

# MARKETING IDENTITY

2020

## COVID-2.0

Zuzana Kvetanová  
Zuzana Bezáková  
Adam Madleňák  
(eds.)

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Faculty of Mass Media Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

# **MARKETING IDENTITY COVID-2.0**

Zuzana Kvetanová  
Zuzana Bezáková  
Adam Madleňák  
(eds.)

Conference Proceedings  
from the International Scientific Conference  
11<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
online



Trnava  
2020

## **MARKETING IDENTITY: COVID-2.0**

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# **MARKETING IDENTITY**

## **COVID-2.0**

International Scientific Conference, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
online, 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 Identity (formerly called New Trends in Marketing and re-named in 2013), which was held for the seventeenth time, but due to pandemic situation for the first time online, is organised by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication UCM in Trnava. The conference took place on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020. It was attended by nearly 110 participants coming from 4 countries who were affiliated with more than 30 different academic and research institutions and professional organisations.

The main theme of the conference was concisely expressed by its subtitle: COVID-2.0. Marketing Identity has always tried to react to the latest trends in marketing communication and media production.

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

Conference website:

<https://marketingidentity.fmk.sk>



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## Preface

Marketing Identity COVID-2.0 – this is the name of the conference resulting from the global situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. The name COVID-2.0 implies the second wave of the pandemic which has directly affected people's lives around the world, bringing the world into crisis communication. It is the communication that has become an important part of informing people about how to behave, how to follow the measures taken and what the disease can cause. At that time, governments realized the power of marketing communication, which took place on all platforms – from online to offline ones. Proper communication played an important role especially in ensuring that the right information reaches the target group as far as possible.

The private sector did not have a very easy time. Especially companies that do business in various industries such as gastronomy, tourism, wellness or event agencies. Many of them had to change their business objectives or adjust them to the current situation. Right then, it was necessary to change the style of marketing communication, and get new products and services out and make them meet the target group. Entrepreneurs responded to new situations, which gave rise to new products and services that had to be made to reach their customers.

The academic sector was also faced with new challenges related to the transition to online teaching. Due to the situation with Covid-19, even educational institutions got into an unpredictable situation that made them react quickly and efficiently. Also at our faculty, the whole academic and student life moved to the online world. We learned a lot and gained new experience. The basic feature of coping with this crisis situation was to continue not only in educational, but also in research and scientific activities, student events, workshops and conferences. I am glad that we were able to prepare an international scientific conference in the online environment. It required a lot of effort of the organizing committee.

The papers in this proceedings are thematically focused on Covid-19. This conference and the proceedings launched a debate on the pandemic year in connection with marketing communication. In the proceedings, you can find many articles that deal with various areas of marketing communication and the impact of coronavirus on the communication of companies. The proceedings' contributions were written by the authors from different European countries, thus providing different views on the topic in each country.

Dear readers, I believe that the papers published in this proceedings will bring you a lot of new knowledge and inspiration, and help you to grow professionally. I believe that we will soon organize our traditional conference outside the online world just as we are used to.

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ľudmila Čábyová, PhD.**  
*Dean of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava*

# HOW THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED THE VIRTUAL ECONOMY IN SECOND LIFE

*Alexandra Alföldiová – Andrej Trnka*

## Abstract

The contribution focuses on virtual economy in general with a particular focus in Second Life one and its potential for profitability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the contribution is to give an insight to its sufficient potential to cover the cost of living of an individual as the main income or at least to make an added passive income that can complement what might be a reduction of income with the current lock downs. We define the virtual environment and the possibilities of creating content within the space. We aim at the application of principles in the virtual world, focusing on virtual content creators and reliability of the virtual economy during pandemic. We demonstrate the current situation by the shortened structured interview with one of the content creators. The self-employment opportunity in Second Life rests mostly on the talent of an individual as well as their ability to generate enough exposure to reach a target audience which secures the necessary revenue during the pandemic.

## Key words:

Coronavirus. COVID-19. Pandemic. Second Life. Virtual Economy. Virtual World.

## Introduction

As some governments in Europe and other western civilized countries insist on maintaining lockdown restrictions in place indefinitely, impeding numerous people to have access to their jobs and creating a great uncertainty on the economic future both local and worldwide markets, some market segments in general, currently grow more affected than others. As an example, the unemployment in the Slovak Republic reached 7,60% in August 2020, which is 2,39% more than in August 2019.<sup>1</sup> The job loss has particularly affected segments such as the service industry, like restaurants, where the increase in unemployment has been extreme, while on the other hand tech focus companies like Apple have registered untold growth beyond what anyone could have ever imagined. To face the challenge of the current situation, many people are looking for alternative ways to make a basic income that can cover some of their most basic fundamental expenses for the time being. In this attempt some people have found necessary to acquire new skills in order to expand their possibilities and be fitting to a wider employment market. Others have decided to try an unusual way of earning money using a virtual environment seeing its great expansion in the last couple of decades and especially since lockdown restrictions started to be mandated. When we mention a virtual economy, we mean an economy that is dependent and operates only in the online environment with physical goods being exchanged. In this case, we can cite digital games or virtual environments as an example.

## 1 The Virtual Economy and COVID-19 Pandemic

Among the more well-known forms of earning an income on a virtual environment can be Twitch Streaming, where individuals broadcast themselves online as they play video games. The platform is wide and extensive, the seemingly simple theme of it has been branched out

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<sup>1</sup> *Nezamestnanosť v septembri klesla aj napriek prílevu absolventov*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/informacie-media/aktuality/nezamestnanost-septembri-klesla-aj-napriek-prilevu-absolventov.html>>.

immensely by the individuals that use it, from casual gameplay, to professional e-sports players to even people that make use of their good looks to attract and audience, individuals have an opportunity to make an income on the platform in the form of tips or subscriptions that are monthly renewed. Some of the most successful ones can expand their earning potential with sponsorship deals that see them promote products to their viewers. Other avenues that have been explored are selling rare and highly sought-after game items in MMORPGs such as RuneScape, World of Warcraft among many others.<sup>2</sup> Some people even find a business into selling entire accounts on these games with characters that have been leveled up to a certain point, the people that buy these do so to skip what they consider to be the initial tedious process and going straight to the content they want to experience. The virtual economy, which we address in this contribution, is focused on the virtual world of Second Life. Second Life is considered to be one of the most recognizable virtual worlds with a virtual economy, which involves the actual participants, known as residents. The virtual world was established by Philip Rosedale, an American California based entrepreneur, who founded Linden Lab in 1999, which develops and hosts Second Life. This virtual environment is categorized as the Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games yet is not considered to be a game due to not meeting the main characteristics of a game.<sup>3</sup>

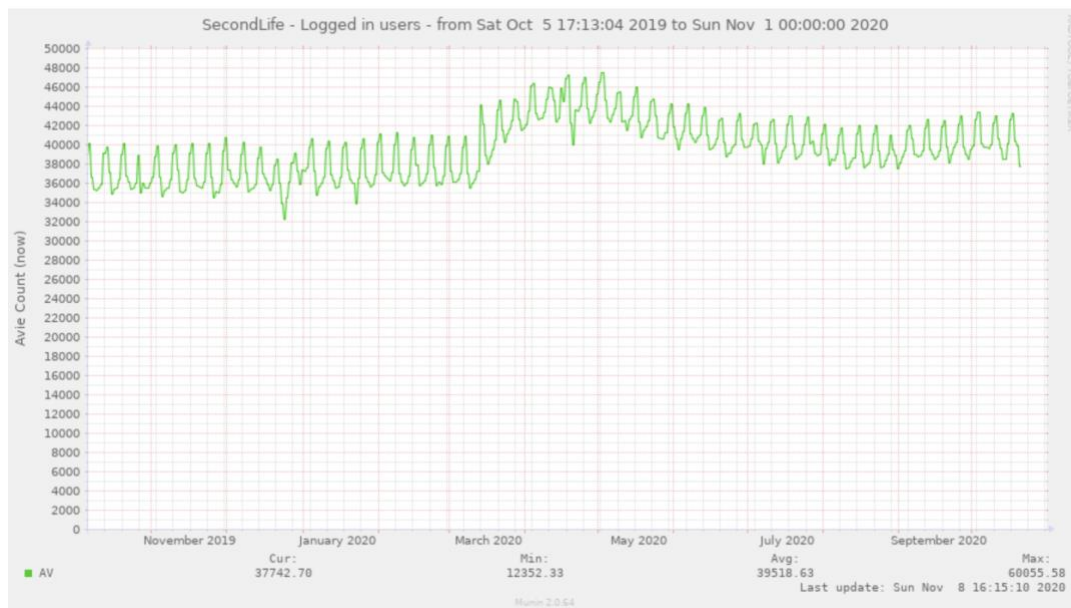
It's rather defined as a social platform with gaming elements in a 3-dimensional environment, where the user creates an avatar in order to participate. The virtual world gradually gained popularity and according to Tyche Shepherd statistics, it had 62,387,753 total user registrations as of March 1,2020. The current statistics after the pandemic state the total user registrations 64,687,961 as of October 21, 2020, which gives the total number of 2,300,208 of new users joining the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Joining the virtual world is free of charge and it is up to the users to decide whether they are willing to invest into their virtual avatar. In case they do, they become a part of the virtual economy, as their billing information is on file and they are able to purchase in-world products and services that Second Life offers.

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<sup>2</sup> DANIEL, E.: *The Virtual Economy*. [online]. [2020-10-29]. Available at: <[https://magazine.verdict.co.uk/verdict\\_magazine\\_sep20/virtual\\_economy\\_pandemic#](https://magazine.verdict.co.uk/verdict_magazine_sep20/virtual_economy_pandemic#)>.

<sup>3</sup> MALABY, T.: *Making Virtual Worlds Linden Lab and Second Life*. London : Cornell University Press, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Second Life Grid Survey – Economic Metrics*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<http://www.gridsurvey.com/economy.php>>.



**Chart 1: Second Life Logged in users from October 31, 2019 to October 31, 2020**

Source: *MUNIN servers Second Life Charts*. 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <[https://eregion.kicks-ass.net/munin/servers/akari.eregion.home/SL\\_Online\\_Now.html](https://eregion.kicks-ass.net/munin/servers/akari.eregion.home/SL_Online_Now.html)>.

According to the statistics available at MUNIN server, we can clearly see the increase in daily logged users before and after the pandemic. The graph shows the highest and lowest number of logged users at the same time per day. The main difference is between January and the start of the pandemic between March and April, where we noted most of active users logged at the same time.<sup>5</sup> The numbers slightly decreased during summer months, which can be related to eased restrictions worldwide and the opportunities to travel. The statistics show slightly higher numbers during the second wave of the pandemic, where people are in lockdown or are requested to remain home. The virtual economy in Second Life consists of trading virtual items and services for a virtual currency known as a Linden Dollar.<sup>6</sup> The virtual items have many forms, such as avatar components, apparel, accessories, decoration, furniture, building components, scripts, technical tools, HUDs, animations, animals or vehicles. The form of services varies and includes virtual land rentals, landscaping, live performances, assorted courses, group memberships, store managing and others.<sup>7</sup> One of the main differences on the virtual world economy of Second Life in comparison with other virtual economies such as the ones found in video games like Fortnite and many others like it is the origin of the content. While in a video game like Fortnite, it is the Epic Games studio that produces the content that is sold in the game.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Second Life however, the content is produced and sold by the users themselves, not Linden Labs, making Second Life more of a platform, with Second Life merely owning the virtual real estate used by the users. This concept allows the users to become an active part of the virtual economy. What makes Second Life unique as a virtual

<sup>5</sup> *MUNIN servers Second Life Charts*. 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <[https://eregion.kicks-ass.net/munin/servers/akari.eregion.home/SL\\_Online\\_Now.html](https://eregion.kicks-ass.net/munin/servers/akari.eregion.home/SL_Online_Now.html)>.

<sup>6</sup> BOELLSTORFF, T.: *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> ALFÖLDIOVÁ, A.: Enterprising in the Virtual World Second Life. In GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S., GREGUŠ, L., PRONER, J. (eds.): *Quo Vadis Massmedia & Marketing*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 6. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://fmk.sk/download/Quo-Vadis-Mass-Media-Quo-Vadis-Marketing-2019-SJ.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> DANIEL, E.: *The Virtual Economy*. [online]. [2020-10-29]. Available at: <[https://magazine.verdict.co.uk/verdict\\_magazine\\_sep20/virtual\\_economy\\_pandemic#](https://magazine.verdict.co.uk/verdict_magazine_sep20/virtual_economy_pandemic#)>.



environment is the possibility to exchange the virtual currency into real currency using their own Tilia Pay exchange platform.<sup>9</sup>

When speaking of virtual economy in Second Life, we mainly target the content creators, users, who are creating items for residents for many different purposes. The content creators usually establish their own virtual brand, under which they sell their items. Running a virtual business is similar to a real business. Factors commonly shared between most of the successful content creators of Second Life are the fact the creator rents a parcel to build an in-world flagship store to display their virtual items for sale.<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to be active on social media such as Facebook, Flickr or Instagram, as well as promote the virtual products in-world through official brand groups, subscription or promotional groups. The main part of being a content creator is to create the virtual item. To create a virtual object, some of the most popular type of virtual content sold in Second Life, it takes the following steps:

- Inspiration – it is essential to create a mood board and brainstorm to create a concept of the virtual item,
- 3D Modeling – recreation of the inspiration into the 3-dimensional form in a modeling program such as Blender,
- UV Map – preparation of the UV map for the model in order to have it ready for texture,
- Texture – drawing the texture of the model,
- Upload – transferring and uploading the 3-dimensional model into Second Life,
- Packaging – texturing the item, adding necessary features, making a promotional image and creating the vendor for sale.<sup>11</sup>

The virtual economy attracts all types of people worldwide without any specifications on gender, age or nationality. What defines on which side of the virtual economy one stands is the intellect, decisiveness and the technical capability of the individuals. To become a virtual entrepreneur, it is necessary to have advanced technical skills and know-how to build the items. The users without the skills have lower to none chance of success if one does not attempt to improve by attending courses or other forms of education. One of the main Second Life's promotional aims is to promote the possibility of replaying the real income with a virtual one. As the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects everyday life, people seek the way to monetize their virtual activities in order to have an income. This statement can be confirmed by the Google Trends chart, where we showcase the terms virtual world and Second Life.<sup>12</sup> Both of these terms were searched on Google significantly more after the start of the pandemic and while there isn't just one factor for this up trend, we can reasonably deduce at least some of these people were looking for alternatives of social platforms or potential profit opportunities in the virtual world of Second Life over this being over 17 years old now and still profitable.

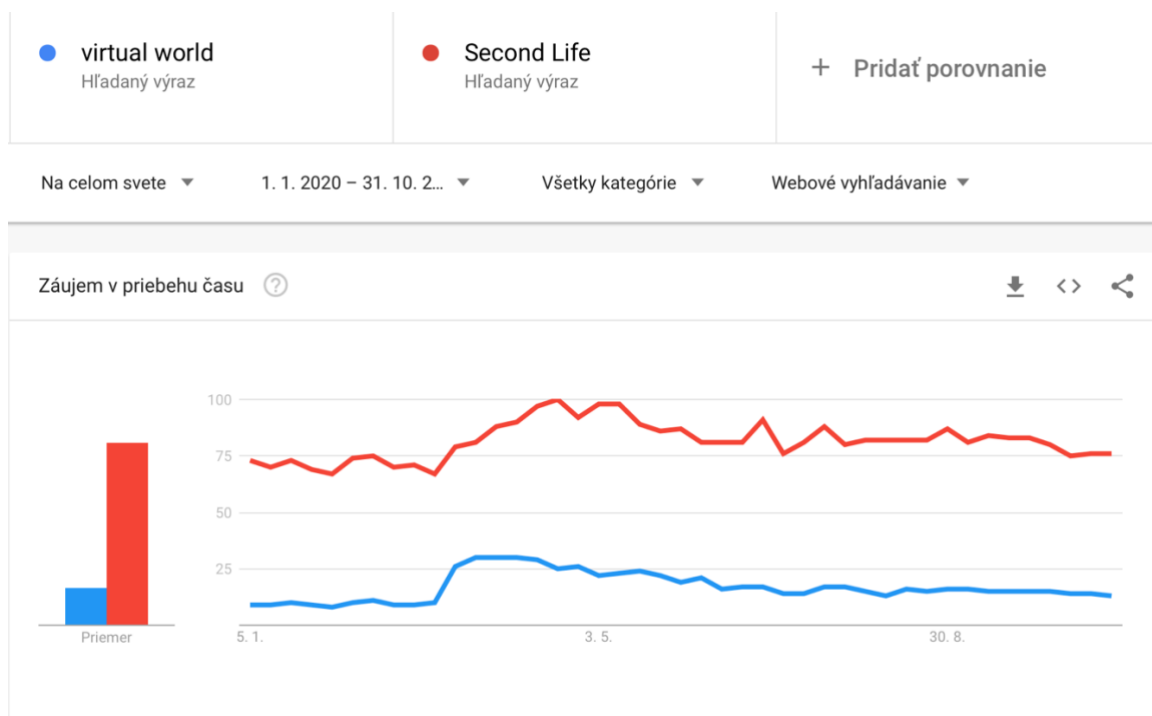
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<sup>9</sup> PEY, I.: *Second Life: Tilia Pay to Handle All USD-Related Transactions*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://modernworld.me/2020/05/20/secondl-life-tilia-pay-to-handle-all-usd-related-transactions/>>.

<sup>10</sup> FREEDMAN, R.: *How to Make Real Money in Second Life*. New York : McGraw-Hill Professional, 2008, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> ALFÖLDIOVÁ, A.: Enterprising in the Virtual World Second Life. In GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S., GREGUŠ, Ľ., PRONER, J. (eds.): *Quo Vadis Massmedia & Marketing*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 8. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://fmk.sk/download/Quo-Vadis-Mass-Media-Quo-Vadis-Marketing-2019-SJ.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> *Google Trends Comparison*. 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-01-01%202020-10-31&q=virtual%20world,Second%20Life>>.



**Chart 2: Google Trends Comparison of the Terms “Virtual World” and “Second Life”**

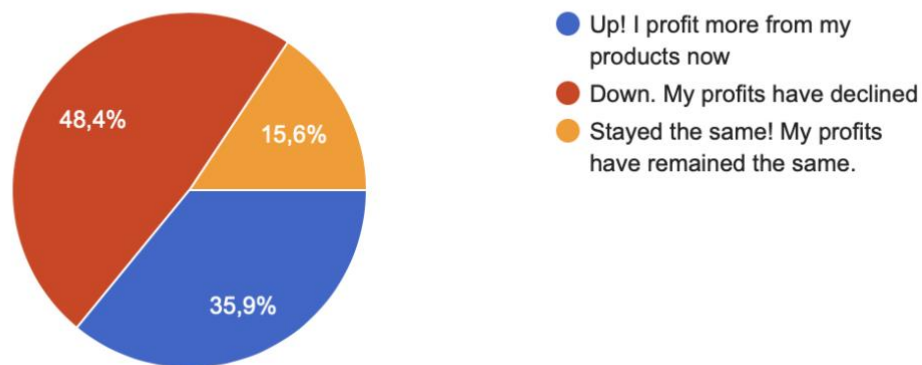
Source: *Google Trends Comparison*. 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-01-01%202020-10-31&q=virtual%20world,Second%20Life>>.

One of the differences between a virtual presence and in-person presence economy are the restrictions imposed regarding the number of people allowed per area and what apparel they are mandated to use. No such restrictions exist in a virtual environment, who's limit of users in an area might if anything be a technical one and apparel is only mandated to comply with the rating of the region.<sup>13</sup> Regarding shortages and distribution chains, once again the virtual economy is unaffected as a virtual object, unless specifically built to otherwise not, can be copied as many times as it is required to fill the demand from the consumers than might want it, without being affected by delivery routes or having to source raw materials for their production or even employees to maintain a facility or work with the public. In Second Life a store can be built and completely automated to work uninterrupted generating a passive income to the owner for a long as interest is drawn to the items on offer. We confronted one of the designers, Veronika Greinerová, a Czech virtual creator in Second Life and the owner of virtual business with female apparel Kaithleen's regarding the impact of the COVID-19 on her sales. She has been an active content creator since 2012 and she reacted on a question “*What difference do you see in your sales in periods prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic?*” She explained that the virtual market is saturated, and it is noticeable especially on Marketplace, an online form of selling on Second Life, where less known creators are willing to sell content below the price just to cumulate a profit. She observed increased traffic in the flagship store and more in-store purchases over event purchases. Her specific case indicates an increase in sales during the pandemic.

<sup>13</sup> *Virtual World Response to Coronavirus: Linden Lab Discounts Virtual Land For Education & Non-Profit Orgs Who Want To Work In Second Life*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <[https://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2020/03/sl-education-non-profit-discount.html?fbclid=IwAR1Nljgf\\_-iSK-PaYH5siNXXIwhIX-vsYgfwjBReUMFMnHyL1JTT7QIhEBs](https://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2020/03/sl-education-non-profit-discount.html?fbclid=IwAR1Nljgf_-iSK-PaYH5siNXXIwhIX-vsYgfwjBReUMFMnHyL1JTT7QIhEBs)>.

The next question was “*What kind of promotions do you have during the pandemic?*”. The content creator responded that she did not create any additional promotional offer, as her customers are used to weekly weekend specials, which are repeating every week. This form of promotion brings new customers to try on a product for discounted prices and in many cases, it is likely the customer will return if is satisfied with the purchase. We questioned a Fair-Trade Alliance, a group of Second Life content creators including 243 members<sup>14</sup> a question “*How has the income gone during the COVID-19 pandemic?*” and we received 128 responses. While 35,9% of the respondents answered that they are profiting more during the pandemic, 15,6% of respondents do not see a difference and 48,4% of respondents have less profits than before the pandemic.

128 odpovedí



**Chart 3: Poll Results on question “*How has the income gone during the COVID-19 pandemic?*”**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

We asked Veronika Greinerová a question regarding our result “*Why do you think such a large number of content creators have a decrease in their profits?*”. She explained that many of the content creators are hiring additional professionals for content creating, such as 3D modelers, graphic designers or scripters. In some cases, the hour revenue increased, and the professionals are expecting to be paid more than before pandemic. It can be caused by the lack of commission work apart from Second Life. This type of creators is investing more into the working process and the final profit is possibly lower after subtracting all the expenses. The other reason can be the already mentioned saturated market, so it is essential to build a loyal customer base to prevent declines in the profit.

## Conclusion

The virtual environment offers a possible alternative solution as a potential source of an additional or even the main income for individuals. The virtual economy in Second Life has proven to be fairly stable with the dollar value of the virtual currency holding its value. A new wave of users that recently joined the platform can potentially expand it even further, bringing both new creators and consumers who can enrich the supply and demand of the virtual market. This environment is just an example of the possibilities a virtual space can offer with their virtual markets each with their own nuances and particularities. The COVID-19 pandemic due to its restrictive imposed lockdowns has had a positive impact on virtual

<sup>14</sup> LINDEN LAB: *Second Life*. [digital game]. San Francisco : Linden Lab, 2003.

economies in general as individuals are forced to spend more or most of their time in their homes and are looking for other leisure activities, some finding them in virtual worlds. The main advantage of participating in a virtual world is the lack of restrictions in regard to social interactions that might be limited or outlawed currently in some parts of the world.

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# ONLINE MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF RESTAURANTS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Zuzana Bezáková – Magdaléna Tomová

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caught humanity unprepared and often unable to continue business, living and working in conditions that are not ideal and are rather limiting. It interfered in the activities of entrepreneurs in any sector, but the impact in the activities of restaurants was enormous. Restaurants are a place where large populations meet in a way that many studies have pointed out and identified as potentially dangerous for the virus. Therefore, in many cases, especially in the Slovak Republic, restrictions have been applied to companies in this sector. This places increased demands on the marketing and innovation of these businesses and online communication, and the new way of working is becoming a key moment for the survival of businesses of this gastronomic establishments. In this article, we deal with a vegan restaurant focused on healthy eating and comparison of online marketing communication with the competition. We point out the changes caused by the pandemic and the innovation in the field of services and their communication in the online space and community building on social networks.

## Key words:

Communication. Covid-19. Groundswell. Healthy Food. Online Marketing Communication. Restaurant. Vegan.

## 1 Introduction

In online marketing, and also directly in the digital communication we can pursue 3 goals, which are<sup>1</sup>:

- brand awareness – as one part of brand knowledge which is the key of building customer-based brand equity, which consists of brand image<sup>2</sup>,
- performance – could be measured by wide range of online metrics<sup>3</sup>,
- customer relationship management – important fact is how customer orientation can stimulate employee training<sup>4</sup> and customer information processing capability when firms implement customer relationship management (CRM)<sup>5</sup>.

ADMA<sup>6</sup> adds another goal, which is education and information of the target group.<sup>7</sup> In context of this goals, the company adapts its communication mix in the online environment, as well as the nature of its entire communication, towards the pursued objectives. In this

<sup>1</sup> DITRICHOVÁ, M.: *Hra na nástroje digitálneho marketingu*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2018. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://adma.sk/hra-na-nastroje-digitalneho-marketingu/>>.

<sup>2</sup> SÜRÜCÜA, O. et al.: Brand awareness, image, physical quality and employee behavior as building blocks of customer-based brand equity: Consequences in the hotel context. In *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 2019, Vol. 40, No. 1, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> DING, J., YU, L.: Analysis on the Construction of Online Marketing Platform for Performing Arts Ticketing under the Background of Big Data. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 2020, Vol. 750, No. 1, p. 2.

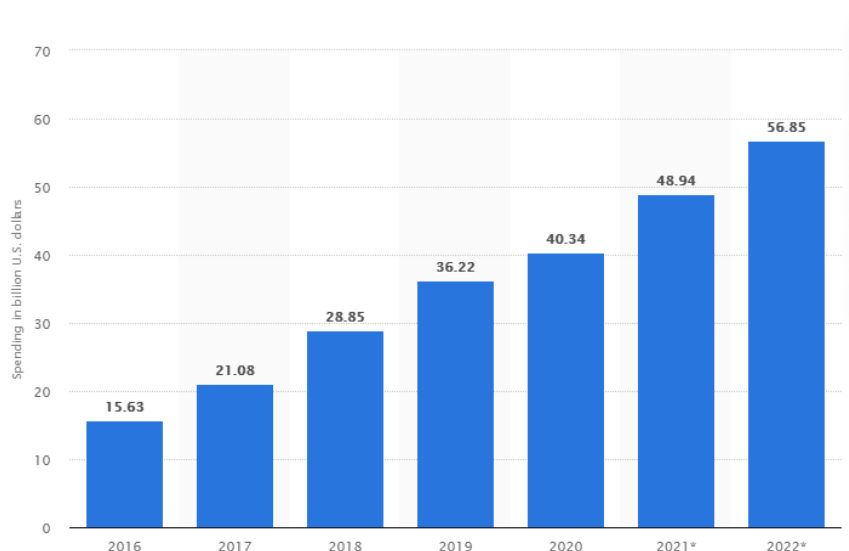
<sup>4</sup> ŠVEC, M., HORECKÝ, J., MADLEŇÁK, A.: GDPR in Labour Relations – with or without the Consent of the Employee?. In *Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2018, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: YONG KIM, B.: Mediated effects of customer orientation on customer relationship management performance. In *International Journal of hospitality and tourism administration*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 192-218. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15256480801909089?scroll=top&needAccess=true>>.

<sup>6</sup> *O ADMA*. [online]. [2020-11-06]. Available at: <<https://adma.sk/o-adma/>>.

<sup>7</sup> DITRICHOVÁ, M.: *Online médiá hybu svetom*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://adma.sk/online-media-hybu-svetom/>>.

context, the brand may not be perceived the same way as product brands or service brands,<sup>8</sup> also people and organizations can be perceived as brands<sup>9</sup> The choice of the right tools of online marketing communication<sup>10</sup> is often influenced by their popularity, as well as the opinion of experts in the field, but especially the budget of the company and the goals of the company and online marketing. Today, social networks are one of the most widely used tools for promotion and consequently measuring results of enterprise's communication on the Internet<sup>11</sup>. Users are spending more and more time on social networks, and developers are constantly coming up with innovations<sup>12</sup> to make social networks as attractive as possible, not only for users but especially for marketers and companies. The money spent on advertising on social networks is increasing year by year. The graph in Figure 1 shows advertising costs used solely on U.S. social networks in recent years in billions of dollars, as well as a forecast for the coming years.



**Figure 1: Money spend on advertising on social network in the U.S.**

Source: *Social network advertising spending in the United States from 2016 to 2022*. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/736971/social-media-ad-spend-usa/>>.

In January 2020, 4.54 billion users were active on social networks worldwide, which is 59 % of the world's population and an increase of 7 % compared to 2019.<sup>13</sup> In Slovakia, the number of active users of social networks was 2.8 million in January 2020, which makes up 51 % of our population and is 6.6 % more than in April 2019. As many as 96 % of active users use social networks on mobile phones. These data are important for the perception of social

<sup>8</sup> KUPEC, V.: Marketing Communication And Auditor's Brand. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MATÚŠ, J., MENDELOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2016. Brands we love – part I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 446.

<sup>9</sup> KELLER, K. L.: *Strategické řízení značky*. Prague : Grada Publishing a.s., 2007, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> See also: GINSBERG, J. M., BLOOM, P. N.: Choosing the Right Green-Marketing Strategy. In *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 2004, Vol. 46, No. 1, p. 79-84. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/5130041/Choosing\\_the\\_Right\\_Green\\_Marketing\\_Strategy?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/5130041/Choosing_the_Right_Green_Marketing_Strategy?auto=download)>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see: LEPKOWSKA-WHITE, E., PARSONS, A.: Strategies for monitoring social media for small restaurants. In *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 2019, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 351-374. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15378020.2019.1626207>>.

<sup>12</sup> ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BOBOVNICKÝ, A., MADLEŇÁK, A.: How can the state support the innovations to build sustainable competitive advantage of the country. In *Serbian Journal of Management*, 2013, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 257.

<sup>13</sup> *Digital in 2020*. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/digital-2020/>>.

networks and their potential as a communication channel. Another survey showed that Facebook is actively used by 2.50 million users in Slovakia, 52 % of them being women and 48 % being men. 50.4 % of Facebook users log in solely via mobile phone and only 5 % solely via a desktop computer. 44.6 % of users use their mobile phones as well as desktops.<sup>14</sup> The most numerous age group, making up 32 % of users, are users aged between 25 and 34. These are immediately followed by those aged between 18 and 24, making up 24 %.<sup>15</sup> We can state that Facebook has long been the most used social network both among ordinary users and companies. According to Neopublic, this is due to the fact that this network works well as an information and communication platform<sup>16</sup>, where you can effectively provide a wide range of information, often serving as a replacement for a website or customer support. It holds its leading position among the top 100 Slovak companies, and 59% of them use it.

## 2 Marketing Communication of Gastronomic Establishments on Social Networks

Social networking, especially on Facebook, is very common<sup>17</sup> in the gastro sector. The success of enterprises operating in the gastronomy sector is based on the emotions and experiences of the customer<sup>18</sup> more than any other. A satisfied customer is favourable to share their positive experience<sup>19</sup> with other customers or Facebook users, which are spending a more substantial part of their lives on social media<sup>20</sup>. There's a well-known statement "*You do not serve food, you serve the experience.*"<sup>21</sup> Therefore, a very important moment is the concept by which the company differs from others, so-called "*Restaurants without a name*" as the author calls them. According to her, if a enterprise wants to be different, it must not repeat what most of the others do. The uniqueness of the offer, communication and overall experience plays a key role for the success of the restaurant, but also the subsequent communication in the online space, especially on Facebook. We have summarized some important factors that differentiate you from the competition:

- a unique theme reflected in the menu, in the design of it and the whole interior, the approach and communication towards customers,
- simpler menu,

<sup>14</sup> KEMP, S.: *Digital 2020: Slovakia*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-slovakia>>.

<sup>15</sup> *Distribution of Facebook users worldwide as of January 2020, by age and gender*. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/>>.

<sup>16</sup> See also: GRUSS, R. et al.: Engaging Restaurant Customers on Facebook: The Power of Belongingness Appeals on Social Media. In *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 201-228. [online]. [2020-01-23]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1096348019892071>>.

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see: MOTKOSKI, L. J.: *Factors Influencing the use of Facebook by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Restaurant Industry and Examination of Performance Outcomes*. [Master thesis]. Alberta : University of Alberta, 2017. [online]. [2020-01-23]. Available at: <[https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/e2f2c11e-7c59-43f0-9d58-308e039f7362/view/bbd65b44-b042-40cd-8df0-379d178e9aad/Motkoski-20\(1\).pdf](https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/e2f2c11e-7c59-43f0-9d58-308e039f7362/view/bbd65b44-b042-40cd-8df0-379d178e9aad/Motkoski-20(1).pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> See: VOORHEES, C. M. et al.: Service encounters, experiences and the customer journey: Defining the field and a call to expand our lens. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2017, Vol. 79, No. 1, p. 269-280. [online]. [2020-09-17]. Available at: <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296317301364>>.

<sup>19</sup> CHEN, T.: User experience sharing: Understanding customer initiation of value co-creation in online communities. In *European Journal of Marketing*, 2018, Vol. 52, No. 5/6, p. 1156. [online]. [2020-08-12]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJM-05-2016-0298/full/html>>.

<sup>20</sup> KUPEC, V., PÍSAŘ, P.: Audit testing of personal data on social media. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BUČKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2019. Offline is the new online*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 156-169. [online]. [2020-09-17]. Available at: <[https://fmk.sk/download/MI2019\\_AJ\\_final-1.pdf](https://fmk.sk/download/MI2019_AJ_final-1.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> ILIC, B.: *Marketing reštaurácie, ako na to?*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017. [online]. [2020-01-23]. Available at: <<https://madviso.sk/marketing-restauracie-ako-na-to/>>.



- no similar businesses near that could compete with the enterprise (restaurant), the market is not oversaturated with this type of restaurant,
- food prices reflect the quality, location and type of restaurant,
- these restaurants build their brands offline and online.

In addition to the factors that differentiate the restaurant from the competition, it is also appropriate to define general principles that should be applied to ensure success in gastronomy:

- Dialogue – it is important to perceive how people react to a given communication, to be interested in the opinion of customers. Social networks are often the only marketing communication channel where people give feedback without shame;
- Online Reputation – draw on the views you have learned from the answers to the given questions. Say what you want to say, but in a way that is useful to customers;<sup>22</sup>
- In the meaning of groundswell companies need to identify the types of respondents on their networks and decide the best means of communicating with them. They ought to be ready to handle the probable loss of control that comes with the public display of criticism;<sup>23,24,25</sup>
- Web traffic – the recommended strategy is to publish convenient content on the web and link to this content via social networks through visually appealing posts;
- Sales – social networks offer many targeting options. It is appropriate to use the audience targeting on social networks based on data from previous analysis of customer behavior;
- Service – it is important to respond immediately online. It is ideal to publish the opinions of real customers in combination with a visual accessory.<sup>26</sup>

When it comes to the specific behavior of people on social networks, we often meet their interest in sharing photos of food.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is extremely important to give space to such a post, even if we are talking about Facebook, and food photos are mainly associated with the Instagram. It's a good idea to create a new location on Instagram so customers can add it to their posts. This creates space for the use of content creation directly by customers. Social networks have become a popular platform for giveaways, which are very popular with people. It is a fashionable way of gaining interactions with customers and at the same time, it supports the brand building and awareness. Cooperation with "influencers" has also become popular; in the case of restaurants, these may be food bloggers who can have a wide reach and a great influence on creating the aforementioned brand awareness. As part of collaborations, it can be effective to use the services of portals, such as food ordering or table booking portals, which can greatly facilitate certain processes and help with gaining new customers.

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<sup>22</sup> BARTÁK, P.: *Digitálny marketing pre hotely – ako na to?*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://bastadigital.com/digitalny-marketing-pre-hotely-a-restauracie-ako-na-to/>>.

<sup>23</sup> VASANTHA MADHAVI, C. AKBAR, M.: Groundswell effect part I: a new concept emerging in the world of social networks. In *Special Issue: Entrepreneurial Finance in Emerging Markets*, 2011, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, p. 42. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jsc.883>>.

<sup>24</sup> LI, Ch., BERNOFF, J.: *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*. Harvard : Harvard Business Press, 2011, p. 260.

<sup>25</sup> SIDIBE, M.: Marketing Meets Mission. Learning from brands that have taken on global health challenges. In *Harvard Business Review*, 2020, Vol. 98, No. 3, p. 136-143. [online]. [2020-03-07]. Available at: <<http://anjala.faculty.unlv.edu/CB/Fall%202020/6%20HBR%20Marketing%20meets%20mission%202020.pdf>>.

<sup>26</sup> BARTÁK, P.: *Digitálny marketing pre hotely – ako na to?*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://bastadigital.com/digitalny-marketing-pre-hotely-a-restauracie-ako-na-to/>>.

<sup>27</sup> OLIVEIRA, B., CASAIS, B.: The importance of user-generated photos in restaurant selection In *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 2019, Vol. 10 No. 1, p. 3-13. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JHTT-11-2017-0130/full/html>>.

### 3 Methodology and Object of Research

The object of the research was the Organila Food & Drink restaurant, which is a vegetarian and vegan restaurant. Vegetarianism and veganism are beloved and popular ways of eating today<sup>28,29</sup>. Nevertheless, we can still meet people who do not fully understand the principles of vegetarianism and veganism. We focused on this restaurant and the analysis of its online marketing communication during the pandemic, we followed the online communication on the social network Facebook, from the period of the 1st wave, during the downturn and also during the ongoing second wave. This restaurant is new, we date the opening of the company to a period of a few months before the outbreak of the pandemic. Therefore, it is interesting to observe how the company approached the new situation and difficult business conditions. In this case, it is very difficult to talk about a new concept of business, when the old one has not run yet. This company had to switch very quickly to a way of doing business in accordance with the conditions and requirements for restaurants, often selling from a window, meaning an essential land distribution. We analyzed the communication from March to December 2020. The results involve analyses and graphs of the online communication of this restaurant, as well as its competition, which we selected according to the territorial point of view, but with the condition of a similar product, which in this case is vegan food. The research method was based on tracking dependent variables, which are the number of followers, the number of interactions as well as the number of posts on Facebook. Using the correlation, we found the degree of dependence of the two variables on each other.

### 4 Organila's Online Communication on Social Networks During a Pandemic

Despite of the company being young, it has been communicating on the social network Facebook since its inception, trying to create a community of customers, maintain it, and if we evaluated the factors of differentiation from the competition, we could certainly evaluate their fulfillment as follows:

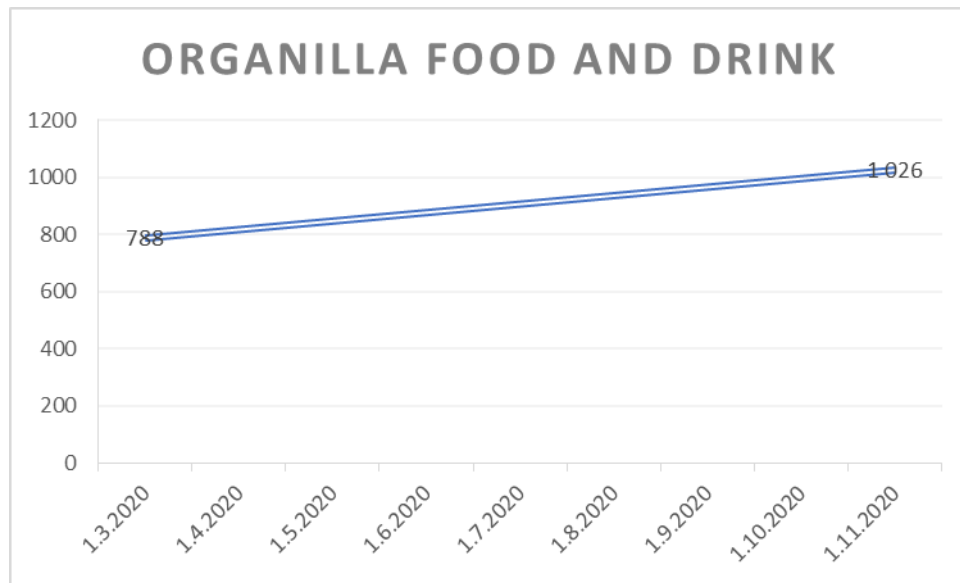
- a unique theme – vegan food prepared from home-grown ingredients. The restaurant communicated it in several posts, veganism is reflected in the menu, in the design of the menu and the entire interior, in communication with customers,
- consistent menu,
- the market is not oversaturated with this type of restaurant, the businesses in the area are not directly vegan, but only offer some vegan dishes,
- food prices are commensurate with the quality and popular location,
- the restaurant communicates offline and, of course, builds its community online

The company's Facebook page is called Organila Food & Drink. This community has 788 fans as of 26.3.2020 and 1026 fans as of 1.11.2020. The number of fans during the pandemic increased linearly by 30%.

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<sup>28</sup> *Becoming a vegetarian*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-03-07]. Available at: <<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/becoming-a-vegetarian>>.

<sup>29</sup> DOMKE, J. F.: *Definitions of "vegan" and "vegetarian" in accordance with the EU Food Information Regulation*. 2018. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <[https://www.euroveg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/EVU\\_PP\\_Definition.pdf](https://www.euroveg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/EVU_PP_Definition.pdf)>.



**Figure 2: Increasing of fans during several months of pandemy**

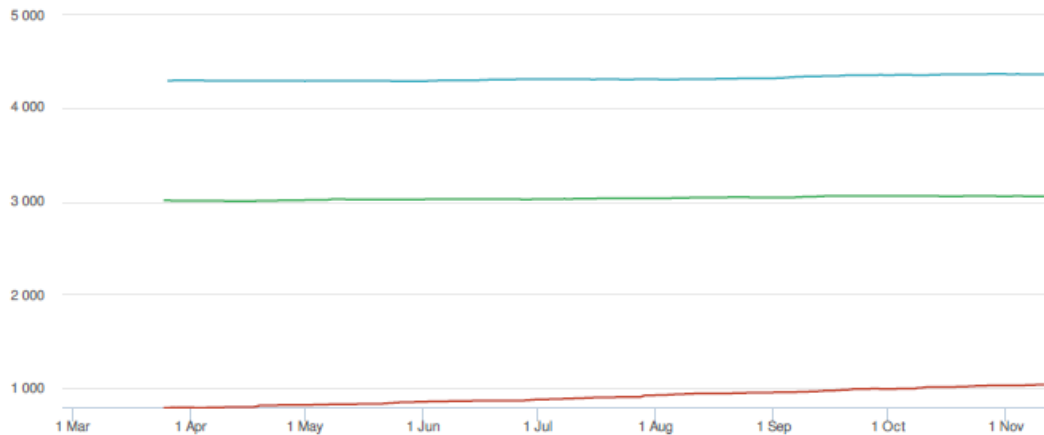
Source: Own processing

Based on 14 reviews from customers, the Facebook page received a rating of 4.7 out of 5. We can find not only recommendations in Slovak, but also in English, which is a great advantage for a company operating in Piešťany, given that it is a spa town and tourists visiting this city can often speak English. Organilla Food & Drink has adapted relatively quickly to the current situation in times of crisis, and we can say that coronavirus has speeded up some processes and introduced new services that the company has not yet been able to implement in its short existence. It is mainly about food delivery, but also the completion of the website. We divided the competition into two categories: primary and secondary. The primary competition is direct competition, which addresses the same customers as our object of research Organilla Food & Drink. In our case, it is Freshco bistro & coffee roasters, mainly due to the fact that there is no other explicitly vegetarian/vegan restaurant in Piešťany. In the category of secondary competition, we have included a company that sells products similar to the offer of our research object, but their offer is not composed primarily of vegetarian/vegan meals, but also includes meat dishes. An interesting part of communication on social networks is the fact how the companies responded to the problem of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. Gastronomy was initially one of the most endangered segments, but thanks to crisis measures, many of them have been able to adapt to the market, change their processes and continue to be able to provide their services despite the restrictions. Freshco has decided not to take any action as part of crisis measures. He even points out that he remains open even though they do not provide food delivery. Žiwell closed its operations to the public and offered customers food delivery directly to their homes. In an innovative way, they also solved the offer of meals outside the lunch menu by creating events with a thematic menu of meals to order. The number of fans of the competitors with a relatively high number of fans increased by less than 2% during the researched period. Organilla increased by 30%. Due to the fact that we do not have data before the pandemic, we cannot compare with this time. However, the result says that the number of fans is growing linearly and did not fluctuate during the first or second wave.

**Table 1: Number of fans**

<i>Restaurant</i>	<b>26.3.2020</b>	<b>1.11.2020</b>	<b>Increase</b>
<i>Žiwell Kursalon</i>	4292	4 361	1,608%
<i>Freshco</i>	3009	3 054	1,496%
<i>Organilla Food and Drink</i>	788	1 026	30,203%

Source: Own processing

**Figure 3: Number of fans**

Source: Own processing

Subsequently, we compiled a table of values of the monitored quantities, while finding the correlation between the two of them. We present the results of this investigation. Results of our research were:

- Correlation between Average number of responses and Average number of fans,  $r = 0.817580589$  - high correlation between the number of reactions and the number of fans.
- Correlation between the Average number of fans and the Number of posts for the observed period,  $r = 0.904713653$  - high correlation between the number of fans and the number of posts for the observed period.
- Correlation between the Average number of responses and the Number of posts for the observed period,  $r = 0.984984794$  - high correlation between the number of posts and the number of reactions.

It holds that if  $0.9 \leq r$ , then there is a very high tightness between the variables. We confirmed the correlation between all the examined variables (always two to each other) and thus that there is a connection between them, ie a dependence. This will lead to results that can be the basis for formulating conclusions and recommendations for the company in the future, if it wants to increase the number of fans, expand the base of its followers and increase user intervention and thus customers. Each change of a given quantity should therefore cause a change in another area.

## Conclusion

The success of the profile and the growth in the number of fans of Organilla Food & Drink probably lies in the community that this company has created around it. This is a community that has not only common eating habits but also a lifestyle in common. As a result, these

people in their community are more open and much willing to provide interactions to the contributions that present this lifestyle. Growth during a pandemic is related to the well-deployed concept of the restaurant and at the same time the ability to cope with the new situation and adapt to it. As for the future existence of the company, the fundamental way it can affect its operation in the online space is increasing the number of posts, the number of published posts will affect the number of fans and at the same time increase the number of resections, which are important factors in building online communities and successful online marketing communication. This company is an example that even a blue business can know how to take advantage of opportunities and work to grow its customers and build an online community on social networks.

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## THE PROBLEM OF JOURNALISTIC OBJECTIVITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

*Pavel Bielík*

### Abstract

It is obvious that a journalist nowadays is not that person that spends whole days sitting in the newsroom and writing articles. They must be able to work with several online platforms and tools, they communicate with their readers in Facebook groups, offer flash news and photo-material on Instagram. This means that there is a part of the audience that interacts with the medium on the internet, but does not read the articles at all and only reacts with “likes” and comments. This social networks have caused a notable revolution not only in our approach to information, but also in the perception of journalistic objectivity. Investigative journalists thus often face a difficult task to provide verified and objective information in crisis situations without overstepping the framework of their profession and succumbing to a cult of their own personality, and respecting the roles and principles of their occupation, which strongly influences the public opinion. The paper focuses on the obstacles and the growing popularity of using social networks in the area of investigative journalism.

### Key words:

Investigative Journalism. Journalist. Media. Objectivity. Social Media.

### Introduction

*“If somebody had called me an influencer some time ago, I might have been offended. My attitude towards social networks was lukewarm; I found them a waste of time. Today, I still feel like Mizík, who cannot use a computer. It takes me an hour to make captions to every story and I cut photos like a butcher. I thought that boomerang is that thing that Fico throws to its dog Larry. Not to mention streams that I still can’t switch on and the videos I sometimes thoughtlessly shoot. I usually fall asleep, bored of them, before I even post them on Facebook or Instagram. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,”*<sup>1</sup> wrote Marek Vagovič, an investigative journalist of the Aktuality.sk portal on his Instagram page in June 2020. The 46 years old journalist and his reaction on the social network confirm the fact that more and more personalities from journalistic life turn to social networks. It is a trend that has recently occurred in the area of journalism, in Slovakia and worldwide. M. Vagovič, who has been a part of this profession for almost two decades and has definitely experienced its transformation, is right – several years ago, few people would have expected that journalists (especially the investigative journalists) would voluntarily convey information about serious affairs, corrupt behaviour or patronage on social networks. According to L. Molyneux, *“in order to achieve objectivity, journalists often avoided personal involvement, especially in politics. Social media, however, take down the curtain by allowing both sources and readers to interact with the journalist. This is part of a larger, digital-age trend.”*<sup>2</sup> Renowned investigative journalist D. Leigh also writes that *“the investigative reporter who wants to operate in this new world has to be willing to cooperate with overseas reporters from other organisations; with hackers and other activists; with non-profit campaigners; with journalists in other types of media; with tech engineers; with data visualisers and graphic designers; and above all, with media outlets who have the time and money to fund complex collaborations.”*<sup>3</sup> And although D. Leigh speaks of several areas where journalism is being transformed in a way that influences journalistic activities, we will

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<sup>1</sup> Instagram Marek Vagoviča. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <[https://www.instagram.com/p/CBq19V9nP\\_6/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CBq19V9nP_6/)>.

<sup>2</sup> MOLYNEUX, L.: What Journalists Retweet: Opinion, Humor and Brand Development on Twitter. In *Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 7, p. 921-934.

<sup>3</sup> LEIGH, D.: *Investigative Journalism: A Survival Guide*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 151-152.



focus our attention mainly on social networks. As stated by M. Švecová, social networks initially served only as an instrument of citizen journalism. Currently, however, they assist well to both the individual media and the journalists and serve several purposes in journalism:

1. transmission of website content and the related gaining of readership,
2. finding tips for stories that could be used to write journalistic contents (social networks are one of the primary sources of information from various areas),
3. feedback from the audience not only in the form of comments, but also communication through private messages, sharing, or other interactive elements,
4. communication of journalists with their readers by informing them about articles,
5. social networks offer windows of opportunity for citizen journalism, smaller media, and bloggers,
6. creation of specific content aimed at concrete social networks, taking into account possibilities of their publishing.<sup>4</sup>

Today, journalists are able to use social networks as sources of stories, to promote their own work, or to network with other journalists.<sup>5</sup> According to A. López-Meri, L. Alonso-Muñoz, and A. Casero-Ripollés, “*self-branding is seen as one of the possible solutions for dealing with the crisis in the journalism sector. In the digital context, future journalists should be able to build their reputation and a personal brand that sets them apart from others, as well as know how to professionally manage their digital identity. In this regard, learning how to design a solid communicative strategy on social media appears to be essential for journalism students.*”<sup>6</sup>

Investigative journalism in the environment of new media comes to a crossroads, where it often must choose the right path. Thanks to social media, it becomes more topical and exclusive on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it also reveals some of its more controversial traits – we are able to notice signs of triviality, superficiality of provided information, sarcasm, irony, and loss of journalistic objectivity. Investigative journalism has found itself in a place where its leading personalities supply their audience with controversial reports, most probably in an attempt to arouse interest, attract attention or bring appealing content. Czech journalist T. Engelová also reminds us that journalists currently face great challenges. They are confronted with working under pressure, flooded by information, and pressured by the public and the politicians. Besides that, they also face commercial pressures, competitive pressures, and also pressures of their own ego.<sup>7</sup> The basic principles of journalism, such as impartiality, objectivity, information based on facts, and use of multiple sources, are still valid, but appear rather counterproductive in the social networks environment. Instagram, which is a place full of entertaining elements, and its users try to reach as much attention as possible, is hardly compatible with serious journalism. Creation of specific contents intended to be spread through social networks has caused the demand for contents with viral potential.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ŠVECOVÁ, M.: *Webová žurnalistika*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> *Using social media*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://earthjournalism.net/resources/using-social-media>>.

<sup>6</sup> LÓPEZ-MERI, A., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, L., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, A.: Strategies in journalistic branding on social media: the influence of public and business dimensions according to future journalists' perceptions. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 55-67.

<sup>7</sup> ENGELOVÁ, T.: *Novinářská objektivita a úskali současné žurnalistiky*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDwodVa86as>>.

<sup>8</sup> ŠVECOVÁ, M.: *Webová žurnalistika*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 161.



Václav Moravec  
@vaclavmoravec

Vážený pane @AndrejBabis měl jsem pravdu, Legislativní rada vlády jako celek věcný záměr stavebního zákona neschvalovala. Škoda, že se Vám @DostalovaK při telefonátu nesvěří, že pracovní komise LRV měla zásadní výhrady. Důkazy rád dodám. Privatizace práva v ČR vítězí, bohužel!

**Picture 1: Czech political presenter sends a message to the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš on Twitter**  
Source: *Twitter Václava Moravca*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://twitter.com/vaclavmoravec/status/1201196023630221312>>.

## 1 Investigative Journalism on Social Networks

Why do they do it? Is it right? Are social networks even an adequate place for journalistic profession under pressure? How do social networks influence journalistic profession, especially in difficult situations? Most likely, we will not be able to find clear answers to all the questions related to the occupation of journalism. However, one thing is for sure – in Slovakia, a country plagued by cases of corruption, scandals, murder of a journalist, and, finally, the coronavirus pandemic, a serious and objective work of investigative journalists is needed more than ever before. Therefore, we will present a few situations that could promote dialogue about journalistic objectivity on social networks, and will also point out the problems related to them. A good example is L. Klicperová, a renowned Czech journalist, photographer, and four times winner of Czech Press Photo Awards, who has visited Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia or Somalia ravaged by war. As a reporter, she has also been to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. In November 2019, she conducted an interview for the online channel DVTV after her return from Syria, where she and M. Kutilová mapped the Turkish offensive and the plight of the Kurds living there. Right at the beginning of the interview, the presenter M. Veselovský asked her, if they had gone to this crisis area as journalists or as pro-Kurdish activists, as he found their posts on social networks one-sided (for example Figure 2). *“When you see those human lives, you are not an analyst who compiles a mosaic from articles collected from the internet. When the suffering is right in front of your eyes, you probably cannot be completely objective. But I think that we are trying to be objective and to draw attention to the suffering. Anyhow, we cannot help feeling the emotions, which there is a lot of, and we are also only human,”*<sup>9</sup> responded L. Klicperová. Shortly after the interview in DVTV, we decided to approach her without colleague B. Oprala as *Denník N* journalists. We wanted to understand not only the seriousness of situation on Turkey-Syria border, but also the way of thinking of the acclaimed journalist, who has built her successful career on working in crisis situations. After several questions, we could sense how L. Klicperová still felt anger and sadness because of what she had seen and encountered. We talked to a person who had not gone to Syria to only do their job as a journalist,

<sup>9</sup> VESELOVSKÝ, M.: *Viděly jsme beznaděj, chaos a spousty mrtvých, říká Klicperová po návratu ze Sýrie*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/videly-jisme-beznadej-chaos-a-spousty-mrtvych-rika-klicperova/r~442de156f0fc11e99d020cc47ab5f122/>>.

but also to help the aggrieved party. *“Pardon me, but I think that Trump is a complete jerk,”*<sup>10</sup> she responded to our question of what she thinks about the American president. Let’s just add that the posts by M. Veselovský on Twitter are also a special case. In 2017, we interviewed him for Denník N and confronted him with his activities on Twitter that sometimes do not seem objective. He responded: *“For me, the broad field and room have opened after I left the Czech Television, but at the same time I detest to comment things publicly too much. The post you have selected is one of the sharper ones.”*<sup>11</sup>



**Picture 2: M. Kutilová and L. Klicperová on Syria-Iraq border. Photograph published on Instagram**  
Source: *Instagram Lenky Klicperovej*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bj7RES3h22V/>>.

As students in 2016, together with the colleague B. Oprala, we have also spoken to a war correspondent and photographer J. Husár about the role of journalism and objectivity in crisis situations. He told us: *“What really concerns me about today’s society is its bipolarization. Everything needs to be explained and showed in a very fast and simple way. I don’t see much meaningfulness in depicting dead people. I rather try to use stories to convey information about where all the hate comes from and where the roots of the evil lie.”*<sup>12</sup> His words remind us of the opinion of the journalist T. Engelová on the pitfalls of journalism in crisis situations. Unfortunately, as journalists, we all face the pressure of being as interesting or entertaining as possible and this erodes our professionalism.<sup>13</sup> The motives of another Slovak photographer

<sup>10</sup> BIELIK, P., OPRALA, B.: *Trump je nekompetentný blb, Erdoganova ofenzíva pripomína anexiu Krymu, hovorí česká novinárka po návrate zo Sýrie*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1656750/trump-je-nekompetentny-blb-erdoganova-ofenziva-pripomina-anexiu-krymu-hovori-ceska-novinarka-po-navrate-zo-syrie/>>.

<sup>11</sup> BIELIK, P., OPRALA, B.: *Martin Veselovský z DVTV: Novinári už sú v kontakte s politikmi výrazne sebavedomejší*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/648998/martin-veselovsky-z-dvtv-novinari-uz-su-v-kontakte-s-politikmi-vyrazne-sebavedomejsi/>>.

<sup>12</sup> BIELIK, P., OPRALA, B.: *Vojnový fotograf Ján Husár: ISIS ťa zbičujú za to, že fajčíš, ale sami nosia vo vrecku kokain*. 2016. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://gaudeo.sk/jan-husar/>>.

<sup>13</sup> ENGELOVÁ, T.: *Novinárska objektivita a úskali súčasnej žurnalistiky*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDwodVa86as>>.

T. Halász, who has worked in crisis areas and helped people at risk in Cambodia, Kenya, Iraq or Ukraine, are also interesting, as at the beginning of 2020 he stood for election to the parliament as a member of the party PS/SPOLU. He was even a cofounder of the Progressive Slovakia (PS) political movement. T. Halász admitted that, as a photographer, he earns his money through commercial projects; however, he has been noted mainly for his award-winning photo essay *Road to the Presidential Palace*, where he had mapped for several months the campaign of the future president Andrej Kiska, who took office in 2014. After publishing his photo essay, the photographer was criticized that he had won the prize thanks to the fact that the presidential candidate allowed him a closer contact and that he had abused his work for political purposes. T. Halász was even a finalist of the prestigious Slovak Press Photo Award for his photograph *The First Candle of the President*. The photo depicts the elected president after the election night quietly stopping at SNP Square to light a candle for the murdered journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. We are talking about the president Zuzana Čaputová, who had stepped down as the vice-chair of the Progressive Slovakia movement cofounded by T. Halász before the presidential election in 2019.



**Picture 3: Journalist and photographer Ján Husár with a policeman in Nigeria. Photo posted on Instagram**  
Source: *Instagram Jána Husára*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/BXFHS\\_sgkvc/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BXFHS_sgkvc/).

*“Social media have enabled journalists to promote their work and interact with audiences without the intermediation of their organisation. Branding on social media has become a new competency that journalists have to address,”*<sup>14</sup> write A. López-Meri, L. Alonso-Muñoz, and A. Casero-Ripollés. If we speak of journalistic objectivity on social networks, we can present several situations with Slovak journalists related to domestic political affairs as examples. Let’s mention M. Sabo, a long-standing presenter and currently a well-known voice of the most

<sup>14</sup> LÓPEZ-MERI, A., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, L., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, A.: Strategies in journalistic branding on social media: the influence of public and business dimensions according to future journalists’ perceptions. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 55-67.

listened to Slovak radio Express, who in August this year published a post on Instagram, where he was holding dummies of Slovak politicians M. Kotleba and R. Fico with the inscription “*Watch out, anything might be hiding in the bushes*”.<sup>15</sup> When asked whether he doesn’t consider this reaction over the top, he said that it was just a meme that he found funny. He knows that many people were looking for deeper meanings, but “I haven’t thought it through that much,” he said. Eventually he added that he regards at least one of them as trash.<sup>16</sup> Is such behaviour of a presenter appropriate in his position? It is hard to find a clear answer, but considering his recent activities, we can assume that he is paving his own path into politics for the future. When interviewed, M. Sabo did not deny a possible career in politics, stirring up further speculation about his continuance in media and whether his activities on social networks aren’t just an act of self-branding before his entry into politics. M. Sabo is a presenter of a commercial medium; he doesn’t do investigative works. However, we can also find cases of personalities that are among the most significant in the area of investigative journalism in Slovakia. And their activities on social networks are debatable. M. Vagovič, a renowned journalist and colleague of the murdered Ján Kuciak, uses Instagram not only to inform the public. His posts are embedded with sarcasm, irony, or wordplay that he uses to express his opinions on serious matters. The Cattleman case starts with the words “*They had their dirty, bloodstained snouts poked in everything.*” and concludes with the words “*An ox forgot how it was when he was a calf.*”<sup>17</sup> On June 30<sup>th</sup> he published a post as a reaction to the fact that the police corps presidency of M. Lučanský is over: “*The police president Lučanský finally quits. Thank God.*”<sup>18</sup> On July 14<sup>th</sup>, he attracted attention on his Instagram by a photo, in which he is standing under the monument of the famous highwayman Juraj Jánošík: “*The first communist Juraj Jánošík, who robbed the rich and gave to the poor. The idol of the fake social democrat Robert Fico, who robbed everyone and gave to his people.*”<sup>19</sup>

Another personality, who shows elements of unobjectivity is the investigative journalist of Denník N Monika Tódová. Her work cannot be doubted, as she is one of the most outstanding journalists in the fight against corruption, is a two times winner of the 2019 Journalism Award in the categories *Best investigative story* and *Best interview*. Her posts on social networks can, however, hardly be considered objective. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, she reacted to the court’s verdict of M. Kočner’s innocence by saying: “*Two judges think that we are deaf and blind and unable to think logically.*”<sup>20</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, she published a post with a caption “*Pleasure at work*”,<sup>21</sup> in which she shows a photo of herself with her article entitled *Mojmír Mamojka Resigns from the Post of Constitutional Court Judge due to Contacts with Kočner* from March 22<sup>nd</sup>, where she writes: “*So far, I have sat on this blue couch with the sixth minister of interior.*

<sup>15</sup> Instagram Michala Saba. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CDI2EN5FGop/>>.

<sup>16</sup> BIELIK, P., OPRALA, B.: *Moderátor Sabo z Expressu: Pellegrini sa mi ozval na Instagrame, nie som veľkým fanúšikom súčasnej vlády.* Released on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/2003449/moderator-sabo-z-expressu-pellegrini-sa-mi-ozval-na-instagrame-nie-som-velkym-fanusikom-sucasnej-vlady/>>.

<sup>17</sup> Instagram Mareka Vagoviča. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CCLEYTRH4mB/>>.

<sup>18</sup> Instagram Mareka Vagoviča. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CCDlBxgHdDD/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Instagram Mareka Vagoviča. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CCoQCnKH3rh/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Instagram Moniky Tódovej. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <[https://www.instagram.com/p/CEqyGJ9nQO\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CEqyGJ9nQO_/)>.

<sup>21</sup> Instagram Moniky Tódovej. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CAIBqA9HN0t/>>.

*Where Kaliňák ends, I am just starting.*<sup>22</sup> As we might notice, the activities of M. Tódová and M. Vagovič on Instagram have similar features. Are they breaking the law? Certainly not. However, are they impartial? Within the investigative journalism, there are difficult discussions being led about impartiality. On the one hand, an investigative journalist is a guardian of democracy that uncovers antisocial, corrupt behaviour in the public interest<sup>23</sup> and their role is to reveal the truth and identify the untruth,<sup>24</sup> on the other hand, it is a person bound by the basic principles governing a journalist's work thoroughly described in the Code of Journalistic Ethics – impartiality, balance, objectivity.<sup>25</sup> Denník N even writes on their website that they respect the aforementioned Code.<sup>26</sup> But then, there is a third party – a journalist is a part of infotainment and branding of their medium. A proper example is a study by the Reuters Institute from 2015, where respondents generally think that journalists will have to think more about personal branding, for example, on social media, be more entrepreneurial, as the ability to count on stable employment, full-time journalism work, and life-long careers in journalism are seen as threatened.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

Elements of humour, suspense, pleasure, and entertainment have gradually established themselves throughout the media production. Entertainment (not information) is what keeps the attention and interest of the audience, because it provides joy, amusement, and relaxation.<sup>28</sup> We are living in a time of infotainment, in a time of emotions and adventurous or dangerous contents. Television reporters broadcast live from unconventional places or situations in order to impress. As an example we can mention the famous video coverage which shows reporter Mike Seidel struggling to keep his balance as he reports in Wilmington, North Carolina in 2018, and which became viral.<sup>29</sup> During a live coverage, he could not keep his balance due to strong wind, but there are people in the background walking without any trouble. Weather channel then responded to claims that the reporter was faking coverage of hurricane Florence – he was tired, they said. A “selfie” made by E. Smetanová, the presenter of the online channel DVTV, with a burning Notre-Dame Cathedral in the background, posted on social networks in April 2019, also invited sharp criticism.<sup>30</sup> Journalists and the media themselves are currently facing the challenges of the internet and social networks. Media are operating across various platforms that did not exist before and the journalists are being required to engage with audiences more

<sup>22</sup> *Instagram Moniky Tódovej*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-DXUCfHJI-/>>.

<sup>23</sup> LEIGH, D.: *Investigative Journalism: A Survival Guide*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> MORAVČÍKOVÁ, M.: *Investigatívne novinárstvo*. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Slovník vybraných pojmov z mediálnych štúdií. Kľúčové termíny v súčasnej mediálnej komunikácii*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> *Etický kódex novinára*. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<http://www.ssn.sk/eticky-kodex-novinara/>>.

<sup>26</sup> *Denník N*. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/?ref=menu>>.

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see: PICARD, R. G.: *Journalists' Perceptions of the Future of Journalistic Work*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Journalists%27%20Perceptions%20of%20the%20Future%20of%20Journalistic%20Work.pdf>>.

<sup>28</sup> KOLTAIOVÁ, A.: *Magazín o životnom štýle*. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Slovník vybraných pojmov z mediálnych štúdií. Kľúčové termíny v súčasnej mediálnej komunikácii*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> *Weather channel responds to claims reporter was faking coverage of hurricane Florence*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyrRCx8-fZk>>.

<sup>30</sup> *Nečakanou „hviezdou“ požiaru Notre-Dame je česká moderátorka. Takto zabáva internet*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/1925340-necakanou-hviezdou-poziaru-notre-dame-je-ceska-moderatorka-takto-zabava-internet>>.

than ever before.<sup>31</sup> It is obvious that a journalist nowadays is not that person that spends whole days sitting in the newsroom and writing articles (or working in the field). They must be able to work with several online platforms and tools that contemporary audiences find appealing – pressrooms mass-produce podcasts (audio files on websites of media and other platforms like Spotify or Soundcloud),<sup>32</sup> they communicate with their readers in Facebook groups, offer flash news and photo-material on Instagram. This means that there is a part of the audience that interacts with the medium on the internet, but does not read the articles at all and only reacts with “likes” and comments. A. López-Meri, L. Alonso-Muñoz, and A. Casero-Ripollés in their article describe strategies aimed at personal branding in journalism, which involve the *positioning* (giving opinions, openly defending ideas and even showing one’s ideology) *content curation* (it consists of gatekeeping, prioritising and recommending content for the audience), *personalisation* (it has been assumed that the more intense the dialogue, the more reinforced the personal brand) and *specialisation* (promoting specialised content).<sup>33</sup> L. Molyneux published qualitative textual analysis of retweets on Twitter – study from 2014 found that “journalists are challenging norms of objectivity and independence on Twitter. Journalists frequently pass along subtle interpretation and analysis rather than strong opinions. Many retweets are humorous, sometimes even at journalism’s expense. Journalists also retweet many messages about themselves, working to build a personal brand and relationships with their audience.”<sup>34</sup> A large portion of retweets contained opinion (about half the sample were journalists identified as columnists or commentators) and second significant pattern in retweets was a preference for humour. In crisis areas, there is a tendency to make oneself more heroic and to exaggerate things, as the reality is often less interesting than what is presented in the media.<sup>35</sup> Social networks demand our personal view, opinion, and emotions - things that are the opposite of professional and serious journalism.

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<sup>31</sup> See also: PICARD, R. G.: *Journalists’ Perceptions of the Future of Journalistic Work*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Journalists%27%20Perceptions%20of%20the%20Future%20of%20Journalistic%20Work.pdf>>.

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<sup>33</sup> LÓPEZ-MERI, A., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, L., ALONSO-MUÑOZ, A.: Strategies in journalistic branding on social media: the influence of public and business dimensions according to future journalists’ perceptions. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2020, p. 55-67.

<sup>34</sup> MOLYNEUX, L.: What Journalists Retweet: Opinion, Humor and Brand Development on Twitter. In *Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 7, p. 921-934.

<sup>35</sup> ENGELOVÁ, T.: *Novinárska objektivita a úskali súčasnej žurnalistiky*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDwodVa86as>>.

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# LISTENING TO SLOVAK RADIO DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND CORONAVIRUS WAVES

*Andrej Brník*

## Abstract

During the first and second waves of coronavirus spread, the inhabitants of Slovakia had to get used to various restrictions on movement several times. Among the most significant were the restrictions closed by bars, restaurants, sports grounds and other cultural and social spaces. People were forced to stay more in their homes and devote their time to themselves and their families. This condition helped increase radio listening or, conversely, damaged them. The paper maps the listening of selected Slovak commercial and public radio stations on the basis of a comparison of listening data from 2020 and from 2019. As a source we will use data obtained from two sources: median.sk and radia.sk. The aim of the article is to provide the reader with a detailed analysis of the current listening of radio stations Expres, Fun, Vlna and public radio Slovakia with regard to the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

## Key words:

Coronavirus. Listening. Radio. Radio Broadcasting. Radio Communication.

## 1 Current Radio Market in Slovakia

The Slovak radio market, on the basis of dual broadcasting, which was adopted by the Act of the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic No. 468/1991 Coll. on the operation of radio and television broadcasting, has been evolving for a long time. A year after the fall of communism and the associated censorship, the first competition of state radio in Slovakia entered in 1990. During the establishment of the first private radio, students stood and the French Embassy in Slovakia also helped. Exactly on June 10th at 14:00, the first jingle was heard, followed by a song by Pink Floyd. And so began the process of broadcasting private radio stations. This radio broadcasts to this day and we know it under the brand FUN radio.<sup>1</sup> Although there was no legislation governing the broadcasting of commercial stations when FUN radio was established, it came soon. Over the years, the radio market in Slovakia has developed. New multiregional radios were created, but they also disappeared. It was the same with regional or local radios.<sup>2</sup> Also in 2020, the Broadcasting and Retransmission Council granted a license for terrestrial radio broadcasting to 37 radios of various radios throughout Slovakia (11 local, 18 regional, 9 multiregional radios), including a public broadcaster broadcasting by law, which has 9 different stations on the frequency:

- **Local** – Rádio aetter, Rádio Liptov, Rádio Mária, Rádio Modra, Rádio Piešťany, Rádio Plus, Rádio Portus, Rádio Roma, Rádio SITY, SKY Rádio, Rádio The End.
- **Regional** – Rádio Beta, Rádio Frontinus, Rádio Goldies, Rádio 7, Kiss Rádio, Rádio Košice, Rádio Muzika, Rádio ONE, Rádio ONE Rock, Rádio Rebeca, Rádio Širava, Trnavské Rádio, Rádio Viva, Rádio WOW, Rádio YES, Záhorácke rádio, Rádio WOW Nitra.
- **Multiregional** – Anténa rock, Best FM, Európa 2, Rádio Expres, Fun Rádio, Rádio Jazz, rádio Jemné, Rádio Lumen, Vlna rádio.

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<sup>1</sup> SUDOR, K.: *Študenti pred 30 rokmi na kolene založili prvú súkromnú stanicu FUN rádio a nezarobili na tom*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-24]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1924710/studenti-pred-tridsiatimi-rokmi-na-kolene-zalozili-a-postavili-prvu-sukromnu-stanicu-fun-radio-a-nezarobili-na-tom/>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Zákon o vysielaní a retransmisii č. 308/2000, Z. z. z dňa 14. septembra 2000*. [online]. [2020-09-21]. Available at: <<https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2000-308>>.

- **Public service** – Rádio Devín, Rádio\_FM, Rádio Patria, Rádio Regina, Rádio Regina – Západ, Rádio Regina – Stred, Rádio Regina – Východ, Rádio Slovensko, Rádio Slovakia International.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Steps Introduced Against the Spread of Coronavirus in Slovakia

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic in Slovakia is part of a worldwide pandemic of the infectious disease COVID-19, which began to spread from China and later became the epicenter in Italy, Europe. The first case was confirmed in Slovakia on March 6th, 2020. A 52-year-old man from the Bratislava region proved positive, but he was not abroad, but his son was in Venice in mid-February.<sup>4</sup> A day later, on March 7th, 2020, a positive test was also confirmed to the son, who was confirmed as patient „0“ - the first carrier of the disease.<sup>5</sup> Which steps followed:

- **March** – Already on March 12th, the crisis staff adopted the first restriction on movement - the closure of schools, leisure facilities, the cessation of international traffic and the introduction of a 14-day mandatory quarantine when returning home from abroad. Furthermore, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, universities, retail and non-food services, pharmacies and drugstores, and sports venues were closed on March 16. From March 25, the mask must also be worn in public.<sup>6</sup>
- **April** – On April 22nd, the first phase of the relaxation of steps began, which the government divided into 5 parts. Retail stores and services up to 300 m<sup>2</sup> were opened, long-term accommodation, outdoor contactless sports were allowed, open markets.<sup>7</sup>
- **May** – In May, May 6th, the second and at the same time the third phase of the relaxation of measures began. Short-term accommodation, meals in common areas, pedicure, manicure, outdoor hiking, taxi, massages, museums, libraries.<sup>8</sup> Later, 20th May, the last phase of release has begun. Theaters and cinemas were opened, events with less than 100 participants were allowed, and shopping malls were opened. The inhabitants of Slovakia can travel abroad.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Prehľad slovenských rádii*. [online]. [2020-10-21] Available at: <<https://www.radia.sk/radia>>.

<sup>4</sup> HAJČÁKOVÁ, D.: *Na Slovensku potvrdili prvý prípad koronavírusu, od pondelka sa zakázu lety do Talianska*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22351714/na-slovensku-potvrdili-pripad-koronavirusu.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> *COVID-19: Slovensko pozná pacienta „0“*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-24]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4064:covid-19-slovensko-pozna-pacienta-0q&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4064:covid-19-slovensko-pozna-pacienta-0q&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153)>.

<sup>6</sup> FOLENTOVÁ, V.: *Nové opatrenia: Povinné rúška vonku, obchody otvorené pre seniorov, odsun úradných lehôt, sledovanie pohybu mobilov*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1818474/nove-opatrenia-povinne-ruska-vonku-obchody-otvorene-pre-seniorov-odsun-uradnych-lehot-sledovanie-pohybu-mobilov/>>.

<sup>7</sup> FRANTOVÁ, E.: *Uvoľňovanie opatrení: Od stredy sa otvoria maloobchodné prevádzky a služby*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-24]. Available at: <<https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/549196-nazivo-vlada-o-postupnom-otvarani-prevadzok/>>.

<sup>8</sup> CEHLÁRIKOVÁ, A.: *Slovensko vstúpi rovno do tretej fázy uvoľňovania opatrení*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://bratislavskykraj.sk/slovensko-vstupi-rovno-do-tretej-fazy-uvolnovania-opatreni/>>.

<sup>9</sup> KATUŠKA, M.: *Rúška už nebudú povinné všade, povolia cesty do zahraničia na krátky čas*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22406854/koronavirus-slovensko-uvolnenie-dalsich-opatreni.html>>.

- **June** – Kindergartens also opened on 1st June and the first grade of primary schools, with the second grade being on a voluntary basis. The 5th release phase also started on June 3rd for larger service events.<sup>10</sup>
- **July, August** – these months were without any restrictions, the only one concerned the organization of mass events for up to 1000 people.
- **September** – the so-called traffic lights for districts which, in addition to steps in a worse than green color, provided for stricter actions for holding mass events (with the exception of weddings). At the same time, the end of September also includes the start of the so-called second wave.<sup>11</sup>

The state of restrictions therefore began on March 13th, and the last major restrictions (apart from mass events over 1,000 participants) were lifted on June 3rd. **It was a total of 69 days.** However, at the end of April, after 39 days, the measures began to ease. **The so-called full lockdown lasted from March 13th to April 22nd.** From this we could expect that March, or April will be one of the best months in listening if the lockdown had a certain effect on listening to the radio.

### 3 Listening During the First and Second Waves of Coronavirus Spread

What is the long-term listening to Slovak radio stations? MEDIAN SK regularly examines listening to radios in Slovakia. For 2019, they conducted a survey<sup>12</sup> where 86 % of respondents answered positively in the parameter „*listened to last week*“, which represents almost 3,9 million listeners aged 14-79. On the contrary, more than 58 % of the population listens to the radio every day, representing 2,6 million people. On average, listeners listen to the radio for about 50 minutes a day.<sup>13</sup> Rádio Expres has been the leader on the radio market for several years. In 2019 with a share of 22 % in the radio market. In second place in listening is the public circuit RTVS - Rádio Slovensko with a share of 21 %. It is followed by a significant rebound Fun Rádio (12 %), Rádio Vlna 8 %, Európa 2 (7 %), Radio Jemné (7 %), the public circuit RTVS - Rádio Regina 6 % and other smaller regional or local radios.

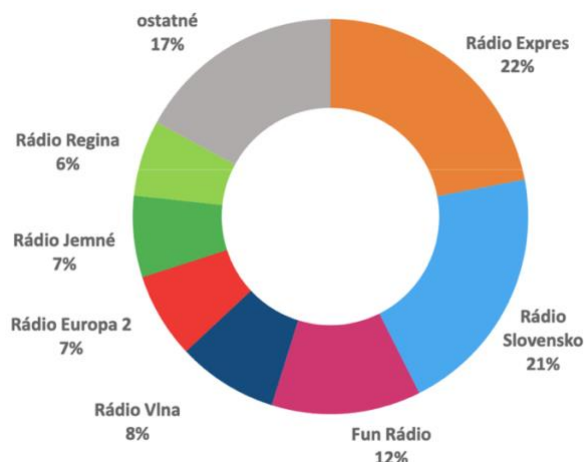
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<sup>10</sup> *Od 1. júna sa časť detí a žiakov bude môcť vrátiť do škôl.* Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.minedu.sk/od-1-juna-sa-cast-deti-a-ziakov-bude-moct-vratit-do-skol/>>.

<sup>11</sup> *COVID-19: Toto je mapa rizikových regiónov na Slovensku, kde platia nové opatrenia.* Released on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.omeiach.com/strucne/18762-covid-19-toto-je-mapa-rizikovych-regionov-na-slovensku-kde-platia-nove-opatrenia>>.

<sup>12</sup> Remark by the author: The company MEDIAN SK conducted the survey on a sample of 3,157 respondents aged 14 – 79 years.

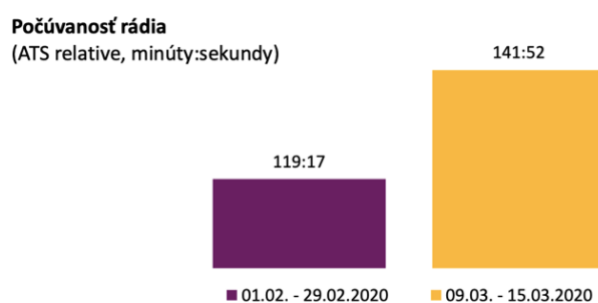
<sup>13</sup> *Slováci počúvajú rádiá, denne majú takmer 2,7 milióna poslucháčov.* Released on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/2004975-slovaci-pocuvaju-radia-denne-maju-takmer-2-7-miliona-posluchacov>>.



**Picture 1: Listening to radios in Slovakia in 2019 according to MML-TGI**

Source: *MML-TGI národný prieskum spotreby, médií a životného štýlu Market & Media & Lifestyle -TGI Základné výsledky za rok 2019*. Bratislava : MML-TGI, 2019, p. 13. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.median.sk/pdf/2019/ZS1914SR.pdf>>.

Big radios did well, but also small ones. But what happened after the world was forced to remain in domestic quarantine? The UN estimates that 3,4 billion people, almost 50 % of the world's population, were forced to stay at home during the first wave of coronavirus spread and related measures.<sup>14</sup> At first glance, these numbers may have meant increased demand for media such as television, streaming services and, of course, radio. According to a survey conducted by the MEDIAN SK agency from the first wave, from an average of six and a half hours spent before the introduction of individual measures, the time with media between individual media types increased to more than seven hours a day. And so the radios are also doing well, recording an increase of about 25 % in March.<sup>15</sup> However, we are not talking about an increase in new listeners, but an increase in time spent with favorite stations. More than radios, television began to be watched, which according to several sites breaks the record in terms of viewership, as well as the website in terms of the number of visits.



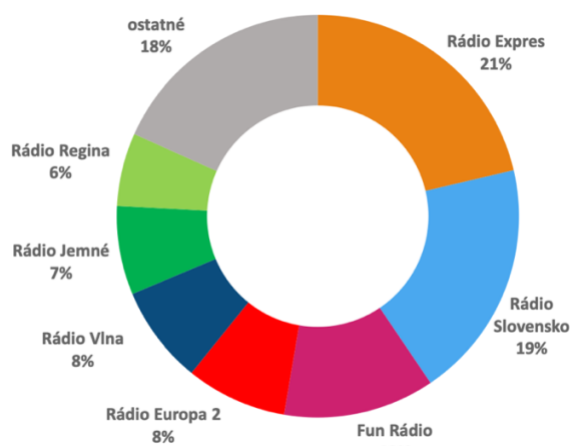
**Graph 1: Listening to ATS relative radio (minutes: seconds) in February, compared to March**

Source: *adMeter a koronavírus – zmeny v mediálnej konzumácii Slovákov*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <[https://www.median.sk/pdf/OSTATNE/MEDIAN\\_SK\\_adMeter\\_koronavirus\\_media\\_20200330\\_22\\_v014.pdf](https://www.median.sk/pdf/OSTATNE/MEDIAN_SK_adMeter_koronavirus_media_20200330_22_v014.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> *Pandémia prinútila zostať doma takmer 3,4 miliardy ľudí*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/547072-online-v-najhorsom-scenari-moze-virus-v-usa-zabit-200-tisic-ludi/>>.

<sup>15</sup> *adMeter a koronavírus – zmeny v mediálnej konzumácii Slovákov*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <[https://www.median.sk/pdf/OSTATNE/MEDIAN\\_SK\\_adMeter\\_koronavirus\\_media\\_20200330\\_22\\_v014.pdf](https://www.median.sk/pdf/OSTATNE/MEDIAN_SK_adMeter_koronavirus_media_20200330_22_v014.pdf)>.

**For the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2020** or during the first and beginning of the second wave of coronavirus, according to the obtained MML-TGI data, radios performed as follows: 90 % (compared to 86 % in 2019) of respondents responded positively in the parameter „*listened to last week*“, aged 14-79. Conversely, „*every day*“ radio is listened to by just over 59 % of the population (58 % last year).<sup>16</sup> The first place in listening was occupied by the stable Rádio Expres with a share of the radio market of 21 %. In second place in listening is the public circuit RTVS - Rádio Slovensko with a share of 19 %. The third place belongs to Fun Rádio with 12 %, Rádio Vlna 8%, Európa 2 (8 %), RaRádio Jemné (7 %), the public circuit RTVS - Rádio Regina 6 % and other smaller regional or local radios.



**Picture 2: Listening to radios in Slovakia in 2020 according to MML-TGI**

Source: *MML-TGI národný prieskum spotreby, médií a životného štýlu Market & Media & Lifestyle -TGI Základné výsledky za 1. kvartál 2020 a 2. kvartál 2020*. Bratislava : MML-TGI, 2020, p. 13. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.median.sk/pdf/2020/ZS202SR.pdf>>.

We took a closer look at listening to the top four of the most listened-to radios. In listening, we chose the most listened and largest radios in Slovakia, Rádio Expres, Rádio Slovensko, Fun rádio and Rádio Vlna. We used two relevant sources to obtain the data:

- Radioprojekt: is a separate survey of MEDIAN SK, focused on radios. The results are published monthly and are based on data collected over a rolling period of three consecutive months. It has been implemented since 2009.<sup>17</sup> These are relatively accurate numbers of listening and representation of the radio market in Slovakia.
- Radia.sk website + application: Radia.sk has been publishing daily listening to radios through its website and application since November 1st, 2019. It is a site that also runs a mobile application, which can be used to listen to any Slovak radio and the Internet anywhere in the world using a mobile phone.<sup>18</sup> These are not exact listening numbers in terms of the market but only in terms of their application and website. However, they copy the real situation and can tell us more about the situation on the radio market.

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see: *MML-TGI národný prieskum spotreby, médií a životného štýlu Market & Media & Lifestyle -TGI Základné výsledky za 1. kvartál 2020 a 2. kvartál 2020*. Bratislava : MML-TGI, 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.median.sk/pdf/2020/ZS202SR.pdf>>.

<sup>17</sup> *Median.sk*. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.median.sk/sk/>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Počúvanosť rádii cez web a aplikáciu Radia.sk*. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.radia.sk/pocuvanost/radia-sk/dni>>.

### 3.1 Characteristics of Selected Radios

For our research, we chose the four most listened Slovak radios as a sample. In the first four, in addition to commercial radio stations, there is also a public broadcaster. To begin with, we briefly characterize the selected radios according to their own characteristics published on their website. We also add an overview of their origin, ownership and radio format, which has the greatest impact on the station's listening. It should be noted that large commercial radio stations only exceptionally changed the broadcasting program itself during a pandemic. For example, Fun Rádio included reading from the audiobook on weekdays from 6 pm. Other radio stations have added more news.<sup>19</sup> However, public service broadcasting in all its constituencies has been fully adapted to include:

- Educational program for children who do not go to school, which was included mainly in the morning.<sup>20</sup>
- Evangelism program for people who cannot attend church - half-hour broadcasts for Catholic believers are broadcast on Radio Regina, always from Monday to Thursday from 5.30 pm on Friday for Greek Catholics and Orthodox. Radio mediates these services directly from its studios.<sup>21</sup>
- Increased demands for information in the field of news and journalism.

**Rádio EXPRES** – since the last quarter of 2002 it has been the most listened to commercial radio and since the middle of 2005 the most listened radio in Slovakia. In its broadcast you will find only the biggest music hits, the latest news and transport service throughout the day. The signal of Rádio Expres covers 88,08 % of the territory of Slovakia through the network of its own transmitters (*official text of the broadcaster*).<sup>22</sup>

Start of broadcast: 2000.

Station type: private.

Target group: 18 – 40 years.

Music format: Hot AC – is a radio format that includes music of various genres from the 70s to the present. At the same time, it avoids aggressive genres (hard rock, heavy metal, hip-hop), music intended for young people and the genre of techno and dance music. It has a high proportion of new songs and these are included in the broadcast sooner.<sup>23</sup>

**Rádio SLOVENSKO** – in its 24-hour program, it is primarily focused on streaming with a dominant focus on current news and analytical journalism, supplemented by blocks of the art program. The mission of Rádio Slovensko is to provide a service to the public in the field of broadcasting, which is universal in terms of its geographical reach, programmatically diverse, prepared on the principle of editorial independence and which develops the cultural level of listeners, provides space for current social and cultural activities. It focuses primarily on credible opinion-forming news, unrivaled sports news (live broadcasts from sports events),

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<sup>19</sup> *Sed' doma a počúvaj, Fun rádio uvádza audioknihu do tvojich uší.* Released on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <[https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4174\\_sed-doma-a-pocuvaj-fun-radio-uvadza-audioknihu-dosi-tvojich](https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4174_sed-doma-a-pocuvaj-fun-radio-uvadza-audioknihu-dosi-tvojich)>.

<sup>20</sup> *Bohatá rozhlasová ponuka na vzdelávanie aj príjemné trávenie času.* Released on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <[https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4169\\_bohata-rozhlasova-ponuka-na-vzdelavanie-aj-prijemne-travenie-casu](https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4169_bohata-rozhlasova-ponuka-na-vzdelavanie-aj-prijemne-travenie-casu)>.

<sup>21</sup> *RTVS rozširuje vysielanie bohoslužieb.* Released on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <[https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4181\\_rtvs-rozsiruje-vysielanie-bohosluzieb](https://www.radia.sk/spravy/4181_rtvs-rozsiruje-vysielanie-bohosluzieb)>.

<sup>22</sup> *O rádiu.* [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.expres.sk/reklama/o-radiu/>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Malý lexikon rozhlasových formátů.* Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2002. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <[https://www.radiotv.cz/p\\_radio/r\\_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/](https://www.radiotv.cz/p_radio/r_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/)>.

and analytical journalism. It provides information that is impartial, verified, unbiased, up-to-date, comprehensible and, in its entirety, balanced and pluralistic. Rádio Slovensko is in constant contact with its listeners through interactive broadcasting and discussion sessions, in which it presents a wide range of opinions. First of all, Rádio Slovensko wants to correctly inform, educate in an interesting way and, at the same time, entertain (*official broadcast text*).<sup>24</sup>

Start of broadcast: 1993.

Station type: public service media.

Target group: 25 – 60 years.

Music format: *Full Service* – Radio provides a complete service, that means music, news, journalism, entertainment. The greatest emphasis is on the information component.<sup>25</sup> The core consists of proven hits of the 80's and 90's. There is no fundamental emphasis on the volume of contemporary (current chart) music. The exception is current domestic production. In addition to the profiled music format in streaming, Rádio Slovensko does not neglect minority genres in specialized journalistic programs. We pay special attention to contemporary and older Slovak music. Radio Slovakia also supports new musical talents in its broadcasting.<sup>26</sup>

**FUN rádio** – Fun rádio was the first Slovak private radio to be born on the frequency 94.3 FM on June 10th, 1990. Initially, the broadcast from the studio in Bratislava covered 4 hours, for the rest of the day the signal from the broadcast of French Fun radio was taken over. Gradually, the broadcast from Bratislava expanded - from 4 hours to 12 to the final 24 hours a day. We make the day more pleasant for our listeners with funtastic music and in addition to having fun with our moderators, we also provide them with a full-fledged information service throughout the day – the latest news, transport service or weather reports (*official text of the broadcaster*).<sup>27</sup>

Start of broadcast: 1990.

Station type: private.

Target group: 18 – 40 years.

Music format: CHR – music format based on current hits. The playlist is very narrow and the rotation of the songs is high.<sup>28</sup>

**Rádio VLNA** – Rádio Vlna plays hits proven from the 60's to the millennium. We are oldies radio. There is no lack of current news monitored by experienced editors throughout the day (*official text of the broadcaster*).<sup>29</sup>

Start of broadcast: 2015.

Station type: private.

Target group: 30 – 60 years.

Music format: Oldies AC – they play mostly pop / rock music of the 60's and 70's with an overlap to the 80's and 90's. The latest songs do not belong to this format.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Rádio Slovensko*. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://rtvs.org/programove-sluzby/radio-slovensko>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Malý lexikon rozhlasových formátů*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2002. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <[https://www.radiotv.cz/p\\_radio/r\\_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/](https://www.radiotv.cz/p_radio/r_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/)>.

<sup>26</sup> *Rádio Slovensko*. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://rtvs.org/programove-sluzby/radio-slovensko>>.

<sup>27</sup> *O nás – O Fun rádiu*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.funradio.sk/clanok/750-o-nas-o-fun-radiu/>>.

<sup>28</sup> *Malý lexikon rozhlasových formátů*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2002. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <[https://www.radiotv.cz/p\\_radio/r\\_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/](https://www.radiotv.cz/p_radio/r_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/)>.

<sup>29</sup> *O rádiu*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.radiovlna.sk/o-radiu>>.

<sup>30</sup> *Malý lexikon rozhlasových formátů*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2002. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <[https://www.radiotv.cz/p\\_radio/r\\_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/](https://www.radiotv.cz/p_radio/r_program/maly-lexikon-rozhlasovych-formatu/)>.



### 3.2 Listening to Selected Radios in Numbers

How did the corona really (not) help listening to the radio? We collected data from two different sources and compared them with 2019. We will look at the data in more detail in the attached tables. We are the first to analyze listening data for 2020. The first restrictions on movement occurred in mid-March, during the summer months of July and August all restrictions were lifted and with the advent of the second wave of coronavirus spread, new measures restricting citizens' mobility were gradually introduced in September. As this paper was created in early October 2020, the data ends in September.

**Radia.sk** – on this website and through their expanded mobile application, we see that listening in terms of numbers copies long-term trends. The only exception here is that Rádio Vlna has skipped Fun Rádio in listening. According to the numbers, we can see that the summer months – especially August – meant the least listeners for the radios. March was really a record number for radio, but not as significant as it might seem. During the full lockdown, increased listening should manifest in April, but this did not happen. We see a decline with every radio.

**Table 1: Listening to selected radios in 2020 based on data from radia.sk.**

RADIO	Average daily listening 2020 - radia.sk						
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	4 449	4 151	4 109	4 438	4 056	3 731	4 194
<b>Fun rádio</b>	2 456	2 355	2 361	2 760	2 486	2 284	2 533
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	2 862	2 760	2 934	3 002	2 878	2 779	2 808
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	3 765	3 230	2 949	3 147	2 884	2 750	3 097

Source: Own processing, 2020.

If we compare the year 2019, the increase in the number of listeners in 2020 compared to 2019 by almost half is visible. People started listening to more radios through their mobile phones and website. For comparison, August is also weaker than in other months. However, Rádio Express and Fun Rádio hold similar listening numbers, and Rádio Vlna is slowly growing here as well.

**Table 2: Listening to selected radios in 2019 based on data from radia.sk.**

RADIO	Average daily listening 2019 - radia.sk						
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	2 733	2 687	2 845	2 683	2 798	2 706	2 327
<b>Fun rádio</b>	2 367	2 221	2 447	2 470	2 463	2 346	2 412
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	1 722	1 749	1 742	1 888	2 065	2 085	1 766
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	2 072	1 909	2 387	1 675	1 668	1 748	1 689

Source: Own processing, 2020.

**Median.sk** – within the so-called radio project, the listens of the most listened radios in Slovakia are measured every month. Even according to the available data, it is clear that the radios kept their listening in approximately the same numbers every month. Rádio Expres keeps its listening position stable, Fun Rádio has been growing slightly since March. Rádio Slovensko fluctuates the most and Rádio Vlna is on the rise. It is interesting to observe that the largest listening numbers did not have radio in March, but paradoxically in May and June, when anti-pandemic measures were gradually released. However, since March, all commercial radio stations have improved slightly in their numbers, except in April, when we expected an increase

in listening. It did not like Rádio Expres and Rádio Slovensko, but for example Fun Rádio improved and so did Rádio Vlna.

**Table 3: Listening to selected radios in 2020 based on data from median.sk.**

RADIO	Average daily listening 2020 - median.sk						
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	1 507 000	1 502 000	1 535 000	1 535 000	1 548 000	1 527 000	1 524 000
<b>Fun rádio</b>	1 033 000	1 048 000	1 073 000	1 081 000	1 060 000	1 044 000	1 051 000
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	712 000	775 000	760 000	764 000	752 000	787 000	803 000
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	1 130 000	1 123 000	1 134 000	1 127 000	1 140 000	1 087 000	1 073 000

Source: Own processing, 2020.

In 2019, listening was slightly lower than in 2020. Rádio Vlna did not grow here, on the contrary, it decreased, as did Rádio Slovensko. Overall, listening to the selected four radios was much more stable than in 2020.

**Table 4: Listening to selected radios in 2019 based on data from median.sk.**

RADIO	Average daily listening 2019 - median.sk						
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	1 497 000	1 494 000	1 494 000	1 481 000	1 482 000	1 481 000	1 483 000
<b>Fun rádio</b>	1 045 000	1 042 000	1 068 000	1 053 000	1 045 000	1 009 000	1 003 000
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	682 000	673 000	672 000	659 000	659 000	660 000	662 000
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	1 202 000	1 197 000	1 190 000	1 186 000	1 181 000	1 181 000	1 174 000

Source: Own processing, 2020.

Let's imagine a closer summary of listening in percentages and the difference between 2019 and 2020. In the table we see big jumps for all radios except Fun Rádios. For Rádio Expres, this is the difference from 2019 for the month of September, an increase of 80 % in the number of listeners. Even better is Rádio Vlna, 83 %. Overall, Rádio Slovensko in particular improved on average by up to 68 %. On the contrary, the worst was Fun Rádio, which, among others, improved on average by only 3 %.

**Table 5: Difference in %, year 2019 – 2020 – radia.sk.**

RADIO	Difference in %, year 2019 -2020 - radia.sk							AVERAGE
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep	
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	63%	54%	44%	65%	45%	38%	80%	<b>56%</b>
<b>Fun rádio</b>	4%	6%	-4%	12%	1%	-3%	5%	<b>3%</b>
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	66%	58%	68%	59%	39%	33%	59%	<b>55%</b>
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	82%	69%	24%	88%	73%	57%	83%	<b>68%</b>

Source: Own processing, 2020.

With a more representative median.sk, the difference from previous years can be seen in the increase in listening. These are small differences. Rádio Vlna improved the best, at the expense of the public Rádio Slovensko, which lost a significant share of listeners compared to last year 2019. If we look at the average for the entire period under review, we see that the increases are not large. Rádio Vlna has the highest increase and Rádio Slovensko has a negative increase (fewer listeners). If we look at the development of listening through measures, paradoxically, radios began to prosper more during the months when measures were canceled and movement ceased to be restricted.

Table 6: Difference in %, year 2019 – 2020 – median.sk.

RADIO	Difference in %, year 2019 -2020 - median.sk							AVERAGE
	mar	apr	may	june	july	aug	sep	
<b>Rádio Expres</b>	1%	1%	3%	4%	4%	3%	3%	<b>3%</b>
<b>Fun rádio</b>	-1%	1%	0%	3%	1%	3%	5%	<b>2%</b>
<b>Rádio Vlna</b>	4%	15%	13%	16%	14%	19%	21%	<b>15%</b>
<b>Rádio Slovensko</b>	-6%	-6%	-5%	-5%	-3%	-8%	-9%	<b>-6%</b>

Source: Own processing, 2020.

## 4 Discussion

So what has the corona crisis brought about the radio market? We could summarize this in a few points that characterize its impact on radio listening:

1. **Increased listening time** – it was clear from the median.sk survey, new listeners did not come, only their time spent listening to individual radio stations increased. Listeners had more time at home during the first lockdown and could have their radios on longer.
2. **Only a slight increase in listening** – if we record a certain increase, really only in small percentages, which, however, are at the expense of Slovak radio or radio, which disappeared or stopped playing during the coronavirus crisis. However, it is in small numbers.
3. **The order of listening does not change** – the corona crisis did not turn even with the order of listening, so the most listened radios still hold their share of the radio market.
4. **Higher listening after the lifting of restrictions** – paradoxically, we can say that both radiach.sk and median.sk increased the most after the previous months of lockdown in June, when all measures preventing movement (except for shares over 1000 participants) ceased to apply.
5. **Unambiguous winner Rádio Vlna, mobile application** – during the coronary crisis Rádio Vlna improved the most. It gained the most new listeners up to 5 times (on average 15 %) more than its competitors. In addition, the radia.sk mobile application has also improved its listening experience. However, the trend in growth was already last year, so we can not unambiguously attribute it to the co-crisis.
6. **Slovak Radio lost in particular** – while all radio stations more or less kept their broadcasting structure the same (increased the share of news and supplemented short programs), Slovak Radio was forced to change its structure quite significantly in all areas due to its public nature. It also affected his most listened to circle, Radio Slovakia. He lost the most listeners of all on average up to 6 %. We can thus state that the changes in its broadcasting structure did not help at all.

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## FACT-CHECKING AS A KEY COMPETENCE IN INFODEMIA

*Diana Bulganová*

### **Abstract**

The global COVID-19 pandemic in the society has shown, among other things, a low media literacy level and a lack of critical thinking in recipients. In addition to the viral disease, we have also faced an information pandemic, which also threatens the lives of people around the world. The ability to critically and impartially evaluate the information circulating in the media environment, and especially on the Internet, has become one of the key competencies not only for journalists. The mixture of fake news, hoaxes, emotions and serious information often serves the difficult task of assessing the quality of information for the general public. We often find and discover the truth, which is difficult even for experienced fact-checkers. Nevertheless, we believe that verifying the facts is not a difficult activity. It is primarily the formation and other habits that each recipient will apply when receiving information. The aim of the paper *Fact-checking as a key competence in infodemia* is therefore to map this current issue through the analysis of theoretical knowledge of several authors. In the article, we will focus on and define the information pandemic, fact-checking as a key competence, and we will also give a few tips on how fact-checking can be implemented.

### **Key words:**

COVID-19. Critical Thinking. Fact-Checking. Infodemia. Journalists. Verification.

### **Introduction**

Since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have been fighting not only with an aggressive virus that poses a threat to human health and lives, but with an information pandemic, too. This information pandemic (or in short, the infodemia), which has been spreading various conspiracy theories, disinformation, misinformation, and "well-meant advice of experts,"<sup>1</sup> exposes people to almost same dangers and health threats as the virus. If such disinformation is disseminated by a well-known public figure, then its reach and speed of dissemination is much higher.<sup>2</sup> Recently, the Internet environment has been literally contaminated with theories of how and why the virus originated, how it spreads, and even "the guaranteed resources" offer information on how we can protect ourselves from the virus. As a result, some recipients consider the World Health Organization's recommendations unnecessary. The most common disinformation regarding COVID-19 was and is mainly about the belittlement of its dangers, alternative treatments, fake testing, the dangers of testing, but also the dangers of vaccines. Warnings on responsibility, wearing of face masks, observance of minimum safe distance and hygiene measures are considered by the recipients of alternative media, who disseminate mostly deceptive and misleading news, to be groundless, unreasonable, exaggerated and thus inadequate to the current situation. On the other hand, serious media, influential experts and medical authorities draw attention to the proper observance of hygiene and safety measures. Therefore, fake news once again polarizes the general public and create tensions and disagreements in society. Some politicians are even making a political campaign by derogating the threat of coronavirus and collecting political points. The complete absence of ethics, morality, logical and critical thinking brings us all into a difficult social, health and economic situation. We will be recovering for many years from this complicated situation caused by the coronavirus in all of the above-mentioned areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Remark by the author: Experts who are not epidemiologists, virologists, but for example nutritionists.

<sup>2</sup> LUENGO, M., GARCÍA-MARÍN, D.: The performance of truth: politicians, fact-checking journalism, and the struggle to tackle COVID-19 misinformation. In *The American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 2-22. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7520375/>>.

## 1 Information Pandemic as a Sign of the Disinformation Age

We could define the information pandemic as an excessive amount of diverse information about a problem, which is usually misleading, unreliable and rapidly spreading and make difficult or delay the achievement of a solution.<sup>3</sup> The mixture of true information, facts, fake news, statements, data, speculation, and in some cases even information anxiety and information pressure make it difficult for the recipient to think rationally about the problem. In addition to this, fake news, which often evoke negative emotions, are spreading much faster on the Internet. We can therefore say that the fight against fake news is a phenomenon of the Internet age. However, this does not mean that before the Internet age there were no disinformation, it just did not have as much influence and impact as it does today. Commenting on and sharing such news increases their readability and reach and makes fake coronavirus news spread even faster than the virus itself. The groups gathered around the conspiracy media support each other in their opinions, attitudes, thoughts and worldviews, and create the so-called disinformation bubbles. Facts, rumours, and people's fears mixed together make it sometimes difficult (e.g., especially at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic) to learn important information about the problem.<sup>4</sup> D. García-Marín says that fake news about coronavirus are dynamic because they adapt to the current social and information context, while becoming increasingly politicized.<sup>5</sup> Journalists, media consultants, critical thinking coaches and health organizations are trying to refute the conspiracies and clear them up. Unfortunately, this does not always work. Weak level of media literacy, uncritical thinking of recipients, being controlled by one's own emotions when getting news, complete absence of rational thinking, failure to verify sources, bias towards serious media, prejudice, inability to reasonably process information and put it into context all result in the current information pandemic.

A. Leonard, A. Meban and O. Young say that it is natural for humans to spread disinformation. Dissemination of disinformation news is therefore not a phenomenon of today. They explain this idea according to psychologist D. Kahneman, who says that we rely on the information we have available, without making an effort to look for what we do not know.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we neither search for any additional information, nor we verify the truthfulness of the news. Recipients also receive information based on their own beliefs, worldviews, personal preferences, and not every recipient understands the same information in the same way.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of the news is therefore different and the same information may have a different meaning for several people. A. Leonard, A. Meban and O. Young also say that the biggest barrier to searching for the truth is prejudice. On the one hand, it makes our everyday lives easier, but on the other hand, it prevents us from accepting facts that are often clearly presented.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that being well informed about disinformation news and hoaxes can be difficult for the average layman with regard

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<sup>3</sup> *Infodemic*. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/infodemic>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Words We're Watching: „Infodemic.“* [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/words-were-watching-infodemic-meaning>>.

<sup>5</sup> LUENGO, M., GARCÍA-MARÍN, D.: The performance of truth: politicians, fact-checking journalism, and the struggle to tackle COVID-19 misinformation. In *The American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 2-22. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7520375/>>.

<sup>6</sup> LEONARD, A., MEBAN, A., YOUNG, O.: *What is fact-checking and why is it important?*. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://coinform.eu/what-is-fact-checking-and-why-is-it-important/>>.

<sup>7</sup> MANTZARLIS, A.: Fact-checking 101. In IRETTON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 91.

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to the information and disinformation explosion that exists around the coronavirus. This can be particularly difficult for older recipients who do not know how media reality is created, while the blind trust of the recipients in some sources also supports the conspiracies. Disinformation portals contradict with their statements what scientists, doctors and experts say and encourage people to behave irresponsibly. However, the rebellion against the virus by no means makes one a hero. It is a manifestation of irresponsibility and selfishness. However, it must be said that the concept of information pandemic is nothing new.<sup>9</sup> It existed, for example, in the Middle Ages, during the Black Death or during the Spanish flu. The scenarios of the development of the epidemic, but also disinformation, are quite similar and in some respects even the same. Nevertheless, we are unable to learn from the past and we literally copy people's behaviour during the previous pandemics.<sup>10</sup> In addition to this, the information pandemic makes it difficult to find serious information and credible sources not only for recipients, but also for doctors and healthcare professionals. That's why recipients may feel anxious, depressed, emotionally depleted, and infodemia may adversely affect decision-making processes.<sup>11</sup> Fake and fabricated news thus make work difficult also for health professionals, who must often teach their patients about the real situation and medical facts.

## 2 Fact-Checking as a Key Competence

Fact-checking was known as early as the 1920s, when the *Time* magazine in New York was employing fact-checkers whose main task was to verify if the information gathered by journalists was accurate and true. Over time, this method started to be applied in other editorial offices, too, mostly in the major American magazines. Fact-checkers tried to confirm or refute verifiable information that journalists had already published in the magazine.<sup>12</sup> Verification of facts by fact-checkers is therefore different from verification of facts by journalists. According to J. Posetti, the fact-checking process consists mainly of the source and the content fact-checking.<sup>13</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary defines this term very briefly as the process of verifying information that is in either written or spoken form.<sup>14</sup> In 1993, the term of fact-checking took on a new dimension with the establishment of Fact-Check.org.<sup>15</sup> One of the main goals of this website is to verify the truthfulness of statements made by e.g. politicians in the United States in their speeches, television debates, and interviews.<sup>16</sup> A. Mantzarlis says that it is mainly the politicians but also marketers and brands who have the

<sup>9</sup> MAXWELL, K.: *Infodemic*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/infodemic.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Španielska chripka VS. Koronavírus / Lekcia z minulosti?*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSal9wP5W4c>>.

<sup>11</sup> *Understanding the infodemic and misinformation in the fight against COVID-19*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52052/Factsheet-infodemic\\_eng.pdf?sequence=14](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52052/Factsheet-infodemic_eng.pdf?sequence=14)>.

<sup>12</sup> SILVERMAN, G.: *Verification and Fact Checking*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-1/additional-materials/verification-and-fact-checking>>.

<sup>13</sup> POSETTI, J.: *When Good People Share Bad Things: The basics of Social Media Verification*. Released on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<http://mediashift.org/2014/07/goodwhen-good-people-share-bad-things-the-basics-of-social-media-verification/>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Fact-check*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fact-check>>.

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<sup>16</sup> SILVERMAN, G.: *Verification and Fact Checking*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-1/additional-materials/verification-and-fact-checking>>.

<sup>16</sup> *FactCheck.org A project of The Annenberg Public Policy Center*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.factcheck.org/>>.



tendency to distort information. That is why, according to him, fact-checking is focused primarily on political advertising and campaigns.<sup>17</sup> Respectively, we can say that manipulation, exaggeration and distortion of facts is typical of anyone who is trying to gain popularity.<sup>18</sup> Proper verification of information is becoming one of the most important competencies for being better informed about the wide range of trustworthy and untrustworthy information in an information pandemic. Fact-checking focuses on statements that contain information whose truthfulness can be objectively verified.<sup>19</sup> In general, we can therefore speak of checking, verifying or assessing the truthfulness (accuracy) of a particular statement. According to A. Leonard, A. Meban and O. Young, it is extremely crucial to stop perceiving "retold epic stories" as real news. Verification of information in the media space should be similar to a "critical, investigative investigation." However, in order for such verification to take place, it is necessary to have certain knowledge and skills.<sup>20</sup> We could include media literacy and critical thinking among these knowledge and skills. According to A. Mantzarlis, the purpose of the fact-checking is, inter alia, to ensure that politicians, public figures and people who speak to the media are also responsible for the truthfulness of their statements.<sup>21</sup> With their speeches, they often cause unnecessary panic, chaos and polarize society. The European Commission is also helping to fight against the information pandemic. He says that the fight against fake news is a principle of respect for fundamental rights. Therefore, we cannot perceive the coronavirus as a means of restricting freedom, freedom of expression and access to information to journalists.<sup>22</sup> C. Silverman says that the need to verify information is more important than ever when it comes to the global dissemination of vast amounts of diverse information from different sources around the world.<sup>23</sup> The European Commission points out that fake news is harmful, even if, for example, some are not contrary to law. European Commission also points out that fake news also damages the public interest and may be motivated by economic gain, that fake news also provides misleading information about health care.<sup>24</sup> It should therefore be the effort and also the duty of each of us to eliminate the impact of fake news, because it concerns every area of life.

### 3 How to Verify Information?

The rapid dissemination of news, the use of social networks together with the inattention of recipients and the tendency to read only headlines make it easier for recipients to believe fake news. M. Luengo<sup>25</sup> and D. García-Marín say that the methods and procedures used by fact

<sup>17</sup> MANTZARLIS, A.: Fact-checking 101. In IRETON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> LEONARD, A., MEBAN, A., YOUNG, O.: *What is fact-checking and why is it important?*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://coinform.eu/what-is-fact-checking-and-why-is-it-important/>>.

<sup>21</sup> MANTZARLIS, A.: Fact-checking 101. In IRETON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> *Boj proti dezinformáciám týkajúcim sa koronavírusu*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation\\_sk?fbclid=IwAR3o1CIh4dgsQU961xw0DH4sy3xkOxGsi9FgjZ8lwcelr-7exC9kI22-q-o](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation_sk?fbclid=IwAR3o1CIh4dgsQU961xw0DH4sy3xkOxGsi9FgjZ8lwcelr-7exC9kI22-q-o)>.

<sup>23</sup> SILVERMAN, C.: *Verification and Fact Checking*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-1/additional-materials/verification-and-fact-checking>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Boj proti dezinformáciám týkajúcim sa koronavírusu*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation\\_sk?fbclid=IwAR3o1CIh4dgsQU961xw0DH4sy3xkOxGsi9FgjZ8lwcelr-7exC9kI22-q-o](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation_sk?fbclid=IwAR3o1CIh4dgsQU961xw0DH4sy3xkOxGsi9FgjZ8lwcelr-7exC9kI22-q-o)>.

<sup>25</sup> *Fake News & Misinformation: How to Spot and Verify*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://guides.stlcc.edu/fakenews/factchecking>>.

fact-checkers are different from those of journalists and media organizations. Fact-checkers do not verify new information, but information that has already been published by someone. We can therefore say that this activity corresponds to "retroactive dynamics," and thus that the fact-checking is checking what journalists have already written. By contrast, journalists must also obtain information. However, what applies to both fact-checkers and journalists is that they should not be biased. There are various mechanisms for verifying the authenticity of information, photos and videos. For example, according to A. Mantzarlis, the fact-checking consists of 3 phases:

1. finding information that needs to be confirmed, checked, verified,
2. searching for evidence to evaluate the truthfulness/untruthfulness of the statement,
3. formulation of conclusions, evaluation of information on the basis of evidence.<sup>26</sup>

This method is relatively simple, but in our opinion, several more steps are needed to verify the truthfulness and validity of the statement. For example, B. Gray offers as many as 10 steps that recipients can use to detect fake news:

1. scepticism – one needs to be sceptical and check information before sharing it, just as journalists do,
2. developing one's own method of verifying information, while it is needed to perceive the information verification as everyone's duty, as disinformation creates chaos and creates disputes,
3. basic theses for information verification:
  - Who gives the information? – does the author refer to any source?,
  - From where can the author know about it?, Does the author present only one side of the coin in the article?, Is he or she not biased?, Have you heard anything about him or her?,
  - Do the news appear on trustworthy websites?, Trustworthy news websites ?,
  - Were any facts omitted in the article?, Is the information contained in the article questioned by other credible sources?.
4. surprising news – does the news seem to be unbelievable? If so, it needs to be verified,
5. original sources – does the article refer to any source?, information should be received from original sources as interpretation may change the meaning of the news,
6. eliminate one's own bias – it is necessary to be aware of one's own bias, prejudices to the researched matter and try to eliminate them, because we interpret the information according to our expectations and worldview,
7. emotions – is the news written in such a way that it evokes negative emotions in you?,
8. thorough verification – the most common mistakes in fake news are, for example, misspelled names, places, titles, statistical data, reference to historical facts, time periods, also pay attention to words such as unique, first, most,
9. checking of verified sources – original sources, statistical data, original research, listening to experts, monitoring of websites that deal with fact-checking,
10. be transparent – always write the source from which you draw the information.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> MANTZARLIS, A.: Fact-checking 101. In IRETON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> GREY, B.: *10 Tips for Fighting Fake News. How to Fact Check Like a Pro*. 2017. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/pdf/nexis/Nexis-webinar-how-to-fact-check-like-a-pro.pdf>>.

The official website of the European Union also offers 6 tips on how to detect, recognize and stop the spread of disinformation on the Internet:

1. Verify the resource: If you haven't encountered the source yet, you need to verify it. For example, the section "About us", where you can find the name of the editor-in-chief, editors, or other details, can be useful. If this basic information is missing there, it is probably a non-credible source. Also, if the source is imaginatively similar to another, it is probably a fraudulent source which tries to imitate another source.
2. Verify the author: if it is a trustworthy author, it should be possible to search for his or her previous employment, articles and posts. Beware of Internet robots that "imitate" the behaviour of a real user.
3. Verify the content: is there another source that deals with the topic? Can we find the same topic in television, radio, newspapers, for example? Do other organizations publish such content? Credible media have certain standards that they adhere to when publishing information. They eliminate bias, subjectivity and balance of news.
4. Verify images and videos: photos or videos can be edited or older and do not reflect reality.
5. Feelings that the article evokes in me: negative emotions evoked by fake news undermine people's trust in public institutions and serious media. The information therefore needs to be compared, as the media will give their time to important information.
6. Report misleading content: if you come across fake news, it's good to report it. This will prevent the further dissemination of disinformation.<sup>28</sup>

These steps can be considered as one of the basic methodologies for verifying information. Some steps are repeated by authors, some are added. One should keep in mind that everyone should create their own way of information verification that they find the best. The main thing is always to search for the original source, not to be captivated by emotions and superlatives. That is why we consider scepticism, critical thinking and the elimination of bias to be the most important. T. Trewinnard and F. Bell say, that the procedures and methods of information verification must be continuously updated and adapted to the dynamics of rapidly spreading online disinformation and behaviour of recipients in the Internet environment. They also agree that verifying online information should be just as fast and dynamic as the spread of fake news, which is incredibly fast.<sup>29</sup> In conclusion, we would like to add that the preciseness and accuracy of evaluation is also an important factor when assessing the trustworthiness of online information.

## Conclusion

We rely on the media to always provide us with up-to-date, verified, quality information. However, we are witnessing that modern technologies spread and also serve false information. Fake news pose threats to people's health and lives, undermine democracy, divide society, and are neither ethical nor moral. Sharing fake news should be a shame, a mockery. Sharing fake news is proof of the absence of critical and deeper thinking. The fact is, however, that in the Internet environment and on social networks there are more and more

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<sup>28</sup> *STOP šíreniu dezinformácií na internete: 6 spôsobov, ako môžete pomôcť*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/slovakia/news/stop\\_sireniu\\_dezinformacii\\_na\\_internete\\_6\\_sposobov\\_ako\\_mozete\\_pomocet\\_sk](https://ec.europa.eu/slovakia/news/stop_sireniu_dezinformacii_na_internete_6_sposobov_ako_mozete_pomocet_sk)>.

<sup>29</sup> TREWINNARD, T., BELL, F.: Social media verification. In IRETON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 103.

fake news, hoaxes, and conspiracy theories, not only about coronavirus. Recipients read short and shocking news that they share the fastest. They form opinions based on misleading information that they do not verify. They think that after reading a few short articles, they understand everything complicated, but it takes time and enough information to really understand the issue. They present their views as real facts, but as A. Mantzarlis says: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts."<sup>30</sup> Lies are simplified and easier to understand, while real news requires the involvement of logical reasoning. Moreover, the truth remains that we cannot understand everything because we are not adapted to it. The fact also remains that primary and secondary education in Slovakia do not sufficiently develop critical thinking, or there are only few schools that try to do so. This indirect proportion may unfortunately have undesirable consequences in the future. Online bullying of people with fake news has an impact on people's mental well-being. That is why in the age of post-truth information and in the age of emotion-enriched information, fact-checking is one of the most important competencies of the digital age. Fact-checking should serve as a tool to eliminate false statements, it should serve the truth, but also the freedom of speech.

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<sup>30</sup> MANTZARLIS, A.: Fact-checking 101. In IRETON, Ch., POSETTI, J. (eds.): *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation*. Paris : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018, p. 86.

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## THE REACTION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE CONTEXT OF SUPPORTING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has bitterly hit the healthcare system and the economies of countries around the world. Many countries, as well as businesses, have not been ready for this kind of pandemic. The adverse impact fully exposed the countries' fragile economies and enterprises themselves, facing existential problems. Governments of countries throughout the world have been forced to intervene to protect their citizens' health. Several measures have been taken to prevent the spread of the disease and alleviate the pandemic's adverse effects on the economy. However, the scope and form of the taken measures are very different across countries. Some countries focus mainly on employment support, others for deferral of payments or financial instruments. Most countries (as well as Slovakia), however, uses a combination of support measures focused on different areas. In this article, we try to point out the various measures introduced by the Slovak republic to support the development of the economy during the pandemic, associated with regional development.

### Key words:

Economy. Regional Development. Regions. Slovak republic.

### Introduction

The current economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the economies of all countries of the world. The pandemic's impact is estimated to be much greater on national economies than the economic crisis in 2008. As a result of various measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, several companies have had to suspend their business. It has also continuously paused the countries' economy's growth, which has caused considerable damage and problems. Strong economies and large multinational corporations have also faced the adverse impact of the pandemic. One of the most vulnerable and most affected groups of businesses is small and medium-sized enterprises, which are, in some cases, severely affected by life-saving measures and question their existence. Insufficient demand, low liquidity and high fixed costs are a burden for many of them, not easy to handle. The OECD study<sup>1</sup> states that small and medium-sized enterprises are affected by the measures introduced in its existence by up to 50%. Suppose we assume that this size category of enterprises in OECD countries employs about 60-70% of the working population. In that case, their eventual liquidation could have a significant impact not only on the current state of the national economy but also on possible global growth prospects. As the success of the economic recovery will depend crucially on the measures taken during the crisis, governments worldwide face the challenge of identifying the optimal balance between measures to save lives and ensure the basic functionality of the economic system and, thus, regional development. In response to the further development of the pandemic in each country, these countries' governments have taken various measures to support the business environment associated with the growth mentioned above at the regional level.

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<sup>1</sup> *Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME Policy responses*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://oecd.dam-broadcast.com/pm\\_7379\\_119\\_119680-di6h3qgi4x.pdf](https://oecd.dam-broadcast.com/pm_7379_119_119680-di6h3qgi4x.pdf)>.

## 1 Challenge of Regional Development in the Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic is one of the countries that are part of Western democracy and developed economies, as evidenced by its membership in the European Union, the Schengen area, the monetary union, the OECD and NATO, and active members of the UN. For Slovakia, being a member of these communities means new opportunities for the development and quality of life of the population. It is certainly also a new challenge arising from the need to ensure its competitiveness in a globalizing world<sup>2</sup>. Besides, there is a need to work more effectively and better to meet the needs of citizens while effectively tackling, together with the other states of this community, the challenges and issues arising from global change, such as climate change, mobility and migration, growing globalization, dynamism and instability of the world economy, etc. One such change is the impact of the Slovak Republic by a pandemic connected with the spread of the Covid-19 virus in 2020. Being the part of the community of advanced economies and democracies also means identifying its internal potentials and limits, clearly standing up to them, and using all its capacities to evaluate and solution. In today's complex and dynamically changing world, this is crucial for using an integrated approach, flexibility and focus on priorities and goals. Experts on strategies and development of the given areas agree that Slovakia needs a new vision and development strategy at various levels and a regional level.<sup>3</sup> The country's vision and strategy need to be based on the principles of open governance, partnership, transparency, and representatives of all elements participating in the development. These are state administration and self-government, entrepreneurs, academics and civil society.

The public administration fulfills the specific role of coordinator, implementer, mediator and advocate of the public interest, to which the new managerial approach and organization of public administration must correspond. There is a need to focus on integrated strategic management and planning at all levels of government. It could significantly reduce the adverse effects of the political cycle and ensure the continuity of implementing strategic programs and projects in Slovakia. The change that would occur would bring solutions whose implementation requires both horizontal and vertical integrated management. The OECD recommended the same to Slovakia to document Better Coordination for Better Policies, Services and Results.<sup>4</sup> The experts' recommendations agree on several views, but above all the one that Slovakia needs to increase the effectiveness of the use of internal development potentials of regions, cities and municipalities by strengthening the links of sectoral policies to their area by interconnecting regional and spatial planning, as well as strengthening capacities, active participation and responsibility of individual regional and territorial development participants and by creating adequate space for their participation in its management. There are also debates among experts about new principles; Slovakia should undoubtedly consider its further development.<sup>5</sup> These are mainly the following priorities:

- Sustainability priority, perceived as a balance between available resources and their usability.
- Prioritizing the quality of life over economic growth.
- Efficiency should be based mainly on its synergy.

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<sup>2</sup> HUDEČKOVÁ, H., LOŠTÁK, M. et al.: *Regionalistika, regionální rozvoj a rozvoj venkova*. Prague : ČZU in Prague, 2015, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> FORET, M.: *Marketingové řízení místního rozvoje*. Prague : Key Publishing, 2016, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Slovak Republic: Better co-ordination ofr better policies, services and results*. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264257627-sk>>.

<sup>5</sup> BENKOVÁ, L.: *Vízia a stratégia rozvoja Slovenska do roku 2030*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.srk.sk/sk/o-srk/aktuality/336-vizia-a-strategia-rozvoja-slovenska-do-roku-2030>>.

- Slovakia should also focus on integrating policies and their tools.

In 2019, a new document was presented dealing with the future direction of the country called Vision and Development Strategy of Slovakia until 2030. Its authors no longer consider GDP growth as a critical indicator of society's development but focus on a set of indicators measuring the quality of life. This approach has been taken into account while creating the document and preparing the four integrated development programs, which are key in the content of the document. We mean the following programs:

- quality of life for all,
- an innovative and sustainable economy,
- multi-level leading closer to the citizens,
- protection and development of natural, human and cultural resources.

As the integration of programs, projects and financial resources impacts several dimensions, with the spatial dimension being particularly important, the development strategy addresses the level of regions, particularly as a critical level of spatial integration.

### 1.1 Future Development on the Regional Level

Development planning and implementation need to be done in a targeted and systematic way. Slovakia cannot be fully developed without its individual parts' development activities; therefore, it is necessary to create supporting activities. The country can define supporting activities, e.g., also at the regional level. Slovakia tries to approach Europe's more developed countries and regions, as it currently ranks among the middle-developed countries and the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Cyprus and Portugal<sup>6</sup>. That is why experts in regional strategy and development have developed a Multilevel Management Closer program for Citizens. This program aims to streamline and bring the public service management closer to citizens by building multi-level integrated development management at national, regional and local levels. Also, the program aims to use the territorial potential of the regions effectively. Among the fundamental changes that should emerge through this program's use is, in particular, the creation of a mutually coordinated system of public policy management to ensure joint intervention of all levels of public service (from municipalities to the national level) in strategic planning regions. These regions represent a new level of economic and social development between the regional and local levels with all parties' participation. The change should be achieved mainly through:

- increasing the transparency and efficiency of public policies + public administration,
- increase the efficiency of investment management,
- change towards strategic planning and management,
- sustainable and efficient financing of development.

Improving public administration quality is one of Slovakia's declared priorities and the public perceives this topic very sensitively and even problematically. Slovakia was ranked 119th (148 countries in total) in assessing the institutional environment as a pillar of the competitiveness of economies by the World Economic Forum. The main issues mentioned were the inefficiency of public administration bureaucracy, political instability, and restrictive legislation. The problem is also characterized by the low cooperation with regional development participants in creating and implementing strategies and low availability of

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<sup>6</sup> BÚŠIK, J.: *Regionálny manažment a marketing*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2010, p. 85.



regional development tools for target groups or individuals.<sup>7</sup> The current Act on the Support of Regional Development does not include regional development entities, business entities, schools, etc. Creating strategic documents for regional development, preparation, monitoring and evaluation of projects or participation in projects has long been inaccessible to target groups. This fact was caused mainly due to the ever-increasing administrative complexity and a poor reflection of current needs, whether at the local or regional level. Long-term applied primary exogenous approaches have impacted not only the low effectiveness of interventions from public sources but also on the unsustainability of some solutions<sup>8</sup>. An example is a development of job creation in 2011-2016, during which there was an increase in the number of jobs by about 6%, while in three of the four regions of Slovakia, according to the OECD analysis, unemployment in occupations threatened by industrial automation prevailed in the short term horizon. Regional disparities were misunderstood only as problematic phenomena. Therefore, including investment, public development policies were not focused on capitalization and development based on specific regional potentials, including human and natural capital<sup>9</sup>. There is a need for continuity of crucial policies and processes in the regions through strategic planning, societal consensus, and significant public involvement in designing, implementing, and controlling public policies and strategies.

## 2 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises as Co-Creators of Regional Development

We understand small and medium-sized enterprises as units in the business sphere that should satisfy their customers' needs and wishes, whether they are products or services. Also, if we look at small and medium-sized enterprises from the state's point of view, they have to pay state taxes, which increases the state budget. If we look at small and medium-sized enterprises from the region's perspective and its development, we will notice their usefulness.<sup>10</sup> This is because small and medium-sized enterprises provide work for the unemployed in a given region. In the case of tourism-oriented businesses, they increase the attractiveness of a given area in the context of providing information about it. Businesses can attract investors, meet citizens' needs, increase their quality of life, focus on environmental education in a specific area, etc. Benefit but also the necessity of the existence of small and medium-sized enterprises is necessary for regional development. Since March 2020<sup>11</sup>, small and medium-sized enterprises had to gradually implement the measures ordered by the Slovak Republic state concerning the spread of the Covid-19 virus. As well as small and medium-sized enterprises, as establishments and businesses were gradually closed down and residents were advised to visit grocery stores. For this reason, it was necessary to take such steps that would not lead small and medium-sized enterprises to lose or even to close their business forever. Therefore, the state decided to take measures in employment, deferrals of payments and financial instruments, which is considered the most important. No measures have been taken in

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<sup>7</sup> VÝROSTOVÁ, E.: *Regionálna ekonomika a rozvoj*. Bratislava : Iura Edition, 2010, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> JÁNOŠOVÁ, D.: *Uplatňovanie marketingových aktivít v prospech regionálneho rozvoja*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> HORVÁTHOVÁ, M.: *Marketing miest a obcí. S dôrazom na marketingovú komunikáciu a vplyv informačno-komunikačných technológií na jej rozvoj*. Košice : METROPOLA TRADE, 2012, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> *Map of SME-support measures in response to Covid-19*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2020/04/14/map-of-sme-support-measures-in-response-to-covid-19>>.

<sup>11</sup> *Informácie o opatreniach pre podnikateľov na zmiernenie dopadov pandémie Covid-19*. [online]. [2020-09-29]. Available at: <<https://www.mhsr.sk/uploads/files/pwGI6qSi.pdf>>.

Slovakia in the area of structural policies.<sup>12</sup> However, measures have been taken to support employment, increase liquidity through deferral payments, and increase financing available through financial instruments. As of the employment, the state has taken measures to support the maintenance of jobs for entrepreneurs who have been forced to close or reduce their operations due to the situation. Measures to support employment were also taken for sole entrepreneurs.

- *Support within sickness absence*

Through its measures, Slovakia supported entrepreneurs who had to partially or entirely reduce their operations due to the pandemic (but also the decision of the Public Health Office). Employers + sole entrepreneurs who are also employers and had to close their operations by order of the Government of the Slovak Republic are provided by the state with a contribution to compensate part of the employee's salary in the amount of 80% of his average earnings, but up to a maximum of 1 100€. The condition for such a contribution is to keep the job position even after the end of the crisis period. For entrepreneurs who did not have to close their operations, but had to limit its operation partially, the state prepared the option to choose from two alternatives. The first is the payment of compensation for part of the employee's salary to whom the employer cannot assign work due to an obstacle on the employer's part. The contribution amount is at most 80% of the employee's average earnings (up to a maximum of € 880). The second measure to support entrepreneurs is a flat-rate contribution to cover part of the wage costs per employee, depending on the decline in sales in the company. Measures from the state also apply to sole entrepreneurs, which had to close their operations based on the Public Health Office's decision, or their sales decreased by at least 20%. Sole entrepreneurs have the opportunity to apply for a contribution to compensate for the loss of income from operation activity, which is determined concerning the amount of decline in sales.<sup>13</sup> The amount of decline in sales can be determined in two ways. The first way is to compare the sales amount for the current month in 2020 with the amount of sales for the same month in 2019. The second way is to compare the sales amount for the current month in 2020 with the average sales for the whole year 2019. The state proposes this method only for businesses active throughout 2019.

- *Support in the tax field, social security and rent-related debts*

Businesses whose sales have decreased by more than 40% may request a deferral of income tax advances. Advances that the taxpayer does not pay in 2020 will have to be settled in the tax return for 2021. Also, the Slovak Republic Government prevented tax arrears related to the late filing of the tax balance or late payment of the tax. Entrepreneurs also have the opportunity to offset previously unapplied losses from previous periods since 2014. Sole entrepreneurs and employers, whose sales have fallen by 40%, have the opportunity to request a deferral of payment of levies, i.e., social security and advances on health insurance. The state also waived the obligation to pay insurance premiums for the employer for social insurance, pension savings, and additional pension savings. Small and medium-sized enterprises and sole entrepreneurs have the opportunity to request a deferral of loan or

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<sup>12</sup> *Makroekonomické predikcie vybraných bánk.* [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.nbs.sk/sk/statisticke-udaje/vybrane-makroekonomicke-ukazovatele/makroekonomicke-predikcie-vybranых-bank>>.

<sup>13</sup> *Kvantifikácia opatrení na zmiernenie dopadov rozšírenia infekčného ochorenia Covid-19.* Released on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.rozpocetvarada.sk/vo\\_download/ko\\_covid\\_19\\_20200430.pdf](https://www.rozpocetvarada.sk/vo_download/ko_covid_19_20200430.pdf)>.

mortgage repayment without deteriorating the credit quality of the borrower.<sup>14</sup> The maximum is 9 months in a creditor who is a bank or a branch of a foreign bank. As for other creditors, the debtor may request a deferral of payment for a maximum of 3 months and subsequently an extension of the deferral for another 3 subsequent months.

- *Support in the field of financial tools*

To facilitate the problematic situation in which small and medium-sized enterprises and sole entrepreneurs currently are, the Slovak Republic Government has taken measures to support them through financial instruments. The measures mainly concern bank guarantees and guaranteed loans. Slovakia provides guarantees for loans provided by the bank and interest payments on the bank's loan. The provider of financial assistance is the MFSR and the intermediaries are Eximbanka and SZRB. The operating loan „Entrepreneur 2020“ is provided by SZRB. Its purpose is to mitigate the pandemic's effects and support small and medium-sized enterprises by providing financial assistance. Anti-Corona Guarantee is the bank guarantee and interest subsidy scheme launched by MFSR and Slovak Investment Holding.<sup>15</sup> It is a program that focuses on guarantees for financial institutions that subsequently provide preferential bridging loans for small and medium-sized enterprises and sole proprietors. The Government of the Slovak Republic also assists small and medium-sized enterprises in subsidies, specifically interest rate subsidies for loans for small and medium-sized enterprises. The government has prepared a flat rate contribution for sole proprietors without any income.

## 2.1 Possible Forms of Communication Between SMEs After a Pandemic

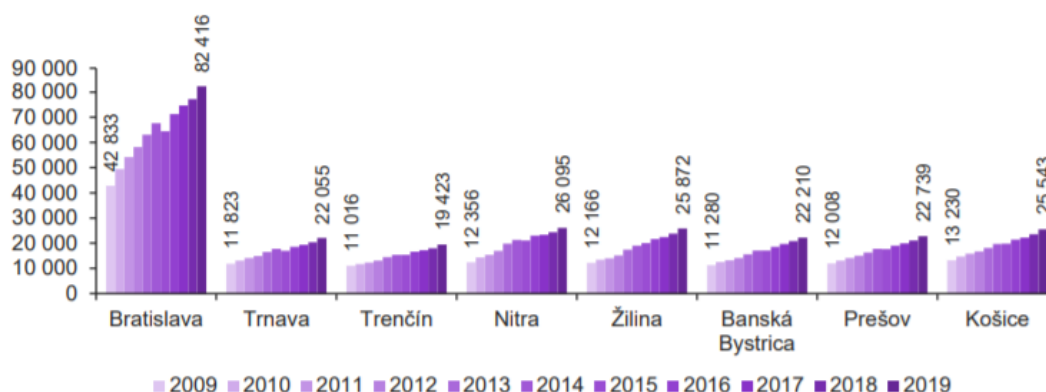
Small and medium-sized enterprises are one of the essential preconditions for the country's healthy economic development. Small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia create 99.9% of the total number of business entities, provide employment opportunities in the corporate economy for almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  (74%) of the active workforce and contribute by more than half (55%) to value-added. The most active sectors in the SME environment are business services, trade, construction and industry. Small and medium-sized enterprises recorded a positive development in 2019. However, their results have already been affected by the slowdown in the Slovak economy's growth rate, which has achieved the lowest growth in the last three years<sup>16</sup>. The year 2019 was also the last year of a successful decade for small and medium-sized enterprises, characterized by an increase in the SME sector's performance. For small and medium-sized enterprises, 2020 means coping with the coronavirus pandemic's effects, putting the Slovak economy in recession.

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<sup>14</sup> *Skúsenosti európskych miest a obcí II*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <[https://www.zmos.sk/skusenosti-europskych-miest-a-obci-ii-oznam/mid/435037/html#m\\_435037](https://www.zmos.sk/skusenosti-europskych-miest-a-obci-ii-oznam/mid/435037/html#m_435037)>.

<sup>15</sup> *Kvantifikácia opatrení na zmiernenie dopadov rozšírenia infekčného ochorenia Covid-19*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.rozpocetovarada.sk/vo\\_download/ko\\_covid\\_19\\_20200430.pdf](https://www.rozpocetovarada.sk/vo_download/ko_covid_19_20200430.pdf)>.

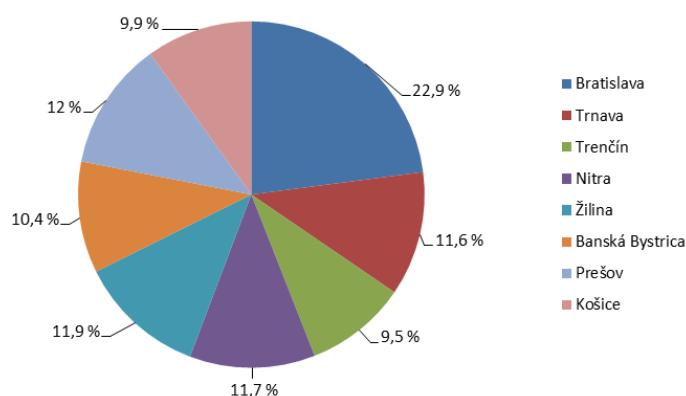
<sup>16</sup> For more information, see: *Malé a stredné podnikanie v číslach v roku 2019*. Bratislava : Slovak Business Agency, 2020. [online]. [2020-10-04]. Available at: <[http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male\\_a\\_stredne\\_podnikanie\\_v\\_cislach\\_v\\_roku\\_2019.pdf](http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male_a_stredne_podnikanie_v_cislach_v_roku_2019.pdf)>.



**Figure 1: Development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the years 2009 – 2019 in the regions of the Slovak Republic**

Source: *Malé a stredné podnikanie v číslach v roku 2019*. Bratislava : Slovak Business Agency, 2020, p. 48. [online]. [2020-10-04]. Available at: <[http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male\\_a\\_stredne\\_podnikanie\\_v\\_cislach\\_v\\_roku\\_2019.pdf](http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male_a_stredne_podnikanie_v_cislach_v_roku_2019.pdf)>.

In 2019, the highest level of business activity of small and medium-sized enterprises was recorded in the districts of the city of Bratislava and Košice. Other regional cities, such as Banská Bystrica and Žilina, as well as the districts of the Bratislava region - Senec and Pezinok, are also characterized by higher business activity.<sup>17</sup> In general, a higher level of business activity of small and medium-sized enterprises prevails in western Slovakia, Považie and northern Slovakia, which is also related to the development of the regions. Since March 2020, the Slovak Republic Government has ordered measures that were not favorable for the operation of small and medium-sized enterprises. According to the SK NACE classification, 53,243 small and medium-sized enterprises operate in Slovakia in the sectors affected the most at risk of quarantine measures. The most vulnerable SMEs by size are micro-enterprises (96.1%), employing 10 or fewer employees.<sup>18</sup> Further, there are small enterprises (3.4%) and medium-sized enterprises (0.4%). According to the legal form, the most endangered groups are self-employed persons (59.7%), enterprises as legal entities (37.4%) and the free professions (2.9%).



**Figure 2: Small and medium-sized enterprises by region of operation, considered in threat**

Source: Own processing based on data from the Register of Organizations of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

<sup>17</sup> See also: *Malé a stredné podnikanie v číslach v roku 2019*. Bratislava : Slovak Business Agency, 2020. [online]. [2020-10-04]. Available at: <[http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male\\_a\\_stredne\\_podnikanie\\_v\\_cislach\\_v\\_roku\\_2019.pdf](http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/male_a_stredne_podnikanie_v_cislach_v_roku_2019.pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> *Analýza: Malé a stredné podniky ohrozené pandémiou*. [online]. [2020-10-04]. Available at: <<https://www.npc.sk/sk/podnikanie-v-koronakrize/analýza-male-a-stredne-podniky-ohrozene-pandemiou/>>.

Each of the natural and legal persons operating in the market should have a pre-determined and elaborate way of presenting itself externally and how it wants to be perceived by the public. The entity determines the presentation style and which, if adequately communicating with customers, gets their attention and can affect their behavior. The customer's first touch with a legal or natural person does not occur in all cases through personal contact, but mostly with an innovative, sophisticated, and significant company presentation through marketing<sup>19</sup>. There are many options for small and medium-sized enterprises to choose from, offered by marketing communication. By choosing marketing, companies and sole entrepreneurs can join several associations focused on promoting their services and products. It is beneficial for companies to use unique, creative communication with a profound idea and a timeless message. Marketing communication options for small and medium enterprises<sup>20</sup>:

- Blog – is a space for businesses to promote themselves. If a blog is placed on a portal, it is usually for free. An ideal option for a business or self-employed person lacking their website;
- Website – the best form of selling products or services. Modern versions are simple and clear, offering answers to customer questions;
- Social networks – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. It is necessary to create a profile on such a social network corresponding most with the company and the target group;
- PPC – such campaigns are most often used to improve search engine rankings or as links to PR articles;
- Podcasts – one of the options to share the news with our customers in audio or video form. Podcasts are currently top-rated. However, it is necessary to have a higher budget for their creation;
- E-mailing – unsolicited and requested e-mails are part of some companies' marketing, presenting news, discounts, and various announcements related to the sale of products or services. A suitable form of the newsletter can attract a new customer.

There are several ways how SMEs can become visible after a difficult period. Therefore, these options are not cost demanding and could help achieve the objectives set when used correctly. If an entrepreneur cannot orientate in marketing, he should contact an expert in this field who could restart his business.

## Conclusion

Most countries in the world and Slovakia have decided to introduce several measures to fight the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The measures we mentioned in the article were introduced in connection with the support of small and medium-sized enterprises and sole entrepreneurs. The most widespread measures taken include mainly income tax deferrals, direct loans and wage allowance assistance. Measures in the area of structural policies have been implemented only to a limited extent. According to the World Bank, researching measures in 121 countries, 1,071 measures were taken to support small and medium-sized enterprises. More than 80% of them were focused on debt financing, employment support and taxes. From March to May 2020, Slovakia took several measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the field of employment, deferral of payments, and financial instruments. Measures in the field of structural policies in Slovakia have not been taken. However, estimates of the impact of the

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<sup>19</sup> KINGSNORTH, S.: *Digital Marketing Strategy*. London : Kogan Page, 2019, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 157.

measures taken vary. According to updated information of NBS from May 2020, which recorded a deterioration in the economic prognosis, a decline in GDP of up to 8.3% can be expected in 2020, which may have a more significant effect in the second quarter. In this case, gross public debt could exceed 60% of GDP. Such a massive economic downturn could cause 88,000 jobs to be lost and unemployment to rise to almost 9%, despite government support. As a result, socio-economic development in the regions and the whole country could be affected. The country needs to address current measures and its overall future development direction in these difficult times. Small and medium-sized enterprises can ensure economic growth in a given country in a state with no significant issues. However, the current situation associated with a pandemic requires compliance with specific measures, to which small and medium-sized enterprises are also subject. These measures are not in favor of the future existence of these companies. Those small and medium-sized enterprises that survive the pandemic will be forced to develop marketing communication activities for their restart and start from scratch again. It is essential that small and medium-sized enterprises become interested in their future development and use marketing communication tools to be visible again.

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*Map of SME-support measures in response to Covid-19.* Released on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2020/04/14/map-of-sme-support-measures-in-response-to-covid-19>>.

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## MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

*Ivan Dudáš*

### **Abstract**

This text is a reflection and contribution to what is related to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. Innovative education and online learning platforms were marginalized in various areas, especially in education, and to name more precisely in the Slovak education environment. These platforms are being used for education through different levels of schools during the time of global pandemic. This crisis was unpredictable and has affected all areas of being, including communication. All people in our society must be protected from the spread of coronaviruses in the spirit of a dominant motto – stay at home. Now more than ever we have to adapt to a massive way of this new situation. Digital capabilities and the online environment have become our unique tool for receiving, transmitting, sharing a streaming different information.

### **Key words:**

Coronavirus Pandemic. Covid-19. Online Education. SARS-CoV-2. Wu-Chan.

## **1 Context**

At the beginning of 2020, disturbing information and images from China about a dangerous viral infection began to seep across all countries in the world. In China itself, the spread of the SARS-Cov-2 virus, which belongs to the group of coronaviruses and causes a respiratory disease called Covid-19, has begun to raise many questions about the readiness of individual countries to cope with the epidemiological situation in case of intrusion into their territory. The place of origin of the dangerous coronavirus infection is Chinese Wu-Chan, - the capital of Hubei Province. On approximately 10 January 2020, the Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic was informed of this situation by the European authorities about the occurrence of viral pneumonia in the city of Wuhan in the eastern part of China.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1 This Is Not Our Problem, an Underestimation of the Situation in Individual Countries**

Unfortunately, what seemed distant to us and not to us has become a reality on a global scale. It turned out that the disease spread very quickly across continents to all countries of the world, including Slovakia. A significant degree of this expansion was caused by global tourism, not least by air transport. One concrete example is the Italian city of Bergamo in northern Italy, which had direct air connections to the city of Wu-Chan, and at the time of worrying numbers of individual infections, there were still no major measures taken in the region but also at the level of all Italy, not to mention sporting events, where striking, it was the Champions League match in front of a hopelessly sold-out stadium. Unprepared Italy stopped coping with the onslaught of serious cases and the country's health system began to collapse completely. Unfortunately, other countries were unprepared, they did not have enough protection, tests, lung ventilators, and the world suddenly began to fight other problems brought about by the pandemic, and individual countries suffered economic and social downturns as a result of restrictive measures.

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<sup>1</sup> *Informácia o výskyte vírusovej pneumónie v Číne – mesto Wuhan spôsobenej novým druhom koronavírusu.* Released on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-01-10]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3998:informacia-o-vyskyte-virusovej-pneumonie-v-ine-mesto-wuhan-sposobenej-novym-druhom-koronavirusu&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3998:informacia-o-vyskyte-virusovej-pneumonie-v-ine-mesto-wuhan-sposobenej-novym-druhom-koronavirusu&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153)>.



## 1.2 Situation in Slovakia

In this situation, when the dangerous virus began to spread to individual continents and countries, it was only a matter of time before post-election Slovakia became a country with a given epidemiological problem. The first wave hit our country in the time before the change of government. On March 6, 2020, Slovakia reported the first confirmed case of a father whose son was previously in Venice, and who was identified as the carrier of the so-called "0", then on March 7, his wife had a positive test. The first hard measures were taken by the outgoing government. From 7 am on March 13, border controls were launched and all international flights were cancelled. On the 16th March, primary, secondary schools and universities were closed. The dangerous virus was very unknown to us and it was necessary to react immediately based on learning from the situation and disturbing images from China and then in the European area from Italy, where the industrial north was most affected. The so-called the first wave was in many countries, in ours not to mention associated not only with concerns about managing the situation from the point of view of health care and staff, but it was, above all, a major unknown. As of March 10, the crisis staff of the Slovak Republic banned all cultural and sports events for a period of 14 days, and quarantine was also ordered for people coming from high-risk countries. This measure has, of course, been prolonged in view of the developments directly linked to the spread of the virus. Social life stopped, cinemas, restaurants, retail outlets and cultural events were closed. On 21 April, 4 steps of gradual relaxation of measures were presented according to the epidemiological situation and the daily increase in the number of infected. The first phase started on 22 April, the second and third on 6 May, the fourth phase on 20 May and the fifth phase on 3 June. These individual substances defined exactly when and under what circumstances the release measures were set. *„Officials announced that progression through the phases will depend on the average daily number of newly diagnosed COVID-19 cases and that special restrictions may be enacted as needed to maintain proper social distancing”*<sup>2</sup>.

Life in Slovakia seemed to return to normal. Little did anyone know, however, that the covid-19 would return in the more aggressive second wave after the summer months. Records of the number of infected in each day began to fall. Despite the recommendation of the pandemic commission and the crisis staff, which responded to the arrival of the second wave of the pandemic with the reintroduced measures at the end of August for individual districts. On 22 September, a record was set as part of the daily increase in the number of effectively tested, exceeding 300. On 1 October, a state of emergency was declared for a period of 45 days and measures are gradually being reintroduced. On October 24, a curfew was announced, with the exception of travel to work, for testing and to provide essential needs. The Government of the Slovak Republic has decided for general testing of the population<sup>3</sup>. This event, called Joint Responsibility, has become the largest logistics event in Slovakia. The nationwide testing was preceded by pilot testing from 23 to 25 October in the districts most affected by the pandemic – Tvrdošín, Námestovo, Dolný Kubín and Bardejov.<sup>4</sup> Operation joint responsibility

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<sup>2</sup> *Health Alert: Tentative Easing of Quarantine Regulations Announced*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://sk.usembassy.gov/health-alert-tentative-easing-of-quarantine-regulations-announced/>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Premiér: V SR sa chystá plošné pretestovanie obyvateľov na nový koronavírus*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://www.vlada.gov.sk/premier-v-sr-sa-chysta-plosne-pretestovanie-obyvateľov-na-novy-koronavirus/>>.

<sup>4</sup> PAVELEK, M.: *Veľké testovanie Slovákov začne na budúci víkend na Orave*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://myorava.sme.sk/c/22513282/velke-testovanie-slovenska-zacne-na-buduci-vikend-na-orave.html>>.

so-called nationwide testing took place from Saturday 31 October to Sunday 1 November. Approximately 3,500,000 Slovak citizens were tested.

## 2 Culture and Creative Industries During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The field of culture and the creative industry, which is dependent on viewers, was immediately affected. Cancelled concerts, events and various cultural events during the first wave of the pandemic disappeared a bit in connection with the acceptance of the situation we got into in connection with the solidarity of society with the measures to face the “invisible enemy”.

### 2.1 The First Wave of Coronaviruses as the Beginning of a Decline in Culture

However, the economic aid package for people affected by the pandemic has not been sufficient to take into account the number of people working in the cultural and creative industries, who are estimated to have received aid and are around 220,000 people. For many months they could not see their money, they could not work due to restrictions, and their problem was swayed by the Minister of Culture with the Prime Minister. The arrival of the second wave of the pandemic was known, but the competent ones, especially in the summer months, took the situation easily. Even the communication of the representatives of the state power and its chairman was not adequate to the people in culture, let alone other areas. The individual measures seemed chaotic, unprofessional, constantly changing and their justifications were inadequate, the state management failed to communicate, and as the massive protest of people working in culture approached, the daily numbers of those infected began to rise at a dizzying pace and regulations and restrictions began to tighten drastically. In the meantime all cultural and sports events stopped again, exceptions within sports were given only to professional clubs, especially the first leagues - of course without spectators. But let's go back to the field of culture? A state of emergency has been declared, and I have taken measures to put a stop to virtually cinemas, theatres, concerts and galleries. This situation raises many questions. Is the state in the field of culture behaving bad? Do competent people understand at all the problems of people in this field? Associations and associations of workers in the cultural and creative industries have decided to publicly point out that they are on the verge of collapse after six months of unsuccessful negotiations with government officials. “In an open letter to Prime Minister Igor Matovič, they point out that it employs 220,000 people in the cultural and creative industries, which is about 9 percent of workers. “About one third of them have had a job decline of more than 80% in the last seven months, some sectors up to 90%,” the signatories said.”<sup>5</sup> These cultural associations announced the protest on October 14 in the early evening of #Spolu za kultúru (Together for Culture),<sup>6</sup> but events with a pandemic situation took such a rapid turn that the government gradually took steps to slow down the spread of Covid-19 gradually halted all mass events, declared a state of emergency, most recently banned dealing with exceptions such as the way to work and shopping.

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<sup>5</sup> *Otvorený list premiérovi Matovičovi: Nie sme komedianti, ale priemysel zamestnávajúci 220-tisíc ľudí.* Released on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-04]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/2223571-otvoreny-list-premierovi-matovicovi-nie-sme-komedianti-ale-priemysel-zamestnavajuci-220-tisic-ludi>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Kultúrne organizácie avizujú protest, upozornia na problém kreatívneho priemyslu.* Released on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-05]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22502900/prva-pomoc-do-kulturneho-priemyslu-neprisla-tvrdia-umelci-v-otvorenom-liste.html>>.

### 3 The Onset of the Pandemic and Its Impact on the Education System in Slovakia

The field of the education system in the Slovak Republic found itself overnight in a situation where it was necessary to respond globally at all levels of schools throughout the country. All types of schools, from primary, secondary to tertiary switched to a distance form of study, which was the only one possible in the given situation. Immediately, digital technologies and online platforms became the only possible tool for securing the educational process. Education in the Slovak Republic experienced in the given situation the so-called a fundamental reform, at least as regards the use of modern and innovative technologies and online learning, which had only been discussed for a decade before the Covid-19 era and was not allowed to be applied in part.

#### 3.1 Unprecedented Reform in Online Education

This terrible disease, which spread rapidly among the population in all corners of the world, thus caused, in addition to chaos and destabilization of the economic situation in individual countries, various other challenges which were nevertheless of positive significance in the given context. At least in Slovakia, online teaching has become a reality that has brought teachers new questions. We have never had any experience with this situation before, unlike individual projects of some institutions and on such a mass scale within the educational system in Slovakia. Teaching in our faculty has been suspended in full-time and part-time form on March 9, and on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, at the entire university, according to government regulations when introducing a mandatory 14-day quarantine for colleges and universities. The original regulation of the 14-day quarantine recommended for universities was extended according to the given situation, but at our faculty distance learning in the form of online teaching took place until the end of the final term. In this situation, at one point, the entire education system, from primary, secondary to higher education, found itself. The Ministry of Education tried to manage the situation and motivate teachers to cope. It brought together the web [www.ucimenadialku.sk](http://www.ucimenadialku.sk) to help teachers in their situation and to work together with students to better manage a crisis situation unknown to us caused by the first wave of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.<sup>7</sup> As already mentioned specifically at our faculty, the classic form of full-time teaching has stopped on March 9, 2020, following the measures and extensions of these measures, the online form of teaching was practically applied until the end of the final term 2020. We switched to the new technological tools applicable in online teaching almost immediately, the younger generation had experience at the basic level, the older generation of teachers learned on the go. Various platforms such as google meet, skype, discord, zoom were used for the lectures. In essence, screen sharing made it possible, as far as possible, to operate on theoretical subjects to an acceptable degree. However, the teaching of theoretical and practical subjects was questionable. Despite the logistical complexity associated with "a certain flat discomfort", our teachers coped with the situation.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize, especially at the beginning, that this text does not determine the right to completeness, it is just an attempt to indicate some discourse on the issue. A global pandemic in the form of the spread of the Covid-10 virus has caused chaos

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<sup>7</sup> *Nový web pomôže žiakom, učiteľom a rodičom počas prerušeného vyučovania.* Released on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-03-25]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/546637-novy-web-pomoze-ziakom-ucitelom-a-rodicom-pocas-preruseneho-vyucovania/>>.

and problems in almost every country in the world. I focused primarily on culture and education. For both areas, "communication" is an important aspect not only in presentation and representation. The global pandemic has halted the classical structure of full-time teaching. Online education, especially at universities, was the only one possible at a time of anti-pandemic restrictions. Cinemas, museums and galleries also got into trouble during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, Cinemas welcomed their visitors to cinemas three months after closing. Life seemed to be on track as before. Musicians and singers could once again play and sing in front of their own fans at concerts. Theaters resumed their performances and the artists in the galleries invited to the exhibition to open. People have stopped paying attention to the distances and especially many of them, despite the confusing situation, went on summer vacation. This situation resulted in the outbreak of the second wave, despite imported cases infected from abroad. As a result of the second wave of coronavirus spread, all mass events in Slovakia were closed again in October 2020. Universities have again and immediately switched to the distance form of online education. It can be stated that most universities did not even manage to open the academic year in full-time form. Most teachers, together with students, have only met online through online platforms since March. The fight against the invisible enemy seems complex and demanding on the psyche of each individual. Online learning has been seen by many as the future. Sure, this option is innovative, but I think it only works in combination with full-time teaching, with all the social ties. The world before this terrible pandemic seemed different, more free. Memories of the state before her arrival make me constantly think, is this the future after which we dreamed or its foundations stopped in time and we were left with only memories, memories of the future.

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*Kultúrne organizácie avizujú protest, upozornia na problém kreatívneho priemyslu.* Released on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-05]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22502900/prva-pomoc-do-kulturneho-priemyslu-neprisla-tvrdia-umelci-v-otvorenom-liste.html>>.

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## SLOVAK 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND E-COMMUNICATION

*Michal Garaj – Jakub Bardovič*

### **Abstract**

Social networks are becoming a stable and powerful tool for reaching voters in election campaigns. The main goal of the paper is to identify the structure of published posts of selected candidates in the 2019 presidential election on Facebook. The analysis focus on: distribution of posts related to communication of topics or promotion of the candidate, types of promotion, themes of communicated topics, frequency of publishing posts, interactions on published posts, frequency of keywords, relations between interactions on posts and relations between style of published posts (text, image, video, and combinations) and interactions. Data are collected in the period of 60 days before the elections. The source of data source represents Facebook. Processing and evaluation of data is performed through descriptive statistics and advanced statistical analyzes for confirming relationships. Results show that candidates use Facebook primary for propagation of their activities, TV debates, Radio debates or meetings. Frequency of post publication and activity on facebook is higher to date of election. Relationship between types of interactions on posts is strong and affects the number of interactions.

### **Key words:**

Communication. Election. Facebook. President. Propagation.

### **Introduction**

In 2019, the fifth direct elections of the President of the Slovak Republic took place. Together with the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, they are connected with relatively high media focus and, in comparison with some other elections (e.g., elections at the local government level or elections to the EP), also with higher participant rate. Like any election, these have also caused several specifics, which has opened up space for examining existing phenomena, monitoring changes in development, and identifying new phenomena. An essential part of every election is, among other things, the election campaign (and thus political / pre-election communication). The paper focuses on the 2019 presidential election. The paper's primary goal is to identify the structure of published posts on Facebook's social network by selected political representatives in the campaign before the presidential election in 2019. The partial goals are to determine: the number of published posts on the social network; development of the number of published posts; the highest and lowest daily number of posts; the number of interactions on posts (Like, Share, Comment); development of the number of interactions on posts (Like, Share, Comment); relationships between interactions (Like, Share, Comment); the proportion of posts focusing on the candidate's promotion and political communication; the structure of posts in order to promote specific topics; the structure of posts devoted to the communication of topics; the frequency of occurrence of keywords / essential words in published posts. The period follows the publication of posts in 60 days before the date of the elections. The analysis includes the first three candidates according to the official results of the presidential election in 2019. The article's subject is Facebook promotion, particularly the communication of selected candidates in the 2019 presidential election. The subjects of the article represent the presidential candidates: Z. Čaputová, M. Šefčovič and Š. Harabin. We get the data from the official Facebook profiles of candidates in a selected period. They are processed into a basic data matrix. Data evaluation is provided in two ways. The first is represented by descriptive statistics with a description of the data. We apply the advanced statistical method of Multiple regression analysis to research the mutual relationship of interactions within the posts. The evaluation includes a presentation by graphs and tables (figures) followed by the final comparison.

## 1 The President of the Slovak Republic and Election

The tradition of presidential elections in Slovakia dates back to the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic when for the first time, the post of the president became part of the political system as an element of the executive or the government power<sup>1</sup>. A parliamentary republic<sup>2</sup> thus replaced the previous monarchist establishment with an indirectly elected president. Practically until the implementation of the amendment to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic<sup>3</sup> and Act 46/1999 Coll. on the method of electing the President of the Slovak Republic, on the vote on his dismissal and the amendment of some other acts, the voter in Slovakia was not directly involved in the election of the head of state<sup>4</sup>. In particular, the implementation of the Act itself, which was the pre-election commitment of the newly formed government coalition, together with the situation in the election of candidates for this position, created the conditions for the voter himself to participate in the election of the candidate. This condition opened two other fundamental changes. The first concerned the procedural side - the method of selection. The members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic decided on the application of an absolute majority electoral system, which is based on the requirement to achieve an absolute majority of votes from all eligible voters in the first round and the possible existence of the second round if such a candidate is not found<sup>5</sup>. The second change is associated with a change in the very logic of direct voting. Until then, the winner of the election was more the result of mutual political agreements between the relevant political parties without the need to form a specific election campaign, after - the responsibility for decision-making shifted from deputies to voters. It significantly increased the importance of the standard political marketing tools linked to candidates' mutual electoral competition.

Since 1999, the President of the Slovak Republic's elections have taken place five times (1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019), every time it was necessary to hold the second round. Even though the very essence of the electoral system has not changed, several provisions for implementing the elections have been amended. Since 2014 a new electoral law procedure has entered into force, in particular Act 180/2014 Coll. on the conditions for the performance of election legislation, which is subsequently amended by a separate act regulating the election campaign - Act 181/2014 Coll. on the election campaign and the amendment of Act no. 85/2005 Coll. on political parties and political movements, as amended.

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<sup>1</sup> *Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky*. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <[https://www.noveaspi.sk/products/lawText/1/1702/1/2/zakon-c-121-1920-sb-kterym-se-uvozuje-ustavni-listina-ceskoslovenske-republiky#c\\_3380](https://www.noveaspi.sk/products/lawText/1/1702/1/2/zakon-c-121-1920-sb-kterym-se-uvozuje-ustavni-listina-ceskoslovenske-republiky#c_3380)>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the functioning of parliamentary republic and the position of the president in it, see for example: MIHÁLIK, J.: *Kapitoly z porovnávej politológie*. Trnava : FSV UCM in Trnava, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Ústavný zákon č. 9/1999 Z. z. ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa Ústava Slovenskej republiky č. 460/1992 Zb. v znení ústavného zákona č. 244/1998 Z. z.* [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1999/9/19990127>>.

<sup>4</sup> Remark by the authors: As of the Czech Republic, the change from an indirect election to a direct election did not occur until 2013, when Miloš Zeman won the mandate on the basis of success in the second round. The mentioned change in the method of electing the President of the Czech Republic was caused by *Constitutional Act 71/2012 Coll., amending Constitutional Act 1/1993 Coll., The Constitution of the Czech Republic, as amended by later constitutional acts*.

<sup>5</sup> *Zákon č. 460/1992 Zb. Ústava Slovenskej republiky*. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/20190701>>.

## 1.1 Political Communication in Case of the Slovak Republic and Its Research

The form of political communication has changed significantly over the years, which has led, among other things, to new technological possibilities<sup>6</sup>. One of the last changes so far can be linked to the development of the Internet and social media. Its importance became apparent, for example, in the US presidential election in 2008 during B. Obama's successful pre-election campaign, as well as in his re-election in 2012<sup>7</sup>. Within the Slovak Republic, this type of media's role is becoming more significant in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2010, when the then newly established political party SaS succeeded online communication. Gradually, other entities and individuals joined it as well, as a result of which we have reached a state where some politicians<sup>8</sup> (e.g., the current Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Igor Matovič, communicate several messages via the social network Facebook) some fundamental messages are communicated through their profiles on social networks. For this reason, e-communication research has become the subject of interest of several scientific disciplines, while monitoring various attributes. On the one hand, we distinguish studies that reflect the primary period of pre-election campaigns<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, some go beyond this scope and follow the inter-election period<sup>10</sup>. The studies reflect political parties' communication<sup>11</sup>, individual politicians<sup>12</sup> or other organizations associated with politics<sup>13</sup> or a specific state or supranational organizations (institutions)<sup>14</sup>.

The issue of political (and especially pre-election) communication and the political campaign itself in the presidential election, has gained importance, as mentioned above, since 1999. While the first elections (1999, 2004, 2009) can be characterized as elections where the majority of voters inclined towards already "present and well visible" politicians with previous experience in this field and also in some respects by a clear link to political parties

<sup>6</sup> For the development of political campaigns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see for example: BLUMLER, J. G., KAVANAGH, D.: The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. In *Political Communication*, 1999, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 209-230.

<sup>7</sup> See also: BIMBER, B.: Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment. In *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 2014, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 130-150.

<sup>8</sup> Remark by the authors: Outside Slovakia, we find it useful to mention the communication of e.g. US President D. Trump, sharing his messages not only on US but also foreign policy via social networks – Twitter.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example: FILIPEC, O., GARAJ, M., MIHÁLIK, J.: Ako komunikuje pravica: komunikačné aktivity vybraných (krajne) pravicových politických strán v Českej republike a na Slovensku pred parlamentnými voľbami v rokoch 2016 a 2017. In *Politické vedy*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 183-212.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see: JANKOĽA, M., ŠIMUNEKOVÁ, N.: Médiá a krajná pravica. In MIHÁLIK, J. (ed.): *Storočie českej a slovenskej krajnej pravice*. Bratislava : Iris, 2019, p. 231-255.; BARDOVIČ, J.: Political communication of MPs of the People's Party – Our Slovakia in digital area. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., RYBANSKÝ, R., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Mirrors – part I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 25-35.

<sup>11</sup> GARAJ, M.: Facebook in Use of Political Parties in Slovakia – Tool for Communication of Promotion: Far Right Vs. Others. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Mirrors – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 99-107.; HORVÁTH, P., MELUŠ, M.: Media Games in the Background of Slovak Parliamentary Elections in 2016. In *Communication Today*, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 68-83.

<sup>12</sup> MURRAY SVIDROŇOVÁ, M., KAŠČÁKOVÁ, A., BAMBUŠEKOVÁ, G.: Social media in the presidential election campaign: Slovakia 2019. In *Administratívne a Management Public*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 33, p. 182-193.

<sup>13</sup> MIHÁLIK, J., DŽAČOVSKÝ, T.: Social Media as a Mediator of Political Ideas in European Context. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Mirrors – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 69-71.

<sup>14</sup> VESNÍČ-ALUJEVIČ, L.: Political communication on Facebook: A case study of the European Parliament profile page for the elections 2009. In *CM : Communication Management Quarterly: Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem*, 2012, Vol. 7, No. 22, p. 36-53.



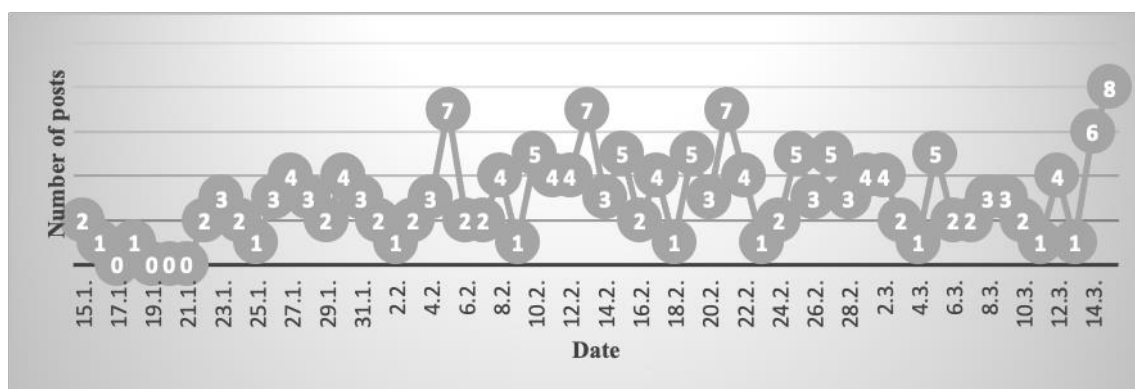
(at least in the form of previous cooperation with them), 2014 and 2019 can be described as elections where candidates from outside politics, or with no experience within this field. Especially, in this case, the importance of political communication grows not only with the fulfillment of standard tasks, but also concerning the initial building of a “brand” (or “name”), so that the initial recognizability of their person with voters should be automatic. The importance of traditional media (such as television) and modern ones, such as social networks, was proved in several respects by the last two presidential elections (2014 and 2019), as much of the communication has shifted to this interactive environment.

## 2 Facebook in the Slovak 2019 Presidential Election

The following section analyses the posts on the social network Facebook of three selected candidates: Zuzana Čaputová, Maroš Šefčovič and Štefan Harabin. It focuses on the 60-day pre-election period to monitor the categories specified in the main goal and sub-goals. After an independent analysis of each particular candidate, we evaluate them in selected aspects and from a common perspective.

### 2.1 Zuzana Čaputová

The daily amount of published posts by Z. Čaputová is shown in Figure 1. For the entire period, we found 176 posts, on average 2.93 posts per day. We recorded the lowest frequency in the first week of monitoring when no post was published on the website for four days. From January 21, 2019, at least one post appears in the profile every day until the end of the period. In the first half of the period (January 15 - February 13), 75 posts (42%) with a daily average of 2.5 posts per day. In the second half of the period (February 14 - March 15), we identify an increase in posts to 101 (58%) with an average of 3.36 posts per day. The highest number of posts (8) was published on the last day, March 14, 2019.

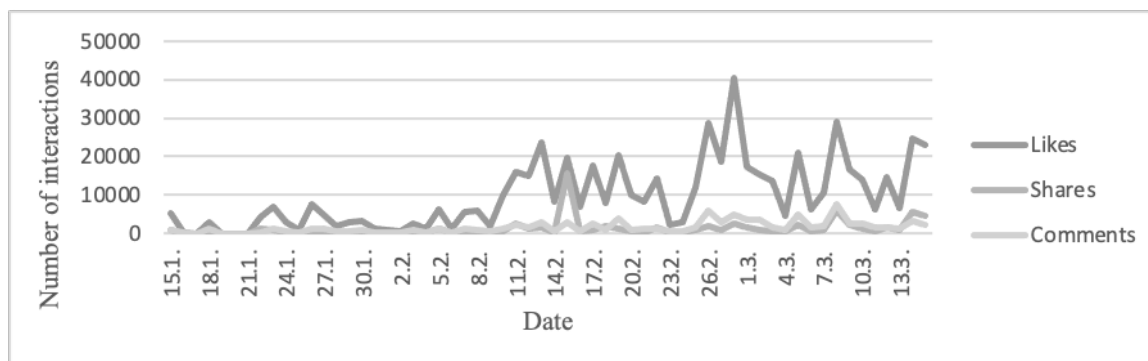


**Chart 1: Z. Čaputová – Frequency of published posts on Facebook page**

Source: Own processing

Figure 2 is focused on the development of interactions on published posts by Z. Čaputová. 176 posts received a total of 575,986 likes (daily average 9599), 72,362 shares (1206 daily average) and 92,300 comments (daily average of 1538). By February 10, the interaction rate trend follows relatively similar development, with shares and comments maintaining stable values throughout the period. The only significant exception considering the high number of shares is five posts on February 15, receiving a total of 15,762 shares (21.7% share of the total value). As per the graph, we identify a significant increase in likes for posts, especially in the second half of the period, 440,592 (76.5% of the total) with a daily average of 14,686 likes.

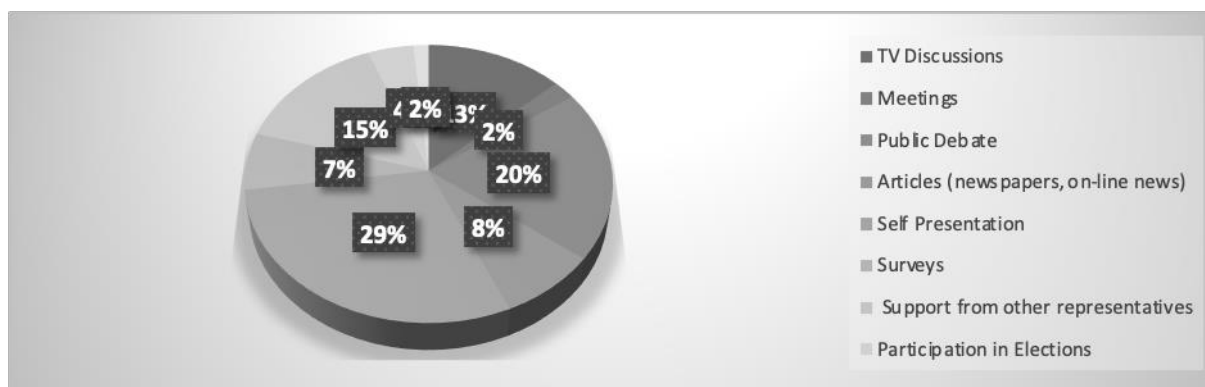
The most “Likes” was given on February 28, when three published posts received a total of 40,400 interactions. The calculation of the relationships between interactions (Likes, Shares and Comments) by Multiple Linear Regression shows the value of the relationship  $R = 0.908$ ,  $\text{Sig } F = 3.32 \times 10^{-22} < 0.05$ . There is a considerable interdependence between the variables - statistically significant. The number of Likes, Shares and Comments interact positively while increasing the number of interactions.



**Chart 2: Z. Čaputová – Interactions on Facebook posts**

Source: Own processing

The promotion posts of candidate Z. Čaputová represent a 77% (136/175) share. Their structure is shown in Figure 3. The highest number of posts promote the candidate herself and her daily activities (29%). We also record a higher share of posts regarding participation in public debates (20%), proven support from other representatives (15%) and participation in TV debates (13%). The remaining posts (23%) focuses on the political communication of topics and posts are related to the following topics: Social events (41%), Justice (27%), Law (18%), Culture (5%), Agriculture (5%) and Sport (4%).



**Chart 3: Z. Čaputová – Propagation Posts – Structure**

Source: Own processing

Based on the analysis of the frequency of occurrence of words, presented in Figure 1, we express several conclusions of the setting of political communication by Z. Čaputová. The most important aspect is the emphasis on Slovakia and changes focused on the future with citizens’ need to go to the polls. Mobilizing of voters to vote is next crucial aspect. Thematically, it focuses primarily on justice and the need to make society and government changes based on discussion and consensus. Z. Čaputová keeps the identification of supporters and promotion on the posts through using the #mojaprezidentka.

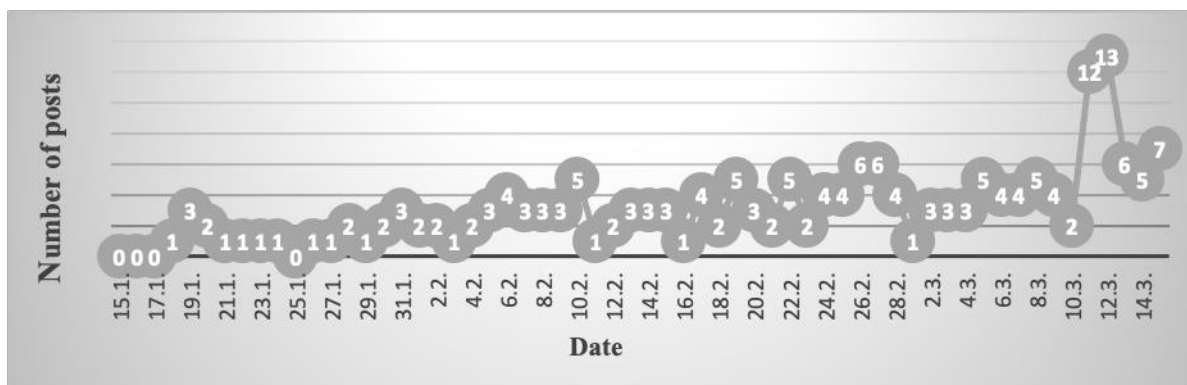
**Table 1: Z. Čaputová – Core Words Count in posts**

Word	Number	Word	Number	Word	Number	Word	Number
ďakujem	43	slovensku	29	kandid	24	diskusiu	23
mojaprezidentka	42	kampan	28	chcem	24	teraz	22
slovensko	33	ludia	26	volič	23	spolu	21
podporu	31	spoloč	26	spravodlivos	23	prezidenstsk	20

Source: Own processing

## 2.2 Maroš Šefčovič

Graph 4 presents the daily number of posts published on M. Šefčovič's Facebook fan page. For the entire monitored period, we find 185 posts with a daily average of 3.08 posts. At the beginning of the observed period, there are three days without any single post, while the total days without any post are 4. The frequency of the number of posts has a gradual increase during the whole period. The difference between the first (54 posts / 29.2%) and the second half (131 posts / 70.8%) is up to 77 posts. We register the most significant week based on the numerics at the end of the period, where 49 posts were published. The highest number of posts per day can be found on March 12 (13 posts) and March 11 (12 posts).



**Chart 4: M. Šefčovič – Frequency of published posts on Facebook page**

Source: Own processing

The development of M. Šefčovič's interactions is shown in Chart 5. During the period, a total of 173,813 Likes (2,893.9 daily average), 10,998 shares (183.3 daily average) and 53,794 comments (896, 6 as day average) were gained by the all posts. We identify the relatively most stable development of interactions during the entire period in the category „Share“; we do not identify a significant increase, decrease or fluctuation in individual days. We conclude the gradual increase in the remaining two categories of Likes and Comments. In the category of Like, the first half of the period has a total of 40,800 (23.5%) Likes (1360 daily average); in the second, we record an increase to 133,013 (76.5%) Likes (4433.8 daily average). The day with the highest number of likes is registered on March 9, 5 posts received 9579 likes. The second category, Comments, has a similarly positive growth rate in the second half. The difference between the first part (14,360 comments / 478.66 daily average) and the second part of the period (39,434 comments / 1,314.46 daily average) represents 25,074 posts, calculated as more than a 100% increase. The relationships between interactions (Likes, Shares and Comments) by Multiple Linear Regression shows the value of the relationship  $R = 0.817$ ,  $\text{Sig } F = 2.24 \times 10^{-14} < 0.05$ . There is a considerable interdependence between the variables, which is statistically significant. The number of Likes, Shares and Comments interact positively in increasing the number of interactions.

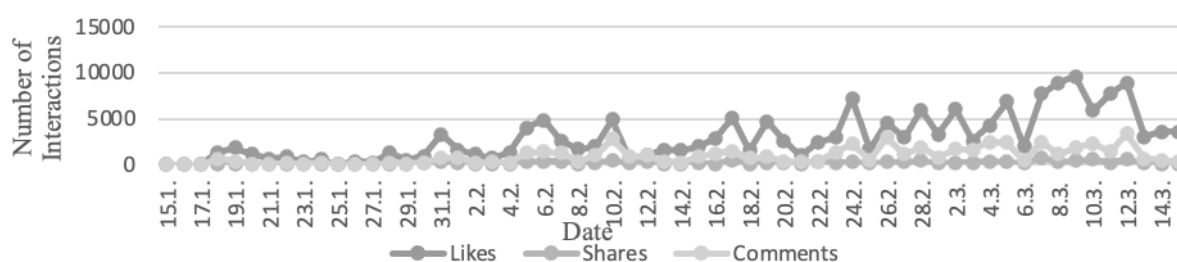


Chart 5: M. Šefčovič – Interactions on Facebook posts

Source: Own processing

The structure of posts devoted to the candidate’s promotion and communication of political topics is in M. Šefčovič in the ratio of 77.3% (143 posts) - promotion vs. 22.7% (42 posts) - communication. M. Šefčovič uses the promotion of his activities and events (29%) to the greatest extent, together with the promotion of meetings he participated in (23%) and public discussions (20%). Communication of topics plays a secondary role on the social network of M. Šefčovič in comparison with promotion. According to the data, current social topics (38%), social policy (25%) and culture (13%) are profiled as the most important topics. Other marginal topics are communicated issues of foreign relations (8%), agriculture (8%) and industry (4%).

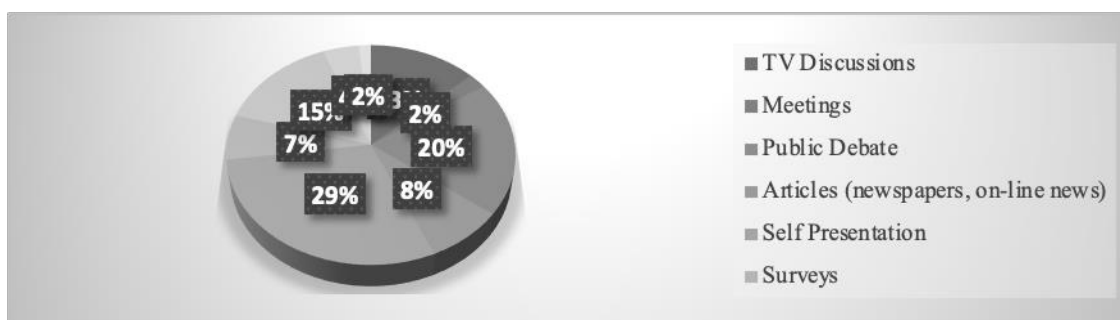


Chart 6: M. Šefčovič – Propagation Posts – Structure

Source: Own processing

The most significant communicated aspect of M. Šefčovič, according to Figure 2 emphasizes in various forms Slovakia and other forms of the Slovak Republic and the institute of the president. The communication of topics primarily focuses on the solution of social issues/events. To a lesser extent, there is an aspect of citizen mobilization, which is replaced by emphasizing current support. The candidate also emphasizes all inhabitants’ connection and does not focus on specific target groups of the population.

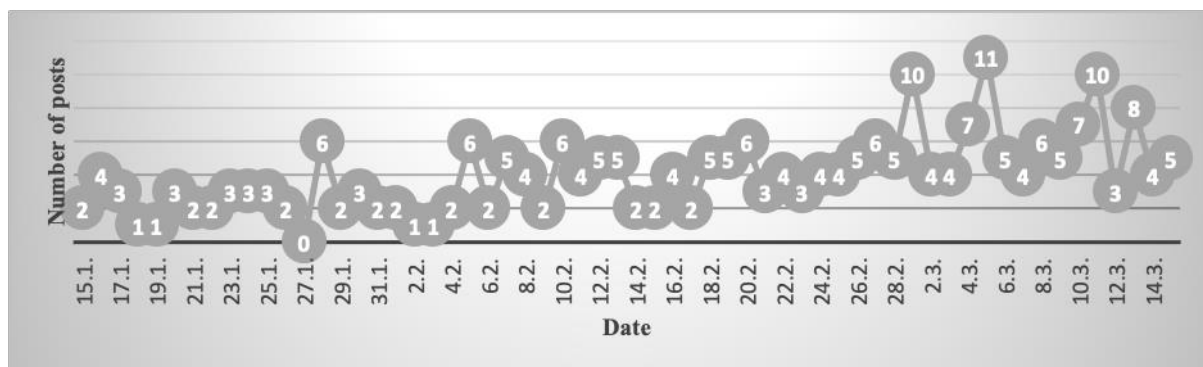
Table 2: M. Šefčovič – Core Words Count in posts

Word	Početnosť	Word	Početnosť	Word	Početnosť	Word	Početnosť
slovensko	84	prezident	31	podporu	20	prezidentsk	16
slovensku	48	dakujem	30	slovensku	19	potrebuje	15
prezidenta	38	kandid	22	zahrani	16	budem	15
slovenska	36	spolo	20	socia	16	najleps	14

Source: Own processing

### 2.3 Štefan Harabin

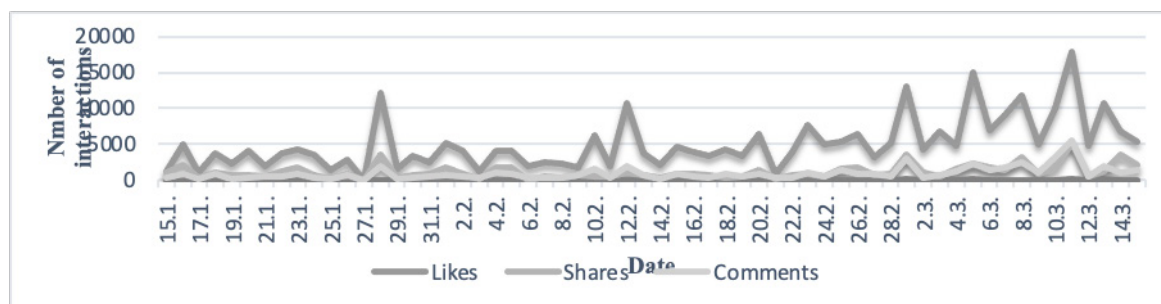
The published posts on the facebook page of Š. Harabin proves – according to Figure 7 - one case with no published post in the whole period. As in previous cases, the development increases more significantly towards the end of the observed period. Compared to Z. Čaputová (75 posts) and M. Šefčovič (54), Š. Harabin is more active in publishing posts already in the first part of the period (87 posts). The second part of the period included the publication of 153 posts (a total of 240). The difference between the first (36.3%) and the second half (62.7%) of the observed period is 66 posts (almost 100%). We identify the most significant increase from March 1 to the end of the period. In a selected interval, we identify three days with a daily number of posts higher than or equal to 10.



**Chart 7: Š. Harabin – Frequency of published posts on Facebook page**

Source: Own processing

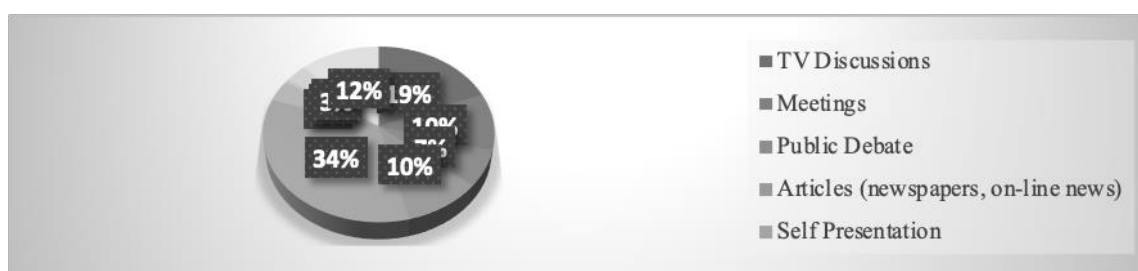
The development of interactions is similar to the previous cases of Z. Čaputová and M. Šefčovič. Figure 8 shows a stable development of the primary category of comments. Categories Like and Share categories show gradual positive progress towards the end of the period. The whole period records the most interactions with Like - 300 974 (5016.23 daily average). Followed by Share - 67,112 (daily average 1118.53) and Comments - 53,158 (daily average 885.97). We observe a relatively stable development of the number in the first period in all categories. The only fluctuation reflects 6 posts from January 28, receiving a total of 17,466 interactions. In the first half of the period, published posts received a total of 103,549 (34.4%) likes, 25,546 shares (38.06%) and 16,578 comments (31.18%). In all three categories, we record an increase in interactions in the second part of the period of approximately 200%. According to the graph, we find the most successful day in terms of the number of Like March 11 - 17,926 interactions. The calculation of the relationships between interactions (Likes, Shares and Comments) by Multiple Linear Regression shows the value of the relationship  $R = 0.901$ ,  $\text{Sig } F = 2.1 \times 10^{-21} < 0.05$ . There is a large interdependence between the variables, considers to be statistically significant. The number of Likes, Shares and Comments interact positively in increasing the number of interactions.



**Chart 8: Š. Harabin – Interactions on Facebook posts**

Source: Own processing

Out of the total number of 240 posts, 185 (77.08%) focused on promoting the candidate in various forms. The structure of forms of promotion is shown in Figure 9; similarly to Z. Čaputová and M. Šefčovič, we identify the presentation of activities and events of the candidate as the most used form of promotion. Other forms of promotion relate primarily to participation in TV discussions (19%), radio discussions (12%) and published articles in other media (10%). About a quarter of the remaining posts are included in the political communication of topics. In this case, almost half of all posts (40%) focus on tradition, church, and religious issues. Other priority topics are communicated with foreign policy issues (26%) and social issues (14%). Marginally, communication is focused on culture, justice, sport or the economy.



**Chart 9: Š. Harabin – Propagation Posts – Structure**

Source: Own processing

Considering keywords in the content of published posts, we define several essential areas on which communication emphasizes mostly. In the first place, the posts emphasize the very person of the candidate himself - Š. Harabin. Considering the key topics, as in previous cases, the emphasis on Slovakia and the Slovak Republic is evident, as well as the institute of the President itself and the mobilization aspect towards the day of the elections. Compared with the previous candidates, the difference element is the direct criticism of the opponents' opinions, pointing out different ideological values. We find a strong critique of liberal ideological values and the use of the term "sunlover" (significant connotation, especially in Slovakia) as a negative form of communication towards the opponent.

**Table 3: Š. Harabin – Core Words Count in posts**

Word	Number	Word	Number	Word	Number	Word	Number
Priatel'ia	118	prezidenta	45	budem	30	slovenska	22
kandid	66	liber	37	bude	30	slnie	22
Slovensko	65	harabin	36	harabin	29	rozhovor	22
prezidentsk	45	spolo	33	volieb	23	marca	22

Source: Own processing

## 2.4 Summary

The basic summary of quantitative findings is presented in Table 4. The highest number of posts considering the daily average reaches Š. Harabin, sharing posts in most of the days. In her posts, Zuzana Čaputová gets the highest number of interactions in all categories: Likes, Comments and Shares. The structure of published posts considering the division to promotion and communication identifies the primary focus on promoting all monitored participants. Z. Čaputová, M. Šefčovič and Š. Harabin reach an equal share of 77% / 23 in favor of the candidate's promotion. All monitored candidates achieve a stable relationship between the interactions of the posts. In each of the analyzed cases, the fact is that increasing the number of interactions (Like, Share, Comment) has a positive effect on increasing other interactions of the post.

**Table 4: Summary of chosen indicators – comparative perspective of all candidates**

Candidate	Number of posts/ Daily average of posts	Počet dní bez príspevku/ Najvyšší denný počet príspevkov	Number of Likes/ Daily average	Number of Comments/ Daily average	Number of Shares/ Daily average	Proportion of posts: Promotion/ Communication	Rate of relations between interactions (R)
Z. Čaputová	176/2,93	4/8	575 986/ 9599,8	92 300/1538	72 362/1 206	77%/23%	0,908
M. Šefčovič	185/3,08	4/13	173 813/ 2893,9	53 794/ 896,6	10 998/183, 33	77%/23%	0,817
Š. Harabin	240/4	1/11	300 974/ 5 016,23	53 158/ 885,97	67 112/ 1118,53	77%/23%	0,901

Source: Own processing

## Conclusion

As a social network, Facebook played an essential role within the candidates' presentation in the presidential election campaign in 2019. The three presidential candidates generally participate in publishing posts on their fan profiles during the period under review. According to our findings, promotion is preferred over the communication of topics. Candidates consider the promotion of activities with the probable ambition to present candidates positively to be the most important. Facebook also plays an essential role in informing supporters and voters about participating in various public debates, TV debates, radio debates or meetings. The effort to mobilize the voter for the election intensifies, especially at the end of the period close to the election. As the election date approaches, the number of published posts also increases, the same is for increasing interaction within these posts. As a platform for direct contact with network users, Facebook was an essential and active tool for all monitored candidates.

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## TECHNOLOGIES AS A TOOL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HOAX

*Martin Graca*

### **Abstract**

With the advent of new technologies, people have gained another means of disseminating information. Specifically, after the availability of personal computers, tablets, smartphones and their connection to the Internet. The Internet as such offers a wide range of possibilities and it is up to the people to use this digital space. In addition to a large number of benefits, the Internet also brings risks. One of these risks are hoaxes. Hoaxes are currently the biggest problem with disseminating information on the Internet. Unlike ordinary media, the Internet space is not sufficiently regulated, which results in easy spreading of false news. Social networks have long overlooked the problem of disseminating this type of information. In the last period, they have modified their rules for users several times and created a network of employees who check their compliance. On a global scale, it is not possible to guard against all rule violations or hoax checks. Therefore, technologies that can analyze text and videos through machine learning have begun to help combat false information. They are more economical and efficient.

### **Key words:**

Deepfake. Fake News. Media Literacy. Technologies.

### **Introduction**

False information has been part of the Internet since its inception. Hoaxes increased more significantly with the emergence of social networks. People lock themselves in them into the so-called bubbles and create their own reality and truth in them. Such a space is a breeding ground for hoaxes. According to a 2018 survey, 37% of European Union citizens encounter false reports and misinformation every day or almost every day.<sup>1</sup> There is currently a portal that monitors the most watched portals with misleading content. Konšpirátori.sk was created to monitor unethical, unserious websites that use lies and hoaxes in order to enrich them in the advertisements or products they offer. An evaluation committee composed of 13 experts in various fields (for example, history, politics, journalism, etc.) selects the sites that it places on its portal and gives them a hazard rating (1 low-risk to 10 dangerous). The list is used by advertisers to eliminate advertising on such sites and currently contains 198 sites. This system supports a wide range of digital, marketing, advertising, PR and communication agencies (40 agencies are joining the initiative).<sup>2</sup> The list of sites with questionable content has reduced advertising on conspiracy sites and reduced their advertising revenue. One of the most watched conspiracy portals, Hlavné Správy, with the konspiratori.sk website is in litigation. The court has currently ordered the portal removed from the list of conspirators until the court has given a final judgment. From the above, we can assume that the list of sites with disputed content works and has an impact on the funding of the site in question. The Hlavné Správy has long been known for its unsubstantiated information, its proximity to Russian propaganda, and its content, which is created mainly to profit from advertising.

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<sup>1</sup> JOHNSON, J.: *Fake news on Facebook: removed pages in Europe 2019, by country*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1077107/fake-news-facebook-pages-removed-in-europe/>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Prečo vznikla táto iniciatíva*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.konspiratori.sk/dovod-vzniku.php>>.

## 1 Analysis of the Current State

Social networks and governments were not interested in fighting hoaxes and propaganda. Some governments use this method of disseminating information to their advantage on a daily basis. We find this way in the world, for example, in US President Donald Trump. For example, during the ongoing pandemic, he made several unsubstantiated allegations to blame China and the WHO to cover his inaction in dealing with COVID-19. He subsequently blocked financial contributions from the USA to the World Health Organization. He mainly uses Twitter, which has more than 87 million followers, to spread and share misinformation. The media that criticize him are attacked that they are FAKE NEWS. The phrase is also used by his supporters, who curse the media and chant Fake News during Donald Trump's campaigns. They attack CNN in particular. By contrast, FOX, where Trump invested 52 percent of his advertising money, supports his actions in the presidency and is known for disseminating misleading information, has remained popular. This is one of the reasons why political elites, rather the media, use hoaxes to spread hoaxes in their favor, as if to act against them.



**Picture 1: Donald J. Trump Twitter account**

Source: NEUMAN, S.: *In U.N. Speech, Trump Blasts China And WHO, Blaming Them For Spread Of COVID-19*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/09/22/915630892/in-u-n-speech-trump-blasts-china-and-who-blaming-them-for-spread-of-covid-19?t=1603887208803>>.

It should be recalled that the essential features of fake news - “Fake News” are deliberate production and the dissemination of false information that looks authentic.<sup>3</sup> Fake news are types of information that are verifiably false, in whole or in part, are deliberately produced as false and then deliberately disseminated, with an authentic informative appearance, which is

<sup>3</sup> KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Fenomén „fake news“, hoaxov a konšpiračných teórií v kontexte mediálnej výchovy*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 18.

intended to give the impression that it is a serious message. They are intended to deceive, manipulate or misuse their recipients, usually for economic or political purposes.<sup>4</sup> In Slovakia, the use of hoaxes to obtain political points is nothing new. In the past, they were used by the Speaker of the Parliament Boris Kollár. On his profile on the social network Facebook, he often shared fictional stories about migrants and supplemented them with comments that evoked various emotions in recipients, thanks to which he got into parliament for the first time in 2016.



