactions, a claim supported by the emergence of cryptocurrencies, which are already widely used in the market. For financial transactions, it may not just be the cryptocurrencies themselves but also digital currencies used by central banks. Various regulators and policymakers should also look into understanding the metaverse itself. Already in September 2022, we could see the presidential campaign in the Czech Republic being run in the metaverse by the presidential candidate mathematician Karel Janeček. He uses Somnium Space to create the campaign itself, which can be considered an ambitious metaverse project, with hundreds of people visiting the space every day.²

¹ *Metaverse Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Product, By Platform, By Technology (Blockchain, Virtual Reality (VR) & Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR)), By Offering, By Application, By End Use, By Region, And Segment Forecasts, 2022 – 2030.* [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/metaverse-market-report>>.

² LEINERT, O.: *Janeček rozjel kampaň v metaverzu, zatím je v něm sám. Uspěje spíš jako investor než hradní kandidát.* [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-67111450-janecek-rozjel-kampan-v-metaverzu-zatim-je-v-nem-sam-uspeje-spis-jako-investor-nez-hradni-kandidat>>.

This paper is intended to present the preferences of the studied consumer segments in order to increase knowledge about the attractiveness of selected activities in the metaverse. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the metaverse options from the perspective of general consumers and to determine whether the popularity of each activity varies according to the selected segmentation criteria.

The second part of this paper is devoted to a literature search that focuses on the current possibilities of using the metaverse in everyday life. This research is divided into the main section discussing the potential of the metaverse, followed by subsections focusing on the topics of money, work, education, health and medicine, and social media and leisure/shopping. These sub-chapters discuss how the metaverse is being used in these sectors or what the potential for future use of the metaverse is. This is followed by a section introducing the methods used in this study. The fourth section contains the results of the research and the specific outcomes that can be drawn from the questionnaire survey. This section contains tables and graphics based on the analysis of the primary data. Then follows a discussion of the results of the study, its limitations, and future research in this field. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings of the research conducted.

2 Contemporary Main Knowledge about Metaverse

The metaverse is the gateway to the online economy and communication in the online community itself. This community is growing at a high rate. Once upon a time, the Internet was received primarily with disgust and distrust. Today, the opposite is true. Users are demanding more data, which is why big and new technologies are emerging. More data and more resources help to sort out a lot of important information. Due to the rapid growth of Google and the rise of social networks like Facebook, individuals can see active users of the metaverse as active players who can help companies accelerate the reality of actualizing people's desires.³ One of the most discussed activities within the metaverse is certainly the Horizon Worlds project by Meta Platforms, which was launched in 2021. This project has a vision of how the metaverse could potentially shape the work and social life of users.⁴ The new concept, as outlined by founder Mark Zuckerberg himself, talks about connecting the virtual and real worlds in which avatars and holograms can be used to work. With these avatars and holograms, users can share their simulated experiences.⁵

The potential for different organisations to adapt their business models and operational capabilities to operate in the metaverse can have a significant impact on marketing, tourism, leisure, citizen-government interaction, healthcare, education, and social networks. For individuals who choose to enter the metaverse in the future, the seamless transition from physical to virtual environments opens up an infinite number of possibilities that may go beyond human understanding. Some of the most discussed topics in relation to the metaverse these days include the financial sector, work, education, health, and medicine, social networks, leisure, and shopping. The different domains are further specified in the following paragraphs.

³ THE META-VERSE: *Metaverse Investing Beginners Guide To Crypto Art, NFT's, & Digital Assets in the Metaverse: The Future of Cryptocurrency, Digital Art*. Great Britain : Metaverse Books, 2021, p. 3.

⁴ *Create in Meta Horizon Worlds*. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <https://latest.www.meta.com/help/quest/articles/horizon/create-in-horizon-worlds/?utm_source=www.google.com&utm_medium=dollyredirect>.

⁵ NEWTON, C.: *Mark in the Metaverse*. [online]. [2022-09-07]. Available at: <<https://www.theverge.com/22588022/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-ceo-metaverse-interview>>.

2.1 Financial Sector

Regarding the metaverse in the financial sector today, we can imagine, for example, a currency that will only exist in the metaverse. For simplicity, it will be represented as a 3D gold coin. This coin will exist in virtual reality and people can donate it or use it to pay for things. Above all, there should be some overlap between the digital world and the real world. As the metaverse develops further, it will offer users many opportunities, for example, to invest their funds in individual companies or individual entrepreneurs. Virtual currency is already a reality today. And we use it to invest in virtual reality.⁶

2.2 Changes in the Work Process

Metaverse has only started to become more widely used in the world of work and employment in 2019, the year the Covid-19 virus hit the world. Due to the compulsory changes, workers have started using the online world. And thanks to it, they spent 12% less time in big meetings and also reduced their time with customers by 9%. Lowdown was able to help people create their own schedules and time management. Last but not least, when employees learn online, they perceive their position as more important and interesting. The big change has been in the meetings mentioned earlier. In the past, meetings in the workplace were considered essential and crucial. With the advent of online meetings via Zoom, Google Hangouts, or Microsoft Teams, meetings have become more focused and time-sensitive. These meetings have become more productive for employees.⁷ This development has also influenced the increasing use of virtual reality meetings, for example through the Horizon Workrooms app.

2.3 Possibilities in Education

With the rise of the internet, education has started to modernise. Most schools and universities around the world are ready for the metaverse thanks to the crisis and are actively using it to enhance learning.⁸ The greatest spread can be seen in universities among students of professional institutions and academics. University students use the metaverse for virtual experiences, as well as for comprehensive learning and research itself. Students can also use the various platforms to discuss new ideas or propose new projects that they can share with each other and provide to the outside world.⁹

The metaverse can also serve as a safe place to train, for example, police officers or shop workers. In real life, it may happen that an officer may encounter a gunman or a storekeeper with a complex problem. In VR these problems can be practiced over and over again, and new better scenarios can be discovered.¹⁰

2.4 Health and Medicine

Covid-19 has also changed the way we contact our doctors. As one example of remote contact, it should be possible to book an appointment with a doctor and then make an initial appointment using an avatar. People should be able to take a photo, video or live to record of a health

⁶ RADOFF, J.: *Metaverse*. [online]. [2022-09-09]. Available at: <<https://www.mindmeister.com/2025115594/metaverse?fullscreen=1>>.

⁷ BIRKINSHAW, J., COHEN, J., STACH, P.: *Research: Knowledge Workers Are More Productive from Home*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://www.hbr.org/2020/08/research-knowledge-workers-are-more-productive-from-home>>.

⁸ *En.unesco*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://en.unesco.org/icted/sites/default/files/2019-04/261278e.pdf>>.

⁹ HYUN, J. J.: *A Study on Education Utilizing Metaverse for Effective Communication in a Convergence Subject*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO202134234751537.page>>.

¹⁰ LEE, H. K.: *The Educational 'Metaverse' is Coming*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/educational-metaverse-coming>>.

problem, and the virtual doctor should be able to assess what the problem is.¹¹ Lawry talks about how most healthcare organizations today already have an artificial intelligence (AI) plan or strategy. This AI should help drive seamless service innovation at all touchpoints and experiences. AI should be faster and smarter to help sick people.¹²

2.5 Shopping, Social Media, and Leisure Time

In the shopping sector, we will see an increase in metaverse goods in the coming years. It is completely wrong to imagine that the virtual world will completely mirror the goods and experiences of real life. Users can set up different teams, and they can set up different cities or environments in which they will live virtually.¹³ Anderson talks about how Microsoft thinks that the metaverse is solely focused on gaming and will likely span several different platforms. These platforms will interact with each other, and it will be a challenge for big companies. When people talk about games, games like Minecraft or Second Life are usually seen as separate entities in the metaverse.¹⁴ Guodong et al. report that social networks are very standard in the metaverse. It will not just be a place where a user's status is posted, but it will be a place where the user's status lives. This social world in virtual reality will be a place for the user to escape.¹⁵

3 Methods

This study focuses on activities that consumers would want to do in the metaverse if they had the opportunity. Thus, it is essentially exploratory research exploring the possibilities of the metaverse for general consumers. A survey method was used to obtain responses. This method is one of the most effective for obtaining an adequate number of respondents who meet the distribution in terms of demographic factors of the population. In order to identify the preferred activities, subjects were asked to tick off a selection of activities they would like to carry out in the metaverse. At the same time, respondents were allowed to write their responses. Thus, a semi-open question was used to better capture any individual-specific responses.

Since this is research in an emerging field with which not all respondents may be familiar, the concept of the metaverse was explained to them in the questionnaire as follows: *"The metaverse can be imagined as a virtual environment that can be entered instead of just viewing a flat screen. It is a world of unlimited possibilities, interconnected communities, of places for virtual*

¹¹ USERN [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://usern.tums.ac.ir/News/New?title=Medicine+in+the+era+of+the+Metaverse>>.

¹² LAWRY, T.: *Hacking Healthcare: How AI and the Intelligence Revolution Will Reboot an Ailing System*. [online]. [2022-09-12]. Available at: <<https://books.google.cz/books?id=rwR0EAAAQBAJ&pg=PT201&dq=Metaverse+Health&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjucHio6D6AhWvM-wKHxaZBdkQ6AF6BAgJEA#v=onepage&q=Metaverse%20Health&f=false>>.

¹³ GISSEN, L.: *Florida Couple Holds Virtual Wedding in the METAVERSE While Simultaneously Getting Married in Real Life – Complete with Avatars That Mimicked Their Exact Moves for Their Online Guests*. [online]. [2022-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10309237/Couple-met-online-holds-virtual-wedding-metaverse-simultaneously-marrying-real-life.html>>.

¹⁴ ANDERSON, D.: *Metaverse NFT*. [online]. [2022-09-19]. Available at: <https://books.google.cz/books?id=9mpwEAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=metaverse+money&hl=cs&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=metaverse%20money&f=false>.

¹⁵ GISSEN, L.: *Florida Couple Holds Virtual Wedding in the METAVERSE While Simultaneously Getting Married in Real Life – Complete with Avatars That Mimicked Their Exact Moves for Their Online Guests*. [online]. [2022-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10309237/Couple-met-online-holds-virtual-wedding-metaverse-simultaneously-marrying-real-life.html>>.

meetings, work, and for play. Special virtual and augmented reality headsets such as glasses, smartphones, and other devices that work with these technologies play a major role in the metaverse."¹⁶

The samples were obtained through the research agency Ipsos at the beginning of 2022. A random sample of subjects was obtained from their panel of respondents, which included respondents from all over the Czech Republic. In total, responses were obtained from 525 respondents.

3.1 Sample Characteristic

To characterize the sample in more detail, respondents were characterized in terms of selected demographic factors in relation to the frequency of Internet use and frequency of social media use. Table 1 also shows the overall proportion of respondents within specific variables. The table shows that the gender balance of respondents is fairly balanced (48% female and 25% male). In terms of generational involvement, respondents by the size of place of residence and education, the sample corresponds appropriately to the base population.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents in terms of frequency of Internet use

Demographic factors	Variables	N	%	Frequency of internet use in leisure time in percentage					
				Never	Once per month	1 to 6 times week	Daily – less than 3 hours	Daily – 3 to 6 hours	Daily – more than 6 hours
Gender	Female	254	48.4	0.00	0.82	5.35	46.91	19.34	27.57
	Male	271	51.6	0.38	0.00	3.38	35.34	23.31	37.59
Generation	Baby Boomers	55	10.5	0.00	0.00	5.45	54.55	23.64	16.36
	X	261	49.7	0.00	0.39	4.67	45.53	18.68	30.74
	Y	135	25.7	0.78	0.78	4.69	35.94	21.09	36.72
	Z	74	14.1	0.00	0.00	1.45	21.74	30.43	46.38
Size of a place of residence	Up to 1,000	90	17.1	1.12	0.00	5.62	46.07	22.47	24.72
	1,001 to 5,000	117	22.3	0.00	0.00	4.35	36.52	22.61	36.52
	5,001 to 20,000	93	17.7	0.00	2.22	4.44	42.22	22.22	28.89
	20,001 to 100,000	115	21.9	0.00	0.00	3.60	39.64	16.22	40.54
	More than 100,000	110	21.0	0.00	0.00	3.85	41.35	24.04	30.77
Education	Primary school	59	11.2	1.82	0.00	1.82	30.91	32.73	32.73
	Secondary school with apprenticeship	203	38.7	0.00	0.50	7.00	45.50	16.00	31.00
	Secondary school	179	34.1	0.00	0.58	3.49	41.86	23.26	30.81
	College	84	16.0	0.00	0.00	1.22	34.15	23.17	41.46

Source: own processing, 2022

Examining the frequency of internet use in leisure time, the table shows that almost 50% of women use the internet daily, but for less than 3 hours. Men are also the most likely to use the internet daily, but the frequency of use is more than 6 hours. A closer look shows that both

¹⁶ BAUEROVÁ, R. et al.: *The Opportunities of Using the Metaverse from a Business Perspective*. [online]. [2022-11-19]. Available at: <https://www.iivopf.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/WPIEBRS_72_Bauerova_Miksik_Vavruskova_Gavendova_Haladejova_Vavruska.pdf>.

genders have more or less similar values in each category. In contrast, an examination from a generational perspective shows large differences in the frequency of internet use. While only 16% of Baby Boomers use the internet for more than 6 hours on a daily basis, the figure for Generation Z is as high as 46%. Table 1 also shows that the younger the generation, the more time they spend on the Internet. In terms of the size of the place of residence and educational achievement, the values are fairly balanced. There is only a significant difference in the case of daily internet use of more than 6 hours between people from a place of residence of up to 1 000 inhabitants and people from a place of residence of 20001 to 100 000 inhabitants.

The following table looks at the frequency of social media use in terms of selected demographic factors.

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents in terms of frequency of social media use

Demographic factor	Variables	Frequency of social media use in percentage				
		Never	less than a few times a week	Several times a week	Once a day	Several times a day
Gender	Female	5.33	5.74	7.79	11.07	70.08
	Male	13.91	13.16	14.66	13.53	44.74
Generation	Baby Boomers	25.45	16.36	14.55	9.09	34.55
	X	12.84	11.67	16.34	15.95	43.19
	Y	1.56	7.03	5.47	10.16	75.78
	Z	1.43	1.43	1.43	5.71	90.00
Size of a place of residence	Up to 1,000	7.87	7.87	13.48	20.22	50.56
	1,001 to 5,000	8.62	10.34	10.34	16.38	54.31
	5,001 to 20,000	14.29	9.89	5.49	6.59	63.74
	20,001 to 100,000	7.27	10.91	11.82	10.91	59.09
	More than 100,000	11.54	8.65	15.38	7.69	56.73
Education	Primary school	1.75	12.28	5.26	14.04	66.67
	Secondary school with apprenticeship	8.04	8.54	7.54	14.57	61.31
	Secondary school	12.21	10.47	16.28	8.72	52.33
	College	14.63	8.54	14.63	13.41	48.78

Source: own processing, 2022

The values in Table 2 show that the results are very different by gender in terms of frequency of social media use. As many as 70% of females are accustomed to using social media several times a day, compared to only 45% of males. The difference in social media use is also noticeable from a generational perspective. The frequency of social media uses increases with each new generation. As many as 90% of Generation Z respondents use social media several times a day. In contrast, only 35% of Generation BB respondents use social media several times a day and up to 25% have never used social media. Thus, even in 2022, we still see large differences in social media use between generations in the Czech Republic. In terms of the size of the place of residence, the results are not very different. In the case of education, there is a slight difference in the frequency of social media use. People with higher education use social media less frequently.

3.2 Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software (version 21). Missing values were excluded from the analysis. In total, there were 16 missing values for frequency of Internet use and 15 missing values for frequency of social media use. Due to the nominal type of data, the chi-square test was used for testing. If the conditions of the Chi-square test were not met (all expected numbers greater than 5 and no more than 20% of the cells have expected values less than 5), then Fisher's exact test of independence was used. The null hypothesis is that preferred activities are not influenced by demographic factors or the frequency of Internet and social media use.

4 Results

First, the focus of the analysis was generally on the preference for particular activities that can be performed in the metaverse. The following figure shows what activities respondents prefer within the metaverse environment. The activities that most respondents would undertake in the metaverse if given the opportunity include traveling (63% of respondents) and learning a new skill (58% of respondents). Other preferred activities included attending a virtual concert, visiting a store and looking at real things in it, visiting museums, spending time in leisure, playing games, and spending time on social media. Less than 1/5 of respondents would use the metaverse for work-related activities (working, training courses, communication in work teams). Of the activities surveyed, going to school in the metaverse shows the least popularity.

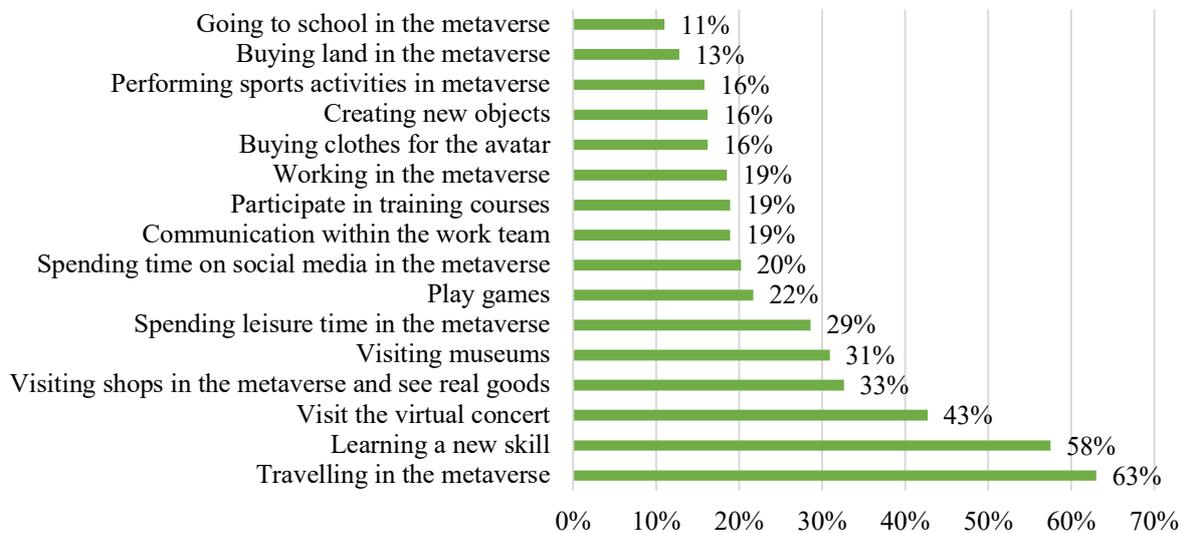


Figure 1: Preference for selected activities realizable in the metaverse

Source: own processing, 2022

The analysis then focused on whether preferences for these activities differed in terms of several selected factors. The factors examined included demographic factors (gender, generation, size of place of residence, and education) and frequency of internet and social media use. Using Chi-square and Fisher's Exact tests, it was found that respondents answered differently for some of the activities they would like to do in the metaverse depending on which category they belonged to within the selected factors. Table 3 shows the results of those tests that emerged as significant in this investigation.

Table 3: The results of Chi-square Tests and Fisher’s Exact Tests

Activity	Factor	Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig.	Exact Sig.
Spending time on social media in the metaverse	Generation	Pearson Chi-Square	13.592	3	0.004	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.159			
	Education	Pearson Chi-Square	9.470	3	0.024	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.133			
	Frequency of SM use	Pearson Chi-Square	17.801	4	0.001	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.184			
Travelling in the metaverse	Gender	Pearson Chi-Square	3.860	1	0.049	
		Fisher’s Exact Test				0.030
		Contingency Coefficient	0.085			
Visiting shops in the metaverse and see real goods	Generation	Pearson Chi-Square	24.576	3	0.000	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.211			
	Gender	Pearson Chi-Square	5.227	1	0.022	
		Fisher’s Exact Test				0.014
		Contingency Coefficient	0.099			
	Size of a place of residence	Pearson Chi-Square	11.406	4	0.022	
Contingency Coefficient		0.146				
Learning a new skill (a new foreign language, how to make something, or how to use something)	Education	Pearson Chi-Square	31.279	3	0.000	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.237			
Communication within the work team	Generation	Pearson Chi-Square	15.386	3	0.002	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.169			
	Education	Pearson Chi-Square	13.822	3	0.003	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.160			
Buying clothes for the avatar (for their character in virtual reality)	Gender	Pearson Chi-Square	7.928	1	0.005	
		Fisher’s Exact Test				0.003
		Contingency Coefficient	0.122			
	Education	Pearson Chi-Square	11.037	3	0.012	
		Contingency Coefficient	0.143			
	Frequency of SM use	Pearson Chi-Square	10.349	4	0.035	
Contingency Coefficient		0.141				
Buying land in the metaverse	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	13.045	3	0.005	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.156			
Working in the metaverse	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	14.525	3	0.002	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.164			
	Size of a place of residence	Contingency Coefficient	10.427	4	0.034	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.140			
Play games	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	29.377	3	0.000	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.230			
	Education	Contingency Coefficient	10.502	3	0.015	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.140			
	Frequency of internet use	Contingency Coefficient	17.064	7	0.017	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.180			
Going to school in the metaverse	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	24.022	3	0.000	

		Pearson Chi-Square	0.209			
	Frequency of SM use	Contingency Coefficient	9.687	4	0.046	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.137			
Performing sports activities in metaverse	Frequency of SM use	Contingency Coefficient	16.259	4	0.003	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.176			
Participate in training courses	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	12.213	3	0.007	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.151			
	Education	Contingency Coefficient	10.016	3	0.018	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.137			
Visit the virtual concert	Generation	Contingency Coefficient	12.284	3	0.006	
		Pearson Chi-Square	0.151			

Source: own processing, 2022

As some of the variables examined were found to be related to reported preference for activities in the metaverse, further investigation was undertaken. This focused on finding out how preference is therefore influenced by these variables.

First, the results of an investigation of how generational membership influences the preference for the activities under study will be presented. Figure 2 shows that Generation Z is the most open generation to performing individual activities in the metaverse. Compared to the other generations, we can see here large differences between the percentages of those from Generation Z who would be willing to do the activities under investigation in the metaverse if they had the opportunity. Generation X and Generation Y show very similar values for the popularity of single activities in many cases. Nevertheless, it is clearly visible that Generation Y is more likely to use the metaverse within work activities (work, participation in training courses, communication within the work team) than Generation X. Not surprisingly, more than 1/3 of Baby Boomers would like to visit stores and look at real things or attend a virtual concert. After all, for these activities, the metaverse could be a very promising environment for this generation in terms of utility and entertainment. The remaining activities did not particularly interest this generation.

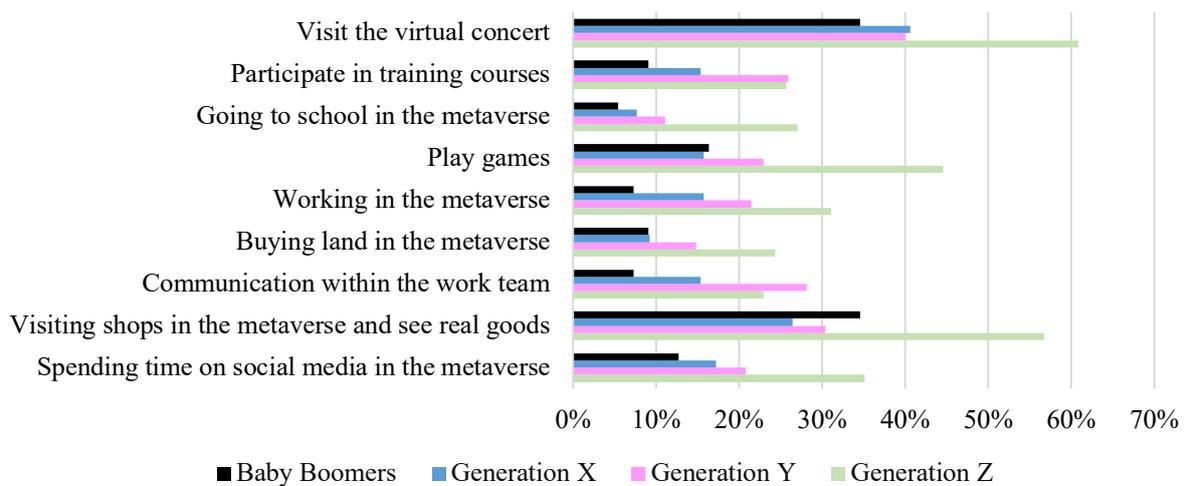


Figure 2: Differences in preferences by generation

Source: own processing, 2022

Another important factor that influenced the respondents' answers was their level of education. Here we can see the biggest difference in education-related activities (participation in training, learning new skills), with those respondents with a university degree achieving the highest values. Even up to 74% of respondents who have a university degree would like to learn new skills in the metaverse. The group of respondents who have only had primary school education so far chose playing games and spending time on social media in the metaverse as their favourite activities. This is not a surprising finding as this is mostly a group of respondents who are of an age where they do not yet have work responsibilities. The following figure shows the detailed results of this investigation.

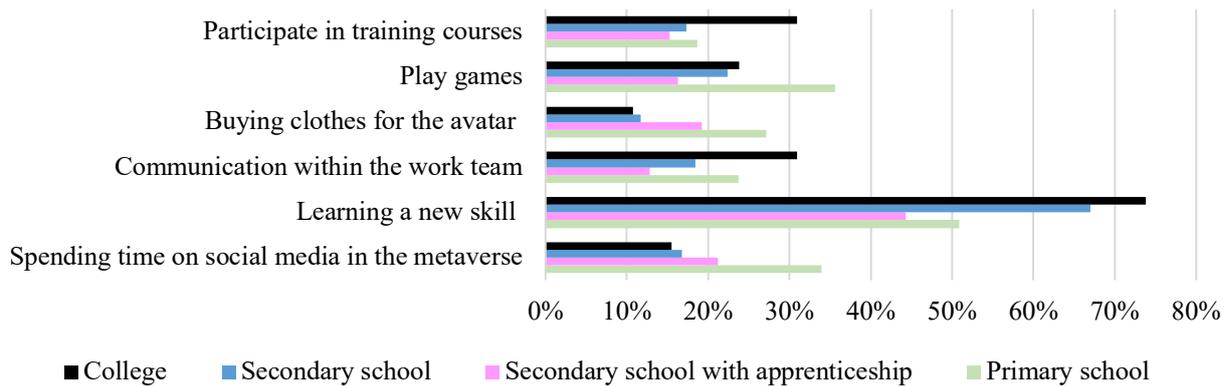


Figure 3: Differences in preferences by education
 Source: own processing, 2022

Gender played a role in the differences in responses for shopping for avatar clothing, visiting stores and viewing real goods, and traveling in the metaverse. In all cases, more women than men would perform these activities. Specifically, 9% more women would like to visit shops for real goods and shop for clothes for avatars, and 8% more women would like to travel in the metaverse.

In terms of the size of the place of residence, it was evident that people living in an area with a population of 5,001 to 20,000 were most interested in visiting the stores and browsing the real goods therein. Up to 45% of them would like to do this activity in the metaverse. People living in an area of up to 1,000 inhabitants (27% of them) and people living in an area of 20,001 to 100,000 inhabitants (23% of them) would most like to work in the metaverse.

The last group of factors examined was those associated with the use of the online environment. It was found that people with different lengths of time spent on the Internet responded differently when playing games in the metaverse. People using the Internet for 3-6 hours a day would most welcome this activity (31% of them). The second largest group was those who use the internet for more than 6 hours a day (25% of them). Respondents' perspectives on some selected activities they would like to do in the metaverse also differed when it came to how often they use social media. Figure 4 shows more detailed results in this domain.

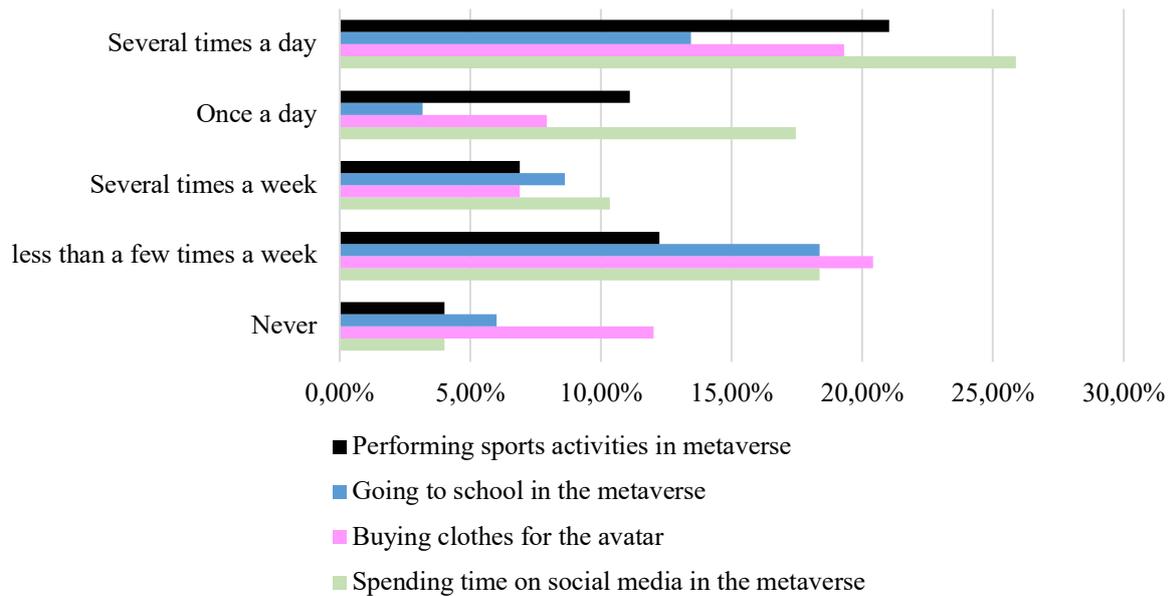


Figure 4: Differences in preferences by frequency of SM use

Source: own processing, 2022

Not surprisingly, those respondents who spend the most time on social media also show the greatest interest in spending time on social media in the metaverse. Nevertheless, this is only 26% of them. Despite the fact that this is only 26% of them in contrast to the results of those who do not use social networks at all this result is valuable. Interestingly, people who use social media less than a few times a week would like to use social media in the metaverse more than those who use social media several times a week or once a day.

5 Discussion

Interestingly, the results revealed variations in the popularity of activities that can be performed in the metaverse. These activities were examined in terms of selected demographic factors and the frequency of use of the Internet and social networks. Within the university degree, it was found that up to 74% of them would like to learn new skills in the metaverse. It could be assumed that these respondents would be looking for new ways to acquire new information. In contrast, the group of respondents who have only primary education so far would use metaverse to play games compared to other segments of respondents in terms of education. Interesting results also came from the perspective of the different generational segments of potential customers who would use the metaverse, each generation would prefer slightly different activities in the studied environment. Although comparing Generation X and Generation Y resulted in very similar values in the popularity of each activity, we see that Generation Z and Baby Boomers are the most popular of the activities studied in almost all cases. Baby Boomers would like to visit real shops or concerts in virtual reality. As might be expected, Generation Y would most often use metaverse for work activities (training, team communication). On the contrary, Generation X would most like to use virtual reality for entertainment, specifically to attend a concert. Interestingly, it can also be considered that online shopping for avatar clothes, visiting stores and viewing real goods, and traveling in the metaverse would be performed by more women than men.

Our research shows that people who use social networks even in a traditional layout would like to use social networks in the metaverse. The authors Guodong et al. even suggest that this world will change in the classical world and users will only use the metaverse to visit with their friends.¹⁷

Residents of smaller communities (5,001 to 20,000 residents) are more interested in shopping in the metaverse, which may be due to the lack of a retail network in these small communities. Those living in larger municipalities (20,001 to 100,000 inhabitants) would most welcome the opportunity to work in the metaverse, which represents a new home office format that is likely to be very popular with this group in the future. The possibility of playing games would be most welcomed by respondents who spend an average of 3 to 6 hours a day on the Internet. However, there are also those who spend more than 6 hours on the Internet, which is the case for up to 25% of the respondents. Dick also confirms that people like to spend time on the Internet and that the metaverse could be an interesting space for them.¹⁸

This study also has limitations. The results should be interpreted with caution, given that respondents may have been influenced by the preset answer choices, i.e. the semi-open-ended questions. However, these questions gave participants the opportunity to comment on activities that might not have occurred to them.

The results show that people who use social media less than a few times a week would like to use social media in the metaverse more than those who use social media several times a week or once a day. Could this result indicate that they are not comfortable with social media on current platforms, but are interested in connecting with other people as such and would therefore welcome this in the metaverse? Research results in this domain suggest that entirely new target groups of potential customers may emerge within the metaverse that are not very engaged within the online environment. Future research could address barriers to entry into the metaverse from the perspective of potential customers and firms and the factors that can be used to mitigate these barriers. This could contribute to faster technological acceptance of the technology. The metaverse has great potential for companies within their current target segments, as well as reaching out to completely new ones.

6 Conclusion

This research focuses on activities that consumers would like to do in the metaverse if they had the opportunity. Therefore, it was essentially exploratory research. The aim of this research was to explore the metaverse option from the perspective of general consumers and to see whether the popularity of each activity varies according to the segmentation criteria selected. This focus was essential to find out what general consumers are interested in and what activities they would like to do within the metaverse. The results show that consumers are more interested in traveling in the metaverse and learning new skills using this virtual environment. Activities that more than 1/3 of the respondents would like to do include attending a virtual concert. Shopping for real goods via virtual reality does not seem to be a bad business opportunity either, as 33% of respondents would like to shop in that way. The research revealed many business opportunities

¹⁷ GUODONG, Z. et al.: *Metaverse* 中译出版社. 2021. [online]. [2022-09-19]. Available at: <<https://books.google.cz/books?id=WG1WEAAAQBAJ&pg=PT64&dq=metaverse+social+networks&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwimvdSqlqD6AhWMzqQKHe8UD-YQ6AF6BAgIEAI#v=onepage&q=metaverse%20social%20networks&f=false>>.

¹⁸ DICK, E.: *Public Policy for the Metaverse: Key Takeaways from the 2021 AR/VR Policy Conference*. [online]. [2022-09-19]. Available at: <<https://www2.itif.org/2021-arvr-policy-conference-report.pdf>>.

in terms of consumer perceptions. However, this is an assumption of consumer behaviour in the metaverse, as the survey respondents were only answering a hypothetical situation of how they would behave if they had the opportunity to operate in the metaverse. Therefore, the results may differ after consumers have had the opportunity to actually perform the activities studied in this environment.

A deeper investigation revealed that consumer segments differ in their preferences across activities. Factors that were found to influence the results include generation, education, gender, size of the place of use of the residence, frequency of internet, and frequency of social media use. However, these factors did not affect individual activities in general, but only had an effect on some activities. The most significant differences are evident within generational groups, with Generation Z being among the generation most inclined to perform the activities studied in a metaverse environment. As this is an emerging generation in the consumer spending sphere, we see a large market opportunity for businesses here in terms of not only shopping, gaming, meeting friends through new social media, and hosting concerts, but also in terms of education.

Acknowledgement: Publication of this paper was supported by the Student grant competition project SGS/18/2022: “The opportunities of using the metaverse in the implementation of product sales and marketing communication”. The support is gratefully acknowledged.

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THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENT TELEVISION BEYOND CURRENT TRENDS

Matúš Višváder, Zora Hudíková

Abstract:

The media system in Slovakia also includes student television. However, the number of such student broadcasts is decreasing every year. Apart from the potential of media content creators, the quality of their functioning is also dependent on the technical provision of the educational institutions in which they operate. Most universities in Slovakia have not updated their technical facilities for many years and student televisions still publish their outputs in the only financially unencumbered space – the Internet. However, there are many more possibilities for presentation. Various social networks offer their platform as a space for publishing various audiovisual outputs. Since the beginning of 2009, the YouTube platform has dominated as the main publishing channel for student television. However, the gradual emergence of the metaverse offers new opportunities to present creative activity to a wider public. At the same time, it opens the door to other ways of interacting with potential viewers. The authors of the paper explore in more depth the Internet platforms most frequently used by student television. They focus on the technical quality of student submissions and outline possible publishing avenues outside the established platforms.

Key words:

Audiovisual Production. Creativity. Media Audiences. New Platforms. Student Television.

Introduction

The complexity of the concept of mass media is explained by several international and domestic authors. From the theory of mass communication we know that this term refers to a set of media institutions and activities related to the creation and broadcasting of media content.¹ There is a scarcity of articles on the issue of student media, so we give our own definitions. Student media are particularly specific in that they are created and disseminated in schools. They are part of the educational system in primary, secondary and universities. Student media are created by students for students. However, they can also act as part of the communication of the academic community or serve to present the results of students' activities within universities. To a large extent, they resemble media at the local and regional levels. They are also intended for a specific group of the population, namely the students of each university. The size of their editorial staff, the organisational structure of the staff and often the quality of production are on a similar, if not the same, level. The functionality² of student media is increasingly expanding. The basic function is informational. These media bring information from both in-school and out-of-school environments. The place of their media activity is therefore not only the school, but also the city in which it is located. Each student media also has a representative function. It seeks to reach out to professional organisations, other educational institutions as well as the public. It spreads the good name of the school, the faculty, the university. Student media are part of the educational system, especially in schools with a mass media focus, but also in secondary vocational schools, as well as the system of media education. For students, such media not only fulfil an educational function, but also provide a leisure activity. By being able to participate in their activities, they gain their first practical contact with the media environment. In this context, Andrej Tušer described student media as a “journalistic playground”³, which is a great place to

¹ MCQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teórie masovej komunikácie*. Prague : Portál, 1999, p. 32.

² JIRÁK, J., KOPPLÖVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Prague : Portál, 2003, p. 416.

³ TUŠER, A.: *Vydávame školský časopis*. Zvolen : Krajská knižnica E. Štúra vo Zvolene a Televízia Markiza, 2005, p. 47.

start a media career. Student television at secondary and primary school level is often just an extracurricular activity or part of media education, where students learn about the journalistic profession. At the university level, student television may take the form of a student organisation or be a special department of the university. Student television normally broadcasts news and current affairs programmes. Similarly to student periodicals and radio, their audience is young. In the case of student television, we also speak of broadcasting as a process of dissemination of sound and image. However, it is not done via cable or satellite television, as this would be very costly. And such costs would be prohibitive for public schools. Therefore, the Internet is the primary venue for publishing student television productions. The aim of our study is to name, on the basis of quantitative and qualitative analysis, which publishing channels are the most used in functioning student television broadcasts of universities and colleges in Slovakia. Based on the results from it and our other studies of the technological environment, we will present the options that are not standardly used and we will also present new ways of broadcasting for named television.

1 Established Publishing Paths

One of the most used platforms for publishing videos is the online video database *YouTube*⁴. Viewers have access to the desired content at any time and directly, viewing the programme is not tied to inclusion in the programming structure within the linear daily broadcast, as is the case with conventional television stations. This brings them closer to the currently popular video-on-demand (VOD) streaming services in terms of publishing their programmes. Of the currently operating university student broadcasts, we can register all six student televisions on this platform – *eŠTV* (Technical University in Košice), *UNI TV* (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice), *i-Téčko* (University of Žilina in Žilina), *TV UNICA* (Catholic University in Ružomberok), *Televízia Mediálka* (University of Prešov in Prešov), *TV UNICA* (University of Ružomberok in Ružomberok), *Televízia Mediálka* (University of Prešov), as well as *FMK TV* (University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava). This best-known video sharing website allows its users, including school television, to share their videos almost without technical restrictions, except for two parameters – a maximum file size of up to 128 GB and a maximum length of 12 hours per video. *YouTube* has been providing media space for 18 years. Embedding and sharing videos is easy, but it provides its users with a very limited range of options for customising videos, such as cutting out parts of the video or adding background music. The platform allows uploading all possible audiovisual formats from movie trailers to music videos, live streams, vlogs, reviews, tutorials, lectures, news to branding videos for promotion and many other types of content. *YouTube* is, and most likely will continue to be, one of the best and most well-known platforms that allows you to publish your own audiovisual works completely free of charge. But when it comes to using *YouTube* as a platform for hosting videos, the most obvious drawback for broadcasters is the embedded ads. In the past, ads could be switched off completely; today, this option is limited to stand-alone videos. Enforcement of fair use policies⁵, aimed at protecting copyright has tightened dramatically in recent years. If the TV broadcast also consists of third-party content, such as the use of popular background music, it is most likely that unskippable ads on that platform will be part of the broadcast. In some cases, this may go as far as a complete ban on public video publishing. In addition to publishing

⁴ Rules: *YouTube Community Guidelines*. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_sk/howyoutubeworks/policies/community-guidelines/#community-guidelines>.

⁵ *Fair Use – Copyright on YouTube*. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PvjRlkwIl8>>.

on the YouTube, student college TV stations also actively use the social network *Facebook*⁶ to promote their broadcasts. Apart from *TV Unica* and *eSTV*, all other TV stations are also active on this platform. Various types of videos are posted on *Facebook* as a social media website, such as personal events from everyday life, advertisements and adverts, inspirational and informative videos and more. Through *Facebook*, videos can be shared on one's personal timeline or on a business page that the organization owns. The size of a single video must not exceed 10 GB and 240 minutes in length. However, the maximum quality of videos is limited to 1080p resolution and the quality of live broadcasts to 720p resolution versus the *YouTube* platform, where the maximum quality allowed is 4K for live broadcasts and 8K for other videos. While televisions broadcast at 1080p by default, streaming services have already pushed their standard to the 4K limit. Mobile devices, as well as PCs and laptops, already include higher resolution displays than 1080p, even in what are described as mid-range products⁷. It is therefore natural that 4K resolution will become the standard for TV broadcasting in the near future. Facebook has not yet announced an increase in resolution for videos to make up for its loss to *YouTube*. Embedding at both *YouTube* and *Facebook* is limited to fixed-design visuals. Thus, one cannot customize the player color, icon, button layout, and settings that the viewer can manipulate. This visual is the same for all creators on the platform. Thus, embedding on external sites will always link to *YouTube*, which archives these videos. With the acquisition of *Instagram* by *Meta* in 2012 and the gradual integration of *Facebook* with *Instagram* created the possibility of duplicate publishing to both platforms at the same time or recycling previously published audiovisual formats. Thus, posts created for *Facebook* can already be simultaneously posted to *Instagram* when published on *Facebook*. There is also the possibility to adapt posts originally created in landscape format to the *Instagram* format, i.e. portrait or cube, with a link to the original *Facebook* post. Student broadcasters, however, do not use these aforementioned options as much and only post behind-the-scenes photos or additional information related to their activity on *Instagram*. In their early days, *FMK TV* and *i-Těčko* student broadcasters also published using the internal LAN. Thus, their broadcasts could be watched on TV sets connected to the internal LAN and distributed using an IP address from the broadcast centre to anywhere in the university. To provide such broadcasts, a wired Internet connection and a multimedia centre connected to the television receiver were required. However, the technology lost relevance after the entry of social networking sites on the Internet. Viewers can now find their favourite shows on their mobile devices in the comfort of their home or dorm at the time they want. Thus, the television sets used to distribute student TV broadcasts using the internal network have naturally depreciated over years of use and have fallen into disuse.

2 New Platforms – New Possibilities

In addition to the possible publishing routes mentioned above, two other options are freely available. *TikTok* is both a mobile app and a social network that was created in 2016. It focuses on short videos with the greatest possible reach and is intended for audiences over the age of 13. On the other hand, *Twitch* is a platform that, since its inception in 2011, has focused on live interaction between creators and their own audiences. *Twitch*, is currently the most well-known streaming platform for creators worldwide. It became famous for revolutionising online live broadcasting, mainly due to its low broadcast latency, the possibility of viewer interaction and the emergence of large fan communities. *YouTube* and *Facebook* are its direct competitors in

⁶ *Facebook Terms and Policies*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/policies_center/>.

⁷ PRESTON, D.: *The Best Mid-range Phone 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.techadvisor.com/article/723509/best-mid-range-phone.html>>.

mediating live broadcasts, but lag behind in viewership by more than three times⁸. Last year alone (2021), viewers watched more than 24 million hours of live broadcasts on *Twitch*⁹. The website is completely free, with the exception of optional additional paid features such as an extended emoji library, custom username color, or an archive of previous broadcasts that can help improve the streaming experience for both creators and their viewers. It is very often used by creators to broadcast additional content to work published on the *YouTube* platform. This is mainly due to the aforementioned low broadcast latency, i.e. contact with the viewer in near real time. *TikTok*, unlike *Twitch*, allows viewers and creators to collaborate on content creation. They can upload and attach their own creations to creators' videos to create even more interesting content and help foster the creativity of their favourite creators, as well as other users of the platform. While until now the platform has supported videos with a maximum length of 15 seconds, 30 seconds and 3 minutes, the platform recently announced the introduction of videos up to 10 minutes in length¹⁰, which will certainly change its conditions on the maximum size of uploaded files. *TikTok* features an integrated video editor, allowing you to create creative videos directly on your mobile device without the need for additional hardware, and the entire app is freely available to the general public. Viewers on this platform generally have a low attention¹¹. However, the platform, with its time constraints, does not even allow the viewer to watch a particular video. The role of such posts is to provide information as quickly as possible or simply to entertain the viewer. *TikTok* has the potential to bring a new viewer to student television who would otherwise not be interested in student broadcasting. However, attracting them to watch longer and more complex audiovisual contributions will not be easy. By contributing to the platform, student TVs can tap into the algorithm of *ByteDance*, the company that owns the *TikTok* social network, and appear on mobile devices to the right audience. The company, Meta, reflects the competition in the social networking market and is therefore creating new opportunities for creators to present themselves on their own profiles. All student TVs use *Facebook* and their subsidiary platform *Instagram* to share photos. However, the interconnection of these social networks allows short "Stories" to be published on both platforms at the same time, and the metadata for the posts in question may differ. It can be identified from public statistics that the audience on *Facebook* is considerably older compared to *Instagram*. The age group 25-44 is the most represented on *Facebook*¹², while *Instagram* is dominated by the 18-34 age group¹³. Therefore, student television is more likely to find a potential audience on *Instagram*. The use of short Stories or videos in the form of Reels, can direct a potential viewer to their main publishing avenue, be it *YouTube* or *Facebook*. The reach of *Instagram* posts is significantly higher compared to the average viewership of videos published on *YouTube* or *Facebook*. For example, FMK TV Student Television has an average viewership of 137 views per post on its main publishing platform, *YouTube*. However, the average *Instagram* Reels on the official *Instagram* of this television reaches up to 595 views¹⁴. Over the past year we have seen a new trend on the internet associated exclusively with the

⁸ *Number of Hours Watched on Leading Gaming Live Stream Platforms Worldwide in 2nd Quarter 2022, by Platform*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1030795/hours-watched-streamlabs-platform/>>.

⁹ *Number of Hours Watched on Twitch Worldwide from 2nd Quarter 2018 to 2nd Quarter 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1030852/hours-watched-twitch/>>.

