Marketing in multiverse 2023 : from real to virtual : conference proceedings / 28th CROMAR Congress

Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli

Fakultet ekonomije i turizma
"Dr. Mijo Mirković"

28th CROMAR Congress

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October 12th-13th, 2023
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Papers in English and Croatian have undergone
an international double blind review.
All papers were presented at the conference in their original language.
The papers were reviewed by the Department of Social Sciences of the
Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

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PREFACE

The 28th biannual international scientific congress CROMAR, entitled “Marketing in Multiverse: From Real to Virtual”, was held at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism “Dr. Mijo Mirković” between 12th and 13th October 2023. The congress gathered over 75 scientists from Croatia, Portugal, Poland, Slovenia, Türkiye and United Kingdom and was organised by CROMAR (Croatian Marketing Association), Juraj Dobrila University of Pula - Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković", and Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA). At the congress opening, renowned scientists and experts presented their keynote lectures. The eminent professor João Guerreiro from Lisbon (Portugal) presented an interesting lecture about the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing, while Aleksandar Raić, a member of the Infobip Board, formulated how the first Croatian unicorn Infobip uses artificial intelligence in their business.

The congress covered a wide spectrum of topics from the field of marketing which are elaborated in the papers contained in these Proceedings. The Congress proceedings contain a total of 27 scientific papers which have passed a demanding double blind review process. The papers contained in the Proceedings primarily deal with the following marketing topics: particularities in the behaviour of different consumer groups (children, young people, members of Generation Z and persons with visual impairment), price perception in unfavourable market conditions, marketing communication in the digital environment (promotion based on blockchain technology, use of Tik-Tok for educational purposes, promotional appeals of nonprofit organisations, tourist board websites and others), tourism destination marketing (branding and tourism destination market positioning), ecological awareness, sustainability and competitiveness of different industries (food industry, beer industry, fashion industry, road construction, as well as cultural organisations), and use of biometrics, artificial intelligence and IoT in marketing.

We believe that the themes contained in the Proceedings are topical, relevant and interesting and that the published papers will contribute to the development of the marketing science through new ideas and considerations of different paths in solving numerous challenges marketing scientists and experts are facing today in both real and virtual environments.

We take this opportunity to extend our thanks to all who took part in the congress organisation, keynote speakers, members of the programme and organising committee, the session chairs and our students. We especially thank the reviewers who, with their constructive suggestions, contributed to a higher quality of the papers and the Conference proceedings as a whole. We also hope that the topics explored in the Proceedings will provide ideas for many a future research of which some, we trust, will be presented at our next CROMAR congress. Enjoy the Proceedings!

Editors

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WHY DO THEY FOLLOW INFLUENCERS? A STUDY ON GENERATION Z IN CROATIA AND TÜRKIYE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Generation Z is known for their affinity for social media and digital communication. In Türkiye and Croatia, they represent an important consumer group, particularly in the context of influencer marketing. This paper aims to investigate factors that influence the intention to follow influencers within Generation Z in these two countries, as well as to observe and discuss possible differences between these countries regarding influencer marketing.

Methodology: Based on a literature review, three potential factors have been identified: the perceived power of influencers, perceived ease of interaction with influencers and conformity. Their influence has been tested with regression analysis. In addition, descriptive statistics, comparative analysis and regression analysis were performed.

Results: The proposed model explained a total of 45.5% (CRO) and 42.3% (TUR) of the variance. The results show a statistically significant positive influence of Perceived power of influencers (PPI) in both countries on Intention to follow influencers in Generation Z (INT) and a positive influence of Perceived ease of interaction (PEI) on the Croatian sample.

Conclusion: In both countries, influencer marketing has become an important and even unavoidable marketing tool for reaching out to the Generation Z. They are familiar with the term and accept influencers as a credible source of information. While the reasons for choosing a specific influencer are similar, there are some differences in the perception of the ease of interaction as well as in the platforms they use, which is grounded in cultural, economic and social reasons.

Keywords: Perceived Power of Influencers, Perceived Ease of Interaction, Conformity, Social Media, Influencer Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of youth is an important phase in the personal development process of individuals, and it is well known that social interactions play a major role in this process. In recent years, the rapid spread of digital media and the increasing popularity of social media platforms have greatly changed young people's access to information, content sharing and social interactions. In this context, social media phenomena known as "influencers" have had a significant impact, especially on the younger generation known as Generation Z.

Generation Z has grown up in the digital age, a time when influencers have created a strong presence on social media and digital platforms. Understanding why and how this generation is drawn to influencers is important for marketing and communications strategies. The research was designed to capture Generation Z individuals in two countries in different geographic regions, Croatia and Türkiye. The research examines the impact of cultural, social, economic, psychological, etc. differences on Generation Z's followership of influencers and use of social media. In particular, the emphasis on the differences between Croatia and Türkiye gives the research a unique perspective. In this way, the differences between Generation Z members' reasons for following influencers and their behaviour can be better understood. The main goal of the research is to understand which factors have influence on future intention to follow influencers among members of Generation Z in Croatia and Türkiye. The research aims to understand the reasons why Generation Z people in Croatia and Türkiye follow influencers and compare the differences between these two countries. By focusing on Generation Z's behaviour of following influencers, the study aims to explore the relationship between social media platforms, content types, and demographic factors. It also aims to contribute to the existing literature on why Generation Z members follow influencers and provide important insights for marketing strategies and social media communications.

The goal of this research is to determine the social media usage habits of Generation Z in both countries and their interest in influencers, thus making an important contribution to the development of social media marketing strategies. Such cross-cultural research can help local and global brands better connect with their target audiences. It also provides valuable insights into how Generation Z uses social media, and the influence influencers have on their buying behaviour. Generation Z has different tendencies in terms of their consumer behaviour and purchase decisions than previous generations (Dabija and Lung, 2019, Kamenidou et al., 2019, Thach et al., 2021). This generation's interest in influencers is important for understanding consumer behaviour and shaping future marketing strategies.

This comparative analysis will help to better understand the relationship between social media use and youth culture by allowing us to understand the popularity and influence of influencers in different cultural contexts. Generation Z is a generation that has grown up in the age of globalisation and digitalisation and finds different cultural, social and economic conditions.

In conclusion, this research on the reasons and behaviour of members of Generation Z in Croatia and Türkiye to follow influencers provides valuable insights that will help to make marketing strategies more effective and reach Generation Z better.

It was found that no comprehensive cross-cultural research has been conducted on Generation Z's consumption and social media usage habits. This is the starting point of this study and provides a unique perspective by highlighting the differences between the two countries' Z generations. Research in the literature has generally compared generations or focused on only one generation.

Platform preferences, language and communication styles, content preferences, legal and cultural constraints, number of users, etc. are factors that influence individuals' use of social media. In addition to these factors, demographic variables, level of access to technology, economic conditions, and other social factors may also be among the factors that influence social media use (Auxier & Anderson, 2021, Lionbridge, 2022). This situation may vary by country and culture.

As a result of the literature review, a new model proposal was needed in line with the objectives of the research. Many theories have been developed in the literature, past and present, to understand and explore technology use and consumer behaviour. Various theories on influencer marketing, which is the subject of this study, have been discussed by researchers under different titles. Consumer Socialising Theory (Wang et al., 2012), Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1986, Malhotra & Galletta, 1999), Theory of Planned Behaviour (Chetioui et al., 2020, Chopra et al., 2021), and Social Influence Theory (Claesson & Taegt Ljungberg, 2018, Rohde & Mau, 2021) are some of these theories. The common point of all these theories is to understand individuals' perspectives on technology, their intentions, attitudes, and behaviours, and to show the impact of technology on consumer behaviour. These theories have been criticised in part for being outdated, not targeted enough, and not measuring well (Ajzen, 2011, Malatji et al., 2020). The criticisms expressed in this research and the theories developed were examined, and the need arose to explore some new factors. Based on the literature review, three factors have been identified: the perceived power of influencers, perceived ease of interaction with influencers and conformity of followers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section lists three different dimensions that the authors deemed necessary, based on the literature review and studies conducted.

2.1. POWER OF INFLUENCERS

Power of Influencers refers to the ability of influencers to exert an influence on their followers to promote brands, products, or ideas among their target audience (Kapitan et al., 2016, Jimenez Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). It is related to their ability to attract, influence and direct the attention of their followers (Jansom & Pongsakornrungsilp, 2021). Influencers, who usually specialise in a particular niche or topic, can influence decisions by giving their followers a sense of trust, authority, and leadership (Schaffer, 2020: 5-8). Influencers' power can be used for purposes such as increasing brand awareness, promoting sales of products, guiding consumer behaviour, addressing social issues, or promoting a certain lifestyle by using their influence on their followers (Keller & Fay, 2016: 4). The number of followers, engagement rate, reputation, areas of expertise, quality of content, and relationships with followers can vary depending on the influencer. While the power of influencers is an important part of influencer marketing strategies for brands, it is also important from the consumers' perspective. It can play an important role in consumer decision making and engagement with influencer recommendations and content.

The perceived power of influencers has a significant impact, not only on followers' purchasing behaviour (Freberg et al., 2011), but also on political, cultural, social and psychological aspects (Woolley, 2022). Influencers' reputation, expertise and leadership qualities can positively influence followers' trust and purchase intention. A meta-analysis (Sun et al., 2020) examined the impact of influencer marketing and found that the perceived power of influencers has a positive influence on consumers' buying behaviour. It has also been found that the perceived power of influencers affects followers' attitudes toward brand image. Influencers can have impressive power over their followers and play an important role in the perceived value of brands (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In another study

(Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010), the perceived power of influencers was found to strengthen followers' relationships with brands and increase loyalty. Influencers' advice to their followers can help followers build an emotional connection with brands and develop brand loyalty. In addition, research has demonstrated that influencers' perceived power influences followers' adherence to social norms (De Veirman et al., 2017). Followers may tend to conform to a particular social group or trend by following influencers' suggestions.

These findings show that influencers' perceived power can have an impact on factors such as followers' buying behaviour, brand image, brand relationships, and adherence to social norms. Understanding the impact of perceived power on influencer followers is important for developing influencer marketing strategies.

So, the first hypothesis (H1) would be: Perceived power of influencers (PPI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z.

2.2. PERCEIVED EASE OF INTERACTION WITH INFLUENCERS

Perceived Ease of Use (Davis et al., 1989), defined as the extent to which a person believes that using certain systems is effortless, has been used in various studies related to technology (Bryce & Fraser, 2014, Hansen et al., 2018). Interaction, which not long ago was determined by technology and simply described as a click action, has now evolved (Lenz et al., 2013: 126). Interaction now occurs through different interactive actions such as likes, comments, shares, tagging or private messaging on social media platforms. Furthermore, engagement can occur in a variety of ways, such as consumers responding to influencer content, asking questions, sharing their opinions, or sharing their experiences with brands.

The dimension of perceived ease of interaction with influencers refers to the ease and simplicity of the process of interacting with influencers and is important from the perspective of marketers (brands) and followers who want to collaborate or communicate with influencers. Perceived ease of interaction includes the simple and seamless process of communicating with influencers, closing deals, creating content, or planning marketing strategies. If marketers or users perceive that interacting with influencers is easy and effortless, the interaction process can be more efficient (Kim, 2021).

It has been found that promotion of products on Instagram by an appropriate influencer leads to more positive customer attitudes and purchase intentions due to the interactions and information they receive (Folkvord et al., 2020). In addition, the use of influencers has been shown to break down the wall between the consumer and the brand, changing the way the two interact (Glucksman, 2017: 77) and making it easier for both sides. From the consumer's point of view, the influencer who is easy to reach and interact with simplifies the decision-making process and provides trustworthy information. It also enables the consumer to get the information precisely when he/she needs it.

The second hypothesis (H2) would be: Perceived ease of interaction with influencers (PEI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z.

2.3. CONFORMITY OF FOLLOWERS

Conformity is a social phenomenon in which individuals adjust their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to conform to the perceived norms or expectations of a group (Allen, 1965, Lapinski & Rimal, 2005: 130). As a result of the increasing use of the internet and especially social media, people's communication and interaction styles have changed (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This situation has transferred conformity from family, friends, peers and society to the social media platforms that people interact with in their daily lives. Social media has become another conformity factor that shapes individuals' behaviour. By taking advantage of this interaction, marketers conduct promotional activities for products and services through influencers on social media. Individuals can change their buying behaviour by responding to the likes, comments, number of views, and recommendations of the community (Kozinets, 1999, Kozinets et al., 2010). In this context, the reason for using this dimension is to understand the tendency of individuals to conform to the behaviours, norms and expectations of other users on social media.

Many studies have examined the different dimensions of conformity in social media, trying to understand why and how individuals conform (Neubaum et al., 2018, Colliander, 2019, Wijenayake et al., 2020). Some of the studies have looked at the relationship between social media conformity, consumer behaviour and purchase intentions. Research has shown that sharing and following similar content on social media leads to adherence to social norms and increases group cohesion. (Wang et al., 2012, Kwahk & Kim, 2017). Social media conformity also influences consumers' decision-making processes regarding product reviews (Cheung et al., 2009, Kim & Srivastava, 2007, Kuan et al., 2014). Many factors can influence people's inclination to follow influencers' recommendations. These include the influencer's credibility, area of expertise, social influence, social evidence, perception of similarity and influence of reference groups. As a result of the research, it has been revealed that conformity positively affects individuals' frequency of Twitter use (Yoo et al., 2014).

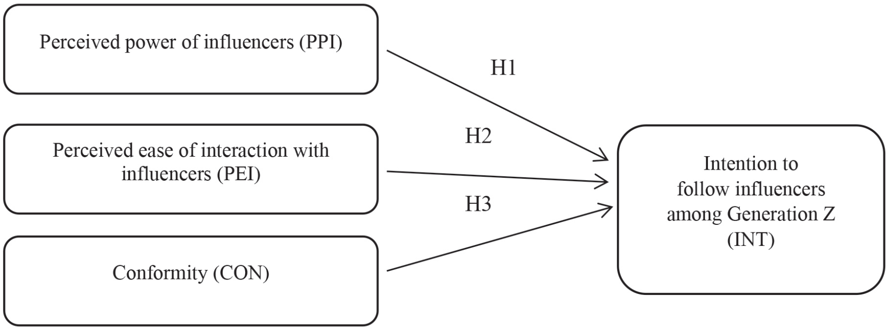
From another perspective, following influencers can also be a form of conformity since more and more people are using them as a source of information, inspiration or amusement. Besides responding to the content they create, users of social media can also recommend and promote influencers and it can be assumed that, due to conformity, people will be more inclined to accept that source of information and consequently to respond to their recommendations.

The third hypothesis (H3) would be: Conformity (CON) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z.

2.4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As mentioned earlier, based on previous research, the conceptual framework for this study was designed as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of research



Based on three factors that were identified after the literature review, three hypotheses were designed:

H1 Perceived power of influencers (PPI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z.

Under the H1, the following variables were tested: I believe that influencers have a great impact on the formation of attitudes, opinions and decisions of their followers; I believe that influencers have a great influence on my own attitudes, opinions, and decision making; I believe that influencers can greatly help businesses in promoting their products and services; I recommend influencers to others; The influencers I follow have an impact on my decisions; I intend to create content that could become an influencer.

H2 Perceived ease of interaction with influencers (PEI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z

Under the H2, the following variables were tested: I believe that it is easy to become an influencer depending on the topic; I believe that it is easy to follow the content of an influencer; I believe that influencers reach their followers easily.

H3 Conformity (CON) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z

Under the H3, the following variables were tested: The opinion of my close family members is important to me when it comes to following influencers; The opinion of my friends about following influencers is important to me; It is important to me that society (environment) accepts me better when I follow an influencer; It is important to me that society (environment) accepts me better when I copy an influencer; It is important to me that society (the environment) accepts me better when I buy the products of an influencer.

Intention to follow influencers among Generation Z (INT) measure with the following variables: I intend to continue to follow the influencers I have followed so far; I intend to follow the influencer in the near future (if I haven't already); I intend to recommend an influencer to my friends so they will follow them; I intend to attend meetups, concerts, and other events of the influencers I follow; I follow influencers.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The data collection was conducted in December 2022. The sample consisted of a total of 138 students from Türkiye and 361 students from Croatia. The survey was conducted at one higher education institution in each country, and it represents 30% of the total number of students at a given institution. The survey was conducted using Google forms. It was anonymous and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Respondents were familiar with the purpose of the survey and completed the questionnaire under the same conditions. Questionnaires were completed in the native languages of the institutions concerned. Translators and academics were consulted for translation from English. The questionnaire was back-translated from the native language into English to make it understandable and to avoid shifts in meaning, and the integrity of the meaning was checked. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. In the first part, the researchers wanted to find out what social networks the respondents use, how often they use them, as well as their perception of the importance of certain characteristics of influencers. The second part of the survey examined the perceived power of influencers, perceived ease of interacting with influencers, conformity, and intention to follow influencers within Generation Z.

The degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements within the stated factors was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 - "totally disagree" 5 - "totally agree"). The third part of the survey was related to the socio-demographic data of the respondents. A description of the sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample description

		Croatia (CRO)		Türkiye (TUR)[1]	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Gender	Male	101	28	68	49.3
	Female	260	72	70	50.7
Year of study (graduate)	1st	57	15.8	39	28.3
	2nd	53	14.7	15	10.9
	3rd	100	27.7	38	27.5
	4th	71	19.7	44	31.9
	5th	80	22.2	-	-

Source: Authors' research

3.1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In the study involving 40,000 people from different continents and cultures in 2021, it has been shown that consumers trust the recommendations of people they know more than any other channels and tend to buy products they encounter in social media streams (Nielsen, 2021). However, this situation may vary depending on the characteristics mentioned above. Other views and opinions may differ from country to country. Croatia, which is in Europe, and Türkiye, which is in West Asia and Europe, differs in terms of religion, beliefs, culture and demographics. While there are 20 million people in Generation Z group in Türkiye, the

1 There is a missing 2 (1.4%) in year of study and at higher education in Türkiye they don't have a 5th grade

total population of Croatia is about 4 million. Looking at the proportion of Generation Z compared to the total population, it is 23% in Türkiye and 17% in Croatia (TUIK, 2022, Perić et al, 2020).

When examining the research on Generation Z and influencer marketing in Türkiye, it can be observed that the results are similar to the studies in the other literature. In the qualitative research conducted by Tukel Paker (2022: 459), it was found that Generation Z, which is a frequent shopper, is particularly affected by the Instagram phenomenon in Türkiye and the frequency of shopping increases with the introduction of the "scroll up" function. Another study showed that Generation Z individuals actively use YouTube; most of them follow a vlogger and consider vloggers in their purchasing decisions (Oyman & Akıncı, 2019:441).

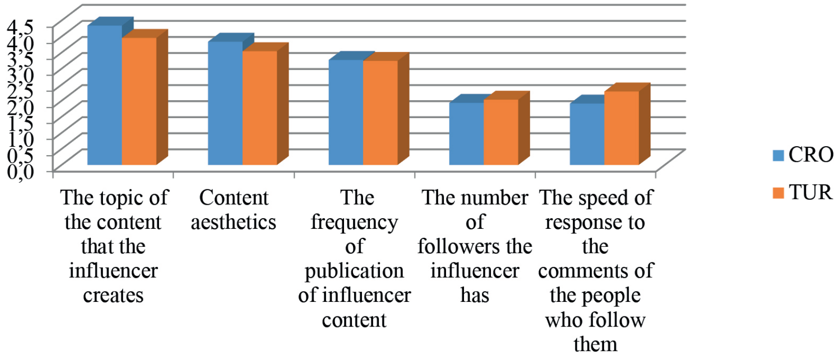
In Croatia, Facebook had 1.75 million users (43%) at the beginning of 2022, YouTube had 2.90 million users, YouTube ads reached 86.9% of total internet users in Croatia, Instagram had 1.45 million users. All other social networks generate less than one percent of traffic to other websites (datareportal, 2022).

3.2. RESEARCH RESULTS

The reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed using the statistical software package SPSS 23. Also, the regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses and the relationships between variables.

The results revealed that Generation Z knows the term "influencer" (CRO 99.2% vs. TUR 89.9%) and that most of them follow at least one influencer on one of the social platforms (CRO 84.2% vs. TUR 79.7%). Generation Z is present on numerous social platforms where they have created a personal profile. In Croatia, most respondents (23%) have created five profiles on different social networks, while in Türkiye most of the respondents own four profiles (25.4%). Graph 1 shows that Instagram ranks first among respondents from both Croatia and Türkiye. After Instagram, Turkish respondents are most frequently present on Vlogs and Twitter, and least frequently on blogs and TripAdvisor. Croatian respondents most frequently use Instagram and Facebook followed by blogs, while they use TripAdvisor and Vlogs the least.

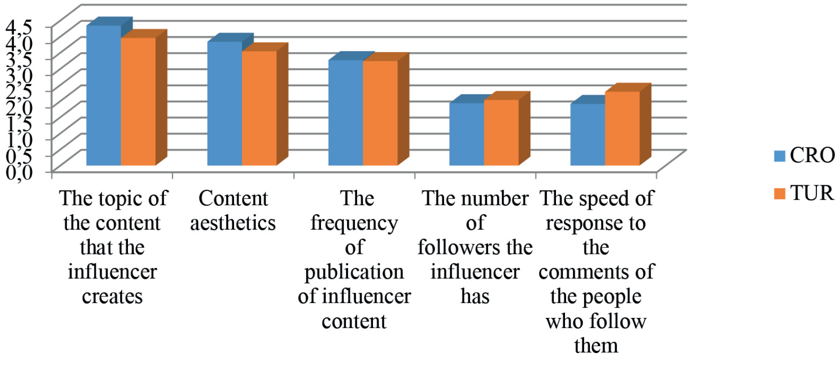
Graph 1: Frequency of use of platforms (0 – never; 5 – many times in a day)



Source: Authors' research

When observing Croatian and Turkish respondents, the most important characteristics that influence the choice of influencers they follow are (Graph 2): the topic or the content the influencer creates (average scores: CRO 4.34; TUR 4.00), the aesthetics of the content (CRO 3.84; TUR 3.54), the frequency of publishing the content (CRO 3.27; TUR 3.24), the number of followers (CRO 1.93; TUR 2.03), and the speed of response to the comments of the people who follow them (CRO 1.91 vs TUR 2.29).

Graph 2: Importance of items when choosing influencers to follow



Source: Authors' research

Before the actual testing of the proposed factors, the internal reliability of the measurement instrument was checked, measured by the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The determined value of the Cronbach alpha coefficient ranges between 0.697 and 0.911, which is acceptable (Schmitt 1996 and George & Mallery, 2003). The obtained results show satisfactory reliability of the measurement instrument (Table 2).

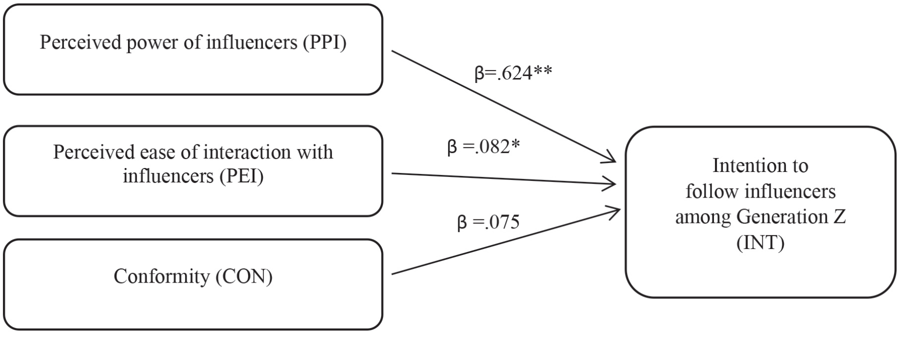
Table 2: Reliability of the measurement instrument

		CRO		TUR	
Construct	**N of items**	α	**sd**	α	**sd**
Perceived power of influencers (PPI)	6	.719	4.1011	.763	5.0826
Perceived ease of interaction with influencers (PEI)	3	.697	2.6119	.708	2.9787
Conformity (CON)	5	.911	3.7768	.871	3.7679
Intention to follow influencers among Generation Z (INT)	5	.713	3.6607	.740	4.4461

Source: Authors' research

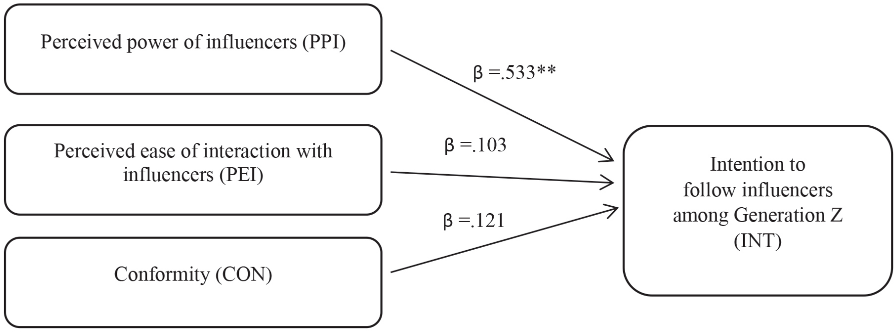
Accordingly, all scales are consistent enough to perform regression analysis. Tested models for Croatia and Türkiye are shown in Figures 2 and 3. A regression analysis was performed using the Enter method. The model explained a total of 45.6% of variance on the Croatian sample (F(3.337) 99.644, p=0.000) and 42.3% of variance on the sample of Türkiye (F(3.138) 33.713, p=0.000). The results reveal how Perceived power of influencers (PPI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z in both countries and Perceived ease of interaction with influencers (PEI) has a positive influence on intention to follow influencers among Generation Z in the Croatian model.

Figure 2: Tested model (Croatia)



*** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
** Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*
Source: Authors' research

Figure 3: Tested model (Türkiye)



*** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
** Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*
Source: Authors' research

4. DISCUSSION

When examining social media usage and differences between Generation Z individuals in Croatia and Türkiye, it can be seen that there are some similarities as well as some differences in content preferences, social media usage and engagement levels, although they prefer similar platforms. These differences are shaped by cultural and social dynamics, as well as young people's interests and priorities.

While Instagram ranks first in both countries, vlogs (YouTube) and Twitter are highly influential in Türkiye. This situation changes depending on the platforms used by influencers in the country and the social structure of the country. While Instagram and YouTube are used for entertainment, shopping and socialising purposes, Twitter is used mostly for news flow tracking and activism. Facebook, which is the most widespread platform of Generation Z in Croatia after Instagram, is less popular in Türkiye. This situation can be explained by the fact that the use of social media in Türkiye varies according to the distribution of generations. Namely, Facebook, which has a large user base in Türkiye, is used more by middle-aged and older people than by young people. Another interesting finding is the cross-national use of blogs and vlogs. While the use of vlogs, which are based on visual media, is much more present in Türkiye, blogs, which are written media, are more widely used in Croatia. This could be related to the fact that people's reading and viewing habits are different in each country. In addition, the difference between Generation Z's Twitter usage rates is quite significant. It appears that generation Z in Croatia relies on some other sources of information for news flow. When it comes to important characteristics of influencers that drive the choice of influencer, the interesting finding is that those characteristics do not differ significantly between countries. For Generation Z in both countries, the most important factor is the topic of the content, followed by the aesthetics of the content.

It can be stated that, in both countries, influencer marketing has become an important and even unavoidable tool for reaching out to Generation Z, since most of them (about 80%) follow at least one influencer. While the reasons for following influencers are similar, the differences in the platforms they use is grounded in cultural, economic and social reasons.

Based on the tested factors, the findings of the survey reveal that the perceived power of influencers has a positive impact on the intention to follow them. This means that Generation Z believes that influencers have a big impact on their attitudes, opinions and decisions. They recommend them and are willing to create content that can make them an influencer. Generation Z trusts influencers who can affect their decisions (Schaffer, 2020), guide their behaviour, or promote a certain lifestyle through their influence (Keller & Fay, 2016). Most of Turkish Generation Z follow a vlogger and consider vloggers in their purchasing decisions (Oyman & Akıncı, 2019:441). After Instagram, Turkish respondents are most often present on Vlogs, which can be seen in Graph 1.

When it comes to perceived ease of interaction, the positive influence was only found in the Croatian sample, but the influence of this factor was not found to be significant on the Turkish sample. This points to the conclusion that Croatian respondents perceive this communication as somewhat more complicated, which drives the significance of this influence, while Turkish respondents probably do not observe it as a complicated process at all. Croatian respondents believe that it is easy to become an influencer, to follow the content of an influencer and they believe that influencers reach their followers easily. Like Glucksman (2017) said, the use of influencers has been shown to break down the wall between the consumer and the brand and change the way the two interact. An influencer who is easy to reach and interact with simplifies the decision-making process.

The influence of conformity however was not found to be significant in either of the samples, which could mean that the opinions of family members, friends, and the environment are not important at all to Generation Z when following influencers, and being better accepted by society is not important to them when buying influencer products. Generation Z has different tendencies in terms of their consumer behaviour (Dabija and Lung, 2019).

This also could be assigned to the fact that this behaviour exerts a low level of consumer involvement due to the fact that it carries low or no risk at all for the social media user since the influence of conformity tends to be stronger when it comes to high involvement decisions.

5. CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing has become an essential part of successful marketing strategies and practices in every area and every market around the world. It is therefore understandably attracting a lot of attention of researchers in practice and in academia. The same applies for the Generation Z that is often in the focus of current research due to the fact that they represent the future of marketing and strategic conditions marketers are trying to understand and adapt to. They represent a large population around the world, which shows some specifics in relation to other generations. Also, it is important to be aware that they live in countries with different cultural, social and economic conditions. When it comes to influencer marketing, these differences can impact the implementation and effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies.

The main limitations of this cross-national study refer to the generalisability of the results since only two countries were involved. Including a broader list of countries would enable more robust conclusions. Also, the methodology was chosen according to the hypotheses and the purpose of the present study. However, applying different methods such as Structural equation modelling (SEM) would facilitate revealing some indirect influences and/or possible moderation effects. Future research could follow that direction and also include other factors (such as engagement, perceived credibility, perceived congruence etc.), as well as include other generation groups. The above mentioned would enable discovery of the main motives, possible reasons for differences and sources of impact for following influencers and for a specific influencer choice. Understanding such motives and influences promotes the effective influencer marketing strategy design for both brand marketers and influencers.

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AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND MARKETING PRINCIPLE IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS / ODREĐIVANJE KRITERIJA ZA MJERENJE EFIKASNOSTI MREŽNIH STRANICA TURISTIČKIH ZAJEDNICA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Tourist boards play a significant role in destination promotion, often reaching out to source markets through their websites. To create a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of these websites, an extensive literature review was conducted, identifying established and, in some cases, tested criteria, factors, and variables for assessing websites of tourism entities and destinations. Although the measurement of website effectiveness in tourism is widespread, there is currently no measurement tool applicable to tourist boards.

Methodology: Constituent parts of instruments designed for evaluating various national tourism websites, hotels and other accommodation units, tourist agencies, ski resorts, restaurants, entertainment centres, attractions, and conference tourism facilities were investigated. Specific factors were identified, and within them, criteria were created adapted to the contemporary macro-environment, especially considering technological and legislative factors.

Results: An instrument for measuring the effectiveness of tourist board websites was created, consisting of six factors and 99 criteria: information quality (22 criteria); usability (17 criteria); responsiveness (18 criteria); legal compliance/security (9 criteria); appearance/attractiveness (22 criteria); and accessibility/connectivity with other media and platforms (11 criteria).

Conclusion: The measurement tool is valuable for destination managers and heads of tourist boards in developing high-quality, modern websites. Ministries and tourism administrators can use it for valuable comparative analyses. The same instrument can be applied to similar institutions promoting tourist destinations, events, and services in EU countries and the rest of the world, in tourist boards and organisations whose websites are visited by EU citizens, ensuring compliance with GDPR regulations.

Keywords: tourist boards, destination promotion, effectiveness research, websites, measurement instrument

SAŽETAK

Svrha: Turističke zajednice imaju značajnu ulogu u promociji destinacija, a doseg do emitivnih tržišta često se ostvaruje putem njihovih mrežnih stranica. U svrhu kreiranja instrumenta za mjerenje efikasnosti tih stranica provedeno je opsežno istraživanje literature s razvijenim, a ponegdje i testiranim kriterijima, faktorima i varijablama za evaluaciju mrežnih stranica turističkih objekata i destinacija. Iako je mjerenje efikasnosti mrežnih stranica u turizmu vrlo zastupljeno, ne postoji mjerni instrument koji bi bio primjenjiv za turističke zajednice.

Metodologija: Istraženi su sastavni dijelovi instrumenata namijenjenih evaluaciji raznih nacionalnih turističkih mrežnih stranica, hotela i ostalih smještajnih jedinica, turističkih agencija, skijališta, restorana, zabavnih centara, atrakcija i objekata konferencijskog turizma. Izdvojeni su određeni faktori i unutar njih kreirani kriteriji prilagođeni suvremenom makrookruženju, a posebno aktualnim tehnološkim i zakonodavnim čimbenicima.

Rezultati: Kreiran je instrument za mjerenje efikasnosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica koji se sastoji od šest faktora i 99 kriterija, a to su: kvaliteta informacija (22 kriterija), jednostavnost korištenja (17 kriterija), responzivnost (18 kriterija), pravna usklađenost/sigurnost (9 kriterija), izgled/privlačnost (22 kriterija) i pristupačnost/povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama (11 kriterija).

Zaključak: Mjerni instrument koristan je destinacijskim menadžerima i voditeljima turističkih zajednica u razvoju kvalitetne i suvremene mrežne stranice te ministarstvima i upraviteljima u turizmu koji njegovim korištenjem mogu doći do vrijednih usporednih analiza. Isti instrument može se primijeniti na slične institucije koje promoviraju turističke destinacije, događaje i usluge iz područja turizma u zemljama EU i ostatku svijeta u turističkim zajednicama i organizacijama čije mrežne stranice posjećuju građani EU, pa se iz tog razloga usklađuju s GDPR-om.

Ključne riječi: turističke zajednice, promocija destinacija, istraživanje efikasnosti, mrežne stranice, mjerni instrument

1. UVOD

Obzirom da turističko tržište postaje sve konkurentnije, mnogi znanstveni radovi bave se proučavanjem turističkih destinacija iz strateško-upravljačke perspektive (Franch et al., 2004; Font et al., 2023). Destinacijama u cijelom svijetu upravljaju turističke zajednice koje mogu biti lokalne, regionalne ili nacionalne, što ovisi o organizaciji sustava pojedine zemlje. Osim upravljanja destinacijom kao sustavom, njihova glavna zadaća je promoviranje odredišta i privlačenje turista. U okviru svog djelovanja one olakšavanju koordinaciju među lokalnim operaterima, hotelima, turističkim agencijama i prijevoznicima. Turistička zajednica jednako može biti poznata pod nazivima "Turistička uprava" (***eng. Tourism Authority***), "Turistički savez" (***eng. Tourism Association***), "Turistički ured" (***eng. Tourism Office***), ili slično.

Strategije turističkih zajednica kreiraju se s ciljem identificiranja ključnih karakteristika povezanih s pojedinom destinacijom, a potom se provode u vidu njezine promocije, uz korištenje raznih alata. Sve značajniji promotivni alat je njihova mrežna stranica. Obzirom na milijunska ulaganja u razvoj mrežnih stranica i rastući pritisak na proračune organizacija koje se bave destinacijskim marketingom, postaje sve važnije pronaći najbolji način za procjenu njihove učinkovitosti i povrata na ulaganja, te dobiti informacije o potrebnim poboljšanjima (Morrison et al., 2004; Park & Gretzel, 2007).

Tijekom proteklog desetljeća za evaluaciju mrežnih stranica u sektoru turizma koristili su se brojni pristupi u različitim kontekstima, no promjena okolnosti i tehnološki napredak nalažu da se ovo područje stalno ponovo istražuje i adaptira. Recentne studije marketinga u turizmu potvrđuju važnost tehnološke infrastrukture, odnosno upotrebu pametnih telefona i aplikacija, kao danas nezaobilaznih alata u privlačenju turista i promoviranju općenito (Al-Hazmi, 2021). Također, postoje specifičnosti koje se isključivo vežu za mrežne stranice turističkih zajednica, za razliku od drugih stranica u turističkom sektoru (npr. hotela i ostalih smještajnih jedinica, skijališta, putničkih agencija, restorana, muzeja, zabavnih centara, atrakcija i objekata konferencijskog turizma).

Stoga se u ovom radu postavljaju sljedeća istraživačka pitanja:

- Koji su ključni faktori za evaluaciju djelotvornosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica?
- Ukoliko se uzmu u obzir suvremeni trendovi u turizmu i njegovom okruženju, koje kriterije obuhvaća svaki pojedini ključni evaluacijski faktor?

- Postoji li mjerni instrument za mjerenje efikasnosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica koji je široko primjenjiv?

Kako bi se odgovorilo na pitanja bilo je potrebno proučiti literaturu vezanu uz mrežne stranice u turističkoj djelatnosti općenito, a zatim posebno vezano za turističke zajednice, u zemlji i svijetu. U svrhu kreiranja instrumenta za mjerenje efikasnosti tih stranica provedeno je i opsežno istraživanje radova s razvijenim, a ponegdje i testiranim kriterijima, faktorima i varijablama za evaluaciju mrežnih stranica turističkih objekata i destinacija diljem svijeta. Stoga se u nastavku iznose teorijske postavke koje prethode izradi mjernog instrumenta koji je pogodan za procjenu mrežnih stranica, specifično za turističke zajednice.

2. TEORIJSKE POSTAVKE

2.1. ZNAČAJ TURISTIČKIH ZAJEDNICA U PROMOCIJI DESTINACIJA

Franch i autori su 2004. proučavali strategije za marketing destinacije od strane regionalnih turističkih zajednica s ciljem identificiranja karakteristika povezanih s integriranom turističkom destinacijom. Pojedini autori naglašavaju značaj turističkih zajednica u promociji i/ili repozicioniranju turističkih odredišta. Tako je Alford (1998) istraživao uspješnost turističkih zajednica i predložio bolje praćenje potreba turista koje bi doprinijelo jasnoći pozicioniranja. Krajnović i autori (2016) ističu ulogu turističke zajednice u redefiniranju turizma i promociji kulturnog turizma. Naime, jedinstvena turistička ponuda prezentirana na stranicama stvorila bi konkurentsku prednost destinaciji i doprinijela gospodarskom razvoju. Mrežne stranice turističke zajednice dobre su za informiranje i promociju manifestacija, atrakcija i autentičnih događanja temeljenih na kulturi odredišta. Lončarić i autori (2013) su utvrdili da organizacije za upravljanje destinacijom (DMO[1]) igraju ključnu ulogu u promicanju turizma u zemlji, regiji ili gradu, turistima, turoperatorima i posrednicima, stvaraju imidž i utječu na pozicioniranje destinacije. Internet im je glavni komunikacijski kanal za informiranje turista i partnera, a mrežne stranice su vrijedan izvor informacija pri planiranju putovanja. Iako turističke zajednice svojim društvenim djelovanjem unaprjeđuju turistički proizvod, podižu njegovu

1 DMO (eng. *Destination Management Organization*) ima slične funkcije kao turistička zajednica ali ima širu odgovornost za upravljanje, planiranje i razvoj destinacije. Osim promocije turizma, u nadležnosti DMO-a može biti i razvoj infrastrukture, planiranje turističkih politika i slično.

kvalitetu i naglašavaju autohtonost ponude, neka istraživanja ukazuju na nesrazmjer između obalnih i ruralnih turističkih zajednica s aspekta pokretanja razvoja novih turističkih proizvoda (Aflić & Gržinić, 2019). Sánchez-Teba i autori (2020) ukazuju na važnost uloge turističkih zajednica u inovativnom privlačenju turista visokospecijaliziranim sadržajima nakon perioda pandemije bolesti COVID-19. Font i autori (2023) evaluirali su utjecaj pokazatelja održivog turizma na konkurentnost odredišta s obzirom na Europski sustav pokazatelja za turizam (ETIS) koji je korišten kao polazna točka za podizanje svijesti o održivom turizmu unutar DMO-a.

2.2. MREŽNE STRANICE KAO EFIKASAN TURISTIČKI PROMOTIVNI ALAT

O značaju mrežnih stranica i internetskog marketinga u turizmu provedena su brojna istraživanja diljem svijeta, a postoje i razni pristupi njihovom ocjenjivanju. Benckendorff i Black (2000) istraživali su destinacijski marketing na internetu australskih regionalnih turističkih organizacija. U studiji koju su napravili Feng i autori (2004) ocjenjivane su marketinške strategije mrežnih stranica, dizajn stranice, marketinške informacije i tehnička kvaliteta, kako bi se usporedile mrežne stranice DMO-a u SAD-u i Kini. Procijenjene su četiri razine mrežnih stranica: državni uredi za turizam i uredi za kongrese i posjetitelje u SAD-u, te pokrajinske i gradske turističke uprave u Kini. Utvrđeno je da su mrežne stranice američkih DMO-a superiornije od onih u Kini u pogledu marketinških strategija i informacija.

Rad Morrisona i autora (2004) sugerira da se pristupi evaluaciji mrežnih stranica mogu klasificirati u četiri skupine temeljem toga zašto i kada se evaluacija provodi (formativna nasuprot sumativnoj) i mjeri li se efektivnost ili djelotvornost. Obuhvatili su pristupe korištene za procjenu turističkih i ugostiteljskih mrežnih stranica (1999. - 2003.) i zaključili pozivom na akciju konzultantima, vodećima u industriji i znanosti, da razviju jedinstvenu proceduru za ocjenjivanje mrežnih stranica u turizmu i ugostiteljstvu. Cassidy i Hamilton (2016) proveli su istraživanje turističkih mrežnih stranica putem fokusnih skupina i *benchmarkinga* temeljem tri dimenzije: estetske, marketinške i tehničke.

Istraživanja koja su se bavila utjecajem sadržaja koji generiraju turisti na ponašanje u turističkoj potrošnji, potvrđuju da su društveni mediji važan izvor informacija. Naime, empirijski rezultati (Wang & Yan, 2022) pokazuju da kvaliteta sadržaja društvenih medija pozitivno utječe na namjeru putovanja, u čemu važnu ulogu ima povjerenje koje posreduje u odnosu između kvalitete informacija i namjere putovanja. Rezultati istraživanja koje su proveli Abdurrahim i autori (2019) i Bilgihan i autori (2016) pokazuju da promocija na društvenim mrežama značajno utječe na pozornost, interes i želju da se pronađe više informacija o promoviranim sadržajima, a to ima značajan utjecaj na turističke odluke.

2.3. PROMOCIJA NA MREŽNIM STRANICAMA HRVATSKIH DESTINACIJA

Većina autora u Hrvatskoj bavila se mrežnima stranicama hotela. Da su u tom pogledu hrvatskim hotelima potrebna određena poboljšanja zaključili su Spremić i Strugar 2008. godine, dok su Galičić i Šimunić, (2010) i Jakovic i Galetic (2014) iznijeli mjere za poboljšanje stanja internetskih prezentacija na mrežnim stranicama hrvatskih hotela s pet zvjezdica. Smatraju da prezentacija ponude putem interneta i mrežnih stranica postaje aktivni generator hotelskog poslovanja i razvoja. Sa svrhom identifikacije kritičnih atributa odredišta i utvrđivanja njihovog doprinosa ukupnom zadovoljstvu turista, Bašan i autori (2021) proveli su istraživanje na Opatijskoj rivijeri. Analiza nije otkrila značajne razlike između percipirane i pružene kvalitete atributa destinacije, što može značiti da su informacije na mrežnim stranicama odavale pravo stanje u destinaciji, bez obzira jesu li one bile dobre ili ne.

Istraživanjima mrežnih stranica destinacija bavili su se i drugi autori. Tako su potencijal Istočne Hrvatske kao turističke destinacije istraživali Biloš i autori (2015), analizirajući trenutno stanje prezentacije na internetu, naglašavajući važnost ove vrste oglašavanja zbog sve aktivnijih korisnika interneta. U svrhu promocije destinacije na mrežnim stranicama provedeno je i istraživanje metodom intervjuiranja stručnjaka – direktora turističkih zajednica Zadarske županije, kao najreprezentativnijih osoba za ovu temu, jer imaju odgovornost i sposobnost poboljšati trenutnu turističku situaciju u županiji (Krajnović et al., 2016).

3. ISTRAŽIVANJE FAKTORA I KRITERIJA U SVRHU POSTAVLJANJA INSTRUMENTA ZA EVALUACIJU MREŽNIH STRANICA TURISTIČKIH ZAJEDNICA

Kako bi se izradio instrument za mjerenje efikasnosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica bilo je potrebno proučiti već postojeća istraživanja u kojima su razvijeni i testirani pojedini kriteriji, faktori i varijable za evaluaciju mrežnih stranica, a posebno mrežnih stranica turističkih objekata i destinacija.

Većina stranih autora bavila se istraživanjem i usporedbom nacionalnih turističkih mrežnih stranica (Kozak et al., 2005; Giannopoulos & Mavragani, 2011; Dasgupta & Utkarsh, 2014) ili hotela (Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Lee & Morrison, 2010). Jeong i Lambert (2001) radili su faktorsku analizu istražujući informacije na mrežnim stranicama za smještaj. Dva faktora su bila isključivo vezana uz hotele, dok su preostala tri faktora bila: opća kvaliteta informacija, lokalitet te dizajn mrežne stranice i format. U radu koji je Perdue objavio 2001. godine istražujući skijališta u Sjevernoj Americi, ukupna kvaliteta mrežne stranice sagledana je kao funkcija četiri osnovna elementa: dostupnost stranice, navigacija, vizualna privlačnost i sadržaj informacija. Van der Marve i Bekker (2003) dali su okvir i metodologiju za evaluaciju mrežnih stranica za e-trgovinu grupirajući kriterije u pet grupa (sučelje, navigacija, sadržaj, pouzdanost i tehnički aspekti), raščlanjujući ih dalje u podgrupe iz kojih je dio kriterija za evaluaciju koji se čine važnima za stranice turističkih zajednica preuzet u ovom radu. Kaplanidou i Vogt (2006) istraživali su utjecaj karakteristika turističkih mrežnih stranica na percipiranu korisnost u planiranju odmora pri čemu su napravili faktorsku analizu tri faktora: jednostavnost navigacije, motivirajući vizualni elementi i funkcionalnost informacija o putovanju. Morrison i autori (2004) su kritične čimbenike u evaluaciji mrežnih stranica u turizmu i hotelijerstvu podijelili u četiri perspektive: tehnička, marketinška, interna i korisnička. Predložili su i standardizirani obrazac za procjenu mrežnih stranica u sedam kategorija: tehnički aspekti, jednostavnost korištenja, atraktivnost stranice, marketinška učinkovitost, popularnost poveznica, pomoć u planiranju putovanja i usklađenost sa zakonima. Iako im fokus nije bio isključivo na turističkim zajednicama, preporuke iz njihovog istraživanja utjecale su na formiranje mjernog instrumenta u ovom radu. Dasgupta i Utkarsh (2014) proveli su analizu sadržaja službenih turističkih mrežnih stranica deset najprivlačnijih zemalja koristeći pet osnovnih faktora koji utječu na njihovu učinkovitost: kvaliteta informacija, jednostavnost korištenja, sigurnost/privatnost, responzivnost i vizualni izgled, koji su dodatno razvijeni u 68 potkriterija. Giannopoulos i Mavragani (2011) su šest nacionalnih stranica procijenili kroz: vizualni izgled, kvalitetu i raznovrsnost informacija, jednostavnost korištenja, interaktivnost i personalizaciju.

Benchmarking nacionalnih turističkih organizacija radili su Han i Mills (2006). Od 47 različitih instrumenata razvili jedan, primjenjiv u različitim poslovnim subjektima turističkog i ugostiteljskog sektora. Testirali su ga na 25 nacionalnih turističkih organizacija diljem svijeta. Iako je većina kategorija i podkategorija instrumenta koji koriste identična već navedenim istraživanjima, stavke vezane uz kvalitetu informacija na stranicama i responzivnost su jedinstvene, i ovdje su uvrštene kao evaluacijski kriteriji. Obzirom na informacije koje turisti traže prije posjeta destinaciji temeljem kojih donose odluku o posjetu, ovo istraživanje nadopunjeno je podkategorijama iz rada koje su 2004. godine objavili Cai i autori. Neke podkategorije preuzete su iz instrumenta korištenog u analizi sadržaja koji su kreirali Kozak i autori (2005) uspoređujući turističku promociju putem mrežnih stranica 19 mediteranskih zemalja. Što klijenti u SAD-u i Kanadi traže od mrežnih stranica destinacija istraživali su Choi i autori 2007. godine. Rezultati su pokazali da preferencije koje turisti imaju vezano uz informacije ovise o vrsti stranice. To sugerira da se stranice lokalne turističke zajednice po svom sadržaju razlikuju od nacionalnih i drugih te da turisti traže informacije prije posjeta, za vrijeme i nakon posjeta destinaciji, što je sve uvršteno u podkategorije ovog istraživanja. Korisnost 40 mrežnih stranica u promociji turističkih destinacija istraživali su i Woodside i autori (2011) i pri tome kreirali metriku s više stavki iz koje su neki atributi vezano uz kvalitetu informacija i jednostavnost korištenja uvršteni u mjerni instrument ovog istraživanja. Pojedini kriteriji vezani uz tri faktora (kvalitetu informacija, jednostavnost korištenja i izgled/privlačnost) preuzeti su iz komparativne studije istraživanja hotela koje su 2010. godine napravili Lee i Morrison. Uz korištenje pristupa ***Balanced Scorecard*** oni su kroz četiri perspektive istražili izvedbu mrežnih stranica vodećih hotela u Južnoj Koreji i SAD-u.

Pregled dizajna mrežnih stranica u turizmu i hotelijerstvu radili su Cheng Chu Chan i autori (2021) sintetizirajući i integrirajući nalaze 78 znanstvenih članaka o utjecaju dizajna na posjetitelje. Definirali su i detaljno opisali karakteristike pet kategorija dizajna (sadržajni, sustavni, osjetilni, društveni i hedonistički). Kategorije hedonističkog, osjetilnog i društvenog dizajna imaju karakteristike koje su korištene za formiranje podkategorija ovog mjernog instrumenta. Stoga se u specifičnost novokreiranog mjernog instrumenta ubraja komponenta "hedonističkog dizajna" u vidu inovativnosti, jedinstvenosti i kreativnosti s jedne strane (npr. "proširena stvarnost" - AR; "Internet stvari" – IoT i sl.), te neugodnih iskustava s mrežnim stranicama (npr. buka, ***banneri***, loša rezolucija i sl.), s druge strane. U kategoriju "osjetilni dizajn", osim vizualnog (grafičkog) sadržaja stranice koji se spominje i u prethodnim radovima, Cheng Chu Chan i autori (2021) uvrštavaju i audio aspekt. Multimedijski elementi i njihova primjena u internetskim sadržajima spominje se i u drugim istraživanjima koja naglašavaju da je pored teksta, slika i videa izuzetno važan zvuk, odnosno muzika ili govor koji omogućavaju da doživljaj sadržaja bude potpun (Galičić & Šimunić, 2010). Značajne probleme vezane uz pristupačnost turističkim informacijama s kojima se suočavaju osobe s invaliditetom istaknuli su Eusébio i autori (2023). To je razlog zbog kojega se peti faktor (izgled/privlačnost) u ovom instrumentu odnosi kako na vizualne, tako i na druge aspekte izvedbe.

Pri kreiranju mjernog instrumenta u ovom istraživanju preuzeti su najvažniji faktori i evaluacijski kriteriji prisutni u prethodnim istraživanjima. Neki od njih prilagođeni su suvremenom trenutku, a dodani su i novi, zbog čega se njihov broj povećao. Dodan je faktor vezan uz pristupačnost i povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama.

3.1. UTJECAJ NOVIH TEHNOLOGIJA NA KREIRANJE FAKTORA "PRISTUPAČNOST/ POVEZANOST S DRUGIM MEDIJIMA I PLATFORMAMA"

Obzirom da društvene mreže dnevno prate događanja i važan su pokazatelj života pojedine turističke zajednice, dodatnu vrijednost predstavlja njihovo povezivanje s mrežnim stranicama. Također, turisti za informiranje često koriste mobitele pa je važan pokazatelj dostupnosti postojanje stranica i na raznim verzijama mobilnih sučelja. Naime, mobilni uređaji mogu koristiti razne aplikacije i putem internetske povezanosti pružati usluge u bilo koje vrijeme, s bilo kojeg mjesta, specifičnim grupama turista, turističkim nišama, koje u realnom vremenu mogu razmjenjivati iskustva i ideje (Dickinson et al., 2016). Tradicionalni turizam se sve više personalizira, omogućava se interakcija, koriste se sustavi preporuke temeljeni na profilima posjetitelja, razne aplikacije te sustavi za praćenje lokacije koji pokušavaju pretpostaviti ponašanje korisnika i postići oglašavanje temeljeno na lokaciji. Stoga se danas govori o konceptu "pametnog turizma" (eng. ***smart tourism***) kao tehnološkom ekosistemu (Kontogianni & Alepis, 2020). Prednost koju ovo donosi je, između ostaloga, mogućnost prikazivanja u vidu proširene stvarnosti (eng. ***augmented reality***). Prema istraživanju radova objavljenih u periodu od 2013. do 2019. godine (Kontogianni & Alepis, 2020), interes za koncept "pametnog turizma" se s godinama značajno razvija jer on povezuje fizički i digitalni svijet koristeći prednost društvenih mreža, računalstvo u oblaku i Internet of Things (IoT), te međupovezanost između uređaja bilo kada i bilo gdje. Dodatno se pojavio i koncept "proširene stvarnosti" koji, putem multimedijskih formata i kompjutorskih kamera/zvučnika, pametnog telefona ili drugih uređaja, može stvoriti percepciju realnog svijeta. S tim u marketingu u turizmu raste značaj mobilnih aplikacija i pametnih telefona (Al-Hazmi, 2021; Ružić et al., 2012) koje mogu privući turiste, pojačati iskustvo i zabavu te priskrbiti dodatne vrijedne informacije turističkom posjetitelju (Kontogianni & Alepis, 2020).

Najnovija istraživanja pokazuju da postoji izravan odnos između broja posjetitelja turističkog odredišta i prisutnosti na društvenim mrežama, te da društvene mreže pozitivno utječu na interaktivnost, odnosno, ponašanje pri kojem se vrši utjecaj i dijeli znanje, a korištenje društvenih mreža smatra se dijelom faktora "jednostavnost korištenja" (Bilgihan et al., 2016).

Korištenje raznih kanala (višekanalni marketing) danas je vrlo značajno u kontekstu izgradnje marke pojedine destinacije te u nastojanju da se turisti iz faze svjesnosti dovedu do odluke (Wang & Yan, 2022). Iako je adaptacija mrežnih stranica i usluga za korištenje na mobilnim telefonima vrlo troškovno intenzivna, intenzitet korištenja pametnih telefona koji imaju internetski pristup značajno raste, pa je to razlog zbog kojeg se u destinacijskom marketingu sve više u to ulaže (Groth & Haslwanter, 2016). Responzivne mobilne turističke mrežne stranice prilagodljive su za prikazivanje na desktop računalima, laptopima, tabletima i mobilnim telefonima, što utječe na doseg sadržaja, djelotvornost i zadovoljstvo korisnika te je izuzetno važno za imidž destinacije. Iako se u dosadašnjim radovima ove teme svrstavaju u faktor "jednostavnost korištenja" i/ili faktor "responzivnost", njihov značaj je toliko narastao da se ukazala potreba za kreiranjem novog, zasebnog faktora. Stoga je u ovom instrumentu kreiran faktor "pristupačnost/povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama", a u okviru njega su se našli evaluacijski kriteriji koji se odnose na mobilne uređaje i aplikacije.

Pristupačnost se pokazala kao važan faktor već u kvalitativnoj meta-analizi koju su Park i Gretzel radili 2007. godine provodeći istraživanje faktora uspjeha mrežnih stranica u okviru destinacijskog marketinga na uzorku od 53 rada iz turizma i 100 radova iz ne-turističkih djelatnosti. Istaknuli su 13 zajedničkih faktora koji se nalaze u većini studija iz područja turizma i to redom: kvaliteta informacija (87%), jednostavnost upotrebe (60%), sigurnost/privatnost (43%), responzivnost (42%), služba za korisnike (39%), interaktivnost (39%), pristupačnost (29%), navigacija (27%), vizualni izgled (23%), personalizacija (19%), povjerenje (18%), marka/ugled (16%) i poticaj (16%). Dok je većina faktora ista u svim studijama, kod ne-turističkih djelatnosti faktor "ispunjenje" pojavljuje se u čak 90% slučajeva, a autori Park and Gretzel (2007) tumače kako se on odnosi na dostupnost, praćenje i pravovremenu isporuku. Tako se može zaključiti da je odavno postojala potreba za stalnim praćenjem sadržaja, dostupnošću i personalizacijom, no u međuvremenu je došlo do velikih tehnoloških pomaka koji su utjecali na samu izradu mrežne stranice i njezino povezivanje s mobilnim sučeljem te korištenje aplikacija. Pored toga, u većini radova koje navode Park i Gretzel (2007) spominje se samo vizualni dojam stranice jer tada multimedija nije bila na današnjoj razini postojanja zvučnih, video prikaza, virtualnih šetnji ili prikaza putem kamera postavljenih na destinacijama, što je također sagledavano prilikom formiranja evaluacijskih kriterija ovog mjernog instrumenta.

Istražujući mrežne stranice DMO-a Južne Koreje, Sjedinjenih Država i Njemačke došlo se do saznanja da se hiperlink informacije također mogu iskoristiti za dobrobit turista (Park & Stepchenkova, 2023). Na Instagram i njegovu potencijalnu vrijednost u brendiranju destinacija kroz fotografiju u Indoneziji usredotočio se rad koji su objavili Fatanti i Suyadnya (2015). Pored Instagrama, izdvajaju se i druge platforme na kojima turističke zajednice dijele sadržaje i s kojima povezuju svoje mrežne stranice: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest i Youtube (Biloš et al., 2015; Kaur, 2017). Analiza utjecaja objavljenog sadržaja na angažman turista pokazuju da interaktivne i informativne objave postižu najveći angažman na Facebooku odnosno Twitteru (Shabana et al., 2023), a za korištenje i dijeljenje informacija značajna je izgradnja povjerenja (Wong et al., 2023). U mjerni instrument dodan je Tik Tok koji se danas koristi u sektoru turizma (Wahid et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2023) uz druge spontane online društvene mreže koje mogu biti nezavisni proizvodi (npr. BeReal) ili značajke dodane postojećim (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2023).

3.2. SPECIFIČNOSTI FAKTORA "PRAVNA USKLAĐENOST/ SIGURNOST"

Izazovi koji se javljaju pri kreiranju mrežnih stranica su privatnost korisnika i svijest o kontekstu (Kontogianni & Alepis, 2020). Iako postoji značajan broj radova čiji evaluacijski kriteriji sadržavaju faktor "sigurnost/ privatnost" (Van der Marve & Bekker, 2003; Kim et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2017) ili "usklađenje sa zakonom" (Morrison et al., 2004), danas oni nisu u skladu s novim tehnološkim dosezima i zakonodavstvom Europske unije. Stoga je bilo potrebno istražiti aktualnu zakonsku regulativu vezanu uz zaštitu pojedinaca u vezi s obradom osobnih podataka. Turističke zajednice koje postupaju u skladu s poštivanjem i zaštitom osobnih podataka i privatnosti korisnika na mrežnim stranicama ističu Izjavu o privatnosti sukladno Uredbi (EU) 2016/679 Europskog parlamenta i Vijeća od 27. travnja 2016. (Službeni akt EU, 2016.). ***The General Data Protection***

Regulation (GDPR) je vrlo strogi zakon o privatnosti i sigurnosti čija uredba je u Europskoj uniji (EU) stupila na snagu 25. svibnja 2018. i koji nameće obveze organizacijama diljem svijeta koje ciljaju ili prikupljaju podatke koji se odnose na stanovništvo EU. S GDPR-om Europa pokazuje jasan stav o privatnosti i sigurnosti podataka pojedinaca jer za one koji se ne usklade s GDPR-om propisane su ozbiljne novčane kazne (GDPR.EU, pristupljeno 10/5/2023.). Stoga su se sve mrežne stranice pravnih subjekata od 2018. prilagodile i poštuju pravila o privatnosti i sigurnosti podataka koji se sakupljaju i čuvaju.

Turističke zajednice u Hrvatskoj danas ističu Obrasce zahtjeva za pristup informacijama, odnosno Obrasce zahtjeva za ponovnu uporabu informacija koji se mogu uputiti službeniku za informiranje, a sve u skladu sa Zakonom o pravu na pristup informacijama (NN, 25/13) i Zakonom o izmjenama i dopunama zakona o pravu na pristup informacijama (NN, 69/22).

Sve navedene informacije bile su korisne pri ažuriranju i nadopuni nekih već postojećih, no danas zastarjelih opisa kriterija unutar faktora “pravna usklađenost/sigurnost”.

4. REZULTATI ISTRAŽIVANJA – INSTRUMENT ZA MJERENJE EFIKASNOSTI MREŽNIH STRANICA TURISTIČKIH ZAJEDNICA

U Tablici 1. prikazano je šest faktora i 99 kriterija za evaluaciju djelotvornosti mrežnih stranica, postavljenih temeljem prethodno navedenih istraživanja, a pomoću kojih se može raditi analiza sadržaja stranica turističkih zajednica. Kriteriji su raspoređeni prema faktorima na sljedeći način: kvaliteta informacija (22 kriterija), jednostavnost korištenja (17 kriterija), responzivnost (18 kriterija), pravna usklađenost/sigurnost (9 kriterija), izgled/privlačnost (22 kriterija) i pristupačnost/povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama (11 kriterija). Kod svakog faktora navedena su istraživanja koja su utjecala na njegovo postavljanje te postavljanje kriterija koji mu pripadaju.

Tablica 1: Faktori i kriteriji za evaluaciju djelotvornosti mrežnih stranica

1. Kvaliteta informacija Jeong & Lambert (2001), Cai et al. (2004), Kozak et al. (2005), Han & Mills (2006), Kaplanidou & Vogt (2006), Morrison et al. (2004), Lee & Morrison (2010), Woodside et al. (2011), Giannopoulos & Mavragani (2011), Dasgupta & Utkarsh (2014), Font et al. (2023)	**2. Jednostavnost korištenja** Van der Marwe & Bekker (2003), Kozak et al. (2005), Kaplanidou & Vogt (2006), Morrison et al. (2004.), Lee & Morrison (2010), Woodside et al. (2011), Giannopoulos & Mavragani (2011), Dasgupta & Utkarsh (2014)	**3. Responzivnost Jeong & Lambert** (2001), Van der Marwe & Bekker (2003), Kozak et al. (2005), Han & Mills (2006), Choi et al. (2007), Dasgupta & Utkarsh (2014), Cheng Chu Chan et al. (2021)	**4. Pravna usklađenost/ sigurnost** Van der Marwe & Bekker (2003), Morrison et al. (2004), Kim et al. (2011), Huang et al. (2017), GDPR. EU (2023)	**5. Izgled/ privlačnost (vizualna i druga)** Jeong & Lambert (2001), Van der Marwe & Bekker (2003), Kozak et al. (2005), Kaplanidou & Vogt (2006), Morrison et al. (2004), Lee & Morrison (2010), Galičić & Šimunić (2010), Giannopoulos & Mavragani (2011), Dasgupta & Utkarsh (2014), Cheng Chu Chan et al. (2021), Eusébio et al. (2023)	**6. Pristupačnost/ povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama** Biloš et al. (2015), Kaur (2017), Huang et al. (2017) Wahid et al. (2023); Zhou et al. (2023)
1.1. Osigurane su kulturno-povijesne informacije o odredištu	2.1. Lako je pronaći stranicu	3.1. Dostupni podaci Turističke zajednice (e-mail, adresa, kontakt broj, kontakt osoba...)	4.1. Objašnjeni uvjeti korištenja	5.1. Početna stranica sažeta i jasna	6.1. Mobitel Iphone - IoS
1.2. Informacije o prirodi i znamenitostima	2.2. Sadržaj je logično strukturiran u različitim sekcijama	3.2. Obvezna registracija na stranici	4.2. Objašnjena politika kolačića	5.2. Logotip, izjava o pozicioniranju, slogan ili elementi marke prikazani na svakoj stranici	6.2. Mobitel – drugo - Android
1.3. Postoje informacije o relevantnim događajima, sportovima, izložbama, koncertima, muzejima i dr.	2.3. Jasni i učinkoviti alati za navigaciju na svakoj stranici / dosljedna navigacija kroz stranicu	3.3. Jednostavna registracija na stranici	4.3. Postoji mogućnost odabira nužnih i ostalih kolačića	5.3. Tekst ili fotografija koja se mijenja ili pomiče	6.3. Facebook

1.4. Kako stići/ pristupiti odredištu	2.4. Mapa stranice/sadržaj dostupan na svakoj stranici	3.4. Interaktivni organizator putovanja	4.4. Sigurnosni protokoli dobro komunicirani	5.4. Fotografije odredišta	6.4. LinkedIn
1.5. Informacije o prijevoznim sredstvima u području odredišta	2.5. Tekst jasan i čitljiv	3.5. Uvjeti i odredbe lako dostupni	4.5. Izjava o pristupu informacijama	5.5. Fotografski prikaz pružatelja usluga	6.5. Twitter
1.6. Karta okruženja	2.6. Jednostavno za istraživanje specifične ideje ili subjekta/opcije pretraživanja	3.6. Ime, e-mail, adresa, telefon pružatelja usluga	4.6. Opća pravila privatnosti (Pravilo privatnosti) dostupno je na stranici	5.6. Virtualne ture	6.6. Instagram
1.7. Lokalne informacije o vremenu	2.7. Jednostavno pronalaženje određenih informacija / pretraga po ključnim riječima	3.7. Formular za rezervaciju / online kupnja postoji	4.7. Korišteni sigurni sustavi plaćanja	5.7. Izravne kamere	6.7. Pinterest
1.8. Pružene su informacije korisne za boravak na odredištu (dokumenti (viza), navike, valuta, preporučena odjeća, lokalno vrijeme...)	2.8. Jednostavno korištenje tražilice / prilagođeno korisniku	3.8. Dostupni obrasci za povratne informacije / prilika za ispunjavanje online ankete	4.8. Jasno su prikazane informacije o sigurnosti plaćanja	5.8. Učinkovito korištenje bijelog prostora	6.8. Youtube
1.9. Podaci o vrsti smještaja	2.9. Jednostavan povratak na glavnu stranicu (početna tipka dostupna sa svih stranica)	3.9. Brzi odgovori na upite e-poštom	4.9. Postoje "pečati" koji potvrđuju da su informacije na stranici sigurne / akreditirani sigurnosni sustavi	5.9. Učinkovita i dosljedna upotreba boje / dobar kontrast boja	6.9. Tik Tok
1.10. Kratak opis usluge koja se nudi, hotelski objekt, raspoloživost i cijena soba, restorani/ barovi, putničke agencije	2.10. Jednostavan pristup potpunim informacijama o odredištu	3.10. Online pritužba		5.10. Učinkovito i dosljedno korištenje pozadine / kontrast između pozadine i teksta	6.10. www.croatia.hr

1.11. Dostupne su sve pojedinosti o paket aranžmanima/ prijedlozi itinerera/rute	2.11. Funkcija pomoći jednostavna za korištenje	3.11. Online upit (FAQ)		5.11. Učinkoviti stilovi pisanja teksta (fontovi)	6.11. Aplikacije
1.12. Informacije o cijenama	2.12. Nema neispravnih veza / nema grešaka u tražilici	3.12. Svjedočanstva / komentari posjetitelja		5.12. Grafika i multimedija olakšavaju razumijevanje stranice (animacija i video)	
1.13. Informacije o COVID-19	2.13. Veze (unutarnje i vanjske) označene i definirane	3.13. Visok stupanj interaktivnosti u zajednici		5.13. Lako razumljivi simboli/ikone	
1.14. Hitne informacije o zdravlju ili policiji	2.14. Mogućnost povratka s mjesta na koje se skrene u pretraživanju	3.14. Broj posjetitelja mrežne stranice		5.14. Brzo preuzimanje / veličina grafike i multimedije: nema negativnog utjecaja na učitavanje	
1.15. Pregled svih informacija za konačnu odluku	2.15. Kalendar posebnih događanja	3.15. Dostupnost chat-a za diskusiju među turistima o destinacijama i iskustvima		5.15. Dosljedan stil stranica	
1.16. Kako doći do prijedloga / gdje potražiti više informacija	2.16. Dostupno na nekoliko jezika	3.16. Program članstva/ nagrađivanja		5.16. Ispravan pravopis i gramatika	
1.17. Popis nagrada ili priznanja koje je mrežna stranica primila	2.17. Nema stranica "u izradi".	3.17. Zahtjev za brošuru ili vodič		5.17. Veličina stranice stane u prozor preglednika	

1.18. 2-3 klika za potrebne informacije		3.18. Posjetitelji stranice mogu odabrati primanje posebnih vijesti, newslettera ili ponuda za odmor		5.18. Dostupna je verzija za ispis određene stranice	
1.19. Informacije se ne ponavljaju				5.19. Dostupna je verzija koja sadrži samo tekst	
1.20. Informacije na stranici su aktualne i pravovremene				5.20. Nema neugodnosti ni stvaranja neugodnih osjećaja kod korisnika (buka, banneri, loša rezolucija...)	
1.21. Posebne informacije za pojedine skupine korisnika (posjetitelji s malom djecom, dojenčad, osobe s posebnim potrebama, kućni ljubimci...)				5.21. Inovacija; postoje elementi povezani s kreativnošću i jedinstvenošću stranice (proširena stvarnost - AR; Internet stvari - IoT...)	
1.22. Pokazatelji održivog turizma i pripadajuće informacije				5.22. Prilagođeno osobama s invaliditetom	

Temeljem ovdje postavljenih faktora i kriterija može se napraviti analiza sadržaja mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica tako da ocjenjivači za svaki pojedini kriterij procjenjuju je li on prisutan na stranici ili nije. Ukoliko se želi učiniti dublja analiza i dobiti detaljniji odgovor vezano uz neki specifični kriterij, on se dodatno može procijeniti na Likertovoj skali 1-5.

5. ZAKLJUČAK

Prvo istraživačko pitanje odnosilo se na ključne faktore za evaluaciju djelotvornosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica. Istraživanje je pokazalo šest ključnih faktora i to su: kvaliteta informacija; jednostavnost korištenja; responzivnost; pravna usklađenost/sigurnost; izgled/

privlačnost; i pristupačnost/povezanost s drugim medijima i platformama. U usporedbi s prethodnim istraživanjima, oni su raščlanjeni na poprilično veliki broj evaluacijskih kriterija zbog adaptiranja instrumenta turističkim zajednicama te novih kriterija za istraživanje mrežnih stranica koji su se u međuvremenu pojavili, pa tako instrument ima 99 evaluacijskih kriterija. Time se odgovara i na drugo istraživačko pitanje vezano uz suvremene trendove u turizmu i njegovom okruženju te, u skladu s tim, adaptaciju kriterija. Najznačajnije promjene odnose se na pravno okruženje zbog zakonskih regulativa vezanih uz građane EU te na novosti u svijetu tehnologije. Naime, cjelokupno tehnološko okruženje, računala, video zapisi, mobilni telefoni i Internet danas općenito doprinose boljem funkcioniranju, ekonomskom rastu i razvoju turističkih zajednica (Kuźmicki & Kuś, 2019). Stoga su danas stranice institucija koje se bave turizmom povezane s društvenim mrežama i platformama za distribuciju informacija, pojačano kontaktiranje/informiranje posjetitelja i rasprostiranje sadržaja. Uz to, zakonska regulativa koja se tiče stranica koje posjećuju građani EU, značajno se promijenila od 2018. godine.

Posljednje pitanje odnosilo se na primjenjivost samog mjernog instrumenta. Osim što je on koristan za analizu djelotvornosti mrežnih stranica turističkih zajednica u zemljama EU, čime se može dobiti uvid u njihovo ukupno i usporedno stanje, isti instrument može se primijeniti na slične institucije koje promoviraju turističke destinacije, događaje i usluge iz područja turizma i u ostatku svijeta, u turističkim zajednicama i organizacijama čije mrežne stranice posjećuju građani EU, pa se iz tog razloga usklađuju s GDPR-om.

6. DOPRINOS I OGRANIČENJA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Turizam je u mnogim zemljama agregator gospodarskih aktivnosti te generator prodaje i izvoza, pa je prvenstveni značaj ovoga rada u aktualnosti teme koja pobuđuje široki interes. Ovaj mjerni instrument naglašava korištenje novih tehnika i alata čime je moguće preciznije ciljati na određene segmente i ostvariti konkurentsku prednost. Njegova primjena može biti od iznimne koristi destinacijskim menadžerima i voditeljima turističkih zajednica u razvoju kvalitetne i suvremene mrežne stranice koja može značajno doprinijeti povećanju posjećenosti bilo kojeg grada ili regije te ministarstvima i upraviteljima u turizmu koji njegovim korištenjem mogu doći do vrijednih usporednih analiza. Ulaganje u kvalitetu mrežnih stranica može poboljšati tržišnu poziciju i otvoriti nove prilike u vidu bolje ponude, smanjenja sezonalnosti, povećanja zadovoljstva gostiju i potrošnje, što posredno otvara i nova radna mjesta. Također, praktične smjernice za učinkovito oblikovanje sadržaja mrežne stranice, uz adekvatno korištenje platformi za dijeljenje, osigurava veći angažman turista i distribuciju na različitim platformama (Shabana et al., 2023; Wahid et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). Poboljšanja je potrebno provesti i kako bi se prevladale informacijske poteškoće s kojima se suočavaju turisti s invaliditetom (Eusébio et al., 2023).

Ograničenja ovog istraživanja mogu se povezati s metodom koja se isključivo odnosila na proučavanje sekundarnih izvora podataka. Iako je korišten veliki broj već testiranih mjernih instrumenata, kao i meta-analiza, u kojima je sumirano svo prethodno znanje, u daljnjem istraživanju bi instrument trebalo praktično testirati te provesti kvalitativnu analizu određenog broja stranica.

Iako se ovaj mjerni instrument može koristiti u raznim zemljama i raznim oblicima i vrstama turističkih zajednica, ipak postoji mogućnost da su neke od njih toliko specifične da zahtijevaju njegovu prilagodbu. Međutim, unatoč postojanju geografskih i nacionalnih razlika u organizaciji i nazivima turističkih zajednica i DMO-a, kvaliteta mrežnih stranica se može procjenjivati istim instrumentom.

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THE ROLE OF BLOCKCHAIN-BASED ADVERTISING IN ENHANCING CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND REPUTATION: A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the Internet is one of the dominating technologies over the last decade. This remarkable innovation has led to the alteration and advancement of marketing strategies. Many industries, including airlines and retailers, use blockchain-based apps and platforms to create strong and secure relations with the consumer. Considering the above, this research aimed to determine the role of Blockchain technology (BCT) and to analyse the radical impacts of BCT in achieving customer trust and brand recognition. This study investigates the impact of blockchain technology on consumer trust and brand reputation by examining the influence of decentralisation, transparency, and security and privacy. For this, the research followed a quantitative research method, whereby the primary data was collected using a questionnaire and secondary literature. A total of 113 responses were collected and analysed using SPSS Statistics. Similarly, the research used previous articles and literature to present the secondary findings. The results indicated a positive and significant influence of decentralised ads, transparency and security/privacy of blockchain technology on consumer trust and brand reputation. In addition, the study's findings depict a positive and strong association of these features with consumer trust and brand reputation. Based on the results of the research, it can be recommended that companies and industries looking to improve customer trust and brand recognition should consider implementing blockchain technology in their marketing strategies.

Keywords: Blockchain technology, consumer trust, brand reputation, blockchain-based advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

A Brand is a promise enclosed in an experience; it is indeed a consistent promise enclosed in a consistent experience. The role of branding is central to keeping the brand promise with the customers in the global market, ensuring the quality of the product or service. Marketing strategies have been adapted concerning the evolution of digital technology (Saleem et al., 2018). The emergence of the Internet is one of the dominating technologies over the last decade. This remarkable innovation has led to the alteration and advancement of marketing strategies (Saleem et al., 2018). Blockchain refers to an advanced digital system of IT that helps the consumer to use decentralised databases and mutually to store and track transactions (Kokina et al., 2017, Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017). Blockchain-based technology has been a great approach to nurturing the relationship with the consumer and for brand recognition. It precisely enhances the engagement of the consumer with the brand (Essamri et al., 2019, Scholz and Duffy, 2018). Many industries, including airlines and retailers, use blockchain-based apps and platforms to create strong and secure relations with the consumer (Casino et al., 2018). On the other hand, it produces some potential barriers and challenges which result in inconvenience in consumer experience and expectations in their journey with the brand (Scholz & Duffy, 2018).

The technology in IT has revolutionised within a few years and it has been challenging to grind down its roots in becoming the most sustainable and secure tool for customers. BCT is currently a low-paced approach to getting acceptance from the consumer. The major lack of acceptance of this technology is due to lack of user adoption, privacy invasion and security threats, technological limitations, regulatory hurdles and lack of standardisation (Kumar et al., 2022). Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the recent trends of blockchain in gaining consumers' satisfaction and trust and how these marketing tools can contribute to enhancing the reputation of a brand.

Blockchain technology emerged as a revolutionary development with the potential to transform various industries, including digital marketing and advertising. As a decentralised and transparent system, blockchain has garnered interest among researchers and practitioners alike, primarily due to its ability to facilitate secure, transparent and efficient transactions (Boukis, 2020, Rabby et al., 2022). In the context of digital marketing, blockchain technology has been explored in various applications such as online consumer reviews (Salah et al., 2019, Karode, 2021), food traceability (Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021), electronic payment systems (Ahn et al., 2018) and supply chain traceability (Cao et al., 2021). Furthermore, blockchain-based solutions have been studied in the context of ethical marketing (Tan & Salo, 2023) and the sharing economy (Jenkins, 2022).

Despite the growing body of literature on the applications of blockchain technology in digital marketing, there still needs to be more research which investigates explicitly the role of blockchain-based advertising in enhancing consumer trust and brand reputation. Existing studies have primarily focused on blockchain's impact on consumer behaviour (Wang et al., 2021) and its potential to improve trust in various contexts, such as food traceability (Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021), supply chains (Cao et al., 2021) and online reviews (Salah et al., 2019, Karode, 2021). However, the potential of blockchain-based advertising to cultivate trust and bolster brand reputation has yet to be comprehensively explored.

While existing literature extensively explores the applications of Blockchain technology (BCT) in sectors like food traceability, online review systems and supply chain management, there appears to be limited comprehensive research on its specific role in the broader realm of marketing (e.g., Ertemel, 2018, Rabby et al., 2022). While some studies have delved into how blockchain might transform digital marketing or its implications for brand-consumer relationships (e.g., Boukis, 2020, Rahman, 2021), there is a need for a holistic understanding of BCT's overarching role in the marketing landscape. Furthermore, while trust and brand reputation are often discussed in the context of specific applications like food traceability (e.g., Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021) and online reviews (e.g., Karode et al., 2022), a comprehensive analysis of how BCT influences customer trust and brand reputation in marketing is relatively uncharted territory.

In the light of this research gap, the current paper aims to investigate the role of blockchain-based advertising in enhancing consumer trust and brand reputation. By leveraging blockchain technology's transparency, immutability and decentralised nature, this study seeks to understand how blockchain-based advertising initiatives can contribute to more secure, trustworthy and credible advertising practices, ultimately leading to a more substantial brand reputation and consumer trust. This paper aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for researchers and practitioners in digital marketing and advertising through a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and an in-depth analysis of blockchain-based advertising in enhancing consumer trust and brand reputation.

Given the gaps above, this study aims to offer a thorough exploration of Blockchain technology's role in the domain of marketing. First, it seeks to determine BCT's profound and multifaceted role in shaping marketing strategies, consumer engagement and overall marketing efficiency. Secondly, the study aims to elucidate the radical impacts of BCT in bolstering customer trust and enhancing brand reputation, deciphering its transformative potential in nurturing brand-customer relationships, and ensuring authentic and transparent marketing practices. Through these objectives, the study strives to provide a roadmap for how marketers can harness the power of blockchain technology in crafting future-forward marketing strategies.

Thus, the study develops the research objectives:

1. To determine the role of Blockchain technology (BCT) in marketing.
2. To analyse the radical impacts of Blockchain technology (BCT) in achieving customer trust and brand reputation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. ROLE OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN MARKETING

The role of blockchain technology in marketing has been increasingly recognised in recent years, with various studies investigating its potential applications and implications in the marketing domain. Online consumer reviews play a critical role in shaping consumer decisions and perceptions of brands (Salah et al., 2019). Blockchain technology has been proposed to enhance the reliability and credibility of online reviews (Karode, 2021, Rahman, 2021). By leveraging blockchain's decentralised and transparent nature, these systems can help mitigate issues such as fake reviews and review manipulation (Karode et al., 2020, Karode & Werapun, 2022).

Blockchain technology has also been explored in food traceability (Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021). Blockchain-based traceability solutions can enhance consumer trust and influence retailer choice by providing a secure and transparent system for tracking food products along the supply chain (Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021). This has been demonstrated in studies on blockchain-based traceability systems for beef supply chains (Cao et al., 2021) and herbal products (Yik et al., 2021). Also, in electronic payment systems, blockchain technology has been proposed to enhance trust and reputation (Ahn et al., 2018). Reptor, for instance, is a blockchain-based model that derives trust and reputation for electronic payment systems (Ahn et al., 2018). Similarly, Liu et al. (2019) developed an anonymous reputation system for IIoT-enabled retail marketing based on the PoS (Proof of Stake) blockchain.

Supply chain traceability is another area where blockchain technology can offer significant benefits. Blockchain can strengthen consumer trust and improve traceability by providing a transparent, immutable and decentralised system for tracking goods throughout the supply chain (Cao et al., 2021). In this context, blockchain has been used to implement a human-machine reconciliation mechanism to enhance trust in beef supply chain traceability (Cao et al., 2021). The potential of blockchain technology to promote ethical marketing has also been explored in the literature. For instance, Tan and Salo (2023) discuss the role of blockchain in the sharing economy, emphasising its ability to foster ethical marketing practices through decentralisation and transparency. Lastly, the role of blockchain technology in the metaverse and virtual commerce has gained traction in recent studies (Hopkins, 2022, Jenkins, 2022). These studies highlight the potential of blockchain-based digital assets, data visualisation tools, and immersive virtual shopping experiences in shaping the future of retail and e-commerce (Jenkins, 2022).

2.2. ROLE OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN CONSUMER TRUST

The existing literature on the role of blockchain technology in fostering consumer trust spans various domains, including, but not limited to, online consumer reviews, food traceability, electronic payment systems and supply chain traceability. The transparency, immutability and decentralisation of blockchain technology have been associated with its potential to improve consumer trust in marketing and advertising (Madhani, 2022). Blockchain's ability to enhance trust in the marketing mix strategy is highlighted as a key benefit. It can offer marketers new ways to demonstrate authenticity and transparency in their campaigns (Madhani, 2022). In the context of ethical marketing, Tan and Salo (2023) discuss the role of blockchain in the sharing economy. They argue that blockchain can foster ethical marketing practices by providing a transparent and decentralised platform for sharing resources, thus addressing trust, privacy and security issues. Blockchain's potential to facilitate ethical marketing can ultimately enhance consumer trust in brands operating within the sharing economy.

The retail metaverse and virtual commerce have also been identified as areas where blockchain technology can foster consumer trust (Hopkins, 2022, Jenkins, 2022). By enabling the creation of blockchain-based digital assets, data visualisation tools and immersive virtual shopping experiences, blockchain can give consumers greater confidence in their transactions' authenticity, ownership and security in virtual environments. In blockchain-based food traceability, Garaus and Treiblmaier (2021) emphasise the mediating role of trust in influencing retailer choice. Their study demonstrates that the increased trust resulting from blockchain-based food traceability systems can lead consumers to choose retailers that adopt such systems, showcasing the potential impact of enhanced trust on consumer behaviour.

Overall, the existing literature on the role of blockchain technology in enhancing consumer trust has covered various aspects and applications, such as online consumer reviews, food traceability, electronic payment systems, supply chain traceability, ethical marketing and the sharing economy. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the potential of blockchain-based advertising to foster consumer trust and improve brand reputation. This gap calls for further investigation into how blockchain technology can be leveraged to bolster consumer trust in the context of advertising and marketing communications.

2.3. ROLE OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN BRAND REPUTATION

Blockchain technology's ability to improve trust in online consumer reviews can significantly impact the brand reputation (Salah et al., 2019, Karode, 2021). As online reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions of brands, ensuring the credibility and reliability of these reviews can enhance brand reputation. Blockchain technology's decentralised, transparent and tamper-proof nature helps mitigate issues such as review manipulation and fake reviews, ultimately contributing to an improved brand reputation (Karode et al., 2020, Karode & Werapun, 2022). In food traceability, blockchain technology's capacity to ensure transparency and security throughout the supply chain can enhance brand reputation by demonstrating a commitment to quality and safety (Garaus & Treiblmaier, 2021). As consumers increasingly prioritise food products' origin, safety and quality, brands that adopt blockchain-based traceability systems can differentiate themselves and foster a positive reputation (Cao et al., 2021, Yik et al., 2021).

Blockchain technology has also been associated with the potential to improve brand reputation in the sharing economy by facilitating ethical marketing practices (Tan & Salo, 2023). By offering a transparent and decentralised platform for sharing resources, blockchain can address issues related to trust, privacy and security, ultimately contributing to a brand's positive reputation within the sharing economy. In supply chain traceability, blockchain technology can enhance brand reputation by demonstrating a commitment to transparency, sustainability and responsible sourcing (Cao et al., 2021). By providing a decentralised, transparent and tamper-proof system for tracking goods throughout the supply chain, blockchain enables brands to showcase their commitment to ethical business practices, which can, in turn, improve their reputation among consumers. Finally, the emergence of the retail metaverse and virtual commerce offers new opportunities for brands to leverage blockchain technology to build their reputation (Hopkins, 2022, Jenkins, 2022). By enabling the creation and management of blockchain-based digital assets, brands can demonstrate innovation, security and a commitment to providing unique and immersive virtual experiences for their customers.

2.4. DECENTRALISED AD NETWORK IN BLOCKCHAIN-BASED ADVERTISING, CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND REPUTATION

Online social networks are one of the most renowned applications for users globally. Social media users and the trend of using social media are increasing annually, which also increases users' privacy concerns with a high impact. Decentralisation in this concern has become an excellent opportunity to develop a new generation of decentralised social media platforms. However, the actual benefit of introducing blockchain in social networks is limited, characterised by limitations such as technological limitations, regulatory hurdles, lack of standardisation and lack of user adoption, according to a study by Guidi (2020). Blockchain technology is identified by decentralisation, showing autonomy, openness, high security and tamper resistance as significant solutions for the media industry. According to the study by Madhani (2022), blockchain is decentralised and has a distributed ledger to create the records. Moreover, the decentralising nature of blockchain leads the customers to check and verify the products, such as their cost, origin, sustainability and inorganic or organic nature. Due to decentralisation, the advertising budget can be invested effectively to access the targeted market (Sey et al., 2021). Advertisers usually do not have a connection with customers, as they need more knowledge to target the customers.

In contrast, consumers must know how third parties utilise their data without consent. According to Stallone, Wetzels, and Klaas (2021), blockchain's decentralised nature gives a transparent advertising ecosystem to connect advertisers with users. This approach also offers a real-time platform to run campaigns and track their progress, whereas marketers and consumers can also view the results, bringing the consumers closer to the brand. Based on the literature evidence, the study proposes a research hypothesis:

H_1. Decentralised blockchain technology significantly influences (a) consumer trust and (b) brand reputation.

2.5. BLOCKCHAIN ADVERTISING TRANSPARENCY, CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND REPUTATION

In the extant literature, consumer trust has been regarded as a significant factor in deriving relationships in marketing. Trust in a brand can be achieved at various levels in marketing. Trust is the behaviour that leads customers to rely on the company. According to Tan & Saraniemi (2022), in the marketing domain, trust is the belief in the exchange party's trustworthiness due to reliability, expertise or intention. On the other hand, digital marketing is forced to rely on the tech giants such as Google, Microsoft, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. These giants maintain a monopoly in the market and charge fees through the contracts, using massive data from user profiles to gain an advantage from the new product markets. In this regard, blockchain technology maintains the data durability that assures financial transactions and information exchange, such as smart contracts (Chen, Xu, Lu & Chen, 2018), automatically reducing the cost of verification and networking covered by mediators to retain the trust in financial transactions. Therefore, multiple stakeholders must agree with the rules in a trusted governance model of a blockchain network. These arrangements improve the trust of consumers and marketers, while reducing the dominant marketers, as each is treated equally.

Besides the other qualities, blockchain's primary characteristic is the nature of enabling trust. The study by Gebel (2012) states that trust acts according to consideration, transparency, honesty and accountability. Gaining the trust of stakeholders is the biggest challenge for the marketing actors, which is necessary for the e-commerce and digital marketing settings. According to the study by Ertemel (2018), blockchain technology tackles the problem by reducing uncertainty at various stages. With the increasing number of businesses, customers demand more integrity and transparency in business practices. Measures used by the marketers, such as enabling customers, are used to track the complaint rates, the score for consumer satisfaction and the rate of defective items (Malinova & Park, 2017). In this way, consumers can check the brands in real-time, enhancing their brand trust. Based on the literature evidence, the study proposes a research hypothesis:

$H_{2.}$ Blockchain advertising transparency significantly influences (a) consumer trust and (b) brand reputation.

2.6. PRIVACY AND SECURITY TO DEVELOP CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND REPUTATION

As stated above, with growing social media and usage of internet technology, security and privacy issues are also increasing. These concerns relate to the breach and misuse of personal data along with the concerns of data storage systems. Security threats with appropriate marketing infrastructure can benefit from blockchain technology (Rejeb, Keogh & Treiblmaier, 2020). On the other hand, brand reputation can be maintained by providing data security and privacy that can be achieved through blockchain technology to meet consumer needs. Blockchain technology creates interruption-free ledgers to develop consumer trust in transactions (Chen et al., 2018). Blockchain has the characteristics to limit the users to access specific data; taking this approach, advertisers and marketers can ensure the implementation of technology for the privacy and security of the consumers. Privacy-preserving systems can benefit from blockchain technology in multiple ways; according to the study by Bellini, Iraqi & Damiani (2020), blockchain can provide security with a solid architecture. Blockchain strengths can be defined as overcoming cybersecurity threats by encrypting information to prevent cyberattacks. The privacy and security systems of blockchain thus build the trust of consumers in a brand and enhance the reputation of the brand (Subramanian, 2017). Based on the literature evidence, the study proposes a research hypothesis:

$H_{3.}$ Blockchain security and privacy significantly influence (a) consumer trust and (b) brand reputation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

A research approach refers to the methodology used to conduct a research study. It outlines the steps and processes involved in collecting, analysing, interpreting data and addressing a specific research problem. Research incorporates one of the three approaches that are: qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method approaches. The present study leverages quantitative research, combining the strength of qualitative study as well (Shariue, Sumaiya, & Sudarshana, 2019). The approach is helpful for the present study as the researcher intended to analyse the causal relationship between blockchain-based advertising and consumer trust and brand reputation (quantitative) and concurrently analyse the phenomenon. This allowed the researcher to triangulate the data, increase the validity of the results and gain a more holistic understanding of the research problem (Shariue, Sumaiya, & Sudarshana, 2019).

Furthermore, the research design refers to the plan or strategy that outlines how a research study will be conducted. It encompasses methods and techniques used to collect and analyse data (Brauer & Eriksson, 2020). For the present study, the researcher incorporated a descriptive and correlational design for analysing the present study. The descriptive design provided a detailed overview of the current relationship between blockchain-based advertising and consumer trust and brand reputation. On the other hand, the correlational design was used to examine the relationship between blockchain-based advertising and consumer trust and brand reputation (Inaam & Islami, 2016).

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection refers to gathering information from various sources for a research study (Abu-Taieh et al., 2020). The study collected data by distributing survey questionnaires among marketing professionals. The study distributed survey questionnaires on 05.12.2022 according to the needs of research for blockchain, consumer trust and brand reputation.

This research gathers the primary data from the questionnaire respondents, while the secondary data was collected through available historical data. The data has been collected by using the valid and reliable scales from the previous research. The Cronbach alpha and factor loading values were higher than 0.70 in the previous studies. The study adapted six items of blockchain advertising-based decentralisation from the study of Madhani (2022). The study adapted five items of blockchain-based advertising; transparency from the study of Ertemel (2018), and the study used five adapted items of blockchain security and privacy from the study of Rejeb, Keogh & Treiblmaier (2020). Six items of consumer trust have been adapted from the study of Gebel (2012) and six items of brand reputation from the study of Malinova & Park (2017). All measurement scales were measured on 5-points Likert scales ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

3.3. DATA SAMPLING

Regarding the role of BCT on customer trust and reputation, this study obtained data from marketing professionals. The convenient sampling technique is used to obtain the required data. The research aimed to survey 300 respondents, including data on their demographic information and a questionnaire of 28 closed-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale. However, only 113 responses were completely filled in and collected. The online questionnaire survey is used as it is convenient and cost-effective, which also increases the response rate (Bartram, 2019). Therefore, the quantitative part of the study is conducted with an online survey.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

Secondary data, which is collected from the work of the previous researchers, helped to understand the concepts they used and is referenced in the study, while the numerical data gathered from the survey is analysed using mathematical and statistical methods to assess the effects of BCT on customer trust and brand reputation. According to Sen et al. (2022), researchers prefer using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme to conduct the statistical analysis, as it improves accuracy and representativeness. Moreover, its widespread acceptance in academic and professional research reinforces the credibility and reliability of SPSS results. In this regard, the SPSS programme has been used to obtain the findings from the survey as quantitative outcomes.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC OF PARTICIPANTS

The demographic characteristic of the participants is shown by percentages and frequency to explore the participants (Table 1). The total number of participants is 113 after removing the unclear and irrelevant responses. Mostly (63.7%) female participants are part of the survey. A further 23.9% of the participants belong to the age group 18-25 years, whereas 19.5% of the participants belong to the age group 26-36 years and 23% to the 36-45 years age group. Moreover, most participants (45.1%) have a Master's degree, whereas 31.9% have a bachelor's degree. Similarly, mostly participants (32.7%) have less than 5 years of experience in Marketing and 6.2% do not have any experience in Marketing. Similarly, most of the participants work in small enterprises (35.4%), while the least number of participants work in Micro enterprises.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18- 25 years	27	23.9
26-36 years	22	19.5
36-45 years	26	23
46-55 years	20	17.7
56-65 years	12	10.6
Older than 65	6	5.3
Gender		
Female	72	63.7
Male	41	36.3
Education		
High School	15	13.3
Bachelor's degree	36	31.9
Master's degree	51	45.1
PhD degree	11	9.7
Marketing experience		
<5 years of experience	37	32.7
>10 years of experience	14	12.4
5-8 years of experience	34	30.1
9-10 years of experience	21	18.6
I do not work in Marketing experience	7	6.2

Type of company		
Micro enterprise	16	14.2
Small enterprise	40	35.4
Medium-sized enterprise	35	31
Large company	22	19.5

Source: authors

4.2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive statistics of the responses are calculated to explore the basic statistical characteristics such as mean, minimum, maximum and standard deviation of the responses for each of the selected variables (Table 2). The average response of the participants for the three selected variables for Blockchain-based advertising, including Decentralised Ad Network, Transparency and Security and privacy, is greater than 4 for each of the statements, excluding two (Mean =>3). This indicates that participants agree with the efficiency of Blockchain-based advertising in providing a decentralised Ad Network, transparency and privacy. Similarly, for the variable consumer trust, most of the participants agree with the effectiveness of Blockchain-based advertising for building consumer trust. Identically, participants also agree with the effective role of Blockchain-based advertising in building an effective brand reputation, as the mean value is greater than 4. Furthermore, the standard deviation values for each of the responses indicate less variation in the responses.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the participants

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Decentralised Ad Network		
DCAN1	4.09	0.97
DCAN2	3.99	1.13
DCAN3	4.04	1.07
DCAN4	4.07	1.00
DCAN5	4.11	1.14
DCAN6	3.98	1.13
Transparency		
TR1	4.11	0.86
TR2	4.16	0.85
TR3	3.89	1.11
TR4	4.10	1.01
TR5	4.06	1.03
Security and Privacy		
SAP1	4.13	0.95
SAP2	4.13	0.80
SAP3	4.03	1.08
SAP4	4.05	0.94
SAP5	3.94	0.92
Consumer Trust		
CT1	4.01	1.01
CT2	3.94	0.92
CT3	4.11	0.86
CT4	4.16	0.85
CT5	4.06	1.03
CT6	4.10	1.01
Brand Reputation		
BR1	4.03	0.95
BR2	4.20	0.97
BR3	4.05	1.02
BR4	4.18	0.80

BR5	4.23	0.97
BR6	4.34	0.77

Source: authors

4.3. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The correlation analysis is calculated to measure the strength of the association between the different characteristics (Table 3) of Blockchain-based advertising, including decentralised Ad Networks, transparency and privacy with consumer trust and brand reputation. The high and significant value of the correlation is found between Decentralised and Consumer Trust (r=0.735, sig=<0.01), as well as with the Brand Reputation (r=0.812, sig=<0.01), so, a stronger association between Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation with the decentralised feature of the Blockchain-based advertising is found. Moreover, the Transparency of feature of Blockchain-based advertising also has a high and significant correlation with both Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation (r=0.906, sig=<0.01, and r=0.776, sig=<0.01). Similarly, the third characteristic of Blockchain-based advertising (Security and Privacy) also has a significant association with Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation (r=0.713, sig=<0.01, and r=0.619, sig=<0.01). Overall, the correlation results show a significantly positive association between Blockchain-based advertising and Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation.

Table 3: Pearson correlation between selected variables

Correlations					
	Preliminary paper	Transparency	Security and Privacy	Consumer Trust	Brand Reputation
Decentralised	1				
Transparency	.631**	1			
Security and Privacy	.586**	.512**	1		
Consumer Trust	.735**	.906**	.713**	1	
Brand Reputation	.812**	.776**	.619**	.846**	1
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Source: authors

4.4. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

To examine the role of the Decentralised, Transparency, Security and Privacy of Blockchain-based advertising on Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation, regression analysis is used. Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation both are taken as dependent variables, whereas Decentralised, Transparency and Security and Privacy are taken as independent variables. So, overall, two regression models are used. The summary of the models is as follows.

Table 4: Summary of the models

Dependent variables	Consumer Trust	Brand Reputation
R	0.957	0.886
R Square	0.916	0.785
Adjusted R Square	0.914	0.779
Std. The error in the Estimate	0.193	0.280

Source: authors

For both Models, the value of R Square is very high (for Model 1= 0.916 and for Model 2 = 0.785), indicating that 91.6% of the variation in the responses of the Consumer Trust and 78.5% of the variations in the variable Brand Reputation are explained by Blockchain-based advertising variables (Decentralised, Transparency and Security and Privacy). Overall, evidence of the good-fitted regression models is found. The results of the regression models are shown in the following table. Regression coefficients are significant for each of the variables as the p-value is less than 0.05. For Consumer Trust (Model 1), the regression coefficient of the Decentralised is 0.159 with a p-value of 0.00, Transparency is 0.644 with a p-value of 0.00, and Security and Privacy are 0.382 with a p-value of 0.00, whereas for the variable Brand Reputation regression coefficient of Decentralised is 0.477, with a p-value of 0.00, Transparency 0.356 and Security and Privacy 0.158 with a p-value of 0.00 and 0.022 respectively. So, a significant impact of the characteristic of Blockchain-based advertising (Decentralised, Transparency and Security and Privacy) on Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation is found. Overall regression analysis provides evidence of the positive impact of Blockchain-based advertising on Consumer Trust and Brand Reputation.

The two models' results indicate the significant impact of Dcentralisation, Transparency, Security and Privacy on the dependent variable. In Model 1, all three factors show a positive relationship with the dependent variable, with significant t-values and p-values ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, Transparency has the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.644$), followed by Security and Privacy ($\beta = 0.382$) and Decentralisation ($\beta = 0.159$). In Model 2, the positive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable persists, but the relative strengths of the factors change. Decentralisation now has the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.477$), followed by Transparency ($\beta = 0.356$) and Security and Privacy ($\beta = 0.158$). All three factors remain statistically significant, with p-values of less than 0.05. Based on these findings, we can conclude that decentralisation, transparency and security and privacy all significantly influence the dependent variable. The results indicate that these factors, which are inherent characteristics of blockchain technology, positively impact the aspects under study, such as consumer trust and brand reputation. The differences between the two models suggest that the relative importance of these factors may vary, depending on the specific context or application of blockchain technology. These findings highlight the potential benefits of incorporating blockchain technology in various domains to enhance trust, transparency, security and privacy, ultimately improving consumer trust and brand reputation.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient Results

		B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Model 1	(Constant)	-0.749	-4.736	0.000	-0.749
	Decentralised	0.159	3.729	0.000	0.159
	Transparency	0.644	18.235	0.000	0.644
	Security and Privacy	0.382	8.154	0.000	0.382
Model 2	(Constant)	0.151	0.230	0.654	0.515
	Decentralised	0.477	0.062	7.675	0.000
	Transparency	0.356	0.051	6.930	0.000
	Security and Privacy	0.158	0.068	2.322	0.022

Source: authors

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from the study show an important aspect of Blockchain-based advertising and consumer trust and brand reputation. The quantitative method suggests the proficiency of Blockchain-based advertising strategies such as decentralised, transparency and security and privacy for building effective consumer trust and brand reputation. Moreover, the correlation analysis of primary data shows the significant and positive association of Blockchain-based advertising with consumer trust and brand reputation. These results supported the work of the previous literature, such as Garaus & Treiblmaier (2021), and suggest that Blockchain-based advertising positively associates with consumer trust. Moreover, it is suggested that Blockchain-based advertising provides more knowledge regarding the consumer's behaviour to the retailer. The development in the utilisation of Blockchain marketing improves the virtual capacity of the business in supply chain logistics. Consumer trust is an important phenomenon for effective marketing and is essential in every industry, specifically in the food industry, as this relationship is with consumer health (Singh & Sharma, 2022).

In contrast to the previous work, this study individually represents the contribution of some characteristics of Blockchain-based advertising, including transparency, decentralisation and security and privacy. Correlation, as well as the regression analysis, both show that positive association, as well as the positive impact of the three characteristics of Blockchain-based advertising, including transparency, decentralised security and privacy, on building consumer trust and brand reputation. Individually, the role of the decentralised aspect of the Blockchain-based advertising strategy is very crucial in the process of transferring of control and making the decision. The research suggests that decentralisation in Blockchain-based advertising provides more efficient management of resources, leading to more reasonable and greater achievement in marketing (Sober et al., 2022). However, it is also suggested that decentralisation in Blockchain-based advertising opens new ways for customer data access, since data sharing becomes easier (Verma & Kaur, 2022). The decentralisation in Blockchain-based advertising provides efficiency and reliability of administration, helping to improve local development and support, which consequently helps in building stronger consumer trust (Cao, 2022). Blockchain marketing solves many challenges for small and large industries. It reduces the risk of hacking consumer data and provides more chances of consumer anonymity.

Similarly, the personalised strategy in Blockchain-based advertising helps build a stronger relationship between suppliers and consumers. Moreover, it is suggested that decentralisation reduces transportation costs and provides more opportunities for lower prices. Researchers suggest that, in blockchain marketing, blockchain technology delivers more valuable insight into the production and supply chain process. This technology demonstrates a remarkable growth scenario in a short interval of time. So, the technologies in Blockchain-based advertising play an essential role in developing the new effective data lead campaign.

As Blockchain marketing enables more transparency by introducing a new setting for the consumer to track the product at any stage of the supply chain, and so the effectiveness of blockchain marketing enables the consumer to verify the ad claim (Iqbal & Butt, 2020). This consequently improves consumer trust in the marketing and the product. In the same way as the positive role of blockchain marketing in building consumer trust, the study also shows the progressive role of blockchain marketing in growing brand values. Similarly, it creates an advertisement ecosystem where marketers can access consumer consent. This study has three characteristics of blockchain marketing which can be a limitation towards the study's contribution (Guo & Yu, 2022). Similarly, the creation of digital assets in Blockchain-based advertising promotes successful marketing.

The study shows that the integration of blockchain-based marketing provides facilities for developing information transparency, as the consumer gets full awareness regarding the data using authorities (Mezquita et al., 2019). Peer-to-peer communication in blockchain technology marketing creates many deviations in the market structure. Traditional marketing intermediaries cause damage to consumer data as well as costing more. However, blockchain-based marketing provides more transparency by eliminating the role of the intermediaries (Centobelli et al., 2022). Consequently, this leads to consumer trust in the brand. By utilising effective blockchain-based marketing, the management of the transaction nodes becomes more accessible, as it allows the preservation of the supply chain participant's identity. This study suggests the positive role of blockchain-based marketing in brand value growth. One of the great features of blockchain-based marketing is consumer data security and privacy.

Blockchain can be defined as overcoming cybersecurity threats by encrypting the information to prevent cyberattacks. This marketing allows marketers to campaign more effectively by providing relevant ads to the potential consumer and ensuring the safety of consumer data and privacy.

The revolutionary technology of the Blockchain allows marketers to exist in more secure ways and enables them to perform the transaction and other legal requirements under strong security and privacy (Wylde et al., 2022). A different feature of Blockchain limits the users' access to specific data. So, under this approach, advertisers and marketers can ensure the application of technology for the privacy and security of the consumers. Moreover, integrating Blockchain in marketing protects against click fraud, which artificially expands traffic data for online advertisements (Wang et al., 2020). So, to reach legitimate customers, the technology of Blockchain is crucial. Correspondingly this also creates a more reliable digital marketing ecosystem for both consumers and brands and consequently helps to grow the brand value. Furthermore, the role of blockchain-based marketing is not just limited to data privacy, but also provides traceability in the transaction process. This enables marketers to target high-potential consumers and provides the feature of increasing campaign exposure by using notifications. So, by using the effectiveness of blockchain-based marketing, consumer experience with the brand is improved in many aspects, including consumer trust and satisfaction (Tan & Salo, 2021).

Similarly, blockchain-based marketing allows confirmation of each node of the blockchain network, which prevents alteration. In the same way, the researcher suggests that the quality of the marketing by blockchain-based marketing helps to improve customer loyalty towards the brand and helps to maximise the financial benefits. Correspondingly, the technology of blockchain-based marketing contributes to a positive image of the brand and effective engagement and trust of the customer for the individual product or whole brand (Peres et al., 2022). In the same way, blockchain-based marketing facilitates marketers to improve brand awareness, which is an essential factor of brand value. Blockchain development in marketing allows effective communication, greater trust and process efficiency. Establishing brand value and loyalty among consumers is a challenging aspect. However, a loyalty programme with the help of blockchain-based marketing provides tools to grow brand loyalty (Antoniadis et al., 2019). Similarly, this allows the brand to reduce the price sensitivity of their product and services.

The limitation of this study is that the results provide ideas for blockchain-based marketing across various sectors. However, in future studies, blockchain-based marketing in a single sector, such as food or technology, can be used to promote more effective results. Similarly, in future studies, the other characteristics of blockchain-based marketing, such as immutability, traceability and efficiency, can be discussed.

5.1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the revealing insights gained from the analysis, this study has several limitations:

1. The research is constrained by the reliance on Pearson correlation to establish relationships, which only captures linear associations and does not consider potential non-linear relationships or interactions among variables.
2. While the regression models provide a robust R-square value, indicating a high percentage of variance explained, they do not account for potential omitted variable bias, or the possibility that external factors not considered in the study might influence the outcomes. The generalisability of the findings may also be limited to the specific context of blockchain-based advertising and might only apply sometimes across different industries or geographic regions.
3. Causality cannot be firmly established based solely on these results, and further experimental or longitudinal studies would be needed to confirm the direction and magnitude of the observed relationships.

In the light of the study's findings and limitations, future research directions can be charted to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of blockchain-based advertising. Exploring non-linear relationships or interactions among the variables would be worthwhile using more sophisticated statistical techniques, such as structural equation modelling or path analysis. Additionally, examining the impact of external factors or potential moderating and mediating variables enriches the understanding of how blockchain-based advertising influences consumer trust and brand reputation. Cross-industry comparisons or international studies also shed light on the generalisability of the findings, highlighting any industry-specific or cultural nuances. Lastly, longitudinal studies could be embarked upon to establish causality and track the evolving nature of consumer trust and brand reputation in the rapidly changing landscape of blockchain technology and advertising.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1. CONCLUSION

The new Blockchain brings new promises to advance marketing, but also carries new threats to marketers. Consumers nowadays are not solely on the consumption side as the modern marketing environment evolves. BCT is currently a low-paced approach to gaining acceptance from the consumer. However, Blockchain-based technology is considered exceptionally constructive in order to nurture the relationship with the consumer as well as brand reputation. This study aimed to determine the impact of Blockchain-based advertising/marketing on consumer trust and brand reputation. In this regard, the paper has also highlighted the factors that influence consumer trust and brand reputation in order to understand the radical impacts of BCT on these two variables. Based on the findings and results of this study all three factors (decentralised, transparency, security and privacy) have a significant and positive impact on consumer trust and brand reputation. Based on the results of the research, it can be recommended that companies and industries looking to improve customer trust and brand recognition should consider implementing blockchain technology in their marketing strategies. The findings indicate that decentralised ads, transparency and security/privacy are key features of blockchain technology that can have a positive impact on customer trust and brand reputation.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To fully leverage the benefits of blockchain technology, companies can consider the following recommendations:

- Adoption of decentralised advertising: Companies can use decentralised advertising platforms to ensure that the information displayed to the consumer is accurate and not influenced by intermediaries.
- Increase transparency: Companies can use blockchain technology to make their supply chain processes more transparent and provide customers with detailed information about their products.
- Emphasise security and privacy: Companies can use blockchain technology to store customer data securely and ensure that it is not misused.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – Survey Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of Blockchain-based advertising/marketing in enhancing consumer trust and brand reputation. It will not take more than 15 minutes. All your data will be handled following the data privacy rule. All the rules of data confidentiality and anonymity will be considered throughout the research. Please carefully read the questionnaire and answer honestly.

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

1. What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female

2. What is your age?

☐ 18 – 25 Years
☐ 26 – 35 Years
☐ 36 – 45 Years
☐ 46 – 55 Years
☐ 56 – 65 Years
☐ Older than 65

3. What is your education level?

☐ High School
☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Master's degree
☐ PhD Degree

4. What experience do you have in marketing?

<5 years of experience
5-8 years of experience
9-10 years of experience
>10 years of experience
I do not work in the Marketing sector

5. What type of company do you work for? (Maybe, if it suits you)
Micro enterprise
Small enterprise
Medium sized enterprise
Large company

SECTION 2: BLOCKCHAIN-BASED ADVERTISING

		SD	D	N	A	SA
	Blockchain-based advertising: Decentralised Ad Network					
1	Decentralised Ad Network in Blockchain-based advertising provides help for efficient control over consumer data to build effective advertisement strategies.					
2	The decentralised ledger technology in Blockchain-based advertising is proficient in understanding consumer behaviour.					
3	Blockchain-based marketing provides the facility to control the type of content for the community.					
4	Blockchain-based advertising offers strategies to promote innovation and new ideas effectively.					
5	Blockchain-based advertising help to promote creativity, and entrepreneurship with the help of decentralised techniques.					
6	Decentralised Ad Network in Blockchain-based advertising enhances customer targeting by enabling marketers to track every interaction with the customers.					
	Blockchain-based advertising: Transparency					
7	Blockchain-based advertising provides transparency in the process of the advertisement.					
8	The transparency in Blockchain-based advertising provides a better understanding of biases in the advertisement.					
9	Blockchain-based marketing is comparatively more efficient as compared to other available options in providing transparency.					
10	I believe that transparency Blockchain-based advertising provides deeper insight into consumer data to recognize the potential customer.					
11	The level of transparency provided by blockchain is incomparable with any other option.					
	Security and Privacy					
12	Blockchain-based advertising provides proficient Security and privacy.					

13	The security and privacy characteristic of Blockchain-based advertising provide advanced and effective features for the data protection of the customer.					
14	Security and privacy in Blockchain-based advertising provide the setting for customer preferences and control on adding views.					
15	Blockchain-based advertising supports the long-standing commitment to customer data privacy.					
16	Blockchain-based advertising is an effective way to protect customer privacy to ensure human dignity and self-determination.					

SECTION 3: CONSUMER'S TRUST

		SD	D	N	A	SA
17	The utilization of Blockchain-based advertising improves customer loyalty and trust.					
18	Blockchain-based marketing provides more security against the click-fraud.					
19	Blockchain-based marketing creates a more trustworthy digital marketing environment for the consumer.					
20	Blockchain-based marketing strategies such as customer loyalty programs and privacy protection bring more loyalty among the customer.					
21	The Blockchain-based advertising campaign causes growth in good reviews and ratings.					
22	The interaction with costumer by utilizing Blockchain-based advertising delivers great brand trust.					

SECTION 4: BRAND REPUTATION

		SD	D	N	A	SA
23	The transparency of Blockchain-based advertising has caused growth in brand value.					
24	After the utilization of Blockchain-based advertising, the brand may become one of the fastest-growing brands in the market with a growing brand share of voice (SOV).					
25	The effectiveness of Blockchain-based advertising provides more sustainability to the brand value.					
26	Blockchain-based advertising increases the probability of long-term revenue generators and growing brand reputation.					
27	Effective and timely customer communication generates an appealing brand reputation among customers.					
28	The feature of Blockchain-based advertising such as privacy protection, digital marketing security, and loyalty deliver an increasing brand reputation.					

Thank you for your participation!

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ECO-LABELS AND BRAND IMAGE AS A WAY TO DISTINGUISH SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of eco-labels and brand image used by the fashion industry, i.e., fashion brands and companies, on consumers' purchase intention to buy sustainable clothing products.

Methodology: The questionnaire was formed based on previous studies. It was conducted among 197 respondents and hierarchical regression analysis was applied to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results: The study confirmed that both brand image and eco-labels have a positive influence on the purchase of sustainable clothing products, with eco-labels having a greater influence. The results were controlled for gender and self-perception as green consumers, as these factors have previously been found to be important to sustainable consumption, but were found to be insignificant, or barely significant, respectively.