**Picture 2: Fake news shared by Boris Kollár**

Source: *Facebook Boris Kollár*. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/BorisKollarOfficial/>>.

Stefan Harabin, the former Supreme Court President and the unsuccessful presidential candidate is also using „alternative information“ on his YouTube videos. The fact that he has been a long-time judge and uses judicial terminology adds to the seriousness of his often false and misleading statements. His statements on various social events are shared by the entire disinformation scene.

<sup>4</sup> BALLESTEROS, A.: ¿Sociedad de la desinformación? Perspectivas sobre las noticias falsas. In LUCAS, A. S. (ed.): *Sociedad digital, tecnología y educación*. Madrid : UNED, 2018, p. 90-129. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6551638>>.



**Picture 3: Štefan Harabín is sharing fake news about arriving 10 000 migrants**  
 Source: Facebook Štefan Harabin. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/harabinstefan/>>.

The opposition party ĽSNS also uses hoaxes for propaganda, which has also created several platforms for this purpose, where it disseminates this false information. These are, for example, the portals Kulturblog, Magazín 1 or the print newspaper of the Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko. Another means of disseminating information for them are social networks. They have an extensive fan base on Facebook and their usual way of working is to share misinformation and hoaxes.



**Picture 4: Fake news in newspaper ĽSNS**  
 Source: Kotlebovské noviny šíria hoax o Irene Bihariovej. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.omeiach.com/hoaxy/16581-kotlebovske-noviny-siria-hoax-o-irene-bihariovej/>>.

In addition to politically motivated misinformation, we can also find portals that provide alternative treatments, especially for fatal diseases. Such sites raise funds not only through PPC advertising but also by promoting the products they sell to help you overcome various diseases. They are dangerous mainly because of such an alternative treatment, you refuse professional help, or in the current pandemic state, you will believe that COVID-19 can be treated with sunlight and vaccination against it will only harm you, or the government will insert a chip into your body. One of the many such types of sites is the [Badatel.net](http://Badatel.net) portal. Its work was recently noticed by the Ministry of Health, which filed a criminal complaint against the hoaxes distributed by the portal regarding COVID-19.



Picture 5: Facebook posts of *Bádateľ*

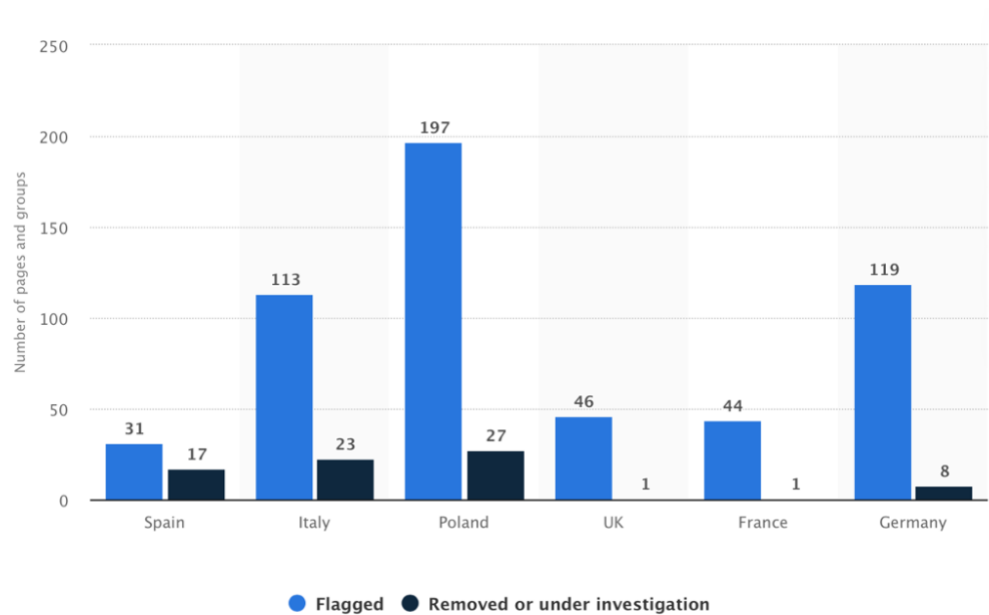
Source: *Facebook Bádateľ*. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <https://sk-sk.facebook.com/PortalBadatelNet/>.

## 2 Technologies Help Eliminate Fake News

In the previous chapter, we analyzed several types of sites and celebrities spreading hoaxes. In Slovakia, the [Konspiratori.sk](http://Konspiratori.sk) website has joined the fight against the spread of misinformation. Global technology giants and social networks are also becoming more involved on a global scale. The first steps on the social network Facebook in eliminating misinformation were the creation of a network of people monitoring compliance with the rules (so-called content moderators), who checked the content of reported posts and Facebook pages from users. Social networks have set rules for publishing content to their sites, and therefore they can afford to remove content that violates these standards and, in case of repeated violations, block the user or Facebook page. The weakness of this control is the human factor. With a high frequency of reported content, content moderators have too little time to review it objectively enough. The network of people monitoring compliance is therefore very extensive, as we are talking about a global social network. In 2009, Facebook employed 12 content moderators with 120 million active users per month. In 2018, it increased the number of content moderators to 15,000, and monthly user activity increased to 2.3 billion.<sup>5</sup> Facebook did not decide to eliminate hoaxes until the onset of the pandemic, when they removed the post of Donald Trump, who claimed that COVID-19 is less deadly than the

<sup>5</sup> FELDMAN, S.: *How Does Facebook Moderate Content*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/17302/facebook-content-moderator/>.

flu, which, according to Johns Hopkins University statistics, is a lie. Twitter also joined Facebook and hid the president's post. In addition, Facebook uses algorithms to help it eliminate fake sites and users. Within Europe in 2019, reporters and experts identified the most disinformation sites and groups in Poland. Of the 197 reported pages, Facebook deleted or further assessed 27 of them, which makes up 13.71%. In Germany, the share of reported contributions to deleted ones is 6.7%, in France 2.27%, in the United Kingdom 2.17%, in Italy 20.35%. Spain had the lowest number of reported disinformation sites 31 but the most deleted 17, which is 54.84%. When reporting hoaxes and misinformation, Facebook is not effective enough, as is the case, for example, when deleting fake profiles or pages. Compared to deleted content depicting suicide, self-harm, or incitement to do so, Facebook removed up to 4.5 million posts in 2019. Thanks to algorithms, up to 95% of posts were deleted before anyone could view them.<sup>6</sup> Machine learning and algorithms help in efficiency in terms of both speed and volume in removing content violating rules. We must not forget the error rate of this way of moderating content.



**Picture 6: Number of Facebook pages and groups removed, following investigations into fake news in Europe**

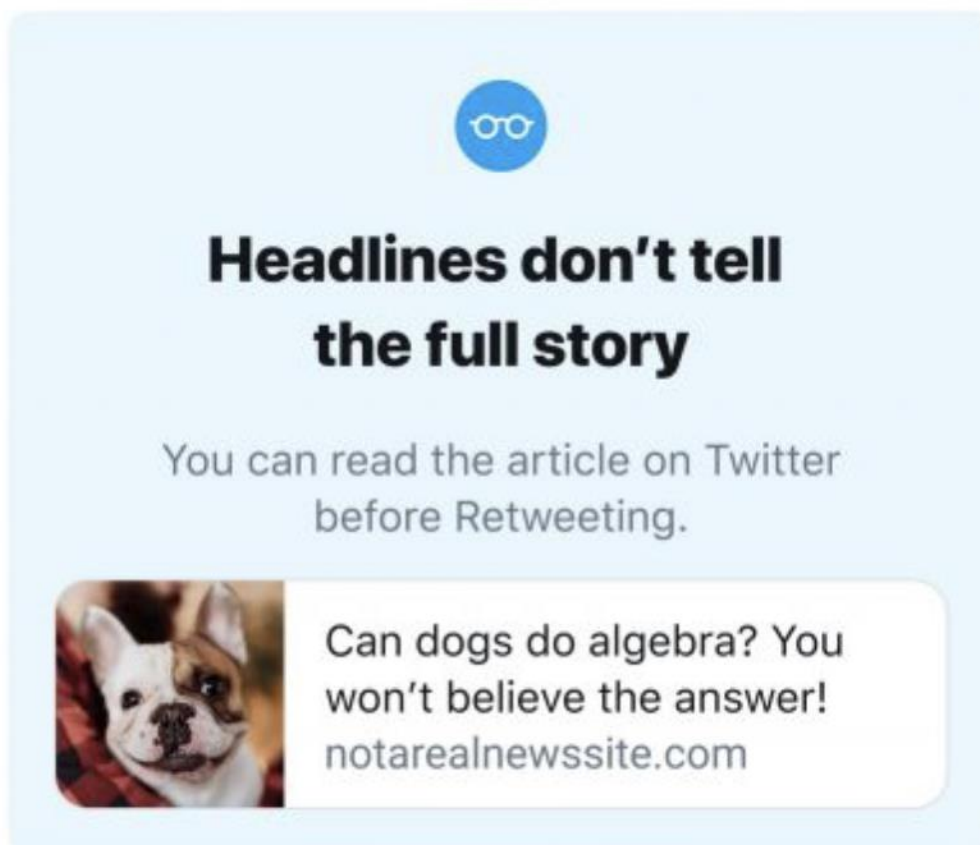
Source: *Number of Facebook pages and groups removed, following investigations into fake news in Europe in 2019, by country*. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1077107/fake-news-facebook-pages-removed-in-europe/>>.

Facebook is also trying to fight the so-called deepfake videos. Deepfake uses a form of machine learning - deep learning to create false images, events, etc. This technology can create compelling but completely fictitious videos or photos.<sup>7</sup> That's why Facebook AI created the DeepFake Detection Challenge Dataset, aimed at creating automated detection tools. He used more than three thousand actors for this, who appeared in more than a hundred thousand manipulated videos. The manipulation involved various techniques such as deep learning or digital face swap. Facebook has achieved 82% success in identifying known data.

<sup>6</sup> *Facebook zmazal miliardy falešných účtov*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/2041434-facebook-zmazal-miliardy-falosnych-uctov>>.

<sup>7</sup> *SAMPLE, 1: What are deepfakes – and how can you spot them?*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jan/13/what-are-deepfakes-and-how-can-you-spot-them>>.

When applying clips to a real environment, its accuracy decreases to about 60%.<sup>8</sup> Machine learning is still evolving and is therefore likely to be much more accurate in the future. Of course, it will depend on the size of the analyzed data and the development of technology. The social network Twitter, which is especially popular in the USA, is trying to prevent the spread of hoaxes by enlightening users. Before retweeting (sharing) a post that may have a misleading headline, Twitter warns you to read the article carefully. You can quickly get around the alert by clicking on the article and then retweet. The principle is to educate the user with knowledge about misleading article titles. In this way, Twitter tries to limit the spread of hoaxes by users who do not verify the information. Repression is being replaced by awareness.



**Picture 7: Retweet notification on Twitter**

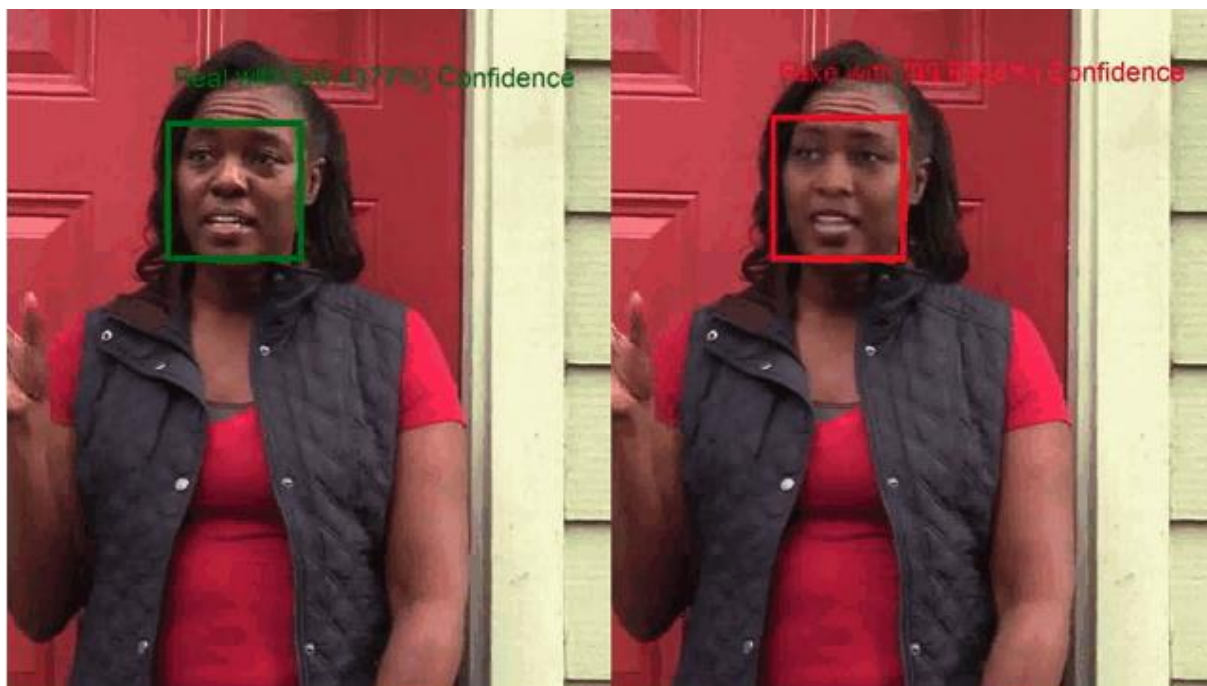
Source: VINCENT, J.: *Twitter is bringing its „read before you retweet“ prompt to all users.* Released on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.theverge.com/2020/9/25/21455635/twitter-read-before-you-tweet-article-prompt-rolling-out-globally-soon>>.

Microsoft offers 2 technologies that can identify hoaxes. The first technology is called Microsoft Video Authenticator. Using artificial intelligence, it evaluates videos and photographs and then provides data on their possible manipulation. It displays the result of the manipulation in percentages and can analyze the videos in real time. Compared to visual inspection performed by people, this method is much more effective not only in terms of time. Microsoft Video Authenticator detects different elements of the image, such as object borders, image fading, and so on. This tool has potential in the fight against hoaxes and the so-called

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<sup>8</sup> HORACZEK, S.: *Microsoft's new video authenticator could help weed out dangerous deepfakes.* Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.popsoci.com/story/technology/microsoft-video-authenticator-deepfakes/>>.

deepfake videos. Microsoft Video Authenticator will not be available to the public yet. It will be available exclusively to the AI Foundation as part of the Reality Defender 2020 program. Over time, the tools should also reach the general public.<sup>9</sup>



**Picture 8: Video analysis with Microsoft Video Authenticator technology**

Source: BURT, T.: *New Steps to Combat Disinformation*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2020/09/01/disinformation-deepfakes-newsguard-video-authenticator/>>.

The second tool from Microsoft in the fight against hoaxes is intended for content creators. The technology allows you to add to your digital content such as photos and videos, so-called digital prints and certificates. This tagging method allows you to identify the original content more quickly and identifies the content that has been edited. This tool works as part of the Microsoft Azure cloud service.<sup>10</sup> Such labeling can be useful in authenticating elements in the digital world as well as in protecting intellectual property. With a digital fingerprint or certificate, you can very easily and quickly prove the authenticity and date of creation of digital content. Google, like Facebook, created its DeepFake Dataset. The company does not plan to create deepfake detection for the general public. It has implemented some image manipulation detection tools into an image search feature.<sup>11</sup> These largest global companies are preparing to offer their own solution for detecting manipulated content and creating and misinforming and hoaxing.

<sup>9</sup> HORACZEK, S.: *Microsoft's new video authenticator could help weed out dangerous deepfakes*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.popsoci.com/story/technology/microsoft-video-authenticator-deepfakes/>>.

<sup>10</sup> PLIEŠOVSKÝ, R.: *Microsoft prináša novú technológiu na boj proti hoaxom*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://techbox.dennikn.sk/microsoft-prinasa-novu-technologiu-na-boj-proti-hoaxom/?ref=impn>>.

<sup>11</sup> HORACZEK, S.: *Microsoft's new video authenticator could help weed out dangerous deepfakes*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.popsoci.com/story/technology/microsoft-video-authenticator-deepfakes/>>.



## Conclusion

Technologies can make a significant contribution to the fight against hoaxes in the future. They will not solve the problem of publishing false and misleading reports completely. The trend of technology development in this area is based on machine learning. Therefore, if people come up with new ways to circumvent these technologies, algorithms to detect hoaxes will always be insufficient. In connection with media literacy, critical thinking of the population and the legal regulation of the dissemination of misinformation, we will be able to win this fight. It is important to change people's thinking in relation to information in media education, which should start in primary schools. Verifying sources of information and critical thinking in accepting their content is a foundation that people around the world should learn.

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## EVENTS DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

Slávka Gracová

### Abstract

The organization of events was very affected by the extraordinary situation and affected their course or existence throughout 2020. This paper deals with the organization of events during the pandemic, a separate part consists of events organized at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication UCM in Trnava. The author of the article reflects the situation in Slovakia during 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic and the beginning of the second wave. She provides an overview of current measures concerning the organization of mass events in the months of March to November 2020. Based on personal experience with the organization of events at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, the author will describe the way of organizing events in the online environment, mainly through social networks. The Faculty of Mass Media Communication involves in the organization of events mainly students who gain real experience in this area of marketing. Working in an online environment has been a new experience for many students and educators, reflecting the reality of today.

### Key words:

COVID-19. Events. Faculty of Mass Media Communication. Online. Pandemic. Social Networks.

### Introduction

Events of any kind are a daily part of our lives. „*The organization of an event (event) requires thorough organization, preparation, planning, control and evaluation. There are many types of events and each requires different training.*“<sup>1</sup> The year 2020 hit deeply many sectors of human life, the economy, industry, etc. The organization of events is no exception. „*The pandemic has brought an unprecedented losses and challenges for the events industry, but also the rise and popularity of virtual alternatives.*“<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has now persisted for the larger part of 2020 and while businesses initially canceled thousands of events, the need to adapt has forced many of them to go online. Through various digital platforms like Zoom and Google Hangouts, individuals and businesses alike have found new ways to comply with social distancing while still hosting events.<sup>3</sup> In Slovakia as well as in other countries, most events had to be canceled or, if possible, moved to the online space. Of course, not all types of events could use this option. Online events or virtual events were here even before the pandemic situation arose, they are nothing new. A virtual event can be a conference, a live stream, or any type of event that takes place online. The key word is that the event is fully online. These can be incredibly powerful as they vastly increase the number of people who can attend. Remote attendees are able to join from all around the world. You'll also have access to top-tier presenters who can easily participate from home.<sup>4</sup> In other parts of the article, the author provides an overview of measures related to the organization of mass

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<sup>1</sup> See also: GRACOVÁ, S., GRACA, M.: Ako organizovať kultúrny event?. In ČÁBYOVÁ, E., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., MENDELOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2019: Aktuálne výzvy onlinej a offlinej komunikácie*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 352-363.

<sup>2</sup> COPANS, V.: *Before, During and After: Planning Live Events in a Pandemic*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-11-21]. Available at: <[https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/post-lockdown-events-guide?fbclid=IwAR14oox0GjuApZgPcwiiim9Yoe8iWTZUwodLQ8-8CqsdNTKfZIJJ805R\\_h0](https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/post-lockdown-events-guide?fbclid=IwAR14oox0GjuApZgPcwiiim9Yoe8iWTZUwodLQ8-8CqsdNTKfZIJJ805R_h0)>.

<sup>3</sup> YUAN, M.: *How to Launch Successful Events Online During COVID-19*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-15]. Available at: <<https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/How-to-Launch-Successful-Events-Online-During-COVID-19>>.

<sup>4</sup> WEST, Ch.: *15 Virtual Event Ideas and Best Practices*. [online]. [2020-11-09]. Available at: <<https://visme.co/blog/virtual-event/>>.

events in Slovakia and specific events organized at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication during the first wave of the pandemic in the online environment.

## 1 Objective and Methodology of Research

The main topic of the paper is the characteristics of the current situation in the organization of mass events in Slovakia in 2020, which was affected by the emergency situation associated with the spread of the Corona virus. The article offers an overview of measures from March 2020 to November 2020, published by the Public Health Office of Slovak Republic. Following this topic, for the purposes of this paper, we examined the organization of the event in the online environment and its previous year organized in the offline environment. The article uses in the first part a summary of measures related to the organization of mass events in the Slovak Republic and chronological order. In the second part, the author uses a qualitative analysis of selected events and compares the results. She uses a description to characterize the researched events. The object of the research is a selected event of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication FMK day, organized in 2019 in an offline environment and its implementation in 2020 in an online environment. Its comparison relates mainly to the Facebook event and only partially to the course and program of both forms of the event. It is understandable that events organized offline and online differ in many ways and cannot be compared at such a level as, for example, two years of the same event organized in the same conditions.

## 2 Organization of Events in Slovakia in 2020

In the first two months of 2020, no regulations restricting the organization of mass events were issued in the Slovak Republic. The situation changed in March, when the first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in our territory. In the following section, we have compiled an overview of measures concerning the organization of mass events in the months of March to November 2020. As the first wave of the pandemic and the beginning of the second wave were recorded during this period, measures in this area have changed. All the above information is processed on the basis of information from the Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic.

### 2.1 March

On March 9, a public decree was published - Prohibition of a mass event.<sup>5</sup> According to § 48 par. 4 letter d) of Act no. 355/2007 Coll. Every individual, individual – entrepreneurs and legal entities are prohibited from organizing mass events of a sporting, cultural, social or other nature. This decision was taken to prevent the emergence and spread of communicable disease COVID-19 in the context of the unfavorable development of the epidemiological situation in the incidence of coronavirus-related COVID-19. The duration of this Regulation was extended by the same-sounding regulation from 24.3. 2020. The ban on the organization of mass events was further recalled in other guidelines in the fight against the spread of coronavirus in Slovakia.

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<sup>5</sup> COVID-19: Rozhodnutie ÚVZ SR – zákaz hromadného podujatia – verejná vyhláška. [online]. [2020-11-09]. Available at: <<http://www.ruvzt.sk/aktuality/247-covid-19-verejna-vyhlasaka-2/>>.

## 2.2 May

From 20 May 2020, a measure concerning the organization of mass events entered into force, in which:

- it prohibits all, individuals, entrepreneurs and legal entities from organizing mass events of a sporting, cultural, social or other nature with more than 100 persons,
- all natural persons, natural persons - entrepreneurs and legal entities are prohibited from organizing any mass events of competitive sporting nature.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of this measure, smaller events of up to 100 people could take place with strict rules on wearing a mask, disinfection, keeping two-meter intervals between people, etc.

## 2.3 July

In the summer months, a measure came into force authorizing the organization of mass events exclusively with a sitting audience, provided that the organizer was able to ensure that there was always one free seat among the seated seats and that the seating capacity did not exceed 50%. Events were also allowed where the organizer was able to provide controlled entry and exit to the mass event sector, there were at most 1000 people in the sector at one time, for outdoor sectors, one person must have at least 5 m<sup>2</sup> of sector area, for indoor sectors, one person must have at least 10 m<sup>2</sup> of area of the sector and others.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4 September

With effect from 1 September 2020, a measure was adopted which prohibited all individuals, entrepreneurs and legal entities from organizing mass events of a sporting, cultural, social or other nature at one time in more than 1,000 people or in interiors at one time in the number of over 500 people.<sup>8</sup> As usual, the measure was associated with obligations for the organizer regarding disinfection, wearing masks, room ventilation, entrances and exits of events, etc. With the onset of the second wave of the pandemic in autumn 2020, measures for organizing mass events were gradually tightened.

## 2.5 October

From 1 October 2020, every individual, entrepreneurs and legal entities are prohibited from organizing mass events of sports, cultural, entertainment, social or other nature at one time in the number of more than 50 people. If the number of people at cultural or sporting events acting on behalf of the organizer (performers, athletes, organizing team, etc.) exceeds 50, the mass event can take place, but without the presence of the audience.<sup>9</sup> This regulation has not been in force for a very long time. Based on the deteriorating pandemic situation, it was

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<sup>6</sup> *Opatrenie ÚVZ SR: Pri organizovaní hromadných podujatí od 20.5.2020*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.ruvzpp.sk/opatrenie-uvz-sr-pri-organizovani-hromadnych-podujati-od-20-5-2020/>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Opatrenie ÚVZ SR: Prevádzky (OLP/5454/2020)*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://www.ruvzpp.sk/opatrenie-uvz-sr-prevadzky-olp-5454-2020/>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Opatrenie ÚVZ SR: Prevádzky a hromadné podujatia (OLP/6849/2020)*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://www.ruvzpp.sk/opatrenie-uvz-sr-prevadzky-a-hromadne-podujatia-olp-6849-2020/>>.

<sup>9</sup> *Opatrenie ÚVZ SR: Prevádzky a hromadné podujatia (OLP/7694/2020)*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.ruvzpp.sk/opatrenie-uvz-sr-prevadzky-a-hromadne-podujatia-olp-7694-2020/>>.

adjusted as follows. Every individual, entrepreneurs and legal entities are prohibited from organizing mass events of sports, cultural, entertainment, social or other nature at one time in the number of more than 6 people.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.6 November

The latter measure was extended in November. The difference is the exceptions in this measure and the fact that some sports competitions are allowed, such as the Hockey Extraliga and the Slovak Hockey League, the Football League and II. Football league, women's and men's handball, men's and women's volleyball extra league and men's basketball and women's extra league.<sup>11</sup> The pandemic situation in Slovakia is not improving and we do not expect that this will change rapidly by the end of 2020. We can expect a release in the field of event organization only after successfully overcoming the second wave.

## 3 Online Event at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication

The pandemic situation in Slovakia paralyzed the organization of events at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, which organizes a number of events for students as well as people from the city and the surrounding area during the year. Due to the situation in March 2020, for example, the following were canceled: an event of an environmental nature, which took place regularly in the city center, and also the largest event Night Run in Trnava UCM night run, which was attended by runners from all over Slovakia. This event could not be moved to the online environment. Other, smaller events took place through the social networks of the faculty. These included FMK Breakfast, faculty conferences such as Megatrends and Media 2020 and the doctoral conference Quo Vadis massmedia, Quo Vadis marketing and many more. FMK day, the day for students prepared by the teachers, is a popular event of the summer semester. The event takes place in the school property called Jama and its premises. Each department of the faculty has its own spot, where it offers food and drinks, followed by competitions, quizzes, etc. The whole afternoon is accompanied by a moderated program, music, competitions and sport activities. The essence of the event is to meet teachers and staff in an environment other than lectures and exams.

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<sup>10</sup> *Opatrenie ÚVZ SR: Prevádzky a hromadné podujatia (OLP/8326/2020)*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-14]. Available at: <<https://www.ruvzpp.sk/opatrenie-uvz-sr-prevadzky-a-hromadne-podujatia-olp-8326-2020/>>.

<sup>11</sup> *Aktuálne platné hygienické opatrenia*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-11-27]. Available at: <<https://korona.gov.sk/platne-hygienicke-opatrenia/>>.

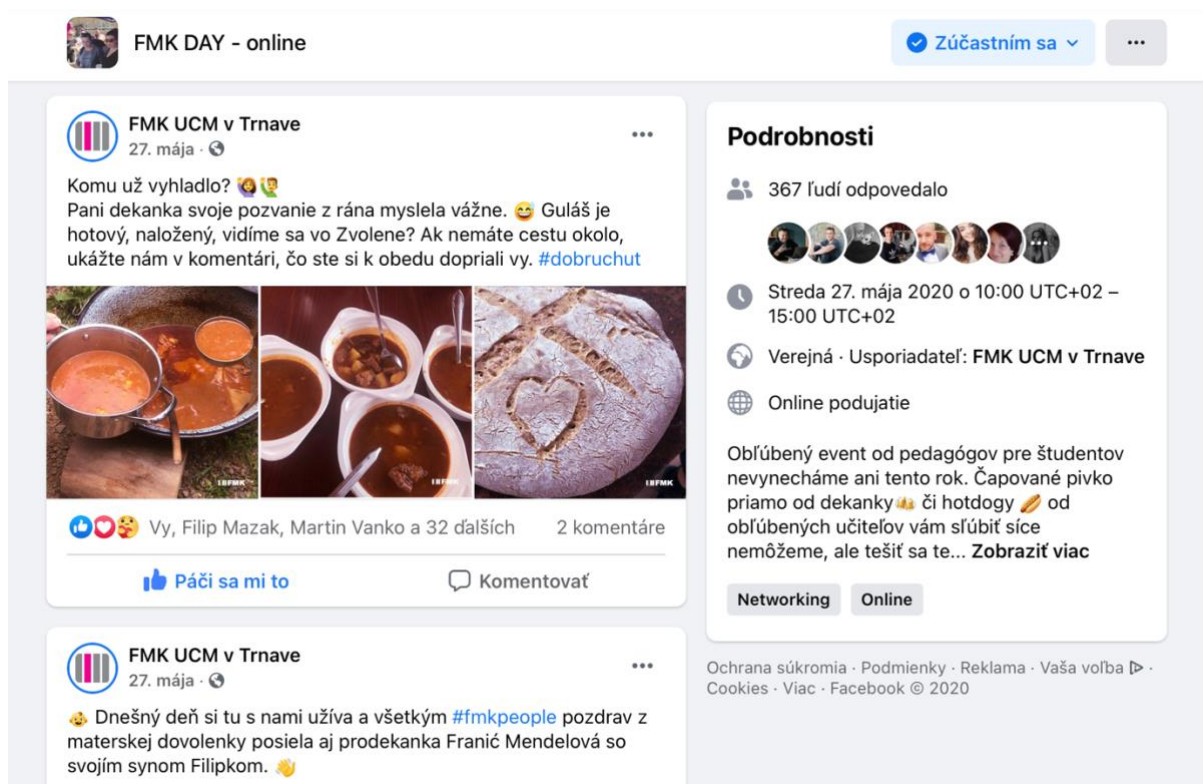


**Picture 1: FMK day 2018**

Source: Facebook – FMK DAY – online. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-11-27]. Available at: <[https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?active\\_tab=discussion](https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?active_tab=discussion)>.

In 2020, the organizers of the event decided to move the event to the online environment. That's how students and teacher isolated at home during the online lectures could connect with their faculty. *“We will not miss the popular event from teachers for students this year either. We can't promise you a draft beer directly from the dean or hot dogs from your favorite teachers, but you can look forward to unceasing fun right at your home this year. Our #fmkpedagogovia (#fmkteachers) are preparing interesting tips for filling your free time #doma (#home) for you. We will not even miss the popular quarantine fermentation, we will mix refreshing drinks together and we will also check your knowledge in a fun way. You don't need anything but to be home and online right on this event on Wednesday, May 27th. Let's not let the pandemic ruin the traditional May entertainment at FMK.”*<sup>12</sup> The quote from the Facebook event describes the nature of the event and its adherence in the online environment during the emergency situation in Slovakia. To join the program, it was enough to visit the FMK DAY Facebook online event during the day. The whole program was prepared by the teachers and faculty staff members. To involve students and develop an activity during the day, right at the beginning of the event students received a photo of the place where the event usually takes place and their task was to add themselves and their friends to this photo in a creative way. The following program consisted mainly of videos that were processed in advance. In them, individual teachers prepared food or drinks that spectators could prepare at home, instead of those that they would normally buy at the event. There was also a live student concert in the program. From the sports activities, workout that could be carried out at home was prepared for students, as well as yoga exercises.

<sup>12</sup> FMK DAY – online. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-11-27]. Available at: <[https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?acontext=%7B%22event\\_action\\_history%22%3A\[%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22search\\_results%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22search%22%7D\]%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22search_results%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22search%22%7D]%7D)>.



**Picture 2: FMK DAY – online, Facebook event**

Source: Facebook – FMK DAY – online. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-11-27]. Available at: <[https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?active\\_tab=discussion](https://www.facebook.com/events/2636168869995066/?active_tab=discussion)>.

The original point of the program was to write the dictation live. This discipline is not very popular during Slovak language lessons in contemporary communication, but during this event the students took it with an interesting and funny variety. The dictation was written by about 15 students at a time, who later found out how many mistakes they had made. The activity had to be directly at a specific time at a Facebook event. It was a good idea and a difference from other activities, in which only videos intended for watching were added. At the end of the program, the organizers registered live from the original venue of the event and evaluated the results of the competition.

## 4 Comparison

At individual Facebook events, Facebook users have the opportunity to mark from three options of their interaction, such as – they are going, interested or they are not interested. In the Facebook event FMK DAY, there were marked 367 people, 128 people were attending and 239 were interested. In the Facebook event FMK DAY 2019, there were 504 people, of which 154 would take part and 350 were interested. Based on this comparison, in the event between 2019 and 2020 the difference between those who marked that they were attending is only 26 users. The total difference is 137. We know from the experience with the organization of events that not all marked visitors are at the time of the event really there. These numbers are rather indicative for the organizers. Since the year 2019 took place on the premises of the faculty, we can say that more people took part in the event than was marked in the Facebook event. In the same way, the individual videos of the program in the year 2020 could also be watched by those who were not marked in the event. Another element that can be partially compared is the interaction and frequency of adding posts in a Facebook event. It should be



noted that the version of the event in the offline environment was more about the promotion of the event, program presentation and organizational guidelines, in the online event all activities took place directly in this Facebook event. FMK DAY – online: During the way were added 15 posts to the event which received an average of 58 likes. FMK DAY 2019: 9 posts were added after the event, including three promotional videos and one contest. On average, one post received 31 likes. A maximum gained the realized competition. The above data show that the FMK DAY – online received more likes and interactions from students, which results from the fact that the contributions were directly programmed. Another difference was the financial side of the events. The organization of the online event did not require financial resources, as it was in the case with the classic version in the offline environment. The preparation of videos, photos and graphics was directed by the teachers and the organizing team of the event.

**Table 1: Common features and differences FMK DAY 2019 and FMK DAY – online**

Common features	Differences
Program created by the teachers?	Less attendance of online event
Representation of individual departments in the program	Weaker interaction with students
Competitions	It is not possible to involve as many teachers in the online environment as in the offline environment
Music performance	Absence of photos and aftermovie from the online environment
Sports activities	Online event did not require financial resources for preparation

Source: Own processing, 2020.

## Conclusion

Organizing events in an online environment has its pros and cons. Online events are nothing new in the pandemic period of 2020. During the emergency, the possibility of organizing events in Slovakia, but also in other countries, was limited or banned to the extent that was before the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As a result, many events were canceled or moved to the online environment. Not every event can be organized in such a design. During 2020, and thus the two academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, several events took place at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in the online environment. Some were implemented through the video communication platforms, where participants could talk live. Other, such as FMK DAY, consisted of a program that was added to a Facebook event in the form of prepared videos and photos. Such a version can't fully replace activities where people meet - like participation on the event planning. The situation requires this form and it is only a matter of time when it will be possible to return to the old ways of organizing events.

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## A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MOVIE DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION?

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### Abstract

Due to the technological development of recent decades, the possibilities of digital content distribution via Internet networks (OTT, VOD, SVOD, TVOD, AVOD, PVOD) have accelerated. These new distribution protocols began to gradually transform the film distribution environment on a global scale. However, gradual process changes were accelerated by the outbreak of the COVID 19 global pandemic in 2020, significantly affecting the functioning of existing and emerging models, having a crucial impact on production volume, changing audience behavior and subsequently also producers' thinking, as well as the overall prospects of the cinema industry and entertainment in the global context for the near future. The still unfinished year of the pandemic with the ongoing second wave shows not only growing billions in losses, but especially the unpredictability of further developments in film distribution, the question of the future of cinemas and audience behaviour as well as the future of global or local film producers. The study deals with the development of the distribution of digital content, primarily world film production. It briefly summarizes the basic differences from traditional (analog) distribution and its gradual transformation from the point of view of various participants in the distribution chain.

### Key words:

Cinema Distribution. Digital Content. Film Distribution. Film Production. OTT. PVOD. SVOD. VOD.

### Introduction

In recent decades, film distribution has gradually moved to the forefront of film theorists' research. There may be several reasons. One of the relevant reasons may be the dynamics of development in this area, but especially the growing influence of the distribution phase of film production on the entire production chain and the cycle of material and creative resources involved in the creation of each individual film. In the case of the film industry, the term "distributor" may seem slightly misleading; perhaps the term "brokering" of an artifact could be presented as "publishing". But even this concept does not go so far in its meaning as to embody the dominant role or diversity of activities that distributors represent in the film industry.<sup>1</sup> Traditional methods and mechanisms of film distribution have been significantly disrupted in the last 30 years by new technological developments (leaps from VHS technology, through DVD, to digital files distributed in the form of EST<sup>2</sup>, VOD<sup>3</sup> or OTT<sup>4</sup> services). To understand the causes and mechanisms of change, we need to examine the nature of existing distribution models, which are clearly being eliminated and replaced by digital ways and methods. In the presented study we will focus on the development of the so-called "traditional" Hollywood distribution model as developed and implemented by the "Majors" – Hollywood production and distribution companies. Since most of them are no longer based in Hollywood today, it will be more appropriate to use the name MPA (Motion Picture Association).<sup>5</sup> It is an organization founded in 1922 which associates following companies: Warner Bros. (founded

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<sup>1</sup> CRISP, V.: *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals*. Basingstoke : BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Remark by the authors: EST – electronic-sell-through – a method of distribution, whereby consumers pay a one-time fee to download and own a digital media file.

<sup>3</sup> Remark by the authors: VOD – video on demand – A business model allowing consumers to purchase film and television content from an online or a cable service that they can then stream or download.

<sup>4</sup> Remark by the authors: OTT – over-the-top – delivery of media content or services over an infrastructure that is not under the administrative control of the content or service provider. Examples of OTT video services include Netflix, iTunes, Amazon, and Hulu.

<sup>5</sup> *Motion Pictures Association*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.motionpictures.org>>.

in 1923), Paramount Pictures (1912), Universal Pictures (1912), Sony / Columbia Pictures (1918) and Walt Disney Pictures (1923). The dates of the establishment of the MPA members show that the ways and methods of film distribution have been evolving for more than a century.<sup>6</sup> These long and carefully developed methods have always been very quickly adapted to current developments in film technology, business models and changing audience expectations. The aim of this study is to use a historical analysis of processes and phenomena in the field of distribution of film (as a medium), to formulate a qualified, empirically based explanation of the causes and connections of processes and changes in film distribution, up to the current digital era. In the first part we describe the model of traditional film distribution at the time of analog production, in the second one we discuss transitional period, when television entered the classical model and the first phase of diversification of distribution channels started. The third part deals with the entry of the film into the online space and in the fourth part we describe the impact of the current global pandemic on individual distribution channels and online platforms. The aim is to define the individual stages of film distribution with regards to the prediction of possible future developments in the field. Our reflections also consider a fact that one distribution segment is currently in a deep depression due to a drop in cinema attendance, while other distribution segments, on the other hand, have seen strong growth - both due to the global pandemic. Finally, we will try to outline possible scenarios for developments in this area, although the duration of the global pandemic is still unpredictable.

## 1 Model of Traditional Film Distribution

Distribution companies form the core of economic power in the film industry. The creators need them for their work to reach the audience, the cinema owners need them to provide them with films for their screening rooms. Companies belonging to the MPA follow elaborate business strategies, monitor technological developments, specific conditions of countries and continents. Their business results prove that distribution - the sale of films, has become a lucrative business, a strong economic segment with an overlap in culture, media and politics – not only in the United States. These companies are an example of how, by effectively managing, monitoring and stimulating technological change, film is still a desired commodity, a profitable product, with worldwide demand. Doing films – especially those produced in Hollywood studios - is very expensive and only economically strong companies can bear the risks of film production. In the work of Ramon Lobato, in the study of Hollywood resp. traditional distribution, terms "formal" and "informal" distribution are distinguished. Although such terminology is not entirely perfect, it reflects the fact that certain distribution channels are recognized and validated, while others are not. According to Lobato, "formal distribution consists of a legally charged formal economy on which distribution data and trends are routinely based, while informal distribution includes the gray economy (secondary markets, peer-to-peer exchange at

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<sup>6</sup> Remark by the authors: In this context, we would like to mention that for almost 80 years, in the environment of film distribution, it was worked exclusively with distribution copies of films in analog form – first on celluloid and later polyester strips. Generally speaking, a distribution copy of a regular feature film used to cost the producer about \$1,500 – sometimes more, depending on the length of the film, the type of raw material used, and the number of copies produced. The costs increased in the production of language versions with subtitles, which were copied or burned into a film copy, which significantly increased its price. The number of distribution copies of major Hollywood productions was in the hundreds, the number of copies in our environment tens. In both environments, however, the price to produce distribution copies was a significant amount, which burdened the film producer mainly financially, but also logistically. The role of the distributor was to secure a contractual agreement with the cinema operators and to take care of the promotion and marketing during its screening, resp. sales abroad.

household level)".<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in this case word formal is used to refer to "traditional" distribution, where "studios control the profits from ticket sales, release films for coordinated introduction in cinemas and then present them consecutively through a sequence of hierarchical distribution windows".<sup>8</sup> The formal distribution in this context is therefore the legal acquisition of the rights to present the film in cinemas, and / or to produce DVD / Blu-ray copies for retail sale in the given territory and later for the flat or regional distribution in television broadcasting. Several researchers have looked in detail at the rules of formal distribution functioning as applied by the Majors, which have controlled the distribution of Hollywood productions for decades – e.g. Janet Wasko, Allen J. Scott, Tino Balio, and others. Janet Wasko, for example, points out, among other things, distribution mechanisms that are designed in a way that some participants in the entire production process benefit more and others less. Complex contracts and well-functioning creative accounting often provide a one-sided advantage for the distributor, who, unlike the manufacturer, producer or direct creator, almost always benefits, and always more than the rest of the production chain.<sup>9</sup> Interesting is the research by Allen J. Scott, which mapped the structure of distribution and documented that distribution in US cinemas alone for almost past 20 years has not been a significant part of formal distribution revenue – but that it is rather all forms of selling, renting and distributing copies and licenses to broadcast in other "distribution windows that are up to three times higher than the revenue from direct cinema distribution."<sup>10</sup> In his work (2013) in the context of US distribution research, Tino Balio defines the growing role of marketing, which he says is the main business of large companies in Hollywood. It presents the idea that invisible distribution staff makes crucial decisions and that marketing tools shape the final product not only when it is put into distribution, but throughout the whole production process.<sup>11</sup>

The first changes in the era of "analog" film distribution began in the 1950s with the advent of television broadcasting. Due to the lack of the original television program offer, Hollywood studios opened their archives and offered thousands of hours of films to air. Televisions have benefited from the appeal of the golden age of Hollywood and offered a new range of entertainment options to new audiences. Cable television in particular has become an important predecessor of today's distributional revolution. The reason was to offer more personalized content, in contrast to the limited number of terrestrial channels, cable television offered various specialized and thematic channels and thus the viewer had more choice. As a result of

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<sup>7</sup> LOBATO, R.: Subcinema: Theorizing Marginal Film Distribution. In *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 114-119. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/33574/65670\\_00004084\\_01\\_Lobato.pdf?sequence=1](https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/33574/65670_00004084_01_Lobato.pdf?sequence=1)>.

<sup>8</sup> Remark by the authors: "Windows of exhibition"- one of the basic terms of film distribution, which defines in what chronological order does the film get from the producer to the audience. Most films use a system of distribution windows, which originated in the 80's in the USA and was gradually taken over all over the world. It remains basically the same, but nowadays the length of the individual "windows" and the gaps between them are shortening. 1<sup>st</sup> window: cinema distribution – lasts 3-4 months from the premiere in the cinema; 2<sup>nd</sup> window: TVOD + BLU-RAY + DVD, formerly VHS – at the earliest after 3-6 months the film is downloaded from the cinema and viewers can watch it from the purchased medium at home; 3<sup>rd</sup> window, 9-12 months after the premiere in the cinema, 6 to 9 months after BLU-RAY / DVD / TVOD, comes "window" PAY TV + SVOD, the title can be found on paid channels such as HBO or Netflix. The title remains on sale BluRay, DVD or TVOD (but often the possibility of borrowing is withdrawn); 4<sup>th</sup> window – FREE TV + AVOD – after 18 the soonest, usually after 24, but before and after 36 months from the cinema premiere, the title can be seen either on classic television or seen for free and officially on Youtube. At the same time, the title is also available in other variants – e.g. BLU-RAY, DVD or TVOD and SVOD platforms.; See also: *Distribuční okna*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://filmtoro.cz/wiki/distribucni-okna>>.

<sup>9</sup> WASKO, J.: *How Hollywood works*. London : Sage Publications, 2003, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> SCOTT, A. J.: *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> BALIO, T.: *Hollywood in the New Millennium*. London : Palgrave, 2013, p. 66.

competition, government regulations and audience expectations, but especially thanks to technological innovations, media distribution models have thus shifted from the mass to the individual, from synchronous to asynchronous, from collective perception to the individual one.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, the foundations of the revolution in distribution brought by electronic media can be identified.

## 2 Television – A Kidnapper of Movies and Viewers

The roots of the digital distributional revolution lie in the tradition of commercial competition and innovation, which drove the industrial revolution two hundred years ago. In addition, this commercial competition took place in the context of changes in the perception of the role of the media in society, as well as in the context of political struggles for freedom of expression and the public good. Technological innovations are associated with a long-term interest in expanding and improving the availability of media entertainment for audiences. On one hand, the audience and inventors dreamed of technological utopias, such as personal audio or video players, on the other hand, shareholders and managers fought for the maximum use of the latest innovations (e.g. film without celluloid i.e. film in the form of data). The very idea of delivering an audio-visual image to the home of a recipient dates to the 19th century – much like the fantasies of personal portable devices offering new forms of entertainment. With the birth of cinema, radio, television, computer technology, and even telecommunications, it was argued with promises to change social hierarchies and unite the human community. In the end, however, the result was more dependence on governing institutions, new sources of profit and instruments of political advantage.<sup>13</sup> The development of new communication means has been promoted by large, ever-growing corporations in telecommunications and media (AT&T, AP, Reuters, Paramount, Fox, NBC, CBS, Time Warner, IBM etc.), as well as by a number of military institutions. The public was placed in the role of an audience that used to consume an ever-increasing amount of media content. But access to it was selective and controlled – the viewer had the opportunity to obtain the desired content only in certain places at certain times. Distribution windows were calculated for exact price values – for those with a better approach, the price was higher. More was paid for premium content and for live entertainment production.<sup>14</sup>

The expanded possibilities of television brought innovative programming and the arrival of remote controls enabled the surfing of dozens of TV channels before the advent of the Internet. This is where the first cracks appeared in the audience's predictable behavior so far. Home Video Recorder (VCR), an innovation promoted by Japanese electronics manufacturers, offered viewers the opportunity to record, share and time-watch their favorite movies and TV shows. It also allowed them to avoid (skip) advertising, which called into question the basic principles of film and television distribution in the United States, based on a symbiosis of the product (film, TV show, etc.) and advertising, which directly funded the ability to broadcast the product on television. This seemingly exclusively technological improvement has, in fact, affected the competitive conditions in the electronics industry. This stimulated further development – e.g.

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<sup>12</sup> LOBATO, R.: Subcinema: Theorizing Marginal Film Distribution. In *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 119. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/33574/65670\\_00004084\\_01\\_Lobato.pdf?sequence=1](https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/33574/65670_00004084_01_Lobato.pdf?sequence=1)>.

<sup>13</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Introduction: Making of a Revolution. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

audio cassette recorder, portable cassette player (Walkman) and video recorder were introduced to the market. Sony Corporation, one of the main innovators, was largely motivated by the competitive conditions in Japan and the increasingly globalized consumer electronics market.<sup>15</sup> However, this application of technology in consumer electronics has gradually proven to be detrimental to American media companies.

Other driving forces also entered the process of branching the distributional channels of film content: telecommunications were deregulated, and foreign investors could also join American companies, which pushed the boundaries of technological innovation to digital technological solutions. This increased the speed of transmission, as well as the volume of delivered data, which in digital form first composed photos, then music and finally movies. In the mid-1990s, these technologies suddenly allowed satellite transponders to carry eight times as many channels as before,<sup>16</sup> and optical broadband also expanded the transmission capacity of terrestrial and transoceanic cables. As capacity grew, price wars began, eventually overthrowing some of the largest telecommunications competitors. This has proved to be a benefit for consumers - lowering prices and allowing cheaper access to telephone and computer communications. Sony bought Columbia Pictures in 1989, Matsushita bought Universal shortly afterwards, and News Corp. Australia was taken over by 20th Century Fox already in 1985.<sup>17</sup> Similar maneuvers were carried out by Italian, French, German and British media giants. These merges, acquisitions and alliances foreshadowed an unprecedented transformation of media institutions and practices. Developments that have given consumers greater autonomy in gaining access to the desired content have driven the nascent globalization of the media. The expansion of the number of home video recorders has forced a change in the distribution offer, resp. creating a model with the rental of videocassettes, later DVDs and Bluray discs. With the development of DVDs, distributors created a vibrant sales market that allowed fans to buy and collect their favorite movies and TV shows on a new electronic medium.<sup>18</sup> These new forms of distribution, with their simplicity of use, price and geographical availability, quickly gained popularity and television sets became an almost full-fledged distribution channel for film production. Television has thus "stolen" a certain part of the audience by offering home entertainment.

### 3 The Film's Entry into Online Space – The Birth of Digital Distribution

The first steps leading to the differentiation of distribution routes brought new models of so-called Electronic Sell Through (EST), which offered to purchase an electronic copy of a film (or song, music album, or computer game). EST allowed the buyer to store a digital copy of the premiere or older film offered by his provider in his "library" on a computer. Editors of the *Distribution Revolution* publication, *Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*, in interviews with leading film studios, defined the "new golden age"<sup>19</sup> as follows: *The development of technologies and new distribution platforms necessarily required innovation and new creative strategies on the part of digital content providers. The distribution revolution has indeed posed a number of new challenges for studios, from engaging an elusive*

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<sup>15</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Introduction: Making of a Revolution. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> PRINCE, S.: *A New Pot of Gold*. Los Angeles : University of California Press, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> TRYON, Ch.: *Reinventing Cinema*. New Brunswick, New Jersey : Rutgers University Press, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Studios: Edistors' Introduction. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 21.

online audience to the art of rethinking content for the digital marketplace. *Uncertainty and innovation are two common dynamics that managers must consider.*<sup>20</sup> The distribution of films via electronic media, which went only a small step behind new television technologies, reacted very sensitively (though often reluctantly) to changes in audience behavior by introducing business models that used new technologies their advantage. One of the pioneers in this field was Apple, which adapted the EST model to DTO ("download-to-own"), and in its iTunes service, users could keep digital copies of movies on their own devices.<sup>21</sup> The availability of this service gradually expanded geographically, also because it offered films from all major Hollywood studios. At the time of the advent of these new platforms (2001-2008), a number of different similar platforms (UltraViolet, BlinkBox, Mubi, etc.) emerged, which used various models to attempt to attract subscribers through formal distribution. At that time, however, the global "explosion" of illegal content sharing and downloading (music, software, movies), which was based on the creation of servers with illegally distributed content (MediaFire, Uploaded, FileFactory, etc.) and P2P (peer-to-peer), also culminated. Networks that have made it possible to share content illegally, in particular through bittorrent programs. However, in this article we do not want to deal with informal distribution in more detail, also because its development has its own specifics. However, given the damage it causes to DRM<sup>22</sup> infringements by copyright holders - including official distributors (including Majors) – it must be said that informal distribution of films has been an important driving force in creating an offer that attracts users, despite its charges.

In the late 1990s, Netflix company also began operations, initially distributing video. At the beginning of this millennium, services with video-on-demand (VOD) resp. prepaid services in a variety of subscription-based video-on-demand (SVOD) business models on television. Netflix's innovation was not significant at first glance – the company delivered DVDs with the desired title via mail. However, the company's website created the ability to personalize content from an extensive library of titles that innovatively offered related content, according to customer tastes and choices. Unlike stone rental companies, Netflix offered monthly subscription services, including the ability to rate each movie in a huge digital catalog and compile a personal list of preferred titles. By creating a profile of each subscriber, Netflix obtained data to define recommendations for future selection. This pioneering level of personalization was the result of the work of researchers from Silicon Valley, outside the film and television industries. Netflix thus became the discoverer of many principles and practices that defined the revolution of digital film distribution.<sup>23</sup> And so in the period 2010-2020 – similarly to about a hundred years ago - a group of gradually dominating companies was formed, which mediate films to viewers, although today through completely different channels than in the 1920s. These innovators quickly adapted their VOD business models using the growing possibilities of network communication to SVOD and in a relatively short time

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<sup>20</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Studios: Edistors' Introduction. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Jordan Levin, President, Alloy Digital, and Chief Executive Officer, Generate. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Remark by the authors: DRM – Digital Rights Management. An umbrella term referring to technologies used by publishers or copyright holders in order to control access to or usage of digital data, software, and/or hardware, and to restrictions associated with a specific instance of a digital work or device. Common components of DRM can be copy protection, or other technical protection measures.

<sup>23</sup> CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K.: Introduction: Making of a Revolution. In CURTIN, M., HORT, J., SANSON, K. (eds.): *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*. California : University of California Press, 2014, p. 11.



dominated a large part of the global market. Companies have crystallized from several entities looking for models for an internet-mediated media service - the so-called OTT (over-the-top) for media distributed over the Internet. The original focus of the companies was diverse: iTunes - as a service primarily providing music, since 2001; Netflix based transformation of DVD libraries, since 2007; then Hulu as a web portal with television programs and sports content since 2008, etc.<sup>24</sup> Gradually, other platforms were added: Prime Video - 2011, CBS All Access – 2014, Apple TV and Disney+ in 2019. All originated in the USA, with the gradual expansion of its territories to Canada, but also to Asia and Europe.<sup>25</sup> The last decade of operation of these companies on the market has brought a breakthrough in the revenues of digital distribution of films and television programs through streaming services SVOD.

Several researchers monitored changes in the processes of distribution channels. Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham<sup>26</sup> named the cornerstones of the change and success of the new distribution channels: the new companies disrupted traditional film patterns by offering films and television programs by changing the previously recognized rules of distribution windows. Stuart Cunningham has adopted the term "disruptive innovators"<sup>27</sup> for these companies, a term used in a broader context in the economy for companies that "with fewer resources are able to compete successfully and threaten established businesses."<sup>28</sup> "Disruptive Innovators" entered the established distribution market by offering films and television programs through video-on-demand models, which made it possible to watch the program anytime, anywhere, on various devices. These services differed in different models of payment for purchase, viewing or screening within a subscription or other combined purchase. Shortly after entering the market, they established themselves in a fixed position in the distribution "windows", creating a space for their subscribers to watch premium content (initially) via cable television (PPV – pay-per-view services) and later on online, through streaming services. And all this at home, outside the cinema, individually or with the family. Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham, who examined in detail the "digital disruption", the massive expansion of digitally available content, also found several benefits that new distribution channels have brought to film production: they have also opened up space for independent producers and creators for original needs of digital distributors. This can be seen as an unexpected benefit of a changing traditional scheme.<sup>29</sup> Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime and Hulu in particular stand out in this respect – companies that have gained dominance and are already referred to as the "Big 4". This completely new source of original programs has various genre forms, individual platforms are programmatically won and specialized (HBO GO drama and documentaries,

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<sup>24</sup> CRISP, V.: *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals*. Basingstoke : BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> CLARK, T.: *Apple's new TV service sounds like a clone of Amazon Prime Video – here is how the 2 compare*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.businessinsider.in/Apples-new-TV-service-sounds-like-a-clone-of-Amazon-Prime-Video-heres-how-the-2-compare/articleshow/68570687.cms>>.

<sup>26</sup> IORDANOVA, D.: Digital Disruption: Technological Innovation and Global Film Circulation. In IORDANOVA, D., CUNNINGHAM, S. (eds.): *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*. St Andrews : St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012, p. 2-30.

<sup>27</sup> CUNNINGHAM, S.: *Hidden Innovation: Policy, Industry and the Creative Sector*. Brisbane : University of Queensland Press, 2013, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> CHRISTENSEN, M. C., RAYNOR, E. M., McDONALD, R.: What Is Disruptive Innovation?. In *Harvard Business Review*, 2015, Vol. 59, No. 10, p. 45-52. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptive-innovation>>.

<sup>29</sup> IORDANOVA, D.: Digital Disruption: Technological Innovation and Global Film Circulation. In IORDANOVA, D., CUNNINGHAM, S. (eds.): *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*. St Andrews : St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012, p. 2-30.

Netflix - series, Apple TV – drama and documentaries),<sup>30</sup> but especially they are able to operate regionally and support local or regional producers and creators. Therefore, in some of them it is possible to meet with the offer of Slovak, resp. European origin. Large distribution companies in the Majors category have meanwhile adapted and, using dynamically evolving technologies, have developed sophisticated marketing and logistics strategies to apply their original production in new conditions. In cooperation with service providers in all distribution windows, they offer viewers a choice. Richard Berger from Sony Pictures summarized the current offer of distribution channels: *If you really want to watch the premiere film, you can go to the cinema and pay to watch it on the big screen. If you want to watch it at home at the premiere, you can rent or buy it. If you want to wait a little longer and not pay for it separately, you can get it as part of a subscription package. Alternatively, if you wait long enough, you can watch it for free with ads. All movie sales or rental models have DRM treated and settled. New technologies are constantly disrupting traditional distribution models. We are actively working to find ways to innovate and monetize new distribution models. We have learned a lot in the last ten years.*<sup>31</sup> And although the outlook and statistics were largely as expected at the end of 2019, circumstances have developed completely differently.

#### 4 Global Distribution Under the Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The film industry creates enormous economic values - apart from the artistic ones - which can be quantified: e.g. Hollywood supports more than 2 million jobs and 400,000 American companies. British film and television are worth around £ 60 million a day to the British economy. Global film distribution revenue reached a record \$ 42.5 billion in 2019, despite less convincing performance in North America, where ticket sales reached \$ 11.4 billion.<sup>32</sup> The overall increase in distribution revenue was supported by increased demand in the rest of the world, where sales reached \$ 31.1 billion. It was the first time that revenue had exceeded \$ 30 billion. The statistics thus recorded a 4 percent increase compared to 2018 (a total of 41.7 billion USD).<sup>33</sup> These were the basic parameters of the productivity status of the film industry just before the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic. In March 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the film industry at all levels. The invasion and spread of the virus not only frightened and divided the world, but in a very short time paralyzed not only film production but also the entire entertainment industry: music and film festivals, top-level sporting events, theater performances, as well as film premieres that are scheduled to be canceled. long-term, with a view even more than 2 years before the theatrical release. Production stopped almost overnight – the production of films, television series and even studio programs. Almost everything has stopped working, except for the news. This lockdown for the collective consumption of entertainment, the "enjoyment" of free time, the visit to cinemas and theaters resulted in the spectators being "stuck" at home. Their expectations turned to the screen, where they were looking for new, available content. This huge surge in demand – evident not only

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<sup>30</sup> See also: *HBO GO*. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://hbogo.sk>>; *Netflix*. [online]. [2020-10-28]. <<https://www.netflix.com/>>; *Apple TV +*. [online]. [2020-10-28]. <<https://www.apple.com/sk/tv/>>.

<sup>31</sup> CUNNINGHAM, S., SILVER, J.: On-line Film Distribution: Its History and Global Complexion. In IORDANOVA, D., CUNNINGHAM, S. (eds.): *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*. St Andrews : St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> McCLINTOCK, P.: *2019 Global Box Office Revenue Hit Record \$ 42.B Despite 4 Percent Dip in U.S.* Released on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02] Available at: <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/2019-global-box-office-hit-record-425b-4-percent-plunge-us-1268600>>.

<sup>33</sup> McCLINTOCK, P.: *2019 Global Box Office Revenue Hit Record \$ 42.B Despite 4 Percent Dip in U.S.* Released on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02] Available at: <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/2019-global-box-office-hit-record-425b-4-percent-plunge-us-1268600>>.

in the US but also on all continents - has had at least two significant effects: an explosion of new subscribers' interest in digital distribution services in the form of SVOD, and enormous pressure on producers (including Majors) to release their new titles to SVOD, i.e. PVOD distribution.<sup>34</sup> The proof of the first effect is the statistics - which cannot yet contain the results for the whole year – but the additions of subscribers for the first half of 2020 already have a telling value: e.g. Netflix gained 25.86 million new customers<sup>35</sup> during this period, bringing the total to more than 193 million; the Disney+ gained 31 million, and Amazon Prime reached totally 150 million subscribers,<sup>36</sup> and Hulu added 35 million subscribers.<sup>37</sup>

Proof of the second effect was that film studios – distributors, immediately began to look for digital alternatives for their completed but non-premiered titles. Although some postponed their premieres (even more times - such as the new James Bond), many until 2021, many of the producers began selling their "fresh" production through subscription-based streaming platforms. They set out to release the films and provided them on so-called "premium video on demand" (PVOD). This means that they have granted the right to be listed for a certain surcharge for a specific title. And unexpected things happened: in April (in the middle of a pandemic) Universal released the animated children's film "*Trolls World Tour*" on digital platforms for \$ 19.99 for a 48-hour rental. It turned out to be a digital blockbuster that earned more in the first three weeks of digital launch than its 2016 predecessor *Trolls* in five months of theatrical screenings.<sup>38</sup> The following month, they released Warner Brothers *Scoob!* on VOD platforms and achieved similar success.<sup>39</sup> Subscription-based video streaming platforms also use new movie releases as a means to gain and retain customers. Producers proved to be flexible in responding to the demand situation and the open possibilities of the distribution channel and were successful, despite the fact that the activity was a combination of several circumstances: the obligation to entertain children during quarantine, more time spent at home during lockdown, increased use of online shopping and services. Consumers who opt for PVOD said they enjoy the convenience of home viewing and the opportunity to watch with their families. It has also been shown that some population segments have adopted PVOD more easily than others.<sup>40</sup> It should be added that the trends of digital distribution are also active in local markets and there are a total of about 400 different digital distribution platforms in the world - the largest (except American) include Chinese (iQiyi, Tencent Video, Youku), Indian (Alt Balaji, Eros Now), Asian (Viu, Iflix)<sup>41</sup> and many others. Their audience is apparently approaching a number that exceeds a billion subscribers, making itself a huge space for sales and consumption for any

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<sup>34</sup> Remark by the authors: PVOD – premium-video-on-demand – is a form of monetization strategy where the end-user can pay to get access to a “premium” blockbusters, to watch a movies before it hits the general SVOD subscriber pool.

<sup>35</sup> WALSH, J.: *Netflix Subscribers Growth Slows After Surging During Pandemic*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2020/10/20/netflix-subscriber-growth-slows-after-surging-during-pandemic/?sh=4a2f7c14244e>>.

<sup>36</sup> SPANGLER, T.: *Amazon Prime Tops 150 Million Members*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<https://variety.com/2020/digital/news/amazon-150-million-prime-members-1203487355/>>.

<sup>37</sup> WATSON, A.: *Number of Hulu's paying subscribers in the United States from 1st quarter 2019 to 4th quarter 2020*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/258014/number-of-hulus-paying-subscribers/>>.

<sup>38</sup> SRIVASTAVA, S.: *After COVID-19, will movie fans return to the theater – or keep watching at home?*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/pvod-upend-content-covid.html>>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> *The world's most popular video streaming services (Amazon Prime Video is at #5)*. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://whatsnewinpublishing.com/the-worlds-most-popular-video-streaming-services-amazon-prime-video-is-at-5/>>.

segment. Of course, no one knows how the following months will shift the activity and preferences of the audience. For example, Big 4 distribution platforms have seen a sharp decline in new subscriber interest after the first half of huge subscription growth and are also registering a certain percentage of terminated subscriptions - customers who have decided in the new conditions with less threat of a domestic lockdown to get rid of regular subscriptions.<sup>42</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the film industry have challenged the typical notion of film distribution in cinemas. Will PVOOD become a viable alternative release method for all or only some film productions? Is there a need to strike a balance that supports cinema and studio owners? Will PVOOD have long-term consequences for the economics of film production? Surely the most important question is to be asked about the dramatic twists on stage we are watching: Can moving viewers to the digital service mean that they will be reluctant to return to cinemas for premieres in a comfortable armchair with addictive refreshments? We think it is likely that as soon as people feel safe again in a seat without a veil on their face, the desire to go into society and indulge in a shared cinema experience is likely to return.

## Conclusion

From our experience today, any classic Hollywood model of film distribution may seem outdated, something like the archology of film. There is no doubt that the distribution sector of the global film industry has undergone a revolutionary change in recent years. We are in an era when movies and TV shows (not to mention books, computer games, etc.) are available in an instant – we are experiencing an explosion of accessibility. And almost in formal and informal (illegal) online distribution. All this is due to the constant growth of the speed and capacity of the world Internet network in the last 15 years or so. Despite high expectations and bombastic headlines about the digital revolution, several researchers are critical of some aspects of it. E.g. Julia Knight and Peter Thomas argue that the digital revolution has not solved the diversity of films, so the diversity of film culture and the viewing experience remain the same.<sup>43</sup> The promise to expand the selection of films for viewers, combined with the digitization of film screenings and online distribution, is strikingly reminiscent of the previous expectations placed on multiplex cinemas with many halls offering more varied programming. Expectations were not fulfilled, because the multiplexes did not bring a richer offer, they only strengthened the mainstream commercial and the effect of Americanization.<sup>44</sup> The digitization of different areas of culture brings a discourse that emphasizes unlimited choice in the new digital world, unlike the previous non-digital era, during which the availability of cultural products was insufficient in relation to potential demand. Chris Anderson, longtime editor of Wired magazine, introduced his marketing "long tail theory", which includes the idea that humanity has entered an "age of abundance" in which there is simply not enough room to carry everything for everyone, space on the shelf for all CDs, DVDs and video games produced; lack of screens to display all available movies; lack of channels for broadcasting all television programs. Therefore, it is now entering online distribution as a world of abundance.<sup>45</sup> The question remains whether the abundance and constant growth of the online offer will also bring satisfaction to the recipient.

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<sup>42</sup> *Netflix falls short on new subscribers as pandemic boost fizzles*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/netflix-falls-short-on-new-subscribers-as-pandemic-boost-fizzles-1.4386890>>.

<sup>43</sup> KNIGHT, J., THOMAS, P.: *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image*. Bristol : Intellect, 2012, p. 274.

<sup>44</sup> ALLISON, D.: Multiplex Programming in the UK: The Economics of Homogeneity. In *Screen*, 2006, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 82–89. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://academic.oup.com/screen/article/47/1/81/1899094>>.

<sup>45</sup> ANDERSON, Ch.: *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*. New York : Hyperion, 2008, p. 18.

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## DETERMINANTS OF INTERCULTURAL TOLERANCE IN YOUNG GENERATION COMMUNICATION

*Aleš Hes – Martina Švecová*

### Abstract

The concept of interculturality seeks a way of coexistence of different cultures and a way of communication between them. It is based on the assumption that the more intensive the intercultural contacts are, the more precise the mutual knowledge and the more likely the possibility of elimination of various conflicts. The paper deals with the determinants of intercultural tolerance in the environment of selected universities in the Czech Republic. It is based on the fact that foreign students are not frustrated with Czech cultural customs, because over 50% rate Czech culture close to their culture, 19% have identified the cultural and communication environment of Czech universities as similar, but 30% feel indifferent and different. This result represents a challenge for the Czech academic environment to improve communication relations with foreign students and not to close up to this problem, because communication is currently neutral between Czech and foreign students, without interest in another culture. Changes in communication within interculturality have also been recorded in the current period, influenced by the COVID '19 pandemic.

### Key words:

Communication. Cultural Custom. Higher Education. Interculturalism. Student. The Younger Generation.

## 1 Introduction

The young generation is exposed to strong global influences, especially digitisation in communication, which have significant impacts on it at certain stages of life. There is a strong inclination towards modern means of communication even within university studies, which strongly determine how the students communicate. The young generation's dependence on digital technologies is really strong. It is impossible to imagine a situation where these technologies, such as social networks or mobile applications, would be no longer available to them. A brief 2018 study of university students showed that almost 85% of them experienced mental and physical suffering, panic, anxiety, confusion, insecurity, nervousness, depression, extreme isolation and loneliness. Research has also shown that 83% of young people aged 18-29 sleep with their mobile phones in close proximity, 60% of them regularly check e-mails, text messages and social networks throughout the day, 30% use their mobile phone on the toilet and 20% admit that they send text messages while driving.<sup>1</sup> Although university students are influenced by digital technologies, the question arises whether their digital communication transfers homogenise expressions of students coming from different cultures and the communication across cultures is therefore correct or, conversely, if it creates space for a conflict environment focused on confrontation of different cultures and their values. From a linguistic point of view, it is surprising that the young generation can communicate relatively well, but this may not be enough for coexistence and reaching common goals. The differences of other cultures, which are clearly reflected in mutual communication, simply do not disappear, but often appear to a greater extent than the original culture could admit.<sup>2</sup> Good communication and especially successful cooperation are conditioned by the personality of cooperating individuals. The structure of values recognised by individuals also has a certain effect on the communication outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: CARUSO, Ch.: *Understanding Y*. Melbourne : Wrightbooks, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> NOVÝ, I. et al.: *Spolupráce přes hranice kultur*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Prague : Management Press, 2005, p. 50.

## 2 Methodology

The research of the communication environment of university students was based on a pilot questionnaire survey. It was divided into two phases. The first phase was focused on the quantification questionnaire survey results concerning the verification of the current situation of communication activities of foreign students with Czech students at selected Czech universities. The questionnaire survey was conducted among both foreign and Czech students. The respondents quota was filled according to the rules of random selection, the deviation of the obtained values did not exceed the size of the probable share of the sample of foreign and Czech students  $\left[ \frac{p}{1-p} \right]$ , which approached parity representation. The examined sample was not large (200 foreign students); therefore, the reliability deviation was real. The questionnaires contained instrumental and result questions in a closed variant form, so that the results could be well quantified. In the second phase of the investigation, a qualitative research was conducted focusing on motivational issues in the form of non-standardised and semi-controlled interviews with foreign students. This provided relevant information, which served as the basis for the evaluation of the determined determinants of intercultural communication of the young university generation.

## 3 Results and Discussion

Present-day university students do not learn, but work with already created information, which are not necessarily verified or true. Perception is narrowed down to a piece of information and passed on without sticking in one's memory.<sup>3</sup> It is only natural that this work with information can lead to the dementia of the young generation. However, dementia is not only forgetfulness, although it has been clearly established since 2007 that young people are more forgetful (Study by Korean scientists), but it is a complex of preconditions for human mental decline. Student's reading and arithmetic performance has been shown to be significantly worse for those who use a computer several times a week.<sup>4</sup> For example, if a cashier makes a significant error while adding up or if a banker miscounts something by 55 billion euros, it may mean that the person in question was not thinking while using technology. Instead of relying on their own reason, they relied on digital helpers. In essence, it is a synergy of a real programming mechanism that connects a person with the technology that works for him or her. It is also confirmed that the digitisation of the commercial sphere is the cause of the necessary transformation of employment in modern society. People are being replaced by self-controlling (automatic, robotic) technologies. The similarities with commercial penetration and its development of computers in the field of education are striking. Computers have become as necessary as a bicycle for swimming or an X-ray machine for fitting shoes.<sup>5</sup> Even the education system of the young generation is subordinated to external factors of the digitised society and becomes very superficial, which leads to differences in the level of knowledge of the graduates of educational institutions. A number of contemporary reforms of the education system in European countries lead to non-valuable forms of knowledge based only on superficial and short-term competencies completely

<sup>3</sup> SPITZER, M.: *Digital Demenz, wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen*. München : Verlagsanstalt, Th. Knaur Nacht, 2012, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> CACIOPPO, J. T. et al.: Alone in the crowd: The structure and spread of loneliness in a large social network. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2009, Vol. 97, No. 6, p. 977.

<sup>5</sup> SPITZER, M.: *Digital Demenz, wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen*. München : Verlagsanstalt, Th. Knaur Nacht, 2012, p. 58.



alienated from the traditional idea of education.<sup>6</sup> It can be concluded from the above statement that education systems are increasingly focusing on work with technology instead of thought development. Computer use in early childhood can lead to attention deficit disorders<sup>7</sup> and computer use in preschool age to reading disorders.<sup>8</sup>

It can be assumed that present-day university students are completely influenced by digitisation in communication, represented by new information technologies. And forms of university studies are adapting to this trend. Social media are used to turn students into communities in which they can associate with each other through interest systems, share photos, videos and hypertext internet links. Facebook is one of the most popular social medium; it is an extensive social web system used to create social networks, communicate, share multimedia data, maintain relationships and have fun.<sup>9</sup> It is quite clear that social media can be considered an influential environment in the context of intercultural communication between students. This was among the conclusions of foreign studies as well. E.g. Cancer Research UK (2018) study found that 44% of people aged 18–24 said they felt more comfortable talking to new people through social media, messaging apps and other online means, rather than in person. Only 37% of this age group said they felt more comfortable talking to people they did not know face to face, compared to more than two-thirds of people over 55. Another study found that 21% of respondents aged 18–24 admitted that they did not communicate with those they live side by side with.<sup>10</sup> Students coming to Czech higher education institutions and universities to study are primarily focused on the idea that education in the Czech Republic will increase their chances of finding a job on the European or global labour market. Foreign students come to study in the Czech Republic to make it easier to secure work in third countries (55%) and in the Czech Republic (15%). Only 6% want to permanently reside in the Czech Republic and 15% of respondents want to return home. The results significantly prove that foreign students want to work in European Union or overseas after graduation. In a way, this shows that studying at a Czech university is a prerequisite for getting a better job in the EU than in one's home country. Students come to the Czech Republic to study mostly from Eastern Europe (40%), from the countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Turkmenistan), 32% from East Asia (China, Vietnam), 20% from Central Europe (Slovakia, Poland) and 6% from Western Europe (Ireland, Spain, Portugal). Most students study in English, but it is becoming more prevalent for students to learn Czech and apply for study fields taught in Czech, which causes considerable problems for both teachers and Czech classmates.

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<sup>6</sup> ROUBAL, O.: Recognising students' social profile and its role in the marketing practice of universities in the "society of knowledge". In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 62.

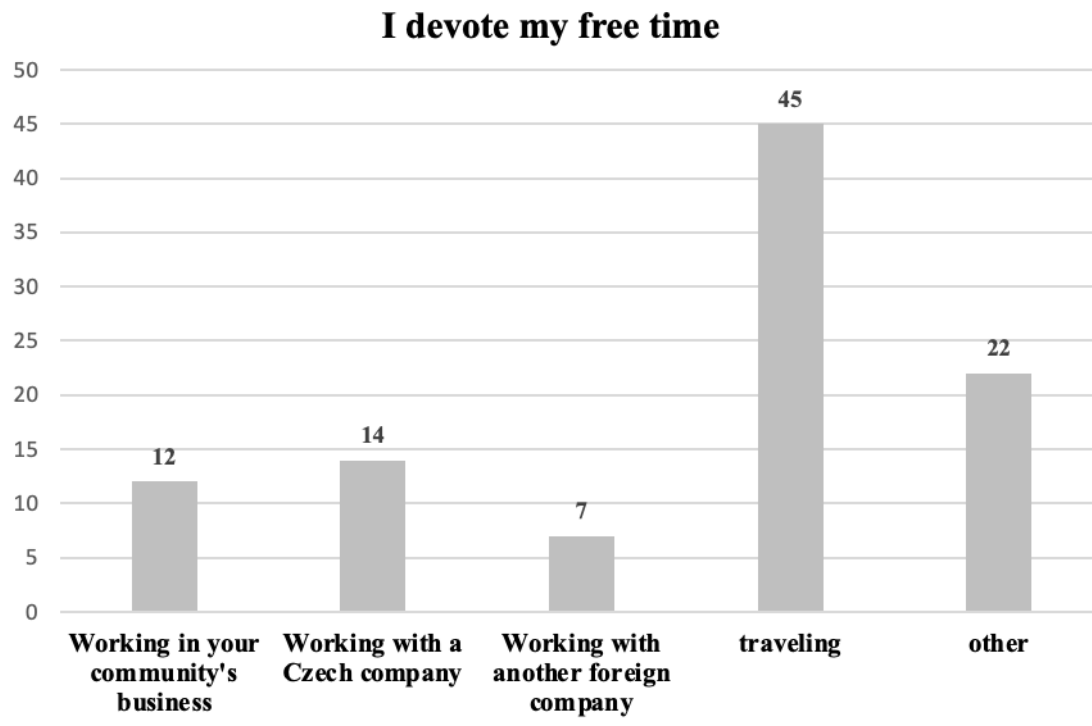
<sup>7</sup> CHRISTAKIS, D. A. et al.: Viewing television before age 3 is not the same as viewing television at age 5. In *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 2004, Vol. 118, No. 1, p. 435.

<sup>8</sup> ENNEMOSER, M., SCHNEIDER, W.: Relations of television viewnig and reading: Findings from 4-year longitudinal study. In *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 2007, Vol. 99, No. 2, p. 349.

<sup>9</sup> FREY, P.: *Marketing communication: new trends 3.0.*. Prague : Management Press, 2011, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> POLIANSKAYA, A.: Millennials shun face-to-face conversations in favour of social media and online messaging. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018. [online]. [2020-11-29]. Available at: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/millennials-social-media-cancer-research-uk-study-a8182211.html>>.

#### 4 Determinant – Of Free Time Activity of Students



**Graph 1: Free time activities of foreign students**

Source: Own processing



**Graph 2: Free time activities of foreign students**

Source: Own processing

Foreign students engage in their leisure activities with representatives of the same culture /37%/ and their community /32%/, with Czech students 12% and individually 7%. As for the cooperation of foreign students directly with the Czech community, foreign students accept Czech students and the Czech environment for their leisure activities neutrally /47%/, very well /34%/, they do not accept cooperation, they are not willing /12%/ and they are indifferent /7%/.

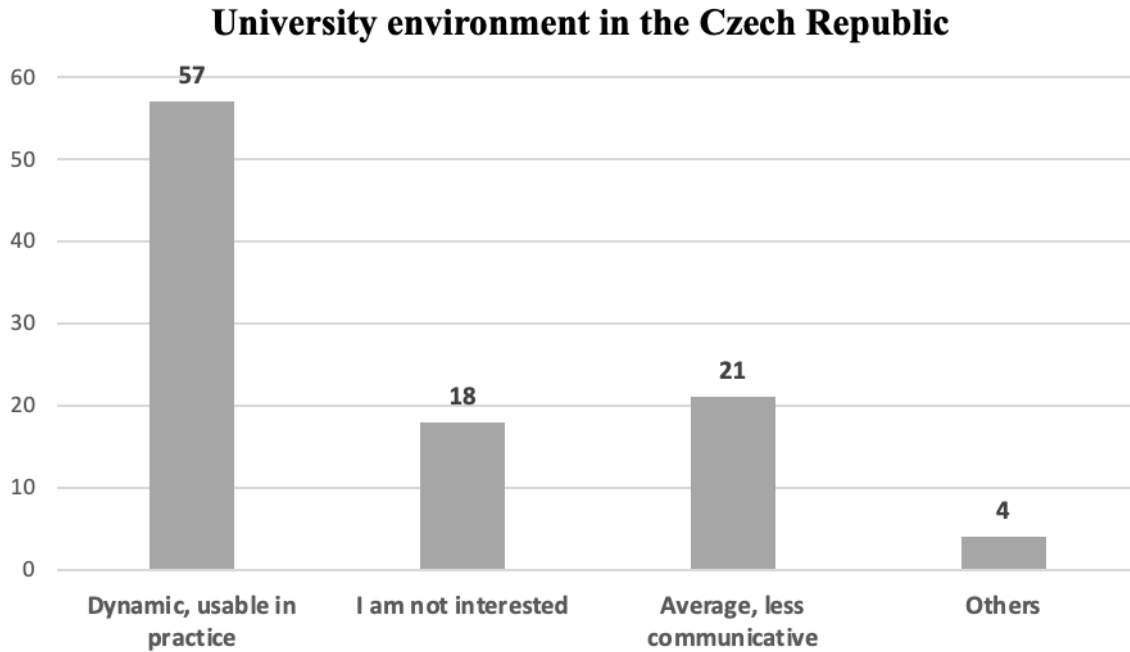


**Graph 3: Cooperation with the Czech Republic**

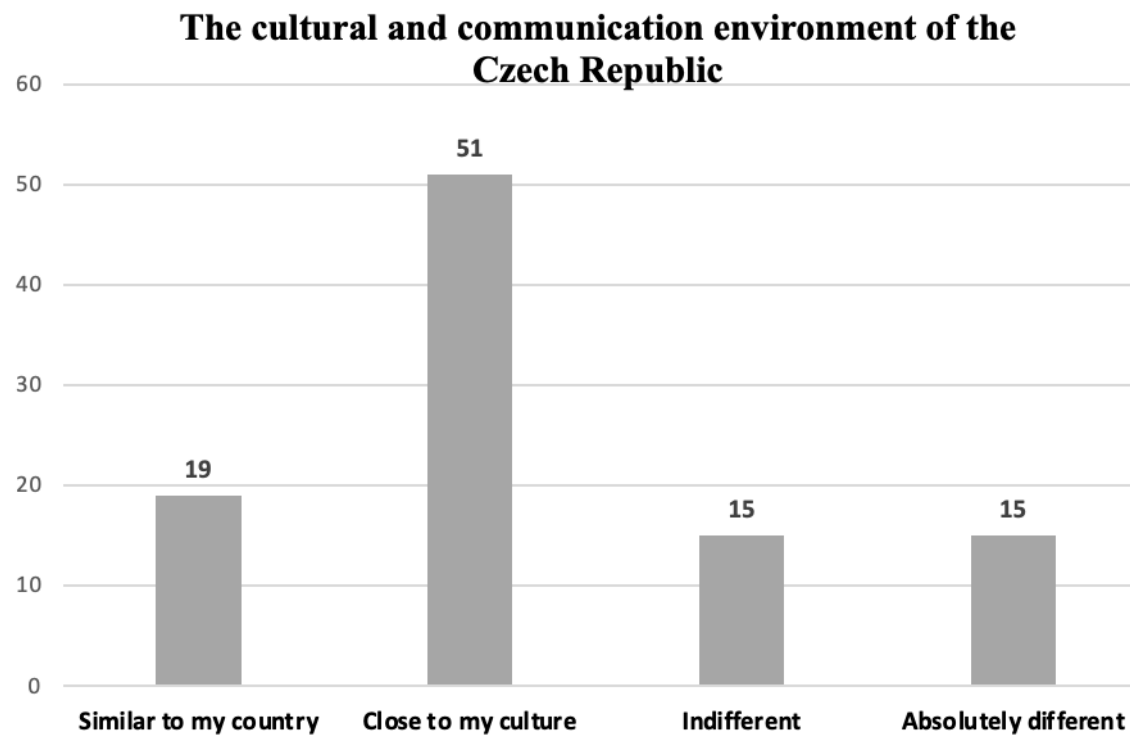
Source: Own processing

## 5 Determinant – University Environment in the Czech Republic

International students accept the Czech university environment favourably, because 57% of respondents evaluate the Czech academic environment as dynamic with the acquisition of knowledge usable in practice, 21% as average and less communicative, only 18% evaluate the Czech university environment as not of interest to them. This result shows a relatively good image of the Czech university environment among foreign students and a potential leading to improved communication relations with foreign students. /Graph 4/ Intercultural communication between Czech and foreign students usually takes place in a neutral way, without interest in another culture, although Czech students show sufficient openness and loyalty. It is here that it is possible to correct a lot from the position of the teaching staff, e.g. by creating mixed working groups in solving seminar assignments and projects. Cooperation with Czech students is again evaluated as indifferent and neutral. Foreign students are not frustrated with Czech cultural habits, because over 50% of them evaluate Czech culture as close to their culture, 19 % described the cultural and communication environment of Czech universities as similar, however, 30% feel indifferent and dissimilar here. This result represents a challenge for the Czech university environment to improve communication relations with foreign students and it is necessary not to close oneself off from this problem. The result is not small; it makes up almost one third of the respondents. /Graph 5/.



**Graph 4: University environment in the Czech Republic**  
Source: Own processing



**Graph 5: The cultural and communication environment of the Czech Republic**  
Source: Own processing

With regard to differences between the different cultures from which foreign students come, a pilot survey of 200 respondents addressed in a random way in an online environment revealed several interesting situations. Respondents evaluated cultures from the point of view of the most frequently spoken foreign languages: Americans, British, Germans, French, Spaniards, Russians and other representatives in connection with Asian and Arab culture. 30.4% of respondents stated that they have no problem with any culture, only 0.8% of the total number

of respondents condemn cultures with failing basic human rights and where violence against women and children occurs. Nevertheless, the majority (69%) have problems with Arab culture, especially Muslim culture, of which they are concerned due to terrorist attacks, which are mainly caused by representatives of Arab culture. Furthermore, respondents rated as problematic the culture originating from the nations of the former Soviet Union (19%), Chinese culture was described by 10% of respondents as conflicting with other cultures on the grounds of over-imposition on other cultures through various forms of Chinese medicine and history. American culture was described as problematic for other cultures by 5% of respondents; 3% described thusly German and French cultures respectively. Based on the results obtained in the above manner, the cultures were divided into five categories:

1. Intolerant – they avoid selected cultures.
2. Rather intolerant – they are more vigilant towards selected cultures, but do not avoid them.
3. Rather tolerant – they are aware of their prejudices, but try not to be influenced.
4. Tolerant – they do not engage in prejudices; they judge each person from a different culture individually.
5. Preferential – they tend to be more accommodating toward disadvantaged (problematic) cultures.

Regarding the proportions in these categories, most cultures were fell into the tolerant and preferential categories, the intolerant category was well below the average evaluation. The result for Chinese culture was very worrying result. Although Arab culture was most widely represented as very problematic and dangerous to other cultures, Chinese culture was rated as one of the most endangered cultures in terms of growing hatred towards the culture. All respondents pointed to the widespread unpopularity of Chinese culture and the dangerous role of its uncompromising implementation in other foreign cultures. The experience of cooperation with Chinese foreign students also shows a certain caution on the part of Czech students. Chinese students do not participate in joint projects or leisure activities and Czech students show considerable indifference to them.

## **6 Determinant – Intercultural Communication Competence /ICC/**

For intercultural communication competencies, it is necessary to understand the process of social perception, i.e. how a foreigner is perceived. If there is a social perception between two individuals, it is an interpersonal perception, which consists of three parts: the perceiving person (subject of perception), the perceived person (object of perception) and the situational context.<sup>11</sup> It is the situational context that is very important when meeting people from other cultures, because it uses the available information to adjust the interpretation of the communicated content. Each person is different and has a different set of internal personality factors, of which knowledge, status, attitudes, emotions, communication skills and culture play a major role during the communication process.<sup>12</sup> Intercultural differences in communication can then manifest themselves, for example, in illogical argumentation, reduced respect for the other party, verbal assault or complete exclusion of further communication, or the strengthening of negative prejudices that form about the other person's culture. These processes can also be studied in foreign students from different cultures. If we examine their communication competencies, it can be said that it developed from the original

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<sup>11</sup> NEWSTROM, J. W., DAVIS, K.: *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work*. New York : McGraw-Hill College, 1992, p. 582.

<sup>12</sup> SCHMELTZER, L. R., WALTMAN, J. L.: *Managerial Communications*. New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, 1992, p. 18.

teaching of foreign languages to include the ability to learn, to have a supply of knowledge about the world around us or about the types of motivation. Therefore, it is not currently possible to assess communication competences according to how many languages a person speaks, but according to declarative knowledge, skills, practical knowledge, personality factors, one's own attitudes and ability to learn. This complex can then be perceived as communication competence. According to a simple previously evaluating factor (language skills), foreign students are most equipped with English 99%, followed by German (60.5%) and Spanish (19.2%). This is followed by knowledge of Russian and French (15%). International students most often speak two foreign languages (45.5%) and the most popular combinations are English and German, English and Spanish. When comparing the body of knowledge and skills, practical knowledge and ability to learn, the cultures of Western and Northern Europe and the USA are the most well-equipped. In addition to knowledge of several languages, these students show great motivation to learn in a foreign culture as many positive and useful skills as possible for their further knowledge development and practical self-realisation. Due to the fact that the quantitative evaluation of the ICC (e.g. attitudes, emotions, knowledge, skill, etc.) is very complex, this survey was supplemented by personal interviews with foreign students in the number of 98 people, which were audio-recorded.

In the current pandemic period of COVID '19, communication between students has changed significantly. Communication between foreign and domestic students now occurs very rarely, in contrast to communication between foreign students and teachers, which increased in the environment of MS Teams.com, google.meet.com or skype.com by about 68%. Records with individual teachers and foreign students in the online environment confirm the influential expansion of digital means of communication at a time when contact teaching or contact communication cannot be completed. Unlike domestic students, who evaluate the current situation negatively, the fact that online communication suits foreign students have been proven. It is another important way to bring different cultures closer together and create important joint activities (projects, leisure activities, etc.).

## **Conclusion**

Czech society appears to foreign students as rather closed and indifferent towards members of other cultures. International students are met with indifferent approach in terms of being offered to engage in leisure activities. Therefore, they separate and do not allow others to get close unless necessary. On the other hand, Czech students also do not seek the company of foreign students, they are more vigilant towards foreign cultures and rather wait for a specific impulse to cooperate. Joint leisure activities are almost non-existent; they only take place through social networks or student organisations. This determinant has great importance in intercultural communication between students from different cultures. The university environment, as the second determinant of intercultural communication, turned out better. International students evaluate the Czech academic environment rather positively. Intercultural communication between Czech and foreign students usually takes place in a neutral manner, with no interest in another culture. This is a call for the teaching staff to help improve communication activities between students from different cultures, for example by setting up joint working groups in solving joint research projects. Cooperation with Czech students is assessed by foreign students as indifferent and neutral. At present, universities report and provide foreign language programmes and fields in which an increasing number of members of foreign cultures study. However, this presupposes a more widespread offer of the

whole professional field of intercultural communication based on linguistic discourse, which will, for example, provide the following:

- Greater opportunities for communication in extracurricular activities on the basis of experiential and didactic courses with greater involvement of personal contacts of Czech students.
- Creation of joint projects within a concentric thematic focus.
- Creation of voluntary joint communities that will have the same or similar worldview or want to work in the same field of science.
- Communication in a language that is not problematic for any members of foreign cultures, mostly English.
- Creation of communication relationships on social networks.

For the third determinant, intercultural communication competencies (ICC), it is important to evaluate the complex of factors that affect the ICC other than just language skills. International students (45%) are able to speak at least two languages, but other factors lag behind. The cultures of Western and Northern Europe and the USA exhibit the highest extent of declarative and practical knowledge, emotions and values. This poses another challenge for the Czech academic environment, which should study foreign cultures and be less indifferent to them.

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# INTERNET ADDICTION IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN YOUNG ADULTS

*Vladimíra Hladíková – Anna Hurajová*

## Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of online risks with a special emphasis put on Internet addiction as one of the most significant and most serious threats especially in young users, and has the character of a theoretical-empirical study. The main goal of the paper is to examine the issue of Internet addiction and its subjectively perceived potential increase in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in young adults, based on theoretical background and empirical research. The first part presents fundamental theoretical ideas of the issue investigated, categorisation of online risks with a focus on Internet addiction, its definition, manifestations and specifics from the point of view of various authors. The empirical part interprets the results of the research, the research group consisted of 687 respondents from the age category of young adults. In conclusion, the authors summarize the data obtained and appeal to prevention activities as well as the development of media and digital literacy.

## Key words:

Addiction. Coronavirus. Digital Media. Internet. Online Risks. Pandemic. Young Adults.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a global revolution also in the use of the Internet and digital media. Almost all processes, meetings, education and work activities have shifted to the virtual environment and at the same time, there has been a massive increase in the use of social networks. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to redefine and create the relationship of society and individuals to the Internet. The coronavirus has brought harsh measures, bans and restrictions in all areas of life. It has changed the functioning of society, views on relax, culture, education and information. Millions of people have been locked up in their homes and they, as other social opportunities or sports activities are strongly limited, surf the Internet much more than ever before. Digital media have thus become the only means of communication, socialization and spending time for a large section of the world's population. Research shows that the pandemic has brought an extreme increase in time spent on the Internet and social networks – about four hours a day, which is 87 % more than on pre-pandemic days.<sup>1</sup> Due to unstructured, excessive and inappropriate use of the Internet, users can become more vulnerable to many risks or even victims of gambling addiction, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying and Internet addiction.

## 1 Risks of Internet Communication

As mentioned above, in the current social situation and COVID-19 pandemic, it is therefore natural, sometimes even inevitable, to use information and communication technologies, the Internet and other digital media. Computers, the Internet and smartphones have become an important part of our lives. They serve us not only for work activities but also to relax, gain knowledge and information or establish relationships. They can be considered a great temptation, especially in the context of digital games and social networks. In addition to the many opportunities and benefits these technologies offer us, we must not forget the risks connected with their use.

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<sup>1</sup> DHAWAN, V.: *We can redefine our relationship with the Internet during this COVID-19 Pandemic*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.psychreg.org/internet-addiction-covid-19/>>.

It can be stated that if in the period of the press (differentiated according to J. Lohiss<sup>2</sup>) we communicated in a city or in a space denoted as "megapolis", then in the period of new digital media we communicate in a new "city" created by digital technologies – "technopolis". The inner world of the Internet – cyberspace is closely linked to people. In this context, it is possible to talk about a new anthropogenesis of man based on network information links, sharing images or videos or identifying with cyberspace avatars or multiplication of identities. Opportunities and risks overlap in all areas of everyday life of an individual and society as a whole. The efforts of science and business to proceed and achieve ever greater progress inevitably generates new risks. In this context, some authors speak of the concept the so-called risk society. One of them is the renowned German sociologist Ulrich Beck who deals with this issue in his publication of the same name – Risk Society. The possibilities for the classification of the risks are broad, with the different perception of danger on the Internet being the main attribute of this diversity. The study and assessment of online risks is addressed in the study by E. Aristodemou, Y. Laouris a T. Taraszow<sup>3</sup>, presenting unique results of the research that used the methods of so-called. *qualitatively structured dialogic design*. The study offers a comprehensive classification consisting of fourteen categories which represent the range of possible risks faced by children and adolescents who are online. These categories reflect not only the risks occurring directly on the Internet, but also the risks arising from the use of the Internet itself and affecting the wider context of the child's quality of life. An overview of individual risks is given in Table no. 1.

**Table 1: Classification of online risks for children and adolescents**

Online risks categories	Possible risks faced by children and adolescents in the online environment
Seduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grooming – manipulative techniques to gain someone 's trust</li> <li>➤ Phishing – fraudulent techniques to obtain sensitive data</li> <li>➤ Communication with a stranger</li> <li>➤ Easy access to dangerous groups and ideas</li> <li>➤ Anonymity abuse in the online environment</li> <li>➤ Fraudulent e-mails trying to wheedle out money</li> <li>➤ Sexting – receiving and sending messages containing sexual content</li> </ul>
Personal data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identity theft</li> <li>➤ "Internet archive" – all data remains on the web</li> <li>➤ Disclosure of personal data</li> <li>➤ Immediate dispersion of disclosed personal data</li> <li>➤ Possibility of GPS monitoring in the phone</li> <li>➤ Webcam hacking and video recording – penetration into a foreign computer system</li> </ul>
Problematic content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Access to fictitious or false information that appears to be true</li> <li>➤ Seeing inappropriate content</li> <li>➤ Approach to illegal content</li> <li>➤ Access to websites promoting anorexia/bulimia, satanism/black magic</li> <li>➤ Easy access to age inappropriate digital games</li> <li>➤ Exposure to racist content</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> See also: LOHISSE, J.: *Komunikační systémy*. Prague : Karolinum, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> ARISTODEMOU, E., LAOURIS, Y., TARASZOW, T.: Identifying and Ranking Internet Dangers. In GAROFALKIS, J., XENOS, M. (eds.): *Social Applications for Lifelong Learning*. Patras, Greece : EACEA, LLP, 2010, p. 69-75. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<http://orion.westgate.gr/sall2010/documents/SALL%202010.pdf#page=78>>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Easy access to websites containing instructions for the production of explosives, drugs, etc.</li> </ul>
Addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Urgent need to be online as much as possible</li> <li>➤ Alienation from the natural environment, reality</li> <li>➤ Addiction to playing violent and digital games</li> <li>➤ Addiction to online gambling</li> </ul>
Reality distortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Confusion from the alternation of existence in the real and virtual world</li> <li>➤ Double identity, or further multiplication</li> <li>➤ Establishing false friendships</li> <li>➤ Confusion in recognizing true and false information</li> </ul>
Harassment/intimidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cyberbullying</li> <li>➤ Intimidation</li> <li>➤ Creating pressure by sending chain messages</li> </ul>
Social pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Access to incorrect patterns and copying incorrect values</li> <li>➤ Imitating of idols</li> <li>➤ Supporting self-destructive acts (e.g., suicide)</li> <li>➤ Internet advertising</li> <li>➤ Creating pressure by sending chain messages</li> </ul>
Physical problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vision problems</li> <li>➤ Wrist pain</li> <li>➤ Back problems, headache</li> </ul>
Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grooming- manipulative techniques to gain someone's trust</li> <li>➤ Child pornography</li> </ul>
Educational problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Problems with information processing</li> <li>➤ Lack of preparation for school due to a computer virus</li> <li>➤ Distortion of language and ability to express oneself</li> <li>➤ Reduction of creativity and critical thinking</li> </ul>
Inappropriate entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Access to websites offering a virtual card game</li> <li>➤ Addiction to virtual card games</li> <li>➤ Easy access to age inappropriate digital games</li> </ul>
Desensitization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Desensitization as a result of excessive exposure to inappropriate content</li> <li>➤ Desensitization as a result of non-manifestation of declared negative consequences</li> <li>➤ Acceptance of piracy – illegal downloading of music, films, etc.</li> </ul>
Auto-social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possibility of using the Internet by strangers, terrorists (e.g., when planning abduction of a child)</li> <li>➤ Opportunity to form racist and xenophobic groups</li> </ul>
Social consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social isolation</li> <li>➤ Change in the quality of communication and relationships</li> <li>➤ Increasing social inequality – not all children have equal access to the Internet and not everybody is equally computer literate</li> </ul>

Source: ARISTODEMOU, E., LAOURIS, Y., TARASZOW, T.: Identifying and Ranking Internet Dangers. In GAROFALKIS, J., XENOS, M. (eds.): *Social Applications for Lifelong Learning*. Patras, Greece : EACEA, LLP, 2010, p. 69-75. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<http://orion.westgate.gr/sall2010/documents/SALL%202010.pdf#page=78>>.

## 2 Internet Addiction as a Risky Aspect of Communication in Cyberspace

As mentioned above, there are really many risky manifestations of communication and life in cyberspace. The aim of this paper is a closer empirical investigation of Internet addiction

behaviour and its potential increase in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, however, we consider it important to briefly define the very concept of Internet addiction. Generally speaking, addiction is a condition that is dependent on a particular situation or circumstance that a person needs or believes to need in order to exist. To some extent, addiction is a common phenomenon because almost all organisms are dependent on water, food or oxygen to survive. Pathological addiction, however, is a significant negative phenomenon, and it is an uncontrollable urge to repeat a certain action regardless of its consequences. In this context it is therefore possible to define physical addiction, which is substance addiction, and mental addiction, which has a non-substance form. Despite the fact that the issue of substance addiction is increasingly investigated and presented, it is the issue of non-substance addictions which is one the increasingly topical societal issues in today's context. In this context, a prominent Czech addictologist K. Nešpor<sup>4</sup> defines the term of *craving* which belongs to the basic building blocks of both substance and non-substance addictions. This term can be explained as the so-called craving, uncontrollable desire, the urge to repeat behaviour. Craving is the aspect on the basis of which it is possible to primarily observe any form of addiction. Craving is an equally strong and motivating factor in both forms of addictions – substance and non-substance ones. So-called new or modern non-substance addictions are often directly related to information and communication technologies. In addition to the already mentioned technological addictions, some experts mention specific forms of addiction, e.g., relationships addiction, television programs or soap operas addiction, then addiction to mother, father, sports or hobbies. As L. Sejčová sees it,<sup>5</sup> non-substance addictions include:

- Technological addictions – Internet addiction (chat, web surfing, e-mail, online shopping, virtual sex, digital games);
- Gambling – pathological gaming;
- Oniomania – pathological shopping;
- Workaholism – work addiction;
- Addiction to sects and cults;
- Addiction to diets and starvation – e.g., anorexia nervosa, dieting;
- Addiction to food – obesity, bulimia nervosa.

The phenomenon of Internet addiction behaviour first appeared in the literature in 1995 in the text written by an American psychiatrist Dr. Ivan Goldberg who, however, revised it and proposed to change it to *pathological computer use (PCU)*. This term mainly refers to any problem related to the uncontrolled use of a computer. According to P. Vondráčková and J. Vacek<sup>6</sup>, the first description of the signs and characteristics of addictive behaviour on the Internet was provided by the American psychologist K. Young in 1996. Since then, the phenomenon of the virtual environment and addictive behaviour has gradually been attracting attention of the professional public almost all over the world. Some countries (e.g., China, South Korea) even consider problematic Internet use to be one of the most serious threats to public health. The authors agree with the opinion of I. Hupková, who defines Internet addiction as the use of the Internet which brings psychological, social, work and/or school complications into an individual's life. Young<sup>7</sup> defines Internet addiction as an impulse-control disorder that does

<sup>4</sup> NEŠPOR, K.: Kto zvládne craving, zvládne aj závislosť. In *Bedeker zdravia špeciál. Ako zvládať nelátkové závislosti*, 2015, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> SEJČOVÁ, L.: *Mladí v sieti závislostí*. Bratislava : Album, 2011, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> VONDRÁČKOVÁ, P., VACEK, J.: Závislostné správanie na internete. In *Sociálna prevencia – Prevencia nelátkových návykových chorôb*. 2009, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> YOUNG, K.: *Caught in the Net: How to recognize the signs of Internet addiction and a winning strategy for recovery*. New Jersey : John Wiley&Sons, 1998, p. 13.

not require any intoxication and is similar to pathological gambling. Meerker et al. state that behaviour referred to as Internet addiction involves excessive Internet use leading to serious problems in the psychosocial and professional fields. The inability to stop using the computer, a strong need to spend more and more time on computer, neglecting duties (work, personal), neglecting family and friends, lying the family about the length of time spent at the computer and others are to be classified as the most common symptoms of PCU by J. Benkovič<sup>8</sup>. It is worth mentioning that computers themselves do not cause addiction in the strict sense of the word. However, they cause a strong desire or urge to work on computer and subsequent problems with self-control. K. Young, psychologist and the founder of so-called *Netaddiction*, Centre for Online Addiction (1995), divides the addictive behaviour on the Internet into five basic categories:

- a) addiction to virtual sexuality which is manifested by the compulsive use of websites with pornographic content,
- b) addiction to virtual relationships,
- c) internet compulsions such as playing online computer games or online shopping,
- d) information overload which may include excessive surfing the Internet or searching online databases,
- e) computer addiction, most commonly referred to as excessive gaming.<sup>9</sup>

Several studies have, however, confirmed that one does not develop an addiction to the Internet in general but rather to specific Internet applications or websites. Social networks and applications enabling two-way communication belong to the most addictive ones. The TOP 10 most used applications in Slovakia include Messenger, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber (communication) Wish (shopping), George Go (banking), Weather & Radar (weather forecast) and Dances from Fortnite (entertainment).<sup>10</sup>

### 3 The Main Goal and Methodology of the Research

The main goal of the paper is to examine the issue of Internet addiction and its subjectively perceived potential increase in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in young adults, based on theoretical background and empirical research. When examining these contexts, a quantitative research strategy was used because it results in diverse data. The basic tool of the quantitative research was a self-designed questionnaire which contained several questions of various nature. When evaluating and interpreting the research results, the methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison as well as generalization of data or their graphical representation were used. Since the research was exploratory (the current state of the Internet use, amount of time spent online, subjective perception of the increase in the Internet addiction in the context of the coronavirus pandemic were investigated), in this case, the hypotheses were not formulated but several assumptions were made, based on the comparison of the literature and previous research of the issue. For the sake of this paper, the following assumptions were made:

1. We assume that most respondents spend their free time during the COVID-19 pandemic most frequently using digital media and technologies.

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<sup>8</sup> BENKOVIČ, J.: Niektoré klady a zápory virtuálneho sveta počítačových hier a internetu. In: *Sociálna prevencia*, 2014, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> VONDRÁČKOVÁ, P., VACEK, J.: Závislostné správanie na internete. In *Sociálna prevencia – Prevencia nelátkových návykových chorôb*. 2009, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 5.

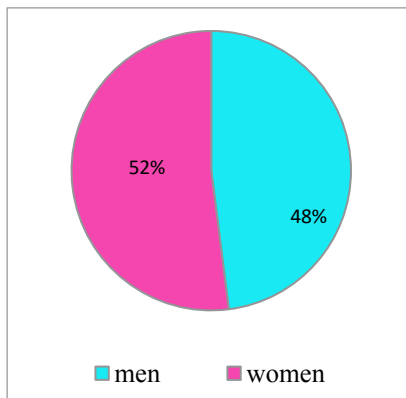
<sup>10</sup> KAPUSTA, M.: *Toto je TOP10 Android aplikácií, ktoré s'ahujú Slováci najčastejšie*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018. [online]. [2020-10-13]. Available at: <<https://www.mojandroid.sk/top-android-aplikacie-slovensko-05-2018/>>.

2. We assume that most respondents spend much more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic than before.
3. We assume that most respondents do not subjectively perceive that they have become Internet-addicted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. We assume that for most respondents, the Internet medium is the source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

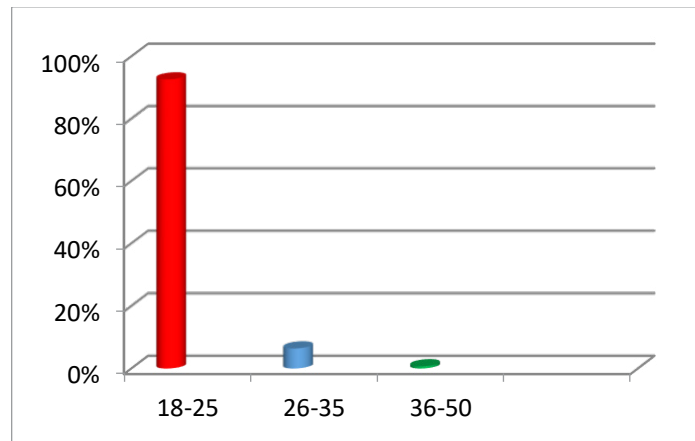
The obtained data were analyzed and evaluated, and certain conclusions and opinions were drawn from them which are presented in the following chapter of the paper.

#### 4 Interpretation of Research Results

In the first part of the questionnaire, the demographic data of the respondents (sex, age) were found out. The survey involved 687 respondents, with almost 93 % of the respondents aged 18-25. In the following graphic overviews, the identification data of the research sample respondents are presented.

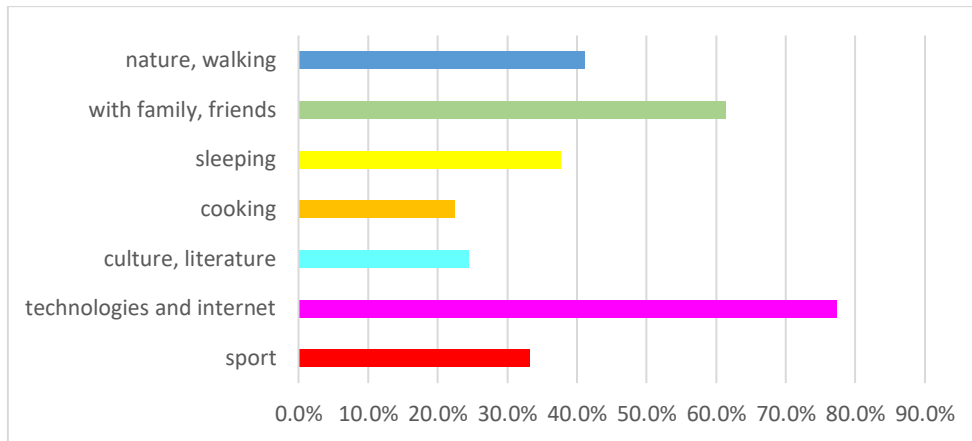


Graph 1: Sex of the respondents  
Source: Own processing



Graph 2: Age of the respondents  
Source: Own processing

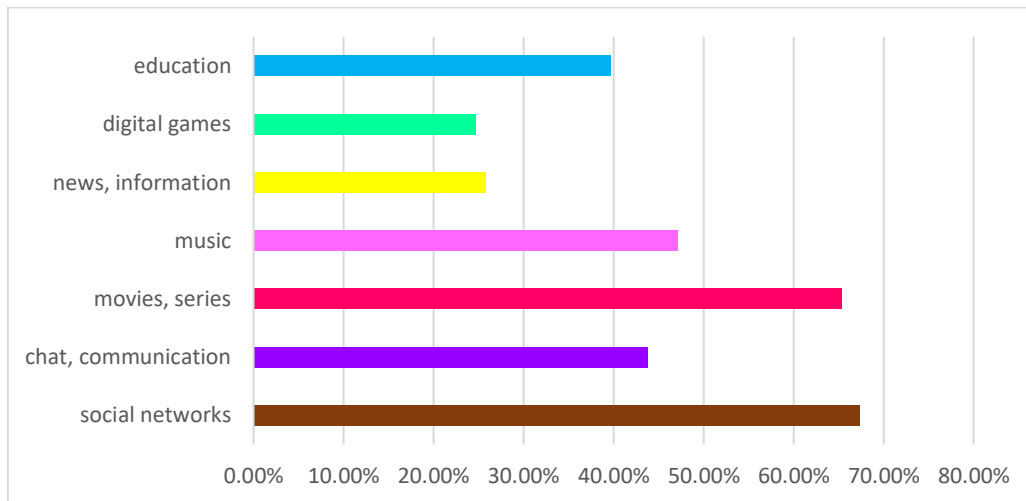
In the introductory part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked how they most often spend their free time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents could choose out of three options – they could mark a maximum of three activities. The aim of the question was to find out whether the use of the Internet and digital technologies is really as massive as some research carried out in this context in our research sample indicates. The results brought interesting findings – the most preferred free-time activity of the respondents was the use of available information and communication technologies and the Internet. As many as 77.4 % of the respondents marked this option. The respondents also prefer to spend time with their family and friends (61.4 %) and in the countryside (41.2 %). Almost 38 % of the respondents stated that they prefer to sleep in their free time, a third of the respondents are inclined to sports activities. It was disappointing that only 24.5 % of the respondents mentioned cultural activities (literature, listening to music, watching films, etc.) as a way of spending free time. It can be noted in this respect that the *assumption no. 1 that most of the respondents spend their free time during the COVID-19 most often by using digital media and technologies was confirmed.*



**Graph 3: Spending free time during COVID-19**

Source: Own processing

With respect to spending time online the respondents were asked which activities they prefer to carry out in cyberspace. Following social networks such as Facebook and Instagram became the most popular activity of the research sample – this option was marked by almost 68 % of the respondents. Watching series, movies, videos or vlogs is also very popular, preferred by more than 65 % of the respondents. Other activities that the research sample likes to carry out in the online environment include listening to music (47.2 %), communication and chatting (43.8 %) and playing digital games (24.7 %). It is encouraging that almost 40 % of the respondents also use the Internet for educational purposes (outside of educational process itself), and approximately 26 % of the respondents most often search for new information and read news.

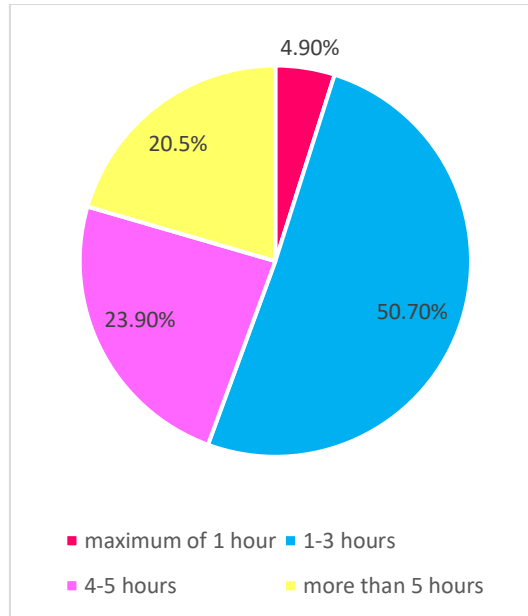


**Graph 4: Spending time online**

Source: Own processing

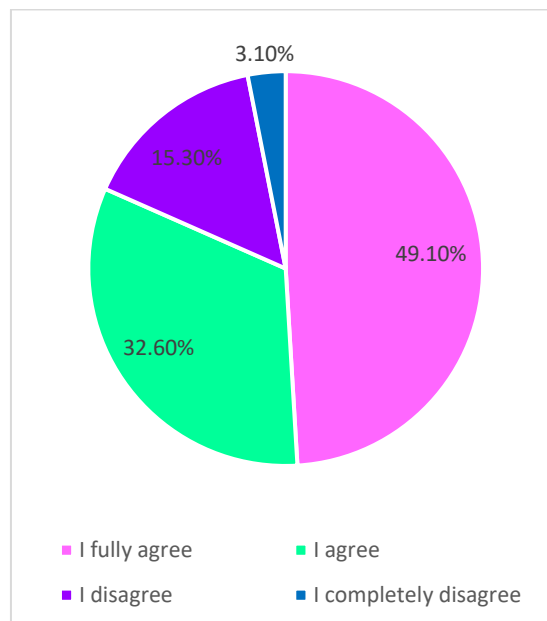
Other question dealt with the amount of time the respondents spent online per day before the COVID-19 pandemic. The answers delivered the desired results, with most respondents stating that they used to spend about 1-3 hours a day online each day. Almost 24 % of the respondents were online 4-5 hours a day and one fifth of the sample even more than 5 hours a day. Less than 5 % of the respondents said they used to be online for a maximum of one hour a day before the pandemic. In this respect, the next question asked whether it is true that the respondents spend much more time online using the Internet and digital media during the COVID-19 pandemic than in the period before its outbreak. Almost 82 % of all the respondents are in favour of this

fact, of which about 50 % of the respondents fully agree and state that they spend much more time online during the pandemic. Approximately 15 % of the respondents gave a dissenting opinion and 3 % of them do not agree with this statement at all. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the **assumption no. 2** that most of the respondents spend much more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic than before **was confirmed**.



**Graph 5: Spending time online per day before pandemic**

Source: Own processing



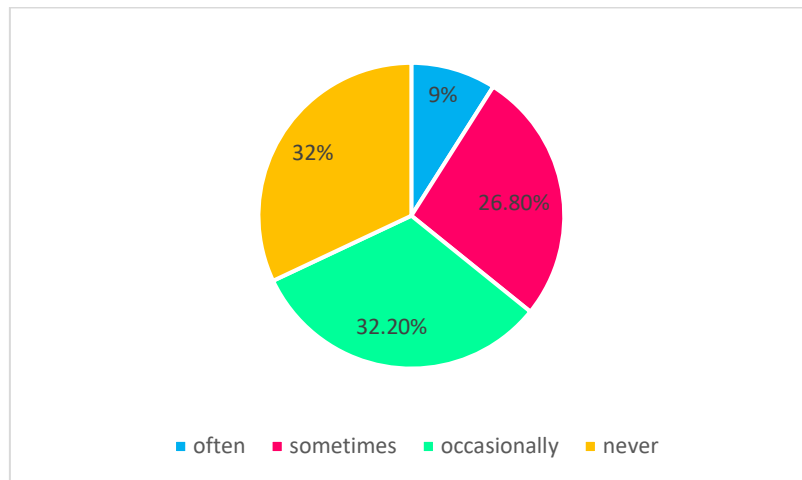
**Graph 6: During pandemic I spend much more time online.**

Source: Own processing

Other questions were focused on the context of addictive behaviour and Internet addiction, too. In question no. 8 the respondents were asked whether they felt they were addicted to the Internet before the pandemic. Thirty-two per cent of the research group have never had this feeling, almost one third of the respondents admit that they have already experienced the feelings of addiction, although occasionally. Approximately 27 % of the respondents stated they had ever

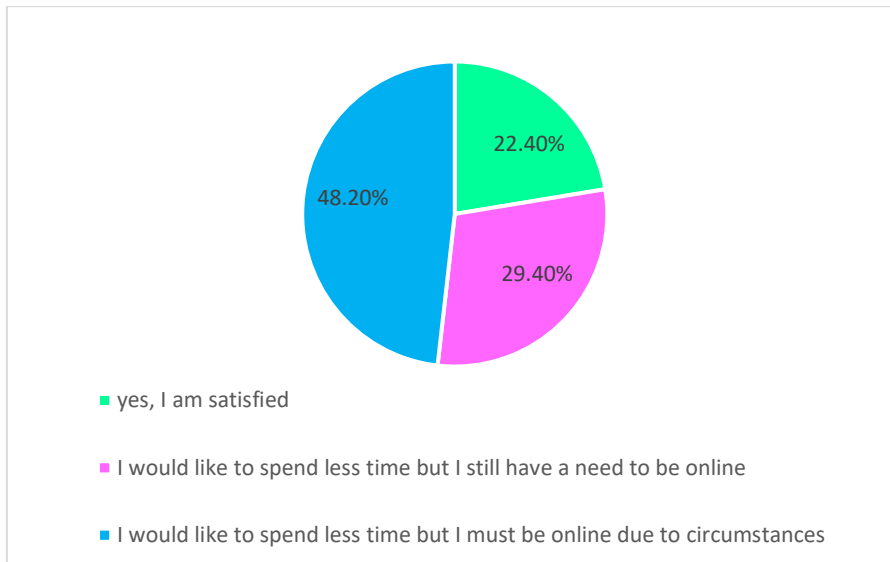


felt to be addicted and 9 % of them confessed to have experienced Internet addiction in the pre-pandemic period really often. Since it is clear that the pandemic has brought new situations into our lives and all aspects of life that could be digitized have moved to the virtual environment, the respondents also confirmed (89.1 %) that most of their activities were shifted to the online space. However, in addition to new habits among Internet and communication technologies users, this shift has also brought a number of negative feelings that the respondents had to deal with. The most frequently negative feelings reported were stress (49.3 %), anxiety (35.2 %) and depression reported by more than 30 % of the respondents.



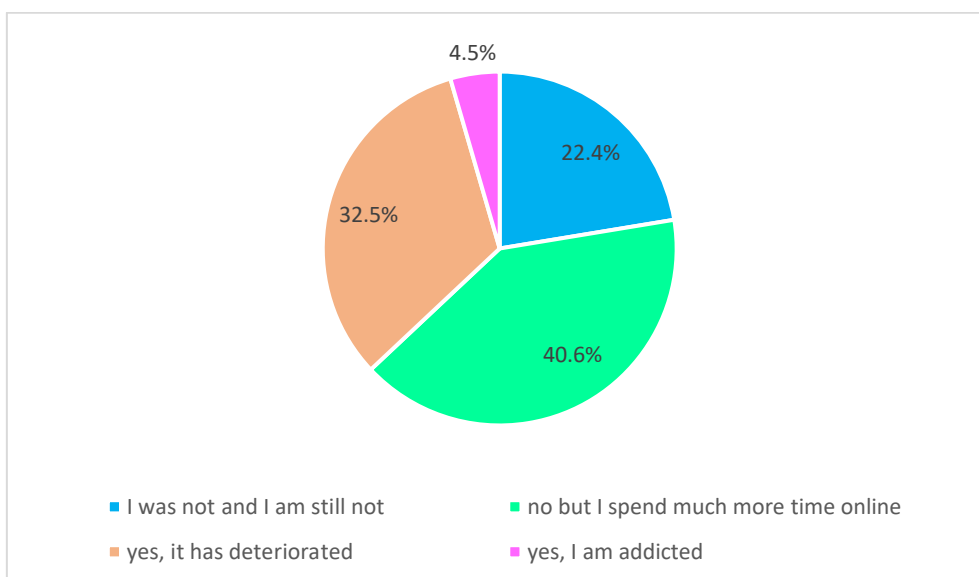
**Graph 7: Subjective perception of Internet addiction before the COVID-19 pandemic**  
Source: Own processing

The question no. 9 sought to find out how satisfied the respondents are with the amount of time they currently spend online. Approximately 22 % of the respondents said they were satisfied with the current situation and the amount of time spent online. The interesting finding was that almost 30 % of the research sample said they were not satisfied and would like to spend less time being connected – however, they still have a specific but unspecified need to be online. It is this result that may send a clear message about the users whose behaviour shows signs of addiction to the Internet. Less than half of the research sample is not satisfied with the amount of time spent online – but work and study circumstances require their presence in cyberspace.



**Graph 8: Satisfaction with the amount of time spent online during the COVID-19 pandemic**  
Source: Own processing

The question no. 10 was very important for the research. It sought to find out the respondents' subjective evaluation of the degree of their Internet addiction – they were asked whether they felt that they had become more addicted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 22 % contested this option and claimed not to be addicted and even not to have been addicted in the past. Most respondents (40.6 %) said that they did not consider themselves to be addicted but admitted that they spent much more time in cyberspace than before the pandemic. Almost one third of the research group admits that the pandemic and the shift to the virtual environment have caused an exacerbation of their Internet and digital media addiction, and approximately 5 % of the respondents clearly stated that they were addicted. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the **assumption no. 3** that most respondents do not subjectively perceive to have become Internet addicts during the COVID-19 pandemics **was only partially confirmed**. Exactly 63 % of the respondents said that they did not become addicted during the pandemic but more than 40 % of them admitted that the time spent online was significantly extended during the pandemic.



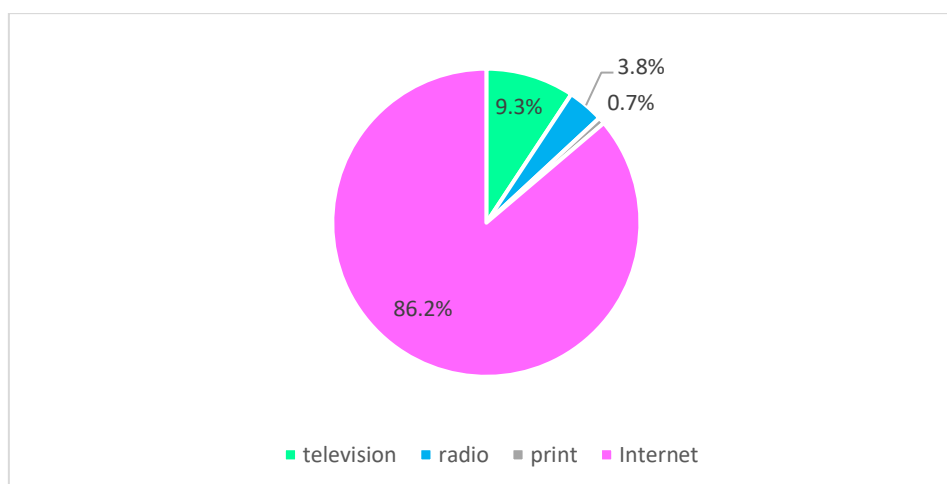
**Graph 9: Subjective perception of Internet addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic**  
Source: Own processing

Also, a brief category of questions concerning the sources of information on the current situation in connection with the spread of coronavirus was included in the research. Therefore, the question no. 13 sought to find out which media the respondents draw information about the current state and development from. The respondents' answers brought the expected results as 86.2 % of the whole research group stated that they drew information on this topic mainly from the Internet. Approximately 9 % of the respondents prefer television and especially television news as a source of information. Radio is considered to be the dominant information medium by 3.8 % of the respondents and print media are used only by a negligible number of 0.7 % of the respondents. Based on the results of the research, it can be clearly conducted that the **assumption no. 4 that the medium of the Internet is the prominent source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic for the majority of the respondents was confirmed.**

In this context, the respondents' preferences within specific web news portals when drawing information about the pandemic were investigated. More than 45 % of the respondents stated that they considered the news portal *aktuality.sk* to be the most reliable source of information about COVID-19. The respondents also included the SME daily (36.4 %) and *Denník N* (34.5 %) among reliable media. In a big surprise, almost 19 % of the respondents consider the main daily source of information to be the Internet daily *Hlavné správy* which can clearly be classified as disinformation or conspiracy medium. As the respondents state it, the daily *Pravda* (9.2 %) and the daily *Hospodárske noviny* (13 %) are among the less credible source. About a fifth of the respondents do not consider any medium or web portal to be credible. The option "other" involved foreign media, the government website *korona.gov.sk* or television TA3. However, the results involved also other interesting sources such as the Facebook satirical profile *Zomri*, the tabloid website *topky.sk*, the official website of the Ministry of Health and some respondents stated that they did not follow the information about the COVID-19 pandemic in the media at all. In conclusion, a relatively new term of ever increasing importance – *infodemic* is worth mentioning. From the etymological point of view, it combines the concepts of information and epidemic and refers to the rapid and far-reaching dissemination of relevant, but often inaccurate information, especially about diseases. When there is a situation where facts, rumours and concerns are mixed and dispersed, it is very difficult to obtain relevant and truthful basic information on the subject, in this respect about the COVID-19 pandemic. It can therefore be stated that we are living in an age of the fight against the epidemic but also in an age of the fight against the infodemic. One can only agree with the statement of WHO Director-General T. Adhan Gebreyesus<sup>11</sup> who stated in February 2020: „False news are spreading faster and easier than coronavirus.“

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<sup>11</sup> *Words We're Watching: 'Infodemic'*. [online]. [2020-10-19]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/words-were-watching-infodemic-meaning>>.



**Graph 10: Preferred media as a source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic**

Source: Own processing

## Conclusion

The year 2020 has brought fundamental changes in the functioning of society in the global context. It is particularly marked by the emergence and long-term presence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic which, in addition to several new principles of existence, has caused significant digitization in the fields of work and education. This undoubtedly implies new habits in the use of digital media and information and communication technologies. The aim of this paper was to examine how the pandemic affected the use of the Internet in young users and the time they spend online as well as the subjective perception of the degree of Internet addiction in young adults. The research results provided interesting data, with most respondents confirming that the amount of time spent online is several times higher than before the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, several respondents admitted to be Internet addicts and the pandemic has exacerbated this addiction. Everybody is addicted to the Internet to some extent, just as we are dependent on electricity, for example. Network or data connection are available everywhere. However, the line between normal and excessive use of the Internet is very thin and as soon as we notice warning signs and evidence similar to other behavioral addictions in us or the others, it is inevitable to start talking about the problem or seek professional help. Therefore, we consider it very important to carry out various prevention events and projects. In the academic world, we consider it essential to carry out research focused on this topic and to disseminate the results as well as the possibilities of solutions among the general public. In conclusion, it is also possible to appeal to the constant development of digital and media literacy, information hygiene as well as to emphasize the presence of disinformation media that can negatively affect the axiological and gnoseological aspects of world perception, especially in the age groups of young adults.

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# INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SUSTAINABLE FASHION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Dana Hodinková – Oľga Púchovská

## Abstract

In the era of digital revolution, which is closely tied with the so-called “fashion revolution”, digital opinion leaders come to the foreground – microcelebrities or influencers whose presence in social media is particularly relevant for younger generations of consumers. One can also point out the negative impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on the working conditions of social media influencers despite the fact that our current situation has forced us all to move into the online environment, which presupposes increased exposure of social media influencers. The aim of this case study is to map out the specifics of engagement of social media influencers in sustainable fashion during the Covid-19 global pandemic and show the specific aspects connected with influencer marketing, but also the activities of select social media influencers operating in sustainable fashion, primarily focusing on the period of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe.

## Key words:

Covid-19. Fashion Revolution. Influencer Marketing. Sustainability. Transparency.

## Introduction

Influencer marketing is an important component of the brand marketing mix.<sup>1</sup> The professional website SocialMediaToday<sup>2</sup> notes that up to 94% of the marketers who use influencer marketing see it as a very effective tool with the potential to reach a ROI level up to 11 times higher than the traditional forms of advertising (e.g. print, TV, web). Nowadays the leading influencer networks (where the communication occurs most frequently) include Instagram (99%), Facebook (70%), Snapchat (46%) and Twitter (42%).<sup>3</sup> The importance of influencers and the broader concept of influencer marketing is supported by the very nature of social media and networks that aim to create a complex digital marketplace, and their potential is also reflected by the brands in the textile and clothing industry and beauty and body care.<sup>4</sup> Influencer marketing may be based on *barter cooperation*, *paid cooperation*, *press events* or *cooperation within the corporate communication channels*.<sup>5</sup> Despite the numerous possibilities of cooperation with a potential even during the periods of social distancing, some influencers lost up to 95% of planned cooperation in 2020.<sup>6</sup> The unfavorable situation associated with Covid-19 can be easily labeled as potentially life threatening in relation to influencer marketing. On the other hand, the corona crisis has forced us all to move to the online environment, which presupposes a natural and native/organic environment for the influencers,

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<sup>1</sup> TABOR, E.: *Credibility And Trust Are Key To Authentic Influencer Marketing*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-08] Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/04/08/credibility-and-trust-are-key-to-authentic-influencer-marketing/#4cc4079d48ed>>.

<sup>2</sup> WILTSHIRE, E.: *The Brand Value of Influencer Marketing in 2018 [Infographic]*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/the-brand-value-of-influencer-marketing-in-2018-infographic/520810/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> NATÉ, T.: *Creative Summit. Tina Naté: Ako využiť influencer marketing čo najefektívnejšie*. 2018. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.creativesummit.sk/blog/influencer-marketing/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> BISHOP, K.: *The pandemic and the influencer: will the lifestyle survive coronavirus?*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/may/02/influencers-coronavirus-future-income-marketing-lifestyle>>.

and stands in stark contradiction to the above statement. Although the corona crisis is an acute state of emergency, we must not forget our climate and the ongoing climate change, which together with the impact of the corona crisis can greatly deepen the climate crisis whose uncontrolled culmination may be a direct threat to world population. It is therefore very important to raise awareness of the environment (e.g. in matters of renewable and clean energy, recycling, sustainable lifestyle, etc.) and engage the population (e.g. through the aforementioned concept of sustainable fashion because fashion industry produces up to 10% of carbon emissions and uses up to 20% of the total consumption of water). Sustainable fashion has over the years become an important phenomenon notoriously linked to the concepts of *swapping*, *second-hand attire*, *slow and fast fashion*, *organic clothing*, *local production*, *recycled materials* and *minimalism*.<sup>7</sup> The primary objective of the present study is to map the specific engagement of influencers in the field of sustainable fashion on social media with a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the use of content analysis as a research method, the research part reflects not only specific aspects associated with influencer marketing, but also the aspects of activity of selected influencers operating in the field of sustainable fashion, focusing on the period of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe (approximately from January 2020 when the first cases were recorded in Europe, to June 2020 when the number of infected in most European countries showed a downward trend). We tracked the pair of Instagram profiles – *Natália Pažická* (@nataliapazicka) and *Melisa Minca* (@Melisaminca).

## 1 The Concept of Social Media Influencers

As early as in 2016, Google published a study highlighting the impact of youtubers as a new category of referrers on the behavior, preferences and values of the millennials.<sup>8</sup> Up to 70% of the respondents considered youtubers to be more credible and relevant compared to the so-called traditional celebrities, the central pillar being the true potential of online communities around the personality and its interaction with the “audience”. These persons are then perceived as the so-called trendsetters, i.e. persons with the potential to shape the culture and society and affect the buying decisions of their audience (and not only them). Social media influencers thus extend the category of referrers with their specific operations in the environment of social media where blogs, statuses, the so-called “stories”, tweets etc. are becoming the pivotal means of communication.<sup>9</sup> The characteristic features of this phenomenon are determined by the specifics of social media and Web 2.0, which is an environment supporting collaboration of users and simultaneous self-presentation by sharing various forms of content created by the respective authors. The attributes of social media and the general technological predisposition associated with Web 2.0 gave the users an opportunity to produce and, in particular, instantly share various forms of content within a specific community of users, paving way for the potential of user generated content (UGC). Thanks to the opportunities offered by social media, ordinary Internet and social media users have become “celebrities” with their own online audience.<sup>10</sup> In the Slovak context, we can mention the original creators of game tutorials or the

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<sup>7</sup> *Sustainable Fashion Matterz*. *Understanding sustainable fashion, and what it means to you*. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.sustainablefashionmatterz.com/what-is-sustainable-fashion>>.

<sup>8</sup> O'NEIL-HART, C., BLUMENSTEIN, H.: *Why YouTube stars are more influential than traditional celebrities*. 2016. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-strategies/video/youtube-stars-influence/>>.

<sup>9</sup> FREBERG, K., GRAHAM, K., McGAUGHEY, K., FREBERG, L.A.: Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. In *Public Relations Review*, 2011, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 91-92.

<sup>10</sup> MIKULÁŠ, P., CHALÁNYOVÁ, O.: Digital and Traditional: Perception of contemporary celebrity by adolescents. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Critique in media, critique of media*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 127-128.

so-called “unboxing” videos – YouTuber Selassie or Gogo. However, the potential of UGC (e.g. video, eBooks, infographics, memes and others) can be used in almost any area – ranging from food, through fashion and travel, to lifestyle. The very lifestyle and approach to values can be considered a central pillar of communication of the personalities involved in ecology, sustainability and reflecting on the acute need for solutions to the ecological crisis. When using the technological potential of the platforms combined with their passion in the matter, these personalities may represent a specific category of influencers that overlaps with the concept of opinion leaders.

Some “creators”, as the today’s influencers term themselves, acquired significant skills in creating sophisticated content (stories, video, visuals), which rather quickly earned them mass audiences thanks to the viral nature of their content.<sup>11</sup> It must be pointed out in this context that Du and Li<sup>12</sup> consider the increasing number of followers to be the first phase in the transition from social media users to social media influencers. The concept of “creators” as a gradual alternative to influencers is also mentioned by Influencer Marketing Hub<sup>13</sup>, however, this website stresses that influencers should not be regarded as a "tool", but rather an asset in terms of their relationships and social circles. Building the relationships is nowadays largely determined by the actual content we use to communicate with the target group, which should ideally reflect the mutually shared values.<sup>14</sup> Given the importance of the influencers’ marketing perspective, we also need to mention the approach of Freberg et al.<sup>15</sup> who defines SMI as a new type of independent referrers influencing the attitudes of their audiences through blogs, tweets and other forms of social media communication, with authentic communication<sup>16</sup> as the basic element of their influence. The very authenticity is a fundamental attribute of communication, and it is required by the recipients themselves – it increases the reception rate of information, fosters the perceived quality and boosts the purchasing intentions.<sup>17</sup> Campbell et al.<sup>18</sup> attribute the current boom in social media influencers to several mechanisms. The transition of consumers seeking information from offline to online environment, different responses to online forms of promotion, increase in time spent online in the social media

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<sup>11</sup> AUDREZET, A., DE KERVILER, G., MOULARD, J. G.: Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 1, p. 558-568.

<sup>12</sup> DU, T.C., LI, F.: Maximizing micro-blog influence in online promotion. In *Expert Systems with Applications*. 2017, Vol. 70, No. 1, p. 53-65.

<sup>13</sup> *What Is an Influencer?*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/>>.

<sup>14</sup> BAKHTIARI, K.: *Influencer Fatigue Sets Stage For A New Generation Of Creators*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kianbakhtiari/2020/04/06/influencer-fatigue-sets-the-stage-for-a-new-generation-of-creators/#634d8ecf2535>>; HODINKOVÁ, D., SPÁLOVÁ, L.: Influenciari a občianska participácia v otázke migrácie – reflexia in/kongruencie sociálneho posolstva a identity influencerera v prostredí sociálnych sietí. In *Dot.comm*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 29. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <[https://www.eamm.eu/dot-comm-pdf/2020\\_01.pdf](https://www.eamm.eu/dot-comm-pdf/2020_01.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> FREBERG, K., GRAHAM, K., MCGAUGHEY, K., FREBERG, L.A.: Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. In *Public Relations Review*, 2011, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 91-92.

<sup>16</sup> See also: SCOTT, D. M.: *The new rules of marketing and PR : How to use social media, online video, mobile applications, blogs, news releases, and viral marketing to reach buyers directly*. New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015.

<sup>17</sup> AUDREZET, A., DE KERVILER, G., MOULARD, J. G.: Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 1, p. 557-569.

<sup>18</sup> CAMPBELL, C., GRIMM, P. E.: The challenges native advertising poses Exploring potential federal trade commission responses and identifying research needs. In *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 2019, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 111-122.



environment, and the tendency to spend time with people in the community with the same interests – all underscore the importance of social media influencers.

## 2 Trends Resonating in the Textile and Clothing Industry

Textile and clothing industry is currently the most dynamic and also the most risky sector in the global economy, and it belongs to the oldest and most widespread manufacturing sectors.<sup>19</sup> *Textile industry* inherently includes research, design, development and production of fibers and fabrics that have a significant impact on the environment and use of natural resources both in the production phase and in the consumption process. *Clothing industry* (or also called *fashion industry*) focuses primarily on the life cycle and production of clothing and other textile products (e.g. household textiles, footwear and accessories).<sup>20</sup> The development of this industry is closely linked to the society's approach to clothing, with two prominent tendencies, which are related in meaning<sup>21</sup> – *transparency* and *sustainability*. The issue of transparency in the textile and clothing industry is analyzed by the *Fashion Revolution*<sup>22</sup> initiative (other similar initiatives include e.g. Know the Chain, Cradle to Cradle, Ethical Trade, GOTS certification, etc.)<sup>23</sup>, which regularly compiles the transparency ranking of brands and chains, *the so-called Fashion Transparency Index*<sup>24</sup>. The transparency of *250 world's most prominent fashion brands and chains* is determined by the level of information provided on their social and environmental production processes and sales practices – i.e. where, by whom and under what conditions the clothing is produced, what dyes are used in the fabric, what fabric is used, whether the production is environmentally friendly etc. According to recent results, only one brand (H&M) earned a score higher than 70%, an average score of 23% was achieved by 58 brands, and 10 evaluated brands have a score of 0%. Sustainability in the textile and clothing industry is associated with two opposing concepts – *fast fashion* and *slow fashion*. The former, i.e. *fast fashion*, is dominant: it is characterized by rapid production, rapid consumption, low product price and the ultimately problematic disposal of bulky textile waste with negative impacts on the environment. In the case of *slow fashion*, which is one of the hallmarks of our age, one can talk about a revolution in the perception of fashion itself. The proponents of this concept boycott mass production, international chains and seasonal fashion pieces that are often just a short-term fad. The primary focus is on quality of apparel and respect for the environment, which is embodied by a number of local designer brands (such as the Slovak HEAVENLY, Pohan, Láskovo, YOGIness, MiLE and others)<sup>25</sup>, focusing on the production of design pieces of high

<sup>19</sup> SINGH, S., KHAJURIA, R.: Penicillium Enzymes for the Textile Industry. In GUPTA, V. K., RODRIGUEZ-COUTO, S. (eds.): *New and Future Developments in Microbial Biotechnology and Bioengineering*. London : Elsevier, 2018, p. 202-214. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780444635013000119>>.

<sup>20</sup> *Commission staff working document – Sustainable garment value chains through EU development action*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017, p. 6-7. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10102/2017/EN/SWD-2017-147-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>>.

<sup>21</sup> GARDNER, T.A. et al.: Transparency and sustainability in global commodity supply chains. In *World Development*, 2019, Vol. 121, No. C, p. 164-176. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X18301736>>.

<sup>22</sup> *Fashion Relovution*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ako sa zorientovať vo svete módného priemyslu? Heslo: transparentnosť*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.sumne.sk/l/komplikovana-tema-transparentnosti-alebo-ako-skutocne-vediet-za-co-davam-svoje-peniaze/>>.

<sup>24</sup> *The Fashion Transparency Index 2020*. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency/>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Slovenské módné značky, ktoré dokazujú, že slow fashion vieme nakúpiť aj lokálne*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://nasebio-eko.sk/slovenske-znacky-slow-fashion/>>;

quality, but at higher prices – the consumer, however, buys high-quality hand-made clothes that can withstand more (and especially longer) than cheaper clothing of commercial brands that are put under pressure by the consumers to rethink their production approaches and implement the sustainability principles into their value chains.



**Figure 1: Seven forms of sustainable fashion as seen by the consumers and producers**

Source: *About Anna Brismar*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.greenstrategy.se/about-us/anna-brismar/>>. ; *Seven forms of sustainable fashion*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.greenstrategy.se/sustainable-fashion/seven-forms-of-sustainable-fashion/>>.

According to dr. Anna Brismar<sup>26</sup>, the founder and owner of consulting company *Green Strategy*, which focuses on the issue of circular and sustainable fashion in the textile and clothing industry, the various forms of sustainable fashion (Figure 1) should be ideally combined in each newly manufactured piece of clothing. This should be manufactured upon request and customized ("*On demand & Custom made*"), in high quality and timeless design ("*High Quality & Timeless*"), organically ("*Green & Clean*") and with a view to various ethical issues ("*Fair & Ethical*"). The clothes should be in effective use as long as possible, especially through appropriate care, minor fixes, or a complete rework ("*Repair, Redesign, & Upcycle*"). If the product is no longer suitable (or interesting) for its original owner, it should be put into collection bins, donated to charity, friends, relatives or second-hand stores to extend its useful life ("*Rent, Lease & Swap*" in conjunction with "*Secondhand & Vintage*"). If the piece of clothing is completely worn out, it is best to dispose of it at a collection point for the recycling of clothing and textile so that it can then be later reused in the production of new clothing and other textile products (e.g. centers for reuse<sup>27</sup> where items are repaired and offered for subsequent reuse – damaged clothing may be turned e.g. into woven carpets). The purchase of a new piece of clothing can be further replaced by lease, rent or exchange for other clothing that no we longer plan to use ("*Rent, Lease & Swap*"), or we can consider buying clothing in a second hand store or purchase clothing that is second-hand, but modified ("*Secondhand & Vintage*"), e.g. we may create new clothing by combining several pieces of deprecated clothing.

The dissemination of knowledge on this issue is particularly suitable for social media influencers who can present themselves as opinion leaders (with a certain degree of

HAGAROVÁ, K.: *Šetríte planétu a podporte lokálny dizajn. 5 slovenských značiek, ktoré učarujú každému*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.interez.sk/usetrite-planetu-a-podporte-lokalny-dizajn-5-slovenskych-znaciek-ktore-ucaruju-kazdemu/>>.

<sup>26</sup> *About Anna Brismar*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.greenstrategy.se/about-us/anna-brismar/>>. ; *Seven forms of sustainable fashion*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.greenstrategy.se/sustainable-fashion/seven-forms-of-sustainable-fashion/>>.

<sup>27</sup> MOŇOK, B., PLÁNICKA, R.: *ODPADY – príručka o znižovaní vzniku a triedenom zbere komunálnych odpadov*. Košice : Priatelia Zeme – SPZ, 2015, p. 21-22. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <[http://www.nulaodpadu.sk/files/Odpady\\_prirucka.pdf/](http://www.nulaodpadu.sk/files/Odpady_prirucka.pdf/)>.

terminological inaccuracy). In the context of sustainable and ethical fashion, the following Instagrammers stand in the forefront globally – Kathleen/@consciouschic, Michelle/@michelleforgood or Amber/@theconsciouscut.<sup>28</sup> Actually, in the Slovak context, there are only two relevant ratings available that include the influencers operating in the rather unique category of socially and environmentally ethical fashion. The Forbes ranking<sup>29</sup> of influencers in general is based on the assessment by IPI score<sup>30</sup>. In this ranking, a total of 20 influencers were identified: the first place is held by the fashion consultant, stylist and fashion blogger Janatiny whose posts discuss high fashion, but are also balanced by her reflections on the potential of secondhand products. The 10th place in this ranking goes to Natália Pažická, an activist and author of sustainability initiatives #everyindividualmatters, who also reveals important facts about fast fashion and disseminates knowledge on social media about the unethical practices of well-known fashion brands and balances this negative information with the presentation of information on the opportunities in the so-called ethical and sustainable fashion. She also directly encourages purchases in second-hand shops where the production meets the criteria for a sustainable fashion brand. Another specific ranking of Instagrammers active in the area of lifestyle and fashion is provided by RedBull<sup>31</sup>, which identified 10 involved Slovak Instagrammers, with Petra Macková/@Pepamack a Zuzka Gašparovičová/@zuzstories presenting minimalism and sustainable fashion in their profiles. However, Melisa Minca/@melisaminca, the owner of MM – a brand focused on ethical clothing, clearly stands out in the crowd thanks to her professional activities in sustainable fashion.

### 3 Case Study Activities of Selected Influencers in Sustainable Fashion in the Period of the First Wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Slovakia

The definition of a *case study* as a research approach defines it as a holistic approach that seeks to understand the constitutive components of a particular case, capture the studied case (or several cases) in a real life context, and arrive at a deeper understanding of the case.<sup>32</sup> It differs from other types of studies (e.g. ethnographic, phenomenological or biographical), while it includes an intensive analysis and description of a standalone unit or system, which is bounded by time and space.<sup>33</sup> A case study can also be seen as a detailed study of one or a few cases in an attempt to capture the complexity of the case and describe the relationships in their entirety, hoping that a thorough examination of one case can help us better understand other similar cases.<sup>34</sup> In our study, we use the *multiple exploratory case study* approach, which explores the hitherto unknown or little-known patterns of relations in the examined phenomenon and its

<sup>28</sup> SPOLJARIC, S.: *16 Ethical Fashion Instagram Influencers Who Will Inspire You To Have A More Conscious Closet*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/ethical-fashion-instagram-influencers>>.

<sup>29</sup> 2020. *Králi internetu. Kto je TOP influencer na Slovensku?*. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/top-influencer-2020/#hello>>.

<sup>30</sup> Remark by the authors: IPI – influencer power index score is calculated on the basis of the influencer's fame, potential reach, popularity and connection to the brand, and it also considers the “influence funnel” or “potential influence of influencers”.

<sup>31</sup> *10 slovenských instagrameriek, ktorým štýl určite nechýba*. Released in 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.redbull.com/sk-sk/to-najlepsie-z-instagramu-slovensko-local-bloggerky-moda-lifestyle>>.

<sup>32</sup> MAREŠ, J.: Tvorba případových studií pro výzkumné účely. In *Pedagogika*, 2015, Vol. 65, No. 2, p. 116. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://pages.pedf.cuni.cz/pedagogika/?p=11212&lang=cs>>.

<sup>33</sup> VASILOVÁ, M.: Využitie prípadových štúdií ako výskumnej metódy v marketingu. In *Vedecké state Obchodnej fakulty 2013*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2013, p. 648.

<sup>34</sup> HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní metody a aplikace*. Prague : Portál, 2005, p. 104.

context.<sup>35</sup> Our detailed analysis is focusing on the communications of two social media influencers active in sustainable fashion. Although the phenomenon of sustainable fashion is currently a leading topic notoriously linked to the fashion industry and these ideas are presented by a large amount of well-known media personalities (even celebrities like Eva Mendes and Gwen Stefany buy clothing in second hand stores)<sup>36</sup>, a deeper scientific analysis and popularization of this issue in terms of its broader establishment in the context of social media influencers is so far absent at least in Central Europe. This is why we decided to conduct a study mapping the specifics of presentation of this issue in two select online personalities who are active in this area – *Natália Pažická* and *Melissa Minca*.

### 3.1 Research Problem, Objective and Questions

The aim of this case study is to map out the specifics of engagement of social media influencers in sustainable fashion during the Covid-19 global pandemic and show the specific aspects connected with influencer marketing, and the activities of selected social media influencers operating in sustainable fashion, primarily focusing on the period of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. The formulated research objective and the subsequent research problem is based on two important and interrelated societal tendencies – *establishment of sustainable lifestyle* as a necessary orientation of our activities<sup>37</sup> in light of the current climate situation, and the current and ongoing *coronacrisis* with significant negative impacts on every aspect of the economy. In the case of sustainable lifestyle, the phenomenon of sustainable fashion comes to the foreground because this industry produces up to 20% of the world's waste and is the second largest consumer of water.<sup>38</sup> Sustainable fashion is therefore focused on eliminating the negative effects of the fashion industry on the environment and society by promoting accessibility and transparency in the sector.<sup>39</sup> The global Covid-19 pandemic has among other things resulted in the collapse of trade in the textile and clothing industry. As a result of the global economic downturn, closure of retail outlets and significantly limited online sales, many brands are in a dismal economic situation. The website of the *Fashion Revolution*<sup>40</sup> initiative states that the most affected link in the supply chain is also the weakest and most vulnerable one: the factory employees. The global brands canceled their orders, withheld payments for finished goods, and if any of the countries re-launched production, they demanded discounts on the products supplied. This situation could force the producers to pursue economically less demanding and environmentally friendlier procedures in order to reduce the potential losses and/or mitigate the effects of the coronacrisis. On the other hand, we can view the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reconceptualize the tendencies of the designers and consumers toward rational and modest consumption.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> VASILOVÁ, M.: Využitie prípadových štúdií ako výskumnej metódy v marketingu. In *Vedecké state Obchodnej fakulty 2013*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2013, p. 648.

<sup>36</sup> *Aj celebrity nakupujú v second-handoch!*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://zenskyweb.sk/aj-celebrity-nakupuju-v-second-handoch>>.

<sup>37</sup> DŽUPINA, M.: *Historické kontexty vzniku zodpovedného podnikania*. Nitra : UKF, 2013, p. 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> *On trend: sustainable fashion in the wake of COVID-19*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/trend-sustainable-fashion-wake-covid-19>>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *The impact of Covid-19 on the people who make our clothes*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/covid19/>>.

<sup>41</sup> *On trend: sustainable fashion in the wake of COVID-19*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/trend-sustainable-fashion-wake-covid-19>>.

To achieve our research objective, we ask the following basic question, which represents our research problem: *RP: What are the specifics of engagement of select representatives of the Slovak social media influencers in sustainable fashion on Instagram during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

To arrive at the answer to the above research problem, we can fragment it into partial research problems: *RP1.1. What are the specifics of the content communication strategy of select social media influencers active in sustainable fashion?* In the first partial research problem, we focus on identifying the present topics falling within the area of sustainable fashion, analyzing the frequency and space dedicated to this issue, and identifying the forms of content elements (e.g. tutorials, still photos, videos etc.) and cooperation with other influencers or brands in the surveyed sector. *RP1.2. How have the select social media influencers reflected on and integrated the issues associated with Covid-19 into the concept of their communication strategies?* In the second partial research problem, our research efforts revolve around the specific attributes of communication associated specifically with the issue Covid-19: our intention is to identify whether and to what extent the select influencers reflected on the pandemic and how it was integrated into the very structure of their posts (i.e. general recommendations about Covid-19, calls for creative social distancing, tutorials for making “sustainable” masks – disposable masks are yet another threat in terms of the ecological situation).

### 3.2 Research Methodology

In our case study, which involves various conceptual approaches, types of studies and specific aspects studied in particular case (or cases)<sup>42</sup>, we decided to use *content analysis* as a research method. This technique for the collection of empirical data is based on the work with social facts as bulk data, and the transfer of qualitative information to quantitative information.<sup>43</sup> It also has its use in the content analysis of Instagram user profiles, which also includes the analysis of photos and various technological features, such as hashtags (#) and tags (@).<sup>44</sup> Through content analysis, it is possible to search for, identify and formulate elements and phenomena, which can in turn be quantified. The content analysis used in this study represent qualitative-quantitative approach<sup>45</sup>, in which we identified and analyzed the following framework categories:

1. **General posts** – contributions presenting the life and broader lifestyle of the author without overlaps into fashion (e.g. photos from home, activities with friends, posts presenting other activities and others).
2. **Posts with general social responsibility overlaps** – this category was further divided into the posts on **corporate social responsibility activities** (e.g. activities of the influencer's civic association, involvement in the fight against racism, involvement in the LGTQ community, activities in the area of gender equality, social differences, etc.) and **environmental responsibility**, which reflects on the aspects directly related to the issues of ecology and climate change (e.g. pollution of wastewater, waste separation, composting, bio cosmetics, etc.). We did not include any posts related to fashion in this category although some factual connection could be found in them.

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<sup>42</sup> MAREŠ, J.: Tvorba případových studií pro výzkumné účely. In *Pedagogika*, 2015, Vol. 65, No. 2, p. 116. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://pages.pdf.cuni.cz/pedagogika/?p=11212&lang=cs>>.

<sup>43</sup> NOVÝ, I., SURYNEK, A.: *Sociologie pro ekonomy a manažery*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a. s., 2006, p. 273.

<sup>44</sup> LIU, R., SUH, A.: Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style bloggers on Instagram. In *Procedia Computer Science*, 2017, Vol. 124, No.1, p. 13-19.

<sup>45</sup> REICHEL, J.: *Kapitoly metodologie sociálních výzkumů*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a. s., 2009, p. 127.

3. **Fashion** – this category is perhaps the widest area because we divided it into two complex subcategories: **general fashion** (posts related to the issue of fashion but unrelated to sustainable fashion) and **sustainable fashion** (this subcategory was further structured as follows: second hand, upcycled/domestic production, sustainable fashion – fashion production meeting the attributes of socially responsible production and business based on three pillars – ecology, economy and social aspects, environmentally friendly production, recycled fashion, vegan fashion, the so-called biodegradable fashion/use of substances that naturally break down, and fashion supporting the idea of zero waste).
4. The **posts related to Covid-19** are about the coronavirus, basic pillars of protection (mask, hands, distancing), importance of social distancing, tutorials on creating custom protective equipment (e.g. antibacterial gels, masks, soaps, etc.).

In addition to the above, we also analyzed the use of hashtags as a way to categorize the posts by topic – these data were an additional data set for visual analysis because they often represented a significant additional interpretative level of the image – we followed their occurrence in the posts and their unique character in terms of the relation **to their own brand** (# identifies the brand of the influencer); **to another brand** (most often in various forms of cooperation); presence in terms of **sustainability topics** (e.g. indication of the type of production or procedure – #upcycling, #organicbasics, #sustainablefashion) and last but not least, we monitored the presence of **hashtags related to Covid-19** (e.g. the #stayhome and #wearmask challenges etc.).

### 3.3 Research Results

A **research unit (research subject)**<sup>46</sup> is the basic element in each case study. This may be an *individual* (manager or other person with experience and competence in the area of interest), *situation* (decision-making, program, implementation process, organizational change) or *organization*, organizational unit, workgroup in the organization. The data sources used in the given case will be limited by time and space, in which the research unit operated. Our research subjects are two representatives of the Slovak social media influencers involved in sustainable fashion. The identification was carried out based on the analysis of available relevant ratings of the influencers – the rating *2020 Kings of the Internet Who is the top influencer in Slovakia?*<sup>47</sup> as the starting point, followed by the specific rating by *RedBull*<sup>48</sup> focused on the field of fashion. We have selected these ratings as a framework for our research since the identification of influencers (Instagrammers) operating in this field is quite challenging because when using reputable tools (such as HypeAuditor) only the issues of fashion are foregrounded without the possibility to identify the sustainability subsegment. In these two rankings we found personalities operating in different areas, with their initiative in the issue of sustainable fashion and an active profile on Instagram as the inclusion criteria. Based on the above criteria, Natália Pažická (@nataliapazicka)<sup>49</sup> and the originally Slovak blogger and up-cycle designer Melisa Minca (@melisaminca)<sup>50</sup> became the subjects of our research. The timeframe of analysis is also delimited by a specific situation – the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. In

<sup>46</sup> VASIEOVÁ, M.: Využitie prípadových štúdií ako výskumnej metódy v marketingu. In *Vedecké state Obchodnej fakulty 2013*. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2013, p. 651.

<sup>47</sup> 2020. *Králi internetu. Kto je TOP influencer na Slovensku?*. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/top-influencer-2020/#hello>>.

<sup>48</sup> *10 slovenských instagrameriek, ktorým štýl určite nechýba*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.redbull.com/sk-sk/to-najlepsie-z-instagramu-slovensko-local-bloggerky-moda-lifestyle>>.

<sup>49</sup> *Instagramový profil @nataliapazicka*. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/nataliapazicka/>>.

<sup>50</sup> *Instagramový profil @melisaminca*. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/melisaminca/>>.

Slovakia, this period began on 12.3.2020 when an emergency situation was declared<sup>51</sup>, which effectively lasts until today. In a similar way, the country has currently declared a state of emergency, however, the emergency in the first wave was only declared in the health sector and it ended on 14.6.2020. This period delimits the timeframe of our analysis of the period 1.3.2020 – 30.6.2020.

The blogger and environmental activist *Natália Pažická* has been active in the world of fashion since she was 14 when she actively started to pursue modeling.<sup>52</sup> She is currently active mainly in the field of *sustainability*, she also deals with the topic of *fast fashion*, and regularly publishes posts on the unethical practices of well-known fast fashion brands (e.g. ZARA, H&M and others). She also discusses the topic of *environmental protection*. She is the founder of the initiative *#everyindividualmatters* where together with other regular contributors such as *Civic Association #EIM* she helps people and animals “because she believes that help is necessary here and there”<sup>53</sup>. The fashion influencer *Melisa Minca* originally worked as a fashion blogger and since 2018 she has been the owner of her ethical clothing brand “MM”. Her clothing collections consist of up-cycled pieces made from second-hand clothing. With her brand, she embarked on a journey against *fast fashion* and she strives to offer ethical, responsible and unique production, which she “sees as a tool for self-expression and celebration of human diversity”, while the concept behind the brand seeks to understand design in terms of trends and ethical approaches.<sup>54</sup> The MM website is currently presenting 13 collections, and the author showcases their value in the descriptions<sup>55</sup> – “More sustainability in fashion & creating truly unique clothes to express ourselves with!” A qualitative-quantitative analysis of the content on the *@nataliapazicka* and *@melisaminca* Instagram profiles highlights the representation of various topics, in particular those digressing from the professional orientation and interests of the surveyed influencers (Table 1).

**Table 1: Number of posts in each monitored category**

	<i>@nataliapazicka</i>	<i>@melisaminca</i>
<b>Number of posts (total):</b>	59	74
<b>General posts</b>	14	12
<b>Social responsibility-themed posts</b>	34	3
<b>Sustainable fashion-themed posts</b>	18	54
<b>Fashion-themed posts – no explicit overlap with sustainable fashion</b>	1	6
<b>Posts with links to Covid-19</b>	11	3
<b>Posts with #</b>	53	32
<b>Posts with # on sustainable fashion</b>	11	28
<b>Posts with # showing support for social distancing and masks</b>	4	4

Source: Own processing

In the analyzed period (from 1.3.2020 to 30.6.2020), the *@nataliapazicka* Instagram profile was primarily focused on topics related to social responsibility (a total of 34 posts out of 59

<sup>51</sup> For more information, see: *Koronavírus na Slovensku*. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://korona.gov.sk/>>.

<sup>52</sup> 2020. *Králi internetu. Kto je TOP influencer na Slovensku? : Natália Pažická*. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/top-influencer-2020/#nataliapazicka>>.

<sup>53</sup> *Every Individual Matters*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://everyindividualmatters.sk/>>.

<sup>54</sup> HUBEŇÁKOVÁ, R.: *Melisa Minca o módnom priemysle : Musí sa veľa zmeniť, aby sme na tejto planéte dokázali prežiť*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/melisa-minca/>>.

<sup>55</sup> MINCA, M.: *From me to you*. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://melisaminca.com/the-process/>>.

posts); the author mainly commented on various social and environmental issues within the topic, e.g. racism, working conditions of factory workers, activities of the #EIM civic association, composting, biocosmetics, bioproducts and others.



Figure 2: Examples of posts reflecting on the theme of sustainable fashion  
Source: Instagram @nataliapazicka

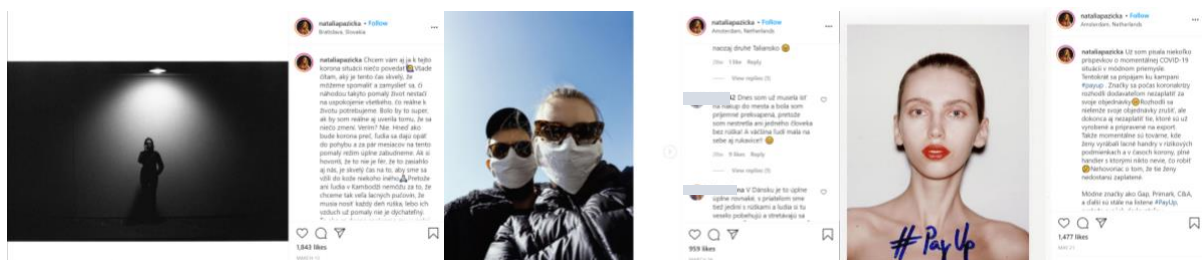


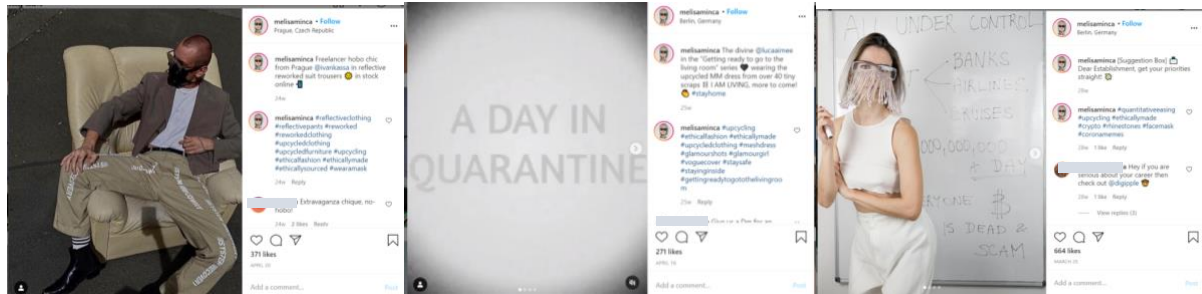
Figure 3: Examples of contributions reflecting on the current global problem – Covid-19  
Source: Instagram @nataliapazicka

The frequency of sustainable fashion-oriented posts (a total of 18 posts; Figure 2) and posts of a general nature, i.e. posts in which the author presented experiences and topics from her privacy (a total of 14 posts) were represented to a lesser extent. In the months of March-April (a total of 11 posts; Figure 3), the posts were also focused on the topics related to the global economic crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily focusing on the negative impacts of unemployment of the workers in the developing countries who work in the clothing factories for commercial fast fashion brands and chains. We have also noted some posts supporting isolation at the times of pandemic, but only marginally, and through the #quarantine hashtag. The @melisaminca Instagram profile was regularly enriched with new posts (a total of 74) during the analyzed period (1.3.2020 to 30.6.2020). The influencer reflected mainly on her dedication to up-cycling, i.e. remodeling old clothes into new fashion pieces. In terms of the nature of the content, the contributions presenting the products of the designer herself were dominant, which, given the specificity of the production, is a sustainable fashion issue. Only a very small part of the posts (12 in total) presented general content without overlaps with the dominant issue; most often in the form of photographs documenting the life of the author. With reference to the results of content analysis, it can be said that the author is living her own fashion revolution through the MM brand by presenting new perspectives on unique clothes that have been given a “second chance”; her collections contain pieces underlining female sexuality, but also the concept of unisex, which we can also associate with her partial focus on the LGBTQIA issues. In terms of sustainable fashion, she mainly highlights the approach of up-cycling, ethical fashion, vintage and reworked clothing (most commonly under #upcycling, #upcycle, #ethicallymade, #reworked, #reworkedvintage, #sustainablefashion, #reworkedclothing or #slowfashion) (Figure 4). It is interesting that the author communicates mainly through stylized fashion photos of the finished products, with only a negligible number of tutorials on how to make them, or videos presenting the procedures.





**Figure 4: Posts on up-cycling, ethical fashion, vintage and reworked clothing**  
Source: Instagram @melisaminca



**Figure 5: Examples of contributions reflecting on the current global problem – Covid-19**  
Source: Instagram @melisaminca

The content structure of the @melisaminca Instagram profile pushes the associations with the promotional and communication profile of this sustainable brand, however, without the distinctive nature of a platform disseminating the knowledge of sustainable and ethical fashion, and without a significant representation of the interaction through UGC (user-generated content) presented by the followers. A wider overlap with the complex issue of social responsibility is rather marginal in the profile, in the form of posts (a total of 3) highlighting the issue of combating racism, the issues of LGBTQIA, but also the current global problem – Covid-19 (3 posts in total; Figure 5), however, especially in the form of an implicit reflection of the situation, which is most often only expressed through the hashtags – #quarantined, #facemask, #coronamemes, #stayhome, #staysafe, #wearmask, #stayinside. There were no posts on the masks produced by MM (the brand probably did not pursue this direction), or instructions how to make unique up-cycled masks. Although the content structure and the very nature of the analyzed Instagram profiles differs, the topical content of the individual posts primarily deals with sustainability in the textile and clothing sector, which is closely linked to the topic of social responsibility in the context of social and environmental impacts of the brands and chains on society. The differences in the very form of communication can also be interpreted following the model of key attributes of an influencer – ABCC<sup>56</sup>, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, congruence with the brand, community and content. Although the category of sustainable fashion is not extensively developed in scientific and professional practice, its practical level encompasses a fairly large array of different approaches with a common noble objective to reduce the ecological and social footprint generated by the textile industry. Thus, there is a certain discrepancy in the way and nature of communication, both authors use their own way and methods for achieving the given goal, which also includes the specificities of the community and the potential of presenting their own brand or collaborating with other brands in the field. However, given their affiliation to the micro-influencer category, the need for authentic communication, which is supported by the unique content structure of

<sup>56</sup> BACKALER, J.: *Digital Influence: Unleash the Power of Influencer Marketing to Accelerate Your Global Business*. Cham : Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, p. 28-31.

the communication of the two analyzed Instagrammers reflecting their actions, promoting expertise and building a relationship with the community, comes to the foreground.

## Conclusion

The issue of social responsibility in the production, distribution and promotion of goods and services is particularly important in the leading industrial sectors, such as the textile and clothing industry. The importance of these tendencies is also seen in the growing category of social media influencers who are engaged in this issue. The implementation of the present research has also shown the potential limits of the “market category” of unique personalities involved in the issue of sustainable fashion. This category, for example, is currently not present in the categories provided by HypeAuditor, which makes the precise identification of specific active influencers in the field considerably difficult using this tool, and at the same time, the absence of this filtering criterion can also be attributed to insufficient attention this issue is receiving in society. Based on the selection criteria, we chose two relevant Instagrammers. The analysis of the profiles showed significant differences in the style of communication with the audience, particularly in terms of content diversity. Both authors are comparable in terms of intensity of communication, however, Melisa Minca stands out with her involvement in the issue of sustainable fashion in terms of quantity. However, if communication is looked at from the perspective of diversity, the approach of Natália Pažická should be emphasized. Even though she devoted less space to the issue, she covered several aspects of a specific subcategory of sustainable fashion (i.e. up-cycle, eco fashion, vegan fashion, second hand, etc.), and also linked the content of her posts with the presented brands operating in sustainable fashion. On the other hand, 54% of Melisa Minca’s messages were on the phenomenon of up-cycling as a form of sustainable fashion. Her approach is, of course, coupled with her professional activities as an up-cycle designer with her own brand, whose products were frequently used to present the content. It is interesting that she did not use the hashtag pointing to her own brand in an extensive way. Melisa Minca reflected on the actual situation with Covid-19 only marginally in her posts without a significant trace of this issue in their content structure; the connection could mainly be noted in her stressing the need to wear masks or socially distance. However, this specificity could be analyzed in a greater detail in light of the developments in Germany because even though the Instagrammer is Slovak, her professional activity is settled in Berlin. On the other hand, Natália Pažická demonstrated her comprehensive focus on social responsibility, which is evidenced by 58% of her posts reflecting on the subject, while the posts on Covid-19 were represented by almost 19% of the total amount of posts. In addition to the variety of topics presented, the author also used a variety of formats and divulged her ideas and suggestions not only through static images or a series of photos, but also through videos, graphics and motivational posts calling for the desired activity.

The varying content structure can be associated with the heterogeneity of the market and diverse preferences of the target groups. In the case of Generation Y and Generation Z, we can also talk about the need and tendency to experiment, therefore, the appeals for various forms of sustainability such as *"Second hand & Vintage"*, *"Repair, Redesign & Upcycle"* and *"Rent, Loan & Swap"* are often used in their case. The fact that second-hand products or clothes inherited from grandma have a story to tell and should not end up in the trash, is stressed by Natália Pažická in her post: *"This jacket is a second-hand piece and it has a long history with me. And that's what fashion should be. The stories, inheritance, permanence. The beautiful things with a soul and without cruelty. Today's fashion industry is the exact opposite. Speed,*

*anonymity, fear, pollution, cruelty, slavery and human suffering.*"<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the potential of up-cycling, i.e. reworking old pieces of cloth, curtains, table cloths or jeans, is also pointed out by Melissa Minca, the lover of reworked clothing "*Fast Fashion is doing many things wrong. For example, everybody looks the same. I'm against it. We all should look different, because we are different.*"<sup>58</sup> "*On demand & Custom made*" and "*High Quality & Timeless*" are ideal sustainability solutions for those consumers who do not support secondhand clothes, but appreciate quality and uniqueness of clothes. Every responsible consumer should promote the "*Green and Clean*" and "*Fair & Ethical*" sustainability principles when buying new clothes, and understand how the pieces of clothing were made, or what impact the production had on the environment. In addition to the above tendencies, the concepts of digital fashion come to the foreground, e.g. Carlings successfully sold its first digital collection in 2018. Natália Pažická adds: "*For 20 € you could buy a digital piece, send them a photo of you in which you want to wear it, and their 3D designer would fit the piece on your body. Disposable styling on Instagram is a ready-made solution and it did not cause any harm. The future? For our generation, where outfits are often bought because of the pictures on IG, I hope.*"<sup>59</sup>

Although we mostly highlighted the negative aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, associated primarily with the working conditions or economic aspects, it should be noted that this unpleasant situation also promoted a positive transformation in the minds of the consumers. The pandemic was often inflected in connection with the climate crisis, many viewed it as a warning sign of our irresponsible and indifferent behavior and unsustainable consumer lifestyle. The McKinsey research<sup>60</sup>, which was conducted in the UK and Germany in connection with the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, shows a shift in thinking in the representatives of all generations of consumers, especially Generation Y and Generation Z, with almost a half of the respondents voicing their willingness to shop in second hand stores and up to 2/3 of them claiming that the pandemic made them understand the need for an environmentally responsible behavior to eliminate the effects of climate change. In terms of consumer sentiment, the perception of Covid-19 as a chance for a hard reset is being foregrounded, and it is also a good opportunity for the representatives of fast fashion and luxury brands to strengthen their commitment to sustainability. The respondents presented their belief in the rapid transformation of industry, for example by reducing seasonal collections. As emphasized by Richetti and De Palma<sup>61</sup>, there is essentially no choice between economic and environmental sustainability in this case, as the transition to sustainable business models and supply chains is now an essential step to business survival.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Remark by the authors: @nataliapazicka, IG post (20.4.2020).

<sup>58</sup> HUBEŇÁKOVÁ, R.: *Melisa Minca o módnom priemysle : Musí sa veľa zmeniť, aby sme na tejto planéte dokázali prežiť.* Released on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/melisa-minca/>>.

<sup>59</sup> Remark by the authors: @nataliapazicka, IG post (12.4.2020).

<sup>60</sup> GRANSKOG, A. et al.: *Survey : Consumer sentiment on sustainability in fashion.* Released on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <[https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/survey-consumer-sentiment-on-sustainability-in-fashion#/>](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/survey-consumer-sentiment-on-sustainability-in-fashion#/).

<sup>61</sup> RICHETTI, M., DE PALMA, R.: *Will Covid-19 accelerate the transition to a sustainable fashion industry.* Released on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://www.unido.org/stories/will-covid-19-accelerate-transition-sustainable-fashion-industry>>.

<sup>62</sup> DŽUPINA, M., JANKOVÁ, G.: Development of sustainable consumption through consumer education. In YONGQIANG, L., HUNJET, A., RONCEVIC, A. (eds.): *Economic and Social Development.* Varazdin, Prague, Warsaw, Koprivnica : Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency, City of Prague; Faculty of Management University of Warsaw, University North, 2017, p. 247-248. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <[https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/882878.Book\\_of\\_Proceedings\\_esdPrague\\_2017\\_Online.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2vfp-pAF5KhqS9Zl48JwRjQORholQotyMoj\\_CfWvp5gEXxbZtF58lvDp8#page=252](https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/882878.Book_of_Proceedings_esdPrague_2017_Online.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2vfp-pAF5KhqS9Zl48JwRjQORholQotyMoj_CfWvp5gEXxbZtF58lvDp8#page=252)>.

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## MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF THE AREA IN THE CONTEXT OF VISIT RATE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS IN SLOVAKIA

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### Abstract

The presented paper deals with the influence of tourist information centers visit rate on the management of TIC marketing communication. The aim of research is to propose an optimal way of marketing management of tourist information centers in the framework of increasing number of domestic visitors in the regions and in online space. It is digital marketing at a time of growing demand for domestic tourism and the closure of state borders, that is an essential tool for the promotion of a given area. Statistical data of TIC within the Slovak Republic for the months May - June in 2019 and 2020 will be monitored. This is a comparison of the period before the summer season outside the pandemic (2019) with the period before summer season in 2020. The research will determine three hypotheses that will be evaluated by the statistical method of correlation analysis. Primary data are obtained from Statistical Yearbook issued by Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and other data provided by the Association of Slovak Tourist Centers.

### Key words:

Marketing Communication. Regional Marketing. Slovak Republic. Tourist Information Centers. Visit Rate.

### Introduction

Currently, domestic tourism comes to the forefront of interest of local self-governments. It is due to the closure of borders with the neighbouring countries due to the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the existence of various online information sources, one of the important forms of communicating official tourist information within self-governments is a tourist information center as a guarantor of authenticity, objectivity, and topicality of the provided information. Strong dynamics of the marketing communication sector, changing motives for participation of various subjects in the area of marketing management of a region, and consumption behaviour of visitors bring increasing demands on tourist information centers. Development of new products of territorial marketing is related mainly to the changes in motives for visiting local self-governments and to the new trends in communication influencing the needs of the actual participants of territorial marketing.<sup>1</sup> Mazúchová, Pančíková<sup>2</sup> states that tourist information centers form the first, critical impression about the area, the standard of provided services, and the quality of a region. Provision of relevant and topical tourist information is preceded by the collection, gathering, selection, and storage of suitable and efficient information. Through the communicated information and recommendations, tourist information centers inspire their visitors to consume goods and services in the region and, in this way, contribute towards economic, social, and recreational wealth of local community. The presented paper primarily addresses the implemented instruments of marketing communication within the sector of Tourist Information Centers ("TIC") in Slovakia. It analyses reasons for visiting TIC during the period of June in 2019 and 2020. The aforementioned years will be the subject of comparison from the statistical

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<sup>1</sup> BUTORACOVÁ ŠINDLERYOVÁ, I., HALMO, M.: The use of marketing tools in the management of public institutions in relations to the personality of the manager. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BUČKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2019: Offline is the new online*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 1017.

<sup>2</sup> MAZÚCHOVÁ, E., PANČÍKOVÁ, K.: The Importance of Tourist Information Centers in the Development of Tourism In Slovakia. In *5<sup>th</sup> International Multidisciplinary Scientific on Social Sciences&Arts SGEM 2018*. Albena : SGEM World Science, 2018, p. 786.



calculation point of view. These periods have been selected due to the availability of statistical data for the year of 2020. This is a pre-season period, when TIC show higher numbers compared to other months of the spring and autumn periods. We will thus examine the difference in the decrease of the visit rate in 2020 compared to 2019 on one hand, and the influence of reasons for visiting tourist information centers on the total visit rate in a self-governing region on the other hand.

## 1 Research Methodology

The objective of the submitted paper is to propose an optimal method of marketing management of tourist information centers in online space based on the results of the analysis of personal marketing communication in TIC. For this reason, the paper focuses on the research of the implemented instruments of personal marketing communication in TIC and the consequent proposals for their usage in the digital environment. The online marketing communication appears to be an effective and efficient way of supporting the promotion of self-governing regions in the period of the restricted functioning of tourist information centers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will analyse statistical data related to tourist information centers within the Slovak Republic for the months of May – June of 2019 and 2020. We have selected the period of May and June due the availability of statistical data for the year of 2020. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic does not register data for the period of July and August. In order to record the analysed issue complexly and provide own suggestions, the object of our analysis comprises all existing and functional tourist information centers/offices in the territory of the Slovak Republic. In total, there are 104 of them, 16 operating in the Banská Bystrica Region, 9 in the Bratislava Region, 13 in the Košice Self-Governing Region, Nitra Region – 9, Prešov Region – 1, Trenčín Self-Governing Region – 15, Trnava Region – 8, and Žilina Region - 22. The analysis is aimed at a comparison of the pre-summer season in the absence of the pandemic (2019) and during the pandemic in 2020. Within the research, we have set two hypotheses that will be verified by using the statistical method of correlation analysis. The primary data will be obtained from the Statistical Yearbook published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, from statistical data provided by the Slovak Association of Tourist Centers, and data provided by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. In the paper, we have set the following two hypotheses:

- **H1:** There is a statistically significant relationship between the number of personal requests for provision of information about the region and the total visit rate of tourist information centers.

We assume that personal demand for the provision of information about a region in TIC influences the visit rate of tourist information centers by more than 80% in 2019 and by more than 70% in 2020.

- **H2:** There is a statistically significant relationship between the number of the conducted guidance tours and the total visit rate of the self-governing region.

The conducted guided tours influence the self-governing region visit rate by more than 70% in 2019 and by more than 55% in 2020. To evaluate and confirm the influence of visits of tourist information centers on the total visit rate of the self-governing region, we will use a statistical method that analyzes the rate of dependence between two or more variables, i.e. the method of correlation. The research focuses on simple linear correlation, which is applied

when variables are measured on an interval scale. Correlation coefficient (also referred to as Pearson's "R") will represent the rate of linear dependence of two variables and can range between the values -1 and +1. The value -1 represents the highest negative correlation, the value +1 the highest positive correlation, and the value 0 means that the variables are uncorrelated. To fulfill the objective of the paper, we will analyse the rate of linear correlation between the visit rate of tourist information centers and reasons for the visit and the total visit rate of the self-governing regions on an interval scale in the years of 2019 and 2020. We will use the obtained primary statistical data for the calculation.

## 2 Analysis of Implementation of Personal Marketing Communication Instruments in Tourist Information Centers – Results of Research

This part of the paper presents the analysis of the research results in a form of statistical inquiry of the obtained primary data. Within the research methodology, we have set two hypotheses that will be tested through correlation analysis. First, we will state results from the period of May – June 2019. Consequently, we have conducted correlation of the collected data for the period of May – June 2020. This a period, when travelling within Europe and worldwide was restricted. In the Table 1, in a correlation matrix, we present the results of correlation related to the visit rate of tourist information centers and reasons for the visits in 2019.

**Table 1: Correlation Matrix of the Influence of Visit Rate of TIC in 2019**

<i>Number for the month of June 2019</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Visit rate of TIC (1)</i>	1						
<i>Demand for regional information (2)</i>	0,99989	1					
<i>Sold souvenirs and promotional materials (3)</i>	0,88550	0,67483	1				
<i>Persons who have used guide services (4)</i>	0,79414	0,99469	0,74748	1			
<i>Sale of tickets by direct sale (5)</i>	0,53896	0,48620	0,47487	0,47895	1		
<i>Bicycle rental (6)</i>	0,39958	0,37859	0,35598	0,40749	0,43759	1	
<i>Currency exchange services (7)</i>	0,19540	0,25936	0,24369	0,39534	0,48656	0,54795	1
<i>Number for the month of June 2020</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Visit rate of TIC (1)</i>	1						
<i>Demand for regional information (2)</i>	0,80436	1					
<i>Sold souvenirs and promotional materials (3)</i>	0,82673	0,61873	1				
<i>Persons who have used guide services (4)</i>	0,98815	0,39065	0,72274	1			
<i>Sale of tickets by direct sale (5)</i>	0,50572	0,45893	0,42472	0,43871	1		
<i>Bicycle rental (6)</i>	0,37851	0,33768	0,32392	0,37949	0,40349	1	
<i>Currency exchange services (7)</i>	0,17842	0,22785	0,22788	0,34566	0,43295	0,52595	1

Source: Own processing

Value in an interval from 0.0 to 0.1 shows trivial correlation, 0.1 – 0.3 small correlation, 0.3 – 0.5 moderate correlation, 0.5 – 0.7 large correlation, 0.7 – 0.9 very large correlation, and 0.9 – 1 almost perfect correlation. However, we also must mention that a negative value represents inverse proportionality (from -1 to 0) and, reversely, a positive value represents direct proportionality. Correlation matrix in the Table 1 shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the visit rate of tourist information centers and the request for provision of information about the region in both analysed months. For June 2019, the value of their

influence represents 0.99989 and for June 2020 0.80436. Both values are the closest to the number +1 and, thus, from all the examined variables/reasons for visiting the TIC, the demand for information influences the total visit rate in the TIC at the highest rate. In the correlation matrix (Table 2), we present the results of statistical measurement of the influence of the number of people who have used guidance services on the total visit rate of the self-governing regions.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix of the Influence of Visit Rate of Self-Governing Region for 2020**

<i>Number for the month of June 2019</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Visit rate of Self-Governing (1)</i>	1						
<i>Demand for regional information (2)</i>	0,99463	1					
<i>Sold souvenirs and promotional materials (3)</i>	0,93679	0,87225	1				
<i>Persons who have used guide services (4)</i>	0,98536	0,93552	0,84622	1			
<i>Sale of tickets by direct sale (5)</i>	0,78539	0,79474	0,77584	0,79391	1		
<i>Bicycle rental (6)</i>	0,57848	0,61684	0,62768	0,64748	0,66489	1	
<i>Currency exchange services (7)</i>	0,36949	0,38637	0,41684	0,43794	0,48648	0,51685	1

<i>Number for the month of June 2020</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Visit rate of Self-Governing (1)</i>	1						
<i>Demand for regional information (2)</i>	0,80922	1					
<i>Sold souvenirs and promotional materials (3)</i>	0,89562	0,84355	1				
<i>Persons who have used guide services (4)</i>	0,98474	0,79065	0,76337	1			
<i>Sale of tickets by direct sale (5)</i>	0,75721	0,64683	0,58528	0,64783	1		
<i>Bicycle rental (6)</i>	0,50527	0,53783	0,55428	0,56771	0,59045	1	
<i>Currency exchange services (7)</i>	0,32782	0,33689	0,37653	0,38994	0,41274	0,45682	1

Source: Own processing

Correlation matrix in the Table 2 shows that there is statistically significant relationship between the total visit rate of self-governing regions and the number of people who have used guidance services. The value of their influence for June 2019 is 0.98536 and for June 2020, it is 0.98474. Similarly to the first analysed variable, both examined values from the Table 2 are the closest to the number +1, i.e. from all the analysed variables/reasons for visiting the TIC, guidance services largely influence the total visit rate of self-governing regions. The reasons for visiting tourist information centers in the Slovak Republic were the object of our analysis. From the available primary sources, we have analysed the following variables: number of requests for provision of information about the region, number of souvenirs and promotional materials sold in TIC, number of people who have used guidance services, number of tickets (for events, historical and cultural monuments) sold through direct selling, number of rented bicycles, and number of currency exchange services. As regards the informational function, TIC must provide information only about those businesses and tourist facilities that operate in accordance with the applicable regulations. It must provide general and specific information about the attractions of tourism and destinations and thus make a visitor's decision-making easier. The basic structure of information that the TIC works with is: the name of the subject, its address, phone number, e-mail, website, in case of events also their genre, date, venue, and entrance fee.<sup>3</sup> Because a tourist information center represents for its clients one of the forms of acquiring official information about the tourism offer and the offer of services in the destination, it is very important for it to establish its own, regularly updated databases of

<sup>3</sup> ARAÑA, J. E. et al.: Designing Tourist Information Offices: The Role Of The Human Factor. In *Journal of Travel Research*, 2015, Vol. 55, No. 6, p. 765.

information. These databases are a source of providing specific data directly to the visitors and, at the same time, they form a basis for further processing of the data into final outputs and their consequent distribution through all available communication channels.<sup>4</sup> TIC can also provide ancillary commercial services (business activities), through which it contributes to the experiences of its visitors. By performing these activities, TIC acquires a part of its financial revenues. All services must be conducted in accordance with applicable legislation. These activities include mainly the sale of own or partnership products and services of tourism: the range of goods and services. TIC's range of goods and services mostly consists of: tourist maps, guide books, publications about the destination, wide range of souvenirs, destination discount cards, tourist stamps, and tickets to cultural and sporting events.<sup>5</sup>

The services recommended for sale are:

- Provision of sightseeing tours of the destination/city/region by certified guides – a regional guide gives a professional commentary and accompanies visitors on tours to local/regional historical and cultural monuments and attractions of a village, city, region or area. They provide commentary on their history and present, on natural heritage, and the surrounding environment. Every local-governing advanced tourist destination requires services of skilled regional/local guides acquainted with knowledge of the particular areas of interest.<sup>6</sup>
- Accommodation intermediation – this activity requires minimally a trade authorization for travel agency operation, in accordance to the Act No. 455/1991 Coll. on Trade Licensing as amended. TIC can provide accommodation intermediation based on intermediary contracts with accommodation facilities and receive provision for intermediation. For these purposes, TIC can also use electronic accommodation reservation system. Some TICs use their own reservation systems, or reservation systems of Regional Organizations of Tourism within the regions they operate in.
- Currency exchange offices – TIC can establish an exchange office on the basis of a trade authorisation, according to the Act No. 455/1991 Coll. on Trade Licensing as amended.
- Mountain rescue insurance – is provided on the basis of a contractual relationship with an insurance company (companies) that offers this type of insurance, e.g. Generali Insurance Company.
- Bicycle rental – TIC can provide a year-round rental of bicycles for children and adults, including tricycles, scooters, and accessories (helmets, bicycle locks).<sup>7</sup>

As we have already mentioned, the paper focuses on linear dependence between the visit rate of tourist information centers in the Slovak Republic and the number of requests for information about a region. Relationship between the variables is represented by the calculated equation, where the independent variable “x” is the visit rate of tourist information centers and the dependent variable “y” is the number of requests for provision of information about the region. Chart 1 presents the correlation coefficient of the analysed variables for the month of June in years 2019 and 2020.

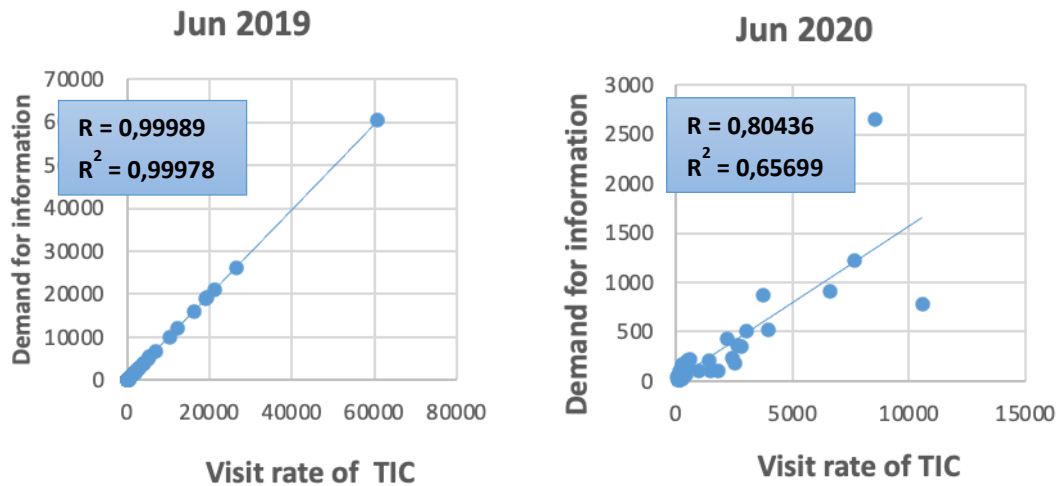
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<sup>4</sup> FRAŇOVÁ, I. et al. *Analytická štúdia Sektoru turistických informačných centier (TIC) na Slovensku-návrh optimálneho fungovania TIC*. Bratislava : AiCES, 2018, p. 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> MAZÚCHOVÁ, E., PANČÍKOVÁ, K.: The Importance of Tourist Information Centers in the Development of Tourism in Slovakia. In *5<sup>th</sup> International Multidisciplinary Scientific on Social Sciences&Arts SGEM 2018*. Albena : SGEM World Science, 2018, p. 787.

<sup>6</sup> HOGHOVÁ, K. Virtual tour as a form of marketing communication of a sacral sights. In VÁZQUEZ DE ÁGREDOS-PASCUAL, M. L., RUSU, I., PELOSI, C. (eds.): *ESRARC 2019 – 11<sup>th</sup> European Symposium on Religious Art Restoration & Conservation*. Torino : Kermes, 2019, p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> FRAŇOVÁ, I. et al.: *Metodická príručka pre turistické informačné centrá (TIC) na Slovensku*. Bratislava : AiCES, 2018, p. 24-29.

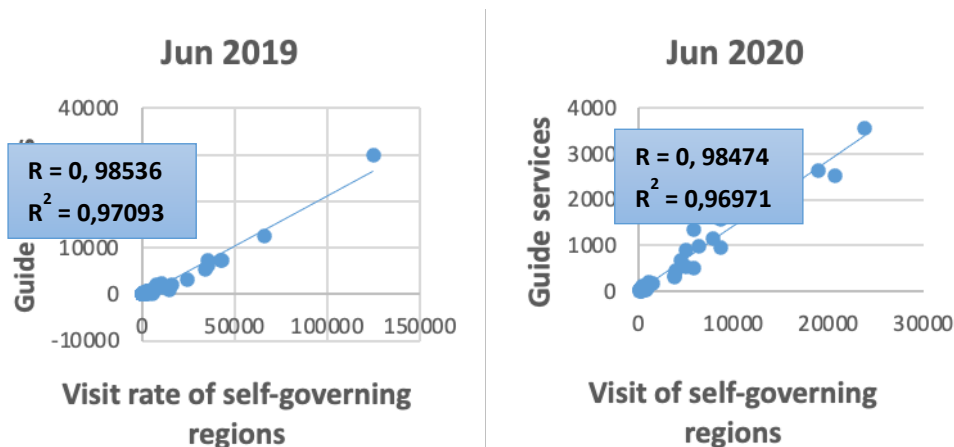


**Chart 1: Correlation Analysis of the Visit Rate in TIC for June 2019 and June 2020**

Source: Own processing

Correlation coefficient (Pearson's "R") has been enumerated through Microsoft Excel program. The result of correlation analysis for 2019 is 0.99989 and 0.800436 for 2020 (both figures close to +1), i.e. indicating a strong linear dependence between the variables. The aforementioned clearly proves that the visit rate of tourist information centers in both analysed months was highly dependent on the number of requests for provision of information about a region, which are the main reason for visiting tourist information centers. The strength of relationship between the variables is represented by the coefficient of determination, which we get by squaring "R" at the bottom of the equation (June 2019  $R^2 = 0.99978$  and June 2020  $R^2 = 0.65699$ ). That means that the number of requests for provision of information about a region influences the visit rate of tourist information centers in both months, in June 2009 by 99.90% and in June 2020 by 65.70%. This fact suffices to confirm the influence of requests for information about a region on the visit rate of TIC.

The first hypothesis has thus been confirmed, as the values of the influence of the visit rate in tourist information centers resulting from the correlation analysis for June 2019 and June 2020 reach figures in the interval from 0.7 to 0.9 (very large correlation) and 0.9 to 1,0 (almost perfect correlation). The assumption that personal requests for provision of information about a region in TIC influences the visit rate of tourist information centers by more than 80% in 2019 and more than 70% in 2020 has been verified. Within the research, we have also stated a premise of a statistically significant relationship between the total visit rate of a self-governing region and the number of people who have used guidance services of tourist informational centers. In this case, the relationship between the variables is also represented by a calculated equation, where the independent variable "x" is the total visit rate of the self-governing regions and the dependent variable "y" is the number of people who have used guidance services provided by tourist information centers. In Chart 2, we present the correlation coefficient of the analysed variables for June 2019 and June 2020.



**Chart 2: Correlation Analysis of the Visit Rate of Self-Governing Regions for June 2019 and June 2020**

Source: Own processing

Correlation coefficient (Pearson's "R") has been enumerated through Microsoft Excel program. The resulting value of correlation analysis for 2019 is 0.98536 and, for 2020, it is 0.98474 (both figures close to +1), i.e. indicating a strong linear dependence between the variables. This clearly shows that, for both years, there is a statistically significant relationship between the visit rate of self-governing regions and the number of people who have used guidance services. The strength of relationship between the variables is represented by the coefficient of determination, which we get by squaring "R" at the bottom of the equation (June 2019  $R^2 = 0.97093$  and June 2020  $R^2 = 0.96971$ ). This means that the number of people who have used tourist information centers influences the visit rate of self-governing regions by 97.09% in June 2019 and by 96.97% in June 2020. This fact is sufficient to prove the aforementioned influence. The second hypothesis has been confirmed, as the values of the influence of the guidance tours resulting from the correlation analysis in June 2019 and June 2020 reach figures in the interval from 0.7 to 0.9 (very large correlation) and 0.9 to 1.0 (almost perfect correlation). As regards the assumption that the conducted guidance tours influence the total visit rate of a self-governing region by more than 70% in 2019 and by more than 55% in 2020, it has been verified for both analysed months of years 2019 and 2020.