¹⁰ BAIN, E.: *How To Get 10 Minute Videos On Tiktok As New Feature Arrives*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2022/03/03/how-to-get-10-minute-tiktok-videos/>>.

¹¹ TWENGE, J.: *Teens Today Spend More Time on Digital Media, Less Time Reading*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/08/teenagers-read-book>>.

¹² *Distribution of Facebook Users Worldwide as of January 2022, by Age and Gender*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/>>.

¹³ *Distribution of Instagram Users Worldwide as of April 2022, by Age and Gender*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/248769/age-distribution-of-worldwide-instagram-users/>>.

¹⁴ Authors' note: Statistics were pulled from FMK TV's official *Facebook* and *Instagram*.

audio side of production. Podcasts have picked up approximately 140% of active listeners since 2020. For example, podcasts published by *SME.sk* were listened to by approximately 2.7 million listeners in September 2022, an increase of 1.3 million listeners from 2020¹⁵. While in the aforementioned 2020 a paid membership to external hosting companies was required to publish podcasts, today, thanks to the *Anchor.fm* platform, it is also possible to publish your own podcasts or audio outputs for free on all streaming services¹⁶. This platform brings a new opportunity to recycle already created student TV content, as well as a space to create new audio outputs. Two of the aforementioned student university televisions were once also broadcast on the local internet network. However, such distribution required costly technical support, which is no longer necessary thanks to constant technological advances. In fact, student televisions are able to broadcast to TV sets using the SMART functions of newer TV sets or portable android devices connected to older TV sets. Whereas once cabling and expensive broadcasting equipment was required, today all that is needed is an integrated *YouTube* player or web browser and you can broadcast to anything using just a WiFi signal. On main publishing path *YouTube*, it is possible to create a list of videos, or create a broadcast loop of a TV broadcast in a similarly longer video, containing all audiovisual outputs for a specific time horizon. Such a list or video can be embedded directly into a *Wordpress* site, where by hiding the player controls and running the video in a loop, a live broadcast simulation can be created directly on the site¹⁷.

3 Student University Broadcasting on Platforms and Social Networks

We included all six currently operating student broadcasts in our qualitative analysis of television and quantitative analysis of content. We drew information and data from the official publication pathways of the selected student broadcasters. We analyzed all available posts from the last five academic years, from 2017 to 2022. We tracked all forms of activity on the publication pathways used, from audiovisual to photographic to textual posts, for a total of 2,619 diverse posts.

eŠTv¹⁸ (144 posts)

The Student Television of the Technical University of Košice is currently on social networks under the name *eŠTV*. Its beginnings can be dated back to 1989, when a small broadcasting workplace was set up at the Technical University of Košice dormitory. It has been broadcasting on the *YouTube* since April 2011. The archive was available on its own domain studenttv.sk, which is currently unavailable. *eŠTV* broadcasts only on the *YouTube* platform, while it also promotes its activities on the social network *Facebook*. Only students of the Technical University work in the editorial office. The production of the television is not extensive, currently it only covers news from the dormitory and university environment, but in the past it has also produced journalistic programmes oriented towards student life. At present, it publishes very irregularly, most often one video per week.

¹⁵ TVRDOŇ, D.: *Podcast Revolution, One Year in. Who is Listening to Podcasts in CeNtral Europe*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://medium.com/sme-sk-tech-product-blog/podcast-revolution-one-year-in-who-is-listening-to-podcasts-in-central-europe-425d6d9625fc>>.

¹⁶ ANCHOR: *Anchor by Spotify | Your Voice is a Podcast Voice. Take It Somewhere New*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpTOG89jAvU&ab_channel=Anchor>.

¹⁷ *We Created the Broadcast Loop and Applied the Procedure for the Student FMK TV*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.fmktv.sk/stream/>>.

¹⁸ *Official Website of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Technical University of Košice*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<http://www.fe.i.tuke.sk/sk/fakulta/studentsky-zivot/studentska-televizia>>.

Televízia Mediálka¹⁹ (857 posts)

Televízia Mediálka is a university student media of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov in Prešov. Since its creation in 2008, it has been operating on the Internet platform *YouTube*. Under the name *Mediálka TV* it has created and published more than 80 audiovisual outputs²⁰. In 2012, the television was restructured and redesigned and operates on the *YouTube* platform, as well as on the social network *Facebook* and *Instagram* under the name *Televízia Mediálka*, in short *TV Mediálka*. It originally operated as a student television station and produced mainly news programmes, while also producing cookery programmes that were only a supplement to the television programme. It is now presented as university television and covers university ceremonies, festivals and sporting events. In November 2021, it added journalistic interviews with students and their unusual activities alongside their studies to its repertoire. Currently, she publishes mainly news stories, at least twice a week.

í-Téčko²¹ (164 posts)

The student television *í-Téčko* has been operating at the University of Žilina since 2009. *í-Téčko* was established with the same intention as *eŠTV*, originally as a dormitory medium, which later transformed into a university television. The editorial staff consists exclusively of university students and is currently still based in the Veľký diel dormitory near the university's headquarters. It presented its productions through an internal dormitory network, but today it exclusively uses the *YouTube* platform and the social network *Facebook*. She also uses the social network *Instagram* to promote her activities. It also has its own website available on the domain itecko.uniza.sk. Broadcast programme currently includes mainly news from the university environment, but in the past the TV station has also produced cooking programmes and interviews with *Erasmus+* students. It does not broadcast regularly and publishes its stories almost as soon as they are processed. The pandemic situation has created an environment for the emergence of new formats, of which the television uses mainly live broadcasts in the form of talk shows or, more recently, streaming online social games.

TV Unica²² (103 posts)

Unica Television is a university television station that was established in 2013 at the Catholic University of in Ružomberok. It is listed on the *YouTube* platform under the name *mediakusk*, but cannot be found on social media. The television is part of the student media of the Department of Journalism, which combines television, radio and an online magazine. It has its own private website on the domain unica.ku.sk, which is, however, outdated compared to the common domain of all media called media.ku.sk. The media website regularly features up-to-date articles. The television is housed in the University Library and its editorial staff consists mainly of students of the Department. In the past, it has also done journalistic work in the field of music and film and produced entertainment and discussion programmes on student and city life. Currently, she concentrates on news work and produces feature stories, which she publishes irregularly.

¹⁹ *YouTube Channel TV Mediálka*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/user/TVMediálka>>.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ *í-Téčko Website*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <itecko.uniza.sk>.

²² *Associated Media YouTube Channel of the Department of Journalism*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/user/mediakusk>>.

UniTV²³ (373 posts)

Student television *UniTV* was established at the Faculty of Arts of the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in 2013. Its creation was initiated by the students of the faculty themselves. They are professionally advised by lecturers from the Departments of Slovak Studies, Slavic Philology and Communication of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Applied Sciences in Košice. Since 2016, also on the basis of the project of reconstruction of the building of the Faculty of Philosophy of UPJŠ, a stable studio for the needs of student television was created. The faculty also uses the premises for teaching courses focused on television or film production. *UniTV* profiles itself as a university television and its aim is to bring up-to-date information to all parts of the university's academic community. It currently operates on the *YouTube* platform and shares its activities through the social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Its studio space is tailored to the needs of the news activities to which it is primarily dedicated. Thus, their programme mainly includes reports or news interviews. At the beginning of the academic year 2022/23, the television changed its identity as announced on the official website of the university²⁴. The emphasis was on the colour correlation with the home university as well as the symbolism of the television production. The new logo featured the colours blue and gold in the camera symbol. At present, the TV station publishes very irregularly, with a maximum of two videos per month.

FMK TV²⁵ (978 posts)

The Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava also has a student television. It was established two years after the establishment of a laboratory for the needs of education in the field of audiovisual production on Skladova Street in 2013. During the 9 years of its existence, it has undergone several changes, both organizational and technical. *FMK TV* is moving in a different direction than other student TV. With its mainly journalistic programmes of an entertainment nature in the field of music, lifestyle, book production and film production, it tries to get closer to commercial broadcasters. It also broadcasts news in the form of a weekly round-up of events from the University and produces instructional videos for students as required. She posts her productions on *YouTube*, but is also active on the social media platforms *Facebook* and *Instagram*, where she posts short polls on various topics and entertaining videos and behind-the-scenes photos. She also has her own website, fmk.tv.sk, where she keeps an archive of her broadcasts, as well as an embedded link to the current week's broadcast.

As part of our research, we were interested in the representation of specific TV stations on the different platforms they use.

²³ *O televízii*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.upjs.sk/verejnost-media/vztahy-s-verejnostou/uni-tv/otelevizii/>>.

²⁴ *Nová grafická vizualizácia UniTV*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <https://www.upjs.sk/filozoficka-fakulta/UniTV-nova-graf-vizualizacia/?fbclid=IwAR0gwB6VtaD3CQcw_BjxVnvSoMiPksQ5heUh4k5Ug1b8RabzU3raO5vDbDE>.

²⁵ *Official Website of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://fmk.sk/fakultny-zivot/fakultne-media/>>.

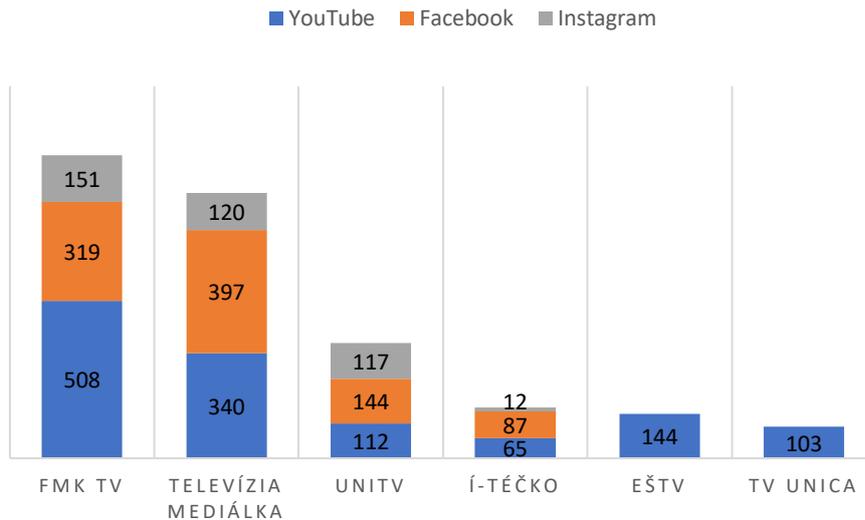


Chart 1: Tracked activity on publication trips over the last 5 academic years
 Source: own processing, 2022

We found that all the student-run college TV stations publish their audiovisual outputs on the *YouTube* platform. *FMK TV*, *TV Mediálka*, *i-Téčko* and *UniTV* also publish on *Facebook* and *Instagram*. We observe the dominance of the *YouTube* platform for publishing audiovisual contributions for all broadcasts except *TV Mediálka*. This television uses *Facebook* as a second publishing channel and publishes the same outputs on both platforms at the same time. Like *TV Mediálka*, *UNI TV* and *i-Téčko* also duplicated their outputs on *Facebook* several times, which caused a slightly higher number of posts compared to *YouTube*. However, for all the televisions monitored, the *YouTube* platform is the place where the televisions publish their premieres. For all the selected televisions, the social network *Instagram* serves only as a tool to publish photos, accompanying articles or information about auditions or events related to the activities of the televisions.

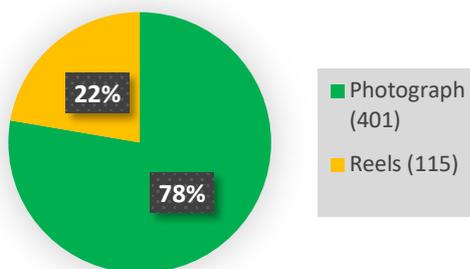


Chart 2: Type of post on Instagram
 Source: own processing, 2022

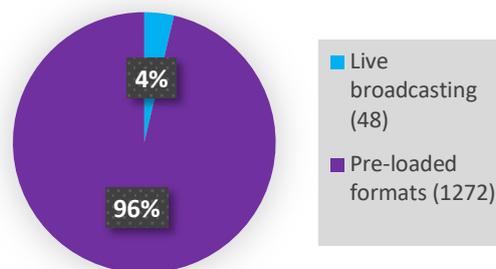


Chart 3: Ratio of live broadcasts to pre-recorded outputs
 Source: own processing, 2022

At *FMK TV* and *UniTV*, we observe the use of **Instagram** also for publishing audiovisual formats. However, of the 516 posts published on this social network, only 115 posts are in the form of REELS – portrait videos. The remaining posts on this platform represent only photos from filming sessions, invitations or graphic information. We observe live broadcasting when cumulating posts on both publishing channels (*Facebook* + *YouTube*) in only 48 cases out of the total of 1320 audiovisual posts, which represents only 4% of the student TV broadcasts. The highest number of live broadcasts was made by *FMK TV* at 31, followed by *i-Téčko* at 15 and *TV Mediálka* broadcast live only twice.

Conclusion

In fact, college student television has not significantly changed the way it publishes its audiovisual output since its inception. Despite the fact that all student television broadcasts are internet-based, we do not observe the use of the potential of this space for better self-presentation. The most commonly used platform for publishing is *YouTube* and *Facebook*, whose publishing possibilities are limited. However, we are in an era where the use of multi-platform applications is a daily part of life. A multi-platform content strategy is the approach that creates the most complete picture and the most engaging forms of storytelling for a growing digital audience, especially younger ones. The goal of this strategy is to distribute content wherever the audience is, and that is everywhere today²⁶. The easiest multi-platform form of self-promotion for student television is to duplicate content created on *YouTube* as well as on *Instagram* or the aforementioned *TikTok*. On both platforms, short excerpts and segments from interviews, reports or other audiovisual creations are currently viral. Pulling the most interesting, relevant or even controversial part of a video can have unexpectedly high impressions and create better organic reach for future posts. Social networks are constantly moving forward and adding new content creation opportunities. Technology is constantly evolving. What once required significant funding can now be created with the help of a smartphone. The viewer has moved from the television set to the computing device and from there to the mobile phone. It is therefore also essential for student television to follow and resemble its viewer on all possible platforms.

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²⁶ BROWN, N.: *Why Multi-Platform Content Is Key for Marketing Younger Generations*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/multi-platform-content-key-marketing-younger-generations/>>.

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BEYOND STREAMING: FANDOM AND VIRTUAL WORLD EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:

Streaming platforms seek possibilities to connect with audiences through new channels and to enter new markets. The brand identity of streaming platforms is based on elements including content offer, target audience, marketing and business strategy. Current media environment is constantly evolving and adapting the user experience to an advanced level. In order to keep up, brands need to extend own identity and further adjust to the competition on the market. Virtual experience in marketing provides a unique opportunity to produce new situations, impossible to create in real world, and the development of contexts that will never be experienced by most people in real life. The virtual affordance exceeds the usual communication between the product and the customer which supports the opportunity to extend the brand and appear more competitive on the market. Streaming platforms aim to capture the attention of audiences and further expansion into virtual world seems relevant for the improvement of the possible user experience. Audiovisual content has the ability to transfer storyline and emotions using narrative structures. Interactive environment provides the audience with an option to deepen the experience and to become a participant in the story. Also, the transmedia storytelling and extension of the cinematic universe associated with the audiovisual content both build and improve stronger fandom community. The paper aims to describe the use of virtual worlds as a part of the marketing strategy of streaming platforms. Case study will be based on two examples from current production of Netflix and HBO Max. First case study will explore metaverse experience established by Netflix as part of their advertising campaign to support a movie *The Gray Man*. Second case study will focus on virtual reality app *DracARys* released by *HBO Max*. Finally, we discuss the differences between the two cases and how they relate to the promoted content of the streaming services.

Key words:

Advertising. Augmented Reality. Interactive Marketing. Streaming Platform. Virtual World.

1 Streaming Platforms and Connecting with Audiences in New Markets

1.1 Streaming Platforms and Connecting with Audiences in New Markets

The development of cultural industries and society have always been linked and further impacted by one another. Cultural industry studies can be approached from a variety of angles, with a focus on distinct drivers of change. We recognize key influencers such as socio-economic factors, technology and development of the new communication tools or habits and expectations of the consumer society. Furthermore, advantages of the internet and network era have brought new distribution channels and tactics that have altered the production, dissemination, and consumption of culture by society. Cultural and creative industries strive to maintain production on a high level and aiming to remain leaders through offering competitive products to the public. In order to achieve such targets, producers explore opportunities and boundaries of the digital worlds, finding possible brand extensions using multichannel and crossmedia distribution.

Streaming platforms are perceived as an innovative product in itself since they are recognized as a strong initiator of the change in the production and distribution processes in the audiovisual industry. Mittel notes the contemporary cultural transformations are tied to the emergence of digital media and more interactive forms of entertainment.¹ The use of new digital media is classified as interactive since it relies on the user actively searching, gathering information, and

¹ MITTEL, J.: *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York, London : New York University Press, 2015, p. 53.

selecting the content they wish to consume.² The digital age is characteristic in its own ability to surround consumers everywhere and anytime, recognizing patterns of multiscreen use and simultaneous engagement with a multiple media devices.³ These elements make digital production more exciting and support innovative approach of the producers, but at the same time stress the importance of the advertising since the market is evolving at a steady pace.

Previously stated shifts on the market support the need to redefine term advertising and to suggest a definition that “*both accommodates the unique descriptors of advertising, as well as the changes to the advertising environment.*”⁴ Advertising as a concept is connected with elements such as audience, devices or message effect, which are perceived as fluctuant in the current era. Dahlgren and Rosengren develop the notion of the transformation in each aspect and recognize audience as becoming “*participants, seekers, and even cocreators of the communication (or the value of the product)*”.⁵ The proposed terms put forward the interactive approach of the consumer, own desire to gain deeper experience and surpass boundaries of traditional consumerism. Digital media provide the possibility to make use of various tools in order to enable such objective.

Term “interactive” appear to be a synonym for a successful product which has potential to draw attention of the consumers. We recognize interactive tools in advertisement, meaning the brands have a broad variety of possibilities how to create more memorable presence in everyday life. One of the possible tools is use of new technologies, internet and metaverse. The consumer-brand interactions in the metaverse may transform how consumers process, perceive and respond to advertising.⁶ The metaverse is interactive in two aspects, in its own nature and through the interactive use an avatar – “embodied user”⁷.

Kapferer explains brand identity as a concept of brand management which aims to create targeted self-image, to specify the brand’s values and meaning. Brand identity depends on communication and advertising which should improve the ability of the brand to succeed on the market.⁸ Identity of the brand includes positioning on the market, meaning characteristic elements of the product which makes it stand out in comparison to others.⁹

According to Caldwell, brands are expected to operate in a far more broad and complicated manner in the digital era than they did in the analog period.¹⁰ Media convergence and a brand's

² See: NIEBORG, D., POELL, T.: The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 11, p. 4275–4292. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1461444818769694>>.

³ BURY, R.: *Television 2.0: Viewer and Fan Engagement with Digital TV*. New York : Peter Lang, 2017, p. 37.

⁴ See: GAYLE, K., JEF, R.: Redefining Advertising in Research and Practice. In *International Journal of Advertising*, 2021, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 175-198. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02650487.2020.1769407?journalCode=rina20>>.

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⁶ See: JOOYOUNG, K.: Advertising in the Metaverse: Research Agenda. In *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 141-144. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15252019.2021.2001273>>.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ KAPFERER, J.: *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. London : Kogan Page, 2012, p. 93.

⁹ Ibidem. p. 96.

¹⁰ CALDWELL, J. T., EVERETT, A.: *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*. New York, London : Routledge, 2003, p. 130.

capacity for market adaptation are related. This expansion of the brand onto another media channel, and thus to another environment, is building on the original identity and established audience. Extension towards new products enables brand to evolve and to appear more competitive on the market.¹¹

1.2 Fandom and Extension of the Cinematic Universe

Fandom is defined as a shared mode of reception, a shared set of critical categories and practices, a tradition of aesthetic production, a set of social norms and expectations.¹² The individual does not become part of fandom by some kind of official entry; belonging to fandom is about individual fan involvement, to the extent that the individual prefers. At the same time, an important element of belonging to fandom is intertextuality of the content which is further connected to the concept of transmedia storytelling.

Concept of transmedia storytelling represents a process in which the integral elements of fiction are disseminated systematically across multiple distribution channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium offers its own unique contribution to the unfolding story.¹³ New media do not interfere with specific forms of media content, such as books, which are intended solely for the transmission of static images and text, radio, which is intended solely for the transmission of sound, or television, which is intended for the transmission of audiovisual content. The online environment makes it possible to transmit almost any type of content.¹⁴ Multimedia use supports brand extensions which are present on various channels and to be perceived in a prefer manner. Producers have an opportunity to create a “cinematic universe” which is present through various platforms or media. Furthermore, the consumers have a possibility to extend their knowledge of the universe and of the product.

2 Research Design

The aim of the theoretical part was to introduce possible use of advertising strategies in the interactive environment and to define key motivators behind. The presented research was conducted using a qualitative method and further contributes to the theoretical part. The case study illustrates two examples from recent production of the major streaming platforms – *Netflix* and *HBO Max*. The production of the major streaming platforms was chosen to receive the highest possibility of the use of virtual world experience since both brands are well established, seek to explore new markets and operate on a global scale. Still, the study is not suggesting that the selected cases are exceptions on the market and we need to acknowledge that both *Netflix* and *HBO* have explored possible use of VR as a brand extension of their advertising strategy before.

The two representatives were selected based on the following elements:

- virtual experience – AI or VR,
- operates on another platform,
- being part of the advertisement campaign of the newly released AV content,

¹¹ KAPFERER, J.: *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. London : Kogan Page, 2012, p. 76.

¹² JANSOVÁ, I.: *(Bez)mocní mediální fanoušci: televizní seriál jako zdroj bojů o význam mezi fanoušky a producenty*. Olomouc : Univerzita Palackého, 2020, p. 56.

¹³ JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York : New York University Press, 2008, p. 21.

¹⁴ BOOTH, P.: *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York : Peter Lang, 2010, p. 38.

- aimed to attract mainstream audience,
- clear link between the AV content and the virtual experience,
- recently released (Summer 2022).

First representative is ***The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission*** which is a virtual world experience related to the release of the movie *Gray Man* (premiered 22nd July 2022 on *Netflix*).

Second representative is ***DracARys*** which is a virtual reality application related to the release of the series *House of the Dragon* (first episode premiered 21st August 2022 on *HBO Max*).

Data were collected based on a formal analysis of the chosen representatives and analyzing publicly available documents. Both virtual reality and virtual world experience have elements of a gameplay so for the purpose of this paper were analyzed using a similar framework. Formal analysis of games aims to shape an understanding how the game system works.¹⁵ To describe the games, we recognize primitives such as actions and goals.¹⁶ Analysis of the publicly available documents provided description and rules of the platform (*Decentraland*) used by the first representative.

In order to conduct the research according to the proposed design, author of the paper aimed to obtain personal experience of both virtual reality representatives. We need to acknowledge limits of the research since the ***The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission*** was available for a limited period and at the time of the study was already inaccessible. To acquire purposeful data, the author analyzed the use of the platform Decentraland to recognize primitives such as players and system actions. To gain understanding of the chosen case, we reviewed three user experience videos available on *Youtube* (users JimSedric, Kevin on Earth, Truth Awakens).

In case of the second representative ***DracARys***, author downloaded the application and interacted with the app for a set period of time over a course of 10 days.

The results of the research are further explored in the discussion. The aim is to compare two representatives introduced in the case study and to discuss each brand extension with a critical approach.

3 Case Study

3.1 The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission

The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission was released following a premiere of the movie *The Gray Man* produced by *Netflix*. Labeled genre action thriller, the movie is based on a novel *The Gray Man*.¹⁷ The movie had a limited theatrical release on 15th July 2022 and on the streaming platform *Netflix* premiered on 22nd July 2022.

Netflix's first metaverse experience has crucial elements such as use of *Decentraland*, time limited access, form of a competition, use of the key motives of the movie supporting the clear link to the AV content.

¹⁵ LANKOSKI, P., BJÖRK, S.: *Game Studies Research Methods: An Overview*. Pittsburgh : ETC Press, 2015, p. 23.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Watch the Gray Man | Netflix Official Site*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.netflix.com/cz/title/81160697>>.

Decentraland is described as “the first fully decentralized virtual world”¹⁸ powered by the *Ethereum* blockchain. The virtual space is called *LAND* which is divided into parcels which can be purchased by the users. For purchases, *Decentraland* uses own cryptocurrency token *MANA*.¹⁹ The users experience the virtual world through an avatar. The look of the avatar can be customized, including optional purchase of clothes and accessories. The users have an option to experience *Decentraland* with use of a digital wallet or without it. The digital wallet works as a personal account, keeping digital assets such as collectibles or *LANDs*.²⁰ Users have an opportunity to create Events hosted in *Decentraland* which can vary anything from a game to a live concert.

The virtual world has regulations and policies which are governed by its users through “*DAO*” – Decentralized Autonomous Organization. The specificity of *Decentraland* is that the users have the possibility to vote on policy updates and other relevant issues connected with the user experience.

Netflix has chosen *Decentraland* as part of the promotion strategy for the new movie *The Gray Man*. *The Metaverse Mission* was created as an event occurring for a limited period of time – “From: Friday, 22 Jul at 03:00pm (UTC+2), To: Saturday, 23 Jul at 03:00pm (UTC+2) and From: Sunday, 31 Jul at 03:00pm (UTC+2), To: Monday, 01 Aug at 03:00pm (UTC+2)”.²¹ The event is described in a dedicated blog post on *Decentraland* platform. The blog post explains the aim: “Your mission: find the fountain in the maze and retrieve the USB with classified information, then get to the secret room to check your personal time and collect your rewards.”²²

The virtual world experience is based on a game where users need to move through a maze in order to find a USB. Each attempt to move through the maze is timed and users with the best time receive a prize connected with the movie. In final step, user has to answer questions regarding the movie. As a prize, users could receive wearables – virtual clothes and accessories to customize own avatar. “*Sierra Six’s Jacket: suitable for all the needs of a Sierra Agent. Lloyd’s Trash Stache: Nothing says “trash” like a stache/polo combo. Miranda’s Bob: A cool suit AND a cool hairdo.*”²³

User experience in *Decentraland* can be described in a following way. To access, users can run *Decentraland* via a web browser or on a locally installed desktop client. Currently, *Decentraland* cannot be accessed on mobile devices. Minimum hardware requirements are stated on their website.²⁴ Users have a variety of player actions as moving avatar in any direction, using a map to move in the world or browsing through events to transfer avatar to a specific environment.

¹⁸ *Decentraland DAO*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://dao.decentraland.org/en/#lean-more>>.

¹⁹ *FAQ. 2018*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://docs.decentraland.org/player/general/faq/>>.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://events.decentraland.org/event/?id=4c11e0b1-b403-45c0-aa74-9d5699126fa9>>.

²² RAVI, R.: *Netflix, Decentraland Partner to Bring ‘the Gray Man’ to the Metaverse*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://nftevening.com/netflix-decentraland-partner-to-bring-the-gray-man-to-the-metaverse/>>.

²³ *The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://events.decentraland.org/event/?id=4c11e0b1-b403-45c0-aa74-9d5699126fa9>>.

²⁴ *Hardware Requirements*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://docs.decentraland.org/player/general/hardware-requirements/>>.

3.2 The House of the Dragon: DracARys

DracARys is an application available for mobile devices related to the release of *HBO Max* series *House of the Dragon*, first episode premiered 21st August 2022. The application can be downloaded using *App Store* or *Google Play* and is free to access. *DracARys* was launched on 20th July 2022.

Drama series *House of the Dragon* is a prequel to *Game of Thrones*.²⁵ *HBO* offers many additional products to the brand *Game of Thrones* and production of its prequel is an extension of the brand.

Application *DracARys* offers an augmented reality (AR) experience where users observe physical world through the digital device which may enhance parts the reality and have a computer-generated input.²⁶ At the beginning, users have to approve their device to collect audio and visual data and current location. The application is described as: “*In this immersive, free-roaming AR experience, you will steal into Westeros to claim a coveted dragon egg as your own, and return to our world to raise your tiny Hatchling into a mighty dragon.*”²⁷

As introduced, user first picks a dragon egg and further has to care for the dragon in his application such as feed him, walk him and train his skills. The dragon appears in users’ physical environment through the mobile device and is able to react on voice instructions, motion and hand gestures. “*As your dragon grows it will develop its own unique appearance, behavior and abilities entirely dependent on your personal interactions with it, eventually reaching full adulthood, ready to explore the outside world.*”²⁸ *DracARys* connects AR experience and short scenes with a storyline. Use of the application and each move is titled with a caption providing description of the story.

The dragon presents a key element of the *DracARys* and of the whole *House of the Dragon* series. The application includes detailed information about the dragon such as time and place of birth, size and weight. At the time of the birth of the dragon, user need to name the dragon. The development is gradually illustrated with achieved milestones. Milestones are achieved through learned skills and over time.

The dragon interacts on voice commands made by the user in Valyrian language²⁹. User learns Valyrian words each time dragon reaches a new milestone.³⁰

4 Discussion

Previously introduced cases present different use of virtual worlds and extended reality as part of the brand strategy. Discussion will focus on accessibility and user experience with emphasis on the diverse approach of the producers. Furthermore, we recognize how producers made use

²⁵ *House of the Dragon* | Official Website for the HBO Series | HBO.com. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.hbo.com/house-of-the-dragon>>.

²⁶ *AR & VR*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://arvr.google.com/ar/>>.

²⁷ *House of the Dragon: DracARys*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://apps.apple.com/app/house-of-the-dragon-dracarys/id1623419149>>.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Author’s note: Valyrian language = fictional language in fantasy novels by G. R. R. Martin and in their television adaptation *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon*.

³⁰ *House of the Dragon DracARys App FAQ* | Official Website for the HBO Series | HBO.com. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.hbo.com/house-of-the-dragon/dracarys-app-faq>>.

of the brand extension and how strong is the link between the promoted AV content and the AR/VR experience.

AR vs. VR

Extended reality as a tool has various options to provide different user experience. *The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission* present a virtual reality (VR) experience which is completely in a virtual environment and user enters a simulated world through an avatar. On contrary, *DracARys* presents an example of an augmented reality (AR) application which builds on physical environment of the user and further enhances the reality. Application is similar to successful and awarded app *Pokémon Go*³¹ which also build on the fandom of the famous cartoon series and games.

We need to acknowledge that use of the AR technology is legally challenging and has issues with regulatory practices since users have to approve their device to collect audio and visual data and location.³² Still, we recognize that in case of *DracARys*, these features are necessary in order to enable personal experience and include reaction to the gestures, voice commands and movements.

Accessibility and user experience

The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission present a specific example since the VR experience was available only for a limited period of time connected to the release of the movie. Streaming platform *Netflix* have chosen a platform *Decentraland* to release the experience and not a separate application to be accessed by download. These notes suggest the aim to create an exclusive event which was limited in its accessibility. The VR experience used primitives of the *Decentraland* such as event, access through the avatar, placement of the event on the map and even prizes for the winners were wearables relevant only for the platform. The strong connection with the platform presents a brand extension using already existing platform and customizing its possible use for own profit.

DracARys is available to be downloaded on mobile devices through an App Store or Google Play which makes the experience more accessible. The issue is previously mentioned data privacy regarding the use of AR applications. Alongside, user reviews are referring to a bad user experience since the application drains the devices battery and is often crashing.³³ Still, the idea behind the app and possible use are valuable and later bug fixes may help the user experience.

Brand extension

Both *Netflix* and *HBO* build their promotion strategy on a strong link between the AV content and chosen marketing tools. Extended reality experience is recognized as a brand extension of the newly introduced branded content.

We recognize that the title of the product is similar to the title of the original content or clearly implies the connection. This supports the notion that the extension of the brand needs to keep

³¹ *Pokémon GO*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/pok%C3%A9mon-go/id1094591345>>.

³² DALTON, J.: *Legal and Regulatory Challenges in the Enterprise Application of Virtual and Augmented Reality: What Lies Ahead*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.pwc.co.uk/issues/intelligent-digital/metaverse-technologies/legal-regulatory-challenges-enterprise-application-virtual-augmented-reality.html>>.

³³ *House of the Dragon: DracARys*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://apps.apple.com/app/house-of-the-dragon-dracarys/id1623419149>>.

key words and visuals in order to maintain the original brand. Each product is targeted on the specific group of consumers who are familiar with the original brand.

The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission includes key elements of the original movie *The Gray Man*. The theme and setting of the virtual world experience refer to the storyline of the movie since the game includes captions and questions related to the Gray Man. Throughout the experience are visual references like portrait of the main character or logo of the movie brand. Term “mission” in the title of the virtual world experience addresses the primary plot of the movie.

As already mentioned, *Metaverse Mission* is specific for its presence on the platform *Decentraland* and its characteristic elements are associated with the platform. Consumers receive a prize after completing the “mission” which are wearables connected with the movie. Virtual clothes and accessories to customize own avatar are appealing for fans of *The Gray Man* but in order to obtain the prize, user needs to hold a digital wallet.

In case of the *House of the Dragon*, which is a prequel to immensely successful series *Game of Thrones*, HBO has an advantage of enlarging the already viable brand. Both series have dragons as one of the main subjects of the storyline, so the application *DracARys* is appealing for the audience of *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon*. Title of the app isn’t directly suggesting the series. The description of the application includes terms directly connected with the storyline such as “Westeros”, “dragon” and “Hatchling”.³⁴ User experience includes captions describing the storyline connected to the series. Another strong feature is the possibility to give voice commands strictly in a fictional “Valyrian” language which is used in the series. Fandom around the *Game of Thrones* is supported by many branded products including books, games and other additional miscellaneous items. Application *DracARys* allows consumers to become closer to the *Game of Thrones* universe and to receive experience within the *Game of Thrones* universe.

5 Conclusion

Extended reality experience provides new opportunities for brand extensions on the market. Technical progress and innovations are changing the media landscape which challenges its producers. The introduction supports the notion that brands are expected to appear more competitive on the market with use of modern tools and digital devices. The paper focused on brand extension of audiovisual content produced by streaming platforms. Apart from traditional advertising strategy, consumers expect to receive more interactive experience which may even proliferate thorough various platforms. Transmedia storytelling can be perceived as several brand extensions which use different media channels. This includes an ability to communicate storyline and create a cinematic universe based on a certain media product.

Case study introduced two examples from recent production of the major streaming platforms – *Netflix* and *HBO Max*. First, *The Gray Man: Metaverse Mission*, presents a virtual world experience which is specific for its limited accessibility and strong connection with the platform *Decentraland*. Second, *The House of the Dragon: DracARys*, is an application available to be downloaded for mobile devices related to a very viable brand – series *Game of Thrones* and its prequel *House of the Dragon*.

³⁴ *House of the Dragon: DracARys*. [online]. [2022-11-01]. Available at: <<https://apps.apple.com/app/house-of-the-dragon-dracarys/id1623419149>>.

In conclusion, both augmented reality and virtual world experience present an interactive tool which can be used as part of the marketing strategy. Each technology has different limitations which should be considered and perceived from the point of view of the consumer. Furthermore, we acknowledge that in order to extend the cinematic universe, extended reality presents an effective tool to provide a personal experience of the story.

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Section 2:

Change in Preferences in Buying
Behaviour of Consumers
in the Context of the Dynamics
of Marketing Communication
Tools Development
(VEGA č.1/0606/21)

TRENDS IN CONSUMER DECISION MAKING RESEARCH

Tamás Darázs

Abstract:

The presented contribution focuses on the understanding of the consumer and his perception as well as on relatively popular ways of researching consumer behavior. Through this understanding, he clarifies the concepts of Homo economicus and explains the evolution of the understanding of the consumer from an individual who tries to maximize his profit to an individual who is irrational, influenced by implicit motives. The fact that an individual acts “irrationally” based on his motives and instincts is the focus of this paper, which tries to shed new light on how an individual perceives surrounding stimuli and processes them through his central nervous system. Thus, his brain and the processes that take place in it appear in the center of attention in consumer research. It turns out that most of our everyday perceptions are not processed consciously, but these stimuli nevertheless participate in our everyday decisions. It is necessary to know these processes taking place in our subconscious in more detail in order to be able to tell how the consumer behaves.

Keywords:

Consumer Behavior. Consumer Research. Implicit Reactions. Marketing Communication. Marketing Research.

Introduction to the Issue of Consumer Behavior

In the 1950s, marketing began to adopt techniques used by motivation researchers, including in-depth interviews, projective techniques, thematic and perceptual tests, and a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods.¹ Recently, researchers have added a new set of tools, including ethnography, photo-elicitation techniques, and phenomenological interviewing. Today, consumer behavior is considered an important subdiscipline within marketing and is part of the study in almost all undergraduate marketing programs.

Consumer behavior includes “*all activities associated with the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services, including the emotional, mental, and behavioral responses of the consumer that precede or follow these activities*”.² The term consumer can refer to individual consumers as well as organizational consumers, more specifically “*the end user, and not necessarily the buyer, in the distribution chain of a good or service*”.³ Consumer behavior refers to:

- purchasing activities: purchase of goods or services; how consumers acquire products and services and all activities leading to a purchase decision, including information search, evaluation of goods and services, and payment methods, including the purchase experience,
- activities related to use or consumption: refers to who, where, when and how consumes and experiences of use, including symbolic associations and the way goods are distributed within families or consumption units,
- disposal activities: refers to the way consumers dispose of products and packaging; it may also include resale activities such as *eBay* and second-hand markets.⁴

¹ FULLERTON, R. A.: The Birth of Consumer Behavior: Motivation Research in the 1950s. In *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 2013, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 222. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17557501311316833/full/html>>.

² KARDES, F., CRONLEY, M., CLINE, T.: *Consumer Behavior*. Boston : Cengage Learning, 2014, p. 576.

³ *What Is a Consumer? Definition and Meaning*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/consumer.html>>.

⁴ KARDES, F., CRONLEY, M., CLINE, T.: *Consumer Behavior*. Boston : Cengage Learning, 2014, p. 576.

Consumer responses can be:

- emotional (or affective) responses: refer to emotions such as feelings or moods,
- mental (or cognitive) reactions: refer to the thought processes of the consumer,
- behavioral (or conative) responses: refer to the observable reactions of the consumer in connection with the purchase and sale of goods or services.⁵

Tracking and researching customer purchasing decisions is essential in building an effective marketing strategy. This whole process is a comprehensive summary of several factors that influence the customer and it is necessary to analyze them in order to obtain the desired information. Basically, the purchasing decision process includes:

- recognition of the problem/need,
- obtaining information,
- evaluation of alternatives, selection of the most suitable alternative,
- evaluation after purchase.

Since the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behavior is interactive, the current global trend is to examine marketing communication in relation to consumer behavior. Marketing communication influences, shapes and changes consumer behavior. Conversely, changing consumer behavior forces companies to modify their marketing communications by introducing new forms and tools to gain customer trust and influence purchases. To build long-term relationships with customers, marketing communication is used as a tool for influencing consumer behavior.⁶

Work Methodology

Science in researching and evaluating consumer data is based on knowledge of logic, mathematics and statistics. The aim of the article is to open up space for a proper understanding of the meaning of new ways of consumer research, which will allow us to examine in more detail the impact of new information on managerial marketing tools, while the solution of the mentioned issue required the use of several approaches, as well as logical and empirical methods of scientific research. Empirical methods, such as: analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, concretization and abstraction, dominated the processing of the work. The implemented method of indirect collection of facts, the so-called boards research, as well as their subsequent processing and evaluation are described in the work, while it was carried out by collecting secondary data, which can for example take the form of available magazine and book information, conference proceedings and academic studies, as well as indirect observation. Subsequently, abstraction was used, ignoring less important publications whose impact on the field of marketing was not very significant.

As part of the article, we used several of the theoretical research methods, which we also classify as general scientific methods. Among these theoretical methods, which we applied within general (logical) methods, we include:

- Formal abstraction, within which we applied idealization, which resulted in the theoretical categorization of new knowledge.
- Causal analysis and synthesis in accordance with available professional literature.

⁵ KARDES, F., CRONLEY, M., CLINE, T.: *Consumer Behavior*. Boston : Cengage Learning, 2014, p. 576.

⁶ See: KUSÁ, A., ZÁŠKOVÁ, A., ČÁBYOVÁ, L.: Effect of Marketing Communication on Consumer Preferences. In *AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 150-155. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://sekarl.euba.sk/ar1-eu/en/detail-eu_un_cat-0267251-Effect-of-Marketing-Communication-on-Consumer-Preferences-and-Purchasing-Decisions/>.

1 Relatively New Ways of Consumer Research

To gain insight into consumer behavior, researchers use standard research methods, such as market surveys, in-depth interviews, or big data analysis. However, researchers are increasingly turning to newer methodologies and technologies in an effort to find an understanding of why consumers behave in certain ways that are decidedly non-rational. These newer methods include ethnographic research (also known as participant observation) or neuroscience, as well as experimental laboratory designs. In addition, researchers often turn to other scientific disciplines for insights with the potential to inform consumer behavior. For example, behavioral economics adds new insights into certain aspects of consumer behavior. The following sections of this post expand the knowledge base on these methods.

1.1 Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research or ethnography has its origins in anthropology. However, marketers use ethnographic research to study the consumer in terms of cultural trends, lifestyle factors, attitudes, and how the social context influences product selection, consumption, and use. Ethnographic research, also called “participant observation”, attempts to study consumer behavior in a natural environment rather than an artificial environment such as a laboratory. Different types of ethnographic research are used in marketing:

- Tracked product use: tracking regular product use at home or at work to gain insight into how products are opened, prepared, consumed, stored, disposed of, etc. to gain insight into the usefulness of packaging, labeling and general use.
- Studies from everyday life: extended visits during product use situations to gain insight into consumer norms and expectations.
- Accompanying purchase or purchases: a researcher accompanies a shopper on a shopping expedition to gain insight into consumer reactions to merchandising and other sales tactics.
- Cultural studies: similar to traditional ethnography; extended stays in a group or tribe to uncover the basic rules and conventions that govern behavior.
- Guerrilla ethnography: casual observations in public settings to help establish research questions or gain quick insights into specific behaviors.
- Mystery shopping: observations in a retail context to gain insight into customer experiences with services.
- Multiple methodologies: combining ethnographic research methods with conventional research techniques to triangulate results.⁷

Charlie Gower, group head of insight and research at insurance company *Hiscox*, has long advocated the benefits of ethnography and has used it in previous roles. However, he admits that it can be time-consuming and therefore expensive. “Thanks to mobile technology and people being more willing to share their thoughts, you don’t have to hang around with someone all day – they can send you an email, photos or a video diary.”⁸ Marco Madrisotti, vice-president of product development at cosmetics company *Coty*, says that mobile ethnography is an attractive option in this regard. He says: “The absence of an observer in the living room makes things even more natural. It’s also three to five times cheaper than traditional ethnography, which means we can do it more often and cover more markets”.⁹ *Coty*, which owns makeup brands including *Rimmel* and *New York Color*, plans to do just that. Following a successful eye make-up project with mobile ethnographic research agency *EthOS*, the company

⁷ *What Is a Trend?* [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<http://www.faithpopcorn.com/trendbank/>>.

⁸ BURROWS, D.: *How to Use Ethnography for In-Depth Consumer Insight*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.marketingweek.com/how-to-use-ethnography-for-in-depth-consumer-insight/>>.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

is launching further studies across the make-up range. Many brands are reluctant to discuss their ethnographic research, let alone the findings and returns. Maybe it's because they don't want others to understand how successful it can be. As Goffin concludes: *"Marketing has traditionally been the home of understanding customers, but through ethnography it can be the driving force behind major breakthroughs"*.¹⁰ Because of this, marketers have a vested interest in knowing what's going on behind their customers' front doors and keeping a lock on what they discover.

However, ethnographic research brings with it three major challenges that must be accepted when using it:

Resources

Not everyone has the time or budget to conduct in-depth ethnographic market research, which has led to many relying on the focus method group. True, ethnography can be expensive, but the combination of mobile technology and the willingness of customers to share their experiences makes it more accessible to many.

Data Overload

Those who want to embark on projects must be aware that systematic analysis of 30-60 hours of video is not easy (generally a base of 20-30 customers is used). Therefore, many brands seek help from specialized agencies.

Access to All Areas

Involving experts is useful, but agencies are beginning to find that clients are interested in coming along with researchers for home visits. The problem can be too many people disturbing the natural environment of the investigated object.

1.2 Cognitive Psychology

It is a field of psychology that deals with the study of conscious and unconscious cognitive processes (→ cognitive processes, → cognition), which are the basic prerequisite for a person's orientation and adaptation in the world. It deals with psychological phenomena involved in the daily functioning of a person as a psychosocial being and focuses on the study of processes involved in cognition, feeling and perception, on attention and learning, without which the world could not improve and change, on memory, imagery and emotionality, which they affect decisions and direction, as well as motivation, speech, and judgment. It emphasizes the importance of cognition, thinking, mental abilities, skills and intellect. Cognitive styles describing the way a person perceives, thinks, remembers and solves problems, as well as the biological basis of cognitive processes, attention, consciousness, perception, memory, mental representations, language, problem solving, creativity and creative thinking are also an important area of research in cognitive psychology, decision-making and decision-making processes, developmental cognitive changes in the course of human life, and human and artificial intelligence.

Cognitive psychology is also understood as the equivalent of the psychology of information processing, part of its conceptual apparatus are also cognitive strategies that allow a person to manipulate information, e.g. through reasoning, analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, generalization, categorization, classification, creation of own terms and conceptual constructs, as well as summarization.

¹⁰ BURROWS, D.: *How to Use Ethnography for In-Depth Consumer Insight*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.marketingweek.com/how-to-use-ethnography-for-in-depth-consumer-insight/>>.

In his research, he uses psychobiological methods, experiments, observation in natural and artificial conditions, self-observation, case studies, computer simulations and a general method for solving artificial intelligence research problems (GPS, English General Problem Solver). Basic methods and tests include e.g. measurement of reaction time, which provides information about the internal state of a person, the tachyscopic method, in which the proband is e.g. at the same time, visual stimuli (words, symbols) are given to the left and right visual field, and then performance is compared (→ tachyscope), mental chronometry, which determines how long it takes the human mind to become aware of the presented stimulus (letters, words, sentences, pictures, colors; thanks to this method, it is possible to recognize the cognitive side of the mind – abstraction, recognition of unknown objects), search tests, which measure different levels of mental performance, conceptual classification tests, which make it possible to find out the point of classification, the complexity and nature of operations, as well as various forms of computer simulations that are compared to human behavior as well as thinking out loud. In clinical practice, cognitive psychologists focus on changing clients' thinking as a basic prerequisite for changing their behavior and actions (cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy).¹¹

1.3 Behavioral Research Techniques

Neoclassical economics is based on the assumption of rationality, that is, that people try to fulfill their own interests as much as possible. It uses robust mathematical models that are prescriptive – they prescribe how people should behave in order to actually achieve their goals. In other words, it describes ideal black-and-white states that we should reach in order to maximize our own benefit, our own “happiness”, resulting from the efficient allocation of our resources, regardless of the happiness of others. At the same time, it prescribes relatively complicated and computationally demanding operations that should lead us to the given states.¹² In contrast, behavioral economics does not use mathematical models, but economic experiments in which it observes the real behavior of people and thereby reveals real decision-making mechanisms. Behavioral economics is therefore descriptive – it does not study what people should do, but how and why people actually behave. It uses psychological theories to explain “why”. Thanks to the integration of psychological phenomena into economic models, we can predict human behavior more accurately and reliably.