Conclusion: This research contributes to a better understanding of sustainable consumption and the influence of marketing managers of fashion companies can use it better understand how to communicate and design sustainable clothing products aiming to reach and motivate environmentally conscious consumers to buy their sustainable fashion products. Based on our findings we provide directions for future research and suggestions for policy makers and professionals.

Keywords: green brand image, eco-label, sustainable consumption, fashion

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion and sustainability seem like contradictory concepts, as fashion is always subject to change, while sustainability implies sustained consumption (Forbes, 2020). Given that the fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world, responsible for around 10% of total global carbon dioxide emissions (sustainyourstyle.org, 2022) and consumers are increasingly aware of this fact, ignoring environmental concerns is no longer an option for many fashion brands. This paved the way to various green marketing activities which ensure that the product production and distribution leave less negative impact on society and the environment than they used to (Širola & Rosandić, 2019). At first, sustainable production in the fashion industry entailed the use of organic materials, recycled materials, or green designs that resonate well with consumers (Sung & Lee, 2011). Subsequently, fashion brands have adopted new ways of differentiation by officiating eco-labels (Sung & Lee, 2011). Most recently, innovations in green marketing, developed in the case of the Brazilian cotton ecosystem, show how such programmes work when actors act above commercial interest to offer each other guidance and promote cohesion (Duarte et al., 2022). This is the case where joint effort of institutions, NGOs, smallholders' associations and government build an ecosystem that encourages smallholders to adopt sustainable practices such as "rain fed crops, soil nutrition, biodiversity maintenance, and integrated fibre and food crop production" (Duarte et al., 2022, p. 1).

Taking on responsibility and introducing changes in their industry presents a real challenge for companies; if a sustainable, green image is promoted too much, there is a risk of accusations of so-called greenwashing, i.e., misleading consumers with incorrect information (de Freitas Netto et al, 2020). On the other hand, not enough attention to problematic topics for consumers can come over as a lack of concern for current problems and call out and demand responsibility from manufacturers (Forbes, 2021).

Terminologically, Thomas (2002) explains, in the context of fashion, that the term "green" product can be used broadly to refer to sustainability in a broader sense than the usual environmental sustainability (growth, processing and production). It entails design processes (innovation and imagination minding sustainable utilisation of materials), manufacture, distribution, disposal, human rights and fair wages. Building on this notion, in this study the term "sustainable clothing" will be used as an umbrella term for fashion products referred to as eco-friendly (Tran et al, 2022, Sobuj et al., 2021), green apparel (Lee, 2011), and upcycled (Oncioiu & Ifrim, 2022).

The issue of sustainability became a topic in the early 2000s (e.g., Laroche et al., 2001, Dickson, 2000, Verma, 2002) but became very relevant in the next decade (Shen et al., 2014). The conceptual framework developed by Laroche et al. (2001) was a basis for supervening research on factors related to consumers' willingness to pay a price premium for sustainable products. The proposed framework had five categories: demographics, knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviour. To date, these categories have been tested, combined, set in various cultural contexts and additional insights have been gained. Verma (2002) examined environmentalism in its early stage and concluded that consumers perceived various environmental problems as serious, but this notion was not enough to evoke a change in their behaviour. The author described it as only "early signs of greening" among consumers and predicted that consumer behaviour will change with time as these concerns grow. Indeed, after 20 years we testify the rise of a novel consumer cohort called neogreen consumers that care not only about product quality and sophistication, but also about the sustainability of its consumption (Platania et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, words frequently used in communicating sustainable fashion messages are unclear to consumers and lead to frustration more than positive outcomes, such as engaged decision-making and action regarding sustainable item purchases (Evans et al., 2018). Currently, fashion sustainability issues are strongly covered in the media as part of consumerism criticism, and the need for eco-labelling of goods is proposed as one of the mechanisms needed for a holistic change in production and consumption patterns in the textile industry (Virta & Räisänen, 2021). However, there is a need for ensuring greater industry transparency when it comes to eco-labels (Hur & Faragher-Siddall, 2022).

All this points to the need to further examine consumer responses towards brands employing green marketing strategies. Building on signalling theory (White et al., 2019, Connelly et al., 2011) we assume that consumer responses to brands that build their image as eco-brands and use eco-labels to stimulate the purchase of sustainable clothing will be examined as drivers of change in sustainable consumer behaviour. We focus on the purchase intention as the outcome variable for two reasons. First, it is a critical predictor of actual consumer behaviour (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020), and second, it is a common outcome variable in the context of green marketing (e.g. Bakış & Kitapçı, 2023, Dangelico et al., 2022, Leclercq-Machado et al., 2022) and will allow our research to build on existing insights on a topic of growing importance.

This study contributes to the body of literature on sustainable consumption by examining the underlying factors impacting decision-making related to sustainable consumption. It reveals how successful are methods of strategic marketing (i.e., eco-branding and eco-labelling) in evoking meaningful changes in consumer behaviour. At managerial level, the findings help companies to create an adapted marketing strategy, focused on branding and/or labels to maximise their benefit using sustainable ways of doing business.

The next chapter, Theoretical and Conceptual Background, provides the overview of the literature on sustainable consumption in the fashion industry and eco-labels, and touches upon the persisting issues in sustainable consumption theory and practice. The third chapter contains hypotheses development and proposes a conceptual model based on previous research. The fourth chapter, Methodology, provides a description of the method used, sample details and questionnaire and measures information. The next chapter provides insight into the study results in terms of descriptive statistics and hypotheses testing. The sixth and last chapter called Discussion and Conclusion summarises the study results and discusses theoretical and practical implications.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Early evidence on sustainable consumption in the fashion industry (Lee, 2011) showed that people who know more about the environmental issues are not necessarily the consumers of sustainable fashion products. Additionally, the same study revealed it is the concern about environmental issues and sustainable behaviour in general (e.g., energy saving) that leads to a willingness to pay a price premium for sustainable clothing. A year later, additional insights provided strong predictors of purchase intention of sustainable clothing which are: attitude toward brand, subjective norm, attitude toward advertisement, eco-fashion involvement and environmental commitment (Yan et al., 2012). Visser et al. (2015) used double benefit theory to propose effective ways of promotion of sustainable shoes to mainstream consumers in order to increase their buying intention. They test and propose a combination of both personal and environmental benefits as an effective green marketing strategy advertisement, leading to increased purchase intention. Later studies are dedicated to determination and scrutiny of those factors.

Quality perception, uniqueness, caring and connectedness to nature can predict consumer's intention to buy sustainable fashion items (Song & Kim, 2018). Nguyen et al. (2022) used an integrated research model consisting of the value identity personal norm model and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The model was applied to the Vietnamese fashion context to determine how consumers plan green purchases. The study revealed that environmental self-identity and personal norms are positively related to the attitude to buy green fashion products. Attitude had been the most influential predictor of green purchase, followed by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Similar results were obtained in the European context (Hrlec Gorše et al., 2022).

Following the assumptions of the same theory, Leclercq-Machado et al. (2022) showed that environmental attitude is an important mediator linking environmental concern and environmental knowledge with purchase intention of green products and subsequently purchase behaviour. Their study also showed that subjective norms are not a significant predictor of purchase intention, but that the attitude is shaped based on the concern and knowledge about environmental concerns. Slightly different findings were those of Ramany et al. (2022), who again employed the theory of planned behaviour and found that social norms, environmental consciousness and the usage of social media have a positive impact on purchase behaviour of sustainable clothing, while attitude and perceived behavioural control were not related to it. Peer influence, perceived risk, environmental concern and perceived usefulness of the product also show a positive impact on purchase intention of sustainable fashion items (Oncioiu & Ifrim, 2022).

Symbolism plays an important role in purchasing green clothing products and not only in terms of social status. A recent study found that four perceived symbolic meanings of green clothing (status, environmentalism, innovation and fashion symbols) impact purchase intention of green clothing positively and indirectly via consumer attitudes (Bakış & Kitapçı, 2023). Song and Kim (2019) took an interesting perspective to find that the concept of impure altruism as a duality of altruistic and egoistic warmth plays an important role in green apparel purchases. They have shown that communal harmony and global wellbeing prompt altruistic warmth in consumers and uniqueness and product quality encourage egoistic warmth. On top of that, altruistic warmth contributes to egoistic warmth, which leads to the formation of impurely altruistic consumers, but it shows that both altruistic and egoistic warmth increase the intention of purchasing green apparel. That is why the application of "feel-good" marketing strategies is proposed by Song and Kim (2019) to promote the benefits of a sustainable lifestyle.

Brands should also focus on other cues, as they might play an important role in accepting their green marketing efforts. Environmental concern and the perceived value of sustainable fashion products are positively related to purchase intention and paying a premium, regardless of the type of eco-materials used, but both indirect and direct experiences show different effects, depending on the specific eco-material used (Dangelico et al., 2022). It is important to note that if a fashion brand is perceived as socially responsible for altruistic reasons it directly affects attitudes toward the brand, brand trust and perceived consumer effectiveness of that brand. However, neither of those predict purchase intention of a sustainable product only because the brand acted socially responsibly (Neumann et al., 2020). Consumers' perception of greenwashing has a direct negative effect on their purchase intention of green products. If consumers consider there had been greenwashing it will have a negative effect on the perceived financial risk, although this effect is reduced in the case of impulse purchase (Lu et al., 2022). In case of popular "Black Friday" purchases consumers who exhibit actual sustainable behaviour do not find ads combining Black Friday discounts with sustainability appealing, as opposed to consumers who show only general concern for environmental issues (Sailer et al., 2022).

While some would argue that consumer behaviour related to green clothing products is strongly related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the consumer (Dangelico et al., 2022), awareness about the use of upcycled fashion products is growing among all generations (Oncioiu & Ifrim, 2022). In their attempt to determine the factors related to purchase of sustainable clothing, Tran et al. (2022) employed mixed methods approach and found that Gen Z's perceptions of quality is most strongly related to their purchase intention, followed by environmental awareness and environmental behaviour regarding sustainable clothing. Respondents also mentioned that they mostly find out about such products on social media and expressed their concern about high prices for such products. Notable is the inclination of Generation Z to support local producers and fair trade when making sustainable purchases; however, it is accompanied by low post-consumption concern in terms of recycling the clothing (Dlačić et al., 2021)

In the context of the sustainable fashion green-feminine stereotype, i.e., the notion that only women adopt sustainable and ecofriendly fashion prevails, hindering male consumers' adoption of sustainable clothing products, and poses cultural obstacles to male entrepreneurs in the slow fashion niche. However, men do see fast fashion practices as unsustainable and increasingly embrace reflective masculinity crafted to nurture sustainable fashion that can be promoted to male consumers (Pohlmann & Valencia, 2021). The male segment of sustainable clothing was defined early on as consumers that care about the environment, sustainable pricing, sustainable behaviour and sustainable branding (D'Souza et al., 2015).

2.2. ECO-LABELS

Purchase intention of sustainable clothing is primarily related to the environmental concern and environmental knowledge of the consumer, followed by social norms and attitudes (Sobuj et al., 2021). In this regard, eco-labelling works as an educational and awareness-raising tool for supporting sustainable fashion consumption, as long as it is accompanied by educational policies. European eco-label implies that the product was produced using methods which are ecologically sustainable, produced with best practice farm management, and confirming compliance with EU regulations (Prescott, 2008). The existing labelling methods are very complex because of the complexity of terminology, lack of eco-literacy and distrust of industry claims about eco-products (Hur & Faragher-Siddall, 2022). Along with the need for ensuring greater industry transparency when it comes to eco-labels (Hur & Faragher-Siddall, 2022), another challenge for eco-labelling is the lack of environmental production information that can be incorporated into a user-friendly barcode system (Beck, 2012).

Consumers show increasing interest in eco-labels, quality marks and sustainable fabric substitutes, while product attributes such as price, brand and fashion are losing importance (Teli et al., 2017). However, the results of the recent conjoint analysis (Wang et al, 2022) suggest that price is still the most important attribute to consumers, followed by type of fabric (recycled), availability of eco-labels and type of down (traceable). Additionally, eco-labels and ethical labels have no significant influence on purchasing sustainable clothing if the item does not fit or is not comfortable (Rahman & Kharb, 2022). Recent findings on eco-labels based on 58,000 actual online purchases (Feuß et al., 2022) reveal that eco-labels in the fashion industry increase purchases, with a price premium even reinforcing this relationship. Interestingly, discounts were effective in increasing purchase intention of eco-labelled items only in combination with high price premiums (Feuß et al, 2022). Eco-labels and activities related to corporate social responsibility are the ways in which businesses play a vital role in facilitating consumer's sustainable practices (Lee et al., 2015) and they can also encourage best practices in manufacturing (Kumar et al., 2011, De Coster, 2007).

2.3. PERSISTING ISSUES IN SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Green marketing and the sustainable consumption it encourages are unarguably the path to a better and cleaner future. There are, however, three paradoxes when it comes to sustainable consumption that persist and challenge green marketing strategies: complicated greenness, green luxury and femwashing/greenwashing.

Olson (2022) pointed to the paradox in green fashion products consumption, stating that consumption of green fashion clothing makes people less guilty about making the purchase which leads to more purchases. Even in the most environmentally conscious consumers, consumption of sustainable products reduces purchase-related guilt. The author explains that the purchase of green products enables consumers to engage in moral licensing, i.e., justifying the purchase because it is green, which leads to a paradox. Hepburn (2013) calls this paradox a complicated greenness. On the example of the Patagonia clothing company dedicated to sustainability, this author had shown that consumers fall into the trap of ending up doing what they had tried to avoid.

Another paradox related to consumption of sustainable clothing is green luxury. The prestige of the brand is not enough to be a guarantor to the consumer anymore, causing even luxury brands to gradually go green. In such circumstances, both self-expressive brand and brand attachment are good antecedents for luxury brand love (Platania et al., 2019). However, a review on sustainable luxury marketing confirmed that research on sustainable luxury is still significantly underdeveloped (Athwal et al., 2019). In general, ethical and luxury consumption do not go hand in hand as they are related to completely different taste regimes (Leban et al., 2021). Using a cross-cultural sample and building on Heider's balance theory, Carranza et al. (2022) examined the underlying mechanisms of green luxury consumption centring on a psychological imbalance that fosters their attitude–behaviour gap. Attitude towards green luxury is moderated by consumers' self-enhancement and self-transcendence.

The last paradox in the sustainable fashion industry is that companies use social and environmental justice concerns to market products made under the conditions of deep social and environmental injustice (i.e., femwashing and greenwashing), that way trying to obfuscate unsustainable and unfair exchange and the true costs of the fashion industry (Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020).

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

3.1. GREEN BRAND IMAGE

Brand image has an important position in establishing the relationship between consumers and companies. It is gaining more and more importance because it influences consumer buying behaviour. Consumers will make purchases when they are confident in the quality of the product and believe that the amount they spend is proportional to the quality they receive in return. Recognisability and awareness of a particular brand can make it easier to choose a product on a market that offers a diverse selection (Prihandono, et al., 2020). Associations related to the brand can be divided into attributes, benefits and attitudes, and environmental acceptability can be classified under attributes if consumers use beliefs about a sustainable product to characterise the brand. If the consumer believes that the product can really help the environment, beliefs can also act as additional benefits, and also can be related to the feelings and emotions that the consumer experiences when using the brand. Thus, consumer satisfaction can increase if he/she believes that, by purchasing a product of a certain brand, he/she really contributes to environmental and social well-being, and consumers who are considered environmentally conscious will not buy products of a brand that they believe does not support their ideology (Montoro Rios et al., 2006). Positioning the brand as green implies active communication and differentiation of the brand from others based on ecologically sustainable attributes. If brands do not have effective communication, it will be very difficult for green products to achieve commercial success, and therefore green brand positioning is a very important aspect of green marketing strategies (Hartmann et al., 2005).

Various studies have examined the impact of brand positioning as environmentally conscious on consumer purchasing behaviour. Mokha (2018) proves that eco-brands have a positive impact on purchase decisions because consumers are aware of them and have trust in them, which helps them differentiate from other brands. Prihandono et al. (2020) conclude that brand image influences the purchase decision and that consumers are more inclined to buy products from a brand that they believe operates according to ecological principles. In their research, Rahbar and Abdul Wahid (2011) also confirm the positive impact of eco-brands on purchasing behaviour, and Suki (2013) states that awareness of the brand image is the factor that most influenced the purchase decision. Taking into account the literature and research, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1: Brand image as an eco-brand has a positive effect on the intention to purchase sustainable clothing products.

3.2. ECO-LABELS

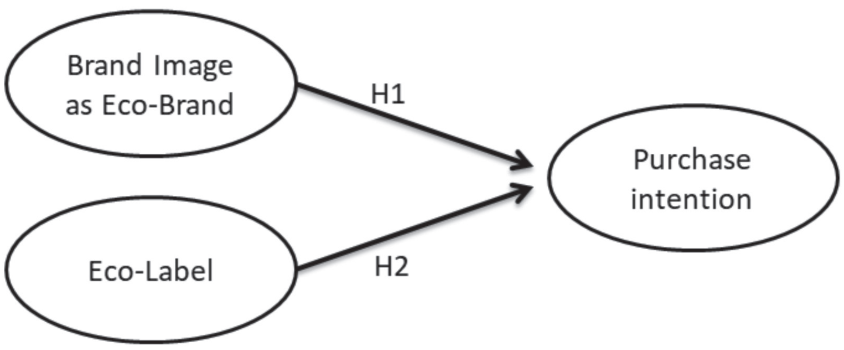
One of the relevant market shortcomings that can limit the consumer's choice of green products is the so-called information asymmetry that occurs during transactions at different stages of the value chain when an economic entity does not provide complete information about cost savings, environmental benefits and business opportunities that are achieved through more efficient use of resources or better environmental efficiency. In particular, if the manufacturer does not provide complete, correct and easy-to-understand information about the environmental benefits of the product throughout its entire life cycle, and if for consumers the personal search for this information represents a price and time cost, it may result in less green products being purchased (Testa, et al., 2013). The eco-label system is a useful green marketing tool that provides consumers with information about the sustainability of products at the point of purchase in order to facilitate their choice of environmentally acceptable products. They promote sustainability without compromising the customer's freedom of choice, while at the same time reducing the cost they would otherwise have to bear if they had to do their own research on the sustainability of the chosen product (Thøgersen et al., 2010). A key influence on the consumer's choice of a green product is its green features, i.e., properties, as well as ecological awareness, of the selected product, and consumers see the green label as proof that the product is really green (Suki et al, 2016).

Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) conclude that the different formats and origin of labels have a limited influence on behavioural variables, but still have a significant impact on attitude towards the product as well as trust towards labels. The results of the study show that there are certain combinations of message factors and production involvement that encourage positive reactions towards eco-labels. The findings suggest that more detailed and meaningful claims can lead to a higher level of consumer trust, as well as a more favourable attitude towards the product, which can further be positively related to purchase intention, given that consumers are more inclined to buy products they trust and have positive connotations for. D'Souza et al. (2019) conclude that customers consider the provision of information about product sustainability very important, and most respondents said that they read labels and make informed purchase decisions based on them. Also, it was concluded that consumer self-confidence mediates between information on eco-labels and purchase intention and, for this reason, ambiguous and confusing claims should be avoided. Testa et al. (2013) prove that eco-labels can support the development of green purchasing, but also state that it is essential to have well-designed certification schemes as well as communication instruments to avoid unclear and confusing messages. It has been confirmed that stronger communication of environmental guarantees and information to the market increases consumer confidence, which can have a positive impact on competitiveness, but also turnover, i.e., profit. Therefore, marketing campaigns based on the use of environmental labels, especially when it comes to labels that are used throughout the market segment and by competitors, could be effective for increasing consumer trust, but also increasing sensitivity and awareness, and creating a circle that prepares and stimulates them to buy green products. The following hypothesis follows from the above:

H2: Eco-labels on products positively influence the intention to purchase sustainable clothing products.

Based on previous research, hypotheses that form a proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) were empirically tested in the field study.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model



Source: Authors

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. METHOD AND SAMPLE

For this study, an online survey via Google Forms was conducted online in July 2021. Respondents were reached through Facebook in groups "*EFRI diplomski studij 2020/2021*", "*EFRI 3. godina 2020/2021*" and "*Anketalica*". The convenience sample consisted of 197 respondents whose questionnaires were valid and were subjected to further analysis. For testing the proposed hypotheses, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in SPSS Version 26.

4.2. QUESTIONNAIRE AND MEASURES

The questionnaire contained 22 questions of which two were open-ended questions and 20 were closed questions. The majority of them were 5-point Likert type scales for measuring agreement with a statement where 1 indicates complete disagreement and 5 complete agreement. Some questions measured agreement on a dichotomous yes/no scale, while some offered a drop-down menu with offered answers. The first part of the survey contained 16 questions on the familiarity of respondents with the term green marketing and its application in the fashion industry, and their consumption habits when it comes to purchasing clothing. There were also questions regarding respondents' self-perception as a green consumer and questions related to green brand image and eco-labelling. The second part was related to 6 demographic questions such as age, gender, education and income. The questions were formed based on previous studies dealing with similar topics and research purposes (Kjellevand & Kjellevand, 2018, Tahir, 2017, Širola & Rosandić, 2019).

5. RESULTS

5.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The respondents were mostly women (81%) and almost half (45%) of the respondents were between 18 and 25 years old. Only 18% of respondents were older than 50 years, which is not surprising given that social media was used for collecting data. Respondents mostly came from Primorsko-goranska county (73%), with Zagreb, Istria, Karlovac, Sisak-Moslavina counties following but with much fewer respondents. Almost half of the respondents (47%) have obtained a college degree, while 35% finished undergraduate study. There were 14% of respondents with high school diplomas and the rest, 4%, had a postgraduate diploma or a doctorate.

More than half of the respondents were employed (51%) and 40% of them are still students (with approximately half of them working student jobs) while only 8.5% were unemployed or retired. Income was almost respectively distributed throughout the four observed categories (all except the highest, above approx. 1,500 euros). A quarter of them (25%) have income from approx. 1,000 to 1,500 euros, 23% have an income between approx. 300 to 700 euros and 22% of respondents have 300 euros or less at their disposal each month. Little less than 20% of respondents have between 650 to 1,000 euros of monthly income and only 8% of respondents have more than 1,500 euros of income per month.

In order to ensure the homogeneity of our sample and minding recent findings that indicate sustainable consumer behaviour is strongly related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the consumers (Dangelico et al., 2022, Tran et al. 2022, Feuß et al., 2022, Wang et al., 2022), we have conducted chi-square analysis for age, education level, employment status and personal income. As Table 1 shows, all of the tests were insignificant, indicating that our results are eligible for further analysis.

Table 1: Chi-square test for socio-demographic variables

	Pearson Chi-Square	df	p
Employment Status	6.03	16	0.988
Age	16.35	12	0.176
Education Level	18.14	16	0.316
Personal Income	12.82	16	0.686

Source: Authors' calculations

5.2. HYPOTHESES TESTING

Independent variables were tested for multicollinearity and although they were correlated (r=0.64) the threshold of 0.8 for dismissing (Tay, 2017) them as separate independent variables was not reached and they were left in the analysis. However, this level of multicollinearity pointed to the use of a hierarchical regression instead of a linear one. Thus, the hypotheses were tested in a hierarchical multiple regression model, where purchase intention of sustainable clothing was a dependent variable, whereas perception of the brand as green (green brand image) and the existence of the eco-label were independent variables. The recent studies which show environmental self-identity (Nguyen et al., 2022) can positively impact the intention to buy green clothing and, following still-present green-feminine stereotype (Pohlmann & Valencia, 2021), we have included gender and self-identification as green consumer in the model as control variables. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of independent, dependent and control variables.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Purchase Intention	3.06	0.9	197
Eco-Label	3.18	1.01	197
Green Brand Image	2.82	0.96	197
Self-perception as Green Consumer	2.97	0.79	197

Source: Authors' calculations

In order to test the hypotheses, two blocks of variables were used in the multiple regression analysis. The first block included control variables, gender and self-perception as green consumer as predictors of purchase intention of sustainable clothing products as a dependent variable. In the second block green brand image and eco-labels were also included as predictor variables for the same dependent variable.

Overall, the first model was significant ($F_{2,194}$=23.75; R^2=0.20; p<0.001), as Table 3 shows. Both gender (β=0.13, t=2.06, p<0.05) and self-perception as green consumer (β=0.43, t=6.67, p<0.001) evoked a change in purchase intention of sustainable clothing products (Table 4).

The second model ($F_{4,192}$=84.92; R^2=0.64; p<0.001), in which green brand image (β=0.39, t=6.88, p<0.001) and eco-labels (β=0.43, t=7.26, p<0.001) were included, showed significant improvement from the first model ($\Delta F_{(2,192)}$ = 117.55, ΔR^2=0.44, p < 0.001). When perception of green brand image and eco-labels are included, the model explains 64% of the variance in sustainable clothing purchase intention, as opposed to only 20% explained by the gender and self-perception as green consumer.

Table 3: Model summary and comparisons

model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	0.44	0.20	0.19	0.81	0.20	23.75	0.000
2	0.80	0.64	0.63	0.55	0.44	117.55	0.000

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 4 shows how each of the independent variables are related to the dependent variable in the second model, i.e., how much change in intention to buy sustainable clothing is affected by green branding as opposed to going a step further and getting eco-label, compared to gender and self-perception as green consumer.

Table 4: Linear regression coefficients for both models

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
1	(Constant)	1.36	0.26		5.23	0.00
	Self-perception as Green Consumer	0.49	0.07	0.43	6.67	0.00
	Gender	0.30	0.15	0.13	2.06	0.04
2	(Constant)	0.40	0.19		2.13	0.03
	Eco-Label	0.38	0.52	0.43	7.26	0.00
	Green Brand Image	0.37	0.05	0.39	6.88	0.00
	Self-perception as Green Consumer	0.12	0.06	0.11	2.26	0.03
	Gender	0.07	0.10	0.03	0.68	0.50

Source: Authors' calculations

The model shows that both reinforcing of green brand image and getting eco-labels are efficient ways of encouraging consumers to buy sustainable clothing items, confirming both of our hypotheses. Standardised coefficients show that, if consumers perceive that the brand has a green image, they will be inclined to buy the sustainable clothing product ($\beta=0.39$; $p<0.001$), but even more effective will be eco-labels ($\beta=0.43$; $p<0.001$). Self-perception as a control variable showed a barely significant and relatively small effect in the model ($\beta=0.11$; $p<0.05$), while gender was not a statistically significant ($p>0.05$) predictor of purchase intention of sustainable clothing in this model.

6. DISCUSSION

The current research attempted to build on the existing knowledge of factors related to sustainable consumption of clothing. Although this research is preliminary in its nature, still the research findings can serve as a good starting point for exploring the phenomenon of sustainable fashion products in Croatia among young female adults. Similar research to date can be divided into studies focused on factors related to consumer characteristics, situational prepositions, or marketing strategy as predictors of purchase intention. Branding fashion products as sustainable by building their image as such has been discussed more among professionals than as theoretical constructs. This study is based on the premises of symbolism that has been shown to impact the consumption of sustainable clothing positively and indirectly via perceived symbolic meanings of sustainable fashion products (Bakış & Kitapçı, 2023). Similar to the study conducted by Woo (2021), our findings indicate that efforts made in terms of green branding and acquiring an eco-label for the item affect the intention to buy sustainable clothing positively. Our results are also on the trail of those proposed by Song and Kim (2019), indicating that the application of a marketing strategy that focuses on green branding as a driver of consumption yields promising results. Previous research indicates that the brand message about the sustainability of clothing must be explicit in order to affect attitudes towards the brand positively (Yan et al, 2012), and our results corroborate such notion.

Our study also evidences and supports the use of signalling theory in the sustainable fashion industry. It points out that the use of eco-labels in the fashion industry helps consumers to easily differentiate sustainable fashion products, while building a green brand image is helping in this process. Additionally, existing concern regarding eco-labels is ambiguous and complex (Hur & Faragher-Siddall, 2022) but does not seem to affect the purchase intention of our respondents, suggesting that the symbolic value of the label does convey the intended message. Green-feminine stereotype (Pohlmann & Valencia, 2021) was not found in this study as there was no significant impact of the respondent's gender on the purchase intention of sustainable clothing. Due to the statistically significant and strong impact of eco-labels on the purchase intention of sustainable clothing, the need for making their acquisition clearer and more user-friendly (Beck, 2012) remains a priority for both professionals and policymakers.

7. CONCLUSION

Brand managers should not neglect the nurture of green brand image through various ways of branding – insisting on sustainability in the product and distribution formation and a carefully crafted communication strategy that will deliver that message to the right, conscious, audience. However, a vital point of green branding should also be eco-labelling sustainable products. If fashion products do not have an eco-label, it would be wise to reorganise processes and apply different policies in order to include materials or policies to obtain one.

This study's main limitation is its ecological validity. Despite strong relationships among our constructs, it would be beneficially to examine the effects using different methodological approaches, preferably an experiment. The research sample is also a limitation of the study as the majority of the respondents are female and young adults. Hence, providing a more balanced sample of young adults would benefit the study, as well as additional focus solely on female respondents. Nevertheless, a masculine view of sustainable fashion would be neglected and conclusions narrow-minded to one target market, albeit quite important (Pohlmann & Valencia, 2021).

Additionally, this study was done among a heterogeneous sample of respondents, whereas comparing generations on a large scale might indicate generational differences that would contribute to a deeper understanding of sustainable fashion consumption. The strong effect eco-labels have on sustainable clothing consumption should be tested according to different types of label and their acceptance across cultures. In the end, further studies should examine the moderating potential of greenwashing in the relationships proposed in this paper.

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EXPLORATORY STUDY IN GENERATION Z: FEAR APPEAL TO HEALTH WARNING LABELS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Fear-appeals in advertising attempt to challenge human emotion and evoke fear to stimulate or change specific consumer behaviour. Therefore, many emotions such as fear, sadness, disgust and contempt impact consumers' motivation to process the information and encourage socially desirable behaviours in fear appeal campaigns. The aim of this research is to determine how Generation Z perceives health warning labels in the tobacco industry and to research their reactions towards fear appeal (text/photos).

Methodology: To fulfil the aim of the research the empirical research has been conducted on a sample of 47 Generation Z members in the period October 2022 – January 2023 using neuroscience metrics. Eye Tracking, Galvanic Skin Response and Facial Expression Analysis (AFFDEX) have been used to evaluate engagement, arousal and emotions of the respondents belonging to Generation Z. Inferential statistics method – Mann Whitney test has been used.

Results: The results indicate the existence of statistically significant differences between smoking status and neuromarketing metrics (engagement, arousal and emotions) in photo-based and text-based messages.

Conclusion: The results are indicative and can be used to gain a deeper knowledge about elements (text/photos) which Generation Z reacts to in order to establish better health campaigns and prevention programmes.

Keywords: Generation Z, neuroscience techniques, fear appeal, tobacco industry

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, marketing research methods have aimed to explain and predict the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. Many studies were based on consumers' abilities to express how they feel about a particular part of advertising, such as self-reports, focus groups, market tests etc. However, these methods were not as effective as expected. First, they assume that people are actually able to describe their own cognitive process. Second, numerous factors motivate research participants to change the statements about their feelings (Morin, 2011). The level of people awareness and emotional involvements are complex and difficult to understand and express by the traditional methods. Therefore, there was a need to include other effective approaches that rely on the ability and willingness of the person to report their preferences, behaviours, emotions and attention.

For several years, many researchers used neurophysiological methods to evaluate the effects of advertisements in marketing and how they stimulate consumer purchase behaviour. Many researchers stated that neuromarketing is a part of neuroscience that uses neurological and biological methods to evaluate the effect of marketing stimuli in emotions, decision making, memory, reasoning etc. (Custodio, 2010, Pozharliev, 2017, as cited in Preira, 2017). Such multi-method approach allows marketers to gain some valuable insights into the cognitive processes clarifying why a message/advertisement succeeds or fails. The applications of neuromarketing within the marketing literature have been focused on brands and consumer behaviour, especially in creating advertisements with fear appeal features.

Merriam–Webster (2002) defined fear as an unpleasant emotional state characterised by anticipation of pain or great distress and accompanied by heightened autonomic activity, especially involving the nervous system (William, 2012). The appeal of fear in marketing is usually associated with advertisements that contain intimidations or warning features. Therefore, in marketing, the appeal of fear can be seen as the risks of using and not using a specific product, service, or awareness which are not a part of fitting or appropriate use. It needs to be emphasised that there is no agreement regarding what causes a message to be categorised as a fear appeal (Witte, 1993) but fear can be an effective motivator on consumer behaviour.

Fear appeal messages have been widely used and tested across different contexts (Chen et al., 2021, Roberto et al., 2019, Chen & Tang 2022, Yang & Zhang, 2022), change non-adaptive behaviour patterns and endorse a healthier lifestyle such as non-smoking campaigns. Regularly, warning labels with text or image have been used to force the person to quit smoking or to educate smokers about the health effects of tobacco. Young people especially, like Generation Z, could be a crucial target for the social companies in order to raise awareness against potential unhealthy behaviour such as tobacco use. Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine how Generation Z perceives health warning labels in the tobacco industry and to research their reactions towards fear appeal (text/photos).

To achieve the research objectives, the paper is organised into four sections. Following the introduction, the second section provides the selected literature mainly related to fear appeal advertisements. The research methodology is presented in the third part, while the data analysis and research results are explained in the fourth section. Finally, the paper closes with conclusions drawn from the paper.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The use of fear and threat features in advertisements are an essential part in social and marketing areas; for example, healthy food marketing to adolescents (Charry & Demoulin, 2012), transportation (Krishen et al., 2010), tobacco use (Devlin et al., 2007, Dickinson & Holmes 2008, Michaelidou et al., 2008), and HIV prevention (Turk et al., 2006). In its communication and advertising, social marketing uses emotional appeals (Antonetti et al., 2015), especially negative or fear appeals which are regularly preferred. Early research shows that fear appeals can cause interest and excitement, which can eventually lead to changes in behavioural intention (LaTour et al., 1996). Therefore, fear appeals have been used for many products, services, ideas and causes, including smoking cigarettes, safe driving practices, insurance, financial security, social embarrassment and anti-drug abuse.

Advertisements based on fear appeals usually try to influence the target audience to change their non-adaptive behaviour patterns. Therefore, the fear appeals motivate non-adaptive actions such as message acceptance and self-protective avoidance. According to Witte & Allen (2000), strong fear appeals, and high-efficacy messages produce extreme behaviour change, whereas strong fear appeals with low-efficacy information create the highest levels of defensive reactions. They have established that fear appeals are most effective when they contain both high levels of threat and high levels of efficacy. Nabi et al., (2008: 191) stated that a fear appeal should encompass an adequate level of threat and efficacy massage to induce fear and inform the audience about adaptive behavioural possibilities.

Today, many marketers support the existing practice of using high levels of fear in social and marketing advertising. The assumption is that fear appeals are based on a threat to an individual's well-being, which motivates them to take control and prevent unwanted behaviour. A fear appeal is composed of three main concepts: fear, threat and perceived efficacy (Williams, 2011). The fear is a negative emotion that is usually related with physiological stimulation. The second concept is threat as an external motivation that creates a perception in recipients that they are sensitive to some negative situation. Efficacy shows a person's belief that recommendations given in a message can be implemented and will effectively reduce the perceived threat (Williams, 2012). Therefore, stronger fear appeals can influence greater attitude, intention and behavioural changes. Tannenbaum et al. (2015) found that high levels of fear could strongly predict adaptive behaviour (i.e., attitude and behavioural change) but Dickinson & Holmes (2008) found that low and moderate fear were the most effective for adolescents and young audiences.

Fear appeals are considered to be more powerful motivators to gain appropriate behaviour in person. Some studies (Allen et al., 2015, Biener et al., 2004, Terry-Mcelrath et al., 2005) have confirmed that fear appeals have the most consistent effect on behaviour in young people because of the provocative tone and intense images that can draw their attention. Likewise, Chang (2007) suggests that fear is more effective for people who perceive products as high risk such as unhealthy food or cigarettes. Because of these beliefs, such products have different warning labels on their packages that contain elements of fear, especially picture-based warnings which have been used extensively (Hammond et al., 2003). When negative framed messages use fear and unpleasant elements, they are unlikely to evoke reluctance to consume cigarettes. The warning labels with graphic/image elements appear to be a particularly powerful tool in educational and promotional anti-smoking campaigning. The cause can probably be found in the fact that text-based warnings are not as vivid and intense as a graphic warning in order to describe negative health consequences. Also, the use of images to express the consequences of smoking may be particularly effective if some of the users do not understand text-based warnings. In their paper Leshner et al. (2010) experimentally tested two types of message elements commonly used in anti-tobacco campaigns. The results of that study show that the impact of disgust content in anti-tobacco ads on cognitive resources varies, depending on whether the message contains elements of fear. It has been suggested that defensive reactions are most likely to occur in individuals who are categorised as most at risk, based on their current behaviour (Harris et al., 2007:438).

The fear appeals affect younger generations' attitudes and behaviours more than older people (Farrelly, et al., 2002, Pechmann & Reibling 2006, Ferguson & Phau, 2013, Andrews et al., 2014). Many studies have found a relationship between anti-tobacco advertisements and the consumption of tobacco products, attitudes toward smoking and brand awareness in young audiences (Arora et al., 2008, Gilpin et al., 2007, O'Hegarty et al., 2009, Samir et al., 2014). Young adults are vital objectives for anti-smoking messages (Ferguson & Phau, 2013), because they are most likely to experiment to become smokers and most likely they will influence their friends to smoke (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012). Also, young adults will be able to quit smoking more easily since they are minimally addicted (Jenks 1994, Breslau & Peterson 1996, Messer et al., 2008). Pechmann (1997) concluded that anti-smoking advertisements aimed at students can influence their health education by showing them that smoking has undesirable social as well as health consequences. On the contrary, Albaum et al. (2002) argued that anti-smoking advertisements which include fear elements fail to reach young adults. Some studies (Hastings et al., 2004, Sutfin et al., 2008) found that young audiences better respond to humour appeals and messages with positive elements and had better communication effects on young smokers than a negatively framed message. In addition, advertisements with positive and humour elements could have a stronger effect towards desirable behaviour in relation to fear appeals that can provoke defensive reactions, encouraging the young audience to avoid or reject the negatively framed message.

Hogg and Garrow (2003) explained that the different gender of audiences may also influence the response towards the advertisement. Chinwong et al., (2018) found that people with different smoking status and gender have different reactions to different warning labels. According to Smith and Stutts (1999) young females believe that smoking is significantly more dangerous and addictive compared to males. Haddad and Malak (2002) found that female smokers are more inclined to change their attitude towards smoking than male smokers when they are faced with health warning labels. They were more aware of the negative impact and harmful effects of smoking. Smith and Stutts (2003) found that long-term fear appeals appear to be more effective with females than males, where it has been shown that short-term fear appeals are more effective for them. De Meyrick (2010) found that anti-smoking advertisements have no impact on female adolescents to quit smoking. The prevention of youth smoking has become of crucial importance and advertisements with fear appeal can be one of the effective ways to positively influence young people (Allen et al., 2015, Brinn et al., 2012, Solomon et al., 2009).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is a pilot research and a part of a wider one. Only one part of the research has been used. To accomplish the main aim of the paper, an exploratory sequential mixed method research design has been applied. It consisted of six photos with six different texts below them, which were combined and had been promoted by the Ministry of Health in a non-smoking campaign. The photos were randomly set. After each photo and text, the respondents expressed the level of liking the photo and text on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is “I do not like it at all” and 10 is “I like it a lot”.

The research was made on a purposive sample of 47 respondents belonging to Generation Z in the period October 2022 –January 2023 using neuroscience metrics. Eye Tracking (ET), Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) and Facial Expression Analysis (AFFDEX) have been used to evaluate the engagement, arousal and emotions of the respondents.

In order to collect the data about visual attention, Eye Tracking tool with Smart Eye AI-X device with a sampling rate of 60Hz has been used. Applying this approach, respondents’ eye movements were monitored on screen by an eye tracking camera. Eye tracking was applied to determine eye movements that were recorded automatically by computer software iMotions 9.3 (iMotions, Copenhagen, Denmark). To detect respondents’ visual attention to the shown photos with fear appeal for smoking, heat maps and eye tracking fixation and saccade-based metrics were used.

The Galvanic Skin Response tool was applied to track emotional arousal towards photo/text stimuli among respondents. Shimmer 3 GSR device was applied. Two main components for GSR analysis – skin conductance level (SCL) and skin conductance response (SCR) were monitored. Widely used parameters for GSR include the amplitude and latency of SCR and average SCL value (Sun et al., 2012). GSR metrics applied in the research were: peeks (if there are any or not), number of peeks, peeks per minute and average peek amplitude.

Facial Expression Analysis was applied by iMotions AFFDEX software based on frame-to- frame analysis of static photos. Primarily, the position of a respondent’s face was detected in a photo. Secondly, his/her facial landmarks were identified. Thirdly, an internal face model was formed. Finally, the framed face was fed for translation of the features into specific action units that have been built on Ekman's emotional facial action coding system to detect facial emotion expression (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise and contempt) (Ekman, 2007). As the facial expression or emotion occurs and/or intensifies, the confidence score rises from 0 (no expression) to 100 (expression fully present) (Franek et al., 2022).

For the research purposes Mann Whitney tests were used to explore differences between sociodemographic variables and arousal and emotional reactions of respondents to seen photos/text. SPSS 25 software has been used to analyse the data provided by iMotions 9.3 software which has been used for measuring respondents' arousal and emotions.

4. RESULTS

As seen from Table 1 the research consisted of 47 respondents belonging to Generation Z. 87.2% were aged 18 and 12.8% were 19 years old. Most of respondents were females (72.3%) while 27.7% were males. Considering the smoking status, 70.2% were smokers and 29.8% were non-smokers.

Table 1: Respondents profile

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18	41	87.2
19	6	12.8
Gender		
Male	13	27.7
Female	34	72.3
Smoker or not		
Yes	33	70.2
No	14	29.8

Source: Authors research

The following part represents photos/text used by the Ministry of Health in a non-smoking campaign. The left side of the figures from 1st to 6th shows the photos/text that respondents were watching. The time for watching was not limited. The right side of the figures presents the results using heat maps. Heatmaps were defined by red–green spectrum (red areas present the longest fixation time, while green ones represent the shortest one). Therefore, it can be concluded that the attention of respondents has been put on text rather than on photos and on the parts of the text that had been highlighted and boldened in red. Also, since there are no red areas of heatmaps, respondents had fixations, but they lasted a short period of time (presented as green colour on photos/text).

Figure 1: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 1

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Figure 2: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 2

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Figure 3: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 3

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Figure 4: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 4

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Figure 5: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 5

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Figure 6: Fear appeal photo and text and heatmap - 6

Source: NN 114/2018 and authors' research

Table 2 presents fixation and saccade–based metrics using an Eye Tracking device. Areas of interest (AOI) had been defined for each photo and text in the context of the most significant detail of fear appeal for photos and the whole text was selected as the AOI. The results are in accordance with the heatmaps. They show that, in general, respondents pay more attention to text in comparison with the photos. Likewise, respondents revisited text more than photos and the number of fixations has been higher for text. The time till first fixation (TTFF) shows lower times for text, which means that they needed less time to fixate text than photos, the time they spent on AOI (dwell time) is also higher for text than photos and the fixation duration also, with the exception of the last photo.

Saccade based metrics show that their number is higher for text than photos, with the exception of the last photo, and saccade duration are higher for photos (with the exception of the last photo) which means a lesser fixation time.

Table 2: Fixation and saccade-based metrics (Eye tracking metrics)

	AOI 1	AOI 1 text	AOI 2	AOI 2 text	AOI 3	AOI 3 text	AOI 4	AOI 4 text	AOI 5	AOI 5 text	AOI 6	AOI 6 text
Fixation based metrics												
Respondent ratio (%)	27.66	**91.49**	61.7	**89.36**	34.04	**61.7**	46.81	**53.19**	55.32	**61.7**	53.19	**59.57**
Revisit count	0.38	**0.56**	0.31	**1.17**	0.12	**0.41**	0.44	**0.5**	0.34	**0.69**	0.43	0.6
Fixation count	1.92	**5.4**	1.79	**4.1**	1.62	**3.62**	1.82	**4.84**	1.92	**3.62**	2.04	**4.86**
TTFF AOI (ms)	**3173.62**	633.5	**2312.61**	360.18	**4947.27**	3171.55	**5828.42**	3339.33	**6731.26**	3174.91	**5529.05**	4352.54
Dwell time (ms)	358.99	**1054.63**	360.85	**1032.1**	320.59	**735.69**	379.65	**1104.97**	327.96	**743.32**	484.89	**1159.61**
Dwell time (%)	4.53	**13.74**	5.18	**12.46**	3.53	**7.56**	4.74	**10.5**	5.26	7	4.57	**10.22**
Fixation duration (ms)	182.28	**186.94**	204.55	**220.63**	203.14	**206.42**	198.14	**227.91**	166.75	**234.2**	**240.89**	**218.8**
Saccade based metrics												
Respondent ratio (%)	14.89	**85.11**	31.91	**72.34**	12.77	**55.32**	25.53	**48.94**	29.79	**53.19**	17.02	57.45
Saccade count	1.86	**4.4**	1.13	**2.68**	1.67	**2.65**	1.5	**4.3**	1.29	**2.76**	1.75	**4.19**
Saccade duration (ms)	**52.15**	41.58	**40.55**	37.63	**47.04**	37.6	**49.09**	36.83	**39.31**	40.4	**35.6**	**37.22**

Source: Authors' research

To explore the connection between smoking status and the level of their arousal caused by photos/text with fear appeal, Mann Whitney test was applied. The results from Tables 3 and 4 indicate the existence of a statistically significant difference in the level of arousal in accordance to the smoking status of the respondents belonging Generation Z. Nevertheless, those who are not smokers tend to express a higher level of arousal (more peaks, peaks per minute and higher peak amplitude) in comparison to those who are smokers.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney Test – Rank based on smoking status (GSR metrics)

Ranks				
	Smoker or not	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
has peaks	yes	33	22.39	738.87
	no	14	24.68	345.52
peak count	yes	33	23.32	769.56
	no	14	24.29	340.06
peaks per minute	yes	33	21.50	709.5
	no	14	25.06	350.84
peak amplitude	yes	33	23.57	777.81
	no	14	24.18	338.52

Source: Authors' research

Table 4: Mann-Whitney Test statistics based on smoking status (GSR metrics)

	Has peaks	**Peak count**	**Peaks per minute**	**Peak amplitude**
Mann-Whitney U	208.500	221.500	196.000	225.000
Wilcoxon W	313.500	326.500	301.000	330.000
Z	-.611	-.249	-.904	-.155
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.041**	.004**	.066*	.077*
a. Grouping Variable: Do you smoke?				

***p<0,05*
**p<0,1*
Source: Authors' research

Further analysis was needed to detect explicitly the underlying emotion while watching photos/text (valence). Tables 5 and 6 indicate the existence of statistically significant differences in expressed emotions like disgust, contempt, attention, negative and neutral time on photos/text regarding smoking status.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney Test - Ranks based on smoking status (AFFDEX metrics)

Ranks				
	Smoker or not	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**
anger time	yes	33	23.50	775.50
	no	14	25.18	352.50
sadness time	yes	33	23.50	775.50
	no	14	25.18	352.50
disgust time	yes	33	21.00	693.00
	no	14	**31.07**	435.00
joy time	yes	33	23.48	775.00
	no	14	25.21	353.00
surprise time	yes	33	24.21	799.00
	no	14	23.50	329.00
fear time	yes	33	23.50	775.50
	no	14	25.18	352.50
contempt time	yes	33	22.50	742.50
	no	14	**27.54**	385.50
engagement time	yes	33	22.52	743.00
	no	14	27.50	385.00
attention time	yes	33	19.00	627.00
	no	14	**26.12**	366.00
positive time	yes	33	23.52	776.00
	no	14	25.14	352.00
negative time	yes	33	20.15	665.00
	no	14	**33.07**	463.00
neutral time	yes	33	**26.97**	890.00
	no	14	17.00	238.00

Source: Authors' research

Those who are not smokers express a higher level of negative emotions such as disgust and contempt time. They pay more attention to the seen photos and text and time spent on them is with negative emotions. On the other hand, those who smoke show more neutral emotions while watching photos/text with fear appeal.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney Test statistics based on smoking status (AFFDEX metrics)

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
anger time	214.5	775.5	-1.535	0.125
sadness time	214.5	775.5	-1.535	0.125
disgust time	132	693	-3.971	**0**
joy time	214	775	-0.553	0.581
surprise time	224	329	-0.651	0.515
fear time	214.5	775.5	-1.535	0.125
contempt time	181.5	742.5	-2.717	**0.007**
engagement time	182	743	-1.251	0.211
attention time	161	266	-1.676	**0.094**
positive time	215	776	-0.52	0.603
negative time	104	665	-4.302	**0**
neutral time	133	238	-2.31	**0.021**

Source: Authors' research

In regard to the level of liking the presented photos/text and smoking status, there are no statistically significant differences between smokers and those who do not smoke. The mean of liking level of the presented photos/text for all respondents is 5.6, which means that they were indifferent.

Table 7: Mann-Whitney Test ranks and statistics based on smoking status (self-report)

Ranks				
	Smoker or not	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**
like level	yes	33	24.36	804.00
	no	14	21.14	296.00
	Total	47		

Test Statistics[a]	
	like level
Mann-Whitney U	219.000
Wilcoxon W	324.000
Z	-.284
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.077
a. Grouping Variable: do you smoke	

Source: Authors' research

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Today, companies embrace different types of advertising appeals to persuade the consumers in their purchase decision. Therefore, in order to draw consumer attraction, encourage their thinking or to make them aware, companies use different appeals such as humour, entertainment, sex, fear, or other means to evoke consumers' emotions such as sadness, disgust, joy, anger or surprise. However, fear appeal advertising has strength to change non–adaptive behaviour patterns and endorse a healthier lifestyle. It has to be highlighted that these kinds of appeal are considered to be more powerful motivators then other appeals, especially when an advertiser uses strong textual and graphic images. Fear appeals are based on a threat to an individual's well-being, which motivates them to take control and prevent undesirable behaviour. The warning labels with photo/text elements appear to be a particularly powerful tool in educational and promotional anti-smoking campaigning, particularly for young people like Generation Z. For them, this could be crucial in order to raise awareness against potential unhealthy behaviour such as tobacco use.

The results of the research indicate that, in general, Generation Z pays more attention to text in comparison with the photos. Likewise, respondents revisited text more than photos and the number of fixations has been higher for text, indicating that grade level and message type had a significant impact on the processing of tobacco-related messages. These results are broadly compatible with the study by Gradepre et el. (2003). Also, it has been shown that there are statistically significant differences in the level of arousal in regard to their smoking status. Smokers tend to show less peaks with lower amplitudes in comparison to non-smokers. AFDEX metrics shows different emotions considering smoking status. These results are similar to the findings of Sutfin et al. (2008), who found that adolescents' responses differed based on smoking status and they suggested that smokers respond differently to types of anti-tobacco ads. Namely, those who are non-smokers express more negative emotions (disgust, contempt, and more negative time), while smokers show more neutral reactions. According to the study by Haddad and Malak (2002), non-smokers had more positive attitudes against smoking and were more aware of the adverse effects of smoking. Higher attention while watching photo/text is also expressed by non-smokers, indicating that non-smoking campaigns have a higher impact on non-smokers, although their main target segment are smokers. This finding can also be of use in terms of smoking prevention.

Limitations of this paper can be found in the fact that this was a pilot research, and in the type of sample used for the research. Since a purposive sample was used, the results can be seen just as indicative and cannot be generalised to the whole Generation Z population. Considering the importance of the topic for the whole of society, further research should try to use some of the probability sampling methods in order to get representative results which could be applied to the whole of Generation Z.

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DESTINATION BRANDING IN MEDICAL TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROATIA

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism intended to provide health services that contribute to preserving the physical, mental and spiritual health of a person. During the last decade, it has become the fastest growing form of tourism at the global level, which indicates an increasing concern for one's own health and an orientation towards a healthy lifestyle. In the highly competitive industry of medical tourism, branding is the future.

The main goal of this paper is to explore the possibilities of branding Croatia as a medical tourism destination. Croatia has the potential to become a successful health tourism destination in the near future. It is necessary to analyse the potential that Croatia contains for the purposes of developing such form of tourism and to consider the elements which influence its development and recognition on the global market. When creating a brand, it is very important to create special, unforgettable feelings and experiences with potential consumers. Branding a destination means creating a certain awareness of that destination in the eyes of consumers, making it recognisable. After detailed analysis of the factors contributing to health destination branding, recommendations for the future development of Croatia as a medical tourism destination have been provided in the summary of the paper.

Keywords: medical tourism, health tourism, destination branding, Croatia

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's lifestyle is accompanied by stressful infections, an increase in chronic diseases and a lack of physical activity, which leads to an increasing demand for travel for health purposes. Also, people have more free time, higher incomes and better access to information about the quality of medical services provided in medical facilities in certain destinations, which makes it easier for them to choose to travel. A recent report by UN's World Tourism Organization recognised the exponential growth of health tourism in the last decade and its importance for many established and emerging destinations around the world. At the same time, the concept is still not well defined with differences varying and originating from cultural, linguistic and geographic factors (UNWTO, Exploring Health Tourism, 2018). UNWTO therefore recommended taxonomy and definitions for health tourism as follows: "Health tourism covers those types of tourism which have, as a primary motivation, the contribution to physical, mental and/or spiritual health through medical and wellness-based activities which increase the capacity of individuals to satisfy their own needs and function better as individuals in their environment and society"; it includes wellness tourism and medical tourism as its subtypes. "Medical tourism is a type of tourism activity which involves the use of evidence-based medical healing resources and services (both invasive and non-invasive). This may include diagnosis, treatment, cure, prevention and rehabilitation". Finally, "Wellness tourism is a type of tourism activity which aims to improve and balance all the main domains of human life including physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual and spiritual. The primary motivation for the wellness tourist is to engage in preventive, proactive, lifestyle enhancing activities such as fitness, healthy eating and relaxation, pampering and healing treatments" (UNWTO, Exploring Health Tourism, 2018).

Croatia is well known as a Mediterranean country and offers good weather, food, culture and opportunities for relaxation. Croatia has quality doctors and a number of EU standards that have already been implemented in healthcare and universities, yet, for example in this segment, it is mainly recognised in Italy for dental tourism. It is necessary to use marketing activities to promote Croatia as a holistic health tourism destination. Brand mission is to differentiate destinations from each other and their strongest assets in the minds of consumers. There are a large number of different destinations that have the same or similar assets on the market today. For example, many countries have the seaside and the coast, forests and mountains, but branding is the thing which makes one destination special and most desirable in the eyes of a consumer.

Therefore, the **main focus** of the paper is primarily on the opportunities and challenges of branding Croatia as a destination for medical tourism. It aims to explore the untapped potential that Croatia possesses in this sector and to provide actionable recommendations for its future development. Specific areas of focus include:

- The global context of medical tourism and its relevance to Croatia,
- The elements that can contribute to Croatia's success, such as geographical advantages and existing infrastructure,
- The trends affecting the growth of medical tourism globally and how Croatia can leverage these trends,
- The importance of effective branding and promotion strategies in destination branding.

In terms of the **methodology** used in the paper, it employs a multi-faceted approach to explore its focus areas:

- Literature Review: relying on existing literature to define and understand the concepts of destination branding and medical tourism, particularly within the European context,
- Analysis of Current State: including a situational analysis of the current state of medical tourism in Croatia and how it compares to other countries,
- Factors and Trends Analysis: discussion of various factors like geography, infrastructure and global healthcare gaps that could influence the development of medical tourism in Croatia.

Qualitative analysis was used based on existing literature, expert opinions and strategic documents in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations. Based on the analysis, the paper provides recommendations for the future development of medical tourism in Croatia. It also examines how medical tourism fits into Croatia's broader tourism and economic development strategies, which represents the main contribution of the paper.

2. DESTINATION BRANDING

The theoretical foundations of country and destination branding often draw upon general branding theory, extending principles from product and corporate branding to geographical entities. Kotler and Gertner (2002) offer a seminal work in this respect, articulating the complexities of country branding, particularly the challenges of managing multiple stakeholders and navigating political considerations. This work has laid the groundwork for understanding the intricacies of how countries and destinations can be marketed.

Stakeholder engagement has emerged as a critical theme in the recent literature on country and destination branding. Morgan et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of integrating various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses and governmental agencies into the branding process. Hankinson (2015) extends this discussion by highlighting how stakeholder engagement contributes to the authenticity of branding efforts and ensures the brand reflects the values of the community. Zenker and Braun (2017) further discuss the significance of stakeholder engagement, arguing that it not only enhances the authenticity of the brand, but also leads to more sustainable tourism practices.

The rise of digital media has significantly impacted the landscape of country and destination branding. Morrison et al. (2018) explore how digital platforms, particularly social media, have democratised the branding process, allowing consumers and locals to become co-creators of the destination image. Neuhofer et al. (2019) delve into how technology, especially augmented and virtual reality, can be used to enhance destination experiences, thereby contributing to more effective destination branding.

Cultural elements have been increasingly recognised as crucial components of country and destination branding. Blichfeldt and Knutson (2018) discuss how cultural heritage can be effectively integrated into branding strategies, while Pike (2020) explores the role of gastronomy and culinary traditions in shaping destination images. In this context, Ko et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of storytelling in leveraging cultural heritage for destination branding.

Sustainability is another emerging focus in the literature. Giraldi and Cesareo (2016) examine how sustainability practices can be incorporated into the country branding, arguing that a commitment to sustainability enhances brand equity. Dinnie (2015) goes a step further to discuss how sustainability could be used as a unique selling proposition for destinations looking to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace.

In summary, recent literature on country and destination branding has expanded to include diverse perspectives and methodologies, including stakeholder engagement, the impact of digital media, the integration of cultural elements, and the importance of sustainability. These themes reflect the evolving complexities of branding in an increasingly globalised and digitised world.

3. MEDICAL TOURISM IN EUROPE

Health care services have four distinctive characteristics that greatly affect the design of marketing programmes for them: intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability. Service marketers must also be able to transform intangible services into concrete benefits—a process for which a set of concepts is used under the term customer experience engineering. Organisations must first develop a clear picture of what they want the customer's perception of an experience to be and then design a consistent set of performance and context clues to support that experience. In the case of a hospital, a good surgical outcome is a performance clue; a context clue is whether the surgeon and nurses act in a professional manner. The context clues in a hospital are delivered by people (humanics) and things (mechanics). The hospital assembles the clues in an experiential blueprint, a pictorial representation of the various clues (Kotler et al., 2008).

Medical tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism intended to provide health services that contribute to preserving the physical, mental and spiritual health of a person. It is considered as a complex tourist product that affects the development of tourism. During the last decade, it has become the fastest growing form of tourism with an annual growth rate at the global level, which indicates an increasing concern for one's own health and an orientation towards a healthy lifestyle.

Medical tourism as a segment of health tourism is a complex tourist product that includes the provision of health services for the purpose of preserving one's own health (Institute for Tourism, 2014).

The main motives of medical tourism travel are medical preservation, disease prevention and hospital treatment or procedure (Ivandić, Kunst, Telišman-Košuta, 2015). In academic literature different authors have identified different motivational factors to travel abroad for a medical purpose, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Motivational factors to travel abroad for medical treatment

Source	Factors
Joan C. Henderson (2004)	High cost in home country, absence of certain procedures or procedure using advanced technologies, and long waiting lists at home and feeling of superior standards elsewhere
John Connell (2006)	high cost of treatment in developed countries, long waiting lists at home, affordability of international air travel and ageing of post-war generation
Percivil M Carrera and John FP Bridges (2006)	Increased health awareness, increased healthcare expectations, ease of travel due to globalisation
Arnold Milstein and Mark Smith (2006)	increasing out-of-pocket expenditure for health including insurance premium, enormous price advantage, and bonuses and cash incentives to employees
Leigh Turner (2007)	lower labour cost and lower training cost in developing countries
K. A. Bramstedt and Jun Xu (2007)	proposed US medical insurance programs to handle long waiting list, availability of organ
Rory Johnston, Valorie A Crooks, Krystyna Adams, Jeremy Snyder and Paul Kingsbury (2011)	Service not available in Canada, Avoiding waitlists, Cost Savings, Seeking better quality of care, Anonymity, Faster Care, Appeal of Tourism
Jonathan Crush and Abel Chikanda (2014)	Lack of access of basic healthcare at home.
J. Hanefeld, N. Lunt, R. Smith and D. Horsfall (2015)	Treatment factors: Unavailability (with many variance) and distrust or dissatisfaction with NHS and travel factors: cost, expertise, availability and cultural familial
Sarika Thoke and Shivaji Madan (2017)	high cost at home, long wait times for certain procedures, unaffordability of private physician, unavailability of treatment in home country, treatment is illegal in home country, ease and affordability of international travel, improvements in both technology and standard of care

Source: Faisal & Dhusia (2020), p. 54

Today's lifestyle is accompanied by stressful infections, an increase in chronic diseases and a lack of activity, which leads to an increasing demand for travel for health purposes. Also, people have more free time, higher incomes and better access to information about the quality of medical services provided in medical facilities in certain destinations, which makes it easier for them to choose to travel. Trends that occur due to the aging of the population, an unhealthy lifestyle, but also an orientation towards a healthy life, affect the extremely rapid growth and development of this form of tourism on the market, which was particularly reflected during the last decade and became one of the most important reasons for travel.

Medical tourists are those who, due to the need for medical treatment or healthcare, travel to another country and stay at least one night. Travel for medical treatments is accompanied by a stay and care during recovery. Given the global recognition of medical standards and regulations, there is a need for the best treatments at competitive prices in other countries. The motives for travelling to another country are related to the lower price of the service, better quality of the service, getting the service in a shorter time and the inability to provide the service in one's own country. In Figure 2 there is an example of comparison in prices of medical procedures in different countries in the year 2011. Prices of medical services today are considerably higher, but ratios between different countries are still applicable.

Figure 2: Comparison of medical tourism prices for selected countries

Procedure	US	India	Thailand	Singapore	Malaysia	Mexico	Cuba	Poland	Hungary	UK
Heart bypass (CABG)	113 000	10 000	13 000	20 000	9 000	3 250		7 140		13 921
Heart Valve replacement	150 000	9 500	11 000	13 000	9 000	18 000		9 520		
Angioplasty	47 000	11 000	10 000	13 000	11 000	15 000		7 300		8 000
Hip replacement	47 000	9 000	12 000	11 000	10 000	17 300		6 120	7 500	12 000
Knee replacement	48 000	8 500	10 000	13 000	8 000	14 650		6 375		10 162
Gastric bypass	35 000	11 000	15 000	20 000	13 000	8 000		11 069		
Hip resurfacing	47 000	8 250	10 000	12 000	12 500	12 500		7 905		
Spinal fusion	43 000	5 500	7 000	9 000		15 000				
Mastectomy	17 000	7 500	9 000	12 400		7 500				
Rhinoplasty	4 500	2 000	2 500	4 375	2 083	3 200	1 535	1 700	2 858	3 500
Tummy Tuck	6 400	2 900	3 500	6 250	3 903	3 000	1 831	3 500	3 136	4 810
Breast reduction	5 200	2 500	3 750	8 000	3 343	3 000	1 668	3 146	3 490	5 075
Breast implants	6 000	2 200	2 600	8 000	3 308	2 500	1 248	5 243	3 871	4 350
Crown	385	180	243	400	250	300		246	322	330
Tooth whitening	289	100	100		400	350		174	350	500
Dental implants	1 188	1 100	1 429	1 500	2 636	950		953	650	1 600

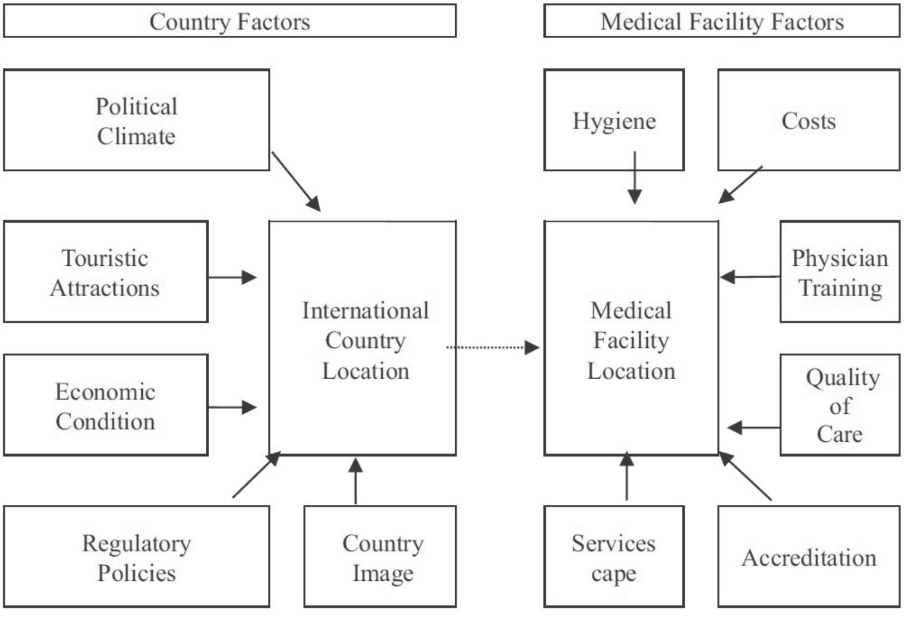
* Costs of surgeries around the world. Costs given in US$

** The price comparisons for surgery take into account hospital and doctor charges, but do not include the costs of flights and hotel bills for the expected length of stay.

Source: Lunt et al., (2011, p. 12)

Certain hospitals are even advertised through intermediaries or directly, combining medical services with tourist experiences in the destination. However, recent research emphasises the importance of country (destination) factors and medical facility factors together as a key success for branding a country as a medical tourism destination as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Two-stage model describing factors affecting patients' choice of destination and medical facility



Source: Sag & Zengul (2018), p. 299

The medical tourism market is growing extremely fast, while Europe is the most significant region in terms of size and number of visits. The global medical tourism market has been growing at a rate of 25% per year for the past 8 years (Barač Miftarević, 2022). It is estimated at over 200 billion EUR. North America, Europe and Asia have the largest share of medical tourists. The European medical tourism market is estimated at around EUR 115 billion, generated from around 200m connected trips (Barač Miftarević, 2022.). Germany, Turkey, Switzerland, Spain and Poland are the most frequent destinations. Most tourists come from Northern Europe, the UK, Russia and the Middle East. European countries are highly attractive medical tourism destinations. Leading rehabilitation medical facilities in Europe demonstrate high success rates for neurological and orthopaedic therapy and offer focused on extremely innovative devices and technologies.

The first good practice example is in Austria - Lassnitzhöhe Private Clinic. Lassnitzhöhe is among the best rehabilitation centres in the world. Due to high quality management and patient satisfaction Lassnitzhöhe is the primary choice of Arabic and Russian speaking patients. The centre specialises exclusively in neurological and orthopaedic rehabilitation. The centre is equipped with Armstudio, robotic instruments for training damaged hands.

The second good practice example is Cereneo in Switzerland. Cereneo is a Swiss centre specialised in rehabilitation after stroke, head and spine injuries. Cereneo works with extremely innovative devices and technologies (brain simulation, motion sensors, virtual games and robotics). Neurorehabilitation specialists in the clinic restore patients' musculoskeletal system and speech functions. Patients mostly come from UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Great Britain.

Turkey has targeted the medical tourism segment by focusing on quality at an affordable price. World Eye Hospital is the world's largest private eye hospital group. The group consists of 10 hospitals in Turkey and 6 clinics in Europe (Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Cologne, Tirana, Heusde-Zolder). They have customisable medical tourism packages (e.g., EUR 1,840 round trip from London to Turkey, 3 nights in a 5* hotel, airport transfer, laser treatment on both eyes, examination at an international branch) and online reservation system in 10 languages. Accommodation is provided within the hospital and additional contents.

International medical organisations can be an additional leverage in market positioning. Best practice examples are Medical organisations, for example The Medical Tourism Association. It is the first international organisation for medical tourism and the global health industry. The goal is to promote the highest level of healthcare quality. It provides educational training, certifications and other programmes that enable easier brand development. The International Board of Medicine and Surgery is one more organisation that brings together doctors, surgeons, dentists and other health professionals interested in establishing and maintaining a professional standard of patient care. The goal is to establish centres of excellence in healthcare that meet their rigorous standards.

The European Medical Tourism Alliance is an organisation that represents the interests of stakeholders in the medical tourism industry, coordinates their activities and improves patient mobility. One of the goals is to provide an appropriate alternative solution to the lack of healthcare system in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world.

4. BRANDING CROATIA AS A MEDICAL TOURISM DESTINATION

Country branding is a relatively new field which has gained significant attention in recent years. It involves creating and promoting a positive image of a country in the minds of people from other nations. The ultimate goal of country branding is to attract foreign investment, promote tourism and enhance the country's global reputation.

Country branding can be defined as "the process of developing and communicating a unique identity and image for a country or region, with the objective of promoting and enhancing its reputation in the global community" (Anholt, 2008, p. 109). A country brand is a set of values, beliefs and images that create a distinctive identity for a nation. It reflects the country's culture, history and achievements, and distinguishes it from other nations.

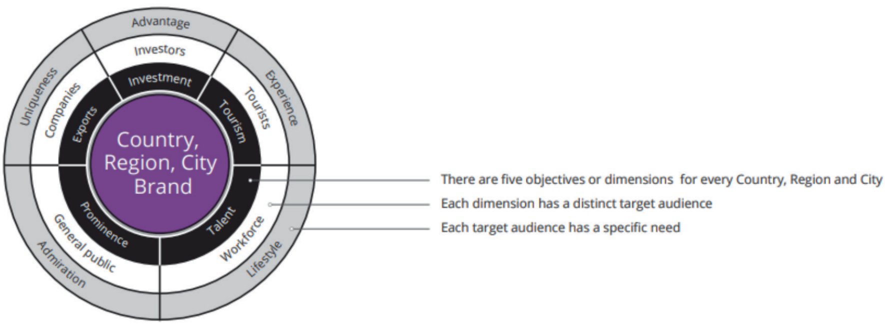
The significance of country branding lies in its potential to create economic and social benefits for a country. A strong country brand can attract foreign investment, increase exports and promote tourism, which can contribute to economic growth. It can also enhance the country's image and reputation, which can have a positive impact on diplomatic relations with other countries. According to Balakrishnan and Phau (2015), "country branding is increasingly seen as an important tool for countries to differentiate themselves in the global marketplace, particularly in the areas of tourism and foreign investment" (p. 218).

Creating a successful country brand involves several strategies, such as identifying the country's unique attributes, creating a clear and consistent message and developing effective communication channels. According to Kotler and Gertner (2002), the four key elements of a successful country brand are authenticity, differentiation, relevance and coherence. Authenticity refers to the country's ability to deliver on its promises, while differentiation is the ability to stand out from other countries. Relevance refers to the country's ability to meet the needs of its target audience, and coherence is the ability to maintain consistency in the country's messaging and actions. One of the most effective ways to create a successful country brand is through the use of storytelling. Storytelling helps to create an emotional connection with the target audience, by highlighting the country's unique attributes, culture and history. According to Kim and Ko (2012), "storytelling is a powerful tool that can help countries to differentiate themselves from other countries, create a sense of identity and pride among citizens, and generate interest and engagement from foreign audiences".

When considering Croatia in terms of branding and familiarity in the minds of people around the world, some of the strongest associations regard tourism (Dubrovnik, nice coastline with a lot of islands), sports (especially football), historic heritage, and of recently high tech (Rimac, etc.). However, medical tourism is not what is usually associated with Croatia on a wide scale.

According to the most recent Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking (2023) tourism report, Croatia holds a very high 16th place in the World with a strong (AA) CBS rating.

Figure 4: Bloom Consulting's approach to country branding

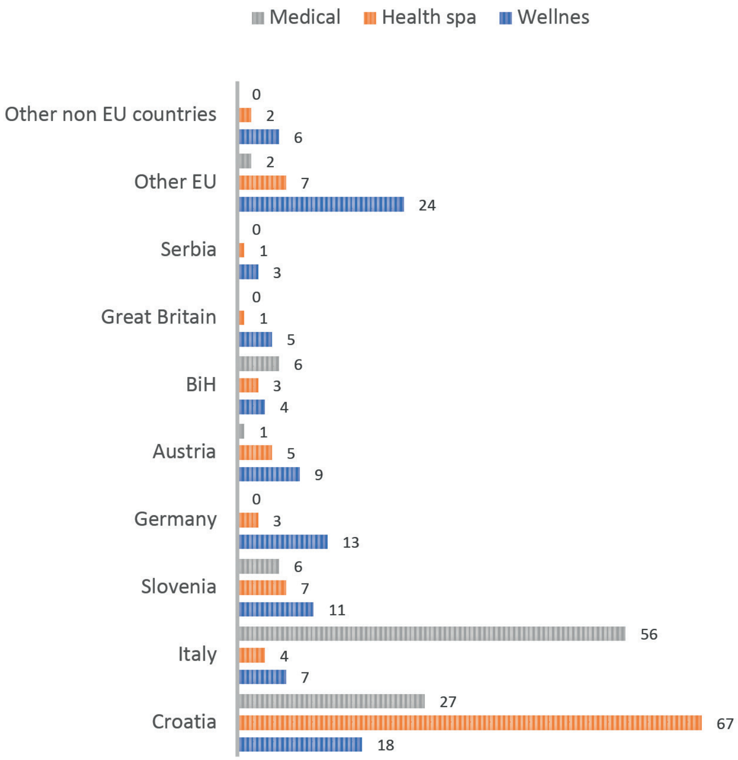


Source: Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking: 2022/2023 Tourism Edition, Future Brand

Croatia is also ranked as the 27th most successful tourist destination in the world, with tourism (direct and indirect) contributing to the country's GDP in the year 2019 with 25%, according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics and Strategy for development of sustainable tourism until the year 2030 (Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030, 2022). According to the data from the Croatian National Bank, overall income from tourism in the same pre-pandemic year amounted to 10.5 billion Euros. Croatia is well known and popular as a Mediterranean tourist destination around the world. However, tourism in Croatia has a long tradition dating back to Roman times, when thermal baths, private rest areas and summer houses were created. In the middle of the 19th century, tourist health resorts were created at hot mineral water sources that emphasise the importance of body recovery and treatment. Climate health resorts are opening in Opatija, Crikvenica, on the islands of Veli and Mali Lošinj and Rab, in Skrad and Delnice. Croatia is a country with a pleasant and mild climate, natural healing factors and a favourable geographical location that creates natural predispositions for the development of medical tourism. The geographical position that enables the proximity of large broadcasting markets and the transport infrastructure contribute to the development of medical tourism. The key problems of Croatian medical tourism are a lack of attractive offers, i.e., inadequate quality of health infrastructure, public health system problems (such as long waiting lists for different procedures), lack of qualified human resources, lack of investment and the absence of coordinated proactive development between all key stakeholders. However, in a strategy of development of Croatian tourism it is recognised as a prioritised strategic tourism product, which can be used to solve the problem of seasonality and increase the added value, as well as offer destinations on the continental part of the country (Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030, 2022). Some of the necessary steps involve an implementation of all official action plans and promotion of public-private joint partnerships, application for additional money from the EU funds in order to improve, repair or build the infrastructure needed for the development of medical facilities, as well as attraction of needed medical workers, from doctors to nurses (Barač Miftarević, 2022). Medical tourism is therefore a significant product with high growth potential in Croatia. Health tourism exists in Istria, Kvarner, Northern Croatia and Zagreb. The future development of medical tourism in Croatia is recognised in the current Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism Croatia until 2030. According to the Croatian Government, Medical tourism is a special form of tourism that annually contributes 500 million euros to the state budget.

Croatia is well known as a Mediterranean country and offers good weather, food, culture and opportunities for relaxation. Health care in Croatia is cheaper compared to the countries of Northern and Western Europe and offers better returns and a competitive advantage. Due to its geographical location, Croatia offers easier access to European customers than some traditional medical tourism countries (example Turkey). Due to EU membership, Croatia has achieved trust and easier access to patients from Europe, as well as being visa-free for many countries. Croatia has quality doctors and a number of EU standards that have already been implemented in healthcare and universities. The successes so far have been achieved as a result of individual entrepreneurs, primarily from the medical sector, in the areas of dentistry, ophthalmology and rehabilitation. Croatia is recognised on the Italian market as a country of dental tourism. Promotion at the national level is limited and mostly relies on the independent efforts of service providers. The sectors of tourism and medicine are not in close communication, nor is there systematic cooperation that would result in a common approach to potential clients. Users and agencies do not perceive Croatia as a health tourism country (Perception of Croatia as a health tourism destination on the intermediary market - Final report, HZZO Health brochure). According to the TOMAS survey for 2018, the visitor's profile shows that health tourism visitors are mostly middle-aged and older individuals, with the youngest visitors of an average 43 years old being users of wellness services, and the oldest customers with an average age of 58 being medical tourism customers. Regarding nationality, users of wellness and medical tourism services are predominantly foreigners (82% and 73%) coming from Croatia's traditional, close-by, tourism generating markets, while users of health spa services are mostly domestic guests (67%), as shown in the graph below (Marušić, Telišman Košuta, Sever, 2019).

Figure 5: Country of permanent residence of health tourism visitors according to segments in %



Source: Marušić, Telišman Košuta, Sever, 2019, p. 25

According to the THOMAS study, the main motivation for health tourists coming to Croatia are relaxation, physical therapy, dental work and rehabilitation. The average daily expenditure of such overnight visitors amounts to €149 (€82 for accommodation, €11 for health related services) in the wellness segment, €63 (€34 for accommodation, €16 for health related services) in health spa and €292 (€31 for accommodation, €221 for health related services) in the medical segment (Marušić, Telišman Košuta, Sever, 2019). The promotion of medical tourism in Croatia is in the process of development. Promotion refers to a set of promotional activities aimed at stimulating the sale of products and services on the market. Medical tourism in Croatia aims to extend the tourist season, improve the offer in the pre-season and post-season, and attract customers with higher paying power. For this purpose, it is necessary to use marketing activities where promotion is emphasised as an excellent way of establishing relations between health services and the market. Advertising on the digital platform is one of the most effective promotion channels, and at the same time the most expensive. With the help of digital marketing, consumers can easily and quickly get all the information and form an opinion about it by comparing it with other offers, thus speeding up the purchase process. The audience to which the message is sent through digital marketing is unlimited, but at the same time it gives the opportunity to determine the target group that is most important to the company. The content created by digital marketing allows the offer to be tailored to the consumer, based on their behaviour and preferences. Businesses using digital marketing have full control over their advertising; there are insights into statistics so they can quickly find out how successful they are in advertising and adjust its content to increase performance. The speed and ease of obtaining information provides a great time saver. Digital marketing makes it easier to build long-term relationships with consumers, because it provides the ability to follow up with consumers who have already purchased or were interested in purchasing, leading to personalised offers that may lead to new purchases. With the development of social networks, a new way of digital marketing has also developed - advertising on social networks. The great advantage of digital advertising is the large number of users, personal access to the user and direct communication with existing and potential users. According to Singh et. al. (2005), with the rise in popularity of digital marketing, many businesses are exploring how social media can help them promote their products and services to potential and existing customers. According to Weinberg (2009), the main advantage of social media marketing is related to costs. It is necessary to start from the basics, such as consolidation and structuring of the offer on the website, creative solutions and active marketing through a mix of channels with a focus on digital marketing. In addition to the above, it is important to simultaneously carry out promotion through appearances at fairs and conferences, running social networks, organising training, publishing brochures, flyers and other promotional materials. Considering the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries are promoting the health safety of the destination, facilities and services of the health system.

5. CONCLUSION

Croatia has the opportunity to adjust the country destination promotion according to the specifics of the broadcast markets. In order to establish Croatia as a medical tourism destination, multi-stakeholder engagement, involving healthcare providers, the tourism industry and the government is crucial. Croatia should utilise the main benefits of its socio-economic environment in order to further develop an image of an attractive medical tourism destination. Given advantages such as membership in the EU, which encompasses the common market, legislature and common currency, as well as geographical location, it should focus on attracting patients/tourists from well-developed EU neighbouring countries that have high purchasing power and whose tourists already represent the major share of inbound tourists, such as Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Germany. Croatia should therefore become a regional hub for certain medical procedures. As more and more EU citizens choose to buy real estate in Croatia, especially in the Adriatic part, and come to spend their retirement days on a sunny coast, there is a huge opportunity for organic growth for different medical services from those expats as well. Zagreb is known for primary services such as: dentists, ophthalmology, cosmetic surgery and dermatology. It is necessary to segment the offer according to the most requested services, create a marketing message about holding medical conferences, provide services through a digital platform in order to establish business contacts and develop brand awareness and carry out higher education of medical professionals. Croatia's offer of medical tourism can be price competitive, but when marketing the offer, the focus must be on the high quality that it can realistically offer. There is still a lot of work to be done in developing the necessary medical human resources, as well as building modern medical facilities that can offer high standard medical care for a high volume of patients. Marketing promotion would promote the destination in addition to the content itself, which would be much more effective and profitable.

With an adequate strategy, promotion, investments and maximum utilisation of resources, there is a great possibility that Croatia will become a medical destination in the future, thus benefiting from inbound tourists all year round and offering services with high added value for the benefit of the medical sector as well as the country's GDP as a whole.

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NONPROFIT ADVERTISING APPEALS – HOW DO THEY IMPACT GENERATION Z PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR? EXPERIMENTAL SURVEY STUDY IN CROATIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of different advertising appeals (global vs. local and benefit vs. guilt) used by non-profit organisations (NPOs) on Generation Z prosocial behavioural intentions such as volunteering, in kind donating and donating money.

Methodology: Using a scenario-based approach, 513 Croatian Generation Z survey respondents were randomly shown one of four ads, each representing a specific type of appeal - a combination of global or local and benefit or guilt appeals.

Results: The study found no statistically significant difference in intention to engage in prosocial behaviour intentions based on global vs. local appeals. There was also no significant difference in intention to make in kind donations or donate money based on guilt vs. benefit appeals. However, guilt appeals had a stronger influence on intention to volunteer compared to benefit appeals.

Conclusion: This study identified the most effective appeal combinations for influencing Generation Z members' intentions to engage in various forms of prosocial behaviour. The combination of global and guilt appeals proved best for in kind donations, the combination of local and guilt appeals proved best for intentions to volunteer, while monetary donations were most encouraged by a combination of global and benefit appeals. The research findings can help NPOs to develop more successful advertising campaigns to engage Generation Z to their causes.

Keywords: nonprofit marketing, prosocial behaviour, advertising appeals, generation Z

1. INTRODUCTION

Being heavily resource dependent, nonprofit organisations (NPOs) fundamentally depend on individual charitable contributions such as donations, endowments and volunteering (Lindenmeier, 2014). In order to raise contributions and/or other kinds of involvement they often use advertising, i.e., communication of their goals and activities. Particularly, charities rely on advertising as an important tactic to present messages to audiences (Wymer et al., 2006). Communication through advertising is an important social marketing tool which represents one of the most efficient tools to persuade people to adopt social change (Wood, 2008). It provides information and arguments of recommendation and/or uses emotional appeals to invite and encourage adopting a desired social behaviour (Lee et al., 2015). NPOs, depending on their programmes and activities, can have diverse needs in terms of donations at various times – sometimes they just need in kind donations, sometimes money and sometimes volunteers. As several studies indicate, different resources might be psychologically distinct in several ways (Okada & Hoch, 2004, Zauberman & Lynch, 2005, Mogilner & Aaker, 2009) and these differences may impact consumers' prosocial behaviour (Liu & Aaker, 2008).

Although there are numerous studies investigating prosocial behaviour, there is little empirical evidence which discusses how Generation Z perceives charitable donations and philanthropic work (Konstantinou & Jones, 2022). Generation Z is an emerging cohort in all aspects of economic and social life. In terms of characteristics, lifestyles and attitudes, Generation Z individuals are the new conservatives embracing traditional beliefs, valuing the family unit, self-controlled and more responsible. This generation values authenticity and "realness" (Williams & Page, 2011). At the same time, Generation Z consumers are challenging to impact via advertising appeals due to their short attention spans (Conlin & Bauer, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to get a deeper insight into the impacts of different NPOs' advertising appeals on diverse types of prosocial behaviour of Generation Z. To our best knowledge, there are only a few studies that investigate the impact of different appeals on diverse types of prosocial behaviour. For example, previous study on Croatian Generation Z (Leko Šimić at al., 2023) has shown that they interact with NPOs in a somewhat different way than previous generations, and therefore marketing communication and advertising appeals need to reflect this difference.

This research seeks to further the understanding of different types of prosocial behaviour of generation Z by clarifying the roles of nonprofit advertising appeals in their response and motivation to engage in prosocial behaviours. It investigates global vs. local appeal and guilt as negative emotional appeal vs. benefit as positive emotional appeal in the context of nonprofit advertising campaigns addressing the specific context of child hunger. Such a study can contribute to the creation of more effective advertising campaigns of NPOs, using the criteria of goals they want to accomplish.

The paper is organised as follows: after the introduction, the literature overview section investigates Generation Z's response to nonprofit advertising appeals, concentrating on appeals (global vs. local and guilt vs. benefit appeals) that will be studied in this paper. The literature overview has identified a research gap, and three research questions were developed. The research section describes the experimental methodology used, as well as statistical analysis, and presents research results and discussion. In the conclusion section the research findings are elaborated. Study limitations are identified as well as further research development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

From abundant literature on generation Z characteristics, there are different ways in which nonprofit advertising appeals can influence Generation Z's prosocial behaviour (Singh & Dangmei, 2016, White, 2017, Shin &Lee, 2021):

Emotional appeal. Generation Z is often driven by emotional connections to causes, and nonprofit advertising appeals that tug at their heartstrings can be highly effective. For example, ads that highlight the impact of donations or highlight the struggles of people in need can be powerful motivators for Generation Z to act.

Authenticity and transparency. Generation Z values authenticity and transparency in organisations, and nonprofit advertising appeals that are honest about their goals and impact can be more effective. Ads that show how donations are being used or highlight the organisation's impact in a specific community can help to build trust and motivate Gen Z to get involved.

Social media. Generation Z is a highly connected generation, and nonprofit advertising appeals that leverage social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Twitter can be remarkably effective. Social media platforms offer a low barrier to entry for young people to engage with causes they care about and can help build a sense of community around a nonprofit's mission.

Empowerment. Generation Z is a generation that wants to make a difference and have an impact. Nonprofit advertising appeals that focus on empowering young people to act can be remarkably effective. Ads that encourage Gen Z to volunteer, donate, or advocate for a cause, can help them feel like they are making a difference and have agency in creating positive change.

This study focuses on the two types of appeals in social marketing: global vs. local appeals and benefit vs. guilt appeals. Spatial distance (local vs. international/global appeal) indicates the donation area for fundraising and is one of the major studied appeal types in charity advertising (Chen, 2020). Studies on global vs. local appeals rely on the social identity theory which posits that people's identities are based on a sense of belonging and, therefore, in the context of prosocial behaviour, they would react more positively and passionately to stimuli that benefit their ingroups (i.e., local appeal) and less positively to stimuli that are unrelated to their ingroups or related to outgroups (i.e., global appeal) (Woo, Kim & Childs, 2019).

In accordance with the above, several studies found that people prefer donating to local nonprofit organisations (NPOs) more than international NPOs (Rajan et al., 2009, Knowles & Sullivan, 2017) and generally prefer helping the ones in need in their own countries before helping across borders (Erlandsson et al., 2018). Global vs. local context was chosen in the case of Generation Z since this generation is identified as global, due to its active participation in an online, borderless, world. They are identified as a global and diverse generation who come from a wider mix of backgrounds with different experiences and ideas but believe that they can impact the world (Williams & Page, 2011). However, Woo et al. (2019) found national differences in global vs. local appeals efficiency between the USA and South Korea and related it to national cultural differences (individualism and collectivism). Taking all that into account and identifying Croatian national culture as collectivistic, we propose the following research question:

Q1: Is Generation Z in Croatia more responsive to engage in prosocial behaviour when exposed to local or global appeals?

Furthermore, guilt vs. benefit nonprofit advertising appeals were analysed. The two are sometimes identified as negative vs. positive appeals (Erlandsson et al., 2018). Guilt appeals are often used in NPOs, particularly for charitable donations (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Academic literature suggests that guilt is often related to empathic concern (Tangney, 1995). Studies have also demonstrated that guilt enhances prosocial behaviour (Tangney, 1995, Batson, 1998). It has been studied extensively in the context of encouraging prosocial consumer behaviours (Coulter & Pinto, 1995, Basil et al., 2008, Duhachek et al., 2012). In general, guilt can motivate prosocial actions like charitable giving and ethical purchasing, but guilt appears to be most effective when it does not activate thoughts of manipulative intent (Hibbert et al., 2007), when a moderate amount of guilt is activated (Coulter & Pinto, 1995), and when guilt is more subtly versus explicitly activated (Peloza et al., 2013). Basil et al. (2008) connect the sociological concept of the social norm of helping the less fortunate and the feeling of guilt because of failing to do so. Their research demonstrated that high guilt increases both guilt response to an advertisement and charitable donation intentions. Eayrs & Ellis (1990) study found that guilt, pity and sympathy predict the greatest commitment to give money. However, there are also some opposite results. Plewes & Stuart (2007) found that campaigns which make an individual feel negative emotion like guilt make the potential donor feel hopeless and reduce intention to help.

Benefit appeals focus on communicating the positive outcomes and benefits that donors can experience by supporting a nonprofit organisation's mission. They typically focus on the social impact that one makes with his/her engagement; personal satisfaction one can feel from supporting a worthy cause and personal fulfilment that comes from supporting a cause that aligns with one's values and beliefs. Benefit appeals are said to be particularly effective in activities that aim to improve the well-being of others and therefore could be very efficient in charities looking for support.

The studies in this context show inconsistent results and there are both theoretical models and empirical findings in favour of both negative appeals and positive appeals (Erlandsson et al., 2018). For example, Cialdini et al. (1987) study shows that guilt appeals make us feel more distress and the easiest way to reduce negative emotions is to help, while benefit, i.e., positive appeals, enable us to see the positive consequences of engagement in prosocial behaviour (Burt & Strongman, 2005).

Based on the above, the second research question is proposed:

Q2: Is Generation Z in Croatia more responsive to engage in prosocial behaviour when exposed to benefit or guilt appeals?

Finally, based on the obtained results and research goals, the last research question is proposed:

Q3: What is the optimal combination of appeals (global vs. local and benefit vs. guilt) for different types of prosocial behaviour for Generation Z in Croatia?

3. RESEARCH

3.1. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a scenario approach with altogether 513 Croatian Generation Z questionnaire respondents. Each one was randomly assigned to one of the four advertisements promoting a cause regarding a children's hunger issue, which varied in appeal type. The appeals differed in appeal combinations: global and benefit, global and guilt, local and benefit and local and guilt. The appeals were inspired by and made to resemble real charity advertisements but are fictive.

They were asked to decide for themselves and indicate the intended behaviour that included four types: doing nothing, i.e., not responding to the appeal, in kind donations (food, clothes, school supplies and similar), donating money and donating time, i.e., volunteering. After viewing the print advertisements, they also responded to other measures (attitudes toward local vs. global charity campaigns and socio-demographics).

The spatial distance was manipulated in the context of the advertisement, which described the first case as the local campaign by stating that the charity raises money for Croatian children and the second as a global issue with the aim of helping hungry children around the globe (i.e., local vs. international). Guilt vs. benefit appeals were also defined by the message (for example, in case of local the message included *"You pass by at least one hungry child a day"* and benefit appeal message included the sentence *"You have a chance to help a hungry child".*

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with attitudes toward the effectiveness of different nonprofit advertising appeals, in order to assess the impact of advertising appeal attitudes on their intention to engage in prosocial behaviour.

3.2. RESULTS

In order to obtain answers to research questions, SPSS 26. was used for statistical analysis.

Q1: Is Generation Z in Croatia more responsive to engage in prosocial behaviour when exposed to local or global appeals?

To investigate this research question, a T-test was conducted. T-tests were employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the intentions to engage in various forms of prosocial behaviour, such as in kind donations, donating money, volunteering, or refraining from any involvement, based on local or global appeals. The results can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Results of T-tests – group statistics (local/global appeals)

Prosocial behaviour intention	Ad. Appeal	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
I will make in kind donation	Global	271	0.56	0.497	0.030
	Local	242	0.52	0.500	0.032
I will donate money	Global	271	0.44	0.497	0.030
	Local	242	0.38	0.486	0.031
I will volunteer	Global	271	0.20	0.397	0.024
	Local	242	0.22	0.414	0.027
I will not engage in any way	Global	271	0.16	0.369	0.022
	Local	242	.019	0.396	0.025

Table 2:. Results of T-tests – independent samples test (local/global appeals)

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error difference
I will make in kind donation	Equal variances assumed	2.622	.106	.902	511	.367	.040	.044
	Equal variances not assumed			.902	503.644	.367	.040	.044
I will donate money	Equal variances assumed	6.186	.013	1.270	511	.205	.055	.044
	Equal variances not assumed			1.272	506.662	.204	.055	.043
I will volunteer	Equal variances assumed	1.703	.192	-.653	511	.514	-.023	.036
	Equal variances not assumed			-.652	498.965	.515	-.023	.036
I will not engage in any way	Equal variances assumed	3.544	.060	-.942	511	.347	-.032	0.034
	Equal variances not assumed			-.938	494.378	.349	-.032	.034

As can be seen in Table 2, 2-tailed significance was above the value 0.05, implying that there is no statistically significant difference in the intention for any of the types of prosocial behaviour based on local/global advertising appeals.

Q2: Is Generation Z in Croatia more responsive to engage in prosocial behaviour when exposed to benefit or guilt appeals?

To test this research question, T-tests were also performed for each of the intended behaviours based on benefit/guilt advertising appeal. Results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Results of T-tests – group statistics (benefit/guilt appeals)

Prosocial behaviour intention	Ad. Appeal	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
I will make in kind donation	Benefit	274	.51	.501	.030
	Guilt	239	.58	.494	.032
I will donate money	Benefit	274	.45	.498	.030
	Guilt	239	.37	.483	.031
I will volunteer	Benefit	274	.17	.378	.023
	Guilt	239	.25	.432	.028
I will not engage in any way	Benefit	274	.20	.404	.024
	Guilt	239	.15	.354	.023

Table 4. Results of T-tests – independent samples test (benefit/guilt appeals)

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error difference
I will make in kind donation	Equal variances assumed	6.742	.010	-1.521	511	.129	-.067	.044
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.522	503.230	.129	-.067	.044
I will donate money	Equal variances assumed	11.533	.001	1.772	511	.077	.077	.043
	Equal variances not assumed			1.776	505.178	.076	.077	.043
I will volunteer	Equal variances assumed	17.764	.000	-2.107	511	.036	-.075	.036
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.088	476.436	.037	-.075	.036
I will not engage in any way	Equal variances assumed	12.097	.001	1.715	511	.087	.058	.033
	Equal variances not assumed			1.731	510.984	.084	.058	.033

As Table 4 shows, when it comes to the intention to make an in kind donation and money donation, as well as not to engage in any type of prosocial behaviour, there were no statistically significant differences regarding benefit vs. guilt appeals. However, the results have shown that advertisements using guilt appeals show a statistically stronger influence on the intention to engage as a volunteer (p=0.037).

Q3: What is the optimal combination of appeals (global vs. local and benefit vs. guilt) for different types of prosocial behaviour for Generation Z in Croatia?

To determine the optimal combination of advertising appeals for different types of prosocial behaviour, frequency analysis was performed. Table 5 shows the total percentage of respondents who marked different types of prosocial behaviour they intend to engage in, based on the advertisement appeal they were exposed to (global, local, benefit, guilt).

Table 5: Intention to engage in different types of prosocial behaviour

Prosocial behaviour intention	Global	Local	Benefit	Guilt
I will make in kind donation	**56.5%**	52.5%	51.5%	**58.2%**
I will donate money	**43.5%**	38%	**44.5%**	36.8%
I will volunteer	19.6%	**21.9%**	17.2%	**24.7%**
I will not engage in any way	16.2%	19.4%	20.4%	14.6%

Table 5 indicates that respondents who were exposed to guilt appeals were most likely to express their intention for making in kind donations (58.2%). They were followed by the respondents who were exposed to advertisements using global appeal (56.5%). In other words, if the NPO is looking for in kind donations, global/guilt appeals combination would be optimal.

When it comes to the intention to donate money, respondents who were exposed to benefit appeals were most likely to express their intention for money donations (44.5%). They were followed by the respondents who were exposed to advertisements using global appeal (43.5%). Therefore, for encouraging money donations, a global/benefit appeal combination would be optimal.

Finally, regarding the intention to volunteer, respondents exposed to guilt appeals (24.7%) and local appeals (21.9%) were most likely to express their willingness to volunteer. The optimal combination of advertising appeals for fostering this behaviour would be a local/guilt appeal combination.

To assess the impact of advertising appeal attitudes on the intention to engage in prosocial behaviour, a regression analysis was conducted. Three statements were incorporated as independent variables: 1) People are more inclined to participate in local community nonprofit activities than in global ones, 2) NPO advertising appeals emphasising the benefits of certain actions positively affect involvement, and 3) NPO advertising appeals inducing guilt for non-participation positively influence people's involvement.

The dependent variable was the intention to participate in various prosocial behaviours. Tables 6 and 7 display the results of the regression analysis.

Table 6: ANOVA results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	**Regression**	2.387	3	.796	2.118	.097
	Residual	191.231	509.376			
	Total	193.618	512			
a. Dependent Variable: Prosocial behaviour intention						

Table 7: Regression coefficients

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients B	Std. Error	Stand. Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.729	.153		11.331	,000
	People are more inclined to participate in nonprofit activities for the local community than in nonprofit activities on a global level	.002	.029	.004	.080	.936
	Appeals from nonprofit organisations that emphasise the benefits of some actions have a positive impact on the involvement in those activities	.036	.0358	.049	1.034	.301
	Appeals by nonprofit organisations that induce feelings of guilt for non-participation have a positive effect on people's involvement in those activities	.049	.025	.090	1.999	.046
a. Dependent Variable: Intention to engage in prosocial activities						

The linear regression results indicate that attitudes toward NPO advertising appeals inducing guilt for non-participation positively affect people's involvement in those activities (sig=0.046, B=0.090). However, attitudes suggesting that people are more inclined to participate in local rather than global nonprofit activities, and appeals emphasising the benefits of certain actions, do not have a significant impact on engaging in prosocial activities (sig=0.936, B=0.004; sig=0.301, B=0.049).

4. DISCUSSION

This study looks into the efficiency of different NPO appeals and their impact on prosocial behaviour intentions of Generation Z. No statistically significant difference in the intention for any of the types of prosocial behaviour based on local vs. global advertising appeals was found. This corroborates with the description of Generation Z as the one that does not make a difference between global and local issues, but is contrary to the findings of several studies (Rajan et al., 2009, Knowles & Sullivan, 2017) that emphasise a preference for donating to local NPOs more than to international ones. This was similarly found in a study of New Zealand young peoples' attitudes toward charitable giving for reducing poverty – the larger the geographical distance, the larger the emotional distance, i.e., no intention to donate (Dalton et al. 2008). On the other hand, the Australian results indicated that donors have more positive attitudes toward national and international charities than local charities (Lwin et al., 2014). However, their studies were not dealing with Generation Z. This confirms the specific profile of Generation Z in terms of the perception of global vs. local issues and its importance.

In our research results regarding benefit vs. guilt appeals, no significant difference in cases of intention to make in kind donations and money donations, as well as not to engage in any type of prosocial behaviour, was found. In case of intention to volunteer, however, guilt appeals have a statistically stronger influence, meaning that usage of guilt appeals will have a more positive response in volunteering intention than usage of benefit appeals. This can be significant since Ho & O'Donohoe (2014) observed volunteering to be seen as an undesirable activity for Generation Z. A study by Brennan & Binney (2010), however, found that many people felt negatively towards marketing campaigns that used guilt appeals, even when they recognised that they were for a good cause. It was emphasised that guilt appeals which have a clue on how their small and individual effort can help in solving social problems would be more efficient than guilt messages on their own. Another study has found that Generation Z dislikes attempts to gain their attention through making them feel guilty (Konstantinou & Jones, 2022). Bennet (1998) also suggests robust evidence that guilt appeals can be a useful tool for influencing donors' behaviour. Another study found that the most effective fund-raising appeals, i.e., those aiming at money donations, are those that communicate the benefits to others, significantly more than those that evoke negative emotions i.e., guilt (Fisher et al., 2008). In the case of Millennials, the earlier generation —those born between 1980 and 2000—they respond best to social media campaigns emphasising how others benefit (Paulin et al., 2014).

Finally, this study has identified the most efficient combinations of appeals for motivating different types of prosocial behaviour intention of Generation Z. If NPOs are looking for in kind donations, i.e., food, clothes, toys and similar, the optimal combination of appeals to Generation Z will be a combination of global and guilt appeals. In case of money donations, the highest level of intention to donate was revealed by a combination of global and benefit appeals, while for volunteering intention, the most suitable combination of appeals is local and guilt appeals.

5. CONCLUSION

This research provides a deeper insight into Generation Z response to the different advertising appeals. It looks at how different advertising appeals (global vs. local and guilt vs. benefit appeals) impact Croatian Generation Z prosocial behaviour intentions in terms of their engagement in different prosocial activities: in kind donations, money donations, volunteering or non-engagement. It clearly shows that different appeal combinations motivate different types of prosocial behaviour intentions of Croatian Generation Z. Although global vs. local appeals per se show no difference in their effectiveness for any type of prosocial behaviour intention and guilt vs. benefit appeal effectiveness differs significantly only in the case of volunteering intentions, the optimal combination of appeals for in kind donations is global and guilt appeals, for money donations, it is a combination of global and benefit appeals, while for volunteering it is a combination of local and guilt appeals.

Our findings can help NPOs to take the right approach to garner Generation Z support for social causes in terms of optimising information to be presented in an advertisement, thus increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit advertising campaigns.

Some of the limitations of this study need to be emphasised. One is the high contextuality of NPO advertising causes, meaning that prosocial behaviour intentions in case of child hunger issues might be different than in, for example, environmental issues, which could limit the generalisability of our findings. The other one is that there might be differences between intentions to engage in prosocial behaviour and actual helping behaviour, which was not measured in this study. It corresponds with Erlandsson et al. (2018), who suggest that it is problematic to rely on attitude measures when inferring actual appeal effectiveness. These limitations indicate the possible future research; comparing different campaigns, i.e., causes, measurement of actual prosocial behaviour instead of intentions, as well as the impact of different socio-economic factors, seem to be relevant topics in this sense.

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HOW GEN Z AND THE SEX-WELLNESS INDUSTRY BECAME FRIENDS IN THE PANDEMIC: MORE TOYS, MORE PLAY BUT LACK OF OPEN CONVERSATION REMAINS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The sex-wellness industry still remains an uncharted territory for research and Gen Z, as current and future buyers, remains one of the most interesting generations to investigate. This article aims to understand how the pandemic period potentially influenced the attitudes and habits of Generation Z when it comes to sexual habits and likelihood to buy or own a sex toy.

Methodology: This longitudinal research was done in two waves: the first in June 2020 (n=510), and the second one in January 2023 (n=314).

Results: The results show a rise in sexual activity (from 57% to 80%) and ownership of sex toys, and more participants state they would likely buy a sex toy. The first research wave had 17% of participants owning a sex toy whereas, in the second wave, this percentage grew to 37%. Almost 30% of participants in the second wave stated that they feel that the pandemic period had a significant influence on their sexual habits. We used the opportunity to further research the feeling of safety regarding open conversation about sex; the 2023 research shows that more than 60% of participants still cannot talk openly about sex in their family and 77% of participants do not feel that the Croatian society in general is open for conversations about sex.

Conclusion: All the results aim towards the conclusion that the sex-wellness industry profited largely from the pandemic period, although it can be further discussed whether society in general benefited in terms of more open conversation about sexual habits.

Keywords: Gen Z, sex-wellness, attitudes, habits, sex, conversation

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding Gen Z and their attitudes and habits still remains an ambitious goal both for marketing experts and researchers. They are the generation that already has strong shopping power and, as they grow older, this shopping power will only become stronger. The term sex wellness yields 253 thousand results on Google scholar, whereas Gen Z yields around 9.5 million results. It can be argued that, as an industry, sex wellness is still under-researched, while Gen Z is of great interest and focus for researchers. Understanding the attitudes and habits of Gen Z in the area of sex habits and sex-wellness is the main focus of this article with additional insight provided from two waves of research regarding the possible pandemics' influence on the above-mentioned topics. The goal of this research project was to further delve into the habits and attitudes of Generation Z when it comes to sexuality and sex-wellness, and to understand whether the pandemic period had significance for them, to what extent and what kind. The insights of this research should preferably serve as a basis for further research regarding the sex wellness industry in Croatia. This article will provide a brief theoretical background followed by the presentation of the methodology and results which are structured in three areas: behaviour insights, sexual habits and attitudes and pandemic-related questions.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

People born between 1995 and 2010 are referred to as Gen Z. They are real digital natives who have grown up with access to the internet, social media and mobile devices (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The same report, conducted by McKinsey, concludes that the zeitgeist of a society has traditionally been best personified by young people, who have a significant impact on both trends and conduct. With the pursuit of truth at the core of its distinctive behaviour and consumption patterns, Gen Z—the first generation of true digital natives—is now having an impact on society as a whole. Young people nowadays are more connected than ever before to one another and to the rest of society, thanks to technology. Since they were reared with sophisticated social media, online creative tools and entrepreneurship platforms at their fingertips, Gen Z is ushering in a new era of influence and creative communication. Generation Z has not known a time without digital technology or connectivity via smartphones and cell phones (Twenge, 2017). Recent research conducted by Kanhar and Kumar in 2023 revealed a significant correlation between Generation Z's use of

Instagram and both sexuality and drug consumption. According to the study, those who regularly use Instagram, and were born between 1997 and 2010, are more likely to engage in sexual conduct and take drugs. Another qualitative research from 2020 by Kaviani and Nelson aimed to give more context to the sexuality of young men in the USA and smartphone use. Smartphones were seen as putting pressure to engage in sexual activity but also discouraging it by providing a way to avoid it. Despite wanting to develop intimate relationships, young males reported having little experience in starting them. A fundamental problem can be discussed; as anonymous online access to sexual materials and willing partners expands, so do the problems; that is, the quicker someone can get more material and potential partners, the simpler it is to get into personal or professional trouble (Weiss & Samenow, 2010). According to surveys, up to 20% of teenagers have shared nude text photos of themselves or others (Smith, 2010). The criteria of what constitutes normal adolescent behaviour, problematic sexual behaviour and a criminal sex crime have all been challenged by sexting. Although considering research regarding other factors shows that, when it comes to Gen Z, the future might not be so pessimistic. For example, Silver (2022) found that Gen Z was more likely than Millennials to utilise two types of contraception and protection against STDs during sex. Compared to Gen Z, millennials reported having a larger percentage of unintended pregnancies. The percentage of STD history among millennials was greater. Being exposed to safe sex education and being urged to communicate openly and honestly with loved ones, friends, and respected adults in their community are the most important factors that influence a teen's decision to engage in safe sex practices (Gillmore, Archibald, Wilson, et al., 2002). According to a study, a teen's first sexual behaviours are more influenced by their relationship with their parents and their friends than by social media, porn, television, movies or music. It can be simple to blame the entertainment industry or the rise of the digital world, yet children's living conditions and social circles have a bigger influence (Steinberg & Monahan, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic surprised everybody and brought significant changes to everyday life. Extensive limitations on travel and social interaction were put in place by governments all across the world. Lockdown orders and "social distancing" rules brought about dramatic changes in daily life that had a big impact on leisure activities like sex (Garcia, Gesselmen & Mark, 2021). Healthy sexual function does not develop in a vacuum. Instead of only having a healthy reproductive system, healthy sexual functioning requires a sound mind, a sound body and a sound environment which was much deteriorated by the pandemic rules (Sathyanarayana & Andrade 2020). Research conducted by

Garcia, Gesselmen and Mark showed that the pandemic had an influence on 1,559 adults who participated in the research. One in five participants claimed to have increased their sexual repertoire by adopting new activities, whereas half of the sample reported a reduction in their sex life. These results were in line with a smaller concurrent study showing a drop in the frequency of sexual activity among a sample of young adults in China (Li et al., 2020), but are contrasted with research among Southeast Asian married adults who reported vague changes in their sexual lives, but not less frequent sex reports (Arafat et al., 2020). While designing the research of this article, the main goal was to understand better the influence of pandemics on sexual habits, especially within the Gen Z generation, due to their natural connection to digital tools. Sex toys, as material things that are used to produce or increase sexual arousal and pleasure in both solo and partnered sex (Döring & Pöschl, 2018), and questions regarding their usage, were logical to include since it can be presumed that their usage would rise due to the isolation measures of pandemics. Sex toys, even though not mentioned frequently in scientific literature, are not a novel innovation. Drawings, paintings and books from antiquity, the Middle Ages and modern times provide evidence of the use of sexual aids in numerous civilisations, although electric vibrators were first successfully promoted as health equipment and home appliances at the beginning of the 20th century, which led to their public visibility and societal acceptance (Lieberman, 2016). Even though the sexual revolution had contributed to the normalisation of certain sexual behaviours like oral sex and premarital sex, the stigma associated with masturbation, particularly female masturbation, persisted (Lieberman, 2017). The same author further argues that sex toys gave women fresh perspectives on their sexuality. As mentioned before, research is lagging in light of the mainstream and commodification of sex toys over the past few decades. Less than 100 studies of sex toys have been published in academic journals, compared to thousands of studies on pornography, suggesting that material sexual devices are significantly understudied (Döring & Pöschl, 2018). When it comes to the commercialisation of sex toys, views are different. Sex toy manufacturing, marketing, and consumption are all aspects of a capitalist consumer culture that have been condemned for a variety of reasons, including commodification of sexuality, exploitation of workers, dangerous or even toxic items and environmental pollution (Döring, 2021). However, it must be equally admitted that the democratisation and de-stigmatisation of human sexuality also happens along its commercialisation (Atwood, 2006). Research conducted by Eaglin and Bardzell in 2011 advanced the overall understanding of the usability and experiential difficulties related to the use of sex toys as well as how and why people choose to incorporate them into their life. Despite the fact that people use or desire to utilise sex toys to support their sexual wellness (such as achieving orgasm or sexual satisfaction), perceived design defects and societal taboos sometimes discourage or annoy them. In conclusion, research of this article aims to deepen the understanding of sexual habits of Gen Z consumers with special focus on sex-wellness products in a specific environment: Croatia as a traditional society and pandemics with its special effects due to social isolation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This longitudinal research comprises of two waves. The first wave of the research was conducted in June 2020 (three months into the pandemic). The second wave of research was conducted in January 2023, which can be considered a time where the pandemic had already finished, although the official WHO announcement about the end of the pandemic came in May 2023. Croatia had been with loose or almost no pandemic measures throughout the whole year 2022.

Same conditions for obtaining the sample were applied in both waves:

- Random sample (Croatia)
- Online questionnaire; self-reported survey
- Voluntary basis and anonymity guaranteed
- Sex-wellness influencer relevant for Gen Z shared the questionnaire with own invitation to participants focusing her message on the importance of open conversation regarding sex in general and better understanding of sexual habits and attitudes of younger generation.

Information that was obtained through the research can be grouped into following areas:

- Personal information and demographic
- Behaviour insights (free time activities, media content attitudes, social lives)
- Sexual habits and attitudes
- Pandemic-related questions

Questions were formed with predefined answers either related to the content of the question or formed using Likert scale as a guide (with mostly 5 degrees).

Table 1: Demographic sample structure

	Sample size	Gender	Age	Sexual orientation
1st wave (June 2020)	n=510	81.6% - Female 16.7% – Male 1.8% - do not wish to answer	82.2% - 18 to 22 years old 16.8% - 22 to 25 years old	76.9% - Straight 10.8% - LGBTQ+ 10.4% - I do not wish to define 1.9% - rest/undefined
2nd wave (January 2023)	n=314	77.7% - Female 20.1% - Male 1.6% - Gender fluid 0.6% - do not wish to answer	43% - 18 to 22 years old 57% - 22 to 25 years old	77.6% - Straight 16.9% - LGBTQ+ 4.5% - I do not wish to define 0.6% - asexual 0.3% - bisexual 0.3% - rest/undefined

Source: Authors' research

Only in the second wave of the research, an additional question was added regarding own questioning of sexual orientation. The results are divided: 49.2% of participants reported they were questioning their sexual orientation. An additional question that obtained personal information was regarding current love status. Interestingly, two waves of research differ quite significantly when it comes to love status. More relationships were reported in the second wave. The first wave of the research reported 47.8% single participants, whereas the second wave of the research reported 28.7% single participants. Accordingly, the first wave of the research reported 39.2% of participants in a relationship and vastly more in the second wave, 61.1%.

4. RESULTS

The results will be presented according to the above-mentioned groups of questions within the research: behaviour insights, sexual habits and pandemic-related questions.

4.1. BEHAVIOUR INSIGHTS

Dating differed in the first and second waves of the research: 41.4% of participants reported they were not dating in the first wave and in the second wave of the research this choice was selected by 30.9% of the sample. In the first wave, "not dating at all" was the highest reported choice and, in the second wave of the research, the highest reported choice was "I date rarely" with 37.3%. If they are not dating, this research aimed to understand how Gen Z manages to relax. The second wave of the research reported the following ways of relaxation as the top five:

- Going out (clubs, coffee places) – 31.3%
- Consuming alcohol – 22.0%
- Social media – 18.5%
- Hanging out/talking with friends – 18.2%
- "I don't know" – 17.3%

Interestingly, almost 16.3% of participants reported usage of drugs as a form of relaxation and only 5.8% reported sex as a way of relaxation. The first wave of the research reported similar results for the top five ways of relaxation. In terms of preference on how they spend their free time, the following choices were most reported:

- Hanging out with friends – 77.3%
- Watching series alone – 66.1%
- Social media – 54.3%
- Reading a book – 40.9%
- Gaming with friends – 29.4%

Similar results were reported in the first wave of research without any significant differences. As social media was one of the top choices when it comes to relaxation and spending free time, it was interesting to inspect the reported levels of influence of social media on their lives by participants. In the second wave of research the level of participants that believe social media has no influence on their life has decreased (from 10.4% to 8.3%). The level of participants that believe social media has a low influence on their life has risen to 28.8%, compared to the previously reported 19%. Additionally, levels of participants that believe there is a significant influence on their lives from social media has also risen to 34.2%, compared to the previously reported 23.5%, although the level of participants who report a significant influence of social media on their lives has decreased to 2.2% compared to the previously reported 10.6%. In regard to the main topic of interest of this article, the participants were asked in the second wave of the research what type of content they find most interesting on social media when it comes to the topic of sexuality. Educational content was reported as most interesting with 40.3%, amusing content follows with 23.3%, along with informative content with 23%. None of the listed was chosen by 13.4%.

