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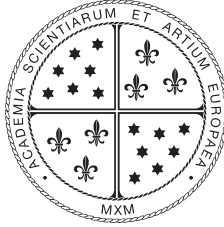


# EXPLORING THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE: THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON COMMUNICATORS

Editor: Božidar Veljković

MARIBOR, 2023





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**EXPLORING THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE:  
THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON COMMUNICATORS**  
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**Reviewers:** Assist. Prof. Dr. Slobodan Hadžić, Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Assoc. Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Sead Alić, „North“ University, Croatia

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## FOREWORD

Needs, wishes, intentions, and expectations are only knowledge for themselves, and they mean nothing until they become knowledge or a message for others with the help of certain symbols and actions, as well as the means of their transmission - MEDIA. „Without transposing the information into some communication medium (movement, speech, letter, electronic and electromagnetic waves, etc.), it remains silent and invisible to others in the social environment, except for the author himself (Plenković, 2019).“ In the most general sense, communication, in addition to the living (social and animal) and „non-living“ world, is increasingly becoming a part of the virtual world of artificial intelligence. That key element of the communication process is the MEDIA. The scientific monograph, which is in front of you, contains the works or research results of professors and students of communication science on the topic of the relationship between media and science. All the papers published in this book were subjected to the process of anonymous peer-review. So, what is the social role of the media, or in other words, the media between professionalism and ideology today, is a wide area of the author's research curiosity, whose works we present.

»We live in a time of exceptional complexity of social circumstances, technological progress, and complexity of scientific information. The media image of the social role of science has changed over time, but it is precisely the complexity and diversity of scientific research that distances science from the interests of the wider population and makes it difficult to understand the importance of science in everyday life (Mustić and Veljković)“. Therefore, part of the attached papers in this monograph indicates the relationship between the goals of science in general (the good of man) and the new approaches of the media in informing the public. Thus, the author Jakšetić investigates the extent to which media articles about covid-19 were supported by scientific evidence and determines, „that there is a statistically significant difference in the acceptability of information between published newspaper articles about covid-19, compared to articles that use scientific research as a source.“ Of course, the works in the monograph do not include all aspects of the relationship between science and the media, but that is why the need for credibility and ethics of the media is more emphasized (due to fruitful communication among the scientific public).

The virtual world, as prof. Baltazarević emphasizes in her work, offers the possibility of satisfying the hunger for communication, but also of disseminating information and forming different groups for the exchange of opinions. This phenomenon of human community enables the positioning of one's own choice. However, in such a parallel communication space, as prof. Baltazarević argues, it

is possible to endanger the safety of users. The safety and dignity of the human - communicator in the world of social interactions and the role of the media in that process is also a topic that captures the research attention of the authors of the monograph. Namely, reality is not something substantial, but a product of language. The word, written, spoken, performed, whatever it may be, is the basis of symbolic social interaction and a means of transposing knowledge into information, the ultimate purpose and achievement of which is fatally determined by the media (Berger and Luckmann).

The monograph also contains chapters dealing with the impact of technologies on the development and perspective of new media from the point of view of creation, transmission, and management of information. »Now we have the Internet, multimedia, and VR (virtual reality), but it is not easy for us to predict what will happen next. In addition to technology as a creator, new media are increasingly the subject of scientific research through social sciences, especially through communication in its multi, but also transdisciplinary sectors (Šorđan)«.

In addition to the development of the material part of information technology and the emergence of new media, the role of media in modern society also has the technology of applying verbal concepts of communication, the basis of which is speech. We are talking about a stereotype, as distorted information. »The research conclusions show that stereotypes are created as generalized opinions, which are significantly influenced by the mass media, but also cultural differences. The solution can be seen in continuous education, objective public information and coordination of civil society organizations, state institutions and bodies,“ conclude Mutić and Grmuša in their research on communication with refugees in Croatia.

The research results of some of the chapters in this monograph indicate that social networks are the most common and comprehensive social media, so we are talking about online communication, in all areas and levels of social organizational structures. »Online social networks are considered a two-way communication medium of the modern age. They are present in all spheres of human life, including in the work environment. Employees also use them for personal purposes during active working hours (Lebar).“ Digital channels as a form of marketing are becoming the main way of marketing communication for companies around the world (Simonovich). The author Maruša Mavsar devotes a special aspect to the role of the media at the regional-local level in her research work. »Local storytelling has a proven effect in increasing civic participation and ensuring pro-social behavior. Despite the important role of local media in community engagement, communication studies seem to ignore local storytelling in Southeast Europe.“

In short, by extracting certain sequences from the works of individual authors, we wanted to present some of the topics that were the subject of research on the

unlimited, all-time, and ubiquitous teaching of social interactions, relationships in which all stakeholders, regardless of their legal status, necessarily enter. The aphorism, everything that is not in the media - does not exist, illustrates the social role of the MEDIA in an inspiring way. Of course, we dedicate this scientific monograph, as well as the previous one, to the founder of the doctoral study Strategic Communication Management, at the AME academician, prof. Ph.D. Mario Plenković.

Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Božidar Veljković, Editor  
Acting head of the doctoral study program  
Strategic Communication Management  
Alma Mater Europaea – ECM



# THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON MODERN COMMUNICATORS

**Prof. Ph.D. Vesna Baltezarević**

Faculty of Law, Megatrend University, Belgrade, Serbia

## ABSTRACT

The virtual world offers the possibility to satisfy the hunger for communication, but also to disseminate information and form different discussion groups in order to exchange opinions. This phenomenon of human community allows positioning of one's own choice. However, in such a parallel communication space, it is possible to endanger the security of users. The acceptance of the imposed views of the media in order for the communicator to identify with the group, he/she is approaching, is particularly dangerous, as this leads to the renunciation of freedom and the right to know the truth. Absolute defense against the media is not possible, but media literacy can mitigate the negative effects of the media and its deception. The research conducted in this paper answered the following research questions: Is virtual communication as attractive as real-world communication? Do communicators adhere to virtual group attitudes? Does media literacy contribute to preserving the freedom of communicators and realizing the right to the truth?

**Keywords:** virtual world, security, virtual group attitudes, freedom and right to truth, media literacy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication in the face of new technologies is increasingly „moving“ to the virtual world. The attraction of the Internet is becoming a new phenomenon of the human community. The virtual world offers pleasure to the communicator who positions himself in the computer world by his own choice. A technological leap in the progress of human society has laid the foundation for a new, parallel virtual world. “New technologies and global media have already established themselves as the key social factors that shape modern society. Mass communication has become the dominant mode of information exchange and the inevitable fact of life for the modern man. People are increasingly turning to media trying to address the problem of alienation and growing social dysfunction. They expect that the media will feel the gap it contributed to in first place” (Baltezarevic & Baltezarevic 2019, 231). Media literacy, which includes information literacy, indicates the significant role of information and media in everyday life. It is a prerequisite for achieving freedom of expression and information. Its goal is to enable media consumers to understand the functions of the media and other broadcasters of information, to educate them to critically evaluate media content and make informed decisions as users and producers of information and media content. “Socializing and surfing the online space does not pass without leaving traces. Each user provides information about himself, sometimes as a condition to be able to access the requested applications, when he consciously agrees to it, sometimes by exchanging data with other network participants, unaware that the network ‘remembers everything’, that the data remains deposited even in the case when remove your profile” (Baltezarevic et al., 2015a, 370). The Internet, as the first medium that enabled a model of communication in which communicators are numerous and scattered all over the world, promoted the user of information from a passive recipient of information to an active media participant.

“Defense against the media is the only way to one’s own freedom, but facing media politics shows that absolute defense against the media is not possible. Members of the mass can only partially oppose imposed attitudes by actively participating in communication processes. However, the media-insufficiently educated public often accepts media messages, without a deeper analysis and search for the real essence. That’s why we can’t even talk about reaching complete freedom, because always, at least part of the manipulative media messages find their way to people’s consciousness and inevitably stay there” (Baltezarevic et al., 2015b, 56) The popularity of the Internet is enhanced by the possibility to satisfy the hunger for communication, but also to market information and form different discussion groups for the exchange of opinions, news, and reporting on events that are important to that audience for any reason. The Internet thus provides a wide va-

riety of information sources, and this affects the attraction and retention of the audience. Recklessness on the networks has led to the emergence of a number of wide-ranging incidents, which has had the effect that Internet users are beginning to express concern about the significant publication and use of their personal data (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

Electronic media continuously exert influence on group identity and do so without special effort because they are not constrained by the ties between physical location and access to information. The group identity based on the physical presence of the communicator is giving way to various new forms where the physical location is not crucial. On the Internet, everyone is at the „same place“ and at the „same time“. The global nature of internet communications allows the audience to look for information whenever they want, rather than passively waiting for it, and this is the most significant change in the nature of the media. In this surrogate space, people find satisfaction that is often denied them in reality. They form their characters, often completely different from the one they have in the real world. Thanks to the new media, the common man is able to get information easily. However, this is exactly the trap set by the new form of mass communication. Holding a phone in their hands or sitting in front of their computer, people have the feeling that they are safe in „their“ cyberspace and that they have control over what happens to their data that they leave behind every day. All these data represent a challenge for hacker groups and various corporations that use these data to form databases that they use for their own needs without the consent of the „owner“ of the data. The information found on the portals is often unverified, and the anonymity of the participants is enabled, which can be a cover for various criminogenic behaviors. A significant part of the online media space is still not covered by legal regulations, which leads to numerous violations of human rights, but also to serious criminal acts that remain outside the scope of the law.

Media literacy is becoming a necessity of modern society, but the education and skills necessary for this type of literacy require educated and interested citizens as a prerequisite. Citizens found space for action in this qualitative vacuum. There is an increasing number of yesterday's passive media observers who, when they find themselves in the right place at the right time, inform others about it and spread the information they have obtained. The Internet and modern technologies have enabled the „ordinary man“ to become a reporter from the scene. A passive recipient of 'already seen' news becomes an active distributor and producer of current information.

The human mind is a marvelous collection of structures, systems and memories. He is the center of man's consciousness and his way of acting. Thanks to the specificity of the mind, each person has his own identity and his own view of the world. How to drown such a unique person in the crowd? The only possibility is to adapt to a

model called the „desired subject“. „The media helps the individual define himself in relation to other people, while at the same time developing the fear that not accepting the established model of behavior can alienate them from their own group“ (Baltezarevic at al., 2016, 37).

“Hybrid identity and human action become, thus, a virtual upgrade of real limitations and shortcomings, which attempts to overcome physical, spiritual, social, psychological, spatial and temporal limitations. There remains, however, a doubt as to whether it is a driving, positive utopia and the embodiment of Bloch’s principle of hope, which directs the subject towards reaching the idea of the foreign, undiscovered, non-existent, or a media dystopia, as a negative utopia that deprives thought of both layers of subjectivity, making it impossible to overcome individually its limit of empirical experience and the transition into the sphere of action of Kant’s transcendental non-imagination?” (Đorđević, 2011, 133).

## **2. IS VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION AS ATTRACTIVE AS REAL-WORLD COMMUNICATION?**

This reevaluation of the importance of physical presence and interpersonal touch is particularly important considering an increasing use of virtual environments that strongly rely on vision and audition, but scarcely involve tactile stimulations. Indeed, current communication systems, such as videoconferencing, social media use and engagement with virtual reality activities, do not support sensory feedback through the sense of touch and they have been shown to be not sufficient to prevent social isolation and loneliness.

The importance of physical presence and interpersonal touch is gaining importance due to the increasingly frequent presence of media users in a virtual environment that relies on vision and audition, and very rarely includes tactile stimulation. Existing communication systems and virtual reality activities do not include sensory feedback through the sense of touch, which affects the fact that they are not sufficient to prevent social isolation and loneliness (Usta et al., 2014). It has been shown that the appearance of loneliness and the effort to achieve and maintain contacts with peers and family through social media is not enough (Cauberghe et al., 2021).

Virtual communities enable communication between people who are physically distant, providing a sense of social presence, but it is only a matter of perception of presence with others in an environment created through communication technologies.

## **3. DO COMMUNICATORS ADHERE TO VIRTUAL GROUP ATTITUDES?**

Virtual teams, like real-world teams, can have a stronger or weaker team identity, whereby a greater degree of team identity in virtual teams can reduce some of the negative aspects (Zimmerman, 2011), while a sense of belonging, as well as a social



presence within a virtual team, can be achieved by creating a shared social identity as a group, rather than by creating interpersonal connections between individuals. Central to the process of social categorization is the mechanism of depersonalization. When following group prototypes, individuals no longer perceive people as distinctive individuals but as better or worse approximations of the group prototype. The perception of others and the perception of the self are depersonalized (Schulz et al., 2020, 204).

Identity develops across contexts and time, and is shaped by cultural influences including age, generation, ethnicity, race, religion, spirituality, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, education, employment, ability status, national origin, immigration status, and historical, as well as ongoing experiences of marginalization, among other variables (Comas-Díaz, 2012).

#### **4. DOES MEDIA LITERACY CONTRIBUTE TO PRESERVING THE FREEDOM OF COMMUNICATORS AND REALIZING THE RIGHT TO THE TRUTH?**

„In a world in which most people communicate using media and in which most people therefore have the potential to access mass audiences, it is multiple truths – in the plural – which are becoming the norm. The truth is dissolving in the face of more pluralist understandings of truth (and at times even alternative truths)” (Knaus 2020, 7).

Media literacy implies education in the field of communication with the media, which is needed especially for young people to become competent to be critical about the credibility of news on conventional and social media platforms (Pate et al., 2019, 26). With competence in media consumption and production, citizens have the opportunity to revalue and rebalance the unity, individual and societal freedoms, and economic underpinnings that are crucial to democracy (Jolls & Johnsen 2018, 1379), but providing freedom of communication, without control, is a big problem, because it allows people to spread misinformation, which leads to a disturbed information value system (Tasnim et al., 2020).

#### **5. METHODS**

In order to collect data, a survey of respondents was conducted through an electronically forwarded questionnaire. In the first part of the questionnaire, there were questions about the respondents' personal data (gender, age and professional education). In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to express their views based on closed-ended questions. Respondents were offered answers ranked on a Likert scale from 1. Absolutely disagree to 5. Absolutely agree. IBM SPSS software for data processing in the field of social sciences was used to process the survey results. The answers were processed using descriptive statistics,

comparative methods and correlation analysis. For the purposes of this research, a special questionnaire was prepared and sent electronically to 150 e-mail addresses. A total of 129 valid questionnaires were selected for final processing.

## 6. RESULTS

Demographic data on the respondents, show that n=81 (62,8 %) male respondents, and n=48 (37,2 %) female respondents. The age structure shows that most responders are from the age group 26-35 years n=57 (44,2 %). According to the educational structure, the most respondents were with secondary education n=53 (41,1 %).

The data collected through the conducted empirical research enabled us to gain insight into the views of the respondents who provided us with answers to the research questions posed in this paper.

**RQ1.** Is virtual communication as attractive as real-world communication?

**Table 1. The respondents' attitude to the assertion that communication is as attractive as real-world communication**

RQ1	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	13	10.1	10.1	10.1
Disagree	20	15.5	15.5	25.6
Neither agree nor disagree	32	24.8	24.8	50.4
Agree	55	42.6	42.6	93.0
Strongly agree	9	7.0	7.0	100.0
Total	129	100.0	100.0	

N= 55 (42,6 %); Mean =3,21; Standard deviation=1.109.

From the Table 1. We can see that the most of respondents agree with the assertion.

**RQ2:** Do communicators adhere to virtual group attitudes?

**Table 2. The respondents' attitude to the assertion that communicators adhere to virtual group attitudes**

RQ2	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	6	4.7	4.7	4.7
Disagree	40	31.0	31.0	35.7
Neither agree nor disagree	24	18.6	18.6	54.3
Agree	54	41.9	41.9	96.1
Strongly agree	5	3.9	3.9	100.0
Total	129	100.0	100.0	

N=54 (41,9 %); Mean =3,09; Standard deviation=1.034.

From the table 2. We can see that the most of respondents agree with the assertion.

**RQ3:** Does media literacy contribute to preserving the freedom of communicators and realizing the right to the truth?

**Table 3. The respondents' attitude to the assertion that media literacy contribute to preserving the freedom of communicators and realizing the right to the truth**

RQ3	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	13	10.1	10.1	10.1
Disagree	27	20.9	20.9	31.0
Neither agree nor disagree	29	22.5	22.5	53.5
Agree	60	46.5	46.5	100.0
Total	129	100.0	100.0	

N=60 (46,5 %); Mean =3,05; Standard deviation=1.041.

From the table 2. We can see that the most of respondents agree with the assertion.

## 7. DISCUSSION

By analyzing the results of the research on the views of the respondents in relation to the research questions that were raised in this paper, the statement that was arrived at through theoretical consideration is confirmed. Almost half of the respondents believe that virtual communication is as attractive as real-world communication. In search of new contacts, the respondents decide to replace the real world with virtual communities, that are formed through modern technologies in the hope that the virtual proctor will enable them to overcome loneliness and isolation. Respondents also agree with the statement that communicators adhere to virtual group attitudes, which further means that when individuals follow group prototypes, they no longer perceive people as special individuals, but as approximations of the group prototype. The perception of others and the perception of self are depersonalized. By accepting the views of the group, which they join in the virtual environment, it simultaneously leads to the upgrading of the entered identities. Respondents recognize the role of media literacy in preserving the freedom of communicators and realizing the right to the truth. Only mastering the tools of media literacy can help digital media users recognize the quality of posted information, as well as protect themselves from inaccurate and malicious posts. In this way, a predisposition is created for the protection of the freedom of communicators and a more favorable climate is created for their realizing the right to the truth.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In the modern media environment, communicators are exposed to the influence of virtual media that redesign their everyday communication. In an attempt to

overcome the loneliness they are exposed to in the real world, communicators often look for a new communication proctor, which inevitably takes them to the virtual world. Joining virtual communities gives them the illusion of socializing and making new friends. By approaching virtual social groups, in fear of being isolated, it leads communicators to agree with the views of such groups and thereby expose their united identities to changes. Such identity upgrading is positive when the group exchanges information that is true, positive and encourages the individual's right to exercise their right to freedom and truth. However, the virtual proctor can be misused to market inaccurate and malicious information, which can misinform and disorient communicators. In order to be able to overcome the danger of these traps lurking on the Internet, communicators must educate themselves, in the sense of getting to know the tools and methods that media literacy entails.

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AS A BASIC FEATURE OF MODERN COMMUNICATION - WHERE IS INTERNET GOING

Prof. Ph.D. Zdravko Šordjan

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

Accelerated technological development creates newer and newer media, so we cannot imagine the end of the above-mentioned technological process, not even in our most fantastic predictions. Now we have the Internet, multimedia, and VR (virtual reality), but it's not easy for us to predict what will be next. Apart from technology, as a creator, new media are more and more the topic of scientific research through social sciences, especially through the communicology in its multi as well as transdisciplinary sectors. Learning how new media be used became a challenge and, at the same time, its own purpose, but above all the necessary thing. Tracking technological innovations in the new media becomes more and more complicated, due to the fact that something which is new today, and tomorrow becomes old-fashioned and is not used anymore. But regardless of these changeable facts, it is reasonable to get these two conclusions: (1) New media shall be upgraded in their basic elements, which is the same case with offline media, as well as (2) New media in most cases shall not eliminate digital communications which already exist; instead, the latter shall be increased with new dimensions. Now we may ask ourselves questions: "What is it going to change?" and "What will stay unchanged?", but we cannot answer these questions and, for now, both of them stay rhetorical, because we all lack empirical research in order to get adequate and complete answers. The truth is, that not only technological levels have been undergoing deep changes, but social and cultural levels as well, which is finally the most important thing. It is a strategic question of what kind of social, psychological, and cultural changes shall be caused by the development of new media. Regardless of so many still unanswered questions, yet, some answers, as well as some future theories on this topic are possible at the communicational level.

**Keywords:** technology, modern communication, Internet, media, VR (virtual reality)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of media technologies leads to the relatively rapid elimination of the dominance of mono-media. Print, radio, television, telephone, and film will not disappear, but will likely continue to exist as components of a new multi- and poly-media system. The use of new media implies that users must acquire technical knowledge in the use of modems and adapters, and generally transform or navigate in a technically integral, differentiated, open media system. This circumstance is significant, especially in the transitional period. There will be more „established connections“ and fewer direct, immediate relationships facilitated by the senses between living and omnipresent human beings around us (Radojković, 1997).

The rapid development of media technologies has caused a technological shock primarily among the older generation. Similar to the emergence of printed media, when the limiting factor was general illiteracy, here we are dealing with the need for technological literacy. There are already developed multimedia systems that use modems, adapters, etc. to realize the transformation of individual classical media and content: television, text, telephone, music - into an integrated system.

Involvement denotes the psychological factor of attention arousal. It has long been known that information connected to emotional reactions is more accessible, especially if the degree of involvement of the recipient is low. This fact is known from the results of research and applied psychology practice and is especially used in economic propaganda, often as an element of banal contrast and surprise in relation to the situation and the recipient. However, it is also known that reactions to message content also depend on the existence of an active interest on the part of the recipient in the respective content. Classical media have already developed basic methods of survival or at least mitigating this psychological problem by offering the so-called informational-emotional mix. The communication act represents the dynamic aspect of the communication phenomenon, so besides the operations marked on the message transmission line, a very lively social interaction takes place... (Đorđević, 1989). This principle will be maintained in new media as well, with the need to resort to even more radical solutions, alongside significantly differentiated offerings. What is most interesting is the role assigned to information accumulation and its storage in human language in order to be reused (Havelok, 1991).

Intensification also means amplifying existing mixed content so that as many individual and group interests as possible are separately covered. Categories, whether mass or public, lose significance in this case, giving way to the dominance of separate groups. It is currently difficult to find a general predictor.

Therefore, it is possible for forms of communication in which communicative groups overlap or connect in the domain of interests to completely disappear.

However, there will still be situations where it is necessary to lead a general campaign on a certain issue of general interest. However, these campaigns, given the multitude of groups with very different interests, will require significantly more creativity in finding and determining methods and content that allow for a common consensus. „This is a problem that will affect the development of society as a whole“ (Groebel, 1994).

Differentiation, which has occurred since the Middle Ages and especially in the 20th century, has led to an increasing importance of group and individual factors and value characteristics. The rapid development of technological civilization in recent decades, as well as social and economic changes, have necessitated appropriate cultural changes. In these changes, the aesthetic perception of the world and phenomena in an individualized structure has become so differentiated that it cannot be generalized into a few general patterns. Therefore, individual symbols must be taken into account as factors that arouse emotional reactions in order to capture attention. It is important to pay attention to aesthetic criteria. This primarily applies to the medium of virtual reality in the entertainment and recreational field, but also in other areas. The strength of the impression and the level of media acceptance as a whole depend on aesthetic criteria and greater individual orientation

Similarly, attention must be paid to various content and forms of fantasy and imagination, so that along with the content of media messages, a series of receptive argumentative sequences can be enabled. The possibilities of fantasy are unlimited. And a special characteristic of the development of new media are games in the domain of fantasy for children and young people. The ability to create such games is crucial for the commercial breakthrough of new media, especially virtual reality media. New media are already capable of producing countless games and enabling users to do the same.

The information sector will develop in multiple directions. On one side, there is the Internet, which has the capacity to receive and provide all kinds of information free from the management of traditional media. As a result, a large portion of this information will be in circulation without anyone knowing where to find it. Approximately one-quarter of all Internet users in the United States visit the presentation of a religious organization at least once a month (Stojković, 2009).

On the other side, the classical principle of information processing will remain partially, whether permanently or temporarily, with the capabilities of information and communication systems disproportionately increasing. Access to these systems will also be facilitated. Under the influence of new media, further globalization of information is underway, more in terms of transmission than internationalization, storage, or the creation of scientific systems. To realize this optimally, discussions



and organizational experiences of experts from different fields are necessary. All of this encompasses cultural, symbolic, and codic integration. In this regard, a legitimate question can be raised as to whether different textual codes (scripts) will survive in 21st century Europe, especially whether the Cyrillic code will survive or disappear in new media, as the synchronization process, which has long been perfected technically, is still not in use in Serbia at the end of the 20th century.

The growing significance of images, that is, the increasing visualization of communication in new media, raises, among other things, a question for which there is currently no answer: Are we „returning“ to the beginning of pictorial writing with new media, or is something else at play?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION**

New media enable new types of communicative interactions that are not characteristic of traditional media and encompass a wide range of communicative activities. They are realized through digital technical means and involve individuals, groups, and mass participants. The Internet represents one such digital system that offers a range of choices from the lowest to the highest degree. In the business world, a system called „pay-per-view“ is already established, which means that an individual is offered a wide selection of products or movies and chooses the one that suits their needs. However, teleshopping and telebusiness represent a limited form of interaction. The process of modernizing education also inherently requires media literacy (Radojković, 1997).

Digital interactions, in the true sense of the word, are much broader. They involve communication in the real and unreal world, with real and virtual partners. The subject and purpose of these communicative interactions are conversations, information exchange or acquisition, satisfying curiosity and entertainment, and possibly developing lasting relationships among participants. Digital communication among numerous participants or groups, whether one-time, sporadic, or continuous over an extended period, is realized without personal contact, which is truly a revolutionary novelty in the development of media and communication in general.

In addition, aspects of voluntariness and the minimum degree of mutual obligation imply a new form of group dynamics because on the Internet it is possible to communicate without revealing one's true identity. Digital interactions also signify the expansion of global communications. Unlike traditional media such as, for example, the telephone, the Internet provides incomparably greater and more favorable possibilities for global interaction.

New media are versatile in terms of identity. It is possible to communicate without revealing one's identity or with partial identity disclosure, etc., all the way to full representation. It is also possible to assume someone else's role and identity.

From a social and cultural standpoint, the role and identity of individuals have developed as a result of social comparison and increasing differentiation within the community. The Middle Ages did not know the problem of identity except in the immediate environment where the individual spent their entire life. By belonging to one of the two social classes acquired at birth, they permanently retained the inherited role and identity.

While in contemporary society, there is the possibility of constructing one's own identity independently of social origin, new media offer the possibility of choosing an identity, whether real, less real, or fictional. Just as the real environment and traditional television offer countless roles and models of behavior, one can speak of the disintegration or destruction of traditional identity.

The increase in technological possibilities of communication through the Internet, satellites, etc., clearly shifts communication from regional and national frameworks to a global dimension. Simultaneously, under the influence of the aforementioned factors, communicative globalization will likely increase the need for narrower orientations and the demonstration of authentic identity in local and regional environments.

The cessation of the dominance of traditional mono-media has one consequence: individual media preferences towards partial media are significantly shifted and directed towards other factors. Traditional media have attractiveness due to certain technical characteristics and convenience they offer, competitive abilities, while integrated multimedia provides significantly greater possibilities in reaching a larger number of recipients. Individual traditional media are unable to reach a large part of the population despite efforts to programmatically and content-wise cover topics and events of interest to the majority of the population. Research has long shown that the creation of an increasing number of mono-media leads to further fragmentation, further fragmentation of the audience share of traditional media (Maletzke, 1987).

Such a trend in the development of traditional media has, in fact, opened a gap for the development of multimedia and poly-media. The latter are characterized by presenting the same content across different media simultaneously. Therefore, questions about „universal services“ in digitally integrated communities, initiated in the context of the development of traditional media, are even more relevant but have not been consistently realized due to technical limitations.

In addition to significantly greater possibilities for satisfying general and specific demands in terms of social integration, new media offer almost unlimited possibilities for individual communication and meeting individual needs through the internet and virtual reality media. Mass culture is a product of modern technology; it contributes to abstraction, replacing bodies with images, but at the same time, it is a reaction to a world of abstract relationships (Moren, 1979).

The perspectives of communication brought about by new media involve further internationalization or planetary virtualization. However, in addition to internationalization as a basic global characteristic, which primarily entails communication based on international relations, intergovernmental agreements, and treaties, there has been a gradual deepening and expansion of communicative interactions beyond that.

Vast and increasing amounts of information and data of various contents flow around our planet. This flow has long been carried out through traditional media such as mail, telephone, telex, radio, gramophone records, films, etc. Some of them, as physical carriers, are no longer in use, while others are on the path of elimination and substitution by digital transporters. Satellites have long enabled direct inclusion in continental and planetary networks through parabolic antennas, while the Internet has integrated multiple functions of traditional media from the domain of postal systems, printing, radio, and television, simultaneously enabling planetary communication. However, there will certainly remain certain, but significantly decentralized, or rather, partialized forms of control over databases and communication networks. However, that control will primarily be oriented towards commercial rather than political criteria. Otherwise, all technological progress would be devalued and meaningless.

Reflecting once again briefly on the above-mentioned standpoint, which implicitly predicts the struggle for software, i.e., for information as a common good but also as a commercial value - a commodity, it can be confidently predicted that in the future, there will continue to be sometimes milder, sometimes fiercer competition to acquire better positions on the economic level. The naturally limited resources for satellite „parking space“ must not be lost sight of. Although the classical function of radio waves is increasingly being substituted by the establishment of broadband cable networks, these valuable resources find application in new functions. Among the aspects related to new media and the changes they bring about, there are also ethical questions regarding the relationship between media supply and communicative culture. Both towards traditional and new media, demands, or rather desires, for liberation from the manipulative component remain in force. In the case of morality, human action may be jeopardized... another sphere based on belief may be endangered as well (Radojković, 1997).

Ethical demands have particular significance in light of the decreasing possibilities of normative requirements and the reciprocally growing autonomy and freedom of participants in communicative processes. In this context, the main ethical components of digital communications are distinguished as credible information, reliable business information, the individual's right to power and representation, and ethically appropriate communication with children.

The previous experiences of the Internet demonstrate that respecting ethical elements of communication and the need for correctness can organically develop within the communicative field. The absence of legal norms also shows that certain rules of behavior remain, which promise the establishment of a socially-ethical agreement within the communicative structure and will primarily be acquired in the educational process.

The parallel development of computer technology in the form of multimedia and the Internet has led to the emergence of virtual communication on both sides of the screen, i.e., the creation of parallel worlds, groups, and alternative communities in relation to the traditional state. New media lead to the expansion of virtuality in general. In order for an innovation to gain social recognition, that is, for it to be institutionalized, it must overcome the obstacles that stand in its way (Šušnjić, 1995).

Traditional communicative interactions until recently took place directly and through what can now be called classical media, in organic environments and communities such as family, professional environments, social groups, nation, state, etc. However, the question remains: what would the communication system in public service look like in practice... how can it be developed through political and legal strategies (Kin, 1995).

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The emergence of virtual human structures in the domain of communication is exclusively associated with new media. The primary condition for, so to speak, belonging to a virtual community is communication through computers, or connectivity in a computer network, and a closer definition of that structure is only possible in comparison with existing so-called organic communities. Unlike the virtual world, which is interactive behind the screen, a virtual community is not a computer simulation but a real phenomenon. It is a category of people who „meet“ without physical presence using communicative symbols, words, graphics, etc.

This description of a virtual community truly appears futuristic to those who do not have access to electronic communication. However, the history of communication is a history of successive breaking of spatial and temporal boundaries. It has progressed in tandem with the general historical distancing of time. (Giddens, 1990.).

„Traditional societies were based on direct interaction between people who lived close to each other. Modern societies have expanded through time and space. Temporal limits have been exceeded through communicative transfer of tradition. Spatial boundaries have been broken by new means of transportation and communication.“ (Dijk, 1997.).

One of the most important aspects of a virtual community is that it is not strictly tied to a specific time and place, leading some to conclude that these dimensions are no longer relevant in a galactically free grouping and flow of information. However, such determinism is exaggerated. Technological development and achievements are the main characteristics of contemporary civilization. The end of this kind of revolution is far from being in sight.

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# INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATION AS A DRIVER OF MANAGING SOCIAL PROJECTS IN A TURBULENCE ENVIRONMENT

**Prof. Ph.D. Sergiy Bushuyev**

**Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Victoria Bushuieva**

**Prof. Ph.D. Denis Bushuiev**

**Prof. Ph.D. Natalia Bushuyeva**

Kyiv National University of construction and architecture, Kyiv, Ukraine

## ABSTRACT

Inspirational motivation is considered a social and psychological tool for transferring the intuition, leadership and design of the social project management team to the project's success. Inspirational motivation impacts the development of modern technology project implementation and the involvement of the project manager and team in inspirational states has an impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of social project management. The objective of inspirational motivation analyses is to develop the organization of specific behaviour in turbulence or aggressive external conditions of the project managers. The inspirational motivation model, as the driver of social projects, is based on an understanding of the intuition, leadership and design of the project management team. Emotions are considered the driver of managing social projects. A conceptual model of inspiring management in the processes of managing innovative projects based on emotional intelligence, inspiring intuition, leadership and motivation is given. The influence of cognitive models on the development of inspiring management of innovative projects regarding the acquisition of knowledge and management technologies is determined. Within the framework of cognitive models, in the example of a construction project, the qualitative effects of individual competencies on the formation of inspiring management are determined. The model related to the application of the system of knowledge and competencies for the management of innovative projects and P2M programs allows for the evaluation of the key competencies of managers. Within this model, the priority competencies that form inspiring project management are defined. Based on the assessment of cognitive maps in the usual mode and in the mode of inspiring management, a model of the influence of inspiring management on the competencies for the implementation of innovative projects and programs was built.

