

Global Pandemic and Digital Marketing: Trends and Perspectives

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has caused issues and significant challenges in all spheres of business activities. Digital marketing is no exception, which, although based on the application of information technologies and thereby its functioning was not vitally jeopardized, has undergone significant transformations. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to identify key trends in digital marketing that have arisen as a consequence of the global pandemic outburst. The paper analyzes the economic aspect, i.e. the impact of the pandemic on the growth of digital marketing observed through the total spending on digital advertising at the level of 28 European countries. Moreover, the aspect of adapting marketing communication to the new phenomena in society, such as living and working at home and rising isolation due to social distancing measures, was also observed. The results of the research contribute to the growing body of literature in the field of digital marketing by providing a systematic overview of the changes that have occurred, as well as development trends that are anticipated for the future period.

Keywords: *digital marketing, Covid-19 pandemic, digital marketing growth, e-commerce, digital marketing campaigns.*

JEL classification: M31, M37

Rukopis dostavljen: 13.03.2022.

Rukopis prihvaćen za štampu: 27.06.2022.

Napomena: Rad u formi prethodnog saopštenja predstavljen na naučnoj konferenciji „Izazovi i perspektive marketinga“ održanoj na Zlatiboru od 5. do 7. novembra 2021. godine i prihvaćen je za publikovanje u zborniku radova čiji je izdavač časopis Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has induced significant challenges to almost all aspects of business activities. In order to overcome the adverse effects of the ongoing health crisis, the business sector has turned to digital technologies and the application of advanced ICT solutions (Lazić, Jovanović & Lazarević-Moravčević, 2021) due to their potential to significantly improve competitiveness and business processes (Domazet, Zubović & Lazić, 2018). Along with the increased usage of digital technologies in everyday lives, the world population spends most of their time connected. According to official data (Statista, 2022a), as of April 2022, the total number of active internet users on the global level accounts for 5 billion, with 4.65 billion in social media alone. It is estimated that approximately every second person in the overall global population uses at least one social network. Facebook is still the most popular, currently recording more than 2.91 billion active users.

Although in the early phases of the pandemic, most advertisers substantially reduced the funds intended for digital advertising and consequently postponed the launch of their marketing campaigns, soon after „the marketing dollars started to turn back on“ (Graham, 2021) companies have managed to consolidate their budgets and organize their business activities under the new circumstances. Due to the accelerated digitalization, there has been an expansion of e-commerce and soar in content created for digital channels since social distancing measures have shifted all focus of communication and money transactions to the digital environment.

After the initial drop in ad spending during 2020, advertisers did not go blind in 2021 but continued to invest. According to official statistics

(Statista, 2022b), ad spending in the global digital advertising market reached 521.02 billion USD dollars in 2021. Search Advertising is estimated to represent the largest market segment, with a world revenue of 182.9b USD and an overall share of more than 30% (Statista, 2022b). Regarding the European digital advertising market, despite the adverse effects of the ongoing pandemic, it recorded a growth of 6.3% in 2020 (IAB Europe, 2021). Nevertheless, the pace of growth of the European digital advertising market during the year 2020 is considered to be the slowest in recent history, even compared to the global recession induced by the outbreak of the Global financial crisis in 2008.

Considering the context, the subject of this paper is the analysis of the economic aspects, i.e. the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the European digital market growth observed through the total spending on digital advertising at the level of 28 European countries. Furthermore, substantial attention has been devoted to the observed adaptation of the overall marketing communication to the new phenomena in society, such as living and working at home, increased health concerns, but also social problems such as rising unemployment as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The paper consists of 5 sections. After the introductory remarks, the second and third sections have been devoted to analyzing the impact of the ongoing health crisis on life and business, as well as digital marketing. The fourth section highlights the main trends observed in the European digital advertising market during 2020. The fifth section concludes the paper and discusses the scope for future work.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK ON LIFE AND BUSINESS

On December 31 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in the People's Republic of China was informed on the cases of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, by Wuhan health authorities. In order not to be connected to geographical location, animal species or group of people and therefore create stigma and discrimination, WHO decided to name the novel coronavirus Covid-19 (World Health Organization, 2021). The term will, later on, be used heavily due to the quick global spread of novel coronavirus and the consequences that it had on all aspects of life and business.