4.2. SEXUAL HABITS AND ATTITUDES

The first and second waves of the research show vast differences when it comes to sexual activity. In first wave of research, 57.3% reported being sexually active, where in the second wave of research 79.9% of participants reported being sexually active. Consequently, 20.1% of participants were not sexually active in the second wave, compared to 42.7% in the first wave. These results are in line with those regarding frequency of sexual activity; the main differences were found in those who are not sexually active – the percentage declining from 39.6% to 13.5%.

Table 2: Frequency of sexual activity

	Sample size	1-2 times a week	Not too often	Not sexually active	More often than listed
1st wave (June 2020)	n=510	25.1%	19.2%	39.6%	6.3%
2nd wave (January 2023)	n=314	27.7%	21.6%	13.5%	10.8%

Source: Authors' research

An additional question to deepen the understanding of sexual activity frequency was asked in the second wave. Participants were asked to report their number of sexual partners and 65% of participants reported up to 4 sexual partners by the age of 18, 13.1% reported up to 8 sexual partners and 12.1% reported an even higher number. Ownership of sex toys shows a significant difference between waves. In the first wave only 17.5% of participants reported owning a sex toy, where in the second wave 37.6% of participants reported owning a sex toy.

Table 3: Frequency of using sex toys

	Sample size	Seldom	Cannot estimate	Often	Very often
1st wave (June 2020)	n=510	6.7%	5.1%	4.8%	6.2%
2nd wave (January 2023)	n=314	11.8%	3.5%	16.2%	6.4%

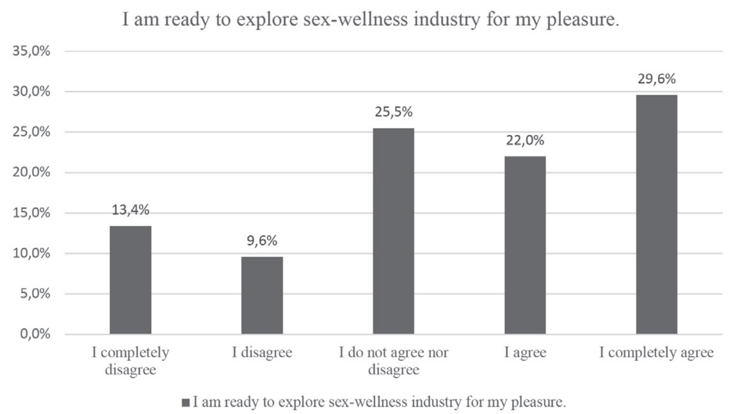
Source: Authors' research

The most significant difference between the waves when it comes to frequency of using sex toys is seen in those who report using sex toys often – 16.2% in the second wave, compared to 4.8% in the first wave. Those who reported not owning a sex toy were (only in the second wave of the research) asked whether they would consider buying a sex toy: 22% are sure they would buy a sex toy and 12.4% would do so most likely, 26.4% reported that they might buy a sex toy and 12.4% reported that they would definitely not buy a sex toy. Also, 87.9% (in the second wave) reported that they did not come across sex toys in their home either through conversation or finding other family members' sex toys. When it comes to the largest influence when buying a sex toy, 74.8% of participants reported that they would buy the toy in agreement with their partner (similar to the first wave 62.7%). Recommendations by friends came second with significant differences in the research waves: 52.2% second wave, 19% first wave. When asked what would entice them to further research the sex-wellness industry (only in the second wave of research) participants listed the following top reasons:

- 48.7% own motivation
- 43% friends
- 30.3% influencers
- 21% Netflix series

Additionally, almost 50% of participants (only in the second wave) reported a motivation to further explore the sex wellness industry for their own pleasure.

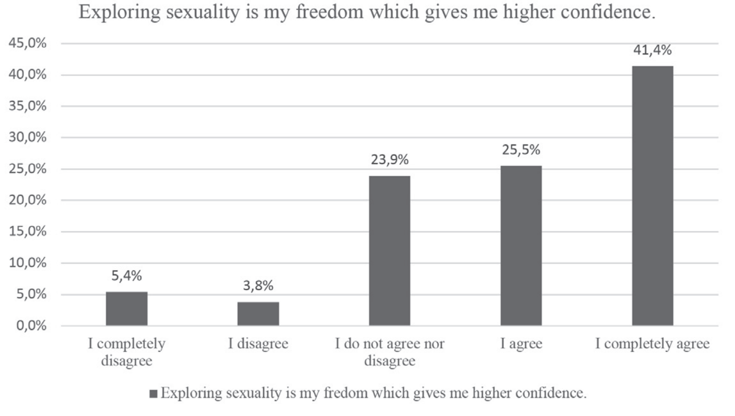
Graph 1: Readiness to explore sex-wellness industry



Source: Authors' research

Attitudes on exploring sexuality show an even more positive trend where more than 60% of participants reported agreement in positive association with exploring sexuality.

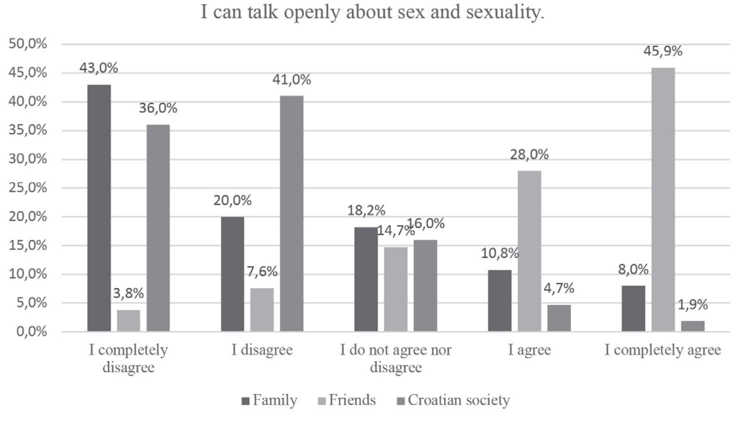
Graph 2: Attitudes on exploring sexuality



Source: Authors' research

This question was also added in the second wave with the goal of a better understanding of attitudes regarding sexuality within Gen Z. Another question was asked regarding where participants mostly find education on the importance of safe sex. Internet outperforms all other possible answers with 79.9%, followed by 20.4% of responses "at school."

Graph 3: Openness in talking about sexuality



Source: Authors' research

Another question was added to the second wave of research with the goal to understand how comfortable Gen Z feel discussing sex and sexuality. They feel most comfortable talking about sex with their friends and, according to the results, do not feel comfortable among family with these topics. More than 70% stated that they disagreed with the statement “Croatian society is open in talking about sex with young people” which concludes that the overall society is not perceived as an inviting one for discussion regarding sex and sexuality by Gen Z. These categories were additionally examined in terms of their influence on participants’ lives, where family displayed a 51.44% size of influence and 58.15% of participants stated that their friends have a large influence on them. Social networks displayed a 34.19% result for having a large influence on participants’ lives. Continuing on this topic, participants were asked whether they believe their friends discriminate on race, gender or intimate basis, which was a question asked in the first wave of the research as well.

Table 4: Discrimination on race, gender or intimate basis

	Sample size	YES	Sometimes	No
1st wave (June 2020)	n=510	10.8%	44.5%	44.7%
2nd wave (January 2023)	n=314	7.3%	38.7%	54%

Source: Authors’ research

The overall results show an improvement, but there is still a large percentage of perception that their friends sometimes discriminate against others.

4.3. PANDEMIC-RELATED QUESTIONS

In the second wave of the research participants were asked to estimate whether the pandemic had any influence on their sexual habits: 8% of participants stated that the pandemic completely influenced their sexual lives and 21.4% stated that the pandemic had a large influence on their sexual lives. A small influence was reported by 21.4% of participants and no influence was reported by 29.7% of participants. Almost a fifth (19.5%) stated that they could not estimate. When it comes to social relations and socialising, 44.1% reported that pandemics had a negative influence on their social life, 36.7% stated that they believed that it had no influence, and 18.8% believed that the pandemic had a positive influence. A more in-depth question yielded results regarding the pandemic influence on sexual activity:

- 20.1% of participants reported that the pandemic period allowed them to explore more their own sexuality
- 21.7% of participants reported that they started to masturbate more during the pandemic
- 8.6% of participants reported a decline in sexual activity during the pandemic due to fear of contagion.

When it comes to dating apps and their usage during the pandemic period, 15.3% reported using them and 9.9% reported downloading them but not using them. They used them for scrolling through profiles (7.3%), chatting and texting (9.6%), which resulted in meeting in person (11.8%). During the pandemic period, 76.7% of participants reported more frequent usage of online streaming platforms. This question was followed by an additional one asking participants whether they noticed more sexual content than usual during the pandemic period in series available on these platforms, where 62.3% report they did. Participants were also asked if they believed that this type of content influenced their perception on sexual relationships and 20.1% reported that they believed it influenced them.

5. DISCUSSION

Firstly, the results need to be commented on from the perspective of the structure sample. One of the limitations of the study is that the sample sizes differ (n=510 in the first wave; n=314 in the second wave) and that both samples are predominantly female (81.6% in the first wave, 77.7% in the second wave). Further on, questionnaires were not completely the same in both waves, where some questions were added in the second wave due to the pandemic context and to deepen the understanding of some elements from the first wave.

When it comes to behaviour insights, the largest differences appear in the segment of dating. In the second wave 30.9% of the respondents stated that they were not dating and, in the first wave, this percentage was much higher – 41.4%. The respondents reported similar preferences when it came to ways of relaxation and spending time, with the biggest difference in waves regarding the reported influence of social media on their lives. In the second wave, 34.2% reported a belief of significant influence of social media on their lives, compared to 23.5% of respondents reporting this in the first wave.

Sexual habits and attitudes show a difference between the research waves as well. In the second wave, respondents reported higher sexual activity and higher frequency of sexual activity. The difference appears in ownership of sex toys: in the first wave, 17.5% of participants reported ownership of a sex toy, where in the second wave this percentage climbed to 37.6% of participants. Even though the size of the sample differs, the structure of the sample between waves was similar, which indicates that the pandemic might have influenced positively the ownership of sex toys. The second wave of the research aimed for a deeper understanding of whether Gen Z feels comfortable to discuss sexuality. More than 70% of the participants disagreed with the statement that Croatian society is open in talking about sex with young people, which can lead to the conclusion that Gen Z in Croatia still does not feel fully comfortable with regards their own sexual expression.

Regarding the pandemic, a higher influence was reported by participants regarding socialising compared to their sexual lives. Almost half of them reported a negative influence of the pandemic on their social life, where a fifth of them reported a large influence on their sexual lives. On the other hand, 20.1% of participants reported that the pandemic period allowed them to explore more their own sexuality. An interesting insight came from the question regarding content: 62.3% of respondents reported that they noticed more sexual content in series available on streaming platforms.

The authors tried to apply different statistical methods including correlations (Pearson, Spearman, ordinal regression) between various items, but these operations did not show any statistically significant results (p-value less than 0.05). Points of interest for independent variables were gender, sexual orientation, dating habits and for the dependent variable different buying preferences and sexual habits. Better results would be expected if the sample size was larger. Correlation tables are presented further.

Table 5: Correlation table on gender vs. sexual orientation

Gender	Your sexual orientation						
	Asexual	Bisexual	LGBTIQ+	I do not wish to define	Straight	I don't know	Total
Gender fluid	1	0	2	1	1	0	5
	20.00	0.00	40.00	20.00	20.00	0.00	100.00
	50.00	0.00	3.85	7.14	0.41	0.00	1.59
Male	0	0	5	1	58	0	64
	0.00	0.00	7.81	1.56	90.63	0.00	100.00
	0.00	0.00	9.62	7.14	23.67	0.00	20.32
I do not wish to define	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	0.00	0.00	1.92	7.14	0.00	0.00	0.63
Female	1	1	44	11	186	1	244
	0.41	0.41	18.03	4.51	76.23	0.41	100.00
	50.00	100.00	84.62	78.57	75.92	100.00	77.46
Total	2	1	52	14	245	1	315
	0.63	0.32	16.51	4.44	77.78	0.32	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' research

First row has *frequencies*; second row has *row percentages,* and third row has *column percentages*

Table 6: Correlation table on gender vs. ownership of sex toys

Gender	Ownership of sex toys		
	Yes	No	Total
Gender fluid	5	0	5
	100.00	0.00	100.00
	4.24	0.00	1.59
Male	14	50	64
	21.88	78.13	100.00
	11.86	25.38	20.32
I do not wish to define	2	0	2
	100.00	0.00	100.00
	1.69	0.00	0.63
Female	97	147	244
	39.75	60.25	100.00
	82.20	74.62	77.46
Total	118	197	315
	37.46	62.54	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source Authors' research

First row has *frequencies*; second row has *row percentages*, and third row has *column percentages*

Table 7: Correlation table on sexual orientation vs. ownership of sex toys

Your sexual orientation	Ownership of sex toys		
	Da	Ne	Total
Asexual	1	1	2
	50.00	50.00	100.00
	0.85	0.51	0.63
Bisexual	1	0	1
	100.00	0.00	100.00
	0.85	0.00	0.32
LGBTIQ+	31	21	52
	59.62	40.38	100.00
	26.27	10.66	16.51
I do not wish to define	8	6	14
	57.14	42.86	100.00
	6.78	3.05	4.44
Straight	76	169	245
	31.02	68.98	100.00
	64.41	85.79	77.78
I do not know	1	0	1
	100.00	0.00	100.00
	0.85	0.00	0.32
Total	118	197	315
	37.46	62.54	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' research

First row has *frequencies*; second row has *row percentages,* and third row has *column percentages*

Table 8: Correlation table on gender vs. love of sexting

Gender	Love of sexting			
	Yes	No	Sometimes	Total
Gender fluid	3	0	2	5
	60.00	0.00	40.00	100.00
	3.53	0.00	1.49	1.59
Male	18	21	25	64
	28.13	32.81	39.06	100.00
	21.18	21.88	18.66	20.32
I do not wish to define	1	0	1	2
	50.00	0.00	50.00	100.00
	1.18	0.00	0.75	0.63
Female	63	75	106	244
	25.82	30.74	43.44	100.00
	74.12	78.13	79.10	77.46
Total	85	96	134	315
	26.98	30.48	42.54	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' research

First row has *frequencies*; second row has *row percentages*, and third row has *column percentages*

Table 9: Correlation table on sexual orientation and love of sexting

Your sexual orientation	Love of sexting			
	Yes	No	Sometimes	Total
Asexual	2	0	0	2
	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	2.35	0.00	0.00	0.63
Bisexual	0	1	0	1
	0.00	100.00	0.00	100.00
	0.00	1.04	0.00	0.32
LGBTIQ+	18	14	20	52
	34.62	26.92	38.46	100.00
	21.18	14.58	14.93	16.51
I do not wish to define	2	5	7	14
	14.29	35.71	50.00	100.00
	2.35	5.21	5.22	4.44
Straight	63	76	106	245
	25.71	31.02	43.27	100.00
	74.12	79.17	79.10	77.78
I do not know	0	0	1	1
	0.00	0.00	100.00	100.00
	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.32
Total	85	96	134	315
	26.98	30.48	42.54	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' research

First row has *frequencies*; second row has *row percentages,* and third row has *column percentages*

6. CONCLUSION

The pandemic had a deep influence on the whole world, and it is expected that many research projects will try to delve deeper into all its post effects. This research can bring forward insights where, when it comes to Gen Z in Croatia, the pandemic had an overall positive influence; more sex toys and more opportunity to explore own sexuality. Still, lack of freedom to discuss openly own sexuality within the society remains. It can be discussed that this effect derives from Croatia being a more traditional society although further research is needed for a better understanding. What is more concerning is that 60% of participants do not feel they can openly discuss sex and sexuality within their families. Having in mind the previously mentioned study by Steinberg and Monahan, which provides insights that a teen's first sexual behaviours are vastly influenced by their relationship with their parents and their friends, looking further into this topic might be of great importance in creating a healthier environment for Gen Z and development of their sexual habits and attitudes. The sex-wellness industry as such is not sufficiently researched, but it can also be said that it is at the beginning of its commercialisation. This could be the perfect timing to carefully consider all the possible negative aspects of the industry and set up ethical practices which could foster healthy sexual development, along with other important ethical practices, such as implementing a sustainable approach to the production of sex toys.

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PERCEPTION OF GENERATION Z MEMBERS ABOUT DIGITAL BANKING SERVICES/ PERCEPCIJA PREDSTAVNIKA GENERACIJE Z O USLUGAMA DIGITALNIH BANAKA

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SUMMARY

Purpose: The paper explores the perceptions among Generation Z users of digital banks and their services, as a specific type of bank whose popularity is growing in Croatia and the world. Digital banks (such as Revolut) have no physical branches like traditional banks and typically charge lower user fees (or even do not charge any fees at all). As a relatively new term in the current scientific and professional literature, digital banks represent an insufficiently researched area. It remains unknown to date how so-called Generation Z (19-24 years old) perceive the emergence of such banks and what kind of experiences they have when using their services. Therefore, the objective of the paper was to investigate how young users of banking services: a) perceive digital banks, b) what their experiences in using digital bank services are.

Methodology: The research study used qualitative methodology in two phases. The first phase of the research aimed to discover young people's associations with the term digital bank. In doing so, the method of mental maps was used on a sample of 189 young users of banking services. In the second phase of the research, an in-depth interview method was used on a sample of 16 young users of digital bank services. A semi-structured interview guide was applied as a research instrument, which provided a deeper insight into the research problem.

Results: The primary research revealed predominantly positive and neutral associations with the term digital bank. Some of the young people were found to perceive traditional banks as digital banks because they offer digital banking. At the same time, it was discovered that Gen Z members have extremely few negative associations with the term digital bank, and negative experiences in using digital bank services are rare among these users. All surveyed Gen Z users of digital bank services have positive experiences in using them and believe that digital banks have numerous advantages compared to traditional banks. Although they have confidence in digital banks as financial institutions, some of these young users expressed concern about the safety of the funds in the account.

Conclusion: The paper provides a first insight into the perceptions among Gen Z members with regard to the emergence of digital banks, as well as a deeper insight into the experiences by the members of this specific segment of service users when using the services of these banks. The limitations of the paper are related to the research methods, mental maps, and in-depth interviews conducted on a sample of just 16 users of digital bank services.

Keywords: digital bank services, young users, qualitative research

SAŽETAK

Svrha: U radu se istražuje percepcija korisnika pripadnika Generacije Z o digitalnim bankama i njihovim uslugama kao specifičnoj vrsti banaka čija popularnost sve više raste u Hrvatskoj i svijetu. Digitalne banke (poput Revoluta) nemaju fizičke poslovnice kao tradicionalne banke te u pravilu naplaćuju niže naknade korisnicima (ili ih čak ne naplaćuju). U dosadašnjoj znanstvenoj i stručnoj literaturi digitalne banke relativno su nov pojam te predstavljaju nedovoljno istraženo područje. Još uvijek je nepoznato kako mladi (19-24 godina) percipiraju pojavu takvih banaka te kakva su njihova iskustva u korištenju usluga tih banaka. Stoga, ciljevi rada bili su istražiti kako mladi korisnici bankarskih usluga: a) percipiraju digitalne banke, b) kakva su njihova iskustva u korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka.

Metodološki pristup: U istraživanju se koristila kvalitativna metodologija u dvije faze. Prva faza istraživanja imala je za cilj otkriti asocijacije mladih na pojam digitalne banke. Pri tome je korištena metoda mentalnih mapa na uzorku 189 mladih korisnika bankarskih usluga. U drugoj fazi istraživanja korištena je metoda dubinskog intervjua na uzorku 16 mladih korisnika usluga digitalnih banaka. Kao instrument istraživanja korišten je polustrukturirani posjetnik za intervju koji je omogućio dublji uvid u istraživački problem.

Rezultati: Primarnim istraživanjem su otkrivene pretežno pozitivne i neutralne asocijacije na pojam digitalne banke. Otkriveno je kako dio mladih percipira tradicionalne banke kao digitalne banke zbog toga što nude digitalno bankarstvo. Istodobno je otkriveno da mladi imaju izrazito malo negativnih asocijacija na pojam digitalne banke, te su među korisnicima rijetka negativna iskustva u korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka. Svi ispitani korisnici usluga digitalnih banaka imaju pozitivna iskustva u korištenju te smatraju da digitalne banke imaju brojne prednosti u odnosu na tradicionalne banke. Iako imaju povjerenje u digitalne banke kao financijske institucije, dio mladih korisnika izrazio je zabrinutost po pitanju sigurnosti sredstava na računu.

Zaključak: Rad daje prvi uvid u percepciju mladih o pojavi digitalnih banaka, kao i dublji uvid u iskustva korištenja usluga tih banaka među pripadnicima ovog specifičnog segmenta korisnika usluga. Ograničenja rada vezana su uz korištene metode istraživanja, mentalne mape i dubinske intervjue na uzorku od 16 korisnika usluga digitalnih banaka.

Ključne riječi: digitalne usluge banaka, mladi korisnici, kvalitativno istraživanje

1. UVOD

Tržište financijskih usluga, posebno bankarskih, u posljednjih nekoliko godina doživljava brojne promjene. Najveća promjena vezana je uz pojavu nove vrste banaka, takozvane neobanke (engl. *neobank*), digitalne banke (engl. *digital bank*) ili internetske banke (engl. *internet-only-banks*). Smatra se da su digitalne banke poremetile tržište bankarskih usluga posebno na tržištima u razvoju (Windasari i sur., 2022).

Digitalne banke nude financijske usluge isključivo putem digitalnih kanala bez mreže fizičkih poslovnica. Stoga se njihovi poslovni modeli razlikuju od onih tradicionalnih banaka (Hopkinson i Klarova, 2019). Zahvaljujući takvom specifičnom modelu poslovanja, digitalne banke su uspjele minimizirati troškove poslovanja te su omogućile pristup svojim uslugama besplatno ili uz minimalnu naknadu korisnicima (Walden i Strohm, 2021). Digitalne banke su se pojavile kao odgovor na digitalno doba i digitalne potrebe korisnika koji sve manje žele fizički posjećivati banke (Skinner, 2014). Dodatno, prema izvješću HNB-a (2022), tradicionalno bankarstvo polako nestaje, a zamjenjuju ga virtualne usluge koje se temelje na sve većoj ulozi tehnologije u pružanju bankarskih usluga.

Diferencijacijom od tradicionalnih banaka digitalne banke su u ključnom trenutku prepoznale želje korisnika te promijenile tržište bankarskih usluga. Te su banke privukle korisnike koji su prethodno koristili usluge tradicionalnih banaka, a sve više privlače i mlade korisnike. Prema podacima Statiste (Statista, Market Share of Neobanks Worldwide, 2020), udio korisnika koji imaju bankovni račun u digitalnoj banci je porastao sa 17% na 23% na globalnoj razini, dok je procijenjena stopa penetracije novih korisnika u 2023. godini 3.3%, a predviđa se da će rasti te u 2027. godini iznositi 4.7% (Statista, Neobanking Worldwide, 2023). Isto tako, veličina tržišta digitalnih banaka procijenjena je na gotovo 47 milijardi američkih dolara u 2021. Nadalje, procjene predviđaju da će veličina tržišta tog sektora rasti do 2030. godine (Statista, Neobanks Global Market Size, 2021). Najpopularnije digitalne banke u svijetu su Revolut, Chime, Nubank, N26 i Monzo (Statista, Neobanking Worldwide, 2023).

Iako u literaturi desetljećima postoji kontinuirani interes znanstvenika za istraživanjem bankarskih usluga (Jun i Cai, 2001; Rod i sur., 2009; Arcand i sur., 2017), usluga usmjerenih mladima (Koenig-Lewis i sur., 2010; Ozretić Došen i Vajda, 2011) te novih načina plaćanja (poput NFC-a) (Alt i Agárdi, 2023), otkriven je nedostatak istraživanja o digitalnim bankama (Windasari i sur., 2022). Posebno je prisutan nedostatak istraživanja koja bi produbila razumijevanje iskustva korištenja digitalnih banaka iz perspektive mladih, osobito u zemljama u tranziciji. Navedeno je važno istaknuti s obzirom na sve veći tržišni udio ovakvih banaka na tržištu bankarskih usluga, ali i zbog posebnosti digitalnih usluga i, posljedično, iskustva koja pružaju takve banke svojim korisnicima.

Nakon Uvoda, u radu se predstavlja i kritički analizira teorijski okvir koji je pozicioniran u područje marketinga usluga digitalnih banaka. Nakon toga, opisan je metodološki pristup istraživanju. Objašnjene su dvije vrste kvalitativnog istraživanja na mladim ispitanicima. Ukratko se prikazuju i interpretiraju rezultati oba istraživanja, te se diskutiraju u odnosu na prethodna istraživanja u području marketinga usluga u bankarstvu. Na kraju rada sumiraju se najvažniji zaključci rada i ograničenja provedenog istraživanja.

2. TEORIJSKI OKVIR

2.1. DEFINIRANJE I OBILJEŽJA USLUGA DIGITALNIH BANAKA

Pojavu digitalnih banaka najavio je Bill Gates još 1994. kada je izjavio *"Bankarstvo je neophodno, ali zato banke nisu."* U to je vrijeme bilo gotovo nezamislivo nepostojanje tradicionalnih banaka (PwC, 2016). S razvojem tehnologije, promjenama u načinu života pa tako i po pitanju korištenja bankarskih usluga, tradicionalne banke s fizičkim poslovnicama nisu više nužne kako bi korisnici mogli koristiti bankarske usluge (Skinner, 2014).

Digitalne banke ili neobanke su "financijsko-tehnološka poduzeća koja nude digitalne ili samo mobilne financijske usluge" (Kaabachi i sur., 2022). U literaturi se ističe kako digitalne banke pripadaju brzorastućim FinTech poduzećima čiji je cilj postati digitalni ekvivalent tradicionalnim bankama pružajući kombinaciju tekućih računa, štednih računa te debitnih i kreditnih kartica (Barba, 2018). Takve banke na tržištu nude kombinaciju financijskih usluga, stoga za korisnika mogu predstavljati potencijalnu ili potpunu zamjenu za tradicionalne banke. Dodatno, one su se pojavile kao odgovor na nezadovoljstvo korisnika tradicionalnim bankarstvom te ciljale na taj segment korisnika tradicionalnih banaka (Bradford, 2020). Njihova velika prednost u odnosu na tradicionalne banke proizlazi iz nižih troškova za korisnike, ali i dodatnih poboljšanja u odnosu na usluge tradicionalnih banaka kojima se nastoje zadovoljiti potrebe korisnika (Valero i sur., 2020). Neke od tih prednosti su manji administrativni napori i bolja fleksibilnost usluge (Pritchard, 2019). Dodatno, za razliku od tradicionalnih banaka koje imaju stroge poslovne procese izrade i prilagodbe usluga, poslovni modeli digitalnih banaka omogućuju višu razinu personalizacije (Temelkov, 2022), te se mogu fokusirati na određenu skupinu korisnika i razviti prilagođena rješenja koja će pokriti specifične potrebe tih korisnika (Temelkov, 2022).

Digitalne banke se mogu pojaviti u različitim oblicima te se mogu razlikovati s obzirom na veličinu (BBVA Research, 2016). Osim toga, digitalne se banke razlikuju po načinu regulacije, po ponudi usluga, kao i po skupini korisnika (Medici Team, 2019). Smatra se da većina digitalnih banaka posluje s građanstvom i nastoji pružiti svoje usluge većem dijelu stanovništva; postoje i digitalne banke specijalizirane za usluge za određene industrije ili mala i srednja poduzeća (BBVA Research, 2016).

Važno je istaknuti kako digitalne banke treba razlikovati od pojma digitalnog bankarstva koje pružaju i tradicionalne banke (Chauhan i sur., 2022). Kod digitalnog bankarstva banke usluge pružaju kroz internetsko i mobilno bankarstvo u svrhu pružanja boljeg iskustva korisniku (Chauhan i sur., 2022). Digitalne banke po svojoj prirodi, usluge pružaju isključivo kroz digitalne kanale, posebno mobilno bankarstvo. Stoga, digitalne se banke razlikuju od tradicionalnih banaka kroz četiri obilježja (Hopkinson i Klarova, 2019). Prvo, vrhunsko korisničko iskustvo koje je temelj ponude vrijednosti digitalnih banaka, poput otvaranja računa isključivo putem interneta. Korištenje mobilne aplikacije jednostavno je i intuitivno, te su prisutni niži troškovi transakcija, često bez mjesečnih naknada s *freemium* modelom. Taj model omogućuje korisnicima kombinaciju besplatne (engl. *free*) i *premium* usluge, odnosno omogućuje korisnicima osnovnu verziju usluge besplatno i *premium* verziju s dodatnim značajkama uz plaćanje određene cijene (Gu i sur., 2018). Dalje, digitalne banke imaju inovativne značajke i nude alate za upravljanje novcem korisnika, kojima omogućuju, primjerice, automatiziranu štednju, veću agilnost i strukturu niskih troškova, jer digitalne banke mogu brže implementirati promjene i razviti nove značajke usluga zbog nepostojanja mreže poslovnica koje u pravilu imaju visoke troškove održavanja. Kod digitalnih banaka usredotočenost je na tehnologiju kojom se pruža usluga, a manje na fizički rad zaposlenika. To smanjuje operativne troškove što znači niže ili čak nepostojeće naknade za usluge koje se pružaju korisnicima. Posljednje razlikovno obilježje odnosi se na transparentnost u komunikaciji s korisnicima po pitanju strukture troškova i naknada za usluge koje banke pružaju (Hopkinson i Klarova, 2019).

Ipak, nedavno izvješće Međunarodnog monetarnog fonda pokazuje da digitalne banke imaju veće operativne troškove, kao i slab potencijal za generaciju profita uslijed velikih troškova akvizicije novih korisnika (Global Financial Stability Report, 2022). Nadalje, digitalne banke na tržištima u razvoju pokazuju da imaju manji rizik likvidnosti od digitalnih banaka na razvijenim tržištima, što se pripisuje životnom ciklusu digitalnih banaka, gdje su na tržištima u razvoju dostupne "zrelije digitalne banke" (Global Financial Stability Report, 2022). Dodatno, digitalne banke se mogu suočiti s većim problemima sigurnosti podataka o korisnicima te problemima vezanim uz nelegalne aktivnosti zbog slabije regulacije (Larisa i sur., 2019) u odnosu na tradicionalne banke, što stvara neželjene probleme u širenju poslovanja ovih banaka.

2.2. MLADI KAO SEGMENT KORISNIKA BANAKA

U literaturi se navodi kako banke dugo vremena nisu u potpunosti shvaćale mlade kao važan tržišni segment s većim tržišnim potencijalom (Ozretic-Dosen i Zizak, 2015). U istraživanjima provedenim posljednjih godina vidljiv je interes za istraživanjem mladih korisnika bankarskih usluga, posebno u području mobilnog bankarstva (Koenig-Lewis i sur., 2010; Chawla i Joshi, 2017; Manser Payne i sur., 2018) kojemu su skloniji mlađi korisnici (Manser Payne i sur., 2018).

Najnovija Generacija Z je definirana kao "skupina osoba koje su rođene između kasnih 1990.-ih i ranih 2010.-ih, za koje se smatra da su vrlo dobro upoznati s internetom" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2023). Prema Seemiller i Grace (2019), Generacija Z ima drugačija obilježja kohorte od Generacija X i Y, kao i drugačije karakteristike. Prema istraživanjima autora, Generacija Z sebe smatra odanima, promišljenima, odlučnima, suosjećajnima, otvorenima i odgovornima (Seemiller i Grace 2017, citirano u Seemiller i Grace, 2019). Nadalje, odrasli su u drugačijem kontekstu od prethodnih generacija u pogledu razvoja tehnologije, interneta i društvenih medija, te preferiraju više digitalne od tradicionalnih *offline* usluga.

U dosadašnjim istraživanjima mladih korisnika aktualne Generacije Z otkriveno je kako mladi očekuju da usluge plaćanja (poput NFC-a) budu korisne, da pružaju određeni stupanj uživanja, te im je bitna preporuka njihovih vršnjaka kako bi se takva vrsta plaćanja uklopila u njihov životni stil (Alt i Agárdi, 2023). Nadalje, očekuju nisku razinu financijskog rizika kod korištenja usluga plaćanja temeljenih na NFC-u (Alt i Agárdi, 2023).

U pogledu mobilnog bankarstva temeljenog na umjetnoj inteligenciji, Manser Payne i sur. (2018) su istraživali čimbenike koji utječu na percepciju mladih o mobilnom bankarstvu te interakciju s umjetnom inteligencijom. Konkretnije, istraživali su relativne prednosti: percipirano povjerenje u mobilno bankarstvo, korištenje umjetne inteligencije, kvalitetu usluge, potrebu za uslugom i sigurnost korištenja. Otkriveno je kako su mladi podijeljeni po pitanju relativnih prednosti mobilnog bankarstva, iako relativne prednosti imaju najveći utjecaj na namjeru korištenja mobilnog bankarstva. Dodatno, otkriveno je kako ne postoji značajan utjecaj relativnih prednosti mobilnog bankarstva na mobilno bankarstvo koje koristi umjetnu inteligenciju. Nadalje, autori ističu potrebu dodatnog istraživanja segmenta mladih korisnika i njihovih percepcija korištenja umjetne inteligencije u mobilnom bankarstvu.

Istraživanjem koje su proveli Kaabachi i sur. (2022) u Francuskoj nastojalo se otkriti percipiranu kvalitetu e-usluga digitalnih banaka na uzorku mladih korisnika pripadnika Generacije Z pri odabiru usluga digitalnih banaka. Autori su otkrili kako su dimenzije pouzdanost, korisnička služba i podrška, asortiman usluga, transparentnost banke, personalizacija, sigurnost i privatnost pozitivno povezani s percipiranom vrijednošću usluga digitalne banke, te da vrijednost koju percipiraju korisnici pozitivno utječe na njihovu lojalnost digitalnoj banci. Autori sugeriraju kako su upravo te dimenzije ključne za pružanje jedinstvenog korisničkog iskustva kod korištenja usluga digitalne banke Generaciji Z.

Lee i Kim (2020) su istraživali čimbenike kod namjere usvajanja digitalnih banaka kod nekorisnika i postojećih korisnika u Južnoj Koreji na široj dobnoj skupini ispitanika (od 20 do 49 godina), dakle, uključujući i mlade. Otkrili su kako broj usluga koje banke nude, te povjerenje u digitalnu banku, imaju najveći utjecaj na namjeru korištenja, dok sigurnosni rizici imaju negativan utjecaj. Stoga, digitalne banke trebaju raditi na povećanju sigurnosti korištenja te na povjerenju u usluge.

Nadalje, Windasari i sur. (2022) su istraživali čimbenike koji doprinose iskustvu korištenja digitalnih banaka kod Generacija Y i Z u Indoneziji. Autore je zanimalo kako varijable ekonomska vrijednost, lakoća korištenja, društveni utjecaj, reputacija poduzeća, promocija, karakteristike, znatiželja i nagrađivanje korisnika za korištenje usluge banke utječu na namjeru korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka. Otkrili su kako sve varijable, osim znatiželje i promocije utječu na namjeru korištenja digitalnih banaka. Nadalje, rezultati su pokazali kako su za mnoge korisnike bankarskih usluga digitalne banke nov i nepoznati koncept usluge (Windasari i sur., 2022).

S obzirom na novost pojma digitalne banke i relativnu neupoznatost mladih s njegovim značenjem, o čemu svjedoče u relevantnoj literaturi objavljeni rezultati do sada provedenih istraživanja, te zbog nedostatka istraživanja u Republici Hrvatskoj, uočen je kontekstualni istraživački jaz kojim se željelo otkriti a) jesu li mladi u Hrvatskoj upoznati s pojmom digitalne banke, te kakve su njihove asocijacije na pojam digitalne banke.

Dodatno, s obzirom na sve veću zastupljenost digitalnih banaka i rast broja korisnika u Republici Hrvatskoj (Statista, Neobanking – Croatia,

2023) nastojalo se istražiti b) kakva su iskustva i razlozi korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka među mladim korisnicima digitalnih banka. Stoga su postavljena dva istraživačka pitanja:

IP1: Jesu li mladi upoznati s pojmom digitalne banke, te kakve su njihove asocijacije na pojam digitalne banke?

IP2: Kakva su iskustva i koji su glavni razlozi za korištenje usluga digitalnih banaka među mladim korisnicima Generacije Z?

3. METODOLOGIJA

Kako bi se odgovorilo na postavljena istraživačka pitanja te otkrile percepcije mladih o digitalnim bankama provedeno je istraživanje u dvije faze. U prvoj fazi, na namjernom prigodnom uzorku mladih ispitanika, prikupljale su se asocijacije na pojam “digitalna banaka”. Za prikupljanje asocijacija korištena je kvalitativna metoda pomoću mentalnih mapa. U ovoj je fazi istraživanja sudjelovalo 189 ispitanika. Istraživanje je provedeno u travnju i svibnju 2022. godine.

Dodatno, prikupljeni su podaci o tome koriste li ispitanici internetsko ili mobilno bankarstvo te, ako koriste, zamoljeni su da navedu banku. Prikupljeni su i demografski podaci o spolu i dobi ispitanika radi bolje analize i interpretacije rezultata. Provedene su kvalitativna i kvantitativna analiza prikupljenih podataka.

Potom je uslijedilo glavno istraživanje u kojem je primijenjena kvalitativna metoda pomoću dubinskog intervjua (Creswell, 2009). Instrument istraživanja bio je polu-strukturirani podsjetnik za intervju sa šesnaest pitanja otvorenog tipa. U ovom dijelu istraživanja je sudjelovalo šesnaest mladih ispitanika - korisnika usluga digitalnih banaka, koji su različitih razina obrazovanja, a nisu sudjelovali u prvom dijelu istraživanja. Uzorak u ovom dijelu istraživanja je bio namjerni prigodni uzorak.

Uz dopuštenje ispitanika, svi intervjui su snimani i ručno prepisani. Intervjui su provedeni licem-u-lice, te su u prosjeku trajali oko 20 minuta. Sve intervjue je proveo jedan istraživač. U analizi i interpretaciji prikupljenih podataka su sudjelovala dva istraživača. Istraživanje je provedeno u lipnju 2022. godine.

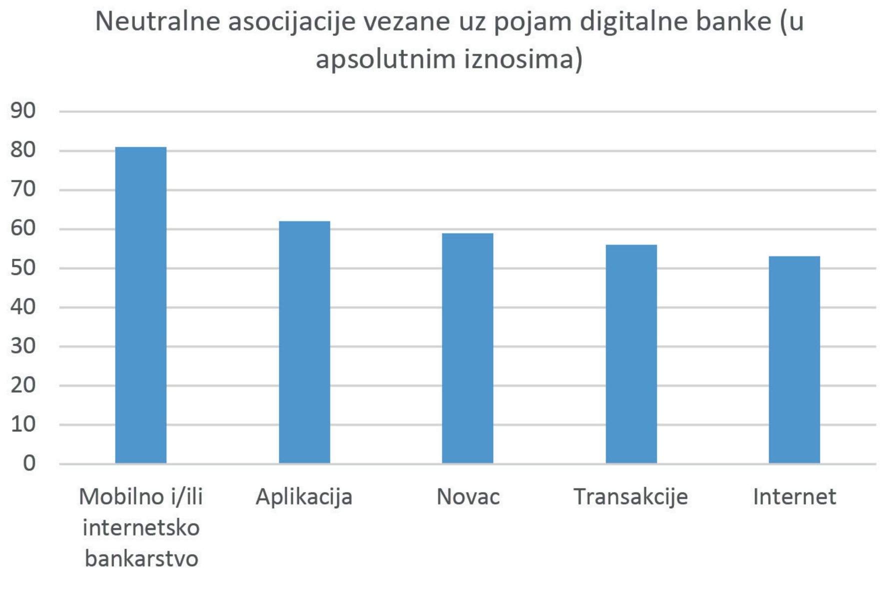
4. REZULTATI

1. faza – mentalne mape

Sukladno provedenim fazama prikazani su rezultati istraživanja. U prvoj fazi istraživanja prikupljane su asocijacije mladih ispitanika na pojam "digitalna banka". U tom dijelu istraživanja, u kojem su korištene mentalne mape, sudjelovalo je 189 ispitanika. Od toga, 61% ispitanika (116) bilo je ženskog, a 39% ispitanika (73), muškog spola. Svi ispitanici su bili dobi u rasponu između 19 i 24 godina, a prosječna starost ispitanika bila je 20,3 godina.

Ukupno je prikupljeno 846 asocijacija na pojam "digitalna banka". Analizirajući asocijacije, utvrđeno je da je najveći broj asocijacija bio neutralan, ukupno 605. Kod neutralnih asocijacija, najviše se spominjalo "mobilno i/ili internetsko bankarstvo" kao asocijacija kod 81 ispitanika. Nakon toga, kao drugu najčešću asocijaciju ispitanici su naveli "aplikacija" 62 puta, dok je treća najčešća neutralna asocijacija bila "novac" kod 59 ispitanika. Od ostalih neutralnih asocijacija ispitanici su često spomenuli "transakcije" i "internet" (Grafikon 1).

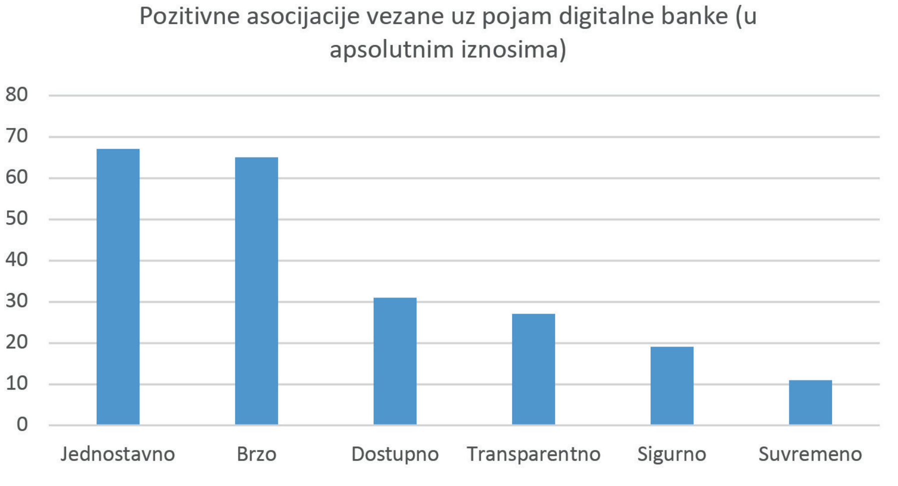
Grafikon 1.: Pet najčešćih neutralnih asocijacija ispitanika na pojam "digitalne banke"



Izvor: Istraživanje
N=189

Nadalje, prikupljeno je 234 pozitivnih asocijacija. Najučestalija pozitivna asocijacija je bila "jednostavno", koja je bila navedena ukupno 67 puta. Uz "jednostavno", druga najčešća asocijacija je bila "brzo", navedena 65 puta. Nakon toga, treća najčešća asocijacija bila je "dostupno", koju su ispitanici naveli 31 put. Ostale asocijacije su bile "transparentno", asocijacija navedena 27 puta, "sigurno", asocijacija navedena 19 puta u mentalnim mapama, te "suvremeno", spomenuta 11 puta (Grafikon 2).

Grafikon 2.: Pozitivne asocijacije na pojam "digitalne banke" po učestalosti spominjanja



Izvor: Izrada autora
N=189

Potom, otkriveno je izrazito malo negativnih asocijacija, svega njih 7, od ukupno 846 asocijacija. Sve negativne asocijacije su bile vezane uz sigurnost i pouzdanost te njihove povezane pojmove kao što su krađa podataka te strah, rizik i stres koji proizlaze iz preispitivanja ispitanika o samoj sigurnosti digitalnih banaka.

Važan nalaz istraživanja je vezan uz percepciju tradicionalnih banka kao digitalnih kod dijela ispitanika. Navedeno je otkriveno prikupljanjem i analizom asocijacija na pojam "digitalna banka", gdje su ispitanici spomenuli tradicionalne banke kao što su Zagrebačka banka (15 ispitanika), OTP banka (7 ispitanika) te Privredna banka Zagreb (8 ispitanika). Tek manji broj ispitanika na pojam "digitalna banka" navodi asocijacije vezane uz digitalne banke koje isključivo nude usluge putem digitalnih kanala, te su spomenuli digitalne banke Revolut (15 ispitanika) i Wise (4 ispitanika).

Iz navedenih rezultata može se zaključiti da mladi uglavnom neutralno i pozitivno percipiraju usluge digitalnih banaka te ih često povezuju s tradicionalnim bankama, vjerojatno zbog brojnih digitalnih usluga koje nude tradicionalne banke kako bi se približile korisnicima, ali i konkurirale digitalnim bankama.

Dodatno se, nakon prikupljanja asocijacija, ispitanicima postavilo pitanje o korištenju mobilnog bankarstva. Takvo pitanje je postavljeno kako bi se ustanovila njihova razina korištenja mobilnog bankarstva. Od 189 ispitanika, 91% ispitanika (172) koristi, dok 9% ispitanika (17), ne koristi mobilno bankarstvo. U kategoriji ispitanika koji koriste mobilno bankarstvo, od ispitanika se je tražilo da navedu banku čije usluge koriste, neovisno o tome radi li se o tradicionalnoj ili digitalnoj banci. Ispitanici najviše koriste mobilno bankarstvo Zagrebačke banke - 56% ispitanika (96), zatim mobilno bankarstvo Privredne banke Zagreb - 21% ispitanika (36), Erste banke - 8% ispitanika (14), te ostalih banaka - 9% ispitanika (15). Usluge digitalnih banaka (Revolut) koristi 6% ispitanika (11).

2. faza – dubinski intervjui

U drugoj fazi istraživanja intervjuirano je ukupno 16 mladih ispitanika, korisnika usluga digitalnih banaka (koji nisu sudjelovali u prvoj fazi istraživanja). Od 16 ispitanika, 13 njih koristi Revolut, dok 2 ispitanika koriste Revolut i Wise istovremeno, a 1 ispitanik koristi Monese. Prosječni broj godina korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka je ispod dvije godine (1,68).

Uzorak ispitanika su činili: 11 ispitanika ženskog i 5 ispitanika muškog spola. Istraživanjem su bili obuhvaćeni ispitanici u dobi između 21 i 25 godina starosti, s različitom razinom obrazovanja, od srednjoškolskog do visokog obrazovanja.

Već tijekom provođenja intervjua je otkriveno, a analizom sadržaja prikupljenih podataka potvrđeno, kako su odgovori ispitanika bili veoma slični kod svih postavljenih pitanja.

Na početku intervjua ispitanici su upitani o tome koje specifične usluge digitalne banke koriste. Otkriveno je da su to primanje i slanje novca, te plaćanje u Hrvatskoj i na putovanjima. Neki ispitanici su objasnili *"Koristim za slanje i primanje novaca na račun, kao i plaćanje u Hrvatskoj i vani dok putujem."* (ISP_3), *"Šaljem i primam novce na račun, volim pratiti potrošnju putem alata za budžetiranje te plaćam u dućanima i dok sam u izlascima."* (ISP_1). Dvoje ispitanika je navelo i dodatne usluge kao što su grupno dijeljenje računa te slanje personaliziranih darova u obliku GIF-a.

Dodatno, jedan ispitanik spomenuo i mogućnost doniranja neprofitnim organizacijama.

Na pitanje o učestalosti korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka sedam ispitanika je izjavilo da koristi usluge digitalnih banaka svakodnevno, dok je pet ispitanika izjavilo da koristi usluge barem jednom tjedno. Ostalih četvero ispitanika izjavilo je da koristi usluge svega nekoliko puta mjesečno, po potrebi.

Nadalje željelo se istražiti koji su razlozi korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka. Otkriveno je kako svi ispitanici smatraju brzinu i jednostavnost temeljnim razlozima za korištenje usluga digitalnih banaka. Isto tako, smatraju da su brzina i jednostavnost glavne koristi i prednosti digitalnih banaka u odnosu na tradicionalne banke. Jedna ispitanica objašnjava *"Otvorila sam račun u digitalnoj banci prvenstveno radi Erasmusa, ali sam ostala jer mi se jako svidio koncept te najviše brzina i jednostavnost"* (ISP_2). Slično tome, *"Brzo i instantno slanje i primanje novaca u trenutcima kada mi treba je jedna od glavnih pogodnosti"* (ISP_4).

Ispitanici su dodatno naglasili mogućnost podizanja gotovine na bankomatima u Hrvatskoj, ali i u inozemstvu bez naknade digitalne banke, koji je određen do limita za kojeg su svi ispitanici istaknuli da je i više nego dovoljan.

U sljedećem pitanju ispitanici su trebali procijeniti tri karakteristike digitalnih banaka: a) jednostavnost, b) brzinu i c) sigurnost. Procjenjivane su, na ljestvici od 1 (nedovoljno) do 5 (odlično) aktivnosti slanja i primanja novca putem računa digitalnih banaka. Rezultati su pokazali da su "jednostavnost" i "brzina" ocijenjeni s prosječnom ocjenom 4,88, dok je "sigurnost" ocijenjena s 4,43. Pri tome, ispitanici su objasnili da je *"sigurno, ali do određenog iznosa"* (ISP_12) te da *"postoji mogućnost da može doći do hakerskog napada i gubitka sredstava na računu"* (ISP_6).

Potom, željela su se otkriti mišljenja ispitanika po pitanju sigurnosti držanja novaca na računu digitalne banke. Primjerice, ispitanici ističu da je sigurno koristiti usluge digitalne banke uz objašnjenja kao što su *"digitalna banka ima licencu sa razlogom"* (ISP_11), *"postoji osiguranje depozita do određenog iznosa koje pokriva nacionalna banka gdje je digitalna banka registrirana"* (ISP_8). Suprotno, jedan od ispitanika smatra da ne postoji dovoljna sigurnost i ističe *"u medijima i na društvenim mrežama se mogu pronaći izjave nezadovoljnih korisnika kojima su računi ugašeni i izgubili su novce"* (ISP_6).

U sljedećem pitanju, od ispitanika se je tražilo mišljenje o jednostavnosti aplikacije digitalne banke u odnosu na aplikacije tradicionalnih banaka. Većina ispitanika (njih 15) je izjavila da je aplikacija koju pruža digitalna banka bolja, dok je svega jedan ispitanik izjavio da je aplikacija tradicionalne banke bolja u usporedbi s aplikacijom digitalne banke (ISP_14). Kao glavne argumente zbog čega je aplikacija digitalne banke bolja u odnosu na aplikaciju tradicionalne banke. Ispitanici su ponudili iste odgovore kao i na prethodna pitanja, ističući brzinu i jednostavnost korištenja. Samo je jedan ispitanik izjavio suprotno, to jest, da aplikacija tradicionalne banke izgleda bolje po rasporedu informacija i mogućnostima.

Kod pitanja o zadovoljstvu s postojećim uslugama digitalnih banaka, svi ispitanici su izjavili da su izrazito zadovoljni, potkrijepivši to objašnjenjima poput *"imam sve na jednom mjestu i nemam briga"* (ISP_4) te *"brzina je sve"* (ISP_1).

Istraživanjem se željelo otkriti i imaju li digitalne banke nedostatak iz perspektive korisnika. Većina ispitanika je odgovorila da digitalne banke nemaju nedostataka, dok je dvoje ispitanika ipak navelo *"nedostatak dobre korisničke podrške"* (ISP_6) te zabrinutost zbog mogućeg *"podizanja naknada kako raste baza korisnika"* (ISP_9).

Zatim je pitanje postoji li neka usluga digitalne banke koja se trenutno ne pruža, a ispitanici misle da bi se trebala ponuditi, rezultiralo veoma zanimljivim odgovorima, što upućuje na potencijalne nedostatke u ponudi usluga digitalnih banaka. Jedan korisnik objašnjava kako mu nedostaje *"više opcija za ulaganje, primjerice uvođenje trgovanja indeksima"* (ISP_7). Nadalje, *"nedostaje opcija zajedničkog računa na Revolutu"* (ISP_11), *"kupnja bona za mobitel"*, (ISP_9) te *"kreditna kartica i mogućnost uzimanja kredita"* (ISP_15).

Zanimljivi nalaz je vezan uz fizičku poslovnicu koju nemaju digitalne banke. Tako je dvoje ispitanika navelo kako smatraju da digitalna banka treba imati *"svoju poslovnicu"* (ISP_16, ISP_13). Kao razlog tome navedena je *"mogućnost obavljanja transfera većeg iznosa, te izvršavanje ostalih administrativnih obveza koja zahtijevaju fizičko prisustvo"* (ISP_13).

Povjerenju u digitalne banke bilo je posvećeno sljedeće pitanje. Gotovo svi ispitanici su izjavili da vjeruju digitalnim bankama (što je i očekivan nalaz s obzirom da koriste njihove usluge). Kao glavni razlog ističu da su digitalne banke licencirane financijske institucije, te na temelju toga postoji sigurnost, ali i osiguranje depozita u slučaju da sama digitalna banka propadne. Jedan ispitanik je izjavio: *"vjerujem dokle god se ne pokaže suprotno"* (ISP_6). Kako bi se dodatno istražila percepcija sigurnosti korištenja usluga, postavljeno je pitanje o tome boje li se ispitanici krađe ili otuđenja vlastitih podataka kod korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka. Otkriveno je da se većina ne boji, no dio njih smatra da ipak postoji rizik. Pr tome, ispitanici objašnjavaju razloge zašto misle da nema rizika sličnim argumentima, poput: *"ne bojim se i smatram da je sâm sustav siguran"* (ISP_14). Ipak, jedan ispitanik (ISP_15) smatra da uvijek postoji mogućnost napada od strane hakera te ulaska u račune korisnika usluga digitalnih banaka.

Pred kraj dubinskog intervjua postavljena su dva pitanja vezana uz umjetnu inteligenciju (AI) korištenu kod usluga digitalnih banaka. Na pitanje imaju li ispitanici povjerenja prema aplikaciji digitalne banke koja koristi umjetnu inteligenciju, svi ispitanici su odgovorili potvrdno. Dodatno, na pitanje, postoji li zabrinutost kod korištenja takve aplikacije, svi ispitanici su se složili da ne postoji zabrinutost jer *"danas je normalno da se umjetna inteligencija nalazi u softveru"* (ISP_14) i da *"najmanja briga postoji kod bankarstva, dok je kod društvenih mreža to veći problem"* (ISP_16).

Naposljetku, ispitanike se tražilo da prema svojoj procjeni ocjene vlastitu financijsku pismenost ocjenama od 1 (nedovoljno) do 5 (odlično). Prosječna ocjena kojoj su ispitanici ocijenili sami sebe bila je 4,68. Velika većina ispitanika smatra da je i više nego dovoljno financijski pismena, ali da uvijek postoji prostor za napredak. Prema mišljenju ispitanika *"samo korištenje usluga digitalne banke dokazuje iznadprosječnu financijsku pismenost"* (ISP_2). Također, ispitanici su zamoljeni za mišljenje o općoj prihvaćenosti digitalnih banaka među mladima u dobnoj skupini od 19 do 25 godina. Gotovo svi ispitanici (13 ispitanika) misle kako su digitalne banke u većoj mjeri prisutne među mladima i da je taj trend u stalnom porastu. Manji dio (3 ispitanika) smatra da je situacija kod mladih u Hrvatskoj "skromna" u odnosu na situaciju u drugim državama, ali da je vidljiv trend prihvaćanja usluga digitalnih banaka.

Na kraju, može se zaključiti da je percepcija mladih korisnika o uslugama digitalnih banka pozitivna.

5. RASPRAVA

Kroz provedeno primarno istraživanje (u prvoj fazi) otkriveno je da većina mladih pojam digitalnih banaka percipira neutralno, štoviše, da pojam digitalne banke ne povezuju prvenstveno s digitalnim bankama (kao novijom vrstom banaka) nego s tradicionalnim bankama koje nude digitalno bankarstvo. Nalaz obogaćuje rezultate prethodnog istraživanja Windasari i sur. (2022), koji su ustanovili kako je za brojne korisnike bankarskih usluga digitalna banka nov i nepoznati koncept usluge. Preciznije, ovim istraživanjem je otkriveno kako digitalne banke nisu nepoznat koncept među mladim korisnicima bankarskih usluga, ali je za veći broj mladih percepcija digitalne banke vezana prvenstveno uz digitalno bankarstvo koje mogu nuditi i tradicionalne banke. Ovakav je rezultat djelomično očekivan s obzirom da tradicionalne banke nude brojne digitalne usluge koje mladi preferiraju koristiti budući da nisu skloni fizičkom posjetu banci. Zanimljivi nalaz istraživanja jest i da mladi imaju jako malo negativnih asocijacija na digitalne banke i potencijalno digitalno bankarstvo, što je otkriveno analizom njihovih asocijacija, a u okviru koje su identificirane glavne prednosti jednostavnost, brzina, i dostupnost digitalnih banaka.

Navedene karakteristike digitalnih banaka su istaknuli i ispitanici u drugom dijelu istraživanja (provedenog na stvarnim korisnicima usluga digitalnih banaka) te su one spomenute kao glavni razlog zbog kojeg su počeli koristiti usluge digitalnih banaka, a za čije korištenje se služe mobilnim aplikacijama. Ovi rezultati upotpunjuju nalaze prethodnog istraživanja Manser Payne i sur. (2018), koji su otkrili da su mladi prvi koji će prihvatiti korištenje mobilne aplikacije za digitalno bankarstvo u odnosu na prethodne generacije.

Nadalje, rezultati istraživanja o razlozima korištenja digitalne banke nadopunjuju nalaze prethodnog istraživanja koje su proveli Kaabachi i sur. (2022) na Generaciji Z u Francuskoj. Izabrane dimenzije kvalitete usluga doprinose stvaranju vrijednosti za korisnike, pa tako jednostavnost i brzina doprinose dimenziji pouzdanosti korištenja usluge, što stvara lojalne korisnike digitalnoj banci. Ovim istraživanjem je potvrđeno da su navedene dimenzije glavni preduvjet za korištenje i lojalnost digitalnoj banci.

Zanimljiv nalaz istraživanja je vezan uz sigurnost. Ispitanici vjeruju digitalnim bankama, a glavni je razlog tomu licenca za pružanje financijskih usluga koju posjeduju digitalne banke, i znaju da su im sredstva osigurana do određenog, za njih dovoljno visokog, novčanog iznosa. Navedenim se dopunjuje prethodno istraživanje Lee i Kim (2020), koji su istaknuli sigurnosne rizike u korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka, te zaključili kako digitalne banke trebaju raditi na povećanju sigurnosti kako bi stvorile povjerenje u usluge koje pružaju. Ovakav rezultat istraživanja je djelomično očekivan jer je istraživanje provedeno na stvarnim korisnicima usluga digitalnih banka, a za očekivati je da se korištenje usluga digitalne banke temelji na povjerenju u nju.

Dodatno, po pitanju korištenja umjetne inteligencije, ispitanici imaju povjerenja i nisu zabrinuti za svoje podatke i transakcije zbog činjenice da digitalne banke koriste umjetnu inteligenciju pri pružanju usluga. Navedeno potkrjepljuje rezultate do kojih su došli Manser Payne i sur. (2018), koji zagovaraju veću sigurnost mobilnog bankarstva koje se koristi umjetnom inteligencijom s obzirom na njegovu kompleksnost, u odnosu na mobilno bankarstvo bez korištenja umjetne inteligencije.

Zanimljiv nalaz istraživanja je vezan uz percipirane nedostatke korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka. Otkriveni su: nedostatak korisničke podrške ili loša korisnička podrška, s obzirom da se radi o bankama koje se prije svega oslanjaju na digitalna rješenja, a ne na zaposlenike u rješavanju problema korisnika. Navedeno predstavlja važno područje koje digitalne banke trebaju adresirati u budućnosti, bilo uvođenjem korisničke podrške - zaposlenika ili nove generacije *chatbot*-a koji će pomoći korisniku u otklanjaju problema pri korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka.

Posljednje, otkriveno je kako mladi smatraju da je prihvaćenost digitalnih banaka među mladima u porastu, te da će digitalne banke postati još više prihvaćene među mladima u budućnosti. Ovaj je nalaz istraživanja u skladu s prognozama o rastu tržišta i broja korisnika do 2027. godine u svijetu (Statista, Neobanking Worldwide, 2023) te u Republici Hrvatskoj (Statista, Neobanking – Croatia, 2023).

6. OGRANIČENJA I PREPORUKE ZA BUDUĆA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Rad ima nekoliko ograničenja koja treba imati na umu prilikom interpretacije rezultata. Prvo ograničenje odnosi se na korišteni namjerni prigodni uzorak mladih ispitanika u obje faze istraživanja, s većim udjelom ženskih ispitanika. U prvoj fazi istraživanja, svi ispitanici su bili studenti pretežito iz većih gradova, te su zanemareni ruralni dijelovi. Drugo ograničenje je vezano uz kvalitativnu metodu prikupljanja asocijacija pomoću mentalnih mapa koja može pružiti ograničeni uvid u asocijacije u određenom trenutku vremena istraživanja. Isto tako, ograničenja su vezana i uz metodu dubinskog intervjua. Sljedeće ograničenje se odnosi na subjektivnost istraživača prilikom odabira ispitanika u uzorak, te prilikom analize i interpretacije rezultata istraživanja.

Preporuka istraživačima za buduća istraživanja je da se dodatno istraže specifične usluge koje pružaju digitalne banke, te percepcija vrijednosti pojedine usluge. Nadalje, pitanje sigurnosti korištenja usluga je potencijalno važno područje istraživanja o namjeri korištenja usluga digitalnih banaka. Zaključno, bilo bi zanimljivo istražiti spremnost mladih korisnika usluga tradicionalnih banaka da u potpunosti zamijene usluge tradicionalnih s uslugama digitalnih banaka, uzimajući u obzir predviđanja rasta tržišta digitalnih banaka i veću spremnosti mladih da prihvaćaju inovativne oblike bankarstva.

7. ZAKLJUČAK

Pojava novih oblika banaka promijenila je tržište bankarskih usluga jer sve više korisnika prihvaća usluge digitalnih banaka i koristi ih za plaćanje proizvoda i usluga. Sukladno provedenim istraživanjima, mladi ostaju važan i privlačan segment bankama, bilo tradicionalnim ili digitalnim.

U literaturi je prepoznata potreba za daljnjim proučavanjem Generacije Z u kontekstu bankarskih usluga, posebno digitalnih banaka, što je dodatno potvrđeno i ovim istraživanjem, u okviru kojeg je ustanovljeno da mladi u nekim slučajevima ne razlikuju pojam digitalne banke kao nove vrste banaka, već ga povezuju s tradicionalnim bankama koje nude digitalno bankarstvo. Dodatno, to može upućivati na relativnu neupoznatost mladih s novim vrstama banaka, i/ili na uspješno pozicioniranje tradicionalnih banaka prema mladim korisnicima s obzirom da većima mladih koji su sudjelovali u istraživanju posjeduje račun u tradicionalnoj banci.

Zanimljivo je da mladi imaju izrazito neutralne i pozitivne asocijacije prema digitalnim bankama, s izostankom negativnih asocijacija. Nadalje, mladi korisnici usluga digitalnih banaka imaju veoma pozitivna iskustva u korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka. Stoga je opravdano očekivati da će u budućnosti dio mladih usluge tradicionalnih banaka zamijeniti uslugama digitalnih banaka te da će, sukladno predviđanjima, rasti tržište digitalnih banaka.

Problem s kojim će se ubuduće susresti digitalne banke u konkurenciji s tradicionalnim bankama je diferencijacija, s obzirom da tradicionalne banke nude digitalno bankarstvo, a sve više njih pri tome dodaje funkcionalnosti temeljene na umjetnoj inteligenciji koje će nuditi personalizirana rješenja. Dodatno, problem percepcije sigurnosti i pouzdanosti korištenja isključivo usluga digitalnih banaka će biti prisutan dok god se u potpunosti ne reguliraju tržišta i poslovanje digitalnih banaka globalno.

Iako su digitalne banke temeljene na digitalnoj usluzi bez kontakta s pružateljem usluga (zaposlenicima banke), to može predstavljati ograničavajući faktor u korištenju usluga digitalnih banaka, jer je istraživanjem otkriveno kako su izostanak i neodgovarajuća korisnička podrška jedna od zamjerki koje mladi imaju prema digitalnim bankama.

Preporuka digitalnih bankama je da trebaju jasnije komunicirati vrijednost od korištenja usluga digitalne banke kroz informiranje mladih, posebno onih koji ne razumiju razlike između tradicionalnih i digitalnih banaka. U komunikaciji naglasak treba biti na jednostavnosti, brzini i dostupnosti usluge, te ulijevanju povjerenja prema digitalnim bankama.

Zaključno, može se pretpostaviti da će usluge digitalnih banaka postati uobičajeni dio bankarskog tržišta u budućnosti. No, kako bi to bilo moguće potrebno je da a) korisnici u potpunosti razumiju prednosti digitalnih banka (poput manjih naknada) u odnosu na tradicionalne banke, b) se tržište zakonski dodatno regulira, te c) se uz digitalne banke ne vežu nepoželjne situacije gubitka informacija o korisnicima, novca ili ilegalnih aktivnosti. To će potaknuti i promjene na cijelom bankarskom tržištu koje će u središte staviti razumijevanje korisnika usluga i njihova iskustva te kreirati personalizirana rješenja koja očekuju nove generacije korisnika poput Generacije Z.

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ANALYSIS OF COMPETITIVE FORCES IN THE CROATIAN BEER INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the beer industry in the Republic of Croatia and presents a theoretical and practical elaboration of Porter's five forces model.

Methodology: Considering the scope of the topic, the methodological approach is based on the collection and processing of relevant data from secondary sources, their analysis, synthesis, description and classification, which relates to the first part of the work, as well as primary research where the characteristics of the Croatian beer industry, as well as the influence of five competitive forces on the beer industry in the Republic of Croatia, were investigated using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with a sample of industry experts.

Results: The entire Croatian beer industry was analysed within the paper and its attractiveness was assessed using Porter's five forces model. Following the analysis of individual assessments of competitive forces and given the presence of both attractive and non-attractive characteristics, it follows that the Croatian beer industry is characterised by a medium level of attractiveness.

Conclusion: It has been concluded that the moderate bargaining power of suppliers, the small threat of new entrants and the moderate threat of substitutes has a favourable effect on the assessment of the Croatian beer industry attractiveness. However, the strong bargaining power of buyers has a negative impact on its attractiveness. The conducted strategic analysis based on recent data can serve as useful guidance for all industrial actors, as well as potential entrants to the industry, and this reflects the basic practical contribution of the work.

Keywords: industrial analysis, Porter's 5 forces model, Croatian beer industry, structural approach to strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

The Croatian beer industry is one of the most important industries in the Croatian economy. The annual inflow into the state budget from the beer industry is three times higher than the state allocation for culture, i.e., almost half of the total annual commitment to agriculture. In 2020, the total revenue in the beer industry amounted to HRK 2.1 billion, which is a decrease of 11.0% compared to 2019, while the total expenditure was lower by 7.6% (FINA, 2021). In 2020, the beer industry was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a lower number of tourists in Croatia and the closure of catering establishments, which consequently meant a drop in beer sales on the Croatian market and reduced exports.

The assessment of the company's competitive position and performance is primarily based on an analysis of the industry within which the company operates. If a certain industry has a stable competitive structure, a low threat of new entrants and a favourable position towards customers, suppliers and industries that produce substitutes, its profitability will be higher, and vice versa (Porter, 2008).

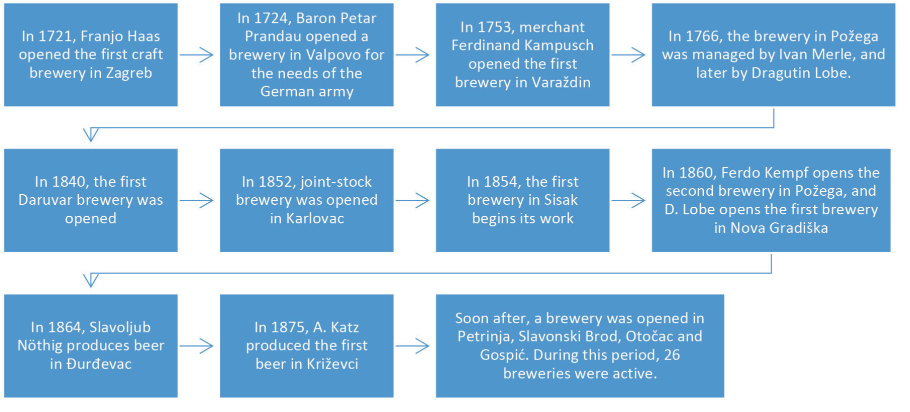
The aim of this paper is to present, based on secondary data, the development of the beer industry in Croatia and the basic elements of the Croatian beer market, such as production, sales, export, and consumption. In addition, the paper presents the results of primary research carried out using a survey questionnaire, which aims to gain insight into the characteristics and state of the Croatian beer industry, while the influence of five competitive forces on the Croatian beer industry is investigated using the method of semi-structured interviews.

The work is divided into four parts. The introductory part is followed by a review of the beer industry development in Croatia. The research part of the paper begins with the methodology and is followed by the presentation of the results and the conclusion.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BEER INDUSTRY IN CROATIA AND ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the beginning, beer was a privilege of selected layers of society, both in other parts of the world and in Croatia. The development of the brewing industry in Croatia is shown in Figure 1. Zagreb had its first brewery in 1721. It was opened by a brewer named Francis Haas (Marić and Nadvornik, 1995). In 1724, Baron Petar Prandau opened the brewery in Valpovo exclusively for the German army of Emperor Charles III, and in 1753, trader Ferdinand Kampusch opened the first brewery in Varaždin. Daruvar brewery was opened in 1840, in the same place where the current brewery of the same name is located and, in 1854, a joint-stock brewery was opened in Karlovac.

Figure 1: History of the development of the beer industry in Croatia



Source: Adapted from Marić and Nadvornik, 1995

As in other industries, the advent of industrialisation somewhat suffocated the former manufactures and crafts, whereby small plants were slowly closing down and were being replaced by large plants, as well as imports. From 1880 to 1950, the number of active breweries in Croatian territory fluctuated, but without significant success in the fight against competition from foreign breweries whose beer was cheaper because, among other things, it was not taxed. After 1950, there was an increase in beer consumption due to the development of tourism in Croatia. Jadranska pivovara was built in Split (1970), the Pannonian Pivovara in Koprivnica (1971) and the Istrian brewery in Buzet (1977) (according to Marić and Nadvornik, 1995). Today, the Croatian market is dominated by three industrial breweries owned by global brewing corporations: Zagrebačka pivovara d.o.o., Heineken Croatia d.o.o. and Carlsberg Croatia d.o.o.

The following table shows beer consumption by type of beer in Croatia for 2019 and 2020.

Table 1: Beer consumption in Croatia by type of beer

	Sales of domestic breweries		**Import**		**Total sales on the domestic market**	
Type of beer	2020 (hL)	Change '20/'19 (%)	2020 (hL)	Change '20/'19 (%)	2020 (hL)	Change '20/'19 (%)
Alcoholic beer	2,044,432	-17.05 %	555,102	1.56 %	2,599,534	-13.67 %
Non-alcoholic beer	17,941	-30.41 %	699	-28.52 %	18,640	-30.34 %
Flavoured beer	63,596	-25.88 %	8,584	-4.45 %	72,180	-23.84 %
Total	**2,125,969**	**-17.47 %**	**564,384**	**4.41 %**	**2,690,354**	**-14.12 %**

Source: Global Data (sent to the author on request)

By looking at the types of beer during the year 2020, the production of alcoholic beer for the domestic market was 2,044,432 hL, including imports. The total sales on the domestic market was 2,599,534 hL, which is 13.67% lower than the previous year. The biggest drop in sales on the Croatian market refers to non-alcoholic beer: the annual production is significantly smaller compared to other types and the total sales on the domestic market show a significant drop of 30.34%.

The beer industry in Croatia has been stable over the last few years. A positive trend that was active in the period from 2013 to 2019 refers to the popularity of craft beer. Consumers have a great desire to try something that is authentic, unique and local, and therefore the demand for craft beer has been on the rise in recent years, and microbreweries have experienced a great rise in the market. Consumers also showed a preference for fruit-flavoured beers in 2019 and 2020. The growth within this category was stimulated by the launch of the Karlovačko Crna Višnja product. Wheat beer has been a popular segment in the beer market for the past two years, which was stimulated by the launch of the 1664 Blanc brand in 2019 by Carlsberg Croatia.

A negative trend affecting the beer industry is the decrease in the population of Croatia. During 2020, the number of live births decreased compared to the previous year by 0.8%, i.e., 290 fewer children were born than in 2019 (DZS, 2021). Croatia is also facing issues with an aging population and emigration to other countries that offer better conditions for family, life, and career.

The decrease in the number of inhabitants also affects the reduced consumption of beer, and further consequences for the beer sector can be expected in the future. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on tourism and the entire economy of Croatia, including the beer industry. According to the data of the Croatian Tourist Board (2021) and the eVisitor system, in 2020 there were 7.8 million arrivals in Croatia (37% of the results from 2019) and 54.4 million overnight stays (50% of the results from 2019). Frequent restrictions on gatherings, closure of catering and sports facilities, and reduction of cultural activities are some of the factors of the negative impact of the pandemic on the beer industry.

The production differentiation and diverse offer of breweries provide an opportunity to deal with the negative influences that come from the environment. Hard seltzers, carbonated water with flavour and alcohol, contributed to the growth of many breweries during 2020. In addition, low-alcohol or alcohol-free products also represent an opportunity for future growth given the health and wellness tourism trend that has come to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to variety and products with lower alcohol content, consumers are also attracted to products that emphasise their quality (IWSR, n.d.).

3. RESEARCH ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CROATIAN BEER INDUSTRY

3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the scope of the topic, the methodological approach in the empirical part of the work is based on primary research using a survey method and in-depth interviews with experts in the Croatian beer industry. The basic objectives of the research are to evaluate the state of the Croatian beer industry and to analyse the influence of five competitive forces on the beer industry.

Questionnaires were distributed in the Zagrebačka brewery, Heineken Croatia, Carlsberg Croatia, Osječka brewery, Daruvar brewery and the Association of Beer, Malt and Hop Producers of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce. The first part of the questionnaire contains multiple-choice demographic questions and questions related to the evaluation of the respondent’s perception of the intensity of rivalry by certain elements. The second part of the questionnaire consists of 15 selected questions for measuring the perception of industrial structure from the work of the authors Pecotich, Hattie and Peng Low (1999), for which it was estimated that it was not possible to find answers from secondary data sources. A Likert scale with five response levels was used to express the opinion of the respondents (1 – I strongly disagree; 5 – I completely agree). 32 respondents, beer experts, fully completed the questionnaire, representing a fair sample since a significant number of Croatian largest beer companies were taken into the research. The interpretation of the answers is based on the calculation of the average by forces, whereby the assessment of the impact of each force is determined. Additionally, the analysed findings, together with the results of in-depth interviews, were used to evaluate the attractiveness and profit potential of the industry.

On the other hand, in-depth interviews were conducted with three beer industry experts, who are currently in managerial positions in the beer industry, with the aim of defining the characteristics and structure of the beer industry and determining the size and influence of five competitive forces on the beer industry. In doing so, F2F interviews were conducted. In the very introduction, demographic data was collected from the respondents, while in the main part the influence of five competitive forces on the beer industry was examined by discussing each individual force and analysing its intensity.

3.2.RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the survey are based on 31 fully completed questionnaires by managers or experts in the beer industry. The largest share of respondents, 48%, has been working in the beer industry between 11 and 20 years, followed by those with up to five years of experience (29%). There were almost 10% of respondents who have been working in the industry for more than 20 years.

In order to evaluate the respondents' perception of the rivalry intensity by certain elements, the respondents were asked to associate each of the offered elements with the intensity of the rivalry on a scale from 0 to 6. Table 2 shows the perception of the respondents on the intensity of the rivalry by elements.

Table 2: Perception of the intensity of rivalry by elements

	0 (no rivalry at all)	1	2	3 (medium level of rivalry)	4	5	6 (highest level of rivalry)
PRODUCTS (characteristics and functionality)	0%	9.7%	9.7%	12.9%	22.6%	25.8%	19.4%
PRICES	0%	3.2%	12.9%	25.8%	16.1%	29.0%	12.9%
DESIGN	0%	6.5%	6.5%	48.4%	22.6%	16.1%	0%
ADVERTISING	0%	0%	3.2%	22.6%	16.1%	35.5%	22.6%
INNOVATIONS AND NPD	0%	0%	16.1%	22.6%	35.5%	19.4%	6.5%
SALES AND DISTRIBUTION	0%	3.2%	3.2%	12.9%	16.1%	35.5%	29.0%
TECHNOLOGY	3.2%	22.6%	9.7%	32.3%	22.6%	9.7%	0%

Source: Authors' research

Grouping the ratings for the absence of rivalry and low level of rivalry (0 and 1), medium level of rivalry (2, 3 and 4) and high level of rivalry (5 and 6), for the element of characteristics and functionality of the product, an equal number of respondents consider that the intensity of rivalry is medium and that there is a high level of rivalry. Regarding the element of price, 54.8% of them believe that the level of rivalry is medium, 41.9% that the level is high, while only 3.2% of them believe that there is no rivalry. Regarding the element of advertising, the majority of respondents (58.1%) believe that the intensity of rivalry is high, while regarding the element of innovation, 74.2% believe that the intensity of rivalry is medium. The sales element achieved the expected results; as many as 64.5% of the respondents believe that the intensity of rivalry is high. The element of technology achieved the lowest intensity of rivalry compared to other elements, 25.8% believe that there is no rivalry, and 64.5% believe that the level of rivalry is medium.

Respondents were then asked to identify common competitive actions within the beer industry. 61.3% of respondents believe that advertising and investing in marketing is a common competitive action within the beer industry, 32.3% of respondents believe that it is the lowering of the prices, and one respondent thinks that it is innovation and the development of new products or services and that it is a combination of all three offered answers, with advertising and marketing being the most pronounced action.

The second part of the questionnaire sought to examine the perception of the respondents concerning the impact of five competitive forces from Porter's industrial analysis model. Only some questions from the original research (Pecotich et al., 1999) were selected and were adapted for the beer industry, to which respondents gave answers using a Likert scale with 5 response levels (1 - I strongly disagree, 5 - I completely agree).

At the very beginning, the respondents' opinion on the rivalry between existing competitors was examined. Managers often define competition too narrowly, looking only at direct competitors, which can result in ineffective strategic solutions (Porter, 2008: 79). Although competition is considered as one of the biggest threats in the market, looking at the positive aspects, competition pushes market actors to be better and to find new and better ways to reach new consumers and to keep the existing ones (Porter, 2008: 80). Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics related to the statements made regarding the rivalry of existing competitors from the perspective of the respondents' perception.

Table 3: Descriptive measures of respondents' perception of the rivalry of existing competitors

	Companies within the beer industry are equally large and powerful.	In the beer industry, companies are mutually dependent - the competitive moves of one company have significant effects on other competing companies and initiate retaliation and countermoves.	In the beer industry, competitors are very different in terms of origin, strategy, goals, management style, personality, way of competing, etc.
Mean value	2.78	3.75	2.84
Standard error	0.21	0.15	0.15
Median	3	4	3
Mode	2	4	2
Standard deviation	1.21	0.84	0.88
Relative standard deviation	43.54%	22.46%	31.08%
Sum	89	120	91

Source: Authors' research

According to the data in Table 3, considering the three observed statements, it can be concluded that respondents least agree with the first statement that companies within the beer industry are equally large and powerful (lowest mean value and lowest mode), but the third statement also does not deviate much. For the first statement, the standard deviation of 1.21, i.e., the relative deviation from the average of 43.54%, indicates significant deviations in the respondents' answers. This suggests that a significant part of the respondents do not have the same opinion or have different perceptions regarding the size and strength of the beer companies, which is analysed in the next table.

Furthermore, most of the respondents agree with the statement that, in the beer industry, companies are mutually dependent - the competitive moves of one company have significant effects on other competing companies and initiate retaliation and countermoves. 69% of them agree or completely agree with that statement. The standard deviation is significantly smaller than in the previous statement, which is confirmed by the relative standard deviation from the average and goes in favour of the strength of responses.

Finally, similar to the first statement, 44% of respondents do not agree that competitors in the beer industry are very different in terms of origin, strategy, goals, management style, personality, way of competing, etc. Knowing that 31% of them neither agree nor disagree with that statement, it can be concluded that respondents mostly think that in the beer industry, competitors are very similar in this respect. However, the relative standard deviation suggests that there are differences in the respondents' perceptions in this regard as well. In order to get a more detailed insight into the respondents' answers, they are structured in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' perception of the rivalry of existing competitors

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
Companies within the beer industry are equally large and powerful.	16%	31%	19%	28%	6%
In the beer industry, companies are mutually dependent - the competitive moves of one company have significant effects on other competing companies and initiate retaliation and countermoves.	0%	9%	22%	53%	16%

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
In the beer industry, competitors are very different in terms of origin, strategy, goals, management style, personality, way of competing, etc.	0%	44%	31%	22%	3%

Source: Authors' research

The respondents' perception of the size and power of companies within the beer industry is extremely heterogeneous. Namely, an equal share of respondents agree with this statement (28%), but also disagree (31%), that is, they have a completely opposite opinion. 19% of them are indifferent. It could be said that the majority are those who strongly disagree that the companies within the beer industry are equally large and powerful, since there are more of them than those who strongly agree with the statement. As for mutual dependence, as many as 53% of respondents believe that companies in the beer industry are mutually dependent, that is, that the competitive moves of one company have significant effects on other competing companies and initiate retaliation and countermoves. Also, 16% of the respondents fully agree with this, and only a slightly larger proportion of them cannot make up their minds on this issue.

When it comes to the perception of differences in origin, strategy, goals, management style, personality, way of competing, etc., 44% of respondents disagree with this statement, that is, they believe that competitors are not significantly different in this regard. Almost a third of them cannot decide, and 22% of them agree that there are big differences between the competitors.

Finally, it can be concluded that the respondents' perception of the rivalry of existing competitors in the beer industry in the Republic of Croatia is very heterogeneous, that is, there is no consensus as to whether the rivalry of existing competitors is strong or weak.

For the second competitive force, the bargaining power of suppliers in the beer industry in the Republic of Croatia, respondents were asked three statements in order to evaluate their perception, the descriptive statistics of which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive measures of respondents' perceptions of suppliers' bargaining power

	Suppliers' products represent important inputs for the beer industry.	Suppliers in the beer industry can easily increase their prices or threaten to reduce the quality of their products.	In the beer industry, suppliers are powerful.
Mean value	4.13	3.47	3.59
Standard error	0.12	0.15	0.10
Median	4	4	4
Mode	4	4	4
Standard deviation	0.66	0.84	0.56
Relative standard deviation	16.00%	24.27%	15.58%
Sum	132	111	115

Source: Authors' research

At first sight, this section highlights the greater homogeneity of the perception of data subjects in the light of the answers gathered. In each of the claims observed, the highest proportion of respondents agree. Also, the relative standard deviation in the first and third statements is significantly smaller compared to the previously observed group. On average, comparing the three provided statements, respondents mostly agree with the statement that the suppliers' products represent important inputs for the beer industry. The highest heterogeneity of respondents' answers (that is, the standard deviation) was observed for the statement that suppliers in the beer industry can easily increase their prices or threaten to reduce the quality of their products. Finally, regarding the third statement, most respondents agree that suppliers are powerful in the beer industry. A more detailed insight into each claim is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Respondents' perception of suppliers' bargaining power

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
Suppliers' products represent important inputs for the beer industry.	0%	0%	16%	56%	28%
Suppliers in the beer industry can easily increase their prices or threaten to reduce the quality of their products.	0%	19%	19%	59%	3%
In the beer industry, suppliers are powerful.	0%	0%	44%	53%	3%

Source: Authors' research

Out of the total number of respondents, only 16% of them cannot decide whether the supplier's products represent important inputs for the beer industry or not, while the rest agree (56%) or completely agree (28%) that the supplier's products represent important inputs for the beer industry. The largest share of respondents (59%) also agree that suppliers in the beer industry can easily increase their prices or threaten to reduce the quality of their products. On the other hand, 19% of them cannot make up their minds about that claim, and an equal share of them disagree with that claim. Finally, most respondents also agree with the statement that suppliers are powerful in the beer industry (53%), however, a large proportion of them (44%) cannot decide. Looking at all the answers together, it can be concluded that the respondents, on average, believe that the bargaining power of suppliers in the beer industry in the Republic of Croatia is present, but not strongly expressed.

For the purpose of assessing threat of new entrants, three additional claims were analysed, the results of descriptive statistics of which are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Descriptive measures of respondents' perception of the threat of new entrants

	New companies entering the beer market must invest a large amount of capital in risky and sunk advertising and/or research and development costs.	New entrants to the beer industry will find it difficult to ensure distribution for their products.	Entering the beer industry requires significant capital and/or financial resources.
Mean value	3.81	3.41	4.19
Standard error	0.17	0.16	0.11
Median	4	3	4
Mode	4	4	4
Standard deviation	0.97	0.88	0.59
Relative standard deviation	25.31%	25.68%	14.14%
Sum	122	109	134

Source: Authors' research

On average, respondents agree more with statements related to the threat of new entrants than with the first two observed forces. In each of the observed statements, respondents most often expressed agreement with them. For the first two statements, a moderate deviation from the average was observed; however, for the third statement, the relative standard deviation from the average is only 14%, which makes it possible to conclude that the respondents agree that the entry into the beer industry requires significant capital and/or financial resources. A more detailed insight into each claim is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Respondents' perception of the threat of new entrants

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
New companies entering the beer market must invest a large amount of capital in risky and sunk advertising and/or research and development costs.	3%	3%	28%	41%	25%
New entrants to the beer industry will find it difficult to ensure distribution for their products.	0%	16%	38%	38%	9%
Entering the beer industry requires significant capital and/or financial resources.	0%	0%	9%	63%	28%

Source: Authors' research

Two thirds of respondents agree or fully agree that new companies entering the beer market must invest a large amount of capital in risky and irreversible advertising and/or research and development costs, which would mean that the entry to the beer market in the Republic of Croatia is very risky and expensive. The above is partially confirmed by the responses of respondents who believe that the new entrants to the beer industry will find it difficult to secure distribution for their products, which further increases the risk of their entry or stabilisation on the market. However, some of the respondents do not agree with this, and a significant part of them cannot make up their minds about the statement. Finally, the respondents express their greatest agreement with the statement that significant capital and/or financial resources are needed to enter the beer industry, which ultimately leads to the conclusion that entering the beer market in the Republic of Croatia is an entrepreneurial venture that can be very risky, and it is necessary to analyse all parameters well in order to avoid an unsuccessful entry attempt. Considering the attitudes of the respondents, it can be concluded that the existing players in the beer market are relatively safe from the threat of entry of a significant number of new entrants.

From the aspect of the analysis of the fourth competitive force, the threat of substitute products, i.e., substitutes, the opinion of the respondents was observed in relation to the three statements, the results of descriptive statistics of which are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Descriptive measures of respondents' perception of the threat of substitute products or substitutes

	The products of the beer industry perform functions that can be performed by many other products.	The prices of the beer industry are higher and / or grow faster than the price of substitutes.	In the beer industry, there is a significant pressure of cheaper substitutes (substitute products).
Mean value	2.94	2.59	2.97
Standard error	0.17	0.16	0.19
Median	3	2	3
Mode	2	2	4
Standard deviation	0.95	0.88	1.06
Relative standard deviation	32.28%	33.72%	35.78%
Sum	94	83	95

Source: Authors' research

Based on the conducted descriptive statistics, respondents on average agree to the smallest extent with the statements related to the threat of substitute products or substitutes; however, their views are significantly different, as indicated by the measure of the relative standard deviation. Namely, most respondents do not agree that the products of the beer industry perform functions that can be performed by many other products, nor that the prices of the products of the beer industry are higher and/ or grow faster than the prices of substitutes. Accordingly, the threat of substitute products on the beer market is not emphasised according to the respondents. On the other hand, which is not in favour of what has just been stated, the largest share of respondents agree that in the beer industry there is a significant pressure of cheaper substitutes (substitute products), which makes the industry and the beer market vulnerable from the aspect of threats from substitute products. A more detailed insight into each claim is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Respondents' perception of the threat of substitute products or substitutes

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
The products of the beer industry perform functions that can be performed by many other products.	3%	34%	31%	28%	3%
The prices of the beer industry are higher and / or grow faster than the price of substitutes.	3%	53%	28%	13%	3%
In the beer industry, there is a significant pressure of cheaper substitutes (substitute products).	13%	19%	28%	41%	0%

Source: Authors' research

Almost a third of the respondents believe that the products of the beer industry perform functions that many other products can perform, but the same number of them cannot express their opinion, while slightly more than a third of the respondents disagree. This statement showed the greatest dispersion of responses. More than half of the respondents do not agree that the prices of beer industry products are higher and/or grow faster than the prices of substitutes, while 41% of respondents believe that there is a significant pressure of cheaper substitutes (substitute products) in the beer industry. Based on the analysed answers, despite their heterogeneity, it can be concluded that there is a moderate threat from substitute products in the beer industry.

Finally, for the purposes of analysing the fifth competitive force, the answers related to the last three statements were observed, the descriptive analysis of which is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Descriptive measures of respondents' perceptions of buyers' bargaining power

	A small number of customers account for a large share of the beer industry's total sales.	Products sold by companies in the beer industry make up a significant portion of total customer costs.	Buyers of beer industry products are in a position to ask for concessions.
Mean value	3.22	3	3.78
Standard error	0.21	0.16	0.13
Median	4	3	4
Mode	4	3	4
Standard deviation	1.21	0.88	0.71
Relative standard deviation	38%	29%	19%
Sum	103	96	121

Source: Authors' research

The majority of respondents agree that a small number of customers account for a large share of the total sales of the beer industry and that customers of beer industry products are in a position to ask for concessions, which would mean that beer producers are quite dependent on a relatively small circle of customers who have significant bargaining power. However, the heterogeneity of the responses observed through the relative standard deviation from the average indicates the impossibility of making concrete conclusions. Regarding the share of costs of products sold by companies in the beer industry in the total costs of buyers of these products, the respondents could not express their opinion to the greatest extent. A more detailed insight into each statement is shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Respondents' perception of the bargaining power of buyers

Respondents' answers	1 (I strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (I completely agree)
A small number of customers account for a large share of the beer industry's total sales.	6%	31%	9%	41%	13%
Products sold by companies in the beer industry make up a significant portion of total customer costs.	3%	28%	34%	34%	0%
Buyers of beer industry products are in a position to ask for concessions.	0%	6%	19%	66%	9%

Source: Authors' research

In the whole set of statements related to the bargaining power of customers, heterogeneity can be observed in the attitudes of respondents. Namely, 54% of the respondents agree or completely agree that a small number of customers account for a large share of the total sales of the beer industry, but 37% of the respondents do not agree or do not agree at all. Furthermore, 34% of respondents agree that the products sold by companies in the beer industry make up a significant part of the total costs of customers, the same proportion of respondents cannot decide, while 31% of them do not agree or do not agree at all. The greatest homogeneity among the responses was observed in the statement that customers of beer industry products are in a position to ask for concessions, with which two thirds of the respondents agree. The above could ultimately direct the conclusion in favour of the buyers, that is, that they have a pronounced, but not a key, role in terms of their negotiating power.

In the second phase of the research, through semi-structured F2F interviews with three experts in the beer industry in managerial positions of one of the top three breweries, the size and influence of five competitive forces on the beer industry was additionally investigated. The knowledge collected from the semi-structured interviews together with the knowledge collected from the survey questionnaire served for the final assessment of the attractiveness and profit potential of the beer industry.

The intensity of competition among customers (which in the observed beer industry primarily consists of retail chains) is highly pronounced, and large retail chains attract the attention of consumers with their diverse offer and design within the branch. Activities that buyers use in the competition include price reductions, maintaining catalogue sales, a variety of offers, loyalty programmes, improving the appearance of branches, attracting the end consumer with private brands, using Internet sales and offering delivery services. Buyers can greatly influence the final consumer's purchase decision by lowering prices, putting special displays of products in the store where consumers linger the most and where they could attract their attention to the greatest extent. Buyers who influence the success of the beer market are national buyers, large retail chains, who have the greatest bargaining power compared to other smaller, regional buyers. Entering or not entering large retail chains by a brewer can greatly affect the market results of a company. The majority of customers come from the three leading retail chains on the market, but with the increase in the share of craft beer in the total offer, the number of suppliers they buy goods from has increased over the years. All interviewees rate the bargaining power of customers in the beer industry as high.

The structure of existing competitors on the beer market is quite stable. There are three strong "players" who occupy the largest part of the market, and their total share has only slightly fluctuated over the years. Craft breweries are not big competitors of the biggest market leaders, and if they want to become one, they need to work on industrialisation and distribution of their products in large retail chains. This is the direction in which only a few craft breweries are currently going, while the others maintain a semi-artisan mode of operation, with limited distribution and small quantities, which means that they do not represent direct competitors to the beer leaders on the Croatian market, i.e., Zagrebačka pivovara, Heineken Croatia and Carlsberg Croatia. Observing the competition among the main competitors and leaders on the market, the usual approach to competition is by lowering prices, i.e., price promotions and actions, marketing activities and fights for contracts and long-term channels with profitable catering establishments in the on trade channel and contracts within the off trade channel with national customers, respectively trade chains. Product differentiation on the market is not significant. The majority of the Croatian beer market is made up of lagers, both in terms of quantity and value of the market structure. Lager is a type of product that is drinkable, does not have a strong aroma and the differentiation between lagers is not significantly pronounced. There is also no big difference in price since it varies up to 2 HRK (0.27€). According to respondents, the intensity of rivalry among existing competitors is moderate. Companies look at what the competition is doing and adapt their actions to it, but there are no tightened relations between existing competitors. The relations are fairly correct and there is quality cooperation through the Association of Brewers of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, where they work on topics of common interest.

New players entering the beer market will find it difficult to ensure the distribution of their products through existing sales channels. In retail chains, there is a barrier to entry in terms of buying shelf space, and the shelves are mostly already filled, and it is difficult to get a space on the beer shelf. In the HoReCa channel, the situation is specific, most catering establishments have contractual relations with existing breweries on the market. Someone who is new to the market must invest significant resources to become available to consumers. Existing brewers on the market can prevent the arrival of new entrants, but this is not something that happens on the Croatian market. The way business is conducted in the beer market is such that the barrier to entry is higher than in some other industries. Currently, there are policies and regulations that require a certain level of quality, ways to dispose of by-products in production, regulations that a new entrant must meet, and this means that new entrants will have to invest significantly in their business in order to enter the beer industry.

The availability of substitutes in the brewing industry is not high; there are categories that are close to beer, but in terms of consumer habits, Croatia is a country of beer and wine lovers. These are consumers looking for a drink with a lower alcohol level. Besides wine, substitutes can also be non-carbonated and carbonated juices, but they are not widely accepted by beer consumers, so these substitutes do not represent a big threat to the beer industry.

4. CONCLUSION

Data from the Croatian Chamber of Commerce suggest that the beer industry represents an important branch of the national economy, in terms of contribution to the gross national product and employment. The COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on Croatian industry; however, based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that it will recover quickly since it is not significantly susceptible to the influence of external forces, i.e., it copes well with them.

Based on the analysis of respondents' answers, collected by the survey questionnaire method, it can be concluded that the perception of respondents about the rivalry of existing competitors in the beer industry in Croatia is very heterogeneous, that is, there is no consensus as to whether the rivalry of existing competitors is strong or weak. This conclusion is driven by the relatively high standard deviation among their answers. The same is indicated by the respondents' answers collected by the method of semi-structured interviews, according to which the intensity of rivalry among existing competitors is moderate. Also, there are no strained relations between existing competitors. The bargaining power of suppliers in the beer industry in Croatia is present, but not strongly expressed. Furthermore, entering the beer market in Croatia is an entrepreneurial venture that can be very risky, and it is necessary to carefully analyse all parameters to avoid unsuccessful entry attempts by new entrants. Considering the attitudes of the respondents, it is concluded that the existing players in the beer market are relatively safe from the threats of the entry of a significant number of new entrants, and the same was confirmed by the conducted interviews. Based on the analysed answers, despite their heterogeneity, it can be concluded that there is a moderate threat from substitute products in the beer industry.

The availability of substitutes in the beer industry is not great; there are categories that are close to beer, but considering consumer habits, Croatia is a country of beer and wine lovers. Buyers of the beer industry's products (primarily retail chains) are in a position to ask for concessions since beer producers are quite dependent on a relatively small circle of buyers who have significant bargaining power. The aforementioned was also confirmed by the conducted interviews, where the interlocutors rated the bargaining power of customers in the beer industry as high.

The knowledge collected from semi-structured interviews together with the analysed knowledge from the survey questionnaire, as well as secondary data, served for the final evaluation of the attractiveness and profit potential of the beer industry. After analysing individual evaluations of competitive forces, considering the presence of both attractive and unattractive characteristics, it can be concluded that the Croatian beer industry is characterised by a medium level of attractiveness.

Like other researches, this research has certain limitations that primarily relate to the subjectivity in giving answers both in the survey questionnaire and during the interview, whereby a larger number of respondents would increase the objectivity of the overall research. Despite the limitations, the results of this analysis of the structural components of the beer industry can serve the existing industry participants for better positioning in relation to competitive forces, and potential entrants for evaluating the height of entry barriers, profit potential and the meaningfulness of possible entry into the industry.

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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF DESIGN THINKING IN THE CONTEXT OF A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE INDUSTRY: THE EXAMPLE OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper aims to identify the application of design thinking in the road construction industry, particularly concerning private investors, by exploring current and prospective opportunities for its utilisation. With its strong emphasis on customer focus and fundamental link with marketing, design thinking is a valuable tool for players in the road construction market to understand clients' needs better.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was adopted to explore this emerging field, utilising semi-structured in-depth interviews based on a theoretical framework developed through a literature review. The qualitative methodology aims to uncover participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards implementing design thinking in road construction, allowing for detailed and rich data collection.

Results: The research findings demonstrate that design thinking principles are applied in road construction, enabling companies to enhance problem-solving, increase productivity, and improve client satisfaction. By embracing design thinking and developing related skills, companies can drive innovation, overcome internal barriers, and gain a competitive advantage.

Conclusion: Design thinking, as a customer-focused approach, has significant potential within the context of the road construction industry. Although design thinking principles may be perceived as intuitive and with certain marketing roots, the proper application requires training and education and solving the internal barriers.

Keywords: design thinking, user-centred, customer focus, road construction industry, B2B marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent post-COVID-19 era, we are seeing growing demand for design thinking (DT) and empathetic behaviours, as well as a higher level of emotional capabilities of employees on all levels. Exceptional circumstances and developments require even more empathy towards customers and their emerging needs. This paper aims to explore the potential applications of DT in the context of the highly competitive European road construction market as part of the overall construction industry. According to IBISWorld (2022), the European road and motorway construction market reached around EUR 136 billion, dominated by public clients. As the OECD Transport Statistics (2023) data suggests, public spending on transport infrastructure varies yearly, significantly influenced by the overall economic development and EU funding schemes. Therefore, big players in the EU road construction market have to offset adverse developments in the context of public investments with more intensified activities in the private market. In contrast, success in public procurement relies significantly or almost entirely on the bidding price. Therefore, private sector investors are prone to negotiate and consider other elements of an offer besides being entirely focused on the price.

Considering the highly competitive environment of the European road construction industry, this paper aims to investigate current practices of road construction industries in the context of private investors in order to detect current and potential applications of the DT approach. Since this study is explorative, it utilises qualitative research methodology. Through a series of in-depth interviews with business development managers from ten EU countries, common practices in the context of the private market are investigated.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework that outlines the potential application of design thinking in the context of the (road) construction industry will be elaborated below. Firstly, the main principles of DT will be presented to define this study's theoretical framework. Furthermore, studies focused on the specific application of DT in the broader context of the construction industry will be analysed.

2.1. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking goes beyond being solely a tool for designers. As a problem-solving technique, it does not mandate creativity as a prerequisite for participants; instead, it actively fosters the development of creative thinking. Some DT principles overlap with marketing principles, such as understanding the consumer, testing the product, and iterating based on feedback (Knight, 2021). However, design thinking is not limited to design or marketing, but it is a broader approach to problem-solving and innovation that can be applied in various domains. Companies like IBM, Apple, and Google use a design thinking mindset to design user products and experiences (Fanguy, 2018). The roots of the design thinking approach can be traced to the concept of creative engineering, which emerged as a research topic in 1950 (Arnold, 2016). This concept inspired Simon (1969), who defined design broadly as the activity that changes existing situations and design as a complement to natural science: engineering, architecture, business, education, law and medicine. Nevertheless, he also pointed out how human problem-solving can be considered as a process of a methodical search of possibilities, limited by the individual's adaptive capabilities of information processing, thus leading to a selective search strategy (You & Hands, 2019). Furthermore, Simon (1969) conducted a comparative analysis between the data processing methods employed by computers and the human approach to information search and processing. He concluded that the theory of design serves as a comprehensive theory of search, highlighting the interplay between these two domains. From his perspective, everyone could be considered a designer as long as a person "devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon, 1969: 55). McKim (1979) further carried out the research and developed a need-based design theory covering the entire process, including physical concerns and a human's intellectual and emotional nature. Furthermore, McKim also defined the core concept of his need-based design theory: "Design is the unique capacity of the human species to manipulate materials and energy in a reasoned or a felt response to human physical, intellectual, and emotional needs—human needs which are partially formed and modified by the natural and cultural environment" (von Thienen et al., 2019: 200).

Design thinking addresses 'wicked problems' in organisations and society (Buchanan, 1992). The term 'wicked problem' was initially described as the "class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing" (West Churchman, 1967: B-141). Wickedness refers to highly complex challenges that are difficult to define and solve. These problems often involve multiple interconnected factors, and stakeholders with varying perspectives, values, and priorities often struggle to understand each other (Buchanan, 1992). The wicked-problems approach considers almost all design problems fundamentally indeterminate, except for the most basic ones that have already been simplified to determinate or analytical problems by removing their 'wickedness' (Buchanan, 2010). In other words, 'wickedness' suggests complexity and indetermination, while clear-cut conditions and determinate issues are necessary for the linear design model.

Design thinking can be defined as "a human-centred approach to innovation that puts the observation and discovery of often highly nuanced, even tacit, human needs right at the forefront of the innovation process" (Gruber et al., 2015: 1). According to IDEO U (2023), design thinking is "a human-centred approach to innovation—anchored in understanding customer's needs, rapid prototyping, and generating creative ideas—that will transform how you develop products, services, processes, and organisations". Instead of relying on historical data or their instincts, design thinking advocates focus on what the customer wants (IDEO U, 2023).

The Stanford Life Design Lab (Stanford, 2023) suggests the non-linear five-step design thinking process as follows:

- Step 1 – Empathise: research your users' needs, problems and lifestyles;
- Step 2 – Define: state what issues you are going to try to solve;
- Step 3 – Ideate: challenge assumptions and create ideas;
- Step 4 – Prototype: start to create downscaled solutions and test them to minimise risk;
- Step 5 – Test: use the prototyping data to adjust your products or ideas.

These stages are not always sequential, and design teams often run them in parallel, out of order and iteratively repeat them (Balcaitis, 2019). Although empathy is explicitly included in the first step, it is vital to emphasise empathy as an inherent and inevitable component of the design thinking process and all five stages.

The designer's empathy represents the foundation of design thinking. As Köppen & Meinel (2015: 20) suggested, empathy is viable if "one's own perspective is rejected in favour of the observed user". Kouprie & Visser (2009) stressed the relevance of empathy in design by suggesting the four essential steps to be followed in the process:

- Discovery - enter and connect with the client's world, ask about difficulties, absorb what they are feeling, and gain insight; the goal is to enter the client's world and achieve willingness without judging;
- Immersion - wandering around in the client's world and taking the client's point of view;
- Connection – resonating with the client and achieving emotional resonance;
- Detachment – designer detaches from his emotional connection but keeps the client's perspective.

By emphasising creative solutions that are technically feasible, design thinking tackles complex problems with an ongoing concern for meeting fundamental human needs (Subramanian, 2023). Products developed by design thinkers are directly tailored towards the careful and intentional gratification of critical human needs. Design thinkers should learn to empathise with users before developing a suitable design solution. Therefore, designers should communicate with clients to understand their wants, thoughts, needs, motives, and emotions so that designers can learn to innovate for them and design solutions for the detected needs (Doorley et al., 2018).

As an advanced customer-centric approach, the design thinking practice is implemented in organisations of every size and within all industry sectors (Schmiedgen et al., 2015). Design thinking presents business and public sector organisations with a method to create novel products and services that cater to unexpressed needs. This approach is recognised as a potential source of a competitive edge as it enables innovation and facilitates the management of organisational transformations in the midst of swift shifts in consumer preferences, supply chains, and intense competition (Dunne, 2018).

Implementation of design thinking requires resources and willingness to change. The process of integrating design thinking requires an organisation to undergo multidimensional changes, have management support, strong leadership, skilled staff, and a culture of innovation, as well as the capacity to adapt and evolve (Ward et al., 2009). Despite potential benefits, studies demonstrate that, as an exploratory process, design thinking may need help surviving within organisations prioritising efficiency (Dunne, 2018). In other words, its creative and emphatic nature and customer focus are somewhat challenging to quantify and translate into units that can be easily measured. For design thinking to have a long-term impact, it necessitates the involvement of multiple individuals, as the transient nature of most design thinking engagements may cause individuals to overlook the bigger picture, and organisations must be mindful of creating conditions that support design integration beyond individual successful engagements or interventions (Wrigley et al., 2020).

2.2. CUSTOMER FOCUS AND DESIGN THINKING APPLICATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

In the construction industry, the activities usually start with the client's brief describing requirements and project design, while commissioning and handover occur in the later stages. During the project's life cycle stages, a group of stakeholders with different views on the entire project influence the decision-making process and its impact on the project itself (Padala & Maheswari, 2017). However, they all share the need to finish the project most efficiently. Poor design and inadequate project planning can result in delays and financial losses during the execution phase of the construction project (Nikolić & Cerić, 2022). Traditionally, good collaboration between a client and a construction company can improve the overall quality of the project outcome (Latham, 1994).

As an essential driver of better relationships with clients, studies suggest applying specialised software tools, such as building information modelling, which provides better control over the whole lifecycle of a construction project (Pham et al., 2021). On the other hand, construction project failures are commonly attributed to the human factor, especially in project management (Ewin et al., 2017). While project managers in the construction industry are commonly civil engineers, their formal education usually lacks soft skills that are imperative in creating and nurturing a relationship with the client and adequately addressing the client's needs (Pant & Baroudi, 2008). Consequently, projects would usually fail due to a lack of communication with the client, the inability to comprehend business objectives, and the inability to manage client expectations (Lahiri et al., 2021). Unfortunately, there is usually too much focus on the business needs. However, to improve the understanding of the client's needs, some recent studies suggest a design thinking approach (Ewin et al., 2017, Lahiri et al., 2021). Specifically, user-centredness and holistic view are considered the most relevant design thinking competencies (Lahiri et al., 2021). In this context, user-centeredness considers the capability to observe things from multiple perspectives and recognise other person's needs and values (Carlgren et al., 2016; Howard & Davis, 2011). Similarly, a holistic view refers to a complete, 360-degree perspective on the overall problem, with the view of customer needs, technical feasibility, organisational constraints, regulatory implications, competitive forces, resource availability, strategic implications, as well as the costs and benefits of different solutions (Holloway, 2009, Schweitzer et al., 2016, Dosi et al., 2018). In other words, this implicated the need to thoroughly define customer problems, while maintaining the DT mindset (Schweitzer et al., 2016).

Although there is a rationale for using the DT approach in the construction industry, especially in the context of project management, it is a topic that would require more attention from researchers. There is still little or very little empirical evidence suggesting the benefits of design thinking in the construction industry context (Dijksterhuis & Silvius, 2017), and adaptation of this approach would require a more explicit measure of its actual value (Rauth et al., 2014). Additionally, studies primarily focus on customer-centrism and empathy while giving less attention to other individual steps of the DT process (Lahiri et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies suggest a significant absence of customer focus in the construction industry and project management in the real-life context (Ewin et al., 2017).

Another field where design thinking could become beneficial is innovation diffusion. In the road construction industry context, innovations are sometimes expensive but would lower the overall cost in the long term by increasing durability and reducing maintenance costs (Gee, 2021). Nevertheless, the successful implementation of an innovation tremendously depends on the client's engagement, which could sometimes be quite unpredictable, and overall preparedness for innovations can be questionable (Widén et al., 2014). In other words, clients (i.e., investors) are sometimes unaware of the potential benefits a technology innovation can provide them. Therefore, the construction company must communicate all the benefits properly and manage the innovation diffusion process. In this intention, design thinking can act as a catalyst since it has been considered an approach to innovation (van Reine, 2017). Specifically, design thinking can be used to improve the quality and efficiency of road construction projects while understanding the needs of investors and road users and designing roads that meet their needs. Additionally, design thinking can assist construction companies in improving the sustainability of road construction projects by considering the environmental impact of road construction materials and techniques (Jaber, 2020).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

As the literature review suggests, there is a potential for design thinking in the context of the construction industry, especially in the context of private projects. A better understanding of the client's requirements is the main driver for hassle-free project execution (Carlgren et al., 2016, Howard & Davis, 2011). However, there is also the presence of uncertainties when it comes to the perception of the benefits of the design thinking approach in the construction industry context (Dijksterhuis & Silvius, 2017). Furthermore, there is minimal evidence of the design thinking application advantage in the specific case of road construction as a part of the construction industry. Therefore, we suggest the following research proposition:

P1: Implementation of the design thinking methods and approach has potential benefits for the road construction industry.

Various studies (e.g., Holloway, 2009, Schweitzer et al., 2016, Dosi et al., 2018) recognised the need for a customer-centric approach to improve the company's competitiveness and nurture long-term relationships with clients; however, there seems to be a lack of customer focus in the road construction industry (Ewin et al., 2017), which can be partially attributed to the lack of soft skills among civil engineers managing construction projects (Pant & Baroudi, 2008). Implementation of design thinking in the construction industry context can be problematic due to various factors, so the following research proposition is developed:

P2: Implementation of customer–centric approach in the context of the road construction industry is hindered by various barriers.

As the literature suggests, design thinking has the potential to aid in innovation diffusion in the road construction industry. However, successful implementation depends heavily on client engagement, which can be unpredictable, and overall preparedness for innovation can be questionable (Widén et al., 2014). Design thinking relates to thinking processes connected with empathy and better understanding among customers and clients (Stanford, 2023). Therefore, better communication with customers can be expected if the company relies more upon the design thinking approach, resulting in better mutual understanding. Potentially, road construction companies can improve overall relationships with clients and manage the diffusion process to meet the needs of investors by applying design thinking principles. Therefore, we suggest the following research proposition:

P3: The application of design thinking can improve the customer acceptance rate of product innovation in the context of road construction projects.

3.2.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the analysed literature reveals, the application of design thinking in the context of the broader construction industry and narrower road construction industry has received limited attention among scholars. Nevertheless, it is a developing field in the broader body of design thinking research. Therefore, this research study adopted a qualitative approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews based on the theoretical framework developed through a literature review. The qualitative research approach aims to generate knowledge and insights into the participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes (Tenny et al., 2022) towards the application of design thinking in road construction. Semi-structured interviews are used because they allow the researcher to probe deeper into the participant's responses, thus obtaining more detailed and rich data. Due to the specifics of the research goal, this study intends to shed some light on the current practices and potential for applying the design thinking approach when dealing with private investors. Although the usage of qualitative methodology can cause a certain level of subjectivity and difficulty in data interpretation, it is commonly considered an appropriate approach in the field of management and marketing (Gummesson, 2000, Drew et al., 2007).

3.3. RESPONDENTS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The primary research comprises 15 in-depth interviews with industry professionals proficient in road construction. They all had more than ten years of working experience in related industry. The respondents are sales and business development managers from ten European countries. Regarding their background, nine of them are civil engineers, while six have an educational business background. Their employer is one of the most prominent players in the industry.