**Keywords:** Inspirational motivation, social projects, turbulence environment, competencies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cognitive modelling ensures the preparation and adoption of effective management decisions, the search for system development scenarios (projects) based on the selection of elements that quantitatively and qualitatively characterize the situation, as well as the assessment of the mutual influence of factors. As a rule, cognitive modelling is carried out by a team of people (leaders, managers, experts) who are responsible for the development of some institutional structure of the organization.

The methodology of cognitive modelling aims to analyze and make decisions in situations of uncertainty. It develops in the direction of improving the apparatus of analysis and modelling of the situation in the development processes of complex weakly formalized systems (SAF 2018).

The mechanisms of inspiring management of projects for the creation of innovative products or technologies allow motivating the team, including its intuition, inspiration and leadership based on the formation of the broadest and clearest vision. In this case, inspiring management is a driver in the implementation of innovative projects based on knowledge (P2M 2017; PMBOK Guide 2021).

One of the reasons for the ineffective management of innovative projects is the inadequate competence of managers in the organization and the resistance of the staff. The level of inefficiency depends on many factors. Such factors include the essence of innovative changes, the perception of these changes, the level of organizational culture, management style, and many others (Bushuyev et al. 2021; P2M 2017).

One of the reasons for the ineffective management of innovative projects is the inadequate competence of managers in the organization and the resistance of the staff. The level of inefficiency depends on many factors. Such factors include the essence of innovative changes, the perception of these changes, the level of organizational culture, management style, and many others (PMBOK Guide 2021), (Bushuyev et al. 2022).

### 1.1 Purpose and goals

The purpose of the article is to study the development of an inspiring style of management and motivation of innovative projects based on the use of cognitive maps in achieving the success of projects and programs.

### 1.2 Methods

Let's look at the conceptual modelling of inspiring management and motivation of innovative projects. The main elements of inspiring management and motivation of innovative projects are:

- strategic trust – determines the level of trust (mistrust) in the project implementation strategy;

- emotional intelligence is a mental reflection in the form of a direct, biased experience of the life content of phenomena and situations, which is determined by the relationship of their objective properties to the subject’s needs;
- inspirational leadership is a leadership technique that motivates a team of project managers to create value and results;
- inspiring intuition is a complex mental state of reflection in the form of experiencing the significance of the influence of external and internal stimuli. It can include several emotions, and the duration of the inspiring intuition is longer than the duration of the emotion;
- inspiring motivation – is a complex tool for inspiring management in the form of supporting creative thinking and effective activity of managers of innovative projects and their teams.

Let’s consider the application of cognitive maps in the development processes of inspirational management.

The conceptual model of the formation of the value of the inspiring management of innovative projects is shown in figure 1.

The conceptual model of value formation in the development of organizations provides for two lines of application of inspirational management in operational activities and the implementation of innovative projects and programs. At the same time, tools of inspiring intuition, inspiring motivation, strategic thinking and development of these competencies are used (Drouin et al. 2021).

Let’s consider the proposed model for assessing the strategic trust of the project in the example of one of the construction projects (IPMA OCB 2013).

**Figure 1: Conceptual model of value formation in inspiring management of innovative projects**



Source: Authors.



Let an erected building in the suburbs of Kyiv be prepared for commissioning and occupancy during the hostilities in Ukraine. Let's consider two scenarios of the strategy of the developer's company.

**Strategy 1.** Commissioning of the building during hostilities.

Estimates of trust in this strategy were made by the company's management team and are listed in the table 1.

**Table 1: Estimates of confidence in the strategy of putting the house into operation during hostilities**

№	The name of the trust parameter	Average	Assessments of strategic trust					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Understanding strategy	0,8	1	0,8	0,8	0,7	0,7	0,7
2	Understanding the criteria for development success	0,7	0,9	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,7
3	Management strategy support	0,7	0,9	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,7
4	Understanding of strategy by stakeholders	0,7	0,7	0,5	0,6	0,7	0,8	0,6
5	Assessment of cognitive readiness for strategy implementation	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,7	0,5
6	Understanding the architecture of the strategy implementation program	0,5	0,6	0,4	0,5	0,4	0,5	0,6
7	Evaluation of the proposed KPI system	0,6	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,4
8	Proactive application of development trends as drivers of strategy	0,6	0,6	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,4
9	Ensuring sustainability of development according to the principles of coherence and congruence	0,5	0,5	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,5	0,4
10	Ensuring the current activities of the development project	0,5	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,4	0,5	0,5
11	Identification, assessment and analysis of critical success factors of projects	0,6	0,4	0,7	0,6	0,7	0,5	0,4
12	Leadership in teamwork	0,6	0,6	0,4	0,6	0,7	0,5	0,6
	Assessment of confidence in strategies	0,6						

**Strategy 2.** Commissioning after the end of the war.

Estimates of trust in this strategy were made by the company's management team and are listed in table 2.

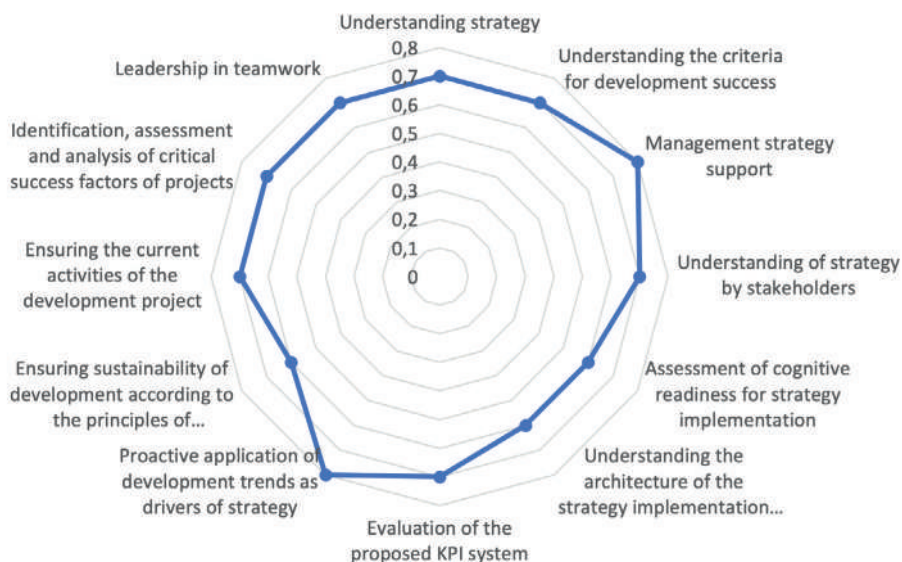
**Table 2: Estimates of confidence in the strategy of putting the house into operation during hostilities**

№	The name of the trust parameter	Average	Assessments of strategic trust					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Understanding strategy	0,7	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,7	0,8
2	Understanding the criteria for development success	0,7	0,7	0,8	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,7
3	Management strategy support	0,8	0,9	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,8
4	Understanding of strategy by stakeholders	0,7	0,9	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,8	0,7
5	Assessment of cognitive readiness for strategy implementation	0,6	0,6	0,5	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,6
6	Understanding the architecture of the strategy implementation program	0,6	0,8	0,5	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,7
7	Evaluation of the proposed KPI system	0,7	0,9	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,7	0,6
8	Proactive application of development trends as drivers of strategy	0,8	0,8	0,8	0,7	0,7	0,7	0,8
9	Ensuring sustainability of development according to the principles of coherence and congruence	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,6
10	Ensuring the current activities of the development project	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,8	0,7	0,6	0,7
11	Identification, assessment and analysis of critical success factors of projects	0,7	0,8	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,6	0,7
12	Leadership in teamwork	0,7	0,8	0,5	0,7	0,7	0,6	0,7
	Assessment of confidence in strategies	0,7						

Based on the estimates of trust in the managers' strategy regarding the first model, we see that the company is more focused on its profit and does not worry about the general energy system in the city and the country. The second model is more far-sighted, this one is during the war and the lockdown period, no one will make (massive) repairs and also invest money in new construction, etc. The house will be entered, but it will simply stand still, while money will be spent on heating, electricity and maintenance.

Let's consider the model of competencies of inspiring management of innovative projects proposed by the authors. The model has four components that form product value, process value, business value and development value (P2M 2017). Drivers of innovative development are defined in each component of the model. Each driving force is tied to a set of specific competencies defined below (IPMA ICB 2015).

**Figure 2: The result of quantitative assessments of the level of influence of competencies on the effectiveness of inspirational management**



Source: Authors.

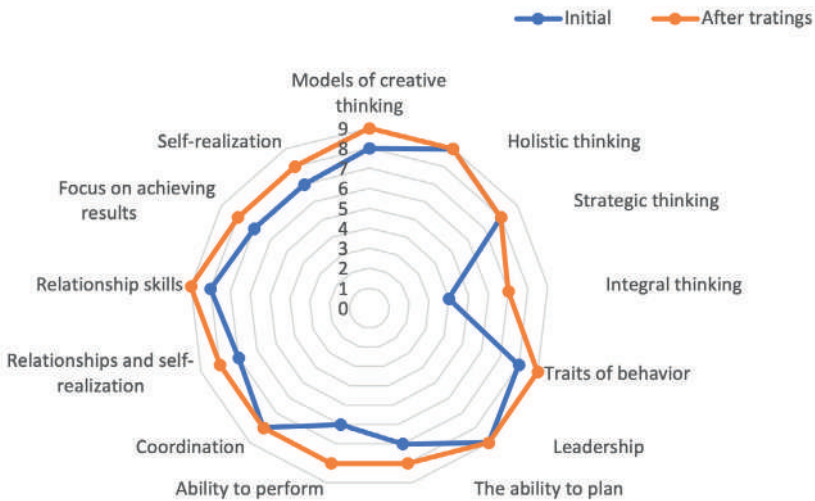
Let's consider a model for assessing the level of influence of competencies on the inspiring management of innovative projects. The model is presented in the table 3.

**Table 3: The level of influence of competencies on the inspiring management of innovative projects**

№	Group/competence	The level of influence on inspirational management (1-10)
1	Models of creative thinking	8
2	Holistic thinking	9
3	Strategic thinking	8
4	Integral thinking	4
5	Traits of behaviour	8
6	Leadership	9
7	The ability to plan	7
8	Ability to perform	6
9	Coordination	8
10	Relationships and self-realization	7
11	Relationship skills	8
12	Focus on achieving results	7
13	Self-realization	7

The results of the quantitative analysis of the existing competence and their influence on the effectiveness of the implementation of one of the innovative projects (figure 2) show a weak point - this is "integral thinking". After applying corrective actions regarding the development of inspiring management competencies and conducting two specialized pieces of training of 40 ac. hours (figure 3).

**Figure 3: The result of quantitative assessments of the balance of the effects of competencies and entrepreneurial energy on the effectiveness of inspiring management**



Source: Authors.

## 2. RESULTS

Cognitive maps, which are used to choose a strategy in conditions of uncertainty, make it possible to determine the readiness of the company and the chosen strategy to apply inspiring management of projects and programs.

## 3. CONCLUSION

The proposed model for assessing the level of influence of competencies on the inspiring management of innovative projects allows to identify of weaknesses and gaps in the groups of competencies "creative thinking", "behaviour traits" and "relationships and self-realization" regarding the effective application of the inspiring management of projects and programs.

The obtained results allow us to evaluate the balance of the model regarding the competence of the team of managers of the innovative project and the entrepreneurial energy spent on guiding the success of the application of inspirational management.

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# THE ROLE OF STEREOTYPES IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION WITH REFUGEES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA<sup>1</sup>

**Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Ljiljana Mutić**  
Public Open University Zagreb (POUZ), Croatia

**Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Tanja Grmuša**  
Zagreb School of Business, Croatia

## ABSTRACT

Refugees are undoubtedly a social phenomenon, and the stereotypes that accompany them are a phenomenon with complex psychological characteristics. Therefore, the emphasis is placed on intercultural sensitivity, intolerance, prejudices and the radical relocation of a person from the previous environment to a new living environment. The goals of the work were to examine the differences in the awareness of the existence of stereotypes among refugees and among representatives of institutions that work with them, to analyze the influence of the cultural environment on the presence of stereotypes, to investigate the influence of media reporting on stereotypes about refugees, as well as to determine their awareness of the stereotypes that exist about them in the public sphere. The empirical part of the work brings qualitative research conducted in 2021 using the method of in-depth interviews on a sample of nine respondents. The research conclusions indicate that stereotypes are created as generalized opinions, which are significantly influenced by the mass media, as well as cultural differences. The solution can be seen in constant education, objective information of the public and coordination of civil society organizations, state institutions and bodies.

**Keywords:** interpersonal communication, refugees in the Republic of Croatia, stereotypes, integration, civil society organizations.

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1 This paper is based on the research conducted by Ljiljana Mutić as a part of her final thesis at the undergraduate professional study programme in Marketing and Communication. The thesis titled „Stereotypes as a communication challenge with refugees in the Republic of Croatia“ was made under mentorship of Tanja Grmuša, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and defended at Zagreb School of Business in July 2021.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Republic of Croatia had to respond to the most serious migration challenge since the end of the Second World War. A large number of people from the Middle East come to Europe via Croatia because of war conflicts, fear, and persecution in their countries. Refugees also come from distant regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. The reasons for their migration are great poverty, lack of freedom, repression, and insecurity in countries such as Somalia, Eritrea, Senegal, and Nigeria (Rukavina and Bašić, 2016). Although Croatia largely remained outside the European migration flows, the number of refugees in Croatia is not insignificant (Baričević and Koska, 2017).

As the number of refugees in Croatia grows, a large part of the public faces a communication challenge with refugees, which is manifested in reduced tolerance and the strengthening of stereotypes towards this vulnerable group in society. „Stereotypes represent characteristics that reflect certain groups. They influence people’s perception and reaction, on members of certain groups, and are transmitted through media, language and discourse“ (Rukavina and Bašić, 2016, 26). The majority of people stereotype the Other and Different based on media captions, and the influence of the media on the issue of the coexistence of different cultures, i.e. security issues, is particularly visible, and because of the bias and limitations in dealing with the topic, stereotypes encourage discrimination. A small number of studies on this topic have been conducted in Croatia (Medlobi and Čepo, 2018; Kiralj and Ajduković, 2022) which show different results depending on the presence of contact interaction between the respondents and refugees, while the majority of refugees state that they mostly feel welcome as foreigners in Croatia (Baričević and Koska, 2017).

The basis of all policies in Europe and the world when it comes to the problem of refugees is the problem of their integration. At the same time, integration as a goal, task and obligation is deeply confronted with both stereotypes and communication problems in the narrower and broader sense of the word. Furthermore, the communication problem is intertwined with ethical, cultural and linguistic diversity, which complicates communication processes and is a suitable ground for the birth of all forms of stereotypes, but it also complicates the area of solving these problems. All of this, in simplified terms, requires that the refugee become an accepted member of society and exercise his fundamental and political rights, create an economic basis for his existence, and affirm his cultural and religious diversity.

Data on the number of refugees in the world are relatively imprecise. According to the European commission’s 2019 report, which is based on UNHCR data, there were 26 million refugees and 45.7 million internally displaced persons living in the world. Furthermore, in 2019, only a tenth of all refugees in the world lived

in the EU. Even more frightening is the fact that the share of refugees in the EU population is only 0.26 % (European Commission, 2020). In these data, we can look for the roots of social indifference towards the refugee problem. According to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia (2022), a total of 7,258 people applied for asylum in Croatia in the last nine months: 4,279 women and 2,979 men.

**Table 1: Statistical indicators of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia from 2015 until September 30, 2022.**

PROTECTION/ TYPE	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Asylum	35	83	184	244	158	36	68	16	824
Men	31	50	132	156	91	22	39	9	530
0-13	3	7	33	43	31	8	15	6	146
14-17		5	4	14	8	1	8		40
18-34	21	29	81	67	26	10	8	3	245
35-64	7	9	15	32	26	3	7		99
65>							1		1
Women	4	33	51	88	67	14	29	7	293
0-13	1	15	22	35	25	5	10	5	118
14-17		1	2	14	5		4	1	27
18-34	2	15	17	17	17	5	7	1	81
35-64	1	2	10	21	19	4	8		65
65 >				1	1				2
Subsidiary protection	7	17	27	21	1	6	0	0	100
Men	5	11	18	13	1	4			52
0-13		3	5	4		1			13
14-17		2	3	2	1				8
18-34	3	6	5			2			16
35-64	2		4	4		1			11
Women	2	6	10	11		2			31
0-13	1	1	2	7		2			13
14-17			4						4
18-34		2	3	2					7
35-64	1	3	1	2					7

Source: author's work. According to: [https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2022/10/web%20statistike%202022%20Q3\(1\).pdf](https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2022/10/web%20statistike%202022%20Q3(1).pdf), (January 23, 2023).



This paper is focused on respondents' impressions of stereotypes in order to gain an insight into the destructive power of stereotypes, which is most difficult to measure and is discussed superficially, without taking into account the spiritual dimension by which they affect the human determination and dignity of refugees. The main goal of the work was to show the influence of the cultural environment from which the refugees come, media messages, and political discourses on the creation and retention of stereotypes. The specific objectives of the work are as follows: to examine the differences in the awareness of the existence of stereotypes among refugees and among representatives of institutions that work with them, to analyze the influence of the cultural environment on the presence of stereotypes in communication; to investigate the impact of media coverage on refugee stereotypes; to determine the refugees' awareness of the stereotypes that exist about them in the public sphere. Finally, let's mention the basic research questions (qualitative methodology): What is the difference in awareness of the existence of stereotypes among refugees and representatives of institutions that work with them? How does the cultural environment affect the presence of stereotypes in communication? How does media coverage of refugees affect the creation of stereotypes about them?

## 2. COMMUNICATION AND STEREOTYPES

The stereotype appeared in the field of social sciences only in 1922, when journalist Walter Lippman introduced it, mentioning it for the first time in the professional publication *Public Opinion* (Popović, 2015). The definition given by the Croatian encyclopedia (The Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, 2021): „stereotype (stereo- + -type, according to the French *stéréotype*) represents a set of simplified and excessively generalized characteristics, added to all members of a social group.“ A stereotype is a widespread, permanent cognitive scheme about the common, more often negative than positive features of a social group. By simplifying the complex social environment, stereotypes contribute to facilitating the processing of information and navigating it. Thus, for example, insufficient information about the characteristics of an individual is compensated by „knowledge“ about the characteristics of the group to which he belongs. In a broader sense, a stereotype is an often repeated, unoriginal action or work, a cliché (The Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, 2021).

Mass media have a huge reach in society and are a key filter through which people learn about each other, but many studies show that these media continue to reproduce religious, ethnic (Kirinić and Plenković, 2016; Šlezak and Šiljeg, 2020), gender (Tomić Koludrović and Petrić, 2004; Majstorović, and Vilović, 2017; Sever Globan and Kralj, 2019; Anić, 2022) and racial stereotypes with often harmful effects. In various media, news, dramas, and games, ethnic minority groups are usually mar-

ginalized and portrayed in a negative context (Vilović, 2003). Very often they are portrayed only in narrowly stereotypical roles, such as the model Asian migrant or the exotic Latina, or negatively portrayed as problematic „others“, disproportionately represented as violent or criminal and „less than“ the dominant group (ie less intelligent, less wealthy, less powerful). Ethnic minority media generally offer more positive portrayals (Tatalović, 2003) and a counternarrative to common stereotypes (Župarić-Iljić, 2011), but they can also be prone to narrow portrayals and stereotypes. The prevalence of stereotypical representations in media formats and types is partly the result of complex media production processes, norms and values, commercial drivers, and the lack of producers of ethnic minorities, but also insufficient education of media workers to report on diversity (Malović, 2003; Kanižaj, 2003). Nevertheless, their effect, although difficult to measure, is potentially significant. Mass media play a significant role in the formation of collective identities and attitudes among groups (Samovar, 2016), and by typifying certain groups, they often distort the image of the Other and the Different (Labaš, and Grmuša, 2011), portraying them as „problematic Others“ (Ross, 2019). There is evidence to suggest that these distorted media representations may not only promote public hostility towards other ethnic groups but also lower self-esteem for ethnic minority individuals. As a result, it is crucial to research ways to combat stereotypes and promote more positive representation in the media (Ross, 2019), which is what this paper is about.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Method and sample

The research was conducted using qualitative methodology in May 2021. We used the method of in-depth interviews with refugees, from different countries, in order to see their perspectives on difficulties (6 refugees). This method has proven to be ideal in this type of examination related to feelings or attitudes because it allows us to obtain honest and detailed answers from the participants with sub-questions and additional clarifications (Wimmer, Dominick, 2014). The challenge in this part of the work was language barriers. In order to communicate as transparently as possible, we used the service of a translator from their native language. The idea was to research refugees from several different countries, of different genders, ages, and levels of education, and to examine how much they encounter stereotypes in communication and how much this affects their satisfaction with life in Croatia and integration.

Furthermore, we interviewed three (3) people from different non-governmental organizations (Center for Peace Studies, JRS Jesuit Service for Refugees and Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma) who deal with refugees in their work and

investigated their perception of stereotypes as a communication challenge with refugees. Furthermore, it examined how non-governmental organizations help refugees integrate into society, and what their experience is with the administrative, social and police systems, and the media.

**Table 2. General sociodemographic data of refugees (N=6)**

Participants	Age	Gender	Country they come from	Education level	Stay in Croatia (in years)	Languages they speak	Marital status
participant „A“	56	Female	Syrian Arab Republic	Higher education	5	Arabic, Croatian and English	widow
participant „B“	21	Male	Syrian Arab Republic	High school education	5	Arabic, Croatian and English	unmarried
participant „C“	47	Male	State of Eritrea	High school education		Tigrinya, Croatian and English	married
participant „D“	30	Male	Syrian Arab Republic	High school education	5	Arabic, Croatian and English	divorced
participant „E“	25	Female	State of Palestine	Higher education	1	Arabic, Croatian and English	-
participant „F“	18	Male	Islamic Republic of Iran	Elementary school	2	Persian, Arabic, Croatian and English	unmarried

Source: author's work.

### 3.2. Interpretation of research results

#### 3.2.1. Conversations with refugees

As the refugee research itself was conducted using the qualitative method of in-depth interviews, which were limited partly by language barriers and partly by cultural differences and the level of education, we had to decide to process their statements so that what was said would be linguistically correctly formulated, taking into account so as not to lose the authenticity of their statements, attitudes, observations, and thoughts.

The main limitation of the conversation with the refugees was their relatively difficult understanding, and thus the understanding and understanding of stereo-

types. In this sense, considerable effort was made to describe, with examples and sub-questions, a concept that was difficult for them to understand. It was clear to some interviewees what exactly we meant, and that was due to their education, good knowledge of the Croatian language, and the skill of the translator where he was present.

Each respondent had the need to state the reasons for leaving their home country and briefly describe the journey (process) of arriving in Croatia with special emphasis on the experiences they had in the countries they passed through, and the ways and means they used to travel. This is important to emphasize because it was a traumatic experience for all of them, with very different scenarios, but the ending of all these confessions was always the same - their happiness to be in Croatia, the way they were received, the positive process of their integration, which shows that in with their attitudes, opinions, and hearts, Croatia has the status of a „promised land“.

It is important to point out that these were quite emotional conversations. This emotionality was able to get truly extraordinary statements and testimonies, but it was also often the cause of significant reticence in giving answers, which is a clear indication that their experiences and memories are very difficult for them.

The next important experience that we have through these conversations is their undisguised fear that they answer questions related to Croatian institutions in a very general, „diplomatic“ way, fearing that possibly a wrong statement (because the conversations were recorded) could go where it shouldn't and create unnecessary problems, although it was clearly emphasized to them that the conversation is anonymous and that their answers are a secret that will be presented professionally, without citing their spoken statements.

#### *Participant from the Syrian Arab Republic*

During the conversation with the interviewee from the Syrian Arab Republic, a translator was present, which greatly facilitated communication. She is an experienced woman who differs in her motives for leaving her home country, as they were not political nature. Furthermore, we are talking about a highly educated woman who understands the concept of stereotypes and who is aware of the existence of stereotypes. Personally felt them through her way of dressing and experienced comments that she emphasized were „hard words“. In the beginning, these stereotypes created emotional stress for her. For the sake of the authenticity of this work, we will quote one of her statements (based on the spoken translation) that she experienced:

„Go back to Syria. Why did you come here?“ (Participant A)

Furthermore, we will mention another experience of hers. She was sitting on the bus. A man who entered the bus put the bag down next to her and said: „BUUUUM!“,

without alluding to anything he implicitly told her that she was a terrorist. However, she decided on the tactic of ignoring stereotypes and over time the occurrence of stereotypes began to decrease significantly. She added that she clearly distinguishes between the existence of stereotypes in „ordinary“ people and the existence of stereotypes in the media.

„I don't think there are so many stereotypes in the media, but there is a misrepresentation of information about refugees.“ (Participant A)

Too much attention is focused on some general information about the refugee crisis in Croatia that is typical for Europe and the world in general. The same goes for official policy statements. He cites his poor knowledge of the Croatian language and his desire to improve it as soon as possible as a very significant problem in overcoming stereotypes and integration in Croatia. This lack of knowledge of the language does not allow her to realize her basic expertise.

„It's a problem for me to find a job because I don't have enough knowledge of the Croatian language and new skills. I am ready to volunteer to learn how to work well in my profession.“ (Participant A)

If we talk about general social problems that should be solved by refugees, the problem of obtaining health care services stands out. She admitted that at first, she didn't understand anything and that she had a hard time communicating with people. Now she is ready to volunteer in the profession for which she was educated in order to improve her language (especially professional) and to affirm her professional knowledge.

#### *Participant from the Syrian Arab Republic*

The next respondent is also from the Syrian Arab Republic. He did not refer specifically to the concept of stereotypes but emphasized the importance of knowing the language. However, what is extremely interesting in his statement, which confirms that he is aware of the existence of stereotypes, is that he stated that, regardless of his good knowledge of the language, he lacks socializing. On the other hand, the little association he has is with highly educated people, which confirms that this is the only society in which he does not feel stereotypes. During the beginning of learning the Croatian language, and thus the beginning of integration into Croatian society, he had a lot of help from his schoolmates, without whom he would not have progressed in the language and education as he did. In addition to his schoolmates, teachers also helped him during and after school hours.

„The first year was difficult, I didn't know the language, and I wanted to go back. My friends from school helped me a lot, and because of their help I learned the language and have good grades. The teachers helped me even after school hours. People said it was really nice that I learned the language so quickly.“ (Participant B)

Among the general problems, he points out the difficulties in employment, the provision of health services and bureaucratic obstacles. Regardless of the bureaucratic obstacles, he considers the communication with the police extremely correct, which indicates that he did not encounter any significant stereotypes.

*Respondent from the State of Eritrea*

The reasons for his arrival in Croatia are related to the political, still undefined situation in his country. How difficult it was is best shown by the fact that his wife and children remained in his home country. He speaks Croatian fluently and uses English fluently, which is the reason why he is employed in Croatia and therefore quite well-integrated. He denies the existence of some special stereotypes, but essentially idealizes his position in Croatia, so we have to take his statements about the non-existence of stereotypes with a grain of salt.

„I don't feel stereotypes in the relationship between me and Croatian citizens, but they exist among refugees.“ (Participant C)

Furthermore, he is the only one among the respondents to state the existence of stereotypes and prejudices within the refugee population itself, both at the level of national and religious and political identity. He experienced all possible inconveniences within the refugee population, and he also said that the behavior of the environment depends on personal behavior. Using his knowledge of the Croatian language, he socializes with people, tries to be good to everyone, and that is returned to him in a good way.

„I help everyone in the neighborhood, I chop wood, I help in the garden, everyone knows me and everyone is nice to me.“ (Participant C)

He assesses the media coverage of the Croatian media as favorable, while he found the majority of negative coverage exclusively in foreign media.

*Participant from the Syrian Arab Republic*

The next respondent from the Syrian Arab Republic points out that his knowledge of the Croatian language was crucial in his integration into Croatian society. His statement that due to his knowledge of the Croatian language, people showed interest in him as a human being, is particularly impressive, and thus he essentially avoided encountering stereotypes. He admits that it was extremely difficult for him when he arrived in Croatia because he did not understand people. Obviously, this language handicap saved him from stereotypes that may have existed. He notices the difference in communication between „ordinary“ people and civil servants, but he does not consider it problematic. He is employed, he loves Croatia, he loves the people, he likes it there and would like to stay there.

„Thank you Croatia! I feel good and I plan to stay there because it's really nice.“ (Participant D)

### *Participant from the State of Palestine*

It is about a female person who, just like a female person from the Syrian Arab Republic, had her first contact with stereotypes through clothing. She can even feel it in the looks of people on public transport. Furthermore, she still has problems with the Croatian language, as she partially speaks English, so we used the service of an Arabic translator for the conversation. With his help, we brought the concept of stereotypes closer to her. How clear this concept is to her is shown by her statement that confirms theoretical knowledge about stereotypes that often arise from the generalization of certain examples:

„Sometimes some refugees do something ugly and then people think that all refugees are bad.“ (Participant E)

She did not notice anything bad in the media, and she had no problems communicating with the police because the officers spoke English. We were surprised by her statement that she had problems in hospitals because of the employees' lack of English and their lack of willingness to help. As an independent woman, without support, she considers her life in Croatia difficult. She set herself the task of being patient and strong, and she believes that things will be easier and better for her in the future.

### *Participant from the Islamic Republic of Iran*

This interviewee was absolute surprise of this research. We are talking about a young man with incredible knowledge of the Croatian language, acquired in just two years, who emigrated from his home country due to domestic violence. He highlighted the positive experiences he had in Croatia, adding that in his case the assimilation went well.

„I am happy that my family and I had positive experiences because I hear from other refugees that they had negative experiences. Before entering Croatia, we heard that Croats are not good, and that they do not like refugees. All the smiles I saw on Croats changed that opinion.“ (Participant F)

„My best friends are Croats. I call Croatia my homeland. I want Croatian citizenship and I want to stay there to work in order to help Croatia with my work as Croatia helped me and my family.“ (Participant F)

He is aware of the fact that stereotypes exist mainly due to a lack of information among people and the media, and he believes that they are mostly incorrect. He emphasized that stereotypes should be fought by educating all stakeholders in society:

„Stereotypes are generalized opinions of people that arose after some behavior of individual people. If a refugee has done something bad, then all refugees are thought to be bad. Stereotypes are far from the truth. Most people don't

think for themselves, they listen to other people. I'm against it. I think with my head." (Participant F)

„With uneducated people, stereotypes are large and pronounced. People need to be informed, educated, and stereotypes will decrease.“ (Participant F)

The aforementioned statements of the respondents require a certain type of synthesis. In understanding stereotypes, we would first emphasize knowledge of the Croatian language as a prerequisite for their identification. Furthermore, we highlight the opinion of the interviewees that stereotypes arise as generalized opinions, which is also confirmed by the theoretical framework of the work. It is also worth mentioning the connection between the appearance of stereotypes and the education of citizens, especially in the context of differentiating statements between „ordinary“ people and institutions.

The phenomena that are closely related to stereotypes are the problems that women have with their clothing culture and one very extreme phenomenon in which a female person of Arab origin was very unpleasantly provoked and equated with terrorism. Socializing and communicating with the environment, which, as a prerequisite, knowing the language, has been highlighted as ways to overcome existing stereotypes on several occasions. Examples of help from the environment in overcoming all problems, especially language and integration, were touching. We are not able to investigate the two mentioned phenomena in this work, but they definitely exist: women as refugees and stereotypes within the refugee population. What does not belong to the discussion of stereotypes, but is very different among the respondents, is the motive for leaving the home country.

### 3.2.2. Interviews with representatives of civil society organizations

Three people from civil society organizations participated in our research, with whom an in-depth interview was also conducted in May 2021. These are the following people: Dragana Knezić - Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma, Martina Prokl Predragović - JRS Jesuit Service for Refugees and Tea Vidović - Center for Peace Studies. Their perception of the existence of stereotypes about refugees differs significantly from the image that refugees have of themselves. In their statements, which overlap in many respects, three essential features can be seen: burdened with everyday problems, a much broader insight into the problem itself than the refugees themselves, and criticism of the state system. As far as the discussion of stereotypes is concerned, we would like to point out one type of systematization of the problems that prevail in society, which was very precisely stated by one of the participants in the discussion:

1. A stereotype is not natural, but we all have it;
2. Stereotype vs. prejudice;



3. Stereotypes about the experiences that people have had;
4. Stereotypes are neutral;
5. Problems of prejudice;
6. Example of a family with many children (stereotype) value neutral;
7. Traditional role of women, subordination as necessarily imposed;
8. Hijab - the order of the husband, it is not imposed as it is thought, there is one and the other;
9. Male privilege - questionable - great responsibility - burdensome - leads to frustration;
10. Motive for arrival - living on social assistance - classic prejudice;
11. Importance of work permits;
12. War zone and job search (motives for coming, op.a.)
13. Too much violence, persecution - many different forms (in home countries, op.a.)

