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**The role of social media in tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic**

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**Abstract**

The role of digital marketing in promoting tourism has become a necessity for businesses today, especially in the pandemic period. This high social in popularity and increasing use of social media. It is also related to the fact that the function or content that is disseminated on social media is related to the promotion of tourist attractions. The most similar tools in promoting tourism on social media are reviews, images, videos, stays of other tourists, etc. The study service highlighted the role of the media in tourism during the social pandemic period. The primary data collection tool applied in this study is the questionnaire divided into two different demographic and psychological sessions. Sample from 383 respondents. Analysis and processing of study data was done by applying the statistical instrument correlation and partial correlation. Some of the findings of the study from the demographic data: 83.3% of respondents belong to the female gender, 73.9% of the respondents belong to the age group of 20 to 30 years. The educational level of the respondents 50.1, the high level level, etc., while in the psychography data some of the conclusions are: The frequency of behavior of the respondents 86.9% is 24 times a year or on average 2 times a month. Passion of respondents on average is 3,725 out of 5. Social media that have more than 70.8% of respondents are general information media on Facebook and Instagram. While in terms of using social media to get information about tourism on average it is 3.32 out of 5. While in the results of in-depth statistical analysis some of the conclusions are: Using social media to get information about tourist attractions in the fact of doing. vacations as best as possible, also adhere to social networks in planning vacations for the future. Content of the company on social media in decisions about tourist attractions, etc.

***Key Words****: social media, tourism*

1. **Introduction**

The vicinity of have a study of the research we`ve were given finished essentially consists in exploring how information and communique generation is changing marketing and marketing withinside the vicinity of tourism. One of the most competitive areas of the Service vicinity is the tourism corporation, which requires effective manipulate of the natural, monetary and human belongings modern-day withinside the u . s .. For the development of the tourism corporation in any u . s . it is important to provide the appropriate infrastructure, decorate the tremendous of provider and boom customer satisfaction. The cause of successful marketing and marketing is to provide enough price to gain reliable long-term customers. There are exclusive sorts of marketing and marketing tools, which aim to boom customer satisfaction.

Social media has end up an important tool for corporation success nowadays. Most clients talk about corporation the usage of social media, this pushes businesses to installation direct relationships with customers. Social media marketing and marketing is the way businesses method customers. According to the International Tourism Research Centers 88% of tourism corporation representatives are actively using social media and 70% of clients believe withinside the recommendation given via social networks. Social media marketing and marketing additionally may be useful in statistics customer attitudes. The consumer of the social network has the opportunity to percentage opinions with loads of hundreds of customers about adventure destinations, tremendous of provider. This brings the want that social media need to be included withinside the marketing and marketing combo and lead customers withinside the right direction, ie towards looking for or encourage them to decorate withinside the looking for process.

1. **Literature review. Social Networks and People’s Behaviour**

Frequent use of the Internet nowadays has led to the technological process of purchasing and based on Ena Fejzagic that today's shopping behavior is often called online decision making. It is characterized, among other things, by information overload. Modern consumers are bombarded with thousands of pieces of information every day through the internet and their attention span is rapidly deteriorating. This means that the typical customer evaluation cycle is shortened significantly from a stage of multiple days or hours to minutes or even seconds, which is important for marketers to know, as traditional marketing communication strategies no longer work. Social media and internet technologies have allowed a consumer today to have access to information about products and services on a global scale. Today, consumers can type in their online search engine the exact type of product they are looking for and very quickly make their decision based on their sensitivity to price, quality, product price-value ratio, user comments, etc. [[1]](#footnote-1)

But another perspective on the mechanisms that influence online decision making was taken by Dellarocas (2002)[[2]](#footnote-2) explained that online mechanisms nowadays can change people's behavior in significant ways. Unlike a decade ago, when people based their decisions on ads or other advice from professionals, now they rely more and more on reviews or opinions posted on online systems. But basically, according to Alsubagh (2015)[[3]](#footnote-3) customers are constantly exposed to these various advertisements that try to attract the attention of individuals.

According to Kumar (2004-2005) [[4]](#footnote-4) explained that search tools are now used to search for product information before purchase, such as price, style, reviews, etc. The internet tends to be the main source of information for most customers on a regular basis and social networks allow customers to rate products, make recommendations and make status updates. This will facilitate the process of sharing ideas, opinions and their experiences while connecting with other colleagues online according to (Nolcheska, 2017)[[5]](#footnote-5).

1. **Social media and influence in the buying process**

Social media has brought a lot of influence to the buying process and according to Forbes and Vespoli (2013) where they investigated consumers who bought a product based on a colleague's recommendation or contact through social media results show that consumers are buying either very cheap items or very expensive, and are doing so based on people's recommendations. they would not consider themselves “influencers or leaders of opinion” dhe sipas Moreover, the results show a slow shift from more traditional forms of social media like Facebook to faster types of social media like Twitter. [[6]](#footnote-6) An analysis of the factors influencing purchases was conducted by Leerapong and Mardjo (2013), where they examined the factors that influence their decision to buy online through the online social network, particularly Facebook. Customers ranked relative advantage, trust, perceived risk, compliance as factors that encouraged or discouraged them from purchasing the product through Facebook.[[7]](#footnote-7) From the study of Sharma and Rehman (2012) it results that positive or negative information about a product or a brand available on social media has a significant overall impact on consumer buying behavior. Customers spread positive words through social media. [[8]](#footnote-8)

While the extent of the impact of social networks was researched by Pietro and EleonoraPantano (2012) where the aim was to investigate to what extent social networks, such as Facebook, influence the consumer's purchasing decision. They find that satisfaction is a key determinant of using social media as a tool to support a purchasing decision. They also suggest that the perception of consumer usefulness for product recommendations and suggestions on Facebook, consumer satisfaction in using the Facebook social network to search for information on products and brands, and perceived ease of use of the tools offered influence the attitude of consumers in using the system as a support tool for their purchasing decision.[[9]](#footnote-9) Also seen from the perspective of researchers around WOM (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) Themba and Mulala (2012) investigated the extent to which students at the University of Botswana engage in brand-related eWOM through social media and the effects of such engagement on their decisions for purchase. They reported that the level of brand-related eWOM engagement through social media is relatively low and brand-specific eWOM engagement in general and specifically, public opinion polling significantly and positively influences purchasing decisions.[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. **The impact of social media on tourism**

As far as holiday travel related products are of an experimental nature, their purchase is considered complex and involves high risk. Therefore, they involve extensive information search[[11]](#footnote-11).Consumers rely on the experiences of other travelers to plan vacations and reduce uncertainty. Vacation reviews online are perceived to be similar to recommendations from friends and family. 23% of internet users in the US are significantly influenced by social media for their travel / vacation decisions [[12]](#footnote-12). Social networks are becoming increasingly important in holiday planning. They are vital sources of information, providing access to the experiences of other travelers and enabling storytelling, an after-travel activity that offers a sense of belonging to virtual travel communities. Thanks Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy (2007) [[13]](#footnote-13) It turned out that online comments and ratings of websites increase travelers' confidence in decision-making. Travelers read reviews through the various stages of travel planning - before, during and after the trip. Most existing studies attempt to describe the role of social media, focusing either on a specific social media or on the impact of social media on a particular phase of the journey. There is no adequate academic research on the impact of social media on the entire travel process. In many parts of the world, social media is being considered as an important tool through which the tourism industries can promote themselves, and also have a major impact on the world of travel and tourism (Jan & Khan, 2014).[[14]](#footnote-14) Moreover, the interactivity that empowers most social media is encouraging users to share and exchange data, experiences, opinions and on products and services, in addition to enabling them to form new relationships based on the study of (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).[[15]](#footnote-15). Social networks have so far enabled and expanded the capacity of individuals to share their travel experiences with a larger audience than ever before according to (Kaur, 2017)[[16]](#footnote-16). Due to the way in which it is portrayed, social media content also creates interest especially in the form of photos and experience based on the study of (Khan & Jan, 2015)[[17]](#footnote-17). Increasing shopping activities along with the recommendations offered to internet users make social media an important tool for analyzing the attitudes of tourists. Moreover, the fruitful creation of service-oriented brands in the tourism industry means that each suggestion must be uniquely valuable in terms of a customer experience. To minimize the risks associated with making purchasing decisions related to tourism, travelers need to get a lot of data before thinking about purchasing travel-related products, which is achieved through the experimental characteristics of most purchases. of products based on the study of (Manap & Adzharudin, 2013).[[18]](#footnote-18) Businesses in the US used social media to interact with clients or customers. A Google-based data search in 2019 showed that Facebook was being used for business purposes by (70%), followed by Twitter (46%), LinkedIn (37%) and YouTube (25%) according to (Matikiti et al . 2017). [[19]](#footnote-19)

1. **Methodology**

The methodology is divided into several mechanisms such as type of study, method used, instruments for data collection, sampling, analysis and data processing. The type of study is a descriptive study because it aims to create an overview of the impact of social media on tourism. In terms of the study method it is inductive because first we collect data then we freeze theories or find connections between variables that serve the purpose of our study. The strategy of the applied method is the survey and the questionnaire instrument. The sources of information in this study are primary and secondary. Primary sources were collected through a questionnaire, while secondary sources were based on literature from different materials, mainly in search engines, such as books, newspapers, various papers, studies conducted by different researchers and the authenticity of their work was not overlooked. The instrument in this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions, where each question represents a variable and each variable constitutes a goal in itself. Some of the variables are gender, passion for tourism, use of social networks, influence of social networks for travel planning, etc. In our study we are dealing with a probability sample, which implies that each element of the population has the same choice. Regarding the sample number it is statistically representative because the total number is 384. With parameters 95% reliability level and 5% error margin with the total population of the city of Tirana 906,166 inhabitants and it turns out that the sample should be statistically representative should be 383 individuals. Subjective inductive method and Likert scale as measurement etalon were used for data processing and analysis in this study, the answers are from number 1 to 5 and each number represents an answer ranging from not at all to extremely much or not at all agree and extremely okay. Also, for a more in-depth analysis used the statistical program SPSS 24. The way of analyzing and processing the data is correlation. This method was chosen because its purpose is to test the linear relationship between 2 variables or a variable with many other variables that corresponds to the purpose of our study, The Pearson coefficient was used as a data processing tool. This coefficient serves to measure the relationship between 2 variables, this coefficient is used because we are dealing with a normal distribution.

1. **Data analysis and interpretation**

From the processing and analysis of the data it has resulted that the demographic data of the respondents are: 83.3% of the respondents belong to the female gender, the age of the respondents 73.9% belongs to the segment of age 20 to 30 years. The educational level of the respondents 50.1% is the Bachelor level. While the income level of the respondents 46.7% is 0 to 30,000 Lek. In terms of psychographic data that are directly related to the purpose of the study, it turned out that the time of surfing the Internet by 35.8% of respondents is 2 to 3 hours. The travel frequency of the respondents 86.9% is 24 times a year or on average 2 times a month. Passion of respondents on average is 3,725 out of 5. The social media most used by 70.8% of respondents are information distribution media like Facebook and Instagram. While in terms of using social media to get information on tourism the average is 3.32 out of 5. Using social media to plan vacations has resulted in an average of 3.09 out of 5. Based on the fact that using social media to make the holidays better resulted in an average of 2.92 out of 5. Based on consumer decision-making under the influence of respondents' social networks, the average result was 3.26 out of 5. Regarding the advisory role of social media for tourism, the respondents averaged 3.0 out of 5. Also, in terms of Regarding holiday planning for the future, the impact of social media has resulted in an average of 2.96 respondents. In terms of membership in tourism platforms it turned out that 88.5% of respondents are not registered. In terms of content distributed on social media it matters to respondents on average 3.25 out of 5. The attitude of other consumers affects respondents on average 3.0 out of 5. In terms of review of other respondents about tourism it resulted on average 3.7 out of 5.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | | |
| Control Variables | | | Cilat media sociale përdorni më shpesh? | Sa shpesh i përdorni rrjetet sociale për të marrë informacione për turizmin? |
| Cilës gjini i përkisni? | Cilat media sociale përdorni më shpesh? | Correlation | 1.000 | -.015 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | . | .769 |
| df | 0 | 380 |
| Sa shpesh i përdorni rrjetet sociale për të marrë informacione për turizmin? | Correlation | -.015 | 1.000 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | .769 | . |
| df | 380 | 0 |

*Table 1 Correlation of frequently used media variables and frequency of information, controlled variable is gender*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the most frequently used social media variable and the frequency of using social media to obtain information, but keeping the gender variable under control because this element can affect the correlation between the two variables. table 1 that the Pearson coefficient is -0.15. We are dealing with a strong negative correlation, this fact shows that the variables go in opposite directions, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the opposite direction. This shows that the more a social network is used the less it is used to influence the receipt of information from the frequency of use of social media, so the more often a social network is used the less influenced consumers are to obtain information on tourism, frequency of using social networks reduces the interest in getting information about tourism. Based on the strength of the bond the result obtained from the correlation occurs in a large number of cases.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | | |
| Control Variables | | | Sa të apasionuar jeni për turizmin ? | Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: |
| Cila është mosha juaj? | Sa të apasionuar jeni për turizmin ? | Correlation | 1.000 | .164 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | . | .001 |
| Df | 0 | 380 |
| Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: | Correlation | .164 | 1.000 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | .001 | . |
| Df | 380 | 0 |

*Table 2 Correlation of variables passion for tourism and the influence of social networks to decide about tourist attraction, the controlled variable is age*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the variable passion for tourism affects the variable social media help to decide about places to go for tourism, but keeping the variable age under control because this element can affect the correlation between the two variables. It results from Table 2 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.164. We are dealing with a weak positive correlation, this fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that the more a consumer is passionate about tourism the more he uses social networks to get help to decide about a place to go for tourism, so the more a consumer is passionate about tourism the more many use social networks for help to decide about places to go for tourism, so the passion for tourism pushes consumers to get help from social networks to decide for tourist places, this is related to the fact that the passion for tourism pushes them people to search as much as possible and research for more destinations. Based on the strength of the bond the result of the correlation does not occur in a large proportion of cases.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | |
|  | | Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar ti bëj udhëtimet e mia sa më të mira: | Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: |
| Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar ti bëj udhëtimet e mia sa më të mira: | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .535\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: | Pearson Correlation | .535\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

*Table 3 Correlation of variables, the impact of social networks for better vacations and the impact on decision-making for places to go for tourism*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the variable of assistance in decision-making from social networks about places for tourism has influenced the fact that the holidays have turned out to be better. It results from Table 3 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.535 which indicates that we have a strong positive correlation. This fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that the more consumers use social networks to get help deciding on places they want to go for tourism, the more likely it is that the holidays will turn out as good as possible, ie if a consumer does not use social networks for get help in deciding about tourist attractions where they want to go reduces the chances for the best vacation, so social networks help consumers not only to find the place they want, but also to find the place that the vacation results in the best. Based on the strength of the bond the result obtained from the correlation occurs in a large number of cases.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | | |
| Control Variables | | | Rrjetet sociale më ndihmojnë për planifikimin e udhëtimeve për të ardhmen : | Sa ndikim ka tek ju për të udhëtuar drejt një atraksioni turistik përmbajtja e shpërndarë në rrjetet sociale? |
| Cilat media sociale përdorni më shpesh? | Rrjetet sociale më ndihmojnë për planifikimin e udhëtimeve për të ardhmen : | Correlation | 1.000 | .313 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| df | 0 | 380 |
| Sa ndikim ka tek ju për të udhëtuar drejt një atraksioni turistik përmbajtja e shpërndarë në rrjetet sociale? | Correlation | .313 | 1.000 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| df | 380 | 0 |

*Table 4 Correlation of variables The impact of social networks on vacation planning for the future and the impact of content to travel to an attraction, the most frequently used social media controlled variable*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the content variable distributed on social networks has an impact on future travel planning. but by keeping the social media variable under control most frequently used because this element can affect the correlation between the two variables. It results from Table 4 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.313. We are dealing with an average positive correlation, this fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that the more impact the content distributed on social networks has, the more consumers will receive help from social networks to plan holidays for the future. so the higher the quality of the content distributed on social networks, in addition to the fact that it affects the choice of attractions in the present, it also affects the planning for future vacations, affects the projection or perception of individuals to go on vacation in the future. Based on the strength of the bond the result of correlation occurs, but not in a significant proportion of cases.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | |
|  | | Sa ndikim ka tek ju për të udhëtuar drejt një atraksioni turistik përmbajtja e shpërndarë në rrjetet sociale? | Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: |
| Sa ndikim ka tek ju për të udhëtuar drejt një atraksioni turistik përmbajtja e shpërndarë në rrjetet sociale? | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .390\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: | Pearson Correlation | .390\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

*Table 5 Correlation of variables content distributed on social networks and decision making for tourist attractions*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the variable content distributed on social media affects the help of social networks and consumers to decide around places to go for tourism. It results from Table 5 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.390 which shows that we have a positive average correlation. This fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that the more influence the content distributed on social networks, the more social networks help consumers to decide about a tourist attraction, so the content distributed on social networks has a great impact on consumers' decision-making about places to go for tourism. . Based on the strength of the bond the result obtained from the correlation occurs, but not in a considerable part of the cases.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | |
|  | | Sipas mendimit tuaj sa të rëndësishme janë review në rrjetet sociale për të vizituar një atraksion turistik ? | Kur dua të shkoj në një destinacion për turizëm rrjetet sociale luajnë rolin e këshillues për mua: |
| Sipas mendimit tuaj sa të rëndësishme janë review në rrjetet sociale për të vizituar një atraksion turistik ? | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .249\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| Kur dua të shkoj në një destinacion për turizëm rrjetet sociale luajnë rolin e këshillues për mua: | Pearson Correlation | .249\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

*Table 6 Correlation of variables the advisory role of networks and the importance of Review to visit an attraction*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the review affects the advisory role of social media about tourist attractions. It results from Table 6 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.249 which indicates that we have a positive average correlation. This fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that with the increasing importance of review for a consumer, the more social media play an advisory role for tourist destinations, so review on social networks has a great impact on the advisory role of social media about places to go for tourism. Based on the strength of the bond the result obtained from the correlation occurs, but not in a considerable part of the cases.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | |
|  | | Qëndrimi i turistëve të tjerë në mediat sociale për vendet që kanë vizituar ka pasur një ndikim të madh në preferencën time për të vizituar atraksione turistik | Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: |
| Qëndrimi i turistëve të tjerë në mediat sociale për vendet që kanë vizituar ka pasur një ndikim të madh në preferencën time për të vizituar atraksione turistik | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .373\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| Rrjetet sociale më kanë ndihmuar të vendos rreth vendeve ku do të shkoj për turizëm: | Pearson Correlation | .373\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
| N | 383 | 383 |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

*Table 7 Correlation of variables the attitude of other tourists and the influence of social networks to decide about places to go for tourism*

The reason for this correlation is to understand whether the attitude of other tourists influences consumers' decision-making about tourist attractions. It results from Table 7 that the Pearson coefficient is 0.373 which indicates that we have a positive average correlation. This fact shows that the variables go in the same direction, if one increases or decreases, the other goes in the same direction. This shows that with the increasing importance of the attitude of other consumers, the influence of social networks in the decision-making of other consumers for places to go for tourism increases, so the attitude of other consumers in social networks has a great impact on the role. that have social media to influence consumer decision making about places to go for tourism. Based on the strength of the bond the result obtained from the correlation occurs, but not in a considerable part of the cases.

**Conclusions**

After processing and analyzing the data, it turned out in terms of demographic data that 83.3% of respondents belong to the female gender, the age of 73.9% of respondents belongs to the age segment of 20 to 30 years. The educational level of the respondents 50.1% is the Bachelor level. While the income level of the respondents 46.7% is 0 to 30,000 Lek, these serve the description of the audience taken in the study, but also the data serve for the marketing strategy to target consumers based on demographic data and the elements that can serve for targeting consumers in the function of tourism. While based on psychographic data it has resulted that: that are directly related to the purpose of the study it has resulted that the time of surfing the Internet by 35.8% of respondents is 2 to 3 hours. The travel frequency of the respondents 86.9% is 24 times a year or on average 2 times a month. Passion of respondents on average is 3,725 out of 5. The social media most used by 70.8% of respondents are information distribution media like Facebook and Instagram. While in terms of using social media to get information on tourism the average is 3.32 out of 5. Using social media to plan vacations has resulted in an average of 3.09 out of 5. Based on the fact that using social media to make the holidays better resulted in an average of 2.92 out of 5. Based on consumer decision-making under the influence of respondents' social networks, the average result was 3.26 out of 5. Regarding the advisory role of social media for tourism, the respondents averaged 3.0 out of 5. Also in terms of Regarding holiday planning for the future, the impact of social media has resulted in an average of 2.96 respondents. In terms of membership in tourism platforms it turned out that 88.5% of respondents are not registered. In terms of content distributed on social media it matters to respondents on average 3.25 out of 5. The attitude of other consumers affects respondents on average 3.0 out of 5. In terms of review of other respondents about tourism it resulted on average 3.7 out of 5 All these data provide information about the lifestyle of these individuals based on the element that influences the marketing strategy in order to target individuals in the service of tourism and that the targeting is as effective as possible and reduces the risk of targeting the audience. wrong, these also better describe the psychological aspect of consumers, which increases the instability of targeting the appropriate audience for the field. While to better understand the audience taken in the study in function of the purpose of the study was performed correlation analysis and partial correlation has resulted that: the use of social media to get info with tourism is not related to the type of social media, scale for the passion for tourism influences the use of social media to make decisions in the choice of places for tourism. The use of social media to decide about tourist attractions affects the fact of making the best vacation, also the content distributed on social networks affects the planning of vacations for the future. Content distributed on social media influences decision-making about tourist attractions. Distributed review on social media influences the advisory role of social media, also the attitude of other consumers influences consumers' decision-making about tourist attractions.

**Recommendation**

Social media should be used as an advertising tactic for tourism because it affects the stages of the purchasing process of individuals in tourism. More specifically in the stages: Obtaining information, considering alternatives, making decisions, pre-planning stage, planning for the future and finding alternatives. In terms of attitudes of other tourists should be used as a form of advertising if the digital marketing strategy is chosen with social media tactics to promote tourism because they have an impact on individuals to visit a tourist attraction. Review should be used as a form of advertising if the digital marketing strategy is chosen with social media tactics to promote tourism because they have an impact on individuals to visit a tourist attraction. Also the content disseminated on social media should be as influential as possible to individuals to visit a tourist attraction. If the digital marketing strategy is chosen with social media tactics to promote tourism, social media should be chosen for the dissemination of information because they are used more often by the audience.

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**Impact of Covid-19 on economic security of the republic of Kosovo**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the economic security of the Republic of Kosovo. COVID-19 pandemics has led to unprecedented collapse of world economy, followed by the supply and demand disruptions, fall in commodity prices, reduced manufacturing output and disrupted operations in global value chainsThe state of affairs known as the COVID crisis began in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the COVID-19 virus first appeared. As the virus progressed, the Chinese started establishing quarantine and de facto prohibiting people from moving. The first country in Europe to declare quarantine was Italy, on March 10, 2020. After Italy, other European countries did the same, and so did the Republic of Kosovo as well. The introduction of lockdowns has led to a decrease in economic activity, followed by a decline in gross domestic product across the EU. The COVID 19 pandemic was an unprecedented event that led to government lockdowns and quarantines, disrupting the global supply chains, and acting as an external shock to international markets. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kosovo’s real GDP trickled down by 8.8 % by the end of the second quarter, the biggest drop of the quarterly Kosovo GDP in existence. The pandemic has had the most significant impact on transport, food processing, and service industries such as shops, cafes, restaurants and accommodation and tourism services. In terms of security, the pandemic is primarily a public health problem with long-term repercussions on the economic welfare of the Republic of Kosovo.

***Key Words:*** *COVID-19, Republic of Kosovo, economic security, GDP, lockdown.*

1. **Introduction**

Limited physical interactions, self-social distancing, and various official measures against COVID-19 pandemics affected all segments of the industry.

Numerous studies are describing the change in consumer behavior and structural outcomes of this crisis. At the end of 2019, a yet unknown virus called SARS-CoV-2 appeared in the Chinese  
city of Wuhan. Scientists quickly determined that it is, in fact, a new strain of the previously  
known virus, which was also first found in China in 2002 (Ropac et al., 2020). The severe  
acute respiratory syndrome virus was first found in Guangdong Province, China, and spelled  
severe or atypical pneumonia. Among the first infected people was a chef from the city of  
Shenzhen, who worked in an exotic restaurant that mainly served wild animals. The main  
symptoms of infection were: muscle pain, fever, cough and fatigue (Kuhar and Fatović-  
Ferenčić, 2020). SARS-CoV-2 virus mainly spreads in three ways, namely by sneezing,  
coughing, and speaking. Due to the rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the World Health  
Organization declared it as a pandemic threat on 11 March 2020. The first case of infection in the Republic of Kosovo took place on March 27, 2020. After the first case, sporadic cases of SARS CoV-2 infection were still occurring, but a more severe form of the pandemic affected the Republic of Kosovo in the second half of April 2020 (Ropac et al., 2020). It is appearant that the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic virus is not only a health problem, but also a problem tightly connected to safety and economic sustainability. According to Bilandžić (2021): "the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health and medical problem, but above all a security one, a matter of national and international security" (Bilandžić, 2021, p.17). In the case of the Republic of Kosovo, the COVID-19 virus pandemic presented the biggest challenge since the Homeland War took place.  
The aim of this paper is to explore how the pandemic affected the economic security and  
prosperity of the Republic of Kosovo. Hence, the aim of this paper has also been incorporated into the research question, which asks how the pandemic affected the economic security of the Republic of Kosovo and how these influences can be absorbed. The scientific contribution of this paper is reflected by providing an extensive elaboration of how one infectious disease can paralyze the whole world and affect all segments of society: from economy to security.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used when writing the paper itself, combining existing literature’s views with own evidence. The first part of this paper will tackle the terms of economic security and the context in which the COVID-19 pandemic operates in. In the second part, health impacts of the pandemic in the Republic of Kosovo will be given insight to, following with more extensive economic analysis of the pandemic’s impacts in the part three and finally, the paperwill be finished with asummary and conclusory remarks.

1. **Economic security**

The concept of economic security is a relatively recent area of study and was not incepted until after the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, greater attention was focused on traditional concepts of security and less on the economic security issues. With the end of the Cold War, there came a complete redefinition of the concept of security. The main reason was the collapse of the USSR and the victory of liberal democracy and market capitalism. Thus, states were no longer competing on the political-ideological front, but on the economic one. The latter asking: which state can prosper the most in the then-modern framework of a market economy (Dent, 2010)? Economic security can be analyzed in one of two possible ways. The first is the so-called micro-level way, which encompasses the economic security of individuals, households, the local community, with its main task being the survival of these entities. The second, also dubbed the macro-level, deals with entities that must be capable of conducting foreign economic policy, and these are national states (Dent, 2010). The fact that the concept of economic security has gained importance is evident from the Clinton administration's 1997 report. One of the main goals of the Clinton administration was to increase American economic prosperity by means of increasing the effective use of diplomacy and armed forces (Dent, 2010, p. 235). The aforementioned concept of economic security is no longer a matter of just one of the "new sectors", say, for example, the al Qaeda's attack on the United States. According to the work of Bilandžić (2019), the Al Qaeda terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon cost the USA somewhere between $300,000 and $500,000. Moreover, direct financial losses from the terrorist attack amounted to nearly $100 billion for the US making the States lose nearly 1.8 million jobs in the process (Bilandžić, 2019, p. 197-198).