The researchers followed a research agenda and asked open-ended questions allowing participants to express their views on applying design thinking in road construction. Nine interviews were conducted in person and six via video conference and recorded, transcribed, and analysed, using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that involves identifying patterns, themes, or categories within the data, in order to identify the meaning and significance of the data and to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Nowell et al., 2017, Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Application of design thinking in the context of the (road) construction industry can have positive outcomes and improve relationships with customers. Regarding the formal knowledge of the DT methods among respondents, there is undoubtedly a huge potential for improvement since only three respondents stated their familiarity with the technique. However, once they were acquainted with the basic principles of design techniques, they recognised it as a customer-centric marketing approach they commonly apply in their day-to-day activities and interactions with clients:

I am familiar with the concept since what we do here is focused on our clients. [...] Our task is to provide them with the best possible solution in asphalt. (Respondent 4)

Interaction with our clients is based on mutual understanding and respect. [...] Clients would describe their specific needs, and it would be our job to provide them with the best solution. (Respondent 6)

In most cases, clients approach us with a request for a specific type of works or type of asphalt. However, we usually suggest alternative solutions after inspecting the request and getting more information about specific requirements. [...] clients are sometimes not familiar with the range of products and technologies we can offer. [...] Our job is to listen carefully to our clients to reveal problems they are trying to solve. Only this way can we develop a customised solution for them. (Respondent 9)

As an essential building brick of design thinking, the importance of empathy is recognised among respondents. Most of them stressed the need to identify all the relevant aspects of a project correctly. This way, a proper technical solution can be proposed to solve the client's problem. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of customer's needs can result in higher levels of customisation and more meaningful proposals for solving customer's problems:

We must demonstrate empathy towards our clients. Only this way can we build our relationships to become long-lasting. [...] If we properly assess our client's needs and issues, we can propose customised solutions, like some special *types of asphalt. [...] One should also not underestimate the importance of a personal relationship with the client. When you develop a sincere relationship with your client, he or she will always look for you once the need for specific road construction works arises.* (Respondent 12)

I consider empathy as looking at things from my customer's perspective. We do not necessarily share our clients' views, but showing respect and understanding is the key to business success. [...] If we ignore the specific requirements, we cannot propose the best possible solution. (Respondent 13)

Respondents were also directly asked to assess the potential benefits of design thinking for their companies. Considering the main principles of design thinking, respondents expressed their firm belief in customer-centred strategies and the need to understand and address clients' needs properly. Furthermore, most of the respondents recognised design thinking as a potential differentiator for a company, contributing to the company's competitiveness:

A systematic application of design thinking would definitely help our company to gain a better understanding of customers and their needs. [...] Design thinking can improve our competitiveness. (Respondent 1)

Many of our competitors are struggling to maintain good relationships with their clients. I see a huge potential for design thinking in our company. It will give us an advantage over our competitors. (Respondent 3)

Sometimes, our management should be more customer-oriented. I understand their focus on financial indicators and overall business development. However, I see a huge potential for design thinking here. If the whole organisation adopts customer-centric principles, we will profit from it. Our relationships with clients will be stronger and more profound. (Respondent 11)

Although design thinking is widely accepted among all respondents as an approach with huge commercial potential that could positively impact the company's overall market success, some organisational functions have different focuses than the commercial part of an organisation. As most respondents reported, the role of sales managers and business developers is sometimes underestimated. On the one hand, most turnover is generated through public tenders. However, it is vital for companies to maintain a blend of private and public clients:

Our construction department prefers working on big projects. Commonly, these big projects belong to the public segment. Hence this is why sometimes other departments need more understanding of the private projects. (Respondent 1)

Some of my colleagues from other departments need to become more familiar with the scope of our activities. Sometimes, this lack of understanding of the sales role within an organisation can harm inter-department relationships. [...] However, our CEO would usually support us by restating the importance of our department. (Respondent 10)

The majority of turnover in our business unit comes from public projects. However, our strategy is to develop the business with private investors further. Unfortunately, sometimes I feel I need more support from other departments. (Respondent 14)

The road construction industry is traditional, where civil engineers commonly play the most critical role in establishing and nurturing client relationships. Therefore, significant players in the industry recognised the need for dedicated staff with better soft skills to improve the overall relationships with clients. Overall, communication between clients and project managers can sometimes become quite dramatic:

Communication at the construction site is usually quite dynamic. Sometimes, people are also yelling at each other. [...] communication can sometimes be an issue, together with a lack of understanding for other party's issues and problems. (Respondent 2)

Conflicts are common in our business, especially on the construction site. Sometimes, conflicts may occur in meetings with clients and supervising engineers. [...] situation can escalate quickly because both sides usually have opposing goals. (Respondent 5)

While sales managers and business developers sometimes act as client ambassadors and propagators of the design thinking principles, they are also aware of difficulties and barriers while trying to integrate these principles within the organisation. It seems that one of the main barriers is the short-term focus of decision-makers:

There is considerable pressure on immediate results. Design thinking, which I consider to be an approach rooted in marketing philosophy, has some short-term effects, but the majority will come from a mid and long-term perspective. This is sometimes challenging to explain within the company. (Respondent 15)

We must deliver results. That is imperative in an organisation. [...] If the tool or technique does not provide visible results in the short term, it could raise major concerns among the management. (Respondent 7)

The short-term focus of some decision-makers within our organisation looks like the biggest barrier to design thinking implementation. [...] Management is also sometimes quite suspicious towards tools that emphasise soft skills. (Respondent 12)

When it comes to design thinking, the focus is on understanding the customer and the customer's needs, wants and emotions. Therefore, if a business organisation endorses design thinking as a customer-focused strategy aimed at solving 'wicked problems', customers should be aware of it or at least perceive certain benefits. On the other hand, sales managers and business developers see an opportunity for design thinking in providing and implementing new technical solutions:

Our clients are only sometimes welcoming deviations from their initial designs and BOQ [Bill of Quantity]. They are only sometimes prepared to discuss potential changes in technology and materials. However, we can suggest new technologies to clients with whom we have a more extended relationship based on mutual understanding and respect. [...] We would also develop a prototype and conduct extensive testing to improve the innovation acceptance rate. (Respondent 2)

We can easily suggest an alternative technology if we carefully listen to clients' requests and identify their problems. (Respondent 8)

With a relationship based on mutual understanding, proposing new technology to the client is relatively easy. [...] Clients that trust us are usually open-minded. Especially when we have an excellent joint project behind us where we proved ourselves being good listeners and experts in road construction. (Respondent 15)

We would fail every time we try to 'sell' new technology to a client without caring about what they are looking for. However, if we listen to the client's needs and wants and try to figure out what brings value to the client, we will be successful. (Respondent 13)

5. DISCUSSION

Our research study confirmed that building interpersonal relationships and skills is very important in the context of a customer-centric approach. Furthermore, an empathic approach towards customer needs and wants would result in satisfaction and loyalty. When dealing with new situations and challenging problems, breaking out of established routines is required. By using DT to guide the way how an activity is conducted, one can practice out-of-the-box thinking and excel in any problem-solving scenario (Choi & Kim, 2017)

As our respondents indicated, developing design thinking skills and having an empathetic and open-minded approach to clients and co-workers could lead to better problem-solving and increase productivity and work-related satisfaction. It is crucial to understand the client and their preferences. It is essential to develop design thinking skills in the road construction industry and implement this approach to improve client satisfaction and the company's competitiveness. In other words, design thinking is recognised as an approach or even a business strategy that can positively impact companies operating in the context of the road construction industry. Therefore, the research findings provided support for P1.

In the road construction industry context, the role of sales managers and business developers is sometimes underestimated. Consequently, there needs to be more understanding of customer focus and design thinking approach. In the design thinking approach, it is vital to have all employees included in the process of decision-making or client-related behaviour. People and their attitudes constitute a vital barrier to change in routines and behaviours (Cummings & Worley, 2013, Judson, 1991). Many people dislike change since it involves moving from the security of something well-known into unfamiliar territory (Okumus & Hemmington, 1998).

Furthermore, a high focus on public tenders, where the company's competitiveness is predominantly expressed with the ability to offer the lowest project price, does not contribute to recognising design thinking as a valuable technique. Furthermore, as the literature suggests, a lack of soft skills among engineers can also hinder the broader acceptance of design thinking among decision-makers. Although design thinking is recognised as a valuable approach in the context of private projects and creating and nurturing long-term relationships with investors, internal barriers are noted, together with the need to better understand the importance of soft skills and empathy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of design thinking in the context of the road construction industry faces significant barriers, which supports P2.

The way that innovations spread in a market is described by the innovation diffusion theory (Rogers, 1995). According to the theory, innovation aims to bring something novel with potential benefits or advantages compared to existing alternatives (Robinson, 2009). From the marketing perspective, customers demand new products and technologies. However, new technology suppliers could also influence the customer's implementation decision process (Hall, 2004). According to our research findings, the design thinking approach could help improve the rate of innovation acceptance by customers in road construction projects. It is essential to listen to and understand the client in order to provide them with meaningful innovation. Ultimately, the client should be willing to accept the innovation. Therefore, road construction companies should improve communication with clients and manage the innovation diffusion process to meet the needs of investors by applying design thinking principles. Thus, P3 is also supported.

6. CONCLUSION

The implications and conclusions of this paper are based on the literature review, research propositions, and findings of the in-depth interviews. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, specific hypotheses were neither formulated nor tested at this point. However, this paper can be used as a starting point for further research where specific hypotheses can be tested.

Despite limited insights from existing literature, our findings indicate that implementing design thinking can be successful in this industry, as it has demonstrated success in other industries. Respondents believed that design thinking could help them address the challenges encountered on construction sites and when dealing with private investors. However, additional training and education are necessary to facilitate its effective implementation.

Design thinking plays a fundamental role in the process of customer experience management. It fosters employee engagement by providing an opportunity to develop solutions that meet customer expectations from the design phase through project implementation and construction.

As design thinking garners increasing attention, our study contributes to the limited research on its application in the construction industry, highlighting avenues for further exploration. Future research should focus on refining the design thinking model, examining its applicability to road construction project management, and enhancing customer satisfaction.

Regarding the limitations of this paper, our findings stem from a small sample size, and caution should be exercised when making international generalisations due to cultural and social differences. Additionally, although interviews offer flexibility and provide in-depth information, the research design has limitations in terms of generalisability. Further studies with larger sample sizes, quantitative methodology and diverse cultural contexts, need to be conducted.

In conclusion, this study represents one of the few efforts to address design thinking in the road construction industry, leaving ample room for further exploration. The development of tools for evaluating solutions and ideas generated by design thinking should be investigated, as well as determining the specific types of problems in which design thinking is most successful in road construction management.

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USING TIKTOK FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In recent times, there has been a digital shift, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting the entire society, including businesses and universities. As a result, the number of online and hybrid studies has increased. In response, higher education institutions such as universities should embrace this change and use social media, despite its negative aspects, to engage with students. TikTok is one of the most downloaded apps and is primarily used by young individuals, including current and potential students. To gain a deeper understanding of TikTok's potential, four research questions were posed: RQ1: "What can be the role of social media in a contemporary educational context?"; RQ2: "Is there evidence to support the use of TikTok in education?"; RQ3: "In which fields can TikTok be used in education?"; RQ4: "What can be the outcomes of social media use in a contemporary educational context?".

Methodology: In this study, an extensive literature review was conducted on the roles and possibilities provided by social media, particularly TikTok, in an educational context.

Results: This research can be beneficial to university management in shaping study programmes and to teachers and educators in general by highlighting social media as a potentially helpful tool in conveying course content in an impactful and engaging way for students.

Conclusion: However, this exploratory study has several limitations that can be addressed in future research. Firstly, TikTok is a new research topic and, besides this, different impacts on social media should be studied further. Secondly, future research should analyse students' feedback about the use of social media in teaching, as well as examine educational outcomes. Specifically, an analysis of the impact of social media on achieving learning outcomes should be measured and a deeper analysis of the positive and negative outcomes of social media in the educational context should be conducted.

Keywords: social media, higher education, TikTok.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's generations of pupils and students, known as Generation Z or digital natives, are born with technological devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops. Moreover, simultaneously with the rise of smartphones, the social media phenomenon started to gain importance. The rise of social media started with Spotify, and it was fuelled by the advent of the smartphone revolution driven by the first iPhone in 2007.

Generation Z is the true Internet generation, as they were born and raised with digitalisation (Syah et al., 2020). But besides them, older-generation members are going through a technological and digital shift and facing challenges today, and most of them have accepted new media. According to Statista (2022), there were 4.7bn global active social media users in 2022 and the daily time spent on social media amounted to 147 minutes per day, with TikTok being the most downloaded social media app worldwide. Aggressive use of social media affects people's focus, behaviour, preferences and perceptions, but despite the large number of negative effects, it can also lead to positive outcomes if used properly.

In addition to the above-mentioned trends, the pandemic boosted the use of digital media in every aspect of our lives and especially in the learning environment. A special challenge for educators during the pandemic was online study and how to effectively convey the course content (Zaitun et al., 2021).

All the above said facts have pushed educational institutions, and educators as well, into starting to perceive and use social media, not only as a promotional tool, but as a tool that can be used for educational purposes. Namely, by exploiting its positive features, social media shows the potential to be used in the educational context (Alexandro et al., 2022). Authors (Komljenović, 2019, as cited in Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021) stated that due to social media, higher education is undergoing changes.

As stated before, TikTok, a short-form video app, is the most downloaded social media app worldwide at the moment and hence it deserves special attention. Moreover, video can be a strong educational and motivational tool within the teaching and learning process because videos can make the content more realistic and they can be effectively used by teachers in the educational process (Afidah et al., 2021).

Despite the importance of social media in people's lives, research on social media still needs to be expanded (Azman et al., 2021). Studies aiming at understanding TikTok are scarce (Montag et al., 2021) and authors (Yang, 2020) pointed out that there is an especially limited literature on the use of TikTok in education and as a source of information for students (Azman et al., 2021). Montag et al. (2021) suggested that there is a need for further comprehensive research on TikTok.

In line with this, the current research provides a comprehensive overview of empirical evidence on this topic available thus far. The main purpose of this paper is to systematically analyse the existing research on social media, especially TikTok, in order to assess the possibilities of its use in spreading educational content, to identify the areas it can be used in, and to define its role and the consequences of such use.

The study is guided by the following research questions: RQ1: “What can be the role of social media in a contemporary educational context?”; RQ2: “Is there evidence to support the use of TikTok in education?”; RQ3: “In which fields can TikTok be used in education?”; RQ4: “What can be the effects of social media use in a contemporary educational context?”.

TikTok is a hot topic in marketing and research as well. However, there is not too much research on it. Therefore, this paper strives to present a systematic and holistic overview of the existing literature on the topic in order to expand the knowledge about it, in present day reality.

The results could be helpful for all levels of educator, like high school teachers, university professors and consultants in their strive to connect and share knowledge with young generations who grew up in a specific environment made up of social media, smartphones and Internet.

The paper consists of six chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter presents the specificities and use of TikTok. The third chapter provides details of the analysis of the literature on TikTok for educational purposes, while the fourth chapter provides the results of the conducted research. The fifth chapter highlights the discussion and implications. Finally, the sixth chapter outlines the conclusion and limitations of the current research and provides directions for further research.

2. TIKTOK SPECIFICITIES AND USES

TikTok is a short-form video app. Videos last 15s, 60s or 3m, active users are called tiktokers and they create content and engage with the audience. TikTok was launched in China in 2016 (as Douyin) and it went international in 2017 (as TikTok) (Fiallos et al., 2021). At the beginning, TikTok attracted young users, mostly thanks to LypSync videos (Montag et al., 2021). The app was originally founded by Zhang Yiming. It was acquired by Beijing ByteDance Technology in November 2017 and renamed TikTok (Montag et al., 2021).

TikTok has become the most downloaded and active social media platform globally (Akbari et al., 2022). According to Statista (2022) TikTok increased its first-time installs by almost 400% year-over-year, reaching 740 million new users in 2021. Moreover, TikTok had 656 million downloads worldwide in 2021 and its brand value in 2021 was 43.52bn USD, while the ByteDance annual revenue in 2021 was 58bn USD (Statista, 2022). The time spent on TikTok in 2021 was 19.6 hours per month, 57% were female users (Statista, 2022). In January 2022, TikTok was the sixth social media network ranked by number of active monthly users (after Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and WeChat/Weixin) with 1,000 million users (Statista, 2022). The highest paid TikTok star is Charlie D'Amelio, the leading hashtag #fyp. The share of global TikTok creators aged 18-24 is 52.83% (mostly female). The share of marketers using TikTok scores 9%, the share of marketers planning to increase marketing efforts on TikTok is 21% (Statista, 2022). As stated by Hu (cited in Akbari et al., 2022), approximately 41% of users between 16 and 24 years spend on Tik Tok 52 minutes per day on average.

Xu et al. (2019) pointed out that short videos used for socialisation are nowadays gaining particular importance among netizens. TikTok is the most used app by members of Generation Z (Gen Z), and it has become popular among this generation due to its authenticity and self-deprecating humour (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021).

Moreover, due to exposure to highly immersive content and its prolonged use, social media companies are getting deep knowledge about user interests and psychological traits, and this allows better microtargeting (Montag et al., 2021). In addition, Montag et al. (2021) pointed out that TikTok Landing Page (For You page) learns very well and quickly about individual user preferences, thus being able to offer appropriate content and to capture user attention for a longer time span, which consequently leads to longer use of the platform than maybe planned.

Similarly to other social media, TikTok has its own advantages or positive aspects and disadvantages or negative aspects. Among the negative aspects of TikTok, researchers have quoted: non-existing profit model (consequent lack of liquidity), fake goods invading the app and insufficient supervision by the platform, and content homogeneity that lead to users' loss of interest (Xu et al., 2019). Moreover, the disadvantages encompass confidentiality issues, security of data, cyberbullying, possible addiction, exposure to inappropriate content, and time-consuming activity (Nichita et al., 2021). Among the negative effects of TikTok, Putri (2021) also mentioned the possibility for content creators to post 18+ content or inadequate songs that can be heard and seen by the general public. Montag et al. (2021) highlighted that TikTok may produce different negative outcomes such as spreading hate, privacy issues, negative behaviour, or cyberbullying.

On the other hand, there are a number of advantages of using social media, such as fast interaction, easy transmission of multimedia files, possibility of video call or private conversation and back-ups, encryption, and overcoming distance between the parties (Nichita et al., 2021). Moreover, there are many aspects that can be used to achieve positive goals, e.g., TikTok can be used to increase people's digital literacy and dance creativity (Putri, 2021) and it can be used to spread health-related information, government information, in the political field, tourism, sales, and even for educational purposes (Montag et al., 2021). During the pandemic, social media showed their impact and were used in the STEM field to spread medical and scientific pieces of information (Radin & Light, 2022). Xu et al. (2019) analysed the positive and negative aspects of TikTok. They highlighted that among the reasons for TikTok's success there are effective marketing strategies, quality algorithms and successful fulfilment of users' needs.

TikTok has multiple purposes; e.g., it is the cheapest tool for creation and promotion of content, a platform for network creation, a tool used by influencers and sports practitioners, athletes, a platform for promoting e-cigarettes (vape), sports goods, tourism destinations, culinary content, climate change issues and similar (Akbari et al., 2022). Khlaifi & Salha (2021) highlighted the role of social media for government and non-government agencies, especially for relationship building and engagement with customers or citizens. Moreover, TikTok represents a new business opportunity, especially in product and service marketing (Akbari et al., 2022). In fact, besides a recreational function, social media such as Tik Tok have educational and business potential (Akbari et al., 2022). TikTok provides a fertile ground for creative expression and creative approach in different fields, such as education. TikTok shows potential to be used not only for promotion of higher education institutions (Akbari et al., 2022), but also as a tool for spreading knowledge.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ON TIKTOK USES FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

In order to answer the posited research questions and to achieve the research goals, the Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Willey Online and Google Scholar databases were analysed. In the search, the following keywords were used: TikTok, education, higher education, and the combination of these words. After the first inspection, only the most relevant papers were analysed further. The database research was conducted from August 11 to August 15, 2022. After the first analysis, all the relevant papers were saved for the second, deeper and more detailed analysis with the aim of answering the posited research questions.

4. TIKTOK FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

As mentioned above, in order to get deeper knowledge and to answer the posited research questions, extensive research of the existing literature was conducted.

The first research question (**RQ1**) was: ***What can be the role of social media in a contemporary educational context?***

Authors (Mahnun, 2012, cited in Syah et al., 2020) pointed out three functions of social media: stimulus, mediation and information. Moreover, Gupta & Bashir (2018, cited in Alexandro et al., 2022) pointed out several main reasons for using social media applications, such as entertainment, socialisation, informativeness and academic.

Nowadays, education is evolving. Online and hybrid education are getting more popular (Alguacil et al., 2021) due also to the COVID-19 pandemic (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Jerasa & Boffone (2021) pointed out that, despite there being no evidence that educational organisations struggle to adequately meet student needs, due to COVID, both institutions and students made a digital shift. In these settings, social media can be a great tool for science communication, especially if directed to young people (Jing et al., 2021) and, at the same time, social media deeply impacts, even revolutionises, the educational process (Alguacil et al., 2021, Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021) and the way people communicate (Alguacil & Lopez-Camil, 2021).

Authors, such as Syah et al. (2020), pointed out that the massive use of social media among youngsters (Generation Z) should be seen as a huge opportunity for their interaction with the educational process. Social media can be used to improve the interaction between students and educators and can be seen as an alternative learning technique (Hayes et al., 2022). Khlaifi & Salha (2021) stated that social media drastically impacts pedagogical approaches, and that connected learning could provide better outcomes than traditional 'old-school' practices. Moreover, e-learning entails the integration of social media in the educational process (Khlaifi & Salha 2021). Social media use is one of the most popular online activities and, due to this fact and the possibility of mobile use, educators have the opportunity to apply them in the educational process (Draganić et al., 2021).

Despite these facts, the use of social media in higher education is a sporadic phenomenon and of salient interest in research while, at the same time, students are ready to use social media for education (Alexandro et al., 2022).

In this context, short videos could play an important role in micro and nano learning. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that two of the most popular social media platforms, namely YouTube and TikTok, both rely on videos and are popular, but while on YouTube there is mostly long-form video content, on Tik Tok there is mostly short-form video content (Al-Maroof et al., 2021). In line with this, TikTok popularity has increased dramatically, boosted by the pandemic, and the content is created in different fields and for different purposes, its popularity growing rapidly, especially among Gen Zers (Xiuven & Razali, 2021). In addition, in their research, Al-Maroof et al. (2021) pointed out that YouTube has been more impactful for users and eventually a more efficient learning source. Nichita et al. (2021) stated that, in order to facilitate the use of TikTok videos in the learning process and in order to reduce the time spent in scrolling, it is necessary to create a formal study programme, at the same time also creating one for moments of relaxation (comments and watching of educational TikTok videos should be seen as an act of relaxation by the users).

In their paper, authors such as Hayes et al. (2022) argued the pros and cons of reductionism as an educational approach in modern science education. As they (Hayes et al., 2022) clarified, the term reductionism is an approach in science education that puts an impetus on dividing complex problems/topics into bite-sliced pieces of information. That approach makes complex science topics easier to understand. Nevertheless, they (Hayes et al., 2022) pledged for a system thinking approach in education as a better extension of reductionism and a more holistic approach to knowledge dissemination.

The second research question **(RQ2)** was: ***Is there evidence to support the use of TikTok in education?***

Among many social media, the most dynamic at the moment is TikTok. TikTok is a free application that enables content creators to publish short videos and use many different features, e.g. add or use ‘stickers’, ‘GIFs’, ‘filters’, ‘augmented reality’, ‘split screens’, and ‘green screens’, ‘lip Synchronisation’, ‘Duet’ or ‘Stitch’ (users add themselves into a video) and ‘React’ (users film themselves reacting to a video), ‘Live video’ and many other options (Hayes et al., 2022). Moreover, TikTok enables sharing content on other platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Instagram Stories, WhatsApp, and Facebook Stories and downloading it directly on Google or Dropbox in order to share it via email or any other way (Hayes et al., 2022). TikTok was the second most downloaded app in 2020 and it was, at its beginning, well-known as a platform for users who recorded themselves in a dancing act, lip-sync or showing talents, but it entered the educational field with people sharing knowledge and using the hashtag #learnontiktok (Fiallos et al., 2021).

Authors, such as Alexandro et al. (2022), noticed and pointed out that TikTok can be a valuable platform to use for educational purposes (many hashtags promote learning) and activism of Generations Y and Z. They argued about TikTok as a platform that gives many opportunities for the improvement of the teaching and learning process (Alexandro et al., 2022). Azman et al. (2021) stated that TikTok can be used in higher education in multiple ways, i.e. for brand and reputation development of an institution, and also by researchers for spreading knowledge. They highlighted the current and future role of TikTok in education by emphasising its large potential. Likewise, Draganić et al. (2021) confirmed that TikTok can also be used in an educational context and that it gives opportunities to create informative, entertaining and visually attractive learning content. While Syah et al. (2020) highlighted that TikTok can be implemented in daily life learning for Generation Z, Fiallos et al. (2021) pointed out that TikTok is a quality platform for efficient dissemination of knowledge in different science fields. Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) highlighted the role of TikTok in learning due to its specific type of content creation (video). Khlaifi & Salha (2021) highlighted that TikTok, which delivers short, enjoyable, creative video content, shows potential in the pedagogical context as a platform for co-creation of high-quality e-learning content based on nano-learning principles. Jerasa & Boffone (2021) pointed out that TikTok can be used as support in teaching and Radin & Light (2022) concluded that the inclusion of TikTok as a teaching tool can help in teaching and scientific dissemination. Khlaifi & Salha (2021) emphasised the need to integrate TikTok videos into current pedagogical approaches in primary and secondary schools, as well as in higher education institutions.

In their paper, Xiuwen & Razali (2021) highlighted that TikTok can be used in students' education. Moreover, Afidah et al. (2021) pointed out the positive effects of using TikTok as video aids in university courses. In their research, Radin & Light (2022) showed that students were satisfied and excited because of the creative task they had to fulfil; namely, they had to communicate to a young generation the results of their scientific assignments via social media.

In line with the above said, Pavlik (2020) highlighted that TikTok is especially important for universities, because most TikTok users will apply for a university in a year's time or have already applied (Pavlik, 2020). Aware of this, universities already use TikTok for promoting themselves to prospective students. The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), for example, set up its TT account in 2019, as well as the Louisiana State University (Pavlik, 2020), and most universities (e.g., the York University) besides promotion use TikTok for spreading knowledge (Draganić et al., 2021).

The third research question (**RQ3**) was: ***In which fields can TikTok be used in education?***

Although a number of researches, as seen above, confirmed the role of TikTok in the educational context, it is still interesting to research in which fields it can be used.

According to Al-Maroof et al. (2021), YouTube and TikTok have been recognised as social media platforms that support knowledge creation, sharing and acquisition in the medical field. In May 2020, TikTok launched the LearnOnTikTok programme, dedicated to educating people during the COVID-19 pandemic. The creators were professionals from different disciplines and students (Fiallos et al., 2021). According to Basch et al. (2021), TikTok was one of the most important sources of health information for young people during the COVID era. Their (Basch et al., 2021) research results showed that videos with a negative association to COVID testing had a significant number of views and likes, which should be of particular concern and interest, especially for public health associations. Edwards (2021) stated that during the pandemic a creator on TikTok, @epidemiologistkat, created a short 60s informational video for the general public focused on COVID-19 medical studies.

Comp. et al. (2020) discussed the use of Tik Tok in medicine (delivery of information about public health and education) and the pros and cons of such use. Besides many positive goals that can be achieved, there are also some negative effects such as unchecked information, undeclared conflict of interests, credibility issues and the like. Nevertheless, Zhu et al. (2019) highlighted that social media, and their positive effects represent an opportunity even for public health departments in terms of delivering information and healthcare education, but most health institutions (in China) struggle with the use of TikTok. Al-Maroof et al. (2021) highlighted that personal innovativeness is the most important trait for accepting

YouTube and TikTok as platforms for medical content creation, sharing and consumption.

In their research, Jerasa & Boffone (2021) analysed the possibility for teachers to integrate TikTok videos as a support for their instruction and in order to enhance classroom community; in short, to integrate TikTok into ELA classrooms. In their study among university students, Afidah et al. (2021) pointed out that students have positive attitudes toward the use of TikTok as video aids in teaching English language. This was confirmed by Yang (2020), who pointed out that secondary-school students approve introducing TikTok as video aids in EFL classroom teaching (English learning). In their research, Afidah et al. (2021) showed that students are bored with studying English as a foreign language only with books and Xiuwen & Razali (2021) highlighted the role and importance of TikTok as an innovative approach to teaching the English language in EFL classrooms. In their study about the impact of TikTok use on improving students' English-speaking skills via the assignment of tasks related to video descriptions and via storytelling about a person, place or object, Zaitun et al. (2021) showed that this method positively impacts students' confidence in speaking English, and it represents a new experience for them. Secondary-school students see TikTok as especially useful for speaking, vocabulary and listening skills (Yang, 2020). As Jerasa & Boffone (2021) stated, there is a new subculture of young readers - and not only readers but also adolescents - engaged on the book topic in various ways, which is built around the BookTok hashtag (or connected with #BookTok). Jerasa & Boffone (2021) pointed out that BookTok serves as a classic literacy community, like an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Xiuwen & Razali (2021) concluded that technology has revolutionised the way of learning languages.

Moreover, authors (Hayes et al., 2022) argued that TikTok can be used to create fun, engaging video content for science dissemination, especially in the field of chemistry. In their research, Hayes et al. (2022) set up a TikTok account named "The Chemistry Collective", aimed at undergraduate students who created 16 educational videos. The viewers of the videos strongly agreed they had learned something new about the topic and 82.7% of the viewers agreed that the videos increased their interest in chemistry. In their paper, Draganić et al. (2021) also mentioned the effort of the York University members interested in chemistry, who set up the account "The Chemistry Collective" with the aim to spread chemistry knowledge in a funny and engaging way.

Khlaifi & Salha (2021) pointed out that TikTok videos can be used to enrich courses in different fields of education. Besides chemistry, they can be used to explain topics in maths and physics in an interesting and compelling way. Other authors (Draganić et al., 2021) argued about different areas of shared knowledge on TikTok (besides chemistry), such as creative ideas, cooking, drawing, experience-based knowledge, crafts and science, medicine, technology, and culture. Moreover, the content linked to hashtag #LearnOnTikTok encompasses different topics: chemistry, cooking, health, learning languages and creating origami figures (Fiallos et al., 2021).

Zea & Heekyoung (2019) highlighted the fact that short videos have become popular for learning and sharing achievements in different fields like cooking, drawing, or crafting.

In their research, Syah et al. (2020) pointed out that TikTok can also be used in physics courses. They used it to produce interactive videos whose function was to explain Newton's laws. Moreover, Escamilla-Fajardo, Alguacil, Lopez-Camil (2021) suggested introducing TikTok into the learning process in courses like corporal expression courses of the sport science, because of its specific content.

Nichita et al. (2021) highlighted that TikTok allows dance students to express creative ideas in digital form. Students are able to apply technology while learning dance and this boosts exploration, improvisation and students' creativity.

In their research, Fiallos et al. (2021) pointed out that, on TikTok, there are a number of educative videos about Health and STEM areas, and as well, even though to a minor extent, videos about social sciences (law and education). Authors of these videos were under the age of 34 (similarly to the largest audience on this media).

Radin & Light (2022) highlighted the benefits of using TikTok for teaching and dissemination of scientific results. In their research conducted on TikTok videos that presented science-related content, Jing et al. (2021) highlighted that among 200 analysed videos, 55% were about physics and chemistry (mostly experiments and reactions), 9% were biology videos (often animals and plant life), 3% were focused on social and behavioural sciences (mostly psychology), whereas 13% of the videos were classified as science in general. Regarding their format, 59% of the videos addressed visualisation and/or explanation of a research process, 21% of the videos were focused on the explanation of scientific concepts, 12% of the videos showed science-related objects (for example science toys). Regarding the presentation, most videos used experiments, gadgets or animals in a demonstration or plain speaking.

Edwards (2021) argued about the need to incorporate digital communications (e.g., via TikTok) in basic communication courses in order to meet the wants of today's employers. Moreover, students prefer to study with video aids rather than audio media aids (Afidah et al., 2021).

The fourth research question (**RQ4**) was: ***What can be the effects of social media use in a contemporary educational context?***

According to Radin & Light (2022), social media started to rise in 2000 and educators have been increasingly using them in their pedagogical efforts, mostly because social media improves students' learning experience. Azman et al. (2021) analysed previous research that had highlighted positive effects of the use of social media in education, such as enhancing students' commitment and contribution, promoting learner-centred approach, higher students' involvement, encouraging creativity and producing better academic outcomes.

Using #BookTok with its 70.7 billion views (August 16, 2022), many tiktokers do book reviews, recommend books, post videos about libraries and everything connected with books and, by doing this, they promote reading and books, make them cool again and affect book sales as well.

Studies have confirmed that the creation and consumption of mini video lectures improves participants' satisfaction, and TikTok provides an ideal tool and format to achieve this outcome (Fiallos et al., 2021). Radin & Light (2022) argued about the possibility of using TikTok for communication of science and consequently improving science communication skills and improving the quality of teaching.

TikTok can be a very conveying tool, because the educator can explain complex concepts in a creative and more realistic and interesting manner. Moreover, it motivates students to learn because the material is conveyed in a cool and unique way (Aji, 2018, cited in Syah et al., 2020).

In their research, Azman et al. (2021, p. 24) demonstrated that most of the respondents agree that TikTok as social media platform (SOCMED), TikTok as a window for online learning (ODL) and TikTok improve communication desire and that technology skills as education tools (EDU) will influence the acceptance of TikTok towards education development.

Research (Draganić et al., 2021) also demonstrated that the use of TikTok in medicine positively impacts doctor-patient relationship and changes patients' behaviour.

In their research among Spanish sport science students, Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (n.d.) highlighted that the use of TikTok in education promotes students' motivation and engagement and boosts their creativity and curiosity.

Azman et al. (2021) argued about the pros and cons of TikTok in education. They stated that TikTok provides many benefits for learning, especially online learning. Likewise, more innovative teachers can give students TikTok related tasks and even students could be encouraged to create study content (peer-to-peer education).

At the same time, it should be noted that research showed that online learning (in this case, in the specific context of the pandemic) can be perceived as negative and overwhelming for students (Litert, 2021).

Students declared that TikTok catches everyone's attention, but the videos should be interesting and contain clear and short learning (Afidah et al., 2021). Zea & Heekyoung (2019) pointed out that only 30% of users were really engaged in the knowledge-sharing process by leaving comments and information.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Beside the fact that social media impacts almost everyone's life and produces many negative effects, they can also be used for positive goals, such as young people's education. Young people i.e., students, spend much of their time online, mostly on social media. Moreover, they prefer to consume short, visually attractive content, and among many social media, the most downloaded app in 2020 was TikTok. Therefore, social media, and especially TikTok, deserve special attention not only by marketers, but also by university management and professors. In order to assess the possibilities of use of this relatively new media, beloved by the young generation, i.e., students and future students, an extensive review of existing literature was conducted. Moreover, in this exploratory study, the author posited four research questions with the aim to synthesise the existing research on this hot topic. Regarding the first research question (RQ1: *What can be the role of social media in a contemporary educational context?*), it can be stated that the impact of social media in education can be significant, especially due to its massive use by young people. Previous research has shown that social media can be used for different purposes, such as science communication and education, and they provide better educational outcomes than traditional teaching and learning. Social media, especially short video content, can play an important role in the context of micro and nano learning. All contemporary happenings like the COVID 19 pandemic, hybrid or online learning, young people's attraction to new and innovative approaches and similar, boost the use of social media in education. In order to answer the second research question (RQ2: *Is there evidence to support the use of TikTok in education?*), extensive research of existing literature was conducted, and it turned out that previous research had pointed out many positive examples of such use. Many hashtags related to learning and book reading are popular among TikTok consumers and the research confirmed that the TikTok app provides opportunities to improve the teaching and learning experience. Research has shown that students involved in classes that assigned TikTok projects were excited about the task and the experience. Furthermore, the research about the fields in which TikTok can be used (RQ3: *In which fields can TikTok be used in education?*) showed a variety of fields for such use. TikTok was proven successful in creation and dissemination of knowledge and in the teaching process in the following fields: medicine and health (especially during the pandemic), teaching languages, English language (ELA English Language Arts), literacy community (#booktok), chemistry, maths, physics, drawing, cooking, crafts and science, creating origami figures, corporal expression course of sport science, dance teaching, STEM areas, social sciences (law and education), dissemination of scientific knowledge, biology videos (often animals and plant life), psychology and communication courses. The aim of the last and maybe the most important research question was to discover the effects of social media use in the contemporary educational context (RQ4: *What can be the effects of social media use in a contemporary educational context*?). Some of the effects seem to be really helpful for pedagogical efforts and teaching experience in today's environment. Studies have pointed out that social media improves students' learning experience, promotes students' commitment, involvement and contribution, promotes learner-centred approach, promotes creativity, and improves the overall academic outcome. Moreover, by using specific hashtags, TikTok promotes reading books and short video content leads to increased students' satisfaction. It improves science communication and the quality of teaching. TikTok motivates students to learn due to increased creativity and uniqueness of conveying topics, it improves communication desire and technology skills. In medicine, TikTok improves the doctor-patient relationship. Authors have claimed that TikTok positively impacts students' motivation, engagement, creativity and curiosity, but it can also be overwhelming in some cases.

Despite TikTok's image as a platform for futile entertainment with a negative impact on users and their focus, it has been demonstrated that it can be used for valuable goals. Videos in general (either longer or shorter) change the way of learning, especially for Generation Z, who are the most common users of social media platforms (especially TikTok). Social media can be a new method for knowledge transmission. Video content distributed via social media can be an impactful learning tool. And besides all the negative effects, the existing, although limited, literature on the topic shows many positive aspects as well, especially knowing that today`s youngsters need new approaches and new methods and techniques of conveying knowledge. as An inevitable phenomenon, social media can be used by educators to improve the learning experience and, by doing so, to achieve higher student satisfaction. Based on this evidence, university management should recommend, and professors should embrace, this new tool at their disposal and, by doing this, they might achieve many personal and institutional goals. This approach (the use of social media, in this case TikTok) would be underpinned in the first instance by innovative, creative professors, a sort of early adopter. This exploratory study was conducted with the aim of expanding the body of knowledge in this new research area. Social media and especially TikTok is a topic of salient interest and not sufficiently explored to date. This literature review is an attempt to systematise the knowledge on the topic and deepen the knowledge about it in an educational context and about its use for educational purposes.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Social media has become an important phenomenon in most peoples' lives, and that is especially true for young people. Social media impact communication, social interaction, focus span and, in addition, youngsters spend a lot of their time online. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted many aspects of our lives. It especially shook up the learning processes, but at the same time it pushed people to accept digitalisation more quickly. While businesses and people are embracing the digital shift head-on, schools and universities are struggling to get students' attention. Therefore, given the above-described reality, educational institutions have to take into consideration the possibility of applying and using social media for positive and important goals, such as for educational purposes. The use of social media could represent an innovative and efficient way to convey educational topics to customers (i.e., students). This paper outlines the possibilities and pros and cons of using social media (i.e., TikTok) for educational purposes.

This exploratory study has a few limitations that can serve as a basis for future research. First of all, a more solid systematic review should cover at least a 10-year period, which is not possible in this case as it is a novice phenomenon. Moreover, the research was limited to three keywords, namely TikTok, Education, Higher Education, and only five, although significant, databases were explored.

TikTok is a new research topic and its many impacts, as well as the impacts of social media in general, should be researched further. Future research should analyse students' feedback about the use of media in teaching. Moreover, educational results should be analysed. Future research should measure whether social media contributes to the achievement of learning outcomes and include an in-depth analysis of the positive and negative effects of social media in the educational context. Future literature reviews could also encompass more keywords and more databases.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of social media represents both a special challenge and opportunity in higher education, perhaps not of crucial importance, but it shows many possible benefits that should be taken in consideration by educators worldwide.

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EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN INTERNAL MARKETING, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATIVITY AND SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Internal marketing (IM) has been recognised as an important strategy for enhancing employee engagement and satisfaction, yet its implementation in practice still needs to be improved. This study aims to fill the research gap by examining the impact of IM on employee creativity and engagement and the impact of employee creativity on satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, this study will explore the relationship between work-life balance and creativity, engagement, and satisfaction and include employee agility, as it has an important influence on adaption to external influences. Data was collected on a sample of employees in Slovenia, and the results provide valuable insights for organisations seeking to improve their internal marketing strategies and employee well-being.

Methodology: The research was quantitative, using an online questionnaire on a sample of employees in Slovenia (n=89). The scales included the concepts of satisfaction, creativity, engagement, agility, work-life balance and internal marketing, consisting of subconstructs, internal communications, education and training, motivation and reward system, internal market research and retention policy. We deployed exploratory factor analysis to test the reliability and validity of the scales.

Results: This study confirms the positive relationship between internal marketing and employee work-life balance. It also suggests that internal marketing may predict creativity and higher levels of internal marketing motivation and training are associated with lower levels of engagement. Finally, employee creativity and engagement positively impact employee satisfaction, but work-life balance does not significantly correlate.

Conclusion: The study shows how internal marketing practices can improve employee agility, work-life balance and engagement, and suggests that organisations should adopt them to address employee needs and preferences. It also calls for further research to explore the indirect relationships of internal marketing and the optimal strategies for positive employee outcomes.

Keywords: internal marketing, employee creativity, work-life balance, employee engagement, employee satisfaction, employee agility

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of every company is a successful operation, but the challenge is how to achieve that success. In today's dynamic business environment, achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage has become the main challenge, leading companies to new strategies and business orientations. Gwinji et al. (2020) argue that internal marketing (IM) positively impacts a company's ability to achieve competitive advantages in the market. Therefore, the role of employees is becoming increasingly recognised, and IM is a key element that takes care of their satisfaction and creates long-term relationships by increasing their commitment and dedication (Caldwell, Licona & Floyd, 2015).

A solution for companies to adapt to rapid changes and accelerated cycles is to become agile. Employee agility with IM practices may be the answer to this complex and uncertain business environment because of better adaption to environmental changes and prompt better responses. Employees' agility has become a popular topic in relation to organisational success and gaining competitive advantages (Morgan, 2004, Jager, Born & Molen, 2022). IM practices that focus on employee development and empowerment and the use of technology to facilitate communication and collaboration may also foster employee agility. With an agile and creative workforce engaged and satisfied with their work-life balance, companies may respond promptly to environmental changes, improve service quality, and achieve long-term success.

IM has many effects on employees and their behaviours. IM practices, such as internal communications, motivation and rewards, training, and marketing research, help companies to get to know their employees, and their wants and needs. On the other hand, with employee growth and development, it has been recognised as an important strategy for enhancing employee engagement, creativity and satisfaction (Gounaris, 2006, Kaur & Sharma, 2015, Crnjar, Dlacic & Milfelner, 2020, Ferdous & Polonsky, 2014, Kadic-Maglajlic, Boso & Micevski, 2018, Al-Qudah et. al., 2013, Nemteanu & Dabija, 2021, Sarker & Ashrafi, 2018). Because implementing IM contributes to greater interaction between employees and employers, this means an increased exchange of ideas, experiences and thoughts, which leads to greater employee creativity (Gjurašić & Marković, 2017). While more research is needed to understand the impact of IM on employee creativity fully, there are several ways in which IM practices can support a culture of innovation and creativity in the workplace.

Despite the significant evolution in the notion and content of IM, until today, only a few companies have implemented IM in practice (Gounaris, 2006). This could be due to limited awareness of the positive impacts of IM, resulting from the absence of adequate quantitative research. To address this research gap, this quantitative study aims to examine the impact of IM on employee creativity and engagement, as well as the impact of employee creativity on satisfaction and engagement, in the context of companies in Slovenia.

This study will also explore the relationships between work-life balance and creativity, engagement, and satisfaction. Relatively few studies have focused on the application of IM and its impacts in Slovenia. Researching and measuring IM in different cultures is crucial to understanding whether its impact on employees is consistent across different cultural contexts or whether differences need to be considered.

Our study enriches the literature by developing and validating an instrument to measure IM and employee creativity, agility, satisfaction, engagement and work-life balance in organisations. It also examines the relationship between IM and work-life balance, which can significantly impact employee satisfaction. In a study by Irawanto et al. (2021), it was confirmed that work-life balance positively and significantly impacts employee satisfaction. It allows employees to have flexibility and autonomy in balancing their professional and personal life (Song and Gao, 2019) which in turn can also contribute to their agility.

Moreover, the study researches the significant impact of IM on employee creativity, engagement, and satisfaction, and extends the existing literature by examining the linkage between IM and employee creativity. Lastly, the study expands current research on IM in Slovenia, and confirms the positive effects of implementing IM practices worldwide.

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between IM and employee creativity, engagement, work-life balance, agility and satisfaction, which is one of the main purposes of IM. More precisely, we want to address a research gap in the literature on IM and employee creativity, by exploring the influence of IM on employee creativity, agility and engagement, and by exploring relationships between creativity and work-life balance, as well as the relationship of both on employee satisfaction.

The paper is structured in several key parts. After the introduction, a theoretical background and hypotheses development are presented, followed by methodology, and finally the results. The paper ends with conclusions. In addition, limitations are stated, and further research ideas are being identified.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. INTERNAL MARKETING

Internal marketing combines marketing philosophy and human resource management practices aimed at improving performance in the external market (Paul & Sahadev, 2018). IM aims to motivate, retain and attract employees to achieve business goals. This can be achieved by understanding employees' emotional and intellectual needs, offering customised solutions, and focusing on building long-term relationships (Roberts-Lombard, 2010). Rafiq and Ahmed (1993, 2000) define IM as a strategy for managing organisational change to overcome opposition and provides the first comprehensive definition as "*a planned effort using a (1) marketing-like approach to (2) motivate employees, targeting on delivering (3) customer satisfaction and (4) achieving organisational objectives through (5) inter-functional coordination*". This emphasises the importance of treating employees as internal customers and using marketing principles to motivate and engage them in achieving organisational objectives. The focus on inter-functional coordination highlights the need for collaboration and internal communication across different departments to achieve common goals. This definition provides a useful framework for organisations to implement IM strategies that can improve employee satisfaction, engagement, productivity and, ultimately, better customer experiences. Companies that pay attention to satisfying the needs of their employees create value (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006) in terms of interdependence, support and reciprocity between the company and its employees. Therefore, it is extremely important for such a company to collect, evaluate, and make sense of relevant information about work through internal marketing research (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Based on the theoretical knowledge we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Internal marketing positively influences the employee agility.

H2: Internal marketing positively influences the employee creativity.

H3: Internal marketing positively influences the employee work-life balance.

H4: Internal marketing positively influences the employee engagement.

H5: Internal marketing positively influences the employee satisfaction.

2.2. EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction is assumed to be a pleasant and positive emotional state from evaluating one's work or work experiences. A satisfied employee has a lower desire for turnover and strives for greater commitment to the company (Locke, 1976). Furthermore, IM, employee engagement, work-life balance and job design have all been shown to positively affect job satisfaction (Saks, 2006, Shuck & Reio, 2014). Understanding and enhancing job satisfaction is essential for organisations to retain talented employees and maintain a competitive advantage.

2.3. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Strong empirical evidence shows positive results for individuals and companies that regulate their work-life balance (Hobson, Delunas, & Kesic, 2001, Kalliath & Brough, 2008). The term "work-life balance" refers to the relationship between an individual's work and non-work aspects. To achieve a good balance between professional and personal life, limiting one side (usually work) is often necessary to provide more time for the other. Work-life balance can positively impact employee creativity, as it gives individuals the necessary resources to pursue personal interests and activities, stimulating creative thinking and problem-solving abilities in the workplace (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). A positive relationship has been found between work-life balance and job satisfaction, according to Jackson and Fransman (2018). Thus, on work-life we hypothesise:

H6: Work-life balance positively influences the employee satisfaction.

2.4. EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

Employee creativity is an important and interesting factor in internal marketing research to achieve and maintain competitive advantages. Companies can succeed in a competitive and unpredictable business environment with creative employees who improve service quality, increase efficiency, and ensure long-term survival (Andleeb, Chan & Nazeer, 2019, Gjurašić & Marković, 2017). According to Anderson et al. (2014), creativity means generating ideas that enable developing, accepting and implementing new ideas (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004, Yuan & Woodman, 2010), as well as improving service quality.

IM can stimulate creativity in employees by creating an environment that fosters communication, trust and creativity (Gursoy, Chi, & Lu, 2018).

By providing training and development opportunities, employees are equipped with skills to generate and implement new ideas. This approach can lead to a higher level of employee creativity and job satisfaction, positively impacting organisational performance (Lin et al., 2008, Gounaris et al., 2010, Rezvani et al., 2016). Based on that, we have formulated the following hypothesis:

H7: Employee creativity positively influences the employee satisfaction.

2.5. EMPLOYEE AGILITY

Companies must continually respond to a dynamic and competitive environment to survive, and this can be achieved by being agile. Agility refers to employees who can adaptively but also proactively deal with changes (Chonko, Lawrence, & Jones, 2005). Therefore, agility is also important when ensuring success and competitive advantages. Agility depends on the employee initiative and their skills, knowledge and access to information (Salmen & Festing, 2022). Moreover, agile employees are more likely to maintain a good work-life balance. Considering the relationship between agility, IM and employee well-being, it is possible to influence employees' creativity, engagement, and work-life balance. Based on these findings, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H8: Employee agility positively influences employee creativity.

H9: Employee agility positively influences work-life balance.

H10: Employee agility positively influences employee engagement.

2.6. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Engaged employees are committed to the goals and values of the company and are motivated (Baumruk, 2004, Shaw, 2005, Richman, 2006) to contribute to its success, with an increased sense of their own well-being (Saks, 2006, Shuck & Reio, 2014). The importance of employee engagement is also supported by research linking it to a range of positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour and reduced absenteeism (Macey & Schneider, 2008, Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010), which are also the benefits of IM. Engaged employees are more likely to be satisfied with their work and committed to their organisation, which can result in increased performance and productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). This leads to competitive advantage and creative work of employees (Kim & Kao, 2014; Alavi, Wahab, Muhamad, & Shirani, 2014). This leads us to hypothesis:

H11: Employee engagement positively influences the employee satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLE

The data wase collected using an online survey instrument, and the research involved employees in Slovenia from different sectors and companies between 30th March and 20th April 2023. The sample consists of 89 respondents, with 45% being men and 55% women. On average, the respondents have been employed for 7.4 years. Regarding work arrangements, 60% of the sample work from the office, while 40% work in a hybrid arrangement. Additionally, only 37% of respondents have flexible and others have fixed working hours. The average age of respondents is 38 years. The sample for this study was a non-random judgemental sample.

3.2. MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), was used to measure the proposed concepts.

A list of items for measuring *IM* was developed from items previously used in the literature (Foreman & Money, 1995, Lings & Greenley, 2005, Gounaris, 2006, Tsai & Thang, 2008). Items for measuring *employee satisfaction* were adopted from Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014), Williams (2004), Rue and Byars (2003) and Kaliski (2007), and some were self-generated. *The work-life balance* scale was partially adopted from Fisher et al. (2009) and Jianfeng et al. (2019) and partially self-generated. *Creativity* was measured using the 8-item scale by George and Zhou (2001). The scale for measuring *employee engagement* was adopted from Robinson et al. (2004) and Gallup (2006). *Employee agility* was measured using 11 items adopted from Alavi et al. (2014).

3.3. DIMENSIONALITY, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE SCALES

As the first step, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using a principal component analysis and varimax rotation with the statistical software IBM SPSS. We used the KMO, Bartlett's test, factor loadings, total variance explained and Cronbach's alphas to assess the reliability and validity of the scale. Items with communalities below .4 were eliminated and retained if they had factor loadings above .6 on the associated factor and below .4 on other factors.

A total of 23 items were subjected to EFA measuring *IM* and 8 of them were eliminated. Our original scale was composed of five dimensions to measure IM, but with EFA one dimension (retention policy) exhibited a low factor loading and was subsequently removed from further analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, which indicates the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis, was .825 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity $p<.001$. The factor analysis resulted in four factors, which accounted for 66.109% of the variation in the data. All Cronbach's - values for the four factors were between .576 and .844, indicating good reliability. The lowest Cronbach alpha was exhibited for motivation and rewards dimension and may be due to the low number (3) of items.

Based on the results of our EFA for *employee creativity*, we found that a total of 4 items were suitable for measuring the construct, and they loaded onto a single factor. The KMO coefficient equalled .806 ($p<.001$), indicating that the data was suitable for factor analysis. The one factor solution accounted for 74.723% of the total variance in the data. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the four items was .886, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the scale.

The *Work-life balance* scale consisted of 5 items with a single factor solution, as indicated by a KMO of .826 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity $p<.001$. The total variance explained by this factor was 62.941%, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .846 demonstrated high internal consistency and reliability of the scale.

Four items for measuring *employee satisfaction* loaded onto one factor, which accounted for 64.019% of the total variance in the data. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .782, indicating that the data was appropriate for factor analysis and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity $p<.001$. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha for the four items was .811, indicating high reliability.

We retained 4 items measuring *employee engagement*, which formed one factor with KMO of .788 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity $p<.001$, explaining 67.50% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha value of .832 suggests that the scale is reliable.

Out of 11 items we retained 5 items to measure *employee agility*, which formed one factor with KMO of .785 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity $p<.001$. We explained 52.273% of the total variance; this result is a bit lower because of the low number of final items. Cronbach's alpha value of .764 suggests that the scale is reliable.

4. RESULTS

To test the proposed relationships, factor scores were calculated using the regression method and impact was measured using the multivariate regression analysis. IM included four dimensions: internal communication, internal marketing research, training and motivation.

We tested the hypotheses using five regression models, covering all the anticipated options corresponding to each hypothesis. Specifically, we employed multivariate regression models, which were evaluated using the maximum likelihood method. The dependent variables in each model were as follows: Agility (regression model 1), Creativity (regression model 2), Work-life balance (regression model 3), Satisfaction (regression model 4) and Engagement (regression model 5).

The regression equations for the five models were as follows (abbreviations are specified beside the Table 1) and results for testing the hypotheses are presented in Table 1:

Model 1: ***Agility*** *=0 + .327*IM_communication + .031*IM_motivation + .239*IM_research +.082*IM_training*

Model 2: ***Creativity*** *= 0 + .499*Agility + .017*IM_communication + .030*IM_motivation + .102*IM_research + .000*IM_training*

Model 3: ***Work-life balance*** *= 0 + .242*IM_communication - .096*IM_motivation - .091*IM_research - .138*IM_training + .434*Agility*

Model 4: **Satisfaction** *= 0 + .152*IM_communication + .169*IM_motivation – 0.017*IM_research + .205*IM_training + .078*Work-life balance + .203*Creativity + .361*Engagement*

Model 5: ***Engagement*** *= 0 + .742*IM_communication - .154*IM_motivation - .006*IM_research - .142*IM_training + .074*Agility*

Table 1: Results of the multivariate regression analyses

Hypotheses	Relationship	Betas/ R2	Sig.	Hypotheses	Relationship	Betas/ R2	Sig.
Regression model 1				**Regression model 2**			
H1	IM_ communication -> Agility	.327	p<.001	H8	Agility -> Creativity	.499	p<.001
H1	IM_motivation -> Agility		n.s.	H2	IM_ communication -> Creativity		n.s.
H1	IM_research -> Agility	.239	p<.05	H2	IM_motivation -> Creativity		n.s.
H1	IM_training -> Agility		n.s.	H2	IM_research -> Creativity		n.s.
	R2	*.292*	*p<.001*	*H2*	*IM_training -> Creativity*		*n.s.*
					R2	.172	p<.01
Regression model 3				**Regression model 4**			
H3	IM_ communication -> Work-life balance	.242	p<.05	H5	IM_ communication -> Satisfaction		n.s.
H3	IM_motivation -> Work-life balance		n.s.	H5	IM_motivation -> Satisfaction	.169	p<.10
H3	IM_research -> Work-life balance		n.s.	H5	IM_research -> Satisfaction		n.s.
H3	IM_training -> Work-life balance		n.s.	H5	IM_training -> Satisfaction	.205	p<.05
H9	Agility -> Work-life balance	.434	p<.001	H6	Work-life balance -> Satisfaction		n.s
Regression model 5				**H7**	**Creativity -> Satisfaction**	**.203**	**p<.05**
	R2	.32	p<.001	H11	Engagement ->Satisfaction	.361	p<.001
H4	IM_ communication -> Engagement	.742	p<.001		R2	.384	p<.001
H4	IM_motivation -> Engagement	-.154	p<.05				
H4	IM_research -> Engagement		n.s.				
H4	IM_training -> Engagement	-.142	p<.05				
H10	Agility -> Engagement		n.s.				
	R2	.633	*p*<.001				

Note: only regression coefficients for statistically significant variables and variables of interest are represented
Abbreviations: IM – internal marketing; n.s. – non-significant

First, *internal marketing communication* (- = .327; p<.001) and *internal marketing research* with (- = .239; p<.05) significantly impacted *employee agility* and *internal marketing motivation* and *training* had no significant impact on agility. The hypothesis H1 was therefore confirmed.

The results suggest that there was no significant impact of *IM* on *employee creativity*. The R^2 value of indicates that the predictor variables (*internal marketing communication, motivation, research and training*) explain 17.2% of the variance in *employee creativity*. However, since none of the individual predictors reached statistical significance, it suggests that *IM* may not be a strong predictor of *employee creativity* in this study, and therefore H2 was rejected.

IM did not significantly impact *work-life balance*, with the exception of *internal communications* (- =.242; p<.05). The R^2 value of .32 indicates that the predictor variables (*internal marketing communication, motivation, research, and training, together with agility*) explain 32% of the variance in work-life balance. This suggests that these factors together are relatively good predictors of *work-life balance*, and therefore we partially confirmed H3.

Impact of *internal marketing communication* on *employee engagement* is strong and significant. Unexpectedly the impact of *motivation* and *training* on *employee engagement* is negative and significant, and the impact of *internal marketing research* on *employee engagement* is non-significant, The R^2 value indicates that the predictor variables (*internal marketing communication, motivation, research, and training, also with employee agility*) explain 63.3% of the variance in employee engagement. This suggests that these factors together are relatively strong predictors of employee engagement. Because of negative influence of IM dimensions on employee, engagement H4 cannot be fully supported.

Internal marketing research and *internal communication* did not significantly impact *employee satisfaction,* but *motivation* (β= .169; p<.1) and *training* (β = .205; p<.05) did. The hypothesis H5 is therefore supported.

Employee agility had a significantly influence on *employee creativity* (β = .499; p<.001) and *work-life balance* (β = .434; p<.001), but not on *employee engagement*. Therefore, we supported hypotheses H8 and H9, but rejected H10.

Work-life balance did not significantly influence *employee satisfaction,* while *employee creativity* (β = .203; p<.05) and *employee engagement* (β = .316; p<.001) had. The hypothesis H6 was therefore rejected, and H7 and H11 were supported. The R^2 was significant at p<.001, indicating that the predictor variables explain 38.4% of the variance in employee satisfaction.

Internal marketing training and employee creativity appear to be important factors to consider in promoting employee satisfaction. Additionally, the strong relationship between engagement and satisfaction highlights the importance of fostering a positive and engaged workforce to improve overall satisfaction levels.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the relationship between IM and various employee outcomes, including agility, creativity, work-life balance, engagement and satisfaction. It contributes to the field of IM as it proposes and empirically tests relationships with the multidimensional conceptualisation of different concepts (engagement, agility, creativity, work-life balance). Lastly, it further develops the theory of IM by empirically testing multidimensional conceptualisation, also with other concepts between employed people in Slovenia and exploring relationships between IM and the concepts that may influence the outcomes. Lastly, it includes employee agility and creativity as two important concepts which can impact the company's success and increase competitive advantage with new ideas.

The results indicated that internal marketing communication had a significant positive correlation with employee agility, work-life balance and engagement. In other words, better internal marketing communication is associated with higher levels of employee agility, work-life balance and engagement, but not satisfaction.

Internal marketing research was found to have a significant positive impact on employee agility but not a direct impact on creativity, work-life balance, engagement or satisfaction. Research within the organisation can enhance employees' ability to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. Internal marketing training and motivation did not show any significant relationship with agility, creativity, or work-life balance. In fact, higher levels of internal marketing motivation and training were associated with lower levels of engagement. An explanation for this result could be that excessive training may lead to burnout or employee exhaustion, ultimately impacting engagement levels. Future research should investigate the underlying mechanisms to understand this relationship better. Motivation and training had a significant positive correlation with employee satisfaction. When employees receive adequate training and are motivated to perform their job well, they may feel more confident in their abilities and more satisfied with their job and overall work experience. Additionally, feeling supported and invested in by their organisation through motivation and training can contribute to a positive work environment, which may further enhance employee satisfaction.

Employee agility was found to be positively correlated with creativity and work-life balance, but not with engagement. Being agile may allow employees to be more innovative and efficient in their work, and to better balance their work and personal lives. Employee engagement positively influenced employee satisfaction, suggesting that if employees feel engaged in their work, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their job.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of IM in shaping employee outcomes. Organisations should invest in effective internal communication and internal marketing research strategies to improve employee agility, work-life balance and engagement. However, further research is needed to understand better the complex foremost indirect impacts of IM on employee outcomes, and to identify the most effective strategies for them to be positive.

Our study provides insights into relationships between IM and employee outcomes in Slovenian organisations. The managerial implications suggest that companies should prioritise employee needs and preferences by implementing effective IM practices that foster a positive work environment conducive to satisfaction, engagement, creativity and work-life balance. The study underscores the need for further research to identify the most effective IM strategies that promote positive employee outcomes.

5.1. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the study generated some valuable insights, it also has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample group was limited to Slovenian employees, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other cultural and geographical contexts. Future research can aim to test the scale and its validity in other cultures. Moreover, it is important to note that this study was exploratory in nature and focused on examining five specific constructs. As a result of this and a small sample size, it did not incorporate control variables, such as demographics of workers and firms, which have the potential to influence the regression outcomes. To enhance the robustness of future research, it is important to consider these additional factors in subsequent studies. For instance, such study may highlight how individual traits, such as age, gender, education level, and experience, could impact the relationships between the examined constructs. Additionally, firm-specific variables, such as industry type, size, and organisational culture, may influence the strength and direction of these relationships. By accounting for these differences, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced factors that contribute to employee agility, creativity, work-life balance, satisfaction, and engagement within various organisational settings. Such knowledge would provide valuable implications for HR management practices and organisational policies aimed at optimising employee well-being and performance.

Future studies can use an experimental and longitudinal research design to examine the sustained impact of IM on creativity and its consistency across different cultural contexts. It could explore the relationship between IM and other important outcomes, such as organisational performance, turnover intention, and job burnout, in different cultural settings, as suggested by Lings and Greenley (2005).

Despite these limitations, our research is Slovenia's first survey examining IM, employee creativity, satisfaction, engagement and work-life balance. It is also one of the first quantitative types of research measuring the impact of IM and employee creativity, including the work-life balance and employee agility.

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THE USE OF BIOMETRICS IN MARKETING: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper reviews the use of biometric methods in marketing published in 2012-2023 in academic journals. The purpose of the paper is to reduce the fragmentation in the field of biometrics in marketing by identifying gaps and potential directions for future research. Furthermore, based on a review and analysis of studies published in peer-reviewed journals in the last decade, the aim is to show the expansion of this field over time and offer a basis for future research and application of biometric methods.

Methodology: A systematic literature review using papers published in databases Web of Science and Scopus containing both biometrics and marketing as keywords and published from 2013 to 2023.

Results: A literature review of 62 selected papers pointed out the main biometric methods used in marketing: eye-tracking, facial recognition, skin conductance response and heart rate, together with areas of marketing with the most common application of biometric methods: advertising, retailing and sensory marketing. Based on that and main ethical and privacy concerns, future research directions are discussed.

Conclusion: The integration of biometrics in marketing holds huge potential to unlock a deeper understanding of consumers' response to marketing activities, enabling marketers to create more targeted consumer experiences. However, it is crucial to find a balance between the power of biometric data and preserving individual privacy. By navigating these challenges and using most of the opportunities presented, marketers can embark on a new era of consumer-centric approach that includes subconscious, physiological responses to create resonating experiences.

Keywords: biometrics, marketing, artificial intelligence, technology, behaviometrics

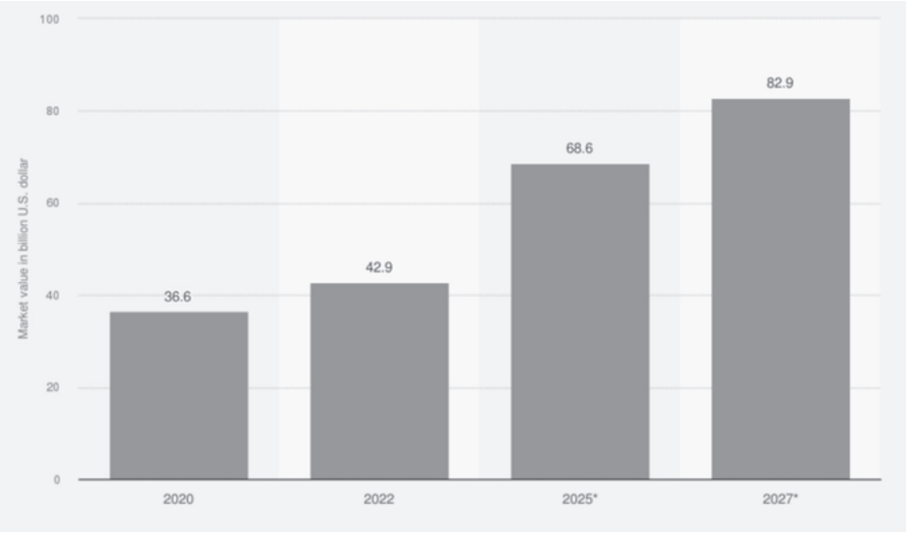
1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, marketing professionals are constantly seeking innovative strategies to deepen their understanding of consumers and enhance the effectiveness of marketing activities (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Among the emerging technologies that have gained significant attention is biometrics, which holds a promise for unlocking valuable insights into consumer behaviour (Potter & Bolls, 2012, Rodgers et al., 2021, Kasim et al., 2021). Biometrics, a field encompassing the measurement and analysis of unique physical and behavioural characteristics, has traditionally found its applications in areas like security, forensics and health care (Rodgers 2010).

However, its potential to revolutionise the field of marketing by capturing real-time, subconscious consumers' response has rapidly grown attention (Morz-Gorgon et al., 2022). By analysing physiological indicators like heart rate, skin conductance, eye movements and facial expressions, marketers gain access to authentic and unfiltered consumer responses, leading to a deeper understanding of their preferences, emotions and engagement levels (Lugli et al., 2014). Biometric methods are considered to be a mediator between humans and technology (Humphrey, 2022) and the biometric system market is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, as shown in Figure 1 (Sava, 2022).

Advancements in biometric technologies, together with a growing number of wearable devices and smartphones, have made it increasingly feasible to collect biometric data (Koo & Fallon, 2018, Miranda et al., 2020, Wang, 2021). The latter helps marketers to optimise advertising content, enhance product design, and personalise customer experiences (Schwarzkopf, 2015). One of the critical factors for business growth is acquiring new customers and focusing on developing and maintaining relationships. In the field of customer acquisition, biometric data can provide timely and precise information about the prospects (Noble, 2013, Du et al., 2021).

Figure 1: Global biometric system market revenue from 2020 to 2027 (in billion U.S. dollars)



Source: ReportLinker (2022). Global biometric system market revenue from 2020 to 2027 (in billion U.S. dollars. In Stattista, Retrieved June 07, 2023, from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1048705/worldwide-biometrics-market-revenue/

Having in mind the transformative role of biometrics in marketing, this paper aims at consolidating the existing knowledge on the use of biometrics in marketing and equipping researchers, marketers and policy makers with potentials and pitfalls of this technology, by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: Which areas of marketing benefit the most from biometric data?

RQ2: Which biometric methods are most frequently applied in marketing?

RQ2: What are the possible privacy issues and ethical concerns in biometric data collection and application?

RQ3: What are the potential future research directions for the use of biometrics in marketing?

2. RESESARCH METHOD

The research questions were answered through a comprehensive review of existing literature on the use of biometrics in marketing published in academic journals in the last decade, from 2012 until 2023, published in databases Web of Science and Scopus. As a traditional way of reviewing the current literature, the narrative view was applied (Sylvester et al., 2013), together with a qualitative analysis of the findings.

Table 1: The research method overview

Type of Analysis	Qualitative
Databases	Web of Science, Scopus
Time Range	2012-2023
Keywords	biometrics, marketing
Language	English
Paper Type	Research Articles; Review Articles

Source: Authors' research

The initial search of databases WOS and Scopus resulted in 168 papers containing both keywords: biometrics and marketing. For further analysis, the papers were selected based on topics that were related more narrowly to the fields of marketing such as advertising, retailing, social responsibility, privacy and recruiting. For the purpose of this study, 62 articles were thoroughly analysed.

3. THE POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF BIOMETRICS IN MARKETING

3.1. DEFINITION OF BIOMETRICS

Originally, the term biometrics was used for statistical and mathematical methods applied in biological sciences. Biometrics may seem like a contemporary term, but it is one of the oldest forms of identification, as people have been identified by their fingerprints at crime scenes for ages, and we recognise each other by sight, voice and facial expressions (Rodgers, 2010). Over time, the economic relevance of biometric methods has become more obvious with public projects (e.g., biometric passports) using them to improve security or boost productiveness (Koltzsch, 2007, Tomakova & Kopteva, 2020). Generally speaking, biometric systems are pattern recognition systems (Wojciechowska et al., 2017).

The term biometrics describes bodily or automatic responses to an outside stimulus (Venkatraman et al., 2015). It is defined as "measurable physiological and/or behavioural characteristics that are innate and unique to the individual and which can be used to verify their identity" (Jones, et al., 2007, p. 217). Biometric characteristics are unique and mainly permanent during people's lives (Zhang et al., 2003). Commonly, these include fingerprints, hand geometry, facial characteristics, iris, retina and personal scent, while behavioural characteristics include handwriting, keystroke, voice and gait (Jones et al., 2007, Erdem, 2011). Another classification (Unar et al., 2014) divides biometric characteristics into six groups:

1. Hand region – fingerprint, palmprint, hand geometry, hand vein pattern, finger knuckle print,
2. Facial region – face, ear shape, teeth, tongue print,
3. Ocular region – retina, iris, sclera vasculature,
4. Medicochemical – body odour, DNA, heart sound, electrocardiogram,
5. Behavioural – keystroke, voice, signature, gait,
6. Soft – gender, ethnicity, height, scars, marks, tattoos.

Selection of a particular biometric characteristic should be guided by the following criteria (Mroz-Gorgon et al., 2022):

- Universality: almost every individual in the population has the trait.
- Uniqueness: the feature is highly distinct.
- Persistence over time: the trait does not alter significantly over time.
- Feasibility of acquiring: the trait can be read relatively easily.
- Acceptability: cultural, religious concerns, sense of comfort and hygiene.

In marketing literature, the most used and examined physiological measures include heart rate, facial recognition, breathing frequency and skin conductance response (SCR) (Venkatraman et al., 2015).

3.2. MOST FREQUENTLY APPLIED BIOMETRIC METHODS IN MARKETING

3.2.1. EYE-TRACKING

The fact that we use eyes to focus attention gives important information about us and it has led the eye-tracking technique to become one of the most validated tools to detect what attracts our visual attention (Ohme et al., 2011). Eye tracking is a technology that allows for the measurement of eye movements and gaze behaviour. It involves the use of specialised hardware, such as eye-tracking devices or cameras, to track and record the movement of a person's eyes as they interact with various stimuli, such as images, videos, or physical objects (Pfeiffer et al., 2020).

In market research, eye tracking was primarily used to obtain qualitative individual data and retail research to examine consumers' attention while shopping, navigating store shelves and interacting with products (Shi et al., 2013). Also, it was used for usability tests for websites to see which features grab viewers' attention and to construct a user-friendly interface and to test packaging design based on brand elements (Gofman et al., 2009).

It can be used to assess the advertising effectiveness by analysing consumer's attention and help marketers to understand which elements attract most attention, how long viewers spend looking at different parts and whether the ad successfully delivers the intended message (Shi et al., 2013). Pfeiffer et al. (2020) emphasised an important finding that eye-tracking data can categorise consumers' purchase motives with high accuracy in both digital and physical reality.

3.2.2. FACIAL RECOGNITION

Face recognition is one of the most widely used biometric methods for identification (Wang, 2021). It matches users' facial features with the image database, and it has found its application in various industries such as retail, fintech, healthcare, tourism and banking (Liu et al., 2022b).

It has become more popular during the coronavirus pandemic as it does not require any contact but serves as a means of identification (Elloumi et al., 2021, Kostka et al., 2021). A study by Moriuchi (2021) has showed that consumers rather use facial recognition for in-store shopping than online. Contrary to these findings, marketing practice shows attempts at introducing facial recognition technology for payments on e-commerce platforms like Alibaba (Liu et al., 2021a). Also, Liu et al. (2021b) proposed a hierarchical model that combines facial recognition with structured behavioural traits and show their superior power in predicting consumers' purchasing decisions.

3.2.3. SKIN CONDUCTANCE RESPONSE (SCR)

Skin conductance response (SCR), also known as galvanic skin response (GSR), is a physiological measure that reflects changes in the electrical conductance of the skin and is primarily caused by the activity of sweat glands in response to emotional and psychological stimuli (Boucsein, 1992). This is due to the release of sweat, which contains electrolytes that enhance the skin's conductivity. The conductance of the skin can be measured by attaching electrodes to the skin's surface and recording the electrical signals (Venkatraman, 2019). In marketing, skin conductance response is used as a physiological indicator of emotional and cognitive engagement (Baldo et al., 2022).

3.2.4. HEART RATE

Heart rate refers to the number of times the heart beats per minute, indicating the speed at which blood is pumped throughout the body (Guixeres et al., 2017). It is physiological measure used to assess cardiovascular health and overall fitness levels and is influenced by various factors like physical activity, emotional state, stress levels or external stimuli (Baldo et al., 2022). Acceleration or deceleration of heart rate can give important information about a consumer's attention or emotional state (Abercrombie et al., 2008).

3.3. THE USE OF BIOMETRICS IN ADVERTISING

In today's "attention economy" where consumers are overwhelmed with information, the challenge for advertisers is how to attract and keep consumers' attention (Teixeira, 2015). Furthermore, measuring consumers' attention to advertising presents a very complex task considering the variety of stimuli and different types of attention (Bellman et al., 2019). The development of direct measures for attention allows them to verify long-standing beliefs in the advertising industry and make improvements in the validity of findings (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Collecting data on how consumers respond to advertising helps marketers to align their message with the most desirable outcomes (Du et al., 2021).

By using a biometric measure (heart rate), Simmonds et al. (2020) indicated that audio-visual sensory cues evoke more active attention in relation to just visual cues. By this, they confirmed heart rate being an important indicator to measure visual and auditory attention. Computerised facial expression coding showed that smiling after the brand was shown later in the advertisement enhanced purchase intent, compared to when the brand was shown earlier (Teixeira et al., 2014).

Bellman et al. (2017) have conducted the largest research on the effectiveness of television advertising, including more than 100 product advertisements for Mars, Inc. and over 1,000 respondents. The goal of this company-funded research was to identify what makes an advertisement successful and to validate a neuroscientific toolbox. Biometric measures used for this research were skin conductance, inter-(heart) beat interval (IBI), smiling (facial expression detection) and branding exposure (fixation time). They showed that a combination of physiological measures paired with a specific ad objective can outperform traditional measures of predicting successful advertising.

Facial recognition and video analytics applied on social networks have enabled a new form of avatars (previously associate with a video game character) called mavatars – marketing avatars. Mavatars are made by digital signage systems and contain the biometric characteristics and behavioural profile of consumers (Mennecke & Peters, 2013). Even though the use of mavatars is still in its infancy, Harrison et al. (2014) propose the use in both business-to-customer and peer-to-peer contexts, emphasising that their future growth may be primarily dependent on savvy businesses to improve their products and services.

Addressing the need to add more efficient measures of advertising success, Venkatraman et al. (2015) captured six different methods: traditional self-reports, implicit measures, eye tracking, biometrics electroencephalography, and functional magnetic resonance imaging. Their research showed that fMRI explains the most variance in ads. On the other hand, the combination of EEG and eye-tracking improves understanding of consumers' emotional reactions to ads (Ohme et al., 2011). Bellman et al., (2019) examined how scalable biometric measures – eye tracking, skin conductance, and heart rate represent consumers' attention toward ads. Ineffective sales ads systematically attract lower levels of attention than effective sales ads, measured by heart rate.

3.4. THE USE OF BIOMETRICS IN RETAIL INDUSTRY

Retail technology is facing many challenges, constantly changing, and evolving with customers' needs and an imperative to create a personalised and engaging customer experience (Rancati & Maggioni, 2023, Grewal et al., 2020, Lowrence, 2014).

Biometric technology offers several advantages for both consumers and retailers, such as a reduction of cost and complexity in payment processing (Lowrence, 2014). Rodgers et al. (2021) conducted an experiment using AI-based facial and music biometrics to examine how music affects consumers' cognitive and emotional state while shopping. The research is based on a premise that sound waves produced by music and reflected in consumers' body reactions can be used to classify their preferences (Sim et al., 2018). The study by Rodgers et al. (2021) employed an algorithm-based throughput (TP) model and facial recognition to recognise how music impacts consumers' decisions in retail setting. The findings showed that likability and tempo of the music have a significant influence between cognition and behavioural intention.

3.5. SENSORY MARKETING

Traditional marketing has been reducing branding to mainly visual expression, but the need to include other human senses in the overall consumer experience has become widely recognised (Schmitt, 1999, Brakus et al., 2009, Hulten, 2010). Engaging human senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) enables brands to create a more profound consumer experience, to connect with consumers on a deeper level and to understand their emotional responses (Nam & Kim, 2018).

Nam and Kim (2018) proposed a conceptual model in sensorial marketing and selling that combines business practice with nanodevices and biometric technology, linking the manufacturers and sellers, triggering potential shoppers, combining the user interface and internal business processes. Raising the need for personalisation and greater engagement with consumers opens new opportunities for the acquisition and use of consumer biodata (Sim et al., 2015).

3.6. ETHICAL AND PRIVACY CONCERNS FOR THE USE OF BIOMETRIC DATA IN MARKETING

The dominance and abundance of data signals that they may be one of the most valuable resources in almost all industries (Prince & Wallsten, 2022, Westerlund et al., 2021). However, the introduction of new information technologies has always raised privacy concerns and the issues of data use (Smith, 2000). It can also raise uncomfortable feelings and the fear of physical harm (Kim & Bernhard, 2014). In the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the EU has emphasised that biometric data belongs to a particularly sensitive area and stressed the need for special protection (European Parliament, 2016).

A study comparing consumers' and marketers' privacy expectations showed that, when it comes to biometrics, consumers may become more cautious were they more informed (Milne & Bahl, 2010). However, a cross-national study on data privacy valuation (Prince & Wallsten, 2022) found that respondents value the privacy of their biometric data (fingerprint) and financial information more than any other. In the workplace, biometric systems are becoming more popular as an access control mechanism, which raises employees' concerns about the use of their data. The main constructs related with the privacy concerns are perceived accountability, vulnerability and distrust (Carpenter et al., 2016, Norfolk & O'Regan, 2020). In terms of using facial recognition technology for payment, privacy risk is shown to be one of the most influential predictors of the technology use (Palash et al., 2022).

Research on the use of biometrics (fingerprint system) in the hospitality industry (Kim & Bernhard, 2014), showed there are seven factors that encourage hotel guests to use a fingerprint system: perceived usefulness and ease of use, subjective norm, perceived convenience, data and property security and personal concerns. Additionally, it showed that younger consumers (Generation Y) are more influenced by perceived convenience and data security than the elder respondents.

Biometric data is highly personal and sensitive and unlike passwords or PIN numbers cannot be changed if compromised (Erdem, 2011). Hence, marketers must implement robust security measures to protect biometric data from unauthorised access, breaches, or misuse (Wang et al., 2023). Addressing these privacy and ethical concerns requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal safeguards, transparent practices, informed consent mechanisms, strong security measures and ongoing monitoring to comply with laws and regulations (Lewinski et al., 2016).

4. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article explores the use and challenges of biometrics in marketing, delving into its potential to understand consumers at a subconscious level by capturing physiological responses and behavioural patterns. Addressing the first two research questions on areas and biometric methods most used in marketing, the results of the systematic literature review show that advertising, retailing and sensory marketing are most prolific fields of marketing when it comes to the use of biometric methods. These results are not surprising given that they engage different consumers' senses and aim at creating relationships with consumers. Among methods, it is shown that eye-tracking, facial recognition, skin conductance response and heart rate best capture consumers' responses to marketing. However, this opens an important question on distinguishing between biometric and neuromarketing methods, as some of those (e.g., skin conductance response) are often classified as neuromarketing methods (Kenning et al., 2007, Button et al., 2013). Future research should focus on more precise classification of the physiological measures of consumer behaviour.

In the context of employment, potential employees are considered as customers, and employers are the ones offering and communicating value. Artificial intelligence has an impact on how companies position themselves as desirable employers and how they attract and select new employees (Van Esch et al., 2021). From the company perspective, physiological data can be a useful predictor of candidate's social habits, detail orientation, dealing with stress, ability to work in teams and suitability for a certain job role (Everett, 2017). However, the use of biometric methods in the context of creating strong employer branding remains under-researched.

Based on this literature review, most of the research in this field is focused on B2C context, while there is no research on the application of biometric methods in the B2B context. Also, there is a shortage of papers providing a framework for segmentation of the consumers based on their physiological responses to marketing activities. The vast majority of papers in the review are concentrated on existing products and services, while there are no findings on how biometric methods can contribute to new product or service development, especially in the wellness segment given the increasing number of wearable devices consumer use to track their health and fitness activities (Koo & Fallon, 2018). Despite the fact that advertising is widely researched in this context, there still remains a gap to fill on indicators of negative reactions towards ads or content in digital marketing. Also, do these reactions depend on the cultural or demographic background of respondents? Much has been done in terms of research on ethics and privacy for the collection and use of biometric data, but the lack of longitudinal studies and studies on the effectiveness of current regulation is missing. Based on the review, Table 2 summarises research areas where gaps are delineated and points out the potential future research directions.

Table 2: Research gaps and future research directions

MARKETING AREA	FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS
B2B Marketing	• Deeper understanding of how different emotions and attention patterns influence B2B purchasing decision and • how biometric data can be used to tailor marketing messages, experiences and products to individual B2B customers.
Market research and segmentation	• Developing more precise segmentation techniques that combine biometric data with demographic and psychographic information to create comprehensive customer profiles.
New product/service development	• Utilisation of biometric data in developing innovative products and services, especially in the wellness segment.
Content marketing and advertising	• The indicators of negative consumer reactions towards ads and content on social media and other platforms. • How biometric measurements differ among various populations and how cultural and demographic factors influence consumers' reactions to advertising.
Employer branding	• The influence of biometric data integration into everyday works processes on organisational trust, culture, and overall employees' satisfaction.
Ethics and privacy concerns	• Longitudinal studies to understand the long-term implications of the use of biometric data in marketing. • Effectiveness and adequacy of existing regulations of privacy protection of biometric consumer data.

Source: Authors' Research

Even though the use of biometric methods is a relatively young field of research, it opens many opportunities for future researchers and marketers. Its appealing proposition of capturing what consumers cannot express in traditional research methods comes with a danger of drawing "voodoo correlations" and oversimplification of conclusions (Baron et al., 2017) which indicates the need for multidisciplinarity in this field. Overall, the future research directions for the use of biometrics in marketing encompass a broad range of areas and continued exploration in these areas can unlock the full potential of biometrics in enhancing marketing strategies and improving consumer experiences.

5. CONCLUSION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of marketing, businesses are continually looking for new methods of understanding consumer needs. One such method that has emerged in recent years is biometrics. Biometrics refer to the measurement and analysis of unique human characteristics such as facial expression, fingerprints, eye movement, gait, heart rate, and so on. These neurophysiological measures complement and have a potential to outperform traditional measures when it comes to improving predictive power of marketing activities such as advertising. Incorporating biometric data in customer acquisition is considered one of the most unused opportunities and it is one of the technologies that might radically impact the future of marketing models.

This paper presents the most used biometric methods in marketing: eye-tracking, facial recognition, skin conductance and heart rate and delineates the most fruitful areas for use of biometrics in marketing: advertising, retail, and sensory marketing. Despite many benefits of this new technology, it also raises many ethical, legal and privacy concerns. Future research in this field is directed toward different areas of marketing as it presents an exciting frontier in marketing research, offering unique opportunities to understand consumer behaviour and once again proves that the most fruitful scientific progress often occurs at the intersection of diverse fields.

Hence, some of the future research endeavours may be directed toward expansion in the new contexts of research such as business-to-business marketing, the use of biometric data to create new offers, especially in those fields rich in wearable technology such as wellness. Also, a meaningful use of biometrics may be a tool for attracting younger employees and creating strong employer brands. To conclude, in order for this field to advance, collaboration between marketers, technology providers, regulators and researchers is crucial. Establishing industry-wide best practices, ethical guidelines, and comprehensive legal frameworks, will foster responsible and sustainable use of biometrics in marketing.

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THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN B CORPS IN MARKETING AND ICT INDUSTRY SUSTAINABILITY PATH

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ABSTRACT

Global changes and its impacts have led to the need for transformations and new approaches to managing economic systems, also including corporations that must benefit to the wider environment, communities, customers and different stakeholders, which are important parts of the sustainability concept. Certified B Corporations represent a still underexplored area, where scientific research about its characteristics, growth and impacts are developing. The purpose of this paper is to compare the industrial distribution of the existing B Corps in the European Union and to analyse in more detail the following industries: advertising and market research, information, communication and technology. After presenting the role of the European B Corps based on relevant literature and available databases on B Corps, the results of the B Impact Assessments for the mentioned industries will be analysed and elaborated. The paper confirms the value and potentials of B Corp certification in different industries and, by using descriptive analysis, presents differences between and within the European countries. By analysing governance, workers, community, the environment and customers as categories that are included in impact assessments, the authors indicate the areas where the scores can be improved in the observed industries. The approaches seen in the B Corp movement can result in the transformation, but with more sustainable and inclusive society as the main goals, where B Corps in marketing and ICT industry have important roles.

Keywords: B Corp, European Union, marketing, ICT industry, transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the paper is to explore the role and the significance of the European B Corps in the marketing and information, communication and technology (ICT) industry sustainability path. The authors' focus on those industries was based on the premise that those companies are often seen as leaders in the 21st century's digital transformation processes, while the mentioned industries are also rarely analysed separately in previous researches about the B Corps. Digital marketing agencies are using and improving products and services produced by the ICT sector: mobile applications, social networks and info sharing, and companies from both of those sectors represent a relevant set of businesses which contribute to the rise of technology-based services, info service activities and other business support services in today's technologically advanced and demanding environment. Their role in fostering economic growth is evident in both the developed and developing countries; however, the authors' main research question was related to their sustainability path, as a broader concept than should be included in development and business processes and that can be realised through the B Corp certification process. The research question was formulated as follows: what is the role of the European B Corps in marketing and ICT industry's reaching for the sustainable development path? The authors have used the B Corp Certificate as an indicator that shows the marketing and ICT companies' overall dedication to a fair, accountable and sustainable business. The B Corp certificate assesses the company's overall impact through five main areas: governance, workers, community, environment and customers. Due to the limitations of the paper, the authors have focused their research on the European Union (EU) market, considering the growing trend of the European B Corp movement since its beginnings in 2012. The research is based on the qualitative analysis of theme-relevant literature, and on the quantitative analysis of data about the B Corps in the advertising and marketing and ICT industry category, extracted from the B Corp directory (B Lab, 2023a), and processed for the purposes of the research. The quantitative analysis's aim was to focus on specific industries important for sustainable digital transformation, to present the share of marketing and ICT industry in the EU B Corp Movement (overall and by EU country), and to compare their B Impact results in order to recognise the areas where the observed industries are leading the way for others, as well as areas which most need improving in the forthcoming years. The paper will give insight into the relevance of Certified B Corporations in the European marketing and ICT industry, also including the presentation of the chosen characteristics of the analysed companies, which was less investigated in previous and contemporary studies about the B Corps in Europe.

The paper is organised as follows: after the introductory part, in the second chapter the authors present a theoretical background on the B Corp Certificate and the European B Corp Movement. The focus of this research was formulated based on the gaps detected in theme-related literature, which is elaborated in the theoretical part. The third chapter presents the methodology, the results and discussion on the results of the research. The final chapter gives concluding remarks, implications of the results and recommendations for future research, which is followed by the list of references.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The B Corp certificate and its relevance in today's globalised economy is still an underexplored area of scientific research. This paper's goal is to contribute to the empirical scientific research on this subject by exploring the role and the significance of the European Certified B Corporations in the marketing and ICT industry sustainability path. In the following subchapters the authors give theoretical insights into the B Corp certification, its benefits, and challenges, and into the European B Corp Movement by shortly elaborating its history, growth, and structure, which gives a framework to the empirical part of the paper.

2.1. THE B CORP CERTIFICATE AS A TOOL TO MEASURE AND IMPROVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The main idea of B Corp certificate, which was introduced by a non-profit organisation B Lab in 2006, was to give for-profit businesses a possibility to distinguish themselves on the market, where almost everybody is claiming to be socially responsible, as good businesses, not just good marketing. When the greenwashing activities were rapidly starting to grow in the profit sector, more and more companies were searching for ways to show themselves, its customers, investors, employees, and the whole community its core orientation towards both profit and social goals (Hargreaves, 2019). The B Lab's cofounders, Gilbert, Houlahan, and Cassoy (Honeyman, 2014), came up with the idea of developing a new legal entity form, Benefit Corporation (Alexander, 2018, Kocollari, 2018), which will allow companies to register both their profit and non-profit purpose in their instruments of incorporation. However, aware of the time needed for introduction of this new legal framework into the national legal systems, they started simultaneously working on the new certificate which will allow any company in the world, regardless of their legal form of business (sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, cooperative, corporation, (Orts, 2013:210)), to test and prove their commitment to the accountable and socially and environmentally benefiting business. The first B Corporations were certified in the USA in 2007 (Honeyman, 2014), and from that year we are witnessing significant growth rates of Certified B Corporations around the globe. Today (June 2023) there are 6,954 Certified B Corporations across 91 countries employing 615,350 workers in 161 industries (B Lab, 2023e).

Certified B Corporations are companies that meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. Although several certifications already allow companies to measure themselves as green or fair, they are in the specific aspect of a company (product or building), such as Fair Trade or LEED, the B Corp certificate is a certificate that evaluates an entire company: worker engagement, community involvement, environmental footprint and governance structure (Epstein & Rejc Buhovac, 2017). The B Corp certification therefore includes and combines several other certifications, standards, and impact measurement frameworks such as: the Social Performance Taskforce and ALINUS indicators for the micro-finance industry, FSC certified forestry products, Fair Trade certification, Organic Certification and ISO 14000 (B Lab, 2023b). The B Corp Certificate is aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and, with the United Nations Global Compact, the B Lab developed a tool that helps businesses take action towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: the SDG Action Manager (B Lab, 2023b). To gain the B Corp certificate, each company must achieve a minimum of 80 (out of 200) points on the free publicly available online tool, B Impact Assessment, which consist of up to 250 questions depending on the company's size (number of employees), sector/industry and location or market, developed or emerging (Peter et al., 2022, Brewster & Cerdin, 2018). E.g., a service with a significant environmental footprint will have to answer the greater number of questions in the environmental area. The questions in the B Impact Assessment cover five stakeholder-focused impact areas and its specific dimensions: governance (mission and engagement, ethics and transparency, mission lock), workers (financial security, health, wellness and safety, career development, engagement and satisfaction, worker owned, workforce development), community (diversity, equity and inclusion, economic impact, civic engagement and giving, supply chain management, supply chain poverty alleviation, microenterprise/microfranchise, local economic development, producer cooperative, designed to give), environment (environmental management, air and climate, water, land and life, renewable energy, land and wildlife conservation, toxin reduction, resource conservation, environmental education, environmental innovation practices) and customers (customer stewardship, basic services, education, arts, media and culture, economic empowerment, health and wellness, support for purpose driven enterprises, impact improvement, and serving those in need, industry specific addenda).[1] The companies earn points for their positive impact based on its policies, practices, outputs and outcomes. The negative impacts of the company are separately assessed through the B Impact Assessment's Disclosure Questionnaire, background checks and the public complaints process. Risk standards are additional minimum standards that companies in industries or with practices with potential negative impacts must meet to be eligible for B Corp certification (B Lab, 2023d).

The credibility of the certificate is obtained and improved through following system: the verification of answers from B Lab staff, background checks by B Lab staff, an independent committee oversees and regularly updates the B Lab's certification standards (Standards Advisory Council), random in-depth site reviews for 10% of B-certified companies per year, which typically takes 6-10 hours, depending on the size and scope of the business, the public transparency criteria which requires that all Certified B Corporations share their B Impact Report summary publicly, the recertification obligation every three years (B Lab 2023b, Gutterman, 2018).

The benefits of attaining a B Corp certificate are many: increasing credibility and building trust, benchmarking and improving performance, attracting talent and engaging employees, attracting investors, protecting a company's mission for the long term, building collective voice, leading a global movement, being part of a community of leaders with shared values, saving money through access to partnership discounts and service and product discounts inside the B Corp community, and generating press, i.e., attracting media interest (Honeyman, 2014, Cao et al., 2018). In the context of the concept of employer branding (Welsing, 2006, Deb, 2006, Barrow & Mosley, 2011, Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2015, Burke et al., 2016, Collings et al., 2017, Gehrels, 2019, Sandhu, 2021, Kochummen & Kumar, 2022) the B Corp certificate is one step forward towards employee attraction, engagement and retention (Marquis, 2020: 135, Whitter, 2019: 113, Gupta

1 For the full list of questions see in: B Lab (2023c). B *Impact Assessment Standards Navigator*. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/b.lab/viz/StandardsNavigator/StandardsNavigator (accessed June 3, 2023).

& Kumar Sahoo, 2020: 21, Sokro, 2012, Gilani & Cunningham, 2017, Chawla, 2020). The benefits of the B Corp certificate are also connected with the mentioned goal of this study, which is focused on sustainability path. The term sustainability path defines sustainability as a journey and not merely by the results. In this context, sustainability encompasses not only sustainable products, but a sustainable purpose, ethics, and stewardship (Andreas et al., 2011.). The B Corp Certificate as a tool to measure, but also to improve, the overall socio-economic performance of a company, together with the certificate's requirement to adopt the Benefit Corporation or SPC-equivalent status, represents a practical mechanism that guides companies on their sustainability path.

The shortcomings of the certificate are related to the annual certification fees (depending on the annual sales of the company) and to the unrecognisability of the certificate in some countries, but the main challenge is how to survive and prosper in the strongly competitive market where most competitors are still profit-oriented greenwashing companies. The financial results of the many Certified B Corporations show that this challenge is manageable (B Corps obtain higher revenue growth rates (Chen & Kelly, 2014), and higher growth in sales, (Romi et al., 2018)), especially in today's market where customers, employees and investors are more and more searching for companies which are in line with their set of values: person-organisation fit (Latham, 2007, Morley, 2007, Wanberg, 2012, Fields, 2013, Subramanian et al., 2022).

The idea of the B Corp movement is to redefine success in business so that companies compete not just to be the best in the world but also to be the best for the world (Honeyman, 2014). To measure and report about the progress across the five B Impact areas (governance, workers, community, environment, customers), the Certified B Corporations are beginning to publish their B Corp Impact Report (e.g., Anthesis, 2022) and, to distinguish themselves among the constantly growing B Corp community since 2013, they can reach the status of Best for the World Honouree (in a specific impact area or overall), which shows that they are amongst the global top 5% in their corresponding size group (B Lab, 2023b).

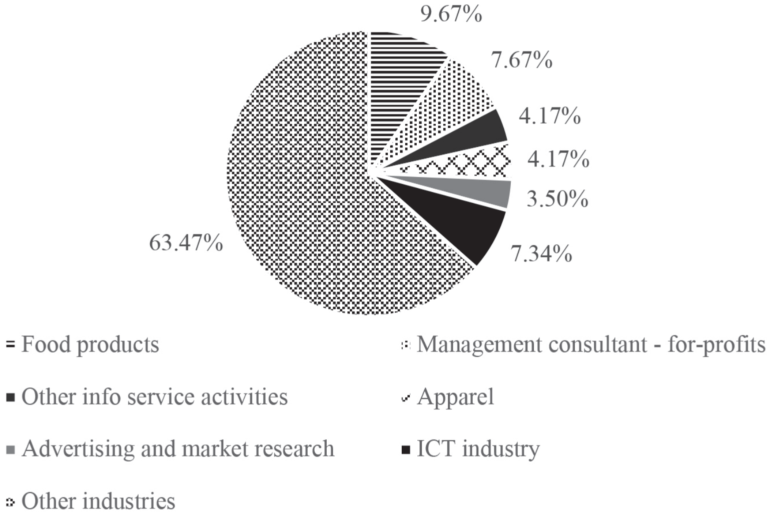
2.2. THE B CORP MOVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS INDUSTRY AND SIZE STRUCTURE

The European B Corp movement started with the first B Corps being certified in Europe (in 2012), but a significant boost for the rise of the movement was the founding of the B Lab Europe (in 2013), a B Lab's Global

Partner committed to promoting and enabling the B Corp certification across Europe. The second impulse for the growth of the European B Corp movement was the introduction of a new legal framework in some EU countries which is in line with the B Lab's certification standards (e.g., Società Benefit in Italy). Since then, the number of certified B Corporations has reached over 2000: 2600 in Europe, including UK (B Lab Europe, 2023). Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania still do not have certified B Corporations and there is still work to be done to raise awareness about the benefits of the certificate in those countries.

Previous studies confirm differences in B Impact Assessment scores of the B Corps within and across industries (e.g., Cao et al., 2018). If we review the status of the B Corp movement in the EU countries, which is the focus of this paper, the most represented industries among the 1199 EU B Corps (in May 2023) are: food products, management consultant - for-profits, other info service activities and apparel (Graph 1). The graph also presents the shares of the industries that are important for our analysis, advertising and market research and summarised results for the industries that are the part of ICT industry category, except the industry "other info service activities" because it is presented separately as one of the top performers (which is important to note during the interpretation of the presented data).

Graph 1: Distribution of Certified B Corps in the EU countries by chosen industries (at the end of May 2023)



Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

The above given data shows that the companies from the marketing and ICT industry represent a significant share of the B Corp community in the EU, which is especially confirmed if we consider the size of those companies (the number of employees they employ and develop). The size structure of Certified B Corps in the EU and the size structure of EU Certified B Corps in the advertising and market research and ICT industries are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The size structure of Certified B Corps in the EU (at the end of May 2023)

Number of employees	Number of B Corps Total EU	Number of B Corps in advertising and market research	Number of B Corps in ICT industry category
0	59	0	4
1-9	374	8	32
10-49	460	27	64
50-249	198	7	23
250-999	71	0	9
1000+	37	0	6

Note: "0 – the company's workers consist only of the founders or partners who own 10%+ of the company".
Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

It can also be seen that the highest number of B Corps have a number of employees between 10 and 49, which is the same conclusion for the observed industries. This confirms the potential of small and medium sized companies to differentiate on the market through a process of B certification.

The B Corp movement is committed to addressing equity and injustice, and it therefore tracks the demographic data regarding ownership of the Certified B Corporations, its management structure and workers structure (B Lab, 2021, B Lab, 2022). The ownership structure, which shows the number of the EU Certified B Corporations owned by minoritised groups, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The ownership structure of Certified B Corps in the EU owned by minoritised groups (at the end of May 2023)

Ownership structure	Number of B Corps Total EU	Number of B Corps in advertising and market research	Number of B Corps in ICT industry category
Black	4		
Employee	35	2	5
Family	61	1	1
Immigrant	5		
Indigenous	4		
LGBTQ	9		3
Minority	6		
Person with disability	1		1
Women	110	6	8
Total number	235	9	18

Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

As the above given data shows, the ICT is for now the only industry in the EU which has Certified B Corporation owned by persons with disability.

To analyse in more detail the relevance of the European B Corp movement in marketing and the ICT industry sustainability path, the authors have conducted empirical research, and the results are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CERTIFIED EUROPEAN B CORPS IN MARKETING AND ICT INDUSTRY – RESULTS OF B IMPACT ASSESSMENT

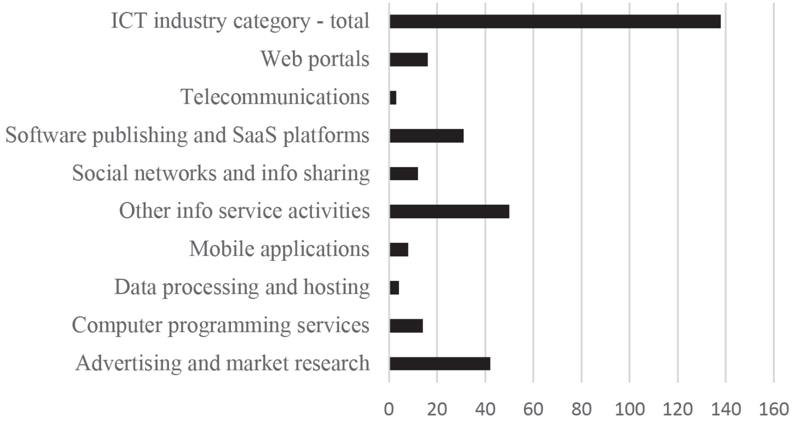
3.1. DATA AND SAMPLE

The underlying principles of the B Corp certification can motivate the companies to do their best in reaching sustainability, while B Impact Assessment enables us to see the achieved results and represents the ground for the future guidelines of business models with higher social and environmental responsibility as important integral parts. This implies that the results of the B Impact scores can be used as an indicator in describing the sustainability path of the B Corps. In the paper of Boffa et al. (2023), the overall performance output of the B Corps certification process was used in measuring the sustainability performance of the B-Corporation towards a circular economy. Our study focuses on the two areas important in digital transformation, B Corps in industry advertising and market research and B Corps in industries that belong to industry category ICT: computer programming services, data processing and hosting, mobile applications, other info service activities, social networks and info sharing, software publishing and SaaS platforms, telecommunications and web portals. The mentioned classification is used based on the purpose of the paper and classification of industries and industry categories of B Lab in order to be reliable in the interpretations of the results of the B Impact Assessment scores. In April-May 2023, web scraping of the B Lab Global Directory (2023) was performed and a sample that consists of 180 B Corps in advertising and market research and in the ICT industry category in the EU was collected. B Corps with the headquarters in one of the observed 27 EU member states are included and the member states that do not have B Corps in the observed industries (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia) were excluded. For each of the 180 companies, the results of the B Impact scores, overall and by specific areas: governance, workers, community, the environment and customers, were extracted and used in further descriptive statistics analysis to give conclusions about the sustainability path of the chosen companies/industries. The main findings are presented below.

3.2. RESULTS

Before presenting the results of the B impact scores overall and by specific areas connected with sustainability goals, in graphs 2, 3 and 4 can be found the distribution of the Certified B Corps by EU member states and observed industries.

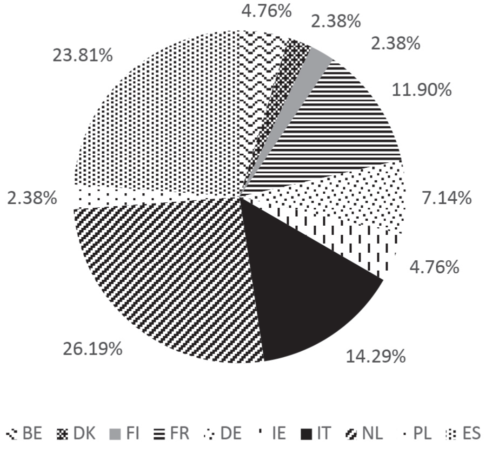
Graph 2: The number of Certified B Corps in advertising and market research and ICT industry category in the EU (at the end of May 2023)



Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

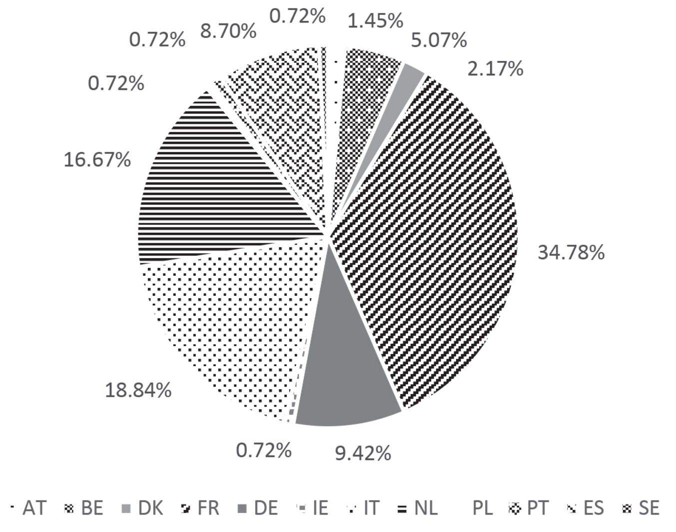
There are 42 Certified B Corps in advertising and market research and 138 in the ICT industry category. In ICT industry category, the highest number of Certified B Corps is in other info service activities industry, followed by software publishing and SaaS platforms.

Graph 3: Distribution of Certified B Corps in advertising and market research by EU member states (at the end of May 2023)



Note: BE: Belgium, DK: Denmark, FI: Finland, FR: France, DE: Germany, IE: Ireland, IT: Italy, NL: Netherlands, PL: Poland, ES: Spain.
Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

Graph 4: Distribution of Certified B Corps in ICT industry category in the EU (at the end of May 2023)



Note: AT: Austria, BE: Belgium, DK: Denmark, FR: France, DE: Germany, IE: Ireland, IT: Italy, NL: Netherlands, PL: Poland, PT: Portugal, ES: Spain, SE: Sweden.
Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

Netherlands, Spain and France are the countries with the highest number of Certified B Corps in advertising and market research in the EU (Graph 3). Cumulatively, the share for these top 3 countries is 64.29% in the total number of B Corps in advertising and market research. The highest number of Certified B Corps in the ICT industry category (Graph 4) have France, Italy and the Netherlands (cumulative share is 70.29%). Analysis of the structure of ICT industry categories shows that France has the highest number of Certified B Corps in other info service activities, software publishing and SaaS platforms, web portals and social networks and info sharing. In the industries computer programming services, data processing and hosting, Italy has the first position regarding the number of Certified B Corps in the EU.

Descriptive statistics of the chosen indicators is calculated based on B Impact Assessment scores, overall and by specific areas, by using extracted data on 180 Certified B Corps in advertising and market research and ICT industry category. Tables 3 and 4 present the main results.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the B Impact Assessment scores of Certified B Corps in advertising and market research

B Impact Assessment scores	Average	Median	Min	Max	Min-Max	SD	VAR	Q1	Q3
Overall score	88.6	86.2	80.1	123.4	43.3	8.95	80.17	82.3	91.78
Impact area governance	16.87	17.2	7.9	21.3	13.4	3.49	12.20	14.8	19.88
Impact area workers	29.50	30.7	14.5	36.9	22.4	4.68	21.86	28.2	31.8
Impact area community	23.50	22.85	14.6	42.5	27.9	6.95	48.35	18.53	26.45
Impact area environment	9.19	8.2	4.5	16.7	12.2	2.97	8.85	7.3	11.68
Impact area customers	10	8.55	1.6	29.7	28.1	7.04	49.57	4.08	13.5

Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the B Impact Assessment scores of Certified B Corps in ICT industry category

B Impact Assessment scores	Average	Median	Min	Max	Max-Min	SD	VAR	Q1	Q3
Overall score	90.03	87.6	80.1	122.7	42.6	8.86	78.43	82.65	94.95
Impact area governance	16.90	17.15	7.8	22.3	14.5	3.18	10.10	15.1	19.3
Impact area workers	30.22	30.3	11.8	56.6	30.3	6.63	44	25.43	34.18
Impact area community	22.09	19.7	8.1	85	76.9	10.48	109.84	16.93	23
Impact area environment	11.97	10.45	1	35.8	34.8	6.82	46.46	7.4	13.48
Impact area customers	9.92	5.1	1.3	47.1	45.8	9.20	84.57	3.9	15.1

Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

Average, median and quartiles (Q1, Q3) indicate that the overall score in the ICT industry category for the certificated B Corps is higher than the results in advertising and market research. For both groups, the results are not far from the minimum value necessary to get the certificate (80). However, it is important to highlight that this 80 score is not easy to achieve, while "the median score for businesses who complete the BIA globally is between 50-55" (B Lab Australia & New Zealand, 2022). This also confirms the attempts towards sustainability in the observed B Corps. All B Corps are dedicated to achieving higher values, so in next researches it would be interesting to track and investigate the progress during several certification cycles (overall, by industries and by specific areas; examples of best practice and best improvements).

Comparison of average overall scores and scores in specific impact areas shows that the results for the two groups are similar. Max-min (data range), standard deviation (SD) and variance (VAR) present the differences and dispersion between the analysed units. Differences between and within the countries imply also that the institutional contexts in different countries are important and should be investigated in future researches.

In the paper of Silva et al. (2022), the authors highlight that the minimum values established for each of the B indicators are lacking and present weaknesses in the measurement constructs. We have found in our research that B Lab defines the total points available for each area in the assessment, while the company can also earn additional points in Impact Business Model scoring (B Lab, 2023b). This allows comparability but, considering that the minimum values are not established, the comparison is challengeable.

More detailed analysis of the results in industries that are classified in ICT industry category (Table 5) shows that average and median scores for all Certified B Corporations in the observed ICT industry categories are higher in industries data processing and hosting, software publishing and SaaS platforms, telecommunications and web portals, in comparison with the results for the total ICT industry categories.

Table 5: Average and median overall B Impact Assessment scores of Certified B Corps in ICT industries

B Impact Assessment scores – overall scores	Average	Median	Min	Max	Max-Min	SD	VAR	Q1	Q3
Computer programming services	87.41	87.3	81.2	98.1	16.9	5.38	28.96	82.45	91.3
Data processing and hosting	95.15	95.05	90.4	100.1	9.7	5.43	29.50	90.48	99.73
Mobile applications	84.06	81.7	80.2	95	14.8	5.51	30.38	90.48	99.73
Other info service activities	88.93	86.3	83.88	86.3	26	6.91	47.77	83.88	93.43
Social networks and info sharing	86.88	84.7	80.1	96.8	16.7	5.95	35.49	82.23	91.03
Software publishing and SaaS platforms	92.56	92.1	80.4	114.6	34.2	10.48	109.83	84.45	96.95
Telecommunications	96.3	90.7	80.8	117.4	36.6	18.93	358.41	85.75	104.05
Web portals	93.78	89.5	80.1	122.7	42.6	11.88	141.17	85.28	98.03

Source: authors' own calculation according to B Lab (2023a)

B Corps in the EU also have companies that are recognised as the top-performing, "Best for the World." Based on the data given in B Lab (2023a), from 2012-2022, it can be concluded the share of "Best for the World" B Corps in advertising and market research in total number of "Best for the World" B Corps, is 2.72%, while the share for the ICT industry category is 12.25%. The number of "Best for the World" B Corps is the highest in the area of governance (in comparison with the number of "Best for the World" B Corps in the other evaluated areas). Comparing with the B Corps that are "Best for the World" in the observed industries can also be useful because the practices and policies of the leaders can be interesting for future investigations (regardless of their final average scores further investigations of the particular cases can give recommendations for the other companies in the mentioned industries).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper confirms the potential of Certified B Corps in the industry advertising and market research and ICT industry category to contribute to higher sustainability goals which can be important also for other countries in the EU that do not have B Corporations. Even though it is determined that in the structure of B Corps in the EU these industries have a significant share, the analysis shows that the B Corps in the observed industries are still concentrated on a few countries. B Corps in advertising and market research and ICT industry categories are mostly small and medium sized companies and committed to diversity and inclusion issues which can be seen from its ownership structure (minoritised groups as owners). Impact assessments enable the companies to direct their future activities and to achieve the best possible (positive) results regarding governance, workers, community, the environment and customers. At the time of necessary transformation, this may be seen as a useful concept to operationalise, implement the changes in practice towards sustainability and reduce negative influences of growth, with more benefits for the wider society. Companies that produce a positive impact for the society should be recognised and strengthened through the institutional framework and their internal activities. Possible directions and important factors can be investigated in more detail in specific questions that are included in the B Corps' certification process. Companies in advertising and market research and ICT industry category are accelerators of the digital transformation processes, so it is necessary to have principles of sustainability included in their business practices. Results in the observed sample imply that there are possible areas for improvement to achieve higher scores, which may be connected with their future sustainability path, but significant impact can be confirmed (especially in the governance impact assessment area). The analysis contributes to investigations about the B Corps in the EU and to papers, discussions that deal with the directions of future transformation, to studies of their industrial structure that were rarely presented in previous studies about the B Corps. The approach that includes samples of Certified B Corps in advertising and marketing and ICT industry category in EU member states can be further developed, having in mind also the weaknesses in scoring specific areas through B Corp certificate and variability of the results in the observed sample. Some of the marketing corporations are also included in the other categorisations of industries (e.g., in industry other business support), so this can be added to the given categorisation presented in this paper. In future research, it can be interesting to analyse the differences in results in a more comprehensive analysis that will include the causal relationships between overall results and governance, workers, community, environment and customers' areas as well the impact and contribution of these companies to sustainable development goals. Regarding the performed analysis, future studies can find it interesting to focus on these specific areas, to determine their minimum thresholds, to define peer countries which can be the starting point in network creations that will spread the idea and best practices in sustainability paths.

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REACHING A COMPROMISE IN PARENT-CHILD NEGOTIATION IN FOOD SELECTION AND PURCHASES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Household models of decision-making often assume that parents lead the process of food selection and purchase, with children playing a subsidiary role. However, children regularly participate in this process, trying to influence parents' food choices by making purchase requests. Children more frequently request the purchase of unhealthy, rather than healthy, foods, which, when parents acquiesce, can negatively affect the diets of the whole family. In this study, parents' perceptions of negotiations with children in food selection and purchase are explored to identify what strategies parents can employ to mitigate children's unhealthy purchase requests.

Methodology: Three focus groups were conducted (n=26) with the parents of children aged 3-10, who are responsible for food purchases. Three topics were discussed: negotiations about food within the family, children's behaviour in food purchases, and children's influence on family food selection and purchases.

Results: The findings revealed that parents have to negotiate food selection and purchase with their children, which often results in reaching a compromise. Three strategies were identified that parents use to overcome children's unhealthy food purchase requests: limiting the number of children's purchase requests, rejecting children's purchase requests, and talking to children about the importance of eating healthily and avoiding unhealthy food.

Conclusion: These findings can help policymakers to design interventions that aid parents in mitigating children's requests for unhealthy food and implementing healthier diets for the family. The contribution of this paper is the identification of strategies for successfully addressing challenging negotiations in family food selection and purchase that can underpin further research.

Keywords: food selection, food purchase, family, compromise, negotiation

1. INTRODUCTION

Household food consumption is increasingly attracting the attention of academics (Moore et al., 2017), due to the importance of diet for health and wellbeing (WHO, 2020). Food selection for children is typically challenging for parents. Parents often wish their children to eat healthier (Gronhoj & Gram, 2019, Noble et al., 2007), but their preferences may be sacrificed in negotiations since children often request or demand the purchase of unhealthy food (Castro et al., 2021, Nørgaard et al., 2007, Wingert et al., 2014). To achieve better dietary outcomes for children and parents, there is a need to encourage children to make healthier food choices. It is also necessary to uncover strategies parents can adopt to overcome children's purchase requests for unhealthy food (Vos et al., 2022).