### 3 Proposed Model of Digital Marketing Communication Used by TIC

Stemming from the results of the statistical analysis of the TIC visit rate in the Slovak Republic, we propose several methods of marketing communication in the online space. The reason for analysing personal marketing communication and its consequent transformation into a digital form is that it helps to reach a wide spectrum of visitors in times when governmental measures against coronavirus spread restrict and slow down regional marketing in Slovakia. The main goal of external communication provided by information centers is to promote a distinctive differentiation of a destination from others and thus enhance its competitiveness.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, an information center must maintain regular contact with service providers and other involved subjects in the destination in order to create joint strategies and communication plans. The prerequisite of high quality communication of an information center towards a visitor is to have a clear tourist offer, product mix, visitor segments, and communication goals towards selected segments of potential visitors defined by a local organization of destination management. Based on this material, an information center makes

<sup>8</sup> ARAÑA, J. E. et al.: Designing Tourist Information Offices: The Role Of The Human Factor. In *Journal of Travel Research*, 2015, Vol. 55, No. 6, p. 765.

simple communication plans. Modern online marketing consists of a large number of instruments and applications from various disciplines. In this study, we have focused our attention on some of these that we regard as the basis that every TIC should incorporate and should further build on to extend its marketing activities online. The fundamental, and from the investment point of view, the most efficient instrument of online marketing is an own website, which is also the most important element of online marketing communication.<sup>9</sup> Survey by AiCES conducted in 2018 shows that as many as 57 of the surveyed tourist information centers did not have their own websites. It is also important to note that only 11% of the tourist information centers use their own platform on YouTube, as stated by AiCES in their Methodology Manual from 2017.<sup>10</sup>

It is questionable whether TIC should or should not have own websites. It is an advantage to have a website, because TIC is able to administer it by itself, it can operationally update it and add content as needed, improve functionality and configuration of the website within their capabilities. However, if a TIC cannot afford an own website, it does not really need it for high-quality promotion of services, products, and value. It is an advantage to have an own website, but a lot work can be done under other subjects, where the majority of TIC websites are currently situated. A certain obstacle could be the high variability of software used for websites of the TIC. In an additional survey, we have found out that the websites, where the presentations of TIC are situated, are built on at least 17 different content management systems. Another view on this issue is the reflection that if the information centers used the same software for their promotion, it would be possible to create for them uniform and updatable manuals on how to build their websites, maintain them, how to incorporate marketing content into them, etc. These manuals, for example, could be placed on the internet in a form of short educational videos, thus allowing the TIC employees to be able to learn continuously and acquire skills when in a time suits them best. A professional discussion forum, where competent employees would answer specific questions, could also be a part of this system. Besides the aforementioned, individual TIC would have a chance to advise and help each other, if needed.

One of the analysed variables was the guidance services conducted by the tourist information centers. As an alternative, we propose a virtual tour of an area (city, region) available at the TIC websites, social networks or YouTube channels. Digital tours represent a possibility to visit a place which a potential customer might want to see through a website. For instance, self-governments could be presented in this way through local cultural and historical monuments or institutions of similar type. A visitor would thus be able to visit a place several hundred kilometers far from their home virtually, on their computer, and literally go for a virtual walk around the area. Social media have caused a revolution in the usage of the internet as an instrument of promotion of products and services and their consequent sales. For many subjects, they have opened opportunities for less costly and, at the same time, more efficient online marketing. Social networks offer possibilities of direct contact with the visitors and potential customers and can be inspiring when business and communication strategies are created.<sup>11</sup> This means that Facebook is an exceptional place to grab some of the

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<sup>9</sup> LUKAČ, M.: Alternative sources of financing of attractive touristic sites. In *2<sup>nd</sup> International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences&Arts SGEM 2015*. Albena : SGEM World Science, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> FRAŇOVÁ, I. et al.: *Analytická štúdia Sektoru turistických informačných centier (TIC) na Slovensku-návrh optimálneho fungovania TIC*. Bratislava : AiCES, 2018, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> VAŇOVÁ, J. et al.: Benefits of Using Social Networks in Integrated Marketing Communications. In ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., RYBANSKÝ, R., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2018: Digital Mirrors – part I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 179.

potential customers' time for promotion of TIC's activities, goals, and products. Facebook has reached many areas of life; it has major power and significance, and is referred to in other media and television. Another proposed instrument of marketing communication would be an online store, which can bring the tourist information centers many benefits. As stated above, internet is a significant tool of building relationships with customers/visitors. The greatest advantage of an online store is its cost-saving effect in the time of a decrease in sales and number of visitors. Primarily, operational costs for building an online portfolio are lower than in the brick-and-mortar information centers. Newsletter would also be a suitable form of communication with the target groups that would otherwise not have a reason to visit websites of information centers actively and regularly. In the light of the diversity of the target groups, it would be possible to publish a newsletter in several editions, e.g. for the visitors, tour operators, etc. A newsletter should always be sent from the address of an information center, which should not send newsletters of other parties.

It is important for every tourist information center to have a uniform name on a website, social networks, and its brick-and-mortar premises. In the online environment, a wide variability of the names of individual information centers poses quite a big problem. Currently, the following names and acronyms appear in the sector of tourism centers: acronyms such as TIC, TIK, MIC, MIK, IC, IK, always combined with a city, place or region, or acronyms deviating from the visitor's common usage, such as IA (information agency), RIA (regional information agency). The most frequently used phrases of TIC combined with a city, place or region are: information office, city information office, tourist-information office, information center, and tourist information center. Such variety in names of individual TIC leads to a problem when people searching online for a TIC in a foreign city/place or region do not have a fixed uniform name and are thus not able to search for it. For this reason, a consistent nomenclature should be established and every TIC should use a uniform and approved name derived from the basic phrase "Tourist Information Center". However, it goes without saying that an information center can only use a wider spectrum of communication instruments in dependence to the amount of funds it has to its disposal for the corresponding calendar year.

## **Conclusion**

The objective of the submitted paper is to propose an optimal method of marketing management of tourist information centers in online space based on the results of the analysis of personal marketing communication in TIC. For this reason, the paper focuses on the research of the implemented instruments of personal marketing communication in TIC and the consequent proposals for their usage in the digital environment. Within the paper, two hypotheses were defined. They were verified through statistical analysis. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed, the result of the correlation analysis for 2019 is the value of 0,98536 and for 2020 0,98474 (it was a strong linear dependence between the variables). There is a statistically significant correlation between the number of self-governing regions visitors in the two surveyed months and those who use the TIC guide services. The second hypothesis also confirms the same statement. In the proposal part, recommendations using TIC marketing communication tools in the online space were presented with regard to the current situation associated with pandemic.



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# RESEARCH ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF THE NEW GENERATION OF CUSTOMERS WITH REGARD TO GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE ASSESSMENT OF UNCERTAINTY FACTORS IN ONLINE TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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## Abstract

Even though e-commerce is of great importance in online sales, it also means high risks for consumers and retailers, e.g. cybercrimes, hacker attacks, spam or lack of personal interactions and asymmetry of information. These risks can lead to consumer uncertainty. This means that consumers feel insecure when buying products online, compared to the same products in stores. This uncertainty in online stores discourages many consumers from participating in online transactions. At the time of the corona crisis, uncertainty in online shopping increases, but is suppressed by the need to buy certain products, as the possibility of shopping in stores is severely limited in connection with government regulations. The aim of this paper is to identify the shopping behavior of Millennials and their gender differences at the level of assessing the factors of uncertainty in online shopping. The limitations of our research lie in the number and composition of respondents. Due to this condition, it is necessary to repeat the research with an even distribution of the sample and compare the results.

## Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. E-Commerce. New Generation of Customers. Uncertainty.

## 1 Introduction

It has been widely accepted that uncertainty is a major barrier for consumers when it comes to buying products online.<sup>1</sup> Half of Internet users do not buy products online due to feelings of insecurity.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Wall Street Journal<sup>3</sup> reported that only 25% of consumers who searched for products online actually bought them online. Another survey showed that 65% percent of online consumers did not finish their purchase due to feelings of uncertainty about the credibility of the seller, the information on the website or presentation of products.<sup>4</sup> From this earlier research, it can be concluded that consumers remain to some extent insecure about e-commerce transactions and that managing this uncertainty is a key issue for e-commerce managers. In addition, previous research discusses some issues related to uncertainty based on the consumer's inability to fully observe the seller's performance: wrong choice (hidden information) and moral hazard (hidden conduct).<sup>5</sup> This means that consumer uncertainty results from information asymmetry due to hidden information and moral hazard problems. Information asymmetry is defined as "the feeling of a buyer that the seller has a greater amount of information about the products, properties and sales practices".<sup>6</sup> For example, in online environment, it is difficult for a buyer to determine whether a seller is of high or low quality

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<sup>1</sup> PAVLOU, P. A., LIANG, H., XUE, Y.: Understanding and Mitigating Uncertainty in Online Exchange Relationships: A Principal-Agent Perspective. In *MIS Quarterly*, 2007, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 106-135.

<sup>2</sup> *Everything you need to know about SSL certificates*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016. [online]. [2020-11-12]. Available at: [https://www.verisign.com/en\\_US/website-presence/online/ssl-certificates/index.xhtml?loc=en\\_US](https://www.verisign.com/en_US/website-presence/online/ssl-certificates/index.xhtml?loc=en_US).

<sup>3</sup> KESMODEL, D.: *Despite Growth of E-commerce, Some Retailers Remain Offline*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2006. [online]. [2020-11-12]. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB114556563438531611>.

<sup>4</sup> GRAEBER, R.: *E-trade Battles Online Fraud with Strong Authentication*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2005. [online]. [2020-11-12]. Available at: <http://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=115861>.

<sup>5</sup> ŠTEFKO, R., ŠTEFFEK, V.: A Study of Creative Industry Entrepreneurial Incubation. In *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 251-260.

<sup>6</sup> ŠTEFKO, R., POLLÁK, F., GAVUROVÁ, B.: Offline and Online Approaches to Quality Perception of Slovak University Hospitals. In *Marketing and Management of Innovations*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 108-114.

(seller quality or product quality) because low quality sellers may try to distort their online image, while in brick-and-mortar stores, buyers can verify such information or quality at the time of purchase. Due to the physical separation of buyers and sellers in e-commerce, the problem with information asymmetry arises, thus increasing the feelings of insecurity of online consumers.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, perceived information asymmetry leads to increased consumer uncertainty in the online environment. Thus, online retailers must seek to reduce this uncertainty. "Feelings of insecurity tend to lead to a feeling that outcomes cannot be controlled".<sup>8</sup> This means that activities over which people think they have control are likely to be considered less uncertain than actions over which people have no control.<sup>9</sup> Control therefore projects a feeling of security. In particular, the model of uncertainty by Weary and Edwards<sup>10</sup> clarifies that people who are uncertain are comforted when they feel they have things under control. The model confirms that the lack of control is a source of increasing uncertainty. This means that when people do not feel they have things under control, their uncertainty is greater than that of people who feel they have things under control. Previous research has shown that consumers do not like being in precarious situations where they feel things are not under their control and therefore need to feel in control to avoid negative feelings.<sup>11</sup>

Control is an important element of individuals' behaviour. According to Ashford and Black, this means that the more consumers feel in control of uncertain events, the less risky the consequences of uncertainty are. Consumers want to feel in control of the situations in which they act and will actively seek to achieve this level of control.<sup>12</sup> Consumers will therefore seek to gain control in various ways, e.g. by seeking information or acquiring mastery skills. Earlier research distinguished between several types of control. Ajzen<sup>13</sup> suggested that the most important type of control is the perception of behavioural control and its impact on purchasing decisions and actions. He suggested that "perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perceived ease or difficulty of performing the particular behaviour". This can be compared to Rotter's<sup>14</sup> control position. While the localization of control is a general expectation that remains constant in different situations, perceived control of behaviour may vary between situations. Control localization is often used to predict different behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it can be predicted that the location of control plays a role in consumers' purchasing decisions in e-commerce. Consumers wish to eliminate their feelings of insecurity when shopping online, so it is appropriate to suggest that the need for control alleviates these feelings of insecurity. Because of this, web design and information are the best at achieving positive feelings about

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<sup>7</sup> HUSTON, J. H., SPENCER, R. W.: Quality, Uncertainty and the Internet: The Market for Cyber Lemons. In *American Economist*, 2002, Vol. 46, No. 1, p. 51-59.

<sup>8</sup> EDWARDS, J. A., WEARY, G.: Antecedents of causal uncertainty and perceived control: A prospective study. In *European Journal of Personality*, 1998, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 136-147.

<sup>9</sup> LANGER, E. J., ROTH, J.: Heads I win, tails it's chance: The illusion of control as a function of the sequence of outcomes in a purely chance task. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1975, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 952-954.

<sup>10</sup> WEARY, G., EDWARDS, J. A.: Individual differences in causal uncertainty. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1994, Vol. 67, No. 1, p. 309-317.

<sup>11</sup> ASHFORD, S. J., BLACK, J. S.: Proactivity during organizational entry: The role of desire for control. In *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1996, Vol. 81, No. 2, p. 200-213.

<sup>12</sup> GREENBERGER, D. B., STRASSER, S.: Development in application of a model of personal control in organizations. In *Academy of Management Review*, 1986, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 165-176.

<sup>13</sup> AJZEN, I.: The Theory of Planned Behavior. In *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 1991, Vol. 50, No. 1, p. 180-210.

<sup>14</sup> ROTTER, J. B.: Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. In *Psychological Monographs*, 1966, Vol. 80, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> BUSSERI, M. A., LEFCOURT, H. M., KERTON, R. R.: Locus of Control for Consumer Outcomes: Predicting the Consumer Behavior. In *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 1998, Vol. 28, No. 12, p. 1067-1086.

a website.<sup>16</sup> "Web design elements can be defined as properties, components, and information used in the development of e-commerce websites".<sup>17</sup> Lack of knowledge and skills and poor information of web design make consumers insecure when buying a product online. Therefore, to reduce the feeling of insecurity, consumers need control over these elements of web design. Consumers feel in control of a website when the website is easy to use and when they can successfully complete a purchase.<sup>18</sup> As already mentioned, consumers cannot actually see the product and cannot physically meet the online retailer. Therefore, a website needs elements of web design that create the impression of consumer control. Web design elements thus help customers use the website effectively and provide a sense of control.<sup>19</sup> Thus, consumers seem to need some control over web design, and therefore over the website itself, in a way that reduces their feelings of insecurity and makes them feel comfortable and informed. In addition to the design of the website, the quality of the information on the website is also very important as it directly affects consumer uncertainty and therefore the feeling of being in control. As already mentioned, information asymmetry leads to consumer uncertainty. Information asymmetry can be reduced by the informativeness of the website. Website informativeness is defined as the extent to which a website provides buyers with information they deem useful and relevant.<sup>20</sup> According to Pavlou et al.<sup>21</sup>, consumers will not be sure of their purchase when they read information they do not find useful. This means that sellers must inform buyers about the true quality of the products, true characteristics of products and their sales practices. If consumers find this information to be useful, information asymmetry will be reduced. Thus, in addition to web design, consumers also need control over the information provided. This entails increased awareness of the website, which in turn will lead to a reduction in consumers' sense of insecurity. In short, based on the above, it can be concluded that consumers are discouraged from buying products in online stores due to their feelings of insecurity. This uncertainty stems from perceived information asymmetry, meaning that buyers cannot determine whether the quality of the product or the quality of the seller is high or low. Therefore, consumers are not sure about buying products in e-shops.

## 2 Methodology

Based on the analysis of the current state of shopping behaviour of the new generation of customers, the aim of this paper is to identify the shopping behaviour of this generation and the gender differences at the level of assessing the factors of uncertainty in online shopping. Based on the set main goal of the research, the following research problem was identified:

- Are there statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected factors of uncertainty in online shopping between men and women?

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<sup>16</sup> CHEN, Q., WELLS, W. D.: Attitude toward the site. In *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1999, Vol. 39, No. 5, p. 28-36.

<sup>17</sup> SONG, J., ZAHEDI, F.: Web Design in E-Commerce: A Belief Reinforcement Model. In *Management Science*, 2005, Vol. 51, No. 8, p. 1220-1234.

<sup>18</sup> HARRISON, D. A., MYKYTYN, P. P., RIEMENSCHNEIDER, C. K.: Executive decisions about adoption of information technology in small business: Theory and empirical tests. In *Information Systems Research*, 1997, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 172-194.

<sup>19</sup> SONG, J., ZAHEDI, F.: Web Design in E-Commerce: A Belief Reinforcement Model. In *Management Science*, 2005, Vol. 51, No. 8, p. 1220-1234.

<sup>20</sup> LUO, X.: Trust Production and Privacy Concerns on the Internet: A Framework Based on Relationship Marketing and Social Exchange Theory. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2002, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 112-117.

<sup>21</sup> PAVLOU, P. A., LIANG, H., XUE, Y.: Understanding and Mitigating Uncertainty in Online Exchange Relationships: A Principal-Agent Perspective. In *MIS Quarterly*, 2007, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 106-135.

Perceived risk has shown to generally disrupt exchange relationships<sup>22</sup>, and this perception has also been shown to negatively affect consumer acceptance of e-commerce.<sup>23</sup> If buyers are concerned about the outcome of online transactions due to the risk of loss, they are likely to limit their online shopping. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- H: We assume that there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected factors of uncertainty in online shopping between men and women.

Scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison method and selected statistical methods will be used to meet the goal of the paper. A questionnaire method was used to obtain primary data. The link to the electronic questionnaire was placed on the relevant Facebook pages, it was also distributed within the regions of the Slovak Republic by e-mail (the author's private database). A total of 962 respondents filled in the questionnaire. However, the research focuses only on the new generation of customers - Generation Y (1984 - 2000), i.e. respondents aged 20 to 36.<sup>24</sup> After removing questionnaires not meeting the requirements, we arrived at a total sample of 824 respondents. The obtained data were processed using Microsoft Excel. The results of individual analyzes were obtained using the program Gretl and Statistica 13. The method of nonparametric Man-Whitney U test was used to verify the hypothesis. Inputs to the analysis were obtained by implementing the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method. To obtain the necessary primary sources of information and data for the purposes of the paper, an exploratory method was used – questionnaires. The main principle of questionnaires is to obtain data based on subjective answers of respondents, which in this case are representatives of the new generation of customers (Generation Y/ Millennials) who shop online. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items. The first five items aimed at sorting the analyzed sample for subsequent statistical analysis. The questionnaire focused on demographic information and data related to the consumer behaviour of Millennials and their perception of uncertainty when shopping online. The research focused on a new generation of customers - Millennials (Generation Y). Regarding the definition of the age group, the paper follows the methodology of Young from the company Ogilvy & Mather. Millennials are referred to as "Generation Y" and are aged 20-36 years.

**Table 1: Age distribution of consumers by generation**

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

Source: Own processing

The research sample consisted of 824 respondents, of which 180 (21.84%) were men and 644 (78.16%) were women. The average age for the whole sample was 24.73 years, for men it was 25.01 years and for women 24.64 years. The reason for this disparity is the fact that women take part in research more than men. Given that the selection was based on availability and

<sup>22</sup> ROUSSEAU, D. M., SITKIN, S. B., BURT, R. S., CMERER, C.: Not So Different After All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust. In *Academy of Management Review*, 1998, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 394-403.

<sup>23</sup> PAVLOU, P. A., LIANG, H., XUE, Y.: Understanding and Mitigating Uncertainty in Online Exchange Relationships: A Principal-Agent Perspective. In *MIS Quarterly*, 2007, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 106-135.

<sup>24</sup> YOUNG, M.: *Ogilvy o reklamě v digitálním věku*. Bratislava : Svojtka & Co, 2017, p. 68.

voluntariness, the disparity was not "corrected". More detailed descriptive statistics for the gender variable are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the variable age**

Number	%	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation	5. percentile	95. percentile
<b>Entire sample</b>								
824	100	24,73	24	20	36	4,16	20,00	33,75
<b>Males</b>								
180	21,84	25,01	24	20	36	4,45	20,00	33,95
<b>Females</b>								
644	78,16	24,64	23	20	36	4,08	20,00	33,75

Source: Own processing

### 3 Results

The following shows individual factors into which questionnaire items could be grouped:

- Factor 1 – Information on personal data protection and sensitive information (items 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29),
- Factor 2 – Concerns about the seller's opportunism (items 15, 16, 17, 18),
- Factor 3 – Perceived uncertainty associated with online shopping (items 9, 10, 11, 12, 28, 30),
- Factor 4 – Information asymmetry (items 19, 20, 21),
- Factor 5 – Purchase engagement (items 13, 14).

The first factor was based on studies by Salisbury et al.<sup>25</sup>, Smith et al.<sup>26</sup> and Yang and Jun<sup>27</sup>, who examined barriers that discourage consumers from shopping online, their concerns about privacy, and their perceptions of the quality of e-services. Based on their proposed constructs, Factor 1 was compiled, which consists of issues like the protection of consumers' personal data and their concerns about the security of information in the process of electronic commerce. The second factor was based on studies by Gundlach et al.<sup>28</sup> and Jap and Anderson<sup>29</sup>, the subject of which was the structure of liabilities in transactions between buyers and sellers, as well as performance and continuity based on past opportunism. Based on their design, factor 2 was conceived. It consists of items related to concerns about the seller's opportunism in the process of electronic commerce. The third factor was based on studies by Torkezadeh and Dhillon<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> SALISBURY, W., PEARSON, R., PEARSON, A., MILLER, D.: Identifying Barriers That Keep Shoppers off the World Wide Web: Developing a Scale of Perceived Web Security. In *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 2001, Vol. 101, No. 4, p. 166-175.

<sup>26</sup> SMITH, H. J., MILBERG, S., BURKE, S.: Information Privacy: Measuring Individuals' Concerns about Organizational Practices. In *MIS Quarterly*, 1996, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 168-195.

<sup>27</sup> YANG, Z., JUN, M.: Consumer Perception of e-Service Quality: From Internet Purchaser and Non-Purchaser Perspectives. In *Journal of Business Strategies*, 2002, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 20-40.

<sup>28</sup> GUNDLACH, G. T., ACHROL, R., MENTZER, J.: The Structure of Commitment in Exchange. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1995, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 79-91.

<sup>29</sup> JAP, S. D., ANDERSON, E.: Safeguarding Interorganizational Performance and Continuity Under ex post Opportunism. In *Management Science*, 2003, Vol. 49, No. 12, p. 1685-1700.

<sup>30</sup> TORKZADEH, G., DHILLON, G.: Measuring Factors that Influence the Success of Internet Commerce. In *Information Systems Research*, 2002, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 188-203.

and Salisbury et al.<sup>31</sup>, Smith et al.<sup>32</sup> and Yang and Jun<sup>33</sup>, who examined the factors which influence the success of e-commerce, as well as the barriers that discourage consumers from shopping online and their perception of the quality of e-services. Given these constructs, factor 3 was subsequently developed. It consists of items focused on perceived uncertainty in online shopping. Factor 4, related to the perceived information asymmetry of consumers, was conceived on the basis of studies by Dunk<sup>34</sup> and Mishra et al.<sup>35</sup>, who investigated the impact of information asymmetry in different transactions, as well as information asymmetry and its level within transactional relationships. The last, fifth factor, which consists of issues related to involvement in the purchase/ purchasing engagement, was conceived on the basis of a construct by Laurent and Kapferer<sup>36</sup>, whose scientific research focused on measuring consumer engagement in shopping and perceiving the importance of online shopping. The aim of the research was to find out whether there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected factors of uncertainty in online shopping between men and women. The resulting hypothesis of the existence of statistically significant differences was verified using the nonparametric Man-Whitney U test. The results of the Man-Whitney U test for the 5 factors are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of the Man-Whitney U test for the hypothesis**

Factor	Order - women	Order - men	U	Z	p-value.	Average women	Average men	N women	N men
1	275777,5	64122,5	47832,5	3,5873	<b>0,0003</b>	<b>4,24</b>	<b>3,86</b>	644	180
2	277626,0	62274,0	45984,0	4,2421	<b>0,0000</b>	<b>4,15</b>	<b>3,67</b>	644	180
3	268049,5	71850,5	55560,5	0,8498	0,3954	3,99	3,95	644	180
4	264992,5	74907,5	57302,5	- 0,2327	0,8160	4,74	4,79	644	180
5	259135,5	80764,5	51445,5	- 2,3075	<b>0,0210</b>	<b>3,65</b>	<b>3,88</b>	644	180

Source: Own processing

The results show that with regard to factors 1 and 2 (information on personal data protection and sensitive information, concerns about the seller's opportunism), women feel more insecure. Men place more importance on factor 5 (involvement or purchase engagement). Gender differences were not confirmed for factors 3 and 4. Based on the results of the Man-Whitney U test, we can state that the hypothesis: "We assume that there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected factors of uncertainty in online shopping between men and women" was confirmed.

<sup>31</sup> SALISBURY, W., PEARSON, R., PEARSON, A., MILLER, D.: Identifying Barriers That Keep Shoppers off the World Wide Web: Developing a Scale of Perceived Web Security. In *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 2001, Vol. 101, No. 4, p. 166-175.

<sup>32</sup> SMITH, H. J., MILBERG, S., BURKE, S.: Information Privacy: Measuring Individuals' Concerns about Organizational Practices. In *MIS Quarterly*, 1996, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 168-195.

<sup>33</sup> YANG, Z., JUN, M.: Consumer Perception of e-Service Quality: From Internet Purchaser and Non-Purchaser Perspectives. In *Journal of Business Strategies*, 2002, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 20-40.

<sup>34</sup> DUNK, A. S.: The Effect of Budget Emphasis and Information Asymmetry on the Relation Between Budgetary Participation and Slack. In *Accounting Review*, 1993, Vol. 68, No. 2, p. 401-409.

<sup>35</sup> MISHRA, D. P., HEIDE, J. B., CORT, S. G.: Information Asymmetry and Levels of Agency Relationships. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1998, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 278-294.

<sup>36</sup> LAURENT, G., KAPFERE, J.: Measuring Consumer Involvement Profiles. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1985, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 42-52.

## Conclusion

The buyer's behaviour is inherently uncertain, given that the buyer's decisions have consequences that cannot be fully predicted. In the relationship between the buyer and the seller, the perceived uncertainty is defined as the extent to which the buyer cannot accurately predict the outcome of the transaction due to factors on the part of the seller and the product. Uncertainty relates to the quality of the seller and the quality of the product or service. Given that the two aspects of uncertainty are closely related and together describe the extent to which the outcome of a transaction can be accurately predicted, this paper focuses on the overall degree of perceived uncertainty, which includes the overall perception of uncertainty about seller and product quality. The issue of uncertainty in online transactions is still a relatively new yet extensive area of knowledge which develops rapidly, mainly due to the growth of e-commerce. The aim of the presented paper was to identify shopping behaviour of Millennials and gender differences within the generation at the level of assessing the factors of uncertainty in online shopping. Based on our research, it can be stated that there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected factors of uncertainty in online shopping between men and women. The results of our survey are more relevant than ever during the global coronavirus pandemic. However, mitigating this uncertainty and suppressing the sellers' advantage is limited by current anti-pandemic measures stemming from government regulations. Thus, consumers have no choice but to take the risk of uncertainty and risk purchasing products for which they do not have enough information about their appearance and quality.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN RAISING AWARENESS OF HEALTHY FOODS

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### **Abstract**

In her contribution, the author deals with the topic of a healthy lifestyle and the specifics of shopping behaviour when buying healthy food at the time of the spreading Coronavirus. Marketers are following new trends and looking for incentives that, despite the difficult situation associated with economic uncertainty and growing consumer antipathy to traditional advertising forms, still influence them to buy and finally consume. Businesses have a number of tools to address and influence the customer to buy a specific food product. In order to gain a competitive advantage, they reach for lesser-known, but much more innovative forms of marketing communication. In the theoretical basis, the author characterizes a consumer from the Z generation, whose shopping behaviour changes in the context of technology and its relationship to them. The author deals in more detail with marketing communication tools that are able to influence the consumer of generation Z in the choice of food, such as packaging, advertising, personal recommendations and promotion. In the second part of the paper, it brings knowledge from research already carried out in the field of healthy eating. The aim was to find out the level of shopping behaviour in this segment, the relationship of young people to a healthy lifestyle, what are the specifics of their shopping behaviour and what factors influence them when buying healthy food.

### **Key words:**

Advertising. Educational Campaigns. Generation Z. Influencer. Packaging. Personal Recommendations. Shopping Behaviour.

### **Introduction**

The hot topic of the current time has affected each of us. The coronavirus, which is now widespread around the world, has triggered a wave of panic and unknown expectations, which are also reflected in marketing. This situation showed us how the spread of the virus has affected people's shopping behaviour and whether brands are ready to respond to the current situation. In addition to the fear of infection, we are also confronted with an economic crisis and economic uncertainty. Customers are changing their shopping behaviour and focusing mainly on essential purchases such as food, hygiene products, and medicines. Many products and services have become unnecessary for customers at the moment. Therefore, it is important that in this situation, brands offer customers a suitable solution to their problems and needs.

### **1 The Theoretical Background of the Researched Issue**

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is characterized by new approaches to nutrition, changes in eating habits, as well as changes in lifestyle. People's living standards are rising and with it the demands on food, lifestyle and diet. In the days of Coronavirus, even more attention is being paid to retaining a key customer, which represents security and stability for the company in the context of the competition. Understanding consumer behaviour creates a competitive advantage for society, as it knows how consumers respond to individual marketing stimuli. We apply the topic of the paper to the Generation Z market segment. Many brands have understood the importance of this market segment and have begun to adapt their marketing activities to it. Generation Z is young people born since 2000, according to some authors since 1995.<sup>1</sup> In general, we can characterize them as an educated,

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<sup>1</sup> KOTLER, P., ARMSTRONG, G.: *Principles of Marketing*. Harlow : Pearson Education Limited, 2018, p. 99.

technologically proficient, creative and innovative generation. They are children of Generations X and Y. They are not indifferent to what is happening around them, they express themselves critically, they look too confident or even arrogant. In connection with the change in their consumer behaviour, two main directions of analysis of the behaviour of Generation Z come to the fore:

- *behaviour in the context of technology and the relationship to technology*<sup>2</sup>;
- *behaviour in the context of shopping behaviour with emphasis on the online environment*.<sup>3</sup>

The above research confirms the difference between the generations, both in relation to technology and in relation to shopping behaviour. They also emphasize the need for a special approach to Generation Z and the need to set up communication channels, as well as the form and content of communication in the way technologies are used by this generation. Based on these surveys, we can identify several trends and recommendations for marketers in the use of social networks based on their impact on Generation Z consumers:

- it is necessary to use marketing activities on various social networks,
- there is no need to target potential users at different times,
- should be taken into account when deciding on the content of information about companies and products on social platforms,
- the transition of advertising targeting from television and radio to the online world,
- use Generation Z personalities and celebrities to promote products,
- preference for some social networks when searching for shopping recommendations – YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat,
- most users follow popular brands on social networks – mainly due to discounts and special offers – create a positive brand experience,
- the number of users who buy products directly through the social network is increasing,
- the preference for the following marketing tools in the online world is increasing – professionally written reviews, ratings and recommendations of customers and results of unsponsored searches.

## 2 Specifics of Marketing in Food Selection

Slovak producers are able to offer domestic as well as foreign consumers food products that are able to withstand the fight against competing for foreign products in terms of quality. This requires an analysis of the market situation, a thorough knowledge of the characteristics of its consumers, the setting of goals and strategies, and last but not least, detailed elaboration of the marketing mix. The marketing mix contains marketing techniques and their interconnection, which are used to create an optimal marketing strategy and tactics, where the goal is to know customer needs and desires, find the right way to meet those needs. It consists of four basic tools, which are referred to in professional terminology as 4P: product, price, distribution (place) and communication (promotion). In this paper, we will deal with marketing communication tools that are able to influence an environmentally responsible consumer when choosing food, such as packaging, advertising, personal recommendations and promotion. From the consumer's point of view, finding quality and honest food in stores is no longer

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<sup>2</sup> MAYA, B.: Cross-generational analysis of information seeking behavior of smartphone users. In *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 2017, Vol. 69, No. 6, p. 725.

<sup>3</sup> DUFFET, R. G.: Influence of social media marketing communications on young consumers' attitudes. In *Young Consumers*, 2017, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 20-38. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-07-2016-00622>>.

as easy as it used to be. On the other hand, today we have a choice of many brands, types, each product has a different price and, moreover, they are more and more similar to each other. It is very difficult for a consumer to orientate himself when buying a new food product in a tangle of information. The expected quality hidden under the packaging can only be estimated by trial and error.

## 2.1 Food Packaging

Based on the basic tasks of packaging, which are to extend shelf life and maintain quality, the comparison of the packaging of food and other industrial products is different in that both tasks must be fulfilled for food, while for industrial products only quality maintenance.<sup>4</sup> Its use has long exceeded the limits of basic functionality and the purpose of packaging has changed. It has become an important sales tool. In the past, the packaging had to protect the product, allow it to be easily handled and transported, as well as efficient storage. At present, product packaging is gaining much more important roles. Its marketing function comes to the fore. It is one of the important means of ensuring the communication of the product with the customer. It helps to achieve business goals and satisfy consumers. It performs many functions with different degrees of representation: *protective, rationalizing, communication, ecological, economic and guarantee*.<sup>5</sup> In addition, in the food industry, the packaging helps the food to retain its shape, shape, texture, aroma and also helps to regulate the water content of the product. Suitable packaging prolongs the shelf life or even improves some properties of the food, e.g. dairy products in opaque packaging mean less loss of riboflavin, a light-sensitive vitamin. According to Július Mazán, innovation manager of Smurfit Kappa Obaly Štúrovo, it is possible to increase product sales by up to 20 percent with appropriately designed attractive packaging. "The uniqueness of the packaging lies in highlighting and strengthening the properties of the packaging and the way it is used by the user so that it brings him a significant positive effect and added value of the product."<sup>6</sup> Kotler and Armstrong recognized as early as 1992 that "packaging is becoming an important marketing tool" and that "packaging has great power, consumers are willing to pay a little more for the comfort, appearance, reliability and prestige of better packaging" and continue, that "companies must do more than just produce quality products".<sup>7</sup> Despite the above, they failed to expand the range of the four P marketing mix. Only today is it generally accepted and referred to as packaging as the fifth P of the marketing mix: "Packaging is a necessity today and is considered the fifth P in marketing. The cost of packaging is not negligible and also on the packaging depends on how the product meets the needs and wishes of the customer. "<sup>8</sup> Properly designed packaging can be considered a classic example of the direct relationship between quality and design.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, luxurious and imaginative packaging can be a product in itself, which at the same time increases the level of the product, which leads to a decrease in total costs. The basic aspects that guarantee the desired effect of packaging include the following:

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<sup>4</sup> KAČEŇÁK I.: *Obal – základ obchodu a bezpečnosti výrobkov*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2013. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://printprogress.sk/obal-zaklad-obchodu-a-bezpecnosti-vyrobkov/>>.

<sup>5</sup> NAGYOVÁ, E., MAĎAROVÁ, E.: *Obal – nositeľ informácií pre spotrebiteľa*. In *Medzinárodné vedecké dni 2004 : európska integrácia – výzva pre Slovensko*. Nitra : SPU, 2004, p. 772-774. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<http://www.slpk.sk/eldo/mvd2004/nagyova.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Vieme ako vytvoriť obal, ktorý predáva...* Released on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019. [online]. [2020-09-11]. Available at: <<http://www.ezisk.sk/clanok/vieme-ako-vytvorit-obal-ktory-predava/4633/>>.

<sup>7</sup> KOTLER, P., ARMSTRONG, G.: *Marketing*. Bratislava : SPN, 1992, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> KAČEŇÁK I.: *Obal – základ obchodu a bezpečnosti výrobkov*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2013. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://printprogress.sk/obal-zaklad-obchodu-a-bezpecnosti-vyrobkov/>>.

<sup>9</sup> GRZNÁR, M., JURÁŠEK P., TRŠŤANSKÁ, A., VYBÍRALOVÁ, J.: *Trh potravín a jeho fungovanie*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2004, p. 56.

- attract the buyer, evoke the wish of the buyer to buy the product,
- provide product information,
- brand the product so that it is memorable,
- the ecological effect, the possibility of its easy disposal without adverse effects on the environment, or re-use or recovery.

At the point of sale, it is an important moment to make a decision in front of the counter, when the consumer is inclined to buy the product under the influence of positive perception. Many manufacturers are just copying common shapes and packaging concepts, hoping for a positive effect on the sales of their products. But it doesn't always work. One group of customers is subject to impulsive purchases (without preparation) and the other group are determined consumers who know in advance what they will buy when they enter the store. Whether we act purposefully or impulsively, always at the moment of deciding on a given product, our actions are influenced by external influences. Such influences include the colours of the packaging, the product logo and its knowledge through advertising or the recommendation of acquaintances. However, there are many more elements that influence customer decisions. The advantage of displaying the product in the store is the ability to assess the packaging through other sensory organs.<sup>10</sup> In the food industry, the consumer's interest in buying can also be aroused by the smell, which stimulates the consumer's taste. Consumers' demands for food packaging are increasing and their choice is also expanding. The packaging is expected to be easy to handle, to be easy to open, to be resealable after the required dose has been taken, to be open at any time, to meet aesthetic requirements, to be environmentally acceptable. There are many criteria to meet: shape, weight, easy handling, extended durability. All this belongs to the preferred features of the packaging. Of course, the ideal packaging cannot include all these features, preferences must be made, while the price of the product must also be taken into account.<sup>11</sup> If the packaging is to engage and meet the needs of the consumer, it must fully respect his information requirements. At the same time, feedback pointing to the consumer's interest in the information on the packaging is equally important.<sup>12</sup> Keller pointed out that consumers are exposed to more than 20,000 product choices during a 30-minute visit to the supermarket, making the packaging a "final sales proposal that stimulates impulsive purchases, increases market share and reduces promotional costs."<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 Advertising

Today's consumers have a wide range of options for deciding what to buy, where to buy it, for how much, in what quantity and quality. Many factors play an important role in their decision-making. In the previous section, we imagined packaging that replaces advertising in a way at the point of sale. The eye-catching packaging of the product at the point of sale will reach a larger number of customers than in the case of using advertising or other communication mix tools. The definition of advertising has changed significantly. It is no longer limited to

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<sup>10</sup> NAGYOVÁ, E., MAĎAROVÁ, E.: Obal – nositeľ informácií pre spotrebiteľa. In *Medzinárodné vedecké dni 2004 : európska integrácia – výzva pre Slovensko*. Nitra : SPU, 2004, p. 772-774. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<http://www.slpk.sk/eldo/mvd2004/nagyova.pdf>>.

<sup>11</sup> GRZNÁR, M., JURÁŠEK P., TRŠŤANSKÁ, A., VYBÍRALOVÁ, J.: *Trh potravín a jeho fungovanie*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Bratislava : EKONÓM, 2004, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> NAGYOVÁ, E., MAĎAROVÁ, E.: Obal – nositeľ informácií pre spotrebiteľa. In *Medzinárodné vedecké dni 2004 : európska integrácia – výzva pre Slovensko*. Nitra : SPU, 2004, p. 772-774. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<http://www.slpk.sk/eldo/mvd2004/nagyova.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see: *Portuguese consumers attitudes towards food labelling*. Copenhagen, Denmark : World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2017. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/353050/Foodlabeling-in-Portugal\\_web.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/353050/Foodlabeling-in-Portugal_web.pdf)>.

providing basic information about products, but its activities have expanded to influence the customer, his shopping behaviour and feelings. Advertising connects the consumer with the product in order to evoke certain feelings in him, which activate him to buy the product. According to Čmejrková, its task is “to first draw attention to oneself and only then to identify the product, so that it stands out from the ranks of others on the market. The interest of the observer must be stimulated and convinced that the product will satisfy a certain need and that it is the best.”<sup>14</sup> Vysekalová offers a different view “it is mainly about communication between the client and the person to whom the offered product or service is intended, through some medium with a commercial purpose.”<sup>15</sup> According to Kotler, “The goal of advertising is a specific task and the degree of its fulfilment within a specific audience and a specific time.”<sup>16</sup> Based on the above definitions, we can state that advertising is any paid form of product or service promotion, which on the one hand serves to exchange information and on the other hand influences the attitudes and behaviour of potential customers. Today's food market is characterized by goods of the same quality. Today, the products are increasingly similar to each other. Advertisers are thus forced to look for different ways to reach a customer to choose their product.

Today, it is common to link a combination of communication and business channels and marketing. On the social network, we show interest in a healthy diet and we immediately receive attention related to products related to healthy lifestyle products. We even get coupons on our smartphone with a notification about how we can use them. According to retail analyst Lubomír Drahovský, the numbers clearly show that the Slovak consumer is still orientating and making decisions based on price. This is despite the fact that in various surveys, people say how they look at the quality, freshness and the like. The analyst estimates that resellers will continue to come up with additional promotional activities and various discount offers. Lidl is one of the most communicated brands in Slovakia, it has the most advertising of all chains. Kaufland presents itself with an offer of Slovak food, and the COOP Jednota beasts have already become an advertising legend. Another area is children's advertising. Food businesses must be particularly careful not to abuse their influence in a way that harms the public. Children are particularly sensitive to irresponsible food advertising. According to Vysekalová, the positives of advertising are that: it disseminates information about products and services, reaches a large number of recipients faster than “oral submissions”, enables retrospective verification of how it worked, values goods and services and gives them specific features (personality traits), gives consumers a sense of confidence - they prefer to buy goods they know something about, increase the quality of goods and breadth of choice (stimulates competition, helps customers ensure choice), expands media choice (advertising money allows independent media), is important for economic prosperity (best prosperous the world economies are those where advertising is most prevalent).<sup>17</sup> Then why it is the target of criticism? One view is that this is a waste of money that the consumer must ultimately pay. Vysekalová objects, good advertising increases the efficiency of sales and customers have the opportunity to control. Another view criticizes advertising for its manipulation of people. Vysekalová claims that advertising can only convince, the effect of subliminal advertising has never been proven, people have a free choice when buying.<sup>18</sup> In conclusion, we can state that the role of advertising is not only to present the product, but it is important to know the needs of the population,

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<sup>14</sup> ČMEJRKOVÁ, S.: *Reklama v češtině a čeština v reklamě*. Prague : Leda, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> VYSEKALOVÁ, J., MIKEŠ, J.: *Reklama. Jak dělat reklamu*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s., 2010, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> KOTLER, P., KELLER, K. L.: *Marketing management*. 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s., 2013, p. 544.

<sup>17</sup> VYSEKALOVÁ, J., MIKEŠ, J.: *Jak dělat reklamu 4*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s., 2018, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

highlight the specific advantages of advertising that are important to the consumer and can convince him of product quality.

### 2.3 Personal Recommendations

The Customer Experience Report Slovakia 2010 survey conducted by GfK Slovakia in February on a sample of 810 respondents shows that up to six out of ten consumers in Slovakia can be influenced by the opinion of their friend.<sup>19</sup> The recommendations of those known about the more favourable price of certain foods and, more recently, especially about the higher quality of products, are an important factor influencing consumer behaviour. Another survey by the above-mentioned agency for an organization that brings together the largest retail chains on the Slovak market, in a sample of thousands of respondents in February 2018, says that almost half of respondents said that quality is their first most important factor in purchasing decisions. About a quarter of respondents look at the price in this way. According to Rastislav Kočan from the Slovak branch of GfK, this is a relatively historical thing, because for many years it used to be reversed. Quality gradually comes first in almost all target groups. The trend of price decline at the expense of quality is visible, especially in the last two or three years. However, it has not yet settled in the entire market.<sup>20</sup> We can assume that the change in approach to food choices is also due to food scandals and the dual quality of products, the media coverage of which has triggered a debate on food safety, consumer protection and the ethics of food production. Quality and trust are the main reasons consumers are willing to pay. These facts have led to the Slovak consumer gradually trusting Slovak food products, relying on quality conditioned by tradition, whether by buying a well-known, traditional product or deciding on a product from a producer who has a tradition in Slovakia. Most surveys say that consumers are interested in domestic products, they are willing to prefer them to foreign ones, provided that they taste and are of high quality. They are even willing to pay more. All campaigns for the sale of Slovak products brought effects. However, it should be noted that the food must first and foremost be of good quality, its origin is only the second consideration criterion.<sup>21</sup> A new trend in the approach of Slovaks when buying food is also the ever-improving perception of private labels, which people no longer consider as a lower price compensation, but as an equal rival also for large global brands.<sup>22</sup> Special local brands, which have a traditionally strong position in some regions, can completely displace world-famous brands in food.

The perception of quality is often caused by the relationship to the brand. It can be influenced by previous customer experience, whether own or mediated. Several product quality studies have confirmed that the perception of product quality is largely influenced by the relationship to the brand, its strength, the emotions from advertising and the associations that consumers associate with the brand. It is because we like to return repeatedly to a brand that we know and perceive as quality. The strength of the brand influences loyalty. A loyal customer spreads positive references about the brand, whereby the brand builds advertising itself and for free. By summarizing the findings, we can say that today's consumer is increasingly aware and more

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<sup>19</sup> PALFIOVÁ, A.: Nepodceňujte silu spotrebiteľských skúseností. In *Obchod*, 2010, Vol. 15, No. 7, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> LEGEŇ, M.: *Kvalita potravín už tankuje Slovákov viac ako cena*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/kvalita-potravin-uz-tankuje-slovakov-viac-ako-cena.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> SEDLÁK, J.: *O obsahu košíka už nerozhodujú iba príjmy*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://peniaze.pravda.sk/spotrebitel/clanok/372189-o-obsahu-kosika-uz-nerozhoduju-iba-prijmy/>>.

<sup>22</sup> PODSTUPKA, P.: *V potravinách rozhoduje cena, nie značka*. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<http://hnonline.sk/c1-48619990-v-potravinach-rozhoduje-cena-nie-znacka>>.



demanding when buying food. He is interested in the composition of the food he buys. In the first place, he puts quality for which he is willing to pay extra. He is interested in the composition and origin of food. He searches for information directly at the point of sale, where he can involve several senses in the research. Under the pressure of media coverage of food scandals, it buys proven products from verified producers, often from Slovak local producers. On the other hand, emotions almost always stand in the background of his decision. Every human decision-making is first and foremost emotional and only later rationally justified. And this is a place that traders can use to influence the consumer's purchasing decision.

## 2.4 New Forms of Communication

It has always been shown that consumers searching for products on the Internet follow the opinions of other users when shopping. We can say that they use the form of a recommendation when making purchasing decisions. Considering that up to 4.2 billion users use the Internet from the world's population, and on average one in five people has a social network account where they spend about two hours a day, we have a large base of potential customers. That's why companies have decided to promote their products online. In Slovakia, 80% of households have the Internet, while digital literacy is constantly growing.<sup>23</sup> The oversaturation of the online market, which caused conscious or subconscious ignoring of advertising banners on the website and the fact that if the website does not load within 3 seconds, users leave it, has created the need to find a new way to reach customers. And so the content was created by authentic personalities – influencers. The power of influencer marketing lies in the fact that people trust a specific personality with influence, influencer, more than the brand itself. The influencer can create interest in the product in an unobtrusive way that at first glance does not look like direct advertising. It provides a credible review of the product, whether positive or negative. This usually includes information on price, availability and also the possibility to order the product online. It is much easier for the customer to obtain information in this form, as he consumes the content created by influencer naturally. He perceives this recommendation more as friendly advice from a person who is either sympathetic to him or familiar with the issue. In Slovakia, the most used advertising is via social networks Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. However, collaboration is also possible with personalities active on LinkedIn or with bloggers. Depending on the channel they use, we can divide them into several groups:

- *Blogger*: author of blogs who writes about various topics that have attracted more readers and people who follow their opinions,
- *Instagrammer*: through photos on Instagram he gained a large number of fans who follow his activities,
- *Youtuber*: A professional YouTube user who shares opinions, experiences, tips, or advice on any topic in their videos.

All of these people have one thing in common: influencing the community of their fans through their communication channel and financial reward for promoting the products and services of companies that pay them for this form of advertising.<sup>24</sup> Each influencer is different, it differs in the number of followers, content, originality or specification. Not everyone is suitable for promoting every brand, so we can divide them:

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<sup>23</sup> KRAMÁROVÁ, M.: *Influencer marketing – všetko, čo musíte vedieť skôr, než sa doň pustíte*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.ecommercebridge.sk/influencer-marketing-vsetko-co-musite-vediet-skor-nez-sa-don-pustite/>>.

<sup>24</sup> CAMARENA, A.: *Akú úlohu v marketingu hrajú influenceri a ako vám môžu pomôcť*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<http://www.bigbuy.eu/blog/sk/aku-ulohu-v-marketingu-hraju-influenceri-ako-vam-mozu-pomoc/>>.

- *Expert* – a person who can convince even experts, because he has knowledge in a specific field and his followers trust him.
- *Trendsetter* – is used to promote the field of technology, beauty, fashion and is used mainly when launching a new product on the market, because it has great power to influence trends and shopping behaviour of followers.
- *Blogger* – specializes in one area whose information is conveyed to people. He can engage his readers and build a relationship with them. He uses a blog, a personal website, as a platform.
- *Celebrity* – a well-known face, which can be, for example, an actor, singer or athlete. Customers are often interested in the product being promoted because it is recommended by a person they know or want to resemble.
- *Ambassador* – the idea of rewarding the most loyal customers with products who enthusiastically promote him not only online, but also in their surroundings. This form of promotion based on recommendations has quickly established and new forms of influencers are constantly emerging:
  - *Micro-influencers* are people who have only a few thousand followers, but can accurately address the desired target group, they can have up to 60% greater impact,
  - *Kid influencers* – mostly children of famous parents,
  - *Virtual influencers* – a modern trend where the brand is promoted by computer-generated models or singers,
  - *Animal influencers* brands use animals that can reach any age group and be much more viral than ordinary influencers to promote their products.<sup>25</sup>

The advantages of using influencers in marketing are mainly the following: *natural advertising, improving the reputation and credibility of the product, increasing the number of conversions, improving the position in search.*<sup>26</sup> The food industry does not lag behind in the use of new trends in promotion either. Since January 2019, the KRAJ retail network has been cooperating with ambassadors. Two influencers Silvia Križanová (sisa\_kr) and Milan Bardún (milan\_bezmapy) inform in an attractive way about the origin of raw materials, composition, production processes and health benefits. In recent years, we have seen a significant shift in the world of gastronomy in conjunction with visual elements such as photographs, video recipes, graphic elements. Now this connection will be deepened even more. Not only the taste and smell itself but also the latest sounds are becoming extremely important elements of modern gastronomy. Gastro-themed ASMR videos, which contain sounds such as the rupture of the packaging, chewing, whispering and twisting, creasing of the packaging, evoke increasing feelings of euphoria and joy, especially among Internet users. ASMR Internet stars (ASMRDarling, HungryCakes, ASMRTheChew and GIBIASMR) already have tens of millions of followers today, and some videos have seen more than 6 million views. The influencers, who play the main role in the mentioned videos, bring their viewers to another dimension, in which they can feel the food perfectly, especially thanks to their hearing. The creative process of creating advertising today requires more than just common sense. A little experimentation with ideas that are based on the principles of intuition and inspired by the subconscious is required. Advertising must first and foremost be true and transparent. Consumers want to know where their food comes from, how it is processed, what added value they bring. Thus, not only the product that we consume but also the way we consume it and the

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<sup>25</sup> *Influenceri na Slovensku: Aké typy influencerov existujú?*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017. [online]. [2020-09-01]. Available at: <<https://contentagency.sk/influenceri-na-slovensku-ake-typy-influencerov-existuju/>>.

<sup>26</sup> KRAMÁROVÁ, M.: *Influencer marketing – všetko, čo musíte vedieť skôr, než sa doň pustíte*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.ecommercebridge.sk/influencer-marketing-vsetko-co-musite-vediet-skor-nez-sa-don-pustite/>>.

information we obtain when consuming it remains an important indicator in the preparation of advertising campaigns.

## 2.5 Foreign Research in This Area

According to the research “*New food product consumer's behaviour: Health literacy and neophobia*”<sup>27</sup>, the goal of developing a new food product is to respond to consumer concerns about food promotion and health. Education plays a key role in consumer behaviour by providing tools that enable them to make informed choices. Empowering the consumer is essential to the success of a health promotion strategy. The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of health literacy and novel food consumption behaviour (especially neophobic and unofficial behaviour) of the Lisbon population in Portugal. A questionnaire, which includes the Portuguese version of the Newest Vital Sign (NVS),<sup>1</sup> was applied to a sample of 384 individuals<sup>15</sup> from the Lisbon area, distributed in accordance with the 2001 Census of the Portuguese population. In the Lisbon, area lives 25% of the Portuguese mainland population with a mean age very close to the Portuguese total population. From these individuals, only those over 15 years old (age considered to define a consumer<sup>1</sup>) were selected to participate in the study. The questionnaire is divided into five dimensions: sample characterization; health literacy; responsible food consumption; environmental awareness on the consumption of food products, and concern about health issues. The level of health literacy was scored in 3 groups, using the number of correct answers (six questions giving one point for each correct answer), a score of 0-1 correct answers suggests high likelihood (50% or more) of limited literacy, 2-3 correct answers indicates the possibility of limited literacy, 4-6 correct answers almost always indicate adequate literacy. Food consumption behaviour was evaluated in two of the dimensions allowing the characterization of neophobic and neophilia aspects as well as environmental aspects on food consumption and finally, in the last dimension, its relation with health concerns. Data analysis was performed using SPSS®, version 19. Given that new food products can improve the health and dietary aspects of the population, the findings have led to the conclusion that educational strategies are needed to improve health literacy and consequently food neophilia, in this particular study, especially in the elderly lower school population.

Very similar conclusions are drawn by the study “*The Factors That Influence Our Food Choices*”<sup>28</sup> Studies indicate that the level of education can influence dietary behaviour during adulthood.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, nutrition knowledge and good dietary habits are not strongly correlated. This is because knowledge about health does not lead to direct action when individuals are unsure of how to apply their knowledge. Furthermore, information disseminated on nutrition comes from a variety of sources and is viewed as conflicting or is mistrusted, which discourages motivation to change.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is important to convey accurate and consistent messages through various media, on food packages and of course via health professionals.

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<sup>27</sup> SORES, L., HENRIQUE, L.: *New food product consumer's behaviour: Health literacy and neophobia*. In *Global Journal of medicine and Public Health*, 2016, Vol. 5. No. 3, p. 4. [online]. [2020-10-06]. Available at: <[https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/34280/1/WU113\\_LUIh%20N\\_AI\\_2016.pdf](https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/34280/1/WU113_LUIh%20N_AI_2016.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> BELLISLE, F.: *The Factors That Influence Our Food Choices*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2006. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/the-determinants-of-food-choice/>>.

<sup>29</sup> KEARNEY, M., KEARNEY, J., DUNNE, A., GIBNEY, M.: Sociodemographic determinants of perceived influences on food choice in a nationally representative sample of Irish adults. In *Public Health Nutrition*, 2000, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 220. [online]. [2020-09-06]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10948389/>>.

<sup>30</sup> DE ALMEIDA, M. D., GRACA, P., LAPPALAINEN, R., GIACHETTI, I., KAFATOS, A., KEARNEY, J. M.: Sources used and trusted by nationally-representative adults in the European Union for information on healthy eating. In *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1997, Vol. 51, No. 2, p. 17. [online]. [2020-10-06]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9222719/>>.

There are many influences on food choice which provide a whole set of means to intervene in and improve people's food choices. There are also a number of barriers to dietary and lifestyle change, which vary depending on life stages and the individual or group of people in question. It is a major challenge both to health professionals and to the public themselves to effect dietary change. Different strategies are required to trigger a change in behaviour in groups with different priorities. Campaigns that incorporate tailored advice that include practical solutions, as well as environmental change, are likely to succeed in facilitating dietary change. Further foreign research "*Consumers' behaviours and attitudes toward healthy food products: The case of Organic and Functional foods*"<sup>31</sup> conducted a survey to understand attitudes towards healthy foods with special reference to organic and functional products through cluster analysis. The main goal of this study was to derive clues that can contribute to better strategic and tactical marketing decisions. The findings of this study are also important for government agencies interested in designing public health programs. For the purpose of this study we conducted a survey on 300 Italian consumers, living in three different cities Bologna, Rome and Naples, aged over 18 years and responsible for ordinary domestic shopping, The face to face interviews were carried out in different days and in different outlets such as, open markets, traditional shops and supermarkets; all interviews were completed between January and April 2009. A pilot test on 30 consumers was conducted in order to ensure that the statements were clear and to identify redundant variables and questions that were difficult to understand. According to the pre-test results some questions were removed, others were modified. The other benefit of the pre-test was that it provided a clear idea on the time needed to fulfill the questionnaire. The final questionnaire included 30 close-ended questions and it is structured in four specific parts.

The first part of the questionnaire focused on assessing consumers' propensity for a healthy lifestyle and how this trend was reflected in their food purchases and consumption. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the analysis of consumer attitudes towards organic products and functional foods. The third part of the survey sought to analyze various ways in which consumer-mediated information on functional foods and organic products seeks to understand the adequacy, clarity and reliability of the information system and the level of awareness of health aspects of these products and to identify some possible strategies to improve the efficiency of information flows. Detailed socio-demographic information on the following parameters were also collected: gender, age cohort, education, employment, marital status, number of people in the household. For the purposes of this study, a quantitative approach was adopted to identify differences between respondents about their attitudes, shopping behaviour, knowledge and perceptions. The data obtained were analyzed twice. The results show that Italian consumers are well informed about the links between eating habits, food health and personal health, although they are not always willing to give up the pleasure of what they consume and continue to give taste a dominant role in food choices. This is confirmed by other studies, which also point to the primary role of taste as a factor driving food choices for the consumer in general. At the same time, the results confirm the strong interest in the nutritional aspects of food and in products with a healthy image, which confirms the attention paid to functional and organic foods. However, when analyzing the respondents' propensity for these two product categories, there is still some ambiguity as to their properties, in particular as regards functional foods. The descriptive analysis undoubtedly emphasizes the greater awareness of respondents about organic products, most respondents in fact gave the correct definition of organic production and declared a higher tendency to consume compared to functional foods. In addition, in terms of motivation to consume, the results derived from this

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<sup>31</sup> ANNUNZIATA, A., PASCALE, P.: Consumers' behaviours and attitudes toward healthy food products: The case of Organic and Functional foods. In *113<sup>th</sup> EAAE Seminar 2009: A resilient European food industry and food chain in a challenging world*. Chania, Crete : MAICh, 2009, p. 2-13.

analysis show that consumers buy functional and organic foods mainly for health reasons; they assume that these products are healthier than traditional products. In particular, as is largely reported in the literature, food safety and health have been the very dominant motivation for organic shopping in most European countries.

The aim of the Slovak survey on „*Consumer Purchasing Behavior and their Attitudes to Organic, Traditional and Functional Foods*“<sup>32</sup> was to analyse and determine Slovak purchasing behaviour and their attitudes to organic food, traditional and functional foods. The questionnaire survey was attended by 141 Slovak respondents aged 18 to 70 years. Most often Slovak consumers buy foods in supermarkets and hypermarkets, less from local producers and small owners. Slovak consumers take into account by buying foods, in particular, the quality and freshness of food, price, and only every tenth respondent note the country of origin. Almost a quarter of respondents consider traditional foods for most beneficial for health, after functional and organic foods. Near every fourth respondent thinks that organic foods are a scam. Slovak consumers don't have much trust in health-promoting foods, which may be caused by the lack of information about their benefits. Regarding the trust to organic food, consumers should be more informed as to verify whether organic food is really organic food, for example, by the special mark and the number of the certifying company below it. The YEME family supermarket strives for consumer confidence with its concept.<sup>33</sup> They put it together to meet the needs of the city and family customer. Their mission is to bring really high-quality, honest and mostly local food to Slovak tables. They try to encourage local manufacturers to create an environment of sheer quality and honesty, as this is the only recipe for success. Their website is educational but at the same time funny, full of useful information and attractive even for a more demanding customer. The same philosophy is also developed by the FARMFOODS concept<sup>34</sup>, a supply chain based on pillars denoting the entire process "from Slovak farms to the final consumer". All partners are entitled to use this logo who, in addition to adhering to the FARMFOODS quality policy, operate on the principle of six pillars: healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy animals, healthy food, healthy people and an undisturbed landscape. Both concepts respect the special approach to Generation Z, the need to set up communication channels as well as the form and content of communication in the way technologies are used by this generation.

## Conclusion

In the last decade, consumer health awareness has become an important factor in driving the agri-food market. Healthier food products have entered world markets in recent years and have quickly gained market share. As a result, the food industry has responded to this trend by developing a growing range of new products with health claims and images, including organic and functional foods, that consumers choose for their health-promoting properties. The healthy food and drink market are currently performing well in terms of innovation and market penetration; healthy food in Europe has a turnover of € 5.7 billion. Various researches have concluded that a better understanding of consumers' perceptions of healthy foods and their determinants is a key success factor for market orientation and development and for the

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<sup>32</sup> JAROSSOVÁ, M. A.: Consumer Purchasing Behaviour and their Attitudes to Organic, Traditional and Functional Foods. In *Studia commercialia Bratislavensia*, 2015, Vol. 8, No. 31, p. 372. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <[https://of.euba.sk/www\\_write/files/veda-vyskum/scb/vydane-cisla/2015-03/scb0315\\_Jarossova.pdf](https://of.euba.sk/www_write/files/veda-vyskum/scb/vydane-cisla/2015-03/scb0315_Jarossova.pdf)>.

<sup>33</sup> *Koncept Yeme*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.yeme.sk/koncept-yeme/>>.

<sup>34</sup> *Farmfoods koncept*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.farmfoods.sk/koncept-farmfoods>>.

successful negotiation of market opportunities. Consumers generally understand the link between food and health, and many are interested in acting accordingly. Our findings are consistent with the results of other studies that demonstrate the positive impact of health information on consumer expectations, perceptions or intentions. On the other hand, product information is one of the external factors/cues that have been shown to influence consumer choice. These three groupings identified in our research have shown significant differences in terms of knowledge of health products, especially organic and functional foods, and different levels of information lead to a different propensity to consume. Therefore, the acceptance of health claims by the consumer may increase the intention to purchase this product. It follows that the question of how consumers can and should be informed about the health properties of foods is a key issue in the development of organic and functional foods, as well as in new and healthier food products. However, providing a large amount of information to consumers has a limited chance of success simply because much of this information does not focus on a specific need. Therefore, there is a risk that consumers will not participate in them and will not process them.

A particular challenge is to identify and effectively address market segments. A generic approach, which involves providing a large amount of information to the general public, poses a real risk of information overload, leading to confusion and disinterest for most consumers. In this context, an interesting indication of the respondents' confidence in public information campaigns, which can reveal to consumers the link between diet and health, the nutritional and healthy properties of healthy products, in particular organic and functional foods, and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Interesting findings came from the results of a 2015 Nielsen survey<sup>35</sup> of 30,000 consumers in 60 countries about how consumers perceive consumer brands and how these feelings affect their shopping behaviour. The result of the report was that today's consumers are willing to pay more for sustainability, and this is especially true for the millennium generation and its successor, the Z generation. The young generation supports socially responsible companies. They are willing to spend more knowing that they are spending money on something that is good for the planet and for the people who live on it. This is a relatively new perspective for consumers, although, in an increasingly interconnected world, it is beginning to be normal to think critically about where things come from and whether the society you support is responsible. Many dietary trends and new products are emerging in the food market. The consumer of the Z generation combines the quality of food with several aspects, such as the nutritional value of the product, required quality standards, originality, product uniqueness, food functionality, timeliness of production and quality in relation to value and wants to get all this information in a creative way. As regards the promoter of promotional education campaigns, consumers have expressed strong confidence in the research on the information disseminated by health professionals and government agencies, which are considered to be more effective. From a dynamic point of view, the implementation of targeted information campaigns can play a crucial role in the development of healthy products. As lifestyles have changed over the course of the last few months and a number of products and services are not essential for customers at the moment, it is important for businesses to be able to adapt to the situation by adapting those products and services, which consumers prefer to buy under the current situation. A seller of nutritional supplements, e.g. focuses mainly on products such as vitamins and nutritional support. Food supply chains ensure the delivery of food directly to the customer. It is essential that they adapt appropriately and even at this time offer customers a suitable solution to their problems and needs. Brand communication should

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<sup>35</sup> *Slováci sa cítia finančne istejšie ako pred piatimi rokmi*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019. [online]. [2020-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/sk/sk/insights/article/2019/slovaks-feel-more-financially-than-five-years-ago/>>.

always be up-to-date, consistent and understandable. The same is true in the crisis situation which we are currently experiencing.

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## SEXVERTISING – THE GAME CHANGER

*Jana Hubinová*

### **Abstract**

Taboos are meant to be overcome. There are all types of taboos one can imagine in the world. There are reasonable, legitimate ones and the taboos that need to be overcome. By this article, we aim to remind ourselves of some advertising campaigns that helped to overcome some taboos and raise awareness of health and medical condition related issues by means of sexvertising, a provocative marketing strategy. We mostly deal with campaigns of the 21st century that influenced certain societies if not society as a whole. One of mentioned campaigns was launched in COVID-19 pandemic period. The reason why we present sexvertising campaigns as game changers is their potential to attract attention and by that way to initiate discussion about important societal issues.

### **Key words:**

Attention Fishing. Awareness. COVID-19 Pandemic. Health. Sex. Sexvertising. Societal Change. Taboos.

## **1 Introduction**

In 2020 when most of life on Earth depends on our responsibility to stop and if not stop at least to reduce the pace of COVID-19 virus spreading, most of our activities have moved online. We learn online, do exercises online, gather online... We even date online. Offline marketing is for now dead, zero and marketer's job has become even harder as the split in between online and offline somehow caused online being more '*crowded*' than ever before. Advertising must be even more specific and attention catching now. Creativity is no longer an advantage, it is a must for all advertisers as they would otherwise get lost in that peculiar marketing era. The term intimacy is quite peculiar, too. And it is ambiguous. Most people refer to intimacy as to an euphemism used to describe sexual character of a relationship, though, this is not the only extent of '*being intimate with someone*'. Intimacy also refers to cosiness, closeness and at the same time openness towards another human being. Intimacy is referred to as certain affinity with another living creature that creates a comfortable atmosphere for all parties involved. And here is the thin, thin line that tends to be sometimes crossed. All involved parties should feel comfortable with an intimate utterance. While speaking about marketing, this is the tricky part. Marketing is meant not only for the targeted audience, as it usually reaches general public, too. As easy as it can be to suit an advertisement for a very narrow and specific target group, the harder it gets then to suit it to pretty much everybody whom the ad can reach. The article seeks data on what level of intimacy has been easily accepted by general public and where exactly the thin line actually lies.

Sexvertising is an eyebrows-raising marketing method by which marketers fish for attention of products for the benefit of their clients. The attention they get can be of all kinds- positive, negative, rising awareness or even controversial. All kinds of products are advertised by use of sex, nudity and naked role models. Alcohol, entertainment and beauty products are the primary product categories for sexvertising campaigns. The list does not end there, though. Surprisingly, societal, health-related and many other fields can be advertised by means of sex, too. Sexvertising as a marketing approach can be applied with multiple levels of intensity (via both visual or audiovisual and textual communication channel) and people's sensitivity to its intensity may tremendously vary from culture to culture, from country to country, based on recipient's age, sex and, eventually, their actual state of mind. This article presents several campaigns in which sexual imagery was used as primary marketing language and here we rate their success and appropriateness in field.

## 2 Important Milestones

Society is formed by individuals. Their individual acts can ignite social commotions but also arouse societal changes. Certain historic events helped to direct the society and civilisation as a whole to get accustomed with freedom of sexual expression more than others. For the purpose of being authentic, important milestones of history need to be reminded as those eased sexuality as a topic to be opened in general public. The very first milestone to be mentioned is abolition of slavery. The very first country in the world to abolish slavery was one of the US federal states, the State of Vermont in 1777. It is true that the State of Vermont, as the first state in the US abolished slavery and slave imports from Europe<sup>1</sup> but it came as a result of anti-slavery debates started on the old continent a decade ago. Following the precedens, in 1781 slavery was abolished in all the territory of Austrian-Habsburg dominion. As it seems, passing the abolition law was a complicated task for Britain. British colonies where the trade with slaves was a, especially exports of slaves to the US was a lucrative means of money making and at the same time a great opportunity to get rid of likely unadaptable inhabitants on British territory. Abolition of slavery was civilisation's project number one in regards to rights of man. The first country to refer to is France where back in 1789 just shortly after French Revolution started, the National Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The most important charter of the document was the liberty of freedom and equality stated in its 17th article: "*Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.*"<sup>2</sup> Sexuality is very closely linked with slavery, as it is believed that out of 40 millions of people enslaved in modern forms of slavery, 12,5 % are victims of sex slavery and unbelievable 37,5 percent are those forced into marriage slavery (that can be into great extent perceived as a more acceptable form of sex slavery). 15 millions people around the world were forced into marriage and opening the topic of sexuality, especially of women sexuality, is the key element to launch the fight against pre-arranged marriages.

The next milestone to be mentioned is the one granting equal treatment of individuals. Equal treatment of individuals is granted to all citizens of internationally recognised alliances such as the European Commission as result of various directives and norms stipulated by law.<sup>3</sup> The importance of stipulations legally sanctioning breach of human rights on the ground of discrimination matter especially for women who are often judged based on their sex life, nudity exposure and often based on their decision to have or not to have children as a result of their sexual behaviour (speaking of abortions but having in mind sexual harassment, too). Discrimination, as a result of belief that some sex, race, social status, culture or even health status is superior to other and that makes its holder a superior human being is stipulated in European Union as follows: "*Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.*"<sup>4</sup> The wording of the right ("*shall be prohibited*") comes from the original document the Charter of Fundamental Rights and may be found in article 21 and is considered to be quite weak and unclear as the limits are not clearly set and the sanctions are therefore hardly applicable for example in case of age-related, sex-history related of sexual-orientation related discrimination cases.

<sup>1</sup> *Chronology: Who banned slavery when?*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2007. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-slavery-idUSL1561464920070322>>.

<sup>2</sup> BALES, K.: *New slavery: A reference handbook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Santa Barbara : ABC-CLIO, 2004, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Non-discrimination – Know Your rights*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-rights/equality/non-discrimination\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-rights/equality/non-discrimination_en)>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

The reason why the milestone is mentioned in connection with sexuality and sex topics is that not until now (2020) the topic of discrimination cannot be considered closed. As a reminder of that, in the US people with dark skin color are still treated differently from their white fellows. Surprisingly, even at socio-political level. #BlackLivesMatter as a decentralised socio-political movement takes irreplaceable stand in the fight for equal rights realisation and their actual application in real life all around the world. Another example of inequality is how much wages of a man and a woman differ. The data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics have clearly shown that in the third quarter of 2020, women earned in average 19% less than their male counterparts<sup>5</sup>. The statistic does not take into consideration seasonality of surveyed jobs, neither job type nor employee's seniority, meaning that the percentage gap could be far bigger on the account of male preference in certain occupations or job positions. The situation in the EU is not much better as back in 2014, the gender pay gap in the EU stood at 16% which means that average hourly rate differed greatly based on employee's sex. In 2018, the hourly rate in between men and women differed by 14,8%. Even the percentage lowers, the pace of decrease is tremendously slow. The next thing to be mentioned is an important milestone related to journalism and subsequently to promotion and marketing of goods is the Freedom of speech. The freedom of speech is as a principle embedded into legal documents, most importantly into the Universal declaration of human rights. It pretty much grants the same right as the antidiscrimination code related to freedom of opinion expression. *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."*<sup>6</sup> The community strengthening aspect of any previously mentioned movement made this very important social and cultural regulation pass through into any constitutional rights known as the principle of freedom of expression. The notion did not exist until late 18th century. Until then, some people had paid high price for expressing their opinions and ideas, especially in public as the equity of opinions couldn't be legally bounding.

Freedom of expression is commonly misinterpreted as 'freedom of speech' that is only limited to auditory and visual media. In fact, *"freedom of speech is the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, by any means"*<sup>7</sup>. The last milestone to be mentioned here is universal suffrage. Until not long ago (just some 100 years ago) the only members of society who were entitled to vote were white men. The first country to adopt universal suffrage was New Zealand and it happened in 1893<sup>8</sup>. The phenomenon that is nowadays referred to as 'white male privilege' is thankfully long decades gone in all European and North American countries, though, there still exist some countries where for example women are not allowed to vote. Until lately, it was the same case in Saudi Arabia where women enfranchisement was granted just in 2015. As much as it seems to be unbelievable, it is a fact. Women's right to vote has influenced general standpoint of various cultures towards female sexuality as nude females are the most commonly depicted humans in advertising ever since. Last to be mentioned here is feminist movement. It is often believed that feminism is an extreme form of women's movement trying to bring back some sort of matriarchate. In fact, there are all forms of feminism out there; black

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<sup>5</sup> *Economic News Release. Table 3: Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by age, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and sex, third quarter 2020 averages, not seasonally adjusted.* Released on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-31]. Available at: <<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t03.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Universal declaration of human rights.* [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>>.

<sup>7</sup> *What is freedom of speech?.* Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/free-speech-freedom-expression-human-right>>.

<sup>8</sup> MILLER, Z.: *When women got the right to vote in 25 places around the world.* Released on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.insider.com/when-women-around-the-world-got-the-right-to-vote-2019-2>>.

feminism, fat feminism, radical feminism, equity feminism... If there exists any kind of social injustice, certain group of feminists will surely pick up on it and start the struggle for improvement. The first wave of feminism dates back to 18th century and took place in France where the women suffrage movement fought for women's right to vote in elections. Since the first wave that resulted in voting right for women all around the world a long time has gone. Yet, still not all the countries of civilised world have accepted women as equal voters and even some economically prominent countries tend to regulate voting right of some individuals. This is the case of the US, too, where in 2020, some minorities are not allowed to register for voting due to fact that some individual state policies require at least two document mirroring individual's identity. This prevents some transgender people or even married women from voting. And these are the times we still live in.

### **3 Unique Sexvertising That Has Shaped the Society**

Expectedly, sexvertising is a marketing technique used to market entertainment, alcohol, sex-life and sex-health related products. Mostly. Sex related campaigns of these industries are 'no-hitters' of advertising as there is nothing to blame their producers for. The averment about marketing being able both to arouse customers' attention as well as to make them pay attention to their actual needs is very truthful. Some advertising campaigns moved not only the promoted brand but also cultural and societal limits that needed to be changed and pushed forward toward better. If understood and played with well, innovative marketing techniques may be a great advantage in marketing products and services. There can be found many examples of marketing one's product inducing change in thinking of the overall society. Here we comment on some sexvertising campaigns that have changed the viewpoint on important socio-cultural issues related to sexuality, healthy sex life or even help to promote feminism.

#### **3.1 Let's Talk About Reproduction System Organs**

Since 2000, TV commercials have become more of real creative short movies than advertisements. Radio commercials sometimes try to do so as well, though, an audio message without support of appropriate visual piece does not usually hit the nail of targeted customers that well. And then, not every radio is willing to advertise a yeast infection drug ad, for example. On the other hand, commercial TVs are able to provide appropriate time and space to this type of commercials and sometimes are able to synchronise it with the program structure so that the message of the advertisement is delivered exactly to targeted audience (e.g. in summer, the yeast infection drug commercial could be broadcasted straight after the weather forecast as the news are usually followed by lakes and rivers availability for swimming and water sports where yeast infection can be easily caught). Such a placement is a win-win strategy for both parties, the advertiser and TV management; the advertiser addresses directly women interested in water resorts where, as we all know, the probability of candida infection arises incredibly during summer season and at the same time, placement of the commercial shortly after the news of weather forecast is not prohibited by law and the TV profits from this prime time commercial placement as well. In 2015 in Czech Republic, the commercial of trademark Idelyn Belieina created quite a fuzz. The company Idelyn was founded in the same year with solely focus on women intimate health. The trademark Idelyn belongs to Walmark, a. s. that is a part of Walmark group. In fact, the original company was founded by Czech brothers of Walach family in 1990. The name of the company, visibly, comes from their surname Walach and the word market. In the course of 28 years, they have expanded their business into 8 other European countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). They

have acquired other drug trademarks such as Proenzi, Sinulan or Pneumolan and created several highly successful trademarks on their own (Beliema, Biopron, Mart'ankovia, Urinal). To keep the track of their European success short, the company has become “*the fastest growing pharmaceutical company on the mid-european market*”<sup>9</sup>). As it is clear, we are not referring to any start-up or a disoriented market new invader.

The Idelyn commercial shows a young woman (approx. 25 – 30 years old) who is a wife and dog lover. She encounters everyday domestic chaos as every and each of us. It is very easy to identify oneself with her. She speaks about her family members annoying morning routines, such as her husband playing invisible electric guitar while listening to music with his headsets, her dog stealing one of her slippers, etc. Then she comes to bathroom and without hesitation speaks about her actual intimate issue with vaginal infection. She compares it to annoying habits of her family members that she has just spoken about. She does not feel ashamed of it, she does not search for specific situation that made her to catch the infection; at the very moment, she is just looking for the actual medical cause of her issue. Is it bacteria or some candida? As she is not a doctor (who she visibly does not have time to go to), she would need a treatment for both possibilities to make sure the infection will go away. Finally, she states that now she knows already what to do. A quick and hundred percent treatment for both candida and bacteria caused vaginal infection is '*a new pill Idelyn Beliema*'<sup>10</sup>. From the marketing point of view, the commercial is quite a good piece – the actress is well chosen to be easily identified with for targeted female age group of frequent vaginal infections who may become potential customers. In regards to women's sex lives, not much has been said and especially related to health of their reproduction organs. Not only is the topic important from socio-political point of view as women become mothers and primarily raise new generations but also from health-related point of view. The ad's memo that women should start to treat themselves with enough respect to take care of their health is a well-known fact. Another thing is that due to certain stereotyping, women are the ones to take care of sexual health of their counterparts, too. By inducing the discussion about healthy sex life, commercials have tremendously helped to induce the discussion about women's sex lives and furthermore about women's pleasure that they are entitled to while having sex. The topic has been a taboo for long decades and still, people, especially women, still feel ashamed to speak about sex, sexting, nudity or them having sex appetite, sex issues or moved morals. Generally speaking, commercials have immensely simplified to open this type of discussions on level of all available mass platforms. The company has been a real '*game changer*' for mid-European market. They came up with something very different from what the era had brought before, an absolutely user-committed, witty TV commercial.

As second in the row we reference Durex '*hoax*' news publicity. In 2016 when sex life was no taboo for general public, Durex fished for attention of social media world when they released a hoax about a new flavour of their condoms to be launched<sup>11</sup>. The new flavour should have been the one of an aubergine. The eggplant emoji (in other words aubergine emoji)<sup>12</sup> is nowadays the most popular emoji used to indicate part of man's genitals, the penis. The announcement

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<sup>9</sup> *Walmart Stada Group: O nás.* [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://www.walmartgroup.stada/sk/about>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Idelyn CZ.* Released on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOtj\\_Lq1TNg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOtj_Lq1TNg)>.

<sup>11</sup> BHATTACHERRYA, U: *In the World of Flavoured Condoms, Who speaks for Female Orgasm?*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://www.thequint.com/voices/women/flavoured-condoms-chocolate-sunny-leone-durex-manforce-ranveer-singh-female-orgasm-edible-body-paint-lube>>.

<sup>12</sup> *Eggplant emoji.* [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://www.dictionary.com/e/emoji/eggplant-emoji/>>.

did not sound as a hoax as the company produces also other, mostly fruity and food aphrodisiacs (such as chocolate) flavoured products and has built its reputation as a unique condom producing company concentrating on not only safe and healthy but also playful and joyful sex life of adults. As the first flavoured condoms were originally coming with strawberry and banana flavours, the aubergine taste did not seem to be such a faux-pas as both previously mentioned food items, strawberry and banana, were also referenced to speak about man's penis some time ago. Sucking the strawberry or peeling a banana has been for long a motto to start sexual intercourse, especially in reference to oral sex. Fruits in general and especially such sweet and popular ones as banana and strawberry provoke positive connotation. On the other hand, there is nothing that cute about visualising eating an eggplant, especially as it usually comes cut into pieces and well-cooked so it has lost its original shape in the process. The imagery might be quite appealing. Nevertheless, eggplant became the most phallic vegetable of recent years. Phalus shaped vegetable won its success in the emoji world and the debate that arouse thanks to Durex' hoax made it even more popular on social networks such as Instagram or Twitter. An interesting information, is that before releasing the eggplant emoji worldwide, Japanese iPhone users might have tested it for short period of time prior to its release. Another, not less interesting, thing is that Japanese aubergine emoji came '*typically longer, thinner and a bit more corkscrew-shaped than the eggplant you [the US market] may be used to*'.<sup>13</sup> After all, the hoax released by Durex caused that for some short period of time, Durex brand name (as well as aubergine, eggplant and brinjal) was the most searched word in convenient search engine Google. Durex profited from that period of time as they were able to introduce a new emoji for safe sex and condoms usage, a lila umbrella with raindrops. According to Daily Mail, the umbrella emoji was voted number 1 as no official safe sex emoji had existed before. The fact is that more than 60% of respondents found it hard, uncomfortable, even non-sense to speak about sex with their counterpart<sup>14</sup>. Innuendos, such as emojis, are a helpful tool to induce discussion about sex. This tremendously simplified safe sex-related communication prior to sexual intercourses might help to prevent sex transmitted diseases as well as avoiding unwanted sex.

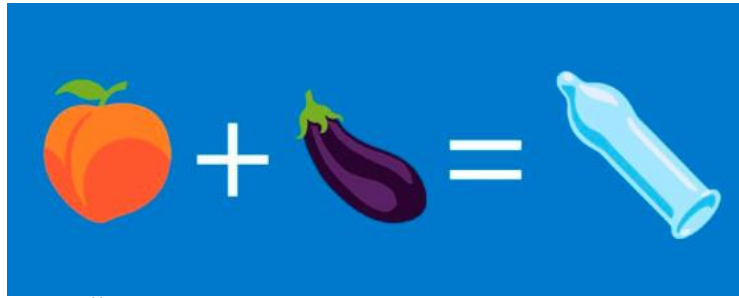


**Picture 1: Unofficial safe sex emoji**

Source: McCARTHY, J.: *Open Umbrella with Raindrops crowned Durex's safe sex emoji for World Aids Day*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/11/28/open-umbrella-with-raindrops-crowned-durex-s-safe-sex-emoji-world-aids-day>>.

<sup>13</sup> HESS, A.: *Move over, banana. How the eggplant became the most phallic food*. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <[http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/users/2015/04/eggplant\\_rising\\_how\\_the\\_purple\\_fruit\\_surpassed\\_the\\_banana\\_as\\_the\\_most\\_phallic.html?via=gdpr-consent](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/users/2015/04/eggplant_rising_how_the_purple_fruit_surpassed_the_banana_as_the_most_phallic.html?via=gdpr-consent)>.

<sup>14</sup> MACDONALS, Ch.: *The unofficial safe sex emojis revealed: Researchers find 'umbrella with raindrops' most often used amid calls for an official condom symbol*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3987900/The-unofficial-safe-sex-emojis-revealed-Researchers-umbrella-raindrops-best-represents-condom-s-no-official-symbol.html>>.



**Picture 2: Safe sex emoji**

Source: KULP, P.: *Durex wants to make a condom emoji for safer sexting*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2015. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://mashable.com/2015/11/19/durex-condom-emoji/?europe=true>>.

### 3.2 Make Sexadvertisement Change the Game During COVID-19 Pandemic

Another very recent campaign that attracted public attention and raised many eyebrows in regards to its legitimacy to the topic was the one launched by NYC's (New York City's) department of Health who issued very graphic guidelines about what is and what is not recommended related to one's sex life and health from the perspective of not spreading the virus of COVID-19 during sexual intercourses. The graphic public alert was released by the department in March 2020 when the pandemic broke in its first non-Asian continent wave as a part of some general warning related to interpersonal contacts with strangers. One of its points entitled '*Take care during sex*' spotted rim jobs as a dangerous intercourse during which protection cannot be used. It explicitly stated "*Rimming (mouth on anus) might spread COVID-19. Virus in feces may enter your mouth.*" The text itself had nothing to do with sexvertising, it contained a usual warning note. The guideline itself provoked a lot of social media coverage and reposts. What, surprisingly, received even more attention was the New York Post's communication of the guideline. NY Post as a conservative daily tabloid supported their article on the topic by an image of a person standing with their back towards the camera, an emoji sticking its tongue out just above their jeans and a very expressive prohibition sign. Marketing during COVID-19 pandemic has been harsh. Especially because of the fact that online marketing pitch is overloaded with good ideas and even public journalism takes a piece of cake and popularity and followers once in a while. The fact is that playing the audience by use of sexual imagery for in case of industries dealing with entertainment, beauty products and alcohol is already a well-known but quite annoying issue. Fishing for attention incase of medical and drug related industry is somehow a nuance of marketing whistle blower of the chemicals industry. Running an advertisement for sex-related pandemic precautions rules is a real game changer!



**Picture 3: NYC's Health Department**

Source: DeNINNO, N.: *NYC declares war on 'rim jobs' in graphic health department memo*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://nypost.com/2020/03/24/nyc-declares-war-on-rim-jobs-in-graphic-health-department-memo/>>.

## Conclusion

Here we are, by the end of the first quarter of the third millennium, and in marketing we face the every-day struggle to be better, more creative, to use the most innovative approaches to commercial graphic design and heart beat accelerating copywriters' texts. Here we stand, at the edge of what can be still introduced as moral and where the perception of immorality ends all positive endeavour of the creative marketing team. Exactly now, there comes on the market a whole new segment of products and services to be advertised. Sex itself, hot lines or even the drugs used to treat illnesses of human reproductive system organs has been sold long ago. However, the process of demand and supply of intimacy and sex related items was kept a secret that no one from your neighbours was supposed to know about. Nowadays, when everything of delicate nature can be bought online, in discreet silence and in home privacy by a few simple clicks on your laptop keyboard, marketing intimacy related goods became a must. E.g. sex goods advertisements that can be found in print (usually as advertisement in the form of press releases or so in women' magazines) or sex organs drugs advertisements on TV (as usual commercials broadcasted e.g. in Slovakia after 10PM) became a matter of necessity in the way too competitive business. The candidness used in such products propagation is sometimes harsh, breathtaking, not easily to be digested by conservative people or countries and definitely not always understood well. Sometimes the equivocal undertone or explicit language used may arouse ambiguity in regards to creator's intention. Commercialisation related to our sex drive and body as different sex creatures has somehow gone as far as to advertising drugs for erectile dysfunction or menstrual cups. The explicit language and true-to-life depiction of people intimacy zone topics (that sex definitely used to be) seem to reflect our generation's openness to other people's opinion with nothing more than a deep breath. We do not go any further than to hateful comments on social networks or in discussions at blogs. Exactly at this point of public social discussion there arises a question the answer to which is very similar to chicken-egg situation. Is it us, people, who demand these sometimes hardly to be considered adequate commercials or are the marketers the ones who try to break decades held moral status quo? Do they feed us their vision of how the society should behave not actually how it does? The answer is unclear.

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## CHANGES IN MARKETING STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION OF SLOVAK POP CULTURE CONVENTIONS DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

At the time of the declared coronavirus pandemic many festivals for fans of pop culture, anime, manga and cosplay did not take place. This resulted in significant changes in the form and manner of communication of event organizers towards their fans and regular visitors. On the example of the two most visited and largest festivals in Slovakia (Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW and Y-Games & Y-Con), we observe two different communication and marketing strategies. In the form of in-depth interviews with both organizers, we attempt to identify the most important changes in the organization, preparation and realization of festivals. In this study, we describe the different approaches of both festivals and compare the data obtained from interviews (website traffic, fan engagement on social networks of the sites of these festivals, marketing impacts of contributions (Facebook and Instagram)). The organizers also had to take into account the possibilities of rescheduling or cancelling festivals, searching for possible online alternatives and working with changes related to future measures and their implementation in future years of festivals.

### Key words:

Cosplay. E-Sport. Fan Convention. Fan Studies. Pop-Culture Event.

### Introduction

Fan festival – conventions are one of the most important events in a year of fans of video games, e-sports, anime, manga, cosplay, sci-fi and many more. Many of fans are saving their money and time to spend it at these conventions. In a year of 2020, sadly, many of these conventions did not take place and left their fans unavailable to attend these conventions. It is important to look at and consider losses at both sides – fans and organizers of these events. Fans lost their possibility to be part of community gatherings provided by such conventions, meeting their celebrity idols and friends. They could not attend physical contest such as cosplay contest, art contest, karaoke and other. On the other hand, convention organizers had to deal with sudden loss of visitors, income from tickets and partner's activities income. Most importantly, organizers had to, and till this day<sup>1</sup> they still have to deal with possibility that these conventions will not be happening anytime soon due to pandemic.<sup>2</sup> The organizers therefore had to change their communication strategy with their fans and adapt to the situation. Two of the largest and most visited fan festivals in Slovakia - Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW and Y-Games & Y-Con, have embarked on two different communication and organizational strategies. Daily monitoring of current hygiene measures issued by the government and the chief hygienist made it very difficult for festival organizers to work and communicate with visitors to their events. The organizers also had to take into account the possibilities of moving or cancelling festivals, searching for possible online alternatives and working with changes related to future measures and their implementation in future years of festivals. One of the festivals did not take place at all in 2020 and was moved to the next year, the other festival took place online - in the form of an online cosplay competition and an online e-sports tournament.

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<sup>1</sup> Remark by the authors: As of November 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Remark by the authors: In a traditional sense of pop culture event organization – in a pre-set building with partner and promotional booths, program (such as cosplay contest, celebrity and guest meetings, lectures, etc.), helping crew and staff.

## 1 Theoretical Background

Public events dedicated to pop culture, anime, manga and cosplay are an integral part of the community life of fans of these activities and fandoms. Communities, which are usually meeting at these events are of different fandoms. It is important to notice, that even though there are different members of different communities present at these conventions, all visitors are experiencing life at convention in harmony, despite their different taste in movies, music or fashion.

### 1.1 Who Attends Pop-Culture Festivals?

Throughout last 60 years, the term *fan/s* has been perceived differently and gone from fanatically obsessed to creators and contributors of widely known content. Etymology of the term *fan* has its roots in Latin *fanaticus* which simply meant: appertaining to church/cathedral, servant of church, admirer, dedicated disciple, ... But quickly this notion acquired negative connotation such as: people inspired by heathen worship allied with prodigality. Henry Jenkins in his ground breaking work *Textual poachers: television fans & participatory culture* from 1992 analyses furthermore the meanings of the term. Progressively, the connotation of term *fanatic* has changed from reference to excessive form of religious adoration to any abnormal abusive addiction. Such demonstrations of fans often initiated critique of opposing political opinions. Derived form *fan* has been for the first time used in late 19<sup>th</sup> century in journalistic news describing spectators of professional sport teams, in particular baseball. Shortly, has the meaning of the term advanced and incorporated any sport or commerce amusement devotee. One of the former application of the term named female theatre-goers as *matinee girls*, name which has been given to them by male theatre reviewers. They claimed that these fan girls/women do not frequent theatre for purpose of admiration of the play, but merely to admire male actors.<sup>3</sup> In the early beginnings fans were patalogized and perceived as passive and easy manipulated by media during consumption of mainstream production.<sup>4</sup> This claim was later refuted by many scholar (such as Jenkins, Siuda, Bacon-Smith, Penley) in their respective works. These works were written mainly in early 1990s. They focused on fan activities at fan conventions, writing letters to creators of their favourite show, series, or creating of their own fan content (fan fiction, fan art, fan songs). Jenkin's research in *Textual Poachers* shows how fan create and construct their own culture by possessing and remixing – “poaching” of contents. By means of “poaching” fans produce content for prolongation and to expand/fill story lines of media contents or missing narratives of official contents. This is usual practise for the purpose of satisfaction of fan communities (fandoms). Inspired by de Carteau, Jenkins argue that fans miss direct access to means of cultural production and yet they create particularly active communities. These community actions focus their attention on this process of cultural poaching.<sup>5</sup> Tactical fan revision of textual contents and methods, in which fans are adjusting endings of the texts to their arbitrariness, Jenkins understands as progressive behaviour. Reading of such customised texts often engenders delectation in fan groups, as opposed to mainstream text reading.

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<sup>3</sup> JENKINS, H.: *Textual poachers: television fans & participatory culture*. New York : Routledge, 1992, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> ALVERMAN, D., E., HAGOOD, C.: Fandom and critical media literacy. In *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 2000, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 437. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277667002\\_Fandom\\_and\\_Critical\\_Media\\_Literacy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277667002_Fandom_and_Critical_Media_Literacy)>.

<sup>5</sup> JENKINS, H.: *Textual poachers: television fans & participatory culture*. New York : Routledge, 1992, p. 27.

It is important to apprehend basic terms, which are regularly used among fans of pop culture conventions. Many of these fans call themselves *otaku*. Term has been first used in 1983 by essayist Akio Nakamori in his work in Manga Burikko magazine. He describes typical representatives of Japanese anime and manga fandom, not in a good light. He compares them to either sickly thin and underfed individuals or overweighted boys with glasses. Girls are mostly not good looking with embarrassing hairstyles wearing long white socks.<sup>6</sup> Since then term *otaku* has gone a long way and today it is perceived in a less insulting way. It is essential to establish that this expression has different nuance in west culture compared to Japanese culture. In west, focusing mainly on Slovak fans of pop culture, this term is perceived in different way. Term *otaku* has found its way to Slovak pop culture (mainly Japanese culture) fans in early beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Connotation of this word is perceived differently in Slovakia and amongst Slovak anime & manga fans than their Japanese counterentry. Slovak *otaku* are proud of this nomenclature as it is not apprehended in a bad light among general audience in their country. Term *otaku* is mainly used as a description of manga, anime and general Japanese culture a pop culture aficionado.

One of the most favourite and most pleasing to eye activities is cosplay and cosplay contest. According to the Japanese dictionary jisho.org, cosplay is considered a performative art in which participating individuals or groups wear a costume and accessories that express a particular character or idea. Cosplayers often interact with each other to create a subculture centralized around roleplay. The wider use of the term cosplay can be used for other roleplay in costume at festivals except of stage performances, regardless of the cultural context. Popular resources for cosplayers are Japanese manga comics, animated series, Western and other comic books, video games and movies.<sup>7</sup> Cosplay can be categorized into various genres such as fantasy, kawaii<sup>8</sup>, romance, horror, science fiction, fetish, gothic, mythological and others, with each genre containing a wide range of characters. In the 1990s, this subcultural phenomenon became popular outside of Japan, and spread to many parts of Asia, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Recently, the meaning of cosplay as a term has grown and includes almost any type of disguise beyond traditional and standard boundaries of understanding. Rahman et al. examples include making costumes from Chinese historical drama and non-Japanese sci-fi movies such as *The Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. However, he states that the lolita subculture is generally not considered cosplay because fans of lolita costumes do not imitate a specific character and therefore do not use roleplay.<sup>9</sup> According to Robin Anne Reid (2009), cosplay differs from disguise as historical characters, or characters that may have occurred in a particular historical period, such as the Renaissance or the Civil War, in that the cosplay character does not represent historical reality but a fictional character depicted in ahistorical times. and space.<sup>10</sup> Many cosplay enthusiasts tend to form their own common groups or tribes through friends, events and the Internet, respectively viral communities. Members of such postmodern communities or tribes can be kept together through

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<sup>6</sup> ALR, M.: *What kind of otaku are you?*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Cosplay*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<http://jisho.org/search/cosplay>>.

<sup>8</sup> Remark by the authors: From Japanese 可愛い translates as adorable, cute. In the cosplay theme, it refers to the cosplaying of cute characters, often depicted with large glowing eyes and a high female voice.

<sup>9</sup> RAHMAN, O., WING-SUN, L., HEI-MAN CHEUNG, B.: „Cosplay“: Imaginative Self and Performing Identity. In *Fashion Theory The Journal of Dress Body & Culture*, 2012, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 318. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265140961\\_Cosplay\\_Imaginative\\_Self\\_and\\_Performing\\_Identity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265140961_Cosplay_Imaginative_Self_and_Performing_Identity)>.

<sup>10</sup> HIGGINS, D. M.: *Science Fiction, 1960-2005: Novels and Short Fiction*. In REID, R. A. (ed.): *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy. Connecticut*. London : Greenwood Press, 2009, p. 75.

shared emotions, lifestyles, new moral beliefs, and content-taking practices. Members share a sense of rituals, traditions, moral responsibilities to oneself, and the need to belong somewhere, to be a part of something.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2 Pandemic Situation in Slovakia in 2020 in Short

Year 2020 has been by many marked as unfortunate one, with main reason being quickly and widely spread deadly coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Whole world is focused on pandemic and its progress. It is essential to mention the important dates and actions which had been executed in Slovakia during past months, as it is consequential for this research. Many of the following states of situations had direct effect on domestic pop cultural events and their organizers and visitors. It had been also crucial to changes at marketing communication and strategies. Here is a time line of the most important dates in 2020 related to this paper's theme:

- 10<sup>th</sup> of January – the Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic was informed for the first time about the occurrence of viral pneumonia in the city of Wuhan in China,<sup>12</sup>
- 31<sup>st</sup> of January – the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a state of global health emergency,<sup>13</sup>
- 10<sup>th</sup> of March – the crisis staff of the Slovak Republic prohibited the organization of sports, cultural and public events for a period of 14 days, with the proviso that the time period may be extended if necessary,<sup>14</sup>
- 3<sup>rd</sup> of June – the fifth phase of the loosening of measures began. Based on the measures of the Public Health Office and the favourable epidemiological situation in Slovakia, in addition to the facilities opened during the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th release phases, other facilities, services, premises and mass events were opened,<sup>15</sup>
- 11<sup>th</sup> of August – after the meeting of the Pandemic Commission of the Slovak Republic, the Minister of Health of the Slovak Republic Marek Krajčí confirmed the second wave of the pandemic. The Commission approved the Pandemic Plan at its meeting,<sup>16</sup>
- 31<sup>st</sup> of October – a state of emergency was declared for a period of 45 days throughout the territory of the Slovak Republic.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> RAHMAN, O., WING-SUN, L., HEI-MAN CHEUNG, B.: „Cosplay“: Imaginative Self and Performing Identity. In *Fashion Theory The Journal of Dress Body & Culture*, 2012, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 320. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at:

<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265140961\\_Cosplay\\_Imaginative\\_Self\\_and\\_Performing\\_Identity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265140961_Cosplay_Imaginative_Self_and_Performing_Identity)>.

<sup>12</sup> *Informácia o výskyte vírusovej pneumónie v Číne – mesto Wuhan spôsobenej novým druhom koronavírusu*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3998:informacia-o-vyskyte-virusovej-pneumonie-v-ine-mesto-wuhan-sposobenej-novym-druhom-koronavirusu&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3998:informacia-o-vyskyte-virusovej-pneumonie-v-ine-mesto-wuhan-sposobenej-novym-druhom-koronavirusu&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153)>.

<sup>13</sup> *WHO vyhlásila pre nový koronavírus 2019-nCoV stav globálnej zdravotnej núdze*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.health.gov.sk/Clanok?who-vyhlasila-pre-novy-koronavirus-2019-nCoV-stav-globalnej-zdravotnej-nudze>>.

<sup>14</sup> *COVID-19: Slovensko zakazuje športové, kultúrne a verejné podujatia, hlási 7 potvrdených prípadov*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4071:covid-19-slovensko-zakazuje-portove-kulturne-a-verejne-podujatia-hlasi-7-potvrdenych-pripadov&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4071:covid-19-slovensko-zakazuje-portove-kulturne-a-verejne-podujatia-hlasi-7-potvrdenych-pripadov&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153)>.

<sup>15</sup> *Postupné uvoľňovanie opatrení*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://korona.gov.sk/ako-sa-budu-uvolnovat-opatrenia-uvodne-informacie/>>.

<sup>16</sup> *Krajčí: Na Slovensku je druhá vlna pandémie*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/559770-pribudlo-16-novych-pripadov-otestovali-vyse-1400-ludi/>>.

<sup>17</sup> *Koronavírus a Slovensko*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://korona.gov.sk/>>.

### 1.3 Research Methodology

Due to the nature of the theme, qualitative research was considered the most appropriate research method. The researched area of the paper is still very little explored in Slovakia. The main goal of this paper was to determine the main aspects of changes in communication of event organizers to their followers and fans, which include marketing communication changes as well as personal communication. To achieve this goal, research questions were used, which helped to better orientate the in - depth interviews. The creation of the research questions was based on the general determination of the research goal. A list of questions in the broader categories was prepared in advance. The method of narrative in-depth interviews was used for data collection. This method is most suitable for the purposes of the submitted paper, as it allows the researcher to inquire all information provided by informants personally. Interviews were conducted individually with each informant in a quiet and undisturbed place, without the presence of other informants, to ensure the spontaneity and invulnerability of the answers. Throughout the interviews as well as conducting the research, the basic principles of ethics were followed. The informants had the opportunity to refuse to participate in the research at any time during the research process. In total, one representative of each participating event organizers was present, which conclude in 2 in-depth interviews. Research is divided in three major groups which were researched (statistic data: comments, number of likes, acquired followers, biggest engagement; organization part: pandemic situation apprehension, event's alternatives, contests, structural changes, financial loss; communication changes: fans interaction with event's content, used marketing and communication strategies).

## 2 Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW

Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW is an international pop culture festival held twice a year - also known as autumn and spring IistroCON. The festival focuses on comics, anime, games, Japanese culture, KPOP, sci-fi, fantasy and horror. The festival includes a rich offer of lectures, workshops, competitions, the latest films, fantastic literature, music and art. It offers meetings with writers, book launches and, of course, various creative competitions. Convention has a long history, being present from early 2000 (AnimeSHOW from 2009). The usual visitors of this conventions are fans of anime, fantasy and history. Convention usually holds many visitor and fan friendly competitions (cosplay contest, fan art contest, karaoke) and accompanying program (artist alley, cosplay booths, arcade games, photo booths). This research focused on main changes and steps in communication in marketing (on social media Facebook) with event's followers and fans. As described in chapter 1.3, research's results were divided into three main categories, each focusing on different aspect and problem of researched theme.

### 2.1 Comparison of Engagement on Social Media

This part focuses on different engagement, number of likes and comments on event's post/fan page and analyses it. It is important to notice, that compared time period in 2020 is 82 days shorter, due to research being done in early October of 2020 and its quick respond to pandemic situation.

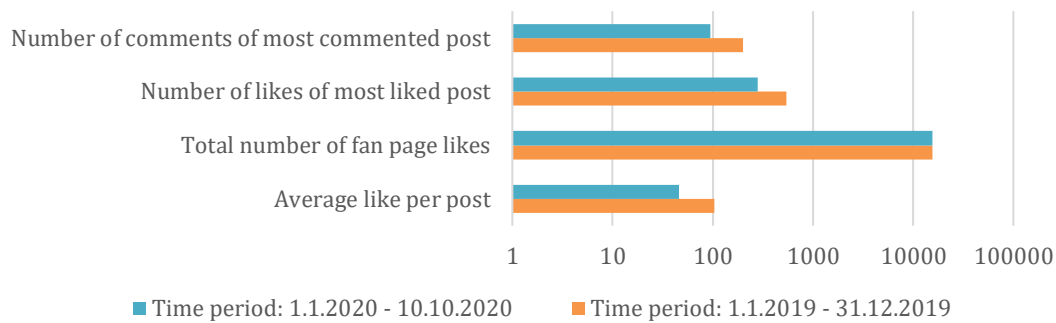
**Table 1: Social media engagement of Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW**

	Time period:	
	1.1.2019 - 31.12.2019	1.1.2020 - 10.10.2020
<b>Average like per post</b>	103	46
<b>Total number of fan page likes</b>	15554	15489
<b>Number of likes of most liked post</b>	542	279
<b>Number of comments of most commented post</b>	202	95

Source: Own processing

As seen on *Table 1: Social media engagement of Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW* general social media engagement has been researched. Average like per post dropped by 57 compared to 2019 results. This may be, as suggested by organizers in chapter 2.3, direct result of ongoing pandemic and reduced engagement of fans on posts. Also the total number of all followers on Facebook dropped by 65 likes. This is caused by reduced posting on social media (by page admin/editor), due to less contemporary and engaging contents. Page could not share new foreign celebrity guests, program, lectures, contests. This directly led to lesser engagement from event's side and thus lesser activity from followers. The most liked post in 2019 has in total 542 likes and announces foreign celebrity guest Gemma Whelan. This same post also is the most commented post from 2019 period (202 comments). In comments, fans generally express excitement for guest appearing, they are tagging their friends or ask organizer various question about guest. This post is one of the most liked posts in history of this event's fan page. As opposed, the most liked post in 2020 period has 279 likes (dropped by 263 likes) and is not at the same time the most commented one. Most liked post is announcement and deals with contemporary questions and concerns about pandemic. It is contemporaneously the first post by this organizer about virus. Graphic used is in light mood and it alleviate the situation with comical picture. The most commented post in 2020 has 95 comments (drop by 107 comments) and announces online contest for movie tickets to *Birds of Prey*. As the rules states, to enter fans have to comment and tag one friend, to enter the contest. Hence, the big number of comments for quite regular post. As suggested, people are commenting mainly with just tag, few of them wrote a short accompanying text as well. See *Chart 1: Social media engagement of Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW* for better visualization of compared period data.

## Social media engagement of Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW



**Chart 1: Social media engagement of Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW**

Source: Own processing<sup>18</sup>

### 2.2 Change in Organization, Operating with Alternatives and Accommodation to Situation

This section answers the open questions in interview and focus mainly on organizational changes and adaptation to situation. On the question of “*When did you, as event organizers, first heard of coronavirus and what was your first step in action?*” recipient answered that first time they heard info about coronavirus was around December 2019 from TV news. They started to take it more seriously around February 2020 when many visitors of their festival started to ask about situation of upcoming event (which was supposed to take place in March 2020). They started to collect more info so they would be able to answer question and prepare FAQ. In the question of alternatives for event (if it were to be cancelled for original date) organizer answered they had 3 alternatives with which they operated with. First one was to postpone event and move it to next possible date. Second one was to make event possible in the original date and place but with measurements taken (such as: less visitors, limited program and attractions). And the third one was to cancel the event for the year. In the end, event was 2 times postponed and finally cancelled for the year 2020 (both March one and September one). For the various contest that these events usually hold, this event organizer was from the start against online alternative for contest (such as online cosplay contest or online drawing/singing contest). Their reasoning was simple: Physical contact and interaction between contestants and visitors during event is unique, and no online alternative can be the same. The feeling is just not the same. Hence, they did not hold any online alternatives for contest. There has been no change in organizational structure within team members of event. Members were in daily contact, with more spare time as none of the conventions took place that year. All of the members do this kind of work voluntarily as they have regular day time jobs. As for financial loss, this event figure as non-profit organization and instead of employees has volunteers, who work for free or are paid in free entry to convention. There was surely a discrepancy in cash flow (slightly under zero) which has been caused by blocking of tickets on the part of third party providing event tickets. These will not be paid off to organizers and visitors until the day of event realization. Other significant charges and payments would come with actual realization – partners, rent, guest compensation and fees... Fundamentally, as non-profit organization they have to be legally with zero income, so any spare budget and finance was invested in accessories, furniture and technique.

<sup>18</sup> Remark by the author: Chart is stated in logarithmic scale.



## 2.3 Communication Changes and Their Direct Consequences

As the virus spread, it was important to monitor situation on a daily basis, with different restrictions and assignments. Among the frequently asked questions asked by visitors and fans of convention was one that could not be eluded: *“Will the convention be happening this year?”* For this occasion, organizer decided to make automatic respond on all social media with the FAQ answering the most asked questions. It incredibly sped things up, as it saved organizer’s time for answering. As for interaction of fans to posts, in comparison to last year, it went down about 50%, which is significant change. Fans were reacting in sadder way, with depressing undertone to their comments. Majority of post in 2020 were about spreading virus, updates on status, few partner posts, shares, simple announcements. In comparison, in 2019 there were various post about program, guests, memes, contest, sharing contest posts. When asked about usage of different marketing strategies and communication during pandemic, respondent answered that they basically did not use any new strategies. They worked with what they had, and tried to keep up with the situation, posting as soon as possible. They did not acquire any new skills or strategies. Last question was about summarisation of current situation, apprehension of pandemic, respondent was asked if they learned something from this situation (with appeal to effectivity, strong and weak points of their organizational structure and communication). They answered that it mainly brought negative expectations from politicians and general public in a way of their behaviour. They were not satisfied with communication of Slovak politicians and how they handled the situation. On the other hand, they were pleasantly surprised with communication and reactions of event’s fans, visitors and followers.

## 3 Y-Games & Y-Con

This event is fairly new compared to one in chapter 2. It started as student LAN tournament in technical University in Bratislava in 2014 as Y-Games tournament and slowly became bigger and with more attraction. From 2016 event is officially under Yvents, s.r.o., company focused on entertainment and event organization.<sup>19</sup> This convention has several smaller branches, each focusing on different part: Y-Con for cosplay, otaku and fantasy fans; Y-Tech for fans of new technologies; BSK Tech day – specialised day at convention place for middle school under Bratislava district; Y-Games for e-sport tournament and qualification to MSR.<sup>20</sup> Visitors of these events are mainly fans of gaming, e-sports, TV series, movies, cosplay and fantasy. Convention holds panel discussions with celebrity guest, YouTubers and influencers, as well as big cosplay contest, fan art contest (not regularly), provides place for cosplayers and cosplay guests. Friday holds specialised program for middle schoolers and their teachers, with many technological lectures about influence of games, students can meet teachers and students from other schools, communicate and network with them on various levels. Students can also meet University representatives, who have their own promo booth present at convention.

### 3.1 Comparison of Engagement on Social Media

This part focuses on different engagement, number of likes and comments on event’s post/fan page and analyses it.

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<sup>19</sup> Remark by the author: Information provided by event organizer Karol Cagaň.

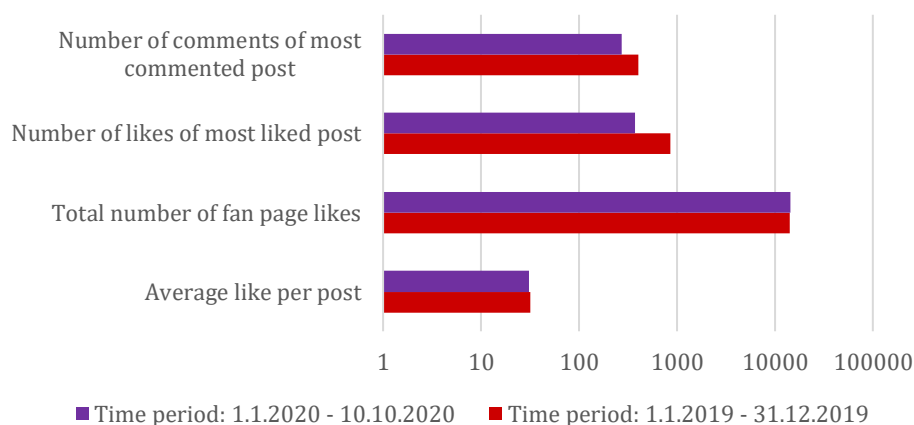
<sup>20</sup> Remark by the author: MSR is event also organised by Yvents, s.r.o., usually held in October. It is official Slovak republic championship in e-sport.

**Table 2: Social media engagement of Y-Games & Y-Con**

	Time period:	
	1.1.2019 - 31.12.2019	1.1.2020 - 10.10.2020
<b>Average like per post</b>	32	31
<b>Total number of fan page likes</b>	14175	14494
<b>Number of likes of most liked post</b>	858	373
<b>Number of comments of most commented post</b>	401	274

Source: Own processing

As seen on *Table 2: Social media engagement of Y-Games & Y-Con* general social media engagement has been researched. Even though, average like per post is considerably smaller than in *Table 1*, representing other convention, both compared units are almost the same amount. It is important to notice, that year 2020 is not over yet, hence it may grow till end of year. Fan page usually post funny pictures (meme), information and announcements about current situation, shares partner's graphic and contests and promotes their other events and activities. This has been stable during pandemic too, which can explain why there is no such contrast between two data. As opposed to Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW total number of likes on fan page is higher than in year 2019 (+319 followers). This can be explained by continuous posting on fan page, communication with fans and followers and maintenance of page. The most liked post in 2019 has 858 likes and announces V4 Future Sport Festival convention held in Budapest, Hungary. The most liked post in 2020 is meme picture which has 373 likes. The drop of likes in most liked posts in both years is 485 likes. The most commented post in 2019 has 401 comments, it is picture from game Witcher with text encouraging fans to describe in comments their favorite game character in 5 words and other commentators have to try to guess the character. As encouragement states, most comments are in such spirit – descriptions of game characters, which other try to guess. Most commented post in 2020 has 274 comments (drop by 127 comments) and is, again, meme type. It encourages fans to comment and tag their gaming friends. See *Chart 2: Social media engagement of Y-Games & Y-Con* for better visualization of compared period data.

**Social media engagement of Y-Games & Y-Con****Chart 2: Social media engagement of Y-Games & Y-Con**

Source: Own processing<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Remark by the author: Chart is stated in logarithmic scale.

### 3.2 Change in Organization, Operating with Alternatives and Accommodation to Situation

First time organizer of Y-Games & Y-Con heard about corona virus pandemic was around December, when virus was in China. They did not impute to its relevance much at that time. When virus appeared in Slovakia and the first measurements took place they intensified their attention and stopped all their activities. Since Y-Games were to take place in June, they remained calm, hoping that till June everything will be back to normal. They set up a deadline for expected number of infected people and since situation did not go as expected, they relocated event to online scene. Event took place in online form with rather positive feedback from fans. In autumn, after every government meeting, they had their own meeting session where the plan of event was adapted accordingly. In question of alternatives, organizers were operating with step by step manual which they prepared beforehand. The ground alternative was to organise full online event in spring (Y-Games), since the measurements were very strict at that time. For autumn MSR there were various alternation, according to situation development:

- Event with measurements,
- Event with limited number of visitors,
- Event without visitors, players only in studio form (broadcasting the event),
- Event without visitors, players from Czechia only with negative PCR test only in studio form (broadcasting the event),
- Event in relocated studio in Bratislava, with separated studios for each game, altogether maximum of 50 people.

As for contests, namely cosplay competition, it took place. As opposed to traditional contest at event with visitors, this one took solely online form without visitors. Firstly, people send their cosplay photos with information about themselves to organizers, who posted it on their social media and web page. Then fans, followers and other could vote for their favourites, from top 5 cosplayers with most votes advanced to finale, which took place in studio. Cosplayers demonstrated their costume at green screen, and people voted for them in real time. As for game contest (e-sport), there were no problems, as contestants played from their homes. Lectures and partners program were put in between streaming of tournaments. There were very few to none panel discussions and quizzes. YouTubers and influencers, apart from commentators of games, were not part of program this year. There were no internal changes in company and organization, as all employees kept their job. People from event section helped with other branches (online stream, finance, etc.). As for financial loss compared to 2019, there was about 30% - 50% financial drop in partners, and almost 100% loss in players (tickets), visitors, gastro.

### 3.3 Communication Changes and Their Direct Consequences

Organizers noticed that their followers and fans took migration to solely online space very good. Fans were happy about event's activities; engagement of players was almost record high. Some of the fans even wanted to arrive to streaming studios to see it all live. As organizers, they communicated mainly, apart from standard theme posts, safety during pandemic, encouraged people to wash hands and wear face masks, to stay safe and play from home, which fans took positively. Since there was no offline event, as last years, organizers did not have to do campaign for offline space, hence communicating program and guests. Communication from their side was slightly less common. As for marketing strategies, they did not use any drastically different ones, but focused more on online promo of streaming, instead of trying to sell tickets for offline event. When asked, if there was anything that they took from ongoing pandemic

situation, organizers displayed moderate reaction. Since the work possibilities reduced, organizers had more time to prepare proper communication strategy for all aspects of online events. They were successful in levelling their online production of streaming, which had not been primary before. They successfully got e-sport to live TV (Orange sport), they were provided with Ministry of School support. They learned a lot, they had a chance to prioritize and focus on certain aspects, which enabled their realization in dramatically better quality.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper described two different pop culture themed events in Slovakia and their accommodation to current pandemic situation. Thanks to analysis of provided social media data and executed in-depth interviews we were able to recognize main changes in comparison of year 2019 and 2020. These are the main differences between two events:

- Pandemic communication approach: Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW used more sensational graphic, trying to create wonder in eyes of their followers, they used different rhetoric, with not so professional approach. On the other hand, Y-Games & Y-Con tried to stay more formal, but still very informative. This is also demonstrated on number of reactions (like, comment, share) on each post about pandemic on each fan page,
- Amount of daily communication and posting: Y-Games & Y-Con tried to post as regularly as before, which is clearly seen on almost zero drop count of average likes per post/year. On the other hand, Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW reduced posts to mainly pandemic announcements (hence almost 50% drop rate),
- Event alternative approach: From the beginning, both event operated with 3 main alternatives: cancelation, postponing or happening of event with restricted measurements. In the end, Comics Salon & AnimeSHOW did cancel both of their events for the 2020. They were opposed to any online alternative of event. On the other hand, Y-Games & Y-Con organised both cosplay contest and e-sport tournament in online space, with success,
- Structural changes: In both cases there were no major internal structural changes in organisation team.

This research was processed in a short amount of time only on two event organizations, and with its potential it is recommended to continue to research this theme. As the pandemic is still happening in world, it would be wise to revise this problem and theme in time period to come.

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## QUARANTINE – THE MODERN CAMERA OBSCURA? ASPECTS OF THE MEDIUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC

*Eva Jonisová*

### Abstract

The paper deals with a reflection of the medium of photography within the context of global coronavirus pandemic. It observes narrative methods in contemporary photography, analogy to the very origin of photography, as well as the latest trends influenced by the current pandemic situation. It compares photographing during quarantine to camera obscura, a device that is regarded as the predecessor of present photographic cameras. At the same time, the author addresses the term creativity, its definitions, and overlap with art, especially in the context of the medium of photography. The main objective is to reflect the current state of creativity in photography and to point out possibilities of using this medium in online environment through the methods of analysis and comparison. The online environment includes mainly online vernissages, online theatre performances, and the possibility to create virtual gallery space or organize fashion magazine photoshoots through applications such as Zoom or FaceTime.

### Key words:

Camera Obscura. Coronavirus. Creativity. Medium of Photography. Pandemic. Pinhole Camera. Quarantine.

### Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has caught us all unprepared and has touched possibly all areas of our day-to-day lives. It has filled hospitals, paralysed the economy, incorporated social isolation and distance from other people into our relatively warm nature. It is becoming a subject of various hoaxes and conspiracies with an alarming number of shares on social networks. Even the “social media giants” themselves have sensed the danger of these pseudo-news and are starting to intervene – at the beginning of October 2020, Facebook restricted pages of conspiracy websites *Bádateľ* and *Zem a Vek*, when it deleted some of their posts and threatened to block and delete their accounts. It is similar for the *Slobodný vysielateľ*, which also faces publishing ban for constantly breaching the Community Standards.<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned websites have continuously been spreading nonsense, e.g. conspiracies about vaccines, which is especially dangerous in the current situation when the covid-19 disease has killed more than one million people worldwide (up to 15.10.2020, the website [www.worldometers.com](http://www.worldometers.com) shows 1.098.225 victims).<sup>2</sup> This is also connected to another measure: on October 14<sup>th</sup>, Facebook announced that it bans ads that discourage the use of vaccines.<sup>3</sup> The coronavirus pandemic is also strongly influencing the cultural industry – Slovak artists have sent an open letter to the Prime Minister Igor Matovič, pointing out the fact that the promised help from the state has not yet reached the cultural and creative industry. The signatories also oppose the fact that the government trivializes the topic as if it only concerned a few artists, while remarking that

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<sup>1</sup> KERNOVÁ, M.: *Facebooku došla trpezlivosť už aj so slobodným vysielateľom*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://www.omeiach.com/hoaxy/19020-facebooku-dosla-trpezlivosť-uz-aj-so-slobodnym-vysielacom>>.

<sup>2</sup> *COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Facebook zavádza zákaz reklám, ktoré ľudí odrádzajú od očkovania*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/2229244-facebook-zavádza-zakaz-reklam-ktore-ludi-odradzaju-od-ockovania>>.

approximately 9% of the working Slovaks work in the cultural industry.<sup>4</sup> The letter has been signed by Bohunka Koklesová, the rector of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and other 20 organizations, one of them being the Association of the Professional Photographers of SR. In the submitted paper, it is the medium of photography and the consequences of coronavirus pandemic on the photographic industry that we address. However, we do not pay too much attention to the economic side; we are concentrating mainly on the creative and philosophical aspects and on the search for parallels between the current situation and the origins of the invention of the medium of photography.

A significant number of authors address the term creativity in their publications across a wide spectrum of sectors, but it is still difficult to outline its uniform and universal definition. Something new, unusual, pioneering, something that has not been seen before; however, we often encounter the statement that everything has been seen before. Everything has already been created, painted, written; everything has been photographed, and, as stated by Terentius, nothing is said that has not been said before. Where then does the novelty, originality in art lie? Where are the limits of creativity, what are we able to think up, and what are the directions of our thoughts while creating something progressive? What does it depend on? In our study, we primarily deal with the term creativity within the context of art, mainly the medium of photography. We cannot deny the fact that there were times when photographing a naked body was something creative, novel (even sensational), beyond the boundary of decency; it was a bearer of erotic and even pornographic connotations; however, at the same time we are able to observe a shift in the minds of percipients and art critics. Can a nude photograph still be something new? What is the purpose of the continuous creation of new photographs – of, for example, female body? What new do they bring? What is the meaning of art, when, hyperbolically said, everything has been seen before? We will try to find an answer in the following lines.

## 1 Camera Obscura Vs. Quarantine

Art is a necessity of life. Through it, we express out thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and opinions; art cultivates our behaviour, through art we discover or comprehend the world. The same applies for photography. Renowned essayist Susan Sontag says: “*To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power.*”<sup>5</sup> Art can hardly be created on command. It follows from the abovementioned that it is a certain way of communication with the world, a reaction to the societal (and one’s own) problems. Art, and in our case photography, cannot be created during set 8 hours a day, 7 days a week. The actual realization is preceded by certain pre-understanding, study, and much more – let’s not forget, for instance, the wait for weather suitable for photographing outside, lighting conditions, time needed to prepare “the scene”, improvised atelier, etc. We are working with the assumption that photographers work nonstop. They are so absorbed in photography that they completely give in to it. The outbreak of the pandemic has also affected this area of creative industry and has fundamentally influenced and limited it. In the following lines, we will try to clarify how this medium has changed within a few months, how this is related to camera obscura, and why the current photographs are, or are not creative.

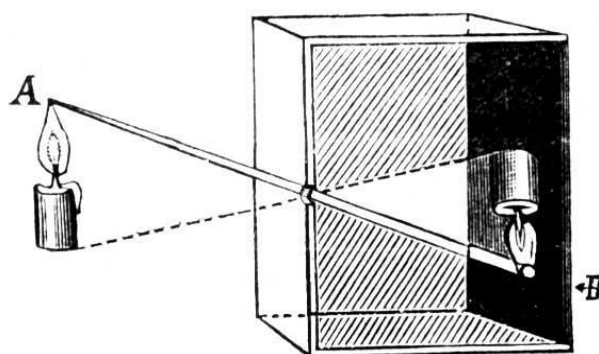
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<sup>4</sup> Pod otvorený list Matovičovi sa podpísalo ďalších sedem kultúrnych inštitúcií. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22503773/pod-otvoreny-list-matovicovi-sa-podpisalo-dalsich-sedem-kulturnych-organizacii.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> SONTAGOVÁ, S.: *O fotografii*. Prague : Paseka, 2002, p. 10.

## 1.1 Camera Obscura in the Past

It is mentioned in probably all photographic manuals and textbooks about the history of photography. Camera obscura, an interesting invention, origins of which are, according to L. Hlaváček, connected to the world-renowned Leonardo da Vinci. It is described as an ancestor of modern photographic cameras. The principle of camera obscura functioning lies in the fact that in a completely darkened chamber (it could be a smaller shoe box, but also a whole room) light travels through a miniature pinhole and projects a side-reversed and mirror-inverted image of the outside world at the opposite wall.<sup>6</sup> Even before da Vinci named this optical device at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, the aforementioned principle had been used as an aid by painters – they projected an image onto paper and traced the outlines of the outside world.<sup>7</sup> In our short excursion to history, we can go even further. The actual invention of photography and photographic devices was preceded by exploration of light and its properties. For instance, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, while observing the eclipsed sun, realized that sunlight passing between leaves of a tree projected an image onto the ground – and the smaller the gap, the sharper the image. Before Aristotle (350 BC), a similar phenomenon had been observed by Chinese philosopher Mo Ti in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Skipping a few centuries, we get to Arabic mathematician and scientist known as Alhazen (Ibn al-Haitham). He lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, also observed the partial solar eclipse, and consequently described in his book how the projected image dissolves when enlarging the aperture through which the light passes.<sup>8</sup> We could continue naming other inventors who have contributed to the improvement of camera obscura. It lasted a few centuries for them to figure out how to preserve the projected image, how to enhance its sharpness, how to get a mirror into it for the image not to be reversed, etc.



**Figure 1: Camera obscura**

Source: *The Camera Obscura: Modern Photography's First Ancestor*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://moneymakerphotography.com/camera-obscura/>>.

## 1.2 Camera Obscura Today

*“Pinhole camera (translation of camera obscura) is an ancestor of modern cameras. It is essentially a photographic camera without a lens. Instead of a lens, it has a tiny aperture,”*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> HLAVÁČ, L.: *Dejiny fotografie*. Martin : Osveta, 1987, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> WOLFE, S.: *Agents of Change: Camera Obscura*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://magazine.artland.com/agents-of-change-camera-obscura/>>.

<sup>8</sup> WARREN, L.: *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*. New York : Routledge, 2006, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup> *Dierková komora*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAxQI8Z-wIM>>.



explains Jozef Pajerský. In his bachelor thesis<sup>10</sup>, he addressed the pinhole camera and has contributed to the creation of a space that unites photographers that use this principle for their photography. He established a website [DierkovaKomora.sk](http://DierkovaKomora.sk). He himself uses a camera that reproduces this principle – he has made it from wood on a basis of YouTube tutorials. There are two most frequently used ways to capture an image by a pinhole camera – either on a black-and-white film or on a photographic paper consequently developed in a dark chamber. Nowadays, we have – to say it expressively – grown lazy. Technological progress has taught us to photograph without deeper consideration, as it is possible to just flip through images and delete the failed shots. It used to be the case for the analogue cameras that a photographer carefully thought it through before “spending” the remaining frames of the film. Jozef Sedlák, a photographer, graphic artist, and a graduate of the Prague FAMU, recalls his studies during the pedagogical process. From his statements we know that the photography students had to make sketches and drafts, *storyboards*<sup>11</sup> of a sort that depicted what and how they were planning to photograph. We thus presume that the pinhole camera is used mainly by photographers - enthusiasts. The absent lens, which is replaced by a small hole made by, for example, a point of a pin in today’s camera obscura, causes that one never knows ahead what they end up photographing. Naturally, such a camera does not have a viewfinder. The resulting photographs are thus a synthesis of good lighting conditions, technical execution of the pinhole camera, and the photographer’s skills. Referring to the current epidemiologic measures, we could state that the camera obscura system is unwittingly largely used nowadays. Or at least figuratively. Restrictions of social contact and compulsory isolation have caused our personal space – house, flat, room – to become a camera obscura. As the miniature lens, we can imagine a keyhole (or a window), through which an image of the outside world reaches us. At the same time, we can mention that for all the people working from home, a webcam is that imaginary hole that allows them to communicate with the surrounding world (Fig. 2 serves us to illustrate this metaphor). However, it is questionable how the creative process takes place in such a situation.



**Figure 2: How to convert your room into a giant camera obscura**

Source: *How to convert your room into a giant camera obscura*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://petapixel.com/2014/05/12/diy-tutorial-convert-room-camera-obscura/>>.

<sup>10</sup> See also: PAJERSKÝ, J.: *Realizácia internetového portálu dierkovakomora.sk*. [Bachelor Thesis]. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Remark by the author: The form of storyboard as we know it today has been developed by Walt Disney. He created the first image screenplay in 1933 for the cartoon Three Little Pigs. Storyboard resembles a comic book, as it consists of images that tell a story; it is a technical screenplay of a sort.; For more information, see: *Storyboard – obrázkový scénár*. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://animuj.cz/storyboard-obrazkovy-scenar/>>.

## 2 Creative Photography in the Times of Pandemic

### 2.1 Current State of the Issue

Society suffers not only for fear of the virus itself, but also its consequences – the most notable being the loss of employment. What is the impact of coronavirus on the photographic profession? Cancelled mass events or restricted weddings (up to a certain number of people) have left many photographers jobless. 1000 professional photographers and video makers participated in a survey conducted by the portal Lens Rentals. Its results show that as many as 75% of the orders have been cancelled due to the pandemic. The aforementioned survey also revealed that 19% of the respondents were considering changing their careers.<sup>12</sup> We assume that it is similar in our country. However, let's go back to the start. What motivates the photographers in their work in this situation? What becomes the subject of their photographs and are they even creative? To grasp the issue, we find it necessary to shortly address creativity. The frequently discussed term has many definitions; therefore, we think it is important to pay it due attention right at the beginning.

### 2.2 What Is Creativity

Probably the most banal and brief description of the term creativity has been provided by Soviet author A. Moľakov, who is cited in the book *Tvorivost' – piata dimenzia (Creativity – The Fifth Dimension)* by its two authors. He defines it as a human activity that results in something new, not known until then.<sup>13</sup> M. Zelina and E. Jaššová state: “*Creativity is the peak station that the human spirit strives to reach. Creativity is the pinnacle of self-realization and self-actualization. Creativity is socially beneficial not only because of the self-realization of a human, but it is also the highest level of utility for both the individual and the society.*”<sup>14</sup> Their relatively flowery description could also be expressed in a more scientific way. One of the most complex definitions of creativity in our neck of the woods comes from J. Hlavsa: “*Creativity is a structure of special dynamic characteristics of a subject that, through a synthesis of certain external conditions and internal states, realizes its own alterations that invoke a process that, through intensive activities, leads to discovery of creative situations and creation of products that are unique, novel, progressive, valuable, and communicable and that retroactively permanently form the traits of the subject, especially its creative experience and potential.*”<sup>15</sup> Of course, creativity can be considered also in seemingly more noble, philosophical lines, as it is mostly the philosophers who deal with this term from various points of view, in different contexts. Let's not forget, for instance, Miroslav Holub, Czech doctor, writer and poet. He writes that, when hearing the word creativity, we should not assume an expression of reverence, or even sacredness and, at the same time, humbleness, as if it did not concern us. According to him, almost every member of the so-called creative profession thinks that creativity concerns them a lot, and through their humility expresses cunningly the supposed extent of their divine spark.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, Popovňák's collection of quotes about creativity is similarly interesting. From the many quotations of renowned personalities, we have selected, for example, J. P. Guilford: “*There is no phenomenon or subject that has been both ignored and examined*

<sup>12</sup> *How Covid-19 is Affecting the Photo & Video Industry*. Released on 22<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.lensrentals.com/blog/2020/04/how-covid-19-is-affecting-the-photo-video-industry/>>.

<sup>13</sup> ZELINA, M., JAŠŠOVÁ, E.: *Tvorivost' – piata dimenzia*. Bratislava : Smena, 1984, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> HLAVSA, J.: *Psychologické problémy výchovy k tvořivosti*. Prague : Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1981, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> HOLUB, M.: *Maxwellův démon čili O tvořivosti*. Prague : Československý spisovatel, 1988, p. 9.

for so long as creativity.”<sup>17</sup> G. A. Davydova states: “Creativity is a living seed that has grown on common field. Creativity means the human influence on the world. Just confirming the new does not mean it is creativity.”<sup>18</sup> The excursion to the quotes of the famous will be concluded by Z. Pietrasieński: “The main principle of creativity lies in improving new associations, in creating new configurations of the elements of individual and collective experience.”<sup>19</sup> Creativity has long been a subject of examination of art and philosophy – after all, the first thought of most of us is its association with art. However, creativity became a subject of research and scientific interest only recently, in the 1950s. E. Szobiová writes that the novel term creativity was introduced to this field by the American psychologist J. P. Guilford (by the way, quoted above). He was the reason for a systematic research of creativity through scientific means.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.3 Levels of Creativity

When are we creative? Do we even have abilities, talent or brain capacity to always come up with something new? What is the “novelty” related to? M. Zelina and E. Jaššová define 3 levels of creativity based on the reference set which describes that it is a new thought:

1. novelty of ideas and solutions for the whole human population,
2. product of creative process is being compared within certain groups (company, school class...),
3. an individual themselves is the element of novelty.

According to them, the first case is the highest level of creativity (product/method/idea etc. is new for the whole humanity), the last case is the lowest (product/method/idea etc. is not new in relation to all population or a certain group, e.g. within a school, region or place, but only in relation to an individual themselves).<sup>21</sup> E. Szobiová speaks of a dichotomous division, while referring to, for example, Stein. She defines two levels of creativity:

1. small (products of common people – imaginative creations, drawings, poems, etc.),
2. big (discovery of theory of relativity, works by Michelangelo, Shakespeare, etc. – creations that are characterized by grandiosity, majesty, fundamentally influencing the whole society).<sup>22</sup>

According to M. Mikuláščík, there are many more levels of creativity. Mendelová and Zaušková refer<sup>23</sup> to his book *Tvorivosť a inovácie v práci manažéra (Creativity and Innovation in Managerial Work)*, where he distinguishes the following levels:

1. expressive, intuitive, imaginative, expressional (it is the basic and spontaneous creativity),
2. heuristic (problem solving),
3. technically oriented (constructive activities),
4. productive activities (crafty activities – area of dressing, decorating, etc.),
5. inventive (creating something new from the old and familiar – e.g. various innovative alterations),

<sup>17</sup> POPOVŇÁK, J.: *Tvorivosť – schopnosť ľudská*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2007, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> SZOBIOVÁ, E.: *Tvorivosť – poznávanie tajomstiev*. Plzeň : Vydavateľství a nakladateľství Aleš Čeněk, s.r.o., 2016, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> ZELINA, M., JAŠŠOVÁ, E.: *Tvorivosť – piata dimenzia*. Bratislava : Smena, 1984, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> SZOBIOVÁ, E.: *Tvorivosť – poznávanie tajomstiev*. Plzeň : Vydavateľství a nakladateľství Aleš Čeněk, s.r.o., 2016, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> MENDELOVÁ, D., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A.: *Inovácie v slovenskej reklame*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2015, p. 21.

6. reproductive (interpretation of work of someone else),
7. emerging (by combining the lower elements into new contexts, a higher form emerges; it is reached by creators of works of art, discoverers, inventors, etc.).<sup>24</sup>

Several similarities can be observed in the opinions of different authors. For instance, the definition of emerging creativity by Mikuláščík corresponds to Szobiová's big creativity. Both are close to the first level by Zelina and Jaššová, i.e. creativity that has its significance for the whole human population.

## 2.4 Creative Photography in the Time of Pandemic

In connection to the medium of photography, we can look at creativity from various points of view. It is manifested in technological progress, in diversity of topics, in possibilities of postproduction, etc. Although each generation has its famous photographers, only a few of them stand out from the crowd and have a significant impact on the development of this medium – they are in a certain sense creative, progressive. What constitutes their importance? In the submitted article, for objective reasons, we will leave out creativity related to technological progress or a particular genre and will focus on creativity of photographers influenced by the coronavirus pandemic spread across the whole world. Current situation also provides topics for creative work. Pointing at the work of photojournalists, we can state that the photographs are creative at the lower levels. We cannot hold it against them, as it stems from the nature of journalistic photography that does not allow manipulation of an image, i.e. authentically depicts reality. People wearing facemasks have become new “models” in our culture; by contrast, in China, for example, they are used to this, because they normally protect their airways from smog in this way. However, are people with facemasks really a new trend for photographers? Have something like this really not been here before? Also in this case, we can paraphrase Terentius: everything has been here before. During the epidemics of plaque or Spanish flu, people protected themselves by wearing facemasks, as is proved by a famous photograph from 1918 Seattle, where a public transport driver refused to allow a passenger aboard without this protection. Naturally, the novelty, originality stems from the context – e.g. a photograph of the members of the new Slovak government from March 2020 with masks on their faces. Furthermore, many artists appropriate other authors, imitate them, and place them into new environs. One of the most famous photographs with masks – a kissing couple – was taken as a model by contemporary photographer Arina Voronova, who took photographs of couples in the streets of New York during the first wave of coronavirus pandemic.<sup>25</sup> What is interesting is that the original photograph was made in Hollywood during a rehearsal of a movie kiss in 1937 that was rehearsed with facemasks due to flu epidemic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> MIKULÁŠČÍK, M.: *Tvořivost a inovace v práci manažéra*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2010, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> FREE, C.: *With face masks and a kiss, photographer shines a light on love and acceptance during coronavirus chaos*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/03/14/with-face-masks-kiss-photographer-shines-light-love-acceptance-during-coronavirus-chaos/>>.

<sup>26</sup> *THROWBACK THURSDAY – KISS PROTECTION*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <<http://www.lalalondon.com/2012/10/throwback-thursday-kiss-protection/>>.



**Figure 3: Stanley Morton a Betty Furness, 1937**

Source: FREE, C.: *With face masks and a kiss, photographer shines a light on love and acceptance during coronavirus chaos.* Released on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/03/14/with-face-masks-kiss-photographer-shines-light-love-acceptance-during-coronavirus-chaos/>>.



**Figure 4: Arina Voronova, 2020**

Source: *THROWBACK THURSDAY – KISS PROTECTION.* Released on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <<http://www.lalalondon.com/2012/10/throwback-thursday-kiss-protection/>>.

However, the creatives do not idle and continue to think up new concepts. Referring to current situation, such photographs as those of the sculptures of Štúrovci with facemasks in Modra or the ones depicting deserted towns have been created. This is a photo series “Quiet Town” by Peter Korček, with which he participated in an annual exhibition of the Silesian University in Opava;<sup>27</sup> he was also given space in the cultural centre Nástupište 1-12 in Topolčany.<sup>28</sup> It is, therefore, necessary to accentuate that the photographers – just like other artists – react to topical problems in the world and society and perceive them as thought purposes of their projects. They use creativity and invent new concepts that can be described as progressive and original from the point of view of our topic.

<sup>27</sup> PAVELKOVÁ, M.: *Institut tvůrčí fotografie Slezské univerzity slaví své třicátiny výstavou. Ta zachycuje i dobu koronaviru.* Released on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://www.cysnews.cz/kultura/institut-tvurci-fotografie-slezske-univerzity-slavi-sve-tricatin-y-vystavou-ta-zachycuje-i-dobu-koronaviru/>>.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Korček: *Tiché mesto.* [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <[https://www.nastupiste.sk/news/news\\_peter-korcek-tiche-mesto/](https://www.nastupiste.sk/news/news_peter-korcek-tiche-mesto/)>.



**Figure 5: Peter Korček – Quiet Town, 2020**

Source: MOČKOVÁ, J.: *Prázdné parkoviská, nákupné centrá aj ulice, všade ticho. Bratislava v dňoch korony vyzerá ako skanzen (+ foto)*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1826097/prazdne-parkoviska-nakupne-centra-aj-ulice-vsade-ticho-bratislava-v-dnoch-korony-vyzera-ako-skanzen-foto/>>.

## 2.5 New Challenges for the Medium of Photography

Almost the whole social life has moved to the online space. We use distance learning, we work remotely, and the photography has adapted to this new phenomenon really quickly. Galleries or other cultural institutions lose their purpose without visitors, but they are still searching for (and finding) new ways. In our country, we can mention an example of online performance of the Slovak National Theatre available on the YouTube channel or the possibility to visit the Bratislava's Cinema Lumière online. As regards photography, possibly the most well-known competition in Slovakia is the Slovak Press Photo. Although the formal announcement of this year's winners could not be held due to epidemiological measures, the exhibition of the winning photographs was installed in the House of Arts in Bratislava and has been made available to the public. Naturally, the Instagram is very popular and wide-spread among the younger generation of authors. A group of authors, who have participated on the creation of the publication *Dokument1*, exhibited their art works in Trenčín in The Gallery of M. A. Bazovský. At the same time, they are trying to bring photography closer to their audience through Instagram – for example, at the end of October they discussed photography with the photographer and filmmaker Soňa Maletz. During the first wave of the pandemic, a global photography competition, where authors tried to work creatively from home, took place. The competition was fittingly named #StayHome.<sup>29</sup> Of course, we also regard online exhibitions and vernissages as new opportunities. Graduates of the Creative-Experimental Photography Atelier under the supervision of Mgr. et. Bc. Lucia Škripcová, PhD. also presented themselves in this form, as the vernissage was available online. Visitors got to a virtual gallery space, where moving images were hanging on walls.<sup>30</sup> In this way, they not only showed their audience the final photograph, but also the process of its making. A definite advantage of such newly-arisen online

<sup>29</sup> *International photographers reveal what COVID-19 lockdown looks like around the world in #StayHome global photo contest*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://agoraimages.prowly.com/96168-international-photographers-reveal-what-covid-19-lockdown-looks-like-around-the-world-in-stayhome-global-photo-contest>>.

<sup>30</sup> *Online klauzúrna výstava KEFA 2020*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbGA-NAA9Ws>>.

galleries is their world-wide availability.<sup>31</sup> As another example from the variety of innovations and adaptations to the current situation, we will mention the fashion industry and magazine photoshoots. Spanish stylist Alex Badia, in reportage for the ABC7 New York channel, explained how the shoots for fashion magazine WWD are done during the pandemic. Using the Zoom application, he connects with a model, the garments are sent directly to their home (in different sizes, just in case), the model is stylized through webcam, does their own makeup with a remote guidance by a makeup artist through FaceTime, and the photographer then photographs them. Badia calls this approach “back-to-basics” as a reminder of times when a giant crew was absent and the photographer and the model were alone in the set.<sup>32</sup> Renowned model Cindy Crawford also participated in something similar, when she did a photoshoot through FaceTime with photographer Kate Irlin.<sup>33</sup> And there are many other similar projects that could be found at the present time. Based on the acquired knowledge and observed facts, we can state that creativity in current photography is manifested mainly by the photographer’s approach or by technological gadgets.

## Conclusion

Uncountable amount of images pass through our eyes every day. Photographs are also a part of our lives, as they fulfil not only the role of documenting and authentically depicting reality in the media, but they also have their aesthetic function. They are art, which generally cultivates our demeanour, holds up a mirror towards the society, and confronts us with ourselves. However, individual photographs are often similar. We have analysed what is the original, novel element that makes a shot unique; what can be considered creative. Based on the theoretical framework, we have defined various levels of creativity that – for the purposes of our study – could be minimised to two, the small and the big creativity. We are aware that the big creativity implies inventions and discoveries that are significant for the whole society. The invention of photography itself is included here. However, the individual genres and subgenres, in our opinion, represent the small creativity that does not have such a strong impact on the human population. However, in the same breath, we must add that, in photography, plenty creative elements can be seen that are related not only to the technological progress, but mainly to the progress in the area of philosophical perception of this medium. Current photography does not solely aim to capture the reality, but thanks to ambiguity and symbolism, it becomes a reflection of the society or the intentions of the author who visually communicates with the world in this way. On various levels, creativity is expressed in every photograph. The question remains, whether the author has found the original key to open the door.

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<sup>31</sup> *Študenti vystavujú fotografické práce v interaktívnej online galérii*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://fmk.sk/ronaigallery/>>.

<sup>32</sup> KENYON, S.: *Coronavirus News: Fashion shoots go back to basics amid coronavirus pandemic*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://abc7ny.com/fashion-industry-shoots-photo-sandy-kenyon/6363910/>>.

<sup>33</sup> KELLY, A.: *Cindy Crawford Models in a Virtual FaceTime Photo Shoot While Self-Isolating at Home*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://people.com/style/cindy-crawford-models-in-facetime-photo-shoot-amid-coronavirus/>>.

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# THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF DESIGN AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION AT THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Vladimíra Jurišová*

## Abstract

Earlier in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the course of all our lives. The whole world had to adjust to a new situation and learn to live differently, with restrictions. From the very beginning of the crisis, the communication of government, autonomies, and other parties and authorities with citizens is crucial. How to communicate critical pandemic information in as clear a way as possible in such a dynamically changing situation? Communication messages from the government should be clear, accurate, and understandable. That is not always a case for certain countries. During the crisis, the provision of clear, accurate, and easily accessible information becomes a matter of life and death. Given the current information and misinformation volumes, the necessity for clear communication delivered through the single visual system has never been that high. Design and visual communication comprise the crucial power in solving multiple challenges, including restriction and regulation announcements connected with the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the paper, our focus will be on the general role of design and consistent visual communication; we should also look at the case study of elaborate visual communication of enacted measures in New Zealand at the time of the pandemic.

## Key words:

Colours. Covid-19. Design. Illustration. Logo. Pictograms. Typography. Visual Communication. Visual Identity.

## Introduction

Today the key responsibility of governments and autonomies in the world is to ensure that the citizens are as well-informed as possible about the crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important for us, citizens, to be able to behave in various life situations according to clearly communicated measures. The very best communication programs addressing measures and regulations should be clear, accurate, and easy to remember. One of the tools that might help this is the design, visual side, and visually well-set communication, communication of single measures and regulations. Of course, this goes in hand with crisis management and strong leadership, though the communication and design might be one of the factors, which will help and simplify the topic, however the complex it is, through symbols and communication messages to make the last easy to understand and implement.

## 1 The Significance of Design and Visual Communication

„100% of our world is design“<sup>1</sup> – is a quotation by Austrian designer Stefan Sagmeister, who says that we come across the design more or less all the time, no matter where we are. Just look around, you may find many things that are the result of the work of designers from around the world, should it be a car, a bicycle, a lamp, a table, a chair, or clothes that we are wearing right now. All these objects were, at first, proposed to fulfill a particular aim in the best way possible. For the laymen, the whole design thing is about how things do look. Otherwise, from the design process viewpoint, it aims to solve problems. With the correct solution, the designer can create an added value to the items and services, as for example to generate profits, save money, reach new customers, or communicate important government messages to citizens in the difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> JENČA, M. et al.: *Backstage Talks*. Bratislava : Milk Studio, 2016, p. 5.

Design is an implementation of the concept or thought into a scratch, a model, a particular form, a pattern, guidance, which contributes to the achievement of the identified objectives. To achieve the afore-mentioned objectives, graphics design uses mainly visual communication and its explicit means of expression like symbols, signs, colors, visual metaphors, etc. Graphics design finds its implementation in a wide range of social life spheres. It constitutes the basis of printed media, as are books, daily prints, magazines. It also finds itself in advertisements and marketing, where it helps businesses to build up their identity, save money, increase the value of the products, services, or even the value of the business entity, organization, or institution itself. Graphics designer Pecina had identified the following design functions:<sup>2</sup>

- **Functionality** – with the help of design, we can solve various issues that increase the value and functionality of the product or service. There are well-known case studies, mainly from the field of web design, where even a slight change in the graphics layout improved the clarity and functionality of the web-page. Customers now were able to get the information they need quicker, or in the case of e-shops, they were able to purchase more easily. Usually, even a small change, as the font change, makes a big difference. In an ongoing situation with the pandemic, it is crucial to pay due attention to such changes because they might ease complex messages that are communicated in fast-changing conditions.
- **Increasing the brand's value** – such a benefit might be demonstrated, for example, by the product launch presentation arrangements. High-quality design in the eyes of the customer becomes a sign of professionalism, credibility, and it shows that the brand takes care of its product. Together with the presentation quality growth, there is a corresponding increase in the popularity and fame of the brand, and thus an increase in the brand's value. Customers are more loyal to such brands and are eager to pay more.
- **Improving turnover and profit** – even the slight change in the web design might lead to a higher number of online orders in the e-shops, for instance. We may achieve a similar effect in the offline environment by changing a package design.
- **Saving money** – design has the power to save not only money, but the environment, time, and a product life-cycle as well.
- **Clear communication and information transfer** – the design is using multiple tools that help in delivering information to the target audience. To make communication understandable, it needs to be thoroughly thought-out and adjusted to the addressee for whom it is intended to be delivered. It means that one font should be used for communication with children, the other for communication with students, or senior citizens, or visually impaired people. Each of the afore-mentioned groups requires a different approach, knowledge, and education level. Equally important is not only the addressee but also the topic that is going to be presented using visual communication. In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all are addressees of the government's communication, it is, therefore, important to seek a clear, understandable, and universal language to communicate regulations and measures at the time of the pandemic.
- **Beauty** – the design is capable of being beautiful, and one of the tasks is to bring esthetic and emotional pleasure. Even though the beauty is subjective and modern trend turns us all back towards functionality guided by the "form follows the function" slogan, the beauty remains an integral part of the design. Its significance acknowledges one of the most recognized and well-known designers of the modern world – Stefan Sagmeister. As per him, the inter-connection of beauty and design goes back to the time of the stone axes.

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<sup>2</sup> PECINA, M. T.: *Proč je grafický dizajn užitečný*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012. [online]. [2020-11-25]. Available at: <[http://unie-grafickeho-designu.cz/proc-je-graficky-design-uzitecny/#.WE8L\\_DbN0Wo](http://unie-grafickeho-designu.cz/proc-je-graficky-design-uzitecny/#.WE8L_DbN0Wo)>.

They were symmetrical not because they fulfilled their function better but because they were more beautiful this way.<sup>3</sup>

According to the research held by Carl Zeiss company on visual sensory information, up to 80% of senses are received through vision.<sup>4</sup> That creates an enormous disparity between the last four senses, which increases the importance of graphics design and underlines the necessity of treating it responsibly. Graphics design uses several visual communication tools to communicate information. Communication may be briefly defined as "*a process of handing over, transfer, and exchange of meanings and values.*"<sup>5</sup> Visual communication is not essentially different. Only the tools used for the information transfer do change. "*Visual communication is, generally speaking, a transfer of thoughts and information in the forms that can be seen.*"<sup>6</sup> There are plenty of tools by which graphics design may communicate. The ones mostly used are font, text, symbols, colors, shapes, proportions, and even humor or visual metaphors.

## 2 Role of Design and Visual Communication at the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic – Inspiration from New Zealand

New Zealand's campaign significantly entitled Unite against Covid-19 became a successful project that proved the effectiveness of the design as well as became a positive example of the well-done communication of the government with the citizens. The campaign achieved staggering results: 97% campaign awareness, 87% understanding of Alert Levels, 88% trust in government messages.<sup>7</sup> The campaign was ordered from the New Zealand advertising agency Clemenger BBDO Wellington, which stands behind not only this particular campaign but the whole visual information system. This visual system might be treated as one of the most intelligent and thoroughly designed public information and communication programs about the Covid-19 pandemic. The creation of the whole visual system and campaign, taking into consideration the urgency of the crisis and global uncertainty, took a very short period. The agency needed to find a way of bringing clear and helpful messages on Covid-19 to New Zealand inhabitants across all communication platforms and media channels. Design system Unite against Covid-19 shows a unique example of what a good design is capable of doing for people in a time of global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. It was able to unite New Zealand with the help of clear and emphatic messages, with the help of easily recognizable and accessible visual identity. The whole visual information system issues a warning, but along with that brings professional and clear messages.

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<sup>3</sup> VAN SCHNEIDER, S.: *Dilema of form follow function*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <<http://www.vanschneider.com/beauty-vs-function/>>.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: Visual perception. In *The magazine from Carl Zeiss Innovation*, 2006, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 8-11. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://www.zeiss.com.hr/content/dam/Corporate/pressandmedia/downloads/Carl\\_Zeiss\\_Innovation\\_English\\_Is\\_sue\\_17.pdf](https://www.zeiss.com.hr/content/dam/Corporate/pressandmedia/downloads/Carl_Zeiss_Innovation_English_Is_sue_17.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> FORET, M.: *Marketingová komunikácia*. Brno : Computer Press, 2011, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> KYSELICA, P., PTACIN, J.: Úvod do sveta dizajnu. In ČÁBYOVÁ, E., KUSÁ, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: dizajn, ktorý predáva*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> *Clemenger BBDO. Unite Against COVID-19*. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://www.clemengerbbdo.co.nz/the-work/unite-against-covid-19>>.

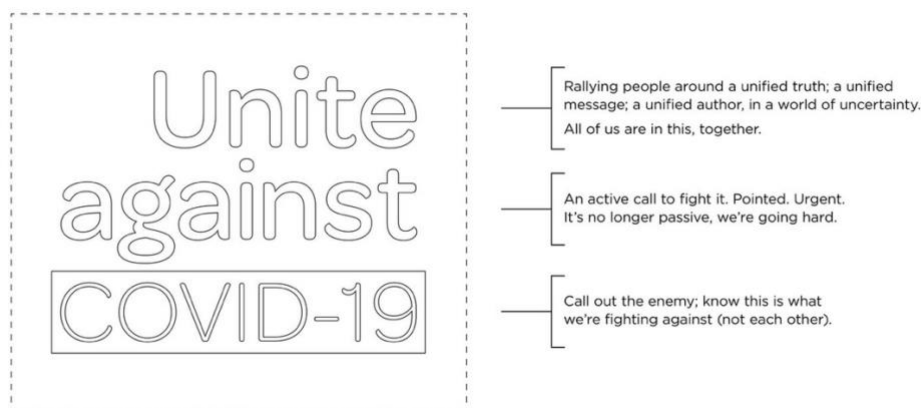


**Figure 1: Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Arden presented Alert System at a press conference about Covid-19 held at the New Zealand Parliament in Wellington**

Source: "Unite against COVID-19" campaign, New Zealand Government. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://fontsinuse.com/uses/35256/unite-against-covid-19-campaign-new-zealand-g>>.

## 2.1 Logo and Colors

The Logo of Unite against Covid-19 is typographical, it follows the title itself. It contains white, black, and yellow color. Michael Dalton, Creative Director in Clemenger BBDO, explains the choice of the black, white, and yellow color: *"What we wanted was to balance the heaviness of a lot of the global work we were seeing by using a lot of white, and white space. Black was a logical colour to use, particularly for type and the Unite Against lock-up, and then we used yellow to highlight Covid-19. We were quite deliberate about not making the word Covid-19 and the wordmark bold and shouty, because everyone was so aware of it, you almost didn't need to say it. Otherwise it was led with white and yellow, to try and get people to realise that this is serious, but hopefully still approachable, rather than it just being a big scary hazard and safety message."*<sup>8</sup> Designers aimed to use colors that would be visually strong on various communication channels and platforms.



**Figure 2: Logo analysis and symbolism of individual parts**

Source: Clemenger BBDO. *Unite Against COVID-19*. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://www.clemengerbbdo.co.nz/the-work/unite-against-covid-19>>.

<sup>8</sup> See also: RAWSTHORN, A.: Design Emergency: Mark Dalton helping people navigate pandemic through design. In *Wallpaper*, 2020, Vol. 25, No, 10, p. 177-179.

## 2.2 Typeface, Pictograms and Layouts

Typeface choice was just as equally important as the choice of the color. For the campaign identification, was chosen The Omnes Typeface by Darden Studio that looks humane, has a broad range of cuts, and is diverse, as it enables the use of the same typeface from the font family for the headlines as well as the body copy. While yellow diagonal stripes signal a state of emergency, the approachable sans serif conveys the textual information in a way that is both clear and humane.



**Figure 3: Logo Unite against Covid-19 and Claim Stay home. Save Lives**

Source: *Unite against COVID-19*. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://covid19.govt.nz/>>.

All measures, regulations, and recommendations from the side of the New Zealand government were communicated in a consistent visual language. Applications, posters, social media posts, and all the other information outputs used the same layout with distinctive warning yellow lanes with pictograms forming the backbone of such messages. Using pictograms enabled easy communication of measures that people should respect. Along with pictograms, they tried not to use prohibitions, but rather positive wording, be that about wearing face covering, coughing or sneezing into your elbow, washing and disinfecting your hands, staying home, or taking care of elderly or vulnerable people.



**Figure 4: Unite against COVID-19 – recommendations**

Source: *Unite against COVID-19*. [online]. [2020-11-28]. Available at: <<https://covid19.govt.nz/>>.

## 2.3 Website and Social Media

Besides setting visual identity and holding the campaign, the central platform <https://covid19.govt.nz/> was created for the complex and effective sharing of the information on Covid-19 from the New Zealand government. The platform consists of 4 levels of the Alert

System, with the help of which citizens can understand in which level the county is right now and which measures may be applied at the various levels. The platform could be considered as transparent but, above all, foreseeable. Moreover, the platform contains clear and complex information from different life spheres that are important for everyday life: travel & border, health & wellbeing, business, work & money, everyday life, updates & resources. The platform was translated into more than 20 languages and is consistent with the set identity. From the beginning of the pandemic, the government communicates important information also using social media. A Facebook page and Instagram profile Unite against Covid-19 were created using a consistent visual style as well.

## Conclusion

Clear, understandable, foreseeable, visually distinctive, and consistent communication of governmental measures at the time of global crisis, as is Covid-19, becomes especially critical while dealing with the pandemic. Not all countries are that good at communicating their messages. A well-marked visual system and elaborated design of the Unite against Covid-19 New Zealand campaign were able to turn chaos and ambiguity during the most uncertain times of the pandemic into clarity, complexity, and simplicity so that people fully understand the situation. The design brought rough clarity along with warmth and empathy towards elderly and vulnerable people, helped to interpret complex changes, set daily routine, and turned government communication into the source of the truth. And this might be one of the reasons why New Zealand is now among the countries with the lowest death rate and the lowest number of cases per 100,000 population.

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Visual perception. In *The magazine from Carl Zeiss Innovation*, 2006, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 8-11. ISSN 1431-8040. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://www.zeiss.com/hr/content/dam/Corporate/pressandmedia/downloads/Carl\\_Zeiss\\_Innovation\\_English\\_Issue\\_17.pdf](https://www.zeiss.com/hr/content/dam/Corporate/pressandmedia/downloads/Carl_Zeiss_Innovation_English_Issue_17.pdf)>.

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## DIGITALIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND HR MARKETING

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the transformation processes that create an environment for strategic human resource management, which raises the need to explore the implications for human resource management and communication methods. The main research method is a systematic and critical review of the literature with regard to the present and future events in society. The scientific goal of this article is to identify the current state of digitalization issues and related concepts, take into account developments in these industries to define the impact of these processes on human resource management and HR marketing. The pace of technological change brought about by Industry 4.0, along with Covid-19, has created a significant gap between employees' current capabilities and the rapidly evolving demands on their competencies and skills and ability to adapt to the online environment.

### Key words:

Competence. Digital Marketing. Digital Transformation. Digitalization. Digitization. HR Marketing. Human Resources Management. Industry 4.0. Smart HR 4.0.

### Introduction

Industry is the backbone of national economies and the industry could be considered as something, what has the impact on whole society. Previous industrial revolutions, of course, had own accelerators and own benefits as well. The first industrial revolution in the 18th century related to the raise of mechanical machines, whose transformation and higher power were perfectly utilized by the second industrial revolution mainly powered by introduction of electricity. This specific evolution was not completed by the third industrial revolution, symbolized by computers and the Internet. Most probably the ongoing fourth industrial revolution is not the end of industrial development. Of course, it is possible that dominance will always be present by entropy, but these are rather philosophical considerations. This paper deals with the current challenges of the transformation processes of the fourth industrial revolution, which can be collectively termed as Industry 4.0. In the introductory part the conceptual framework will be defined and later clarified the importance of fundamental concepts - digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. Following part will illustrate the impact of these processes on the area of human resources management. Industry 4.0's concept fundamentally changes the perception of the subject and object of current "industrial revolution". Both - subject and object - became people, and the biggest challenge for industry (generally), hence for national economies, is not technology, but people, concretely their competences and abilities<sup>1</sup>. The last part illustrates the fact that human resource management can respond to these challenges using modern technology and the latest scientific knowledge. Above all, the HRM is required to take appropriate measures and set the course: the HRM addresses key levers for a pioneering role in digitalized world.

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<sup>1</sup> PWC Report Industry 4.0: Building the digital enterprise. 2016. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/industries-4.0/landing-page/industry-4.0-building-your-digital-enterprise-april-2016.pdf>>.

## 1 Theoretical Background

For the current theme of Industry 4.0 and the challenges it represents it is necessary to define basic concepts. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is strongly linked to the terms of digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. There are hundreds of articles that work with all or some of these terms. Despite that fact, they are often confusing or lead is understand. Therefore, this section of our paper will briefly introduce them to clarify the logical sequence of their interdependence, which provides a framework to highlight the specific competencies of workers needed in Industry 4.0. Bengtsson and Bloom<sup>2</sup> present the thesis that new technologies and overall the technological development enables new forms of corporations, since it allows new ways of interaction, relations and efficient and faster communication. According to Bondarouk and Ruel<sup>3</sup> digital technology modifies every corporation. The process of digitalization is changing how corporations communicate, plan, recruit, manage, stimulate, remunerate, support and educate workforce as well as other HR activities and processes. It can be talked about digital HRM or e-HRM. Bredin and Soderlund<sup>4</sup> discuss the emergence of project-based corporations as a result of the online environment and technological development. They also talk about approaches on how to flexibly meet the technological development. A turbulent environment, global<sup>5</sup> competition and digital era require that corporation will be adaptable, flexible and ready for opportunities and changes.

In general, neither digitalization nor digital transformation is possible without digitization. Digitalization and digitization are two conceptual concepts that are very similar and often confused. To digitize means converting of data from non-digital to digital format, which is used by computer systems for various purposes.<sup>6</sup> It is not possible to “digitize” of processes. Processes can be only automated by digitizing information and implementing technologies that enable automation. Digitization is simply the creation of a digital form of analogous or physical objects (in bytes and bits) - paper documents, pictures, photographs, sounds, etc. Digitization of “things” or “information” enables the digitalization of processes. Digitalization represents the transformation of interactions, communication, functions and business models into digital form, resp. in the form where digital technologies enable digitized data to combine, complement and support the work of machines and people – customer support at all levels or machine production and manufacture. Digitalization follows the digitization process. This means that whenever an object is digitized, it is stored on a computer and you can take additional steps with it. An example of practice is the road light database, which sends information about its condition to a maintenance company.

<sup>2</sup> BENGTSSON, C., BLOOM, M.: *Human Resource Management in a Digital Era. A qualitative study of HR managers' perceptions of digitalization and its implications for HRM*. 2017. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOid=8914716&fileOid=8914717>>.

<sup>3</sup> BONDAROUK, T., RUEL, H.: Electronic Human Resource Management: Challenges in the digital era. In *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2009, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 506-513. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247522493\\_Electronic\\_Human\\_Resource\\_Management\\_Challenges\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Era](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247522493_Electronic_Human_Resource_Management_Challenges_in_the_Digital_Era)>.

<sup>4</sup> See also: BREDIN, K., SÖDERLUND, J.: *Human Resource Management in Project-Based Organizations: The HR Quadriad Framework*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> NADANYIOVÁ, M.: Global trends of the personnel marketing in service enterprises. In KLIESTIK, T. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 16th International Scientific Conference on Globalization and its Socio-Economic Consequences*. Žilina : University of Zilina, 2016, p. 1479. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://globalization.uniza.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/proceedings\\_globalization\\_2016\\_part\\_4.pdf](https://globalization.uniza.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/proceedings_globalization_2016_part_4.pdf)>.

<sup>6</sup> *DevOps*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://denevy.eu/SolutionsAndServices>>.

This process can also be called "The internet of things". Digitalization is the use of digitized data for applications that supports standard workflows. It can be defined as the ability to turn existing products or services into digital variants and thus offer benefits over a tangible product<sup>7</sup>. Brennen and Kreiss<sup>8</sup> describe digitalization as adopting or increasing the use of digital or computer technology by organizations, industry, countries, etc.

Digitalization can be described in three phases according to Savić<sup>9</sup> - the initialization phase involves the automation of individual processes (with support of digitization), the second phase occurs when automated processes are successfully interconnected, and the third, most complex phase comes when the whole system is integrated and functional. However, digitalization does not necessarily bring the digital transformation itself. The digital transformation is primarily characterized as "doing things differently" in the sense of using existing features to fundamental changes in the functioning of an organization / company / society. Savić<sup>10</sup> argues about changes in the nature of the organization - its culture, management strategy, technology mix and organization settings. Customers are at the center of all decisions and activities. Author Schmarzo<sup>11</sup> defines digital transformation as an application that can produce, process and deliver greater efficiency. It also strengthens client value, risk management, risk management and discovers new monetary opportunities. He also outlines four types of survival to help organizations in the future:

1. Digital transformation is about the survival of kinds - an organization must adopt a culture change in order to survive its business model. It is necessary to adopt design thinking, to understand, to learn, to live concepts and approaches of thinking focused on man and modest management of design.
2. Keep and live the so-called. "The Real North" - this should be the reason the organization exists and the value that society provides. It is a commitment to helping customers (both external and internal) streamline the use of data and analytics to strengthen their business models.
3. Identification, codification and operation of new sources of value - digital transformation requires the adoption of these values.
4. Accept a culture of learning, sharing, reuse and refinement - this survival tip can be the most difficult because it is based on an open and transparent culture as well as on the unique economic value of the data and analyst. Every time data and analytics are used, they have the opportunity to improve – more accurately, on time, and more predictively.

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<sup>7</sup> HENRIETTE, E. et al.: The Shape of Digital Transformation: A Systematic Literature Review. In *MCIS 2015 Proceedings*. Samos, Greece : MCIS, 2015, p. 10. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/930d/13fa08e2eeb769493f6687b8e36d2ff3eb00.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> BRENNEN, S., KREISS, D.: *Digitalization and Digitization*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<http://culturedigitally.org/2014/09/digitalization-and-digitization/>>.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see: SAVIĆ, D.: From Digitization, through Digitalization, to Digital Transformation. In *Online Searcher*, 2019, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 37-39. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332111919\\_From\\_Digitization\\_through\\_Digitalization\\_to\\_Digital\\_Transformation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332111919_From_Digitization_through_Digitalization_to_Digital_Transformation)>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> SCHMARZO, B.: *Digital Transformation: Preparing Your Organization For A World Of Constant Change*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.digitalistmag.com/cio-knowledge/2019/11/12/digital-transformation-preparing-your-organization-for-world-of-constant-change-06201425>>.

Digital transformation brings new opportunities to the market. Not only can this improve the internal effectiveness of the company, it can also create new opportunities. According to Parviainen, Tihinen, Kääriäinen and Teppola<sup>12</sup> the impact of digital transformation on an organization can be identified from three different perspectives:

1. internal efficiency, i.e. improved digital work and reworking internal processes,
2. external opportunities, i.e. New business opportunities in the existing business area (new services, new customers, etc.),
3. disruption of change; digitalization completely changes business roles.

Transformation can be seen as a change of business itself to ensure success. It is not only enough to transform the data, but the processes themselves will need to be fundamentally changed to fit the transformation itself. However, digital transformation is not one process, but constantly evolving processes as well. The digital transformation model in a circular process is used to give a more accurate picture of digital transformation. It is not a linear but cyclic process and business is constantly evolving, new data must be digitized and implemented in new processes. Employees must be trained to have sufficient competence to control these processes. Processes often depend on human interaction and cooperation. Excluding the human factor is an unrealistic scenario and ideally is necessary to redefine processes so that the human factor performs a control function rather than an executive function. Moreover, in the definition of digital transformation, the human factor is often underestimated or ignored. In order to achieve the goals of the organization, it is necessary to know the employees, who know what is expected from them and also to provide them with full-fledged training which will be repeated regularly and thus ensure their competence in the given area. All three terms have a very significant developmental charge in addition to the content. They are expressed clearly and concisely in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Digitization, digitalization and digital transformation**

	<b>Digitization</b>	<b>Digitalization</b>	<b>Digital transformation</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Data conversation	Data processing	Knowledge usage
<b>Goal</b>	Change from analog to digital	Automation of current business operation and processes	Change of corporate culture, way of working and thinking
<b>Activity</b>	Convert paper documents, photos, LPs, movies and to digital format	Creation of complete digital working processes	Creating a new or transforming into a digital society
<b>Tools</b>	Computers and conversion and coding equipment	IT systems and computer applications	A matrix of new (currently disturbing) digital technologies
<b>Challenge</b>	Volume (material)	Price (Finance)	Resistance to change (Human Resources)
<b>Example</b>	Scanning a paper registration form	Fully electronic registration process	E2E electronic process (from registration to content delivery)

Source: SAVIĆ, D.: From Digitization, through Digitalization, to Digital Transformation. In *Online Searcher*, 2019, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 37-38. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332111919\\_From\\_Digitization\\_through\\_Digitalization\\_to\\_Digital\\_Transformation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332111919_From_Digitization_through_Digitalization_to_Digital_Transformation)>.

<sup>12</sup> PARVIAINEN, P. et al.: Tackling the Digitalisation Challenge: How to Benefit from Digitalisation in Practice. In *International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 64-76. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.12821/ijispm050104>>.

All the steps or processes described above use more or less modern technology and bring new possibilities. As said before, “without space and time”. Digitization, digitalization and digital transformation embody an innovative approach that is manifested in all areas of industry or society in general. Of course, they also influence the area of human resources management. However, this influence is mutual - innovations are possible (in the sense feasible) not only because of technology platforms, but in mutual symbiosis with human potential. This concerns both the introduction of innovations and the further implementation and use of innovation. The potential of the digitalized world can be exploited through HRM 4.0. thanks to a suitable strategic alignment of all HRM activities and the provision of necessary tools and training. HRM 4.0 is therefore less a trend and more a necessity for successfully mastering the transition to the digital world of work.

## 2 Innovation in the Field of Strategic Competencies and Human Resources Skills

Many businesses / organizations come with product or process innovations that benefit from genetics, artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printers or biotechnology<sup>13</sup>. The majority of innovations contribute to making the industry more efficient, hence to greater connectivity and interconnection of individual segments of the economy (smart city, smart building, smart factory). According to us, the above-mentioned innovations (whether in industry or in society) can only be successfully implemented if the level of employees' competence is adequate. Innovations bring new challenges for human resources management, resp. for strategic competence management, which will ultimately become a key factor in the competitiveness of a company or organization. But the question arises: How to exactly understand the term competence. In the scientific literature can be found several different approaches, therefore it is not possible to define this concept in a uniform way, as can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2: Various definitions of competence**

Approach	Definition
Brophy and Kiely (2002)	Skills, knowledge, behavior and attitudes needed to effectively perform a role.
Tell et al. (2000)	Identifiable aspect of possible working behavior attributed to individuals.
Thompson et al. (1997)	Integrated sets of behaviors that can be directed towards successful goal completion.
Parry (1996)	A cluster of related knowledge, attitudes and skills that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Affect a large part of individual's work</li> <li>2. Correlate with the performance of individual's work</li> <li>3. Can be improved through training and development.</li> </ol>
Klein (1996)	This author refers to observable behavior that excellent employees exhibit more consistently than average employees.
Lawler (1994)	Skills are the cornerstone of competence, and these terms are often confused.
Woodruffe (1992)	A set of behavioral patterns that can be directed towards a successful goal.

<sup>13</sup> HECKLAU, F. et al: Human resources management: Meta-study – analysis of future competences in industry 4.0. In KÁDÁR, B. (ed.): *EPIC – Excellence Center for Production Informatics and Control*. Budapest : MTA SZTAKI, 2017, p. 2-16. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309\\_Human\\_Resources\\_Management\\_Meta-Study\\_-\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Future\\_Competences\\_in\\_Industry\\_40](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309_Human_Resources_Management_Meta-Study_-_Analysis_of_Future_Competences_in_Industry_40)>.

Boyatzis (1982)	Essential characteristics of a person, which may include motives, features, skills, aspects of self-knowledge and social roles, or the basis of the knowledge used by the subject.
Klemp (1980)	Essential characteristics of a person resulting in effective and / or excellent performance in the job.

Source: BACZYNSKA, A.: Analytical, Practical and Emotional Intelligence and Line Manager Competencies. In *Central European Management Journal*, 2015, Vol. 23, No. 4, p. 34. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://journals.kozminski.edu.pl/pub/4499>>.

In addition to these definitions, it is also necessary to mention other approaches that work with the following definitions: “Man's disposition, to behave in a way that ensures the fulfillment of tasks in the required way (core competencies). This disposition is entered by a number of personality variables ranging from knowledge and ability to attitudes, values, motives and others”<sup>14</sup>. Pitaš<sup>15</sup> defines competencies as follows: "Competence refers to the set of knowledge, personal attitudes, abilities and related experience that are required to succeed in a particular position." In common speech we use this term most often in two simple meanings. The first is competence in terms of authority or authorization. The second meaning of the word competence emphasizes the ability to perform an activity, to be able to do it, to be qualified in the relevant area<sup>16</sup>. Just this meaning of the word is identical with the intention of our contribution. The next part of the article will focus on the fact that companies (organizations) are currently aware of the potential of human resources, or rather the effects of not exploiting this potential. In the Czech environment, there is still no investigation of the extent that would allow to generalize its conclusions regarding the required “new” competences for Industry 4.0. But there are numbers of case studies within concrete organizations that demonstrate the current changes in HR and show where HRM 4.0 will go.<sup>17</sup>

However, it can be assumed that in a European environment with similar economic characteristics, the competences will be the same. This is one of the reasons why this paper works with the German meta-study, the methodology of which was developed in a very high quality and above all applied in a very high quality. Details can be found in the source itself, but to summarize it – a team of researchers analyzed 12 studies based on data collected across 2,789 businesses / organizations and interviews with 90 experts. The studies were carried out not only in Germany, but also in other countries outside Europe<sup>18</sup> and based on them, a database for analysis was created to define various competencies needed / required of workers related to the demands of Industry 4.0. The analysis of all the above studies results in a group of 14 competencies, which are mentioned in at least two of the twelve studies. Hecklau notes that different studies work with different terms: “skills”, “abilities”, “knowledge”, “know-how”. However, this does not represent any major terminological shift in our contribution. What matters is their content framework, which determines the location of each.

<sup>14</sup> KUBEŠ, M. et al.: *Manažerské kompetence: způsobilosti výjimečných manažerů*. Prague : Grada, 2004, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> For more information, see: PITAŠ, J. et al.: *Národní standard kompetencí projektového řízení verze 3.2*. Brno : Společnost pro projektové řízení, 2012. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.ipma.cz/media/1286/narodni-standard-kompetenci-projektoveho-rizeni\\_32.pdf](https://www.ipma.cz/media/1286/narodni-standard-kompetenci-projektoveho-rizeni_32.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> KLIMEŠ, L.: *Slovník cizích slov*. Prague : SPN, 1998, p. 296.

<sup>17</sup> See also: BRUCH, H. et al.: *HRM 4.0 – Personalarbeit der Zukunft*. St. Gallen : Top Job, 2017. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/253027/1/TJ\\_17\\_Trendstudie\\_HRM%204.0%20Personalarbeit%20der%20Zukunft.pdf](https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/253027/1/TJ_17_Trendstudie_HRM%204.0%20Personalarbeit%20der%20Zukunft.pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> HECKLAU, F. et al: Human resources management: Meta-study – analysis of future competences in industry 4.0. In KÁDÁR, B. (ed.): *EPIC – Excellence Center for Production Informatics and Control*. Budapest : MTA SZTAKI, 2017, p. 2-16. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309\\_Human\\_Resources\\_Management\\_Meta-Study\\_-\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Future\\_Competences\\_in\\_Industry\\_40](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309_Human_Resources_Management_Meta-Study_-_Analysis_of_Future_Competences_in_Industry_40)>.

The competencies of workers that employers consider necessary and significant can be classified into four groups:

- social,
- methodological,
- personal,
- domain.<sup>19</sup>

The following overview presents the individual competencies, including their characteristics, resp. links to Industry 4.0, in which they were mentioned in the studies.

**Table 3: Overview of social, methodological, personal and domain competencies for Industry 4.0**

Competencies		Industry 4.0 / Context of digitalization
Social	Communication and cooperation	Service Oriented Requirements - ability to listen well and present skills while indirect contact and increasing virtual work requires enough virtual communication skills.
	Leadership	Growing strategic tasks and flattening the hierarchy will cause that more and more employees will hold leadership positions.
Methodological	Analytical competences	Structuring and exploring large volumes of data will become mandatory.
	Comprehensive solution to the problem	Employees must be able to identify sources of error and improve processes both individually and in teams.
	Decision making	Responsibilities are shifted to the procedural level, more decisions must be made independently, as well as in teams.
Personal	Creativity	The need for more and more innovative products, as well as the need for internal innovation, that requires creativity.
	Willingness to learn	In a highly volatile environment, changing conditions and situations must not present problems. New challenges must be adequately addressed. New teams are created with willingness, and as part of development members learn success, and also learn from mistakes. During the appropriate time employees will acquire new knowledge and skills that will enable them to manage other tasks.
	Flexibility and adaptability	The increase of virtual work will enable people to be independent of time and place. The rotation of tasks will require more flexibility in terms of work responsibility.
Domain	Digital networks	Working in a highly globalized and interconnected value chain requires a network of shared knowledge.
	Digital security	Virtual work on servers or platforms will require employees to be aware of cyber security.
	Coding competence	The increase in digitized processes will create a greater need for employees to be able to understand and use codes.
	Understanding the process	Greater process complexity will require a broader and deeper understanding of processes and the ability to think and act across horizontal and vertical processes.
	Interdisciplinary competence	The increasing complexity of the work requires numerous competences and knowledge that go beyond own profession.

Source: HECKLAU, F. et al: Human resources management: Meta-study – analysis of future competences in industry 4.0. In KÁDÁR, B. (ed.): *EPIC – Excellence Center for Production Informatics and Control*. Budapest : MTA SZTAKI, 2017, p. 2-16. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309\\_Human\\_Resources\\_Management\\_Meta-Study\\_-\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Future\\_Competences\\_in\\_Industry\\_40](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309_Human_Resources_Management_Meta-Study_-_Analysis_of_Future_Competences_in_Industry_40)>.

<sup>19</sup> HECKLAU, F. et al: Human resources management: Meta-study – analysis of future competences in industry 4.0. In KÁDÁR, B. (ed.): *EPIC – Excellence Center for Production Informatics and Control*. Budapest : MTA SZTAKI, 2017, p. 2-16. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309\\_Human\\_Resources\\_Management\\_Meta-Study\\_-\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Future\\_Competences\\_in\\_Industry\\_40](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327262309_Human_Resources_Management_Meta-Study_-_Analysis_of_Future_Competences_in_Industry_40)>.

## 2.1 Predicting the Demand for Human Resources Skills

Employee competences at the World Economic Forum in 2018 were defined and interpreted based on comparative research. In the context of the current demand (2018) for specific skills, a prediction of development for 2022 was formulated. It is not surprising that analytical thinking, creativity and originality, critical thinking and complex problem solving, emotional intelligence come to the forefront (see Table 4). Given the decreasing number of blue-collar professions, such emphasis will not be placed on manual skills, direct management style, skills associated with technological installation and instrument maintenance, etc. This illustrates the reflection of the overall transformation of the economic system in the context of Industry 4.0.

**Table 4: Skills demand comparison, 2018 vs. 2022**

Year 2018	Rise in 2022	Descent in 2022
<b>Analytical thinking and innovation</b>	Analytical thinking and strategy of innovation	Manual craftsmanship, perseverance and precision
<b>Comprehensive problem solution</b>	Active learning and learning strategies	Memory, verbal, sound and spatial abilities
<b>Critical thinking and analysis</b>	Creativity, originality and imagination	Financial management, material resources
<b>Active learning and learning strategy</b>	Technological design and programming	Technological installation and maintenance
<b>Creativity, originality and initiative</b>	Critical thinking and analysis	Reading, writing, math and active listening
<b>Attention to detail, credibility</b>	Comprehensive solution to the problem	Management of employees
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	Leadership and social impact	Quality control and safety awareness
<b>Rationale, problem solving and imagination</b>	Emotional intelligence	Coordination and time management
<b>Leadership and social impact</b>	Rationale, problem solving and imagination	Visual, audio and speech skills
<b>Coordination and time management</b>	Systems of analysis and evaluation	Use of technology, monitoring and control

Source: *The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Global Challenge Insight Report*. Geneva : World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 167. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf)>.

## 3 Digital Marketing and Its Influence on HR

As mentioned above, not only the scientific literature, but also the practice highlights the increasing importance of specific competences that respond to the challenges of Industry 4.0. In this publication, our intention is to present a specific tool / technique that illustrates the impact of Industry 4.0 challenges in practice. Modern HR is used to search for candidates with appropriate competences, but also to strengthen the above-mentioned competencies for existing employees, relevant tools and techniques. One such technique is digital marketing, which follows traditional marketing. It is still effective in building brand awareness and interest, and also aims to engage customers. Digital marketing as an example of a specific tool of modern HR plays a more important role because customers and employees (also potential ones) are interested in building closer brand relationships when they are intrigued or given a brand by a “heartfelt” for the customer or current employee. The aim of the digital system is



to move towards greater accountability and management results.<sup>20</sup> In today's accelerated world, a large number of people are active social media platform. Social media can be characterized as digital platforms on which users can create a profile, connect with other users, generate and distribute content and engage in interactive communication. The social media platforms that differ in their specific communication characteristics. Social media represent a differ significantly from more traditional communication sources, which might influence cognition and effect of its users.<sup>21</sup> According to Dineen and Allen<sup>22</sup>, the boom of the Internet changed the recruitment process and it has increased the opportunities for interactive communication. The current and potential employees so can interact with the corporation by communicating through private messages, share their work experiences, liking a post or by writing a reaction on a post of the corporation. Nikolaou<sup>23</sup> concluded from the evidence that social media seem to be an ideal new tool for attracting both active and passive job seekers, but scientific research is lagging far behind<sup>24</sup>. Watson<sup>25</sup> argues that a key part of the core mission of human resource department is to attract, support and develop the employees in line with the overall organizational strategy. This idea highlights the importance and necessity of HR marketing and its individual variables.

### 3.1 Attracting Potential Employees in the Age of Digital Marketing

The development of the economic system brings significant difficulties in attracting quality employees. The Internet world is full of ads, advertisements, clicks to a variety of thematic websites, and it is becoming an increasingly difficult task to reach out to the right job seeker. It is proven that only ten seconds is the time companies have to reach a potential employee or customer. If the seeker's attention has not been attracted by this time, the chances of a page being re-viewed is very little. In the case of a website whose main objective is to find new employees and build the face of a company as a quality employer, this task becomes even more demanding.<sup>26</sup> The phenomenon of the so-called "passive candidate" which works on the principle of addressing the candidate on the part of the company (because the person does not look for a new job independently) has been appearing on the labor market for several years. This problem is solved by several companies in the Czech Republic. According to studies, passive candidates represented almost 75% of the economically active population in the Czech labor market in 2016. Passive candidates are referred to as those who often do not seek work but are willing to consider changing it. Furthermore, only 15% of employees are satisfied with their current job and did not even consider changing. And 60% of employed people think they could do better, but they do not have time and are not interested to actively

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<sup>20</sup> See also: KOTLER, P. et al.: *Marketing 4.0: Moving from traditional to digital*. Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.nima.today/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Marketing-4.0-Philip-Kotler-Hermawan-Kartajaya-And-Iwan-Setiawan.pdf>>.

<sup>21</sup> McFARLAND, L. A., PLOYHART, R. E.: Social media: A contextual framework to guide research and practice. In *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2015, Vol. 100, No. 6, p. 1669.

<sup>22</sup> DINEEN, B. R., ALLEN, D. G. Internet recruiting 2.0: Shifting paradigms. In CABLE, D. M., YU, K. Y. T. (eds.): *The Oxford handbook of recruitment*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> NIKOLAU, I.: Social networking web sites in job search and employee recruitment. In *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 2014, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 180-188. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsa.12067>>.

<sup>24</sup> McFARLAND, L. A., PLOYHART, R. E.: Social media: A contextual framework to guide research and practice. In *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2015, Vol. 100, No. 6, p. 1657.

<sup>25</sup> WATSON, T.: Organizations, Strategies and Human Resourcing. In LEOPOLD, J. W., HARRIS, L. (eds.): *The Strategic Managing of Human Resources*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Harlow : Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 2009, p. 7-32.

<sup>26</sup> *HR marketing na nejvyšší úrovni*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.hrnews.cz/lidske-zdroje/nabor-id-2698717/hr-marketing-na-nejvyssi-urovni-id-2870630>>.

apply for new jobs and wait for companies to find them themselves. And only 25% of people are interested in new jobs and are looking for new jobs and opportunities<sup>27</sup>. This data illustrates the need and necessity of finding new ways and using several ways to attract quality employees.

#### 4 HR Marketing and Smart Human Resources 4.0

HR marketing of the 21st century, refers to personnel activities related to the recruitment and stabilization of the workforce through market analysis (supply of labor resources and competitive jobs), presentations companies in the labor market and create a good reputation for company employees<sup>28</sup>. Effective HR marketing in the digital era needs to use flexible tools that can be managed online, such as career blog, career site, HR branding, employee brand and video or social media. In order for the employer to build a strong brand, it is necessary to work together and also involve the management of the company. This is a long-term process and requires the involvement of as many people from the company as possible, who themselves form an employee and employer brand. The more employees are willing to participate in the creation of the brand, the much more memorable the brand will be<sup>29</sup>. Digital marketing and HR marketing present only some of the forms of so-called "Smart Human Resources 4.0" (SHR 4.0), which represents a new concept evolving as part of Industry 4.0. SHR is characterized by the need to implement innovations Organizations that want to respond adequately to Industry 4.0 challenges must incorporate the functions and tools of SHR 4.0 into their HR processes. Such as the above-mentioned Internet of Things - Big Data Analytics or the use of artificial intelligence<sup>30</sup>. Organizations that want to respond adequately to Industry 4.0 challenges must incorporate the functions and tools of SHR 4.0 into their HR processes. They are interconnected vessels - Employer Branding cannot ignore the incorporation of modern technologies into the work environment in order to streamline processes and performance, align multi-generational requirements of employees, talent management, dynamic leadership, etc. Likewise, knowledge of neurolinguistic programming in conjunction with digital technologies<sup>31</sup> is increasingly used for recruitment.

According to this new concept we should pay attention to a new Human Resources Management – so called HRM 4.0.<sup>32</sup> HRM 4.0 focuses on digital skills for the successful future viability of modern companies in the new world of work. Competency requirements are systematically updated again and again and adapted accordingly to the requirements of

<sup>27</sup> *HR marketing na nejvyšší úrovni*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.hrnews.cz/lidske-zdroje/nabor-id-2698717/hr-marketing-na-nejvyssi-urovni-id-2870630>>.

<sup>28</sup> UNGERMAN, O., MYSLIVCOVÁ, S.: Personnel marketing in the Czech economy: past and present. In *ACC JOURNAL*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 29-42. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311499579\\_Personnel\\_marketing\\_in\\_the\\_czech\\_economy\\_past\\_and\\_present](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311499579_Personnel_marketing_in_the_czech_economy_past_and_present)>.

<sup>29</sup> KMOŠEK, P.: *6 tipů pro váš personální marketing*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.kmosek.com/6-tipu-pro-vas-personalni-marketing-v-roce-2017/>>.

<sup>30</sup> SIVATHANU, B., PILLAI, R.: Smart HR 4.0 – how industry 4.0 is disrupting HR. In *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 2018, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 8-10. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/HRMID-04-2018-0059/full/html>>.

<sup>31</sup> IVASCHENKO, A., MILUTKIN M.: HR Decision-Making Support Based on Natural Language Processing. In KRAVETS, A., GROUMPOS, P., SHCHERBAKOV, M., KULTOSOV, A. M. (eds): *Creativity in Intelligent Technologies and Data Science*. Volgograd, Russia : CIT&DS, 2019, p. 153-160. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-29743-5>>.

<sup>32</sup> BRUCH, H., MUENCHEN, A.: *Arbeitswelt 4.0: Energie und Dynamik*. Zürich : WEKA Business Media, 2017, p. 32.

the company. This shapes the hiring of new employees on the one hand, but also the conception and design of training courses on new skills. One of the biggest blockade arises already in the educational process which nowadays doesn't include enough tools for strengthening of needed competencies.<sup>33</sup> The critical literature search showed linking the issue of Industry 4.0 with the area of education. Obviously, Industry 4.0 (and related concepts or processes) has brought many changes in society that are new, fast and require equally fast response. Paradoxically, modern technology is not what becomes valuable. Although these are technologies that accelerate the ongoing fourth industrial revolution. People are and will be the most valuable for organizations (not only in terms of companies). Our conclusion thus returns to the need to anchor the strengthening of desirable competencies as a stable part of the educational curriculum. Without the interaction of the education system it is impossible to respond effectively to the challenges of Industry 4.0. HR management uses in increasing demand education as a tool for strengthening competences, but it will build on what potential workers have learned in the educational process. Only on this basis can HR staff develop the potential of employees, strengthen the reputation of the organization, and respond effectively to current trends. Their use very well helps to increase employee loyalty and to reach high-quality potential employees.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has brought fundamental changes to society as a result of the development of new information technologies, the introduction of cyber-physical and artificial intelligence systems in manufacturing, services and all sectors of the economy. (MPO, 2016). Industry 4.0 creates new opportunities not only for organizations in general, but of course for their employees. These opportunities are conditioned by the acquisition of competences that were not previously needed to such an extent. Economic change, social change, technical change, environmental change, but also political and legal changes come at ever shorter intervals and require increasingly faster responses. HR Management 4.0 must reflect not only the advancement of modern technologies and massive globalization, but also the needs of people who, despite increasing robotization and automation, play a key role within their organizations. So called Smart HR can no longer work without tools that were previously the domain of specialized areas - IT, neurology, psychology, cybernetics and more. This paper brings unique point of view on digitalization area and provides basement for future qualitative and quantitative deep research of competences followed by HRM to support efficiency and competitive advantage within the environment of industry 4.0 together with their tools and challenges. Above all only those national economics will stand and benefit from the new industrial revolution, they implement the challenges of Industry 4.0 already in the education process. However, such an implementation must take place at a higher level than the corporate one.

## Conclusion

The authors formulated a very clear conclusion in connection with the critical literature search, linking the issue of Industry 4.0 with the area of education. Obviously, Industry 4.0 (and related concepts or processes) has brought many changes in society that are new, fast and require equally fast response. Paradoxically, modern technology is not what becomes valuable. Although these are technologies that accelerate the ongoing fourth industrial

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<sup>33</sup> BENEŠOVÁ, A., TUPA, J.: Requirements for Education and Qualification of People in Industry 4.0. In PELLICCIARI M., PERUZZINI, M. (eds.): *Procedia Manufacturing*. Modena, Italy : Elsevier, 2017, p. 2196-2201. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351978917305747>>.

revolution. People are and will be the most valuable for organizations (not only in terms of companies). Our conclusion thus returns to the need to anchor the strengthening of desirable competencies as a stable part of the educational curriculum. Without the interaction of the education system it is impossible to respond effectively to the challenges of Industry 4.0. HR management uses in increasing demand education as a tool for strengthening competences, but it will build on what potential workers have learned in the educational process. Only on this basis can HR staff develop the potential of employees, strengthen the reputation of the organization, and respond effectively to current trends. Their use very well helps to increase employee loyalty and to reach high-quality potential employees. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has brought fundamental changes to society as a result of the development of new information technologies, the introduction of cyber-physical and artificial intelligence systems in manufacturing, services and all sectors of the economy. (MPO, 2016) This paper refers to changes in terms of Industry 4.0. It brings new challenges, of course, throughout the economic system and within specific area of Human Resources Management. Industry 4.0 creates new opportunities not only for organizations in general, but of course for their employees. These opportunities are conditioned by the acquisition of competences that were not previously needed to such an extent. Economic change, social change, technical change, environmental change, but also political and legal changes come at ever shorter intervals and require increasingly faster responses. HR Industry 4.0 must reflect not only the advancement of modern technologies and massive globalization, but also the needs of people who, despite increasing robotization and automation, play a key role within their organizations. So called Smart HR can no longer work without tools that were previously the domain of specialized areas - IT, neurology, psychology, cybernetics and more. This paper brings unique point of view on digitalization area and provides basement for future qualitative and quantitative deep research of competences followed by HRM to support efficiency and competitive advantage within the environment of industry 4.0 together with their tools and challenges.

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## HOW COVID19 CRISIS SHAKED CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN E-COMMERCE?

*Martin Klepek – Daniel Kvičala*

### Abstract

Consumer loyalty is a broad and important topic for marketers around the world for centuries. With the pandemic situation in Europe and the world the ultimate question arises. How the changes in consumer behaviour were projected into loyalty measures? Since e-commerce experienced dramatic shifts during COVID19 crisis, we picked online shopping loyalty behaviour for our investigation. We used customer data from e-shop from more than thirteen thousand people and compared loyalty behaviour before and during a pandemic situation. Our data shows changes in loyalty in form of the number of transactions made by 20% of most loyal customers as well as in profitability of the same 20% most loyal customers. Moreover, we again support the evidence that the Pareto 80/20 rule does not apply to ecommerce and the proportion is more or less around 60% maximum.

### Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. E-Commerce. E-Shop. Loyalty. Online Consumer Behaviour. Pareto Rule.

### Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has had severe consequences across Europe and the globe. Besides the healthcare and medicine, there are ethical, business, retail, transportation and logistics, tourism, event management or law pandemic-related issues. We can clearly see almost every discipline is influenced by the virus or its consequences. The consumer behaviour is not an exception. Some changes are due to governmental restrictions and a consumer has no other option than to adjust the behaviour to current situation. However, there are also psychological factors influencing human behaviour. Fear from the disease is the main driver in avoiding contact with another person or groups. In this case, the consumer, despite being not restricted, is changing behaviour voluntarily according to the circumstances in his or her local area, region or country. This research deal with both restrictions-related and psychologically related behavioural changes. We inspect how consumers intensify their shopping with online vendor. Further, how the proportion of top 20% loyal and most profitable consumers change in time of pandemic crisis. The paper is structured as follows. We start with brief overview of changes in consumer behaviour caused by pandemic. Moreover, we describe our methods and results. The paper ends with conclusion and managerial implications.

### 1 Consumer Behaviour During COVID-19 Pandemic

There is an unquestionable evidence about changes in consumer behaviour during environmental, political, economic or health crisis. For example, long-lasting environmental issues form consumer demand for circular economy idea<sup>1</sup>. In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, the changes were dramatically quicker with more dangerous consequences for businesses. Various but similar measures were taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections including travel bans, lockdowns or curfews, quarantine measures, and social distancing<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> MUSOVÁ, Z., POLIAČIKOVÁ, E., DRUGDOVÁ, J.: Consumer behaviour in the segment of diary products in the context of circular economy principles. In KUSA, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BUČKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2019: Offline Is the New Online*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 668.

<sup>2</sup> 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, p. 1.



We can point out three main changes and describe them in more detail. First, people start buying intensively some COVID-related product categories such as antibacterial soaps, disinfection, surgical masks or respirators. Second, they started to stockpile some of the strangest products such as yeast, toilet paper or roller skates<sup>3</sup>. Third, consumers turned their attention to online shopping and started buying products via internet. It is not a great surprise that anti-COVID products rocketed in sales as the new information about the dangers of a virus spread. These shifts are usually antecedent by information from media<sup>4</sup>. Nielsen<sup>5</sup> found that people in US raised the consumption of medical supplies, rubbing alcohol, bath & shower wipes and first aid kits in two waves. First was after the first confirmed US COVID-19 case and the second after the suspected local transmissions. Consumers often stockpile supplies to mitigate the risk of future shortages. They may conduct this behaviour in anticipation of a supply shortage by purchasing more than needed when the supply is available<sup>6</sup>. Nearly 60% of Czech consumers confirmed at the outbreak of a pandemic they have already made their stock up or they are going to do it in short time<sup>7</sup>. However, increased consumer stockpiling has immediate and longer-term impacts on retail operations, namely, in-store product availability<sup>8</sup>. Majority of consumers (84%) has experienced this shortage in various product categories<sup>9</sup>.