Following the detection of the first Covid-19 case among the countries around the globe, numerous restrictions were introduced, such as a temporary ban

on entry into a country for foreign citizens coming from areas with intensive coronavirus transmission, and eventually, state borders closure, followed by a declaration on the state of emergency. As no mass gatherings were allowed, companies were advised to introduce work from home arrangements wherever possible. All non-essential services providers faced partial or complete cessation of business. Consequently, all public events and business gatherings with domestic and foreign partners, new product and campaign launching, promotional activities, and other special events were postponed or cancelled.

As a result of multiple-day curfew and police hour movement restrictions, people were forced to organize their lives and work at home, drastically changing their daily routine. More than ever before, people spent their time online, using digital technology for different day-to-day purposes. From home office arrangements to career development, education and self-improvement, telehealth and well-being to entertainment and other leisure activities, a digital environment has become a go-to spot for any personal or professional occasion. Nevertheless, authors Zhao and Zhou (2021) emphasized stress and addictive social media use as important psychological challenges raised during the ongoing pandemic.

Stay-at-home and social distancing measures have severely damaged companies' business performance and revenue (Rapaccini et al., 2020), especially those in the beauty, fashion and leisure industry. Within the beauty industry, stores closure, work from home arrangements and facial mask wearing has resulted in a drop of 55 to 75% in cosmetic and fragrance purchasing in 2020 (McKinsey&Company, 2020). The way customers buy cosmetics has drastically changed, as their interest shifted towards DIY products, which allowed them to mimic the beauty salon experiences.

Due to supply chain disruptions and stay-at-home regulations, the demand for clothes plummeted, and the textile industry has witnessed an unprecedented drop in the second quarter of 2020, which was twice as bad compared to the worst quarter of the 2008 economic and financial crisis (-37%) (Euratex, 2020). Fashion industry giants had to close some of their retail stores as the global pandemic drove sales online. Moreover, the demand for the clothing worn outside dropped, and a new trend of comfort dressing was set, making fashion companies promote garments such as loungewear and shackets, as Zoom video calls only revealed the upper part of persons' outfit. Parallel with health concerns were the efforts towards achieving a healthier lifestyle, which resulted in the growth of ac-

tivewear over 35% in digital orders during Q1 of 2020 (Deloitte, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the entertainment industry has also witnessed major disruptions (Moon, 2020; Ryu & Cho, 2022). Over 9000 cinemas across the EU were closed and just about 2500 in the US, generating the loss of 5 billion USD on the global box office, which was projected to soar up to 15 and 17 billion USD due to stopped or delayed production, cancelled premieres, film festivals and special events (European Parliament, 2020). On the other hand, in 2020, global home and mobile entertainment market growth amounted to 23.0%, (y/y), reaching 68.8 billion USD revenue driven by digital content (Motion Picture Association, 2020). In 2020, streaming service Netflix saw an increase of around 37 million new subscribers globally and a 24% (y/y) growth in annual revenue (WSJ Markets, 2021).

As some sectors lost revenue amidst the Covid-19 crisis, others became much more validated. It is the case of self-improvement and the personal development industry, as online courses achieved exponential growth during the pandemic (Impey & Formanek, 2021). Coursera's CEO has revealed some staggering pandemic related statistics from 2020, which show a growth of 644% in enrollments over a 30-day time compared to 2019, and more than 5 million post-Covid new user registrations (DeVaney, Shimshon, Rascoff & Maggioncalda, 2020). Other research indicated that 35% of Netflix subscribers use this platform for educational content, thereby changing the manner in which knowledge and information are acquired (Kohli, Timelin, Fabius & Moulvad Veranen, 2020).