Traditionally, household models assume parents are the lead decision-makers in the process of food selection and purchase for the family, given their purchasing power. On the other hand, there is evidence that children exert a considerable role in food selection (Kansal et al., 2022), trying to influence parents' purchasing decisions and food choices through their purchase requests (Beltran et al., 2017), especially demands for unhealthy options. Children's unhealthy food purchase requests often result in parents engaging in negotiations with their children (Dikcius et al., 2020). The goal of this study is to explore negotiations between parents and children when selecting and purchasing food by focusing on parents' perceptions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate what strategies parents use that may successfully mitigate children's unhealthy requests.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite numerous studies in the field of family food selection and purchase (Castro et al., 2017, Marshall, 2014, Nørgaard et al., 2007, Page et al., 2018, Russell et al., 2014), it is still unclear how parents negotiate food choices with their children and how they agree on the final decision.

Negotiation about food within the family. Children often try to influence their parents to purchase the foods they want to consume (Beltran et al., 2017), which are usually heavily advertised foods that are high in salt, sugar, and fat (Dallazen & Medeiros Rataichesck Fiates, 2014, Smith et al., 2019, Whalen et al., 2019). Since children's wishes may differ from parents' food-related beliefs, children and parents start to negotiate about food selection and purchase (Nørgaard & Brunsø, 2011). In some situations, parents initiate negotiations with children and seek to include them in the process of food selection and purchase since they want to purchase food that the children will consume (Kansal et al., 2022). However, based on the previous literature, there is no consensus on what the outcomes of negotiations between parents and children are.

Children's behaviour in family food purchases. Children regularly accompany their parents' visits to supermarkets, and their influence on food purchases grows with the frequency of their purchase trips (Vohra & Soni, 2014). Children help parents with food purchases by providing information on food products and brands, checking food prices, and placing products in the shopping basket (Dikcius et al., 2020). Beltran et al. (2017) distinguish three forms of children's purchase behaviour: (1) the child decides on food that will be bought, (2) the parent is mainly responsible for purchases, and the child is involved as much as the parent allows, (3) the parent encourages the child to participate in purchase decisions. Children often verbally request the purchase of desired food products, but sometimes they do it by putting the product in the shopping basket without parental approval (Kansal et al., 2022). Because of the aforementioned examples of children's behaviour, food purchases can cause stress for parents (Noble et al., 2007), and how parents deal with the process of food purchases is not fully explained in the literature.

Children's influence on family food selection and purchases. From an early age, children seek to influence food selection and purchases (John, 1999). They use different methods of influence, such as begging, whimpering, nagging, persuading, putting the product in the shopping basket (McNeal, 2007), and pointing at the product (Gram, 2015). These methods are known as children's active influences (Marshall, 2014m, Vohra & Soni, 2014). Children not only try to influence parents' food choices during purchase, but also at home, during meal preparation and consumption (Beltran et al., 2017). However, Vohra and Soni (2014) also recognise the passive influence of children, i.e., situations in which parents purchase food based on their children's wishes and preferences.

Children constantly influence their parents, directly and indirectly, during grocery shopping by displaying various behaviours (Haselhoff et al., 2014). This study evaluates parental perceptions of the outcomes of negotiations between themselves and their children in these food-related behaviours. It will also uncover the strategies that parents could use to mitigate children's purchase requests for unhealthy food. Therefore, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: *What challenges do parents face in the food selection and purchase process with children?*

RQ2: *How do parents understand the negotiation strategies that children use in the family food selection and purchase process?*

RQ3: *What strategies do parents use to prevail over children's purchase requests for unhealthy food?*

3. METHODOLOGY

Three focus groups were conducted in the Croatian capital of Zagreb during October and November 2022. This study was exploratory and used focus groups as a research method considering that they allow obtaining diverse opinions within the population (Mack et al., 2005). Numerous researches in the area of decision-making regarding the purchase of food products within the family used this method (e.g., Darko et al., 2013, Moran et al., 2019, Noble et al., 2007, Vos et al., 2022). According to Guest et al. (2016), in order to achieve saturation and variability, it is recommended to conduct at least three focus groups.

The sample consisted of parents of young children. Each focus group included seven to ten mothers or fathers. Participants were selected in the sample based on two criteria: at least one of their children is between the ages of 3 and 10 and the parent should be at least partially responsible for food purchases for his/her family. This age group was chosen since children's consumer behaviour becomes more sophisticated and independent during these years (John, 1999). Parents were invited to participate in the research through a children's playroom facility e-mail list. The focus groups were conducted in the same playroom. Participants and their children had free entry to the playroom as an incentive to participate in the study.

In total, 26 parents participated (23 mothers and 3 fathers) in three focus groups. Six parents had one child, half of the parents had two children, five parents had 3 children, and two parents had four children. One parent was younger than 30 years, 14 parents were between 30 and 39 years, and 11 parents were between 40 and 45 years. Most of the parents had at least a college degree (n=18), and the rest of them finished high school (n=3) or completed some college education (n=5). Twenty families had a monthly household income of 2000€ or higher, and 6 earned less than 2000€/month.

At the beginning of the focus group, participants were asked to respond to questions regarding their socio-demographic status. They were also asked to report their child's last meal before coming to the playroom and state who chose that meal, a parent or a child. There were three topics of interest:

(1) negotiations about food selection and purchases within the family, (2) children's behaviour in food purchases, and (3) children's influence on family food selection and purchases. Discussions lasted up to one hour. All focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The analysis started with reading and listening to the manuscripts and recordings several times, to familiarise the investigators with the content of the focus groups. Consequently, the main themes and ideas were identified and highlighted. Afterwards, separate responses previously highlighted were entered into Excel. Separate responses were then coded manually into 1st order concepts and 2nd order themes (see Figure 1), following the approach of Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012). Codes were analysed by two investigators, in order to ensure reliability and impartiality.

Figure 1: Codes used for data structure

1st order concepts	2nd order themes
• Parents' perception of children's influence on food selection	Children's influence on food selection and purchase
• Parents' perception of children's influence on food purchase	
• Parents' perception of methods that children use when persuading their parents to purchase food	
• Food that children request their parents to purchase	
• Situations in which parents (almost) independently decide on the food selection and purchase	Parental influence on food selection and purchase
• Situations in which the opinions and wishes of both parents and children are respected	Achieving a compromise in food selection and purchase
• Parents limit children's purchase requests to one to two items	Strategies implemented for overcoming children's purchase requests for unhealthy food
• Parents saying no to children's requests for unhealthy food • Parents point out the negative effects of eating unhealthy food or the positive effects of eating healthy food	

4. FINDINGS

The focus group discussion started by asking parents what was their children's last meal before coming to the playroom. Parents also indicated who chose that meal. Table 1 presents an overview of responses. The parents perceive that meals are mostly chosen by them, while children chose them only occasionally. When asked if children accept the meals they choose, parents concluded that there are often negotiations over meals. Discussion ensued regarding parents' perceptions of food negotiations between themselves and their children.

Table 1: Children's last meal prior to the focus group.

Code of participant	Number of children	Last meal	The person who chose the meal
P1	Two	Squid and potatoes	Child
P2	Two	Tomato soup and a salad	Child
P3	Two	Pasta bolognese and a salad	Mother and father
P4	One	Soup, mashed potatoes, and fried meat	Grandparents
P5	Two	An apple and a mandarin	Mother
P6	Four	Chicken soup and a sandwich	Mother
P7	Three	Veal and vegetables	Father
P8	One	Pasta with vegetables, and pears	All family members
P9	Two	Banana pancakes	Mother and father
P10	Two	Pork and potatoes, salad, paprika, and squash from the oven	Grandmother
P11	Three	Meat, potatoes, vegetables, and a salad	Mother
P12	Two	Pumpkin soup, rice with spinach, chicken, mushrooms, and a salad	Mother and father
P13	Two	An apple and a mandarin	Child
P14	Two	A soup, meat from the oven with vegetables, and a salad	Father
P15	Three	Chicken soup, sweet potato gnocchi, turkey meat, and a salad	Mother and grandmother

P16	One	Squid and potatoes	Father
P17	Four	A soup, and pasta with four cheeses	Father
P18	Two	A soup, chicken with rice	Child
P19	Two	Beans	Mother
P20	One	Pizza	Mother and father
P21	Three	Pizza	Mother
P22	Two	A soup, chicken with potatoes and Swiss chard	All family members
P23	One	Fried cod and pasta	Mother
P24	Two	A soup, mashed potatoes, fried chicken, and a salad	Child
P25	Three	An apple and cookies	Child
P26	Three	A mushroom and ham soup	Mother

4.1.PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT FOOD WITHIN THE FAMILY

Among the many different situations of meal selection within a family, three themes were observed. First, parents choose a meal for the whole family and expect the children to eat the meal. "*My girl is 5 years old and basically what I buy, what I cook, she has to eat. That's it. What's for lunch is eaten.*" (P5, two children). If children don't want or don't like everything that is being cooked, they need to eat, if not the whole meal, at least part of the meal that has been prepared. "*I have three children, so each one simply likes something different. But generally, we have a rule that the meal we make, if a child likes something it can eat more of it, and if it doesn't like it, it can eat less of it. But it has to try everything.*" (P15, three children). In such situations, the influence of parents when choosing a meal is observed.

Second, when choosing meals, parents claim that they are guided by what their children want and like to eat. "*Nobody wants to argue during mealtime or that children don't eat their meal and ask for something sweet in an hour.*" (P22, two children). Sometimes children do not even need to express a desire for a particular meal; their parents are familiar with their preferences and choose meals accordingly. The following quotation illustrates such an anticipated accommodation: "*Basically, they don't choose their own food because we already know what they want to eat, and we just stick to it.*" (P10, two children). This often results in preparing the same set of meals throughout the week. However, in other situations, children influence parents' meal selection by requesting a particular meal. When asked about the children's last meal, a parent said: *"We had soup and four-cheese pasta that the children chose. Basically, everyone likes pasta and cheese, so everyone wants to eat it. And throughout the week we plan to make something that they want to eat."* (P17, four children). The same parent added, "*At times, in the middle of the week, we make a vegetable stew that we know they don't want to eat, but they also know they have to*." In the above example, it is noticeable that children and parents reached an agreement regarding the choice of meal.

Third, some parents reported that they try to coordinate with their children regarding the choice of family meals. Parents negotiate with their children about what to eat, considering both their wishes and their children's wishes. "*I must say that we always negotiate. Today there was a situation where we were ordering from a restaurant, and we asked our daughter "Do you want to eat meat and rice?". No, she wants to eat pizza. But there was an agreement that before the pizza she must eat homemade soup. So, for a meal, we ate soup, according to my wish, and pizza, according to the child's wish*." (P13, three children).

4.2. PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR IN FOOD PURCHASES

Children's role in household food purchases evoked much discussion. Parents in this sample were at least partially responsible for family food purchases and their children often or sometimes accompanied them when food shopping. Many parents reported that they often go for food purchases with a list or that they know in advance what to buy. Despite parents telling their children what food they have come to purchase, children many times request purchases of food beyond the list or original plan. As a parent described: *"When we go to the store, I usually say what I'm planning to buy. And then they start pestering me on time, we agree on what they can and can't get, and we buy what we came for."* (P2, two children).

Most parents reported that children try to influence them to purchase unhealthy food such as candies, sweets, or bakery products. In such situations, parents usually limit their children's requests by accepting one or two of their requests. However, children do not only request the purchase of unhealthy food. Parents claim that children sometimes request the purchase of fruits, especially seasonal ones, and these requests are usually accepted by parents. But when asked if children are asking for a purchase of other healthy food, such as vegetables, almost all of the parents said no.

4.3. PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR CHILDREN'S INFLUENCE ON FAMILY FOOD SELECTION AND PURCHASES

Parents regard their children's purchase requests as a source of stress. When asked about the methods children employ when requesting the purchase of a product, several parents described tactics such as begging; e.g., "*please, please, please*" or "*give, give, give*." Some tactics are less intrusive, such as pointing at the desired product. "*It's usually a non-stop game. I'd like this, I'd like that, buy it at least now, give it at least once, give me this". Then on one side, you loosen a little, then on the other side, you tighten a little.*" (P23, one child), which suggests that children's begging for purchases ends in achieving a compromise. Reaching a compromise is emphasised by another parent, claiming, "*I always try to reach some sort of compromise. I'm not saying strictly no, you won't get it. But if my child suggests buying fruit yogurt, pudding, and Kinder penguin, it will get one thing. It's not that it won't get anything, but it won't get everything either*." (P11, three children).

Parents revealed that they implement different strategies for overcoming children's requests for unhealthy foods. Parents strive to purchase healthy foods and provide their children with healthy and sustainable diets, regardless of the children's preferences. "*We all try to cook something healthy for them, but whether you want to or not, you want to make it easier for yourself, you go for giving them something healthy to eat, but you think about what they like from that healthy*." (P6, four children). One of the strategies used by parents is to limit their children's requests for unhealthy food by allowing them to buy one or two products of their choice. "*We agree that the child can take two things, and then we take some kind of fruit, vegetables, etc. I limit their requests for sweets. I say ok, two products are enough, and we'll buy others the next time.*" (P11, three children). Another strategy often used by parents is saying "no" to children's requests. Parents stated that over time, children learn that parents will not agree to their requests for unhealthy food, and they no longer even ask. "*We started teaching them a long time ago that no means no. But in principle, we are careful of how much we use it because we don't want to be too strict*." (P24, two children). The third strategy used by parents is talking to children about food. Two cases stand out: parents emphasise the negative aspects of eating unhealthy food or the positive aspects of eating healthy food. Both strategies aim to encourage children to make healthier choices. "*I try to talk to my daughter about how our body does not need sweets for growth and development, but we do need these other foods such as fruits, vegetables, and meat for growth*." (P12, one child).

5. DISCUSSION

This study seeks to uncover parents' perceptions of negotiation outcomes between themselves and their children in food selection and purchases. Additionally, it explores what strategies, employed by parents, may mitigate children's purchase requests for unhealthy foods to achieve healthier diets in the family.

The findings imply that children's influence is noticeable in food selection and meal preparation and can be both active and more commonly passive. Regarding the latter, parents reported a great amount of consideration of children's preferences without children having to say anything while choosing a meal for the family. Parents stated that they try to select foods and prepare meals that children will want to eat, even if this results in preparing the same meal over and over again. Children's passive influence on family food selection is in keeping with previous research (Beltran et al., 2017, Russell et al., 2014, Vos et al., 2022). However, children also exert an active influence on food selection and meal preparation. This active influence regularly results in parent-child conflicts and negotiations. In such situations, parents typically strive to reach a compromise with children regarding food selection and meals to be prepared. Parents accept some, but not all children's wishes.

This study provides new insights into the strategies that parents use to overcome children's purchase requests for unhealthy food, identifying three parental strategies. First, parents limit children's purchase requests to one or two such requests, thus achieving a compromise. Parents who use this strategy claim that children learn over time that they can only request a purchase of one or two food products and that they try to stick to it. Second, parents can refuse children's purchase requests by firmly saying no, thus resulting in fewer requests over time. Third, parents talk to children about the negative sides of eating unhealthy food and the positive sides of eating healthy food, thereby trying to encourage children to make fewer purchase requests for such food. However, what strategy is most successful in limiting children's purchase requests for unhealthy food remains to be investigated, as well as what are the long-term outcomes of these strategies and whether parents can use them to achieve a healthier diet for the whole family.

5.1. IMPLICATIONS

These findings can inform policymakers and marketers, specifically, the development of guidelines for parents on how to mitigate children's requests and demands for unhealthy food, communicating practical strategies. Given the relationships between diet and health, parents should focus on improving diets for their families, and they can benefit from employing strategies to mitigate children's demands for unhealthy foods. Both parents and children participate in negotiations regarding family food selection and purchase, and therefore both should be targeted in such interventions. Additionally, such interventions should focus on behaviour change.

To change the family's unhealthy food choices, it is recommended to implement in-store interventions. Such interventions would include different placement of unhealthy food products within the store. For example, removing unhealthy food products from the cash register or placing them at the beginning of the store. Other interventions include food manufacturers who could invest effort in changing product labelling to provide more information to consumers. In this way, it would be easier for parents to negotiate with their children about food choices during shopping trips and would reduce the efforts they invest in encouraging their children to make healthier choices.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This exploratory study has several limitations. First, only the parent's perspective on the negotiations between parents and children in the process of food selection and purchase was obtained. Children might possess very different views on this topic. Therefore, future studies should involve children to gain their perspectives on these food-related behaviours. This could allow for more comprehensive conclusions to be drawn about the negotiations between parents and children and the strategies they use in food selection. A second limitation relates to the sample. Despite the exploratory nature of the research and important insights into parent-child negotiation in food selection and purchase, the small sample size limits the generalisability of these findings. To broaden the generalisability of the findings, a more extensive study is required. Third, the choice of research methodology is considered a limitation. This study used focus groups as a research method. Future studies should consider applying other qualitative methods, such as household kitchen table discussions that could include all household members that are included in the process of food selection and purchase (such as parents, children, and grandparents) or keeping a diary of family food products purchases within a certain period.

In order to analyse the efficacy of the strategies parents use to mitigate children's purchase requests for unhealthy food, it would be interesting to replicate this study and apply a mixed-methods research design. Self-reported and externally verified measures would be particularly useful for capturing parental strategies. Such an extensive approach would allow for a better understanding of the outcomes of these strategies. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct experiments to understand under what conditions will particular strategies be most effective.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study revealed that parents and children often negotiate food selection and purchases, since they have different desires. When choosing food, parents are guided by the desire to provide healthy nutrition to their children, while children express a desire for unhealthy food in the process of food selection and purchase. Accordingly, negotiations about food selection and purchase often end in a compromise - parents respect some, but not all, of the children's wishes. Moreover, this study highlighted three strategies used by parents to overcome children's purchase requests for unhealthy food. Parents limit the number of purchase requests children can make, reject children's purchase requests, or talk to their children about the negative effects of eating unhealthy food and the benefits of eating healthy food. The long-term outcomes of these strategies on children's purchase requests remain to be explored in future studies.

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AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND MARKETING PRINCIPLE IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS / RAZVOJ PUBLIKE – STRATEŠKI PRAVAC I MARKETINŠKI PRINCIP U UPRAVLJANJU ORGANIZACIJAMA U KULTURI[1]

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper examines the conceptual framework and practical achievements of audience development as one of the more important strategic goals of public policies and management priorities of cultural institutions.

Methodology: In the paper, the authors provide an overview of the literature and of the most important research areas on the topic and analyse several strategic documents in culture regarding audience development. In addition, the authors present several case study analyses of the concept's application in terms of audience development and fostering the creativity of young people in culture. An interdisciplinary approach is used.

Results: The analysis tries to critically assess the concept of audience development through the principle 'development of experience' in cultural activities, as a necessary strategic direction and marketing approach to the development of cultural activities in contemporary society. The paper also contributes to the development of the conceptual framework of management and marketing in the cultural sector, when it comes to orientation towards children, youth and other marginalised groups. Based on the analysis presented in the paper, the authors prove that the time has come to reaffirm the classical concept of audience development in cultural activities, using innovative business models and a hybrid strategy. The scientific contribution of the paper is reflected in the acronym AMIKKA, used to denote the author's model designed to summarize the basic principles of innovative management and marketing when it comes to audience development in the cultural sector.

Conclusion: With their paper, the authors contribute to the research category of 'experience' in the current era of the experience economy, in the area of cultural activities. In particular, they research the youth population and look for creative ways to involve them more significantly in the cultural life of the community, as a group of 'users of cultural content' which is often on the margins of cultural life. The authors are looking for answers to this question that contribute to the culture of life, but also to the well-being and development of young people, and thus to the development of the entire social community, in this insufficiently researched area.

Keywords: audience development, marketing in culture, management of cultural institutions, experience economy, audience pyramid, AMIKKA model

SAŽETAK

Svrha istraživanja: U radu se istražuje konceptualni okvir i praktični dosezi razvoja publike kao jednog od značajnijih strateških ciljeva javnih politika i upravljačkih prioriteta ustanova u kulturi.

Metodologija: Autorice u radu daju pregled literature i važnijih istraživanja na obrađenu temu te analiziraju nekoliko strateških dokumenata u kulturi po pitanju razvoja publike. Isto tako, autorice prikazuju analize studije slučaja primjene koncepta razvoja publike i poticanja kreativnosti mladih u kulturi. U radu se koristi interdisciplinarni pristup.

Rezultati: Analizom se pokušava kritički procijeniti razvoj publike kroz sintagmu 'razvoja iskustva' u kulturnim djelatnostima ali i kao nužni strateški pravac i marketinški pristup razvoja kulturne djelatnosti u suvremenom društvu. Rad ujedno daje doprinos razvoju konceptualnog okvira područja menadžmenta i marketinga u kulturnim djelatnostima, kada je u pitanju orijentacija prema djeci, mladima i drugim marginaliziranim skupinama u kulturi. Temeljem izvršene analize, autorice dokazuju da je nastupilo vrijeme za reafirmaciju klasičnog koncepta razvoja publike u kulturnim djelatnostima, korištenjem inovativnih poslovnih modela i hibridne strategije. Znanstveni doprinos rada ogleda se u akronimu AMIKKA, kojim se označava model autorica osmišljen na način da sumira osnovne principe inovativnog upravljanja i marketinga kada je riječ o razvoju publike u kulturnom sektoru.

Zaključak: Autori radom daju doprinos istraživanju kategorije 'iskustva' u aktualnoj eri ekonomije iskustva, na primjeru kulturnih djelatnosti. Posebice istražuju skupinu mladih te tragaju za kreativnim načinima za značajnije uključivane te skupine 'korisnika kulturnih sadržaja', koja je često u kulturnom životu na marginama, u kulturni život zajednice. U radu se traga za odgovorima na ovo pitanje kojime se doprinosi kulturi života, ali i dobrobiti i razvoju mladih, a time i razvoju cjelokupne društvene zajednice, u ovom nedovoljno istraženom području.

Ključne riječi: razvoj publike, marketing u kulturi, menadžment kulturnih institucija, ekonomija iskustva, piramida publike, AMIKKA model

1. UVOD

U svojoj knjizi Društvo spektakla, Guy Debord (1967: 16) piše: "U postindustrijskom društvu, gdje dominira masovna proizvodnja i mediji, život je predstavljen kao ogromna akumulacija prizora. Sve što je nekada bilo neposredno doživljavano, danas se prikazuje u formi slika.". U ovom kontekstu, blijedi granica između realnog i imaginarnog svijeta, pa se kroz suvremene medije, digitalne svjetove i nove tehnologije iskustvo života i iskustvo virtualnog života preklapaju, otvaraju nove prostore i vidike, nove medije, te nove načine stvaranja i doživljavanja života. Spomenuti filozof Debord (1967) govori o suvremenom *Homo Spectatoru*, i još pred više od 50 godina uočava (već tadašnji) "prodor prefabriciranih 'pseudodogađaja'", za koje kaže da se događaju jer "ukupna stvarnost današnjeg društvenog postojanja sprječava ljude da stvarnost doživljavaju neposredno". U ovom i ovakvom svijetu 'pseudodogađaja', u kojemu, posebno mladi, provode sve više vremena u virtualnom svijetu – na društvenim mrežama, igrajući video igre i slično, kultura dobiva iznimno značenje. No postavljaju se pitanja: Kako potaknuti mlade, kao i općenito širu publiku, na konzumiranje kulturnih sadržaja? Kako ih privući na učestalije posjete kulturnim ustanovama? Koja i kakva su korisnička iskustva u kulturi njima zanimljiva, uzbudljiva, inspirativna? U traganju za odgovorima na ova pitanja, u ovom radu se analizira ključni koncept u ovom području – razvoj publike. Pitanja od kojih se polazi u ovom radu jesu: Kako izgraditi novo korisničko iskustvo u kulturi? Kako izgraditi novu publiku?

U odgovoru na ova pitanja, a da bi se optimalno postavili istraživački ciljevi, desk metodom su istraženi važniji radovi iz ovog područja. Njih su, kao pokušaj svojevrsne konceptualizacije, sumirali Hasitschka i Tschmuck (2005: 147,148), koji navode da najvažnija područja istraživanja, kada su u pitanju studije o kulturnim institucijama, obuhvaćaju sljedeća područja:

- Kulturne interpretacije i evaluacije (npr. mediji umjetnosti i publike, kriticizam u umjetnosti, tržišta);
- Socijalne relacije u kulturnoj praksi (npr. umrežavanje profesionalaca, interakcija s publikom),
- Interakcija između kulturne organizacije (ciljevi, struktura, aktivnosti) i njenog okruženja,
- Ekonomska razmjena dobara i usluga u kulturi,
- Različite profesionalne prakse značajne za kulturu (edukacija, izgradnja kapaciteta, financiranje, mobilnost),
- Profesionalne prakse i tehnološki razvoj,

- Analiza kulturnih politika (npr. statistike u kulturi, kulturna diplomacija, komparativna analiza kulturnih politika).

Ciljevi istraživanja u ovom radu temelje se na opisanom konceptualnom okviru i odnose se na sljedeće:

1. Ispitati teoretske dosege – konceptualni okvir istraživanja u istraživačkom području razvoja publike.
2. Analizirati implementaciju koncepta ekonomije iskustva na korisničko iskustvo u kulturi, s aspekta razvoja publike.
3. Istražiti do koje mjere je razvoj publike zastupljen na primjeru nekoliko strateških dokumenata u kulturi (Velika Britanija, EU, Republika Hrvatska).
4. Osmisliti vlastiti upravljački model kojim se optimizira upravljanje u kulturi sa strateškog i marketinškog aspekta na području strateškog menadžmenta i marketinškog principa razvoja publike.

Metodološki, u radu se koristi desk metoda – analiza i kritički osvrt na dosadašnja istraživanja, te analize studija i strateških dokumenata, pri čemu se autorice nastavljaju i na ranija vlastita istraživanja, kao i vlastito iskustvo u upravljanju ustanovama u kulturi. Nadalje, rad prikazuje analizu nekoliko studija slučaja i analitičkih studija, kako bi se dobile strateške smjernice i postavili temeljni marketinški principi za učinkovito upravljanje ustanovama u kulturi koje su autorice uobličile kroz vlastiti upravljački model. U radu se koristi interdisciplinarni pristup.

2. KORISNIČKO ISKUSTVO U KULTURI – OSOBNO ISKUSTVO I KO-KREIRANJE DOŽIVLJAJA

Živimo u eri ekonomije iskustva, kada središnje mjesto zauzima korisničko iskustvo. Fenomen korisničkog iskustva istražuje se u značajnijoj mjeri nakon što su Pine i Gilmore objavili svoj poznati članak iz 1998. godine u časopisu ‹Harvard Business Review›, naziva ‘Welcome to the Experience economy’, koji je, po mnogima ključni rad u ovom području. U svom radu, Ferreira i Teixeira (2013) daju pregled rezultata dubinske analize literature iz područja ekonomije iskustva i zaključuju da su, u razdoblju od temeljnog članka Pine i Gilmore-a do 2012. godine, brojni autori objavili radove utemeljene na Pine i Gilmoreovom konceptu, i to, kako navode, iz čitavog niza različitih znanstvenih područja, ne samo iz područja menadžmenta, već i iz područja turizma, sporta, zabave i rekreacije te ugostiteljstva. Isti autori nadalje navode da su, po pitanju ekonomije iskustva, među nedovoljno istraženim područjima mjerenje i inovacije, kao i kvantitativna istraživanja.

Noviji pregled literature daju Chevtchouk et al. (2020) koji u svom radu analiziraju 267 izvora literature na temu korisničkog iskustva i uočavaju značajno korištenje multidisciplinarnog pristupa, s obzirom da su u analizi uočili da, među analiziranim radovima, njih 148 pripada području marketinga, 90 pripada filozofiji i 29 radova, psihologiji. Autori smatraju da je dosadašnji opus dobra podloga za daljnje analize i, kako navode, "konceptualizaciju (modela) na više razina, čime se otvara prostor za daljnja teoretska, metodološka i interdisciplinarna promišljanja u ovom području". (Chevtchouk et al., 2020: 1288) Isti autori u svom radu ulaze u samu 'anatomiju iskustva' i konstatiraju da dosadašnja literatura uočava tri tipa, kako navode, "internih subjektivnih ezoteričnih impresija – senzornu, afektivnu i kognitivnu". (Chevtchouk et al., 2020: 1316) No oni se ne ograničavaju na iste, već smatraju da se daljnjim istraživanjima mogu iznaći i drugi tipovi impresija u ekonomiji iskustva. Chevtchouk et al. (2020) nadalje u svom radu obrađuju tri razine iskustva: 1. podsvjesna, 2. instantna (orig. *immediate*) i 3. potrošačka (orig. *consummatory*). Treću razinu – potrošačko iskustvo, autori analiziraju s aspekta iskustva potrošača s brendom i smatraju da postoje tri temeljna aspekta iskustva:

- *Afektivni*: Emocije su, kako navode, "kompleksni niz međupovezanih sub-događaja koji uključuju subjekt i objekt".
- *Senzorni*: Estetika kojom se komunicira radost, zaigranost objekta, 'kvaliteta koja se osjeti' (Mead, 1938, cit. u Chevtchouk et al., 2020) i koja je nužan uvjet za konzumiranje iskustva.
- *Kognitivni*: Svjesna kulminacija koja se događa kada pojedinca prožme osjećaj ispunjenosti.
- Premda se navedena klasifikacija razina iskustva u analizi autora odnosi na iskustvo potrošača s brendom, ona može biti polazište i za izgradnju iskustva u kulturi jer, i u jednom i u drugom slučaju, odnos između 'primatelja iskustva' i 'pružatelja iskustva' je osnova koncepta iskustva, koji bi trebao biti interaktivan i prožimati različite sfere individue – od kognitivne, do afektivne, senzorne, pa i socijalne, koja međutim, u prikazanom modelu, izostaje.

O iskustvu u kulturi kao odnosu govori, primjerice, Nicolas Bourriaud (2013, cit. u Mišković, 2022: 210), definirajući ga pojmom *relacijska estetika*. Bourriaud drži da je odnos u samoj srži umjetničke prakse i ističe iznimno značenje socijalne zajednice i konteksta u kojem umjetnici djeluju.

Mišković (2022: 210) navodi: "Bourriaud umjetnike vidi, ne kao stvaratelje, nego kao facilitatore, a umjetnost kao proces razmjene informacija između umjetnika i publike. Pojam relacijske estetike odnosi se u prvom redu na umjetničku praksu niza umjetnika u području vizualnih umjetnosti, no u proširenom značenju, ovaj pojam predstavlja osnovu za razumijevanje područja inovativne umjetničke i kulturne prakse u Hrvatskoj.".

2.1. KULTURA U ZAJEDNICI – ANGAŽIRANOM PUBLIKOM DO NOVOG KORISNIČKOG ISKUSTVA I INOVATIVNIH MODELA KULTURNIH PERFORMANSI

Kada je o publici riječ, Mišković ide dalje od same interakcije umjetnika i publike i navodi da se "posjetitelji ovih (kulturnih, op. aut.) događaja više ne doživljavaju kao publika koja ulazi u interakciju s umjetničkim radom, nego kao zajednica okupljena oko teme. ... Umjetnički radovi i kulturni programi ... stvoreni (su) u različitim medijima; odlikuju ih različite estetske karakteristike i održavaju se u prostorima koji imaju različita simbolička značenja." (Mišković, 2022: 210).

Dakle, premda je pojam estetike iskustva u kulturi u užem smislu definiran prvenstveno osobnim, individualnim iskustvom pojedinca, što je u osnovi i smisao umjetničke forme, umjetnost i doživljaj umjetnosti danas dobiva širi kontekst, kontekst angažmana i zajednice. Pretpostavlja se da je ova funkcija različita ovisno o grani umjetnosti. Tako se glazba, primjerice, može doživjeti kroz naglašeno intimnu, ali i socijalnu komponentu, dok, primjerice, kazalište ima iznimnu priliku organskog povezivanja sa zajednicom i socijalnog angažmana. Na taj način "kazalište postaje ogledalo društva", kako navodi Nika Krajnović (2022) u svojem osvrtu na dokumentarnu predstavu Crna vuna. Predstava je izvedena u Rijeci krajem 2000. godine od strane kolektiva Igralke, pri čemu Krajnović ističe specifičnosti scene i jedinstveno iskustvo koje donosi ova inovativna kulturna performansa. Scenu, naime, čine žene korisnice Udruge Oaza – udruge za beskućnike i socijalno ugrožene osobe, koje su na rubu siromaštva, a koje, u samoj predstavi, donose svoje priče i prenose vlastita iskustva publici. Zanimljivo, u ovoj predstavi je i kombiniranje umjetničkih formi - osim u izvođenju i ko-kreiranju predstave, korisnice su sudjelovale i u stvaranju naslovne pjesme predstave, uz podršku glazbenika Damira Urbana. Krajnović o tome navodi: "Stihovima koji bez problematičnog romantiziranja prenose bolnu istinu o beskućništvu, pjesma govori o ranjivosti i snazi potrebnoj za nošenje s teškim životnim okolnostima te potiče publiku da, pojedinačno i kolektivno, preispita vlastitu poziciju prema beskućništvu.”. Krajnović zaključuje: “Kazališnoj sceni u Rijeci, ali i u cijeloj Hrvatskoj, zapravo nedostaje radova koji se svojim pristupom smještavaju u tzv. kazalište zajednice (eng. *community theatre*).”. Riječ je dakle o novoj ulozi kazališta koje (re)afirmira tradicionalne vrijednosti, stvara nove zajednice, preispituje aktualna društvena zbivanja i problematizira društveni realitet. “Upravo zbog zajednice koju je stvorila, ali i zbog svoje aktivističke poruke, Crna vuna izvrstan je primjer kazališta koje se ‘prelijeva (iz)van kazališta’. “. (Krajnović, 2022)

3. RAZVOJ PUBLIKE – KONCEPTUALNI OKVIR

Pauletta et al. (2022) u svom radu navode da veliki umjetnik Paul Gauguin u svojim memoarima spominje odgajanje publike i prosvjećenost publike, žaleći se pritom da publika sve manje uživa kulturne sadržaje i programe. Autori dalje nastavljaju: “Dakle, već više od sto godina razgovara se o razvoju publike, ali tek se u posljednjih nekoliko godina (taj pojam, op. aut.) razvio kao legitiman samostalni pojam u kulturnom menadžmentu, vrijedan proučavanja i primjenjivanja.”. (Pauletta et al., 2022: 111)

O konceptu razvoja publike pisali su i raniji autori. Tako, primjerice, Sigurjonsson (2010) u svom radu istražuje korisnički pristup u kulturi apostrofirajući ‘estetiku komfora korisnika,’ ali pritom upozoravajući na rizik dvosmislenosti i različitih interpretacija kada su prilagodbe estetike umjetničkog djela u pitanju. Sigurjonsson, dakle, pristupa publici kao ‘potrošačima’ koji traže pristupačnije i ‘komformnije’ oblike (u analizi autora - glazbenog) angažmana, naglašavajući i da je to ujedno i osnovna doktrina kada je riječ o teoriji o razvoju publike. Ovakav ‘koncept komfora’ potaknuli su teoretičari kao Heather Maitland (cit. u Sigurjonsson, 2010: 266), koja definira razvoj publike (orig. *audience development*) kao “aktivnost koja se sastoji u nalaženju načina da se ljudima umjetnička izvedba u njenim konvencionalnim okvirima učini ugodnijom, pa čak i izmjenu tih konvencija kako bi se ljudi osjećali ugodnije prateći izvedbu” (prilagođeni prijevod autora). Slične teze zastupa i Tim Baker (cit. u Sigurjonsson, 2010: 266), koji objašnjava da je “vrijednost koncerata način na koji je percipiraju potencijalni posjetitelji (orig. gosti), potkopana onime što oni vide kao područja rizika.”. Međutim, postavlja se pitanje je li poimanje publike, odnosno percipijenta (orig. *listener* – slušatelj), primjerice klasične glazbe, kao ‘potrošača’ ili ‘klijenta’, koje je dominantno u marketinškoj koncepciji glazbenog iskustva, nužno dovoljno da nas navede da o razvoju publike razmišljamo na način poboljšanja njihovog komfora i smanjenja rizika. Autor stoga pledira za široko razmatranje kategorije razvoja publike, a ne isključivo zadržavanje na marketinškoj koncepciji. (Sigurjonsson, 2010: 266)

Barlow i Shibli (2007) izvršili su analizu publike komorne glazbe s marketinškog aspekta i zaključili da, kada je riječ o razvoju publike, "nije moguće primijeniti jedinstvenu marketinšku strategiju, već istu treba prilagoditi lokalnom kontekstu.". (Barlow i Shibli, 2007: 102)

4. STRATEŠKI ASPEKT RAZVOJA PUBLIKE I (NE)MJERLJIVOST UČINAKA – MAKRO PRISTUP

Merel Vercammen (2017: 19) navodi da projekti razvoja publike mogu biti učinkoviti "jedino ako su sastavnim dijelom dugoročne strategije razvoja publike koja se razvija u simbiozi umjetničkih, edukacijskih i marketinških funkcija organizacije." i nastavlja tezom da se "diverzifikacijska strategija (se) mora primijeniti kao dio dugoročnog razvojnog plana za privlačenje mlade publike.". Pritom je od iznimnog značenja mjerenje učinka kulturnih politika, s obzirom da vrijednost kulture i njenih učinaka nadilazi područje ekonomije. Pitanju mjerenja učinkovitosti kulturnih politika u tom smislu treba pristupati vrlo oprezno, jer, osim ekonomskih učinaka, tu je i društveni povrat na ulaganje (orig. *Social return on investment* - SROI) i društveno računovodstvo (orig. *social accounting*). (Bakhshi et al., 2015: 2)

Ciljevi istraživanja i praktičnih implikacija strateškog menadžmenta u području javne kulturne politike, kako navode isti autori, jasno su definirani. Adekvatna evaluacija dobara i usluga u kulturi donosi različite benefite:

1. Omogućava institucijama u kulturi izraziti u kvantitativnim izrazima vrijednost koju kreiraju za društvo koristeći pritom metodologiju najbolje prakse kulturnih politika određenih zemalja.
2. Omogućava donositeljima kulturnih politika donošenje optimalnih odluka o investicijama u kulturu temeljem adekvatne evaluacije.
3. Pitanje ekonomske vrijednosti u kulturi je neodvojivo s dobrobiti i kvalitetom života pojedinca. Stoga klasični ekonomski pokazatelji, kao što su učinak na zapošljavanje, dodana vrijednost i vrijednost izvoza, ovdje nisu dovoljni. (Bakhshi et al., 2015: 2)

Iznimno je važno pratiti utjecaj vrijednosti koju stvara kulturni sektor na pojedince u društvu. S obzirom da se ovdje ne može govoriti o tržišnoj cijeni, a kulturne institucije ne predstavljaju klasično 'mjesto susreta ponude i potražnje', praćenje ovog utjecaja je tim teže.

Rezultat toga je često nedovoljno ili neadekvatno vrednovanje kulturnih benefita i rizika, ali i podcjenjivanje društvene vrijednosti investicija u kulturu. Izazov je, stoga, pažljivo odabrati netržišne koristi kulturnih djelatnosti na način da se uzme u obzir niz vrijednosti koje kultura donosi njenim 'korisnicima' ali i društvu u cjelini. Brojne su zemlje gdje se validacija ekonomskih i društvenih benefita kulturne djelatnosti ne vrši, ili se vrši u nedovoljnoj mjeri, a ne vrše se ni primarna istraživanja, a kada se ona i izvrše, ne uzimaju se kao temelj za donošenje strateških odluka ili se za njih jednostavno ne zna. To dovodi do političkih debata na području kulture koje su "fragmentirane i zanimljivo – neutemeljene na empirijskim dokazima". (Bakhshi et al., 2015: 2) To je i razlog više za istraživanja strateškog menadžmenta u kulturi. Nadalje, premda postoji niz metoda validacije učinaka u kulturnim djelatnostima, one često ne dovode do konsenzusa (Bakhshi et al., 2015: 2).

5. ANALIZA STRATEŠKIH DOKUMENATA U KULTURI

5.1. PRIMJER VELIKE BRITANIJE

Kada je riječ o razvoju publike, metodologiju analize strateških dokumenata koriste, primjerice, Barlow i Shibli (2013) u svom članku Razvoj publike u umjetnosti: Studija slučaja komorne glazbe. Oni svoju analizu započinju pregledom strateškog dokumenta institucije ACE – *Arts Council England*, engleske nacionalne razvojne agencije za kulturu koju definiraju kao 'nezavisno tijelo i produženu ruku vlade' u promociji umjetnosti na teritoriju Engleske i navode kako im je cilj 'dati više umjetnosti za više ljudi na više mjesta'. Autori navode da je jedan od strateških prioriteta Engleske povećati broj korisnika kulturnih sadržaja, na čemu proaktivno rade. Kao jedan od načina za postizanje tog cilja ističu donošenje platforme za razvoj inovativnih modela i ideja za privlačenje i uključivanje stanovništva u kulturna zbivanja. Pritom su u strategiji definirani mjerljivi ciljevi i indikatori. Tako se jedan od strateških ciljeva odnosi na uključivanje stanovnika od 16+ godina u sportska i kulturna zbivanja, a kao indikatore (odnosilo se na strategiju 2005.-2008.) vezane, primjerice, uz razvoj publike u glazbenim događanjima navode: Povećati broj ljudi uključenih u umjetničke aktivnosti najmanje dvaput godišnje za 2% i povećati broj posjetitelja umjetničkih evenata najmanje dvaput godišnje za 2%. Pritom upozoravaju na nisku posjećenost evenata (samo 32,8% ispitanika posjetilo je dva li više različitih umjetničkih evenata u posljednjih dvanaest mjeseci). Autori međutim upozoravaju da, unatoč financiranim projektima i drugim poduzetim mjerama u cilju razvoja publike u posljednjih 20 godina (do 2013. kada je rad pisan), u Engleskoj nije došlo do značajnijeg pomaka, pa ponovno naglašavaju potrebu za ulaganjem dodatnih napora u tom smislu od strane nadležnih javnih organizacija. (Barlow i Shibli, 2013: 2)

Crawford et al. (2014: 1072) također analiziraju problematiku razvoja publike u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu i kao smjernice predlažu: povećanje vrijednosti za novac (u cilju proračunskih ušteda u izdvajanjima za kulturu), povećanje efikasnosti menadžerskih operacija u organizacijama umjetnosti i kulture, poboljšanje korisničkog iskustva publike, te povećanje broja i stupnja angažmana publike. Ujedno istražuju korištenje društvenih mreža i konstatiraju da ovaj model može donijeti djelomične uspjehe, ali i da treba tragati i za novim modelima.

5.2. STRATEŠKI PRISTUP RAZVOJU PUBLIKE U KULTURNOJ POLITICI EUROPSKE UNIJE

U Europskoj uniji se zanimanje za koncept razvoja publike pojavilo kao odgovor na nastali problem značajnog pada broja publike u kulturnom sektoru širom Europe. Nakon velikog povećanja broja posjetitelja i različitosti skupina koje posjećuju kulturna događanja, ostvarenog od 1950.-ih do 1980.-ih godina, uočena je stagnacija, a potom i konstantno opadanje sudjelovanja publike u kulturnim događanjima od 1980.-ih do 1990.-ih.

"Nagli skokovi krivulje na dijagramu znanstvenicima su uvijek pokazatelj da postoje nekakve anomalije u sustavu, pa je problem uočen i imenovan." (Lukić, 2017). Naime, u siječnju 2017. Europska komisija objavila je dokument 'Studija o razvoju publike. Kako postaviti publiku u središte kulturnih organizacija'. Studija je imala za cilj iznaći uspješne pristupe i metode u području razvoja publike te ponuditi kulturnim liderima podršku u provedbi tranzicije prema snažnijoj usmjerenosti na publiku. Studija je detektirala ključne probleme, stanje i perspektive koncepta razvoja publike na europskoj kulturnoj sceni.

Da Milano (2022: 38) se također zalaže za razvoj publike i navodi: "Podaci pokazuju da je kulturno sudjelovanje (u EU, op. aut.) još uvijek prilično ograničeno na 'dežurne krivce' – ljude s vrlo čvrstom kulturnom, ekonomskom i društvenom pozadinom. I tu se javlja kratki spoj: divna načela, model prakse koji postavlja ljude u središte odnosa kulturnih organizacija i aktivnosti naspram činjenice da je kulturno sudjelovanje još uvijek ograničeno na uži dio populacije (i to se ne događa samo na temelju potpuno prihvatljivih i respektabilnih osobnih izbora već i zbog ekonomskih, fizičkih, društvenih i kulturnih prepreka...). Kultura i umjetnost moraju odjeknuti u širem dijelu društva da bi ih se smatralo važnima i suvremenima. Kao posljedica toga, zajedničko stvaranje i suradnja postali su novi jezik kulturnog sektora. Institucije postaju poroznije – djeluju unutar i izvan svojih zidova, misija i tradicija. Smislena razmjena s publikom, u kombinaciji s holističkim shvaćanjem položaja kulture u društvu, iz temelja mijenja diskurs kulture i njezine potpore.”.

5.3. HRVATSKA: PROJEKTI RAZVOJA PUBLIKE U RH FINANCIRANI OD STRANE MINISTARSTVA KULTURE I MEDIJA RH

Ministarstvo kulture i medija RH objavilo je na svojim službenim web stranicama dokument Javni poziv za predlaganje programa koji potiču razvoj publike u kulturi u Republici Hrvatskoj za 2023. godinu, u kojemu se navodi: “Pod pojmom ‘razvoja publike’ podrazumijevaju se aktivnosti koje se poduzimaju da bi se, dodatnom potporom, poticalo sudjelovanje u kulturi i umjetnosti, ispunile potrebe i interesi postojeće publike te stvorila nova publika. … Predloženi programi mogu se odnositi na sva područja kulture i umjetnosti: izvedbene i vizualne umjetnosti, književnost, kulturnu baštinu i film te programe međunarodne kulturne suradnje. Posebna će se pozornost posvećivati interdisciplinarnim programima koji nastoje povezati kulturu i umjetnost s drugim područjima društvenog djelovanja.” (https://min-kulture.gov.hr).

Na Javni poziv za dodjelu potpora programima koji potiču razvoj publike u kulturi u Republici Hrvatskoj za 2022. godinu prispjelo je 555 prijava, od kojih je odobreno 93 programa (kazalište: 15 programa, film: 13 programa, ples: 11 programa, knjiga: 12 programa, glazba: 13 programa, vizualna: 9 programa, muzeji i kulturna baština: 8 programa, te interdisciplinarni programi: 12 programa). Pri ocjenjivanju programa vodilo se računa o kvaliteti, izvornosti i inovativnosti predloženog programa, promicanju interkulturnog dijaloga, stručnoj utemeljenosti i ekonomičnosti. Ministarstvo kulture i medija osiguralo je ukupno 2.177.484,56 kuna za provedbu programa razvoja publike u kulturi u Republici Hrvatskoj u 2022. godini (https://min-kulture.gov.hr).

6. STRATEŠKI PRISTUP RAZVOJU PUBLIKE U KULTURNIM USTANOVAMA - MIKROPRISTUP

Sektor kulture i umjetnosti u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu suočava se sa smanjenim proračunskim davanjima, pa je povećan naglasak na vrijednosti za novac, učinkovitost i operacije, poboljšanje iskustva publike i povećanje broja i angažmana publike, navode Barlow i Shibli (2013). Situacija je slična i u drugim zemljama, no međutim pitanje smanjenja proračunskih davanja za kulturu, kao jedini okidač za veću inovativnost, banalizira problematiku šire društvene uloge kulturnih organizacija. Mercer (2008) naglašava važnost učinkovite kulturne politike i 'umijeća upravljanja' u kulturi u širem društvenom kontekstu. U recenziji knjige 'Menadžment umjetnosti u turbulentnim vremenima' naglašava važnost učinkovitog menadžmenta u kulturi i sagledava kulturnu politiku i upravljanje u organizacijama u kulturi u kontekstu izgradnje snažnog civilnog društva i novih oblika građanske inicijative i identiteta koji su, kako navodi, "preduvjet stvaranja uravnoteženih i održivih, inkluzivnih i raznolikih demokracija".

Kada je riječ o funkcijskom aspektu upravljanja u ustanovama u kulturi, Antolović (2009) navodi da, pored temeljnih menadžerskih funkcija – planiranje, organiziranje, upravljanje ljudskim potencijalima, vođenje i kontrola, postoje i posebne – specifične funkcije menadžmenta u kulturi:

1. Doprinos kulturi, kojega definira kao nastojanje "da se ostvari kulturni pomak koji će svojim sadržajem publici dati 'novi doživljaj". Autor navodi da se ova funkcija ispunjava kroz kontinuirani rad i stvaralaštvo, a kao vrednovanje doprinosa ove funkcije navodi kritike, stavove publike ili pak "nagrade koje ga javno vrednuju".
2. Poticanje kreativnosti i stvaralaštva. Umjetnička kreativnost je temeljni princip djelovanja u kulturi i ostvaruje osnovnu funkciju kulturnih djelatnosti – umjetnički doprinos društvu.
3. Odnos prema javnosti (publici), pri čemu publiku postavlja u središnje mjesto djelovanja ustanova u kulturi, odnosno, kako je autor naziva, 'kulturne akcije'.
4. Obrazovni karakter, pri čemu, kako navodi, "upravo u (toj) interakciji između djela i publike ostvaruje (se) edukativan proces koji obilježava programe i projekte u kulturi".

U spomenutoj knjizi, Dragojević i Dragićević Šešić (2008: 85-206) analiziraju smjernice za inovativno strateško upravljanje ustanovama u kulturi, koje nazivaju Razvojne filozofije organizacija u kulturi, kako slijedi:

- Organizacija koja stvara i otkriva
- Organizacija koja djeluje
- Organizacija koja uči
- Organizacija koja kreira znanje
- Poduzetnička organizacija

- Organizacija koja stvara trendove
- Organizacija koja zarađuje.

Svaki se od ovih pristupa i filozofija može konceptualno povezati s razvojem publike.

Mišković također naglašava važnost inovativnog upravljačkog pristupa u kulturnim organizacijama navodeći: “Karakteristike područja inovativnih umjetničkih i kulturnih praksi moguće je podijeliti u tri skupine: relacijsku, metodološku i organizacijsku.” (Mišković, 2008: 210), Autor također ističe da je u inovativnim modelima upravljanja ključna uloga novih medija: “Nove digitalne tehnologije i internet promijenili su oblike produkcije, distribucije i konzumacije kulturnih proizvoda, kao i odnos prema društvenom kontekstu i horizontu očekivanja od kulturnog rada i proizvoda. Ova se promjena u Hrvatskoj očitovala kroz nove oblike umjetničkog stvaralaštva i organizacije kulturnih programa koji umjesto stvaranja imaginarnih svjetova stvaraju prostore komunikacije o zbiljskim fenomenima i procesima. Ključna karakteristika postaje aktivan odnos prema socijalnom kontekstu.” (Mišković, 2008: 210).

7. STUDIJE SLUČAJA

Za razvoj glazbene i scenske publike mora postojati poliptih: djelo – umjetnik (autor) – izvođač – publika. Sa sociološkog stajališta, prisutnost publike važan je element za razvoj umjetnosti. Makar pljeskanjem ili pokretima (gibanjem) daje se do znanja da je publika aktivna. Već obična prisutnost ili odsutnost publike, povoljna ili nepovoljna reakcija, vrši određeni utjecaj na umjetnost i kulturnu scenu. Naime, “pojava koncerta (kao oblika muzičkog života) nalazi sociološko razjašnjenje također u vezi s publikom. Koncert je doveo do sužavanja publike, ali publika je također uvjetovala njegovu egzistenciju i razvitak: intimna muzika /.../ bila je predmet divljenja naobraženih krugova.” (Supičić, 1964: 46). Osim prihvaćanja ili odbacivanja djela, publika potiče stvaranje i širenje umjetničkih djela na izvođenja i interpretacije. (Supičić, 1964) Stoga se u nastavku opisuju dvije studije slučaja kao dobri primjeri strateškog razvoja publike od kojih se prva odnosi na program EU, a drugi na nezavisnu kulturnu scenu.

Primjer 1: Kreativna Europa i sudjelovanje Hrvatske

Program Kreativna Europa program je Europske unije koji kao jedan od prioriteta ima razvoj publike, a kao europski mehanizam potpore za kulturne i kreativne industrije započeo je 2014. godine. Republika

Hrvatska je kroz sudjelovanje u ovom programu ostvarila višestruke koristi: zabilježen je porast broja korisnika potpore, proglašena je hrvatska Europska prijestolnica kulture, a hrvatski su laureati osvojili niz priznanja i nagrada u pojedinim istaknutim područjima, kako ističu u objavljenoj publikaciji o hrvatskim iskustvima u programu. Pri tom se naglašava i da je, sudjelovanjem u programu, hrvatski kulturni i kreativni sektor osnažen, posebno kroz poticanje otvorenosti, dijaloga, partnerstva i umrežavanja na međunarodnoj razini, ali je također uočeno i njegovo "koncentrično širenje na lokalnu zajednicu, odnosno geografska područja izvan velikih urbanih centara". (https://deskkultura.hr/publications/kreativna_europa_kultura_2014_2020_hrvatska_iskustva.pdf).

Marketinški gledano, razvoj publike ogleda se u predstavljanju nacionalnog (umjetničkog) proizvoda koji će se konzumirati i izvan nacionalnih granica, odnosno privući međunacionalnu suradnju u kreiranju novog. Pritom se koristi interaktivna komunikacija s publikom i nove tehnologije. Primjerice, kroz projekt Performing the Museum, "u svakom partnerskom (međunarodnom) muzeju nastojalo se uspostaviti aktivan dijalog s publikom kroz niz prezentacija, namjenskih produkcija, edukativnih radionica te predstavljanja umjetničkih istraživanja u javnosti. Namjera je bila među korisnicima i širom publikom te svima zaposlenima osvijestiti institucionalne resurse koji izlaze izvan uobičajenih okvira muzejskih zbirki, stalnog postava i muzejskih izložbi. Najvažnije aktivnosti bile su vezane uz aktivno uključivanje publike u muzejske procese." (https://deskkultura.hr/publications/kreativna_europa_kultura_2014_2020_hrvatska_iskustva.pdf, 36). Za stvaranje ili razvoj publike, u ovom se slučaju uspostavio poliptih: zbirka/postav/izložba – umjetnik (autor) – muzejski proces – publika.

Nadalje, primjerice, u Programu Kreativna Europa, projekt Aesthetic Education Expanded se bavio estetičkim odgojem koji "umjetnost i kulturu stavlja na produktivnu distancu od ostalih sfera društva te ulazi u dijalog s njima. Opći ciljevi projekta potaknuli su transnacionalnu raspravu o važnosti kulture i umjetnosti u suvremenom društvu, pri čemu su bili određeni osnovni smjerovi djelovanja: razviti kritičko promišljanje utjecaja šireg društveno-političkog konteksta na emancipacijski potencijal umjetnosti i kulture te njihov povratni utjecaj na sam društveno-politički kontekst, kritički preispitati važnost autonomije umjetničke proizvodnje za umjetničku inovaciju i kreativnost, omogućiti dijalog između umjetnika i publike novim načinima diseminacije, te interakcije i participacije." (https://deskkultura.hr/publications/kreativna_europa_kultura_2014_2020_hrvatska_iskustva.pdf, 49-50).

Razvoj publike ogleda se kroz razvoj estetskog i kritičkog mišljenja do razvoja umjetničkog proizvoda, te samu konverzaciju umjetnika i publike putem djela i ambijenta u kojem je umjetnički proizvod postavljen.

Primjer 2. Kulturpunkt

Nezavisni portal Kulturpunkt.hr je projekt kojega provodi udruga Kurziv – Platforma za pitanja kulture, medija i društva. Kako navode na svojoj web stranici, "Kurziv je platforma koja intervenira u hrvatski medijski prostor prateći nezavisnu i suvremenu umjetničku i kulturnu produkciju, aktivističke prakse građanskih inicijativa, ali i šire polje kulture, svakodnevnog života, politike, društva i sl. ... Postavljajući informacijski te analitički, kritički i teorijski okvir, Kurziv razmatra veze između kulturnih i umjetničkih praksi s onim političkim, društvenim, medijskim i ekonomskim.", navodi se na portalu. Svojom su misijom definirali razvoj kritičkog i analitičkog diskursa u javnosti kroz koji žele promicati kulturu, medije i obrazovanje kao, kako navode "ključne faktore ravnopravnog društva, želeći time učvrstiti pozicije organiziranog civilnog društva u području kulture". Platforma Kurziv svoju misiju ostvaruje kroz edukacijski, dokumentacijski, diskurzivni i nakladnički program te druge oblike javnog djelovanja, a namjera im je "proizvesti promjene u širem kulturnom, društvenom, medijskom i političkom prostoru" (https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/node/29).

Motivacija ovakvog pristupa poticanju razvoja publike jest društvena, jer izvire iz potreba i koncepcija koje vladaju u današnjem društvenom okviru, a proizlaze iz društveno-povijesne uvjetovanosti, ali jest i estetska motivacija "jer svjedoči u kojem pravcu se kreću i razvijaju estetske ocjene i ukus prema pojedinim društvima i društvenim skupinama" (Supičić, 1964: 53-54).

8. RAZVOJ PUBLIKE – MARKETINŠKI PRISTUP - PREGLED ISTRAŽIVANJA

Slijedi pregled rezultata odabranih istraživanja područja razvoja publike, u cilju razumijevanja marketinškog aspekta upravljanja kulturnim institucijama.

Studija 1. Primjer klasične glazbe – posjećenost koncerata

Vercammen (2017) je za potrebe svoje disertacije na temu razvoja publike – mladih ljudi za posjet koncertima klasične glazbe u Nizozemskoj izvršio primarno istraživanje.

Rezultati su pokazali sljedeće:

Što se tiče uzorka, preuzeta je teza Barlow i Shibli (2007) o relevantnosti privlačenja skupine ‹mladih odraslih›, odnosno mlađih od 45 godina, bazirano na činjenici da je 1997. godine više od 80% posjetitelja komorne glazbe sačinjavala publika starija od 45 godina. (Vercammen (2017: 19) Zbog toga je autor istraživanje proveo na uzorku ispitanika od 18 do 44 godine.

Vercammen je odvojeno ispitivao razloge posjeta koncertu, razloge zbog kojega apstinenti ne posjećuju koncert i poželjne karakteristike koncerta. Slijedi pregled odgovora s najvećom zastupljenošću u uzorku:

Razlozi posjeta koncertu (neredoviti i stalni posjetitelji): Glazba privlači; Netko me pozvao da mu se pridružim na koncertu; Netko me savjetovao da idem; Specifičnost orkestra ili ansambla; Privlačnost atmosfere i prezentacijskog formata; Specifičan solist ili dirigent; Zbog koncertne dvorane; Nakon što sam pročitao/la kritiku; Nakon što sam pogledao program eventa; Da se družim s prijateljima.

Razlozi zbog kojih apstinenti ne posjećuju koncerte klasične glazbe: Preferiram drugačije zabavne aktivnosti; Pretpostavljam da će koncert trajati predugo; Nemam dovoljno predznanja (vezano uz koncert); (Ovakva) glazba me ne privlači; Ne znam otkud započeti; Prezentacija (izvedba) je preformalna; Ne poznam nikoga s kime bih otišao/otišla na koncert.

Najčešći odgovori na pitanje Kakav bi koncert trebao biti?: Utjecati na tebe (Uključiti te); Opustiti te; ‘Dotaknuti’ te emocionalno; Odvesti te u drugačiji svijet; Potaknuti te na maštanje; Učiniti da zaboraviš svakodnevne brige; Predstavljati intelektualni izazov; Biti inovativan; Eksperimentirati s glazbenim konvencijama; Ponuditi inovativne izvedbe umjetničkog djela; Sadržavati glazbu koju već poznajem.

Može se zaključiti da je doživljavanje koncerta vrlo osoban događaj, a da su razlozi za neuključivanje mladih ljudi vrlo raznoliki te da je na neke od njih moguće utjecati otvorenijim, kreativnijim i inovativnijim modelima privlačenja publike i same izvedbe djela (ili njenog konteksta). Zanimljivo je istaknuti kako su cijena i repertoar značajni (dodatni) faktori za uključenost mlađih dobnih skupina u koncertnu publiku.

Isti autor je putem intervjua s direktorima i voditeljima marketinga orkestara istraživao stavove članova orkestara o mogućnosti uvođenja inovativnih koncepata. Ove teze mogu biti vrlo korisne za razmatranje daljnjih smjerova upravljanja i strategija kulturnih ustanova, a mogu se sumirati kroz sljedeće:

Članovi orkestara svjesni su potrebe za uvođenjem inovativnih koncepata, pored održavanja onih tradicionalnih. Orkestri su razvili i različite formate za mlađu publiku, kojima kombiniraju kraće koncerte i popularna djela s određenim formama objašnjenja i (neformalnije) govorne prezentacije na pozornici. Drugačiji koncepti uključuju nekonvencionalne programe i izvedbu na neformalnim lokacijama. Ovakvi koncepti su se pokazali uspješnima. Neformalne prezentacije na tradicionalnim koncertima također se smatraju uspješnima, tj. takvima ih ocjenjuju orkestri koji su već iskušali ovakve modele. Unatoč tome, neki orkestri se boje izgubiti svoju aktualnu publiku ukoliko učine tradicionalne koncerte manje formalnima. Među ostale faktore koji utječu na privlačenje mlađe publike ispitanici ubrajaju sljedeće: prepoznatljivost (repertoara ili solista), različite udruge mladih – formalne ili neformalne, niže cijene, suradnja sa stručnjacima iz područja umjetnosti, ali i sljedbenicima (primjerice weblogova) različitih glazbenih udruga i slično, termin održavanja koncerta (mlađi ne dolaze na klasične koncerte tijekom dana), korištenje digitalnih medija, adekvatni dizajn svjetla, organizirani dolazak sa školama i marketinške programske edicije. Zanimljivo je istaknuti da neki orkestri inzistiraju na klasičnim konvencijama i stoga ne dopuštaju inovacije, a samim time i 'zatvaraju' pristup mlađoj publici. Neki ispitanici ukazuju na određenu tenziju između njihovih vlastitih umjetničkih ciljeva i želja publike. No navode i da, kada se 'riskantniji' - eksperimentalni programi konzistentno primjenjuju, to doprinosi privlačenju publike.

Studija 2. Studija Razvoj publike u RH

Pauletta et al. (2022) izvršili su istraživanje koje je imalo za cilj definirati motive posjetitelja za posjet i su-kreaciju kulturnih događanja te istražiti dosege primjene koncepta razvoja publike u Hrvatskoj. Autori zaključuju: "Razvoj publike korisnika nastoji pretvoriti u sudionika, što je ujedno i njegov osnovni cilj, ali načini i metode pomoću kojih je taj proces moguće provesti su ono što razvoj publike pretvara u veliko teorijsko i praktično područje koje ima mnogo kreativnoga prostora za istraživanje i primjenu. Čini se da je mnogim kulturnim organizacijama teorijsko znanje o razvoju publike nedovoljno kako bi kreativno primijenile metode razvoja publike u praksi. Svaka se organizacija razlikuje veličinom, organizacijskom strukturom, raspoloživim resursima te umjetničkim sadržajem, pa u okviru tih mogućnosti treba definirati vlastitu strategiju za razvoj publike" (Pauletta et al., 2022: 110, 111).

Studija 3. Projekt ADESTE+

Studija EU koja istražuje problematiku razvoja publike definirala je tri tipa publike u kulturi: publika po navici, publika po izboru i iznenadna publika.

Autori studije naglašavaju da za kulturne organizacije razvoj različitih publika podrazumijeva razvoj različitih vrsta odnosa. U skladu s time, Da Milano (2022: 36, 37) predlaže sljedeće strateške opcije: **proširivanje** - rast broja postojeće publike i privlačenje publike, **produbljivanje** - produbljivanje i diversifikacija kulturne potrošnje i **diversifikacija** strategije usmjerene na iznenadnu publiku i publiku po izboru čija je vjerojatnost za sudjelovanje u umjetnosti mala ili nepostojeća. Kao značajne faktore pri izboru strategije, navodi sljedeće: "čimbenik mjesta" – ambijent gdje se performansa izvodi (formalni ili neformalni), mediji, posebno digitalni, i izgradnju ljudskih potencijala - osnaživanje osoblja i razvoj njihovih vještina, kompetencija i vodstva, što ističu kao ključni faktor, sudjelovanje publike, inovacije programa - u vidu formata, programa, jezika, teme, lokacije; korištenje podataka i analize, suradnja i partnerstvo. Značajan je i aspekt spremnosti na organizacijske promjene i organizacijsko učenje.

Projekt Europske komisije, nastao u okviru programa Kreativna Europa, naziva Adeste+ - *Audience Development Strategies for Cultural Organisations in Europe* (Strategije razvoja publike za kulturne organizacije u Europi, prijevod aut.) imao je za cilj razvoj publike kroz osmišljavanje novih načina rada s publikom, promjene unutar organizacije, privlačenje nove publike, interakciju i angažiranje postojeće publike, a realiziran je kroz suradnju različitih partnera iz 15 zemalja EU, među kojima je i Hrvatska. Projekt je financiran iz programa Europske unije Kreativna Europa i trajao je od 01.8.2018. do 31.3.2022. (https://hnk-zajc.hr/europski-projekti/adeste/). Glavni cilj projekta bio je "potaknuti organizacijsku transformaciju, ohrabriti i osnažiti organizacije na snažnije usmjeravanje prema publici i poduzimanje potrebnih koraka ka ostvarenju tog cilja" (Mažuran Jurešić i Letinić, 2022: 76).

U publikaciji koja je izdana u sklopu projekta navodi se sljedeće: "Model *Audience development* razvijan s pozicija merkantilističke kulture i anglosaksonskog, britanskog ustroja ekonomski odgovornih ustanova trebalo je približiti francuskom modelu oslonjenom na tradiciju i kulturu sudjelovanja i aktivnosti uključivanja, modelu koji je bliži zapadnoeuropskim kontinentalnim ustrojima subvencioniranih i društveno odgovornih ustanova."...(Projekt je uključivao) "nužnu promjenu paradigme institucionalnog promišljanja publike, što je dovelo do osvještavanja potrebe za bitnom promjenom institucionalnog ponašanja u odnosu na publike" (Lukić, 2022: 151). Navedeno iziskuje nužne organizacijske prilagodbe i promjene.

Hrvatska iskustva na projektu sumirana su kroz sljedeće teze: "Iskustvo organizacijske transformacije započinje promjenom paradigme i prihvaćanja novog načina mišljenja o publikama. Taj novi način osvještava manjkavost ustaljenih, okoštalih, tradicionalnih pristupa publikama. Brojevi (gledatelja, prodanih ulaznica) više nisu presudni u procesu. /…/ Zastupa se marketinški pristup, komunikacija, edukacija, posredovanje i animiranje, te korištenje novih tehnologija. Marketinški pristup odnosi se na segmentaciju i diverzifikaciju publike te jačanje vlastitog, sudioničkog i suradničkog potencijala i profiliranja publike, dok je s menadžerskog aspekta došlo do promjene organizacijske kulture, postavljanja publike u središte organizacijskog djelovanja, povećanja fleksibilnosti organizacije, plićih organizacijskih struktura, mrežne organizacije i osnivanja timova za razvoj publika./…/ Došlo (je) do personaliziranja apstraktnog pojma gledatelja i otvaranja prostora empatije prema konkretnim i jasno prepoznatim tipovima publike definirane kao 'naša publika'." (Lukić, 2022: 151, 152). Lukić u istom članku ističe i da su statistički podaci o posjećenosti događanja zamijenjeni novim pojmovima kao što su: osobnosti publika, njihove potrebe i vrijednosti, njihovi modeli ponašanja, kao i mogućnost da kroz sudioničke procese kvaliteta postupno prijeđe u kvalitetu.

Kroz projekt su potaknute organizacijske promjene i razvijen model ACED - *Audience Centred Experience Design* - Dizajn iskustva koji u ishodište postavlja publiku, a koji je utemeljen na pristupu poznatom kao *design thinking*. Lukić iskustva na projektu opisuje ovako: "…projekt razvoja publike (je) multidisciplinaran, transdisciplinaran i intersektorski posao koji mijenja ponašanje ustanove, ali i ponašanje okruženja, čime mijenja i kulturne strategije i politike. Razumijevanje novog koncepta značilo je osvještavanje da je transformacije potrebno istovremeno provesti unutar organizacije na kuratorskoj, menadžerskoj, produkcijskoj, marketinškoj, komunikacijskoj, estetskoj, programskoj, kadrovskoj, financijskoj i tehnološkoj razini, ali da je za sve to kao preduvjet potrebno ustrajavanje na edukacijskoj komponenti i stalnom jačanju kapaciteta organizacije i svih njezinih članova. Unutar organizacija stvoreni su krosfunkcijski timovi za primjenu modela razvoja publike i takva je timska organizacija integrirana u postojeću organizaciju. …Hrvatski partneri na projektu su kao jedan od najvećih izazova naveli uspostavljanje balansa između dvaju bitno različitih modela – potreba fleksibilnije transformacije malih fleksibilnih organizacija u kulturi i s druge strane velikih, jasno strukturiranih ali i donekle okoštalih institucija." (Lukić, 2022: 152, 153).

Studija 4. Zainteresiranost za slušanje autohtonih skladatelja

Tijekom 2008. i 2009., za potrebe izrade doktorske disertacije, Gortan-Carlin (2011) je provela primarno istraživanje pomoću anketiranja, s ciljem ispitivanja stavova publike o klasičnoj glazbi istarskih skladatelja, kojom su bila obuhvaćena istarska priobalna mjesta. Anketiran je auditorij ozbiljne, klasične glazbe te smotre s tradicijskom glazbom, odnosno umjetničkom glazbom koja je proizašla iz tradicijskih elemenata (event 'Naš kanat je lip'). Anketirano je 488 glazbenih recipijenata - 199 hrvatskih građana, od toga 161 iz Istre, te 289 inozemnih gostiju. Istraživanje je pokazalo da percipijenti žele na koncertima slušati veći broj skladbi istarskih (autohtonih) skladatelja. Istraživanje korelacije između stilske preferencije i želje za poznavanjem istarske glazbe kazuje da glazbeni percipijenti koji su odgovorili da bi rado slušali veći broj istarskih skladatelja (77%), a time i istarske glazbe, preferira klasičnu (80%), zabavnu glazbu (49%), zatim tradicijsku glazbu (27%). Izraz "istarski skladatelj" većina percipijenata nije čula i ne poznaju istarske skladatelje. Oni koji su izraz čuli, povezuju ga s: autohtonim, baštinom, duhovnošću, istarskom motivikom, izvodilaštvom, multikulturalnošću, načinom skladanja, okruženjem, mjestom djelovanja, porijeklom, identitetom, promotorstvom, univerzalnošću i glazbenim žanrom. Dvije trećine ispitanika smatra da bi promocija glazbe istarskih skladatelja mogla biti dodatni motiv za privlačenje turista u Istru. Oni bi, nadalje, rado naučili plesati istarske plesove, pjevati istarske pjesme i svirali istarske instrumente. Više od polovice ispitanika smatra da bi državne, regionalne i lokalne institucije trebale pomoći u promociji istarske glazbe putem: marketinga, promidžbe, financiranja, stipendijama skladateljima i izvođačima, uključivanjem u različite projekte, edukacijom, poticanjem publike i boljom kadrovskom ekipiranošću. Ovim je istraživanjem dokazana zainteresiranost domicilnog stanovništva i turističkih posjetitelja za posjet glazbenim događanjima, ali i sudjelovanjem u različitim aktivnostima vezanima uz glazbu, kao što su učenje sviranja autohtonih instrumenata, učenje authohtonih plesova, i slično.

Studija 5. Pula: Novi ambijenti (Cave Romane, Malo rimsko kazalište)

U najstarijem istarskom kamenolomu smještenom kraj Vinkurana se od 2017. godine održavaju koncerti, kazališne predstave, filmske projekcije, te razna druga događanja. Kao suorganizator tih evenata, Općina Medulin time nudi, kako navode, 'novu dimenziju glazbe, akustike i uživanja u koncertima na otvorenom' (https://medulin.hr/rocks-stars-festival-2023-caveromane-jedinstven-spoj-zabave-kulture/). U najavi za kulturni program za 2023. godinu, na web stranici navode: "Čak i oni koji nisu čuli za Cave Romane priznaju da već i sam naziv intrigira, a oni koji su bili njegovim dijelom, doživljaj opisuju riječima: spektakularno, jedinstveno, posebno

/... / pred više od 15.000 ljudi u 5 dana na pozornicu će stati 5 velikih glazbenih imena." (https://medulin.hr/rocks-stars-festival-2023-caveromane-jedinstven-spoj-zabave-kulture/).

U Puli je već godinama Arena pozornica velikim glazbenim i glazbeno-scenskim spektaklima. No, ove je godine, 5. svibnja 2023. godine, otvoreno rekonstruirano Malo rimsko kazalište. Ono je najvjerojatnije bilo izgrađeno u 1. stoljeću na istočnoj padini pulskog brežuljka, podno starog Castruma, i bilo je mjesto umjetnosti, kazališta i glazbe. Darko Komšo, ravnatelj Arheološkog muzeja Istre, odgovoran za izrađeni projekt, navodi: "Kao zajednica imamo obvezu zaštititi bogato kulturno naslijeđe te istovremeno promišljati načine kako da tu vrijednu kulturnu baštinu integriramo u suvremeno tkivo grada kako bi ona kvalitetno služila današnjim potrebama u kulturi, a javnost dobila mogućnost uživanja u prostoru jedinstvene spomeničke vrijednosti, ugođaja i akustičke kvalitete" (Plovanić, 2023). Malo rimsko kazalište danas može primiti oko 1.250 posjetitelja te će, kako navodi Plovanić (2023), "kao i nekad u antičko doba, biti medij za susrete publike i umjetnika, različitih izvođača scenske umjetnosti i publike, a samim time je i koncertna branša dobila jedan vrlo atraktivan ljetni prostor koji će, prema najavama, biti prostor za organizaciju vrhunskih koncerata manjeg kapaciteta, nešto kao što trenutno radi Tvrđava Sv. Mihovila u Šibeniku, koja se etablirala kao vrhunski ljetni koncertni prostor."

9. REZULTATI ISTRAŽIVANJA – VLASTITI MODEL AUTORA

Temeljem izvršene analize ključnih aspekata i teoretskog i praktičnog dosega znanja i implementacije koncepta razvoja publike, autorice donose vlastiti upravljački model za strateški razvoj publike u organizacijama u kulturi, koji se označava akronimom AMIKKA model.

Tablica 1.: AMIKKA - Upravljački model za strateški razvoj organizacija u kulturi kroz koncept razvoja publike

Princip – element modela	Opis elemenata modela
AMBIJENT	Ambijent – formalni i neformalni (novi ambijenti, neočekivane lokacije) izvođenja kulturne performanse, povijesni ambijenti
MEDIJI	Upotreba novih – digitalnih medija, pored klasičnih
INTERAKCIJA S PUBLIKOM	Interakcija s publikom, uključivanje publike, novi programski formati uključivanja publike ili približavanja publici
KOMPETENCIJE	Kompetencije organizacije, zaposlenika, suradničke mreže
KONTEKST	Socijalni kontekst, zajednica u kojemu kulturna organizacija djeluje, autohtonost ponude
ANGAŽIRANOST	Socijalni angažman, društvena odgovornost, inkluzivnost

Izvor: Izrada autora temeljem dubinske analize koncepta razvoja publike i strateških dokumenata

Tablica 1. prikazuje spomenuti model. Kao glavni instrument, treba koristiti Piramidu publike (Dragojević i Dragićević Šešić, 2008) kojom će se, hijerarhijskim modelom, moći fokusirati ciljne skupine publike i razvijati AMIKKA pristup i marketing-miks za svaku ciljanu skupinu. Treba birati hibridne razvojne strategije koji će razlikovati pristup i marketinšku strategiju za tradicionalnu i za 'novu' publiku, sukladno postavljenim strateškim ciljevima. Treba međutim naglasiti da razvoj publike ne bi smio biti izlika za pretjerano dodvoravanje publici ili proizvodnju kiča u kulturi, već se treba držati visokih kriterija struke u kreiranju kulturnih sadržaja i programa, a inovativni modeli trebaju biti usmjereni na kreiranje inovacija u odnosu, komunikaciji, medijima i marketinškom pristupu. Donekle su moguće i inovacije tradicionalnih kulturnih performansi, no prema visokim standardima struke.

10.ZAKLJUČAK

Razvoj publike iziskuje duboke transformacije i organizacijske promjene u kulturnim organizacijama. Europska unija zalaže se za veće uključivanje građana u kulturu, a razvoj publike jedan je od vodećih koncepata u kulturnom djelovanju, kako na razini EU i pojedinih država i vlada, tako i na mikrorazini – unutar pojedinih zajednica i njihovih institucija. Riječ je o otvaranju komunikacijskog toka između građana i kulturnih organizacija, kanala koji su često bili nepostojeći ili neefikasni, ili ih je koristio samo jedan uski dio 'elite', tek dijela građana zainteresiranih za kulturu. Brojne društvene skupine u kulturi su na marginama – djeca i mladi, građani slabije kupovne moći, starije osobe, osobe s invaliditetom i drugi. Aktivno integriranje građana u kulturni sustav jedan je od vodećih čimbenika inkluzivnosti društva, njegove demokratizacije i jačanja nacionalnog identiteta.

Međutim, studije koje je financirala EU navode da je većina organizacija u kulturi u Europskoj uniji još uvijek daleko od prave implementacije strateške vizije koja se temelji na razvoju publike. Kao razlozi za to navode se prvenstveno skepticizam, nedostatak vremena, resursa i aktivnog sudjelovanja ravnatelja nekih kulturnih institucija. Kao ključni problem ističe se nedostatak kontinuiteta. S druge strane, razvoju publike ne može se i ne smije pristupiti samo s aspekta komodifikacije kulturnih programa. Ovo je pitanje dublje i iziskuje multidisciplinarni pristup i šira područja istraživanja.

Nadnacionalne razine, primjerice EU, ali i pojedine vlade, uočavaju ovaj problem i uvrštavaju razvoj publike u svoje strateške planove, u što se aktivno uključila i Hrvatska. No svakako treba ići i korak dalje i djelovati u pravcu dobivanja dubljeg uvida i boljeg razumijevanja koncepta korisničkog iskustva u kulturi. Analiza prikazana u ovom radu pokazala je da istraživačko područje ekonomije iskustva još uvijek nije do kraja konceptualizirano, kako u profitnom sektoru (s većim istraživačkim jazom kod usluga u odnosu na proizvode), tako i u neprofitnom sektoru, posebice u kulturi gdje postoje fragmentirana istraživanja, dok ona sveobuhvatna izostaju.

Marketinški pristup u upravljanju u ustanovama u kulturi donosi nove izazove. Prije svega, različiti autori su suglasni da razvoju publike, kao jednom od najznačajnijih postulata djelovanja ustanova u kulturi, treba pristupiti holistički, što znači da se razvoj publike ne treba sagledavati samo s ekonomskog aspekta, ili s aspekta poboljšanja korisničkog iskustva u užem smislu, već kulturu treba sagledavati kao društvenu investiciju, s obzirom na njene značajne socijalne, odgojne i obrazovne učinke. 'Kulturni proizvod' predstavlja stoga svojevrsni specifikum, pa ga treba sagledavati u nešto drugačijem kontekstu nego što je to klasični element marketing miksa u marketinškoj znanstvenoj disciplini. U tom smislu, ovaj rad predstavlja korak dalje u definiranju konceptualnog okvira 'upravljanja proizvodom' te razvojem odnosa s publikom u ustanovama u kulturi. Doprinos tome ogleda se u predloženom upravljačko-marketinškom modelu autorica AMMIKA, kojeg autorice iznose u ovom radu. Model obuhvaća ključne elemente koji se trebaju primijeniti kada je u pitanju implementacija koncepta razvoja publike na strateško upravljanje i marketinški pristup u ustanovama u kulturi: ambijent, mediji, interakcija s publikom, kontekst, kompetencije zaposlenika, angažiranost. Ovakav je pristup od velike važnosti u eri uspješnosti novih poslovnih modela koji su daleko od tradicionalnih (primjerice Netflix), kada je iznimno velik izazov privući u kulturne ustanove novu publiku, posebno mlade ljude. To ostaje trajan ključni zadatak na svim razinama, u stalnom traganju za odgovorom na pitanje "Tko je 'naša publika?", parafrazirajući Lukićevu (2022) tezu.

Kada je pak riječ o korisničkom iskustvu u kulturi, to pitanje će vjerojatno ostati djelomično zauvijek neotkriveno. Jer, u konačnici, postavlja se pitanje koji je sam smisao umjetnosti za pojedinca. Odgovor se možda može pronaći u promišljanjima o odgoju za kulturu: "Umjetnost pomaže djeci da nauče izreći i ono što se ne može izraziti." (Eisner, 2002, cit. u: Brđanović, 2013: 96). U konačnici, smisao same kulture i umjetnosti je da služe razvoju čovječnijih, toplijih, produhovljenijih i srdačnijih ljudskih individua koje će graditi mirnije, dostojanstvenije, održivije i sretnije ljudsko društvo.

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TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: ATTITUDES, BARRIERS, AND PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand how young people in the Republic of Croatia view environmental issues, this research aims to look at students' attitudes toward sustainable development, pinpoint barriers to sustainable consumption, and provide information on how students relate to those issues. In order to examine potential attitude variations between different groups, the respondents were students from various demographic backgrounds. Research was conducted using an online questionnaire divided into three groups of questions based on related topics (consumption patterns and sustainable consumption, environmental awareness and barriers to sustainable consumption). The main findings of the study show that there is a desire for change among students, and it is seen that the majority of respondents incorporate certain micro-actions aimed at sustainable consumption into their daily behaviour. It was also demonstrated that the students lacked appropriate knowledge of the subject at hand. The cost of green products, a lack of awareness of a sustainable lifestyle, and the belief that one person cannot sufficiently contribute to the preservation of the environment as an individual, are the key barriers to sustainable consumption.

This study offers valuable insights into the motivations and obstacles influencing students' decisions to purchase environmentally friendly products. Moreover, it provides valuable information for both for-profit and nonprofit organisations seeking to remove barriers to sustainable consumption and inspire students to adopt more eco-conscious habits.

Key words: sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable consumption, green products

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' "World Population Prospects 2022" report states that the world population is expected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050 (UN, 2022). Population growth leads to an increase in global consumption and consequently puts greater pressure on the environment. Water scarcity, industrial pollution, climate change, and global warming are just some examples of environmental degradation that cause concern. In a world with limited natural resources, there is a need for sustainable consumption and sustainable products (Gurtner and Soyez, 2016, Pujari, 2006, Banerjee et al., 2003).

Biodiversity is decreasing, and terrestrial ecosystems are degrading at an alarming rate. Worldwide, one million plastic bottles are purchased every minute, and five trillion single-use plastic bags are discarded each year (UN, 2021). Climate change is already impacting health in multiple ways, causing death and diseases due to more frequent extreme weather events, increased disease burden, and mental health issues (WHO, 2021). Therefore, the ecological problems created by humans can trigger social and economic conflicts with catastrophic consequences for present and future generations (Buunk et al., 2008).

To avoid crises, creating a plan that achieves sustainable development and provides a foundation for life on Earth for future generations, is essential. One of the steps in this plan is to promote the acceptance of sustainable products among consumers (Edbring et al., 2016, Mugge et al., 2017).

Given the significance of sustainable consumption in shaping a sustainable future, understanding how young people perceive and engage with sustainability, becomes paramount. As the leaders of tomorrow, the views and actions of young people regarding sustainable consumption hold great importance. This study seeks to explore the attitudes and practices of sustainable consumption among Croatian students, aiming to identify potential barriers and facilitating factors influencing their decisions. By gaining insights into the perspectives of this vital demographic, this research contributes to the broader efforts towards fostering a culture of sustainability and responsible consumption.

2. SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Sustainable consumption

The first official conference on sustainability was held by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, in 1987. It defined the first and most well-known definition of sustainable development in its report "Our Common Future" (WCED, 1987). Sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

In a symposium held in Oslo in 1994, a specific definition of sustainable consumption was proposed as "sustainable production and consumption involve the use of products and services that meet basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials, waste, and pollutants throughout their life cycle, so as not to compromise the needs of future generations" (Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, 1994).

A scholarly and scientific literature review indicates a wide range of approaches to understanding sustainable consumption. According to Montu and Plepys (2008), the term is most commonly used as a general concept to describe concerns related to resource consumption, waste reduction, quality of life, equitable distribution of resources, meeting human needs, etc. Belz and Bilharz (2005) differentiate between sustainable consumption in a narrow and broad sense. In the narrow sense, sustainable consumption refers to consumption patterns that are generalised within and between members of a particular generational group. In the broader sense, sustainable consumption encompasses consumer activities aimed at reducing ecological and social problems associated with standard production and consumption, but is not necessarily generalised within and between members of a particular generational group (Belz and Bilharz, 2005, as cited in Hanss, 2012).

Jackson (2014) goes further and argues that there is no consensus on whether sustainable consumption entails overall reduced consumption or a change in consumption patterns without the need for reduced frequency of consumption. Thus, sustainable consumption challenges the prevailing consumption ideology in the most developed countries, in the so-called "Western society," and its environmental implications for the Earth (Connolly and Prothero, 2003). While technological advancements greatly contribute to sustainable consumption, it does not mean that consumers can relax, but rather that they, too, positively influence the achievement of that goal through behavioural changes (Jackson, 2014).

Different approaches exist to understanding sustainable consumption. Manoochehri (2002) considers sustainable consumption as a strategic approach to environmental and developmental issues. Dawkins et al. (2019) approach sustainable consumption through the prism of local government outcomes in achieving sustainable consumption. Banbury et al. (2012) through introspection of individual consumption, while Hume (2010) examines various variables that influence the understanding of the multidimensionality of sustainable consumption among young consumers, emphasising the importance of understanding all dimensions of consumption to fully grasp its nature. Dolan (2022) argues that, to enable sustainable consumption, it is important to understand the cultural context of consumption, as contemporary consumption can only be reasonable or justifiable within the cultural environment in which the consumer is situated. Sheoran and Kumar (2022) emphasise that sustainable consumption requires a change in lifestyles and is therefore closely linked to personal values and the social environment in which individuals live; the influence of social groups, market forces, and the availability of competitively priced products also play a role in how products are used.

In this study, the broader definition of sustainable consumption according to Belz and Bilharz was used, and products that align with this definition are referred to as sustainable products in the following text.

When it comes to sustainable consumption, it is necessary to define the term *green product*. Tanner and Wölfing Kast define a green product as a product with several characteristics that have a social and environmental impact - locally produced, organically grown, seasonal, fresh, without unnecessary or harmful packaging, and created through quality trade (Tanner and Wölfing Kast, 2003). Durif et al. (2010) consider a product to be green if its design and/or attributes (production, strategy) utilise recyclable resources and if the product improves environmental impact or reduces toxicity throughout its entire life cycle.

In the context of green product marketing (green marketing), promoting and developing consumerism of green products is important for environmental preservation. The strategy of drawing attention to green products is a crucial part of this. Initially, green marketing capitalised on the concept to target new consumer segments, increase loyalty to producers of green products, enhance willingness to pay a higher price, and reduce price sensitivity. Key attempts are made to influence consumers' perceptions and behaviour when making purchasing decisions regarding environmentally friendly products. Differences in attitude and behaviour often result from consumers' lack of knowledge about such products, which is reflected in their purchasing behaviour when making product choices. Therefore, it is important to understand the behaviour of green choices according to consumers' needs in order to stimulate demand for green products and increase their market share (Roy, 2020).

In their research, Ahamad and Ariffin (2018) revealed that university students possess considerable knowledge of sustainable consumption, largely attributable to easily accessible internet resources; yet their attitudes and practices are only moderately sustainable. Given the significant relationships between knowledge, attitude, and practice, the implementation of appropriate interventions or policies could further boost environmental knowledge, potentially leading to enhanced sustainable behaviour and the fostering of an environmentally conscious population.

Barriers to sustainable consumption

A positive attitude towards sustainable products encourages sustainable consumption as it often signals engagement in a specific behaviour. Despite an increasing number of consumers showing a positive attitude towards sustainable products, empirical research in the field of ecological consumption indicates that they often do not choose to purchase them (Park and Lin, 2020, Morwitz et al., 2007, Mintel, 2006).

Consumers' everyday behaviour is often described as habits because they do not make new decisions every time thexy encounter repetitive actions such as travelling or grocery shopping. The advantage of habit is that it eliminates the need for reconsideration and exploring alternatives in each situation. However, research has shown that there is a compromise between attitudes and habits. When habits are strong, the link between attitudes and behaviour is weakened, while the link between attitudes and behaviour is stronger when habits are weak (Verplanken et al., 1994). Therefore, consumers may have habits that are not easily overcome by information aimed at changing attitudes. In the past, individuals may have chosen to commute by car to save time or selected a dishwashing detergent for economic reasons. Such "frozen" behaviours gradually become routine and are later performed without considering whether they are right or wrong (Lewin, 1947).

Consumers are daily constrained by available financial resources, time, cognitive abilities, and knowledge, while simultaneously facing numerous activities that compete for these limited resources. Resource constraints determine how much effort an individual will invest in achieving any goal, including a shift towards a sustainable lifestyle (Thøgersen, 2005).

According to a report by consulting company Deloitte (2020), the percentage of consumers who stated they had recently purchased a sustainably produced product or service dropped in over a dozen European countries in the second half of 2022, with cost being cited as the main reason (Pieters et al., 2022).

Sheoran and Kumar (2022) conducted an analysis of 125 scientific articles written between 1995 and 2020 with the aim of identifying the key barriers to sustainable consumption. Here again, the high cost of sustainable products emerged as one of the most critical obstacles to sustainable behaviour, particularly in the context of electronic devices. Apart from cost, the authors identified eight additional barriers: consumer perception that using green products has minimal impact on environmental sustainability, consumer mistrust due to greenwashing practices carried out by organisations, lack of improvement in consumer image within society, family members not using green products, potential inconvenience during the purchase and use of green products, limited availability of green products and associated accessories, and product inconsistency/incompatibility with products already owned (incompatibility).

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to examine the attitudes of young consumers towards sustainable consumption, identify barriers to sustainable consumption, and propose ways to overcome these barriers.

Previous Research in the Republic of Croatia

When examining previous research on the attitudes of young consumers towards sustainability in the Republic of Croatia, a visible gap between awareness and action becomes apparent.

In a study from 2008 (Rončević et al.), it was shown that the student population primarily associates the concept of sustainability with environmental protection, indicating a lack of sufficient understanding of the broader concept. Additionally, the same study pointed out the issue of inconsistency among young individuals, as they showed awareness of the need for sustainable behaviour but exhibited habits and actions that were not in line with it. This issue was also highlighted in earlier studies (Karajić and Smerić, 1992, Afrić, 2002) and confirmed in later research (Stanić and Buzov, 2009).

However, there are differences in environmental awareness even among the students themselves. According to Anđić and Vorkapić (2015), students who have received education in environmental courses demonstrated greater responsibility towards environmental issues and higher interpersonal and intrapersonal sustainability intelligence, but not necessarily higher awareness of the consequences. Therefore, these studies emphasise the need to introduce sustainable development into the education system and raise public awareness on how to contribute to a sustainable way of life.

In successfully bridging the gap between environmental awareness and action, apart from systematic education, a profound understanding of young consumers and consistent communication from companies about their own green initiatives, are necessary. According to Kadić-Maglajić et al. (2019), pro-environmental and pro-social consumption is linked to the self-identity of young consumers and how they perceive themselves as social beings. Since the attitudes towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among Croatian students are mostly positive (Ham et al. 2015), it indicates that companies should establish a strong CSR identity to which young consumers can relate and take pro-environmental actions.

3. METHODOLOGY

In total 123 students participated in the study using the snowball recruitment method. After clearing the data, 121 entries were accepted as valid. Participants were recruited through social media and data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire in February 2022.

Measures

The dependent variable in this research is sustainable consumption habits. Predictor variables are sustainable attitudes and sustainable behaviour. All variables were assessed with a set of related questions. Control variables included personal demographic attributes and attitudes such as age and gender. All measures were developed by the authors based on previously published research. (reference)

Sustainable attitudes were measured by five items addressing the value of attitudes toward sustainability (e.g., “I don’t know enough about sustainable living.” and “I feel like I can’t contribute much to environmental preservation”). Participants answered questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree). The value had an acceptable level of internal consistency reliabilities with Cronbach’s Alpha α = 0.600023. In data analysis, reverse coding was applied to responses.

Sustainable behaviour was measured by eight items (e.g., “I regularly separate waste.” and ”I support manufacturers who advocate for nature conservation."). Participants answered questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree). The value had an acceptable level of internal consistency reliabilities with Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0.765736$.

Sustainable consumption was assessed by a set of seven items developed based on previous research. Items were in forms to measure participants' sustainable consumption (e.g., "When purchasing groceries, I choose products with minimal plastic packaging."). Respondents indicated their agreement on 5 points Likert scale. Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0751575$ confirmed the internal consistency of items.

4. RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Most of the participants were from 19 to 24 years old (85.12%), mostly female (76.86%). Most of the participants were not working (84.3%), with the majority studying at a public higher education institution (82.64%) and enrolled in study programmes in the field of social sciences (43.8%). Most respondents live in urban areas, with this group comprising 78.51% of the total sample. The majority of the sample identify as religious (69.42%).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

	N	%
Age		
19	9	7.44
20	4	3.31
21	21	17.36
22	26	21.49
23	25	20.66
24	18	14.88
25 +	18	14.88
Gender		
Male	28	23.14
Female	93	76.86

Current work status		
Part time	5	4.13
Full time	14	11.57
Not working	102	84.3
Studying at		
Private institution	21	17.36
Public institution	100	82.64
Field of study		
Biomedicine and Healthcare	10	8.26
Biosciences	22	18.18
Social Sciences	53	43.8
Humanities	13	10.74
Natural Sciences	6	4.97
Technical Sciences	16	13.23
Artistic Field	1	0.83
Living area		
Urban	95	78.51
Rural	26	21.49
Religious status		
Religious	84	69.42
Atheist	12	9.92
Agnostic	12	9.92
Non-disclosed	13	10.74

In data analysis, correlation among variables was calculated using Pearson correlation coefficients. The sustainable attitude was significantly and positively correlated with sustainable behaviour ($r = 0.2891$, $p = 0.0013$). Sustainable behaviour was positively and significantly correlated with both sustainable attitudes (r = 0.4110, p < 0.001) and sustainable behaviour (r = 0.4821, p < 0.001).

Table 2: Descriptive statics

	N	M	SD	SA	SB
Sustainable Attitudes (SA)	121	16.50	3.6518		
Sustainable Behaviour (SB)	121	30.49	5.5194	0.2891	
Sustainable Consumption (SC)	121	23.59	4.9626	0.4110	0.4821

The survey results present a complex image of attitudes towards sustainable living and barriers to sustainable behaviour and sustainable consumption. Most respondents (36.23% neutral, 31.16% agreed) expressed concern about the perceived financial burden of living sustainably, suggesting potential barriers to the adoption of such lifestyles due to economic considerations. In terms of knowledge about sustainable living, the responses were diverse, with the largest proportions indicating either disagreement (26.09%) or neutrality (25.36%), highlighting potential gaps in understanding or knowledge about sustainable practices. Despite this, the sample predominantly rejected the notion of environmental apathy. A significant majority of respondents disagreed (39.86%) or completely disagreed (39.86%) with the statement "I don't feel the need to be environmentally conscious," emphasising a strong inclination towards environmental awareness. Perceptions regarding the environmental attitudes of others varied, with the largest groups either agreeing (31.16%) or remaining neutral (24.64%) to the statement "Few people in my surroundings care about the environment." A majority of respondents disputed the idea that environmental activities, such as waste sorting, were burdensome (38.41% disagreed, 17.39% completely disagreed). Respondents' beliefs in their ability to contribute to environmental preservation were more mixed, indicating a potential area for intervention and empowerment. Lastly, the idea of climate change as a distressing concept elicited mixed reactions, with many participants either disagreeing (26.09%) or remaining neutral (23.19%) to the idea of avoiding such thoughts due to discomfort.

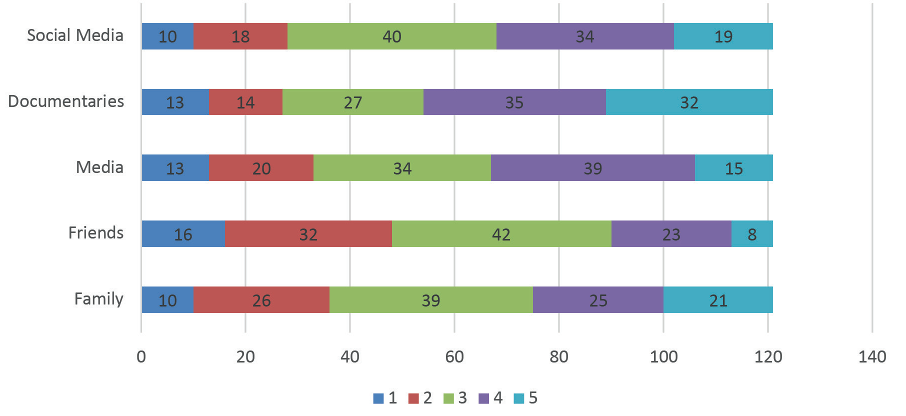
Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed (39.13%) or strongly agreed (15.94%) that sustainable products often carry a higher price tag than their conventional counterparts, suggesting that economic factors may hinder the transition towards sustainable consumption. The potential difficulty in replacing accustomed products with sustainable alternatives also emerged as a concern. The largest groups of respondents disagreed

(30.43%) or completely disagreed (15.94%) with the statement “I cannot replace the products I am used to using with sustainable ones,” indicating some resistance to changing habitual consumption patterns. Similarly, many respondents agreed (28.26%) or were neutral (21.74%) with the notion that finding sustainable products required additional effort, underscoring potential accessibility and convenience barriers. Lastly, a significant proportion of respondents disagreed (27.54%) or completely disagreed (24.64%) with the statement “I do not like the material or composition of these products,” suggesting that product characteristics may not be a major obstacle to the adoption of sustainable products.

The survey data uncovered notable positive attitudes towards the use of sustainable products. Most respondents agreed (37.00%) or strongly agreed (26.78%) that sustainable products have a positive impact on themselves and the environment, indicating a broad recognition of the personal and environmental benefits. A majority also agreed (38.41%) or strongly agreed (15.94%) that these products have a higher value due to better production methods, suggesting an appreciation for the quality and process behind sustainable products. The social aspect was less influential, with a large proportion of respondents disagreeing (24.64%) or strongly disagreeing (19.57%) with the statement “They make me feel more accepted in society and my immediate surroundings.” This suggests that acceptance by others may not be a significant motivating factor for sustainable consumption. The sense of personal contribution to environmental protection was acknowledged by many respondents, with a significant majority agreeing (31.88%) or strongly agreeing (36.23%) that using sustainable products made them feel like they were doing something useful for the environment. The same trend was observed for the reduction of waste and the support of ‘green’ manufacturers, with a majority of respondents agreeing (34.06% and 33.33% respectively) or strongly agreeing (34.78% and 35.51% respectively) with these statements.

The results offered an intriguing perspective on the different influences shaping respondents’ attitudes towards sustainability. Respondents evaluated the impact of family, friends, media, documentaries, and social media on their sustainable attitudes, rating them from 1 (least impact) to 5 (greatest impact) (Graph 1).

Graph 1: The source of information about sustainability



The data suggest that sustainable attitudes are shaped by a mixture of influences, with more formal sources of information, such as documentaries and media, appearing to play a prominent role. Personal relationships through family and friends seem to have a moderate influence, while the role of social media is significant, reflecting the increasing importance of digital platforms in shaping public opinion and attitudes among the student population in Croatia.

Gender Differences

All demographic data was compared on all variables using single-factor ANOVA. Various demographic data (represented in Table 1) was tested, and no significant difference was found between demographic groups in the context of sustainable consumption. However, the results suggest a significant difference between the two genders. The averages suggest that the female participants score higher on sustainable consumption than the male participants ($p = 0.0062$).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research contributes to the understanding of sustainable consumption attitudes and practices among university students, specifically in Croatia. It offers empirical evidence supporting the assertion that attitude and practice are interrelated when it comes to sustainability.

This has theoretical implications for models of environmental behaviour, suggesting that interventions aiming to improve one aspect (e.g., attitude) may have downstream effects on others (e.g., behaviour and consumption). Additionally, the study illuminates the influences shaping sustainable attitudes, highlighting the importance of various channels such as family, friends, media, documentaries, and social media. This adds depth to our understanding of the social and information networks that underpin sustainable behaviour. It particularly underlines the significant role of formal sources of information and digital platforms, which may be central constructs in future theoretical models of sustainable consumption behaviour. Furthermore, from this research, it can be concluded that respondents may not be familiar with how people in their immediate surroundings view environmental behaviour and attitudes. With that in mind, and lack of knowledge about sustainable behaviour, young people are unlikely to discuss these issues and raise awareness about the topic.

Given the high level of sustainability knowledge but only moderate attitudes and practices, it seems there is potential to leverage this knowledge base to shift behaviours. This could be achieved through targeted educational programmes, perhaps focusing on practical ways to implement sustainable choices and clarifying the personal and environmental benefits of such actions.

5.2. STUDY LIMITATION

The current study, while offering valuable insights into sustainable consumption behaviours among university students, has several limitations that should be noted.

Firstly, the sample size used in this study is relatively small, which limits the statistical power and generalisability of the results. Future research could benefit from a larger sample size to ensure the robustness of the findings and the representation of the wider population. Secondly, the sample's uneven gender distribution poses another limitation. As the sample consists predominantly of one gender group, this might bias the results and prevent a complete understanding of gender differences in sustainable consumption behaviours. Further research should strive to recruit a more balanced gender sample to address this limitation.

Moreover, as this study was conducted among university students, the findings may not be applicable to other demographics. Future research could extend this work to other populations to examine whether the findings hold across different age groups, educational levels, and cultural contexts. Lastly, this research adopted a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies could provide more information about the dynamics of sustainable consumption behaviours over time and the factors influencing these changes.

Despite these limitations, this study lays the groundwork for future research into sustainable consumption behaviours, providing valuable findings that can guide more comprehensive and nuanced inquiries in the future.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Discussions and writings about sustainable development and ecology have been going on for years. Considering that the global situation regarding climate change is not improving, this is a topic that will continue to be researched and written about for many years to come. In order to make the results of the conducted research more relevant, it is proposed to continue the same research and collect a larger sample of participants. Additionally, instead of the "snowball sampling" method, it is necessary to consider other sampling methods such as random sampling or stratification of the sample according to specific criteria (e.g., region of origin, years of study, gender, etc.). Furthermore, a comparative study on sustainable consumption among the student population in different countries or cultures could be conducted. By comparing attitudes, behaviours, and practices, potential cultural or contextual factors influencing sustainable consumption among students could be identified.

It is also suggested to further explore the barriers to sustainable consumption by conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups to gain insights into specific obstacles relevant to the student population. Another suggestion would be to investigate potential intergenerational differences in attitudes and practices regarding sustainable consumption by including different age groups in the research. By comparing their attitudes, motivations, and behaviours, insights into possible differences and common aspects regarding sustainable consumption could be gained.

This research suggests that gender could play a crucial role in shaping sustainability-related behaviours, aligning with certain previous findings in the literature. Such gender-based differences might be attributable to social, cultural, or psychological factors, which warrant further investigation in future research. This has implications for theories of sustainable consumption, highlighting the need to incorporate gender as a key variable in conceptual frameworks.

Therefore, based on the research findings, the following steps are recommended to promote more sustainable consumption among students:

- Student education: It is necessary to provide students with more information about sustainable living, making them aware of specific actions they can take to reduce their negative impact on the environment. Organising lectures, workshops, and campaigns that emphasise the importance of sustainability can be an effective way to raise awareness, involving both governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as manufacturers and retailers.
- Practical examples: Encouraging and promoting examples of sustainable lifestyles among students to motivate them towards more sustainable living. Organising panels, discussions, and activities that involve individuals who are successfully living sustainably can provide inspiration and support.
- Availability of green products: Ensuring that green products are accessible to students at affordable prices, for example, by encouraging manufacturers to develop sustainable products that are financially accessible to a wider population.
- Collaboration at multiple levels: Establishing collaboration between universities, local communities, associations, and other sustainability-focused organisations. Through partnerships and joint projects, supportive environments for sustainable consumption and lifestyles can be created.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provided meaningful insights into sustainable consumption behaviours among university students, revealing the influence of various factors such as attitudes, behaviour and external influences like family and friends. This research shows that there is awareness among students about environmental preservation, but actions do not fully align with that awareness, which is consistent with previous research (Park and Lin, 2020, Anđić and Vorkapić, 2015, Stanić and Buzov, 2009, Rončević et al., 2008, Afrić, 2002, Karajić and Smerić, 1992). Students are aware of the impact of their behaviour on the environment but are not sufficiently motivated to purchase green products. The main reasons for the lack of motivation are price and the perception that such products are not readily available. Additionally, a lack of knowledge about sustainable living among students has been observed, indicating a lack of information about how to live in accordance with sustainability principles. The study results underscore a strong awareness of the personal and societal benefits of using sustainable products. Economic and practical factors may present barriers, but the perceived environmental benefits and personal satisfaction offer potential avenues to promote sustainable consumption.

Despite the limitations, the study underlines the potential for raising awareness about sustainability and promoting more sustainable behaviours. Specifically, educational institutions and policymakers can utilise these findings to design targeted interventions to foster a culture of sustainability. These could include initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable consumption and practices and encouraging active engagement with environmental issues.

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PRICE FAIRNESS PERCEPTION IN ADVERSE TIMES: AN INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The pandemic brought changes in consumer buying patterns and challenges in the companies' performance to address consumer behaviour shifts. Such transformations call for exploring the relevance and nature of consumer-seller interdependence, which we aim to address through the price fairness perception. Price fairness perception was often neglected in studies regarding its potentially significant predictors and outcomes. Hence, this study investigates determinants (customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and purchase inability) and outcomes (satisfaction, revisit and recommendation) of price fairness perceptions and the moderating role of consumer optimism within the Covid-19 pandemic setting.

Methodology: We performed confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling to analyse the obtained data.

Results: Research shows that customers' perceived assistive intent of retailers and purchase inability positively impact consumer price fairness perception. Also, price fairness perception positively affects consumer satisfaction with the retailer, revisit, and recommendation intentions. Furthermore, consumer optimism moderates the relationship between purchase inability and price fairness perception.

Conclusion: This study fills the gaps in the literature concerning the unexplored inputs and outputs of price fairness perception. Moreover, the proposed research model contributes to the interdependence theory with new constructs. Our study also offers practical managerial implications regarding the retailers' marketing and communication strategies to effectively manage the crisis and provide a favourable consumer purchasing experience.

Keywords: Price fairness perception, customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers, purchase (in)ability, optimism, behavioural outcomes, interdependence theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers are susceptible to prices, particularly in periods of crisis when they strive to obtain good quality products and overall buying value (Graciola et al., 2018). This goal might be even more evident given a crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Namely, the pandemic brought consumer behaviour changes and challenges in the companies' performance (Jeong et al., 2021). Many retailers passed on the higher costs to consumers who potentially might not have noticed these changes (Lucas, 2021). More than 40% of grocery consumers experienced price increases during the pandemic (Levin, 2020), and more than 50% of the consumers became more price conscious (Kitz et al., 2022).

Price fairness can be defined as "a consumer's assessment and associated emotions of whether the difference (or lack of difference) between a seller's price and the price of a comparative other party is reasonable, acceptable, or justifiable" (Xia et al., 2004: 3.). Furthermore, the price fairness concept can encompass price adjustments, justifications and transparency of prices (Zielke, 2006). The importance of price fairness investigation lies in its impact on the relationship between the consumer and seller and its relevance for consumer decision-making (Andrés-Martínez et al., 2013). Namely, fair prices, and not maximum ones, positively impact the company's profit, while consumers might perceive different prices as fair (Izaret, 2022). The literature on price fairness predictors is not extensive, showing that perceived quality (e.g., Setiawan et al., 2020, Habel et al., 2016), negative emotions (e.g., irritation, sadness, discontent) and moral foundation (Malc et al., 2021) were studied as predictors of price fairness. Other scholars researched price comparison, cognitive attribution, emotional response (Chung & Petrick, 2012), price consciousness, honesty, trust and price knowledge (Khandelwal & Bajpai, 2012) as price fairness predictors. Nevertheless, consumer price fairness perception remains a crucial marketing issue (Friedman and Toubia, 2020). It still needs to offer extensive research efforts (Malc et al., 2021), and is neglected given the other potentially significant price fairness predictors, especially in turbulent times and retail contexts. In addition, less is known about price fairness perception considering the positive emotion, such as optimism, which is relevant in crisis times since it is essential for health restoration and efficacious functioning (Sumi, 2014). This opens the space for seeing the retailers' connection with the consumers in crisis times through their help. Thus, our study presents the concept of customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers. Moreover, the role of the seller is vital in how consumers evaluate prices (Bolton et al., 2003), which we aim to address through the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and perceived purchase ability that stems from the seller's side.

Researchers claim that studies on price fairness perceptions (Jeong et al., 2021), especially those exploring the predictors and outcomes of price fairness perception (Malc et al., 2016), are underexplored in the marketing literature despite being important. The necessity of investigating this issue becomes even more important in a crisis, i.e., pandemic context. Hence, we aim to shed new light on exploring the consumer price fairness perception concerning the proposed predictors (customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and consumer's perceived purchase ability), moderated by optimism, and outcomes (satisfaction with the retailer, revisit, and recommendation intentions). To do so, we utilise the interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Interdependence theory is a useful framework since it refers to interpersonal situations and structures while describing the relevance of the structure for comprehending intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). In our context, structure is assessed through the retail setting during the pandemic. In addition, the situation structure is essential because it depicts the interpersonal reality as a playfield for one's motives, cognition and interaction (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). In this regard, we explore how consumers relate to retailers during their interactions through the relationships of price fairness perceptions and customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and purchase (in)ability. The outcomes of interaction depend on whether the interaction is satisfying (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008), which we consider through the behavioural outcomes of consumers' satisfaction with the retailers, intention to repurchase and recommend.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY

In general, dependence and fairness perceptions represent the main factors impacting the quality of relationships in the purchasing context (Qiu, 2018). This study contributes to the interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), which is one of the few theories of a comprehensive nature that can explain different processes when dealing with threats (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012), such as a crisis, i.e., pandemic. ''Interdependence theory provides unique insight into how interpersonal situations afford specific goals and motives, as well as how situations set the stage for interpersonal processes and interaction" (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008: 18). Hence, we see interdependence theory as a suitable theoretical framework that can help explain how the retail situation (buying during the pandemic) sets the stage for interpersonal processes and interaction. In this regard, we investigate the interpersonal and interaction processes (consumer – retailer) of consumers' perceived price fairness being dependent on the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and purchase (in) ability while moderated by optimism. Optimism is an important input dealing with the self-representation necessary for perceiving the world and situations (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011) and is critical in unfamiliar interactions, and novel and risky situations (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012).

2.2. PRICE FAIRNESS

Price fairness encompasses consumer perceptions and emotions about fairness, acceptability, and reasonability (Xia et al., 2004, Xia & Monroe, 2010). Such judgments depend on economic and social aspects (Maxwell, 1995). In addition, we see the crisis, i.e., pandemic, context as an example of an economic and social part adequate for price fairness perception exploration. It is essential to explore determinants, processes, and consequences of consumer price judgments. Namely, price acceptability and reasonability are relevant for consumer decision-making (Andrés-Martínez et al., 2014), whereas consumer perceptions are vital for marketing exchange interactions (Campbell & Winterich, 2018). However, price fairness perception in terms of the pandemic context is underexplored but is a vital part of a company's recovery strategy (Abdelnour et al., 2020).

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1. CUSTOMER'S PERCEIVED ASSISTIVE INTENT OF RETAILERS AND PRICE FAIRNESS PERCEPTION

Assistive intent refers to consumers' perceptions about the degree of help or support from the marketer/retailer needed to satisfy a particular need or achieve a task (Ta & Young, 2018) and is essential given its positive impact on general consumer perceptions (Shobeiri et al., 2014). It is a crucial factor for developing trust, while trust is central to developing the perceptions of price and fairness (Urban et al., 2009). These notions indirectly suggest that the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers might be important for increasing the consumer's perception of price fairness. In retailing literature, scholars researched the assistive intent to reflect marketers' efforts to help consumers buy (Ta & Young, 2018). However, no direct relationship between the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and price fairness was explored, especially in the pandemic situation. Hence,

H1: Customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers positively impacts the price fairness perception.

3.2. PURCHASE (IN)ABILITY AND PRICE FAIRNESS PERCEPTION

In general, people are willing to tolerate different prices, i.e., price discrimination, especially when feeling that they have control of when and where to buy (Izaret, 2022). Given the variety of purchase (in)ability meanings, it is worth noting that, in our study, we assess the purchase (in) ability in general, i.e., as experiencing difficulties when buying, such as having no alternative to first preferences, realising the existence of only a few options and not being able to buy the wanted product, thus being reliant on the substitutions. Recent findings indicate that consumer behaviour was mostly impacted by fear during the pandemic, whereby the main drivers of buying were quality, availability, and convenience (Eger et al., 2021). In addition, supported by the narrow purchase alternatives, consumers might be unable to purchase, i.e., become vulnerable in association to the perceived unethical retailer's practices (Glavas et al., 2020), and one of the vital vulnerability dimensions is purchase ability (Shi et al., 2017). Furthermore, consumers make decisions based on their ability to purchase, whereas the ability also denotes the affordability relative to the price interpretations (Leow & Zahari, 2015). Given the stressful situation resulting in panic buying, fear, anxiety, buying difficulties, and price changes (Omar et al., 2021), there is a great chance of perceiving the situation differently, including the price fairness, mainly when depending on each other (consumer-seller). The current literature does not indicate existing direct relationships between purchase inability and price fairness perception. However, some indirect findings suggest that mutual dependence might make consumers feel less insecure (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Consequently, crises might stimulate mutually dependent relationships (Brittain, 2020). Therefore, we argue that when feeling more or less insecure, one might still develop more favourable price fairness perceptions because of the situation, i.e., mutual dependence. Hence,

H2: Consumer's purchase inability positively impacts price fairness perception.