In overcoming stereotypes daily, the interlocutors suggest that they should not be ignored, that confrontation should be avoided and continuous and clear communication should be achieved. This means, above all, the establishment of dialogue wherever possible through the organization of meetings between refugees and the environment. As one of the very significant roots of the emergence of stereotypes, they cite the media and political attention surrounding the problem of crossing borders, from which an insufficiently informed public draws wrong conclusions. The problem of border crossing is a much broader problem that goes beyond the Croatian framework, but because of it, stereotypes are created, and stereotypes are strengthened by wrongly recounting this problem.

All three participants fully agree on several basic points: a well-established legal framework, but questionable implementation; excessive importance of the Ministry of the Interior, lack of resources, lack of educated personnel, lack of necessary accommodation facilities, undeveloped refugee education system, inadequately prepared health care system for refugees. All interlocutors particularly emphasized the year 2015, when the European Framework for the Protection and Acceptance of Refugees was introduced. In their statements in the media, they emphasized that the media does not pay enough attention to the issue of integration. News about refugees appears only if it has elements of spectacle and, worst of all, information about refugees appears as a supplement to the media space in the absence of other content. Nevertheless, sometimes a positive story appears, but equally a negative one that has not been sufficiently examined and confirmed. Unfortunately, there are several alternative media of a very dubious orientation that use refugees as a tool to manipulate the public. As a summary of

the political discourse, they mentioned three things: compliance with the European political discourse, manipulation of the public, and the use of the refugee issue when necessary, exclusively for political purposes.

All participants see the solution in education (education), correct and verified public information and systematic connection and coordination of responsible state institutions and bodies. The civil society organizations where our interlocutors work are an absolutely positive example in the integration of refugees and overcoming stereotypes in communication with refugees in Croatia. Through their work, they try to overcome all the problems mentioned so far. They succeed thanks to their expertise, enthusiasm, empathy, constant improvement and coordination, and thanks to the help of a large number of volunteers.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The mass media have a huge reach in society, and thus also on the creation of stereotypes. Cultural differences also have the same influence. Stereotypes are a phenomenon with complex psychological characteristics, where we will emphasize intercultural sensitivity, intolerance, prejudices, and the radical displacement of a person from the original environment to a new environment. Stereotypes penetrate deeply into the cultural perception of refugees in the mental structure of people in the host country they come to. This is where a special narrative is formed in the public when it comes to refugees and in which all the established stereotypes are present. We focused our research on conversations both with refugees and with participants in the integration process who are solving this problem.

Research shows that stereotypes arise as generalized opinions. It is also worth mentioning the connection between the appearance of stereotypes and the level of education of citizens. This is especially evident in statements that touch on the distinction between „ordinary“ people and institutions. The political discourse boils down to three basic things: compliance with the European political discourse, also manipulation of the public and the use of the refugee issue when necessary, exclusively for political purposes. The solution can be seen in education (educatedness), correct and verified public information, and systematic connection and coordination of responsible state institutions and bodies. Civil society organizations are an absolutely positive example in the integration of refugees and overcoming stereotypes in communication with refugees in Croatia. Through the work of civil society organizations, they try to overcome all the problems mentioned so far. This is achieved thanks to the expertise, enthusiasm, empathy, constant improvement, and coordination, and thanks to the help of a large number of volunteers.

The limitations of this research are the language barrier, traumatic experience, emotional restraint, and educational levels of the respondents. A methodological

limitation on the part of the authors is that we included in the research refugees who have been staying in Zagreb for more than a year and who want to stay in Croatia. It would be interesting to examine the opinion of refugees for whom Croatia was only a transit country, refugees who stay in Croatia for a short time, and refugees who stay in another place in Croatia. Future works in this area of research should examine whether the stereotypes experienced by respondents are the result of widespread anti-immigration attitudes of Croatian citizens, and examine representatives of the media and government organizations on the same topic.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA AND SCIENCE: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

**Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Daria Mustić**

University of Zagreb Faculty of Graphic Arts, Croatia

**Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Božidar Veljković**

Alma Mater Europaea, European centre Maribor, Slovenia

### ABSTRACT

We live in a time of extreme complexity of social circumstances, technological progress, and complexity of scientific information. The media image of the social role of science has changed over time, but it is precisely the complexity and diversification of scientific research that distances science from the interest of the general population and makes it difficult to understand the importance of science in everyday life. Likewise, science topics are becoming increasingly complex to teach. There is a permanent specialization of scientific fields, but its understanding still requires a „bigger picture“ and the processing of a large amount of information. The purpose of this research is to determine how social media, which make it possible for sharing, evaluating, and commenting as well as, ultimately, simplification and visualization, influence the teaching of scientific topics. Given that social networks are a place where all types of information - scientific and pseudo-scientific - can be found, it was investigated how students use and evaluate scientific information present in social media. The paper provides an overview of the scientific literature on the topic of the use of social media in the context of education and it was investigated how students use and evaluate scientific information present in social media. This research explores the adoption of social media as a supporting tool in higher education using students' perspective. The study provides insights into students' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of social media in higher education. Results show that students acknowledge the importance of incorporating social media, but they have a problem with validating the credibility of the sources.

**Keywords:** science, media, social media, higher education, evaluation of information

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As of January 2023, there were 5.16 billion internet users worldwide, which is 64.4 percent of the global population. Of this total, 4.76 billion, or 59.4 percent of the world's population, were social media users (Statista, 2023). Social media is a new form of communication and consists of a variety of communication tools such as, blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites, content communities and virtual world (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Statista (2023), social media global penetration reached nearly 54 percent in 2020. Northern and Western Europe had the largest penetration rate, followed by Northern and Southern America. Social media consistently expands, advances and grows around the world. The total number of social media users is expected to hit over 4.4 billion individuals by 2025, which would be approximately half of the world population.

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram offer a quick and effective way to exchange information, connect with people, and participate in discussions on a global level (Uddin et al., 2021). Young people today are digital natives, and they are increasingly using social media to inform themselves about science. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become important sources of scientific information and news for young people. Social media has become an integral aspect of modern student life also, and many students now use various social media platforms to stay up-to-date with scientific developments (Shahbaz et al., 2020). With the increasing accessibility and user-friendly nature of social media platforms, students now have access to an abundance of scientific information at their fingertips (Sahebi et al., 2021). Social networks can enhance learning about complicated topics in a number of ways. Social networks can offer a forum for educators and students to exchange materials like videos, articles, podcasts, and e-books, making it simpler to access and understand difficult concepts. Collaboration and peer-to-peer learning are made possible by social networks, which also offer a platform for peer-to-peer learning. This can be particularly beneficial when learning complex subjects because students can clarify their understanding of concepts by explaining and discussing them with one another. They can also be used to share examples from the real world that illustrate how abstract ideas are put to use in everyday situations. This can aid students in comprehend the topic's significance and relevance, as well as how it is applied in daily life. Learning experiences can be personalized thanks to social networks, where users can follow particular experts or educators and receive material that is specially crafted to suit their hobbies and learning preferences. Learning experiences on social networks can also include gamification components, which can make difficult material more interesting and enjoyable to learn. Quizzes, challenges, and incentives are a few examples of gamification elements that can encourage students to interact with the material. Overall, social

networks can help students learn complex subjects more effectively by making educational resources more accessible, fostering peer-to-peer learning and collaboration, offering real-world examples, allowing for personalized learning, and incorporating gamification elements.

However, while social media can be a valuable tool for students to engage with science, it also presents some challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most significant challenges associated with social media platforms is the credibility of the information being shared. Inaccurate information, fake news and misinformation can spread quickly on social media, often without being checked or critically evaluated beforehand. This can be particularly problematic in science, where accuracy and objectivity are essential components. Students should be able to discern reliable information from unreliable sources when using social media as a resource for scientific information. Teachers and educators can also assist students in determining the veracity of information on social media by giving guidance and resources on how to assess the reliability and accuracy of information sources. Using the viewpoint of students, this study investigates the use of social media as a supplementary tool in higher education. The study offers perceptions and attitudes of students on the usage of social media in higher education. The primary goal of this exploratory study is to analyse student online behavior and model their best use of social media to improve their learning experience. The study is organised as follows. First, the literature review on this topic is presented. Next, the description of the methodology is given and the results obtained from the questionnaire are presented by taking into consideration the current knowledge about social media and their use by young people. Finally, in the discussion section, some suggestions are discussed.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Technology enhances learning, increases learning demand, increases customization and facilitates flexible delivery with respect to the time, pace and place (Westera, 2012). Westera (2012) gave a thorough overview of the use of different types of records for educational purposes - from radio, to educational shows on television, audio cassettes and video cassettes... All these media record carriers enable more flexible use of educational content. Westera (2012) concludes its review with computers that, unlike previous devices, allow a greater degree of interaction and thus greater and more creative user engagement. It is important to emphasize that user behavior and the use of media content have changed over time due to media fragmentation, so that today we find ourselves in the process of media convergence, which again changes the media and educational paradigm by changing our behavior in the use of available media content since everything is available to us through one device. This is a significant change because today's people, and es-



pecially young people who belong to the generation of digital natives, are deeply immersed in the digital world, which offers previously unimagined educational opportunities as an independent tool or as a supplement to traditional forms of learning. The digital divide among the young and adults shows that the new generation has a more positive attitude toward new technologies (Westera, 2012). The advent of Web 2.0 has introduced new philosophy of powers that also encourages education. Web 2.0 replaces traditional models of content development that were hierarchical and company guided with bottom-up models or with individual contributors in social spaces, such as Blogs, Wikipedia, and YouTube (Murad et al., 2017). The idea of social learning is belonging to the social constructivism theory of 1960s advanced by Vygotsky's in 1978. The theory suggests that students learning are based on collaborative activities. This collaborative learning is more effective than the independent learning and contributing a lot to motivation, achievement oriented, and creating beneficial collective outcomes (Murad et al, 2017). The theory of motivation such as a model by Pintrich and Schunk (1996) is focusing students' beliefs with respect to the importance of a task, students' beliefs with ability and their emotional reactions. However, social media applications are highly utilized by students for a lot of non-educational purposes; these applications may badly affect students' academic life and learning experiences (Kuppuswamy and Narayan, 2010). Internet and new technologies have positive impact on students but also cause distraction instead of helping them academically (Gafni et al., 2012). Some studies have found positive correlations between social networking website use and college student engagement (Chou, 2015; Gaudreau et al., 2014). On the other hand, some studies warn of potential technological distractions and their influence on academic performance (Flanigan, Babchuk, 2015).

Previous research has shown that social network Sites (SNS) "support educational activities by enabling interaction, cooperation, active participation, information and resource sharing, and critical thinking" (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Aarepatamannil, and Santos, 2020; Goldsmith- Pinkham and Guido, 2013). In the last two decades, researchers have largely explored learners' attitudes toward new media. However, comparatively few studies have investigated students' attitudes towards using the Internet for different purposes in their formal and informal learning. The social cognitive theory was taken into consideration for the current study's theoretical framework, because it states that both internal and external influences influence behavior (Bandura, 1999).

## 2.1 Methods

This study aimed to investigate how students use social networks for informing themselves about science. Questionnaire form was used to gather the data within the student population. A variety of questions were posed about various social

media platforms, their value for education, the issues with them, such as validation of information, and finally, the factors that might encourage people to use social media platforms to share knowledge for educational and other purposes. MS Excel was used to analyze the data.

The following sections provide a detailed description of the study participants, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Participants**

The study participants were students from University of Zagreb, Faculty of Graphic Arts. The inclusion criteria for the participants were being a student and using social networks for accessing information. Participants were students of the Media communication course. A total of 53 students participated in the study and were interviewed. The sample included 25 percent of male and 75 percent of female. 92 percent of the respondents' ages were ranging from 22-25 years and 8 percent of the respondent ages were ranging from 26 to 28 years, which is the expected age structure, since they are all graduate students (table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

		N	Percentile (%)
Gender	Male	13	25
	Female	40	75
Age	22-25	39	92
	26-28	4	8

*Data Collection Procedure*

The data collection procedure involved the administration of a questionnaire through an Google online survey platform. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions and was designed to collect information about the participants' use of social network in general and for accessing science-related information. The survey was available for a period of three weeks, and reminders were sent to participants to increase response rates.

*Ethical Considerations*

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. The study did not involve any invasive or harmful procedures, and the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. All data collected were used solely for research purposes and were kept confidential.

*Limitations*

The study has several limitations, including the use of convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Additionally,

the study relied solely on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases and inaccuracies. Lastly, the study did not examine the quality of the information accessed by participants on social networks, which may affect their understanding of scientific concepts.

### 3. RESULTS

The use of the Internet and social media identified shows that only 11 percent respective respondents use the Internet for one hour a day, 15 percent for two hours, majority of 42 percent for three hours and 32 percent of them use the Internet for four hours and above in their everyday life. The use of social media shows that all of the participants use the social networks for entertainment (this attitude of students can turn these applications in a source of distraction) and then for informing and socializing activities.

Learning is on the bottom of their activities on social networks, which indicates the untapped potential of using the social networks, with which they are so familiar, for educational purposes. These details of these activities are tabulated in table 2.

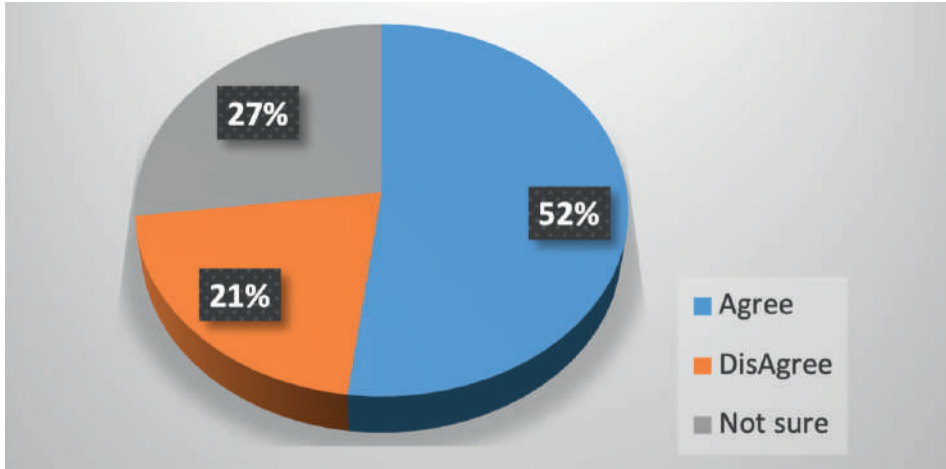
**Table 2: Frequency of social media use**

		N	Percentile (%)
<b>Internet usage in day (h)</b>	1 hour and less	6	11
	2 hours	8	15
	3 hours	22	42
	4 hours and more	17	32
<b>Social media usage in day (h)</b>	1 hour and less	33	62
	2 hours	10	19
	3 hours	6	11
	4 hours and more	4	8
<b>Use of social media sites for</b>	entertainment	53	100
	information sharing	50	94
	socializing	42	79
	learning	18	34

Social media is an umbrella term and consists of different online applications such as social network, blogs, content communities, collaborative projects and virtual or game words (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These applications enable everyone to access, create, and share information online since they are built on user-generated content (UGC). These various social media applications enable various forms of information exchange and contact; yet, the fundamental concept behind each of these websites is the same, and they are all built on web 2.0. The data analyzed

show that 52 percent of them are agreed, 21 percent disagree and 27 percent are not sure that using social media applications can enhance their learning and academic performance. These responses are shown in the figure 1.

**Figure 1: Social media enhance learning**



Although learning is the least common reason for using social networks, we asked students how they use social networks to get information about scientific information (table 3). Watching videos with scientific topics is the most commonly consumed content in the educational field, which is expected, given that the respondents are students from the field of design, and how-to videos and various tutorials are a very common way of informal learning in that population.

**Table 3: Use of social networks for gaining science information**

	N	Percentile(%)
Following science-related pages and accounts	3	6
Participating in online science communities	3	6
Watching science-related videos	17	32
Participating in citizen science projects	0	0
Sharing and discussing scientific information	22	42

To open-ended questions in which they could state the advantages and disadvantages of using social networks to collect scientific information, the main disadvantage students cite is the problem of credibility of information and trust. We still have limited knowledge on how much young people trust social media, which are an important tool for social interaction in this user group (Eger et al., 2020). The main advantage is the easy availability of information and saving time

compared to independent information collection. A few representative responses are given below table 4.

**Table 4: Student responses on positives and negatives of using social networks for informing about science**

Respondent 1	I don't use social media that way because it's hard for me to recognize what information is true.
Respondent 2	I agree that these websites offer opportunities for learning through unlimited access to a range of knowledge and leisure. Playing games and listening to music in a sideways manner can help to relieve anxiety, but we typically follow our friends' tastes.
Respondent 3	These websites are free, however the key concern is the quality of the content.
Respondent 4	I love apps like Wikipedia, I often use it to study, it's much faster than searching a topic on my own.
Respondent 5	I would use social networks more for learning if someone would help me evaluate the content (e.g. professors).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The majority of respondents (62 %) estimate that they spend up to an hour a day on social networks, which correlates with the data of Statista (2022), where it was stated that Internet users in the age group of 20 to 24 spend 49.8 minutes a day on social networks. Interestingly, the use of social networks is longer in older age groups, with the longest daily use in the 40-44 age group (59.85 minutes per day). These data indicate that young people are diversifying their time on the Internet and using it for multiple purposes.

The outputs are showing that all respondents are using social networks as a source of entertainment, activity connected with amusement, vast majority of them are using social network as a communication tool for socializing and information sharing, an activity consisting of using symbols either auditor or visuals. It's obvious that students use social media to satisfy their needs, especially in the field of entertainment, partly also for obtaining information.

Also they use it as a format for the exchange of communication content, while learning through social networks is the least represented, which indicates that respondents do not associate such content with entertainment, nor is learning integrated into the processes of information exchange and socialization.

When we talk about the use of social networks as a means of acquiring science-related information there is room for further development. This newer trend has important implications for science communication and education, as it suggests that social networks can be a valuable tool for reaching and engaging with students. However, there are several factors that need to be considered when using social networks for science communication and education.

One of the main challenges associated with using social networks, as our research has showned, for science communication and education is the issue of trust in information sources. Social networks are often characterized by the sharing of information from a wide range of sources, including both credible and non-credible sources. This is creating confusion among students, who may not know which sources to trust. Therefore, it is important for science communicators and educators to ensure that the information they share on social networks comes from credible sources.

Another challenge associated with using social networks for science communication and education is the issue of perceived relevance. Students may not engage with science-related content on social networks if they do not perceive it to be relevant to their interests or needs, there has to be some uses and gratifications for them. Therefore, it is important for science communicators and educators to ensure that the science-related content they share on social networks are tailored to the interests and needs of their target audience.

Despite these challenges, there are several benefits associated with using social networks for science communication and education. For example, social networks can facilitate informal learning about science topics, which can complement formal science education. Additionally, social networks can be used to engage student sin science-related conversations and debates, which can enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Overall, social media has become an important tool for young people to inform themselves about science. By using social networks, young people can access scientific information, engage with scientific communities, and participate in scientific research in new and exciting ways.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this research highlight the significant role that social networks play in the acquisition of science-related information among students. The analysis of the data has revealed important themes related to the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of students in this regard. One of the key findings of this study is that social networks are not a preferred source of science-related information among students. This suggests that science communication efforts that target social networks has a potential, but it has to be developed more. Additionally, the study has identified several factors that influence students' use of social networks for science-related information, including trust in information sources and perceived relevance.

Another important finding of this study is that social networks can facilitate informal learning about science topics. The informal nature of social networks allows

for the sharing of information and ideas outside of the traditional classroom setting. This suggests that social networks can be an effective tool for promoting lifelong learning about science topics.

Additionally, the study highlights the potential benefits of integrating social media into science education. This can include the use of social networks for informal learning, as well as the integration of social media tools into formal science education curricula. When it comes to scientific information, the accuracy of information on social networks can be a worry.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the use of social networks by students for acquiring science-related information. The study highlights the potential of social networks as a platform for science communication and education, and suggests that efforts to promote science communication should consider the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of students in this regard. The use of social networks for acquiring science-related information among students is a growing trend that has important implications for science communication and education. While there are several challenges associated with using social networks for science communication and education, there are also several benefits. Therefore, science communicators and educators should consider the use of social networks as a valuable tool for reaching and engaging with students. The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the role of social networks in science communication among students. The limitations of the study should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Future research should consider using more diverse sampling methods and examining the quality of information accessed on social networks.

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# THE IMPACT OF MEDIA RELEASE ON THE HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY DISORDER

Tihana Đumić, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to review the literature available to explore the negative effects of the media and its relationship with mental health, specifically in people with anxiety disorder. We wanted to determine whether there is enough relevant literature that would consistently point to the direct or indirect influence of the media on psychological well-being, with an emphasis on people suffering from anxiety personality disorder. For this purpose, available databases were used and searched according to the given criteria. To exclude the influence of media coverage of special or catastrophic events on anxious individuals such as news about pandemics, epidemics, mass murders or terrorist attacks, which are assumed to have an unsettling effect on the majority of the human population, including people who suffer from anxiety disorders were not included. Also, book reviews, editorials, and non-professional and non-academic articles were not included in the content analysis. It has been shown that previous studies of media influence have not focused their interest specifically on people suffering from anxiety disorders and that there is room for more specific research in this area.

**Keywords:** anxiety, media suggestibility, media effects, psychological wellbeing, emotional regulation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mental illnesses, since the beginning of their appearance, and today more than ever, have an increasingly significant impact both on a person's internal functioning, as well as on intrapersonal, intrafamily, and peer relationships (Government of Canada 2006 according to Simard 2020), educational success (Kosanović et al. 2021), professional life, and other important areas of human functioning (WHO 2022). The high rate of occurrence of mental health problems in adolescents, especially anxiety and depression (Simard 2020), is considered to be an alarm that should not be ignored, especially if we look at the data of UNICEF (2021), which indicate that in 2019 anxiety and depression were responsible for 55 percent of mental disorders among adolescents aged from 10 to 19 in Europe. The prevalence of mental disorders for boys and girls aged from 10 to 19 in Europe for 2021 is 16.3 percent, while the global number for the same age group is 13.2 percent, which means that 9 million adolescents in this age group in Europe live with a mental disorder (UNICEF 2021). According to UNICEF (2021), 57.6 trillion US dollars is the estimated annual loss of human capital (mental or cognitive and emotional resources) due to mental disorders (DALY - Disability-adjusted life years).

Due to the seriousness of the mentioned statistical data, it is necessary to focus on the basic data related to the subject of interest of this work - anxiety. Unlike the animal world, where fear reactions appear automatically, in humans, although evolutionarily conditioned, they are often the result of imagined situations and at the same time do not have the function of protection from danger and take on the dimension of anxiety (Mish 1998 according to Akhtar 2014, 16–17). Anxiety is a state of unpleasant physical illness and fear, which is accompanied by a series of physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, hand or body tremors, dry mouth, difficulty breathing, feeling of suffocation, nausea, feeling of heat or cold in the body, tension, inability to relax and similar, along with a series of psychological symptoms that include weakness, confusion, a sense of loss of consciousness, difficulty maintaining attention and concentration, death or loss of control over one's behavior, general discomfort and excessive worry (Ministry of Health and Social Care of the Republic of Croatia 2011). It can manifest over a short period of time, from just a few hours, days or weeks, as a result of mild or moderate distress, all the way to severe conditions that last for months or years (Tudor 1996 according to WHO 2022). Anxiety is a very likely emotional response of a person to a threat or the experience of stress to some life event, and it can be conceptualized as a stable and permanent characteristic of a person or as an immediate response to a certain situation, while it is short-lived and refers to the state (Speilberger 1983 according to McNaughton-Cassill 2001).

The 20th century recognized by advances in communication technology, but also by increasing psychological stress (McNaughton-Cassill 2001), and as the use of digital

media, including television, computers, and smartphones, has become more and more present in the lives of both children and adults, concerns are also growing due to their possible negative effects on mental health (Hoge et al. 2017). As far back as 1976, Ball-Rokeach and Defleur stated mass media can have a diverse emotional impact on an individual, so they can stimulate short-term positive emotions, such as empathy and compassion for other people or events, or negative ones, such as fear and anxiety. On the other hand, they can also have long-term effects on the emotional state of people, depending on how much individuals are exposed to media messages and to what extent they tend to think about them, which can be observed through the degree of emotional engagement of individuals. Some research suggests anxious mood alone may predispose people to follow threatening releases in the media (Mogg et al. 1992 and Wells 1994 according to McNaughton-Cassill 2001). Thus, for example, people who are anxious about a certain topic are more likely to follow media releases about that topic, which in turn will increase their anxiety, regardless of the actual risk factors (Slovic 1987 according to McNaughton-Cassill 2001). Also, the mere exposure to negative news through the media is enough to contribute to symptoms of anxiety and depression (McNaughton-Cassill 2001), especially if it involves excessive viewing of media content, which negatively affects the mental health of the individual (Jahangir et al. 2014).

More recent researches on media influence on mental health deal more with the interactive nature of new media, especially social media, and their impact on anxiety and depression. Key research topics include social comparison, difficulty regulating emotions, social anxiety, inadequate connection with peers and feelings of exclusion, suicide as a result of cyberbullying and other behaviors that can be linked to the use of social media (Hoge et al. 2017), which, with whatever perspective we approach, we can never pay too much attention.

### **1.1 Purpose and goals**

The aim of this research was to review the available literature on the negative effects of media announcements of various kinds of people suffering from mental health problems, with an emphasis on anxiety disorders.

### **1.2 Methods**

In order to identify professional deliberations and explore the results of current research in this area, a systematic literature review was used (Snyder 2019). The bibliographic database of Google Scholar was searched, exclusively in English, focusing on articles dating from the period from 2020 to 2023, due to the search for newer findings on the selected topic. This research was conducted in the period from the end of November 2022 to the end of January 2023.

The research was carried out in several phases, the first of which referred to the refinement of the given keywords by testing different combinations, the second to

the review of research summaries, books and available on-line literature, whereby special attention was paid to exclusion factors, since the initial combinations of the given keywords words counted up to several million results, and finally the content analysis of complete articles, with an emphasis on results and discussion.

In order to identify the answers to the key question in this research, several combinations of keywords were used, excluding those articles which covered topics about COVID-19 pandemic, addictions, and review papers. Master's and graduate theses were also not included in the further process of detailed analysis.

Searches for keywords that contained the word "disorder" mostly yielded results that included results more in the domain of health care, approaches, and prediction of the occurrence of the disorder, and were often combined with the COVID-19 pandemic or young people with pervasive developmental disorder which is not the topic of this paper. Therefore, there are few results that literally include the topic of people with anxiety disorders and the impact of media announcements on them. For the search, the Google search operator "allintitle" was used, which enables to limit search engine results to only papers that have the specific chosen keyword in the title.

Review according to the given criteria:

1. allintitle: media anxiety children -review -pandemic -covid -addiction

There were excluded articles that include: virtual reality (VR) distraction, surgery, digital games, treatment of mental health problems, food allergic, sexualization of children, parental anxiety, foster care, dental.

From the first purified combination of keywords, only one of the nine total articles were suitable for further processing.

2. allintitle: media anxiety adolescents -review -pandemic -covid -addiction

There were excluded articles that include: peer blogging, intervention, health education, developmental issues, autism, support, treatment.

From the second refined combination of keywords, ten of the eighteen articles obtained were suitable for further processing.

3. allintitle: media anxiety adolescent -review -pandemic -covid -addiction

There were excluded articles that include: media advertising, treatment, video explainer.

From the third refined combination of keywords, only three of the five articles obtained were suitable for further processing.

4. allintitle: media anxiety young -review -pandemic -covid -addiction

There were excluded articles that include: assessment, treatment, LGBTIQ+ population, cardiovascular disease, chronic illness.

From the fourth refined combination of keywords, only three of the eleven articles obtained were suitable for further processing.

5. allintitle: media anxiety disorder

From the last refined combination of keywords, only five of the eighteen articles obtained were suitable for further processing when the words were excluded as from the previous searches.

In order to make the research more complete, the included keywords were entered both in the singular and in the plural, and duplicates were removed from further processing.

Also, in order to gain an insight into whether the difficulties related to the use of media are exclusively “more” of Western culture, studies of other cultures (eg China, Brazil, Indonesia, etc.) were also taken into account.

## 2. RESULTS

The literature review provided an answer to the question of the reasons adolescents use social media. Research results suggest this is due to multiple reasons, which include boredom, searching for information, problems they have in their offline lives (Brailovskaia et al. 2020), difficulties in face-to-face communication, feelings of exclusion or rejection, which only results with more time spent on media, especially on-line games and social media (Hrek 2020), but also serves as an escape from negative emotions (Brailovskaia et al. 2020), which very easily turns into an addictive use of social media, a search for positive emotions, but also as an inspiration related to fashion, music or art, establishing and maintaining social contacts, creating new friendships, structuring leisure, entertainment and relaxation (Brailovskaia et al. 2020).

Regardless of the intrinsic or extrinsic motivations young people use social media for, this use is considered primarily through the prism of the negative effects it has on mental health. So the authors listed a number of difficulties arising from the use of the media space, which include stress (Simard 2020), general symptoms of anxiety (Simard 2020; Azhari et al. 2022), but also specific symptoms of anxiety that can be classified as social anxiety (Silmi et al. 2020), situational and interpersonal anxiety in situations of showing extreme or unjustified violence in the media, perversions and similar disturbing content (Hrek 2020) and GAD (Faisal Farid et al. 2022). They also mentioned the emergence of addictive behavior (Simard 2020), problems with self-esteem, impaired self-image, attention deficit disorder, impaired sleep hygiene (Torres Silva 2020), the development of unhealthy eating habits, in the form of focusing on body weight in girls and muscularity in boys, which are a mediator for symptoms of depression and anxiety (Ghergut et al. 2022) related to the use of social media, but also a strong connection between the use

of social media and emotional intelligence. On the other hand, addictive use of media and emotional intelligence were not shown to be related (Faisal Farid et al. 2022), and the connection between the use of social media in the structure of adolescent leisure and social anxiety was not found (Jolly 2022).

Certain behaviors, some from the real life of individuals, some intrinsic events in them, and some behaviors related to the use of media space are related to or influence the appearance of other behaviors or events in and around young people and are therefore divided in this paper into groups called "predictors" and "consequences". Their interdependence and intertwining can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Behaviors or events divided into groups**

CONSEQUENCES	PREDICTORS		CONSEQUENCES	PREDICTORS	
PROBLEMATIC USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety about one's own appearance (body image due to exposure to visual content on social media)</li> <li>improving self-confidence as a selfie expectation (for boys)</li> <li>symptoms of depression and anxiety as a result of obesity</li> </ul>	3	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use of social media</li> </ul>	1
LOWLINESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social media use disorder (Internet addiction)</li> </ul>	1	CYBERBULLING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social anxiety</li> <li>attitudes towards social media</li> </ul>	2
FEWER HOURS OF SLEEP ON AVERAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social media use disorder (Internet addiction)</li> </ul>	1	GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cyberbullying</li> <li>use of social media</li> <li>addiction to social media</li> </ul>	3
POOR QUALITY OF SLEEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social media use disorder (Internet addiction)</li> <li>active use of Facebook</li> <li>active use of Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat</li> </ul>	3	AVOIDING SCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cyberbullying</li> <li>peer abuse</li> </ul>	2
EMOTIONAL STRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>number of hours on social media (for girls)</li> <li>using social media</li> </ul>	2	POOR GRADES, LOWER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, LEARNING DIFFICULTIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fear of missing out (FOMO) important content on social media, gaining popularity, attracting attention, creating a positive self-image</li> </ul>	1
DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>number of hours on social media</li> <li>passive use of media</li> <li>exposure to celebrity photos on social media</li> </ul>	3	SOCIAL ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interactional anxiety</li> <li>addiction to the smartphones</li> <li>extroverts</li> <li>poor relationship with parents</li> <li>unhappy childhood</li> <li>one child</li> <li>cyberbullying and peer violence</li> <li>exposure to celebrity photos on social media</li> </ul>	8
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR HEALTH PURPOSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>depressive and anxiety disorders</li> </ul>	1	DIFFICULTY WITH OFFLINE FRIENDSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exposure to celebrity photos on social media</li> </ul>	1
SOCIAL STRESSORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>different mechanisms by which Facebook may exacerbate anxiety in adolescents with anxiety disorders</li> </ul>	1	ADDICTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social anxiety</li> <li>escape from negative emotions</li> </ul>	2
ANXIETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>broj sati na društvenim medijama, fizički simptomi (žene više)</li> <li>cyberbullying and peer violence</li> <li>koristenje društvenih mreža u situacijama ekstremnog i nepravdnog nasilja</li> </ul>	3	FLOW EXPERIENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>escape from negative emotions</li> <li>searching for positive emotions</li> </ul>	2
PROTECTIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>active use of social media</li> </ul>	1	RISK FACTORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>passive use of social media</li> </ul>	1

Source: author.