The largest increase in sales during this period of purchasing fever was recorded by disinfectants, where sales increased by more than 700%. Sales of wet wipes grew by up to 400%. Sales of household detergents increased by 220%, sales of liquid soaps by 200%, toilet soaps by 140%, rubber gloves by 130% and toilet paper by up to 65%. In addition to drugstore goods, people spent their money mainly on canned foods. The highest increase in sales was recorded by leavening ingredients with an increase of 224%, bread components increased turnover by 220%, flour by 191%, legumes by 183%, rice by 172% and pasta by almost 150%. Sales of ready-made sauces grew by more than 100%, and beverage categories and pet food

<sup>3</sup> BOND, C.: *7 Of The Weirdest Products People Have Been Buying During The Pandemic*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-06]. Available at: <[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/weird-purchases-coronavirus-pandemic\\_1\\_5f319e7bc5b6960c066ae37c?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAApdCRk\\_vrktilo-jw7oKzoLcWd0yVBW6SKdsv6rudrWmiDjnJIqC->](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/weird-purchases-coronavirus-pandemic_1_5f319e7bc5b6960c066ae37c?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAApdCRk_vrktilo-jw7oKzoLcWd0yVBW6SKdsv6rudrWmiDjnJIqC->)>.

<sup>4</sup> 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, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Key customer behaviour thresholds identified as the coronavirus outbreak evolves*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-14]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/ssa/en/insights/article/2020/key-consumer-behavior-thresholds-identified-as-the-coronavirus-outbreak-evolves/>>.

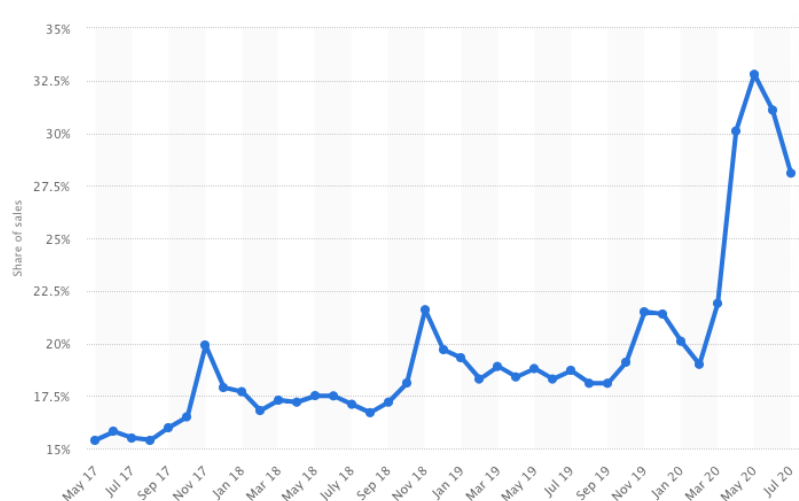
<sup>6</sup> YOON, J., NARASIMHAN, R., KIM, M. K.: Retailer's sourcing strategy under consumer stockpiling in anticipation of supply disruptions. In *International Journal of Production Research*, 2018, Vol. 56, No. 10, p. 3617.

<sup>7</sup> HUKELOVÁ, M.: *COVID 19 mění nákupní chování českých spotřebitelů*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[http://www.socr.cz/file/5992/24032020\\_Tiskov%C3%A1%20zpr%C3%A1va\\_Nielsen\\_COVID-19%20M%C4%9AN%C3%8D%20N%C3%81KUPN%C3%8D%20CHOV%C3%81N%C3%8D%20%C4%8CESK%C3%9DCH%20SPOT%C5%98EBITEL%C5%AE.pdf](http://www.socr.cz/file/5992/24032020_Tiskov%C3%A1%20zpr%C3%A1va_Nielsen_COVID-19%20M%C4%9AN%C3%8D%20N%C3%81KUPN%C3%8D%20CHOV%C3%81N%C3%8D%20%C4%8CESK%C3%9DCH%20SPOT%C5%98EBITEL%C5%AE.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> PAN, X., DRESNER, M. E., MANTIN, B., ZHANG, J.: Pre-Hurricane Consumer Stockpiling and Post-Hurricane Product Availability: Empirical Evidence from Natural Experiments. In *Productions and Operations Management*, 2020, Vol. 29, No. 10, p. 2351-2379.

<sup>9</sup> HUKELOVÁ, M.: *COVID 19 mění nákupní chování českých spotřebitelů*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[http://www.socr.cz/file/5992/24032020\\_Tiskov%C3%A1%20zpr%C3%A1va\\_Nielsen\\_COVID-19%20M%C4%9AN%C3%8D%20N%C3%81KUPN%C3%8D%20CHOV%C3%81N%C3%8D%20%C4%8CESK%C3%9DCH%20SPOT%C5%98EBITEL%C5%AE.pdf](http://www.socr.cz/file/5992/24032020_Tiskov%C3%A1%20zpr%C3%A1va_Nielsen_COVID-19%20M%C4%9AN%C3%8D%20N%C3%81KUPN%C3%8D%20CHOV%C3%81N%C3%8D%20%C4%8CESK%C3%9DCH%20SPOT%C5%98EBITEL%C5%AE.pdf)>.

also enjoyed higher interest.<sup>10</sup> Some industries were not only affected but closed for some period of time. Cultural events, sport venues or restaurants experienced rough times. Fast-food chains as an example, has been highly competitive in creative branding strategies<sup>11</sup>, and it is now fighting severe consequences of governmental restrictions. McDonalds for example reports lowest quarterly profit in thirteen years<sup>12</sup>. We could find more examples across different industries. Moreover, people expect to make a portion of their purchases online post-COVID-19 than before in almost all categories and across countries<sup>13</sup>. Recent research also showed impact of confirmed COVID-19 cases on the possibility of consumers purchasing food online<sup>14</sup>. Internet retail sales ascended disproportionately as seen in Chart 1.



**Chart 1: Internet retail sales as a percentage of total retail sales in the United Kingdom**

Source: *Internet retail sales as a percentage of total retail sales in the United Kingdom (UK) from May 2017 to July 2020*. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/286384/internet-share-of-retail-sales-monthly-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>>.

It is expected the volumes of online sales will drop to certain point as the government restrictions cease to apply. However, there is possibility the crisis attracted new customers to online shopping thus some of them will remain customers in e-commerce. New habits will also emerge by technology advances, changing demographics and innovative ways consumers have learned to cope with blurring the work, leisure, and education boundaries<sup>15</sup>. All these shifts and changes could influence traditional paradigms about consumer loyalty.

<sup>10</sup> COVID 19 mění nákupní chování českých spotřebitelů. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/cz/cs/insights/article/2020/COVID-19-meni-nakupni-chovani-ceskych-spotrebitelu/>>.

<sup>11</sup> MARTOVIČ, M.: Marketing communication of fastfood chains. In PAVLŮ, D., MAJERIK, P. (eds.): *Creative strategy/Strategy of creativity*. Prague : VŠKK in Prague, 2019, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> McDonald's reports lowest quarterly profit in 13 years. [online]. [2020-10-07]. Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/b7824dbf-8de2-4369-913d-fb63086c485a>>.

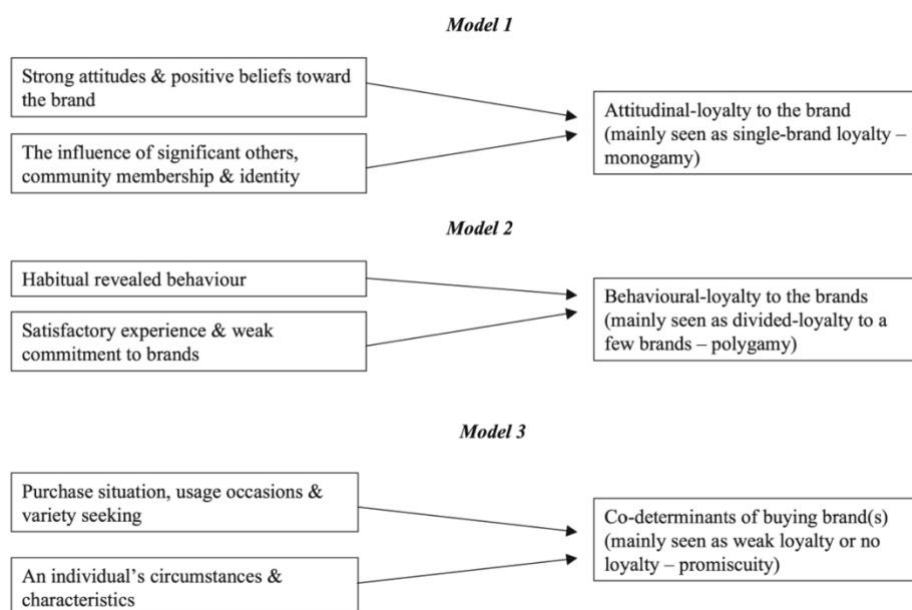
<sup>13</sup> ARORA, N. et al: *Consumer sentiment and behavior continue to reflect the uncertainty of the Covid-19 crisis*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-09-24]. Available at: <<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/a-global-view-of-how-consumer-behavior-is-changing-amid-COVID-19#>>>.

<sup>14</sup> GAO, X., SHI, X., GUO, H., LIU, Y.: *To buy or not buy food online: The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the adoption of e-commerce in China*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0237900>>.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

## 1.1 Customer Loyalty and Pareto Rule

With new customers entering the online shopping world, important marketing measures has to be applied also in this context. One of the most common metrics is customer loyalty which helps to segment audiences to different groups from brand loyal to brand switchers<sup>16,17</sup>. However, there is no consensus regarding the loyalty definition. Instead, literature offers three popular conceptualizations. Loyalty as primarily an attitude that sometimes leads to a relationship with the brand; loyalty mainly expressed in terms of revealed behaviour (i.e., the pattern of past purchases); and buying moderated by the individual's characteristics, circumstances, and/or the purchase situation (see Chart 2)<sup>18</sup>.



**Chart 2: Conceptualizations of customer loyalty**

Source: UNCLES, M. D., DOWLING, G. R., HAMMOND, K.: Customer loyalty and customer loyalty programs. In *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2003, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 296.

With the measures of brand loyalty, naturally, tendency to value some customers more than others occurred. Consequently, moving customers from promiscuity to brand monogamy through sales promotion and loyalty programs become a frequently used tactics. ABC method has been popular for dividing customers into groups based on their loyalty. Some studies claim the ABC analysis often yield 80/20 distribution or Pareto rule. This rule suggests that 80 percent of profits come from 20 per cent of customers<sup>19</sup>. The validity of Pareto's 80/20 rule in displaying profitability of loyal customers is generally confirmed by several authors<sup>20,21</sup>, but there is almost always a lack of empirical data to support such a claim. In contrast, authors who contradict

<sup>16</sup> HALLOWELL, R.: The relationship of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability: an empirical study. In *International Journal of Service Industry and Management*, 1996, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> NOVOTOVÁ, J.: Exploring customer loyalty to fashion brands on Facebook fan pages. In *Ekonomie a Management*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> UNCLES, M. D., DOWLING, G. R., HAMMOND, K.: Customer loyalty and customer loyalty programs. In *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2003, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 295.

<sup>19</sup> BUTTLE, F.: *Customer relationship management*. Oxford : Elsevier. 2011, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> IVANČIĆ, V.: Improving the Decision Making Process Through the Pareto Principle Application. In *Economic Thought and Practice*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 634-655. [online]. [2020-08-16]. Available at: <[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2841896](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2841896)>.

<sup>21</sup> BUTTLE, F.: *Customer relationship management*. Oxford : Elsevier. 2011, p. 16.

the 80/20 ratios between sales and loyal customers used panel data<sup>22,23,24</sup>. We thus decided to use behavioural data from ERP system to expand body of literature grounded in empirical data. Finally, we proposed the research question: How COVID-19 outbreak influenced e-commerce customer loyalty?

## 2 Methods

To answer our research question, secondary data were obtained from e-shop ERP system. Secondary data are considered a valuable source of information<sup>25</sup>. However, one should always analyse potential weaknesses of a dataset at hand. Well known limitations of secondary data are: (1) they were created for a different purpose, (2) data are not up to date, (3) methodology behind its collection is not clear, (4) could be incomplete or in some parts missing. We would like to address all the issues commonly connected with secondary data use in the context of this study. First, our data from e-shop were collected for the analytical purposes. Thus, the first limitation does not apply here. Second, we work with the online data straight from the e-shop ERP system. These are up to date and, in fact, accessible real-time. Third, data are recorded and stored within the same methodology all the time and it is guaranteed by the system provider. Any divergence is unlikely. Fourth, the data are complete and missing parts are rare. System was running and recording business transactions and consumer interactions properly throughout the researched time period. No outages were reported, which is also visible in Google Analytics. Analysed e-shop is Czech based and operates on Czech B2C market since 2007. The offering consists of all sorts of sport equipment for both kids and adults. Its range of goods contains over 100 different product categories. Annual revenues reach dozens of million with 53 million in 2016, 61 million in 2017, 51 million in 2018 and 54 million in 2019. Customer base in the chosen period consists of 54% of females and 46% of males. Majority of customers (70%) fall into the age category of 25-54 years old. The most represented city is Prague with a total 31% of the customer base. Customers use both desktop and mobile devices with the majority of desktop users (55%). Research period is divided into two samples, the year of 2019 and a period influenced by the COVID-19 restrictions (11. 3. 2020 - 31. 5. 2020). Research sample consists of 14 889 customers who made a purchase during the chosen period. Total sales reached 77 916 678 CZK with a total of 49 376 transactions.

**Table 1: Overview of the number of customers, transactions and revenue in chosen periods of time**

Period	2019	COVID-19
Number of customers	8 261	6628
Amount of transactions	36 591	12 785
Revenue	54 072 322 CZK	23 844 356 CZK

Source: Own processing

Collected data were evaluated by Pareto analysis to find out what proportion of sales is made by 20% of most frequent customers and 20% of most spending customers. Comparison of the number of customers and total revenue offers first interesting insight when the number of customers making purchases in COVID-19 period reaches 80% of the whole 2019 amount.

<sup>22</sup> BRYNJOLFSSON, E., HU, J., SIMESTER, D.: Goodbye Pareto Principle, Hello Long Tail: The Effect of Search Costs on the Concentration of Product Sales. In *Management Science*, 2011, Vol. 57, No. 11, p. 1373.

<sup>23</sup> McCARTHY, D. M., WINER, R. S.: The Pareto rule in marketing revisited: is it 80/20 or 70/20?. In *Marketing Letters*. 2019, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> SHARP, B. et al.: Marketing's 60/20 Pareto law. In *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> KOZEL, R., MYNÁŘOVÁ, L., SVOBODOVÁ, H.: *Moderní metody a techniky marketingového výzkumu*. Prague : Grada, 2011, p. 55.

Hence, total revenue in COVID-19 period reaches just 44% of total revenue in 2019. Knowing this, it could be concluded that customers spent less money per purchase during COVID-19 period.

### 3 Results

For the purpose of the research customers were divided into groups based on both the number of purchases made by chosen period and by the sales volume they made. Then, upper 20% of both of the samples were detached to evaluate the sales volume made by these groups of customers. Results are shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Results of Pareto analysis' application in chosen periods**

Period	2019	COVID-19
Amount of transactions made by 20% of most frequent customers	4656	2414
Proportion of the total amount of purchases (%)	56	36
Revenue generated by 20% of most frequent customers (CZK)	11 958 135	4 031 665
Proportion of the total revenue generated by 20% of most frequent customers (%)	22	17
Revenue generated by 20% of most spending customers (CZK)	33 466 872	13 212 319
Proportion of the total revenue generated by 20% of most spending customers (%)	62	55

Source: Own processing

Results from the 2019 period showed that 20 % of most frequent customers generated 56% of purchases and 22% of total revenue and 20% of most spending customers generated 62% of total revenue. Sales volume generated by chosen samples slightly decreased to 17% of sales volume generated by 20% of most frequent customers and 55% generated by 20% of most spending customers. Significant difference was found in the proportion of purchases made by 20% of most frequent customers which got to 36%. None of the results reached to 80% suggested by original Pareto ratio but in both cases 20% of most spending customers generated nearly 60% of sales volume which corresponds to Sharp's study<sup>26</sup> focused on Pareto ratio application. Results also showed a new perspective on behavioural e-loyalty importance when the most frequent buyers generated just about 20% of total sales volume in both cases.

### Conclusion

The first clear insight is the increase of transactions and revenue in COVID-19 period since the number of customers reached 80% and revenue reached 44% of values from 2019 in just 25% of time. From the customer's purchase behaviour point of view there was a 55% decrease of an average amount of money spent by customer, hence an average purchase value increased by 26%. Also, results shown a 43% decrease of an average number of transactions per customer. The average amount of transactions per customer in COVID-19 period reached 1,9 thus there were almost no repeat purchase behaviour intensions spotted. Although customers purchase

<sup>26</sup> SHARP, B. et al.: Marketing's 60/20 Pareto law. In *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 3.

behaviour significantly changed during COVID-19 period, the Pareto ratio moved by more than few percentage points just in one case of its application. 20% of most frequent customers generated 36% of total transactions during the COVID-19 period compared to 56% in 2019. The decrease is in correlation with the decrease of the average amount of transactions per customer. Proportion of revenue generated by 20% of most frequent customers decreased by 5 percentage points. Proportion of revenue generated by 20% of most spending customers decreased by 7 percentage points. From given results it could be suggested that customers' loyalty during COVID-19 decreased since average customer made less transactions and spend less money as well. This study bears some limitations. Using data from only one e-shop leaves little to none room for generalization of a result to whole e-commerce population. Moreover, we compared a 12-month period with 3-month period and since the period length could influence customer repeat purchase behaviour, the results could be distorted. There was a lockdown during COVID-19 period which led to an increase in time customers spent at home, so they had more time to observe and buy. We did not include any information about e-shop's marketing activities which could influence customers' shopping behaviour hence the retention and loyalty as such.

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## EDUCATION-BASED CONTENT MARKETING “IN WHITE AND BLACK”

*Ladislava Knihová*

### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by the outbreak of sensitive social issues, has changed everything. During the lockdown, digital communication channels have become a vital means of brands' communication; sometimes, the only means of communication. We are witnessing many changes since brands are becoming more human, adjusting the brand tone of voice and content of their marketing messages. Some global brands are taking unprecedented steps and demonstrate high levels of creativity in nurturing their customers. Simultaneously with the humanization of the brands' marketing activities, education-based content is starting to emerge in the core of marketing messages ever more frequently. The objective of this paper is to examine, analyse, and interpret the global brands' digital agility during the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic. The literature review shows a significant gap. Therefore, this paper attempts to contribute to the research into brands' behaviour in critical situations, presenting numerous examples and data obtained from the document-level sentiment analysis. The new chapter on branding has been written by life itself; this time, however, in white letters on black background.

### **Key words:**

Brand Behaviour. Brand Digital Agility. Brand Tone of Voice. Document-Level Sentiment Analysis. Education-Based Content.

### **Introduction**

In the Stone Age, animals, signs and symbols were *carved on the walls of caves* by our predecessor for future generations. Since 1450, when Johannes Gutenberg perfected a printed machine, and his printing press was ready to be used commercially, thousands of printer's workshops have been *printing books in black and white*. In marketing, it was also like this until recently. It is evident that the year 2020 will be remembered by the world marketing community as the year when marketing messages were “*digitally carved in white and black*.” These marketing messages are different. Their content is enlightening and uplifting, encouraging intellectual and moral improvement. They are tending to increase knowledge and dissipate ignorance. They are like illuminating lectures. Very often, education-based content is in the core of the marketing message. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the situation has changed dramatically. If digital communication had not been part of the brands' communication channels' portfolio before the coronavirus pandemic struck, now it is not just a necessity but a vital tool indispensable for the very existence of brands. In many cases, digital communication channels remain the only available communication channel since the COVID-19 virus resulted in introducing social distancing and face masks. As a result, face-to-face meetings are virtually impossible. Just a pure observation of brand behaviour during the coronavirus crisis has brought many pieces of evidence that the urgent feeling of the necessity to nurture customers prevailed in the communication of brand leaders during the first months of the pandemic. Some authors label this behaviour as “humanization of brands”. In their research, MacInnis and Folkes investigated various aspects of the *brand humanization* process. Their research questions involved queries like: “Is humanizing brands an accelerating trend?”, “How does humanizing brands influence consumer happiness?”, “How does humanizing a brand change over time?”, or “How does humanization of products differ from humanization of brands?”. The authors' findings suggest that the various ways in which people humanize brands can be mutually reinforcing. In their opinion “the alternative paths

that reflect the causal relationships between these ways of humanizing brands have yet to be studied”.<sup>1</sup>

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, many global brands have changed the focus of their customer communication, adjusting the brand tone of voice and content of their marketing messages. The situation for brands is new, never experienced before and totally unpredictable. In their Harvard Business Review article, Michael Jacobides, professor of strategy at London Business School, and Martin Reeves, the Chairman of the BCG Henderson Institute, bring a parallel to the military thinking. *“In the military, a technique for discovering what you don’t know is to use the “eyes of the enemy.” Military leaders ask themselves: “What is the enemy paying attention to?”, and then shift their own attention accordingly to illuminate potential blind spots and alternative perspectives.”*<sup>2</sup> Even though the “enemy” is COVID-19 and “blind spots” are numerous, business leaders have to be very flexible and prepare different scenarios. Armed with an understanding of the new situation, business leaders take into account multiple perspectives and shape their business models accordingly. Very often, contrary to their monetization strategy, what used to be “the golden eggs” is suddenly being given away free of charge or dramatically discounted. Some global brands are taking unprecedented steps and demonstrate high levels of creativity in nurturing their customers. Also, the most renowned global experts take a stand on the situation. One of them, Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Director of *The World In 2050* and Emeritus Research Scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) believes that *“[...] the future of humanity has always been unpredictable. [...] What is different now, however, is that human beings have become the dominant force of planetary change.”*<sup>3</sup> Apart from reminding us of the negative consequence of the pandemic, Nakicenovic highlights that: *“At the same, the pandemic has brought out some of the best human characteristics in full; self-sacrifice in helping others, renewed empathy and solidarity, and unprecedented global cooperation within science and between governments as we work to stem the worst of the pandemic.”*<sup>4</sup> Hopefully, it will be the world-class scientists who will be “the dominant force” of reaching the tipping point soon.

In the following chapters, the author of this paper will focus on global brands and their digital agility under the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific marketing activities and innovative ideas related to content marketing, visual identity, and social issues will be examined. In relation to NIKE brand, their forceful “white and black” communication strategy will be linked to the latest known business results of the company. Thus, the ambiguous character of the pandemic impact on business will be underpinned by evidence and discussed. Further, the question of how to identify growth opportunities and/or eventually reconfigure the business model under the lockdown of economy, or similar crisis situations, will be suggested for future research. Since nobody knows how long the COVID-19 pandemic will last, it is extremely difficult for brand managers to design brand communication strategies for the months to come. Being under increased accountability for delivering results and under the unpredictable economic and social situation, brand managers are still expected to design effective brand communication strategies with high levels of humanity, knowledge, empathy and foresight. However, they are getting into completely uncharted waters. In this research, the author will

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<sup>1</sup> MACINNIS, D. J., FOLKES, V. S.: Humanizing brands: When brands seem to be like me, part of me, and in a relationship with me. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 27, No. 3, p. 356-373.

<sup>2</sup> JACOBIDES, M. G., REEVES, B.: *Adapt Your Business to the New Reality*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2020/09/adapt-your-business-to-the-new-reality>>.

<sup>3</sup> NAKICENOVIC, N.: *The Coronavirus Crisis as an Opportunity for an Innovative Future / Future Earth*. 2020 [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://futureearth.org/2020/07/14/the-coronavirus-crisis-as-an-opportunity-for-an-innovative-future/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

use the research methods of *empirical analysis, namely naturalistic observation and document study/content analysis*. The brands' communication during the coronavirus pandemic will be subject to the *document-level sentiment analysis* which will be carried out with the help of a *software application* and followed by *critical interpretation* of data and findings. *The method of comparative analysis will be used to compare the findings of the document-level sentiment analysis of brands' documents related to customer education during the coronavirus pandemic.*

## 1 Global Brands and Their Digital Agility Under the COVID-19 Pandemic

This chapter focuses on the selected global brands and their behaviour during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020. Among them, there is IKEA and their deep customer focus; McDonald's, Audi, VW, Coca-Cola and their education-based visual content "play" delivering a vital message to customers; and last but not least NIKE as one of the companies that took a stand on social issues in its communication strategy.

### 1.1 IKEA: Focus on Customer Relations Management

**Table 1: Type of education-based content used by IKEA during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Company / Activity	Format of education-based content
IKEA Swedish meatballs recipe disclosure and sharing	1. education-based text
	2. infographics
	3. "How-to" educational videos

Source: Own processing

As for transformational digital experience<sup>5</sup>, which is innovative, creative and addressing the customer needs with precision, IKEA is a very specific company. It has become a leader in augmented reality implementation into marketing activities in recent years. The company is well-known for its mobile app *IKEA Place* developed with the help of augmented reality.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of customers use this app worldwide. It helps them virtually "place" IKEA products in customers' space. The app was designed as a new way to experience IKEA. A deep customer focus has always been in the centre of IKEA's marketing activities. However, the process of innovation was suddenly interrupted by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. All marketing strategies and communication to customers had to be revisited, discontinued, and/or substituted. Not surprisingly, IKEA again demonstrated its brand leadership. In spring 2020, IKEA came with a breakthrough decision: as its stores and cafeterias were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IKEA shared the recipe for its IKEA signature Swedish meatballs.<sup>7</sup> There was an idea behind this move: "If you can't come to our restaurants, you can make the meatballs at home now." The recipe was published by a lot of different media<sup>8</sup> all over the world. Experts reminded us about the fact that "*the Swedish meatballs are actually*

<sup>5</sup> PINE, B. J., GILMORE, J. H.: *The experience economy: competing for customer time, attention, and money*. Boston, Massachusetts : Harvard Business Review Press, 2019, p. 227.

<sup>6</sup> *Say Hej to IKEA Place*. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UudV1VdFtuQ>>.

<sup>7</sup> *IKEA releases its famous Swedish meatball recipe*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.richmond-news.com/news/ikea-releases-its-famous-swedish-meatball-recipe-1.24124406>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Chybějí vám? IKEA zveřejnila recept na své legendární masové kuličky*. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.novinky.cz/koktejl/clanek/chybeji-vam-ikea-zverejnila-recept-na-sve-legendarni-masove-kulicky-40321171>>.

a descendant of the Turkish köfte, created from a recipe King Charles XII brought back from Turkey in the 1700s.”<sup>9</sup> In the Czech Republic, the menu offered by IKEA in its restaurants, i.e. meatballs with mashed potatoes and creamy sauce, has been very popular. The release of the iconic recipe can be considered as part of IKEA content marketing, though most probably it was only incidental at the very beginning. However, the brilliant idea proved to be viable. It was followed by several video recipes uploaded on YouTube. The focus of marketing managers on deep customer care during the coronavirus crises and sharing *valuable education-based content* will be remembered by IKEA customers. The IKEA meatballs will perform the function of *reminder advertising*, reinforcing the company’s previous promotional activities. It is also worth noting that IKEA invested considerable funds to support different projects during the pandemic. The marketing communication during the COVID-19 pandemic had to be reinvented. All organizations and businesses tried to reassure their customers. IKEA has succeeded and justly earned trust and respect of their customers and IKEA brand followers. The brand communication was not only about giving away the recipe but also about supporting those in need during the coronavirus crisis.

In relation to COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for marketing managers operating in any kind of business to have reliable information at their disposal, i.e. educated guesses and prospective studies in the future quality of life, and/or eventually studies in consumer behavioural changes. In their work, marketing researchers Zwanka and Buff worked with “*the idea of generational cohorts and their collective memory, or collective experience, of major events in history and the impact of those events on resulting behavioural patterns.*”<sup>10</sup> They reviewed the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 on global consumer traits, buying patterns, global interconnectedness and psychographic behaviour, and other marketing activities. The implications of their research suggest long-term behaviour shifts and the resulting shifts in consumer behaviour. Among other findings, the authors highlighted the return to experience and hedonism, however with a caveat: “*Suggested personal interaction changes will be the elimination of the handshake, the isolation preference, maintaining a smaller and more intimate circle of friends, increased awareness of the presence of germs in public areas, more entertainment streaming at home, less attendance at concerts and sports events, less sharing of food (such as tapas), and a questioning of the necessity to fly to meet for personal or business reasons- as opposed to using online platforms, such as Zoom, WebEx, Skype, FaceTime and Loom.*”<sup>11</sup> In addition to it, the discussion on working from home and food consumptions resulted in the authors’ opinion that, as the pandemic eases, it is reasonable to expect customer interest in restaurants to resume, whereas the interest in amusement parks and large gatherings will potentially take longer to resume previous levels of interest.<sup>12</sup> Apart from other aspects, the research into the behaviour of global brands and their digital agility under the COVID-19 pandemic include brand communication through brand visual identity and social issues. These phenomena will be examined in sub-chapters 1.2 and 1.3.

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<sup>9</sup> *IKEA releases its famous Swedish meatball recipe.* Released on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.richmond-news.com/news/ikea-releases-its-famous-swedish-meatball-recipe-1.24124406>>.

<sup>10</sup> ZWANKA, R. J., BUFF, C.: COVID-19 Generation: A Conceptual Framework of the Consumer Behavioral Shifts to Be Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 2020, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 2-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

## 1.2 McDonald’s, Audi, VW, Coca-Cola and Mercedes: Focus on Brand Visual Identity

**Table 2: Type of education-based content used by selected companies during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Company / Content focus	Format of education-based content
McDonald’s/Audi/VW/ Coca-Cola/Mercedes social distancing	1. modified version of a logo
	2. education-based video on YouTube
	3. education-based claims

Source: Own processing

Visual identity is one of the essential aspects of branding. *“Visual identity is all of the imagery and graphical information that expresses who a brand is and differentiates it from all the others. In other words, it describes everything customers can physically see, from the logo to the interior design of a store.”*<sup>13</sup> The basic elements of visual identity are graphics, typography and a carefully selected colour palette. A company logo is at the heart of its visual identity. It is the most visible element of any brand. Johnson describes visual identity in relation to responsibility: *“Visual identity is how you shape perception and create an impression through the visible elements of your brand. Images are a powerful form of communication, specifically because they do not communicate with words. They speak on a primal, emotional level and are thus more persuasive. But with great power of communication comes great responsibility: you’ll want to be extra cautious that you’re not sending the wrong message.”*<sup>14</sup> The idea of brand visual identity as a brand’s visual language lies in the background of global brands’ agility in spring 2020 when they wanted to actively reach out to consumers with the vital message of *social distancing*. No company is prepared to change the graphics of their logo easily, especially if a particular logo has a long history. However, at the outbreak of the pandemic, McDonald’s, Audi, VW and Coca-Cola did not hesitate and communicated the important message through modified versions of their logos, adding the brand power to the message being communicated.



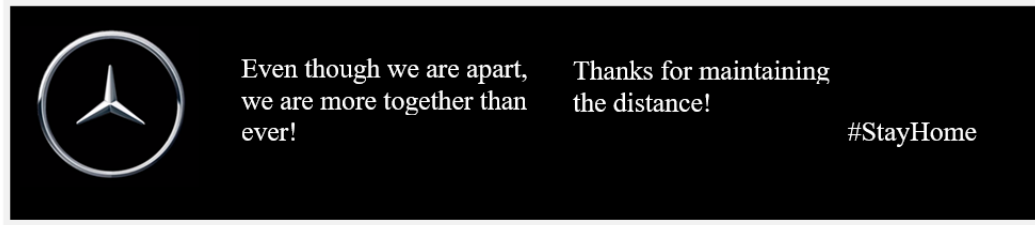
**Picture 1: Modified versions of global brands’ logos during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Source: Own processing; *Social distancing brand logos for Audi, Volkswagen and Coca-Cola*. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://www.designboom.com/design/social-distancing-brand-logos-audi-volkswagen-coca-cola-coronavirus-04-02-2020/>>; ROSENHOLTZ, J.: *Mercedes-Benz Takes Social Distancing Seriously*. Released on 31<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://carbuzz.com/news/mercedes-benz-takes-social-distancing-seriously>>.

<sup>13</sup> JOHNSON, J.: *Visual identity: everything you need to know about this essential aspect of branding*. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://99designs.com/blog/logo-branding/visual-identity/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

The modified digital and analogue versions of global brands logos were displayed elsewhere. They were also a vivid part of education-based videos on YouTube with the vitally important education-based message on social distancing. One of the most persuasive videos dealing with social distancing has been prepared by Mercedes.



**Picture 2: Education-based video on social distancing on YouTube prepared by Mercedes**

Source: Own processing; *Mercedes Social Distancing!*. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK-e37AeRwg>>.

The highest imperative is simplicity. The text is easily understood by everybody. The inverted text colour, i.e. black background with white fonts, helps the brand to keep the audience fully alert. Marketing managers are trained to understand the fundamental principles of graphics. Lankow et al. examined a graphic created with a commercial interest in mind. “*Brands primarily seek to get viewers’ attention and eventually (hopefully) convert those users into paying customers. [...] The order of priorities of a commercial marketing graphic would be appeal, retention, and then comprehension.*”<sup>15</sup> In the case of *social distancing*, we are selling a vitally important idea, an idea which might mean the difference between life and death. Therefore, comprehension plays the most important role; however, the graphic style, which is appealing enough to catch the audience attention, helps to compel the audience to take a specific action. In addition to the marketing concepts of *customer relationship management* (sub-chapter 1.1) and *brand visual identity* (sub-chapter 1.2), the focus on *social issues* will bring the global brands’ communication during the coronavirus pandemic to completeness (sub-chapter 1.3).

### 1.3 NIKE: Focus on Social Issues

**Table 3: Type of education-based content used by NIKE during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Company / Activity	Format of education-based content
<b>NIKE For Once, Don’t Do It</b>	1. education-based video on YouTube
	2. alternative content (different from the line of business)
	3. social media movement via a set of hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticeForFloyd

Source: Own processing

The next part of the empirical analysis focuses on social problems, namely in the USA. As misfortunes never come singly, the media attention of the whole world focused on the racist incidents in the USA. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020, virtually before the eyes of the whole world, Georg Floyd, an African American, was killed. The coincidence of pandemic and racist attacks logically resulted in increased people’s concern for personal safety. One of the first brand leaders reacting to the situation was NIKE. Nike has made a lasting impression on the whole world with a video advertisement with

<sup>15</sup> LANKOW, J., RITCHIE, J., CROOKS, R.: *Infographics: the power of visual storytelling*. Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons, 2012, p. 39.

the strongest emotional appeal in response to racial attacks. Simple video animation on YouTube titled *For “Once, Don’t Do It”* reached more than a million views from May to August 2020. The gradually appearing white text on a black background is an appeal to humanity not to be indifferent to manifestations of racism, because we can all be part of a change of attitude. The video is a call to action. It is an advertisement with a strong anti-racist appeal and a rousing challenge for all those, who tolerate these events, to step out of their comfort zone. During the coronavirus pandemic, Nike brand has become a real brand leader, demonstrating a high degree of social responsibility and a truly humane attitude.

Table 4: The emotionally tuned lyrics of the NIKE video *For Once, Don’t Do It*

**NIKE – For Once, Don’t Do IT**  
Don’t pretend there’s not a problem in America.  
Don’t turn your back on racism.  
Don’t accept innocent lives being taken from us.  
Don’t make any more excuses.  
Don’t think this doesn’t affect you.  
Don’t sit back and be silent.  
Don’t think you can’t be part of the change.  
Let’s all be part of the change.

Source: Own processing; *For once, Don’t Do It*. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drcO2V2m7lw>>.

All of the above examples share several common features. Brand communication focuses on an *alternative<sup>16</sup> content of the message being communicated*. The brand does not talk about its subject of business. Nevertheless, the brand speaks publicly and takes a clear stand, showing the way to go and presenting values that are important to every person on this planet. Demonstrating a clear attitude, the brand educates its followers and proves the ability to be a recognized leader of change. The brand educates. The brand brings up. The brand indicates the right direction. The content of an advertising message represents a point of contact between three marketing disciplines: content marketing with an emphasis on educational content, social marketing and corporate social responsibility. Let us hope that humankind not only listens to these important appeals but above all perceives their importance. They are "digitally carved in white and black".

## 2 Methodology

During the coronavirus pandemic, brands published a lot of documents carrying important information to their customers. Some of them *educated customers* how to behave under the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them were sharing information on strict regulations and limitations imposed on people’s behaviour when visiting the stores, which completely changed “the business as usual” to “a new normal”. Having studied a vast number of these publicly available digital materials, the author of this paper noticed that the brand *tone of voice* and *sentiment* of these documents varied significantly. Taking into consideration that the period of a global pandemic is a new experience to customers, which may result into unexpected shifts in consumer behaviour, it is evident that brand managers need precise information detailing the possible impact of their brand communication at any given time. Current technology can provide the tools necessary to carry out a deep analysis of this kind.

<sup>16</sup> Remark by the author: Alternative content is content unrelated to the core business of a company.

The most suitable research method is to carry out *sentiment analysis at the document level* to examine whether these documents express a *positive, neutral or negative sentiment* with the objective to take timely measures to improve the overall impact of the newly published opinion documents and messages for customers. The sentiment analysis is a valuable research technique which can bring almost real-time results. Bing Liu believes that “*document sentiment classification is considered the simplest sentiment analysis task because it treats sentiment classification as a traditional text classification problem with sentiment polarities or polarities as the classes.*”<sup>17</sup>

**Table 5: Sentiment analysis design**

Research objective:	classification of the selected global brands’ digital communication sentiment during the coronavirus pandemic (i.e. opinion documents)
Research method:	sentiment analysis at the document level
Application / URL:	<b>Sentiment Analyzer /</b> <a href="https://www.danielsoper.com/sentimentanalysis/default.aspx">https://www.danielsoper.com/sentimentanalysis/default.aspx</a>
Documents reviewed:	pandemic-related documents, instructions and brands’ digital communication samples
Measured components:	overall sentiment, tone of voice, or emotional feeling of the analysed text
Metrics / sentiment polarities	<b>sentiment score</b> ranging from <b>-100</b> to <b>+ 100</b> , i.e. -100 = a very negative or serious tone; +100 = a very positive or enthusiastic tone
Research period / time spent:	28 <sup>th</sup> September - 30 September 2020 24 hours of research work
Researched global brands:	IKEA, McDonald’s, Audi, Coca-Cola, Volkswagen, Mercedes

Source: Own processing

Any type of crisis communication of brands presupposes that managers are fully aware of increased accountability for their brand digital agility. Besides, the coronavirus pandemic belongs among unpredictable events with a potential to threaten the stakeholder’s expectations.

**Table 6: Sentiment analysis of selected global brands’ communication during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Brand name	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
<b>IKEA</b>	+41.9 somewhat positive / enthusiastic	+71.7 quite positive / enthusiastic	+69.0 quite positive / enthusiastic
<b>McDonald’s</b>	+39.4 somewhat positive / enthusiastic	-65.0 quite negative / serious	+30.1 somewhat positive / enthusiastic
<b>Audi</b>	+54.6 quite positive / enthusiastic	+22.8 somewhat positive / enthusiastic	+2.6 essentially neutral
<b>Coca-Cola</b>	-8.0 essentially neutral	-40.4 somewhat negative / serious	-65.6 quite negative / serious

<sup>17</sup> LIU, B.: *Sentiment analysis: mining opinions, sentiments, and emotions*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 47.



<b>Volkswagen</b>	-3.5 essentially neutral	-31.9 somewhat negative / serious	-73.6 quite negative / serious
<b>Mercedes</b>	-87.9 very negative / serious	-4.3 essentially neutral	+0.4 essentially neutral
<b>NIKE</b>	-62.0 quite negative/serious	+3.5 essentially neutral	+11.5 somewhat positive / enthusiastic

Source: Own processing based on the results of Sentiment Analyzer analyses

Opinion documents subjected to sentiment analysis:

• **IKEA**

Text 1: Taking care of co-workers, customers and community during COVID-19 (2020-04-10);

Text 2: A Message from IKEA UK and Ireland Country Retail Manager (2020-05-25);

Text 3: Our measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 (2020-08-25).

• **McDonald's**

Text 1: McDonald's Gives Away Nearly 4 Million Thank You Meals to Healthcare Workers and First Responders in First Six (2020-04-28);

Text 2: Our Goal: Safety First (2020-05-19);

Text 3: New U.S. COVID-19 Safety Precautions (2020-07-24).

• **Audi**

Text 1: Audi production gradually restarts in Europe (2020-04-17);

Text 1: Corona pandemic: AUDI AG takes stock after difficult first quarter (2020-04-30);

Text 1: Audi Group in first half of 2020: effects of corona pandemic still very significant (2020-07-31).

• **Coca-Cola**

Text 1: Coke goes big with COVID social distancing in Times Square (2020-03-21);

Text 2: The Coca-Cola Company Announces Strategic Steps to Reorganize its Business for Future Growth (2020-08-28);

Text 3: Volkswagen brand with effective crisis management in the first half of the year (2020-07-31).

• **Volkswagen**

Text 1: Emerging stronger from the crisis – with calmness, consideration and serenity (2020-04-20);

Text 2: Volkswagen hands over first phase of Covid-19 temporary medical facility (2020-06-23);

Text 3: Volkswagen brand with effective crisis management in the first half of the year (2020-07-31).

• **Mercedes**

Text 1: Daimler AG takes further measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-04-17);

Text 2: Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador's home exercise routine during lockdown: Fit & Healthy with Bernhard Langer (2020-04-06);

Text 3: Daimler Buses: safety moves forward (2020-07-30).

• **NIKE**

Text 1: Nike Statement on COVID-19 (2020-03-15);

Text 2: Covid-19 Update on Operations (2020-05-14);

Text 3: Nike shakes off pandemic blues with surging online sales (2020-09-23).

Author's commentary:

The *document-level sentiment analysis* represents a novel research strategy which might help business managers orientate themselves in the complexities of the current business environment. The prevailing negative sentiment polarity (see Tab. 6) might be an important signal and clear evidence for them that the overall style of their brand communication and non-financial reporting needs reinventing since it might have far-reaching consequences. In their decision-making, many people can get easily influenced by opinionated materials, which are easily accessible on the web. Therefore, these materials (disregarding their format) have to be not only easily comprehensible and delivered in due time. Despite the seriousness of the situation, brand communication should be somewhat positive; it should touch a cord. The tone of voice and sentiment should persuade people to take the desired action, and the content of brands' communication should be enlightening, uplifting and encouraging. It starts with the words, phrases and sentences you choose up to the brand communication strategy as a whole. The prevailing negative sentiment polarities of the documents submitted to the sentiment analysis represents an early warning to companies to reinvent their communication style to be not only comprehensible, factual, and timely but also positively tuned, justified and objectively correct.

Out of the twenty-one opinionated documents written by seven global brands during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic submitted to sentiment analysis, only IKEA company demonstrated consistency in the brand tone of voice and *somewhat positive/ quite positive* sentiment polarity. As a result, IKEA brand behaviour during the pandemic helped create a memorable image of the brand. Business managers with decision-making power are mostly result-oriented people. However, faced by the looming risk of a pandemic, the financial success of companies might become insignificant. Therefore, in situations like this, maintaining the right brand tone of voice to connect with customers and build trust is becoming critically important. In the portfolio of all managerial skills, analytical and writing skills come to the fore. However, enhanced communication skills are even more vital. The overall tone of voice should be consistent and observed in every piece of content written for customers. In situations like these, you are not sending just a news piece. You are delivering peace of mind and light at the end of the tunnel. There is a challenge for companies to think carefully about the basic customer needs, and, consequently, provide for the feeling of safety. The brands can leverage the situation as many customers appreciate positive, non-directive approach instead of fears and bans. If brands implement such an emphatic strategy, they will create and enhance longer-lasting brand affinity.

The group of global brands, i.e. IKEA, McDonald's, Audi, Coca-Cola, Volkswagen, Mercedes and NIKE, has not been selected randomly. They have certain characteristics in common. They are the the following, just to name a few: (1) they reacted to the threat of the coronavirus pandemic *fast and promptly*; (2) they based their content marketing strategy on *education-based content*, i.e. health education, raising public awareness of the importance of social distancing, and/ or an attempt to prevent the spread of racism (in the USA); (3) *invested considerable funds* to support those in need as well as e.g. doctors and medical staff; (4) financially *supported medical research* to speed up the vaccine development; and (5) demonstrated *leadership qualities*. The above-mentioned list of seven companies is far from being complete. Many other CEOs of companies voiced publicly their opinions (e.g. A Message on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from Russ Klein, CEO of American Marketing Association; a letter to Harley-Davidson employees On Diversity and Inclusion Strategy by Jochen Zeitz, President and CEO of Harley-Davidson; Apple, Amazon, Microsoft and others joined in major donation pledges to support the movement #BlackLivesMatter, etc.) By their

behaviour, these brands demonstrated the importance of brand personality traits, namely helpfulness, sense of justice, ethical behaviour and empathy. They significantly helped their customers to feel safe and nurtured, and by accelerating the development of their e-commerce activities and digital operations they created favourable conditions for their customers to satisfy their needs during the lockdown. They are brand leaders, followed by many brand followers. The coronavirus pandemic reminded mankind that there is nothing like “a local epidemic” or “local social unrest” any more. On the verge of Industry 4.0, any local problem can become a global problem almost instantly, or within a couple of days. The brand leaders demonstrated their readiness to act appropriately, exemplarily and ethically.

## 2.1 Crisis Communication of Brands: An Opportunity, a Challenge or a Problem

As a rule, well-informed evidence-based managers carefully consider all available sources of information and data that are vital for their business and business sector. It is in their competence to evaluate them for quality and relevance. The interdisciplinary approach guarantees a competitive advantage since modern business operations need data from the fields of psychology, sociology, behavioural economics and other disciplines such as communication and marketing.<sup>18</sup> Starting from the fiscal side of the business, on the 22nd September 2020, NIKE reported financial results for the first quarter of the new fiscal year 2021, which ended on the 31st August 2020. NIKE direct sales were up 12 per cent on a reported basis with growth across all geographies. NIKE Brand digital sales increased by 82 per cent (in EMEA<sup>19</sup> region even triple-digit growth). *“Our results this quarter continue to demonstrate NIKE’s full competitive advantage, as we strengthen our position in the midst of disruption,”* said John Donahoe, President and CEO, NIKE, Inc. *“In this dynamic environment, no one can match our pace of launching innovative products and our Brand’s deep connection to consumers. These strengths, coupled with our digital acceleration, are unlocking NIKE’s long-term market potential.”*<sup>20</sup>

John Donahoe focuses on three aspects: *innovative product, a particular brand deep connection with consumers, and digital acceleration*. Researchers frequently examine all these aspects in the scientific literature. The emotional connection of brands with consumers is the subject of continual research in the literature, e.g. in the recent study by Charmaine du Plessis.<sup>21</sup> In the study, the author accentuates the crucial importance of digital customer experience and customer engagement through story-making in transmedia branding: *“Brands could provide their prosumers with online spaces to express creativity collaboratively while still upholding brand values.”*<sup>22</sup> In their analytical study for Harvard Business Review, Michael G. Jacobides and Martin Reeves remind us that even in severe economic downturns and periods of recession, there are always some companies which can gain an advantage. Simultaneously, they highlight that *“any crisis produces a plethora of temporary changes (mainly short-term shifts in demand) but also some lasting ones.”*<sup>23</sup> In case of NIKE and other

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<sup>18</sup> *The benefits of evidence-based management in a nutshell*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.ckju.net/en/blog/benefits-evidence-based-management-nutshell/1246>>.

<sup>19</sup> Remark by the author: EMEA region involves Europe Middle East and Africa.

<sup>20</sup> BEAVERTON, O.: *NIKE, Inc. Reports Fiscal 2021 First Quarter Results*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200922005991/en/NIKE-Inc.-Reports-Fiscal-2021-First-Quarter-Results>>.

<sup>21</sup> DU PLESSIS, C.: Prosumer engagement through story-making in transmedia branding. In *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2019, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 176-191.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup> JACOBIDES, M. G., REEVES, B.: *Adapt Your Business to the New Reality*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2020/09/adapt-your-business-to-the-new-reality>>.

global brands examined in this paper, the shift to the digitalization of business operations (e.g. in Mercedes company), and namely acceleration of e-commerce (IKEA, NIKE) are vitally important aspects of effective business strategies. However, in the marketing mix of successful companies, a telling digital communication strategy is the key to success. The ongoing pandemic revealed the need to direct brands' communication to education-based content as the core of content marketing strategy. Creative approach to the new situation, reconfiguration of current business models and reallocation of capital can lead to differentiation among companies: some of them will only survive, however, some of them will spot the opportunity immediately and thrive in the future.

### 3 Discussion

The author of the paper is fully aware that the research may have two limitations. The first is the limited number of opinionated documents submitted to the sentiment analysis. The research sample needs to be extended both in quantity and formats. The second uncertainty regarding the methodology is the need to determine to what extent intercultural differences in global teams affect the tone of voice and sentiment polarity of brand communication. As a linguist, the author of this paper is fully aware of specific language usage and techniques, e.g. in the English language, we prefer to use softening, hedging or diplomatic language. The intercultural dynamics, as well as language peculiarities, were not taken into consideration, since the extent of this paper is limited. Apart from the above-mentioned suggestions, the future research orientation could lead researches to examine the causality between brand digital agility and effective digital communication and the resulting brand affinity leading to long-term economic prosperity. Such research could open new ways of thinking about marketing investments and result in timely reassessing growth opportunities.

### Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to examine, analyse and interpret the global brands' digital agility during the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic. The empirical analysis ascertained several directions of the respected brands' marketing strategies implemented during the first six months of the lockdown. They were the following: providing an unprecedented level of customer care (exemplified namely by IKEA), the use of visual brand identity to promote the vitally important idea of social distancing (e.g. McDonald's, Audi and Coca-Cola) and verbal as well as mainly financial support of social issues (e.g. NIKE, Amazon and Microsoft, to name a few). We could observe the signs of humanization of the brands as well as high levels of creativity in reaction to the magnitude of the problems caused by the coincidence of coronavirus pandemic and the outbreak of serious social issues. In most cases, a common denominator of these activities is *education-based content marketing* embodied into different formats, i.e. educational videos, how-to videos, corporate graphics (modified logos with educational messages, infographics, digital education-based articles on health education and the like). The findings of the document-level sentiment analysis unveiled the prevailing negative sentiment polarities of the brand content shared during the pandemic which provides an early warning for brands to reinvent their communication style to be not only comprehensible, factual, and timely but also objectively correct, justified, and positively tuned. By this research, the author attempts to contribute to the scientific literature on brands' behaviour and brand communication in critical situations. The empirical analysis substantiated that *education-based content marketing* is in the sights of global business

leaders and prominent brands. Pro-active brand digital agility and focus on state-of-the-art marketing strategies can help companies to overcome the challenges of heightened uncertainty when business managers cannot accurately predict even the near future.

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# THE ROLE OF POINT OF PURCHASE IN COMMUNICATION WITH CUSTOMERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

In 2020, the issue of the pandemic caused by the Coronavirus COVID-19 has received a lot of attention. As it has had an impact on all areas of working and private lives, the related surveys have had diverse focuses. Due to the development of events and taking into account the current professional scope, we plan to consider the role of the point of purchase in the time of the pandemic at communicating with customers. We focus on imparting initiated by retailers in response to the measures taken in the interest of the public health at the sale points. By communication, we mean not only the tools of marketing communication, but also the factors of the purchasing environment. Under the term the point of purchase we understand the sales area in retail chains of stores, which is a closed space in a building demarcated by the walls. As a medium, the point of sales is distinguished by unique effectiveness, having an impact in the decision-making process, or process of purchasing. The main purpose of the paper is to find out which tasks of communication (to inform, remind of, persuade) retailers at the point of purchase try to achieve and how their fulfilment is reflected on the factors of shopping environment.

## Key words:

Appeals. Marketing Communication. Pandemic. Point of Purchase. Tasks.

## Introduction

Much attention has been paid to the topic of the pandemic caused by the disease Coronavirus COVID-19 from the beginning of 2020. Since it has had an influence on all areas of working and private lives, the related investigation is of various orientation, e.g., mastering the transition of the education process into the online space, possible pitfalls of applying home office working, changes in consumer behaviour, availability of medical care, financial consequences on households and businesses, choice of summer vacation, repercussions on population's mobility, impression on mental health, or expenditures on marketing communications. Due to the course of events and taking into consideration the contemporary professional focus, we have decided to discuss the role of the purchasing point during the pandemic at communicating with customers.

## 1 Point of Purchase

Under this term we mean the retail sales area in the network of stores, i.e., an enclosed space in a building bounded by the walls. Therefore, in theoretical terms, it is explained much more often in connection with distribution than with marketing communication. However, Liljenwall and Maskulka consider the point of sale as „*the most powerful medium available to marketers*.”<sup>1</sup> We make the decision on the media in relation to the resolution on marketing communication. If we explained conveying in the broadest sense of the word, such as, the exchange or transmission of ideas, information, speech, signs of technical means, then we could explain the point of sale as a medium<sup>2</sup> and all factors of the shopping environment as point-of-sale communication. As a medium, the point of purchase would excel in unique

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<sup>1</sup> LILJENWALL, R., MASKULKA, J.: *Mocná zbraň marketingu: Reklama P-O-P*. Hradec Králové : Výběr, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Vplyv komunikácie miesta predaja na spotrebiteľské správanie*. [Habilitation lecture]. Trnava, presented on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

efficiency, influencing at the same time the decision-making and the purchase. The effect of other media depends on the ability of consumers to remember a message delivered outside the sales area.<sup>3</sup> The sales area is intended for the sale of goods at retail prices to end users<sup>4</sup>, who purchase products for personal consumption. The point of sale therefore turns consumers into customers.

## 2 Marketing Communication

In the long run, we favour a definition of marketing communication that takes into account the reaction of consumers to the message the company delivers to them: marketing communication means, on the one hand, informing, acquainting with products, explaining their qualities, emphasizing the benefits, quality, values, beneficial effects and use, and, on the other hand, listening, receiving and responding to consumers' suggestions and requests. The general target of marketing communication - to influence consumer behaviour in the interest of the company, the sale of its products and brands - we concretize into objectives: to inform, persuade, and remind.<sup>5</sup> However, if we continue to explain communication in the broadest sense of the word, point-of-purchase communication has several other goals: to attract attention, build an image, encourage unplanned purchases and simplify purchasing.<sup>6</sup> The messages of marketing communication are based on information appeals, emotional appeals or a combination of them. Information appeals provide consumers with precisely defined data through creative design, which they are able to receive at the time of conveying. Based on the results of the analysis, Abernethy and Franke identified and defined the most common information appeals: price, quality, performance, components, availability, special offers, taste, nutritional value, packaging, warranties, safety, independent research, corporate research, and new ideas.<sup>7</sup> Emotional appeals, humour, eroticism, warmth and fear, as opposed to informational ones, stimulate the imagination and feelings of consumers.<sup>8</sup> Perception of reality and its presentation in an amusing way has been in decline for a long time, but an imaginary stop of humour in communication has been hit by a pandemic. Brands seem to avoid smile-provoking ideas, while consumers would welcome jocularly as a reminder of „normal” times.<sup>9</sup> The most widely repeated words or phrases of marketing communication throughout the pandemic are following: „in times like these; more, than ever before; family; home; we are here for you; we can do it together; let us help each other”, etc.<sup>10</sup> The appeal of fright alerts consumers on, for example, physical, social, temporal, financial or health risks.<sup>11</sup> Panic is a response to a danger that results in a change in consumer behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> LILJENWALL, R., MASKULKA, J.: *Mocná zbraň marketingu: Reklama P-O-P*. Hradec Králové : Výběr, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> CIMLER, P., ZADRAŽILOVÁ, D. et al.: *Retail management*. Prague : Management Press, 2007, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> KOLLÁROVÁ, D.: *Marketing a společnost II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> JESENSKÝ, D. et al.: *Marketingová komunikace v místě prodeje*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2018, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> ABERNETHY, A. M., FRANKE, G. R.: The Information Content of Advertising: A Meta-Analysis. In *Journal of Advertising*, 1996, Vol. 25, No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> DE PELSMACKER, P., GEUENS, M., VAN DEN BERGH, J.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2003, p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> BIRNEROVÁ, A.: *Jsmo v tom společně? Všechny reklamy z období pandemie jsou otravně stejné*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://www.focus-age.cz/m-journal/marketing/jsmo-v-tom-spolecne--vsechny-reklamy-z-obdobi-pandemie-jsou-otravne-stejne\\_\\_s277x15369.html](https://www.focus-age.cz/m-journal/marketing/jsmo-v-tom-spolecne--vsechny-reklamy-z-obdobi-pandemie-jsou-otravne-stejne__s277x15369.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> DE PELSMACKER, P., GEUENS, M., VAN DEN BERGH, J.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2003, p. 222.

<sup>12</sup> VYSEKALOVÁ, J. et al.: *Emoce v marketingu. Jak oslovit srdce zákazníka*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2014, p. 25.



### 3 Methods

The main purpose of the paper is to find out which tasks of communication (informing, reminding, persuading) retailers at the point of purchase seek to reach and how their achievements are reflected on the factors of shopping environment. In order to explain, we can use examples of good practice from the surrounding of retail chain shops with foodstuffs and miscellaneous goods, which operate on the territory of the Slovak Republic, since due to the restrictions it was actually only physical shops with this assortment that were opened. Partial targets are following: to identify the point of purchase, marketing communication and its goals, appeals implemented in marketing communication, role of marketing communication and factors of purchasing behaviour. As information sources, we used academic textbooks, proceedings of scientific works, along with the Internet websites of professional and opinion-forming media. At sources processing, we applied standard scientific methods, including researching, description, analysis, comparison, and deduction.

### 4 Function of the Point of Purchase in Communicating with Customers in the Pandemic

It is vital to focus on looking into the roles of the points of purchase at communication with customers during the pandemic, as the point of sale is the last medium that can convey information to consumers without considering them as bothering. The average length of a purchase in a retail grocery and general shop is 35 minutes, which means that customers on the shopping area are exposed to communication activities at least to this extent.<sup>13</sup> However, throughout the pandemic, the time spent by doing shopping of this assortment went shorter by 20 %, i.e., shoppers buy faster.<sup>14</sup> The pandemic was reflected in the creative design and content of the communication. Marketers respond to the situation in the company and adapt the content to the new situation: they emphasize safety, considerateness and thank their and other employees in the so-called “first line”. They repeatedly emphasize the position of the individual and society as a whole in the fight against the pandemic, the need to comply with the set measures, and call for solidarity with at-risk groups. They also explain the help they provide, for example in this way:” *We help with the prices to make food accessible really to anyone.* “<sup>15</sup> They consider notifying to be the most important. Doubting customers are being convinced of the necessity to adhere to the procedures, and they are being reminded of them directly at the point of sale on various bearers. A large number of the planned activities of sales promotion based on the face-to-face contact with consumers (e.g., tastings, demonstration, handing out samples) was indefinitely postponed or completely abolished.<sup>16</sup> The pandemic suspended the performance of some communication activities, the essence of which lies in the direct contact with the customers (e.g., tastings, demonstrations, handing out samples) at the point of purchase. The safety of promoters and customers has become the most urgent priority. However, the question is whether security will not be more important

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<sup>13</sup> JESENSKÝ, D., STRAKOVÁ, K.: *Bez dobré navigace v prodejně zákazníci utratí méně*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2019. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2019/06/bez-dobre-navigace-v-prodejne-zakaznici-utrati-mene/>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ako sa zmenilo nákupné správanie počas pandémie?*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-11-23]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/marketing/2136141-ako-sa-zmenilo-nakupne-spravanie-pocas-pandemie>>.

<sup>15</sup> *V Kauflande je nakupovanie vždy ozaj lacné. Na betón!*. [online]. [2020-10-19]. Available at: <<https://www.kaufland.sk/sortiment/ozaj-lacne.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> ONDRUŠOVÁ, M.: Sales promotion zažíva obrodzenie. In *Tovar a predaj*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 9-10, p. 44.

after the pandemic than these sales promotion techniques in the promotional mix. In the topical situation, the most widely used sales promotion techniques applied on the point of purchase include merchandising, discounts and multipacks.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, probably more than ever before, floor graphics are used at the points of sales, which, however, this time is not the bearer of the message focused on sales, but the notification oriented to informing, or reminding of the basic form of prevention: face mask – disinfection of hands – social distancing.

The changes did not affect the discounts. Although the share of detergents sold at a discount diminished, the number of traded-in mineral water and confectionery with a price-cut increased.<sup>18</sup> The factors of the purchasing environment and the point of sale are focused on conveying in the outdoor areas and on reminding of the steps in force in the indoor areas. At the same time, the efforts made by customers confirm that traders are socially responsible. The adherence to them will ensure buyers a simple and safe purchase. Consumers can only enter and move within the shops while having the upper airways covered. In order to do so, customers use scarves, shawls or face masks. At the same time, they should keep a distance of at least 2 meters when doing the shopping. The retailers warn customers with stickers on the floor to maintain a sufficient distance, especially in the cash zone and at the service counters. Depending on the hygienic measures in force (maximum number of customers in the store), consumers are lined up in front of the shops, where tension often arises and distances are not kept. Regularly updated steps divide customers into two opposing groups: those supporting the proceedings and those rejecting them. According to the results of a survey by the Focus agency, 62.5% of Slovaks are willing to protect themselves with a face mask against the spread of a new coronavirus. On the contrary, 35.4% say they are not willing to do so.<sup>19</sup> Slovaks started shopping more than standard after the media coverage of news from the world about buying up the items in the stores. Disinfectants and cleaners, soaps, rice, flour, granulated sugar, pulses, pasta and other durable goods were the fastest disappearing from the store shelves. Slovaks were also buying baking ingredients and toilet paper in much higher quantities. In order to maintain their safety, consumers have redirected their purchases to their immediate surroundings, preferably in one place. Interest in the online buying of food and drugstore goods has been constantly growing, as well.<sup>20</sup>

The entrance areas were equipped by contactless disinfection racks with automatic dispensers (for instance, Tesco, Lidl and Kaufland) or disinfectant sprayers, along with notices that disposable gloves are only provided to customers on request. Pictograms or written information notifying customers of the obligation to comply with the hygiene measures taken, as well as alerting of the maximum number of customers at the point of sale at one time, began to appear on automatic opening doors or on shop windows near store entrances. If, under standard circumstances, the entrance areas included amusement machines (e.g., animal driving simulators, winning slot machines with small prizes), their operation was stopped. Several shops that do not have a clearly defined direction of entry and exit from the venue use temporary security barriers to guide the movement of customers. Traders regularly disinfect

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<sup>17</sup> ONDRUŠOVÁ, M.: Sales promotion zažíva obrodenie. In *Tovar a predaj*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 9-10, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> *Během pandemie poklesl podíl cenových promocií*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-19]. Available at: <<https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2020/04/behem-pandemie-poklesl-podil-cenovych-promocii/>>.

<sup>19</sup> BARIAK, L.: *Prieskum: Sme este ochotni nosit' rúška? Niektoré výsledky zarazia*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/820871/prieskum-sme-este-ochotni-nosit-ruska-niektore-vysledky-zarazia/>>.

<sup>20</sup> *COVID-19 mení nákupné správanie slovenských spotrebiteľov*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/sk/sk/insights/article/2020/covid-19-meni-nakupne-spravanie-slovenskych-spotrebitelev/>>.

contact surfaces, handles, shopping carts and baskets, used instruments, tools and aids. The number of customers who can be in the store at one time has also been limited. Therefore, several stores offer only the exact number of shopping baskets, for example, Kraj, Lidl and Kaufland. Purchasers can only enter the store with a shopping cart or basket, and once their number is exhausted, i.e., there is the maximum possible number of customers in the sales area, others must wait in front of the store at two-meter intervals. Retailers, such as Deichmann or CCC, which do not normally have baskets for shoppers in their stores, limit their amount in the sales area with plastic shoehorns (one customers – one shoehorn). Compliance with the measures is monitored by private security services or sales staff.

Merchants, in an effort to mitigate the threat to cashier employees, called on customers to make cashless payments for purchases.<sup>21</sup> Remittance by pay card, mobile phone or smart watch is fast, secure and at the same time increases the cardholder's protection against coronavirus infection. Following the proceedings taken, the banks saw an increased interest in payment terminals and gateways. Global Payments Slovakia recorded approximately 20% higher concern in payment terminals on the part of merchants than in the previous period.<sup>22</sup> Slovaks paid significantly more in groceries, pharmacies and drugstores, as confirmed by the banks themselves. For instance, the bank ČSOB recorded a growth in the daily volume of card payments in groceries by 29%. Tatra banka registered a 45% increase in card payments in pharmacies and drugstores. Higher growth in the purchase of food in supermarkets, but also higher payments in drugstores and pharmacies were also recorded by VÚB. According to Slovenská sporiteľňa, purchases in food increased by up to 56% year-on-year during the three-week quarantine. Due to the improved hygiene, purchases of cleaning products, toilet paper and washing powders have also become popular. Their volume went up by 61% compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>23</sup> At the points of purchase, which co-create the atmosphere of sales or purchases by broadcasting tailor-made radio programme, the muzak is interrupted by announcements of sanitary measures that retail chains observe in their stores, e.g., we regularly clean and disinfect shopping carts and baskets, but also challenges, such as give preference to non-cash payments, use disposable gloves when handling unwrapped pastries, etc. Among other things, Kaufland calls for considerateness: *„In the current situation, it is also up to us to act in the sense of social cohesion. It is important that we adhere to the set measures, are considerate and tolerant of each other. Because only together we can do it!*“<sup>24</sup> Retail employees are among those who work first-line. Traders associated in SAMO have taken steps to protect employees beyond the law, e.g., they have installed protective plexiglass in the cash register area, which prevents direct contact of cashiers with customers, equipped selected employees with protective shields, and handed over vitamin packages to their staff in stores.<sup>25</sup> For various reasons, retailers replaced vulnerable employees (the elderly, pregnant workers, parents of minors) with new workers who had lost their jobs with the outbreak of the pandemic with the original employer or part-time temporary workers.

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<sup>21</sup> *Pandémia priniesla obchodníkom zvýšené náklady aj výkyvy v tržbách.* Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.tovarpredaj.sk/2020/05/11/pandemia-priniesla-obchodnikom-zvysene-naklady-aj-vykyvy-v-trzbach/>>.

<sup>22</sup> *Banky a poisťovne.* Released on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://e.dennikn.sk/minuta/1843629>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Trendy v koronakríze: viac hygieny, menej dovoľení a väčší limit pre bezkontaktné platby.* Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://zbk.sk/trendy-v-koronakrize-viac-hygieny-menej-dovoleniek-a-vacsi-limit-pre-bezkontaktnne-platby/>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Kaufland.* [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://spolocnost.kaufland.sk/>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Viacere zmeny nákupného správania budú trvalé, predikujú obchodníci.* Released on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.retailmagazin.sk/obchodnik/4906-viacere-zmeny-nakupneho-spravania-budu-trvale-predikuju-obchodnici>>.

On the one side, these measures are welcoming, but on the other side, they support or even accelerate robotization in the retail sector (for example, they have already been replacing sales assistants in practice).

## Conclusion

Under the term the point of purchase we understand the sales area in retail chains of stores, which is a closed space in a building demarcated by the walls. Liljenwall and Maskulka consider the point of purchase to be „*the most powerful medium available to the traders*.”<sup>26</sup> As a medium, the point of sales is distinguished by unique effectiveness, having an impact in the decision-making process, or process of purchasing. It is a medium that is not seen by customers as annoying. With regard to statistics on average length of a purchase, we know that for passing a message at the point of purchase, the advertiser has approximately 30 minutes at disposal. We discovered that the pandemic was reflected on creative depiction and the content of communication. Traders repeatedly emphasize the position of the individual and the society as a whole in the struggle against the pandemic, the need to comply with the established measures, and call for solidarity with at-risk groups. A large proportion of the planned activities based on a personal contact with the shoppers was indefinitely postponed or even completely cancelled. More than ever before, floor graphics are used at the sales area, which is focused on providing information or reminding of the basic prevention: face masks - hand disinfection – social distancing. Further, we also discovered that retail traders reacted to the newly-emerged situation even before the Public Health Office of SR and the Government of the SR. The taken measures were reflected into the shopping environment and communication towards customers and their considerateness towards the endangered groups, along with safety at purchasing for all in the form of implementing of the preference giving to seniors, contactless payments and protection of employees by plexiglass in the cash zone. Factors of purchasing environment received new components. Disinfection non-contact stands with automatic dispensers have become part of the entrance areas. Pictograms informing customers of the obligation to comply with the hygiene proceedings taken began to appear on doors or shop windows, along with notifications of the maximum number of customers at the point of sale at one time. Retailers try to mitigate the threat to their employees, for example, by calling for cashless payments or the installation of protective plexiglass in cash registers' areas. Communication at the point of purchase in the broadest sense supports the conveying of retailers in other types of media. It informs customers, reminds them of obligations, but also confirms that retailers are socially responsible.

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<sup>26</sup> LILJENWALL, R., MASKULKA, J.: *Mocná zbraň marketingu: Reklama P-O-P*. Hradec Králové : Výběr, 2001, p. 1.

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## MYTHS AS A TOOL FOR MOBILIZING ON THE EXTREME RIGHT

*Boris Kolman*

### Abstract

Faulty communication of the failure of the constructs of a multicultural society, the initial failure to cope with the migration crisis in Europe, as well as the resistance of a section of the public to the centralization of national policies towards the European Union, gave representatives of extreme right parties a new hope for a political rise. The current political environment in Europe is extremely conducive to the creation of radically conservative parties with a mass membership base. The Slovak Republic is no exception, where the traditionalist electorate addresses the extreme right party Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia. The paper aims to identify the mobilization topics that this party brings into the public space. The strategic style of addressing and communication between the public and activists will be explained on mobilization topics. The analysis period is limited to November 2019 to October 2020. The reason for this framework is to focus on the election campaign of a political party and also focus on using the theme of COVID-19 on political party marketing with the emphasis on the fluctuation of political party preferences. The frame analysis will be primarily used in the data processing process. The methodology of the research will be also complemented by a critical analysis of the sources and an explanation of the traditional myths used by radical right.

### Key words:

COVID-19. Extreme Right. Framework Analyses. Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia. Myths. Parliamentary Elections. Political Mobilization.

### Introduction

In the first twenty years of the 21st century, grew the political influence of radical and anti-system parties. The return of the extreme right in the age of globalization is significantly linked to resistance to the weakening of nation-states in favor of the European Union's centralism, to the great waves of migration from Asia and Africa, and terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists. The negative factors of globalization are also linked to economic crises, social irresponsibility, and inequalities, the transfer of labor and capital outside the original national regions. Leaders of the extreme right also take advantage of the incompetence of European socialist political parties, which in the effort to modernize and gain liberally oriented voters moved to new program goals in the spirit of modern neoliberal ideologies that suppress emphasis on social and national identity and interests. They often emphasize other issues, such as human rights, multiculturalism, the anti-discrimination agenda, and the so-called. Nationally conditioned social paternalistic protection is an irresistible attraction in times of uncertainty. The extreme right as in the past become a herald of the interests of the dwindling dissatisfied European middle class. The subject of this paper is the extremist party Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), which has fully established itself on the Slovak political scene. Nevertheless, ĽSNS is not the only political party in Slovakia with negative attitudes towards cultural, sexual, or value otherness. However, it is the only parliamentary party whose chairman believes in conspiracy theories about the New World Order, thanks to which Jews control the whole world. He expressed this conviction publicly in the Youtube portal Infovojna, when Marian Kotleba declared that „*An interesting book must be read, it is called the Protocols of the Zionist Sages. There, I think that every intelligent person will find a model of how it will develop.*”<sup>1</sup> The Protocols of the Zionist Sages is a deliberately constructed forgery with the intention of spreading anti-Semitism, describing a fictitious Jewish plan of global domination with which far-right

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<sup>1</sup> *Informačná vojna 21. augusta 2017 – Marian Kotleba*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXtwAnG9JBg>>.

movements often operate. In this paper, we will address the topics used by extreme right party LSNS in its mobilization campaign for the 2020 parliamentary elections, with an emphasis on the explanation of the traditional myths used by an extreme right-wing political party.

## 1 Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research is increasingly used in the social sciences. It will be similar in this work. Quantitative methods will be used especially in the preparation phase since we analyse a large amount of data. These data are intended to identify the posts which are most communicated to the public. Quantitative methods will determine the contributions, which will be examined qualitatively. The research question reads as follows:

- *What mobilization topics the extremist party Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia brings into the public space during the parliamentary campaign 2020 and how reflects theme COVID-19 during pandemic crisis?*

The chosen method for data analysis is framework analysis. Although some authors consider it more of a data sorting method<sup>2</sup>, Ritchie and Spencer<sup>3</sup> consider it a very useful method of data analysis in qualitative research. The advantage of the method is, in particular, that it is flexible and allows the researcher to collect the data first, then analyze it, or to analyze it already during the collection. The framework analysis was chosen precisely because of its flexibility. It is dynamic and allows it to be adapted during the data analysis process. At the same time, it is systematic, enabling a comprehensive understanding of data<sup>4</sup>. Framework analysis also allows us to perform analysis inside and also between individual cases. For this case, it means the analysis of individual topics and also the comparison between them. In data analysis, we will follow the procedure proposed by Ritchie and Spencer. The procedure consists of five steps:

1. Familiarization with the data: In this step, the researcher tries to get an overview of the data set, the aim is to pre-identify what basic topics appear in the data.
2. Identification of thematic frameworks: It builds smoothly on the previous phase and aims to identify the basic themes and create the categories according to which the material will be labeled.
3. Creating tables: In this section, for better clarity of data, tables are created, which serve for better comparison of individual cases.
4. Mapping and interpretation: This step leads to the interpretation of the data. The researcher tries to find among the individual topics of the association and offer explanations for them.

We set the period for which we will analyze the data in the range from 1.12. 2020 to 31.10.2020. We consider it broad enough to reveal a framework aimed at a parliamentary campaign and analysis of the mobilization approach of a political party to the COVID-19 pandemics.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. Prague : Portál, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> RITCHIE, J., SPENCER, L.: Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In RITCHIE, J., SPENCER, L., BRYMAN, A., BURGESS, R. G. (eds.): *Analyzing qualitative data*. London : Routledge, 1994, p. 174-193.

<sup>4</sup> SRIVASTAVA, A., THOMPSON, B.: Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research. In *JOAAG*, 2009, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 73-78.



## 2 Extreme Right Ideology and Myths

### 2.1 Myth of "White Europeanness"

The difference between the segregation of the white race from the period of World War II and the period of the current extreme right lies mainly in the concept and interest of the white race. The categorization among whites itself replaced the protection of the interests of the white race as a whole, which the extreme right began to perceive as an endangered human species fighting for its survival. The myth of "white Europeanness" introduces the idea of a single European civilization that includes immigrants, colored minorities, and the states of Israel and Turkey. Races should be territorially separated. Europeans are an elite race and the founders of all the developed cultures in the world<sup>5</sup>. This extreme right concept recognizes only the equal Aryan status of all the original European nations. Although the Nordic Aryan is the subject of special respect, it does not disqualify white Europeans as subordinates.

### 2.2 Antisemitism

The extreme right spectrum is notorious for its radical-conservative and anti-Jewish views. In the sense of extremists, the Jews have taken over Western society and stand in the background behind every revolt and revolution against order. The Slovak nation should supposedly emancipate itself against the ubiquitous Jews. For this reason, the ĽSNS deliberately opens and exacerbates the issue of Jews in Slovak society in a latent manner. In speeches and debates, citizens and radical conservative Nazi activists convince citizens of their conspiratorial interpretation of the causes of the migration crisis, which finds the culprit in alleged global Jewish domination. According to the extreme right spectrum, the Jews deliberately opened the imaginary European gates of Islamists<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.3 A Strong Nation State Against the Centralization and Unification of the European Union

Another extreme right topic is the resistance to European integration and the membership of the Slovak Republic in the European Union. According to ĽSNS, the Slovak Republic should be involved in solving international problems that do not exclusively concern it. Instead, it should focus on building its defense forces, while withdrawing from international organizations of a transnational nature. The process of European integration should be abolished immediately, with the ĽSNS favoring the model of nation-states and mutual bilateral agreements. This extreme right associated with the European Union in particular neoliberalism, neomarxist leftism, and all the hated modernization changes<sup>7</sup>.

### 2.4 Using an Unresolved "Gypsy Issue"

Inseparable extreme right-wing issues also include the unresolved educational and social Roma issue, while the ĽSNS approaches the issue without any empathy and with demands for the cessation of social benefits. By pointing out the officially confusing problem of the conflicts of a part of the community of non-adaptable Roma and the majority population,

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<sup>5</sup> See also: RATAJ, J.: *Storočie českej a slovenskej krajnej pravice*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> MAREŠ, M.: *Otázka výzkumu pravicového extremizmu*. In *Politologický časopis II*, 2003, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 116-131.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see: RATAJ, J.: *Storočie českej a slovenskej krajnej pravice*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2019.

the party is trying to get voters, especially in localities with Roma settlement and growing ghettos and crime.

## 2.5 Conflicts with the Liberal-Democratic Regime

Liberal-type parliamentary democracy is not an ideal system for the extreme right scene but rather sees it as a system that must be tolerated given the political situation. Democracy is from an extreme right perspective, synonymous with the destruction of a nation and homeland. The extreme right spectrum sees it as a system that, with its openness, allows the penetration of foreign elements into the nation and thus helps to weaken the national organism from the outside<sup>8</sup>. In this context it should be noted, that ĽSNS adheres to a constitutionally compliant position to the system. The reason is the experience of Marian Kotleba with the abolition of his former party. For this reason, one cannot expect open communication about the demand for the abolition of the liberal-democratic regime.

## 2.6 Migration and "Islamization" of Europe

Resistance against immigration is one of the central mobilization issues. Immigrants are associated with a threat to the survival of a small Slovak nation, an increase in crime, the introduction of valuable anti-European cultures, the threat of terrorism, rising unemployment, and the social burden of the state<sup>9</sup>. In this area, the extreme right uses the anti-immigration concept Fortress Europe, which advocates the prevention of color migration, the cessation of integration programs, and the development of repatriation measures. In general, the ĽSNS has long sought to use the Muslim unrest in Western Europe to its advantage, and we can state that the anti-Muslim campaign has been present within the ĽSNS for a long time.

## 2.7 Historical Myth

After previous experience with the dissolution of Kotleba's previous party, he reconsidered his approach to political activity. He understood that he could not present his most radical views openly and officially. The reason is possible problems with the law, but also reduced chances of political success. For this reason, the promotion of the introduction of the state system cannot be expected. Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that ĽSNS would not adhere to historical patterns, especially from the period of the Slovak state. The extreme right purposefully and unhistorically distorts the facts in favor of the destitution Slovak state. Adoration to historical patterns is needed in the study of the extreme right, especially in connection with the possible inspiration in the systemic instruments of totalitarian regimes.

## 2.8 Belief in Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories of the extreme right use any crisis of the current system to make visions of its collapse. At the same time, conspiracy theories have been shown to be successful in legitimizing radical anti-systemic ideologies by seeking to name the frustrations shared by the general public and to offer a suitable picture of the enemy. In connection with the expansion of alternative Internet sites promoting conspiratorial interpretations of events at home and abroad, their influence on the radicalization of public opinion towards anti-democratic ideologies is being considered.

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<sup>8</sup> See also: RATAJ, J.: *Storočie českej a slovenskej krajnej pravice*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see: DRÁBIK, J. *Fašizmus*. Bratislava : Premedia, 2019.

### 3 Analysis of Mobilization Topics of the Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia in the Parliamentary Elections 2020

The subject of the research are sources originating from the environment of the extreme right party. In our case, this means the Newspaper of the ĽSNS – Noviny Ľudovej strany Naše slovensko, the Youtube channel – ĽS Naše Slovensko v NR SR and Facebook profile Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko. For examining mobilization topics, a framework analysis will be used for the collected data.

#### 3.1 Newspaper of the Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia

The subject of the framework analysis is, among other things, the party press published in the pre-election period. In the period under study, ĽSNS published two issues of the newspaper of the People's Party Naše Slovensko, which is analyzed in detail and subsequently prepared an overview table with the mobilization topics contained in the party newspapers.

**Table 1: Mobilization topics contained in the party newspapers**

Mobilization topics contained in the party newspapers		
Antisystemicity	Corruption	NGO's, EU and NATO
Criticism of political opponents	Migrants	Roma population
Social policy	Liberalism and LGBTI	Christianity and traditionalism

Source: Own processing

At the beginning of the December election edition, they focused on Roma issues, which they also associated with criticism from the police force. *"Instead of drinking coffee, they will go to order with aggressive antisocials or guard the borders against immigrants"*<sup>10</sup>. In another article, the party focused on criticizing the system introduced after November 1989. *"In recent years, many high-ranking officials of the former regime have admitted that the Velvet Revolution was staged by the secret service to steal the state. In other words, many communists at the time found that it was easier to steal in capitalism than in socialism"*<sup>11</sup>. The electoral motto also contained in the party newspaper ĽSNS is *"Courage against the system!"* by which the party confirms its anti-system setting. Antisystemicity is one of the basic extreme right elements. In general, liberal-democratic regimes are seen by the extreme right as part of a Jewish masonry plan for world domination and the destruction of nations. Another topic of the December edition is corruption. In this context, the ĽSNS has legitimately adopted the populist method of addressing voters, which it effectively combines with the plundering of the allegedly defectively ruling national elite. The magazine also contains criticism of non-governmental organizations, which ĽSNS portrays as foreign agents who *"carry out huge campaigns in support of liberals and finance protests and riots to eliminate uncomfortable politicians"*<sup>12</sup>, stating a coveted example of a sovereign strong antiliberal state with leading authority and a predominance of traditional values. Other topics were criticism of the situation in the military and criticism of the EU towards its tightening

<sup>10</sup> KOTLEBA, M.: Osadníci dostali policajtov!. In *Noviny Ľudovej strany Naše Slovensko*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> KOTLEBA, M.: 17. november 1989 PODVOD NA ĽUDOCH. In *Noviny Ľudovej strany Naše Slovensko*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> KOTLEBA, M.: Pozor: Protislovenské mimovládky!. In *Noviny Ľudovej strany Naše Slovensko*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 5.

weapons policy. At the end of the issue, the newspaper focuses on the social measures proposed by the party in its program for the 2020 elections. The February election edition includes a speech by Marian Kotleba stating that *“The People's Party of Our Slovakia, together with our partner parties, is the only political force that can stop dangerous liberals in their efforts to destroy Slovakia as they have in Western Europe. Join us!”*<sup>13</sup>. It is therefore evident from the statement that the party is trying to make anti-liberalism as the main mobilization theme of the political campaign. The newspapers also focused on criticizing their political opponents. They populist criticized the nationally oriented SNS for buying military fighters, the conservative KDH with alliances with the liberal parties, and also emphasized the likely failure of Stefan Harabin's party in the election. The newspaper also contains states focusing on the protection of the Slovak nation from migrants and the ostracizing LGBTI community. Subsequently, the newspaper presents the party's social activities and the views of the ultra-conservative Catholic priest Marián Kuffa, whose brother candidate in the parliamentary elections on the ĽSNS list of candidates<sup>14</sup>. Finally, a 10-point program of the party with the distinctive name Ten Commandments is described, thus referring to its Catholic focus, however, the party itself develops with an integral dimension.

### 3.2 Youtube Channel of the Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia

The subject of the framework analysis are videos on the Youtube channel ĽSNS - ĽS Naše Slovensko v NR SR published in the range from 2.11.2019<sup>15</sup> to 28.2.2020<sup>16</sup>, while the analysis itself included 78 videos.

**Table 2: Topics published on Youtube channel ĽS Naše Slovensko v NR SR**

Topic	Number of videos
Criticism of liberalism	9
European union	2
Politically incorrect with Milan Mazurek	14
Stefan Harabin	3
Criticism of NGOs	2
Cooperation with foreign political partners	6
Istanbul Convention and traditionalism	6
External meetings and assemblies	6
Roma issues	9
Banska Bystrica Self-Governing Region	6
Social and environmental policy	5
Intra-party activity	5
Fight against financial groups	2
Criticism of the government	5

Source: Own processing

From the framework analysis, it is possible to observe that the most frequented topical uploaded on Youtube's channel of the party is the program Politically Incorrect with Milan Mazurek, which is implemented by a party medium called Kulturblog. From our point

<sup>13</sup> KOTLEBA, M.: Spojili sme sa pre Slovensko!. In *Noviny Ludovej strany Naše Slovensko*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> KOTLEBA, M.: Otec Marián Kuffa: Budem voliť môjho brata na kandidátke kotlebovcov!. In *Noviny Ludovej strany Naše Slovensko*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Milan Uhrík o liberálnej politike EÚ a jej pohľade na strednú Európu (Trenčín – 17. 10. 2019). Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4PfVoBEVdI>>.

<sup>16</sup> *Obnovíme poľnohospodárstvo a ochránime životné prostredie. Vol'te č. 24*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M35bKPS5lw>>.

of view, the reason is the fact that this "political show" captures current political events (from the point of view of Milan Mazurek, Kulturblog, and the party as a whole) as well as the fact that Milan Mazurek candidate from the last candidate spot and therefore his person's media promo was desirable. The second most common topics are the Roma issue and the critique of liberalism, which confirms the party's extreme right-wing direction. The third most frequently communicated topics on the Youtube channel are criticism of the Istanbul Convention and traditionalism, the promotion of external meetings and assemblies, cooperation with political parties, and the Banská Bystrica Region, where Marian Kotleba worked as a chairman in the past. A rather surprising result of the analysis is the finding that criticism of the government and EU membership is given minimal attention. This fact can be explained by the fact that, despite its extremely sharp Euroscepticism, the ĽSNS no longer demands the withdrawal of the Slovak Republic from the EU and also the fact that the party in its campaign favored demarcation against liberals and political competitors.

### 3.3 Facebook Profile of the Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia

When examining the official Facebook profile of ĽSNS, we noticed that it was not established until November 2019. The party did not have an official profile on the social network Facebook for a long time, which stems from the fact that Facebook itself canceled it due to the publication of unauthorized content. The first video that the party uploaded on its Facebook account was directly related to the 2020 parliament election. The subject of the framework analysis is the contributions published on the Facebook profile Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko in the range from 15 November 2019 to 27 February 2020. In that period, 36 posts were published on the party's Facebook profile.

**Table 3: Topics published on Facebook profile Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko**

Topic	Number of contributions
Excerpts from political discussions and external meetings	7
Active mobilization for external meetings and assemblies	12
Stefan Harabin	2
Politically incorrect with Milan Mazurek	1
Cooperation with political parties	1
Criticism of the government	2
Roma issues	4
Criticism of liberalism	1
Banska Bystrica Self-Governing Region	3
Social and environmental policy	2
Criticism of the United States	1

Source: Own processing

From the framework analysis of the contributions, it can be observed that most of the contributions were devoted to the active mobilization of citizens for external discussions with party members. This fact can be explained by the characteristics of the social network itself, which is much more suitable for the active mobilization of potential voters. The second most common type of contributions are excerpts from political discussions with opponents but also from external meetings, which confirms the party's mobilization strategy on social networks. Although the third most frequently discussed topic on Facebook is the Roma issues, it is clear from the number of contributions to these topics that the party in the period did not use Facebook directly to communicate its views, but rather to actively mobilize voters.

#### 4 COVID-19 as a Tool for Political Mobilization of Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia

Almost immediately after the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic 2020, a new global pandemic of the infectious disease COVID-19 hit the whole of Europe. When observing far-right groupings, it can be noted that they are trying to use a global pandemic to discredit the system. From the beginning of the pandemic, they focused their criticism on Western democracies, alleging that, in the name of the inviolability of individual freedoms and democratic practices or economic interests, they responded effectively and responsibly to coronavirus infection. In this context, Marian Kotleba said in one of his very first videos related to the coronary crisis: „*The European Union, which is totally destroying nation states, which is always ready to take more and more guidelines, orders and decisions to destroy the sovereignty of nation states, but when it comes to a pandemic, such as in this case, the Union is suddenly silent about the corona, but even in this experience with the coronavirus, we must understand that the European Union is disadvantageous...*“<sup>17</sup>. The target of the populist critique of the ĽSNS, which brought elements of anti-systemic into its communication, was naturally also the government of the Slovak Republic. At the end of March, the party published a video on its YouTube channels, in which the party's representatives talked about the fact that the government decided to watch the private messages of all citizens under the pretext of a pandemic<sup>18</sup>. These allegations show the first signs of communication of conspiracy theories in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, an open report on conspiracy theories came about with the publication of a video in which Marian Kotleba describes coronavirus as a purposefully artificial infection, the intended goal of which is to devastate the economies of nation states in the interests of transnational capital and global political oligarchy. Under the pretext of economic aid, the European Union will seize all remaining Slovak assets. The coronavirus vaccine, which is being prepared by the USA and Israel, will allegedly contain a chip, with the help of which the supranational centers of power will bring the entire population under their involuntary intelligence control<sup>19</sup>.

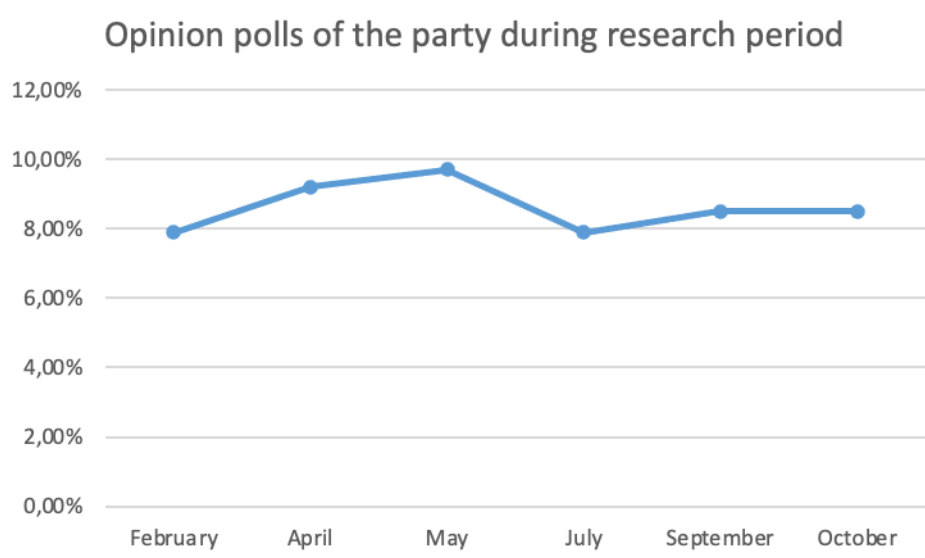
During this period, the first post-election public opinion poll was published, which was a public opinion poll, according to which ĽSNS would win 9.2 percent of the vote in the elections. Compared to the election result, the party thus increased by 1.2 percent of the vote, which suggests that, despite a possible statistical error, the isolated communication of conspiracy theories in connection with the pandemic did not in any way detract from the party's popularity. During the summer months, the party communicated this topic only rarely. This is due to the fact that during the summer, anti-pandemic measures were significantly limited and at the same time the number of patients with the disease was minimal. However, the fact that the party did not pay more attention to the issue of the pandemic during the summer did not significantly affect the party's electoral preferences. In the May survey, the Kotlebists – People's Party of Our Slovakia party scored 9.7 percent, and in July 7.9 percent of the vote. From the point of view of the spread of conspiracy theories by ĽSNS, the summer period is interesting from the point of view that the party began to actively spread hoaxes about the fact that breathing through the mask poisoned the body with carbon dioxide. This conspiracy theory was promoted in particular by Milan Mizarurek, who stated on his

<sup>17</sup> Kotleba: *EÚ zlyhala, koronavírus súvisí s NWO*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdyRyACTwBA>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ludia, nedajte sa zotročiť! Vláda schválila sledovanie všetkých obyvateľov Slovenska*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDRTc0I3bCI>>.

<sup>19</sup> *M. Kotleba: Koronavírus jako zámienka na zotročenie ľudí (15.4.2020)*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbHOWit8wdE>>.

Facebook profile: „*I will not ruin my health with that ugly rag and breathe high concentrations of my CO2*“<sup>20</sup>. Even though this Hoax was also refuted by the WHO<sup>21</sup>, Kotlebists continues to spread it actively. In September, some of the LSNS members of parliament refused to wear a veil directly at a meeting of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. A few days later, Marian Kotleba refused to put on a mask in a political show that aired live<sup>22</sup>. However, September's surveys show that the active dissemination of conspiracy theories about the detriment of wearing masks had no significant effect on the party's preferences. In general, we can say that the COVID-19 pandemic has become the main mobilization tool of the LNRS, as confirmed by the October and November protests, in which the party actively participated. Even after the pacification of the disease, its global crisis effects can be expected, which in certain circumstances may strengthen far-right policies in promoting the strengthening of the role of nation states, growing authoritarian tendencies, sharpening social tensions and conflicts in society, sharpening ethnic problems and the like.



**Chart 1: Opinion polls of the party during research period**

Source: Own processing

## Conclusion

Research on the LSNS mobilization campaign shows that the most used tool in the political campaign for the 2020 parliamentary elections was the party's Youtube channel, while it was very strongly supported by the radically conservative Kulturblog portal, whose statutes are members of the LSNS. Mobilization themes included typical extreme right myths such as antiliberalism and unresolved Roma issues. Topics such as traditionalism and Istanbul convention, cooperation with foreign political partners, or the policy of Marian Kotleba

<sup>20</sup> Milan Mazurek – poslanec NR SR. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=207289726707929&story\\_fbid=797211681049061](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=207289726707929&story_fbid=797211681049061)>.

<sup>21</sup> Fact: The prolonged use of medical masks when properly worn, DOES NOT cause CO2 intoxication nor oxygen deficiency. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <[https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/myth-busters/mythbuster-masks?fbclid=IwAR27zcKvXbofAdgfvBR7nrOju\\_yjM9T-fpUc2VITJK5grGBvATLDJEOcdbg](https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/myth-busters/mythbuster-masks?fbclid=IwAR27zcKvXbofAdgfvBR7nrOju_yjM9T-fpUc2VITJK5grGBvATLDJEOcdbg)>.

<sup>22</sup> Kotleba spochybnoval v RTVS význam nosenia rúška a odmietal si ho nasadiť aj po výzve moderátora. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [2020-18-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8IEKUdtXD0>>.

in Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region were also quite frequent in the campaign. An unexpected finding of the analysis is the fact that in the political campaign the myth of centralization and unification of the European Union was used in a relatively lax way. This reason may consist of the party's accession to the so-called serious radicality that some extreme right parties have purposefully set up to make it easier for them to penetrate a more decent public that is not in favor of the brachial concept of the National Socialist revolution. When analyzing official party sources, we also did not observe anti-Semitic behavior, which may also consist mainly of the unattractiveness of promoting this concept among the general public. From the framework analysis of party Facebook, it is possible to read that social networks are used by ĽSNS mainly for activation and mobilization campaigns. This stems from the fact that up to half of the contributions were aimed at activating voters given that during the parliamentary campaign ĽSNS published only two editions of its party magazine, the analysis of this document was mainly used qualitative analysis, which confirmed the extreme right-wing orientation of the party, but in a constitutionally comfortable direction. The subject of research of this study were the official sources of ĽSNS used in the mobilization campaign. The analysis did not include the official website of the ĽSNS, as the party it canceled itself in connection with the criminal prosecution of the party's chairman Marian Kotleba. When communicating the topic of the pandemic, it can be observed that the party gradually radicalized its rhetoric. While the party initially used the pandemic crisis to criticize the system itself, it began to openly spread the conspiracy theories that the pandemic itself was a worldwide conspiracy of elites. However, from the simultaneous analysis of electoral preferences with milestones of party communication on the subject of the pandemic, it can be concluded that the spread of conspiracy theories did not have a significant impact on the development of political preferences of the Kotlebists - People's Party of Our Slovakia.

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## MEDIA IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

*Peter Krajčovič – Marianna Urmínová*

### Abstract

The presented paper deals with the significance and role of media, their impact on the wide public and the question of credibility of information. The attention is mainly paid to global pandemics which have broken out in the last few years including the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors analyse the number of media outputs while comparing them according to their specific media types and pandemics. Special attention is paid to the proportion of specific media types in the total number of media outputs, number of media outputs and number of shared posts on social sites for the period from January 1 to November 10, 2020, comparison of the number of media outputs by online media during specific pandemics, media behaviour of the public during the coronavirus pandemic and comparison of traffic rates on the selected media before and after the coronavirus outbreak in Slovakia. The authors focus also on the question of credibility of media and a fake news phenomenon. Simultaneously, they define the changes to media behaviour due to the pandemic and emphasise the need to keep trust in traditional media and eliminate the spread of fake news.

### Key words:

Coronavirus. COVID-19. Fake News. Media.

### Introduction

It has almost been a year since the first outbreak of the novel coronavirus causing the coronavirus disease defined as COVID-19. Even though this has not been the only pandemic which has ever hit the society, its impact on our economic, cultural and even social life has been the worst for the last decades. Many of us are experiencing this situation for the first time in our lives and we are all having to face the challenges the current situation has brought. Various restrictions and regulations the governments are imposing in order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus have considerably changed not only consumer but also media behaviour. The amount of time people are online is on a constant growth and so is the number of fake news spreading over the Internet. Especially the phenomenon of fake news has raised many questions in relation to credibility of media and their role within the society. Many global studies report a loss of credibility in social as well as traditional media. This phenomenon can have serious effects these days when the role of media is of the utmost importance as they serve for communicating government measures in their prevention against the spread of the coronavirus or simply keep people objectively posted of the current situation. False news and disinformation, often referred to as hoaxes, may represent a potential threat under specific circumstances the current pandemic has certainly caused. This form of information may not only scare, stress or disturb the people, as demonstrated in our research, but also weaken people's trust in the measures implemented by the authorities in their fight against the coronavirus. We have to be cautious because people are likely to trust this content and instead of seeking expert advice, they have tendency to take their own, often illegitimate, steps to keep away from the virus. Disinformation is especially dangerous because they are spread across various private groups on social sites, in discussions or via private messages of their users.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Dezinformácie a médiá v čase pandémie. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., GRACA, M. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 56-57.

## 1 Reception of Media Information and Media Literacy

The reception of a given piece of media information and recipients' media literacy both play a key role in relation to media influence. Media literacy refers to an ability to identify various types of media to decode the message they send.<sup>2</sup> W. J. Potter defines it as “*a group of perspectives that are actively used in connection with the media with the aim of interpreting the meaning of a message we come across.*”<sup>3</sup> For example, negative effects of media messages are particularly harmful for the young audience who does not need to possess particular intellectual tools that are necessary for proper decoding of a media message.<sup>4</sup> In general, media literacy is multidimensional and consists of a cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and moral dimension and is often referred to as a continuum, not a category.<sup>5</sup> At first, media studies analysed each message in the belief that once a message was sent, each recipient reacted in the same way. Later, the research showed that different people processed messages in a different manner - this is called *selective perception*. This happens because each single person brings various variables into a message - their family background, interests and education. Because of multiplying the sources of information and entertainment, people have had to share a far more limited media space. Consequently, scientists find it difficult to analyse specific or cumulative effects of mass media on the general public.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Media Impact on the Public

Media are often regarded as “a mirror” of the modern society.<sup>7</sup> We are in touch with any form of mass media on a daily basis – economically, socially or culturally. People need messages/information for various reasons, on the one hand, it can be used to get in touch with the public and on the other one, for taking decisions or expressing ourselves.<sup>8</sup> Mass media can influence the way we vote or how we spend our money. Media can affect how we eat, speak, work, study or even relax.<sup>9</sup> They have a direct impact on individuals and what is more, influence the culture, knowledge base, norms and values of the whole society. They provide a set of pictures, ideas, opinions and evaluation the members of the public may use to select their own patterns of behaviour.<sup>10</sup> Extensive and global presence of media means they are able to capture more time and attention than ever before. Media influence almost all aspects of our life and earn an unprecedented amount of money in return for information and entertainment. The impact of media and media outputs in various media type outline also the authors Gálik,

<sup>2</sup> *What is Media Literacy, and Why is it Important?*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.common sense media.org/news-and-media-literacy/what-is-media-literacy-and-why-is-it-important>>.

<sup>3</sup> POTTER, W. J.: *Media Literacy*. Santa Barbara : University of California, 2016, p. 838.

<sup>4</sup> GOODALL, H.: Media's Influence on Gender Stereotypes. In *Media Asia*, 2016, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 160. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01296612.2012.11689932>>.

<sup>5</sup> POTTER, W. J.: *Media Literacy*. Santa Barbara : University of California, 2016, p. 838.

<sup>6</sup> BIAGI, S.: *Media/Impact an Introduction to Mass Media*. Sacramento : California State University, 2015, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Role of Media in Society*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.ssim.ac.in/blog/role-of-media-in-society/>>.

<sup>8</sup> MUGHAL, M. A.: *Mass Media and Its Influence on Society*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<http://thedailyjournalist.com/pen-and-pad/mass-media-and-its-influence-on-society/>>.

<sup>9</sup> BIAGI, S.: *Media/Impact an Introduction to Mass Media*. Sacramento : California State University, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> McQUAIL, D., WINDAHL, S.: *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communications*. New York : Routledge, 2013, p. 98.

Radošinská, Solík and others.<sup>11</sup> Another important role of the media is enhancing people's awareness of fundamental topics or various cultural, social or political issues.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, we all should regard media as extremely important tools, especially in the field of public awareness as well as education and upbringing.

### 3 Impact of Digital and Social Media

Digital media change people's everyday life, the way they connect with one another and cooperate in a broader context, at work as well as within the civil society.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to such a fast growth, digital communication has become a key factor affecting the development of the modern mass media business.<sup>14</sup> How do traditional media influence the development of digital media? Even though some scientists predicted that print media were already dead, the sale of books has remained stable and publishers have introduced e-books to take an advantage of a new digital form. The history of media shows that introducing a new medium or a new delivery system does not necessarily mean the end of the "older" medium. The above theory has been confirmed by an ongoing expansion of the media industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> Each single medium paves the way for its followers. All modern media contribute to discovery of any new media form. Social media are an inseparable part of digital media as they have a considerable effect on behaviour and thinking of users. J. Amadie assumes that social media enable everyone who is connected to use and have an access to an unlimited information flow. The role of social media within the social culture, economy and the general outlook is undeniable. Social media are a new forum enabling people to exchange opinions, be connected, engaged or search and give advice.<sup>16</sup> Despite a number of opportunities and advantages, the popularity of social media has also known some downsides. Social media have also become a main source of stress, depression and anxiety to many of us. Anxiety mainly occurs as a result of permanent exposure to unreal and unreachable perfections presented on social sites.<sup>17</sup>

Users' addiction to social media and social sites is another minefield. People are online for too long and they are unable to turn their attention away and stay focused.<sup>18</sup> Other negative attributes of social media include *cyberbullying*. In his scientific study, L.D. Johnson describes various ways how a person can become a victim of bullying. Some unsocial and inhuman environment is prone to bullying, such as playgrounds, classrooms or educational institutions. Cyberbullying is a new form of bullying which has arisen along with the development of social

<sup>11</sup> See also: GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Influence of the internet on the cognitive abilities of man. Phenomenological and hermeneutical approach. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 5-15.; RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Mediálna Zábava v 21. Storočí: Sociálno-Kultúrne Aspekty a Trendy*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016.; SOLÍK, M., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: Sociálne uznanie v globálnom priestore: Možnosti a limity mediálnej reflexie. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 20-31.

<sup>12</sup> VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., GREGUŠ, E., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J., KUBÍKOVÁ, K.: Television News as an Information Source and Its Perception in Slovakia. In *Communication Today*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 42-59.

<sup>13</sup> *Impact of Digital Media on Individuals, Organizations and Society*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://reports.weforum.org/human-implications-of-digital-media-2016/section-3-impact-of-digital-media-on-individuals-organizations-and-society/>>.

<sup>14</sup> BIAGI, S.: *Media/Impact an Introduction to Mass Media*. Sacramento : California State University, 2015, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> AMEDIE, J.: The Impact of Social Media on Society. In *Pop Culture Intersections*, 2015, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 3. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=engl\\_176](https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=engl_176)>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> SIDDIQUI, S., SINGH, T.: Social Media its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects. In *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research*, 2016, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 74.

media and has eventually caused a new outbreak of despair. In this respect, the aggression is triggered by an aggressor through an electronic medium, especially through a social one.<sup>19</sup> Another dangerous aspect of social media is enabling a swift access to terrorist groups. The number of terrorist attacks has increased since the beginning of this century.<sup>20</sup> Terrorist groups use social media to their own benefit in order to gather information, recruit new members, obtain financial resources or promote their propaganda. Social media are also being abused for spreading disinformation and fake news about the current outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Despite the above negative aspects, most social, ethical, environmental and political problems arising among people would certainly be less visible without the existence of social media. The balance has been shifted from the individual competence to large masses of inhabitants.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to digital and social media, it is essential to understand not only opportunities but also specific risks in connection with the use of the above media so as both the industry and users could learn how to use these advantages to their benefit while mitigating their negative effects.

#### 4 Media in the Time of the Pandemic

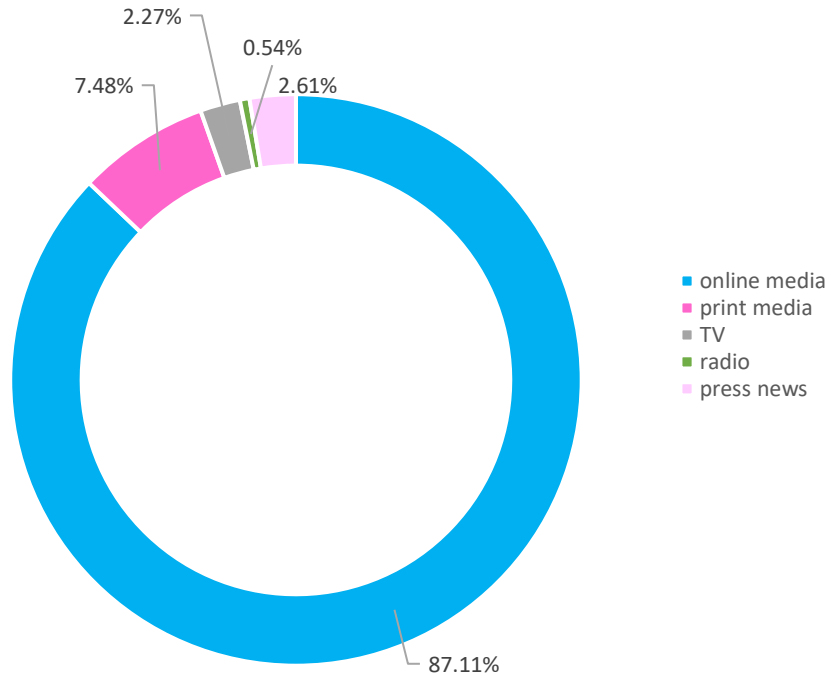
One of the key roles of the media is to keep spectators, readers or listeners posted of the latest news. They bring information from the social, political, cultural or sports events. In addition, they also inform about the spread of various diseases and pandemics which have hit the world. The current COVID-19 outbreak attract the attention of media which are trying to inform not only about the current state of the pandemic and its spreading, but about other related topics, discussions, analyses or experts' opinions. The media interest in the above topics is natural because they are within the sphere of interest of the media public. This is also demonstrated by the number of media outputs which have been published on the above topic by Slovak media since the beginning of the year 2020. In total, 445,000 posts have been published since November 10, 2020. The majority of media outputs have been published in online media (388,153), followed by print media (33,311) and TV (10,103). Press agencies have published 11,620 agency news in total. Most posts were published in March 2020 when the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Slovakia. The most detailed results are shown in Charts 1 and 2 below.

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<sup>19</sup> AMEDIE, J.: The Impact of Social Media on Society. In *Pop Culture Intersections*, 2015, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 8. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=engl\\_176](https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=engl_176)>.

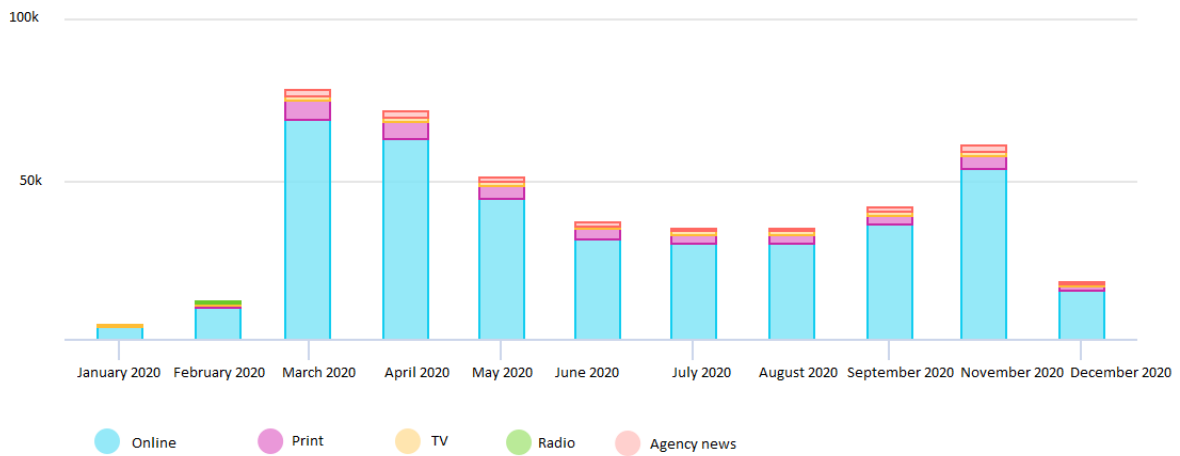
<sup>20</sup> FAHMI, S. S.: Media, Terrorism, and Society: Perspectives and Trends in the Digital Age. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. 6, p. 735. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15205436.2017.1382285>>.

<sup>21</sup> *What is the Major Impact of Social Media: Pros and Cons*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.simplilearn.com/real-impact-social-media-article>>.



**Chart 1: Proportion of specific media types in the total number of media outputs**

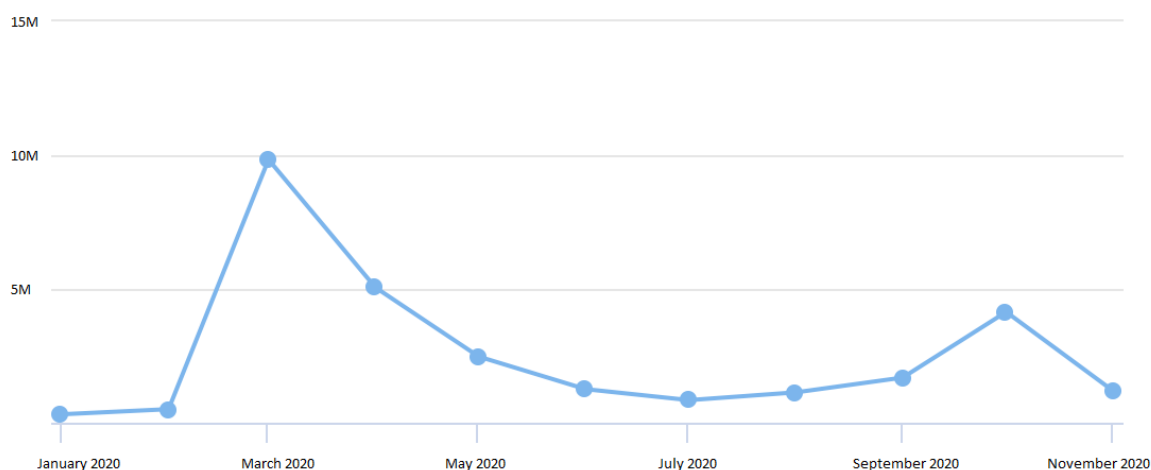
Source: Own processing, 2020.



**Chart 2: Number of media outputs for the period from January 1 to November 10, 2020**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

March 2020 saw the highest number of cases shared through social sites with the number reaching almost 10,000,000. A gradual drop was followed by a repetitive increase in the number of posts for October, during the second pandemic outbreak. The results are shown in Chart 3 below.



**Chart 3: Number of shared posts on social sites for the period from January 1 to November 10, 2020**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The novel coronavirus is not the only pandemic that have caught such media attention. The same trend may be observed in case of other pandemics that had previously hit Slovakia or other countries. It is logical that the number of media outputs did not attain such a level as COVID-19 did as the coronavirus has hit Slovakia directly and much more intensively than any other disease ever before. The number of media outputs about the pandemics presented by online media in the previous years is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Comparison of the number of media outputs by online media during specific pandemics**

Pandemics	Media outputs
H1N1 (2009)	350
SARS (2003)	1,310
Ebola (2014)	3,577

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The interest of the wide public in the information about the current pandemic can also be demonstrated by a corresponding increase in the time people spend online following or using specific types of media. The results of the global research from March 2020 showed that the coronavirus had had a direct impact on media traffic worldwide. Many categories have reported a considerable increase. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Media behaviour of the public during the coronavirus pandemic**

Media consumption due to the coronavirus outbreak	World wide	Italy	Spain	France	Germany	China	USA	UK
Watching more news coverage	67%	67%	63%	50%	60%	77%	43%	50%
Watching more shows/films on streaming services (e.g. Netflix)	51%	53%	58%	31%	21%	63%	42%	32%
Watching more TV on broadcast channels	45%	55%	43%	53%	35%	46%	42%	32%

Spending longer on messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc)	45%	60%	61%	24%	22%	59%	17%	24%
Spending longer on social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc)	44%	52%	49%	27%	21%	50%	32%	21%
Spending more time on computer/video games	36%	41%	48%	39%	21%	29%	29%	20%
Reading more books/listening to more audiobooks	35%	36%	42%	24%	19%	44%	25%	19%
Listening to more streaming services (e.g. Apple Music, Spotify etc)	35%	25%	27%	14%	13%	49%	18%	14%
Listening to more radio	18%	29%	32%	23%	24%	16%	16%	17%
Reading more magazines	16%	23%	22%	14%	17%	14%	12%	15%
Reading more newspapers	14%	18%	14%	14%	10%	17%	12%	9%
Creating/uploading videos (e.g. on Tik Tok, YouTube etc)	14%	10%	15%	7%	5%	17%	6%	6%
Listening to more podcasts	12%	8%	10%	6%	6%	13%	10%	11%

Source: WATSON, A.: *Consuming media at home due to the coronavirus worldwide 2020*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1106498/home-media-consumption-coronavirus-worldwide-by-country/>>.

A considerable increase in media traffic was also reported in Slovakia. According to the research by MEDIAN SK, the Slovaks used mobile applications 6 minutes and 35 seconds longer, were online 6 minutes more and watched TV 30 second more from March 16 to April 19, 2020, i.e. before and after the outbreak of the coronavirus in Slovakia compared to the period from February 1 to February 29, 2020. On the contrary, we reported an 11 minutes' reduction in case of radio broadcast. More detailed results are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Comparison of traffic rates on the selected media before and after the coronavirus outbreak in Slovakia**

Use of media	Feb 1 – Feb 29, 2020	March 16 – April 19, 2020
mobile applications	0:37:49	0:43:54
radio broadcast	0:57:17	0:46:09
web browsing	1:21:59	1:56:58
TV	2:40:14	2:46:54

Source: *adMeter a koronavirus: Češi a Slováci digitálně, virtuálně, jinak*. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.median.eu/cs/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200430\\_MEDIAN\\_adMeter\\_koronavirus\\_TK\\_v14JF.pdf](https://www.median.eu/cs/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200430_MEDIAN_adMeter_koronavirus_TK_v14JF.pdf)>.



## 5 Credibility of Media

The pandemic caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus has also raised the questions about credibility of media and information presented thereon. This is all due to disinformation and conspiracy theories that tend to be published on social sites. The World Health Organisation even declared that false information spread much quicker than the virus and described the situation as “infodemic of a huge extent.”<sup>22</sup> The Media Trust Index (2019)<sup>23</sup> having studied credibility of various types of media such as TV, radio, press, Internet and social sites, observed that 41% of the Europeans showed average confidence in media compared to 40% of EU citizens who had no or extremely low confidence. According to the global study that was carried out in 2019, 62% of respondents believed websites and social platforms published only fake news or fake content.<sup>24</sup> According to the report published by Fake news worldwide – Statistics & Facts, 74% of respondents are worried about the rise of fake news in relation to the coronavirus. 57% of British people refused anti-pandemic measures after they had come across fake news in September 2020 whereas 62% of Americans thought the media had exaggerated the whole situation concerning the outbreak of the coronavirus back in March 2020.<sup>25</sup> The results of our own study carried out from March 29 to April 20, 2020 on the sample of 429 respondents aged 15 to 65 years demonstrated that 83.3% of respondents had been exposed to fake news in relation to the coronavirus. 51.2% were able to recognise the hoax immediately, 47.9% got worried and 20.8% of them started to doubt the legibility of steps the authorities were taking in the fight against the coronavirus. 41.4% of respondents are used to verifying the information from at least one other source, 16.4% verify only the information obtained through social media, 15.2% verify all the information on the websites of the Ministry of Health or the Public Health Authority, 12.7% do not verify the information and 12.5% verify all tabloid information. The respondents find official sources (the average value of 4.07) and news feed websites (the average value of 3.5) the most authentic. On the contrary, social sites are regarded as the least credible (the average value of 2.45).

## Conclusion

Media play a crucial role in the society and that is keeping us all informed. Through media we may obtain not only important information but also express ourselves. However, this presumes a certain rate or a level of media literacy combined with the ability to identify various types of media and understand the messages they send us. Development of social media and Internet access have recently rendered the information much more accessible. However, the growing number of media and sources that keep us posted cast doubts about their credibility. Even though the phenomenon of fake news and social media abuse has not been completely new, it is the current pandemic that has opened the discussion about the risks of spreading of such news. On the contrary, fake news are likely to impair credibility of not only social media but also traditional media under exceptional circumstances, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, or negatively affect our views, opinions or behaviour. Reduced credibility in media

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<sup>22</sup> *Countering misinformation about COVID-19*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/countering-misinformation-about-covid-19>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Media trust index in Europe 2019*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/454409/europe-media-trust-index/>>.

<sup>24</sup> WARTSON, E.: *Perceived prevalence of fake news in media sources worldwide 2019*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1112026/fake-news-prevalence-attitudes-worldwide/>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Fake news worldwide – Statistics & Facts*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/topics/6341/fake-news-worldwide/>>.

has also been confirmed by other global studies suggesting that more and more people are being exposed to fake news. These people often believe they had first become aware of such disinformation in TV or radio broadcast, that is within the media that had originally been regarded as the most trustworthy. Another noteworthy phenomenon is the fact that although social media are less credible than they used to be, they are still widely popular, which increases the probability of being communicated a piece of fake news. As a result, media have to fight for confidence and loyalty. Nevertheless, this role seems to be much more complex than expected with competitors using alternative sources people tend to believe because they need to compensate for lack of trust.

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## HUMOUR AND SOCIAL NETWORKS DURING COVID-19

*Denisa Kraľovičová*

### Abstract

This article arose in the current situation in the world dealing with global COVID-19 crisis, especially the beginning of the second crisis in Slovakia. The article was created when we, the Slovaks had more experience with COVID-19 and were more or less prepared in terms of technical and medical equipment, as well as the qualified staff in the country. The reason for choosing this topic was the fact we noticed on social media during the first crisis, which is using or misusing humour as a tool to communicate in the crisis situation. The main aim of the article is emphasize and evaluate the role of humour in recent crisis situation from both, psychological, as well as marketing point of view. The aim of theoretical part is to make an overview of humour and its specifics on social media. Regarding practical part of this paper, it overlaps with its theoretical part. Its aims are to comment and compare humour being used on social media during the crisis situation in US (Hurricane Sandy) and Slovakia (COVID-19).

### Key words:

COVID-19. Facebook. Global Crisis. Humour and Jokes. Instagram. Social Media. Social Media Communication. Twitter.

### Introduction

Humour, jokes, comics, laughter. Manifestations of everyday life that we already consider automatic and we do not think about. But it was not always like this. *Gilles Lipovetsky* aptly summed up the situation dealing with comedians in today's world in his book *The Era of Emptiness*. „*A comedian* is far from a folk holiday, nor a holiday of wit. It has become a universal social command, a relaxed atmosphere, a permanent environment to which man is exposed even in everyday life.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Humour and Social Media

**Humour** has a very strong role nowadays. Thanks to humour, we can comment on current events and important topics. It can be used as a tool of disagreement and protest. It can also be used to express support and appreciation. Along with humour, *irony* also plays an important role on social networks. Four configurations of comics (irony, humour, naivety and absurdity) exist only exceptionally in their pure form, they are mostly combined, so we will deal with them individually. According to its author, Vladimír Borecký, these four configurations are considered to be only a methodological division in the field of comics. Sigmund Freud dealt mainly with naivety, especially children jokes. There are more authors, who dealt with humour, such as Cazamin and Ševčík. Ševčík considers humour to be based on conscious transposition chosen by its author, it is characterized by a passion for the real. It is comparable to *irony*, as it is transposing, but the process is reversed. Unlike irony, humour accurately and anxiously describes what it is, and pretends that it should be so. Also laughter goes hand in hand with humour and irony, but we will not deal with it in details. Regarding domestic authors, Ľ. Hulajová and M. Ungerová divide the media environment as follows: „**the media environment**” usually consists of print media (the press) electronic media (radio, TV) and new media

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<sup>1</sup> MURTHY, D., GROSS, A., McGARRY, M.: Visual Social Media and Big Data. Interpreting Instagram Images Posted on Twitter. In *Digital Culture and Society*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 114-132.

(the Internet, social networks). ”<sup>2</sup>We also agree with J. Hubinová, who claims that „the Internet is full of motivational quotes and hash tags to help people overcome the period of much time (quarantine) to think about a thing (the pandemic) they cannot change. ”<sup>3</sup>

Boyd considers *social networks* to be web services that allow people to create a public or semi-public profile within a limited system. Social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn or sites which content is shared by users of YouTube, Wikipedia, Bloggers or MySpace have gradually conquered this new space and divided it into specific areas. Comparing Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, all these three platforms are used very frequently, but Facebook (www.facebook.com) is still one of the most visited sites on the entire Internet, especially in Slovakia, as well as in the Czech Republic. Total number of active Facebook users per month is 2.41 billion, Instagram active users per month: 1.0 billion and YouTube active users per month: 1.9 billion. So for the purposes of this article, we will deal with humour on Facebook much more in details, especially during the crisis situation such as pandemic COVID-19. Regarding humour on social media, it is used for various reasons e.g. political campaigns, but we will deal with it as a tool of crisis communication of common users. Social media is perceived as web-based platforms which key applications offer opportunities for users to communicate and maintain social relationships with many people. The most optimistic accounts of social media convey that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube offer anyone, with necessary knowledge and Internet-access, the chance to engage in many-to-many dialogue across the world.

Visual social media data during disasters can reflect a ‘vernacular’ understanding of the disaster, which rather than glossing over humour, pets, and other everyday experiences, draws our attention to them. We agree with Fraustino, Liu and Jin that there is substantial evidence that social media use increases during disasters and the media choice is crucial – e.g. Twitter is considered to be quick with short and news updates. This is what happened in Slovakia during both crises. They also point out the fact that there are various types of social media users. Some of them only take part in information and do not even write anything or share a post („lurkers“). The others have thousands of followers and sometimes even organize public events via social media during the crisis. They have various reasons for using social media during the crises e.g. information retrieval, connection with family and friends and of course, stress – relieving humour. On the other hand, some people even do not use social media because of the issues of privacy and security.

## 2 Practical Part

„Social media such as Twitter and Instagram are fast, free, and multicast. These attributes make them particularly useful for crisis communication. However, the speed and volume also make them challenging to study. Historically, journalists controlled what/how images represented crises.“<sup>4</sup>Regarding practical part of this paper, we were inspired by one international case study in US and its specifics of crisis communication focusing on humour and its images on Instagram and Twitter. We have also focused our attention on Facebook in Slovakia. It has been the most

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<sup>2</sup> HULAJOVÁ, Ľ., UNGEROVÁ, M.: *Media, Marketing Communication and Politics*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> HUBINOVÁ, J.: The Melting Pot of Covid (A Mass Society or a Mass of Individuals). In KVETANOVÁ, Z., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> MURTHY, D., GROSS, A., MCGARRY, M.: Visual Social Media and Big Data. Interpreting Instagram Images Posted on Twitter. In *Digital Culture and Society*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 114-132.

frequently used social media platform in this country these days, as it has been used as the busiest crisis communication channel from the very start of COVID-19.

## 2.1 International Case Study of Social Media Images During and After Hurricane Sandy in US

This study explored the images shared on Twitter and Instagram and behavioural dynamic of disaster-related image sharing on social media. It is very special, because Hurricane Sandy is the first real-life disaster, where Instagram played a key role in social experience of the victims and these images were integrated with Twitter. As it comes to some specific details of this study, 11,964 images were studied and it reveals how social media users behave in a convergent social media space. These studied images appeared on social media during two-week timeline. Methodologically, it is very challenging to study visual social media data. It was found out that the consumption and production of food/drink, selfies, pets and humorous macro images highlight possible changes in the politics of representing disasters. We will not deal with the research methodology in detail in this part, as it is a topic for a separate article. Regarding the role of humour and deceptive images of this case study, it proved that that the images posted on Instagram and Twitter included significant numbers of deceptive images and the authors anecdotically saw a reasonable frequency of these types of images in the data used. These images were not studied too much in details and it is challenging for the authors in terms of future development in this area. „The importance of humour within our collected data was an interesting finding. As our case study was based on the convergence between Instagram and Twitter, we were able to see humour play into this cross-platform space and become networked into Twitter via hashtags. “<sup>5</sup> For example, some images, which featured celebrities – Sean Bean – Eddard Stark from *Game of Thrones*, *Sponge Bob Square Pants* image joined this pre-landfall stream via the fictional character Sandy Cheeks with hash tags such as #sandycheeks parodying Sandy were added. The storm took place around Halloween in the US, so the images included pictures from the original *Frankenstein* movie from 1931. The humorous hash tag #frankenstorm appeared on social media at that time. Many images, which parodied the character Sandy from the classic musical/movie *Grease* appeared as well. These images included some humorous hash tags. Even on the day of US landfall, various humorous images were more frequent. These images mirrored the disaster experiences. The following picture demonstrates the parodied topics we noticed:



**Picture 1: Character Sandy from musical Grease**

Source: JARVEY, N.: *Hurricane Sandy Prompts Grease, Sponge Bob Square Pants Jokes on Twitter*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2012. [online]. [2012-10-29]. Available at: <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hurricane-sandy-grease-spongebob-squarepants-383988>>.

<sup>5</sup> MURTHY, D., GROSS, A., MCGARRY, M.: Visual Social Media and Big Data. Interpreting Instagram Images Posted on Twitter. In *Digital Culture and Society*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 114-132.

## 2.2 Specifics of Humour Used on Facebook in Slovakia During COVID-19

Regarding the overall observation of Facebook, we noticed mostly humour dealing with political topics, topics dealing with students and education, love and relationships, job and common practical advices dealing with e.g. food, face masks, domestic quarantine. We noticed that the users used humour to alleviate the crisis situation, but we also noticed too ironical character of some comments, mostly the political ones. Although it is not necessary to take the situation of these days lightly, even in the most turbulent times, there is room for unintelligent and mundane humour from the Internet. We haven't lost our sense of humour yet. Various jokes were collected mostly from Facebook and deal with COVID-19, its impact on our lives in the form of domestic quarantine and isolation (home office, mandatory wearing of face masks etc.).



**Picture 2: Joke dealing with COVID-19**

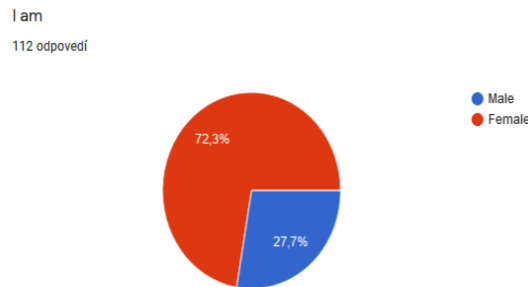
Source: HLAVATOVIČ, V.: *Smiechcezrúško. Pozritesinajlepšievtipy o domácejkaranténe*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-03-19]. Available at: <<https://fici.sme.sk/c/22362571/smiech-cez-rusko-pozrite-si-najlepsie-vtipy-o-domacej-karantene.html>>.

Regarding humour on social media in Slovakia and US, it is necessary to notice the importance of cultural background. Both, the Slovaks as well as the Americans have not lost their sense of humour in crisis situation, but different social media and type of humour was used. The humour in both cases reflected current situation in the country and ability of people to react in the crisis situation. As we said earlier, different platforms were used, the Slovaks used mostly Facebook and Instagram and the Americans Instagram and Twitter. These facts reflect the cultural background too.

### 2.2.1 Methodology of Research

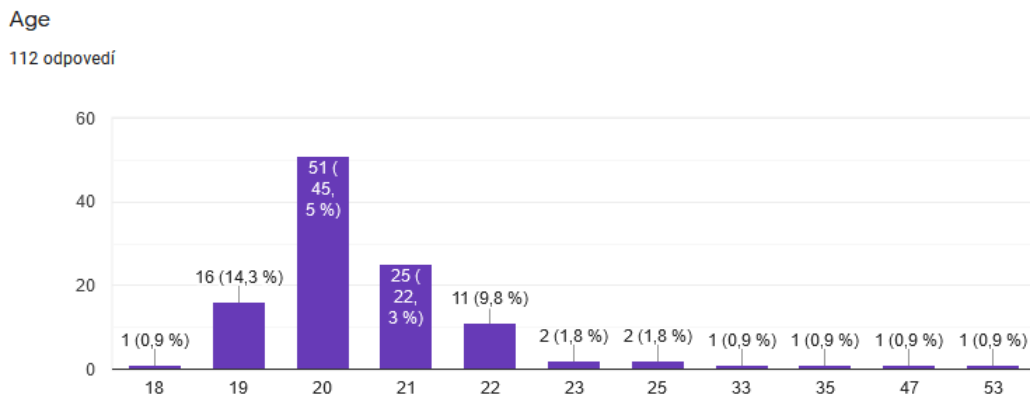
In order to observe a more detailed examination of the topic being discussed, we have made a quantitative research. The research was made at FMK UCM in Trnava, Slovakia during October and November 2020. In the first phase, we used some secondary data, which were obtained by the method of observing social networks, especially Facebook as we expected it to be the most frequently used social network these days in Slovakia. Following these, we have come up with some predictions regarding the areas as follows: social media preferred (Instagram or Facebook), character of humour being used (analysis of pictures, comments, videos etc.), topics focusing on humour, personal experience of respondents, sense of humour etc. The supporting method which was used mainly in the processing of open questions were online interviews with students during the English language lessons. Secondly, we have made the research for the purpose of obtaining some primary data. Our respondents were daily and external FMK students (first and second grade), 3 study programs as follows: marketing communication, mass media communication and media relations. The tool used for collecting the data was a questionnaire consisting of 14 questions (two of them were of demographic character). The questionnaire was

created by Google and was distributed to respondents by direct e-mail. The questionnaire was filled in by 112 respondents. The data collected were made into graphs, the obtained primary data were subsequently analyzed and used for conclusions in this field. The following graphs demonstrate the nature of research sample:



**Chart 1: Gender of respondents**

Source: Own processing



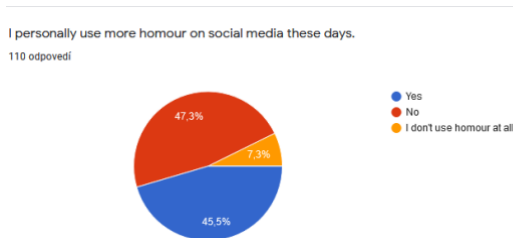
**Chart 2: Age of respondents**

Source: Own processing

Summing up the demographic data, out of total number of respondents (112), 72,3 % were women and 27,7% men. So the questionnaire was answered mostly by women. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 – 53.

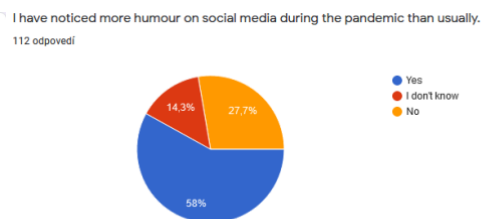
### 2.2.2 Research Results

Regarding frequency of humour being used on social media during the pandemic and personal experience of respondents, 58% of them noticed more humour on social media these days. We have expected a bit higher percentage. Slightly higher number of respondents noticed higher frequency of humour being used on social media during COVID-19. This fact is also quite surprising as we expected much higher percentage of those, who have noticed more humour on social media recently. The following graphs demonstrate it:



**Chart 3: Personal experience**

Source: Own processing



**Chart 4: Frequency of humour on social media**

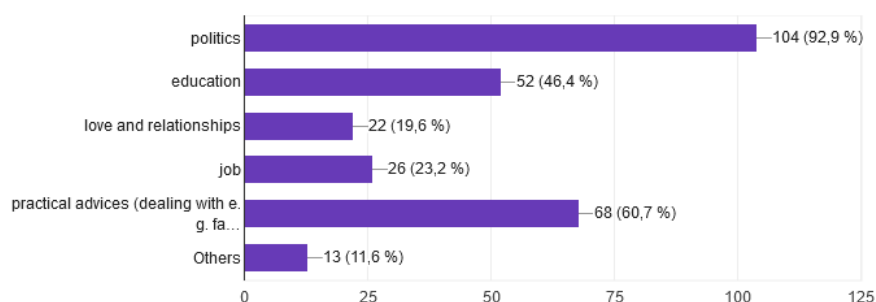
Source: Own processing



As for the topics being discussed on social networks, it was mostly politics, practical advices, education, job, love and relationships and others respectively.

I have noticed mostly some humorous pictures and comments on social media which focused on:

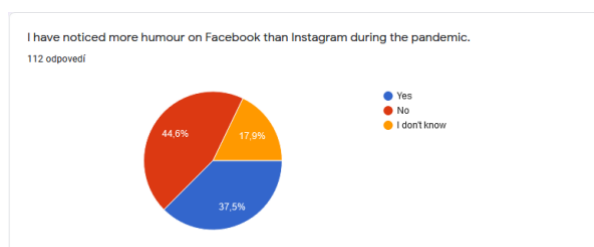
112 odpovedí



**Chart 5: Topics being discussed on social media**

Source: Own processing

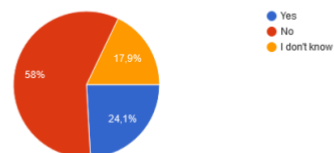
Regarding some open questions, we asked about the humorous pictures, videos and comments the respondents saw on social media, as well as the funniest joke they saw. The first place received a contribution of our prime minister Igor Matovic and his speech in Brussels called “One time next time.” Then there were the posts as follows: elections in the USA, face masks being worn under the nose, Matovic and national testing, certificates, man and women kissing with masks, Donald Trump, memes dealing with forgetting face masks, falling asleep during the class, Covidflakes in Orava region, chipping, 2020 predictions, lockdown in Slovakia, Marian Kotleba, Leonardo Di Caprio, dancing doctors, kids, cats and dogs etc. The following charts demonstrate frequency of humorous comments on Facebook and Instagram, as well as the character of humour being used on social media during COVID-19. Regarding the platform, the respondents noticed slightly more humorous memes on Instagram than on Facebook (Instagram – 44,6%, Facebook – 37,5%). Following the online interviews made during the English classes, we have noticed that as it comes to other platforms, the respondents also prefer Tik Tok quite a lot, so this is an interesting fact to be observed in future. The social media users use especially too ironic (66,1%) and not very decent humour. The character of humour, as well as the platforms used during COVID-19, are demonstrated by the following graphs much more in details:



**Chart 6: Preferred platform**

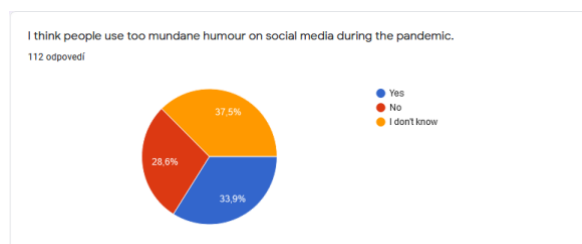
Source: Own processing

I think people use very decent humour on social media during the pandemic. 112 odpovedí



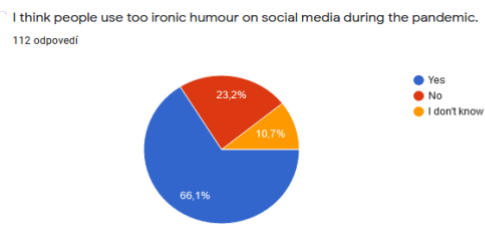
**Chart 7: Character of humour on social media**

Source: Own processing



**Chart 8: Character of humour on social media**

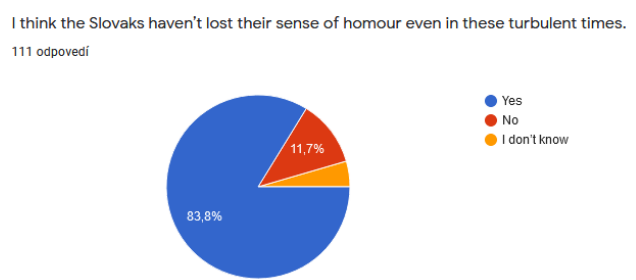
Source: Own processing



**Chart 9: Character of humour on social media**

Source: Own processing

The following graph deals with the Slovaks and their sense of humour. 83,8% of the respondents agree with this statement.



**Chart 10: Slovaks and their sense of humour**

Source: Own processing

Following the previous facts, we would like to conclude this part with emphasising the fact that we, the Slovaks have not lost our sense of humour yet, even in these turbulent times. That is very positive for future development of the crisis situation in the country.

## Conclusion

As we said at the beginning of this paper, what significantly influenced us in terms of this topic is the current pandemic situation in the world, the first as well as the second COVID-19 crisis. Regarding inspiration from media world, it was an interview with Soňa Peková, who said that if the virus does not disappear by itself, there is a chance that it will mutate and return again to the Czech Republic. Survey, which was made for the purpose of this interview proved that 28% of the Czechs is very worried that the virus may return again, 52% is afraid a little bit, 15% is not afraid and 5% is not afraid of it at all. We think that the results would be similar in Slovakia and that is space for further research in this field. Especially the topic fear and its role on social media during the crisis as it goes hand in hand with humour on social media during COVID-19.

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- HUBINOVÁ, J.: The Melting Pot of Covid (A Mass Society or a Mass of Individuals). In KVETANOVÁ, Z., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 297-302.

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## PODCAST – NEW COMMUNICATION PHENOMENON

Viera Krúpová – Zora Hudíková

### Abstract

Podcasts have become a popular format of media. Their quantity, originality, and popularity are constantly on the rise. However, in Slovakia, this format has not yet received enough attention. There is no systematic collection of data concerned with their production, content, authors, no complex or regular following of its listening. The authors of this study are primarily concerned with the main reasons behind the rising popularity of podcasts in the world as well as Slovakia. They approached the topic from several perspectives: what are the reasons for listening to podcasts, who is their target group, and who are their creators. They are also defining the term podcast, and take a short historical excursion in terms of how they developed in the world and at home. They are supporting their arguments with current research in the field. They are also bringing an exclusive survey from the 2muse agency, which has been provided to the authors. They interpret it in terms of domestic and foreign contexts and indicate trends for the near future, especially with the change of our lifestyle under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Key words:

COVID-19. New Forms of Media. Online Participation. Podcast. Radio Broadcasting.

### Introduction

The establishment of podcasts has resonated in recent decades in both- developed and less developed countries - with increasing intensity. This phenomenon is also becoming a topic of many scientific types of research and discourses. When considering the reasons for the expansion of podcasts into everyday life, we should be seeking the answers in a lifestyle that is being modified into an "online" form. People need to be equipped, not only in work but also outside of it, to solve as many things as possible in the shortest time. The pressure comes not only from employers but also from the overall social setting - to be available at all times and in all places. It also interferes with- how, where, and when are people receiving new information. As everything- they want to access it immediately or when they have the time. The media had to start adapting to this trend, as well as to the new rhythm of life. It became clear that it is necessary to move the content online and make it available and up to date, without any limitations. Based on Hana Pravdová, Jana Radošinská a Ján Višňovský "*the influence of the internet and digital technology on media is huge. It changed the way we work with a text, on how we proceed when creating individual genre types and on the content and the formal representation of information*".<sup>1</sup> Over time, it has become apparent that in this changing world, this will not be enough to meet everyone's needs in obtaining information. The pressure to use time efficiently, the need to complete as many activities in a day as possible, work, sports, and social life related, resulted in another, so to speak, new phenomenon. The possibility to receive information while completing a different activity. The solution was offered in the form of a new platform, a podcast. More significant expansion of the number of podcasts connected with the acquisition of new types, formats and authors can be identified in Slovakia since 2017. Renowned media, news portals, as well as personalities of cultural, social, and sports life are exposed to the creation of podcasts. A specific category of this new trend are podcasters who are creating their content without any previous experience in media creation.

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<sup>1</sup> PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Koncepty a praktiky multiplatformovej žurnalistiky. Slovensko v sieťach digitálnych diaľnic*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 5.

Podcasters from the ranks of influencers and YouTubers are also well recognized. It is, therefore, possible to talk about a new communication phenomenon of the present – the podcast. There are many definitions of what a podcast is. One of the comprehensive descriptions was created in 2006 by the author Deborah Potter, who said: *"they are digital files that can be downloaded from the Internet and accessible anywhere and anytime"*<sup>2</sup>. Based on the new Oxford dictionary, podcast is, *"digital recording of a broadcast or a similar program, that is accessible online and can be downloaded to a personal audio player"*<sup>3</sup>. Richard Berry also compares podcast to radio broadcasting, but he puts emphasis on *"their specific characteristics when it comes to their style, sound, and aesthetical features"*<sup>4</sup>. In general, podcast is defined as *"sound recording, that is made available online, to spread information and dissemination of knowledge. A podcast is available online or can be accessed offline after being saved to a personal mobile device"*<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, we are talking about the so-called –audio on demand. In Slovakia, this phenomenon is still being explored to a minimal extent. There is no systematic data collection in several categories. There is a lack of an exact definition of the target group of podcast listeners. There are no program rankings, and neither are listening rankings. Professional as well as amateur producers identify podcasts as a progressive form of the present, that's why they create them and experiment with them. They aim to creatively process topics with the ambition to attract the attention of listeners. It focuses on the starting points on which podcasts and their authors build to maximize the affinity of the target group. They pay special attention to the degree of listening to this form of media and estimating its direction in the upcoming years, all based on the available research abroad. They compare these findings with the exclusive study of the 2muse Agency, which has been provided to the authors. Their interpretation of specific conclusions is based on logical methods such as induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, generalization, etc. They also focus on the COVID-19 era.

## 1 Podcast as a Form of Media

The creation of the first podcast dates back to the period of the creation of platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter. However, the popularity of podcasts and their spread among users - whether professionals or the general public - was far from being so fast. The concept of a podcast was created in 2000. Initially, this format was perceived as a blog connected with a sound. The word- podcasting started to be used only later on. *"The word podcast originated in 2004, by combining the name of Apple's iPod with the English word broadcasting"*<sup>6</sup>. The term was for the first time officially used in February 2004 by its author, journalist Ben Hammersley. The first podcast in Slovakia appeared in 2005. On July 28, 2005, Slovak writer and journalist Tomáš Ulej began making his recordings of literature and published them under the heading,

<sup>2</sup> POTTER, D. L.: iPod, you pod, we all pod: eager to lure news consumers, media outlets are experimenting with news-on-demand podcasts. They're fun, fresh--and often unpolished. In *American Journalism Review*, 2006, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 64. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <<https://go.gale.com/ps/anonymus?id=GALE%7CA142798333&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=10678654&p=AONE&sw=w>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Podcast declared 'Word of the Year' by Oxford Dictionary*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019. [online]. [2020-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.exchange4media.com/media-others-news/podcast-declared-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionary-18950.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> BERRY, R.: Part of the establishment: Reflecting on 10 years of podcasting as an audio medium. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 666. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354856516632105>>.

<sup>5</sup> *Čo je to podcast?.* [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<http://www.webakademia.sk/laicka-verejnost/co-je-podcast>>.

<sup>6</sup> TVRDOŇ, D.: *Čo je podcast a kde nájdete podcasty?.* Released on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2017. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://tech.sme.sk/c/20681175/co-je-podcast-a-kde-najdete-podcasty.html>>.

first Slovak podcast. Radio FM is one of the pioneers of podcasts in Slovakia. On April 1, 2006, the third circuit of the public Slovak Radio launched a podcast service on its website. Radio officials justified this by the great popularity of podcasting in the world. Within the system, the software automatically tracked updates and downloaded files to the user's disk, which could then be copied to a personal MP3 player. Marcel Forgáč, the chief editor of Radio FM, said that *"the listener can listen to a favorite show, or section of it, anywhere and anytime"*<sup>7</sup>. However, broader expansion of podcasts in Slovakia came only after 2017, when other media and news platforms began to create podcasts. Among the essential experimenters in Slovakia is Denník SME. Its first news podcast, Dobré ráno, was created in October 2017. Intensive discussions around podcasts in Slovakia began in 2018. Several Slovak portals, online radios, commercial radios, television, and even the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic started to create podcasts. The trend of podcasting continued in 2019. Several media launched new podcasts, and all Slovak radios began publishing shows in the form of podcasts as well, including RTVS. Several celebrities and YouTubers have also tried this genre<sup>8</sup>.

In connection with the new phenomenon of a podcast, there is a discourse among the professional public as to where to include this medium. With the advent of digital technology and the Internet, there has been discussion around the "new media." There are efforts to unambiguously define the new medium phenomenon, but there are no exact conclusions.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it can be claimed that in general, the new media includes forms of communication that are dependent on the use of modern technologies in their creation and dissemination. Slavomír Gálik and Sabína Tolnaiová Gáliková emphasize that new communication technologies have a significant impact on human cognitive changes and subsequently on differences in culture and society<sup>10</sup>. Based on Robert K. Logan's definition *"The term new media generally refers to a media that is digital, interactive, involves two-way communication, computing to some extent, and is unlike an old media such as telephone, radio, and television"*<sup>11</sup>. Even older media that did not initially need computer technology, now use it. However, Robert K. Logan puts the term "new media" in quotation marks, which means that he refers to interactive digital media. *"New media without quotation marks, generally refers to media that are new because of their content. To better illustrate the difference in terminology, we can say that today, all "new media" are also new media."*<sup>12</sup> Based on the information stated above, podcasts can be classified as "new media" as well as new media. However, a lot of "new media" was created by combining older media with the use of computer technology. When looking for a podcast's origin, it is based on traditional radio broadcasting. A podcast, like radio, has an identical purpose of disseminating information, which by its specificity affects the listener's perception. The sound phenomenon of radio and its values have not been surpassed despite the advent of new technologies. An answer to a question, why is it that way, can be justified by personal characteristics of broadcasting, which are, based on Karol Orban *"unrestricted dissemination of information, the possibility of using live speech and acoustic*

<sup>7</sup> AUGUSTÍN, R.: *Rádio FM spúšťa podcast*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2006. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://medialne.etrend.sk/radio/radio-fm-spusta-podcast.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> TVRDOŇ, D.: *Podcasty na Slovensku získali v roku 2019 stovky tisíc poslucháčov*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-11-01]. Available at: <<https://podcasty.sme.sk/c/22294836/podcasty-na-slovensku-v-roku-2019-prehľad-a-cisla.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> See also: LISTER, M. et al.: *New media: a critical introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York : Routledge, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Cyberspace as a New Existential Dimension of Man. In ABU-TAIEH, E., EL MOUATASIM, A., AL HADID, I. H. (eds.): *Cyberspace*. London : IntechOpen, 2020, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> LOGAN, R. K.: *Understanding new media: extending Marshall McLuhan*. New York : Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 5.

*images of reality*"<sup>13</sup>. One of the most significant advantages of acoustic dissemination of information is their accessibility and the fact that it is possible to listen to them so-called obediently (prísluchovo). Both academics and professional practitioners discuss whether podcasting can be considered a "specific form of online participation"<sup>14</sup> or a "specific type of amateur radio"<sup>15</sup>. Siobhán McHugh points out that in recent years, the understanding of a podcast has shifted "from the technology itself to a unique media genre." <sup>16</sup> This conceptualization of podcasting refers to it as a "new hybrid medium that is accessible to both amateurs and professionals in media."<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Popularity of Podcasts

The most common way we categorize podcasts is by their content or the topic they cover. The content is focused on various segments of society – business, business marketing, science, education, news, politics, economics, personal development, motivation, travel, sports, nutrition. Podcasts are also oriented towards the needs of specific target groups for which they are intended, for example, for women or children, etc. Special podcasts are created to bring humour or various forms of entertainment. Individual applications such as Apple Podcasts or Spotify, also make their own, unique categorizations. Each application has its list of categories, although many intersect and are similar. The topics are usually business, news, sports, art, fiction, marketing, and alike. The listening of Slovak podcasts can be determined indirectly based on who publishes them and how often they are published. "Another indirect indicator is the ranking of podcasts on platforms such as Apple Podcasts and Spotify"<sup>18</sup>. Web Chartable regularly provides updated rankings for both of these platforms, and it can be found on its site every month. This is what the results look like for March 2020.

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<sup>13</sup> ORBAN, K.: Rozhlasová tvorba. In TUŠER, A. et al.: *Praktikum mediálnej tvorby*. Bratislava : BVŠP, 2010, p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> MILLETTE, M.: Independent Podcasting as a Specific Online Participative Subculture: a case study of Montreal's podcasters. In *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 12, p. 2-11. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <<https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/spir/article/view/9111/7199>>.

<sup>15</sup> BERRY, R.: Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2006, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 144. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354856506066522>>.

<sup>16</sup> McHUGH, S.: *Memoir for Your Ears: The Podcast Life*. AVIESON, Bunty, Fiona GILES a Sue JOSEPH. *Mediating Memory: Tracing the Limits of Memoir*. New York : Routledge, 2017, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> BERRY, R.: Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2006, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 157. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354856506066522>>.

<sup>18</sup> TVRDOŇ, D.: *Ktoré sú najpopulárnejšie slovenské podcasty*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-09-02]. Available at: <<https://slovenskepodcasty.sk/1/najpopularnejsie-slovenske-podcasty/>>.

**Table 1: Podcast ranking on platforms – Apple Podcasts and Spotify, March 2020**

Poradie podcastov na Apple podcastoch:	Poradie podcastov na Spofity:
Dobré ráno/Denný podcast denníka SME (SME.sk)	Dobré ráno/Denný podcast denníka SME (SME.sk)
Denník N Newsfilter (Denník N)	Denník N Newsfilter (Denník N)
Braňo Závodský Naživo (Rádio Expres)	Boris a Brambor (zapo)
Podcasty Aktuality.sk (Aktuality.sk)	Lužifčák podcast (Lužifčák)
Boris a Brambor (zapo)	Podcasty Aktuality.sk (Aktuality.sk)
NAHLAS/Aktuality.sk (Aktuality.sk)	jauuu, PS: to bolelo (zapo)
Ráno Nahlas (Aktuality.sk)	Braňo Závodský Naživo (Rádio Expres)
Denník N Podcasty (Denník N)	NAHLAS/aktuality.sk (Aktuality.sk)
Vedátorský podcast (vedatorskypodcast)	Denník N Podcasty (Denník N)
Rozhovory ZKH (SME.sk)	Rozhovory ZKH (SME.sk)

Source: *Apple Podcasts – Slovakia – All Podcasts*. [online]. [2020-09-05]. Available at: <<https://chartable.com/charts/itunes/sk-all-podcasts-podcasts>>.

From the information stated above, we can conclude that the most popular podcasts are coming from reputable media. Well established brand with high popularity seems to be an advantage. Podcasts coming from official media have the benefit of being processed at a higher quality in terms of their technical processing, content, and interpretation. The sound quality is comparable to the one received on radios, and the presenters are experts. As for amateur podcasts, those whose authors are well-known personalities, moderators, or well-known influencers are reaching higher levels of listening. The rising growth and popularity of podcasts was also caused by technological progress. Abroad, data about the podcast world and its development are collected by major research agencies. In the United States, it's Edison Research. According to its latest survey, *The Edison Infinite Dial 2020, "in 2020, 104 million people are listening to podcasts monthly, in the United States"*.<sup>19</sup> This is an increase of 19 per cent compared to 2019. On average, according to the research, an average listener listens to podcasts for 6 hours and 39 minutes in a week. As other examples, we can mention Australia, where 13 per cent of listeners<sup>20</sup> listen to podcasts weekly, or Canada where it is 19 per cent<sup>21</sup>. In the UK, the most renowned agency concerned with the podcast market is The Rajar Midas Survey. According to the Rajar Midas Audio Survey Spring 2020, the number of podcast listeners is growing year by year. In England, *"18 per cent of people aged 15+ listen to podcasts weekly, which is an increase of 4 per cent compared to 2019"*<sup>22</sup>. The Digital News Report 2019, which monitors and compares trends in the recognizability and listening to podcasts in 38 countries, is being prepared by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University. According to this, the knowledge of podcasts in Slovakia exceeds the European average. *"Compared to the surrounding countries, Slovaks more often answered that they listen to podcasts. As many as 43 per cent of respondents said they listened to a podcast last month."*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *The Infinite Dial 2020*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <<https://www.edisonresearch.com/the-infinite-dial-2020/>>.

<sup>20</sup> *The infinite dial australia 2018*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<http://www.edisonresearch.com/the-infinite-dial-australia-2018/>>.

<sup>21</sup> *The infinite dial canada 2018*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<http://www.edisonresearch.com/infinite-dial-canada-2018/>>.

<sup>22</sup> FERRIGAN, L.: *MIDAS Measurement of Internet Delivered Audio Services*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-27]. Available at: <[https://www.rajar.co.uk/docs/news/MIDAS\\_Spring\\_2020.pdf](https://www.rajar.co.uk/docs/news/MIDAS_Spring_2020.pdf)>.

<sup>23</sup> TVRDOŇ, D.: *Takmer polovica Slovákov pozná podcasty. Sme európsky nadpriemer*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22143028/digital-news-report-2019-o-podcastoch-na-slovensku.html>>.



## Frekvencia konzumácie podcastov na Slovensku

Najviac vzrástol počet ľudí, ktorí počúvajú podcasty niekoľkokrát týždenne. Avšak nárast je vo všetkých kategóriách pomerne viditeľný.



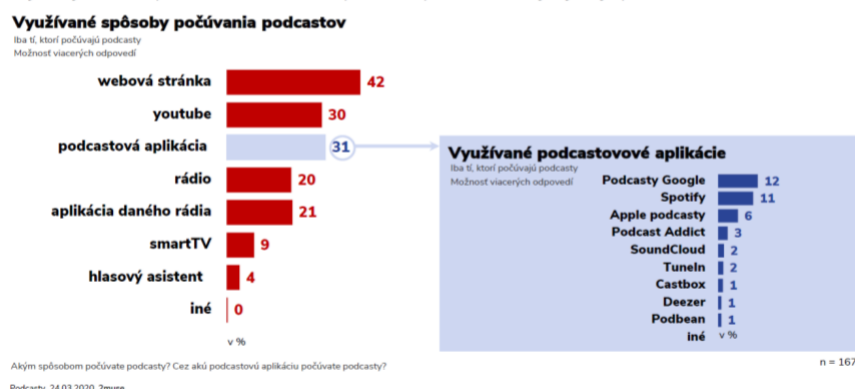
**Chart 1: Frequency of listening to podcasts in Slovakia.**

Source: *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

A regular podcast survey in 2019 was started by the 2muse agency, which collected the data, through an online survey, from an 18+ group. The surveys were conducted in November 2019 (999 respondents) and March 2020 (803 respondents). According to the study, the number of listeners has yearly growth. While in November 2019, 15 per cent of respondents listened to podcasts, in March 2020 it was 21 per cent. The most significant increase in the number of listeners was noticed in the category of weekly listeners. The growth is also visible in all other categories. According to the survey, 6 per cent of respondents listen to podcasts once a week, as well as 6 per cent, listen to podcasts several times a week. 3 per cent of respondents listen to podcasts daily or almost daily.<sup>24</sup>

## Akým spôsobom počúvajú Slováci podcasty?

Slováci zatiaľ počúvajú podcasty hlavne cez webové stránky, pričom dvaja z piatich využívajú viacej možností, najčastejšie web a youtube, keďže mnohé z podcastových kanálov majú aj svoju youtube verziu.



**Chart 2: Podcast listening platforms**

Source: *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

The 2muse agency also researched on which platforms people listen to podcasts the most. Slovaks most often listen to podcasts on a website, followed by Youtube, and in the third position is one of the podcast applications (Google Podcasts, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Podcast Addict, SoundCloud, Tunnel, Castbox, Deezer, Podbean and others).<sup>25</sup> On a sample of 803 respondents, the agency also evaluated the listening of Slovak podcasts in March 2020 – spontaneously (name without a hint) and support (selection from the submitted sample).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

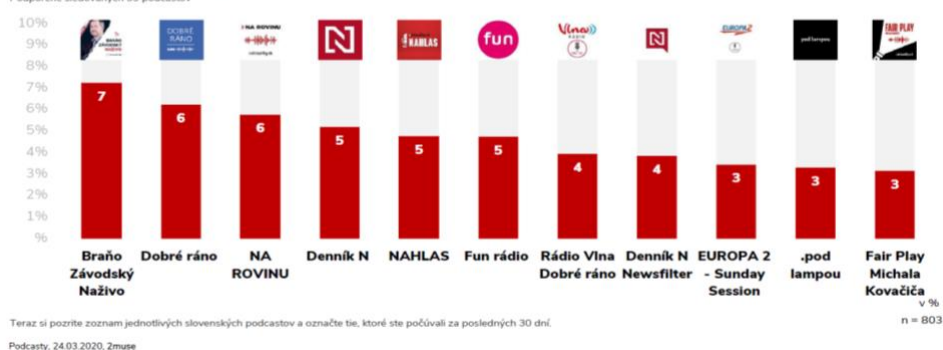
<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

## Najpočúvanejšie podcasty v marci 2020 - podporene

Pre podporené testovanie sme vybrali 33 slovenských podcastov rôznych žánrov, medzi hlavných hráčov vystrelilo aj rádio Expres s Braňom Závodským naživo.

### Výber zo zoznamu (podporené opytovanie) – TOP 11

Podporené sledovaných 33 podcastov



### Chart 3: Listening to podcasts – additional

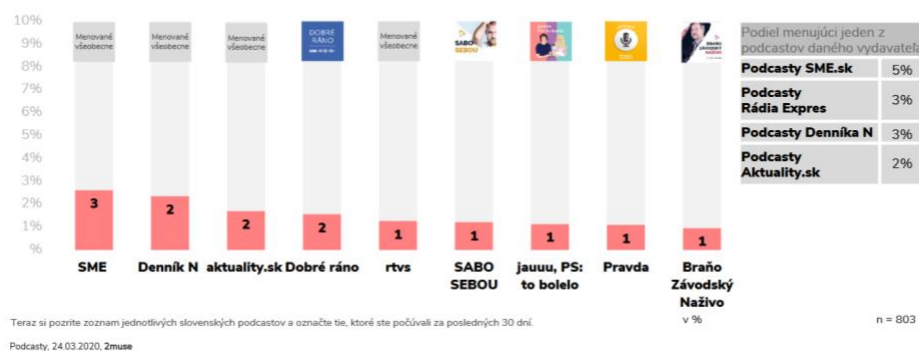
Source: *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

When asked what podcasts do you listen to, the respondents spontaneously stated that they are listening to one of the podcasts created by the journal SME. However, not everyone could determine which specific podcast from the journal it was. On a chart of results in spontaneous inquiries, Denník N finished second, and aktuality.sk landed third place.<sup>27</sup> Based on the information mentioned above, we can conclude that podcasts that are a part of a professional online news portal are starting to be more recognized.

## Najpočúvanejšie podcasty v marci 2020 - spontánne

Spontánne ľudia uvádzali najčastejšie niektorý z podcastov SME, ide o najsilnejšieho „podcastového vydavateľa“. Celkovo ľudia najčastejšie menujú podcasty všeobecne „počúvam SME“. Menej často uvedú konkrétne Dobré ráno, Rozhovory ZKH, Zoom či Klik.

### (spontánne opytovanie)

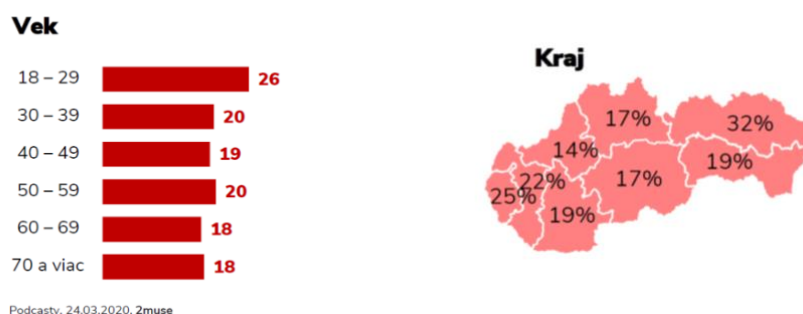


### Chart 4: Listening to podcasts – spontaneously

Source: *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

To support the testing (choice from the submitted list), the agency selected 33 Slovak podcasts of various genres. Respondents were asked which of the specific podcasts they had listened to over the past 30 days. During the supported testing, the results showed that the podcast of Rádio Expres with Braňo Závodský took the first place, the second place got Dobré ráno created by the journal SME and the third-place – Na rovinku by portal aktuality.sk. Among the top ten highest rated podcasts in Slovakia, official media podcasts dominated, while amateur podcasts lagged behind. Again, this is due to the advantage of the listener's familiarity with the brand and its reputation.

<sup>27</sup> *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.



**Chart 5, 6: Listening to podcasts based on an age group/Listening to podcasts based on a district**  
 Source: *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

To answer the question – who are the active listeners of podcasts, we can state, based on domestic as well as international research, that they are mainly users from the younger generation. The main reason for it is that it is natural for young people to use modern technology. They quickly adapt to platforms such as YouTube, Amazon, Netflix, or Spotify. In an article on podcast listeners, by D. Jovic, he states that "67 per cent of podcast listeners are between the ages of 18 and 44"<sup>28</sup>. He further notes that podcasts are more popular amongst men (56 per cent) than women (44 per cent). Listening to podcasts is also preferred by groups with higher education - up to 68 per cent of listeners have a university degree. Similar data were obtained by the 2muse Agency, which stated that most listeners were aged between 18 to 29 (26 per cent), followed by a group aged from 30 to 39 (20 per cent). However, it would be incorrect to claim that older generations don't listen to podcasts. Even in older age groups, over the age of 50, there is no significant decline of interest in podcasts. In terms of regional distribution, most listeners are in the Košice region, followed by Bratislava.<sup>29</sup> However, the size of the residence is not decisive; the listener base is extremely balanced. In terms of gender, Slovakia also has more men listening to podcasts than women. As abroad, in Slovakia as well, most listeners have a university degree and an income of more than 1,500 euros per month. Thus, Slovaks are showing the same trend as in the world.<sup>30</sup> If we were to create a podcast listener's profile based on the information from the survey of the 2muse agency, it would look as follows. It would be a man, university-educated, with a higher income, living in Bratislava or Košice region, aged 18 to 39, listening to podcasts on a website, youtube, or via a podcast application, several times a week. Another trend suggested by the survey is the increasing popularity of podcasts in Slovakia. This is not proven only by the yearly increase in podcast listening (from 15 to 21 per cent) but also by the increase in listening to podcasts a few times a week. The increase in the popularity of podcasts can also be found in the database of sources and specifics of classical radio broadcasting. As a result, radio programs have a precisely defined time range and can only be listened to at a specific time. On the other hand, there is the advantage of permanent online and offline availability of the podcast and its unlimited time range. Classic radios often solve this by storing sessions in an online archive. But more and more, downloading and listening to podcasts, later on, is becoming easier and more convenient for the listeners. Also, it is possible to subscribe to their regular collection, thus preventing the listener from missing a new episode. Another factor is that the offer provided by classical radio is limited. The podcast listener can choose from a broader range of genres, offered topics, formats, but also moderators, who approach the listener.

<sup>28</sup> JOVIC, D.: *40 Powerful Podcast Statistics to Tune Into*. Released 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.smallbizgenius.net/by-the-numbers/podcast-statistics/>>.

<sup>29</sup> *Počúvanie podcastov*. [Final report of Agency 2muse]. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

## Conclusion: The Future of Podcasts

When thinking about the future of podcasts in the upcoming years, it is optimal to look at the reasons why are they popular today. In the world of visual culture and fast technological progress, it can be challenging to understand their growing popularity. Mainly when looking at the latest statistics that suggest that the average length of a marketing video is decreasing (almost by 49%, the maximum length is 60 sec<sup>31</sup>). Life is getting faster; people want to know everything they need in the shortest amount of time. However, with podcasts, the situation is entirely different. As many as "90 per cent of users listen to podcasts on an average of 41 minutes."<sup>32</sup> There are several reasons why are the listeners willing to dedicate more time to listening to podcasts than watching video production. First of all, podcasts allow multitasking. According to a study by Edison Research, people listen to podcasts as follows: "49 per cent at home, 22 per cent in a car, 11 per cent at work, 8 per cent during exercise"<sup>33</sup>. This means they save time and do at least two activities at once. The same study showed that the most common activities, when listening to podcasts, are housework, driving, cooking, or baking. The second reason for their extraordinary popularity is the fact that listening to podcasts allows them to receive the latest information comfortably. According to the Publisher's Guide of Podcasting, news podcasts are produced by massive media such as "The Washington Post, Vox, The Guardian, The Economist, and The New York Times"<sup>34</sup>. The latest one has more than 2 million listeners a day. People usually listen to podcasts within 24-48 hours after their downloading, and as many as "52 per cent of respondents said they listen to the entire podcast, 41 stated that they listen to most of it"<sup>35</sup>. In addition to learning new things and listening to the latest information, people also use podcasts as entertainment. These types of podcasts are popular mainly due to the diversity of their formats. There are interviews, reading fiction or non-fiction, etc., they take the form of monologues and dialogues, even live podcasts are starting to appear.

Media and marketing professionals see the future of podcasts in their continuous growth. Katarína Šebová from Social Media Lead TRIAD said "Podcasts have great potential in the future, and their listening is already significantly increasing, which is related to these crazy times and our laziness to read." Online strategist Jeremy Finch admits that just as podcasts have replaced analogue radio, in time, they will be replaced by something else as well. But until then, he sees the prospect of their growth, mainly in "the diverse mix of styles, topics, and hosts in my podcast library."<sup>36</sup> The number of adaptations and modifications of podcasts will continue to grow; this is related to the growing popularity of podcasts as well as to the advancement and development of technological possibilities. Some examples can be already found today. For example, the TV show "Dirty John" is available on Netflix and is also available on the

<sup>31</sup> SIBIRTSEVA, M.: *The state of video Marketing 2019-2020: Numbers, Statistics and Trends*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-10-14]. Available at: <<https://blog.depositphotos.com/the-state-of-video-marketing-2019-2020.html>>.

<sup>32</sup> MISENER, D.: *Podcast episodes got shorter in 2019*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<https://blog.pacific-content.com/podcast-episodes-got-shorter-in-2019-69e1f3b6c82f>>.

<sup>33</sup> *The podcast consumer 2019: The report from the infinity dial 2019*. 2019. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<http://www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Edison-Research-Podcast-Consumer-2019.pdf>>.

<sup>34</sup> THORPE, K. E.: *The Publisher's Guide to Podcasting*. London : WNIP, 2019, p. 6-7. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<https://whatsnewinpublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-publisher%E2%80%99s-Guide-to-Podcasting.pdf>>.

<sup>35</sup> *The podcast consumer 2019: The report from the infinity dial 2019*. 2019. [online]. [2020-10-12]. Available at: <<http://www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Edison-Research-Podcast-Consumer-2019.pdf>>.

<sup>36</sup> FINCH, J.: *The Future of Podcasts*. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://www.altitudeinc.com/future-podcasts/>>.

*Christopher Goffard podcast*<sup>37</sup>. This adaptation received a lot of positive feedback from the audience. HBO has adapted this way of thinking and has also turned several podcasts into a TV series. A similar example can be found in Slovakia as well. The popular podcast Boris a Brambor became a television entertainment show<sup>38</sup>. The future of podcasts will also be progressing due to intelligent speakers; we will enter a new era of podcasts. Due to modern technology, their listening will be more comfortable. The New York Times has already launched its news podcast, The Daily, directly on Amazon Alexa<sup>39</sup>. This intelligent technology is capable of voice interaction, playing music, creating to-do lists, providing up-to-date information about weather, traffic, sports, etc., in real-time, as well as streaming podcasts. Technological solutions will advance, and podcast producers will be able to reach a much larger, even international audience. One of Google's latest solutions translates audio into various languages while preserving the voice of the audio creator<sup>40</sup>. Thus, "sound" can be translated "into sound" without being converted to text as an intermediate. With the arrival of the new virus COVID-19, we entered a new life era all around the world. It is very likely that the virus and global quarantine have affected and influenced interest and listening to podcasts. It has also been proven in a survey by 2muse, which has discovered that listening to podcasts in Slovakia increased by up to 6% compared to November. The coronavirus pandemic has supported and accelerated the digitalization of the world, as well as reinforcing the importance of new technologies.

COVID-19 has changed our lifestyle, the way we work, and our overall communication. According to Ľudmila Čábyová and Alena Hrušková "the crisis in 2020 has affected the whole world indiscriminately, not limited to the lower social layer and not dependent on national borders. Unlike natural disasters, it is a long-term crisis, difficult to predict and affecting all areas of our lives. It is a crisis that has changed people's purchasing behaviour, restricted their freedom of movement and residence."<sup>41</sup> The world is more oriented towards an online environment, which naturally includes podcasts. Both foreign and domestic surveys show that the increase in popularity of the format has been continuous over the years. The number of listeners is increasing and with it a wider range of types and formats. If we look at the target group of regular listeners, it is also necessary to point out a few interesting facts. From a general point of view, it might seem that podcasts are most popular exclusively amongst the younger generation. This reasoning is natural as this generation has grown up with modern technology and the online world as a natural part of their lives. But it's not just the younger generation that is inclined to podcasts. Based on research, podcasts are also popular among middle-aged or older generations. The reason can be found in the similarity of the new medium with the classic radio production, which the older generation experienced for many years. A significant benefit for all groups of recipients is the possibility to perform other activities during listening, i. j. – an affiliation of podcasts. The second significant benefit is the possibility to choose – not only the type of a program but also the time when the listener can or wants to listen regardless of the

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<sup>37</sup> SIBIRTSEVA, M.: *Why are podcasts so popular: A look at their Past, Present and Future*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://blog.depositphotos.com/why-are-podcasts-so-popular.html>>.

<sup>38</sup> *Boris & Brambor – od mikrofónu pred kameru*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://www.rtvsk.sk/novinky/tipy-z-programu/235436/boris-brambor-od-mikrofonu-pred-kameru>>.

<sup>39</sup> *Become an FT Subscriber*. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/7c35bbac-ae33-11e9-b3e2-4fd846f48f5>>.

<sup>40</sup> HAO, K.: *Google's AI can now translate your speech while keeping your voice*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/05/20/103054/google-ai-language-translation/>>.

<sup>41</sup> ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., HRUŠKOVÁ, A.: COVID-19-our best chance to change universities. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and media: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 277.

program structure that used to be provided by the classic radio. These two benefits make podcasts a very attractive media product that has two dominant characteristics - it offers the freedom and maximizes the use of time. Which is necessary in this rapidly changing world and continuously increasing pressure to perform in the work sphere as well as in the personal. Podcasts are also bringing other specific characteristics, and that is in the field of their creators. Unlike in traditional media, where the creators are professionals, podcasts are often created by amateurs, YouTubers, athletes, or other celebrities from various walks of life. This brings enriching elements to the field of media production. In light of the information stated above, we can conclude that podcasts are a new communication phenomenon that has the potential to become a permanent part of our lives and the modern world. Media experts and analysts anticipate that this trend will continue and will be supported by new technological possibilities that will make podcasts more attractive for their "consumption". In Slovakia, we can predict an even greater increase in their popularity.

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## CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING IN THE PRESENCE OF A COMPROMISE ALTERNATIVE: LIMITS AND MODERATORS

*Radka Kubalová*

### Abstract

The compromise effect is reported to occur when an alternative described by certain attributes and characteristics is more preferred by consumers when it is introduced into a choice set as a middle-option rather than an extreme alternative. Using the compromise strategy in their decision-making helps consumers to lower the uncertainty and risks that every decision brings and minimize possible losses. While this effect is believed to be robust and was explored in different areas beside consumer research and marketing, there are still numerous factors that might moderate or fully diminish the compromise effect. Firms designing their product lines or product offers in a way that would support the compromise effect should be aware of existence of these factors. The goal of this paper is to indicate the factors, which might influence the strength of the effect. The paper categorizes the factors depending on two aspects: whether they influence the decision-making process or not and whether the factor is connected to the consumers' characteristics or the characteristics of the concrete decision-making. The paper employs the research method of literature analysis of previously published studies about the topic.

### Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. Context Effects. Choice.

### Introduction

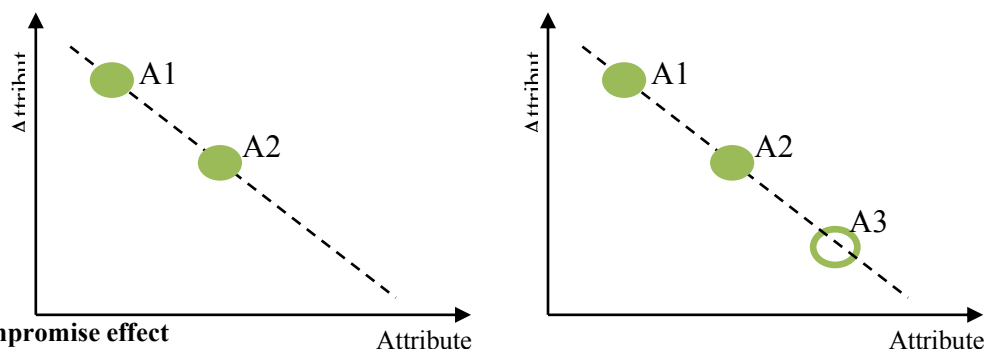
Compromises are an important part of our everyday lives and choices, even more prominently in the current era of COVID-19 when governments have to compromise between economic interests and health and safety interests, just like individuals compromise between maintaining a certain degree of the regular comfort they are used to and accepting for themselves the safety measures. However, compromises are the part of difficult decision-making in all fields and at all times. From the government finding compromises when it comes to the budget spending and policies that influence our lives to compromises we ourselves make to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with others. People who never accept compromises and do not know how to lose hardly find a common ground with others. Beside these compromises we make with other people, each of us has to compromise daily when it comes to dividing our limited time between our favourite activities and responsibilities and of course, also when it comes to spending the other available resources, especially the money.

Limited by the income and savings, individuals have to decide which goods and services to buy and which they can omit from consumption. This decision usually depends on the specific needs of the consumer who aims to satisfy the needs according to their importance. The nature of the needs and their categorization by importance were explored by different motivational theories, e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. However, consumers do not only face the decision among which types of products to divide their consumption but when they already consider purchasing a certain product they are also met with wide variety of products of different or even same brands with more or less similar features and price that they can choose from on today's market. When deciding between the available alternatives, single-attribute decisions, such as choosing the cheapest option, are always simple. However, most of the products are described by multiple-attributes like price, brand, quantity, quality, presence of additional functions or services, and the consumer has to usually accept some kind of trade-off between the attributes. One of the important and robust phenomena documented in behavioural research in marketing is the tendency of alternatives gaining

larger share when they are presented as the middle, compromise option in the choice set, giving the phenomenon the name compromise effect.

## 1 Choice and Compromise Effect

All marketers can profit from understanding how and why consumers buy. Companies spend more than ever to find out who makes purchases, when they make purchases, where they make them and why they make them.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the question how consumers make their choice and form their preferences and what leads them to the purchase is one of the important questions for marketing and consumer research. While in the past and according to the classical economics theory, the consumers were assumed to maximize value, their preferences were considered stable and independent on the context, a great deal of consumer research documents the preferences are constructive and choices are often affected by the context<sup>2</sup> and by context it is meant the relative position of the alternatives. Up to this day, there are several of these ‘context effects’ known beside the compromise effect, e.g. attraction effect<sup>3</sup> (also called the effect of asymmetrically dominated alternative or the decoy effect), the similarity effect<sup>4</sup>, the lone alternative effect<sup>5</sup>. These effects are the proof that consumers' preferences are not dependant only on the attributes of each alternative but also, they are influenced by the relative position of alternatives in a choice set, whereby the alternatives in superior or compromise positions are most likely to be preferred. The compromise effect tends to occur when the likelihood that one option will be chosen over its alternative is enhanced by the introduction of a third option, which makes the first option appear as the middle option<sup>6</sup> as shown in the picture 1 below. While the attributes of the original alternatives A1 and A2 do not change, the consumers’ preferences for A2 can be shifted merely by introducing a third extreme option A3.



Picture 1: Compromise effect

Source: Own processing

<sup>1</sup> KOTLER, P., ARMSTRONG, G.: *Principles of Marketing*. Upper Saddle River : Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> BETTMAN, J. R. et al.: Constructive Consumer Choice Processes. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1998, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> HUBER, J. et al.: Adding Asymmetrically Dominated Alternatives: Violations of Regularity and the Similarity Hypothesis. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> TVERSKY, A.: Elimination by aspects: A theory of choice. In *Psychological Review*, 1972, Vol. 79, No. 4, p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> GLAZER, R. et al.: The Influence of External Constraints on Brand Choice: The Lone-Alternative Effect. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1991, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> SIMONSON, I.: Choice Based on Reasons: The Case of Attraction and Compromise Effects. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1989, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 159.

How is it possible that a mere addition of another alternative influences the popularity of the original alternative which remains the same? The explanation can be found in few concepts: uncertainty and risk-aversion, loss-aversion and extremeness-aversion, and need to justify. Firstly, the compromise effect might be a result of an uncertainty of decision-making. Selection usually involves two kinds of uncertainty, one is the uncertainty of the consequences of the current decision, and the other is the uncertainty of the future preference for these consequences.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the decision maker does not know which of the two attributes is more important or which attribute they prefer more. Given most of the individuals are risk-averse and try to avoid mistakes or possible future regret, a selection of a compromise alternative which combines both attributes might seem the safest and the easiest to justify. Moreover, most of the individuals exhibit loss-aversion as well<sup>8</sup>, meaning losses are more painful to them than the same-valued gains. Selecting the alternative with one extreme attribute value, risk of the loss of the other extreme attribute is significant.<sup>9</sup> Based on the concept of loss aversion, the principle of extremeness aversion suggests that (all else being equal) the addition of the extreme option A3 increases the choice share of A2, because A2 has only small advantages and disadvantages with respect to option A1 and A3, whereas both extreme options have larger advantages and disadvantages with respect to each other. In that sense, the compromise effect is the result of minimizing this expected loss by choosing the intermediate option with medium attributes rather than high and low attributes. Although, the compromise effect was successfully replicated in studies of different authors many times, there is currently still no comprehensive theory that allows one to predict both the occurrence as well as the magnitude of compromise effect.<sup>10</sup> While the effect is said to be robust and notable, it would be too optimistic to assume companies might be able to profit from merely altering their product lines and introducing a third alternative to raise the sales of preferred products. Everything has its limits, including this interesting phenomenon. There has been traced several factors which might lead consumers to not preferring the ‘safe’ middle option and these factors are categorized and described in the next chapter.

## 2 The Factors Influencing the Compromise Effect

Over the years, a number of moderating factors was detected and therefore, the effect is sensitive to external and internal factors. As shown in the picture 2, the factors can be divided into two basic groups: the procedural moderators, which might alter the effort and processing mechanism used in the decision-making, and descriptive moderators which do not directly influence the information processing.

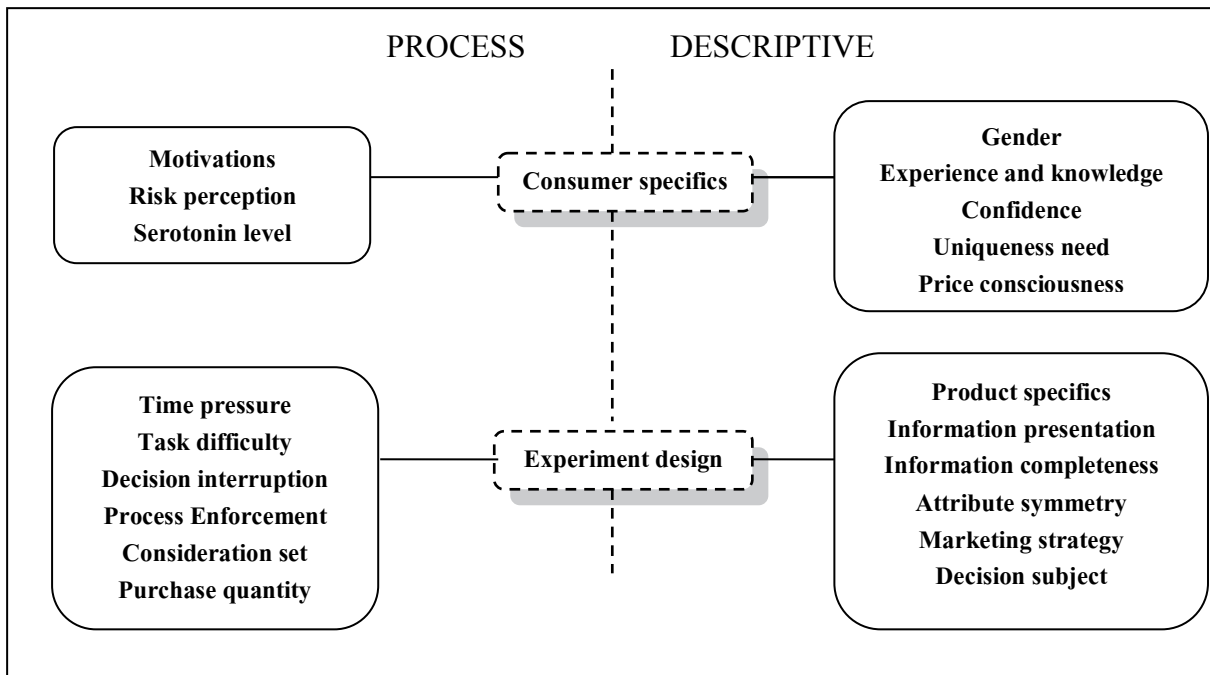
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<sup>7</sup> SIMONSON, I.: Choice Based on Reasons: The Case of Attraction and Compromise Effects. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1989, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> SCHMIDT, U., ZANK, H.: What is Loss Aversion? In *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 2005, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> SIMONSON, I., TVERSKY, A. Choice in Context: Trade-off Contrast and Extremeness Aversion. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1992, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 281.

<sup>10</sup> KIVETZ, R. et al.: Alternative Models for Capturing the Compromise Effect. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2004, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 238.



**Picture 2: Moderating factors of compromise effect**

Source: Own processing

Based on whether the designer of the experiment can actively influence or change the factors, the factors could be divided also into consumer specifics (or individual based variables) and factors of experiment design (or situational variables of the concrete decision-making). Consumer specifics are the characteristics of the decision-maker that can be observed and measured but not influenced during the decision-making. Not all consumers are the same and their different characteristics have impact on the strength of the compromise effect. Consumer specifics which influence the processing mechanism can be consumers' motivations and risk perception. For example, consumers who are prevention-orientated (or loss-avoiding) tend to avoid mistakes and exhibit a stronger compromise effect as opposed to promotion-orientated consumers.<sup>11</sup> The effects of promotion and prevention motivations are increased in a combination with process enforcement, when the consumers are asked to justify their choices, or in a combination with promotion presentation. The acquisitive promotion description can reduce promotion-oriented consumers' preference for the compromise option and for the loss-avoiding consumers, a loss-reducing promotion description can make them less likely to choose the compromise option.<sup>12</sup> Interesting finding is that the level of serotonin in consumer's brain which is often associated with mental disorders as depression or anxiety might lead to lower preference of the compromise.<sup>13</sup>

Among descriptive consumer specifics, such factors like gender, experience, confidence or needs uniqueness were explored. While there are no significant gender differences reported on the individual level and therefore, it is generally suggested all decision makers are driven to choose the compromise options due to the same mechanism, in the joint binary decision-making the gender of the decision partners was found to play a role as a result of social

<sup>11</sup> MOURALI, M. et al.: Compromise and Attraction Effects under Prevention and Promotion Motivations. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2007, Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> LIU, H. et al.: Research on the Influence of Promotion Description on the Compromise Effect of Consumer Choice. In *China Market*, 2005, Vol. 5, No. 5, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> LICHTERS, M. et al.: The Influence of Serotonin Deficiency on Choice Deferral and the Compromise Effect. In *Journal Of Marketing Research*, 2016, Vol. 53, No. 2, p. 183.

influence and common societal expectations about the appropriate behaviours and traits of men and women. Unlike female or mixed decision partners, two males were more likely to make extreme choices and were more critical of the compromises made by male decision makers than by female decision makers.<sup>14</sup> Another moderator is the experience and knowledge of the consumers since greater product knowledge and familiarity lead to lessened compromise effect<sup>15</sup> as it becomes easier to extract information from the shopping environment and memory, and make a more comprehensive evaluation of the options.<sup>16</sup> When it comes to complexity or uncertainty of the decision task, the compromise effect is driven by the uncertainty and therefore, confidence which moderates the uncertainty felt by consumers is found to be one of the major moderators of the effect. Studies report that consumers with high levels of confidence or self-confidence face less uncertainty in purchase decisions and are less likely to make compromises.<sup>17</sup> The nature of the needs and need for uniqueness, is believed to influence the effect strength since those who aim to differentiate themselves with a strong demand to be unique are less likely to choose the compromise option or any other conventional option, especially when they should explain their decision in a form of a process enforcement.<sup>18</sup> When it comes to price sensitivity or consumers' relationship to price and quality, those who are price conscious tend to exhibit weaker compromise effect unlike quality-seeking consumers.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, there are also variables that weaken the compromise effect and that are connected to the elements of the experiment design, the environment and circumstances under which the decision-making is taking place. In few studies, important factor of time pressure was found out to lessen the compromise effect and the preference for an average option.<sup>20</sup> One possible explanation is that context effects arise due to an excessive focus on the relations between the available alternatives, and time pressure, therefore, reduces the magnitude of such effects.<sup>21</sup> While that was confirmed in few studies, in one case an opposite tendency was found and time pressure actually strengthened another context effect, attraction effect which contradicts the previous explanation.<sup>22</sup> Other factors which influence the process of decision-making is the difficulty of the task which leads consumers to rely on intuition resulting in weaker compromise effect<sup>23</sup> and also decision interruption which is believed to give the decision-maker a sense of familiarity with the alternatives and reduce the sense of risk upon returning

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<sup>14</sup> NIKOLOVA, H., LAMBERTON, C.: Men and the Middle: Gender Differences in Dyadic Compromise Effects. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2016, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 355.

<sup>15</sup> SHENG, S. et al.: Understanding the mechanism and determinants of compromise effects. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 2005, Vol. 22, No. 7, p. 591.

<sup>16</sup> CHEN, J. S. et al.: When Could Persuasive Information Influence Consumer's Choice?. In *Chinese Journal of Management*, 2011, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 437.

<sup>17</sup> CHUANG, S. C. et al.: The Impact of Self-Confidence on the Compromise Effect. In *International Journal of Psychology*, 2013, Vol. 48, No. 4, p. 660.

<sup>18</sup> SIMONSON, I., NOWLIS S. M.: The Role of Explanations and Need for Uniqueness in Consumer Decision Making: Unconventional Choices Based on Reasons. In *Research Papers*, 2000, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> MÜLLER, H. et al.: To Be or Not to Be Price Conscious – a Segment-Based Analysis of Compromise Effects in Market-Like Framings. In *Psychology & Marketing*, 2012, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> PETTIBONE, J. C.: Testing the effect of time pressure on asymmetric dominance and compromise decoys in choice. In *Judgment and decision making*, 2012, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 520.

<sup>21</sup> DHAR, R. et al.: Trying Hard or Hardly Trying: An Analysis of Context Effects in Choice. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 189.

<sup>22</sup> LIN, C. H. et al.: Time Pressure and the Compromise and Attraction Effects in Choice. In *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, 2008, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 348.

<sup>23</sup> LEE, C. F. et al.: The Influence of Task Difficulty on Context Effect-Compromise and Attraction Effects. In *Current Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 392.

to the decision-making, and thus increase their preference for the extreme options.<sup>24</sup> As it was already mentioned some of the previous factors like motivations or uniqueness need might be accentuated when some type of process enforcement is present but generally, such enforcement as justifying the choice leads to stronger compromise effect.<sup>25</sup> Besides of the different external circumstances of the decision making, the consideration set, especially its size and structure, are an important factors of the compromise effect. According to findings, the bigger consideration sets with more alternatives results in weaker effect as well as low extremeness of the alternatives.<sup>26</sup> Concerning the structure of the consideration set, the compromise effect was found to be robust and significant even when one of the extreme options was marked as unavailable in the choice set and therefore, could not be chosen by the consumers. They did not exclude the unavailable 'phantom alternative' from the consideration nor focused on the remaining two alternatives as a binary choice set but still preferred the middle compromise option.<sup>27</sup> Unlike in the real world, most often the participant of the experiments are not presented with an option to not choose any alternative, introducing such option in a consideration set allows consumers to solve the uncertainty and avoid the risk by picking the no-choice, rather than the compromise alternative.<sup>28</sup> Not only the size of the consideration set but also the purchase quantity matters as the share of the middle option in a trinary choice set decreases when the purchase quantity increases which can be explained by balance heuristic, meaning consumers try to distribute their multiple choices among the available options to achieve a balanced state and to satisfy their variety-seeking tendency.<sup>29</sup>

Beside procedural factors of the decision-making, there is also a several descriptive ones as the product specifics, information presentation, etc. In product specifics, factors like product type or product country of origin (COO) matter. The compromise effect was studied for wide variety of products, from consumables like wine or chocolate to PCs and phones. The product category and type have influence on the effect as it is weaker for fast-moving consumer goods rather than durable goods.<sup>30</sup> Also, the effect decreases when it comes to hedonic consumption since that accentuates emotion like enjoyment and pleasure. As a result, consumers prefer to choose extreme options over the compromise.<sup>31</sup> The products' COO can moderate the effect too when the consumers have a negative impression of product origin.<sup>32</sup> Important aspect of the product specifics is also a product brand which can help the consumers who are familiar with the brands to better differentiate products or lower the uncertainty and therefore, when consumers are not familiar with the brand of the compromise options, they rather choose

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<sup>24</sup> ZHANG, Q. C. et al.: A Review of Literature on Context Effect in Customer Choice Behavior and Future Research Prospect. In *Soft Science*, 2011, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> SIMONSON, I.: Choice Based on Reasons: The Case of Attraction and Compromise Effects. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1989, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> YOO, J. et al.: Compromise effect and consideration set size in consumer decision-making, In *Applied Economics Letters*, 2018, Vol. 25, No. 8, p. 513.

<sup>27</sup> SIMONSON, I.: Choice Based on Reasons: The Case of Attraction and Compromise Effects. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1989, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 158.

<sup>28</sup> DHAR, R., SIMONSON, I.: The Effect of Forced Choice on Choice. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2003, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 146.

<sup>29</sup> CHENG, Y. H. et al.: The impact of purchase quantity on the compromise effect: The balance heuristic. In *Judgment and decision making*, 2012, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 507.

<sup>30</sup> LICHTERS, M. et al.: How durable are compromise effects?. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2016, Vol. 69, No. 10, p. 4056.

<sup>31</sup> KIM, S., KIM, J.: The influence of hedonic versus utilitarian consumption situations on the compromise effect. In *Marketing Letters*, 2016, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 387.

<sup>32</sup> CHUANG, S. C., YEN, H. R.: The impact of a product's country-of-origin on compromise and attraction effects. In *Marketing Letters*, 2007, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 279.

the more familiar brand of the extreme options.<sup>33</sup> Not only what products are part of the decision and their features but also the presentation format of these attributes play important role. For example, the compromise effect is less significant in the numerical presentation rather than graphical information presentation that makes it easier to identify the relative positions of compromise options.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the compromise will be less attractive for the consumers if it is further from the neutral middle option, when the information is not displayed together and the product attributes are not displayed in a board format.<sup>35</sup> What is also playing role in the effect strength beside the presentation format of the attributes is also the attributes importance. To prefer the middle option, the consumers should not be facing an easy decision and therefore, the alternatives which are evaluated by them should be described by such attributes which are both similarly important. In the case when one attribute is more important than the other, consumers are going to prefer the extreme option which is superior in that important attribute.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the decision-making can be influenced by effects of the marketing strategies, mostly promotional and pricing strategies<sup>37</sup>, e.g. offering price promotion for low-priced goods leads to lower preference of the compromise option.<sup>38</sup> Whether there is any difference between individuals and couples making the decision was explored and beside the differences in gender mix of the pair as mentioned before, couples in a long-term relationship generally did exhibit the preference for the compromise, just like individuals do.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, often there are cases when the decision-maker or the customer differs from the consumer and they make decision for someone else whether it is helping a friend to choose their product or buying something for relatives. When subjects choose for others the effect is generally enhanced, even more so when the level of intimacy between the subjects is lower, leading to greater uncertainty about the preferences of others and a greater need for justification, which makes the compromise option seem appealing.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

Almost every decision brings a certain kind of uncertainty connected to the consequences of the decision and the future preference of these consequences. The research in the field of consumer behaviour and decision-making, as well as marketing, points out most of the consumers are also uncertain about the decision-making and have tendency to be averse to risk, loss and extremeness. This often leads them to prefer the compromise alternative

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<sup>33</sup> SINN, F. et al.: Compromising the compromise effect: Brands matter. In *Marketing Letters*, 2007, Vol. 18, No. 4, p. 233.

<sup>34</sup> KIM, J.: The influence of graphical versus numerical information representation modes on the compromise effect. In *Marketing Letters*, 2007, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 397.

<sup>35</sup> CHANG, C. C., LIU, H. H.: Information Format-Option Characteristics Compatibility and the Compromise Effect. In *Psychology & Marketing*, 2010, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 881.