Research brought by UNCTAD (2020) showcased that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed consumer behaviour for good, accelerating the shift towards the digital environment and online shopping, especially in developing countries. Due to social distancing measures and retail stores closure, e-commerce has witnessed an intense growth in new users. This is evidenced by the fact that during 2020 the share of e-commerce in global retail trade increased by 3% (from 16% in 2019 to 19% in 2020) (UNCTAD, 2021), while the global e-commerce market achieved an increase of 27.6% (eMarketer, 2020). Current trends in consumer behaviour across all life spheres have made an impact on the global market. In order to stay competitive or become market leaders, companies have had to adapt to the new reality and novel consumer needs, interests and priorities promptly. In achieving this aim, marketing strategies are vital for communicating shared values and providing support to con-

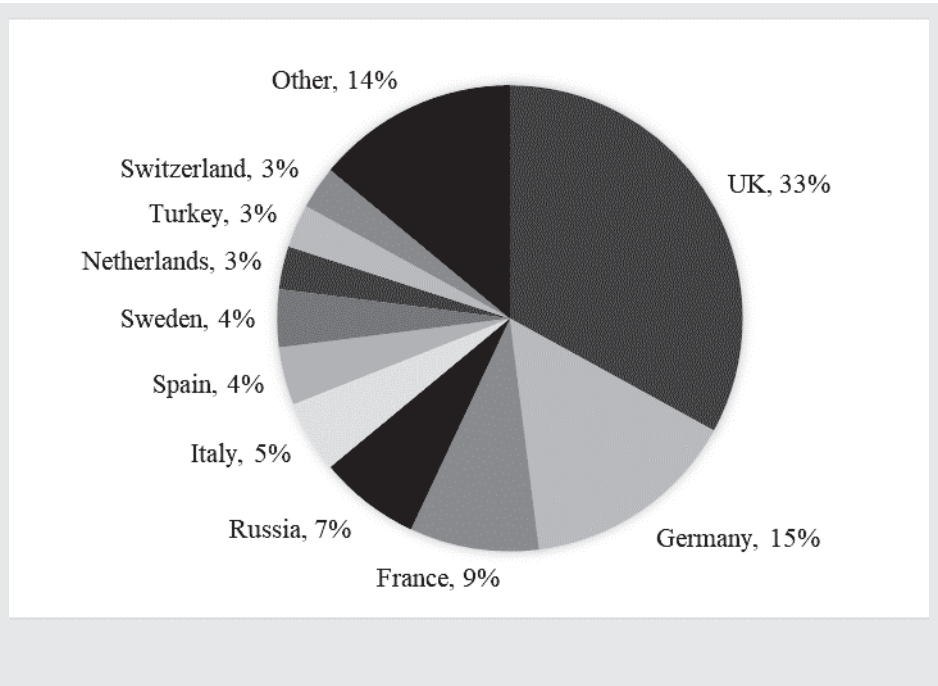
sumers in a fast-changing world, strengthening customer loyalty and creating more business.

3. TRENDS IN EUROPEAN DIGITAL ADVERTISING IN 2020

The economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the state of the global advertising industry. In 2020, a drop in advertising spend was recorded across Europe, with an average decline of 9%, and in the US by 10% and China by 8% (y/y) as the rule of thumb indicates that ad spend follows GDP growth rates (Li & Hall, 2020). Since companies faced economic challenges due to reduced business activity and a decline in consumer spending, 70% of media buyers, planners and brands have modified or paused their planned ad spend during Q1 and Q2 of 2020 (IAB, 2020b). Besides reduced budgets, changed patterns in consumer behaviour are a strong influence on advertising spending. Therefore, timely and continuous trend analysis of consumer behaviour can serve as an efficient tool for providing a proper answer to the impending changes in marketing and advertising.