Thus, young people who feel anxiety due to social perception, or social anxiety, and those who have more positive attitudes towards social networks, are more vulnerable to online abuse or cyberbullying (Karaman and Arslan 2020). Internet abuse, apart from causing social anxiety, also leads to symptoms of GAD (generalized anxiety disorder) (Kaloeti et al. 2021), just as the addictive use of social

media also favors the development of GAD, only a moderate correlation was found for the general use of social media (Faisal Farid et al. 2022). Both cyberbullying and peer abuse proved to be significant predictors of avoiding school, also the appearance of symptoms of separation anxiety and panic attacks, but exclusively in girls (Kaloeti et al. 2021). On the other hand, the authors state that worse grades in school, lower academic achievement and learning difficulties are the result of the fear of missing out (FOMO) of important content on the networks due to the desire to achieve popularity, attract attention and create a positive self-image (Tanrikulu and Mouratidis 2022).

A significant number of predictors in research indicate social anxiety associated with the use of social networks, whereby the authors mention interaction anxiety, addiction to the use of "smart" phones (Jia et al. 2022), experience of online violence (Jia et al. 2022; Kaloeti et al. 2021), exposure to photos of famous people in the media, in which this exposure is also responsible for difficulties in offline friendships, and for the appearance of depressive symptoms in young people (Charmaraman et al. 2021). Social anxiety is also related to real-life situations such as physical peer abuse (Kaloeti et al. 2021). Jia et al. (2022) state the only children in the family, young people who had a difficult childhood or have a bad relationship with their parents, as well as extroverts, are at a higher risk of this type of social anxiety. As a rule, socially anxious individuals show higher levels of addiction to social media (Jia et al. 2022), while escape from negative emotions is also closely related to addictive use of social media (Brailovskaia et al. 2020). Young people who are running away from negative emotions or looking for positive emotional experiences, as a rule, use social media more because of the flow experience associated with the use of social media (Brailovskaia et al. 2020). The authors also talk about predictors that lead to problematic use of the Internet and social networks, and thus state anxiety about one's own appearance, i.e. images of one's own body due to exposure to visual content on social networks (Boursier et al. 2020), expectations from posting "selfies" on social networks, especially for young men, who in this way want to raise their self-confidence (Boursier et al. 2020), but also symptoms of depression and anxiety as a result of obesity (Jolliff et al. 2020). That this is serious addictive behavior, not just behavior unfairly characterized as addiction, is also indicated by data implying the fact when people have reduced their time using social media, they use other screen-related behaviors, such as playing games, which are way to reduce discomfort and frustration (Simard 2020). Problematic use of social networks, i.e., addictive behavior on social networks is a predictor of loneliness, also of fewer hours of sleep on average, as well as poorer sleep quality (Azhari et al. 2022), which is due to the active use of the social platform Facebook, while the influence of Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat did not show significant (Azhari et al. 2022).

The number of hours spent on social networks, especially among the fairer sex (Thorisdottir 2020), but also the general use of social media for both sexes (Simard 2020), affect the feeling of emotional distress in young people. It is also associated with the appearance of depressive symptoms (Thorisdottir 2020; Culpepper 2020), as well as passive media use, especially among female users of social media (Thorisdottir 2020). The number of hours young people engage in social networks is not linked to the occurrence of social anxiety related to media use (Thorisdottir 2020), nor to the occurrence of depressive or anxiety symptoms (Culpepper 2020), and in general, only a small correlation was found between the engagement of young people in the use of social media for health purposes and anxiety or depressive disorders (Ayangunna 2022). There are also many social stressors that young people feel due to the use of social media, especially increased rumination, social comparison, fear of judgment, concern about privacy, seeking approval, compulsive checking and similar behaviors that are based on an anxious mood. The authors mentioned the use of Facebook, with an emphasis on young people suffering from an anxiety disorder (Calancie et al. 2017), while media reports about the ideal body image did not prove to be as important to adolescents for integration into their own ideals as peer attitudes (Trekels and Eggermont 2021).

Physical symptoms of anxiety occur more often in the fairer sex as a result of the number of hours spent on social networks (Thorisdottir 2020), while cyberbullying and peer abuse is directly related to the occurrence of anxiety for young people of both sexes (Kaloeti et al. 2021). The presentation of extreme or unjustified violence in the media, as well as perversion or similar disturbing content also affects the occurrence of anxiety in adolescents (Hrek 2020), while the disorder of using social networks (Azhari et al. 2022) was not shown to be related to the emergence of anxiety in young people. The authors cite active use of media as a kind of protective factor for mental health, while passive use is considered a risk factor for the mental health of young people (Thorisdottir 2020). The use of digital media more or less than usual (as assessed by the users themselves) did not prove to be a risk factor for psychological difficulties over time (Sewall et al. 2022).

Table 2 was created for the purpose of reviewing through the included papers the enumerated consequences of the influence of various factors on the mental health of young people. The criteria are summarized into categories, while the subcategories show predictors grouped into a particular category.



**Table 2: Table of summed criteria**

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	DISORDERS AND DIFFICULTIES	PROTECTORS AND RISK FACTORS	SCHOOL-RELATED BEHAVIORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addictive use of social networks</li> <li>• problematic internet and social networks use</li> <li>• flow experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anxiety ( social, GAD, the anxiety, separation, panic attack)</li> <li>• depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protectors (social media usage for health purposes)</li> <li>• risk factors</li> <li>• cyberbullying</li> <li>• emotional stress</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• number of hours of sleep</li> <li>• sleep quality</li> <li>• emotional intelligence</li> <li>• social stressors</li> <li>• offline friendships</li> <li>• eating habits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic performance</li> <li>• avoiding school</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: author.

It can be seen that most of the reviewed papers dealt with difficulties and disorders related to anxiety disorders (anxiety, social anxiety, GAD, separation anxiety and panic attacks) and depressive symptomatology, to which the authors linked the most predictors for the use of social media (21 of them). The next category according to representation in the works was related to protective and risky factors of using social media, with a total of 15 predictors. The last two categories, which describe the use of the Internet, social media and behaviors related to school, contain a total of 10 predictors.

### 3. DISCUSSION

Regardless of which part of the world young people live in, the need to use social media is equally expressed and media have become almost the basic interactive tool of younger generations, which is why it is not surprising that the problem of psychological safety of young Internet users is receiving more and more attention. A large number of predictors of negative consequences clearly indicate the use of media cannot be seen as a benign structure of children's and young people's leisure time. The results of this review agree with the previous findings of many authors, whereby special attention should be paid to the reasons why young people turn to online interactions, since social networks are often used automatically (Kosanović et al. 2021), without awareness of possible harmful consequences. Thus, in this review, the most common reasons for using the Internet among young people are boredom (Puharić et al. 2014), socialization and the creation of new intrapersonal relationships (Kraut et al. 2002 according to Thorisdottir et al. 2019; Hoge et al. 2017; O'Day,

and Heimberg 2021), escaping from negative and searching for positive emotions, thereby avoiding real emotional experiences, which can easily lead to difficulties with emotional regulation and the appearance of various psychopathological disorders, such as anxiety and depression (Hoge et al. 2017; Kosanović et al. 2021; Cacioppo, and Patrick, 2008, 186-187; Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016). They also use the Internet in order to prevent the feeling of discomfort caused by direct communication (Kosanović et al. 2021), since the Internet provides them with the possibility of hiding behind a kind of anonymity (Cook 2022), but which can easily lead to the replacement of face-to-face communication with online communication and to feelings of loneliness and depression (Kumar 2014; Bickham et al. 2015 according to Hoge et al. 2017). Erwin et al. (2004 according to O'Day and Heimberg 2021) note that socially anxious people perceive the Internet as more pleasant for interaction, which is why they often decide on an online form of interaction, more precisely in order to compensate for the feeling of lack social support in the real world (Weidman et al. 2012 according to O'Day and Heimberg 2021). However, symptoms of social anxiety can also occur as a result of virtual interaction (Rauch et al. 2014 according to O'Day, and Heimberg 2021), which was also shown in this review. In addition to the above, young people also talk about the need for entertainment and relaxation as a reason for using the Internet (Lin et al. 2016), which would not be a problem if the use did not turn into a loss of control over one's own time, life and scholastic obligations, and interpersonal relationships (Kosanović et al. 2021; Puharić et al. 2014).

Many authors of other researches, not covered by this review, obtained similar results in their works, citing a number of negative consequences of using social media (listed in Results). Anxiety is already associated with excessive consumption of television (Jahangir et al. 2014), while media exposure has a complex but positive relationship with stress (McNaughton-Cassill 2001), whereby a direct negative impact of media content on the psychological well-being of young people can be expected and acute reactions if they deal with negative or disturbing topics (Ball-Rokeach and Defleur 1976; McNaughton-Cassill 2001). Hoge et al. (2017) describe the interrelationship between the use of digital media such as television, computers, computer games, smartphones, etc. and symptoms of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents. The use of media is also associated with generally worse psychological well-being (Kross et al. (2013 in Thorisdottir et al. 2019), stating that those who used digital media for more than seven hours a day showed a higher level of both depressive (Twenge et al. 2012 according to Thorisdottir et al. 2019) and anxiety symptoms (Vannucci et al. 2017 according to Thorisdottir et al. 2019), which agrees with the findings of this review. According to UNICEF (2021), in 2019 anxiety and depression was responsible for 55% of mental disorders among adolescents aged 10 to 19 in Europe, which is more than worrying data. Durocher et al. (2011 according to

Hoge et al. 2017) state that the cessation of the use of digital technologies can lead to increase in anxiety symptoms, while in this review, the decrease in the use of social networks is linked to the appearance of other forms of screen-behavior (Simard 2020), which corroborates previous findings and indicates the addictive attitude of young people towards digital media. O'Day and Heimberg (2021) specifically associate social anxiety and loneliness with the problematic use of social media, which is also concluded in this paper.

Due to the amount of time they spend on digital media and the accompanying excitement, young people often suffer from impaired sleep quality (Telzer et al. 2013 according to Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016), which is manifested in the form of shorter sleep duration (Garmy et al. 2012; Pea et al. 2012 according to Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016), later going to sleep (Van den Bulck 2004; Shochat et al. 2010; Garmy et al. 2012 according to Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016), prolonged sleep latency (Shochat et al. 2010 according to Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016), and because of which they suffer from fatigue during the day. They are also more susceptible to various stressors and psychological difficulties, which can cause a number of physical, cognitive and emotional problems (Hoge et al. 2017).

In his work, Patchin (2019) states a high prevalence of experiencing some form of online abuse and states that adolescent girls are at a higher risk of experiencing this form of abuse, which can be linked to the results obtained in this work, because they are more prone to anxiety due to social perception and behaviors which result in a body conforming to the socially set of ideal (Erceg Jugović and Kuterovac Jagodić 2016). They are also more prone to the development of dependence on social networks (Kosanović et al. 2021), while young men also come across a bad and distorted image of their own body and the desire to reach social ideal of "muscularity" (Erceg Jugović and Kuterovac Jagodić 2016). However, since cyberbullying has also been recorded as a predictor of social anxiety (Kaloeti et al. 2021), it seems this relationship is more complicated than it seems at first glance.

Cook (2022) states the prevalence of this type of abuse in more than 50 % and warns of a constant increase, which can be related to the increased rate of auto aggressive behavior and suicide among adolescents (Cook 2022; Coppersmith et al. 2016, Burnap et al. 2015 and Shing et al. 2018 according to Chancellor, and De Choudhury 2020; Daine et al. 2013 according to Hoge et al. 2017). It is important to emphasize the use of social media is directly related to lower self-esteem, both of adult individuals and adolescents (Thorisdottir et al. 2019), to which young people are particularly vulnerable (Orth et al. 2015; McLaughlin, and King 2015 according to Cleland Woods, and Scott 2016), which is associated with a number of psychological difficulties.

It is alarming that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 29, according to WHO data, and the number of children admitted to hospitals

for suicide attempts or expressing suicidal thoughts doubled between 2008 and 2015, with much of the increase attributed precisely to the increase in internet violence (Cook 2022).

Self-harm and suicidality have been shown to be closely related to social anxiety (Hoge et al. 2017) and depressive symptoms, and since depressed individuals often feel overwhelmed by daily obligations and demands in their immediate environment, the online world is an ideal escape (Shensa et al. 2018 according to Brailovskaia and Margraf 2020). Depression is one of the leading causes of hospitalizations in the Republic of Croatia in 2020, in third place among total hospitalizations due to mental illnesses (Silobrčić et al. 2022), while in the whole Europe this figure rises to over 30 million people, making it one of the most common diseases in the member states of the European Union, it is one of the leading causes of disability and occurs more often in people of the fairer sex (ZJZ Zagrebačke županije 2022). It occurs often and is comorbid with other psychiatric diseases, such as anxiety and substance addiction disorders (Kessler et al. 2005; Burcusa and Iacono 2007 according to Lin et al. 2016), and its serious symptoms and serious consequences are brought into relation in this paper with using the internet and media space.

The shortcomings of this work can be seen in the number of reviewed literatures that conform the inclusion criteria, which means that certain important topics, especially those related to the impact of media use on academic success or interpersonal relationships, were not sufficiently covered. Also, not enough literature was found that dealt exclusively with the consequences of media announcements on people suffering from anxiety disorders, since the reviewed papers mostly dealt with the negative aspects of using the Internet and the media on healthy individuals and the symptoms that appear in them as a result of exposure. Research that dealt with mental health disorders and the influence of the media, including anxiety disorders, mostly focused on therapeutic guidelines and the image that the media transmits about a certain mental disorder, while the influence of the media itself or media announcements may be currently uninteresting or generally insufficiently researched. Although a limited number of research deals with the topic of interest for this paper, it is assumed that not only the use of Facebook but also the use of other media increases the anxious mood and thus the symptoms in people suffering from anxiety disorders, which is why future research should put more focus on this question.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From all that has been stated throughout the paper and with reference to earlier research, it seems that the behaviors that are the motive for using media of any kind and the consequences of using them are intertwined and form a moderator

variable for other behaviors or consequences, in the form of symptoms or the possible development of disorders, which makes the topic itself complex, but very valuable in the context of caring for future generations, especially if attention is paid to the risk factors for mental health problems related to the use of media. Therefore, the goal of today's and future parents, teachers, professors and all adults should be, not only teaching children and young people to use the media through the prism of critical thinking, but also ensuring a healthy micro and macro level for growth and development while building a realistic self-concept, learning adequate social and emotional skills and inculcating much-needed healthy lifestyle habits, all for the purpose of ensuring protection from the Internet and the media in general, which nowadays cannot be avoided and have become a full-fledged part of today's life.

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# E- CONSULTATION AS A WAY OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC IN ADOPTING REGULATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Irena Klepac Mustać, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

The concept of „smart legislation“ includes the need to consult the wider public before adopting regulations. The consultation process itself with the interested public is carried out in the Republic of Croatia by the central body of the state administration through the *esavjetovanja.gov.hr* portal (e-Savjetovanja). In order for the future law to be of the highest quality, it is necessary to achieve the highest possible quality of communication and involve the media in order to inform about the possibility of participating in the process of law making.

The purpose of this article is to provide answers to the following questions: does conducting e- consultation through the *esavjetovanja.gov.hr* website represent the media that plays the highest quality role in the process of consulting the public; what is the role of the media in that process and to what extent?

The research will use the method of analyzing existing sources of relevant literature and available data and conducting a survey with which hypotheses will be challenged or confirmed: (*whether*) the e-consultation platform via certain websites represents an adequate way of collecting information about legislative proposals and; (*whether*) all relevant media are sufficiently and evenly involved in the consultation process. The results show that the *esavjetovanja.gov.hr* portal is the dominant area in which e-consultation was carried out in the Republic of Croatia during 2021, and that 39.14 % of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia are not aware that they have the opportunity to participate in consultation during law making, while 60.89 % of them are not aware of the existence of the web portal *esavjetovanja.gov.hr*.

**Keywords:** media; e- consultation; smart legislation; public; legal acts.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The definitions of e-participation that we find in the scientific literature differ, but most definitions include the terms of using information and communication technologies (ICT) that have the purpose of involving citizens in decision-making and the provision of public services. Macintosh (2004, 5–8) gave the most commonly used definition of e-participation as „the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with each other and with their elected representatives.“

Since it is necessary to create an environment of trust in order for citizens to decide to participate in e-participation processes, this paper through empirical research analyzes the factors that directly affect the procedure, technology, perception and adequacy of ways that affect trust in e-participation, so that within the scope of this research, it will also study the adequacy of the web portal through which E-consultation is carried out. Citizen participation is considered one of the key elements of transparency of governments in relation to their citizens. In order to realize the principle of transparency, governments must identify and offer the best means to achieve the most effective electronic participation of the public in order to create the conditions to enable citizens to have a timely and real influence on the decisions that are made. „Consultation with the public implies that the public authority publicly publishes the draft of the normative act and invites the public to express their opinion, i.e. submit feedback on the proposed act“ (Đurman 2020, 410).

This paper is an attempt to examine the adequacy of the web portal through which e-consultation is carried out in the Republic of Croatia, as one of the possible ways of e-consultation, whereby the existing literature and available data are being analyzed and a survey conducted with which the hypotheses will be challenged or confirmed: (*whether*) the e-consultation platform via certain websites represents an adequate way of collecting information about legislative proposals and; (*whether*) all relevant media are sufficiently and evenly involved in the consultation process.

E-consultation in the Republic of Croatia is a term in the law-making process that includes consultation with the public of state administration bodies that is carried out through the central state internet portal for consultations with the public, whereas other state bodies, units of local and regional (Regional) Self-Government and legal entities with public authorities do the same via the website or by using the central state internet portal for consultation with the public, by publishing a draft regulation, general act or other document, with an explanation of the reasons and goals to be achieved by adopting the regulation, act or other document and by inviting the public to submit their suggestions and opinions (Zakon o pravu na pristup informacijama NN 85/15).

Consultation is a two-way process during which state bodies ask for and receive feedback from citizens, i.e. the interested public in the process of adopting laws, other regulations, and acts (Kodeks savjetovanja sa zainteresiranom javnošću u postupcima donošenja zakona, drugih propisa i akata).

The process of standardizing the consultation process in the Republic of Croatia began in 2009, when the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Code of Practice on Consultation with the Interested Public in Procedures of Adopting Laws, Other Regulations and Acts (Kodeks savjetovanja sa zainteresiranom javnošću u postupcima donošenja zakona, drugih propisa i akata). Along with the adoption of the Code, the Government simultaneously obliged the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia to draw up Guidelines for the application of the Code and a systematic training program for consultation coordinators, who had to be appointed in state administration bodies and Government offices (e-Savjetovanja). The procedure of e-consultations in the Republic of Croatia is regulated by the Act on the Right to Access to Information (Zakon o pravu na pristup informacijama), the Code of Practice on Consultation with the Interested Public in Procedures of Adopting Laws, Other Regulations and Acts (Kodeks savjetovanja sa zainteresiranom javnošću u postupcima donošenja zakona, drugih propisa i akata).

Basic information on the existence and method of the consultation procedure can be found on the state portal [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr). After each consultation is carried out, all accepted and not accepted comments and suggestions must be published on the website, as well as reports on the conducted consultation.

The way, standards and principles on which the state determines consultation with the public largely depends on the sector area in which the consultation is carried out. When it comes to the field of environmental protection policy, the acts that prescribe e-consultation are binding in their nature, and in relation to them there is a tradition of involving the public. On the other hand, in other cases, the governments of the countries of the European Union independently assess the adequacy of the e-consultation method, guided by the guidelines and documents of certain international and European organizations, such as the Council of Europe (CE), the United Nations (UN), which documents are non-binding in their nature and come in the form of recommendations or guidelines, such as the White Paper on European Governance from 2001 (Commission of European Communities 2001), which advocates the values of public participation and openness to the public, as well as General Principles and Minimum Standards for consultation of interested parties from 2002 of the European Commission The Mandelkern report on better regulation from 2000 (Mandelkern Group on Better Regulation. 2001, 1–84), which contain recommendations for involving the interested public, transparency of inclusion, recommended duration of consultation, as well as advice for including

the Internet as a tool for the highest possible involvement of the public for the purpose of availability of comments (Musa 2015).

In order to implement the aforementioned guidelines and recommendations, it is necessary to carry out timely and adequate informing the public, organize a clear system of the consultation process, carry out timely and early involvement of the public, carry out the consultation in a sufficient duration, rely on several methods that also include computerization, carry out training of civil servants and provide feedback on the conducted consultation.

## 2. PURPOSE AND AIMS

The purpose and aim of this paper is to provide answers to the following questions: whether conducting e-consultation through the website [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr) is the most appropriate and effective communication channel in the consultation process with the public; what is the role of the media in that process and to what extent?

The aim of the conducted survey is to obtain answers to the following questions: what the level of information among citizens about the possibility of their participation and contribution in the law-making process in such a way is that citizens participate as effectively as possible in the consultation that precedes the law-making process in the Republic of Croatia.

Through the analysis of the conducted survey of 711 respondents, as well as the quantitative analysis of the content of the report on the conducted e-consultations, and the analysis of the data obtained from the European Statistical Office – Eurostat (2021; 2023) and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics for the year 2021, (2021a; 2021b.) the findings of the research and the conclusions drawn from the findings as well as certain recommendations will be discussed for the purpose of more effective implementation of e-consultation in the Republic of Croatia, as well as to confirm the hypothesis (*whether*) the e-consultation platform through the website [www.savjetovanje.gov.hr](http://www.savjetovanje.gov.hr) represents an adequate way of collecting information on legislative proposals and (*whether*) all relevant media are sufficiently and evenly involved in the consultation process.

## 3. RESEARCH

### 3.1 Research Methodology

The research will use the method of analyzing existing sources of relevant literature and available data, as well as conducting a survey, which will challenge or confirm the set hypotheses.

The research was conducted online with the help of the Qualtrics web tool voluntarily and anonymously on adult respondents, citizens of the Republic of Croatia,

and analyzes the factors that influence the procedure, technology, perception and adequacy of electronic participation through 19 questions. This paper therefore particularly examines the aspect of the guidelines for the development of adequate tools for e-participation in the Republic of Croatia, citing various factors that influence the respondents' attitudes on which the effectiveness of e-consultation depends.

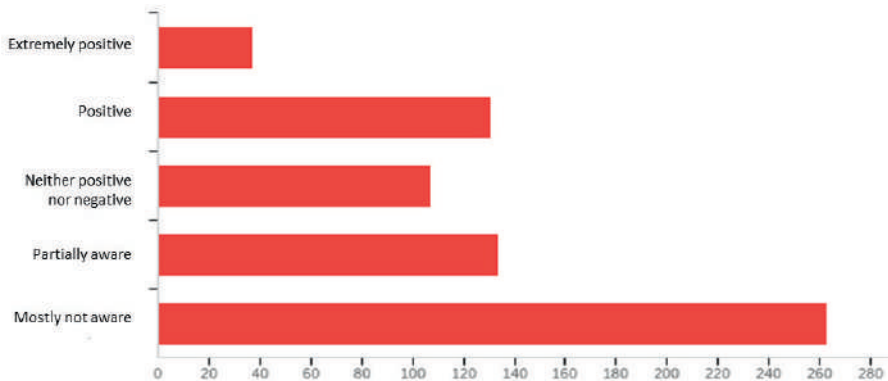
Then, after reviewing the legislative framework of e-consultation in the Republic of Croatia, by using the method of quantitative analysis of the content of reports on conducted e-consultation and by analyzing data obtained from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat 2021.) and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (DZS) for 2021 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021a; 2021b) on the structure of the population for each of the EU member states and the Republic of Croatia, and comparative data on socio-economic factors (age structure of the population at the level of the European Union, data on the frequency of Internet use by the population over 65 years old, educational structure), the above data will be compared with the data and the results of the survey under the topic: „Are you aware of the possibility to participate in the law-making process and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions“ which was conducted voluntarily by the Qualtrics Survey online program (Qualtrics 2023) among 711 adult respondents, of which 68.41 % are female and 31.59 % male, from January 19, 2023 to January 31, 2023. The conducted survey is completely voluntary and anonymous and contains questions about the level of information of the public, about the way they can participate in the law-making process and make their suggestions, and about the way they think is the most acceptable way of participation. The survey contains 19 questions, divided into 4 thematic blocks: on the possibilities of consultation in the law-making process, on the e-consultation portal, on the way of receiving information, and on socio-demographic issues. Respondents gave one answer to each of the 19 questions that were asked individually.

### **3.2 Results of Survey Research**

The conducted survey, which was attended by 711 respondents in the Republic of Croatia, in the period from January 19 to January 31, 2023, entitled „Are you aware of the possibility to participate in the law-making process and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions“ obtained the following results for 19 questions:

To the first survey question „To what extent are you aware of the possibility to participate in the process of adopting laws and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions?“, 39.14 % of respondents answered that they were mostly not aware, 19.94 % were partially aware, 15.92 % were neither good nor bad, 19.49 well aware, and 5.51 % were extremely well (Graph 1).

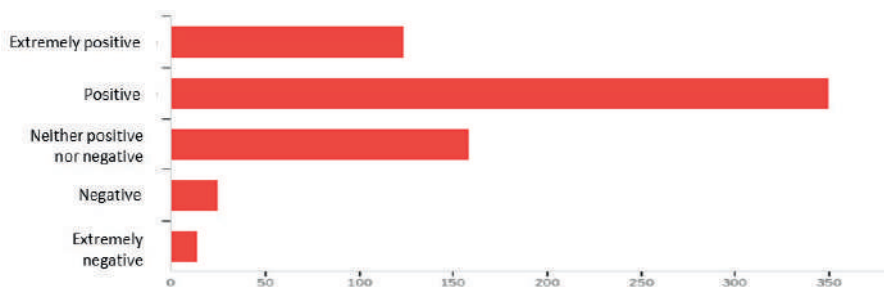
**Graph 1: To what extent are you aware of the possibility to participate in the law-making process and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions?**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

To the second question: „What is your attitude towards the opportunity to participate in the law-making process and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions?“, 18.48 % of respondents declared themselves extremely positive, 52.16 % as positive, 23.55 % as neither positive nor negative, 3.73 % negative, while an extremely negative attitude was expressed by 2.09 % of respondents. (Graph 2)

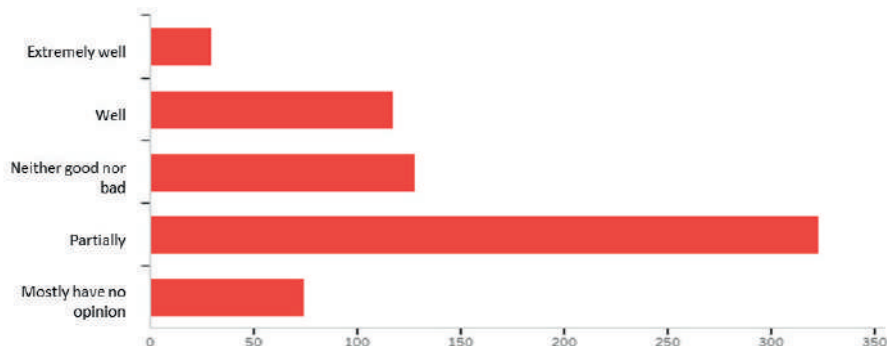
**Graph 2: What is your attitude towards the opportunity to participate in the law-making process and the way you can participate with your comments and suggestions?**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

On the third question: „To what extent do you think that you can influence the final text of the law that is adopted with your suggestions and/or comments on the legislative proposals?“, the majority of respondents (48.14%) believe that they can partially influence, 4.32 % extremely well, 17.44 % well, 19.08% neither good nor bad, 48.14 % partially, while 11.03 % mostly have no opinion. (Graph 3)

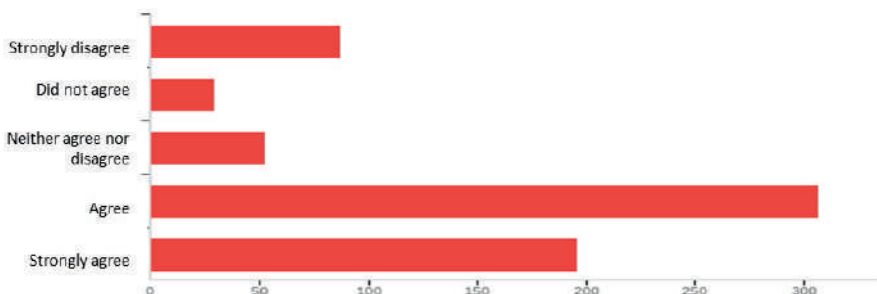
**Graph 3: To what extent do you think that you can influence the final text of the law that is being adopted with your suggestions and/or comments on the legislative proposals?**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

To the fourth question: „Do you agree or disagree with the statement that an informed public is very important for the quality of law-making and the best possible law“, 12.95 % of respondents answered that they strongly disagree, 4.32 % did not agree, 7.89% neither agree nor disagree, 45.68 % agree, and 29.17 % strongly agree. (Graph 4)

**Graph 4: Do you agree or disagree with the statement that an informed public is very important for the quality of law-making and the best possible law?**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

To the fifth question: „I am aware of the existence of the e-consultation website [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr), where I can view legislative proposals and give my remarks and/or comments“, 60.89 % of the respondents answered that they were not aware while 39.11 % stated that they were aware of it. (Graph 5).

**Graph 5: I am aware of the existence of the e-consultation website [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr), where I can view legislative proposals and give my remarks and/or comments**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

To the sixth question: „Have you ever participated in the e-consultation process and given your suggestions and/or comments on legislative proposals“, 19.42 % of respondents answered positively with „Yes“, while 80.58 % of respondents answered „No“ (Graph 6).

**Graph 6: Have you ever participated in the e-consultation process and given your suggestions and/or comments on legislative proposals**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

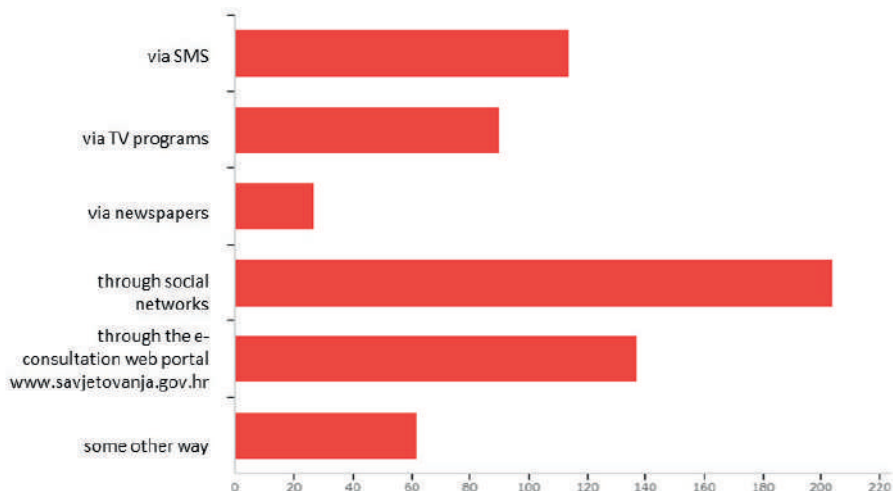
To the seventh question: „Are you willing to participate in the e-consultation process via the website [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr) and give your suggestions and/or remarks on the legislative proposals“, 69.33 % respondents answered Yes, and 30.67 % No.

To the eighth question: „Are you willing to participate in any way in the e-consultation process and give your suggestions and/or remarks on the legislative proposals“, 72.35% answered Yes, and 27.65 % No.

The ninth question: „In what way would you like to be informed that there is an ongoing discussion/consultation procedure regarding a law that is being adopted“ was answered as follows: 17.98 % via SMS, 14.20 % via TV programs, 4.26% via newspapers, 32.18 % through social networks, 21.61 % through the e-consultation web portal [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr), and in some other way 9.78 % of respondents (Graph 7).



**Graph 7: How would you like to be informed that a discussion/consultation procedure is underway regarding a law that is being adopted**



Source: Qualtrics 2023.

To the tenth question: „Which laws are you most interested in being informed about the process of adopting amendments to the law“, the answers were as follows: 29.50 % labor law, 11.51 % family law, 17.98 % real estate/property, 24.92 % tax law, 16.09 % some other law.

To the eleventh question: „Which media is most convenient for you to have the opportunity to comment on legislative proposals“, the answers were as follows: via SMS 7.44 %, via the website [www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr](http://www.esavjetovanja.gov.hr) 29.75 %, via social networks 24.68 %, by e-mail 32.59 %, by personally coming to a certain place that would be provided for submission of comments 2.53 %, in some other way 3.01 %.

To the twelfth question: „Do I plan to participate in the future with my remarks/suggestions in the procedures for adopting laws“, 27.06 % respondents answered with „Yes“, 8.86 % „No“ and 64.08 % „Maybe“.