In reality, people usually do not make decisions by cold calculations, but follow certain rules, which we also call heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts. Heuristics are often discussed mainly in connection with the errors that their use can lead to. Behavioral economics is therefore often perceived as a science investigating human irrationality. In reality, however, decision rules/heuristics are very reliable and usually lead to incredibly rational decisions. They lead to errors only exceptionally. This is due to the fact that these rules of behavior are a product of the evolutionary process. Evolutionary rules are adapted to work well in ordinary environments, not in exceptional or unnatural situations – environments where people often make mistakes.

Behavioral economics examines the ways in which people select information, how they decide between alternatives, how they respond to opportunities and risks, and how they evaluate perceived gains and losses. At the same time, it examines various techniques that influence people in favor of choosing a particular option. It turns out that factors that classical economics considers irrelevant (for example, information framing, decision baits, reference points...) often play a role in decision-making and are crucial from the point of view of psychology.

¹¹ *Kognitívna psychológia*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/kognitivna-psychologia>>.

¹² LORKO, M.: *Behaviorálna ekonómia*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/blog/1894225/behavioralna-ekonomia-co-to-vlastne-je-a-na-co-je-dobra/>>.

In order to be able to trust that people will make rational and effective decisions, it is sufficient that three conditions, which are often quite easily achieved, are met: a predictable environment (the same decision leads to the same or at least a similar result), immediate feedback (the environment immediately “punishes” an individual for a mistake and rewards for a correct decision) and the possibility to repeat the decision, i. e. to train. Humans can generally learn very quickly and efficiently.

Among the most important principles of behavioral economics, we can consider the following:¹³

- overconfidence effect – leads to the fact that people tend to overestimate their abilities, prospects, and chances of success,
- loss aversion,
- anchoring effect – when people think about another value (calmly even random) before estimating some unknown amount or number, the anchoring effect works in such a way that in their estimations they stick close to the value they were thinking about before, and this earlier value is called the anchor,
- framing effect – is an example of a cognitive bias in which people react in different ways depending on whether a choice is presented as a loss or a gain. If the argument is positive, people tend to take risks, but if the same argument is framed negatively, people are risk averse,
- social approval,
- the power of free,
- decision paralysis,
- the effect of an asymmetrically influencing alternative (eng. dominated alternatives) – also we can talk about the so-called bait,
- paradox of choice,
- herding effect,
- mental accounting.

It is important to realize that effective communication from the point of view of behavioral marketing can only be considered when the message sent is understood and leads to the reaction the sender intended. Since the creators and receivers of marketing communication messages are “only” people, knowledge from psychology and behavioral economics can also be used for more effective marketing communication. Marketers, like behavioral economists, believe that emotions often play a more important role in human decision-making than information alone. Results in marketing practice show that emotional reactions to advertising have a greater influence on purchase intention than the content of the advertisement itself. So they pay close attention to what emotions their brands or communication messages evoke in consumers. Also, knowledge about how people perceive different colors is already widely used in practice today when designing logos, sales materials or the stores themselves in order to evoke desirable emotions and behavior in the consumer. It’s the same with music that can play in shopping malls or in TV commercials. One of the principles of behavioral economics, which can be practically used in marketing communication, is the so-called framing effect (framing effects). According to this concept, people can perceive content-identical messages very differently only in how they were formulated. An example can be two messages:

- “Up to 95% of the phones in our case won’t break when dropped.”
- “Only 5% of the phones in our case break when dropped.”

¹³ HORVÁTH, M.: Potenciál využitia behaviorálnej ekonómie v rámci manažérskych marketingových nástrojov. In *Studies commercialia*, 2020, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 118. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://of.euba.sk/www_write/files/veda-vyskum/scb/vydane-cisla/2020-02/scb0220_horvath.pdf>.

Although the content of these messages is exactly the same and the fact remains that 95% of phones do not break and 5% do, the first of them is formulated positively – it is presented to consumers that a high percentage of mobile phones will be saved by the cover, and therefore their phone has a good chance, that it also won't break if they buy it and use that cover. On the contrary, the second wording leads consumers to think that they may be one of those whose phone breaks even with the cover. In other words, even a different wording of the same message can evoke a different reaction from the consumer. In conclusion, we would like to mention another example of the use of behavioral economics in personal selling. This is an experience from one department store, where kiosks were set up in the run-up to Christmas, and their sellers stopped passing customers. One of the kiosks was focused on perfumes, and two salespeople approached customers to try two different perfumes and decide which one was better. When the customer made his choice, they very enthusiastically offered him this perfume and another one for free. Both boxes were immediately placed in his hands while still assuring him what a good deal it was. Watching how the sellers in this kiosk always acted the same way, we couldn't help but feel that they were carefully trained and tried to evoke emotions in customers – surprise and excitement that they have the opportunity to get something for free. However, there may have been another important element in their tactics. This case forces us to think again about the issue of the so-called loss aversion. As we briefly mentioned before, it manifests itself in the way that people feel the loss much worse than they enjoy the gain. The fact that these sellers always put the perfumes in the customers' hands immediately instead of leaving them on the counter, we cannot explain in retrospect other than that it was a carefully thought-out intention that had the task of making customers feel as if they already owned the perfumes and returning them to the seller in case of rejection of the offer was thus perhaps more “painful” for potential customers.¹⁴

1.4 Consumer Neuroscience

Neuromarketing as a part of consumer neuroscience refers to the commercial use of neuroscience in the field of marketing when applied to the study of marketing problems and consumer research. Some scholars have argued that the term consumer neuroscience is preferable to neuromarketing or other alternatives.¹⁵

Consumer neuroscience uses sophisticated biometric sensors, such as electroencephalography (EEG), functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), eye tracking,¹⁶ and others, to study the ways in which consumers respond to specific stimuli, such as product displays, brands, packaging information, or other marketing cues. Such tests reveal stimuli that trigger the brain's pleasure centres, or consequences of launching these centres. Consumer neuroscience has become a major part of consumer research methods. International market research company *Nielsen Research* recently added neuromarketing to its services with the acquisition of neuromarketing research company *Innerscope*, enabling *Nielsen* to add neuromarketing research to the suite of services available to clients.¹⁷

¹⁴ HORVÁTH, M.: Potenciál využitia behaviorálnej ekonómie v rámci manažérskych marketingových nástrojov. In *Studies commercialia*, 2020, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 118. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://of.euba.sk/www_write/files/veda-vyskum/scb/vydane-cisla/2020-02/scb0220_horvath.pdf>.

¹⁵ RAMSØY, T. Z.: *Introduction to Neuromarketing and Consumer Neuroscience*. Rørvig : Neurons Inc., 2015, p. 3.; See also: HUBERT, M., KENNING, P.: A Current Overview of Consumer Neuroscience. In *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 2008, Vol. 7, No. 4-5, p. 292.

¹⁶ CHOI, D., HAHN, M., LEE, K.: A Comparison of Buying Decisions by Product Involvement: An Eye Tracking Study in Intelligent Information and Database Systems. In PAN, J. S., CHEN, S. M., NGUYEN, N. T. (eds.): *4th Asian ACIIDS Conference (Part 3)*. Heidelberg, Dordrecht, London, New York : Springer, 2012, p. 46.

¹⁷ DOOLEY, R.: *Nielsen Doubles Down on Neuro*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rogerdooley/2015/06/03/nielsen-doubles-down-on-neuro>>; See also: NARASIMHAN, C.: Competitive Promotional Strategies. In *Journal of Business*, 1998, Vol. 61, No. 4, p. 427-449.

Conclusion

The fact that an individual acts “irrationally” based on his motives and instincts is the focus of this paper, which tries to shed new light on how an individual perceives surrounding stimuli and processes them through his central nervous system. Thus, his brain and the processes that take place in it appear in the center of attention in consumer research. It turns out that most of our everyday perceptions are not processed consciously, but these stimuli nevertheless participate in our everyday decisions. It is necessary to know these processes taking place in our subconscious in more detail in order to be able to tell how the consumer behaves. Also based on the facts presented in this post, we have read that by using new methods of consumer perception research, we can shed more light on the issue of consumer decision-making when purchasing.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development

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THE POSITION OF NEUROECONOMICS AND NEUROMARKETING IN THE UNIVERSE OF CONSUMER NEUROSCIENCE

Tamás Darázs

Abstract:

By studying the opinions of other authors the aim of the article is to open up space for a proper understanding of the meaning of new ways of consumer research. The presented contribution examines the position of neuromarketing and neuroeconomics in connection with the issue of consumer neuroscience, while trying to find a certain hierarchy between these concepts. There are subtle but distinct differences between them. It seems that neuroeconomics is more of an academic field, we can say that it is an extension of behavioral economics in which knowledge from neuroscience, neuropsychology as well as experimental and cognitive psychology and other related fields are applied to refine an integrated view of economic decisions. Neuromarketing is more of an applied science. What unites all 3 fields is that they can be an integral part of relatively new ways of consumer research, such as ethnographic research, mobile ethnographic research, cognitive and cognitive psychology or as part of behavioral research techniques. The present contribution brings order to the hierarchy of these concepts through observation and abstraction.

Keywords:

Consumer Neuroscience. Consumer Research. Neuroeconomics. Neuromarketing. Marketing Research.

Introduction

For decades, consumer researchers have never been able to directly record the internal mental processes that drive consumer behavior; they have always limited themselves to designing experiments in which they change external conditions to see the ways in which changing variables can affect consumer behavior (examples include changing packaging or changing the subject's mood). With the integration of neuroscience with consumer research, it is possible to go directly into the brain and discover the neural explanations of consumer behavior. The ability to record brain activity with electrodes and advances in neural imaging technology make it possible to pinpoint specific areas of the brain responsible for critical eating behaviors.¹

Consumer neuroscience is similar to neuroeconomics and neuromarketing, but there are subtle but distinct differences between the two. Neuroeconomics is more of an academic field, while neuromarketing and consumer neuroscience are more of an applied science. Neuromarketing focuses on the study of various marketing techniques and attempts to integrate knowledge from neuroscience to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of said marketing strategies. Consumer neuroscience is unique among the three because the main focus is on the consumer and how various factors influence individual preferences and purchasing behavior.

Work Methodology

Science in researching and evaluating consumer data is based on knowledge of logic, mathematics and statistics. The aim of the article is to open up space for a proper understanding of the meaning of new ways of consumer research, which will allow us to examine in more detail the impact of new information on managerial marketing tools, while the solution of the mentioned issue required the use of several approaches, as well as logical and empirical

¹ KENNING P., PLASSMANN, H.: How Neuroscience Can Inform Consumer Research. In *IEEE Transactions on Neural Systems and Rehabilitation Engineering*, 2008, Vol. 16, No. 6, p. 538.

methods of scientific research. Empirical methods, such as: analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, concretization and abstraction, dominated the processing of the work. The implemented method of indirect collection of facts, the so-called boards research, as well as their subsequent processing and evaluation are described in the work, while it was carried out by collecting secondary data, which can for example take the form of available magazine and book information, conference proceedings and academic studies, as well as indirect observation. Subsequently, abstraction was used, ignoring less important publications whose impact on the field of marketing was not very significant.

As part of the article, we used several of the theoretical research methods, which we also classify as general scientific methods. Among these theoretical methods, which we applied within general (logical) methods, we include:

1. Formal abstraction, within which we applied idealization, which resulted in the theoretical categorization of new knowledge.
2. Causal analysis and synthesis in accordance with available professional literature.

1 Consumer Neuroscience

Consumer neuroscience is the application of neuroscientific methods to understand consumer behavior. Using methods such as EEG, fMRI, eye tracking, GSR, and more, consumer neuroscientists seek to better understand how consumers make decisions that may lead to purchases.

The research conducted provides an opportunity to understand why we act in a certain way in the present, but also creates an opportunity to understand how we will act in the future. For consumer neuroscientists, this is the ultimate goal – to better understand and predict what will lead to our later purchasing decisions.

Consumer neuroscience arose as a result of researchers accepting the impact of bias on traditional question-and-answer research. Research has shown not only that surveys lead to inaccurate answers², but also that thinking about an answer itself can lead to a change in its outcome³. It seems that the more we consciously think about our answers, the less likely they are to be true.

Neuroscientific approaches used in this context attempt to bridge the gap between unbiased but unconscious responses and their relationship to future purchases. We hope that by getting the right data, a clearer vision of the future will emerge.

In many ways, it's like the job of weather forecasting – taking complex and noisy data and using it to make predictions.

1.1 Neuroeconomics

Neuroeconomics is an interdisciplinary field that tries to explain human decision-making, the ability to process multiple alternatives and follow a certain course of action. It studies how

² BIEMER, P. et al.: *Measurement Errors in Surveys*. New York : Wiley, 2011, p. 764.

³ MORWITZ, V., FITZSIMONS, G.: The Mere-Measurement Effect: Why Does Measuring Intentions Change Actual Behavior? In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2004, Vol. 14, No. 1-2, p. 74.; See also: BOKSEM, M., SMIDTS, A.: Brain Responses to Movie Trailers Predict Individual Preferences for Movies and Their Population-Wide Commercial Success. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2015, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 492.

economic behavior can shape our understanding of the brain and how neuroscientific discoveries can constrain and guide models of economics.⁴

It combines research from neuroscience, experimental and behavioral economics, and cognitive and social psychology. As research on decision-making behavior becomes increasingly computational, it also includes new approaches from theoretical biology, computer science, and mathematics. Neuroeconomics studies decision-making using a combination of tools from these fields to avoid the shortcomings that arise from a single-perspective approach. In mainstream economics, expected utility (EU) and the concept of rational agents are still used. Many economic behaviors are not fully explained by these models, such as heuristics and framing.⁵

Behavioral economics emerged to explain these anomalies by integrating social, cognitive, and emotional factors into the understanding of economic decisions. Neuroeconomics adds another layer by using neuroscientific methods to understand the interplay between economic behavior and neural mechanisms. Using tools from various fields, neuroeconomics works on an integrated overview of economic decision-making.

The field of decision-making is largely concerned with the processes by which individuals choose one of many options. These processes are generally assumed to occur in a logical manner, so that the decision itself is largely context-independent. The different options are first converted into a common currency, such as monetary value, and then compared with each other, and the option with the greatest total utility value should be selected.⁶

Neuroeconomics emerged from this controversy. By determining which areas of the brain are active in which types of decision-making processes, neuroeconomists hope to better understand the nature of what appear to be suboptimal and illogical. While most of these scientists use human subjects in this research, others use animal models where the studies can be more tightly controlled and the assumptions of the economic model can be directly tested.

For example, *Padoa-Schioppa & Assad* monitored the firing rate of individual neurons in the orbitofrontal cortex of monkeys, while the animals chose between two types of juice. Neuron firing rates were directly correlated with food utility and did not differ when other types of food were offered. This suggests that, consistent with economic decision theory, neurons directly compare some form of utility among different options and choose the one with the highest value.⁷ Similarly, a common measure of prefrontal cortex dysfunction, FrSBe, correlates with several different measures of economic attitudes and behavior, supporting the idea that brain activation may depict important aspects of the decision-making process.⁸

⁴ *Center for Neuroeconomics Study at Duke University*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://dibs.duke.edu/centers/center-cognitive-neuroscience>>.

⁵ LOEWENSTEIN, G., RICK, S., COHEN, J.: Neuroeconomics. In *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 59, p. 672. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17883335/>>.

⁶ RUSTICHINI, A.: Neuroeconomics: What Have We Found, and What Should We Search For? In *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 2009, Vol. 19, No. 6, p. 677. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959438809001366?via%3Dihub>>.

⁷ PADOA-SCHIOPPA, C., ASSAD, J. A.: The Representation of Economy Value in the Orbitofrontal Cortex Is Invariant for Changes of Menu. In *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 2007, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 102. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2646102/>>.

⁸ SPINELLA, M., YANG, B., LESTER, D.: Prefrontal Cortex Dysfunction and Attitudes Toward Money: A Study in Neuroeconomics. In *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 2008, Vol. 37, No. 5, p. 1788. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222772358_Prefrontal_cortex_dysfunction_and_attitudes_toward_money_A_study_in_neuroeconomics>.

Neuroeconomics studies the neurobiological along with the computational foundations of decision-making. A. Rangel , C. Camerer and P.R. Montague propose a framework of basic calculations that can be applied to neuroeconomic studies.⁹ They divide the decision-making process into five stages implemented by the entity. First, a representation of the problem is created. This includes analysis of internal states, external states and potential course of action. Second, potential actions are assigned values. Third, one of the shares is selected based on the award. Fourth, the subject evaluates how desirable the result is. The final phase, learning, involves updating all of the above processes in order to improve future decisions.

Main areas of research:

- Decision making under risk and ambiguity
- Serial and functionally localized model vs. distributed, hierarchical model
- Loss aversion
- Intermediate election
- Group decision making vs. decision making of individuals
- Gender-based decision-making

1.2 Neuromarketing

Neuromarketing is a field of commercial marketing communication that applies neuropsychology to market research, studies sensorimotor, cognitive and affective reactions of consumers to marketing stimuli.¹⁰ Potential benefits for marketers include more effective and efficient marketing campaigns and strategies, fewer product and campaign failures, and ultimately the manipulation of people's real needs and wants to suit marketing's needs and wants hobbies.¹¹

Some companies, especially those with big ambitions to predict consumer behavior, have invested in their own laboratories, research staff or partnerships with academia. Neuromarketing is still an expensive approach; it requires advanced equipment and technology, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), eye-tracking motion sensing, and electroencephalography.

Neuromarketing is the answer to the increasingly missing information about the consumer and his preferences. Neuromarketing research, in contrast to classic research such as interviews with customer samples or questionnaire studies, focuses in real time on the reactions of the subconscious, influencing consumer behavior such as attention and emotions. It looks for them, records and analyzes them. It uses modern technologies for this. Using modern technologies, neuromarketing research can eliminate many of the shortcomings of classical research, but it is not a substitute, but a supplement. To say that neuromarketing is unethical is not correct. It is just a tool that, in the hands of an ethical researcher and with the sole voluntariness of the participant, can provide a lot of important information about the mood, attention and preferences of individuals. But how? There are various methods of obtaining implicit

⁹ RANGEL, A., CAMERER, C., MONTAGUE, P.: A Framework for Studying the Neurobiology of Value-Based Decision Making. In *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 7, p. 556.

¹⁰ LEE, N., BRODERICK, A., CHAMBERLAIN, L.: What Is "Neuromarketing"? A Discussion and Agenda for Future Research. In *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 2007, Vol. 63, No. 2, p. 204. See also: VLĂSCEANU, S.: New Directions in Understanding the Decision-Making Process: Neuroeconomics and Neuromarketing. In *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2014, Vol. 127, p. 762; GEORGES, M.: *Neuromarketing in Action: How to Talk and Sell to the Brain*. London : Kogan Page, 2014, p. 16; AGARWAL, S: Neuromarketing for Dummies. In *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2014, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 331.

¹¹ AGARWAL, S: Neuromarketing for Dummies. In *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2014, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 331.

information. But why is neuromarketing more effective than conventional research methods? Because people can't always tell about their true emotions or preferences. Respondents do not always talk about their memories, feelings and preferences. People have faulty memories; they lie when they are trying to please or when they are embarrassed; their perception may be influenced by how the question is asked. Market testing can overcome these shortcomings, but it can also be costly, risk alerting competitors to innovations, and can only be done late in the development process when production and distribution systems are already in place. Trade-off approaches such as simulated markets and conjoint analyzes all involve some trade-off between cost and quality.¹²

Neuromarketing requires specialized equipment and skills that are beyond the reach of most companies alone. When executives want to engage one of the many neuromarketing service providers, they should understand the salient features and differences of the available techniques. There are several consumer neuroscience tools used to study consumer decision making and behavior. Consumer neuroscience tools typically include devices that can measure vital physiological functions (e.g. heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure) and reflexes (e.g. gaze fixation, pupil dilation, facial expression). These tools reveal information about impressions, reactions (e.g. positive, negative) and emotional responses (e.g. positive, negative) when exposed to marketing stimuli. Consumer neuroscience tools also allow real-time measurements of brain activity, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalogram (EEG). Consumer neuroscience tools can be divided into three categories based on the type of measurements: (1) self-report and behavioral, (2) physiological, and (3) neurophysiological. Currently used tools in consumer neuroscience research are EEG, fMRI, fNIRS, EKG, ET, GSR and fERS.



Figure 1 : Research combining ethnographic techniques and neuromarketing

Source: CRIST, C.: *On the Mind: How Companies Influence Us with Brain Research*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.pastemagazine.com/science/neuroscience/on-the-mind-how-companies-influence-us-with-brain/>>.

¹² DARÁZS, T., ŠALGOVIČOVÁ, J.: Research of Sensory Perception of the Product on the Market by Means of Neuromarketing. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BUČKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2019: Offline Is the New Online*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 769.

Table 1: Selected tools used in neuromarketing

	fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging)	EEG (electroencephalogram)	Eye tracking: gaze	Eye tracking: pupillometry	Biometrics	Face coding
How does it work	detects blood flow in the brain associated with increased nerve activity	it records electrical signals on the scalp from neurons inside the brain	recognizes exactly where objects direct their gaze	measures whether subjects' pupils are dilated	measures skin conductivity, heart rate and breathing	identifies facial expressions
What it says about consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed emotional reactions level of involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> level of involvement call off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> which catches their attention what confuses them recognition speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> level of involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> level of involvement whether their answer is positive or negative 	general emotional reaction: happiness, surprise, fear, etc.
It is used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> set prices improve branding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve advertising and branding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve website design, advertisements and packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve ad content 		
Pros and Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the most expensive and invasive method less detailed than EEG, but considered the gold standard for measuring specific emotions must be performed in a laboratory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more expensive and invasive than many other methods they are not as accurate as fMRI, but can measure changes over smaller time intervals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relatively cheap and easy to manage best used in conjunction with biometrics it does not measure emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it is best used in conjunction with other methods such as eye tracking 		relatively cheap

Source: own processing, 2022

1.2.1 Selected Research Areas in Neuromarketing

Advertising and Emotions

Emotion studies are central to advertising research because emotions have been shown to play a significant role in ad recall.¹³ The attractiveness of advertisements correlates with specific changes in brain activity in various brain regions, including the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate, nucleus accumbens and higher order¹⁴ visual cortices. It may represent an interaction between consumers' perceived attractiveness of the ad and the emotions expressed by the people depicted in the ad.¹⁵ It has been suggested that ads that use people with positive emotions are perceived as attractive, while ads that use only text or show people with neutral expressions may be generally perceived as unattractive. Unattractive ads activate the anterior insula, which plays a role in processing negative emotions.¹⁶ Both attractive and unattractive ads have been shown to be more memorable than ads labeled as ambiguously attractive, but more research is needed to determine how this translates into overall brand perception in the eyes of the consumer and how this may influence future purchase behavior.

¹³ AMBLER, T., IOANNIDES, A., ROSE S.: Brands on the Brain: Neuro-Images of Advertising. In *Business Strategy Review*, 2000, Vol. 11, No. 3, p. 30; See also: DELGADO, M. R. et al.: Brain-Imaging Detection of Visual Scene Encoding in Long-Term Memory for TV Commercials. In *Advertising Researches*, 2001, Vol. 41, p. 21; KLUCHAREV, V., SMIDTS, A., FERNANDEZ, G.: Brain Mechanisms of Persuasion: How Expert Power Modulates Memories and Attitudes. In *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2008, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 366.

¹⁴ KENNING P., PLASSMANN, H.: How Neuroscience Can Inform Consumer Research. In *IEEE Transactions on Neural Systems and Rehabilitation Engineering*, 2008, Vol. 16, No. 6, p. 538.

¹⁵ PLASSMANN, H. et al.: What Can Advertisers Learn from Neuroscience? In *International Journal of Advertising*, 2007, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 175.

¹⁶ GREENE, J. et al.: An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment. In *Science*, 2001, Vol. 293, No. 5537, p. 2108.

Mental Processing of Advertisements

There are various studies that have been conducted to investigate the question of how consumers process and retain information presented in advertisements. TV commercials with scenes lasting more than 1.5 seconds have been shown to be more memorable a week later than scenes lasting less than 1.5 seconds, and the scenes that produce the fastest electrical response in the left frontal hemisphere have been shown to be more memorable. Research has shown that there are certain ad periods that are much more important to the consumer in terms of creating advertising effects. These short segments are referred to as “brand moments” and are considered the most engaging parts of an ad. These moments can be identified using EEG and analysis of alpha waves (8–13 Hz), beta waves (13–30 Hz) and theta waves (4–7 Hz). These results may suggest that the strength of an advertisement in terms of its impact on the consumer can be assessed by the strength of its unique brand moments. In addition, the research also found that the implication of curiosity in terms of advertising is that unsatisfied curiosity can lead to indulgent consumption in any field.¹⁷

Affective versus Cognitive Advertising

Affective advertising (using comedy, drama, tension, etc.) activates the amygdala, orbitofrontal cortices, and brainstem, while cognitive advertising (hard facts) mainly activates the posterior parietal cortex and superior prefrontal cortex. Ambler and Burne in 1999 created the Memory-Affect-Cognition (MAC) theory to explain the processes involved in decision-making. According to the theory, most decisions are habitual and do not require affect or cognition; they only require memory. Most of the remaining decisions require only memory and affect; they do not require knowledge. The main use of cognition is in the form of rationalization after a particular action, but there are occasional instances in which memory, affect, and cognition are used in conjunction, such as during a debate about a particular choice. The above findings suggest that there is a correlation between ad recall and the degree of affective content in the ad, but it is still unclear how this translates into brand memory.¹⁸

Branding

In a study of fMRI scans of loyal and less loyal customers, it was found that for loyal customers, the presence of a particular brand serves as a reward for selected tasks, but less loyal customers do not show the same reward pathway. Loyal customers were also found to have greater activation in areas of the brain involved in emotion and memory acquisition, suggesting that loyal customers form an emotional bond with a particular brand that serves as a primary motivation for repeat purchases. Brand loyalty has been shown to be the result of changes in neural activity in the striatum, which is part of the human reward system. To become brand loyal, the brain must decide on brand A over brand B, a process that relies on the brain to make predictions based on expected reward and then evaluate the results to learn loyalty. The brain is required to remember both the positive and negative outcomes of previous brand decisions in order to be able to accurately predict the expected outcome of future brand decisions. For example, a helpful salesperson or a price discount can serve as a reward to encourage future customer loyalty. It is thought that the amygdala and striatum are the two most important structures for predicting the outcome of decisions, and that the brain partly learns to predict better by creating a larger neural network in these structures. There is greater emotional excitement for recently formed brand relationships. Over time, self-reported emotional arousal decreases and inclusion increases. Skin conductance testing found increased emotional arousal

¹⁷ KEMP, A. et al.: Steady-State Visually Evoked Potential Topography During Processing of Emotions Valence in Healthy Subjects. In *Neuroimaging*, 2002, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 1692.

¹⁸ IOANNIDES, A. et al.: Real Time Processing of Affective and Cognitive Stimuli in the Human Brain Extracted from MEG Signals. In *Brain Topography*, 2000, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 19.

for recently formed close relationships, but not for previously formed close relationships with the brand. A link was also found between activation of the insula (a brain region associated with compulsion, addiction, loss aversion and interpersonal love) and close relationships formed.

Research shows that brand betrayal is neurophysiologically distinct from brand dissatisfaction. Brand betrayal is associated with feelings of psychological loss, self-blame from previous brand endorsement, anger from resentment, and rumination. Thus, compared to brand dissatisfaction, brand betrayal is likely to be more damaging to both the brand and the person's relationship with the brand. This makes it difficult for marketers to avert brand betrayal with longer-term consequences. In an effort to model how the brain learns, a temporal difference learning algorithm was developed that takes into account expected reward, presence of stimuli, reward evaluation, timing error, and individual differences. For now, it is a theoretical equation, but it may be solved in the near future.¹⁹

Conclusion

The presented contribution examines the position of neuromarketing and neuroeconomics in relation to the issue of consumer neuroscience. Finds and approximates subtle differences between the studied concepts. It seems that neuroeconomics is more of an academic field, we can say that it is an extension of behavioral economics, in which knowledge from neuroscience, neuropsychology, as well as experimental and cognitive psychology and other related fields are applied to refine an integrated view of economic decisions. Neuromarketing is more of an applied science. All 3 fields have in common that they can be an integral part of relatively new ways of consumer research such as ethnographic research, mobile ethnographic research, cognitive and cognitive psychology or as part of behavioral research techniques. Based on this research, we can say that consumer science is a field under which we can include neuromarketing and neuroeconomics.

Acknowledgement : This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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THE INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR IN A RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract:

Marketing communication is an integral part of a successful retail operation in the marketplace, developing its business activities as well as gaining a competitive advantage. This is influenced by market globalisation, digitalisation, new marketing trends as well as new forms of sales in the retail sector. As well as the retail sector, the consumer is also influenced by current trends, so it is necessary to rethink previous approaches. The current approach to customer segmentation has brought more effective communication and marketing tools placing emphasis on influencing the purchasing decision. A consumer requires an individual approach to his shopping due to the fact the decision-making process has become more sophisticated and demanding. The aim of the paper is identification of the interactive relationship between marketing communication and consumer purchase behaviour in a retail environment. The paper describes key factors affecting consumer purchase in a retail outlet. The factor analysis considers the credibility approach and the availability of information sources for decision making.

Key words:

Communication Strategy. Consumer Behaviour. Marketing Communication. Purchase Behaviour. Retail.

1 Introduction

Marketing activities through which retail outlets create strategies to satisfy customers' needs on the market and through which they reach their targets are no longer oriented towards the society as a whole. On the contrary, a company increasingly seeks segments, or even sub-segments in which they could apply their marketing and communication strategies towards the consumer in a targeted manner. However, this concrete fact is directly influenced by the other fact, the one that it is possible to approach individual key or specific segments only if the marketing has appropriate theoretical and subsequently also practical base of information and knowledge available. Such attitude is applied for effective market stratification approach.

2 Theoretical Basis

Matúš and Ďurková state that *“the retail activity can be performed by producers, wholesalers and retailers.”*¹ For many reasons, most producers do not sell their products directly to individuals and households, that's why the part of selling activities is delegated to retailers thus waiving the control over how and who the products are sold to.²

Horská regards the retail business as *“an undertaking involving the purchase from wholesalers or producers and its sale to an end user without any other processing.”*³ On the contrary, do not emphasise the duties of wholesales and producers: *“Retail entail all activities that are connected with the sale of goods or services directly to end users for their personal or non-personal use.”*⁴

¹ MATÚŠ, J., ĎURKOVÁ, K.: *Moderný marketing*. Trnava : UCM, 2012, p. 114.

² KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 454-456.

³ HORSKÁ, H. et al.: *Merchandising a event marketing pre produkty pôdohospodárstva*. Nitra : SPU, 2010, p. 78.

⁴ MATÚŠ, J., ĎURKOVÁ, K.: *Moderný marketing*. Trnava : UCM, 2012, p. 114.

When defining the retail business, point out that the goods is provided to consumers without any further processing.⁵ Viestová add that the retail describes the shop on a small scale⁶, Kita emphasise that the retail fulfils the function of the provider of goods in a consumer quantity.⁷ As retailers do not only serve the market but also create it, marketing communication function is one of its key functions.⁸ Retail marketing communication can be carried out from the initiative of the producer, the retailer or by joint efforts.⁹ Marketing communication is a tool by means of which businesses try to inform and persuade their consumers while reminding them products or brands they sell.

Bárta with co-authors claim that communication with consumers in the point of sale through tools and techniques of marketing communication is only the secondary form of communication.¹⁰ Primary communication with consumers is performed by means of a specific product (benefits for consumers and basic product features), its price (low, affordable, high) and the place where the product is sold (retail and selling methods).

Kotler and Keller agree that each contact with a brand leaves consumer with a specific impression but primary communication is more or less related to business rather than to marketing communication.¹¹ The fundamental goal of marketing communication is to influence consumers' buying behaviour the main aim of which is to sell products or services.

From this point of view, it is useful to view consumer behaviour as the starting point for making purchases in the form of purchasing behaviour. Nowadays consumer behaviour may be observed from various perspectives in line with the specification of the given field, such as a dynamic character, a reciprocal system and an interactivity. Blackwell, Miniard and Engel define consumer behaviour as "*the activities of people which are connected with acquiring, consuming or handling products or services.*"¹² Solomon broadens this definition by one more purpose: "*consumer behaviour is the process when individuals or groups choose, purchase, use and dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to meet their wants and needs.*"¹³ This statement is also supported by the authors Kanuk and Schiffman. A broader definition of consumer behaviour is provided by Sheth and Mittal: "*consumer behaviour entails physical and mental activities performed by individual consumers as well as organisations resulting in decisions and activities before the purchase, during the purchase and in consumption of products or services.*"¹⁴ Kulčáková also emphasises mental, social processes, their particular phases and their role in consumer behaviour.¹⁵ The research has recently focused on analysing consumption and bringing knowledge about consumer behaviour from a broader concept – why and how people use consumer products. As for the latest requirements on the consumer behaviour market, it can be said that defining particular aspects in course of the whole process is of the utmost importance. Saturation of the offer and increasing consumer demand for

⁵ CIMLER, P. et al.: *Retail management*. Prague : Management Press, 2007, p. 12.

⁶ VIESTOVÁ, K. et al.: *Lexikón obchodu. Trh, obchod, tovar*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2006, p. 144.

⁷ KITA, J. et al.: *Marketing*. Bratislava : Iura Edition, 2010, p. 284.

⁸ KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 454.

⁹ PELSMACKER, D. P., GEUENS, M., BERGH, D. V. J.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2003, p. 360.

¹⁰ BÁRTA, V., PÁTÍK, L., POSTLER, M.: *Retail marketing*. Prague : Management Press, 2009, p. 130.

¹¹ KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 518.

¹² BLACKWELL, R., MINIARD, P., ENGEL, J.: *Consumer Behavior*. Ohio : Thomson South – Western, 2006, p. 4.

¹³ SOLOMON, M. et al.: *An European Consumer*. New Jersey : A Simon and Schuster Company, 2006, p. 134.

¹⁴ SHETH, J. N., MITTAL, B.: *Customer Behavior: A Managerial Perspective*. Boston : Cengage, 2003, p. 12.

¹⁵ KULČÁKOVÁ, M., RICHTEROVÁ, K.: *Spotřebitel' na trhu*. Bratislava : Sprint, 2000, p. 74.

selection of the product and the point of sale on the one hand and consumption and consumer satisfaction on the other one predetermine the future behaviour of the consumer.¹⁶

3 Methodology

In order to fulfil the aim of this paper, consumer research was carried out, focused on the knowledge of purchase decision process. From the point of view of the evaluation of consumer research and the focus of this paper, it is crucial to identify factors influencing consumer purchases in retail environment. In terms of the focus of the publication, only the data in question will be evaluated in the following section, regardless of the range of carried research.

The focus of this study consisting of identifying the number of respondents being targeted by communication activities of all types of retail outlets and their respective visits. For the purpose of identifying the dependence between targeting through marketing communication and the activity in terms of visits to the retail outlet, we selected the regression analysis method interpreted by means of the regression coefficient parameters that are expressed by the regression axis principle determining the addition to the medium value of the dependent variable. Using a mathematical-statistical method of determining the size of the sample, the sample consists of 3,000 respondents.

4 Research Outputs

Business should primarily focus on the personalised communication strategy triggering a positive change in consumer behaviour and persuading the consumer to do shopping in the given retail outlet. The regression model may help us to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship expressed by the so-called linear model. Therefore the score on the alignment axis will be obtained by the following equation: $\text{Visits traffic} = -41,2965 + 0,522436 * \text{Number of targeted customers}$.

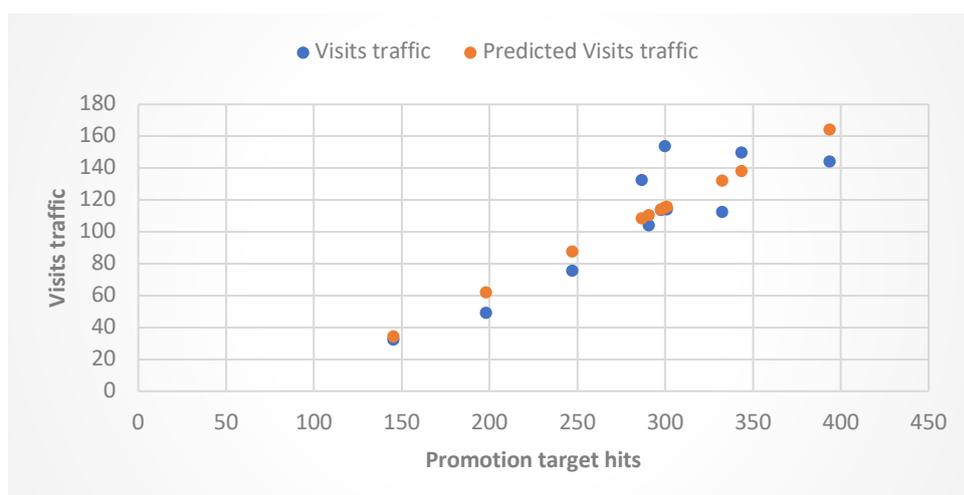


Figure 1: Impact of the marketing communication on the customers visit
 Source: own processing, 2022

¹⁶ KUSÁ, A., HRABAČKOVÁ, V.: *Ženy spotrebiteľky. (Predikčné modely nákupného správania)*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 97.

The value of the regression coefficient says that if the number of targeted customers increases by 100, the visit traffic increases by 52 customers. It is noteworthy that the targeting and the impact of marketing communication was carried out on prospective customers moving within the retail area. Visit to the retail outlet does not define itself the realisation of purchase. Therefore we should define the dependence between the visits traffic and the size of the shopping transaction. The chart below illustrates the average transaction volume in the defined strategy of the main purchase within the given target groups.

The purchase in the selected retail outlet subsequently depends on the customer's factors. The following figure demonstrates that the most significant factors affecting the buying behaviour of consumers are: the price (47.9%), the goods quality (16.7%), the product range (12.5%) and the outlet location (10.4%). The given percentages refer to the most significant attributes of the proportionate structure within the first or the second factor of selection. This is to say that the total value of shares is not 100%.



Figure 2: Customer's factors of purchase behavior
Source: own processing, 2022

When looking at the above figure, we may observe the distance and inclination leading to particular attributes. The bigger the size and the inclination, the more significant the attribute of the given factor in the decision-making process of the consumer selecting a particular retail outlet. Within the initial decision-making process of the consumer (factor 1), the attention is paid to the price of goods. Then the quality of goods and the outlet location start playing a role (factor 2).

When studying the purchase process, it should emphasise the parameters affecting credibility of communication tools. The above mentioned factor matrixes demonstrate that marketing communication is the key factor affecting consumer's shopping tendencies. As for credibility of communication tools, the following attributes play a crucial role.

Table 1: Identification of factors affecting consumer’s credibility

Attribute	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5
Credibility TV commercials	0.18	0.683		0.231	
Credibility Advertising in the point of sale	0.411	0.488		0.624	
Credibility Sales promotions, discounts, special packaging, samples, gifts	0.156	0.176	0.13	0.703	
Credibility Internet forums	0.384		0.757	-0.116	
Credibility Internet blogs	0.155	0.214	0.691	-0.314	
Credibility Magazines, newspapers	0.29	0.617		0.161	
Credibility Posters, flyers, catalogues	0.46	0.532		0.143	
Credibility Recommendations from friends/relatives	-0.221		0.624		
Credibility Outdoor advertising: billboards, citylights	0.577	0.331		0.221	0.197
Credibility Facebook, social networks	0.602	0.348	0.178	-0.113	
Credibility Product presentations, tasting		0.143	0.481	0.328	0.147
Credibility Internet advertising	0.671	0.174		0.271	0.127
Credibility Employees in the shop	0.343	0.184		0.316	0.264
Credibility Company website	0.678			0.104	0.112
Credibility Direct marketing (by phone, email, post)	0.19	0.563			0.461
Credibility Teleshopping		0.606			0.304
Credibility WOM (references - word of mouth)		-0.118	0.482	0.217	
Credibility other forms of marketing communication	0.309	0.25	0.163	0.122	0.809

Source: own processing, 2022

As the time consumers are online is growing at a constant rate each year, it is possible to identify the impact of online communication on their behaviour. This mainly relates to purchase of durable goods where online communication is regarded as the most trustworthy communication channel. The second factor suggests that the standard communication channels, i.e. media advertising are still highly popular and credible. The third factor identifies the substantial impact of reference groups on buying behaviour. When doing his/her shopping, the consumer looks for references in relation to satisfaction parameters while moderating post-purchase dissonance. Another key factor is communication in the point of sale. This factor shows that the consumer is often subject to direct communication activities in course of his/her shopping (mainly in relation to items of daily use). The last factor indicates that creativity in marketing communication substantially affects consumer’s credibility. Non-standard forms of marketing communication are thought to affect consumer’s behaviour on the subliminal level while spontaneously being adapted to communication and the subsequent natural influence in course of the shopping process.

With a regard to the credibility of communication tools, it is useful to look at the source of information (the communication media). To the given research questions, the majority of respondents state that the TV is their most favourite means of mass communication (58.3%) the same as the Internet (41.7%).

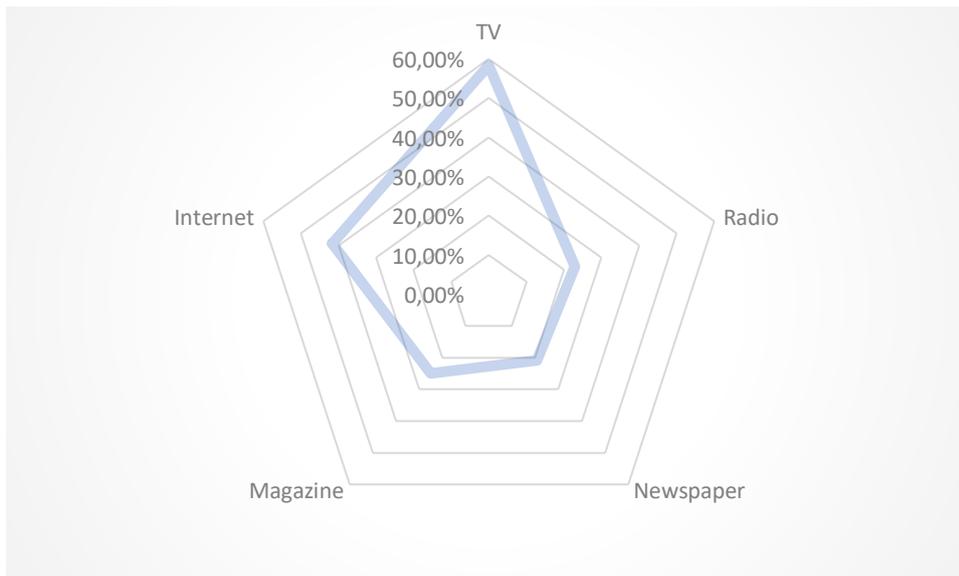


Figure 3: Preferred means of communication of consumers

Source: own processing, 2022

Preferred television stations are *TV Markiza* with 33.7%, *TV JOJ* with 20.7% and *RTVS* channel 1 with 13.7%. The most visited websites of consumers are *Facebook*, *Google* search engine and *Instagram*. *Facebook* comes first with 28.7% followed by the search engine *Google* with 19.3% and *YouTube* with 18.4%.

5 Conclusion

Marketing communication of retail outlets is being adjusted to the consumer behaviour and the buyer decision process in terms of their target markets and often times uses the stratification approach to consumers. Investigating buyer decision process is not easy because of many variables and their tendency to interact and influence one another. The individual determinants of consumer behaviour, their nature and the relative intensity of the impact cannot always be directly observed. Human mind is so complex that understanding buyer decision process requires constant research and application of various theories and concepts. The dynamic character of the consumer behaviour characterises dual attitude from the scientific research point of view and from the comprehensiveness of the phenomena which influence the issue. From this point of view we can observe always new surfacing issues related mainly to the measuring of the aspects of human mind and its processes. Moreover, consumer behaviour is constantly under the changing trends influenced by the actual inflation crisis and by the influence of global and demographic changes. An ongoing formation of new micro-segments crates pressure on marketers and changes common patterns of efficiency, marketing and business success.

Acknowledgement: The paper is a partial output of the grant VEGA č.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE FACE OF REPUTATION ISSUES OF SELECTED BRAND

Jana Galera Matúšová

Abstract:

Even though we are in the era of digitization, when a lot of information is moving to the online environment (especially social media), traditional media have their merits. Media relations as a public relations tool is thus still considered one of the key tools of brand communication. And taking care of brand reputation as a necessary goal of any communication activity of any brand in any market. Credibility is not achieved by a brand through massive advertising, but through targeted PR activities, as well as how it behaves towards all its target or interest groups. Medialised information about the society do not only have a huge impact on its reputation, but they can also influence the overall attitude of current as well as potential customers of the given brand. The paper below states the example of the company Dedoles whose financial problems, eventually resulting in a bankruptcy proceeding, were thoroughly medialised in 2022.

Key words:

Behaviour. Brand. E-commerce. Media. Reputation.