3.3. PRICE FAIRNESS PERCEPTION AND OUTCOMES

Satisfaction can be best explained by the fairness perceptions (Oliver & Swan, 1989), whereas price fairness perception seems to be directly and indirectly correlated with consumer satisfaction (Nazari et al., 2014). Furthermore, if the consumers perceive prices as unfair, they will experience disappointment (Malc et al., 2016). Thus, they would be less satisfied with the retailer and purchase. Similarly, when consumers perceive prices as fair, they have more confidence in purchase decisions and are more satisfied (Andrés-Martínez et al., 2014). Following a similar line of reasoning, we assume that the price fairness perception might be a relevant predictor of one's satisfaction with the retailer, especially within the novel retail context affected by the pandemic when many conditions and relationships are disturbed. Hence,

H3: Price fairness perception positively impacts consumer satisfaction with the retailer.

Drawing upon the extensive literature analysis and depicting the revisit as an essential dimension of consumer loyalty, scholars (e.g., Nazari et al., 2014) claim that price fairness is vital for consumer repurchase. Seeing the loyalty as a desire to purchase again, Söderlund (2006) found a positive relationship between price fairness perception and revisit, while Andrés-Martínez et al. (2014) could not detect a significant relationship between price fairness perception and loyalty. Furthermore, Lynn and Wang (2013) suggest the relevance of perceived expensiveness and fairness for the patronage likelihood. However, we found no direct connection between the price fairness perception and revisit intention, particularly considering the pandemic retail context. Hence,

H4: Price fairness perception positively impacts consumer revisit intention.

Price fairness is essential for consumer engagement in the behaviours that can benefit or damage the seller (Xia & Monroe, 2010), including spreading positive or negative information (Xia et al. 2004). Based on the prior literature findings, researchers (Nazari et al., 2014, Söderlund 2006) stress the relevance of price fairness perception for positive word-of-mouth communication, whereas other scholars (e.g., Andrés-Martínez et al., 2014) were not able to determine this relationship. Considering the main literature findings, we assume that more favourable consumer price fairness perception will lead towards more recommendations, i.e., positive word-of-mouth. Thus, *H5: Price fairness perception positively impacts the further recommendation intention.*

3.4. THE MODERATING ROLE OF OPTIMISM

As omnipresent in every aspect of our lives, while encompassing cognitive and emotional elements and showing our favourable expectancies for the being and future (Carver et al., 2010), optimism is fundamental in adverse and stressful circumstances (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011). Although findings regarding the connection of optimism with price fairness and retailer's performance seem to be non-existent, some indirect notions suggest its relevance for the researched context. Namely, assistive intent can result in trust impacting the perception of price fairness (Urban et al., 2009), which increases optimism and perceived price values while stimulating consumers' willingness to pay a higher price (Wu et al., 2017). Drawing on these insights, we assume that optimism might be relevant for the price fairness perception affected by the retailer's performance, e.g., customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers. Thus,

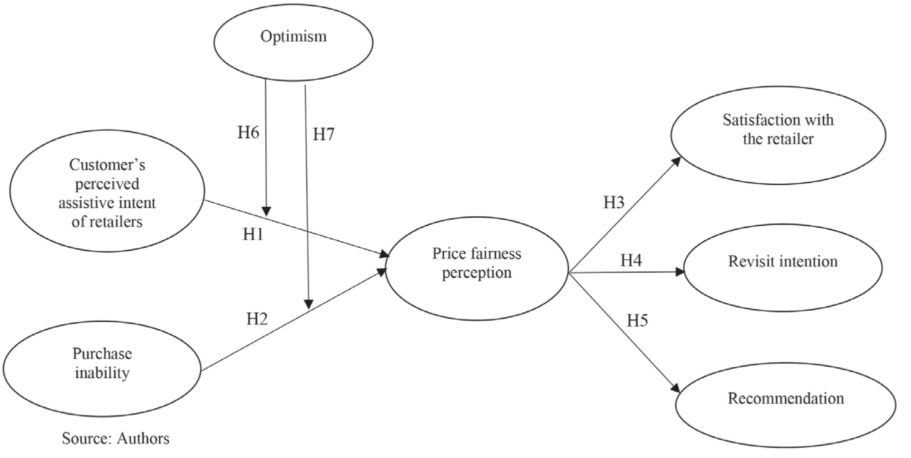
H6: Optimism moderates the relationship between a customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and price fairness perception.

Prior research indicates that consumers' emotions are impacted by the external stimuli that influence their judgment and decision-making (Baker et al., 2013), especially when faced with a crisis (Västfjäll et al., 2008). Moreover, consumers who feel happy tend to assess service quality more favourably (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2011), whereas positive feelings influence price assessments as well (Suri et al., 2002). Although we found no studies exploring the impact of optimism on purchase (in)ability and price fairness perception, previous indirect notions suggest that consumer optimism might be relevant for purchasing and price perceptions. Thus, we argue that consumer purchase (in)ability on price fairness perception might differ given consumer optimism. Hence,

H7: Optimism moderates the relationship between purchase inability and price fairness perception.

Explored relationships are visible in the research model (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Research model of price fairness perception: determinants, outcomes, and moderation



Source: Authors

4. METHOD

4.1. SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

We used convenience sampling, whereas data collection encompassed 502 Croatian respondents and covered the period of end-May until mid-June 2020. We developed the highly structured and Likert scale questionnaire using Qualtrics, which we distributed using various channels, such as e-mails and social networks (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber). Regarding preliminary statistical analyses of missing values and outliers, we detected 94 missing values, five univariate (Z-scores), and three multivariate (Mahalanobis distance) outliers and removed them from the further analyses. Therefore, the final sample size was N=400. The sample structure is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Women	286	71.5
Men	114	28.5
Age		
18-24	74	18.5
25-34	111	27.7
35-44	140	35
45-54	45	11.3
55-64	19	4.7
65-74	10	2.5
75-84	1	0.3
Education		
Elementary school	2	0.5
High school	165	41.2
College	89	22.3
University and higher	144	36
Total	400	100

Source: Research

4.2. MEASUREMENT SCALES

We developed some scale items, while we used others from the relevant literature and modified them to a certain extent to better fit the research context. The modifications referred to the wording, item variations, and sentence completion with the term 'pandemic.' All items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale and are visible in Table 3. In this regard, customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers included items from Gupta et al.'s (2009) attitude toward the retailer – assistive intent scale and one/last item self-developed. The items used for assessing the purchase (in)ability were those from Shi et al.'s (2017) consumer vulnerability scale, dimension/section of purchase ability. We measured price fairness with items adapted from Koschate-Fischer et al.'s (2016, 1 item) price fairness scale and Habel et al.'s (2016, 2 items) value of the company's product scale. We assessed the moderating variable of optimism with items from Nenkov et al.'s (2008) positive outcome focus dimension and one/last item from Briley et al.'s (2017) optimism scale. Outcomes encompassed satisfaction with the retailer that we measured with three items (adapted from Wolter et al., 2017, Thomson, 2006, and one self-developed, see Table 3). Word-of-mouth (recommendation) was measured with self-developed item *"I would recommend the companies I bought from during the pandemic to others,"* while revisit intention was measured with one self-developed item *''I will continue to buy from the retailers I bought from during this pandemic''*.

5. RESULTS

We analysed data in SPSS v23 and AMOS program(s) for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Table 2 shows that consumers had moderate perceptions about price fairness during the pandemic and slightly higher perceptions of the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers. Furthermore, the results show that the consumers did not feel vulnerable due to the pandemic concerning their purchase abilities, while they were pretty optimistic about the future. Moreover, the consumers were satisfied with the retailers they bought from during the pandemic and showed the intention to revisit and recommend their retailers. In addition, we tested data for normality of distribution and (multi)collinearity. The performed tests confirm the adequacy of the data.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers	4.724	1.174	-0.583	-0.066
Purchase inability	3.551	1.266	0.170	-0.846
Price fairness	4.365	1.380	-0.491	-0.563
Optimism	5.597	1.011	-0.985	1.247
Satisfaction with a retailer	5.065	1.048	-0.724	0.362
Recommendation	5.080	1.199	-0.918	0.701
Revisit intention	5.220	1.178	-1.159	1.571

Source: Research

5.1. TEST FOR COMMON METHOD BIAS

For a proper analysis, we ensured that the common-method variance did not violate our model assumptions. Namely, to do so, we followed several procedures: 1) we informed the respondents that there are no ''right or wrong'' answers and that the confidentiality and anonymity were ensured during the data collection; 2) VIF values from collinearity analysis are within the suggested thresholds (<3.3); 3) we have also performed Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1976, Podsakoff et al., 2012) – all items underwent one fixed factor principal component analysis, whereas the results showed that the total variance extracted by one factor was less than the recommended threshold of 50%. Hence, performed tests led us to believe that the data is free of common method bias.

5.2. MEASUREMENT MODEL

As a necessary precondition for structural equation modelling and to assess the scales' reliability, validity, and unidimensionality, we developed the measurement (CFA) model. The maximum-likelihood method was employed following the relevant thresholds and principles (e.g., Kline, 2011), whereas the CFA analysis also indicated a good model fit (GFI = 0.961, AGFI = 0.939, NFI = 0.964, CFI = 0.989, RMSEA = 0.032, SRMR = 0.034, PCLOSE = 0.981, X^2 = 154.478, and df = 1.404), thus confirming the unidimensionality of the measures. Furthermore, since all factor loadings needed to be significant and high, to achieve this assumption, one item from customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers was excluded from CFA analysis due to the lower factor loading. CFA results (Table 3) showed that the measurement scales achieved reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3: CFA results

Factor/item	Factor loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach alpha
Customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers		**0.846**	**0.583**	**0.826**
During this pandemic, the companies made an effort to facilitate consumers' selection of good and adequate products.	0.648			
I believe that, in this pandemic situation, companies did everything in their power for the consumer's well-being.	0.837			
In this pandemic situation, companies have responded well to consumer needs.	0.882			
Purchase inability		**0.739**	**0.491**	**0.732**
When buying a product, I often have no alternative but to give up my first preference and choose another/worse one.	0.575			
When buying a product, I often realise that there are very few options within my ability.	0.685			
I cannot often buy what I want and need to buy a similar substitute.	0.820			
Price fairness perception		**0.923**	**0.800**	**0.920**
I think that product prices provided by the companies I bought from during the pandemic are fair.	0.851			
I think that the companies from which I bought during the pandemic offered good value for money.	0.956			
I think that the prices of products, which I bought during the pandemic, fit the quality of the product.	0.872			
Optimism		**0.862**	**0.613**	**0.853**
I always have a positive attitude that, eventually, everything will be all right.	0.695			
I rather think about good things that might happen than about the bad ones.	0.869			
When I think about my decisions, I am more focused on the positive outcomes.	0.883			
I am optimistic about my future.	0.659			
Satisfaction with the retailer		**0.859**	**0.672**	**0.871**
I think that the market approach of the companies from which I bought during the pandemic fulfilled my expectations.	0.745			
I am satisfied with my relationship with the companies I bought from during the pandemic.	0.889			
My purchasing experience with companies I bought from during the pandemic is satisfying.	0.819			

Source: Research

In addition, the scales showed discriminant validity since the roots of AVEs were higher than the correlation values (Table 4).

Table 4: Discriminant validity

Factors	PF	RA	PA	OP	RS
PF	0.894				
RA	0.531**	0.763			
PA	-0.115*	-0.107*	0.700		
OP	0.201**	0.267**	-0.009	0.782	
RS	0.450**	0.527**	-0.167**	0.218**	0.819

*Source: Research; Abbreviations: PF = price fairness perception, RA = customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers, PA = purchase inability, OP – optimism, RS = satisfaction with the retailer; **correlations significant at p<0.001 level, *correlations significant at p< 0.05 level.*

5.3. STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING (SEM)

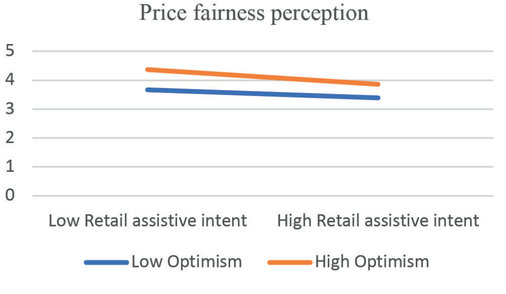
For SEM modelling purposes, we developed covariance-based constrained (without moderator – Model 1) and unconstrained (with optimism as a moderator – Model 2) structural models. We estimated parameters with the maximum-likelihood (ML) method. Model 1 included main effects with moderating effects fixed to 0, while Model 2 encompassed both main and moderating effects freely estimated. Considering significant model change ($\Delta X^2/\Delta D.F. = 26.622/2$), hypotheses were tested with regard to Model 2 that showed an acceptable model fit ($X^2 = 234.738$ (df = 90), GFI = 0.936, AGFI = 0.904, NFI = 0.942, CFI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.063, SRMR = 0.049, PCLOSE = 0.493). We assessed the moderating effects of consumer optimism on the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers – price fairness perception and purchase inability – price fairness perception relationships as interaction terms of customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers, purchase inability, and optimism variables. SEM results are visible in Table 5 and the additional insights on moderation in Figures 2 and 3.

Table 5: SEM results

	Model 1 (Constrained model)	Model 2 (Unconstrained model)
Main effects	Standard estimate	Standard estimate
H1: Customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers → Price fairness perception	0.545*	0.676*
H2: Purchase inability → Price fairness perception	0.112*	0.333*
H3: Price fairness perception → Satisfaction with the retailer	0.484*	0.487*
H4: Price fairness perception → Revisit intention	0.435*	0.437*
H5: Price fairness perception → WOM/ recommendation	0.463*	0.465*
Moderating effects		
H6: Optimism X Customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers → Price fairness perception		-0.007
H7: Optimism X Purchase inability → Price fairness perception		-0.374*
Model properties χ2/D.F. Δ χ2/ΔD.F. GFI AGFI NFI CFI RMSEA	261.360/92 0.929 0.895 0.951 0.968 0.068	234.738/90 26.622/2 0.936 0.904 0.942 0.972 0.063

Source: Research; Note: Effects are significant at p <0.001 (*).

Figure 2: Moderation – hypothesis H6



Source: Research

Figure 3: Moderation – hypothesis H7

Source: Research

SEM results showed that the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers was strongly and positively associated with the consumer's price fairness perception. Price fairness perception was also affected by the consumer's vulnerability, i.e., perceived purchase inability. Furthermore, price fairness perception was positively associated with consumer satisfaction with the retailer, revisit intention, and recommendation. Regarding moderating effects, the analysis showed that consumer optimism did not moderate the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers – price fairness perception link, unlike the purchase inability – price fairness perception relationship, whereas the negative moderating effect occurred. This result suggests that the higher the optimism, the lower the consumer's perception of price fairness through purchase inability, that is, higher through purchase ability.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research results indicate that the retailers' assistance, i.e., customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers, during the hard times, represents an essential determinant of the consumers' favourable price fairness perception. Thus, hypothesis H1 is supported. This result follows the previous finding of Shobeiri et al. (2014), who claim that the assistive intent favourably impacts general consumer perceptions. However, it represents a novel finding regarding the relationship between customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and price fairness perceptions within a crisis suggesting that price fairness perception represents a critical factor in the interdependence theory. Given the pandemic setting, this finding also contributes to the structure (situation) dimension of interdependence theory explaining the mutual dependence of retailers and consumers in crisis.

The research shows that consumers' inability to purchase significantly influences price fairness perception. Namely, the results indicate that the higher one's vulnerability, i.e., purchase inability, the more positive the price fairness perception is. Hence, hypothesis H2 is supported. This finding is interesting given the pandemic setting; one might expect that, in a crisis, consumers are vulnerable and often unable to purchase, especially when contrasted with the retailer's practices that might sometimes be perceived as unethical, as suggested by Glavas et al. (2020). However, when facing a crisis, consumers perceive prices as fair because they feel vulnerable, i.e., unable to purchase. Since scholars have not explored this relationship, it represents a novel finding.

The results show that price fairness perception positively impacts the consumer's satisfaction with the retailer regarding behavioural actions. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is supported. This result aligns with some previous findings (e.g., Nazari et al., 2014), stating that price fairness perception is vital for price and consumer satisfaction. However, gained insight represents a novel finding regarding the satisfaction with a retailer during the crisis. Furthermore, the research shows that favourable price fairness perception positively influences consumers' revisit intention. Hence, hypothesis H4 is supported. Such insight aligns with Nazari et al.'s (2014) and Söderlund's (2006) notions that price fairness impacts the repurchase. However, the research context (pandemic) adds a new perspective on this relationship. The research also shows that the price fairness perception positively affects the positive word-of-mouth-spreading, that is, recommendation of a particular retailer. Thus, hypothesis H5 is supported. This result complies with some prior research stressing the relevance of price fairness perception for spreading positive word-of-mouth (Nazari et al., 2014, Söderlund, 2006). In hard times consumers spread positive information due to the perceived price fairness, which is the novel finding regarding the researched pandemic context.

The research shows that consumer optimism does not moderate the relationship between the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers and price fairness perception. Thus the hypothesis H6 is rejected. These results suggest that the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers is vital for price fairness perception, regardless of the consumer's optimism, and represents a new finding. Furthermore, consumer optimism does play a significant conditioning role when it comes to the purchase inability and price fairness perception relationship. Thus, hypothesis H7 is supported. Namely, the research results show that this effect is negative, i.e., the higher consumer optimism, the lower the consumer's price fairness perception through the purchase inability. In other words, the lower the purchase inability (i.e., higher purchase ability), the higher is the price fairness perception in the case of optimistic consumers. The obtained result aligns with some general notions of optimism being relevant in challenging times (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011), and new or uncertain situations/interactions (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012) while showing increased level importance when correlated with price fairness perception (Urban et al., 2009). However, this represents a novel finding given the researched retail pandemic context and relationships.

6.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The research results indicate that the mutual dependence of retailers and consumers is necessary to perceive price fairness in the marketplace, particularly in adverse times. Given the positive impact of the customer's perceived assistive intent of retailers on the price fairness perception, the retailers need to show genuine and continuous care for the consumers' well-being by communicating the messages of good choice and fair prices. They need to stress the message of their presence, that is, being there for consumers to help them as much as possible and address their needs. To obtain and retain a fair perception of prices, the retailers need to communicate the quality of their products and the decision not to increase the prices without reason. If they need to increase the prices, the retailers should inform consumers (sometimes in advance), explain the causes, and describe the value for the consumers. Open and transparent communication about the prices provides valuable assistance to consumers during their purchasing experience while retaining the perceptions of fairness necessary for consumers' satisfaction with the retailer and for stimulating them to revisit and recommend. Such an approach could create trust that results in favourable perceptions and behavioural actions.

The result showing that purchase inability affects the higher price fairness perception indicates that consumers feel vulnerable, so retailers need to communicate that they acknowledge their vulnerability while not profiting from it, offering fair prices, good quality, and value for money to maintain the high fairness perceptions. For this purpose, marketers can include the appeals of fear in their messages while providing the scenario of diminishing the fear through their offers, that is, communicating that they are the solution. Such communication should cover the buying possibilities they offer, both offline and online (e.g., improved usability of online ordering with the benefits of free delivery, return, pickup) options.

The positive connection of perceived price fairness with consumers' satisfaction with the retailer, intention to revisit and recommend suggests that retailers concretely communicate via messages/campaigns that their prices are fair. In addition, they should share that they offer quality and value for the money. For this purpose, they might include the regular man advocacies. For example, they can include consumers within the message/ad showing their satisfaction and calling for action (cues such as, 'find the best prices,' 'check why I'm satisfied', 'come again', 'tell everyone', 'don't feel scared when we are here'...), while using rational appeals to communicate trust and reassurance through just prices.

Lastly, given the varying and suppressing effect of optimism on the relationship between purchase inability and price fairness perception, the retailers should be aware that when consumers feel optimistic, the price fairness perception is diminished through the purchase inability. Therefore, the retailers can appeal to optimism, hope, and happiness, i.e., positive outcomes and interdependence (cues like 'together in hard times,' 'stay together and positive,' 'together towards bright future'...), because these might decrease the feelings of helplessness. In this way, consumers might feel more secure and more in control, which might positively impact their price perceptions and behavioural actions. Besides advertising, retailers could offer additional benefits, such as coupons, discounts, free products and deliveries, and loyalty programmes that might alleviate the pressure and vulnerability and thus create and enhance the assistance, fairness perceptions, and positive behaviour. In addition, retailers should constantly stress and communicate their social responsibility and interdependence through their advertising campaigns for future potential price fairness changes. Such an approach is vital for managing customer relationships and preparing for damage control, e.g., rising dissatisfaction non-revisit or negative word-of-mouth spread. Transparent and enhanced communication through all available channels (traditional, online) is the key, especially since information sharing emerges to be the most valuable asset in crisis times.

6.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

One research limitation is the use of the convenience sampling method. In addition, another limitation is the data collection obtained at one single point of time on the sample of consumers from one country (Croatia). Therefore, future research on the representative sample of Croatian consumers might provide more in-depth insights. Future research might also encompass more countries to contrast the possible differences concerning the researched constructs. Additional research directions might also inspect individual consumer differences, resilience, and knowledge in terms of the price fairness perceptions. It might also be interesting to investigate the retailer's perspective by capturing their experience with consumers during the pandemic and the consumer purchase experience (perceptions and behaviours) in the post-pandemic time, as well to analyse the prices based on the quickly changing demand and supply.

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IS DIGITAL MEDIA ADDICTION LINKED TO RETAIL THERAPY? – A DEEPER INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In the last 15 years society has been transformed into a hyper-connected, well-informed, and technology-savvy community. Phenomena like short attention span, multitasking, and content overload do not help an individual to successfully manage well-being. Instead of digital detox, many seek comfort in social media. Authors argue that social media addiction produces negative emotions which need compensation. One of the possible solutions to relieve tension is so-called retail therapy.

Methodology: Using adjusted scales, Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS-SF) and Retail Therapy Scale (RT), the authors were searching for a link between social media addiction and retail therapy. The data was collected via the online form and included 335 valid responses, predominantly from the student population in Croatia. The correlation was measured through the Pearson correlation coefficient and, additionally, confirmatory factor analysis and SEM were performed for a better understanding of the model.

Results: The paper shows that there is an up to moderate correlation between social media addiction and retail therapy items and that social media addiction as an independent variable can be used as a predictor for retail therapy.

Conclusion: The availability of social media as well as online and offline stores provide (irresistible) convenience to buy for the sake of shopping as a rewarding process. Social media addiction can co-exist with retail therapy, and one may argue that individuals prone to social media addiction are also prone to stress-relief retail shopping behaviour. Further studies have to be made to determine the true nature of social media consumption and what consequences these processes bring, including reduced well-being, as many contemporary scientific papers show. However, there are not many papers that link social media addiction as an unwanted condition with retail therapy as a tension-relieving process. This paper will add to scientific knowledge about these two phenomena.

Keywords: Retail Therapy, Mental Well-Being, Social Media Addiction

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is structured in the following order: Introduction, where relevant information is provided with emphasis on previous studies important for the matter of the study. Theoretical and conceptual background/framework, where important psychological theories are presented as a foundation for research. Methodology of the study. Results of the study. Discussion, which is needed to cover scientific space regarding the results of the study, as well as space not covered by the study important for further research. Conclusion, a concise report on the findings of the study.

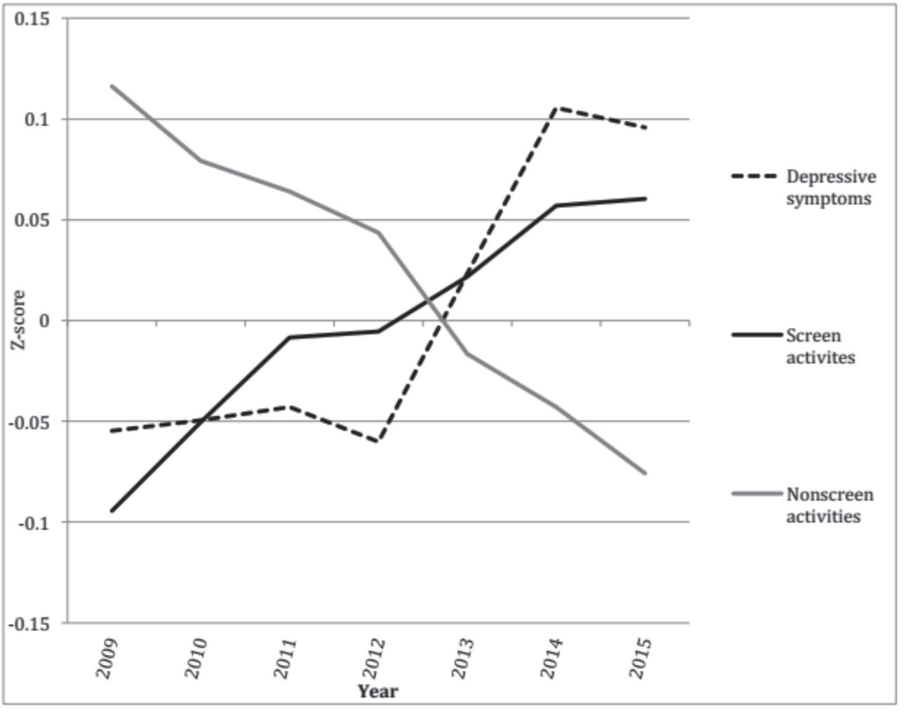
In recent years, the sense of problematic smartphone use is becoming increasingly present (Twenge and Campbell. 2018). Since smartphones accompany people everywhere they go, it is the matter of convenience that explains the ease of usage and the frequency with which they return to the online content.

The years between 2010 and 2012 (Figure 1) were particularly important because in that period a significant digital revolution took place. Three phenomena are recognised globally:

- The emergence of social media and deeper penetration into societies
- The availability of broadband internet
- The penetration of touchscreen smartphones with the convenience of content consumption and interaction

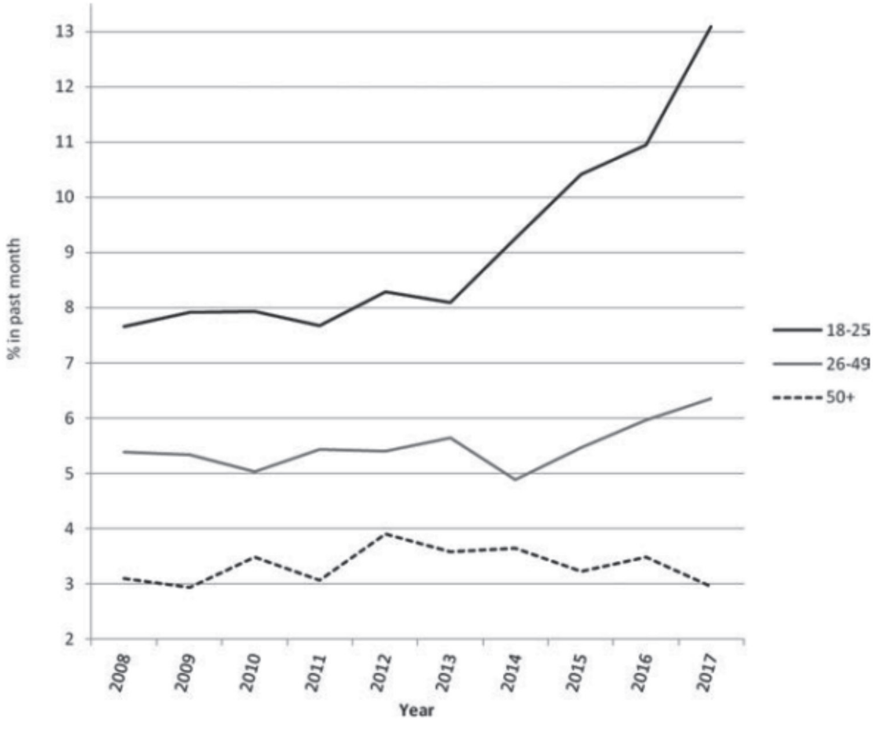
The increase in online time proportionally reduced the time spent on traditional offline activities. The quality of mental well-being has also reduced proportionally, according to studies performed on the most affected population – teenagers (Figure 1) (Twenge, 2017). Also, similar results are found when addressing the older - student age - population. (Figure 2). According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH; N 611,880) (Twenge et al., 2019), a nationally representative survey of U.S. adolescents and adults, age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes since the mid-2000s, were assessed. Rates of major depressive episodes in the last year increased 52% from 2005–2017 (from 8.7% to 13.2%) among adolescents aged 12 to 17 and 63% from 2009 –2017 (from 8.1% to 13.2%) among young adults 18 –25. Serious psychological distress in the last month and suicide-related outcomes (suicidal ideation, plans, attempts and deaths by suicide) in the last year also increased among young adults 18 –25 from 2008 –2017 (with a 71% increase in serious psychological distress).

Figure 1: Screen Activities, Non-Screen Activities, and Depressive Symptoms



Source: Trends in screen activities, non-screen activities, and depressive symptoms, among 8th and 10th graders, (Twenge et al., 2017)

Figure 2: Percent with serious psychological distress in the last month by age group, 2008 –2017

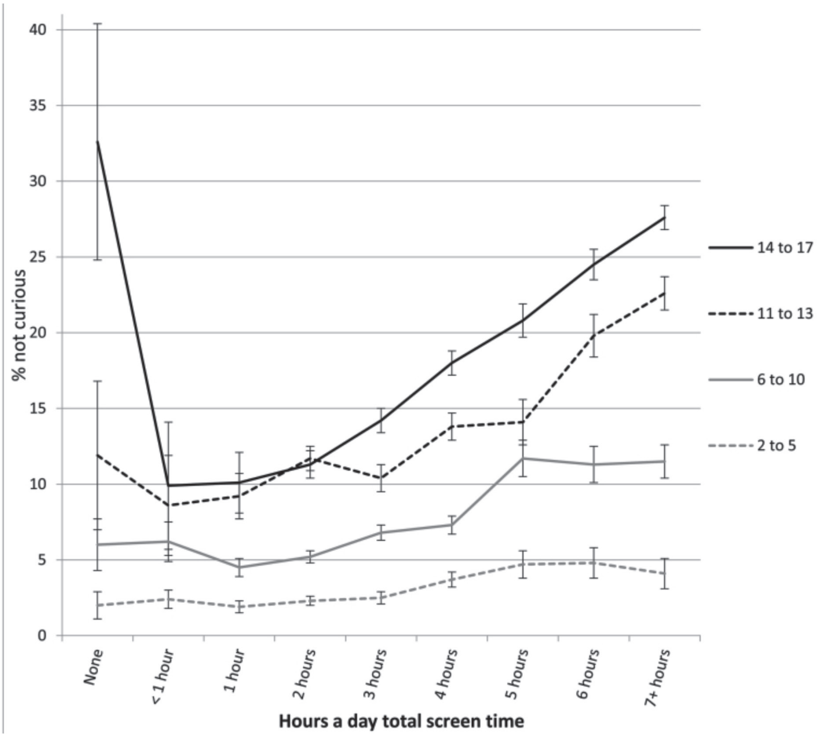


Source: Age, Period, and Cohort Trends in Mood Disorder Indicators and Suicide Related Outcomes in a Nationally Representative Dataset, 2005–2017, (Twenge et al., 2019)

Additionally, motivations for social media use in the student population vary from information sharing, passing time and escapism to social interaction, social capital and appearance feedback (Jarman et al., 2021). The results showed that motivations for social media use were positively associated with the type of social media engagement. Motivations for social media use were also directly associated with body satisfaction and well-being but, contrary to predictions, these relationships were not mediated by the type of social media engagement. In addition, with the inclusion of motivations, measures of social media engagement were not directly related to body satisfaction or well-being in the model. When it comes to the duration of time spent on social media most students spend a total of six hours on social media every day according to a cross-sectional study performed by Kolhar et al. (2021). In this study, the findings point to the fact that the time spent online also influenced the quality of sleep, which in turn may affect the quality of studying among students.

Furthermore, the more time one spends consuming online content the less is he or she interested in the world around them. (Figure 3). However, it is not only the quantity of time spent online but also the quality of that time. Social media rewards users with content, interaction and social contact and communication. It is the reward learning system that keeps users occupied and attached to the content on social media (Lindstrom et al., 2021). It has been shown that human behaviour on social media conforms qualitatively and quantitatively to the principles of reward learning. Processes within the learning function rely non-linearly on dopamine signals within the striatum, amygdala and frontal cortex (Schultz, 2016), pointing to hardware brain physiology.

Figure 3: Percentage not curious or interested in learning new things, by age and level of screen time, with controls, U.S., 2016. Error bars are ±1 SE.



Source: Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study, (Twenge and Campbell, 2018)

The dopamine signal increases with reward value and codes formal economic utility. Drugs of addiction generate, hijack and amplify the dopamine reward signal and induce exaggerated, uncontrolled dopamine effects on neuronal plasticity. It is thus inducted that habitual reward learning on social media makes strong neural connections activated by cues (Van Koningsbruggen et al., 2016). Cue-driven behaviour goes under the threshold of consciousness frequently and repeatedly. As discovered by Twenge (2017), the more one spends time on social media the more probability of mental health deterioration there is. Furthermore, if all is taken into consideration, one can induce that social media behaviour is likely to fall into the compulsive behaviour category (Aladwani and Almarzouq, 2016) and may be associated with mental health problems. It should be noted that the premise is: If one is prone to compulsive behaviour online, is it possible or probable that the same individual may develop compulsive behaviours in other aspects of life or lifestyle? Furthermore, social media addictive behaviour is strong enough to discourage other forms of dopamine-driven behaviours, because the dopamine loop is closed within touchscreens and consequent content: According to REFRAMING SPORT FOR TEENAGE GIRLS - Tackling teenage disengagement, offline dopamine-driven activities are in decline on a huge scale especially in teenage girls (UK) (Kelly et al., 2019) who are particularly influenced by social media. Social media dopamine is enough to satisfy and discourage other dopamine-driven activities such as sports.

If the prolonged time spent online produces unpleasant emotions (Steinert and Dennis, 2022), can one compensate for those unpleasant emotions through coping activities such as retail shopping? Can such shopping be called retail therapy?

Retail therapy is approached as a means of mood repair (Atalay and Meloy, 2011). In the process of retail therapy, one cheers oneself up through the purchase of self-treats. The individual who indulges in retail therapy experiences some kind of reward. Retail therapy can be compulsive, but also a strategic process. Thus, it is not entirely unplanned and spontaneous but rather goal-oriented, predominantly as a mood improvement.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND/ FRAMEWORK

There are three main theoretical backgrounds to help explain the phenomena and links between social media addictive behaviours and retail therapeutic behaviours:

1. Control Theory (Carver and Scheier, 1982).
2. Narrative Identity Theory (Pasupathi and Hoyt, 2009, Mcadams and McLean, (2013).

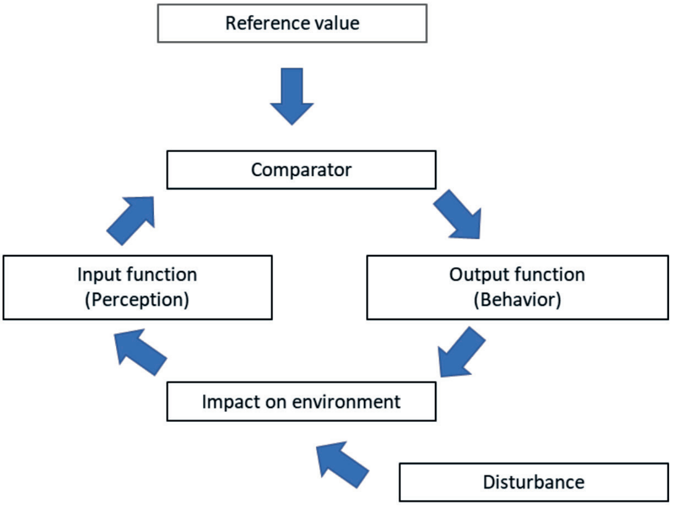
   a) Compensatory Consumption and Narrative Identity Theory (Woodruffe-Burton and Warwick, 2005a, Coles et al., 2017a, Grunert, 1993a)
3. Learned Helplessness Theory (Seligman and Maier, 1967a).

At the time of writing, the authors were unable to find other or newer psychological theories that would better fit the research and were unable to find any research that would correlate social media addiction and retail therapy (as a non-compulsory behaviour).

Control Theory

The Control Theory understands that behaviour follows perception. In Control Theory, one wants to maintain the status quo regarding inputs (perception) and outputs (behaviour) in a way that he or she corrects behaviour to preserve control of the system. For example, if one drives a car, he or she wants to keep the car on the road. If a curve occurs, then he or she adjusts the direction of the car via the steering wheel maintaining the control of the system (Figure 4.).

Figure 4: The negative feedback loop—the basic unit of cybernetic control



Source: Control Theory: A Useful Conceptual Framework for Personality-Social, Clinical, and Health Psychology, (Carver and Scheier, 1982)

Relation to social media addiction and retail therapy

The acknowledgment of overtime spent on social media and possible cognitive dissonance may be conscious or subconscious. It is a possible situation that suggests that the individual has lost control of time management and even acknowledgment of compulsive behaviour as an unwanted behaviour. To compensate for that, an individual must prove himself or herself that there is some control left and then he or she utilises that control in shopping where many aspects of behaviour are controlled. (Kang and Johnson, 2011).

Control theory posits that people engage in behaviours to regulate and maintain control over their internal states, such as emotions, needs, and desires, as well as their external environment.

When applied to shopping behaviour, control theory can help explain how individuals use shopping to regulate their emotions, fulfil needs and exert control over their environment:

1. Emotional regulation: Shopping can serve as a form of emotional regulation (Lee and Bottger, 2017, p. 38), where individuals engage in retail therapy to manage their emotions. By making purchases, individuals may regain a sense of control over their emotional states.
2. Need fulfilment: Shopping can also be driven by the desire to fulfil specific needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) suggests that individuals have a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to higher-order needs like self-esteem and self-actualisation.
3. Sense of control: Shopping behaviour can provide individuals with a sense of control over their environment.
4. Self-regulation and goal pursuit (Babin, 1995): Control theory highlights the importance of self-regulation in achieving desired outcomes. Shopping behaviour can be influenced by individuals' self-regulatory processes, such as setting goals, planning purchases, and monitoring progress. Individuals may engage in strategic shopping behaviours to exert control over their financial resources, time allocation, and overall consumption patterns.
5. Other factors.

Narrative Identity Theory

According to this theory, our behaviour is influenced by the story people accept as their own. The story here has a broader sense of one's life and it is an always-evolving life companion that is shaped by internal and external processes. The findings suggest that late adolescents and early adults construct more meaning-laden, interpretive, accounts of their everyday experiences when they converse with responsive friends. This is in tune with the perception that one may have of oneself while on social media, and that perception shapes one's identity (a very complex entity). One study (Pasupathi and Hoyt, 2009) shows that personal stories shape other people's behaviours as an evolving personal story that consists of empathy, compassion, comparison, and personal history.

Relation to social media addiction and retail therapy

One's behaviour has a strong tendency to be under own identity narrative (personal storytelling). This in turn means that people design perception, cognitive and emotional properties as well as behaviour under that narrative. By design, it is understood that identity narrative is an active and ongoing process. The behaviour on social media, as well as the purchasing behaviour, is also a reflection of own identity narrative.

Identity narrative theory suggests that individuals construct and express their identities through storytelling, creating narratives that help them make sense of their lives and present themselves to others. These narratives encompass various aspects of a person's life, including their interests, values, aspirations and social roles.

When it comes to purchasing habits, individuals often use their consumption choices to communicate and reinforce their identities.

1. Self-expression (Sirgy et al., 2016): Consumers often buy products or services that align with their desired or perceived identities.
2. Social belonging (Vargas-Bianchi, n.d.): People frequently adopt consumer behaviours that help them fit into specific social groups or subcultures. They may purchase products associated with a particular group to signal their affiliation and gain social acceptance.
3. Aspirational identities: Individuals may also make purchasing decisions based on the identities they aspire to have. For instance, someone aspiring to be seen as a sophisticated and cultured individual might invest in high-end fashion, luxury goods and cultural experiences (Marcussen and Gallagher, 2017).
4. Storytelling through brands (Raluca Mihalcea and Iacob Catoiu, 2008): Brands play a significant role in identity narrative theory. Consumers often choose brands that align with their self-perceived identities or the narratives they wish to portray.

5. Rituals and consumption experiences: Purchasing habits can be driven by the desire to engage in meaningful rituals or experiences that contribute to one's identity narrative. (Ratcliffe et al, 2019), (Rook, 1985).
6. Other factors.

Compensatory consumption

Compensatory consumption is explained by Grunert (1993), depicting compensation as the process where a lack of X is cured by a supply of Y, instead of X. It aligns well with Control Theory also, but, unlike Control Theory compensatory consumption does not interfere with primary behaviour where there is a lack of control; it rather refers to an invented way of controlling other aspects of life (secondary behaviour) (consumer behaviour) as compensation.

Compensatory consumption and identity narrative

Furthermore, compensatory consumption refers to the tendency of individuals to engage in excessive or extravagant consumption as a means of compensating for perceived deficiencies or negative experiences in their lives in other areas. On the other hand, narrative identity theory explores the role of personal narratives or life stories in shaping individuals' sense of self and identity. Although these concepts might seem distinct at first, they are linked through how compensatory consumption can be used as a means of constructing and expressing one's narrative identity.

By acquiring certain products or engaging in excessive consumption, individuals may attempt to portray a particular image or story about themselves. For example, someone who feels insecure about their social status might compensate by purchasing luxury goods to present an image of wealth and success.

Narrative identity theory suggests that individuals construct their identities by organising their life experiences into meaningful narratives. Compensatory consumption can play a role in this process by becoming a part of the individual's narrative. For instance, someone might incorporate stories of their extravagant purchases or experiences into their life narrative to reinforce a desired identity, such as being adventurous, extravagant, or successful.

In this way, compensatory consumption can be seen as a tool for individuals to enhance or modify their narrative identities. It allows them to fill perceived gaps in their self-image or compensate for negative experiences by creating a narrative that aligns with their desired identity.

Learned Helplessness Theory

Learned helplessness theory, developed by psychologist Martin Seligman (1967), suggests that individuals can develop a passive and helpless response to aversive situations after experiencing repeated and uncontrollable negative events. Learned helplessness refers to a state in which an individual learns to believe that they have no control or influence over their environment, even when opportunities for control or escape exist. This belief is acquired through experiences where the person encounters aversive events that are perceived as uncontrollable and unavoidable. When individuals repeatedly face situations in which their actions or efforts fail to bring about positive outcomes or prevent negative outcomes, they may develop a cognitive and emotional state of helplessness. They come to believe that their actions are futile and that they have little or no control over their circumstances.

Relation to social media addiction and retail therapy

Learned helplessness theory can be related to social media (Anon, 2021) and retail therapy in the following ways:

1. Social media addiction: Social media platforms often provide a constant stream of stimuli and rewards, such as likes, comments and notifications. Individuals who develop a pattern of excessive and compulsive social media use may experience learned helplessness if they feel unable to control or regulate their behaviour despite negative consequences.
2. Retail therapy, which involves shopping to improve mood or gain a sense of control, can be one such coping mechanism. When individuals engage in retail therapy, they experience temporary relief from negative emotions and a perceived sense of control over their emotions and environment.
3. The cycle of reinforcement: The cycle of learned helplessness, social media addiction, and retail therapy can reinforce one another. Individuals experiencing learned helplessness in controlling their social media use may resort to retail therapy as a coping mechanism for emotional regulation. Retail therapy provides a temporary escape or distraction from negative emotions associated with social media addiction. However, relying on retail therapy without addressing the root causes of social media addiction can perpetuate the cycle. Over time, this cycle can become self-reinforcing, as individuals associate retail therapy with relief from negative emotions and continue to engage in both behaviours.

Additional relationship between social media use and therapeutic effects – alternative ways of therapy

Some studies show that actively interacting with people — especially sharing messages, posts, and comments with close friends and reminiscing about past interactions — is linked to improvements in well-being. People who sent or received more messages, comments, and Timeline posts reported improvements in social support, depression, and loneliness (Burke and Kraut, 2016). The positive effects were even stronger when people talked with their close friends online. Simply broadcasting status updates was not enough; people had to interact one-on-one with others in their network. Other peer-reviewed longitudinal research and experiments (Frison and Eggermont, 2015) have found similar positive benefits between well-being and active (Tobin et al., 2014) engagement on Facebook.

Scales used in this research

In the main comprehensive research (Krištof et al., 2021a), the following scales were used: (SMAS-SF, GAD-7, PHQ-9, RT) – each in the form of a statement. The anxiety scale GAD-7 (Spitzer et al., 2006) and depression scale PHQ-9 (Kroenke, Spitzer, and Williams, 2001) are scales used to determine one's self-reported anxiety and depression levels. GAD-7 and PHQ-9 are not used for the model presented in this paper. Only SMAS-SF and RT (as a part of the broader questionnaire) are used to find only the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy, regardless of anxiety and depression levels, although part of the same research.

For the original SMAS-SF study (constructing the SMAS-SF) 998 students in Turkey participated and the scale was validated through expert opinion, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, total item correlations, mean differences between upper and lower groups, internal consistency coefficient and test-retest correlation coefficients. The authors of that study performed explanatory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis which both showed the existence of four factors. They are as follows:

- Virtual tolerance: Relates to the tolerance of the discomfort individual experiences while not on social media – important concerning compensatory consumer behaviour
- Virtual communication: Relates to communication eagerness as a motive to go to social media – not that important for compensatory consumer behaviour
- Virtual problem: Relates to problems emerging from social media use – important concerning compensatory consumer behaviour

- Virtual information: Relates to motives of informational nature to go to social media – not that important for compensatory consumer behaviour

Furthermore, the authors used a validated scale for Retail Therapy (Kang and Johnson, 2011), developed to discover and define factors that lead to retail therapy (defined as a strategic process to alleviate negative moods). Retail therapy scale development consisted of three phases: initial item generation, scale purification, and scale validation. 43 initial scale items were generated based on interview findings from previous studies and included in the survey questionnaire. 258 survey responses from the general population were used for scale purification, through which a four-factor measurement model was developed with 22 items. The refined measurement model was validated using a separate sample of 272. Four different factors were constructed upon exploratory factor analysis:

1. Therapeutic shopping motivation - used
2. Therapeutic shopping value: Positive mood reinforcement - used
3. Therapeutic shopping value: Negative mood reduction - used
4. Therapeutic shopping outcome – not used

Both scales (SMAS_SF, RT) are in the same direction, meaning the higher the score the higher the negative aspect:

- SMAS-SF: Addiction
- RT: Inclination to retail therapy – in this sense negative because it is extrinsic in nature and reduces self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a, 1986a, 1997a)

Omitted constructs

Since the comprehensive questionnaire (GAD-7, PHQ-9, SMAS-SF, and RT) would have too many items (60 total), the authors reduced the number of items to 44 to make the questionnaire easier to fill in and to reduce the fatigue of the participants. The authors omitted constructs: Virtual information and Virtual communication in SMAS-SF scale and Therapeutic shopping outcome in RT scale with the intent to preserve the quality of information gathered, so that the presented model would still be concise and relevant. These omitted constructs would likely provide insights that would not be relevant to the model. Additionally, CFA was conducted and showed that the information gathered still presents a good fit for the model.

Scales degrees were used as in the original scales; therefore, the degrees were as follows:

1. GAD-7: 0-3 (Not at all, Several days, More than half the days, Nearly every day) – not used in the model of this paper.
2. PHQ-9: 0-3 (Not at all, Several days, More than half the days, Nearly every day) – not used in the model of this paper.
3. SMAS-SF: 1-5 (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Not disagree – nor agree, Agree, Strongly agree).
4. RT: 1-5 (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Not disagree – nor agree, Agree, Strongly agree).

3. METHODOLOGY

The authors researched the student population in Croatia to investigate the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy. To achieve this the authors decided to use SMAS-SF, Social Media Addiction Scale – Student Form (Sahin 2018) to determine the social media addiction of secondary school, high school, and university students (335 observations). This study group consisted of dominantly young people from central and coastal Croatia. The median age was 21.5 years, and the average age was 25.18. Out of the sample, there were 114 (34%) males and 218(65%) females, and 3(1%) participants recognised themselves as non-binary. The survey was held via Internet form distributed among a predominantly student population using direct contact, e-mail and social networks. The survey had 44 items in total and, apart from the demographic part, it included 30 Likert scale items covering the research as stated in the previous chapter.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using R v.4.1.3 (R Core Team, 2022) using the Lavaan package (Rossell, 2012). Basic descriptive statistics were performed to get basic information about the observed values for both scales.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the proposed structures of SMAS_SF and RT scales, comparing several plausible measurement models. In both cases, a unidimensional model was compared to the multidimensional one and the multidimensional one with modifications. To control for skew the robust MLR estimator was used in assessing model fit. CFA models were evaluated using the model's chi-square ($\chi 2$) and fit indices root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Stieger, 1990), standardised root mean residual (SRMR; Bentler, 1990a), and comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990b). The following cut-off criteria were used: CFI values over .95 and RMSEA and SRMR values below .05 indicated good fit; while CFI values over .90 and RMSEA and SRMR below .08 were considered to indicate adequate model fit (Little, 2013). Models were compared with the scaled chi-square difference test for nested models (Satorra & Bentler, 2001).

To explore the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy, a structural equation model (SEM) was specified with social media subscales used as predictors and retail therapy subscales used as outcomes. Measurement models for the constructs used were specified according to the results of the previous step. Model fit was evaluated using the same criteria as for CFA models, and standard errors for parameters were computed by using 1000 bootstrap samples. Furthermore, participants' ages and gender were used as covariates in this model, so the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy is explored, holding the two constant.

4. RESULTS

Regarding the SMAS-SF scale, descriptive statistics were performed as shown in Table 1, while structure description is shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between SMAS_SF items

Item	M	SD	SI	KI	SE	r														
						2	3	4	5	6	12	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	3.46	1.16	-0.62	-0.44	0.06	.55**	.51**	.30**	.32**	.16*	.52**	.18**	.29**	.22**	.35**	.18**	.33**	.12	.22**	.09
2	2.53	1.11	0.43	-0.62	0.06		.43**	.43**	.44**	.31**	.43**	.44**	.31**	.45**	.44**	.36**	.46**	.29**	.22**	.25**
3	3.17	1.32	-0.20	-1.18	0.07			.30**	.37**	.25**	.44**	.21**	.32**	.22**	.33**	.26**	.25**	.11	.21**	.13
4	2.59	1.17	0.26	-0.81	0.06				.41**	.28**	.36**	.32**	.30**	.37**	.42**	.28**	.44**	.28**	.22**	.29**
5	1.90	0.93	0.71	-0.42	0.05					.41**	.36**	.30**	.43**	.50**	.44**	.36**	.38**	.23**	.17*	.26**
6	1.71	0.82	1.33	2.13	0.04						.26**	.37**	.44**	.54**	.27**	.36**	.31**	.37**	.22**	.30**
12	3.29	1.05	-0.55	-0.19	0.06							.28**	.32**	.31**	.41**	.29**	.37**	.17**	.24**	.23**
15	2.29	1.14	0.55	-0.71	0.06								.47**	.54**	.41**	.46**	.38**	.37**	.54**	.56**
16	1.96	0.98	0.91	0.26	0.05									.66**	.44**	.50**	.46**	.38**	.34**	.47**
17	1.71	0.83	1.02	0.38	0.05										.52**	.58**	.57**	.45**	.32**	.49**
18	2.36	0.91	0.06	-0.75	0.05											.40**	.57**	.31**	.27**	.39**
19	1.70	0.86	1.17	0.82	0.05												.49**	.50**	.33**	.57**
20	2.14	0.99	0.54	-0.45	0.05													.38**	.34**	.43**
21	1.68	0.90	1.28	0.91	0.05														.36**	.44**
22	2.99	1.28	-0.14	-1.16	0.07															.42**
23	1.81	0.98	1.24	1.13	0.05															

*M- Mean; SD- Standard deviation; SI- Skewness index; KI- Kurtosis index; SE- Standard error of the mean; r- Pearson correlation coefficient; * < .05, ** < .01. Note: Items were labelled according to the number of items in the original questionnaire*

To assess the structure of the SMAS_SF several measurement models were specified and tested in a nested sequence. First, a unidimensional model was specified with one latent variable explaining the covariation between all indicators. In the second step, a multidimensional model was specified with items 1-5 loading on the Virtual Tolerance factor and items 15-23 loading on the Virtual Problem dimension. In the third step, a modified multidimensional model was specified with the following covariances between pairs of items estimated freely: 15-22, 1-3, 1-2, 16-17. These correlated uniquenesses allow for item wording or content overlap between the items to be considered.

Table 2: Comparison of structure models for SMAS_SF

	Model fit						Comparison with Unidimensional		Comparison with Multidimensional	
Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Unidimensional	400.8^{***}	77	.805	.769	.112 [.102–.122]	.085				
Multidimensional	286.5^{***}	76	.875	.85	.091 [.08–.102]	.071	60.2^{***}	1		
Modified	194.3^{***}	72	.928	.909	.071 [.060–.083]	.056			79.6^{***}	4

*Note. $\chi 2$ = chi-square statistic; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; CI = confidence interval; df = degrees of freedom. *** $p < .001$*

Table 2 shows measures of fit for the three models described above, as well as the comparisons between the nested pairs. The unidimensional model shows poor fit and, specifying two distinct factors, improves model fit significantly, even though the fit is still bad in absolute terms. Introducing the covariation between selected pairs of items improves fit significantly over the base multidimensional model. The final modified model showed adequate fit to the data with adequate standardised item loadings (all $\lambda \geq .48$) and was used as a measurement model in further SEM analyses.

Descriptive statistics were performed on the RT scale as shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Intercorrelations between RT items

Items ("I shop to...")	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
(1) Relieve stress	1.000														
(2) Cheer up	0.640*	1.000													
(3) Feel better	0.713*	0.744*	1.000												
(4) Compensate bad day	0.792*	0.605*	0.653*	1.000											
(5) Feel relaxed	0.695*	0.603*	0.613*	0.744*	1.000										
(6) Good about self	0.628*	0.572*	0.638*	0.603*	0.665*	1.000									
(7) Positive distraction	0.477*	0.450*	0.532*	0.424*	0.451*	0.522*	1.000								
(8) Sense of achievement	0.437*	0.389*	0.460*	0.432*	0.417*	0.536*	0.468*	1.000							
(9) Visual stimulation	0.515*	0.465*	0.489*	0.457*	0.516*	0.498*	0.519*	0.511*	1.000						
(10) Positive feelings	0.398*	0.395*	0.460*	0.309*	0.384*	0.436*	0.429*	0.482*	0.564*	1.000					
(11) Escape from loneliness	0.509*	0.344*	0.415*	0.482*	0.465*	0.531*	0.369*	0.454*	0.432*	0.465*	1.000				
(12) Escape stress environ.	0.676*	0.523*	0.505*	0.656*	0.625*	0.583*	0.422*	0.402*	0.424*	0.372*	0.667*	1.000			
(13) Take mind off	0.720*	0.601*	0.540*	0.667*	0.625*	0.618*	0.424*	0.403*	0.450*	0.389*	0.589*	0.796*	1.000		
(14) Fell an empty feeling	0.603*	0.527*	0.519*	0.526*	0.487*	0.525*	0.447*	0.488*	0.471*	0.473*	0.557*	0.593*	0.652*	1.000	
(15) Control things	0.605*	0.442*	0.492*	0.565*	0.515*	0.556*	0.427*	0.485*	0.450*	0.490*	0.674*	0.642*	0.692*	0.741*	1.000
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$,															

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for RT items

Item	Mean	SD	SI	KI
1	2.370.149	1.176.239	.3793253	1.972.029
2	3.214.925	1.219.263	-.515266	2.208.685
3	2.967.164	1.229.185	-.1893503	196.576
4	2.361.194	1.212.825	.5123913	2.121.106
5	2.474.627	1.213.12	.4321398	2.142.439
6	2.632.836	1.225.77	.1601271	1.872.178
7	3.026.866	1.087.157	-.2632829	2.445.126
8	2.432.836	1.072.574	.3278123	2.254.909
9	2.883.582	1.184.303	-.1856783	2.019.492
10	2.889.552	1.199.942	-.1617497	2.017.111
11	2.020.896	1.087.289	.868354	2.816.606
12	2.391.045	1.210.945	.3417723	1.937.307
13	259.403	1.288.814	.131797	1.712.158
14	2.459.701	1.169.992	.3050225	2.066.923
15	2.134.328	1.095.657	.7445722	2.792.252

For Retail Therapy, the comparable models were tested using the same procedure. In this case, the multidimensional model had three correlated dimensions with items 1-6 loading on the therapeutic shopping motivation factor, items 7-12 loading on the positive mood reinforcement factor, and items 13-17 loading on negative mood reduction. The final model was modified to include two covariances between items 2 and 3, as well as 16 and 17. Once again, unidimensional and multidimensional models showed a poor fit to the data with the latter showing better fit. The modified multidimensional model again showed adequate fit in absolute terms and a significant improvement over the base multidimensional one. This model had very good, standardised factor loadings (all $\lambda \geq .68$). Fit measures and comparisons are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of structure models for Retail Therapy

Comparison of structure models for retail therapy

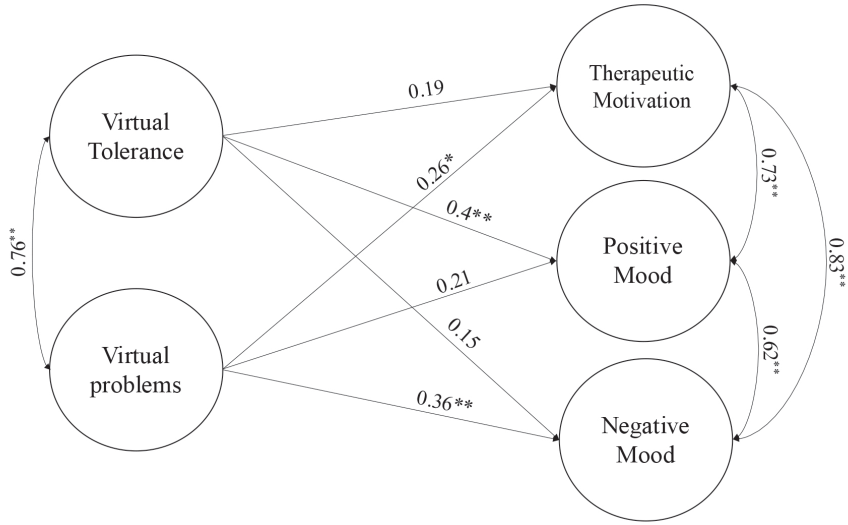
		Model fit					Comparison with Unidimensional		Comparison with Multidimensional	
Model	χ^2	*df*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Unidimensional	530^{***}	90	.835	.808	.121 [.112–.129]	.069				
Multidimensional	309.8^{***}	87	.917	.9	.087 [.078–.089]	.049	185.9^{***}	3		
Modified	240.9^{***}	85	.943	.929	.074 [.064–.084]	.049			45.2^{***}	2

*Note. χ2 = chi-square statistic; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; CI = confidence interval; df = degrees of freedom. *** p < .001*

Relations between social media addiction and retail therapy

To explore the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy a full SEM model was specified based on the measurement models established above. The authors modelled virtual tolerance and virtual problems as exogenous variables and the three retail therapy subscales: therapeutic shopping motivation, positive mood reinforcement and negative mood reduction as endogenous. Age and gender were used as controls and modelled as manifest-level predictors of the three outcome variables. This model showed adequate fit to the data ($\chi2$ (413) = 947.59, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.062, 95%CI [0.057, 0.067], $p < .001$, SRMR = 0.066, CFI = 0.9, TLI = 0.886) and the structural part of the model is presented in figure XY (control variables are omitted from the picture).

Figure 5: The structural part of the SEM model of the relationship between social media addiction and retail therapy.



*Note: measurement parts of the model, variances, and residuals as well as control variables are omitted from the picture for the clarity of presentation. Coefficients from a fully standardised solution are shown. ** p < .01; * p < .05*

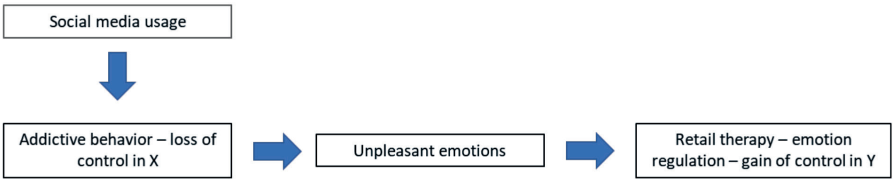
As can be seen from the picture, when controlling for age and gender as well as the other social media factors, each outcome had one significant predictor. For Therapeutic Motivation and Negative Mood, this was Virtual Problems, indicating that those individuals who report more problems score higher scores on Therapeutic Motivation and Negative Mood. On the other hand, Positive Mood is associated with higher scores on the Virtual Tolerance dimension.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the presented analysis it is evident that latent variables (factors) of the social media addiction scale and retail therapy scale are connected. It can be concluded that a higher incidence of latent variables in the SMAS-SF scale predicts a higher incidence of correlated latent variables in the Retail Therapy scale as shown on SEM (Figure 4). Precisely, the SEM returned that the Virtual Tolerance can be used as a predictor for Positive Mood (mood repair) as the beta is 0.4; additionally Virtual Problems is a predictor for Negative Mood, the beta is 0.36. Other correlations within SEM also include betas to be above 0.2 in pairs: Virtual Problems – Therapeutic Motivations (beta=0.26), Virtual Problems – Positive Mood (beta=0.21). All betas in SEM are statistically significant since the p-value is below 0.05. The authors accept that beta values between 0.2 and 0.4 are indicators of moderate correlation. This is a matter of interpretation and discussion.

Based on the presented theoretical background, along with the indicated results of the research, the authors can put all presented information together and develop a theoretically based model (Figure 6). The model implies timely order, meaning that addictive behaviour on social media precedes retail therapy as compensation. The results in the research do not represent that model but they do not contradict it.

Figure 6: Relation between social media addiction and retail therapy



Source: Authors

Authors still, for the sake of discussion, suggest that X (high frequency of social media activity) precedes Y (lower frequency of shopping activity) on the argument of frequency. It is therefore probable that individuals spend more time scrolling social media than shopping. So, a lot of consumption of social media content shapes individuals' identity narrative, which is influenced by addiction. Addiction is a loss of control (Woodruffe-Burton and Warwick, 2005b, Coles et al., 2017b, Grunert, 1993b). To maintain control individuals engage in activities where they have, at least, an illusion of control to improve mood and consequently identity narrative. Having control improves self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977b, 1986b, 1997b). and self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behaviour, and social environment. On the other side of the self-efficacy spectrum, there is helplessness (Seligman and Maier, 1967b). Since learned helplessness arguably produces unpleasant emotions, individuals tend to improve their emotional response and go to the pleasant side of the spectrum. This process also motivates individuals to engage in retail therapy. Learned helplessness can be applied to the long-term learning curve about self-identity narrative which, after years or at least months of addictive behaviour, strategically changes the way individuals see themselves in a worse way. Interestingly, on the same dataset, the authors showed that social media addiction is a moderate predictor of both depression and anxiety. This work also should incite further research on the matter with an ethical goal to improve self-efficacy through a better understanding of technology, mental disorders, and impulsive/compulsive behaviour. For the sake of further discussion, a previous study shows (Mclean et al., 2011) that women have consistently higher prevalence rates of anxiety disorders, and that depression and anxiety frequently co-occur (Hirschfeld, R., 2001). One of the contributing factors is that girls use social media more frequently than boys and, other factors aside, this has at least some contribution to increase in girls suicide rate (Luby, J. and Kertz, S., 2019). Another study (Coyne et al., 2021) shows the connection between social media use and teen girls' suicide risk. The sum of presented theories and research suggests that social media addiction and retail therapy are behaviours that need self-supervision and an incentive to change behaviour toward activities that regulate emotional response strategically and in the long term including a reduction of online activities. Also based on Twenge (2018) one can conclude that mood improvement can also be achieved through reduction of screen time. The world population lives in a super-connected world, but lack of in-person social contact induces new sorts of discomfort and problems (Kroencke et al., 2023, Anxiety Centre, 2019), and personal, social contact improves mood and emotional exchange which is beneficial. In other words, to improve mood it is preferable to engage in live social activities intrinsically motivated, rather than sustain passive content consumption on social media and extrinsically motivated retail therapy.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper serves as an incentive to conduct further research to better understand social media phenomena and consequent behaviours. Firstly, it combines psychological theories as a possible framework for the explanation of phenomena (social media addiction and retail therapy) and the results of the research which showed that there is a moderate correlation between latent factors of both scales (SMAS-SF, RT). Authors argue that it is better to engage in activities that improve mood in the long term, rather than short-term mood repair like retail therapy. Reduction of screen time is preferable to be more open to offline dopamine sources in contrast to convenient social media content consumption. Also, person-to-person interaction is preferable to a virtual one. The study summarises that reported social media addiction is a predictor of therapeutic shopping (Virtual tolerance – Positive mood). Bearing in mind that the worldwide number of active social media "user identities" reached 4.80 billion in April 2023, (Kemp, 2023), and that social media use continues to grow too, with 150 million new user identities over the past year delivering annual growth of 3.2 percent, it is a large portion of the world population that is exposed to potentially unpleasant emotional states. That in turn may be used by marketing activities pointing to products and services presented as stress relievers. It is a huge "market of negative emotions" that may be used by brands to encourage spending, providing a good margin of profit for them. Additionally, there is a huge field of opportunities for therapeutic workers, but also government institutions in broader scope to educate the affected population about the negative impact of social media use on mental health. Education about social media use is thus a necessity rather than an option when it comes to the mental health of the world population.

Study limitations and guidelines for future research efforts

The study limitations are a relatively small sample of participants (n=335), culturally homogenous participants (students in Croatia), omitted scale constructs to reduce the number of total items (44 vs. originally 60) and self-reporting mental states per se have subjective bias. An important note is also that the research was performed just before the Coronavirus pandemic and thus was not influenced by that phenomenon. Future research is in order since there are no other papers (according to the findings of the authors, at the time of writing) that connect unpleasant emotions originating from inadequate social media use and compensatory retail therapy. Since social media is a well-established phenomenon and extremely present in the everyday life of young adults, it is peculiar that there are not more studies connecting social media and buying behaviours. The authors encourage further research, also having in mind ethical issues – the negative influence of social media on mental health and co-existing buying behaviour – a commercial space that can be abused by marketing activities harvesting on unpleasant emotions (Puccinelli et al., 2016).

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AN ASSESSMENT OF DETERMINANTS INFLUENCING THE ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF RETAIL CONSUMERS IN CROATIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that affect online trust, online repurchase intentions, and intentions to engage in online word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the condition of the Croatian retail market. That includes exploring the set of online shopping drivers, easy to perceive and recognise by online consumers and store managers, and the frequently researched concept of the online customer experience.

Methodology: The survey captured the opinions and revealed the preferred online shopping drivers and behaviour of predominantly younger Croatian examinees (N = 276). The factor analysis and structural equation modelling were applied.

Results: The outcomes imply a positive impact of the online customer experience and online trust on repurchase intentions and intentions to engage in eWOM. Furthermore, three sets of online shopping drivers were found to positively impact repurchase and intentions to eWOM, while online trust mediates the relations between online customer experience, and both repurchase and intentions to eWOM.

Conclusion: The outcomes confirmed the value of creating a favourable online experience and the relevance of determining specific online shopping drivers. Furthermore, these outcomes corroborated previous studies, concluding that the continuous effort to gain and sustain online consumers' trust pays off through elevated repurchase and word-of-mouth intentions.

Keywords: Online Shopping Drivers, Online Customer Experience, Online Trust, Repurchase Intentions, eWOM Intentions

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has significantly influenced consumer behaviours, particularly online shopping. The mandatory closure of physical stores led to a rapid increase in the share of e-commerce in 2020 (by nearly 30%; http://www.statista.com). However, brick-and-mortar retailers' gradual and complete reopening did not restore the sales structure to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, the continued growth of online retail participation persisted, especially among younger age groups known as "digital natives." Consequently, a growth of approximately 10.4% (approximately USD 6.3 trillion) is expected for global online B2C in 2023, with a three-percentage-point increase compared to 2020 (17.8% → 20.8%) and a seven-percentage-point increase compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019 (http://www.statista.com). The share of weekly global online purchases in the age groups of 16-24 and 25-34 in 2022 (Q4) compared to 2020 (Q4) increased on average by 44.3% (We are Social & Meltwater, 2023: 257, and We are social, Hootsuite, 2021: 168). Similar trends can be observed in Croatia, where there was a 3.9% increase in online consumers in 2022 compared to 2021 (totalling 2.51 million, i.e., +94 thousand consumers). However, there was a decline in the overall e-commerce sales of consumer goods by 10.6% (-146 million USD), amounting to 1.23 billion USD (We are Social & Meltwater, Digital 2023 Croatia: 59). Meanwhile, at the global level, there was a growth of approximately 9.7% in 2022, reaching 5.7 trillion USD (http://www.statista.com).

This paper explores the significance of specific online shopping drivers, the influence of online shopping drivers, and online experience on consumer trust, repurchase intentions, and the intention to engage in electronic word-of-mouth, particularly among the younger population in Croatia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW, CONCEPT AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Online market providers have been striving to identify consumer behaviour patterns when visiting their web stores and recognise the factors that have the most significant impact on their (repeat) purchase intentions for almost 30 years. By doing so, they aim to refine their marketing and retail strategies further and improve market results.

Extensive research in this field has been ongoing for over two decades, relying on various approaches. Through a meta-analysis of 72 studies on determinants of online shopping, Asraar Ahmed & Sathish (2015: 495-498) found that 57% (41 studies) of the authors developed independent research models that included different constructs. Similarly, various approaches were applied in this study. For instance, some researchers, such as Lester et al. (2005: 131-133), Bucko et al. (2018: 6-7), and Clemons et al. (2016: 1127), examine consumers regarding specific factors (criteria) that influence their repeat purchase intentions. These factors typically include free shipping, coupons, discounts, consumer reviews, an easy return policy, social media likes and comments, etc. A similar approach was used in the analysis of e-service quality factors, for instance, by Yoo & Donthu (2001: 45-46), Wolfinbarger & Gilly (2003: 188-189), Blut et al. (2015: 682), Rita et al. (2019: 3).

Furthermore, rankings of the essential online purchase criteria (online purchase drivers) have regularly been published in recent years by renowned commercial providers of social and media intelligence, such as We are Social & Meltwater (2023: 258), quarterly and annually since 2021 for global online shopping, including partial data for local markets, including Croatia (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-croatia) and Postnord (E-barometern, 2022: 50-51) since 2017 for the Swedish online market. This approach is based on similar research conducted in traditional (offline) markets. For example, Deloitte investigates the biggest in-store shopping inhibitors (Paul & Hogan, 2015: 7).

Although studies on factors (criteria) are likely most useful for professionals - web merchants, the most frequent theoretical frameworks in researching online consumer behaviour are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Both approaches rely on the Theory of Reasoned Action - TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, as cited in Putra, 2018: 9), which is one of the fundamental and influential theories that view human behaviour intentions as a function of attitudes and subjective norms. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and the Technology Acceptance Model, behavioural intention is a reliable predictor of actual behaviour (Bhattacharya et al., 2018: 5). It follows that online repurchase intentions can also be considered a good predictor of actual online purchases. Repurchase Intentions encompass the degree to which consumers are willing to repeat product or service purchases, representing a straightforward, objective, and measurable expectation of buying behaviour (Huang et al., 2014: 109).

There is broad consensus among researchers that consumer trust plays a crucial role among the antecedents of repurchase intentions (Aiken et al., 2007: 3, Ganguly et al., 2009: 27, Asraar Ahmed & Sathish, 2015: 491, Hao Suan et al., 2015: 236-237). Online trust is most commonly defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the action of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (according to Mayer et al., 1995, as cited in Aljazzaf et al., 2010: 4).

Through a meta-analysis of 41 empirical research articles, Kumar & Kashyap (2022: 4) examined eight relationships with repurchase intention (trust, perceived shopping value, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, e-service quality, convenience, and perceived risk) and found that the relationship between trust and repurchase intentions yielded the highest average result ($r = 0.686$, $p < 0.01$), which was also the most frequently investigated relationship (in 21 studies). The relationship with perceived ease of use had the second-highest average result ($r = 0.756$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of 72 studies, Asraar Ahmed and Sathish (2015: 495-498) found that trust (as a standalone construct) and purchase intention were examined in 15 cases. Trust was found to have the second highest association with purchase intentions (path coefficient = 0.406), following consumer attitudes (0.552).

In addition to the direct effect of consumer trust on online repurchase intentions, several authors have investigated the mediating effect of trust on the relationship between various antecedents and repurchase intentions. For example, Hong & Cha (2013: 930) analysed the direct and indirect effects of perceived risk on purchase intentions, and Jadil et al. (2022: 7) examined the effects of perceived reputation, size, and risk on attitudes and purchase intentions with trust as a mediator.

Based on the presented research approaches, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Online shopping drivers (OSD) have a positive impact on ($H1_1$) consumer online trust (OT), ($H1_2$) consumer repurchase intentions (RPI), and ($H1_3$) positively impact intentions to engage in eWOM.

H2: Consumer online trust (OT) has a positive impact on ($H2_1$) repurchase intentions (RPI), and ($H2_2$) positively impacts intentions to engage in eWOM.

Following the approach of Zhao et al. (2020: 3), H1 and H2 are integrated, resulting in the following hypotheses:

H3: Consumer online trust (OT) mediates the relationship between online shopping drivers (OSD) and ($H3_1$) consumer repurchase intentions (RPI) and ($H3_2$) intentions to engage in eWOM.

Furthermore, numerous studies have emphasised the crucial role of online customer experience (OCE) in the strategic differentiation of online retailers (Bhattacharya et al., 2018: 3). OCE is defined differently depending on the aspects of the online experience emphasised, as well as the terms used, such as "online customer experience," "website experience," or "online purchase experience." In this context, OCE is defined as "the customers' cognitive and affective state of experience resulting from personal interaction with the online shopping website", which is consistent with both cognitive information processing and affective processing approaches used to describe online shopping behaviour (Hao Suan et al., 2015: 236).

The significance of the impact of OCE on RPI has been confirmed by empirical research. For instance, a meta-analysis of 18 drivers of online shopping across 72 studies conducted by Asraar Ahmed & Sathish (2015: 498-499) revealed the third-highest association between OCE and RPI (path coefficient = 0.38). Among various OSD, reviews by other consumers, likes, and comments (about products, services, delivery speed, websites, etc.) on social media platforms hold an important position in online shopping and RPI. This form of online consumer communication is known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is defined as "any positive or negative informal statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a brand, product, service, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004: 39). Based on research, individuals engaging in eWOM have the following motives: altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, and economic incentives (Ismagilova et al., 2020: 1207).

In the past two decades, numerous studies have been conducted on this phenomenon. For example, a bibliometric analysis by Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023: 409) found 797 articles (399 in the business domain and 398 in the tourism domain) published between 2003 and 2021. These studies have analysed various perspectives of eWOM, such as examining eWOM metrics, including volume, valence (positive or negative), composite measures, variance, and variability (Babić Rosario et al., 2016: 305). In the context of eWOM messages, factors such as argument quality, eWOM credibility, eWOM usefulness, existing eWOM, trust in the message, valence, and volume have been investigated (Ismagilova et al., 2020: 1211). The impact of eWOM has been explored concerning consequences such as purchase intention, increased trust, customer engagement and satisfaction, financial performance, and hotel performance (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023: 416).

Within this study's scope, individuals' inclination to engage in eWOM has been analysed. A meta-analysis of 69 studies conducted between 2000 and 2017 (Ismagilova et al., 2020: 1207 and 1213) revealed the second-highest correlation level ($r = 0.556$, $p < 0.001$) with purchase intentions (after eWOM credibility) among seven different eWOM concepts. Based on the findings of empirical studies on the concepts of OCE and eWOM, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4: Online customer experiences (OCE) have a positive impact on ($H4_1$) online consumer trust (OT), on ($H4_2$) repurchase intentions (RPI), and on ($H4_3$) intentions to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Once again, by integrating $H4_2$, and $H4_3$, the following hypotheses emerges:

H5: Consumer online trust (OT) mediates the relationship between online customer experiences (OCE) and ($H5_1$) consumer repurchase intentions (RPI) and ($H5_2$) intentions to engage in eWOM.

H6: Intentions to engage in eWOM positively impact repurchase intentions (RPI).

3. METHODOLOGY

The proposed hypotheses in this study were tested using an online questionnaire encompassing all variables. The statements for measuring individual constructs were drawn from previous research and adapted to the research context (online shopping) and the research period (during the COVID-19 pandemic). OT was measured using five statements based on Ennew & Sekhon (2007, as cited in Lee Hao et al., 2015: 242). OSD consisted of 31 items, amended from the scales used by Lester et al. – 4 items (2005: 132-133), Bucko et al. – 19 items (2018: 6), and Clemons et al. – 5 items (2016: 1127), and three self-developed statements. For OCE (three statements) and intention to engage in eWOM (five statements), the scales were adapted from Lee Hao et al. (2015: 242). Lastly, the variable of RPI was measured using three statements based on a modified scale developed by Pavlou & Fygenson (2006: 139). All statements were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also included eight demographic variables (gender, age, education level, employment status, sources of income, household income, and place of residence) and was prepared using the LimeSurvey tool. Overall, 276 responses (cases) were collected, mainly from a younger student population. This sample corresponds to the recommended ratio of observable variables to the number of independent variables of 15-20:1 (Hair et al., 2019: 279). The tested hypotheses are presented along with the obtained results through structural equation modelling in Section 4 of this study.

4. RESULTS

The obtained results were analysed using the statistical software Jamovi 2.3.21. Given that this study employs a combined approach of investigating desirable criteria that encourage online shopping along with previously researched constructs like online trust or consumer online experience, the priority among the examined criteria (factors) encouraging online shopping was first explored. In the initial step, a principal component analysis (PCA) approach was applied, as used by, for example, by Bucko et al. (2018: 6-9). However, since the online shopping drivers (OSD) scale was expanded with additional statements, the obtained results (components) could not be logically interpreted within the research context. Therefore, prior to reusing PCA, all variables (statements) were categorised based on an approach developed by Lawton and Parasuraman (1980, refined by Nwankwo 1995 and Bathgate et al. 2006, cited in Kowalik 2011: 64 and 66) into low, medium, and high levels of perceived importance for individual criteria encouraging online shopping. The study employed a five-point Likert scale. According to this approach, all ratings < 3 represent low, ≥ 3 < 4 represent medium, and ratings ≥ 4 represent high perceived importance for criteria. Thus, five statements with ratings < 3 were excluded from the scale:

1. There must be a physical store of the same seller in Croatia;
2. The same seller must have a physical store in another European or global country;
3. Automated seller recommendations are based on your browsing history or (when available) based on your demographic data (gender, age, occupation, employment, etc.);
4. Recommendations from influencers regarding specific products, services, or online sellers;
5. The number of followers the vendor has on their social media.

The remaining OSD variables were then analysed using PCA (varimax), in which six components were determined based on eigenvalues (> 1), with communalities values above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019: 158) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measurements above 0.6 for all variables (Shrestha, 2021: 6). After verifying the reliability of the extracted component scales, it was determined that a component called "recommendation" (REC), consisting of three statements: country of origin, personal experience, and recommendations from friends and acquaintances, did not meet the necessary reliability level and was excluded from further analysis. Following a repeat PCA analysis, five components were retained. In this process, from the "Review" (REV) component, a variable with a communalities value < 0.5 was excluded. In this process, 14 variables from the Bucko et al. scale (2018: 6) were retained, two from Lester et al. (2005: 131) and one from Clemons et al. (2016: 1127). The remaining three were self-developed. These five OSD components are comparable to the results of Bucko et al. (2018: 9) analysis, which revealed seven components. Six of them are similar to this study: price and scarcity ≈ price (PRI); social proof and social media activity ≈ social media (SOC); conditions and product details ≈ web shop features (eSHOP). Loadings and variance percentages for remaining latent and observable variables of online shopping drivers (OSD) are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Principal component analysis results

Latent variable	Index	Observable variable (shortened)	Factor loadings	% of variance
Web shop features (eSHOP)	v21	Payment method	0.668	20.70
	v22	Photo and video of products/ services	0.827	
	v23	Detailed product/service description	0.862	
	v24	Simple website navigation	0.696	
	v25	Mobile optimisation	0.616	
	v26	Availability of sales terms	0.657	
	v27	Availability of delivery terms	0.637	
Price (PRI)	v13	Low price	0.785	14.00
	v14	Discounts	0.814	
	v15	Price comparison	0.698	
	v16	Time-limited offer	0.622	
	v17	Free delivery	0.602	
Social media (SOC)	v29	Web integration with social media	0.651	13.01
	v30	Presence on social media	0.814	
	v31	Strong search engine positioning	0.761	
Review (REV)	v6	Product test specialists	0.756	9.97
	v7	Online certificates	0.847	
	v8	Testimonials	0.724	
Warranties (WARR)	v10	Money-back guarantees	0.845	8.82
	v11	Product return guarantees	0.899	

Note: Cumulatively, these constructs account for 66.50% of the total variance of the OSD factor.
Source: Research

The reliability of the measurement scales and the normality of distribution is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptives, Reliability, and Normality

	M	SD	SE	α value	Ordinal α	AVE	Skew.	Kurt.	Shapiro-Wilk
REC	3.64	0.774	0.047	0.527	0.576	0.312	- 0.547	0.278	0.961***
REV	3.74	0.676	0.045	0.709	0.768	0.557	- 0.106	0.305	0.973***
WARR	4.47	0.661	0.040	0.824	0.906	0.839	-1.195	0.971	0.775***
PRI	3.85	0.729	0.044	0.793	0.837	0.536	-1.064	1.953	0.929***
eSHOP	4.22	0.694	0.042	0.892	0.930	0.693	- 0.972	1.191	0.905***
SOC	3.56	0.900	0.054	0.776	0.816	0.638	- 0.507	0.138	0.959***
OCE	3.87	0.632	0.038	0.754	0.810	0.621	- 0.405	1.244	0.943***
OT	3.44	0.622	0.037	0.754	0.821	0.561	- 0.226	1.437	0.969***
RPI	3.97	0.801	0.048	0.774	0.847	0.668	- 0.652	0.542	0.929***
eWOM	3.45	0.832	0.051	0.876	0.904	0.713	- 0.295	- 0.137	0.978**

*Note: 1. REC (recommendation) = country of origin, personal experience, and recommendations from friends and acquaintances; 2. REV (reviews) = consumer recommendations; 3. WARR (warrants) = money-back/product return guarantees; 4. PRI (price) = price and (free) delivery; 5. eSHOP = web shop features; 6. SOC (social media) = seller's social media; 7. OCE = online customer experience; 8. OT = online trust; 9. RPI = repurchase intention; 10. eWOM = intention to engage in eWOM; * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*
Source: Research

It is evident that all Cronbach's α and AVE coefficients are within the recommended limits of reliability, except REC which was excluded from further analysis. All skewness coefficients are within the acceptable range for normal distribution. The kurtosis coefficient is dominantly positive, indicating a more peaked distribution for some variables. Furthermore, by examining the graphical representation, it was concluded that all variables have a roughly normal distribution shape.

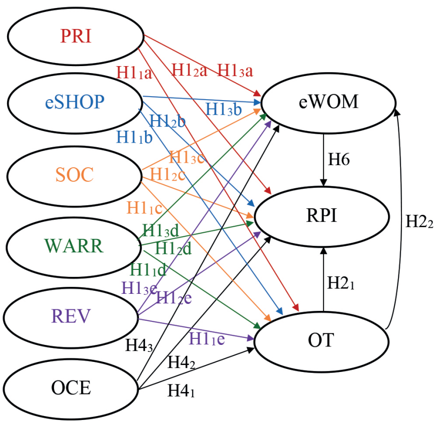
The PCA analysis reduced the OSD items to five distinct constructs (Table 1), requiring the following adjustments to hypotheses H1 and H3:

H1: OSD components: a) price (PRI), b) web shop features (eSHOP), c) social media (SOC), d) warranties (WARR) and e) review (REV), have a positive impact on ($H1_1$) online trust (OT), on ($H1_2$) repurchase intentions (RPI), and on ($H1_3$) intentions to engage in eWOM.

H3: OT mediates the relationship between the OSD components: a) price (PRI), b) web shop features (eSHOP), c) social media (SOC), d) warranties (WARR), e) review (REV) and ($H3_1$) consumer repurchase intentions (RPI), and ($H3_2$) intentions to engage in eWOM.

The proposed hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (Maximum Likelihood method). The conceptual model of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The proposed research model and hypotheses



Note: Due to complexity the hypothesised mediation links (hypotheses H3 and H5) are not visualised.
Source: Research

Table 3 depicts the fit measures of the SEM model testing.

Table 3: Model fit summary

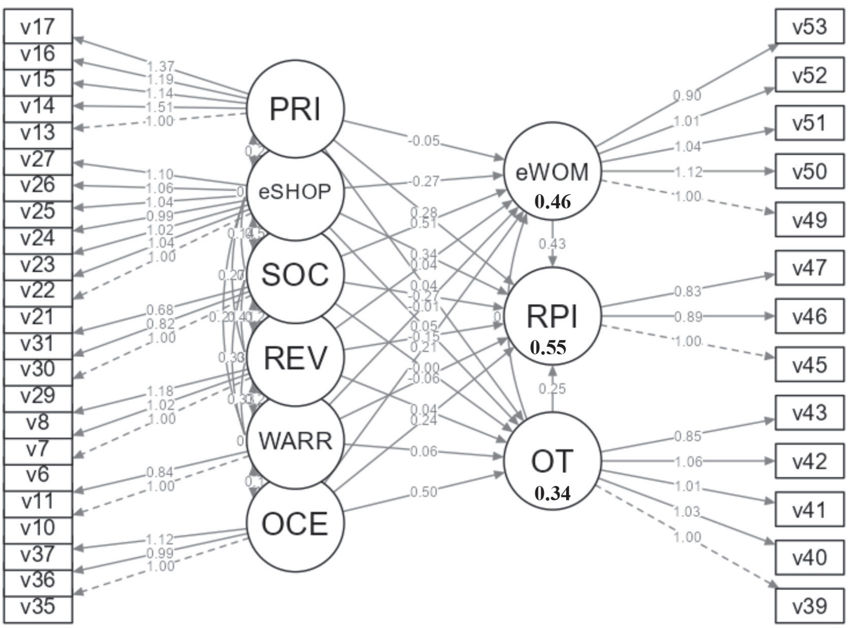
Fit indices	Value	Suggested value
Chi-square $\chi 2$	1535 ($p<0.001$)	$\chi 2$: df ≤ 3:1; p value=expected significant (Hair et al., 2019: 638, 642)
Degrees of freedom (df)	558	
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.9748	> 0.92 (Hair et al., 2019: 642)
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.9715	
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.9714	> 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019: 637)
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.9603	> 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019: 637)

Standardised Root Mean Square Residual SRMR	0.0762	>0.03<0.08 (Hair et al., 2019: 637)
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation RMSEA	0.0798	

Source: Research

Table 3 implies that the values of all the parameters are within the acceptable limits with the exemption of $\chi 2$:df ratio = 2.75, and significant $\chi 2$ value, at $p<0.001$, and somewhat higher values of SRMR and RMSEA indicators (RMSEA value lies between lower value of 0.0750, and upper value of 0.0846 of the 95% confidence interval, which is slightly above the admissible value of 0.08). Consequently, the proposed model has a relatively good fit. The final model with estimates (or non-standardised regression coefficient), and R^2 values are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2: SEM path model with estimates, and R^2 values



Source: Research

Based on the results of the determination coefficients (R2) displayed in Figure 2, it can be concluded that the exogenous variables explain 34% of the variance in the endogenous variable OT, 46% in eWOM, and 55% in RPI.

Moreover, the R2 values indicate (a solid) predictive power of the tested model.[1] The magnitudes of the estimates shown in Figure 2 are explained within Table 4, which presents the summary results of the hypotheses testing, including mediation effects not depicted in the conceptual model.

Table 4: Summary of the SEM testing

Hypothesis	Effect	Estimate	S.E.	β	z-value	Conclusion
$H1_1a$	PRI → OT	0.038	0.0912	0.030	0.42	Rejected
$H1_1b$	eSHOP → OT	0.051	0.1230	0.054	0.41	Rejected
$H1_1c$	SOC → OT	- 0.004	0.0844	- 0.005	- 0.05	Rejected
$H1_1d$	REV → OT	0.037	0.0940	0.034	0.39	Rejected
$H1_1e$	WARR → OT	0.056	0.0744	0.074	0.75	Rejected
$H1_2a$	PRI → RPI	0.276	0.1268	0.179	2.18*	Supported
$H1_2b$	eSHOP → RPI	0.339	0.1375	0.303	2.46*	Supported
$H1_2c$	SOC → RPI	- 0.273	0.1260	- 0.287	- 2.17*	Rejected
$H1_2d$	REV → RPI	- 0.147	0.1097	- 0.114	- 1.34	Rejected
$H1_2e$	WARR → RPI	- 0.058	0.0875	- 0.064	- 0.66	Rejected
$H1_3a$	PRI → eWOM	- 0.054	0.0976	-0.038	- 0.56	Rejected
$H1_3b$	eSHOP → eWOM	- 0.267	0.1290	- 0.258	- 2.07*	Rejected
$H1_3c$	SOC → eWOM	0.506	0.0940	0.576	5.39***	Supported
$H1_3d$	REV → eWOM	0.042	0.0880	0.035	0.48	Rejected
$H1_3e$	WARR → eWOM	- 0.011	0.0756	- 0.013	- 0.14	Rejected
$H2_1$	OT → RPI	0.247	0.0822	0.207	2.99**	Supported
$H2_2$	OT → eWOM	0.337	0.0709	0.306	4.75***	Supported
$H3_1a$	PRI → OT → RPI	0.010	0.0226	0.006	0.42	Rejected
$H3_1b$	eSHOP → OT → RPI	0.013	0.0302	0.011	0.41	Rejected
$H3_1c$	SOC → OT → RPI	- 0.001	0.0208	- 0.001	- 0.05	Rejected
$H3_1d$	REV → OT → RPI	0.009	0.0236	0.007	0.39	Rejected
$H3_1e$	WARR → OT → RPI	0.014	0.0191	0.015	0.72	Rejected
$H3_2a$	PRI → OT → eWOM	0.006	0.0133	0.004	0.42	Rejected
$H3_2b$	eSHOP → OT → eWOM	0.007	0.0186	0.007	0.40	Rejected

1 As a reference, R2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be classified as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Hair et al., 2019: 780). However, an alternative perspective, as presented by Ghodsi et al. (2022: 12), suggests that R2 values above 0.67 are considered desirable, values around 0.33 are considered mediocre, and values around 0.190 are considered weak.

$H3_2c$	SOC → OT → eWOM	- 0.000	0.0124	- 0.000	- 0.05	Rejected
$H3_2d$	REV → OT → eWOM	0.005	0.0140	0.004	0.39	Rejected
$H3_2e$	WARR → OT → eWOM	0.008	0.0108	0.009	0.76	Rejected
$H4_1$	OCE → OT	0.499	0.0817	0.502	6.11***	Supported
H_42	OCE → RPI	0.245	0.1047	0.207	2.34*	Supported
$H4_3$	OCE → eWOM	0.208	0.0820	0.190	2.53*	Supported
$H5_1$	OCE → OT → RPI	0.123	0.0428	0.104	2.87**	Supported
$H5_2$	OCE → OT → eWOM	0.073	0.0222	0.062	3.29**	Supported
H6	eWOM → RPI	0.434	0.0751	0.401	5.78***	Supported

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

An overview of the SEM model's hypothesis testing results indicates that all hypotheses involving constructs measured using previously developed and repeatedly tested scales (i.e., OCE, OT, RPI, and eWOM) have been successfully verified. Thus, hypotheses **$H2_1$, $H2_2$, $H4_1$, $H4_2$, $H4_3$, and H6 are confirmed**, with estimate values ranging from 0.499 ($H4_1$), at p < 0.001, to 0.208 ($H4_3$), at p < 0.05. The previously applied scales were also utilised for the constructs included in hypotheses (**$H5_1$ and $H5_2$**), where a mediation effect of online trust (OT) **was established** but with low values (estimates ranging from 0.073 to 0.123, at p < 0.01).

Among the hypotheses involving independent variables determined through PCA analysis of online shopping drivers (OSD), hypotheses (**$H1_2a$, $H1_2b$, and $H1_3c$**) **were verified**. These include components with the highest share in the explained variance of the OSD factors (see Table 1), namely: price (PRI), web shop features (eSHOP), and social media (SOC). For hypotheses $H1_2c$ and $H1_3b$, a statistically significant (p < 0.01) but negative influence was established (SOC on RPI and eSHOP on eWOM), leading to the **rejection of hypotheses $H1_2c$ and $H1_3b$**.

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to verify the validity of the model regarding the five OSD components (eSHOP, PRI, SOC, REV, and WARR), revealing partly unsatisfactory model reliability ($\chi 2$:df ratio = 3.2 at p < 0.001, CFI = 0.861, SRMR = 0.0639, RMSEA = 0.0893).

Furthermore, an alternative SEM model was tested with one exogenous variable (OCE), i.e., excluding the OSD components (eSHOP, PRI, SOC, WARR, and REV). It resulted in an equally robust model fit, with slightly lower R^2 values than the base model with six predictors. Thus, the single-predictor model explains 33% of the variance in the endogenous variable OT vs. 34% with six predictors, 31% vs. 46% of the variance in eWOM, and

49% of the variance in RPI vs. 55% with six predictors. That confirms that the OCE construct is the dominant predictor of the model, particularly regarding the dependent variable OT. The single-predictor model confirmed all hypotheses, just like the base model (Table 4), including the mediation effects of OT. The estimates are generally higher than the base model, except for the relationship eWOM → RPI (H6), where the single-predictor model yields a significantly lower effect size.

By testing differences concerning demographic variables, significant differences were found among online shopping drivers concerning gender and education level (Table 5).

Table 5: Differences concerning demographic variables

Gender	**Feminine** (N = 199)		**Masculine** (N = 77)		***t***	**Sig.**
Variable (concept)	M	SD	M	SD		
REV	3.773	0.731	3.533	0.757	2.421	0.016*
WARR	4.538	0.607	4.305	0.762	2.651	0.009**
eSHOP	4.330	0.665	3.930	0.688	4.448	0.000***
SOC	3.663	0.865	3.277	0.933	3.254	0.001**
eWOM	3.524	0.858	3.252	0.729	2.455	0.015*
Education level	**Low & Middle** (N = 137)		**Higher & High** (N = 139)		t	**Sig.**
Variable (concept)	M	SD	M	SD		
RPI	4.102	0.780	3.832	0.801	2.837	0.005**

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$*
Source: Research

The results in Table 5 suggest that women agreed more with statements for all concepts, and these differences are significant for four OSD components and the eWOM variable. Furthermore, lower and middle-educated respondents exhibited higher repurchase intentions.

Considering the significant proportion of female participants in the sample (72%), gender response differences were verified through SEM analysis. With identical parameters retained, very similar model reliability results were obtained. The model based on the female subset of the sample fit revealed the acceptable levels of the fit indicators (CFI, GFI, AGFI, SRMR, RMSEA) and reliability measures (α, Ordinal α, AVE). Without entering into a more detailed display of the outcomes, the SEM model tested on the female subset of the sample does not yield a different perspective on the analysed constructs or their interrelations compared to the model derived from the entire sample. Hence, from a business standpoint, devising different approaches for the female segment of online consumers is unnecessary.

A comparison of this study's most influential online shopping drivers (based on mean values) and previous local and global findings disclosed similar top three results, namely: free delivery, coupons and discounts, and easy returns policy (We are Social & Meltwater, 2023: 361, for global stats rank; Ružić et al., 2017: 29, for Croatian rank).

5. DISCUSSION

This study addresses a prominent contemporary issue in the realm of online shopping. The main objective was to assess the importance of creating a favourable online customer experience, enhancing the appropriate online shopping drivers, and establishing online customer trust.

The SEM analysis findings confirmed a significant association between OCE, OT, RPI, and eWOM. Among online shopping drivers (OSD), components price (PRI), web-shop features (eSHOP), and social media (SOC) were confirmed as essential predictors of repurchase (RPI) and eWOM intentions.

The exogenous variables (OSD components, OCE and OT) exerted a low to medium-strong impact on customer repurchase and eWOM intentions. Compared to existing literature, a meta-analysis by Kumar & Kashyap (2022: 4) found an average impact of trust on repurchase intention of 0.686 (r), while Kim & Peterson (2017: 49) reported an average impact of 0.51 (r, at $p<0.01$). Another meta-analysis by Asraar Ahmed & Sathish (2015: 498) revealed a value of 0.406 (path coefficient), which is similar to the result of this study (OCE → OT), 0.499 at $p<0.001$. The concept of OCE also demonstrated a positive impact on repurchase intentions (0.245, at $p<0.05$), somewhat weaker than the findings of Asraar Ahmed & Sathish (2015: 498), with a meta-analysis result of 0.38 and Hao Suan et al. (2015: 244), with a result of 0.62 ($p<0.01$). Additionally, the meta-analysis conducted by Ismagilova et al. (2020: 1213) revealed an average value of 0.556 (r at $p<0.001$) for the relationship between intention to engage in eWOM and repurchase intention, whereas this study found a value of 0.434 ($p<0.001$).

Additionally, the impact of social media (SOC) on the repurchase (RPI) and web shop features (eSHOP) on eWOM intentions was found significant (weak), but with a negative effect. That may be interpreted based on the commonly accepted, although relatively underexplored, quote that 'bad news travels faster than good news'.[2] In this case, a higher vendor's online search engine position, more social media presence, or better web shop features may be seen as positive news that travels slower than negative ones (e.g., insufficient online presence and poor web shop features), resulting in a negative effect on dependent constructs (RPI and eWOM).

Exploring online trust as a mediator between different predictors of (re)purchase intention has received limited attention in the literature. Thus, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating a significant (low) mediation effect (0.123; $p<0.01$) of OT as a mediator of OCE → RPI relation. For comparison, Hao Suan et al. (2015: 245) reported a mediating effect of trust on the relationship between OCE and purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.40$, at $p<0.01$).

6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The increasing interest in online shopping stimulates further exploration of various aspects within this domain and contributes to the existing body of knowledge. Croatian scholars aim to expand the local understanding of well-researched topics and offer additional insights for academics and practitioners. This study's examination of the essential online shopping drivers enables e-commerce managers to focus on five recognisable factors that positively influence consumers' repurchase and intentions to eWOM. Furthermore, including online shopping drivers within the broader research framework involving online customer experience, online trust, repurchase intention and intentions to engage in eWOM, represents a novel contribution to this research field.

However, there is room for further expansion by examining specific online markets, diverse online shopping drivers, or incorporating additional demographic variables. The possibilities are extensive, and with the rapid growth of social media, the potential research avenues seem limitless.

2 For instance, Vosoughi et al., 2018: 1149, and Bellovary et al., 2021: 11, demonstrated the faster spread of negative sentiments on the Twitter social network.

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RESEARCH OF THE PURCHASE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE ROLE OF SITUATION FACTORS / ISTRAŽIVANJE PROCESA DONOŠENJA ODLUKE O KUPNJI OSOBA S OŠTEĆENJIMA VIDA S NAGLASKOM NA ULOGU SITUACIJSKIH ČIMBENIKA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: According to data from the World Health Organization (2021), there are at least 2.2 billion people with visual impairments in the world, while in the territory of the Republic of Croatia there are about 19,000 of them. The aim of this paper is to gain a deeper insight into the buying process of blind and partially sighted people as a specific group of consumers with special emphasis on the role of situational factors in the buying process.

Methodology: Qualitative research was conducted through three focus groups with a total of 22 subjects with visual impairment who live and shop in the Republic of Croatia. The research covered the physical store environment (store location, store environment, music, colors and crowd), social environment (other customers, accompanying persons and employees), time aspect and shopping goals.

Results: Customers with visual impairments purchase products or services and go through all the stages of the buying process, but they need more time to make the purchase and often need the help of other people or store employees. Due to the lack of sight, they have more developed other senses such as hearing, smell and touch, which they use more intensively in the buying process. The interior, or more precisely the frequent changes in the layout of products in stores, negatively affects the ease of movement, which makes shopping more difficult, just like loud music, while unpleasant smells encourage them to finish shopping as soon as possible and to makes them doubt the quality of the products in the store.

Conclusion: Marketers should take into account the situational factors that play an important role in the purchasing process of people with visual impairments.

Key words: situational factors, purchase process, people with visual impairments, blind, partially sighted

SAŽETAK

Cilj rada: Prema podacima Svjetske zdravstvene organizacije (WHO) iz 2021. godine, u svijetu ima najmanje 2,2 milijardi osoba s oštećenjima vida, od kojih je na području Republike Hrvatske njih oko 19.000. Cilj rada je steći dublji uvid u kupovni proces slijepih i slabovidnih osoba kao specifične skupine potrošača s posebnim naglaskom na ulogu situacijskih čimbenika u procesu kupnje.

Metodologija: Provedeno je kvalitativno istraživanje putem tri fokus grupe s ukupno 22 ispitanika s oštećenjem vida koji žive i kupuju na području Republike Hrvatske. Istraživanje je obuhvatilo fizičko okruženje (lokacija prodavaonice, uređenje prodavaonice, glazba, boje i gužva), društveno okruženje (drugi kupci, pratnja kupca s oštećenjem vida i zaposlenici), vremenski aspekt kupovine te cilj povezan s ponašanjem potrošača.

Rezultati: Kupci s oštećenjima vrše nabavu proizvoda ili usluga i pritom prolaze kroz sve faze procesa, ali im je potrebno više vremena za samu kupnju i često im je potrebna pomoć drugih osoba ili zaposlenika u prodavaonicama. Nedostatkom osjeta vida imaju razvijenija druga osjetila poput sluha, njuha i opipa, što intenzivnije koriste u procesu kupnje. Interijer, točnije česte promjene rasporeda proizvoda u prodavaonicama negativno utječu na lakoću kretanje, što otežava kupnju baš kao i preglasna glazba, dok ih neugodni mirisi potiču da kupnju što prije završe te da posumnjaju u kvalitetu proizvoda u prodavaonici.

Zaključak: Trgovci bi trebali voditi računa o situacijskim čimbenicima koji imaju veliku ulogu u procesu kupnje osoba s oštećenjima vida.

Ključne riječi: situacijski čimbenici, proces kupnje, osobe s oštećenjima vida, slijepi, slabovidni

1. UVOD

Odlazak u kupovinu je rutinska aktivnost za većinu potrošača o kojoj ne razmišljaju puno, posebno ako se radi o kupnji proizvoda svakodnevne potrošnje. Nažalost, kod osoba koje imaju neki oblik oštećenja vida proces kupnje nije lagan i jednostavan jer zahtijeva više vremena, a često i pomoć drugih osoba (Kostyra et al., 2017). Prema podacima WHO-a iz 2021. godine u svijetu postoji oko 2,2 milijarde osoba s oštećenjima vida, a oko 40 milijuna je slijepo (WHO, 2021). Promatrajući ovu populaciju na razini Republike Hrvatske, prema podacima Hrvatskog zavoda za javno zdravstvo u Hrvatskoj živi oko 19.000 osoba s oštećenjem vida (Benjak, 2021). Unatoč tome, u dosadašnjim istraživanjima navedena skupina potrošača je u velikoj mjeri zanemarena, te je stoga fokus ovog rada upravo usmjeren na potrošače s oštećenjima vida.

Donošenje odluke o kupnji je proces na koji utječe niz čimbenika kao što su kulturni, socijalni, osobni i psihološki (Kotler et al., 2006). Osim navedenih čimbenika, na proces kupnje utječu i situacijski čimbenici povezani sa specifičnom situacijom, vremenom i mjestom kupnje (Anić & Radas, 2006). Budući da je u situaciji kupnje u fizičkim prodavaonicama dodatno naglašena upravo uloga situacijskih čimbenika koji mogu promijeniti sam proces i konačnu odluku o kupnji, cilj ovog rada je istražiti ulogu situacijskih čimbenika u procesu donošenja kupovnih odluka osoba s oštećenjima vida.

Ostatak rada je organiziran kako slijedi. U narednom poglavlju dan je pregled teorijskih saznanja o čimbenicima koji utječu na ponašanje potrošača s posebnim osvrtom na situacijske čimbenike. Prikazana su i teorijska saznanja o ulozi koju odabrani čimbenici ponašanja potrošača imaju u procesu kupovine osoba s nekim oblikom oštećenja vida. U trećem dijelu rada prikazano je provedeno empirijsko istraživanje kojem je cilj saznati više o ulozi situacijskih čimbenika u procesu kupnje slijepih i slabovidnih osoba u Hrvatskoj. Rad završava zaključkom u kojem su prikazana najznačajnija saznanja proizašla iz rada, te su elaborirana ograničenja istraživanja.

2. PREGLED LITERATURE

Za poduzeća je iznimno važno razumjeti zašto se potrošači ponašaju na određeni način i na temelju općeg ponašanja razviti, komunicirati i isporučiti prikladne proizvode odnosno usluge i vrijednosti koje kupci traže kako bi osigurali opstanak poslovanja (Hoyer et al., 2012). Međutim, taj je zadatak iznimno kompleksan jer je svaki potrošač jedinstven, što utječe na individualno kupovno ponašanje pojedinca (Katrodia, 2021) koje je često kompleksno, neorganizirano i nesvjesno (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2015). Kako bi ipak bolje razumjeli ponašanje potrošača, proučavaju se pojedine faze ponašanja i čimbenici koji na potrošača pri tome djeluju.

U literaturi se mogu naći različite kategorizacije čimbenike ponašanja potrošača (Hawkins i Mothersbaugh, 2015). Kotler i sur. (2006) tako navode četiri skupine čimbenika: (1) kulturni čimbenici, (2) socijalni čimbenici, (3) osobni čimbenici i (4) psihološki čimbenici. Navedeni autori u kulturne čimbenike ubrajaju kulturu, subkulturu i društveni sloj dok, u sklopu socijalnih čimbenika, navode referentne grupe, obitelj te uloge i status. Kesić (2006) navedene dvije kategorije objedinjuje pod pojmom društveni čimbenici ponašanja potrošača. Za razliku od društvenih čimbenika, osobni čimbenici su usko vezani uz potrošača jer se ne mogu odvojiti od osobe (Katrodia, 2021) i uključuju čimbenike kao što su motivi i motivacija, percepcija, stavovi, obilježja ličnosti, vrijednosti, vjerovanja, stil života i znanje (Kesić, 2006). Kotler i sur. (2006) navedene čimbenike nazivaju psihološkim čimbenicima te ih razlikuju od osobnih čimbenika kao što su dob, faza u životnom vijeku, osobnost, zanimanje i slično.

Način na koji će potrošač prolaziti kroz proces kupnje ovisi o svim dosad navedenim čimbenicima kao i poticajima od strane poduzeća koji potrošače pozivaju na akciju. Međutim, sami poticaji nisu dovoljni ako situacija u kojoj se potrošač nalazi ne omogućuje adekvatan odgovor pa je iznimno važno proces ponašanja potrošača promatrati u kontekstu u kojem se odgovor očekuje (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2015). Kako bi se što jasnije razumio odnos poticaj-situacija-reakcija, znanstvenici proučavaju situacijske čimbenike koji utječu na ponašanje pojedinca (Belk, 1975).

2.1. SITUACIJSKI ČIMBENICI

Kesić (2006: 128) definira situacijske utjecaje kao "čimbenike povezane sa specifičnom situacijom, specifičnim vremenom i prostorom koji su u potpunosti neovisni od obilježja potrošača, proizvoda i usluga koji se kupuju". Slično tome, Hawkins i Mothersbaugh (2015) smatraju da situacijski čimbenici uključuju stimulanse koji nisu glavni poticaj za kupnju, ali koji privremeno utječu na proces kupnje. Prema Belku (1974) situacijski čimbenici imaju sustavan i jasan utjecaj na ponašanje potrošača, a vezani su za vrijeme i mjesto u kojem se osoba nalazi, ali i uz obrasce ponašanja svake osobe. U skladu s navedeni stajalištem, Belk (1975: 159) navodi pet grupa varijabli koji se smatraju situacijskim čimbenicima, a to su: (1) fizičko okruženje, (2) društveno okruženje, (3) vrijeme kupovine, (4) cilj povezan s ponašanjem potrošača i (5) prethodno stanje organizma i uvjeti kupovine.

Fizičko okruženje je često najuočljiviji situacijski čimbenik koji uključuje prostorne aspekte prodajnog prostora (Kesić, 2006). Odeh i As'ad (2014) daju širi obuhvat fizičkog okruženja prema kojem se to okruženje sastoji od tri elementa. Prva dva elementa su vezana uz sam ambijent pa stoga uključuju čimbenike kao što su osvjetljenje, boja, glazba, miris te čimbenike razmještaja i dizajna prostora. Kao treći element fizičkog okruženja navode društvene čimbenike koji obuhvaćaju simbole, oznake i artefakte, ali i osoblje te buku. Iako izgled prodavaonice nije presudan u procesu donošenja odluke o kupnji određenog proizvoda, njegov je značaj velik u fazi odabira samog prodajnog mjesta gdje će se kupnja obaviti jer potrošači biraju prodajna mjesta koja im se sviđaju (Gogoi, 2017). Pri tome trgovci često koriste boje koje potrošači prvo primijete, a utječu i na njihovo ponašanje kroz poticanje aktivacije s bojama kao što su crvena i žuta, te opuštanje hladnim bojama kao što su zelena i plava (Renko, 2019). Utjecaj boja se dodatno može istaknuti odgovarajućim osvjetljenjem i glazbom (Mariri & Chipunza, 2009), a sve to zajedno pridonosi općoj atmosferi prodavaonice (Kesić, 2006). Kesić (2006) navodi da je i lokacija jedan od važnih čimbenika fizičkog okruženja jer će se vjerojatnost kupnje smanjiti što je udaljenost prodavaonice od mjesta stanovanja veća.

Osim fizičkog okruženja, na potrošače pri kupnji mogu utjecati i druge osobe koje su u trenutku kupovine prisutne na prodajnom mjestu, što čini društveno okruženje (Belk, 1975). Druge osobe mogu utjecati na kupovni proces kroz traženje i primanje informacija, kao i na samu odluku o kupnji (Anić & Radas, 2006), ali i kroz društvenu interakciju koja ne mora biti isključivo vezana uz kupnju (Kesić, 2006).

Vremenska dimenzija se odnosi na vrijeme koje potrošač ima na raspolaganju pri kupnji, način na koji vrednuje svoje vrijeme, ali i na doba dana ili godišnje doba (Kesić, 2006). Uz vremensku dimenziju je vezan i cilj koji potrošač kupnjom želi ispuniti. Naime, dokazano je da postoje razlike u ponašanju potrošača pri kupnji poklona i kupnji iste vrste proizvoda za osobnu upotrebu i to u kontekstu odabira prodajnog mjesta, samog proizvoda, vremena za odabir te poslijekupovnog ponašanja (Hawkins et al., 1989).

Uz sve navedene dimenzije, važno je razmotriti i opće raspoloženje potrošača pri kupovini kao i uvjete kupnje (Belk, 1975). Naime, kupovni proces će izgledati znatno drugačije ukoliko je potrošač pri kupnji anksiozan, gladan ili umoran u odnosu na situaciju dobrog psihofizičkog stanja (Kesić, 2006).

Na temelju svega navedenog može se zaključiti da situacijski čimbenici imaju sustavan utjecaj na ponašanje potrošača (Anić & Radas, 2006) te, kroz utjecaj na procesuiranje informacija u prodavaonici, izravno utječu na kupovne odluke (Hoyer et al, 2010).

2.2. ULOGA SITUACIJSKIH ČIMBENIKA U PROCESU KUPNJE SLIJEPIH I SLABOVIDNIH OSOBA

Istraživanja o ulozi situacijskih čimbenika u procesu donošenja odluka o kupnji slijepih i slabovidnih osoba nisu u velikoj mjeri zastupljena. Postoje istraživanja koja su provedena na uzorku osoba s nekim oblicima oštećenja vida no ista su tek u manjoj mjeri usmjerena na pojedine situacijske čimbenike.

Baker, Stephens i Hill (2002) proveli su istraživanje kojem je cilj bio ispitivanje kupovnog procesa osoba s oštećenjima vida, ali više iz perspektive njihove (ne)ovisnosti i odnosa prodavača i drugih osoba u prodavaonici prema njima tijekom kupnje. Istraživanje provedeno metodom dubinskih intervjua s 21 ispitanikom je pokazalo da kupci s oštećenjem vida žele biti što je moguće više neovisni pa pretjerana uslužnost prodajnog osoblja može imati suprotan efekt stvaranja nelagode pri kupnji.

Yu i Tullio – Pow (2010) su se u svom istraživanju usmjerili na fizičko okruženje prodavaonice. Istraživanje provedeno putem fokus grupa sa 17 ispitanika je pokazalo značaj lokacije prodavaonice zbog problema mobilnosti osoba s oštećenjima vida. Kako bi se olakšalo kretanje navedenoj skupini potrošača, raspored prodavaonice bi trebao biti logičan i ravnocrtan s jednakim osvjetljenjem u prostoru. Dostupnost prodajnog osoblja koje je upoznato s proizvodima i može pružiti informacije je također istaknuto kao važno. Posebno su istaknuti i problem kod plaćanja ukoliko su POS uređaji na dodir te nemaju označene tipke koje slijepim osobama služe kao orijentacija.

Kaufman-Scarborough (2000) se u istraživanju usmjerila na daltoniste te je provela 62 dubinska intervjua s ciljem spoznavanja kako navedeno oštećenje vida utječe na njihov kupovni proces. Rezultati su naglasili značaj osvjetljenja i nužnost korištenje svijetlih boja u prostoru kao i na ambalažama proizvoda. Posebno je istaknut problem informacija o sigurnosti proizvoda koje često znaju biti označene crvenom bojom što daltonisti ne mogu uočiti.