The current economic crisis was initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also served as both a healthcare and an economic problem in the States too. After the discovery of the virus in China in early December 2019, the virus spread very quickly to neighboring countries, with Thailand (Džidić, 2021) among the first ones to be infected. The first detected case of SARS-CoV-2. Virus in the Republic of Kosovo dates back on 27 March 2020. The person who brought the virus was returning from a trip to the Italian province of Lombardy, namely the city of Milan.  
The crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic significantly differs from the causes  
of previous historic crises, namely the Great Depression of 1929 and the economic crisis of  
2008. It is worth mentioning that no crisis so far has affected the whole world so quickly and  
left behind a deep decline of activity in almost all economic sectors (Čavrak, 2020).

The Covid crisis, unlike other crises that have hit the world, contains as many as four shocks. The first shock developed on the supply side, the second shock on the demand side, the third  
shock was defined by a sudden decline in expectations and a rise in uncertainty, and finally the fourth shock being the so-called “shock of bad measures”. The economic crisis caused by the coronavirus has not bypassed the Republic of Kosovo either. The cause of the Kosova’s corona crisis was contributed exclusively to the incidence of the COVID-19 disease, but more with closure of all economic activities. After the first case in the Republic of Kosovo was detected, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo introduced an immediate lockdown. A lockdown implies a suspension of production and free movement of people, the halt of most of the financial and commodity flows, as well as closure of all state institutions. After the lockdown was introduced, the economy suddenly stopped breathing and began to generate losses. The reason for this is very simple, because, and citing Šonje and Kotarski (2020): "the economy is woven from a fine weave and once it is interrupted, reconstruction takes time". In other words, economies are very vulnerable to sudden shocks and once the normal economic flows are disrupted, it takes time to get things back on track (Šonje and Kotarski, 2020). Also fractious is the figure cited by the Kosovo National Bureau of Statistics (2020), that "Kosova's GDP is 5.3% lower in real terms in the 2020 year compared to last year’s levels and also the biggest drop in real GDP since the measurements were first made" (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). More insight into the economic impact of the virus on the Republic of Kosovo will be given in chapter four.

**2.1 Securitization of COVID-19 virus pandemic**

As stated earlier, with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the notion of security was  
redefined. Along with that, a new framework for security analysis was created within the  
Copenhagen School, which, in addition to military security, adds in environmental, economic, political and social elements of security (Emmers, 2010). In addition to redefining the concept of security, two new concepts were also added: securitization and desecuritization.

The concept of securitization can be defined as follows: "Securitization is a process of adding a security significance to a particular issue or occurrence", while desecuritization means: “when a particular issue arises, taking away security significance from the said issue" (Emmers, 2010, p. 134). In addition to the processes of securitization and desecuritization, the Copenhagen School also developed a model of referral facilities. According to the latter, socalled referential objects define what is considered to be existentially threatened and has a legitimate right to survival according to Emmers (2010, p. 134). In other words, the referential object can be the state, that is, the military security of the state, state sovereignty, or political security, the survival of the national economy or economic security, and/or the security of people or the community under the term of social security (Emmers, 2010). The securitization model defines three ways in which an issue can be utilized, politicized, or securitized. The term of non-politicization of an issue means that the issue is not subject to state action or is not discussed publicly. If a particular issue or phenomenon is politicized, it means that the issue or phenomenon will be the subject of debate within the political system, and that the issue or appearance in question will be addressed by the state itself. If a particular question or phenomenon is securitized, it means that it is marked as a security problem and that it poses a threat to the referrer of the object. This issue or appearance is also to be dealt with by securitization enforcers, namely the government, the military, the political elites, or the civil society (Emmers, 2010). If a particular issue needs to be securitized then, according to the Copenhagen School, the process should be carried out in two stages. The first stage serves to present that there indeed vincing the audience that something is a security threat. This audience is most often made up of politicians, state officers, citizens, and/or other elites and it is crucial for them to convey the message that the clerks of the facility (in this case the state), is at risk and that urgent measures are necessary in order to stop it (Emmers, 2010).  
Securitization of infectious diseases is not a new thing and has incited in the past. For  
example, on 10 January 2000, the United People's Security Council declared HIV/AIDS a  
threat to international security (Bilandžić, 2021). The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had an impact  
on three different safety concepts: namely human security, international security and national  
security. In terms of human security, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is directly suited to millions of  
lives a year worldwide. The consequence for international security is reflected in the fact that  
it endangers members of the armed forces who are actively involved in peacekeeping  
operations. In national security terms, the HIV/AIDS pandemic undermines the ability of the  
armed forces to perform their function due to a high rate of HIV/AIDS infections (Elbe,  
2010). An estimated 40 million people worldwide are infected with HIV. Furthermore,  
according to Elbe (2010), certain African countries’ national infection rates exceed one third of the adult population. The securitization of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Kosovo began with the formation of the so-called crisis headquarters of the Ministry of Health on the 03th of Prill 2020, which was tasked with managing the COVID-19 virus pandemic. That the COVID-19 pandemic has been suitably securitized, is evident from the  
decision of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Kosovo to restrict all travel  
inside and outside of the home country. In addition to restricting free movement, the  
Government of the Republic of Kosovo had also suspended on-site classes at all universities,  
primary, and secondary schools, as well as suspending preschool education.  
The Kosovos Civil Protection Headquarters also decided to suspend public transport in the  
Republic of Kosovo as well as ceasing operations of shops supplying food . The  
introduction of these restrictive measures is a kind of precedent for liberal-democratic  
societies, because it strips away their most important elements, the matters of individual  
freedom. The reason for such restrictions lies in the fact that one affected person can infect, n  
average, two to three people. In order for securitization to succeed, the securitization actors  
mainly used persuasion techniques. With this technique, they had to convince the public that  
the clerks of the facilities in this case would, in fact, be the health of the citizens. In addition  
to persuasion techniques, they also used the language of endangerment to further justify the  
introduction of extraordinary measures. Whether the securitization of COVID-  
19 virus in the Republic of Kosovo was successful or not is also told by the fact that the vast  
majority of citizens adhered to the measures. The aim of securitizing the COVID-19 virus  
pandemic was not to restrict people's freedom, but to prevent even more damage that could  
have been caused by the spread of the disease. Infectious diseases not only bring security and  
health risks, but also pose a threat to the economy as a whole. After the pandemic ends, its  
consequences will be felt for many years to come. A key take away from the incidence of the  
pandemic itself is the fact that such diseases are a persistent and serious danger and that as  
much work should be done in their prevention as possible.

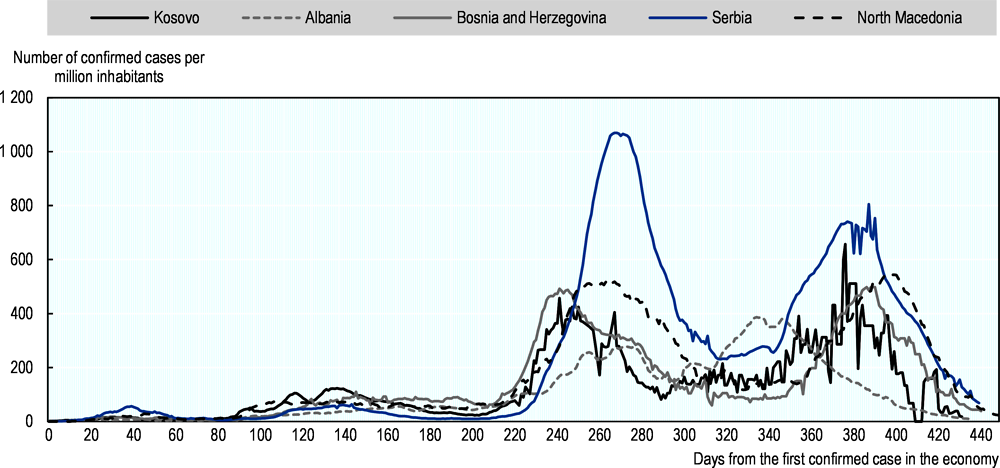
**3. Impact on the health system of the republic of Kosovo**

After the general notification of the Crisis Staff of the Ministry of Health about the  
declaration of the epidemic and the mobilization of all health workers, a large number of  
notifications arrived daily about the manner and organization of the work of health institutions. In order to speed up the flow of information and consultations with employees,  
various ways of communication have been established - by phone, by internet and over social  
networks.  
It was necessary to establish new separate COVID 24-hour clinics for triage examinations  
of patients suspected of COVID-19 along with active telephone lines to communicate with a  
large number of worried people. In addition to the COVID clinics, a number of swab  
collection points were set up for testing for the virus. (Healthy Ministry Kosovo, 2020.)  
Fast and efficient communication has enabled the prompt dissemination of information  
on the movement of pathogens and monitoring of the effectiveness of various models and  
approaches in combating the disease they cause. In Kosovo the timely discovery of the first  
few cases of the virus along with the simultaneous introduction of isolation and self-isolation  
measures played truly decisive roles in battling the virus. The latter was followed by the  
introduction of broader quarantine measures, such as restriction of free movement, assembly  
and operation of shops. (Kuhar and Fatović-Ferenčić, 2020.).

**Kosovo has experienced four waves of the pandemic.**Kosovo reported the first case of COVID-19 on 13 March 2020. On 17 March 2020, the president signed a decree to call a state of emergency.About three months later, there were around 1 500 cases (500 cases per million inhabitants) ([Figure 10.1](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0314c10c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/0314c10c-en#figure-d1e41725)) and about 30 registered deaths (16 per million inhabitants) ([Figure 10.2](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0314c10c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/0314c10c-en#figure-d1e41770)). Like most of the region, Kosovo has hitherto experienced four waves of the pandemic. On 26 May 2021, Kosovo counts an accumulated 103 599 cases and 2 176 registered deaths (55 312 cases per million inhabitants and 1 162 registered deaths per million inhabitants, on average). The fatality rate in Kosovo (around 2.6 registered deaths per 100 cases) is, however, higher than in other economies that have been more affected by the virus, namely Serbia (around 1.0 registered deaths per 100 cases).

**Evolution of Covid-19 cases in the Western Balkans**

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million inhabitants, rolling seven-day average

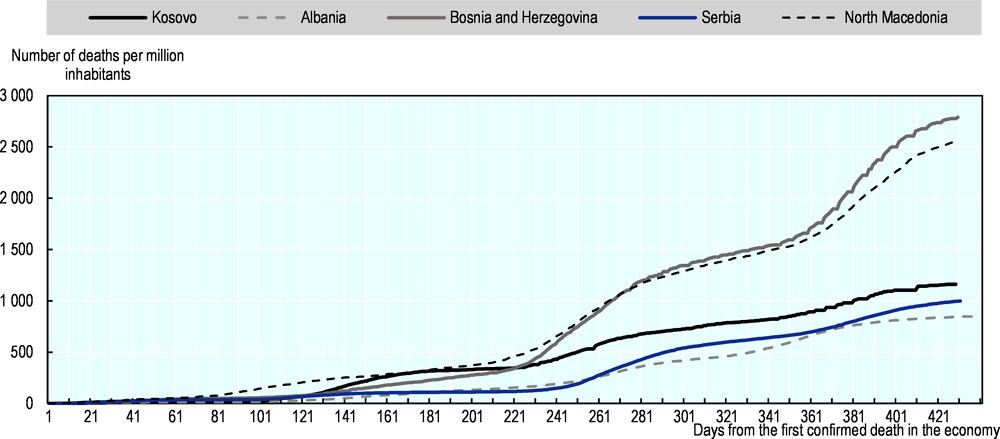


*Note:* Kosovo reported its first registered COVID-19 case on 13 March 2020.

*Source:* Authors' calculation based on Our World in Data (2020[1]), Our World in Data website, <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

Figure 10.2. **Registered deaths per million inhabitants in the Western Balkans**

Cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million inhabitants

  
*Note:* Kosovo registered the first COVID-19 death on 22 March.

*Source*: Authors' calculation based on Our World in Data (2020[1]), Our World in Data website, <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

On March 16, 2020, according to the recommendations of the National Civil Protection  
Headquarters and the Kosovo Institute of Public Health, a new way of working in primary  
healthcare practices began. The new way of working included, according to the  
recommendations of the Crisis Staff and the Kosovo Institute of Public Health, major  
changes in the organization of family medicine. Firstly, patients had to order examinations by  
telephone or e-mail before arriving at the office with the family doctor deciding on the  
urgency of the examination. Secondly, a triage, if needed, was to be performed at the  
healthcare organization’s entrance. Thirdly, a short stay of one patient per team was allowed  
in the waiting room. Only after the treated patient leaves the waiting room, the next can enter  
the premises of the Health Center. Next, it was highly recommended that patient examination  
takes no more than 20 to 30 minutes, which is enough time for targeted examination and  
implementation of surface disinfection measures, as well as ventilation of the room until the  
next ordered patient arrives. If a patient was vitally endangered, the triage provider at the  
entrance contacts the family doctor who then performs immediate examination. Also, patients  
suspected of having a COVID-19 infection during the telephone consultation should be  
referred for prior testing in consultation with an epidemiologist. If the received test result is  
negative and the patient still has respiratory symptoms and fever, they will be examined in a  
separate isolated room, with the obligatory wearing of protective clothing including masks,  
gloves and goggles (visors) and if further processing of the patient is deemed necessary, it is  
recommended to contact the service to which the patient needs to be referred (X-ray,  
laboratory) and arrange an appointment beforehand. If the smear test is positive, the protocol  
for COVID-19 positive patients then follows, whether it be in the Clinic for Infectious  
Diseases Dr. Fran Mihaljević or at the patient’s home.

Simultaneously with the introduction of the triage mode of operation during surgeries, a  
separate COVID-19 specialized clinic was also established. Very quickly, as part of the clinic, nasopharyngeal swab test were introduced in a new and more efficient, so-called “drive-in” form (Nakić, 2020).

Due to the application of even stricter measures of distancing, procedures and  
examinations in healthcare institutions were called off. The system was quickly "locked up"  
as at the time, the most important thing was to stop the disease spreading. The repurposing of  
one hospital in Prishtina, namely Clinical Hospital Prishtina, as a hospital for the treatment of  
patients with coronavirus allowed other hospitals to continue operating as regularly as  
possible given the circumstances caused by the pandemic’s incidence. As the epidemiological  
situation began improving, all parts of the hospital were gradually opened, and instruments and devices intended for the treatment of COVID-19 patients were slowly repurposed to their  
original function, and with additional working hours, delayed procedures were quickly  
compensated. As for today, the current epidemiological situation in the Republic of Kosovo is deemed satisfactory, although the real danger of the virus still exists according to the Kosovo Legal Centre.

The differentiation between healthcare systems during the coronavirus pandemic was best  
seen in the number of respirators available in a state, which were of utmost importance as  
some cases became so severe that respirators were essential to keep the patient alive. Kosovo,  
which overcame the crisis quite well, was equipped with mere 800 respirators, i.e. one  
respirator per 2,500 inhabitants. Some richer EU countries had a lot more. Germany, for  
example, was providing about 25,000 to 82.8 million inhabitants, meaning one respirator per  
3312 inhabitants. France has a population of 67 million and has had roughly 7,000 respirators, meaning one in 6.500 inhabitants as stated by the Kosovo Legal Centre.  
Timely coordination of the Ministry of Health, the National Defense Headquarters, and  
regional patient care centers was one of the key elements of success in the fight against  
coronavirus. The health system quickly adapted to the new situation and adapted continuously during the epidemic to respond to all the challenges that the disease presented. All that led to Kosovo having a relatively small mortality and virus incidence rates.

Kosovo Health Ministry ensures the payment of health services in full for the  
entire health care related to COVID-19 disease. These costs are related to the three basic  
fractions: treatment, sick leave and testing. In addition to the listed costs, there are also the  
costs of procuring respirators, adjusting the space for the treatment of Covid patients and  
opening makeshift hospitals.

1. **Impact on the economic system of the republic of Kosovo**

Kosovo's economy was heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020 Kosovo's economy recorded a contraction of 6.9%, mainly due to declines in consumption, especially diaspora-related exports of travel services and investments.

Macroeconomic data: Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Kosovo’s economy contracted by 5.6% in the first nine months of 2020 (cf. 4% in 2019). The Kosovar diaspora has strongly supported domestic consumption; workers' remittances increased by 18% compared to 2019 and stood at 13.6% of GDP. The drop in GDP was somewhat mitigated by a fall in imports of goods and services (13.5% y-o-y). • Fiscal data: Kosovo has allocated roughly EUR 570 million for economic recovery efforts in 2020, and an additional EUR 200 million in support to the private sector was allocated through the Economic Recovery Programme in December. There is no effect on exchange rates as the country is unilaterally euroized. In January-November 2020, budgetary revenue fell by 10.3% y-o-y with income from direct and indirect taxes contracting by 9.5% and 10.8% y-o-y, respectively. This outcome is considerably worse than the revised budget assumption of 5.2% annual revenue contraction. The eleven-month general government deficit reached EUR 83 million (4.9% of projected annual GDP) while in 2019, over the same period, it had a surplus of EUR 243 million. • Budget: The draft 2021 budget was prepared before the adoption of the additional package of EUR 200 million and does not fully take account of its fiscal implications. The full implementation of the package is thus likely to lead to a budget revision during 2021. The adopted 2021 budget foresees a deficit of 4.7% of GDP (according to the fiscal rule definition). Tax revenues are projected to increase by 7.2% y-o-y while total spending is set to decline by 6.3% y-o-y.

The government announced a range of stimulus measures amounting to 2.8% of GDP to support affected citizens and businesses. Government transfers to households went up by 38% (World Bank, 2021[2]).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Table 10.1. Policy measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic | | |
| People | Businesses | Other measures |
| * Cover pension contributions for the next two months for those who benefit from the minimum wage of EUR 170. * Suspend all verification requirements for pensions. Those with a pension of less than EUR 100 will receive a temporary EUR 30 top-up. * Cover monthly wages in April and May by an amount equivalent to the minimum wage. * Extension of the deadline to fill and pay tax liabilities and pension contributions.   Payments of up to EUR 130 for April, May and June to citizens who lost their jobs due to the public health emergency. | * Financial support for companies in financial difficulties because of a decrease in activities: 1) cover monthly wage expenses up to EUR 170 for April and May (EUR 41 000 000); 2) subsidise leases up to 50% of the value of the lease for SMEs for April and May (EUR 12 000 000); 3) cover the value of pension contributions for wages for April and May (EUR 8 000 000). * Interest-free loans to public enterprises in financial difficulties due to the public health emergency to ensure their temporary liquidity (EUR 20 000 000) * Support to exporters (EUR 10 000 000). * Financial support for commercial companies that hire employees with an employment contract of at least one year during the public health emergency, covering EUR 130 of employees’ salary for the two months after the employment registration (EUR 6 000 000). * Loan guarantees by the state benefiting private borrowers.   Financial liquidity ensured for: 1) microenterprises and the self-employed through financing by the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, amounting to up to EUR 10 000 for 24 months (EUR 15 000 000); 2) commercial/authorised companies that provide basic services (similar to those of public enterprises). | * Increase the budget for grants and subsidies for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development to increase agricultural production (EUR 5 000 000). * Provide extra financial support to affected municipalities (EUR 10 000 000).   Increase the budget for grants and subsidies to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports due to the impact on sports and cultural activities (EUR 5 000 000) |

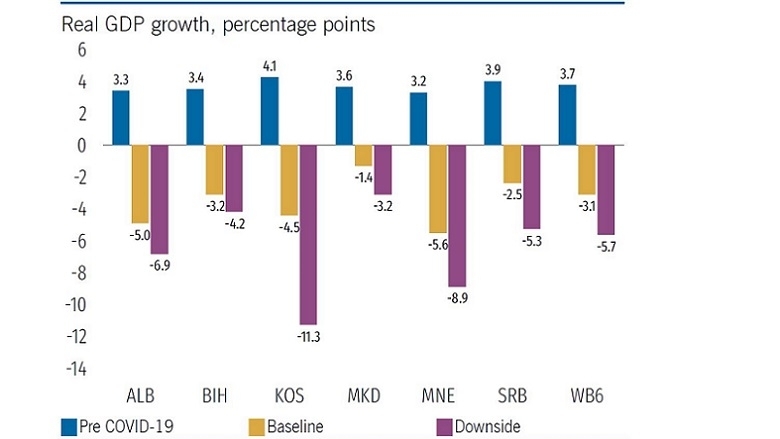
*Source:* OECD (2020[3]), “Covid-19 Policy Tracker”, webpage, [http://oecd.org/coronavirus/en/#country-policy-tracker](http://oecd.org/coronavirus/en/).

**Kosovo’s economy was heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis.** In 2020 Kosovo’s economy recorded a contraction of 6.9%, mainly due to declines in consumption, especially diaspora-related exports of travel services and investments. Government support, mainly surprising surges in both remittance receipts and exports (the latter among other causes due to higher demand for Kosovo’s nickel), helped avoid a deeper recession (World Bank, 2021[2]).

**Kosovo’s relatively sound public finances can help in taking measures that attenuate the impact of COVID-19.** Kosovo entered the crisis with some fiscal buffers and has considerable fiscal space to mitigate the effects of the crisis. Gross public debt accounts for around 18% of GDP, compared to an OECD average of 66.4% ([Table 10.2](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0314c10c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/0314c10c-en#tablegrp-d1e42053)). The government announced a range of measures in response to the crisis. In addition to the deferral of tax payments, it set up an emergency response package worth 2.8% of GDP. Despite sound public finances, the likely large revenue shortfall, combined with this fiscal stimulus, is expected to widen the budget deficit in 2020 (World Bank, 2020[4]).

The outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased government spending, especially with regards to the purchase of goods and services. There has been an evident, increased spending to address supplementary needs and shortfalls of the health care system in municipalities, especial l y the demand for medical e q u i p m e n t a n d d i s i n f e c t a n t s a s preparedness for responding to an outbreak of COVID-19.The economic implications of COVID-19 in Kosovo have caused problems across many business sectors as they have in many parts of life. At the start of the pandemic in March Kosovo, like other countries in the region, adopted very severe measures by completely shutting down the private sector for almost two months. These measures were reasonable for the time, considering that the alternative might have found the health system unprepared for overload by COVID-19 patients, which would have been very costly in human lives.

**Real GDP Growth, Two Scenarios for 2020**



The recession in all Western Balkan countries will be driven by a significant drop in both domestic and foreign demand during the pandemic. Travel restrictions and social distancing measures have a particularly protracted impact on tourism and services, the latter accounting for around 50 percent of total employment in five countries in the region and 75 percent in Montenegro. Supply-side disruptions and lower demand further affect many manufacturing sectors, while liquidity constraints and acute uncertainty stifle investment.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Kosovo was worth 7.61 billion US dollars in 2020, according to official data from the World Bank. The GDP value of Kosovo represents 0.01 percent of the world economy.

For Kosovo, the report projects that the economy will contract by 4.5 percent in 2020, followed by a rebound in 2021. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the necessary containment measures are putting investment, private consumption, but also exports and remittances from the diaspora, under unprecedented strain. While consumption may rebound as the economy recovers, service exports and investment will take longer to recover. Against this background, public revenues will experience a significant shortfall. Because Kosovo entered the crisis with some fiscal buffers (high government deposits, relatively low public debt), it now has some fiscal room to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, albeit limited by the concurrent growth of current expenditure. However, a prolonged outbreak and containment measures may lead to a more severe recession and a larger revenue shortfall, further limiting the fiscal space for policy response. In addition to a general deferral of tax payments, the caretaker government has rapidly taken action and announced an emergency response package of about 2.8 percent of GDP to support affected citizens, businesses, and professions. Adequate targeting for those most in need remains crucial in softening the immediate economic, poverty, and social impact of the crisis. It will be important to maintain some fiscal space to be able to provide additional support if the crisis lasts longer and to support the necessary economic recovery.

According to the World Bank, Kosovo is expected to have negative growth of 8.8% in 2020, with the most significant impact in diaspora-driven service exports. investment, and private consumption. A deeper economic decline will be prevented by the increase of remittances from the diaspora and base metal exports, which are continuing to grow.1 Kosovo’s economic growth of around 4.4% in 2019, and similar growth in previous years, was based mainly on consumption and public spending. While public spending has been hit by reduced collection of taxes due to business inactivity, consumption has suffered a smaller impact for several reasons. First and foremost, public sector wages are a large contributor to consumption, with almost 30% of the total jobs in Kosovo being in the public sector, where average wages are considerably higher than in the private sector.

The impact of the crisis, in addition to affecting healthcare, has also had a profound effect  
on the economic system itself. Most countries, in order to protect the health of their residents,  
have opted for a lockdown despite its negative impacts on economic activity and growth. On  
top of that, it directly threatens the survival of the more vulnerable businesses. That is why  
employers have started thinking about laying off employees in order to rationalize their costs.  
To avoid such scenarios, many countries implemented some form of either direct or indirect  
economic aid to try to uphold the sustainability of both the employers and the employees.  
On April 2, 2020, European Commission proposed to establish “The temporary Support  
to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)” program to be implemented on  
September 22, 2020. The program’s main goal was to provide support and protect the  
employees and the self-employed against the risk of unemployment and loss of income, while  
also preserving their jobs. The financial support was mostly provided in the form of loans  
granted on favorable terms from the EU to their Member States. The program itself holds a  
budget of €100 billion and by May 25, 2021 it has approved a total of €94.3 billion in inancial support to target 19 Member States. As Kosovo is no, a member of the European  
Union, it has received a total of €190 million in financial support (European Union, 2021).  
In Kosovo, the Government has adopted many measures to help the economy. One of  
which is financial payment support for preservation of jobs that ranges from EUR 170 to a  
maximum EUR 250 per month, per employee if the required prerequisites are checked.  
These conditions refer to the health of a business, for example that the business employs more than 10 employees and has a drop in income by more than 40% compared to the previous year or that it has been forced to close down as part of its efforts to curb the spread of the virus (International Monetary Fund, 2021). As can be indicated, this financial support, along with a decline in budget revenues and some unpredictable financial expenses urged Kosovo to take up on new public loans consequentially increasing its total indebture.

When comparing the COVID crisis to the financial crisis of 2008, it is obvious that a  
hybrid health-driven crisis such as this one can prove to be far more serious than an  
exclusively economy-related one.

The real estate crisis has had a number of long-lasting negative economic consequences  
and it took almost six years for Kosovo’s economy to get back on track after it. That could  
have been partly contributed to the country’s sluggishness and unwillingness to interfere in its economic affairs. On the other hand, the Corona crisis was a bit different as the country  
decided to interfere almost immediately with measures aiming to stimulate consumption and  
economic growth. That is why it has evaded potentially catastrophic repercussions that could have arisen from such devastating drops in GDP. The corona crisis is also much more complex than a “regular” economic crisis because it affects the healthcare system, too. Due to that, many scientists and economists must collaborate to navigate successfully through it with as little negative consequences on health and economy as possible. As time goes by and the Government does not do anything to interfere with existing health measurements, the number of infected along with the mortality rate would both begin to rise, but the economy itself would not decline as much . In that case, there would not be any lockdowns or restrictions and the economy would operate as usual . In the other case, if the Government were to interfere with existing health measurements putting the highest priority on people’s health, there would be much less infected and the mortality rates would be much lower, but the economic recession would be significantly greater.