Introduction

Sabate and Puente (2003) review the empirical literature analyzing the relationship between corporate reputations and financial performance. Not surprisingly, they found that some studies supported corporate reputations being a cause of better profits and that some found the reverse to be true. Now there can be a host of reasons for these discrepancies, such as the measures of profit and reputation used, the people surveyed, the research methods employed, the statistical analysis conducted, etc. Unfortunately, however, concluding that there is likely to be a two-way relationship allows both advocates and critics to support their claims for more or less funding for the development of a better corporate reputation. One study that was omitted from the Sabate and Puente (2003) review was done by Roberts and Dowling (2002).² This study analyzed the corporate reputations and financial performance of Fortune 1000 companies during the period 1984-1998. It had a number of interesting properties that provide insight into the cause – effect relationship between profit and reputation: The data set was cross-sectional and longitudinal, and contained 3,141 firm year observations. The statistical analysis (autoregressive profit models and proportional hazards regression models) enabled the impact of corporate reputation on the path of future financial performance to be estimated. The respondents who provided corporate reputation scores for each company were senior managers, directors and financial analysts who knew about the companies they rated. It is the last property of the data that is particularly interesting. If any group is likely to use profits as a key driver of corporate reputation, it would be this group –especially given the fact that two of the (eight) reputation rating scales were ‘financial soundness’ and ‘investment value’. Given this potential bias, these data provide a ‘tough test’ of the hypothesis that corporate reputation drives profitability. To search for this relationship, the authors decomposed each company’s overall reputation score into a component that is predicted by its previous financial performance (labelled as ‘financial reputation’) and that which is ‘left over’ and due to reputation-building activities that have no direct impact on current financial performance. The hypothesis was that rather than there being a two-way relationship, there was a two-part relationship. Hence, both types of reputation would simultaneously help to drive above industry average financial performance. And both effects were found to be acting in unison. Thus, this study suggests that the way for companies to

achieve sustained, superior financial performance is to invest in being more profitable and in being perceived as good.¹

1 Reputation Issues

There is no doubt that the company reputation influences the public as well. Businesses with good reputation are less impaired by occasional negative medialisation. This was also demonstrated in the research by Edelman Trust Barometer:

- in case of a reputable business (company), up to 51% of recipients believe in the positive message after being exposed one or two times,
- only 25% believe in negative information after being exposed one or two times,
- in case of a non-reputable business, 57% of recipients believe in negative information after 1-2 exposures,
- only 15% believe in positive information after 1-2 exposures.²

1.2 Significance of Reputation

Reputation is referred to as the company's good renown in the public. In individuals' minds, reputation is more deeply rooted than the image and it is more difficult to change. So-called reputation management, i.e. the company's renown management system, has developed as one of the latest PR techniques. In this context, there are four elements of the system. These are trustworthiness, reliability, credibility and responsibility. Reinforcing these four elements should be the key objective of media relations. Thanks to development of the Internet, another specific technique called online reputation management has also emerged. This refers to an effort to spread only positive information on the Internet and, on the contrary, to ensure that all negative information will be removed, corrected, rectified, explained or marginalized. This is a rather complex procedure. The development of cyberspace also means that the company image or reputation are not necessarily created by the authorised and selected individuals, bosses, managers and PR workers, but also by anyone with the Internet access.³ The PR expert Michaela Benedigová has also observed a shift in this area: *"While ten years ago reputational factors such as the company performance and economic results functioned as a benchmark of its success, trust and popularity in the public, nowadays, this factor comes as the last one. Other factors are more important for the company reputation, e.g. to what extent it is socially responsible, ethical, transparent, readable or how it cares about its staff or the environment. These factors are more remarkable than the mere economic performance. Of course, there are sectors where the economic stability plays a role, for example the financial sector – if I deposit funds somewhere, I want to see that the company is healthy. But these things are not essential in other sectors."*⁴

The *RepTrak* framework defines seven dimensions that structure organizational reputation (Table 1). These dimensions resulted from multiple stakeholder interviews and focus groups

¹ DOWLING, G.: *How Good Corporate Reputations Create Corporate Value*. London : Corporate Reputation Review, 2005, p. 135.

² *Edelman Trust Barometer, 2013*. [online]. [2013-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/global-deck-2013-edelman-trust-barometer-16086761>>.

³ TOMANDL, J.: *Public relations a zpravodajství*. Zlín : VERBUM, 2012, p. 39

⁴ STRUHÁRIK, F.: *Ak chce byť firma úspešná, musí komunikovať zodpovedne, vraví odborníčka na PR Benedigová*. Released on 6th July 2022. [online]. [2022-07-06]. Available at: <<https://e.dennikn.sk/2920742/ak-chce-byt-firma-uspesna-musi-komunikovat-zodpovedne-vravi-odbornicka-na-pr-benedigova/>>.

conducted between 1996 and 2006. To date, the Reputation Institute continues to consider these same dimensions of reputation.⁵

Table 1: Reputation dimensions as defined by the Reputation Institute

Dimension	Description
Performance	Reflects the long-term commercial success and financial strength of a company. Attributes: profitable, good performance, and growth potential
Products/Services	Information on products/services and customer satisfaction. Attributes: value for money, responsibility for the quality, quality of products/services, and customer needs satisfaction
Innovation	New ideas and incorporation into products. Attributes: innovative company, easy to adapt to change, and launches innovative products/services
Workplace	Work environment, ability to attract, train and retain talent. Attributes: equal opportunities, employee welfare, and fair wages
Governance	Company's relationship with authorities. Attributes: ethical behavior, responsible use of power, and open and transparent
Citizenship	The company recognizes social and environmental responsibility. Attributes: protects the environment, contributes to society, and supports social causes
Leadership	Company leadership. Attributes: well organized, excellent management, solid and respected leadership, and clear vision of its future

Source: RepTrak: *Why Reputation Institute: The Quantification of Reputation (2018)*. [online]. [2022-07-06]. Available at: <<https://www.reputationinstitute.com/why-reputation-institute>>.

Junqiushi Ren did the research into how reputation can work in the voucher business. Daily deals are nowadays very popular. As a new form of marketing, they allow local small businesses to sell vouchers at substantial price discounts for a very limited period of time. However, it is unclear whether and to what extent a seller's online reputation affects the outcomes of its daily deal promotions. This paper presents an analysis of 4060 daily deals scraped from Groupon. These empirical results suggest that (1) business reputation, measured by displayed average rating, is positively associated with the sales of vouchers; (2) business reputation has no significant relationship with voucher discount depth; (3) business reputation is positively associated with the increase of customer traffic following a daily deal promotion; and (4) ratings displayed on daily deal sites are more influential than ratings displayed on third-party review sites. (These findings extend our understanding of daily deals and provide concrete guidance to merchants regarding how to attract more purchases and traffic through online deals as well as to platform owners by pointing out the value of reputation in moderating consumers' and merchants' behaviours.⁶

Polák, Dorčák and Markovič, having studied reputation in the field of family businesses, also dealt with the current trends and challenges in their study. Current studies in which the issue of reputation is examined to a relatively wide extent across the economic and managerial sciences bring interesting findings and, last but not least, confirm the topicality of the chosen topic. After studying a wide range of available literature, it is possible to extract key aspects that need to be taken into account in the reputation building process. In a study on building trust mechanisms, Shao et al. state that security is a key element in building the trust and reputation. Another study on consumer interactions in the online environment states that digital content marketing is on the decline. It is not a particularly surprising finding, but an interesting fact is that the study points to a growing need to seek customer involvement in brand building process. It is this procedure that we increasingly encounter in business practice. Involving customers in communication activities or directly in the processes of building a brand is certainly one of the new challenges for reputation management. The most important consequences of brand-customer interaction include cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement of consumers. Marketers encourage customers to identify with brands, thus creating a committed community

⁵ RepTrak: *Why Reputation Institute: The Quantification of Reputation (2018)*. [online]. [2022-07-06]. Available at: <<https://www.reputationinstitute.com/why-reputation-institute>>.

⁶ See: REN, J.: Effects of Reputation on Daily Deal Promotions: Evidence from Groupon. In *Mathematical Problems in Engineering*, 2020, Vol. 2020, 8 p. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/mpe/2020/8855783/>>.

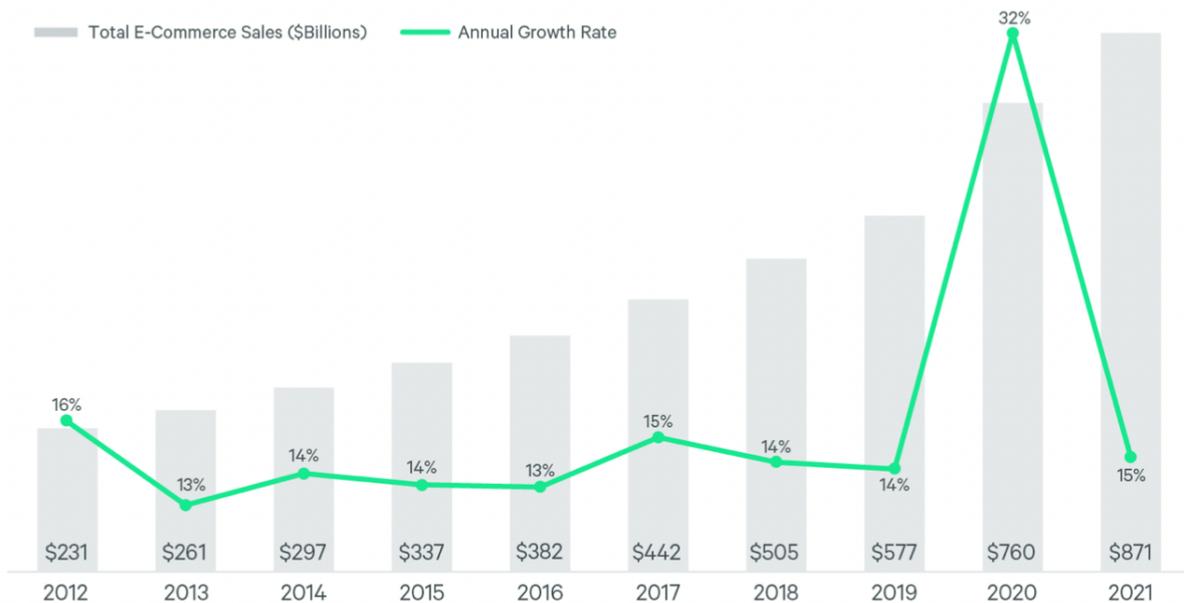
of followers. Online platforms use the communication capability of the Internet in order to develop large networks in which perceived quality can be assessed and thus contribute to increasing trust and building the reputation of entities. So far, this technology is well-known and used for building trust, especially in online marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay. However, the mechanisms and algorithms that allow these entities to work with data are ready for application to a wider range of uses. Decision-making support and the mechanisms recommended in complex specific scenarios can also be used in areas such as e-health and e-marketing. A transparent, digitized, and interconnected environment is putting increasing pressure on companies to take social responsibility for their actions. Studies confirm that accepting social responsibility increases customer loyalty to the brand.⁷

It is therefore obvious that building a positive image should be a top priority for brands as it has a considerable impact on its life cycle and consumers’ attitudes thereto. That’s why the real data shown below demonstrate how medialised information can influence the consumers’ attitude towards a particular brand.

2 Dedoles and the Reputation

2.1 Background of the Problems of Dedoles

The pandemic favoured development of the e-commerce market. However, after the economy opened, many people immediately returned to brick-and-mortar stores and what is more, other macroeconomic factors emerged. Overall, the e-commerce market reported a global downfall for the year 2021 as shown below:



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quarterly E-Commerce Report, CBRE Research Q1 2022.

Graph 1: E-commerce market

Source: CBRE: U.S. Census Bureau *Quarterly E-Commerce Report, CBRE Research Q1 2022*. [online]. [2022-12-14]. Available at: <<https://www.cbre.com/insights/retail-insights>>.

⁷ See: POLLÁK, F., DORČÁK, P., MARKOVIČ, P.: Corporate Reputation of Family-Owned Businesses: Parent Companies vs. Their Brands. In *Information*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 2, 89 p. [online]. [2022-07-09]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2078-2489/12/2/89>>.

The future of this sector is also rather uncertain, as stated by Daniel Gašpar, one of the partners of the investment platform Crowdberry, for *forbes.sk*: “It is very difficult to foresee how a customer will react these days. From every side, he is pushed by rising prices of food, energies, products, increased interest rates on loans and mortgages. The real income is falling and next year will be even worse.”⁸As the pandemic times, as stated above, accelerated development of the e-commerce segment, many brands based their future planning thereon and predicted the extent of their stock to be usually ordered half a year in advance. Dedoles has been one of those e-commerce businesses whose growth ambitions were overestimated. During Q4/2021, the company reported the first cooling of the consumer’s mood, which was reinforced by a sharp inflation and rising prices. Therefore, the company had to adopt fundamental measures which eventually resulted in restructuring. Whereas the first information entered the media through its former employees, Dedoles itself proactively communicated its restructuring proposal at the press conference and through interviews of Jaroslav Chrapko, the company founder, for two selected dailies and one monthly.

2.2 Impact of Medialised Events on Consumer’s Mood

In the research which the agency 2muse done for Dedoles in September 2022, the brand wanted to find out how the given topics demonstrated in attitudes towards the company, future sales and the overall reputation. The research showed that medialised information about the company issues considerably resonated with the consumers as they were spontaneously mentioned by 26% of the respondents.

Table 2: Spontaneous events connected with the brand Dedoles

		Index of perception of the event
debts, bankruptcy, cost-of-living crisis, dismissals	26%	14
dancing hamsters (advertising)	15%	82
colourful socks with funny patterns	9%	82
special offers, sales, discounts	6%	73
summer collection (swimwear)	4%	81
underwear, slippers, flip-flops	4%	78
support of LGBTI+	3%	22
non-quality products	3%	10
colourful funny clothes	3%	79
good and interesting advertising	2%	90
an interesting store with a wide product range	2%	19
boring and stereotypic advertising	2%	88
high-quality products	1%	89
Dedoles song	1%	96
high prices	1%	18
decreasing demand	1%	72
expansion abroad and opening new branches	1%	11
environmental awareness	0	100
news (e.g. Hats)	0	67

⁸ GULISOVÁ, S. *Pád niektorých e-shopov spôsobilo viacero faktorov. Ale na jednu hrozbu mnohí zabudli*. Released on 5th October 2022. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/pad-niektorych-e-shopov-sposobilo-viacero-faktorov-ale-na-jednu-hrozbu-mnohi-zabudli/>>.

other	7	
they don't know / no answers	39	

Source: own processing based on research by 2 muse for Dedoles, September 2022, n=1002 (internal documents)
 Note: Index of event perception on the scale from 0 (negative perception) do 100 (positive perception)

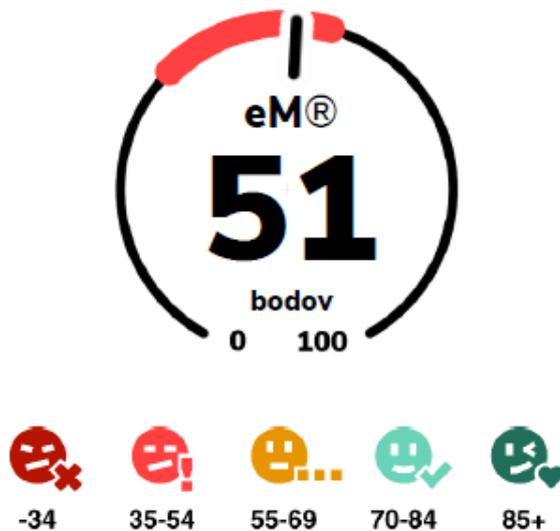
Even though customers mostly caught information about its discounts or sales, when asked to mention the statement they strongly perceived in connection with Dedoles, financial problems came second. The attribute of dismissing the staff appeared individually.

Table 3: Catching the attributes, the respondents ticked whether they caught each of the statements

	Yes	No	Index impact
discounts and sales	57%	43%	57
financial problems	46%	54%	49
unreadiness	40%	60%	53
price rise	38%	62%	52
supporting LGBTI+	35%	65%	55
dismissals	35%	65%	50
climate and environmental support	34%	66%	62
the most reputable company	32%	68%	67
support of the disabled/marginalised	31%	69%	62
the significant employer	31%	69%	64
decline in quality	29%	71%	45
support of sports and education	26%	74%	65

Source: own processing based on research by 2 muse for Dedoles, September 2022, n=1002 (internal documents)
 Note: Index of event perception on the scale from 0 (negative perception) do 100 (positive perception)

The above has considerably influenced the company reputation reaching only 51 points:



Picture 1: Reputation points

Source: Based on research by 2 muse for Dedoles, September 2022, n=1002 (internal documents)

At the same time, we reported a sharp rise in the number of those people refusing the brand (please find below the comparison between Q1/2022 and Q3/2022 because the most medialised problems occurred between the two quarters):

Table 4: Attitude to Dedoles brand

	Q1/2022	Q3/2022
I don't know	3%	4%
I refuse	14%	20%
I accept	51%	52%
I prefer	31%	24%

Source: own processing based on research by 2 muse for Dedoles, September 2022, n=1002 (internal documents)

Conclusion

The findings from the above research have shown that medialisation of negative information about the company has a substantial impact on its reputation. However, we are not able to precise to what extent it contributes to a decline in sales as these tend to be influenced by other external factors such as the inflation, the subsequent rising prices of consumption goods as well as the uncertainty resulting from high energy prices across all sectors. All this has a considerable impact on the above-mentioned cooling of consumer's moods that is described in more detail in the paper **Change in brand communication reflecting changes in consumer behavior under the influence of external indicators** as the outcome of this conference. As demonstrated in the research carried out by M. Benedigová, a low product price cannot compensate non-ethical behaviour of its producer if the consumer learns about it – reputation attributes of the company or the brand affect buying decisions and the consumer's will to recommend the product or the service to others.⁹ According to the research named Reputation Leaders Study, up to 60% of company leaders think that reputation affects company financial results – retaining the customers, earnings, market share, costs effectivity as well as recruitment.¹⁰

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development..

Note by the author: In this study, we work with internal documents of companies, which were provided to us for academic purposes only.

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¹⁰ RepTrak: *Why Reputation Institute: The Quantification of Reputation (2018)*. [online]. [2022-07-06]. Available at: <<https://www.reputationinstitute.com/why-reputation-institute>>.

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CHANGE IN BRAND COMMUNICATION REFLECTING CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL INDICATORS

Jana Galera Matúšová

Abstract:

The year 2022 brought many changes to the market, which also affect the communication of companies and, above all, the behavior of consumers. The war in Ukraine, inflation, increased energy prices - all this is changing consumer behavior, including in terms of media consumption. Companies on the market have to react to all this. The article deals with values in changing consumer behavior and provides examples of communication activities of companies that had to react to these new facts. We can't forget that we are behind (perhaps) the covid period, which was accompanied by several waves of lockdowns and which also fundamentally changed the field of brand communication. Not only in terms of communication channels, but also in terms of the content of each brand's communication. Also for this reason, in this post we devoted space to changes in connection with the Covid situation and mapped the attitude towards brands in this particular period.

Key words:

Behavior. Communication. Covid. Customer. Influencer. Market.

Introduction

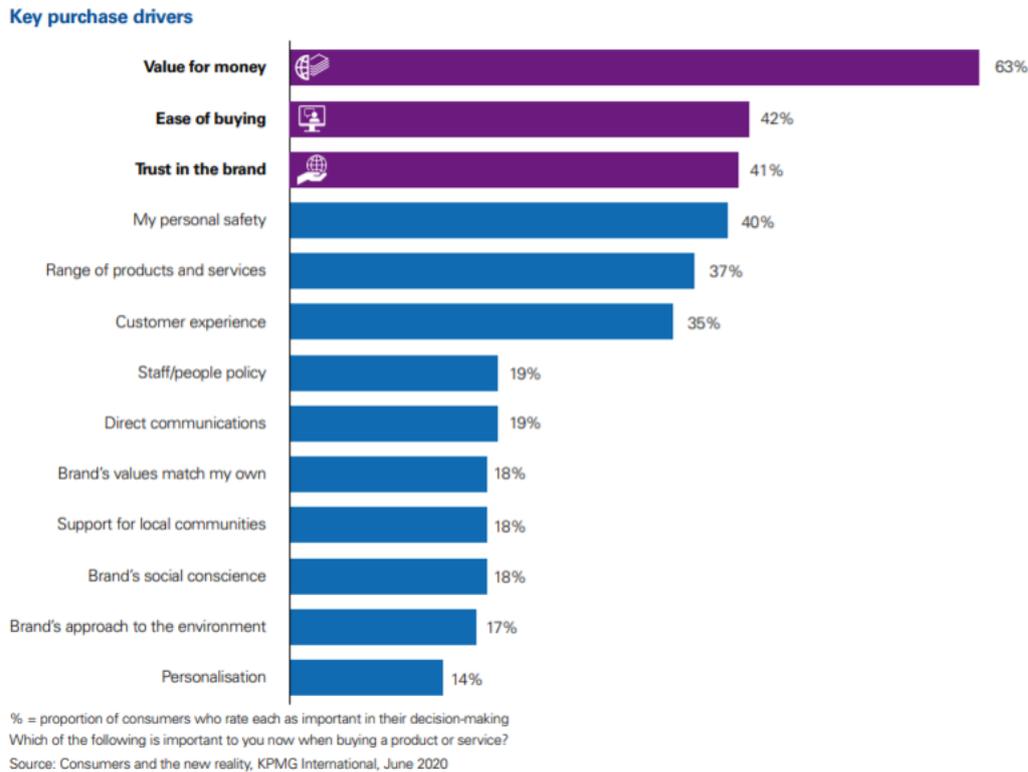
A brand is one of the most valuable assets of any firm that wishes to develop competitive advantages (Schultz et al.). Brands are relevant in consumer markets where firms seek to develop trust, loyalty, and consumer preferences. Consumer brand preference is a critical measure for understanding consumer choice behavior and its influence on purchase or visit intention (Ebrahim et al., Ye et al.). Building strong brands improves brand preference, so how a brand is communicated, and its image strengthened, may influence brand preference (Ebrahim et al., Schultz et al.). Brand communication is central to transforming product value into consumer behavior (Dolan, Goodman). Given the competitive challenges faced by most companies, developing marketing strategies that utilize brand communication is crucial to achieving organizational objectives (Luxton et al.).¹

1 Market Changes

The pandemic has already had a considerable impact on brand communication and especially on media consumption and the overall buying behaviour. It has introduced new trends in almost

¹ GOMEZ-RICO, M. et al.: The Role of Novel Instruments of Brand Communication and Brand Image in Building Consumers' Brand Preference and Intention to Visit Wineries. In *Current Psychology*, 2022. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-021-02656-w>>; See also: SCHULTZ, F., CASTELLÓ, I., MORSING, M.: The Construction of Corporate Social Responsibility in Network Societies: A Communication View. In *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2013, Vol. 115, No. 4, p. 681–692.; EBRAHIM, R. et al.: A Brand Preference and Repurchase Intention Model: The Role of Consumer Experience. In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2016, Vol. 32, No. 13–14, p. 1230–1259.; YE, B. H., ZHANG, H. Q., YUAN, J.: Intentions to Participate in Wine Tourism in an Emerging Market: Theorization and Implications. In *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 8, p. 1007–1031.; DOLAN, R., GOODMAN, S.: Succeeding on Social Media: Exploring Communication Strategies for Wine Marketing. In *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 2017, Vol. 33, p. 23–30.; LUXTON, S., REID, M., MAVONDO, F.: Integrated Marketing Communication Capability and Brand Performance. In *Journal of Advertising*, 2015, Vol. 44, No. 1, p. 37–46.

every area (from sweatpants fashion to permanent home office). At that time, consumers tended to focus more on effective expenditure – with regard to the current restrictions, they would use the shortest and the easiest way to do their shopping (the market share of e-commerce has risen, people would buy consumer goods in smaller stores in their surroundings and of course, they were limited by government restrictions of free movement) and what is more, they preferred those brands they can surely trust.



Graph 1: What is important for customers when buying a product or service
 Source: KPMG International Study: Consumer and the New Reality. June 2020. [online]. [2022-10-09]. Available at: <<https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/09/consumers-and-the-new-reality.html>>.

The consumer is now multimodal, keen to use whatever is the most convenient approach at any point in time. The need to physically engage with the products on offer in-store has become less and consumers are increasingly happy with a hybrid approach. The challenge for the retailers now is understanding these multiple touchpoints - knowing when the customer is shopping in-store and online and making sure the data enables real-time decisioning about offers, products and services. The key trends across The Six Pillars are as follows:

• Integrity

Transparency, values, and ethics have never been more important to shoppers. The KPMG Global COVID 19 tracker showed that 71% of shoppers want to buy from companies that share their values, and 41% of consumers actively seek to buy from a company associated with social, environmental, and political ideals.

• Resolution

To meet customer needs for rapid responses, more and more retailers are turning to chatbots and AI driven devices. Whilst this can be an efficient way to cover greater volume for lower cost, it can also be a source of customer irritation if not executed well.

• Expectations

Customer expectations for shipping times are only getting faster. First came 2-day, then next-day, then same-day with Walmart in the US expanding their two-hour express delivery options.

• Time and Effort

Some brands, like Lego, have even created digital shopping assistants, which give customers personalized gift recommendations based on their answers to a few simple questions. Once a user decides on a product, the chatbot directs them to the website where they can complete the purchase.

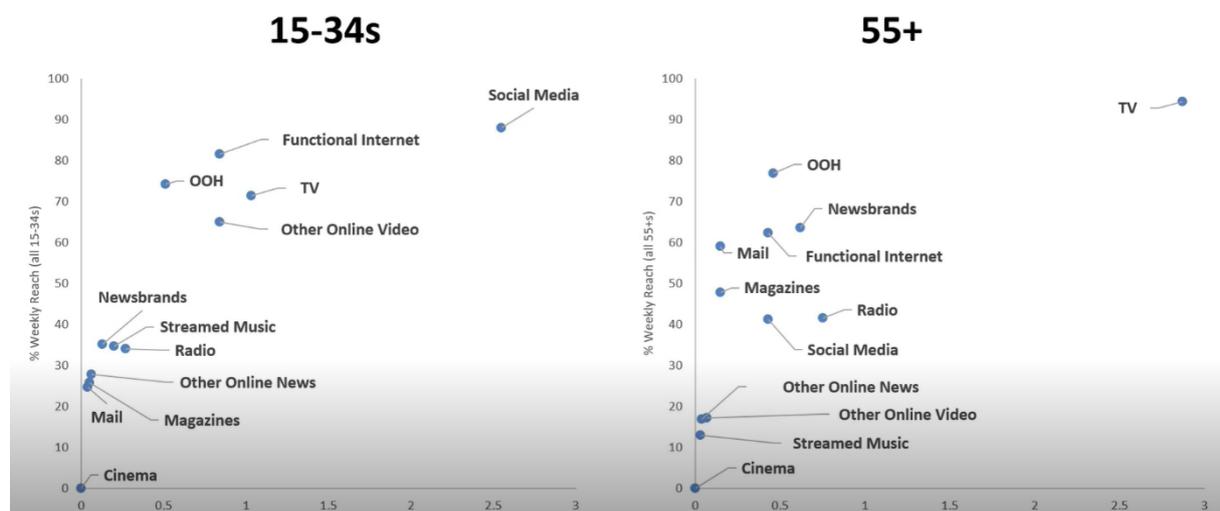
• Personalization

There is a growing focus on personalized product recommendations and going beyond traditional points-based loyalty schemes into much more customizable and personally relevant applications. Retailers talk about being able to know the customer's preferences even before they walk through the (physical or digital) door.

• Empathy

COVID 19 has driven the emergence of empathetic retail, how businesses can connect with consumers by promoting progressive policies and taking compassionate actions. Authenticity is key here, consumers are on the look-out for green-washing and other exaggerations. ²

The above scenario has also brought a considerable change in media consumption which has developed at the pandemic times and can be demonstrated by Les Binet's chart (Group Head of Effectiveness adam & eve, who presented at the Digital Rulezz 2021 conference and talks about watching the media at the time of the lockdown in the UK):

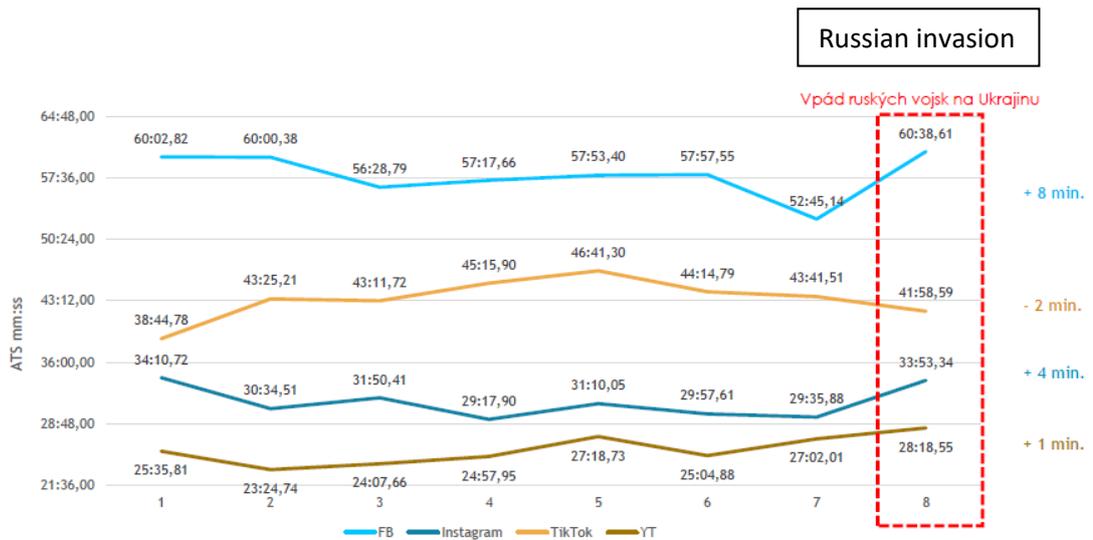


Picture 1: Media consumption

Source: Les Binet's chart, *Online Conference Digital Rulezz*, 11th March 2021.

Such development has been accelerated by the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine, which can again be demonstrated on Slovak data. This event has made people watch TV more often and what is even more remarkable, it has increased the social media traffic, especially those the people tend to browse to search new information.

² *Global Customer Experience Excellence Report 2021*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2021/11/non-grocery-retail.html>>.



Source: AdMeter, Median Slovensko (01-02/2022), ATS rel. Denné, CS: All

Graph 2: Russian invasion and media consumption
 Source: AdMeter, Median Slovensko (01-02/2022)

The only social site having reported a decrease is TikTok the role of which already showed during the pandemic when it mostly served as a source of fun and entertainment. Please find below the consumer sentiment about the economic events occurring in the market, such as the inflation and rising prices. Consequently, we may assume that the media consumption will certainly increase, not only that of social media, but also traditional ones such as TV, for instance. This mainly relates to traditional (aerial) TV broadcast because, as demonstrated in the research below, TV expenditure (also including streaming platforms) may be restricted.

2 Change of Consumer Behaviour Triggered by the Inflation

The topic how the inflation will influence the life of Slovaks was dealt with by the research agency NMS Group within its qualitative and quantitative research carried out in July 2022. Its findings show that up to 99% of people in Slovakia have already observed rising prices whereas only 23% of them will be able to cover their necessary expenditure with the remaining respondents not being capable of doing so (6%) or having to limit their expenditure either slightly (42%) or considerably (29%). These restrictions might occur in the same areas as negatively impaired by the pandemic, such as restaurants, cultural institutions and tourism.

Table 1: Where shall we tighten our belts?

Eating out	69%
Clothes	56%
Travelling	54%
Culture	53%
Hobbies and free time activities	47%
Electronics	44%
Transport costs	41%
Sports equipment	41%
Education	39%

Food	36%
Household costs	35%
Drugstore products and detergents	25%
TV, phone and Internet costs	24%
Healthcare	13%

Source: Research by NMS – How Does the Inflation Change the Life of Slovaks – July 2022, N=1 010, online research through the Slovak national panel

At the same time, the attitudes of Slovak consumers in the field of food and clothes has already undergone a major change – when it comes to food, they prefer discounted products more than ever while the second field (clothes) has to face more restrictions.

Table 2: Where shall we tighten our belts?

Food:

I buy more discounted products	65%
I buy products for reserve at an affordable price	49%
I buy cheaper alternatives of products	48%
I stopped buying some products	45%
I buy smaller packages which cost less	18%
I buy more private labels	10%

Source: Research by NMS – How Does the Inflation Change the Life of Slovaks – July 2022, N=1 010, online research through the Slovak national panel

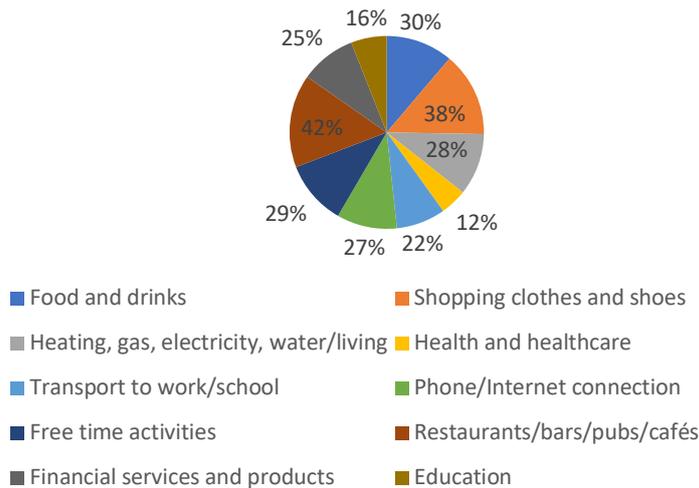
Table 3: Where shall we tighten our belts?

Clothes:

Overall I buy fewer clothes	54%
I buy more discounted products	34%
I often buy second-hand products	12%
I do not buy clothes at all	10%

Source: Research by NMS – How Does the Inflation Change the Life of Slovaks – July 2022, N=1 010, online research through the Slovak national panel

Dedoles is facing a sharper fall according to research data by 2muse. As shown by its findings, from a third to 40% of people are planning to cut their expenditure in other, not absolutely necessary, areas of consumption – restaurants or free-time activities. This decrease, which already started in April this year, has accelerated a bit in September 2022. The number of people who intend to cut their expenditure still remains high across all segments.



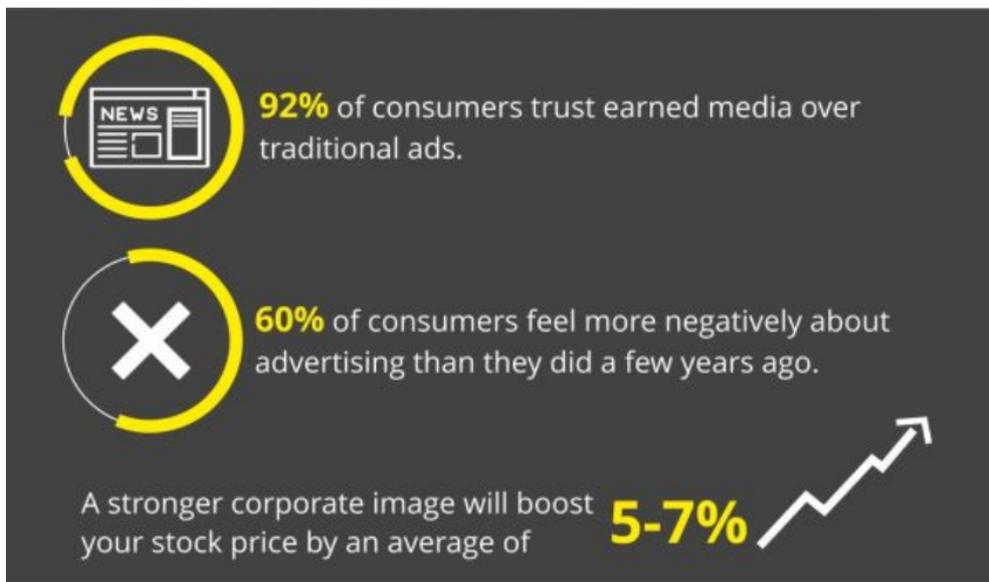
Graph 3: Are you planning to change your expenditure in the following segments? September 2022
 Source: own processing based on Research by 2muse: Dedoles'22: communication and brand CAWI, n=1002, representative sample of the population aged 18-69

3 Changes in the Brand Communication

Even the brands themselves have to properly react to changes in consumer behaviour while taking into consideration the above mentioned Six Pillars. Not only from the aspect of their product or service offer, but also searching new channels or content of their communication.

3.1 Transfer from Advertising to Influencer Marketing

Not only higher consumption of social sites, but also a gradual decline in trust in traditional advertising which has been lately observed have started shifting the interest and communication of brands towards so-called influencer marketing.



Picture 2: Statistics to drive your PR campaigns
 Source: *Statistics to Drive Your PR Campaigns*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.prdaily.com/infographic-statistics-to-drive-your-pr-campaigns/>>.

In contrast to traditional advertising, up to 79,2% of Slovaks follow influencers with 76% are motivated to purchase goods or browse the brand website thanks to influencers.³

This trend has not only emerged in the field of advertising, but also across all PR activities of brands which focus their communication campaigns on influencers as representatives of traditional media/journalists. For example, Ikea, instead of using a traditional product press conference for media, opted for a specific event focused on influencers. The information about the new offer of the bedroom equipment was communicated to its target group through social and not traditional media. The educative-entertaining event generated organic engagement on social sites by reaching almost 600,000 and enhancing brand loyalty (from the application of the PR agency Adison for the competition *Zlatý Středník*, the author obtained the information directly from the agency).

Based upon the above data, we may say that consumers are dealing more with the issue of trust in brands and the related reputation. In this context, businesses are helped by CSR activities and their communication, sympathy (or antipathy) may also be triggered by attitudes of brands towards common social topics. One of them is supporting LGBT+ community represented in the Slovak market by brands Dedoles and Absolut vodka. The latter stated in its application for the competition PR Prokop 2021 that Slovakia is regarded as a homophobic country where people from the LGBT community are afraid of coming out due to fear of refusal, prejudices, hatred or even physical attacks. Therefore, ABSOLUT came with the activity motivating the heterosexual majority to experience coming out themselves. Thanks to various love stories and the famous love anthem we were able to prove that the majority can be tolerant and instead of polarising the society, we managed to open the door for tolerance and acceptance. The proof is 90% of a positive sentiment on social media, 66% of positive outcomes in media and reaching millions of target audience (from the application for the competition PR Prokop 2021, where the campaign came third in the category Content in PR, more information: <http://www.prokop.online/>).



Picture 3: Campaign of Absolut vodka

Source: *The Application of the Brand Absolut Vodka*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <[prokop.online.sk](http://www.prokop.online.sk)>.

³ *Aký vplyv má influencer marketing na nákupné správanie mladých ľudí?* [online]. [2022-10-09]. Available at: <<https://vidadu.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Na%CC%81kupne%CC%81-spra%CC%81vanie-influenceri-a-mladi%CC%81-l%CC%8Cudia.pdf>>.

Conclusion

Changes in consumer behaviour have initiated considerable changes in brand communication as well. It is not possible to ignore them. According to forecasts by the National Bank of Slovakia, the year 2023 will bring more challenges: the Slovak economy will fall into recession next year with the inflation reaching 22%. This scenario also foresees energy prices for households that would accelerate the average inflation to 18%, as stated by the Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia Peter Kažimír.⁴

The exact impact on brand communication is hard to be predict. As present by Richard Mareček, the brand manager of Dedoles, at the conference Marketing Rulezz (27th September 2022):

- If people postpone purchase, the brand needs to be communicated.
- During the recession, sales campaigns tend to be less effective and pose a profit risk.

It can be said that the following trends are expected to persist in brand communication activities:

- emphasis on building reputation/reputation management,
- recommendations of influencers are important for customers and brands,
- statements to political and social issues,
- employer branding and internal communication.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

Note by the author: In this study, we work with internal documents of companies, which were provided to us for academic purposes only.

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⁴ DENNÍK N: *Minúta*. [online]. [2022-09-28]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/minuta/>>.

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THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE CHANGES IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION INTENDED FOR CONSUMERS

Denisa Jánošová

Abstract:

The changes that marketing has experienced since the 21st century can be characterized as turning points. These are turbulent changes in the external environment of individual companies. The changes relate mainly to the increase in the number of products and product lines, brands, shortening of the product life cycle, market segmentation, increasing consumer demands and also the problem of gaining their attention. Marketing must react to the given changes by moving its orientation as well as its focus. Concentration on maximizing a consumer value and the need to bring the offer closer to the consumer more effectively can be considered essential. These activities also lead to changes in marketing communication of companies. As a result of marketing communications more and more frequently acts as very personalized communications “made to measure”. However, to become this personalized, it must draw on knowledge of the individualized needs of the consumer, their values, interests, expectations, and desires. The question is, what challenges marketing communications must face in the current phase of the postmodern society.

Key words:

Communication Tools. Consumer. Corporate Social Responsibility. Innovation. Purchasing Behaviour. Retail.

1 Introduction

Currently, we consider consumption to be of primary importance, as it becomes directly proportional to the lifestyle. The recording of the population curve is increasing. On this basis, it is clear in which direction the amount of produced waste will grow. Hazardous substances and emissions are increasing, people’s health is deteriorating and ecosystems are being disrupted. We constantly struggle with the opinion that economic growth must be linked to the deterioration of the environment and the deterioration of the quality of life of individuals. When we talk about environmental policy, the discussion is more about mitigating the negative impacts of industrial production. The ability to think in the long term and to have the capacity to relate different phenomena is a necessity. Society must develop not only with regard to the economic side but it must also take into account the quality of life and environmental protection. Environmental and economic problems are often associated with waste production, which is a debated topic in most countries. Most of the products are not built in such a way that they can be reused in production, and thus the company is not ready to deal with the waste that is accumulated in various legal and illegal landfills. Despite various efforts for recycling, it is not yet possible to solve this situation in an effective way. There is a clear connection between the environment and waste management. It is in our interest to protect and maintain the environment not only in the present but also with regard to future generations. The solution to the given problems would be the introduction of certain innovations, which would preserve the economy as well as the economic growth.

In a diverse business environment with the gradual creation of a global market, customer demands, the growth of supply and services and the related competition in individual markets are an important driving force. The development of technologies, innovation is a means to cope with given changes. It is extremely important if an organization wants to keep pace and have a competitive advantage to pay due attention to innovations. To constantly come up with new ideas, develop a corporate innovation policy and pay attention to development trends. It also

includes innovation processes, which also need to be improved. Strong organizations that take care of their development in the field of innovation occupy the first ranks in the market positions.

The innovation does not have to mean revolutionary technological solutions. However, they generate technological changes to the product and thus mean a technological advance, i.e. a prerequisite for success. Innovations bring a benefit to the consumer, which is not only the result of technical development, but stands in the position of a new business opportunity. Their goal is to prove that the competition will become uninteresting for the consumer. In order for an organization to secure a competitive advantage, it is not enough to simply reduce costs and optimize certain processes. The success of innovations is based on the knowledge of the evolution of systems, the clear definition of contradictions and the mastery of psychological as well as philosophical aspects. Their task is to integrate mainly business and marketing processes, development stages, production needs, company resources and their organization. Currently, not only companies but also individual states are dealing with this fact. The European Union strives to apply principles aimed at using limited resources and making production processes more efficient through innovations.

2 Corporate Social Responsibility and the Innovation Process

Corporate social responsibility is a term that comes from the Anglo-Saxon terminology, it means the concept of a company where the main priority is the integration of a social interest within the individual activities of a particular company. This is a business concept, the main goal of which is not only profit maximization, but also focus on environmental, social and community aspects and goals. We recorded the first ideas associated with this term in the 1950s in the USA, but only in professional literature intended for managers. In the USA and Western Europe, this concept comes into practice in the 1980s.

For the Slovak Republic, Zdražilová's definition is apt, which states: “*Corporate social responsibility is a voluntary commitment by companies to behave responsibly in their business towards the environment and the society in which they operate.*”¹ A socially responsible company does not consider profit as its only priority but manages its activities regarding their social and environmental impact on the surrounding environment.

Among the basic principles of corporate social responsibility belong the voluntariness of activities carried out beyond the framework required by the relevant legislation, participation in improving the value of life, sustainable development, regular communication activities with subjects and the integration of social and economic values and parameters within the company's practice. Corporate social responsibility is applicable in the following areas: economic, social and environmental. Particular areas determine the activity and interest that a socially responsible company should fulfil and follow.

In Slovakia, several well-known and lesser-known brands and companies represent or support corporate social responsibility. These are, for example, *TESCO* or *METRO* retail chains, the company *Embraco Slovakia*, the company *Profesia*, or the *IKEA Group*. Smaller regional companies and entrepreneurs are also increasingly involved.

¹ ZADRAŽILOVÁ, D. : *Společenská odpovědnost podniků: Transparentnost a etika podnikání*. 1st ed. Prague : C.H. Beck, 2010, p. 47.

The efforts of the companies are to obtain a certificate for a socially responsible business, which can serve as proof for the competition as well as the consumers demonstrating that the company is trying to achieve the above-mentioned principles. An interesting example is the example of Tomáš Baťa and Ján Baťa, who tried to implement corporate social responsibility a hundred years ago.

Innovative activities aim at increasing the performance of a specific business entity. They are associated with the preparation and sale of an original idea. In practice, we characterize these activities as leap innovations. The main target of innovation activities is the consumer. The new economy creates conditions for a new concept of thinking, which is based on new knowledge with the use of information and communication technologies.

In the marketing process, we consider innovative marketing to be extremely important, as the environment is characterized by various dynamic changes and the constant development of technologies. Such a characteristic is suitable for the current market environment. From the point of view of globalization, the constantly expanding economy of Asian countries, especially China's, indicates a possible direction of an observable increase in the company's competitiveness.²

Orientation to the innovation process is crucial for the company. J. What characterizes a company's suitable environment for innovation if:

- *“a free flow of information is ensured, which makes it possible to find stimulating ideas even in unusual places and forces management to combine even fragments of information,*
- *there are close and frequent contacts between company departments,*
- *there is a tradition in teamwork,*
- *the management believes in innovations and provides the necessary resources for their implementation.”³*

The first three aspects of a successful innovation process are based on communication and interaction. Leap development of the company's innovation strategy is directly linked to good human imagination. Based on it, it is possible to eliminate the prolongation of the process of scientific investigation of the modernization of the production and technological process, and thus it is possible to open the possibility that will concern not only the improvement of reproduction, but also innovations in thinking, acting and management based on ethics.⁴

2.1 Tools of the Integrated Marketing Communication in Innovation Processes

Marketing communication forms an integral part of marketing. We have been experiencing dynamic development for several decades. It results from technological progress, the use of information and communication technologies and globalization trends. In marketing communication, there is room for creating new methods and techniques aimed at addressing target groups and potential customers. Within the competitive environment, it is necessary to use interactivity through a new philosophy.

Modern marketing requires more than just preparing a good product, setting an attractive price and making it available to target customers. Companies must communicate with current and

² ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., DOMOVÁ, J.: *Inovačná schopnosť a inovačná výkonnosť podnikateľských subjektov*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 13.

³ ČIMO, J.: Úloha inovatívneho marketingu v komplexnej inovačnej stratégii. In *Ekonomické rozhľady / Economic review*, 2010, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 120.

⁴ ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., DOMOVÁ, J.: *Inovačná schopnosť a inovačná výkonnosť podnikateľských subjektov*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 14.

future customers. Just as good communication is important for building and maintaining a certain relationship, it forms a key element in a company's effort to establish a relationship with consumers. Modern society must communicate with its intermediaries, consumers and various target groups. Intermediaries also communicate with consumers and target groups. Consumers communicate between themselves and other groups and transfer information by hearing. Each group provides feedback to all others. And this is the reason why the company must work with a complex communication system also within the innovation processes.

The marketing communication mix in its traditional form consists of a specific mix of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing tools.