Najopsežnije istraživanje proveli su Kostyra, Żakowska-Biemans, Śniegocka i Piotrowska (2017) na uzorku od 250 slijepih i slabovidnih potrošača s područja Poljske. Korištenjem kvantitativne metodologije i anketnog upitnika ispitivali su proces kupnje hrane od strane slijepih i slabovidnih osoba te zaključili da su najznačajniji čimbenici zaposlenici prodavaonice kao elementi društvenog okruženja te lokacija i raspored proizvoda na policama kao elementi fizičkog okruženja. Baš kao i druge skupine potrošača, ispitanici imaju jednaku definiciju zadatka odnosno problem kojeg žele riješiti, a bolje poznavanje potreba ove skupine potrošača u procesu kupnje pomoglo bi istima da cijeli proces bude što ugodniji i prirodniji.

3. METODOLOGIJA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Pregled literature pokazuje da kupovni proces osoba sa i bez oštećenja vida nije u potpunosti jednak. Vid je osjetilo kojeg potrošači bez oštećenja kontinuirano koriste u procesu kupnje, dok osobe s oštećenjem vida u kupovini nailaze na brojna ograničenja. Stoga se ovim radom pokušava odgovoriti na sljedeće istraživačko pitanje:

I1: Koja je uloga situacijskih čimbenika u procesu donošenja odluke o kupnji osoba s oštećenjem vida?

Kako bi se dobio odgovor na definirano istraživačko pitanje, provedeno je jednokratno kvalitativno istraživanje putem tri skupna intervjua (fokus grupa). U istraživanju su sudjelovala ukupno 22 ispitanika u dobi od 28 do 83 godine od kojih je 17 slijepo, a 5 slabovidno. Svi ispitanici su članovi udruga za slijepe s područja grada Karlovca, Istarske županije te Zadarske, Sisačko – moslavačke i Primorsko – goranske županije. Struktura po spolu pokazuje da su u većoj mjeri bili zastupljeni muškarci (15 ispitanika) u odnosu na žene (7 ispitanica).

Skupni intervjui provedeni su online uz pomoć aplikacije Google Meet tijekom kolovoza 2022. godine. Kao instrument istraživanja korišten je vodič za intervju oblikovan prema dostupnoj literaturi, konkretnije radovima autora Yu i Tullio-Pow (2015), te Baker, Stephens i Hill (2002). Intervjui su transkribirani i analizirani od strane autora rada.

4. REZULTATI ISTRAŽIVANJA

Rezultati istraživanja su podijeljeni i prikazani kroz nekoliko podpoglavlja koja ukazuju na najznačajnije zaključke o ulozi situacijskih čimbenika u kupovnom ponašanju potrošača s oštećenjima vida.

4.1. STUPANJ SAMOSTALNOSTI I UČESTALOST OBAVLJANJA KUPNJE

Od 22 ispitanika njih 20 osobno obavlja kupovinu ili samostalno ili uz pomoć osobe koja nema oštećenja vida. Dva najstarija ispitanika (H - 72 godina i O - 83 godine) zbog zdravstvenih razloga više ne odlaze u prodavaonice, već kupnju za njih obavljaju članovi obitelji ili prijatelji. Hoće li kupovinu obaviti samostalno ili uz pomoć pratnje, ovisi o vrsti kupovine.

Naime, manje kupovine proizvoda svakodnevne potrošnje (npr. kruha i mlijeka) obavljaju samostalno, dok im je kod većih kupovina ili kupovina odjeće, namještaja i slično, potrebna pratnja osoba koje nemaju problema s vidom. Prehrambene proizvode kupuju svakodnevno ili nekoliko puta tjedno, a u kupovinu proizvoda kao što su odjeća i obuća odlaze kada se za to pojavi potreba.

4.2. ODABIR NAČINA I MJESTA KUPNJE

Svi ispitanici kupnju obavljaju u fizičkim prodavaonicama. Međutim, troje ispitanika (A - 28 godina, N - 50 godina i Z - 38 godina) je navelo da uz fizičke prodavaonice povremenu kupuju i online. Razlog zašto više ispitanika ne kupuje online ili zašto te kupnje nisu učestalije leži u neprilagođenosti web prodavaonica govornim jedinicama i nemogućnosti da odjevne predmete opipaju kako bi stekli dojam o njihovoj kvaliteti, kao navodi ispitanik A (28 godina):

"Kombinirano, u fizičkim prodavaonicama, ali i online iako je online rjeđe. Jer online trebaju biti određene cifre za dostavu, a i ne mogu po opisu odrediti je li nešto lijepo na primjer ili ne. Nema taktilnog doticaja s materijalom i krojem kod odjeće."

Dominantan kriterij kod odabira prodavaonice u kojoj će obaviti kupnju je lokacija ili preciznije blizina lokacije mjestu stanovanja ispitanika. Osim blizine, u lokalnim prodavaonicama ih zaposlenici već poznaju te znaju kako im pristupiti i ophoditi se s njima, što olakšava i ubrzava samu kupnju.

4.3. PROCES KUPOVINE U FIZIČKIM PRODAVAONICAMA

Sam proces kupnje se razlikuje ovisno o tome obavljaju li kupovinu samostalno ili s pratnjom, te o vrsti prodavaonice koju posjećuju. U prodavaonicama koje još uvijek imaju uslužni pult poput mesnica i pekara je jednostavnije, jer tada mogu prodajnom osoblju reći što trebaju u sklopu uobičajenog procesa kupnje. S druge strane, kupovina u samoposlužnim prodavaonicama je kompleksnija i traje duže. Naime, svi ispitanici navode kako je u velikim samoposlužnim prodavaonicama teško naći zaposlenike koji bi im pomogli u kupnji, a kada ih i pronađu, zaposlenici im se nisu uvijek u mogućnosti odmah posvetiti, što odužuje cijeli proces.

Proces kupnje se razlikuje i ovisno o proizvodima koje kupuju. Tako ispitanik V (71 godina) objašnjava kako kupuje odjeću:

"Odjeću kupujem nekoliko puta sezonski s videćom pratnjom ili unukama, obitelji. Koristim prepoznavač boja koji mi kaže koje je boje odjeća. ...U prodavaonici opišem što želim, koje bi boje trebalo biti, kako izgledati i videća pratnja mi donese to u kabinu da probam gdje ju ja čekam. Gubitkom vida razvijaju se druga osjetila poput opipa, mirisa, sluha i tako onda lakše izvršim kupovinu. Videća pratnja mi sve temeljito objasni i pročita s ambalaže. Isto je bilo i s kupnjom namještaja i drugim proizvodima, poput kućanskih uređaja."

Kako bi pojednostavnili i skratili kupovni process, četvrtina ispitanika se priprema prije odlaska u prodavaonici na način da naprave popis proizvoda koje trebaju kupiti, ili istražuju ponudu online ili kod poznanika.

4.4. POLOŽAJ POLICA I PROIZVODA U PRODAVAONICAMA

Kretanje po prodajnim mjestima nije uvijek jednostavno zbog uskih prolaza, proizvoda koji čekaju slaganje na police i drugih kupaca. Kako bi si olakšali kupovni proces, osobe s oštećenjima vida pokušavaju napamet naučiti raspored proizvoda na policama, što je izvedivo u prodavaonicama manjeg formata. U većim prodavaonicama je puno teže zapamtiti raspored proizvoda na policama zbog velikog asortimana, ali i činjenice da su promjene rasporeda česte, a povremeno se u prostor dodaju i novi komadi namještaja. Više od polovice ispitanika je primijetilo kako se u prodavaonicama nekoliko puta godišnje mijenja raspored proizvoda na policama, što otežava kupnju jer se slijepa osoba navikne na određeni raspored i pravac kretanja. Takve promjene produžuju vrijeme koje je slijepim i slabovidim osobama potrebno za kupnju.

4.5. ULOGA GLAZBE I PROMOCIJE PUTEM RAZGLASA U PRODAVAONICAMA

Svi ispitanici tijekom kupovine primjećuju korištenje glazbe kao i promocije proizvoda putem razglasa na većim prodajnim mjestima. Glazba u prodavaonici im ne smeta ukoliko nije preglasna. U situaciji kada je glazba preglasana, otežana im je komunikacija s osobom koja ih prati u kupovini ili koju su, u samoj prodavaonici, zamolili za pomoć.

Što se tiče promocije proizvoda putem razglasa u prodavaonicama, ispitanici su podijeljeni. Prvoj skupini ispitanika ovakva aktivnost načelno ne ometa kupnju, ali ponekad postaje iritantna ukoliko se učestalo javlja. Druga skupina ispitanika kaže kako im takav način komunikacije pomaže u kupnji, te će odabrati upravo proizvod koji se oglašava ukoliko ga smatraju potrebnim ili zanimljivim.

4.6. ULOGA MIRISA U PRODAVAONICAMA

Mirise u prodavaonici uočavaju svi ispitanici, a njihov utjecaj ovisi o vrsti i intenzitetu mirisa kao i dužini trajanja kupovine. Ispitanik A (28 godina) objašnjava:

"Mirisi ovise o tome kakvi su. Oni mi manje smetaju u prodavaonicama koji su u gradu uz ulicu jer ću obavit kupnju i izaći na svježi zrak opet. Dok u shopping centru gdje nema svježeg zraka pa se različiti mirisi spoje što mi smeta i često puta skratim zbog toga svoju kupnju. U svakoj prodavaonici sam kraće."

Također, neugodni mirisi, osim što skraćuju samu kupovinu jer su neugodni, potiču kod ispitanika sumnju u kvalitetu proizvoda u prodavaonici. Ispitanik N (50 godina) navodi:

"Miris ovisi o trgovini, kod nekih je užasno, kod nekih se ne primijeti. Ali me tjera da izađem prije van ako je neugodan miris. Neugodni mirisi me tjeraju da razmišljam o kvaliteti proizvoda."

4.7. UTJECAJ BOJA I OSVJETLJENJA U PRODAVAONICAMA

Boje i osvjetljenje nemaju velik utjecaj na osobe koje su slijepe, ali odražavaju se na iskustvo kupovine slabovidih osoba. Slabovidni ispitanici su istaknuli kako im je najvažniji kontrast, jer tada je najlakše raspoznati proizvode po bojama. Pri tome je iznimno važno osvjetljenje koje ne smije biti niti previše tamno, niti previše svijetlo.

4.8. ODNOS DRUGIH KUPACA PREMA KUPCIMA S OŠTEĆENJIMA VIDA

Ispitanici imaju dominantno pozitivna iskustva s drugim kupcima u prodavaonicama koji su im spremni pomoći i asistirati kada kupuju, odvesti ih do određenog dijela prodavaonice, odnosno police ili pronaći blagajnu. Kako navodi ispitanik P (39 godina):

"U manjim prodavaonicama mi često drugi kupci uskoče u pomoć, ponude se i sami ili ih ja zamolim za pomoć, to mi olakšava cijeli proces kupnje i štedi vrijeme."

Svega troje ispitanika je istaknulo kako su imali i loših iskustva s drugim kupcima, te da postoji problem što ljudi ne znaju kako se ponašati prema osobama s oštećenjima vida. Ispitanik S (67 godina) navodi:

"Događa se da kupci govore mojoj pratnji umjesto direktno meni ili razgovaraju na mobitel pa ne znam pričaju li onda meni ili ne. Ljudi čine medvjeđu uslugu jer ne znaju kako se trebaju ponašati (evo tu, dođite tu ne pomaže, već odmaže). Također ima i situacija da se ljudi guraju iako vide da osoba ima invaliditet."

Svi ispitanici koji kupuju samostalno ili s pratnjom naglašavaju kako im veliki broj drugih kupaca u prodavaonicama, odnosno gužve, ne smetaju, niti im je to poticaj da odustanu od svoje kupnje, pošto su usmjereni na ostvarivanje cilja.

4.9. OSTALE POJEDINOSTI O KUPNJI OSOBA S OŠTEĆENJIMA VIDA

Ispitanici navode da se susreću s ograničenjima i prilikom završetka kupovine odnosno plaćanja na blagajni. Podjednako koriste plaćanja gotovinom ili karticom, te se pri tome mogu služiti raznim aplikacijama koje olakšavaju proces plaćanja, kao što su aplikacije za očitavanje vrijednosti novčanica ili prepoznavanje boja.

Kao što je već istaknuto, većina ispitanika je jako zadovoljna odnosom drugih osoba u prodavaonici, samo smatraju da nedostaje edukacije kako to učiniti, ne samo kupcima već i zaposlenicima, što je objasnio ispitanik C (69 godina):

"Potrebna je bolja suradnja između udruga i trgovaca, ali i bolja edukacija, jer neki ljudi uopće ne znaju kako pristupiti nama i što je bijeli štap."

Ispitanik M (58 godina) je istaknuo razliku između života u ruralnom i urbanom području za osobe s oštećenjima vida, ali i generacijskim razlikama:

"Ima sigurno osoba s oštećenjima vida koji se lagano služe s bijelim štapom, internet bankarstvom i gradskim prijevozom. Drugačije je sigurno u ruralnim područjima i urbanima, poput Zagreba. U ruralnim područjima smo više ovisni o drugim osobama, a manje smo samostalni. Proizvodi nemaju oznake na Brailleovom pismu, pa je i to otežavajuće."

5. ZAKLJUČAK

Cilj ovog istraživanja je bio steći bolji uvid u način kako osobe s oštećenjima vida, konkretno oni koji su slijepi i slabovidni, obavljaju kupovinu, te kakva je pri tome uloga situacijskih čimbenika. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da se kupci s oštećenjem vida žele osjećati ravnopravno s potrošačima bez oštećenja vida, jer oni to i jesu. Faze samog procesa kupovine su iste, ali ono što je drugačije je da slijepim i slabovidnim osobama prilikom kupnje treba više vremena i strpljenja, a često i pomoć osoba bez oštećenja vida. Iako ispitanici kupnju obavljaju sami uvijek kada je to moguće, posebno u manjim lokalnim prodavaonicama, kod velikih prodavaonica u kojima se učestalo mijenja raspored proizvoda, pomoć je svakako potrebnija.

Istraživanje je pokazalo da situacijski čimbenici mogu imati značajan utjecaj na sam proces, ali i ishod kupnje slijepih i slabovidnih osoba. Oni se naime, zbog nedostatka vida, u velikoj mjeri oslanjaju na druga osjetila i podražaje koje osobe bez ograničenja ponekad svjesno ni ne primjećuju. To je posebno vidljivo kod rasporeda i razmještaja proizvoda na policama. Prilikom posjeta istim prodavaonicama, osobe s oštećenjima vida pokušavaju zapamtiti raspored proizvoda na policama kako bi u budućnosti smanjili vrijeme potrebno za kupnju i potrebu da se oslanjaju na pomoć druge osobe. Upravo zato je njihova razina frustracije veća kada dolazi do čestih promjena rasporeda proizvoda na policama.

Razlika je vidljiva i kod utjecaja gužve ili vremena koje je potrebno za obavljanje kupovine. Zbog ovisnosti o drugim osobama i potrebne organizacije, slijepe i slabovidne osobe najčešće ne odustaju od ispunjenja svog cilja odnosno kupovnog zadatka, bez obzira na uvjete u prodavaonici.

Glazbu u prodavaonicama uvijek primjećuju i ista ih ne ometa u kupnji ako nije preglasna, dok glasna glazba otežava komunikaciju s osobama koje im pomažu pri odabiru proizvoda. Mirise u prodavaonici također primjećuju, te će neugodni mirisi utjecati na skraćivanje kupovine ukoliko je to moguće. Dodatno, budući da ne vide što potencijalno uzrokuje neugodan miris, kod osoba s oštećenjem vida se javlja sumnja u kvalitetu proizvoda u prodavaonici, ali i odnos poduzeća prema kupcima, što utječe na stvaranje lošeg imidža prodavaonice. Boje i osvjetljenje utječu samo na osobe koje su slabovidne i mogu im pomoći kod snalaženja na prodajnom mjestu.

Iako većina ispitanika ima pozitivna iskustva vezana uz prisustvo drugih osoba u prodavaonici istaknuta su i dva problema. Prvi se odnosi na zaposlenike koje je, posebno u velikim prodavaonicama, teško pronaći kako bi ih se zamolilo za pomoć. Isto tako, zbog opsega posla koji obavljaju, povremeno nisu u kraćem roku u mogućnosti posvetiti se kupcu s oštećenjem vida. Drugo ograničenje se odnosi kako na zaposlenike, tako i na druge kupce. Naime, ispitanici navode da osobe s kojima u prodavaonici dolaze u kontakt često ne znaju kako reagirati i na najbolji način pomoći osobi koja treba pomoć. To je, uz lokaciju, jedan od razloga zašto kupovinu vole obavljati u manjim prodavaonicama gdje ih zaposlenici poznaju, ili u prodavaonicama koje nisu samoposlužne, jer je u tom slučaju kupovni proces sličniji procesu osoba bez oštećenja vida.

Prilikom provedbe istraživanja nametnulo se nekoliko ograničenja. Kao prvo ograničenje ističe se prigodni uzorak od 22 ispitanika s područja četiri županije, odnosno grada Karlovca te Istarske, Zadarske, Sisačko – moslavačke i Primorsko – goranske županije što je, s obzirom na geografsku šarolikost i specifičnost Republike Hrvatske, ograničenje, jer postoje velike razlika u standardu i načinu života u ruralnim i urbanim područjima. Buduća istraživanja bi svakako trebala obuhvatiti veći uzorak ispitanika iz svih županija Republike Hrvatske kako bi se dobila konkretnija saznanja, te usporedile potencijalne razlike u kupovnom iskustvu osoba s oštećenjima vida s obzirom na mjesto stanovanja.

Sljedeće ograničenje je dob sudionika koji su dominantno srednje i starije životne dobi. Za očekivati je da bi rezultati u pojedinim aspektima istraživanja (npr. online kupovina, korištenje aplikacija i slično) bili drugačiji da je u uzorku bilo zastupljeno više mlađih ispitanika. Daljnja istraživanja bi trebala obuhvatiti mlađe ispitanike, te upotrebu tehnologije u procesu donošenja odluke o kupnji. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da su mlađi ispitanici skloniji korištenju novih tehnologija koje im smanjuju ovisnost o drugim osobama prilikom kupnje. Svakako bi bilo zanimljivo istražiti upoznatost i učestalost korištenja posebno oblikovanih aplikacija od strane osoba s oštećenjima vida.

Dodatno ograničenje je što je ovo istraživanje obuhvatilo općeniti proces kupnje, bez fokusa na pojedine kategorije proizvoda, gdje može biti značajnih razlika u procesu kupnje. Sami ispitanici su naveli da kupnja proizvoda svakodnevne potrošnje nije istovjetna kupnji odjeće koja je kompleksnija, pa bi se budućim istraživanjima trebale obuhvatiti različite kategorije proizvoda, kao i različite kupovne situacije.

Unatoč navedenim ograničenjima, dobiveni rezultati mogu biti dobra podloga za menadžere, odnosno osobe na vodećim pozicijama u trgovačkim lancima, te pružiti smjernice kako unaprijediti svoje poslovanje i olakšati svakodnevnu kupovnu aktivnost osobama s oštećenjima vida, ali i drugim oblicima invaliditeta. Provedeno istraživanje je podloga za daljnje aktivnosti, odnosno istraživanja na ovu temu na području Republike Hrvatske, koje će omogućiti donošenja čvršćih zaključaka i time podići standard života ove skupine potrošača.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND AWARENESS AND THE ABILITY TO DISCRIMINATE BRAND COLOURS / POVEZANOST SVIJESTI O MARKI I SPOSOBNOSTI DISKRIMINACIJE BOJE MARKE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of the study is to examine how accurately consumers can differentiate between a specific brand colour and similar colours, and to explore the relationship between colour recognition and brand awareness. The research seeks to demonstrate the importance of well-defined brand colours to enhance brand recognition, particularly in times when consumers are increasingly exposed to numerous brands within the same product category.

Methodology: An online experiment was conducted with a sample of 51 participants. Participants were presented with logos of non-alcoholic beverage brands against varying backgrounds. Each brand was displayed 10 times: once in its original colour and nine times in colours similar to the original brand colour. Reaction times and accuracy of responses were recorded alongside measures of brand awareness.

Results: For brands that held a stronger position in consumers' awareness, participants were observed to more accurately distinguish the brand's colour from similar ones. Further analysis revealed a positive correlation between the accuracy of brand colour recognition and the frequency of consumption, as well as the frequency of recalling the brand as part of a specific category.

Conclusion: Higher consumption frequency is associated with greater recognition of brand colours. Brands achieving high consumption frequency are those perceived as highly positioned in consumers' awareness. The importance of colour for brand awareness has been emphasised, particularly in recognition and recall, playing a pivotal role in purchasing decisions and in later stages where consumers become loyal to a brand.

Keywords: colour, brand, brand awareness, visualisation, advertising

SAŽETAK

Svrha: Cilj rada je istražiti koliko precizno potrošači mogu diskriminirati boju marke od sličnih boja, te u kakvoj vezi su prepoznatljivost boje marke i svijest o marki. Svrha rada je dokazati važnost dobrog etabliranja zaštitnih boja marke kako bi se povećala prepoznatljivost marke u vremenu kad su potrošači sve više i češće izloženi većem broju različitih marki unutar iste kategorije proizvoda.

Metodologija: Online eksperiment je proveden na uzorku 51 ispitanika. Ispitanicima su nasumičnim redoslijedom prezentirani logotipovi marki bezalkoholnih pića na pozadini koja je varirana. Svaka marka prikazana je 10 puta, jednom na svojoj originalnoj boji marke, a ostalih devet puta na bojama sličnim boji marke. Vrijeme reakcije i točnost odgovora su zabilježeni uz mjere svijesti o marki.

Rezultati: Kod marki koje su pozicionirane više u svijesti potrošača uočeno je ispitanici točnije diskriminiraju boju marke od sličnih. Detaljnijim uvidom uočeno je da su pozitivno povezane točnost prepoznavanja boje marke i učestalost konzumacije, ali i učestalost dosjećanja marke kao pripadnika kategorije.

Zaključak: Veća učestalost konzumiranja povezana je s prepoznatljivošću boja marke. Marke koje su ostvarile visok postotak učestalosti konzumacije su one marke koje su procijenjene kao visoko pozicionirane u svijesti potrošača. U radu je naglašena važnost boje za svijest o marki, posebice za prepoznavanje i prisjećanje koje igra veliku ulogu kod kupnje, pa tako i u kasnijim fazama gdje potrošač postaje lojalan marki.

Ključne riječi: boja, marka, svijest o marki, vizualizacija, oglašavanje

1. UVOD

Marke su postale dio svakodnevice svakog prosječnog potrošača, gdje su potrošači svakodnevno svjesno i nesvjesno izloženi nekolicini marki. Jedan od elemenata vizualnog identiteta marke je boja koja se smatra jednim od glavnih čimbenika privlačenja i prepoznavanja potrošača današnjice, pri čemu je važno istaknuti da marke grade svoju osobnost temeljem boja (Jabbar, 2014) te tako osiguravaju bolju prepoznatljivost među konkurentskim markama. Samo prepoznavanje marke temeljem boja može potaknuti potrebu za proizvodom (Hunjet i Vuk, 2017) i izazvati emocionalni odgovor potrošača (Halkiopoulos i suradnici, 2021). U današnjem svijetu, razlikovanje marke od konkurencije postaje izrazito važno, a samim time svijest o marki važan element na kojemu se gradi komunikacija. Boja kao jedan od elemenata logotipa marke (Bottomley i Doyle, 2006; Foroudi, 2019), važan je element komunikacije i međusobnog razlikovanja marki, odnosno logotipa marki. Često mijenjanje i ne-konzistentno korištenje boja marke u logotipu marke izaziva negativnu reakciju kod potrošača, odnosno pridonosi zbunjenosti samih potrošača. Boja je postala jedan od najvažnijih vizualnih identiteta marke; ona doprinosi prepoznatljivosti marke i izgradnji imidža marke (Shah i suradnici, 2020) te posljedično, kroz dugu izloženost potrošača istoj, može utjecati na svijest o marki.

Naime, potrošači sve češće identificiraju određenu marku na temelju boje i fonta korištenog na ambalaži, te je boja jedna od prvih stvari koju potrošač primijeti i koja potrošača potakne na kupnju proizvoda (Shah i suradnici, 2020). Boja značajno utječe i na svijest o marki. Tako, na primjer, marke na temelju boje se mogu lakše zapamtiti i kasnije prepoznati, marke koje ne mijenjaju svoje zaštitne boje mogu biti prepoznate i bez uporabe drugih vizualnih elemenata, te potrošači mogu brže pronaći proizvod koji traže na temelju poznavanja zaštitne boje (Koskinen, 2021). Na temelju toga dolazimo do hipoteze prema kojoj će veću točnost diskriminacije boje marke od sličnih boja postići marke s višom svijesti o marki (poznatije marke).

Cilj rada je istražiti koliko precizno potrošači mogu diskriminirati boju marke od sličnih boja, te u kakvoj vezi su prepoznatljivost boje marke i svijest o marki. Svrha rada je testirati važnost dobrog etabliranja zaštitnih boja marke kako bi se povećala prepoznatljivost marke u vremenu kada su potrošači sve više i češće izloženi većem broju različitih marki unutar iste kategorije proizvoda.

Rad se sastoji od nekoliko cjelina. Nakon uvoda, slijedi teorijska pozadina, gdje se objašnjava tržišna vrijednost marke, svijest o marki, te ističe važnost boja u marketingu. Slijedi metodologija i rezultati istraživanja, gdje se razlaže eksperimentalni dizajn istraživanja, te nalazi samog istraživanja. Rad završava diskusijom o rezultatima istraživanja i zaključkom.

2. TEORIJSKA POZADINA

Dodatna vrijednost koja obogaćuje proizvode i usluge određene marke poduzeća naziva se tržišna vrijednost marke (Kotler, 2014) te predstavlja dodatni element koji je pored funkcionalne karakteristike proizvoda/usluge (Aaker, 1991) važan potrošaču (Alhaddad, 2014). Ona predstavlja i dodatni element koji je važan kupcu da se odluči za kupnju proizvoda/usluge (Wood, 2000). Kako bi marka izgradila tržišnu vrijednost, potrebno je stvoriti poznato ime marke te pozitivan imidž marke, odnosno jake i jedinstvene asocijacije usmjerene prema marki (Keller, 1993). Prema Kotleru (2014), tržišna vrijednost marke se odražava u načinima na koje potrošači razmišljaju, osjećaju i djeluju s obzirom na marku te kao udio na tržištu, cijeni i profitabilnosti koju marka donosi. On navodi tri glavna pokretača tržišne vrijednosti marke: početni izbor elemenata identiteta marke koji čine marku, proizvod, usluga i sve popratne marketinške aktivnosti, te potporni marketinški programi i ostale asocijacije koji se posredno povezuju s markom kroz povezivanje s drugim entitetom (npr. poput osobe, mjesta i stvari).

Pristup mjerenju tržišne vrijednosti marke je putem poznavanja marke, odnosno putem svijesti o marki, te imidža marke (Rajh, 2005). Da bi marka bila uspješna, te imala tržišnu vrijednost, bitan je početan izbor kod elemenata identiteta marke (naziv, logotip, simbol,..) i kako su ti elementi integrirani u marketinškom programu usmjerenom prema potrošačima (Keller, 1993).

Način na koji su ti elementi integrirani u marketinškom programu uvelike pospješuje vjerojatnost da će marka biti prepoznata ili da će je se potrošači lakše dosjetiti. Navedeno (prepoznavanje i dosjećanje) odrednice su tzv. svijesti o marki (Keller, 1993). Odabir boje je jedan od najvažnijih čimbenika prilikom planiranja integrirane marketinške komunikacije s potrošačima. Odabirom ispravne boje u komunikaciji, dizajna i oglašavanja s potrošačem, može se doprijeti do potrošača i njegove svijesti, te potaknuti potrebu za proizvodom (Hunjet i Vuk, 2017). Boja je značajna za komunikaciju i izgradnju odnosa između potrošača i marke, te je važna usklađenost integriranog marketinškog komuniciranja koja se reflektira i na svijest o marki.

2.1. SVIJEST O MARKI

Svijest o marki nije dovoljna za uspjeh marke. Marka nije sačinjena samo od karakteristika i specifikacija proizvoda; nju čine emocije i asocijacije potrošača, te uspjeh marke ovisi o odnosu marke s potrošačem (Seturi, 2017). Prepoznavanje marke se sastoji od toga da je potrošač sposoban prepoznati prethodnu izloženost marki. Prisjećanje marke se odnosi na sposobnost potrošača da se prisjeti u koju kategoriju proizvoda/usluga marka spada, koje potrebe zadovoljava itd., odnosno da ju generira iz sjećanja (Keller, 1993). Drugi autori navode kako se svijest o marki sastoji od dvije navedene i još dvije dodatne razine. Razina koja prethodi prepoznavanju marke je razina gdje potrošač nije svjestan postojanja marke. Nakon razine prepoznavanja marke, slijedi navedeno prisjećanje marke. Posljednja razina je kad je potrošač u potpunosti svjestan marke i preferira ju nad ostalim markama (Tritama i Tarigan, 2016).

Učestalim oglašavanjem, poduzeća mogu povećati svoju prepoznatljivost kao marke (Shahid i suradnici, 2018). Povećana prepoznatljivost marke povezana je s većom vjerojatnošću kupovine, među ostalim (Laurent, Kapferer & Roussel, 1995). Isti autori operacionaliziraju svijest o marki kao vjerojatnost prepoznavanja i dosjećanja marke kao pripadnika određene kategorije proizvoda/usluge. Tradicionalna sredstva korištena za podizanje svijesti o marki poput televizije, novina, časopisa, odnosa s javnošću itd., kao i moderna sredstva poput oglašavanja, integrirane marketinške komunikacije i sponzorstva, nude mogućnost upoznavanja i interakcije potrošača s markom (Latif i suradnici, 2014). Oglašavanje ima značajan učinak na povećanje svijesti o marki, gdje potrošači postaju svjesni prisutnosti i dostupnosti proizvoda/usluga poduzeća. Danas najveću ulogu kod stvaranja svijesti o marki imaju društveni mediji (Rrustemi i Baca, 2021).

Svijest o marki je jedan od glavnih čimbenika za uključivanje marke u skup razmatranja za vrijeme procesa odlučivanja o kupnji, jer većina potrošača radije kupuje marke koje su im poznate od prije. Stoga, potrošači radije i s manjim rizikom kupuju proizvode/usluge onih poduzeća za koje imaju određenu svijest o marki. Svijest o marki utječe na percipiranu procjenu rizika potrošača i njihovo povjerenje u odluku o kupnji (Moisescu, 2009). To je ujedno i dominantan element u procesu stvaranja namjere za kupnjom, a isto tako na namjeru za kupnjom imaju i drugi elementi poput pouzdanosti marke, lojalnosti prema marki i kredibiliteta marke (Bakator i suradnici, 2019).

Potrošači su skloniji kupnji marke koju dobro poznaju, jer potrošači najčešće oklijevaju prilikom kupnje novog proizvoda koji im nije poznat

(Shahid i suradnici, 2018). Prema Bakatoru i suradnicima (2019) što je marka prepoznatljivija, odnosno što je viša svijest o marki, postoji veća vjerojatnost da će potencijalni kupci postati lojalni prema marki, što u konačnici vodi do ponovljene namjere za kupnjom kod potrošača, bolje konkurentske pozicije poduzeća na tržištu i snažnijeg utjecaja poduzeća na tržište, odnosno snažnije povezanosti s ciljnim tržištem (Labrecque i Milne, 2012). Za marku koja je poznata potrošačima i za koju postoji visoka razina svijesti o marki, smatra se da pruža visokokvalitetne proizvode/usluge i da će najčešće u budućnosti razviti značajnu bazu podataka novih kupaca, kao i održavati postojeću zbog povećane razine lojalnosti potrošača prema marki. Lojalnost potrošača će pozitivno utjecati na tržišnu vrijednost marke, koja u konačnici može generirati rast prihoda, smanjenje troškova i veći profit poduzeća (Zaif i Cerhia, 2018). Jedan od čimbenika koji ima izniman utjecaj na svijest o marki, točnije na njenu prepoznatljivost, je boja marke koja ujedno i s vremenom postane dio njene osobnosti.

2.2. BOJE MARKE

Boja, odnosno boja marke, može izazvati emocionalni odgovor potrošača na proizvod/uslugu i utječe na njegovo mišljenje o tome kako predstavljeni proizvod/usluga može odražavati njihov osobni stil ili karakter, te oblikuje kupovne odluke potrošača, a za poduzeća može biti korisna kod planiranja komunikacijskih strategija i izgradnje marke (Halkiopoulos i suradnici, 2021).

Na pakiranju proizvoda trebaju biti korištene boje koje odgovaraju kategoriji proizvoda, tako npr. kod dizajniranja ambalaže pića, ambalaža mora biti svjetla i osvježavajuća (Seher i suradnici, 2012). Boje igraju glavnu ulogu u oglašavanju proizvoda, jer ako je oglas privlačan i primamljiv, tada će potrošač biti pod većim utjecajem tog oglasa. Na potrošače više utječe vizualni izgled proizvoda i, ukoliko je boja korištena kod proizvoda prema njihovom mišljenju atraktivna, posljedično će proizvod biti privlačniji potrošačima. Poznavanje psihologije boja može pridonijeti boljem uspjehu poduzeća s obzirom da boja može prenijeti emocionalnu poruku, svrhu i određene karakteristike proizvoda, kao npr. prethodno spomenuta ambalaža pića, gdje boja prenosi poruku da je piće osvježavajuće (Shaip, 2020). Boja je značajan faktor koji se treba pažljivo birati prilikom dizajniranja proizvoda, ambalaže proizvoda i okruženja u kojem će se proizvod prodavati.

Rezultati istraživanja Hunjet i Vuk (2017) pokazuju kako su potrošačima odlučujući čimbenici prilikom kupnje proizvoda/usluge sam dizajn i ambalaža proizvoda, da je boja jedan od ključnih čimbenika prilikom kupnje određenog proizvoda, te da je potrošačima izbor boje korištene u oglašavanju vrlo važno. Ispitanici u istraživanju su isto tako morali određenu boju povezati s asocijacijama na određeno poduzeće ili logo. Tako je, na primjer za crvenu boju, najveći broj asocijacija bio na Konzum i Coca Colu, a za plavu na Facebook i INA-u. U istraživanju je također dokazano kako su ispitanici povezivali proizvode na prirodnoj bazi sa zelenom bojom, proizvode za čišćenje, klima uređaje. Flaširanu vodu su povezivali s plavom bojom. Na učinkovitost boje u oglašavanju mogu utjecati nijansa (*eng. hue*), zasićenost (eng. *saturation*) i svjetlina (*eng. value* ili *lightness*) korištene boje (Shi, 2012). Najčešće korišten naziv za tu kombinaciju odrednica je HSV.

HSV je jedan od načina definiranja boje koji je razvijen kako bi se objasnio način na koji pojedinci percipiraju boje i često se koristi u marketinškim istraživanjima. Nijansa (*eng. hue*) boje odnosi se na čistu boju kojoj nalikuje i pokazuje njen položaj na kotaču boja. Počinje od 0 koja označava crvenu, nastavlja se na 60 za žutu, 120 za zelenu, i završava na 360 odnosno na početnom položaju. Zasićenost (*eng. saturation*) i Vrijednost (*eng. value*) odnose se na zasićenost čiste boje, odnosno svjetlinu. Iako sve tri odrednice utječu na konačan izgled boje, obzirom da je nijansa ono na što se misli kad se kaže "boja", Shi (2012) navodi kako se u većini istraživanja u obzir uzima/mijenja isključivo nijansa (*eng. Hue*), dok su ostale dvije stavke zanemarene.

Prema istraživanju Shaip (2020), tumačenje i utjecaj boje na ponašanje potrošača se razlikuju od kulture do kulture tako da, pri odabiru boje koja će se koristiti na logotipu i proizvodu, u obzir bi se trebale uzimati kulturološke razlike ciljane skupine. Osim kulturoloških razlika kod ciljane skupine, poduzeća trebaju voditi obzira o odabiru boje prema rodu i spolu ciljane skupine. Tako su, na primjer, kod proizvoda namijenjenim za žene korištene pastelne i nježnije boje u odnosu na proizvode koji su namijenjeni muškarcima, s obzirom da su određene boje označene kao boje za muškarce, a druge za žene (Shah i suradnici, 2020).

Boje utječu na asocijacije potrošača prema marki i njenom identitetu, a psihologija boja igra značajnu ulogu u izgradnji jače asocijacije, prisjećanja i identiteta (Sharma, 2021). Boja igra ključnu ulogu u vizualnom iskustvu potrošača (ColorCom, 2019): 92,9% ispitanika ističe kako prilikom kupnje proizvoda najveću važnost pridaje vizualnim čimbenicima, pojedinci donose podsvjesnu prosudbu o osobama, proizvodima ili okolini unutar 90 sekundi, te se između 62% i 90% prosudbe donosi na temelju boje, boja povećava prepoznatljivost marke do 80%, te se oglasi u boji čitaju 42% više od oglasa u crno-bijeloj varijanti.

Prema istraživanju Shah i suradnika (2020), boja je postala jedan od najvažnijih vizualnih identiteta marke; ona doprinosi prepoznatljivosti marke i izgradnji imidža marke. Boje koje određene marke koriste povezane su s emocijama koje njihovi potrošači osjećaju i s kojima se karakterno poistovjećuju; tako grade svijest o marki, prepoznatljivost marke i lojalnost prema marki (Rodriguez, 2022).

Važnost korištenja boje kao djela prepoznavanja od strane potrošača pokazuje istraživanje provedeno nad genereacijom milenijalaca, gdje se ispitivalo prepoznavanje logotipa određenih popularnih marki poput Pepsi i McDonalds, kada je logotip marke obojen, odnosno kada je u sivim tonovima. Rezultati su pokazali da su sudionici prepoznali marku unutar dvije do tri sekunde kada je logotip bio u boji, dok kod uporabe sivih tonova logotipa, bilo j potrebno duže vrijeme za prepoznavanje (Delabre i suradnici, 2018). Kako bi se ispitala važnost poznavanja psihologije boja za prepoznavanje marke, na temelju istraživanja Chinery (2019) zaključuje da na prepoznavanje marke veću ulogu ima boja nego sam naziv poduzeća, odnosno marke. Također, boja igra veliku ulogu u emocionalnoj privrženosti, pažnji, memoriji, odnosno prepoznavanju i stavu, te utječe pozitivno na namjeru kupnje (Dzulkifli i Mustafar, 2013). Za razliku od istraživanja Delabre i suradnika (2018), gdje su ispitanici brže prepoznali marku kada je logotip bio u boji, istraživanje Jelenc, Grgurić Čop i Torbarina (2021) je pokazalo drugačije rezultate; ispitanici su bolje zapamtili i prepoznali logotipe u sivoj boji naprema logotipima u boji.

S obzirom da će u eksperimentu biti korišteni logotipi u boji, točnije u crvenoj, plavoj, narančastoj i zelenoj, važno je navesti još jednu spoznaju iz istraživanja. Uočen je negativan učinak količine crvene boje u logotipu na niže sviđanje/prepoznavanje od ispitanika. Istraživanje Jelenc, Grgurić Čop i Torbarina (2021) govori kako zbog velike zasićenosti različitih logotipa crvenom bojom, crvena boja dovodi do manjeg sviđanja i slabijeg prepoznavanja zbog nemogućnosti razlikovanja različitih logotipa. U istom istraživanju autori su opazili malu, ali značajnu, pozitivnu vezu između plave/zelene boje i sviđanja/točnosti prepoznavanja.

3. METODOLOGIJA

Eksperimentalno istraživanje provedeno je online, koristeći se online programom Psytoolkit kojim je moguće valjano i pouzdano provoditi eksperimentalna istraživanja i studije vremena reakcije (Stoet, 2010, 2017; Torbarina, 2022). Rezultati su analizirani R statističkim paketom, a sve vizualizacije su napravljene korištenjem paketa “ggplot2” (Wickham, 2016) i “ggimage” (Yu, 2023).

3.1. ISPITANICI

Analizirani su rezultati 51 ispitanika s potpunim podacima. Ukupno je istraživanju pristupilo 79 ispitanika, no potpuni odgovori su prikupljeni od 51 ispitanika. Trećina ispitanika (33%) bilo je muškog spola, prosječne dobi 23,59 godina (sd = 2,26 godine). Obzirom da je svaki ispitanik reagirao na 10 trening podražaja i 40 eksperimentalnih podražaja, analizirano je 2.550 mjerenja. Većina ispitanika (86,27%) istraživanju je pristupila putem mobitela, dok je ostatak njih pristupio putem računala. Nije uočena statistički značajna razlika u vremenu reakcije dviju skupina ($t = 0{,}58$; $df = 2049$; $p>0{,}05$), stoga su rezultati obje skupine analizirani zajedno.

3.2. PODRAŽAJI

Zadatak ispitanika bio je reagirati na prezentaciju loga marke prikazanog na obojenoj pozadini. Ispitanici su morali procijeniti odgovara li boja pozadine boji marke, ili se radi o sličnoj boji. Odabrano je pet marki koje su korištene u eksperimentu. Kriteriji odabira bili su da se obuhvati čim širi raspon poznatosti marke, da se radi o marki s izraženom zaštitnom bojom te da je marka prisutna na hrvatskom tržištu, odnosno da spada u kategoriju bezalkoholnih pića.

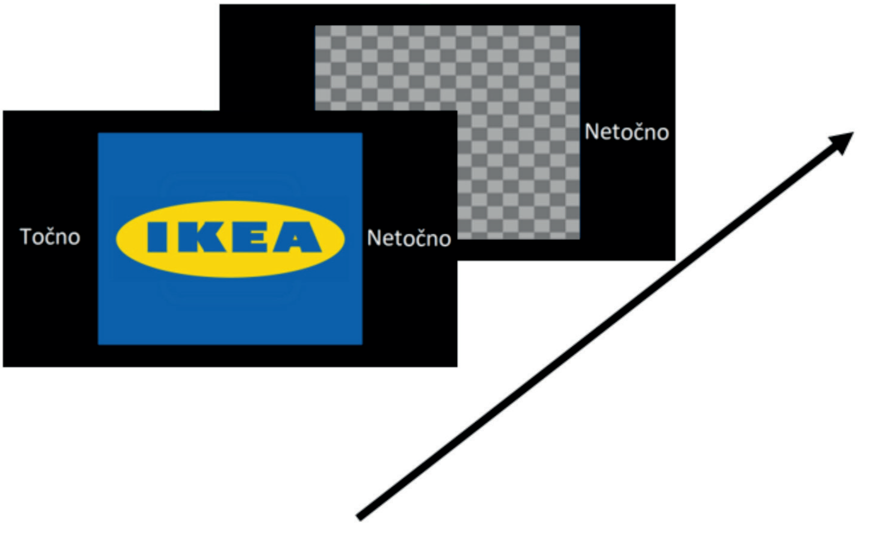
Izbor je pao na marke bezalkoholnih pića Cedevita, Coca-Cola, 7up, Pepsi i Pipi. Slike loga preuzete su pretraživanjem pojma: "[marka] logo". Nakon preuzimanja, slike su računalno obrađene na način da su sve svedene na istu veličinu (720x576 piksela) te da je varirana boja pozadine u tzv. *hue* (hrv. sjaj) dimenziji boje u koracima od 2 stupnja iznad i ispod originalne *hue* vrijednosti.

3.3. POSTUPAK

Eksperiment je započeo uputom u kojoj su ispitanici obaviješteni da se radi o istraživanju boja. Nakon toga, odgovorili su na pitanja o spolu, dobi i mediju putem kojeg pristupaju istraživanju. Potom, postavljena su im dva pitanja koja su za cilj imala ispitati položaj u svijesti marki korištenih u daljnjem istraživanju. Najprije su ispitanici odgovorili na pitanje da se dosjete 10 marki bezalkoholnih pića a nakon toga da označe ona pića koja su konzumirali unazad mjesec dana. Ponuđene marke su bile one korištene u daljnjem istraživanju.

Zatim je započeo eksperimentalni dio istraživanja, gdje je ispitanicima dana još jedna uputa da će im biti prezentiran logo na pozadini koja može biti boja marke ili pozadini čija se boja razlikuje od boje marke. Zadatak ispitanika je pritisnuti na riječ "Točno", prezentiranu lijevo od podražaja ukoliko se radi o boji marke, odnosno na riječ "Netočno", ukoliko se radi o boji različitoj od boje prezentirane marke (Slika 1).

Slika 1.: Eksperimentalna procedura



Izvor: izrada autora

Kako bi se ublažio efekt učenja, ispitanicima je prvo prezentirano 10 trening podražaja (logo Ikea prezentiran na pozadini originalne plave boje, ili na pozadini druge boje (zelene, roze, narančaste, itd). Nakon toga im je prezentirano 40 eksperimentalnih podražaja. Za razliku od trening bloka u kojem su razlike između boje marke (plava) i ostalih boja bile velike, razlike u boji u eksperimentalnom bloku bile su suptilnije. Marke i boje prezentirane uz marku su se pojavljivale u nasumičnom redoslijedu svakom ispitaniku.

4. REZULTATI

Sva mjerenja dulja od 2.000 ms (2 sekundi) i kraća od 250 ms su izbačena iz daljnjih analiza kao nevaljana. Radi se o 499 mjerenja (19,57%). Prije početka eksperimenta, ispitanici su reagirali na 10 podražaja kako bi se umanjio efekt učenja, poznati artefakt eksperimentalnih nacrta s višestrukim izlaganjem identičnom zadatku. Taj cilj je postignut. Koeficijent korelacije između rednog broja mjerenja i vremena reakcije iznosio je r =

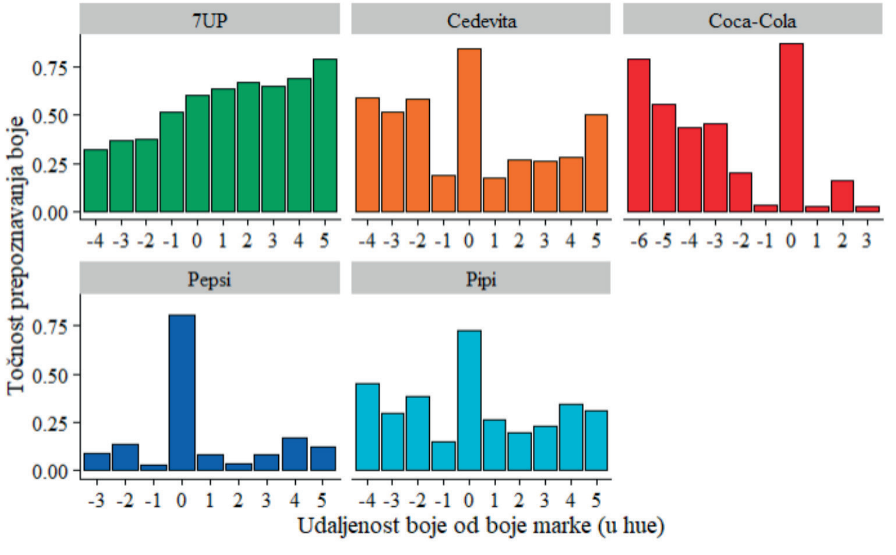
-0,41 u trening bloku, dok je smanjen na r = -0,28 u eksperimentalnom bloku.

Daljnje analize provedene su samo na eksperimentalnim mjerenjima. Cilj je bio saznati može li se na temelju brzine reakcije i perceptivnosti ispitanika zaključivati o snazi marke. U tu svrhu provedene su tri analize.

4.1. DISKRIMINACIJA BOJE MARKE OD SLIČNIH

Zadatak ispitanika bio je odrediti radi li se o boji marke ili ne, pritiskom na "Točno" ili "Netočno". Nakon izbacivanja ekstremnih vrijednosti, prosječno vrijeme reakcije iznosilo je 1051,14 ms (sd = 376,47 ms). Prosječna točnost iznosila je 47%, što je tek malo ispod razine pogađanja (obzirom da su bila dva moguća ishoda, pogađanjem bismo očekivali da će biti 50% točnih odgovora). Kada se analizira točnost prepoznavanja da je boja marke – boja marke, rezultati su drugačiji. Točnost značajno varira kod marki. Pa tako Coca Cola (87%) i Cedevita (84%) boje su najtočnije prepoznate kao njihove boje marke, dok 7up ima najnižu stopu prepoznavanja (60%). Pipi (73%) i Pepsi (80%) nalaze se između prethodno spomenutih. Podrobnija analiza, prikazana na Slici 2., pokazala je da ispitanici nisu veoma precizni diskriminatori boje marke.

Slika 2.: Točnost prepoznavanja boje marke u odnosu na slične boje



Izvor: izrada autora

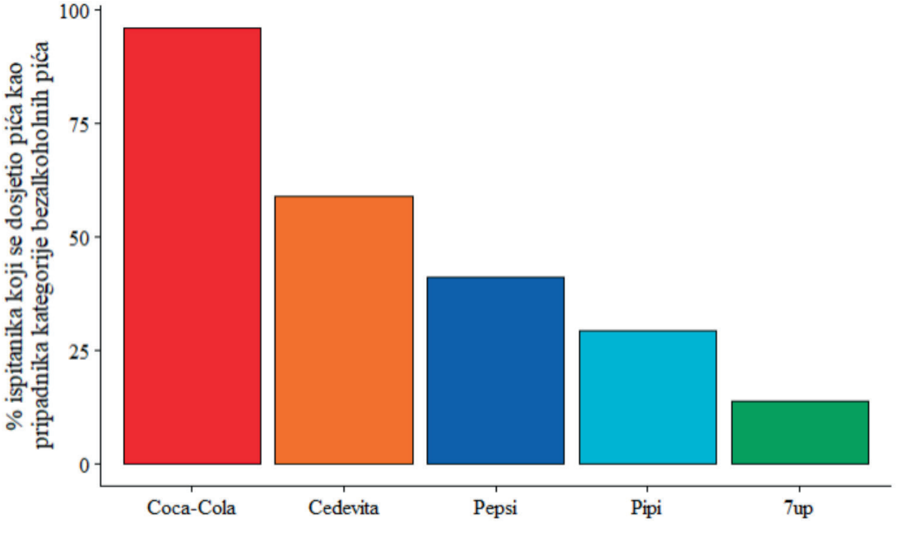
Na prvu, sa slike je vidljivo da stupac označen s nula odskače od ostalih stupaca, te bi bilo jednostavno zaključiti da se radi o tome da su boju marke ispitanici najtočnije prepoznavali. No, obzirom da je visina stupca određena točnošću odgovora (oznaka "Točno" kad se radi o boji marke, odnosno oznaka "Netočno" kad se ne radi o boji marke), zaključujemo da ispitanici nisu toliko precizni diskriminatori boje marke. Na pitanja o svijesti o marki, kao dvije marke s najvišim rezultatom, Coca-Cola i Cedevita bilježe najmanje točne odgovore za boje najsličnije boji marke. Radi se o netočnom rezultatu obzirom da su ispitanici označavali i tu boju kao boju marke.

S druge strane, kod 7up marke se radi o skoro pa uniformnoj distribuciji (s prosječno 50% točnosti, razina pogađanja), no još je zanimljiviji nalaz kod Pepsija, gdje su ispitanici (skoro) za svaku boju označavali da je upravo to Pepsi boja, što je dovelo do visokog postotka točnosti "prave" boje, ali i niskog postotka "krive" boje. Nalaz je još zanimljiviji obzirom da je jedino Pepsijev logo sadržavao i boju marke na sebi.

4.2. SVIJEST O MARKI

Svijest o marki testirana je kroz dva najčešće korištena načina mjerenja (Laurent, Kapferer i Roussel, 1995; Rossiter, 2014), prepoznavanje i dosjećanje. Umjesto klasičnog prepoznavanja, obzirom da se radi o više-manje poznatim markama, ispitanici su morali označiti one marke koje su konzumirali unazad mjesec dana. Na pitanje o dosjećanju, ispitanici su imali priliku dosjetiti se do 10 marki iz kategorije bezalkoholnih pića. Potonje pitanje je postavljeno prvo, kako ne bi kao dosjećanje navodili odgovore koji su im bili ponuđeni u pitanju o konzumaciji. Na prvo pitanje ("Navedite 10 marki bezalkoholnih pića"), 96% ispitanika je navelo Coca-Colu, a 59 % ispitanika, Cedevitu (Slika 3.).

Slika 3.: Dosjećanje marke kao pripadnika kategorije bezalkoholnih pića

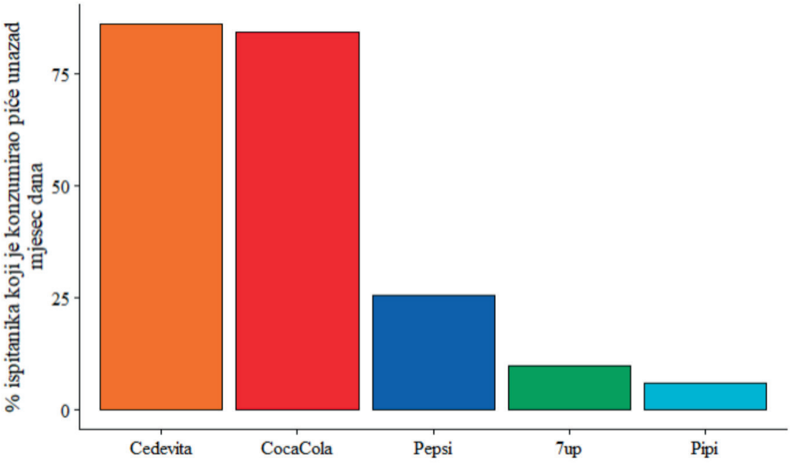


Izvor: izrada autora

Na drugo pitanje, u kojem su se ispitanici trebali dosjetiti marki kategorije bezalkoholnih pića, Coca-Cola je spominjana ili kao jedna od prve tri marke, ili nije spominjana, a Cedevite su se ispitanici podjednako često dosjećali na svakoj od 10 pozicija, Pipi je navođen u sredini (6. i 7. po redu) dok je Pepsi spominjan malo ranije (2.,4. i 5. po redu je najčešće dosjećan) (Slika 3.).

Sličan obrazac uočen je i kod pitanja o nedavnoj konzumaciji. Coca-Cola i Cedevita su najčešće konzumirani napitci unazad mjesec dana. Ostale marke su rijetko konzumirane (Slika 4).

Slika 4.: Učestalost konzumacije unazad mjesec dana

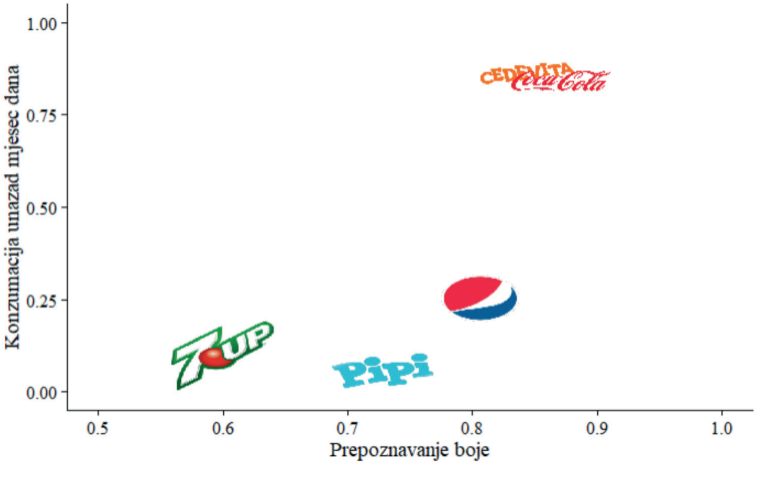


Izvor: izrada autora

Hipoteza je da će boja marke, obzirom na učestalost s kojom su joj potrošači izloženi biti najtočnije i najbrže prepoznavana, posebno kod dobro poznatih marki.

Na Slici 5. je prikazan položaj marki u koordinatnom sustavu određenom postotkom ispitanika koji su konzumirali navedenu marku unazad mjesec dana (y-os) i prosječnom točnošću prepoznavanja boje marke.

Slika 5. Odnos učestalosti konzumacije i točnosti prepoznavanja boje marke

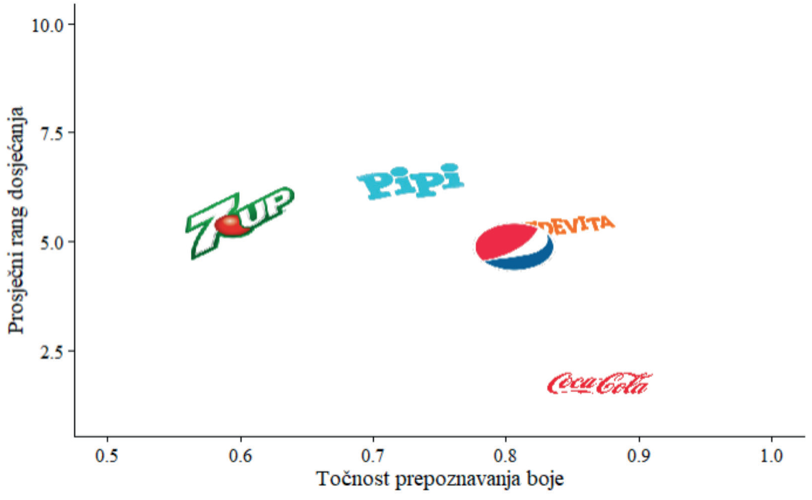


Izvor: izrada autora

Bolja pozicioniranost marke u svijesti potrošača povezana je s većom točnošću prepoznavanja boje marke. No, to nije jedini faktor koji utječe na točnost prepoznavanja obzirom da su Pipi, Pepsi i 7up podjednako (malo) konzumirani, no svejedno variraju u točnosti prepoznavanja boje.

Na kraju, za detaljniji uvid u vezu svijesti o marki i točnosti prepoznavanja boje, koordinatni sustav je određen prosječnom točnošću prepoznavanja boje (x-os) i prosječnim mjestom na koje je marka dosjećana na pitanje o markama kategorije bezalkoholnih pića (y-os) (Slika 6.).

Slika 6.: Odnos prosječnog ranga dosjećanja i točnosti prepoznavanja boje marke



Izvor: izrada autora

Coca-Cola značajno odstupa od ostatka marki, te je vidljiva negativna povezanost dviju varijabli. Drugim riječima, potvrđeni su rezultati prethodne analize da su svijest o marki (pozicioniranost na čim manjem rangu) i točnost prepoznavanja boje marke povezani. Objašnjenje i implikacije dobivenih rezultata prikazano je u Diskusiji.

5. DISKUSIJA I ZAKLJUČAK

U radu je analizirana prepoznatljivost boje marke s obzirom na svijest o marki odnosno dosjećanje i konzumaciju maraka od strane potrošača (ispitanika). S obzirom da na učinkovitost boje u oglašavanju, točnije na atraktivnost i prepoznatljivost oglasa, mogu utjecati nijansa, zasićenost i svjetlina boje (Shi, 2012), odlučeno je da se ovim eksperimentom testira kako promjena nijanse zaštitnih boja marke utječe na prepoznatljivost marke. Hipoteza ističe da će boja marke, obzirom na učestalost kojoj su potrošači izloženi, biti najtočnije i najbrže prepoznavana posebno kod dobro poznatih maraka. Provedenim eksperimentom hipoteza je potvrđena, odnosno učestalost konzumacije, koja predstavlja svijest o marki, povezana je s točnošću prepoznavanja boje marke. Marke Coca Cola i Cedevita ostvarile su visok postotak učestalosti konzumacije od kod potrošača, odnosno prisutna je visoka svijest o marki. S obzirom na informaciju da je Coca Cola najpopularnija, najprodavanija i najprepoznatljivija marka u svijetu (Coca Cola, 2023), a Cedevita jedna od najpopularnijih i najdugovječnijih maraka na području hrvatske regije i okolice (Cedevita, 2023), rezultati učestalosti konzumiranja su očekivani. Coca Cola i Cedevita su marke koje su godinama prisutne na hrvatskom tržištu, značajno ulažu u razne tradicionalne i suvremene kanale oglašavanja koje dovode do visoke izloženosti potrošača markama. Isto tako, kako navedene marke godinama nisu mijenjale važnu stavku svog vizualnog identiteta – boju, visoka svijest o marki je i očekivana. To potvrđuje tvrdnju Koskinen (2021) koji zaključuje da su marke koje ne mijenjaju svoje zaštitne boje prepoznatljivije, kao i tvrdnju Rrustemija i Baca (2021) da oglašavanje ima značajan učinak na povećanje svijesti o marki, gdje potrošači postaju svjesni prisutnosti i dostupnosti proizvoda poduzeća. Navedene tvrdnje poklapaju se sa rezultatima provedenog istraživanja i dovode do prihvaćanja hipoteze da češća konzumacije marke dovodi do veće prepoznatljivosti boja marke od strane potrošača. Odnosno, da veća svijest o marki dovodi do veće prepoznatljivosti boja marke.

Zanimljivi su rezultati koji se tiču točnosti prepoznavanja boje marke u odnosu na slične boje. Naime, uočeno je kako Coca-Cola i Cedevita, kao dvije marke s najvišim rezultatom na pitanjima o svijesti o marki, najmanje točne odgovore bilježe za boje najsličnije boji marke.

Takve rezultate možemo opravdati zaključkom istraživanja Jelenc, Grgurić Čop i Torbarina (2021) koje govori da zbog velike zasićenosti različitih logotipa crvenom bojom, crvena boja dovodi do slabijeg prepoznavanja. S obzirom na veliku prisutnost konkurencije Coca Cole u vidu identičnog tipa bezalkoholnih pića poput Sky Cole, Fis Cole i ostalih varijanti koje koriste crvene boje u svojim logotipima, postoji mogućnost da je to razlog zbog kojeg su ispitanici najsličnije boje marke označavali točnima.

Ovaj eksperiment može poslužiti marketinškim stručnjacima koji su u različitim fazama razvijanja marke. U radu je naglašena važnost boje za svijest o marki, posebice za prepoznavanje i prisjećanje koje igra veliku ulogu kod kupnje, pa tako i u kasnijim fazama gdje potrošač postaje lojalan marki. Kada potrošač zapamti zaštitne boje marke, marka napravi trag kod potrošača. Slično ističe i Koskinen (2021), tvrdeći kako tada potrošač ima mogućnost bržeg pronalaska proizvoda u trgovini jer može prepoznati marku na temelju poznavanja njene zaštitne boje. Uz marketinške stručnjake, ovaj rad može poslužiti i budućim istraživanjima u sferi psihologije boja i njene povezanosti s marketinškom komunikacijom. Kako je fokus dosadašnjih istraživanja takve vrste bio na eksperimentu gdje su se ispitanicima prikazivali logotipi u boji vs. sivim tonovima (Delabre i suradnici, 2018) i prepoznavanju marke na temelju boja (Chinery, 2019), ovo je istraživanje postavilo zahtjevniji i znatno kompleksniji zadatak pred ispitanike, te su dobiveni rezultati znatno produbili razinu dosadašnjih istraživanja.

5.1. OGRANIČENJA I PRIJEDLOZI ZA BUDUĆA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Eksploratorna istraživanja otvaraju više pitanja nego li nude odgovora. Iako je istraživanje provedeno na manjem broju marki u svrhu održavanja složenosti eksperimentalnog nacrta na upravljivoj razini, dobiveni rezultati daju jasne smjernice za buduća istraživanja koja mogu testirati hipotezu da su svijest o marki i točnost prepoznavanja boje marke u pozitivnoj vezi, no isto tako mogu uzeti u obzir neke od nedostataka istraživanja. Boje marke korištene kao distraktori (ne-boje marke) veoma su se suptilno razlikovale jedna od druge. Bez obzira, uočeno je da se marke razlikuju u točnosti s kojom je njihova boja prepoznata. Naravno, osim kategorije bezalkoholnih pića, buduća istraživanja mogu se orijentirati i na druge kategorije proizvoda, kao i na marke s više od jedne zaštitne boje.

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DESTINATION POSITIONING THROUGH SLOGANS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this paper was to analyse slogans of the German federal states and to identify their characteristics, as well as to determine associations of potential tourists related to the slogans and to compare them with the previously defined categories.

Methodology: Tourist slogans of the German federal states were collected, analysed and classified into categories according to predefined characteristics. An online survey was then conducted to determine respondents' associations regarding the slogans of the German federal states. The survey included two groups of respondents who were exposed to slogans in different languages (German and Croatian).

Results: The content analysis showed that half of the German federal states use slogans that describe different characteristics of their destinations. It is evident that respondents have more specific associations with slogans that contain the name of a federal state or geographically describe a federal state, which most often includes the names of cities, attractions, or some other attractive resources. Federal states that have slogans with no specific focus also generated generic associations. Although it seems that the level of knowledge of the German language did not significantly affect the results, respondents who were exposed to slogans in German expressed more specific associations related to the slogans of the federal states.

Conclusion: This study combined several scientific approaches, qualitative and quantitative, to gain a deeper insight into the use of slogans in the positioning of a destination. As the results have shown, destination marketing managers should use short slogans, defining some of the characteristics of a destination, to differentiate the destination from others on the tourism market. The use of a local language for a specific target market is not crucial if the comprehension of the used foreign language is satisfactory.

Keywords: Destination marketing, Destination, Positioning, Slogans, German federal states

1. INTRODUCTION

The competition in the tourist market is extremely high, and therefore destinations, regardless of the geographical area they cover, fight on this competitive market by using various marketing tools to attract tourists. Through their marketing strategies, tourist destinations define how to attract tourists and, at the same time, how to satisfy their needs. Hence, the strategic positioning of a destination plays a key role in this process (Saqib, 2019, Rejikumar et al., 2021). When a destination appears on the market, one of the first steps is certainly the development of its brand, through its name, symbol and slogan. A slogan is short and catchy, and it conveys the producer's message about the brand identity in a way that should make it stand out among many other competing brands, but it should also be noticed by the target consumer in a meaningful and memorable way (Pike & Page, 2014). The question that arises is what striking message to convey. Tourist destinations are areas that most often have a mix of attractions for tourists, so displaying just one striking message within a slogan is an extremely complex process (Dann, 2000).

This paper analyses slogans of the German federal states. According to IPK International - World Travel Monitor 2022, Germany is the third most preferred destination for Europeans, right after Spain and France, while according to the research of the European Travel Commission, Germany was the fifth most preferred travel destination according to the preferences of the European tourist market in 2022 (5.2%) (after France, Spain, Italy and Greece). Therefore, Germany represents an important destination according to the above data.

According to the data of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, a total of 4 million private multi-day trips by citizens of the Republic of Croatia were made in 2022, of which 71.7% were in Croatia, and 1.1 million (28.3%) were abroad. In total 10.1% of them travelled to Germany, which makes it the second most attractive destination after Bosnia and Herzegovina (28.5%). In this context, it is important also to stress that the citizens of the Republic of Croatia travel abroad most often to visit relatives and friends (41.5%) and to visit cities/excursions/culture/ entertainment (30.5%) (CBS, Tourist activity of the population of the Republic of Croatia in 2022).

Thus, this data shows that Germany is an extremely important destination for the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, but there is a lack of research on the effect of Germany's positioning on Croatian tourism demand. According to all the above, in this work we want to determine the characteristics of the slogans of the German federal states and whether youth associations in the Republic of Croatia are linked to the German federal states in accordance with the characteristics of their slogans. It is also important to identify which slogan category is perceived as the most attractive, as well as to define guidelines for destination marketing managers regarding destination positioning.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. POSITIONING OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Positioning is very important for creating a competitive advantage, especially in areas dominated by numerous close substitutes. It is preceded by market research, consumer behaviour analysis, segmentation and determination of the target market (Kotler et al., 2006). The extremely complex process of positioning requires a well-thought-out approach that will influence the consumers' perception of the brand in view of the existence of other alternatives (Pavlek, 2008). When viewed from the aspect of a tourist destination, it can be said that the positioning process represents creation of a recognisable image of the destination in the minds of potential tourists (Embacher & Buttle, 1989, Rejikumar et al., 2021).

Before implementing the positioning process, it is necessary to consider existing alternatives and available strategies, such as strengthening the existing position in the minds of consumers, taking a new vacant position for which there is a business justification and repositioning (Ries & Trout, 1986, as cited in Kotler et al., 2006: 434). Choosing one of the above three options depends on market research results that provide insights into the current experience of different brands on the market. Tourist demand is subject to change in its preferences over a shorter or longer period of time. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate destination attributes and connect them again with the destination as such, bearing in mind the weaknesses and strengths of the destination attributes. Rejikumar et al. (2021) state that the repositioning of a tourist destination can occur due to changes in 1) user attitudes, 2) destination attributes and 3) quality criteria.

A common practice is to combine approaches when choosing a strategy to maximise its strength. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the choice of the correct competitive advantages and the way of communicating the chosen position (Previšić & Ozretić Došen, 2004). When it comes to a tourist destination as a product, it represents a mixture of products, services and relationships that develop between tourist destination stakeholders in meeting the tourist supply and demand. This multiplicity of relationships makes the process of positioning/repositioning of the destination extremely complex (Chacko & Hawkins Marcell, 2008, Čavlek et al., 2011, Saqib, 2019). Rodríguez-Molina et al. (2019) found a whole series of researches that examined the positioning of tourist destinations in relation to other competitive destinations and identified various attributes related to tourist preferences, destination characteristics and benefits that tourist want to derive from the destination. At the same time, they establish the existence of a whole series of research that connects the attributes and positioning of a particular destination.

The positioning of a tourist destination is a process that Pike (2010) presents through seven stages. It begins with defining the target market and travel context, determining the competition with the same target market and the travel context, identifying the motivation for visiting, then defining the strengths and weaknesses of the competition, the potential for differentiated positioning, then the selection and implementation of the position is carried out, and ultimately it is necessary to monitor the results to be able to make adjustments in the future.

The positioning process is an intensive undertaking. It requires careful consideration of each step, and while achieving the desired position is a long-term effort, the risk of losing it is constant. Pike and Ryan (2004) found that effective positioning requires a concise, focused and consistent message. That message must be focused on the unique attributes that the destination has, one that differentiates it from the competition (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019).

Tourist destinations offer different services; therefore, they rely on certain elements of positioning to achieve the desired position. Aaker (1991) defines a brand as a distinctive name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of any seller or group of sellers, and to distinguish them from those of competitors. Most often, the name, symbol and slogan are recognised as brand features (Pike, 2004, Gali et al., 2017). In this paper, the focus will be on the slogan as an element of the positioning of the tourist destination, which also represents the most dynamic part of the combination.

2.2. SLOGAN AS AN ELEMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION POSITIONING

The slogan is one of the elements of the tourist destination positioning, which must form a common entity with the name and symbol (Kohli et al., 2007, Gali et al., 2017). It is a relatively short phrase that conveys descriptive and/or persuasive information about a brand (Keller, 2012, Pike, 2010). Slogans of tourist destinations mostly communicate the most important features of a particular tourist destination (Supphellen & Nygaardsvik, 2002, Lee et al., 2006). According to Pan (2019), tourism slogans consist of an average of 3.64 words, with a median of 3 words. The question that arises is how to state the unique selling proposition (USP) of a tourist destination with only a few words?

Slogans represent the core of marketing campaigns and advertising and as such they should successfully represent the character and personality of the tourist destination, successfully communicate with potential consumers, and provide a basis for the development of unique sales tactics (Barišić & Blažević, 2014). It is extremely important to maintain consistency in communication, as this contributes to destination positioning quality (Šerić et al., 2014, Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). Slogans should be given a lot of attention since they actually form the basis of the entire promotion because they represent a link in the form of a basic message that runs through all forms of advertising. They influence the achievement of the desired position on the market, and, after its establishment, they serve as associations (Qu et al., 2022). A slogan must be memorable and convincing (Pan, 2019) to be a brand carrier.

Galí et al. (2017) analysed the characteristics of a successful slogan, and the principles that should be followed when creating it indicate that the slogan should be short, fun, credible, long-lasting, special, concise, direct and appropriate. When creating a slogan, it is not possible to satisfy all principles, but it is important to take them into account because they can help create an original slogan that stands out from the mass of generic statements.

Many authors point out that it is difficult to find suitable, long-term, striking and memorable slogans that convey the essence of a tourist destination (Barišić & Blažević, 2014, Pike, 2010, Pan, 2019). Creators of tourist slogans face numerous problems; however, one of the more important problems is certainly a loss of meaning in translation.

There are a significant number of works presenting different types of slogan analysis (Dowling & Kabanoff, 1996, Miller & Toman, 2016), while there are not many works in the literature that offer guidelines for the analysis of tourist destination slogans (Pike, 2004, Pike & Page, 2014, Pan, 2019, Gali et al., 2017, Adamus-Matuszyńska & Dzik, 2022). Pike (2004) proposes an analysis and categorisation of the slogans of tourist destinations according to their key concepts and distinguishes ten categories. Which keywords will be used depends on the characteristics of the destination and its desired image. Pike's (2004) categorisation of slogans according to the keywords used was applied in the next research part of this paper and will be explained in more detail there.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The empirical research on the role of slogans in the positioning of the German federal states includes two studies, each of which was carried out in several steps. In the first research, the slogans of the German federal states were categorised, which created prerequisites for the second part of the research which analysed the associations of young people (18 to 29 years) in the Republic of Croatia regarding slogans of the German federal states.

3.1. CATEGORISATION OF THE SLOGANS OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

a) Defining the methodology for categorising the slogans of the German federal states

The categorisation of slogans in the research was done according to the functional categorisation approach defined by Pike (2004). This approach is based on the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of the slogan and has different sets of criteria based on the value statements of the slogan.

Table 1: Slogan categories with descriptions

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
Functional destination attributes	characteristics of destinations such as location, nature, climate, etc.
Affective qualities	feelings that the destination wants to associate with itself
Travel motivation benefits	new experiences that the destination can offer
Market segmentation	emphasising a specific form or type of tourism that the destination develops, a specific target market, etc.
Symbols of self-expression	the influence of the destination on the visitor's identity
Countering risk	destination security
Brand leadership	destination characteristics in which the destination is first or best
Focus	emphasising a unique resource
Unfocus	general presentation without emphasising anything special about the destination
Combinations of the above	

Source: Pike (2004)

b) Analysis and categorisation of the slogans of the German federal states

First, the official website of the National Tourist Board of the Federal Republic of Germany was visited to collect the slogans of all sixteen German federal states with links to the official websites of the tourist boards of individual federal states. Several obstacles were encountered in this step. Some tourist boards of federal states did not have official websites, and others did not clearly state their official slogan anywhere, which is why it cannot be said with complete certainty that the slogan that has been taken over is really the official tourist slogan of a particular German federal state. For example, the websites of the tourist boards of Brandenburg, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Rheinland-Pfalz did not clearly display slogans anywhere, which is why it cannot be said with complete certainty that the ones used for this research were the official tourist slogans of a particular German federal state. Statements from these online sources that are listed as slogans were chosen based on their prominence from the rest of the text.

The listed web sources of the slogans were in German, with an option to translate them into other languages. All web sources had the option of translation into English, however some federal states had the slogan only in English (Berlin or North Rhine-Westphalia), while other web sources have it in German and English. The existence of this discrepancy resulted in translation of slogans from German and English versions into Croatian, to determine whether there are differences in slogans and their characteristics when they are pronounced in different languages. The translation of the slogan from German to Croatian was confirmed by a German language professor and another native German speaker, to reduce errors. Based on the collected data, a content analysis was done, and the slogans were classified into the defined categories.

c) Testing the categories assigned to the slogans of the German federal states

The authors decided to additionally test whether the categories assigned to individual slogans were correctly selected, to confirm the results from the content analysis. Therefore, an online questionnaire was created in which all slogan categories with a description along with all slogans were listed. A total of 32 persons completed the questionnaire. Authors distributed the survey manly to students and colleagues, so the sampling was convenient. This part of the survey was done in June 2022. The questionnaire consisted of the main part where the slogans and descriptions where stated, and the second part with the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Each of the respondents could assign to each slogan the category they considered to be the most appropriate.

The predominant gender of the respondents was women 83.3%, and 16.7% were men. The age range of the respondents was from 18 to 64 years, where the largest number of respondents, 72.2% was in the age group of 18 to 29 years, and 27.8% of them were 30 years and older. The level of education of the respondents ranged between completed high school education, undergraduate and graduate degrees, of which the highest percentage of 61.1% had an undergraduate degree. This demographic structure of the respondents was desirable, considering that young people aged 18 to 29 were the primary target group of the research on associations related to slogans, which was carried out in the next step.

d) The results of the categorisation of the slogans of the German federal states

The results of the German federal states slogans' categorisation are presented in Table 2, showing translation of the slogans from German and English into Croatian and a comparison of the assigned categories regarding the assessments of the authors and respondents.

Table 2: Categorisation of the slogans of the German federal states

FEDERAL STATE	SLOGAN (GERMAN)	SLOGAN (CROATIAN)	CATEGORY (AUTHORS)	CATEGORY (RESPONDENTS)
Baden-Württemberg	Wir sind Süden (We are South)	Mi smo Jug	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Bavaria	Erlebe Bayern (Experience Bavaria)	Doživi Bavarsku	Unfocus	Travel motivation benefits
Berlin	Visit Berlin *Only in English.	Posjeti Berlin	Unfocus	Unfocus
Brandenburg	Entdecke das Berliner Umland! (Discover the Berlin surrounding area!	Otkrijte okolicu Berlina	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Bremen	Erleben! (Experience!)	Doživjeti!	Unfocus	Travel motivation benefits
Hamburg	Hamburg Ahoi! (Hamburg Ahoy!)	Hamburg Ahoj!	Unfocus	Unfocus
Hessen	Erlebnisland Hessen (A land of experiences Hessen)	Hessen, zemlja doživljaja	Travel motivation benefits	Travel motivation benefits
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Tut gut (Feels good)	Čini dobro	Affective qualities	Affective qualities
Niedersachsen	Fühl die Weite (Feel the vastness)	Osjeti prostranstvo	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
North Rhine-Westphalia	Around the corner *Only in English.	Iza ugla	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Rheinland-Pfalz	Jetzt Natur- und Kulturschätze entdecken (Discover natural and cultural treasures now)	Otkrijte sada prirodna i kulturna blaga	Travel motivation benefits	Market segmentation
Saarland	Das Land der Grenzenlosen Erlebnisse (The land of limitless experiences)	Zemlja neograničenih iskustava	Travel motivation benefits	Travel motivation benefits

SLOGAN (ENGLISH)	SLOGAN (CROATIAN)	CATEGORY (AUTHORS)	CATEGORY (RESPONDENTS)
The Sunny Side of Germany	Sunčana strana Njemačke	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Experience Bavaria	Iskusi Bavarsku	Unfocus	Travel motivation benefits
Visit Berlin	Posjeti Berlin	Unfocus	Unfocus
All around Berlin	Sve oko Berlina	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Live it!	Doživi!	Unfocus	Travel motivation benefits
Hamburg Ahoi! *Only in German.	Hamburg Ahoj!	Unfocus	Unfocus
A land of experiences Hessen	Zemlja doživljaja Hessen	Travel motivation benefits	Travel motivation benefits
Best of Northen Germany	Najbolje od Sjeverne Njemačke	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Head for the horizon	Krenite prema horizontu	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Around the corner	Iza ugla	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Discover & set new milestones	Otkrijte i postavite nove ciljeve	Symbols of self-expression	Symbols of self-expression
For Boundless Experiences	Za neograničena iskustva	Travel motivation benefits	Travel motivation benefits

Saxony	Land von Welt (World Country)	Svjetska zemlja	Brand leadership	Brand leadership
Saxony-Anhalt	Reiseland vom Harz bis zur Elbe (Destination from the Harz Mountains to the Elbe)	Odredište od Harza do Elbe	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Schleswig-Holstein	Der echte Norden (The real North)	Pravi Sjever	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Thuringia	Thüringen entdecken (Discover Thuringia)	Otkrijte Tiringiju	Unfocus	Unfocus

Source: authors' own research according to the available websites of the German federal states and other available materials

It can be concluded from the conducted content analysis that eight of the slogans can be classified into the same category in both languages. Most of them are classified as slogans in the category Functional destination attributes, which means that they mainly describe some destination attributes that can be easily recognised from the slogan. There are only two exceptions, where Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's slogan in English is in the category Functional destination attributes and in the German version it is classified as Affective qualities ("Tut gut"). The slogan of Saxony-Anhalt is in German classified as Functional destination attributes and in English it is Brand leadership. That means that these two federal states use slogans with different meanings in German and English. Slogans of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saxony-Anhalt belong to different categories depending on whether they are translated from German or English. This inconsistency points to the creation of different perceptions and expectations of each mentioned German federal state.

Furthermore, the German version of the slogan of Saxony was classified as Brand Leadership by both the authors and respondents, but only the authors classified the English slogan in the same category.

The slogan "Visit Thuringia" is a "general presentation without emphasising anything special about the destination" (Unfocus category). Whereas, Hessen and Saarland have slogans which were assessed as some that emphasise a specific form or type of tourism that the destination develops ("A land of experiences Hessen" and "For Boundless Experiences").

State of the Arts	Pokrajina umjetnosti	Brand leadership	Market segmentation
Heartland of German History	Srce njemačke povijesti	Brand leadership	Brand leadership
Germany's true North	Pravi Sjever Njemačke	Functional destination attributes	Functional destination attributes
Visit Thuringia	Posjetite Tiringiju	Unfocus	Unfocus

The federal state Rheinland-Pfalz has different slogans in German and English, but the English version "Discover & set new milestones" has been classified by both groups as a slogan in the category Symbols of self-expression, while there is no agreement on the slogan category in the German version.

Two interesting results were recorded in the slogan categories of Bavaria ("Experience Bavaria") and Bremen ("Live it!"). The meaning in both languages is the same, but the categories assigned by the authors and respondents are different. In both cases the authors classified them into the category Unfocus, whereas the respondents said that these are slogans from the Travel motivation benefits category. So, the authors perceive these as not emphasising anything special about the destination, while the respondents who are manly young people see destinations which can offer new experiences.

Three slogans are only stated in English (North Rhine-Westphalia, Berlin, Hamburg). Berlin and Hamburg have a category of Unfocus slogan and North Rhine-Westphalia a Functional destination attributes slogan.

3.2. ASSOCIATIONS REGARDING THE SLOGANS OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

In the second part, a survey was conducted to determine associations regarding the slogans of the German federal states. The research was conducted within two groups of respondents.

The first group of respondents was exposed to slogans translated into the Croatian language, while the other group was exposed to slogans in the

German language. Therefore, especially for the second group of respondents, the level of knowledge of the German language was important to participate in the survey. The aim of such approach was to determine whether there are differences in their associations related to the slogans and perceptions of the German federal states. The process of conducting the research will be explained in detail further in the text.

3.2.1. SAMPLING AND CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

The survey was conducted in the Republic of Croatia. Based on data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, citizens of the Republic of Croatia between 15 to 34 years of age make the most trips in Croatia and abroad (CBS, Tourist activity of the population of the Republic of Croatia in 2022).

Therefore, the main criterion for the sampling was the age of the respondents. According to Eurostat, young people are those between 15 and 29 years old. Due to ethical reasons the authors decided to include only respondents between 18 and 29 years old. This criterion was applied to all respondents.

An additional criterion was defined for the respondents who participated in the survey with the slogans stated in the German language. For them, a minimum knowledge of the German language at the level B1 was defined. The degree of knowledge of the German language is important because in the first questionnaire the slogans were translated from German into Croatian, while in the second questionnaire slogans were stated in the original version in the German language.

The target group, therefore, consisted of young people aged 18 to 29 living in the Republic of Croatia with different levels of knowledge of the German language. The reason for choosing two groups of respondents was to try to gain an insight into how associations with observed slogans differ depending on the language of the slogans.

The survey was conducted online in July and August 2022. The sampling method was snowball sampling to reach the desired target age group. The questionnaires were mainly distributed via social media in various student groups in Croatia. The questionnaire intended for German language speakers was distributed mostly to students of the German language via social media or e-mail.

In total, 53 respondents participated in the survey which included slogans of the German federal states, translated into the Croatian language. Additionally, 51 respondents participated in the survey in which the slogans were stated in German.

3.2.2. CREATION OF A MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

Two questionnaires were created; each of them consisted of five groups of questions.

The first group of questions regarding the demographic characteristics included the gender, age and level of respondents' education.

The second group of questions was related to the respondents' visit experience to the German federal states, as well as to knowledge level of the German language and the general knowledge about the German federal states. The knowledge of the German language was assessed on a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "I don't know the German language at all" and the grade 5 "I know the German language very well". The overall knowledge of German federal states was also measured on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 means "I do not know the German federal states at all" and 5 means "I know the German federal states very well". The perception about Germany was determined by using the TOMA (Top-of-mind awareness) method, as an open-ended question: "What is your first association regarding Germany?"

The third part of the questionnaire was oriented towards the attitudes regarding tourist slogans in general. This part consisted of three statements "Every tourist destination should have a slogan.," "When choosing a tourist destination, I look at its slogan." and "The slogan affects my decision when choosing a tourist destination." A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the statements, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 "Strongly agree".

Associations regarding the slogans of the German federal states formed the fourth part of the research. The question was: "Please state the first thing that comes to your mind when you read (slogan of each German federal state)." The name of the federal state was not mentioned. This was the only part in which the questionnaires differ. In one version of the questionnaire the slogans were stated in Croatian, and in German in the other version.

In the last question the respondents could choose the three most attractive slogans.

3.2.3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the conducted survey will be presented comparatively. The first group of respondents were those exposed only to Croatian slogans. The second group of respondents, who had a minimum B1 level of German, were exposed to slogans in the German language. As it shown in Table 3 the demographic profile of the respondents in both groups was quite similar.

Over a half of respondents in both groups were in the age group between 22 to 25, which is also reflected in their educational level.

Table 3: Respondents' demographic profile and their familiarity with Germany

	1st GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (GRO) N = 53	2nd GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (GER) N = 51
Gender	women (50.9%); men (39.6%); no answer (9.4%)	women (60.8%); men (35.3%); no answer (3.9%)
Age	18 - 21 (28.3%); 22 - 25 (50.9%); 26 - 29 (20.8%)	18 - 21 (19.6%); 22 - 25 (64.7%); 26 - 29 (15.7%)
Educational level	high school (34%); undergraduate degree (49%); graduate degree (17%)	high school (21.6%); undergraduate degree (68.6%); graduate degree (9.8%)
Most time visited	1 to 3 times in their lifetime (43.4%)	4 to 6 times in their lifetime (29.4%)
Knowledge of the German language	average= 2.75	average = 4.27
Knowledge about the German federal states	average = 2.30	average = 3.35
First associations regarding Germany (TOMA method)	Berlin, work, Oktoberfest, beer	Berlin Wall, Berlin, beer, football

Source: author's own research

The differences are noticeable in the familiarity level regarding Germany. Respondents who expressed better knowledge of the German language also show better overall knowledge about German federal states and they have also visited Germany more often in their lifetime than the other group of respondents with a lower level of knowledge of the German language. Berlin is among the most common associations about Germany expressed by both groups of respondents.

Before exposing the respondents to the slogans of German federal states, they were asked to assess their attitudes regarding tourist slogans in general (Table 4). So, the respondents expressed a very high level of agreement with the statement that every tourist destination should have a slogan. The average score for the first group of respondents was 4.55, and for the second group 4.94. However, when it comes to the importance of tourist slogans in their decision-making process, they do not perceive slogans as important elements. Slogans almost do not affect their decision when choosing a destination.

Table 4: Attitudes regarding tourist slogans in general

	1st GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (CRO) N = 53	2nd GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (GER) N = 51
Every tourist destination should have a slogan.	4.55	4.94
When choosing a tourist destination, I look at its slogan.	1.91	1.67
The slogan affects my decision when choosing a tourist destination.	1.55	1.55

Source: authors' own research

Associations regarding the slogans of the German federal states formed the third part of the questionnaire, and the results are presented and compared in Table 5. Three most often mentioned associations were stated in the table (or more if the number of associations was the same for some words) stated according to the frequency.

It is evident that respondents have more specific associations with slogans that contain the name of a federal state or geographically describe a federal state, which most often includes the names of cities, attractions or some other attractive resources. This is especially visible in the slogans of the federal states Berlin, Brandenburg, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. All these destinations are very well branded tourist destinations, with well-known attractions. One interesting result comes from the associations regarding the slogan of Baden-Württemberg "We are South," where the first association is Bavaria, the neighbouring federal state.

Bremen has a very generic slogan "Live it," and therefore the associations are also very generic. The first group of respondents mentioned associations such as explore, new experience or nature and the second group associated it with adventures, new experience or nothing. Hamburg has a specific slogan Hamburg Ahoi! Ahoi itself stands for a signal word used to call a ship, so the associations are mainly related to port, sea and sailing.

Although it seems that the level of knowledge of the German language did not significantly affect the results, young people who are more familiar with Germany express more specific answers, such as the names of specific attractions or landmarks. This can be related to the fact that these respondents have visited the Federal Republic of Germany more often, and therefore they have a better knowledge of the destination. It is also interesting to see that "nothing" as an association is not among the three most often mentioned in the second group of respondents, whereas it is mentioned a lot in the first group of respondents regarding Hessen, Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt, Bremen, Hamburg, as well as Baden-Württemberg. Many slogans generated nature as an association. Additionally, from all the slogans, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's slogan is the most specific one, as it associates the respondents with helping or kindness, or emotions in general. It stands out compared to all other slogans.

Table 5: First associations regarding the slogans of the German federal states

GERMAN FEDERAL STATE	SLOGAN (CRO)	1st GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (CRO)	SLOGAN (GER)	2nd GROUP OF RESPONDENTS (GER)
Baden-Württemberg	Mi smo Jug	Bavaria, Alps, nothing	Wir sind Süden	Bavaria, Alps, nature
Bavaria	Doživi Bavarsku	beer, Oktoberfest, castles	Erlebe Bayern	Oktoberfest, München, football
Berlin	Posjeti Berlin *Translation from English.	Berlin wall, bear, Berlin pride	/	/
Brandenburg	Otkrijte okolicu Berlina	nature, Berlin, suburb	Entdecke das Berliner Umland!	nature, castles, Berlin
Bremen	Doživjeti!	adventures, new experience, nothing	Erleben!	explore, new experience, nature
Hamburg	Hamburg Ahoj!	port, sea, nothing	Hamburg Ahoi!	sea, port, sailing
Hessen	Hessen, zemlja doživljaja	nothing, nature, adventure	Erlebnisland Hessen	Frankfurt, forests, nature
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Čini dobro	helping, being a good person, help	Tut gut	helping, kindness, volunteering
Niedersachsen	Osjeti prostranstvo	nature, sea, meadow	Fühl die Weite	nature, sea, valley
North Rhine-Westphalia	Iza ugla *Translation from English.	vicinity, nature, "at hand reach"	/	/
Rheinland-Pfalz	Otkrijte sada prirodna i kulturna blaga	heritage, explore, history	Jetzt Natur- und Kulturschätze entdecken	explore, rich history, castles
Saarland	Zemlja neograničenih iskustava	new experience, lots of possibilities, events	Das Land der Grenzenlosen Erlebnisse	new experience, lots of possibilities, fun

Saxony	Svjetska zemlja	development, wealth, economy	Land von Welt	development, quality, culture
Saxony-Anhalt	Odredište od Harza do Elbe	nature, river, landscape, nothing	Reiseland vom Harz bis zur Elbe	nature, natural beauty, travel through nature, forests
Schleswig-Holstein	Pravi Sjever	coldness, sea, winter	Der echte Norden	sea, ice, snow
Thuringia	Otkrijte Tiringiju	nature, nothing, adventure	Thüringen entdecken	forest, nature, central Germany

Source: authors' own research
**Translations of the slogans are in Table 2.*

Finally, the respondents evaluated the level of attractiveness of the slogans. They could choose not more than three slogans from the list where all slogans where stated. The results showed that the most attractive slogans for the first group of respondents were "Osjeti prostranstvo" (Fühl die Weite/ Feel the vastness), "Zemlja neograničenih iskustava" (Das Land der Grenzenlosen Erlebnisse/ A land of experiences Hessen) and "Pravi Sjever" (Der echte Norden/The real North). The most unattractive slogans were "Otkrijte Tiringiju" (Thüringen entdecken/ Discover Thuringia), "Otkrij okolicu Berlina" (Entdecke das Berliner Umland! /Discover the Berlin surrounding area!), "Posjeti Berlin" (Visit Berlin) and "Hamburg Ahoj!" (Hamburg Ahoi!/ Hamburg Ahoy!). The most attractive slogans belong to the Functional destination attributes category, while the least attractive slogans belong to the category Unfocus. Among the second group of respondents, the most attractive slogans were "Fühl die Weite" (Feel the vastness/ Osjeti prostranstvo), "Wir sind Süden" (We are South/ Mi smo Jug) and "Der echte Norden" (The real North/ Pravi Sjever). On the contrary, the most unattractive slogans were "Thüringen entdecken" (Discover Thuringia/ Otkrijte Tiringiju), "Erleben!" (Experience!/ Doživjeti!) and "Erlebnisland Hessen" (A land of experiences Hessen/ Zemlja doživljaja Hessen). So, the most attractive slogans were again from the Functional destination attributes category, while again the most unattractive ones were in the Unfocus category.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this research showed that young persons in the Republic of Croatia believe that the existence of a tourist slogan is important for the positioning of a destination, but when it comes to their destination choice, slogans do not play an important role. Nevertheless, slogans that describe some of the destination attributes, especially geographical attributes, are perceived as the most attractive. Slogans that can be classified as Functional destination attributes are also the most often used slogans of the German federal states. The results of this survey showed that such slogans generate associations consistent with German federal states. Dass et al. (2014) believe that the clarity of the message is one of the important characteristics of the slogan, since it is through the slogan that a focused message should be conveyed to consumers to communicate the advantages of the brand, but also to create affection to it. Therefore, to achieve a successful differentiation in relation to the competition, it is necessary to emphasise the unique features of the destination. Furthermore, Gali et al. (2017) also point out that slogans trying to communicate everything do not show anything unique and special about the destination and thus become generic and too unoriginal. This happens with slogans in the Unfocus category, in which no unique destination features are presented (for example “Experience”). If the consumer is not familiar with brands which communicate these slogans, the message can be lost. This can be seen in the associations such slogans generate. Slogans in this category are perceived also as the most unattractive ones.

Although not all slogans are the same in different languages, most of the federal states kept the same general message of the slogan. Both groups of respondents provided associations for most of the slogans in accordance with the previously determined categories of the slogans. It is clear that associations differ regarding the respondent’s familiarity with Germany, so additional surveys should take that into consideration. Nevertheless, even though the wording of the slogan differs in different languages, they succeeded in communicating the same characteristic or the same message. Comprehension of a foreign language has an important role in marketing. Studies have shown that for example English is preferred in comparison to the local language when it is easy to understand (Hendriks et al., 2017, Hornikx et al., 2010). Hendriks et al. (2017: 8) also concluded that “the effects of the difficulty of the foreign language are not limited to attitude toward the text and the advertisement but extend to the underlying objectives of the use of a foreign language in advertising: positive attitude toward the product and increasing the intention to purchase the product".

This study combined several scientific approaches, qualitative and quantitative, to answer the defined research questions, and to gain a deeper insight into the use of slogans in the positioning of a destination, especially about the potential tourist behaviour on the Croatian tourism market. It also contributed to a better understanding of the use of different languages in the process of positioning of a destination. As shown in the results, destination marketing managers should use short slogans defining some of the important characteristics of their destinations, differentiating their destination from others on the tourism market. Also, slogans with no specific information about the destination should be avoided, as they do not generate any specific information when it comes to the recall. The results also showed that the use of specific languages for the target market is not crucial, as long as the comprehension of the language is satisfactory, and the message is well communicated.

The conducted research has certain limitations. The first limitation is related to the small number of respondents of the survey. It was conducted online, and non-probability sampling methods were used, but it was also limited to only one market segment defined by age. Therefore, recommendations for future research are focused on the inclusion of more respondents with different characteristics, and especially to the inclusion of more variables related to familiarity with the destination. For future research on this topic, it is also recommended to conduct research on other outbound markets, but also on the domestic market in the Federal Republic of Germany for additional comparison and a more detailed insight into the perceptions of the German federal states' slogans. It would be also important to receive information from individual tourist organisations of federal states about the use of slogans in their positioning on the domestic, but also on different international markets.

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USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG DIFFERENT GENERATION GROUPS ON THE CROATIAN MARKET

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Social networks are developed daily and eliminate all spatial and temporal limitations and, unlike traditional media, enable two-way communication in real-time. As social networks evolve, so do their users. This paper aims to show the habits and reasons for using the most popular social networks by users of different generational groups on the Croatian market. This paper can be helpful for both the scientific and practitioners' marketing community because of the lack of this type of research on the Croatian market.

Methodology: The paper presents the results of quantitative descriptive research conducted by using a questionnaire as an instrument for collecting primary data on a deliberate, avalanche sample. The questionnaire was distributed through Facebook and Instagram. A total of 348 respondents from four different generational groups (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z) answered all the questions in the questionnaire, and the analysis by conducting descriptive statistics of their answers is presented in the paper.

Results: Based on the results, looking at all four generational groups, it can be concluded that each of the generations has roughly the same reasons for using the social networks included in the research. Considering the three most used, it can be said that respondents, regardless of which generation they belong to, use Facebook to search for information and follow family and friends, Instagram for entertainment, and YouTube for listening to music. However, when observing the share of user representation in the three social networks mentioned above, it is necessary to point out that the share in a particular social network changes with the generation. As the generations get younger, the share of Instagram increases, while that of Facebook and YouTube decreases.

Keywords: social networks, social network users, user habits, generational groups (generations)

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of a new digital age, accompanied by rapidly evolving digital technologies, has significantly changed the way of life of many generations. The advent of the Internet, later computers, smartphones and other mobile devices, has become an inevitable part of everyday life. Older generations, i.e., Baby Boomers and Generation X are still adapting to the digital age and technologies in general, while Generations Y and Z were born into the digital age, and it is much easier for them to adapt. The last and youngest generation, Generation Alpha, does not remember the time without mobile devices and online communication. Social networks are one of the most popular channels for online communication, as well as for networking around the world. There are a large number of social networks in the world, the most popular of which are: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Each network has a different way of functioning and its laws, which attract different generational groups. The subject and goal of this paper is to investigate the frequency, habits and reasons for using social networks among different generational groups on the Croatian market. The contribution of the work itself is manifested through the obtained research results, considering that there is a shortage of papers on the Croatian market that cover the stated subject of research, which was determined by the conducted desk research.

2. SOCIAL NETWORKS - THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As one of the biggest phenomena of the 21st century and the development of digital technology, social networks, since their appearance in 1997 (Dobrinić & Gregurec, 2016), occupy an important role for individuals considering the fact that social networks enable them to present themselves, establish or maintain relationships with others (Ellison et al., 2007). As the word itself implies, social networks help individuals who share common characteristics and interests such as education, lifestyle and hobbies, to communicate and exchange information, knowledge and experiences (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010, Al-Abdallah et al., 2021, Phan et al., 2021) that is, to successfully share written and visual content in real time (Oyman & Kocak, 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and to establish and maintain spontaneous social contacts and relationships (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008) between people and groups of people within communities (Mital & Sarkar, 2011, Amatulli et al., 2014). Young individuals are the ones that use social networks the most and they use them in their daily lives and for different activities (Mazman & Usluel, 2011).

Bradley (2010) defines social networks as "tools, platforms, and applications that allow consumers to connect, communicate and collaborate with others". According to Škare (2011), social networks can be considered as platforms that serve to interact with users and exchange communication content. Users are both receivers and providers of messages and content, but they do not individually control the overall content, that is, they do not have control over the medium. So, social networks differ from other forms of communication because they support user participation in mass i.e., collective level, and contributions to this tool are distributed among users for review, sharing and improvement. The specificity of social networks, unlike traditional media of communication, is that consumers have the opportunity to be creators of communication and initiate communication with others as well with companies and their brands. Social networks are a place where consumers feel more comfortable in communicating with brands, since they also have the opportunity to lead communication, because social networks are also a place where they feel "good, safe and accepted" (Yoo et al., 2000).

Although the main goal is communication and exchange of content and experiences, social networks are much more than that. The main reasons for using social networks fall into five main groups: (1) Meeting new people, (2) Entertainment, (3) Maintaining relationships, (4) Learning about social events, and (5) Media for sharing content (Mital & Sarkar, 2011). The literature also mentions four different approaches to understanding social networks, or rather four fundamental features of social networks, namely: (1) interaction approach (based on contacts that individuals have with others on social networks over a certain period of time), (2) role relation approach (focuses on the types of roles that affect individuals, i.e. reference groups, such as family members or friends), (3) affection approach (subjective criteria of individuals to determine who is most important to them) and (4) exchange approach (individual behaviour based on certain reward systems to determine the extent and composition of one's social network) (Shu & Chuang, 2011)the popularity of social networks (SNS. Based on all of the above, as well as the data presented below, it can be seen how important the role of social networks is for society today.

Based on data from Datareportal, in the year 2023 there are about 8.03 billion inhabitants in the world, of which about 5.48 billion (68.3%) use mobile devices, about 5.18 billion actively use the Internet (64.6%), and about 4.8 billion of them use one of the social networks (59.9%). This means that almost 93% of Internet users use social networks every month. The number of active social media user identities around the world has increased by 3.2% in the past 12 months, with 410,000 new users every day, which means that social network users are currently growing at a rate of 4.7 new users every single second. Globally, on average, social network users spend around 2 hours and 24 minutes on social networks per day. However, time spent on social networks decreases with the age of the user. Users between the ages of 16 and 24 spend significantly more time on social networks per day (females 3 hours and 5 minutes, males 2 hours and 36 minutes), while females between the ages of 55 and 64 spend 1 hour and 40 minutes, and males spend 1 hour and 29 minutes on social networks, and every month they use an average of 6.6 different social platforms. The most users of social networks are on Facebook (2,963 million), YouTube (2,527 million), Instagram (2,000 million), TikTok (1,092 million), Snapchat (750 million), etc. The main reasons for using social networks are keeping in touch with friends and family (48.2%), filling spare time (36.8%), reading news stories (34.5%), finding content (29.2%), seeing what's being talked about (27.6%), finding inspiration for things to do and buy (25.5%), finding products to purchase (25.3%), watching live streams (22.8%), sharing and discussing opinions with others (22.6%), making new contacts (22.2%), watching or following sports (21,9%), seeing content from your favourite brands (21.5%), work-related networking and research (21.0%), finding like-minded communities and interest groups (19.9%), following celebrities or influencers (19.6%), etc. The share in each reason depends on the generation to which the users belongs (*Digital Around the World - Global Statshot Report*, 2023). If only the Croatian market is observed, at the beginning of 2023 there were 3.34 million Internet users, or 83% of the population. Regarding social networks, there were 2.94 million users in Croatia in January 2023 (73.1% of the population), and 88.1% of Internet users are present on at least one social network. There are 1.75 million users of the social network Facebook, 2.94 users of YouTube, 1.3 Instagram users, 820,000 users of LinkedIn, 585,000 Snapchat users and 298,000 Twitter users (*Digital 2023*, 2023).

2.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE CROATIAN MARKET

This development of social networks encourages both scientists and practitioners in the field of marketing to research the habits of social network users, as well as the reasons for their use and influence on their daily lives, especially from the perspective of different generational groups, which is the topic of this paper. It should be pointed out that there are not many papers, especially on the Croatian market, which cover the subject of the research. The reason for that may be that the practitioners in digital marketing know from their daily activities what social network is more important for what generations and for what purpose they use them, and there is therefore no need to conduct research. On the other hand, scientists rely on data available to the public, such as data from Datareportal. According to that, this paper can be of considerable use to both scientists and practitioners.

One of the researches on the Croatian market was conducted in 2018 by Maja Fistrić. The research was based on the impact of the generational gap from Baby Boomers to Generation Z. The purpose of the research was to show the effect of digitisation and globalisation on generational groups. In conclusion, the paper confirmed that there are generational differences and that they are most visible in the use of social networks. In the virtual world people or generations who were born with them manage and use it better than those who were not. As a major problem in the research, the inequality of users in access to the Internet is cited, because the majority of the elderly population do not have or do not know what an Internet receiver is, nor do they have the desire to install one. On the contrary, the interesting thing is that respondents who have access, and at least one profile on social networks, use some of the online platforms several times a day (Fistrić, 2019).

The research that was also found when desk research was conducted was the research from 2019 conducted by the Croatian digital marketing agency Arbona. In its research, the agency studied the habits of users when using Facebook and Instagram. Some of the interesting facts they discovered were as follows: For Facebook: there were 1.9 million active users in Croatia in 2019 and, of course, that number is much higher today. The age structure of Facebook users is somewhat older, that is, the users who use Facebook more often were between the ages of 25 and 44. On average, each active user liked one Facebook page, liked up to 20 posts a day, commented and shared a post only 3 times. When the agency obtained data on Facebook promotional activities, the results were significantly better. On average, the user clicked on up to 17 ads in 30 days. For Instagram: In 2019, there were 1.1 million active users in Croatia but, as with Facebook and Instagram, that number is much higher today. Instagram was much more used by female users. Unlike Facebook, the age group is younger and is ideal for advertising if a company wants to reach a younger audience of 13 to 24 years (Arbona, 2019).

Another research conducted in Croatia was related to the use of social networks in communication and how to approach a certain generation. The research was conducted by Martina Ferenčić in 2012 for the needs of one Croatian company in which the impact of Internet advertising and social media advertising was observed in relation to the type of ad formats and the age of the user. The conclusion reached by the research was that there is no ideal marketing strategy and that, before each campaign, it is necessary for the company to clearly highlight its goals and its current position on the market in order to know who they want to approach in the digital world (Ferenčić, 2012).

3. THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS BY DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

When looking at the use of social networks by Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), only 40% of users of this generation consider social networks an essential part of their lives, and most of them, even 73%, use them to stay connected with family and friends. 53% of Baby Boomers use social networks in their spare time. Baby boomers may have been slower to adopt social networks at first, but after months of separation and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to change; 37% of Baby Boomers increased their use of social networks. Baby Boomers share a tendency to favour Facebook. The number of Boomers on the platform nearly doubled from 2012 to 2019. As a demographic, Baby Boomers share similarities in how they connect with brands. 35% of Baby Boomers use social media to discover new brands, and 48% say social networks allow them to interact with brands and businesses online. Baby Boomers are less likely to create profiles on new social networks, but are open to trying new methods of communicating with businesses on the platforms they have already adopted ("Sprout Social - How Different Generations Use Social Media—and What This Means for Your Business", 2022).

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) is in the middle between the much larger generations, Generation Y and Baby Boomers. Although this group is smaller, it makes up a large number of users on the most popular social networks. Generation X adopted social networks and their use is not slowing down. 52% say that their use of social networks has increased in the past year, and 29% believe that their share will continue to grow over the next three years. 74% of Generation X also say that social networks are an essential part of their lives. When it comes to platform preferences, YouTube and Facebook are the main social networks for them. Generation X values their independence and prefers to make their own assessment of a product or service. 56% of Generation X users learn about new brands on social media, and many appreciate the additional product research opportunities created by a brand's active social network presence. The ideal approach to Generation X is through detailed instructions. Showing how the products can be used together or separately can help make the most of the budget, whatever it is. Generation X's trust is hard to earn, but it is also hard to lose. Research shows that Generation X is one of the most loyal consumers, often willing to pay more for products from brands they trust. Brands that offer omnichannel support are better equipped to provide the superior customer service needed to build loyalty with Generation X ("Sprout Social - How Different Generations Use Social Media—and What This Means for Your Business", 2022).

Members of Generation Y or Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) are often burdened with stereotypes from previous years on social networks, which does not give marketers a clear picture of who they are, or what their characteristics are. Most users from that generation are going through early adulthood and the excitement and uncertainty that comes with it, including milestones at work, parenthood and care about the elder generations. 72% of Generation Z users said social networks are an important part of their lives, the highest of any age group. The most common reasons for using social networks are: to communicate with family and friends (61%), 51% use social networks in their spare time, 47% use them to learn about new trends, and 43% to receive the latest news. 63% of Generation Y users have increased their usage in the past year, and 46% expect the share to continue to increase over the next three years. 75% of Generation Y say that social networks allow them to interact with brands and businesses. That interaction opens the door to connections with other fans around the world. Generation Y has high expectations of customer service but are generous when it comes to good service. 42% of users who take to social networks do so to express their love for a product or service, the most of any age group. The survey also found that 60% of Generation Y used social networks for customer support, by sending a private message or posting publicly on a brand's page. Social networks are quickly becoming their main channel of customer service, and businesses that prioritise it as such can tap into this valuable audience ("Sprout Social - How Different Generations Use Social Media—and What This Means for Your Business", 2022).

Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) spends a lot of time online. In fact, most of these digital natives have been on social networks for more than half their lives. This generation of socially savvy represents a change in the way social networks are used. 66% of Generation Z users say that social networks are an essential part of their lives, but their thinking is unique. The most common reason Generation Z uses social networks is to kill their free time, making them the only generation to rank it above connecting with family and friends. As the years go by, the usage of Generation Z social networks continues to grow. 65% of Generation Z users have increased their use of social networks in the past year, and 45% expect it to continue to increase over the next three years. This is and will continue to be a major driver of trends in the use of social networks. Generation Z is eager to interact with brands beyond the storefronts. 76% say that social networks allow them to interact with brands and businesses, and 78% say that they use them to learn about new brands. They are raising awareness on social media and expect brands to keep up. Embedded amid countless data privacy debates, these informed consumers have a deep understanding of what companies can do with their personal data. Instead of shying away from sharing their data, Generation Z wants companies to make smarter decisions using the information they have already made available. Generation Z shoppers expect companies to use their data to create a level of intimacy that mimics the personal shopping experience without being invasive or overbearing. Keeping this balance in mind can build trust and loyalty among this target group ("Sprout Social - How Different Generations Use Social Media—and What This Means for Your Business", 2022).

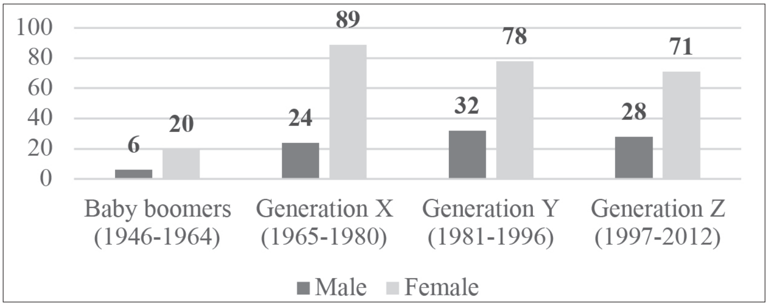
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To collect primary data, quantitative descriptive research was conducted. The research aimed to analyse the habits and reasons for using social networks by users of different generational groups. The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire created on the basis of previously conducted desk research. The questionnaire contained basic demographic questions as well as questions related to social networks. The questionnaire also included statements related to the use of social networks measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed via the social networks Facebook and Instagram in the period from the beginning of July to the end of August 2022, and therefore the research was conducted on a deliberate, avalanche sample. 348 respondents, members of four generations of social network users - Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in the Croatian market, participated in the research, and a statistical analysis, shown below in the paper, was performed on their responses by conducting descriptive statistics. According to conducted desk research, research questions were set as follow:

- RQ1 - Which medium each generation group prefer for accessing information and news?
- RQ2 - Which social networks do different generational groups prefer?
- RQ3 - What is the opinion about the use of social networks from the perspective of all generational groups?

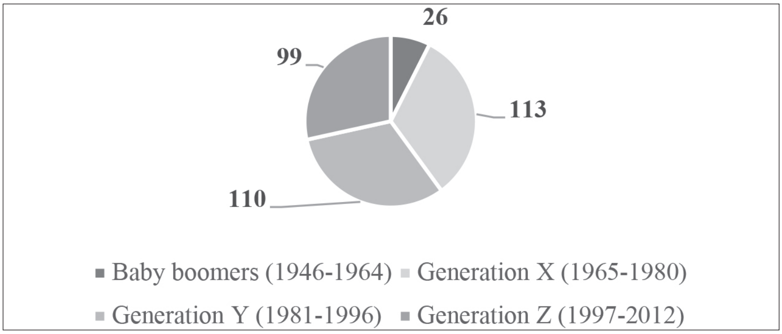
Regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, 258 female respondents and 90 male respondents participated in the research (Graph 1). In terms of generations, the questionnaire included 26 respondents of the Baby Boomers, 113 respondents of Generation X, 110 respondents of Generation Y, and 99 respondents of Generation Z (Graph 2).

Graph 1: Structure of respondents by gender



Source: Research

Graph 2: Structure of respondents by generation (age group)

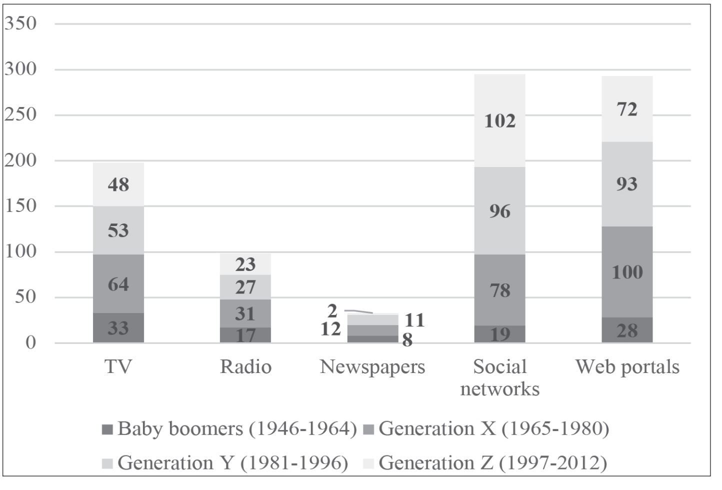


Source: Research

4.1. RESEARCH RESULTS

When asked through which media they most often get information, it can be seen from graph 3 that, from the oldest generation, the generation of Baby Boomers, to the youngest generation, Generation Z, the popularity of TV as a source of information decreases, while social networks increase. It is also evident that internet portals are interesting and relevant to Generation X. Radio, which extends through all generations, has an almost equal share of importance in every generation if it is viewed as a medium for the arrival of information. Based on this data, it can be seen that traditional media are still present in all generations and that their role is important, but also that they could lose popularity in the coming years as new generations develop.