To the thirteenth question: „Do I have access to the Internet“ the respondents answered i.e. 0.47 % of them with „No“, 0.32 % with „Yes, once a week“, 0.00 % with „Yes, twice a week“, 0.47 % with „Yes, several times a week“, and 98.73 % with „Yes, every day“.

To the fourteenth question: „Am I IT literate“, the respondents answered as follows: 1.90 % with „I strongly disagree“, 0.00 % with „I disagree“, 7.12 % with „I neither agree nor disagree“

48.58 % with „I agree“ and 42.41% „I strongly agree“.

To the fifteenth question: „Do I use the Internet“ the respondents answered as

follows: 0.32 % with „No“, 0.79 % with „Yes, once a week“, 0.16% with „Yes, twice a week“, 2.37 % with „Yes, several times a week“, and 96.37 % with „Yes, every day“.

To the sixteenth question: „Does the respondent have a smartphone“, the respondents answered as follows: 94.75 % with „Yes“, and 5.25 % with „No“.

To the seventeenth question: „What is the level of education of the respondent“ the respondents answered as follows: 0.00 % with „I have no education“, 0.6 3% with „I have primary school“, 28.64 % with „I have secondary school qualifications, and 70.73 % with „I have a university or associate degree“

To the eighteenth question: „What age group do you belong to“, the respondents answered as follows: 5.38 % with I am 18-25 years old, 9.18 % with 25-35 years old, 28.16 % with 35-45 years old, 34.02 % with 45-55 years old, 16.61 % with 55-65 years old and 6.65 % with over 65 years.

To the nineteenth question: „What is the gender of the respondent“, the respondents answered as follows: 31.59 % are male, and 68.41 % are female.

### **3.3 Analysis of the E-Consultation Report for the Year 2021**

From the Report on the implementation of public consultations in the procedures of adopting laws (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Legislation Office 2021) ((hereinafter: the Report) on the implementation of public consultations in the procedures for the adoption of laws, other regulations and acts in 2021, an analysis is available that includes public consultations conducted during 2021 by state administration bodies and the Croatian National Bank and the Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency (hereinafter: state bodies) through the e-Savjetovanja portal and outside the application - by publishing draft regulations on the websites of state bodies, holding public debates, round tables, consultation meetings and alike. According to the data from the Report, in 2021 a total of 821 consultations of state bodies were conducted via the e-Savjetovanja portal, and 31 consultations were conducted by the Croatian National Bank via its website. In 2021, the primary consultation method was consultation through the e-Savjetovanja portal, the second most common consultation method was individual or group consultation meetings, of which a total of 75 were held, and 10 public debates, and 7 online consultation sessions (outside the e-Savjetovanja portal) and 12 other consultation methods.

Out of the 821 consultations conducted in 2021, 86 of them lasted 30 or more days, while the remaining 735 consultations were held in a shortened period, that is, less than the prescribed 30 days. Despite the provision of the Act on the Right to Access to Information, which stipulates a period of 30 days for consultation with the public as a rule, and the obligation to publish consultation plans that should enable compliance with the specified deadline, a number of government bodies continue to conduct consultations in a much shorter period, citing the urgency of solving the problem / of adopting the act.

According to the aforementioned Report, in relation to comment submitters, i.e. public participation in consultation procedures, a total of 8,459 legal and natural persons participated in 2021 and submitted their comment/s on draft laws, other regulations or acts to competent authorities, and according to indicators of the number of comments from 2012 to 2021, the report states that there is a constant growth in the number of registered users of e-Savjetovanja, of which on May 12, 2022 there were 43,780, and in relation to the structure of comment submitters, the largest number of submitters are individuals, that is, out of a total of 23,462 comments, 16,587 were submitted by individuals.

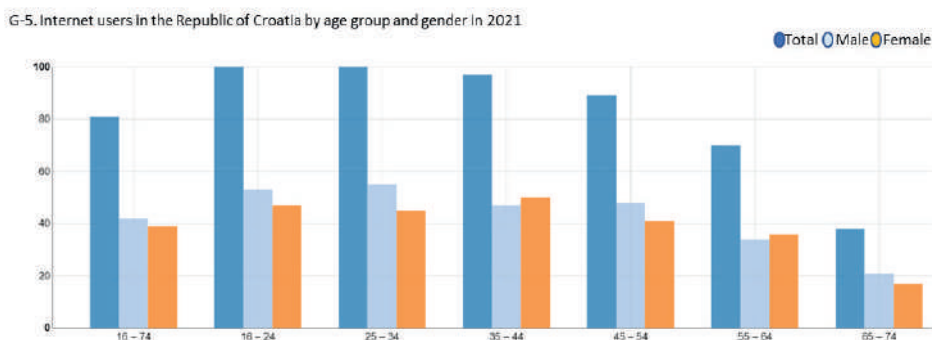
### 3.4 Analysis of the Structure of the Population of the Republic of Croatia in Relation to the Countries of the European Union

According to the report of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2021a) based on the 2021 population census, the share of the population in the Republic of Croatia aged 65 and over year is 22.45%.

According to data from the Statistical Office of the European Communities from 2021 (Eurostat 2021), the average share of the population over 65 in the European Union is 21 %. Along with the Republic of Italy (24 %), Finland and Greece (23 %), the Republic of Croatia belongs to the group of countries with the largest share of the population over 65 years old.

According to the data of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, on Internet users by group and gender from 2021(Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2021b) it is clear that the smallest number of Internet users is present in the age group of the older population from 65 years old. (Graph 8)

#### Graph 8: Internet users in the Republic of Croatia by age group and gender in 2021



Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021b.

According to Eurostat data (2021), the share of the population aged 65-74 who used the Internet in 2020 show that the Republic of Croatia is in penultimate place, ahead of Bulgaria, which is last.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Looking at the results of the conducted survey, it is clear that the respondents are mostly not aware of the possibility of participating in the law-making process, nor are they aware of the way in which they can participate with their comments and suggestions.

The results of the analysis of the Report of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, Legislation Office (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Legislation Office, 2021) (hereinafter: the Report) on the implementation of public consultation in the procedures for adopting laws, other regulations and acts in 2021 show that the website *www.savjetovanje.gov.hr* is the dominant area in which e-consultation was carried out, while the analysis of the results of the conducted survey shows that the majority of citizens are not aware of the existence of the mentioned website.

Although the majority expressed a positive attitude and willingness towards the opportunity to participate in the law-making process, the majority believes that they can only partially influence the legislative proposals with their suggestions and/or remarks, which indicates a lack of confidence in the consultation process itself. The majority of respondents are not even aware of the existence of websites for e-consultations, although they believe that an informed public is important for adopting quality laws. Furthermore, the conducted survey shows that the majority of respondents have never participated in any form of consultations or e-consultations, although they express their will to participate, and in terms of how they want to be informed about the consultation process, the majority prefers social networks as a more adequate medium. Regarding the question through which communication channel they prefer to conduct the very consultations, the majority of respondents opted for electronic mail (e-mail), while the next choice is the government portal e-consultation. Regarding the question of which area of interest and/or law they are most interested in participating in the consultation, the majority chose labor law, followed by tax legislation and finance. The majority of respondents have access to the Internet and are computer literate, and according to the educational structure, most of them have university or higher education degree, aged between 35-55 years, while a smaller number of respondents are older than 65 years. According to the mentioned data from Eurostat (2021) and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021a), it is clear that the Republic of Croatia is one of the countries of the European Union that has a larger share of the population over 65 years of age, and that according to the percentage of use of information and communication technology (ICT) among the mentioned older population, the Republic Croatia, along with Bulgaria, is at the back compared to the other countries of the European Union. Considering the above indicators of an extremely low percentage of ICT use, the population older than 65 does not have adequate access to the consultation process through

the government's e-consultation internet portal. In relation to the indicators from the Government Report on the conducted consultations, it is clear that most laws are adopted in such a way that the consultation with the public lasted less than the recommended 30 days, which was justified by the necessary urgency. The very fact of the shortness of the consultation period affects the level of timely and early information of the public about the consultation process itself and the preparation for the submission of quality comments.

In addition to the above, it follows from the Government Report that the majority of consultations is carried out through the e-consultation portal, while other methods of consultation are marginalized. By comparing the results of the conducted survey and the Government's Report on the conducted consultation, we come to the conclusion that the public is not sufficiently informed about the possibilities and ways in which they can participate in the consultation, and since the consultation takes place mostly through the government's portal according to an abbreviated procedure in which the recommended deadline of at least 30 days for consultation is not implemented, the public does not have enough time to be provided with all the information about consultation options in a timely manner. Regarding the way in which consultation is carried out, from the results of the conducted survey and the data of Eurostat (2021) and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021b), it follows that the population older than 65 years mostly does not have access to ICT and therefore such a way of consultation is inadequate for them. Considering all of the above, the hypothesis that the e-consultation platform through the website represents an adequate way of collecting information on legislative proposals and that all relevant media are sufficiently and evenly involved in the consultation process can be challenged.

## 5. CONCLUSION

„The Code of Practice on Consultation with the Interested Public in Procedures of Adopting Laws, Other Regulations and Acts was adopted as one of the measures of the Action Plan along with the Strategy for the Suppression of Corruption adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia on June 25, 2008, it is stated on the website of the state portal for consultation of the Republic of Croatia). According to the mentioned Code, the participation of the interested public includes four stages: information, consultation, involvement and partnership. Quality communication between the stakeholders of the consultation process is a basic prerequisite for the realization of the recommended principles and guidelines and ultimately the set goal, which is the value of participation and openness to the public. Without high-quality and timely information about the participation rights that the public has in law-making procedures, one cannot expect to achieve the set goals in the future. Observing the social structure according to the data of the Croatian Bureau

of Statistics (2021b) as well as Eurostat (2021), certain factors can be observed that have a negative impact on the information of citizens, such as the percentage of the population over 65 years of age that does not use information and communication technology (ICT). Therefore, in relation to the mentioned population, any attempt at online communication is unsatisfactory, and it is necessary to implement measures with the aim of educating and motivating the population over 65 to use ICT. From the above, we can conclude that it is necessary to conduct education, not only for the purpose of improving public information, but with the aim of bringing the elderly population of the Republic of Croatia closer to the level of IT literacy and ICT use to the European Union average or to the percentage of ICT use among the younger population. With regard to the level of citizens' awareness of the existence of the government's online portal through which they can access e-consultation, the conducted survey shows that the public is insufficiently informed, and it is necessary to implement measures that will provide the public with timely and high-quality information in ways and through communication channels that are the most acceptable to it (e-mail, social networks and alike).

Given that communication between the public and civil servants conducting e-consultation is two-way, it is necessary to conduct education for civil servants with the aim of promoting and informing the public about their rights to participate.

From the conducted research, it follows that the age structure of the population, the percentage of ICT use among the population over 65 years old, and the level of information of the general population are factors that directly affect the procedure, technology, perception and adequacy of the methods that affect trust in e-consultation.

Future research on the most suitable communication channels for consultation with the public needs to be adapted to the structure of the population, and by analyzing the data obtained, the best communication channel for each group of society should be determined, separately for the information process and separately for the consultation process, which needs to be adjusted in order to make it simple, accessible, fast and clear, and the duration of the consultation should be extended in order to achieve the declared general principles, standards and measures for consultation with the interested public prescribed by the Code of Practice on Consultation with the Interested Public in Procedures of Adopting Laws, Other Regulations and Acts (Kodeks savjetovanja sa zainteresiranom javnošću u postupcima donošenja zakona, drugih propisa i akata).

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# THE ROLE OF PERSONAL BRANDING AS A CONTRIBUTION TO CREATING POSITIVE IMPACT IN SOCIETY: EXAMPLES OF GROF DARKULA AND PAMELA PERKIĆ<sup>1</sup>

Vanja Krznarić, Project Management Assistant

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, Croatia

Tanja Grmuša, PhD, Assistant Professor

Zagreb School of Business, Croatia

## ABSTRACT

Marketing communication includes media channels and messages marketers use to communicate with target audiences, i.e., the market. With the development of technology and modern methods of communication, integrated marketing communication is being developed, which includes a set of all marketing tools and methods used by experts to present a coherent message to customers through various and numerous channels. Furthermore, the marketing strategy takes place based on the branding strategy, i.e., the brand and the branding strategy are developed first. In this paper, the emphasis is on personal branding, which refers to the creation of a media presentation, impression, and reputation of a certain person. The goal of personal branding is to consciously and intentionally impact an individual's perception in the public by presenting himself as a person of importance in the field of his activity, which encourages raising credibility and increasing the range of influence. Personal branding is also used by actors of social marketing, i.e., actors of marketing in which the strategic approach is the development of activities aimed at changing and maintaining people's behavior for the benefit of the individual and society. Furthermore, research was conducted using the methods of in-depth interviews and case studies, based on which we want to determine what are the personal branding strategies of social marketing actors when presenting on social networks and communicating current social topics. The case study analyzed the Instagram profiles of social activists – Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić. The in-depth interview provided an insight into the communication and presentation of these actors of social marketing, and the obtained results were structured into three categories: the way of presentation through social networks: actors of social marketing; peculiarities and characteristics of personal branding; creating social impact through social marketing.

**Keywords:** marketing communication, integrated marketing communication, personal branding, social marketing, activism on social networks.

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1 This paper is based on the research conducted by Vanja Krznarić as a part of her final thesis at the graduate university study program in Communication Studies. The thesis titled „The role of personal branding as a contribution to creating positive impact in society: examples of Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić“ was made under the mentorship of Tanja Grmuša, PhD, Assistant Professor, and defended at the Faculty of Croatian Studies in September 2022.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this paper is the role of personal branding in creating positive changes in society, that is, the role that personal branding plays in social marketing campaigns to encourage activism and social change. The first part of the paper is a theoretical framework in which marketing communication and its peculiarities and strategies will be presented; the concept of branding; the concept of personal branding and the strategies that use it; peculiarities of branding through social networks; the concept of social marketing, and the strategy of this form of marketing through social networks. In this paper, the emphasis is on the personal branding of social marketing actors. On the one hand, personal branding and presentation through digital channels are crucial in creating a brand, i.e., in creating personal recognition and presentation to the public. On the other hand, social marketing is associated with activism and social change, so it is important to be aware of the phenomenon and effect that social marketing and activism have in society.

The research part of this work is focused on the role that personal branding plays in creating and promoting positive social changes through social networks. More precisely, it tries to determine which personal branding strategies are used by Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić when presenting themselves on social networks and communicating current social issues. This work aims to provide an overview of the main communication elements and other peculiarities of social marketing communication on the examples of selected respondents.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is divided into three main thematic units, namely: marketing communication, (personal) branding, and social marketing.

### 2.1 Marketing communication

The last few decades have been marked by rapid technological development, and parallel to this, changes have occurred in the market, consumer society, media, and ultimately communication itself, including marketing (Kitchen, Burgmann, 2015, 35). Technological progress has influenced the fact that there is a surplus on the supply side, and the market is increasingly fragmented precisely because of the large supply, but also the more demanding needs of consumers. This led to consumers and buyers having influence and importance because supply exceeds demand. Therefore, from mass marketing, which is focused on products, marketing communication is now focused on the customer as he has become an important factor in selecting and using products and services. Changes in the technological and communication environment have presented a challenge to marketers, whose task has become to fulfill the demands and needs of customers and other interest

groups and to create long-term relationships, which consequently leads to the growth of customer power (Kitchen, Burgmann, 2015, 35).

New technological possibilities improve the use of the Internet together with the elements of the marketing mix, and for example, content can be sponsored that raises awareness of the existence of the brand, i.e. its digital presence and the opportunities offered; newsletters can be sent to inform about specific products, topics, news, etc.; web pages are increasingly using chatbots to talk to users who need to solve a problem; etc. On digital channels, information can be transferred, exchanged, and changed quickly, with low costs in real-time (Ivanov, 2012, 538).

Due to its possibilities, social networks have become indispensable tools for the marketing activities of business entities. According to Biloš & Kelić (2012, 154, 155): „marketing on social networks can therefore be seen as part of integrated market communication whose purpose and goal is to connect the elements of the promotional mix [...] that would attract consumers who are focused on a positive message.“ With the trends of modern technologies, the presence of business entities on digital platforms becomes not only a possibility but also a requirement. This ensures transparency in business and openness to the public by publishing basic information, business results, news, new products, etc. (Biloš & Kelić, 2012, 158).

## 2.2 Personal branding

Branding is the process of building a brand, and the brand is part of the process of that construction in which its identity and characteristics are developed. Abbot (2020, 106) defines a brand as the: „[...] authentic „name and surname“ of a concept, person, and object; and in marketing – products, or services. We specifically identify it through a set of peculiarities, which form its market identity. It consists of the name/name, appearance, artistic design (pictorial appearance), and the idea of the utility features and business value.“ A closely related term is „human brand“ (Jacobson, 2020, 716), which primarily refers to a well-known person who uses marketing strategies to present himself to the public. Also, „human brand“ sometimes refers to traditional celebrities such as actors, singers, and athletes, and „personal brand“ is used to describe less famous people (Jacobson, 2020, 716).

The value of the brand can be increased by the intangible heritage of the brand, i.e., all the positive values associated with the brand, regardless of whether these values were communicated by the company that represents the brand or by the public that itself assigned certain meanings depending on how it perceives the brand (Abbot, 2020, 106). By creating an image of the brand, connecting concepts, and telling a story, one wants to achieve (although not necessarily) a positive impression on the public, that is, an image. Image is defined by Abbot (2020, 108) stating that: „brand image is the added value that a specific trademark has created in the eyes of users.“

Brand management is a long-term activity aimed at giving strength to a brand, product, or service, which then results in market value, brand recognition, etc. The brand or brand being managed must contain characteristics that stand out, must correspond to consumer preferences, and be adaptable to changes in these preferences (Marušić & Vranešević, 2021, 415). Successful brand management, consistent and timely communication, and customer service can lead to the expansion and strengthening of the brand and, consequently, the business. But, as stated by Marušić & Vranešević (2021, 416): „[...] brands in the social media environment, due to the expansion of fast communication, become significantly more exposed to competition, as well as criticism from consumers themselves, and it is necessary to determine what changes are occurring in the process of brand management.“ Consequently, Jacobson (2020, 717) states that: „personal branding is largely about self-presentation and impression management.“ Using personal branding strategies, an individual can be careful, that is, selective in the choice of information to present and in what way, which consequently leads to the fact that the individual can present himself only in positive ways if he wants to (Jacobson, 2020, 716). According to Rangarajan et al. (2017, 2), to develop a successful and specific personal brand they say the following: „[...] align your values and competencies with the priorities of the audience that is important to your career, but you should expect that to change with your brand over time regarding different audiences and different circumstances.“

### 2.3 Social Marketing

Social welfare marketing is focused, as stated by Carvalho & Mazzon (2015, 177), on: „problems that are mostly associated with suffering in our society.“ Examples of such problems are eating disorders, violence toward others, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, drugs, etc. Social marketing thus contributes to its programs, as stated by Carvalho and Mazzon (2015, 177): „reducing social bad mood“ and „activating well-being drivers“, which consequently lead to the improvement of the individual's life, but also of the entire living environment. Social marketing campaigns are often aimed simultaneously at alleviating suffering and increasing well-being, as this is the ultimate purpose of this form of marketing (Carvalho & Mazzon, 2015, 177).

Social marketing differs from traditional, i.e., commercial marketing in the way that it does not target individual behavior when choosing a product, promoting a product, or purchasing, but social marketing is aimed, according to Bach & Alnajjar (2016, 21), at: „[...] complex and controversial behaviors present in society that are trying to achieve ideal change.“ Social marketing can successfully convince individuals and groups to adopt positive behaviors, especially those related to health and the environment. Positive behavior change, according to Bach & Al-

najar (2016, 21): „[...] is related to the ability of social marketers to apply proven research/methods of commercial marketing and planning along with selected behavior-related tools to encourage certain behaviors or even discouraging certain behaviors or habits such as smoking.“

A feature of social media in the context of social marketing is the ability to organize social movements across borders, that is, on a transnational level, all to connect with other organizations to build a large network that will transcend spatial and temporal limitations (Cammaerts, 2015, 5). A great advantage of social media within the field of activism is stated by Cammaerts (2015, 5): „it is often claimed that social media potentially provide (new) opportunities for citizens and subordinate groups in society to bypass state and market control and mainstream media to build alternative collective identities.“

Social media, as Smith et al. (2019, 182) state: „can serve as a platform for protest and a vehicle for voice.“ Despite this, numerous debates are emerging that question the effectiveness of activist campaigns on social media. It is believed that social media prevents activism, that is, that activism as such takes place only in digital reality and that there is no real involvement of the individual in the real world. This, 'lazy' form of activism was named „slacktivism“ (Smith et al. 2019, 182).

Finally, Authors Barrington et al. (2015, 163) state that: „although defining universal minimums of 'good behavior' to achieve the greater social good [...] is a worthwhile endeavor, we believe that remaining rooted in the theme of influencing people's behavior towards the greater social good is not ideal for social marketing, nor is being a prisoner of a pre-determined planned strategy for social change.“ Consequently, it is stated that planning and strategy goals focused on behavior change are important, but social marketers need to be much more open to adaptation communication strategies depending on the topic being treated and presented, since the topics themselves are variable, sensitive, and require a different approach than classic product marketing (Barrington et al. 2015, 163).

### **3. RESEARCH PRESENTATION**

The subject of research in this paper is the role of personal branding in creating and promoting positive social changes through social networks. More specifically, we want to determine which personal branding strategies are used by the selected respondents, i.e., Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić, when communicating current social topics on their profiles.

The criteria for selecting respondents, i.e. the profile to be analyzed, was influenced by the chosen topics and the importance of social topics propagated by the profiles, and the audience reaches that the profiles have on their social networks.

Current social topics dealt with by social actors Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić are the fight for women's rights, homophobia and promoting the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, suicide, political activity, elections, etc. The people behind these profiles can be called creators of positive social change because they present facts, events, and other important information that are essential for understanding the situation in which society is in a systematic, educational, and informative manner. Profiles such as Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić appeal to the public good and long-term good, because examples of going to the sources and equalizing the rights of people of all genders and genders can contribute to the progress of our society in all aspects: political, economic, social, etc. These two actors of social marketing, i.e., Grof and Pamela, mostly operate on Instagram. Grof Darkula currently has more than 52,000 followers (<https://www.instagram.com/grofdarkula>, page visited on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023), and Pamela Perkić more than 16,500 followers (<https://www.instagram.com/pamelaperkic/>, page visited January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

### **3.1. Research methods**

Qualitative research methods, namely case study, and in-depth interview methods were used in this research. The methods of in-depth interviews and case studies are suitable for this research because they provide the opportunity to ask open questions and get broad answers regarding current social changes through the prism of self-perception that personal branding has in communicating social issues.

### **3.2. Research objectives and research questions**

The main goal of this thesis is to investigate the components and strategies of personal branding used by creators of positive social change on social networks and what importance it has when communicating. From the above, the main research question follows:

- what are the components and strategies of personal branding used by creators of positive social change on social networks and what importance does it have when communicated?

The specific objectives of the research, from which auxiliary research questions also arise, are the following: analysis of the specificity of the profiles on social networks of two selected activists – Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić; researching techniques for creating a personal impression/personal brand and reputation through social networks; determining the elements of personality used in creating a digital presence; examination of the connection between the values promoted by the analyzed individuals and social changes.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. Case study

This case study is based on content analysis, i.e., the Instagram profiles of respondents were analyzed because they are also the most active on that social network. When reviewing and analyzing individual profiles, the basic framework for content analysis in a case study is divided into the following categories:

1. profile specifics,
2. elements of visual identity,
3. textual and spoken elements of expression,
4. creating a personal impression and reputation – personal brand,
5. role in activism through social networks.

#### 4.1.1. Instagram profile analysis @grofdarkula

The specifics of the profile (1) of Grof Darkula are manifested in his presentation as an imaginary person, i.e. an octopus. Most of the published content on the profile are pictures with a certain photo and/or illustration with an accompanying title/sentence/question/statement, etc. In the highlights section of the profile, important social topics that were published via stories are arranged thematically and have been preserved for the audience to be informed and educated about a topic that is important or necessary. The characteristic elements of the visual identity (2) are: the mentioned octopus as an imaginary person representing the profile; the green color that is on the background of every published image; illustrations and photos related to the theme in each image; the accompanying description/sentence/rhetorical question found in each picture with the illustration; the white color of the text on the images. For Grof Darkula, elements of the textual expression are largely characteristic. As already mentioned, each post on the picture has an accompanying text, and some of the examples are: „Abortion in the Constitution“, „All faces of Croatian homophobia“, and „6 reasons why we are taking to the streets today“ (related to the case of Mirela Čavajda and abortion), etc. Furthermore, the creation of a personal impression and reputation – personal brand (4) with Grof Darkula results from the following: dealing with socio-political topics of interest to a wider audience; the characteristic way of publication and expression; encouraging conversation and discussion on a specific topic; giving advice and assistance; creating a space to hear the voice of the audience and the problems and experiences of individuals. Ultimately, Grof Darkula's role in social media activism (5) is divided into two groups: community-level action and individual-level action. At the community level, Grof invites the public to participate in protests, encourages signing petitions, calls for voting, etc. At the individual level, Grof motivates and encourages positive change

in the context of seeking psychological help, reporting violence, demystifying taboos, and stereotypes, etc.

#### 4.1.2. Instagram profile analysis @pamelaperkic

The specifics of Pamela Perkić's profile (1) are reflected in her personality, uniqueness, uniqueness, and simplicity. Pamela acts as an activist from her personal profile on Instagram, and in an informative and humorous way shows and analyzes certain current events or 'banality' from everyday socio-political life. The elements of visual identity (2) on Pamela's profile do not have certain specific features, and what greatly distinguishes her from the others is that her photos are not edited and do not contain effects (the exception is posts related to promotional content). The textual and spoken elements of expression (3) on Pamela's profile are mostly manifested in story posts in which she writes about a specific topic that is currently current and opens a dialogue with her audience, and in the publication of videos in which she verbally explains a specific topic and current situation, analyzes and comments, and all this with an inevitable humorous aspect. Creating a personal impression and reputation – personal brand (4) Pamela creates based on the way she presents herself and the content she publishes, i.e., her pictures are natural, the tone of communication is sincere, cordial, and humorous, and in addition to all this, she promotes positive social values. For Pamela, the role of activism through social networks (5) is manifested in the coverage of certain social topics and problems and the opening of dialogue and discussion with the audience. What is characteristic of Pamela is that she mostly acts as a person who creates awareness about a certain topic and problem, and for a problem-solving and real activity she refers to official organizations and professional staff.

#### 4.2. In-depth interview

An in-depth interview conducted with respondents Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić enabled the analysis of the content to be divided into three thematic parts shown in the following table:

**Table 1. Categorization of branding social marketing activists**

1. The way of presentation through social networks: actors of social marketing	1.1. Characteristics and peculiarities of individual profiles on Instagram and Facebook: Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić
	1.2. Communication tools for creating content
	1.3. Communication formats
	1.4. Targeted audience
	1.5. Sponsored content
	1.6. Social media posting strategy
	1.7. Elements of visual identity
	1.8. Other communication elements
2. Peculiarities and characteristics of personal branding	2.1. Creating an impression and reputation
	2.2. Influence of public figures – influencing
	2.3. Characteristics and personalities of actors of social marketing
	2.4. Peculiarities of the profile in relation to the competition
3. Creating social impact through social marketing	3.1. A role in spreading social influence
	3.2. The role of slacktivism in socially important issues
	3.3. The influence of social marketing profile activities on important issues
	3.4. Promoting the value of social change

Source: author's work.

#### 4.2.1. Way of presentation through social networks: actors of social marketing

For the creators behind the profiles of Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić, the way of presentation is manifested in the creation of visuals with accompanying, often activist texts. With his work on the profile, Grof Darkula aims to influence the change of the community and society, but also the change of the individual who will dare to take a certain step that will have significance in social change, either from a personal aspect or from the aspect of the community. Likewise, Pamela Perkić points out that her profile is mostly characterized by honesty and transparency, and she believes that anyone who visits the profile can see something new and different that characterizes her profile and with which they can identify. She believes that her audience can follow the content for various reasons, such as the way it is expressed, the subject matter, aesthetics, etc. Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić do not have a specific audience that they are targeting in their address via Instagram, that is, it can be said that the target audience is every individual who is interested in the topics they cover. It is interesting to note that 90% of their audience are women, while only 10% are men.

*„We found that the audience on Facebook is older and more serious, and we are followed there much more by people who are from some associations, organizations,*



*etc., and by people who are much more interested in participating in a specific action, while on Instagram the audience is more open to communication, discussion, and familiarization with current events and social problems, and there our audience is much more active in that digital form” (Grof Darkula).*

According to Grof, what stands out are the texts below the posts, which are not too long, but concise and informative, and with the help of as many as 10 short sentences, he successfully explains and conveys the topic. Furthermore, Pamela often uses the Q&A (question and answer) type of communication. This often includes some social and everyday topics, based on which Pamela leaves her comment, discusses with her audience about a certain topic, creates awareness about a certain issue, etc. Also, she often shares other people's messages that act as a trigger for entering the discussion or people's experiences related to a specific problem.

#### 4.2.2. Peculiarities and characteristics of personal branding

Grof Darkula states that he creates his impression and reputation by not being afraid to speak about any topic, he deals with topics that he considers to be important, he sticks to the truth in writing and processing topics, he refuses collaborations in which there is a possibility of censorship and dictating the way of publication, and mostly because he wouldn't agree to something he doesn't believe in and doesn't agree with. Also, in her approach to communication, Pamela firmly expresses her views and does not express concern that the audience will express disagreement.

*„I always try to be careful about what and how I say on Instagram – now this may sound contradictory to the honesty I mentioned in the previous question – but the point of it is that I don't want to hurt any community of people who are facing some problem. In my communication, I try to be respectable and equal to everyone” (Pamela Perkić).*

Grof believes that he has a strong desire for justice. The creators behind the profile believe that they have established good values from their childhood, in which they were sensitive to injustice, and thus throughout their lives, they built an awareness for activism, from which the profile itself arose.

*„We think we are quite empathetic, especially in socio-political issues that have had a negative impact on the community. We often have this approach when we share other people's experiences based on a case, and we try to be a mediator, help, and influence towards some greater good” (Grof Darkula).*

Among her characteristics and personality, Pamela emphasizes self-confidence, self-love without fear of judgment and comments from others, good communication skills, communication skills with other people and cooperation, a sense of humor, and development of critical thinking.

#### 4.2.3. Creating social impact through social marketing

Grof states that he tries to be as objective as possible in conveying current and socially problematic topics, and he sees his relevance in the organic reach of the audience and the reaction and engagement of the audience to their posts. Furthermore, Grof believes that he is well-educated about the topics he covers, and will neither present inaccurate information nor present this information in a sensationalist manner. Also, it is important to emphasize that in his approach to topics, Grof also offers solutions to problems faced by individuals in society, such as legal or psychological help, and in this way encourages conversation, change, and the further spread of ideals and values among individuals. Despite the objective approach to the topics, Grof always gives his subjective stamp and review of the topic.

*„We strive for objectivity, but this subjective side is also inevitable, which is passionate in us, and which encouraged us to do something new and strive for change in society, and we also think that because of this, individuals can more easily find themselves in all of this if we share the same values“ (Grof Darkula).*

Pamela states that she always studies the topics she talks about, and, for example, she states that she read a book in which there was information that every third woman in Croatia was sexually abused, and she shared this information on her Instagram and thus started a discussion and awareness about this very important and problematic topic.

*„Considering the number of people who follow me, I definitely think I have a responsibility in spreading social influence. I think that I am relevant and competent for all of this precisely because I exist at all and have my own life experiences, but also a great desire to help others if I can in some way“ (Pamela Perkić).*

Finally, Grof emphasizes the importance of representing the inclusiveness of all people, the promotion of freedom, human rights, the human right to security, and a life without violence. The main value would be focusing on people and providing a platform, i.e., the ability to communicate through a platform for people because that is the main reason it was created. Some other values that Grof considers to be the main ones are precisely this fight for freedom, and equality, putting important topics in the center of the discourse and emphasizing values. Pamela states that her values have always had a common denominator, which is honesty. Other values that he promotes and that pave the way for positive changes in society are openness, the way of communication, and the clear communication of complex and important matters.

#### 4.3. Discussion

Based on the presented theoretical framework, the results of the conducted research can be classified into three thematic units:

1. Peculiarities of communication through social networks of activist profiles
2. The role of personal branding of social marketing actors
3. Contribution of social marketing in creating social impact

First, the peculiarities of communication through social networks of the activist profiles that participated in this research – Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić, are: a unique way of visual and textual expression, a tone of communication adapted to the topics being addressed, the use of relevant and official sources in the analysis and processing of topics, the influence of personal characteristics in the way of communicating through activist profiles, the wide range of topics that are covered, the moral values involved in the promotion of values and the way of expression.