A country’s economy is a highly complex mechanism and only time can tell which  
approach did a better job at tackling and battling the crisis from all of its standpoints as well  
as which of the chosen approaches is generally more efficient: restrictions for the preservation  
of people’s health or actions taken with the focus on economic welfare. The onset of the  
COVID crisis has most certainly taught one thing: all business sectors are vulnerable, no  
matter in which country they operate. The world has become a pseudo-unified global “place”, and one country’s decisions usually effect other countries, too and sometimes even more than  
that, the entirety of the world itself. Taking into consideration everything previously  
mentioned and explained, it is crucial to develop and define effective mechanisms to fight  
with economic, health, and any other crises while investing efforts to minimize negative  
consequences.

**Conclusion**

With the end of 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, causing acute respiratory syndrome, appeared  
in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Although the virus appeared on a whole other side of the  
planet, due to globalization, it had quickly spread across the world causing a global health  
crisis with huge impacts on global economic security. The Republic of Kosovo was not an  
exception with the first case of infection recorded in Prishtina, on March 13, 2020. Due to the  
rapid spread of the disease, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared a state of pandemic. Kosovo  
had established a crisis headquarters and securitized the Covid threat. To save the lives and  
health of its people, the Government opted for an approach using the public communication of  
endangerment and persuasion before introducing a full lockdown. New COVID 24-hour  
clinics were established along with various informational lines to communicate with  
distressed people. Despite of all the preparation, the virus had succeeded to spread and in 2020, 35,000 people were affected, while around 950 deaths were registered. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis, in addition to affecting the healthcare systems all over the globe, has also had a profound effect on the economy and economic sustainability. Kosovo’s real decrease in GDP  
flunked by an astounding -5,7% in 2020, the biggest drop since known data. Various  
financial aids were being introduced and provided to various crisis-affected businesses and  
due to the leaping increases in the country’s expenditure, its total debt had increased  
substantially and at the end of September 2021, total debt reached Euro 1,682.89 billion and had amounted to 23.34% of GDP. Despite the intensive increases in the country’s borrowing and the sudden aggressive onset of the virus, with the Government’s implemented measures and the people’s accordance to them, the Kosovo National Bank projected an almost unexpected 7,1 % GDP growth for 2021.

Finally, the COVID crisis began as a mostly health-related one affecting one single  
country (China), and has since quickly turned into a full-blown comprehensive global crisis  
encompassing both elements of an economic downturn and a health threat. For that matter, it  
is essential that both scientists and economists collaborate in order to successfully navigate  
through it in order to minimize negative consequences on both the general health and the  
economy and to find new ways of adapting and preparing for future threats. The COVID  
crisis is a valuable lesson that is sure to enhance global security and country risk mitigation  
standards everywhere.

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**Marketing challenges for women economy during pandemic era**

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**Abstract**

There exists a general increase in women unemployment in the recent years, due in part to the pandemic COVID 19 and to the previous global economic downturn. Women unemployment in rural parts is much worse than in cities and in the coastal belt. *More women than men have lost the jobs during pandemic and earthquake*. There has been a slight increase in the numbers of women living in poverty, especially in rural areas, pushing younger women to move away to the cities. Although education rates have improved for girls in all age groups, still women face more barriers to access the labour market and to be self-employed. In precarious and worsened conditions of getting through the market, women are inventing new ways to challenge the difficulties in marketing their working skills and professional abilities. Tourism is becoming a new venue for economy in recent years and has seen a steady rise towards all year. For women living in rural areas, agritourism has turned into promising opportunity for economic development. During pandemic era their production kept increasing slightly, but not sufficiently. Rural women need significant investment to develop agritourism. Public transport restrictions and transport related cost affect women mobility to access markets outside the villages. Management of asset continuity and marketing of the agricultural products remain a challenge in front of rural women economic activity.

***Key Words:*** *women, rural, Covid-19 pandemic, marketing, economy*

* 1. **Introduction**

The agricultural sector is the largest contributor to the rural economy. Despite the inefficient management of the sector, about half of the population lives in rural settlements and is mainly engaged in agriculture. Agricultural sector employs 36.4 percent of country active labour force. However, this trend tends to decrease, as the rural population is shrinking, compared to the urban one. Farmers use the land mainly to meet daily needs and only a few of them engage in greenhouse farming. Despite high productivity and very favourable climatic conditions for agricultural development, the pandemic has recently impacted the regular economic activity of women in rural areas for almost two years, causing considerable damage to the economic resources.

In Albania, women make up the most of agriculture workers (41.4% versus 31.8% men), and they contribute 5.43 hours unpaid work to the family welfare, while men contribute only 2.6 hours a day. Women are double charged with family work, such as dual work (for agriculture activity and domestic chores) and dual care (for family members and livestock), having no time for education and employment. The unpaid contribution to their family leaves women outside the labour market, with limited access. Women participate less than men (men 66.9% versus women 52.3%) in paid jobs. Women run 25 percent of the farmer activity, although representing the highest share in agricultural work. Even when heading the agricultural activity as entrepreneurs they are invisible and often called as “farmer’s wife”. Their identities are ignored, and they get no credit for the work. Women’s gainful engagement in the rural economy is hindered by limited participation in knowledge of, and access to information on agricultural technology, which also negatively affects their ability to access financial resources. In 2020, the agricultural sector employed 41.4 per cent women[[20]](#footnote-20), however, women represent only 7 per cent of farm owners. Rural women have limited access to subsidy schemes and extension services, since entitlement is based on being officially registered as a “farmer”. Few are working in fish processing industry on daily basis.

* 1. **Agritourism as a venue for rural women**

Tourism is a growing economy sector. Before pandemic spread, in 2019, tourist flow increased by 8, 1 %, with archaeological parks being the most visited sites (39, 9 % of visitors), while during pandemic the trend was in decline. In cultural heritage sites, 55% of visitors are foreigners usually from Europe[[21]](#footnote-21). Natural landscapes and rural areas provide opportunities for the development of rural tourism, ecotourism, and outdoor activities. Coastal tourism during summer is focused mainly on activities close to beach areas, as well as short visits to several coastal protected zones. The narrow coastal belt, which represents 11.78% of the overall surface of the Republic of Albania, is inhabited by 1/3 of the total population (36.3%)[[22]](#footnote-22). The coastal zone of Albania has already shown itself to be sensitive to the nature of perturbations that are expected from climate change. Climate changes are expected to affect the agricultural activity in lowlands as well as dwelling centres and infrastructure[[23]](#footnote-23). Evidence of climate change is recorded during flooding of previous years when the coastal area was inundated[[24]](#footnote-24). Currently approximately 80% of tourists visiting Albania are concentrated in the coastal area and in the capital Tirana.

As tourism sector is steadily growing, women participation in tourism economy is increasing. Despite contribution, women suffer endemic structural barriers towards entrepreneurship such as lack of access in land, forestry, and pastures. Without ownership of assets, women cannot access credits, extensions, and technological services*,* what in turn affects their ability to sustain their families and manage other natural resources that lay the foundation for sustainable production system, as well as deepens their exclusion from participation in development projects, extension work/ services and policy-making processes[[25]](#footnote-25). Official data show that less than 5% women are registered as owners of agriculture land, however 60% of unpaid informal workers in agriculture sector are women, and 7% of women are owners of business farmhouses. Care provision conflicts with income generating activities. Women are responsible for household tasks and care for children, elderly and the sick while at the same time they have to secure food, provide clean water, household energy and run income generating activities[[26]](#footnote-26). Pandemic has put additional burdens to the double and triple burdened women, working in the tourism sector as they have to afford the adversary impact of change while concomitantly caring and working to escape poverty trap. Previous disasters, provoked by climate changes, such as the floods have had a disastrous impact on the lives of women[[27]](#footnote-27).

The agritourism sector had a steady growth trend during the recent decade. In economic terms, the contribution of tourism has been increasing since 2013. In the tourism sector, women are employed for preparing food and looking after rooms and restaurants hygiene, cleaning and washing. Women working in the hotel/culinary service are paid low wages and no insurance from employees (the hotel owners). The service sector is poorly paid, and women do not benefit from their contribution in tourism sector, although the unparallel work dedicated to it compared to men. Men are in contact with clients and benefit more from payments, while women are in the backstage and have no direct contacts with clients.

Globally, one in three employed women works in agriculture, while in Albania, one in two active women work in agriculture[[28]](#footnote-28). The vast majority is not formally recognized and cannot benefit from social protection and pension schemes. Most of them do not own the land and do not have access to credit schemes to become economically independent. Because of that, they are more prone to falling into poverty and exclusion**[[29]](#footnote-29)**. Tourism is one of the most important activities and instrumental for women development in rural areas. Because of the natural advantages, the rural area has a great potential for tourism development. The geomorphologic, biologic, and climatic characteristics offer several kinds of nature recreational assets in rural sites. The riches and diversity of cultural, culinary, social, and spiritual characteristics offers wonderful potentials for tourism and recreation[[30]](#footnote-30). Women in rural areas have access in natural resources and can use them to the benefit of economic sustainability[[31]](#footnote-31).

* 1. **Pandemic impact on rural women**

The COVID-19 global pandemic has caused a massive disruption in the global economy, especially the tourism and hospitality industry [[32]](#footnote-32). Women reported a decline in incomes resulting from the crisis, with growing concerns of rising unemployment and declining demand for products even after the crisis. The pandemic reduced the chances for financial mechanisms to support women to run small and medium enterprises or to continue running the existing enterprises either by easing collateral or other eligibility criteria, extending moratoriums on loans, or providing subsidies to continue. The existing financial schemes were underused due to the low level of women awareness about existing financial schemes and scarce initiatives at the district and local levels to attract investors attention on these schemes. The local government units could not establish or implement COVID-19 recovery policies to help women economic activity bounce back and build back better. Although the pandemic offered a unique chance to utilise the digital platforms, rural women, invested in agritourism did not benefit from appropriate technological infrastructure and digital platforms to promote online sales. Rural women could not advocate solutions and work with partners including government and private sector to focus on alternate livelihood creation or adapting existing livelihoods to help bounce back from the crisis.

The impact of Covid-19 was often borne by rural women and girls who were already held back by gender and economic inequalities as well as deeply engrained social norms. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, women report that the time spent on unpaid care and domestic work increased significantly and has nearly doubled, extending to 6 or more hours a day[[33]](#footnote-33). The closure of schools and the care for children and the elderly demanded more of women’s time at the household level. Care provision and domestic chores have consequently increased the women’s burden of unpaid domestic work, alongside a decrease in income from the paid work hours.

Young women faced severe economic hardships, with less than 5% of women receiving paid leave[[34]](#footnote-34). The closure of non-essential businesses had an immediate impact on tourism sector, leaving many women without job. Even employed and self-employed women faced economic destitution being paid fewer hours. The coronavirus confinement measures significantly increased unpaid domestic and care work. The burden of the domestic “invisible work” was carried out by women who continued to perform the bulk of household chores and care work. On average, half of employed women in tourism sector reported a decrease of earnings from employment, while two-thirds experienced a loss of income from farming[[35]](#footnote-35). Economic activity after COVID-19 experienced strong adjustments, which sometimes caused traditional activity to stop or alter operations in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The shifting of economic activities caused an immediate surge in unemployment. The biggest decreases were registered in income generated from farming and agritourism.

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**Digital marketing during Covid-19 and the post-pandemic strategies**

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**Abstract**

One of the most significant events of the decade could be the Covid-19 pandemic. During the first days of the outbreak, all sectors seemed to be freezing. In their article, He and Harris stated that “*Changes to the marketing environment and the marketing landscape forced organizations to develop a strategic agility pre-, during-, and post-pandemic.*” (He & Harris, 2020) This paper aims to answer three important questions: (1) What were the marketing challenges during the pandemic? (2) What opportunities brought Covid-19 for digital marketing? and (3) What marketing strategies do businesses aim to develop in the post-pandemic reality? The methodology of this article uses a descriptive qualitative approach by analyzing various literature on marketing. The findings in this study showed that the era of digitalization played a role in the development of digital marketing, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The pandemic gave rise to the need for businesses to switch their activities online. Companies need to be prepared for any similar crisis that may occur in the future and switching to online activities is just one of the effective strategies in any case.

***Key Words:*** *Challenges, Covid-19, Digital Era, Marketing Strategies, Opportunities, Post-Pandemic*

* 1. **Introduction**

Maintaining a high customer base through marketing may be one of the most significant challenges for a business in times of pandemic. The dynamics of Covid-19 indicated that with the “new normal”, most traditional marketing practices were no longer effective (Khudhair, Alsaud, Alsharm, Alkaabi, & AlAdeedi, 2020). Technology, from the very beginning, brought a new era of implementation and development of marketing practices. Advances in technology are moving fast and despite Covid-19 it is impossible to stop progress as innovative methods and modern marketing tools are developing by leaps and bounds (Afanasyeva, Grishakina, & Pokrovskaia, 2020). In his article with topic “*Digital Marketing*”, Sawicki defines Digital marketing as “exploitation of digital technologies, which are used to create channels to reach potential recipients, in order to achieve the enterprise’s goals, through more effective fulfillment of the consumer needs (Sawicki, 2016)”. Durmaz and Efendiouglu indicated in their study “*Travel from Traditional Marketing to Digital Marketing*” that digital marketing aims to serve customers as quickly as possible and expects guidance from customers instead of trying to change their perception like traditional marketing (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

Analyzing the impact that Covid-19 had on the marketing sector the author of this paper highlights challenges and opportunities marketing faced during pandemic. During the research, the author has identified various marketing strategies companies need to adapt not only for their reputation maintenance after Covid-19 but also, retaining the base of consumers gained during pandemics.

* 1. **Literature Review**

The aim of literature review is to observe and analyze relevant research literature that has a significant connection with the topic our paper brings to the reader. There have been many authors who have studied the effects that the pandemic caused to marketing. During the research, the author has traced some studies to be considered worthy of reference.

In their report in 2020, “*Albania e-Commerce Diagnostic*”, World Bank indicated that almost 20% of surveyed Albanian firms have either started or increased online business activity during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and close to 55% of Albanian survey respondents report having increased their use of online shopping since the start of the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). This report gains special importance as it studies the Albanian market compared to regional and beyond regional peers. In this report, the World Bank showed the importance of the online market in overcoming traditional barriers to trade and economic development. Moreover, they highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the use of online shopping. Their report contributes to giving recommendations helping Albania better leverage the opportunities associated with digital trade.

Another study that has addressed similar topics related to this paper is the work of Jyoti Gogia and Sawan Nanda (Gogia & Nanda, 2020). Their paper, “Digital Marketing: Significance and Trending Strategies During COVID-19”, is initially focused on the significance of digital marketing during COVID-19. They discuss some trending digital marketing strategies and recommend the companies to see the benefits and opportunities that digital channels can offer. According to their study, the adaptation of digital marketing strategies may become part of companies long-term marketing contingency plans.

In another study, in their paper “*Marketing in the era of COVID-19*”, authors Janny C. Hoekstra and Peter S. H. Leeflang discuss the effects of COVID-19 on consumer behavior and elaborate on the consequences of this disruption for marketing strategies and marketing policies (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020).

* 1. **Research methods**

In this paper, the author has used a qualitative descriptive approach by studying the literature that has had as its main focus the impact of Covid-19 on marketing.

3.1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the challenges and opportunities that Covid-19 brought to digital marketing during the pandemic and what are some of the best strategies that companies should adopt after the pandemic.

3.2. Research questions

This paper aims to answer three important questions:

(1) What were the marketing challenges during the pandemic?

(2) What opportunities brought Covid-19 for digital marketing? and

(3) What marketing strategies do businesses aim to develop in the post-pandemic reality?

3.3. Data Collections

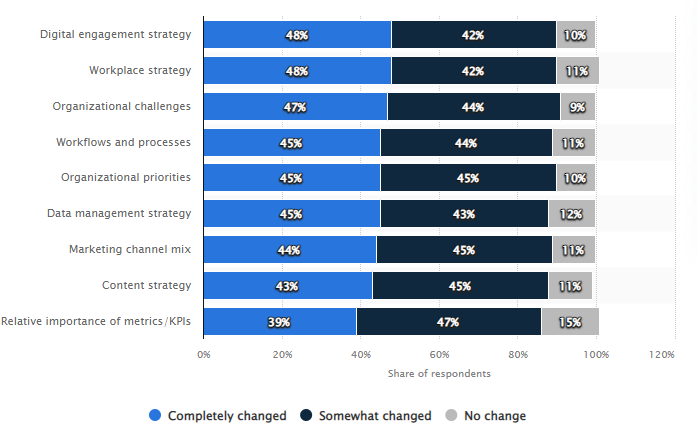
The data used in this paper are secondary data. These data are received from online journals, newspapers, reports and books. While processing these data through the descriptive method, the author has drawn analysis over the indicators that affected marketing during Covid-19.

**4. Limitations**

This research is limited only to secondary data. Research has not gone into more depth and detail on digital marketing opportunities, challenges and strategies, only focusing on collecting sources of information from newspapers and journals related to the topic. This paper does not refer to the case of Albania.

**5. Results of Research**

Many companies had started the adoption of new innovative marketing strategies before the pandemic outbreak. During a 2021 survey among 8,227 marketers worldwide, 48 percent of respondents said their digital engagement strategy and their workplace strategy completely changed since before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (fig.1) (Statista, 2021).



*Figure 1: Changes in marketing strategies due to Covid-19 Source: Statista*

In the early days of the pandemic, businesses faced the immediate suspension of physical operations. Although this closure was temporary, new strategies had to be thought out and implemented as soon as possible. In their publication, McKinsey & Company highlighted that the establishment of two-week sprints as the standard working speed of agile marketing was too slow for the world as it was then (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

**5.1 Challenges faced by marketing during the pandemic**

5.1.1. Changes in consumer behavior

The resulting lockdown caused people to have managed with an extent of changes in their activities. One of the consequences caused by the lockdown was “...the extreme increase in the usage of Internet and social media” (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Companies that did not operate online before the pandemic had to shift some of their activities online to adapt to the changed consumer behavior. In their article “*The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy*”, He and Harris stated that “Changes to the marketing environment and the marketing landscape forced organizations to develop a strategic agility pre-, during-, and post-pandemic*.*” (He & Harris, 2020)

5.1.2 Audience engagement

As most businesses shifted their activities online, for some it was a challenge to attract new consumers because of the trust they should gain (Kelly, 2020). Maintaining consumer engagement through making engaging digital content and virtual environments was a challenge for marketers (Ayush & Gowda, 2020).

5.1.3 Online advertising

For some businesses, adapting new marketing strategies during Covid-19 was an added cost due to lack of experience. Time was tight and certain skills had to be learned quickly. Businesses that had previous experience in online advertising had an advantage over those without experience, as the implementation of this strategy required time and money.

**5.2 Opportunities Covid-19 brought for digital marketing**

5.2.1 Changes in consumer behavior

“Consumers vaulted five years in the adoption of digital in just eight weeks*.*” (McKinsey & Company, 2020) According to UN research, during Covid-19 pandemic, Internet user ranks grew to 4.9 billion in 2021, from 4.1 billion in 2019 (Chen, 2021). As per McKinsey & Company research “*A global view of how consumer behavior is changing amid COVID-19*”, many consumers say they plan to continue shopping online even when brick-and-mortar stores reopen (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

5.2.2. Rise of audience engagement

During Covid-19, consumers and companies increased the communication between each-other through digital media, which on the other hand, was not possible in case of traditional media (Gogia & Nanda, 2020). As a result, this provided an opportunity for marketers to capitalize on and better connect with their customers through various online channels (Ayush & Gowda, 2020).

5.2.3 Online advertising

The effect that Covid-19 pandemic had on the Online Advertising Market was positive (Mordor Intelligence). Online population and streaming was increased as people became more attracted to online portals and social networking sites (Mordor Intelligence, 2021). Companies gained a great quantity of customer engagement on their digital media channels through online promotion.

**5.3 Marketing strategies for the future**

5.3.1 SEO Optimization

Given the fact that most business activities were shifted online this automatically increased the competition in the online market. To have a competitive advantage in the online market it is important to optimize search engines. SEO makes a business site more visible, and that means more opportunities to convert prospects into customers (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). Consumers are inclined to contact businesses that appear first in their search engines. If this advantage is combined with the quality of product and the trust of consumers, then you will be invincible.

5.3.2 Online Advertising

As life is returning to normal, businesses need to maintain all the online reputation they had during pandemic (Ayush & Gowda, 2020) so, they should find the best online advertising stories to retain the current consumers and attract new ones. On their report “*Online Advertising Market | 2022 - 27 | Industry Share, Size, Growth*”, Mordor Intelligence definedonline advertising as a marketing strategy adopted by various organizations, which involves using the internet as a medium to obtain website traffic, and target and deliver marketing messages to the right customers(Mordor Intelligence)*.* In their report on October 2021, they stated that “the Online Advertising Market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 14.3% over the forecast period*.*” (Mordor Intelligence, 2021)

5.3.3 Social Content Creation

Media consumption has changed, as consumers were spending more time online. Consumers are too emotional by content they see on social media and consumer decision making is currently driven purely by self-interest and emotions, such as fear, anger, and anxiety (He & Harris, 2020), so *“*in order to keep the customers engaged, a business needs to convey the message that they are either doing good for the community or sharing content that makes people feel good.*”* (Arzhanova, Beregovskaya, & Silina, 2020) Rather than focusing solely on the maximization of stakeholder profit, businesses revised their mission and values towards more society orientation during the pandemic (Gigauri & Djakeli, 2021).

5.3.4 Multichannel

Pandemic gave rise to the need of switching activities online and companies with their own online channel had a competitive advantage compared to stores that used to operate offline. According to their research, Hoekstra and Leeflang indicated that “applying a multichannel strategy that combines online and offline channels, performs better in terms of share of wallet” (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). For many consumers, the physical examination before the purchase remains a priority (Aryani, et al., 2021), but the pandemic highlighted the need for online operating for both consumers and businesses. Shopify announced on their website that total revenue for the full year 2021 was $4,611.9 million, a 57% increase over 2020 (Shopify, 2022). This is an indicator that businesses are considering e-commerce as users are familiarized with this technology more after the pandemic. According to a recent study by Statista, over 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide in 2020 and this number is projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025 (Statista, 2022). This statistic should serve businesses as an indicator to consider social media as a primary channel for promotion, advertising and brand creation.

**Conclusions**

Impact of Covid-19 on digital marketing is positive for most of the part. Going forward in the future, the marketers have to maintain or improve on the current digital opportunities in order to retain the customer base acquired during the Covid-19 period. So, they should work on strategies focusing on increase of the business online presence through e-commerce, online advertising and social media. A company should combine online and offline marketing as there are consumers that prefer to examine physically a certain product. Regardless of the marketing strategies that may be suggested, every business should choose to implement those strategies that it deems appropriate and consistent with its activities, budget and interests.

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**Marketing challenges and strategies during pandemic era**

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**Abstract**

In this new era of competition, companies are deeply and relentlessly researching the management of marketing strategies to protect and expand their market position. The unexpected changes brought about by the crisis caused by the Covid-19 virus pandemic have transformed the approaches of a number of organizations in order to adapt to change and survive in the new already "normal" conditions. In this new era, the first task of organizations in dealing with pandemic challenges was survival. For those with clear visions and concrete strategies, the initial feat brought them prosperity. The skills to deal with the crisis by creating smart strategies, clear and harmonized vision for the future, digital transformation and proper use of human resources within this crisis have shown many results. This paper provides answers to certain questions that have plagued and continue to plague businesses for a prosperous exit from the crisis.

***Key Words****:* *Smart Marketing Strategies, Covid-19, buying dynamics, digitalization, human capital.*

1. **Introduction**

Dealing with the crisis imposed the creation of clear visions, but also strategies on how to deal with the uncertain. Organizations and leaders do not know what will happen tomorrow, but they can imagine what they want to create and then to find a way to get there.

Marketing is process of creation, communication, delivery of products and services in exchange of money.

In this current time of COVID-19, marketing becomes a mode for establishing a goodwill in the minds of customers/clients. This pandemic hit the whole economy at large and it has changed consumers buying patterns as they become more dependent on virtual tools than physical modes. At this point, the marketers will have to adopt new-age tools to keep in touch with their customers in this social distance time of COVID19. New age technology is game changer during this difficult time of lockdown as it has been solving numerous problems of sellers as well as of buyers. So, marketers/businessmen are shifting from physical modes to digital modes for fulfilling customers demand during this lockdown time.

1. **Theoretical framework. Defining the concept**

Organizations are facing incredible changes that create rare opportunities to refresh their own reorganization and restructuring strategies. Because everything has changed and the customer attitude, consumers, and regulatory factors and the whole business environment organizations must find and apply tactics that will help them reshape their future.

How the great addiction versus the addiction in the corona crisis encourages coercion organizations to work in new ways through reorganization in terms of who they are, how to work and how to grow. Clear goals, focused teams and quick decision making significantly replace the corporate bureaucracy. That's why business leaders need to keep looking forward without looking back. The question for personal identity, strategies, roles, personal share, leadership and how it works are screens for carrying important decisions faster and better in order to have a deep understanding of the client.

**Research discussion**

***Need of reinventing marketing strategies***

Number of surveys have been showing that customers have adopted new buying behaviour with changed routine and habits during this pandemic period. Consumers are searching for new gadgets/products such as Virtual meetups, blogging, DIY video applications, google meet app, other online platforms for study/entertainment/job/business etcetera. Change is indispensable as we all are at a critical inflection point where all businessmen have to take rational decision as it creates new economic or business dynamics. So, everyone has to avoid impulsive decisions and act according to current situation.

There are numerous marketing strategies that introduced by marketers to cope up with this drastic situation of virus. Such as, these smart strategies will explain one by one in upcoming parts of this paper as under as:

1. Concerning appeals or campaigns strategy – in this toughest time of COVID-19, millions of companies reanalyzed their marketing techniques by creating inspiring or concerning appeals to its target audience. So, it’s a high time for companies to show empathy for customers health and safety by showing great amount of concern about their lives during this pandemic. Entrepreneurs are understanding customers emotions and feelings at this sensitive time of corona virus, that is why they are prioritize customers safety rather than seeking profits. New appeals are requesting customers to stay safe by staying indoor.

Many companies is appealing customers to not come out of their houses by adding new slogan of

“Stay safe stay home” which showing concern of safety.

2. Redesigning logo strategy- one of the smartest actions that companies are taking during this pandemic is about changing their existing logos in sake of COVID-19. Top most companies are redesigning their logos with a view to promote social distancing mask wearing, sanitized hands and so on. Numerous brands have come up with creative ideas to spread the message of safety of customers through their innovative logos at the time of public health crisis.

3. Virtual events strategy - digital modes are most preferable ways to stay in touch with customers during this time social distance. So, companies are using online platforms to listen customer grievances as well as for informing them about their upcoming launches and this all becomes possible because of incredible technology. Most of companies are hosting virtual events through their apps to connect with large audience at a time and it’s a need of hour to reorganize customer base via online meetings or virtual events during this pandemic period.

4. Social media marketing strategy- social media has been playing a vital role for businesses to survive and grow during this crisis. During lockdown period, people tend to spend more time on social platforms than usual time to get rid of boredom due to same routine from couple of months. So, entrepreneurs took great advantage of these platforms by adding more and more people from all corner of the world during this pandemic. Companies become more agile and updated their social media to connect with audience as majority of people are available on these sites like, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Skype.