Since more consumers were migrating online, particularly in countries with the strictest lockdown measures, marketers needed to change strategies and reallocate budgets to answer consumers' needs and meet them in a new environment. During 2020, social media had over 1.3 million new users daily, which amounted to 13.2% of the total growth. Moreover, practically half of internet users covered by a series of research on the global state of digital claimed that they used social media more since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, while 23% stated spending significantly more time on social media (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021). Accordingly, online streaming and time spent watching TV surged during the pandemic. Global Web Index on consumer shifts showed that more than 80% of consumers in the US and UK claimed consuming more content, principally through online videos, online TV/streaming and broadcast TV (Global Web Index, 2020). The shift in consumer behaviour and movement restriction measures has resulted in ad spend modification during 2020. Traditional ad spends dropped by 30%, while digital ad spend increased by 6%. Out-of-home dropped by 46% among traditional advertising channels, while print fell by 33%. On the contrary, within digital ad spend, paid search grew by 26%, social media by 25%, while digital video and digital display advertising grew by 18 and 15% (y/y), respectively (IAB, 2020a).

FIGURE 1. Share of European digital ad spend by market in 2020, %



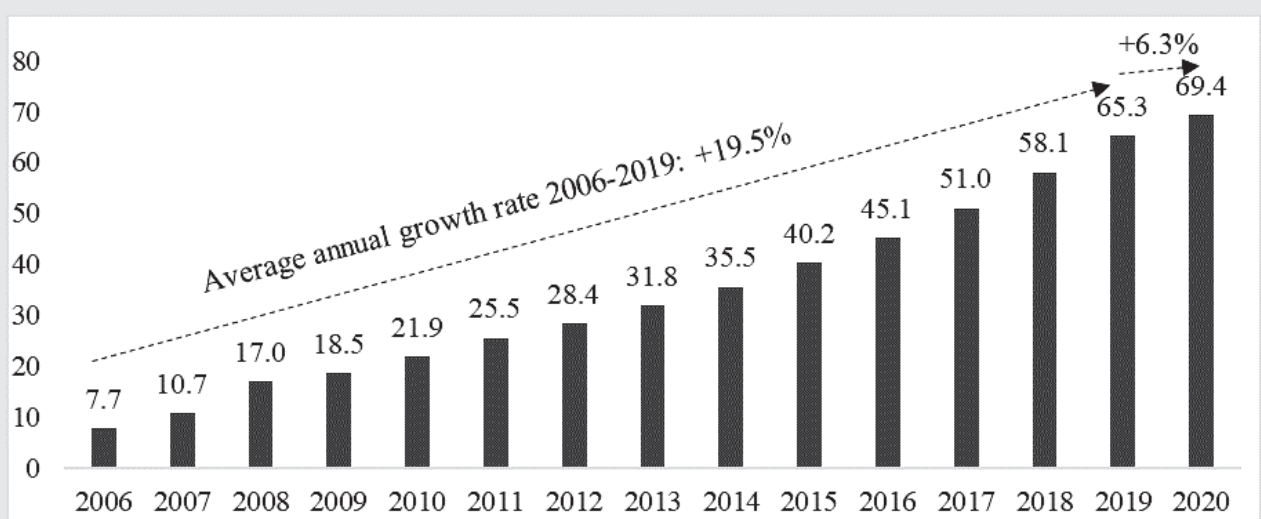
SOURCE: IAB Europe, 2021.

In order to identify the main trends in the European digital advertising market during the pandemic caused by the coronavirus outbreak, a sample of 28 European economies has been used. The following countries were included: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, Ukraine.

According to the latest data (IAB Europe, 2021), the total value of the largest three markets represented more than 50% of the overall European digital ad spend in 2020 (Figure 1).