During the last period, companies are constantly improving effective advertising techniques by using mass media. The form of today's marketing communication is changing by two main factors. The first factor is that marketers are moving away from mass marketing due to the fragmentation of mass markets. They prepare targeted marketing programs designed to build closer relationships with customers in individual micro-markets. The second factor is the fact that there has been progress in the field of information technology, which allows the transition to segmented marketing. Modern information technologies allow marketers to monitor the needs and expectations of consumers, which means that they have more information about consumers at their disposal earlier than ever, both at the level of individuals and households. New technologies offer new ways of communication to achieve set goals. As a result of the fragmentation of the market, the fragmentation of the media occurred, which caused the emergence of more specialized media that better correspond to today's target market selection strategies. In addition to traditional mass media, marketers increasingly use new, targeted media, ranging from narrowly focused specialized magazines and cable or satellite stations, through CD catalogues and websites, to advertising signs on floors or in supermarket aisles. Many companies are shifting their marketing spending to interactive marketing, focusing on online communications and sponsorships, websites and extranets, e-mail marketing and interactive digital television. Through these tools, attention can be more effectively focused on individual consumer and business segments.

Currently, many companies are switching to the concept of integrated marketing communication. The company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communication channels to deliver a clear and compelling message about the organization and their products.

3 Methodical Approach and Research Outcomes

Data collection took place between January 2022 and August 2022 across the enterprises in the Slovak Republic. The sample consisted of 123 enterprises. Simple random sampling was used, the sampling units were enterprises. The investigation was carried out in the form of classic questionnaires, while personal interviews were used and part of the questionnaires were sent electronically.

Most of the participating companies from the survey had the legal form s.r.o. (60%), there were fewer joint-stock companies (28%), followed by businesses of natural persons (12%). We investigated which of the forms of marketing communication (traditional, new) prevail in the investigated companies and also which of the traditional tools of marketing communication have the greatest importance for the company. In addition to traditional forms and tools of

marketing communication, we also investigated the use of its new forms, specifically the Internet and its means of communication, social media and specific forms of marketing.

As part of the investigation of the use of traditional or new forms and trends of marketing communication among individual respondents, we found that the use of traditional forms in marketing communication prevails (59%). Of the traditional tools of marketing communication, advertising is the most important – of which Internet advertising (16%), outdoor advertising (12%) and printed advertising (11%) are the most important. Personal sales also occupy an important place (12%). Radio advertising accounted for the smallest percentage (2%). The importance of other components of communication (sales support, PR, direct marketing) was balanced and ranged from 8% to 4%. Compared to other tools of marketing communication, companies attach at least equal (28%) or greater importance to marketing communication via the Internet (27%). By examining individual forms of marketing communication on the Internet, companies stated that the most used PR on the Internet – company webpages (35%) of businesses, followed by direct marketing – e-mail and sending newsletters (17%), banner and text advertising was used less (15%), and website sponsorship and affiliate marketing (3%) were used the least. We examined the use of social media in the categories of company blogs, forums, rating sites, video and photo sharing, and social networks on the Internet. Of the mentioned forms, the respondents use social networks on the Internet the most (39%). The majority of them were *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *LinkedIn*. One fifth of the companies (20%) indicated that they do not use social media at all. The main reasons they stated were: lack of time, lack of funds, impersonal contact and also that they are not interested or do not consider this communication to be effective considering the nature of their products. On the contrary, the activity of companies in social media is conditioned mainly by monitoring the attitudes and opinions of customers in discussions on forums and blogs (29%).

4 Conclusion

Another fact pointed out by the survey is that in the marketing communication of companies in Slovakia traditional forms of communication prevail, while at the same time there is no expected shift in terms of the importance of individual basic components of communication (in favour of sales support, PR and direct marketing). Despite this, at least the Internet, which can be included in the category of trends and newer forms, is considered by companies to be, if not more important, then at least an equal communication tool compared to other traditional components. However, most businesses do not implement all the tools and possibilities offered by Internet marketing. In this area, they only use a website and e-mail, which is no longer a competitive advantage, but a matter of course. It is good to use the potential of the Internet to a wider extent (e.g. also SEM or SEO) not only because they represent more targeted communication, but at the same time these tools fall into the category of low-cost. In addition, with traditional tools render measuring their success more difficult, but the Internet also has this unique advantage. It is then important not to underestimate this possibility, but on the contrary to actively approach monitoring the success of online campaigns and regularly analyze the application of individual tools.

Despite the fact that social media belong to global trends with huge marketing potential, according to the results of the survey, they are a less used form of communication for businesses in Slovakia. Here it is important to realize what possibilities are opened up for the company in terms of marketing by operating in the field of social media. In addition to publishing information about the company, it is also commenting, discussions, reviews. Here, customers

can express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction or ask questions about the products. Feedback is quick and easy. Businesses that decide to operate on social networks and it should be effective should have a defined business goal, i.e. what they want to achieve by operating on a social network, create quality content and be active in the long term. However, in some types of businesses, the use of social media is of little practical importance. The problem of companies in Slovakia is also the use of alternative forms of marketing. The reason is a certain mistrust of these forms, they underestimate new forms and consider current forms to be sufficient, but above all they lack experience in this area. Therefore, the way to greater use could be both to explore the possibilities for their implementation in the company and at the same time to popularize these forms through successful examples from the marketing practice of companies in Slovakia.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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THE ROLE OF MOBILE MARKETING IN COURSE OF THE BUYER DECISION PROCESS OF GENERATION Z

Daniela Kollárová, Miriama Koliščáková

Abstract:

The object of study is Generation Z consumers and the importance of their mobile phones before, during, and after a purchase in a brick-and-mortar store. In the theoretical background, we first identify consumer behaviour and the different stages of consumers' purchasing decisions. Then we characterize Generation Z and provide an overview of selected research on the role of mobile marketing in the shopping experience of consumers aged from 13 to 27. We draw on university textbooks, and articles in professional and scientific journals to develop the theoretical background. The empirical background is based on the results of our own pre-survey on an available sample of 56 respondents belonging to the generation under study. We interpret the obtained results, which confirm that technology is an integral part of the respondents' lives even while shopping in the offline space, using verbal descriptions and graphs. We compare our own findings with the results of other, publicly available secondary sources.

Key words:

Customer Behaviour. Generation Z. Mobile Devices. Retail.

Introduction

Digital has been on rise for many decades due to massive evolution of modern technologies, globalisation and automation. The term "mobile marketing" has become predominant as one of the most significant tools of the communication policy. It covers technologies such as Bluetooth, mobile apps, text messages, MMS, mobile Internet and geolocation services. It represents a fast and permanently changing area evolving exactly at the same pace as consumers are able and willing to accept innovations and get used to new technologies. 848,541 members of Generation Z live in Slovakia.¹ In the whole world, Generation Z already makes up a quarter of the world population and the first signs of its consumer behaviour indicate that this socially aware generation would have a much higher impact on the whole society than the preceding generation of Millennials.² Nowadays, mobile marketing belongs amongst the most spread and the fastest growing methods how to appeal to customers, which highlights its potential in terms of mutual communication between the company and the buyer.

1 Consumer Behaviour and the Buyer Decision Process

Expert publications say that satisfying customer's needs is the basis for any future marketing activities of the company. The company needs to know requirements, opinions and behaviour of their customers to do so. From the marketing point of view, consumer behaviour is a scientific discipline based on findings from other scientific disciplines such as economics, psychology, anthropology and sociology, thanks to which we are able to understand consumers

¹ Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <[http://statdat.statistics.sk/cognosext/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer&ui.action=run&ui.object=storeID\(%22i73A51921BEAC4C85B747133F2FF9824A%22\)&ui.name=Vekov%20skupiny%20-%20SR%20oblasti%20kraje%20okresy%20mesto%20vidiek%20%5bom7007r%5d&run.outputFormat=&run.prompt=true&cv.header=false&ui.backURL=%2fcognosext%2fcps4%2fportlets%2fcommon%2fclose.html](http://statdat.statistics.sk/cognosext/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer&ui.action=run&ui.object=storeID(%22i73A51921BEAC4C85B747133F2FF9824A%22)&ui.name=Vekov%20skupiny%20-%20SR%20oblasti%20kraje%20okresy%20mesto%20vidiek%20%5bom7007r%5d&run.outputFormat=&run.prompt=true&cv.header=false&ui.backURL=%2fcognosext%2fcps4%2fportlets%2fcommon%2fclose.html)>.

² *The Rise of Gen Z*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bloomberg.com/gen-z>>.

and their behaviour.³ Consumer behaviour is realised on the consumer market covering all individuals and households which purchase products for their own consumption.⁴ Consumer behaviour refers to those activities related to acquisition, handling or consumption of products and services.⁵ In practice, there are two terms we often come across i.e. a customer and a consumer. A consumer is often referred to as an individual or a household while a customer can be defined as someone who pays or influences, initiators, controllers, advocates or users of the product.⁶ We agree with Keller, who succinctly and clearly defines these two concepts. Keller defines a consumer as being a young child immediately after birth, but becomes a customer only when he or she goes into a shop and makes a purchase for the first time on his or her own.⁷ The consumer market keeps changing and developing. In the past, the customer would have only one alternative to choose from. Nowadays, the market is oversaturated with products and the customer has at least two options to choose from. This phenomenon is also present in the buyer decision process in course of the selection of a suitable product.

The whole buyer decision process can be divided into five phases. Various experts say that while under some circumstances, purchase happens to be simple, in the case of financially more demanding purchases, the whole process is much more complex and the consumer goes through all phases of the buyer decision process. These are as follows:

- Problem recognition (realizing the need we need to satisfy by purchase whereas these needs can be tangible or intangible, current or future when it comes to time specification);
- Information gathering (we need sufficient information to make the right decision, its absence increases the feeling of risk whereas their excess can lead to confusion. The form in which the information is communicated plays a key role in the decision-making process. This information may come from personal but also from mass media sources.);
- Evaluating solutions (comparing information and selection of the most appropriate decisions);
- Purchase phase (occurs after the selection of the product, it refers to the decision about when the purchase is made, except for impulsive purchases);
- Post-purchase phase (customer satisfaction with the product – the seller should pay attention to post-purchase consumer behavior to gain loyal customers as well as new ones thanks to positive reviews).⁸

Experts warn that purchases can be differentiated according to their frequency and impulsiveness. Standard purchase is a regular, routine operation providing that the shopping conditions have not changed. Specialized purchase is made only once and irregularly. Impulsive purchase describes unplanned shopping under the influence of emotions, e.g. buying sweets, clothes, or jewellery.⁹ Kollárová also adds a so-called limited buyer decision process, i.e. limited purchase which is described as the situation when the customer knows the product range well and only needs additional information to make the purchase.¹⁰ Vysekalová et al. agree with

³ KUSÁ, A. et al.: *Spotrebiteľ a spotrebiteľské správanie v kontexte psychológie a sociológie trhu*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2015, p. 40.

⁴ KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Marketing a spoločnosť II*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2013, p. 6.

⁵ BLACKWELL, R., ENGEL, J., MINIARD, P.: *Consumer Behavior*. Ohio : Thomson South – Western, 2006, p. 4.

⁶ KUSÁ, A., HRABAČKOVÁ, V.: *Ženy spotrebiteľky*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 13.

⁷ See: KELLER, K. L.: Conceptualising, Measuring and Managing Customer – Based Brand Equity. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1993, Vol. 57, No. 1, p. 2-22. Available at: <<https://faculty.fuqua.duke.edu/~moorman/Marketing-Strategy-Seminar-2015/Session%203/Keller.pdf>>.

⁸ VYSEKALOVÁ, J. et al.: *Psychologie reklamy*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 49.

⁹ KITA, J. et al.: *Marketing*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2017, p. 107.

¹⁰ KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Marketing a spoločnosť II*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2013, p. 50.

the above wording and add that in case of limited purchase, other criteria may play a key role, such as the product price, environmental friendliness or ecological aspects communicated by advertising.¹¹

2 Generation Z

Generation Z is the young generation of the 21st century which is permanently evolving and developing.¹² Opinions of experts about the age limitation of Generation Z vary considerably, though. *Resolution Foundation*, the UK independent organisation, dates it back to 2000¹³ while the government agency *Statistics Canada* speaks about people to be born after 1993.¹⁴ The *Organisation Pew Research Center* (US non-governmental organisation) defines Generation Z as the generation to be born after 1996 without stating any upper age limit.¹⁵ Exact age limitation of generation Alfa also differs considerably. According to the Australian consultancy agency *McCrindle Research Centre*, generation Alfa dates from 2010 (including) to 2024 (including). After the year 2025, the brand-new generation – generation Beta – emerges. The article also presents the limitation presented by the organisation *McCrindle Research* defining Generation Z as people born between 1995 (including) and 2009 (including).¹⁶ This is to say that to the year 2022, members of Generation Z are aged 13 to 27. Generation Z can take different names. Expert literature often uses the following ones: Zeds, iGen, Digita integrators, Post Millennials or Bubble-wrap kids. McCrindle states that Generation Z, in terms of its development and evolution, is the fastest growing generation. This is also confirmed by the WHO research stating that in contrast to previous generations, Generation Z goes through several development life phases, which makes its members grow much faster.¹⁷ Generation Z is young, IT literate, socially oriented and having access to a large amount of information on the Internet since the very young age. When it comes to ethnicity, it is the most heterogeneous generation. It is also the youngest generation on the labour market. Its members were born at the time of considerable population ageing defined by a declining birth rate and a higher life expectancy of inhabitants. Its members grow up at uncertain economic times, badly affected by the cost-of-living crisis in contrast to rapid growth of global technologies and global brands. None of the previous generations was as global as this one. Generation Z lives among global communication and trends as well as global music, films, fashion, foods, online entertainment including following global celebrities.¹⁸ This is the first generation growing up in the post-digital era. They are not

¹¹ VYSEKALOVÁ, J. et al.: *Psychologie reklamy*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 53.

¹² MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ. Understanding the Global Generations. 3rd edition*. Bella Vista : McCrindle Research Pty Ltd McCrindle, 2014, p. 31. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328347222_The_ABC_of_XYZ_Understanding_the_Global_Generations>.

¹³ *New Generational Contract: The Final Report of the Intergenerational Commission*. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/advanced/a-new-generational-contract/>>.

¹⁴ *Generations in Canada*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021003/98-200-X2021003-eng.cfm>>.

¹⁵ DIMOCK, M.: *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins*. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>>.

¹⁶ *Understanding Generation Alpha*. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <<https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/gen-alpha-defined/>>.

¹⁷ MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ. Understanding the Global Generations. 3rd edition*. Bella Vista : McCrindle Research Pty Ltd McCrindle, 2014, p. 71. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328347222_The_ABC_of_XYZ_Understanding_the_Global_Generations>.

¹⁸ MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ. Understanding the Global Generations. 3rd edition*. Bella Vista :

able to imagine their lives without smartphones and existence of social media.¹⁹ Technologies and globalisation are one of the main reasons for their visual orientation. Many businesses know it and therefore they try to overcome language barriers and communicate with them through videos and photos rather than words. They focus on visual knowledge when most of them choose to watch the video to learn new things rather than read them in books.²⁰ Generation Z loves following media platforms. Series and films are watched on *Netflix* or any other streamlining channel instead of the radio, music or podcasts are listened to on *Spotify* installed on their mobile devices. Social media are also used to watch news feed and TV is the least relevant media as it has already been replaced with streamlining services.²¹ Since, as many experts point out, Generation Z has grown up very differently from other generations, we can conclude that we also need to approach them differently, understand them and adapt our ways of conveying the marketing message to make it seem as natural as possible to Generation Z customers.

3 In-store Activities on Mobile Devices Performed by Members of Generation Z

Appealing to Generation Z seems to one of the biggest challenges for the retail sector. Members of this generation behave differently from other generations. They are more focused on innovations and fast solutions. What is more, IT development helps create new opportunities for retailers and forms the retail environment. Technologies keep changing our traditional concept of buying behaviour. Using smartphones in brick-and-mortar stores has become the new normal for most consumers at the time of technological development. This can represent a challenge or even an obstacle for businesses depending on their reaction to use of technologies in their outlets.²² According to the research from 2021 and carried out on the sample of 9,000 consumers in the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Australia, Singapore and India, two thirds of buyers use their mobile devices in stores to search information about products or purchase products. The most common in-store activities on their mobile devices are browsing retailer's websites, using the retailer's app, using loyalty cards or coupons, scanning QR codes, comparing prices, reading reviews, online shopping or contactless payments.²³ In-store activities on mobile devices are show in the Figure 1 below.

McCrindle Research Pty Ltd McCrindle, 2014, p. 31. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328347222_The_ABC_of_XYZ_Understanding_the_Global_Generations>.

¹⁹ FROMM, J., READ, A.: *Marketing to Gen Z*. New York : Amacom, 2018, p. 48.

²⁰ MCCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ. Understanding the Global Generations. 3rd edition*. Bella Vista : McCrindle Research Pty Ltd McCrindle, 2014, p. 33. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328347222_The_ABC_of_XYZ_Understanding_the_Global_Generations>.

²¹ *Ako robit' marketing pre generáciu Z?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.digitalmarketingclub.sk/ako-robit-marketing-pre-generaciu-z/>>.

²² See: NASIR, S., KURTULUŞ, B.: *Handbook of Research on Consumerism and Buying Behavior in Developing Nations*. Pennsylvania : IGI Global Publisher, 2016. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/technology-is-transforming-shopping-behavior/154454>>.

²³ FREER, A.: *Shoppers Are Increasingly Using Their Mobile Phones and Apps in Store*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.businessofapps.com/news/shoppers-are-increasingly-using-their-mobile-phones-and-apps-in-store/>>.

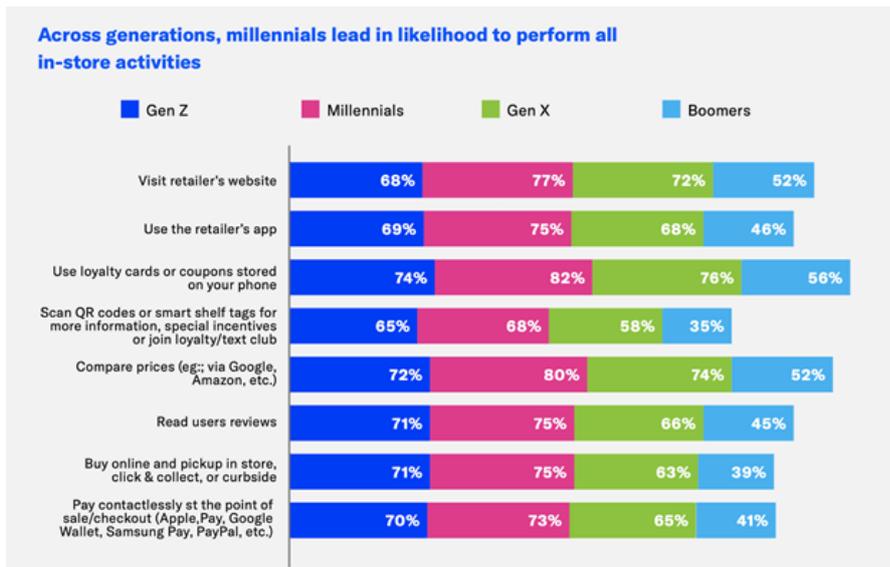


Figure 1: In-store activities on mobile devices across generations

Source: FREER, A.: *Shoppers Are Increasingly Using Their Mobile Phones and Apps in Store*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.businessofapps.com/news/shoppers-are-increasingly-using-their-mobile-phones-and-apps-in-store/>>.

The graph in the Figure 1 shows that mobile devices narrow borders between the physical and digital buying behaviour, which highlights the significance of research into the above field. We can also see that using mobile devices does not only concern the younger Generation Z but is present across all generations. The research carried out on the sample of 5,000 respondents in the US in 2017 by *RIS Nws* and *Tata Consultancy Services* demonstrates that Generation Z is more likely to use technological innovations in comparison with the average buyer. In the above research, this generation stated they are likely to use self-checkout, interactive boards for shopping and virtual try-on for fashion.²⁴ This group of consumers will probably do their shopping at those retailers who are able to fulfil their wishes by implementing new technologies to retain consumers from Generation Z.

4 Methodics

The main aim of the paper is to find out the role of mobile marketing in course of the buyer decision process of Generation Z in Slovakia. The following partial goals were determined to fulfil the above purpose:

- to define the terms of consumer behaviour and the consumer,
- to characterise the buyer decision process with the focus on the particular phases: the manner of obtaining information, the form of the buyer decision process and post-purchase behaviour of consumers,
- to define the consumers from Generation Z,
- to examine the role of mobile phones in the process of the buyer decision process of Generation Z,
- to observe the role of mobile phones in the process of the buyer decision process of Generation Z,
- to define the manner of obtaining data, sources and implemented evaluation methods,
- to interpret the obtained results and suggest how businesses may react to such findings.

²⁴ KEYES, D.: *These Are the Retail Innovations Gen Z Craves*. [online]. [2022-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.businessinsider.com/these-are-the-retail-innovations-gen-z-craves-2017-10?r=US&IR=T&IR=T>>.

When processing the results, we used the sources from domestic and foreign literature. As for the secondary information sources, we used university textbooks and articles from scientific and expert publications and journals. Primarily the data are taken from our own research. We also worked with adequate scientific methods (search, description, deduction, comparison and analysis).

Our own study is done as pre-research from 3rd October 2022 to 11th October 2022 on the available sample of Slovak respondents (56) belonging to consumers from Generation Z (consumers born between 1995 and 2009). As this is the logicity and understandability test of particular questions, the manner of data collection and its tool (online questionnaire), the number of respondents is sufficient.

The data are collected through the online questionnaire, by means of the *Google form*. As pre-research was carried out in the online environment, the respondents could get access to the questionnaire by scanning QR codes. The questionnaire consists of 16 questions, 3 semi close, 3 open and 11 close questions. Using close questions is more precise when evaluating the questionnaire. Open questions, on the other hand, offer us the opportunity to obtain more information, which allows the respondents to present themselves and their opinions. The point is that the questions do not suggest answers, which helps us catch the reality in the broader sense. The results are interpreted by means of the descriptive and interpretational summary, through transparent graphs demonstrating the findings. As respondents' concentration tends to drop while filling in the questionnaire, the most significant questions are asked at its beginning. Questions about demographic data are asked at the end of the questionnaire.

5 Results Interpretation

The age of respondents taking part in the pre-research, 18 to 24 years old, corresponds with the identification of consumers with Generation Z. In Slovakia, the lower age limit (18 years) is connected with reaching the legal age, getting independent, earning money, purchasing products and brands according to consumer's own choice, etc. In terms of geographical location, the representation of respondents is rather large as the applicants come from all eight regions across Slovakia.

Connecting to the Internet by a mobile phone requires mobile data and therefore, the first question in the questionnaire was to find out how much data the respondents could use per month. Seven per cent of respondents do not have this information due to their age or just a simple fact that many students have their phone bills paid by their parents. 9% of respondents use an unlimited data with no limits while 37% of respondents use mobile data exceeding 10 GB. The remaining 54% of respondents use data ranging from 500 MG to 8 GB.

In contrast to the results of the global research by *Ericsson* dated June 2021, we may assume that the average smartphone user uses 10 GB of data with this number growing up to 35 GB per month by the end of 2026.²⁵ Other questions focused on particular phases of the buyer decision process. In the information gathering phase before entering the store, the respondents use mobile phones to find out about opening hours (84%), store location (51%), search for product reviews (51%), search for special offers (50%) or write down the shopping list (30%). It is

²⁵ *Ericsson Mobility report*. [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.ericsson.com/4a03c2/assets/local/reports-papers/mobility-report/documents/2021/june-2021-ericsson-mobility-report.pdf>>.

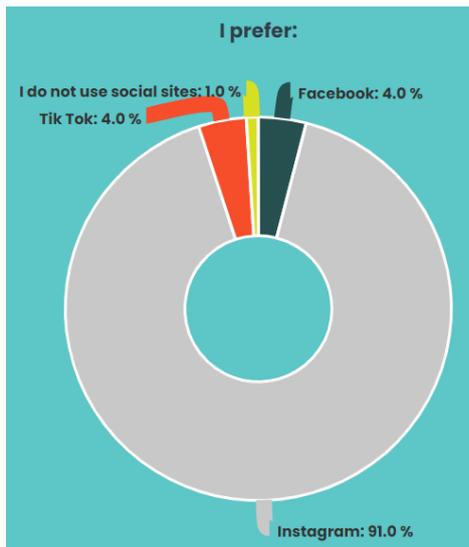
interesting, that at a time when the bulk of retailers organized in a chain of stores have outlets located in different types of shopping malls, with opening hours from 09:00 to 20:00, respondents need to verify the opening hours. At the same time, for this target group (13 to 27 years old), we did not anticipate such high (30%) shopping list writing. In the purchase phase, directly in the store, the respondents use mobile phones to pay for shopping (70%), using coupons from the mobile app or the loyalty programme (57%), following items on the shopping list (41%). As a matter of comparison, *IBM Institute for Business Value* carried out in 2017 on the sample of 15,600 respondents aged 13 to 21 in 16 countries worldwide discovered that only 27% of respondents use their mobile phone to pay for their shopping in the store²⁶ (compared to our figure – 70%). We assume that the results may be different, e.g. in 2017, when the research was done, technologies used were much more obsolete and the respondents did not have sufficient access to students' bank accounts. Moreover, we assume that the culture in which respondents lived did not allow young consumers to handle money and other goods. Other figures show that back in 2017, the respondents would use their mobile phones in stores to search for other similar products in other stores to compare the prices (52%), to search for discounts and vouchers (51%) or to browse through online items which are not available in the store to help them decided what else to buy (53%). In light of the aforementioned, it can be said that consumers belonging to Generation Z, while during their shopping in the store, are interested in special offers (discounts, coupons, rebates). 73% of respondents use their mobile phones to be able to interact with their relatives and know their opinion of the purchase.²⁷ Besides the role of the mobile phone in course of the buyer decision process, we were also interested in any other in-store use of mobile phones by the respondents, more precisely, the social sites activity. As social sites have accompanied members of Generation Z since their infancy (events, experiences, persons caught on digital photos), our questions dealt with preferences of social sites and related in-store activities. The findings show that more than a half of respondents are active on social sites during their shopping (see Graph 1) while 91% of them prefer *Instagram* enabling its users share photos and videos (see Graph 2). We can conclude that these channels of social networks have a high impact on generation Z and it is important for marketers to communicate throughout social networks with generation Z on regular bases if the company wants to succeed.



Graph 1: In-store activity on social sites
 Source: own processing, 2022

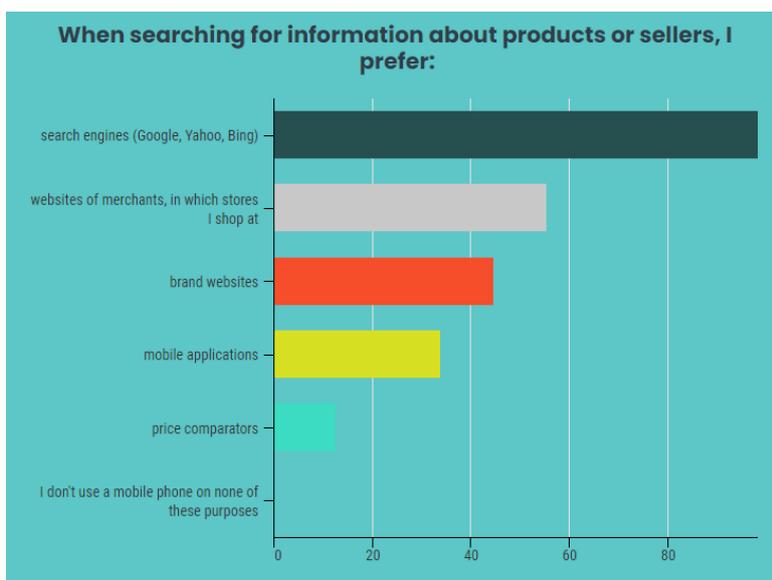
²⁶ *What Do Gen Z Shoppers Really Want?* [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://cdn.nrf.com/sites/default/files/2018-10/NRF-IBM%20Generation%20Z%20Study%20Part%20III.pdf>>.

²⁷ Ibidem.



Graph 2: Preferences of social sites for Generation Z
Source: own processing, 2022

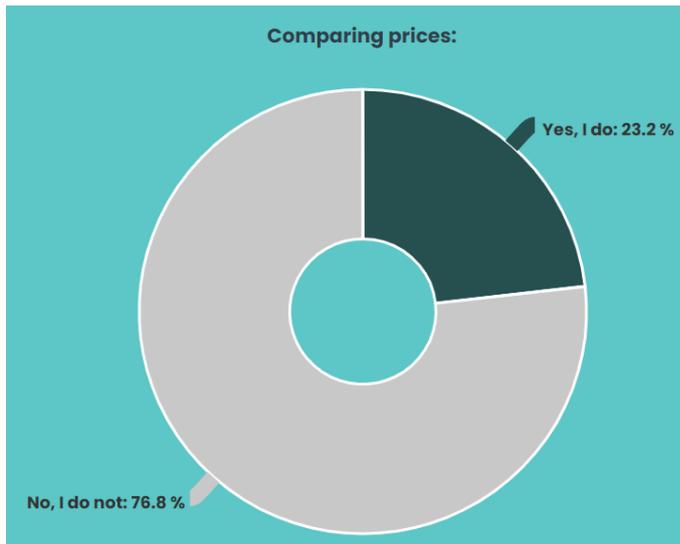
It is obvious that Generation Z regards the online world and technologies as a natural part of its life. Studies demonstrate that Generation Z prefers searching through social sites *Instagram* or *TikTok* to *Google*. “Almost 40% of young people, when looking for a place for lunch, do not use *Google Maps* or *Google search engine*. They rather go to *TikTok* or *Instagram*.”²⁸ The results of our research that are shown in the Graph 3 demonstrate that most of our respondents (98%) still do searching through search engines such as *Google*, *Yahoo* or *Bing*. This may be related to several factors. For example, free email services from *Google* and *Yahoo* are quite widespread among the Slovak population. *Gmail* is even integrated with *Google Chat*, *Google Meet* and includes popular applications such as *Calendar*, *Drive*, *Docs* and others. At the same time, *Google* provided an education space for a number of schools during the pandemic, which may have provided a positive experiential learning experience for respondents.



Graph 3: When searching for information about products or sellers, I prefer:
Source: own processing, 2022

²⁸ LANG, R.: *Nearly Half of Gen Z Are Using TikTok and Instagram to Search Rather Than Google*. [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.ladbible.com/news/latest-nearly-half-of-gen-z-use-tiktok-instagram-search-instead-google-20220713>>.

As most members of Generation Z consist of high school and university students having lower income than their parents or working peers, we were interested whether these respondents tend to compare prices through price comparison websites before purchase. As far as Slovaks are concerned, more than 70% of consumers regularly compare product prices in various competitive stores before purchase and another 20% do so occasionally.²⁹ Our findings show that 76% of respondents do not use price comparison websites. Those respondents who said they did, preferred comparison websites such as *Heureka*, *Glami* or *Trivago*. Although 50% of respondents take the time to search for promotional offers before purchasing, they do not appear to include the use of price comparison sites in this activity.

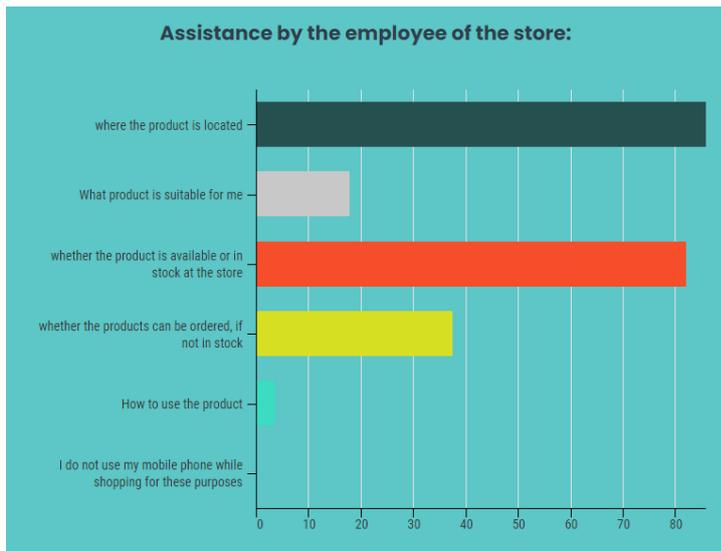


Graph 4: Do you compare prices through price comparison websites during shopping?
 Source: own processing, 2022

Another question we studied is in what situation the respondents need assistance of the staff in the store. As shown in the Graph 5, the respondents usually have difficulties finding a product in the store (86%), then they verify product availability in the store or in the stock and its subsequent ordering (82%). A wide product range in the stock and its proper placement are key factors for this generation. This is also confirmed by the findings of the research by *The National Retail Federation* showing that 68% of respondents pay attention to a wide product selection, 66% to product availability and 56% to good experience with retail.³⁰

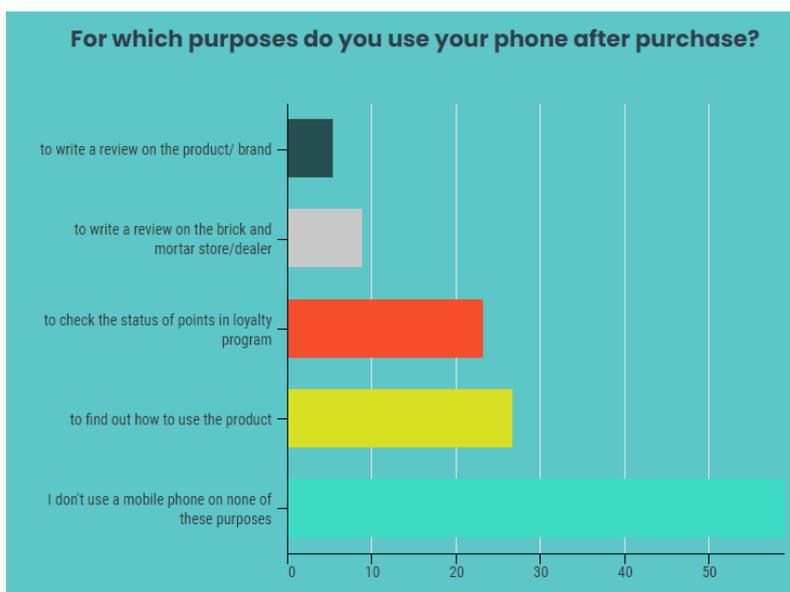
²⁹ *Tri štvrtiny Slovákov pred nákupmi pravidelne porovnávajú ceny u viacerých predajcov.* [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.homecredit.sk/tlacove-spravy/tri-stvrtiny-slovakov-pred-nakupmi-pravidelne-porovnavaju-ceny-u-viacerych-predajcov>>.

³⁰ *What Do Gen Z Shoppers Really Want?* [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://cdn.nrf.com/sites/default/files/2018-10/NRF-IBM%20Generation%20Z%20Study%20Part%20III.pdf>>.



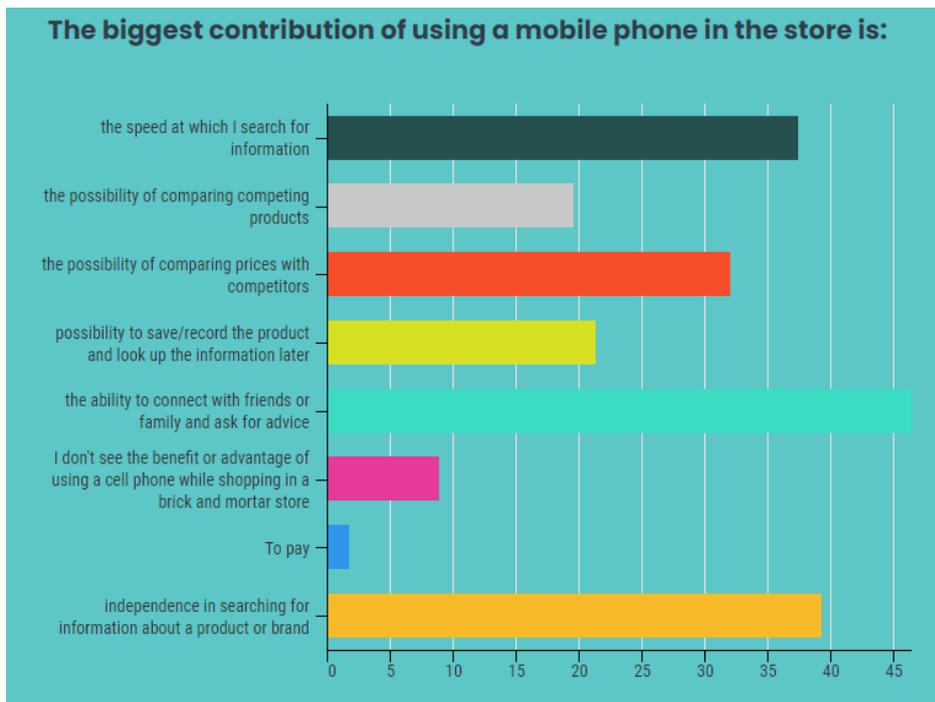
Graph 5: Assistance by the employee of the store
Source: own processing, 2022

Post-purchase behavior is as important as the previous phases of the buyer decision process. Therefore, we focused on defining the role of the mobile phone after purchase (see Graph 6). The findings of our research show that more than half (59%) of our respondents use their mobile phones in the post-purchase phase and a quarter (26%) of them use their mobile phone to find out how the product they had bought is used. Less than 10% of respondents declared to write a review for the product they bought or the store they visited. Compared to our survey last year, 20% fewer respondents are writing reviews. This is where we see room for improvement. Reviews can help businesses develop or discover failures they can work on. The issue does not seem to be that customers are not allowed to express their opinions. Generation Z is permanently online and therefore, it would be interesting to find out what motivation this generation needs to start expressing their opinions and attitudes to given products or brands after making the purchase.



Graph 6: Post-purchase behaviour of Generation Z
Source: own processing, 2022

One of the last questions focused on evaluation of benefits of using mobile phones in the store by Generation Z. The respondents highly appraise the possibility to connect with their family and friends (46%). The second benefit would be independence when searching for information in the store (39%). Follows the speed at which the respondents can search for products (37%). More data are shown in Graph 7. The speed is a key factor for buyers, which was also demonstrated by the US research *NRF*. Up to 49% of respondents appreciate the speed at which they can find all necessary information about the product or the brand and 41% of them like the possibility to use various discounts or benefits from using mobile devices.³¹



Graph 7: The biggest contribution of using a mobile phone in the store
Source: own processing, 2022

We can say that the above findings are nothing new for us. Customers falling under Generation Z are dynamic, IT literate and can say what they want. Their consumer behaviour is affected by the offer of a good bargain in terms of the quality and the affordable price. This is what the interpreted results have also shown.

Conclusion

In the theoretical background we pointed to the divergence of roles of consumers and customers and afterwards, we defined particular phases of the buyer decision process. Finally, we identified the types of purchase according to their frequency and impulsiveness. The considerable part was also dedicated to Generation Z with the focus on its relationship with technologies. Empirical background is based on the results of our own pre-research on the available sample of respondents belonging to Generation Z (consumers born between 1995 and 2009). The obtained results were interpreted by means of graphs and verbal description.

³¹ *What Do Gen Z Shoppers Really Want?* [online]. [2022-10-26]. Available at: <<https://cdn.nrf.com/sites/default/files/2018-10/NRF-IBM%20Generation%20Z%20Study%20Part%20III.pdf>>.

Our own findings are compared with the results of other commercial studies. We found out that in the pre-purchase phase, i.e. before entering the store, the respondents use their mobile phones to be informed about opening hours (84%). In the purchase phase, directly in the store, the respondents use their mobile phone mainly to pay for their shopping (70%). In the post-purchase phase, more than a half (59%) of respondents does not use their mobile phones in relation to post-purchase behaviour. However, it is interesting to note that 55.4% of respondents are active on social sites in course of purchase. The contribution of the given paper is to demonstrate the potential of using mobile marketing for those businesses serving Generation Z based on interactions in the field of application of mobile marketing in course of the buyer decision process of Generation Z in the retail store.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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PREFERENCES OF YOUNG CONSUMERS TOWARDS CUSTOMER LOYALTY PROGRAMMES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DYNAMICS OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

In the context of the dynamics of development of marketing communication tools, we are going to study preferences of young consumers from the Generation Z towards customer loyalty programmes. As a result of the inflation, up to 80% of Slovak consumers have opted for discounts or various special offers communicated through leaflets or customer loyalty programmes provided by retailers. Therefore we have decided to observe the preferences of customers from the Generation Z and their relation to loyalty programmes. As far as the theoretical background is concerned, we will firstly identify the phase of the buyer decision process where the loyalty is created and we will then define the loyalty itself, loyalty programmes, their basis and fundamental principles in practice. Empirical background is based on the results of our own research carried out on the available sample of 60 respondents from the Generation Z. The results we obtained will be interpreted by means of the verbal description and graphs. Our own findings will also be compared with the results of other studies. In the conclusion, we will present the benefits of our paper, information about the collected data and how these can serve as a basis for any further research.

Key words:

Loyalty Programmes. Loyalty. Pre-research. Satisfaction. Generation Z.

Introduction

The tradition of loyalty programmes dates back to the last century even though the said topic was not thoroughly observed as it is now. Although many different kinds of loyalty programmes are still emerging, the academic environment fails to properly react to such development. Available scientific knowledge is usually processed as the partial topic rather than the detailed overview. In the Slovak market, loyalty programmes are usually perceived in food retail, general stores or drug stores. The significance of benefits provided through loyalty programmes is directly linked to current economic issues faced by the society, especially individuals and households. Not so much research has been done in the above field in Slovakia. Those sources that can be regarded as relevant or reliable often fail to focus on specific questions. All the aforementioned factors highlight the significance of the given topic and its proper place in research programmes.

1 Loyalty as the Result of Satisfaction in Course of the Buyer Decision Process

Acknowledging the problem is connected with the moment when customers realize their specific need. This can be triggered either by unfavourable changes of the current state of products, e.g. utilization, wear and tear and damage, or by increasing the level of the required state, e.g. due to a stronger financial health of customers. The first out of five phases of the buyer decision process must also be present. However, customers do not go through all phases of their buyer decision process in each purchase with the same intensity. If they purchase the products they know well, their shopping is not that risky, the extent of information they search for gets reduced and so does the consideration of various alternatives. On the other hand, if customers purchase the products with much lower shopping intensity, at a high price or at high

risk, they tend to pay more attention to each phase of the buyer decision process, including post-purchase behaviour.¹

Customers' satisfaction and loyalty reflect post-purchase behaviour as the final phase of the buyer decision process. Its basis consists of comparing what customers had expected from the product or the service with what the product and the service really fulfilled. Expectations are based on previous customer experience, opinions of their family relatives, friends or acquaintances or on the information and promises made by the business or its competitors.

Customer satisfaction is affected by the product or the service itself solving the specific issues; the tone of communication and sufficient information help customers create the imagination and expectations about the product or the service; inadequate form of sale, advisory services, service and after-sale services, including complaint handling procedures;² techniques of the price and non-price support and dissatisfaction with the competition.³ Satisfied customers keep more durable loyalty toward the company or the brand, they spread positive information, they less focus on their competitors, they are less price-sensitive, they purchase in larger quantities, which eventually means that their service is less costly in contrast to new customers.

Even though the customer satisfaction is a rather relative notion, it may generate the following groups of positive effects: loyalty, generalization and positive verbal expression. Loyalty is calculated, timely, it is based on the selection of alternatives and results from the evaluation process. It can relate to various objects: a business relation, a brand, a product or an outlet.⁴ Generalization means that customers transfer their satisfaction with the company or the brand into the purchase of other products or brands of the company. Satisfied customers spread positive information about the company and its brands when communicating with members of their reference groups.

On the contrary, dissatisfaction arises in the situations when customers have to decide between various equivalent alternatives, i.e. none of the products has a decisive competitive benefit; customers can try on the products before purchase while having limited options for return or exchange (e.g. in case of mail order or catalogs) or have only minimum information about the product.⁵

Customer dissatisfaction lead to changes to the brand, discrimination or negative verbal expression.⁶ This is to say that customers, in order to satisfy their needs in course of the future buyer decision process, will select a product of a different brand. At the same time, they will not buy any other products of the brand that disappointed them and what is more, they will spread this experience further, e.g. by word-of-mouth, among other members of respective reference groups. According to the results by oracle.com, after bad experience 89% of customers switch to competitors and 79% of customers who shared their negative experience n social sites, will not get any feedback.⁷

¹ KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Marketing a spoločnosť II*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 7.

² MIKLENČIČOVÁ, R.: *Meranie ukazovateľov výkonnosti CRM*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2012, p. 35-36.

³ BÁRTOVÁ, H., BÁRTA, V., KOUDELKA, J.: *Spotřebitel (chování spotřebitele a jeho výzkum)*. Praha : VŠE, 2007, p. 91.

⁴ RICHTEROVÁ, K. (ed.): *Spotřebitel'ské správanie*. Bratislava : Sprint 2, 2015, p. 282.

⁵ BÁRTOVÁ, H., BÁRTA, V., KOUDELKA, J.: *Spotřebitel (chování spotřebitele a jeho výzkum)*. Praha : VŠE, 2007, p. 91.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ *Prečo sa CFO musí zaujímať o spokojnosť zákazníkov*. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.cfo.sk/articles/preco-sa-cfo-musi-zaujimat-o-spokojnost-zakaznikov#.Y4c-tHbMJPY>>.

2 Loyalty Programmes in the Buyer Decision Process

Relations with customers and customer care need to be especially maintained after sale, mainly if they are satisfied and their satisfaction lead to loyalty, generalization and positive verbal expression. The practice recognises various forms of customer care arising out of the contract (e.g. verification of proper fitting, providing instructions, warranty and after-warranty service) and beyond the contract (advisory services, making the plan for maintaining further customer relations, satisfaction survey, analysing complaints, loyalty programmes). The role of this approach from the part of the company has been lately confirmed by the economic and social development having a negative effect on the cost structure of individuals and households. Therefore the following text will mainly focus on loyalty programmes serving as tools of care and communication with customers on a regular basis.

Loyalty programmes are defined as long-term value-oriented, developing and mutually favourable relations between the producer, the intermediary and the customers reinforcing customer steadiness and loyalty.⁸ The philosophy of customer-centred loyalty programmes is to attain advantages based on long-term consumption of the product or the brand. From the viewpoint of the target group these can be close or open. Close loyalty programmes have strict rules for obtaining or maintaining membership in course of time with the focus on the selected market segment. Open loyalty programmes do not have any strict rules for membership and therefore, they tend to connect customers across numerous market segments with the high percentage of inactive members.⁹

Loyalty programmes are usually initiated, planned and managed by the company which opted for systematic building and retention of customer relations when the customers become their members on a voluntary basis at their own discretion. Customers are offered financial benefits (immediate discounts from product prices), non-financial benefits (exchange of collected points for other company products or merch products) or their combination in exchange for customers' information (sex, age, contact data) and their buying habits (structure of purchased goods, price sensitivity, outlets and branches they visit, etc.) which the company will subsequently use for planning various marketing activities. Loyalty programmes, in line with technological possibilities, offer room for the dialogue between the company and its customers (call centre, live chat, messages and posts on social sites, etc.).¹⁰

Based on the conceptions of loyalty programmes in practice, we recognise: loyalty programmes for regular customers through collection of points and use of discounts; membership clubs with a number of benefits building the brand community; programmes of prominent persons designed for the most valuable customers, for a relative small group of customers and special recognition programmes based on various types of social events for the invitees.¹¹

⁸ KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Podpora predaja pri komunikácii s vybranými cieľovými skupinami*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2014, p. 83.