Furthermore, the role of personal branding of social marketing actors stands out the most precisely through the characteristics of their way of communicating through social networks, dealing with important socio-political topics, and creating space for discussing socially important topics. Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić are one of the first activist profiles in Croatia, that is, one of the first profiles that gained more popularity among their audience. The actors behind both profiles do not act as a professional organization, but as a few individuals who, through digital channels, have been given the opportunity to create a discourse on topics that they personally consider important for the individual and society. Precisely for this reason, what is characteristic of the branding of people who are actors of social marketing is the following: the use of personality elements, the way of expression, attractive visual components of the content, the authenticity of the individual profile and the relevance of the topics and cases that the actors propagate and that affect their reputation as responsible persons for activist and social changes.

Third and last, the contribution of social marketing in creating the social influence of these profiles is currently manifested in the great support of the audience that supports the work of the profile and shares its content and based on it, further online or privately extends the discussion on a certain topic. Also, the impact is visible in the example of feedback from the audience who, based on the work of these profiles, made some changes, and shared their experiences. In addition to the above, influence is manifested by participating in work with associations, calling for elections, distributing petitions for signing, and generally participating in political and socially important topics that have an impact on the lives of all people in the community.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

To increase the success of profiles and campaigns, branding is important, based on which certain values are connected and a relationship with the audience is created. This is about the branding of people who deal with activist topics and

who must successfully maintain their reputation, while at the same time maintaining their authenticity, uniqueness, and aspiration for social change. Creating social change is sometimes not enough by itself, but it is necessary to emphasize desirable behavior in social marketing. It can be said that Grof Darkula and Pamela Perkić both have strong, clear, and expressed messages, and based on audience feedback, they are successfully achieving their goals so far. Also, their characteristic uniqueness creates a basis for defining larger goals, which as successful actors of social marketing they have the opportunity to achieve.

It is concluded that social marketing actors who participated in this research build their digital presence and reputation – personal brand – based on the following reasons: addressing current and problematic social topics and cases; how such topics are communicated to their audience, which is characteristic of a particular profile, such as the visual identity of the profile, textual and spoken expression and management of communication with the audience; the possibility of connecting people and communities based on similar or the same values and experiences; systematicity and consistency in communicating topics and promoting certain values; clarity and characteristic expression in different communication formats; creating a platform for communication about topics that are not so well represented in the mainstream media; morality as a guide for communication on activist topics; positive audience reactions based on the topics that are represented.

Social marketing has a kind of utilitarian significance and promotes positive social values that can consequently be reflected in a change within the structure of society. Despite this, the field of social marketing and the actors operating within it, do not have pronounced business and financial elements that are an indispensable part of the traditional form of marketing. Social marketing does not aim to collect profit, and what can be 'earned' with this form of marketing is the change of existing beliefs and values that harm society and minority groups.

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# ASPECTS AND METHODS OF COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO THE DIGITIZED EVERYDAY LIFE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Tjaša Glažar, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

I am interested in the specificities and ways of using the media to best reach the young population with information related to the written youth strategy of the municipality. The municipality of Hajdina does not want certain documents to remain merely written down and not reach those key target groups of young people. The key objective is to understand the ways in which young people communicate and consequently, to link this to the use of the media by the selected municipality and to improve the flow of information. The entry of mobile and digital technologies into our lives practically from birth, have changed the (in)visibility of many other media. Key processes of digital media such as algorithmisation, datafication and artificial intelligence require different communication approaches, but this does not mean that this is the best way to use media in our case.

This also leads to my research question: are the young people in Hajdina sufficiently informed and familiar with the Hajdina Youth Strategy and the actions in the field of youth in the municipality itself? For the research I used a focus group among young people aged 15-29 and an interview with the Mayor of Hajdina. This helped me to gather information on the current state of information and ways to provide young people with an optimal media context for information. Through analysis and discussion, I have identified the current situation, both on the municipality's side and on the side of young people, which is the basis for designing a matrix of communication methods that would represent the most optimal media practice for the future.

**Keywords:** communication, media, digitization, young people, political participation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication with the younger generation, ways and forms of improving communication in a way that benefits both the young people and the organisation involved, is a hot topic. My attention will be focused on finding the answer whether the young people in the Municipality of Hajdina are sufficiently informed and familiar with the Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Hajdina and the actions in the field of youth in the municipality itself? This is my research question, which will be tested through the research.

In the modern world of great cultural changes, economic progress, unbalanced development and technological dominance, there is a great interest in human beings and their communication potential. The new paradigm of communication is taking place through various channels such as the internet, email, Skype, mobile phone, SMS, Viber, WhatsApp, etc. (Plenković and Mustić 2016, 143–149). Digital changes also bring about an adjustment in the value of communication. What to communicate is less important and how to communicate is more important if we want to successfully reach our chosen target group. Technology is constantly bringing innovations that have a significant impact on the effectiveness of communication, depending on the use of these technologies.

The disappearance or invisibility of media is one of the greatest challenges for media and communication studies in the 21st century, says Mark Deuze (2011, 137–148), drawing on Kittler to stress the invisibility and taken-for-grantedness of media due to their prevalence and ubiquity. With the intensive processes of digitisation at all levels of our lives, there has been a major upheaval in the field of effective communication with outreach to target audiences. The entry of mobile and digital technologies into young people's everyday lives from pre-school onwards, together with the shift from mass to interactive media and social platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook as the central spaces of their sociability, is transforming many contexts and the existing relationships within them: from school, family and peers to culture, politics and the course of everyday life (Jontes and Tašner 2022, 11–19).

The profound mediatisation associated with key digital media processes such as algorithmisation, datafication and artificial intelligence also calls for different analytical approaches, as Hepp (2020, 6) points out. In this context, we need to understand the contemporary technological society as a historical process of increasing technological interdependence and intensifying media transformation of the functioning of all other entities and the interrelationships between them. The media industry has been forced to go beyond the old question about its primary communication channel, "Is their organisation a newspaper, a television station, a radio?" etc., and move on to the question "Are we dealing with content? What

are the complementary channels for delivering that content?" (Lawson-Borders 2005, 5). Given the facts stated above and the findings of recent studies that show that most news today reaches audiences through converged and digital media, the importance of critically assessing the convergence of media in our society and digital media is growing.

Several concepts have recently emerged to describe and analyse this new media ecology, ranging from 'media plurality' (Couldry) and 'ubiquitous media' (Coleman) to 'connective media' (van Dijck) and 'polymedia' (Madianou and Miler 2012, 169–187). Couldry's (2011) emphasis that the 'media manifold' is not a simple summation of the media used by an individual, but denotes the meaningful relationship between them in everyday practices, is relevant here. Indeed, studies show that leisure-time media uses are more advanced than school uses, and families and peers are thus key spaces for the acquisition of 'informal media competences' (Drotner 2005, 47–48).

There is a clear awareness of the need for change to ensure the best possible access to information for young people. However, it is not enough to be aware of change, but to make concrete changes. I am interested in the specifics and ways of using the media with the aim of reaching the young population in the best possible way, with information related to the written strategy of young people in the municipality, specifically in the Municipality of Hajdina. I do not want certain documents to remain merely written down and not reach the key target groups for which they are intended. The measures available to young people are therefore only for themselves. Good information is the key to success.

### **Definitions and understanding of key concepts**

The concept of communication is defined differently in the literature. In general, it is a process of communication, the essence of which is the attunement of the persons communicating with each other. Only in this way will they achieve the purpose and aim of communication. Communication enables individuals and organisations to exist and develop. It is therefore an activity that can be taken for granted and taken for granted (Kavčič 2002, 1).

The method of communication is the way in which a message is conveyed by communicating with each other. Humans communicate through verbal and non-verbal signals. The use of both gives the communicative effect, i.e. the image created by communication, which is always a web of verbal and non-verbal communication (Florjančič and Ferjan 2000, 26). With the rise of computer technology, so-called electronic communication, which is written or oral communication, has also become established. The point is that electronic means are used to transmit messages (Gradišar, Jaklič and Turk 2007, 125). An effective communication between two people is one in which the receiver and the sender interpret the transmitted



message in the same way. It therefore depends on the effective sending and receiving of messages. A large number of barriers can prevent or distort effective communication (Robbins, and Jurge 2002, 10).

A youth strategy is a document that brings together concrete actions for young people in the areas of education, youth housing, youth employment, youth mobility, youth leisure and participation, and a few others that have proved to be important during the process of creation. The Strategy promotes young people's participation in democratic life, supports social and civic participation and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to participate in society (Official Journal of the European Union, 18.12.2018).

In today's digitalised world, there are many ways to get your message across. Understanding the young generation is crucial if we want to successfully communicate information to them. The Public Interest Act defines young people as those aged 15 to 29. The lower age limit is linked to certain statutory milestones as actual transitions in the lives of young people (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 28.5.2010).

Young people are often the age group that is forgotten and should be given the most attention. The needs of young people are different from those of the older population. It is the task of the state, local authorities and municipalities to identify the problems of young people and to try to improve their situation by communicating with them as effectively as possible. It must be the wish of every local community and municipality that young intellectuals remain in their municipality, and therefore they must be given special attention, which the municipality of Hajdina defines primarily through the written Youth Strategy and the measures to be implemented on the basis of the written strategy.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

I want to use valorisation to support my research question: are young people in the municipality of Hajdina sufficiently informed and familiar with the Hajdina Youth Strategy and the consequent actions in the field of youth in the municipality itself? For the research itself, I focused on the interview and focus group method, which I used to explore the field and which I will use to confirm or reject my research question. Through the interview method, with the leaders in the municipality of Hajdina, I obtained information on the current way of using the media to reach the young population. I conducted a structured interview, consisting of four questions, where I guided the conversation through pre-prepared questions. The interview was the most optimal choice, the questions gave me exactly specific answers related to my topic. I conducted the interview with the Mayor of Hajdina. Through the interview I got an insight into the thinking and the functioning of the municipality in the area under discussion.

Focus groups are used as a research method on their own or in combination with other research methods (Flick 2006, 197). The focus group method is a form of group interview in which a few participants are present (alongside a moderator), the focus is on a fairly narrowly defined topic, and the interaction within the group is focused on (Bryman 2001, 337). It is led by a moderator, whose task is to find out as much information as possible about the topic being researched (Bryman 2001, 337). Focus groups are a form of group interview, in which several participants are present (alongside a moderator), the focus is on a fairly narrowly defined topic, and the interaction within the group is focused on. Participants are encouraged to give frank answers and each is free to give his or her opinion, viewpoint or belief on a topic.

As a second method, I used a focus group of young people aged 15-29 who gave me information about their current state of information. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, the population of the municipality of Hajdina in 2022 is 523 people aged 15-29. For this purpose, I included in the focus group 2 inhabitants from the age group 15-19 years, 2 inhabitants from the age group 20-24 years and 2 inhabitants from the age group 25-29 years. Through a guided conversation, for which I had nine pre-designed questions, we debated the chosen topic with the interaction of the selected group.

### **3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

Through the interview with the Mayor, I learned that the municipality is aware of the importance of providing young people with information that is directly related to them. The municipality needs to use technology that is close to young people in its communication with them, as this is an indispensable part of their lives. The municipality's aim is to keep as many young people as possible in the municipality, as this is the only way the municipality will be able to develop in the desired direction.

The Mayor says that the municipality of Hajdina monitors the situation of young people in the municipality, prepares expert reports and coordinates various measures in the field of youth, and cooperates with all the actors that affect the situation and activities of young people in the municipality (education, employment, culture, sport, housing, health, social services, etc.). It promotes opportunities for the active participation of young people, which have an impact on their situation in the municipality, and ensures the operation of programmes and projects aimed at young people.

The Municipal Council has received the Hajdina Youth Strategy (related to youth participation, education, employment, housing, youth organising and participation in joint projects), which identifies various measures to help young people. They also set up the Hajdina Youth Commission, which is the municipality's extended arm in the field of youth action. From the above, it can be concluded that the municipality monitors young people and encourages them to take part in various

activities. In this area, young people can approach them with ideas and initiatives through the aforementioned Youth Commission. The municipality is trying to create a supportive environment for young people and to offer them opportunities for personal growth and career development, as well as personal development.

Through the measures in the Youth Strategy, the municipality has already adopted a number of benefits for young people. These include: subsidised monthly tickets; cheaper municipal contributions for young families; co-financing of youth programmes operating within the municipality's associations and societies; financial support for the work of the designated Youth Commission - the organisation of various events, a youth section in the municipal newsletter Hajdinčan, the promotion of international mobility of young people, cash prizes for young graduates, master's and doctoral students, etc.

The municipality monitors young people, both those in primary school who are not yet part of our research group and where successful communication is largely ensured by the Hajdina Primary School, and those who are older. The municipality is aware that this communication is somewhat lost later on, as it no longer takes place through a common organisation. Communication with the target group is therefore currently carried out via the website and in the municipal newsletter of the municipality of Hajdina, where information related to the Youth Strategy and the actions resulting from it are visible. In the case of various events, it is also done through social networks, leaflets and local television, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Throughout the interview we have seen how many activities and actions are actually taking place, and in the following we will check our key question whether all this information is reaching young people, who are the final "users".

The focus group took part in a structured discussion on the chosen topic. We therefore selected a group covering the 15-29 age group, and I also established a balance of women and men involved. I then selected the focus group on the basis of random sampling, among those who were willing to participate.

**Table 1: Information on the selected focus group candidates**

FOKUS GROUP	MALE/FEMALE	Age in years
1.	M	16 years
2.	F	18 years
3.	M	21 years
4.	F	24 years
5.	M	28 years
6.	F	25 years

In the focus group, we started by outlining the topic of our discussion and its purpose. The conversation itself took place on 27.1.2023. I started the conversation with an introductory part, where the participants familiarised themselves with the topic. I asked some introductory questions on the topic of young people, through which the participants saw the way of working. Participants immediately started to actively respond and give their opinions. Later questions were specific, requiring reflection and presentation of the opinions of the individuals involved. We started with the topic of what young people would like to have for themselves in Hajdina, what is missing for them. This allowed us to get to know the way and to discuss the wishes of young people, which are not the main topic of our research. However, it was clear from the answers that young people want to spend time in their municipality and want activities that they can participate in.

When asked if they know what the Youth Strategy is and if they are familiar with the Youth Strategy of the municipality of Hajdina, young people were unanimous that they are not familiar with it and do not know what is written in this document. Through the sub-questions we came up with a conceptual outline of what such a document could contain, but still the Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Hajdina, which is written down exactly, is unknown to them. This partly answers the research question that young people do not know about the Hajdina Youth Strategy, or even that it exists.

We continued the discussion with an overview of the written Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Hajdina. The focus group found out that there are a lot of actions that are aimed at them and a lot of activities that they can get involved in through different associations, but they lack information that the municipality allows them to do so. The most common measure is the use of subsidised monthly/annual passes (four people in the focus group had already used this measure), which allow them to travel to educational institutions more cheaply, but they can also use it in other ways (e.g. during weekends and holidays).

We continued the discussion on how they get information about these measures. Most of the information they get is through friends who also use the measures. I presented them with the possibilities where they can find this information (the municipality's website and the municipality's newsletter). The problem arises because these young people don't follow the municipality's website and newsletter, or they do so very rarely. The municipality is currently not present on other networks (social/social), which means that they cannot even receive information through these channels. The majority of the selected focus group is of the opinion that the ways through which information could reach them are worse than would be possible if the added channels of communication were used. They also respond that they would use a greater number of possible actions aimed at them if they

were aware of them. They are aware of the proliferation of social media and the possibility of obtaining information via social media.

We concluded by asking how they would like to receive information from the municipality. The focus group highlights the massive use of social media and not so much newspapers, websites, radio broadcasts. Participants highlighted the positive features of social media, which allow people to stay in touch, connect, socialise and communicate. They claim that it gives them access to the information they need, allows them to express themselves freely and to get new ideas. They also pointed out that it is very quick to get feedback, easier to coordinate communication and to find information in one place, so you don't waste time searching for it. They would also like to see the municipality start using social networks, where information would be more accessible to them, as they would use them much more often.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Through this research I wanted to gain knowledge about aspects and methods of communication with young people, which has changed a lot over the years, due to the increasing impact of digitalisation and new technologies, which have had a significant impact on the effectiveness of communication in the same way as 50 years ago. Through the focus group method, I obtained the different opinions and beliefs of the participants. I gained a wealth of information and deeper insight into the topic.

The key objective is to understand the ways in which young people communicate and, consequently, to link this to the use of media by municipalities and to improve the flow of information. This also leads to my research hypothesis that current communication methods are not effective enough to get information to the target group of young people.

Participants consider communication via social networks to be a good idea, as this would allow the municipality to get in touch with young people and get their feedback quickly. As a result, young people would be able to contribute more actively with their ideas and initiatives to the design of the various measures. On the other hand, they could also like, comment and share the news among others who may not be as actively involved but are active on social networks. Young people could thus turn from passive citizens into active creators of the promotion of activities for young people in the municipality.

Digital technologies represent a new form of communication among young people. The aim of this research was to determine the state of information of young people in the Municipality of Hajdina in the field of the Youth Strategy and the actions resulting from it. The question that follows the results of the survey

is which media to use and how to use them to ensure that young people get the (right) information that the municipality wants to convey. From the survey it would be possible to set a communication model in the future, according to the results obtained, through which communication and information delivery would work more efficiently.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through my research I have answered my research question that young people are not sufficiently aware of the Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Hajdina and that the current methods of communication are not effective enough and the information about the measures offered to young people does not reach the target group in the vast majority. Communication through the municipal website and the municipal newsletter is not adapted to the target group and the information of young people is low.

Young people are different and it is therefore necessary to find ways of communication that are close to them. The key is to adapt to the generations and not just blindly follow one's own style of communication. This is the only way to improve communication and to convey information more effectively. Young people made concrete suggestions on how they would like to receive information, but this would require a step forward in the municipality. In order to implement this, a communication plan for young people in the municipality of Hajdina should be drawn up in cooperation with the Hajdina Youth Commission, which is the next step in achieving effective communication.

The quality and manner of the information is of utmost importance for the understanding of the information. This should be the guiding principle of the municipality when providing information, not only to young people, but to all target groups.

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# NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING AS THE WAY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE FINANCIAL SECTOR AND THE PUBLIC

**Manuela Bukovec, Ph.D. Candidate**

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

This review paper presents the results of reviewing literature published by various authors on the topic: how institutions in the financial sector communicate with the public about their socially responsible behaviour. With the adoption of the Non-financial Reporting Directive (European Parliament and the Council 2014) for large companies across the European Union, non-financial reporting has become a new way of communicating between business entities and the public. Large companies, which also include institutions in the financial sector, send a message through non-financial reporting that achieving profit is not their only business goal, but that their business strategy also includes care for society, the environment, and especially care for their employees. We assume that different audiences follow this essentially new form of communication with the public. In the paper, using the descriptive method and systematic review of scientific literature, collected data will be synthesized to show how and which communication channels are used and what role they play in disseminating information about socially responsible business. Future success, and ultimately profit, depends on the feedback the financial institutions receive from the public and upon learning from it.

**Keywords:** communications, socially responsible behaviour, non-financial reporting, media, communication channels



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world today depends on communication channels, the task of which is to inform, quickly and effectively, to warn and to convey ideas and knowledge, and in that respect, communication can be described as sharing information with others. Communication in terms of communication science can be defined as an exchange of signs and a combination of signs between living individuals or technological systems. In today's world, corporate communication occupies a special place. Radical changes in business and media have affected corporate communication, and for a better understanding of this process, it is necessary to look back at the far-reaching technological changes that have changed communication media in recent decades. Changes in the global economic system, along with technological changes, have changed the role and structure of multinational corporations. All these changes have also led to a change in the context of corporate communication (Goodman and Hirsch 2010, 3). Accordingly, Pirić (2006) describes the concept of corporate communication as "upgrading the field of public relations that came about due to the need of the company to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to changes in its environment". (Pirić 2006, 53). A well-composed concept of corporate communication and its high-quality presentation in public contribute to the good image of the corporation. A good corporate image can also be viewed from the aspect of a country's image. A country's image often depends on some elements that distinguish it from other countries, due to which its reputation and potential for inclusion in international business can grow, whether it is about the excellence of services or products, expert knowledge or natural treasures. If there is no experience or previous knowledge about the possibilities and potentials of a country, its image will shape the available information about it (Ozretić Došen et al. 2003). The same principle can be applied to corporations. According to Ozretić Došen et al., for the best effect of the communication strategy, various types of media should be combined at the same time. The way corporations communicate with their targeted and interested audiences will influence the building of their image and their competitiveness.

Communicating with the public, as part of corporate communication, has a very important role and represents one of the strategic functions of management (Milas 2011, 104). According to Nickols, strategy is a term that implies a complex network of thoughts, ideas, insights and experiences (Nickols 2016, 7), and strategic thinking should not only be imagining the future but should open up new possibilities and create new opportunities, monitor changes and adapt businesses to those changes. In today's society and in the business world, these possibilities and opportunities certainly apply to socially responsible business and will have a significant impact on the image of corporations in the future.

Socially responsible business refers to a business in which companies integrate care for the environment and society into the decision-making system. It is based on sustainability and sustainable development, and in such business, companies inform their public about how this strategy is implemented through non-financial reporting, i.e. through sustainability reporting. The obligation on non-financial reporting is brought by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), the provisions of which should be applied from January 1, 2024 for those entities that have more than 500 employees in a business year on average (European Parliament and the Council 2021). How socially responsible business will affect the image of the corporation will depend on how corporations will inform their targeted audiences about it. Changes and technological development have resulted in the fact that digital media of all kinds have become the main communication channel for public relations used by financial institutions, thus the business success of financial institutions has become increasingly dependent on the quality of information and the ease of use of new communication channels. One of the first studies on the topic of communicating socially responsible business in the Republic of Croatia was summarized in the original paper by Dr. sc. Igor Klopotan in 2021 (Klopotan 2021, 1–34). According to Klopotan, companies with good reputation, regarding the products or services they provide, are the ones that publish non-financial reports on social networks in a timely manner. Such companies also have a better reputation regarding leadership. But what his study also showed is that companies that have greater timeliness in online reporting on sustainable development and CSR and that publish their content on social networking sites also have a greater reputation for leadership.

### **1.1 Purpose and goals**

The aim of this review paper is to present the results of reviewing literature from various authors published on the topic: the way institutions in the financial sector communicate to the public about their socially responsible behaviour. The research question, fundament for writing this paper, was the following: How and which communication channels does the financial sector use regarding its socially responsible behaviour in communication with its target audience? Does online communication affect the image of a financial institution? To what extent does reporting on socially responsible behaviour affect the image of a financial institution and ultimately its profits? Considering the fact that it is a relatively recent and increasingly important topic, a series of questions, that represent the potential for new research, arise from reviewing the literature.

### **1.2 Methods**

The results presented in this review were obtained using a semi-systematic literature review (Snyder 2019, 333–339) and a content analysis method. The articles that were analysed when writing this paper were searched in the following databases

in English and Croatian: Hrčak, Web of Science, Science Direct and Scopus of Elsevier. In order to identify and present the facts relevant to this paper from the available literature, the literature review and content analysis were carried out in 3 phases. First, keywords were defined according to which the databases were searched. In the search, keywords were used independently and in different combinations. Key words when searching for literature in English were: sustainability\*, non-financial reporting\*, financial sector\*, banks\*, ESG\*, communication\*, media\*, connected with Boolean operators (AND, +, OR) that are used se to associate words and phrases within a search query. When reviewing the literature in the Croatian language, the following words were used: *održivi razvoj\**, *nefinancijsko izvještavanje\**, *financijski sektor\**, *banke\**, *ESG\**, *komunikacije\**, *mediji\**, and the same operators were used to connect the words. Then, the summaries of the found articles and other literature were reviewed, focusing attention on the factors relevant to the topic of this review paper. Finally, as part of the third phase, analysis of the content of the selected papers was conducted.

The research of the largest part of the review literature was carried out in the period from December 10, 2022 to January 15, 2023, however while writing this paper, databases were searched again, when necessary, in order to review newly published papers. The time criterion in which articles were searched for results review can be divided into the following periods:

- a) Online communication and its role in building the company's image - from 2003 to 2018;
- b) Non-financial reporting and its role in building the company's image - from 2014 to 2021.
- c) Non-financial reporting as a way of communication between the financial sector and its target audience - from 2018 to 2022.

## 2. RESULTS

This review paper is based on a literature review that includes 23 papers in the field of communications and socially responsible behaviour, while 19 of them were used as the basis for the results presented in the paper. The two oldest articles included in the review are from 2003 and 2005. All the remaining articles date from 2013 to 2022, which indicates the fact that the interest and need for research in this area is increasingly present. The results of the work are divided into three separate categories and are described in more detail in the following subsections.

### 2.1 Online communication and its role in building a company's image

The importance of online communication in building the image of a country has been intensively discussed for the last two decades. Online communication, and

its role in building the image of a country, is transferred to the entire national economy, hence it can be concluded that it is equally important for the financial sector. But this process is long-lasting, demanding, dependent on various factors and by no means a static process, so in the conclusion of their work, Ozretić Došen et al. (2003) state that "Development, launch and implementation of campaigns to build and communicate the image of a country are expensive. However, not even the most expensive and original communication campaign can significantly change the country's image if there are no real improvements in the economy, politics, culture and science." (Ozretić Došen et al. 2003). Building a good image, i.e. a competitive product, is an important prerequisite of success in the financial industry, regardless of where in the world financial supply and demand take place. A study of important factors affecting brand loyalty among special customers in one of the largest Iranian banks was conducted in Iran (Azad and Hassanabadi 2013, 2113–2118). Their study indicates that a good relationship with customers, competitive technology, continuous advertising and the size of the organization are important for building a good bank image and brand loyalty.

The importance of online digital communication in the financial sector is the subject of many studies around the world. The range of services in the financial sector that can be affected by new technologies is wide and the influence of FinTech competitors is increasingly present in loan granting operations, asset management and payment systems (Vives 2017, 97–105). According to Vives, new technologies in the financial sector, the so-called digital finance, provide lower costs of financial intermediation, better products for consumers and better and faster assessment of creditworthiness of applicants for financing. Issues of digital financing are also covered in the study "Impact of digital finance on financial inclusion and stability" (Ozili 2018, 329–340). In the study, the author deals with the issues of digital finance and financial inclusion, the stability of the financial system, and consequently the advantages and risks of digital finance. Undoubtedly, there are benefits such as increasing access to finance among poor individuals, reducing intermediation costs for financial institutions, and the fact that FinTech service providers can influence the increase in the volume of financial transactions during favourable economic times. According to Ozili, the advantages are also the reduction of the circulation of fake money, the ability to quickly exchange money and the increase of the gross national income by increasing the total consumption of digitalized economies. As disadvantages, or challenges, Ozili states that digital finance requires the use of mobile phones and digital devices, i.e. they depend on internet access. The introduction of digital financing in a country can be successful if the population is ready for it, and the security of digital data is extremely important for user trust.

## 2.2 Non-financial reporting and its role in building a company's image

In addition to factors such as products and services, main factors in the financial sector use online communication to inform their audience about how they care for the society, the environment, their employees and other interest groups. Business in which the only goal is to make a profit is no longer sustainable in the long term, therefore socially responsible business (CSR) becomes an indispensable strategy for responsible management of the financial sector. CSR, i.e. environmental, social, governance (ESG) criteria are increasingly important for building an image, and how financial institutions communicate it to their audience is part of indispensable strategic corporate communication, where it is indispensable that public relations be defined as a management function (Skoko and Mihovilović 2014, 84–91).

Research on the relationship between ESG criteria and corporate finance performance (CFP) criteria dates back to the beginning of the seventies of the last century. How important ESG criteria are and how they affect CFP criteria is shown in the 2015 study "ESG and financial performance: aggregated evidence from more than 2000 empirical studies" (Gunnar et al. 2015 210–233). The results of this study show the importance of ESG criteria and their empirical basis. No negative ESG-CFP connection was found in approximately 90 % of the included studies. On the contrary, most studies report positively on this causal relationship, and that ESG influence on CFP is stable over time. Further research points to the impact of ESG criteria in the building of value for shareholders. While in the past, portfolio management relied mainly on financial reports and technical information derivable from past results, today ESG provides data that represents a set of additional high-value data that provides insight into future performance (Verheyden et al. 2016, 47–55). CSR, i.e. ESG, stands out more and more as one of the most frequently studied aspects of corporate reputation.

Non-financial factors that can influence the building of the image and reputation of a financial institution are presented in table 1.

**Table 1. Experts' evaluation of the importance of non-financial bank value drivers**

Rank	Value factor	Evaluation	Rank	Value factor	Evaluation
1	Knowledge and competence of bank employees	4,8125	15	Balanced pricing strategy	4
2	Effective remuneration and financial motivation system	4,625	16	Number of bank legal clients	4
3	Operating efficiency of bank staff (speed, accuracy, small number of errors)	4,625	17	Well-designed performance measurement system	3,9375
4	Customer servicing and selling skills of bank employees	4,5625	18	Bank brand recognition	3,875
5	Competence and strategic thinking of top managers	4,5625	19	Number of internet bank users	3,875
6	Aligned interests of owners and top executives	4,5	20	Strategically right localization of bank branches	3,8125
7	Bank customer satisfaction	4,4375	21	Number of bank private clients	3,8125
8	Bank customer loyalty	4,4375	22	Well-considered non-financial motivation system	3,75
9	Bank reputation	4,4375	23	Range of bank products and services	3,6875
10	Experienced middle-level managers with high communication and leadership skills	4,375	24	Number of issued payment cards	3,6875
11	Bank structure – properly determined roles and responsibilities	4,3125	25	Active social media marketing	3,625
12	Loyal bank employees	4,25	26	Loyalty programmes for customers with bonus system	3,5
13	Development and implementation of innovative bank products	4,125	27	Number of ATMs and POS terminals	3,1875
14	Advanced digital consultancy services	4,0625	28	Active usage of social networks in bank activities	3,1875
			29	Number of bank customer service	3

Source: "Non-financial value drivers: case of Latvian banks" (Titko and Shina 2016, 192-199).

The authors conducted the research based on the case of Latvian banks; the data was collected in the period from 2012 to 2015 (Titko and Shina 2016, 192-199). According to the research results, the most important non-financial drivers are employees. The knowledge and competences of satisfied, loyal and productive employees create quality products, such employees provide quality service that is positively affected by users, and this consequently means greater profit and growth for the financial institution. The research conducted on two large banks in the Republic of Croatia shows, with respect to corporate reputation as a specific and intangible organizational resource, the role of reputation in the market success of today's banks and the relationship between CSR and a bank's reputation. (Starešinić et al. 2019, 264-277). The authors point out that reputation is built on the quality of products and services, but socially responsible business creates a positive image and reputation on the part of users.

Finally, the study "Stock market reactions to adverse ESG disclosure via media channels" (Wong and Zhang 2022) points to an increasing global pressure for companies to engage in CSR in order to maintain a quality corporate reputation, and thus to maintain a favourable impact on capital requirements, i.e. on calculation of own capital, liquidity, leverage ratio and large exposure. This study is concerned with empirically determining the impact of ESG-related undesirable corporate behaviour on the stock price of companies that do not implement it. The findings

of the study provide important guidance to managers, investors, employees, customers and other stakeholders on the importance of reputation management, which is directly affected by socially responsible behaviour. The study points out that firm size, stock liquidity, reputational status, and industry classification are highly valued firm characteristics that influence capital requirements. The study also provides empirical results on the unfavourable reaction of the capital market in case of negative ESG coverage in the media, pointing to the need to include ESG criteria in modern capital and portfolio management models.

### **2.3 Non-financial reporting as a way of communicating the financial sector with the public**

Non-financial reporting, i.e. reporting on sustainability, is the way the business sector today communicates with the interested public about its transparency towards society and the environment, and it can differ significantly from company to company. In the domain of sustainability, the way a company communicates with the public, which channels are used, how often and which content is chosen, clearly reflects the culture of a company, its priorities and its leadership. (Reilly and Nazin 2018, 621–637).

Author Genç deals with the importance of sustainability in his work. In his work “The Importance of Communication in Sustainability & Sustainable Strategies”, Genç raises the research question of the importance of communication in sustainability strategies and how it affects the activities, organization and decisions of organizations related to sustainability (Genç 2017, 511–516). The results obtained indicate that communication, whether internal or external, plays a key role in any sustainability strategy.. If there is no internal communication, strategic changes related to sustainability are very difficult to implement. Furthermore, external communication with all interested members of the public about the sustainability strategy is necessary because otherwise the organization could face losses in business. The progress and development of communication technologies has influenced the communication strategies of organizations, forcing them to change the previous ways of communicating with their stakeholders and to communicate with stakeholders more through social media. Social media is a very cost-effective and easily accessible tool for communicating CSR to different audiences. By strategically communicating about CSR through social media, organizations demonstrate commitment, influence and good reputation, and such communication provides instant feedback to the public (Gomez 2021, 577–598). In the activities of financial institutions, well-planned activities related to CSR can be a key resource of competitiveness. Communicating CSR through social media evokes positive emotions in consumers because they react positively towards institutions that really practice CSR. In this way, consumers become strong advocates of such institutions (Ahmad et al. 2021). Communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) via social networks is also tested in the study “The relationship

between CSR Communication on Social Media, Purchase Intention, and E-WOM in the Banking Sector of an Emerging Economy” (Cheng et al. 2021, 1025–1041). In their study, the authors point out that the results of their research show that CSR activities, related to customers directly and indirectly, are related to E-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) and customers’ purchase intentions. The development and increasing presence of social networks in everyday life are changing the rules of the game for all large companies, including financial institutions, with the aim of attracting the attention of stakeholders in the market.