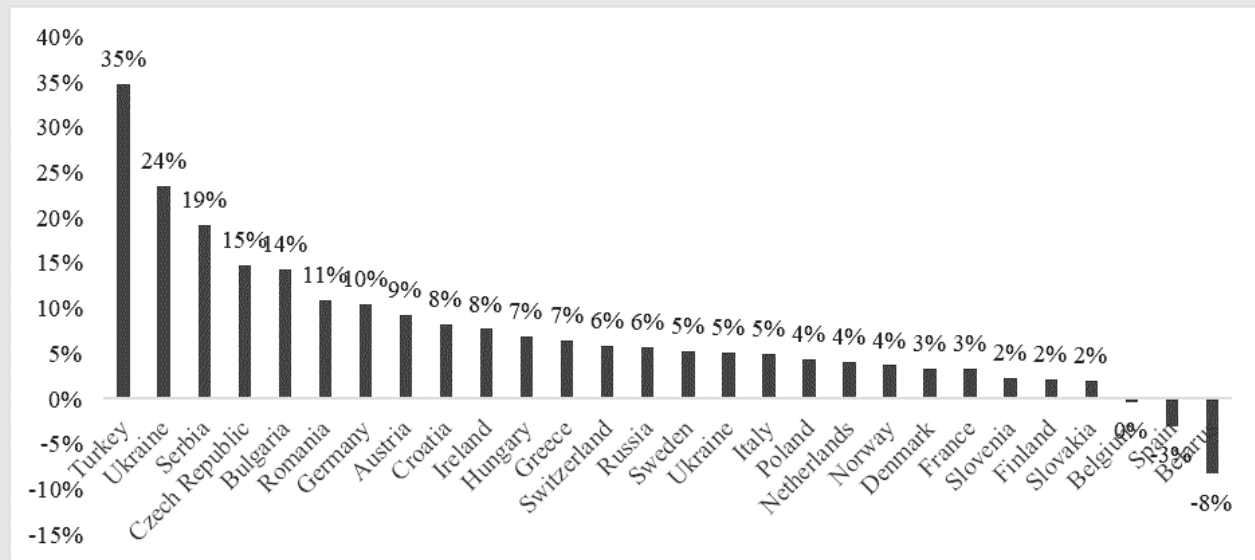
Despite the circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the overall European digital advertising market has experienced growth of 6.3% in 2020 (Figure 2). Still, this is the slowest growth that has been recorded since the year 2006 (including the period of the harmful recession induced by the Global financial crisis).

FIGURE 2. Total digital ad spend in the European market during the period 2006 - 2020, bn EUR



SOURCE: IAB Europe, 2021.

FIGURE 3. Digital ad annual growth rate in 2020, %



SOURCE: IAB Europe, 2021.

In 2020, 7 out of 28 analyzed countries faced a double-digit annual growth rate, with Turkey (34.8%) as the fastest-growing market, followed by Ukraine (23.5%) and Serbia (19.2%). On the other hand, during the first year of the pandemic, only Belgium (-0.4%), Spain (3.0%) and Belarus (-8.3%) experienced the advertising spend decline (Figure 3).

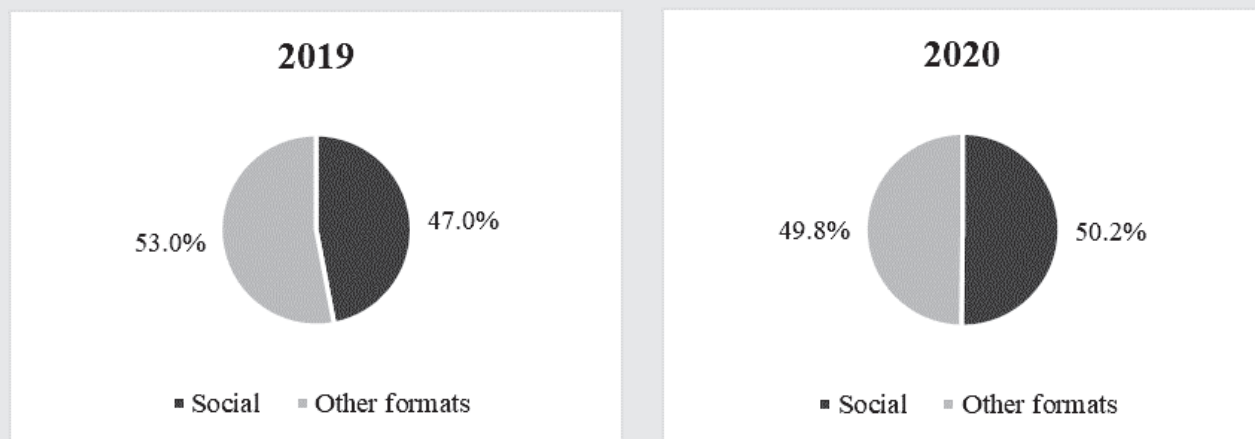
The growth of the European digital ad market recorded in 2020 differed among formats: with the rise of 9.1%, Display recorded the most significant annual growth rate, followed by Paid-for Search with annual growth of 7.8%. The total increase in Display was pri-