5. Discounts or other schemes strategy- people are facing financial crisis due to lockdown which makes people jobless or number of people shut their business due to no sale from last some months of pandemic.so, companies come forward in this tough time to show some gestures of help of their customers and numerous companies are offering heavy discounts, Zero Cost EMIs, free shipping, free installation etc. all these moves are incredible in this crisis period. Moreover, it is best way to attract new customers and retain existing customers during this COVID-19 period.

The implementation of technology in the processes of organizations during the pandemic did not require perfection, but quick adaptation to change. It was necessary to look for solutions that would give them enable smooth functioning of organizations, acceptance of digitalization as a priority and adjusting the conditions.

We must admit that even before the pandemic, technology was inevitable a useful tool for working with a number of organizations that provided flexibility in relationships and process transformation and automation. However, the spread of the corona virus has encouraged everyone organizations to seek creative digital solutions so they can continue to function and be in touch and serve their customers.

**Conclusion**

The pandemic has more than ever highlighted the inequality and inadequacy of systems. Also, refocuses strategies towards the fundamental values ​​of human life, human capital and existence. Now is the time to invest in the most precious thing: human capital. Now is a time when organizations need to accept digitalization as a necessary challenge. Now is the time to which adjustment to change needs to be made much faster than ever. Now is the time to risk should be seen as a challenge, when proactive visions and strategies need to be created, when thinks in a way how to prosper in new conditions of a new time. Labor itself offers thoughts that are key to a better future, activities that organizations need to consider for to create a clear and flexible vision, so that they can be properly reorganized by prioritizing digital processes and the necessary skills of employees to make those processes work as well taking steps for proper operational recovery. The perception of possibilities during the pandemic, in some organizations will remain as lasting opportunities for survival and prosperity in the future.

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**The role of emerging digital marketing in the success of businesses in Tirana region**

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**Abstract**

Identifying customer needs, wants, and opportunities and strive to meet these expectations, is the goal of marketing. With the change of lifestyle, with the advancement of technology in general, has arisen the need to design new marketing strategies. Electronic marketing, which is advancing very fast, has made it possible to reduce costs in the case of marketing activities, as well as to manage in real time, product or service promotion. Nowadays consumers have changed their habits even in terms of digital equipment, where most of the time they are online on social networks or utilizing E-Search engines to get the information they want. Dissemination of information is usually done across multiple channels, such as Google, YouTube, Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and on many other channels or platforms. The Internet enables us to advertise quickly worldwide, to all who are interested in our products or services. Although electronic marketing is one relatively new field, it has witnessed significant growth and development in recent years Marketing activities are being transferred very quickly as a result of the use of technology information and networking technology. From all what was said above during this paper we will conclude that the use of electronic marketing is the most effective form of a successful business. The purpose of this paper is to study the impact of electronic marketing on businesses in the region of Tirana, as an important tool for both traders and consumers. The whole idea of ​​the paper is to conduct a research to identify and analyze the condition of e-marketing in various businesses and enterprises in the Tirana region.

***Key Words****: E-marketing, Technology information, enterprises.*

1. **Introduction**

Electronic Marketing is a relatively new and unique way of doing business. We address to it as e-business, meaning, the system of doing business processes over the internet. Digital marketing is the act of selling products and services through channels such as social media, SEO, email, and mobile apps. Basically, digital marketing is any form of marketing that involves electronic devices and it has been changing all elements of the business world as well as the overall way of doing business.

Negroponte (1995) examines the problem of digitalization and describes the relationship between digitalization and the supply side that will be the most important factor in a company's future success. Increasingly fierce competition, changes in the business environment, customer demands and desires have prompted companies to increasingly address the digital business standard, focusing on the B2C (business-to-consumer) model. For example, online business development has had significant effects on the marketing engagements of sales firms. By conducting their sales and promotions online, their usual activities are improved from their classic form by accepting their execution in many forms that are distinguished from "who initiates" the activities and "who is the target".

Empirical analyzes show that internal e-business factors such as online product marketing and e-business assets directly increase firm promotion, communication and distribution efficiency, plus, they increase price competition. Using e-business, also called online business in this sense, facilitates the strong relationship of classic and interactive ways to target customers and sell products. The main factors that led to the development of online business are:

1. improvement of telecommunications
2. dynamic development of information technology
3. online business of SMEs
4. global processes of globalization and integration
5. international business practice
6. integration of information and telecommunication technologies
7. increase commercial service

The application of information technology is of strategic importance for every business. It reduces costs, speeds up administrative work, encourages decision-making in modern business, strengthens competitiveness in the market, increases productivity, and makes work more comfortable, successful, and effective. [Chaffey (2009](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-5)) stated that “with the continual introduction of new technologies, new business models and new communication approaches, e-business offers the potential for organizations in all industry sectors to improve their competitive advantage.”

Even though e-marketing is frequently used to save costs, many organizations are commonly seen with the same mistake which is allocating the budget for internet marketing insufficiently. Bigger companies can take advantages of that fact, and use their funds to exploit the more advanced digital technologies. Chaffey and Chadwick (2013) stressed that most of the time; a lot of companies treat the internet as another distribution channel, and misuses the true potential of the internet. Hence, the values delivered to customers are not evaluated right. Moreover, the rise of social media and online community not only allows companies to spread the message much faster and more efficiently but also is an obstacle for marketers to overcome. Customers have now owned the power of sharing their experience and connect with other people, brand image can be greatly improved or heavily damage in seconds. As a matter of fact, the power has shifted from companies to their individual customers as the internet users now has a tool to share, discuss, inform and control the way they perceive the marketing message together with other people, who appear to be more credible than the company itself (Strauss, 2012). Depending on the marketing strategies as well as the campaign contents, marketers can either gain favour or criticism from their customers, which would be both in great amount in short period of time (Strauss, 2012)

The paper gives importance to acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to buy online, i.e., easier access to desired products. Finally, recommendations have been made for successful, transparent, and modern e-business focusing on online sales and purchases in contemporary businesses in Tirana. For the realization of this paper, primary and secondary data are used. Primary data were collected through research, and a survey was conducted. After collecting secondary data, we reviewed materials containing foreign and domestic professional literature, journals, publications, research by professional research centres, databases, and other sources from internet data. The methodology used was primarily related to the application of qualitative methods.

1. **Literature Review**

**2.1 Overview**

The concept of digital marketing started from the Internet, web search tools, and ranking the Websites. The first search engine began in 1991 with a network protocol called Gopher for inquiry and search. Since the dispatch of Yahoo in 1994 companies began to increase their ranking on the site. At the point when the predictions turned out to be wrong, the market was ruled by Google and Yahoo for search development.

While, the Internet search traffic developed in 2006 along with the development of major companies like Google, in 2007, the use of cell phones expanded Internet utilization moving radically and individuals everywhere throughout the world began interfacing with one another more conveniently through social media (Smyth 2007).

Recently, companies have been understood the significance of digital marketing. Businesses should consolidate online with conventional techniques to be fruitful for addressing the requirements of clients (Parsons, Zeisser, Waitman 1998). Firms are as of now highlighting the significance of setting up a digital relationship' with clients (Phillips, 2015)

Whereas Kotler & Armstrong (2006) defined marketing as: “the process that firms use to increase the customers' value and build a strong relationship with them in aims to get their money, according to this exchange, firms provide customers’ needs and relative services to achieve the profits” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006, 5).

Digital marketing has been practically proven to be super effective and technically flexible (Skerlavaj et al., 2007). They suggest that a more comprehensive definition of organizational performance should include operational and organizational effectiveness beside frequently used financial indicators. This position is also maintained by Kennerley and Neely (2002) who have recommended the balanced scorecard published by Norton and Kaplan (1996) as a universally accepted indicator of performance.

Also, Skerlavaj et al (2007) view Market-oriented culture influences performance through innovation, loyalty, and quality. A body of literature exists, linking customer-oriented culture with organizational performance in line with enhanced profitability plus costs. They assert that a market-oriented culture can only be linked to superior performance if it can adapt to changes according to the environmental conditions. Therefore, the company culture must not only be strong and widely shared, but it must also have unique qualities that cannot be imitated. When this is achieved, the company culture can correlate with good performance. (Skerlavaj et al, 2007).

**2.2 Organizational Performance**

Organizational performance refers to competencies in terms of resource use in addition to achieving goals (Firer & William, 2003). Performance measures indicate the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization. All decisions taken in the organization have to do with its performance. Most measures of organizational performance are historical and how the organization's performance is measured and presented is often determined by the stakeholders.

While measures of organizational performance are varied as the traditional measures include profitability, productivity, and market evaluation (Firer & William, 2003). and the Financial performance indicators include return on investment, return on assets, and return on equity. On the other hand, operating performance indicators include market share, products, new product quality, market or sector effectiveness, manufacturing value addition, technological efficiency, and survival over time (Wekesa, 2016).

According to Lebans and Euske (2006), he defines organizational performance as the idea of measuring the results or the return of a particular procedure or method, then modifying the procedure or system to increase the output, increase the efficiency, or increase the validity of the procedure or strategy. It also contains the return or outcomes. The organization's real value as assessed against its planned returns or targets, which includes financial and non-financial indicators that provide evidence of the level of achievement of the organization's goal

* 1. **Digital Marketing and Organizational Performance**

E-promoting involves the utilization of the web and different types of intuitive advancements to intercede exchange between an association and its clients. It contrasts from other promoting activities because of its dependence on innovation to empower intuitiveness. E-advertising impacts associations decidedly through improved correspondence, showcasing research, deals execution, client relationship the executives just as in investigation and arranging (Brodie et al., 2007). Studies have shown an immediate connection between e-promoting and authoritative execution through improved help conveyance, deals execution, and client cooperation (Hossinpour et al, 2014, Trainor et al, 2011; Brodie et al, 2007). E-marketing improves business performance by improving sales performance and efficiency, which affects both the cap and the profits in intercompany businesses (Avlonitis & Karanyani, 2000).

Thus, electronic marketing allows sales personnel to make interactive communications with customers, which greatly affects the activities of sales management by facilitating market segmentation and customer categorization through effective database management and information exchange between organizations. It also facilitates product management activities that lead to product customization and acceleration of innovations.

Other studies show a solid positive connection between e-marketing infiltration and organizational performance in affecting client securing and maintenance (Brodie et al, 2007). Bar Wise and Farley's (2005) adds that organizations are increasingly embracing e-marketing and integrating it with other marketing practices to improve customer engagement and feedback. Thus, the success of e marketing comes from enhancing and supporting current business practices.

Day and Bens (2005) hypothesize that organizations that are Adopted digital marketing often perform better by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of network marketing practices and databases. Adopting e-marketing enables companies to increase their intensity and enrich their interactions with partners and suppliers. Important planning and inventory information is shared regularly or even in real-time, which leads to more productive relationships (Siegel, 2003).

Akroush et al. (2009) assume that there is a positive and important relationship between the e-marketing mix strategies, which are e-product, e-pricing, e-promotion, electronic distribution channels, and the overall performance of organizations through both financial and non-financial.

E-marketing strategy of using technology in e-marketing transforms many marketing strategies leading to new business models that add value to customers as well as increase company profitability (Frost & Strauss, 2001). Marketing research is made easier through the capabilities of e-marketing. Organizations that have adopted e-marketing can efficiently collect market information that helps segment the market, develop products, improve service quality, search for competitors, understand the industry, and customer feedback and all of this improves market targeting and success Business. (Hossinpour et al, 2014).

Despite the rich literature related to e-marketing in organizational performance, Tsiotsou and Vlachopoulou (2009) discovered that e-marketing has a mediating effect on business performance due to its integration with and interconnectedness with other marketing resources and practices. While Avlonitis and Karanyani (2000) postulate that e-marketing practices improve business performance in terms of sales performance and efficiency, they argue that their approval does not automatically lead to a competitive advantage in efficiency but enables the implementation of interactive sales management activities and customized product offerings without sacrificing efficiency.

According to Kariuki et al. (2014) illustrate that Digital marketing influence the performance of the organization by focusing on Marketing activities which are expected to add value and deliver on the goals of the organizations and using a firm’s marketing communication mix to cooperate with its customers. Moreover, Sabri (2008) clarifies that many businesses continue to fail in their marketing efforts despite the utilization of new technologies that’s because many people still refuse to make any digital exchanging. They don’t believe in such process, especially in case of expensive goods or high-risk trading process and they think that most companies are fake or managed by deep internet users (deep web), especially when the marketing websites don’t have the infrastructure (design and language) to attract the consumers or guarantee or save way for consumer’s payments, which means that consumers can’t save their rights. (Kimani,2015) mentioned that Social media successfully affect the awareness of the consumer, information acquisition, and purchasing behaviour by using technology to achieve profitable growth of small and medium enterprises.

Besides, Alford (2010) said that the business organization should take advantage of digital marketing technologies to compete effectively through attraction and retention of customers and to avoid being thrown out of business by competitors. Furthermore, Sabri (2008) observes that the increasing levels of globalization and as a result of the widespread of the internet which now has become one of the modern life’s fundamentals, the consumers can easily get any information about any commodity and make any comparison from multi sources to take buying decision by visiting company’s websites, and complete the exchange process easily. So most businesses have developed new technologies to improve their digital marketing to achieve competitive advantage in the current competitive environments.

Additionally, (Zarrella, 2009) defined social networking as a website for one to associate with people through an online and offline community. Social media have become a potential marketing platform for many international companies because it provides many opportunities to interact with target customers. It also allows the customer to connect with different customers. It is additionally used to convince each other that the company’s items or services are good because often the comments of the customers are more convincing and influential. On the other hand, (Neti, 2011) mentioned that social network marketing has many advantages as it can be done at the lowest cost, create enormous exposure to businesses, rising the popularity of the brand, increasing customer satisfaction, and sales.

Parveen, Jaafar, and Einen (2016) also explain the influence of social media on entrepreneurship and organizational performance. The study concluded that the use of social media has a strong positive impact on the conditions of cost reduction, information dissemination, and improvement of relationships with customers, which affects the performance of organizations. The importance of the study was to provide managers with information to better understand the areas that can be improved by social media to influence organizational performance. The study also provided strong evidence of the impact of this on the direction of entrepreneurship. (Parveen, F, Jafar, In and Ainain, S., 2016)

Likewise, Erdam Duduk and Muhammad Al-Ma`aytah (2019) studied the effect of social media use on organizational performance in the cosmetics sector, and researchers used social media for marketing, customer relations, and access to information. As an independent variable, they designed the hypothesis of the study to demonstrate the direct impact of social media on organizational performance through its subcategories, quick adaptation, time to market, cost reduction, customer satisfaction, and innovation. The conclusion indicates that the use of social media can give the organization a competitive advantage over the competitors through rapid changes in the Internet to achieve the change in customer needs in a short period.

Besides, Barnes, and Scornavacca (2004) defined Mobile phone marketing as an innovative form of commercial communication and valuable personalized marketing medium used to convey commercial content and communicate with customers by sending messages to their mobile phone via short message services (SMS) and multimedia messaging (MMS).

Whereas, Hughes and Fill (2007) found that website marketing impact on the performance of the organizations due to the increased use of the websites in promoting the products and services, constructing strong customer relationships and collect customer feedback (Hughes and Fill, 2007).

Based on unified model Venkatesh et al. (2003) clarified that Mobile phone marketing influence and performance benefits had a significant relationship. There are a variety of implications for any organization which considers using mobile marketing because it is an increasingly effective channel for marketing. Mobile marketing is more effective if it has achieved certain qualities such as permission, personalized, and more

The study of McCue (2009 and Kula & Tatoglu (2003) reviewed that Website marketing is important to enhance the corporate image by using the strategies to reduce costs and to provide additional benefits and value-added services to both consumers and employees (McCue, 2009); (Kula & Tatoglu, 2003).

1. **Methodology**

The research methodology for the case is the design of logical procedure proposed by [Yin: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyse, and share (Yin, 2009](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-35)).

Survey method was used as it is the most appropriate for this research ([Kothari, 2004](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-15)). The main reason for choosing this method of collection was to ensure speed and minimize cost, visual appeal, interactivity and respondent participation ([Zikmund & Babin, 2007](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-38)). The primary data was collected using questionnaires. Secondary data were sourced from foreign and domestic professional literature, journals and publications, research by professional research centres, databases and Internet (web portals and corporate sites).

A survey questionnaire was prepared, with different types of questions ([Zikmund & Babin, 2007](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-38)). We assigned 80 managers to a representative sample in companies in the city of Tirana.

The method of data collection used was in person (visit to the company). Of the questionnaires administered, 60 of them were filled correctly, 20 of them were incompletely filled or no answers at all. Thus, 60 of them were accepted as valid for access to the processing of the survey forms. The main reason for choosing this method of collection was to ensure speed and minimize cost, visual appeal, interactivity and respondent participation ([Zikmund & Babin 2007](https://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO202026061031124.view?orgId=kodisa#ref-38)).

The questionnaire for this research was designed to contain a total of 28 questions under these two broad research questions:

*Does modern e-business have a positive impact on the business success of the company?*

*Is there a correlation between marketing strategy and customer satisfaction in online business?*

The survey was conducted in the city of Tirana. The surveyed companies are from the manufacturing, commerce, and services sectors and mainly belong to the structure of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

**Research Hypothesis:**

Hypothesis 1: Contemporary e-business has a significant impact on the Tirana City market.

Hypothesis 2: Application of marketing strategies for online business is positively related to business result.

**4. Results and Discussion**

**4.1 Companies that Uses Internet for Business**

Almost all companies surveyed in Tirana generally use the Internet in some way for business purposes (90%) on a daily basis. Only 10% of the surveyed companies do not use the Internet for business purposes and do not plan to start using it in the future.

Internet usage is similar across companies regardless of size.

**4.2** **Medium of Electronic Business Transaction**

24 (40%) of respondents use only computers, 12 (20%) use only phones and 24 (40%) use either phones or computers in conducting their business.

As shown in Figure 3. above, many companies use e-banking services (38, 70.4%); and e-ordering by 38.9% (21). About one-third of companies use online system for their supply (18, 34%). While 66.7% (36) use it for other online activities, where the profile is similar - email, online banking and searching for products and services on the internet.

**4.3 Integration of Electronic Business in Tirana**

As part of the daily business routine for all companies, using the Internet is for various purposes, such as e-mail on mobile phones, online telephony (Skype), Viber, Facebook, e-government services, and online recruitment. This confirms our 1st hypothesis: Marketing activities in online business have a positive impact on the business success of the company.

What is being bought online, according to our research, is as follows: machines and equipment for business activities are purchased by 41% of the companies; Office supplies are purchased by 34% of companies; while 23% of the companies supplied raw materials. The level of satisfaction with online shopping among businesses is high. Almost 90% are satisfied with their online shopping experience or e-shopping.

About 70% of surveyed companies in Tirana have a company website, and about 3% of companies are in the process of building a website; while the remaining do not have a website. The main reason for this is lack of desire to invest and lack of knowledge as well as information. Also these companies have estimated that it is not an effective strategy for their business.

Small and medium-sized enterprises offer their products and services online more than micro-enterprises. Only about one-third of businesses offer their products and services online. Most (88%) of them generally use a company website alongside with social networks and advertising sites.

**4.4 Benefits of Online Business**

Businesses in Tirana believe that the main benefit of online business is better access to more consumers (63%) and faster turnover rate (46%). Respondents believed that e-shopping is attractive to consumers because of its convenience: it saves time and is easier than going to the store (73% and 52%, respectively). E-commerce with an online ordering option was mainly introduced to increase sales. Some businesses are motivated by comparing them to competitors or by asking consumers for that option. Most businesses are satisfied with the online aspect of their business.

**4.5 Obstacles to Online Shopping**

Privacy and security risks (50%) are seen as the main obstacle among companies considering online shopping.29% of the respondents regard a lack of trust among consumers an obstacle to online business. Only a few are concerned about legal and administrative obstacles (21%). Consumers, on the other hand, are believed to be concerned about the security of payments when shopping online (44%). Also, consumers prefer the conventional style of shopping as they are used to seeing, touching, and trying a product to make sure it fits their needs (38%), which discourages them from buying online.

**Conclusions**

Every business should be obliged to plan, organize, execute, and control marketing activities while doing trade on the Internet, as other departments may not function well if they are not affiliated with the marketing department. It is not enough to just define the marketing strategy of the company, but it is important to apply it in the best possible way and to analyse by management the difference between the set and expected goals.

Given the turbulence of today's environment affecting ever-changing business conditions, competition and the position of businesses in the environment in which they operate must be controlled over time. Also, the success factor is joint planning and goal setting, which leads to quality communication between employees. Taken together, all the information has a positive impact on future strategic decision-making processes.

Only 16% of businesses in Tirana offer their customers the option to order products/services online (this percentage is higher in the retail sector). Online ordering is mainly introduced to increase sales. However, for most businesses, the internet is still not a significant source of business; it only contributes up to 10% of total turnover. Online payment options are on offer as well as offline (cash on delivery) payment (almost all businesses have an e-payment option, either directly to the company or through an online payment system). It is optimistic that most of them are satisfied with the aspect of online business in their business. About 18% of SMEs present their products and services online, but do not offer their customers the ability to order and pay online. This is mainly due to the belief that the introduction of the ordering system is too complicated. From a consumer perspective, businesses believe that e-shopping is attractive mainly for convenience it is faster and easier than regular shopping. Businesses, on the other hand, find that consumers are generally discouraged by payment security issues, delivery problems, and inability to try a product like in a real store.

Most of them claim that online business development has received more attention, which businesses are more open by introducing online business into their activities, that consumer awareness is increasing and that it is more acceptable for consumers to shop online. The promotion of online business seems to have influenced this change in attitude of the businesses toward it. About half of the companies heard about some of the promotional activities during the previous year, mostly through the Internet.

Online business brings a new concept to Tirana market. However, it does not guarantee business success either. The rules that apply to classic business apply to electronic commerce. Business strategies, management, marketing principles, and all other methods that led to successful traditional businesses are also used in e- business.

The most common obstacles are lack of e-business infrastructure, lack of understanding of the benefits of online business (especially in terms of return on investment and speed of work), legal issues, the refusal of the majority of the older population to be "e-literate", and lack of security in online business, especially transaction.

The development of e-business is an important segment of connecting with the world and an important factor in participation in the world market, where there is a growing need for innovation and modernization of business due to the rapid growth of competition. Managers need to be aware of the "opportunities" and "risks" of a company in the market on time, and they should constantly evaluate the level and impact of competition activities. Marketing strategies should be the basis for determining the market position and positioning of the company. E-business has a future in the market, both domestic and primarily regional, and not world-wide, and therefore businesses in Tirana need to be oriented in that direction

Due to what has been said above, as well as the data and analysis we have shown above, there is a space for researchers who wish to continue in this direction. For further research, more extended research with broader samples is essential. We hope that this research has scratched the surface to this field of study and made an addition to existing theory.

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**The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Economy of North Macedonia- Macroeconomic Growth Analysis**

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**Abstract**

The past two years haven’t been easy on any country. Being isolated for long period made some economic indicators such as consumption, imports and exports decrease and this had a major impact on the whole GDP of a given country. Tourism sector was hit also hard and there were necessary actions taken to help the businesses that were part of this sector. North Macedonia as a fairly high mid-class income country, according to the World Bank, took some steps to reinforce businesses and to prevent disaster and collapse of economic system and labor market. Those steps taken deepened even more the countries’ public dept. After the restrictions lifted North Macedonia struggles with constant rise of prices and CPI, the problem that concerns almost every country. The rise of prices is as a result of the increased consumption which made a booming economic growth when the restrictions lifted. Recommendations and possible solutions to the crisis are given based on the econometric analysis of economic indicators of North Macedonia.

***Key Words****: North Macedonia, COVID- 19 Pandemic, economic growth, macroeconomic indicators, CPI*

1. **Introduction**

Medical historian Mark Hongisbaum in his latest book “The Pandemics History”, (2020) emphasizes that no matter how prepared and advanced in technology, medicine and epidemiology humanity is the pandemics have always taken us by surprise. It happened with the Covid-19 and we are to witness. At first the virus was underestimated until it became too strong to control and afterwards it was overreaction with some of the precautions that decreased the World’s economy by limiting free movement of people and produces as well as services.

Since the 1850s, there have been six influenza pandemics (present pandemic excluded) according to Beveridge (1991) and the CDC: in 1857–58, 1889–90, 1918–20, 1957–59, 1968–70 and 2009–10, Caldela and Geloso (2021). According to the same authors (Caldela and Geloso) during the pandemics the so called HIEL index or Historical Index of Economic Liberty had positive impact on GDP growth.

“COVID-19 has led to disruptions in food processing industries, which have been affected by rules on social distancing, by labour shortages due to sickness, and by lockdown measures to contain the spread of the virus. In confined spaces such as packing plants for fruits and vegetables or meat processing facilities, necessary social distancing measures may reduce the efficiency of operations and there is a need to ensure adequate protections for employees. Many firms have also reported high rates of worker absences; for example, staff availability was reduced by up to 30% in French meat processing facilities in the regions of the country worst hit by COVID-19”, OECD (2020).

International Monetary Fund on World Economic Outlook update that issued on January 2022, corrected the predicted economic growth rate of world economy, stating that in 2022 growth is expected to be 4.4% in comparison to the higher growth of 2021 which was 5.9%. The most concerning is the outlook for 2023 which is predicted to be 3.8% of global economic growth. According to the IMF inflation also has been shown even more serious issue than previously thought, but as is stated in the outlook “inflationshould start gradually decrease as supply-demand imbalances wane in 2022 and monetary policy in major economies responds”.

Comodityprices. World Bank January report hasn’t covered the Ukraine- Russia crisis and as we are sure there are going to be more updates and correction regarding the 2023. According to IMF, Advanced Economies were expected to grow 2.6% during 2023 and EMDEs (Emerging Market and Developing Economies) were expected to grow 4.7% compared to the growth of 4.8% during 2021.

Another problem that seems to have more of an impact than it previously thought is the constant rise of the prices of commodities and energy. In *Table 1* are given for 4 years commodity prices in indexes with a basic index of year 2019. As we can see in 2022 compared to 2019, we have an increase of 42.5% of prices of *metals and minerals,* 28.1% increase of prices of *energy* and 28.4% increase of prices of *agriculture.* All the data are source of World Bank.

Table 8 Index prices of commodities and energy during 2019-2022, World bank



*Source: World Bank*

Table 2 shows the deviation of output from pre-pandemic trends and we can notice that excluding China, Emerging Markets and Developing Economies (EMDEs) have higher deviation than Advanced Economies (-7.2% compared to -5.9%). China has a great impact on the overall prognosis for EMDEs.

Table 9Deviation of output from pre-pandemic trends, World Bank



*Source: World Bank*

1. **Data analysis**

In *Figure 1* we can see the seasonally adjusted series of different sectors which represent the GDP with added value otherwise known as GDP calculated with production method. Series are quarterly, starting from the first quarter of 2000 and up to the third quarter of 2021. It is hard to distinguish the latest impact of the pandemic but there is one thing for sure, the second quarter of 2020 has decreased for a significant amount in finance sector, information and communication, mining is hit harder along with processing industry, on the other hand there is a smaller impact on public defense and governance sector. Professional and scientific sector with real estate sector have decreased also but since their weigh is small on the overall GDP values, unlikely it has caused a serious impact.