Strategic communication, as a topic, is increasingly important in the financial sector, which is also shown by the work of a group of authors from 2022, in which the aim is to empirically investigate the content and scope of sustainability disclosures in the banking sector in the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA). By observing the results in one reporting year, the authors come to the discovery that banks in the EU published more about sustainability than banks in the USA. Banks from both areas are quite interested in how their business affects the society in which they operate. Based on a sample of 67 banks from the EU compared to 67 banks from the USA in the period from 2013 to 2021, with regard to ESG results, the authors conclude that EU banks outperform US banks in three dimensions: direct social, direct environmental and indirect social results, while US banks exceeded in indirect environmental sustainability results (Moufty et al. 2022).

### 3. DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the 1970s, research into the relationship between ESG criteria and corporate financial performance criteria began. Online communication plays an important role in image building which is a rule that applies to all countries, and from there these rules are transferred to the entire national economy and equally to the financial sector. In addition to loyalty to a specific product or brand of a financial institution, a good relationship with customers, competitive technology, continuous advertising and the size of the organization are also important. The security of digital data should not be neglected as well. Furthermore, research on non-financial reporting leads to the role of employees as the most important stakeholders. The knowledge and competences of employees create quality products, such employees provide quality service that is positively affected by users, and this consequently means greater profit and growth for the financial institution. Caring for employees is an important part of the ESG criteria, the obtained research results, indicating that employees are the most important non-financial factors in image building, represent significant guidelines for the further inclusion of sustainable development in the future strategies of financial institutions.

All the presented results agree that online communication, whether internal or external, is important for building the image of financial institutions, that strategic



communication about sustainable development is becoming a legal obligation, that it also significantly affects the image of the company, and that communication plays a key role in any sustainability strategy. When reviewing the literature and online content, it was observed that social media, although a very profitable and easily accessible tool for communicating CSR to different audiences, is not used enough as a communication channel.

Apart from the improvement of online methods of communication and the development of new technologies, finding a connection between the knowledge and competence of employees of financial institutions and the strategy of sustainable development represents a future challenge for financial institutions in further development of non-financial reporting. Important guidelines in the creation of future corporate communication strategies of financial institutions on sustainable development can also be provided by the results of future research that should answer the following questions: In what way does employee awareness of CSR affect the building of the financial institution's image? What is the role of employees in the socially responsible business of a financial institution and how important is their knowledge of the socially responsible behaviour strategy?

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The importance of sustainable development is based on the need to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet those same needs. It encompasses economic, social and environmental aspects and seeks to balance them in a way that ensures long-term sustainability. In order to achieve a balanced way that will ensure long-term sustainability, both the business world and the world in general are changing. These changes are faster and more demanding. Changes that depend on the development of technologies are important, however changes related to attitudes towards the environment, sustainability and caring for people have been of primary importance for a long time, because life on Earth depends on it. Each person individually, must change their attitudes about sustainability, the same principle must be applied to all the products of their activity, that is, and the companies they establish, develop and use to create new values. The changes that must be accepted and implemented are difficult for individuals as well as business entities. Success in accepting and implementing these changes leads to sustainability, a positive impact on image, but also on profit. Implementation of changes must be transparent, and information about it must be available to the public. For this reason, business entities report on sustainability. Non-financial reporting on sustainability is often a part of reports that are published publicly, but from the beginning of 2024 it is set to become an obligation. It is up to the financial institutions to devise the way they will communicate their attitude towards sustainability to the public as successfully as possible and through which communication channels.

Their current and future corporate communication strategy will continue to build their image and the public's perception of them. There are many opportunities for effective communication with the public, the available communication channels just need to be recognized and used in order to achieve success.

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# CRISIS MANAGEMENT BY OPERATORS OF GAMES OF CHANCE (INTRODUCTION OF THE EURO AS THE OFFICIAL CURRENCY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA) VIA FACEBOOK

Lucija Dujmović, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

Operators of games of chance use social media platforms to promote their products and services and increase audience engagement. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms precisely because it has older and wealthier users compared to other social media platforms. With the announced introduction of the euro as the official currency in the Republic of Croatia, the operators of games of chance had to ensure a technological, systemic and secure transition of important data and currency conversion from January 1, 2023, so that players would not be deprived of or worried about their personal data and the value of the game played. Regarding the technological undertaking and possible service interruptions, this original scientific paper aimed to investigate whether the operators conveyed the news about the introduction of the euro to their audience on Facebook and what the comments and reactions of the players at the beginning of 2023 were. For this research, content analysis was applied to process data from the posts of the operators of games of chance and the comments of players on the social media platform Facebook from December 30, 2022, to January 14, 2023. The research analyzed how operators of games of chance communicate with players in a crisis situation and what the operators' engagement and reaction to the players' negative comments was.

**Keywords:** crisis communication, games of chance, reputation, social media platforms, Facebook.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Games of chance are types of games in which the outcome is not known in advance and mostly depends on chance and luck, and less on skill and reason (Game of chance, 2022). These games are regulated by law and played under certain rules. Players can try their luck at points of sale and on the operators' websites by using a computer or mobile device. Some operators also offer the possibility of playing via a mobile application. According to the law, players of games of chance must be of legal age, regardless of whether they play games online or at points of sale (Act on Games of Chance 2022; Ordinance on Lottery Games 2022; Ordinance on Organizing Remote Gambling Games 2022). The State implements its measures through laws and other legal acts in order to help its citizens and society and protect vulnerable groups. During the game, the player tries to remain "free within the limits of the rules" (Caillois 1979, 36). Players participate in games of chance for various reasons. The most common reasons and motives are entertainment and the hope of winning a big prize (Bahtijarević et al. 1991, 66–73).

Players who play games of chance may encounter certain inconveniences during the game that spoil the positive experience of the game – such as various errors in the system, inability to access games, inability to log into the system or unsuccessful payment and/or payout of stakes and winnings. Technical difficulties do not have to be the only issue that cause players' dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction can also be caused by poor communication on social media platforms, a bad personal experience at the point of sale when interacting with the sales staff, or poor communication and interaction with technical support. Players then often report their dissatisfaction to technical support or share their opinion and experience on social media platforms.

Games of chance operators use social media platforms to promote their products and services and increase audience engagement. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms precisely because it has older and wealthier users compared to other social media platforms (Smartbrief 2014 and Gainsbury et al., 2015, 16). On this social media platform, the operators of games of chance find their target group of players more easily, because, as was pointed out earlier in the paper, players of games of chance must be of legal age. However, there are certain risks and inconveniences that operators and organizers of games of chance may encounter when using social media platforms, namely negative, unfavorable and offensive comments written by players or followers. This is exactly what Gainsbury et al. (2015) write about in their research "The Use of Social Media in Gambling", pointing out that the nature of social media means that companies have limited control over content posted about them online.

Consequently, the spread of falsehoods, rumors or negative 'word-of-mouth', as well as cynical comments and campaigns, can damage a company's reputation.

Furthermore, attempts to remove negative comments or hide public information can only cause an opposite effect, causing customers to repost unwanted information about the company (Gainsbury et al. 2015, 20).

The crises that occur may vary. Otto Lerbinger (1997) lists eight types of crisis situations that are caused by environmental forces and management irregularities. According to Lerbinger's categorization, there are several types of crises, namely: natural crises, technological crises, confrontational crises, malevolence, distorted values of the administration, fraud, irregularities in the work of the administration, and economic and business crises (Lerbinger and Jugo 2017, 58; Tomić 2016, 823).

The technological crisis is precisely the type of crisis that could hit operators of games of chance during the currency conversion - from kuna to euro. Since the introduction of the euro as the official currency in the Republic of Croatia was announced, the operators of games of chance had to ensure a technological, system and security important data transition and currency conversion from January 1, 2023, so that players would not be deprived of or worried about their personal data and the value of the game played. If something goes wrong, it will be necessary to act properly and urgently in order to correct the error that occurred.

In view of the technological undertaking and possible service interruptions, this paper investigated how the operators of games of chance communicate with players in a crisis situation. The opportunity is exceptional because a crisis cannot be predicted, but it was possible to directly monitor the operators' behavior on social media platforms, before and after the introduction of the euro as the new official currency in the Republic of Croatia.

The research results can benefit operators, and the games of chance industry in general, in recognizing their mistakes when communicating with the public on social media platforms, and it can be useful for others to better prepare for a crisis that is predictable and inevitable.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

For this research, content analysis was applied to process data from Facebook posts of the operators of games of chance and the comments of players from December 30, 2022, to January 14, 2023. In the comments section of the posts, operators' engagement and reactions to the players' negative comments were studied, as well as whether the operators' reactions were in accordance with the guidelines for crisis communication and communication on social media platforms.

### **2.1 Research aims and objectives**

This research aims to investigate how operators of games of chance manage crisis situations and how they react to players' negative comments on social media platforms. The objective of this paper is to analyze the operators' posts and play-

ers' negative comments in order to determine whether they communicated the conversion of the currency to the players on social media platforms in a timely manner; to determine what negative comments the operators most often encountered during the observed period; and whether and how they reacted to the players' negative comments.

Research questions:

1. Did the observed operators of games of chance convey the announcement about the currency conversion from kuna to euro to their players on Facebook?
2. Did the players have any remarks on Facebook about the currency conversion from kuna to euro?
3. What were the negative comments from the players about?
4. Do the operators of games of chance follow the guidelines and principles of good crisis communication on social media platforms?

### **3. RESPONDENTS AND MEASURING INSTRUMENTS**

For the purposes of this research, the Facebook posts of the operators of games of chance were observed in the period from December 30, 2022 to January 14, 2023. The posts of the following operators and brands were studied: Hrvatska Lutrija, Cro Casino, Cro Bet, Super Sport, Germania, PSK, Rizk, Favbet, Arena Casino and Admiral Casino.

The posts of the operators, the number of comments and the types of comments on the posts (positive, neutral and negative comments) were observed. Positive comments refer to the players' praise of the operators of games of chance and satisfaction with the promotion, prize or bonus. Neutral comments indicate players' comments that are a by-product of the prize contest or comments on the set topic, whereas negative comments refer to the insulting and belittling of the games of chance operators, the use of irony, sarcasm and vulgar words addressed to the operator, dissatisfaction with the promotion, prize or bonus, dissatisfaction with the application or the website and dissatisfaction with technical or customer support.

In addition to the above, it was also examined whether the operators announced the currency conversion to their players and followers on social media platforms; whether the players wrote negative comments on their posts regarding the currency conversion; whether there were different negative comments from the players during the observed period and whether the operators replied to the players.

Some operators of games of chance conveyed this information on Facebook, and the reaction of followers and players after the introduction of the euro was not absent.

The collected data are included in two tables. Table 1 offers an overview of the number of posts and comments. In table 2, an overview of posts, negative comments and operators' reactions is presented.

**Table 1: Overview of the number of posts and comments**

<b>Games of chance operators</b>	<b>Number of posts in the observed period</b>	<b>Number of posts that contain comments</b>
Hrvatska Lutrija	38	27
Cro Casino	13	10
Cro Bet	18	18
SuperSport	64	21
SuperSport Casino	19	7
Germania sport kladionica	80	23
PSK - Sports & Casino	84	55
Rizk Casino	7	4

<b>Operators of games of chance</b>	<b>Number of posts in the observed period</b>	<b>Number of posts that contain comments</b>
FavBet sportska kladionica (Favbet Hrvatska)	24	7
Arena Casino	17	2
Admiral Casino	10	9



	<b>Total number of comments</b>	<b>Positive comments / %</b>	<b>Neutral comments / %</b>	<b>Negative comments / %</b>
981		7	929	45
		0.71%	94.70%	4.59%
35		1	20	14
		2.86%	57.14%	40.00%
397		10	378	9
		2.52%	95.21%	2.27%
326		1	318	7
		0.31%	97.55%	2.15%
304		0	292	12
		0.00%	96.05%	3.95%
432		0	419	13
		0.00%	96.99%	3.01%
823		1	812	10
		0.12%	98.66%	1.22%
23		1	21	1
		4.35%	91.30%	4.35%

	<b>Total number of comments</b>	<b>Positive comments / %</b>	<b>Neutral comments / %</b>	<b>Negative comments / %</b>
61		0	55	6
		0.00%	90.16%	9.84%
6		1	5	0
		16.67%	83.33%	0.00%
14		0	11	3
		0.00%	78.57%	21.43%

**Table 2: Overview of posts and negative comments**

<b>Operators of games of chance</b>	<b>Post about the conversion to the euro</b>	<b>Did the post contain remarks from players</b>	
Hrvatska Lutrija	yes	yes	
Cro Casino	yes	yes	
Cro Bet	yes	yes	
Super Sport	yes	no	
Super Sport Casino	yes	no	

Remarks from players and types of negative comments on posts in the observed period	Operators' reaction to the comments
the amount in euros is not equal to the previous amount in kunas	almost all players are given the same generic answer
technical difficulties - application, payments payments and buying HL coupons at the post office, on kiosks	not replying to all of the players' comments
players' dissatisfaction with small bonuses	ignoring the dissatisfied players' comments
insulting Hrvatska Lutrija	ignoring comments that insult Hrvatska Lutrija
the amount in euros is not equal to the previous amount in kunas	mostly ignoring comments; only one player got the same reply as the players on Hrvatska Lutrija's profile did
the game that was available before the conversion to the euro is no longer available	
players write that the stake in the games is more expensive than before and that they will lose players because of it	
Aircash payments are not possible inability to purchase HL coupons at Tisak	replied to most of the players' inquiries and comments
insulting the betting and gambling company	ignore the insulting of the betting and gambling company
inquiry about using the application	asking the player to send the inquiry via e-mail – not offering a forthright answer via social media platforms
increase in stakes in casino games	ignoring players' inquiries about the change of stakes in games
lack of promotions and bonuses for players insulting the casino	

Operators of games of chance	Post about the conversion to the euro	Did the post contain remarks from players
Germania sport kladionica	no	/
PSK - Sports & Casino	no	/
Rizk Casino	no	/
FavBet sportska kladionica (Favbet Hrvatska)	no	/
Arena Casino	no	/
Admiral Casino	no	/

<sup>1</sup>A post in the form of a prize contest in which followers are encouraged to predict the outcome of an event, in which they then reward people who give the correct answer.

\* A later check revealed that the player's comment on the three posts no longer exists.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of all the observed operators and organizers of games of chance, only Hrvatska Lutrija and Super Sport shared the announcement about the conversion to the new official currency. Hrvatska Lutrija and its sub-brands Cro Casino and Cro Bet had the most negative comments and remarks from players. Super Sport had no negative comments on posts.

When it comes to the number of posts and the mutual ratio of positive, neutral and negative comments compared to the total number of comments, it is evident that PSK – Sports & Casino is the leading operator in terms of the number of Facebook posts in the observed period, followed by Germania with 80 posts, Super Sport with 64 and Hrvatska Lutrija with 38 posts. Hrvatska Lutrija has the most

Remarks from players and types of negative comments on posts in the observed period	Operators' reaction to the comments
insulting the betting and gambling company	ignoring comments
the amount in euros is not equal to the previous amount in kunas	ignoring comments
Prize quiz <sup>1</sup>	On one prize quiz they did not write who the winner was. Even if nobody won, they should have informed the players who played that no one offered the correct answer.
technical difficulties - application	ignoring comments
insulting the betting and gambling company	ignoring comments
a player writes that they spelled an athlete's last name incorrectly on the visual	ignoring comments
no offer for a handball game on the webpage	ignoring players' dissatisfaction
technical difficulties	ignoring comments
the same player insults the betting and gambling company in 3 different posts and claims the company is deleting his comments	ignoring player's comments; potentially deleting player's comments*
/	no comments
one player thinks that the same player always wins jackpots - he got the support of other players and followers	ignoring comments

comments - a total of 981, while PSK has 823 comments, followed by Germania with 432 comments and Cro Bet with 397 comments. Cro Bet has the most positive comments (10 positive comments that make up 2.52 % of the total comments), followed immediately by Hrvatska Lutrija with 7 positive comments that make up 0.71 % of the total comments. Hrvatska Lutrija has the most neutral comments (929 neutral comments that make up 94.70 % of the total comments), but also negative ones (45 negative comments that amount to 4.59 %).

The collected data showed that there was no technological crisis during the conversion to the new official currency. Nevertheless, players expressed their dissatisfaction in the comments due to the increased stakes and price of the game, as well as the inability to buy HL coupons or pay for the game at business partners. The observed negative comments that operators encountered in the observed period can be divided into four thematic categories:

- increased stakes and price of the game after the conversion to the euro,
- technical difficulties (mobile applications not working well),
- insulting comments and
- inability to pay and make a purchase at the operators' business partners.

The players' dissatisfaction can be publicly seen the most on social media platforms, where they publicly comment on posts and express their emotions and feelings with emoticons. It is necessary to approach these crisis situations, such as numerous negative comments by players on social media platforms, in accordance with crisis communication guidelines. Crisis management is an important element in reputation and image management. In accordance with the mentioned theory and research results, the research questions were answered.

1. Did the observed operators of games of chance convey the announcement about the currency conversion from kuna to euro to their players on Facebook?

According to the research results, only Hrvatska Lutrija (including its sub-brands Cro Bet and Cro Casino) and Super Sport conveyed the announcement about the conversion to the new official currency on their official Facebook profiles. Germania, PSK, Rizk, Favebet, Arena and Admiral did not convey the announcement about the conversion to the new official currency on their official Facebook profiles.

2. Did the players have any remarks on Facebook about the currency conversion from kuna to euro?

Hrvatska Lutrija, Cro Casino and Cro Bet's posts about the conversion to the new official currency contained negative comments from players who expressed their dissatisfaction with increased stakes and price of the game.

3. What were the negative comments from the players about?

The observed negative comments that operators encountered in the observed period can be divided into four thematic categories: increased stakes and price of the game after the conversion to the euro, technical difficulties (mobile applications not working well), insulting comments and the inability to pay and make a purchase at the operators' business partners.

4. Do the operators of games of chance follow the guidelines and principles of good crisis communication on social media platforms?

Given that there was no serious technological crisis during the conversion to the new official euro currency, what stood out in the comments of Hrvatska Lutrija's posts were the comments of players who claimed that the stake in the game was not the same as the previous one in kunas, that is, that there had been an increase in price. Hrvatska Lutrija gave the players the same generic answer in which they cited the games provider who determines the minimum stake in the game as the reason for the increase in price. Their reply lacked an apology and a show

of understanding for their dissatisfaction. It was also noticed that the operators and organizers of the games of chance ignored the players' negative comments, especially those that insulted the betting and gambling company or casino, and did not answer some of the players' inquiries, as well as those who encountered technical difficulties. Accordingly, the research showed that the operators do not actively follow the guidelines for good communication and crisis communication on social media platforms.

A crisis situation demands quality crisis communication, which consists of recognizing the crisis and the problem, quick and timely response, informing the public and all stakeholders about the crisis, defining the facts, communicating honestly and showing concern about the resulting crisis, being proactive, implementing procedures that seek to minimize damage in order to preserve the corporation's image and reputation (Tomić 2016, 841–844). Damir Jugo provides similar instructions for crisis communication, arguing that communication should be timely, consistent, open and honest, it should offer instructional information (instructions for stakeholders to protect themselves from the potential consequences of the crisis), information about adaptation (support for stakeholders, responding to issues in order to reduce stress, anxiety and uncertainty caused by the crisis) and effort should be put into the management and repair of reputation (Jugo 2017, 155–164). For better communication on social media platforms and dealing with negative comments, it is recommended that brands and organizations show how much they care about their customers and, in doing so, turn negative comments into a positive experience. Ignoring comments or deleting them are the biggest mistakes a brand can make on social media platforms. "Reacting appropriately and honestly to negative comments is important because it shows that the brand cares about its customers, and leaving negative experiences on a fan page creates the impression that the brand is real and that there are people behind it who, like all of us, make good and bad decisions. Such a transparent relationship shows customers that their voice and opinion are important, that their complaints are noted and taken seriously..." (Sok 2013).

During the observed period of the posts created by operators and organizers of games of chance, the most inquiries and dissatisfying players' comments related to the increased price of the game and the stakes not being identical to those before the conversion to the euro. They were mostly related to the price and amount of stakes in casino games. Hrvatska Lutrija, along with its associated sub-brands, replied that the reason for this was the provider's decision on the minimum stake in the game. The generic reply to the players on their Facebook fan pages was as follows:

*"Hello (player's name), in order to provide its players with the most favorable game possible, Hrvatska Lutrija has set minimum amounts for stakes in games for each*

*individual provider. Providers have technical limits for certain games, which Hrvatska Lutrija unfortunately cannot influence. We take this opportunity to emphasize that Hrvatska Lutrija is in the process of expanding its offer of Casino games and introducing new providers. We shall certainly take into account our players' wishes and add games with lower minimum stakes to our offer."*

Hrvatska Lutrija's reply, although explaining the reason for the increase in price, lacks the segment of apology and expressed compassion, humanity and understanding for the feelings (in this case anger and general dissatisfaction) that the increase in the price of stakes in the game created among players. The observed posts show that Hrvatska Lutrija did not reply to all of the players' inquiries, and that it ignored some of the players' comments and inquiries. With other operators, it was also observed that players' comments and certain inquiries were ignored, which only contributes to the greater dissatisfaction of players who wish to be heard, understood and have their problems solved.

Negative comments on posts can be mere rumours, speculations or disinformation, but they can still damage the reputation of the organization or company. Social media platforms make it possible to spread such information faster than before, so it is important to act in a timely manner and provide a clear answer to the media and the public. Dealing with social media platform followers' frustrations can be terrifying and stressful for organizations, but it can also turn into a positive experience for both parties. Therefore, a quick reaction and a show of compassion can turn a critic into an advocate (Scott 2011, 116–117). In the event that such an unfavourable situation occurs, it is necessary to work on limiting the negative impact on the reputation. In their paper "The Use of Social Media in Risk and Crisis Communication", Cécile Wendling, Jack Radisch and Stephane Jacobzone point out that it is important not to overcome the illusion that social media can be controlled, but to use social media in order to respond more quickly to criticism and attacks. Moreover, responding by respectfully correcting inaccurate information can prevent and stop the spreading of rumours (Wendling et al. 2013, 28).

For successful communication on social media platforms, proactivity and the desire to help customers are important. Nielsen and McKinsey's research from 2012 showed that one negative customer experience can influence the future decisions of other customers, while a positive decision requires at least five positive posts or messages (NM Incite's 2012).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In order to answer the cardinal research question of how operators of games of chance communicate with the players in crisis communication, it is important to emphasize that the currency conversion from kuna to euro went well, and there-



fore there was no crisis situation in the technological sense. Out of the studied operators of games of chance, only Hrvatska Lutrija (with the associated sub-brands included) and Super Sport conveyed the information about the conversion to the new official currency, while other operators did not convey this information to players on Facebook in the form of an official post. The comments of the players regarding the new currency were aimed at expressing dissatisfaction with the new (higher) price of the game, that is, with the increase in the price of the new minimum stakes. The collected data on the operators' comments and reactions show that the operators mostly ignore the players' negative comments and inquiries, which is contrary to the guidelines for crisis communication and communication on social media platforms.

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## ADDRESSING THE LOCAL THROUGH DIGITAL

**Maruša Mavsar, Ph.D. Candidate**

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

### ABSTRACT

While European Union started mapping the phenomenon of European communities without news outlets in 2023, the news deserts in the United States are already a high-speed expanding phenomenon. Local storytelling has a demonstrated effect in increasing civic participation and securing pro-social behaviour. Despite the important roles of local media concerning the engagement of communities, communication science seems to overlook the local storytelling in Southeast Europe. As vast changes in communication ecologies are directing local storytelling to online mode, we are interested in different ways, digital affordances, and modes by which online local media of Slovenia and Croatia are addressing their audiences. Furthermore, by adopting the multimodal approach our study will also assess the relations among local, national, and global discourses in four local digital outlets and introduce some implications for the future of smaller media.

**Keywords:** local media, digital media, multimodality, news deserts

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On Friday, 9. December 2022, European Commission granted a 2 million euros sum to a consortium of three organisations (International Media Support, Journalism-Fund.eu, and the European University Institute - Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom) for their research within Local Media for Democracy project (European Commission 2022). Through this project, European Commission will fund some local media initiatives, but their primal goal is to map European news deserts and areas that are at risk of becoming an area without local news. Czech lawyer and politician Věra Jourová, vice-president of the European Commission for Values and Transparency accompanied this project by expressing a concern that many communities are “no longer served with independent information covering topics of direct interest to them, such as local politics, community events or public services. This project will generate crucial data on the issue of news deserts and identify practical solutions and support directly local media with grants” (Jourová and European Commission 2022).

In this way Europe finally starts to investigate the phenomenon that is systematically researched in the United States by different foundations and initiatives for at least 15 years, warning the politics and institutions of democracy about the serious situation in the local media landscape that just got worse in pandemic time: “Over the past 15 years, the United States has lost 2100 newspapers, leaving at least 1800 communities that had a local news outlet in 2004 without any at the beginning of 2020” (Abernathy et al. 2020, 9). This leads researchers to alert that acknowledging and fighting news deserts means fighting “cultural, economic and political divides” (Abernathy et al. 2020, 89).

Because “all citizens in a certain community need access to critical information in order to make informed decisions on topics that affect the quality of their lives” (EUI 2023) the as current as possible research of local media ecosystems is of vital importance in all areas of Europe. Research should involve the study of “micro, meso and macro forms of communication, and address the primary contexts in which citizens receive information” and be “executed at a local level” (Napoli et al. 2012, 2). Today local audiences expect local media to supply them with diverse backgrounds and local information, expect them to promote social integration, give their citizens insight into how the city ‘works’, to provide inspiration, ensure their recognition and representation – to give them a ‘voice’, to increase the level of local understanding, to create a civic memoir and contribute to social cohesion and a sense of belonging (Costera Meijer 2010, 327).

Proximity as a news value presents itself as a complex but promising phenomenon, which could give us some answers to how media values and products could be better aligned with their today’s audiences and their vast expectations.

This article seeks to highlight the articulation of locality on two local news web pages in Slovenia and two in Croatia by analysing different modes used on these web pages, such as layout (structure of the news homepage), typography, and other digital affordances on the homepages (as elements for interactivity, blog, newsletter, share tools, social media buttons, most-viewed, comments, etc.), but taking into account the dominant – primary local identity. Our main research question can be framed:

*RQ: How do the 4 local/regional digital media in Slovenia and Croatia address local audiences and invoke locality and a sense of belonging to a local community through different modes and digital affordances?*

Although in this article we will not make further exploration into the consumption phase of local news, we acknowledge that people can “approach participatory websites with fully formed identities and may not find affirmation of that identity within the website” (Barnes 2016, 94) and that each insight into the local media also needs to consider that “people involved in the subculture are constantly negotiating what is local, what it means to be local, what it means to be part of the community - bringing these things into existence and also questioning and contesting them” (Hess and Waller 2016, 205).

## 2. METHOD

After preliminary readings and first data samples from four online local news pages in December 2022, the current data for this study was collected on three weekdays in March 2023. Each webpage was downloaded and saved, the four homepages were then chosen as the central point of analysis, and recurring themes and patterns were identified to answer the research question, inquiring about the use of modes and digital affordances that evoke locality and a sense of belonging to a local community and at the same time enable user engagement.

Homepages were chosen because they function as an entry point for the local media: “The front page is the part of the website where the entire macro-cosmos of the site is usually condensed in a micro-cosmos with textual markers of time and space often used as structuring devices, and therefore, it constitutes a privileged entry point for discussion of time and space” (Bødker and Brügger 2019, 246).

Some features of local media seem more obvious to tackle the locality and enhance the articulation of imagined community (Anderson 1998) of a local place than others. If the classical masthead is a notorious imagination centre for newspapers, Funk states that for online media “there is simply no better place to study a newspaper’s articulation of place than its banner” (Funk 2012, 579). Analysis that includes multimodal micro-observations was chosen as the most relevant for this online environment as it examines processes of meaning-making with respect to a

multiplicity of modes (Jewitt and Mackley 2019), examines which semiotic resources are available in each situation and acknowledges that (digital) affordances are shaped through historical, cultural, and social usage. If the content in textual form links itself more logically to the locality and local issues, the multimodal analysis helps us to emphasize the visual communication of online media, the essential communication of the 'www' which enhances the metacognitive experience and is easier to understand and process (Vaccari and Chadwick 2020, 2). In this type of empirical observation – qualitative one - we keep in mind that "what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures. And this will affect meaning" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 2). Research in social semiotics always accentuates that each meaning in communication is made through interaction and that each performed text (or visual element) encompasses three meta functions, following Halliday's model (Halliday 1978): Ideational function, Interpersonal function, and a Textual function, which Kress and van Leeuwen adapt according to other modes and primarily visual media to Representational, Interactive, and Compositional function. For this article, we looked only at a few individual elements of web pages, focusing upon two dimensions of interactive signs, choosing those where we found locality enhancement already at our first reading.

Since low bounce rate and user engagement should be of vital importance for local media, who struggle to retain their audience, our inquiry looked additionally into the website's accessibility and scannability, but also into the meta description inscribed in the most used search engine in the two countries.

Four regional/local news webpages that were chosen for the analysis share some main similarities in pairs: Gorenjski Glas from Slovenia and Glas Istre from Croatia are web pages of two very influential and read regional newspapers in both countries. Furthermore, they share a classical newsroom organisation and an admiring long history of news as they regularly reached their regional readership already before World War II. The other two web pages function as online-only regional news, Maribor.info from Slovenia and ePodravina.hr from Croatia. Their locality shares an attachment to a similar landscape and one common important natural resource – the river Drava, but Maribor.info is closely linked to one bigger Slovenian city, Maribor, while ePodravina functions as a regional media with notably bigger media coverage area and employs more journalists.

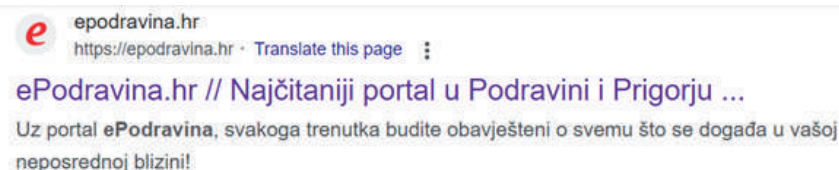
### 3. RESULTS

Answering our research question starts with observing how individual websites are inscribed online. Entering keywords in search engines showed that local space can be effectively evoked even before the user/visitor/local reader enters

the homepage. The meta description on the search engine results page already alerts the user of what can be found on the next landing page. This presents itself as important since users do not “necessarily differentiate between different types of news when browsing online, as participants reported to switch seamlessly between local, national and international news” (Guylas et al. 2019, 1852).

Correspondingly the two Croatian local/regional digital media (ePodravina and Glas Istre) have a clear and comprehensible articulation of locality already in their meta description. ePodravina describes itself as “the most read webpage in Podravina and Prigorje region” and adds the usability for a local audience, the ‘why’ of their local news: “With the ePodravina portal, you can be informed at any moment about everything that is happening in your immediate vicinity!”, whereas Slovenia’s both analysed media didn’t recognize this opportunity in the search engine inscription.

**Figure 1: Meta description of the ePodravina webpage.**



Source: Own, www.google.com search, keyword “ePodravina”. Accessed March 3, 2023.

### 3.1 Ease of access, speed, structure, and fonts

As regards to the ease of accessibility, all four websites are mobile friendly, whereas Gorenjski Glas is the least pleasant for a mobile user since it keeps the modular way and not the one-column structure. Google prioritises mobile-friendly websites and pages that load faster, accordingly the loading speed affects the site’s position in search results (Pushkar et al. 2020, 21). Page loading speed differs greatly and could discourage the local user: on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 Glas Istre took 28,8 seconds to fully load, ePodravina 9,4 seconds, Maribor.info 11,6 seconds, and Gorenjski Glas 5,3 seconds. Nevertheless, Glasistre.hr had a traffic volume of 5.185 unique daily visitors, ePodravina had 1.069 uniques, Gorenjski Glas had 1.351 unique daily visitors and Mariborinfo.com traffic volume was 2.296 unique daily visitors. Glas Istre and ePodravina seem to have its servers in Croatia, Gorenjski Glas in France, and Mariborinfo in the United Kingdom.

Concerning the user experience with the structure, navigation, and organization principles of the page our research showed that all four digital media homepages have a modular web design, all four media have a comprehensive guided navigation, and are easy to scroll. In all four media, the main image in newsbite is having

a complementary function (Martinec and Salway 2005). Gorenjski Glas, Glas Istre, and ePodravina have their Signature – Tail location, whereas Mariborinfo has an endless scroll design.