marily driven by video (+16.3%) and social (+15.9%), mainly due to the soar of e-commerce and brand advertising.

On the other hand, Classifieds, Directories and Affiliates recorded loss with a negative annual growth of 9.1%, mainly due to the weak job market (IAB Europe, 2021). Display represents more than 50% of the overall digital ad spend in a majority (13 out of 28) of the European countries included in the sample, with social being the main contributor (Figure 4).

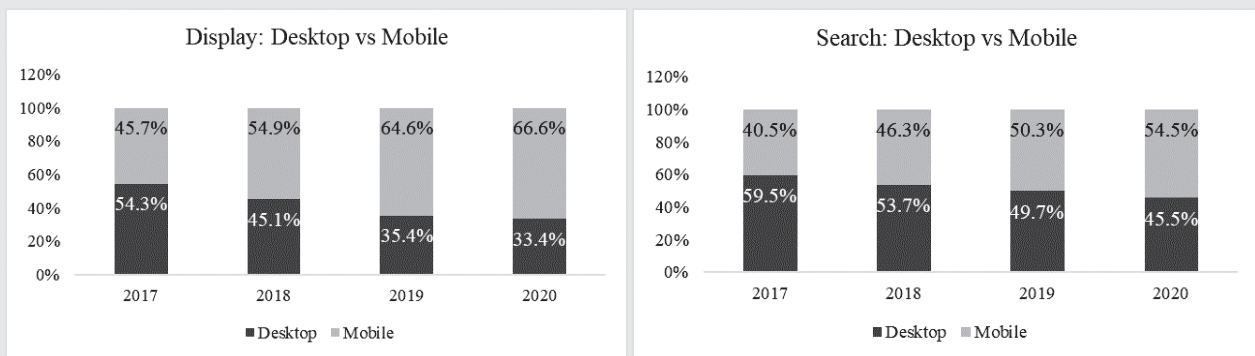
In general, social media are the most effective channels to communicate with the target audience.

FIGURE 4. Overall Display spend in Europe by formats in 2019 and 2020, %



SOURCE: IAB Europe, 2021.

FIGURE 5. Digital ad spend by device during the period 2017-2020, %



SOURCE: IAB Europe, 2021.

According to official statistics (Statista, 2021c), the average time spent on social media in 2020 amounted to 145 minutes a day.

During 2017-2020, the mobile ad spend recorded growth, whereas desktop ad spend faced a decline (Figure 5).

According to the latest trends presented, it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic has on average been managed better than expected.

4. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 TRENDS ON DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Besides e-commerce acceleration, increased focus on digital advertising resulted from the need to manage marketing and advertising budgets in a more cost-effective manner. Due to movement restrictions and limited financial resources, brands had to give up on expensive advertisements filmed in studios with considerable production value. Marketers' focus was shifted towards creative strategies, including user-generated content, real-life setting and organic distribution that implies engagement with an online following without paid promotion. User-generated content is a powerful storytelling tool that helps bridge the gap between companies and consumers (Vukmirović, Kostić-Stanković & Domazet, 2020). It creates a sense of community for consumers, motivating them to be loyal and support companies and their brands.