⁹ ŠTARCHOŇ, P., FALTYS, J., DZUGASOVÁ, J.: *Priamy marketing alebo priama cesta ako si získať a udržať zákazníka*. Bratislava : Direct marketing Beta, 2004, p. 226.

¹⁰ KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Direct marketing*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2012, p. 60-61.

¹¹ KRAJČOVIČ, P., MARTOVIČ, M., MENDELOVÁ, D.: *Praktická implementácia nástrojov marketingovej komunikácie*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 61.

3 Methodics

The main objective of the paper is to define the preferences of consumers belonging to the Generation Z in relation to loyalty programmes. The subsequent partial goals are as follows: to identify the phase of the buyer decision process when the loyalty is built; to define loyalty programmes; their basis and fundamental principles implementing in practice; to describe the methodics and research methods; to define the methods used for evaluating and interpreting obtained results.

When processing the paper, we used secondary (university textbooks, monographs) as well as primary (pre-research) information sources. Primary sources were obtained through our own pre-research of 10 October 2022 on the available sample of 60 respondents. As this relates to the test of logicity and understandability of particular questions, the form and the tool of data collection (online questionnaire). The number of respondents is sufficient. Data were collected through the online questionnaire – Google forms. As the pre-research was carried out in the online environment, the respondents could download the questionnaire by means of the QR code. The technique for data collection named CAWI was used. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions with 2 half-closed and 8 closed questions. Out of the total, two questions were linked to respondents' identification. Other questions focused on e.g. specifying the number of loyalty programmes where the respondents are active; the product range they relate to; the manners of proving the membership; preferred benefits. If significant differences occur, we will point to diversity between particular genders. The results of the research will be interpreted through the verbal description and graphs.

4 Research on the Usage of Loyalty Programs in Slovakia among Young Audience

In our evaluation of the results, we want to compare results between female and male students where possible, as well as compare overall results with external research. At the end of the chapter, some conclusions on the topic are provided.

Firstly, we have to define, who exactly participated in our research. So, we started with some basic demographical questions. A total of 60 respondents participated in our questionnaire 72% of which were female, and 23% stated that they were male, and 5% preferred not to state their gender or age. We can already see that the majority of participants were women, and this is one of the things that need to be taken into consideration when analyzing other results. The age of most respondents was 19 years, with 55% voting for this option. The second most voted possibility was 20 years old, for which voted 28%. Another 5% of participants stated that they were 21.3% were 22, and options of 23 and 24 years old both got 2% of votes. As we mentioned earlier, 5% of respondents preferred not to provide information on their age. We can summarize that 83% of respondents were aged either 19 or 20 years old. This means that the responses we've got were primarily from students in the first year and that the results can be generalized to people of this age group.

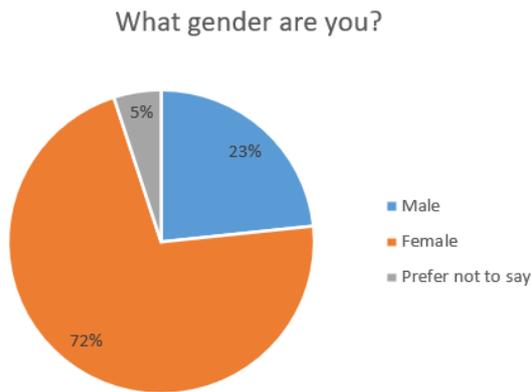


Chart 1: Gender of the respondents
Source: own processing, 2022

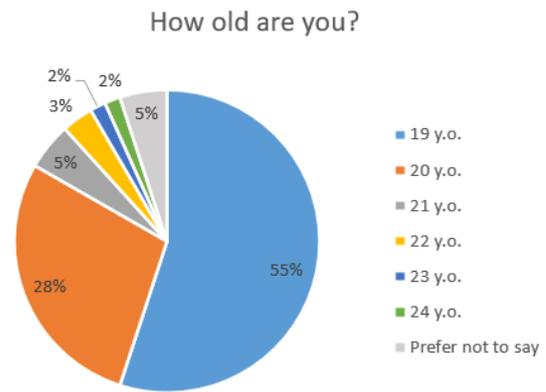


Chart 2: Age of the respondents
Source: own processing, 2022

One more question we needed to get an answer to before asking questions directly about loyalty programs was whether students have their own sources of income, e.g. part-time jobs, or are they fully dependent on someone. Here, we want to look at the results of male and female respondents separately. The results between genders were similar. Among men, 71% answered positively, while the other 29% stated that they didn't have any personal source of income. Among women, the percentage of participants who had their own income was a little higher than among men, with 79% of respondents voting positively, and only 21% of them answering negatively. We may conclude that around three-quarters of all the participants in our questionnaire had their own source of income, so those are not people who are solely dependent on funding.

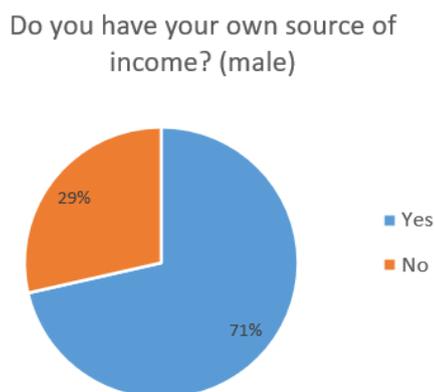


Chart 3: Income of the respondents
Source: own processing, 2022

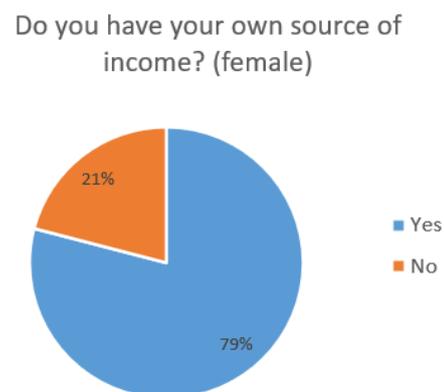


Chart 4: Income of the respondents
Source: own processing, 2022

All the following questions were dedicated to the loyalty programs and the attitude of the respondents towards them. Also, we want to provide a general evaluation of the result on each question, as well as divide answers depending on gender. The very first question that we had to ask our respondents was: "How many loyalty programs are you actively using?". This information can give us insight into how many brands young people show loyalty to through loyalty programs. Among male respondents, almost two-thirds, 64% answered that they actively used from 1 to 5 loyalty programs, while the other 36% voted for an option of "6 to 10" loyalty programs. No one among male respondents used less or more than that. Among women, the results were a bit different. Almost four-fifths of all female respondents, 78%, stated that they use from 1 to 5 loyalty programs. The second most voted option, similarly to males, was "6 to 10" loyalty programs, but only with 11% of votes. However, 4% stated that they used "11 to 20" loyalty programs and the rest 7% said they were not using any loyalty programs at all. That 7% of voters were not given any following questions to answer since they

are not using any program, so the rest of the questions will have 57 answers. From this, we may conclude that more women tend to actively use from 1 to 5 loyalty programs, while a bigger amount of men use from 6 to 10 programs.

How many loyalty programs are you actively using? (male)

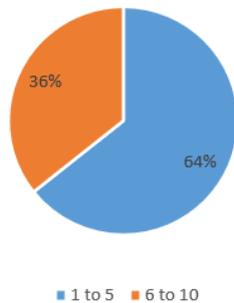


Chart 5: Amount of loyalty programs used
Source: own processing, 2022

How many loyalty programs are you actively using? (female)

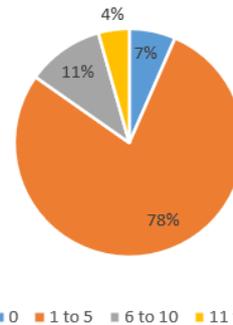


Chart 6: Amount of loyalty programs used
Source: own processing, 2022

Another question we wanted to answer is how this data corresponds with external research. It is important to notice that there is not so much publicly available research on this topic in Slovakia. The latest and the most relevant one that we found was from the year 2021 conducted by the agency Go4insight. According to the results they are providing, the average Slovak customer uses nine loyalty programs.¹² Those results do not correspond with the ones we got in our questionnaire. We may state, that while an average Slovak uses 9 loyalty programs, among young people and fresh university students, for the majority, this number drops to the amount from 1 to 5 programs, which is significantly less. There can be a few reasons for that. Firstly, at this age, the purchasing power may not be as high as among adults, which, in turn, may lead to a smaller amount of loyalty programs used, since fewer purchases are made. The other possible explanation is that young people show their loyalty differently than adults, focusing on the values of the brands and staying with the ones they feel connected to. In other words, there is a possibility that they are buying the same amount, or even more, but from a smaller number of brands. However, further research is required in order to prove or disapprove this assumption.

The next question we asked our respondents was about which model of loyalty programs they preferred. We gave respondents two possibilities for answering: either they preferred programs based on immediate rewards or long-term, but more valuable rewards. Among men, 86% chose immediate rewards as their preference, while 14% voted for long-term awards. Results from women were very similar, with 88% of votes given to loyalty programs based on immediate rewards, and only 12% chose a long-term rewards-based model. This information shows us, that the vast majority of young people are focused on immediate rewards, and most probably they would be much more likely to use a program, that is based on such a model. Only roughly one-tenth of respondents said that they prefer the collection of points with the goal of their exchange in the long term, which is a fairly little number given the number of loyalty programs built on this model on the market.

¹² *Slováci sú rekordéri, majú aj 20 vernostných programov súčasne.* [online]. [2022-10-22]. Available at: <<https://tlacovespravy.sme.sk/c/22637210/slovaci-su-rekorderi-maju-aj-20-vernostnych-programov-sucasne.html>>.

Which loyalty programs model you prefer? (male)

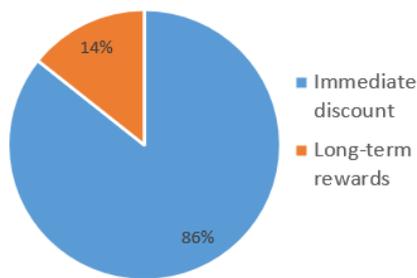


Chart 7: Preferences of loyalty programs model
Source: own processing, 2022

Which loyalty programs model you prefer? (male)

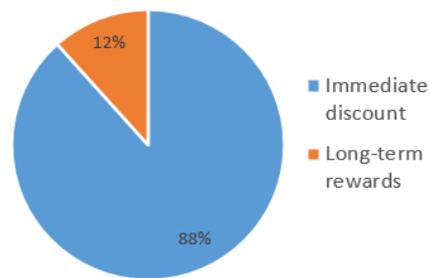


Chart 8: Preferences of loyalty programs model
Source: own processing, 2022

After that, we were aiming to understand, what category of products our respondents were primarily buying when using loyalty programs, and the results we got are, for the first time, very different between the genders. Among men, only three categories of products were mentioned. Half of the respondents, 50% said they were primarily using loyalty programs when buying food products, another 43% voted for “Clothing” as their preferred category of products and 7% wrote their own category – fuels. What about the female side? More than half of all respondents, 54% chose “Drugstores, cosmetics, perfumes” as their answer. The second most voted option was “Food” with 23%, followed by “Clothing” with 16% of votes. Only 2% chose “Electrotechnique” as a preferred category of products, and another 5% stated that they use loyalty programs for all of the stated categories. The first, and the biggest difference that can be seen from those numbers, is that while more than half of women stated that they prefer using loyalty programs while buying in drugstores, cosmetics, or perfumeries, there was not a single answer for this option from the male side. This is understandable considering the main target audience of such shops and products, however, another interesting insight can be gotten from this. This number among women was more than twice bigger, than the people who voted for “Food” as their preferred category. Another interesting insight is that, by percentage, more male buyers prefer not only the “Food” category but also “Clothing”, which may be surprising. No one among our respondents voted for the category “Shoes, bags, handbags”.

Loyalty programs connected to what product range are you particularly interested in? (male)

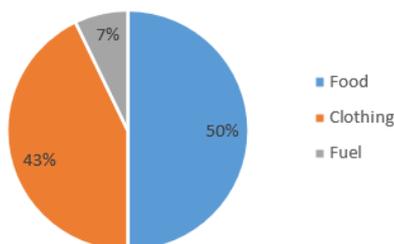


Chart 9: Categories of products with which loyalty products are used
Source: own processing, 2022

Loyalty programs connected to what product range are you particularly interested in? (female)

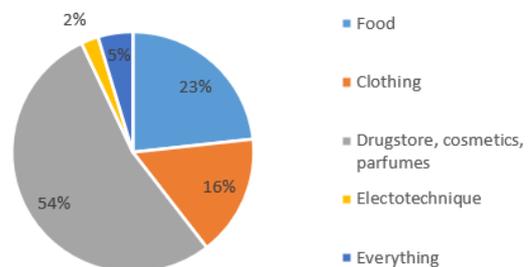


Chart 10: Categories of products with which loyalty products are used
Source: own processing, 2022

How do these results compare with the results from external research? According to research from the agency *Go4insight*, traditionally, the vast majority of Slovaks use loyalty programs connected to food retail chains, with more than 80% of respondents voting for this option. The second most voted category was drugstores and perfumeries, followed by sports and hobby

products.¹³ As we may see, the results are different from the ones we have in our questionnaire. The biggest difference is that among our respondents, in neither of the gender groups “Food” category had such a big percentage of votes. Also, the “Clothing” category wasn’t in the top three among the Slovak population, while fresh university students voted differently. Most probably, this can be explained by the fact, that people of such age are not used to buying food products for themselves yet, thus there is not a big need for usage loyalty programs connected to them, and since the “Food” category doesn’t have such a big amount of votes, they are spread among other categories, that can be closer to people of this age. However, once again, in order to prove or disapprove this hypothesis further research is required.

The next question we asked was open, and respondents had to write, which loyalty programs they are part of. The results were very diverse, and many of the programs got only one vote, so we will analyze the top three options for each gender. Among men, the leader with 57% of votes was Tesco with its loyalty program *Clubcard*. It was followed by three programs with 21%: *Lidl Plus*, *Kaufland Card* and *Spotify*. Among women, the results were different. 77% of votes went to *DM Drogeria*, a famous drugstore. Second and third places belonged to *Tesco* with 39%, and *Kaufland* with 26% of votes accordingly. The results correspond with the data from the previous question.

One more thing we wanted to understand is how a younger generation is using those programs. By this we mean, if they are still using plastic cards, that almost every merchant issues on demand, or if they are fond of digital applications and digital loyalty cards. Among men, almost everyone, 93%, stated that they primarily use digital applications, and only 7% used plastic cards. Among women, the difference is more distinguishable. Only around two-thirds of respondents, 63%, chose digital applications as their primary choice, and the other third – 37% still used plastic cards as their preference. This shows us, that the younger generation indeed is more into digital applications connected to loyalty programs. Nevertheless, even among such an age group, there is a relatively big percentage of people who still use plastic cards, so this type should not be forgotten as well.

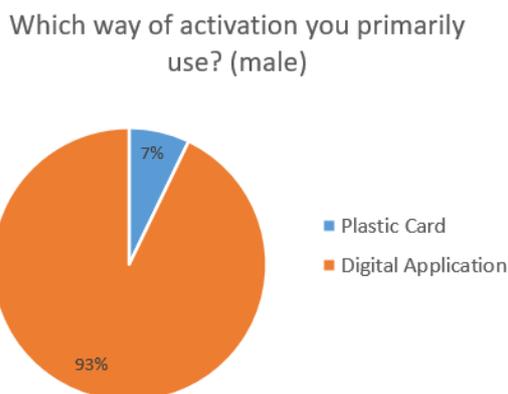


Chart 11: Digital vs physical loyalty cards preference
 Source: own processing, 2022

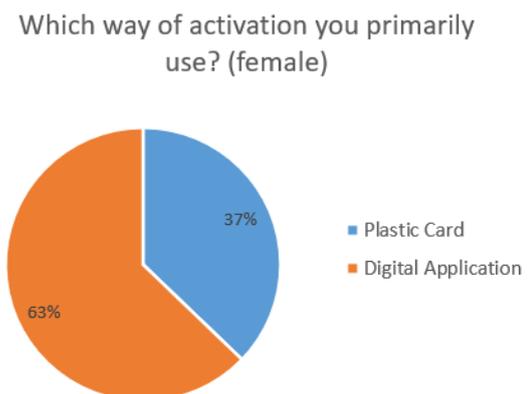


Chart 12: Digital vs physical loyalty cards preference
 Source: own processing, 2022

The last two questions from our questionnaire were aimed at understanding, how the number of loyalty programs changed over the years, and how people got to know about the programs they were using. Starting with the first question, there were 2 possibilities for answering – either

¹³ *Slováci sú rekordéri, majú aj 20 vernostných programov súčasne.* [online]. [2022-10-22]. Available at: <<https://tlacovespravysme.sk/c/22637210/slovaci-su-rekorderi-maju-aj-20-vernostnych-programov-sucasne.html>>.

the amount of loyalty programs has increased or decreased for a person over the years. Among men, 86% said that the amount of programs has increased, and only 14% began using fewer programs over the years. Among women, even more, 93% stated they were using more programs over the years, and only 7% noticed the decrease. From this, we can summarize that the amount of loyalty programs used by younger people and young adults is rising over the years, both among men and women. This also shows us, that even when it may seem there are too many such programs on the market already, there is still space for new ones.

How did the number of your loyalty programs changed over the years?
(male)

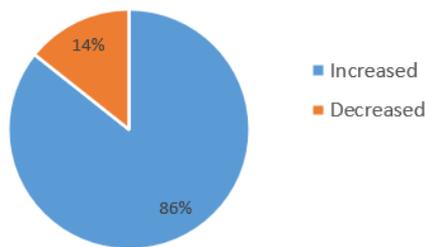


Chart 13: Change in the number of loyalty programs over the years
Source: own processing, 2022

How did the number of your loyalty programs changed over the years?
(female)

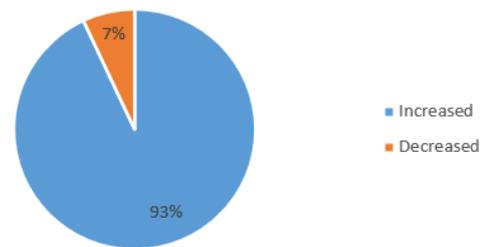


Chart 14: Change in the number of loyalty programs over the years
Source: own processing, 2022

As mentioned earlier, in the last question we aimed to dig into how respondents got to know about the loyalty programs they were using. Participants had three options for answering: either they learned about them directly in the physical shop, from relatives, or from ads on various media channels. Also, there was a possibility of writing one's own answer in case neither of the options was suitable as an answer. Among male respondents, exactly half, 50%, said that they learned about loyalty programs from friends, relatives, or family. Almost one-third of respondents, 29%, were presented with loyalty programs directly in physical shops, and the rest 21% of respondents got to know about them from ads. Among female participants, the answers were different. Two-thirds of all respondents, 68%, stated that they learned about loyalty programs directly in the shop. Another 16% said that their friends, relatives, or family members were their source of information about the programs, and only 14% got to know about them through ads. 2% of respondents wrote that the source of information was email. As we can see, personal in-store promotion is still functioning, and even the younger generation is likely to be persuaded by it. When it comes to friends, relatives, and family, recommendations from these people tend to have much more value in our eyes, so it can be a great way of "pushing" someone into trying a new loyalty program. The channel that got the least amount of votes among both genders is an advertisement, either on TV, radio, internet, or social media. This shows us, that loyalty programs are not communicated enough through means of advertising, and there is a big potential in this field for it.

How did you get to know about programs you are using (male)

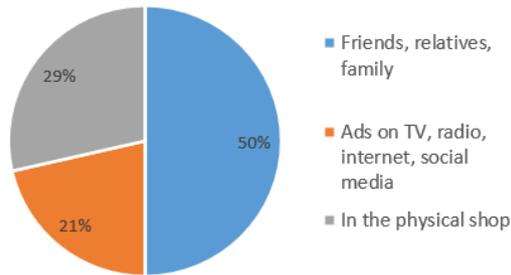


Chart 15: The way respondents got to know about loyalty programs they were using
Source: own processing, 2022

How did you get to know about programs you are using (female)

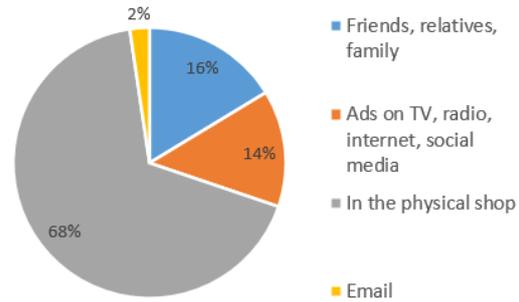


Chart 16: The way respondents got to know about loyalty programs they were using
Source: own processing, 2022

To conclude we may say that a loyalty program is a thing to stay with us for a long time, and even young people are actively engaging with them. Some results from our questionnaire were expected to appear, like a preference for immediate rewards over long-term rewards. Since the world is very fast today, the amount of competing loyalty programs is giant, and it is hard to expect people to be invested in one's program when the reward is long-term and unclear. The only reason for such an investment could be good motivation – a very valuable reward, which also may be problematic depending on the type of business. Other results, like the number of loyalty programs actively used, were unexpected. Not only the amount from 1 to 5 is quite low, but it was also around twice less than the results we could find in external research, leaving the ground for further analysis.

Overall, we can surely state that the topic of loyalty programs deserves attention and further inquiry has to be made in this field. From our questionnaire, we can conclude that the behavior towards loyalty programs of young people can be different than that of the rest of the population, and further research with bigger numbers of respondents would definitely bring more interesting insights on the topic.

Conclusion

In theoretical bases, we will firstly identify the phase of the buyer decision process when the loyalty is created and after that, we will define the loyalty, loyalty programmes, their fundamental principles implemented in practice. Empirical background is based on the results of our own pre-research carried out on the available sample of 60 respondents from the Generation Z. The obtained results will be interpreted by means of the verbal description and graphs. Our own findings are compared with the results of other studies. The main contribution of the presented paper is to obtain data about the approach of young consumers towards loyalty programmes and their subsequent comparison of the obtained data with external sources. We have not found any research from Slovakia having focused on the given topic, which highlights the significance and importance of the research in the above field of consumer behaviour. Findings from the research will be used by both the young and the elderly. Simultaneously, the results can also serve as the first basis for confirming or rejecting the above-mentioned assumptions.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega No.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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NEUROMARKETING: THE FUTURE OF UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Alena Kusá, Patrícia Beličková

Abstract:

Neuromarketing has arisen from the combination of two disciplines: neuroscience and marketing. This relatively new marketing discipline uses the latest knowledge from neuroscience, i.e. the study of a human brain, to reveal the processes occurring in the human decision-making. It enables us to properly understand our customers – their opinions, motivations, and preferences. Neuromarketing is not here to replace traditional research methods but rather to provide unique and additional observations. Therefore, the paper is going to focus on how neuromarketing can be used as a tool for understanding customer's behaviour. Its main aim is to map all available tools that are used while implementing neuromarketing research and at the same time to analyse their advantages or possible drawbacks. The paper also covers the possibilities of using virtual and augmented reality in neuromarketing research.

Keywords:

Augmented Reality. Consumer Behaviour. Marketing Research. Neuromarketing. Neuromarketing Tools. Virtual Reality.

1 Understanding the Consumer's Brain

Understanding customer behaviour through neuromarketing has revolutionized marketing. Thanks to a better understanding of customers' motivation and decision-making process, companies can communicate more effectively.

Although the term "neuromarketing" is several decades old, it is still a relatively unexplored field. By combining neuroscience and cognitive science and their implication in marketing, we have the opportunity to find out more precisely how the communication of individual brands works. Are their messages communicated correctly? How to encourage a customer to purchase or convert? Thanks to modern technologies, we can also find answers to these questions that are supported by data and not just marketers' guesses.

Currently, neuromarketing research is not widely used in the Slovak market due to insufficient interest from companies or a lack of their financial resources. The situation is similar abroad. As noted in their study by Crespo-Pereira, Legarén-Lago and Arregui-McGullion, most large companies still do not use neuromarketing techniques. At the same time, however, they add that in the future we should observe a rising interest in this type of research.

The main reason to conduct neuromarketing research and use the insights from its results is that it uncovers real customer reactions. Often during interviews with respondents, their answers are distorted. Whether it relates to a conscious or subconscious bias, we have to consider it in this kind of research. This statement is also confirmed by G. S. Kushwaha and A. Kumar who say that "*neuromarketing techniques finally allow marketers to peep into the consumers' brains to gain valuable insights on the subconscious processes explaining why a message eventually succeeds or fails. They do so by removing the biggest issue facing conventional advertising*

research, which is to trust that people have both the will and the capacity to report how they are affected by a specific piece of advertising.”¹

2 Neuromarketing Tools and Their Use

Neuromarketing research can be carried out with the help of several tools. Thanks to them, we can record the real, genuine, reactions of the research participants. We divide these tools based on what they can map in research.

The basic division of neuromarketing tools are:

- tools that record the metabolic activity of the brain,
- instruments that record electrical activity in the brain,
- tools without recording brain activity.

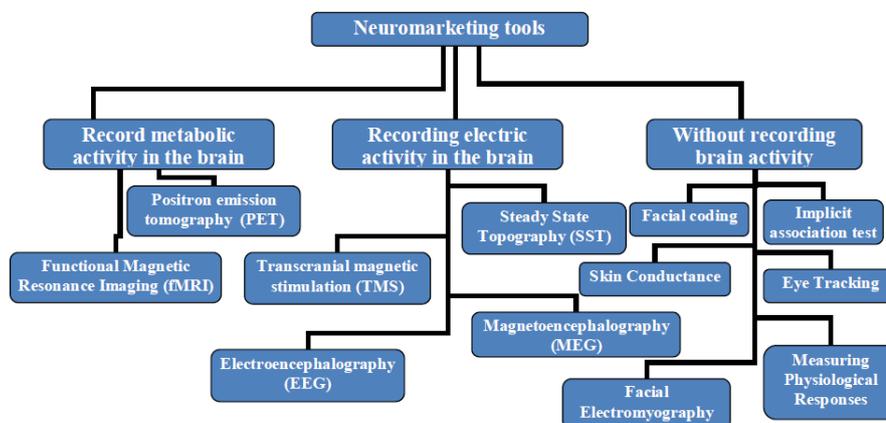


Figure 1: Classification of neuromarketing tools

Source: KUMAR, A., KUSWAHA, G. S.: *Neuromarketing: The Future of Advertising?* [online]. [2022-11-06]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anil-Kumar-316/publication/330422858_Neuromarketing/links/5c40947792851c22a37c37dd/Neuromarketing/>.

“With the help of neuromarketing research tools, we can record and measure various vital functions or reactions at the time of their occurrence as a result of surrounding perceptions.”, say Tamás Darázs and Peter Krajčovič in their paper named *Neuromarketing – A New Possibility in Marketing Research* at FMK UCM in Trnava². If we want to carry out neuromarketing research, we can use various tools. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalogram (EEG) are considered to be the main tools used in this type of research.³ The use of fMRI technology depends on the use of specialized equipment, which is mostly found in medical or university facilities, and the scanners require complex training to operate. Analysing the obtained results also requires considerable expertise and time. Moreover, it is at least three times more expensive than using other neuromarketing tools.⁴ It is therefore

¹ KUMAR, A., KUSWAHA, G. S.: *Neuromarketing: The Future of Advertising?* [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anil-Kumar-316/publication/330422858_Neuromarketing/links/5c40947792851c22a37c37dd/Neuromarketing/>.

² KRAJČOVIČ, P., DARÁŽS, T.: *Neuromarketing – A New Possibility in Marketing Research* at FMK UCM in Trnava. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol 12, No. 2, p. 196.

³ HARRELL, E.: *Neuromarketing: What You Need to Know*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2019/01/neuromarketing-what-you-need-to-know/>>.

⁴ KARMARKAR, U. R., YOON, C., PLASSMANN, H.: *Marketers Should Pay Attention to fMRI*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2015/11/marketers-should-pay-attention-to-fmri/>>.

practically unimaginable for a company as such to carry out this kind of research on its own. Even when cooperating with an external company that offers the implementation of neuromarketing research using this method, it is still a very expensive method of research.

Unlike fMRI, electroencephalogram is a relatively less expensive technology that we can use in neuromarketing research. With this technology, it is possible to analyse the brain's electrical activity using a helmet with small sensors. This method detects changes in the electrical currents of brain waves.⁵ Thanks to better portability and at the same time affordability, this technology is probably one of the most frequently used in neuromarketing research. The fact that fMRI devices are currently only used in a few neuromarketing companies is also confirmed by Carl Marci z Nielsen Consumer Neuroscience. *"Despite these promising academic findings, marketers have been slow to use EEG and fMRI devices. In a survey of individuals from 64 neuromarketing firms, for example, only 31% reported using fMRI machines. I know of three or four vendors who have made fMRI their main service offering, and they've all failed,"* says Carl Marci, the chief neuroscientist at Nielsen Consumer Neuroscience.⁶

As seen in the picture, neuromarketing tools are far from limited to fMRI or EEG. One of the other frequently used tools is, for example, face coding, which does not examine brain activity. This tool is aimed at exploring spontaneous facial expressions in real time. In other words, as claimed by D. A. Dragoi, it is facial coding that identifies and records macro and micro facial expressions based on the movement of facial muscles. Furthermore, the author adds that thanks to the analysis of up to 43 facial muscles, scientists can determine 6 main emotions in real time, namely happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, fear and anger. Facial coding is often used to identify possible improvements to advertising content, as it is a relatively inexpensive neuromarketing tool.⁷

Another frequently used tool is the eye camera. It is used so that we can find out what the respondent actually notices and how much attention he pays to individual parts of the visual or advertisement. Thanks to the eye camera, we can prevent many errors in advertising campaigns, such as illegibility, poor text layout, low visibility of an important message, insufficient contrast or, for example, too much text that the viewer cannot process properly.

In addition to classic eye cameras, we also know various software that can to some extent predict the customer's attention based on artificial intelligence. Predict, for instance, is one such software. It is the generation of heat maps based on artificial intelligence. These show which areas of different visuals people look at the most. Such software makes it possible to conduct attention surveys, for example, without the participation of a control group. However, we also encounter disadvantages here. This is, for example, the high costs of using such software, or, for example, not as accurate data as is the case with research carried out using the classic eye tracking technique. The Predict tool evaluates only the first seconds of the customer's attention and does not accompany us throughout the customer's decision-making process, which we can also consider as one of the disadvantages. However, modern technologies and their constant development constantly offer us new possibilities of using neuromarketing knowledge.

⁵ *The 7 Most Common Neuromarketing Research Techniques and Tools*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.bitbrain.com/blog/neuromarketing-research-techniques-tools>>.

⁶ HARRELL, E.: *Neuromarketing: What You Need to Know*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2019/01/neuromarketing-what-you-need-to-know>>.

⁷ DRAGOI, A. D: Facial Coding as a Neuromarketing Technique: An Overview. In *"Ovidius" University Annals, Economic Sciences Series*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 683. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/2021-2/Section%204/17.pdf>>.

Neuromarketing tools can help to understand consumer behaviour correctly. Although these tools are expensive and require technically demanding operation, they undoubtedly offer various benefits compared to traditional research methods. “*What should be particularly exciting to marketers is the possibility that only a small number of people may be able to [accurately] predict how a large customer base will respond,*” claims Uma Karmarkar, neuroeconomist v UC San Diego.⁸ The authors of the paper also see a great benefit in neuromarketing research. Although the small sample on which the research is mostly carried out can be limiting and debatable in terms of the results obtained, it is possible to draw a lot of interesting knowledge from neuromarketing research and later test them in practice. The benefit of this type of research is the acquisition of general knowledge that is based on the science of the functioning of the human brain. If the research is carried out under the right conditions, with a properly selected control group, it can bring really valuable knowledge that is applicable to companies in improving their marketing communication.

3 Use of Virtual and Augmented Reality in Neuromarketing

Technologies are advancing every day. This may also be one of the factors that will make neuromarketing research more and more accessible. For example, augmented reality offers the possibility to create a world similar to reality in which customers can experiment with objects or exist in different spaces, which offers brands to show how their products can be used. This allows brands to understand consumer reactions by measuring their emotions. (Russo, Bilucaglia, Zito).⁹ It is precisely the increasing degree of availability of various technologies that predetermines the increase in the use of neuromarketing research. Companies will thus be able to learn more about the purchasing decision process of their customers. As the authors Bojic, Tucaković and Nikolić state, the academic community should not only carry out basic research in neuroscience, but also look for their practical use in marketing.¹⁰ We fully agree with this statement, as it is one of the aspects thanks to which educational institutions can contribute to the improvement of the applicability of the conducted research. They add that the future of neuromarketing depends on finding a deeper sense of how marketing works and not just researching specific advertising campaigns.¹¹

One of the technological options for making neuromarketing research more accessible is the use of virtual or augmented reality. Virtual reality and augmented reality were used by the YORD studio in the creation of a research laboratory at the Palacký University in Olomouc. In addition to combining the virtual and real world, the lab also includes eye camera technology and electrocardiogram sensors. These are some of the most widespread technologies used in neuromarketing research. The goal of the project was to better understand consumer behaviour and emotions in various religious environments with the help of XR technology, i.e. augmented

⁸ HARRELL, E.: *Neuromarketing: What You Need to Know*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2019/01/neuromarketing-what-you-need-to-know>>.

⁹ See: RUSSO, V., BILUCAGLIA, M. ZITO, M.: From Virtual Reality to Augmented Reality: A Neuromarketing Perspective. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, Vol. 13, Article 965499. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.965499/full>>.

¹⁰ BOJIĆ, L., TUCAKOVIĆ, L., NIKOLIĆ, N.: Neuromarketing Unmasked: A Review of Current State in the Field. In *Ekonomika Preduzeća*, 2021, Vol. 69, No. 7-8, p. 409. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://rifdt.institfdt.bg.ac.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/2631/0353-443X2107403B.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 411.

reality technology.¹² Different innovative approaches and combinations of used and new technologies bring the possibility of obtaining relevant data not only for academics, but also for companies.

Virtual reality or augmented reality no longer apply only to the gaming industry. They offer the possibility of use also in the medical field, or for example in psychotherapy. In Slovakia, for example, the organization *IPčko* works with virtual reality technology, which uses virtual reality in the already mentioned psychotherapy. As an advantage, he cites the possibility of being in an environment that would otherwise be difficult to reach for the needs of therapy. The present time offers neuromarketing research the opportunity to benefit from these technologies as well. They represent a completely new way to deliver marketing stimuli to research participants and at the same time examine their reactions.¹³ It is also important to note that it is augmented or virtual reality that can save considerable space costs in research. Laboratories no longer have to constantly develop means to adapt the environment in which they want to carry out research. Through the software, researchers can design the environment and individual situations that are necessary for their research and at the same time they can save financial costs that would have to be spent on research in a real environment.

One of the neuromarketing researches that was carried out in virtual reality was focused on merchandising. This research was carried out by Accenture. The obtained data indicated that shopping in the virtual space reflects the purchasing behaviour of customers in reality. The research was carried out for the Kellogg's company, which was launching a new product – Pop Tarts Bites. They needed to find out the best possible placement of the product on the shelves and at the same time find out an effective marketing strategy. With the help of an eye camera, Accenture implemented two scenarios. In the first, they placed the new product on a higher shelf and added a promo label. In the second scenario, they placed a new product with a promo label on a lower shelf. With the help of an eye camera, they discovered that it was in the second scenario that the attention of customers directed towards the surrounding products of the given brand increased. The second scenario ultimately boosted the brand's total sales by 18%.¹⁴

¹² *XR Research Lab – UPOL*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://yordstudio.com/project/xr-research-space-upol/>>.

¹³ RUSSO, V., BILUCAGLIA, M., ZITO, M.: From Virtual Reality to Augmented Reality: A Neuromarketing Perspective. In *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, Vol. 13, Article 965499. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.965499/full>>.

¹⁴ GUENTHER, D.: *Virtual Reality Merchandising*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.accenture.com/gr-en/insights/technology/virtual-reality-merchandising>>.



Figure 2: Scenario no. 1 – placing a new product on a higher shelf

Source: *Virtual Reality Merchandising*. [online]. [2022-11-21]. Available at: <<https://www.accenture.com/green/insights/technology/virtual-reality-merchandising/>>.

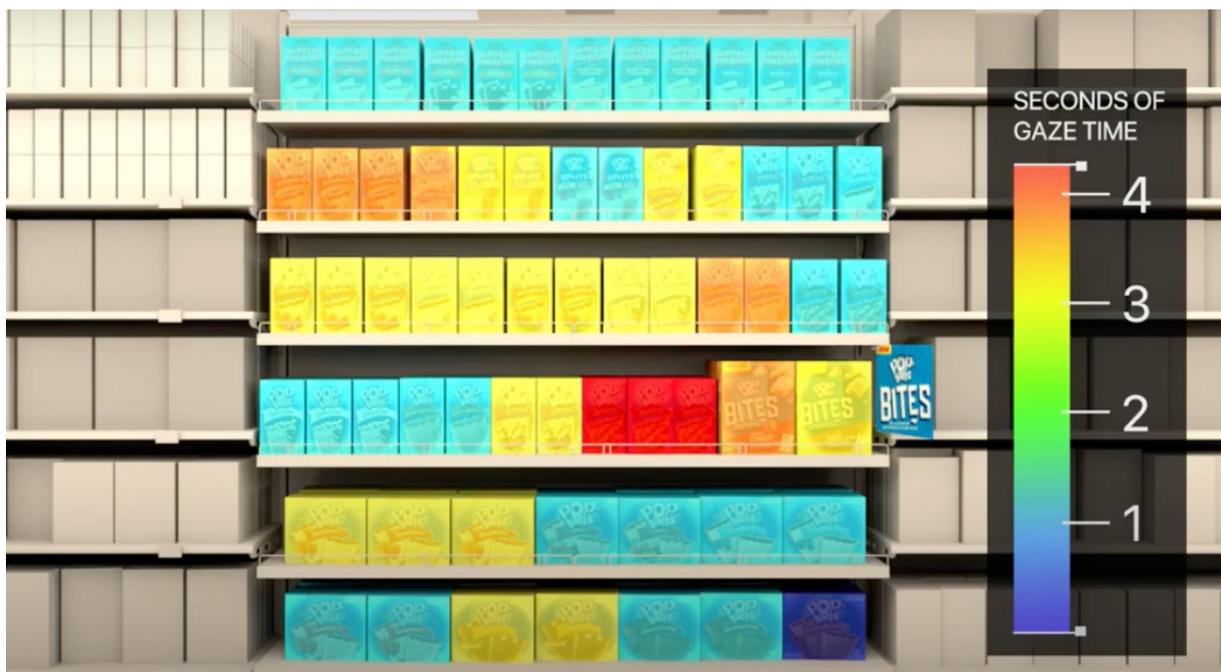


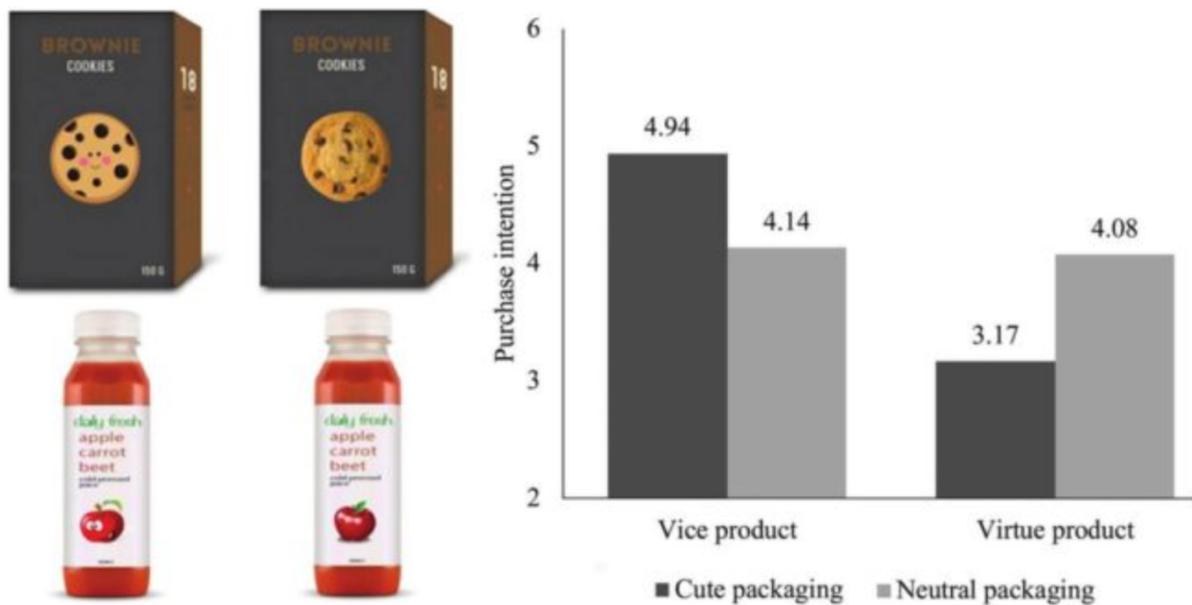
Figure 3: Scenario no. 2 – placing a new product on a lower shelf

Source: *Virtual Reality Merchandising*. [online]. [2022-11-21]. Available at: <<https://www.accenture.com/green/insights/technology/virtual-reality-merchandising/>>.

Virtual reality in combination with neuromarketing tools can also be used in customer journey mapping. It thus brings the possibility of more efficient retail management, which mainly concerns the arrangement of products on the shelves and merchandising adjustments. Thanks to such findings, companies are able to purchase more advantageous product placement positions in stores. At the same time, stores can use this technology to enhance customer satisfaction during the purchase process by optimizing individual steps, such as the clarity of the arrangement, product offer or various promotions. Kumar Ahir also adds in the article Using

virtual Reality Retail product in-store placements that the implementation of such research can pave the way for generally applicable knowledge. Retailers may find, for example, that most customers first look at the top shelves of the shelves.¹⁵

The environment of virtual or augmented reality in connection with neuromarketing can also be used in product design. Such research, which examines the consumer’s preferences and his attention to the given product, can help in the correct design of the product’s packaging. Morgan David, director of Analytica researched the relationship of packaging design with product type. For products that we refer to as vice products, i.e. products that are often excessively consumed (such as various biscuits, snacks, sweetened drinks), the packaging, which included a nice drawing, worked better. On the contrary, realistic packaging worked better in the category of virtue products.¹⁶ Thanks to this kind of research, we can more accurately determine the effectiveness of the chosen packaging design, even before the product is launched on the market. This can save marketers from making unnecessary mistakes and losing customers.



“Vice product” corresponds to cookies, and “Virtue product” corresponds to fruit juice

Figure 4: Comparison of customers’ package preferences for various product categories

Source: *How To Use Neuromarketing & Customer Psychology for Product Design & Packages?* [online]. [2022-11-21]. Available at: <<http://cabinet-analytica.fr/en/neuromarketing-psychology-packages-design/>>.

4 Methodology

The contribution, the aim of which was to map the available tools of neuromarketing research and to analyse the already conducted studies, mainly used so-called secondary research. Secondary research consists of the analysis of data that have already been collected in the past for other purposes. The data we used in compiling the post came from various, primarily foreign, sources. Thanks to this, we were able to look at the situation with the technical possibilities of implementing neuromarketing research from a broader perspective and did not

¹⁵ AHIR, K.: *Using Virtual Reality Retail Product In-store Placements*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://medium.datadriveninvestor.com/using-virtual-reality-retail-product-in-store-placements-a0272fddd9cd>>.

¹⁶ DAVID, M.: *How To Use Neuromarketing & Customer Psychology for Product Design & Packages*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<http://cabinet-analytica.fr/en/neuromarketing-psychology-packages-design/>>.

limit ourselves to Slovakia. Based on the description and subsequent analysis of the individual tools, we were able to determine the advantages, but also the weaknesses, of the individual tools used in neuromarketing research. At the same time, we also offered information from the environment of augmented and virtual reality in the context of neuromarketing research. We drew data not only from foreign publications, but also based on interviews with people who work in these areas and who were able to give us a valuable overview of the possibilities of using virtual and augmented reality even outside the gaming industry. By summarizing the data, we came to the possibilities of using neuromarketing research in the future as well.

The disadvantage of secondary data can be that it is not up to date for the given period. However, we tried to prevent this by obtaining information from as many up-to-date and relevant sources as possible. We supplemented them with our own knowledge from practice, which we acquired while researching the given topic of neuromarketing research or directly when working with the individual tools mentioned in the article. In this way, we tried to offer readers an insight into the current state of the possibilities of using neuromarketing tools in the implementation of this type of research. We carried out a content analysis of the ways of using neuromarketing tools and we came to our own knowledge by deduction.

5 Results and Discussion

Although experts' opinions differ on the possibilities and benefits of neuromarketing research, this type of research has its undeniable advantages over traditional marketing research. It is the knowledge from neuroscience that we can verify when implementing marketing activities and examining consumer reactions. The results of neuromarketing research can be of great benefit to company owners, advertising and marketing agencies, but also to the academic community. It is neuromarketing that can help brands not to manipulate the customer, as many think, but on the contrary to make their communication more effective. This can result in more effectively shared marketing messages towards consumers. At the same time, we are fully aware that the situation is not entirely favourable for the implementation of this type of research. As it is rather financially expensive research, mainly due to technical devices used for its implementation, or, for example, the personnel involved in the implementation and evaluation of the research, companies are more reluctant to use it in the practice. However, it is not only about the aforementioned financial or time barriers, but often about distrust in the obtained data. Since neuromarketing research is mainly carried out on a small sample of respondents, companies can be sceptical about the correctness of the evaluated data. However, if the research is carried out correctly, we can draw from it very useful knowledge that can be helpful to companies. Companies can relatively easily create a graphic visual of the campaign based on already acquired knowledge from neuromarketing, or further investigate its effectiveness, for example, using eye cameras and a selected group of respondents. If the group of respondents consists of the real target group of the given company, there is a high probability that, thanks to such research, the brand can reveal its shortcomings and really make its communication towards the consumer more effective.

6 Conclusion

Nowadays, almost every company devotes considerable financial or time resources to marketing activities. However, companies should also pay attention to whether their marketing activities are really effective. Marketers often base their marketing activities on theoretical

knowledge or current trends. However, they constantly encounter doubts as to whether their advertising activities will really be properly set up and effective. Only practice will show them the answers to these questions. However, thanks to neuromarketing research, they can answer some questions even before they start implementing selected marketing activities. It is the possibility of insight into the functioning of the human brain that brings us valuable knowledge that companies can put directly into practice.