<sup>36</sup> SHENG, S. et al.: Understanding the mechanism and determinants of compromise effects. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 2005, Vol. 22, No. 7, p. 591.

<sup>37</sup> YAN, J. Y. et al.: The Impact of Marketing Strategy on Compromise Effect Based on the B2C Website. In *Management Review*, 2012, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> NOWLIS, S. M., SIMONSON, I.: Sales Promotions and the Choice Context as Competing Influences on Consumer Decision Making. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> MUNRO, A., POPOV, D.: A Missing Link in Behavioural Economics? A Portmanteau Experiment on the Relevance of Individual Decision Anomalies for Households. In *Discussion Paper Series*, 2009, p. 24. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at:

<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46459531\\_A\\_Missing\\_Link\\_in\\_Behavioural\\_Economics\\_A\\_Portmanteau\\_Experiment\\_on\\_the\\_Relevance\\_of\\_Individual\\_Decision\\_Anomalies\\_for\\_Households](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46459531_A_Missing_Link_in_Behavioural_Economics_A_Portmanteau_Experiment_on_the_Relevance_of_Individual_Decision_Anomalies_for_Households)>.

<sup>40</sup> CHANG, C. C. et al.: The Compromise Effect in Choosing for Others. In *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 2012, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 109.

in the choice set that also allows them to justify with more ease their choice, either for themselves, or the others. This paper reports numerous factors, which influence the compromise effect, either by affecting the decision-making process itself or not. There were found several factors, both procedural and descriptive ones. Some of them can be linked to individual characteristics of the consumer (or decision-maker), who might have different attitudes to risk perceptions, and other factors are mostly connected to the characteristics of the experimental design (or the decision-making task) which brings different level of uncertainty and risks. Based on the mechanism and explanation of the compromise effect, any factor raising the uncertainty and the risks of the consumers' choices (e.g. time pressure, consideration set, attribute symmetry, consumer's low experience and knowledge, low confidence or task difficulty) can be assumed to also raise the strength of the compromise effect itself. On the other hand, factors lowering that uncertainty or lowering the importance of risk in favour of other aspects (e.g. consumer's need for uniqueness) would also weaken the compromise effect. However, certain external factors like marketing strategy, product specifics, information presentation, and decision interruption have been found out to have a moderating effect as well.

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<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46459531\\_A\\_Missing\\_Link\\_in\\_Behavioural\\_Economics\\_A\\_Portmanteau\\_Experiment\\_on\\_the\\_Relevance\\_of\\_Individual\\_Decision\\_Anomalies\\_for\\_Households](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46459531_A_Missing_Link_in_Behavioural_Economics_A_Portmanteau_Experiment_on_the_Relevance_of_Individual_Decision_Anomalies_for_Households)>.
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## USE OF INTERNET PERSONALIZATION IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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### Abstract

Personalization as an instrument to support communication between a salesperson and a customer is already a widespread element in practice. This communication has a two-way effect. A salesperson can present his offer to a customer in a way that he considers effective in terms of implicit and explicit effect on the customer's needs and benefits. On the contrary, a customer can, thanks to personalization, directly influence the salesperson's behaviour and his offer. Personalization is therefore advantageous for both participants in the business transaction, but it also carries risks, such as the risk of misuse of customers' personal data. However, in times of crisis, such as the coronavirus crisis, when a significant proportion of business activities are moved to the Internet, personalization is one way for a salesperson to increase his competitiveness. The thesis deals with the personalization of the Internet, its benefits for users and its impact on the success of a salesperson. It presents the approaches used for its implementation, categorizes them and analyses the theoretical foundations. It also examines whether and how individual personalization techniques are used in crisis communication in practice between marketing specialists. The main benefit of the work is a comprehensive view of personalization and its use in the real environment of today's world.

### Key words:

Communication. Competition. Competitiveness. Consumer. Crisis. Customer. Information Technology. Internet. Personalization. Salesperson.

### Introduction

Whenever a crisis comes, regardless of its cause, companies have to respond promptly if they want to maintain the prosperity of their business. Management communication with customers<sup>1</sup> plays an important role in the post-crisis period. The determining element is not only the communication itself, but mainly at what level the company will involve the customer in it.<sup>2</sup> The current coronavirus crisis is specific for its sudden onset and immediate impact on the economies of individual states and thus on the economy of the globalized world. One of the opportunities to keep existing customers in a situation where the economy has been hit hard<sup>3</sup> by state interventions is to move business activities to the online environment in case that the entrepreneur was no longer active there. Due to the fact that even before the crisis, more than three quarters of the Czech population aged 16 to 75 used the Internet daily<sup>4</sup>, the move from the off-line environment to the online environment represents a chance even for those companies that have so far resisted moving or they postponed it due to other investment opportunities. However, because competitors are also moving to the online environment, it is necessary to look for adequate instruments that will make it easier for entrepreneurs to access and communicate with a customer. At such a time, personalizing the Internet is an instrument that can help an entrepreneur increase its competitiveness, bring

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<sup>1</sup> JAQUES, T.: Issue and crisis management: quicksand in the definitional landscape. In *Public Relations Review*, 2009, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 281-285.

<sup>2</sup> LEE, S., KIM, S.: The buffering effect of industry-wide crisis history during crisis. In *Journal of Communication Management*, 2016, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 348-361.

<sup>3</sup> PAVEC, J.: Jak nouzový stav přiškrtil ekonomiku: přinášíme unikátní data o „nákupní panice“ i obřích ztrátách hospod a hotelů. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://denikn.cz/355583/jak-nouzovy-stav-priskrtil-ekonomiku-prinasime-unikatni-data-o-nakupni-panice-i-obrich-ztratach-hospod-a-hotelu/?ref=list>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Informační společnost v číslech – 2019*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-08-20]. Available at: <<https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/informacni-spolecnost-v-cislech-2018>>.

benefits in the form of improved communication with existing customers and help gain new customers. Internet personalization is often discussed in terms of the threats that affect end users and as a result of society as a whole.<sup>5</sup> However, properly applied personalization of the Internet can be benefit for both parties to the transaction, a salesperson and a customer.<sup>6</sup> The development of information technology that we have been facing in the last three decades has made personalization measures and personalization techniques more sophisticated and their use having expanding potential. The company is therefore offered an instrument that can significantly help it succeed in online competition, which, however, must be handled with caution and awareness of all risks.

## 1 Literature Review

Customer needs and preferences are evolving along with the development of the use of information and communication technologies. The current customer, who is already ordinarily online, is no longer a passive recipient of the information provided by a salesperson.<sup>7</sup> A customer is actively interested in and desires to interfere in the sales and production activities of a salesperson and various platforms such as social networks are used for this. Salespersons should take this situation into account if they want to remain competitive. One of the methods is to involve a customer in communication about products, the method of their production, distribution channels, etc.<sup>8</sup> A customer therefore wants to feel that a salesperson is communicating with and listening to him or her. Internet personalization serves to target the communication with an end customer, and its importance and impact can be crucial.<sup>9</sup> Internet users provide their personal data (whether consciously or unconsciously), and at the same time data mining is an important factor in the success of personalization<sup>10</sup>. Personalization of the Internet then helps the company to overcome the problem of how to distribute its information with respect to a huge number of specific characteristics of a potential end user. From the data extraction, a salesperson will gain knowledge about customer preferences A salesperson can then target a customer in detail.<sup>11</sup> Personalization from the customer's point of view then offers flexibility of the environment, targeting of various advertising techniques, recommendation of a specific product, comparison of prices of specific and substitute

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<sup>5</sup> SCHLAGER, T., HILDBRAND, Ch., HAUBL, G., FRANKE, N., HERMANN, A.: Social Product-Customization Systems: Peer Input, Conformity, and Consumers' Evaluation of Customized Products. In *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 320-348.

<sup>6</sup> LI, C., JIANGMENG, L., CHENG, H.: The Effect of Preference Stability and Extremity on Personalized Advertising. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 96, No. 2, p. 407-426.

<sup>7</sup> ZIEMBA, E., EISENHARDT, M., MULLINS, R., DETTMER, S.: Prosumers' Engagement in Business Process Innovation – The Case of Poland and the UK. In *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management*, 2019, Vol. 17, No. 5, p. 25-38.

<sup>8</sup> MONTEIRO, T., GIULIANI, A., PIZZINATTO, N., LARIOS-GOMEZ, E.: Managing the Digital Consumer: Insights From Brazil and Spain. In *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 2019, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 1197-1214.

<sup>9</sup> GARRIGÓS, I., GOMEZ, J., HOUBEN, G.-J.: Specification of personalization in web application design. In *Information and Software Technology*, 2010, Vol. 52, No. 9, p. 992-1009.

<sup>10</sup> WANG, J., LIU, J., HIGGS, R., ZHOU, L., ZHOU, C.: The Application of Data Mining Technology to Big Data. In *IEEE International Conference on Computational Science and Engineering*. Los Alamitos, CA : IEEE Computer Society, 2017, p. 285-287.

<sup>11</sup> CHENG, Y., CHEN, K., SUN, H., ZHANG, Y., TAO, F.: Data and knowledge mining with big data towards smart production. In *Journal of Industrial Information Integration*, 2018, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 2-13.

products, localization and other information that make it easier for a customer to make decisions.<sup>12</sup>

However, there can be a problem with the use of the Internet personalization because as users use the Internet in their daily lives, the amount of information to be processed (on the basis of which a salesperson has to make decisions) is increasing. Programmers and managers using personalization should respond and adapt to this. However, with increasing data volumes the risk is that it may not always be possible to anticipate all the situations that data mining applications will encounter, which may then give misrepresented results, which may be counterproductive for an end user.<sup>13</sup> But it can be said that properly managed personalization in the online environment increases the customer's willingness to buy, as evidenced by scholarly texts on this topic.<sup>14</sup> Of course, personalization can also be used in the off-line environment, where the goods are modified according to customer's wishes during the personal contact.<sup>15</sup> However, this method of personalization cannot be used as a competitive advantage in the current crisis, in which the off-line personalization is becoming a disadvantage. In contrast, the online personalization enables to provide comprehensive services to a customer based on data that is provided by a customer in the Internet environment<sup>16</sup>, so it is suitable for the current coronavirus crisis. Studies prove that a customer perceives personalized content in positive way, both in the case of clearly explicitly personalized information and in the case of implicit<sup>17</sup> personalized information. This means that personalization brings salesperson an advantage even in two specific situations. If a customer only assumes that he or she is the target of personalized communication, but faces only well-established general communication that creates the impression of personalization. And when a customer does not realize that he or she is the target of personalized communication.<sup>18</sup>

However, personalization is not just about direct communication between salesperson and customer. It can be seen as an element of comprehensive marketing processes of the company, into which the personalization enters in some specific areas. For example, Murthi and Sarkar<sup>19</sup> state that it greatly facilitates the market research. They complement the Brandenburger-Nalebuff<sup>20</sup> Value Net Model, which helps to complement the company's

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<sup>12</sup> KALAI GNANAM, K., KUSHWAHA, T., RAJAVI, K.: How Does Web Personalization Create Value for Online Retailers? Lower Cash Flow Volatility or Enhanced Cash Flows. In *Journal of Retailing*, 2018, Vol. 94, No. 3, p. 266-278.

<sup>13</sup> GHIANI, G., MANCA, M., PATERNO, F., SANTORO, C.: Personalization of Context-Dependent Applications Through Trigger-Action Rules. In *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 2017, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 1402-1432.

<sup>14</sup> PAPPAS, I. O., KOUROUTHANASSIS, P. E., GIANNAKOS, M. N., CHRISSIKOPOULOS, V.: Shiny happy people buying: the role of emotions on personalized e-shopping. In *Electronic Markets*, 2014, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 194-205.

<sup>15</sup> SHEN, A., BALL, A.: Is personalization of services always a good thing? Exploring the role of technology-mediated personalization (TMP) in service relationships. In *Journal of Services Marketing*, 2009, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 81-91.

<sup>16</sup> ADOMAVICIUS, G., TUZHILIN, A.: Towards the Next Generation of Recommender Systems: A Survey of the State of the Art and Possible Extensions. In *IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering*, 2005, Vol. 17, No. 6, p. 735-748.

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see: ROBERTS, M. L., ZAHAY, D.: *Internet Marketing: Integrating Online and Offline Strategies*. Boston : Cengage Learning, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> LI, C.: When does web-based personalization really work? The distinction between actual personalization and perceived personalization. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2016, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 26-32.

<sup>19</sup> MURTHI, B. P. S., SARKAR, S.: The Role of the Management Sciences in Research on Personalization. In *Management Science*, 2015, Vol. 49, No. 10, p. 1345-1361.

<sup>20</sup> See also: BRANDENBURGER, A., NALEBUFF, B.: *Co-opetition*. New York : Currency Doubleplay, 1996.

customer-supplier relationship. At the same time, it also helps to complement the relationship between the company and its competitors. Murthi and Sarkar use three basic outputs of personalization to do this: personalization allows the company to effectively become acquainted with the customer's preferences; personalization can be used to match the offer to the customer's request; personalization enables effective evaluation, comparison and improvement of the offer. Similar conclusions are drawn by other authors.<sup>21</sup> Xo et al.<sup>22</sup> adds that in terms of marketing processes, the personalization is important, especially in marketing management, competition marketing and innovation marketing, because personalization techniques allow almost instantly to identify a customer, gives the company more ability to capture more information about a customer and more ability to retrieve information about once captured and identified customer through a database. A significant advantage of the personalization for marketing processes is the ability to respond in real time to any changes in customer behaviour and requirements.

## 2 Methods

The aim of this text is to find out the connection of the Internet personalization to communication during the coronavirus crisis in the context of the marketing environment of the Czech Republic. It should contribute to the texts on personalization by focusing on employees who should use the Internet personalization in practice, i.e. middle and senior management of a particular category of companies, and in the form of a questionnaire survey will find out whether they consciously use the Internet personalization and if so, which of identified and categorized methods are most often used and how the coronavirus crisis manifested itself in the use of personalization. The researched topic here is the personalization of the Internet, more precisely its form, which can be used by companies in crisis communication to reach the target group of customers. The performed literature research in connection with the author's previous research, which is presented in the text, helps to provide a new view of already existing knowledge, or to combine it with previous knowledge. During the synthesis of individual views on a given topic, important links between contexts within individual components of a certain phenomenon are observed.<sup>23</sup> This fact then leads to the discovery of the internal functioning and possible development of the phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> Research in the form of a questionnaire survey, which examines on the basis of a categorization created by the author, which methods of personalization are used by marketing specialists in practice in the context of the ongoing crisis and why. Furthermore, how the crisis affected the use of personalization and how the coronavirus crisis affected customer requirements for the Internet personalization, more precisely the online communication. Research limitations enter the work significantly, in this case they are given by several factors. The questionnaire survey is limited to marketing specialists operating mainly in Prague, because Prague has a specific position in the context of the Czech Republic

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<sup>21</sup> GARRIGÓS, I., GOMEZ, J., HOUBEN, G.-J.: Specification of personalization in web application design. In *Information and Software Technology*, 2010, Vol. 52, No. 9, p. 992-1009.

<sup>22</sup> XU, H., LUO, X., CARROLLA, J. M., ROSSONA, M. B.: The personalization privacy paradox: An exploratory study of decision making process for location-aware marketing. In *Decision Support Systems*, 2011, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 43-51.

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see: BRYMAN, A., BELL, E.: *Business Research Methods*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> JERSÁKOVÁ, J.: *Literární řešerše*. [online]. [2020-09-25]. Available at: <[http://kbe.prf.jcu.cz/sites/default/files/diplomky/Literarni\\_reserse.pdf](http://kbe.prf.jcu.cz/sites/default/files/diplomky/Literarni_reserse.pdf)>.

as the most economically developed region.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, it is one of the most economically developed regions in the entire EU and makes up approximately a quarter of the total GDP of the Czech Republic.<sup>26</sup> In the preparatory phase of the research, it was found out that there is no research in the literature and texts that would examine the relationship of Czech marketing specialists to the use of the Internet personalization with regard to communication in times of crisis. There is therefore room for the implementation of such research (research gap). To select marketing specialists suitable for questionnaire survey, the Mediář database – Katalog komunikačních Agentur<sup>27</sup> and the APRA database - Asociace public relations, z. s.<sup>28</sup>, where 70 companies were selected to ensure return of the questionnaires and the availability of experts<sup>29</sup>, were used. Thanks to this, 108 respondents to the questionnaire survey were selected. Suitable participants in the questionnaire survey are employees from sales, marketing or IT departments of agencies, who all potentially encounter the personalization of the Internet. The questionnaire survey took place in the form of semi-structured questionnaires<sup>30</sup> and with regard to theories about finding information in target groups and their numbers<sup>31</sup> supplemented by the theory of finding business information<sup>32</sup>.

### 3 Results

The work focuses on the personalization of the Internet, more precisely on its types, which are available to marketing specialists. It is therefore important to focus on current and past trends in the Internet personalization and to sort them out based on the technologies they use. Personalization is taken for the needs of marketing processes as a set of instruments and algorithms that can be applied in the online environment and thanks to which it is displayed to a user as filtered, limited or otherwise affected virtual space, or information. The division of personalization techniques is based on the author's previous work<sup>33</sup> and corresponds to current trends and knowledge about personalization. This categorization therefore divides personalization techniques into four main categories: recommender systems; collaborative filtering; contextualization; customization. The given categories are subsequently used in the questionnaire survey, as they are sufficiently giving a clear picture about personalization techniques in their categories. These main categories of personalization include various techniques, the general list of which, based on previous author's research, is as follows:

- Recommender Systems: Rule-based Systems; Content-based Filtering; Remarketing; Pers. Newsletters; Hybrid Recommender Systems.
- Collaborative Filtering: Memory-based Collaborative Filtering; Model-based Collaborative Filtering.

<sup>25</sup> *Analýza vývoje ekonomiky ČR 2019 – Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu*. 2019. [online]. [2020-08-09]. Available at: <[https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/rozcestnik/analyticke-materialy-a-statistiky/analyticke-materialy/2019/4/Analiza-vyvoje-ekonomiky-CR\\_duben-2019.pdf](https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/rozcestnik/analyticke-materialy-a-statistiky/analyticke-materialy/2019/4/Analiza-vyvoje-ekonomiky-CR_duben-2019.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> BĀČOVĀ, P.: *Praha patří k ekonomicky nejrozvinutějším regionům EU*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> Decemeber 2017. [online]. [2020-08-09]. Available at: <<https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/praha-patri-k-ekonomicky-nejrozvinatejsim-regionum-eu>>.

<sup>27</sup> *Mediář – Katalog komunikačních agentur*. [online]. [2020-07-12]. Available at: <<https://mediar.cz/agentury/>>.

<sup>28</sup> *Seznam agentur*. [online]. [2020-07-12]. Available at: <<https://apra.cz/agentury/>>.

<sup>29</sup> See also: DISMAN, M.: *Jak se vyrábí sociologická znalost*. Prague : UK in Prague, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> For more information, see: MAREŠ, J.: *Dotazník sociální opory u dětí a dospívajících*. Prague : Institut pedagogicko-psychologického poradenství ČR, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> See also: BOONE, L. E., KURTZ, D. L.: *Contemporary Marketing*. Boston : Cengage Learning, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see: CHURCHILL, G. A., IACOBUCCI, D.: *Marketing research: methodological foundations*. Nashville, Tenn : Earlie Lite Books, Inc., 2018.

<sup>33</sup> KUPEC, M.: Using the Concept of Diversity in Personalization of the Internet on the Labour Market. In *Slovak Journal of Public Policy and Public Administration*, 2019, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 101-111.

- Contextualization: Responsive Websites; Communication of the Server with the Customer; Localization.
- Customization: Content Customization; Price Adjustment; Product Configuration; Task Perform Support.

### 3.1 Designing the Questionnaire

When designing the questionnaire, it was necessary to take into account the fact that the larger the questionnaire, the more information can be obtained from it. However, the concentration of the respondent also decreases, which can significantly affect the quality of the obtained data. Since in this case it was necessary to address the employees of middle and senior management, who are often busy regarding time and work, there was a real risk that respondents will have a problem with a larger questionnaire and will not fill it in at all. The questionnaire was therefore designed with an effort to minimize it. The questionnaire was distributed in printed and electronic form. It was structured into four parts. The first contained an introductory text that informed respondents about the content and purpose of the questionnaire. The second part followed, the purpose of which was to exclude questionnaires filled in by respondents who were not the target respondents of the research. It contained a closed question: Do you work in marketing? With the possibility to answer yes/no. Another semi-closed question: What specific area does the agency department in which you work deal with? With possible answers: IT department, marketing department, sales department, others with an open answer option. Other open-ended questions: How many employees does the agency you work for have? What is your position in the agency you work for?

This was followed by the research part of the questionnaire, which contained semi-closed, closed-ended, open-ended and scaling questions. This part was divided into two areas. The area dealing with personalization generally included the first two closed questions with possible answers yes/no were: Are you familiar with the principle of personalization of the Internet? Do you use personalization of the Internet in any of its forms in your work? The other question was: Which of the following categories of personalization techniques do you currently use in the company? Respondents had the opportunity to state yes/no for individual categories of customization, recommender systems, contextualization, collaborative filtering. The questionnaire included brief explanations listing four categories (as mentioned above), including their individual techniques, with each technique containing a simple explanation of what its principle was to help respondents better orient themselves. The possibility of stating yes / no for individual categories was always followed by an optional open-ended question: Which specific techniques from the given category of personalization do you use and why? The second area of the third part of the questionnaire contained questions aimed at personalization with respect to crisis communication. The first question was scaling: How did the coronavirus crisis affect the number of your clients? Respondents mentioned the following possibilities: a significant decrease; slight decrease; it did not manifest itself; slight increase in number; large increase in number of customers. Another question was: How did your customers become interested in any of the personalization techniques after the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis? With scaling answers: reduced interest; it did not manifest; increased interest. The following question was: Do you use personalization in your work compared to the time before the onset of the coronavirus crisis: more/same/less. In the third part of the questionnaire, there is a content space for comments, where respondents could add a comment to the questionnaire, or complete their answers. The fourth part of the questionnaire contained the already mentioned explanations of individual techniques in four given categories and a final thanks.



## 3.2 Evaluation of the Questionnaire

Within the questionnaire survey, 57 questionnaires were evaluated, which represents a 53% return of the questionnaires. Of the addressed individuals and agencies with a size of up to 10 employees, a total of 67 % of questionnaires were returned. Of the larger agencies with more than 10 employees, 33 % of questionnaires were returned. In addition to the questionnaires themselves, the respondents were also provided with simple explanations of individual categories of personalization techniques to ensure a sufficiently clear understanding of the questions by the respondents.

### 3.2.1 Questionnaire – Part Dealing with Personalization in General

The questionnaire survey based on the obtained results can be evaluated as follows. The vast majority, specifically 95 %, of the addressed marketing specialists are acquainted with the personalization of the Internet, as a technique usable in the marketing processes of their company. While their use in practice was confirmed by 87 %. It can be stated that the rate of using personalization in the Czech marketing environment is high. But because the personalization of the Internet is divided into four categories, a more comprehensive view is provided by evaluating which categories are used and to what extent. The most common method of personalization among respondents is some of the methods of customization, which is already used by 68 % of respondents. This result reflects the fact that customization is the technologically simplest personalization technique, i.e. it places the least demands on acquisition costs. At the same time, it does not require fundamentally complex IT background and does not place high demands on IT and marketing department employees. As part of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire survey, respondents most often mentioned the use of the configuration method for customization, i.e. their website had a product configurator. They also mentioned a responsive website with the addition that a non-responsive website is an element that discourages a potential customer and deprives him or her of the desire to return to the website. In practice, 64 % of respondents to the questionnaire survey use recommender systems. If the respondents responded to open-ended questions, they usually added that they use simpler techniques from this category, especially remarketing and rule-based. As they stated the contextualisation was used by 41 % of respondents and the smaller representation of this category in practice can be attributed to the fact that, for example, the localization is not as important a factor of personalization for the automotive industry as can be expected in other sectors. Collaborative filtering as a technique used in the company is mentioned by 5 % of all respondents. This low number can be attributed to the cost of implementing collaborative filtering, as well as the complexity of qualified IT staff that collaborative filtering assumes. However, this technique appears to be potentially the most effective<sup>34</sup>, so such a low result seems surprising. However, in the context of personalization techniques, it is the youngest and is subject to constant development<sup>35</sup>, which may be the reason for its low use in practice.

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<sup>34</sup> KARABADJIAB, N. E. I., BELDJOU DIAB, S., SERIDIB, H., SABEUR, A., DHIFLI, W.: Improving memory-based user collaborative filtering with evolutionary multi-objective optimization. In *Expert Systems with Applications*, 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 154-164.

<sup>35</sup> ABBASCHIAN, B. J., KHORSHIDI, S.: A review of hybrid recommender systems. In *Ad Alta : Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2017, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 260-264.

### 3.2.2 Questionnaire – Part Dealing with Personalization in the Context of the Ongoing Crisis

According to the respondents, the coronavirus crisis had a significant decrease (21 %) and slight decrease (40 %) in the number of clients. This together makes a customer a 61% drop for marketing agencies, which can be explained by the fact that clients first cut marketing costs when they are in need of sudden savings. At 15 % of agencies, the coronavirus crisis did not affect clients' mail at all. Only 17 % of them recorded a slight increase and 4 % of them a high increase in clients. Behind these numbers are those clients who took the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to improve their communication with customers and tried to respond flexibly to the situation by moving to new instruments. Regarding clients' interest in the Internet personalization, only 6 % of respondents answered that their clients responded to the coronavirus crisis with reduced interest in the personalization. Another 36 % of them said that the coronavirus crisis did not affect interest in the personalization. However, 56 % of respondents said that their clients were interested in some personalization technique. This can be explained, among other things, by the fact that personalization is being talked about more in the media and that general awareness of it is gradually increasing. Clients then apply this knowledge in crisis situations in their requirements for marketing communication. The lower use of personalization techniques compared to the pre-coronavirus crisis was not confirmed by any of the respondents. 72 % of marketing specialists use personalization to the same extent, 28 % of respondents started to use personalization more after the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis. The situation that a large proportion of marketers use personalization to the same extent as in the pre-coronavirus crisis, although clients show increased interest in it, can be explained by the fact that marketers as knowledgeable experts included personalization in their work even before the coronavirus crisis, whereas the clients either did not know or did not realize it, or did not understand the principle of personalization.

## 4 Discussion

This research must be responsibly confronted with other facts. At the same time, it is necessary to mention the fact that the topic reflects highly current issues, so the results of comparable work in the Czech environment is not widely available. What can be perceived as a limitation of the research by the questionnaire solution is a lower number of respondents. For this reason, the results of the investigation cannot be generalized. In the next survey, it would also be appropriate to deal with marketing workers outside the Prague area, or to expand research beyond the borders of the Czech Republic, which could bring a new perspective on the use of personalization in crisis communication. The questionnaire could be further focused on individual techniques of the four categories, but a researcher is exposed to the risk of a large questionnaire, which could lead to a lower rate of return of questionnaires and increased demands on the processing of such research. Another topic that could be taken into account in the research is the issue of risks associated with the protection of personal data and privacy of the user in general, as Toch<sup>36</sup> discussed it, for example, when he states that personalization has the potential to amplify and complicate inherent risks and privacy concerns in the Internet. The complexity of the whole topic is increased by the fact that the development of the field of information technology, especially in comparison with some sectors is enormously intensive. As technologies, hardware, software, and algorithms improve, so do the techniques and accuracy of the Internet personalization, to which not only developers but also marketers must respond. This opens up space for further scientific research.

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<sup>36</sup> TOCH, E., WANG, Y., CRANOR, L. F.: Personalization and privacy: a survey of privacy risks and remedies in personalization-based systems. In *Springer Science+Business Media*, 2012, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 204-219.

## Conclusion

The development of information technology brings new opportunities for salespersons, but also for customers, which was significantly reflected in the current coronavirus crisis, when a significant part of business activities moved to the online environment. In such a situation, it finds its use of personalization as an effective instrument for increasing the competitiveness of a salesperson. It can even be said that the conditions for the use of personalization are more favourable than ever in history, from a technological, economic and social point of view. Developments in technology facilitate the implementation of personalization measures and personalization techniques are becoming more sophisticated with a wider potential for use. The presented text seeks a comprehensive view of all the instruments and techniques of personalization that are currently available. It also comes up with the research into which of the personalization techniques are used in communication between a salesperson and customer from the point of view of marketing experts with regard to the current coronavirus situation. Personalization is a complex and broad topic that will be constantly evolving in parallel with the development of information technology. Because it can be said that personalization enters the lives of every Internet user, personalization appears to be an effective instrument to support the business activities of a company of which, strengths are gaining in importance in times such as the coronavirus crisis. On the other hand, for the same reason, it is desirable to constantly monitor it and subject it to professional critical examination.

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# GENERATION SNOWFLAKE COMMUNICATION AUDIT

*Václav Kupec*

## Abstract

Human communication is evolving. This development reflects the influence of the micro- and macro-environment, the current Covid-19 situation, and the comprehensive digitisation of the environment. The digitisation of the environment and communication occurs mainly in Generation Z, or rather in its fraction called Generation Snowflake. Is the mentioned communication based on classic communication models, or do they differ significantly? To answer such questions or to verify the constructed hypotheses, the following research goal was set: to compile a real communication model of Generation Snowflake in a marketing environment. This goal was methodically fulfilled by modern audit approaches, which not only analyse the issue, but also establish new approaches and formulate recommendations. To fulfil the goal, the technique of independent observation of the sample of 149 respondents of the generation in question is used. Based on the fulfilment of the goal and the obtained results, it is possible to design the Generation Snowflake communication model and formulate its mathematical representation: the studied generation is still based on the Shannon – Weaver communication model, but due to digitisation the used communication lines multiply. Generation Snowflake thus uses multiple layers for communication. This means that in contrast to the classic one-line communication, these people communicate on multiple lines by so-called multi-line communication. The recorded knowledge is then important especially in marketing communication. The marketing management of modern companies can thus better and effectively manage and target marketing information.

## Key words:

Audit. Communication. Generation Snowflake. Generation Z. Management. Marketing.

## Motto

*“You are not special. You're not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You're the same decaying organic matter as everything else.”*

Tyler Durden/Chuck Palahniuk

## 1 Introduction and Review of Literature

Communication is an integral part of human society. This is confirmed by both domestic and foreign theories. The word “*communication*” is derived from the Latin word “*communis*”, i.e. “*common*”,<sup>1</sup> or is derived from the Latin word “*communicare*”, i.e. “*to share*.”<sup>2</sup> When communicating, the society shares information according to the classic Shannon – Weaver model,<sup>3</sup> interpreted by Příkladová et al.<sup>4</sup> However, communication is evolving, breaking the paradigms of associated areas and establishing new communication models. Exposed communication models include the *Generation Z* communication. This generation largely determines future trends and at the same time is an important target group of current business. Prenskey<sup>5</sup> introduced the division of generations according to communication. Its digitisation is described by Egan<sup>6</sup> or Spitzer,<sup>7</sup> especially in the generations born after 1980 (*Digital*

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<sup>1</sup> KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> CHANDLER, D., MUNDAY, R.: *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> PŘÍKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> PRENSKY, M.: Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. In *On the Horizon*, 2001, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> EGAN, J.: *Marketing Communication*. London : Sage Publications, 2015, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> SPITZER, M.: *Digitální demence*. Brno : Host, 2014, p. 185.

*Natives*). The time of birth of *Generation Z* is explicitly determined after 1995 by McCrindle<sup>8</sup> or Stankiewicz-Mróz.<sup>9</sup> This generation is defined by Scholz<sup>10</sup> or Seemiller – Grace: “*Generation Z sees the world through multiple screens, but as evidence by their we-centric attitudes, they recognize that societal issues are much larger than just themselves.*”<sup>11</sup> *Generation Snowflake* is subsequently a part of the *Generation Z* discussed in literature, its subset or faction with a specific approach to digital communication. *Generation Snowflake* is demonstrably associated with the digital technologies it uses.<sup>12</sup> Digital technologies are an effective tool in today’s marketing communication,<sup>13</sup> helping to meet the needs of this generation.<sup>14</sup> Here it is possible to draw attention to the primary paradox, or to draw attention to the risk of this correlation. Marketing communication for *Generation Snowflake* in question is prepared by marketers of other generations. The sent information<sup>15</sup> can thus miss the recipient. The process of communication of marketing information is therefore a key process of marketing or management. It is therefore necessary to examine the whole area and respond to ongoing developments, especially in the Covid-19 situation. Based on the above issues and literary research, the following question or problem arises: Q1/P1<sub>descriptive</sub> – What is the *Generation Snowflake* communication model? The research goal (A1) is therefore: to build a real communication model of *Generation Snowflake* in the marketing environment. To achieve this aim two hypotheses were formulated: H1 – The *Generation Snowflake* communication model is based on the classic model of two-way communication. H2 – The *Generation Snowflake* communication model is different from the classic model of two-way communication. Fulfilment of the above tasks will be performed by application of adequate methods, which are listed below.

## 2 Material and Methodology

The research material is the *Generation Snowflake* communication. This is defined by Giurgiuman – Buzgar: “*These young people are deficient in managing the real-life situations correctly.*”<sup>16</sup> The authors add that the generation is hypersensitive, selfish and fragile, does not compare well with life’s difficulties, etc.<sup>17</sup> That is why it is likened to snowflakes, which may be unique, but unfortunately melt quickly. “*They are super-sensitive teenagers who react strongly to unpleasant situations, hard work and emotionally disturbing experiences.*”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>8</sup> McCRINDLE, M.: *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations*. Sydney : UNSW Press, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> STANKIEWICZ-MRÓZ, A.: Perception of Work Flexibility among Students as Representatives of Generation Z and Employers from the SME Sector. In *Human Resource Management*, 2020, Vol. 132, No. 1, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> SCHOLZ, Ch.: *Generation Z*. Weinheim : Wiley – VCH Verlag, 2014, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> SEEMILLER, C., GRACE, M.: *Generation Z Goes to College*. San Francisco : John Wiley and Sons, 2016, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> ÇORA, H.: The Effects of Characteristics of Generation Z on 21st Century Business Strategies. In *Kafkas University, Journal of Economics & Administrative Sciences Faculty*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 20, p. 911.

<sup>13</sup> AGWU, M. E., ONWUEGBUZIE, H. N.: Effects of international marketing environments on entrepreneurship development. In *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> MADLEŇÁK, A., ŽUĚOVÁ, J.: *The Right to Privacy in the Context of the Use of Social Media and Geolocation Services*. Budapest : Wolters Kluwer Hungary, 2019, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> KUPEC, V., KRETTNER, A.: Měření atributů marketingových informací. In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> GIURGIUMAN T., BUZGAR, R.: The bullying phenomenon among the new generations. In *Journal of Educational Sciences and Psychology*, 2019, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> ABBOTT, T., ABBOTT, R.: *The Snowflake Generation – A Paranormal Perspective*. Camberwell : Divine Publishing, 2017, p. 1.

When these people, for example, are offended, they react hysterically, adds Heather.<sup>19</sup> The term is also associated with the novel *Fight Club* by Palahniuk,<sup>20</sup> where it was used negatively. However, the studied generation is positively associated with communication<sup>21</sup> or digital technologies.<sup>22</sup> „A smartphone is their inherent attribute.“<sup>23</sup> This is also confirmed by Cora<sup>24</sup> or Kharisma – Sari.<sup>25</sup> Silinevica – Meirule call *Generation Snowflake* true digital natives, who have always been exposed to the Internet, social networks and mobile devices. This has turned this generation into a hyper-cognitive generation that effectively gathers information from multiple sources while integrating it effectively.<sup>26</sup> This fact is important to emphasise, as it is an integral part of the presented research. Changing generational paradigms have significant impacts on marketing and management.<sup>27</sup> For the needs of marketing and management, it is possible to analyse and evaluate *Generation Snowflake* by audit approaches.<sup>28</sup> These are especially useful in the field of communication, as they are based on Latin terms “*audire*” which means “*to listen*” or “*to hear*”.<sup>29</sup> Audit is a consulting service<sup>30</sup> that helps management solve risky processes<sup>31</sup> or new business challenges.<sup>32</sup> The added value of the audit for communication processes is solved by Kupec – Lukáč – Štarchoň – Pajtinková Bartáková.<sup>33</sup> Selected approaches to communication audit, which are methodically used in the following research, are theoretically described by Karjalainen – Niskanen – Niskanen.<sup>34</sup> The research was carried out methodically with the aforementioned *Generation Snowflake* (limited to the age of 20 to 25 years). In the Czech Republic, this basic set counts 597,309 members

<sup>19</sup> HEATHER, S.: *Special Snowflake Syndrome: The Unrecognized Personality Disorder Destroying the World*. London : Panther Books, 2016, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> PALAHNIUK, C.: *Fight Club*. New York : Norton, 2005, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> BEZÁKOVÁ, Z., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A.: *Marketing communication in the eco-innovation process*. Katowice : Wydawnictwo Unikat 2, 2016, p. 132.

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<sup>23</sup> KRÓL, M.: Generational Differences in the Evaluation of Labor Market Leaving Models: The Example of the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation Z. In *Human Resource Management*, 2020, Vol. 133, No. 2, p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> ÇORA, H.: The Effects of Characteristics of Generation Z on 21st Century Business Strategies. In *Kafkas University, Journal of Economics & Administrative Sciences Faculty*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 20, p. 911.

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<sup>26</sup> SILINEVICA, I., MEIRULE, L.: Generation Z Enters into the Latvian Business Environment. In *Latgale National Economy Research*, 2019, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 99.

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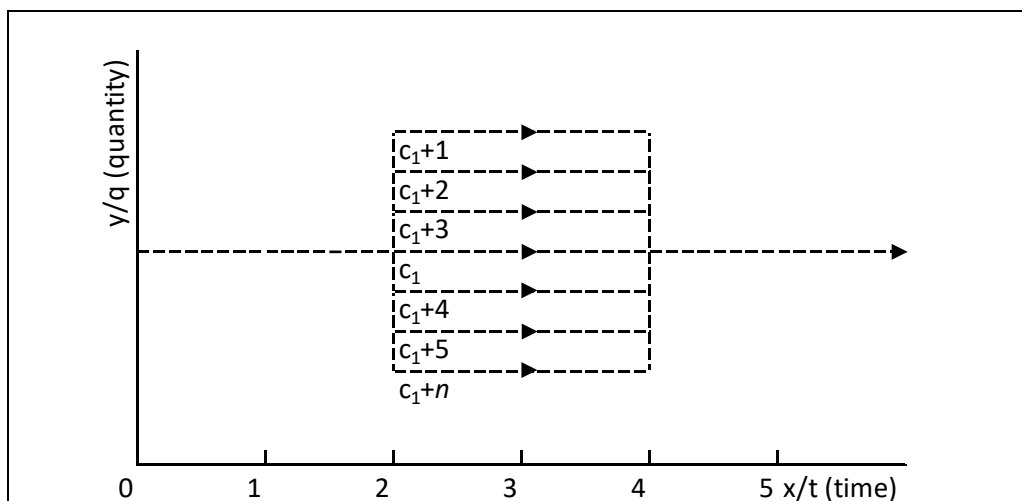
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according to the Czech Statistical Office.<sup>35</sup> The experiment was performed on a sample of 0.25% of the basic set, which is 149 respondents. These respondents were then selected from among university students. Their communication approaches on their smartphones were tested. The translated outputs of the presented research follow the scientific projects *Marketing Communication and Generation Z in the Context of Business Management*<sup>36</sup> and *Marketing Models in the Environment of Industry 4.0*.<sup>37</sup> The symbiotic results of the research are presented below.

### 3 Results and Discussion

*Generation Snowflake* communicates on smartphones completely differently from the classic communication model. The classic incoming communication line<sup>38</sup> can be divided by its members and they are able to communicate on more lines, i.e. by so-called multi-line communication. Subsequently, they can literally switch between individual communication lines without completely ignoring other lines. At one point, they can integrally perceive audio, visualisation or communication in a completely multiplicative way (see Picture 1). Marketing management<sup>39</sup> can thus divide their communication with *Generation Snowflake* and then use the communication line that suits these young people best.



**Picture 1: The multi-line communication process**

Source: Own processing

<sup>35</sup> *Věkové složení obyvatel k 1. 12. 2019*. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/121768532/1300642007.pdf/c80aeca5-b529-46c1-a58c-fc78e8024284?version=1.1>>.

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<sup>38</sup> PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> PETRŮ, N., ZICH, F.: Evaluation of Family Business Marketing Activities. In PETRANOVÁ, D., ČÁBYOVÁ, L., BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Online rules – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 397.

The presented model is based on a simplified Shramm model<sup>40</sup> of classic communication, limited to the recipient. This communication is represented by line  $c_1$ , which carries a certain amount of marketing information (y-axis). However, with *Generation Snowflake*, information may be received or collected from other communication lines ( $c_{1+1}$  to  $c_{1+n}$ ) at a certain time (x-axis, point 2). At the following time (x-axis, point 2 to point 4), this information is evaluated. And at another time (x-axis, point 4), the collected information is integrated and the feedback is provided through the noise.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore necessary to efficiently manage all communication lines to support adequate information integration.

$$C = c_1 + ((c_1 + 1) + (c_2 + 1) + (c_n + 1))$$

Where:

C = resulting communication,  
 $c_1$  = classic communication (one line),  
 $c_n$  = classic communication (another line).

**Figure 1: The multi-line communication process formula**

Source: Own processing

The reasons for *Generation Snowflake's* behaviour refer primarily to the social changes of the 1990s, while also reflecting setting of a society-wide system.<sup>42</sup> However, this is not the subject of discussion of the results. Nevertheless, this generation is the target group of many companies.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore the goal of communication, marketing communication of these companies in the conception of theories of Réklaitis – Pilelienė<sup>44</sup> or Labanauskaitė – Fiore – Stašys.<sup>45</sup> The analysis of the behaviour of *Generation Snowflake* in question must therefore be viewed quite objectively, in order to adequately analyse its communication (Kupec;<sup>46</sup> Kupec – Lukáč – Štarchoň – Pajtinková Bartáková<sup>47</sup>) and respond to potential risks (Tkachenko et al.,<sup>48</sup> Ferreira – Crema – Verbano<sup>49</sup>). It is also necessary to mention the limits of the presented research. These can be seen primarily in the acceptance of possible errors of inaccurate (non-digital) testing. As further research possibilities, it is therefore possible to propose duplication of an experimental observation method – eye tracking and an observation method – smartphone screens, all in a longer time frame. The more precise results of the proposed experiment will then make it possible to refine the communication approaches to this

<sup>40</sup> KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

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<sup>43</sup> CHATURVEDI, P. D., CHATURVEDI, M.: *Business communication: concepts, cases and applications*. New Delhi : Pearson, 2011, p. 32.

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<sup>49</sup> FERREIRA, P., CREMA, M., VERBANO, C.: Risk management in SMEs: A systematic literature review and future directions. In *European Management Journal*, 2020, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 78.

generation as well. Despite these limits, however, it can be stated that the presented findings expand the current knowledge of *Generation Snowflake*. The results can be used especially in the field of marketing management.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

The society's communication is evolving, which of course cyclically affects the society itself. Communication is the subject of long-term research, based on Shannon – Weaver models,<sup>51</sup> followed by Shramm<sup>52</sup> or Příkrylová.<sup>53</sup> However, these models must reflect the influence of the micro- and macro-environment, the current Covid-19 situation, and the digitisation of the entire environment.<sup>54</sup> Digitisation occurs mainly in *Generation Z*,<sup>55</sup> or rather in its faction called *Generation Snowflake*,<sup>56</sup> born after 1995.<sup>57</sup> So how do these young people communicate (Q1/P1<sub>descriptive</sub>)? The hypotheses state that *the Generation Snowflake* digital communication is based on classic communication models<sup>58</sup> (H1), but at the same time they differ from them (H2). To verify these hypotheses, the goal (A1) was set to compile a real communication model of *Generation Snowflake* in the marketing environment. This goal was methodically fulfilled by audit approaches,<sup>59</sup> which not only analyse the issue, but also establish new approaches and recommendations. Based on the fulfilment of the goal (A1), the obtained results and especially the proposed communication model (see Picture 1, see Figure 1), it is possible to state the confirmation of both constructed hypotheses (H1, H2). The tested communication of *Generation Snowflake* in question still holds a communication line according to the Shannon – Weaver models,<sup>60</sup> but due to digitisation, its lines may be layered into the so-called multi-line communication. This knowledge is important especially in the marketing communication. The marketing management of modern companies can thus better and effectively manage and target marketing information.<sup>61</sup> This can improve the marketing communication in question.

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<sup>52</sup> HALADA, J.: *Marketingová komunikace a public relations*. Prague : Karolinum, 2015, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> EGAN, J.: *Marketing Communication*. London : Sage Publications, 2015, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> SEEMILLER, C., GRACE, M.: *Generation Z Goes to College*. San Francisco : John Wiley and Sons, 2016, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> ABBOTT, T., ABBOTT, R.: *The Snowflake Generation – A Paranormal Perspective*. Camberwell : Divine Publishing, 2017, p. 1.

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<sup>58</sup> KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

<sup>59</sup> FURTUNĂ, C., CIUCIOI, A.: Internal Audit in the Era of Continuous Transformation. Survey of Internal Auditors in Romania. In *Audit Financiar*, 2019, Vol. 17, No. 155, p. 459.

<sup>60</sup> KULKA, J.: *Psychologie umění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 186.

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## NATURE AND CRITIQUE OF THE GAMIFICATION PHENOMENON

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### **Abstract**

Digital games are a significant fragment of lives of many people of almost every age category. Fashionability and popularity of these media products have launched an extensive discussion in the society of possible application of this concept in education, as, according to many theoreticians, the currently used teaching methods are inefficient, outdated, and lower the motivation of individuals to continue learning. Digital games might present one of the adequate solutions to this problem. Their partial components are being applied in the process of education through gamification. In practice, this phenomenon creatively uses elements and mechanics of digital games in order to naturally encourage interest, activity, and motivation of individuals during the educational process. Any element of a digital game can thus be a potential impulse for changing the character of education, whereas in the current situation regarding the spreading coronavirus, this form of education is more than desirable, despite its many pitfalls. The primary objective of the submitted paper is to present the nature and possible risks closely connected to the discussed phenomenon. In the presented theoretical reflection, we thus work with relevant publications by N. Esposito, M. J. P. Wolf, N. Vrabec, V. Kačínová, D. Buckingham, S. Deterding, S. Sanduskyová, and other authors that address definitions of a (digital) game, media education, and gamification itself. Our goal is to present the basic and topical terminological axis of the analysed issue on the one hand and, on the other hand, to point out the critical aspects related to this instrument of modern education, which might appear to be solely positive at first sight. To achieve the set ambition, we will apply logical-conceptual methods in the text.

### **Key words:**

Critical Aspects. Digital Game. Gamification. Gamification of Education. Gamification Tools. Media Education.

### **Introduction to the Analysed Issue**

Education is one of the most important parts of life of every individual and strongly influences their existence in the society. It is a process of active acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values contributing to the formation of an individual's personality. Despite its significance, we are currently mostly confronted with standard teaching methods that are considered inefficient and outdated in relation to a continuous decline in motivation. This problem could be solved by various available options, one of them being the application of game elements in education – the so-called gamification. Gamification in education creatively uses selected elements of digital games (points, levels, trophies, etc.) as tools that stimulate long-term activity and motivation of individuals and initiate positive changes in their behaviour. Digital games are among the most popular forms of unwinding and entertainment for people of all age categories, because their principle is based on natural stimulation of motivational processes through the use of suitable game mechanics. Principles of gamification are built on this basic premise and attempt to transform the fundamentals of our learning to make it more pleasant, efficient and to eliminate most of the negative consequences of traditional educational processes. Therefore, gamification in education, as a progressive educational method with a high potential, is gaining more and more recognition in the society. In the presented paper, it is, therefore, our objective to clarify the nature of the gamification phenomenon, while not forgetting the critical aspects related to this concept. Reflexion of basic terminological axis, which we use to characterize and clarify the most exposed terms related to the object of our study, such as “digital game” or “media education”, will allow us to meet the aforementioned ambition. We will reach the primary and the partial objective thanks to implementation of relevant literature and scientific electronic sources, i.e. by using logical-conceptual methods. The contribution of the submitted linguistic manifestation is thus

not only to accumulate the already existing knowledge of the gamification phenomenon, but also to point out the obstacles associated with the application of game elements in education.

## 1 Basic Terms Closely Connected to the Analysed Issue

Based on the theories of relevant authors such as e.g. J. Huizinga<sup>1</sup>, R. Caillois<sup>2</sup>, and others, we can state that play has been certainly present in the society since the emergence of humans. As it has consistently been an important part of human culture, there has always been an intention to extend it and bring other original concepts of various types of games in a different form. The suitable moment for this purpose came with the development of new technologies, such as computer and internet, which allowed the distribution of heterogeneous types of games to ever-growing groups of population. The phenomenon of play has thus naturally adapted to the expected technological progress. This development resulted in the emergence of the so-called digital game.

N. Esposito provides one of the available definitions of this term. According to the author, digital game is a game played through an audiovisual apparatus, which consists of an electronic computing system with the possibility of connecting input devices (controllers, mouse, keyboard, steering wheel, touchpad, etc.) and output devices (screen, television, loudspeakers, headphones, etc.). All these devices have a common denominator – a human-computer interaction. Interaction of a human with a computing system is one of the differentiating factors compared to their nonelectronic precursors – games in everyday socio-cultural reality.<sup>3</sup> Another theoretician defining digital game is D. Djaouti. With a group of experts under his direction, he has addressed this issue in a study entitled *Play, Game, World: Anatomy of a Videogame*. Its output, inter alia, was a complex characterization of a digital game and its features. During their research, the authors of the study proposed a model of repetitive interaction cycle involving a player and a digital game. Within the same context as Nicolas Esposito, they speak of an important model of interaction between a human and a computer through an electronic device. We can envision it as a set of three closely interconnected and mutually communicating parts in real time – the player's input, the computing system, and the output device. They thus consider a digital game an interactive system applying basic principles of gameplay through a complex electronic device.<sup>4</sup> Game theoretician M. J. P. Wolf also approaches a digital game in relation to its technological aspects. According to him, it means a transformation of a game into a digital form (software) that is played on the basis of the feedback received from the display, using an electronic system to provide this chain.<sup>5</sup> To sum up, a game distributed to a player through an electronic device that allows their input and displays the output on a monitor or television screen could be regarded as a digital game. Therefore, an important specific of a digital game is

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London, Boston, Henley : Routledge a Kegan Paul, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> See also: CAILLOIS, R.: *Hry a Lidé*. Prague : Nakladatelství Studia Ypsilon, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> ESPOSITO, N.: A Short and Simple Definition of What a Videogame Is. In DE CASTELL, S., JENSON, J. (eds.): *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference – Changing Views: Worlds in Play*. Vancouver : Digital Games Research Association, 2005, p. 2-5. [online]. [2020-09-14]. Available at: <<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/06278.37547.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> DJAOUTI, D. et al.: Play, Game, World: Anatomy of a Videogame. In *International Journal of Intelligent Games & Simulation*, 2008, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 2-4. [online]. [2020-09-14]. Available at: <[http://www.ludoscience.com/files/ressources/cgames07\\_videogames\\_anatomy.pdf](http://www.ludoscience.com/files/ressources/cgames07_videogames_anatomy.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> WOLF, M. J. P.: What Is a Video Game?. In WOLF, M. J. P. (ed.): *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation and Beyond*. Westport : Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 3-5.



the implementation of the system of interaction between a human and a computer. Using peripheral devices (game controller, keyboard, mouse, etc.), the player directly interacts with the internal system of a digital game and receives feedback in real time. It thus applies the basic principles and characteristics of a classic game (occurring in socio-cultural reality) transferred to virtual reality. Based on the acquired knowledge, we can further state that although digital games are a part of the media that primarily provide entertainment, they also offer space for education and acquisition of new information.

Educational potential of digital games is closely connected to media education. The wide variety of definitions of this term is expressed by N. Vrabec. He declares that, in general, it is not a static concept. On the contrary, it keeps developing together with current trends in the area of media. The common denominator of the majority of formulations is their procedural character, as they are built on a basic paradigm that media education is a more or less systematic and complex process, which aims to develop in an individual a certain qualitative transformation referred to as media literacy. It is based on a premise that there are differences between individuals in the quantity and quality of their knowledge.<sup>6</sup> V. Kačínová further states that it is important to take into account the context and methods of realizing the educational process in media education. According to the author, the term in question evokes mainly intentional and planned interactive teaching and learning about media with an aim to form an individual's ability to receive and use media in a sensible, i.e. critically-evaluative, value-selective, and responsible (in accordance to a positive personal contribution) way. Media education also includes a term "media competency" stemming from communication competency. Development of media competencies is closely related to the transformation of communication structures caused by the progress and advancement of technical-technological facilities and the ability of an individual to respond to these changes and use media for their communication and conative repertoire.<sup>7</sup> We thus witness the same effect as when a person improves their communication competencies by acquiring experience through the contact with other people. Moreover, S. Breška also takes his view on media education. According to him, it is a wide scale of educational, pedagogical, awareness-raising, promotional, and other activities with a common goal to acquaint various groups of the public with media activities, the real purposes of media contents, and possible consequences of their influence on lives of individuals and the whole society.<sup>8</sup>

The presented facts thus clearly imply that the domestic authors evidently derive their opinions from foreign theoreticians. In this context, one of the renowned theoreticians is D. Buckingham, who equally states that media education is a means to acquire media competencies. These are understood as an ability to work with media and capability to receive and further interpret media contents, i.e. to participate on a process of media communication. The level of the media competencies developed in an individual speaks of the level of their media literacy.<sup>9</sup> The author further suggests that the attention of media education is also aimed at the technological side of media. In this sense, he presents how the devices that provide access to information function, how to operate them and use them to our advantage.

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<sup>6</sup> VRABEC, N.: *Mediálna výchova: teoretické východiská a trendy*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Teória a prax mediálnej výchovy : mediálna výchova ako súčasť všeobecného školského vzdelávania*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2015, p. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> BREŠKA, S.: *Východiská koncepcie a ciele mediálnej výchovy*. In MAGÁL, S., PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Kolokvium 1 – 2 Katedry masmediálnej komunikácie : Zborník príspevkov z jarného a jesenného kolokvia Katedry masmediálnej komunikácie FMK UCM v Trnave*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2004, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> BUCKINGHAM, D.: *Media Education. Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 2003, p. 4.

D. Buckingham points out this aspect mostly in the context of current technological trends, as, in the recent two decades, a notable expansion in usage of modern devices (smartphones, tablets, portable computers, etc.) has occurred in the households and educational institutions.<sup>10</sup> In general, based on its specifics, we can regard media education as a strong instrument of teaching and learning by using various media contents including digital games. Therefore, a serious debate about forms of their potential application in education has started in academia. Within this context, M. Pivec emphasises the importance and significance of digital games in the lifelong education, as the digital games become a new form of teaching due to their interactive content.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 Nature and Realization of the Gamification Phenomenon

Usage of the principles and elements of digital games in the process of education is currently known as “gamification”, while distinguishing two forms of this phenomenon. Both categories are essentially quite similar; however, they differ in the ways of how they use the specific elements of a digital game in the educational practice. The first form of gamification is the so-called structural gamification. It is characterized by using elements and instruments of game design of digital games to increase integrity and deeper involvement of individuals during a particular task or activity. The important characteristic of this type of gamification is the ambition to introduce entertaining elements to particular assignments and present their content in a simpler and playful way.<sup>12</sup> Another author addressing the issue of defining structural gamification is S. Sanduskyová. She explicates it mainly in the relation to the usage of elements of digital games with an aim to make a concrete change in the behaviour of an individual. It is a phenomenon, when selected specifics of digital games (points, experience, ranking, badges, trophies, rules, goals, etc.) are used as gamifying instruments for the purposes of communicating information. Structural gamification uses the design of digital games to create an optimal context for behaviour changes, motivation increase, and achievement of results. Using the seemingly simple elements of digital games thus establishes a high level of immersion of individuals and stimulates their attention.<sup>13</sup> The second type is the so-called content gamification. It is an application of game elements, game mechanics, and game thinking into a particular, primarily non-game, task.<sup>14</sup> To ensure the highest possible level of an individual’s activity, it uses different challenges, stories, and characters. These elements are the main narrative carriers in digital games. In educational process, the aforementioned form of gamification is applied mainly to produce an engaging experience inducing the desired behaviour. In the activities, individuals represent various fictitious roles, which stimulate their interest in the task.<sup>15</sup> Content gamification is usually present during

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<sup>10</sup> BUCKINGHAM, D.: Media Education Goes Digital: An Introduction. In *Learning, Media and Technology*, 2007, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 111-112.

<sup>11</sup> PIVEC, M.: Editorial: Play and Learn: Potentials of Game-Based Learning. In *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 2007, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 387.

<sup>12</sup> DETERDING, S. et al.: Gamification: Using Game Design Elements in Non-Gaming Contexts. In TAN, D. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 2011 Annual Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. New York : Association of Computer Machinery, 2011, p. 2426.

<sup>13</sup> SANDUSKY, S.: *Gamification in Education*. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://repository.arizona.edu/bitstream/handle/10150/556222/GamificationinEducation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>.

<sup>14</sup> KAPP, K. M., BLAIR, L., MESCH, R.: *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction Fieldbook : Theory into Practice*. New York : John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 237.

<sup>15</sup> FILATRO, A., COSTA CAVALCANTI, C.: Structural and Content Gamification Design for Tutor Education. In BASTIAENS, T. (ed.): *E-learn – World Conference on E-learning*. Washington DC : Association for the

monotonous activities that lead to a potential gradual loss of motivation. One of the interesting ways of using it is a story of a hero, where individuals, e.g. during a lesson, play fictitious roles of warriors dealing with challenges and obstacles in a form of assigned tasks (for example math exercises). By overcoming obstacles (correctly solving the tasks), they gradually “fight their way” to the end and the main enemy. They can only defeat the enemy, if they solve a difficult final “mission”. These are simple forms of using the narrative elements with an aim to efficiently attract the attention of individuals and motivate them to carry on with the activity. Teachers can further enrich this gamified education by suitable audiovisual materials.<sup>16</sup>

Simultaneously, gamification introduces an element of catharsis into the process of education, liberating an individual from potential dejection caused by an activity or task. This is the reason why the elements of digital games – gamification tools, are especially successful in the education process. These important instruments allow keeping the attention and activity of individuals at a high level. The pedagogues and teachers help them in this creative way to reach the desired results. To sum up, we can state that gamification is a process of applying game elements in non-game contexts with an aim to reach the expected result. In the theory of media studies, we are also able to note an occurrence of a term with similar meaning, i.e. the “game-based learning”. Authors addressing the issue of gamified education often point out that these are not synonyms, but different forms of using digital games and their elements for educational purposes.<sup>17</sup> Authors S. Tang, M. Hannghan, and A. El Rhalibi define the term “game-based learning” as the use of a digital game to present educational materials. Through telling its story, players are able to improve in a specific topic (i.e. they acquire knowledge concerning media, economy, etc.). The educational process is carried out through solving problems according to a predefined script determined by the selected digital game. It may be a part of learning in class, group, or through individual schooling. Cooperation with the teacher, who provides direct feedback, is also an important part of the process.<sup>18</sup> Game-based learning works with digital games specifically designed and intended directly for education. It is a popular method for teachers to gain favour and attention of individuals. However, the question of technological complexity of conducting this type of education may be a potential problem. Based on the aforementioned facts, we can state that gamified education is still a relatively novel phenomenon and there are permanently appearing discoveries of more efficient methods of its implementation into educational process.

Currently, we thus speak of an existence of an unsettled range of tools used to conduct the gamified education. It is an area of finding new ways of applying the elements of game design and game mechanics of digital games. In connection to game design, it is important to consider a number of variables, because application of the same tools in different contexts and situations does not always lead to the same result. By combining these instruments, it is possible to bring into the process of gamified education a desired uniqueness evoking interest

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Advancement of Computing in Education, 2016, p. 2-5. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <[https://cdn1.unasp.br/home/2017/11/paper\\_49942\\_30741-1.pdf](https://cdn1.unasp.br/home/2017/11/paper_49942_30741-1.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> MENTLÍKOVÁ, L.: *Jak vypadá gamifikace e-learningu v praxi?*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sk/node/47473>>.

<sup>17</sup> AL-AZAWI, R., AL-FALITI, F., AL-BLUSHI, M.: Educational Gamification Vs. Game Based Learning: Comparative Study. In *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup> TANG, S., HANNEGHAN, M., EL RHALIBI, A.: Introduction to Games-Based Learning. In CONNOLLY, T., STANSFIELD, M., BOYLE, L. (eds.): *Games-Based Learning Advancements for Multi-Sensory Human Computer Interfaces: Techniques And Effective Practices*. Hershey, PA : IGI Publishing, 2009, p. 2-16. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<http://biblio.uabcs.mx/html/libros/pdf/9/c1.pdf>>.

and increase in motivation and activity of individuals.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the constant development in the area of information technologies, the most popular solutions are those that use the modern intelligent devices. Educational institutions have also noticed their great potential and have gradually started to implement them in the realization of education. Game studios, companies, and organizations have reacted to this situation by launching the development of appropriate tools allowing conducting gamified education by using these devices. Applications based on principles of games (not explicitly digital games) proved to be a suitable instrument.<sup>20</sup> An adequate example is an application that assigns specific tasks, which the user is supposed to carry out in real world. When users accomplish them, they can mark this activity as completed in the application and it displays information about the received points, trophies or about reaching the next level. The application can then assign new tasks continually and autonomously. This cycle might potentially go on indefinitely, or until its usage is terminated. The “player” is motivated by the context of the application, i.e. by the opportunity to carry out activities with positive consequences on their life in the real world. Generally, these are often applications aimed at fitness and exercise; however, applications intended to educate are not an exception.<sup>21</sup> Educational platform *Kahoot!* is a fitting example of the aforementioned solution. It is implemented into the educational process as a tool for fast testing and reviewing of students’ knowledge. It is based on quizzes and made available to the users through its mobile application or web interface. The simplicity of its basic principle is one of its greatest benefits. In a collective education, this tool is used in cooperation with a lecturer, who presents questions that need to be answered by selecting one of four options. After responding to all questions, individuals can access the leaderboard, which is determined by the number of correct answers and the speed of their placement.<sup>22</sup> Other suitable examples of applications intended for gamified education are e.g. *Duolingo*, *Coursera* or *Quizizz*. Based on the stated facts, it is obvious that the gamification tools do not have clearly set boundaries and are open to additions of new elements. If the techniques are applied correctly, they bring many benefits for the individuals. However, teacher’s preparation is equally important, because if the selection of gamification tools is not right, it can lead to often concealed negative effects related to the issue concerned (e.g. loss of motivation and interest of the individuals).

### 3 Critical Aspects Closely Related to Use of Gamification Techniques in Practice

Using gamification in educational process is still a relatively new phenomenon and this is reflected in practice. Applying its concepts is currently based mainly on voluntariness and is not firmly integrated in educational curricula. Pedagogues and teachers decide for themselves whether they are willing to implement gamification into the educational process. Similar liberality regarding this phenomenon is also present in the forms of its realization. This state is presently reflected in the low extent of practical application of gamified education, especially in Slovakia. It can most frequently be encountered in interactive courses or fun

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<sup>19</sup> PAPPAS, Ch.: *23 Effective Uses Of Gamification In Learning: Part 1*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2015. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://elearningindustry.com/23-effective-uses-gamification-in-learning-part-1>>.

<sup>20</sup> LEHENCHUK, Y.: *Get the Most in Life and Work with Gamification*. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://producttribe.com/productivity/life-gamification>>.

<sup>21</sup> MASTROIANNI, B.: *Turning Exercise Into a Game Can Make Fitness More Fun and Effective*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2018. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/turning-exercise-into-a-game-can-make-fitness-more-fun-and-effective>>.

<sup>22</sup> DEBBITA, T., GANAPATHY, M., KAUR, M.: *Kahoot! It: Gamification in Higher Education*. In *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 2018, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 570-572.

programming.<sup>23</sup> A suitable way for the lecturers to grasp the principles of gamification use in education would be to organize the so-called hackathons. These events are focused on designing and developing new ways of implementation of design elements of digital games into educational process in such a way that promotes its improvement and innovation. The advantage of hackathons is that its active participants are able to apply creative thinking without restrictions in the given assignment. After they finish, each individual can evaluate how people from different areas handled an identical task. Hackathon outputs are publicly available and everybody who is interested can consequently use them in practice.<sup>24</sup> Besides hackathons, there are also other available options to enhance the use of gamified education. Empirical courses familiarizing individuals with gamification and possibilities of its practical usage are one of the options. Their advantage is that, through practical examples, the future lecturers are able to better understand how their students might think and potentially act.<sup>25</sup> Similar approach is also present abroad and the majority of the existing gamified online systems are currently aimed at programming. Interactive platforms such as *Code School* or *CodeCombat* are directed at both the children and adults and consist of fun courses with a digital-gaming theme. Another example is the tutorial *Rails for Zombies*, where the student's task is to programme a simple application for zombies to communicate with each other.<sup>26</sup> However, the current situation at home and abroad in relation to the usage of gamified education can be regarded as a period of adaptation. Individual countries, including Slovakia, have not implemented this phenomenon in their national education systems due to lack of research in this area. Gamified education is practically carried out mostly by private companies and online platforms that are capable of allocating the necessary time and funds. In Slovakia, organizations as *EduLab* or *Hemisféra (Hemisphere)* can be considered such pioneers. Both institutions attempt to show a suitable way of using modern methods of employing the elements of digital games in the educational process that could be applicable in the public sector. The majority of theoreticians view the practical use of gamification in the learning process as a positive. They especially highlight the natural way of stimulating motivation and activity of individuals by using elements from digital games. Besides the aforementioned positives, we can also impute certain negative characteristics to the discussed phenomenon.

Norwegian professor M. F. Buck is one of the primary critics of applying gamification in education. In his opinion, the phenomenon in question is an abandonment of serious pedagogical and didactic methods. He states that gamified education disrupts the basic critical aspects provided by school and can lead to isolation of the students, because it suppresses natural exploration and confines their creativity in problem solving.<sup>27</sup> Authors I. Bogost and M. Robertson are also relatively strong opponents of gamification in educational process. They argue that “gamification” should be called “pointsification”. They base this opinion on the basic paradigm that the gamification elements in education are frequently reduced to

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<sup>23</sup> HELD, M.: *Hravost' vo vzdelávaní – gamifikácia*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://vlcata.sk/hravost-vo-vzdelavani-gamifikacia/>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ako vyzerá gamifikácia vo vzdelávaní?*. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://ipao.sk/nezaradene/ako-vyzera-gamifikacia-vo-vzdelavani-ipao/>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Vstúpte do sveta gamifikácie: Praktické cvičenia pre HR/e-learning profesionálov*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://eduworld.sk/kd/644/vstupte-do-sveta-gamifikacie-prakticke-cvicenia-pre-hr-e-learning-profesionalov/>>.

<sup>26</sup> McGOWEN, B.: *How I learned Ruby On Rails*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://developer.rackspace.com/blog/how-i-learned-ruby-on-rails/>>.

<sup>27</sup> BUCK, M. F.: Gamification of Learning and Teaching in Schools – A Critical Stance. In *International Journal of Media, Technology and Lifelong Learning*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 36-47. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573768.pdf>>.

a system of points and badges. Although these instruments are great tools of communicating progress and effort of individuals, they do not constitute a game by themselves. According to the authors, they are the least important part of digital games with minimal relation to communication of rich cognitive, emotional, and social drivers of individuals.<sup>28</sup> G. Zichermann and C. Cunningham point out another possible risk of gamified education. Rewards closely connected to the gamification process often strengthen individuals' motivation, but once this process is started, it is necessary to stick to it until the completion of education. Otherwise, it might have an opposite effect.<sup>29</sup> Opinions of authors, who criticise the use of gamification in education, often show several recurrent motives. Among these are the high expenses on equipment, software, training of pedagogues, etc. The abovementioned potential costs mostly affect students by various fees that can be considered an obstacle of entering this type of education. Another problem is the so-called logistics of games, as the gamified teaching requires much planning and preparation. Schools need to ask themselves many important questions (e.g., whether the classes are fitted with enough technical means, such as computers and other necessary devices and aids). Such preparation requires quite a lot of time and space, which the schools must take into account.<sup>30</sup> Criticism of any phenomenon is a standard occurrence in the media studies, gamified education being no exception. The aforementioned risk related to the loss of motivation is, however, one of the most serious, as the stimulation of motivation is the key factor of future direction of gamification.

## Conclusion

Dynamic development of modern society results in the fact that people are permanently exposed to new information, phenomena, and challenges. This state motivates them to learn constantly and actively. Despite the significance of education in the life of every individual, we mostly encounter the usage of standard teaching methods. These techniques often adversely affect motivation of individuals and, for this reason, are frequently regarded as inefficient and obsolete. Social discussion has thus raised a question of how to eliminate this problem. Gamification of the educational process might be a potential solution. It is based on using the elements of digital games (e.g. points, trophies, levels) in a non-game environment as an appropriate instrument of positive stimulation of activity or motivation of individuals. Digital games are a popular form of catharsis for people of every age category, because they naturally drive them to do a certain activity through game mechanics. Gamification thus changes the character of education with an aim to eliminate the majority of negative consequences of traditional educational processes with the help of popular elements of digital games. With regard to the aforementioned facts, the gamification phenomenon has become the centre of our attention in the submitted paper, whose primary objective was to present the basic and topical theoretical framework of the analysed issue and to point out the critical aspects related to this tool of modern education. We have successfully reached our objective by using relevant publications, journals, and electronic sources. We have given a detailed description of terms such as “digital game” and “media education”. An in-depth clarification

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<sup>28</sup> YUAN HUNG, A. Ch.: A Critique and Defense of Gamification. In *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 58-69. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/15.1.4.pdf>>.

<sup>29</sup> ZICHERMANN, G., CUNNINGHAM, Ch.: *Gamification by Design: Implementing Game Mechanics in Web and Mobile Apps*. Sebastopol : O'Reilly Media, 2011, p. 15-17.

<sup>30</sup> GLOTZBACH, M.: *Gamification Can Help Education – Here's How*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018. [online]. [2020-09-16]. Available at: <<https://venturebeat.com/2018/09/06/gamification-can-help-education-heres-how/>>.

of the gamification phenomenon in relation to education has also been a subject of our study. We have focused our attention on its forms, available instruments and the actual realization. However, we also found it essential to point out the critical opinions of theoreticians and the risks associated with the application of gamified education in practice. In accordance with the aforementioned, we conclude that we have met all of the preset ambitions. However, due to a marked technical-technological progress in the area of education, it is vital that our findings are continuously updated, compared to the original ones, thus creating a suitable environment for further discourse.

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## SUPERHERO ARCHETYPE IN CURRENT MEDIA PRODUCTION

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### **Abstract**

Myths and legends about heroes could be considered obvious determinants of the formation of a superhero archetype that has naturally established itself in consciousness of individuals. Gradually, however, the superhero archetype has transformed itself into media production where it has become an ostensible element in production of narrative contents. Massive popularity of this phenomenon has thus led to it being constantly used in creation of media products, especially cinematographic works. By recycling the conventional archetypal patterns, the producers of superhero audiovisual pictures started to contribute permanently to various adaptations of the aforementioned concept. Although the majority of films with this topic are based on an almost identical premise, we are able to define some different typological characteristics of individual protagonists. Therefore, the main objective of the submitted study is to identify the forms of expression specific for media superheroes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For deeper comprehension of the issue in question, we have used significant publications by renowned authors, such as R. J. Gray, B. Kaklamanidou, E. C. Arenas, N. Wolf, J. Radošinská, and A. Plencner or various other relevant journal and digital sources. Our ambition is not only to generalize the forms of expression representing contemporary superheroes, but also to present topical theoretical ground related to the discussed issue. The basic aim of the paper is simply to clarify the nature of superhero archetype in current media, or audiovisual production influenced by the current situation closely related to the spread of coronavirus. For the purposes of reaching the set objective, we are using the methods of logical analysis of text in combination with qualitative content analysis.

### **Key words:**

Archetype. Cinematographic Work. Female Superhero. Film Production. Hero. Male Superhero. Media Production.

### **Introduction**

Global interest in superhero topic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has caused an enormous increase in its movie adaptations. The reason for this phenomenon could be that the recipients are fascinated by extraordinary capabilities of the superhero characters. However, the aforementioned specific, primarily physical, abilities are not necessarily the most attractive elements for the recipients; they might also be attracted by the dominant character traits of the main protagonists. On the other hand, the consumers of superhero movies are also being offered heterogeneous narratives in a form of mythological concepts. In this context, we must not forget the fact that the superhero phenomenon has arisen from mythology reflecting deity, mythical heroes or other heroic entities. Furthermore, the producers of these characters have certain tendencies to create individuals as authentically as possibly, although the fundamental origin of these characters stems primarily from the aforementioned archetypal, currently often unreal, figures. Based on this, nowadays, only somewhat recycled forms of established heroes are being created. In this context, we also find it equally important to mention that the constant depiction of superhero archetype shows not only positive, but also negative impacts on the media audience. Watching these cinematographic works can thus markedly influence an individual's day-to-day life, in the sense of their behaviour and socially (un)desirable actions. In the submitted study, we aim to clarify the nature of superhero archetype in current media environment, mainly in the sphere of cinematographic production, with regard to the ever-present gender differences between the superhero characters. Our equally significant ambition is to map typical attributes of contemporary superheroes in specific products of foreign cinematographic production, using relevant research procedures – the methods of logical analysis and qualitative content analysis. Thus, the primary objective of the presented paper is to identify forms of expression specific for “the media superheroes” of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. Therefore, the main contribution of the text is the summarization of topical research findings related to the issue of superhero archetype in current media production, which, however, needs to be continuously objectively evaluated.

## 1 “Archetype” and “Hero” – Their Contemporary Meaning in the Context of Media Environment

The hero archetype has been occurring in the media environment since time immemorial. In the recent years, however, popularity of the phenomenon in question is growing constantly. From myths, short stories, to comics stories, a hero has established themselves also in the blockbuster movies. The hero archetype has thus become a pop-culture sensation of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A. Plencner divides the archetype of modern hero in media production into the following categories:

- *superhero* – resembles the hero from myths the most. He never chooses his destiny, is invincible and immortal (for example *Superman, Spider-Man*).
- *antihero* – hero with a problematic character. This hero is incompetent, awkward, unpopular, and passive (for instance *Don Quijote, Glum* from *The Lord of the Rings*).
- *dark hero* – has a painful and unresolved past. He is mostly motivated by a strong desire for revenge. He is being analogized to Jung’s archetype of “the shadow” (e.g. *Batman, León*).
- *female hero* – this is a new phenomenon, where women take on male patterns of behaviour. This hero represents the opposite of classic stories, in which a woman is “the damsel in distress” that needs to be saved and can only fulfil her destiny by finding a man and getting married. In the modern stories, however, women become heroes that are able to save not only themselves, but also others; they are no longer the passive characters (for example *Nikita, Xena*).<sup>1</sup>

Currently, we can definitely include the aforementioned modern superhero fiction in the multimedia narrative forms. The reason for this is the occurrence of the topic in every media area, while we consider the film and TV series industry the most popular. This is also confirmed by their global profits for 2019, where the dominant movie *Avengers: Endgame* (directed by Joe Russo, Anthony Russo, 2019) grossed approximately 2.8 billion USD. It is followed by the movies *Captain Marvel* (directed by Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck, 2019), and *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019), also grossing more than 1 billion US dollars.<sup>2</sup> We also must not forget that superhero movies often concentrate on special individuals (e.g. aliens or mutants), often working in a team.<sup>3</sup> It is one of the primary reasons for their success, because depiction of something unreal in our real world is currently a considerably attractive element within the movie production. This is also a reason for the frequent recycling of the superhero archetype concept. Within this context, there is also the closely related issue of a similar plot of the majority of the cinematographic and TV series productions with the discussed theme. Both the classic and the contemporary heroes must be believable dramatic characters whose adventure from the dramaturgy point of view develops within a conventionalized sequence of specific stages (exposition, conflict, crisis, peripety, and catastrophe/denouement). It is

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<sup>1</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Archetyp hrdinu I. Súčasný obraz hrdinu II. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Média na prahu tretieho tisícročia: súčasný stav mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2006, p. 72-75.

<sup>2</sup> 2019 Worldwide Box Office. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2019/>>.

<sup>3</sup> GRAY, R. J., KAKLAMANOUDOU, B.: *The 21st Century Superhero. Essays on Gender, Genre and Globalization in Film*. Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2011, p. 4.

impossible to create a story, whose structure would defy the conventional narrative techniques.<sup>4</sup> This thesis is closely connected to a statement by Z. Gindl-Tatárová, as the author thinks that the American three-act structure uses the so-called fairytale layout in the majority of its mainstream movies, while being based on the basic premise that good always wins over evil. The hero thus decides their destiny.<sup>5</sup>

A possible update of the superhero narrative in contemporary film production is the depiction of the so-called “collective” superhero, as is the case in the movie *X-Men* (directed by Bryan Singer, 2000), with the leading protagonist *Wolverine* contrasting with a group of mutants. *Wolverine* represents a classic hero of popular culture, who is more stable (i.e. conventional and invariant) and more popular with older audiences. His opposite is the group of mutants personifying uncertainty, this group being more attractive for the adolescent audience.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, when thinking about heroes, regardless of their individual or group character, we mostly take into account their attractiveness. We admire their physical disposition and do not put emphasis on their character traits. For this reason, we often encounter morally unintegrated and unscrupulous heroes, with a so-called phenomenon of “negative heroes”.<sup>7</sup> These are primarily antiheroes, who can be friends with the superhero to a certain extent; however, they become an adversary of the superhero protagonist when they use dangerous and extreme tools to reach common goal, thus modifying the protagonist’s convictions. Consequentially, they head towards a conflict. Within the duality, there is the protagonist and the antagonist who, in this context, personifies Jung’s archetype of the “shadow”.<sup>8</sup> The phenomenon of negative hero had also been popular in the past, but it is especially apparent in present times. We state this on the basis of how we tend to gloze over the things that are morally corrupt, perverse, or bad.<sup>9</sup> The so-called “aestheticization of evil” has become especially sought-after in the film genres of action and superhero type. As an example, we can use the antiheroes *Joker* or *Loki*. Many spectators favour these negative protagonists (antagonists or antiheroes) over the actual positive heroes. The aforementioned phenomenon has its roots in the times of mythical and supernatural entities, when there were many gods who ruled cruelly and egocentrically and yet were glorified and worshipped. In his research, U. Eco ascribes the popularity of the so-called villains mainly to socio-cultural and psychological aspects, such as e.g. fear, anxiety, racial prejudice, humour, cruelty, existential anguish, etc.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that the concept of superheroes is a complicated complex of various differentiations and research perspectives. Another important aspect of a superhero is the archetype of anima and animus, i.e. the hero’s feminine and masculine side.

<sup>4</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Archetyp hrdinu I. Súčasný obraz hrdinu II. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Média na prahu tretieho tisícročia: súčasný stav mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2006, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> GINDL-TATÁROVÁ, Z.: *Hollywoodoo*. Bratislava : Slovenský filmový ústav, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Obraz superhrdinu v súčasnej filmovej tvorbe. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S., PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Vrtieť psom. Metafora v médiách – Megatrendy a médiá*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Archetyp hrdinu I. Súčasný obraz hrdinu II. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Média na prahu tretieho tisícročia: súčasný stav mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Obraz superhrdinu v súčasnej filmovej tvorbe. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S., PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Vrtieť psom. Metafora v médiách – Megatrendy a médiá*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Archetyp hrdinu I. Súčasný obraz hrdinu II. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Média na prahu tretieho tisícročia: súčasný stav mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2006, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> ARENAS, E. C.: Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy. In FAHRAEUS, A., YAKALI-ÇAMOĞLU, D. (eds.): *Villains and Villainy: "Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media"*. New York : Brill, 2011, p. 10.

The issue of gender portrayal is closely related to the superhero topic and its media adaptations. In contemporary media production, a woman is still being portrayed more as a “sex symbol” or a victim than as a strong and independent hero. Despite the attempts on equal society, the general concept of a (super)hero as a heterosexual white man with masculine appearance remains. In this context, A. Plencner summarizes the views of M. Hourihan and states that heroes in western popular culture are predominantly white, male, British, European or American, which clearly declares marginalization of women.<sup>11</sup> Another problem occurs in the casting of female characters in media contents. N. Wolf points out that if the same standard were applied equally to men as to women (not just in media environment), most of the men would be unemployed. In media industry, the primary requirements for women are youth and beauty; if they do not meet them, they are replaced by other, younger and more beautiful, versions. This is mostly evident for television anchors, but this issue also inherently touches the film industry. From the view of youth and beauty, the emphasis put on male TV presenters and actors is not so great. We can overlook gray hair, wrinkles, bulbousness or baldness; however, similar “deficiencies” are taboo for women.<sup>12</sup> As stated by H. Pravdová, the feminine and masculine principle is also explicitly present in the media contents and messages. It forms a basis of various stories, narratives, and value judgments, contained in the media texts<sup>13</sup>, and this is also reflected in the depiction of female heroes in media contents, or cinematographic works. However, in regard to contemporary cinematography, gradual, although still just slight, modifications in presenting female protagonists do occur – gender differences in depicting individual characters are being reduced in the films with the superhero theme or in other action audiovisual works.

One of the visible differences is the film *X-Men* (directed by Bryan Singer, 2000), which depicts multiple female heroes (Jean Grey, Rogue, Storm). The protagonists do not just have unique special superpowers; they are also remarkable for their behaviour, actions, and physical capabilities. It is possible that these modern portrayals will contribute to the equalization of gender beliefs, a greater respect for human body, and the preference of physical or mental abilities over the looks. Despite this, contemporary female superheroes are mostly portrayed as unreal sexual representations of women. Their character traits and actions are sidelined and the only remaining attractive element is their appearance. The perfect figures constitute the so-called phenomenon of “the beauty ideal”. It is represented in the films such as *Catwoman* (directed by Jean-Christophe Comar, 2004), *Wonder Woman* (directed by Patty Jenkins, 2017) or *Black Widow* (directed by Cate Shortland, 2020). Within the issue of manifestation of not only the female, but also male protagonists of superhero movies, we must not forget to mention a certain, often symbolic, meaning of their appearance. Each superhero (superheroine) and each comics character usually has a specific costume. J. Radošinská says that a superhero’s costume “removes” elements of their ordinary identity and activities. It replaces them with a simplified idea, message, reflected in colours, cut, and accessories of the costume.<sup>14</sup> According to L. Gotto, a mask is a perfect synecdoche for a superhero. It allows the protagonists to conceal (or not reveal) their true identity, resulting in attracting even more attention.<sup>15</sup> Within this context, J. Radošinská sums up the statement of V. M. Gaine, who says that every superhero can only perform heroic acts, if they keep their

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<sup>11</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Archetyp hrdinu I. Súčasný obraz hrdinu II. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Média na prahu tretieho tisícročia: súčasný stav mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2006, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> WOLF, N.: *Mýtus krásy*. Bratislava : Aspekt, 2000, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> PRAVDOVÁ, H.: *Determinanty kreovania mediálnej kultúry*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2009, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinách*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> GOTTO, L.: Fantastic Views. Superheroes, Visual Perception, and Digital Perspective. In STORK, M., GILLMORE, J. N. (eds.): *Superhero Synergies: Comic Book Characters Go Digital*. Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014, p. 42-43.

dual identity and conceal their superhuman abilities.<sup>16</sup> However, it is important to add that not all superheroines and superheroes hide their identity (the exceptions being e.g. *Wonder Woman*, *Captain America*, superheroes from *The Fantastic Four*, etc.). Another significant factor of gender divergence is the usage of the superheroes' extraordinary abilities, fighting techniques, or weapons. Male characters generally use more weapons and have more superpowers (for example invisibility, super speed, flying, using magic) than female characters. Superheroines achieve victories more through wit, nurturing, persuasion, and compassion.<sup>17</sup> Based on the aforementioned, we can state that there are evident specifics in the contemporary superhero film production. Our central objective is, thus, to clarify the nature of modern heroes in the discussed type of cinematography through identifying the forms of expression typical for "media superheroes" of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 2 Brief Description of the Used Methodology

Transmedial character of the superhero archetype enables its usage in diverse media segments. For the purposes of our study, we are primarily focusing on the area of film production. We are thus trying to apply the abovementioned theoretical knowledge to a specific research material, or to identify forms of expression characteristic for contemporary media superheroes contained in it. To achieve the set intention, it is necessary to select equally suitable research methods, determine research questions, define analytical categories, and characterize the intentionally selected research material – films with the superhero theme.

In regard of reaching the pre-set objective – to clarify the specifics of contemporary movie superheroes – it is appropriate to apply the qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research has a long tradition; it dates back to the origins of social sciences.<sup>18</sup> According to A. Surynek et al., the main role of qualitative research is to detect unknown facts about social and social-psychological phenomena, i.e. their existence, structure, traits, and factors related to or influencing these phenomena.<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is a process of comprehension based on diverse methodological traditions of analysing a given social or human issue. A researcher creates a complex holistic image, analyses various types of text (or media communication). An explorer simply searches for and analyses any information that contributes to an explanation of the research questions, while drawing deductive and inductive conclusions.<sup>20</sup> According to P. Gavora, the object of qualitative research comprises not only verbal data, but also other forms of expression. In the area of media contents, these are, for instance, drawings, photographs, films, or television programmes.<sup>21</sup> One of the types of qualitative research is the qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is mostly aimed at examining the content through a set system of categories.<sup>22</sup> This type of research is not processed numerically, but is performed through other means, for example the analysis of text content, its interpretation, and explanation.<sup>23</sup> According to P. Gavora, content analysis is

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<sup>16</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> MILLER, M., RAUCH, J., KAPLAN, T.: Gender Differences in Movie Superheroes. Roles, Appearances, and Violence. In *ADA: A Journal of Gender New Media & Technology*, 2016, Vol. 1, No. 10. [online]. [2020-09-07]. Available at: <<https://adanewmedia.org/2016/10/issue10-miller-rauch-kaplan/>>.

<sup>18</sup> HENDL, J.: *Kvalitatívny výzkum : základní metody a aplikace*. Prague : Portál, 2005, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> SURYNEK, A. et al.: *Základy sociologického výzkumu*. Prague : Management Press, 2001, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> HENDL, J.: *Kvalitatívny výzkum : základní metody a aplikace*. Prague : Portál, 2005, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> GAVORA, P.: *Spríevodca metodológiou kvalitatívneho výskumu*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2007, p. 113-115.

<sup>22</sup> SURYNEK, A. et al.: *Základy sociologického výzkumu*. Prague : Management Press, 2001, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup> GAVORA, P.: *Úvod do pedagogiky skúmania*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2008, p. 146.

present in almost every research and the researcher's task is to carry out an analysis of the research data. Furthermore, the author states that a research neither begins nor ends with the content analysis. Therefore, before commencing, it is necessary to select texts, define the unit of analysis/the so-called analytical categories), and compose research questions.<sup>24</sup> These are stated in a form of questions based on researcher's expectations.<sup>25</sup> Research question is a statement manifesting what exactly we want to focus on and determine through our research. Furthermore, it allows us to reduce the research problem to a size that is realistically analysable.<sup>26</sup> Research questions are thus being formulated for the qualitative research. Based on the aforementioned, we have set the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What are the symbolic artefacts owned and used by individual superheroes in the selected research materials?
- RQ 2: Do the film superheroes in the research materials have extraordinary abilities? If they do, what are the abilities?
- RQ 3: Can we identify a secret identity of individual superheroes in the selected cinematographic works? If we can, what is the secret identity?
- RQ 4: Which heroic acts define each superhero in the individual analysed materials?

Within the applied qualitative content analysis, we also need to define the discussed analytical categories, based on which we are able to identify the desired data. To choose the coding units means to select the central phenomena, conditions, and circumstances that we focus our attention on during the conducted research<sup>27</sup>, and, therefore, we have set the following analytical categories:

1. **symbolic artefact** – within the first coding unit, we observe the artefacts, or “magical” items that symbolize individual superheroes. These serve as a primary identifier of a given character. Each superhero possesses a certain item, whether it is their costume, mask, auxiliary object (property), or just their physical or mental abilities that reflect their superiority.
2. **extraordinary attributes** – in the second analytical category, we focus our attention on the individual superhero characters that have various magical or supernatural abilities. These enable them to perform heroic acts to save the world and remain unconquerable. These qualities thus notably distinguish them from the classic, ordinary heroes.
3. **secret identity** – in the third coding unit, we pay attention to the dual identity of superheroes, which is one of their identifying attributes. It shapes who they really are and, therefore, their superhero alter ego cannot exist without their ordinary identity, and vice versa. However, the presence of secret identity of the presented superheroes is not required as a condition in contemporary film production of this type, i.e. individual characters can only have one (super)heroic “Self”.
4. **heroic acts** – in the last analytical category, we examine the heroic acts that define individual superheroes, as these are the reason for their superiority and, thus, by accentuating certain acts of the protagonists, we are able to clarify their dominance over other beings, naturally within the limits of superhero cinematographic works.

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<sup>24</sup> GAVORA, P.: Obsahová analýza v pedagogickom výskume: Pohľad na jej súčasné podoby. In *Pedagogická orientace*, 2015, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 347-350. [online]. [2020-09-08]. Available at: <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/547a/530ff483b5c772ea305f0609288089a1b19c.pdf>>.

<sup>25</sup> TRAMPOTA, T., VOJTĚCHOVSKÁ, M.: *Metody výzkumu médií*. Prague : Portál, 2010, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> STRAUSS, A., CORBINOVÁ, J.: *Základy kvalitativního výzkumu*. Brno : Albert Boskovice, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> FERJENČÍK, J.: *Úvod do metodologie psychologického výzkumu*. Prague : Portál, 2010, p. 152.

To fulfil our pre-set ambition, i.e. to identify the typical forms of expression of media superheroes in the film production, it is important to describe the analyzed research material more closely. Based on the analysed issue, we have chosen as our research materials the following superhero cinematographic works: *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (directed by Joss Whedon, 2015), *X-Men: Apocalypse* (directed by Bryan Singer, 2016), and *Justice League* (directed by Zack Snyder, 2017). We consider the selection of our research material adequate, as each of the films involves several superheroes at the same time. We are thus able to identify the selected coding units in a more significant number of film superheroes. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is an action-adventure sci-fi film produced by the *Marvel Studios*. Its cumulated worldwide gross is approximately 1.4 billion dollars.<sup>28</sup> Superheroes in this movie fight an artificial intelligence that wants to destroy humans. First, Tony Stark and Bruce Banner discover artificial intelligence within a gem and use it to complete the Ultron project. However, the artificial intelligence later concludes that the only option to save Earth is to eradicate humanity. The following superheroes/Avengers appear in the movie – *Tony Stark (Iron Man)*, *Steve Rogers (Captain America)*, *Thor*, *Bruce Banner (Hulk)*, *Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow)*, *Clint Barton (Hawkeye)*, *Pietro Maximoff (Quicksilver)*, and *Wanda Maximoff (Scarlet Witch)*. We have chosen this particular film because of its immense popularity and the casting of several superheroes at the same time, while also containing female superheroes. These facts allow us to obtain heterogeneous data within the pre-set analytical categories. The second research material is the movie *X-Men: Apocalypse*. It is an action adventure science fiction film also under the aegis of the *Marvel Studios*. Worldwide grosses for this movie are approximately 543 million USD.<sup>29</sup> The main story line presents the lord of mutants En Sabah Nura, aka Apocalypse. He believes that humanity “has lost its way” and, therefore, wants to destroy the world and remake it according to his wishes. The movie features superheroes/mutants such as *Charles Xavier (Professor X)*, *Raven Darkölme (Mystique)*, *Hank McCoy (Beast)*, *Peter Maximoff (Quicksilver)*, *Cyclops (Scott Summers)*, *Nightcrawler (Kurt Wagner)*, *Magneto (Erik Lehnsherr)*, *Jean Grey*. Besides the aforementioned, we have also selected this film because it depicts more divergent superheroes, enabling us to identify diverse extraordinary attributes. The last research material is the cinematographic work *Justice League* that falls within the action, adventure, fantasy, and sci-fi genre and has been produced by the *DC Extended Universe*. Its cumulative worldwide earnings are around 658 million US dollars.<sup>30</sup> Superheroes in this movie try to save humanity from Steppenwolf, who returns to Earth and aims to destroy its ecology in order to transform it in the image of his homeworld. The movie features characters such as *Bruce Wayne (Batman)*, *Diana Prince (Wonder Woman)*, *Barry Allen (The Flash)*, *Arthur Curry (Aquaman)*, and *Victor Stone (Cyborg)*. The selection of the last superhero movie has been determined by the presence of superheroes who possess several symbolic attributes or secret identities. Each movie also contains heterogeneous heroes, with the exception of Peter Maximoff (Quicksilver) – he appears in both the first and the second selected movie. All the chosen cinematographic works are popular worldwide, i.e. watched by diverse media audience. In each of the selected films, the protagonists face evil and possible destruction of humanity, what, in our case, means multiple conflict situations through which we can analyse the forms of expression characteristic for film superheroes. The selected movie production thus offers a wide scale of characters representing the superhero archetype, which enables us to obtain the data necessary to reach our eminent objective.

<sup>28</sup> *Avengers 2: Vek Ultrona*. [online]. [2020-09-08]. Available at: <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2395427/>>.

<sup>29</sup> *X-Men: Apokalypsa*. [online]. [2020-09-08]. Available at: <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3385516/>>.

<sup>30</sup> *Liga spravodlivosti*. [online]. [2020-09-08]. Available at: <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0974015/>>.



### 3 Closer Explication of the Results Obtained from the Conducted Qualitative Content Analysis

In the presented paper, we have focused our attention on defining the forms of expression typical for the archetype of contemporary superhero by analysing current film production with a superhero theme. Using a suitable selected methodological procedure (qualitative content analysis), we have obtained valuable results that we have consequently interpreted in a form of answers to our pre-set research questions:

#### 1. What are the symbolic artefacts owned and used by individual superheroes in the selected research materials?

The majority of the superheroes in the individual cinematographic works (19 from the overall number of 21) have a symbolic artefact or specific costumes and combat items that have become typical for them. These are attributes consisting of advanced technologies (*Iron Man's* suit; *Batman's* suit, weapons, and vehicles; *Cyborg's* robotic body; *Cyclops's* glasses), costumes (*Magneto's* suit and helmet; *Quicksilver's* costume; *Flash's* flame-resistant suit), defence items (*Captain America's* shield), portable weapons (*Hawkeye's* bow and arrows) or weapons with absorbed magical energy (*Thor's* hammer; *Wonder Woman's* lasso, sword, and shield). In other cases, the external body features of the superheroes have become their symbolic identifiers. We are speaking of the mutants, such as *Beast*, *Mystique*, *Nightcrawler*, and *Hulk*, whose distinguishing features are their ability of transfiguration and the specific colour of their bodies.

#### 2. Do the film superheroes in the research materials have extraordinary abilities? If they do, what are the abilities?

In the analysed cinematographic works, all superheroes besides the characters of *Black Widow* and *Hawkeye* have extraordinary abilities. Other protagonists, for instance *Iron Man* and *Batman*, do not have supernatural dispositions, but we have decided to include them as superheroes with superhuman capabilities, because the intensity of their technologies convincingly simulates extraordinariness. These superheroes have achieved the aforementioned attributes through their intelligence and technological advancement (*Iron Man's* mechanized suit with sonic weapons; *Batman's* tailor-made costume and weapons), allowing them to float in the air, to be stronger, faster, and more agile than ordinary individuals. Other main actors have obtained their extraordinary capabilities through scientific modifications (*Hulk* has been transfigured due to gamma radiation; *Captain America*, *Quicksilver*, and *Scarlet Witch* acquired their abilities through experiments; *Cyborg* possesses the robotic mechanism due to a laboratory modification; *Flash* has gained superhuman speed as a result of being struck by lightning). The aforementioned consequences caused the superheroes to be faster, stronger, and more agile than ordinary people or, in the case of *Scarlet Witch*, to have magical powers (telekinesis and telepathy). Besides the aforementioned options, some of the superheroes acquired their supernatural attributes because of their divine origins. For example, *Thor* is excessively strong, fast, and able to float in the air; *Wonder Woman* manifests abilities of unaging, extreme strength, speed, agility, perception, etc.; *Aquaman* is capable of hydrokinesis (water manipulation), is superhuman, fast, and strong. The last reason that the presented characters gained transcendent capabilities is human mutation that granted the mutants the powers of transfiguration, telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation, and levitation.

### 3. Can we identify a secret identity of individual superheroes in the selected cinematographic works? If we can, what is the secret identity?

In the cinematographic works in question, not all superheroes have a secret identity. In some cases, the protagonists have an alter ego, based on which they are publicly known (*Iron Man* as a rich inventor *Tony Stark*; *Captain America* as a “thawed” soldier *Steve Rogers*; *Professor X* as a renowned professor *Charles Xavier*). Other superheroes have a certain alter ego, but their real identity is secret (*Black Widow* as *Natasha Romanov*; *Hawkeye* as *Clint Barton*; *Wonder Woman* as *Diana Prince*; *Aquaman* as *Arthur Curry*; *Cyborg* as *Victor Stone*; *Flash* as *Barry Allen*). Other protagonists also have another identity, but do not overly try to conceal it or, in some cases, their alter ego has already been revealed. Specifically, we are referring to the protagonists such as *Hulk*, who has been called by his real name *Bruce Banner* several times; *Quicksilver*, aka *Pietro Maximoff*; *Scarlet Witch* and *Mystique*, known as *Wanda Maximoff* and *Raven Darkölme*; *Cyclops*, *Nightcrawler*, and *Beast*, who we have registered as *Scott Summers*, *Kurt Wagner*, and *Hank McCoy*; *Magneto*, noted as *Erik Lehnsherr* or *Henryk Gurszky*. The only superheroes without a secret identity are *Thor* and *Jean Grey*.

### 4. Which heroic acts define each superhero in the individual analysed materials?

In the cinematographic works that have become the object of our research, the superheroes performed heroic acts mostly in a group form, although many of them carried out individual heroic acts that helped to accomplish the failure of the antagonists. These were mainly heroic actions where the protagonists risked their lives to save civilians (*Iron Man* used an aircraft carrier to save people of Sokovia, endangering his existence during the destruction of “the floating island”; *Captain America* evacuated Sokovia inhabitants; *Thor* was rescuing people from “falling” cars; *Hawkeye* was helping a little boy; *Quicksilver* sacrificed his life to protect *Hawkeye* and the boy from bullets; *Scarlet Witch* was protecting the Sokovians from robots and stayed to safeguard “the Core”; *Magneto* saved a co-worker’s life in a factory in Poland; *Wonder Woman* shielded people from army’s bullets; *Flash* got a family of civilians to safety; *Batman* sacrificed himself to lure demons away from innocent inhabitants; *Aquaman* saved a fisherman at sea; *Cyborg* rescued his father). Other heroic acts are related to helping or saving other superheroes (*Professor X* sacrificed his life to *Apocalypse*; *Quicksilver* saved mutants from the explosion in the school; *Mystique* provided help and protection to mutants all over the world; *Jean Grey* freed *Professor X* from an astral projection with *Apocalypse*; *Nightcrawler* protected *Professor X* from *Apocalypse*, etc.). However, superheroes *Black Widow*, *Cyclops*, and *Beast* did not perform any individual heroic acts in the movies.

## Conclusion

Using the archetypal and mythological patterns in creating superhero characters leads to an emergence of heroes with specific features. The aforementioned characteristics comprise, for example, symbolic artefacts, extraordinary attributes, secret identities or unique heroic acts. These phenomena can result in an enormous interest of the media audience in superhero films. Another reason for the popularity of this phenomenon might be the fact that it offers a certain form of “escape” from the recipient’s ordinary life. Despite the fact that recipients of diverse age categories show their preference for superhero cinematographic works, the analysed films also have some negative aspects. The adverse consequences include the portrayal of superhero characters as “typical beauty ideals” or the depiction of evident differences between male and female film superheroes. Modern film superhero of male gender is presented as a masculine and agile individual with an absence of empathy. By contrast, a female superhero is depicted as an attractive and emphatic individual, often being

reduced to a position of an accessory. These conventional concepts that marginalize movie heroes of female gender can influence the formation of behaviour of the adolescent recipients. On the other hand, the positive consequences of the aforementioned films could include heroic and moral actions of superheroes having a positive impact on an individual's way of thinking, understanding the world or solving potential life situations. The main objective of the paper has thus been to identify the forms of expression typical for "media superheroes" of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that could eventually influence behaviour or actions of the recipients of this type of media products.

To achieve the eminent objective of the study, we have used relevant theoretical ground, based on which we have explicated terms related to the analysed issue. Within the presented theoretical part of the paper, we have clarified the facts connected to the actual superhero archetype. We have illuminated the current position of a superhero in the media and film production, while paying attention to the depiction of feminine and masculine superheroes in the cinematographic works. Equally, we have fulfilled our intention – to map the specific elements typical for contemporary superhero archetype – thanks to the application of qualitative content analysis, the formulation of suitable research questions, the definition of analytical categories or description of the research material, which was, in this case, represented by superhero cinematographic works of the action genre type with elements of science fiction (*Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Justice League*). As a result of the conducted qualitative content analysis, we can state that the majority of the superheroes possess a *symbolic artefact* (for instance, a suit, robotic body, shield, sword or hammer), but there were some who did not use any items typical just for them in the movies. Further, we have pointed out the fact that the majority of superheroes had some *extraordinary attributes* (for example, transfiguration, telepathy, telekinesis, super speed, agility or supernatural power), however, the analysed cinematographic works also contained heroes without any superhuman abilities. Consequently, we are also able to confirm the majority presence of individual superheroes having *dual identity*, while also registering superhero characters without an alter ego. Furthermore, almost all of the superheroes performed individual *heroic acts*, although we have also encountered characters not realizing any autonomous heroic actions. Through conducting qualitative content analysis, we have come to valuable in-depth, and, from the view of media research, substantial data, but analyzing a small number of media products determines an obvious generalization of the ascertained data. For this reason, it is vital to subject the obtained findings to constant critical reevaluation.

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# HOW POKÉMON GO DEALS WITH COVID-19: THE LOCKDOWN CONUNDRUM

*Miroslav Macák*

## Abstract

The paper reflects on the digital game *Pokémon GO* and its gameplay changes to comply with social restrictions that are being enforced to circumvent the global threat of COVID-19. *Pokémon GO* can be categorised into the group of augmented reality location-based digital games. In those, game mechanics interact with real-world objects and/or locations to create an immersive experience for the player. *Pokémon GO*, in its current state, is a game that heavily focuses on social interactions. This mostly consists of *Raids*, where players meet at dedicated locations to battle a specified enemy. Live events used to be held as well, either by the developer *Niantic*, or in the form of community driven player-versus-player tournaments; these interactions now have to be altered or cancelled to preserve a safe playing environment. In the text, we explain the changes that *Pokémon GO* had to undergo in its structure to help players with social distancing, as well as new or altered mechanics that were implemented to make this inherently social game playable even though the player is alone.

## Key words:

AR Gaming. Augmented Reality. COVID-19. Game Mechanics. Location-Based Gaming. Pokémon GO. Social Gaming.

## 1 Introduction

Neither *Pokémon* nor *Pokémon GO* needs an introduction. They are both integral parts of a global cultural phenomenon that sparked many debates in various fields of research. Some of them explain why the game may have a positive impact on healthy or at least healthier lifestyle. A study by Tim Althoff et al. points out that an engaged user can increase their average physical activity by 26%.<sup>1</sup> Another study even mentions that *Pokémon GO* has the potential to increase one's interest in wildlife conservation, drawing parallels with habitats and rare species.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the game can also have a negative impact on some players' behaviour. According to available research data, a substantial portion of players are willing to sacrifice sleep, pay more attention to the game than their surroundings or ride various vehicles (bicycles, etc.) while playing. Some are likely to play while driving and a few of them are even willing to trespass on a private property or play in places where they do not feel safe.<sup>3</sup> Given the mentioned examples, it is apparent that people are willing to take risks just to play the game. However, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot. People should abide certain guidelines involving social distancing, and some parts of the world have even experienced (or are still experiencing) a lockdown. The game in its pre-COVID state would thus be severely limited, or in some cases it would even be almost impossible to play; not to forget some players would probably be willing to break the safety measures just to play. In this paper, we look at countermeasures the company *Niantic* implemented into the game to make it as enjoyable as possible, albeit the current state of the world counteracts with its core gameplay.

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<sup>1</sup> ALTHOFF, T., WHITE, R. W., HORVITZ, E.: Influence of Pokémon Go on Physical Activity: Study and Implications. In *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 2016, Vol. 18, No. 12, p. 1-8. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5174727/>>.

<sup>2</sup> DORWARD, L. J., MITTERMEIER, J. C., SANDBROOK, C., SPOONER, F.: Pokémon Go: Benefits, Costs, and Lessons for the Conservation Movement. In *Conservation Letters*, 2017, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 161-164. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12326>>.

<sup>3</sup> WAGNER-GREENE, V. R., WOTRING, A. J., CASTOR, T., KRUGER, J., MORTEMORE, S., DAKE, J. A.: Pokémon GO: Healthy or Harmful?. In *American Journal of Public Health*, 2017, Vol. 107, No. 1, p. 35-36. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5308184/>>.

## 1 Augmented Reality and Location-based Games in Digital Game Industry

“Augmented reality” (abbr. AR) in its most general form can be described as enhancing the real-world environment by computer-generated additions. Augmented reality can have a wide variety of uses outside of the sphere of digital games,<sup>4</sup> but our focus will be on using the technology in the context of gaming. Some of the most prolific examples of AR in mainstream gaming can be found in *Nintendo 3DS AR cards* and *Playstation 3* exclusive digital card game *Eye of Judgment* (SIE Japan Studio, 2007) or the *Invizimals* franchise (Magenta Software, Novarama, 2009 – 2015). They all use cameras built within their respective devices to capture their surroundings and cards with pictures that the software can recognise to scale and position the presented 3D models. While *Eye of Judgment* captures the playfield of the card game and adds card animations and gameplay modifiers onto the captured area, the other two allow players to generate 3D models of characters that appear on the screen as if they were physically present in the area where their card is scanned. Players can then interact with these characters, or in the case of *Invizimals*, fight against them.

Nowadays, the concept of AR in gaming is deeply intertwined with smartphones and location awareness. Location-aware AR games can be compared to geocaching. Participants use GPS technologies or mobile devices and other navigational tools to hide and seek objects at specific locations marked by coordinates.<sup>5</sup> The main difference is that players of AR location-based games interact with digital objects inside the game (that often represent their real-life counterparts). Such games have different goals (capture a creature, defeat an enemy, claim a territory, etc.) but in all cases the players have to physically relocate to achieve them. This kind of digital games was once considered a *niche* genre; the most successful title being *Niantic's* other game, *Ingress* (2012). However, *Pokémon GO* singlehandedly pushed the concept into the mainstream. Nowadays, many other popular franchises have their own AR location-based games, for example *Dragon Quest Walk* (COLOPL, 2019, Japan only), *Harry Potter: Wizards Unite* (Niantic, 2019), *Jurassic World Alive* (Ludia, 2018), *Men in Black Global Invasion* (Ludare, 2019), *The Walking Dead Our World* (Next Games, 2018), and the upcoming *The Witcher Monster Slayer* (Spokko, to be announced).<sup>6</sup> The influx of AR games, however, does not necessarily mean the rise in demand and can very well be a case of trend-chasing, as all of the mentioned games failed to surpass *Pokémon GO* in terms of popularity.

## 2 Pokémon GO – From Experiment to Experience

The popularity of the *Pokémon* brand is undeniable, as *Pokémon* is probably the most profitable media franchise.<sup>7</sup> Aware of this immense popularity, producers may engage in certain experimentation which can help attract new audiences and expand the franchise's current reach. *Pokémon GO* originally started as an April Fools' Day joke by Google.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: BLAHÚT, D.: Rozšířená realita a kultúrne dedičstvo. In JURISOVÁ, V., KLEMENTIS, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2017: Onlinové pravidlá*, Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 198-204.

<sup>5</sup> *Geocaching pre začiatok*. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.geocaching.com/guide/default.aspx>>.

<sup>6</sup> *The Witcher Monster Slayer Coming Soon!*. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://thewitchermonsterslayer.com/>>.

<sup>7</sup> JONES, K.: *The World's 25 Most Successful Media Franchises, and How They Stay Relevant*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/successful-media-franchises-1028712444>>.

For a limited time, there were ‘sprites’<sup>8</sup> of *Pokémon* placed on the *Google Map*, and users had to find them.<sup>9</sup> This was also accompanied by a trailer that showed people exploring the wilderness to capture the aforementioned creatures.<sup>10</sup> Whether this was an inspiration for the concept of *Pokémon GO*, or an elaborate PR stunt, i.e. indirect reveal, a year and a half later, *Pokémon GO* was officially announced and released in selected regions in July 2016. The game was made officially available in other regions gradually, by staggered release. Players were, however, able to play the game in unsupported locales by simply downloading the application from unofficial sources. The success of this unusual merge of a (at the time marginal) gaming genre and the media giant was instantaneous. A mere month after the release, the game passed 200 million dollars in revenue, reached 10 million downloads in seven days and had an average of 26 minutes of daily usage per user.<sup>11</sup> Gameplay parallels can be found in older titles (mainly *Ingress*, which was used as a sort of template for *Pokémon GO*, copying existing points of interest); however, none of them had appeal as broad as *Pokémon GO*. Christian Licoppe compares the game to the older, Japan-exclusive title *Mogi*. Although the article is a bit outdated, his statement that *Pokémon GO* does not yet harness the full social networking potential of mobile locative media<sup>12</sup> still stands strong, even after multiple social-based additions to the core gameplay.

Before we conduct an analysis of the game itself, we must first clarify a few core in-game terms to better understand the problematic. The first two key terms that player encounters in the game are *Pokéstop* and *Gym*. They are both stationary interactable objects in the game that represent real-life landmarks. When players interact with them, they obtain resources such as *Pokéballs*, healing items, etc. In addition to that, *Gyms* have two additional functions. A player can leave one of their *Pokémon* in the *Gym* to ‘defend’ it. After that *Pokémon* is defeated by a player representing an opposing faction, it is sent back and its owner receives a set amount of premium currency based on how long that *Pokémon* was in the *Gym* (up to a daily cap of 50 *Pokécoins*).<sup>13</sup> Another function of *Gyms* is that they can spawn and host a *Raid*. During a *Raid*, a group of players must fight a powerful *Pokémon*, trying to capture it and add it to their collection.<sup>14</sup> One *Raid* can be attempted for free every day and additional entries (*Raid Passes*) can be purchased with premium currency. *Raids* can be considered the main social aspect of the game, as they promote or even require cooperation and coordination

<sup>8</sup> Remark by the author: A ‘sprite’ is a bitmap graphic element placed in a larger scene (for example, a game character placed in the game world). They are most often used in two-dimensional digital games. The graphics based on them were typical of the third and fourth console generation.

<sup>9</sup> NOMURA, T.: *Become a Pokémon Master with Google Maps*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://blog.google/products/maps/become-pokemon-master-with-google-maps/>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Google Maps: Pokémon Challenge*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YMD6xELI\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YMD6xELI_k)>.

<sup>11</sup> NELSON, R.: *Ending a Historic First Month, Pokémon GO Has Passed \$200 Million in Worldwide Revenue*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2016. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://sensortower.com/blog/pokemon-go-first-month>>; For more information about the success of the game at launch, see: BLAHÚT, D.: Rozšířená realita a Pokémon GO. In JURIŠOVÁ, V., KLEMENTIS, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2016: Značky, ktoré milujeme*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 161-166.

<sup>12</sup> LICOPPE, C.: From Mogi to Pokémon GO : Continuities and change in location-aware collection games. In *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Remark by the author: This system is not a part of the game since the beginning. The older system rewarded players for the total number of occupied *Gyms* (up to 10). The reward had to be manually collected, which could be done every 20 hours. This old system, however, encompassed numerous problems and was later reworked into what is described above.

<sup>14</sup> Remark by the author: Some raids can be suppressed by a single player. Some communities challenge themselves by deliberately trying to face hard raids with less than an optimal number of participants (usually one or two). This is commonly referred to as ‘soloing’ or ‘short-manning’.



of the playgroup. All of these can be interacted with only if the player is in a small vicinity of the desired point of interest.

When *Pokémon GO* first arrived, we could often see people playing the game gathering at the same location and catching the same creature, but the game itself could hardly be called ‘social’ back then. Even though it rallied people together, it did not encompass any in-game cooperation or competition. Players could not interact with each other in game in any direct way. They could tell each other where a rare or strong *Pokémon* spawned, or in rare cases, could coordinate *Gym* takeovers from opposing faction, but they had to use external communication means. The core gameplay experience was the collecting itself, which at first was not a problem, as collecting creatures is a core part of the *Pokémon* franchise. The problem started to be much more apparent after releasing the second generation of *Pokémon*,<sup>15</sup> i.e. expanding the game. Most players already collected all of the previously obtainable creatures and capturing newly released ones did not feel rewarding, nor did it take as long as completing the previous generation. The new system of *Raids* was later implemented into the game. It prevented the potential content draught, revitalised players’ motivation and also created a new source of revenue for the developers. To a singular player, it acted as a payoff for their current collection. If they already had a roster of strong creatures, they could utilise it in various challenging fights and receive meaningful rewards. More importantly, however, this created a goal that had to be overcome by joining a group. Most desirable *Raids* required a group of players to be successfully completed. It helped to either create or strengthen player communities. It could be argued that this expansion also promoted monetisation through peer pressure,<sup>16</sup> but on the other hand, it helped the game maintain its engaging gameplay loop. *Niantic* later added more player interactions into the game. Most notably trading (which could only be done in person) and player versus player (PVP) battles, which were recently extended to ranked matchmaking against semi-random people all around the world. To compete in a set of five matchmaking battles, the player had to walk a certain distance to unlock the entry. All these new additions to the game turned *Pokémon GO* into prevalently social experience. It requires real-life contact to engage in most of the aforementioned activities. These expansions were mostly viewed as a positive, until the recent COVID-19 outbreak.

### 3 COVID-19 and Social Gameplay of Pokémon GO

Considering the spread of COVID-19, social distancing measures and even lockdowns in some areas, *Niantic* had to react quickly and alter the gameplay. The game, as structured before, would otherwise promote breaking the said social distancing rules, as the main gameplay loop consisted of a group of people standing together at a dedicated location for a prolonged period of time. A single *Raid* with a proper group usually takes around five to eight minutes; however, playgroups usually do more than one *Raid* at once and technical problems prolonging the required time are not uncommon, so such a session can easily exceed an hour. This playstyle was promoted even more during *Raid Hours*, i.e. a specifically assigned time period when all *Gyms* spawn pre-determined *Raids*. To lessen the need

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<sup>15</sup> Remark by the author: New *Pokémon* introduced in a flagship title are considered a *Pokémon* generation. For example, the first 151 *Pokémon* introduced in *Pokémon Red/Blue* (*Game Freak*, 1996) are considered the first generation, *Pokémon* 152 - 251 introduced in *Pokémon Gold/Silver* (*Game Freak*, 1999) are considered second generation, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Remark by the author: If the playgroup wanted to attempt more *Raids*, but someone did not have a *Raid Pass* anymore, they were more likely to purchase one to continue playing with the group.

for players to interact with each other, *Niantic* had to go against its own game design principles and gradually change the game so it can be played from home; yet it should still retain the gameplay loop and not penalise players that could not go out and play as originally intended. However, some gaming events had to be postponed or cancelled altogether. The first countermeasure was taken on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and was aimed at the most critical areas. The *Nidorino and Gengar Raid Day* was cancelled for Japan, South Korea and Italy.<sup>17</sup> The event was held normally in other parts of the world. With the exception of cancelling location-specific events, this was the only case of restricting a global event to specified areas, which was linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another cancellation was announced on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Location-based city-wide event *Safari Zone St. Louis* was supposed to be postponed; however, until today, no substitution was announced. As *Safari Zones* are sanctioned events, this situation was handled differently. Players had the choice to either refund their tickets through in-game support or keep them and have associated bonuses made available for them at a certain time, wherever they were.<sup>18</sup> The first major global adjustments were announced on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, beginning with the delay of planned *Community Day* alongside with a few gameplay changes. Most notable of them were introduction of bundles purchasable for 1 *Pokécoin* (with the first one containing 30 *Incense*) and increased duration of *Incense* from 30 minutes to 1 hour.<sup>19</sup> *Incense* is an item that makes *Pokémon* appear around the player's avatar for a set duration of time. Until these changes were implemented, *Incense* was considered one of the worst premium items, only spawning one *Pokémon* per 5 minutes if standing still, or up to one per minute while walking. The duration increase, along with change to the number of *Pokémon* spawned per minute implemented later, made these items much more desirable for players. On the same day, prolongation of ongoing raid-encounterable *Pokémon* was announced, but more importantly, target *Pokémon* was also added as a reward for PVP.<sup>20</sup> This addition allowed players to obtain currently chased *Pokémon* without having to meet with other people in the real world.

On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the first *Raid Hour* event was cancelled globally<sup>21</sup> and on 19<sup>th</sup> March another 'chase' *Pokémon* that was introduced in *Raids* received the same treatment of being available as a PVP reward.<sup>22</sup> A day later, a major change was announced for the PVP system. The walking requirement that was necessary to participate in ranked PVP was removed altogether.<sup>23</sup> This, along with addition of 'chase' *Pokémon* into the PVP rewards pool, made the game partially playable from home. So far, all the activities were tied to walking a certain distance or being at a pre-determined real-world location, so a change like this was necessary to keep the players engaged, yet not force them to leave home. The change to PVP was supposed to last until 1<sup>st</sup> May, but it was not reverted yet. After a few minor event

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<sup>17</sup> *Nidorino and Gengar Raid Day Has Been Canceled in Japan, South Korea, and Italy. Please Stay Tuned to Our Channels for Updates.* Released on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://twitter.com/NianticHelp/status/1233497146386788359>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Niantic Live Events Update – March 2020.* Released on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://nianticlabs.com/blog/liveevents-update-20200306/>>.

<sup>19</sup> *Updates to Events: Abra Community Day.* Released on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/updatedevents-abracommunityday/>>.

<sup>20</sup> *Special Raid Weekends Update – Cobalion Raids Extended!* Released on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/cobalion-lugia-raid-events/>>.

<sup>21</sup> *Updates to Events: Raid Hour.* Released on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/updatedevents-raidhour/>>.

<sup>22</sup> *The Forces of Lightning and Wind Call Landorus to Pokémon GO!* Released on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/landorus-raids-mar2020/>>.

<sup>23</sup> *GO Battle League Temporary Updates.* Released on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/gobattleleague-updates/>>.

cancellations and 1 *Pokécoin* bundle rotations, another major change was announced on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020; the interaction distances of *Gyms* and *Pokéstops* were doubled.<sup>24</sup> It was supposed to be a temporary measure to allow the players to participate in *Raids* without forcing them to stand close to each other. However, it was well received and is thus still present in the game.

A follow-up to the increased interaction distance was announced on 15<sup>th</sup> April; *Remote Raid Pass* was introduced.<sup>25</sup> The feature allowed players to join any *Raid* they could see on the screen; without having to be physically present. At the time of writing this article *Remote Raid Passes* had the same effect as traditional *Raid Passes*, with the added benefit of being able to be used distantly or after being invited into the *Raid* by a friend. When the pandemic is over, the players using *Remote Raid Passes* will be supposed to deal less damage to the enemy; *Remote Raid Passes* will thus be less effective to use and going to the designated areas will be more desirable again. No further information on this reduction has been provided yet. A player can only hold 3 *Remote Raid Passes* at once. They can be either purchased as one per 100 *Pokécoins* or a bundle of three for 250 *Pokécoins*. They are also occasionally given out for free. This was a necessary addition to keep the raiding groups active, even when they cannot participate in *Raids* as intended. The free *Daily Pass* was, however, left intact and to participate in a *Raid* using it, the player must still be within the vicinity of the *Gym*. Those lucky enough to have a *Gym* close to their home can utilise their free passes, while other players that do not live near a *Gym* are either forced to use only *Remote Raid Passes* or commute to a *Gym* to use their free pass, which creates a small, yet significant disparity amongst players. Overall, the *Remote Raid Pass* addition has been received well, as it adds another way to engage in the current core gameplay activity. Its promised presence after the pandemic will enrich the gaming experience, as people belonging to smaller groups will be able to utilise external help without resorting to cheating.

Another notable addition is the ability to receive a *Field Research Task* without interacting with *Pokéstop* once a day. *Field Research Tasks* are small challenges that a player receives after spinning *Pokéstop*. There are various rewards associated with their completion and after completing seven tasks, a larger pre-determined reward can be claimed that changes every month. The same criticism that applied to *Daily Pass* can be applied here. Players with a *Pokéstop* within their reach could engage in the activity, while those who do not live nearby any such spots are forced to commute. Even though rewards from the added *Field Tasks* are on the low end of the spectrum, they at least let players without a nearby *Pokéstop* continue to proceed towards the larger reward. The developers also announced the first *Incense Day*, a new type of event similar to past *Community Days*, with distinction of bonus spawns tied to the use of *Incense*.<sup>26</sup> The first run was a success, as it already had multiple iterations, but more importantly, formerly delayed *Abra Community Day* received an overhaul, so that it worked in a similar fashion as *Incense Day* with added spawns of traditional *Community Day*. The altered *Community Day* took place on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020.<sup>27</sup> In the following weeks after the introduction of *Remote Raid Pass*, *Raid Hours* were re-introduced, with focus on the new feature. A plethora of meta-relevant *Pokémon* returned to *Raids* during this time period,

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<sup>24</sup> *Temporary Changes to Pokémon GO: Gym Interaction Distance Has Been Doubled*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/gyminteractionupdate-20200331/>>.

<sup>25</sup> *New Ways to Raid, Power Up Your Pokémon, Receive Gifts to Send Out, and More*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/raidbattleupdate-april2020/>>.

<sup>26</sup> *Introducing Incense Day: Type Shuffle!*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/incenseday-typeshuffle-april2020/>>.

<sup>27</sup> *Abra Community Day Rescheduled for Saturday, April 25, 2020*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/communityday-april2020/>>.

to help promote the feature. With all the changes and additions made to the game in a relatively short period of time, returning or new players could feel alienated by some features. On 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020 *Niantic* announced an addition, specifically an in-game guide to the new features and general way how to play at home.<sup>28</sup> The implementation of this feature was necessary, but was realised very late. Almost three months after the first global change due to the pandemic, players already had a plethora of new-features centric events; the guide should have been released much sooner.

A change also had to be made to an annual event called *GO Fest*. It is a sanctioned event that usually takes place at a pre-selected location. Players have to purchase tickets, as well as be present in the dedicated place to take part in the event. The participants have a chance to capture a variety of rare *Pokémon* during their stay, with various sections visibly divided in the real-world. With visitor count reaching over 21,000 in a single park,<sup>29</sup> an event like this would not be possible in current situation. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 *Niantic* announced that the event will be global, alongside with the changes made. The sections which were tied to the real-world locations were instead available everywhere and were rotating in pre-determined time blocks. Nevertheless, the bonus spawns were only available to ticket-holders.<sup>30</sup> The unclear way of the announcement could be called questionable, as the producers wanted to keep Day 2 a surprise and did not share any details. However, as the event was sanctioned, the players did not know what they were paying for in advance. Outside of the gameplay perspective, *Niantic* launched a *Local Business Recovery Initiative*. To help smaller businesses recover from pandemic, 1,000 of the nominated 38,000 enterprises will become sponsored locations in the game for free for one year.<sup>31</sup> This is a free in-game advertising<sup>32</sup> in one of the most popular mobile games, which has very high potential of reaching new customers. This way of helping may even be better than direct monetary support, as it can generate long-time revenue through new loyal customers.

The changes so far have been an adequate, if a bit late, reaction to the current events. They helped keep a portion of the core aspects of the game intact while providing new ways to approach them. If the changes towards sustainable ways to play from home were kept intact and improved upon, the current second wave of the pandemic would be more bearable for the player base in the parts of the world under lockdown. However, some of the recent changes and additions are questionable in the light of the development of public health. On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020 some of the adjusted bonuses were reverted to their 'normal' state, namely *Incense* effectiveness and shortened egg hatching distance.<sup>33</sup> *Incense* can still have increased spawn rate, but only if the player is actively walking. The developers' reasoning was that

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<sup>28</sup> *Your Guide to Playing Pokémon GO at Home Is Coming Soon*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/playathome-menu/>>.

<sup>29</sup> FOGEL, S.: *Second Annual Pokémon Go Fest Draws over 21,000 Attendees*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://variety.com/2018/gaming/news/pokemon-go-fest-2018-attendance-1202874228/>>.

<sup>30</sup> *Pokémon GO Fest 2020 Brings Summer Adventure to You!*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/post/pokemongofest2020-details/?hl=en>>.

<sup>31</sup> LI, C.: *Niantic Local Business Recovery Initiative Launches Today in Support of Small Businesses*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://nianticlabs.com/en/blog/local-business-recovery-initiative/>>.

<sup>32</sup> Remark by the author: In-game advertising is a segment of advergaming. According to Zdenko Mago, it consists of using media space in existing or upcoming digital games (to promote other products).; For more information about the topic, see: MAGO, Z.: *World of Advergaming: Digitálne hry ako nástroje reklamy*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 34-65.

<sup>33</sup> *Updates to Temporary Bonuses*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/post/update-20200929/?hl=en>>.

during *Go Fest 2020*, people walked an average of 15 kilometres during the event and that they want to encourage them to walk outside again.<sup>34</sup> The sentiment was only strengthened by two new features that were released during October; a new type of eggs that require 12 kilometres of walking to hatch<sup>35</sup> and a new type of *Research Tasks* that requires people to capture ('*Scan*') target real-life objects on camera.<sup>36</sup> Alongside these, an event focused on hatching eggs was also announced.<sup>37</sup> Another change that seems to be counterintuitive with regard to the current situation is cancellation of a prepared overhaul for obtaining premium currency in-game. The new system was already tested in a few areas including Australia and Germany and was composed of completing daily tasks to receive coins alongside the *Gym* system already in the game. The new system would help generate premium currency for those that were unable to go outside and interact with *Gyms*. According to the latest report, the new system will be cancelled and reverted back to the old system in the testing areas by 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020.<sup>38</sup> These decisions feel tone-deaf to the currently occurring massive second wave of the pandemic. Especially the new *AR Scanning Tasks* promote behaviour that goes against the changes *Niantic* implemented to prevent players from undesirable actions (e.g. from going to overcrowded public places).

## Conclusion

COVID-19 affected multiple areas of digital gaming. The restrictions such as social distancing and lockdowns were (and still are) severely felt by location-based games. *Pokémon GO* had to alter its core gameplay that promoted group gathering and exploration of urban areas. The changes mostly came in the form of increased ranges of interaction with the points of interest, as well as passive benefits for the existing mechanics. Later benefits even enabled the players with limited to no points of interest in range to play the game, at least to some degree. *Niantic* managed to modify and expand the existing principles of the game to offer the players a way to play from home, while not restraining those who are able to go outside and play as originally intended. Some of the practices may feel slightly predatory (*Remote Raid Passes* being a premium item while not utilising the existing free *Raid Passes*), but *Pokémon GO* is still one of the tamest free-to-play mobile games when it comes to monetisation. Especially the philanthropic initiative to help small businesses is commendable and could be expanded even further. The reaction itself was a bit slow; some critical features, like the guide on how to play from home, were released well after the time they had been needed. However, the current dubious changes and additions seem to suggest that *Niantic* is working on features that are counterproductive to the current situation. Having people walk to get the benefits, or even sending them to specific locations during a lockdown is directly against the principles of playing from home. Hopefully, with the spreading of the second wave of pandemic, *Niantic* will re-introduce the features they have already reverted, along with new and exciting ways to play at home that will be utilised until the pandemic is truly over.

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<sup>34</sup> *(Re-)Embracing the Real World*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://nianticlabs.com/en/blog/re-embracing-the-real-world/>>.

<sup>35</sup> *What Are These Strange Eggs? Save Them from Team GO Rocket during the Autumn Event!*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/post/autumn-event-2020-strange-eggs/?hl=en>>.

<sup>36</sup> *AR Mapping Tasks Are Coming to Pokémon GO*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/post/armapping-researchtask/?hl=en>>.

<sup>37</sup> *Get to Eggs-ploring, and See Which Pokémon Are Now Hatching from Eggs!*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/post/egg-changes-2020/?hl=en>>.

<sup>38</sup> PHILLIPS, T.: *Pokémon Go Cans Plans to Revamp Free Premium Currency System*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2020-10-27-pokemon-go-cans-plans-to-revamp-free-premium-currency-system>>.

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- Your Guide to Playing Pokémon GO at Home Is Coming Soon.* Released on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://pokemongolive.com/en/post/playathome-menu/>>.

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## THE UK MEDIA AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR BREXIT

*Markéta Mackuřáková*

### Abstract

The 2016 EU referendum was a momentous event in contemporary UK politics. Indeed, speeches, debates, political meetings and talks with party presidents and important figures filled the pages of newspapers and monopolized television programs. But the media have done much more than relaying this information to the public: they have actively participated in the construction of the public debate on Brexit. The press in most Western countries is not as politically engaged and partially imprisoned as in Britain. The fact that the British print media are very partisan, the author will mainly focus on the example of print, which is one of the most used media in the UK. In this paper, the author aims to clarify the role of the national print as an actor in the public debate on Brexit, which captured and effectively spread Eurosceptic sentiments and the impact of the print media on the results of the referendum of 23 June 2016 on UK membership in the European Union.

### Key words:

Brexit. British Press. Emotive Politics. European Union. Print Media. Referendum. UK.

### Introduction

The EU referendum in 2016 was a major event in current UK policy. Especially because the referendum is not entirely in line with the style of Britain's strong parliament, but in some cases political decisions need to be backed up by public opinion precisely because parliament is ideologically polarized into two strong camps.<sup>1</sup> The referendum provided an opportunity for British voters, many of whom were sceptical of the EU's supranational power. The debate on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union (EU) dates to the 1960s. After several unsuccessful starts, the United Kingdom was admitted to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. The first membership referendum was held in 1975, similar as to the one in 2016. The citizens of the United Kingdom voted to remain in the European Community. As for the media, the seventies were a little different from the media in the 21st century. However, the approach of the then advocates of both sides of the campaign was also different. In 1975, the media focused mainly on the presentation of facts, today it is more about attracting the voter and the information provided than about trying to educate him about the subject.<sup>2</sup> More than 40 years ago, the campaign was distributed among all available media, press conferences were held, and it was reported in bulletins or regular weekly reports that summarized the key events for the reader and potential voters. Short films were made to educate people about the concept of the European Community. In 2016, we are encountering higher media awareness, which, however, lies behind the opaque veil of populism. In 2016, a pre-determined game was played through the media, in which the representatives of the campaigns slowly revealed their intentions to the voters, thus tying them more and more to their campaign. The balance has shifted, and protagonist views are filtered more than ever before.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FIALA, P., PITROVÁ M.: *Evropská referenda*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2005, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> JORGENSEN-WAHL, K.: The emotional politics of the EU Referendum: Bregrexit and beyond. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 116. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandurope.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> BLUMLER, J.: EEC/EU campaigning in long-term perspective. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 11. [online].

The EU referendum, launched by then-Conservative leader and Prime Minister David Cameron, be as one of the most emotionally demanding and worst-winning political competitions in history. June 2016 was marked by a truly epoch-making event - the so-called Brexit (Britain's departure) - a referendum, as a result of which 51.9% of the population voted for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and only 48.1% were against.<sup>4</sup> The pre-referendum polls, which predicted a clear victory for the REMAIN group, were incorrect. Academics, convinced that the opportunity to maintain the status quo would win, were taken aback. The British media acted as a platform for political debate and debate on the key issue of Britain's EU membership.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, the most powerful media conglomerate had a decisive influence on the mood of citizens, which increased social polarization, which was reflected in the result of the fateful referendum. Either way, a referendum is an implementation of British public opinion that was undoubtedly driven by something. It is clear that the British press played a role in shaping public opinion on this issue, although the exact effect of media reports is difficult to calculate due to the lack of objective indicators regarding the influence of a journalistic text on human opinion. The paper focuses on the position of the British National Press in connection with the referendum on Britain's departure from the EU in high-quality and mainstream British national media. Special attention is paid to the main tabloid media *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Sun*; as well as publications that traditionally represent the type of quality printing such as *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*. Research Question:

- How did the British press cover the EU referendum story?

## 1 Political Assessments of Brexit in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland

The Brexit referendum arose as the culmination of decades of internal division in the British Conservative Party on the issue of European integration. Disagreements within the Conservative Party deepened in the UK in October 2016, when Prime Minister Theresa May took office following the resignation of David Cameron. May immediately announced her intention to invoke Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union and formally announced Britain's intention to leave the EU.<sup>6</sup> Public opinion in the country differed on this issue. At the same time, the specificity of approaches to Brexit in different regions of the United Kingdom: England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland were determined. This issue was important for politicians as well as for the national press. Brexit again revealed differences in political preferences in the country. The results of the Brexite referendum depicted a deeply divided country not only by class, education, and generation line, but also geographically. The referendum showed a split in British society along ethnic lines: against those who are "for" and "against" Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. First it is necessary to briefly describe the category of citizens of the Kingdom who voted in favour of revising relations with Brussels. Overall, in June 2016, the participation was 72.2%. However, the overall data do not show

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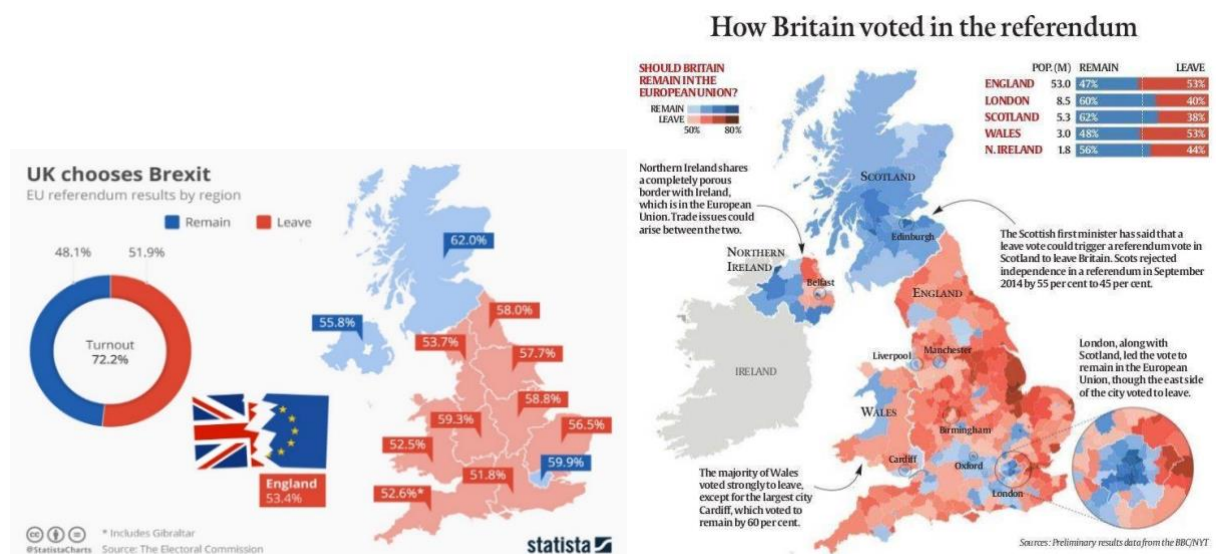
[2020-08-10]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> ASHCROFT, M.: *How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>>.

<sup>5</sup> JORGENSEN-WAHL, K.: The emotional politics of the EU Referendum: Bregrexit and beyond. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 116. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> ASTHANA, A. et al.: *UK votes to leave EU after dramatic night divides nation*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-10-10] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/britain-votes-for-brexit-eu-referendum-david-cameron>>.

regional differences. However, this referendum cannot be rejected as a mere manifestation of English island isolation. For many who favoured Brexit, concerns about immigration and the loss of a distinct national identity were important. These were the problems that clearly divided the Leave and Remain camps. Such concerns about immigration and multiculturalism are more pronounced among voters with lower levels of education and a more vulnerable position in the labour market. An analysis of statistics by the Lord Ashcroft Agency shows that Brexit has been supported by low- and middle-income people in rural England aged 35 and over, of whom more than 37% said dissatisfaction with EU membership "was long overdue."<sup>7</sup> Naturally, the party affiliation of those who voted to withdraw from the European Union was expressed by 96% of UKIP (British Independence Party) supporters, 58% of the Conservative Party (Tory) and only 30 to 37% of Labour.<sup>8</sup>



**Picture 1: The majority vote by regions in the 2016 referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union**  
Source: *EU referendum: How did your area vote?*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit/73825/eu-referendum-how-did-your-area-vote>>.

**Picture 2: How Britain voted in the referendum**  
Source: BOOTH, L.: *What the 52-48 vote for Brexit says about Britain and its people*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/brexit-referendum-results-united-kingdom-european-union-leave-and-remain-camp-2876015/>>.

The results of a statistical sample that demonstrate the negative attitude of Brexit supporters to such socio-political trends and phenomena as multiculturalism (39%), globalization (36), social liberalism (35), migration (54), ecology (26) feminism (22) and finally capitalism (43%). The average supporter of the British withdrawal from the EU is therefore originally from a province with a traditional value system and does not adopt a liberal agenda.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, the British media became the catalyst for such sentiments. While most media in the UK remain a platform of liberal intelligentsia with a corresponding political orientation, they have successfully contributed to the polarization of the population, making Brexit possible. Both the traditional

<sup>7</sup> ASHCROFT, M.: *How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>>.

<sup>8</sup> HOBOLT, S.: The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent. In *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2016, Vol. 23, No. 9, p. 1260-1276.

<sup>9</sup> ASHCROFT, M.: *How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>>.

media and the trend-following social media communities quickly divided the citizens of the United Kingdom into supporters of EU membership and its opponents.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 The Position of the British Press Towards Brexit

The media influence the political positions and preferences of readers, forming certain attitudes between readers towards a particular political party. Colin Seymour-Ure (1974) was one of the first scientists to speak of political and party publications (the term "parallelism" between parties and newspapers is sometimes used in the scientific literature to refer to this phenomenon). In his opinion, these are three main features: media ownership of political parties, editorial selection and party affiliation of readers. A relationship model is being developed in which the media systematically repeat the views and programs of specific political groups. Seymour-Ure considered situations where a party influenced a particular newspaper, up to full control. Party supporters support newspapers whose views are in line with those of the party's supporters.<sup>11</sup> The British print media have a relatively large reach and have a large and diverse reading base. The British press, compared to most Western countries, is more politically engaged. In British public life, the press, specifically the right-wing popular newspaper, has long recognized an almost supernatural power to influence the outcome of elections and referendums. British dailies have always been very partisan, although some have changed their ideological stance during their existence. Over the last few decades, opinions have increasingly permeated the news, so on some issues many newspapers pretend to be objective to be truly little or not at all.

The negative attitude towards the European Union, which is cultivated in the British press, is a source of Euroscepticism in Great Britain. The British press has prejudices against the EU. For example, *The Sun* - one of the UK's best-selling periodicals - has repeatedly portrayed the EU "as a rotten and unreliable structure as a predator aimed at harming Britain's economic interests, the country's security and its sovereignty."<sup>12</sup> Researchers of British Euroscepticism agree that the British press is exaggerating the EU's shortcomings and "forgets" to report on the benefits of Britain's participation in the European integration process. There is no doubt that membership of the European Union has advantages and disadvantages. However, the British press has only noticed the downside: "Everything that comes from Europe must necessarily be bad - and if it is not, then it is simply not talked about."<sup>13</sup> The main target of hatred in the press is the European Commission. It is compared to "a giant octopus, which seeks to cover all aspects of British life with its tentacles."<sup>14</sup> For example, a British newspaper wrote that the European Commission was planning to change the definition of the word "island" or that

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<sup>10</sup> BERRY, M.: Understanding the role of the mass media in the EU Referendum. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 14. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandurope.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>11</sup> SEYMOUR-URE, C.: Media Policy in Britain: Now You See It, Now You Don't. In *European Journal of Communication*, 1978, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 270-287. [online]. [2020-08-27]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0267323187002003002#articleCitationDownloadContainer>>.

<sup>12</sup> ANDERSON, P. J.: A flag of convenience? Discourse and motivation of the London-based Eurosceptic press. In *European Studies: An Interdisciplinary Series in European Culture, History and Politics*, 2004, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> JONES, A.: *Britain and the European Union*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh university press, 2007, p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 29.

Brussels was setting a speed limit for children's carousels.<sup>15</sup> According to the British press, "bureaucrats from Brussels without a face" they dream of controlling all aspects of human life, even forcing the British to use grams and kilograms instead of the usual pounds and ounces.<sup>16</sup> Brexit and the subsequent election campaign in 2016 provided another example of skilful speculation about facts and figures, the successful creation and dissemination of unverified information through the media, which became a particularly effective tool for manipulating the public. The Brexit example showed how to take the success of such campaigns to a new level using all kinds of mass media (from traditional to electronic, including social networks). While most media in the UK remain a platform of liberal intelligence with an appropriate political orientation, they have successfully contributed to the polarization of the population, which has enabled Brexit. The traditional media quickly divided UK citizens into supporters of EU membership and their opponents. In other words, the media motivated politically passive citizens who felt "depressed" to come to the polls and "finally" determine the future of Britain. The strike on the adaptable population paid dividends in the form of Brexit support.<sup>17</sup>

The following **Picture 3** illustrates the tendency of newspapers to publish its position on Brexit. In terms of content, messages throughout the campaign focused more on the LEAVE campaign than the REMAIN campaign. For example, based on a three-month (February 20, 2016 - May 31, 2016) survey of the nine largest periodicals, 41% of the 1558 articles were published for the LEAVE campaign, 27% for REMAIN, and the rest were either mixed or completely without it.<sup>18</sup> According to David Levy (2016), CEO of Reuters, the biggest mistake of the REMAIN campaign was the fact that, with arguments based on the economic factor, it seemed as if it were only speaking to the elite. The campaign was about fighting for the nation's preferences, which the campaign advocating membership did not fully understand. Today, British national press releases reach only 29.3% of people aged 15-24, but on the other hand up to 67.9% of people over 65.<sup>19</sup> If we look at the articles expressing their preferences, 60% of them concerned the campaign for performances, 40% for staying. If we recalculate this percentage for articles focused on LEAVE and REMAIN, it is a ratio of 80% to 20%.<sup>20</sup> **Picture 3** shows the summary stories of the front pages of British national newspapers, which from 23 May have preferred either the theme of 'LEAVE or' REMAIN'.

<sup>15</sup> GOWLAND D. et al.: *Britain and European integration since 1945: On the sidelines*. NY : Routledge, 2010, p. 302.

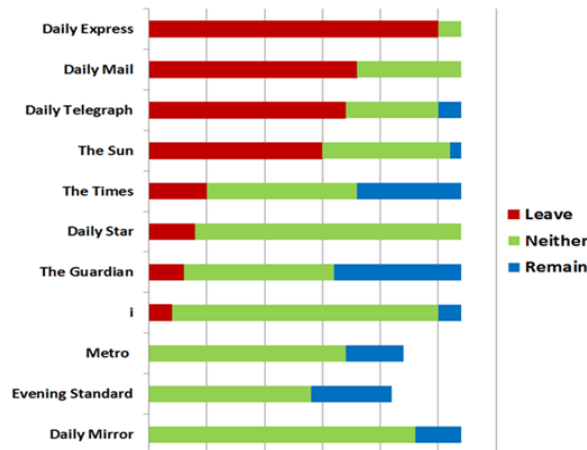
<sup>16</sup> JONES, A.: *Britain and the European Union*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh university press, 2007, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> LAMBERT, H.: *EU Referendum result: 7 graphs that explain how Brexit won*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-result-7-graphs-that-explain-how-brexit-won-eu-explained-a7101676.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> PONSFORD, D.: *EU referendum: Daily Mail front page says Leave, Mirror backs Remain – weight of Fleet Street coverage favours Brexit*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/eu-referendum-daily-mail-front-page-says-leave-mirror-backs-remain-weight-of-fleet-street-coverage-favours-brexit/>>.

<sup>19</sup> LEVY, D. et al.: The press and the Referendum campaign. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 33. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>20</sup> DEACON, D. et al.: The narrow agenda: how the news media covered the Referendum. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 34. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.



**Picture 3: Newspaper front pages 23 May – 22 June 2016 favouring Leave, Remain or neither**

Source: PONSFORD, D.: *EU referendum: Daily Mail front page says Leave, Mirror backs Remain – weight of Fleet Street coverage favours Brexit*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/eu-referendum-daily-mail-front-page-says-leave-mirror-backs-remain-weight-of-fleet-street-coverage-favours-brexite/>>.

Opinions differed. Proponents of keeping Britain in the EU included newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Mirror*. The Eurosceptic camp was joined by the tabloid such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*. Support for Brexit is generally higher than support for voting against withdrawing from the EU, which can also be seen in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: UK newspapers' positions on Brexit**

The British press	pro-Brexit	neutral	anti-Brexit
The Sun	x		
The Daily Mirror			x
The Daily Mail	x		
The Daily Telegraph	x		
The Guardian			x
The Times		x	

Source: Own processing

## 2.1 The Topic of Britain's Departure from the EU in the Mainstream British National Media

The volume of articles was the largest in *The Daily Mail*. The tabloids like *The Daily Mirror* had the least. Strongly pro-tabloids such as *The Sun* had a relatively large number of referendum articles due to its size. *The Daily Mail* (the second most popular after *The Sun*) used its front page and 13 inside pages to get Britain out of the EU. *The Daily Mail* said one day before the EU referendum, "If you believe in Britain, leave."<sup>21</sup> The editorial position of *The Daily Mail* was not surprising. An analysis of Press Gazette shows that 18 of the magazine's last 27 front pages favoured the LEAVE campaign. It did not publish any front-page stories that would

<sup>21</sup> DEACON, D. et al.: The narrow agenda: how the news media covered the Referendum. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 34. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>; *EU referendum: How did your area vote?*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit/73825/eu-referendum-how-did-your-area-vote>>.

favour the REMAIN campaign. *The Daily Mail* sells an average of 1.5 million copies a day. According to the National Readers' Survey, its printed edition will reach 10 million readers during the month. *Indeed, The Daily Mail took every opportunity to remind its readers of "the costs of EU membership, the loss of sovereignty and the laws written by irresponsible foreigners"*<sup>22</sup>, told horror stories about uncontrolled migration and the impending demographic revolution that will occur when migrants and their descendants invade the whole country. The tabloid, close to the Labour and Pro-European daily *The Daily Mirror*, is in favour of keeping the United Kingdom in the EU. For example, the newspaper criticizes arguments for a pro-Brexit policy that "blames Europe and immigration for the problems they have created."<sup>23</sup> The daily called on its readers to vote for staying in the EU, saying: "We need the EU. If we break away from our friends across the canal one day, we will become an isolated insignificant island."<sup>24</sup>



**Picture 4: Critique of arguments for pro-Brexit policy**

Source: SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

Most tabloids pushed the topic of immigration to the surface. A survey of public opinion in times of economic crisis in 2008 found that the dominant public is convinced that immigrants are directly causing the public deficit. Personally, they had nothing against them, but they were upset that they were "squeezing" funds from the state budget, which is untrue from an economic point of view.<sup>25</sup> The media played a huge role in the campaigns, but not only during their duration. For more than 40 years, the media has shaped public opinion on the topic of EU membership. As for the long-term effects, they played in favour of the winning LEAVE campaign, which was based on years of publications in which membership was mostly addressed as a burden, a reason for the disintegration of political parties, but rarely as a prosperous partnership. The media was uncompromising. The REMAIN campaign did not have the slightest chance to compete, for example, with the daily *The Sun*, which from the beginning was the media face of Euroscepticism in Great Britain. With each crisis, the media increasingly

<sup>22</sup> SPENCE, A.: *Where the British press stands on Brexit*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20160520140718/http://www.politico.eu/blogs/spence-on-media/2016/05/where-the-british-press-stands-on-brexit-2016-june-newspaper-best-bet/>>.

<sup>23</sup> SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

<sup>24</sup> *UK newspapers' positions on Brexit*. Released on 23<sup>th</sup> May 2016. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2016-05-23-uk-newspapers-positions-brexit#>>.

<sup>25</sup> BERRY, M.: *Understanding the role of the mass media in the EU Referendum*. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 14. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandurope.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

attacked the integration grouping. In 1992, when Britain left the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), *The Sun* announced that the European Dream was in ruins. After the end of the Margaret Thatcher era and the rise of John Major, who infamously pushed the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, a wave of criticism broke out across all media, not just the cumulatively hostile *The Sun*. In 1996, when the export of British beef was suspended, he declared that he wanted to see unadulterated free trade among friendly nations and not the Orwellian superstate.<sup>26</sup> The British tabloid *The Sun* officially stood up for Brexit on Tuesday, June 14, 2016. The conservative daily, which belongs to magnate Rupert Murdoch, explains in an editorial that the country's future, which is hampered by the "the tireless expansion of the German federal state", would be "much darker" in the EU than outside. "*Brexit*" offers freedom from the dictatorship of Brussels."<sup>27</sup> This choice of tabloid is not surprising, as the newspaper has multiplied articles against the EU for weeks. *The Sun* was also invited to take part in a debate with Queen Elizabeth II in May, she was claiming that itself supported the United Kingdom's departure from the EU.<sup>28</sup> The day before the referendum, the statements were sharper, especially in *The Sun*. "Today you can make history - you can win British independence from the crushing power of the Brussels machine. We invite you to vote for LEAVE ... make today Independence Day."<sup>29</sup>



**Picture 5: Be-leave in Britain: The Sun backs Brexit**

Source: SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

<sup>26</sup> Remark by the author: 'Orwellian Superstate' refers to the world order in the 1984 book by Georg Orwell. Orwellian is an adjective describing a situation, idea, or societal condition that George Orwell identified as being destructive to the welfare of a free and open society. It denotes an attitude and a brutal policy of draconian control by propaganda, surveillance, disinformation, denial of truth (doublethink), and manipulation of the past, including the "unperson" – a person whose past existence is expunged from the public record and memory, practiced by modern repressive governments.

<sup>27</sup> SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> FIRMSTONE, J.: Newspapers' editorial opinions during the referendum campaign. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 36. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeurope.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.



## 2.2 The Topic of Britain's Departure from the EU in a Quality British Press

British quality press includes *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*.<sup>30</sup> Professor of Media Communication at the University of Leeds, Dr. Julie Firmstone, devised a tenacity rating system to measure media deployment in the last 13 days before the referendum, from 10 to 23 June. 1 point was for the article, 3 points for the title page, 3 points for the editor's statement regarding the referendum and 1 point for the banners and logos on the title page. The campaign REMAIN (*The Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*) scored 61 points, the opposition campaign LEAVE (*The Sun*, *The Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*) scored 92.<sup>31</sup> The influential newspaper *The Times*, whose readers come from the country's political and financial elite, has always advocated maintaining Britain's membership of the European Union. *The Independent* chose a simple strategy, "get up and go and vote."<sup>32</sup> *The Guardian* is considered centre-left. In total, *The Guardian* published 6 articles on Brexit on May 28, 2015. This is the smallest number on the subject at the time of the decision to withdraw from the EU. Most of the comments (2638) were aimed at the Foreign Minister warning that the United Kingdom would leave the EU if the prime minister's reforms did not take place. Two days before the vote, the *Guardian* appealed again, in an editorial: "Vote Thursday. Vote for a united country, which reaches out to the rest of the world, vote against a divided nation which turns in on itself. Vote "remain."<sup>33</sup>

The conservative best-selling quality daily *The Daily Telegraph* supported the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. *The Daily Telegraph* explained in its headline on 21 June that: "We are not trying to reconnect with a lost golden age, (...) but we hope for a new start for our country. We are told that [this referendum] is a choice between fear and hope. If so, we choose hope."<sup>34</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*:

- "Boris: learn English if you want to move to the UK,"
- "Gove blasts EU elite for destroying British jobs,"
- "European criminals free to live in Britain,"
- "Britain can fight terror threat better outside EU,"
- "Vote Leave, change history,"
- "Cameron's migration deception."

In these headlines, we find some of the pro-Brexit/anti-EU arguments raised by the main political leaders.<sup>35</sup> Despite all the above, on the eve of the referendum, the British press did not have a unanimous position on the issue of leaving or remaining in the EU.

<sup>30</sup> WITHEROW, J.: *News UK. Executives*. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<https://www.news.co.uk/who-we-are/executives/john-witherow/>>.

<sup>31</sup> FIRMSTONE, J.: Newspapers' editorial opinions during the referendum campaign. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 36. [online]. [2020-09-09]. Available at: <<http://www.meandeuropa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Referendum-Analysis-2016-Jackson-Thorsen-and-Wring-v2.pdf>>.

<sup>32</sup> SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> SORABJI, D.: *Brexit: la position des journaux britanniques*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques\\_4950638\\_4872498.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/referendum-sur-le-brexit/article/2016/06/15/brexit-la-position-des-journaux-britanniques_4950638_4872498.html)>.

<sup>35</sup> BERRY, M.: Understanding the role of the mass media in the EU Referendum. In JACKSON, D. et al. (eds.): *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics*. London : The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, 2016, p. 14.

## Conclusion

As for the arguments used in the British national press, although *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror* had differing views, both relied heavily on arguments about sovereignty, while the extensive publications of *The Guardian*, *The Times*, all focused more on economic arguments and less on sovereignty. *The Daily Mail* focused more on migration. In the case of Brexit, the media did not play the role of mediator, as their etymological level suggests. Both campaigns were significantly shaped by the media, the narrative was driven by sympathy, modified by the needs of public opinion, and marked by non-existent legislation in the case of correction of political statements in the media. In this sense, the British media were the real players in the Brexit campaign and were not just rapporteurs. As a result, the British press was generally Eurosceptic in terms of the number of articles published. Thus, we can conclude that, although part of the British press is hostile to the European Union and does not spare criticism of Brussels, thereby contributing to the formation of a negative attitude towards the EU in British society, it cannot be said that the overwhelming majority of British publications adhere to this view - there are influential newspapers with obviously pro-European views and there are publications that adhere to neutral positions.

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*UK newspapers' positions on Brexit*. Released on 23<sup>th</sup> May 2016. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2016-05-23-uk-newspapers-positions-brexit#>>.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR S-COMMERCE DEVELOPMENT AT THE TIME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Adam Madleňák*

### **Abstract**

The need to limit physical contact in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among people brought about social distancing and isolations which can be very mentally challenging for many. Social media therefore play an important role, allowing internet users to express their views freely at any time and to share information with the general public in couple of seconds. It is the virtual environment that seems to be a suitable alternative that would enable social interaction. In practice, this is reflected, for example, in the buyer's efforts to become more familiar with the properties and features of products offered on the market through the experience of other customers published on the Internet. As the time people spend in their homes has increased significantly as a result of the measures taken due to the pandemic of the new coronavirus, people spend their time online on social media. At the same time, the rise of an emerging trend known as s-commerce can also be expected. The presented paper focuses on elements able to help the growth of social media, especially in connection with the purchase plan.

### **Key words:**

Groundswell. Information. Internet User. Marketing Communication. S-Commerce. Social Media.

### **Introduction**

Following the current situation regarding the coronavirus pandemic, we noticed the growing importance of social media in the process of communication between Internet users and producers and sellers of products. Social media is a unique means of staying in touch with others while ensuring that new information is always provided. It is becoming a standard that we regularly learn about the opinions and experiences of others through electronic devices connected to the Internet. It helps us prepare a space suitable for self-realization and to plan activities more effectively to carry out one's ideas. We are also willing to share interesting experiences and observations that could shape the demand of other interested parties. At the same time, people with a certain common characteristic tend to group together (they usually work with text, various audio or video files, photographs and the like). The output, which was prepared by several independent creators, is also expected to significantly influence public opinion.<sup>1</sup> However, it is a double-edged sword. Although the presented message may correspond to the real situation, on the other hand, it sometimes includes statements whose informative value can be questioned. Therefore, in addition to the need to verify the veracity of the communicated message, the risk also lies in the credibility of the information source itself. According to experts representing the World Health Organization, we have reached the stage of an uncontrolled spread of information. Its manifestations include, in particular, excessive availability information and oversaturation of information.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, information have a simple task – spread panic, stimulate interest, make a recipient feel stressed or damage the image of the subject of the message. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of such action is the increasing level of scepticism among people when dealing

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<sup>1</sup> HOLLAND, H.: *Dialogmarketing: Offline- und Online-Marketing, Mobile- und Social Media-Marketing*. München : Verlag Franz Vahlen, 2016, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> SWART, J., PETERS, Ch., BROERSMA, M.: Sharing and Discussing News in Private Social Media Groups. The Social Function of News and Current Affairs in Location-Based, Work-Oriented and Leisure-Focused Communities. In *Digital Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 190.

with freely available digital sources of information.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, this also has an impact on official recommendations published in the virtual environment by the relevant authorities. It therefore seems necessary to achieve a certain minimum level of media literacy in the population. Population should be able to critically assess the seriousness of both the news carrier and the content provided. In order to avoid hasty or incorrect conclusions, it is necessary to critically assess the published article. In addition, we should be able to take into account the context of the reaction, which may be distorted by bias, the emotional state of the author or some of his character traits.

## 1 The Benefits of Communication Through Social Media

Due to the uncontrolled dissemination of information in the online environment, the position of information recipients is changing – from an exclusively passive recipient of content to an active contributor. We are witnessing a continuously changing role of the individual – a viewer becomes an author and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the initial information or content published online, other content comes to the fore – the feedback of a group of website visitors or a wide community of users of the relevant software application. In contrast to the classic mainstream media, the added value of social media is the ability to comment, edit and evaluate the articles made available, directly or indirectly influence their impact and reach, and thus participate in building the cultural and spiritual values of the society. We believe that the pursuit of open communication and freedom of speech contributes to the greater interactivity between those involved while the boundaries between professional and lay web content creators begins to blur. The technology available to digital media presuppose a high level of mutual exchange of user-generated content in solving problems, managing unforeseen situations, additional information, education or even streamlining sales efforts. The rise of the social phenomenon, which is known as "groundswell" may also have a significant negative impact on the reputation of the assessed entity, not excluding its economic results.

Several extensive researches have analysed the impact and potential of user-generated content e.g. comments on social networks, reviews, blogs or amateur photographs on consumer behaviour. Although the quality of the presented information and sometimes the motivation of the creators themselves remain questionable, the results showed an almost 7-fold increase in the number of reactions to such posts compared to those published by the producers or authorized dealers of goods themselves. The direct statistical dependence between the perception of positive experiences of other customers and the growing determination to purchase the same product has also been proven.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we can assume that social media significantly shape not only the decision-making of the subject, but also his/her lifestyle. Many of the inspirations for spending free time, information on professional and career growth opportunities, recommendations on how to resolve disagreements and improve interpersonal relationships reach us through social media, to which we have virtually unlimited access anytime and anywhere. According to available statistics, the Internet is

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<sup>3</sup> VALENTOVÁ, T., HORECKÝ, J., ŠVEC, M.: *GDPR v pracovnoprávnej praxi. Ako byť v súlade s nariadením o ochrane osobných údajov*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2020, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> BEŽÁKOVÁ, Z.: Impact of the Globalization on the Process of Creating Marketing Communication and Its Importance in the Creation of Innovation. In KLIESTIK, T. (ed.): *Globalization and Its Socio-Economic Consequences*. Žilina : ŽU in Žilna, 2016, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> YOO, B., KATSUMATA, S., ICHIKOHI, T.: The Impact of Customer Orientation on the Quantity and Quality of User-Generated Content. A Multi-country Case Study of Mobile Applications. In *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 2019, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 523-524.; MOURA, M., FARIA, A.: Production, Search and Information Sharing in the Context of Mobile Commerce. In *Em Questao*, 2019, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 429-430.

already used by almost 59% of the world's population. With regard to the Slovak Republic, the Internet is available to approximately 83% of the population. As far as social media is concerned, almost 84% of internet users (globally) use them at least once a month, i.e. 49% of the world's population. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, this amounts to 62% of Internet users - 51% of the domestic population. It is also interesting to note that the number of those who prefer access social media via their mobile phone is increasing. Globally, up to 92% of Internet users regularly connect to the network via mobile devices. In addition, the actual website traffic mediated by smartphones in recent years exceeds the cumulative share gained by the sum of traffic through all other electronic devices.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Electronic device used to visit websites in the year 2019**

Cell phones	53,3 %
Laptops and desktops	44 %
Tablets	2,7 %
Other devices (game consoles and others)	0,07 %

Source: *Digital in 2020: Global Digital Overview*. [online]. [2020-09-20]. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/digital-2020>>.

In the future, it is necessary for portable electronics manufacturers to bear in mind that especially modern mobile phones must be able to do tasks of several other technological devices which until recently were separate units (e.g. desktop computer, digital camera, camcorder, MP3 player, voice recorder, GPS navigation, etc.). Social media platforms are currently experiencing their heyday as people are used to carrying their phones more or less everywhere. On the other hand, the mere ownership of a cell phone does not mean that its owner uses its potential to the fullest. In order to determine the degree of socialization in the online environment, we should primarily focus on the Internet user's regular active participation in discussions, his willingness to share content with friends and make new contacts.<sup>7</sup> To this end, we distinguish a relatively wide range of categories of social media, the aim of which is to offer the public attractive and useful content, usually in a new interactive form. The present classification takes into account the intention of the Internet user to make the best use of information obtained. At the same time, individual types of social media are characterized by their own unique set of characteristics:

- social networks – connecting people and electronic communication in a virtual space (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn),
- content sharing websites – sharing photos, audio, videos and more with the online community in their personal profiles registered on the platform (Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr),
- discussion forum – exchange of views and experiences, education (Reddit, Quora, Yahoo! Answers),
- social bookmarking – regulation of published content through the dissemination of selected messages, depending on the preferences of the platform user, it is possible to group, organize and further share content from several information sources (StumbleUpon, Digg, Delicious, Pinterest),
- review websites – critical analysis and rating of products/ services (TripAdvisor, Yelp, Zomato),
- blogs – publishing in an online environment (WordPress, Blogger, Medium, Tumblr),

<sup>6</sup> *Digital in 2020: Global Digital Overview*. [online]. [2020-09-20]. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/digital-2020>>; KEMP, S.: *Digital 2020: Slovakia*. Released in 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-09-20]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-slovakia>>.

<sup>7</sup> LIPSCHULZ, J. H.: *Social Media Communication*. New York : Routledge, 2018, p. 102.

- community interest portals – presentation of specific interests and hobbies in a group of like-minded people (Houzz, Last.fm, Goodreads),
- multi-product collective trading platforms – various usually smaller retailers in one place (Etsy, SAShE),
- electronic platforms of the shared economy – products and services (Airbnb, Uber, TaskRabbit),
- anonymous chat forums – communication aimed at gossiping, chit chat, relaxing (Ask.fm, Whisper).

As developers strive to continually improve the content and functionality of social media by adding software tools, we can notice similarities between social media. The modified portfolio of services subsequently offers various innovative elements, such as e.g. live broadcast, augmented reality or geolocation function. The tendency to efficiently handle information in order to maximize the profit while making the best possible use of allocated funds in many cases requires the competent implementation of the SoLoMo concept<sup>8</sup>. Delivery of a personalized message at the right time and place should thus help overcome the potential lack of interest of the addressee, thus increasing the effectiveness of the implemented communication strategy.<sup>9</sup> However, the availability of identical elements on several social media platforms causes the Internet user to search for such platforms that would offer him certain competitive advantages. We believe that while the use of social media may seem necessary for the optimal functioning of business entities in the 21st century, certain types of social media can be useful only for a very specific group of users, while some social media can even give the impression of dishonesty and unprofessionalism. Therefore, some social media should be avoided if a business entity wishes to project a certain image of itself. In connection with the content offered by social media, we should consider several quantitative and qualitative criteria when considering information we want to present or share. In addition to the overall volume and structure of the data transmitted, which should allow easy orientation in the virtual space, it is necessary to take into account, in particular, the cost of obtaining them and the time required to ensure access to messages with certain information value. With regard to the qualitative parameters of the analysed social media, the availability of specific data is decisive for the user. In practice, only unrestricted access to information sources can help reveal the potential and variability of data shared. In addition, however, we must pay attention to the comprehensibility of individual statements, which, in turn, affects the understanding of the facts presented.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 The Impact of the Internet User on the S-Commerce Development

The interaction of social media users with others in the virtual world made it possible to use social media for buying and selling goods. The term s-commerce<sup>11</sup> is used to refer to a subset

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<sup>8</sup> Remark by the author: Social – local – mobile.

<sup>9</sup> HSIEH, M.: SoLoMo Technology: Exploring the Most Critical Determinants of SoLoMo Technology in the Contemporary Mobile Communication Technology Era. In *Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Humanized Computing*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 310.; VLACSEKOVÁ, D.: Comparative Analysis of Motivation of Civil Servants and Public Servants in the Local State Administration – Case Study of Slovakia. In *Central European Journal of Labour Law and Personnel Management*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> ŠVEC, M., OLŠOVSKÁ, A., MURA, L.: Protection of an "Average Consumer" in the Digital Society – European Context. In MATUŠ, J., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Life – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2015, p. 277.; KUPEC, V., KRETTNER, A.: Measurement of Data Attributes. In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Remark by the author: Social commerce.



of electronic commerce which uses various types of social interactions in the decision-making process and the buying (selling) process itself. At the same time, a transaction can only be concluded in the physical world as a result of a previous digital exchange of information. However, social media platforms run on a common assumption - an individual in a group of people sharing approximately the same values, hobbies and beliefs tends to adapt his or her conduct to that of the others in order to achieve a predetermined goal.<sup>12</sup> We talk about the so-called experience curve effect, where the customer tries to avoid all the risks that could be associated with the purchase. Based on experience of other community members, opinions of others become much more acceptable. Demand is formed on the basis of publicly published posts which are further shared within the online community. Therefore, no social media platform should lack the comment section as it allows interested parties to follow (synchronously or asynchronously) the relationship dynamics.

Through s-commerce, customers obtain information which help them analyse the current state of the market environment and be informed of the products and services offered. They have a platform through which they can compare their experience in order to choose the right product that will suit them. It should be borne in mind that also the sellers themselves can learn how the public actually perceives the products they sell or even their brand (the reliability of the business entity in delivering the product and providing after-sales service).<sup>13</sup> Thanks to the published reviews, the business entities may not only identify, but also gradually eliminate the identified shortcomings. The business entity can use the information obtained to change the range of assortment that it offers in the brick-and-mortar store or through its website, or to change the content of the communication with emphasis on the declared preferences of consumers. In order to increase the customer's trust in the business entity, some business entities even create and manage their own space where consumers can share the joy of shopping, but also get advice on how to use the goods properly or where to get additional products.<sup>14</sup> However, people can also share their disappointment with the quality of the purchased product or dissatisfaction with the course of the business transaction. The business entity should therefore be prepared to react immediately in such circumstances, provide feedback to minimize negative impacts and eliminate the damage caused. In addition to their own software applications, marketers now have to monitor various competing platforms to access such information. Criticism based on personal experience with the selected business entity or recommendations allow others to find the best solutions that suit their needs the best.

### 3 Using a Software Product Supporting S-Commerce in Practice

Software solutions which, on the basis of integration with existing social media platforms, represent a source of information necessary for the Internet user to carry out a shopping plan, include e.g. Foursquare, Yelp or AroundMe. They allow consumers to search for hotels, restaurants and shops located in their immediate vicinity. They also present interesting opportunities for cultural and sports activities in the place of residence. Of course, there is

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<sup>12</sup> TURBAN, E., STRAUSS, J., LAI, L.: *Social Commerce – Marketing, Technology and Management*. Cham : Springer, 2016, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> KORAUŠ, A., KAŠČÁKOVÁ, Z., FELCAN, M.: The Impact of Ability-enhancing HRM Practices on Perceived Individual Performance in IT Industry in Slovakia. In *Central European Journal of Labour Law and Personnel Management*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> KINGSNORTH, S.: *Digital Marketing Strategy: An Integrated Approach to Online Marketing*. London : Kogan Page, 2019, p. 180.

also an overview of the services provided, some even with direct booking through the relevant application or in cooperation with the websites of partners. It is therefore important to point out the fact that even using only one application, we can arrive at crucial information related to our object of interest. We can look up not only opening hours of stores, a specific menu, accommodation, goods offered for sale, but also other detailed information about the item registered in the database. Various filters and bookmarks also make it easier for the user to navigate the application - sort individual items according to the price, distance, as well as the evaluations and recommendations of others. Of course, it is also possible to group the preferred items in one place and keep track of changes that have occurred over time. The possibility to choose from several alternatives is almost always dependent on the content of published reviews. The similarity of several statements can convince the software user of the correctness of the choice made or, conversely, based on the reactions presented, the existing doubts may be exacerbated, thus making the user to opt for something else. In order to improve the quality of the services provided, many software applications also submit a request to the user to record and process his geolocation data. Thanks to this feature, the user is navigated towards the set point on the map by the application itself or a link can be made to other platforms containing maps (Google Maps, Apple Maps, Navigon, TomTom, Sygic and others). In connection with targeting of the advertising message to selected groups of registered users of the analysed software products, the dynamic mobile advertising service comes to the forefront. The user is addressed based on geographical, demographic, but also psychographic and behavioral data in combination with data on the device's operating system or screen size.<sup>15</sup> The aim is to automatically submit highly personalized messages based on the person's activity on the Internet using the set advertising template. The task of dynamic ads is mainly to direct potential customers to what they are actually looking for at a given time based on geographical data.

## Conclusion

The exchange of information via social media is usually associated with the implementation of multidirectional communication flows. Undoubtedly, the possibility of accessing social media content through user accounts set up on other (partner) digital platforms also contributes to this. Dissemination of individual statements without a prior objective assessment of their veracity means most businesses will have to face a challenge of eliminating risks associated with the presentation of incorrect, distorted or otherwise parasitic content that would mislead the recipient. Therefore, in order to optimally cope with quite demanding communication situations – criticism, it is extremely important to bring to the fore especially questions about Internet users' preferences when working with information in the social media environment, focusing mainly on unknown, known and popular entities, information about the entity and its products, as well as the virtual identity in terms of the legal protection of good name and reputation of the entity, so as not to fulfil the factual nature of unfair competition.

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<sup>15</sup> ROWLES, D.: *Mobile Marketing – How Mobile Technology is Revolutionizing Marketing, Communications and Advertising*. London : Kogan Page, 2017, p. 163.

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# INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON SOCIAL NETWORKS OF HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS

*Matej Martovič*

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic appeared in Slovakia in March. This was the month when the first patient with COVID-19 was confirmed in Slovakia. It has become a whole society topic. All healthcare institutions started to actively communicate this topic not only in the media, but also on social networks. Social networks particularly became a place for fast communication of information about COVID-19. Offices and hospitals used Facebook to inform the public about current situation in connection to the pandemic. Institutions informed about the number of infected people and the related measures and hospitals informed whether they have patients with confirmed COVID-19. It was the speed of information provision to the public, often faster than the media, which allowed the institutions and hospitals to gain thousands of new Facebook fans through organic content. Hospitals started to be more active on Facebook and, by this activity, contributed to the availability of verified information obtainable directly from the source. Hospitals became a guarantee of verified information related to the hospitalized patients with COVID-19. On their networks, they informed whether there was or was not a hospitalized patient. The government and administration needed to communicate pandemic measures. Social networks became a place to communicate this information.

## **Key words:**

COVID-19. Facebook. Healthcare. Hospital. Institution. Social Networks.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, we will address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of fans of hospitals and institutions in the area of healthcare. It was the verified information that allowed the official institutions or hospitals to attract new readers and reach new fans of their social networks. Through charts, we will determine the numbers of fans that these websites have gained.

## **1 Marketing and Hospitals**

Marketing manager in a hospital sector must keep up with the newest clinical technologies, legislation in the area of healthcare, and trends in the field of healthcare. They must be a notable “educator” and mentor for their colleagues and help them to understand hospital’s vision, which plays an important role in building confidence in the minds of the patients. They must be a diplomat, but also should be tenacious. This person must be a visionary that would be mindful of details – in short, they must be a marketing guru.<sup>1</sup> Marketing of hospital is a process of promoting health care to the patient. Hospital marketing itself has three basic functions:<sup>2</sup>

- From the hospital's point of view: through analysis of the target market, it should meet other consumer needs and develop a good management strategy.
- From the consumer's (patient's) point of view: my marketing serves easily accessible and important information for patients in order to achieve so-called "doctor shopping", which can lead to a deterioration of the patient's health and increase costs for the doctor.
- From a social point of view: the patient should receive good and affordable health services.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: BUCKLEY, P. T.: *The complete guide to hospital marketing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Danvers, MA : HCPro, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See also: CHANG, C. C.: *The Study for the Association between Sources of Patients' Health Information and their Determinants*. Taichung City, Taiwan : China Medical University, 2000.

## 2 Social Networks and Healthcare<sup>3</sup>

**Social networks** have become an everyday part of life. People have them in their mobile devices, personal computers, and use them at work and in their free time. Social networks have also become a place for sharing ideas, opinions; a place for offering products and services. Social networks, also known as social media, have brought a revolution to the sector of healthcare and have instantly become a preferred source for individuals looking for information about healthcare. Patients browse social network groups to find other patients that fight the same disease. They share advice, recommend doctors to each other, send virtual support. Hospitals also use social networks as a marketing instrument of education, promotion, entertainment or as a means to become the place for patients in need. Facebook serves as an instrument of establishing a fan base of a hospital, where patients are able to ask questions and communicate with each other. YouTube serves as a place for educational videos or videos of a promotional character, i.e. which present the hospital to the public. Twitter is used to link the current press releases, educational blogs about specific diseases, etc. Some healthcare institutions started to use social networks as a recruitment instrument.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, extremely important to interlink social media with the Web 2.0. We frequently encounter the term social media. *"The climate of social media offers very dynamic conditions in which technological progress is constantly bringing new opportunities for users, which is reflected in the rapid obsolescence of some general ideas, assertions, views and definitions. For these reasons, it is complicated to divide and refine definitions and in literature, we find mainly those which are strongly influenced by the current point of view of the author on the given issue. Many definitions also describe a specific form of content and label social media as a means of sharing information in the form of text, image, sound or video."*<sup>5</sup>

If we realize the significance of marketing communication, we can state that hospitals should also work towards a continuous communication between the client (patient) and the hospital itself. As online communication comes to the forefront, the hospitals should not forget the significance of social networks, as well as the important role of a website. However, healthcare marketing has certain specifics, especially the following:<sup>6</sup>

- **from the marketing point of view, the healthcare sector is at the border between the commercial and the public,**
- **marketing management is situated at the boundary between the economic and the medical,**
- **health is not a commodity** – a high-quality medical performance should be preferred,
- **competition in healthcare is not possible** – this opinion is preferred by the opponents of marketing in healthcare; however, hospitals are regularly evaluated in various rankings,
- **marketing in healthcare is unethical** – this is also connected to the opponents of healthcare marketing, although marketing in healthcare can be as unethical as any other,
- **two-bed market** – it is necessary to focus on patients as well as, e.g., sponsors,

<sup>3</sup> RENDKOVÁ, P.: International Relations 2018: Misie krízového manažmentu Slovenska v rámci Európskej únie. In CIBULEA, A., GODA, N. et al. (eds.): *International Relations 2018: Current issues of word economy and politics. Current issues of word economy and politics*. Bratislava : Publishing Ekonóm, 2018, p. 628-632.

<sup>4</sup> PILLAI, P.: *Social Media in Healthcare: Making the Case*. 2012. [online]. [2020-11-11]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235997869\\_Social\\_Media\\_in\\_HealthcareMaking\\_the\\_Case](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235997869_Social_Media_in_HealthcareMaking_the_Case)>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: KLEPEK, M., STARZICZNA, H.: Marketing communication model for social network. In *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 2018, Vol. 19, No 3, p. 500-520.

<sup>6</sup> HANULÁKOVÁ, E.: *Marketing v zdravotníctve*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2013. [online]. [2020-12-03]. Available at: <<http://www.hpi.sk/2013/12/marketing-v-zdravotnictve/>>.

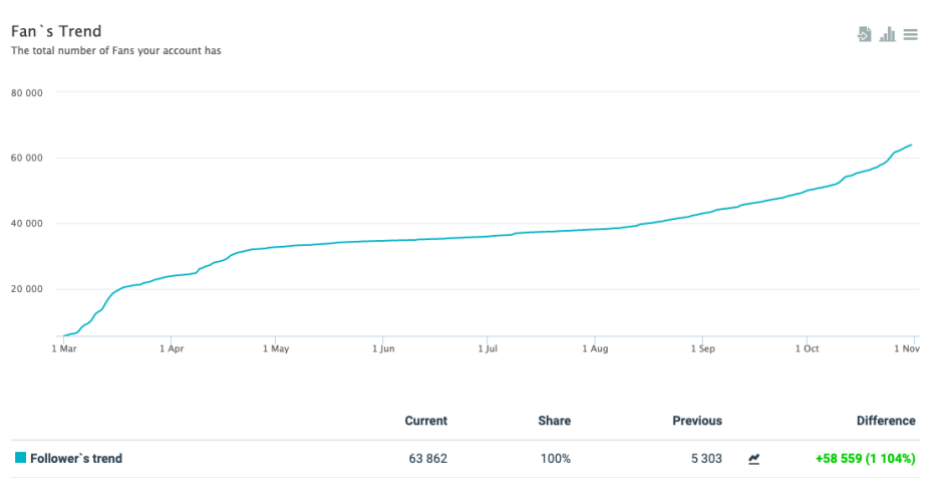
- **quality of services is dependent on the delivery of services as well as the quality of the delivery.**

### 3 Methodology

Within the methodology, we have examined the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the evolution of social networks of organizations operating in the healthcare sector through the Zoomsphere program. The organizations comprised the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and the selected hospitals under the establishment scope of the Ministry. We have monitored the development of these organizations' activity on social networks for the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

### 4 COVID-19 Influence on Social Networks in Healthcare

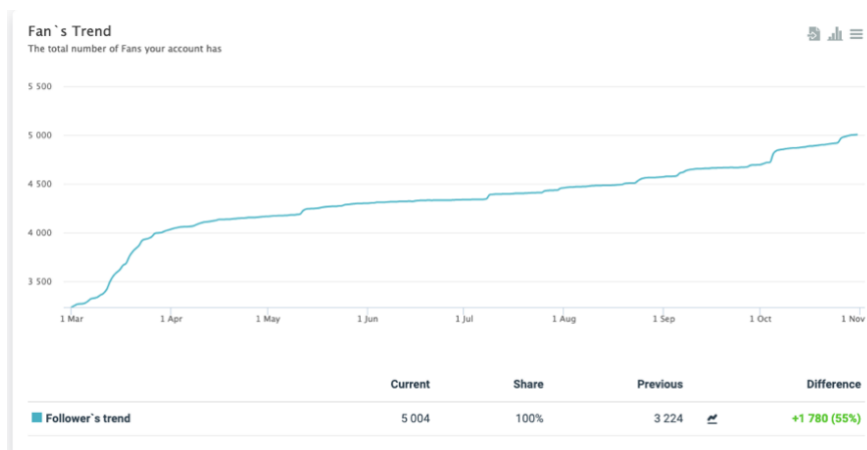
Coronavirus reached the territory of the Slovak Republic in March 2020. Until then, the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic had communicated only standard topics. Since March, however, COVID-19 has become the central topic. People wanted to be informed and the Ministry of Health has become the fastest source of information.



**Chart 1: Evolution of the Number of Facebook Fans of the Ministry of Health of the SR**

Source: Own processing

On the Chart 1, we can see that the number of fans during the period of seven months has grown by 58 000, which is an enormous increase. The Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic started to be more active on social networks and brought information regarding COVID-19 first. This main societal topic has brought the Ministry such a high increase in the number of fans of their page. Hospitals are also not an exception. Because they are institutions with regional impact that hospitalize patients with COVID-19, the public started to be interested in the work and happenings in hospitals.



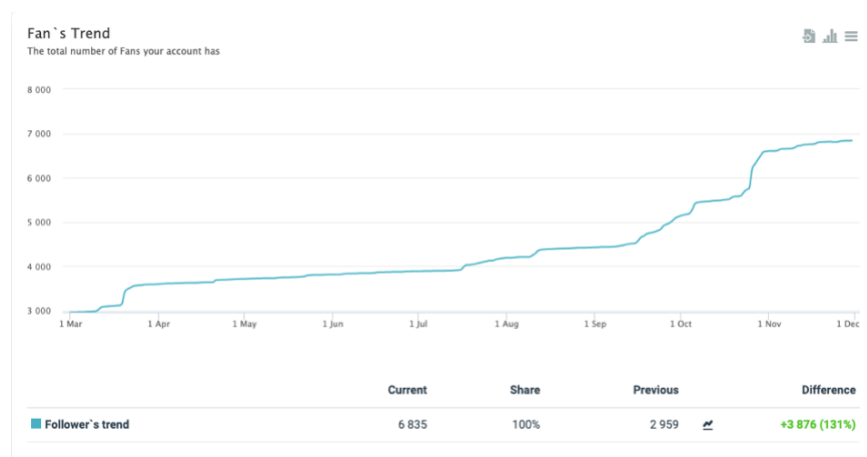
**Chart 2: Evolution of the Number of Facebook Fans of the University Hospital Bratislava**  
Source: Own processing

University Hospital Bratislava is the largest provider of healthcare in the Bratislava Region. At the beginning of the COVID-19 period, it was the hospital where patients with this disease had been transferred and thus the majority of the patients were concentrated here.



**Chart 3: Activities of the University Hospital Bratislava on the Social Network Facebook**  
Source: Own processing

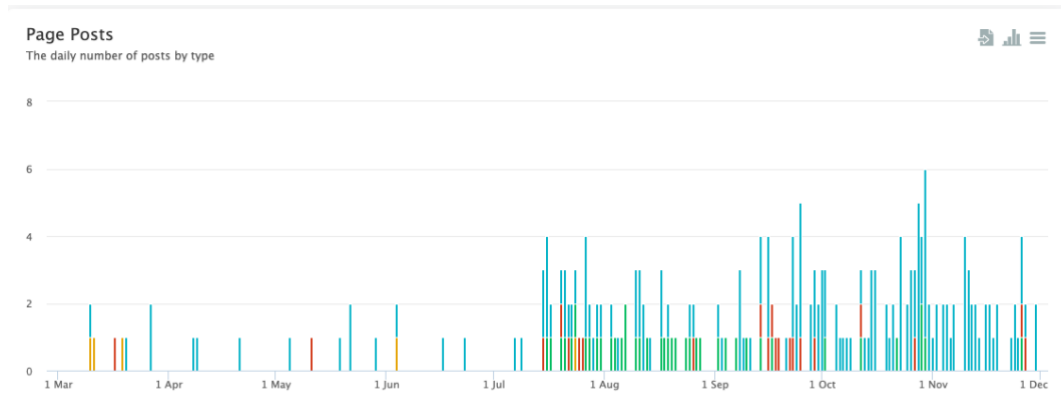
The Chart 3 presents the activities of the University Hospital Bratislava on Facebook. We can see that the hospital was especially active at the beginning of the pandemic and added several posts. During summer, the activity subdued, but at the start of the second wave, the hospital became more active. The number of new fans of the hospital is not as pronounced as is the case of the Ministry of Health. It is less than 1800 new fans.



**Chart 4: Evolution of the Number of Facebook Fans of the University Hospital in Košice**  
Source: Own processing



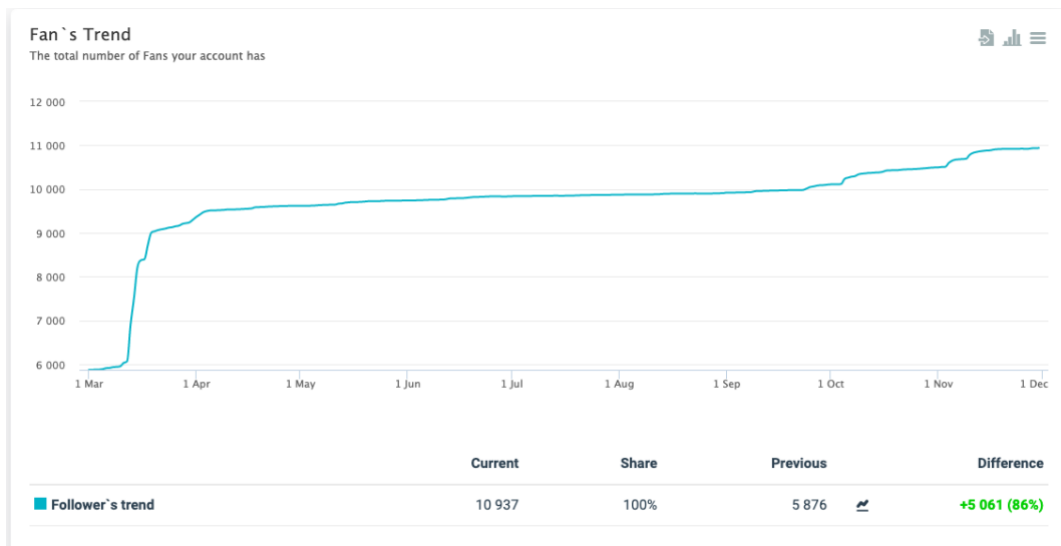
Louis Pasteur University Hospital in Košice shows a different development of the fan base than the Bratislava Hospital. We are able to see that the growth in the number of fans is the strongest in August. In October, the hospital encountered an affair with a mother that refused to comply with the increased hygienic measures while giving birth and her lawyer publicized their telephone conversation on social network. We can see that the number of fans increased significantly in this month. It became a whole society topic that contributed to a better visibility of the hospital; however, it divided the public into two groups.



**Chart 5: Activities of the University Hospital in Košice on the Social Network Facebook**

Source: Own processing

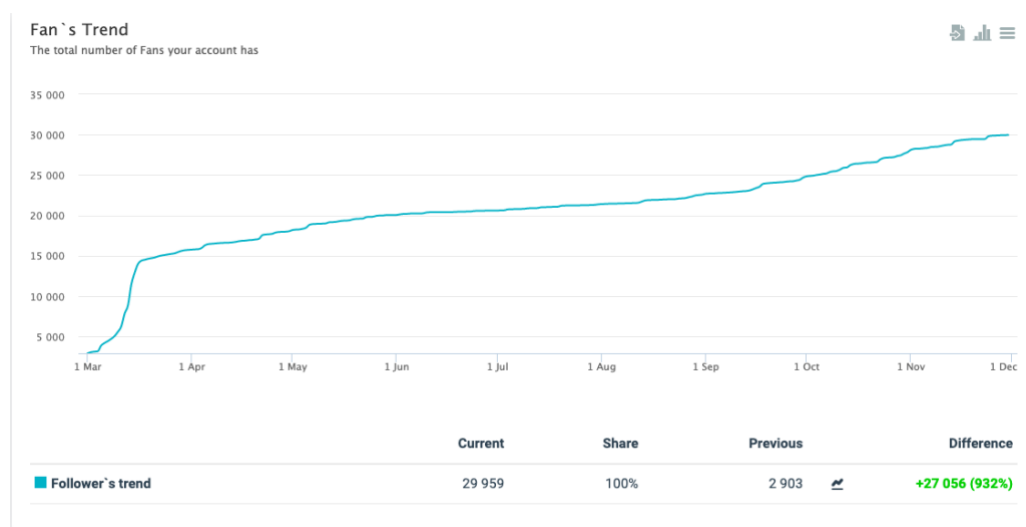
As regards the activity, we can see that the hospital started to communicate more frequently in August, which was reflected in the increased number of fans. It has confirmed the rule that the more active the page is, the more fans visit it and give their “like”.



**Chart 6: Evolution of the Number of Facebook Fans of the F. D. Roosevelt University Hospital in Banská Bystrica**

Source: Own processing

In case of the hospital in Banská Bystrica, we observe an enormous growth in the number of fans in March. On the 13<sup>th</sup> March, the hospital published official information that a man with COVID-19 had been hospitalized there. This information had 1.1 thousand shares and the number of new fans grew accordingly thanks to this post.



**Chart 7: Evolution of the Number of Facebook Fans of the Public Health Authority**

Source: Own processing

The Public Health Authority is the central authority of the state government that regulates the COVID-19 pandemic at national level. This authority started to actively communicate information about the pandemic on Facebook. The overall period of the pandemic has brought it almost 30 000 new fans. It can be stated with certainty that the page would not have reached that many fans if the coronavirus pandemic had not occurred.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic started to be actively communicated in March. The first patient and several suspected pandemic cases were major topics that concerned the public. All healthcare organizations started to communicate the topic and because the demand for coronavirus information was strong, it was reflected in the number of Facebook fans of healthcare institutions and hospitals. The paper shows that if hospitals and institutions actively communicate, they gain a high organic reach and a large number of fans. In the case of hospitals, we see that they can carry reliable information. People on social networks are informed through hospital profiles, which also increases the hospital's transparency. We live in an age of information and it is necessary for information to be open and verified. This is where we see the meaning of hospitals and social networks. If the information is provided by a trusted institution, people will want more such information. This may be reflected in the number of new fans of hospital profiles.

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## MULTIMEDIA JOURNALISM IN THE SLOVAK MEDIA AREA BEFORE THE ENTRY OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Simona Mičová*

### **Abstract**

In the presented article entitled Multimedia journalism in the Slovak media space before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the author deals with the issue of contemporary multimedia journalism, focusing on the current characteristics of this profession. Emphasis is placed on the performance and position of the journalistic profession itself, while the findings it brings are an interpretation of the partial results of an extensive questionnaire survey, which was carried out on a sample of 79 professional Slovak journalists. The article also includes interested and outbreaking information which were conducted thanks to an extensive global survey of journalists, which maps the impact of a pandemic on the journalistic profession since its inception. Both questionnaire survey and research results provided positive and negative opinions. At the end of the article, the author brings possible predictions of further development of journalism, which was also influenced by the occurrence of a global pandemic known as COVID-19.

### **Key words:**

COVID-19. Editorial Work. Home Office. Journalists. Multimedia Journalism. Pandemic.

### **Introduction**

The work of a journalists, from the beginnings of this profession, is in many respects influenced by the current social situation, the prevailing dogmas and set standards or technical progress. These factors largely determine the direction of the journalistic profession and the way in which and what information is collected, how it is processed and in what form it is further disseminated to society. However, journalists continue to play an important role. Writing under often enormous pressure often tests the boundaries of their moral setting, as the most widely read articles often transcend the boundaries of what is and may be ethically appropriate. Therefore, there are debates in society about what can be considered as a product of serious news and what falls within the framework of tabloid journalism. The fast pace, which is the primary characteristic of multiplatform publishing, journalists themselves consider both an advantage and a complication. Therefore, finding a workflow, we mean clearly define the system of editorial work in today's online newsrooms, would unify and at the same time facilitate the work of journalists, stabilize the form of journalistic content and define which aspects of individual content are within the limits of ethical publishing. The paper is divided into four sections: in the first section we define multimedia journalism and its characteristics, as well as aspects of the journalistic profession. We also drew attention to the evaluation of the journalistic profession and the changes that occur because of the onset of the global pandemic COVID-19. In the second part, we approach the selection of the research sample, which we set for the implementation of partial research. In the third chapter, we present the evaluative opinions of professional journalists on today's journalism.

### **1 Aspects of Multimedia Journalism**

Although the Internet was originally intended to connect scientific and research institutions, it has gradually spread to households and other social spheres. It has become attractive to society. The gradual increase in the number of Internet users, their right to constantly increase speed and the demand for multimedia content required investment in its constant technological development. The word multimedia means that, by technical means different types of content

are interconnected, textual, visual, static (photographs, illustrations), moving (video), audio (audio recordings) and others. Multimedia content allows their users to combine different types of data and further work with them. The terms „integration“, „combination“ and „convergence“ therefore become the basic starting point for understanding the essence of multimedia. The result is a specific process of creating and disseminating content through Internet networks that meet the criteria of multimedia.<sup>1</sup> As a typical representative of multimedia, we can mention any page of the news portal. It offers readers a wide range of content, in each of which it simultaneously connects text, photography, graphics, audio files or video recordings. The content is linked via hyperlinks, which increase the content of the content offered by the page. If we were looking for a forerunner of multimedia journalism, we would reach for online journalism as such. Online journalism of a purely news character is characterized by continuous online publishing, with the proviso that the articles can be constantly updated. The transition from the online to the multimedia version caused the advent of new media. According to J. B. Pavlík, new technologies are transforming journalism in four fundamental areas. The first is the area of news, which is changing, especially in terms of content. In the second case, it is a change in the working procedures by which journalists carry out their work. In the third case, the author talks about the changes that have occurred in the structures of newsrooms and the media industry. The last area that is subject to these changes is the relationship between journalists, media organizations and the audience, i.e. readers, reviewers, competitors, etc..<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Current Aspects of Multimedia Journalism

By singular work of an individual in a team we mean the performance of journalistic activities by a natural person, a journalist. J. Višňovský writes that the essence of the journalistic profession is periodical bringing of current social facts in the form of journalistic units, which are the results of collective editorial work.<sup>3</sup> This includes all the personality traits of the author, his intellectual conditions, but also the extent of his knowledge of journalistic practices. The combination of all these together transforms into a journalist's ability to create his own authorial expression. One of the most important personality traits of journalists is talent. According to M. Dočekalová talent for creative writing is a kind of disposition to express feelings, emotions and experiences in words, a disposition to plot and control one's imagination in favour of things, and a disposition to create written materials that will appeal to a wider readership.<sup>4</sup> However, an online journalist is primarily a multimedia journalist, so the scope of his abilities and competencies is extended by other features that are directly related to multimedia. Such a journalist must be mainly multi-skilled, which means that he must master a set of specialized skills related to the development of new technologies, which bring about organizational change in newsrooms.