The idea of including consumers in digital marketing strategies was motivated by the extended time in isolation. It has made people search for ways to spend their time in a more clever way than worrying, thereby immersing in creativity and creating content. Moreover, people felt the urge to contribute to their com-

munities by sharing relevant information, supporting local businesses through social media posts or appealing to responsible behaviour. Being separated from family and friends resulted in increased digital social interactions. In order to satisfy the need for social interaction, people turned to social media platforms in search of a sense of collective belonging. Accordingly, marketers tried to make the best of the unfavourable situation the world found itself in through campaigns that call for unity and connection in uncertain times. More time spent at home provided people with the opportunity to introspect and reconsider their lifestyles, personal relationships, life expectations, and the need for personal growth and development.

Accordingly, global marketing campaigns of the world's largest brands were based on lifestyle trends accelerated by the pandemic. After „going dark“ and pausing all advertising campaigns in April 2020, as the marketing budget was repurposed for ensuring the safety of employees, customers and communities, the Coca-Cola company launched two campaigns that focus on the positive aspects of a global pandemic (Coca-Cola Great Britain, 2020). These campaigns were built to express empathy, understanding, solidarity, and support by mimicking people's real-life circumstances during the pandemic lockdown. The main idea behind „The Great Meal“ campaign was to engage real families worldwide in food preparation, as eating together has always been more than simply sharing meals. This campaign builds upon „the day when the world stopped“ and the unprecedented challenges that followed, stating that being „lost together“ was a great chance to rediscover ourselves. What's more, in the time of unforeseen circumstances when most daily life and pastime activities were banned or

unavailable, food and beverages were one of the rare certainties, therefore, providing comfort and security.

Being an industry leader in marketing, Coca-Cola's creativity undoubtedly set the tone for digital marketing campaigns. In a campaign „Open like never before“, the company focused on depicting ordinary people as superheroes, highlighting the importance of their roles as parents or educators and showing respect for some jobs which were usually underestimated. In 2020 and 2021, we witnessed many advertisements distributed online and on TV created of people's phone recorded videos or inspired by them. Accordingly, British retailer Tesco launched a social media campaign that engaged their followers to cook meals for loved ones and virtually dedicated them those dishes in videos distributed online with a hashtag. By promoting a comforting activity of cooking for those they miss and providing a platform to do so, Tesco sent a warm, caring, and empathetic message to their followers, strengthening the mutual bond and putting efforts into achieving top-of-mind awareness. German retailer Penny based their Covid-19 inspired campaign on the challenges of working from home and home-schooling. At the same time, Sainsbury's made jokes about going out of lockdown in Great Britain as visiting the supermarket will no longer be the highlight of one's day. Jack Daniel's made cheers to social distancing campaign, showcasing innovative ways of staying in touch with family and friends while being isolated in a string of user-generated footages. The Facebook campaign „We're never lost if we can find each other“ builds upon user-generated content, creating a documentary-like advertisement made of photos and videos captured and filmed by its users.

Pandemic has also brought to the surface many issues of social inequality or has made them even more severe. The polarized social and political climate has put an additional burden on companies in already challenging times. As consumers expect companies to be inclusive, more sensitive to social issues and embrace diversity, more focus has been put on changing or adapting their key messages. In practice, this approach is known as diversity marketing, which was a 2020 trend and continued to be relevant in 2021 (Hubspot, 2021). Empathetic marketing is what advertisers are expected to cultivate in the pandemic period as consumers want to see values associated with kindness and caring in marketing campaigns. In line with the challenging society we live in, purpose-driven marketing will remain relevant in the upcoming period. As its main idea is to base marketing strategy over a social cause that is in accordance with the com-

pany's fundamental values, organizations will have many opportunities to organize their promotional activities around current social, health or environmental issues. Accordingly, engaging NGOs in marketing plans and digital marketing strategies is predicted to be a 2022 trend, including product placement, affiliate marketing activities and percentage of sales donations (INC, 2021)