Closer look we would have if we analyze the GDP quarterly for shorter period of time, we have taken into consideration the period from first quarter of 2016 up to the third quarter of 2021. Series is seasonally adjusted, *Figure 2.*  It is clearer the situation now that we cut the series for a shorter period of time. The second quarter of 2020 has decreased significantly to fewer than 145 billion Denars approximately 2,3 billion Euros. The third and the fourth quarter seem to have picked up where they were previously but after are followed by slightly decrease in the next quarter. The fourth quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022 data are missing by official institutions of North Macedonia but it is very important to mention the impact that would have the Ukraine- Russia crisis on the fragile economic growth that followed the pandemic period.

Figure 2- seasonally adjusted series of GDP calculated with added value, quarterly data, 200Q1-2021Q3



*Source: State statistical Office of North Macedonia, accessed 25.03.2022*

During the pandemic the rate of unemployment increased slightly and according to National Bank of North Macedonia in the second quarter of 2020 the rate of unemployment was 16.7% from 16.2% in the previous quarter. The last quarter of 2021 according to the State statistical office of North Macedonia, rate of unemployment was 15.2%. As data suggest there is no significant increase of the rate of unemployment, this means surreal compared to the economic growth negative rate and increase of commodity prices. It can be somewhat as a result of several economic aid programs that government of North Macedonia released during the pandemic but that should be a topic of anther research to what extend these programs helped overcome the pandemic crisis.

Figure 3- Seasonally adjusted GDP series of North Macedonia, quarterely data 2016-2021



*Source: State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, accessed: 31.03.2022*

If we continue our analysis with price indexes (CPIs) we should be referred to series in *Figure 3*. We have monthly data form January 2002 to February 2022 and the indexes are CPI basic compared to the CPI average of priory year. All categories mark increases except communication and education. Transportation seems to have a peak during 2021 compared to 2020 followed by slight decrease in the recent months. In February 2022 compared to the average of 2021 transportation is for 8.78% more expensive. Food and beverages have increasing trend, in February 2022 compared to the CPI average of 2021, food and nonalcoholic beverages cost 6.28% more. Alcoholic beverages, tobacco and narcotics have also increased approximately 4% in February 2022. Restaurants and hotels have increased prices about 4%. Housing, gas and electricity have rise for whooping 7.09% during 2022, month February. The trends and variability of the series during these 20 years can be seen in Figure 3 and in Figure 4 where we have truncated two indexes, that of food and nonalcoholic beverages and housing, gas and electricity to see for better effect the lates changes and trends that these indexes followed from 2016 until 2022. Food and beverages seem to have increased trend with some sign of decrease but the housing, gas and electricity have increased trend and no signs of slowing down. Housing, gas and electricity CPI for the past 5 years has been stable and with no visible trend and then in 2020 the leap is visible and huge.

Figure 4- CPI of different categories, montly data, 2000-2022 M2

*Source: State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, accessed: 31.03.2022*

The constant growth of some of the indexes is explained by the growth of prices of crude oil and as mentioned before in this research, the rise of commodity prices. In Table 3 we have the comparison of oil products prices according to Energy and Water Services Regulatory Commission of North Macedonia. On 30 August 2021 price for one-literEurosuper 95 was 71 denars, one-literEurosuper 98 was 73 denars, one-literEurodiesel was 62.5 denars, heating oil price was 62.5 denars per liter and last one-liter mazut was 637.019 denars. On 15 March 2022 the Eurosuper 95 oil rose to 86.5 denars per liter, Eurosuper 98 rose to 88.5 denars per liter, Eurodiesel 81 denars per liter and mazut price went to 59.299 denars per liter. On 21 of March after the government took actions to soothe the constant rise of oil prices, can be seen somewhat small decrease of prices.

Figure 5- CPI for food and nonalcoholic beverages, monthly data 2016-2022, base index is average of previous year



Figure 6- CPI for housing, gas and electricity, monthly data 2016-2022, base index is average of previous year



Table 10- Oil products prices according to Energy and Water Services Regulatory Commission of North Macedonia

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Eurosuper-95-Den/L | Eurosuper-98-Den/L | Eurodiesel  Den/L | Heating oil- Den/L | Mazut  Den/L |
| 30.08.2021 | 71 | 73 | 62.5 | 62.5 | 37.019 |
| 15.03.2022 | 86.5 | 88.5 | 85 | 81 | 59.299 |
| 21.03.2022 | 79 | 81 | 81 | 73.5 | 52.354 |

*Source:* [*https://www.erc.org.mk/*](https://www.erc.org.mk/) *, accessed: 31.03.2022*

**Conclusion**

North Macedonia was hit by the pandemic crisis just like any country in the World. Fragile economic growth was greatly decreased during the pandemic with biggest fall in the second quarter of 2020 to trying catching up the forthcoming quarters. The crisis deepened even more with Ukraine- Russia conflict which led to continuous rise of commodity prices. The government should act fast and continuously to curve the commodity price rise. As a country which relies greatly on consumption imports it is more than certain that the economic growth will continue to shrink. North Macedonia government should take measures which would help households and preserving employment. According to OECD some of the measures can be contra- productive such as prolonged containment and mitigation measures because that could drag the financial sector along with the real sector economy. Since the consumption and imports are North Macedonia’s leading source of growth then simulation should be done with wage rise and rising exports by differentiating products and services of home manufacturers. Wage rise should be done carefully to not deepen any more the country’s foreign debt which is around 82% of the GDP currently and still on rise. Fiscal policy should be harmonized with monetary policy to keep the steady state us much as possible, also helping the companies to maintain their liquidity and providing sources of credits for their businesses to keep pace with the crisis.

Many other measures should be introduced and use in order to tackle the following Ukraine- Russia crisis which as we can see from the beginning of it, is starting to make even greater problems in the energetic sector and oil industry. The uncertainty continues, North Macedonia should observe, learn and face the new challenges that come ahead, timing is very important since the sooner we get to interfere the better and lower are going to be the costs.

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**Digital Marketing transformations and its regulation by law**

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**Abstract**

During the pandemic era we were able to understand how much technology had affected our lives and the biggest benefits we could take out of it. Considering the difficult situation of the lockdown in almost all the countrys, the humanity started taking a look beyond the limits of the present and taking into consideration other ways of living, consuming and working. Even though the digital marketing was quietly active and was already having an important role on the development of the marketing strategies, this period helped for giving it more attention and turning on the focus on the new elements that could be added to transform it, in a more productive way. One of the most important elements of the marketing is of course the consumer. Except that the main purpose is to serve to it, another important aspect is even to protect him through the necessary legal regulation which improve the quality of marketing and as well assure the security of the consumer.

***Key Words:*** *marketing, technology, lockdown, digital, development, strategies, consumer, regulation, observations, reinventing.*

1. **Introduction**

Philip Kotler, considered as the father of the marketing which started do push back in the 60s to implement marketing as an important discipline of the economic, saw marketing as the disciplined task of creating and offering values to others for the purpose of achieving a desired response. The generic view of marketing is defined by a set of four axioms and leads to new marketing typologies and views of the tasks of marketing management. With the development of economics and technology, marketing itself recognized new ways of launching it. With the development of the internet in the 90's it became possible for the first commercial banner to appear through the web. The development of internet marketing and web platforms would otherwise be known as digital marketing. After the 2000s with the spread of social networks the way digital marketing would be organized would recognize new dimensions which were not known before and the way it has been transformed in recent years is quite dynamic and fast, so much so that does not leave time to analyze every detail of them.

Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or the internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers. In today’s time, digital marketing has become a new trend that brings together customization and mass distribution to achieve the marketing goals. Technological convergence and the multiplication of devices have led to an opening up of the ways in which we thinking about, 38 T. Piñeiro-Otero and X. Martínez-Rolánmarketing in Internet and have pushed the boundaries towards a new concept of digital marketing user-centered, more measurable, ubiquitous and interactive. Digital marketing strategies offer much potential for brands and organizations. Some of them are as like Branding, Completeness, Usability, Interactivity, Relevant advertising, Community connections.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The main goal of marketing is to connect the product with the customer. The difference between traditional and digital marketing is the fact that this one has the ability to connect directly with the consumer, get feedback from them faster and have the ability to modify itself in just as fast.

1. **Digital marketing strategies during Covid-19**

Having a specific marketing strategy means having a well-designed plan to convey your product to the customer and ensure his marketing. Over the years with the endless development of technology, as the majority of the population enjoys free access to the internet and also given how search engines and social media have developed, having a direct relationship with customers is made easier. Also, from this point of view the level of competition has increased, therefore having a well-thought-out marketing strategy is extremely important for the success of the product itself. To create a marketing strategy, some important elements must be taken into consideration, such as market research, product use, possibilities, vision for the future, KPIs, etc.

Digital marketing is divided into several types, where the following are mainly known:

* Search Engine Marketing (SEM) & PPC (Pay per Click)
* Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
* Social Media Marketing (SMM)
* Email Marketing
* Content Marketing

The way marketing developed during the pandemic period was significant for the conditions in which humanity was. Marketing strategies during this period, unlike what had happened until then, were more oriented towards human values, and what was expected was for the business to show its human side through community support because only in this way could it grow the level of confidence in certain brands. Communication was also another very important strategic element throughout this period. Direct communication with the audience, conveying motivational messages, clear definition of the rules for the continuity of work and especially when the latter came directly from market leaders, was another very significant marketing orientation that left its mark on consumer memory.

Given this focus, marketers have increased their investment in social media budgets by 74% since February 2020, increasing as a percent of marketing budgets from 13.3% to 23.2%. Marketers believe this strategy has paid off: the rated contributions of social media to company performance rose up 24% since February. This is an important finding because social media contributions have previously remained flat and at average levels since 2016, despite rising investments. Mobile investments are also up, but contributions to company performance are flat because stuck-at-home consumers turn to easy-to-use non-mobile options, such as laptops, for search and purchase. The challenge for marketers is to maintain and expand these successful social habits and migrate them across to mobile even as customers increase their movements due to relaxed state and local mandates.[[37]](#footnote-37)

One of the other marketing strategies that sprang up throughout the pandemic was the focus on local products. In terms of isolation and lack of movement, having the necessary products close and easily accessible was vital during this period. Through social media platforms marketing was simpler and it was easier to orient the consumer towards these movements.

1. **Social Media Marketing**

For the era we live in, it is impossible to separate marketing from social media. In recent years we have an increased presence of digital marketing which takes place on these platforms, even if until a few years ago they did not exist, today this type of marketing has brought the creation of new professions which develop their advertising activity in these networks. The use of social networks, regardless of age, has greatly increased since their creation. Currently most of the population is made dependent on them and the daily time spent in them is very high. This makes social media the most suitable environment for marketing development. It is a simple tool to reach the end customer and also an effective tool to measure the audience. The widespread use of social networking sites makes them the most effective marketing channels. Businesses have the opportunity through online advertising to increase the audience and benefit new customers of their products or services.

However, in using social media for marketing, some key elements that serve the business strategy are taken into consideration. They are mainly related to the goal that the business sets for itself to achieve, the content that they will decide to publish, which includes elements of photos, videos, text or message conveyed. It is also important to listen and analyze the audience to understand what elements attract the most prospective customer and what product or service best suits their needs. The final product that is served to the customer after the implementation of this strategy is advertising, which presents all the above elements in a single product ready for the market.

Using social media in marketing does more than improve site traffic and increase your reach. It turns your business into a personality that your audience can communicate and connect with on a deeper level. Regardless of which platforms you use or how you use them, the most important thing to remember is that social media is not a platform to pitch your business. It’s a community for you to express your personality, demonstrate your values, share useful information, and build up those around you. With people naturally following you and promoting your content, there will be no need for pitching. And with this approach, you’ll achieve not just your business goals but all of the other intangibles that translate to gratification and fulfillment.[[38]](#footnote-38)

1. **Customers privacy concerns**

In general, marketers are not worried about customer privacy concerns raised by their data usage. Overall average concern is highest for third-party data usage.

Banking/Finance/Insurance and Technology companies are the most concerned about third-party data, with over 50% of both industries reporting a 5 or higher. These findings are not surprising given that Technology companies are at the forefront of aggregating user data, and Banking/ Finance/Insurance are at the forefront of new payment technologies such as touchless checkout and mobile banking. With the rise of online transactions, both industries face new challenges in protecting users' information across platforms.[[39]](#footnote-39)

With the development of technology, which today affects every part of our daily life, we are exposed to everyone. Most of our data is no longer private. We give the right to companies from which we receive products or services to use our data which is related to identity, addresses, profession, bank accounts, etc. This type of exposure also increases the risk of their misuse and makes us more vulnerable to third parties. Because of this the need arises to have strict rules when it comes to consumer data protection. Taking into account all the developments of technology and digitalization, at the end of 2020, given the concerns raised by European citizens regarding the exposure of their data, the European Parliament began its work and proposed a resolution which calls for an ambitious reform of the existing EU e-commerce legal framework while maintaining the core principles of its liability regime, the prohibition of general monitoring and the internal market clause, which it considers to be still valid today. Confirming the objectives of the e-Commerce Directive, the resolution calls for measures which have consumer protection at their core, by including a detailed section on online marketplaces, and which ensure consumer trust in the digital economy, while respecting users’ fundamental rights. The resolution also advocates for rules to underpin a competitive digital environment in Europe, and envisages the Digital Services Act as a standard-setter at global level.

Since 2018, the European Union has entered into force the data protection regulation of its citizens regardless of their location (GDPR). So far this law is considered to be the most effective in terms of digital marketing. This is the reason why when you browse the web you often come across "cookies", because every company must ensure that everything is developed in accordance with the rules of privacy. In digital marketing, in order to design different market action strategies, or to measure profits, companies need to constantly collect and process customer data. If they lack the protection of this data, the consequences are not only for consumers, but also for the company itself. With the high speed of information dissemination, we are dealing with bad publicity that damages the future of the company and the decline of its market power. The trust relationship between companies and consumers is the key to success in any case.

The proposal of EU of Digital Services Act defines clear responsibilities and accountability for providers of intermediary services, and in particular online platforms, such as social media and marketplaces. By setting out clear due-diligence obligations for certain intermediary services, including notice-and-action procedures for illegal content and the possibility to challenge the platforms’ content moderation decisions, the proposal seeks to improve users’ safety online across the entire Union and improve the protection of their fundamental rights. Furthermore, an obligation for certain online platforms to receive, store and partially verify and publish information on traders using their services will ensure a safer and more transparent online environment for consumers. Recognizing the particular impact of very large online platforms on our economy and society, the proposal sets a higher standard of transparency and accountability on how the providers of such platforms moderate content, on advertising and on algorithmic processes. It sets obligations to assess the risks their systems pose to develop appropriate risk management tools to protect the integrity of their services against the use of manipulative techniques. The operational threshold for service providers in scope of these obligations includes those online platforms with a significant reach in the Union, currently estimated to be amounting to more than 45 million recipients of the service. This threshold is proportionate to the risks brought by the reach of the platforms in the Union; where the Union’s population changes by a certain percentage, the Commission will adjust the number of recipients considered for the threshold, so that it consistently corresponds to 10 % of the Union’s population. Additionally, the Digital Services Act will set out a co-regulatory backstop, including building on existing voluntary initiatives.[[40]](#footnote-40)

At a time when technological change is so rapid, the need to regulate it by law must be adapted just as quickly. The cyber risk due to network exposure is very high and the consequences that can come from it affect human identities and can cause irreparable damage. Awareness of these phenomena that circulate everywhere around us should be individual and not just. Therefore, such regulations that help mainly consumers are essential for the well-being of marketing and the economy.

1. **Materials and methods**

The methodology used in this work is based on primary research, the basis of which are researches, comparative and observations in order to understand how the digital marketing is transformed and what the main directions to work on reinventing it are. Also to this is added a jurisprudential analysis that includes principles and legal frameworks through which marketing can take place. This study is assisted by the oversight of the main marketing strategies and regulations adopted by the European Union for marketing development and consumer protection.

**Conclusions**

Marketing development is already mainly focused on its digital development. The extraordinary impact of social media on human life has made marketing to take place mainly through them as much as through these platforms because it is easier to get the raw material regarding the likes and main consumption of individuals. In this way the connection with the customer becomes simpler, his main needs are understood and the delivery of the product and service becomes even easier. Through the strategies followed in them, for the consumer the connection with the product and its providers becomes easier. Technology will continue to develop at a galloping pace and depending on it will be developed even the marketing performance in general.

Humanity has entered this millennium on the path of digitalization. The main pillars of economic development revolve around technological development. Reaching the consumer today is many times easier than ever. The Covid-19 pandemic made people realize that life can develop evenly and in narrower spaces without the need for movement and all the attention is turned back from the network. Marketing certainly sets in motion and connects the product and service with the customer. Social media today is one of the best ways to develop digital marketing. Due to its wide use by the population and the speed of providing and receiving information through it, it has become a strategic environment for advertising products and services and consequently the investments in it by companies are even greater than ever.

Marketing development requires access to a range of data that is primarily related to customer requirements and expectations. When we mention data we know that we are dealing with a delicate element because just as their use can bring benefits, misuse causes harm. Data processing to ensure marketing development makes their processors responsible and for their preservation. For this reason, the need arises for this processing to always be done within a certain legal framework that guarantees the protection of every individual and consumer. Leakage or misuse of information weighs on both parties with serious consequences for market continuity. Therefore, compliance with regulations related to this aspect plays a very important role in respecting the consumer and free competition.

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**Marketing Strategy of Supermarkets in North Albania**

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**Abstract**

The food market in Albania has experienced a continuous growth during these decade. One of the most important parts of this distribution channel are supermarket. Since the competition of supermarkets in Albania is high the road to securing successful marketing strategies arises. To remain competitive, retailers like supermarkets are seeking to attract consumers by implementing marketing strategies within their campaigns. The aim of this research paper is to evaluate and develop an analysis of marketing in the supermarket that operate in Northern Albania. This research describes the use of individual marketing mix variables and presents solutions for supermarkets to adapt their marketing approaches for future strategies. The central element of this research is identifying traditional marketing problems and developing resolutions based on environmental changes, new technologies and trends.

The methodology of this paper is based on the analysis of secondary data and processing of primary data. The secondary data are the result of a review of an extensive and contemporary literature, domestic and foreign, related to the marketing strategies of retailer or supermarkets, ets. The primary data is achieved using quantitative research, with the instrument of questioner. The questionnaires contain open and structured questions and are self-administered by the managier of supermarket tha operate in northen Albnaia. The results of quetioner were elaboreted with SPSS program.The result show that few supermarkets dominate the food markets in northen Albania. They are abel to aply some of marketing strategies. The information produced from this paper will present various approaches to be used by supermarkets to assist in developing effective marketing strategies and competitive advantages.

***Key Words:*** *Supermarkets, retailer, marketing, strategy, North Albania.*

1. **Introduction**

Supermarkets, since they showed, have performed an important role in food distribution. This distribution model was commonly accepting by companies and consumers. The evolution of these stores in recent years has been quite dynamic based on their good combination of supply, environmental condition such as competition, medical issues like Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, etc. Supermarkets are increasingly valued by consumers, compared to other commercial formats, which triggers the gradual disappearance of traditional markets. The traditional market in Albania has very difficult chance to survive, as the consumer change the way they perceive retailers, their requirements and high price sensitivity.

Supermarkets support the distribution of food which is an important basis of human life. This makes them very necessary and demanded by consumers. All people have different needs and want to meet them needs. Maslow (1943) formulates a hierarchy of human needs and it protects that when the person meets his basic needs, he develops higher needs and desires. Among these needs, she finds a nutritional need and is here where the importance of supermarkets and hypermarkets is important. These stores meet the basic needs of the people, so the audience they target is very wide or the entire population. Despite the wide market, the competition is fierce. Nowadays different distribution chains use different strategies to increase their sales. In this distribution process is included psychological, scientific and business study, which seeks to know the tastes, habits, needs and way of thinking of consumers These stores satisfy the food need of human beings, so their target consumers (Gajanayake and Surangi, 2011). So in these times when the competition is greater it is very important to gain a competitive advantage over your competitors. Since the competition of supermarkets in Albania is high the road to securing successful marketing strategies arises. To remain competitive, retailers like supermarkets are seeking to attract consumers by implementing marketing strategies within their campaigns.

The aim of this research paper is to evaluate and develop an analysis of marketing in the supermarket that operate in Northern Albania. This research describes the use of individual marketing mix variables and presents solutions for supermarkets to adapt their marketing approaches for future strategies. The central element of this research is identifying traditional marketing problems and developing resolutions based on environmental changes, new technologies and trends. To achieve this goal, various techniques applied by stores are analyzed. The other objective of this research is to find out if supermarkets implement these strategies in the same ways, what are their differences and similarities. The research question of this thesis is: How are marketing strategies implemented by supermarkets within their facilities.

An entire theory has been developed on this topic. The basis of the theory is "marketing mix" and focuses on trading POS (point of sale). It has several tools to achieve its goal, but in this research will be analyzed the tools that consumers can find in supermarkets. These are point-of-sale advertisements, through posters and exhibits; how are the shelves distributed in the enterprise and the product in them; different use of music, lighting and colors in the object. During the data collected it may find more strategies that the report does not consider. In this case, these will be analyzed and commented later.

The economic crisis in world and especially in Albania has had a major impact on the evolution of retail assortments in food base. It has changed the buying behavior of consumers seeking brands that offer confidence, but at very competitive prices. Another element that article will address will be also the economic crisis and change on the assortment size in different categories of products in supermarket in Albania.

Before proceeding with the work, it is important to define what is meant by concepts like supermarket and marketing strategy.

Supermarket is: *a retail format with a broad range of branded food articles, characterized by a self-service set-up with, usually, counters for serving fresh products like meat, cheese and bread (Juergens 2020).*

*a large self-service grocery store selling groceries and dairy products and household goods. Surface area: 100-2,500 m 2 (Ruiz-Real, Gázquez-Abad, and Martínez-López 2016).*

“Marketing strategy is the basic approach that the business unit will use to attain its goals, and which comprises of elaborate decisions (strategies) on largest markets, market positioning and mix and marketing expenditure allocation. Moreover, the marketer should take care of the other two strategic aspects, viz., expected environment and competitive conditions while determining the marketing strategy” (Philip Kotler, 2012).

The methodology of this paper is based on the analysis of secondary data and processing of primary data. The secondary data are the result of a review of an extensive and contemporary literature, domestic and foreign, related to the marketing strategies of retailer or supermarkets, etc. The primary data is achieved using quantitative research, with the instrument of questioner. The questionnaires contain open and structured questions and are self-administered by the manager of supermarket that operate in northern Albania. The results of questionnaire were elaborated with SPSS program. The importance of this paper lies in the fact that it addresses a topic not much addressed in scientific papers in Albania. Understands that the situation faced by these business structures is increasingly unstable. This makes it even more important to address the concrete marketing strategies that these businesses need to follow.

While the limitation of this paper lies in the fact that it treats supermarkets in Northern Albania. But we must consider that supermarkets such as: Big Market, Spar, Conad and EcoMarket, etc. These main supermarkets in the country are chains which means that the strategy used in an Albanian city can be used in other cities in the country. Big Market have 105 stores, Spar 50 stores, Conad 30 stores, Eco Market 25 stores in all Albania. But there are cases of supermarkets such as Xheddis, Ashel that are in a specific city such as Shoder, making it impossible to generalize the results of the marketing strategy of supermarkets for the whole of Albania.

1. **Theoretical Concepts**

Albania is a country of Eastern Europe with a relatively young and predominantly rural population. Agriculture accounts for an important share of the gross domestic product (GDP), but the level of mechanization is low, and the size of farms is small. Agricultural exports are limited, and production is mostly for subsistence. While the GDP has been growing substantially, poverty still affects a large proportion of the population, particularly in rural areas and among the newly urbanized, and causes problems of access to food and health services. An experienced a difficult economic transition and suffered two economic shocks due to the financial collapse of the so-called “pyramid schemes” in 1997 and to the Kosovo crisis in 1999.

Being a country with a weak economy makes people very sensitive to prices, especially of basic living products. According to official statistics provided by INSTAT for information on key indicators such as average monthly consumption expenditures of households, has increased in recent years of expenditures on food and non-alcoholic beverages. But costs for other types of products or services are reduced. These densities favor more the business structures that deal with the distribution of these foods. But what has been proven is that in order for these businesses to survive from hihger competition, they need an appropriate marketing strategy that differentiates it in the eyes of the consumer.

Tabel. 1 Consumption Expenditure

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2021** | **2019** | **2017** |
| Food and Non-alcoholic drink | 34.713 | 33,952 | 32,347 |
| Alcoholic beverages and tobacco | 3.130 | 3,077 | 2,558 |
| Clothing and footwear | 3.875 | 4,289 | 3,128 |

1. **Marketing Strategies**

They are three periods of change that have transformed marketing in retail company.. The first periods started at the beginning of the ‘80s was the wide diffusion of UPC barcode scanning. The second periods began ten years later was customer relationship management or CRM based on retailer introduction of customer loyalty cards. The third periods of marketing intelligence, called customer experience management, which is just getting underway. Recent innovations in the real-time tracking of customer behavior in retail stores allow marketers to measure consumer response to the in-store environment and manage the shopping process. The genesis of customer experience management describes available tools for tracking shopper behavior and measuring store performance and discusses two case studies which illustrate the use of tracking research in retail settings (Merkel, Jackson and Pick 2006).

If we consider the management of an organization, determining the marketing strategy is very important. Defining the elements of the marketing mix and the segment to serve organizations such as supermarkets are very important. The set of marketing tools -product, price, promotion and place- is used by supermarkets to achieve their objectives. As Baker (2003)states, the marketing mix is the only way to maximize customer’s satisfaction and it results in higher sales and market share. To understand marketing mix is necessary to understand its tools. “These 4-Ps –Product, Price, Promotion and Place-, are the four key decisions areas that they satisfy or exceed customer needs better than the competition” (Jobber, 2001, p.13). According to Lauterborn (1990), each element of the marketing mix is designed to meet a customer’s need. He assumed this being aware of the importance of the four Cs –Costumer solution, Customer cost, Communication and Convenience.

* 1. **Product**

According to Jobber (2001), the product decision involves what goods or services should be offered to different groups of customers. As Fifield (1998) states, the product policy is undoubtedly the most important element of the marketing mix. The product is the vehicle used by companies to satisfy consumers’ needs and it should be always to orientated to consumer.

Supermarket must decide on three major product variables: product assortment, services mix, and store atmosphere. The products assortment should distinguish it while matching target costumers’ expectations. One strategy is to offer merchandise that no other competitor carries, such as store brands or national brands on which it holds exclusive rights.

The store’s atmosphere is another important element in the supermarket product arsenal. Retailers want to create a unique store experience, one that suits the target market and moves customers to buy. Many retailers practice experiential retailing. For example, L.L. Bean has turned its flagship retail store in Freeport, Maine, into an adventure center, where customers can experience the store’s goods before buying them.

Successful supermarket carefully orchestrates virtually every aspect of the consumer store experience. The retail store—whether it sells consumer electronics, hardware, or high fashion—carefully consider the surroundings. The store’s layout and displays. The background music, the colors, smell. Chances are good that everything in the store, from the layout and lighting to the music and even the colors and smells, has been carefully orchestrated to help shape the customers’ shopping experiences—and open their wallets. For example, retailers choose the colors in their logos and interiors carefully: Black suggests sophistication, orange is associated with fairness and affordability, white signifies simplicity and purity (think Apple stores), and blue connotes trust and dependability (financial institutions use it a lot). And most large retailers have developed signature scents that you smell only in their stores (Merkel, Jackson, and Pick 2006).