The authors S. Russ-Mohl and H. Bakičová present three main specific roles of online journalists. It is a „navigator“ journalist who guides the reader to read other content; these are thematically linked, contain relevant information and their sources. The second type is the journalist „archivist“, who regularly supplements the offer of news, expands it, and updates it, thus ensuring the influx of the most up-to-date information. According to the authors, the last,

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<sup>1</sup> PRAVDOVÁ, H.: Mediálne a kultúrne rámce multiplatformovej žurnalistiky. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J (eds.): *Koncepty a praktiky multiplatformovej žurnalistiky: Slovensko v sieťach digitálnych diaľnic*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> PAVLÍK, B.: *Journalism and New Media*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Problematika štruktúry a kompozície v novinárstve*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2012, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> DOČEKALOVÁ, M.: *Tvůrčí psaní pro každého*. Prague : Grada, 2006, p. 13.

third type is a journalist in the position of a „moderator“, who directly enters communication with the recipients of journalistic content.<sup>5</sup> P. Bradshaw and L. Rohumaa consider a „multimedia journalist“ to be a journalist with the skills to work simultaneously for print, television, radio, and online media.<sup>6</sup> Although students of media and communication studies or journalism are still improving their work for one type of media, it is more than likely that their later work will never again focus on activities within one type of media. Just as television has a website where an editor can blog, print media have their own web versions where a video or audio podcast can be published. Therefore, we are convinced that a journalist trained for only one type of media will become inferior on the labour market, especially compared to a journalist whose media competencies extend to as many media areas as possible. In a post for The Boston Globe, T. Rosenstiel wrote that anyone can be a journalist. It is questionable whether his work is journalistic. At the same time, he adds that a journalist, as an expert in his profession, should follow the following rules:

- A journalist always tries to tell the literal truth. He gets the facts right; he does not rely on gossip and rumours. The process of verifying the information should be as transparent as possible.
- The role of journalists is to inspire and encourage public debate. Their job is not to help one side win or lose. Only activists do that.
- Neutrality is not a fundamental principle of journalism. Above all, this includes adherence to facts and party independence.
- The journalist's loyalty to the audience he informs is superior to loyalty to the employer.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 The Journalistic Profession and the Global Pandemic

Changes in the performance of the profession have affected everyone equally, journalists are no exception. The worldwide introduction of the so-called district closures of countries, quarantine and the observance of social distances have also changed the system of editorial work in selected media. An extensive global survey of journalists, which maps the impact of a pandemic on the journalistic profession since its inception, was conducted by three authors Julie Posetti, Emily Bell, and Pete Brow. The study *Journalism and the Pandemic: A Global Snapshot of Impact* is a result of a collaboration between the International Centre for Journalists and the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism at Columbia University. The research project was launched in April 2020 to map the effects of the coronavirus crisis on world journalism. The researchers obtained data from 1406 respondents (53 % women, 46 % men) from 125 countries. The research sample consisted of journalists, editors, publishing directors, chief executive officers and other journalistic professions.<sup>8</sup> The findings of the survey provided both positive and negative opinions. At a time when the public is looking for reliable, credible and independent sources of information, journalists, news organizations and newsrooms are facing a crisis in employees' mental health, financial dangers, threats to employees' physical security and attacks on press freedom. At the same time, they are fighting against multiple levels

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<sup>5</sup> RUSS-MOHL, S., BAKIČOVÁ, H.: *Žurnalistika: Komplexní průvodce praktickou žurnalistikou*. Prague : Grada, 2005, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> BRADSHAW, P., ROHUMAA, L.: *The Online Journalism Handbook: Skills to survive and thrive in the digital age*. London : Routledge, 2011, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> ROSENSTIEL, T.: *Who's a Journalist? Take Notes: You Might Be Surprised*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2004. [online]. [2020-04-22]. Available at: <[http://archive.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2004/07/26/whos\\_a\\_journalist\\_take\\_notes\\_you\\_might\\_be\\_surprised/](http://archive.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2004/07/26/whos_a_journalist_take_notes_you_might_be_surprised/)>.

<sup>8</sup> *How is COVID-19 Transforming Journalism? Our Global Study Will Find Out*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-04-09]. Available at: <<https://www.icfj.org/news/how-covid-19-transforming-journalism-our-global-study-will-find-out>>.

of pandemic misinformation. One of the key findings is that the social network *Facebook* is most often referred to as a place where misinformation spreads very fruitfully. Up to two thirds of respondents (66 %) indicated this possibility. More than one third chose the *WhatsApp* application (35 %). *Instagram* was chosen by 11 % of respondents and *Messenger* by 9 %. Important respondents identified politicians, elected officials and government officials as the main sources of dissemination of the pandemic. To prevent the spread of false information and hoaxes, respondents were also interested in training that will teach them how to work:

- with scientific, medical or health reports (66 % of respondents),
- with technologies for content creation, editing and publishing (67 % of respondents),
- programs for advanced verification and control of facts (67 % of respondents).

As many as 70 % of respondents also assessed the psychological and emotional effects of the COVID-19 crisis, considering them to be the most difficult aspect that greatly affects the performance of their work. A similar percentage (67 %) also identified concerns about financial difficulties as serious. The intensification of the workload due to the pandemic ranked third in severity, social isolation in fourth, and the risk of possible virus infection in fifth place. 43 % of respondents said that during the first wave of COVID-19, the audience felt increased confidence in their journalistic work. As many as 61 % of respondents said they felt more committed to journalism than before the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Research Methodology

The focus of our attention was to define the position of contemporary multimedia journalism on the Slovak media market, with an emphasis on how journalists themselves evaluate this profession. We were therefore also interested in the profession of multimedia journalist and the changes brought about by the gradual establishment of multiplatform publishing. It is important to note that the results presented in Part 3 Evaluative Opinions of Journalists on Contemporary Online Journalism are partial results of an extensive questionnaire survey, which we conducted on a sample of 79 professional journalists, in the period from February 3, 2020 to April 2, 2020 (60 days in total). In terms of the period of research, we moved at a time when the COVID-19 virus was also present in the Slovak Republic, but its effects were not already known. The research question was set out in the following wording „*How do journalists evaluate online journalism?*” We also sent an electronic questionnaire via e-mail to selected newsrooms (*Denník N*, *Aktuality.sk* and *SME*) and it was shared on the social network *Facebook*. The selection of the research sample was intentional; we implemented it in the form of an available selection. The selection of respondents was not stratified, which means that their age, gender, highest level of education or location of work were not considered. We do not consider the sample to be a representative set, as it was not structured according to the required features. To participate in the research, respondents had to meet the following characteristics:

- working in editorial office,
- work for a medium operating in the Slovak Republic,
- at least six months of experience in the media.

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<sup>9</sup> POSETTI, J., BELL, E., BROW, P.: *Journalism and the Pandemic: A global snapshot of impacts*. 2020. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020_FINAL.pdf)>.

The research sample we contacted consisted of employees of print, electronic and internet media, as well as employees of agencies and journalists working as self-employed persons (so called freelancers), who perform journalistic activities for all types of media. The research sample consisted of journalists of productive and post-productive age. Men were more represented than women. Respondents work mainly in online newsrooms in the Bratislava region. We did not intentionally use the phrase „in the online media”, as some of the journalists addressed work in television, radio, a news agency, or a publishing house, or in a traditional newsroom. Journalists are mostly university-educated, not only in the field of journalism and mass media, but some also in the field of technology, natural sciences, or social, economic, and artistic fields.

### 3 Evaluative Opinions of Journalists on Contemporary Online Journalism

As part of an extensive research that focused on the transformation of editorial work models in the online medium, we were interested in one of the research questions about how journalists view contemporary journalism. We asked them what three attributes / characteristics, whether negative or positive, they would give to contemporary journalism. The question was open and answered by all 79 respondents (100 %). According to the tone of the evaluation, we divided the answers of the journalists into positive evaluators, neutral evaluators, and exclusively negative evaluators. If we were to define the categories by numbers, in the first category we can include the answers of 12 journalists (15,2 %), in the second category of answers 20 journalists (25,3 %) and in the third, exclusively negative evaluation category answers up to 39 journalists (49,4 %). Eight journalists (10,1 %) did not give an answer. Although digital technologies and environments bring comfort in many ways, as many as 49,4 % of journalists rate current journalism negatively. They blame its weak verification of facts, tabloid character and sensational greed. Addressed journalists also blame current journalism for putting quantity above quality, due to increasing readability. In addition, because of the anonymity of the online environment, journalists also encounter verbal attacks from readers. Although publishing for the web means an unlimited scope of the paper, the topics are not professionally and in depth. That is why journalists consider it superficial. Deficiencies in grammar and stylistics are no exception. In this case, however, not only journalists should think about the goals for the future, but also the media or publishers, which measure the success of newsrooms by the number of clicks on the article, at the expense of its quality. Another variable in this case is education, for which colleges, universities and other educational institutions are responsible. Finally, the readership belongs to this triangle, because it is its preferences that determine what will be published.

In the neutral assessment, journalists also most often cite speed as one of the dominant values, which at the same time causes superficial treatment of topics. Addressed journalists also blame current journalism for putting quantity above quality, due to increasing readability. In addition, because of the anonymity of the online environment, journalists also encounter verbal attacks from readers. From the positive evaluation group, up to 10 out of 12 journalists described the current journalism as fast. At the same time, they consider it current, very predatory, and broad-spectrum. It also gained attributes such as open, pluralistic, prompt and varied. However, journalists also rate it as demanding, and although it is becoming better, it still struggles with considerable mistrust in society. The big positive is its interactivity, which allows you to link several types of content at the same time. From the positive aspects, they emphasize the continuity of publishing, greater impact of information, greater availability of information. Some journalists also appreciate the work with new technologies or programs that make it easier



for them to create the final product. Of the positively oriented responses, respondents indicated a more accessible search for information; the emergence of programs that make their work easier; visually and graphically more compelling content; greater creativity, competitiveness, openness, and courage.

## Conclusion

Journalists are most influenced by the speed, which has affected not only the way it is published for the web, but also the workload of individual journalistic professions. Although multimedia and the web bring many benefits, today's journalists criticize contemporary online journalism. They blame its superficial treatment of topics, insufficient verification of facts, which conditions the origin and the dissemination of hoaxes and the unprofessional approach of journalists to content creation. This is manifested by the tabloidization of mostly news content or undisguised theft of information from other author's contributions. Therefore, if we were to predict what awaits online journalism and the journalistic profession at home in the next decade, we would use the phrases advanced digitization, payment gateway optimization and nationwide charging for online content and artificial intelligence as part of production automated online media reports. Robotic journalism and its onset have already been noted and although its manifestations are still much more pronounced abroad, individual trends are already penetrating us and integrating into our media system. However, it is still unthinkable to claim that this type of online journalism will completely replace journalists. Machine work and artificial intelligence is still based on the principle of systematization and data collection, not on the creative mental activity of the individual, which is unique and varies from person to person. Keep up with new, especially digital technologies, it will require a much higher degree of control of technical and graphic programs - a common or advanced level of knowledge will no longer be sufficient. Unless journalists become masters of their craft in this direction, they can fall out of the already high pace. In terms of editorial work systems, we expect the emergence of fully integrated newsrooms, which are technically adapted for multiplatform publishing.

If we must look for variables which are common between worldwide journalism and Slovak journalism, we can say that the biggest issue is and will be represented by verification of facts or better-known journalistic fact checking, which must be done to prevent spread of hoaxes and false information. Therefore, we think that scientific research and attention of the journalists should be focused on the area, which is birthplace of false information – on the area of social sites. It is important to understand three reals: the most efficient communication pattern which moves false information throughout the society, why are false information more likely to be believed and how it is linked with the way society works and lastly, what are the most efficient steps we must take to distinguish between truth and false while swimming through the ocean of information.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA OF YOUTH POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

*Jaroslav Mihálik – Jakub Bardovič – Michal Garaj*

### Abstract

The current setup of society requires all entities that want to maintain their existence and potentially grow, to use online communication tools. These allow them to share various messages, gain new customers / clients, and keep those up to date. This trend did not escape the political sphere either, and thus also political parties or several youth organizations operating alongside them. The aim of this paper is to identify the use of online communication tools of youth organizations of political parties in Slovakia and to characterize the form of communicated content in relation to topic of COVID-19. For the purpose of fulfilling this goal, youth organizations are monitored, which are linked to relevant (parliamentary) political parties. Relevant online communication platforms - websites and social networks - serve as a source of data. We have included several categories of research: the existence of own website, the link from own website to social networks, the existence of a blog on the website, the types of social networks used, the division of contributions according to topics (COVID-19 included) and promotion of the organization, the rate of publication of posts (COVID-19 posts vs. others), the rate of interactions (COVID-19 posts vs. others), monitoring the relationships between types of interactions and differentiation of the rate of interactions according to the type of published contribution (COVID-19 posts vs others). The data are processed by descriptive statistics and, in the case of monitoring relationships and their extent, also through advanced statistical analyzes (correlation analysis, CrossTabs). The results show active use of the website and the social network Facebook. Promotion predominates over the communication of social and political topics. The interaction rate on posts increases with the number of other second interactions. The form of the contribution does not directly affect the number of interactions.

### Key words:

Online Communication. Political Party. Slovakia. Social Media. Youth Political Organization.

### Introduction

Communication is an integral part of human life. It is present in both the private and public spheres, including politics. Previous years have brought significant technological progress, which can be associated with the shortening of distances between people and, at the same time brought space for the formation of such communication tools that allow the exchange of information almost immediately without localization limits. An important phenomenon in this area is the Internet itself and related social networks. In recent years, presence in the e-environment has become an essential element of the existence of any organization or institution. The presented paper deals with the issue of online communication of youth political organizations. Its aim is to identify what communication tools they use and also to characterize the form of communicated content on a specific social network - Facebook. With regard to the goal, we divide the research plan into two parts. The first monitors the existence of own website, its connection to social networks and the presence of blogs. Other watched categories in this section include: the existence of a page on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and a YouTube channel. In the case of Facebook, the number of likes and followers is followed, the number of followers and posts on Instagram, the number of subscribers and views on Youtube, and finally the number of followers on Twitter. In the second part, only the social network Facebook is monitored. The basic group consists of 5 youth organizations of the current parliamentary parties, namely **Mladí sociálni demokrati**, **Mladí pomáhajú**, **Ľudová mládež**, **Mladí Saskári** and **Mladí za Ľudí**. The second research project uses the same set of subjects and analyzes the categories related to the use of the social network Facebook: the frequency of publishing contributions, the division of contributions according to topics or promotion of the organization, the rate of publication of contributions, the rate of interactions,

monitoring the relationships between types of interactions and differentiation of the rate of interactions according to the type of published contribution (text, image, video and combinations). We process data by creating a basic data matrix. We apply basic descriptive statistics to evaluate the data. In the case of identifying the presence of relationships, we use Multiple Regression Analysis and CrossTabs with the selection of suitable coefficients for the research of relationships of nominal and interval variables. We present data through tables, graphs and statistical outputs.

## 1 Political Communication and New Digital Media

Although we can speak of a form of political communication since the emergence of politics itself, it has become increasingly important in connection with the expansion of the right to vote, and thus the involvement of wider sections of the population in decision-making processes at various levels of society.<sup>1</sup> While in some states (especially Western democracies) we talk more about evolutionary developments in this area, in others these changes took place rather "by leaps and bounds." For example, in the first Czechoslovak Republic, it was its origin that extended the right to vote to virtually all adults, including women.<sup>2</sup> It was the increase in the "audience," and thus the number of recipients, who in a democratic society are simultaneously transformed not only into passive recipients but also active communicators in combination with technological development, brought gradual changes in the setting of political communication. The mentioned technological development in recent years has created a space for research into new forms of communication, which in some respects have modified its appearance compared to what it looked like during the 20th century. It is worth mentioning that the 20th century itself is characterized by dynamic development and has brought several significant changes. In this context, the author T. Taseňte talks about 4 phases into which we can divide political communication, while the first two fall in full into the 20th century and the remaining two phases are linked to the turn of the century and then the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> It is based on the original development model presented by the authors J. G. Blumler and D. Kavanagh working with 3 phases.<sup>4</sup> Based on this, author T. Taseňte distinguishes these 4 phases. The first phase is called "*the golden age of the parties*" or "*the age of the newspapers*," the origins of which date back to the period after World War II. He refers to the second phase as "*the age of the television*" and connects it with the period since 1960. The turn of the century was subsequently referred to as „*the Digital era*.“ So far, he names the last phase as the "*new media era*" and dates it from 1990, respectively 2000.<sup>5</sup> If we look at the research already carried out in the field of electronic political communication, we will find

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<sup>1</sup> Remark by the authors: Its usually associated with the period of antiquity, it appears in various forms from Greek philosophers: Plato and Aristotle.; KAID, L. L.: Introduction and Overview of the Field. In KAID, L. L. (ed.): *Handbook of Political Communication Research*. Mahwah, New Jersey, London : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> More on the issue of election censuses in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, see: BARDOVIČ, J.: Bariéry politickej participácie – volebný cenzus a jeho historický kontext v slovenských podmienkach. In EŠTOK, G., BZDILOVÁ, R., BARDOVIČ, J. (eds.): *Občianstvo a občianska spoločnosť. Stav – Kontexty – Perspektívy*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2016, p. 66-81.

<sup>3</sup> TASEŇTE, T.: The 4 phases of evolution of political communication systems: from the golden age of the parties to the golden age of the users. In *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 2020, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 77-82.

<sup>4</sup> Remark by the authors: The article was published in 1999, so it does not take into account current trend.; See more: BLUMLER, J. G., KAVANAGH, D.: The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. In *Political Communication*, 1999, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 209-230.

<sup>5</sup> TASEŇTE, T.: The 4 phases of evolution of political communication systems: from the golden age of the parties to the golden age of the users. In *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 2020, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 77-82.

focus on a wide range of attributes, where modern electronic (online) tools such as political party websites<sup>6</sup> as well as social networks and politicians' communication or political parties on them.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1 Youth Political Organizations

The current setting of democratic societies offers a wide range of opportunities for individuals to engage in politics. An important place in this is played by citizenship education, whose ambition is to prevent, among other things, the so-called secondary illiteracy (not only) in young people.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, various platforms are being created to activate them (for example, youth parliaments, various youth organizations, etc.). It is youth organizations operating alongside political parties that give young people the opportunity to come into direct contact not only with politics itself, but also with the various organizational and decision-making processes taking place in society. The publication of R. Štefančík made a significant contribution to the current state of knowledge in the field of youth organizations in Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> Due to the significant dynamism of the Slovak party system<sup>10</sup> and the application of new communication tools in the online space, which gradually began to enter the political environment in 2010 (year of publication), there is room for monitoring new phenomena or comparing developments within existing phenomena.

## 2 E-Communication of Youth Political Organizations in Slovakia

Looking at the current parliamentary political parties, it can be stated that all but the strongest government party OĽaNO, which avoids functioning based on the principles of classical political parties, have their own youth organizations. With regard to the length of existence of the parent party, the youth organization of SMER-SD has the greatest tradition of the monitored parliamentary parties. However, it is worth saying that the existence of youth organizations is not limited to these political parties. Young people can also organize alongside older currently non-parliamentary parties such as SNS and KDH, newer ones such as Progresívne Slovensko, SPOLU, or unrelated political parties such as the civic organization Občianska demokratická mládež. Out of the 5 monitored youth organizations, only 3 of them present their own website: Mladí sociálni demokrati (MSD), Ľudová mládež (LM) and Mladí SaSkári (MS). On the mentioned pages it is possible to find a Facebook page link and in case of MS and MSD is available also Instagram. Only in the case of MSD, the website also offers blogs of its members, which, however, are of older dates (ending in 2019).

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<sup>6</sup> In foreign studies, see more: GIBSON, R., WARD, S.: A Proposed Methodology for Studying the Function and Effectiveness of Party and Candidate Web Sites. In *Social Science Computer Review*, 2000, Vol. 18 No. 3, p. 301-319.; In Slovakia realizes research of the on-line communication of political parties for example: ŽÚBOROVÁ, V., ŽÚBOR, M.: Metodický pohľad na funkciu a činnosť webových stránok politických strán v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky. In *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*, 2013, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 305-329.

<sup>7</sup> GARAJ, M.: Facebook in Use of Political Parties in Slovakia – Tool for Communication of Promotion: Far Right Vs. Others. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Mirrors – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 99-107.

<sup>8</sup> On the issue of secondary illiteracy, see: GBÚROVÁ, M. et al.: *Sekundárny analfabetizmus alebo o príčinách a dôsledkoch nízkeho záujmu verejnosti o politiku na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see: ŠTEFANČÍK, R.: *Politické mládežnícke organizácie na Slovensku*. Bratislava : IUVENTA, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> More about the issue of age of political parties in Slovakia, see for example: FILIPEC, O.: Challenging Trends within Slovak Party System in the Context of 2016 Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In *Politics in Central Europe*, 2019, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 7-34.

**Table 1: Youth political organizations and their websites**

Political Party	Youth Political Organization	Web	Social Media Link on website	Blog
OĽaNO	X	X	X	X
SMER-SD	Mladí sociálni demokrati	mladalavica.sk	Facebook, Instagram	✓
SME RODINA	Mladí pomáhajú	X	X	X
Kotlebovci - ĽSNS	Ľudová mládež	www.ludovamladez.sk	Facebook*	X
SaS	Mladí SaSkári	mladi.sas.sk	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube**	X
Za Ľudí	Mladí Za Ľudí	X	X	X

Note: \* Not in operation. \*\* Link to YouTube channel of political party SaS.

Source: Own processing

If we look at the presence of youth organizations on social networks, it is possible to state that all have their own Facebook page. Apart from LM, we can also find everyone on the social network Instagram. The largest group of users is addressed by MSD (7,702 likes and 7,908 followers). Over 3,000 users are also addressed by LM and MS. On the contrary, the Mladí za Ľudí (MZL) page has the least impact, only 578 likes and 602 followers. On Instagram, the reach of individual youth organizations is different. In this case, MSD, on the other hand, has the smallest number of followers (335) compared to Mladí pomáhajú (MP), whose site is followed by 2,875, MS 1,148 and also MZL 715. At the same time, however, it is appropriate to say that MSD is, despite the lowest number of followers in terms of posts, the most active in comparison with other monitored youth organizations. The opposite paradox can be found in the MP site, which has the lowest number of followers, the lowest number of posts, namely 57. Other monitored social networks, YouTube and Twitter, show the absence of these youth organizations on them. The exceptions are MSD and LM, which have their own YouTube channel. In neither case, however, we find significant activity there.

**Table 2: Youth political organization and their communication on Facebook and Instagram**

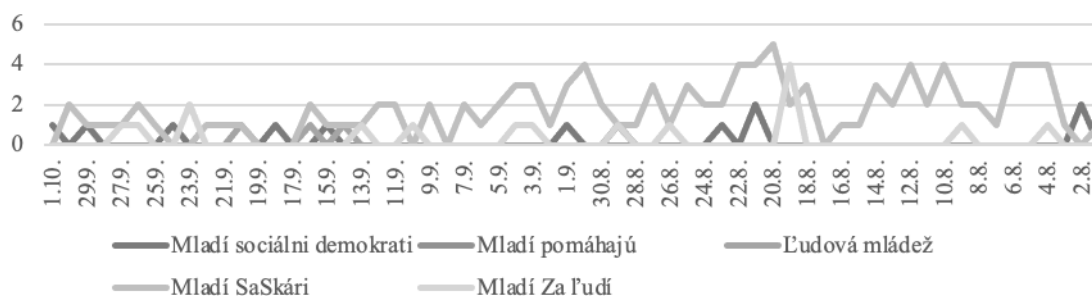
Youth political organization	Facebook		Instagram	
	Page	Likes / Followers*	Page	Followers / Posts*
Mladí sociálni demokrati	✓	7 702 / 7 908	✓	335 / 334
Mladí pomáhajú	✓	2 813 / 2861	✓	2 875 / 57
Ľudová mládež	✓	3 537 / 3 686	Unclear - There are 2 pages without clear connection with official website.	
Mladí SaSkári	✓	3 065 / 3 252	✓	1 148 / 76
Mladí Za Ľudí	✓	578 / 602	✓	715 / 63

Note: Data collected due 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

Source: Own processing

### 3 Facebook of Youth Political Organisations in Times of COVID-19

Five youth political organizations posted a total of 139 posts (10 posts with COVID-19 topic/7,2%) on Facebook over 62 days. The most significant contributors are MS (110 posts/79.1% of all posts). The remaining 29 posts are divided between three organizations: MZL – 13 posts (9.4%); MSD – 12 posts (8.6%) and LM – 3 posts (2.9%). The MP did not publish any post in the defined period. COVID-19 topic posts took place only by MS – 6 (5,5% of all MS posts), MZL – 3 (23% of all MZL posts) and MSD – 1 (8,3%) Graph 1 presents the development of the daily number of published posts on facebook profiles of youth political organizations. The highest daily average of posts is achieved by MS – 1.77 posts per day. The remaining organizations are in the zone below the limit of 1 post per day: MZL – 0.21; MSD – 0.19 and MS – 0.48. The COVID-19 posts did not exceed 1 post per day in each case. The frequency of daily numbers shows values that are more significant in the first half of the period in August. The difference between the first and second half of the period represents an increase of almost 100%.



**Chart 1: Frequency of daily post publishing - comparative perspective**

Source: Own processing

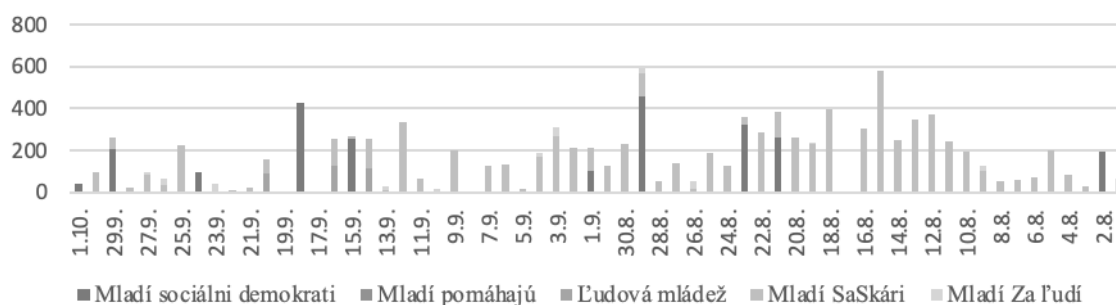
Youth political organizations use various forms of posts to communicate topics or promote themselves. In our cases, we identified 8 different types of posts that combines text, images, videos, documents, and shared content from other sources. According to Table 3, the most commonly used form of post is represented by a combination of text and image (90% of all COVID-19 topic posts). Generally are combinations more popular forms of communication or presentation than adding only text or an image without second component. The combination of the text and image represents the most used form of the posts for all monitored subjects (except MP).

**Table 3: Types of posts – comparative perspective**

Structure of the post – Total posts //(COVID-19 posts)	Text	Image	Text+image	Text+video	Text+share post	Text+share video	Text+share image	Text+document
Mladí sociální demokrati	2 (1)	1	5	2	1	1	0	0
Mladí pomáhajú	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ludová mládež	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Mladí SaSkáři	1	4	90 (6)	5	2	2	2	1
Mladí Za Ľudí	0	0	11 (3)	0	2	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Source: Own processing

Interactions are analysed in three categories: "Like" - Like, Comments, and Shares. We record the most interactions on posts in the case of MS (8863 / average 80.57 per post). Descending by number, they are followed by MSD (2771 / average 230.92 per 1 post), LM (395 / average 131.7 per 1 post), MZL (289 / average 24.08 per 1 post) and MP (0 / average 0 for 1 post). Despite the highest quantitative amount of contribution at MS, the average number of interactions on their posts does not hit the highest score. The highest number of interactions on average in one post is achieved by MSD which has up to the third highest number of published posts. The reason for the high level of interactions at MSD is probably primarily the highest fan base on the profile and their willingness to actively comment, share or like the published posts. The all COVID-19 posts reached 1164 interactions (9,44% of all interactions) in following structure: 979 likes (MSD – 271; MZL – 68; MS - 825) , 112 comments (MSD – 31; MZL – 0; MS - 81) and 73 shares (MSD – 29; MZL – 5; MS - 39). The analysis of the impact and relationships between the individual categories of interactions shows a high level of relationships in all examined subjects, even with confirmed statistical significance: MSD – Multiple R = 0,879, Sig. F =  $9,9 \times 10^{-20} < 0,05$ ; MP – bez výpočtu; LM – Multiple R = 0,915, Sig. F =  $4,81 \times 10^{-31} < 0,05$ ; MS – Multiple R = 0,713, Sig. F =  $7,65 \times 10^{-10} < 0,05$ ; MZL – Multiple R = 0,811, Sig. F =  $1,83 \times 10^{-14} < 0,05$ . Based on Multiple Regression Analysis, we claim that as one category of interactions increases, the other categories of interactions positively increases as well. Ensuring interaction on the post is an important factor, which ensures the visibility of the post and increases the overall reach among users. Chart 2 evaluates the first category of "Like" interactions in a common comparative perspective. In the evaluated category, they are presented with the highest score in descending order: MS - 7800 (average 125.8 per 1 post); MSD – 2355 (average 37.98 per post); MZL – 271 (average 4.37 per 1 post), LM – 90 (average 6.42 per 1 post) and MP - 0. According to the development in the monitored period, we record higher number of " I like it "during the first part of reference period. The highest number of Likes on the posts, as well as in the case of the total highest values, as well as daily averages, we identify in the organization MS – 575 Like. The highest total number of Likes in COVID-19 posts received MS (705) followed by MSD (271) and MZL (68). Average number per 1 post showed highest rate by MSD (271), MS (117,5) and MZL (22,6).



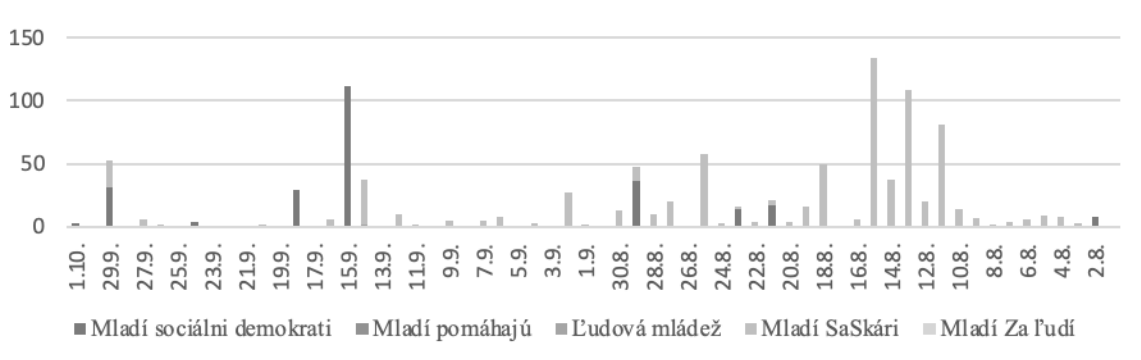
**Chart 2: Interactions – Like – Comparative perspective**

Source: Own processing

Compared to the Like category in the overall quantitative perspective, comments are a less common form of interaction for users. In the comparison with the sharing category, we rank it in second place. According to Chart 3, the most discussed and commented posts are on the MS profile (770 comments / 7 comments average per 1 post). The analysis of the totals and daily averages of the comments, similarly to the Like category, ranks MSD second. They are followed by LM and MZL. The MP organization has no comments and discussions without



published contributions. The most commented COVID-19 topic posts in average we identified in MS posts (31 per post/31 total), MS (13,5 per post/81 total) and MZL (0 per post/0 total).



**Chart 3: Interactions – Comments – Comparative perspective**

Source: Own processing

The third most used form of user interactions on posts - sharing, is comparatively analyzed in Chart 4. The intensity of the use of shares has significantly lower values than in the case of Likes. The deviation from the comments is not so significant. As in the previous two cases of categories, the highest rate of contribution sharing is achieved by MS. The share of the total number of shares is up to 75%. According to quantitative comparisons, they are followed by MSD, MZL, LM and MP. In total, the first part of the period contains up to 70% of all interactions, the second part of the period records a significant decrease with a 30% incidence of shares of the total number. The COVID-19 topic posts reached the most shares by MS subscribers (39) followed by MS (29) and MZL (5). In average view received highest rate MSD (29 per 1 post), MS (6,5 per 1 post) and MZL (1,67 per 1 post).



**Chart 4: Interactions – Comments – Comparative perspective**

Source: Own processing

Table 4 presents the structure of the use of the form of contributions that youth political organizations publish on Facebook profiles. The purpose of the research is primarily to determine the relationship between the form of the contribution and the level of interaction in general for all organizations together. The basic description of the data shows the highest level of representation of the number of interactions on the contribution in the lowest range from 0 to 100 interactions. Posts that combine text with an image achieve the highest level of interactivity in this band. Other forms of contributions occur in relatively similar values at low rates below the level of 10 cases. The test of the dependence between the form of the contribution and the number of interactions did not show statistical significance in any of the two selected coefficients with a high presence of the degree of relationship: Chi-square tests - Pearson Chi-Square = Sig. F = 0.938, Linear-by-Linear Association = 0.278 and N = 139, Nominal by Ordinal, Lambda - Symmetric: Sig. F = 0.563, Value = 0.02. These results lead

to the finding that in this case the form of the contribution does not affect the number of interactions. It is possible to assume that interactions in terms of quantity will not be provided by the form of the contribution, but by the qualitative content with which the user will be interested in the contribution.

**Table 4: Relations between form of post and interactions – general view (and COVID-19 ratio)**

Form of Post - Number of all (Number of COVID-19)	Number of Interactions				Total
	0-100	101-250	251-400	401+	
<b>Text</b>	1,00 25,00%	2,00 50,00%	1,00 (1) 25,00%	,00 ,00%	4,00 (1) 100,00% (25%)
<b>Picture</b>	4,00 80,00%	1,00 20,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	5,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Picture</b>	81,00 (7) 72,97% (6,31%)	22,00 (1) 19,82% (0,9%)	5,00 (1) 4,50% (0,9%)	3,00 2,70%	111,00 (9) 100,00% (8,1%)
<b>Text+Video</b>	7,00 77,78%	1,00 11,11%	,00 ,00%	1,00 11,11%	9,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Document</b>	1,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	1,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Share of Article</b>	4,00 80,00%	1,00 20,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	5,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Share of Video</b>	2,00 66,67%	1,00 33,33%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	3,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Share of Picture</b>	1,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	1,00 100,00%
<b>Total</b>	101,00 72,66%	28,00 20,14%	6,00 4,32%	4,00 2,88%	139,00 100,00%

Source: Own processing

The only sufficient number of contributions for the calculation of the relationship between the form of the contribution on the number of interactions is recorded in the case of MS. The results of testing the presence of the relationship are presented in Table 5. As in the case of the general view, the most represented group of the form of the contribution is the combination of text and image. Other forms of contributions do not have a significant representation. The calculation of statistical significance and strength of relationships between variables shows the values: Chi-square tests - Pearson Chi-Square = Sig. F = 0.999, Linear-by-Linear Association = 0.291, N = 139, Nominal by Ordinal, Lambda - Symmetric: Sig. F = NaN, Value = NaN. None of the coefficients used show statistically significant values and the rates of relationships are in very low bands. The specific case of MS in the resulting values coincides with the general calculation. This fact is also due to the high degree of representation of MS values in the joint comparative evaluation. The use of COVID-19 topic in posts dont help for receiving a increase number of interaction in any form of posts.

**Table 5: Relations between form of post and interactions – view of Mladí SaSkáři (and COVID-19 ratio)**

Form of post - Number of all (Number of COVID-19)	Number of Interaction				Total
	0-100	101-250	251-400	401+	
<b>Text</b>	1,00 50,00%	1,00 50,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	2,00 100,00%
<b>Picture</b>	4,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	4,00 100,00%
<b>Text+Picture</b>	65,00 (4) 73,03% (4,5%)	19,00 (1) 21,35% (1,12%)	3,00 (1) 3,37% (1,12%)	2,00 2,25%	89,00 (6) 100,00% (6,7%)
<b>Text+Video</b>	7,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	7,00 100,00%

<b>Text+Document</b>	1,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	1,00 100,00%
<b>Text+share of article</b>	3,00 75,00%	1,00 25,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	4,00 100,00%
<b>Text+share of video</b>	2,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	2,00 100,00%
<b>Text+share of picture</b>	1,00 100,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	,00 ,00%	1,00 100,00%
<b>Total</b>	84,00 76,36%	21,00 19,09%	3,00 2,73%	2,00 1,82%	110,00 100,00%

Source: Own processing

The last researched category in the structure of published contributions is represented by the use of contributions to communicate topics or promote the organization. The data show the predominance of the share of posts that are focused on the communication of topics at MS (share 68-62.7% / 43-37.3%) together with MSD (share 12-54.5% / 10-45.5%). MZL and LM focuses primarily on promotion. A specific subcategory in the case of communication of topics is represented by reactions to political opponents. The reactions are not used for self-promotion or specific communication of topics, but for agitation against political opponents. We record the use of this type of contributions at the MS and MSD organizations, while the mentioned organizations also published negative contributions to each other. In case of COVID-19 posts the structure is more positive to communication as for the promotion (70% to 30%). A specific view of topics communication offers the following structure of published posts: MS focuses mainly on rights and freedoms (17%), economics (11.7%), COVID-19 (11,7%) and historical events (10.3%). MSD is mostly devoted to historical events (50%), followed by a balanced space on youth (8%), economics (8%), social issues (8%) and COVID-19 (8%). In MZL case, we record only one contribution on the topics of human rights, law and justice, social events, history and self-government and local authorities. To the COVID-19 topic was related 2 posts. Selected organizations give similarly significant space to promotion on Facebook. MSD focuses as much as possible on the presentation of members of the organization (30%), participation in press conferences (30%) and the organization's own identity (20%). MS dominate in the promotion of activities and activities (53.5%), the promotion of communication platforms (Discord) (18.6%) and participation in discussions (18.6%). MZL primarily build the identity of the organization (50%) and promote activities (50%). Similarly, LM devotes maximum space to presentations of performed activities (100%). Specific place took promotion of information about COVID-19 actual situation and restrictions. In comparison to communication topics MZL (1 post) and MS (2 posts) published in total 3 posts of COVID-19 promotion. In that case posts focused on actual pandemic situation in the world, how to prevent from the virus and actual domestic statistics. The posts promoted

## Conclusion

The activity of selected youth political organizations has been found to demonstrate different approaches to operating and communicating on the Internet. We cannot identify the basic perspective in the form of an active website for all entities. Similarly, the blog domain is not one of the strengths of youth political organizations and represents a marginal opportunity for communication. On the contrary, a popular form of communication and promotion is currently represented by social networking platforms. Currently, the most used social network by all monitored entities is Facebook. The effort is primarily aimed at promoting its activities and activities. To a lesser extent, they approach the communication of selected social or

political topics. A significant advantage in the number of published contributions is gained by the MS organization, which also has the highest values in the number of interactions. As a most used form of contribution, subjects generally use a combination of text and image. The very form and style of published articles is not directly related to obtaining a higher number of interactions. On the other hand, the increasing number of one category of interactions (Like, Comment and Share) can positively influence the increase of the remaining two categories of interactions. The COVID-19 is actual hot topic in society but according to results of analysis this topic is included only as a partial issue. The COVID-19 is used mainly as a discussion topic. In less cases are promoted the most essential informations and restrictions due to COVID-19. The communication of Youth political organisations on social networks in Slovakia dont reached a highest number of posts and interactions. From that reason is The COVID-19 topic quite underrated. The youth political organisation are focused more on inter political parties battles as on the communication and propagation of key COVID-19 issues. The COVID-19 topic is used only by MSD for an aiming against the current government. Other COVID-19 cases represents basic stuff for subscribers and are not used for political battle.

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# THE IMPACT OF THE MEDIA ON SOCIETY: A FIELD OF MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE BEFORE AND DURING A DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY

*Natália Mulinová*

## **Abstract**

According to the core of the Agenda Setting theory, the media has a significant position towards society in terms of opinion-forming and prioritization of specific topics. The reverse theory perceives the individuals as an opinion-forming entity defining emerging issues, and leaves the media the role of entities that immediately adopt the issue. One of the topics that does not yet resonate with society is the area of the quality of mental health of young people. The need for increased emphasis on the mental health of young people was highlighted by the COVID-19, during which this area is beginning to appear fully in society, but also in the media. While our chosen media addressed the concept of mental problems in the context of psychological diagnoses (such as depression, anxiety or suicide) within the scope of their content before declaring a state of emergency, following the declaration of a state of emergency, the concept of mental health became more frequently associated with the stigmatization of mental health, the need for reform and investment, and criticism of the school and health system. The number of articles did not increase compared to the period before the declaration of a state of emergency, but rather had a declining trend. On the other hand, the context and frequency of occurrence of the term mental health of both media has changed significantly.

## **Key words:**

Aktuality.sk. COVID-19. Denník N. Media. Mental Health. Young People.

## **Introduction**

For decades we have been registering that the political and media agendas overlap and influence each other. We also register the fact that both agendas also have a positive or negative effect on human society, opinions or patterns of behavior. In the process of developing a political or media agenda, scientists began to ask the question of reverse theory, they started to research whether the world of politics and the media raises topics in society or it is society, or rather individuals who determine the discourse of interest, whether it is individuals who highlight certain topics that are subsequently adopted by both political leaders and journalists for their agenda. Such a cycle represents a complex, never-ending process in which some topics in society are intense, some have a declining trend, some are out of date, others do not yet exist. It may be out of interest to society, or insignificant, or not applicable in a given country. In our paper we deal with the content analysis of two opinion-forming media in the conditions of the Slovak Republic: Denník N and Aktuality.sk. One of the topics that is currently resonating in society is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for increased attention to mental health, which has been stigmatized and unreformed for many years. However, it is important to realize that the pandemic has only exacerbated and intensified the mental health problems that existed long before its spread. A pandemic would not strike us unprepared if there were effective mental health strategies and policies, whether at national or local level. The aim of our contribution is not to point out specific entities and reasons for insufficient interest in the field of mental health. The aim of our paper is to identify the frequency and content of messages that were addressed to the phenomenon of "mental health" before and during the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research into such a holistic concept as mental health needs to be carried out categorically. For the results to be effective, it is therefore appropriate to examine mental health individually according to various criteria, such as age or a certain group of the population. In our article we focus on the mental health

of young people and its aim is to find out in what context and with what frequency the individual articles on the Internet portals of the above Slovak media focused on mental health 8 months before and 8 months after the declaration of emergency in the Slovak Republic.

## 1 Media Agenda and the Field of Mental Health

The aim of the following chapter is not to provide an exhaustive theoretical definition of the term media agenda, nor to provide broad-spectrum terminology for the development or effects of the media agenda on the general public. Our intention is to point out the years – scientifically proven theory of the media agenda and its ability to determine thematic, interest areas in society. Through their communication channels, the media have the opportunity to mass-influence the thinking of the population, thus to a large extent shaping the political, economic, social, but also psychological views of the population. Through their communication channels, the media have the opportunity to mass-influence the thinking of the population, thus to a large extent shaping the political, economic, social, but also psychological views of the population.<sup>1</sup> Likewise to other undeniable, positive and negative implications, they also have the opportunity to educate society intellectually and point out professional topics, remove social stigma by notifying and pointing out certain phenomena. In addition to the function of a "watchdog", which is associated mainly with the political agenda, respectively with the theory of political action and guarding democracy, the task of educating and causing significant social change in the context of creating certain positive values and patterns of behavior may be perceived as the most important addition value of the media.<sup>2</sup> This added value can be transformed in society in the form of opening new, as yet undiscussed topics in order to spread new knowledge in areas about which the public does not have sufficient information. On the one hand, however, the media cannot be expected to fulfill the educational function of the population, it is not possible to replace other important actors in this issue, such as political or professional authorities. As McCombs noted, journalists are not responsible for covering or addressing all the topics that resonate in the world, and in many cases they are limited to the information provided by the heads of public relations departments of individual organizations, companies or ministries.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, due to their influence and wide scope, they can raise awareness of topics that may not be in the interest of other entities, of topics that have not yet been formed or insufficiently formed. Based on their activities, they have the power to create an ontologically safe environment in society<sup>4</sup>, not by pointing to a certain phenomenon as a problem, but as a fact that exists in society but can have a positive connotation if society takes a strong and critical position towards it. Critical position in terms of awareness of a particular problem and the subsequent introduction of solutions leading to positive change. In the context of our contribution to the issue of media interest in mental health, in terms of creating an ontologically safe environment, the media could focus on areas such as: stopping the stigma of mental health, spreading preventive measures and treatment options or pointing out weaknesses in the system. In reality, however, many media do not focus on mental health, but rather mental problems with negative connotations and negative accompanying, psychological phenomena, such as suicide, illness, depression. Rather, they capture the consequences of not

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<sup>1</sup> McCOMBS, M.: *Agenda Setting*. Cambridge : Polity Press Ltd, 2004, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> URBAN, L., DUBSKÝ, J., MURDZA, K.: *Masová komunikace a veřejné mínění*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a. s., 2011, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> McCOMBS, M.: *Agenda Setting*. Cambridge : Polity Press Ltd, 2004, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> JIRÁK, J., KÖPPLOVÁ, B.: *Masová média*. Prague : Portál, 2009, p. 407.

addressing mental health, which is, however, caused by many factors. One of the most important factors is, for example, the weak involvement in the field of policy-making, so in the political arena. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, mental health has long been pushed to the social periphery, resulting in considerable stigma, lack of doctors, treatment of mental health problems with antidepressants instead of effective psychotherapy, poor or no mental health research and finally no less significant lack of effective strategies and policies, underfunded health and social care for individuals suffering from mental health problems.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of this whole process, it is necessary not to generalize, but rather to diversify the difference between mental health and mental disorders, which are often presented in society as one and the same phenomenon. While mental health is part of the overall quality of life, it is one of the primary attributes of an individual's health and profile, including physical health, related to an individual's ability to realize their own opportunities and ability to be a productive unit in society, be an active member in their community or cope with normal stress and obstacles in life<sup>6</sup>. Mental problems refer to specific diagnosed health problems related to the psychological side of the individual, which includes changes in behavior, thinking or emotions, causes a person's inability to adapt in society, affects his productivity, creating or maintaining family and other social ties.<sup>7</sup>

Mental health is affected by a large number of factors that can be perceived in the context of a hedemonic or eudaimonic approach in combination with objective and subjective attributes of quality of life.<sup>8</sup> The most important factors include family, social and economic background, total GDP, social networks, or a subjective feeling of happiness, fellowship and identity.<sup>9</sup> The connection with the mental health and health of young people, who represent a future intellectual or economic force, is also strongly perceived by the European Union, which however has only supportive or coordinating competences in the field of youth and health policy.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the European Union and its institutions do not have the power to apply and implement regulations, directives or decisions in the field of public health or in the youth sector. However, they can guide them through various guidelines, action plans or strategies. One of the most ambitious strategies in the youth field is the European Union's Youth Strategy for 2019-2027, which also acts as a support tool for meeting Europe's youth goals and challenges.<sup>11</sup> The European objectives in the field of youth were defined by the youth themselves through the European Youth Dialogue platform, whereby young people expressed concern about the deteriorating mental health situation of young people and sent

<sup>5</sup> GRAJCAROVÁ, L.: *Duševné zdravie a verejné financie*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.google.com/search?q=GRAJCAROV%C3%81%2C+L.%3A+Du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie+a+verejn%C3%A9+financie.&oq=GRAJCAROV%C3%81%2C+L.%3A+Du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie+a+verejn%C3%A9+financie.&aqs=chrome..69i57.588j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Mental Health: strengthening our response*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2018. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>>.

<sup>7</sup> PAREKH, R.: *What is mental illness?*. 2018. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>>.

<sup>8</sup> POLLOCK, G. et al.: *Measuring Youth Well-being*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> KEYES, C. L. M.: Mental Health as a complete state: how the salutogenic perspective completes the picture?. In BAUER, G. F., HÄMMIG, O. (eds.): *Bridging Occupational, Organizational and Public Health: 179 A Transdisciplinary Approach*. New York : Springer Publishing Company, 2014, p. 180-191. [online]. [2020-10-18]. Available at: <[https://globalhealth.duke.edu/sites/default/files/event-attachments/mental\\_health\\_as\\_a\\_complete\\_state\\_-\\_keyes\\_2014.pdf](https://globalhealth.duke.edu/sites/default/files/event-attachments/mental_health_as_a_complete_state_-_keyes_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> *Division of competences within the European Union*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Aai0020>>.

<sup>11</sup> *Stratégia EÚ pre mládež – investovanie a posilnenie postavenia mládeže Obnovená otvorená metóda koordinácie s cieľom riešiť výzvy a príležitosti týkajúce sa mládeže*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2009. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:SK:PDF>>.



a clear message to European and national leaders.<sup>12</sup> The mental health solution cannot be further delayed. Weak or no investment in mental health policies occurred during the state of emergency caused by COVID-19 pandemic declared on 16 March 2020.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the Slovakian internet psychological counseling center IPčko recorded a threefold increase in cases of domestic and sexual violence in 2019 and 2020, while the number was also increased by repatriates, who during the quarantine period had difficulty dealing with stress and anxiety about potential infection.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the fact that people suffering from mental illness live 20 years less, mental disorders cost not only the Slovak but also the world economy 4% of GDP, summa summarum more than cancer, chronic respiratory or diabetic diseases.<sup>15</sup> For society as a whole, but also for a vital economy, it would be more beneficial not only have reactive mechanisms, so those that started during the pandemic, but rather preventive measures, but especially awareness of the need for mental health care. However, this is the responsibility of society as a whole, from the individual to the community to the media and legislators. In our article, we focused on the media and their interest in mental health, or whether and in what context they addressed this area before and after the declaration of a state of emergency.

## 2 Data Processing and Research Results

From a methodological point of view, we carried out the research through content analysis of articles within two opinion-forming media in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, namely Denník N and Aktuality.sk. The research problem represented the context and frequency of occurrence of the phenomena within monitored media Denník N and Aktuality.sk. In connection with the above, our aim was to find out in what context and with what frequency the articles published on the internet portals of both media deal with the field of mental health of young people. The partial goal was to identify the content of the articles before the declaration of the state of emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible change of context after the declaration of the state of emergency. Our research with these intentions focused on the period from 1 July 2019 to 16 March 2020 and in the second stage from 16 March to 8 October. For the sake of greater clarity, we have divided the results of the content analysis into two tables referring to the results before and the results during the declaration of a state of emergency in both media. The following table shows the quantification procedures for content analysis, in which we give an example of the procedure.

**Table 1: Quantification procedures for content analysis before / during the declaration of a state of emergency**

Article title	Date of publication	Frequency	Mental Health & YP	Context	Problems related to MH of YP
Influence of social networks	12. 08. 2019	1x, 2x, 3x, 4x, 5x, 6x, 6 and more x	Yes/No	Excessive use of social networks distorts reality	Depression, stress

Source: Own processing

<sup>12</sup> *European Youth Goals*. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/youthgoals\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/youthgoals_en)>.

<sup>13</sup> *COVID-19: Vláda SR prijala na mimoriadnom zasadnutí ďalšie dôležité opatrenia*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-24]. Available at: <<https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Prevenčia samovrážd na internete?*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-28]. Available at: <<https://ipcko.sk/prevenicia-samovrazd-na-internete/>>.

<sup>15</sup> *Depresia z vírusu: Pandémia ovplyvnila psychické zdravie ľudí*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-29]. Available at: <[https://www.npz.sk/sites/npz/Stranky/NpzArticles/2020\\_05/Depresia\\_z\\_virusu\\_Pandemia\\_ovplyvnila\\_psychicke\\_zdravie\\_ludi.aspx?did=6&ssid=81&tuid=0&](https://www.npz.sk/sites/npz/Stranky/NpzArticles/2020_05/Depresia_z_virusu_Pandemia_ovplyvnila_psychicke_zdravie_ludi.aspx?did=6&ssid=81&tuid=0&)>.

Before the actual implementation of the research, we determined several identification categories, one of which was the time or date of publication of the article. The method of deliberate selection was identifying for us eight months before the declaration of a state of emergency, so from 1 July 2019, until the declaration of a state of emergency and from 16 March to 8 October. Other identifiers were the websites of both media, i.e. dennikn.sk and aktuality.sk. The analysis was preceded by the identification of keywords. In the first phase of the research, based on the keyword mental health, we identified 37 articles in the period before the declaration of a state of emergency and 22 articles published during the state of emergency on the website of Denník N. The same process was performed with the Aktuality.sk. In the context of our keywords, Aktuality.sk dealt with the field of mental health in its articles 33 times, of which 13 articles dealt with the field of mental health before the declaration of a state of emergency and 20 during its duration. In the second phase of the research, we recorded a significant decrease in articles. The decrease was caused by entering additional keywords in the internet articles we generated after entering the keywords "mental health". In the second phase, we made another key connection to mental health, which were the terms young people. Of the 37 articles on dennik.sk before the declaration of a state of emergency, we registered 8 articles in this way and 6 articles during the state of emergency.

In the case of Aktuality.sk, we recorded an even higher decrease to 2 articles before and 3 articles during the emergency. It is also necessary to note another determining identifier, namely that in our content analysis we excluded those articles that published information on mental health issues outside the Slovak Republic, which is understandable as our goal was to examine the context and frequency within Slovakia. In table no. 1 describes other identifiers determined by us, namely the title of the article. In the context of responding to the frequency and mention of young people in Internet articles, we used the coding process. The frequency was 1x, 2x, 3x, 4x, 5x, 6x and 6 and more x, depending on how many times the phrase mental health appeared in the text of the article. The presence of the phrase young people, we coded in the already generated articles as yes / no. At this point, it should be added that not all research processes could be coded, in the case of context and specific psychological problems related to the mental health of young people. Due to the limitation of the number of pages, we have listed in the tables only those articles that we identified after the second phase of the research, or articles containing the terms mental health and young people. In the tables we present abbreviations of keywords, ie in the case of the term mental health in the table we list MH and in the case of the connection young people YP. For the same reasons, the titles of the articles are abbreviated, but the full title of the articles is easily traceable after the date in the individual tables. Article titles thus contain the first two or three beginning words in the tables.

### 3 Research Results

The term mental health appeared in Denník N before the declaration of an emergency with the greatest frequency in an article dealing with the negative impact of climate change on young people who are experiencing various mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress and depression. These negative psychological phenomena have been correlated both with the awareness of the climatic / ecological threat and at the same time with a certain form of frustration caused by ignorance and lack of interest by adults. Of the eight articles published on Denník N's Internet portal, two articles addressed the impact of social networks on young people's mental health in the context of self-harm, depression or even suicide, which was identified as the result of false, unrealistic ideals on social networks and pressure on users.

social networks. A more positive report on young people's mental health came from an article about a young student who set up a platform for young people called "Nepanikár" after encountering the unavailability of psychological, health care for young people in terms of her own mental health problems. Lucia Grajcarová also points out the low availability, underfunded health care, insufficient technical or human capacity in the field of mental health in her study *Mental Health and Public Finances*, which was published as a discussion study of the "Value for Money Unit".<sup>16</sup>

**Table 2: Frequency and context of addressing the topic of MH of YP (Dennik N - before the declaration of a state of emergency)**

Article title	Date of publication	Frequency	Mental Health & YP	Context	Problems related to MH of YP
"Climate change ..."	26. 07. 2019	3x	Yes	YP in the context of danger, awareness of the ecological threat, frustration from ignoring adults	Anxiety, depression, stress, violence, escalating aggression by increasing °C
"The problem of social networks ..."	04. 09. 2019	1x	Yes	The impact of social networks on young people	Suicide, self harm, depression
"A girl with depression ..."	17. 09. 2019	1x	Yes	Questionnaire on MH in high school, questionnaire without evaluation	Suicide, depression
"Everyone wants ..."	24. 09. 2019	1x	Yes	Vegas Movie - Friendship Replaces Incomplete Families	
"Instagram hid the number ..."	25. 11. 2019	1x	Yes	The pressure on the authors of the contributions, MH is decreasing	
"She experienced anxiety, depression ..."	06. 12. 2019	1x	Yes	The application "Nepanikár" for YP, psychological care for YP is not freely available	Depression, anxiety, stress, panic, post-traumatic stress disorder
"Psychologist Bartíková ..."	24. 12. 2019	1x	Yes	YP find it difficult that their parents behave like experts on their lives, trying to control, negative mentoring	Modern narcissism
"Only pills ..."	17. 01. 2020	1x	Yes	Number of younger children under 14 years attempted suicide in 2018, need for increased attention to MH, ignoring symptoms	Suicide, risk of heart attacks, strokes, digestive problems

Source: Own processing; *Vyhľadavanie: duševné zdravie*. [online]. [2020-10-14]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/?s=du%5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie>>.

Depression and suicide, i.e. mental problems, were identified five times in eight articles, either in connection with climate threats, a questionnaire on mental health, which was conducted in high school without evaluation, in the context of the application "Nepanikár", and in the case of an article reporting on an increased number of children under the age of 14 who attempted suicide in 2018. The mentioned article, which warns about the connection between mental disorders and the risks of heart attack, stroke or digestive, is also the only article in the period before the declaration of a state emergency, which pointed out the need to increase attention to the topic of mental health. Another article we generated based on the keywords was informative, featuring the film Vegas and its three main characters: young teenagers whose friendship replaced not very functional families. Next article refers to the widespread trend of modern narcissism associated with the negative mentoring of parents trying to control the lives of their children according to their own ideas.

<sup>16</sup> GRAJCAROVÁ, L.: *Duševné zdravie a verejné financie*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-09-12]. Available at: <<https://www.google.com/search?q=GRAJCAROV%C3%81%2C+L.%3A+Du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie+a+verejn%C3%A9+financie.&oq=GRAJCAROV%C3%81%2C+L.%3A+Du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie+a+verejn%C3%A9+financie.&aqs=chrome..69i57.588j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>>.

**Table 3: Frequency and context of addressing the topic of MH of YP (Denník N - after the declaration of a state of emergency)**

Article title	Date of publication	Frequency	Mental Health & YP	Context	Problems related to MH of YP
"Every fifth college student ..."	28. 05. 2020	1x	Yes	Link to the League for MH, the occurrence of depression and anxiety before and during COVID-19 at Comenius University, MH as a serious problem that does not receive enough attention	Depression, anxiety
"A college student with a disorder ..."	24. 07. 2020	1x	Yes	Ignorance of society, insufficient help, mental stigma, criticism of the school system, society perceives YP with mental diseases as weak	Suicide
"State should reform ..."	11. 08. 2020	4x	Yes	Interview with a psychiatrist, the need to reform mental health in Slovakia (retention of future psychologists and psychiatrists in the country, critique of the education system)	
"Antidepressants are not ..."	29. 09. 2020	1x	Yes	MH as a big taboo, the fear of people admitting to a mental disorder	Anxiety, panic attacks
"Human today achieves..."	05. 10. 2020	3x	Yes	The number of psychiatric patients increased by 40-50% during COVID-19, YP are most affected, MH on the sideline	
"Medicines for depression ..."	08. 10. 2020	2x	Yes	Pills Vs Psychotherapy, psychotherapy is expensive, insurance companies pay for it to a much lesser extent, access to it is relatively difficult in Slovakia	Recurrent depressive disorder

Source: Own processing; *Vyhľadávanie: duševné zdravie*. [online]. [2020-10-14]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/?s=du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie>>.

During the state of emergency, the articles mentioned problems such as society's lack of information, insufficient help, stigma, mental health reform, keeping future psychologists in the country, criticism of the education system, taboo, people's fear of admitting mental illness, expensive psychotherapy, insufficient reimbursement by insurance companies, the fear of young people in a society that perceives them as weak individuals, an increase in the percentage of patients with psychiatric disorders by 40 to 50%, among whom young people were most affected. With the declaration of a state of emergency on March 16, 2020, Denník N gradually transformed its information and communication agenda into a reactionary one within the individual articles. Over the course of eight months, in correlation with mental health and young people, five of the six articles were published on the mentioned Internet portal, which pointed out criticism of the school or health care system, long-term unresolved stigmatization of mental health and the need for fundamental reform of mental health policy in Slovakia. The predominantly stagnant problem of mental health of young people in Slovakia has become serious.

**Table 4: Frequency and context of addressing the topic of MH of YP (Aktuality.sk - before declaring a state of emergency)**

Article title	Date of publication	Frequency	Mental Health & YP	Context	Problems related to MH of YP
"The Slovak is at war ..."	16. 07. 2019	1x	Yes	For the younger generation, it is less and less a shame to solve mental problems	
"Experts: suicide ..."	18. 01. 2020	5x	Yes	Link League for MH, physical MH are equally important, preventive measures (good atmosphere in the family, attention, understanding, mutual respect, movement, social ties, suicide is one of the leading causes of death in European countries between the ages of 15 and 24 life, the need for a serious approach to the first signals, suicide can avoid surroundings (family, peers, co-workers)	Suicide

Source: Own processing; *Vyhľadávanie: duševné zdravie*. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/vyhľadavanie/?search%5Btext%5D=du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie>>.

Within eight months, based on our criteria of content analysis, we identified two articles on the Aktuality.sk website, which devoted their context to the issue of mental health of young people, during July 2019 and January 2020. The first article included the opinion of a war photographer who in the interview pointed out the still persistent stigma of mental problems. He expressed the slowly evolving determination of young people to solve mental problems. The second article included, in addition to a link to the Mental Health League's online counseling center, the need for an equivalent perception of physical and mental health. The article contained a number of preventive measures in terms of social ties, a positive family atmosphere, mutual respect or physical activity, which should be functional mechanisms effective in preventing mental health problems. As in the case of Denník N, the term suicide appeared in the case of Aktuality.sk, in the context of the main cause of death of young people from 15 to 24 years in some European countries. If we look at OECD statistics, suicides are really the second most common cause of death among young people, after car deaths, in the 36 most economically developed countries in the world.<sup>17</sup> The content of the January 2020 article included the need for a serious approach to the first signs / signals of mental health problems of young people, leading to suicides, which in some cases can be averted around the individuals, mostly by family, co-workers or peers. It should be added that such a system can be implemented only if the family, co-workers or peers are trained in the field of first aid in case of mental discomfort of young people. The need to provide training specifically for family members, peers or colleagues at work is one of the most important strategic preventive measures, which is supported by both the European Union and young people themselves through the European Union Youth Strategy.<sup>18</sup> However, the first steps that are desirable in society are steps to stop the stigmatization of mental health problems. And these can also be achieved through regular holistic as well as partial mental health research. In addition, many studies point to the need for research that is regularly conducted on the one hand and diversified by age category on the other. One of the reasons is the diversity of factors influencing the mental health of young people at different ages. If the decisive determinants for young people under the age of 14 are family background, including social and economic security, for young people in a university environment or in the labor market, these can be factors such as income, friends or social networks.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the most effective research would be that one which is as focused as possible on the age group of young people. And there is currently a shortage of it.

As in the case of Denník N, Aktuality.sk also increased its attention to the hitherto insufficient active intervention in the field of mental health. During the state of emergency, our second opinion-forming, Slovak medium, selected by us, followed up on the topics of reforming the social prism or on the health and social care of the mental health of young people, including preventive measures. COVID-19 also emphasized significant existential problems in society accompanied by relationship problems, reduced work energy, problems related to quarantine measures or situational problems between young people and parents at home, according to articles published on Aktuality.sk internet articles. At Aktuality.sk, we also saw increased attention to topics highlighting currently unsatisfactory investments in strategic, preventive policies and investments in mental health, despite the tendency to increase the number of diagnosed mental disorders. As stated in the October 2020 article, in third place, it was precisely mental health problems that caused disability for young people aged 19 to 39.

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<sup>17</sup> *Suicide Rates*. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://data.oecd.org/healthstat/suicide-rates.htm>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Stratégia EÚ pre mládež – investovanie a posilnenie postavenia mládeže Obnovená otvorená metóda koordinácie s cieľom riešiť výzvy a príležitosti týkajúce sa mládeže*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2009. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:SK:PDF>>.

<sup>19</sup> *Social Determinants of Mental Health*. Geneva : World Health Organisation, 2014, p. 44.

**Table 5: Frequency and context of addressing the topic of MH of YP (Aktuality.sk - after declaring a state of emergency)**

Article title	Date of publication	Frequency	Mental Health & YP	Context	Problems related to MH of YP
„Coronavirus: Slovaks...“	28. 05. 2020	5x	Yes	Existential concerns in connection with COVID-19, reference to the League for MH, practical advice on how to handle the situation, relationship problems in connection with quarantine, educational, school problems, burden for parents - non-cooperation of minors	
"The survey shows ..."	14. 06. 2020	1x	Yes	Lack of energy for work, in connection with COVID-19: the likelihood of less concentration on work due to the housing situation	
"Expenditure on care ..."	06. 10. 2020	6x	Yes	Investment in MH is not enough mainly in the context of the number of people who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder, mental disorders (2018) were in 3rd place newly admitted disability pensions - most of them were YP aged from 19 - 39.	

Source: Own processing; *Vyhľadávanie: duševné zdravie*. [online]. [2020-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/vyhľadavanie/?search%5Btext%5D=du%C5%A1evn%C3%A9+zdravie>>.

## Conclusion

In today's globalized world, we no longer have to ask ourselves whether the media agenda has an important, opinion-forming position in society. Probably a more relevant question would be what image the media tries to provide to its readers through its content, to what extent they try to inform recipients or educate them. It would be wrong to attribute the role of educating society only to the media. Education in various problematic phenomena is the responsibility of the whole society, whether governmental or non-governmental entities, formal or informal groups, schools, teachers, parents. However, with their gradual development, the media have also joined these entities, so we can say that they belong to the complementary units of education in society. In our paper, we have outlined the role of the media in the context of a specific area, which was the mental health of young people. The mental health of young people caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is currently sparking a debate in society. Our goal was to find out whether two opinion-forming media in the Slovak Republic: Denník N and Aktuality.sk focused on the mental health of young people, with what frequency and in what context. Through the content analysis during the eight months before the declaration of a state of emergency, we recorded 8 articles on Denník N and 2 articles on Aktuality.sk after entering the keywords "mental health" and "young people". In the range of eight months after the declaration of a state of emergency, so after 16th March 2020, 6 articles were generated on Denník N and 3 articles on Aktuality.sk after entering keywords. In terms of context, the articles in the period before the declaration of the state of emergency had an informative character, pointing to mental problems rather than mental health, although one article on Aktuality.sk from January 2020 included the importance of mental health prevention in the context of suicides which are one of the leading cause of death for young people aged 14 to 24 within some European countries. In other cases, articles in both media tended to report on terms such as depression, anxiety, suicide, self-harm caused by climate change, by social networks or by family environment. The media focused on the concrete, negative consequence of mental health neglect rather than on mental health itself or related topics such as referring to effective examples of mental health prevention, whether at work, school or domestic environment. A positive connotation was noted in connection with the application for young people called "Nepanikár", which was founded by a student suffering from mental problems who encountered shortcomings in health care in the psychological field.

During the declaration of a state of emergency, the frequency of the term "mental health" in the context of "young people" increased. It has been used more than the term "mental illness". The context of both media articles has also changed from informational to reactionary. However, the number of articles did not increase. In its six articles, the Denník N began to present mental health as a term that has not yet received attention, about which there is not enough information, which is associated with stigma. Criticism of the school and health care system has intensified in both media also a discussion on the necessary reforms, not only in the field of policy-making and strategy, but also in the case of thinking in a society that perceives young people with mental health problems as weak individuals. In times of emergency, topics also emerged highlighting the need to increase investment in this area, both on the side of preventive measures and treatment, including the retention of psychologists and other health professionals in the country. Thus, the state of emergency has largely underlined the need for preventive measures, which are desirable in society in terms of ensuring a safe and healthy environment not only for young people but for all. Preferably before another crisis which will shake society and escalate hitherto neglected areas and sectors, as was the case of COVID-19. This responsibility belongs to individuals, companies, but especially to professionals, legislators, but also to the media, which are the creators of the public interest in every country.

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# NEW CHALLENGES FACING MARKETING AND MARKETING COMMUNICATION. EMPLOYER BRANDING – CHALLENGES FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE CORONA-PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

All over the world – including Slovakia – companies are being forced to reduce their staff numbers due to the Coronavirus crisis. The remaining workforce is, generally speaking, demotivated and uncertain about their own future job security. This is precisely the challenge faced by managers as they look to transform this uncertainty into security, commitment and re-motivation through communication. In addition to customers, employees are also among those stakeholders strategically decisive to any company. Executives should, therefore, not only consider external marketing communication for products and services but also competently communicate the company's values to internal stakeholders. Internal employer branding is the appropriate marketing instrument for this purpose and is presented in this paper.

## Key words:

Crisis Situation. Employee Retention. Employer Branding. Internal Communication. Leadership.

## 1 Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic is creating new economic crises or intensifying existing ones. Even traditional companies such as Volkswagen are facing a competitive environment in which job cuts are seen as an unavoidable rescue measure.<sup>1</sup> External factors – such as price pressure, trade conflicts and declining economic growth – or megatrends such as the digitalisation of business models and, as is the case today in the form of global health crises, are forcing companies to adapt. If restructuring is to succeed, it must be accompanied by internal communication – otherwise, companies run the risk of de-motivation and, in the worst case, staff turnover.<sup>2</sup> Crises are situations that every company is confronted with sooner or later. Some ebb away after a brief period, while others can only be overcome with a lot of staying power from management. Avoiding mistakes in crisis management also depends on the attitudes and behaviour of managers.<sup>3</sup> A central role is played by employer branding, which – not only in times of crisis – also has an internal effect, thus establishing it as a task for all managers. Employer branding communication conveys the employer's positioning to relevant external and internal target groups, it increases awareness of the employer brand and shapes its image.<sup>4</sup> Employer branding is rooted in public relations – employees are internal stakeholders, who are the target of internal PR and its communication efforts.<sup>5</sup> Internal employer branding serves to increase motivation by communicating the values and norms anchored within a corporate culture and to promote employee loyalty by identifying with the employer brand. Brand identity, which is important

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<sup>1</sup> *Stellenabbau: Wie geht es weiter bei VW?*. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <[https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/vw-stellenabbau-101~magnifier\\_pos-0.html](https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/vw-stellenabbau-101~magnifier_pos-0.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> ANTUŠÁK, E.: *Krizový management. Hrozby-krize-příležitosti*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2009, p. 324-325.

<sup>4</sup> KREMMEL, D., HOFER-FISCHER, S., VON WALTER, B.: *Kommunikationsprogramm: Arbeitgebermarke kommunikativ umsetzen*. In VON WALTER, B., KREMMEL, D. (eds.): *Employer Brand Management. Arbeitgebermarken aufbauen und steuern*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2016, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> HEJLOVÁ, D.: *Public relations*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2015, p. 101-102.

in this context, is the self-image of the company and it also has an effect on internal target groups. Brand identity is normative-strategic in nature and serves as a guideline for employees.<sup>6</sup>

If current employees are experiencing a sense of job insecurity due to the crisis, internal employer branding offers the possibility of transforming insecurity into security and commitment and re-motivation by way of targeted communication measures. This is not only the task of central corporate communications, but of all managers at all levels within the hierarchy. In what has become a global pandemic, it is not possible to duck or avoid this situation – any attempt would be interpreted as a leadership weakness – which, in turn, would result in uncertainty, feelings of disruption and prevailing de-motivation. The connection between employer branding and corporate culture is an important feature of the authenticity that underpins the statements made.<sup>7</sup> According to a study just 15 years ago, less than 1% of the marketing budget was spent on internal communication.<sup>8</sup> The reasons for this were not only a lack of awareness within companies regarding the importance of employees for brand management, but also a lack of knowledge concerning how to tackle this challenge.<sup>9</sup> These gaps have now been closed in 2020. The focus on exchange relationships with customers has been extended to all reference groups, in order to take into account the interests and needs of all relevant target groups (including employees) in a sustainable and balanced manner. Marketing, in the form of employer branding, has become relevant for Human Resources Management.<sup>10</sup> An important function of employer branding – especially in crisis situations such as the Coronavirus pandemic – is the identification of current employees with their employer. Their enthusiasm and motivation to continue working for the company is the primary target. This is the basis for the employees' affective commitment – as well as their willingness to remain loyal to the employer. From an HR strategy perspective, the aim is to retain employees who have qualifications that are critical to success, who have the potential for successful further development within the company, who are motivated as top performers and who are highly committed, even in times of crisis.<sup>11</sup> In this article, we will develop suggestions on how employees threatened by crisis-related uncertainty can be supported in their communication efforts. It is the task of managers to transform this uncertainty into security, commitment and re-motivation. In this context, it should be examined as to how an authentic communicative recourse to the generally accepted values of corporate culture can increase identification, and how internal employer branding measures can support managers in meeting this challenge.

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<sup>7</sup> SCHUHMACHER, F., GESCHWILL, R.: *Employer Branding. Human Resources Management für die Unternehmensführung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2014, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> SIMMS, J.: HR or marketing: who gets staff on side?. In *Marketing*, 2003, Vol. 2003, No. 1, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> SPONHEUER, B.: *Employer Branding als Bestandteil einer ganzheitlichen Markenführung*. Wiesbaden : Gabler, 2010, p. 246.

<sup>10</sup> MATTMÜLLER, R., BUSCHMANN, A.: Marketing: Das Management aller Zielgruppen. In HESSE, G., MATTMÜLLER, R. (eds.): *Perspektivwechsel im Employer Branding. Neue Ansätze für die Generationen Y und Z*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> BÖTTGER, E.: *Employer Branding. Verhaltenstheoretische Analysen als Grundlage für die identitätsorientierte Führung von Arbeitgebermarken*. Wiesbaden : Gabler, 2012, p. 1-2.

## 2 Coronavirus Pandemic and Employment Market Effects

The increasing prevalence of COVID-19 have implications for economic development. The high degree of openness that characterises the Slovak economy makes it vulnerable to external influences. According to IMF forecasts, Slovakia's GDP will fall by approximately 6.2 per cent in 2020.<sup>12</sup> The Institute of Employment reported an unemployment rate of 8.4% in Slovakia in August 2020 (of which 2.6% are long-term unemployed).<sup>13</sup> Slovakia enjoys close economic ties to Germany and can become affected by those problems afflicting the local economy there. The decline in German GDP in 2020 is about 5.5 per cent.<sup>14</sup> According to employment market statistics, the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic were felt until August 2020.<sup>15</sup>

- The unemployment rate in August 2020 was 6.4 % (1.3 % higher than in the same month of the previous year).
- Of the 44.57 million registered employees in Germany, 5.36 million workers were recipients of cyclical, reduced hours compensation in June 2020.

The number of job vacancies in Germany fell by 36 % to 893,000. This is almost half the number before the Coronavirus crisis.<sup>16</sup> Employees with the intention of changing jobs have fewer chances and choices to find new employment in a timely manner. Loyalty to the current employer is on the increase. Rational loyalty and emotional ties, however, have a negative influence on each other. The Coronavirus crisis has encouraged many Slovakian employers to adopt flexible working time models. Teleworking, flexible working hours and part-time work are being used more frequently. Since 04.04.2020, a new law on reduced hours work has also been in force.<sup>17</sup> Reduced working hours (or short term working) offers the chance to uphold the employment contract during the crisis and to resume employment after the crisis without any friction.

## 3 Employee Retention, Employer Appeal and Internal Communication in Employer Branding as a New PR Task

Shifts are being observed in the discipline of public relations (PR): From the seller's market to the buyer's market, and from the employer's market to the employee's market. This creates new challenges for PR, which also have an impact on employer branding.<sup>18</sup> In Slovakia, too, attention has recently been focused on brand image building, employer branding and internal communication. In addition to classic media work, the internal perspective – with due consideration given to employee values – is becoming increasingly important for the PR

<sup>12</sup> *Ochorenie COVID-19 a jeho vplyv na slovenskú ekonomiku*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.sav.sk/index.php?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source\\_no=20&news\\_no=8852](https://www.sav.sk/index.php?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=8852)>.

<sup>13</sup> *Inštitút zamestnanosti*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.iz.sk/sk/o-nas/aktualizovane>>.

<sup>14</sup> *IfW Konjunkturprognose: Wirtschaft verliert nach Aufholjagd an Tempo*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-19]. Available at: <<https://www.ifw-kiel.de/de/publikationen/medieninformationen/2020/ifw-konjunkturprognose-wirtschaft-verliert-nach-aufholjagd-an-tempo/>>.

<sup>15</sup> *Arbeitslosenquote und Arbeitslosenzahlen 2020*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/news/arbeitsmarkt-2020>>.

<sup>16</sup> *Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung: Aktuelle Ergebnisse*. [online]. [2020-09-26]. Available at: <<https://www.iab.de/de/befragungen/stellenangebot/aktuelle-ergebnisse.aspx>>.

<sup>17</sup> *Podpora zamestnanosti v období Koronakrízy v SR a okolitých krajinách*. Bratislava : Slovak Business Agency, 2020, p. 50. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<http://www.sbagency.sk/vplyv-pandemie-covid-19-na-zamestnanost-na-slovensku#.X38Rru1CRPY>>.

<sup>18</sup> MATÚŠOVÁ, G. J.: Trendy na trhu PR. In *Časopis Marketing a komunikace*, 2020, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 16. [online]. [2020-09-19]. Available at: <[http://casopis.cms-cma.cz/2020/MaK\\_1-2020/mobile/index.html](http://casopis.cms-cma.cz/2020/MaK_1-2020/mobile/index.html)>.

sector.<sup>19</sup> Employer branding is the sum of measures aimed at establishing the company as an attractive employer on the employment market (externally), as well as in the context of employee retention (internally). The following section focuses on internal employer branding – with employee retention as the primary objective and internal communication as an instrument. Within the framework of integrated marketing communication, modern corporate communication is closely intertwined with Human Resources Management and Corporate Social Responsibility.<sup>20</sup>

- *Employee retention*

Employee retention describes a special quality of the employees' relationship with the company. Here, the emotional bond with the employer – through identification with the employer's goals, vision and values/standards of the corporate culture – is at the forefront. Employee loyalty can be positively influenced by work content, working conditions and, to a significant extent, by the leadership behaviour of direct superiors. Fairness, participation and motivation are decisive influencing factors here. For example, research on transformational leadership styles suggests that a good emotional relationship between the manager and the employees can be helpful.<sup>21</sup> Employee loyalty and employer appeal are closely related within internal employer branding. Successful emotional employee retention has three typical characteristics: On the one hand, there is a high willingness to make a special contribution to the retention partner (the current employer) with particular acts of good performance. In addition, there is the need to establish this bond in the long-term. The reason for this willingness to commit is the pronounced concordance between the goals and values of the commitment partners (employee and employer). At the interface between internal communication and the values of the corporate culture, points of contact for inward-looking value-based marketing can be identified, which is closely linked to existing moral and social value systems via values and ethics.<sup>22</sup> This perspective is extended to include the consideration of employees. The application of values is revealed through behaviour – at the same time, the behaviour of others is viewed and evaluated through one's own value lens.<sup>23</sup>

- *Internal communication*

The change in social values implies that correspondence messages or staff newspapers can no longer satisfy the communicative needs of employees. In view of the fact that the role model played by managers has changed (e.g. in Germany as a moderating coach and cooperative consultant), the demand for informative and motivating communication that reaches employees locally, technically and emotionally has also increased.<sup>24</sup> The reasons for crisis communication

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<sup>19</sup> MATUŠOVÁ, G. J.: Trendy na trhu PR. In *Časopis Marketing a komunikace*, 2020, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 16. [online]. [2020-09-19]. Available at: <[http://casopis.cms-cma.cz/2020/MaK\\_1-2020/mobile/index.html](http://casopis.cms-cma.cz/2020/MaK_1-2020/mobile/index.html)>.

<sup>20</sup> PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> KANNING, U. P.: *Personalmarketing, Employer Branding und Mitarbeiterbindung. Forschungsbefunde und Praxistipps aus der Personalpsychologie*. Berlin, Heidelberg : Springer, 2017, p. 229-231.

<sup>22</sup> PŘIKRYLOVÁ, J. et al.: *Moderní marketingová komunikace*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2019, p. 285.

<sup>23</sup> DROESSLER, J.: Kultúrne rozdiely netreba podceňovať. In *Newsletter Slovensko-nemeckej obchodnej a priemyselnej komory: Interkultúrna Komunikácia Slovensko-Nemecko*, 2018, Vol. 2018, No. 3, p. 7. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[<sup>24</sup> MONTUA, A.: \*Führungsaufgabe Interne Kommunikation. Erfolgreich in Unternehmen kommunizieren – im Alltag und in Veränderungsprozessen\*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 5-6.](https://mediafra.admiralcloud.com/customer_609/f0872008-f435-4c68-a4a2-deee703ccab7?Expires=1602419399&Key-Pair-Id=APKAI2N3YMVS7R4AXMPQ&Signature=Uf6vD5nHxypDuvYxT7Ofs8fCsknA8h725QFsqnNnl5YEkoiDXfj65XWtnqlMJODtCMbKFoN46EC8pUOunKLB1xPpuvX51i5KSL90yF2kMBB0teqeJ1m3O2~Ir5ezixCijTgidaQTJQ6izi6EuoqR5x0SfnsoG2mC~FgA7S25kMnTXIEH~FUVUlaKixBYt6o97C4hRFjKelhfxcbl-kZ0xxWL6otstOLDMGdd7NyQDnbdololyLHpukjebK048o38lxsPZQQN4itj5Y51bTCeZ1uX4zb7oWB-btpJo2qBMQqacd3i8t0t9gGv-M2KLZ4RDin-2Ga9dp6rI8b3bO3w__>.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

are logical, rational and data-based, whereas the effects are emotional in nature. Professional internal communication is, therefore, a success factor in restructuring.<sup>25</sup> The question of responsibility for internal communication encompasses all managers at all levels.<sup>26</sup> Internal communication represents the intersection of leadership and motivation – crisis situations require special measures. Communication is an instrument for supporting managers as they foster employee loyalty and commitment. Successful communication ascertains the relevant aspects for the target group. Management decisions should, therefore, always be checked for their communicative impact – especially in crisis situations and the announcement of painful decisions such as dismissals and site closures.<sup>27</sup> Crises are dynamic and, if the uncertainties triggered by them will ultimately cause catastrophic damage to those affected, this leads to the development of interests and a collective capacity to act, in order to overcome the crisis.<sup>28</sup> Loyalty and commitment, the transformation of insecurity into security, and the maintenance and promotion of motivation and commitment lead to three challenges for internal communication:<sup>29</sup>

1. *Stability and change*: Leaders must provide orientation (security) and, at the same time, demand visionary readiness for upcoming change (motivation through vision).
2. *Current challenges and strategy development*: In everyday work under time pressure, the focus is often on day-to-day operations; at the same time, strategic issues are often out of sight. This results in a fatal spiral involving the overestimation of short-term goals and the suppression of long-term strategy development. The current fear of job loss is stronger than the willingness to think about the year after next.
3. *Knowledge and experience*: Knowledge and experience are mutually dependent. Knowledge grows as experience is gained. This also applies to negative experiences with the employer, such as those that can occur in crisis situations and the ensuing unprofessional communication, i.e. without consistency, coherence and clarity.<sup>30</sup>

Loyalty is often associated with reliability, decency, loyalty, sincerity and fairness. In a strongly normative form, loyalty prohibits the pursuit of individual goals if collective goals were to suffer as a result. Managers and employees are mutually linked through a sense of loyalty that is shaped by the interplay of care and allegiance. Loyalty in this sense is derived from the values, norms and basic assumptions of corporate culture.<sup>31</sup> Not only (but especially) in times of crisis, what counts is how positively employees look at their company and how motivated they are to work together to provide the best services for customers. The willingness and ability to deal constructively with crises stands and falls with the appropriate communication of decisions by managers.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, in times of crisis, it is necessary to rethink management practices that are well-established. However, the dilemma is that new framework conditions

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<sup>25</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> RUNKEL, Ch.: *Employer Branding für die Logistik. Mit Social Media eine attraktive Arbeitgebermarke entwickeln*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2018, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> SCHOLTZ, H.: *Mediensoziologie. Eine systematische Einführung*. Wiesbaden : Springer, 2020, p. 302.

<sup>29</sup> SCHUHMACHER, F., GESCHWILL, R.: *Employer Branding. Human Resources Management für die Unternehmensführung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2014, p. 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> MÜLLER, A.: Corporate Communication – Consistency, Coherence, and Clarity of Corporate Messages. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 392.

<sup>31</sup> SCHUHMACHER, F., GESCHWILL, R.: *Employer Branding. Human Resources Management für die Unternehmensführung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2014, p. 18-19.

<sup>32</sup> MONTUA, A.: *Führungsaufgabe Interne Kommunikation. Erfolgreich in Unternehmen kommunizieren – im Alltag und in Veränderungsprozessen*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 16-17.

also require new attitudes – this visionary guidance into uncharted territory is the task of managers and requires the competence of crisis communication.<sup>33</sup> When considering internal communication and its effect on employee loyalty, the media context must also be taken into account. While in the past, a handful of media stakeholders decided among themselves (along with a few other elites) what content should be and thus ignored the opinions of its recipients, this has changed fundamentally thanks to social media. Lay people produce and pass on content; sometimes with enormous media aggregation potential.<sup>34</sup> Influencers, digital word-of-mouth, social media and internal communication in the context of employer branding are inseparably linked, and life can no longer be imagined without them. Especially negative word-of-mouth propaganda can have a strong opinion-forming influence, and not just in product marketing.<sup>35</sup> Informal communication processes elude central control. The needs and interests of employees lead to the creation of informal communication networks with separate subcultures, such as those found among colleagues in WhatsApp groups. The overriding goal of all corporate communication, namely to achieve the most undistorted possible exchange of information, is rendered more difficult by the impossibility of controlling interventions in such communication processes.<sup>36</sup> Staff reductions and site closures in crisis situations affect employees and managers in very different ways: while employees have to grapple with the fear of losing their jobs, or perhaps even discover that long-standing colleagues have been affected by staff reductions, managers are faced with the challenge of satisfying the interests of shareholders<sup>37</sup> and, if necessary, implementing draconian measures.

#### 4 Challenges for Managers

The strands of employer appeal, employee retention and leadership in times of crisis can be linked together and challenges can be derived from them:

##### 1. *Emotionality yes, but culturally sensitive*

Emotions are powerful – mostly unconscious – yet consciously experienced drivers of preference formation and triggers of targeted thought and action.<sup>38</sup> The use of emotions depends on the culture and situation in question. In cultures with a great Power Distance (e.g. Slovakia), the manager has a dominant position – and also standardises the emotions of those being led, from whom he demands obedience, even in times of crisis. In cultures with pronounced Uncertainty Avoidance (e.g. Germany), employees and managers must break out of their rule-led routines in times of crisis and find new ways of solving problems together. Meaning that if effective commitment is to be promoted within the framework of internal employer branding, the values of the respective national culture must be taken into account.<sup>39</sup> Employee management is very different between Slovakia and Germany: Non-culturally sensitive communication can cause culturally sensitive interference when cultural structures are

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<sup>33</sup> ANTUŠÁK, E.: *Krizový management. Hrozby-krize-příležitosti*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2009, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> SCHOLTZ, H.: *Mediensoziologie. Eine systematische Einführung*. Wiesbaden : Springer, 2020, p. 267.

<sup>35</sup> DEGES, F.: *Quick Guide Influencer Marketing. Wie Sie durch Multiplikatoren mehr Reichweite und Umsatz erzielen*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2018, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> STEIN, V.: Die Bedeutung der Unternehmenskultur für die Unternehmens- und Marketingkommunikation. In BRUHN, B., ESCH, F. R., LANGNER, T. (eds.): *Handbuch Strategische Kommunikation. Grundlagen – Innovative Ansätze – Praktische Umsetzungen*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2016, p. 529.

<sup>37</sup> DOYLE, P.: *Value-Based Marketing. Marketing Strategies for Corporate Growth and Shareholder Value*. Chichester : Wiley, 2000, p. 295.

<sup>38</sup> BÖTTGER, E.: *Employer Branding. Verhaltenstheoretische Analysen als Grundlage für die identitätsorientierte Führung von Arbeitgebermarken*. Wiesbaden : Gabler, 2012, p. 124-126.

<sup>39</sup> *Compare Countries*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>>.

transferred from one's own culture to equivalent structures of the foreign culture – a communication challenge in every internationally active company. This applies, above all, to verbal and non-verbal communication, which can have a different effect in the foreign culture (potentially as not trustworthy), which can then lead to misunderstanding.<sup>40</sup> These misunderstandings disturb communication in social interaction during the transition from the sender's cultural circle to the recipient's foreign cultural circle. Such cultural interferences, i.e. cultural overlaps, are far removed from the paradigms of internal consistency and unity.<sup>41</sup> In crisis situations characterised by a high degree of emotionality and anxiety, nerves can become exposed – this prepares the ground for misleading statements or rash decisions, which can destroy trust in the long-term. A frequent reaction to this is de-motivation, accompanied by a decline in work performance.<sup>42</sup> The cultural dimensions according to Hofstede<sup>43</sup> also influence the perception and independence of communication and the media used: particularly in cultures with a high Power Distance, it can be observed that ethics are afforded less attention in PR.<sup>44</sup> Cultures with a high Power Distance are characterised by hierarchical decision-making processes in which communication and participation are limited and only take place in one direction (from top to bottom).<sup>45</sup> There is a difference between Slovakia and Germany (Power Distance in organisations), which regulates the relationship between employees and managers.<sup>46</sup> Culture proves not only to be non-homogeneous here but also contains cultural interferences: cultural interference occurs when identical situations, symbols and events are interpreted differently by stakeholders with different cultural backgrounds.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. The primacy of internal communication

External reporting has a considerable influence on the attitudes of employees. The question of what impression the employer's situation makes on the public plays a major emotional role in the situational assessment. Consistent communication with all (including internal) target groups is, therefore, important. Employees should always be informed directly by their

<sup>40</sup> DROESSLER, J.: Kultúrne rozdiely netreba podceňovať. In *Newsletter Slovensko-nemeckej obchodnej a priemyselnej komory: Interkultúrna Komunikácia Slovensko-Nemecko*, 2018, Vol. 2018, No. 3, p. 7. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[<sup>41</sup> AMELINA, A.: Jenseits des Homogenitätsmodells der Kultur. Zur Analyse von Transnationalität und kulturellen Interferenzen auf der Grundlage der hermeneutischen Wissenssoziologie. In ROSLON, M., BETTMANN, R. \(eds.\): \*Interkulturelle qualitative Sozialforschung\*. Wiesbaden : Springer VS, 2019, p. 31.](https://mediafra.admiralcloud.com/customer_609/f0872008-f435-4c68-a4a2-deee703ccab7?Expires=1602419399&Key-Pair-Id=APKAI2N3YMVS7R4AXMPQ&Signature=Uf6vD5nHxypDuvYxT7Ofs8fCsknA8h725QFsqnNnl5YEKoiDXfj65XWtnqlMJODtCMbKFoN46EC8pUOunKLB1xPpuxV5li5KSL9OyF2kMBB0teqeJ1m3O2~Ir5ezixCijTgidaQTJQ6izi6EuoqR5x0SfrnsoG2mC~FgA7S25kMnTXIEH~FUVUIaKixBYt6o97C4hRFjKelhfxcbl-kZ0xxWL6otstOLDMGdd7NyQDnbdoloIyLHpukjebK048o38lxsPZQQN4itj5Y51bTCeZ1uX4z7oWB-btpJo2qBMQqacd3i8lOt9gGv-M2KLZ4RDin-2Ga9dp6rI8b3bO3w__>.</a></p>
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<sup>42</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> For more information, see: HOFSTEDE, G., HOFSTEDE, G. J., MINKOV, M.: *Lokales Denken, globales Handeln. Interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit und globales Management*. 6<sup>nd</sup> Edition. München : dtv, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> HEJLOVÁ, D.: *Public relations*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2015, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> See also: MÜLLER, A., MÜLLER, A.: Das Unternehmen ohne Hierarchie – Messung und Umsetzung. In HERMEIER, B., HEUPEL, T., FICHTNER-ROSADA, S. (eds.): *Arbeitswelten der Zukunft. Wie die Digitalisierung unsere Arbeitsplätze und Arbeitsweisen verändert*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2019, p. 459-476.

<sup>46</sup> MÜLLER, A.: Corporate Communication – Consistency, Coherence, and Clarity of Corporate Messages. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 390.

<sup>47</sup> For more information, see: AMELINA, A.: Jenseits des Homogenitätsmodells der Kultur. Zur Analyse von Transnationalität und kulturellen Interferenzen auf der Grundlage der hermeneutischen Wissenssoziologie. In ROSLON, M., BETTMANN, R. (eds.): *Interkulturelle qualitative Sozialforschung*. Wiesbaden : Springer VS, 2019, p. 27-51.

employer about the employer's current situation and should not learn about possible problems from the press.<sup>48</sup> Internal communication describes a continuous dialogue between management itself, specific managers and employees. The goals are understanding and cooperation. Appropriate communication cascades – coordinated in terms of time and content – must be observed: a comprehensive notification that is delivered in advance of external communication. Discrepancies between internal and external communication lead to confusion and dissatisfaction among employees and should, therefore, be avoided.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Present and future

Dialogue with employees must always be tailored to individual needs, i.e. employees who are informed of a dismissal for operational reasons have different information needs than the rest of the workforce. But it is precisely those employees, who are not currently in danger of being dismissed, who lose colleagues they have grown fond of over many years and who are induced to convert their affective commitment into calculated, continuation-related commitment. Under these circumstances, the importance of material incentives for re-motivation increases.<sup>50</sup> Trust, especially in phases of crisis-related uncertainty, is of great importance, achieved by reducing complexity, stabilising commitment and enabling future motivation.<sup>51</sup> Between the present and the future, there are often instances of dissonance, i.e. feelings of disruption based on individual perception. Dissonance among employees in crisis situations can, in the most radical case, lead to dismissal and thus a loss of expertise at the employer. The reduction of dissonance is possible by adjusting expectations for the future – this requires open, transparent and solution-oriented internal communication.<sup>52</sup> In the communicative clash between the present and future, two needs become particularly apparent. One is the *need for orientation and security*: Surprises are not desired in working life as they disturb process and routine. However, a crisis situation actually consists of a surprise – at the very least, predictability and comprehensibility become unlikely. Early internal communication can provide orientation and security here. The concern that early communication would unsettle the workforce is unfounded. The other is the *need for consistency*: Human relations (including those between managers and employees) are based on trust. Managers can establish trust through the conclusiveness and traceability of their communication.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

Internal employer branding and the actions of managers are inseparably linked in crisis situations. The (emotional) commitment of employees, even in phases of temporary uncertainty and de-motivation, is one of the core tasks of crisis management at every level of the company. In order to prevent the loss of motivation or even staff turnover, managers at all levels are called

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<sup>48</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> MATTMÜLLER, R., BUSCHMANN, A.: Marketing: Das Management aller Zielgruppen. In HESSE, G., MATTMÜLLER, R. (eds.): *Perspektivwechsel im Employer Branding. Neue Ansätze für die Generationen Y und Z*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2019, p. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> GARTNER, U.: *Unternehmenskommunikation in Restrukturierungsphasen. Mit strategischer Kommunikation den Wandel erfolgreich gestalten*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> MONTUA, A.: *Führungsaufgabe Interne Kommunikation. Erfolgreich in Unternehmen kommunizieren – im Alltag und in Veränderungsprozessen*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> BÖTTGER, E.: *Employer Branding. Verhaltenstheoretische Analysen als Grundlage für die identitätsorientierte Führung von Arbeitgebermarken*. Wiesbaden : Gabler, 2012, p. 165-166.

<sup>53</sup> MONTUA, A.: *Führungsaufgabe Interne Kommunikation. Erfolgreich in Unternehmen kommunizieren – im Alltag und in Veränderungsprozessen*. Wiesbaden : Springer Gabler, 2020, p. 48-51.



upon to communicate emotionally, culturally sensitively, informatively, trustfully and consistently, in order to transform the uncertainty that accompanies crisis situations into security, commitment and re-motivation. Managers are elite employees in a company and, therefore, one of the most important critical success factors of every company within the discipline of internal and external marketing communication.

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## SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS FOR IDIOCRACY BECOMING A NEW MEDIA STANDARD

*Branislav Oprala*

### Abstract

The term post-truth era has been known in global media environment for some time. As society, we are gradually getting used to the fact that a large part of media recipients have become completely resistant to accepting media contents created by the so-called mainstream media. The lack of confidence in professional journalism based on factual information does not have to be the biggest problem. However, the problem might be the form and sources of information that this distrustful part of society absorbs instead of verified information and the consequences that such behaviour of a non-negligible proportion of population might have on the whole society. On the following pages, we will try explain clearly, what are the, mainly psychological, reasons for the rise of the era of idiocracy, where qualification and professionalism no longer matter.

### Key words:

Conspiracy Theories. Fake News. Hoaxes. Idiocracy. Information Verification. Media Competence. Media Literacy. Propaganda. Social Networks.

### Introduction

Current coronavirus pandemic has caught the world absolutely off guard. In the course of a few weeks, our common, routine activities have become a thing of past. We had to get used to restrictions that neither our generation nor the previous generations had experienced. Life in isolation has become a new standard; frontiers have yet again become a physical barrier, not only a vague term reminding us of the past. With the real – physical pandemic, a pandemic taking place on the internet and mainly in people’s minds have surprisingly quickly entered our lives - pandemic of conspiracies, hoaxes, and disinformation. Pandemic of idiocracy. What media circles consisting of journalists and media theoreticians predicted in the last few years, has come true. For a long time, we have been saying that life full of misinformation and conspiracies is not just a free choice of an individual. It is a threat to society; it undermines its basic functions and can easily lead to direct danger to the lives of individuals. Unfortunately, the behaviour of a large part of global society confirms this to us due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Recent study conducted by *The Oxford Internet Institute* shows that YouTube videos containing misinformation about coronavirus were shared more than the videos of five largest television channels combined (CNN, ABC News, BBC, Fox News, and Al Jazeera).<sup>1</sup> Another recently published study from the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* provides a relatively clear view of the consequences of consuming misleading media contents and conspiracies. It states that in the first few months of 2020, at least 800 people died as a result of disinformation connected to the covid-19.<sup>2</sup>

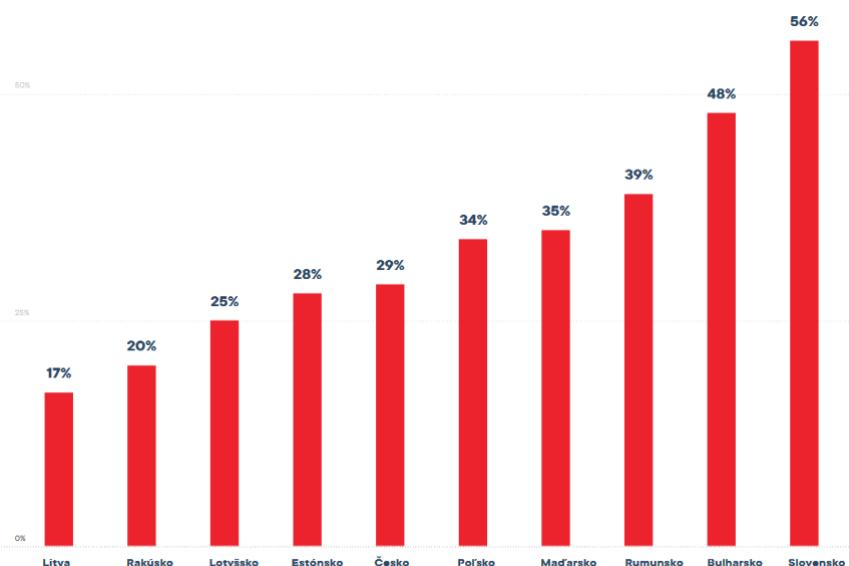
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<sup>2</sup> ISLAM, S., SARKAR, T., KHAN, H., S. et al.: *Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis*. In *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 2020, Vol. 103, No. 4, p. 1622-1628. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<http://www.ajtmh.org/content/journals/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0812>>.

## 1 Slovak Online Space Dominated by Conspiracies and Conspirators

The abovementioned headline might, at first sight, seem too shocking and tabloid-like. However, it seems that way only at first sight. In global researches addressing the influence of conspiracies on public opinion, Slovakia does not show any better results than the rest of the world and the situation is apparently relatively serious also in our country.<sup>3</sup> Slovak non-governmental organization Globsec that deals with analyses and research of international politics and security, published results of an interesting survey at the beginning of September. For the publication entitled *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe*, during March 2020, they asked a representative sample, set as a range of 1000 - 1047 respondents, about the rate of their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and the state.<sup>4</sup> Besides Slovakia, the survey took place in 10 more countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. However, the results for Slovakia can be regarded as startling in many respects. Why? As many as half of the respondents believe that global affairs are not decided by the elected leaders, but by secret governments and societies that are seeking to establish totalitarian world order. Together with Bulgaria, citizens of the Slovak Republic are the most prone to believe hoaxes and conspiracy theories in the Central and Eastern European region.<sup>5</sup> We have chosen several figures and statistics from the Globsec analysis, which we think are important to present in this text in relation to the selected topic of the paper.



**Figure 1: Conspiracy theories and misinformation**

Source: HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava : Globsec, 2020, p. 46. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-print-version.pdf>>.

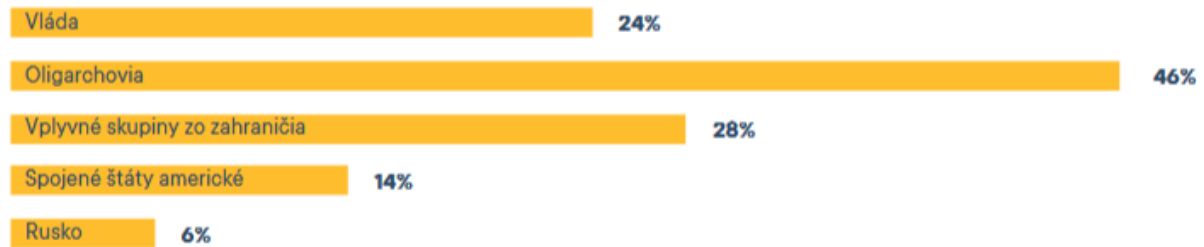
Figure 1 shows us the percentage of respondents with a tendency to believe a statement involving untruths and conspiracies. The figure provides percentage comparison to other countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. Slovakia with 56 percent is at the top of the scale.

<sup>3</sup> ŠTRBA, P.: *Skrývali sa na internete, ale teraz vyšli do ulíc. Pandémia konšpirácií zasiahla aj Európu*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/835641/koronavirus-protesty-fake-news-konspiracie-europa/>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Globsec: Polovica Slovákov verí, že Západ ohrozuje ich hodnoty*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2034650/>>.

<sup>5</sup> HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Vnímanie demokracie a konšpirácií na Slovensku*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/publications/vnimanie-demokracie-a-konspiracii-na-slovensku/>>.

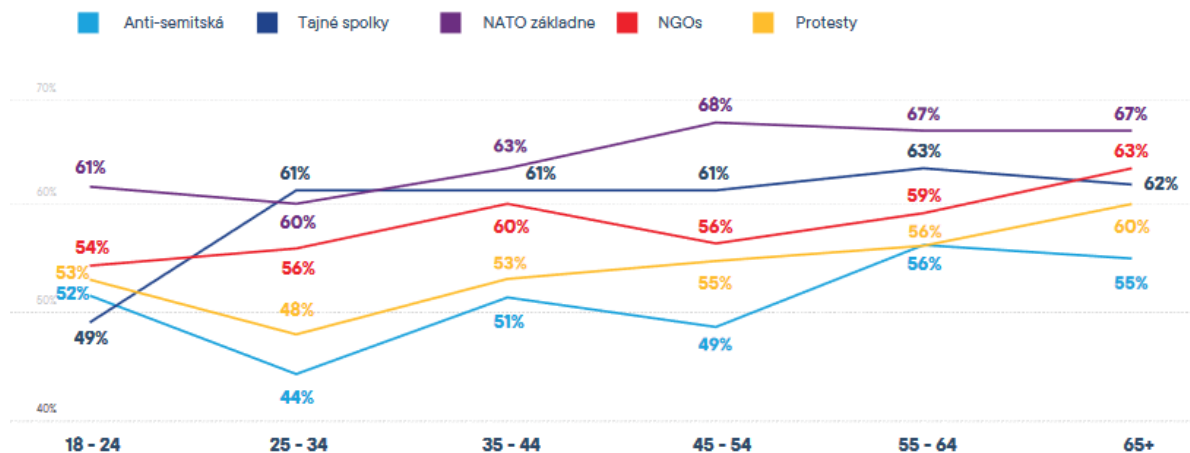
According to the survey, people most susceptible to conspiracy theories are those who feel threatened by Western societies and, at the same time, would prefer more autocratic leaders, those that are dissatisfied with the system and with their lives, and those with an opinion preference that the media are not free.



**Figure 2: Who do you believe influences the media in Slovakia?**

Source: HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava : Globsec, 2020, p. 40. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-print-version.pdf>>.

The second figure presents the opinion of the respondents that stated that media are rather or completely unfree on who has the strongest influence on the Slovak media. Confidence in the freedom of media has a significant impact on the respondent's belief in conspiracy media. The results clearly show that Slovak media lose their credibility mainly because of their ownership and financial ties to oligarchs.



**Figure 3: Belief in conspiracies indicated by age**

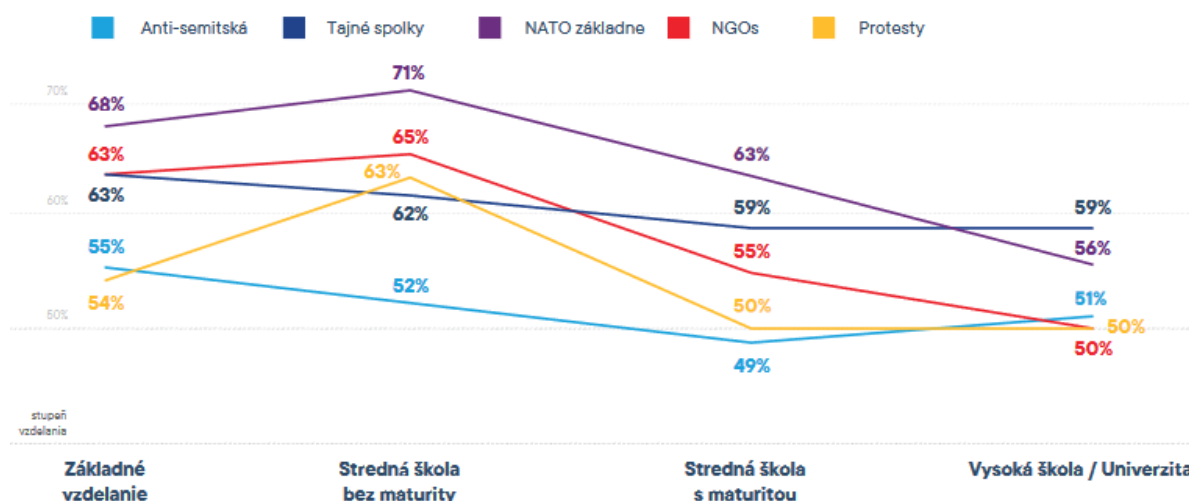
Source: HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava : Globsec, 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-print-version.pdf>>.

The third figure depicts the tendency to believe in conspiracy theories on the basis of the respondents' age. The Globsec study selected a number of conspiracies that have been successfully spreading among Slovak population for a long time, mainly thanks to their popularity on social networks. The percentage corresponds to the average number of responses agreeing with the five most popular conspiracy theories:

- *“Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world;*
- *World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order;*

- *NATO bases in Slovakia would mean US occupation;*
- *Non-governmental organizations are the secret voice of foreign powers and interests;*
- *Anti-government protests in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other institutions, were controlled and paid from abroad.”<sup>6</sup>*

The survey has shown a relatively strong correlation between the age of the respondents and their susceptibility to conspiracies. Although, as stated by Globsec, the rate of belief in conspiracy theories in Slovakia is high in all age groups, it is significantly higher in the 65+ category. 61% of the respondents from this age group agreed with the conspiracies or misleading statements that were offered by the interviewers.



**Figure 4: Education**

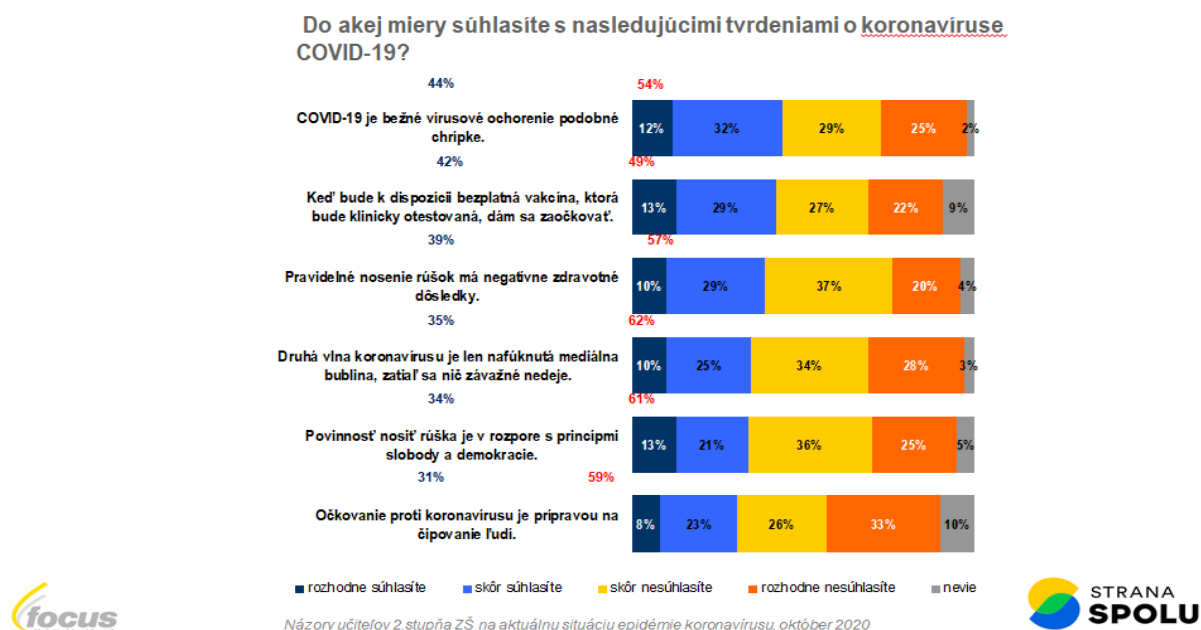
Source: HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Voices of Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava : Globsec, 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-print-version.pdf>>.

The fourth and last important chart from the topical study by Globsec is the correlation between the level of attained education and the susceptibility to conspiracies. For experts in the area of media, it cannot be surprising that the rate of belief in conspiracy theories is higher for people with only basic education compared to those who have attained higher education. However, the surprising fact of this local – Slovak survey could be that the differences are not as significant and deep as we might have expected. “On average, 61% of the interviewed Slovaks with basic education agreed that the conspiracies are true, while “only” 53% of those with university education.” It thus seems that higher education does not automatically mean a higher level of critical evaluation of media information. A dangerous trend, which the research of Globsec organization points out, is the significantly higher rate of belief in conspiracy theories in the category of people with basic education. Compared to 2018, it has grown by 13 percentage points. Moreover, the study confirms the assumption that the tendency to believe in one conspiracy is connected to an inclination to also believe in other conspiracies, as the majority of the respondents believed several of the stated conspiracy theories.<sup>7</sup> The analysis presented above is not the only Slovak survey that indicates a negative trend in the discussed topic. Extensive quantitative research aimed at Slovak teachers of the second stage of elementary

<sup>6</sup> HAJDU, D., KLINGOVÁ, K.: *Vnímanie demokracie a konšpirácií na Slovensku*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-11-02]. Available at: <<https://www.globsec.org/publications/vnimanie-demokracie-a-konspiracii-na-slovensku/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

schools was commissioned by the European People's Party together with the non-parliamentary party SPOLU. It was conducted by the Focus Agency on a nationwide representative sample of 518 teachers and took place at the turn of September/October. The results of the survey were publicized in the second half of October and are shocking.



**Figure 5: Agreement with statements about coronavirus**

Source: *Exkluzívny prieskum medzi učiteľmi: Nedôverujú vláde a mnohí si myslia, že sa chystá čipovať ľudí*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://stranaspolu.sk/exkluzivny-prieskum-medzi-ucitelmi-nedoveruju-vlade-a-mnohi-si-myslia-ze-sa-chysta-cipovat-ludi/>>.

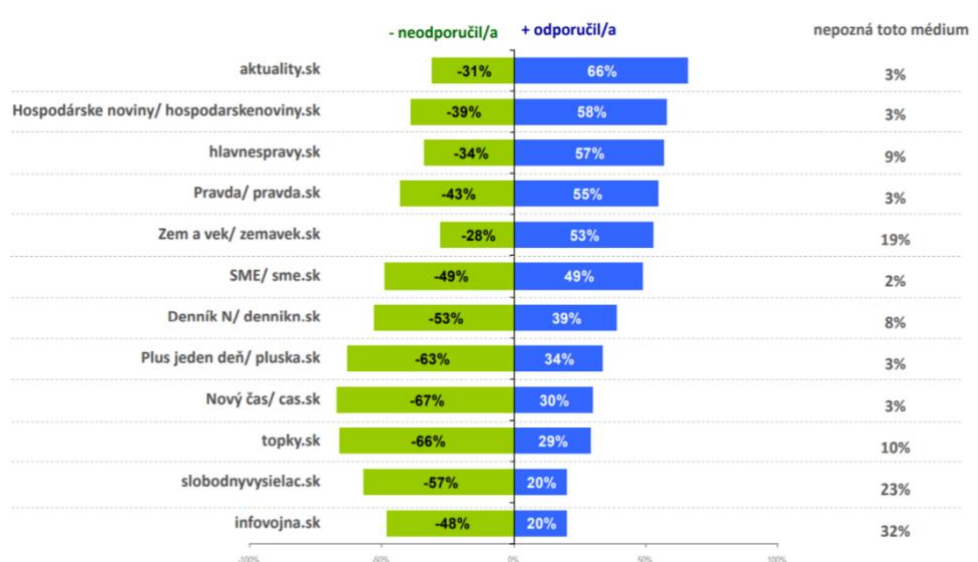
As many as 44 percent of the interviewed teachers consider coronavirus a common viral disease similar to flu, 49 percent are not planning to get vaccinated against it, even if the vaccine was free and clinically tested, 57 percent think that wearing facemasks regularly has negative impacts on their health, and staggering 59 percent, i.e. almost two thirds of Slovak teachers think that vaccination against coronavirus is a setup for injecting people with chips.<sup>8</sup> The most recent survey by the Focus agency thus clearly shows, what the aforementioned Globsec survey already outlined – higher education does not necessarily mean a more critical approach to media information and social networks content. Slovak teachers, however, have been confirming this presumption for some time now. Similar survey, also conducted by Focus Agency in June 2019, showed that many teachers do not hesitate to recommend to their students media that are known to spread conspiracy theories.<sup>9</sup> From the view of a teacher, media worth their students' trust include *Zem&Vek*, described as a conspiracy medium by the project *konšpiratori.sk*<sup>10</sup>, and also the website *Hlavné správy*, also regarded as a conspiracy medium in professional media circles.

<sup>8</sup> *Exkluzívny prieskum medzi učiteľmi: Nedôverujú vláde a mnohí si myslia, že sa chystá čipovať ľudí*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://stranaspolu.sk/exkluzivny-prieskum-medzi-ucitelmi-nedoveruju-vlade-a-mnohi-si-myslia-ze-sa-chysta-cipovat-ludi/>>.

<sup>9</sup> STRUHÁRIK, F.: *Učítelia považujú Hlavné správy a Zem a vek za dôveryhodné médiá, odporučili by ich žiakom*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1571894/ucitelia-povazuju-hlavne-spravy-a-zem-a-vek-za-doveryhodne-media-odporucili-by-ich-ziakom/>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Zoznam stránok so sporným obsahom*. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://www.konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok.php>>.





**Figure 6: Media trustworthiness for students from the view of a teacher**

Source: STRUHÁRIK, F.: *Učítelia považujú Hlavné správy a Zem a vek za dôveryhodné médiá, odporúčili by ich žiakom*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1571894/ucitelia-povazuju-hlavne-spravy-a-zem-a-vek-za-doveryhodne-media-odporucili-by-ich-ziakom/>>.

Similar results were recorded by the aforementioned survey conducted by the Focus Agency from the turn of September/October. It showed that conspiracy websites Hlavné správy and Zem&Vek are still regarded as trustworthy sources of information by the Slovak teachers.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 Why Do We Voluntarily Become Idiots and Thus Contribute to Formation of Idiocratic Society?

All the above stated surveys and analyses are topical and provide an overview of the way the global and Slovak society is influenced by the pandemic of conspiracies, hoaxes, and fake news. It is not the objective of this paper to find the way to deal with this pandemic occurring in our minds. The following few pages will, however, be sufficient for us to provide easily comprehensible answers to the following basic questions:

- *Why does a large part of the public behave anti-scientifically and in opposition to “mainstream”?*
- *Why does it in almost all circumstances blindly adopt and further share any opposing, often scientifically unfounded, “proof” and opinions?*

Naturally, answers to the questions above do exist. We want to look at them from two points of view – the psychological and the sociological. Author and publicist Petr Nutil addresses various relevant reasons, why people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century give in to disinformation, hoaxes, and propaganda so frequently and easily. In the following lines, we will refer to some psychological and sociological aspects that he concisely described in his book *Média, lži a príliš rýchly mozek* (*Media, Lies, and the Super-Fast Brain*). We will, however, also refer to other sources.

<sup>11</sup> *Exkluzívny prieskum medzi učiteľmi: Nedôverujú vláde a mnohí si myslia, že sa chystá čipovať ľudí*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-03]. Available at: <<https://stranaspolu.sk/exkluzivny-prieskum-medzi-ucitelmi-nedoveruju-vlade-a-mnohi-si-myslia-ze-sa-chysta-cipovat-ludi/>>.

## 2.1 Thinking Really Hurts

The fundamental reason is the way our brain works, as it “favours” conspiracies in a certain way. Human thinking is divided into two parts – the evolutionary significantly older part – intuitive, and the younger – rational. Intuitive thinking represents emotions, innate reactions, and basic instincts, i.e. preinstalled software of a sort that can be also observed in animals. When we see a snake, we instinctively jump aside and our body gets into defensive mode. We do it automatically and subconsciously. Rational thinking is much more complex and sophisticated. Thanks to it, we ask ourselves questions, think logically, and are capable to plan ahead. Nutil calls it reason – the thing that separates us from animals.<sup>12</sup> However, what will we do, if someone jumps out at us from behind a corner? Intuitive thinking automatically takes complete control over our body, regardless of the rational thinking, as there is no time for that – we must act immediately, quickly, and efficiently; otherwise, it might not end up well when we are in danger. However, our body activates such automatic reactions based on innate stereotypes much more often than we are willing to admit. It happens in situations when we are tired, under time pressure, when our mind is too busy, or when we are emotionally distraught. It is nothing else but our brain trying to preserve energy and work efficiently. According to Nutil, we also know this way of thinking from other types of human behaviour as the principle of least effort. It explains that, in most cases, people tend to perform tasks in a way that requires the least possible effort. Human brain works similarly – it is mostly focused on efficiency. To be able to cope with reality, we simplify it, because rational and critical thinking is exhausting, it requires our willpower, and that is why it is so uncommon. Conspiracies and hoaxes are usually based on simplification, pigeonholing, generalization or escalation of emotions, i.e. the patterns that our brain, figuratively speaking, enjoys. This is one of the simple reasons why we tend to believe in conspiracy theories.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 We Try to Eliminate Uncertainty

World is a very complex place. However, most of us, at least in our close environs, try to pretend that we understand it. We cannot be taken by surprise by American presidential candidates, because we know exactly which one of them would be better for the country. We have answers to global warming and a clear and strong opinion on geopolitical situation between the USA and Russia. It is similar with conspiracies – many of us blindly believe in them and nothing can convince us that coronavirus is not a made-up disease. Why is it so? Not having a clear and definite opinion causes us discomfort, as it would mean admitting to ourselves that something is beyond our comprehension; that we are at sea with many things and are unable to understand them without sufficient and high-quality education. However, hoaxes and conspiracies often provide seemingly correct answers to many topical questions. As stated by social psychologist Ivan Brezina in his Denník N blog, they are an efficient instrument of eliminating uncertainty. *“Not only do they create shortcuts in the complex and incomprehensible world of information, at the same time, they provide an illusion of control over events that are beyond our control.”*<sup>14</sup> In other words, any explanation of complex and difficult phenomena is better than none. To have answers, regardless of their truthfulness, gives us at least a small, illusory control over events.

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<sup>12</sup> NUTIL, P.: *Média lži a príliš rýchly mozek – průvodce postpravdivým světem*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2018, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> HUBČÍKOVÁ, E.: *Ani vedci nie sú imúnni voči konšpiračným teóriám*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/blog/1771282/ani-vedci-nie-su-imunni-voci-konspiracnym-teoriam/>>.

### 2.3 We Love Secrets and Playing Heroes

Theories or explanations that are too boring and uninteresting are also a problem. As stated by Ivan Brezina, people are naturally curious creatures and enjoy learning about the outside world. *“If this process involves elements of forbidden fruit, mystery, revealing secret information and the “truth” carefully hidden from the public, there is plenty of attention. Both the creator and the consumer of these theories become rebels that have separated themselves from the blind herd and have found the courage and sense not to allow being deceived.”*<sup>15</sup> Conspiracy theories thus take us back to our childhood in a way. They give us an opportunity to uncover secrets, fight the evil and injustice and thus deserve due respect, acknowledgment, and attention of those around us. If we are not able to achieve these in our social sphere in some other way, sharing conspiracies might be an adequate alternative.

### 2.4 We See Intention Even Where There Isn't Any

Psychologist and co-author of the book *Prečo ľudia veria nezmyslom (Why People Believe Nonsense)* Vladimíra Čavojská states that we tend to see deliberate intentions in completely random situations. If something is on fire, the explanation that the fire caught coincidentally is not as interesting as the one stating that somebody had set it intentionally.<sup>16</sup> Ivan Brezina holds a similar theory. According to him, it has been proven by social psychology that people usually believe that ambiguous situations are a result of other people's intention rather than a coincidence or other factors. The trait of distrustfulness has kept us alert for millennia and has helped us to survive. Nowadays, it appears to be a predisposition to conspiracy theories.

### 2.5 Our World-View Influences Us More than We Think

Above, we have written that our brains make us look for answers to difficult questions practically all the time. “To not know” and to not have answers is unpleasant from the psychological point of view and even dangerous from the sociological point of view. We are afraid that people around us might find us incompetent or even stupid. To say that we do not have a definite and clear opinion is to admit that we do not have enough information, are unsure and undecided. Therefore, it is not only our brains, but often also people around us that pressure us to accept various theories uncritically. Our world-view also has a strong influence on our susceptibility to conspiracy theories. We are pre-programmed to look for theories that confirm our view of the world. Psychologist Mike Ward from the University of Winchester states an example: *“If you support Trump and come across a conspiracy theory saying that all his opponents are bad and join up to sacrifice children in satanic rituals, you are more willing to believe this theory because it fits your narrative.”*<sup>17</sup> Similar attitude is confirmed by Nutil, who states that it is not our intention to look for facts. We are drawn by any information that confirms our subjective beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> HUBČÍKOVÁ, E.: *Ani vedci nie sú imúnni voči konšpiračným teóriám*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/blog/1771282/ani-vedci-nie-su-imunni-voci-konspiracnym-teoriam/>>.

<sup>16</sup> BALÁZS, M.: *Psychologička: Prečo ľudia veria nezmyslom a konšpiráciám? Fakty sú pre mozog nudné, úmysly hľadáme aj v náhodách*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://www.dobrenoviny.sk/c/178435/psychologicka-preco-verime-nezmyslom-nas-mozog-je-efektivny-ale-aj-lenivy>>.

<sup>17</sup> *Prečo ľudia veria konšpiračným teóriám*. [online]. [2020-11-04]. Available at: <<https://kritickemyslenie.sk/preco-ludia-veria-konspiracnym-teoriam/>>.

<sup>18</sup> NUTIL, P.: *Média lži a príliš rýchly mozek – průvodce postpravdivým světem*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2018, p. 143.

## 2.6 We Deceive Ourselves by Believing in Our Uniqueness

We have a natural tendency to consider ourselves unique and original. In reality, the opposite is true in most cases and we only delude ourselves. Human kind is extremely obedient, conformable, and adaptable. Unsurprisingly, evolution is the reason. We learn from one another and we adopt patterns of behaviour of others. Adaptability is one of the key traits of our kind and we do not even realize many of the conforming elements in our behaviour. After all, most of us comply with the society's written and unwritten rules automatically. But why do we do it? Because people around us do it too. Compliant people, as stated by Nutil, easily learn and accept what the society wants them to learn, including their beliefs. They are, however, incapable to retrospectively analyse the benefits of such information. Such innate behaviour is manifested, among other things, when we face pressure from people around us. We regard as trustworthy things that other people also support. We swim with the current and believe in what is popular.<sup>19</sup> If conspiracy theories are popular around us, it is very likely that we will uncritically accept them too due to our innate conformity.

## Conclusion

The abovementioned behaviour is especially dangerous on the internet and in the environment of social networks. It is enhanced by the so-called filter bubbles, arising as a result of personalized searches and advertising, that effectively isolate users in their ideological groups. Therefore, social networks users only get to one-sided selective information based on their own preferences. The users only see what they want to see – the groups on social networks, liked media, products, websites. Opinions they disagree with are filtered out; media that they consider untrustworthy are not displayed to them. The combination of filter bubbles, conforming behaviour within them, and all the other aforementioned psychological reasons is currently, in our opinion, the greatest cause of the spread of hoaxes and disinformation that more and more frequently leak from the closed bubbles and reach also the critically thinking people. Nowadays, almost everybody uses internet. However, a much smaller percentage of population also possesses media literacy and critical thinking - the essential equipment for evaluation of media information. Lies spread much faster than the truth. It is easier to have an opinion than facts. For a large part of population, conspiracy theories are much more comprehensible than complex scientific studies. In difficult times, people are controlled by emotions, and emotions, as we have explained above, lead to a search for the simplest explanations. Online anonymity does not encourage cultivated discussion; on the contrary, together with the affirmation of attitudes in the opinion bubbles, it incites radicalization. Radicalization then fundamentally degrades public discussion and causes the so much wheeled out polarization of the society. If we thought that global society was troubled by the onset of post-factual era, the coronavirus pandemic demonstrates that we might be coming to a new phase. Post-factual era is being substituted by Idiocracy that is becoming a new media standard.

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<sup>19</sup> NUTIL, P.: *Média lži a príliš rýchly mozek – průvodce postpravdivým světem*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2018, p. 43-46.

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# APPROACH OF SLOVAK PUBLISHERS TO E-BOOKS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Jana Paveleková

## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected lives all around the world. Many companies had to change their marketing strategies, including the companies on the Slovak book market. E-books are a vision to the future. Sales and reading of e-books may have more significance, especially during and after this pandemic. The number of sold e-book readers shows an increase of sales during the first wave, that hit in the spring of 2020. Customers have shown their interested in this type of book format. Many Slovak publishers regularly include e-books in their publication plans. Although e-books undoubtedly have many advantages and do not endanger classic books, it can be seen at first glance, that the number of titles in electronic format is lower. Current marketing activities focus more on the promotion of classic books. The aim of the paper is to map the approach of selected Slovak publishers to e-books and to find out if their e-books are promoted in the digital space. The research results represent the current state of publishing e-books in the Slovak language, which can help publishers in planning future marketing campaigns.

## Key words:

Book Market. Covid-19. E-Book. Publishers. Slovak E-Book Market.

## 1 Current State of the Problem in Slovakia and Abroad

Since the beginning of letterpress printing, books have registered great positive differences in their content or form. Kovač, Van der Weel, Wischenbart and Phillips defined 4 fundamental elements, which a classic book in paper form must have, so we can call it a product: „*a minimum length, emphasis on textual content, boundaries to its form, book information architecture.*“<sup>1</sup> We would like to add other mandatory essentials to that statement, which come from law legislature of respective state where the book is published and also, that each printing should contain their respective International Standard Book Number – ISBN<sup>2</sup> (ISBN differs when it comes to books, e-books, audiobook etc.), EAN code a recommended price under which the book is registered. The most similar other form of standard printed book reading are e-books. They also contain attributes that paper books miss: they are more social, allow faster sharing, discussion and commenting, they can measure and compare dynamics of reading.<sup>3</sup> E-books are distributed in a format, which is able to be opened in electronic devices (PC, laptop, smartphone, pad, e-book reader). The advantage of e-books is that except for text, they can contain other accessories, such as audio content, video content or hypertext links.<sup>4</sup> E-books can have different formats. The most used are EPUB, AZW, PDF<sup>5</sup> a MOBI. E-books offer their readers many advantages. They are more environmentally friendly because they do not require paper and other materials used in printing. After the purchase they

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<sup>1</sup> KOVAČ, M., PHILLIPS, A., VAN DER WEEL, A., WISCHENBART, R.: What is a Book?. In *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 289-324. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334580793\\_What\\_is\\_a\\_Book](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334580793_What_is_a_Book)>.

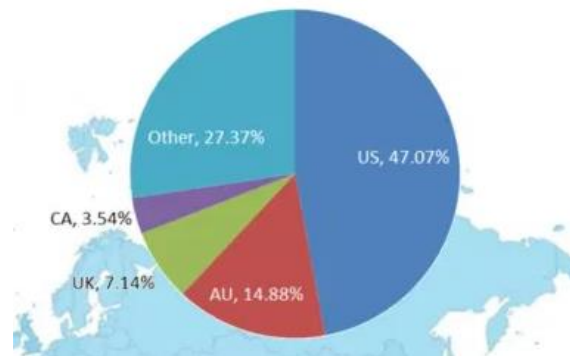
<sup>2</sup> ZBÍNOVÁ, M.: *ISBN – ostaňte jedineční v mori knih*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2017. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.publico.sk/navody/isbn/>>.

<sup>3</sup> KOVAČ, M., PHILLIPS, A., VAN DER WEEL, A., WISCHENBART, R.: What is a Book?. In *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 289-324. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334580793\\_What\\_is\\_a\\_Book](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334580793_What_is_a_Book)>.

<sup>4</sup> YATES, E.: *Ebooks: a beginner's guide*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2001. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/19/ebooks#wha>>.

<sup>5</sup> WAHL, J.: *What is an eBook? Understanding Why They Work and How to Make Your Own*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://learn.g2.com/what-is-an-ebook#ebook-formats>>.

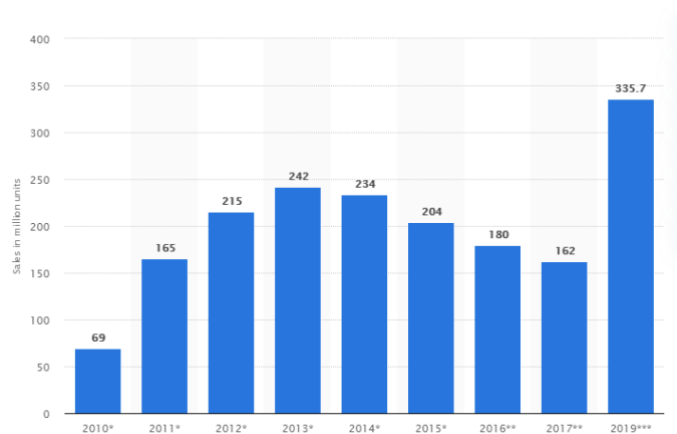
are as fast as possible available to the readers after registering their payment. If customers wish to purchase more books, they are not burdened by their heavy weight and they are more easily stored. E-books also offer many advantages to publishers. They have lower production costs, the cost of printing and distribution to bookstores or storages. *E-books* not only in Slovakia but also abroad have their regular customers. Their releasing or selling is not a threat for printed books or other forms of reading. Research conducted in 2017 declares that e-books made up only one fifth of European book market.<sup>6</sup> E-book readers are mostly located outside Europe. American publishers association stated, that e-book sales made up only 18% of the turnover, while 67 % came from Amazon.<sup>7</sup> E-books have much bigger success in America and other English speaking counties. Picture n. 1 shows that most readers are located in the USA (47,7 %).<sup>8</sup>



**Picture 1: The geographical distribution of ebook sales holds an interesting insight**

Source: *Who's buying ebooks: Geographical insights from eBooks.com. The geographical distribution of ebook sales holds an interesting insight.* Released on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://about.ebooks.com/whos-buying-ebooks-2/>>.

It is hard to track complete e-book sales, because of illegal downloading that became a phenomenon all around the world. According to available information, 335,7 million e-books were sold in the United states just in year 2019.



**Picture 2: E-book unit sales in the U.S. 2010-2019**

Source: WATSON, A.: *E-book unit sales in the U.S. 2010-2019.* Released on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/426799/e-book-unit-sales-usa/>>.

<sup>6</sup> COPPOLA, D.: *Book market in Europe-Statistics & Facts.* Released on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/topics/4062/book-market-in-europe/>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ebook Industry News Feed.* [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://about.ebooks.com/ebook-industry-news-feed/>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Who's buying ebooks: Geographical insights from eBooks.com. The geographical distribution of ebook sales holds an interesting insight.* Released on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://about.ebooks.com/whos-buying-ebooks-2/>>.

In Europe, the most successful market is the British market. From total book sales, e-books make up 34% of sales (87,9 % e-books are sold through Amazon). According to The Global Ebook Report in year 2013, every fourth book sold in UK was an e-book. UK market is also favourable for e-book export. It is focused on counties of Scandinavia, Germany, Ireland, southeast Asia and China.<sup>9</sup> The Slovak market compared to the world market is smaller, but the sales of e-books grows. Overall market volume in 2018 reached 1,2 to 1,5 million Euros. Christmas and summer reasons were particularly strong. Slovenský zväz kníhkupcov a vydavateľov estimates, that 140-180 000 of e-books were sold. The Slovak reader could choose from around 15 000 book titles just from Slovak and Czech language.<sup>10</sup> More up-to-date statistics were not released for the public to see. In Czech Republic, e-books sales climbed up to around a million titles just in 2018. Their turnover is also supported by foreign customers, especially Slovak readers. Their share made up 5-10 % from overall sales.<sup>11</sup> The most popular genres on Amazon are: Religion & Spirituality, Biographies & Memoirs, Business & Money, Self-Help, Cook Books, Food & Wine, Politics & Social Sciences, Health, Fitness & Dieting, Parenting & Relationships, Crafts, Hobbies & Home, Education & Teaching.<sup>12</sup> The best-selling genres in the Czech Republic are crime stories and stories based on suspense, science fiction and fantasy, women's fiction and personal development. In Slovakia, the most sought after genre became fiction, professional and educational literature and books for children and youth.<sup>13</sup> Based on this data, we can assume, that book readers in global and domestic market are different and have different preferences.

## 2 Research Methodology and Goals

The aim of this scientific contribution is to analyze the results of individual interviews with Slovak publishers and authors - self-publishers. The goal is also to map chosen Slovak publishers stance towards e-books. Also to find out, what ways, in terms of digital space, do they promote e-books. The results of this research present the actual state of e-book releasing in Slovak language, which can help publishers with planning future marketing campaigns. We realized qualitative research using electronic questionnaire Survio and additional individual questioning by the form of free answers through e-mail communication. Nineteen respondents made up the sample from influential and favourite large, medium and small publishers. The exact number of active publishers, who also publish Slovak e-books is currently unknown. For data sensitivity and trade secret, none of the respondents will be named. Only condition present while choosing respondents was that they released at least one e-book in the year 2019.

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<sup>9</sup> JENTETICS, K.: *Amazon Ebook Market Share 2019-2020*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://blog.publishdrive.com/amazon-ebook-market-share/>>.

<sup>10</sup> See also: *Správa o knižnom trhu 2018*. Bratislava : Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov SR, 2018. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Knizny-trh\\_2018.pdf/](https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Knizny-trh_2018.pdf/)>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see: TUREČKOVÁ, M. et al: *Zpráva o českém knižním trhu 2018/2019*. Prague : SČKN, 2019. [online]. [2020-09-25]. Available at: <[Zpráva o českém knižním trhu 2018/2019](#)>.

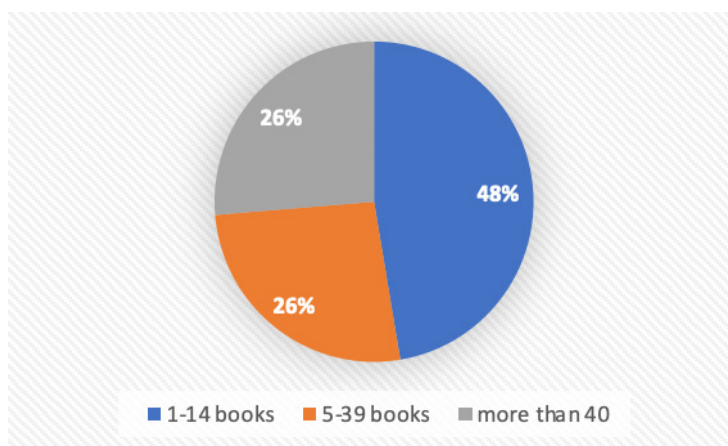
<sup>12</sup> AFFLECK, G.: *10 Best Selling Non-Fiction Book Topics*. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://geoffaffleck.com/10-best-selling-non-fiction-book-topics/>>.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see: *Správa o knižnom trhu 2018*. Bratislava : Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov SR, 2018. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <[https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Knizny-trh\\_2018.pdf/](https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Knizny-trh_2018.pdf/)>.



### 3 Analysis of the Access of Slovak Publishers and Self-Publishers to E-Books

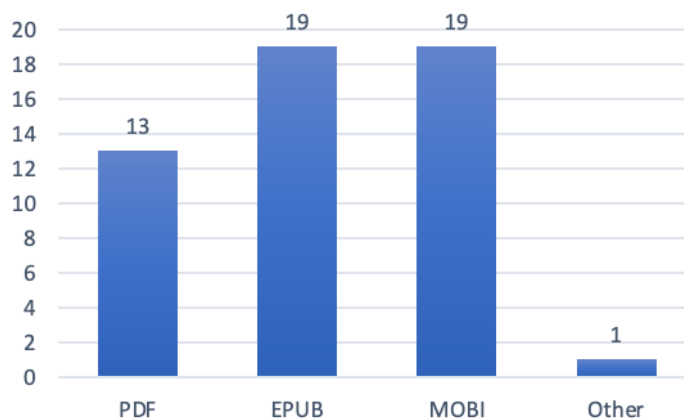
To better illustrate and summarize the results, we have assembled them in their percentage, verbal and graphic representation. In the research, we addressed publishers and self-publishers who focus on popular literature, educational literature, university scripts and textbooks. Overall, nineteen publishers responded, while 9 (60 %) of them release 1 to 14 books annually, 5 (20 %) of them release 15 to 39 books annually and 5 (20 %) of respondents more than 40 books a year.



**Chart 1: How many book titles do you publish a year?**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

Publishers choose book titles to release in electronic form for a couple of reasons. The most common titles are selected minimally, so they release them all, or based on the bought license of translated literature. The purchase of printed book license also commonly contains the purchase of an electronic form of the same title. When it comes to e-book publishing, publishers consider, whether it is a series, but also the age category of potential readers. E-books often do not fulfil editorial plan of Slovak publishers 100 %, compared to printed books. Even though publishers try to release book titles in both formats identically, it is not always possible. E-books make up on average 70 % of editorial plan opposite paper books, which make up 100 % of editorial plan. Slovak publishers release e-books in the PDF 13 (70 %), MOBI 19 (100 %) and EPUB 19 (100 %) formats. One respondent stated, that they release e-books exceptionally in a different format than those mentioned, however he did not specify.

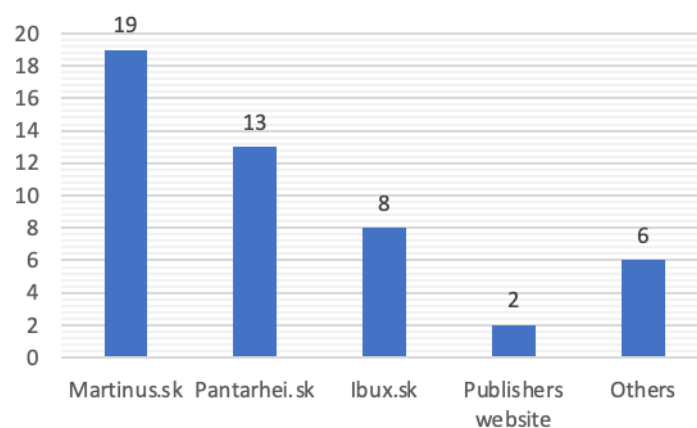


**Chart 2: In what formats do you publish e-books? (you can mark more than one answer)**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

When it comes to e-books, publishers must also focus on their protection from illegal spreading and downloading. They often leave this responsibility to external companies, which process the electronic format (80 %). Only 10 % of respondents stated that their e-books are protected by social DRM security. No security is preferred by 10 % of respondents. They believe that every protection in online space can be bypassed, and that is why it is useless to protect e-books in any way. So they choose, for them, the best possible alternative – to not restrict e-books by defensive measures for all honest buyers. The manuscript is processed into electronic format by an external company. Only 2 respondents process their books by themselves. Up to 70 % of respondents stated that they do not focus their marketing activities specially also on e-books, what we do not evaluate as very positive. At the time of a global pandemic of Covid-19, digital space has more influence and meaning for an individual. E-books provide readers many advantages. For example, we can mention their easier and faster availability. They do not have to wait to read them, distribution is almost immediate after payment. The cost of e-books is cheaper than the cost of paper books. Some bookstores even launched marketing campaigns focused on e-books, where they significantly reduced their cost. This time period during the pandemic can significantly help the readability and sales of e-books.

When it comes to the 30 % of respondents who do focus on marketing activities, we wondered, how do they solve promotion of chosen e-books, respectively what tools of digital marketing communication do they use in promotion campaigns. They mostly use social networks (in particular Facebook and Instagram), newsletters and blogs of cooperating book influencers. However, they don't reserve a large budget for marketing campaigns. Minimum or maximum of 10 % of their respective budgets. If they can, they use free tools and rely on organic reach. We asked 70 % of the respondents a complementary question why do not they also focus on e-books specifically. Based on their words, readers can find an e-book while they search for a printed book. Sometimes they remind readers of them, but they are not a priority, even though they consider them an investing opportunity in the future. They still rely on an assumption that they can sell by themselves, because it is the same text, just in a different format. They focus on potential e-books campaigns only when it comes to some discounts, when a paper form was not released on time, when stores are closed because of Covid-19 regulations or when it is a vision for the future. Still some publishers believe that it is wasted money and they do not see a reason to devote themselves to an individual marketing campaign for them. Publishers state that sales of e-books compared to paper books is only 14 % on average. At current time of closed stores, some of publishers e-books sales compared to paper books rose moderately, but the number is negligible. We wondered, through which bookstores publishers provide their e-books. They could mark multiple choices. All respondents provide their books through Martinus.sk. 70 % of respondents provide their books through ibux.sk, 40 % of respondents through Panta Rhei. 10 % of respondents provide books though their own websites. 30 % of respondents also use different e-shops – e.g. palmknihy, rajknihi etc.



**Chart 3: At which e-shops do you sell e-books? (you can mark more than one answer)**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

## Conclusion

We mapped current stance of Slovak publishers to e-books, how they respond to Covid-19 when it comes to publishing, marketing campaigns and how they deal with other issues that presented themselves organically during this pandemic. We found out how many publishers use digital tools of marketing communication, if not, why and what opinions guide them in their decisions. Our research established what processes do the publishers use when it comes to e-books in Slovak language. Based on gathered data, we evaluated and presented statements, that may guide their planning for future marketing campaigns. According to data gathered by research, we believe that most book readers still prefer printed books. They do so based on their individual beliefs, that printed book can never be replaced by an e-book. Most of book fans will never prefer e-books to printed books, despite quick distribution or fast usage. To rise the number of people who use e-books, rather than printed books, e-books and e-book reading pads must be made more popular and with much higher quality. **Po Except** for text, most of them add nothing more. There are unused opportunities, like adding a dictionary to the book readers. The current situation can get better, but it is not an immediate advancement. During the first wave of the pandemic in Slovakia, e-book readers sales have increased.<sup>14</sup> This is a positive information not only for bookstores, which sell these e-books, but also for publishers themselves. Handling of the pandemic and number of potential waves can influence e-books market in Slovakia, but also internationally. There will be a continuous demand for new e-books, with regular use of e-book readers. Therefore, it is important not only to purchase licenses of foreign fiction, or release Slovak fiction, but also to strengthen online and offline marketing communication for more efficient propagation. Publishers have stated in the interviews, that they still see their future in e-books. Some have even claimed, that e-books will become a new main form of literature. For that to happen, it is necessary to dedicate not only more time to their propagation, but also space and money.

Although publishers also release literature in electronic form, they focus their promotion more on paper books. They rely on the belief that if they promote their paper books more, e-books lover will buy this book title in the form, which suits them the best. Naturally, it is up to the customers, which form of reading they will choose. Even though, we believe that if publishers

<sup>14</sup> KUČERA, Š.: *Ludia sa vrhli na on-line nákupy. Letia webkamery, rúška aj kuchynské roboty*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-11-22]. Available at: <<https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/567167-ludia-sa-vrhli-na-on-line-nakupy-letia-webkamery-ruska-aj-kuchynske-roboty/>>.

not only promoted the story of the book, but also additional advantages of e-book reading, the interest of e-books would naturally go up. Currently, publishers promote e-books only on social networks (mostly on Facebook), blogs and by distributors. We can assume that for the lesser rate of advertising, their sales are naturally lower. We believe that usage of selected marketing tools is on insufficient level. It is necessary to promote e-books on Facebook or blogs (their own, their trade partners or cooperating influencers). Nowadays, the space of online marketing offers broad palette of tools, that publishers can use in low cost regime, or completely freely. Publisher would then save money and thus more finances from budget could be used for paid advertisements on social networks to support organic reach or invest in PR articles and other forms of creative campaigns. We could take into consideration the Anglo-American market and selling through platforms like Amazon, where e-books have their stable place and strong customer base. Even though Slovak market is more traditional, younger generations are used to using modern technologies every day and that is why they are closer to e-books in their preferences.<sup>15</sup> Publishers can use email marketing within their marketing strategies, which still proves to be very strong and useful.<sup>16</sup> By emails, publishers can showcase not only the author and the story of the book, but also other formats of the book. They can directly insert a link to their e-shop, where the recipient can download the e-book to the device or read references from other readers. Publishers should also consider using multiple social networks, not only Facebook. Almost 60% of Slovaks in the age from 16 to 74 use social networks (they have examined interactions, profile creations or publishing of content).<sup>17</sup> Information about e-books could be communicated via Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn or increasingly popular TikTok.<sup>18</sup> Also publishers are making a mistake in the context of weak content marketing. Creating content and its recycling can not only bring new visits and interaction in online space, but also new and regular orders for e-books. It is also recommended to use SEO, writing guest blogs, and creating affiliate marketing strategies with cooperating influencers and partners.

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<sup>17</sup> *Sociálne siete sú na Slovensku obľúbené, podľa prieskumu ich využíva takmer 60 percent ľudí*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-11-11]. Available at: <<https://www.webnoviny.sk/takmer-60-percent-slovakov-vyuziva-socialne-siete-vplyva-z-prieskumu/>>.

<sup>18</sup> DUDOŇ, M.: *Novodobý ošial' TikTok. Čínska sociálna sieť, ktorá vyzvala Instagram a začína dominovať*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.startitup.sk/novodoby-osial-tiktok-cinska-socialna-siet-ktora-vyzvala-instagram-a-zacina-dominovat/>>.

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## COVID-19: CHANGES IN TELEVISION PRODUCTION IN SLOVAKIA

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### Abstract

The article reflects the changes in the Slovak media, specifically in television production, caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus. The aim of the article is to present different ways of the media reaction to these changes. From the complete cessation of the ongoing media content production (e.g. daily television series), through adaptation to the situation using production without personal contact between media workers and respondents, or the new content creation that was often completely absent from the media offer (e.g. educational programmes for different age groups of school children and youth), to the possibility to “benefit” from the situation, especially in the field of marketing communication. In the introductory chapter, the text of the article is based mainly on the knowledge of crisis management and marketing and reflects on the ability of media institutions to adapt to the changes caused by the crisis. The authors focus on three selected areas of media production – live broadcasting, educational programmes for children and youth as well as advertising campaigns of the selected companies, while looking for a parallel between the crisis communication theory and its application in a period covered by the study of media production.

### Key words:

Advertising. Crisis Management. Crisis Marketing. Kids and Teenagers. Live Broadcasting. Television. The Crisis. The Media.

### Introduction

Spreading of the new coronavirus has become a frequently presented topic in media since the beginning of 2020. At the beginning of the year, information was mostly presented as something interesting or sensational. But at the end of January, as soon as the Slovak media began to report on people dying in the streets of China,<sup>1</sup> in the following weeks, the emerging global pandemic became a priority news topic. The information with sensational potential has turned into a society-wide problem influencing the political and economic situation in all countries affected by the virus. Based on the terminology and definitions of crisis management, the situation could be described as a crisis, due to the increasing incidence not only in Slovakia but also globally, when countries began gradually implementing safety measures. These measures limited the functioning of several institutions and companies, in principle, there was a disturbance of the balance in the social system, as the crisis can also be perceived.<sup>2</sup> At that moment, media became a mediator of information on the one hand and on the other hand, as institutions fulfilling a certain function in the society, of course, commercial as well, were equally affected by the event. This dual perspective of media and media production also requires a dual approach to describing the situation. The first perspective perceives media as a part of the crisis management of individual countries, i.e. as a mediator of crisis communication, the second one, as a priority for this text, introduces media as institutions and production systems that are part of the economic system of a country.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mestá zombíkov! Smrtiaci koronavírus sa bleskovo šíri: VIDEO Ludia odpadávajú priamo na uliciach.* Released on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/cl/11/1855445/Mesta-zombikov--Smrtiaci-koronavirus-sa-bleskovo-siri--VIDEO-Ludia-odpadavaju-priamo-na-uliciach>>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: ZUZÁK, R., KÖNIGOVÁ, M.: *Krizové řízení podniku*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s., 2009.

## 1 Theoretical Basis of Crisis Management and Marketing

Since the first outbreak of coronavirus in France at the end of January 2020,<sup>3</sup> the way of informing about the spread of the epidemic has changed. The topic has become a stable part of news programmes and it can be stated that this was a point when countries began, under the influence of global development, to prepare crisis management manuals. Based on the knowledge from the field of management, the first important moment is to map the situation, so that the danger can be subsequently identified and the possibilities of resolving the often, an unexpected crisis situation can be found.<sup>4</sup> Media became part of the crisis management of the country – the increased frequency of news broadcasts, live streaming press conferences and briefings, or special broadcasts and discussions with experts. However, the article focuses on the change in television production in Slovakia, as a result of the crisis caused by the spread of coronavirus, so it is more important to look at media as institutions involved in shaping the state economy and adapting broadcast content or even the production process. In terms of the basic classification of the crisis, the modern COVID-19 pandemic could be classified as a crisis caused by natural disasters, which subsequently resulted in an economic crisis, both at the macro and micro levels.

Media as well as other industries had to adapt to the new situation in many aspects. According to R. Zuzák and M. Königová,<sup>5</sup> time is the decisive factor in a crisis. It is necessary to react to the changes caused as soon as possible and act the way the crisis could not escalate. However, media institutions were faced with the question of how to maintain their standard production during a non-standard period, when commonly used processes were limited, such as a media contact with other institutions, editors' contact with respondents, or contact among colleagues. Much of media production and broadcasting moved to online space, but not every medium was able to take advantage of this opportunity. Similarly, the medium analysed in this article, namely television. The proper functioning of the television as a medium was limited by the first government regulations such as the declaration of an emergency situation on 11 March 2020, but above all, a state of national emergency declared by the Government of the Slovak Republic on 16 March 2020. Several anti-epidemiological regulations, which have been gradually imposed since 13 March 2020, have limited the functioning of this medium to such an extent that the production of regularly broadcast programmes has stopped, e.g. daily series, entertainment programmes, but also live broadcasts. On the contrary, special news programmes or discussion programmes, which offered viewers information in an expanded, analytical form have been increasingly integrated into the programme of both public and commercial television broadcasting. This was the reality in a selected segment of media production in Slovakia at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Crisis management and crisis marketing make it possible to look at the crisis from a different perspective, especially as an opportunity. Firstly, in terms of the approach to solving the problem in a different way, using new procedures, or creating a new product in general. In the case of the issues analysed in this article, these are media content and new television programmes, which have been created as a result of the crisis.<sup>6</sup> Regarding television production, in a relatively short time,

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<sup>3</sup> *V Európe potvrdili koronavírus. Náказа sa objavila vo Francúzsku.* Released on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at:

<<https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1174596/v-europe-confirmed-coronavirus-was-appeared-in-french.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> See also: EVANGELU, J. E.: *Krizová komunikace. Efektivní zvládání krizových a zátěžových situací.* Ostrava : Key Publishing, s.r.o., 2013.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: ZUZÁK, R., KÖNIGOVÁ, M.: *Krizové řízení podniku.* Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s., 2009.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*



the television programme began to be modified not only by the method of production, such as connecting with the respondent, guest in the discussion programme only through a telephone or online interview, but also thematically, as evidenced by the production of programmes for children and youth, especially educational TV shows, which were to complement the distance education. If we apply the selected principles of crisis marketing to our selected sample of research, which we discuss in the following chapters, we will try to generalise the issue on examples of media content that is not necessarily part of marketing production (in addition to advertising campaigns, also analysed children and youth programmes and live broadcasts). In principle, however, it is the ability to adapt to the lifestyle change of the target audience, which under the influence of events, performed most of their daily activities at home.

### 1.1 Analysis of Television Advertising Campaigns

The creators of advertising content reacted to the situation quite promptly and the first information regarding the coronavirus pandemic appeared in advertising production as early as March, when the first case of infection with a new coronavirus in Slovakia occurred (specifically on 6 March 2020). The frequency of using this topic in advertising content has increased over time, but it should be stated that it was a variable phenomenon showing signs of a trend. Through specific examples, we will point out the change in advertising communication in a crisis. To objectify the selection of analysed commercials, the starting point was the results of the *Stratégie Hodnotenie Stratégií*<sup>7</sup> competition, which were drawn from its online platform [strategie.hnonline.sk](http://strategie.hnonline.sk). The priority indicator of success for us is the selection of commercials for the competition itself, not their score evaluation (we take this into account only in some cases). We included the range from February to June 2020 in the selection of specific spots (advertising campaigns in the summer months, even under the influence of easing the measures, focused on other topics), so that there is a visible difference in advertising communication and themes of the pandemic and crisis in television advertising within a specified period.

The subject of the analysis is the competition category *Film – televízna reklama* (television advertising), in the selection of which in February 2020 there was no advertising spot with a topic related to a coronavirus pandemic. That month, *Jeden Paušál, veľa muziky* (promoting the TIDAL streaming service) and *Uši* (for Huawei FreeLace headphones) of company O2 Slovensko were successful, which were a continuation of a successful advertising campaign at that time, with new mascots Ludo and Moya (the company introduced them to the public in September 2019). In March, however, the advertising spot of mobile operator Orange Slovensko *Spolu a zodpovedne* entered the competition evaluation, which promoted new customer benefits such as backup internet, endless SMS and non-stop chat. The headline “Spolu a zodpovedne v sieti najvyššej kvality”,<sup>8</sup> in addition to the promotion of benefits of the operator indicated the emerging socially responsible rhetoric in connection with the spread of a pandemic. Since the beginning of the media coverage of this topic, in addition to the facts,

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<sup>7</sup> Remark by the authors: “*Hodnotenie Stratégií*” is a competition of creativity of marketing communication (domestic or foreign) of Slovak advertising agencies. ([www.n01.hnoline.sk](http://www.n01.hnoline.sk)) We consider the creative approach in marketing communication to be decisive in addressing the target audience. It should be noted that the individual agencies submit their work to this competition, i.e. the selection is thus limited. The competition is open to Slovak advertising, media, communication agency, agency from the BTL series (PR, Event, Sales Promo or Direct marketing agency), which can demonstrably prove authorship to the work they submit, which is a business and is registered in the Commercial Register of the Slovak Republic or the relevant trade register of the Slovak Republic. ([www.n01.hnoline.sk](http://www.n01.hnoline.sk))

<sup>8</sup> *Spolu a zodpovedne*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-03]. Available at: <<https://hodnotenia.hndigital.sk/eventy/hodnotenia/2020/03/spolu-a-zodpovedne>>.

the focus is primarily on the emotions, as evidenced by the slogan of the commercial “Spájame vás s tým, na čom vám záleží”.<sup>9</sup> In April, only one advertising spot got its place in the competition, which thematized the situation caused by the pandemic – it was a television spot *Nekonečné dáta* of the company O2 Slovensko. Formally, it was based on a successful and at that time already established advertising campaign with mascots Ludo and Moya and intertextually referred to two fairy tales – the animated film *Wall - E* (visually) and *Never-ending story* (musically). Only through voiceover was the reference to the then-current situation: “Vieme, že teraz potrebujete ešte viac dát ako zvyčajne. Preto máte odteraz v O2 Smart Paušáloch Nekonečné dáta.”<sup>10</sup> In the following months, the number of commercials referring to the pandemic and its various effects on the functioning of the society increased. The topic became the main motif of most commercials or advertising campaigns in general. In the first commercials, there was a significant similarity in the processing of the theme. Later, however, we could observe its various modifications following the needs of the company, promoted product or service. Regarding to the selected principles of crisis marketing described above, the crisis has turned into an opportunity. In this case, it was an opportunity to use primarily the emotional dimension of socially responsible communication and action.

In May, *Hodnotenie Stratégií* already listed 5 out of 7 commercials focusing on the consequences of a coronavirus pandemic on society. We present them in the order of the evaluation: the highest number of points awarded by the judges went to the advertising spot of Slovak Telekom (*Zrýchľujeme Magio internet*); next is the company 356 bank (*Reklamy z obývačky*), Orange Slovensko (*Záložný internet*), Martinus (*Otvorte dvere hrdinom*) and finally Across Private Investments (*A predsa sa točí*). We will focus the analysis on the first three most successful commercials in May. In the case of telecommunications service providers Slovak Telekom and Orange Slovensko, these are almost identical advertising spots that promoted the Internet connection service. The company Orange Slovensko promoted a specific service called backup internet; Slovak Telekom tried to reach customers by increasing the speed of its internet connection wherever technically possible, as the voiceover of the commercial described. In both cases, it can be stated that the target audience was the whole family, whose individual members had to carry out almost all their activities at home during the restrictions resulting from the anti-epidemiological measures. Advertising spots show common daily activities such as working from home, online education or several leisure activities. Their concept was almost identical in a few details<sup>11</sup>, and the message that both companies sought to communicate to percipients through them was based on the principles of social responsibility. The method of communication chosen for this purpose by the advertising agencies MUW SAATCHI & SAATCHI (Slovak Telekom) and Zaraguza (Orange Slovakia) used elements of situational humour, resulting from the consequences of an internet connection failure, which customers could encounter when changing their lifestyle and especially with more frequent use of this service. These examples, although suggesting

<sup>9</sup> *Spolu a zodpovedne*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-03]. Available at: <<https://hodnotenia.hndigital.sk/eventy/hodnotenia/2020/03/spolu-a-zodpovedne>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Nekonečné dátaaa*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://hodnotenia.hndigital.sk/eventy/hodnotenia/2020/04/nekonecne-dataaa>>.

<sup>11</sup> Remark by the author: The higher-ranked advertising spot of the company Slovak Telekom *Zrýchľujeme Magio internet* (MUW SAATCHI & SAATCHI) did not use any narrator to connect individual activities as this was the role of the voiceover. On the other hand, the advertising spot of Orange Slovensko *Záložný internet* (Zaraguza) had a more pronounced narrative structure and the individual situations were interconnected by the father of the family. We believe that metaphorically, it was a substitute activity in which the father of the family solved individual situations by his actions like a properly functioning internet connection. The difference was also the number of displayed situations – *Zrýchľujeme Magio internet* had three and *Záložný internet* had four of them.

a creative approach in advertising communication and the pursuit of originality in the display of individual situations or choice of means of expression, and ultimately in targeting the final consumer, showed only small differences in both formal and content processing. The reason may be an overall change when the life of society was temporarily limited to the domestic environment and everyday situations became stereotypical. This was rather a negative consequence of crisis marketing communication when limited expressive possibilities reduced the distinguishability of created campaigns. Another approach, the so-called crowdvertising was chosen by the company 365 bank in the advertising campaign *Reklamy z obývačky*. It is a series of 12 television commercials, in the production of which the general public participated. The whole concept of the campaign was created in cooperation with the advertising agency Wiktor Leo Burnett and the registered candidates shot individual videos according to predefined scenarios. 80 families participated in the production of spots from the domestic environment during the quarantine.<sup>12</sup> It is proof that 365 bank used the crisis as an opportunity, correctly identified new patterns of behaviour of potential clients or percipients of advertising content and especially, through an imaginative campaign, resonated in the public perception as a modern mobile bank. Finally, the advertising campaign was awarded in the *Zlatý klinec* creativity competition, in which it won first place in the *Kreativita v čase korony* category.<sup>13</sup>

In the last analysed month of June, 4 advertisements were the subject of *Hodnotenia Stratégii* competition which, in their production, whether visual or content, referred to a connection with a pandemic caused by the spread of coronavirus. Again, we present commercials in the order of the best rated: Slovak Telekom (*Odtiaľ bude dávať každý*), Šariš (*S iskrou v srdci*), Prvá stavebná sporiteľňa (*Splátky od PSS sa nemenia*), Úsmev ako dar (*Koniec zlým snom*). The advertising spot with the highest number of points *Odtiaľ bude dávať každý*, created again by the advertising agency MUW SAATCHI & SAATCHI, freely followed the previous one and develops the concept of individual activities of people using the new operator service with more data. Following the gradual easing of the anti-epidemiological measures, the individual situations are shown in the advertising spot also take place in various places, not strictly in the home environment. Šariš advertising spot was also a direct depiction of the lifestyle change, especially during the period with limited social contacts. Its visual content represents several activities that took place during this period, whether public “Thank you” statement to health care workers and other rescue services by applauding them from the balconies or a television project in the form of series of concerts *U vás doma*. Social responsibility and emotions were also used as the main motif in this campaign. The remaining two evaluated commercials in their content only indicated a connection with the pandemic and its consequences.

## 1.2 Analysis of Educational Programs for Children and Youth

RTVS (Radio and Television of Slovakia) responded to the new crisis situation and the state of emergency, when all levels of education were forced to switch to the distance form, by creating a new format called the *Školský klub* with the subtitle *Hodinka triedy bez kriedy*. Television production for children in the organization RTVS has been criticized in recent decades, especially for the insufficient quantitative representation of premiere titles when compared to the 1970s and 1980s. During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic,

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<sup>12</sup> 365.bank si odnáša Zlatý klinec za svoje „Reklamy z obývačky“ (VIDEO). Released on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://www.omediach.com/reklama/18871-365-bank-si-odnasa-zlaty-klinec-za-svoje-reklamy-z-obyvacky-video>>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

an effort to strengthen media content with a dominant educational function can be observed in the programme structure. For example, the rerun of the animated series *Mat' tak o koliesko viac*, but also the premiere titles – the puppet series *Hlavule* and educational programme on the environment and ecology *Ekonauti*. The older audience could take an entertainment and knowledge quiz *Happy kvíz* linked to the Instagram, in which the signs of online communication also manifested in the language level of the moderators. In the following part, we will briefly analyse the programme *Školský klub*<sup>14</sup>. We will focus on the application of new elements, production methods, and the application of emotionality, which dominated the media in that period (appeal to health, the impossibility of education in the classroom, etc.).

The broadcast of the mentioned programme started relatively quickly after the forced closure of preschool and school facilities. Since it was an unprepared format, several shortcomings reminiscent of an experiment, which gradually sought its shape, can be found from the very beginning. In addition to the content, the form changed as well. In the period from 18 March 2020 to 27 March 2020, the show was broadcast for 46 minutes. From 30 March 2020 to 7 May 2020 within a 90-minute time limit and until 29 May 2020, the creators again chose a shorter 45-minute format. The changes were probably also related to the changing pandemic situation. At the beginning, no one expected its maximum duration, but in May, the question of the return of children to school was frequently discussed. The broadcast time started at 9:15 am and did not change during the broadcast. The introductory 45-minute sections were aimed at the audience of primary education, but later, the scope was expanded to the target secondary school students as well. A certain experiment can also be observed in the incorporation of teachers into the role of moderators, which resulted in several shortcomings (inaccurate articulation, relatively frequent orthoepic errors, insufficient communication with the audience, etc.). Giving specific examples, we will start from the final part broadcast on 29 May 2020, in which, in addition to the new topic, the creators retrospectively return to the broadcast content of the programme *Školský klub* (47 episodes). In the introduction, the audience is addressed by two moderators, who are well known from the regularly broadcast format *Trpaslíci*. Their task is to introduce the teachers. At the end of the session they give a short interview with them and recapitulate the content of the previous sections. When the broadcast of the programme was launched in March 2020, one of the shortcomings occurred, was the absence of children in the role of active students in the broadcasting studio. Gradually, however, the children also became part of the production, and a certain parallel to the teaching process in the classroom was created in the television studio. Of course, it was not a full-fledged replacement of in-class learning, what was probably not the intention of the creators, but it was more about additional information or form of consolidating learning resulting from the name itself (school clubs are not primarily aimed at education in the sense of new content learning). In contrast to this form, Czech Television (CT) in the programme called *UčíTelka*<sup>15</sup> applies the classic form of education to a greater extent that is familiar to students from school facilities (the presence of children in the studio from the very beginning, their division into grades and subjects, assigning homework in advance on the website, use of an interactive whiteboard, etc.). From our point of view, this approach seems to be more effective and better targeted in terms of reinforcement educational activities through television. Moreover, the effort for a similar approach can be also observed in the next episodes of *Školský klub*, as proven by a brief analysis of the final episode, which is a recapitulation. The first episode is introduced by the same teachers who participated

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<sup>14</sup> *Školský klub*. [online]. [2020-09-14]. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Available at: <<https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/15668/229153>>.

<sup>15</sup> *UčíTelka*. [online]. [2020-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/13394657013-ucitelka>>.

in the introductory part. These are two teachers (Dávid and Barborka) who perform their roles – Dávid with his spontaneous behaviour resembling the children's audience (there is also a word game, which is functionally used to clarify the meaning of words – such as “vizitka” and “vizita”) and Barbora, in the position of an adult, is patiently explaining everything and she also supervises the lesson with children in the studio.

The episode is performed by four girls (their age is not known, but they are probably primary school students). Business cards and future professions are discussion topics, while significant time is dedicated to the conversation without an important action (children are discussing various professions – voice teacher for dogs, space scientist, veterinarian, etc.). During the discussions about a creative business card and a model presentation with teeth, the teachers remind the audience of a song from the first episode of the *Školský klub* on respiratory organs. In the part where “pupils” are working on their own creative business cards, David is playing the guitar and singing a dream song (words are written on a blackboard so the audience can also read them). Elements of infantility can be observed in the part where David, a teacher, is demonstrating activities associated with his passion (basketball, swordplay, and sack race) and addressing the audience. After presenting business cards, they discuss with the children what it is like to think about different professions and how they can be implemented in the school environment. The episode is concluded by well-known moderators (*Smajlíci*). They thank children in the studio and at home, watching them on TV, and revise the individual episodes showing the pictures drawn by the audience (they inform that a large part of the audience has responded to the episodes and they have received more than 10,000 elaborated assignments – homework).

Meantime, they repeat the content of the names of selected subjects that the audience has learnt (science, informatics, mathematics, music education, Slovak language, etc.). In the end, they also refer to the website and archive of *Školský klub* and welcome other teachers to the studio, who inform the audience about new or difficult tasks or issues, which have occurred during the programme creation (difference in assignments and the need for higher dynamics, learning about TV professions, etc.). In the end, they also thank the methodologists participating in the programme (non-profit organization *Indícia*), and the children who have performed in the studio. They also wish the students starting school good health and they sing a dream song together. However, their interpretation is very unconvincing. Live streaming appears to be a controversial issue in this programme. On the one hand, we appreciate the effort to capture the school environment as faithfully as possible with the possibility of improvisation and mistakes, but on the other hand, we think that post-production should have eliminated several shortcomings that had occurred due to the listed causes (inexperienced moderators, the process of finding form and reaching target audiences of different ages, the way to find the greatest possible efficiency and so on). The incorporation of simultaneous translation of content into sign language can be considered a positive aspect, making the format accessible to the hearing-impaired audiences. Returning to the application of a crisis marketing theory to a selected program type, we can conclude that the creators intended to do things differently. They also brought a new way of production, which could become a starting point and motivation for similar programmes (application of experiential learning methods). However, more emphasis should be placed on the way of presenting information and more thoughtful content. If we returned very briefly to a comparison with the Czech version of “television education” during the distance form of teaching, one of the reasons for higher quality could be seen in more experienced television creators with genre-diverse types of programmes (current offer of the Czech programmes for children is higher in comparison to the Slovak production), which were on TV in Slovakia during the production periods.

Currently, the programmes for children are created by a small group of people who neither have sufficient capacity nor the opportunity to offer more space to a genre-diverse programme. In this context, *Školský klub* can be considered as an opportunity to renew television programmes for schools that could reflect the current content and at the same time functionally supplement selected standards provided by the National Institute for Education (NIE).

### 1.3 Analysis of Live Broadcasting

The coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected the form of live broadcasting, too. The awards for contributions to culture, architecture, art, television production, and film had to be postponed or changed their form. In recent years, a reflection of the current social issues can be observed at the awards ceremonies (especially in the field of culture and art), while the current pandemic situation has manifested itself in various forms in individual broadcasts: for example in the award for architecture *CE.ZA.AR*, plants, and flowers replaced live audiences. Production of the national film and television award *IGRIC 2000*<sup>16</sup> chose a completely different strategy. Through short interviews and audio-visual demonstrations, the moderating duo (Zuzana Porubjaková and Peter Kočiš) presented the history of the award and introduced important milestones in film and television broadcasting to the television audience (without the presence of a live audience). The theme of the coronavirus was not directly reflected in the case of transmission, but the intimate studio atmosphere indicated a significantly changed form compared to the previous years.

In a brief analysis, we will focus on the 10th National Film Awards ceremony 2020 *Slnko v sieti*, which was broadcast on 9 September 2020 instead of the planned date in April. Changes can be observed in several respects (reduced number of people in the audience, or people wearing face masks and gloves at the ceremony), with the theme of the coronavirus becoming one of the leitmotifs of the whole gala evening. A high degree of emotionality was already evident in the introductory shots (shots of the empty streets of the capital Bratislava) with dramatic background music and moderator of the live broadcast, Bruno Ciberej, commenting: “The coronavirus has probably affected each of us. Many things will never be the same again. In terms of awareness-raising, I have decided to show the whole world what three films nominated for *Slnko v sieti* award for the best film would look like if they were shot during or after a pandemic”.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, the three films (*Nech je svetlo*, *Amnestie*, *Punk je hned*) were introduced to the audience. The moderator of the gala evening played all roles instead of the originally cast actors in the films, and the current situation was a theme of the film dialogues. This part can be considered as some relief from the serious theme presented in the introduction, using elements of humour, persiflage, and hyperbole (inadequate food and disinfection supplies, reaction to hoaxes or secret interview about the vaccine development) based on reactions of the society, but also current measures without denying the seriousness of the societal problem. At the same time it was possible to observe the effort to preserve the poetics of the films (the moderator, through his speech and appearance, stylized himself into the role of protagonists in the selected scenes, speeches of other film characters were not edited; a similar principle was also applied in the introduction of live broadcast in the previous year). The introductory scene was followed by a live introductory speech of the moderator, who again tried to ease the issue when he positively evaluated his acting

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<sup>16</sup> *Igric 2020*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-27]. Available at: <<https://www.rtv.s.sk/televizia/archiv/16332/242800>>.

<sup>17</sup> *Slnko v sieti*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-20]. Available at: <<https://www.rtv.s.sk/televizia/archiv/16242/240658>>.

performance and at the same time remarked that he could not estimate the opinion of the present audience, as they were wearing face masks. Shortly afterwards, he introduced the tradition of the film awards ceremony in Slovakia (since 2006) and, after the scenes from the previous years, presented statistics on the first performances or record numbers of cinema-goers and their current rapid decline (60 years ago, 43 million people visited cinemas in one year, last year it was only 6.5 million people). The subsequent micro-composition of the film awards ceremony was carried out according to the usual norm (nominations, film scenes, thank you speeches, musical performances linked to the nominated films). Each category was introduced by a different actor, but some actors introduced two categories. Some awarded were not present. It was not unusual even for the last year's awards (job duties, etc.), but this year their absence was mainly associated with a coronavirus (compulsory quarantine or inability to return home). In this context, there was also mentioned a positive reason for being absent (restarting film production after releasing the measures). References to the current situation and its impact on cultural life were also present in the opening scenes of the actors (Juraj Bača talking about a negative and inappropriate reaction to promoted information about dissatisfied people working in the cultural sector), but also in thank you speeches (e.g. Marko Škop calls for attention). However, most of the speakers did not explicitly mention the current pandemic situation, but they tried to draw attention to the professions of the nominees.

The moderator repeatedly mentioned the theme during occasional entries, for example when he pointed out the problem of identifying people, who were wearing face masks, using the principle of a teasing advertising text: “We'll see, maybe those faces will be revealed during the evening. It is necessary to keep watching.”<sup>18</sup> In other parts as well, the moderator indicated the importance of solving complex societal problems, cases and at the same time the winners pointed out the need to thematize and cinematize taboo areas and other important topics (such as environmental science, science, research, or human rights), as well as shortcomings in the cultural sector (e.g. animated works are appreciated in foreign forums, but do not get enough space on TV broadcasting). A stable part of the gala evening is a commemoration of the filmmakers, who passed away in the previous year. This section also began with current information about the death of the Czech filmmaker Jiří Menzel and his Oscar-winning film *Ostro sledované vlaky* mentioned as part of historical events. Vanda Hrycová reflected the most current issues at the beginning of the last award ceremony (best feature film). She drew attention to the rough times for the culture and at the same time its important role for the audiences (makes life more pleasant, helps escape from worries, etc.), but also the possibility of watching films online. At the end of the evening, the moderator obligatorily thanked the sponsors, partners, as well as the audience and functionally used the message of the awarded film: “Nech je svetlo!”. It can also be associated with the element of emotionality. If we look at the analysis from the perspective of the application of the crisis management theory, even in this case, we can reflect on a significant application of elements of emotionality, as well as the incorporation of new elements.

## Conclusion

If we were to summarize the overall impact and changes in television production affected by the pandemic situation in Slovakia and on a global scale, we would probably find very few currently produced original titles that would not reflect the topic at all. Regarding

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<sup>18</sup> *Slnko v sieti*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-20]. Available at: <<https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/16242/240658>>.

the programming theory, the topic of coronavirus has become a media event. In this context, J. Rusnák<sup>19</sup> considers the disruption of programme syntax and the “disruptive reality” that media events bring to the programme. This remark has been also applied in the case of the analysed commercials, educational sessions, as well as the creation of a live broadcast. At the same time, new opportunities have gradually arisen to incorporate possibilities into the production of online programmes. It has been functionally used by sports broadcasts (for example, the live audience was replaced by monitor screens with fans), as well as cultural mass events changing the real environment for online or incorporating selected parts into television. These include recordings of theatre performances, various exhibitions from galleries, as well as screenings of films from cinemas and festivals (an example is the online and television broadcast from the international festival of animated films for children *Biennial of Animation Bratislava*). A new format using current issues has been also introduced by the public television RTVS. The title *Pumpa*<sup>20</sup> has been included in the broadcast since September 2002. It reflects on the events of the previous week and is a hybrid format with elements of sketch, reality TV, series and other formats. We assume that television creators will continue to produce texts of various genres and formats in the coming period, which will record to a certain extent the topic of the coronavirus spreads and its causes or consequences for society at various levels.

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<sup>19</sup> See also: RUSNÁK, J.: *Nové trendy v programovaní elektronických médií*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej Univerzity, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> *Pumpa*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://www.rtvsk.sk/televizia/archiv/16350/243123>>.



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## PERCEPTION OF PACKAGE FREE SHOPS AS A PART OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES IMPLEMENTATION BY GENERATIONS X AND Y

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### Abstract

The sustainability is one of the most discussed problems nowadays. To make the world more sustainable participation and cooperation of all market subjects (state, businesses and consumers) is required. New economic model – circular economy is a concept how to achieve goals of the sustainability. Circular economy and its main principles are based on the idea that all material and product flows can be returned to the production cycle (after they have been used) to become new sources for production and service provision. In ideal scenery the waste would not be produced anymore. The aim of the paper is to present results of primary research focused on consumers' perception (generation X and Y) of package free shops as a part of the circular economy. Package free shops are examples of good circular economy principles implementation into the business practice. The object of the research was marketing communication of package free shops and activities organized by them with the aim to support consumer purchasing in package free shops. The Covid-19 pandemic has had numerous consequences for our day-to-day life, package free shopping too. In the paper are presented some impacts of the pandemic on the circular economy principles implementation with the implication for the package free shops too.

### Key words:

Circular Economy. Consumers' Perception. Covid Pandemic. Generations. Marketing Tools. Package Free Shop.

### Introduction

Days we live in now are characterised by turbulent and paradigmatic changes. Humanity has made a huge progress in the way of living. The negative side is that with economical and technical growth we need to use more natural resources, which are, unfortunately, limited. With prosperity, problems with the environment has started. Since the humanity is getting wiser and scientific and technological progress creates many opportunities, circular economy has been created. New economic model with potential to ensure balance between economic growth and environment. However, opinions of scientists and specialists are different and some of them declare that economic growth will always cause harmful effects on the environment, many of them believe in potential of circularity. There are already states implementing its principles into the national economic system. Success of circular economy strongly depends on engagement and cooperation of all market subject. It is a paradigmatic change of how economy works and is different from current linear system. Among other fundamental changes in economic system, role of the consumer is changing a lot. Consumers need to change their thinking, buying habits and life-style in general. In the context of circular economy, zero-waste philosophy has started to spread between consumers, what motivated companies to create new business models – package free shops. Shops where consumers can buy food or other products without package. However, the new way of shopping requires new habits (bringing own package, planning purchase etc.) and the attitude of consumers is questionable. No packaging shopping maybe requires additional time and effort but it brings an economic and environmental savings as a reward. The fact is, not every person or group of people with similar thinking, attitudes etc. (generation) will have same attitude to new trend, even more if it requires something additional from consumer. In addition, the restrictions to combat the COVID-19 virus has strongly and in different ways influenced consumers' purchasing behaviour. In the outlined context, the paper focuses on the selected aspects of package free purchasing. The aim is to present research results about package free shops perception of selected generations – X and Y. Some recommendations for package free shops in view of ongoing Covid-pandemic are indicated.

## 1 Theoretical Background

Nowadays, the sustainability is one of the most discussed topics. New economic model – circular economy – is considered as a solution for making world more sustainable for future generations. It is a system analysing impact on the environment, options of reusing and options of minimum waste generation in the first phases of product creation. Consumers and companies are aware about the fact that some of the sources are becoming valuable because of their decreasing amount. They understand the need of responsible attitude. Everyone should be interested in protection of the environment and take responsibility for future of the planet. However, current global problem is that people consume without any limitation. The result is excessive amount of waste, depletion of Earth's resources and other related negative impacts. United Nations (UN) consider the topic of circular economy and waste management as a very important and requires same attitude from states<sup>1</sup>. UN encourage governments to consider waste management as an urgent and necessary public service with the aim to minimize potential secondary impacts on the health of the population and environment. Organisation also reacts on pandemic expansion of COVID-19. Wrong manipulation with medical and other waste is perceived as one of the threats in the time of pandemic. Safe manipulation with waste from households is, in this context, very important because of used mask and gloves, which can easily end up in communal waste.

New trend in shopping – package free shops – is following circular economy principles. In 1970 has begun discussion about the circular economy, in context with industrial ecology<sup>2</sup>. That was the time when experts and specialists has started to understand the need of linear system modification to sustainable system. Concept itself and the importance of the term has been changing with changes in the environment. Circular economy is a strategy with the aim to create and form healthy and functional relationship between society and nature. It is about perfect closed loops of materials in long term intervals. The main principles of circular economy are based on the idea that all materials and products should return to production cycle after they have been used, so they become resources for production and service provision. The ideal scenery is that waste will not be produced anymore<sup>3</sup>. According to one of the well-known foundations engaged in circular economy, Ellen MacArthur Foundation a circular economy is based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems<sup>4, 5</sup>. Ministry of Environment<sup>6</sup> states the aim of circular economy to maintain material and product values as long as possible (with intention to minimize waste and use of new natural resources). In the end of the product life cycle there is no waste (which would be dumped) but there is source for new

<sup>1</sup> Covid 19 – Európa sa čoraz viac zaoberá odpadom. Ako je na tom Slovensko?. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.ewia.sk/covid-19-europa-sa-coraz-viac-zaobera-odpadom-ako-je-na-tom-slovensko/>>.

<sup>2</sup> PRESTON, F.: *A global redesign? Shaping the circular economy*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012. [online]. [2020-10-19]. Available at: <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2012/03/global-redesign-shaping-circular-economy>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Cirkulárna ekonomika*. [online]. [2020-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.inci.sk/cirkularna-ekonomika>>.

<sup>4</sup> DENG, H., KENDALL, A., WINANS, K.: The history and current applications of the circular economy concept. In *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 2017, Vol. 68, No. 1, p. 826.

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<sup>6</sup> *Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030*. 2019. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <[https://www.minzp.sk/files/iep/greener\\_slovakia-strategy\\_of\\_the\\_environmental\\_policy\\_of\\_the\\_slovak\\_republic\\_until\\_2030.pdf](https://www.minzp.sk/files/iep/greener_slovakia-strategy_of_the_environmental_policy_of_the_slovak_republic_until_2030.pdf)>.

value creation. According to Mugge<sup>7</sup> circular economy model in practice should build competitiveness of states, create stable economic growth and healthy environment. It is characteristic by closed loops of materials and energy in accordance with natural and human resources, science and technology. In Rybansky and Janos<sup>8</sup> opinions the main priority of circular economy is to achieve the greatest possible savings and most efficient use of natural resources (which are limited), most efficient manufacture of products with low resource consumption and minimum emissions. Prevention and reduction of waste are integral part.

Circular economy is based on 3R principles. *Principle of reduction* is about economic reorientation on scientific and technological progress and innovations with intention to use resources most effectively while lowest possible consumption of raw materials and energy. It is about preference of lighter and smaller products, simple and practical packaging etc. Yang et al.<sup>9</sup> state that reduction principle also includes supply of low carbon products and products which are saving energy in households (consumption of water, electricity, production of waste). *Reuse principle* is about reuse of product from someone else. For example, consumers can buy textile products in second-hand stores and various sale events. If there is no option for reusing the product they should be recyclable or degradable. *Recycling principle* means that product in the end of their life cycle can be used as a new source, production inputs. Alatervo<sup>10</sup> declares 3 more principles which can be understand from the consumers' point of view. First, *refuse principle* is about refusing everything what we don't really need, because in most of the cases we don't even use these products so we actually produce another waste. *Replace principle* is about changing our buying habits and trying to prioritize local producers, ecological products and make sustainable choices. Last but not least, *rethink principle* means in every buying decision making process we deeply reconsider if our final choice is the best, we rethink not only our buying habits but the whole life style and we implement environmental standard into daily thinking, behaviour and being.

Package free shop is a special type of store where consumer can buy non-packaged products into own package (glass jar, paper bag, cloth bag, dose or container). Consumers need to make some preparation for purchase – bring their own packages (mentioned above), in which they will take away purchased products. In the shop, products are in big jar glasses from which they can be sprinkled, scooped or poured into customer's packaging. Customers have an option to buy groceries or another non-packaged products or pour in cosmetics or detergents. If customer didn't bring own package some shops have paper bags and jar glasses for sale. Supply of goods is not as diversified as in traditional shops. In package free shops there are approximately 300-1500 products (depends on the size of shop). Main part of package free shops combines well-tried and sustainable retail concept based on organic and regional sources. Conceptual and organizational business model is primarily focused on effectiveness. Through this business model consumer can buy as much as he needs without any marketing tricks so it prevents food wasting and excessive consuming. For this model is characteristic consumer package waste prevention. It recreates traditional way of

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<sup>7</sup> MUGGE, R.: Product design and Consumer Behaviour in a Circular Economy. In *Sustainability*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 3704. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/10/3704/htm>>.

<sup>8</sup> RYBANSKÝ, R., JÁNOŠ, D.: Spotrebiteľské správanie v kruhovej ekonomike. In JURIŠOVÁ, V., KLEMENTIS, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2017: Onlinové pravidlá*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> YANG, Q. Z., ZHOU, J., XU, K.: A 3R Implementation Framework to Enable Circular Consumption in Community. In *International Journal of Environmental Science and Development*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 217-221. [online]. [2020-09-05]. Available at: <<http://www.ijesd.org/papers/481-CD0156.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> ALATERVO, S. J.: *The 6 Rs: making a sustainable impact*. [online]. [2020-01-22]. Available at: <<https://prosperouswaydown.com/6rs-making-sustainable-impact/>>.

understanding healthy life style through the quality products offered by friendly price and what is important with lower negative impact on the environment<sup>11</sup>. Package free shopping is an example of an increasingly common pro-environmental behavioural change initiative focusing on removing unsustainable objects rather than “greening” existing products and objects. Like many other forms of sustainable consumption, package free shopping requires consumers to rethink their way of shopping, to acquire new competencies, to break old habits and to establish new ones, often forsaking some of the convenience, that comes with normal shopping<sup>12</sup>.

All consumption is location and time bound. Consumers develop habits over time about what to consume, when and where. This is not limited to consumption, it is also true of shopping, searching for information and post consumption waste disposal. This is especially true today, during the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic has upended almost every daily routine in our lives. With lockdown and social distancing, consumers’ choice of the place to shop is restricted. Working, schooling and shopping all have shifted and localized at home. At the same time, there is more time flexibility as consumers do not have to follow schedules planned for going to work or to school or to shop or to consume<sup>13</sup>. Health and safety concerns around surface touching during the Covid-19 lockdown have had significant implications, almost all negative, for reuse and reduction practices. The grocery stores no longer accept reusable containers from customers. Retail stores have shifted away from reusable container and cup options that they had introduced relatively recently and back to single use containers<sup>14</sup>. Kalina and Tilley<sup>15</sup> affirm how Covid-19 has led to a widespread resurgence in the use of single-use products and wonder whether this shift can be reversed. Some grocery stores are using extra packaging to reduce handling of produce and in household significant increase the packaging from online ordering for goods and meals.

## 2 Data and Material

The main aim of the paper is to present research results about package free shops perception of selected generations. In the first part, we summarize the theoretical basis of the problem, based on the analysis of available literary sources from the field of circular economy and its principles. After the theoretical definition of the issue, we present the selected results of the primary research focused on package free shops perception of respondents from selected generations. We analysed selected questions – reasons of shopping in package free shops, perception of marketing tools used by them and consumers’ engagement in this shops’ voluntary activities. Empirical data was obtained through our own questionnaire survey, which was focused on examining respondents’ perception of selected no packaging shopping

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<sup>11</sup> BEITZEN-HEINEKE, E. F., BALTA-OZKAN, N., REEFKE, H.: The prospects of zero-packing grocery stores to improve the social and environmental impacts of the food supply chain. In *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 2017, Vol. 140, No. 3, p. 1531.

<sup>12</sup> FUENTES, Ch., ENARSSON, P., KRISTOFFERSSON, L.: Unpacking package free shopping: Alternative retailing and the reinvention of the practice of shopping. In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2019, Vol. 50, No. 1, p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> 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. 280.

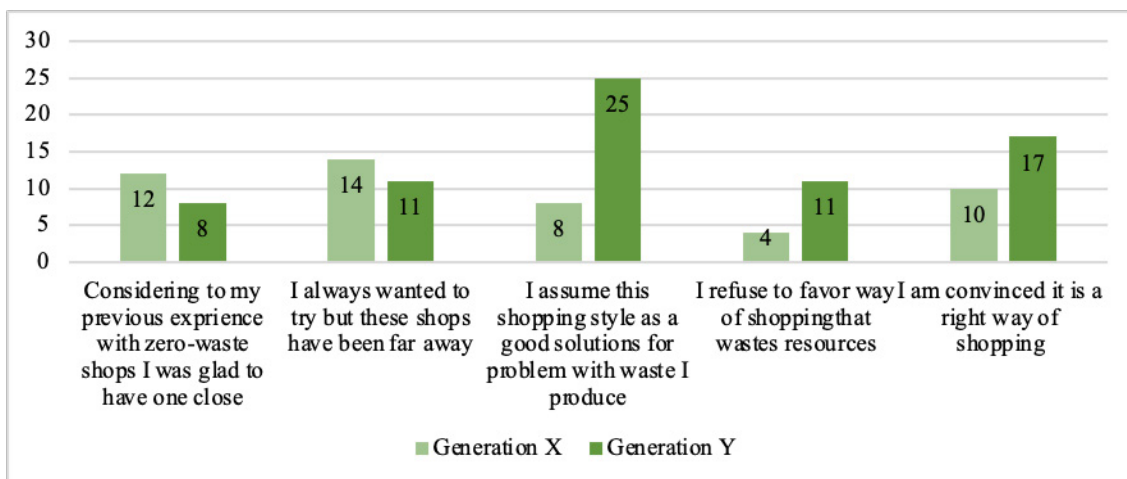
<sup>14</sup> IKIZ, E., MACLAREN, V. W., ALFRED, E., SIVANESAN, S.: Impact of COVID-19 on household waste flows, diversion and reuse: The case of multi-residential buildings in Toronto, Canada. In *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, 2021, Vol. 164, No. 1, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> KALINA, M., TILLEY, E.: „This is our next problem“: cleaning up from the covid-19 response. In *Waste Manage*, 2020, Vol. 108, No. 1, p. 202.

aspects. We conducted the survey in March-April 2020 in the form of personal interviews with respondents in selected shops. Selected consumers of both generations X and Y, different ages, education, income and from different regions of Slovakia were the subject of the survey. The selection of respondents was random. A total size of sample was 80 respondents, of whom 40 was from generation X and 40 from generation Y. We consider the size of our sample to be relevant with respect to the average amount of consumers shopping in package free shops. In both groups prevailed women who are primarily responsible for all household purchases so they visit package free shops more often. In generation X the most respondents were employees, in generation Y most respondents were students.

### 3 Results and Discussion

In the following part we present selected results of the circular economy principles implementation research, specifically the results about customers' perceptions of package free shops (only customers of these shops were asked). Results obtained from respondents of generation X and generation Y were compared. We were interested in reasons why consumers are shopping in package free shops, how the consumers perceive marketing communication of this shops, how they engage in no packaging shops' activities. In comparison of package free shops' consumer reasons we noticed some differences. Results are shown in Chart 1.



**Chart 1: Reasons why respondents purchase in package free shops**

Source: Own processing

Another part of the questionnaire was focused on consumers' satisfaction with marketing mix tools used by shops. Based on the results, we state following: consumers are satisfied with product. In this context we asked about quality of products (36 answers in generation X; 38 in generation Y) and ecological aspect in the process of production (35X; 36Y, satisfied + more satisfied than unsatisfied). Price is better perceived by the generation X. Respondents from generation Y expressed discontent with price (4 respondents) and price discounts (8 respondents). From generation X had same opinion only 4 and 2 respondents. Generation Y is less satisfied with distribution too. Package free shops prefer social media in their marketing communication. Respondents of generation X think the most valuable is received information, but respondents of generation Y have some reservations. However, they are using social media daily, in their opinion there is some lack in communication methods and creativity. The staff was positively rated by both generations, in generation Y absolute satisfaction was prevailed. Selected processes (weighing, package offering) had positive rank. According to generation X physical evidence has some lack (design, equipment and

furnishing), in contrary younger respondents had no reservations to this marketing tool. Based on the results we can state that generation X has information about package free shops from social media and from word of mouth marketing. This confirms fact that generation X hasn't grown up with modern technologies but these people are able to use them in daily life<sup>16</sup>. Relationship between generation Y and modern technologies is completely different. For these people social media are in the first place. Package free shops in a separate research confirmed the same: the most used communication tools are posts on social media sites, web site of shop and education in school. Important part of the package free shops' philosophy are activities organized voluntarily. More than half of the respondents (in both generations) claimed that they are participating in various activities organized by shops. Specifically, the most favourite are charity activities and workshops where customers can try different hand-made techniques and make some new products for themselves. Other activities, such as tasting events, various forms of education and swap events are less favourite (Table 1). Respondents from generation Y are even participating in more activities in contrary with generation X which was unfamiliar with some of them.

**Table 1: Activities of package free shops preferred by respondents**

Activity	Generation X	Generation Y
Workshops ( <i>"How to make" Bee's Wax Cloth Roll, Cloth Bags, Liquid soap, Laundry detergent...</i> )	9	13
Products tasting	8	7
Zero-waste conferences participation	8	10
Lectures	4	11
Education in kindergartens, schools	2	3
Swap events (exchange of clothes and things)	5	10
Charity	12	14

Source: Own processing

Shops stated that most of these activities are organized in cooperation with organizations for example civic associations and schools. When partners of package free shop provide room free of charge for workshops or lectures, synergy effect is the positive result. Since working places of these organizations or institutions are larger more people could participate. Respondents from generation X are happy to get involved in these activities but they don't have enough time and courage to help with organization. Approximately quarter of respondents (generation Y) would be willing to help package free shops when organizing bigger events. In the following Table 2 there are benefits of package free shops according to respondents' opinion. The most significant are quality of products, support of local producers and environmental responsibility of the shop. The answers from both generations are similar.

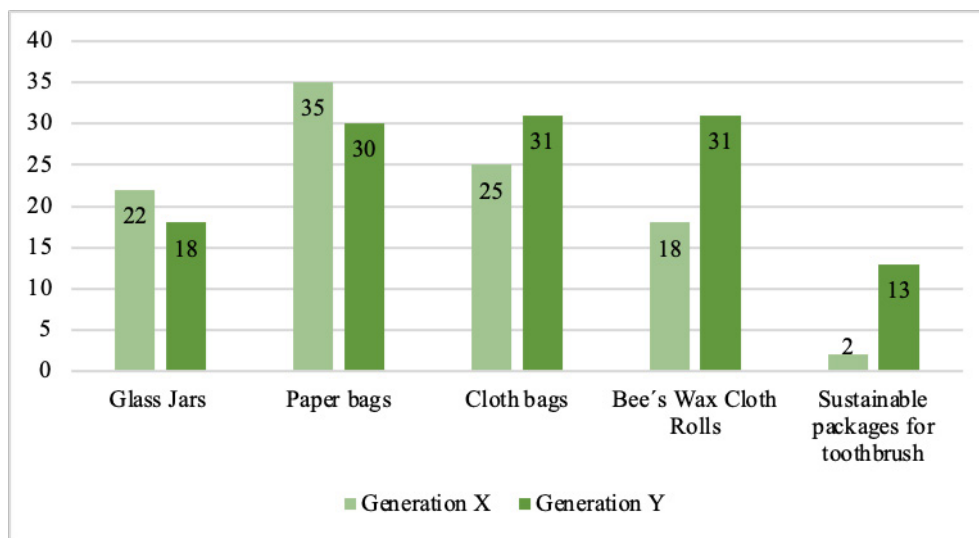
**Table 2: Benefits of package free shops according to respondents' opinion**

Benefits	Generation X	Generation Y
Sale of food by weight	11	20
Quality of products	26	20
Support of local producers	20	28
Information about new products	5	10
Corporate responsibility	12	10
Environmental focus of store	16	25
Support of healthy life style	12	11

Source: Own processing

<sup>16</sup> KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., ČÁBYOVÁ, L.: Effect of Marketing Communication on Consumer Preferences and Purchasing Decisions. In *AD ALTA – Journal Of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 152.