According to Social Media Today, predictions for 2022 and beyond regarding digital marketing show that user-generated content will rise as part of digital marketing campaigns as it increases the time spent on brands' websites by 90% (Social Media Today, 2021). Content marketing and direct-to-consumer marketing will be even more important in 2020 as consumers expect direct and personalized communication with brands who want to listen. Influencer marketing will continue to grow in 2022, reaching 15 bn USD, as marketers spend from 20% up to 75% of marketing budget on influencer content, as it is the case of cosmetics industry brand Estee Lauder (The Drum, 2021). Online events on social media will remain an activity that should be invested in during the upcoming period, as it allows direct interaction fostering and more robust relationship building while gathering data important for personalized content and best purchase experience (BetterMarketing, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic review of digital marketing trends, influenced by global trends accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, aimed to provide insights into the current state of digital and trends that are anticipated for the future period. Systematic and timely qualitative analysis of this kind is important as it provides a comprehensive insight into consumers' needs and shows how advertisers should align with their expectations. The economic aspect of this analysis depicts the current state in the advertising industry in terms of budget shares per different channels. The results of this study highlight a crucial shift in ad spending, as digital advertising took precedence over traditional media. Due to the Covid-19 restriction measures, a further drop in traditional advertising was noted as out-of-home and print advertising fell significantly.

The other aspect of this analysis concerned key trends in the tone and feel of advertising. In the unprecedented circumstances brought by the global pandemic, people searched for comfort, understanding and support. Because of social isolation, people spend

much more time online, making it an ideal opportunity for marketers to establish or strengthen mutual bonds through empathetic and encouraging messages. By introducing user-generated content to a larger extent to their digital marketing strategies, advertisers expressed more appreciation and care for their consumers. As no end to the global pandemic is in sight, it is to believe that these trends will remain relevant in the upcoming period. Even when the pandemic abates, trends from the previous period will continue to shape global marketing. Companies and brands will have to stand behind values that their consumers

find important and foster relationships based on trust and integrity.

This analysis has a few limitations, as it is based on a smaller size of publications, articles, reports and business insights. Thereby, the conceptual framework and the results of this analysis should be considered as a starting point in reviewing current and upcoming trends in the digital marketing industry. As it is the case of a fast-paced changing industry, further research should consider other aspects that influence its transformation, not just the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Apstrakt

Globalna pandemija i digitalni marketing: Trendovi i perspektive

Milena Lazić, Ivana Domazet, Valentina Vukmirović

Pandemija koronavirusa uzrokovala je probleme i značajne izazove u svim segmentima poslovanja. Izuzetak nije ni digitalni marketing koji je, iako se bazira na primeni informacionih tehnologija čime njegovo funkcionisanje nije bilo vitalno ugroženo, pretrpeo značajne transformacije. U skladu sa tim, cilj rada predstavlja identifikacija ključnih tendencija na tržištu digitalnog marketinga koje su izazvane globalnom pandemijom. U radu je analiziran ekonomski aspekt, odnosno uticaj pandemije na rast tržišta digitalnog marketinga posmatran kroz ukupan utrošak sredstava za digitalno oglašavanje na nivou 28 zemalja Evrope. Pored toga, u radu je posmatran i aspekt prilago-

đavanja marketinške komunikacije novonastalim pojavama u društvu, kao što je život i rad k(od) kuće te rastuća izolovanost usled mera socijalnog distanciranja. Rezultati istraživanja doprinose povećanju naučnog fonda iz oblasti digitalnog marketinga dajući sistematičan prikaz nastalih promena u ovoj oblasti, ali i trendova u razvoju digitalnog marketinga koji se anticipiraju u narednom periodu.

Ključne reči: *digitalni marketing, pandemija Covid-19, rast digitalnog marketinga, elektronska trgovina, digitalne marketinške kampanje.*

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