Graph 3: Preferred media for accessing information and news

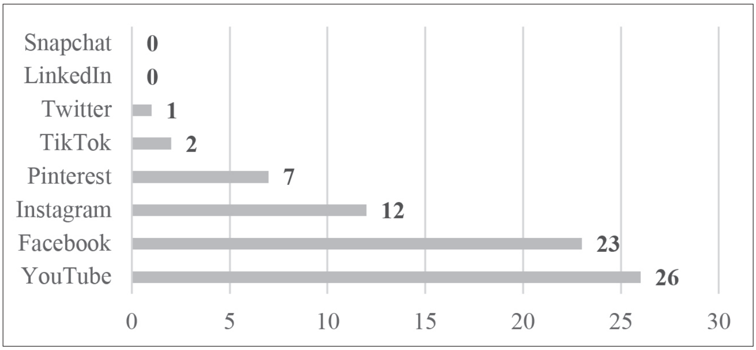


Source: Research

4.2. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE BABY BOOMERS GENERATION

According to existing research, if social networks are observed, most Baby Boomers spend their time on Facebook, which is also confirmed by this research conducted on the Croatian market. According to the results of this research (Graph 4), most Baby Boomers prefer YouTube (26 respondents) and Facebook (23 respondents), and a slightly smaller number of Instagram and Pinterest, while a very small percentage of Baby Boomers use TikTok and Twitter. It is also interesting that not a single user of that generation, covered by the research, uses LinkedIn and Snapchat, which is not surprising considering that this is a generation that has finished or is about to finish their business journey, and they may not need LinkedIn to that extent. On the other hand, Snapchat is probably not a social network interesting to them because of the way it functions and does not have an important role in their daily life.

Graph 4: Baby Boomers' preferred social network



Source: Research

Tables 1 and 2 show the frequency of use of social networks by Baby Boomers by day and hours. Based on the results obtained (Table 1), it can be said that this generation spends its time on social networks every day, most often on the social networks Facebook (20 respondents) and YouTube (12 respondents). They spend approximately between 1 and 2 hours per day (Table 2) on Facebook (11 respondents) and up to 1 hour on YouTube (19 respondents) and Instagram (8 respondents).

Table 1: Frequency of using social networks by day - Baby Boomers

SOCIAL NETWORK	Every day	Every other day	Two times a week	1 time per week	1 time per month
Facebook	20	1	1	0	0
Instagram	5	1	2	3	0
YouTube	12	3	5	3	2
Twitter	1	0	0	0	0
TikTok	1	0	0	0	0
Pinterest	3	2	1	0	1

Source: Research

Table 2: Frequency of using social networks by hours - Baby boomers

SOCIAL NETWORK	Up to 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	Between 2 and 3 hours	Between 3 and 4 hours	4 or more hours
Facebook	6	11	2	0	3
Instagram	8	2	1	0	0
YouTube	19	6	0	0	0
Twitter	0	1	0	0	0
TikTok	0	1	0	0	0
Pinterest	3	4	0	0	0

Source: Research

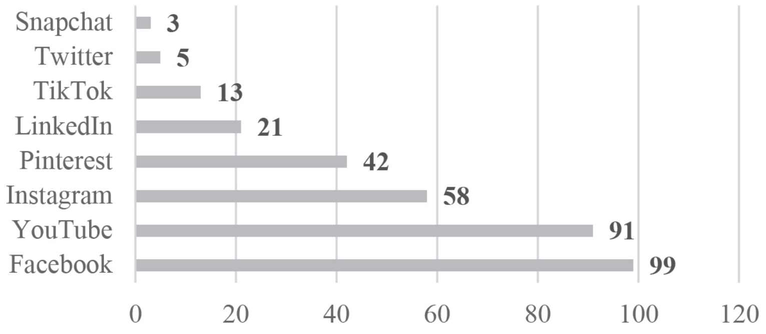
Taking into consideration the reasons for using the three most commonly used social networks by Baby Boomers on the Croatian market, it can be determined that Facebook is most often used to get information (17 respondents), for leisure (15 respondents), to follow family and friends (12 respondents), and conversations with them (8 respondents). Slightly fewer respondents use Facebook for work (3 respondents) and for playing games (2 respondents). On the other hand, this generation of respondents uses Instagram primarily for leisure (9 respondents), following family and friends (7 respondents), and accessing information (5 respondents). Two of them use Instagram to chat with friends, and one respondent uses it for work. YouTube, as the third most popular social network of the population born between 1946 and 1964, is used for listening to music (20 respondents), entertainment (10 respondents), accessing information (9 respondents), and slightly less for doing work (3 respondents). In conclusion, Baby Boomers use Facebook to get information, Instagram for entertainment in their spare time, and YouTube for listening to music.

4.3. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE GENERATION X

According to existing research, as is the case with Baby Boomers, the social networks that Generation X uses most often are Facebook and YouTube. The conducted research confirmed that this is also the situation in the Croatian market. After Facebook (99 respondents) and YouTube (91 respondents), the most common social networks used by members of Generation X included in this sample are Instagram (58 respondents), Pinterest (42 respondents) and, to a lesser extent, LinkedIn (21 respondents), TikTok (13 respondents), Twitter (5 respondents) and Snapchat (3 respondents) (Graph 5). It should be noted that, unlike Baby

Boomers, members of Generation X are present on all social networks included in this research.

Graph 5: Generation X preferred social network



Source: Research

Tables 3 and 4 show the frequency of use of social networks by Generation X. The conducted research shows that the highest percentage of respondents of Generation X (Table 3) use Facebook (91 respondents), YouTube (50 respondents), and Instagram (45 respondents) every day. In addition, they usually set aside up to 1 hour per day for almost all social networks included in this research (Table 4).

Table 3: Frequency of using social networks by day – Generation X

SOCIAL NETWORK	Every day	Every other day	Two times a week	1 time per week	1 time per month
Facebook	91	0	1	5	1
Instagram	45	5	3	4	1
YouTube	50	10	10	15	5
Twitter	1	0	1	1	2
TikTok	12	2	1	3	0
Pinterest	12	2	3	11	13
Snapchat	1	0	0	0	2
LinkedIn	7	1	5	4	4

Source: Research

Table 4: Frequency of using social networks by hours – Generation X

SOCIAL NETWORK	Up to 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	Between 2 and 3 hours	Between 3 and 4 hours	4 or more hours
Facebook	43	36	14	3	2
Instagram	46	10	2	0	0
YouTube	69	14	5	2	0
Twitter	5	0	0	0	0
TikTok	7	4	1	1	0
Pinterest	35	5	1	0	0
Snapchat	3	0	0	0	0
LinkedIn	20	1	0	0	0

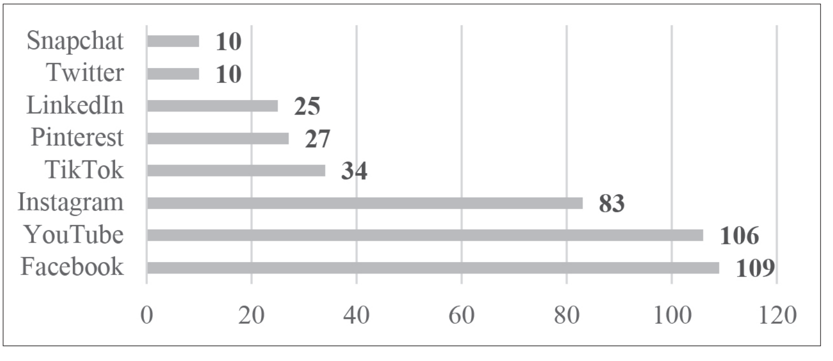
Source: Research

Considering the reasons for using the three most used social networks by Generation X on the Croatian market, it can be determined that members of this generation also use Facebook most often to get information (66 respondents), for leisure (61 respondents), to follow family and friends (31 respondents) and to communicate with them (30 respondents). Slightly fewer respondents use Facebook for work (19 respondents) and for playing games (4 respondents). Generation X most often uses Instagram for leisure (42 respondents), following family and friends (17 respondents), and accessing information (15 respondents). 8 of the respondents use Instagram for work, and 5 of them for chatting with friends. YouTube, as the third most popular social network, is used by the population born between 1965 and 1980 for listening to music (68 respondents), entertainment (41 respondents), accessing information (27 respondents), and slightly less for doing work (11 respondents) and creating their own content (1 respondent). In conclusion, Generation X uses all three social networks to a slightly different extent than their older colleagues, but still for the same purposes. Facebook for getting information, Instagram for entertainment, and YouTube for listening to music. However, it should be noted that this generation uses Pinterest to a slightly greater extent than the previous one. And they use it to search for information (36 respondents), to research content (19 respondents), for leisure (15 respondents), and to do work (11 respondents).

4.4. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE GENERATION Y

From existing research, it can be concluded that millennials, or members of Generation Y, grew up with the advent of the Internet and that it is a generation between new and old trends, whose intentions and opinions on social networks are difficult to assess. Their social networks habits according to the conducted research will be analysed in the following graphs. However, from Graph 6 it is evident that this generation also uses Facebook (109 respondents), YouTube (106 respondents) and Instagram (83 respondents) most often, but in a smaller proportion than is the case with the previous two generations. To a slightly lesser extent, but with higher shares than the previous generation, Generation Y uses TikTok (34 respondents), Pinterest (27 respondents), LinkedIn (25 respondents) and at the least Twitter (10 respondents) and Snapchat (10 respondents).

Graph 6: Generation Y preferred social network



Source: Research

According to Tables 5 and 6, it can be seen that this generation uses Facebook (98 respondents), Instagram (68 respondents), YouTube (65 respondents), TikTok (17 respondents) and LinkedIn (10 respondents) every day. Although social networks such as Snapchat, Twitter, and Pinterest, are used less frequently, from twice a week to once a month (Table 5). Regardless of how often they use one of the mentioned social networks a week, they spend up to an hour on them, as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 5: Frequency of use of social networks by day – Generation Y

SOCIAL NETWORK	Every day	Every other day	Two times a week	1 time per week	1 time per month
Facebook	98	6	3	1	0
Instagram	68	2	6	5	1
YouTube	65	16	15	7	2
Twitter	3	1	3	1	2
TikTok	17	5	3	3	2
Pinterest	4	3	6	4	9
Snapchat	0	2	1	4	2
LinkedIn	10	2	4	4	4

Source: Research

Table 6: Frequency of using social networks by hours – Generation Y

SOCIAL NETWORK	Up to 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	Between 2 and 3 hours	Between 3 and 4 hours	4 or more hours
Facebook	51	30	15	5	7
Instagram	39	18	12	9	4
YouTube	62	26	10	4	3
Twitter	8	1	0	1	0
TikTok	15	10	7	1	0
Pinterest	25	0	1	0	0
Snapchat	9	0	0	0	0
LinkedIn	20	3	1	0	0

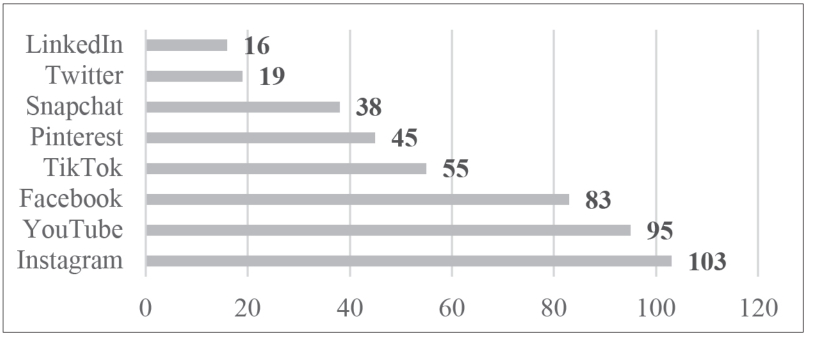
Source: Research

When taking into account the reasons for using the three most used social networks by Generation Y on the Croatian market, the respondents included in this research, who were born between 1981 and 1996, most often use Facebook to access information (61 respondents), leisure (56 respondents), to be in contact with family and friends (40 respondents), and to have conversations with them (40 respondents). Slightly fewer respondents use Facebook for work (20 of them) or for playing games (3 respondents). Generation Y most often uses Instagram for leisure (64 respondents), for following family and friends (25 respondents), communicating with them (21 respondents), accessing information (20 respondents), and doing work (15 respondents). Generation Y uses YouTube for listening to music (86 respondents), entertainment (50 respondents), accessing information (25 respondents), doing work (4 respondents) and creating their own content (3 respondents). In conclusion, if all three social networks of Generation Y are taken into account, they primarily use them for entertainment. Facebook and Instagram are also used to get information and to follow and communicate with family and friends, while YouTube, like other generations, serves mostly as a platform for listening to music. Generation Y uses Pinterest to search for information (36 respondents), research content (17 respondents), have fun (11 respondents), and do work (4 respondents). This generation also uses TikTok to a slightly greater extent. As the research results show, they use TikTok for leisure (23 respondents), monitor content (17 respondents), create their own content (7 respondents) and to do work (1 respondent). LinkedIn is also one of the social networks that is important to this generation. 13 respondents use this social network to look for a job and 12 of them use it to find information, which is understandable considering the nature of the social network itself. They still use LinkedIn for work (8 respondents), leisure (6 respondents) and conversations with other users (2 respondents).

4.5. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE GENERATION Y

Generation Z is considered a socially savvy digital generation. Members of this generation have spent more than half of their lives in the online world, and a large part of it in social networks. Unlike other older generations, they direct their habits on social networks to new platforms. According to Graph 7, the most popular social network among Generation Z is Instagram (103 respondents), followed by YouTube with 95 users of this social network, and Facebook (83 respondents) in the third place. Facebook is followed by TikTok (55 respondents), Pinterest (45 respondents), Snapchat (38 respondents), Twitter (19 respondents) and LinkedIn (16 respondents).

Graph 7: Generation Z preferred social network



Source: Research

As shown in Tables 7 and 8, all social networks except Pinterest and Twitter are used most often daily by members of Generation Z, while Pinterest and Twitter are used somewhat less often, from twice a week to once a month (Table 7). Unlike other generations, they spend a little more time on social networks, as shown in Table 8.

Table 7: Frequency of using social networks by day – Generation Z

SOCIAL NETWORK	Every day	Every other day	Two times a week	1 time per week	1 time per month
Facebook	61	6	7	4	3
Instagram	92	6	1	1	1
YouTube	64	9	13	6	1
Twitter	5	0	8	2	3
TikTok	42	6	3	2	1
Pinterest	7	4	12	6	14
Snapchat	32	1	0	2	1
LinkedIn	5	4	3	1	3

Source: Research

Table 8: Frequency of using social networks by hours – Generation Z

SOCIAL NETWORK	Up to 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	Between 2 and 3 hours	Between 3 and 4 hours	4 or more hours
Facebook	52	16	8	3	2
Instagram	31	30	20	15	5
YouTube	30	30	22	5	6
Twitter	16	1	1	0	0
TikTok	16	14	11	8	5
Pinterest	34	5	2	1	1
Snapchat	22	4	4	2	4
LinkedIn	15	1	0	0	0

Source: Research

The reasons for the use of social networks by Generation Z are as follows: Instagram, as the most represented social network of Generation Z, is mostly used for pure leisure (71 respondents), to follow family and friends (55 respondents), to communicate with them (49 respondents), to find information (34 respondents) and to do work (12 respondents). Members of Generation Z use YouTube for listening to music (78 respondents), entertainment (49 respondents) and searching for information (28 respondents). It can be assumed, according to previous research, that this search for information implies the necessary information for learning, such as videos on various topics, online instructions, etc. They use Facebook as a platform for accessing information (34 respondents), entertainment (33 respondents), following family and friends (32 respondents), communicating with them (28 respondents), doing work (11 respondents), and playing games (2 respondents). This assumes that Generation Z uses Facebook due to their parents or older siblings who are mostly still on Facebook today. TikTok is the social network that most attracts the attention of the younger generation, due to its interactivity and interesting content. Therefore, the members of Generation Z, included in this sample, use TikTok for monitoring content (44 respondents), leisure (28 respondents), creating their own content (9 respondents), following family and friends (3 respondents) or doing work (1 examinee). Pinterest is also very popular among Generation Z, which members of this generation use to the greatest extent for searching for information/ideas (39 respondents), researching various content (23 respondents), for leisure (9 respondents) and for doing work (2 respondents). This generation also uses Snapchat to a greater extent, which is mostly used for chatting with friends (29 respondents), entertainment

(10 respondents), following family and friends (5 respondents) and doing work (1 respondent). As with previous generations, LinkedIn has gained its popularity as a tool through which new generations find work and keep up to date on topics in their business life. Thus, this generation uses LinkedIn mostly for job searching (10 respondents), obtaining information (8 respondents), performing work (7 respondents), leisure (3 respondents) and communicating with other users (1 respondent).

After showing the shares in preferred social networks depending on the four observed generations, as well as their habits and reasons for using them, it is necessary to highlight their attitudes related to social networks. According to the results shown in Table 9, on average, respondents agree the most with the statement "Social networks make my life easier" (mean score 4.08), and least with the statement " Social networks make my life more complicated" (mean score 2.57).

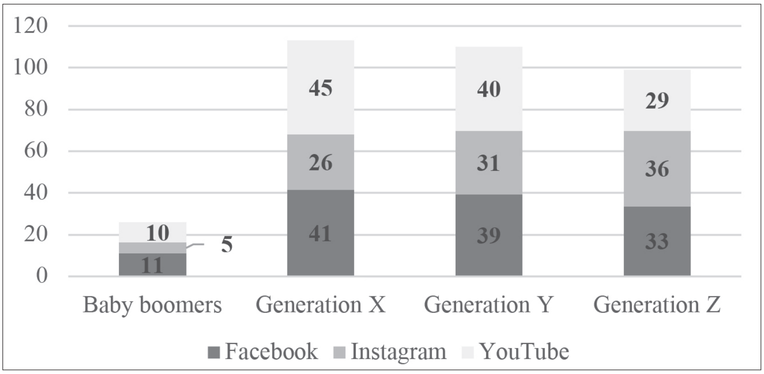
Table 9: Attitudes of the respondents about social networks

STATEMENT	1 – I strongly disagree	2 – I disagree	3 – I neither agree nor disagree	4 – I agree	5 – I strongly agree	Medium grade
Social networks make my life more complicated.	96	78	97	32	45	2.57
Social networks make my life easier.	10	11	70	108	149	4.08
Due to social networks, people spend too much time on unnecessary things.	23	27	61	91	146	3.89
Social networks enable people to spend their time more efficiently.	55	59	103	55	76	3.11
I am more attracted to visual content such as photos and videos compared to textual content such as articles, texts and statuses.	20	24	105	79	120	3.73
I am more attracted to textual content such as articles, lyrics, and statuses compared to visual content such as photos and videos.	79	75	114	40	40	2.68

Source: Research

After presenting the individual results for all four observed generations, it can be concluded that each of the generations has the same or similar reasons for using social networks. However, when looking at the share of users in the three social networks that have the largest market share and are most often used in the Croatian market - Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, it should be pointed out that the share of representation on a particular social network changes with the generations. Graph 8 shows that the youngest generation, Generation Z, uses Instagram somewhat more than other generations, while the oldest generation, the Baby Boomers, uses Facebook and YouTube the most in comparison to others. In other words, as the generations are younger, the share of Instagram increases, while that of Facebook and YouTube decreases. It should also be noted that new social networks, such as TikTok, are emerging, and younger generations adopt them much faster and more easily than the older ones who prefer well-known social networks and surely do not like to change their habits.

Graph 8: Use of three main social networks by observed generations



Source: Research

4.6. DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, research questions were set after the desk research was conducted. Based on the conducted quantitative research, according to primary data, it can be concluded that the answer to the first research question (Which medium each generation group prefers for accessing information and news?) can be found in graph 3. Data shows that representatives of Baby Boomers prefer traditional media such as TV significantly more than new media such as social networks. In the same way representatives of Generation Z prefer social networks for accessing information and news. That is, if all generations are observed, the younger the generations, the popularity of TV as a source for accessing information and news decreases, while the popularity of social networks as a medium increase. Other observed media, such as web portals, radio and newspapers, with regard to the share of representatives of certain generational groups, are almost equally important for access to information and news.

Looking at the second research question: Which social networks do different generational groups prefer? According to the collected data it can be concluded that representatives of the Baby Boomers prefer YouTube, Facebook and Instagram as the three most important social networks. The order of preferred social networks for representatives of Generations X and Y are Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, while the order of preferred social networks for representatives of Generation Z are Instagram, YouTube and then Facebook in third place.

Finally, for the third research question: What is the opinion about the use of social networks from the perspective of all generational groups? The answer can be found by observing statements measured on a five-point Likert scale (Table 9). It can be concluded that on average the respondents agree with the statement that social networks make their lives easier, as well as with the statement that due to social networks people spend too much time on unnecessary things and that they are attracted more to visual content such as photos and videos compared to textual content such as articles, texts, and statuses. Also, on average respondents are undecided when it comes to the statements: "Social networks make my life more complicated.," "Social networks enable people to spend their time more efficiently." and "I am more attracted to textual content such as articles, lyrics, and statuses compared to visual content such as photos and videos."

4.7. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

After conducting the research and presenting the results, it can be concluded that the sample itself is the biggest limitation of the research. Although the survey included 348 respondents, their distribution is not even when looking at different generations (groups) and when looking at the gender of the respondents. Obviously, the results would have been different if the sample had been significantly larger, and if the proportion of respondents in all four observed generations had been equal. Additionally, the problem of the sample can be the way of selecting the sample. The results would be significantly more representative if the questionnaire was not distributed through social networks, or if the sample was not a deliberate, avalanche sample.

However, since there is a lack of this type of research on the Croatian market, this paper may be a good basis for future research in which the problem of the sample should be eliminated as much as possible. It would also be good to include the examination of the attitudes of different generations in the research, as well as the use of A/B testing to determine what different generations follow on social networks, that is, what content would be interesting to different generation users on different social networks.

5. CONCLUSION

As one of the biggest trends of this century, social networks have become an indispensable communication channel that serves to connect people around the world, regardless of which generation they belong to, as the name itself implies. According to statistics, every third person in the world actively uses at least two or three social networks, and the social networks that users use the most are: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, etc. The objective of this paper was to find out how different generations on the Croatian market use social networks.

According to desk research conducted to collect secondary data, there is a lack of research on the Croatian market that covers the research objective set in this paper. Therefore, the fundamental contribution of the paper, apart from the summarisation of the scientific and professional literature covering the research area, is the conduct of quantitative descriptive research with the purpose of collecting primary data with the aim of gaining a deeper insight into the understanding of the habits and ways of using social networks of users of different generational groups. In addition to scientists, the results of the conducted research can also serve marketing practitioners in Croatia to create more efficient digital marketing campaigns and appropriate access to a specific target audience.

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IMPACT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN SHAPING THE DESIRED IMAGE OF SPORTS CLUBS - EXAMPLE OF VOLLEYBALL CLUBS

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ABSTRACT

Sport has become a broad area of social life, embedded in all elements of the social structure, which is why there was a need to research this phenomenon. Sports marketing is the process of planning the positioning of a sports brand and the delivery of sports brand products and services in order to establish a relationship between the sports brand and its consumers. The sports club image represents the club, its sports achievements, as well as its positioning in the minds of people from the immediate environment. The principle of shaping the desired image with the target group refers to achieving a positive image in public awareness and acceptance of what is being offered. Strengthening the image of a sports club is one of the ways to gain a competitive advantage. The main aim of this research is to highlight the importance of enhancing the image of a sports club, identify marketing communication activities that affect the image, analyse the gaps based on the data collected and propose measures for improvement. By analysing the results of the research conducted by a survey method with the club's players and interviews with the management of five Super League volleyball clubs in Split-Dalmatia County, it was concluded that the marketing communication activities of volleyball clubs were poorly recognised by their players and coaches and that they were under-implemented. In accordance with the obtained results, measures are proposed as an additional way of strengthening the image by using promotional activities applicable to a wider audience, i.e., to all volleyball clubs in Croatia in general. The analysed data from this research and the drawn conclusions can form the basis and impetus for future research in the field of sports marketing on enhancing the image of sports clubs.

Keywords: sports marketing; marketing communication; image; volleyball clubs

1. INTRODUCTION

A specific area of business is created by merging sports and marketing principles – one such area is sports marketing. Sport refers to all activities which allow and encourage sports activities and the conditions necessary for such activities (Copley, 2004). With globalisation and social progress, sport itself has become increasingly popular, rapidly transforming from pure entertainment and competition to a large business venture (Novak, 2006). The marketing value of sports and the sports industry has been growing exponentially over the past decades, accompanied by a parallel growth in the use of market research methods, as a logical consequence (Chadwick et al., 2016). Although recession is believed to have a minor effect on the sports industry, this is not entirely true. The sports industry has never been fully resilient to the impact of recession, but it has been more resilient to recession than other industries. However, this feature of the sports industry is slowly disappearing with the growth of industry (Zimbalist, 2006). According to Zimbalist (2006), what makes the sports industry different from other industries is that fans, who represent customers, feel a special bond with their clubs which cannot be compared to the typical connection they have with production or service companies. The goal of market research in the sports industry is to collect, sort, analyse and interpret data to identify relevant data which will be used in sports marketing decision-making (Doyle, 2002). Sports marketing is the process of planning the positioning of a sports brand and the delivery of its products and services to establish a relationship between a sports brand and its consumers (Smith, 2008).

Based on the research on a sample of five Super League volleyball clubs from Dalmatia, the aim of the paper is to demonstrate how the implementation of marketing activities in sports in the business strategy of the club can raise awareness and trust of the general public. Once established, trust represents a great potential for sports clubs as a means of maintaining emotional and long-term bonds with all surrounding stakeholders. The paper also aims to emphasise that the implementation of marketing activities can result in positive long-term effects and success in the long run.

2. MARKETING IN SPORT

According to the recommendation of the Council of Europe, sport in the broadest sense means all forms of physical exercise aimed at expressing or improving physical abilities through compulsory or organised participation, as well as mental well-being, making social connections or achieving results at all levels of competition (Council of Europe, 1992). Sports marketing meets the basic criteria of the marketing concept as (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009): *business concept, business function, economic process, scientific discipline*. Sports marketing is different from traditional marketing. According to Masterlaxis et al. (2014), some of the key differences between sports marketing and traditional marketing are as follows: sports organisations, in many cases, compete and collaborate at the same time; sports consumers often consider themselves experts; consumer demand tends to vary strongly; sports product is intangible, subjective, and extremely experiential; sports product is inconsistent and unpredictable. Similar to general marketing, sports marketing is considered a hierarchical concept observed on multiple levels (Smith, 2008): as a *philosophy* (a set of beliefs of how to approach marketing), i.e. placing consumers' desires and needs at the centre of decision-making at all levels of the organisation and creating mutual benefit for consumers; as a *process*, and as *principles, tools and techniques for applying the sports marketing processes in everyday practice*. Sports marketing has developed in parallel with the development of sport as an economic branch. According to Shank and Lyberger (2015), the basic marketing principles and processes applied in sport are: *sports marketing mix; exchange process, strategic sports marketing process.*

People consider sport as a special experience, which has a special place in their lives, and therefore experts must approach sport differently to what they do in other research areas (Mullin et al., 2014).

Sports marketing is distinctive by many characteristics. Sport is a product determined by the events on the field, which often results in players and teams` dominant role in deciding what happens in sports organisations instead of fans and consumers having a major influence in marketing. In sport, everything revolves around the uncertainty of outcome, and sports consumers help design the product. For many people, the essence of sport is the atmosphere and excitement generated by other people around them. Sports products are part of social and cultural values. Sports marketing faces issues such as the unwavering loyalty that the fans have to their club and team. Sports organisation has a limited control over its products: considering that the uncertainty of outcome is the core of sport, sports marketing, therefore, becomes focussed on how to preserve and develop it. The majority of sports organisations are mainly interested in the question "Have we won the title?", hence sports fans are not interested in market share. Sport has a specific connection to the media. Sports fans will most likely not buy products of rival sports organisations. There has been an increased acknowledgement that sports brands are valuable and that they are used by sports clubs to generate new revenue (Beech & Chadwick, 2007)."

Furthermore, according to Shank & Lyberger (2015), sports marketing *is the specific application of marketing principles and processes to sports products and to the marketing of non-sports products associated with sports.* On the other hand, Wakefield (2007) states that sports marketing is *building a highly identified fan base such that fans, sponsors, media, and government pay to promote and support the organisation for the benefits of social exchange and personal, group, and community identity within a cooperative competitive environment*. In their research, Bee & Kahle (2006) argued that, in the context of sports marketing, the values shared jointly by customers in sports and sports organisations encourage the growth of attachment, and customers in sports demonstrate their attachment to the sports organisation through repeated ticket purchases, continuous attendance at matches and purchase of sports products.

2.1. SPORTS MARKETING MIX

The elements of sports marketing mix are the same as in any other activity. They include sports products and service, prices of sports products and services, distribution of sports products and services, and promotion of sports products and services (Bartoluci, 2003). The difference lies in the nature of the very elements of sports marketing (Beech & Chadwick, 2007). According to Shank & Lyberger (2015), exchange can be defined as a marketing transaction in which the buyer gives something of value to the seller in return for goods and services. Shank & Lyberger (2015) also state that the process of strategic sports marketing is the process of planning, implementing and controlling marketing efforts in order to achieve the set organisational goals and meet the needs of consumers.

In sports marketing, the most challenging issue is to understand the nature of a *sports product*. A sports product is a good, a service or any combination of the two designed to provide a specific benefit to a sports spectator, participant or sponsor. In sports marketing, the term "product" is used in several ways, such as (Smith, 2008) physical good or good, service, idea and/or combination of all of the above. Sports shoes, tennis rackets, golf balls and basketball jerseys are some of the examples of physical products. There are also products that are not exclusively used for sports but can be used with sports or as part of a sports experience, such as sunglasses and caps. A sports product is a complex set of tangible and intangible experiences. The basic differences between sports goods and services that are relevant to sports marketing are as follows (Smith & Stewart, 2015): *tangible* – sports goods are tangible when found in physical form, while services are intangible, consumed at the moment of their production and transformed into an experience; *consistency* – refers to how reliable the quality of a products is over time (sports equipment usually has high consistency, while, on the other hand, the quality of sports services varies); *perishability* – describes whether a sports product can be stored and reused later, *separability* – describes whether the production of a sports product occurs at the same time as the product is consumed or used (sports goods were produced before their use or consumption, while sports services were produced and consumed at the same time). The principal purpose of sports service is the experience that the spectators gain at sporting events. Because of the perceived identification with the team, spectators who identify themselves as fans are considered to be members of the group and show sympathy towards other group members (Wang et al., 2012). Shilbury et al. (2003) argue that the fundamental sports product (service) is the reason why people go to sporting events. They also argue that the product consists of activities that offer fun to spectators who are willing to pay for that fun. At sports events, consumers are not only offered goods and services, but also ideas, such as a sense of belonging and a sense of success, accompanied by a strong personal and emotional identification (identification with the club – everyone is a sports expert). Ngan et al. (2011) argue that team identification refers to the fans level of identification or caring for a particular sports club. Studies have also shown that identifying as a sports fan is related to the gender and age of individuals (Allison & Knoester, 2021). In sports marketing, it is customary to combine products and services, tangible and intangible, to deliver the most appealing combination to consumers (Smith, 2008). According to Schwarz & Hunter (2008), the primary sports product is traditionally based on demand, unlike other generic products that are marketed as needed. In their study, Schwarz and Hunter (2008) state that sports marketing experts use *the escalator concept* to explain the movement of consumers from the lowest to the highest degree of involvement in relation to a particular product, thus distinguishing the following levels of involvement: *non-consumers* – they do not use a product or a service; *indirect consumers* – they use sports products remotely, such as watching sports on TV; *light consumers* – they differ from indirect consumers in that they attend a live sporting event 1 or 2 times a year; *medium consumers* – they attend half of sporting events live; *heavy consumers* – they are at the highest level of consumption, fully involved in the organisational culture.

The sports product consists of (Smith, 2008): *a) fundamental benefit (consumer needs, e.g.* if the consumer buys a T-shirt, the fundamental benefit is to cover a part of the body; if the consumer buys a ticket to a sporting event, the fundamental benefit is the experience that the consumer receives as a result of participating in a sporting event; if the consumer buys a service, such as a course to acquire a specific sports skill, the fundamental benefit is the treatment of an injury or instructions on how to play a particular sport), *b) actual product and extended product* (refers to any improvements added to the actual characteristics of the product). Unlike conventional marketing, sports marketing can encourage the consumption of non-sporting products and services (Smith & Stewart, 2015).

It is essential to ensure that each product or service is offered at a *price* which makes the overall marketing mix appealing to consumers and allows future profit to the organisation (Kriemadis & Terzoudis, 2007). Prices are an important signal for consumers who perceive price as a quality indicator (Torkildsen, 2011). The price of sports goods or services is a monetary expression of the value of a sports product or service (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). Sports marketing experts should be able to recognise which elements of the product require pricing. In sports, this includes the following (Mullin et al., 2014): *products* (sports equipment, etc.), *tickets, membership fees, concessions, information* (magazines, subscriptions, etc.), *use of entities of the institution* (venues, insignia, advertising space), *media rights* (use of logos, photographs, etc.). The price refers to the cost that a consumer must pay to receive a sports product or service. In general, price is an “opinion on a certain matter” expressed financially, but it can also include other things that consumers have to renounce in order to own a product, such as time (e.g., waiting in line to buy tickets) (Smith, 2008).

Sports promotion can be understood as a function of informing or influencing people in connection with sports products, social community engagement or image (Draženović & Hižak, 2005). Image is a very complex emotional-intellectual experience, i.e., attitude. Image is an experiential structure of attitudes, opinions, beliefs, prejudices and earlier experiences which end-consumers, traders, suppliers and other participants in business and market transactions have about a particular product, brand or economic entity. Image refers to the way the public perceives the organisation. The organisation creates its brand identity and positioning to shape the public image, but other factors can also contribute to the resulting image perceived by each individual. It is important to distinguish between identity and image. In marketing, identity usually includes the ways by which a company wants to identify itself or position its product (Kotler et al., 2014). If image components are observed through the subject of this research, it derives that the image of a sports club refers to our perception of the club, its sports successes, as well as its positioning in the minds of people from the inner and wider environment (Tomić, 2001). The importance of a sports club image is based on two basic parameters: (1) the increasing competition of sports clubs and the associated efforts to differentiate them; (2) the increasing public criticism, i.e., allegations related to the abuse of the social position of sports clubs. In addition to these basic parameters, there are also certain derived parameters which affect them to a great extent: the collection of funds necessary for operation, the stay or arrival of qualified professionals, the support of the public and/or the media, and the consumer satisfaction (McDonald & Shaw, 2005). The concepts of club image, brand evangelism, and club identification are of critical importance for the future of professional sports club management (Altin et al., 2020). It is common for sports organisations to use several different promotional activities at the same time, rather than focusing on just one (Smith, 2008). The elements of promotion that a company uses to achieve its marketing goals are (Owomoyela et al., 2013) advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and public relations, while the elements of sports promotion (also known as sports promotional mix) are only slightly different from the conventional ones and include advertising, sponsorship, public relations, promotion of non-sports products, licencing, and personal contact (Mihai, 2013). *Advertising* is a paid form of non-personal communication about a sports product or service. In sports marketing, advertising may include broadcast commercials, direct mailing, facility signage, and manufactured media (Mihai, 2013). Advertising is a means by which the market is introduced to new products and services (Hodak, Botunac, 2006). Economic propaganda investment is aimed at influencing the demand of a sports product (Draženović & Hižak, 2005). *Personal selling* implies an immediate and interactive relationship between a seller and a prospective buyer (Novak, 2006). An example of personal selling is the sale of sports equipment during a training practice with a presentation, during recreation, etc. Personal selling is considered the most effective form of promotion because the sales staff can adapt to the customer during a sales conversation (Kotler et al., 2014). Furthermore, sponsorship is one of the forms of personal selling used in sports. Sports sponsorships occur when an organisation or athlete are sponsored by a certain enterprise. Both sides benefit from this type of relationship (Seyed Ameri & Bashiri, 2010). For a company, the key goal of sponsorship is to improve consumer attitudes towards the endorsed brand. However, just as positive associations are transferred to the sponsor, so are the negative ones, which represents a certain risk for the enterprise. It is one of the most important sources of income in sports. The central principle of sponsorship is that sponsors expect positive associations to be transferred to the sponsored sports club and their brand (Grohs et al., 2015). *Licencing* is one of the fastest growing components of sports promotion, which involves the creation of a strategic alliance in which a sports product manufacturer gives the other party the right to produce that product in exchange for a certain fee or compensation (Mihai, 2013). Sports licencing involves granting licenses for club or league trademarks, such as logos, symbols and player images. However, the most important feature that the licenced product provides is social value. In fact, if a person wears, e.g., a T-shirt with the logo of a favourite club, it gives them the opportunity to express their social identity as a proud fan (Kwak et al., 2015). *Sales promotion* refers to promotional efforts which complement advertising and personal selling by making them more efficient. *Public relations* include communication activities conducted by companies to establish, maintain, and develop mutual trust and understanding with different target groups, such as consumers, prospective consumers, and financial organisations (Batu, 2010). Through public relations, the club seeks to inform the public about important information related to the club, as well as to create a positive image thereof. In this segment of sports product promotion, the following components play a significant role: the president and the spokesperson of the club, the club director and the sports director, newsletters, social networks, websites, football tournaments and charity matches, and seminars in cooperation with scientific and professional institutions (Hodak & Botunac, 2006). Public relations include a number of different activities: crisis communication, media relations, publicity, corporate communication, public affairs, lobbying, investor relations, sponsorship (Arens & Bovee, 1994). The promotion of non-sports products is also an integral part of marketing through sports. The use of celebrities in advertising has been a popular practice for years. This kind of advertising is employed because it is believed that it results in a more favourable perception of the ad and the product itself, and that it can have a significant positive impact on the financial return. The most common reasons for using celebrities to promote products include increased attention, image recovery, introducing consumers to the product, repositioning of the brand, etc. (Banyte et al., 2011). Through the Internet, companies build a direct relationship with the customers via targeted messages that cost only a fraction of the price of high-budget advertising (Meerman, 2009). It has been shown that the use of the Internet represents an improvement in the image of the organisation in the sense that it is perceived, *inter alia*, as more user-oriented, ready to cooperate and sophisticated. *Distribution* refers to ensuring the availability of products or services to the target market when and where they want it (Kriemadis & Terzoudis, 2007). Distribution in sports or "place" refers to how and where the consumers can access or purchase a sports product or service with the aim of using it. There is no point in having a great product at a good price if it is not easily accessible to the consumers. Distribution is, therefore, a significant factor in the sports marketing mix. Distribution refers to the transfer or transport of products from a manufacturer or sports organisation to end consumers (Smith, 2008). Once the consumers visit a facility, receive a service, or buy a sports product, it signals the effectiveness of sports distribution (Mihai, 2013). The sports facility is the most important distribution channel for two types of sports products (Smith, 2008): *sports services* – they offer participation or a sports service including personal training, health and rehabilitation counselling, local sports events, etc.; *professional sports events* – they provide the spectators with entertainment, and the professional players with the opportunity to compete; they include national or international competitions, including all types of sports. The characteristics of sports facilities can have a strong impact on the experience of an event by sports consumers (Smith, 2008). Distribution is also important within the facility, and refers to the placement of key elements inside the facility taking into account their convenience for the consumers, e.g., locker rooms close to the field, kindergarten next to the outdoor court, good view for spectators, etc. (Torkildsen, 2011).

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. SAMPLE, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The main objectives of this research are to: (1) Examine the opinions and attitudes of managers, male and female players of volleyball clubs; (2) Identify the promotional activities which affect the improvement of the club's image; (3) Demonstrate the effect of different forms of promotion on the image of sports clubs; (4) Explore which promotional activity has the greatest and which has the least impact on creating a positive image of a sports club; (5) Propose measures to enhance the image of volleyball clubs. By reviewing the literature, tests of the research objectives have been designed, and guidelines and suggestions provided for a more successful enhancement of the image of sports clubs based on the obtained results. Three primary research objectives, with derived corresponding auxiliary research objectives, have been defined.

1. *To what extant volleyball clubs conduct promotional activities aimed at enhancing the image of the club?*
2. *Does the application of promotional activities have a positive effect on the image of volleyball clubs, considering the use of the following elements of the promotional mix? (Advertising, Social networks, Public relations, Publicity)*
3. *Which promotional activities have the greatest impact on the image of volleyball clubs?*

The theoretical part of the paper is based on the collection and processing of secondary data. The importance of continuity of research is emphasised in order to effectively follow sports trends and define optimal designs of primary research (Šerić, Ljubica, 2018). In the empirical part of the paper, survey and interviewing methods are used. The survey was conducted among the players of five Super League volleyball clubs in Dalmatia. An in-depth interview with five respondents from the managerial tier of each sports club was used to collect data and information. Super League is the highest rank of the Croatian volleyball competition – men`s Super League and women`s Super League. The total of ten clubs compete in the women's Super League. For the purpose of the research, four clubs from the Split-Dalmatia County were selected, namely: *Volleyball Club Brda, Volleyball Club Kaštela, Volleyball Club Marina Kaštela and Volleyball Club Split*. The total number of clubs in men`s Super League is 12, and two clubs from the Split-Dalmatia were selected in the intentional sample for the purposes of the research, namely: V*olleyball Club Mladost Ribola Kaštela* and *Volleyball Club Split*. The basic sample included male and female players, and their coaches, as well as the players of first and second teams of the above clubs who compete in the Super League. Thus, the basic sample consists of a total of 120 respondents, with 92 respondents out of 120 completing the survey. The survey was used as a research tool based on positivism, which is mainly used in the deductive process of testing an already existing social theory (May, Sutton, 2011). Preliminary research and the analysis of secondary data led to the conclusion that there are two relevant groups of respondents in the above-mentioned clubs based on the research subject, namely the club presidents and the coaches. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted individually with the subjects from the managerial tier of a particular club with the aim of obtaining information about the clubs, but also their perspective on the use of promotional activities.

3.2. ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED DATA AND INTERPRETATION

In accordance with the objectives of the research, a survey consisting of 28 questions was conducted. Out of the total number of respondents, most of them are female (62 respondents; 67.39%), while 29 respondents (31.52%) are male. The volleyball clubs from the sample mainly finance their players with scholarship contracts. The value of the signed contract varies depending on the competences of the players and the possibilities of the volleyball club. The largest number of respondents (96.74%) are mostly informed about volleyball clubs via the Internet, while 2.17% are informed via newspapers and 1.09% declared for the category other. Volleyball clubs most often advertise on the Internet (frequency on average 3.89; std. dev.0.90), while advertising through newspapers/magazines is the least common (frequency on average 2.37; std.dev.0.83). The overall level of implementation of marketing activities is 2.92, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.57.

Table 1: Use of marketing tools when informing about volleyball clubs

Club	**VC Brda**		**VC Kaštela**		**VC Marina Kaštela**		**OK Mladost Ribola Kaštela**		**OK Split**	
Marketing tools	**N**	**%**	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Facebook	46	50,00	61	66,30	47	51,09	57	61,96	58	63,04
Instagram	74	80,43	49	53,26	57	61,96	55	59,78	49	53,26
Official website	5	5,43	6	6,52	8	8,70	11	11,96	8	8,70
You Tube	2	2,17	0	0,00	1	1,09	6	6,52	1	1,09
Twitter	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	1	1,09

Table 1 shows the structure of the use of marketing tools when informing about volleyball clubs.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the evaluation of the representation of volleyball clubs on social networks.

Evaluation of the representation of volleyball clubs on social networks	**N**	**Prosjek**	**Std. dev.**	**Medijan**	**Mod**	**Min.**	**Max.**
VC Brda	92	3,75	0,86	4,00	4,00	2,00	5,00
VC Kaštela	92	3,54	0,91	4,00	4,00	1,00	5,00
VC Marina Kaštela	92	3,30	1,05	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
VC Mladost Ribola Kaštela	92	3,72	0,87	4,00	4,00	1,00	5,00
OK Split	92	3,25	0,98	3,00	4,00	1,00	5,00
Representation of clubs on social networks	92	3,51	0,62	3,60	3,60	2,00	5,00

Table 2 shows the assessment of the representation of volleyball clubs on social networks.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of elements on social networks that can damage the perception of the image of volleyball clubs

	N	Avarage	Std. dev.	Median	Mod	Min.	Max.
grammatical errors	92	2,68	1,42	3,00	1,00	1,00	5,00
wrong hashtags	92	2,24	1,11	2,00	1,00	1,00	5,00
poor image quality	92	3,04	1,21	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
too frequent posts	92	2,42	1,06	2,00	2,00	1,00	5,00
too rare posts	92	2,62	1,18	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
too much information	92	2,35	1,05	2,00	2,00	1,00	5,00
too little information	92	2,90	1,23	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
elements of disrupting the experience of the image of the volleyball club	92	2,61	0,80	2,71	3,00	1,00	4,43

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the representation of volleyball clubs in other media

	N	Avarage	Std. dev.	Median	Mod	Min.	Max.
VC Brda	92	2,99	0,94	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
VC Kaštela	92	3,15	0,97	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
VC Marina Kaštela	92	3,07	0,87	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
VC Mladost Ribola Kaštela	92	3,49	0,97	4,00	4,00	1,00	5,00
VC Split	92	2,75	1,07	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00
Representation of clubs in other media	92	3,09	0,71	3,00	3,00	1,40	4,80

The overall average representation of clubs in other media is 3.09 with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.71.

The overall level of agreement with the statement "When I come to the sports events of the volleyball club, I feel welcome, comfortable and safe" for all mentioned volleyball clubs is 3.88, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.65. The overall level of agreement with the statement "Articles in the media about the volleyball club are mostly positive" for all mentioned volleyball clubs is 4.09, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.60.

The overall level of agreement with the statement "Volleyball club successfully uses the Internet as a medium of publicity" for all mentioned volleyball clubs is 3.71, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.68. Most respondents know some sponsors of volleyball clubs (76 respondents; 82.61%). However, none of the respondents mentioned all the sponsors and none of the respondents mentioned all the sponsors of only one volleyball club. Respondents also responded to claims related to creativity, attractiveness, informativeness, irritation and quality of advertisements related to individual advertisements of volleyball clubs.

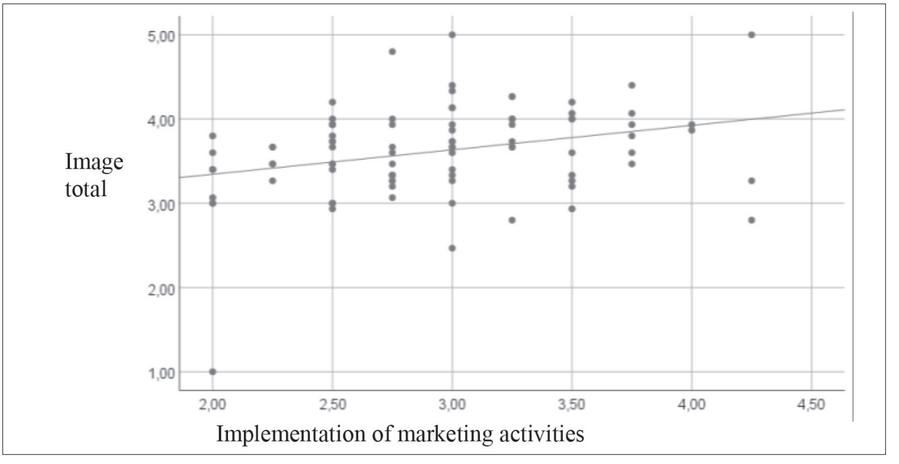
The overall average quality of advertisements of all volleyball clubs is 3.51, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.43. When comparing volleyball clubs with competitors, more than 50% of respondents believe that the best quality ad is VC Mladost Ribola Kaštela (53 respondents; 57.61%), while the least quality ad is VC Split (2 respondents; 2.17%). The reasons why they consider VC Mladost Ribola Kaštela's ad to be of the highest quality are that they consider the ad to be inventive, intriguing, eye-catching and interesting. The emphasis on the club's successes potentially attracts more newly enrolled children, the title of the poster attracts attention and encourages the reading of the entire text and, ultimately, it can be concluded that it is the most visually acceptable ad with all the necessary information. In the same way, in this research, the respondents also expressed the degree of agreement related to the club's reputation, positive associations, attitude and image. The overall average image level of all volleyball clubs is 3.61, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 0.55.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To what extent volleyball clubs conduct promotional activities aimed at enhancing the image of the club?

From the correlation between the *implementation of marketing activities of volleyball clubs and the image* of the club, it can be determined that there is the existence of a positive, weak and statistically significant connection between the level of implementation of marketing activities and the image ($r=0.302$; emp. $p=0.002$), i.e. with an increase in the level of implementation of marketing activities, the club's image also increases, and vice versa. The distribution of the implementation of marketing activities and image is presented by the scatter diagram below:

Graph 1: Scatter diagram



The positive slope of the direction on Graph 1 points to the conclusion that with an increase in the level of implementation of marketing activities, the image of the club grows, and vice versa.

The *connection between the awareness of the marketing activities of volleyball clubs and the image* of the club is positive, weak, and statistically significant, i.e., the increase in the level of awareness of the marketing activities of volleyball clubs is accompanied by the growth of the image of the club and vice versa. The positive slope of the direction on the scatter diagram points to the conclusion that, with the increase in the level of noticing the marketing activity of volleyball clubs, the image and the opposite increase.

Based on the results of the conducted testing, it can be concluded that *volleyball clubs insufficiently conduct promotional activities aimed at enhancing the image of the club.*

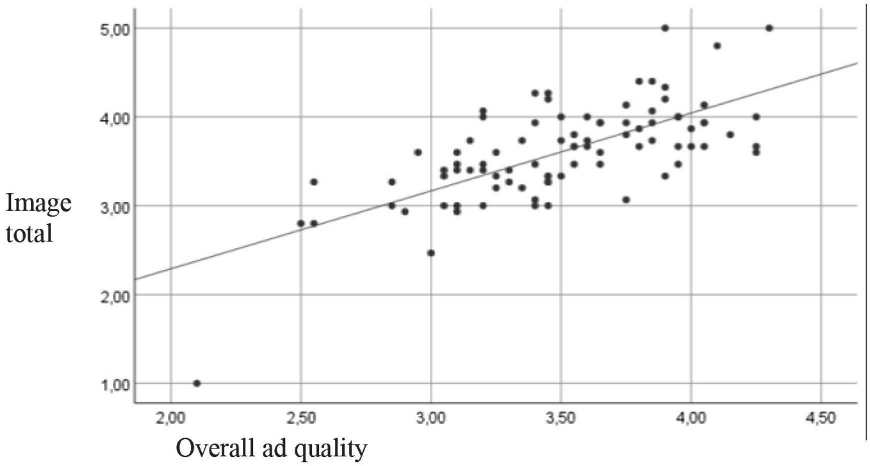
2. Does the application of promotional activities have a positive effect on the image of volleyball clubs, considering the use of the following elements of the promotional mix? (Advertising; Social networks; Public relations; Publicity)

a) Advertising

By testing the connection between the quality of the ad and the image of the club, it is possible to determine the existence of a positive, moderate and statistically significant connection ($r=0.69$; emp $p<0.001$), that is, as the quality of the ad increases, and so does the image of the club and vice versa.

The distribution of the quality of the ad and the image of the club is shown graphically with a scatter diagram. The positive slope of the direction points to the conclusion that, as the overall quality of the ad increases, so does the image, and vice versa.

Graph 2: Scatter plot – ad quality and overall image

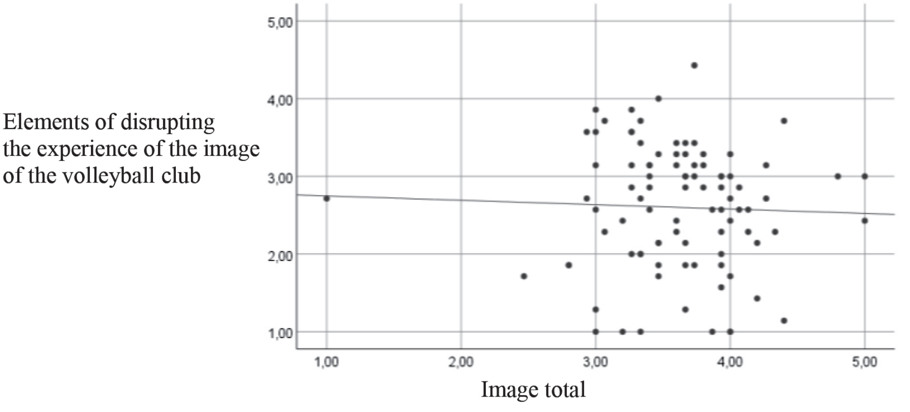


Based on the results of the conducted testing, it can be concluded that *advertising has a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs.*

b) Social networks

The correlation between the presence of elements that undermine the image of the volleyball club, and the overall image of the club, has not been established (r=-0.039; emp p=0.358), i.e., the change in the level of disruption in the elements of the image of the volleyball club is not related to the image of the club. The distribution of the representation of elements that undermine the experience of the image of the volleyball club and the image of the club is shown graphically with a scatter diagram.

Graph 3: Scatter diagram – elements of image and image distortion in total



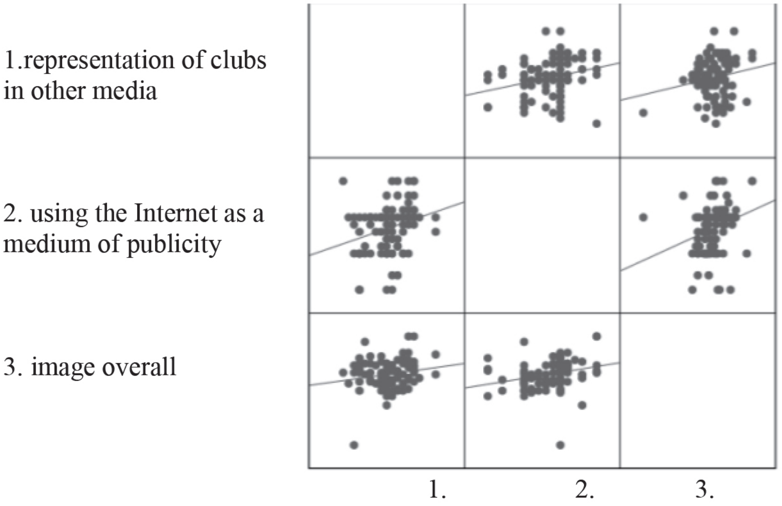
The correlation between the representation of clubs on social networks and the overall image of the club has been established as a weak, positive and statistically significant connection (r=0.293; emp p=0.002), that is, with the increase in the representation of clubs on social networks, the image of the club grows, and vice versa.

The positive slope of the direction on the scatter diagram points to the conclusion that, with the increase in the representation of clubs in other media, the image grows, and vice versa. Following the results of the conducted testing, it can be concluded that *social networks have a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs.*

c) Public relations

From the *correlation between the representation of clubs in other media and the image of the club*, it can be established that there is a positive, weak and statistically significant connection between the representation of clubs in other media and the image of the club (r=0.184; emp. p=0.040). So, with the increase in the level of representation of clubs in other media, the image of the club grows, and vice versa. The distribution of the representation of clubs in other media and the image of the club is shown by a scatter diagram.

Graph 4: Scatter diagram – representation of clubs in other media, use of the Internet and overall image



The positive slope of the curves points to the conclusion that the increase in the level of use of the Internet as a medium of publicity, and the representation of clubs in other media is accompanied by the growth of the image of the club. Following the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that *public relations have a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs.*

d) Publicity

A positive, statistically significant and weak correlation was found between the level of feeling "welcome, comfortable and safe" when attending sports events of the volleyball club and the image of the club ($r=0.282$; emp. $p=0.003$). The correlation was also found to be weak, positive and statistically significant between the use of the Internet as a medium of publicity and the image of the club ($r=0.273$; emp. $p=0.004$), which means that, with an increase in the level of good feeling when attending sports events of the volleyball club, as well as the use of the Internet as a medium of publicity, the image of the club increases, and vice versa. between the positivity of articles in the media and the image of the club is positive, weak and statistically significant ($r=0.478$; emp. $p<0.001$), which means that, with the increase in the positivity of articles in the media, the image of the club grows, and vice versa. The positive slope on the scatter diagram of the curves points to the conclusion that the increase in the feeling of "welcome, pleasant and safe" when attending sports events of the volleyball club, and the positivity of articles in the media are positively related to the movement of the club's image. Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that *publicity has a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs.* After testing research objectives where the influence of each of the selected elements of promotion on the image of the sports club was examined, the existence of an influence was determined, and it can be concluded *that the application of promotional activities has a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs.*

3. ***Which promotional activity has the greatest impact on the image of volleyball clubs?***

This research objective is tested by regression where the image of the club is set as a function of elements of promotional activity (advertising, social networks, public relations, and publicity).

Table 5: Variables and indicators

Variable	Indicators
Advertising	Overall ad quality
Social networks	Elements of damaging the experience of the image of the volleyball club
	Representation of clubs on social networks
Public relations	Representation of clubs in other media
Publicity	The feeling of "welcome, comfortable and safe" when coming to the sports events of the volleyball club
	Positivity of articles in the media
	Using the Internet as a medium of publicity

Table 6: Model Summary

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. ErroroftheEstimate	R SquareChange	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,712[a]	,507	,496	,39	,507	45,240	2	88	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positivity of articles in the media, Overall quality of ads

The estimated regression model obtained by the STEPWISE method interprets 49.60% of the sum of squares of the deviation of the club's image from the arithmetic mean. It is a model of a lower degree of representativeness.

Table 7: Multiple regression

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Stand. Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.	Correlations Zero-order	Correlations Partial	Correlations Part	Collinearity Statistics Tol.	Collinearity Statistics VIF
1	(Constant)	,208	,365		,569	,571					
	Overall ad quality	,759	,108	,598	7,045	,000	,690	,601	,527	,779	1,284
	Positivity of articles in the media	,182	,078	,197	2,325	,022	,478	,241	,174	,779	1,284

a. DependentVariable: Image total

From the table, it can be determined that the variable overall quality of advertising (advertising activities) and the positivity of the article in the media (publicity) have a statistically significant influence on image movement. The value of the beta parameter 0.759 with the variable of total advertisement quality means that with each increase in the quality of advertising by one unit, an increase in the image of the club can be expected by an average of 0.759 units, with other variables unchanged. The parameter is statistically significant (emp. $p<0.001$). The value of the beta parameter 0.182 with the variable of positivity of the article in the media means that, with each increase in the positivity of the article in the media by one unit, an increase in the image of the club can be expected by an average of 0.182 units, with other variables unchanged. The parameter is statistically significant (emp. $p<0.001$).

Table 8: Variables that do not have a statistically significant influence on the image of the club

ExcludedVariables[a]

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	PartialCorrelation	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	Collinearity Statistics VIF	Collinearity Statistics Minimum Tolerance
1	Elements of disrupting the experience of the image of the volleyball club	-,062[c]	-,829	,409	-,089	,998	1,002	,778
	Representation of clubs on social networks	-,056[c]	-,651	,517	-,070	,776	1,289	,657
	Using the Internet as a medium of publicity	,011[c]	,134	,894	,014	,861	1,162	,704
	Representation of clubs in other media	,010[c]	,124	,902	,013	,935	1,069	,738
	The feeling of "welcome, comfortable and safe" when coming to the sports events of the volleyball club	,039[c]	,444	,658	,048	,731	1,367	,609

a. DependentVariable: Image total
b. Predictorsinthe Model: (Constant), Overall ad quality
c. Predictorsinthe Model: (Constant), Overall quality of ads, Positivity of articles in the media

In order for the model to be adequate for use, the absence of multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity problems is necessary. The problem of multicollinearity is checked using the VIF indicator.

Table 9: Multicollinearity

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Overall ad quality	,779	1,284
	Positivity of articles in the media	,779	1,284

a. Dependent Variable: Image total

The values of the VIF indicator for both variables are lower than the limit value of 5, which means that the problem of multicollinearity is not present in the model. The problem of heteroscedasticity is present if the residual deviations are related to the movement of independent variables. The problem is tested by Spearman's correlation.

From Table 10 it can be determined that the movement of the residual deviations is not related to the movements of the independent variables, which is why it is concluded that the problem of heteroscedasticity is not present in the model (emp. p values > 0.050).

Table 10: Heteroscedasticity test - correlation

Correlations

		Overall ad quality	Positivity of articles in the media
	N	92	92
Residual	Correlation Coefficient	-,113	-,145
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,287	,170
	N	91	91

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

The statistical significance of the model as a whole is tested with the ANOVA test.

Based on the empirical F value of 45.24, it can be concluded that, as a whole, the estimated model is statistically significant (emp. $p<0.001$). The results show that two variables are statistically significant. According to the results shown in Table 7, advertising and the positivity of articles in the media are significant variables in the regression model because their value of the empirical level of significance is less than 0.001. Other independent variables have an empirical significance level greater than 0.001 and are not statistically significant, which means that these variables do not significantly contribute to predicting the value of the dependent variable image of sports clubs. According to Table 7, the highest value of the standardised beta coefficient is advertising (beta = 0.598) followed by the positivity of articles in the media (beta = 0.197), and thus they are also the best predictors of the dependent variable (image of the bank). The variable positivity of articles in the media (beta = 0.197) has a slightly smaller relative influence on the dependent variable, but this influence is still statistically significant.

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the conclusion is made that *among all promotional activities, social networks have the greatest impact on the image of volleyball clubs.*

3.3. INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The interviews examined the opinions and attitudes of *managerial structures of all the clubs involved in the research*, which was one of the research objectives. The interviews yielded heterogeneous results, which indicates a non-standardised approach to creating and enhancing the image of a sports club. Each of these clubs has an individual approach to the research subject as they consider appropriate in accordance with the vision of their respective clubs, but also their financial resources. According to the results of the interviews, it derives that all clubs use uniform forms of promotional activities but adapt them in line with the resources of their respective clubs. All interviewed subjects agree that promotional activities are not sufficiently addressed and that more efforts should be invested in the implementation thereof. This corresponds to the opinions of survey respondents, which supports that volleyball clubs insufficiently conduct promotional activities aimed at enhancing the image of the club.

3.4. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The results clearly indicate a link between promotional activities and image, but the limitations of this research should also be considered. This research has regional character; however, the obtained results are suitable for drawing symptomatic conclusions. In order to gain a better overall picture of the situation, it is necessary to include a larger number of respondents from other regions of the Republic of Croatia. In addition to players and coaches, the research should also include fans, supporters or sponsors of clubs and thus get an insight into the overall situation from a different perspective. However, the analysed data from this research and the drawn conclusions can represent the basis and an incentive for future research in the field of sports marketing on the subject of enhancing the image of sports clubs.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Sports marketing is viewed as a specific type of marketing intended for the development of sports activities. Therefore, it is important to understand its role and significance for the operation of a sports club in order to achieve the synergistic effect of all elements of the marketing mix. Successful management of the marketing mix can affect the image of the sports organisation, thus ensuring its competitive advantage in terms of a more successful attracting of financial resources, finding sponsors and donors, signing better players, or increasing the number of children in volleyball schools. By surveying and analysing the opinions of male and female players, club presidents and sports directors, it was concluded that volleyball clubs insufficiently conduct promotional activities aimed at enhancing the image of the club. However, despite the poor recognition of promotional activities by respondents, it can be concluded that the application of promotional activities has a positive impact on the image of volleyball clubs and that among all promotional activities, social networks have the greatest impact on the image of volleyball clubs. The research has found that clubs have the support of numerous sponsors and fans. Therefore, by involving fans and sponsors of clubs in the research, it would be possible to gain an overall picture and insight into the overall situation from a completely different perspective. Such research would yield new conclusions, but also new proposed measures for a more successful enhancement of the club image. Due to the increasing competition, this paper can be considered as an incentive for the clubs` managerial structures to find new marketing strategies, which ultimately results in a more successful distinctiveness from other volleyball clubs. The research has found that all clubs use social networks as one of the ways of communication, namely Facebook and Instagram. It has also been found that clubs generally understand the importance and benefits of using social media, however some of them do not have an appointed expert who is in charge of managing the club's social media profiles for various reasons.

Based on these findings, the guidelines for a better management of social media profiles are presented below. By using all the benefits provided by Facebook, it is possible to raise public awareness about the volleyball club, increase the public recognisability of the club and the rate of attendance of sports matches, etc. The research examined the elements of social media posts, which may compromise the perception of the club's image. The most common reason for compromising the perception of the club is poor image quality, insufficient information, and grammatical errors. It is necessary to invest effort in creating interesting, personalised and quality photos and videos that will quickly attract the attention of visitors. It is also important to write an interesting caption which should not be too long or too short, and which would convey the desired message and all the necessary information to the visitors with grammatically correct text. In addition to the caption, it is desirable to use keywords specific to this volleyball club so that the visitors could associate them with the club, which increases the recognition of the club. It should be noted that social media provide a two-way communication; it is, therefore, necessary to use this benefit. The following techniques are used to achieve specific promotional goals of the clubs and increase their attractiveness and interactivity of their content: responding to visitors' questions, asking questions to visitors, timely response to messages and comments, asking yes or no questions or posting a poll about the winner of the match on the matchday. Furthermore, it is recommended that clubs attend specialised sports events as much as possible, because it is precisely at such events that clubs can introduce themselves to children, parents and the public and present their work and activities. Participation in such events has the reminder function because they try to maintain contacts with the existing stakeholders, but also to create new contacts with the prospective stakeholders of the enterprise. It is also recommended to respond to and participate in various charity events, and to post news about such activities as it contributes to increasing positive publicity. The research has also found that not all clubs use the possibility of delivering a demonstration volleyball lesson in primary schools. It is a great example of personal selling, which is recommended to all clubs as a promotional activity. The beginning of the school year is the ideal time for volleyball clubs to deliver a demonstration lesson. This is a great way to bring volleyball closer to primary school students and potentially enrol them in volleyball schools within the said volleyball clubs. The cooperation with primary schools and the teachers of physical education can be upgraded by turning the demonstration lesson into volleyball classes held once a month or as agreed. Players are promoters of their respective clubs and as such, they can deliver volleyball lessons, which can help popularise volleyball as a sport, enhance the image of the players, and ultimately the image of the volleyball club.

The research has found that clubs pay special attention to attracting children to volleyball schools, so it is recommended to design and introduce a system of a universal sports school, which can be named after and managed by the volleyball club, intended for students from the first to the third grade of primary school. The universal school can be held two or three times a week under the expert guidance of trained coaches. Qualified professionals and proper exercise at the youngest age can affect the development of children`s coordination, motor, and functional abilities. The goal of the sports school is to bring children closer to the elements of different sports and support their athletic development, and to direct the most talented ones towards playing a particular sport. By collecting the membership fees, the club can channel the money into other activities that may contribute to a better image of the club. A universal sports school can bear the name of a volleyball club, thus familiarising children, their parents, and the public (all those who discover the name and the work and activities of the club for the first time) with the name and the activities of the club. In addition, for all those who are already familiar with the name and the work and activities of the club, the club remains within their focus and public awareness, thus enhancing the existing attitude towards the club and fostering its positive image.

The research has found that most clubs do not have an appointed expert who is in charge of organising and conducting the promotional activities of the club. This is due to the fact that they do not believe it is essential for their business operation or they lack financial resources to hire an expert. One of the solutions can be found in cooperation with the University of Split.

University studies provide the students with the competences to perform jobs in science, corporate world, but also society in general. Some university studies provide the opportunity to choose a professional practice as one of the elective courses during the study. Professional practice enables the acquisition of practical skills and the application of acquired theoretical knowledge. A contract on professional practice can be concluded in cooperation with the University or the relevant faculties. By concluding a contract with the Faculty of Economics, marketing students can use their knowledge and creativity to engage in and contribute to the work and activities of the volleyball club.

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WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM? EXPLORING ETHICS IN INFLUENCER MARKETING LITERATURE AND DETERMINING FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES / U ČEMU JE PROBLEM? ISTRAŽIVANJE ETIKE U *INFLUENCER* MARKETINGU I SMJERNICE ZA BUDUĆA ISTRAŽIVANJA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: With the development of influencer marketing, the interest of academia and professionals in the topic of ethics in influencer marketing is growing. The purpose of this paper is to determine which topics, theories and perspectives are predominantly researched, and which should receive more attention from researchers in order to reduce the space for ethical dilemmas and unethical behavior in the context of influencer marketing to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. The research is based on a literature review of papers dealing with ethics in influencer marketing.

Methodology: The TCCM approach to literature review was applied in the paper, i.e. key theories (T), contexts (C), characteristics (C) and methodologies (M) of previous research were identified. Qualitative and quantitative data analyses were used in the analysis.

Results: The results of the research show that most of the research on ethics in influencer marketing was examined on a sample of followers and a wider audience and mainly in the Anglo-Saxon area. Papers belong to very different scientific fields and therefore rely on very different theories. Four areas of research were identified: ethical problems arising from the dual or unclear role of influencers, ethical problems arising from the characteristics of certain influencers, the consequences of influencer marketing for the involved stakeholders, and the prevention of ethically questionable behavior associated with influencer marketing and its negative consequences.

Conclusion: The specific role of influencers on the border between consumers and salespersons, and friends and business partners requires a deeper and more thorough approach to ethical research in influencer marketing than has been the case so far. The conclusions of this paper suggest priority directions for future research in terms of the used theories, context, characteristics and research methods.

Keywords: influencer marketing, ethics, TCCM, literature review

SAŽETAK

Svrha: S razvojem *influencer* marketinga raste i zanimanje znanosti i struke za temu etičnosti u *influencer* marketingu. Svrha je ovog rada temeljem pregleda istraživanja koji problematiziraju etičnost u *influencer* marketingu utvrditi koje teme, teorije i perspektive se dominantno istražuju, a koje trebaju dobiti veću pažnju istraživača kako bi se na zadovoljstvo svih dionika umanjio prostor za etičke dileme i neetičko ponašanje u kontekstu *influencer* marketinga.

Metodologija: U radu je primijenjen TCCM pristup pregledu literature odnosno identificirane su ključne teorije (T), konteksti (C), karakteristike (C) i metodologije (M) prethodnih istraživanja. U analizi je korištena kvalitativna i kvantitativna obrada podataka.

Rezultati: Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da je većina istraživanja o etici u *influencer* marketingu ispitivana na uzorku pratitelja i šire publike i uglavnom u Anglo-saksonskom području. Istraživanja pripadaju vrlo različitim znanstvenim područjima pa se tako i oslanjaju na vrlo različite teorije. Identificirana su četiri područja istraživanja: etički problemi proizašli iz dvojne ili nejasne uloge *influencera*, etički problemi proizašli zbog karakteristika određenih *influencera*, posljedice *influencer* marketinga za uključene dionike, te prevencija etično upitnog ponašanja povezanog s *influencer* marketingom i njegovih negativnih posljedica.

Zaključak: Specifična uloga *influencera* na granici između potrošača i prodavača, te prijatelja i poslovnog partnera, zahtjeva dublji i temeljitiji pristup istraživanju etičnosti u *influencer* marketingu nego je do sada bio slučaj. Zaključci ovog rada sugeriraju prioritetne smjerove budućih istraživanja, i to u smislu korištenih teorija, konteksta, karakteristika i metoda istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: *influencer* marketing, etika, TCCM, pregled literature

1. UVOD

Influenceri na društvenim mrežama (*influenceri*) posljednjih su se godina nametnuli kao nezaobilazan marketinški komunikacijski fenomen. Usporedno, počela su se nametati pitanja etičnosti ovakvog načina komunikacije s publikom (Voorveld, 2019). Od moralnog problema skrivanja sponzorirane prirode *influencerovog* sadržaja, često analiziranog u marketinškoj literaturi (npr., Boerman i Van Reijmersdal, 2020), do moralnih problema koji su privukli manje pažnje istraživača, no jednako zabrinjavajućih, poput uloge *influencera* u promociji duhanske industrije mladima (Kong et al., 2022), etičnost u *influencer* marketingu mnogo je kompleksnija nego što dosadašnje studije pretpostavljaju (Borchers & Enke, 2022). Istraživanje *influencer* marketinga je izazovno jer je područje slabo regulirano, no istovremeno je važno, jer slaba reguliranost ostavlja puno prostora za kršenje društvenih normi i prešutnih obećanja. Istraživači stoga pokazuju sve veći interes prema istraživanju etičnosti i moralnih problema *influencer* marketinga (npr., Archer et al., 2014; Archer i Harrigan, 2016; Mardon et al., 2018; Audrezet et al., 2020; Wellman et al., 2020; Cocker et al., 2021; Leban et al., 2021; Borchers i Enke 2022).

Svrha ove studije je pružiti pregled literature koji će omogućiti temeljiti uvid u akumulirano znanje o etičnosti *influencera* kako bi se utvrdila područja koja iziskuju veću i promptniju pažnju istraživača. Naime, nedavna istraživanja u području *influencer* marketinga (e. g., Cocker et al., 2021; Borchers i Enke, 2022; Mardon et al., 2023) ukazuju da postoje mnogi aspekti etičnosti *influencera* koji su za sada previđeni u literaturi. Slijedeći TCCM pristup pregleda literature (Paul i Criado, 2020), u ovom istraživanju će se utvrditi na kojim teorijama (T), u kojim kontekstima (C) i na kojim metodama (M) se temelji istraživanje etičnosti *influencer* marketinga, te koje su karakteristike (C) tog istraživanja, odnosno koje teme se najviše istražuju. Navedeno će biti temelj za sugestije za daljnja istraživanja koja će, na zadovoljstvo svih dionika, konkretnije doprinositi smanjenju etičkih dilema i prostora za neetičko ponašanje u kontekstu *influencer* marketinga.

2. METODOLOGIJA ISTRAŽIVANJA

2.1. UZORAK

Za pronalazak relevantnih radova korištena je Scopus baza. Osnovni kriteriji pretrage bili su: a) znanstveni rad b) na engleskom jeziku. Pretraga je vršena bez vremenskog ograničenja pošto je etičnost *influencera* novi fenomen, te se očekivalo da će najveći dio radova biti objavljen u posljednjih nekoliko godina. U uzorak su ušli radovi objavljeni do ožujka 2023., kada je izvršeno prikupljanje podataka. S obzirom na to da se termin *influencer* marketing ustalio tek posljednjih nekoliko godina, a fenomen je u svojim začecima opisivan drugom terminologijom, termin pretrage nije bio ograničen samo na *influencer*, već je korišteno više termina koji su temeljeni na definicijama *influencera* u dosadašnjim istraživanjima, kako prikazuje Tablica 1. Slično tome, osim termina *ethic**, pretraživao se i sinonim *moral**.

Tablica 1.: Rezultati Scopus pretrage prema ključnim riječima

Rad koji definira *influencere* koristeći drugu terminologiju	Pretraga u polju: Naslov, Sažetak, Ključne riječi	Broj radova	Potencijalno relevantnih radova	Potencijalno relevantnih novih radova
	influencer and (ethic* or moral*)	166	84	84
npr. Berryman i Kavka, 2017	"opinion leader" and (ethic* or moral*)	123	8	8
npr. Uzunoğlu i Kip, 2014	blogger and (ethic* or moral*)	23	8	7
prema terminu 'vlogger'[1], npr. Lee i Choi, 2019	youtube and (ethic* or moral*)	218	18	12
De Veirman et al., 2019	endorser and (ethic* or moral*)	42	2	2
Jun i Yi, 2020	"content creator" and (ethic* or moral*)	24	3	0
Khamis et al., 2017	"micro-celebrity" and (ethic* or moral*)	2	2	0
Wang, 2021	prosumer and (ethic* or moral*)	8	0	0
Marwick, 2015	"insta-famous" and (ethic* or moral*)	0	0	0
Freberg et al., 2011	"third-party endorser" and (ethic* or moral*)	0	0	0
	UKUPNO	606	125	113

[1]*vlogger je termin koji se koristi za influencere na YouTube-u pa se pretraga smatrala inkluzivnijom ukoliko se koristi termin YouTube, a ne termin vlog/vlogger*
Izvor: izrada autora

Svim člancima koji su se pojavili kao rezultat pretrage (606 radova) glavni istraživač je pregledao sažetak kako bi utvrdio odgovara li tema rada području istraživanja temeljem dva kriterija:

1. rad govori o *influencerima*, odnosno osobama koje su izgradile veliku bazu pratitelja na društvenim mrežama i stoga imaju potencijal vršiti utjecaj na pratitelje (Ki et al. 2020, p. 1) ,
2. rad se dotiče etičnosti, odnosno odluka koje pojedinac donosi, a koje imaju potencijal pogodovati ili štetiti drugima.

Nakon što su sažeci 606 radova pregledani, uklonjeni su radovi koji ne udovoljavaju navedenim kriterijima i koji se preklapaju u rezultatima različitih pretraga. Ukupno je 113 radova ostalo kao potencijalno relevantno, te je za konačnu odluku o njihovoj relevantnosti bilo potrebno pregledati cjelovite tekstove. Za 3 rada nisu pronađeni cjeloviti tekstovi, te su oni uklonjeni iz uzorka. Glavni istraživač je kodirao svaki od preostalih 110 radova kao jasan (relevantan ili nerelevantan) ili nejasan (vjerojatno relevantan ili vjerojatno nerelevantan). Drugi istraživač je potom pregledao dio jasnih i sve nejasne radove. Kod jasnih je podudaranje među istraživačima bilo izrazito visoko, što je potvrdilo validnost kodiranja. Kod nejasnih radova, nije postojao jednoznačan odgovor, te su se istraživači kroz diskusiju složili da je inicijalne kriterije o relevantnosti nužno rafinirati. U konačnici, u uzorku je ostalo 69 radova, i to prema kriterijima koji su zahtijevali da rad:

a. odgovara inicijalnim parametrima pretraživanja (mora biti na engleskom i imati karakteristike znanstvenog rada) te mora biti dostupan cjeloviti rad – iako se očekivalo da će radovi koji ne zadovoljavaju ove kriterije već biti uklonjeni iz uzorka u ranijim fazama, nekoliko je radova iz ovih razloga uklonjeno tek u ovoj fazi,
b. proučava *influencere* na društvenim mrežama, ne *influencere* koji utječu na pojedince u osobnom kontaktu ili kroz klasične medije,
c. proučava *influencere* koji su postali široko popularni tek pristupom društvenim mrežama, bez obzira odnosi li se područje *influencinga* na njihovu profesiju (npr. liječnici) ili ne (npr. *lifestyle influenceri*),
d. promatra problematiku etike povezane s *influencer* marketingom, bez obzira je li *influencer* moralni agent.

2.2. ANALIZA

U analizi sadržaja prethodnih istraživanja korišten je TCCM model (Paul i Rosado-Serrano, 2019; Paul i Rowley, 2020) prema kojem se u svakom radu identificiraju korištene teorije (T), konteksti (C), karakteristike (C) i metode (M) istraživanja. Istraživači su se složili da relevantne dijelove teksta označe sljedećim kodovima (i podkodovima):

- teorija,
- kontekst (znanstveno područje, zemlja istraživanja, komunikacijski kanal, djelatnost),
- karakteristike (svrha rada i objašnjenje povezanosti etike i influencer marketinga) i
- metodologija (metoda prikupljanja podataka i jedinica analize).

Radovi su kodirani pomoću MaxQDA softvera. Glavni istraživač je kodirao sve radove, a drugi 15% radova. Utvrđena su dva tipa nepodudaranja među istraživačima. Prvi, postojale su manje razlike u smislu kodiranja metoda i teorije. Navedene razlike su prodiskutirane i donesena je odluka koja je primijenjena na sve radova. Drugi, pojedini kod je neiskorišten u radu. Kako bi se korigiralo eventualne propuste, glavni je istraživač još jednom sustavno pregledao svaki dokument kroz prizmu nekorištenih kodova, te ih dodao gdje god bi kodovi odgovarali ili potencijalno odgovarali. U većini dokumenata označen je kod, ili njih nekoliko koji potencijalno odgovaraju, te je tada drugi istraživač pregledao sve takve kodove i donesena je zajednička odluka o konačnim kodovima.

U većini radova svaki je kod imao po jedan kodirani segment, no u ponekim radovima pojedini kod nije dodijeljen (ako pojedine stavke nisu u radu definirane, što je bio čest slučaj s teorijama, ali u manjoj mjeri i s drugim kodovima), ili je dodijeljen više puta (ako se npr. istraživanje provodilo u više zemalja ili je provedeno više istraživanja primjenom različite metodologije).

Analiza kodiranih segmenata prati logiku 'hermenautičkog kruga' (Thompson, 1997). Takav pristup podrazumijeva da se analiza konstantno 'seli' sa sadržaja unutar jedinice istraživanja (tj. pojedinog kodiranog segmenta) na usporedbu sadržaja između jedinica istraživanja (tj. uspoređivanje segmenata kako bi spoznaje zaista bile temeljene na prikupljenim podacima). U tom procesu se kodirani segmenti ponekad raščlanjuju na više jedinica analize. Sintezi spoznaja se potom pristupilo hijerarhijskim kodiranjem odozdo prema gore (Kalpokaite i Radivojević, 2019.), tako da najniža razina analize sadrži kodove vođene podacima koji se potom logički grupiraju na jednoj, ili češće više, razina, formirajući teoretske koncepte.

3. REZULTATI ISTRAŽIVANJA

Rezultati analize su predstavljani u 4 podpoglavlja prateći TCCM model. Kontekst (C), odnosno podaci o zemlji, znanstvenom području, kanalu i djelatnosti su kvantitativno analizirani obzirom su egzaktni i jednostavni. S druge strane teorija (T), karakteristike istraživanja (C) i metodologija (M) su kvalitativno obrađene s obzirom na to da zbog složenosti zahtijevaju dublju analizu i detaljniju prezentaciju kako bi se stekli jasniji uvidi u dosadašnja istraživanja.

3.1. TEORIJA

Teorije korištene u radovima na području etike u *influencer* marketingu su obuhvaćene analizom ako su autori radova naveli konkretnu teoriju ili teorijski okvir koji su koristili u kreiranju svog modela ili kojem se istraživanjem doprinosi. Neki radovi tako koriste i po nekoliko teorija dok mnogi ne koriste niti jednu. Teorije korištene u radovima su vrlo raznolike i dolaze iz različitih znanstvenih područja, a grupiraju se na sljedeći način:

- *Teorije o umu, identitetu i socijalizaciji* Teorije u ovoj grupi objašnjavaju kako se formiraju ponašanje i stavovi pojedinca kao pripadnika određene društvene skupine. Primjerice, teorija uma (McAlister i Cornwell, 2009) podrazumijeva sposobnost razumijevanja tuđih misli, uvjerenja i osjećaja i korištenje tih informacija za objašnjenje i predviđanje tuđega ponašanja. Obično se koristi u radovima vezanim uz djecu kao pratitelje *influencera* i njihovom nesposobnom prepoznavanju namjere i ciljeva *influencer* marketinga, te donošenju kritičkih zaključaka. Teorije vezane uz identitet objašnjavaju kako se pojedinci doživljavaju i grade svijest o sebi; primjerice teorija socijalnog identiteta (Huddy, 2001) nalaže da se čovjek doživljava u skladu s društvenim grupama kojima pripada. Takve teorije korištene su u *influencer* marketingu kako bi se razumjeli motivi praćenja *influencera* i karakteristike pratitelja povezane s preferencijom određenog *influencera*. Teorija društvene razmjene (Emerson, 1976) polazi od socijalizacije i nalaže da se interakcija među ljudima svodi na razmjenu troškova i koristi koje svaka od strana dobiva iz odnosa i dok ta ravnoteža ne poremeti odnos opstaje. S druge strane, teorija socijalnog ugovora (npr. Rosenfeld, 1984) nalaže da se unutar društva formiraju nepisane (pa čak i neizrečene) norme i pravila ponašanja čije se kršenje smatra neprihvatljivim. Slično, kao dio antropologije, teorija kultura definira heuristički koncept kulture i, zajedno s teorijom žanra (Bakhtin, 2014), objašnjava kako se elementi i obrasci u društvenoj strukturi s vremenom počinju prepoznavati te nastaju kulture unutar postojeće kulture. U kontekstu *influencer* marketinga primjena ovakvih teorija olakšava razumijevanje implikacija koje *influencer* marketing ima za šire društvene strukture.

- *Teorije o komunikaciji i uvjeravanju*

  U izučavanju *influencer* marketinga vrlo se često koriste teorije o odnosima s javnošću i oglašavanju općenito, a prije svega model znanja o uvjeravanju (Friestad i Wright, 1994) i model dvostrane komunikacije (Grunig, 2009). Oba modela koriste se za objašnjenje prihvaćanja promotivnih poruka od strane publike i razlika u reakciji ako se radi o oglasu ili prikrivenom pokušaju uvjeravanja. Ova grupa teorija najčešće je korištena u radovima koji problematiziraju prikriveno oglašavanje *influencera*.

- *Teorije o moralnosti i pravednosti*

  Ova skupina teorija odnosi se na radove koji promišljaju ponašanje i ulogu *influencera* i s njime povezanih pojedinaca te njihova prava i obveze. Primjerice, teorija pravde (Rawls, 1971) pretpostavlja da svaki pojedinac ima pravo na temeljne slobode i jednake prilike i šanse kao i pojedinci sličnih sposobnosti. Teorija moralne odgovornosti koja datira još iz antičkog doba pretpostavlja da se osoba treba smatrati moralno odgovornom za ponašanje koje je bilo voljno izvedeno i krivom ako je nekome nanijela štetu. U području *influencer* marketinga, također je zanimljiva teorija profesionalizma (korištena u Petresen, 2014),prema kojoj zaposlenici slijede standarde djelatnosti kao etičke principe poslovanja, no takvo što u *influencer* marketingu još ne postoji, te je stoga vjerojatnije moralno dvojbeno ponašanje.

- *Ostale teorije*

  Među ostalim korištenim teorijama nalazi se pletora teorija od onih općenitih i često korištenih u marketingu poput teorija razumnog djelovanja i planiranog ponašanja, do teorija vezanih uz specifičan kontekst poput veganizma.

3.2. KONTEKST

Kao kontekst istraživanja analizirana su znanstvena područja kojima istraživanja pripadaju, zemlje istraživanja, komunikacijski kanali i djelatnosti unutar kojih su se istraživanja provodila.

3.2.1. ZNANSTVENA PODRUČJA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Znanstveno područje istraživanja definirano je označavanjem časopisa u kojima su radovi objavljeni, a oni su potom grupirani prema kategoriji i predmetnom području kojem časopis pripada u Scopusu. Tablica 2. prikazuje znanstvena područja unutar kojih se etika u *influencer* marketingu proučava te, unutar svakog, najčešće utvrđene kategorije i časopise. Obzirom da časopisi često pripadaju u više znanstvenih područja i kategorija, zbrojevi svih područja i kategorija premašuje broj radova u uzorku.

Najviše radova (40) objavljeno je u području društvenih znanosti. Od toga, daleko najviše (27) u kategoriji komunikacija. Ukupno 32 rada pripadaju području poslovna ekonomija, menadžment i računovodstvo, i to kategoriji marketing s 25 radova. Ostala područja i kategorije zastupljene su sa znatno manje radova. U smislu časopisa u kojima su radovi objavljeni, postoji izrazito velika disperzija, te su u svega 2 časopisa objavljena po 4 rada.

Tablica 2.: Područja, kategorije i časopisi u kojima se tema obrađuje

ZNANSTVENO PODRUČJE (Broj radova)	NAJČEŠĆE KATEGORIJE (Broj radova)	ČASOPISI S BAREM 2 RADA (Broj radova)
Društvene znanosti (40)	Komunikacija (27) Kulturne studije (7) Sociologija i političke znanosti (5) Pravo (4)	International Journal of Advertising (4), Public Relations Review (4), Journal of Media Ethics (3) Journal of Advertising (2), Journal of Business Ethics (2), Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication (2)
Poslovna ekonomija, menadžment i računovodstvo (32)	Marketing (25) Poslovna ekonomija i međunarodno poslovanje (11) Organizacijsko ponašanje i upravljanje ljudskim resursima (5) Strategija i menadžment (5)	International Journal of Advertising (4), Public Relations Review (4), European Journal of Marketing (2), Journal of Services Marketing (2), Journal of Advertising (2), Journal of Business Ethics (2)
Umjetnost i humanističke znanosti (10)	Filozofija (5)	Journal of Media Ethics (3), Journal of Business Ethics (2)

Medicina (10)	Zdravstvena informatika (3)	Journal of Medical Internet Research (2)
Psihologija (7)	Primijenjena psihologija (3) Socijalna psihologija (3)	n.a.
Ekonomija, ekonometrija i financije (6)	Ekonomija i ekonometrija (4)	Journal of Business Ethics (2)
Računalne znanosti (4)	Računalne mreže i komunikacije (2) Primjena računalnih znanosti (2)	n.a.
Ostale (Ekološke znanosti, Znanosti o odlučivanju, Inženjerstvo, Zdravstvene djelatnosti) (4)	n.a.	n.a.

Izvor: izrada autora

3.2.2. ZEMLJE ISTRAŽIVANJA

Zemlja istraživanja odnosila se najčešće na zemlju u kojoj su se podaci empirijski prikupljali. U nekoliko slučajeva, kod radova koji imaju filozofsku diskusiju kao znanstveni pristup, zemlja istraživanja se definirala s obzirom na spomenute zakonske regulative ili praktične slučajeve koji se jasno tiču određene zemlje. U velikoj većini radova je zemlja istraživanja definirana i uglavnom se radilo o jednoj zemlji. Međutim, u nekoliko radova provedeno je ili više istraživanja u različitim zemljama ili jedno istraživanje u više zemalja, pa ako su te zemlje na više kontinenata, rad je na Prikazu 1 pribrojen na više kontinenata.

Prikaz 1.: Broj radova na temu etike i influencer marketinga po kontinentima

Izvor: izrada autora prema slici preuzetoj s commons.wikimedia.org

Kako se vidi na prikazu, istraživanje etičnosti *influencer* marketinga dominira u Anglo-saksonskom području. Konkretno, najviše se istraživalo na području Sjeverne Amerike (27 radova), i to SAD-a (27 radova). Slijedi Europa s ukupno 17 radova, od kojih 7 uključuje Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo, a 3 Nizozemsku. Sedam istraživanja provedeno je i u Australiji, a svega nekoliko istraživanja provedeno je u svim drugim zemljama zajedno.

3.2.3. KOMUNIKACIJSKI KANALI

Komunikacijski kanali odnose se na društvene mreže koje koriste *influenceri* u komunikaciji sa svojim pratiteljima. U analiziranim istraživanjima ti su kanali uglavnom jasno definirani, a korišteni su za prikupljanje sekundarnih podataka (npr. komentara pratitelja), kao kontekst istraživanja ili primjer kod prikupljanja primarnih podataka. U većini radova definira se jedan komunikacijski kanal, no u ponekima se koristi i više kanala, te su u tom slučaju radovi pribrojeni kod više kanala. Tablica 3. daje pregled kanala korištenih u analiziranim istraživanjima.

Tablica 3.: Komunikacijski kanali korišteni u istraživanju etike u *influencer* marketingu

Kanal	Broj radova
YouTube	27
Instagram	20
Blog	16
Twitter	8
Facebook	3
Google+	1
MySpace	1
Sina Webo	1
TikTok	1

Izvor: izrada autora

Najviše radova (27) u području etike u *influencer* marketingu je vezano za YouTube kao kanal komunikacije. Osim YouTubea, često su istraživanja vezana uz Instagram (20) i Blog (16). Interesantno je, iako ne i iznenađujuće, da se Instagram i YouTube uglavnom proučavaju u posljednjih nekoliko godina. S druge strane, čak je polovica istraživanja o blogovima objavljena do 2015. godine što ukazuje na važnu ulogu koju su blogovi odigrali u pojavi *influencera*, tj. pojedinaca koji su se izdigli iz mase i privukli pažnju kako publike, tako i sponzora.

3.2.4. DJELATNOSTI

Kod analize djelatnosti istraživanja analizirala se djelatnost ili vrsta proizvoda ili usluge koja je u fokusu istraživanja ili koja je korištena kao primjer u empirijskom dijelu istraživanja. I djelatnost se u većini radova mogla utvrditi, te se većinom radilo o jednoj djelatnosti u radu. Zdravlje se promatra u najviše (13), uglavnom radova iz medicine, koji se bave fizičkim i mentalnim zdravljem. Roditeljstvo i proizvodi za djecu bili su u fokusu 10 istraživanja, s time da dominiraju mame-blogeri i igračke. Kod 7 istraživanja kontekst je prehrana (veganstvo, specifična jela). Životni stil koji uglavnom uključuje luksuzne proizvode, modu i fitness pojavljuje se u 7 radova, turizam u 5, a industrija ljepote u 4. U pojedinim se radovima spominju druge djelatnosti.

3.3. KARAKTERISTIKE

Karakteristike istraživanja u TCCM modelu se odnose na istraživane koncepte, strukturu proučavanih koncepata i njihove odnose (Paul i Rosado-Serrano, 2018; Bommenahalli Veerabhadrappa et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2023). U ovom pregledu literature, u tom je kontekstu analizirana srž svakog istraživanja: njegova svrha, rezultati, diskusija i zaključci, kako bi se utvrdilo na koji način se u istraživanju u vezu dovode etika i *influencer* marketing.

Iako su kodirani i segmenti koji se odnose na svrhu radova kako bi se definirale karakteristike istraživanja, u konačnici su analizirani samo segmenti koji objašnjavaju odnos etike i *influencer* marketinga, obzirom da se ti segmenti uvijek referiraju na svrhu, ali znatno detaljnije i konkretnije obja***šnjavaju*** pitanje etičnosti u *influencer* marketingu, obrađeno u radu. Kao što je prikazano u Tablici 4. i obrazloženo u potpoglavljima, istraživanje etike u *influencer* marketingu može se podijeliti u 4 područja i više tema.

Tablica 4.: Sistematizacija tema povezanih s etikom u *influencer* marketingu

Područje	Teme
Etički problemi proizašli iz nejasne ili dvojne uloge *influencera*	nejasna uloga
	dvojna uloga
Etički problemi proizašli zbog karakteristika određenih *influencera*	djeca kao *influenceri*
	influenceri medicinske struke
	virtualni *influenceri*
Posljedice *influencer* marketinga za uključene dionike	za pratitelje
	za marke koje *influenceri* promoviraju
	za društvo i tržišne odnose
Prevencija etično upitnog ponašanja povezanog s *influencer* marketingom i njegovih negativnih posljedica	uloga roditelja
	uloga regulatornih tijela
	uloga *influencera*

Izvor: izrada autora

3.3.1. ETIČKI PROBLEMI PROIZAŠLI IZ NEJASNE ILI DVOJNE ULOGE *INFLUENCERA*

Mnogi radovi problem etike u *influencer* marketingu vide kao posljedicu nejasne uloge *influencera*. Prema tim radovima, društvo *influencere* percipira kao nekoga bez radne etike, čija uloga, obveze i prava odolijevaju regulaciji (Droz-dit-Busset, 2022), a kompanije priznaju da je poštivanje propisa u poslovanju s *influencerima* mrtvo slovo na papiru (Davies i Hobbs, 2020). Na primjer farmaceutske kompanije promoviraju svoje proizvode putem *influencera*, čak i ako je takvo oglašavanje drugim kanalima zabranjeno (Darmawan i Huh, 2022). Povezano, Archer i Harrigan (2016) i Abd Rahim i Huzooree (2018) nejasnu ulogu *influencera* vide kao ozbiljan etički problem u području odnosa s javnošću (PR-a) jer smatra se da nije etično (niti dozvoljeno) naplaćivati PR sadržaj bez da se sponzorstvo istakne, a istovremeno *influenceri* upravo to rade.

Analizirani radovi promatraju i ulogu *influencera* ne samo kao nejasnu, već kao dvojnu (istovremeno zauzimanje dvije ili više uloga), što rezultira etičkim dilemama jer se moraju zadovoljiti oprečna očekivanja dviju uloga. Primjerice, iako na granici novinarstva, oglašavanja i odnosa s javnošću, *influenceri* ne pripadaju niti jednoj od navedenih kategorija, a kompanije čije marke promoviraju očekuju da zauzmu svaku od tih uloga pomalo (Borchers i Enke, 2022). Cho (2020) pokazuje da marketinški stručnjaci smatraju neetično ponašanje *influencera* uslijed dvojne uloge nužnim za uspjeh svojih poslovnih subjekata i vide vrijednost u njemu bez obzira kosi li se takvo ponašanje s postojećom regulacijom. De Souza-Leao et al. (2022) također se fokusiraju na preklapanje uloge *influencera* kao agenta na tržištu (potrošač, proizvođač, medijator) i daju osvrt u kojemu se spominje i etički aspekt tako specifične uloge. Slično tome, Mahy et al. (2022) se osvrće na etički problem vezan uz dvojnu ulogu *influencera* jer ih vlasti žele pridobiti za svoju propagandu, širenje podvala, klevetanje i govor mržnje, dok publika traži transparentnost sponzoriranog sadržaja, čuvanje vrijednosti i odnosa unutar zajednice i razumijevanje života 'običnih' ljudi. Konačno, prema Leban et al. (2021), primjer dvojne uloge su i *influenceri* koji propagiraju održivost i odgovornu potrošnju istovremeno promovirajući luksuzne proizvode i prekomjernu potrošnju. Oni tu svoju moralnu dilemu rješavaju kreiranjem više identiteta s kojima se naizmjence poistovjećuju.

3.3.2. ETIČKI PROBLEMI PROIZAŠLI ZBOG KARAKTERISTIKA ODREĐENIH *INFLUENCERA*

Znatan dio istraživanja etike u *influencer* marketingu bavi se etičkim pitanjima koja nisu svojstvena svim *influencerima* već proizlaze iz specifičnih karakteristika određene vrste *influencera*. Primjerice, djeca kao *influenceri* izložena su velikom pritisku i nema regulatornog okvira koji ih štiti kao radnike jer ne bi smjeli raditi (Cabezas, 2022). Povezano, roditelji kao *influenceri* ili glavni urednici profila pretvaraju dom vlastite djece u produkcijsku kuću (Ryan, 2022) i od djece rade izvor zarade pri čemu mogu zanemariti svoju primarnu ulogu, a to je zaštita djeteta, uključujući njihovu privatnost (Archer, 2019).

Nadalje, kada su *influenceri* medicinske struke, imaju puno potencijala generirati neetično ponašanje (El Kheir et al., 2022; Picazo-Sanchez et al., 2022). Sporno je tako, i to iz više razloga, objavljivanje fotografija i podataka o pacijentima osobito tijekom kirurških zahvata (npr. otvorenog abdomena). Prije svega je sporna zaštita privatnosti pacijenata, ali i pitanje širenja zaraze neodgovornim ponašanjem za vrijeme kirurških zahvata, i uopće pitanje objavljivanje fotografija s radnog mjesta (Kerr et al., 2020). Također, etički je sporno kada se liječnici ili psiholozi bave *influencingom* jer mogu ponuditi savjet koji se može krivo protumačiti u površnom odnosu na društvenoj mreži (Ranpariya et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2023; White i Hanley, 2023).

Također, postavljano je pitanje etičke odgovornosti i transparentnosti virtualnih *influencera* (Robinson, 2020; Conti et al., 2022). Iako se *influenceri* koji postoje u stvarnom svijetu smatraju moralno odgovornima za svoje postupke, nije jasno na koji način moralno odgovorni mogu biti virtualni *influenceri.*

3.3.3. POSLJEDICE *INFLUENCER* MARKETINGA ZA UKLJUČENE DIONIKE

Etička dimenzija u *influencer* marketingu najočitije je predstavljena u radovima koji razmatraju posljedice *influencer* marketinga za pratitelje, marke, te društvo i tržišne odnose. Uglavnom se razmatraju posljedice etično upitnog ponašanja *influencera,* ali postoji nekoliko radova koji se osvrću na etično upitno ponašanje ostalih dionika *influencer* marketinga, kao i radovi koji obrađuju temu poticanja etičnog ponašanja od strane *influencera*.

Pratitelji mogu imati najdirektnije posljedice neetičnog ponašanja *influencera*. Istraživanja su se u tom smislu bavila obmanama u barem dvije forme: prikrivanje sponzorirane prirode sadržaja (Magnini, 2011; Harms et al., 2022) i nametanje ideala ljepote kroz nerealan sadržaj (Picazo-Sanchez et al., 2022), a zbog kojega se pratitelji osjećaju loše i manje vrijednima (Hudders i Lou 2022). Ne manje bitno, istraživanja su utvrdila da posljedice za pratitelje mogu biti i gubitci zbog slušanja savjeta *influencera.* Bizzi i Labban (2019) tako elaboriraju financijski gubitak koji može nastati ako se kompanije nemoralno okoriste *influencer* marketingom da prikupe sredstva od neiskusnih ulagača koji slušaju savjete *influencera,* dok Ranpariya et al. (2020) argumentiraju mogućnost nastanka zdravstvenih tegoba kada pratitelji slušaju savjet *influencera* o zdravlju prezentiran kao iskrena preporuka, iako se radi o plaćenoj suradnji. Poseban etički problem definiran je i u situaciji u kojoj su djeca pratitelji, a produkcija sadržaja koji im se plasira podrazumijeva kombinaciju recenzije proizvoda, sponzorirani sadržaj i zabavu, te stoga djeca sponzorirani sadržaj prihvaćaju kao iskrenu preporuku što predstavlja veliki etički izazov (Jaakkola, 2020). Srž problema oglašavanja proizvoda djeci putem *influencer* marketinga je da se najčešće radi o plasmanu proizvoda koji ni na koji način nije označen kao plaćena promocija (Choi, 2023), a djeci nerijetko nedostaju mehanizmi prepoznavanja uvjeravanja i skepticizam potrebni za kritički pristup sadržaju (Castonguay, 2022).

Nadalje, mnogi radovi ističu posljedice koje neetično ponašanje *influencera* ima na marke koje promoviraju. Iako se u početku istraživanja etičnosti influencera osnaživanje *influencera* na društvenim mrežama smatralo prilikom za povećanje etičnosti marki, jer su *influenceri* isticali neetično ponašanje marki (Kerr et al., 2012), s vremenom se fokus istraživanja prebacio na posljedice neetičnog ponašanja *influencera* za marku. Utvrđeno je da moralni legitimitet *influencera* (Bora Semiz i Paylan 2023), podvrgavanje plastičnim operacijama koje publika smatra neautentičnim (Lefebvre i Cowart 2022), prikriveno oglašavanje (Magnini, 2011), ponizno hvaljenje marke (Paramita i Septianto 2021) te dopuštanje marki da kontrolira sadržaj *influencerovih* objava (Pradhan et al., 2023), publika smatra neetičnim ponašanjem *influencera* čije se negativne posljedice prelijevaju i na promoviranu marku.

Prethodna istraživanja su utvrdila i da ponašanje *influencera* i općenito *influencer* marketing imaju posljedice na društvo i tržišne odnose. Primjerice, istraživanja su skrenula pažnju da kompanije mogu proizvode čije je oglašavanje zabranjeno ili ograničeno drugim komunikacijskim kanalima promovirati putem *influencera* (Darmawan i Huh, 2022). Također, istraživanja su ukazala da *influenceri* mogu neometano dijeliti informacije o medicinskim istraživanjima, što predstavlja opasnost, jer se rezultati mogu pogrešno interpretirati, a publika to teško razotkriva (Sharma i Francis, 2020). Čak i u najboljoj namjeri da budu mehanizam koji će imati pozitivne posljedice za društvo, posljedice njihovog ponašanja mogu biti suprotne. Utvrđeno je tako da progovaranje *influencera* o tragičnim povijesnim događajima poput Holokausta potiče mnoga etička pitanja jer može odati dojam iskorištavanja nesretnog događaja za vlastitu promociju i potaknuti govor mržnje pratitelja. Svejedno, s obzirom na doseg i važnost *influencera* u javnom diskursu, Łysak (2022) ih poziva na uključivanje i poticanje portretiranja tragičnih događaja u svrhu istinske edukacije publike. Nadalje, Li i Feng (2022) problematiziraju činjenicu da su *influenceri* u Kini postali mehanizam promocije političke doktrine vladajuće stranke. To predstavlja dvojaki etički problem; s jedne strane, represija i ograničavanje sadržaja čine autentičnost sadržaja *influencera* upitnim, dok s druge strane, postoji opasnost od iskrivljavanja slike države.

Konačno, istraživanja su se osvrnula i na ulogu koju *influenceri* mogu imati u poticanju etično poželjnog ponašanja. Djafarova i Foots (2022) tako istražuju kako *influenceri* potiču generaciju Z na kupnju održivih proizvoda. To su *influenceri* koji iskreno vjeruju u načela održivosti i stoga provode 'kalibraciju kreiranja sadržaja' - tako da želja za zaradom i njihova osobna načela budu usklađeni, odnosno biraju promovirati marke koje se zalažu za ista načela kao i oni. Za *influencere* to predstavlja poseban izazov jer im smanjuje bazen potencijalnih suradnji (Jacobson i Harrison, 2020).

3.3.4. PREVENCIJA ETIČNO UPITNOG PONAŠANJA POVEZANOG S INFLUENCER MARKETINGOM I NJEGOVE NEGATIVNE POSLJEDICE

Četvrtu kategoriju istraživanja u području etike u *influencer* marketingu predstavljaju istraživanja prevencije etički upitnih situacija povezanih s *influencer* marketingom i njihovih posljedica za sve dionike. U tom smislu istraživanja su prepoznala ulogu roditelja, regulatornih tijela te samih *influencera*.

Istraživanja ukazuje da bi *influenceri* trebali kombinirati pismeno i usmeno isticanje suradnje s markama da ne bi zavaravali mlađu publiku koja nema sposobnost kritičkog razmišljanja (Loose et al., 2023). Ipak, posebno ističu ulogu roditelja i važnost roditeljske reakcije kad im djeca gledaju *influencere*, u smislu upozoravanja djece da se radi o plaćenoj promociji (Harms et al., 2022; Ahn, 2022).

Također, nekoliko se istraživanja bavilo pregledom regulacije koja se odnosi na *influencer* marketing. Campbell i Grimm (2019) su otkrili značajne propuste regulacije u SAD-u temeljem kojih predlažu kako otkloniti ili ublažiti propuste u svrhu zaštite publike. Još u samim počecima razvoja *influencer* marketinga, Lyu (2012) je dao prijedlog okvira za procjenu etičkih problema na internetu s fokusom na agentovu moralnu i legalnu odgovornost, no istaknuo je da prevelika represija nije primjenjiva na odnose na internetu jer prijeti slobodi govora. Regulacija treba biti specifična za domenu. Nastavno, Abrahams (2012) ističe da je, primjerice, kod korištenje *influencera* u promociji mliječne formule, usklađivanje s kodeksom koji postoji za taj proizvod ključno kako bi se angažman *influencera* u takvim situacijama smatrao etičnim.

Istraživanja su također utvrdila da sami *influenceri* mogu imati ulogu u poticanju etičkog ponašanja *influencer* zajednice. Tzv. 'kreatori drame' na YouTubeu su *influenceri* koji prozivaju ostale *influencere* za nemoralno ponašanje vjerujući da tako podižu standard moralnog ponašanja *influencer* industrije (Lewis i Christin, 2022).

3.4. METODOLOGIJA

Većina analiziranih radova su empirijski radovi s jasno navedenom metodom prikupljanja podataka i jedinicom analize. Manji dio radova su, po znanstvenom pristupu, filozofska diskusija bez empirijskog istraživanja. U empirijskim radovima se dvostruko češće koriste primarni podaci nego sekundarni, a karakteristike su im sljedeće:

- *Primarni podaci* dolaze od tri različite grupe dionika među kojima su daleko najčešći pratitelji i javnost (često ih istraživanja ne odvajaju niti specificiraju). Kod ove skupine ispitanika podaci su najčešće prikupljani upitnicima (često s eksperimentalnim podražajem) i to često online servisima poput MTurka i Prolifica. Također, provedeno je i nekoliko istraživanja metodom intervjua. Osim od pratitelja i javnosti, znatan dio primarnih podataka dolazi od samih *influencera*, od kojih se podaci gotovo uvijek prikupljaju putem intervjua, ali i od relevantnih stručnjaka (najčešće marketinških/PR), pri čemu se podjednako koriste upitnici i intervjui. Podaci iz intervjua se u pravilu analiziraju kvalitativno, a iz upitnika, i to ne uvijek, uglavnom kvantitativno. Osim upitnikom i intervjuom, primarni podaci su u rijetkim situacijama prikupljani i metodama poput netnografije ili fokus grupa.

- *Sekundarni podaci* su korišteni rjeđe nego primarni (u oko trećini radova), a daleko najčešće se odnose na objave samih *influencera*. Pri korištenju sadržaja *influencera* u ranim istraživanjima, autori su koristili blogove (Lomborg 2012; Abrahams, 2012) ili izolirane slučajeve u svojim uzorcima, dok se u posljednje vrijeme, zahvaljujući razvoju tehnologije za prikupljanje i obradu podataka, sekundarni podaci prikupljaju u velikom obimu s raznih kanala (društvenih medija), pa su primjerice Mardon et al. (2018) prikupili 5989 YouTube videa sa skoro 1000 sati sadržaja. Od ostalih izvora sekundarnih podataka koriste se komentari pratitelja, sadržaj drugih medija (npr. novine ili TV), znanstveni radovi i sl.. Sekundarni podaci se uglavnom obrađuju kvalitativno, ali ponekad i kvantitativno.

4. ZAKLJUČAK I SMJERNICE ZA DALJNJA ISTRAŽIVANJA

Istraživanje etike u *influencer* marketingu nije se razvijalo istom brzinom kao i porast etički problematičnog ponašanja povezanog s *influencer* marketingom, poput promoviranja neodgovornog ponašanja, prikrivanja sponzorstava, širenja dezinformacija, iskorištavanja situacija i ljudi u svrhu povećanja osobne financijske koristi, i slično. Prva istraživanja etike u *influencer* marketingu javljaju se s pojavom blogera i datiraju u rane dvije tisućite, međutim u tim istraživanjima etički problemi se sporadično anticipiraju bez sustavnog pristupa. Posljednjih nekoliko godina javlja se veliki porast istraživanja ove teme. Temeljem analize utvrđeno je da se etika u *influencer* marketingu izučava kroz prizmu: (1) uloge *influencera* koja je nejasna ili dvojna, te stvara plodno tlo za moralne dileme i nemoralno ponašanje, (2) karakteristika određenih *influencera* koji mogu biti djeca, medicinari ili virtualni *influenceri* te su, s obzirom na svoje karakteristike, izloženi dodatnim moralno upitnim situacijama, (3) posljedica *influencer marketinga* za pratitelje, marke te društvo i tržišne odnose i (4) prevencije etično upitnog ponašanja povezanog s *influencer* marketingom i njegove negativne posljedice.

Primjena TCCM metode omogućila je konkretan uvid u dosadašnja istraživanja na temu etike u *influencer* marketingu, temeljem čega se preporučuje nekoliko smjerova daljnjih istraživanja.

U pogledu korištenja teorija (T), dosadašnja istraživanja dominantno koriste teorije o umu, identitetu i socijalizaciji, te teorije o komunikaciji i uvjeravanju. U budućnosti je potrebno veći naglasak staviti na univerzalne teorije pravde i moralnosti te preuzeti postojeće modele donošenja etičkih odluka, bilo da se na *influencere* gleda kao na poslovne subjekte (teorije korištene u polju poslovne etike), ili potrošače (teorije korištene u polju ponašanja potrošača). Također, buduća istraživanja bi se trebala eksplicitnije referirati na teorije na koje se oslanjaju kako bi se područje moglo sustavnije širiti i nadograđivati, umjesto da divergira u razne smjerove.

U pogledu konteksta istraživanja (C), daleko je najviše istraživanja provedeno u Anglo-saksonskim zemljama (SAD-u, UK-u i Australiji), što nije idealno obzirom da je etika usko vezana uz društvene norme koje se razlikuju u različitim zemljama i njihovim kulturama. Uski geografski fokus istraživanja stvara problem generalizacije rezultata, pogotovo pri istraživanju regulatornog okvira. U budućnosti se preporuča veći fokus staviti na istraživanja u drugim dijelovima svijeta, poput EU. U pogledu djelatnosti, komunikacijskih kanala i znanstvenog područja istraživanja uočava se disperzija dosadašnjih istraživanja, što je poželjno. Buduća istraživanja trebaju pratiti u kojim se djelatnostima i kojim komunikacijskim kanalima dominantno razvijaju *influenceri*, te se prirodno njima i okretati. Za primijetiti je da, iako je TikTok sve češće korišten kanal *influencer* marketinga, u istraživanjima se gotovo ne koristi i tu se preporučuje veći naglasak u budućnosti.

U pogledu karakteristika (C), polazišta za istraživanje etike u *influencer* marketingu su do sada bila *influencerova* nejasna ili dvojna uloga, karakteristike određenih *influencera*, posljedice *influencer* marketinga za uključene dionike, te prevencija neetičnog ponašanja i njegovih posljedica. S obzirom na to da će etičnost u *influencer* marketingu tek postati vrlo aktualna istraživačima, očekuje se daljnji razvoj svih navedenih tema, ali i pojava novih. Unutar identificiranih tema, uočen je nedostatak radova koji sustavno analiziraju regulatorni okvir u *influencer* marketingu, a koji su neophodni za razvoj diskusije o etičnosti *influencera*, obzirom na povezanost etike i formalnih propisa društva. Također, obzirom da se tek marginalno dotiče etičnost korištenja virtualnih *influencera*, a svjedočimo rapidnom razvoju umjetne inteligencije, ova će tema morati dobiti više pažnje. Slično tome, trenutno nema istraživanja o drugim načinima primjene umjetne inteligencije i proširene stvarnosti u *influencer* marketingu, poput korištenja *deepfake* sintetičkih medija za manipulaciju objavljenim sadržajem ili samog promoviranja alata proširene stvarnosti čije su implikacije za psihološko stanje korisnika i njegovu privatnost još uvijek nejasne.

Konačno, u pogledu metoda (M), trenutno je većina radova u području etike u *influencer* marketingu temeljena na primarnim podacima prikupljenim od strane pratitelja i javnosti. Preporučuje se intenzivnije uključivanje samih *influencera* kao ispitanika, ali i marketinških stručnjaka i zakonodavca, te korištenje netnografije kao metode istraživanja. Pitanje etike pitanje je društvenog konsenzusa i prešutnih dogovora za čije razumijevanje je nužno razumjeti i konstantno uspoređivati percepciju svih uključenih sudionika: *influencera*, pratitelja, javnosti, marki i regulatora.

Etika u *influencer* marketingu ima puno potencijala za razvoj budućih istraživanja. Akademska zajednica mora biti svjesna da se radi o području koje se razvija strelovitom brzinom, te kvaliteta odnosa svih uključenih i ozbiljnost posljedica ovise o pravovremenoj reakciji. Reakcija u smislu regulatornog okvira i upućene publike postiže se istraživanjem i anticipacijom nadolazećih problema, umjesto osvrtanja na one iz prošlosti.

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