* 1. **Price**

As Jobber (2001) says, the price is a key element of marketing mix because it represents on a unit basis what the company receives for the product or service which is being marketed. In other words, price represents revenue while the other elements are cost. Often an organization is willing to spend a hundred thousand dollars on researching its new product concepts, but it is loathed to spend one per cent of that on researching the different customer perceptions to various price levels (Fifield, 1998).

Extreme value retailers are general merchandise discount stores that are found in lower income areas, either urban or rural, and are much smaller than traditional discount stores. They compete by offering good value primarily through their low prices. Wal-Mart, Kohl’s, Lowe’s, and Best Buy are typical examples of retailers in the Big Middle segment. The source of the largest potential base of customers, the Big Middle is where most successful retailers compete in the long term, although it is possible to be successful in the short term with a different approach. In fact, many of the retailers now in the Big Middle have gotten there by way of initially providing either an innovative offering or low price or both, thus providing superior value to customers (Merkel, Jackson and Pick 2006). Surprisingly, successful retailers use an arsenal of different strategies, such as exclusive pricing, moderately promotional pricing, and aggressive pricing strategies, which are customized to fit brand, category, and market conditions, according to a largescale empirical study of US supermarkets (Bolton and Shankar 2003; Shankar and Bolton 2004).

* 1. **Place (or Distribution)**

Place Decision Retailers often point to three critical factors in retailing success: location, location, and location! It’s very important that retailers select locations that are accessible to the target market in areas that are consistent with the retailer’s positioning.

In accordance with Jobber (2001), “place” involves decisions concerning the distribution channels to be used and their management, the location of outlets, methods of transportation and inventory levels to be held. Manufactures are concerned with how to distribute and deliver product to customers, and service providers are concerned with the location of service points and customer accessibility (Fifield, 1998)14. To sum up: “Distribution and place” answers the question: “Where would our customers expect to find our products or services?”

* 1. **Promotion**

With reference to Paul Fifield (1998), “promotion” is defined as the whole array of methods and procedures by which the organization communicates with its target market. Promotion is the element of marketing mix used to inform, persuade and remind to the target audience the capability of the company to satisfy their needs, and they use it willing to influence audience’s feelings, beliefs and behavior. “Promotion” uses different tools to achieve its purpose. These tools, which are Advertising, Publicity Direct marketing Sponsorship, Exhibitions, Packaging, POS (point-of-sale) merchandising, Sales Promotion and Personal Selling. Advertising may be supported by newspaper inserts and catalogs. Store salespeople greet customers, meet their needs, and build relationships. Sales promotions may include in-store demonstrations, displays, sales, and loyalty programs. PR activities, such as new-store openings, special events, newsletters and blogs, store magazines, and public service activities, are also available to retailers. Most retailers also interact digitally with customers via Web sites and digital catalogs, online ads and video, social media, mobile ads and apps, blogs, and e-mail. Almost every retailer, large or small, maintains a full social media presence.

Why have promotions in a grocery environment? The serious customer movement to purchase of private labels from discounters is putting pressure on manufacturers. The latter are striving to improve service for their products while having little pricing flexibility. At the same time, retailers such as hyper- and supermarkets have to either match discounters’ prices or stimulate customer demand through promotions. As indicated by the Huchzermeier and Van der Heyden study, consumers have become more price conscious since the advent of the Euro and are now more likely to respond to promotions than in the past. Thus, in today’s European grocery retailing environment, retail promotions are a fact of life. At the same time, the management of retailer promotions is not trivial, for several reasons. Retailers can use many different forms of price promotions, such as temporary price reductions, coupons, and multi-item promotions, and combine them with non-price promotions like features, displays, and other POS material.

1. **Supermarkets vs. stores**

Neighborhood shops, which in most cases are located below the mansions, give customers the opportunity to buy the products they need for speed issues, albeit at slightly higher prices. This is one of the advantages of small entities.

While offering fresh fruits and vegetables at cheaper prices is another advantage they have over supermarkets. While the latter seem to be more advantageous overall. Due to the load, lack of time, cheaper prices and finding all the necessary consumer products or beyond, in a single space, has made consumers orient themselves to supermarkets and apply weekly or monthly purchases.

While the policies pursued by supermarkets, which for many products (mainly those that are close to expiration), set price reductions, is still an advantage for the latter. While the representatives of the supermarkets themselves list as their primary advantage food safety and standards. "The advantages are many but of course the most important is food security.

While it points out as an advantage that unlike small shops in the neighborhood where mostly customers simply meet their emergency needs for the purchase of consumer products, supermarket chains like "Spar" are focused on providing a customer-friendly shopping experience, where refers to the elements from the atmosphere in the shops (cleanliness, music, air conditioning) to the events organized on weekends with tastings, presentation of new products, prize games, etc. "Certainly the standards of supermarket chains are higher, the service including a number of food safety factors, the choice that a consumer has and other facilities is difficult to achieve from a small single market ".

While as an advantage it also lists sales promotions much better than small points. On the other hand, small neighborhood stores acknowledge the negative impact that the activity of supermarkets brings on their operation.

Some representatives of shops that operate in areas where there is a presence of supermarkets, say that there are few purchases for food products, while the clientele is mostly related to fruits and vegetables, or other products of this nature. While the situation is different in stores where the distance to supermarkets is farther and as such, consumers "fall short", although against slightly higher prices.

1. **Methodology**

The methodology of this paper is based on the analysis of secondary data and processing of primary data. The secondary data are the result of a review of an extensive and contemporary literature, domestic and foreign, related to the marketing strategies of retailer or supermarkets, ets. The primary data is achieved using quantitative research, with the instrument of questioner. The questionnaires contain open and structured questions and are self-administered by the managier of supermarket tha operate in northen Albnaia. The results of quetioner were elaboreted with SPSS program.

The name of supermarket in North Albania choosen a sample of 14 for this study, and 35 questioner ere completed with menager of this supermarket. The same supemarket can have more than a sail point in city or region and every poit of sail have diffeerent manger. The name are: EUROTOP, FERAMARK SHPK, SEABO, XHE-DIS Market, ASAR SHPK, CONAD AEGA MERXHANI, ROSSMAN LALA, ASHEL, GEZIM DIBRA, BIG SCUTARI, PEPAJ MARKET, ASA META SHPK, BIG SHKODRA, SEABO.

1. **Reseach Results**

From the analysis of the questionnaire data it was possible to derive some general results that make it possible for us to understand the marketing strategy of supermarkets in the northern area of Albania.

The supermarkets use different tools to lead consumers in their purchasing. Promotion (displays and posters). All the supermarket interviewed use cards, exhibitions and other instruments to induce the purchase / (seventy percent of purchasing decisions are made during shopping (Diorio, 2007). Economic decline, customers are also looking to buy cheaper. This is the main strategy of differentiation.

There were very few promotional products. The only one kind of discount were rebates applied depending on the sales amount (the product is cheaper if you buy a determined quantity). Usually it was applied to groceries (for example: in case of buying 3 products the price is a little bit lower than buying them independently). To show these promotions, was used the same kind of poster used as price indicator.

The background music was almost imperceptible in the majority of the places and was easier to hear it near the checkout. The music style was modern and its tempo was moderate. According to some staff of the supermarket the music style or volume does not change depending on the time or the flow of people shopping inside the establishment.

Some products were placed on pallets in the middle of the main corridor without any concordance with the products placed around them for exaple CONAD. Some of these products were light bulbs, batteries, sweets...

The supermarket was mostly organized by corridors with shelves on both sides. The main corridor was broader than the others. The shelves had three levels.

The main brand was put on the hands and feet levels and the “private label brand” were put in the eyes level. In the beginning and in the end of the shelves were placed the main brands products filling the three levels of the shelves, so if the consumer wants to get a “cheaper brand”, he has to go to the middle part of the shelf to take this product and come back to the main corridor. The second section analysed was the pasta section. Its organization was similar to the cereleals section. On eyes level there were manufacturer brands and “private brands”, but on the hands level only manufacturer brands and on the feet level only private brand. The third analysed section was the

washing liquid section, which had the same distribution as the other sections. On the eyes level could be found the “private label”,and on the other levels were the manufacturer brands. In the corridor’s endings, near to the main corridor, were placed famous brands. Some of these products did not belong to the same category of the products placed on the other shelves. In the checkout were sold products like sweets, chewing gums, snacks, etc.

*Table 2. General Results*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Instruments** | **Information Collected** |
| Promotion | Kind of posters and displays  Social media  Advertising on National Media  Sale promotion  customer cards, product offers (buys two pays one/ the product is cheaper if you buy a determined quantity) |
| Shelves | Use of the three levels  Distribution of brands |
| Placement of  products | Distributions of shelves  “Hot zones” and “cold zones” |
| Lighting | Zones of special lighting (vegetables) |
| Music | Background music |
| Visual effect:  colours | Colours on posters and zones |
| Price | Discounted price |
| Product | Multiple product lines with a small number of products within the line. |

Pandemics and supermarkets

Supermarket chains, which traditionally operate in the country, only with service units, have taken the first step towards e-commerce by giving by phone, delivered to the client by the postal service. Online sales account for 5-10% of total sales. Food packages were created, which contain the best-selling products in the main categories of food and hygiene according to the values of 5,000 Lek, 7,000 Lek and 10,000 Lek.

**Conclusion**

The retail and trade market is one of the most important drivers of national economies. Therefore, it is necessary to develop it, especially in postmodern economies with highly demanding consumers and intense competition. When it comes to retailing, however, what works today will very probably not work tomorrow. The challenge is to identify the next development while it is still the next. Therefore, analysis of the current status of the retail landscape offers a good insight into the future shape of this extremely important market.

Supermarkets are changing from a reactive to a proactive sector in the European economy. Four characteristics of this restructuring include: fast growth of large firms, a more strategic approach to managerial decision taking, more complex organizational structures, and more retailer coordinated value chains.

For Albania market and especially in North Albania few supermarkets dominate the food markets in northern Albania. “innovation” playing a central role in how these retailers are changing the sector. All the analyzed supermarkets use in different levels of marketing strategies.

Supermarkets are aware that their strength remains in their lower prices. They want to maintain a low pricing position; this is the reason because they focus on the strategies consisting of advertising, colors... which help to show to customers their lower prices.

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**Business activities and the impact of Covid-19**

**(The case of big taxpayers in Albania)**

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**Abstract**

As we know Covid-19 negatively affected the world wide, so this affected even Albanian in different fields in economy. Our study is for the impact of the Covid-19 in the performance of the activity of businesses operating in Albania. We have selected in this study big taxpayers as important contributors in economy and public budget. Big taxpayers are the most important contributers in the budget tax revenues, as well as the high number of employees in these businesses. The study is based literature review by various experts and authors in this field and questionnaires conducted with big taxpayers (VIP). Financial difficulties have increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for services and tourism businesses. To survive and reduce the negative impact of Covid-19, most businesses have used their own capital and retained earnings because most of them had mortgage loans on bank system. A significant number of businesses, consider the government's financial support package to be ineffective and unapropriate. These businesses consider that the appropriate policies to reduce the impact of the pandemic, listed in descending order, are: reducing the fiscal burden, bank loan ristruction, postponement instalment of loans in the bank, direct and indirect financial support.

***Key Words****: Big taxpayers, impact of Covid-19, direct and indirect financial support.*

1. **Methodology**

The Directorate of Large Taxpayers has provided a list of 701 businesses classified as VIP businesses in Albania and this business contributes about 40% of budget revenues. The structure of the questionnaire was designed to contain questions related to: the type of activity they exercise; revenue turnover for the last 12 months and how it has changed for 2020 compared to a year ago; the number of employees and what% of staff has been reduced due to the pandemic; financial problems during the year of the pandemic; measures taken to cope with them; the impact of the pandemic in general and on the level of sales in particular by specifying how revenues have changed compared to a year ago; whether they have been beneficiaries of financial packages provided by the government and the expression of opinion on their effectiveness, as well as an open question about the expectations that the Albanian VIP business has for 2021, compared to 2020. The assessment expressed by each business leader, regardless The nature of the activity he carries out is obtained by completing a questionnaire containing open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was completed by 68 businesses (9.7% of the total).

**2. Information Analysis**

VIP business in Albania operates in all regions of the country. Most of these businesses are concentrated in Tirana and Durrës, as these are also the largest regions of the country. The 68 questionnaires collected are distributed in several municipalities of the country, respectively 2 in Shkodra, 38 Tirana, 2 Berat, 8 Durres, 2 Elbasan, 5 Fier, 1 Patos, 1 Saranda, 1 Kamza, 2 Vora, 2 Vlora, 3 Lushnje and 1 throughout Albania.

In the questions that give a presentation of the business on the type of activity it carries out, in a specified way, the answers are summarized as follows;

*Graph 1: Distribution by type of activity*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

Most of the surveyed businesses, their activity is concentrated in trade, specifically 31% of the surveyed businesses and continuing with 21% in import-export. This shows that in a developing country like Albania, it is precisely trade closely linked to imports and exports that dominates the activity of these businesses. 19% of respondents have been other activities not included in the group list, 11% are focused on the construction sector. Accommodation and food service activities turn out to account for 8% of businesses that responded positively to the questionnaire, followed by transport and storage with 3%, and agriculture, forestry and fishing with only 2%. Graph 2 shows that most of these businesses have up to 50 employees (35% of the total, including businesses with only 12 employees), followed by 25% up to 100 employees. Given that we are referring to the largest businesses operating in the country, the number of employees in these businesses was expected as it turned out to be high (65% of them have over 50 employees). 100-200 employees have 20% of the surveyed businesses, 15% have 200-300 employees. Over 500 employees turn out to have only 5% of the businesses surveyed. In this interval, 3 businesses responded, with 620, 1020 and 1806 employees, respectively.

*Graph 2: Number of employees before the pandemic, from 50 up to 500 employees*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

*Graph 3: Staff engagement at work during the pandemic, on-line, alternated and workplace;*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

From the questionnaire data it results that 52.9% of the surveyed businesses had done the staff engagement only in the workplace for 2020. 45.6% of them did a job combination (present in the workplace and online), and only 1.5% were only online (this only referred to business administration employees).

*Graph 4: Impact of COVID-19 by type of activity, Indystry, construction, agriculture, Import-export, Trade, Transport, Acomadation, ect;*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

The survey showed that most businesses (61.8%) have stated that the level of sales in their business during 2020 has decreased. This proves the authenticity in completing the questionnaire by making the connection with the answers to other analyzed questions. In an equal percentage of 19.1% we have seen an increase in the level of sales and for other businesses the level of sales has remained the same for 2020, compared to 2019.

*Graph 5: Measures taken by the business to cope with the situation- share capital and profits accumulated, cost reduction, loan in bank or have not taken any measure;*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

From the graph presented above we notice that a large part of VIP businesses (32.5%) have not taken any measures to cope with the situation caused by the pandemic. This shows that in these businesses the pandemic has not had an impact or has had a positive impact, not requiring any specific action. 30.9% of surveyed businesses have used share capital and profits accumulated from previous periods, 19.1% of them have undertaken cost reduction measures in the form of staff cuts or production cuts, and only 17.6% have received a loan in bank to overcome the difficult situation created by the pandemic. Bank loans have been taken by about 70% of those businesses that have stated that the pandemic has negatively or very negatively affected their business.

*Graph 6: Solvency of businesses to repay installments in the bank, yes or no;*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

Asked if they have a bank loan, are they able to repay the installments, 63 businesses answered that they are solvent, and only 5 of them stated that they were unable to repay the installments if they will have or currently have a bank loan. Businesses unable to repay the installments from the collected questionnaires belong to the Accommodation and food service sector, trade and other sectors that are not included in the group. If we make the connection with the answers to the above question, we can say that although 50% of the VIP businesses surveyed had financial difficulties during the pandemic year 2020, still most of them are able to repay the installments of a loan. This result follows the logical flow of the size of the VIP business, which despite the difficulties it may have is able to withstand unexpected situations such as the pandemic.

*Graph 7: Resumption of business operations after the removal of restrictions, Yes, partly, no;*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

Following the lifting of restrictions imposed by the government in the spring of 2020, 52.9% of businesses surveyed stated that they have fully started operations in their business, as well as before the pandemic. 45.6% of respondents state that they have partially started operations in their business and 1.5% have not started operations (belongs to the business that carries out the activity of accommodation and food service).

*Graph 8: Answers to the question: What kind of measures would help your enterprise to recover?*

Source: Authors' calculations according to the collected questionnaires

From the survey by businesses (39.6% of them) a new package of economic measures in the form of tax cuts and salary contributions has been judged as the best measure that would help the business recover quickly from the situation created by coronavirus. For 26.5% of them, granting a loan on favorable terms is seen as an ideal measure, while 22.1% of respondents believe that direct government subsidies would greatly help the business to recover and operate as in the pre-pandemic period or and better. Meanwhile, tax deferrals are seen as the best measure for business recovery for 11.8% of the sample taken in the analysis. From the open question addressed to businesses what are their expectations for 2021, only 36 of them answered positively (52.9%). Most of the respondents have stated that they expect from 2021 an increase in the level of sales.

**Conclusions**

Since the private sector is a sector of special importance and major importance in economic development in the country, it should be constantly given importance and support during administrative procedures as well as financial support, involvement in decision-making processes, etc.

The surveyed businesses operate mainly in the region of Tirana (60% of them), and most of them carry out mainly the activity of trade (31% of the respondents) and import-export (21% of them). 65% of the surveyed businesses have over 50 employees and most of them (64.7%) have not fired any employees due to the situation created by COVID-19. We conclude that the pandemic has changed the way many businesses work, as 45.6% of respondents have chosen the combination of working in business premises and online from home for their employees and 1.5% have only worked online. The remaining 52.9% worked in the workplace as before the pandemic. The level of sales decreased for most businesses (61.8%) and for 19.1% did not change or increased. 50% of surveyed businesses have encountered financial difficulties during this period and bill payments are rated as the most important financial problem for the VIP business (39.7% of them), followed by other expenses (35.3%), staff salaries ( 27.9%), loan repayment (25%) and rent (20.6%). Meanwhile, we again conclude that for a significant part 35.3% of respondents did not have any financial problems during the pandemic year 2020. From the questionnaire we estimate that 92.6% of businesses have confirmed their ability to pay credit installments if they currently have a loan or will have in the future and 7.4% of them state that they have no solvency. From this we conclude that the size of the VIP business creates the possibility of repaying the installments of a loan. Most respondents estimate that the new package of economic measures in the form of tax cuts and salary contributions is the ideal measure for the recovery of their business, while granting loans is seen as the second best option (26.5% confirmed this option). Direct government subsidy is estimated as the third option with 22.1%. Meanwhile, tax deferrals are considered an ideal measure for a small part of the sample taken in the study (11.8%). Increasing the level of sales is the main expectation for 2021 for most of the businesses surveyed.

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**Challenges of internal audit in the banking sector afterC-19**

**(*Literature review*)**

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**Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the entire globe and different operations of every sector of the economy, also affected the banking sector. Highlighting the need to adapt and increase the vigilance to the situation of control units within the banking sector. Internal Audit in the banking sector also plays an important role in identifying their procceses change. Recent technology developments indicates tha Internal Audit should be more focused in this area, in order to ensure that the organization operates in accordance with all requirements for banks, to provide reliable products and services to their customers.

Based on previous crises over the last twenty years, banks have tried to manage successfully banking operations, without risking their continuity. The pandemic situation is expected to affect the quality of assets, and consequently the profitability of banks, by increasing the level of non-performing loans, despite the vigilance shown in the criteria set to guarantee the expected return. In this situation, it is important how to orient the processes in a new control environment, educating stakeholders about changes in processes, procedures and platforms. Internal Auditors should be advisors with a closer approach to technology and with integrity in fulfilling their commitments. Nowdays when tools and technology are widely available, we need to understand the changes in the banking system, so starting the transformation and digitalization of Internal Audit processes. The challenge that banks have after Covid-19 is precisely the digitalization of all their processes and procedures, initially training their employees to come to the aid of customers by preparing for "surprises" and new challenges that the future may bring. This paper aims to highlight the important role that internal audit has in evaluating the procedures and recommendations that Internal Audit gives for specific actions to be taken in response to the situation, considering the essential principle of a commercial bank.

***Key Words****: Internal Audit, Bank sector, Covid-19, technological evolution, processes, procedures.*

1. **Introduction**

Covid-19, which was declared a global epidemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) as of March 11, 2020, affected all the countries in the world in a short time. This epidemic, which is called the global crisis, poses a serious threat at every scale, from a large-scale structure such as the state to small organisations. In such a crisis, the institutions’ ability to protect their assets and ensure their continuity depends on the timing and effective implementation of the measures to be taken against the crisis. Crisis management, which is the mechanism that ensures the pre-planning of the measures to be taken against the crisis and their implementation when necessary, is also included in the scope of internal control as a measure to be taken by institutions in case of extraordinary situations. Internal audit is a mechanism that adds value to the activities of the bank institutions by measuring the effectiveness of the risk management, internal control and corporate governance processes of the bank institutions. An evaluation of the design and implementation effectiveness of the controls planned within the scope of crisis management will also be needed during the crisis, which can be provided by the internal audit activity.

With the spread of Covid-19, many governments and company policies banned inperson meetings and restricted travel to both domestic and foreign sites. This change had adramatic effect on internal auditors who could no longer perform planned audits using their traditional, face-to-face methodologies. Affected internal audit functions (IAFs) shifted to performing remote audits, which means performing audit procedures from a different location than the auditee’s using “information and communication technology with data analytics to assess and report on the accuracy of financial data and internal controls, gather electronic evidence, and interact with the auditee” (Teeter, Alles, and Vasarhelyi 2010). The primary difference between conventional audits and remote audits is the absence of in-person, face-to-face interactions which changes how things like walkthroughs, visual inspections, interviewing, and other audit procedures must be performed. When performing engagements remotely, internal auditors leverage technology to carry out the audit work. These technology components include interactive and web-based video conference platforms, software to securely share data, and remote access to financial and operational systems of the auditee.

1. **Literature Review**

Internal auditing is important for organizations because because it can improve operational performance (Jiang, Messier, and Wood 2020), reduce earnings manipulation (Prawitt, Smith, and Wood 2009; Lin, Pizzini, Vargus, and Bardhan 2011; Prawitt, Sharp, and Wood 2012; Ege 2015; Abbott, Daugherty, Parker, and Peters 2016), increase fraud prevention and detection (Kwaku Asare, Davidson, and Gramling 2008; Norman, Rose, and Rose 2010), and reduce risk (Carcello, Eulerich, Masli, and Wood 2020). To achieve these benefits, internal auditors use “a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes” (definition of internal auditing, IIA 2017).

While internal auditors conduct remote reviews of various data, most often, they conduct their audits in-person. Organizations that are geographically dispersed, this requires internal auditors to spend significant time traveling to the locations where they will perform their audits. The significant efforts associated with travel is a primary reason why remote auditing is attractive, it is expected that it will increase the efficiency of internal auditors as they can devote travel time to more productive tasks (Teeter et al. 2010; Christ et al. 2021). If internal auditors are more efficient, they should be able to expand the scope of their work, which would also improve effectiveness. Finally, if internal audits become more efficient and effective, we expect that stakeholders would be more likely to rely on the work of the IAF. Although these are relatively straight-forward expectations, the lack of more IAF’s using remote audits prior to the restrictions imposed because of COVID-19 suggests that either professionals are unaware of these benefits (i.e., they have not tried remote audits) or have not achieved these benefits in the past. It is possible that remote audits cause efficiency losses. Internal auditing is important for organizations and banking sector as prior research has found that it can grow operational performance (Jiang, Messier, and Wood 2020), reduce earnings manipulation (Prawitt, Smith, and Wood 2009; Lin, Pizzini, Vargus, and Bardhan 2011; Prawitt, Sharp, and Wood 2012; Ege 2015; Abbott, Daugherty, Parker, and Peters 2016), ase fraud prevention and detection (Kwaku Asare, Davidson, and Gramling 2008; Norman, Rose, and Rose 2010), and reduce risk (Carcello, Eulerich, Masli, and Wood 2020). To achieve these benefits, internal auditors use “a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes” (definition of internal auditing, IIA 2017). While internal auditors conduct remote reviews of various data, most often, they conduct their audits in-person. For organizations that are geographically dispersed, this requires internal auditors to spend significant time traveling to the locations where they will perform their audits. The significant efforts associated with travel is a primary reason why remote auditing is attractive it is expected that it will increase the efficiency of internal auditors as they can devote travel time to more productive tasks (Teeter et al. 2010; Christ et al. 2021).