Successful implementation of circular economy principles is based on connection of activities and cooperation between state, companies and consumers. One of the options how to engage consumers into the model is higher activity within education about the concept, its main ideas and principles. Some of the respondents from generation X has barriers in this part of engagement. Only half of them told about shopping in package free shops to their family or friends. In comparison respondents from generation Y are proud on their own shopping habits so they tell about this shops to others and indirectly support them. Generation X is more focused on buying bread and all kinds of pastry from local producers or food from farmers. Generation Y is trying to make their own products at home. These respondents buy cosmetic goods without package too. Generation X is separating waste but doesn't consider this activity as an important. Different attitude has generation Y. They are more precise, half of our respondents from this generation is separating all the waste, another half is at least trying to. The results are very similar in attitude to composting.



**Chart 2: Packaging used by respondents**

Source: Own processing

Both generations in our survey are using all kinds of packages offered in package free shops. Generation Y uses more bee's wax cloth rolls and cloth bags, generation X uses more paper bags and glass jars (Chart 2). Most of the customers bring their own packages. Paper bags are usually charged (they cost very low price) with the aim to motivate customers bring their own packages. The lockdown and social distancing to combat the Covid virus generated disruptions on consumer behaviour – existing habits are discarded and new ways to consume are invented. The pandemic has disrupted a lot of practices that were moving people towards higher levels of waste diversion and waste minimizing. After a certain period, behaviour change achieved with the intervention designed to shift households towards more environmentally responsible behaviour, unfortunately could be returned to the original less sustainable alternative. Package free shops also have significant restrictions. The opportunities to reduce waste when grocery shopping by bringing reusable bags has also changed. The shoppers were asked not use reusable packaging because of the risk of virus contamination. The Covid lockdown is also increasing consumption of new products, because used-items shops are closed and typically don't have an online presence.

As pandemic has forced most people to spend more time at home, they have adopted several new technologies and their applications. Consumers has not had a chance to visit shops and shopping centres and therefore they have started shopping online. On the other side,



with online deliveries also on the rise due to safety concerns with in-person shopping, it can be noted, that people sometimes receive “substitutes” in their order that cannot use or they don’t like (with the final result – more waste). Stores are being forced to come home, to their customers. This applies on the package free shops as well. The recommendation for them is to develop online platform and enable to sale products in this way, with emphasis on recyclability of packaging material and waste minimising. One of the fastest growing communication areas is social media marketing and influencer marketing. Based on the research results, package free shops prefer social media in their marketing communication. It is the best possibility to present their products portfolio and organise educational and DIY activities, such as webinars and online workshops. Impact of digital technology on consumer behaviour is massive in scale and pervasive in consumer’s daily life and package free shops can take advantage of this too.

## Conclusion

In the paper, we analysed consumers’ perception of package free shops with the focus on generation X and generation Y comparison. According to results, we can state there are not significant differences but attitudes of respondents from generation Y are more positive. Satisfaction of all respondents with marketing communication of package free shops is overall high. For communication and presentation, this shops mainly use social media sites and web sites, what is appreciated by the consumers. As main benefits of no packaging sale are, in perception of respondents, quality of products, local producers support and environmental focus of store. If the interest in package free shopping and environmentally responsible behaviour will be only one of the actual trends or it will become new, responsible and sustainable life-style, only future will show. The answer is in companies’ and customers’ attitude. It can be assumed that part of them will lose their interest in no packaging shopping and they will revive old buying or business habits. The reason can be environmental awareness, which is still very low. At present the global pandemic and related doubts about health safety of this shopping style can be taken into account as well.

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## CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN THE COVID ERA

*Hana Pravdová – Andrea Imrecze*

### Abstract

This study is concerned with the issue of crisis communication in the period of the first and second wave of viral infection known as COVID19. The aim of the authors, based on a comparative analysis, is to define fundamental mistakes, made by the leaders of the executive, in communicating decisions and recommendations to citizens. The authors generalize the knowledge from the theory of communication, marketing communication and generally valid principles applied in crisis communication, intending to point out the importance of their observance. They compare the defined principles with the public communication of the two Slovak prime ministers during the outbreak of the pandemic and its development from March to October 2020. They conclude that especially in the second wave of COVID 19, the communication of an executive leader significantly deviated from the standard procedures applied in the context of the institution's crisis communication with the general public.

### Key words:

Communication Practices. Communication Principles. Covid 19. Crisis Communication. Executive.

### Introduction

There is no doubt that the emergence of a significant marketing and communication tool- Public relations (PR) and later the Media relations (MR), is purely pragmatic and has a clear goal. The authors agree on the fundamental premise that the role of PR and MR is to create an optimal platform of communication practices in the mutual relationship of all subjects involved, institutions - media - recipients.<sup>1</sup> However, experience also indicates crises when marketing strategists reach for proven communication methods. The term crisis communication covers a whole range of specialized communication procedures of an organization or institution, especially in unusual situations. They usually contain management's consideration whether a crisis event or negative publicity threatens the stability, security or reputation. In this context, J. Ftopek draws attention to the moment of analysis of the situation. This means that only based on an adequate assessment of the situation do specialists prepare and distribute effective messages to eliminate negative publicity. In other words, they try to minimize the damage that a crisis and improperly chosen communication can cause using appropriately selected procedures and communicated messages.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the empirical observations, synthesized into the various recommendations, cannot be questioned either. Among other things, they claim that effective crisis communication is as important in times of peace. It contributes not only to the smooth running of the organization but also to the whole society. It streamlines diverse processes and changes at all levels of social practices, which ultimately cultivates interpersonal relationships. The company works better on the basis of appropriately chosen communication because it is adequately informed about important events and changes. Published, fundamental starting points of the relevant recommendations are suggesting clear and proven procedures on how to handle crisis communication successfully. They are based on the knowledge that the term crisis means, in particular, an event threatening the reputation of an institution or

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<sup>1</sup> KOTLER, P.: *Marketing – management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2001, p. 46.; SOLOMON, R. M., MARSHALL, W. G., STUARD, W. E.: *Marketing očima světových marketing manažerů*. Brno : Computer Press a. s., 2006, p. 407-409.; FTOREK, J.: *Public relations jako ovlivňování mínění. Jak úspěšně ovlivňovat a nenechat se zmanipulovat*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 16.; FORET, M.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Computer Press, 2006, p. 280-288.; See also: ČÁBYOVÁ, E.: *Marketing a marketingová komunikácia v médiách*. Łódź : Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> FTOREK, J.: *Public relations jako ovlivňování mínění. Jak úspěšně ovlivňovat a nenechat se zmanipulovat*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 16.

a company. In this context, there is also an emphasis on the possibility of weakened relationships among the employees, which could potentially disturb the continuity of a workflow. When such a situation arises, it is essential to establish a dialogue between the company, or organization and the public, as well as the organization and its internal organizational structures. However, this is a multi-step process based on different levels of communication practices. A successful communicator should therefore think about the importance of pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis communication strategies.<sup>3</sup>

The pandemic known as COVID 19 hit the whole world, including Slovakia, unexpectedly, but all the more intensely. In a situation where executives on a planet-wide scale, the World Health Organization (WHO) have had to address fundamental medical issues, severe cracks in communication practices have emerged. In this study, we focus on the form and content of crisis communication from the executive in Slovakia, intending to describe and evaluate their quality level. We assume that the communication practices of leaders differed significantly from the principles applied in crisis communication. Based on a comparative analysis, we define fundamental errors in communicating decisions and recommendations addressed to citizens of the Slovak Republic.

## 1 Prerequisites of an Effective Crisis Communication

It is generally known, from professional literature, that the basic requirements for communication in a crisis are speed, truthfulness, objectivity, openness, hospitality, as well as clearly and unambiguously declared effort to resolve the situation.<sup>4</sup> According to the fundamental claim of the authors,<sup>5</sup> when dealing with communication strategies in crises, it is necessary to rationally consider the event and the state of public awareness and then choose the appropriate form and content of the communication. The published recommendations, concerned with how to manage a crisis in individual steps, point at the continuity of decision-making processes as well as the continuity of procedures.<sup>6</sup> Within the synthesis of published knowledge, it is possible to define the necessary steps and relevant actions. The first, so-called the pre-crisis phase of communication, has a strictly preventive character. The process includes monitoring potential risks, developing strategic manuals in the event of a crisis and, last but not least, selecting and training a team. In the event of a crisis, the team communicates not only on an external but also internal basis. The critical figure within the team is, the spokesperson, who acts as the primary medium between the public and the organization, while effectively recognizing the sensitivity of information without in any way damaging the internal processes in times of a crisis. It is some form of prevention for the crisis to even begin. The second phase of a crisis communication begins in the stage of crisis outbreak. The central goal is the processing of signals and the organization's statement under time pressure as well as correct evaluation of the situation. Based on the nature of the crisis, a team of specialists sets priorities.

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<sup>3</sup> *Crisis Management and Communications*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2007. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications>>.

<sup>4</sup> FORET, M.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Computer Press, 2006, p. 280-281.

<sup>5</sup> KOTLER, P.: *Marketing – management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2001, p. 46.; SOLOMON, R. M., MARSHALL, W. G., STUARD, W. E.: *Marketing očima světových marketing manažerů*. Brno : Computer Press a. s., 2006, p. 407-409.; FTOREK, J.: *Public relations jako ovlivňování mínění. Jak úspěšně ovlivňovat a nenechat se zmanipulovat*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2012, p. 16.; FORET, M.: *Marketingová komunikace*. Prague : Computer Press, 2006, p. 280-288.; See also: ČÁBYOVÁ, E.: *Marketing a marketingová komunikácia v médiách*. Łódź : Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> *Crisis Management and Communications*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2007. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications>>.

These are based on the primary identification of risks while appealing to the company's ethical responsibility towards the public.<sup>7</sup> Part of the second phase is also an analysis of information. This process includes not only information about the event itself but also takes into account the communication possibilities of individual types of media. Evaluating the dominant discourse of public opinion then allows communicators to form a more sensitive opinion. It must take into account the value criteria of the public, i.e. reflect on what the public mostly cares about at the moment. This is an excellent starting point for restoring a possible, damaged reputation of the institution. The last primary task in the second phase is the dissemination of information across the media. Each medium can receive different statement according to the possibilities of the specific platform. In case of social media, it is also essential to emphasize the visual presentation. At the same time, it is possible to simplify the content to adapt it to the hectic world of social networks.

The third phase of communication begins after the crisis, i.e. at a time when the organization is given the space for reflection, analysis and final evaluation of well-handled or failed management of the situation. This is important for preparing the company for the same condition in the future. In the event of a communication failure, it is also crucial to take decisions aimed at the external environment to repair the good name of the institution. This communication strategy will also undoubtedly encourage the self-confidence of its internal staff or external collaborators. There is no doubt that in the current, information age, crisis communication is incredibly important and social networks are the most dominant form of communication. According to a survey by the Statista portal from April 2020, the Internet community consists of almost four billion inhabitants, while the number of social media users reaches 3.81 billion.<sup>8</sup> According to a Pew Research Center survey of 5,107 sites in July 2019, Facebook is the most popular medium for getting news and current information. The survey focuses on residents of the United States, where 52 per cent of the population relies on Facebook.<sup>9</sup> A similar trend can be observed in Western Europe, where the numbers are growing at a similar pace and Slovakia is no exception.<sup>10</sup> The main problem with this phenomenon is the speed with which information is disseminated. Negative news, missteps and disasters are being shared more frequently, and therefore the spread of disinformation is typical. It is precisely these factors, as they are a result of the digitalization of information, that crisis communication postulates to a critical position. As a consequence, crisis communication is becoming more popular amongst companies as well as governments. On the other hand, it requires qualified management of internal communication. This is an essential component of crisis communication, especially at a time when messages fly across the world in a matter of seconds. One of the crucial elements of successful communication during a crisis is the way a leader communicates. He should provide people with the necessary information, communicate measures clearly and intelligibly, maintain peace and balance, and argue patiently and constructively. He should ensure that people have the opportunity to give feedback and respond to the government as well as show people the way out of the situation, despite not having

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<sup>7</sup> Remark by the authors: For example, if it is a life-threatening situation, saving human lives should come first. This means that the public interest must always take precedence over the particular interest in the interest of moral imperatives.

<sup>8</sup> CLEMENT, J.: *Worldwide digital population as of July 2020*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide>>.

<sup>9</sup> SHEARER, E., GRIECO, E.: *Americans Are Wary of the Role Social Media Sites Play in Delivering the News*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.journalism.org/2019/10/02/americans-are-wary-of-the-role-social-media-sites-play-in-delivering-the-news>>.

<sup>10</sup> SUMIDA, N., WALKER, M., MITCHELL, A.: *The role of social media in news*. Released on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.journalism.org/2019/04/23/the-role-of-social-media-in-news>>.

specific information or an unforeseen problem has occurred. He should declare an effort to find a way out, tell the truth and lead by example.

The state executive and state administration bodies have several communication channels at their disposal. Their role is to inform the public, to design and coordinate action in the event of any crisis, including the COVID 19 pandemic. In order to fulfil this responsibility, they have several communication channels at their disposal. Such as, press conferences, briefings, regular information published on the official websites of the institutions, creation of a unique site that covers all relevant information about the crisis and possible measures, posters, billboards in public places, Call Center / Hotline, SMS messages and e-mails to the public, personalized messages etc. They can use a wide range of traditional media - periodicals, radio, television, public electronic media,<sup>11</sup> including media in the Internet environment - news portals, e-magazines, etc. In Slovakia, we can observe a particular specificity in communication with citizens. It is evident that most of the information reaches the addressees via social media. It is in this virtual space that public authorities often publish their statements and opinions, even before official press conferences.

## 2 COVID 19 and Crisis of Communication Practices

It is generally known that the COVID 19 virus was first recorded in late 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The situation was closely monitored by leaders from all over the world, trying to determine how fast it will spread. According to S. Neuman, that was the moment when the first communication error occurred. China wasn't fast enough in informing the world about the extent and infectivity of the viral infection, and subsequently, the World Health Organization underestimated the importance and urgency of prevention. Some world leaders have blamed China and the WHO, especially US President Donald Trump. In September 2020, at the United Nations (UN), he said that although China had cancelled domestic flights to isolate Wuhan and not spread the disease throughout the country, it had not cancelled international flights. According to him, this caused a massive spread of the virus around the world.<sup>12</sup> In Slovakia, the first case appeared on March 6, 2020. Nevertheless, Slovakia was lucky. As the new virus

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<sup>11</sup> Remark by the authors: It is empirically provable that public electronic media (television and radio), the vast majority of Slovaks consider Slovaks to be the primary source of information. This is evidenced by the results of a survey conducted for Cenn Press. For more information, see: *Tri štvrtiny Slovákov veria informáciám z médií, ktoré sledujú*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/1857585-tri-stvrtiny-slovakov-veria-informaciam-z-medii-ktore-sleduju>>; Remark by the authors: In the second order of relevance is the periodical press and the press agency (see also: BUCHLÁKOVÁ, L.: *Slováci pri informovaní o koronavírusu veria najviac slovenským médiám*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.sisp.sk/sk/aktuality/2020/7/2/slovaci-pri-informovani-o-koronaviruse-veria-najviac-slovenskym-mediam>>.), then there are online media, websites of official institutions, with social media accounting for up to 68% of the total audience pie, but their credibility is much lower (see: KOČAN, R.: *Facebook, youtube, instagram. Koľko Slovákov je na sociálnych sieťach?*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.trend.sk/blogy/facebook-youtube-instagram-kolko-slovakov-je-socialnych-sietach>>; HAPÁK, P.: *Sociálne siete na Slovensku: ktoré a koľko majú užívateľov?*. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://marketeris.sk/clanok/socialne-siete-na-slovensku-ktore-a-kolko-maju-uzivatelov>>; BUCHLÁKOVÁ, L.: *Slováci pri informovaní o koronavírusu veria najviac slovenským médiám*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.sisp.sk/sk/aktuality/2020/7/2/slovaci-pri-informovani-o-koronaviruse-veria-najviac-slovenskym-mediam>>.).

<sup>12</sup> NEUMAN, S.: *In U.N. Speech, Trump Blasts China And WHO, Blaming Them For Spread Of COVID-19*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/09/22/915630892/in-u-n-speech-trump-blasts-china-and-who-blaming-them-for-spread-of-covid-19>>.

erupted in full force in Western European countries, especially in Italy, we had the opportunity to observe the course of the pandemic and learn from it. The authorities of our country, therefore acted vigorously and relied on security. For the first time, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic officially informed about the spreading disease around January 27. He convened the Security Council and subsequently, after its meeting at a press conference, announced the citizens that Slovakia did not have a case of infection. Still, all relevant parts of the state were on alert and monitoring the situation.<sup>13</sup> The public received information and calmed down. Slovakia recorded its first confirmed case of COVID on March 19, 2020. The virus was confirmed in a 52-year-old man from the Bratislava region.<sup>14</sup> On the same day, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Peter Pellegrini, convened a press conference at which he gathered the necessary information and then informed the citizens about the risks as well as about the measures against the spread of the disease. He added educational graphics to his profile on how to protect yourself from viral infections effectively. He advised citizens to stay at home and not travel to the then plagued Italy. Cultural and social events have been abolished, and a mandatory quarantine has been introduced for passengers from the so-called Red countries.<sup>15</sup>

On March 11 of the same year, the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency. He explained the situation, provided information he had received from the surrounding countries and gave reasons for why the government decided to take such radical measures. As this happened at a time when there was not enough information worldwide about the new virus and the possibilities of protection, people took this measure, and we became one of the least infected countries in Europe. The Prime Minister regularly informed citizens about the situation on his profile and on social media. He drew their attention to the seriousness of the situation and the need for disciplined protection as well as information from border crossings. He visited them personally, which gave the impression that he is monitoring the case and that the situation is under control. The strategy succeeded according to the public opinion; it brought him second place in polls concerned with ranking credibility of political leaders.<sup>16</sup> On March 17, he presented a newly created website, [www.corona.gov.sk](http://www.corona.gov.sk), mainly concerned with informing the public about the virus. The website collected all of the information, statistics, notices and alerts, as well as the most frequently asked questions of citizens and the answers of experts. Based on our observations, we can say that Peter Pellegrini had a relatively simple situation. He performed and acted during the first weeks of the pandemic, when there was not enough information yet. The public was careful and frightened and therefore, obediently complied with government regulations. People wore face-masks in public spaces and shared their private lives on social media, trying to promote the regulations and set an example. In February, Slovakia had parliamentary elections, which resulted in an exchange of political representatives. Igor Matovič became the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic in March. One of his first

<sup>13</sup> *Slovensko prijíma opatrenia, aby bolo čo najlepšie pripravené na nový koronavírus 2019-ncov*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?view=article&catid=250%3Akoronavirus-2019-ncov&id=4012%3Aslovensko-prijima-opatrenia-aby-bolo-o-najlepie-pripravene-na-novy-koronavirus-2019-ncov&tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default&page=&option=com\\_content&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?view=article&catid=250%3Akoronavirus-2019-ncov&id=4012%3Aslovensko-prijima-opatrenia-aby-bolo-o-najlepie-pripravene-na-novy-koronavirus-2019-ncov&tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default&page=&option=com_content&Itemid=153)>.

<sup>14</sup> *Slovensko zaznamenalo prvý potvrdený prípad ochorenia COVID-19*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4061:slovensko-zaznamenalo-prvy-potvrdeny-pripad-ochorenia-covid-19&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4061:slovensko-zaznamenalo-prvy-potvrdeny-pripad-ochorenia-covid-19&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153)>.

<sup>15</sup> PELLEGRINI, P.: *Ako znížiť riziko nákazy koronavírusu*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/pellegrini.peter/videos/545578129414263>>.

<sup>16</sup> HRÍCH, V., HRÍCHOVÁ, K.: *Dôveryhodnosť politických lídrov*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://ako.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AKO\\_pre\\_TA3\\_Doveryhodnost\\_politickych\\_lidrov.pdf](https://ako.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AKO_pre_TA3_Doveryhodnost_politickych_lidrov.pdf)>.



statements, published on his profile, was that he was going to fight the virus. He communicated his efforts to resolve the shortage of tests and medical equipment on a daily basis. He weaved his comments and posts about the Covid 19 with the Beatles song *The Hard Day with Night* or a famous photo from a government meeting. The image was a shot of his feet in socks, because as he stated, "the crisis staff meeting has been going on for 5 hours". As for electoral preferences, such comments, which aim to show that the prime minister is one of the ordinary citizens, turned out to work. According to the AKO research agency, Igor Matovič<sup>17</sup> was the second most credible politician in April. However, it was perhaps the humorous tone that slowly began to cause the public to alleviate the viral infection.

Since March 16, when schools, preschool facilities, retail and services were closed in Slovakia, voices in the government coalition began calling for the economy to be saved and measures to be relaxed in early April. On their margin, the Prime Minister, in his status, called people with such an opinion, including his own minister, irresponsible. It is clear that such a situation is the first violation of the rules of effective crisis communication. The public began to lose confidence in the government's decisions. Published contradictions and differences of opinion among government officials undermined citizens' certainties because they indicated a possible failure of collaboration. From our point of view, they were a proof of an unsuccessful crisis communication. Prime Minister Matovič began to apply a special way of communicating with citizens, primarily through social media. For example, on April 15, he published an advertisement looking for COVID 19 experts. He stated, "if you have already signed up for the audition, you don't have to send a resume."<sup>18</sup> This was his way of expressing his opinion about the citizens who dared to have a different opinion about the situation. On his profile, he addressed them as "múdrosráči".<sup>19</sup> At present, this term has already become part of a slang, but rather in negative connotations. According to the usual procedures in crisis communication, stigmatizing opponents is not the right method. Another status was published on May 5, where the prime minister responded to people's fear of travelling in specially adapted taxis as a result of the measures,<sup>20</sup> by stating "people are crazy". These communication practices can be identified as a second significant communication mistake, because a leader should communicate clearly and patiently, in a worst-case scenario, at least keep his comment to himself.

From April 21, the government began to slowly relax measures and recover the economy to the so-called normal. The strict measures that were taken brought their result when, on May 9, the prime minister announced on social media "state zero", i.e. no new cases of infection. The new government has shown its ability to deal with this "sickener".<sup>21</sup> At this stage of the situation, it was clear that the gradual relaxation of the measures had its defined phases and was well communicated in advance. However, in the following period, the Prime Minister made serious communication mistakes in relation to the citizens, by which he significantly eased the situation

<sup>17</sup> HŘÍCH, V., HŘÍCHOVÁ, K.: *Dôveryhodnosť politických lídrov*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://ako.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/AKO\\_APRIL-\\_2020-Doveryhodnost\\_politickyh\\_lidrov\\_.pdf](https://ako.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/AKO_APRIL-_2020-Doveryhodnost_politickyh_lidrov_.pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> KRAJČOVIČ, M.: *Igor Matovič má ďalší sarkastický status na Facebooku. V inzeráte hľadá odborníkov na COVID-19 z radov 5 miliónov Slovákov*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://refresher.sk/83423-Igor-Matovic-ma-dalsi-sarkasticky-status-na-Facebooku-V-inzerate-hlada-odbornikov-na-COVID-19-z-radov-5-milionov-Slovakov>>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *Lud'om hrabe,) ...igelit zabije,))*. Released on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10219285385337877&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10219285385337877&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo)>.

<sup>21</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *0 (Nula)...ste skvelí, prosím vytrvajte*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10219320921626262&id=1007115541](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10219320921626262&id=1007115541)>.

and lost public credibility. During July, he published a photo of himself without a face-mask, in a room with several other people, while watching a meeting that took place in Brussels. This earned him a great deal of criticism from citizens as well as the media. In a crisis, a clear rule applies. Non-compliance with the measures by the country's top officials generally leads to a decline in the morale of the population. During the summer, with the beginning of the school year approaching, the Prime Minister began to announce the possible introduction of new measures on social media. He advised children, also in primary education, to wear face-masks for the period of the first two weeks of the school year. His rhetoric explained the importance of this measure.<sup>22</sup> However, not so well handled rhetoric occurred in his status on August 19, "what would we all give to know about those who came from dangerous countries and ignore the obligation to report to the Public Health Office".<sup>23</sup> For a citizen, reading a status in which the prime minister admits that a group of people are knowingly breaking the law and just sighs about it, causes questioning of the certainty that the government has the situation firmly in its hands. Such communication gives the impression that the government is defenceless in non-compliance with its regulations and is unable to impose sanctions against those who do not comply with them.

Another communication misstep occurred on September 14 when the prime minister stated that he is willing to "help the brides", as the Pandemic Commission proposed to ban the participation of more than 30 people on weddings. The prime minister literally wrote: "What can we do? Let's not lie - nobody wears a face-mask at a wedding (I know what I'm talking about). That's why it's a big problem in terms of risk. He then calls on the public to come up with an idea for a possible solution."<sup>24</sup> From a perspective of communication principles in crises, such communication can be described as a cardinal error. The prime minister declassified the authority of experts from the Pandemic Commission and showed people that it is not necessary to think about the infection so seriously. All it takes is for people to come up with something and advise the Prime Minister. In addition, he himself confirmed that he did not comply with the regulation of wearing a face-mask at a wedding, thus giving the public a clear recommendation on how to behave.<sup>25</sup> It was this communication that could have been the key to the public's indifferent attitudes to the measures proposed by the experts.<sup>26</sup> Especially, when a few days later, on September 16, he announced on social media that he was doing everything he could and therefore 100 people at a wedding were allowed. He did not forget to mention that the bride and groom are not obligated to wear a face-mask. We believe that it was these communication practices that contributed to the indifferent perception of the pandemic by the public. This assumption is also indirectly confirmed by a survey by IPSOS. According to which, at the beginning of October, people's confidence in the prime minister and government measures fell, and fears of the contagion dropped significantly.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *Rúška v škole*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online.] [020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10220169793527529&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10220169793527529&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo)>.

<sup>23</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *100....*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online.] [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/10220211588012365>>.

<sup>24</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *Nevesty, chcem vám pomôcť, ale priznávam, že neviem ako presne....*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online.] [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10220405394897416&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10220405394897416&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo)>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Remark by the authors: We are aware that such a statement requires at least a quantitative statistical survey based on a questionnaire. Therefore, we formulate it as an unconfirmed assumption based on the development of the communication situation.

<sup>27</sup> PUDMARČÍK, R.: *Prieskum: Voliči Kotlebu sa cítia vírusom najmenej ohrození a najviac veria hoaxom*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online.] [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.ipsos.com/sk-sk/prieskum-volicikotlebu-sa-citia-virusom-najmenej-ohrozeni-najviac-veria-hoaxom>>.

Ten days later, the prime minister published a status "We ruined it". He accused the citizens of causing an increase in the spread of the infection, by an irresponsible behaviour at a time when he was "fighting for finer rules for weddings, sports and culture" One-third of the public literally shits on the rules and acts as if nothing is happening."<sup>28</sup> Such communication can be described as one of the most significant transgressions against the basic principles of communication in a crisis. Showing the public that the rules are being broken massively is not motivating; it is destructive. Attacking people is a way of causing more tension in society, which can ultimately lead to a loss of discipline and conscious resistance. Subsequently, the pandemic in Slovakia took on explosive growth, and the Prime Minister radically changed his rhetoric. He emphasized the seriousness of the situation and the need for following the rules. He was trying to present hope to the citizens and a vision of defeating the viral infection. However, as early as October 11 of the same year, the public was already a witness to live broadcast of the conflict between the Prime Minister and the Minister of His Government Richard Sulík.<sup>29</sup> He left the meeting of the pandemic commission, stating that the decision to close restaurants and other services and the so-called lockdown, is made without the necessary data and may damage the Slovak economy significantly. The numbers of those infected have been, for a long time, presented incomprehensibly and were hard to interpret, which was also continually suggested by the experts.<sup>30</sup> Prime Minister's reaction to Richard Sulík's opinion was immediate. He described a member of his government as a man without an EQ and stated that his actions are irresponsible, inhuman and he went as far as comparing him to Marián Kotleba.<sup>31</sup> We presume that in accordance with communication rules, in such situation, he should have somewhat patiently dispelled all doubts, raised by the Minister of Economy, to the public.

## Conclusion

According to an October edition of a survey concerned with the credibility of government members, by the AKO agency. Prime Minister fell to 13th place, which is his worst result so far.<sup>32</sup> Based on the analysis of crisis communication under his leadership, we can presume that this was caused by a clear fact, which is the absence of implementation of the principles of crisis communication. Applying a humorous tone reduces the seriousness of the situation and blunts the vigilance of the population. Verbal attacks on people with different opinions, inconsistencies of opinion in the ranks of government officials undermined citizens' confidence in the decisions of the executive and clearly pointed to the failure of crisis communication. The apparent communication shortcomings were seen in unnecessary, emotionally subdued comments, expressive statements, and a lack of patience when explaining the reasons behind the government's decisions. Ignoring one's own decisions by not wearing a face-mask at a public

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<sup>28</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *Pokazili sme si to...419*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10220489369796736&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10220489369796736&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo)>.

<sup>29</sup> MATOVIČ, I.: *Milan to VÝBORNE zhrnul*:. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10220612192387224&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10220612192387224&id=1007115541&sfnsn=mo)>.

<sup>30</sup> HRUBÁ, Z.: *Nahrávajú Krajniak s Matovičom konšpirátorom? Experti spochybňujú dáta o počte nakazených s COVID-19*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.webnoviny.sk/vzdravotnictve/nahravaju-krajniak-s-matovicom-konspiratorom-experti-spochybnuju-data-o-pocte-nakazenych-s-covid-19>>.

<sup>31</sup> *Matovič si opäť neodpustil kritický status na Sulíka. Jeho správanie sa nepáčilo Krajniakovi ani Naďovi*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[webnoviny.sk/matovic-si-opat-neodpustil-kriticky-status-hovori-o-politikoch-s-eq-o-sulik-zas-o-tliachaninach/](https://www.webnoviny.sk/matovic-si-opat-neodpustil-kriticky-status-hovori-o-politikoch-s-eq-o-sulik-zas-o-tliachaninach/)>.

<sup>32</sup> BLAŠKO, P.: *Prieskum: Pellegriniho Hlas prvýkrát predbehol OLaNO, výrazne rastie SaS*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/2229557-prieskum-pellegriniho-hlas-prvykrat-predbehol-olano-vyrazne-rastie-sas>>.

event can be considered another severe misstep when it comes to the basic principles of crisis communication. Naturally, the public reacts very sensitively to the behaviour of leaders in unusual and extreme situations. Demonstration of the inability to intervene vigorously and sanction those who violate regulations, the ambiguity of decisions, addressing the public with a call for help to resolve the situation, all of this points to the ignorance of fundamental principles and methods of crisis communication and also underlines the personal insufficiency of a communicating leader, in a crisis. Managing crisis communication requires balance, a rational approach, clear argumentation, being an example, comprehensible messages and instructions. We note that the present study dealt only with the observance of the fundamental principles of communication in a crisis by Slovak prime ministers from the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic to the outbreak of its second wave in the autumn of 2020. The aim of this study wasn't an analysis of the crisis management's quality nor the effect of communication practices, by the executive representatives, on the public.

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## BETTER UNDERSTANDING COVID-19 THROUGH DATA VISUALIZATION

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### Abstract

Media coverage of Covid-19 currently dominates all news channels. Editorial offices around the world are using the availability of data to help clarify the situation regarding the pandemic. In particular, they provide information on the number of infected, cured, new cases or the current spread of the virus in each area. Data visualizations and various graphs or statistics have become part of media production. In the first half of the paper, we define the term data visualization. What is its contribution to the understanding of data and context. Subsequently, the paper offers a look at data portals that use data visualizations and the data from the Covid-19 pandemic itself. It is these data that have an irreplaceable role to play in clarifying the pandemic situation, helping individual governments to fight the coronavirus. The article explains how publicly available data can predict the occurrence of the virus, its spread, but especially its future behavior. The study also includes examples of data visualization focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Key words:

Covid-19. Data Visualization. Eurostat. Graphs.

### Introduction

The World Health Organization has declared the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) a pandemic on March 11, 2020, when hundreds of new cases are emerging in China, Italy, Iran and other countries. Currently, during the second wave of the pandemic, thousands of people are infected every day. According to available data, more than 42 million people have already been infected with coronavirus, with 9 million cases still active.<sup>1</sup> Various measures have been taken by countries and international organizations around the world to beat the outbreak of Covid-19, including promoting transparency and public access to disease data. In an effort to protect public health, therefore, media attention is drawn to this issue in the context of its understanding and the provision of up-to-date information on the spread of a pandemic. Media institutions offer several reports and studies a day that monitor the spread and behavior of the virus. Many of these reports have one thing in common. They are based on acquired data, which are transformed into data visualization. Visualizations, whether maps or graphs, play an important role in such public communication. They offer readers an increased informative value, a correct understanding of the situation and at the same time serve as evidence in negation fake news. The individual visualizations offer various temporal and spatial data that help the public to understand the situation and to actively participate in the fight against the pandemic, through social responsibility. The use of data and data visualization to better understand and search for the causes of disease is nothing new. An example is the visualization - a map by John Snow, showing the cholera epidemic in London in 1854. Each line marked on the map indicates the area with the number of deaths from the disease. J. Snow did not have the opportunity to use modern data collection and therefore used public records and direct interviews with patients to identify the outbreak. The visualization pointed out that the source of the disease is a pump on a marked street. The infection spread through contaminated water from the pump. After its removal, the chorea began to recede in the area.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?/>>.

<sup>2</sup> BEGUM, F.: *Mapping disease: John Snow and Cholera*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016. [online]. [2020-09-13]. Available at: <<https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/library/blog/mapping-disease-john-snow-and-cholera/>>.



**Picture 1: Visualization of the occurrence of cholera by J. Snow**

Source: BEGUM, F.: *Mapping disease: John Snow and Cholera*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016. [online]. [2020-09-13]. Available at: <<https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/library/blog/mapping-disease-john-snow-and-cholera/>>.

Snow's point visualization of cholera cases in London's Soho provides an effective example of how data analysis and data visualization can be used to better understand the spread of the disease. Today, Snow's analysis is considered revolutionary not only in the field of epidemiology, but also in the field of data visualization and information. He used the map not only to find out the cause of the infection, but especially to emphasize and explain the outbreak based on the facts. At present, we encounter similar maps on a daily basis in the analysis and spread of coronavirus. With the access of the Internet, we are facing an excess of data that needs to be processed into a clearly understandable form for the recipient. An article from the NYT editorial staff – How the virus got out – presents a great example of how to use the data and clarify the whole situation about the origin and spread of coronavirus.<sup>3</sup> The article offers interactive data, maps and visualizations of how the virus spread from the province of Wuhan to neighboring countries and subsequently the USA. Unlike the map drawn by John Snow, these interactive maps offer us something more. They tell the whole story complete with facts, graphs and visualizations in a new form.

## 1 Data Visualization

From a psychological point of view, it is known that people learn to receive information faster through images than text. Several areas of neuroscience also address the visual perception of information, examining how people respond to image messages. Studies from MIT University have found that the human brain can identify and recognize images in less than 13 milliseconds, which is faster than the blink itself.<sup>4</sup> It has been proven that people remember more than 2,000 images with approximately 90 % accuracy in a reverse memory test. And even after a short

<sup>3</sup> WU, J., CAI, W., WATKINS, D., GLANZ, J.: *How the Virus Got Out*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/22/world/coronavirus-spread.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> TRAFTON, A.: *In the blink of an eye*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://news.mit.edu/2014/in-the-blink-of-an-eye-0116/>>.



break.<sup>5</sup> But it is also important to mention that 90 % of information comes to the brain through visual perception, while visual information alone can process our brain 60 000 times faster than text.<sup>6</sup> With the huge increase in data as a result of digitization and the advent of the Internet, we face an abundance of information every day. We need to filter them to get the necessary and relevant knowledge. Today, with a surplus of data, visual storytelling plays an important role, especially because it can present a data story in a visual format. Designers and programmers can transform numbers, data and information into a relevant form that is information-saturated and at the same time visually attractive.<sup>7</sup> Data visualization is an integral part of modern journalism, which plays a key role in understanding and transforming data into a visual form. In general, we could say that data visualization is the transformation of data or numbers into a graphic form that can attract the attention of the recipient. Data visualization is a separate branch that stands at the crossroads between mathematics, computer science, cognitive psychology and engineering. It covers disciplines that share the principles of visualization, word-to-image transmission, computer graphics, or statistics.<sup>8</sup> Data visualization refers to the art of representing data, in a visual way. It can take the form of graphs, diagrams, maps or other graphic elements, while their visual presentation facilitates understanding. The presentation of data does not have to be only static, it can also be interactive, or in the form of video or animation.<sup>9</sup> In a broader sense, classical display of pie diagrams, columns, lines, and the like can be associated with data visualization. However, the relationships that arise between data and their representations are more complex. For this reason, the opportunity opens up to create new visualizations that not only draw values, but can create new connections. Such data visualizations allow us to monitor current trends, patterns and other development assumptions.<sup>10</sup> Synonyms and terms such as scientific visualization, information visualization (infovision), infographics or visual analysis are often associated with the term data visualization. Many experts use these terms in various ways, and there is often debate about them. In a broader sense, the term data visualization includes any use of graphic or pictorial material that represents data for further investigation, explanation, or communication. Data visualization can also be used in cooperation with modern tools such as augmented reality. This whole process takes place in real time or RT, here and now. We obtain additional information directly in the image, in the captured reality, without delay. These are stored in extensive databases, which we can access via an Internet connection.<sup>11</sup>

Today we encounter data visualization everywhere. It forms a significant and often integral part of today's media. Articles and stories based on data analysis are becoming increasingly popular in our digital environment. These are, for example, printed infographics in magazines, animated graphs on social networks, or online interactive visualizations that are part of news portals. With the increase in the amount of data, it is possible to discover more and more stories that are

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<sup>5</sup> HERVER, R., CONEZIO, J., STANDING, L.: Perception and memory for pictures: Single-trial learning of 2500 visual stimuli. In *Psychonomic Science*, 1970, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 73. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.3758%2F03337426.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> EISENBERG, H.: *Humans Process Visual Data Better*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014. [online]. [2020-11-07]. Available at: <<http://www.t-sciences.com/news/humans-process-visual-data-better/>>.

<sup>7</sup> SCHERMAN, J.: *What is Visual Storytelling? The Growing Trend in Multimedia Design*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/design/blog/visual-storytelling/>>.

<sup>8</sup> TELEA, A.: *Data visualization Principles and practice*. Florida : CRC Press, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> MOMINO, J., SEDKAOUI, S.: *Big data, open data and data development*. London : Wiley, 2016, p. 34.

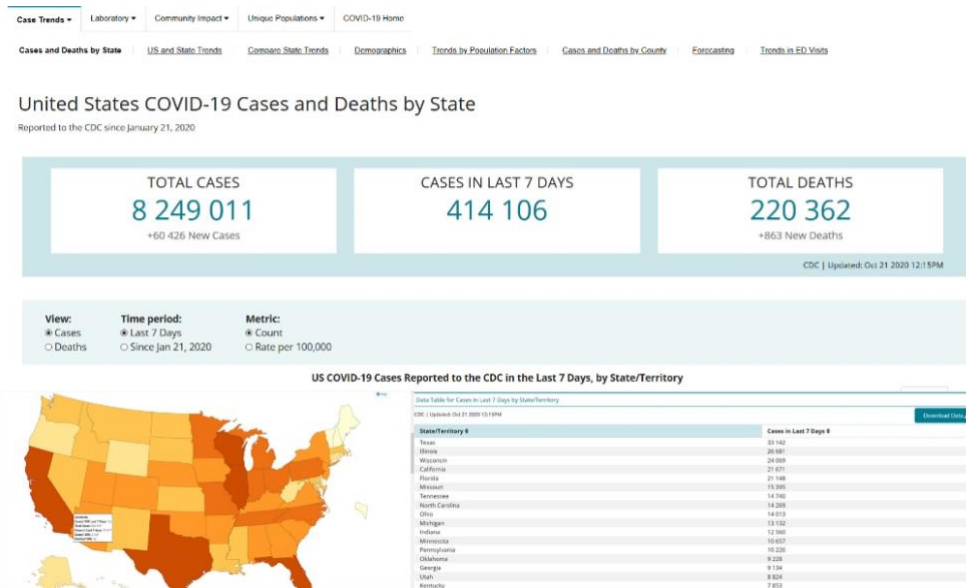
<sup>10</sup> LANKOW, J., RITCHE, J., CROOKS, R.: *Infographics: The Power of Visual Storytelling*. New Jersey : Wiley, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> BLAHÚT, D.: Využitie rozšírenej reality pri vzdelávaní detí. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MENDELOVÁ, D., RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (eds.): *Megatrendy a média 2017: Budúcnosť médií II.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 204.

hidden deep in the data. The data itself in its purely raw form is difficult to understand, it is much easier to understand it through visualization. In addition to standard visualization tools, such as graphs, tables, maps, journalists have begun to use more sophisticated visualizations. More complex, graphically sophisticated, but especially adapted to the specific type of data and the message of the story itself. With the new digital age, there are opportunities to publish individual stories online and engage millions of people who can literally click through a wealth of data through visualization. In summary, data visualization offers us a better understanding of the data we encounter on a daily basis. It has the potential to generate knowledge, identify patterns, or point out trends or the extent of the problem. The power of data visualization is that it can communicate with the recipient in a unique way and clearly illustrate facts and evidence that we can quickly and easily understand. But be careful, bad visualization can create the opposite impression, make false arguments, or mislead the reader.

### **1.1 Data Visualization of the Pandemic and Covid**

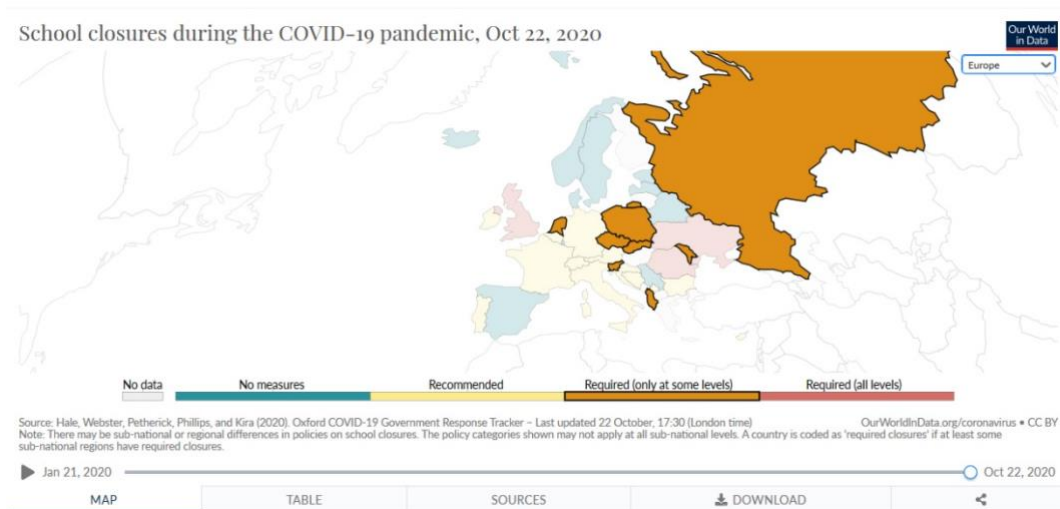
The thematic focus of visualizations is diverse, whether it is the topic of coronavirus, economics, industry, sports or weather. Visualizations can quickly and effectively alert us to various changes. A simple example is a visualization of the weather, the number of precipitation, cloud icons, or an animation of wind movement. Based on these characters, visualizations or icons, we then decide what our day will look like. A second example may be the financial stock market downturn, which indicates whether or not it is appropriate to invest at a given time. For a certain pattern of behavior, a visual message in the form of an image, icon, or visualization of a graph was enough to trigger our perception and connection of the context of how to behave in a given situation and what to expect. The same pattern, or rather the pattern of development, can be found from the data concerning the pandemic. Dozens or even hundreds of data repositories are currently available that offer up-to-date pandemic data. One of these portals is, for example, the American CDC – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which offers aggregate data on covid-19 disease. The organization offers summary data and visualizations about the course of the pandemic. The data obtained are then summarized on the COVIDView subpage, which offers a continuous picture of the spread of the pandemic and its effects. The site includes interactive maps that display individual statistics on the number of infected, cured, or dead. The second type of map shows outbreaks, restaurants, businesses, retirement homes, large protests or other events where the virus has spread tremendously. The data selection is really extensive and also shows the demographic breakdown of the incidence, laboratory statistics, data on community spread, the number of hospitalizations, or other lung diseases. Questionnaires with patients with Covid-19 are also conducted in private laboratories. The data obtained show the most common symptoms of the disease, the age classification of patients, in what activity and at what place they became infected, as well as effective treatments. Data can be selected, compared and, of course, freely downloaded. For all data, their source is clearly stated.



Picture 2: Data visualization from the CovidView portal

Source: *United States COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by State*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <[https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesper100klast7days](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days)>.

A similar portal is Internation SOS, which also offers interactive visualizations in the field of testing, active cases and other statistics. Among other things, it also offers a detailed view of the effectiveness of individual measures. For example, how schools and workplaces are closed in individual countries, how airports are closed and other modes of public transport are closed down. As well as finding contacts in which countries public events are closed, businesses are closed or restrictions are imposed on the country.



Picture 3: Data visualization from the InternationSOS portal

Source: *INTERACTIVE COVID-19 DATA BY LOCATION*. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://pandemic.internationalsos.com/2019-ncov/covid-19-data-visualisation>>.

However, coronavirus visualizations may not only affect the number of infected and the number cured. Covid-19 has triggered a global crisis that affects all areas of our lives. Especially the economy and living standards. For example, a study by A. Sumner entitled Estimates of the impact of Covid-19 on global poverty found, based on available data, that from 420 to 580 million people would be in material need if their income was reduced by 20%. These are mainly

developing countries, where people earn from \$ 1,9 to \$ 5,5 per a day.<sup>12</sup> The effects of a pandemic on the economy and livelihoods can be dramatic in developing countries. Not only because of the economy but especially because of poor living conditions or insufficient health care. For the economy and data on the pandemic, we must also mention the Eurostat data portal. It offers freely available data and visualizations of how inflation, gross domestic product or monthly industrial production is evolving. The portal also offers visualizations and statistics regarding covid and international trade, energy, economic production and unemployment. Through these data and visualizations, individual states, as well as their inhabitants, can prepare for the consequences of a pandemic. At the same time, the European Union has a greater overview of the problems of individual countries, to which it subsequently offers financial compensation for the economic losses caused by the pandemic.



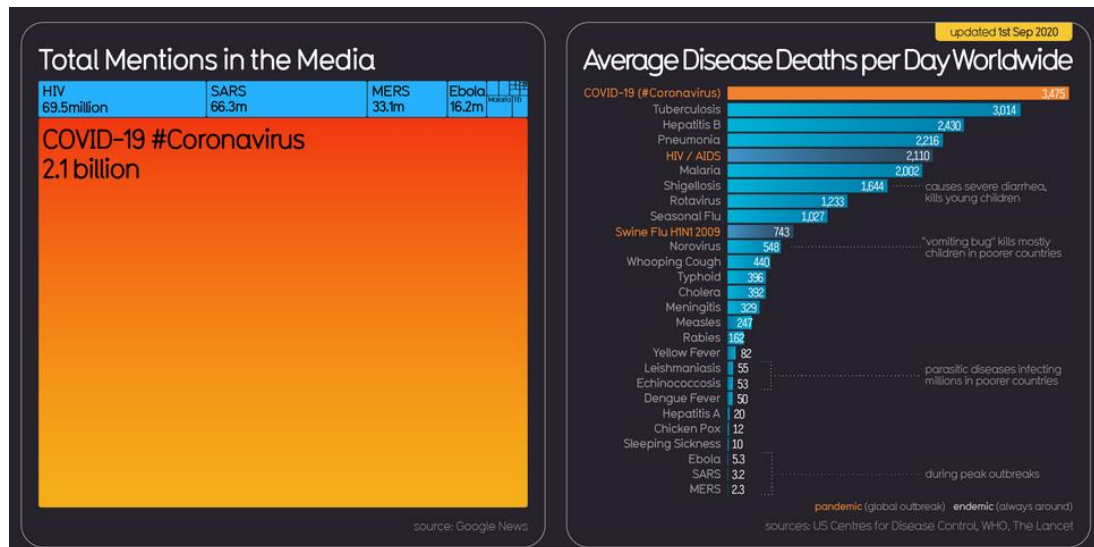
**Picture 4: Data visualization from the Eurostat portal**

Source: *Monthly unemployment rate*. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/covid-19/society-work>>.

The last web portal that we will mention in the article is the Information is beautiful portal.<sup>13</sup> The website presents interesting interactive visualizations and infographics about the number of infected, about infection and fatality rates by country, recommendations of epidemiologists where the virus is most common, the course of the disease, or which age group is most susceptible to the disease. The portal also includes infographics that also offer comparisons of coronavirus with other diseases such as Ebola, MERS, Avian Influenza or a comparison of the number of deaths from Covid and other diseases such as Pneumonia, tuberculosis, HIV or jaundice (HepatitisB). The visualizations also show the incubation period of the virus, its symptoms, examples of protective materials, but also the number of media manifestations that address the issue of Covid.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see: SUMNER, A., HOY, Ch., ORTIZ-JUAREZ, E.: *Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty*. Helsinki : UNU-WIDER, 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <[https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publications/Working-paper/PDF/wp2020-43.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fWwYIy-611uqsRy\\_F1X9STonONAKimtFEMyGFok1chWedugl7O6cX0o4](https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publications/Working-paper/PDF/wp2020-43.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fWwYIy-611uqsRy_F1X9STonONAKimtFEMyGFok1chWedugl7O6cX0o4)>.

<sup>13</sup> *Coronavirus infographic datapack*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/covid-19-coronavirus-infographic-datapack/>>.



**Picture 5: Data visualization from the Information is beautiful portal**

Source: *Coronavirus Infection Trajectories. Which countries are seeing the most new cases?*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/covid-19-coronavirus-infographic-datapack/>>.

## Conclusion

Visualization uses human image perception and can transform a huge amount of information directly into our brain. Subsequently, the brain works as a software that can recognize the visualization and assign relationships and meanings to it. Among other things, visualization also offers space for new questions, ideas, predictions, assumptions or to identify partial problems. It can also point out trends or extreme values that may directly affect the research area. Through visualization, we are able to perceive data in a different light, in which different stories and contexts can be behind a lot of numerical information and data. Data visualization and the data itself are a critical and essential tool in the fight against coronavirus pandemics. Up-to-date data, statistical indicators or other types of data that are relevant to a pandemic can help individual countries to implement measures in time to prevent the collapse of the health system. The collected data can also guide the behavior of communities as well as individuals. How to behave responsibly and prevent the spread of the virus. From the given examples, whether complex interactive maps or simple line graphs, we pointed out how the visualizations can show the critical level of the pandemic, its course, but especially its future development. An ordinary line graph, a curve, can show the number of infected over weeks or months. Government organizations thus have clear evidence of the direction in which the pandemic will develop and what measures need to be taken to stop it. Through visualizations, governments and experts can avoid catastrophic scenarios in time, as was the case during the first wave in Italy. Individual data and visualizations help us to understand the context and severity of the disease. They can also clearly identify the risk factors associated with the disease and its transmission. Infographics and visualizations can illustrate changes in the virus or the course of the disease. Given the individual facts associated with the visual perception of information and the examples we presented in the article, we can assess that the manifestations of data visualization are a great example of how to offer readers clear, verified and up-to-date information in the fight against coronavirus pandemics.

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## CORRELATION BETWEEN CONSUMERS PREFERENCE AND EEG DATA ACROSS POPULATION LEVEL

Michal Pšurný

### Abstract

There is a high demand for new and better methods to predict the success of marketing campaigns and products. One possible way is to use neuroscience data. This study deals with EEG technology in conjunction with predicting consumer preferences using electroencephalography (EEG). To 40 respondents were presented 10 products with different utility while EEG was measuring. The results show that there is a link between the measured EEG data and the actual preferences that were found using a binary choice task and questionnaire. Previous studies have shown that the early event-related potentials (ERPs) such as the N200 component can correlate with consumer preferences for products. At the population level, we obtained a correlation coefficient of 0.803, which proves the strong dependence between the preferential score and the value of the N200 ERP component.

### Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. Consumer Neuroscience. Consumer Preference. Electroencephalography.

### Introduction

Conventional methods of marketing research, such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups have their limitations<sup>1</sup>. Consumer responses may not reflect their true thoughts. Also, respondents may not be able to express their real motivation or express their feelings or thoughts<sup>2,3</sup>. New methods are still being sought that could refine the prediction of future marketing successes. Neuroscientific methods, such as electroencephalography (EEG), appear to be promising methods<sup>4</sup>. Previous studies have shown that it is possible to predict consumer preferences using EEG methods. Several of them have paid attention to measuring event-related potentials (ERP) components and it turns out that the size of the ERP components covaries with consumer preferences or even with their choices<sup>5,6,7,8,9</sup>. All these studies are

<sup>1</sup> HAKIM, A., LEVY, J. D.: A gateway to consumers' minds: Achievements, caveats, and prospects of electroencephalography-based prediction in neuromarketing. In *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 2-20. [online]. [2020-04-30]. Available at: <<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/wcs.1485>>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> ARIELY, D., BERNS, G. S.: Neuromarketing: the hope and hype of neuroimaging in business. In *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 2010, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 285-291. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41669613\\_Neuromarketing\\_The\\_Hope\\_and\\_Hype\\_of\\_Neuroimaging\\_in\\_Business](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41669613_Neuromarketing_The_Hope_and_Hype_of_Neuroimaging_in_Business)>.

<sup>6</sup> TELPAZ, A., WEBB, R., LEVY, D. J.: Using EEG to Predict Consumers' Future Choices. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2019, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 512-528. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmr.13.0564>>.

<sup>7</sup> MA, Y., JIN, J., YU, W., ZHANG, W., XU, Z., MA, Q.: How Is the Neural Response to the Design of Experience Goods Related to Personalized Preference? An Implicit View. In *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 2-7. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2018.00760/full>>.



gradually laying the foundations for a new field of science – consumer neuroscience. This new field aims to examine consumer behavior through neuroscience methods. Neuroscience data do not require such a large number of respondents (subjects) in the studies, because the physiological principles of the brain that are common to individuals do not change as much as other behavioral variables. Also, experiments are performed in a very controlled environment, moreover, the number of stimuli measured per subject is relatively large (in the case of our experiment there are 50 replicates of one product stimuli for one subject)<sup>10</sup>. However, a problem can occur in their replicability. Are we able to measure the same results repeatedly if we perform the same experiment? Although there are studies, as shown above, that demonstrate the relationship between consumer preferences and EEG data, these studies need to be replicated and the same results obtained in order to use these methods for marketing research in common marketing practice. 40 subjects participated in this study. The EEG measurement took place when to subjects were presented images of 10 products with different utility. Before the measurement itself, we let the subjects get acquainted with these products so that they could think about their preferences for them in their heads. After the measurement, we presented a pair of products to them from which they had to choose one. From these answers, we then compiled the preferential order of individual respondents to individual products. We then subjected these preferential orders to correlation analysis with EEG data. This study replicates the design of the Telpaz et al. EEG experiment<sup>11</sup>. This design was used for the first time in an fMRI study<sup>12</sup>. In the experiment during the EEG measurement, a procedure was chosen where the subject does not make any decisions or any other motor responses (pressing a button, etc.).

## 1 EEG Measurements and Consumer Preference

Electroencephalography (EEG) is a method that senses electrical potentials from the surface of the head. One approach to designing an experiment is to measure ERP. It is a measurement of brain waves after the onset of a stimulus. If the wave has a positive voltage - we call it P, if the negative one is called N. The time in milliseconds in which the wave appears then we put behind the letter. If we have for example P300 wave – we know it was a positive wave in 300-400 ms. A number of functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) studies have been performed

<sup>8</sup> GOTO, N., MUSHTAQ, F., SHEE, D., LIM, X. L., MORTAZAVI, M., WATABE, M., SCHAEFER, A.: Neural signals of selective attention are modulated by subjective preferences and buying decisions in a virtual shopping task. In *Biological Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 128, No. 1, p. 12-19. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28666891/>>.

<sup>9</sup> GOTO, N., LIM, X. L., SHEE, D., HATANO, A., KHONG, K. W., BURATTO, L. G., WATABE, M., SCHAEFER, A.: Can Brain Waves Really Tell If a Product Will Be Purchased? Inferring Consumer Preferences From Single-Item Brain Potentials. In *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 2-12. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnint.2019.00019/full>>.

<sup>10</sup> LIN, M-H. J., CROSS, N. N. S., JONES, W. J., CHILDERS, T. L.: Applying EEG in consumer neuroscience. In *European Journal of Marketing*, 2018, Vol. 52, No.1-2, p. 67-90. [online]. [2020-04-30]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJM-12-2016-0805/full/html>>.

<sup>11</sup> TELPAZ, A., WEBB, R., LEVY, D. J.: Using EEG to Predict Consumers' Future Choices. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2019, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 512-528. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmr.13.0564>>.

<sup>12</sup> LEVY, I., LAZZARO, S. C., RUTLEDGE, R. B., GLIMCHER, P. W.: Choice from Non-Choice: Predicting Consumer Preferences from Blood Oxygenation Level-Dependent Signals Obtained during Passive Viewing. In *Journal of Neuroscience*, 2011, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 119-124. [online]. [2020-05-07]. Available at: <<https://www.jneurosci.org/content/31/1/118>>.

in the past, showing that preferences can be quantified from neuroscience data<sup>13</sup>. However, this method is very expensive for routine marketing research. The more affordable for routine marketing research is the EEG. The EEG study<sup>14</sup> found that early brain potentials (neural signals occurring less than 300 ms after participants first see the image of a consumer product) can index consumer preferences. Specifically, it was an N200 component. This was later replicated by this study<sup>15</sup>. However, the study also suggests a link with later waves called LPP and PSW. Early ERPs components such as N200 components indicate preferences that are driven by fast automated and unconscious processes, while late components such as PSW or LPP may be related to more complicated and conscious cognitive processes<sup>16</sup>. ERP studies can also have a direct impact on marketing. The study<sup>17</sup> found that consumer motivation to buy luxury brands is based on the satisfaction of their social goals.

## 2 Methodology

Forty subjects (36 right-handed, 3 left-handed and 1 rereach left-handed) from the Czech and Slovakia republic participated in this experiment. The age of all subjects was between 22 and 36 years (14 women and 26 men; mean age = 28,725; SD = 2,1837). All subjects had normal vision and reported that they are free of neurological disorders. The EEG measurements took place from November 2019 to September 2020. The experiment was carried out at the EEG laboratory at the Multimodal and Functional Imaging Laboratory (MAFIL) at the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC). The whole experiment consisted of three Phases. In the first Phase, the participants were acquainted with the course of the experiment, signed Informed Consent, and became familiar with the products. Compensation for participating in the experiment was one of the ten products in which they became familiar with Phase 1 so we told them they could take one of the products home after the whole experiment ended. Before the second Phase, the participant was fitted with an EEG cap. Then in the second Phase, the EEG measurement itself took place. The participant sat in a comfortable chair in a room that has been shielded from electromagnetic radiation (Faraday cage) and was asked to minimize head and body movements during recording. Only one product was presented at one time. The participant was asked to always think about the value of the product at the moment of presentation. The measurement itself started by displaying the fixation cross, which was then always displayed between each presented product in a random

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<sup>13</sup> LEVY, I., LAZZARO, S. C., RUTLEDGE, R. B., GLIMCHER, P. W.: Choice from Non-Choice: Predicting Consumer Preferences from Blood Oxygenation Level-Dependent Signals Obtained during Passive Viewing. In *Journal of Neuroscience*, 2011, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 119-124. [online]. [2020-05-07]. Available at: <<https://www.jneurosci.org/content/31/1/118>>.

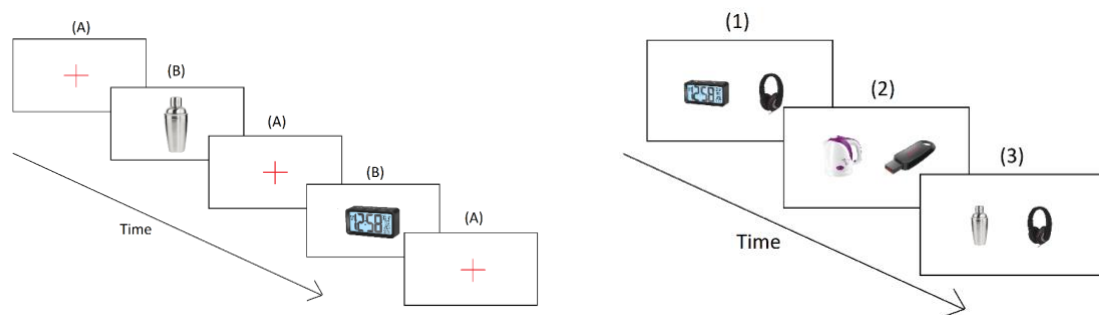
<sup>14</sup> TELPAZ, A., WEBB, R., LEVY, D. J.: Using EEG to Predict Consumers' Future Choices. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2019, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 512-528. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmr.13.0564>>.

<sup>15</sup> GOTO, N., MUSHTAQ, F., SHEE, D., LIM, X. L., MORTAZAVI, M., WATABE, M., SCHAEFER, A.: Neural signals of selective attention are modulated by subjective preferences and buying decisions in a virtual shopping task. In *Biological Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 128, No. 1, p. 12-19. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28666891/>>.

<sup>16</sup> GOTO, N., LIM, X. L., SHEE, D., HATANO, A., KHONG, K. W., BURATTO, L. G., WATABE, M., SCHAEFER, A.: Can Brain Waves Really Tell If a Product Will Be Purchased? Inferring Consumer Preferences From Single-Item Brain Potentials. In *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 2-12. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnint.2019.00019/full>>.

<sup>17</sup> ZHANG, W., JIN, J., WANG, A., MA, Q., YU, H.: Consumers' Implicit Motivation Of Purchasing Luxury Brands: An EEG Study. In *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 2019, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 914-928. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.dovepress.com/consumers-implicit-motivation-of-purchasing-luxury-brands-an-eeeg-study-peer-reviewed-article-PRBM>>.

time interval of 800 – 1200 milisecond (ms). The product presentation always took 2000 ms. To improve the signal-to-noise ratio, each product was presented 50 times in random order, altogether 500 product presentations. These 500 product presentations were divided into 10 blocks of 50 to give the participant time to relax. The participant himself determined how long the pause between blocks would be, triggered the next block by pressing the trigger. At this stage, the participant merely wondered about the value of the product but did not make any choice or motor activity. Product presentations were created in E-Prime software. After the measurement was completed, the EEG cap was taken off. The participant was asked to take a break for a while if he/she wanted to. Then the third phase began - a binary selection of the presented products. Two products always appeared on the screen at the same time and the participant always selected one using the controller, which one they prefer (with no time limit). Thus all possible combinations of 10 products - 45 combinations - were presented. Each of these combinations was presented 6 times in total, so the respondent made 270 binary selections. The combinations were presented randomly, and product placement on the screen (left-right) was evenly distributed. Repeat 6 options to correct measurement errors. From these selections, we were able to create a preferential order for these products.



**Picture 1: Design of the Phase 2 (on the left) and Phase 3 (on the right)**

Source: Own processing

Subjects were also sent a questionnaire after the experiment. In the questionnaire, we asked the subjects how much they like the products, how much they want them (on a 7-point scale), and also to assign a preferential order to the products (from 1 to 10). We also asked in the questionnaire if they own the product or if they are interested in it and how attractive the product is for them. The products used in the experiment were a table alarm clock, flash disk, teapot, spice grinder, French press, Kettle cooked, SD memory card, shaker, headphones, wireless doorbell. The price of all products purchased at the Czech e-shop mall.cz ranged from 249 to 299 CZK (approximately equivalent to 8.7 - 11.7 EUR). Product presentations were created in E-Prime software.

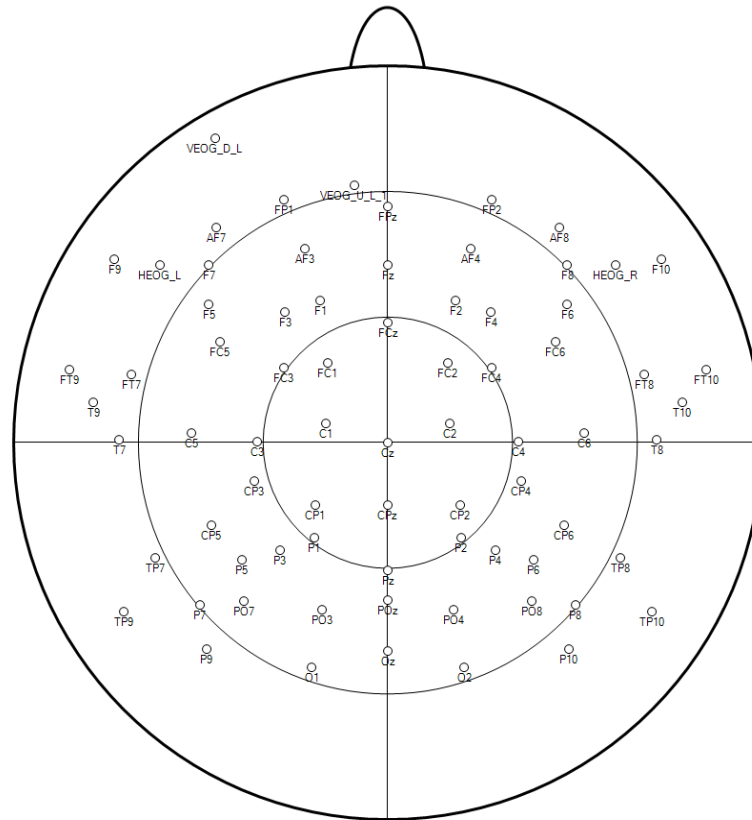


**Picture 2: Products used in the experiment**

Source: Own processing

## 2.1 EEG Data Acquisition and Anlalysis

The laboratory was equipped with EGI Inc., Eugene, USA EEG system with GES 400 amplifier. The measurement itself takes place in a room that is Faraday's cage – a place shielded from electromagnetic radiation. To record electrical activity was used 256-channel Hydrocel Geodesic Sensor. At the beginning of the measurement, the output impedance of the passive electrodes was smaller than 50 k $\Omega$ . Although for the recording was used 256-channel Hydrocel Geodesic Sensor for analysis were used only 68 channels to reduce computational complexity. The layout of the individual channels can be seen in Figure 3. EEG signals were processed in BrainVision Analyzer 2 software. To process the data faster, the sampling frequency was reduced from 1000 Hz to 500 Hz. Artifacts and bad intervals were removed for further analysis using objective criteria (large gradient, min-max potential difference, amplitude size, and low activity). Then the data were filtered by IIR filter with a passband from 0,5 to 40 Hz. For the correction from the ocular movements, Gratton & Coles algorithm was used. Then, the EEG signal was segmented according to individual products. It follows from the above that the brain response of each subject was measured 50 times for each product. This is because the brain response we measure is very weak, and it will therefore be necessary to average this response in each subject for each product to suppress noise and highlight the useful signal. It was also necessary to perform a baseline correction to get the signals to the same voltage level. Baseline correction was performed in a window of -200 to 1000 milliseconds.



**Picture 3: The layout of the individual channels**

Source: Own processing

### 3 Results

First of all, it was necessary to make a table of preferential scores from the binary task (phase 3). In Table 1 we can see the preference score of how many times the first 10 respondents chose which product in phase 3 - we can therefore determine which subject preferred which product. The ability to predict preferences using EEG data also depends on the strength of the preference (preference score), so we calculated the variability of the preference score by subtracting the least preferred product from the most preferred product across subjects. In Table 1, column S (for the first subject, therefore  $54-2 = 52$ ). The average range across subjects was 52,375,  $SD = 1,996$ , and very close to the maximal possible range of 54. Subjects across the whole population also preferred certain products much more (e.g. products 3 - teapot and 9 - headphones). This should be an advantage, as a large difference in preferences should also indicate a large difference in the EEG signal. To make sure that the subjects did not click the binary task at random, we correlated the preference, we compare them to questionnaire responses (preferential order) and to the results (preferential score) of the binary task. The correlation was significant ( $r = 0,92$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). The questionnaire also shows that the subjects often did not have the teapot at home and also, they judged this product might be useful for them. In the case of headphones, the attractiveness of the product.

Table 1: Preference score for first 10 subjects

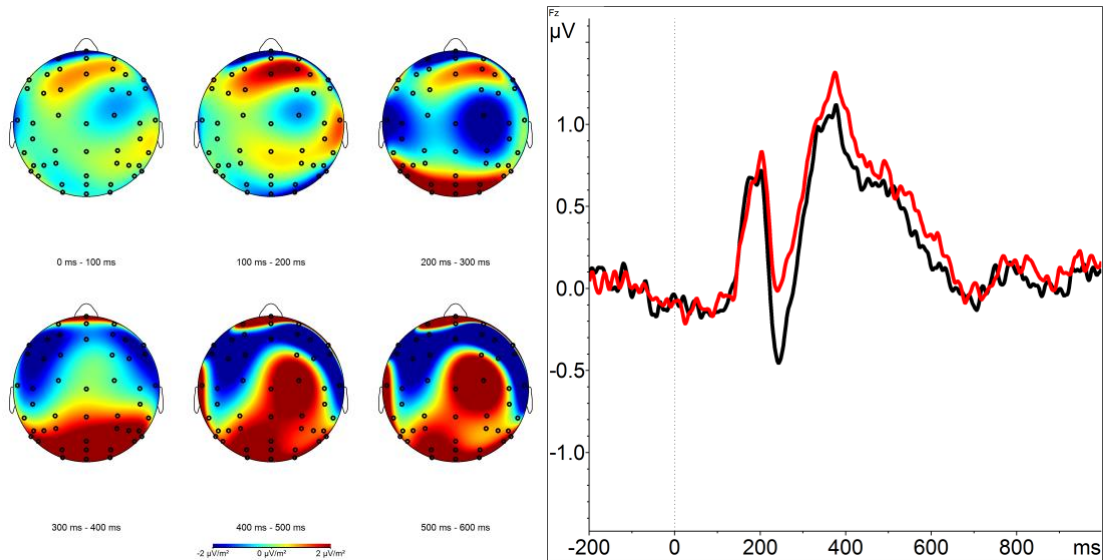
Subjects	Products										S
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	40	14	44	26	54	2	7	35	18	30	52
2	13	42	23	36	45	18	33	5	54	1	53
3	15	47	54	6	31	20	37	20	0	40	54
4	45	23	54	24	40	29	14	34	6	1	53
5	36	48	20	6	12	23	54	0	38	33	54
6	53	27	48	30	7	11	40	20	34	0	53
7	8	24	51	16	14	42	0	29	36	50	51
8	27	32	50	10	34	30	26	7	51	3	48
9	54	24	35	33	14	5	17	1	44	43	53
10	26	40	42	29	6	13	42	16	53	3	50
... (n = 40)											
Suma	1202	1043	1712	1088	1050	863	802	852	1390	798	

Source: Own processing

Because the signals from the brain are very weak and polluted with noise, before interpreting the EEG data itself, it was necessary to average the waveforms of all 50 presentations separately for each product and for each subject. This allowed us to look at the averaged waveforms across the different products for each subject and examine whether there are systematic differences in product preference. To further perform an analysis at the population level - we averaged all ERPs of all entities for the 5 most and 5 least preferred products. Table 1 shows that the 5 most preferred (MP) products are products 3, 9, 1, 4, 5, and 5 least preferred (LP) products are products 2, 6, 8, 7, 10 (suma of preferential scores across the population – all subjects). To make sure which electrode we suppose do the analysis on we used the scalp maps view that you can see in Picture 4. The scalp maps show the distribution of voltage from 0 to 800 ms following product presentation divided into time intervals of 100 ms for low preference minus high preference products. Previous studies showed that the preferential value representation is located more in the frontal areas<sup>18,19</sup>. According to the map that is in Picture 4 on the left side it is evident that in the time of 200 - 300 ms the biggest difference is in the frontal and right frontal part. Another analysis, therefore, dealt with the *Fz* electrode.

<sup>18</sup> TELPAZ, A., WEBB, R., LEVY, D. J.: Using EEG to Predict Consumers' Future Choices. In *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2019, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 512-528. [online]. [2020-10-11]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmr.13.0564>>.

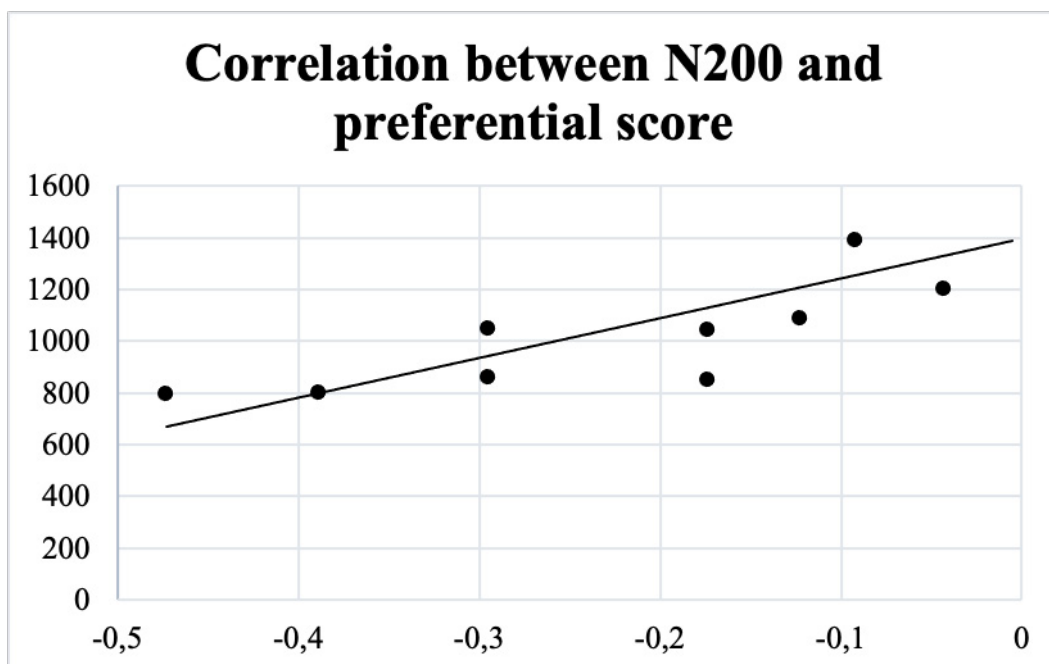
<sup>19</sup> GOTO, N., MUSHTAQ, F., SHEE, D., LIM, X. L., MORTAZAVI, M., WATABE, M., SCHAEFER, A.: Neural signals of selective attention are modulated by subjective preferences and buying decisions in a virtual shopping task. In *Biological Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 128, No. 1, p. 12-19. [online]. [2020-10-23]. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28666891/>>.



**Picture 4: The scalp maps that show the distribution of voltage from 0 to 800 ms following products presentation divided to time intervals of 100 ms for low preference minus high preference products on the left and averaged ERPs for the most preferred and least preferred products on the right**

Source: Own processing

At the *Fz* electrode, we compared the average ERP signal in response to a median split of the top five most preferred products in the sample (across all subjects) and the bottom five least preferred products as you can see in Picture 4 on the right side. The picture shows that the biggest difference is in the time of 200 - 300 ms. This shows that it is the N200 component. The overall deflection of the N200 component for the most preferred products across all subjects is  $-0,014 \mu\text{V}$  and of the least preferred products is  $-0,453 \mu\text{V}$ . This difference can be considered as statistically significant  $p < 0,05$ . Furthermore, we did the peak detection in the time of 200 - 300 ms for the averaged components for each product and do the correlation of EEG activity and preference for products across the population. This correlation is captured on Chart 1 and is quite significant (Pearson  $r = 0,803$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ).



**Chart 1: Correlation between N200 and preferential score**

Source: Own processing

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to verify whether measurements of nerve activity in the brain (specifically ERP) could be used to reliably predict consumer preferences. We focused on previous studies<sup>20,21</sup>, which we tried to partially replicate. Our results suggest that we can indeed use the N200 component to predict product preference. Although experiments that measure ERP components yield relatively accurate results regarding consumer preferences, these measurements require dozens of repetitions of the same stimuli to amplify the resulting signal. This is a significant disadvantage of these measurements, and the question arises as to whether such an experiment design is applicable in routine marketing research<sup>22</sup>. The correlation coefficient at the population level was  $r = 0.803$ , which is approximate as in the study<sup>23</sup> where it came out  $r = 0,76$ ,  $p < 0,01$ . In our further research, we will focus on slow event-related potentials (LPP, PSW) and see if they have greater predictive value.

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## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF ORGANISATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF ITIL® 4

*Miroslav Reiter – Andrej Miklošik*

### Abstract

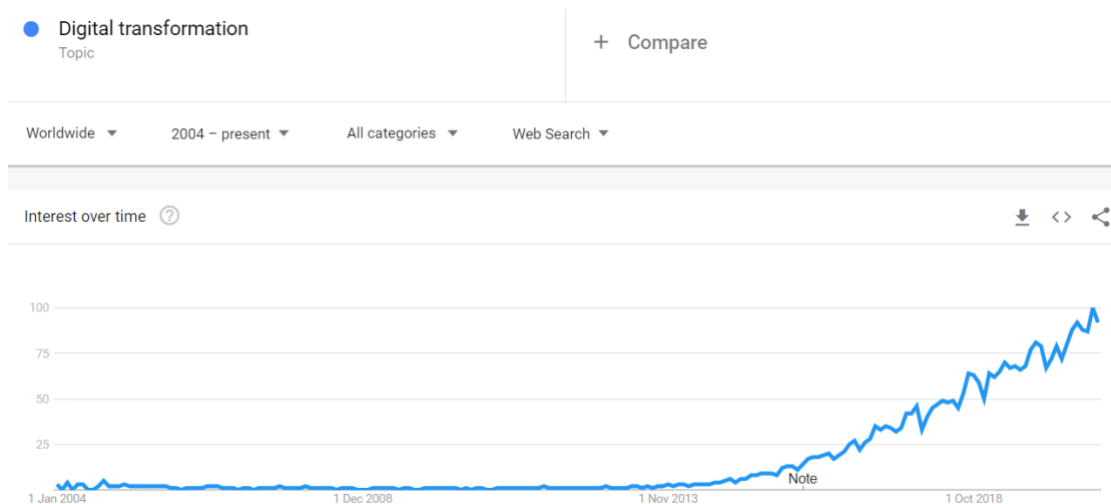
Digital transformation of organisations has accelerated in recent years. Businesses and other organisations but also states, and public institutions are gradually digitising a variety of processes. Agile techniques, design thinking, and large datasets are being fully utilised to improve the efficiency of organisations, their processes, and the user experience with them. The effects, for example, include cost reductions, increasing customer or citizen satisfaction, faster document handling or processing of orders. Many processes become completely automated with minimal human intervention. This paper discusses some the most important aspects of digital transformation in organisations in context of the ITIL, the framework for IT product and service management. Its last version, ITIL® 4, was released quite recently in February 2019. The focus of this paper is to present this new version and its use in organisations. ITIL® 4 brings with it a new structure, reduction of principles, and a new philosophy of processes. An overview of processes deployed in organisations in context of ITIL® 4 is presented in the paper, along with a case study showcasing the use of ITIL® 4 in a digitisation project in the area of customer feedback and satisfaction.

### Key words:

Continual Service Improvement. Digital Transformation. Four Dimensions Model. ITIL 4. Service Value Chain. Service Value System.

### Introduction

Digital transformation is in the forefront of organisations looking to adapt to changing environment. Continual technological changes and the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the need for digital transformation<sup>1</sup>. The data from Google Trends confirm the growing interest in search volumes of this keyword worldwide (Graph 1).



**Graph 1: Interest in Digital Transformation**

Source: *Digital transformation*. 2020. [online]. [2020-10-03]. Available at: <<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=digital%20transformation&geo=US>>.

<sup>1</sup> SOTO-ACOSTA, P.: COVID-19 Pandemic: Shifting Digital Transformation to a High-Speed Gear. In *Information Systems Management*, 2020, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 1-6.

Marketing and advertising are an example of areas that have largely contributed to the growth of digital transformation in organisations. Over the last 15 years, organisations have been adopting digital marketing and digital tools<sup>2</sup>. Examples of such tools and services include Google products, for example Google Ads, Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Google Play, Google Data Studio or Google Tag Manager. Google actively supports digital transformation and digitisation of business and services. It helps small and medium-sized enterprises through the Grow with Google programme<sup>1</sup>. This includes getting their businesses online, selling online, expanding abroad or managing teams and work more efficiently. The Grow with Google platform provides free tools and training, either online or offline, to help people acquire the right skills to find a job, advance their careers or kickstart their business. To acquire digital skills, Google also provides Digital Garage, an online learning platform that includes 26 topics, 106 lessons, and nine hours of free content. For non-profit organisations, there is the Ad Grants programme available, which provides up to \$10,000 for online advertising and digital business transformation. Start-ups are also not forgotten by Google. The Google for Startups and the New Generation of Founders programmes are providing workshops to support innovative ideas, including starting or expanding startups. Google therefore supports digital transformation of organisations to the maximum extent.<sup>3</sup> However, other global companies such as Microsoft, Oracle or Apple are not staying behind. Microsoft supports schools and non-profit organisations during COVID-19 and provides for free Microsoft Teams, a tool for teamwork and communication. A free version with limited functionality is also available for commercial companies.<sup>4</sup>

This paper discusses some the most important aspects of digital transformation in organisations in context of the ITIL framework. Its last version, ITIL® 4 (further as ‘ITIL 4’), was released quite recently in February 2019 and brings with it a new structure, reduction of principles, and a new philosophy of processes. The focus of this paper is to present this new version and its use in organisations. Specifically, the research aimed at creating a comparison of ITIL 4 Practices and ITIL 3 Processes and demonstrating the implementation of ITIL-based digital transformation of processes related to customer satisfaction in a selected company. The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, the importance of digital transformation for organisations is discussed, along with the overview of processes deployed in organisations in context of ITIL. Secondly, the research methodology is presented. Thirdly, the results of the research are presented, including a comparison of ITIL 4 with an older version of ITIL 3, and a case study showcasing the use of ITIL 4 in a digitisation project in the area of customer feedback and satisfaction. The paper concludes with a Discussion and conclusion section.

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<sup>2</sup> WENZLER, M., BHAMBHANI, S., SCHMIDTHALER, M.: Readiness, use and enablers of digital customer interaction tools in Austria. In *Marketing Science & Inspirations*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 2-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Grow with Google*. 2020. [online]. [2020-09-14]. Available at: <<https://events.withgoogle.com/gwgsk/programy/#content>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Microsoft Teams for free*. 2020. [online]. [2020-09-15]. Available at: <<https://www.microsoft.com/sk-sk/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/free>>.

## 1 Background

### 1.1 Digital Transformation

Many companies are trying to transform their business by transitioning to digital platforms to gain the best possible advantage from them<sup>5</sup>. They often apply agile and lean principles and operate in the ever changing technological environment dominated by Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Machine Learning (ML), Artificial Intelligence (AI)<sup>6</sup>. The latter two are used to extract meaningful information from customers' Big Data, which, in the European context, has also legislative implications related to GDPR<sup>7</sup>. Thanks to digital transformation, they often reduce costs, increase company's turnover and profit. They can flexibly solve the problems and challenges of the modern era. As part of the processes, customers' demands on quality and availability increase. Therefore, both customers and companies can benefit from the continuous improvement of services, products, and the use of innovation. Top trends in digital transformation are also DevOps<sup>8</sup>, Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)<sup>9</sup> or User Experience and Interface (UX/UI). These are captured by the modern framework for services, namely ITIL 4, widely beyond the field of IT. We can see that digital transformation is in full swing in Slovakia, especially in automotive manufacturing companies, companies involved in the development of information technologies, the banking sector, and logistics. The state is also striving to digitally transform its processes in order to make life easier for citizens. The digital transformation trend is already developing and has a high potential to grow across all areas of life.<sup>10</sup> The various themes and areas of digital transformation are shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>5</sup> WENGLER, S., UBERWIMMER, M., HAUTAMAKI, P., HILDMANN, G., VOSSEBEIN, U., FUREDER, R.: Digital transformation in B2B sales – differences and best practices in three different European countries. In *Marketing Science & Inspirations*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 41-47.

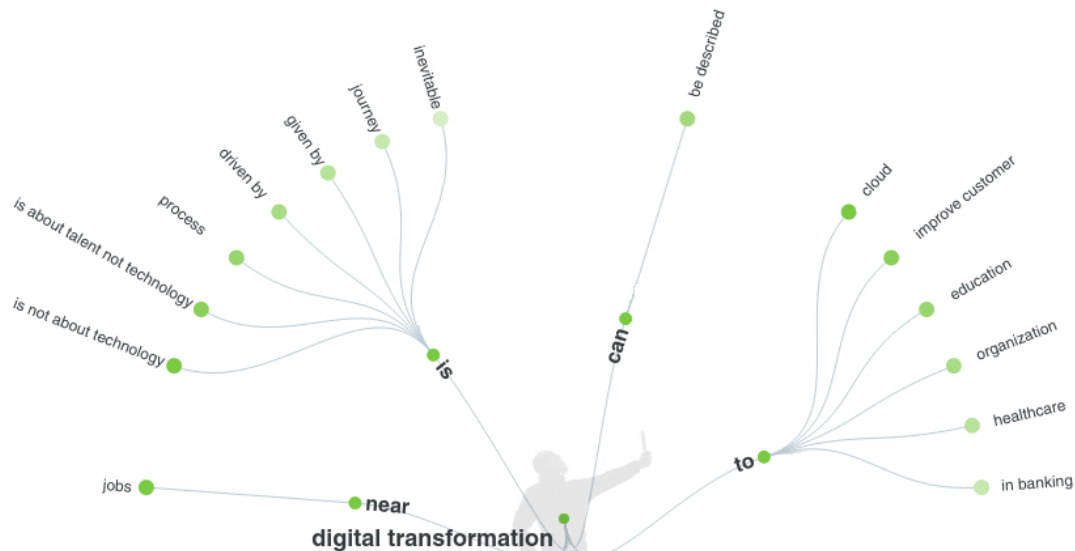
<sup>6</sup> MIKLOŠÍK, A., KUČHTA, M., EVANS, N., ŽÁK, Š. Towards the Adoption of Machine Learning Based Analytical Tools in Digital Marketing. In *IEEE Access*, 2020, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 85706-85717.

<sup>7</sup> VESELÝ, P.: GDPR issues from a marketing perspective. In *Marketing Science & Inspirations*, 2018, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 44-54.

<sup>8</sup> SAHID, A., MALEH, Y., BELAISSAOUI, M. A Practical Agile Framework for IT Service and Asset Management ITSM/ITAM Through a Case Study. In *Journal of Cases on Information Technology*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 72-91.

<sup>9</sup> BAUER, W., SCHLUND, S., VOCKE, C.: Working Life Within a Hybrid World – How Digital Transformation and Agile Structures Affect Human Functions and Increase Quality of Work and Business Performance. In KANTOLA, J. I., BARATH, T., NAZIR, S. (ed.): *Advances in Human Factors, Business Management and Leadership*. Los Angeles, California, USA : AHFE 2017, 2017, p. 4-9.

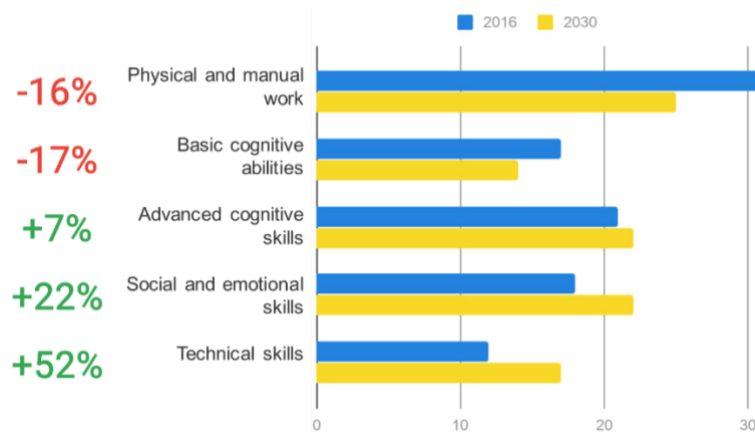
<sup>10</sup> MIKLOŠÍK, A., EVANS, N.: Impact of Big Data and Machine Learning on Digital Transformation in Marketing: A Literature Review. In *IEEE Access*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 101285-101291.



**Figure 1: Digital Transformation Themes and Areas**

Source: Own processing

As Pettey claims: “data and analytics will be at the heart of business strategy, focus and investment.” The key to digital transformation is therefore data and analytics.<sup>11</sup> The world is therefore undergoing a digital transformation that offers enormous opportunities for growth, innovation and job vacancies. However, according to the European Commission report, 44% of the population and 37% of the workforce do not have sufficient digital skills.<sup>12</sup> According to McKinsey<sup>13</sup>, advanced digital skills will be crucial for the digitisation of organisations and the economy in Slovakia, but people with these skills will still be a minority. Details are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: How skills demand and digital skills statistics are changing**

Source: MCKINSEY: *The Rise of Digital Challengers*. 2018. [online]. [2020-09-03]. Available at: <[https://digitalchallengers.mckinsey.com/files/The-rise-of-Digital-Challengers\\_Perspective-on-SK.pdf](https://digitalchallengers.mckinsey.com/files/The-rise-of-Digital-Challengers_Perspective-on-SK.pdf)>.

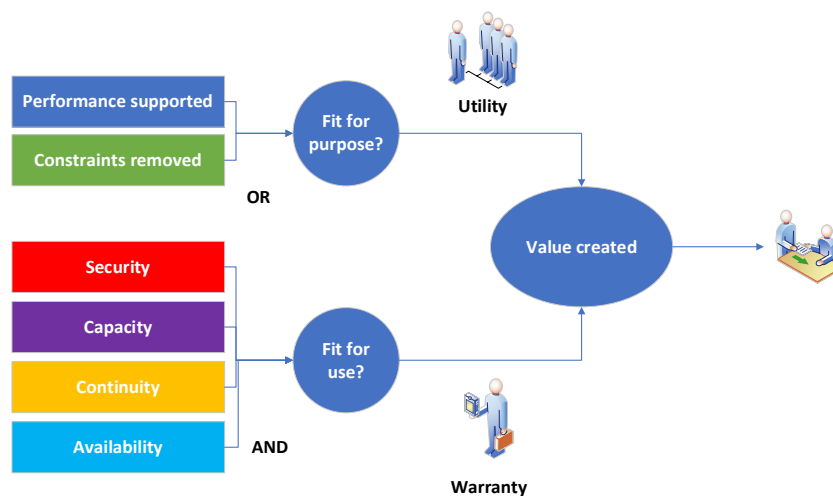
<sup>11</sup> PETTEY, Ch.: *Why Data and Analytics Are Key to Digital Transformation*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019. [online]. [2020-06-09]. Available at: <<https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/why-data-and-analytics-are-key-to-digital-transformation/>>.

<sup>12</sup> *Digitálna transformácia*. 2018. [online]. [2020-06-12]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-proposals-digital-transformation-may2018\\_sk.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-proposals-digital-transformation-may2018_sk.pdf)>.

As this study further states, at the same time, however, all employees will need to develop basic digital skills, as workers will be required to use online applications or other technological tools in their daily work. Yet looking at the current level of digital skills in Slovakia, we can see a clear gap in relation to citizens. This includes basic skills as well as advanced digital skills. It is important to note that the older the age group, the wider the gap, especially in terms of advanced skills. This testifies to the strong need to promote lifelong learning for Slovak citizens.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 Introduction of the ITIL 4 Framework

According to CompTIA<sup>14</sup> and Forbes<sup>15</sup> statistics, ITIL is the **most widespread** and accepted approach to the management of IT services focusing on reconciliation of IT and business. ITIL is very often used in advertising and marketing agencies primarily focused on the provision of digital services. ITIL describes goals, processes, procedures, activities, roles, checklists for integrating IT service operations and business strategy in any organisation. Owned by Axelos, a UK based company that maintains and updates **best practices**, it provides organisations with the need to address the new challenges of service management while exploiting the potential of modern technologies. It is designed to ensure a flexible, coordinated and integrated system of efficient service management with IT support. Services are the basic elements. These are a means of bringing value to the customer by facilitating the results customers want to achieve without specific costs and risks. Services simplify results by increasing the performance of related tasks and reducing the impact of restrictions. While some services increase the performance of tasks or remove restrictions, others have a direct impact and perform the task itself.<sup>16</sup> The assembly of services is visualised in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Assembly of the Service in ITIL**

Source: Own processing according Axelos: ITIL Service Strategy – Value creation through services

<sup>13</sup> MCKINSEY: *The Rise of Digital Challengers*. 2018. [online]. [2020-09-03]. Available at: <[https://digitalchallengers.mckinsey.com/files/The-rise-of-Digital-Challengers\\_Perspective-on-SK.pdf](https://digitalchallengers.mckinsey.com/files/The-rise-of-Digital-Challengers_Perspective-on-SK.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> WATTS, S.: *ITSM Frameworks Explained: Which are most popular?*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017. [online]. [2020-09-05]. Available at: <<https://www.comptia.org/blog/itsm-frameworks-explained-which-are-most-popular>>.

<sup>15</sup> HERTVIK, J.: *ITSM Frameworks: Which Are Most Popular?*. Released on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017. [online]. [2020-09-05]. Available at: <<https://www.bmc.com/blogs/itsm-frameworks-popular/>>.

<sup>16</sup> *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 2.

In February 2019, the ITIL 4 was released and published, which came with a new structure, a reduction of principles, the addition of new practices, use of modern principles and tools such as Lean, Agile and DevOps. The key elements, together with services, are people and their cooperation across organisations. Equally important is the user experience and the use of large data. Instead of the service life cycle and its phases in ITIL 3, ITIL 4 uses a service value system together with a service value chain and a four-dimensional model. The basic comparison of both versions can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Comparison of ITIL 3 and ITIL 4**

	ITIL 3	ITIL 4
Year of publication	2007	2019
Structure	Service life cycle and its phases	Service value system Service value chain 4 dimensional model
Phases/Categories	5	3
Processes/Practices	26	34
Principles	9	7
Lean	✗	✓
Agile	✗	✓
DevOps	✗	✓

Source: Own processing

### 1.3 Service Value System (SVS)

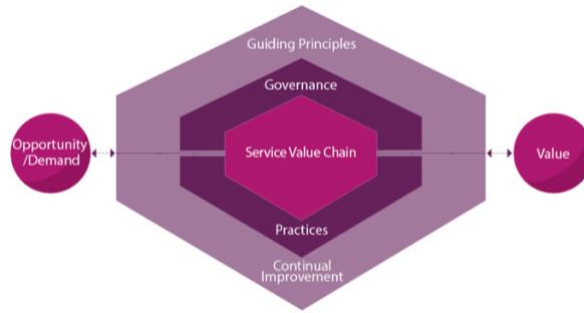
ITIL 4 reshapes many of established IT service management practices in the context of customer experience, services values system and digital transformation. The Service Value System represents how individual components and activities of the organisation cooperate and facilitate the creation of values through IT based services. They can be combined in a flexible way that requires integration and coordination in order for the organisation to be consistent. It facilitates this integration and coordination and provides the organisation with a strong, unified orientation focused on values. The Service Value System consists of the following parts:

1. **Opportunities** – Opportunities to add value to stakeholders or improve organisation.<sup>17</sup>
2. **Demand** – Includes needs or desires for products and services from internal and external consumers.
3. **Outcome** –The result is **Value**, which represents the perceived benefits, usefulness and significance of something. The Service Value System allows you to create different types of value for a wide range of stakeholders.
4. **Guiding Principles** – Recommendations that can guide an organisation in all circumstances, regardless of changes in its goals, strategies, type of work, or management structure.
5. **Governance** – The way the organisation is managed and controlled.
6. **Service Value Chain** – A set of interconnected activities that an organisation performs to provide a valuable product or service to its customers and to facilitate the realisation of value.
7. **Practices** – A set of organisational resources designed to carry out work or to achieve a goal.
8. **Continual Improvement** – Regular organisational activity, carried out at all levels so that the organisation’s performance constantly meets the expectations of stakeholders.<sup>18</sup>

The Service Value System of ITIL 4 is shown in Figure 4.

<sup>17</sup> ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition. London : TSO, 2019, p. 36-40.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.



**Figure 4: Service Value System**

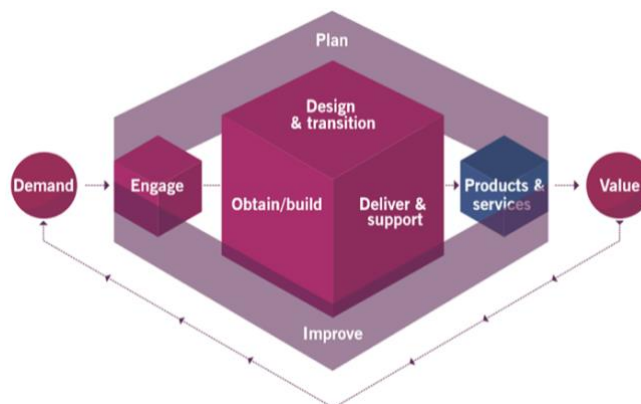
Source: *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 3.

### 1.3.1 Service Value Chain (SVC)

In the Service Value System , an embedded Service Value Chain (Figure 5) can be found. This is a set of interconnected activities that, if linked together in the right order, provide a functional model (operating model) for the creation, delivery and **continuous improvement of services**. It allows an organisation to define many variations of these links, known as **Value Streams**. In total, it contains six activities that lead to the creation of a product and service and consequently to the creation of value. These are the following:

1. **Plan** – Provides a unified understanding of the vision, state of play and direction of improvement for all four dimensions and all products and services within the organisation.
2. **Improve** – Ensures the continuous improvement of products, services and practices across all activities of the value chain and across all four dimensions of service management.
3. **Engage** – Ensures the correct understanding of the needs of all stakeholders, transparency and ongoing engagement, and good relations with all stakeholders.
4. **Design and Transition** – Ensures that products and services constantly meet stakeholders’ expectations concerning quality, costs and time for launching to market.<sup>19</sup>
5. **Obtain/Build** – Ensures that service components are available where and when required according to agreed specifications.
6. **Deliver and Support** – Ensures that services are provided and supported according to agreed specifications and stakeholders’ expectations

In the value chain, it is appropriate to point out the feedback between Value and Demand, when the value obtained for the consumer will have a negative impact on their following requirement, or opportunity to supply a service or product.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 5: Service Value Chain**

Source: *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 57-59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

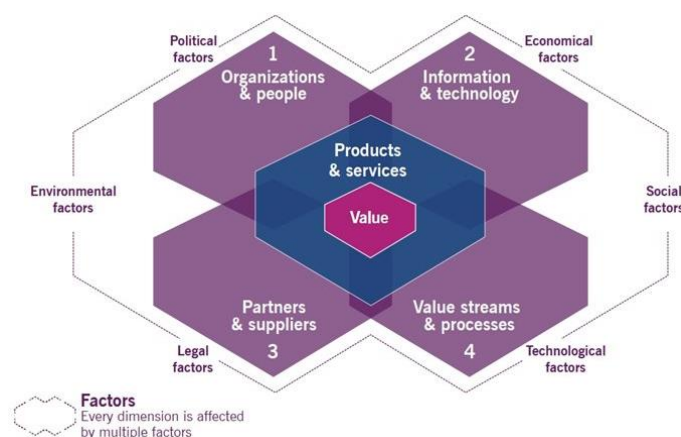


## 1.4 Four Dimension Model

To ensure a **holistic approach** to service management, ITIL 4 introduces **4 service management dimensions**, of which each component of the service value system should be considered:

1. **Organisations and People;**
2. **Information and Technology;**
3. **Partners and Suppliers;**
4. **Value Streams and Processes.**<sup>21</sup>

By paying appropriate attention to each of the four dimensions (visualised in Figure 6), the organisation shall ensure that its service value system remains balanced and effective. The four dimensions represent views relevant to the whole service value chain. All of them relate to the management of services and the services themselves.



**Figure 6: Four Dimension Model**

Source: *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 25.

## 2 Methodology

In line with the research goals, the authors used a combination of research methods. Secondary data has been used as the basis for critical analysis of the ITIL 4 framework and generating the comparison with an older version of ITIL 3. Primary research using the qualitative method of a case study was performed to demonstrate the use of ITIL 4 in the digital transformation of an enterprise. For the purpose of the case study, a Slovak company IT Academy s.r.o. (further as “IT Academy”) has been selected. IT Academy is an accredited and certified educational company based in Slovakia in Bratislava. It provides internationally certified training and exams for companies such as Microsoft, Axelos, Android, Google, ISTQB, Oracle, SAP, EXIN, CISCO and Adobe. The company offers 1,023 in-house trainings and 203 online trainings. There are trainings in areas such as office packages, programming languages, SAP, databases, graphics and design, marketing, advertising and law, management, website creation, networks and IT administration. The director and the employees participated in the case study. Based on the analysis of past data, a new method of customer satisfaction survey data collection has been introduced, along with outlining the processes, to transform the collection from paper to digital. This has assisted the company in its journey of digital transformation, specifically in the area of customer service and satisfaction. The data was generated between 2013 and 2018

<sup>21</sup> *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 24-33.

on the basis of an analysis of 6,485 trainings. The analysis was done in context of the theoretical background of the discussed ITIL4 framework and its structure, practices, and principles. Table 2 shows the data that served as the basis for analysis of the previous (paper-based) customer satisfaction survey results.

**Table 2: Research sample of participants in IT Academy courses**

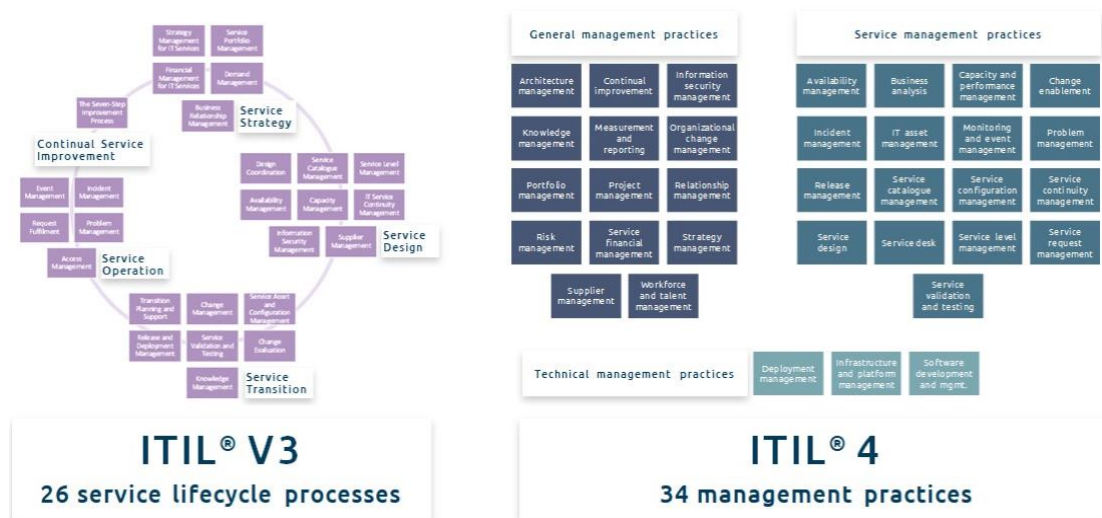
Period	2013-2018
Count of attendees	6,485
Count of men	3,632
Count of women	2,853
Average age of the participant	36.9
The most common type of course	morning
The most frequent graduate of the course	individual participant

Source: Own processing

Following the analysis, which was done during 2019, a new process in regard to the collection of customer satisfaction has been in place since 2020. Details and results of the case study are presented in chapter 4.

### 3 Comparison of ITIL 4 Practices and ITIL 3 Processes

The key elements of each organisation are its processes. These are part of ITIL 3. In the new version of ITIL 4, processes are called practices and ITIL extends the structure to other elements such as **technologies, culture, information** and **data** management and others. Practices employ an **holistic approach** of working. They are becoming an essential part of the ITIL framework. The practices described in ITIL4 continue to preserve the value and relevance of what today’s ITIL processes provide, but will also extend to other areas of service and IT management, from demand up to value. ITIL 4 introduces a new flexible approach for the deployment of practices in the real life of organisations. There are a total of 34 management practices in ITIL 4, while there were 26 in ITIL 3.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 7: Comparison of ITIL 3 and ITIL 4**

Source: KEMPTER, S., KEMPTER, A.: *YaSM and ITIL*. [online]. [2020-09-07] Available at: <[https://yasm.com/wiki/en/index.php/YaSM\\_and\\_ITIL](https://yasm.com/wiki/en/index.php/YaSM_and_ITIL)>.

<sup>22</sup> ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition. London : TSO, 2019, p. 76-77.

### 3.1 Guiding Principles

According to Ustwo, which is involved in the digital transformation of companies, it is necessary to provide existing frameworks and basic principles that make digital transformation easier<sup>23</sup>. Most of the common principles that Ustwo uses in the transformation are based on ITIL. The ITIL 4 framework contains 7 guiding principles of the so-called Recommendations, which guide the organisation in all circumstances and regardless of changes in its objectives, strategies, type of work or governance structure. The main principles are universal and permanent. They were first published in the ITIL 3 Practitioner publication and course. They became the basis for ITIL 4. These principles help professionals adopt and adapt ITIL best practices for their specific needs. The main principles can, and should be, maintained at every stage of co-creation of value for the customer. At the same time, they help professionals choose the right approach and help them cope with difficult decisions. The difference between the versions is that there were a total of 9 principles in ITIL 3. In ITIL 4, several pairs merged into one principle and in addition, the Optimize and Automate principle was added, which ITIL 3 did not contain at all.<sup>24</sup>

1. **Focus on Value** – Everything an organisation does must be directly or indirectly linked to value for stakeholders. The focus on value encompasses many perspectives, including the experience of customers and users.
2. **Start Where You Are** – Don't start from scratch and don't build something new without considering what can be used of what's already available. It is likely that there is much in current services, processes, programmes, projects and people that can be used to generate the desired result.
3. **Progress Iteratively with Feedback** – Do not try to do everything at once. Even large-scale initiatives must be gradually implemented. By arranging the work into smaller, manageable parts that can be implemented and completed in time, it helps to concentrate efforts. The use of feedback before, during and after each iteration shall ensure that activities are targeted and correct even in changing circumstances.
4. **Collaborate and Promote Visibility** – Working together across individual parts of the organisation(s) delivers results that are better received, more goal-oriented, and more likely to be successful in the long term. Achieving the objectives requires information, understanding and trust. Work and results must be visible, without a hidden agenda and shared as much as possible.
5. **Think and Work Holistically** – No service or service element used to provide the service separately exists. The results achieved by the service provider and the service consumer will suffer as long as the organisation works with the service only in parts and not as a whole. The results are delivered to internal and external customers through efficient and targeted management and dynamic integration of information, technology, organisation, people, procedures, partners and agreements, all of which should be coordinated to provide a defined value.
6. **Keep It Simple and Practical** – If a process, service, activity, or metric does not provide value, or does not produce a useful result, remove it. Use the smallest number of steps necessary to achieve a goal in a process or procedure. Always focus on the result and create practical solutions that deliver these results. Do not make things complicated.
7. **Optimize and Automate** – All kinds of resources, especially HR, should be used to achieve the best possible effect. Remove anything that is redundant and use the technology wherever possible. Only carry out human intervention if it truly brings value.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> TYRRELL, J.: *10 principles to drive digital transformation*. 2017. [online]. [2020-09-06]. Available at <<https://www.ustwo.com/blog/ustwos-10-principles-of-digital-transformation/>>.

<sup>24</sup> *ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition*. London : TSO, 2019, p. 39-55.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 3.2 Continual Service Improvement (CSI)

The main objective of continuous improvement of services is to link IT services to changing business needs by identifying improvements in IT services. Other objectives are the following:

- Review, analysis, prioritisation and recommendations for improvement;
- Identify and implement specific actions to improve the quality of IT services;
- Improve the cost-effectiveness of the IT services provided without affecting customer satisfaction;
- Ensure that processes/practices have clearly defined objectives and metrics that lead to improvement;
- Understand what is measured, why it is measured and what should be a successful outcome.<sup>26</sup>

### 4 Case Study – IT Academy

Each organisation should have an integrated process or practice for a continuous improvement of its services, such as customer satisfaction assessment and actioning on this feedback. To demonstrate the ITIL principles and the selected practice of continuous improvement, this case study shows digital transformation from paper questionnaires to a web questionnaire evaluating customer satisfaction with training. IT Academy trains approximately 2,500 to 3,000 customers and 150 to 200 companies annually. At the end of each training, it is necessary to ascertain the level of satisfaction with the training and get feedback from the customer. Annual printing and questionnaire processing costs were around 1,500 Euros. Questionnaires must be printed and handed over to customers. At the same time, questionnaires must be safely archived in accordance with the GDPR. In addition, there may be a situation where the customer needs to leave the training early because he/she is travelling or due to work duties and so does not complete the final assessment. The company decided to innovate the final evaluation process of the training and implement digital transformation from paper to the online form. The company digitised its process and documents while automating the entire process. Thus, using the ITIL 4 Optimize and Automate principle. The company used the ITIL 4 framework and its model of continuous improvement (Figure 8) to progress with digital transformation. It has progressively gone through all seven steps, such as defining the vision or assessing the current and future state it wants to achieve. It also defined the ways in which it wishes to implement and monitor the improvement, together with the activities to be undertaken.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ITIL® Foundation ITIL® 4 Edition. London : TSO, 2019, p. 80-83.

<sup>27</sup> REITER, M.: *Počítačová podpora procesného modelovania s pomocou BPMN*. [Master's thesis]. Trenčín : VSM Trenčín, 2019, p. 94-95.

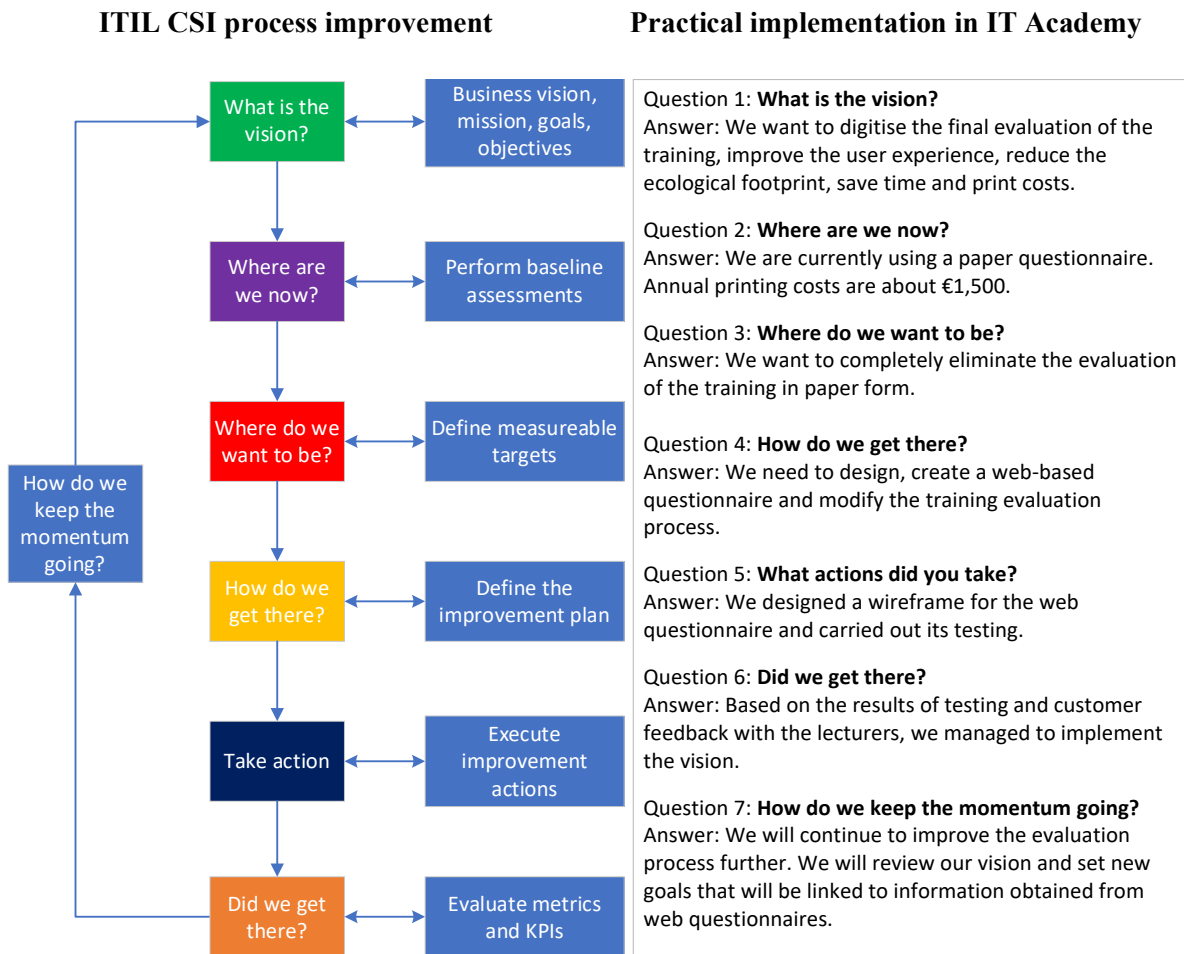
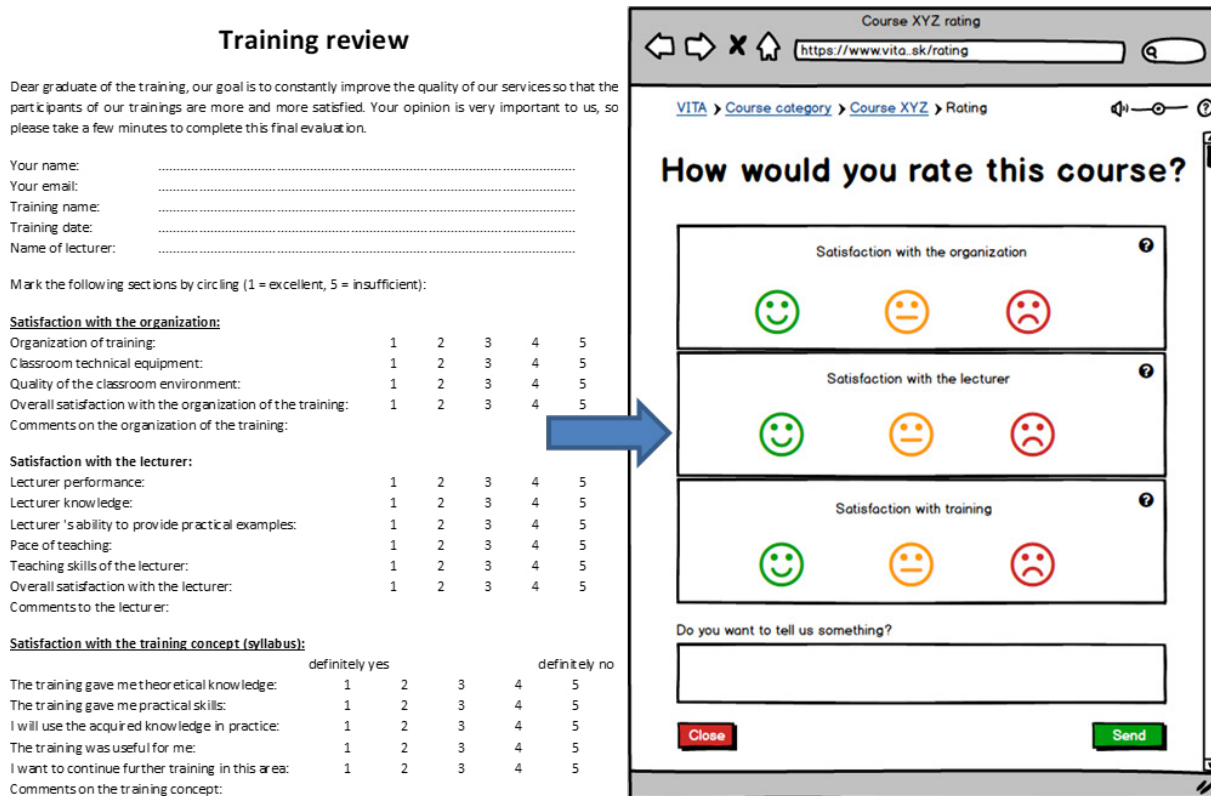


Figure 8: Continuous Improvement Model

Source: Own processing

When designing the web questionnaire, the company used the principle of keeping it simple and practical. It designed a simple and intuitive user interface for customers. It is not necessary to re-list items such as name, email, name and date of the training or the name of the lecturer. It also simplified the evaluation system. Instead of a rating system of 1-5, where 1 means “excellent” and 5 “inadequate”, it chose a rating system using colour smileys, thus significantly reducing the error rate of entering the rating. Around 8.3% of users did not read the paper questionnaires on how the rating works and circled the number 5 everywhere, although they wanted to give an excellent rating. Based on feedback employees found out what the customer was dissatisfied with. However, the customer confirmed maximum satisfaction with the training by e-mail or telephone. So, it was also important to change the evaluation system and improve the user experience. When training directly at the customer’s premises, it is no longer necessary for the lecturer to carry questionnaires in paper form or check their correct completion. In addition, it is also possible to integrate online web questionnaires into online trainings and check satisfaction within the training. All or selected reviews may be published on the company’s website and indicate the customer’s satisfaction with their services, with the consent of the customer. This makes the company more credible in the eyes of other potential customers. Details of the digitised final assessment are show in Figure 9.



**Figure 9: Training Final Assessment Service**  
 Source: Own processing

## Discussion and Conclusion

The description of the new version of ITIL 4 and its comparison with the previous version of ITIL 3 can be perceived as the theoretical contribution of the paper is. The demonstration of the utilisation of ITIL 4 principles, using a case study in the company IT Academy with a practical guide to the digital transformation of the training assessment process, represents a practical/managerial contribution. The ITIL 4 framework can be taken over and used by all training companies, including digital advertising agencies, who want to innovate the evaluation of their training and the collection of feedback. ITIL 4 does not prescribe or give us precise instructions on what technology, applications and tools we have to use, and therefore it is possible to customise the whole process according to your requirements and needs. The research limitation of the case study was a small sample of one Slovak company. The suggestion for future research is to include other educational companies, not only in Slovakia but also in Central Europe or the entire European Union. There are very few case studies with the implementation and deployment of ITIL 4 and the area of practical use is not sufficiently researched. Digital transformation has fully begun in different areas of our lives. It is good to use best practices, tools, and frameworks to manage it. ITIL 4 is one such framework that allows organisations to use best practices, structures, and principles together with its practices. It is appropriate to become inspired by digital transformation and digitisation of and continuously improve organisational processes. Digital transformation should not only lead to increasing profit and reduce costs, but also to reducing the ecological footprint, hand in hand with improving user comfort and experience.

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## DISTANCE LEARNING WITH EDMODO DURING THE CORONAVIRUS SCHOOL CLOSURES

*František Rigo*

### Abstract

The paper deals with using Edmodo (an educational social network) as a distance learning substitution tool in teaching English within university English courses during the first wave of COVID-19 in Slovakia. It draws the basic difference between online learning and distance learning and introduces the network's main features that can be utilised in the process of distance learning of adult learners. It presents the results the research that was conducted with the students of Faculty of Mass Media Communication of UCM in Trnava during ten weeks of distance learning in the period of March – May 2020. Via the quantitative method of a questionnaire survey, the research participants provided feedback on asynchronous distance learning with Edmodo. The findings present students' perception of the educational platform pointing to its benefits, weaknesses and overall effectiveness as a communication platform within distance learning.

### Key words:

Asynchronous Learning. COVID-19. Distance Learning. Edmodo. Educational Social Network. English. Online Learning. Students. Teachers.

### Introduction

Even though distance learning is not a phenomenon of today and its beginnings can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century<sup>1</sup>, never before had it gained as much worldwide attention and importance as it did in 2020 as a result of safety measures taken by individual national governments in order to fight the pandemic of COVID-19. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistic Data, in an attempt to minimise the spread of the new corona virus, as many as 84,5 % of schools closed worldwide, including all types of educational institutions providing education in all levels, from 0 to 8, according to ISCED, in the peak of the first wave of the pandemic. The closure affected almost 1.5 billion learners worldwide. In Slovakia, the number reaches almost 1 million, with 92 454 affected learners being the students of tertiary levels of education.<sup>2</sup> As a result, most educational institutions had to face the challenge of finding a working and reliable tool to ensure the continuation of education or, at least, ensure the flow of educational instruction towards their learners in order to keep up with their curricula, hence switched to distance learning. The unprecedented switch placed all participants of the educational process in a brand-new situation urging institutions to adapt communication tools to allow for great-scale distance learning, teachers to utilise these tools and quickly modify their lessons to support such learning and students to adjust to new learning patterns. In case of universities and their students, as they were the subject of the research presented in this paper, the transition encountered several difficulties. According to a survey carried out by Student Council for Higher Education in Slovakia reflecting on university students' perception of distance learning during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more satisfied students than the unsatisfied ones. However, it also showed that switching to distance learning was inconsistent, various tools of online teaching were used, there were big differences in the quality of tuition between individual subjects and quality transition and good information flow were to be accredited rather to individual teachers than to institutional support and the use

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<sup>1</sup> DELA CRUZ, Y.: *History of Distance Education*. [online]. [2020-11-05]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History\\_of\\_Distance\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History_of_Distance_Education)>.

<sup>2</sup> *COVID – 19 Impact on Education*. [online]. [2020-11-20]. Available at: <<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>>.

of uniform teaching/learning and communication instruments.<sup>3</sup> The findings are not surprising as no educational organisation anticipated this type of transition of face-to face learning to distance learning on a such a big scale. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the quality of each educational system depends, to great extent, on teachers. In this situation, Edmodo proved to be an effective communication and learning tool, as the results of the research presented in the paper suggest.

## 1 Distance Learning

It needs to be borne in mind that the notion of distance learning has shifted significantly since its very beginnings. Starting as learning by correspondence, thanks to the developments in the area of communication technology and computer mediated communication, new ways of implementing learning at a distance have been emerging leading to the rise of terms such as open learning, distributed learning, flexible learning, web-based learning, virtual learning, online learning or e-learning.<sup>4</sup> However, even though both distance learning and online learning rely on learning in the online environment, the terms are not interchangeable. According to Stauffer, there are three major differences between them: location, interaction and intention. In distance learning, students study at home (mostly online) with the teacher assigning and checking work digitally, there is no in-person interaction between them (the communication takes place via messaging apps, email, video calls) and it is nowadays designed as a method for delivering instruction only online. In online learning, or e-learning, on the other hand, students can be together in the classroom with their teacher and work on their tasks and assignments digitally, both parties involved in the process of education interact with one another in-person on a regular basis and the method itself is designed to be used in combination with other teaching methods only as a supplemental activity extending learning opportunities for students.<sup>5</sup> Stauffer's distinction between the two learning methods is clearly drawn also in the definitions of the phenomena provided by online Oxford Learner's Dictionary which defines e-learning as "*a system of learning that uses electronic media, typically over the internet*"<sup>6</sup> and distance learning as "*a system of education in which people study at home with the help of special internet sites and send or email work to their teachers.*"<sup>7</sup> Thus, it can be concluded that what most learners and educators experienced and had to face in the spring of 2020 was the real switch from face-to-face learning to distance learning, that greatly relied on the methods of online learning. While there is no doubt that the transition was a challenge for all participants of education at all levels, we can assume that it was easier in those courses that had embraced some features of online learning already before school closures. From this point of view, being familiar with Edmodo allowed its users for a more convenient adapting to distance learning. Furthermore, the educational platform of Edmodo was among the recommended distance

<sup>3</sup> *Dopad COVID-19 na študentov – hlavné zistenia a závery*. Released on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://saavs.sk/dopad-covid-19-na-studentov-hlavne-zistenia-a-zavery/>>. <[https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History\\_of\\_Distance\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History_of_Distance_Education)>.

<sup>4</sup> DAROJAT, O.: *Reviewing the Basic Themes in Distance Education*. [online]. [2020-11-05] Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/8145537/Reviewing\\_the\\_basic\\_concepts\\_in\\_distance\\_education](https://www.academia.edu/8145537/Reviewing_the_basic_concepts_in_distance_education)>.

<sup>5</sup> STAUFFER, B.: *What's the Difference Between Online Learning and Distance Learning?*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-11-09]. <<https://www.aeseducation.com/blog/online-learning-vs-distance-learning>>.

<sup>6</sup> *E-learning*. [online]. [2020-11-05] Available at: <<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/e-learning?q=e-learning>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Distance learning*. [online]. [2020-11-05] Available at: <<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/distance-learning?q=distance+learning>>.

learning platforms and applications by both UNESCO<sup>8</sup> and the European Commission<sup>9</sup> in response to the worldwide disruption to education due to COVID-19.

## 2 Edmodo

As the research results presented later in this paper focus on using Edmodo in the process of distance learning of students at a tertiary educational level, this part focuses mainly on its features utilised in the process.<sup>10</sup> Edmodo is a free social networking service designed specifically for the purposes of education. It was founded in 2008 in San Mateo, California, USA by Nic Borg, Jeff O'Hara and Crystal Hutter with the intention to bridge the gap between how students live their lives and how they learn in school. It was created to bring education into a 21st century environment.<sup>11</sup> In February 2020 it had over 100 million users, 400 000 of them being teachers.<sup>12</sup> It is available in 18 language mutations, however, neither Slovak or Czech versions are provided.<sup>13</sup> Being a social network in its core, the platform ensures the users' safety by making a closed environment that is free from spammers and internet predators. Teachers can create groups for each of their classes which are self-contained and no one without access may view the group's content.<sup>14</sup> To enter a study group, each student is given a unique group code enabling them to enter a particular group. No other user is able to enter the group unless given the code. The safety is further ensured by teachers operating as administrators of study groups who not only control the content posted by group members, but can also modify or even remove inappropriate content, if necessary.<sup>15</sup> Edmodo serves as an information channel allowing all activities happening within study groups to be posted and accessed later. Both teachers and group members can post material (texts, pictures, podcasts, videos, presentations, links to external websites, etc.) that can be dealt with during the lesson, used for home study or further explored in various assignments according to specific instruction. Edmodo's advantageous position arises also from the fact that all activities happening in the classroom and other study material are stored in one place and are available at any time (as long

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<sup>8</sup> *Edmodo, Subsidiary of NetDragon, Recommended by UNESCO for Distance Learning*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-11-05]. <<https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/03/19/2003088/0/en/Edmodo-Subsidiary-of-NetDragon-Recommended-by-UNESCO-for-Distance-Learning.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> *How VET stakeholders are facing the COVID-19 emergency*. [online]. [2020-11-05]. <[https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/sites/evsw/files/list\\_of\\_tools\\_v5.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/sites/evsw/files/list_of_tools_v5.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> To learn more, see the autor's previous paper on Edmodo: RIGO, F.: *Edmodo as a Communication Tool in Teaching English*. In SOLÍK, M., RYBANSKÝ, R. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Reality and Media Bubbles*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 273-281.

<sup>11</sup> GARNER, G.: *Edmodo – A Platform Redefining Learning*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2015. [online]. [2020-11-05]. Available at: <<http://www.gettingsmart.com/2015/06/edmodo-a-platform-redefining-learning/>>.

<sup>12</sup> SMITH, C.: *10 Edmodo Fact and Statistics (2020)/By the Numbers*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-11-05]. <<https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/edmodo-facts-statistics/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Remark by the author: Still, the absence of the mother tongue version of the platform did not represent a problem for the students participating in the research, as its scope was using Edmodo in distance learning withing an English language course.

<sup>14</sup> WANKEL, C.: *Educating Educators with Social Media*. Bingley : Emerald, 2011, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Remark by the author: Another feature that adds to Edmodo's safety, especially when referring to underage learners, is the fact that the platform is also open to students' parents who get a chance to be informed about the happenings in their children's classes. This way, parents are able to see what topics and tasks are dealt with, which allows them to help their children with learning certain subjects and check the tasks, homework and assignments. This feature also makes it possible for the parent to direct message their children's teacher and take a more active part in their learning process. As a result of switching from face-to-face learning to distance learning during the first wave of COVID-19, a considerable amount of teaching responsibilities had to be taken on by parents. In this situation, Edmodo could undoubtedly serve them as a useful tool in helping their children to keep up with their curricula.

as the Internet connection is provided), thus can be used for later reference. Based on results of a previous study from 2018, the possibility to store all relevant study material in one place and being able to refer to it whenever in doubt about home assignments or when looking for more opportunities to further explore a given subject-matter is highly appreciated by students.<sup>16</sup>

Another Edmodo's feature that may be of considerable benefit to teachers is its Library. The educators working within this platform can store material they wish to use in the classroom or material that has already been dealt with before and they wish to keep it for later use with other groups. It allows them to create and easily manage online tests, Word documents, Excel worksheets or PowerPoint presentations or add links to external websites. Similarly to teachers, students can also create and store digital files via Edmodo's Backpack feature. Thanks to the fact that Edmodo is able to seamlessly integrate with both Google and Microsoft accounts, its users can easily access and share their files from Google Drive and One Drive directly on Edmodo. One of the major characteristics of social networks is their interactivity. Just like other major social networking platforms, Edmodo enables its users to comment on, 'like' or share individual post. Via users' reactions to various posts, the educators, who are, at the same time, administrators of study groups, receive feedback on which topics students find interesting, boring, important or controversial. Furthermore, even students who do not feel comfortable joining classroom oral conversations or discussions might find it more convenient to express themselves this way, as this type of communication has become natural for digital natives. The communication between teachers and their individual students within the platform is reinforced by Edmodo's feature of instant messaging which is, however, limited only to the exchange of messages between the teacher and their students (who can be addressed individually or via a group message). Individual group members are not able to direct message one another. Being a fully functional social network, Edmodo provides its users with notifications about each relevant activity that takes place within a study group, however, students are not notified about all the activities teachers are notified about. All notifications will be stored for three months, keeping teachers/students updated about the newest activity, while also allowing them to review past activity.<sup>17</sup> A notification can be sent either as an e-mail notification, a mobile application notification or a text message, depending on the way users wish to receive them. The users choose which notifications they wish to activate or hide.

Assessment represents an integral part of a learning process. Therefore, Edmodo offers a choice of tools that can be used to evaluate students' activities, performance and progress and thus simplify teachers' work and save their time. They also help students be aware of their progress and manage their learning. Assessment tools include quizzes, polls or assignments of various forms: presentations, essays, seminar papers, recordings, images or even videos. The most frequent assessment tool used in the study groups that provided the research data were tests, or quizzes, as referred to on Edmodo. These are created online within the platform and students also complete them online. To make sure students will not take more time to complete the quiz than necessary, time limit for each quiz can be set. Teachers creating tests can choose from among multiple choice, true/false, short answer, fill in the blank or matching type of questions, or their combinations. Once a quiz is created, it can be saved in the library for later use. When the quiz is completed and submitted by an individual student, the system automatically evaluates it and provides the teacher with the final score in percent. Even though it may seem time-consuming to become familiar with Edmodo and its features at the beginning, especially

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<sup>16</sup> RIGO, F.: Edmodo as a Communication Tool in Teaching English. In SOLÍK, M., RYBANSKÝ, R. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Reality and Media Bubbles*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> *What Information Do Notifications Show?*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://support.edmodo.com/hc/en-us/articles/205005104-What-Information-Do-Notifications-Show->>.

for the educators, once its users become familiar with the features they find most relevant, Edmodo can serve not only as an effective online learning tool simplifying the management of regular face-to-face lessons and courses and bringing education outside classroom, it can also effectively complement distance learning<sup>18</sup>, as the below stated results prove.

### 3 Research

The research focuses on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Edmodo during distance learning in the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to add that Edmodo had been used as a communication channel within English course already before school closures and the switch to distance learning, i. e. during the winter term of the academic year 2019/20, thus the participants of the research could easily adapt it when the tuition moved to online environment. In distance learning, Edmodo was used as a communication tool via which instruction was delivered and regular testing of students' progress was carried out within the course of English language conducted by means on asynchronous learning.<sup>19</sup> The instruction was delivered to students via Edmodo posts in the form of a Word document on a weekly basis. It covered the subject-matter prescribed by individual syllabi for each study group. The students were supposed to work with the delivered study material on their own and were encouraged to consult any ambiguities or individual queries by contacting the teacher via the Edmodo messaging feature and share their language production in the comment section below the respective posts. Within two to three days, each study group was assigned a test covering the subject-matter included in the previous instruction post. Tests had been created using Edmodo assessment tools with a set time limit and a specified deadline. Each lesson instruction was ensued by its respective test. The quantitative research data was obtained by the method of a *questionnaire survey* which was used to get feedback from the research sample on distance learning carried out via the above-mentioned educational platform and following the above-specified teaching/learning procedure.

#### 3.1 Research Sample

The research sample consisted of the students of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, both full-time and part-time, of selected study groups of the first and second year of bachelor study in the field of mass media communication, namely these study programmes: theory of digital games (50 students in the 1<sup>st</sup> year – 2 study groups, 72 students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year – 3 study groups), marketing communication (42 students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year – 2 groups), mass media communication (22 part-time students in the 1<sup>st</sup> year – 1 study group), in the summer term of the academic year 2019/20. Together, 176 students took part in the course being divided into 7 study groups. All students were asked to complete the final feedback questionnaire, as it had been distributed to all 176 students. The response rate was 97,7 % with 172 responses returned.

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<sup>18</sup> Remark by the author: In response to worldwide school closures in March 2020, Edmodo enabled the feature of live streaming by streaming via one of the platforms they support, YouTube Live or Vimeo Live. However, as the streaming platform supported by the organisation within which the presented research was carried out was neither of the two platforms supported by Edmodo, its live stream feature is not dealt with in detail in this paper.; For more information, see: SAMPAT, K.: *How to Video Live Stream to Your Class on Edmodo*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-10-31]. Available at: <<https://go.edmodo.com/how-to-video-live-stream-to-your-class-on-edmodo/#comments>>.

<sup>19</sup> Remark by the author: The tuition started in the week of 11th February 2019 as regular face-to-face learning and after four weeks it switched to distance learning starting in the week of 9th March 2020, i.e. the tuition comprised of four weeks of face-to-face learning and 9 weeks of distance learning.

### 3.2 Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire survey was carried out at the end of the summer term of the academic year 2019/20. It was used in order to obtain feedback from the research participants on distance learning via Edmodo during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Edmodo and the data was being collected from 22<sup>nd</sup> May to 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Using closed question items, we were able to find out about:

- how long the participants have been using Edmodo,
- whether they had known about this educational platform before it was introduced to them in the English course,
- other subjects they currently studied that used Edmodo,
- technical equipment they used when working on Edmodo,
- how much time they spent working with each lesson instruction document,
- when they worked with delivered instruction,
- the reason for posting/not posting their language production on Edmodo,
- the participants' perception of online testing conducted via Edmodo,
- their attitude towards limiting the communication within distance learning only to Edmodo,
- their evaluation of the communication with the teacher via Edmodo messaging.

The questionnaire also included open questions which provided us with an insight into the participants evaluation of Edmodo's benefits and advantages, weaknesses and disadvantages and about its overall effectiveness. At creating the questionnaire, we used a sample questionnaire from *Social Media for Educators*<sup>20</sup>, which we adapted to the needs and objectives of our research.

### 4 Findings

Even though the educational platform of Edmodo has been around since 2008 and has been ranking among top restricted-environment educational networks in the education span from primary to secondary, the results of our research showed that *in Slovak education its use is rather limited*. As many as 94,2 % of the participants (162 students) had never heard about Edmodo and had not used it before it had been introduced to them within their university English course. 4,7 % of the responses (8 students) stated that they had heard about Edmodo before but had never used it prior to their English course. Only 2 students (1,2 %) had had their previous personal experience using Edmodo. Thus, 72,7 % of the respondents (125 students) had been using Edmodo for one academic year only, 26,7 % (46 students) had been using it for two academic years<sup>21</sup> and only 1 student (0,6 %) had been using Edmodo for more than two academic years. Within each study group participating in the research, the English course was the only subject using Edmodo as a tool of communication in distance learning with 99,4 % of responses (171) stating that at that time Edmodo was used only in connection with the English course. Only 1 respondent (0,6 %) stated that they used Edmodo also within other university courses. As for *technical equipment* used when working on Edmodo, most respondents preferred smartphones with 39 % of responses (67 students), followed by laptops with 34,9 % of users (60 students). Desktops computers were used by 22,1 % of the respondents

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<sup>20</sup> JOOSTEN, T.: *Social Media for Educators*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2012, p. 101-104.

<sup>21</sup> Remark by the author: Not all the students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study had been using Edmodo also in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study, namely, 73 students in three study groups started to use Edmodo within their English course in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study.

(38 students). Tablets turned out to be the least popular technical equipment to be used when distance learning with Edmodo with only 7 students (4,1 %).

As far as the *time spent working with the delivered instruction* is concerned, 27,9 % of respondents (48 students) stated they had spent on average 60 – 90 minutes doing so, followed by 26,7 %, i. e. 46 students, spending 30 – 60 minutes engaging in the tasks included in the instruction. Less than 30 minutes were referred to be enough time to complete the given tasks for 17,4 % of the respondents (30 students). 10,5 % of the participants (18 students) needed to devote 90-120 minutes to complete the tasks and the same figures apply to those who spent between 2 and 3 hours working with the instruction. 6 students (3,5 %) took more than 3 hours to follow the instruction and the same number (6 students, 3,5 %) did not devote any time at all to completing the instruction.<sup>22</sup> As distance learning in the courses that were in the focus of our research was conducted by means of asynchronous teaching/learning, the students could decide for themselves when they wished to *devote time to studying*. 45,9 % of the respondents (79 students) stated that they had dealt with the delivered instruction when they had or made time for this activity. As dealing with individual study tasks included in the instruction was supposed to help students prepare for tests carried out on weekly basis, as many as 23,8 % of the respondents (41 students) devoted time to work with the instruction shortly before the tests' due dates. 12,2 % of the research participants (21 students) worked with the study material sent to them via Edmodo when they remembered to do so and 8,1 % (14 students) devoted time to self-study based on the delivered material as soon as it had been posted on Edmodo. The same figures apply to those who engaged in self-study on the same day as the instruction had been uploaded on the network. Only 1,7 % of respondents (3 students) did not work with provided study material at all. In the previous paragraph *regular tests* carried out on a weekly basis were mentioned. These tests formed an integral part of each lesson of the course also within face-to-face learning, however, they were completed in the classroom in paper form. After switching to distance learning, test creation (by the teacher), completion and correction moved to online environment of Edmodo, too. Based on the results of the research this form of testing was preferred over the pen and paper form, as 79,1 % of the respondents (136 students) stated they would prefer online testing in the future, regardless of the form of the tuition, either face-to-face or distance. 36 students (20,9 %) would prefer returning to writing tests on paper during the lessons.

Distance learning of English language in the selected study groups was conducted asynchronously via Edmodo. However, other subjects were taught via other platforms, mostly Google Meet, where students could see teachers lecture in real time. While this type of tuition might be suitable for lecturing, we didn't find them suitable for interactive language learning within bigger groups of students, hence the tuition was carried out by the method described above. When asked about the *lack of real-time visual contact with the teacher*, 52,3 % of the respondents (90 students) agreed with the statement that they did not miss the visual contact with their teacher and that the written instruction and explanation of the subject-matter was enough for them. 41,3 % of the research participants (71 students) said they had missed visual contact with their teacher, but the written instruction and explanation had been enough for them. Only 11 students (6,4 %) stated they had missed visual contact with the teacher and that written instruction had not been sufficient. The written instruction regularly delivered to students each

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<sup>22</sup> Remark by the author: In this context, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that although the assumed achieved language level of the research sample was, according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, at least B1 - intermediate, the real language level of the research sample did not correlate with this requirement. In fact, the study groups the research was carried out with were *mixed ability groups*. This fact might explain the differences in time allocated to the completion of the instructed tasks by different students.

week prompted them to provide their *language production* (via which they would practise target language structures and vocabulary) and post it *in the comment section* below respective posts to obtain feedback from the teacher. However, very few students did so. The reasons for abstaining from the activity was explained by 50 % of the respondents (86 students) by the fact that the topic had been clear to them and they needed no feedback as they had been sure about the accuracy of their language production. 71 students (41,3 %), however, did not post any of their language production even if the topic was not clear to them as they did not want other people/classmates to see their sentences. 15 students (8,7) did not post any of their sentences on Edmodo as they had not done the activity and thus had created no sentences. During the 9-week period of distance learning the students in the study groups participating in the research had a chance to contact the teacher via *Edmodo's messaging feature* whenever they needed. 65,1 % of the research participants (112 students) did not use the messaging feature to contact the teacher because, as they stated, they did not need to do so. 47 students (27,3 %) texted the teacher via Edmodo messaging and they saw it as a fast and effective way of communication. 5,2 % of respondents (9 students) did not send a message to the teacher (even if they may have wished to contact him) because they did not feel comfortable with this way of communication. Only 4 of the students (2,3 %) who contact the teacher via Edmodo messaging said they did not like this feature as they had found it slow and ineffective.

The questionnaire survey used in the quantitative research included also three open questions that allowed us for a more qualitative insight into students' perceptions of Edmodo and its features. When asked to express themselves in their own words on the platform's *benefits and advantages*, the research participants stated that its biggest advantage in asynchronous distance learning lies in the fact that it allows its users to self-manage their time, that it is flexible, easy to use and that the communication within the network is fast. Other frequent responses included: working from the comfort of home, the convenience of online tests, being able to find all relevant information in one place, availability of the mobile application, receiving notifications. Some students stated that Edmodo served them better in distance learning than Google Meets or Google Forms. As far as Edmodo's *weaknesses and disadvantages* are concerned, the survey participants pointed out some technical difficulties they had encountered during its use, lack of interaction both between the students and the teacher and between students themselves. From among other stated disadvantages (none of them reached 5% of responses) we mention minimum space for practising speaking, short time for completion of online tests or the lack of teacher control that might have led to cheating. However, almost 40 % of respondents could not think of any weaknesses, i. e. they stated 'none', 'no', 'I don't know', etc. The final open question invited the participants to reflect on Edmodo's *effectiveness* in the course of the 9 weeks during which distance learning took place. More than half of students (66,9 %) expressed their overall satisfaction with the platform and commented on its effectiveness using attributes such as 'effective', 'good', 'great', 'best possible', 'satisfied'. Other, less frequent comments mentioned the network's clarity, smartness, the advantage of having all relevant study material in one place. Some individuals found Edmodo communication in distance learning better than email communication, some stated they had devoted more time to studying with Edmodo than they had during face-to-face learning and thus had learned more, some students praised the teacher's effort put in the teaching process and some would recommend Edmodo to be used also by other teachers at other subjects. Objections towards Edmodo expressed in the last questions match the disadvantages stated in the previous paragraph. Overall perception of the educational social network and its effectiveness is positive.



## Conclusion

There is a tacit agreement on the fact that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to functionally incorporate not only information and communication technology, but it should also effectively embrace media contents and social media, especially the ones serving educational purposes. Thus, using effectual tools of online learning as part or regular teaching/learning routines can serve all participant of education. The coronavirus-triggered emergency, that forced schools to switch from face-to-face learning to distance learning, placed all people engaged in education in to a hitherto unknown situation and might have changed the face of education forever. Online learning has gained on importance and so has the necessity to have reliable tools to manage and master this type of learning, regardless of whether we are talking about face-to-face or distance learning. Edmodo can serve as one of such tools. Even though it is still relatively unknown and new to Slovak educators, who might prefer other learning platforms, it surely has its advantages beneficial to learners, as our research has shown. Although worldwide it is predominantly used in primary and secondary education, even adult learners participating in our research found it beneficial. One of its biggest strengths lies in the fact that all relevant study material can be posted immediately and subsequently stored and easily accessed later. It enables learners, especially independent adult learners, to self-manage their learning time and, thanks to its mobile application, it can be available at all times allowing for a quick communication with the teacher, if needed. Its assessment tools, tests, or quizzes, in our case, have proven to be a quick and effective way of giving/getting feedback on the learning process and progress and are preferred over paper-based tests. The research has shown that the users from among our research sample generally found it an easy to use and affective tool for online communication within a learning course. The weaknesses of the platform pointed out to in the research were technical difficulties experienced by individuals and the lack of real-time interaction and visual contact with either the teacher or peers arising from the fact that the courses the research focused on had been conducted by means of asynchronous distance learning. This leaves space for further research into the educational platform and its effectiveness as an online learning communication tool complementing synchronous distance learning.

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## EFFECTIVENESS OF TESTING ENGLISH ONLINE IN DISTANCE LEARNING

*František Rigo*

### Abstract

The paper presents the results of a comparative quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of online testing of English as a foreign language. It briefly explains how tuition and subsequent regular testing were conducted within different types of learning and describes the tasks used in testing. It compares university students' performance in different types of testing (paper-based testing, online testing) within the conditions of different types of learning (face-to-face learning, asynchronous distance learning, synchronous distance learning) that had to be carried out in reaction to the first and second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The analysis is complemented by the results of a quantitative questionnaire survey conducted in order to obtain students' feedback on online testing in asynchronous distance learning. Based on the results of the conducted analysis and questionnaire survey, conclusions about the effectivity of the above-mentioned types of testing are drawn.

### Key words:

Asynchronous Learning. COVID-19. Distance Learning. English. Face-To-Face Learning. Online Testing. Paper-Based Testing. Synchronous Learning.

### Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of educational process within any subject. It provides all education participants with feedback on their performance, both learners and teachers. There are various ways of conducting assessment, testing being one of the most often used as it is characterised by objectivity and efficiency.<sup>1</sup> Frequency of testing may vary depending on numerous factors, however, in foreign language education it is important that learners devote time to obtaining new knowledge and skills on regular basis and therefore testing can serve as one, but the only one, of the tools to be used to bring regularity to students' learning activities. There are various types of test techniques and methods reflecting on factors such as the subject-matter dealt with, learning environment and conditions, to name just a few. Even though regular testing may be time consuming for both teachers (creation, distribution, correction and scoring) and learners (preparation for successful performance in testing) its benefits lie in the fact that it makes learners devote their time to studying on a regular basis, keep attendance discipline, focus on relevant content and it also helps them self-manage their learning process<sup>2</sup>. Teachers, on the other hand are provided with regular feedback on students' performance and may adjust teaching activities in order to reflect particular needs of learners. The unprecedented shift from face-to-face learning to the online environment of distance learning, that all participants of education encountered worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, affected all educational processes, including assessment. The ease of the transition depended on many factors, one of them being each educator's willingness and preparedness to include online learning features into tuition already before the pandemic, as in the 21st century teachers should be able to use information and communication technology in their teaching and continually

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: GAVORA, P. et al.: *Elektronická učebnica pedagogického výskumu*. Bratislava : UK in Bratislava, 2010. [online]. [2019-10-25]. Available at: <<http://www.e-metodologia.fedu.uniba.sk/index.php/kapitoly/testy-vedomosti/druhy-testovych-uloh.php?id=i15p7>>.

<sup>2</sup> Remark by the author: Based on the research carried out by a questionnaire survey in order to get learners feedback on tuition including regular testing.; RIGO, F.: *Rozvoj kritického myslenia vo vyučovaní anglického jazyka prostredníctvom mediálnych obsahov*. [Dissertation thesis]. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 97-98.

develop within this area<sup>3</sup>. It was the preparedness of not only teachers, but also their institutions and learners themselves to adapt online learning that influenced the transition. In the first wave of COVID-19 in Slovakia, between March and June 2020, at Slovak universities, teachers used active methods of online teaching like live lectures and live videoconferencing less frequently than the passive ones (study of scripts and literature, writing seminar papers, sharing presentations).<sup>4</sup> This asynchronous type of distance learning<sup>5</sup> during the first coronavirus pandemic wave was conducted also within the courses of English that carried out testing comprising one third of the tests included in our research. However, distance learning during the second wave of the pandemic, from October to December 2020, was carried out synchronously<sup>6</sup>, thus allowing us to compare students' performance in online testing within two different types of distance learning. On top of that, the research sample was complemented by the results of paper-based testing carried out before the transition of learning into the online environment. The paper compares the results of tests carried out within three different types of tuition and based on the comparison draws relevant conclusions.

## 1 Testing

In our research, we analysed the averages success rates of regular tests carried out by means of paper-based testing and online testing within face-to-face learning, asynchronous distance learning and synchronous distance learning. Individual test questions focused at various *subject-matter*, i. e. the tests aimed at vocabulary or grammar prespecified by the course syllabus, included in course literature (course book, workbook, interactive DVD-rom) and dealt with at a lesson prior to the one at which testing took place. On top of that, each test contained an exercise testing students' understanding of certain media contexts such as videos, podcasts, blogs, web sites, etc. that were topically related to the subject-matter of the previous lesson. All relevant information about the content of a forthcoming test (field of grammar, vocabulary range, reference to course literature, recording, links to particular media contents to focus on) was recorded in a Word document (HW worksheet) by the teacher and delivered to students via the educational social network of Edmodo<sup>7</sup> that served as communication platform within all types of learning (face-to-face learning, asynchronous and synchronous distance learning)

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<sup>3</sup> LOJOVÁ, G.: Psycholingvistika – psychológia učenia sa a vyučovania cudzieho jazyka. In *Cizí jazyky*, 1997-1998, Vol. 41, No. 1-2, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Dopad COVID-19 na študentov – hlavné zistenia a závery*. Released on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-30]. Available at: <<https://saavs.sk/dopad-covid-19-na-studentov-hlavne-zistenia-a-zavery/>>. <[https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History\\_of\\_Distance\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History_of_Distance_Education)>.

<sup>5</sup> Remark by the author: Asynchronous learning happens on learners' schedules. Within a course of study, an instructor, or program provides materials for reading, lectures for viewing, assignments for completing, and exams for evaluation. Learners can access this material and satisfy the requirements on their own schedule, provided they meet the expected deadlines. Common methods of asynchronous online learning include self-guided lesson modules, pre-recorded video content, virtual libraries, lecture notes.; *Synchronous Learning vs. Asynchronous Learning in Online Education*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020 [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/synchronous-vs-asynchronous-education/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Remark by the author: Synchronous learning happens in real time. Education participants interact in a specific virtual place at a set time. Common methods of synchronous online learning include video conferencing, teleconferencing, live chatting, and live-streamed lectures that must be viewed in real time.; *Synchronous Learning vs. Asynchronous Learning in Online Education*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020 [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/synchronous-vs-asynchronous-education/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Remark by the author: Edmodo is a free social networking service designed specifically for the purposes of education. Being a social network in its core, the platform ensures the users' safety by making a closed environment that is free from spammers and internet predators. Teachers can create groups for each of their classes which are self-contained and no one without access may view the group's content.; WANKEL, C.: *Educating Educators with Social Media*. Bingley : Emerald, 2011, p. 26.

where it was easily accessible to all students. *Testing within face-to-face learning* in the duration of 20 minutes was carried out at the beginning of each lesson when each student was distributed a blank sheet of paper to write their answers on. Individual test questions and media contents were projected on the screen giving all students the same time for the completion of each test tasks. The teacher could invigilate or provide any additional explanation to instruction to individual test tasks if needed. Correction and scoring were carried out by the teacher and the results for each individual test and student were recorded. *Asynchronous online testing* was conducted on the platform of Edmodo that students had already become familiar with by the time tuition switched to this mode. Similarly to face-to-face teaching, before each test students were delivered HW worksheets, besides other study material, which they were supposed to work with to improve their testing performance. Online tests were created within Edmodo using its assessment tools allowing for creation of such tests. Within the same platform, the tests were delivered to students who then had 48 hours to complete them before they were automatically locked by the system and could not be taken anymore. Once a student started to complete a test, they had to finish it in 20 minutes. After the time limit, tests were locked and automatically submitted to the teacher. Correction and scoring were carried automatically by the system based on the key answers provided by the teacher in the process of test creation. Test tasks that could not be automatically corrected by the platform (students' own language production in form of sentences) were left for the teacher to check and score. The system kept the performance statistics for each individual student, as well as for whole study groups. Within this type of testing, students could decide themselves on the time of taking the test, spend as much time dealing with individual test task as they wished or needed (within the 20-minute time limit) or play particular parts of media contents upon their needs. The same testing procedure applied within *synchronous distance learning*, the only difference being in the time of taking the tests, i. e. all students took tests online at the same time, usually at the beginning of a real-time online session, when they were assigned tests by the teacher and had to complete them within a set time limit. Implementation of online testing is only made possible using a platform allowing for such form of assessment. In teaching and testing that formed the scope of our research interest Edmodo served as such platform.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the form of testing, paper-based or online, individual tests included these five questions types: *multiple choice*, *true/false/not stated*, *matching*, *gap filling (or fill in the blanks)* and *short answer*. Below, we provide a brief description of question types used in testing that later became the scope of our research interest. The specifications provided are based on the Electronic textbook of pedagogical research (*Elektronická učebnica pedagogického výskumu*)<sup>9</sup> and the *Test question types* article<sup>10</sup>. *Multiple choice questions* consist of two parts: a question or an incomplete sentence, the root, and the list of offered answers, one of which is correct and the other ones are incorrect, so called distractors. Test takers are supposed to circle, underline or by a different way, specified in test instruction, mark the right answer. A correct compilation of this type of test item is conditioned by homogeneity of the offered answers. i. e. they should relate to the same set of phenomena. Multiple choice test questions may also contain a longer assignment to which several questions are linked. In this case, unlike with shorter and more simple assignments in the root of multiple choice

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<sup>8</sup> To learn more about the platform, see the author's previous paper on Edmodo: RIGO, F.: Edmodo as a Communication Tool in Teaching English. In SOLÍK, M., RYBANSKÝ, R. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media: Reality and Media Bubbles*. FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 273-281.

<sup>9</sup> See also: GAVORA, P. et al.: *Elektronická učebnica pedagogického výskumu*. Bratislava : UK in Bratislava, 2010. [online]. [2019-10-25]. Available at: <<http://www.e-metodologia.fedu.uniba.sk/index.php/kapitoly/testy-vedomosti/druhy-testovych-uloh.php?id=i15p7>>.

<sup>10</sup> FROST, R.: *Test question types*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/test-question-types>>.

questions which focus on retrieving knowledge from memory, more complex assignments tend to trigger more interpretive mental engagement of tested students. Multiple choice questions used in the researched tests focused on both of the above, simple retrieving knowledge from memory with questions testing new vocabulary and grammar structures and more interpretive mental engagement when working with multiple choice questions testing students' understanding of media contents, videos in most cases. Another type of questions used in testing were *true/false/not stated* questions. This type of question is used, for example, to test reading with understanding in IELTS tests.<sup>11</sup> In the tests we focused our research attention to, this question type was used to tests students' understanding of media contents, videos, recording, texts. In approaching the true/false/not stated type of question, it is very important not to make any assumptions about the content being tested and to ignore anything we know about the topic and to derive our answers from the content itself.<sup>12</sup> True/false/not stated tasks involve higher thought processes, so they were an important part of conducted testing. In the test task of *matching*, the tested items are divided into two columns. The tested person must match the items in the left column, the so-called suggestion, with the items in the right-hand column which represent possible answers. These can be individual words, phrases, parts of sentences, whole sentences, definitions. The matching is conditioned by a certain connection, usually explained in the test assignment, on the basis of which the suggestions and answers belong together. Each stimulus and each response should be used only once. In foreign language teaching, matching test tasks are most often used to test vocabulary, but in the researched testing they were also used to test the overall understanding of selected media contents. In *fill in the blanks*, or *gap filling* type of question, the tested person is required to enter a specific (usually one) word or number in the space provided to complete the incomplete sentence. This sentence must be worded in such a way as to lead safely to the desired answer. Sometimes it is possible to offer the test takers help in the form of the root of the word that needs to be added, the first letter of the word or even a list of possible words the tested person can choose the right answer from. The creation of this type of test task is relatively simple and its scoring is also simple. Unlike within the previous test tasks described above, in gap filling task the tested subjects must produce the desired answer. This type of task usually tests grammar or vocabulary and it is a very effective way of testing the capture of specific words when listening, as was the case also in testing dealt with in this paper. The last type of test tasks used, that also required students to produce the target language, was *short answer*. Within this type of question, students were asked to create their own sentences following clearly specified instruction that made them use particular vocabulary or grammar structures or invited them to express their own opinion about or point of view of certain phenomena, often introduced via media contents, i. e. videos, podcasts, blogs, etc. Each of the tests, the performance within which was researched, contained a variety of minimum three different above-described test techniques to aim at various types of students' mental engagement in the process of test completion.

## 2 Research

The research focuses on examining the effectiveness of online testing and for that reason it compares students' performance in different types of testing (paper-based testing, online testing) within the conditions of different types of learning (face-to-face learning, asynchronous distance learning, synchronous distance learning). By means of quantitative comparative

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<sup>11</sup> OSTER, M.: *How to Answer an IELTS True/False/Not Given Question Type*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.bestmytest.com/blog/ielts/ielts-reading-true-false-not-given/>>.

<sup>12</sup> PELL, C.: *IELTS Reading – True, False, Not Given Tips and Strategy*. [online]. [2020-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.ieltsadvantage.com/2015/04/27/ielts-reading-true-false-not-given-tips/>>.

analysis, the paper's author juxtaposes the figures representing average test results for individual students, individual study groups or individual tests. The analysis is complemented by results of a quantitative questionnaire survey conducted in order to obtain students' feedback on online testing in asynchronous distance learning. Based on the results of the conducted analysis and questionnaire survey, conclusions about the effectivity of the above-mentioned types of testing are drawn.

## 2.1 Research Sample

The research sample consisted of tests, both paper-based and online, completed by the students of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, of selected study groups of the first and second year of bachelor study in the field of mass media communication, namely the study programme of the theory of digital games. For the analysis of individual performance of individual students, in order to be able to compare students' performance in different types of testing and within different learning conditions<sup>13</sup>, the sample consisted of 135 average test results drawn from 810 tests completed by 45 students of the 1st and 2nd year of study, divided into two study groups, in the course of three academic terms – the winter and the summer term of the academic year 2019/20 and the winter term of the academic year 2020/21.<sup>14</sup> The same research sample applied for the quantitative questionnaire survey. The sample used for the comparison of students' performance in individual tests, carried out either in paper-based form or online, is not consistent. In order to be able to make such comparison, the research had to include students from two different years of study. Still, despite this challenge, the sample and the data were selected to reflect the examined phenomena as objectively as possible.<sup>15</sup> The examined tests in paper-based form were completed by 67 students in the course of the winter term of the academic year 2019/20 and by 45 students in the course of the winter term of the academic year 2020/21.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

Regular testing, that is the focus of our research, was an integral part of each lesson of the English course, regardless of the means of tuition (face to face or distance learning). For the comparison of individual performance of individual students in different types of testing and within different learning conditions, we carried out a quantitative comparative analysis of the performance in testing of all 45 students participating in the research. For each study term we

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<sup>13</sup> Remark by the author: Paper-based tests were carried out regularly as integral part of each face-to-face lesson of English course in the winter term of 2019/20. In the summer term of 2019/20, after switching to distance learning on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the tuition was conducted by means of asynchronous distance learning and regular testing remained part of each teaching/learning unit. It was conducted online with students being able to decide on the time of taking the tests, provided they were completed within set deadlines. In the winter term of 2020/21 tuition was carried out by via synchronous distance learning and testing took place online at the same time for all students present at videoconferenced lessons.

<sup>14</sup> Remark by the author: The students, who participated in paper-based testing in the winter term of 2019/20 and in asynchronous online testing in the summer term of 2019/20 were students in their first year of study (study groups 1 Bc TEDI 16 and 1 Bc TEDI 17). The same students participated in synchronous online testing in the winter term of 2020/21. By that time, however, the students had entered the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their study (study groups 2 Bc TEDI 16 and 2 Bc TEDI 17), as they had completed the 1<sup>st</sup> year in the summer term of 2019/20.

<sup>15</sup> Remark by the author: The research sample in both winter terms, the one of 2019/20 and the one of 2020/21 consisted of the tests completed by the students of the theory of digital games study programme in their second year. Even though the compared individual tests (identical in their subject-matter, different in the form of their implementation) were completed by different groups of students, the language level of the research participants was relatively the same.

worked out the average test result based on the results of the first six tests taken in each term<sup>16</sup>, i. e. in case of each student we worked with three figures representing their average success rate in testing for each term. Based on the comparison of these figures we were able to say whether each student's performance had improved or deteriorated, and to what extent (expressed in percent) it had done so<sup>17</sup>. The individual figures were subsequently averaged to provide generalisations for the whole research sample. This allowed us to draw conclusions in relation to the effectiveness of different types of testing within different means of tuition. In order to make comparison of students' performance in individual tests, identical in their subject-matter, different in the form of their implementation, we compared the average success rate of each test achieved by students who completed it in paper-based form within face to face learning with the average success rate of the same test achieved by students who completed it in online form within asynchronous distance learning. This way we compared 6 tests identical in their subject-matter and we present the figures for all 6 individual tests, as well as the averaged results. The questionnaire survey was carried out at the end of the summer term of the academic year 2019/20. It was used in order to obtain feedback from the research participants on asynchronous online testing during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through the educational platform of Edmodo and the data was being collected from 22<sup>nd</sup> May to 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The results are averaged and expressed in percent.

### 3 Findings

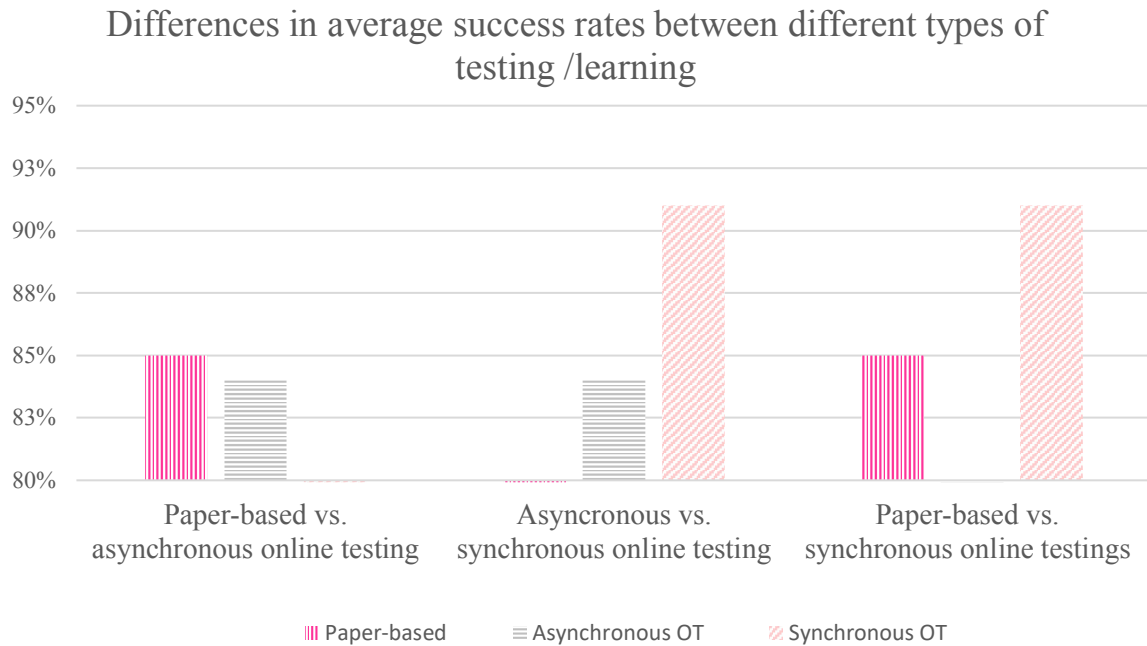
The analysis of students' performance in testing based on the average test results of individual students reflecting their success rate in different types of testing and within different means of tuition showed that students had scored best in online testing carried out within synchronous distance learning. Before school closures in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had been used to writing regular tests at each face-to-face lesson in paper-based form, as they had been taking such tests throughout the whole winter term of 2019/20. The average success rate of this type of testing for all 45 students participating in the research was 85 %. After switching to distance learning and adapting asynchronous online testing, the average success rate dropped by 1 % to 84 % (chart 1). The difference is not relevant, however, when considering the performance improvement/deterioration with individual students (chart 2), we observed that the average success rate of asynchronous online tests dropped in case of 23 students (51 % of the research participants). The average percentage of decrease was 5 %. On the other hand, 17 students (38 % of the participants) improved their performance by 4% on average. For 5 students (11 %), the average testing success rate remained the same for both types of testing.

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<sup>16</sup> Remark by the author: In case of the summer term of 2010/20, only the tests carried out online were included.

<sup>17</sup> Remark by the author: For example, an individual student's average success rate in testing for the winter term 2019/20 was 87 %, for the summer term 2019/20 it was 82 % and for the winter term 2020/21 it was 94 %. Thus, the student's performance in testing dropped by 5 % when comparing paper-based testing with asynchronous online testing, but it improved by 7 % when comparing paper-based testing with synchronous online testing. When comparing asynchronous and synchronous online testing, the student's performance rose by 12 %.

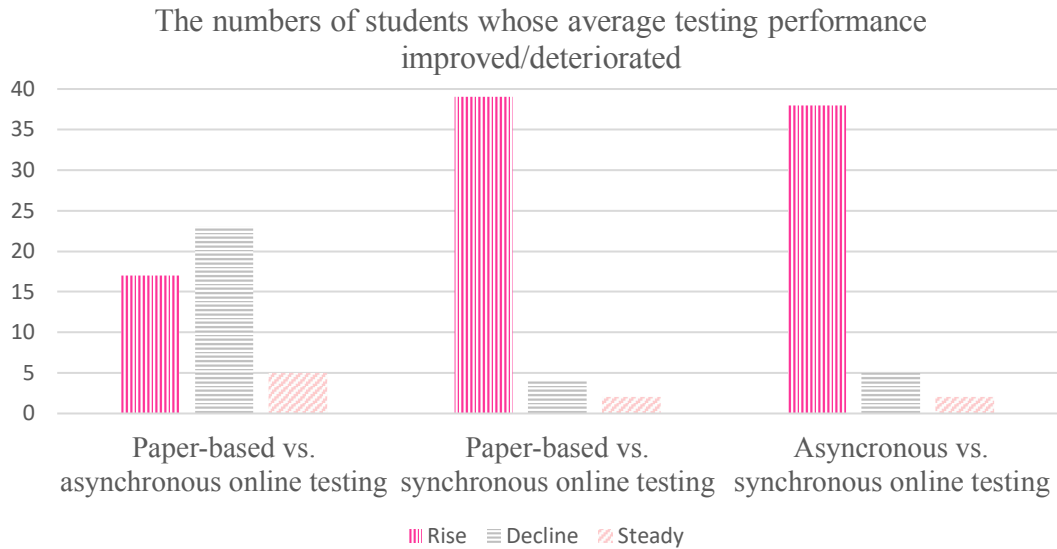




**Chart 1: Differences in average success rates between different types of testing/learning**

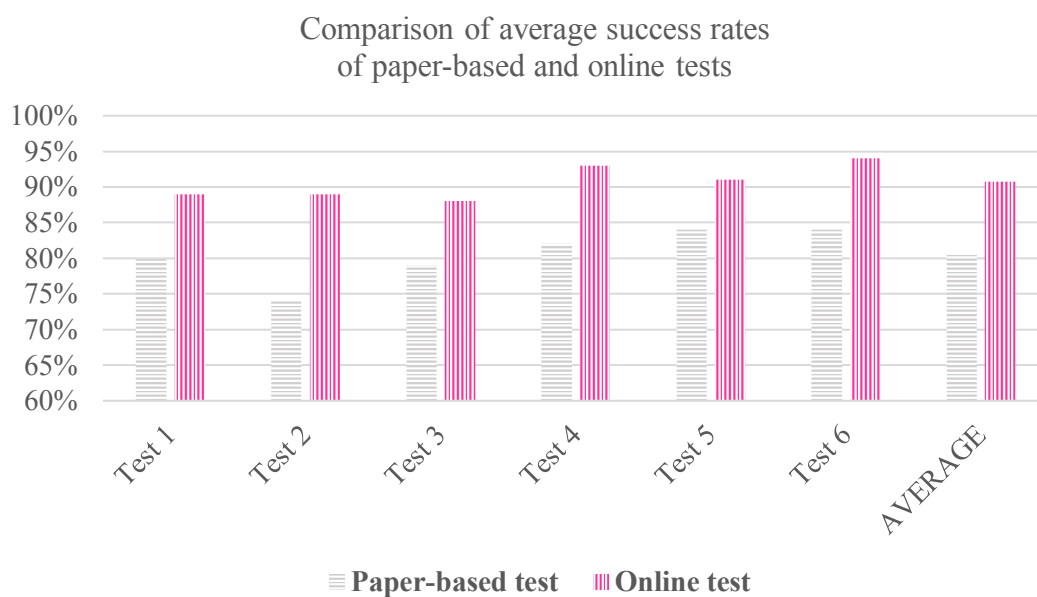
Source: Own processing, 2020.

The comparison drawn between the average success rate of all students in online testing within asynchronous distance learning (84 %) and in the same type of testing within synchronous distance learning (91 %) showed the average increase of 7% (chart 1). Here the difference is considerably higher, even though both, 84 % and 91 %, refer to overall average students' performance in online testing. The difference lies in the method the distance learning tuition was conducted: asynchronously and synchronously. The differences become even more relevant when looking at the performance drift of individual students (chart 2): it can be seen that as many as 38 students (84 % of the research participants) have improved their performance in testing by 9 % on average, while the drop in performance could be observed only with 5 students (11 % of the participants) by 3 % on average. Two students reached the same average result as in the previous term. The last comparison paid attention to in this part of the research was the analysis of the differences in students' testing performance between paper-based testing conducted within face-to-face learning and synchronous online testing. The figures are similar to the ones from the previous comparison. The average success rate in paper-based testing (85 %) is lower than the one in synchronous online learning (91 %) by 6 % (chart 1). The performance drift of individual students presented in chart 2 is also similar to the comparison presented in the previous paragraph with 39 students (87 % of the research participants) who, on average, improved their performance by 9 % and 4 students (9 % of the participants) whose average success rate in synchronous online testing, compared to paper-based face-to-face testing dropped by 3 % on average. Two students performed in both types of testing at the same level.



**Chart 2: The numbers of students whose average testing performance improved/deteriorated**  
 Source: Own processing, 2020.

The findings shown above present the results of testing performance of the same students within three different types of testing/learning conditions. The tested subject-matter, however, differed in each conducted testing. In order to examine students’ performance within testing comprising identical subject-matter, but carried out within different testing and learning methods, we compared the average success rate of each test achieved by students who completed it in paper-based form within face-to-face learning and the average success rate of the same test achieved by students who completed it in online form within asynchronous distance learning. The results of the comparison showed that testing carried out by the latter method had proven to be more successful in all examined tests, namely by 9 % for test 1, 15 % for test 2, 9 % for test 3, 11 % for test 4, 7 % for test 5 and 10 % for test 6. On average, students performed better in online testing carried out within synchronous online learning than in paper-based testing conducted within face to learning by 10,2 %, as shown in chart 3.



**Chart 3: Comparison of average success rates of paper-based and online tests**  
 Source: Own processing

The research presented in the paper is complemented by students' feedback on online testing carried out within asynchronous distance learning reflecting the participants' approach to, and perception of, such testing. Based on the results of a questionnaire survey mentioned in the Introduction of this paper related to paper-based testing within face-to-face learning we were able to conclude that students had found testing a tool forcing them to study continuously and attend lessons regularly. Asynchronous distance learning made students take on the responsibility for their learning on the one hand, on the other hand, it provided them with the possibility to self-manage their study time as 46 % of the survey respondents stated that they had taken the test when they had had/made time for doing so. However, as many as 30 % of students took tests shortly before their due dates<sup>18</sup> and 15 % did so only after they had remembered about this task. 6 % of the survey participants had put regularity in their testing by completing the tests at the same day of the week and 4 % of students took the online tests as soon as they had been posted on the educational social platform that served as the communication tool within their distance learning English course. As far as preparation for asynchronous online testing is concerned, exact half of the students, 50 %, stated in the questionnaire they had taken the tests after going through the whole lesson instruction delivered to them (that included explanation of specific subject-matter, doing relevant exercises to practise the subject matter, completing the tasks listed in homework worksheets accompanying each lesson's instruction and watching videos or going through other media content referred to in test questions that formed part of each test). 28 % of students took online tests once they had completed the task included in the homework sheet and working with media content, 12 % of the survey participants only worked with the media content before taking the test and 2 % worked only with homework worksheet. 8 % of students took the tests without any preparation.

When surveyed about tests' content, clarity of instruction and time limit by agreeing or disagreeing with provided statements, the following responses and figures were obtained: 65 % of students always knew what they had been supposed to do in each test item, while 3 % of students had problems with some types of questions. 52 % were aware of the fact that the tests focused on subject-matter related to lesson instruction delivered to students prior to each test. 52 % of the survey respondents agreed that time limits for completion of each test were enough for them. On the other hand, the tests' set time allowance was not enough for 13 % of students. The same figure, 13 %, applies for those who sometimes forgot about the test and so did not complete it after due date, unlike students who sometimes forgot about the test but asked the teacher for another chance to take the test who account for 5 % of the survey participants. 8 % of students stated they had encountered some technical difficulties while completing the tests. Even though the presented questionnaire survey results are based only on online testing carried out within asynchronous learning<sup>19</sup>, when combined with the research results based on testing performance of individual students carried out by different testing methods and within different types of learning, they enable us to draw some conclusions about the effectiveness of online testing that form the last part of the paper.

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<sup>18</sup> Remark by the author: With this response, it remains questionable whether students had time to prepare for testing as the tests were automatically locked after their deadlines and it was not possible to retake them without consulting the teacher before.

<sup>19</sup> Remark by the author: Feedback on synchronous distance learning and testing was not available at the time of writing the paper as tuition conducted in this way was still ongoing.

## Conclusion

Testing is an efficient and effective assessment tool that is positively perceived by learners as it makes them devote their time to studying on a regular basis, keep attendance discipline, focus on relevant content and helps them self-manage their learning process. Its effectiveness, however, depends not only on the form of testing, paper-based or online, but also on the type of learning it is conducted within, i. e. face-to-face learning, synchronous or asynchronous distance learning. Based on the results of our research, we can conclude that it is the type of learning that plays a more important role in testing performance than the type of test itself. Students scored best in online testing carried out synchronously, however, the second most successful type of testing was the one carried out in paper-based form synchronously. Asynchronous online testing proved to be the least effective type of testing. Even though the difference between the average success rates of paper-based testing and the asynchronous online testing does not seem relevant at only 1 %, from the point of view of individual students we could observe that more students performed better in paper-based testing. This may be explained by the fact that with this type of testing students knew exactly when testing would take place and thus had to be prepared for this type of assessment on a regular basis. This method did not allow students to devote time to individual test tasks according to their needs, i. e. they were not able to easily jump between individual questions or focus on specific parts of media contents, however, on an individual basis they performed better than they did when having a chance to distribute their attention and time to various tasks according to their needs. Although the test takers appreciated the freedom of asynchronous distance learning allowing them for their own management of study-time, only a fraction of them took tests at the same time of the week and almost one third of them took tests before their deadlines, thus not always allowing themselves enough time for preparation and study. Within synchronous online testing, on the other hand, students always knew when testing would be carried out, so they could prepare for the activity and during testing itself they were able to benefit from the advantages of online testing, i. e. distribute their attention and time to individual test tasks as needed. As the comparative analysis carried out within the research showed, majority of students improved their performance within this type of testing in both drawn comparisons, i. e. the same students participating in different types of testing in different learning conditions and the same subject-matter being tested through the same question types by different students via different medium. The absence of invigilator in online testing does not seem to play an important role as this was not present in asynchronous online testing either, still the testing performance dropped with half of the students. Being well aware of the fact that testing should not and cannot be the only form of assessment in foreign language learning, it has proven to be an effective method of making students devote time to learning the target language and providing feedback to both, teachers and learners. Online testing is perceived by students as far more popular than paper-based testing, however, it is the regularity in learners' preparation for testing and fixed test times that make it an effective assessment tool whose use does not need to be limited to distance learning.

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## CONSUMER CULTURE OF ABUNDANCE – AMBIVALENCE OF LIFE IN AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY

*Ondřej Roubal*

### **Abstract**

Theories of consumer culture are increasingly focusing on the unprecedented extension of choice opportunities in the product range. In the ever-increasing abundance of consumer elections, consumer culture is a defining feature of prosperity, a manifestation of the strengthening of individual freedoms and the democratisation of consumerism. The aim of the study is to disrupt the stereotypically accepted perspective of producers, sellers and consumers themselves, that the consumer culture of abundance is a problem-free concept that linearly contributes to the positive effects of all market entities. This situation is characteristic in that its ambivalent nature is reflected only rarely. In many cases, it causes contradictory and conflicting effects in the lives of consumers, exposed to the confusing and diverse terrain of the plurality of consumer choices. The expansion of consumer decision-making possibilities creates an unpleasant pressure on consumers to take responsibility for the making their own decisions for their consequences. The consumer culture of abundance fundamentally complicates the decision-making and implementation of consumer choices. We present arguments here that the consumer culture of abundance makes decision-making act fundamentally problematic. We describe and explain the three main factors that have a negative effect on the psychological level of consumer decision-making. Firstly, there is the problem of processing and evaluating available information, secondly, the growth of consumer aspirations and thirdly, the effect of hedonistic adaptation.

### **Key words:**

Affluence. Ambivalence. Consumer Culture. Consumer Decision-Making. Problem of Choice.

### **Introduction**

We understand consumer culture as a special type of material culture, where qualitatively different relationships of people to things are formed and constitute the symbolic meanings that people attribute to these things. How people approach things and how they interpret these objects in the symbolic levels of their representations also depends on the internal dynamics of consumer culture, the directions and intensity of which are significantly co-created not only by globally functioning markets and economic factors, but also by social, cultural and psychological influences. In particular, the dynamics of changes and trends in consumer culture initiated by business and marketing strategies of producers and distributors of goods and services are gaining more and more distinctive features of ambivalent manifestations, which warrants more detailed sociological attention. The ambivalent nature of consumer culture is characterised by the simultaneous presence of conflicting and ambiguous situations, manifested in ambiguous, uncertain and often conflicting consumer experiences in various acts of consumption. In the spirit of liberal criticism, consumer culture has approached by its character a historically unprecedented expansion of opportunities for selection and choice of everyday consumer products to the idea of fulfilling the project of a prosperous society of abundance, enabling reliable and smooth emancipation of the entities' individual freedoms. Some optimistic scenarios attribute an important function in creating abundance in terms of increasing production of values (tangible and intangible) from fewer sources, but also abundance represented by a more robust choice and diversity of options in areas of consumption, education or health care<sup>1</sup>, in particular to technological innovation.

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<sup>1</sup> BRYNJOLFSSON, E., McAFFE, A.: *Druhý věk strojů: Práce, pokrok a prosperita v éře špičkových technologií*. Brno : Jan Melvil Publishing, 2015, p. 162.

We focus our attention in this study on some possible contradictions and conflicts in the functioning of contemporary consumer culture, typical of the expansion of abundance of consumer opportunities in the form of explosive growth of product range, to which the contemporary consumer is exposed as an active and self-reflective entity with which the consumer must deal. The consumer culture of many opportunities certainly responds to the many expectations of a prosperous life and fulfils the vision of further development and realisation of human freedoms, but at the same time, it initiates a number of unintended effects in the form of ambivalent situations, which result in an ever-increasing concentration of uncertainty in the acts of choice and a growing degree of fragmentation in consumers' life. The aim of the study is to contribute to consumer culture theories, capturing its global significance in the conditions of late modernity, from the perspective of its accelerated development of the quantity of consumer opportunities and unprecedented extension of consumer choices. We present arguments that undermine the stereotyped notion that a growing environment of abundance of opportunity is a non-problematic manifestation of prosperity and affluence with clearly positive effects in the field of human experience and action. We identify and explain the main sources of difficulties and limitations, which are firmly integrated in the sphere of consumer decision-making, but consciously reflected upon only minimally.

## 1 Decommodification as an Essence of Consumer Culture

We define consumer culture as a specific type of material culture, where the relationship of consumers to products is not only shaped by their useful and functional value, but also by their various individually defined, socially communicated and shared symbolic meanings and sign systems. Commodities, however fulfilling their utilitarian and practical-useful functions, are at the same time symbolic indicators through which consumers reproduce, confirm or redefine cultural meanings, structure social space, model interpersonal relationships and organise the coordinates of their own identity. Identities, the forms and contents of which in consumer societies are closely connected with acts of consumption and consumer lifestyle<sup>2</sup>. The principle of consumer culture is that consumer goods in the form of purchased commodities are the object of "decommodification", which develops the ability of social actors to treat consumer goods as intangible resources and instruments of thought, developing fiction, rituals, imagination or constructing various stable and reliable models of self-concept. and the interpretation of their own biography in variously changing relations with the surrounding world<sup>3</sup>. In their roles of consumers in acts of decommodification of market products, social actors, thanks to their ability to actively attribute intangible symbolic meanings to commodities, try to figure out who they are and where they actually belong. Logically, shopping and the entire related set of practices associated with the preparation and mechanisms of purchasing decisions, implemented in situations of increasingly demanding process of comparing and measuring the parameters of models and types of products offered, are a key prerequisite for the implementation of consumer

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<sup>2</sup> ROUBAL, O., ZICH, F.: *Marketingová sociologie. Marketingová komunikace a moderní společnost*. Prague : EUPRESS, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Remark by the author: Consumer goods in the form of decommodified signs and symbols can in a certain way compete (albeit only to a limited extent) with other media and artefacts of the high culture, such as fine arts, literature, music. The point is that consumer culture can develop abilities and skills treat consumer objects as very specific and understandable sources of thinking and self-concept, which has traditionally been the role of works of art. At the same time, the role of consumer products cannot be overestimated in this context. Unlike works of art, their distribution and production are adapted to the requirements of mainstream taste, which does not require such a demanding level of fictionalisation and staging. Mass-produced consumer products may thus, in confrontation with artistic artefacts, correspond to the level of afternoon tv series, entertainment programmes, shows or cartoons.

decommodification practice. It is increasingly demanding because the customer makes choices and decides on the goals of possible consumption in the conditions of intensive and continuous generation of an increasingly diverse range of products. The ever-denser, more voluminous and diverse range of products is supported by an equally diverse and rich circulation of information and media images. Marketing communication strategies manage to create and globally produce this information so that the products offered reliably and engagingly associate desired life values and goals, lifestyle variations or patterns, images, characters and examples of various life stories and situations to choose from, combine, connect and easily manipulate. Consumer culture is thus constituted by the daily “decommodification practices” of consumers and users of market products, (re-)constructing commodities in the non-market logic of symbolic representations and signs so as to give them such social and psychological meanings that give their actions a concrete meaning and comprehensible order.

## 2 Ambivalence of Consumer Culture

In sociological theories of late modernity, it is possible to identify various thought systems focused on the phenomenon of ambivalence of the contemporary life<sup>4</sup>. According to some authors, the ambivalent nature of social reality should clearly become more pronounced due to the accelerating processes of globalisation in recent decades<sup>5</sup>. The accelerating development of digital technologies, online communication and the penetration of artificial intelligence into everyday life are among the main contributors to the strengthening of the ambivalent nature of reality and human experience<sup>6</sup>. In these conditions, the world is certainly more open, interconnected, events are rapidly shared (via media) and become a disseminated experience, the availability and accessibility of information is growing. However, at the same time, global late modern society is more vulnerable, more fragile as a result of a freer and more independent organisation of life, and numerous new issues of security, control and privacy are ever-appearing.

The ambivalent experience of life situations and events is intended to become more prevalent in the current atmosphere of penetrating and hypertrophying individualisation. An individualised person in control of to the social scene of the modern world can find happiness in independence, the ability to freely choose and decide, to purposefully achieve private goals, in the changing and alternating lifestyles, but such person might as well find unhappiness in feelings of isolation, uprooting and insecurity. Indulgence, the ethos of consumption, focus on experiences, sensory pleasures, entertainment and commercialisation of free time, at the same time accompanied by feelings of anxiety, fear, insecurity, disappointment and fright from everyday life<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, the related question of human identity acquired a completely new dimension in the conditions of accelerated individualisation and the optics of postmodern interpretation – a purely ambivalent dimension. Identity has become a “work of art”<sup>8</sup>, a life project, an authentic act of creating and realising a life screenplay, an act of independent dramaturgy and directing, producing episodes of an original life story. A metaphor may be thought of where the social actors become actors, screenwriters, playwrights, producers and directors in one person, whose roles undergo constant change, are the subject of constant choice and decision-making, individual creation and adaptation.

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<sup>4</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Umění života*. Prague : Academia, 2010, p. 118-121.

<sup>5</sup> SCHOLTE, J. A.: *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 224-256.

<sup>6</sup> MAIELLO, G., ROUBAL, O.: *Média a kultura: Od primární orální kultury ke konstrukci kyber-prostorových identit v éře digitální komunikace*. Prague : EUPRESS, 2020, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Hypermodernní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2013, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Umění života*. Prague : Academia, 2010, p. 64.



A complementary part of the ambivalent essence of social reality is the consumer culture as a system of values and processes that (re-)shape this social reality and in its various aspects develop in constant mutual interactions. Postmodern personality also includes a specific type of consumer with a strongly hedonistic life orientation<sup>9</sup>, who newly interprets the acts of shopping and consumption as attractive and meaningful ways of spending free time<sup>10</sup>. New dimensions and meanings of consumption are revealed as a function constituting a number of elements of the individual and social dimension of life<sup>11</sup>, which can also be understood as a creation of a life project, in Bauman's words "work of art"<sup>12</sup>, acquiring specific outlines, contours, colours and shades in the acts of shopping and consumption. There are also bold and original reflections on the role of consumption as a cultural attribute of the "hypermodern age", overcoming not only the era of postmodern personality, but also current ideas about the role of consumption as a source of individual pleasure, easily transforming into various forms of anxiety and concern<sup>13</sup>. Consumer culture can thus resemble the mythological face of Janus, symbolising the simultaneous presence of opposites and the coexistence of contradictions. Janus's face also refers to the motives of change and transformation, movement and dynamics, transition or rebirth from one state to another, i.e. also to the motives of the very essence of the functioning of consumer culture.

The possibility to make free choices and individual decisions is an imperative of the progress of society and the emancipation of the individual of the modern and late modern epoch. Postmodern discourse has further shifted the problem of choice closer to private and consumer life, as its inseparable components. "Basically, we no longer have the option not to make a choice"<sup>14</sup>. Bauman interestingly links the problem of individual choice with the helplessness of consumers, which is not so much about how to obtain the objects of choice and make them objects of recognition and respect for others, but rather about which object to choose and how to keep the ability to get rid of that object in time if it begins to lose its original value and lustre of attractiveness and carry out another round of selections and choices.<sup>15</sup> The consumer society is then the "society of choice", where each choice is a cultural act of choice between culturally prefabricated artefacts<sup>16</sup>. It should be recalled that the implementation of these choices is significantly co-determined by the form of consumer culture and the "decommodification practice" of consumers, redefining the utility value of commodities in the value of symbolic meanings, predetermining the acts of consumer decisions. However, the conditions for implementing these consumer decisions are increasingly demanding. Actors are faced not only with an increasingly diverse, attractive and colourful offer of consumer choices, but also with a number of incompatible and competing decisions. According to Lipovetsky, these decisions are often burdened by the ambivalent nature of postmodern hedonism, symbiotically combining two opposing principles, anchored in the constant tension between detachment, decay and loss of responsibility, and growing responsibility, caution and restraint<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Éra prázdnoty. Úvahy o současném individualismu*. Prague : Prostor, 2003, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> ROBERTS, K.: *Leisure in Contemporary Society*. Wallingford : CABI Publishing, 2006, p. 191-192.

<sup>11</sup> SASSATELLI, R.: Sociologie spotřeby: jednání, distinkce a identita. In ZHRÁDKA, P. (ed.): *Spotřební kultura: Historie, teorie a výzkum*. Prague : Academia, 2014, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Umění života*. Prague : Academia, 2010, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Hypermoderní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2013, p. 35-40.

<sup>14</sup> BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Systém věcí*. Moscow : Rudomino, 1999, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Individualizovaná společnost*. Prague : Mladá fronta, 2004, p. 174.

<sup>16</sup> PETRUSEK, M.: Zygmunt Bauman: „tropika diskurzu“, slovo o pop-kultuře a spotřební společnosti epochy „tekuté modernity“. In *Sociologický časopis*, 2010, Vol. 46, No. 5, p. 809.

<sup>17</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Hypermoderní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2013, p. 19-20.

The point is that the accelerated offer of types and kinds of goods and services makes the consumers uncertain in each individual choice and it exposes them to the risk of the subsequent awakening of negative feelings of their own failure and internal unrest. There is no doubt that in a culture of “over choice”, individual decision-making and subjective evaluation of its results in the form of the realisation of a specific choice is primarily dependent on an awareness of one’s own responsibility. Social actors in the roles of customers are then confronted with the results of these decisions, often burdened by growing doubts and uncertainties. Negative emotions of disappointment, regret and dissatisfaction are then generated in the conflict of uncertainty of choice and certainty of one’s own responsibility for its outcome. Every specific decision, every single choice at the same time means the rejection of other opportunities and the voluntary abandonment of the possibility to achieve the alternative consumption goals. And the more accessible and broader these unused and unexperienced options are, the more intense the awareness of one’s own responsibility for the choice made. At the same time, the degree of subjective satisfaction with the outcome of each individual decision is based on the constant comparison of the selection result with other potential choices, which stimulates feelings of uncertainty and doubt rather than certainty and belief, as the comparison happens in the context of an ever-growing volume of goods and services on the market. In summary, being able to choose from a number of options is associated with freedom and independence, but at the same time it does not mean that being able to choose from a larger number of alternatives is always better. *“The choice brings a sense of great responsibility to the game, and that is linked to the fear of failure, the guilt and the fear that we will feel regret if we make the wrong choice.”*<sup>18</sup>. The unlimited offer of alternatives makes consumers uncertain in each individual choice and it exposes them to the subjectively experienced risks associated with these choices and their consequences.

### 3 Consumer Culture of Abundance and the Problem of Choice

The proliferation of choices in the consumer culture of prosperous societies fundamentally complicates the acts of decision-making. Recall that on the one hand, active efforts to act or “decide for something” are often accompanied by a number of unpleasant experiences (remorse, self-blame, disappointment, etc.), and on the other hand, there is a specific defence mechanism in the form of passivity as a safer strategy of delaying the decision or rejecting it altogether. Let us try to further summarise and briefly describe the possible effects that can function as complementary and interconnected lines of force in the extensive field of consumer choices. So why can we feel worse in situations where we can have more? Firstly, there is the problem of information. Easy availability and amount of information is not only a more general defining feature of today’s technologically advanced society<sup>19</sup> and a common accompanying attribute of everyday action, but also an elementary principle of the functioning of consumer culture, reproduced and confirmed by a globally functioning and operating platform of information flows. Decision-making based on information should, according to all assumptions, optimise the choice, or lead consumers to advantageous or desirable results of selection in terms of their own expectations and wishes. But is it even practically possible to gather, clearly organise, compare and evaluate all the available information on the various products of our interest? Imagine how much information customers need to gather, evaluate and compare in order to find the best possible product choice, for example when only one sports article brand in a retailer’s offer represents more than two dozen different sub-parameters in dozens and hundreds

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<sup>18</sup> SALECL, R.: *The Tyranny of Choice*. London : Profile Books, 2011, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> For more information, see: LEONHARD, G.: *Technológia vs. humanita*. Bratislava : Slovenská inovačná a energetická agentúra, 2018.

of different models of a similar product by other brands<sup>20</sup>. Is it possible to organise and compare hundreds and possibly thousands of pieces of information of different quality parameters and properties in such a wide assortment different types of products?

This reality is sensitively perceived by consumers – they can anticipate internal unrest and uncertainty from the final choice already in the phase of decision-making and selection. This anticipation of internal tension from the lack of possibilities and means to evaluate all sellers' available information is based on the knowledge that each choice made at the same time means a decision not to make the alternative choices (real and imaginative), which may be more advantageous overall or more advantageous after some time. The fact that consumers decide on the basis of the amount of available information for the best possible option from the choice is accompanied by constant uncertainty and doubt, which also reduces the subjective feelings of satisfaction and joy of the product purchased. However, the growing personal anxiety and rising transaction costs associated with learning about selections from an ever-increasing set of goods on offer can still be “built into” a standard consumer behaviour theory.<sup>21</sup> However, there are at least two other reasons, the functions and meanings of which are somewhat out of the spotlight of research and are usually not even part of “standard” consumer behaviour theories. These are the issues of aspirations and hedonistic adaptation.