Neuromarketing research is of great importance to brands and companies around the world. Thanks to the obtained data, we can better understand consumer behaviour, which is often difficult to predict otherwise. It is neuromarketing that uncovers the real needs and emotions of our customers. Neuromarketing research is therefore an effective part of marketing strategies. However, the financial difficulty of using some neuromarketing tools, such as fMRI, represents a barrier in the implementation of such research. In addition, we also encounter doubts about the results of research, which is often carried out on a very small sample. Due to the difficulty in carrying out this type of research, the research sample is usually of a small range, usually 7 to 20 people. This raises sceptical questions when interpreting the obtained data. However, the fact remains that knowledge from neuroscience can be ground-breaking in the marketing environment as well. It is definitely important to conduct the research correctly, and the proper interpretation of the data is also extremely important. However, the knowledge gained gives us room to make marketing activities more efficient.

The contribution provides an insight into financially, time and spatially more efficient ways to implement this type of research as well as into possible innovations in this environment that could make neuromarketing research a little more accessible. Since neuromarketing research is really the future in the correct understanding of consumer behaviour, it is necessary to constantly deal with the possibilities of how to use it despite the possible limitations that we mentioned in the post. It is the understanding of customer behaviour that offers brands the opportunity to implement marketing activities more effectively.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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MARKETING ANALYSIS OF THE MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS MARKET IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Alena Kusá, Ladislav Pátik

Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to process a marketing analysis of the market of mobile operators and their communication in the Czech Republic. On the selected market segment, which is mobile communications, we will perform a marketing analysis of the development trends of this segment as a whole and a description of the current state of the marketing mix of mobile operators, which is part of strategic marketing. In the introduction, we summarize the current form and definition of marketing and marketing mix tools. New trends in the marketing mix and its current form are also an integral part. In the research part, we will perform an analysis of the mobile communications segment, using data obtained through secondary marketing research from available sources and internal materials of mobile operators operating on the market of the Czech Republic. By combining the introduction and the research part, we want to verify the stated theoretical basis of applications on the selected market segment.

Key words:

Analysis. Marketing. Marketing Communications. Marketing Mix. Mobile Communication. Mobile Operators. Value.

1 Introduction

The concept of marketing is very difficult to define, and although it is very extensive and hides many other variables, many people imagine only its two functions under this concept, namely advertising and sales. The reason for this judgment is that people are constantly exposed to television commercials, internet sales campaigns, or advertising flyers. Thanks to the development of the Internet, people are actually affected by advertisements on a daily basis, every time a person looks at the Internet, for example, an innumerable number of different offers and campaigns jump out at him. Marketing affects people's daily lives and is the content of everything we do – when choosing clothes, searching for information on the Internet, etc.¹

It distinguishes managerial and social definition of marketing.² The managerial definition deals with sales and reads: “the art of selling products”. Many people are then surprised that the most important thing is not the sale, but that the sale is only the tip of the iceberg. On the contrary, the social definition already describes marketing in connection with the satisfaction of human needs and customer wishes.

He further highlights that proper marketing is not the result of chance, as one might think, but is the result of careful planning and proper execution.³ On the contrary, excellent marketing is not easy to achieve and is very rare.

Marketing must be understood as the main part of the company's strategy, which aims to satisfy the customer better than its competitors.⁴

All the above definitions have one element in common, namely highlighting the importance of the customer, his needs and wishes. An integral part of all definitions is that satisfying customer needs must be profitable for the company. According to Karlíček, if the shift is going on,

¹ KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. 12th Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 42.

² Ibidem, p. 83.

³ Ibidem, p. 112.

⁴ SVĚTLÍK, J.: *Marketingové komunikace*. Ostrava : VŠPP, 2016, p. 102.

marketing is going on at the same time. Whether one wants to admit it or not, marketing significantly affects the success or failure of any business entity.⁵

If a company wants to be successful, it should know the answers to the following questions: who is its customer, what value is it able to offer to him, how it examines his satisfaction, what is its advantage over the competition and how it can maintain it. These questions can be collectively summarized under the concept of key strategic questions. Tactical marketing questions can include, for example: what the product will look like, what its price will be, how and where it will be promoted (in connection with these questions, the marketing mix should also be mentioned below).⁶

The essence of marketing in all professions is a simple idea and that success comes from understanding the wishes and needs of those around you, from creating services or products that fulfill these wishes and needs.⁷

And what actually constitutes customer value and customer satisfaction? The customer's value is represented by the customer's assessment of the overall ability of the product or service to satisfy and fulfill his needs and wishes. In other words, it is also the difference between the cost that the customer spends to obtain the given product/service and the value that the given product/service has for him. On the other hand, the customer does not always and only objectively evaluate costs and value, but often follows his feelings. Customer satisfaction therefore depends on how much his expectations from the product are met.⁸

1.1 Marketing Mix

Kotler states that the marketing mix is a set of tactical marketing tools – product, price, distribution and communication policies that allow the company to adjust the offer according to the wishes of customers in the target market.⁹

The marketing mix is made up of all the activities that the company performs in order to generate demand for the given product. It is composed of several elements that are interdependent, and the marketing mix tries to find their optimal combinations. It can be said that the marketing mix is therefore entirely in the hands of the given company and it is entirely up to them how to deal with it. The selection of market segments, including target markets, forms the company's marketing strategy together with the marketing mix. The term marketing mix comes from a well-known professor at Harvard Business School in the USA, Neil H. Borden.¹⁰

Traditionally, the marketing mix is divided into 4 basic variables known as the 4Ps. The author of this name – the designation 4P – is Edmund Jerome McCarthy:

- Product – product policy (product),
- Price – price policy (price),

⁵ KARLIČEK, M.: *Marketingová komunikace: jak komunikovat na našem trhu*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2016, p. 45.

⁶ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 83-86.

⁷ JAKUBÍKOVÁ, D.: *Strategický marketing: strategie a trendy*. 2nd Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 107.

⁸ BARTA, V., PÁTÍK, L., POSTLER, M.: *Retail Marketing*. Prague : Management Press, 2009, p. 41-45.

⁹ KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. 12th Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 286.

¹⁰ JAKUBÍKOVÁ, D.: *Strategický marketing: strategie a trendy*. 2nd Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 159.

- Distribution – distribution policy (place),
- Communication policy (promotion).

A product can be defined as any physical good or any service or experience. The basic forms of a product from a marketing point of view are a tangible product, service, person, place, time, idea or technology. The unique characteristic of the product is important in order to differentiate it from the competition. Each product characteristic must be evaluated from the customer's point of view. If the company produces a product that the customer is not interested in, it will not achieve its set goals. Quality, brand, technical level, design and life cycle are very important for the product. During its existence, a product goes through its life cycle, which usually begins with a launch on the market, followed by growth, maturity and finally decline. Every marketer must therefore expect that their product will fail one day and, if it is not innovated, it will be replaced by another product.¹¹ The product life cycle is fundamental and determining for product, price, distribution and communication strategies – these differ according to the individual phases of the product life cycle.

The price, or amount of money, the customer must spend to get their product. Without a price, it would be impossible to sell the product. Therefore, it needs to be established before the product is launched on the market. The terms of payment, amount of discounts, etc. are also important.¹²

Distribution (place) includes the method of distributing the product to the target customer from the manufacturer. It thus includes all activities by which the company tries to get the product to customers. It is also necessary to determine sales routes, stocks, location and size of warehouses, stock determination, etc.¹³

The communication policy contains all activities aimed at the target customer becoming familiar with the product and subsequently purchasing it. The customer should be familiar with which company it is and what exactly the desired product is. In other words, it is sales promotion. Communication policy includes advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, public relations and sales promotion.¹⁴ In its current form, events (experiential marketing), fairs and exhibitions, and sponsorship are added to these.

But over time, the 4P marketing mix began to develop, and the authors tried to improve it by adding another “P” to it. This resulted in a 6P marketing mix, which, in addition to the basic 4Ps, also includes: People and Packaging. The 7P marketing mix, on the other hand, from the basic 4 dimensions, also operates with People, Processes and Physical evidence. The 8P marketing mix is an addition to the 7P marketing mix with Productivity & Quality. Currently, 9P, which is packaging, also appears frequently.

Kotler expanded the basic 4 dimensions due to the implementation of marketing in educational institutions by 3 elements: personalities, pedagogical approaches and participation activating.¹⁵ Of course, it does not matter whether the company uses 4P, 6P or 8P, but what is important is that its strategy is as effective as possible.

¹¹ BÁRTA, V., PÁTÍK, L., POSTLER, M.: *Retail Marketing*. Prague : Management Press, 2009, p. 41-45.

¹² KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. 12th Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 286.

¹³ SVĚTLÍK, J.: *Marketingové komunikace*. Ostrava : VŠPP, 2016, p. 168.

¹⁴ JADERNÁ, E., WOLFOVÁ, H.: *Moderní retail marketing*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2021, p. 123.

¹⁵ JAKUBÍKOVÁ, D.: *Strategický marketing: strategie a trendy*. 2nd Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013, p. 194.

1.2 Marketing Mix 4C

However, the 4P marketing mix concept also has its pitfalls. Many experts agreed that this 4P concept approaches the market from the seller's point of view, on the contrary, the customer's point of view is completely neglected here. In order for a company to dominate the market, only 4P is not enough for it, but it must also start operating with a view from the customer's side, and this is possible precisely with the help of the 4C concept. The 4C concept was invented by Robert Lauterborn and thus allows customers to find out what benefit they could get from the purchased product. The reason for using this concept is that the customer becomes more and more important in the creation of products and thus actually influences the success of the given company. The 4Cs therefore represent the customer marketing mix, and on the other hand, the classic 4P concept is the view of the product producer.¹⁶

The 4C concept includes:

- Customer solution,
- Costs for the customer (customer cost),
- Availability of solutions (convenience),
- Communication.

In the case of comparing the 4Cs to the 4Ps, it is possible to assign the product to the solution of the customer's needs (value), when the customer perceives this value as something that satisfies his needs and wants. For the company, this means understanding the value it has for the customer and thus offering him a product that meets these expectations. Cost to the customer can be compared to price. Under cost, the customer perceives the value that he has to invest in obtaining the product (including physical effort, decision-making, searching, etc.). For the company, the price cannot mean only the number on the invoice, but should also take into account the additional costs for the customer that result from the purchase of the given product.¹⁷ The availability of solutions (convenience), or shopping convenience, represents distribution in the 4P concept. Communication is marked the same in both concepts, because both now and in the future, two-channel communication is and will be needed for successful sales and a satisfied customer.¹⁸

2 Objective and Methodology

The aim of our contribution will be to point out the marketing analysis of the mobile communications market in the Czech Republic as a whole, and at the same time we will reflect on the key mobile operators operating on the market in the Czech Republic. We will perform the analysis from sources obtained through secondary marketing research, namely by looking at the scope of marketing and the marketing mix, as indicated in the initial research in the introduction. As part of our investigation, we used data from the *Czech Statistical Office*, the *Czech Telecommunications Office* and publicly available sources of individual mobile operators.

In the case of the *Czech Statistical Office*, this is data obtained through quantitative primary marketing research on a selected cohort of the population with subsequent projection on the scale of the entire population.

¹⁶ PŘÍKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 98-102.

¹⁷ KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. 12th Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 302.

¹⁸ PŘÍKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 147.

The *Czech Telecommunications Office* provided us with quantitative data, which is a synthesis of information that operators operating in the Czech Republic must provide by law. This is aggregated into a comprehensive output in a report on the state of the market as a whole in the relevant calendar year. We used logical methods – analysis, synthesis, comparison and deduction, as well as methods of content analysis in the theoretical part of the contribution.

3 Results

A mobile operator (MNO – from English Mobile Network Operator) is a telephone company that provides mobile telephone services to its customers. In order for a company to be able to offer these services, it usually has to obtain (buy) a license from the state.

A mobile network operator (OMS), or also a mobile phone operator (or simply a mobile operator or operator), also a telecommunications service provider (PTS), a wireless operator or a telecommunications company – these are types of designations for a telephone company that provides services to mobile phone users.

Before mobile network operators can offer their services to customers in a given country, they must receive permission for the broadcasting spectrum of services from the telecommunications authority. The exact spectrum of services allowed by the telecommunications authority depends on the mobile phone technologies used, which the network operator intends to use. For example, with the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) technology, the network operator must receive the GSM frequency range. The Telecommunications Authority allocates the selected service spectrum using various methods, but the most common spectrum allocation method is an auction. The latest 5G service has recently been licensed through an auction system in Europe and India (3G only in India).

In order for a network operator to provide its services, it must have the necessary equipment, which primarily includes a network radio, a transmitter and a network core. In addition, the network operator must have an additional base of services available, such as a voicemail and SMS center, as well as a billing system and a customer relationship management system (CRM).

Mobile operators are governed by *Act No. 127/2005 Coll.*, on electronic communications. An amendment to this law adopted in 2014 significantly weakened the rights of customers of mobile operators, especially those who are not consumers.

The first publicly available mobile network in the Czech Republic was launched on September 12, 1991 (operator *Eurotel*, used the analog NMT standard). In 1996 the operation of the GSM network was started, the NMT network was finally switched off in 2006.

In 2021, operators *O2 Czech Republic*, *T-Mobile Czech Republic* and *Vodafone Czech Republic* and *Nordic Telecom* operate in the Czech Republic. In 2019, total sales were CZK 82.4 billion (*O2* 38.8, *T-Mobile* 28.3, *Vodafone* 15.3) and profit was CZK 19 billion (*O2* 5.5, *T-Mobile* 12, *Vodafone* 1.46). *Nordic Telecom* is not a real area operator like the other three operators. It focuses on 5G networks and coverage of dense agglomerations (it provides fixed wireless Internet). Nevertheless, you can buy its SIM card, which uses the national roaming of the joint *O2* and *T-Mobile* network.

Mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) is the most typical representative of virtual operators. It provides mobile services directly to end customers. We further divide MVNOs according to the degree of dependence on the host mobile operator.

Branded reseller MVNO (or Branded sales partner) is a type of virtual operator that is most dependent on its home MNO. The MVNO itself only provides sales support, branding and marketing. The contract is concluded directly with the host MNO. The MVNO is therefore only a reseller of MNO services, it does not itself define the services for customers. This type of virtual operator model is particularly suitable for companies with a large marketing force and a wide mass of potential clients (e.g. publishing houses). We can also meet this type of MVNO in the Czech Republic. Typical Branded resellers are, for example, *BLESKMobil* in the *O2 Czech Republic* network, *Mobil.CZ* at *T-Mobile Czech Republic* and *Studentfone* at *Vodafone Czech Republic*. The share of Branded resellers among virtual operators in Europe is roughly 24%.

A specific group among Branded resellers is business (mostly low-cost) brands of mobile operators. In this case, it is a form of Branded reseller, where marketing is done by the same company that provides access to the network and defines services for customers. In Czech conditions, it is *Kaktus* with *T-Mobile* and *Oskart* with *Vodafone Czech Republic*.

A medium MVNO is a type of virtual operator that, in contrast to a Branded reseller, defines the final services for the customer, and usually provides back office services itself. Network access and value-added services are provided to it either by the MNO or the Mobile Virtual Network Enabler (MVNE). This type is the most widespread in Europe and in the Czech Republic.

A full-fledged (or comprehensive) MVNO is a type of virtual operator that is the least dependent on its host mobile operator. It practically only buys access to the network from the MNO. In the Czech Republic, full-fledged MVNOs include, for example, *Mobil* from *ČEZ* (on the *O2* network), *Centropol Telecom* (on the *Vodafone Czech Republic* network) or *SAZKAmobil* (also on the *Vodafone Czech Republic* network).

A Mobile Virtual Network Enabler (MVNE) is a full-fledged virtual operator that buys access from an MNO and offers mobile services on a wholesale basis to mostly economically weaker parties interested in running an MVNO. The MVNE therefore creates one large entity from several to dozens of smaller entities and thus has better negotiating conditions with the MNO. It is also better for small MVNOs to purchase services from MVNEs due to lower financial demands. MVNE also provides additional services (e.g. billing) for customers for some partner MVNOs. Typical MVNEs in the Czech Republic are *GTS* (in the *T-Mobile Czech Republic* network) and *Quadruple* (in the *Vodafone Czech Republic* network).

A similar group of virtual operators are mobile virtual aggregators (MVNAs). The only differences are that they mostly function as mere resellers or offer fewer additional services than MVNEs and also that they can purchase services from MVNEs (in the Czech Republic, for example, *99 Mobile*, which purchases services from *GTS*). MVNAs often also operate retail services. The Czech MVNAs include in particular *99 Mobile* in the *T-Mobile Czech Republic* network and *DH Telecom* in the *Vodafone Czech Republic* network (at the same time, it operates retail services under the *OpenCall* brand).

Around 200 companies providing mobile services operate on the Czech market. However, the majority of the market is still controlled by the three main telephone companies, whose services are complemented by virtual operators. *T-mobile* remains the largest operator with 6.2 million mobile customers. In second place is *O2* with 5.8 million mobile clients and *Vodafone* in third place with 3.9 million.

Virtual operators, according to ČTÚ data, have a share of approximately 7% of the total number of SIM cards. Therefore, they are practically no competition for MNO operators, especially when using their infrastructure. MNO operators have a combined share of around 93% of the total SIM cards, and due to the stagnation of virtual operators, which remain stable at around 7%, they are no competition.

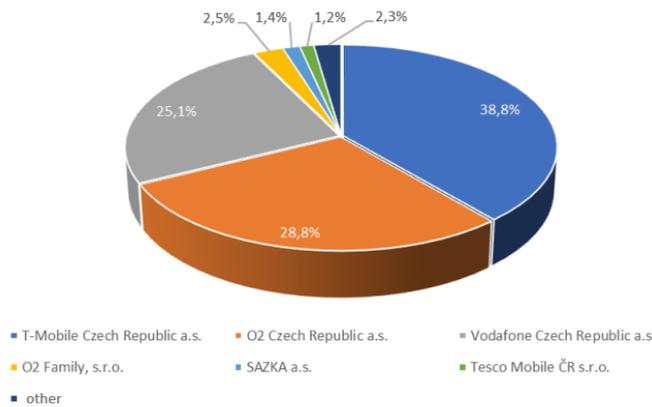


Figure 1: Market shares of mobile operators and virtual operators
 Source: own processing, 2022

There are 3 largest operators on the Czech market, who set the direction in the field of telecommunications: *O2*, *T-Mobile* and *Vodafone*. Each operator competes with each other, but *T-Mobile* remains at the forefront.

- *O2*: sales for 2020 were 39.8 billion, registered number of SIM cards in 2020 – 5.986 million, first place in the launch of 5G network, overall decrease in sent SMS, MMS – expansion of mobile data.
- *Vodafone*: sales for 2020 were 14.7 billion, connection with UPC – greater market power, functional 5G network, unlimited internet at a price of 599, over 4.5 million customers.
- *T-Mobile*: number of customers – 6.2 million, sales for 2020 was 28.3 billion, the number of customers with a mobile tariff.

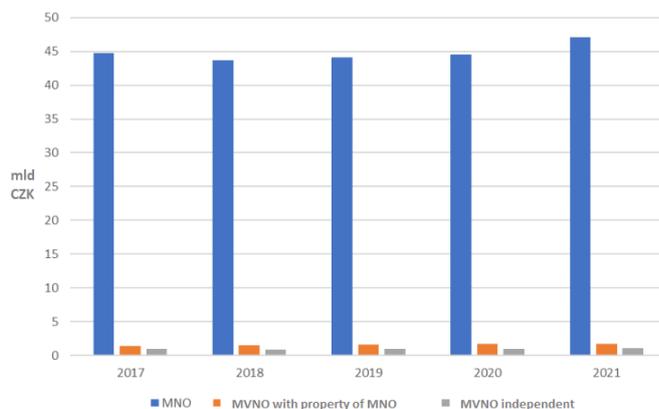


Figure 2: Development of total retail sales for mobile services by type of operator
 Source: own processing, 2022

O2 Family is the largest MVNO on the market with 3.59%, followed by *SAZKA a.s.* with 1.24% and *Tesco Mobile ČR s.r.o.* with 0.90%. The largest virtual operator *O2 Family* specializes primarily in family members of business customers of *O2*. A strong MVNO is *Tesco Mobile ČR, s.r.o.* The reason for the higher market share of this MVNO can be found primarily in the strong background, the strong position of the *Tesco* brand and its distribution chain. The fact that it specializes in the sale of pre-paid services, which are simpler than post-paid services in terms of the sales process, concluding subscription contracts, invoicing services and customer service, certainly plays a role in this.

Overall, the operator *T-Mobile* currently provides the most retail mobile services on the domestic market with 37.6%. Right behind it is *O2* with 28.8% and then *Vodafone* with 26.1%.

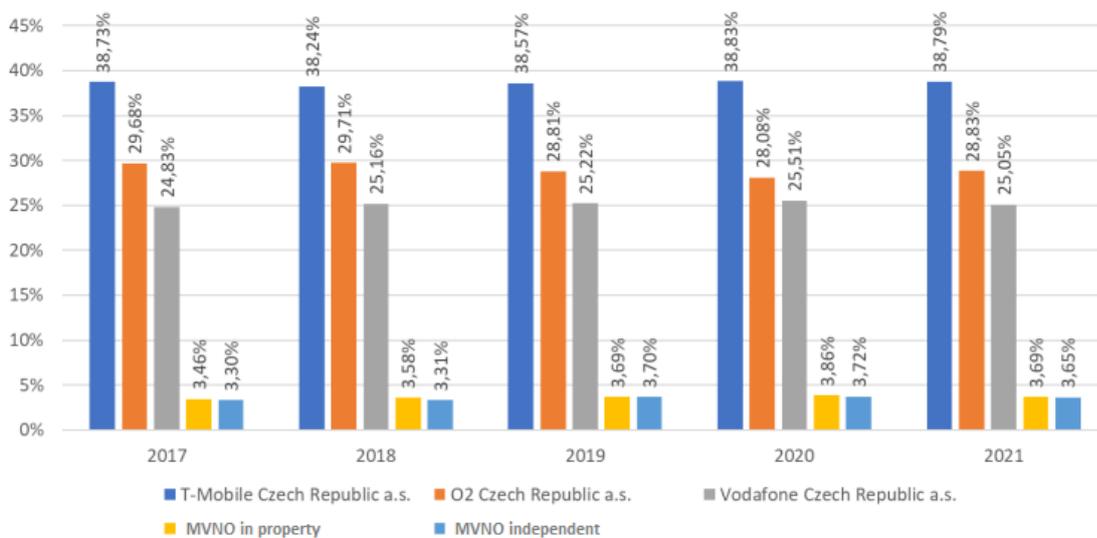


Figure 3: Share of mobile operators on the market in the Czech Republic
 Source: own processing, 2022

The current situation on the market speaks quite clearly. There are three main players: *T-Mobile*, *O2*, *Vodafone*, and they have essentially divided the entire market. At the end of 2020, these “big three” also bought frequencies in the 700 MHz band freed up by the transition of TV broadcasting to DVB-T2, as well as frequencies of 3.4 to 3.6 gigahertz, for almost 5.6 billion crowns, and according to experts, they took everything, what was needed. The opinion of *Natland’s* Chief Economist Petar Bartoná is also interesting, stating that it was probably unrealistic to expect a new operator to enter the main segment. Building a network is a hugely demanding investment, both financially and in time. And the very existence of this auction shows that technologies are developing faster than a new operator could build the infrastructure for one stage of development. The relatively small size of the Czech market also hinders greater interest from investors. It is strange how far the telecommunications markets in Europe are still divided along national borders, despite the principle of the single market.

The total number of active SIM cards is constantly growing. More and more customers prefer a “flat rate”, the number of prepaid cards, on the contrary, is decreasing. In the Czech Republic at the end of 2021, there were approx. 16 million active SIM cards, which is an annual increase compared to 2020 by roughly 1 million SIM cards.

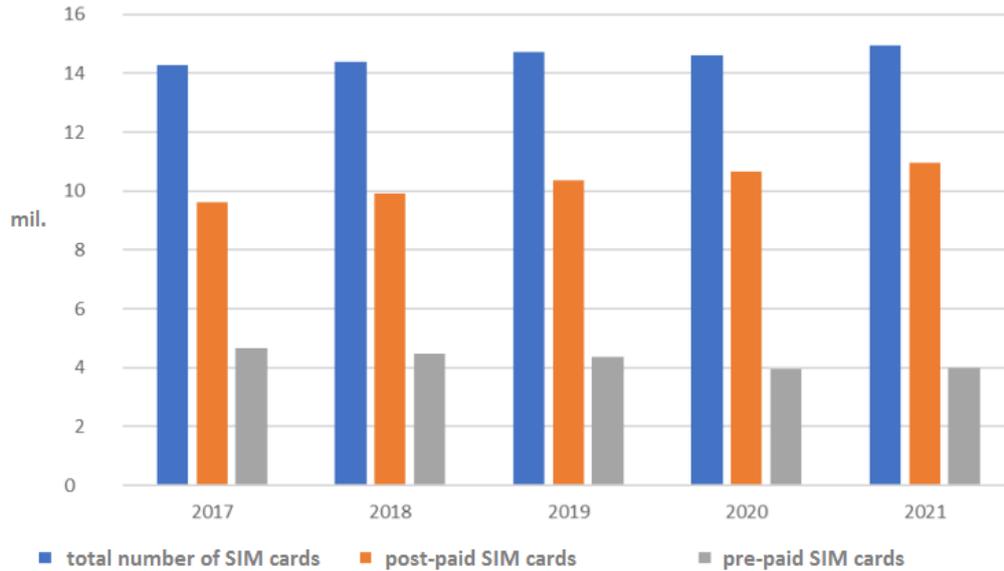


Figure 4: Development of the number of active SIM cards
 Source: own processing, 2022

From the point of view of mobile services, the market for mobile data services continues to be in the forefront. Last year, there was again a noticeable increase in the number of active SIM cards using the Internet service in mobile phones. Compared to 2018, this increased by roughly 1 million to a value of approximately 9.5 million.

The growth is the result of the further development of LTE and 5G networks, the easy availability of suitable end devices (among other things, in certain cases it is also possible to use discounts from mobile service providers for end devices) and the development and attractiveness of content that customers can consume on their mobile devices .

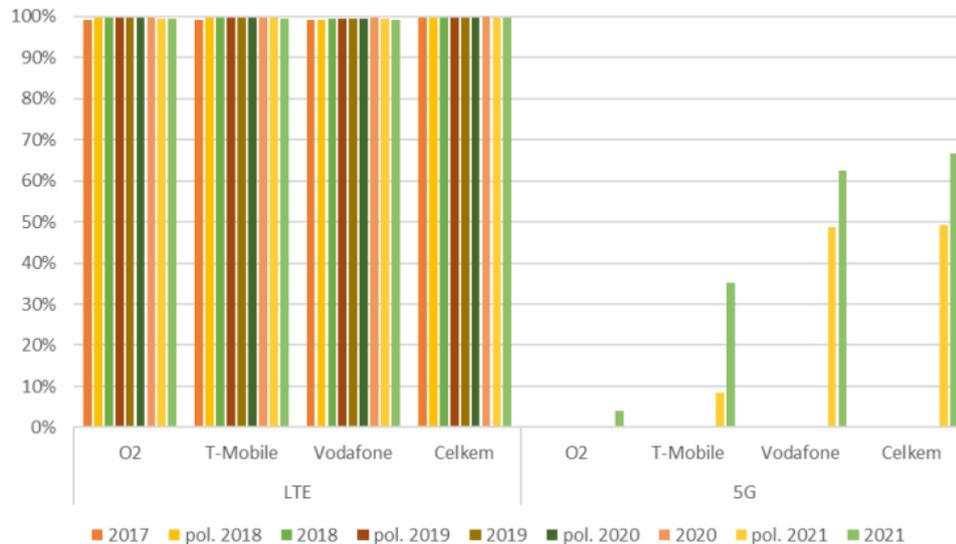


Figure 5: Development of population coverage with LTE and 5G networks
 Source: own processing, 2022

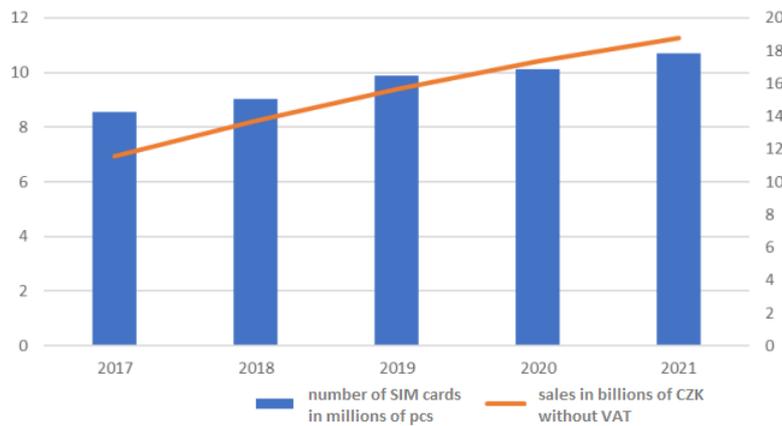


Figure 6: Development of the number of SIM cards used for mobile Internet access and revenues for these services
Source: own processing, 2022

It is not unusual for customers to change their operator. Every year, for the last 7 years, at least 400,000 phone numbers change their operator. This is often the only way to get a lower price, especially thanks to the price policy that the three main operators have basically the same.

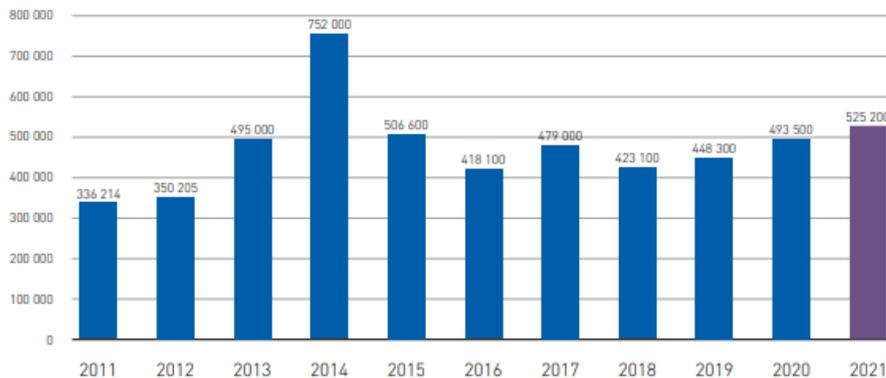


Figure 7: Development of the number of transferred telephone numbers
Source: own processing, 2022

According to *cable.co.uk*, as of 5/02/2021, the Czech Republic has the 210th cheapest data in the world (that is, out of 230 countries surveyed, it is the 20th most expensive in this regard) and that is one of the things that another operator on could clearly change the market.

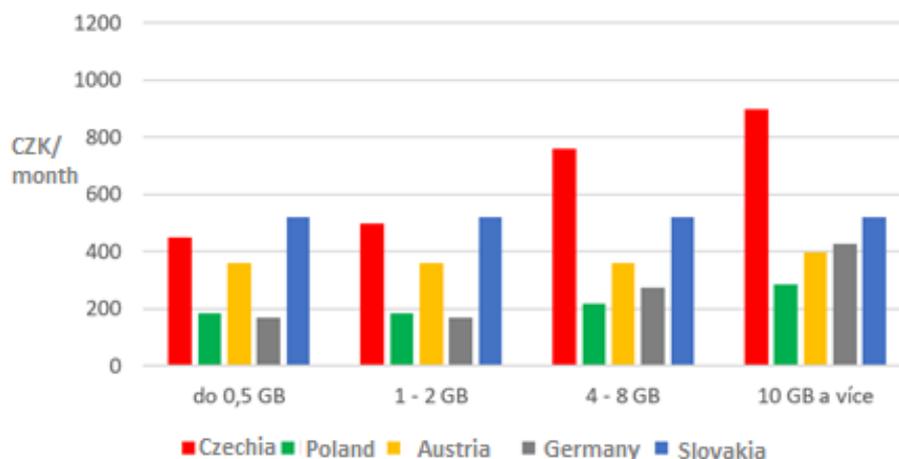


Figure 8: Comparison of mobile data prices in selected countries
Source: own processing, 2022

Thanks to the current situation in the world, basically all activities have moved to the online environment. All work events have similarly moved to the online world. Home office, that's how the life of most employed people in a "classic" office job could be simply summed up. The area of students, including university students, can also be characterized in an identical way.

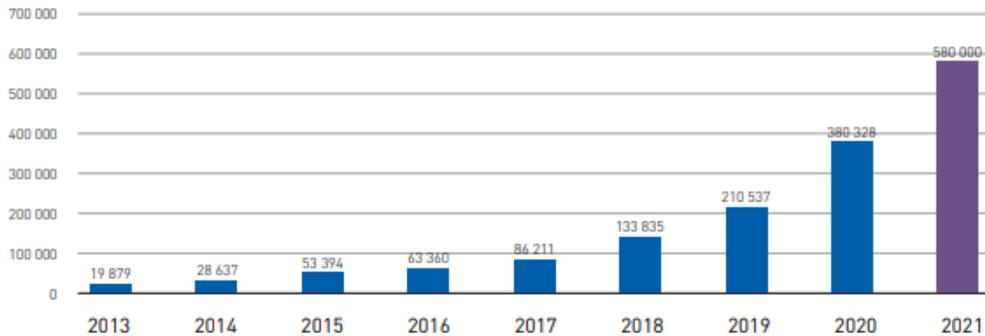


Figure 9: Development of the volume of transferred data in TB
 Source: own processing, 2022

Thanks to this, not only mobile, but generally every Internet connection was used so much more.

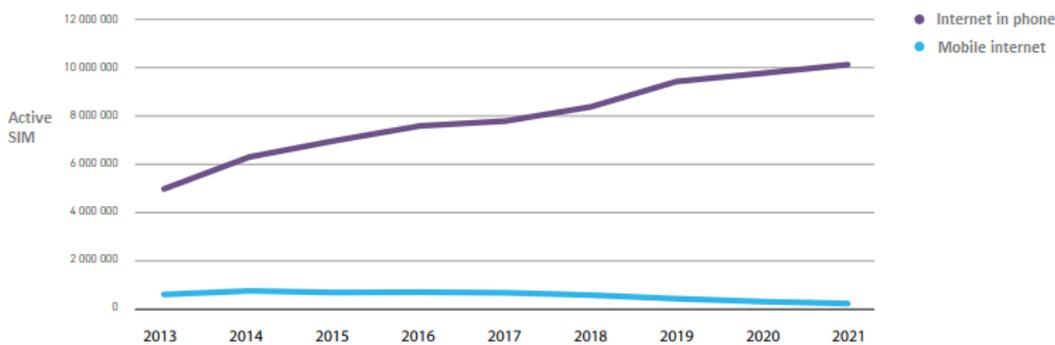


Figure 10: Development of the number of active SIM cards for Internet in mobile and Mobile Internet
 Source: own processing, 2022

A significant trend in the services provided by mobile operators is the continuous decrease in the price per minute called. This is one of the indicators of the development of mobile communications in general and therefore the shift of emphasis to data services.

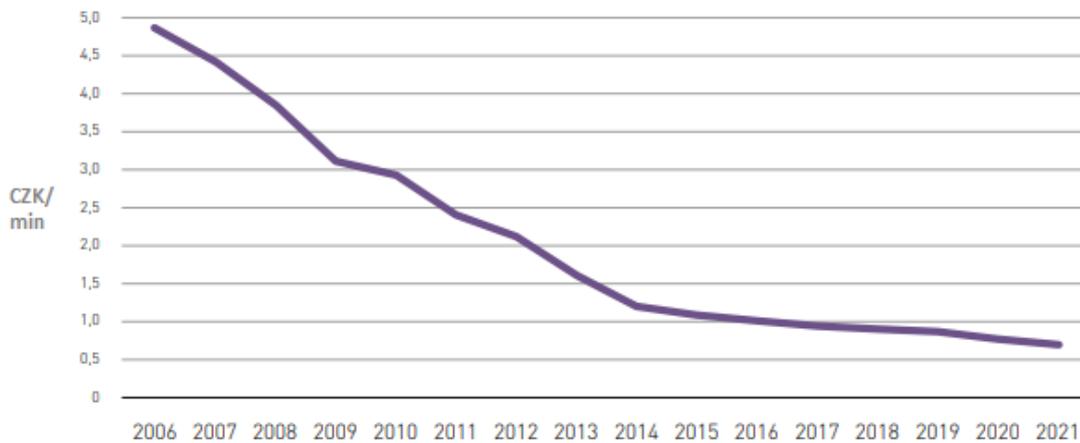


Figure 11: Development of the average price per minute called
 Source: own processing, 2022

We mentioned an important trend, which is the shift between the individual services provided by mobile operators, and we mentioned the trend of the shift to data services. The following graph shows the development of the price for 1 MB of data.

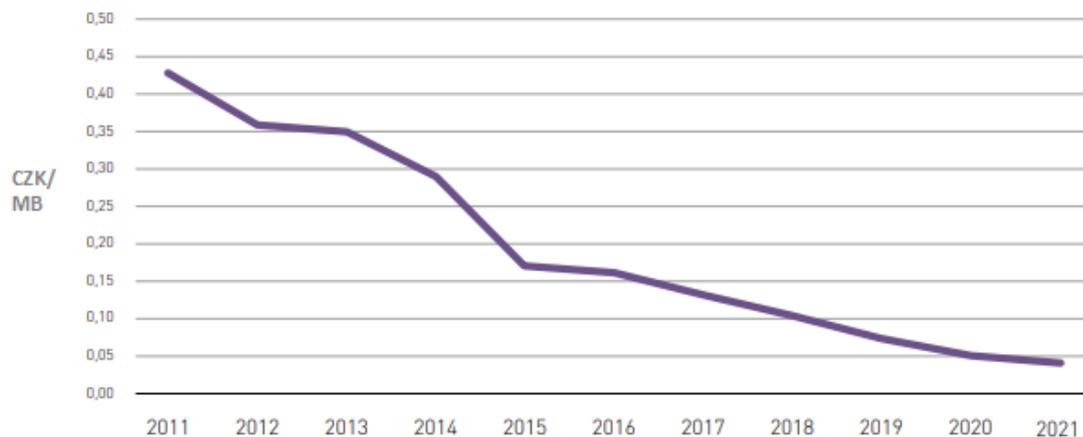


Figure 12: Development of the average price for 1 MB of data
Source: own processing, 2022

Last year, people in the Czech Republic used 25.7 billion minutes from mobile phones within the country, which is 3.7 billion more than in 2020. On the other hand, the number of minutes used for international calls fell by 200 million year-on-year to around 1.4 billion. The reason was apparently limited travel abroad due to the epidemic of the disease COVID-19. This follows from information published by the *Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ)*. In total, last year marked by the spread of the coronavirus, more than 27 billion minutes were used in the Czech Republic from the mobile network, almost 3.5 billion more than in 2020.

According to statistics, the number of people using tariff services in the Czech Republic is gradually increasing. Last year, 10.7 million active tariff SIM cards were registered, five years earlier there were 1.5 million fewer. In addition, the number of prepaid SIM cards has dropped by almost a million to less than four million since then.

Of the other data published by the *Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ)* in October 2021, the following are particularly important in relation to generation Z:

Over 97% of Czechs over the age of 16 use a mobile phone:

- 16-24 years: 99% smartphones,
- 55-64 years: 60% smartphones,
- 75 and over: 8% smartphones.

65% of people use their mobile phone to access the Internet (2019):

- 16-24 years: 97%,
- 55-64 years: 53%,
- 75 and over: 3%,
- 18% of people only connect via Wi-Fi,
- 3% of people connect only via mobile data,
- 4/5 people use both data and Wi-Fi,
- Wi-Fi only: disabled pensioners (31%), seniors (38%),
- both types of connection: persons aged 16-24 (85%) and 25-34 (86%), most often university educated (87%).

In 2020, the *Czech Telecommunications Authority* (ČTÚ) held an auction of frequencies for the construction of fast fifth-generation mobile networks. The winning bidders in the main 700 MHz band were *O2*, *T-Mobile* and *Vodafone*. In other words, this means that there will not be a fourth operator in the Czech Republic yet. The auction brought the Czech Republic almost 5.6 billion crowns, while the total starting bid was only 5.4 billion crowns.

ČTÚ further stated that the sheer number of virtual operators on the market, regardless of the assessment of their ability to bring new offers to customers, is definitely not indicative and is therefore to some extent only an apparent sign of the competitive environment.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the analysis of data obtained from secondary research, we conclude that the mobile communications market in the Czech Republic is not fully competitive. The results of the research show that the portfolios and business strategies of individual operators in the Czech Republic are very similar. The structure of today's market in the Czech Republic clearly fulfills the definition of an oligopoly with high mutual decision-making dependence. Operators tend to "trump" each other and mimic each other. The scope and prices of the operators' basic services do not differ except for minor differences. The companies, however, do not take their price lists as binding and usually prepare an individual offer for the client. Today's market even shows signs of a cartel, which all operators have unequivocally rejected. However, the *Czech Telecommunications Authority* stated in its latest analysis that the mobile market in the Czech Republic is not fully competitive because operators act in so-called tacit agreement. According to the office, the fact that the competition takes place at non-public discounts, and not across the board at list prices, contributes to this.

Marketing, marketing strategy and marketing mix is a dynamic field that reflects the development of the market, consumers, technology development and other key factors. For this reason, the classic 4P marketing mix is no longer completely sufficient, which is why we encounter its expansion to 6P, 8P, and thus 9P. The new components of the marketing mix – people, processes, physical evidence, productivity and packaging – are the ones that confirm the dynamics of today's world. Their importance continues to grow. For the marketing mix as a whole, we can also assume further development and thus the possible expansion of the P model by other components.

The focus is on the consumer and his needs, so the 4C model is more complex than the 4P model, which is the company's point of view. The 4C model is the consumer's point of view, and understanding this is a key factor for an effective marketing strategy for a company operating in the market.

Marketing is a discipline whose role in the achievement of global corporate strategies is continuously growing, and therefore it can also be assumed that marketing and marketing management will be key elements for the success of every company operating on the market.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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TARGET GROUPS IN REGIONAL MARKETING

Lenka Labudová

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present the opportunity for using Value Proposition Canvas model in region conditions. Theoretical part of the paper is focused on target groups, which are the most often mentioned in literature focused on regional development, regional marketing and its characteristics. In the next part the Value Proposition Canvas Model is described - its main usage and all parts. This model is primarily used as part of the more complex Business Model Canvas model and serves to approach customers and target groups in the context of their activities and problems, which the company follows up with an offer. In the framework of this contribution, in the practical part, this model is implemented for a specific target group and elaborated from its perspective and from the point of view of the city offer. There is a summary at the end of the post.

Key words

Business Model. City. Regional Marketing. Target Group.

1 Target Groups and Basic Terms in Regional Marketing

Region

There is no one definition for the term region, as the very definition of this term is possible from the various point of view in different scientific disciplines, for example geography, politics, sociology or economics. From the perspective of geographical division, it is a limited part of the territory characterized by homogeneous characteristics, such as natural conditions, composition of the population, a diversified economic base, significant integrity of intra-regional ties, and it also abounds in its characteristic culture. From a political point of view, we understand the term region as a political territory that, based on historical contexts, was divided and controlled by a political power. This approach was accepted until the 19th century. The current definition of a region according to the Regional Development Support Act reads: *“a region is a territorial unit defined according to the classification of statistical territorial units.”*¹ We can therefore understand it as an area defined by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for the purpose of producing regional policy and development with the help of funds, streamlining economic potential and reduction of disparities between regions. The sociological point of view brings a view of the region as a territorial unit where citizens satisfy their life needs. Among them we include education, housing, health insurance or employment.²

Regional Marketing

Marketing of regions is a significant element strengthening the economy, image and identity of a given location. Marketing tools are thus used to create sustainable, competitively advantageous regions. Author Búšik understands regional marketing as a *“complex and very flexible set of activities. It is also a certain system of thinking, perception and access to a wide range of information with the aim of organizing the internal environment (region) in such a way as to satisfy the needs of customers, purchasing power, financial, material resources and production ability to orient customers to the specified products.”*³

¹ Zákon č. 539/2008 Z.z. o podpore regionálneho rozvoja.

² ZUBRICZKÝ, G.: Regionálne členenie Slovenska z pohľadu jeho rozvoja. In LAUKO, V.: *Regionálne dimenzie Slovenska*. Bratislava : UK, 2014, p. 205.

³ BÚŠIK, J.: *Regionálny manažment a marketing*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2010, p. 95.

The character of the proposed marketing concepts for municipalities, districts, cities, regions or states differs considerably in many cases, even if the same goal and purpose of these activities are pursued. From the point of view of management in marketing, at the level of regions, it is assumed that they will be successful in the long term only if they are managed in a market-oriented way, with the fact that the needs of citizens are met. This management must include thorough planning, control and monitoring of the region's relationship with its market partners. The same author further perceives regional marketing as a general concept that can express the use of all marketing tools for a given area. The use of marketing tools can of course have special characteristics, depending on who is the target group of our marketing activities - investors, consumers, visitors, entrepreneurs, citizens, potential citizens, students, commuters, tourists.⁴

Citizens

A person who has civil and political rights in the territory is considered to be a citizen of the state, and is also considered to be a citizen. A citizen is a person who is part of the political and organized community to which he belongs. Depending on which country they are in, they will have more or less rights and freedoms. In democratic countries, the number of political rights and civil liberties available to a citizen is (or should be) maximum.

Given that citizens are the holders of rights and that illegal immigrants do not have these rights or part of them, all people who inhabit a state can be considered citizens. But only for natives, for those who have a nationality or are not legal immigrants.

The citizens themselves can be divided into different subgroups, their diversity depends on the territory and region.⁵

Potential Citizens

This group is presented by people who could become citizens of the region. The region is attractive to them for various reasons, depending on its offer. They have the opportunity to find work there, or they already have it, they have family members there, better social amenities, better infrastructure, transport, accessibility, equipment and other services for which they are willing to give up their current residence.

City Employees

City employees present a separate target group, as they are representatives of the city's service providers, but at the same time they are residents, or a commuting group, that is, they also use these services. But they have the possibility of internal insight and the possibility of solving problems.

Tourists/Visitors

Tourist is anyone who travels to places other than the one in which is his habitual residence, outside of their everyday environment, for a period of at least one night but not more than one year and whose usual purpose is different from the exercise of any remunerated activity in the place to which he goes.⁶ Just as the travel industry and behavior of travelers have changed, so has the way we market tourism products and services. And this is where tourism marketing

⁴ MANSCHWETUS, U.: *Regional Marketing. Marketing als Instrument der Wirtschaftsentwicklung*. Berlin : Springer – Verlag, 2013, p. 23.

⁵ ECONOMY-PEDIA.: *Občan*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://sk.economy-pedia.com/11032870-citizen>>.