1. **Audit issues and the procedures**

Audit issues and the procedures to assess the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on financial statements

according to ACCA (2020) and Crowe (2020) are as follows:

1. *Revenue contracts:* unprecedented or unexpected changes in the business environment have gave birth to variation in some contract agreements entered into by organization. This changes are made up of penalties or refunds for failure to fulfilled contract agreements, contract modifications and changes in enforceability of contracts. Therefore, the effect of these changes need to be investigated, disclosed or quantified.
2. *Impact on auditors’ report:* to evaluate whether the effect of COVID-19 is a key audit issue or matter. Depending on the resolution of accounting and auditing matters due to COVID19, possibilities exists as to whether it is necessary for the issuance of modified opinion or inclusion of a separate section under material uncertainty related to un going concern in the audit report.
3. *Receivables:* greater judgement is needed from the auditor in assessing the expected credit loss due to the lockdown as a result of the pandemic.
4. *Inventories:* this has to do with identifying changes in the net realizable values either due to obsolesce (out dated) or reduction in value of the selling price.
5. *Impairment of non-financial assets:* such as buildings and equipment. Auditor should identify and discover indications of impairment, changes in key drivers and assumptions used in estimating the receivables accounts of the productive assets.
6. *Lease contracts:* to identify and account for any lease rent concessions.
7. *Going concern:* material uncertainties may also put a significant doubt on the ability of corporate organizations to keep existing as a going concern.
8. *Fixed production overheads:* a higher amount of unallocated fixed overheads has to be expensed off due to abnormal production capacity/low production volume.
9. *Fair value of unquoted equity instruments:* to update key drivers and assumptions used in estimating the recoverable amounts of the productive assets.
10. *Breach of loan covenants:* the auditor should determine how a breach of loan agreement may affect the timing of repayment of the defaulted loan (such as the loan on demand) and how it affects the classification of the related liabilities at the reporting date. This also affect the assessment of the organizations ability to continue to operate as a going concern.
11. *Provision for onerous contracts:* a provision is needed when unavoidable cost of meeting the obligations exceed the benefits expected to be gotten under the contracts.
12. *Government support:* to determine the right or correct accounting treatment of government support such as economic stimulus package. Is a government grant that should be accounted for under SAS the accounting for government grants as disclosure of government assistance?
13. *Foreign exchange transactions:* to consider the impacts of significant fluctuations in foreign exchange rates on the operations of the organization and the effectiveness of hedge accounting.
14. *Disclosures in financial statements:* more comprehensiveness is required of significant accounting judgements, estimates and assumptions used in preparing the financial statements that could result in material adjustments to the carrying amount of assets and liabilities.
15. *Events after the reporting date:* to carefully evaluate whether information on Covid-19 that are made available after the reporting date is an adjusting or non-adjusting event for accounting purposes. Financial statements have to be updated if the event is a significant adjusting event, otherwise, a disclosure is needed.
16. **Audit considerations**

In the mixed of pandemic COVID-19, performing audit procedures is troublesome for many auditors. In some instances, auditors may come acrosslimitation in scope. The limitations in scope topossibly address by auditors as opined by ACC(2020); Arnold (2020) and Illuzi et al. (2020), includes the following:

1. Understanding and testing internal control: one of the professional responsibility of auditors is to plan and carry out any audit or assurance assignment with professional skepticism. Professional skepticism according to Illuzi et al. (2020) is an attitude and behavior that involves being alert, a questioning mind to situations that may show possible misstatement due errors or fraud, and a critical assessment of audit evidence. It is expected that auditors must always be on guide, especially, during pandemic like COVID-19 where many auditors are working remotely. The quality of audit evidence gathered and whether the audit evidence is enough and sufficient to decrease audit risk to a reasonable level. Thus, the gathering of the evidence needs professional judgement about what the evidence contains and indicates. There have been delay in the issuance of financial statements due to COVID-19, which led to unprepared closures and uncertainties in demand, and a low priority in completion of procedures required to give historical financial statements. If possible, the managements and auditors should consider delaying the issuance of financial statements until the situation is enhanced. In the meantime, management of corporates organizations may choose to pass the information to the financial statements users via drafts or projections. Although, this process should have to be carefully look into before such projections can be made.
2. Performing physical stock observation: auditors are expected to gather enough, relevant and related audit evidence concerning the condition and existence of stocks, if stocks are material to the financial statements of the organization. The auditor can do this via physical stock count. But for organization with financial year ends coincide with Covid-19 pandemic, where auditors were unable to travelled due to travel restriction, may face challenges in carrying out physical observations of stock. Thus, in an event where the clients were unable to undertake physical stock counts at the end of the year, an alternative counts date and stock transaction can be fixed or scheduled. However, if the auditor was unable to attend stock counts due to travel restriction, the auditor should take advantage of technology, by the use of camera and live video or virtual means to observe the stock counts. Some auditors might have clients discuss with financial statements users as to whether the review engagements for the year end should be complemented with agreed upon procedures on the stock after year end when counts of stock will be carried out. Access to clients’ records: in an instance where there is crisis, just like the pandemic COVID-19, and there was restriction in movement, getting access to clients’ books and records may be difficult to some auditors, most especially for those clients that keeps records on papers. However, auditors can obtain copies or scanscopies of key records, but he has to be sure that the records are accurate, authentic and complete. If auditors are unable to have access to the books and records, the auditors are to inform the clients that audit cannot be completed, until all records and books are accessed.
3. Understanding and testing internal control: the pandemic related problems that may arise when clients’ sites are closed and auditors are not able to carry out audit on sites, are; auditors did not have enough access to client system of internal control, and they did not access that system remotely. For example, how does the auditor assess some controls activities, the monitoring components and control environment remotely? If management had to change some aspect of the internal control process due to staff working from homes, auditors should discuss any new procedure and agreed on those new controls that have been put in place and make sure they are operating effectively. In addition to that, auditors are required to inquire as to whether there are some changes in the client system of internal control at the time of carrying the preliminary work. If there are changes to accommodate remote work forces and process flows, auditors must determine how much they can rely on those controls that are introduced newly for the portion of the remaining year. After the design and test carry out on those balances, the inability to or none receipt of confirmations would not lead to scope limitations. Alternatively, if auditor did not obtain enough evidence and is depending heavily on receipt of audit confirmations as the main source of audit evidence, the none receipt could lead to scope limitations (most especially, if the balances are material to the financial statements). Lastly, auditors are required to look at the possibility of sending electronic confirmations instead of paper, due to increasing shutdown and movement of business to online and virtual technology.
4. Audit plan: auditors are required to plan their work and adequately supervise their workers as a matter of standards. Auditors must know that working remotely is not an excuse for his inability to plan audit meetings. They should make sure they are having discussions on engagement risk when the need arises with the engagement team before commencing the audit work. The nature and extent of planning activities that are necessary depend on the size and complexity of the company, the auditor's previous experience with the company, and changes in circumstances that occur during the audit. When developing the audit strategy and audit plan, the auditor should evaluate whether the following matters are important to the company's financial statements and internal control over financial reporting and, if so, how they will affect the auditor's procedures:

* Knowledge of the company's internal control over financial reporting obtained during other engagements performed by the auditor;
* Matters affecting the banking industry in which the company operates, such as financial reporting practices, economic conditions, laws and regulations, and technological changes;
* The auditor's preliminary judgments about materiality, risk, and, in integrated audits, other factors relating to the determination of material weaknesses;
* Control deficiencies previously communicated to the audit committee or management;
* Legal or regulatory matters of which the company is aware;
* The type and extent of available evidence related to the effectiveness of the company's internal control over financial reporting;
* Preliminary judgments about the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting;
* Knowledge about risks related to the company evaluated as part of the auditor's client acceptance and retention evaluation.

1. Fraud in the financial statements: despite the fact that there are lay down procedures and requirements, current happening of COVID-19 pandemic allows inquiries to be carried out virtually or via video conferencing. This will allow the auditor to see the body language of the person being investigated. Similarly, auditors are expected to have discussion with the management concerning management assessment risk of fraud and management process for identifying, monitoring and responding to risk of fraud. For any reason, auditors are not able to fulfill this process, they will consider it as scope limitations.
2. Forecasting related to going concern assumption: the continuing existence of an organization as a going concern is mostly affected by one factor or another like; the industry, geographical area, where the organization operates, the availability and accessibility of finance for the organization, financial health of suppliers and customers of an organization. The consequences of COVID-19 may affect the above factors and may lead to the deterioration in the organizations operating results and their financial position. Thus, auditors and organization may be required to look at current important and relevant information in connection with the assessments of going concern. As the situation are changing every now and then as a result of COVID-19 and is having severe effects on many organizations such as airlines, restaurants, entertainments. The ability of the management to evaluate events and situations that may affect the organization to continue its operation as a going concern will be found under the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), and Financial Accounting Standard Board (FASB) accounting standard codification 205-240 as concern presentation of financial statements. Auditors are expected to gain access to the management evaluation of the organization as to whether it will continue as a going concern, or believe and accept that the supporting documents are accurate and complete. Where it is not, auditors are required to consider it as scope limitations. Although in practice, auditors should be reminded that management evaluation, or assumption or forecast might be hard to carry out in the present situation of lockdown. Therefore, management best estimates are to be accepted and will not lead to scope limitations.
3. Performing subsequent events: for audits of calendar year end 2019 financial statements, COVID-19 subsequent events are possibly, and is going to be type 11 events. Type 11 events are events that should give proofs of conditions that arose after the date of the financial statements. Thus, COVID-19 pandemic related subsequent events that needs an adjustment to the financial statements or additional disclosures must be considered.
4. Obtaining management representations: additional representation letter must have to be issued in pandemic situation, apart from the management representation letter issued earlier on. This will also depend on the circumstances of the audit engagement. The additional representation letter may be concern about subsequent events, fraud, going concern assumption, risk and uncertainty and significant estimates. Thus, during pandemic that resulted to lockdown and the inability to access offices physically to sign documents, management representation letter can be obtained electronically.
5. Fraud risk: in this time of uncertainties, auditors are expected to be on high alert for fraud risk that may take place. This is possible with the organizations where workforce is moving out of the typical environment and some key personnel have been laid off. This scenario, could lead to a breakdown of the internal control system. Therefore, auditors should adjust audit procedures as a matter of necessity to help in reducing any potential fraud risks that could have a material impact on the financial statements.

**Conclusion**

As COVID-19 brought most business trips and in-person face-to-face interactions among internal auditors and their clients, internal auditors transitioned to remote auditing to continue with their audit plans. The objective of this paper is to highlights some of the practical challenges auditors may face in auditing financial statements in the light of COVID-19 and areas to put more emphasis in their audit reports. The paper deals with auditing, COVID-19, items in the financial statements affected by COVID-19, audit issues and procedures, audit considerations, audit reports scenarios and modification to the opinion in audit reports. The paper discovered that COVID-19 is having an unprecedented impact on financial statements and auditors’ reports, and highlighted some of the key areas an auditor, management and users of audit reports are to be conscious of when auditing and reading the audit reports. The paper also found out that Professional associations, accounting and auditing bodies are monitoring issues and situations as they unfold that may affect the financial statements and audits reports due to the impact of COVID-19. Moreover, they are ready all the time to issue out additional guidelines as new development unfold, and continue to update professional accountants on issues patterning to the continuity of the organization business, workforce, economic impact and other resources to help their members to serve their clients better in this period of pandemic. The study recommends that, Auditors are expected to display enough professional skepticism and be focused on public interest and ethical responsibilities bestowed on them, and continue to apply the principles contain in auditing standards fully, as well as comply with the fundamental principles of professional competence, confidentiality, objectivity, independence, care and skills and behave professionally. These are keys that will preserve and expand auditors trust in the face of the public. Secondly, technology is a most have if auditors want to survived and continue in business in this period of COVID-19 and in the future. Lastly, an empirical study should be carried out to practically assess the performance of business organizations audit reports during and after the pandemic in order to appraise the performance of auditors on the ability to gather enough and relevant evidence to be used in forming their opinion.

**Recommendations**

As expected, technological advances are indispensable for the establishment of an effective digital auditing system. The impact of data protection measures against cyber-attacks as well as employees' skills and training were found to be significant. Particular attention should be given to the preparation and building of virtual auditing teams. The fact that the digital era is still nascent with its final outcomes not yet visible makes it difficult to produce accurate predictions and draw conclusions.

The actions taken by companies to ensure cyber security and the formation of virtual teams were found to be highly significant for the implementation of a real-time auditing process. Traditionally, factors such as cost and time play an important role in optimizing internal continuous auditing. Technological advancements combined with careful, strategic and case-specific implementation have the potential to enhance the efficacy of older methods.

The positive propensity of staff to adopt technology and modern techniques illustrates how implementation difficulties can be overcome through the redefinition and scheduling of an organization's objectives and training of its personnel.

Audit firm employees highlighted the protection of personal data, the avoidance of cyberattacks and training as major continuous internal auditing goals. The results indicate acceptance towards technology and modern techniques, provided companies ensure adequate preparation and staff training conditions.

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**Sustainability as a driving factor for companies in the tourism sector**

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**Abstract**

Sustainability is a central and inclusive theme in today's world that encompasses all areas of modern life. The following work aims to deepen what are the aspects of sustainability in the tourism sector and how all this is fundamental for the protection of companies in the sector in the short term and how, on the other hand, sustainability could become a driving force for increasing revenues and acquire market shares in the tourism sector. In Europe there are cases of virtuous tourism companies that develop their marketing by focusing everything on sustainability. As regards the level of sustainability that companies follow, there is a system that measures it. This system is called Ecolabel. The Ecolabel system is unique in its kind since it is not mandatory for companies in the sector but guarantees sustainable operations from an economic, social and environmental point of view and consequently all the services offered must meet certain criteria and requirements.

***Key Words:*** *Sustainable tourism, Sustainable Indicators, Ecolabel system.*

**1.Introduction**

The tourism sector in Albania is constantly growing. Until now the sector has turned to mass tourism. The government's program for the development of the sector highlights the importance of sustainable tourism in the Albanian territory. In this regard, a first feasibility study analysis was proposed and carried out in the previous publication.[[41]](#footnote-41)

This study starts from the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)4 and divides the Albanian territory into five zones with very different socio-economic, demographic and territorial characteristics. The ETIS System is aimed at all stackeholders who have an interest in the reference destination, therefore the Government, local authorities, businesses, tourism businesses and finally citizens. As regards the macro indicators of the ETIS System, they are four:

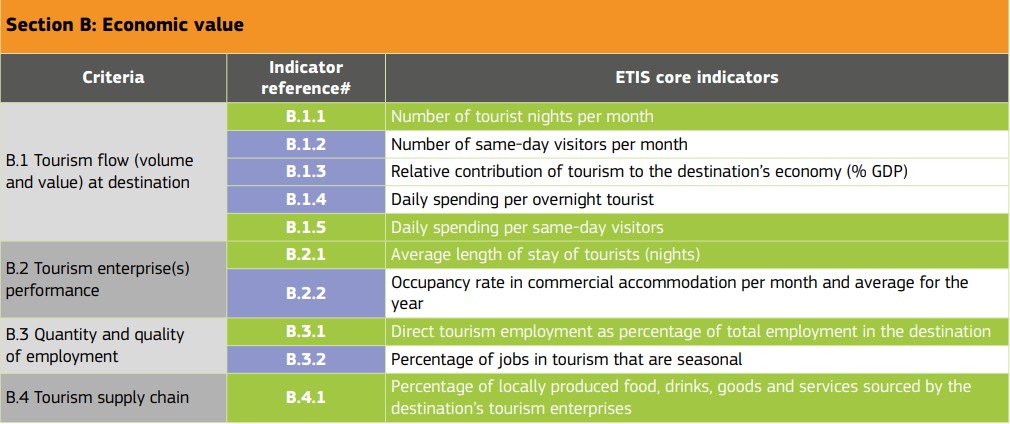
* 1. Destination management;
  2. Economic value;
  3. Social and cultural impact
  4. Environmental impact.

This work aims to shed light on the conditions and results of the tourism sector companies in Albania in order to be able, in a forthcoming publication, to construct a specific indicator that takes into account the results of tourism companies, enhancing sustainability in all its articulations.

1. **Materials and Methods**

As we have explained in the introduction, the ETIS [1] system starts from four macro indicators that embrace a series of indicators internally. From the point of view of companies in the sector, there are some of the macro indicators that are most highlighted precisely by the intrinsic type. Let us therefore dwell on the second macro indicator Economic Value closely linked to tourism businesses. According again to the ETIS System, the same macro indicator is made up of different criteria and a series of reference indicators as illustrated in the table below.

***Figure 1:*** *Section B: Economic Value in European Tourism Indicator System*



Source: ETIS Toolkit.

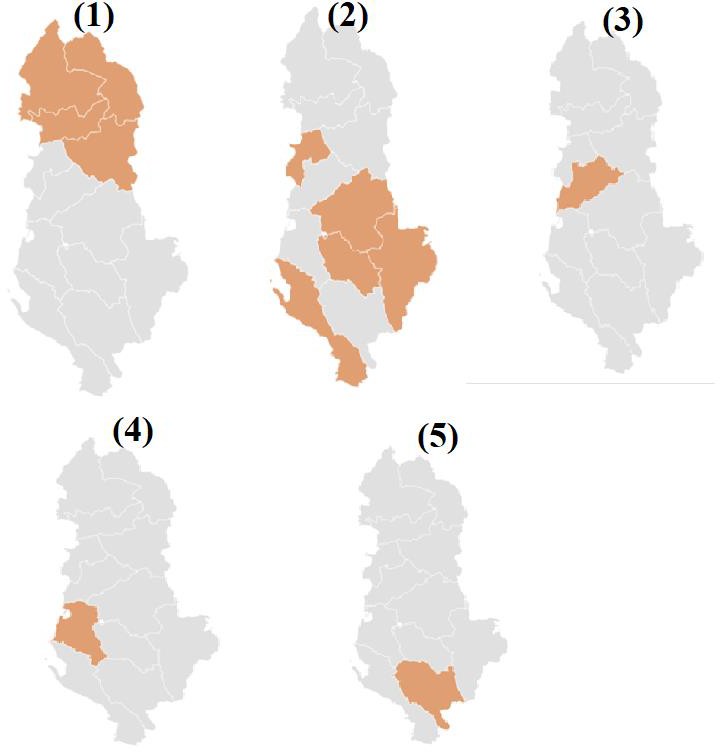
In this regard, we will first analyze and highlight the characteristics of tourism businesses according to the different indicators of Economic Value according to official statistics. Later we will try, through an exploratory statistical analysis, to identify territorial characteristics connected to the companies and finally we will use a confirmatory statistical analysis to validate these territorial characteristics. A statistical methodology used is cluster analysis. The first step is to use this methodology to explore the possibility of dividing the starting data into groups, in this case the hierarchical cluster analysis was applied with the agglomerative method of Ward [1]. This method minimizes the variance and can be defined and implemented through a Lance-Williams algorithm where all the approaches produce potentially different clusters and the choice of which one to use depends is strictly subjective.

1. **Results, discussion and conclusion**

Let's start talking about the number of tourist nights per month 5, the first indicator of the Economic Value [1]. Starting from the year 2017 we can consider the average annual number of overnight stays of tourists which is about 6 nights for a total of 26,824 nights. The relative contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is estimated to be around 1,708 million euros again in 2017. Word Travel & Tourism Council specifies that the total contribution of the tourism sector to the country's GDP (hotels, travel agencies, airlines and other passenger transport services and the activities of the catering and entertainment industry), is 26.2% of the total GDP. The daily expense per overnight tourist amounts to 94 Euros. Finally, let's talk about direct and total employment in the tourism sector. In 2017, tourism generated 291,500 jobs and represented 24.1% of total employment [3]. In the previous work the Albanian territory was divided into 5 characterizing groups on the basis of socio- demorgraphic and economic indicators6.

The groups are highlighted in the following figure. We can observe that the first group is formed by the northern regions, the second group by the southern regions and Durres, the third group by the capital, the fourth and fifth groups by Fier and Gjirokaster.

**Figure 2:** Section B: Economic Value in European Tourism Indicator System[[42]](#footnote-42)



Each of the groups has characteristics based on sustainable tourism related in the previous work [4]. We took the departure data and also added the tourist accommodation data. Through a cluster analysis we have reconfirmed the subdivision into five territorial groups and this time we have also added the characteristic of accommodation for tourists as per the table below. It appears that while for the first and last group all the accommodation possibilities for tourists are little used, for the second group (southern maritime destinations and Durres) the same accommodation possibilities are used to the maximum (except accommodation with friends or family members). There is also the third group (the Tirana district) in which hotels, B & Bs and second homes are used on average. Finally, the fourth group (Fier district where second homes are heavily used).

**Table 1:** Characteristics for each cluster

I cluster II cluster III cluster IV cluster V cluster

Significant Activities

gastronomic coastal/ cultural

tourism

potenzial cultural/

and tourists accomodation

tourism gastronomic gastronomic/ gastronomic

tourism cultural tourism tourism

Agricolture high medium/high low high medium

Arts and e entertainment

medium/low medium high low medium

Pubblic Sector medium/high medium/low low low high Trade/Trasportation medium/low medium high medium high Buildings low medium high medium medium

B&b low high medium low low

Hotels low high medium low low Homes rent low high high low low Second homes low high medium medium low

Stay by

parents/friends

low low high low low

The analysis carried out shows the importance of rented houses alongside the use of B & Bs and hotels. This trend would demonstrate an adaptation of Albanian tourism to do-it-yourself and mass tourism without exploring and highlighting its own strengths of the territory and leveraging sustainability in the tourism sector. In this first context of the feasibility study, the possibility in terms of financial incentives that the government could provide to small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector in adapting to high European standards of accommodation is of great importance. This strategy of investing even without a grant to increase sustainability standards in hospitality businesses could be efficient in the medium and long term, also helping to guide tourists towards solutions equivalent to rental houses but with a sustainable impact of the entire sector supply chain.

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**Reinventing Marketing Strategies in the Pandemic Era**

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**Abstract**

In this modern era of competition, every businessperson is attempting to attract more clients by providing them with a high level of pleasure through good products or services. As a result, marketing is a clever tool for connecting with customers in a variety of ways, including offline and online forms. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on people's lives and companies on a massive scale. Customers' buying dynamics and preferences have shifted as a result of this fatal epidemic. Furthermore, this pandemic will undoubtedly have a long-term impact on customers' psyches, as individuals choose to stay at home because social distance is one of the best ways to avoid contracting this virus. As a result, it is a right time for marketers to rethink their present marketing tactics in order to meet the new challenges that come with a significant shift in customer demands. This study intends to highlight the smart techniques that businesspeople are implementing to ensure their survival during this difficult period, as well as to give readers a valuable insight into the good and bad effects of this pandemic era.

***Key Words****: marketing strategies, social media, COVID-19, marketers and business people*

**1.Introduction**

Marketing is the process of creating, communicating, and delivering goods and services in exchange for money. In this COVID-19 era, marketing has evolved into a means of developing a positive image in the minds of customers and clients. This pandemic impacted the entire economy, changing consumer purchasing patterns as they became more reliant on virtual instruments rather than physical ways. Marketers will have to embrace new-age tools at this point to stay in touch with their clients in this Covid-19 social distance moment. During this difficult period, new age technology has proven to be a game changer, as it has solved several challenges for both vendors and buyers. As result, marketers and businesspeople are migrating from physical to digital channels to meet client demand during the pandemic.

1. **Literature Review**

First question that arise in minds of readers is about why marketers need to reinvent marketing strategies? Several polls have found that throughout the pandemic, customers developed new purchase patterns, changing their routines and habits. Virtual meetups, blogging, DIY video applications, Google Meet app, and other online platforms for study/entertainment/job/business are among the latest gadgets/products that consumers are looking for. Change is essential since we are all at a key juncture where all businesspeople must make rational decisions because it produces new economic or business dynamics. As a result, everyone must avoid making rash decisions and act in accordance with the existing situation.

Marketers have come up with a variety of marketing methods to deal with the virus's dire position. As a result of the crisis, many businesses are becoming more adaptable and developing exciting new ways to attract more customers during Covid-19's challenging period. This is the greatest time for certain businesses to engage more customers by revamping their marketing strategies and demonstrating a greater care for people's health and safety. Content strategy and GTM strategy, for example, and all of these clever strategies will be explained one by one in the following sections of this paper:

1. **Concerning appeals or campaigns strategy** – during the most difficult period of Covid-19, millions of businesses re-evaluated their marketing strategies by producing inspirational or worrisome appeals to their target audiences. As a result, this is a critical time for businesses to demonstrate empathy for their customers' health and safety by expressing genuine care for their well-being during this pandemic. At this critical moment of corona virus, entrepreneurs are aware of their consumers' emotions and feelings, which is why they put customer safety over profit. Customers are being urged to be safe by staying indoors, according to the public service announcements. For example, amazon is urging customers to stay at home by introducing a new tagline, "STAY SAFE STAY HOME," which expresses concern for safety.
2. **Redesigning logo strategy** - Changing current logos in the face of Covid-19 is one of the best actions that organizations are taking during this pandemic. Most major corporations are revamping their logos to promote social separation, mask wear, and cleansed hands, among other things. During times of public health crises, many firms have come up with inventive ways to spread the message of customer safety through their innovative logos. For example, one of the most well-known fast-food companies, McDonald's, recently altered its existing emblem, which was formerly just one golden color alphabetic symbol "M," but in response to the pandemic, the firm has separated its golden arches to encourage social separation.
3. **Strategy for virtual events** - During this period of social distance, digital modes are the most preferred means to stay in touch with clients. As a result, businesses are using online platforms to listen to client complaints as well as notify customers about impending product launches, and this is all made by great technology. During this pandemic, most organizations are conducting virtual events using their applications to communicate with a big audience at once, and it is a pressing requirement to reorganize client base via online meetings or virtual events. For example, jagermeister sponsored an internet event in which people asked to aid a New York restaurant owner by donating money just for the purpose of assisting someone who is unable to maintain their business during this moment of public crisis.
4. I**nstant response to customer questions** – A key aspect of a content marketing strategy is the prompt response to customer questions. Marketers are using this innovative method to please their clients throughout the pandemic by giving them all of the information they need in just one click. Customers can get special help with their questions and be kept up to date on the newest developments. Covid-19 raises a lot of additional questions, such as product delivery time, projected shipment period, and so on. Marketers are focusing on providing immediate responses to client questions because they understand that customers are important and that if customers are happy, a company may survive in this difficult period of public health calamity. For example - Flipkart, Amazon, and other shopping apps have clearly stated that product delivery would be delayed owing to the viral outbreak, and that all courier services will be delayed due to the non-operation of all public transit during the Covid-19 pandemic. “Delivery will be delayed due to Covid outbreak, sorry for the inconvenience, we require your cooperation, please be patient”. In these days of pandemic, all of these lines are widely seen on shopping app taglines.
5. **Social media marketing strategy** - During this crisis, social media has been critical to businesses' survival and growth. People tend to spend more time on social media sites during lockdowns than usual to avoid boredom from the same routine for several months. During the pandemic, entrepreneurs took full use of these platforms, bringing in more and more people from all over the world. Because the majority of people use social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Skype, businesses have grown more adaptable and updated their social media to engage with their audiences. For example, Jeni's Ice Creams demonstrated a high level of empathy in a public post on Instagram, which received millions of views immediately. They spoke about the collective experience of people throughout the world in their message, as well as people's health and safety precautions, and thanked their clients for their support and love during this pandemic.
6. **Discounts or other schemes strategy** - People are having financial difficulties as a result of the lockdown, which has rendered many people jobless, or a number of people have closed their businesses due to a lack of sales over the previous few months of the epidemic. So, in this difficult time, businesses step forward to support their clients by offering large discounts, zero-cost EMIs, free shipment, and free installation, among other things. In this crisis, all of these moves are wonderful. Furthermore, throughout the Covid-19 era, it is the most effective strategy to acquire new clients and keep existing ones. For example, Nyka is a cosmetic company that attracts millions of clients due to its generous discounts and special offers. Buy any Nyka product and get a 50% discount - buy nyka face cream and get a free face mask and so on. Customers applaud these actions, and Nyka emerges as a successful brand during the pandemic.

**3.Economic analysis on the impact of Covid-19**

According to Global Web Index, 44% of people have increased their use of social media, while 51% have increased their use of streaming services. This creates an opportunity for business to business marketers, but they must tackle this difficult situation thoughtfully and honestly. According to some research, 65% of people will base future purchase decisions on how well brands respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and 89% of people approve of brands sharing useful information about how to deal with the current situation in their marketing. Business to business marketers must provide customers with relevant, meaningful content and thought leadership in order to establish brand affinity and loyalty.

1. **What is the objective of the digital marketing efforts?**

Brand awareness is the top objective for 32% of the marketers. Delivering quality leads, which was last year's top goal, is still a close second this year, but marketing teams are discovering that a stronger focus on the top of the funnel boosts performance at the bottom of the funnel, resulting in better leads. Meanwhile, marketers continue to see lead quality as their main concern in 2020 (as they did last year), with 27% of marketers questioned putting it first. Marketing teams must supply better-qualified leads to sales teams, and traditional lead generation activities such as in-person events are currently unavailable, therefore it's more necessary than ever for B2B marketing teams to develop new solutions and reallocate budget.

**Conclusions**

Covid-19 has wreaked havoc on the economy as a whole, with the majority of industries suffering as a result of the epidemic. In this current condition of contactless purchasing and selling, it is only marketing that serves as a link between businessmen and clients/customers. This epidemic has had a significant impact on client purchasing behavior, which has shifted dramatically over the last few months of lockdown. Businesspeople are also changing from physical to digital mode to fulfill new client wants, and the above described tactics helped businessmen survive in this difficult period. Without a doubt, this outbreak has had a devastating effect on the economy, yet some sectors have thrived as a result of the current situation. As a result, businesspeople should not stop and should utilize all available methods to communicate with their consumers as well as to alert the public about safety and health precautionary measures. This article outlines a variety of strategies that marketers can use to reach out to their customers in the face of the epidemic.