We follow the issue of aspirations in the form of hopes and expectations of what we want to achieve in the area of consumer welfare. These usually achieve increasing tendencies in situations of high levels of material security, accompanied by the proliferation of consumer opportunities as an inseparable feature of the rising living standard of prosperous societies. Consumer aspirations are further systematically and programmatically initiated by a dense network of information flows, images and messages of media production in the advertising industry and by advanced tools of integrated marketing communication, including the use of sophisticated artificial intelligence technologies. In the media-reinforced hedonistic orientation of life, demonstrations and presentations of various variants and models of lifestyle attractiveness, the ethos of “life of unlimited possibilities”, “world without borders”, “life of endless opportunities” is awakened, which necessarily deepens the gaps between reality (what we are really achieving) and what can be achieved (what we would like to achieve). Finally, it is a problem of the (hedonistic) adaptation, closely related to the effects of growing aspirations. In the case of consumption, hedonistic adaptation is what subsequently weakens the intensity of the initial joys and pleasures of the goods purchased. Behavioural economics here is based on the assumption that people are emotionally adaptable, they find support for this statement in the psychological theory of the hedonistic adaptation of Brickman and Campbell<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, achieving a higher degree of consumer welfare may cause a certain fluctuation or deviation of the degree of subjective happiness, but this returns to its original level after a certain time. Many see the achievement of happiness in the idea of fulfilling aspirations, but once the finish line is crossed and these aspirations are realised, they are quickly forgotten and thrown into the past as unnecessary artefacts of their own biography. This explains why in societies of abundance they strive so vehemently to achieve an ever-higher standard of living, why people desire to make their material comfort even more “comfortable” and their convenience even “convenient”. The past is always judged from the perspective of a higher level of aspiration, and perhaps too easily we are subject to the illusion of the added value of prosperity towards the future, from which perhaps too much is expected.

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<sup>20</sup> ROUBAL, O.: Maximizers and Satisficers in Consumer Culture Changes. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 49-50.

<sup>21</sup> MLČOCH, L.: *Ekonomie štěstí: proč méně může být více*. Prague : FSS CUNI, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> See also: BRICKMAN, P., CAMPBELL, D.: Hedonic relativism and planning the good society. In APLEY, M. (ed.): *Adaptation-level theory: A symposium*. New York : Academic Press, 1971, p. 287-301.

The hedonistic adaptation probably works on another level as well. Consumers may have a lower ability to predict the future effects of dampening adaptation effects due to higher expectations, based at the same time on their own belief that their choice (based on the ability to obtain, compare and evaluate information) will be the “best” choice. This contributes to the optimistic scenario of hopes that the choice will not bring disappointment, but rather longer-term feelings of satisfaction. However, due to these aspirations, the effects of hedonistic adaptation affect the group of these consumers all the more. The idea that over time, as a result of hedonistic adaptation, the costs associated with finding the best price for a product quickly “depreciates” makes their losses seem even higher.

## **Conclusion**

The current consumer culture is the scene of an expansion of consumer opportunities and possibilities, related to the unprecedented explosion of the offer of types, variants or models of consumer products. However, there are reasons to believe that the essence of this process is characterised by an ambivalent nature. On the one hand, the tendency to pluralise consumer opportunities and make them more flexible is required and supported by the nature of consumer demand, identifying this trend with positive feelings of free – increasingly individualised – independent decision-making, authenticity of choice and the feeling of active and full participation in the world of consumer opportunities. On the other hand, at the same time, consumers are ambiguously and intricately coping with a number of specific situations in which their expectations and ideas of free decision-making are to be satisfactorily realised in the confusing terrain of purchases and choices of consumer goods. At the same time, the emancipation of the freedom of consumer choice is confronted with growing demands related to individual responsibility for the decisions made. In the context of unlimited choice of options, the responsibility for the final decision and the result of the choice is assumed exclusively by the person who consciously and freely made this choice. In a situation of limited choice, independently conditioned by external factors, the responsibility for the result of the choice is comfortably dispersed in the anonymity of non-personal conditions and reasons, independently arising and operating in the decision-making environment. Greater choice is thus far from being only a globally widespread benefit of the market emancipating the individual freedoms of customers’ decisions, but also a task on managing and controlling the responsibility for the results of such decisions.

The consumer culture of abundance is an appealing and attractive vision and it contributes to, among other things, the further emancipation of individual freedoms, intertwined with the need for an increasingly extensive space for selection. At the same time, the world of abundance is identified with the hedonistic values of sensory pleasures, which can probably be fulfilled where there are ever-changing consumer goals of choice in an ever-escalating number of their forms and shapes. It is a metaphorical world of the Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, based on critical knowledge of reality, exposure to divisions, internal conflicts, and the search for answers to the questions of why one is not happy in the modern world. Today’s consumers want to live an unusual and increasingly exciting life, similar to what Dr Jekyll dreamed of. His scientific experiment of a bifurcated personality in the form of Mr Hyde was to realise his imaginary world of being someone else, experiencing something new and exciting. However, such a world then spirals out of control and certainly does not bring the expected happiness. It merely reveals the hidden evil and little-reflected dangers.

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# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PROFESSIONAL AND PERFORMANCE SPORT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Tomáš Ruda

## Abstract

This paper focuses on three sports organizations that operate in professional and performance sports in the Czech Republic and identifies the impact of the COVID-19 situation on their operation. AC Sparta Prague is a club that operates in primary sports (football) and has finished the season despite the limited number of spectators in the stands. HC Sparta Prague is a hockey club, which operates in a competition where the end of the competition (play-offs) has been cancelled, and RunCzech is an organization that organizes distance running and has had its entire planned season cancelled. The study is based on qualitative interviews with representatives of organizations. All organizations are to some extent financially secured, mainly due to the fact that relations with their key partners are long-term and amicable. All organizations, in cooperation with partners, modified the performance of these contracts and at the same time tried to modify their products. In this context, the situation is best for RunCzech, which could change its basic product because it is not tied to time, place, or opponent. AC Sparta Prague and HC Sparta Prague have a more complex position in this context, as their product cannot be provided without the game itself. Due to the fact that collective play needs a large number of people for the actual organization, these sports carry a high risk that the seasons will be interrupted or cancelled again in the event of further epidemic waves, and in the long run there will be drastic changes in collective sports. A common feature of all organizations is that they are ready to invest the necessary money in preventive measures against COVID-19.

## Key words:

COVID-19. Distance Running. Economy. Football. Ice Hockey. Social.

## 1 Introduction

The year 2020 was supposed to be a great year for sport. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (“OG”) and EURO 2020 were the main sport events that most of the athletes, media, partners, investors, international and national organizations and associations, or spectators and fans, etc. were preparing for. Unfortunately, most of the bigger sport events were cancelled (marathons all over the world, Ice Hockey World Championships, Wimbledon - Grand Slam, Winter World Cups – Skiing, Snowboarding, Biathlon, etc.) or postponed (EURO 2020 and Olympic Games 2020). This situation has a major impact for athletes. There were cases where female athletes retired when the OG were postponed because they were planning to start families after the games and they were not able to wait any longer (BBC<sup>1</sup>, Bowes, Lomax and Piasecki<sup>2</sup>). In general athletes, had a variety of emotional reactions that ranged from anger or relief to questioning of what will happen (Schinke<sup>3</sup>) and what all the stakeholders should do. This problem has two aspects. The first one is economic and the second one is social (Voráček<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> Tokyo 2020: How athletes reacted to Olympic Games postponement. Released 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. [online]. [2020-12-10]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/52027542>>.

<sup>2</sup> BOWES, A., LOMAX, L., PIASECKI, J.: The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on elite sportswomen. In *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 2020, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> SCHINKE, R. et al.: Sport psychology services to high performance athletes during COVID-19. In *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 2020, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> VORÁČEK, J.: *Public Relations ve sportovních organizacích*. Prague : Karolinum, 2012, p. 44.

## 1.1 Economic Aspects

The first major problem was an instant lockdown (Yousfi, et al.<sup>5</sup>). The end of big events, the end of gatherings of people, and the end of access to sports venues. The sports environment must be very flexible in nature. Even long-term contracts in football or hockey expired, and athletes were faced with a reduced income. However, there are many sports, especially individual sports, where incomes are dependent on performance and advertising. In the short-term the focused sports were not influenced much. In this period of time, only sports that have high costs, cannot be rescheduled, and have incomes mostly related to the event were impacted the most. Those are sports like golf, tennis, skiing, or distance running. This situation may lead to savings on their teams or material, to reduced practice, reorientation to another sources of income, or considering the end of their careers. Just as the economy will be gripped by a crisis in terms of both supply and demand, so sport will be gripped by financial constraints on the part of both athletes and event organizers. This will lead to great savings and offer a chance to return to the original idea of Olympism and move away from overpaid sport. In the long-term, sports will depend on the further development of the COVID-19 situation. In this case, there are several areas that can easily be predicted even now. At first, there will be a departure of some sponsors and partners from sports, especially on a lower level as happened during the last economic crisis in 2008 (Čáslavová, Dvořák and Voráček<sup>6</sup>). The old sponsors will be replaced by new sponsors and they will bring new rules for contracts and performance. There will be a new need to accept the hygiene rules and therefore a new chapter in strategic plans will soon appear. There will also be pressure for greater team cooperation to deal with problems that might emerge. The sport organizations will unite or at least cooperate closer to deal with financing together. There will certainly be a change of the importance of sports in different countries. Most countries will most likely focus on primary sports and secondary and developing sports will suffer, which on a general level Šíma<sup>7</sup> predicted.

## 1.2 Social Aspects

From the social point of view the world has been divided in two groups of people. The first group prefers freedom and liberty and the second safety and security. These two things cannot naturally go together and therefore there are a number of conflicts between them. In relation to sport, these two currents of thought will greatly influence where sport and the sporting environment will go in the future. This can be manifested, for example, by restrictions on competitions, income limits of athletes, sponsor checks, setting the rules of sport, etc. The ethics of sport can go either to individualization and space for individual creativity (both positive and negative) or it will not be possible to deviate in any way. As is also known, sport has a significant impact on society, health, and people's thinking (Ruda and Matějček<sup>8</sup>). It is a source of inner emotions and a way of expressing oneself. People like to identify with teams / athletes who are sympathetic to them with their performances, story, or approach to life. They like to watch them, support them, and go to their matches. They are inspired by them and it

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<sup>5</sup> YOUSFI, N. et al.: The COVID-19 pandemic: how to maintain a healthy immune system during the lockdown – a multidisciplinary approach with special focus on athletes. In *Biology of Sport*, 2020, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 212.

<sup>6</sup> ČÁSLAVOVÁ, E., DVOŘÁK, J., VORÁČEK J.: Attitudes of companies to sport sponsorship in the Czech Republic during the economic crisis. In *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kineanthropologica*, 2014, Vol. 50, No. 1, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> ŠÍMA, J.: *Ekonomika evropských profesionálních fotbalových klubů a soutěží*. Prague : Ekopress, 2019, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> RUDA, T., MATĚJČEK, M.: Aspects of Motivation for Sponsorship of Professional Ice Hockey in the Czech Republic. In KUSÁ, A., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2018: Digital Mirrors – part II*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 238.

affects their lives. If you take this opportunity from people, they will begin to identify with something else in life. This departure from sports identification is very treacherous because getting this bond back can be very challenging, especially in a situation where we have strong topics such as nationality, freedom, democracy, or the online world as a whole. It can be vividly imagined that fans will begin to identify with virtual athletes (SMT Academy<sup>9</sup>). Another aspect that needs to be mentioned is the impact of sport on health (Čáslavová<sup>10</sup>). Already, society offers few physical activities, especially for young people. On one hand there are people who were forced to start doing sports that are not dependent on other people, such as running, and on the other hand, understandably, with more options, most people would rather choose the easier path with a clearer ending than hard work with no actual love for it. A lot of people who played collective sports are not ready to do individual sports and prefer pharmaceutical options to keep them healthy. This thinking is certainly supported by the pharmaceutical industry because it brings them more patients and higher incomes. From this point of view this crisis will reduce the motivation to be physically active.

## 2 Aim

The main objective of this study is to identify the impact of COVID-19 on professional and performance sport in the Czech Republic in the context of football (the season was finished), Czech Ice Hockey (playoffs were cancelled), football as primary sports, and distance running – marathons (the season was modified) as a developing sport.

## 3 Methods

The qualitative method of online interviews was used for the analysis. The interviews were held with representatives of HC Sparta Prague (“HCS”), AC Sparta Prague (“ACS”) and Prague International Marathon, spol. s.r.o. (“RunCzech”). These organizations were also selected on the basis of availability. The interviews were supposed to determine:

- the impact on partnership with titular sponsors;
- the impact on partnership with main sponsors;
- the impact on partnership with media sponsors;
- the impact on partnership with sponsors on basic level;
- the impact on costs and revenues;
- the impact on supporters;
- adaptation to the new situation.

Also, the analysis of secondary data (desk research) was used to fulfil the main goal of this study. Desk research is a technique for processing the results of previously conducted research or analysis (Hendl<sup>11</sup>). Through secondary analysis, new, as yet unevaluated information about already implemented projects is obtained. Desk research enables the acquisition of deeper knowledge about the researched issues or projects. Content analysis of documents is a quantitative type of data analysis used to analyse text, including transcripts of interviews, newspapers, books, manuscripts, and websites to determine the frequency of specific words or ideas. The results of document content analysis make it possible to identify,

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<sup>9</sup> *Vaše cesta k úspěchu*. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.smtacademy.cz/>>.

<sup>10</sup> ČÁSLAVOVÁ, E.: *Management a marketing sportu*. Prague : Olympia, 2009, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Prague : Portál, 2016, p. 73.



as well as quantify, specific ideas, concepts and their associated patterns and trends of ideas that occur within a certain group or over time. This helps to find any information on a researched topic in other places and to fully describe the problem. During the content analysis, artifacts of the previous activity are assessed. Content analysis presents methods and rules for determining the topic of work or project, includes verbal analysis of content, and analysis and comparison of information obtained. Specific words and topics are searched for, the frequency of their occurrence, meaning, and mutual relationship are determined, and the acquired knowledge is interpreted. Content analysis can be used to verify whether a document (e.g. strategic plan, report) characterizing a particular activity contains relevant and usable data (Faitaicha<sup>12</sup>).

## 4 Results

This chapter will talk about each organization and look at the impact from an economic and social point of view.

### 4.1 AC Sparta Prague

The situation in the Czech Republic has developed quite well for Czech football. The season was suspended, but in the end, it was fully completed with the reduction in the number of spectators, with the exception of the last match, which was to decide the relegation to the second league. Cancellation of the last game had no direct impact on ACS because ACS has played in the title group. The indirect impact is that ACS will have two more games in the 2020/2021 season because the Football Association of the Czech Republic has decided that no team will withdraw to the second league.

#### *Economic Aspects*

In the last five seasons the income from admission has been about 11%, 7% comes from Media Rights, 23% comes from UEFA, 12% are grants and donations, and 47% ACS gets from their partners (Šíma<sup>13</sup>). There was an impact on admission but considering the low dependence on that, Sparta had to deal mostly with the problems with sponsors. A good thing for ACS is that the general sponsors (Tipsport and T-mobile) have a long-term contract and therefore there was no reduction in income. It was the same with platinum partner (Generali Česká pojišťovna), gold partners (eight companies), and media partners (Evropa 2, iDnes, Impuls Rádio, Sport a Radiožurnál). Sparta lost only small partners that provided less than 1% of its sponsor incomes for the 2019/2020 season. Considering that the season was finished, Sparta had the opportunity to meet all its commitments. The problem could appear over a longer period of time. Most of the contracts that ACS has are three to five years long and are continuously extended. Considering that general partners, platinum partner, gold partners and media partners are large and stable companies, ACS should not have problems to maintain great relationships with its partners. ACS met with its partners after the season and came to a conclusion that both sides must go through this problem together as partners. Most of the contracts have a higher force majeure clause in them, but in neither case did Sparta have to use this clause. More economic problems appear in the 2020/2021 season. There is a new clause in most of the contracts that considers COVID-19 exactly. There is a fear that the season will not be finished at all. Even so, clubs, including ACS, invest heavily in prevention

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<sup>12</sup> MAKIHARA, Y. et. al.: Object recognition supported by user interaction for service robots. In *IEEE*, 2002, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 336.

<sup>13</sup> ŠÍMA, J.: *Ekonomika evropských profesionálních fotbalových klubů a soutěží*. Prague : Ekopress, 2019, p. 54.

so that even without spectators, a professional football competition can take place. ACS spends about 100,000 CZK for each COVID-19 test. Players and Staff are tested several times a week. That is a new extra cost that appeared in the club's budget, and ACS is willing to continue to spend the money for prevention.

#### *Social Aspects*

ACS feels responsible and therefore they invest money in Corporate Social Responsibility ("CSR") activities. ACS understands that spectators could not come to the games so they prepared special discounts and offered to return money to all season tickets holders. No one actually returned their season ticket. Sparta also became more active on Sparta TV and they were the first to name the exact players who suffered with COVID-19 to break the unpleasant atmosphere around this virus. ACS also invested in esports, where it has had its team since 2018. This year they played, for example, against FC Victoria Pilsen and SK Slavia Prague, and on had a live stream on YouTube and Sparta TV. Players and employees of ACS worked hard, and in times of emergency they made or bought and delivered masks and other medical supplies to the necessary places (this was an activity initiated by the league football association). ACS also launched a platform called #spartadoma on its website, where it not only informed the fans about what was happening at the club, but also clearly inspired its fans to actively move or have fun at home. An integral part of club activities is various forms of assistance to Czech society in these difficult times. For example, the club decided to distribute its own Spartan masks to the Club of Legends. For the future, ACS will continue its projects and is also preparing to reduce the capacity of the stadium or make other hygienic adjustments. During this fall, a number of brainstorming meetings will take place at ACS, where new topics will be introduced that will lead to open opportunities for followers of ACS if the original product is lost, in this case the football match itself.

#### **4.2 HC Sparta Prague**

The COVID-19 situation in the Czech Republic resulted in the cancellation of the play-offs in the Czech Ice Hockey Extraleague. That meant that all teams played 52 games. For HC Sparta Prague, management expected the team to go far in the play-offs, even though the club budget is not dependent on it. This means that the league was not finished, but the stakeholders got at least most of the league.

#### *Economic Aspects*

HCS was influenced enormously, because the costs of players, operations, organization of matches, etc. did not change significantly, while the revenue from playoffs ticketing was minimal, compensation for season tickets reduced the revenues and some of the basic partners left. It is still a lower number by now, but HCS expects to lose several of them soon. For the general partner, main partners, gold, silver, and media partners, HCS has contracts that are signed for three to five years. That seems like a stable situation for HCS, on the other hand, HCS has over 100 partners and most of them are on a basic level of partnership. These contracts are usually signed for one year and most of the companies in this area are smaller organizations that might have financial problems and might not sign another contract with HCS. Also, HCS is not really dependent on income from admission and only about 12% of its budget is covered by that. Partnerships with sponsors makes up about 63% of its budget. In this area HCS fears that it will lose about 20 – 25% of its income in the next seasons. Therefore, it has already started to work on costs. HCS has agreed with the players to reduce their income by about 20%. Most players accepted the reduction without any problems. Players who did not accept the reduction had to leave the club and look for new contracts.

Sparta has also begun to make more use of its employees, and many of the activities that were previously outsourced are now handled by employees themselves. This means that the quality will go down a little bit but the costs were substantially reduced. This reduction will compensate for the loss of admission. For future use, each employee is going through new training so they can gain more experience over time and therefore there will be no more need to outsource in the future even when the situation returns to normal. HCS contracts are similar to the football ones and have a force majeure clause as well. Also, in this case, HCS did not use this clause however the season was not finished and HCS could not fulfil all the agreements. HCS held negotiations with its partners and most of them understood the situation and, despite the unfinished season, did not reduce the performance for the 2019/2020 season. A small number of partners then agreed with Sparta on a partial reduction in performance, which in none of these cases exceeded ten percent of the original amount. The media rights were not influenced at all because it is under the marketing agency BPA. BPA met all its obligations and paid all clubs in full. This will certainly happen in next three seasons no matter what. HCS, like all of the other ice hockey clubs in the Czech Extraleague, invested a lot of money in prevention to be able to play the games even with no spectators. HCS spends about 70,000 CZK on each test that takes place in the team. During the current season players were tested three times and once for antibodies against COVID-19.

### *Social Aspects*

Because many projects were cancelled, HSC started to focus more on CSR activities and charity projects (Legends Club or Blood of Sparta). HCS also focused on a new marketing strategy (#UNSTOPPABLE - #NEZASTAVÍŠ) that is ambiguous. On the one hand, there is the sporting aspect, which claims that Sparta will not lose, and on the other hand, the slogan should evoke the struggle of the strong Spartan will against COVID-19. The strategy creates a new brand positioning with an emphasis on lifestyle and the inclusion of this brand umbrella in all club activities. Compared to the 2019/ 2020 season, the following business and marketing goals were set for the new season:

1. Increase the average home attendance by 5% (to 9,494 fans per home match).
2. Increase ticketing revenue by 7%, also count on a slight increase in ticket prices.
3. Increase merchandising sales turnover by 10% while maintaining margin.
4. Increase the marketing performance of social networks, namely:
  - Increase followers on Instagram by 15%;
  - Increase the number of total interactions in posts on Facebook and Instagram by 30%.
5. Increase the attractiveness of the brand for sponsors and the value of the brand in general.

Although the fulfilment of all goals is not only in the hands of Sparta, it is determined to focus on those goals that the situation allows them to solve. HCS expects that the marketing strategy will cost them about two million CZK, but that the revenues from this activity will approach five million. In this case, the ROI approaches 250%. HCS is aware that it can only modify its main product to a very limited extent if the extra-league is suspended. Nevertheless, it is ready to invest the necessary funds in prevention so that hockey can take place without spectators, and its product would be sold at a distance. Even in hockey HCS, they realize that the product will have to be modified, where HCS aims to increase the quality of execution so that the experience in the arena and beyond is close to the NHL.

### **4.3 RunCzech**

This organization organizes several large marathons in the Czech Republic every year, including the Prague Marathon and the Half Marathon. Unlike the above, this organization

did not have the opportunity to implement its actions according to the original plan and had to modify its activities immediately. All major events originally planned by RunCzech have been cancelled or are in imminent danger of being cancelled.

#### *Economic Aspects*

RunCzech also has strong general partners (titular partner in this case – VW, Adidas, Sportissimo, Birell, and Mattoni) and usually has contracts for a period of five to seven years. This also applies to main partners (those titular partners which the specific run is not named after), official partners, and media partners (Česká televize, Radiožurnál, Hospodářské noviny, and Seznam). The last group of smaller partners then usually have contracts for about three years or based on an individual agreement. In 2020 RunCzech is in a great position because its partners are strong and their relationship has been in place for between 8 and 25 years. The RunCzech budget is created differently than in team sports. About 50% comes from sponsors and 50% from registrations. Other income is marginal. Due to the fact that the half marathon was cancelled roughly 2 weeks before it was held, RunCzech had to react quickly and come up with a new activity to present to its partners. Due to the good relationship with the partners, RunCzech was assured that the partners would not withdraw and are ready to modify their activities during the 2020 season. From an economic point of view RunCzech was well positioned for the 2020 season even though the main events did not take place.

#### *Social Aspects*

RunCzech saw a new opportunity in the COVID-19 crisis and, because they felt a strong civic duty, they came up with a project "the Czech Republic Continues to Run" (in Czech Česko běží dál), which is also ambiguous. Similar to HCS, they came up with the idea that people in the Czech Republic will continue the actual running and also that the Czech Republic can fight the COVID-19 virus well. This project had a great response from the runners, who made extensive use of 93 prepared five-kilometre tracks, where RunCzech guaranteed that everyone would find one within 14 km of their residence. With the help of the RunCzech application, runners could then participate in the race itself, and enjoy the fun at a safe distance from others. RunCzech was then able to promote its partners and meet its obligations through applications, social networks, and the media. The project led the runners to run at least 125 kms of organized running and thus compensated them for 10 cancelled 5 km runs which would normally be held. RunCzech responded to the current situation in the summer, when the situation for sports improved, and came up with the Runway Run project, which ran races at the airports in Prague, České Budějovice, and Karlovy Vary. In order to comply with the permitted number of people on the sports grounds, RunCzech modified the run by creating several running categories and organizing several races in one day, where people met in smaller numbers. However, a total of 2,500 runners participated in the race and RunCzech was able to sufficiently promote its partners. The last event that RunCzech organized was very successful for them. RunCzech took advantage of the situation that all marathons in the world were cancelled and decided, at the initiative of Adidas, to organize a run "Prague 21.1 - Ready for Restart", where new shoes will be tested, which should significantly speed up the run for the runners. Due to the situation among runners, it was not a problem to bring in world runners even at low cost. This situation led to a world record in the women's category being set in Prague, which resulted in presentation and unpaid public relations on the BBC and Al Jazeera Media Network completely free of charge. During the autumn, RunCzech representatives will meet with its partners and evaluate the fulfilment of contracts. Due to the ongoing communication, RunCzech does not expect the income from sponsorship to be lower in the coming years. Its representatives will focus on modifying the product of runs and they

want to invent other runs where runners will run in a safe place alone or other events similar to Prague 21.1 - Ready for Restart. RunCzech also anticipates increased hygiene costs in its plans.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study must not be generalized. It should always be taken into account that this is only an initial investigation with one representative from a given category. However, based on the obtained data, it is possible to find common and different features that need to be verified in each environment. This fact also opens the logical way to continue research and efforts to find specific and general procedures and scenarios in this uncertain time. From the economic point of view, it seems that this study confirms the thoughts of Čáslavová, Dvořák and Voráček<sup>14</sup>, who claim that the financial crisis does not significantly affect clubs at the highest level. Considering that ACS, HCS, and RunCzech have mostly long-term partnership agreements and at the same time it has good relations with its partners, it cannot be expected that this important source of income should change very much in the future. The fact that all organizations are aware of the risks of not acting on their sports products and all organizations are thinking about future modifications so that they can meet the goals of their own, as well as their partners, also has a positive effect in this direction. In all cases, there are also active negotiations with the partners during the current season, as well as discussions about new projects, which are to some extent created so that the partners continue to be properly presented.

Another common feature is that all general partners are strong companies that will not lose their position even during the crisis. It may be true that if someone has money during a crisis, it pays to invest more. Even in this direction, it is possible that revenues from these strong partners will increase in the coming seasons. All organizations also agreed that it was necessary to change their thinking and modify their product permanently. In this context, RunCzech has a great advantage in that it can completely transform its product from day to day, and runners will still be satisfied. This was also confirmed in 2020, when this company met all its goals and all runners were given a chance to run the same number of kilometres as if the races had taken place according to the original plan. Unlike RunCzech, ACS and HCS cannot easily change their product. Fans of football and ice hockey are waiting for the match. But when force majeure stops matches, these primary sports have a much more complicated situation. Nevertheless, these sports try to target new groups of fans and support, for example, the increasingly popular eSports and other charitable and CSR activities. On the other hand, in the area of media revenues, HCS and ACS have an advantage, where there are long-term contracts that provide clubs with constant revenues. RunCzech must be creative in this area in order to come up with a product that will ensure media interest, as was the case with the Prague 21.1 - Ready for Restart project. Despite all the vicissitudes that the present time is bringing, it must be stated that the researched organizations are aware of the seriousness of the situation and try to respond to it so as to generally ensure their future functioning at the highest possible level.

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<sup>14</sup> ČÁSLAVOVÁ, E., DVOŘÁK, J., VORÁČEK J.: Attitudes of companies to sport sponsorship in the Czech Republic during the economic crisis. In *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kineanthropologica*, 2014, Vol. 50, No. 1. p. 58.

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## SHIFTS IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF BUSINESSES DUE TO THE PANDEMIC SITUATION

*Natália Stalmašeková – Patrik Grznár*

### Abstract

The pandemic of a new coronavirus - COVID-19, hit the world unprepared. In a short time, it affected everyone and everything around us. Households, businesses, universities and national governments have had to adapt to changes from day to day to protect their health. One of the biggest challenges has been and still is the challenge of maintaining economic activity in compliance with current epidemiological measures. It will also be necessary to respond to changes in the implementation of research and development projects with application output for practice. Of all the actors affected by the pandemic, this paper focuses mainly on businesses that are faced with the challenge of rapidly adapting to the changes they need to make to their micro-environment as well as to the macro-environment. The speed of the innovation process in companies has never been more important than in this period, and companies had to reduce the time between the innovation idea and the implementation of innovation in practice to a minimum. The aim of this paper is to identify the changes that have occurred in the business environment during a pandemic and the changes that companies have had to make in their behavior both internally and externally, and which have contributed to their corporate social responsibility.

### Key words:

Adaptation to Change. Businesses. COVID-19. Innovation Process.

### Introduction

It is known that industry is at the threshold of transformation, which will have a major impact on the production of goods, the provision of additional services, the labour market, the working environment, and the behaviour of customers.<sup>1</sup> And sometimes this transformation comes in the most unexpected form and time. Spreading of the new corona virus COVID-19 happened suddenly and uncontrollably. The counter-measures rules have been taken without further dialog between government and the industry and it brought dramatic shift in the economic cycle and innovation cycle. The scientific sector had to adapt immediately to the new needs of practice and it will also need to cooperate with changes in research and development projects with application output for practice. Without further notice, the main priority of the companies became the safety of their customers and their employees. However, to function properly, the companies still need to increase profitability, which is considerably aggravated during the pandemic. However, if you are a digital giant, then you are the winner.

### 1 COVID-19

Throughout human history, the disease has occurred several times, spreading dangerously fast and claiming many casualties. Mankind has tried to fight it by all means currently available, but these have not been sufficient in the past. The last global pandemic was the Spanish flu, which claimed around 50 million lives between 1918 and 1920 and it is estimated, that almost 500 million people were infected.<sup>2</sup> After this contagion, humanity has not yet experienced a pandemic of this magnitude. Everything changed in 2020. The coronavirus causing COVID-19 disease was first identified in China at the end of 2019. It represents a new virus strain that

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<sup>1</sup> GRZNÁR, P., GREGOR, M., MOZOL, Š., KRAJČOVIČ, M., DULINA, E.; GAŠO, M., MAJOR, M.: A system to determine the optimal work-in-progress inventory stored in interoperation manufacturing buffers. In *Sustainability*, 2019, Vol. 11, No. 14, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *History of 1918 Flu Pandemic*. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/2GAqCXC>>.

had not been known in human environment yet.<sup>3</sup> The disease is spread via droplet infections. The estimated incubation period of the disease is 2 to 14 days, may be even longer. The virus affects people with a wide range of symptoms, some individuals manage the virus without symptoms, weaker individuals die. To this day, it is not possible to determine how strongly the virus will affect an individual, and this makes him very dangerous. Most common symptoms of the disease are<sup>4</sup>:

- fever,
- dry cough,
- tiredness.

Less common symptoms:

- aches and pains,
- sore throat,
- diarrhoea,
- conjunctivitis,
- headache,
- loss of taste or smell,
- a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes.

Serious symptoms:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath,
- chest pain or pressure,
- loss of speech or movement.

## 1.1 Statistics of the New Coronavirus COVID-19 So Far

Statistics for the new coronavirus change every day, Picture 1 provides an overview of the most important data as of October 9th. For every single infected person, there are several people who have to remain in quarantine because of him. This situation often affects the operation of entire companies or schools. In addition, according to statistics obtained so far, four percent of cases have a difficult clinical course and about half a percent end up with mechanical ventilation. Now it is a question of whether it will be a percentage of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>5</sup>

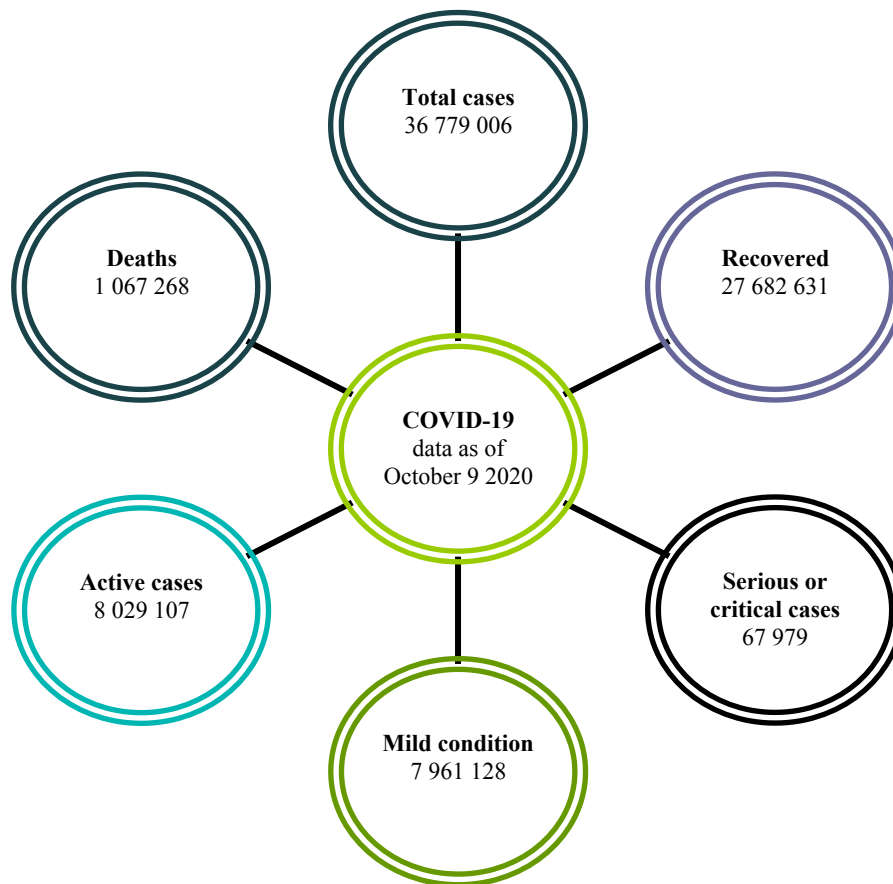
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<sup>3</sup> *What is COVID-19?*. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3d763Oy>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19)*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3lpylwp>>.

<sup>5</sup> FOLENTOVÁ, V., BARČIKOVÁ, M.: *Plúcny lekár: Mali sme pacientov s príznakmi mozgovej príhody, v skutočnosti mali koronavírus*. Released on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-22]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/34zTA22>>.





**Picture 1: COVID-19 statistics**

Source: *COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic*. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at:<<https://bit.ly/3jI1RqW>>.

## 2 Company Social Responsibility

One of the key trends in today's world trade is the admission of the long-overlooked fact that there is an interdependence between companies (corporations) and society, and that it is therefore absolutely necessary to pay sufficient attention to the so-called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Companies need a "healthy" society to be successful, these days it is literally true, quality education, health care, equal opportunities, safe products, good working conditions all contribute to it. Also society needs "healthy" companies to function. The corporate sector performs, in addition to its main - economic activity, other functions that can never be fully replaced by social programs of the state. Companies can thus significantly contribute to the creation of jobs, wealth, be a carrier of innovation or contribute to better living conditions of the population. Howard Bowen, who is considered to be a father of CSR, defined it as *"the obligation of entrepreneurs to adhere to company policy, make decisions or develop activities whose purpose and values are required by society"*<sup>6</sup> In 1971, an American independent think tank, the Committee on Economic Development (CED), whose members are leading business leaders and academics, and which supports private-public collaboration in solving economic and social problems, published a publication entitled *Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations* in response to the significantly changing

<sup>6</sup> CARROLL, B.: A History of Corporate Social Responsibility : Concept and Practices. In CRANE, A., MATTEN, D., McWILLIAMS, A., MOON, J., SIEGEL, D. S. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*. New York : Oxford University Press Inc., 2008, p. 25.

relationship between the company and society. CED defined corporate responsibilities in three concentric circles. The inner circle includes basic responsibilities, which include product production, job creation and economic growth. The middle circle includes the responsibility for the performance of this function with regard to changing social values and priorities, such as attitudes towards the environment, acceptance and relationships with employees, higher information expectations of customers. The outer circle concerns the new emerging responsibilities that business should include in order to engage in improving its social environment (poverty, social "contagion").<sup>7</sup>

## 2.1 Dominant Trends in CSR

Today's dynamic development of CSR issues is closely related to the process of globalization, when, thanks to technological, social and economic development, social relations between various entities across sectors and geographical areas are gaining momentum. There is a growing exchange of resources, assets, capital, knowledge and, more generally, liberalization. The flip side of the same coin is then growing interdependence, and therefore vulnerability, in relation to global risks such as global warming, pandemics and nuclear proliferation.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, globalization is causing the concept of CSR to spread rapidly worldwide, on the other hand, subscribing to CSR policy is often an almost necessary precondition for companies to succeed in the global economy. There are also significant disadvantages for transnational corporations (TNCs), which are key players in a globalized world and whose activities bring many economies in addition to many benefits (job creation, technology transfer, investment in infrastructure) (uneven development, rising unemployment, social tensions). increasing demands today in terms of accountability and transparency. TNC activities, whether production, marketing or other, have the power to influence various areas such as the labor market, the environment, regional economic development or culture.

**Table 1: Trends in Corporate Social Responsibility**

Trends in CSR in 2019	Trends in CSR in 2020 (Pre - COVID 19)	Trends in CSR in 2020 (Post COVID 19)
Ethical product lines and packaging	Searching for the truth.	Safety first
Back to school	Achieving carbon neutrality	Mental well-being and the wider community
More disaster prevention, less relief.	Standing with employees	Short-term vs long-term mindsets
Equity joins diversity and inclusion.	Pursuing purpose over passion	Telling the frauds apart from the genuine do-gooders
Generation Z-ers are here	Looking for the next big thing	

Source: Own processing based on articles of Forbes.com and Socisdg.com.

Year 2019 was a pivotal year in Corporate Social Responsibility as the concepts of corporate responsibility and sustainability received significant media attention. Many brands have started to invest in creating ethically sourced, sustainable product lines and focus

<sup>7</sup> CARROLL, B. A.: A Three-Dimensional Conceptual Model of Corporate Performance. In *The Academy of Management Review*, 1979, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 498-504. [online]. [2020-09-23]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3nty47I>>.

<sup>8</sup> SCHERER, A. G., PALAZZO, G.: Globalization and Corporate Social Responsibility. In CRANE, A., MATTEN, D., McWILLIAMS, A., MOON, J., SIEGEL, D. S. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*. New York : Oxford University Press Inc., 2008, p. 419.

on environment friendly packaging. It is caused by pressure of generation Z-ers (those born after the mid-1990s), now entering the workforce and consumer marketplace in droves (40% of all consumers globally by 2020). Expect Generation Z-ers, who are the real early adopters and digital natives, to demand better and easier-to-use technology, more flexibility in the workplace, more freedom of choice, and greater degrees of acceptance and transparency in the workplace and marketplace. They are particularly interested in seeing companies address issues of global poverty and hunger, the environment and climate change, and human rights. The year 2019 also brought strengthened organizational culture around sustainability and got many corporate leaders and CSR professionals into the training classes and peer-to-peer dialogues in order to keep abreast of changes and best practices in governance and accountability. In the field of sustainable development goals many companies adopted strategy “More disaster prevention, less relief” and they continued to provide relief to victims of natural disasters through cash grants and product donations, we can expect to see more companies move away from a reactive approach to more of a proactive approach of helping communities be more resilient in the future by supporting sustainable development goals. While most natural disasters cannot be prevented from occurring, the impact on people can be mitigated or even largely eliminated through better planning, and more restrictions on building and development.<sup>9</sup>

However, the January 2020 trend estimate did not materialize as the coronavirus pandemic shifted behaviour of the businesses in a very significant way. In the short-term – and as we saw during the initial lockdown period – the major CSR opportunities companies latched onto were directly related to public health initiatives and support for consumers and safeguarding employee welfare. Nowadays, a company’s CSR strategy is benchmarked against its ability to maintain health and safety processes and procedures in their operations, production and service delivery to an excellent standard. And as people gradually return to the workplace, companies will be under scrutiny when it comes to their well-being initiatives, specifically around mental health, as the winding down of furloughing in October and an upcoming recession begin to come into effect. People’s expectations of companies are already beginning to shift as consumer decision making is even more driven by social and environmental concerns. However, this positive trend could be decelerated by concerns for health and safety. For example, people might be using less public transport and more plastic bags for genuine immediate health concerns, meaning long-term social and environmental issues could be kicked into the long grass. However, this potential conflict is avoidable by finding a way for people to avoid making trade-offs by aligning CSR activity to emerging, timely and salient social issues, which presents a huge CSR opportunity for companies in the long-run. To avoid short-termism, strong leadership is key. The pandemic is the perfect acid test of many firms’ genuineness of their CSR record and strategy. For those companies that have established a genuine CSR, ethical, and sustainability culture, particularly among their senior management team, corporate governance, and strategic decision-making process, they will be much less likely to opt for immediate profit gain at the expense of longer-term security.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 7 *CSR Trends that will dominate 2019*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3lj5GO>>.

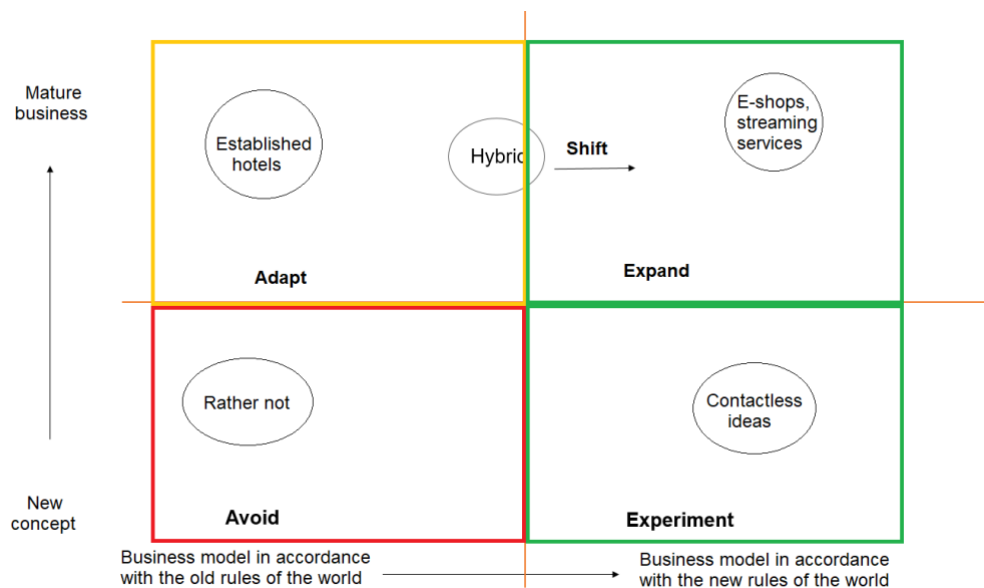
<sup>10</sup> *The Covid Effect On CSR And Marketing*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-09-28]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3nnIeGO>>.

### 3 Shifts in the Behavior of Businesses

Countries around the world have begun to take strict containment measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus and minimize the number of deaths. Measures should prevent overloading the health system and give them time until the vaccine is invented. The measures concerned increasing the capacity to test and monitor contacts, isolating and quarantining infected people, and in particular reducing mobility and creating social distance. These measures have had a short-term effect on saving lives, but have led to unprecedented economic losses and forced companies to change the usual way they offer their products. From a COVID-19 perspective, we can divide companies into three categories depending on their response and the way the pandemic has directly impacted them:

- **COVID-winners** describes those organizations that have naturally thrived during the pandemic due to the nature of the services they offer – such as streaming services (Netflix, Disney+) or online delivery services and e-shops.
- **COVID-resisters** include those companies that are resistant to the pandemic’s impact, such as supermarkets, some pharmaceutical companies, and essential product manufacturers.
- **COVID-strugglers** are those companies which, as a result of the measures, have become undesirable for the customer or have been forced to reduce or close down their operations. For example, travel agencies, airlines, cinemas, theatres...

For all three variations, the challenges and opportunities can differ significantly, particularly in the short term, but it’s the longer-term impact that will likely see these categories shift and companies have to start operate with new strategies.



**Picture 2: Matrix of strategies for companies in COVID-19 world.**

Source: Own processing

New rules of the world:

- Touchless society.
- Social distancing – no overcrowded spaces.
- Disinfection everywhere.
- Digital alternatives of physical products.
- Option of working from home.

Shifts in company strategies:

1. New concept + in accordance with the new rules:
  - A new company with concept coping with the new rules is worth to try, safety of the customers and employees is essential.
2. Mature business + in accordance with the new rules:
  - Operate, grow and scale.
  - Make financial reserves.
  - Improve safety of your customers and employees.
3. New concept + in accordance with the old rules:
  - Not a good time to open travel agency or cinema.
4. Mature business + in accordance with the old rules
  - Adapt as much as you can in according with the new rules, try to make feel your customer safe.
  - If option (money, organisation will), wait, pandemic won't last forever.

#### **4 Shift in the Behavior of the Chosen Company**

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in March, restaurant facilities had to be closed. This also applied to the Slovak operations of McDonald's. Based on the measures taken, the company was able to use at least the distribution channels of car take-out and delivering by partner company in capital city, but the restaurants in the shopping centres had to be closed completely. The company's sales then fell by 55 %. However, this situation did not last long, as the alternative delivery channels (McDrive, McDelivery, later also McWalk) proved to be a great competitive advantage over other restaurants, McDonald's did not lay off a single employee in Slovakia, it even started hiring new ones. Before the coronary crisis, they had 2,500 employees, now they have 2,600 and are still recruiting new ones. The corporation did not receive state aid either, although it would qualify for it. The corporation responded immediately and strengthened the safety of customers and employees as instructed by the regional public health office. In two of the facilities, coronavirus occurred among employees, but because of the established hygiene standards, other customers and employees were not endangered. The restaurants were closed for some time and were subjected to deep disinfection. Employees who could come into contact with those infected had to go to quarantine and were tested. They were all negative. Since the beginning of the epidemic, all employees have used protective equipment such as masks, gloves and certified disinfectants. Therefore, there is enough of hand disinfection in the area, staff disinfects tables and chairs at an increased frequency, displays of digital kiosks, door handles and, of course, disinfection of each tray used. There are stickers in the space, which allow customers to keep the required physical distance for a change. The company has also introduced protective plexiglass at cash registers and counters. Employees hardly come into close contact with customers at all. It is the combination of all these established and effective hygiene measures that ensures the maximum possible prevention of the occurrence or transmission of any viral disease.<sup>11</sup> McDonald's Corporation is one of the largest fast food restaurants. The company was founded in 1940 by the McDonald brothers, but its expansion did not begin until 1955, when it was taken over by Ray Kroc, the son of Czech-Slovak emigrants. The majority of the menu

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<sup>11</sup> KRAJANOVÁ, D.: *Ak viete zohnať pol milióna, môžete sa uchádzať o licenciu McDonald's. V reštaurácii sa treba aj zaučiť*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/34Aofw6>>.

consists of various burgers. The company's first restaurant in Slovak republic was opened in October 1995 in Banská Bystrica.<sup>12</sup> Now in Slovakia there is<sup>13</sup>:

- Total number of restaurants – 34.
- Number of restaurants in the shopping centre – 13.
- Restaurants providing McDrive – 23.
- New generation restaurants – 23.

When we look how COVID-19 pandemic effected it, McDonald's corporation can be classified as a COVID-resister (see Chapter 3). The pandemic did not threaten it, as McDonald's offers fast-to-reach food, a cost-effective meal that the customer can access in almost "contactless" way. The company also responded promptly in corporate social responsibility and provided its customers and employees with all protective measures and means to guarantee safety. The strategy it has started implement in the current situation affected by the new coronavirus falls into the hybrid category, as it offers mature business and transition from the business model in accordance with the old rules, to the business model in accordance with the new rules. We are talking about the new generation of restaurants concept, which are gradually implemented into all establishments in Slovakia. The new generation restaurant is a concept that uses modern technology both by customers when ordering and by employees when preparing products. These new technologies allow customers to create an order in a self-service kiosk and compose it interactively, including the ability to customize their favourite burger to taste. Thanks to new technologies, the preparation of products begins at the time of ordering, which guarantees 100% freshness. Each product is always ready for a specific customer.<sup>14</sup> Ordering at the kiosk guarantees customers minimal contact with employees and eliminates standing in line. New generation restaurants fit perfectly into the new rules even without trying.

## Conclusion

The last 30 years have brought dynamic developments and changes to all sectors of the national economy. The success of companies often depended on how they were able to adapt to these changes. Innovation in the industry brought not only technological progress but also a shift in people's thinking. Corporate social responsibility, corporate culture, the system of employee benefits belong to the parts of the company that it has to innovate as fast as its goods and services. These changes and innovations have always been driven by progress. However, the coronavirus pandemic in the beginning of 2020 caused changes that were a step backwards for many companies. Changes oriented on the comfort and user experience of the customer suddenly became changes to protect the health of customers and safety of corporate employees. Companies had to adapt to these changes from different starting points. Some companies came out as winners and some as losers. The world is still fighting a pandemic and therefore the changes in society's behaviour are not over and will be subject to further research in the near future.

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<sup>12</sup> *History*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://corporate.mcdonalds.com/corpmcd/about-us/history.html>>.

<sup>13</sup> *Overview of restaurants*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3daw3Zf>>.

<sup>14</sup> *The new generations of restaurants*. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/2GCXjUj>>.

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MARKETING OF ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS

*Lenka Švajdová*

### **Abstract**

The submitted article deals with the impact of the contemporary phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic on the marketing management and decision-making of accommodation establishments, which have been and will be, in addition to the guide services, the most affected in the whole tourism sector. Restrictions imposed by government's decisions and bans or significant restrictions on travelling have negatively affected the development of international as well as domestic tourism, in all of its forms on which accommodation facilities are completely dependent. Based on the analysis of secondary sources and managed interviews with the sales directors of selected hotels, the article aims to describe the approaches of various accommodation establishments from different regions of the Czech Republic to marketing management. The analysis and questions will cover changes in product and pricing policy and changes in relation to the target market segment. The results of the implemented analysis will be refined by interviews with managers of selected hotels and an evaluation of the provisional effectiveness of taken measures.

### **Key words:**

Accommodation Services. COVID-19. Marketing Strategy. Tourism.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the third millennium tourism has undoubtedly become one of the most powerful and most dynamically developing economic sector. Before the pandemic of COVID-19 has hit the entire world the experts of tourism were convinced that tourism has its permanent place among the human being activities which WAS demonstrated by the fact that, despite various war conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics, it has neither perished, nor its volume declined, or if declined it has increased again quickly in the aftermath of the threat. But it seems that COVID-19 and its consequences may cause irreparable damage on tourism sector. The tourism is an industry that it's based on the connection of different services that tourism needs to be able to develop. One of the sectors that is suffering most with the COVID and post COVID situation is the sector of accommodation services. The government restrictions on their operation, stricter travel conditions or the complete closure of borders put the hotel management in an awkward situation, where in a very short period they had to adapt to a significant decline in the number of guests, or with the loss of their target market segment made by foreign clients). After the reopening of accommodation in May 2020, many hotels had to decide to change their marketing strategies to make them more attractive in the eyes of potential clients, whether through changes in the product offer, changes in pricing policy or orientation to a new market segment. In the article is summarized the fundamental theoretical knowledge related to the issue of marketing strategies of accommodation facilities. In particular comparison of the views of various authors on the creation of marketing strategies and possible changes in marketing strategies. By using the appropriate methodology, the impact of COVID-19 on applied marketing strategies in accommodation sector will be analysed and the results of the analysis will be confirmed or rejected by managers of selected hotels in structured interviews.

## 1 Marketing Strategy in Accommodation Services

According to Salman the traditional marketing mix (4Ps) as a tactic tool of marketing strategy is ignoring or it's slowly reacting on the impacts of the external environment on marketing decisions.<sup>1</sup> Kotler indirectly supports this idea stating that external and uncontrollable environmental factors are very important factors of the marketing strategies.<sup>2</sup> Hongwei and Harris in their article **The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy** mentioned that changes in marketing strategies will reflect the turbulence that Covid-19 caused in the marketing environment. Recessions, down-turns, wars, revolutions, earthquakes, and volcanos seem minor blips when compared to global lockdowns and expansive state interventionism on scale previously witnessed not for a millennium.<sup>3</sup> Harris and He claimed that the marketing microenvironments of organizations have been hit by a tsunami of change that outweighs any previous fluctuations and reverberations in the marketing macro environment, fundamental changes happened for which the repercussions will resound for decades. Economically, the global economy has been profoundly affected. Dwarfing the impact of austerity regimes, Covid-19 measures closed entire sectors, forced industries to move, almost exclusively, online, and radically changed the nature of consumer spending of tourism services.

Bowie and Buttle say that marketing strategy is the comprehensive plan formulated particularly for achieving the marketing objectives of the organization. It provides a blueprint for attaining these marketing objectives. It is the building block of a marketing plan. It is designed after detailed marketing research. A marketing strategy helps an organization to concentrate its scarce resources on the best possible opportunities to increase the sales. A marketing strategy is designed by choosing the target market and gathering the marketing mix.<sup>4</sup> By target market we mean to whom the organization wants to sell its products. Not all the market segments are fruitful to an organization. By gathering of the marketing mix we mean how the organization proposes to sell its products. The organization has to gather the four P's of marketing in appropriate combination. Traditionally, 4Ps is used and it is related to *Product, Price, Place, and Promotion*. As marketing became a more sophisticated discipline in the hospitality industry, a fifth 'P' was added and implemented *People*. And recently, two further 'P's were added—*Process and Physical evidence*. These considerations are now known as the 7 Ps of service marketing in the hotel industry.<sup>5</sup> Changes to the marketing environment and the marketing landscape forced organizations to develop a strategic agility pre-, during-, and post-pandemic. The answer to post-pandemic era by accommodation facilities can consist in changing of some elements of marketing mix. From the characteristics of individual elements of the marketing mix, it is clear that the elements by which hotel management can immediately respond to unexpected changes coming from the external environment are product improvement / innovation, price increase / decrease or change in pricing strategy, improvement of physical records or change of targeted market segment or expansion of their number.

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<sup>1</sup> SALMAN, D., TAWFIK, Y., SAMY, M., ARTAL-TUR, A.: A new marketing mix model to rescue hospitality industry: evidence from Egypt after the Arab spring. In *Future Business Journal*, 2017, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 48-68. [online]. [2020-08-30]. Available at: <<https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2314721017300105#bib14>>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: KOTLER, P.: *Marketing management*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> HONGWEI, H., HARRIS, L.: The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 116, No. 1, p. 177-181. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320303295>>.

<sup>4</sup> See also: BOWIE, D., BUTTLE, F.: *Hospitality marketing principles and practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford : Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

## 2 Methodology

As a suitable methodology for fulfilling the aim of the article, the author chose methods of secondary data analysis, which the author obtained by a detailed study of information available on selected, verified and therefore relevant websites. The data obtained by this activity were subsequently analysed and the information thus obtained was consulted with the managers of selected accommodation capacities in various parts of the Czech Republic, so as to confirm or reject the effectiveness of the adopted changes in marketing strategy.

## 3 Marketing Survey

Marketing research in the form of secondary data analysis took place in the period from May 2020 to August 2020. The author focused on hotel-type accommodation facilities in the range of categories 2\* to 5\* hotels that provide their services in major tourist areas of the Czech Republic in Prague, South Moravia, and in Šumava. These areas were deliberately chosen because of their different marketing strategies used before COVID-19 as for product, price and target marketing segment. Prague because it is a tourist destination that was completely dependent on foreign tourists before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, South Moravia region, where the share of foreigners in the number of persons accommodated in collective hotel-type accommodation facilities was about 10% before the COVID-19. In the case of Šumava, the share of foreign tourists was about 32%. The evaluated data were related to changes in product and pricing policy and were obtained through analysis of the information provided on the reservation portal [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com) and on the official websites of selected tourist areas. Structured interviews were intended to provide more detailed information on the motives for changes in product policy, pricing policy and a possible change in the target market segment. The interviews were conducted during the month of September 2020 and in each selected area managers of 2 hotels from each category available in the selected tourist area were interviewed.

### 3.1 Prague

The capital of the Czech Republic and the most attractive and most visited tourist sight the Czech Republic. Well known for sightseeing tours, congress tourism with wide offer of all kind of accommodation including sufficient number of 4\* and 5\* hotels. The source of the data are internal documents of Pragu tourism. The target market segment comes from congress tourism and foreign visitors this fact before COVID-19 had impact on product and price policy. During the period from June 2020 to September 2020, the average occupancy of hotels in Prague was 10%, those that were fully regulated to foreign visitors, about 1/3 of the total number, remained closed and plan to open in the spring of 2021. It's necessary to mention that in hotels of higher categories 4\* and 5\* the zero economic result is conditioned by at least 50% occupancy in near future hotels in Prague are expecting average occupancy not higher than 15%. As for results from the survey in Prague there are 817 hotels, 15 two stars hotels, 229 three stars hotels, 215 four stars hotel and 49 five stars hotels. 578 (5 – 2\*hotels, 225 – 3\* hotels, 281 – 4\* hotels, 45 – 5\* hotels, of them are using reservation server Booking.com for sales. After analysing offer on that website 78% of them has reduced the price of accommodation during summer period, the highest discount was 70% (4\* hotel) from the average price, the lowest discount was 10% (2\* hotel), the most frequently mentioned

discount was 40%. The year-on-year decrease in accommodated guests in Prague was 84.2%, a comparison between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020.<sup>6,7</sup>

### 3.2 South Moravia

After Prague and its surroundings and the area of southern Bohemia, the region of South Moravia is the most visited tourist destination in the Czech Republic. Areas outside Brno - the capital of the area is famous for wine tourism and cultural and natural sightseeing stays. Brno and its surroundings offer trade fair and congress opportunities and cultural and historical sightseeing. As for structure of guests 36% were non-residents so this part of Czech Republic can be described as a favourite place for residents' visitors. The following data are based on internal documents of Sdružení cestovního ruchu Jižní Moravy. In summertime period (6/2020-9/2020) the average occupancy of hotels in South Moravia was 67% with big difference between hotels in Brno and surroundings (average occupancy 42%) and areas outside Brno with average occupancy of 92%. The average occupancy in near future is expected to reach 30%. The results of the survey in South Moravia shows that there are 202 hotels in South Moravia (there are no 5\* hotels) 98 of them are having they offer on website of booking.com. After analysis of booking.com website it could be said that 32% of all hotel in this region has reduced their price for summer and the average discount was about 40%, most of this discount were given by hotels in Brno, in area outside Brno there were only 5 offers with discount. The highest discount offered by hotel was 30% (4\* hotel in Brno) and the lowest discount was 5 % in 3\* hotel in city of Mikulov, the most frequently mentioned discount was 30%. The year-on-year decrease in accommodated guests in South Moravia was 78,11% in comparison between 2nd quarter of 2019 and 2020.<sup>8,9</sup>

### 3.3 Šumava

Tourist area, which lies in two regions, South Bohemia and Pilsen. The area is home to one of the most beautiful national parks. Tourist region best known for its nature is chosen by visitors for the possibility of hiking, cycling and wide offer in culture, rural tourism and agrotourism. The share of non-residents visitors before COVID was 66%. Sdružení cestovního ruchu Šumava provided data for this analysis. During the period from 6/2020 to 9/2020 the average occupancy of hotels in Šumava region was 73% with the higher rate of occupancy in the region of Lipno lakes. The average occupancy in near future is expected to reach 50% because of the winter offer. The results of the survey in Šumava region shows that there are 66 (no 5\* hotel) hotels 47 of them are offering their services on www.booking.com. After analysing offers, we can say that only 12% of hotels has offered any kind of reduced price, the average discount was 25%. The highest discount was 20% (3\* hotel in Modrava) the lowest discount was 5% (4\* hotel in area of Lipno Lake) from average price. the most frequently mentioned discount was 10%. The year-on-year decrease in accommodated guests in Šumava region was 86% in comparison between 2nd quarter of 2019 and 2020.<sup>10,11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Cestovní ruch*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni\\_ruch](https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni_ruch)>.

<sup>7</sup> *Prague tourism*. [2020-09-30]. Internal reports and statistics 2020.

<sup>8</sup> *Cestovní ruch*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni\\_ruch](https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni_ruch)>.

<sup>9</sup> *Sdružení cestovního ruchu Jižní Morava*. [2020-09-30]. Internal reports and statistics 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *Cestovní ruch*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2020-09-30]. Available at: <[https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni\\_ruch](https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cestovni_ruch)>.

<sup>11</sup> *Sdružení cestovního ruchu Šumava*. [2020-09-30]. Internal reports and statistics 2020.

### 3.4 Summary of Marketing Research Results

The results of the research show (see Table 1 Summary of marketing research) that there is one phenomenon that are having all studied regions in common – the year-on-year decline in number of accommodated guests. The worst situation is in Prague because the Pragu tourism depended on foreign visitors. Based on research it can be said that change in price policy was used mostly in Prague where also the rate of discount was the highest – 40% was the most frequently mentioned discount. The changes of pricing policy were less applied in region of Šumava. The relatively high average occupancy in south Moravia can be explained by the fact that many of other types of accommodation like guests houses kept prices from the year 2019 so with the applied discount the accommodation in hotels was cheaper and offered more comfort.

**Table 1: Summary of marketing research 1**

Criteria	Prague	South Moravia	Šumava
2nd quarter of 2019 number of visitors	2 157 094	581 418	856 402
residents	317 279	367 357	291 177
non residents	1 839 815	214 061	565 225
2nd quarter of 2020 number of visitors	138 187	127 216	119 896
residents	92 457	113 574	99 674
non residents	45 713	13 642	20 222
Year-on-year decline in %	84,12	78,11	86
Number of hotels (2* - 5*)	817	202	66
Number of hotels on booking.com (2* - 5*)	471	98	47
Expected occupancy in nearest future in %	15	30	50
Average occupancy in 2nd quarter 2020 in %	10	67	25
The most frequently mentioned discount in	40	30	10

Source: Own processing

## 4 Discussion

The results of analysis were discussed with managers of selected hotels in Prague, region of South Moravia and region of Šumava. The interview was made with 2 managers of 2\*, 3\*, 4\* and 5\*. Each manager was asked 3 questions, whether there was a change in product policy due to COVID, e.g. product expansion / improvement. The second question focused on pricing policy and whether and how did they change their pricing policy (increase, decrease price, etc.) and whether the changes after the end of the first wave of the pandemic caused a change or expansion of the target market segment within their focus. Identical facts were identified from the responses for each question and each hotel category. In Prague, the managers of 2-star hotels answered in the same way that there was no change in their product policy, there was a slight reduction in the price policy in both hotels by about 10%, which corresponded to a change in the target market segment from foreign low budget tourists to Czech low budget to tourists. The managers were only able to assess the period from June to August and agreed that they had only less than half the decline in the number of guests accommodated due to the low proportion of foreign tourists. They are afraid of further

development and want to use the upcoming period to improve the product by renovating rooms, etc. In the region of South Moravia and Šumava, the managers of two-star hotels agreed that they did not reduce the price. The price that was applied in the previous period was already at the average to below average price for this type of accommodation. They do not consider orientation to a new market segment. Both accommodation facilities in South Moravia want to use the coming period to renovate the kitchen and dining areas and subsequently improve the product. They are still waiting to identify a new market segment.

Managers of all 3-star hotels agreed that there was a decrease in the number of accommodated guests, they believe that the decrease, especially in Prague, is due to a decrease in prices for higher category hotels. Managers of 3-star hotels in South Moravia and Šumava, where the number of accommodated guests was similar to last year, reduced the price only in a limited number of cases, one of the hotel managers in Šumava is considering creating a sauna centre and not focusing on a new market segment. Managers of 4- and 5-star hotels in Prague expressed concern about the current situation and strong concerns about future developments. The managers of all 4 hotels confirmed that during the summer season they agreed to adjust the pricing policy by applying discounts of up to 60%, the aim was to replace Czech visitors with foreign ones who did not come in such a large number. This goal, they managed to fulfil only partially, they explain it by the fact that Prague is not generally understood as a "summer" destination. One of the analysed hotels wants to make a fundamental change in the provision of catering services in the coming period, and one of the hotels is considering the concept of "family friendly". There are no 5-star hotels in South Moravia and Šumava. As part of the pricing policy, the four-star prices reduced prices by a maximum of 15%, which had a positive effect on the increase in orders. Managers explain this by saying that clients who decided to use the money they had on vacation abroad in the Czech Republic and from abroad are accustomed to a certain comfort, which they did not want to give up even on vacation in the Czech Republic. Only one manager of the Brno hotel is worried about the future, who is aware of the fact that congress tourism is still limited in some way.

The impact of COVID-19 on the tactical management of the marketing mix is obvious after the analyzes. Changing or modifying the marketing strategy in partial areas of the marketing mix in the hotel industry is a frequent reaction of most hotel-type accommodation facilities. The implemented changes most often concern the pricing policy. The hotel facilities, which were focused primarily on foreign clients, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, had to orient and adjust their marketing mix to a new one - domestic clients. Some hotels, which could afford it, used the COVID-19 pandemic as an incentive to innovate the product – the reconstruction of rooms, the construction of SPAs and wellness centers etc. The situation about COVID-19 pandemic is not improving significantly. The hotel industry is facing difficult times, restrictions on the part of government authorities continue and future developments are very uncertain. The question is whether the continuing unfavorable situation can be faced with changes in marketing management, the author believes not.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID 19 pandemic hit the accommodation sector in the Czech Republic hard. Based on the research, the results of which could be subjected to a deeper analysis, it is clear that in the Czech Republic and on the basis of absolute values, Prague, which was dependent on foreign tourists and congress tourism, was the most affected. The area of South Moravia and Šumava was able to partially replace the missing foreign tourists with domestic clients, which is due

to the nature of these destinations, which offer a wide and diverse range of leisure activities and not only sightseeing. The study could be followed by another that addresses the remaining elements of the marketing mix, and the results of both studies could provide a comprehensive picture of changes in marketing strategies as a result of the COVID pandemic 19.

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## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INNOVATION OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING AMONG EMPLOYEES

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### Abstract

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 not only resulted in the need to reconsider the way employees work for the employer, but also affected the way internal corporate communication with employers is carried out. In particular, the process of acquainting employees with work instructions or work tasks, including oversight and supervision, has changed. In this context, the adopted legislative changes and the approach of the supervisory authorities changed the way the adherence of regulations is assessed - from formal to more proactive. The aim of the paper is to outline the areas of controversy that have arisen as a result of changes in the conditions regulating internal corporate communication, including shortcomings in fulfilling various information obligations towards employees and the resulting legal consequences for business entities.

### Key words:

Covid-19. Employee. Information Obligation. Innovation. Internal Communication.

### Introduction

The implementation of internal corporate communication is one of the most important activities ensuring the management and training of the employer's workforce. The ongoing crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic put the internal communication to a test and highlighted its fundamental shortcomings, including, in particular, its degree of effectiveness. However, the crisis also pointed to the lack of personal preconditions in many managers, who are not qualified to ensure proper implementation of communication in the online environment. We must assume that effective communication in the online environment requires the cooperation and action of several factors, including not only the qualifications and professional experience of the manager, but also his personality characteristics, including experience in leading a larger number of employees, ability to empathize, and the like.<sup>1</sup> However, we must also realize that the deterioration of internal communication may not only be caused by the relationship between managers and their subordinates, but also between employees due to the tense emotional situation caused by the current situation. This can be caused by e.g. concern about the loss of employment, reduction of employment rights of employees due to loss of cash flow, etc.<sup>2</sup> However, internal communication is not only an element ensuring employee motivation, but also an element ensuring compliance with the employer's information obligation based on the established obligation arising from relevant legal regulations. The obligation of the employer to inform or educate employees is an integral part of each stage of the mutual relationship between the employer and the employee. We omitted the term "*labor-law relations*" on purpose, as the information obligation of the employer arises in the phase of pre-contractual relations under Art. 41 of Act no. 311/2001 Coll. Labor Code, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Labor Code"), i.e. before

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<sup>1</sup> NOSKOVÁ, M., PERÁČEK, T.: Termination of employment in the Slovak Republic as a key issue of HR Management. In *Central European Journal of Labour Law and Personnel Management*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 45-58.

<sup>2</sup> CSEH PAPP, I., SZABÓ, K., SCHWARCZOVÁ, L., HAJÓS, L.: Expectations and visions of „Z“ generation of university students in relation to the labour market. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 24-37.; See also: HITKA, M. et al.: Strategic Tool of Human Resource Management for Operation of SMEs in the Wood-processing Industry. In *Bioresources*, 2018, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 2759-2774.



the establishment of an employment relationship. Based on the suitability of the established information obligations of the employer in various labor law institutes, the aim of the information obligation is to fulfil the preventive function of protecting the life and health of employees and ensure an adequate level of knowledge on the part of the employee, thus enabling him to perform his work without much problems.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the above, we consider the area of safety and protection of life and health of employees at work as the most important area under the information obligation as any intervention in this regard shall be assessed carefully (expected impacts not only on the safety and health of employees at work, but also on the area of other labor law institutes, e.g. responsibilities).

In this context, we need to emphasize that the internal communication of the business entity plays a crucial role even in the context of managing future behaviour of employees who due to the lack of information on the part of the business entity reach erroneous conclusions and subsequently act in a way that not only contradicts the relevant provisions of generally binding legal regulations, but also increases the risk of damage with a direct impact on their employment rights. The empirical consequence of this statement may be e.g. current "confusion" regarding the expired periods of validity of preventive health check-ups of employees carrying out night work in accordance with Art. 98 of the Labor Code. With regard to the adopted anti-crisis legislation, some employees found themselves in a situation where the period of validity of their preventive health check-ups expired and in the absence of information from the employer, some of them refused to continue their work because, according to their subjective beliefs, the employer was not entitled to assign them work and issue work instructions, as these would be in conflict with the provisions of Art. 47, para. 3, letter a) and b) of the Labor Code, i.e. the instructions would be issued in violation of generally binding legal regulations (absence of a preventive health check-ups). At the same time, employees subjectively assessed that their own life and health were immediately endangered.<sup>4</sup> The failure of internal communication thus directly threatens the production or work process along with other consequences, such as the employer's ability to impose labor sanctions on these employees for breach of work discipline in the form of unjustified absence from work.

## 1 Change in Legislation and Its Impact on Internal Communication

At its session, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted Resolution no. 174 on the measures adopted at the meeting of the Central Crisis Staff to address the novel virus COVID-19 caused by the corona virus SARS-CoV-2 in the territory of the Slovak Republic. The point A.10 of the cited resolution instructs the Minister of Health, in cooperation with the Chief Hygienist of the Slovak Republic and the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, to adopt a measure setting out the conditions limiting preventive health check-ups in relation to work under Art. 30e of Act No. 355/2007, Coll. on the protection, support and development of public health, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Health Protection Act"), i.e. also in relation to the performance of night work. Following the resolution and the need

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<sup>3</sup> BODNÁR, T.: Stages of career path through useful crises. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2016, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 21-27.; See also: JERÁBEK, Z.: Predispositions of an applicant for an employment – advantage for getting hired and for the length of an employment. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2016, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 73-84.

<sup>4</sup> CSEH PAPP, I., VARGA, E., SCHWARCZOVÁ, L., HAJÓS, L.: Public work in an international and Hungarian context. In *Central European Journal of Labour Law and Personnel Management*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 7-14.

to implement the measures adopted in it, Act no. 66/2020 Coll., amending the Act no. 311/2001 Coll., Labor Code, as amended, which supplements certain acts and amending Act no. 124/2006 Coll. on Occupational Safety and Health, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the “Occupational Safety and Health”) has been adopted. The amendment to the Health and Safety at Work Act consists of the newly introduced provision of Art. 39i entitled “Transitional provisions valid throughout the duration of an emergency, emergency situation, emergency state declared in connection with the pandemic caused by COVID-19”, which also introduced:

- The suspension of the employer's obligation to acquaint employees with information pursuant to Art. 7, para. 3 of the Occupational Safety and Health, if the recruitment, transfer to another workplace, assignment or transfer to another job, new technology, new work procedure or new work equipment occurred/ was introduced during an emergency, emergency situation, emergency state declared in connection with the pandemic caused by COVID -19 and if this obligation cannot be objectively fulfilled; however, failure to comply with this obligation must not immediately and seriously endanger life and health. In the case of the procedure under the first sentence, the employer is obliged to notify the employee according to Art. 7, par. 1 and 2 as soon as possible, no later than one month from the date of the crisis situation officially ended;
- Deadlines according to Art. 7, par. 5 of the Act on Occupational Safety and Health which will take place during the emergency, emergency situation, emergency state declared in connection with the pandemic caused by COVID-19 disease. The deadline according to Art. 7, par. 5 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act which will take place one month from the date the crisis situation ends is considered to be met if the employer fulfils the notification obligation no later than one month from the date the crisis situation ends. The provisions of the first sentence and the second sentence shall apply only if it was not objectively possible to fulfil the obligation within the original deadline; however, failure to comply with the notification obligation within the original deadline must not immediately and seriously endanger life and health.

The adoption of the new anti-epidemiological legislation thus significantly affected the area of information obligations of employees, while in our opinion it created several controversial areas of issues and situations that could be avoided by more carefully drawn up legislation and improved internal communication.<sup>5</sup> Legal regulation contained in the Occupational Safety and Health Act before the adoption of Act no. 66/2020 Coll. assumed that in accordance with the provisions of Art 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the employer is obliged to regularly, clearly and demonstrably inform each employee:

- a) on legal regulations and other regulations to ensure occupational safety and health, acquaint them with the principles of safe work, principles of health protection at work, principles of safe behavior at the workplace and with safe working procedures and verify their knowledge,
- b) existing and foreseeable hazards and threats, the effects these may have on health and safety, including countermeasures,
- c) ban on entry, ban on staying in the premises and carrying out activities which could directly endanger the life or health of employees.

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<sup>5</sup> KÁDÁR, B.: Including labour market proposals in higher education offers. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 90-99.; LACKO, R., ROZKOŠOVÁ, A., HAJDUOVÁ, Z.: The last 5 years in e-government services trust, acceptance and implementation. In DOUCEK, P., CHROUST, G., OŠKRDAL, V. (eds.): *Strategic modeling in management, economy and society. 26th Conference on Interdisciplinary Information Management Talks (IDIMT)*. Linz : Trauner, 2018, p. 326-329.

The moment of fulfillment of the given information obligation or the obligation to inform employees is defined in the provision of Art. 7, par. 3 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which states that the employer is obliged to inform the employee in accordance with the provisions of Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 upon hiring, transfer to another workplace, assignment or transfer to another job, introduction of new technology, new work procedure or new means of work.<sup>6</sup> Following the above-mentioned resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic, Act no. 66/2020 Coll., Act no. 69/2020 Coll. on emergency measures in relation to the spread of dangerous infectious human disease COVID-19, as amended (hereinafter the "Emergency Measures Act") was adopted and entered into force on 6 April 2020. With regard to the anti-epidemiological measures to minimize gatherings of large groups of people at one place, the preventive health check-ups of employees have stopped. The Emergency Measures Act added to the provision of Art. 30a of Act no. 355/2007 Coll. on the Protection, Promotion and Development of Public Health, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Health Protection Act"), paragraph 10, according to which, in times of crisis medical fitness is not assessed:

- in times of crisis, providers of occupational health services who are licensed to perform occupational health services pursuant to Art. 30d of the Health Protection Act, and providers of occupational health and safety services who perform activities for employees performing work classified in the first or second category pursuant to Section 30c of the Health Protection Act:
  - a) do not supervise working conditions at employers' workplaces pursuant to paragraph 2 a),
  - b) do not assess medical fitness (carry out preventive health check-ups) in relation to work pursuant to paragraph 2 b),
  - c) provide advice on the protection of health at work and the prevention of occupational diseases in accordance with paragraph 2 (c) by telephone or electronic means; due to the epidemiological situation they are barred from providing advice at employers' workplaces.

## 2 Interruption of Information Provision to Employees as a Crisis Moment of the Internal Communication

The epidemiological legislation meant a complete cessation of internal communication in terms of acquainting employees with information that would normally be communicated in accordance with Art 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, where employers communicated exclusively work tasks or work instructions. In this respect, the scope and manner of information provision was paradoxically limited to the assignment of work tasks, although information and knowledge that directly follows from the provisions of Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act could be communicated in the same way. A key expression for the suspension of the employer's obligation to inform employees pursuant to Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act is the phrase after the semicolon in the wording "*if this obligation cannot objectively be fulfilled*". However, employers have not examined in practice whether or not they can objectively provide information to employees, even in relation to the above subject matter, and simply ceased to provide such information. Formal interruption of information provision in accordance with Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act does

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<sup>6</sup> ŠVEC, M., TOMAN, J. et al.: *Zákonník práce. Zákon o kolektívnom vyjednávaní. Komentár. I. zväzok.* Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2019, p. 789.

not meet the substantive condition set out in the newly introduced transitional provision of the Health Protection Act. The employers did not at all examine the objective reasons which prevented them from fulfilling that obligation to provide information to employees, and ceased to carry out their obligations. However, the provision in question was not drafted in that way, in particular for reasons of maintaining effective employment protection; a teleological interpretation of that provision clearly presupposed that the employer should primarily examine the objective impossibility of carrying out its obligation in this regard and only then suspend its activities in this matter until the end of the said emergency situation.<sup>7</sup>

A crucial factor which significantly influences the decision-making of employers in this area are inspections of the competent authorities supervising labour-law relationships. Although such a guideline or opinion is not officially communicated anywhere, it can be deduced from experience and practice that the supervisory authorities consider the information obligation to be met only when provided with a written confirmation, i.e. attendance sheets drawn up at the training, published training plan, implementation of some form of examination verifying the knowledge obtained at the training, etc. This form of training could not be carried out due to the implementation of anti-epidemiological measures, such as limited large gatherings (natural persons), whereas, by its very nature, employee trainings always mean a large gathering of people at one place. Despite this fact, however, internal communication brings various ways of ensuring that employees are informed, e.g. the intranet, corporate applications or e-mail, video calls, through which it would be possible to ensure employees are informed in accordance with Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Health and Safety Act, especially in situations where employers did not have a major problem with assigning work tasks to employees working remotely (home office, teleworking). In this context, it can be demonstrably concluded that the interruption of information provision in accordance with Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Health and Safety Act should not have meant a general interruption of the process of informing employees, regardless of the nature of their work, and the employer should have had to examine whether its reasons for doing so were objective with regard to protecting the life and health of employees. This might have been possible in case of manual workers, who e.g. stopped working due to obstacles to work on the part of the employer according to Art. 142, par. 4 of the Labor Code, but certainly not in the case of employees whose work could have been carried out from home e.g. paperwork and technical activities. In such cases the interruption of information provision thus was not justified and the employers failed to meet the substantive condition envisaged by the amendment to the said Act.

The substantive condition for the interruption of information provision provides that failure to comply with this obligation must not directly and seriously endanger the life and health of employees.<sup>8</sup> Based on the above premise, in many cases such a condition was not met either, as this assessment process was simply not carried out by employers. Although it cannot be said that there has been a significant increase in the number of cases in which the life and health of employees would be directly and seriously endangered, such situations cannot be ruled out at all, as no previous assessment of such situations has taken place. In this respect,

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<sup>7</sup> KUBÁK, M., BOSÁKOVÁ, L., FIŠAR, M., HAJDUOVÁ, Z., TIMUROVÁ, E.: Dependence of Unemployment Change on Selected Economic Factors: Panel Data Evidence. In DVORÁKOVÁ, P. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 19th International conference: current trends in public sector research*. Brno : Masaryk University in Brno, 2019, p. 22-27.

<sup>8</sup> ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., BOBOVNICKÝ, A., MADLEŇÁK, A.: How can the state support the innovations to build sustainable competitive advantage of the country. In *Serbian Journal of Management*, 2013, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 256-266.

the objective substantive conditions thus stated, although established by the legislator with good intentions, became obsolete and the interruption of information provision was, in principle, generalized by the adopted legislation until the end of the emergency situation. In connection with the above situation, we also believe that, apart from the described labor law consequences, there has been a crisis of internal communication taking place. Responsible managers failed to recognize that the business entity would be able to ensure compliance with Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Health and Safety Act using suitable communication tools.<sup>9</sup> We believe that the failure to secure smooth internal communication in this area pointed to the long-term problem - the quality and development of the internal communication is not being given sufficient attention (in general as well as in extraordinary cases). In many industries, internal communication still depends on an in-person principle – gathering of large groups of people, although new, modern methods of internal communication could do the same job and meet the obligations under Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act - on the one hand to ensure the fulfillment of the purposes envisaged in the legal order, on the other hand to be a sufficiently demonstrable way of providing information which would meet the requirements of supervisory authorities verifying the compliance with labor law regulations.

### **3 Internal Communication with Regard to Home Office and Employer Supervision**

Software The provision of Art. 52 of the Labor Code allows the employer and the employee to agree on working from home or from another agreed place that is not the employer's workplace. The conclusion of a home office (teleworking) agreement entails the need to set up appropriate conditions for the performance of the employee's activities. The employer, regardless of whether the employee performs work from home or directly at the employer's workplace, is obliged to ensure suitable working conditions, i.e. appropriate measures in the field of safety and health at work, the right of the employer to assign work to the employee, provide work instructions to the employee and check their fulfillment. Due to the lasting effects of the COVID pandemic, home office is becoming more widespread, especially in some economic segments. Due to this fact, employers now pay increased attention to the internal communication and tools for checking the employee performance. Teleworking and working from home bring along various communication options – communication via a mobile phone, computer, corporate network - intranet. Some employers require employees to connect to the communication thread, from which it is clear whether the employee is online and working or not, or is inactive (reports on the length of inactivity). Modern technological possibilities are therefore capable of endangering the privacy of employees. If employers monitor employees and their activities, then all the employer's procedures must be in accordance with the GDPR Regulation and the personal data protection legislation.<sup>10</sup>

When working from home using electronic devices, it is common for the employer to provide the employee with a computer, or, in some cases, the employee uses his own equipment (following the agreement with the employer) and installs various systems and programs that

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<sup>9</sup> ONDREJKOVÁ, E.: *Pracovná zdravotná služby pre zamestnávateľov*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2019, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> HITKA, M., LORINCOVÁ, S., LIŽBETINOVÁ, L.: Manager's data in human resource management from the perspective of the work position. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 70-79.; MADLEŇÁK, A., ŽUĽOVÁ, J.: *The Right to Privacy in the Context of the Use of Social Media and Geolocation Services*. Budapešť : Wolters Kluwer Hungary, 2019, p. 68.

allow the employee to perform work. When introducing work from home, the employer must evaluate all risks associated with the protection of personal data, set the conditions for working from home so as not to interfere with the privacy of the employee in question and also other persons to whom the employee has access from the computer. The employer should minimize the associated risks of privacy early at the beginning - prevent unauthorized access of third parties, secure folders and files stored on the network so that they cannot be downloaded and saved, etc. From the point of view of the safety and protection of the life and health of employees and given the established number of working hours, employers may introduce remote mechanisms that would make it possible to check whether the employee works during working hours or engages in other activities (camera system, tracking of activities in the employer's system, movement of the mouse cursor, keystrokes or use of applications, etc.).<sup>11</sup> However, the installation of these tools will most likely not comply with the relevant legislation. For example, camera system or a system that monitors movement of the mouse cursor and keystrokes will in most cases not comply with legal procedures. This would most likely mean an unauthorized invasion to employees' privacy. *“It is essential that the risk associated with working from home or remotely is addressed proportionately, paying attention to the used technology, especially if the boundaries between business and private use are uncertain.”* If, on the basis of an agreement to perform work from home, the employee has the opportunity to perform activities in a place other than the employer's workplace, the employer transfers a number of responsibilities to the employee, such as to record working hours and the like. It is necessary to agree with the employee on the performance of his duties, including weekly working hours, the time zone in which he will work, and under what conditions he will carry out the work. This special type of employment relationship is based on trust, because it is practically impossible to monitor employees and their working time on regular and unlimited basis.

## Conclusion

The process of interrupting information provision to employees in accordance with Art. 7, par. 1 and par. 2 of the Health and Safety Act and the resulting implications did not reflect the currently worsening working conditions at the workplace due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Employers simplified their approach to meeting the substantive conditions set by the new legislation with regard to the employer's ability to interrupt such a process of informing employees. In some cases, such conduct of employers might have endangered the lives and health of employees due to lack of information on legislation and other regulations ensuring safety and health at work, the principles of safe work, the principles of safe behavior at work and safe working practices and lack of knowledge testing, even though many employees continue to perform their work remotely e.g. teleworking, home office. The absence of supervision in this area and poor understanding of legislation caused the aforementioned problems despite the good intention of the legislature.<sup>12</sup> Recommendations are clear - carry out inspections focused on adhering to the provisions in question and at the same time to emphasize the importance of internal communication as a means capable of helping businesses in the implementation of their obligations arising from generally binding legal regulations.

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<sup>11</sup> CSÓKÁS, L., MACHOVÁ, R.: Effective leadership style. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 40-49.; See also: FAPOHUNDA, T. M.: Gender and impression management in the workplace. In *Acta Oeconomica Universitatis Selye*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 47-56.

<sup>12</sup> PITRA, Z., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A.: Communication in knowledge Transfer Management. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 52-64.

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## MONEY HEIST OR HOW NETFLIX FOUND A LOST GEM IN THE LINEAR TELEVISION'S 'JUNKYARD'

Zuzana Točená

### Abstract

The article discusses unexpected success of the episodic television drama *Money Heist*. The author points out probable reasons behind the episodic television drama becoming a hit among *Netflix* subscribers, despite the fact that it was originally developed for a 'linear' television audience. Defining the differences between television distribution models and determining whether or how providers of 'linear' television and Internet streaming services consider audience preferences, the author draws theoretical conclusions about the benefits and positive consequences of companies like *Netflix* operating in the media industry. The paper also aims to reflect on new trends in presenting episodic content via Internet-distributed television platforms, especially with regard to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It may be presumed that various episodic dramas offered by *Netflix* (including *Money Heist*) have gained international popularity specifically during the pandemic. The author utilises qualitative content analysis and logical reasoning methods (synthesis, comparison, inductive thinking, wider generalisation, concretisation) in order to better understand why the episodic drama *Money Heist* could not succeed on 'linear' television and why it is now so popular with global television audiences.

### Key words:

Audience Preferences. Binge-Watching. 'Linear' Television. Money Heist. Over-the-Top Platforms. Television Distribution Models.

## 1 Introduction

The availability of television and possibilities of receiving content throughout multiplatform distribution channels have changed beyond recognition in recent decades. If audience members wanted to see a movie starring their favourite actor just a few years ago, they either bought tickets and went to the cinema or borrowed/bought a DVD. Both of those actions had one thing in common; media recipients had to stand up and leave the comfort of their homes to enjoy culturally enriching events of their choosing. Moreover, since March 2020 it has been impossible to decide whether to go to the cinema or to favour home entertainment – due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has limited our free time activities significantly. Today, however, almost everything is just two or three clicks away, even mediated culture. This shift might be seen as a necessary consequence of the technological revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; moreover, it is also an intended result of new directions prevailing in media industry. The need to study these current phenomena in relation to media industry grows exponentially with the possibilities we have as viewers or content creators. For a long time, 'linear' television possessed a very safe and stable position, industry-wise. Nowadays we witness a battle for viewers and market shares between 'linear' broadcasters and OTT (over-the-top) providers. As noted by Jenner, "*the media industry, and what we define as television, has changed with the increased possibilities of online streaming*". In the context of understanding the shift in this particular part of media industry, the author of the publication *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television* argues that it is impossible to determine which company played a main role in establishing our new understanding of television as a medium. Companies or rather services like *Netflix*, *YouTube*, *Hulu*, *BBC iPlayer*, *iTunes* and many more are all partly responsible.<sup>1</sup> Without contradicting the way Jenner perceives the issue in question, we have to take a closer look at related phenomena. *Netflix* undoubtedly plays a special role

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<sup>1</sup> JENNER, M.: *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*. Cambridge : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 2-3.

in revolutionising television; from the way we understand and receive it to how we respond to its content. In 2014 Lindsey stated: “*Change remains constant in the hectic realm of television.*” This argument is even more true six years later. Today, we see clearly the changes Lindsey anticipated in his publication titled *Questioning Netflix’s Revolutionary Impact: Changes in the Business and Consumption of Television*.<sup>2</sup> Since then many more OTT broadcasters joined the market and *Netflix* alone expanded its services and is now available in more than 190 countries around the world.<sup>3</sup> Growing in numbers, OTT broadcasters are a bigger threat to ‘linear’ television; now more than ever, given the pandemic that has widely popularised OTT platforms as alternative, but still full-fledged distribution channels offering the latest movies and TV shows. Of course, every company wants to be bigger and more successful; while *Netflix* and other similar companies operating via the Internet aim to gain more subscribers, ‘linear’ television providers want to attract more viewers so that they can achieve better market shares and offer more lucrative (in other words, more expensive) advertising time slots. The latter fact is one of the biggest differences between these key groups of television industry competitors. It may seem like a totally different game they are playing, but they are, in fact, standing in the same field. If we want to lay theoretical grounds for differentiating factors that play a crucial role in making a film, TV show or documentary a hit or a miss, we should understand the business specifics of each type of television service provider on basis of their comparison.

## 2 Comparing OTT Services and Linear Television

In case of *Netflix* the main source of income is a subscription fee paid directly by customer to the company.<sup>4</sup> Whilst ‘classic’ television, which we have known since we were born, is mostly financed by on-air advertising (this statement is, however, strongly associated with commercial television enterprises, and not so much with public service media). Cable networks also make money by providing content for distributors. Viewers then pay the distributors or satellite operators, or buy advertised products.<sup>5</sup> Public broadcasting service providers also receive money through television licenses (monthly fees) paid by households. Not to get into unnecessary detail, we can state that (commercial, business-focused, privately owned) ‘linear’ television providers are not paid directly by viewers. It only makes sense – a company which is funded by advertisers or other providers will have more difficulties while determining what people want to watch and pay for than companies like *Netflix* which operate on basis of a transparent financial model. As Raats and Donders explain: “*In the pre-OTT world, both analogue and digital television distribution were part of fairly neat value chain. Consumers paid a company in charge of distributing television signals for access to these signals and in many cases for access to premium content such as sports, film and drama.*” The result was unambiguous; broadcasters reached consumers through intermediary companies and as the authors also add, every representative had a clear role in the value

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<sup>2</sup> LINDSEY, C.: Questioning Netflix’s Revolutionary Impact: Changes in the Business and Consumption of Television. In McDONALD, K., SMITH-ROWSEY, D. (eds.): *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 174-183.

<sup>3</sup> *The Story of Netflix*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://about.netflix.com/en>>.

<sup>4</sup> REIFF, N.: *How Netflix Makes Money*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2020-17-10]. Available at: <<https://www.investopedia.com/insights/how-netflix-makes-money/>>.

<sup>5</sup> SHEFFER, R.: *How Do Media Networks Make Money?*. [online]. [2020-10-17]. Available at: <<https://marketrealist.com/2015/03/media-networks-make-money/>>.

chain; they were the end point.<sup>6</sup> Even before OTT providers became such a big competition for ‘linear’ TV broadcasters, there were first signs of their weakening financial power. Most aspects of this issue lay in hands of advertisers, as already mentioned; the question whether the commercials will get to the viewers as planned (and paid for) remains crucial. As Lindsey puts it: “...broadcast and cable (providers) are concerned about the effects of time-shifted television, but they are not necessarily changing their format entirely, and the practice is certainly not revolutionizing the way we consume media.”<sup>7</sup> The possibility of fast-forwarding over the source of money did not scare ‘linear’ televisions enough to encourage them to make big changes. Even without a possibility of skipping commercials there is no guarantee that they will reach its desired audience; television audiences are so used to commercial breaks in between the screening of a movie or a show that they count on them and use the breaks for preparing a snack, use the bathroom or simply checking their mobile phones. Financial security of *Netflix* (or any other OTT service provider) is in different hands than economic performance of ‘linear’ television providers, which is the first main distinction we need to bear in mind while anticipating the future of television as a medium.

Recognising the distribution models and existing differences between OTT and ‘linear’ television is long overdue if we want to define what is more suitable for contemporary audiences. Everything linked with OTT distribution is nowadays considered to be a distribution model of its own. As Raats and Donders point out: “(...) over-the-top (OTT) television distribution can nowadays be added to the list of distribution models. Over-the-top does not require the use of a physical network for content distribution.”<sup>8</sup> Let us imagine the process itself. If we decided to watch an episodic drama on *Netflix*, all we would need is Internet connection, a mobile phone, computer or laptop and subscription; it is indeed as easy as it sounds. If we want to watch a series more ‘traditionally’, we must have a television set and cable/satellite/IPTV connection (these are the most used ways of receiving television programming in Slovakia).<sup>9</sup> ‘Traditional’ television distribution has its limits, even though providers try to adapt and be present not only via standard television sets. Many successful and established television broadcasters maintain as big Internet presence as is in their power. Today, one can watch a ‘linear’ television programme broadcast in real time on the provider’s website or even later in their archive. There must have been a moment a few years back when ‘traditional’ broadcasters acknowledged that this ‘battle’ with OTT providers cannot be fought without establishing Internet presence. From this point of view, it was the best thing they could have done. The question is whether it is enough. Lindsey points out relativity of this matter: “*Netflix may lead the pack in the new era of internet distribution and online viewing of media as it is doing presently. On the other hand, traditional broadcast and cable*

<sup>6</sup> RAATS, T., DONDEERS, K.: Television Distribution in Flanders: Who Takes the Lead and Is Content Always King?. In SZCZEPANIK, P., ZAHŘÁDKA, P., MACEK, J., STEPAN, P. (eds.): *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*. Cham : Springer Open, 2020, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> LINDSEY, C.: Questioning Netflix’s Revolutionary Impact: Changes in the Business and Consumption of Television. In McDONALD, K., SMITH-ROWSEY, D. (eds.): *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 174-183.

<sup>8</sup> RAATS, T., DONDEERS, K.: Television Distribution in Flanders: Who Takes the Lead and Is Content Always King?. In SZCZEPANIK, P., ZAHŘÁDKA, P., MACEK, J., STEPAN, P. (eds.): *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*. Cham : Springer Open, 2020, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ako spôsob prijmu televízie dominuje u slovenských domácností stále satelit*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2017. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://medialne.trend.sk/televizia/ako-sposob-prijmu-televizie-dominuje-u-slovenskych-domacnosti-stale-satelit>>.

television may play a larger role in the online viewing market.” The author even argues that there is a possibility of traditional broadcasters overcoming *Netflix* in terms of popularity among audiences. The future seems to be even more unclear if we consider the inevitable existence of various illegal possibilities of viewing audiovisual content. Obtaining audiovisual content illegally is not a new phenomenon; if popularity of this behaviour escalates exponentially, it will lead to serious consequences manifesting across the whole industry.<sup>10</sup> Discussing the relevance of ‘traditional’ television providers, Raats and Donders add: “*They have more difficulties in attracting viewers and securing advertising and yet, in the case of public broadcasters, insist on their relevance in the digital age.*”<sup>11</sup> When speculating on the economic stability of *Netflix* and other OTT providers in future, many authors admit that their position may not be as secure as it seems. Raats and Donder basically agree with Lindsey, although they look at the issue in question from a different angle when they mention that *Netflix* “*sees itself confronted with Disney and Apple going rogue. The acquisition of Time Warner by AT&T might also put pressure on the success of Netflix.*”<sup>12</sup> Many factors pose as crucial in this matter of how, when, where and what we choose to watch.

However, ‘linear’ television broadcasters are not the only ones that can readjust certain business priorities when needed. *Netflix* showed enormous urge to get to the top of television industry in 2013 when the company decided to produce its own (original) content. Looking back at that decision, it makes sense. They took one obvious advantage ‘linear’ television broadcasters had and made it their own. Producing original content, which is available exclusively on their platform, made them irreplaceable in the eyes of future subscribers or rather fans. Today, we can state that this strategy works well. Most of us are familiar with at least one of *Netflix*’s hit shows like *House of Cards* (2013 – 2018), *Stranger Things* (2016 – present) or *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness* (2020). When mentioning all that has been going well, we also need to focus on how much money can each representative of contemporary television spend on their own content. According to Bloomberg, *Netflix* was planning to spend astronomical 16 billion dollars on content in 2020.<sup>13</sup> The amount of money spent on content is gradually growing every year. The amount of OTT competitors currently operating in almost every country of the world visibly causes pressure, which results in raising the budgets. Even without complicated mathematical counts, we can safely assume that ‘linear’ television broadcasters are not able to put this kind of money into new content annually. What makes it possible for *Netflix* is their worldwide presence and the current number of the platform’s subscribers being more than 192 million.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> LINDSEY, C.: Questioning *Netflix*’s Revolutionary Impact: Changes in the Business and Consumption of Television. In McDONALD, K., SMITH-ROWSEY, D. (eds.): *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 174-183.

<sup>11</sup> RAATS, T., DONDEERS, K.: Television Distribution in Flanders: Who Takes the Lead and Is Content Always King?. In SZCZEPANIK, P., ZAHRÁDKA, P., MACEK, J., STEPAN, P. (eds.): *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*. Cham : Springer Open, 2020, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> KLEBNIKOV, S.: *Streaming Wars Continue: Here’s How Much Netflix, Amazon, Disney+ And Their Rivals Are Spending on New Content*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sergeiklebnikov/2020/05/22/streaming-wars-continue-heres-how-much-netflix-amazon-disney-and-their-rivals-are-spending-on-new-content/#78009bc8623b>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Number of Netflix Paid Subscribers Worldwide from 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2011 to 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2020*. [online]. [2020-10-25]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/>>.

A significant part of the television business is being able to estimate the chances that a specific content will succeed. ‘Linear’ television has its ratings, shares and generally known preferences of genres and also television hosts or other stars on whom broadcasters can rely to attract audiences. What distinguishes ‘linear’ television from OTT services probably the most, from the viewer’s point of view, is its schedule. Daily schedules are created on the basis of experience or expected behaviour of individuals and groups of viewers. For example, most commercially oriented television channels start each day with a morning show, giving their viewers bits and pieces of news as well as offering discussions on current topics that might be of interest to them. These morning shows are mostly made to appeal to people working from home, parents on maternity/paternity leave or seniors. In general, morning shows aim to catch attention of people being at home during morning hours.<sup>15</sup> Individual sections of each day are all planned in this manner, taking into account who is potentially at home and what would this person want to watch. The structure of weekly schedules does not change a lot anymore; content we now see on television on particular days and at a specific time is probably not so different from a similar programme scheme broadcast fifteen years ago. Evening hours when most viewers are at home are the most interesting and the most expensive part of the daily television schedule for advertisers. This specific time slot is called “prime time”. The term refers to “*the time period when the television or radio audience is the largest*”.<sup>16</sup> This ‘luxurious’ part of each day of broadcasting is often filled with the most expensive shows. One thing all ‘linear’ broadcasters have in common is that they need their viewers to wait around for the show they want to see. Lotz points out that “*particular features of television, such as the patterns of the daily schedule and the experience of waiting for something to ‘be on’, also specifically define our experience with the medium.*”<sup>17</sup> This is how the whole experience of watching ‘linear’ television is determined. ‘Linear’ televisions build upon the fact that the audiences are used to their schedules and they know what to expect and when. *Netflix* uses a different approach. Let us start with what every user knows from the first moments, right after opening the website or application on a mobile phone. There is a lot of content; episodic dramas, feature films, documentaries, talk shows, etc. Everything is divided into specific categories; the subscriber can browse the content by genre, theme, actor’s name or even country of origin. The platform itself offers multiple recommendations. Knowing each individual might get ‘lost’ or feel confused, *Netflix* uses algorithms so that they are able to recommend specific content that should correspond with each individual’s cultural taste. Information that is gathered includes viewing history and data on how each user rates viewed titles. Taken into consideration is also what other subscribers with similar tastes and preferences like to watch. Knowing the time of the day when the subscriber watches, what device they use and how long they watch also helps the recommendation system to figure out what the person would like to see next. Sociodemographic information such as age or gender are not included. The OTT provider strives to help people find a content they would enjoy with minimal effort from their side.<sup>18</sup>

This makes the experience of watching wherever, whenever and whatever even more attractive for millions of subscribers. The need to be able to recommend and, in fact, produce exactly what they want is one of the highest priorities *Netflix* has. The company’s

<sup>15</sup> LOTZ, A.: *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2009, p. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *Prime Time*. [online]. [2020-10-26]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prime%20time>>.

<sup>17</sup> LOTZ, A.: *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *How Netflix’s Recommendations System Works*. [online]. [2020-10-26]. Available at: <<https://help.netflix.com/en/node/100639>>.

CEO Reed Hastings points out that mistakes would happen necessarily if *Netflix* recommended next titles to watch to the viewers only on basis of their already recorded ratings. They (*Netflix* employees) quickly noticed that viewers are metacognitive when rating. The subscriber could give a movie like *Schindler's List* (1993, directed by Steven Spielberg) five stars and then a comedy movie with Adam Sandler only three stars. Later, the same person would watch a few more comedies with Sandler but no more critically acclaimed war dramas. Using all the information they can gives the subscribers better experience in the end. Instead of their viewers' aspirational values, *Netflix* uses the values they unconsciously reveal to the company by consuming what they actually like.<sup>19</sup> We can look at this as a way of giving direct feedback to content makers. Not depending on third parties to pay for advertising space, *Netflix* can also do what they think is best with the money the customers pay monthly. The company's budget is times bigger that any linear television provider can achieve because of the platform's worldwide availability. Already knowing what people want to watch, *Netflix* producers can easily decide what to make, i.e. what kinds of content will have the best chance of being successful. With the rise of *Netflix*, the phenomenon of 'binge-watching' was born. This specific activity consists of two necessities – of a provider being able to release a whole season of an episodic television show at once and viewers being so 'hooked' on the content that they want to watch all available episodes at once, one after another. Often it takes them a day or two, in some cases a night or two to watch a whole season from the first to the last episode. McCormick emphasises the consequential changes in reading audiovisual narratives: "*Binge-viewing changes the stakes of narrative engagement by reframing the temporality of viewing experiences to optimize emotional intensity and story immersion.*"<sup>20</sup> 'Binge-worthy' content leaves people so pleased that they want more, and as soon as possible. Being able to please the audience to the point they make a habit of using the service (and paying for it regularly) is, without a question, crucial to all providers of audiovisual content.

### 3 Money Heist: The Phenomenon of Internet-Distributed Television

*Money Heist* (originally in Spanish *La Casa de Papel*) is a crime-themed episodic television drama originally broadcast on *Antena 3* from May until November 2017. The first two Parts<sup>21</sup> were created as a limited series and consisted of 15 Chapters.<sup>22</sup> Part 1 aired on Wednesdays starting at 22:40 and then Part 2 was moved to the same time slot on Mondays. The episodes had a length of around 70 minutes, which is typical for Spanish television prime time. Chapter 1 opened to ratings of over 4 million viewers, which was a success. However, the numbers were gradually falling down, to average 2.7 million viewers per episode in Part 1.<sup>23</sup> Second season, Part 2, was not a hit among *Antena 3*'s viewers. Eventually the episodic drama was cancelled, not getting another chance on 'linear' television; it almost ended up in 'linear' television's 'junkyard' without making any noticeable impact on viewers

<sup>19</sup> *How Netflix Changed Entertainment – And Where It's Headed* | Reed Hastings. Released on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018. [online]. [2020-10-24]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsAN-TEJfN0>>.

<sup>20</sup> McCORMICK, C. J.: "Forward Is the Battle Cry": Binge-Viewing Netflix's House of Cards. In McDONALD, K., SMITH-ROWSEY, D. (eds.): *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> Remark by the author: Seasons are referred to as Parts.

<sup>22</sup> Remark by the author: Episodes are referred to as Chapters.

<sup>23</sup> MARCOS, N.: *El atraco perfecto llega a su fin*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/10/10/television/1507633357\\_409248.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/10/10/television/1507633357_409248.html)>.

and the industry as a whole. The show's executive producer and screenwriter Alex Pina once commented that the commercial breaks were partly responsible, because they disrupted the narrative flow of the drama.<sup>24</sup> Another screenwriter, Javier Gomez Santander, said that "the story of a series is a failure".<sup>25</sup>

Everything changed at the end of 2017, when *Netflix* acquired exclusive global streaming rights to *La Casa de Papel* and started to stream it internationally. The show was re-cut into 22 episodes (around 50 minutes each), dubbed and renamed from *La Casa de Papel* to *Money Heist*. Without any noticeable promotion, the first season was released on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Second season followed in April 2018, and after that, things started to happen. Without yet knowing the number of views on *Netflix*, actors started seeing huge increase in numbers of their followers on social media. In a documentary *Money Heist: The Phenomenon* (2020) they mention how radically their day-to-day lives changed after that. They went from a few hundreds or thousands of followers on *Instagram* to hundreds of thousands or even millions in just a few weeks.<sup>26</sup> In approximately four months after the drama was added to the service it became the most watched non-English spoken content on *Netflix* ever; this happened in early 2018.<sup>27</sup> Without any noticeable marketing campaign *Money Heist* found its viewers by just 'sitting' in an enormous library, between hundreds of other titles. With the increasing noise around the series, *Netflix* acquired exclusive international rights and started producing Part 3 with the episodic drama's original creators in 2018, although the story was originally self-contained. Part 3 was internationally released on *Netflix* on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The budget was considerably bigger than in the first two seasons, and according to *Variety*, this new season was the most expensive episodic drama per episode in Spanish television history.<sup>28</sup> During the first week more than 34 million household accounts streamed the third season and more than 70% of the mentioned households also finished watching the show in these seven days. *Money Heist* became one of the most watched titles on *Netflix*, now overtaking also most English-spoken content.<sup>29</sup> Part 4 was released on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 and the final fifth season was officially confirmed during summer 2020. No official release date was announced.

The crime drama *Money Heist* is now a worldwide television phenomenon. The influence that the show has on its fans can be described by many examples; one way or another, it is not common. For example, the Italian folk song *Bella Ciao* (originally created around 1942, during WWII), which was heard in *Money Heist*, became relevant again and people started singing it on different occasions. While executing the heist, the main characters are wearing red overalls and masks, which are a reference to the artist Salvador Dalí. These costumes have

<sup>24</sup> MARCOS, N.: *Porqué 'La casa de papel' ha sido un inesperado éxito internacional*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <[https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264\\_215034.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/03/26/television/1522083264_215034.html)>.

<sup>25</sup> CASAUS, S.: *'Money Heist' Almost Flopped: The Story of How Netflix Saved the Show*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://filmdaily.co/obsessions/money-heist-story/>>.

<sup>26</sup> *Money Heist: The Phenomenon*. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81098822?trackId>>.

<sup>27</sup> HEISLER, Y.: *'La Casa De Papel' (AKA 'Money Heist') Becomes Netflix's Most-Watched Foreign Original Series Ever*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://decider.com/2018/04/16/la-casa-de-papel-netflix-most-watched-foreign-original-ever/>>.

<sup>28</sup> HOPEWELL, J., LANG, J.: *'Money Heist' – 'La Casa de Papel' – Creator Alex Pina: 10 Takes on Part 3*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://variety.com/2019/tv/global/money-heist-la-casa-de-papel-creator-alex-pina-10-takes-part-3-2-1203267428/>>.

<sup>29</sup> HOPEWELL, J., LANG, J.: *Netflix's 'La Casa de Papel' – 'Money Heist' – Part 3 Smashes Records*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019. [online]. [2020-10-22]. Available at: <<https://variety.com/2019/digital/global/netflix-la-casa-de-papel-money-heist-part-3-smashes-records-1203288791/>>.

become a mainstream cult and people wear them during various public protests, reacting to issues like the state of democracy or even the current environmental crisis. An important factor that increased the show's success is the narrative's strength (and the way the story is told). The viewers are offered a complex story with elements of the 'classic' bank heist plot, action sequences and personal dramas. Many critics agree that what makes this episodic product stand out and unique is its main characters. Despite the fact that the plot is mainly about committing a crime, viewers root for these protagonists; they want to see them succeed while being fully aware that it is both illegal and morally wrong to rob a bank. Another well thought-out part of the storytelling is giving a group of misfits/thieves names after cities, which often reflect and eventually reveal their individual character traits and special features. The main characters, their backgrounds and motivations evolve from the first episode, when the audiences are not given any information about the planned heist. Using flashbacks, the creators merge a range of individual stories in unexpected ways. This skilfully crafted story is complex, unexpected and full of drama and action; it is supposed to keep the viewers 'on their toes' and it, in fact, does so, as we can read from the numbers of viewers binge-watching the show. Not succeeding on 'linear' television was probably the best thing that could have happened to the episodic drama, although the reasons behind it might be incomprehensible, especially if we only took into account content itself as the main factor of its eventual success.

#### 4 Discussion: Factors Making OTT Broadcasters More Viewer and Creator Friendly than Linear Television

In this part of the paper, we focus on determining what were the reasons behind the success of *Money Heist* on *Netflix*. As stated above, the show was not successful on 'linear' television in Spain; only after being re-released on *Netflix* it gained a massive audience. A number of factors played their role and we believe these factors represent various aspects of OTT services, which should be observed as advantages of Internet-distributed television platforms over 'linear' television providers. **Global availability** is the first factor that made *Money Heist* on *Netflix* more viewer friendly than on 'linear' television. The viewers decide what, when, where and how they want to watch it. Second, **commercials** are non-existent on *Netflix*. Product placement is obvious, but if one's Internet connection is stable, they can enjoy watching content without any forced breaks. Third, **higher production budgets**. *Netflix* can invest great amounts of money in original productions, knowing their purpose is to please people paying for monthly subscriptions, not advertisers. Shows that are more expensive are often visually appealing and their producers are given more space for imagination and elaboration of their creative concepts, aiming to address adult audiences predominantly. Moreover, **audience** truly plays an important role. Media technologies change; so do media audiences. On the one hand, we would like to underline the fact that on *Netflix* there is a vast amount of content to choose from; on the other hand, we have to accept the ways OTT providers utilise user data. These algorithms help the subscribers to navigate through different genres or types of shows on *Netflix*. From the creators' point of view, having their works on *Netflix* means that they can reach millions of viewers worldwide. The possibility of **'binge-watching'** is important, too. *Netflix* releases the whole seasons of television shows at once. Sometimes this is crucial, because some cliff-hangers at the end of 'filler' episodes are not engaging enough to keep the viewers waiting for a week or more until the next episode airs. On the other hand, when there is a whole season available, these cliff-hangers can be used as a method of persuasion; they make people watch episode after episode, just because it is possible. At last but not least, the conditions of everyday life during the **pandemic** are



important to mention as well. While spending most of their free time in their own households, television recipients have much more time to consume specific episodes of the television drama in a row, i.e. to binge-watch them. As noted by an article that aimed to popularise the TV show among Slovak audiences, the story is best experienced by watching multiple episodes in one day.<sup>30</sup>

The success story of *Money Heist* is surely unique in many ways. The moment when *Netflix* acquired the rights to the show was probably the best thing that could have happened after the drama's economic failure on Spanish 'linear' television *Antena 3*. *Netflix* producers did not have to get much work done on the existing content; re-editing and dubbing it did not change the message or the visuals. As stated above, the quality of the first and second season was not at question, whereas Spanish critics had praised the show while its viewer rates had been dropping gradually. The 'linear' television audiences surely can appreciate quality content; however, these recipients need to accept the necessary limitations of watching TV in accordance with a predetermined schedule. Advantages of OTT services seem to be vital for multiple generations of viewers and creators. *Netflix* and other OTT providers operating in the media industry clearly motivate 'linear' television broadcasters to change and adapt, which also results in improving audience experience. Watching and studying this ongoing battle of different television providers helps us understand all obvious changes and thus anticipate the future of television as a medium.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we focused on defining the differences between two competing television distribution models and determining whether or how 'linear' television broadcasters and Internet streaming services consider preferences of their audiences. We believe these differences are crucial to the episodic drama *Money Heist* becoming a cultural phenomenon that it is today. From the moment *Netflix* signed the deal with its creators, the show became available internationally and gained access to bigger production budgets. Its target viewers quickly developed an emotional bond with the story. Used costumes and music elements started to appear within many other ordinary activities of the drama's viewers and in their surroundings. Messages from the show were projected into political and environmental issues we deal with in real life. For many people, *Money Heist* became more than just regular television entertainment. The show's success did not depend on ratings and shares; its viewers could binge-watch and then re-watch the whole seasons at once and still do so; when, where and how they want(ed), although the pandemic situation, in fact, means that people tend to watch content offered by OTT platforms mostly alone or at least exclusively while staying at home. *Money Heist* found its fans while being included in enormous video library, waiting to be recognised as quality content it actually is. Television audiences can be 'read' and partially understood, but they are still largely unpredictable. The question why the show was not a hit on 'linear' television and became such a sensation on *Netflix* cannot be fully addressed. However, given the differences between OTT services and 'linear' television, we have to argue that these were crucial. The more viewer friendly and available the producers made the content, the more diverse audiences the show attracted – some of them might have been bored, looking for something new to experience and considering other people's

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<sup>30</sup> BIZNÁR, M.: *Top 6 seriálov, ktoré sa oplatí pozerať v apríli 2020*. Released on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-11-06]. Available at: <<https://techbox.dennikn.sk/temy/top-6-seriálov-ktore-sa-oplati-pozerat-v-aprili-2020/>>.

recommendations. Moreover, this drama represents only one of many television shows that have been ‘saved’ by Internet-distributed television platforms. Every now and then a new television phenomenon is born; the television industry constantly changes and evolves. ‘Linear’ television and OTT service providers compete for our attention; what often results in our experience of enjoying cultural artefacts is more and more visually superior content. After all, *Netflix* started investing in their original content, because they saw it was advantageous; many ‘linear’ television stations went online, because they realised that nowadays it is the right place to be. Whether ‘traditionally’ scheduled television broadcasts will be relevant enough in the future of the television industry remains to be seen.

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## IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

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### Abstract

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 marks a significant milestone for the world in a number of areas. The world and society are constantly remembering the extensive losses that the pandemic has brought to our lives. However, despite its great negative impact on society, we also perceive its positive aspects, especially in the area of the environment and consumerism. Among other things, the pandemic reduced and closed several brick-and-mortar stores and shopping malls with fashion goods. The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world and Covid-19 has slowed down and mitigated its negative environmental impact for some time due to its widespread impact. How has this disease and situation affected consumers' shopping behaviour in fashion? Based on the results of a questionnaire survey, the article points out changes in consumer behaviour in the field of fashion as a result of preventive measures preventing the spread of Covid 19 in Slovakia.

### Key words:

Consumer Behaviour. COVID-19. Environment. Fashion Industry. Pandemic. Sustainable Fashion.

### Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, the whole society and world were taken by surprise how fast the new coronavirus COVID-19 started to spread from China across all countries worldwide in contrast to previous pandemic outbreaks, which were contained within a particular area (SARS in the North Asia or MERS in the Middle East).<sup>1</sup> The coronavirus crisis represents a new and ongoing challenge which is set to last indefinitely.<sup>2</sup> Since last year, entrepreneurs and businesses have had to face new reality. This is not just a global sanitary or health care crisis affecting millions of people worldwide, but a huge global economic downturn. Lots of entrepreneurs have failed to get adapted to the new beginning COVID-19 has brought to all of us. The changes can now be perceived from two different perspectives. At first, the crisis has a negative impact on entrepreneurship by increasing business risks and eventually hampering new business efforts. On the other hand, the changes we are currently experiencing could positively influence the way the entrepreneurship is perceived, e.g. by improving company emergency plans, creating financial reserves or making home office more accessible for employees. Besides that, during the pandemic we could also intensively perceive changes in companies' marketing communication or modification of particular products. The fashion industry has also been largely affected by the pandemic. After imposing the lockdown of various plants and factories, lower emission and water pollution were observed. The consumption of clothes was also considerably reduced once people had to stay isolated in their homes. Of course, cancellation of orders also negatively affected the poorest workers in the supplier' chain. Piles of stock worth billions of pounds are still left in the warehouses and storage costs are not sustainable. Some brands, on the contrary, were or still are reusing materials from previous collections or extra material to make masks for consumers or protective clothing for health care workers. The fashionable business model is mainly based on fast production, low quality and short life cycles

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<sup>1</sup> RATTEN, V.: Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the entrepreneurship education community. In *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 3. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JEC-06-2020-0121/full/html>>.

<sup>2</sup> HE, H., HARRIS, L.: The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing Philosophy. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 116, No. 11, p. 176. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320303295>>.

of the goods, which leads to overconsumption and excessive waste.<sup>3</sup> How has the lockdown of shopping malls and brick and mortar stores selling clothes affected the consumer buying behaviour? Has their buying behaviour changed in favour of our environment or have people returned to excessive consumption?

## 1 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

April 24, 2013 is considered one of the most tragic days of the fashion industry. Due to the collapse of Rana Plaza, occupied by hundreds of brands and fashion houses, 1,130 people died and 2,500 were badly injured. The collapse, which was the worst industrial accident in Bangladesh, pointed to the problem which had previously been widely discussed by the media as the main flip side of the fashion industry.<sup>4</sup> Greenhouse emissions from the fashion industry are much larger than those from international transport. Toxic substances enter the environment, pollute the nature or deteriorate health of both fashion producers and customers. What is more, some clothes do not even enter the market because due to their poor quality, they end up in a landfill.<sup>5</sup> The fashion industry does not respect borders of our planet because it tends to focus on solving short-term economic problems. In light of the above facts and after the accident in Bangladesh, more and more movements, organisations, ethic or sustainable brands have been created and endorsed by various famous personalities or celebrities. According to Khandual, sustainable fashion is becoming a certain expectation or hope for many brands, fashion designers, retailers or producers who have embraced the negative impact of fast fashion on the environment and the whole society.<sup>6</sup> Sustainable fashion can be defined by fair working conditions, sustainable business models and use of organic and ecological materials as well as transparency of a suppliers' chain.<sup>7</sup> In his publication, Niimaki states that prolonging the period of wearing of garments is one of the key questions of sustainable development. For instance, if we manage to double the period of wearing of garments by consumers, we will be able to cut resources by half while reducing waste consumption. There are many ways how garments can be borrowed or repaired, i.e. "upcycled" in order to prolong wearing of garment while emotionally satisfying customers or enhancing a brand value.<sup>8</sup> According to Khandual and Pradhan, a cost factor is one of the drawbacks of this ecological activity. Using sustainable fashion or materials may cost much more than conventional methods.<sup>9</sup> However, the greatest

<sup>3</sup> MANNING, K.: *What will Covid-19 mean for sustainable fashion?*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://transform.iema.net/article/what-will-covid-19-mean-sustainable-fashion>>.

<sup>4</sup> KOERPER, K.: *The dark side of fast fashion*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<http://www.theperspective.se/the-dark-side-of-fast-fashion/>>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: NIINIMÄKI, K.: *Sustainable fashion: New approaches*. Helsinki : The authors and Aalto University, 2013. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/13769/isbn9789526055732.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>.

<sup>6</sup> KHANDUAL, A., PRADHAN, S.: Fashion Brands and Consumers Approach Towards Sustainable Fashion. In MUTHU, S. (ed.): *Fast Fashion, Fashion Brands and Sustainable Consumption*. Singapore : Springer, 2019, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> HENNINGER, C. E., PANAYIOTA, J., ALEVIZOU, C. J. O.: What is sustainable fashion? In *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 2016, Vol. 20, No. 4. p. 400. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JFMM-07-2015-0052/full/html>>.

<sup>8</sup> HENNINGER, C.: Sustainability in Fashion: A Cradle to Upcycle Approach. In NIINIMÄKI, K. (ed.): *Fashion in Circular Economy*. Aalto University : Springer International Publishing AG, 2017, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> KHANDUAL, A., PRADHAN, S.: Fashion Brands and Consumers Approach Towards Sustainable Fashion. In MUTHU, S. (ed.): *Fast Fashion, Fashion Brands and Sustainable Consumption*. Singapore : Springer, 2019, p. 38.

challenge of sustainable fashion is behaviour of consumers who are hungry to purchase fashion brands of a good quality at a low price and with an exciting shopping experience. Even though customers are worried about sustainability, their consumption and buying behaviour is hardly reflected on sustainability.<sup>10</sup> Proper marketing strategy of sustainable fashion retailers plays a key role in this respect. Through marketing communication, companies are able to influence behaviour and basic values of consumers in the field of clothes and fashion shopping, In her paper, Čábyová states that the main assumption is to familiarise the society and consumers with negative environmental impacts of the fashion industry. Apart from that, companies are encouraged to promote their environmental policies, simply just because it is trendy, modern or “in”.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 Impact of the Pandemic on the Fashion Industry

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the coronavirus crisis has threatened 19 million working positions in the global fashion industry.<sup>12</sup> The survey among international textile producers and 700 fashion houses showed that global orders had dropped by 31% in average.<sup>13</sup> In Bangladesh, where the fashion industry accounts for more than 80% of country's export, the crisis is directly affecting 4 million workers (mostly women) while one more million have already lost their jobs.<sup>14</sup> Fashion is not only made in factories, of course. Fashion is a piece of art which is often hand made in an informal environment. According to the Alliance of Craftsmen, craft is second largest source of employment in a developing world. WIEGO estimates that there are around 2 billion informal workers in the world who lack fundamental health and work safety standards, social care and health care. Due to the fact that COVID-19 is jeopardising global business flows, various cooperatives, craftsmen associations, local craftsmen communities, domestic workers and farmers are having to face disastrous economic consequences.<sup>15</sup> Despite these alarming numbers, the coronavirus crisis may also be a catalyser of changes which might possibly make the fashion industry more responsible, inclusive and resistant in its reactions to serious socio-economic challenges like the one we are facing nowadays.<sup>16</sup> We can now see a promising basis defining a more structured shift in people's minds. The current situation provides various opportunities how to reevaluate processes and speed up positive changes which had already begun in logistics or transport, for instance. More and more representatives of the fashion industry are admitting an urgent need to implement responsible policies - those their consumers and investors ask for due to stringent regulatory

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<sup>10</sup> VARMUŽOVÁ, A.: *Marketingová komunikace jako nástroj pro prosazení udržitelné módy*. [Diploma Thesis]. Zlín : UTB in Zlín, 2019, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> ČÁBYOVÁ, E.: Environmentálne správanie spotrebiteľov v módnom priemysle. In BUČKOVÁ, Z., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L., RYBANSKÝ, R., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2018: Realita a mediálne bubliny*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 470.

<sup>12</sup> *ILO welcomes joint action to tackle Covid-19 threats to global garment industry*. Released on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_742446/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_742446/lang--en/index.htm)>.

<sup>13</sup> *Orders in the global textile value chain cancelled/postponed on average by -31%*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.itmf.org/images/dl/covid/Corona-Crisis-Governments-and-Stakeholders.pdf>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Covid-19 and Responsible Business Conduct*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=129\\_129619-6upr496iui&title=COVID-19-and-Responsible-Business-Conduct](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=129_129619-6upr496iui&title=COVID-19-and-Responsible-Business-Conduct)>.

<sup>15</sup> *The impact of Covid-19 on the people who make our clothes*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-people-who-make-our-clothes/>>.

<sup>16</sup> *How Fashion Could Become More Sustainable After Covid-19*. Released on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://impakter.com/how-fashion-could-become-more-sustainable-covid19/>>.

pressures. Lots of pioneering brands have already understood that investments into sustainability and innovations had strategic significance and that budget cuts could negatively affect their financial performance.<sup>17</sup>

### 3 Impact of the Pandemic on a Consumer

The pandemic has provided consumers with an opportunity and time to think over the fundamental principle of consumption and its impact not only on themselves, but on the whole society and the environment. Before the pandemic, satisfying consumers' needs was quite simple. According to He and Harris, people are just spoiled by "too much choice".<sup>18</sup> Anson believes that the pandemic prompted consumers to truly appreciate environmental impacts of their own consumer habits on fashion products.<sup>19</sup> Social networking sites such as Instagram and Facebook play a key role in this field. Despite the fact that, according to Krajčovič, a large amount of misinformation was spread through these social networks in connection with the Covid-19 disease, since the start of the pandemic,<sup>20</sup> Instagram has reported a 70% increase in the number of followers. Fashion brands and influencers have unexpectedly increased their digital content and interaction with their followers on these platforms in order to profit from this unprecedented global quarantine.<sup>21</sup> In his article dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour, Sheth introduced eight immediate effects of the pandemic on consumer behaviour:

- *stockpiling* – after the pandemic broke out, consumers used to stockpile groceries and basic consumption food, thus leading to a temporary shortage of food stock and supplies,
- *improvising* – when the first measures were imposed, consumers learnt to improvise,
- *restricted demand* – at the time of uncertainty and insecurity, consumers at their own discretion tended to postpone purchases and limit consumption of certain goods (cars, real estate, etc.),
- *discovering digital technologies* – consumers got used to new applications (Zoom, GoogleMeet, WeChat, etc.) to get connected at work or school,
- *home delivery service* – due to complete lockdown in some countries (Italy, China, India, South Korea) and restrictions of entry in retail shops or shopping centres, shops were obliged to deliver products directly to consumers' home address,
- *removing borders between the work and private life* – consumers became prisoners of their own homes with too many multitasking activities (work, home schooling, shopping, socialising) and therefore imaginary borders between the work and private life were removed,

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<sup>17</sup> VELASQUEZ, A.: *Pandemic May Have Varying Degrees of Impact on Sustainable Fashion Startups*. Released on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://sourcingjournal.com/denim/denim-innovations/coronavirus-pandemic-impact-sustainable-startups-fashion-for-good-206324/>>.

<sup>18</sup> HE, H., HARRIS, L.: The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing Philosophy. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 116, No. 11, p. 178. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320303295>>.

<sup>19</sup> ANSON, R.: *Impact of Covid-19 on environmental sustainability in the textile and clothing industry*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.innovationintextiles.com/editorial-impact-of-covid19-on-environmental-sustainability-in-the-textile-and-clothing-industry/>>.

<sup>20</sup> KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Dezinformácie a médiá v čase pandémie. In KVETANOVÁ, Z., GRACA, M. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2020: On the Edge*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 57. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[https://fmk.sk/download/Megatrendyamedia\\_2020\\_On-the-Edge.pdf](https://fmk.sk/download/Megatrendyamedia_2020_On-the-Edge.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> MOLLARD, M.: *Consumer attitudes: Covid-19 x Fashion*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.heuritech.com/blog/articles/consumer-attitudes-covid-fashion/>>.

- *meeting family and friends* – one of the main effects of the pandemic was a contact with family and friends to make sure they were doing fine or share one’s own stories and experience,
- *discovering new skills* – thanks to higher flexibility, consumers used to experiment and test their skills and talent.<sup>22</sup>

During the lockdown, fashion sustainability was mainly characterised by cost effectivity and durability of garments. A lot of people were reluctant to waste their money on unnecessary things such as clothes. The interaction between consumption and necessity changed for a certain period of time. Even though consumers were worried due to the lockdown, some of them discovered a brand new perspective how to face unhealthy consumer habits.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4 Results of the Research – Impact of the Pandemic on Consumer Behaviour

The paper states the results of our own research which was carried out from September to October 2020 on the sample of 252 respondents aged 18 to 26 years old. The main objective of the research was to define the change in consumer behaviour during the lockdown of fashion shops due to the coronavirus outbreak in Slovakia from March to May 2020. The research described the manner in which the respondents preferred to shop for clothes and to what extent the new situation had affected their buying preferences and thinking.



**Graph 1: The ways of shopping for clothes**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The Graph 1 shows that the majority (78.9%) of the respondents prefer shopping for their clothes in brick and mortar shops or shopping centres. Although today’s digital world is made of a number of large e-shops, only 17.8% of the respondents answered they preferred shopping for clothes in this manner. Swaps still belong to the least favourite form of sustainable

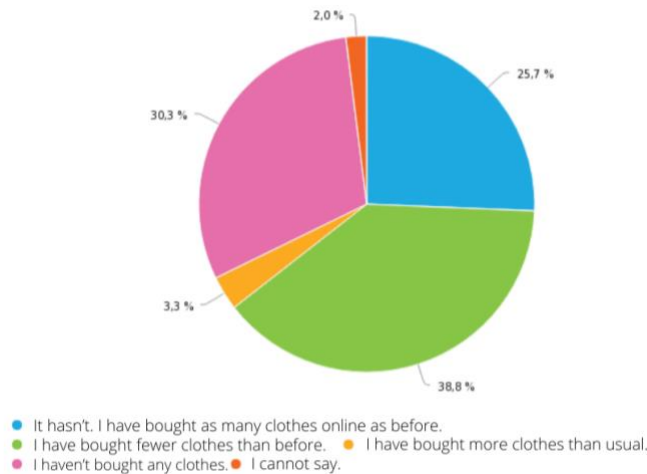
<sup>22</sup> SHETH, J.: Impact of Covid-19 on consumer behaviour: Will the old habits return or die?. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 12, p. 281. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296320303647>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Covid-19: Consumer Behaviour and Sustainable Fashion*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://mindlessmag.com/2020/05/28/covid-19-consumer-behaviour-and-sustainable-fashion/>>.



shopping/barter, which was also demonstrated in the results of the research with only 2% of people using this form of shopping. Online is permanently connected to our everyday life - work, education or entertainment. In spite of that, it was revealed that young people gave preference to many traditional advantages offline space provides.

How has the pandemic affected your buying behaviour during the lockdown of shops and brick and mortar stores selling clothes?

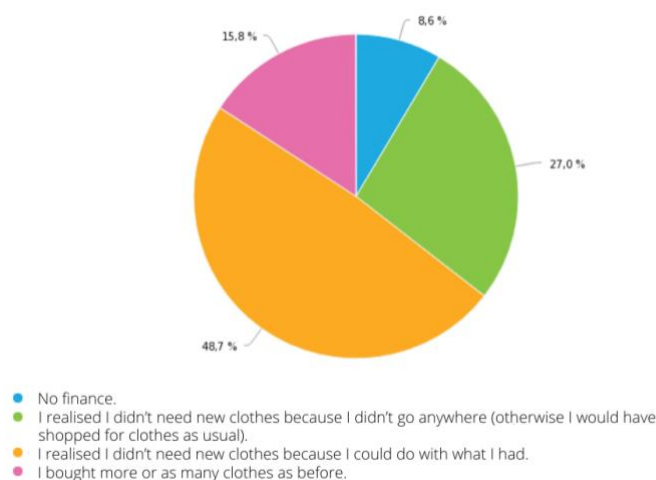


**Graph 2: Scope of influence of pandemic on buying behaviour of consumers in the fashion industry in Slovakia**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The lockdown in Slovakia forced all brick and mortar shops or shopping centres selling fashion clothes to be closed. The fashion industry including sellers, producers, cotton farmers or clothes suppliers have not recovered from the collapse which started last year in China and has continuously moved to all countries worldwide. The results of the research demonstrate that despite the fact that fashion shops went online, 69.1% of consumers bought fewer clothes online than before (38.8%) or no clothes at all (30.3%). Only 25.7% of the respondents stated that their buying behaviour had not changed during the pandemic and they had shopped for clothes as much as before. Only 3.3% of the respondents used to buy much more than ever. Why did the consumers buy fewer clothes online than before?

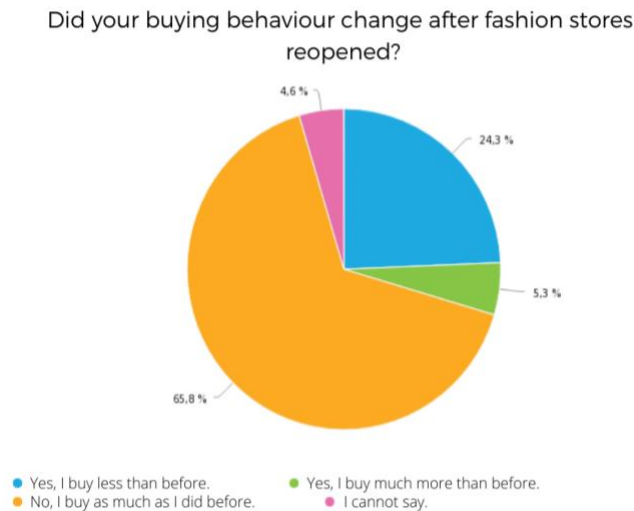
What did you buy fewer or no clothes during the lockdown?



**Graph 3: The main reasons for buying fewer clothes during the first coronavirus outbreak in Slovakia**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

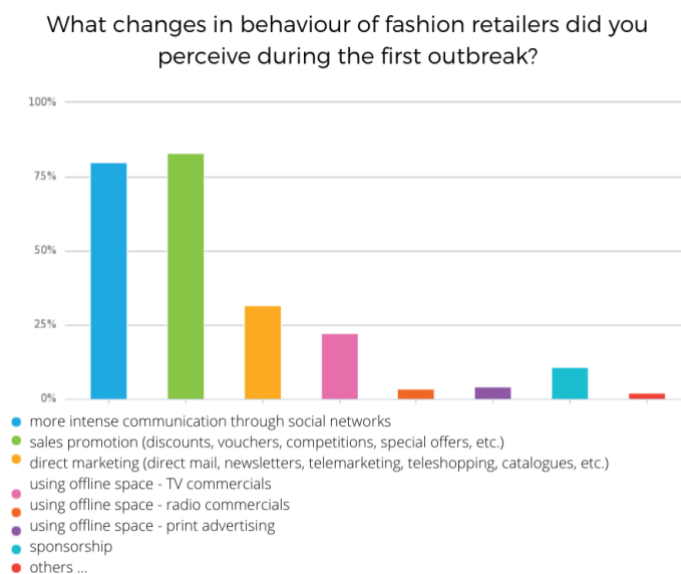
In the answer to this question, almost a half of the respondents (48.7%) said they could do with what is in their wardrobes for this moment. It is obvious that the pandemic helped to modify sustainable thinking of consumers in the fashion industry. Avoiding overconsumption and buying lots of cheap and often unnecessary “cash fashion” clothes is the fundamental principle of sustainability in the fashion industry. 27% of the respondents shopped less because they simply did not need new items as there was nowhere to go but they would have shopped as much as before otherwise. Only 15.8% of the respondents shopped for clothes the same or a bit more than before the outbreak. 8.6% stated they had bought fewer clothes because they did not have enough money.



**Graph 4: Did the consumers’ buying behaviour change after fashion stores reopened?**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

Despite various assumptions about changes of consumer behaviour into a more environmentally-friendly alternative that could possibly reduce overconsumption in the fashion industry, our research shows the contrary. 65.8% of the respondents stated that their buying behaviour had not changed in any manner whatsoever after the retail shops reopened, on the contrary, they tend to shop for clothes the same as or even more than before (5.3%) than before the outbreak. Only 24.3% of them declared they bought fewer clothes than before.



**Graph 5: Change in marketing communication of fashion retailers during the first outbreak**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

As mentioned before, many retailers, e-shops or fashion brands were forced to promote their online sales. 84.2% of the respondents observed a change in their marketing communication after the outbreak. Sales promotion (i.e. discounts, vouchers, competitions, etc.) was one of the strongest and most effective tools noticed by 83.1% of the respondents. More intense communication on social networking sites came second with 79.7% of the respondents. The methods of direct marketing, TV commercials or sponsorship were less frequently used.

## Conclusion

During the analysed research, the authors emphasised changes in consumers' behaviour and marketing communication of fashion brands in course of the first coronavirus outbreak in Slovakia. Even though some survey points out that during the isolation and lockdown, our Planet could "take a deep breath" again, most people then returned to their standard way of life and not only in the fashion industry.

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## THE AIRLINES COMMUNICATING THROUGH SOLOMO PLATFORMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Martin Vanko – Michal Kubovics – Anna Zaušková*

### Abstract

The coronavirus has triggered the crisis affecting not only Slovakia, but also the whole world as well as almost all undertakings operating in the market economy. The tourism industry, especially the airlines, is the worst-hit segment. Whereas e-shops profited from the crisis, the airlines segment was stagnating. The main objective of the authors is to clarify to what extent e-shops were reinforcing their position and what the airlines were communicating to their customers through social media during the most critical months. The authors use quantitative methods to interpret the results of the research and define consumer behaviour during the pandemic, e.g. company financial statements, as well as qualitative methods such as social media analyses, etc. Their subsequent findings will help specify the state of e-shopping during the pandemic in the light of the sale of airline tickets and company communication policies in the context of the coronavirus crisis.

### Key words:

Airlines. COVID-19. Social Media. Social Sites.

### Introduction

Before the coronavirus crisis, the airlines were one of the fastest developing segments as for their capacity and attractivity for both customers and potential clients.<sup>1</sup> Due to the coronavirus crisis, global economic factors have certainly worsened. The airlines do not only operate civil flights for their customers but also provide goods transport services.<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus showed that not only government restrictions but also customers' fears and worries were the most vulnerable traits. These factors have a huge impact on the airlines. Consequently, other segments linked to the airlines sector would be seriously impaired as well, such as manufacturers of airplanes, engines, service providers, airports and other adjacent services. All related segments, which are either directly or indirectly affected, have reported a considerable drop in all of their economic indices.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, the airlines tend to sell their civil flight tickets online through their e-shops. At the same time, bookings from travel agencies are also often made online. There was an increase of 4 to 5% since 2018 whereas the year 2020 has seen a 44.7% decrease with the experts forecasting a minor rise in the coming years with the situation slowly returning to normal not earlier than in 2022.<sup>4</sup> In the paper, we will try to confirm the statements by many prominent authors. The pandemic has been discussed by Vinod who has described a serious financial situation the airlines have had to face. In his opinion, the prognoses

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<sup>1</sup> AGRAWAL, A.: Sustainability of airlines in India with Covid-19: Challenges ahead and possible way-outs. In *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, 2020, Vol. 19, No. 4, p. 2-15. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41272-020-00257-z>>.

<sup>2</sup> LI, T. A.: SWOT analysis of China's air cargo sector in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. In *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 2020, Vol. 88, No. 1, p. 2-5. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7402658/>>.

<sup>3</sup> MACILREE, J., DUVAL, D. T.: Aeropolitics in a post-COVID-19 world. In *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 2020, Vol. 88, No. 1, p. 2-3. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://europemc.org/article/med/32834692>>.

<sup>4</sup> ENBERG, J.: *Travel in Times of COVID-19. How the Coronavirus Will Impact Bookings, Sales and Advertising*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.emarketer.com/content/travel-times-of-covid-19>>.

are rather unfavourable with the previous conditions likely to be restored within two or three years to come.<sup>5</sup> SoLoMo platforms are dealt with in the chapter below.

## 1 SoLoMo Platforms

SoLoMo platforms are closely linked to three basic aspects, i.e. Social (So), Local (Lo) and Mobile (Mo). By joining the above aspects, a rather perspective combination can be created when a potential customer or a current consumer may get what they asked for. A social aspect refers to connection of users and creation of a certain community sharing, evaluating and commenting content created by themselves. A local aspect represents geolocation elements enabling users to get to the content according to their respective location. A mobile aspect is related to mobile devices accompanying users wherever they go. This trend is on a constant growth each year.<sup>6</sup> Social media applications are the ones meeting the conditions of the SoLoMo concept. The most frequent SoLoMo platforms in the world are as follows:

- Facebook (2,603,000,000 users);
- YouTube (2,000,000,000 users);
- WhatsApp (2,000,000,000 users);
- FB Messenger (1,300,000,000 users);
- Weixing/WeChat (1,203,000,000 users);
- Instagram (1,082,000,000 users);
- TikTok (800,000,000,000 users).<sup>7</sup>

In the next chapter, the authors are going to specify other particularly important aspects of social sites with the emphasis on the crisis communication.

## 2 Social Networking Sites

*“Transparency is the key to proper communication during the crisis.”*<sup>8</sup> We accept the statement by P. Galko from the Diorama agency and we can add that transparency should be perceived in each context and should be spread by each single marketing tool. The monthly edition of the magazine *Stratégie* pointed to a “new” form of communication of specific brands with the focus on the coronavirus pandemic. The article *Worldwide brands in the pandemic times* promotes the change of the tone of voice of various brands such as Oreo or Dove. *“The emphasis is placed on responsible behaviour of people because the brands are trying to be responsible themselves.”*<sup>9</sup> In 2020 Oreo has reused the slogan which was first published in their campaigns in 2019: “Stay Playful”. *“The existing slogan was enriched by the motto Stay Home and thus the saying ‘Stay Home, Stay Playful’ was created’.*<sup>10</sup> In this way, the brand reacts to a specific

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<sup>5</sup> VINOD, B.: The COVID-19 pandemic and airline cash flow. In *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, 2020, Vol. 19, No. 4, p. 228-229. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41272-020-00251-5>>.

<sup>6</sup> ZAUŠKOVÁ, A., REZNÍČKOVÁ, M.: SoLoMo marketing as a global tool for enhancing awareness of eco-innovations in Slovak business environment. In *Equilibrium*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 134-149. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<http://economic-research.pl/Journals/index.php/eq/article/view/1767>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2020, ranked by number of active users.* [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>>.

<sup>8</sup> GALKO, P.: Bezpečnosť značky počas krízy. In *Stratégie*, 2020, Vol. 26, No. 9, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Svetové značky v čase pandémie. In *Stratégie*, 2020, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

insight - difficult situations can be easily overcome thanks to playfulness and joy. On the other hand, the beauty brand Dove used people from the so-called first lines to communicate its mission and during the pandemic, it launched the campaign called "Courage is beautiful". On social sites, the company showed emotional and exhausted faces of medical workers marked by wearing face masks.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, we may see that social media and other integrated social sites are likely to become one of the most dynamic marketing tools due to the fact that in 2020 social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and others) do not only serve for entertainment but mainly for staying in touch with other users. According to J.B. Ford, Facebook is seen as an elementary contact between the users and the online environment.<sup>12</sup> According to Piatrov, social sites are the 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. „They have formed the possibilities of creating content, spreading it, getting information practically at the moment of its creations, but they also transformed themselves into fully functional communication channels.”<sup>13</sup> When defining the theoretical framework for social media, we often support the opinion by V. Janouch who thinks that their unstable form is the main advantage of social sites.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that academic sceptics can see a negative connotation, we believe that their continuous formation is a sign of improvement and adaptation to current market or social conditions. Our opinion of social sites as an effective tool for marketing communication and brand or company promotion is also supported by G. Brown who suggests that social sites can be in the same line with other traditional media. “Mainly for the purpose of integrating technologies, social interactions or creating texts and pictures.”<sup>15</sup> J. Burešová defines primary reasons engaging particular customers in everyday use of social networking sites:

- **contact with friends** when online interactions have a positive impact on socialising and interpersonal relations in the offline environment;
- **prestige** because by using sophisticated gadgets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, users can be pictured as symbols of progress;
- **compatibility**, i.e. connecting existing channels with other popular media;
- **multi functions** with all functions concentrated in one place;
- **entertainment** such as playing games, listening to music, watching videos or reading funny comments of other users;
- **the latest information** (the feature we especially appreciate) because thanks to various social sites platforms, specific information can not only be spread but also co-created;
- **business websites** when the users can be in contact with their favourite brands, businesses or other entities.<sup>16</sup>

In light of the above mentioned, we may assume that social media communication in the field of digital marketing should not only be linked to entertainment or earnings for businesses communicating online, but the emphasis should also be placed on forming a public opinion

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<sup>11</sup> Svetové značky v čase pandémie. In *Stratégie*, 2020, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> FORD, J. B.: What Do We Know About Social-Media Marketing?. In *Journal of Advertising Research*, 2018, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 383-384.

<sup>13</sup> PIATROV, I.: Creative approach of an education institution to Instagram communication. In PAVLŮ, D., MAJERIK, P. (eds.): *CREATIVE STRATEGY/ STRATEGY OF CREATIVITY – Trends in creative marketing communication*. Prague : VŠ KK, 2019, p. 207-212.

<sup>14</sup> JANOUC, V.: *Internetový marketing. Prosad'te se na webu a sociálních sítích*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Brno : Computer Press, 2010, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> BROWN, G.: *Social Media 100 Success Secrets: Social Media, Web 2.0 User – Generated Content and Virtual Communities – 100 Most Asked Mass Collaboration Questions*. New York : Emereo Pty Ltd, 2008, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> BUREŠOVÁ, J.: *Budování loajality zákazníků ke značkám oblečení na Facebooku*. Brno : Masaryk University Press, 2018, p. 48-51.



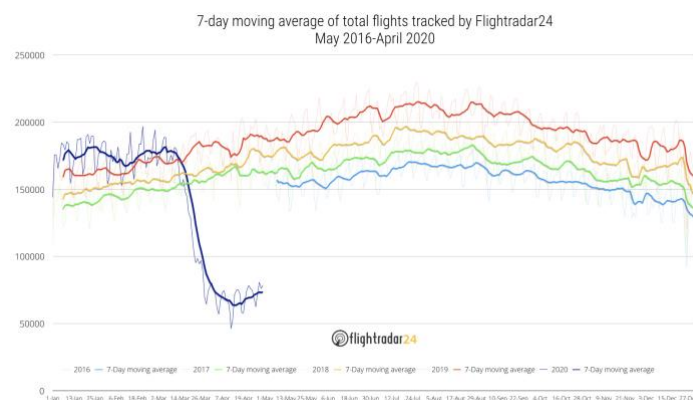
or engaging users into corporate social responsibility. It was the coronavirus pandemic which has given various brands the opportunity to change their standard behaviour on social sites or has promoted a certain company philosophy reflecting on the lockdown measures and preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

### 3 Methodics

In the paper, the authors use primary and secondary sources. The theoretical part comprises expert sources from the respected authors complemented by other reliable sources from prominent magazines and articles. The whole theoretical part also contains statements by contemporary experts on the above topic. Primary data sources involved the questionnaire and the social sites analysis. In order to analyse quantitative data, the authors created an electronic questionnaire. Data collection was carried out from May 21, 2020 to June 3, 2020. There were 10 questions out of which two exactly matched the studied topic and helped to reach our objectives. The target audience consisted of the respondents from 18 to 80 years old. We reported 818 valid answers, i.e. 391 men (37.8%) and 427 women (52.2%). Secondary sources were provided from companies or research agencies with the focus on broad-spectrum statistical results, e.g. flightradar24, eMarketer and Google Trends. In the paper, the authors also point to communication of the selected airlines during the first coronavirus outbreak. Their main objective is to present the current sales figures and crisis management of these airlines during the lockdown and any subsequent flying and travelling restrictions. All the airlines were active on the social site Facebook which, as stated above, belongs to the most popular SoLoMo platforms with 2,603,000,000 users. The airlines (Ryanair, Wizz Air, EasyJet, Emirates, Austrian Airlines, Turkish Airlines) were randomly selected according to authors' preferences.

### 4 Results

The chapter below deals with the results of the scientific analysis by means of primary as well as secondary sources. At first, it is important to specify the corresponding measures and any consecutive decrease in the traffic recorded by the airlines.



**Chart 1: Decrease in the traffic presented by flightradar24**

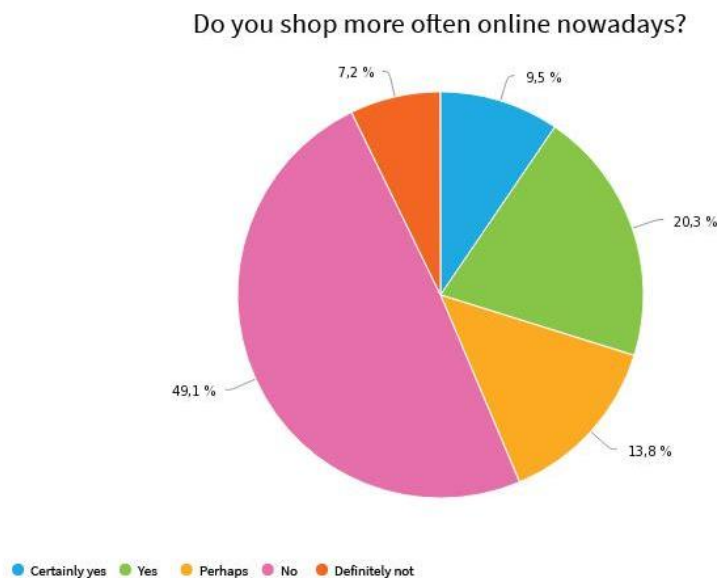
Source: 7 day moving average of total flights tracked by Flightradar24. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.flightradar24.com/blog/scraping-along-the-bottom-april-air-traffic-statistics/>>.

According to the statistics by flightradar24, the airlines have reported a dramatic drop in the number of flights. Statistics suggest that the year 2019 was the most favourable one as for the

number of flights. The beginning of 2020 was a bit better with a turning point in March. This period saw the restrictions to be imposed and consequently, customers and potential consumers started reevaluating their trips and journeys. The airlines have experienced critical times with the urgent need for crisis communication to be implemented.

#### 4.1 E-shops and Online Flight Tickets

The primary sources showed that the majority of respondents were clear about online shopping during the first and the second coronavirus outbreak. “Certainly yes” was chosen by 78 respondents (9.5%) with the answer “Yes” picked by 116 respondents (20.3%). We may say that only 244 respondents do more online shopping than before (29.8%). On the other hand, “No” answer was picked by 402 respondents (49.1%), “Certainly not” by 59 respondents (7.2%). Altogether 461 respondents (56.3%) do their shopping online to the same extent as they did before. When analysed in more detail, we found out that “sports and fitness”, “electronics”, “automotive” and “groceries” had been the most popular product segments. All these findings suggest that there was a minimum interest in travelling services in those days.



**Chart 2: Do you shop more often online nowadays?**

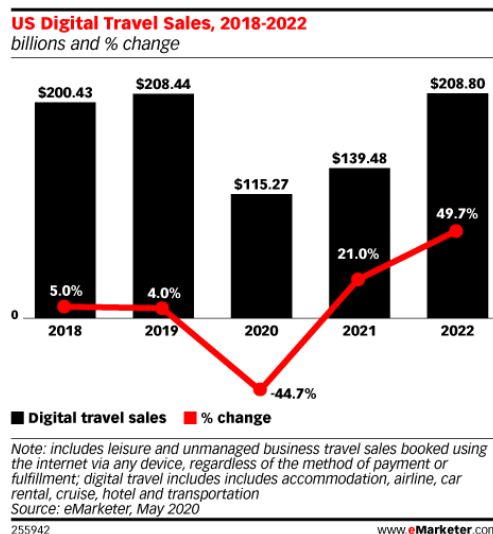
Source: Own processing, 2020.

According to secondary sources by Gallego and Font, we assessed the reduction in the number of flight tickets in comparison with the year 2019. In 2020 we could observe an increase in the number of flight tickets on a year-to-year basis. The year 2020 has seen an 88.8% drop in Europe, 60% in Asia and 59.93% in America. The resultants show a considerably negative effect of the coronavirus crisis on the airlines providing transport services.<sup>17</sup> This is also confirmed by the financial portal S&P Global Ratings forecasting a 60 - 70% drop in the number of passengers. The airlines reported a 97 - 98% slump in their earnings.<sup>18</sup> Flight tickets and trips are sold through online tools, such as websites, applications and portals. According to

<sup>17</sup> GALLEGO, I., FONT, X.: Changes in air passenger demand as a result of the COVID-19 crisis: using Big Data to inform tourism policy. In *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2020, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 2-19. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09669582.2020.1773476>>.

<sup>18</sup> ENBERG, J.: *Travel in Times of COVID-19. How the Coronavirus Will Impact Bookings, Sales and Advertising*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.emarketer.com/content/travel-times-of-covid-19>>.

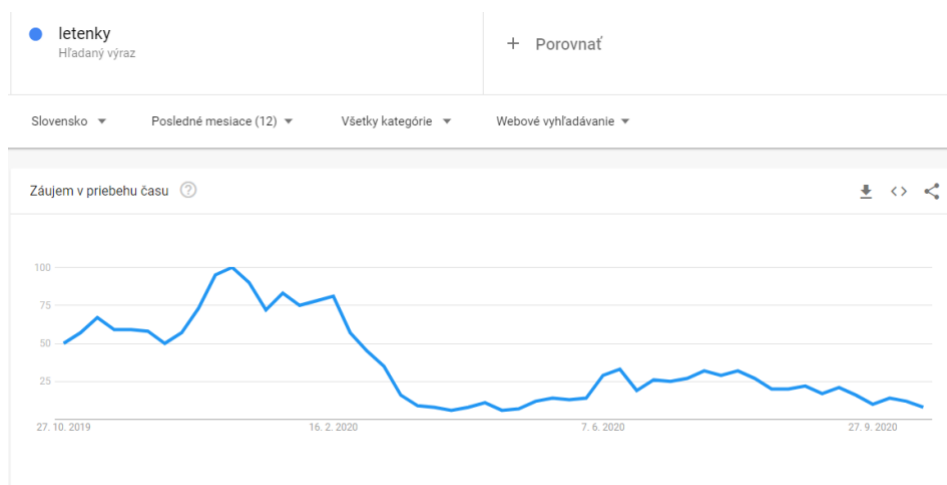
the professional portal eMarketer, America has reported a 44.7% decline this year. Another prognosis forecasts a slight growth or return to normal only after two years.<sup>19</sup>



**Chart 3: Digital Travel Sales**

Source: ENBERG, J.: *Travel in Times of COVID-19. How the Coronavirus Will Impact Bookings, Sales and Advertising*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.emarketer.com/content/travel-times-of-covid-19>>.

The analysis below observes a key word and its search. In the home environment, the word “air tickets” reported a sharp decline after the beginning of the coronavirus crisis. A slight increase was observed later. This fluctuation continued during the first and second outbreak. The key word appeared only very rarely in the search.

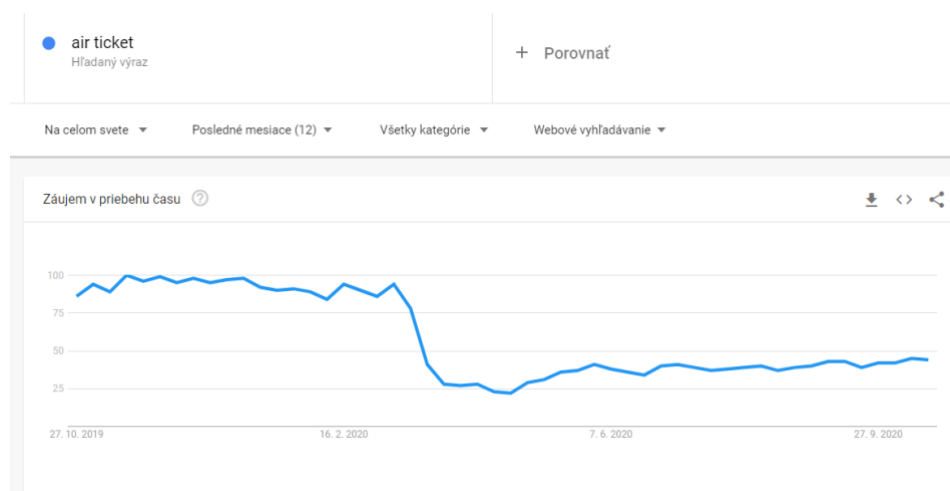


**Chart 4: Google Trends - the key word “air tickets”**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

When comparing the key word “air ticket” in the territorial area worldwide, the results appear to be similar. Search has been rather low since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis.

<sup>19</sup> ENBERG, J.: *Travel in Times of COVID-19. How the Coronavirus Will Impact Bookings, Sales and Advertising*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020. [online]. [2020-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.emarketer.com/content/travel-times-of-covid-19>>.



**Chart 5: Google Trends – the key word“ air tickets”**

Source: Own processing, 2020.

In the following chapters, the authors are focusing on analysing social networking sites of the selected airlines. As the global drop in sales has been reported, the airlines need to learn how to properly communicate the crisis situation. Negative effects can be considerably mitigated if the airlines apply a suitable communication strategy.

#### 4.2 The Analysis of Airlines' Communication Strategies

The qualitative content analysis below describes communication patterns of six major airlines (Ryanair, Wizz Air, EasyJet, Emirates, Austrian Airlines, Turkish Airlines) on social sites during the first coronavirus outbreak, especially their communication policies from March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2020. The following tables contain the evaluated data the authors obtained through observation, description and content analysis of company profiles of the above mentioned airlines on Facebook. The airlines were categorised into low-cost and traditional ones and the content was analysed from March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2020. The content analysis focused on specific formats and context of the most successful posts to have been published during the said time period. The number of fans of the selected airlines on the social networking site Facebook:

- **Ryanair** 5,001,093;
- **Wizz Air** 3,260,618;
- **EasyJet** 1,774,333;
- **Emirates** 10,656,227;
- **Austrian Airlines** 403,280;
- **Turkish Airlines** 10,649,403.

The low-cost airlines Ryanair was the first company to be analysed. In March 2020, the company published one post which was directly linked to the beginning of the pandemic - the company informed their customers about cancellation of their flights and types of refund that will be provided. On the other hand, the above low-cost airlines did not publish any other content for their fans or customers, not even the one about social responsibility or crisis communication.

**Table 1: Social media communication of Ryanair in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
18. 3. 2020	Infographics	COVID-19 Important Customer Notice	1 800	6 200	803

Source: Own processing, 2020.

From March 1, 2020 to March 31 2020 the airlines Wizz Air communicated not only the most essential information on the coronavirus pandemic but also dealt with ordinary communication agenda on social networking sites. The most successful post was the photo displaying the staff and planes transporting medical supplies to be used in the fight against COVID-19 (tests, masks, respirators, etc.) - the photo had 11,300 reactions, 1,200 comments and 686 sharing.

**Table 2: Social media communication of Wizz Air in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
19. 3. 2020	Photo	Photo of the plane	3 400	2 300	67
23. 3. 2020	Photos	COVID-19 - material transport	11 300	1 200	686
26. 3. 2020	Infographics	COVID-19 thanks to employees	3 100	4 900	83

Source: Own processing, 2020.

In March 2020, the third low-cost airlines EasyJet communicated similar stories as the previous company – despite highlighting the need to communicate COVID-19-related topics, they did not avoid other standard posts either (photos of planes, staff or the International Women’s Day). As for the comments, the post from March 18 was the most successful – the infographic published in connection with COVID-19 with 16,800 comments where customers and fans reacted to travel update presented by the analysed airline company.

**Table 3: Social media communication of EasyJet in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
17. 3. 2020	Animation	COVID-19 - flight transfer	600	5 600	323
18. 3. 2020	Infographics	Winter tickets	1 200	5 600	556
20. 3. 2020	Infographics	COVID-19 - travel update	1 000	16 800	691

Source: Own processing, 2020.

As for traditional airline companies, we may assume that back in March 2020 the companies Emirates, Austrian Airlines and Turkish Airlines paid attention to the given restrictions even though they generated a lower demand for their services. They appealed to their fans to follow all the measures while emphasising that they were being obedient themselves - they were wearing masks, gloves and using hand disinfectants in a plane. The first company to be analysed - Emirates - published the most successful posts from all the analysed companies

in March 2020 - the video where they showed their fans how their staff were fighting against the spread of the virus. The video about plane disinfection generated 295,000 reactions, 8,600 comments and 1,200 sharing. In most of their spots from March 2020, Emirates kept to the slogan “We say no goodbye, but see you soon” to show their fans that it was necessary at that time to interrupt their business activities despite a considerable drop in sales figures.

**Table 4: Social media communication of Emirates in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
8. 3. 2020	Video	COVID-19 - disinfection	295 000	8 600	1 200
26. 3. 2020	Photos	COVID-19 - No Goodbye	38 400	3 100	933
27. 3. 2020	Video	COVID-19 - Stay Home	23 400	1 100	765

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The Austrian company Austrian Airlines, the same as Emirates, kept to their social network motto “This is no goodbye, but see you later”. The most successful post dated from March 16, 2020 – the photo of the company staff wearing masks and gloves and calling the world to keep away from travelling unless it is completely safe. In their posts, the company reflected on the need to find any possible solution to cancelled or postponed flights and ticket refunds.

**Table 5: Social media communication of Austrian Airlines in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
16. 3. 2020	Photo	COVID-19 employees	2 900	217	258
18. 3. 2020	Photos	COVID-19 - disinfection	2 700	200	155
19. 3. 2020	Photo	COVID-19 - No goodbye	2 400	253	109

Source: Own processing, 2020.

The last company we analysed were Turkish Airlines with the most successful post dating from March 21, 2020, which was the video where the company staff were applauding all the people working in the first one during the first coronavirus outbreak. The post recorded 21,300 reactions, 685 comments and 678 people shared it. Although the Turkish Airlines did not publish any other posts directly related to COVID-19, they still reflected on the current state. On the occasion of the International Women’s Day the company posted the photo with women employees wearing masks and gloves and calling the fans to celebrate this occasion while promoting social responsibility and inspiring the others to follow the rules.

**Table 6: Social media communication of Turkish Airlines in March 2020**

Date	Format	Content	Interaction	Comments	Shares
7. 3 .2020	Video	COVID-19 - disinfection	14 500	1 300	788
8. 3 .2020	Photo	International women's day	4 400	286	221
21. 3 .2020	Video	COVID-19 - applauding people	21 300	685	678

Source: Own processing, 2020.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

The authors of the paper have managed to fulfil the given objective. They characterised the current sales figures of the airlines which have been considerably reduced during the coronavirus pandemic. Government restrictions and measures have led to a substantial decrease in sale of flight tickets, thus throwing transport companies into a deep crisis. The airlines business is likely to restore in a couple of years. However, the communication of the low-cost airlines was insufficient and did not meet our requirements. When looking at the practice of content creation on social networking sites, it can be assumed that both fans and customers expect professionally managed communication, which the airlines were not able to adhere to. As for the standard airlines, thanks to the presented content analysis we may observe certain social responsibility and their instant effect - when the first reduction was reported, the airlines appealed to their customers to stay at home with a clear message - we do not say goodbye but see you soon. Even though the companies were well aware of disinterest in their services, people's health was their priority and became the point of each content communicated on social networking sites.

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## PERCEPTION OF VISUAL SMOG IN THE CITY AND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Pavla Varvažovská – Martina Jarkovská*

### **Abstract**

The topic of visual smog is becoming more and more topical and is coming to the forefront of the interest of Czech society. This is not only a problem today, but only in recent years, it is increasingly perceived. However, visual smog has plagued postmodern society for a long time. Many advertisements, trailers, colours and various interactivities can be seen in the public space. Advertising is becoming a part of everyday life, it forms life not only in urban but also in rural settlements. Some people do not even perceive advertising in a public space and may say that they are not interested, but the environment in which everyone's life takes place is generally important for the lives of all involved. Advertising affects everyone consciously or subconsciously. Public spaces are the business card of the city and it is important how people perceive it aesthetically and how they feel in it. These aspects further affect such things as crime or cleanliness in a given place. The aim of the article is to find out how citizens and development actors perceive visual smog in rural and urban settlements.

### **Key words:**

Advertising. Countryside. Public Space. Town. Visual Pollution.

## **1 Introduction**

The issue of visual smog is becoming increasingly topical and is also coming to the forefront of the interest of Czech society. It is not only a problem of today but only in recent years have we learned to recognize it and fight it, although visual smog has been bothering us for a long time. We are also getting used to the very concept of visual smog and are slowly beginning to recognize what lies behind it. Advertising surrounds us literally at every step. Some people do not even perceive advertising in public space and may say that they are not interested, but the environment which we live in is important for our lives and advertising affects us subconsciously, whether we like it or not. Public spaces are a business card of the city and it is important how people perceive it aesthetically and how they feel in it. Today's world is extremely saturated with visual content. Sztompka writes that many authors see in modern and especially in postmodern society, a "pictorial reversal".<sup>1</sup> Our culture can be said to be a visual culture. Over the last two centuries, Western culture has been dominated by visual media instead of oral or textual messages. Nowadays, however, the outlines of a new visual civilization stand out increasingly often. Among the many features of this new civilization, the huge role of television and video in everyday life can be pointed out. Today, we can no longer imagine home or work without the Internet. The renaissance of the film is also typical. Besides, it is possible to mention the general and intrusive presence of visual advertising, a poster, a sign, a billboard, and today also digital advertising.<sup>2</sup> We can imagine today's time without ads, as ads are nowadays located at almost every corner and surround us. According to Shimp, today advertising is a greater part of our lives than we think. Let us, therefore, define the concept, which plays an integral part in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> SZTOMPKA, P.: *Vizuální sociologie*. Prague : Sociologické nakladatelství, 2007, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: SHIMP, T. A., ANDREWS, J. C.: *Advertising, Promotion and Other Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications*. Mason, USA : South-Western Cengage Learning, 2013.

## 2 Theoretical Background

There are many definitions of advertising, but in general, it can be said that it is a communication between the client and the person to whom the offered product or service is intended, through some medium with a commercial purpose. Simply put, it is a form of communication with a business purpose.<sup>3</sup> This definition is also mentioned in the book *Advertising & Promotion*<sup>4</sup>. The term visual smog originated from the English word smog = smoke and Latin visual (visual, perceptive) and is a technical term for the infestation ("pollution") of public space, aggressive, tasteless and not adapted to the nature of its surroundings, often placed illegally, without any permission. This term can also be defined as an artificial, flashy and aggressive panopticon obscuring the true face of the city, destroying its uniqueness. This is a phenomenon that we can observe especially in larger cities, where there is logically more space and a reason to advertise goods. Over time, however, this problem is also beginning to reach smaller towns. The problem of visual smog is a sign of ever-increasing competition and the associated effort of sellers to attract a potential customer.<sup>5</sup> Visual smog is a serious intervention in the aesthetic and visual logic of the city and in the overall image of the space. In the developed world, it is now common to regulate the external appearance of shops, notice boards, both in terms of colour and in terms of size, a material used, or location. Visual smog causes an optical disorder in a public space; this environment looks untidy and dirty. However, visual smog has, in addition to an aesthetic effect, another negative impact on health. That is why the Czech authorities, following the example of other countries, banned billboards around motorways some time ago. The vast majority of current advertising is strong, colourful, aggressive, repetitive and, above all, cheap. Few people think about its effectiveness, and logically there is constant congestion of public space.<sup>6</sup> Our cities must rely mainly on the agreement and their ordinances if the property with unauthorized advertising is not a cultural monument. The city can impose a maximum fine, but removal cannot be ordered. Exceptions are advertisements that require building modifications, as their permission or removal is decided by the building authorities. However, these do not include tarpaulins, posters, or monitors projecting advertising.<sup>7</sup> Public space is an important part of our lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that the study of public space is dealt with by the fields ranging from social sciences to humanities.<sup>8</sup> Melková et al. writes about the street as a basic linear element of the outline of public spaces. The role of the street in the city should not be reduced to the transport function only, its role in the spatial and social structure of the city and its residential quality is also important. The city includes streets that contain roads and the function of roads predominates. You can comfortably walk, stop and stay down the street. You can only drive comfortably on the road. A dense network of street connections creates a vibrant city, facilitates identification with the environment and the creation of a mental orientation map. Streets, where the quality of architectural detail and the use of the ground floor of individual buildings play a significant role. The condition for a lively and safe city street is the communicativeness of the ground levels and buildings with the street space.

<sup>3</sup> See also: VYSEKALOVÁ, J., MIKEŠ, J.: *Reklama. Jak dělat reklamu*. Prague : Grada Publishing, a. s., 2018.

<sup>4</sup> See: HACKLEY, Ch., HACKLEY, A. R.: *Advertising and Promotion*. London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> *Vizuální smog*. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://slovník-cizich-slov.abz.cz/web.php/slovo/vizualni-smog>>.

<sup>6</sup> ŠICHANOVÁ, B.: *Adam Gebrian o agresivitě vizuálního smogu*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://wave.rozhlas.cz/adam-gebrian-o-agresivite-vizualniho-smogu-5209932>>.

<sup>7</sup> JETMAR, J.: *Boj měst s vizuálním smogem: radnicím chybí nástroje, vydávají proto vyhlášky*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2017. [online]. [2020-10-20]. Available at: <<https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/2221036-boj-mest-s-vizualnim-smogem-radnicim-chybi-nastroje-vydavaji-proto-vyhlasiky>>.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see: CARMONA, M. et al.: *Public Places Urban Spaces. The Dimension of Urban Design*. Oxford : Elsevier Ltd, 2010.

The main role here is played by the typology of buildings, where spaces for shops and services with direct access from the street are located towards the street.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, an important component of the ground level is the frequency of perceptions at the height of eyes, entrances and visual elements.

### 3 Aim and Methodology

The article will aim to propose a possible solution to the issue of visual smog in selected urban and rural settlements. The main objective will be supported by partial objectives. The first partial objective will be to determine the current state of visual smog in selected urban and rural localities. The second partial objective will be to determine the public's perception of visual smog. Another partial objective will be to find out the opinions and visions of the actors of the affected regions on visual smog. The output will be a proposal for a possible solution to the issue of visual smog in selected urban and rural settlements. Urban and rural settlements in the Central Bohemian Region were selected for the field survey. Due to its location near the capital city of Prague, the Central Bohemian Region is one of the most affected regions by visual smog. As for urban settlements, cities with approximately twenty thousand inhabitants were selected – Mělník and Benešov. Municipalities with approximately two thousand inhabitants – Mšeno and Divišov – were then selected as rural settlements. Two different types of research were chosen for the survey itself, quantitative and qualitative research. The results of the questionnaire survey were processed in MS Excel and subsequently shown in tables and graphs. This program also enabled to process tables in absolute and relative frequencies and also to compile contingency tables in hypothesis testing using Pearson's chi-square test, which is used to accept or reject the null hypothesis at the specified level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Before starting the questionnaire survey, hypotheses were set, which were evaluated using the  $\chi^2$  test (chi-square) as a statistical method.

The following hypotheses were established based on a pilot study and the null hypothesis was verified:

1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the age of the respondents and their knowledge of the concept of visual smog.
2. There is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' educational attainment and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.
3. There is a statistically significant dependence between the respondents' educational attainment and their choice of a more attractive appearance of the advertisement.
4. There is a statistically significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and the choice of the colour appearance of the advertisement.
5. There is a statistically significant relationship between the status of respondents and the choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.
6. There is a statistically significant relationship between the status of respondents and the choice of a more attractive advertisement.
7. There is a statistically significant relationship between the sector in which respondents work and the choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.
8. There is a statistically significant relationship between the sector in which respondents work and the choice of more attractive advertising.

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<sup>9</sup> See also: MELKOVÁ, P. et al.: *Strategie rozvoje veřejných prostranství hlavního města Prahy*. Prague : IPR Praha, 2014.

9. There is a statistically significant relationship between the income of respondents and the choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.
10. There is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' income and the choice of more attractive advertising.

A total of 452 completed questionnaires were collected. In Mělník, 125 persons were willing to fill in the questionnaire, in Benešov 124, in Mšeno 103 and Divišov 100. The research sample consisted of randomly selected respondents of age categories from 15 years to senior age 65 years of age. The qualitative survey was carried out using the technique of non-standardized interviews with individual actors in selected localities. Each of the actors was asked five identical questions:

1. What is your opinion on advertising in public space? (In the town square, in the park, in the street, etc.)
2. Have you ever encountered the issue of visual smog (excess of unsightly advertising in public space) in your position, or in what situation? Describe.
3. What do you think is the problem of a large number of ads in public space?
4. What impact do you think advertising can have on citizens and the city itself?
5. How do you think the issue of a high number of advertisements in public space should be addressed?

## 4 Results and Discussion

Out of a total of 452 respondents, 205 were men and 247 were women. Men predominated in urban areas, while women predominated in rural areas. The testing of the hypotheses was performed for each hypothesis in a standard statistical manner. Due to the limitations caused by the capacity of the article, only one example of testing hypothesis No. 2 will be given. Street A is made up of several differently coloured gables with the signs of the individual shops located in the building. These shields are not unified by any uniform coloured background. The appearance of Street B is created by an advertisement, which has a one-colour black background of gables, where simple logos of shops found in the building can be placed:

- 2H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' educational attainment and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.
- 2H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' educational attainment and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement.

**Table 1: Street signs with more disruptive advertising depending on education**

Marked street	Highest educational attainment of respondents						
	Data	Elementary	Secondary with apprenticeship certificate	Secondary with school-leaving examination	Higher professional education	University education	Total
Street A	a. n. n	34 34.04	77 91.02	124 122.1	18 18.5	83 68.82	336 74%
Street B	a. n. n	12 11,96	46 31.98	41 42.9	7 6,5	10 24.18	116 26%
Total	a. č.	46	123	165	25	93	452

Source: Own processing

**Table 2: Street sign with more disruptive advertising depending on education - Chi-square**

Answer	(a.n-n)2/n	(a.n-n)2/n	(a.n-n)2/n	(a.n-n)2/n	(a.n-n)2/n	Total
Street A	0.0001	2.16	0.03	0.01	2.92	5.12
Street B	0.00005	6.15	0.08	0.04	8.32	14.59
Chi-square						19.71

Source: Own processing

For the number of degrees of freedom  $k = 4$  and the selected level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$ , a critical value of 9.49 was found in Table 1 and 2. The critical value was exceeded (19.71 < 9.49) and therefore we accept the alternative hypothesis. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant dependence between the highest achieved education of the respondents and their perception of more disruptive advertising. All hypotheses were tested and processed analogously. In the monitored group of respondents, there is no statistically significant relationship between the age of the respondents and their knowledge of the concept of visual smog. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant relationship between the highest achieved education of respondents and their perception of more attractive advertising. In the monitored group of respondents, there is no statistically significant relationship between the sex of the respondents and their choice of the colour appearance of the advertisement. In the monitored group of respondents, there is no statistically significant relationship between the status of respondents and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of advertising. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant dependence between the status of respondents and their choice of a more attractive appearance of the advertisement. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant dependence between the sector in which the respondents work and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of the advertisement. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant dependence between the sector in which the respondents work and their choice of a more attractive appearance of the advertisement. In the monitored group of respondents, there is no statistically significant relationship between the income of respondents and their choice of a more disruptive appearance of advertising. In the monitored group of respondents, there is a statistically significant relationship between the income of respondents and their choice of a more attractive appearance of the advertisement.

The solved issue is an increasingly current topic of visual smog. The article was focused on the perception of this problem by actors in selected rural and urban settlements. Nováková dealt with graphic design in public space, showing that multinational chains and large corporations, unlike local stores, have negligible problems with visual smog.<sup>10</sup> Instead of contributing to the problem, these large chains alleviate the problem. In her work, she created certain point evaluations, which were based on respect for the architecture used by the advertisements. It is in this point evaluation that large chains have a much higher respect for the architecture of a given place than the local establishments themselves. In our opinion, these large chains simply have their established names and have marketing departments, and they do not have to present themselves with aggressive advertising to draw attention to them at all costs. Unlike smaller establishments, whose owners think that more advertising must automatically mean greater awareness of their products. And so we can observe the issue of visual smog, especially in larger cities. Nováková focused on these smaller establishments

<sup>10</sup> NOVÁKOVÁ, V. R.: *Reklamy ve městě nevnímám. Proč by mě měl vizuální smog zajímat?*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015. [online]. [2020-10-15]. Available at: <<https://designreader.org/proc-by-me-mel-vizualni-smog-zajimat/>>.

and designed an application that solves the communication of clients and designers; this problem is, in my opinion, one of the key origins of visual smog. The application is aimed at small clients who do not have the financial capacity to finance agencies and do not have a marketing department.

## Conclusions

If we drive through any major city, we will see that almost every city is affected by visual smog. In our case Mělník and Benešov. The issue of visual smog did not escape these cities. Advertisements here line the roads; we can find them on historic buildings, in short, everywhere. This problem escalates especially in the period before the municipal elections when these cities are hit by a rush of posters, banners and billboards with political content. Like Mělník or Benešov, this problem also affects selected rural localities, which in our case are Mšeno and Divišov. In the historical centre of Mělník, advertising is regulated by a decree and only signboards at individual stores are allowed. Mělník also has uniform background panels in place throughout the city, on which advertising is placed. These panels are in one size and a uniform material design. In Benešov, the problem of visual smog is still being solved. In particular, the problem of placing unsightly advertising on the facades of houses, without the appropriate consent of the building authority. In rural settlements – Mšeno and Divišov, this problem does not occur to such a large extent as in the urban settlements. Cities and municipalities should take the path shown to them by cities such as Brno, Ostrava, or Znojmo. Good practice manuals exist or are being developed in these cities. The purpose of these manuals is to cultivate public space and prevent the spread of unsightly and often illegal advertising. Advertising in public space is chaotic and advertising media are often different in size and material, and they add to this distaste. therefore, cities and municipalities should have uniform advertising media of uniform size and in the same material design from one supplier company, which would at least in part solve the problem of visual smog. Visual smog and the issues associated with it are certainly interesting, broad, yet still little described and researched across disciplines. This topic could be interesting in terms of the impact of advertising in public space on our psyche and health. And on how architecture and urban planning are increasingly giving way to advertising.

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## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ENGAGEMENT OF THE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

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### Abstract

One of the biggest questions on all marketers' minds is, "How do we get more Facebook engagement for our brand?" Facebook engagement is any action someone takes on a Facebook page or one of someone's posts. The most common examples are likes, comments, and shares, but it can also include checking in to your location or tagging you in a post. Facebook engagement matters because it can help extend organic reach. According to Statista with over 2.7 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2020, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. This study aims to identify the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on engagement of the tourist information centre's Facebook page. We empirically analyse data from the official tourist Facebook account "Visit Kosice" using Facebook Insight for observed period March to June 2019 and 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the usage of social media by the world's general population, and we compare data before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results show whether or not the pandemic affects the behaviour of Facebook users.

### Key words:

Covid-19 Pandemic. Facebook. Facebook Analytics. Daily Net Likes. Daily Page Engaged Users. Social Network. Tourism Industry. Tourist Information Centre.

### Introduction

Customer engagement has gained much attention in the recent literature. Social media in tourism is an emerging research topic<sup>1</sup>. Social media allows users to create and exchange information, thus it has gained massive popularity among Internet users<sup>2</sup>. Facebook is one of the most robust social media channels available and lends itself well to brand storytelling. Business owners who use Facebook to its full potential have the opportunity to build a strong connection with their audience through targeted posts and ads. Customers generally show their interest in content through interactions – comments, shares, likes, and reactions. Facebook considers these to be "meaningful interactions" and uses these signals to determine the relevance and helpfulness of the content to each user. If we're creating content that regularly generates meaningful interactions, you should see an increase in the number of people exposed to your posts. In Slovakia, former researches measuring the loyalty of customers engaged in Social Networking sites, such as Facebook, are still rare, especially in the travel industry. The goal of this research is to investigate the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on engagement of the tourist information centre's Facebook page. Specifically, we address the impact of the pandemic on daily net likes (daily new likes minus daily unlikes) by comparing data for the period from March to June in 2019 and 2020. We also analyse the existence of a relationship between daily page engaged users and daily net likes using correlation analysis. Using regression analysis, we verify the dependence between these variables and determine which values the dependent variable will acquire when changing the independent variable.

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<sup>1</sup> ZENG, B., GERRITSEN R.: What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. In *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 27. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001>>.

<sup>2</sup> HORN, I. S. et al.: Business reputation and social media: A primer on threats and responses. In *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 194-207.



## 1 Literature Review

DMOs (Destination Marketing Organisation) at both the national and local level need to pay attention to how they use social media, as this can play a crucial role in effectively promoting and marketing a tourism destination in a global context, characterised by hyper-competition not only among companies<sup>3</sup> but also among destinations<sup>4</sup>. Studies conducted from a static perspective have concluded that appropriate content and format and rapid-response posting are crucial to effectiveness in social media management<sup>5</sup>. Format of stories (which cease after 24 hours) is hugely popular, and DMOs tend to bring the daily life of the destination to their customers through them. Stories are real, up-to-date, real-time peaks to what destination has to offer. However, it is needed to think of stories within content published on DMO's social media feed. Brand content has been studied as far as the manner it is deployed and broadcast, using parameters such as the timing of the broadcast, its interactivity, or the type of information it conveys. Yet, beyond these practical aspects, the strategies used to foster CE are complex; these require high degrees of creativity and often involve the development of a storyline around the brand<sup>6</sup> or in this case, destination.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see: D'AVENI, R.: *Hypercompetition: Managing the dynamics of strategic manoeuvring*. New York : The Free Press, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> See also: BAGGIO, R. et al.: *Managing tourism in a changing world: Issues and cases*. London : Routledge, 2013.; MARIANI, M. M. et al.: *Tourism management, marketing and development: The importance of network and ICTs*. New York : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014.; MARIANI, M. M. et al.: Managing change in tourism destinations: key issues and current trends. In *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 2014, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 270-271. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.11.003>>; MARIANI, M. M.: Coordination in inter-network co-opetition: Evidence from the tourism sector. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2016, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 104-122. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.11.015>>; MARIANI, M. M. et al.: Facebook as a destination marketing tool: Evidence from Italian regional Destination Management Organizations. In *Tourism Management*, 2016, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 322. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.12.008>>.

<sup>5</sup> CVIJKJ, I. P., MICHAHELLES, F.: Online engagement factors on Facebook brand pages. In *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 2013, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 844-860. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13278-013-0098-8>>; HAYS, S. et al.: Social media as a destination marketing tool: Its use by national tourism organisations. In *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 212-238. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.662215>>; GÁLVEZ-RODRÍGUEZ, M. et al.: Exploring best practices for online engagement via Facebook with local destination management organisations (DMOs) in Europe: A longitudinal analysis. In *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2020, Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 1. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100636>>.

<sup>6</sup> LEE, D. et al.: Advertising content and consumer engagement on social media: Evidence from Facebook. In *Management Science*, 2018, Vol. 64, No. 11, p. 5106-5130. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2017.2902>>; SCHULTZ, C. D.: Proposing to your fans: Which brand post characteristics drive consumer engagement activities on social media pages? In *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 2017, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 24-33. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2017.09.005>>; ASHLEY, C., TUTEN, T.: Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 2015, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 16-26. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.20761>>; PERA, R., VIGLIA, G.: Exploring how video digital storytelling builds relationship experiences. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 2016, Vol. 33, No. 12, p. 1143-1149. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20951>>; DESSART, L., PITARDI, V.: How stories generate consumer engagement: An exploratory study. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2019, Vol. 104, No. 1, p. 183. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.06.045>>.

## 1.1 Social Media and Facebook Engagement

Social media presents huge opportunities to listen and engage with customers. Stelzner believes that social media is important for business and it helps generate exposure, increasing traffic and providing market place insight<sup>7</sup>. Researchers have focused on identifying brand engagement, exploring the relationships between brands, consumers, and social networks<sup>8</sup>, including some studies focusing specifically on the tourism sector<sup>9</sup>. The literature recognises customer engagement as a predictor of consumer behaviour, including brand loyalty<sup>10</sup>. According Statista (2020) with over 2.7 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2020, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. In the third quarter of 2012, the number of active Facebook users surpassed one billion, making it the first social network ever to do so. Active users are those which have logged in to Facebook during the last 30 days. During the last reported quarter, the company stated that 3.14 billion people were using at least one of the company's core products (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, or Messenger) each month. Facebook reach is the number of unique people who saw your content. It affects every other metric you can track: engagement, likes, comments, clicks and negative feedback. And that's not all. There are different kinds of reach: post, page, organic, viral and paid. Everything on Facebook boils down to reach. Engaged users are people who have clicked on this content from anywhere. It's the most important metric to know after your reach metric. Reach tells you how many people have potentially seen your content; engagement is the number of people who have interacted with your content. Visit Kosice is the official information centre of the city of Košice in the Slovak Republic, which provides free brochures about Košice, city maps and more. This city tourism organization offers traditional and non-traditional souvenirs, blogs about restaurants, tips for accommodation in Košice and was founded ten years ago. As of 11 October 2020, the Visit Kosice Facebook page has a total of 15,346 fans.

## 1.2 Covid-19 Pandemic Tourism Impact

In 2020, the world is facing a world-wide pandemic and travel is restricted in many countries. Some popular destinations closed their boundaries to tourists completely; other require negative PCR test upon arrival and/ or quarantine for a set number of days. Although it serves as the most recent reminder, Covid-19 is not the only infectious disease the world has

<sup>7</sup> CERCHIA A. E.: Social Media – A Strategy in Developing Customer Relationship Management. In *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 2016, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 787. [online]. [2020-10-07]. Available at: <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(16\)30266-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(16)30266-0)>.

<sup>8</sup> SCHAU, H. J. et al.: How brand community practices create value. In *Journal of Marketing*, 2009, Vol. 73, No. 5, p. 31-50. [online]. [2020-10-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30>>; OH, C. et al.: Beyond likes and tweets: Consumer engagement behavior and movie box office in social media. In *Information and Management*, 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 26-36. [online]. [2020-10-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2016.03.004>>; LEE, D. et al.: Advertising content and consumer engagement on social media: Evidence from Facebook. In *Management Science*, 2018, Vol. 64, No. 11, p. 5106-5130. [online]. [2020-10-08]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2017.2902>>.

<sup>9</sup> HARRIGAN, P. et al.: Customer engagement with tourism social media brands. In *Tourism Management*, 2017, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 598-608.; MARIANI, M. M. et al.: The determinants of Facebook social engagement for national tourism organizations' Facebook pages: A quantitative approach. In *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 2018, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 313-324.

<sup>10</sup> JIMÉNEZ, M. A. et al. Evolution of the presence and engagement of official social networks in promoting tourism in Spain. In *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 215. [online]. [2020-10-09]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/40491569/EVOLUTION\\_OF\\_THE\\_PRESENCE\\_AND\\_ENGAGEMENT\\_OF\\_OFFICIAL\\_SOCIAL\\_NETWORKS\\_IN\\_PROMOTING\\_TOURISM\\_IN\\_SPAIN](https://www.academia.edu/40491569/EVOLUTION_OF_THE_PRESENCE_AND_ENGAGEMENT_OF_OFFICIAL_SOCIAL_NETWORKS_IN_PROMOTING_TOURISM_IN_SPAIN)>.

experienced since the new millennium began. Echoes from the past include but are not limited to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) disease in 2003, the H1N1 influenza pandemic during 2009, the Ebola outbreak in 2014, and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) during 2015<sup>11</sup>. The Covid-19 (declared as a pandemic by WHO, 12 March 2020) significantly impacts the global economic, political, socio-cultural systems. Health communication strategies and measures (e.g. social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community lockdowns, stay at home campaigns, self- or mandatory-quarantine, curbs on crowding) have halted global travel, tourism and leisure<sup>12</sup>. Covid-19 tourism impacts will be uneven in space and time, and apart from the human tool, estimates show an enormous and international economic impact: international tourist arrivals are estimated to drop to 78 % causing a loss of US \$1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism and 120 million direct tourism job cuts representing seven times the impact of September 11, and the largest decline in the history<sup>13</sup>. Destinations, however, need to look forward to and keep in touch with future customers, bring them the sense that they can experience a bit of the destination online and make sure they come once it's safe again, so the tourism industry will be able to heal from the impacts of this pandemic.

## 2 Data and Methodology

The objective of this paper is to identify the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourist information centre's Facebook page. We empirically examined data that included engagement indicators of the tourism information centre's Facebook page, i.e. Visit Kosice. For this research data from Facebook Analytics of account Visit Kosice, dated daily from beginning of March to the end of June 2019 and 2020, were collected. As the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic took place in Europe since March 2020, we decided to compare the data for the same period in 2020 and the previous year. The aim of this paper is to compare data for two equal periods, namely basic statistics resulting from the involvement and behaviour of users of Facebook page Visit Kosice. Facebook Analytics collects various types of data about the Facebook page as well as the posts on it. For this paper, user's engagement data were collected, dated from March to June in 2019 and 2020. The collected data were daily total likes, daily new likes, daily unlikes and daily page engaged users. There are various types of posts that can be shared on a Facebook page. In general, photos, links and videos are the most common. Visit Kosice uses mostly links and photos, but statuses (posts with no photo, video, or link), shared videos, and Facebook surveys also occurred. The highest reach is usually observed with photos and videos, videos have become more and more popular recently. When seeing the post, the Facebook user can also decide not to follow the page anymore. There is also a possibility to unlike the page after seeing the post or reporting the post as spam. Numbers of all these variables were collected as well. The data were then adapted for the statistical analyses in IBM SPSS software and a correlation and regression analysis was

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<sup>11</sup> HUANG, A. et al.: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 intervention policies on the hospitality labor market. In *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2020, Vol. 91, No.1, p. 2. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102660>>.

<sup>12</sup> SIGALA, M.: Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 1, p. 313-320. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>>.

<sup>13</sup> UNWTO World Tourism Barometer And Statistical Annex. In *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*, 2020, Vol. 18, No. 2. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/wtobarometereng.2020.18.1.2>>; SIGALA, M.: Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 117, No. 1, p. 313-320. [online]. [2020-10-10]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>>.

performed. The aim of measuring the intensity dependence is to get an idea about the extent to which the behaviour of one variable influences the behaviour of the second variable. For the association degree can be used, for example, the Pearson correlation coefficient or Kendall's coefficient  $\tau_B$ . In this paper the Pearson correlation coefficient is applied to express the degree.<sup>14</sup>

### 3 Results and Discussion

As we can see in Tables 1 and 2, the statistical evaluation of the data clearly shows the difference between the two monitored periods. While in 2019 an average of 9 new daily net likes (which are daily new likes — daily unlikes) were added to the site per day, in the same period the following year this average was only 1.5 new daily net likes. It is clear from this that the Covid-19 pandemic strongly affected tourism, as the number of new fans of Facebook page Visit Kosice increased by 7.5 every day than in the same period of the previous year. This fact can be explained by the fact that the volatile situation and travel restrictions affected many people in that they did not plan their trips and vacations too much, and therefore did not even search for information on tourist information centre and their Facebook pages.

**Table 1: Frequencies of Visit Kosice (March – June 2019)**

		Statistics				
		Lifetime Total Likes	Daily New Likes	Daily Unlikes	Daily Net Likes	Daily Page Engaged Users
N	Valid	121	121	121	121	121
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		13568	10,1	1,1	9	331
Median		13512	8	1	7	320
Std. Deviation		370,754	8,577	,896	8,446	250,524
Minimum		12991	0	0	-1	3
Maximum		14078	46	4	42	1303
Sum		1641714	1223	135	1088	40036

N=121 days from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 29<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

Source: Own processing

**Table 2: Frequencies of Visit Kosice (March – June 2020)**

		Statistics				
		Lifetime Total Likes	Daily New Likes	Daily Unlikes	Daily Net Likes	Daily Page Engaged Users
N	Valid	121	121	121	121	121
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		14455	2,6	1,1	1,5	115
Median		14439	2	1	1	83
Std. Deviation		46,647	4,001	1,045	4,107	114,550
Minimum		14384	0	0	-5	1
Maximum		14546	34	5	34	844
Sum		1749077	314	136	178	13905

N=121 days from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Source: Own processing

<sup>14</sup> See also: HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Prague : Portál, 2008.

Another of the monitored indicators was also the Daily Page Engage Users (i.e. The number of unique users who engaged with the Facebook page. Engagement includes any click or story created.), see Tables 1 and 2. In the monitored period of 2019, the value of this activity averaged 331 activities. For comparison, in 2020 it was 115, which is again a signal of decline despite the fact that if we look at the data showing the total number of fans of the FB site Visit Kosice, it has been growing continuously, see Lifetime Total Likes in 2019 had an average of 13,568 fans, in 2020 it averaged 14,455 fans. Despite the increase in the number of new fans, their activity on this FB site decreased significantly, which can be explained by the fact that the fans of this site are becoming rather passive. We assume that the impact of this behaviour on the social network Facebook will also affect the actual number of physical tourists in Košice and its surroundings. During the data analysis, we were also interested in whether there is an association between daily page engaged users and daily net likes, and correlation analysis was applied to find the relationship. The aim of measuring the intensity of addiction is to get ideas about the extent to which the behavior of one variable infer the behavior of the second variable. For example, Pearson's correlation coefficient is used as a measure of association.

**Table 3: Correlations (March – June 2019)**

Correlations			
		Daily Net Likes	Daily Page Engaged Users
Daily Net Likes	Pearson Correlation	1	,572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	121	121
Daily Page Engaged Users	Pearson Correlation	,572**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	121	121

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

Source: Own processing

Correlation analysis confirmed the existence of an association between the two variables, i.e. between daily page engaged users and daily net likes in the data from 2019, see Table 3. The value of Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.572, which can be considered a strong relationship (the value of the correlation coefficient usually values from -1 to 1). The result can be interpreted as meaning that the behaviour of the daily net likes variable can be deduced from the behaviour of the daily page engaged users variable. If the number of engaged users increases, i.e. If the number of activities on this page increases, the number of new fans of the page (daily net likes) should also increase.

**Table 4: Correlations (March – June 2020)**

Correlations			
		Daily Net Likes	Daily Page Engaged Users
Daily Net Likes	Pearson Correlation	1	,395**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	121	121
Daily Page Engaged Users	Pearson Correlation	,395**	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	121	121

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

Source: Own processing

Correlation analysis confirmed the existence of an association between the two variables, i.e. between daily page engaged users and daily net likes in the data from 2020 too, see Table 4. The value of Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.395, which can be considered a moderate association. The result can be interpreted as meaning that the behaviour of the daily net likes variable can be deduced from the behaviour of the daily page engaged users variable. If the number of engaged users increases, i.e. If the number of activities on this page increases, the number of new fans of the page (daily net likes) should also increase. The results of the correlation analysis confirmed the existence of a relationship (association) between two variables in both periods, which led to the question of whether it is possible to quantify this relationship. The basic motivation for the application of regression analysis was the effort to estimate the values of the dependent variable and thus quantify this relationship. The independent variable is daily page engaged users and the dependent variable is daily net likes.

**Table 5: Regression (March – June 2019)**

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,615	1,051		2,489	,014
	Daily Page Engaged Users	,019	,003	,572	7,599	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Daily Net Likes

Source: Own processing

We used the linear regression method to determine whether the independent variable statistically affects the daily net likes, see Table 5. The results of the linear regression analysis show that if the number of engaged users (user activities) increased by 100 in the year 2019 in the observed period, the daily net likes increased by 1.9 (coefficient Beta = 0.019). If the activities of unique users increase, whether it is like, sharing or any engagement, then the number of fans of Visit Kosice Facebook page increases.

**Table 6: Regression (March – June 2020)**

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-,158	,489		-,323	,747
	Daily Page Engaged Users	,014	,003	,395	4,696	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Daily Net Likes

Source: Own processing

We used the linear regression method to determine whether the independent variable statistically affects the daily net likes, see Table 6. The results of the linear regression analysis show that if the number of engaged users (user activities) increased by 100 in the year 2020 in the observed period, the daily net likes increased by 1.4 (coefficient Beta = 0.014). If the activities of unique users increase, whether it is like, sharing or any engagement, then the

number of fans of Visit Kosice Facebook page increases. This increase is slightly smaller than in the same period last year.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the data shows that some impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism can be observed and statistically evaluated. In this paper, we analysed the data obtained from the Facebook Analytics of Tourist Information Centre Visit Kosice. We compared and analysed data from March to June 2019 and for the same period in 2020 when the European market was hit by the first wave of Covid-19. The basic statistical results show the difference between the two monitored periods. The total number of daily net likes of the Visit Kosice Facebook page decreased from 9 to 1.5 during these two monitored periods. This decline can be explained by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and thus the reduced activity of people in seeking tourist information. Relationships (associations) were found between two important variables, which are daily net likes and daily page engaged users, using correlation analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient showed a strong (in year 2019) and moderate (in year 2020) association for both periods. Regression analysis was used to determine whether it is not possible to estimate a dependent variable using an independent variable. The result is that the dependent variable (daily net likes) increased by 1.19 in the year 2019 in the period under review, when there was an increase in the daily page engaged users by 100. So far in 2020, this increase was by 1.14. The limitations of this research are the data for two monitored periods. To better analyse the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is suitable for the further research to analyse the data for the more time periods before and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

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