⁶ IGI-GLOBAL.: *What Is Tourist*. [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/a-business-model-for-accessible-tourism/30292>>.

comes into play. In a nutshell, Tourism Marketing is a marketing strategy that uses specific marketing plan and techniques to promote touristic products and services such as destinations, hotels and transport services, etc.⁷

Visitor is a subject of tourism, bearer of demand for tourism, i.e. anyone who satisfies his needs while traveling and staying outside his place of permanent residence by consuming tourism goods. According to the WTO (1991), it is a passenger, included in tourism statistics, i.e. a person who travels for a temporary period to a place other than their usual place of residence, while the main purpose of the trip is other than performing a gainful activity in the visited place. A tourist is a visitor who spends the night at least once in the visited place. According to the WTO, in domestic tourism, it is a resident whose trip includes at least one overnight stay, but no longer than six months. In foreign tourism, this is a visitor whose trip to another country includes at least one overnight stay, but does not last longer than one year. From the point of view of the length of stay, we distinguish between a vacationer and a tourist who stays for a short time in the visited place.⁸

Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs bring economic strength to the territory. Taxes and fees are paid to the budgets of the local self-government from the business activities carried out. In this way, they directly affect the financial resources of the self-government. Entrepreneurs act as employers in relation to citizens. Requirements for the qualifications and knowledge of employees can even affect the character of the city. On the other hand, entrepreneurs offer their production of goods and services, so that the local government can benefit from business activities and build its image on them. The municipality is therefore interested in locating entrepreneurs in its territory.

Other target groups can be students commuting to the given territories for the purpose of studying, people commuting to the region for work, owners of recreational cottages and others.

Target Groups Analysis

A target market analysis is an assessment of how your product or service fits into a specific market and where it will gain the most traction with customers. Target market analyses help businesses establish strategies for effective marketing and sales techniques. A company's target market is its core customer base or the demographics of customers most likely to buy its product or service. A target market analysis provides a high-level perspective of the overall business field and usually outlines opportunities and restraining factors for companies hoping to enter that market.⁹

In the next chapter, we will look at method of getting to know the target group at which we aim our activities and try to understand it more closely.

⁷ KULAKOVA, G.: *What Is Hospitality and Tourism Marketing?* [online]. [2022-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.amara-marketing.com/travel-blog/what-is-hospitality-and-tourism-marketing>>

⁸ ŠEVČÍK, M.: *Základy rozvoja cestovného ruchu.* [online]. [2022-11-14]. Available at: <<http://www.tik.sk/projekty/vidiecky-turizmus-a-agroturizmus/ikolo/zaklady-rozvoja-cestovneho-ruchu/>>.

⁹ INDEED.: *Target Market Analysis.* [online]. [2022-11-16]. Available at: <<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/target-market-analysis>>.

2 Methodology

The tool used in customer and target group analysis is called Value Proposition Canvas. Value Proposition Canvas is a business model tool that helps company make sure that a product or service is positioned around customers' values and needs. The tool has been created by Alexander Osterwalder, Yves Pigneur, and Alan Smith. The same authors of the Business Model Canvas, aiming to map the value perceived by customers. The primary purpose is, therefore, to create a fit between the product and market. In the case of regional marketing, the product is considered to be everything that the given territory offers to the target groups that figure in it. In this case, customers or consumers are the given target groups and their representatives

The advantages of using the Value Proposition Canvas:

- Understanding the customer, with their needs and expectations;
- Developing a product in accordance with what your customer need and want;
- Comparing a product you already have with the user's need;
- Finding your product-market fit;
- Avoiding producing something nobody wants,
- Saving time and money.¹⁰

The canvas is divided into two sides: on the right side, it's the Client Profile. And that is divided into Jobs-to-be-done, Pains, and Gains. On the left side, it's the Value Proposition, also subdivided into three: Products & Services, Gain Creators, and Pain Relievers.



Figure 1: Value proposition Canvas

Source: PEREIRA, D.: *What Is the Value Proposition Canvas*. [online]. [2022-11 20]. Available at: <<https://businessmodelanalyst.com/value-proposition-canvas/>>.

As is mentioned above the model is divided into 2 main parts, left part represent a company or city. The right side represent a target group.

Jobs-to-be-done

Jobs describe an important issue customers are trying to solve in their work or in their lives. It could be the tasks they are trying to perform and complete, the problems they are trying to solve, or the needs they are trying to satisfy. Jobs then represent everything that has to be done for specific target groups, activities and responsibilities they have. Each target group has of course its specific jobs, there is difference between single manager in the bank; woman in their 30's on maternity leave or retired couple. This includes: Functional jobs; Social jobs; Emotional jobs; Supporting jobs.

¹⁰ PEREIRA, D.: *What Is the Value Proposition Canvas*. [online]. [2022-11 20]. Available at: <<https://businessmodelanalyst.com/value-proposition-canvas/>>.

Pains

Pains describe anything that annoys your customers before, during, and after getting a job done. This could be undesired costs and situations, negative emotions, or risks. During the time when customers are trying to achieve their jobs (jobs-to-be-done) they can meet a lot of problems which make situation and activities more difficult. Pains can be functional (these solutions don't work for me), social (I do not feel comfortable doing this), emotional (I feel uneasiness every time I do this), or ancillary (it's annoying to go to the store in person).

Gains

Gains describe the outcomes and benefits your customers require, expect, desire or would be surprised by. This includes functional utility, social gains, positive emotions, and cost savings. This attribute is as the previous one connected with jobs-to-be-done and represent savings – mostly time savings, cost savings that can help the customer to get their job done. We can also ask question – What would make our customers happier or more satisfied during this journey?

Products and Services

This is a list of all the products and services a value proposition is built around. It represents a bundle of products and services that help your customers get either a functional, social, or emotional job done, or helps them satisfy basic needs. This element is whatever company or region offer to the current customers or potential customers. Main role of the products and services is help to accomplish the customer jobs-to-be-done.

Gains Creators

Gain Creators describe how your products and services create customer gains. They explicitly outline how you intend to create benefits that your customer expects, desires or would be surprised by, including functional utility, social gains, positive emotions, and cost savings. Involve how the product/service offers the customer added value, what are the benefits your product brings, and if your customer's wishes and expectations are reached. Gains creators meet the gains in the customer part of the model.

Pains Relievers

Pain relievers describe how products and services alleviate specific customer pains. They explicitly outline how you intend to eliminate or reduce some of the pains that annoy your customers before, while, and after they are trying to get a job done. It is very important to understand how deeply product/service help customers with their pains.¹¹

3 Results

We will work on the value proposition canvas in more detail on example of a target group located in the territory of the city of Trnava, Slovakia. The attributes and factors are fictional in this case and its purpose is to demonstrate using this model in practice.

Target group – City citizens – Young people (25-35 years old) who moved into the city mainly for job

¹¹ STRATEGYZER: *Using Our Tools, Canvases and Methods*. [online]. [2022-11-24]. Available at: <<https://strategyzer.uservoice.com/knowledgebase/topics/113454-using-our-tools-canvas-methods>>.

The main jobs-to-done for this target group are:

Have a job/Attend to job
Building career
Have a social life / Meeting with friends
Stay in contact with family
Have hobbies
Stay active

The main gains for this target group are:

Get to and from job easily
Have job opportunities which can help building career
Have an opportunity to meet with friends at various places
Visit the family whenever they want
Possibility to choose from various activities during free time and change them

Pains

Favourite restaurant is closed
During the night Don't feel safe in the city
Have only few places (restaurants, bars) to choose from
Poor infrastructure (including public transport)
Expensive living and prices

Products/services

Premises for new businesses (in shopping centers, in new built blocks, in industry part of the city)
Renovation of the city centre
Building the bicycle paths
Strengthened public transport
E-bikes and E-scooters for rent
Building the new city blocks (flats for rents)
Renovation of the sport centre in the city
Building new and renovating the actual parks
Infrastructure connecting the surrounded cities
Capital city with airport is 50 km far

Gains creators

There are several options in the city for choosing - cafes, restaurants, bars that survived the corona crisis and kept a steady clientele, and new ones are opening
The first big shopping center - Shopping center - City Arena
Possibility to rent scooters and e-bikes for a reasonable price through the application
Built cycle paths connect strategic points of the city
The renovated sports center offers various sports activities - running, cycling, outdoor gym, playgrounds (basketball, volleyball, football)
Strengthened public transport on weekdays

Pains relievers

Possibility to strengthen patrols during weekends and at night (possible help of volunteers)
Efforts and activities to attract more entrepreneurs to the region
Building of rental apartments under the auspices of the city

4 Conclusion

The possibility to use and transform tools and methods that serve to streamline and improve the relationship with the customer for regional purposes, represents for the city new possibilities and ways to better understand the people operating in the given territory. Globalization has connected the world, more than ever before it is easier to change the place of study, living, business, work. People are connected by technology, and online contact can be an alternative to daily personal communication when, for example, moving to another area. Therefore, people and primarily the younger generation have generally stopped being fixed in one place, and the possibilities of flexibility are much more attractive to them. The possibility of comparing different cities and locations raised a higher level of competition between cities. In addition to basic needs and requirements, people have much more complex requirements for the place they choose for study, life, work or recreation. The task of the cities is and will be to convince them that they have made the right choice and the city will try to meet their demands as much as possible. But this is not possible without thoroughly knowing what the given target group really wants and needs and what it lacks. Customer analysis in the business sphere is a common practice without which marketing and innovation activities would not work properly. Therefore, they offer the possibility to use these activities for the regions as well and to get to know better the groups of people - target groups that operate in the given region and to try to carry communication and contact with them in the spirit of empathy and offering possibilities for a better future.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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ONLINE SHOPPING, SERVICES AND ADVERTISING IN THE POST-COVID CHANGES

Jana Přikrylová, Ladislav Pátik

Abstract:

Today's world is overwhelmed with advertising for consumers. We see it on TV, on the computer, on mobile phones, on public transport and basically at every step. People are reconciled to this aspect of everyday life and often do not perceive the supported product as the manufacturers would like to. Trends are changing in every segment of our daily lives, and in the world of advertising, with the advent of new technologies and possibilities, trends are changing as well. Consumers need to know what they are buying and trust the brand. Trust is hard to buy by advertising on TV, banners, or targeted advertising on social networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram* and others. Consumer trust is difficult to build. The aim of this study is to define the current form of online marketing and characterize its individual tools. We focus on online services and shopping. By analyzing literature and *Kantar* research studies, deduction and synthesis to subsequently detect key changes in online marketing, online advertising, online shopping and services in post-covid era.

Key words:

Consumer Behavior. Marketing. Marketing Communications. Marketing Research. Shopping. Social Networks. Tools of Marketing Communications.

1 Introduction

“If your business is not on the internet, then your business will be out of business.”¹
- Bill Gates

Classical advertising methods lose their effectiveness. One of the causes is the negative attitude towards classic advertising due to its oversaturation, and also from the knowledge and habits of the population about the persuasive goals of advertising. But online marketing is changing any advertising strategy. Advertisers have the opportunity to present their advertising to the target group accurately, 24/7 – 24 hours and 7 days a week, non-stop. Online advertising is also constantly developing with the advent of new technologies and offers interactive opportunities to communicate with the target group on both sides. With good knowledge and art of working with online advertising, such a method of advertising is more effective and economically advantageous than traditional methods of advertising such as billboards or TV spots.²

1.1 Definitions

“Online marketing is communication carried out through electronic devices, namely the Internet or a mobile phone. It is based on the estimation of the behaviour and perception of the target group of consumers and, on the basis of these factors, it seeks the most effective methods to bring Internet or mobile phone users to companies' websites, persuade them to make a purchase or other target action. In the online world, all marketing communication becomes direct because it allows for an immediate response from the user.”³

¹ MUDDAPPALAVAR, G.: *“If Your Business Is Not on the Internet, Then Your Business Will Be Out of Business.”* - Bill Gates. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://medium.com/@adsturead/if-your-business-is-not-on-the-internet-then-your-business-will-be-out-of-business-bill-gates-5c8892811638>>.

² SVĚTLÍK, J.: *Marketingové komunikace*. Ostrava : VŠPP, 2016, p. 60.

³ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 113.

As in traditional forms of advertising communication, it is also in this form to satisfy customer needs and wishes, and to build loyalty by various digital marketing tools. The basic strategy of online marketing is not to force advertising on customers, but to get their attention through original and beneficial content and bring them to a targeted website. Compared to offline marketing, where the usual goal is to explain the benefits of the product and its introduction; online marketing is aimed at mutual communication with the customer audience, namely education, entertainment and engagement. The effort is to differentiate from the competition; to offer something different and original so that customers are interested in the brand/company by themselves.⁴

The fundamental element of this strategy is to offer the target group truly unique and attractive content that is both interesting and useful to them. Such content arouses the visitor's interest in the website and along with it creates a positive attitude towards the source of the content (brand/company). However, the content must be appropriately delivered to the target group, which is why this strategy is intertwined with all possible online marketing tools, such as: browser search optimization (SEO), paid advertising (PPC), content marketing (e.g. blogs), email marketing, PR and social media. All these instruments must work in a coordinated manner, otherwise the strategy will become ineffective.

The goal of such a strategy is conversion – a desired action from the company's point of view, which is carried out by a visitor/potential customer and brings a certain benefit to society. Conversion does not only mean the sale of a product or service, conversion can be an expression of opinion, filling in a questionnaire, subscribing to social networks or newsletters or registering in the Members Area. However, the basis for the successful implementation of this strategy is measurement.

1.2 Online Marketing Tools

SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO) aims to attract as much traffic to your website as possible by bringing it to the top of search engine results like *Google*, *Yahoo* or *Bing*. SEOs are used by companies and individuals to maximize the visibility of their websites and content to increase traffic and therefore business. Companies often hire SEO specialists to implement strategies that support organic traffic. Organic traffic comes to the web naturally and not as a result of paid search efforts like paid advertising per click (PPC), from a variety of searches, including image search, video search, academic search, and news search.⁵

The higher the quality of the content on the website, the higher the website will be in search engines, which will attract a greater number of potential customers. Higher quality content means the right keywords that are well combined with the content of the page, high-quality and described images and videos so that users can find them when searching, and user-friendly design.⁶

⁴ SVĚTLÍK, J.: *Marketingové komunikace*. Ostrava : VŠPP, 2016, p. 52.

⁵ *Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Definition*. Investopedia: *Sharper Insight, Better Investing*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<http://web.archive.org/web/20210730103125/https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/search-engine-optimization.asp>>.

⁶ *What Is SEO and How Does SEO Work? Learn SEO in This Starter Guide*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://www.webfx.com/internet-marketing/how-SEO-works.html>>.

PPC

PPC stands for pay-per-click, which is paid advertising per click. There are different types of PPC ads, but one of the most common types is paid search advertising. These ads appear when people search for things online using a search engine like *Google*; especially when they are doing a commercial search. This can be anything from mobile search (someone searching for “pizza at my place” on their phone) to searching for local services (someone looking for a nearer dentist), to someone buying a gift (“Mother’s Day flowers”) or enterprise software. All of these searches run pay-per-click ads. In pay-per-click advertising, businesses that run ads are only charged when a user actually clicks on their ad, hence the name “pay-per-click”. Other forms of PPC advertising include image advertising (usually displaying banner ads) and remarketing.

In order for ads to appear alongside search engine results (commonly referred to as a search results page, or SERP), advertisers simply cannot pay more to ensure that their ads appear more intensely than competitors’ ads. Instead, ads are subject to an ad auction, a completely automated process used by *Google* and other major search engines to determine the relevance and validity of the ads that appear on their SERPs.⁷

E-mail Marketing

E-mail marketing is a marketing channel (a form of direct marketing) that uses email to promote business products or services. Email marketing can help inform customers about the latest items or offers by being fully automated through software such as Mail Chimp. It can also play a key role in the marketing strategy in generating leads, brand awareness, building relationships, or keeping customers in touch between purchases through different types of marketing emails. Nowadays, however, email marketing is only beneficial when company communicates with a customer who has already contacted its brand; otherwise most people perceive email marketing as spam or annoying.⁸ In some countries, the recipient must opt-in.

Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is an online sales tactic that allows a product owner to increase sales by allowing others to target the same audience, “affiliate partners”, to earn commission by recommending a product to others. At the same time, it allows affiliates to make money selling products without creating their own products.

Simply put, affiliate marketing involves recommending a product or service by sharing it on a blog, social media platforms, or website. The affiliate receives a commission every time someone makes a purchase through a unique link associated with their referral.⁹

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is a form of online marketing that uses social media profiles as a marketing tool. The goal of SMM is to produce content that users consume and share with their profiles to help the company increase brand recognition and expand customer reach. The main social networking platforms (at the moment) include *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, *Pinterest*, *YouTube*, and *Snapchat*. According to marketing agency *Lyft*, the SMM is divided into two parts – social media management (content creation) and paid advertising.

⁷ *Pay-Per-Click Advertising: What Is PPC Advertising*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://www.wordstream.com/pay-per-click-advertising>>.

⁸ *Email Marketing Definition – What is Email Marketing?* [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/email-marketing/>>.

⁹ IYER, S.: *Affiliate Marketing: How to Turn Product Recommendations Into Passive Income*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://www.shopify.in/blog/affiliate-marketing>>.

Influencer Marketing

“Influencer marketing is the process of identifying, researching, engaging and supporting the people who create high-impact conversations with your customers.”¹⁰ Influencer marketing is the use of influencers to advertise your product or service. The term influencer is short for social media influencer. Influencers are de facto social media celebrities who create inspirational and highly engaging content in categories ranging from beauty to fashion, travel, food, and lifestyle. Influencers communicate with their audience daily, from whom they gain trust and authority, due to which they influence their decisions and behavior. Through influencer marketing, brands can expand their reach in targeted markets.¹¹

1.3 Online Shopping for Products and Services

The previous part of the text dealt with online marketing communication with an effort to cover the range of typical activities. And since the aim of communication activities is to influence the behavior of customers and lead them to purchase, in the following text we will deal with the decision-making process and the context of its transformations in a crisis situation.

Customer decision-making process (Figure 1) was modified not in its essence, but in the environment in which it took place and takes place.



Figure 1: Decision-making process

Source: Own proceedings based on KOTLER, P. T., ARMSTRONG, G.: *Principles of Marketing*. Harlow : Pearson, 2017, p. 175.

The global pandemic has transformed the world and, in addition to globalization trends that are not new, has brought dramatic changes, respectively, forced the world to dramatic changes in purchasing behavior.¹² The online store is nothing new, but we want to point out the changes that have taken place and look at their “durability” based on research that we could use and process.

In the B2C market, customers use the Internet in a wide range of shopping-related activities. They are usually interested in the characteristics of products and services and monitor their prices. To evaluate the offers, or create and evaluate alternatives, they then use various graders. Especially at this stage, contact with marketing online communication also takes place, the forms and manifestations of which are indicated in the previous section of this article.¹³ Undoubtedly, potential consumers are affected by online advertising there. But not only by advertising, because social networks, influencers and other subjects communicate alongside purely corporate communication. At the end of this phase of the decision-making process, the customer searches for an e-shop, usually recommended. This is where the business transaction takes place. After detailed selection of the product and its features, a decision is made on the

¹⁰ *Influencer Marketing 101: Influencer Marketing*. [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://www.traackr.com/resources/influencer-marketing#:~:text=Influencer%20marketing%20is%20the%20process,described%20in%20the%20Privacy%20Policy.%20>>.

¹¹ SHERMAN: *What Is Social Media Marketing?* [online]. [2022-11-08]. Available at: <<https://www.lyfemarketing.com/blog/what-is-social-media-marketing/>>.

¹² JADERNÁ, E., WOLFOVÁ, H.: *Moderní retail marketing*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2021, p. 86.

¹³ PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 142.

services that are related to the entire transaction. These services are usually e-payment and transport and, if necessary, a decision on the place where the customer will pick up the goods. All common business documents have an electronic form and thus the cycle closes. At the stage of the post-purchase decision, the customer has time to try the product and possibly return it within 14 days. If there are problems with the complaint, the quality e-shop will handle the complaint.

With the gradual expansion, the Internet has become a parallel to brick-and-mortar stores, and in connection with the problems that have arisen in the covid era, it has also surpassed some of them¹⁴, because in connection with various health measures, stationary business networks have been completely or partially unavailable for some time, different in different countries. While grocery stores mostly remained open, online fresh food stores did very well, and many customers found that the convenience of buying from a computer or mobile phone saved time and energy.

The following text will deal with the analysis of changes in the behavior of the Czech population on the Internet in an attempt to point out the changes and discuss their potential long-term. As mentioned above, online marketing communication tools are and will remain part of the communication world. At the same time, we will try to show that the massive transition of the customer to the Internet when shopping means more time spent on the net and also potential overload with online messages, which creates and will create a certain barrier to the mass deployment of online media.

2 Methodology

The aim of our contribution is to point out the current state of online communication in the Czech Republic in connection with its influence on purchasing behavior and the willingness of customers to accept and pay attention to online challenges. The analysis is secondary marketing research using the latest literature and the annual research of the *Kantar* agency “Czechs in the network”, covering population in the Czech Republic. Actual data was collected in June 2021. Methodology is a combination of quantitative and qualitative market research.

Quantitative: CASI (online) questionnaire on a representative sample of the online population aged 16–65, lasting about 70 minutes, total N – 2111, contained a smaller boost for youngsters (approx. 200).

Qualitative: 27 people in the online community across the population (although more active users, whatever they have something to write about), discussion of the key topics of the study and elaboration of hypotheses obtained from the analysis of quantitative data.

Qualitative: follow up on the same platform with 4 for individual in depth interviews.

¹⁴ JADERNÁ, E., WOLFOVÁ, H.: *Moderní retail marketing*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2021, p. 97.

3 Results

3.1 Czechs in the Network

Around 5.8 million Czechs in the 16-64 age group visit online daily or almost daily, 200,000 more than two years ago. The share of daily users in the group jumped from 83% to 87%. A significant part of the new users (if we exclude those who have since “grown up” above 16) are recruited from the 50s, where the share of daily users grew by a very solid 11 percentage points.

Thus, the trend we indicated two years ago continues, the Czech Republic is catching up with the most advanced countries in terms of internet penetration in these age groups, as it is seen reached parity among the younger ones. It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to come across a person who is not Internet savvy among Czechs, and almost impossible among those in their forties and younger.

The depopulation of the group that visits the Internet on a less than daily basis also continues and it is evident that once someone sniffs the Net, they are less and less likely to appear on it casually.

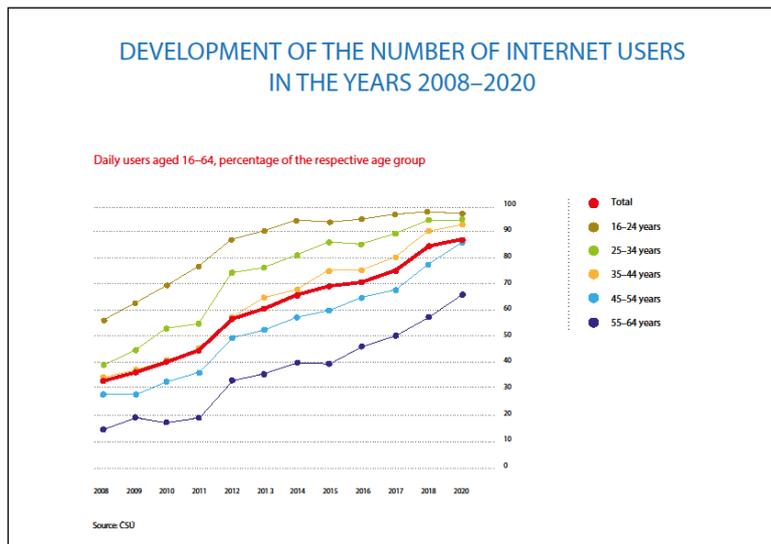


Figure 2: Development of the number of internet users

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval.; See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

Respondents were asked, what are the top 3 websites or apps they spend the most time on. And the top spots of the rankings have barely changed over the years. The top five remained the same, only mirroring the continued shift of users from *Facebook* to *Instagram*. This effect permeates all the way down to the 50-somethings; older Czechs have not yet been reached by *Instagram* to such an extent, and their top five is therefore extremely stable.

Generational differences in the rankings, however, exist and are of course marked. For example, *Seznam*, which dominates the rankings from 35 years upwards, i.e., already in the middle generation, just barely made it into the top five among the youngest, when it was almost overtaken by the rocketing *TikTok*. Among teenagers and those in their early twenties, on the other hand, *Instagram* is the strongest scorer, while for those in their thirties it's *Facebook*.



Figure 3: Where to find Czechs in the network

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

3.2 Other Leisure Activities

- First: Store closures have taught people to buy almost everything online and to pay for it directly there (52% of us have started to buy or pay more online). Plus, they found it easy, convenient, reliable and time-saving, so they plan to continue using it.
- Second is the social compensation: when people couldn't meet friends and family in person, they started to meet more online. 36% of Czechs have used this option newly or more online (more women), which is not that high a number. The remaining 2/3 have probably reduced their social life as such (without compensation) or have more often resorted to traditional phone calls.
- 30% then looked to the online world to better pursue self-development in their hobbies from the comfort of their homes. Thus, they went more to *YouTube* and social networks for all sorts of online inspiration, DIY tutorials on how to improve flats, houses, make something (again, more women).
- A quarter was focused more directly on online learning, which was related to e.g. development in foreign languages, but in the qualitative interviews there were also those who decided to learn programming or investing. Among the young people, as many as 43% were learning more online, over and above their normal online studies.
- Online culture in the coronavirus era appealed more to a fifth of the population, usually in the form of increased consumption of online videos, but not a few also tried watching online theatre broadcasts or concerts (see the media chapter for more).
- 13% tried online support options for sports, and even 18% of those under 35.

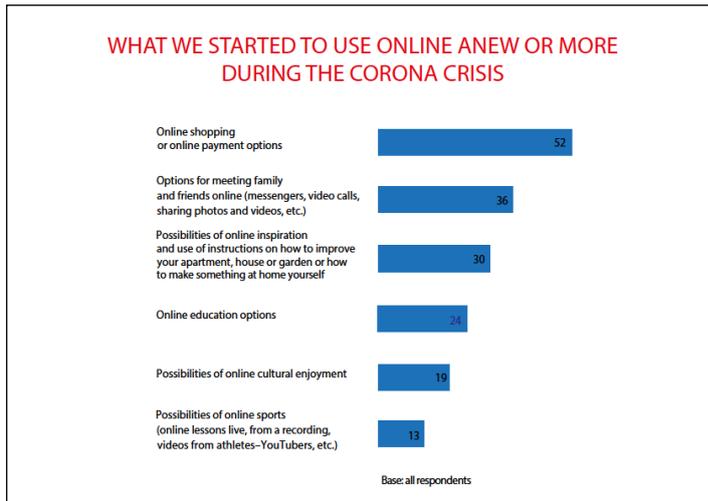


Figure 4: Activities during covid crisis

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

3.3 Online Shopping, Services, and Advertising

Internet shopping was undoubtedly one of the areas of online life that the covid pandemic accelerated. This is evidenced by hard data from the economy showing that the volume of online purchases between 2019 and 2020 grew by a massive 26%, with the *Association for Electronic Commerce* (AEC), for example, expecting growth “only” between 10% and 15%. The most recent figure from the CSO for year-on-year growth between July 2020 and 2021 indicates a 15% increase.

The total sales volume of Czech e-commerce in 2020 will thus reach CZK 196 billion and will already account for 16% of the Czech retail trade, which corresponds to the global average (17%). Our figures clearly confirm this trend.

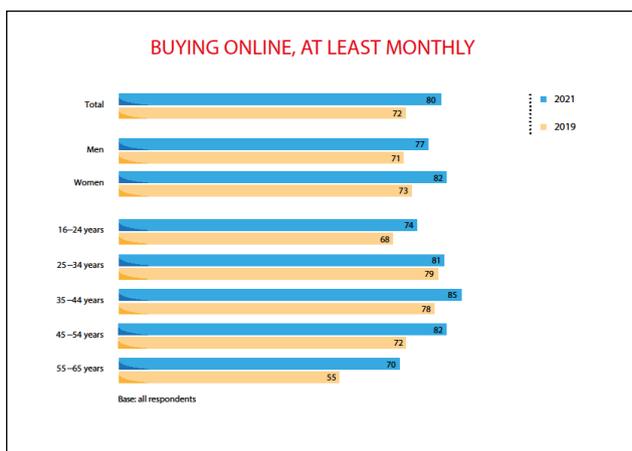


Figure 5: Online shopping

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

The proportion of Czechs who shop online regularly (monthly) has risen from 72% to 80%, which is quite a lot considering how high this number is. We see an even slightly bigger shift among women, probably because under normal circumstances they are more likely to make purchases in the necessary categories. And these have accelerated the fastest, as we will see next.

It is seen the most dramatic increase in the older generations; 55-65-year-olds up to 70%. In this respect, generational differences have almost been wiped out, including the frequency of online shopping. Pandemic closures have clearly contributed too many of the earlier-born also trying the previously unexplored reaches of various e-shops across categories under pressure of circumstance.

BARRIERS TO BUYING GROCERIES ONLINE

	TOTAL	MEN	WOMEN	16-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-65 years
I want to choose the goods myself	50	45	55	40	48	51	51	59
I am satisfied with shopping in regular stores, I have no need to change	39	37	40	40	35	34	44	42
In a regular store, I often remember what else I need to buy	29	26	32	26	35	27	30	26
I am afraid that fruits, vegetables, meat will not be of good quality	22	23	21	17	22	24	23	21
They are more expensive than in a regular store	20	22	18	16	22	21	20	18
I live in an area where no online store delivers groceries	19	18	20	24	20	19	19	15
I enjoy going to the shops	14	14	14	18	12	16	11	15
I can't find things there that I'm used to from regular stores	6	8	4	8	5	6	6	7

Base: who don't buy groceries online

Figure 6: Barriers to buying groceries online

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

3.4 Increases in Essential Goods

For some time now, we have been paying increased attention to online grocery shopping, which is still growing dynamically, even according to market figures (the volume increased by a respectable 42% year-on-year) – in the last two years, the number of Czechs who choose this way, although not necessarily exclusively, has increased by almost a third from 28% to 36%.

Among those who have not yet tried this option, we hear two reasons why this is the case – firstly, they want to choose the goods themselves (more often women and the elderly), but also that they are satisfied with shopping in brick-and-mortar stores and see no reason to change. The third motivator for the ‘classic’ route is that, when browsing in a bricks-and-mortar store, they often remember what else they wanted to buy (here more women and people in their thirties, i.e. usually families with young children).

For all the other categories surveyed, the proportion of those who at least occasionally purchase online is so high (73% or more of those who purchase the category at all, anyway), that it’s better to look at what proportion of all purchases are online. In this regard, the items that have improved the most compared to 2019 are the aforementioned groceries (up by half, from 8 to 12%), medicines, vitamins, medical supplies, etc., and clothing and footwear, items that can be categorized as more or less essential. (These findings correspond exactly to the hard market numbers; see the sources cited above.) The move to online occurred despite the fact that grocery stores as well as pharmacies were among those that remained open even during the harshest lockdowns. Yet clearly a significant proportion of people preferred to purchase these items from home.

These figures correspond well with the answers to a question in which we asked respondents directly what types of goods they had bought more (or less) online than before during the last year of the covid epidemic. For example, of those who shop online for food, nearly half are

those who have intensified their purchases and a third are completely new (internet) shoppers in this category. We see only slightly lower numbers for clothing and footwear (with only a lower percentage of brand-new shoppers), with the aforementioned medicines scoring highly here, as well as toys and baby items, another item that is more difficult to postpone.



Figure 7: Online shopping in categories

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: Kantar [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

3.5 Purchase Services Online

It is obvious that the move to the online world is also continuing with the establishment of service products. Of the products surveyed, the heavily commoditised travel insurance is leading the way in terms of online channel usage, with three out of five customers taking out travel insurance online. However, the biggest shifts have occurred elsewhere.

These were primarily banking products – current accounts and consumer credit in particular – and energy supply. For all these products, the share of those who use the online environment in the middle stage of the purchase, namely when filling in the application form and supplying various documents (personal documents, certificates, etc.), increased significantly, by up to 22 percentage points, which is a lot in a two-year comparison. For consumer credit, this increased willingness to use the direct channel was also reflected in the conclusion of the contract via the internet, which jumped by a very solid 14 p.p. compared to 2019.

The reasons for preferring non-Internet channels when arranging these services have not changed much over time. There is still a need to have everything explained or discussed in person (more common in energy supply contracts) and a feeling that this face-to-face option is quicker or more convenient. However, it is good to say that this latter reason has taken a bit of a back seat compared to 2019, by around 5 to 10 p.p., for travel insurance, credit cards, consumer credit and mobile operator tariffs. So, it seems that for these products, customers appreciate a smoother set-up process over the internet.

Around three-fifths of those who do at least some of their shopping online will take one of the support tools offered by providers. Telephone hotlines remain the most popular of these (especially for telco services and energy), followed by call backs and, more recently, the increasingly popular alternative of speaking to a member of staff on the provider's app (more again for telco and banking products).

The information provided by the operator on the hotline, chat or video call is mostly positively evaluated and about two thirds of customers consider it qualitatively equivalent to a branch or shop; for another 7% it is even a better source of information. Only one in five believe that a staff member in a branch could give better advice; respondents see room for improvement, especially in current accounts.

The people who took the chat to help were three-quarters entertained with a live human, a quarter with a chatbot. At least, that’s how customers perceived.

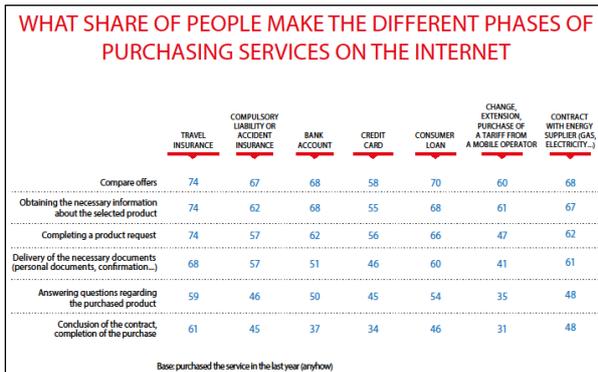


Figure 8: Online purchase of services

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: Kantar [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <https://www.kantar.com/>.

As we indicated above, the number of shoppers who pay (in advance) by card online has increased dramatically over the past two years. 56% of them now prefer this option, compared to 36% in 2019, which is a leap like thunder. This increase went to both the account transfer option (from 28% to 18%) and payment on collection, whether by card or cash (from 35% to 25%). It was pulled slightly more strongly by women and those in their thirties.

One in six of those paying by card also tell us that they only started using this option in the last covid year; among the youngest and oldest it is even one in four. The vast majority of people is then happy with online card payments and plans to stick with it. It is almost certainly not a temporary effect, but rather a dramatic acceleration of a trend that started earlier.

Still, a quarter of online shoppers typically save their credit card details in their browser for to simplify their next purchase.

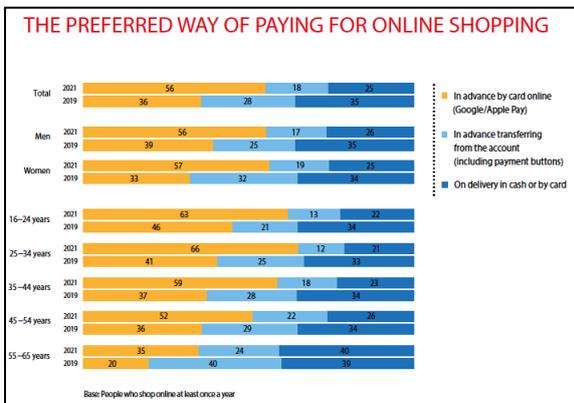


Figure 9: Ways of payment

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: Kantar [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <https://www.kantar.com/>.

3.6 Online Advertising

To conclude this chapter, let's take a look at the perception of different online advertising formats and channels. The most frequent online experiences of Czechs are video ads before and during videos, pop-ups, sponsored links during searches, *Facebook* ads, classic banners, and email ads. All these variants hit roughly two-thirds of internet users at least several times a week.

The numbers are naturally even higher for younger users, given their frequency of access to the web. Specifically, they are naturally significantly more likely to be reached by *Instagram* advertising or influencer promotion on social media in general. We talk about the generation roughly under 30-35.

It probably goes without saying that not all contact with advertising is welcomed by the user, and online advertising is no exception to this, quite the opposite, as we pointed out two years ago and as confirmed by the global *Kantar Media Reactions* study. The unflattering ranking of formats that really bother people a lot is still led by those that somehow prevent them from getting to the content they primarily came for – video ads, either before or during the video, and pop-ups on the web. All these options actually bother more than half of Czechs (of those who see them).

When they were asked about formats they are most 'fine' with, then know that it is advertising inside online banking or telco self-service, which about one in three users have no problem with. Next comes the plethora of those that are accepted by about a quarter of those who encounter them – *Instagram* and *Facebook* advertising, including promotion by influencers (with which the representatives of the youngest generation have no problem, who are also more benevolent towards advertising in podcasts), web banners, advertising in email messages or in the form of sponsored links (search).

Respondents were also asked how successful the targeting of each format is, i.e. how often users are shown ads for goods or services that are potentially interesting for them to buy. Unfortunately, the results are very similar across formats, and so it seems that it is the specific implementation rather than the format that determines the results. *Facebook* and *Instagram* ads scored marginally better than the others, but the differences from the other channels are small. Conversely, video ads score worse than the others. However, it is questionable whether this ranking also reflects the fact that many consumers are allergic to them, as we noted above.

Significantly greater differences are seen in the specific actions that followed viewing. In click-through, social media ads are the most successful, with just over a quarter of users saying they have clicked on one in the last month.

However, online banking or telco self-service ads are already taking the lead in finding out about the advertised product, and for the actual purchase based on the ad, again, completely different channels – promotion by influencers on social media or in podcasts and podcast advertising in general – dominate significantly. For these types of ads, which are built on a recommendation by a given personality, the discovery phase before purchase is often completely eliminated. So, it's obvious that choosing the optimal channel also depends on what the goal of your campaign is. In contrast, video advertising clearly performed the worst in all these metrics.

To conclude this section, it's also worth pointing out that immediate action is not the only thing an ad is designed to build. However, a few simple questions from our study are not enough to determine the effect on brand building. We have other, more sophisticated methods and tools for this purpose.

Two-thirds of Czechs feel that advertising on the internet uses too much of their personal data. More than three quarters say they are being targeted by online advertising and are being shown the same things over and over again.

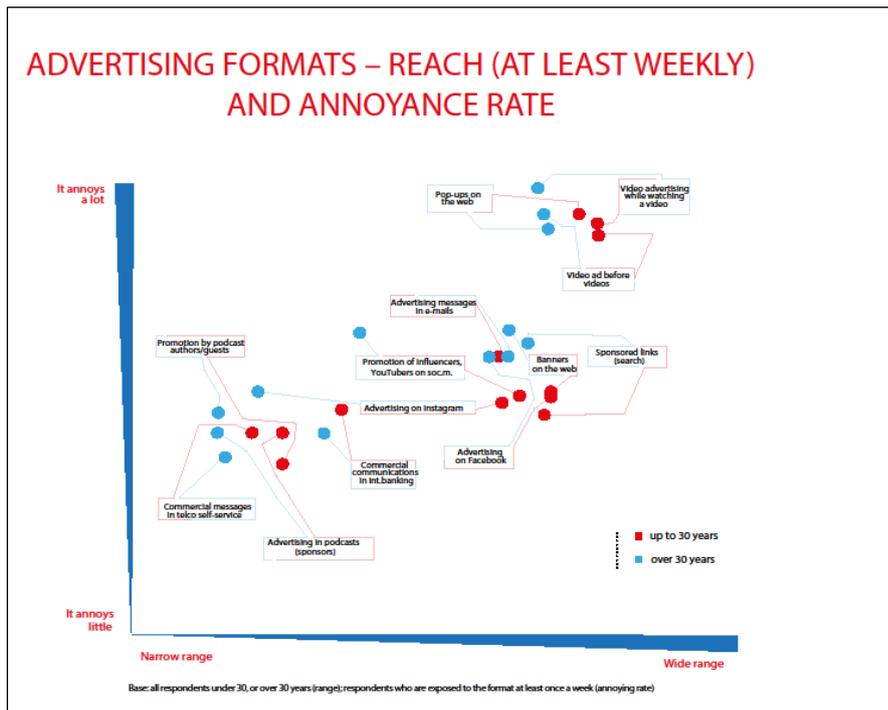


Figure 10: Online advertising formats

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

3.7 Give Me a Break

A few more words about blocking online ads. One in three internet users use some sort of ad blocking tool to block ads on websites on a computer, and 14% on mobile phones. In both cases, men are about twice as likely as women to use it, and the ratio of the youngest to the oldest generation is also roughly two to one.

Paid versions of some services that do not show ads are purchased by a rather low percentage of Czechs. Of those we surveyed, *Spotify* premium is the most popular (9%, more men, but 32% of the youngest, which is certainly not low), followed by the premium version of *YouTube* (5%, again more men, much more across generations) and *Voyo* (also 5 %).

“I use Adblock and block everything that can be blocked. If a site forces me to advertise, I always prefer to skim its content rather than accept the ad. I am often willing to pay for a full version of software that is offered for free at the price of ad breaks.” (Male, 35-44 years old¹⁵)

¹⁵ Remark by the authors: Internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

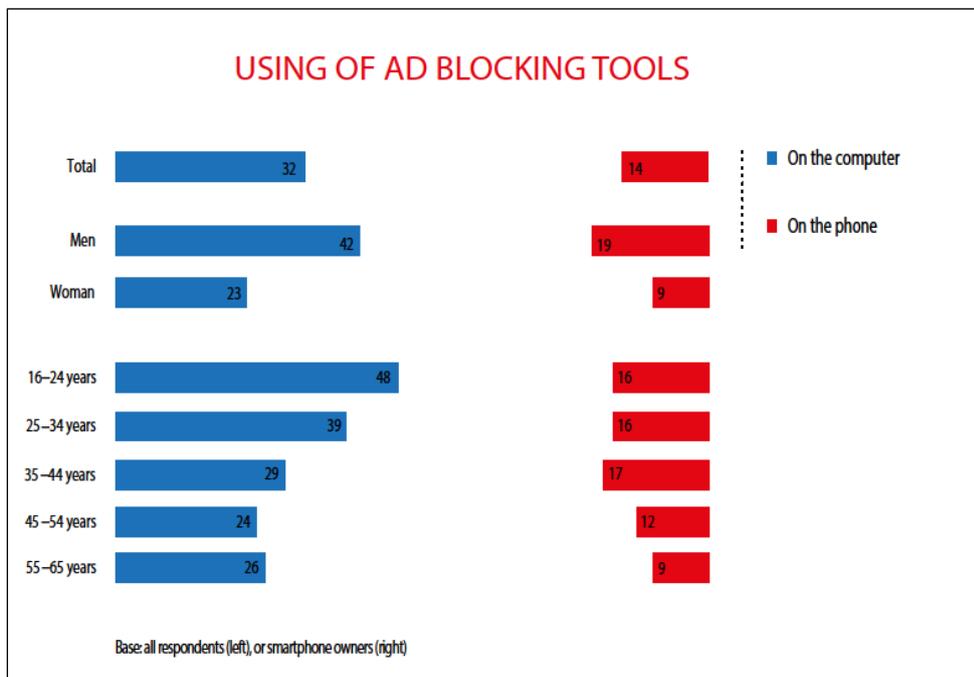


Figure 11: Usage of a blocking tools

Source: Own proceedings based on internal materials provided by Czech branch of Kantar, published with approval. See: *Kantar* [online]. [2022-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.kantar.com/>>.

4 Discussion and Summary

Like marketing, marketing communication is a dynamic field that reflects the development of the market, consumers, technology and other key factors. In this direction, we are talking about marketing communication tools of the 21st century. With the overall situation, we are encountering a significant strengthening of online marketing communication tools in particular, when the Internet and online as such occupy a significant position in the strategies of companies and in the behavior of the consumer. The Internet is a medium that can immediately provide information about the effectiveness of an advertising format, and it is also easy to measure where the company receives the most visitors to its website. In connection with Internet marketing, we come across the following tools in particular: banner advertising, viral marketing, community building, microsites, online PR, advergaming, search engine marketing, e-mailing campaigns, affiliate marketing, content marketing. The most current trend is the use of AI technologies in the form of chatbots and other tools.

The tools of the 'classic' communication mix are also being developed, and we currently encounter tools such as mobile marketing, guerilla marketing, word of mouth marketing, neuromarketing and product placement.

The most advanced trend is the use of AI technologies as chatbots and other similar communications tools.

The development of marketing communication approaches, as well as the coronavirus situation, shifted customer behavior from content consumption to more online action, as the restrictions that prevented free movement and normal life meant the transfer of the purchase process to an online environment.

In the period before the coronavirus pandemic, marketing communication tools were mainly active in the part of the decision-making process before the actual purchase. Online shopping and payment was rather the privilege of the younger generation, which moved quite naturally in the online environment. At the moment when the corona virus shut down imprisoned all people across generations at home, the movement to the network accelerated dramatically. Most shopping activities have moved to an online environment, perhaps with the exception of grocery shopping, where the move was not absolute. Relatively quickly, all generations discovered that not only shopping, but also paying online can be done easily and safely. More options have been added to communicate not only with family and friends, but also with providers of other online services. Although we did not examine the side of the providers of goods and services, it is clear from the rapid development that a technological step or rather a leap was necessary on their side, and most of them managed it relatively quickly and well. It does not only concern sales and payment, but especially improving the ability to communicate with customers, and especially using the online environment much more.

The situation has changed, brick-and-mortar stores and shopping centers once again attract customers not only for goods, services and entertainment, but it is clear that many habits of moving in the online environment will remain with customers.

However, as it follows from our findings, the oversaturation of the online environment needs to be respected. Manufacturers and marketers should keep this in mind when creating communication campaigns and creating marketing communication mixes. Integrated marketing communication should have all theoretically justified attributes, but its clients and creators should know the limits of the intensity of use of individual communication tools. The goal of their activities is to lead the customer to purchase and to ensure that there will be no post-purchase dissonance after its implementation.

Acknowledgement: Authors want to thank the research agency KANTAR CZ (www.kantar.com) and namely Petra Průšová (CEO for Central and Eastern Europe) for their helpfulness, professional consultations and the provision of a number of internal researches, on the basis of which the key findings of this article were determined.

Acknowledgement: This contribution is a partial result of the project Vega no.1/0606/21 Change in Preferences in Buying Behaviour of Consumers in the Context of the Dynamics of Marketing Communication Tools Development.

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MARKETING IDENTITY: METAVERSE IS THE NEW UNIVERSE

Conference Proceedings from the Annual International Scientific Conference
“Marketing and Media Identity 2022: Metaverse is the New Universe”,
25th – 26th October 2022, Trnava, Slovakia.

Editors: Mgr. Monika Prostináková Hossová, PhD.
 Mgr. Martin Graca, PhD.
 JUDr. PhDr. Martin Solík, PhD.

Publisher: Faculty of Mass Media Communication
 University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

Faculty of Mass Media Communication
University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Nám. J. Herdu 2
917 01 Trnava
Slovak Republic



Pages: 511

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in Trnava, Slovakia, 2022

Trnava, 2022

ISBN 978-80-572-0297-4
ISSN 2729-7527

ÜCM FMK

ISBN: 978-80-572-0297-4
ISSN: 2729-7527