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**Market and marketing considerations in the context of public services**

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***Abstract***

The main idea of theory of the market-based approach New Public Management is that market orientation improves public service performance. Many public services have forms of management and organization that are inspired by a market orientation—a businesslike model of governance that emphasizes an external focus on customers and competitors and internal integration of organizational functions, in this way the position of the consummator of the public goods changes form public to client. The imposition of market values onto public organizations creates situational factors in which it becomes difficult for public administrators to discern and advance the public interest in the public service offer.

This is particularly true in those instances where administrators must subordinate their personal and organizational interests to the public interest. From the New Public Management point of view, public administration a well as the public sector and public services would improve their performance if they were market oriented and client oriented. Many authors lay the debates about big disagreements that has to do specially with the role market and marketing in public organizations. In this context there are many arguments that promote the client philosophy in public sector but there are also other arguments that contradict the idea of public sector and public services offered oriented by market and client.

The main purpose of this paper in to reflect what is to explain public services and the main principles under which public services serve better the public interest and through which differ from services offered form private sector or other sectors. In the meantime, democracy and capitalism orients us toward a system leaded form the principles of competitiveness, political issues etc. At this point marketing can play a crucial role, but as it was explained before the considerations versus market oriented public services and marketing practices application in the public sector are divided in two sides, so other purpose of this study is to analyze the arguments of the both sides and reach constructive conclusions about the position of market and marketing practices in public sector.

The methods of this research will be concentrated in the theoretical synthesis and the review of the literature, legislation and reports, overall this study is based in analyzing the literature considerations on the up mentioned issues.

***Key Words***: *market, client, marketing, public administration, principles, public goods services, performance.*

**Introduction**

Dixit (2002)[[43]](#footnote-43) highlights two important issues about public sector activity. The first was the fact that the activity of public organizations to life products and services, which address not only the general public but also more unique users and not massive as the general public. Even public services address themselves politicians or political leadership of the country. The second is a consequence of the first. Its activity has public organizations to achieve multiple goals and objectives often conflict with each other. For example, it is expected that they simultaneously increase the efficiency, the effectiveness, but on the other hand must also ensure equal benefit of public services and public service delivery to the final customer in need. These issues demonstrate the difficulties that performance management of public services or services of general interest in this way of public organizations. These two features, so, the extent of large, even massive geographical public service and often conflicting objectives to be achieved by the provision of public services, makes it impossible to affect the incentives that could be used in the public sector cannot have effect as high as what was in the private sector.

During and after the 90s in what became known as "new public sector", many services in advanced economies were under pressure as efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the reduction of requirements against taxpayers, without reducing the volume production or the quality of public service. Thus the concept of organizational performance and its measurement is of great interest, as to the public or stakeholders, as well as for competition (Brignall, S., Modell, S., (2000)[[44]](#footnote-44).

*According to many considerations, organizational performance includes actual output's measured against planned output. This is one of the simplest definitions, more general, but also more comprehensive organizational performance. Organizations, as well as by this definition, there are exceptions and public organizations. The main purpose behind the definition is to measure its performance and after the measurement, its improvement. Measures which are not directly related to performance improvement (for example: improving communication with the public to build trust) actually are tools through which it aims to achieve the ultimate goal. Organizational performance includes some specific areas (a) financial performance (b) the performance of the product market (c) returns of the shares. To assess how well they are performing a public sector unit, often called and public agencies, managers must determine what it had planned to meet agency* (Behn, R. D., (2003)[[45]](#footnote-45).

An important perspective is given by the institutional theory, the performance can be seen as institutionally defined as institutional factors that determine the interest to be followed by the organization. Briefly argued (Brignall, S., Modell, S., (2000) overall performance, from the perspective of institutional theory can be defined as: (a) the domination of elites in organizations, (b) where there is a high professionalism and (c) the organization performs a technical function, outcomes (outputs) of which they are measurable. The performance can be interpreted more broadly, as (a) the rate of operation of democratic government, sometimes in a formal structure or rules of an organization (b) recognition of different interest costs and (c) the functioning of the organization is non-technical and results (output s) avoid measurement. As mentioned above organizational performance, in particular the public, seen as effective and efficient production of public services, implying different sources, such as: people, technology and various capital assets (Brignall, S., Modell, S., (2000).

In his book "Managing Public Organizations" author A. Ceni (2011)[[46]](#footnote-46) public organizations often see in parallel or in analogy to public services. In this way the public service gets a sublime importance, because it is the face of the organization. Afterwards, given that the service carries the property of simultaneity, so the, produced and consumed at the same time and above all, because public organizations produce public services that address a broad population and which should benefit everyone.

**Public services from the European Union point of view**

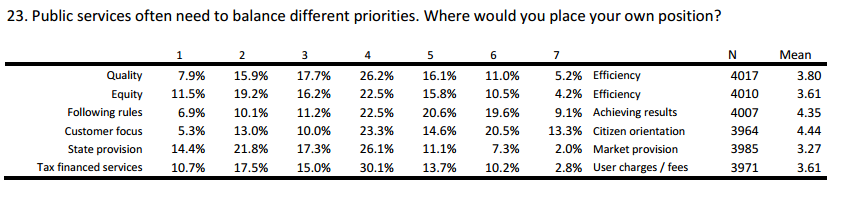
In 2009 the Treaty of Lisbon recognized the specific mission of services of general economic interest and their role in promoting social and territorial cohesion, but not properly defined what public services. Also, during the financial crisis that began in 2009 it has raised the question of financial sustainability of public services as conceived in Europe and called for drastic reforms in many countries (Costa. O., Kaeding. M., (2014)[[47]](#footnote-47). However, the treatment of public services from the point of view of European constitution is their orientation, interest, so it is suggested removing the word "public" and their determination as general interest services and services of general economic interest (Art. 14 of the Treaty Lisbon and Art. 2). In fact, in the jargon of the literature discussed by various authors also found two other definitions that are exactly Services of General Interest Non-Economic and Social Services of General Interest. While first determining therefore uneconomical Services General Interest found support in the European Constitution (article no. 36, Protocol no. 26), for determining second only interpretations. However, definitions are not synonymous with one another but define a category of public services even though the boundaries are fluid. Being a public service of general interest therefore not related to whether the service is provided by public or private sector but the fact that it should benefit all of the public in need. So there should be opportunities for the service to catch up to the last individual, to the classification of education as a service of general interest to exclude it from the rules of free competition (ETUC 2007)[[48]](#footnote-48). Service of general interest should be guided by the principles of equal access, continuity, security, adaptability, quality, efficiency, affordability (affordability), transparency, protection of groups of marginalized users and consumer protection and environmental and civic participation.

In principle the national public interest should generally be in line with market freedoms of the EU and competition law because the latter generally result in lower prices and greater choice for consumers. This is, after all, the goal of having the freedom to market and competition rules in the first place. However, where market failure can lead to suboptimal provision of public goods cannot be a case for public intervention towards the establishment of universal service obligations in one or more undertakings that are active in the market as the provider (s) recently. Even in this case competitive provisions within certain limits may be feasible and should be considered within the context of SGEI - not least, in order to meet the required standards of proportionality (Sauter. W., (2008). Some of the key principles of the approach of the European Commission in relation to services of general interest are (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 12 May 2004 entitled "White Paper on services of general interest" [[COM(2004) 374](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=en&type_doc=COMfinal&an_doc=2004&nu_doc=374) final**)** :

*‘Enabling public authorities to operate close to citizens: Community policies on services of general interest are based on various degrees of action and the use of various instruments, in accordance with the principle of subsidiary. Achieving the objectives of public services in competitive markets open, an internal market open and competitive, on one hand, and development of high-quality services accessible and affordable to the general interest, on the other, are compatible objectives. Ensuring cohesion and universal access: Access to all citizens and enterprises to affordable, high-quality services of general interest throughout the territory of the Member States is essential for the promotion of social and territorial cohesion in the European Union, including the reduction of obstacles caused by lack of access to the outermost regions. Maintaining a high level of quality, safety and security: the Commission wishes to guarantee, in addition to supplying high-quality services of general interest, the physical safety of consumers and users, everyone involved in the production and provision of these services and the public in general and, in particular, to provide protection against possible threats such as terrorist attacks or environmental disasters. Ensuring consumer and user rights: These include, in particular, access to services, in particular cross-border services, throughout the territory of the Union and for all groups of the population, affordability of services, including special schemes for persons with income low physical safety, security and reliability, continuity, high quality, choice, transparency and access to information from providers and regulators. Monitoring and evaluating performance: The Commission takes the view that systematic evaluation and monitoring is vital for maintaining and developing high-quality, accessible, affordable and efficient services of general interest in the European Union. The evaluation should be multidimensional and focus on all the legal aspects, economic, social and environmental. It should also take into account the features of the sector evaluated and situations specific to the various Member States and their regions. Respecting the diversity of services and situations: The diversity of services must be maintained because of the different needs and preferences of users and consumers resulting from different economic situations, social, geographical or cultural. This is true in particular for social services, health care and broadcasting. Increasing transparency: The principle of transparency is a key concept for the development and implementation of public policies regarding services of general interest. This ensures that public authorities can exercise their responsibilities and that democratic choices can be made and respected. The principles should apply to all aspects of delivery and cover the definition of public service missions, the organization, financing and regulation of services, as well as their production and evaluation, including complaint-handling mechanisms. Providing legal certainty: The Commission is aware that the application of Community law to services of general interest could raise complex issues. So, we will pursue an ongoing project to improve legal certainty regarding the application of Community law, the provision of services of general interest. It has already accomplished the modernization of the existing public procurement rules and initiatives in the field of state aid and public-private partnerships.’*

COCOPS conducted a survey in 2015 where several considerations and dimensions of public services were tested and studied[[49]](#footnote-49) regarding the application of several principles in the provision of public services. For this study were made 4814 interviews to public managers in 10 European countries. Through other valuable questions, one of the questions was more interesting for this study and was the where was asked to the managers about their own position for the different priorities that need to be balanced for the public service offer. The results of the answers are reflected in the table below.

***Table 1 Source COCOPS WP3 Survey Research Report - May 2015 page 43***



As we can see in the above table the higher result is on the answer of customer focus and citizen orientation. As it seems the general perception on the public service offer is that it should be focused in the customer needs and request, in this case the client is the public or the citizen. In line with this redefinition of citizens as customers that satisfies the demands of markets forces rather than the needs of citizens, there is an unprecedented expansion of partnership between the public and private sectors. In the current global context characterized by the eclipse of state-centered approach and proliferation of market-biased policies, there has been a growing dilemma in the role of public governance with regard to its responsiveness to the common citizens vis-a-vis the market forces. Such a dilemma between the realization of citizens' needs and the satisfaction of market demands, has been accentuated not only by the changing connotation and composition of citizenship but also by the recent transformation of state bureaucracy.[[50]](#footnote-50)

**Market issues on public services**

At the heart of the New Public Management (NPM) philosophy is a commitment to competitive market models of organizational behavior, the conceptualization of citizens as customers, and the glorification of entrepreneurial management.[[51]](#footnote-51) From many authors is argued that the public institutions that were developed in the past cannot serve us well today, and that the modern environment requires institutions that are extremely flexible, competitive, and able to squeeze "ever more bang out of every buck”.[[52]](#footnote-52) Many public services have forms of management and organization that are inspired by a market orientation – a business like model of governance that emphasizes an external focus on costumers and competitors and an internal integration of organizational functions (OECD 2005)[[53]](#footnote-53). This movement toward a “market orientation” has taken more than 30 years and sometimes reforms has been implemented with the intention of altering bureaucratic structures and managerial processes as in an attempt to improve the productivity and performance of the administrative state.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Adapting private-sector management techniques to public services is hardly a new idea. Bozeman suggests that market models are appealing because the public can understand them easily, public officials can communicate them easily, and they seem to offer shortcuts to decision making.[[55]](#footnote-55) Lynn (2001)[[56]](#footnote-56) observes that, despite its ostensible flexibility, the new paradigm is actually a lot more bureaucratic than the one it was intended to replace, but the decision rules are less constrained by sensitivity to politics, law, and policy than the old public administration. The new decision rules are outcome driven and rely on the manager's ability

Some scholars have been critical of this movement toward the adoption of private sector practices and have pointed to many flaws, such as poor accountability mechanisms, the devaluation of public sector values, a tendency to reduce political questions to administrative trivia, and lowered emphasis on the core administrative values of equity and fairness.[[57]](#footnote-57) Others, however, have welcomed such reforms—particularly overhead political officials who have led campaigns to implement them[[58]](#footnote-58). Nevertheless, while arguments have been presented on these reforms, public management researchers have been slow to place the theoretical infrastructure of New Public Management (NPM) under the empirical microscope and test whether a more businesslike approach to managing public services leads to better results.[[59]](#footnote-59) In the public sector, the customer concept must be broadened to account for the more complex, ongoing, and dynamic relationship between the state and its citizen-owners. This complex relationship between state and citizen cannot adequately be depicted as a series of principal—agent relationships or short-term market transactions between suppliers and consumers. It encompasses far more—public agencies sometimes have to impose obligation on users who can rightly be referred to as clients, and sometimes users are consumers of public services (charged fees) and, on other occasions, customers (receiving a service free at the point of delivery). Thus, while progress has been made in developing a customer orientation, the nomenclature remains complex.[[60]](#footnote-60) The most powerful approach is to force public service delivery organizations to function as business enterprises with financial bottom lines, preferably in competitive markets. We call this enterprise management. Rather than acquiring their government revenues from government appropriations of tax dollars, these public enterprises earn money by selling goods and services directly to their customers. To earn their keep, in other words, they must succeed in the marketplace.[[61]](#footnote-61)

There is many critics of NPM, on the other hand, argue that the values associated with the market, when applied to the administrative agencies of government, can in fact work against the public interest.[[62]](#footnote-62) Along those lines, authors have argued that by reformulating public administration to incorporate the theories, concepts, and practices of business, the field is being returned to the roots of its orthodoxy. [[63]](#footnote-63)

**Conclusions**

The redefinition of the citizen as a customer or a client and the orientation of the public service offer form the market philosophy is certainly a very interesting prospective and from some point of view a very successful way to lead these services to performance improvement. So, from this point of view we will have to rely on business administrators to efficiently distribute goods and services in society by acting as effective stewards of their organizational interests. Where those organizational interests come into conflict with the public interest, we rely on public administrators to constrain their behavior through the promulgation and enforcement of regulatory law. The adoption of market values by our public agencies, however, threatens to unsettle this arrangement by imposing the values of the market onto the very organizations that are intended to address the failures of the market. Therefore, if we are to expect public administrators to act as effective stewards of the public interest, we should be hesitant to impose the values of the market onto our public organizations. As we analyzed before public services have an added value and are served under some strict principles suggest and sometimes forced by the concept of public itself as its was shown also in the context of European Union, but what if this principles conflict or are not in the business interest? Since there are a lot of positive aspect of market orientation for public services but still there are a lot of question marks, and criticism is a issue that requires deeper research.

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**The Influence of Foreign Languages in Advertising**

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**Abstract**

The study of foreign languages in advertising has been a novelty in the last 15 years. The conducted research has tried to delve in the relationship between the foreign languages and the advertised product, the reasons behind the use of foreign languages, and the peculiarities of the targeted audience which may define if the use of foreign languages in the ads is successful or not. English is the most used language in ads nowadays. Due to its importance on the global stage, in the political and economical aspects alike, as well as due to its interconnected nature with the global world and urbanisation, its status as *lingua franca* comes as no surprise. Advertisers, as sharp observers of reality, dedicate much attention to the fact in how their message reaches the consumers and the foreign language is one of the most effective tools used to influence the latter. Having at their dispossal a limited arsenal with which they can impact on the consumers, advertisers endeavour to use foreign language terminology in order to make the product as stunning as possible. For this reason, they try to emphasise the quality of the product under the veil of the foreign language which dons the product with various overtones and peculiarities in order to enchant the consumer. This paper will endeavour to examine the rich corpus of terminology that is used by advertisers and elucidate the ways in how the former influences the consumer’s choice of products.

***Key words****: advertisement, linguistics, english, terminology, marketing, lingua franca*

1. **Introduction**

What role does foreign language comprehension play in advertising? How do consumers evaluate foreign languages in advertisements? Why do brands use a foreign language to communicate with their consumers? These pertinent questions have come to haunt in recent years the academia which is just now dealing with this novel technique by advertisers to latch on to the consumers. Advertisers, as keen observers of reality, pay very much attention to how their messages are delivered. Being aware that people feel happier with the idea of foods that are natural rather than synthetic, they use common language so as to mean something to the consumer. Having a limited amount of space in order to try to capture the potential consumer's

attention, an advertiser will always make conventional usage more attractive. For this purpose he will highlight the product's quality by making associations between the product and something that already possesses the characteristics he needs to claim for the product. As the researchers Lakoff and Johnson clearly state, the very essence of metaphor is the “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

According to the researcher Ingrid Piller, marketing communication makes frequent use of foreign or second language elements in branding and advertising[[65]](#footnote-65). Content analyses support the intuition that English is the language of international marketing communication displayed in many advertisements (ads) to non-native English speakers. Beyond opinions, empirical research investigating the differential effects of language choice in advertising to multilinguals with variable levels of fluency focuses on two main issues: (1) psycholinguistic differences between first and second language cognitive processing and (2) sociolinguistic differences in emotional or attitudinal reactions as a result of language choice. The classic study of the influence of foreign languages in ads is Leclerc et al. (1994), who investigated the impact of foreign branding on measures such as attitude towards the brand and attitude towards the ad. The starting point of this study was the notion that foreign languages seem to connect with characteristics of the country where the language is typically spoken (e.g. France—hedonism, USA—utilitarianism).

The use of foreign languages in advertising is not a new phenomenon. In the 1980s, academics in other domains became more interested in studying foreign languages in advertising, for instance researchers examining issues of globalization in the domain of business and advertising.A first observation from our review is that there is a wide academic interest in foreign languages in advertising. While the interest in foreign languages in advertising until the 1980s was mainly limited to researchers in linguistics (as documented in Piller, 2003), the end of the twentieth century has seen the study of the use and effects of foreign languages in advertising in a range of different fields, including marketing and advertising. While some disciplines are closely related (e.g. ‘marketing' and ‘consumer research', or ‘international advertising' and ‘advertising'), other disciplines are clearly distinct (e.g. ‘marketing' and ‘sociolinguistics'). The general picture that emerges testifies to a multidisciplinary interest in the phenomenon.

Effects of foreign languages in advertising —A number of studies have sought to determine the effects that foreign languages in advertising have on the audience, for instance on the attitude towards foreign language use (e.g. Rash, 1996), the attitude towards the ad (e.g. Ueltschy & Ryans, 1997), and the comprehension of the foreign expression (e.g. Foster et al., 1989; Rash, 1996). Petrof (1990) examined various different measures of effectiveness of the use of foreign languages. Below, the article shall try to dissect some different aspects of the usage of foreign words in ads and how this usage is entrenched in linguistic and discourse.

**1.2. Code switching**

According to the linguistic researcher David Crystal, language can have various functions and may be used for a wide variety of purposes: for example, to express feelings and emotions (the expressive function); to offer advice and recommendations or to persuade (the directive or vocative function); to inform, to report, to describe or to assert (the informational function); to create, maintain and finish contact between addresser and addressee, for example small talk (the inter-actional or phatic function); to communicate meaning through a code which could not otherwise be communicated (the poetic function)[[66]](#footnote-66). Although it might be expected that the informational and directive functions would dominate in advertising discourse, because advertisements are frequently multitype, hybrid discourses, examples of all these functions can be found in individual advertisements. Such hybrid transference between languages is called code switching has long been recognized and studied by sociolinguists. In the words of John J. Gumperz, code-switching can be defined as ‘alternation among different speech varieties within the same event'[[67]](#footnote-67). Code switches may also be motivated by the desire to mark, assert or adopt an ethnic or regional identity, and this is known as tag or emblematic switching.

Lexical borrowing of foreign words is an accepted and established practice among translators, and David Crystal defines a loan word as ‘a linguistic unit (usually a lexical item) which has come to be used in a language or dialect other than the one where it originated[[68]](#footnote-68).

Janet Holmes in her book “Introduction to Sociolinguistics” (1992) lists manifold possible reasons for code-switching – some or all of which may also be used in combination. The reasons are the followings:

1. **The linguistic fetishism**

The evolution of the usage of certain words can be traced, starting from a point at which a word is explained or an equiv-alent or general term is given, to the use of the term as self-evident. ‘Bundesbank' is a good example of this. No longer explained as Germany's central bank in many English texts, it generally stands alone now in media texts. This appears to be an obvious, logical and even wel-come progression. After all, is it not a good thing for the reader to be confronted with ‘foreign' words, to have to learn what they mean, to have to realize that the world is not monolingual?

1. **Association**

Advertisers, as keen observers of reality, pay very much attention to how their messages are delivered. Being aware that people feel happier with the idea of foods that are natural rather than synthetic, they use common language so as to mean something to the consumer. Having a limited amount of space in order to try to capture the potential consumer's attention, an advertiser will always make conventional usage more attractive. For this purpose he will highlight the product's quality by making associations between the product and something that already possesses the characteristics he needs to claim for the product.

1. **Elitism**

According to the philosopher, Theodor Adorno, in his essay ‘On Foreign Words', he argues that ‘foreign words should not be protected as one of the privileges of education':

There is, therefore, this idea that ‘foreign' words give a text an elitist flavour. This is, in and of itself, an interesting attitude, particularly in relation to the Anglophone worlds. While it is of course true that only those with access to a certain level of education have the opportu-nity to acquire a second language, this is really only the case in the industrialized world – since the vast majority of the rest of the world grows up bilingually if not multilingually.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Thus said, elitism is more seen as a globalising tool and mostly piques the interest of youth than old people. As Piller rightly points out, the employment of English words in German texts makes the young, educated elite targeted by such strategies feel good[[70]](#footnote-70). However, this can also alienate other groups, for example, elderly German people for whom the meaning of the ‘smart' ‘cool’ etc., and other English linguistic decorations may be an affront to their sense of linguistic nationality.

1. **Mythology**

Ad about a product usually comes with a brand and a history behind it, a myth of sorts which exemplifies the product and for which it stands for. In his volume of essays entitled ‘Mythologies’, Roland Barthes has pointed out that ‘advertising texts mythologize products for consumers, and this mythologizing includes the supposed national culture of the particular product, alluded to by the language’.[[71]](#footnote-71) A product mythologizes a brand, a nation and this brand or image is necessarily an external phenomenon, it is how the country is viewed from outside even though it may have been formulated domestically, and it is necessarily a simplified view. The German *Fachkenntnisse* (expertise) is lauded among the lovers of cars, with German cars such as Volkswagen and Mercedes being hailed as durable with high longevity – such is the projection of the German car industry worldwide.

**Foreign languages in food advertisement**

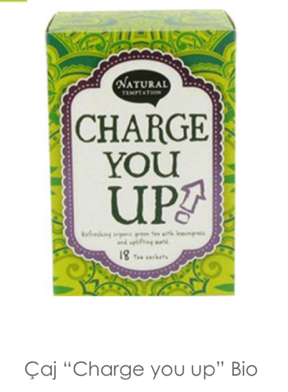
An ad is a type of discourse which make use not only of the language but also of the images in order to ‘hook’ the customer. Language, of course, is not the only mighty tool at the hands of the advertisers when it comes to the promotion of the product or brand building. Nonetheless, the question still persists: do brands influence the customer when they are used in conjunction with foreign languages? Are foreign words a bait that dangle before our eyes and served us as an enticement to buy the product? Do foreign terms such as ‘organic’, ‘wholemeal’, ‘natural ingredient’, ‘farm fresh’, ‘low-carb’ or ‘low fat’? Specifically speaking, what unconscious image or metaphorical concoction is enacted in the minds of consumers and drives them in their purchasing decisions? Should we trust these foreign words in ads that advertisers are so

keen on plastering our tv screens with? Do they warrant enough trust from the English-speaking world by acting as emblems of reliability? These are daunting questions that a consumer must take into account and be aware of them so that he may not fall into that enticing oblivion of foreign words that may drive their purchasing decisions.

The advertisers try to dangle the foreign terminology in front of our eyes in a way as to suggest that their product is of high quality and they always emphasize the fruitful ingredients that they product beholds. In such a digitalized word in which the Content Marketing is supplanting the traditional marketing as a more cost effective means, the usage of a foreign language by the advertisers is a novelty and a strategic ‘weapon’ used by them in recent years. Of course, the field itself is still in its infancy and needs further research on the influence of foreign languages in ads.

Advertisers use language that suggests their product is of especially high quality and they only emphasize the beneficial ingredients their products contain. It is their purpose to find ways through which to arouse customer's interest. Perhaps we do not know exactly how much of this language influences the consumer's attitude and how much of it is used just a marketing strategy but, what we do know for sure, is that metaphor has become an indispensable tool in advertising for the purpose of persuading the audience into buying the products advertised. We believe that slogans are more effective and their effectiveness increases even more when using metaphors. Although they are short and often abbreviated they contain a large amount of conceptual metaphors which offers them the possibility to be interpreted in different ways.

In Albania, a new tendency has come to light in the recent years – namely, the fascination with organic and natural products. An increase in the number of organic shops has been noted recently, sops which operate mostly not only with physical shops but come with a full-fledged online infrastructure.

The number of such operators currently certified in Albania in on the uphill and the array of products that they offer is increasing on a daily basis. For exemplify this trend, I would like to mention (not for marketing reasons) the first organic supermarket in Albania, ‘Bio Ju’ which opened in 2018 And according to their website, it offers over 6000 organic products in their

catalogue; other organic shops such as ‘Goodies Farm’, ‘Marcato’, ‘Organico’ etc., offer a wide array of food products with foreign labels such as ‘charge me up’, as well as German words such as ‘Butterkaese’ (cheese). Needless to say, the German language is not so widespread in Albania but German terminology such the former and the ones mentioned during this article stand now as a staple for the German brand and nation. Under the same breath we can mention the Italian words used profusely in the cosmetic sector by the Albanian operators, an emblem for fashion and beauty.

Not only the food products but also the bar cafes are brimming with with words such as ‘Shisha Lounge’, Bakery&Pastry’, ‘Breakfast&Brunch’ etc. Thus said, it is fair to assume that the trend of foreign words have penetrated In the food ads in Albania and the trend is going to increasing in the following years.

**Conclusions**

The persuasive power of an advertisement varies according to the advantages brought by the proposed product. The image of taste has to base on the elements that create a natural effect. The key concept differentiates the product from the other products existent on the market. The most important elements of the argument correspond to the slogan and to a specific and unique sensation with which the product is associated. Advertisers take advantage of the food domain by creating a multitude of messages which are meant to make their customers believe everything and buy their products. The English language would appear to be the most successful ‘foreign' language in global advertising. It can not only take on a number of different associations and fetishes (exp. cosmopolitan, modern, but can also function as a lingua franca in international advertising ‘communication', and it is the default language for media that are global or pan-national operators. Everyone wants to be perceived as a global player, and such as perception is best achieved through the use of English and other western foreign languages such as German, French, Italian etc., which attest to the domination of the western languages in the marketing discourse, for now at least. The study of the influence of foreign languages in ads is still in its infancy, especially in Albania, but with the growth of online marketing and the increasing awareness of the consumers will drive further forays in the research of this field.

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