Many typographic variables exhibit significant effects on webpage reading (Scaltritti et al. 2019), and typography, fonts of text, and their size are among essential ones for the readability of the page but also other factors as the information recall (Gasser et al. 2005). Gorenjski Glas uses the most accessible font Arial with a 10,5 point size, though case studies showed that the size 14 point showed itself more readable (Bernard et al. 2001), Mariborinfo.com uses Merriweather 11,5, which is readable at a small size and very geometric. Glas Istre uses Calibri 16,5 which is characterised by its clean lines and ePodravina - PT Serif 13 which has a tradition of a trustworthy font. All used fonts exhibit a serious, formal attitude toward their audiences.

### 3.2 Header

By header, we mean the top section of the webpage, though in modern design header coincides with the whole above-the-fold field (Stepanov 2020, 3). The header clearly invokes local sense of belonging in the case of Gorenjski Glas and ePodravina.

#### Figure 2: ePodravina header



Source: Own, www.ePodravina.hr. Accessed March 3, 2023.

Header of ePodravina contains a logo which itself (by the e-) is accentuating the online mode of news but highlights also the Podravina region. The logo includes also their maxim pointing to closeness to a reader/user: "Podravina i Prigorje na dlanu" meaning "Podravina and Prigorje at the palm of your hand". In the right corner, the user can find clearly visible social media buttons and next to them another interaction possibility, where a user/reader/visitor can click and send their news (titled "imaš vijest?" – "do you have news?"). In the background of the header there is a landscape picture with recognizable features for the local population, a panoramic scene.

This latest feature cannot be simply presumed, as Funk found in his research about banners of American online newspapers, where community newspapers surprisingly did not articulate a more "clear sense of local identity or local place" than larger newspapers (Funk 2013, 583). There were, in Funk's opinion, important opportunities for the articulation of identity missed:

*"It is important to note that there is nothing wrong with a newspaper pursuing profit, and imagining a commodity is arguably a key element in selling that commodity. However, as local institutions purporting local coverage, there seems obvious room for experimentation with the banners of community newspaper websites. Why not emphasize the local community more? Why not show pictures or photographs of local landmarks, or articulate affiliations with local high schools or historical figures?" (Funk 2013, 585).*

Concerning the Ideational function: the ePodravina logo is the written title of the page, paradigmatically it redirects the visitor of the site to always come to the homepage. The same logic is present in all four headers of analysed web pages.

In the top left corner of the header, there is also a depiction of weather and the centre of measurement – in the case of Podravina it's Koprivnica. Meanwhile the Glas Istre and Mariborinfo don't use the same logic with weather and the centre of the region in their homepage. Gorenjski Glas, similarly to the ePodravina, chooses the formal centre of a region as the town of the weather measurement, in the case of Gorenjska region the town is Kranj. As visible at Gorenjski Glas their website does not emphasize this information in the header, rather the weather information and articulation of the region's centre has a prominent position on the right column of the homepage, still prominently above-the-fold.

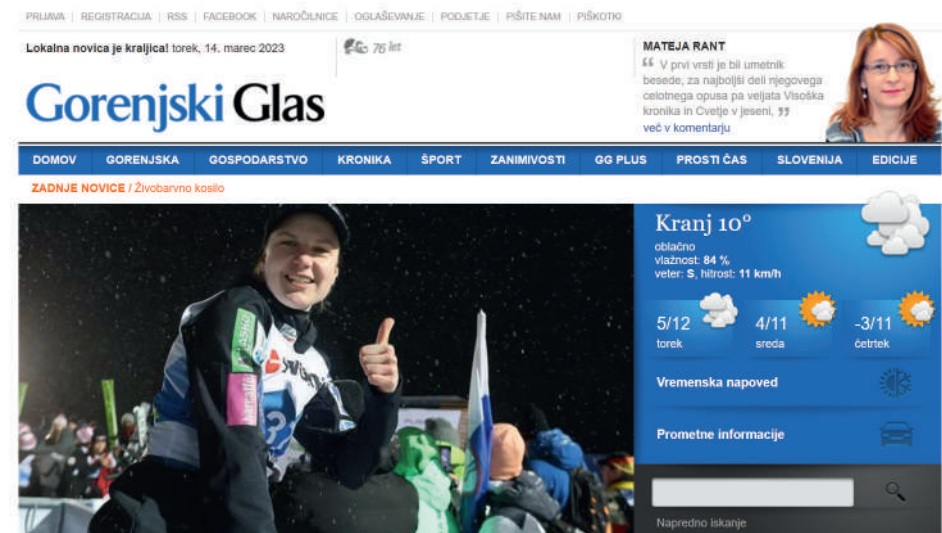
A close look at Gorenjski Glas header demonstrates many other identification points for local audiences. One of them is the "cloves of Gorenje" – gorenjski nagelj, a typical flower of the region, also the Slovenian national symbol. Beside the clove is the mention of "76", which applies to the 76 years of the legacy media, newspaper Gorenjski Glas. 76 years they're building the regional identity. The header also reinforces the locality and localism of the media with a saying: "Lokalna novice je kraljica!" meaning "Local news is the queen!".

At the right corner of the header a quotation from a local journalist or commentator always finds its place. These are authors and faces that users/readers recall from different public events in their neighbourhood and connect with the media and professional local news.

All above-the-fold sections that greet audiences at analysed webpages are abundant with visuals, especially we can see photos of humans (faces or human figures), photographed in medium close shots. These Actors in photos are highly indicative of local audiences and have, as Kress and van Leeuwen state, a psychological salience for viewers (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 63).



Figure 3: Above-the-fold of Gorenjski Glas news page



Source: Own, www.gorenjskiglas.si. Accessed March 14, 2023.

Another case of local identity reinforcement can be applied by choosing the colour palette of the header or the whole page. This is the example of Mariborinfo media that connects its colour palette strongly with the violet colour. Violet is the colour of the main football club in Maribor, NK Maribor (Plestenjak 2017), fans of the club are named "Vijole", consequently the violet became the informal colour of the second largest town in Slovenia, Maribor.

Adding to the information regarding the navigation in this article, a closer look at the main navigation bar of Glas Istre and Gorenjski Glas shows similarities: the second titled page is the region's name – Istra in the case of Glas Istre and Gorenjska in the case of Gorenjski Glas.

### 3.3 Interactivity

Locality on four homepages is supported in digital affordances that enable interactivity. First, a prominent pop-up invitation to sign up for a local newsletter is one of them, second an array of impending buttons that direct browsers to social media sites can be found at all sites analysed. In a syntagmatic way, these buttons are messaging the visitor that he has many networking options and that his local media is up to date. All four homepages have sections specifically prepared for the visitor: a selection of the most read articles or the editor's pick, in the case of Maribor info it's the section "What others are reading", all inviting the visitor to act and click the headlines. Additionally, Gorenjski Glas as a media with a long newspaper tradition puts forward the "letters to the editor". Gorenjski Glas, ePodravina, and Mariborinfo have the

possibility for comments, Slovenian ones enable the visitor to comment directly, ePodravina through a Facebook plugin. These modules are containing the modes where visitors/readers step into agentive roles, which is in contrast with other parts of homepages, where visitors/readers are meant as receivers of information. Since people can spend their free time at local events, Slovenian homepages have the local „event modules“, ePodravina has Kino (Cinema), at the same time Glas Istre highlights local events in articles that can be found on their homepage rather than in special category.

Moreover, local identity can be elicited also by contests and diverse gamification elements as it was within the analysed period in the case of Mariborinfo.

**Figure 4: Gamification element strengthening localism.**



Source: Own, at [www.mariborinfo.com](http://www.mariborinfo.com). Accessed March 10, 2023.

In this example, visitors were invited to vote for their favourite coffee place in Maribor and its surroundings. Because the selection of coffee shops is already offered, the intent corresponds with localism and encourages buying local goods. Furthermore, naming the places at which people regularly stop for a chat, coffee, or having a good time with friends or business partners carries an emotional attachment to the community.

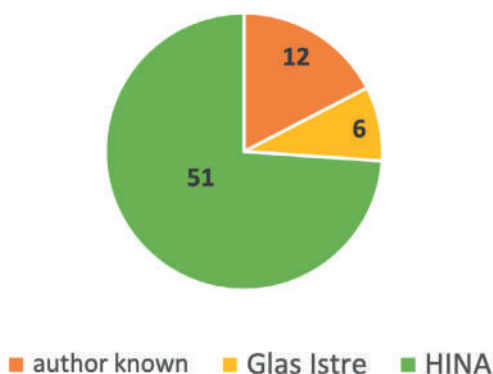
Likewise Glas Istre is connecting the local cuisine with their audience already on their homepage with "Gastro Kutak" entitled "Cook with Glas Istre", reaffirming that culinary tradition is a very important identification point in regional life.

### 3.4 Local vs. national and global

A slower chrono tope can be observed in local media, where "it seems, rather, that this is a slowness that is inherently related to the pace of life at a specific locality; in that sense, it may also represent a pace longed for within or in opposition to a networked and constantly updated digital environment, it is, of course, related to and opposing speed," (Bødker and Brügger 2019, 252).

Gorenjski Glas, Glas Istre, ePodravina, and Mariborinfo seem to be speeding up their chrono tope by adding various percent of national and global news to their homepage. The biggest percentage of non-local news was found at Glas Istre, where 70 – 85 % of reporting in the second week of March 2023 was in the form of nationally and globally themed articles of HINA, the Croatian national press agency. At Glas Istra this coincides with bylined news. In the same time frame Glas Istre had 17 % of news by a known local author and 9 % bylined by Glas Istre, meaning editorship, Gorenjski Glas had 95 % authored articles, and ePodravina 94 % of their own authored articles. 84 % of HINA's articles in this period were globally themed. In fact, we consider the bylined news as another possibility of strengthening the relationship between local media and their audiences. However, our case must not lead to a plain comparison, because Glas Istre in newspaper format is a regional daily newspaper (meanwhile Gorenjski Glas is issued twice a week), which importantly affects their content.

Figure 5: Number of bylined news (articles) with an explicit local author - Glas Istre



Source: Own, Glas Istre on March 13, 2023, the time frame presented in the picture is 03:00 – 13:00.

**Figure 6: Number of bylined news (articles) with an explicit local author - Mariborinfo**

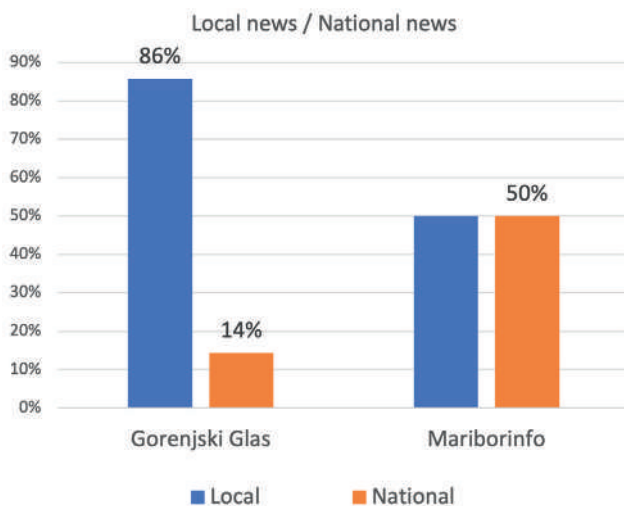


Source: Own, www.mariborinfo.com on March 13, 2023, the time frame presented in the picture is 03:00 – 13:00.

As presented in the picture above, Mariborinfo in this time frame bylined 17 % of articles with explicit local author, whereas 33 % of news were bylined by STA, Slovenian national press agency, and focused upon national news.

Already in December, when we started to make observations and preliminary readings, and also in the whole March 2023 Gorenjski Glas kept their local news percentage strong, reaching 85 % to 90 % in favour of local news or from a local viewpoint regarding the national topics.

**Figure 7: Local news vs. national news in Slovenian analysed homepages**



Source: Own, Gorenjski Glas and Mariborinfo on March 13, 2023, the time frame presented in the picture is 08:00 – 17:00.

Therefore, as the percentage of local news cannot be presumed, additional observations in different periods and seasons would be very valuable.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Analysis showed how elements that address local audiences and offer an invitation to belong to a local or regional community can be found in different modes apart from purely textual elements. Sometimes even textual descriptions could be more strategically planned, starting from meta descriptions already in the Google search engine results page, where only two news outlets make use of this opportunity.

The header and the main navigation zone in all four media communicate efficiently with recipients about where they live and what should attract their attention. Symbols and photos situate recipients in a known place and express the 'why statement' of media companies. Indirectly there are modules such as the weather section or event section that bring the visitor back to his home. A low percentage of bylined news by local authors is also a direction which, in our opinion, presents itself as an opportunity for change, reaffirming the relevance of local media for local surroundings. In the case of Glas Istra we cannot make any conclusions upon the big number of nationally and globally themed articles, as it could be a part of stepping into the demanding role of the one main daily news source for their potential readership.

Homepages in general offer different possibilities of interaction through the networking within social media sites plugins and buttons and different modules that promote two-way communication with editors of the site, though the sites would benefit from being more interactive by maturing their use of multi-modes and enhancing the visuals. They could gain from including a bigger proportion of videos, advanced navigation menus, 3D scroll effects, more internal linking, and innovative feedback tools that could upgrade engagement.

Though we did expose some strategies of invoking locality, there were many limitations concerning the data for this article and generalisation about online news media in Croatia and Slovenia shouldn't be made upon these findings. Additional more systematic and comparative in-depth analysis of supplementary visuals and meanings-making signs reaffirming the locality on these homepages (and other web pages) would offer new valuable insights into the inherent discursive formation. Concurrent research among readers/visitors would significantly build up an understanding of the efficiency of invoking locality and ethnographic approach to newsrooms would reveal the approaches and schemes behind journalism practices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In 2022 Europe responded to a global phenomenon of emerging news deserts, which influences the whole society, not only endangered local media. Policy-makers, governments, and civic organisations debate how changes in the media

landscape will affect voting procedures, health, education, infrastructure, etc. Therefore, researching the articulation of locality that binds the local environment with local media is of a great interest to society.

As researchers, we have an abundance of material in our immediate surroundings that call for our attention because the Western bias in communication sciences (Hanitzsch 2019) is already too big.

In this article, we have seen different practices and multimodal opportunities to connect the online media with their local environment. Forging interactivity, understanding news media through multimodal lenses, and acknowledging the use of various digital affordances can become a backbone of local digital media. More than ever before it becomes important to understand how to achieve the attention and loyalty of audiences that now „consume news accidentally“, their news consumption being „re-contextualized within a vast ocean of all kinds of other information that defies traditional definitions of newsworthiness“ (Boczkowski et al. 2018, 3523). The locality of the content itself cannot be enough to survive in the competitive sphere of different channels, since audiences seem to recognize the „misrepresentation of their community within larger news outlets“ (McCollough et al. 2017, 110), but don't necessarily feel like contributing their news or even become local or community journalists themselves. In addition to the complexity of relations, „loyalty to journalism entities does not unfold and becomes meaningful in a universal and predictable way. It varies according to people's personal experiences and tastes in relation to journalism, the situations of everyday life – both spatial and social – in which journalism is embedded, and the length of time they have been in contact with a particular journalism entity“ (Gajardo and Costera Meijer 2023, 13). Research for scholars (and better-informed media creators) must therefore continue by seeing audiences as communities of place and communities of interest at the same time (Ali 2016).

Above all, articulation of locality should be iterative, conscious, strategic hand-in-hand work of newsrooms and designers. At the same time, we should be keeping in mind that:

*„We need to make sure that whatever replaces the 20<sup>th</sup>-century version of local newspapers serves the same community-building functions. If we can figure out how to craft and implement sustainable news business models in our smallest, poorest markets, we can then empower journalistic entrepreneurs to revive and restore trust in media from the grassroots level up, in whatever form – print, broadcast or digital“ (Abernathy 2018, 9).*

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# THE IMPACT OF MODERN MEDIA ON THE WORK EFFICIENCY OF EMPLOYEES AND THE SAFETY ASPECT OF THEIR USE

Romana Lebar, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

Online social networks are considered a two-way communication medium of the modern era. They are present in all spheres of human life, including in their work environment. Employees also use them for personal purposes during active working hours. The most common reasons for this are the need to strengthen relationships and hedonistic and cognitive reasons. Their use in the work environment for personal purposes affects the employee and the organization. In theory, there is no consensus on which areas of employees and the organization these influences are most reflected in, and whether positive or negative influences prevail. The research question was about the impact of the use of online social networks on the work efficiency of an employee, if he uses them during active working hours, for personal purposes, or for purposes unrelated to his work task. An important aspect that will be observed at the same time is the user's (un)awareness of the (in)security of the use of online social networks in the work environment. We assume that the use of online social networks during working hours for personal purposes that are predominantly hedonistic has a negative impact on the work efficiency of the employee. We will prove the hypothesis by calculating the daily lost work efficiency per employee. At the same time, we assume that awareness of the (in)security of the use of online social networks among employees is low. For the research tool, a survey questionnaire is selected, which is forwarded to a random sample via social networks.

**Keywords:** online social networks, modern media, employees, work efficiency, (in)security of use of online social networks

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online social networks are applications, platforms or other online services and virtual integration and collaboration sites (Daowd 2016, 33). Technologically and ideologically they are based on the so-called web 2.0 (Tajvidi and Karami 2017, 2). They enable the exchange of content of various forms and the free sharing of ideas at the level of a particular virtual community, which can arise intentionally or randomly and act formally or informally (Rause 2014). Online social networks are used by 58.4 % of the world's population, representing 4.62 billion people (Stamford 2022). With their appearance, the way of communication between people has radically changed (Correa et al. 2010; Turban et al. 2011; Moqbel et al. 2013; Holland et al. 2016) on a mass, group, organizational, interpersonal, and also personal level. If communication is classified among the essential elements of culture, the emergence of online social networks can be understood as one of the factors of changes in culture (Castells and Poster in Oblak and Petrič 2005, 23). The possibility of two-way communication, which modern online social networks enable compared to traditional media, satisfies users' primary social need to connect with others and the need to "be heard" (Waters 2010). With the development and expansion of mobile devices, online social networks have gained even new and larger dimensions, as users are allowed to interact on social networks without time and space restrictions (Kane 2017, 41). Most often, the authors cite the need to socialize and strengthen relationships with family, relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances; hedonistic needs for pleasure and emotional experience; and cognitive reasons for satisfying the need to seek information and knowledge (Ali-Hassan et al. 2015, 67).

Online social networks are also increasingly present in work environments (Kane 2017; Tajudeen et al. 2018). Globally, 77 % of employees use online social networks during working hours and, on average, dedicate 12 % of their active working time to the use of non-productive social networks. Furthermore, we find that almost half of employers (45 %) do not have an adopted organizational policy (code) on the use of online social networks in the work environment and that a relatively large percentage of employers (36 %) prevent employees from using them during working hours (Kolmar 2022).

Employees use online social networks in the work environment for personal or business purposes. By "personal use", we mean their use for purposes that are not related to the employee's work and are used exclusively for personal purposes (e.g. monitoring daily news, posting, communicating with friends, playing games, commenting on forums, blogs, etc.). However, when employees use online social networks (publishing, monitoring news, finding contacts, commenting, checking good practices, tracking trends, etc.) because due to their nature of work this is

expected or necessary, we are talking about use for business purposes (Leftheriotis and Giannakos 2014, 134–142). In the literature, the term “cyber-slacking” is often used to refer to the personal use of social networks in the work environment, which could be translated as online “procrastination” (Batabyal and Bhal 2020, 631–647; Luqman et al. 2020, 1426–1436).

The presence of the use of online social networks in the work environment (for business or personal purposes) encourages researchers to think about the effects (positive and/or negative) that the use of online social networks has on the organization and the employee. We are witnessing numerous studies that focus on: the presence of online social networks in the work environment (van Zoonen et al. 2014; van Zoonen et al. 2017); their intensity (Charoensukmongkol 2014) and frequency of use (Bretschneiderin Parker 2016); correlation with relationship management in the organization (Tajudeen et al. 2018); the importance of searching and sharing information (de Zubielqui et al. 2019); satisfaction with the work task (Parveen et al. 2015); method of use for communication of employees with the family (Taha 2018) and culture of knowledge exchange (Naeem 2019, 257–276). We are also seeing research that talks about the impact of social networks on the work efficiency of employees, where we can find that there is no uniform opinion on whether online social networks in the work environment have a positive or negative effect on the work efficiency of employees. Some authors point out that the use of online social networks in the work environment improves the work efficiency of employees (Aknin et al. 2013; Richards 2012; Wu 2016; Brooks and Califf 2017; Moqbel and Nah 2017; Tamengkel and Rumawas 2020), while other authors point out the negative effects and risks to employees and organizations (Kühnel et al. 2017; Aguenza et al. 2012; Wushe and Shenje 2019; Razmerita et al. 2015; Tudu and Pathak 2015; Hysa et al. 2015; Sarbu 2017; Shami et al. 2014; Munene 2016; Shava et al. 2016), especially in the case of uncontrolled use of social networks during working hours for personal purposes. In these studies, we find that work efficiency is defined as the ratio of work outcome to the time invested in the event (Sickles and Zelenyuk 2019), or as the time spent by an employee to perform the work for which they are in charge in order to achieve the expected results (Ferreira and du Plessis 2009).

At this point, it is not superfluous to think about the aspect of (in)security of the use of online social networks in the working environment. These can pose the greatest security risk to the company's data and its possible leakage (Jemec 2011). With activities on online social networks, we become vulnerable to cybercrime (Wise 2009). It has been proven that by using online social networks, companies become more vulnerable (Sarbu 2017; Cao et al. 2012; Shami et al. 2014).

### **1.1 Area and objectives of the research**

The research focuses on the use of online social networks during working hours for personal purposes and the impacts that are consequently reflected on the employee's work efficiency. For the calculation of lost work efficiency, the theory according to the authors Ferreira and du Plessis (2009) is taken into account, which assumes that the time used by an employee to perform other things during active working hours that are not related to their work task (including the use of online social networks for personal purposes) is considered as lost work efficiency. In parallel, when using online social networks for personal purposes, the aspect of (un)awareness of the safety of use is also observed.

The primary objective of the research is to examine the extent to which the use of social networks affects the work efficiency of employees. By calculating the average working time and the average time that employees devote to using social networks for non-work-related purposes, data on lost work efficiency will be obtained. The main causes of the use of online social networks in the work environment for personal purposes will also be highlighted. An important aspect in the use of social networks in the workplace is also the security aspect. Therefore, the research aims to examine the level of awareness of employees about the aspect of (in)security, which is not negligible when using online social networks in the working environment.

Research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The use of online social networks in the work environment for personal purposes has a negative impact on the work efficiency of employees and reduces it.

Hypothesis 2: Hedonistic needs (pleasure and emotional experience) are the main cause of the use of online social networks in the work environment for personal purposes.

Hypothesis 3: The level of awareness of the importance of the aspect of (in)security when using social networks in the work environment is low.

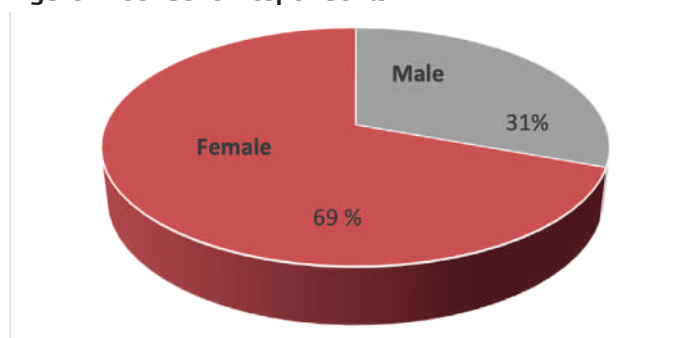
### **1.2 Methods of research:**

The secondary or theoretical part of the research involves the collection and processing of already existing data. Scientific methods of induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis and methods of comparison and generalization were used. The empirical part covers primary data collection within the research environment and questions. For the research tool, an online survey questionnaire was selected, which was distributed with the help of social networks. Participation in the survey was voluntary, the questionnaire was anonymous. Only people in employment or full-time employment were included in the random sample. The others were

excluded before the start of the survey, with the help of an “elimination” question. The survey was conducted in December 2022 and, in addition to demographic question (gender, age, education), it includes 12 closed-ended and one open-ended question related to the research topic. The data was processed in Microsoft Office Excel, and the results are presented in word, tabular, and graphical terms.

The survey, which was conducted over a one-month period, involved 346 respondents. 320 questionnaires were analysed, the other 26 questionnaires were only partially filled out or were prematurely interrupted and therefore excluded from the analysis.

**Figure 1: Gender of respondents**



Source: own research for the needs of the article

As can be seen from Table 1, the majority of respondents (20 %) belong to age group 3 and have a higher or university education. The least represented are employees of age groups 1 (youngest) and 6 (oldest), which together amount to only 3 % of all participants, with their education ranging from vocational secondary school to university.

**Table 1: Demographic data**

Age		Age groups						Num- ber (n)	Per- cent- age (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
		Up to 20 years	Fro m 21 to 30 years	Fro m 31 to 40 years	Fro m 41 to 50 years	Fro m 51 to 60 years	61 years and more		
Education	Primary school	0	1	1	0	2	0	4	1
	Vocational second- ary school or general secondary school	4	29	32	49	8	1	123	38
	Higher education or university	2	34	65	35	10	1	147	46
	Master's degree	0	5	17	9	1	0	32	10
	Master's degree or doctorate	0	0	6	4	4	0	14	4
Number (n)		6	69	121	97	25	2	320	100
Percentage (%)		2	22	38	30	8	1	-	100

Source: own research for the needs of the article

## 2. RESULTS

When asked about the number of hours employees spend in the work environment per day, the vast majority (86 %) say that they spend an average of 8 hours at work, 5 % say 9 hours, 4 % say 12 hours, 2 % say 10 or 11 hours. Based on the data, we can calculate that the average working time of respondents is 8 hours and 33 minutes (513 minutes). The calculated average time was expected, as most workplaces are regulated by an 8-hour workday. The data will be used to calculate the lost work efficiency of employees.

Almost half of respondents (43 %) do routine work, 31 % professional or clerical work and 21 % creative work that requires innovation and trend tracking. The option "other" was listed by 5 % of respondents. The majority of respondents (96 %) use online social networks in the workplace during working hours, while 4 % do not use social networks. With this question, it was emphasized that the time in question is working time, i.e. time devoted exclusively to work, and that lunch breaks or other breaks are exempt. A large percentage of respondents (76 %) who use online social networks in the workplace use them for non-work-related purposes, while 24 % use them for work purposes. The analysis shows that the vast majority of that 24 % are employees who perform creative or innovative work. The key results of the analysis related to this group of respondents will be presented below.

Respondents most often (30 %) use Facebook, 21 % of them use Instagram, 14 % LinkedIn, 11 % YouTube, 6 % Tik Tok, 5 % Twitter and WhatsApp, 3% Viber and 1% list "other online social networks". 4% of respondents who don't use social networks chose the answer "I do not use social networks".

Furthermore, the temporal use of online social networks was analysed during working hours, which were supposed to be devoted to active work. This is for use for purposes unrelated to the employee's work. We note that 24 % of respondents use online social networks for personal purposes for 45 minutes during the time they are supposed to be actively working. 21 % of them use them for 60 minutes, 20 % for 30 minutes, 15 % for 15 minutes, 11 % for 90 minutes, 5 % for 120 minutes or more and 4 % of respondents do not use social networks. Based on these responses, the average daily time of use of online social networks in the work environment was calculated for non-work-related purposes. The average time is 47 minutes, which we estimate as a relatively wide time span.

When asked about the main purpose of using online social networks in the work environment, most respondents (35 %) state that they use them for entertainment (commenting, searching and sharing pictures, videos, etc.), 28 % state the purpose of "informal exchange of information with colleagues, friends and family", 21% indicate the purpose of monitoring news and events around the world, and 12 % of employees use social networks for the purpose of education and searching for work-related information and contacts. 4 % of respondents state that they do not use social networks during working hours.

Under key advantages 43 % of respondents cite stress reduction, 19 % cite establishing and maintaining relationships with colleagues, friends and family, 20 % cite improving general and professional skills in connection with work, 13 % cite strengthening motivation, 3% see no benefits, and 2 % cite the answer "other advantages than those mentioned".

When asked about the disadvantages of using online social networks during working hours, more than half of respondents (55 %) indicate that the use of social networks during working hours, if their use is not related to work, distances employees from the essence of the work task. That the use of social networks is an unnecessary waste of time, which is otherwise intended for work, is stated by 22 % of respondents, further 12 % indicate an increased possibility of hacking into company data (malicious software codes, cyber-attacks, etc.), 7% state that the use of social networks has no disadvantages and 4 % indicate that excessive use of social networks can lead to addiction and mental problems.

The self-assessment of the impact of the use of social networks on the work efficiency of the respondents was also analysed. More than half of the respondents (57 %) say that social networks have a negative impact, 34 % say that they have a



positive impact (8 %) say that they have no influence and 4% of respondents who do not use social networks in the workplace say that social networks have no influence on their work efficiency because they do not use them. A relatively high percentage of self-assessment attributed to the negative impact was not expected.

A high percentage of respondents (77 %) state that in the company where they are employed, they do not have an organizational policy on the use of social networks (a code with rules and provisions on the use of online social networks in the working environment), while 23% of respondents said that such rules are in place. We further note that 58 % of those respondents who do not have an organizational policy on the use of social networks in companies have answered that their implementation would be reasonable, while 42 % believe that regulation of use is not necessary.

In the last open-ended question, we touched on the (un)awareness of the aspect of (in)security that is present when using social networks. 186 respondents (58 %) answered the question of whether they are aware of the dangers of using social networks in the workplace and of which dangers they are aware. The answers can be systematically classified into three categories: (in)security for the user of online social networks, which was highlighted by 49 % of the respondents, (in) security for the company, which was highlighted by 32 %, and no danger, which was the answer of 19 % of the respondents. In the category of "(in)security for users" of online social networks in the work environment, respondents most often highlight the following aspects: addiction to online social networks, possibility of identity theft (illegal data acquisition), loss of privacy, online harassment, loss of contact with reality, online fraud, loss of social skills (online communication replaces personal) and the formation of false self-image. In the category of "(in) security for companies", the following most frequently listed answers are meaningfully linked: increased possibility of hacking malware, reduction of the work efficiency of an employee ("I am stealing the company's working hours for which I am paid" was the answer of one of the respondents), disruption of the work process, increased possibility of leakage of important and confidential data from the company (it may result in a decrease in the reputation of the company and its competitiveness) and susceptibility to cybercrime. In the "no danger" category, respondents state very similarly that they do not feel "threatened" and that they do not see any danger when using online social networks.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The results of the research have shown that the use of online social networks, when used for personal purposes by employees in the work environment, has a negative impact on their work efficiency. Calculated lost work efficiency on a daily basis is an indicator of how extensive the loss can be if the daily calculation

is generalized to monthly or annual. The calculated loss of work efficiency would gain even more weight in the case of a financial evaluation, which could be an interesting topic for a larger survey. In addition to the financial aspect, the security aspect for the individual and the company is not negligible either, because despite the state-of-the-art protection systems, safety risks when using online social networks cannot be avoided. Awareness that there are safety risks associated with the use of online social networks is the first important step, both for the individual and the organization.

One of the possible ways we propose to regulate the use of online social networks in the work environment for personal purposes is an appropriate organizational policy (code) that would give instructions on what and in what time frames is allowed in the work environment (active working hours) and what is not. We agree with many theorists who point out that a total ban on the use of online social networks during working hours for personal purposes could have a negative impact on employees, as online social networks represent a powerful communication tool for employees. This idea is also confirmed by the fact that many very successful companies do not ban the use of online social networks in the work environment for personal purposes.

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# WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNINFORMED PUBLIC FOR ENERGY SECTOR?

Ivana Belić, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

Understanding current trends in each sector is important for developing more effective solutions. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the public is well-informed about the sectors that create our society. The energy sector is certainly one of them. The last year also showed how energy is important for preserving democracy with an emphasis on the energy independence of each individual society. The subject of this paper is to show how important an informed public is for the energy sector. Energy prices reached record levels in 2022. According to the report of the Council of the European Union (2023), the cause of the increase in energy prices is the Russian invasion of Ukraine, namely, the dependence of European countries on Russian gas. The research question is how familiar the general public is with the basic concepts of energy, energy transition and climate change mitigation. The main hypothesis is that an informed public is crucial for the energy sector. In order to conduct the research and verify the set hypotheses, the author will use quantitative research of a survey conducted on a sample of 572 respondents aged 18 to 65, as well as analysis of previously conducted research and available literature, to confirm the hypothesis that an informed public is important for the energy sector. Without energy independence, even a secure democracy is not possible.

**Keywords:** informed public, communication, energy crisis, energy transformation, climate change

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Peters, the public is a set of "operators who come out of their private environment and public opinion is their agreement on matters of general interest" (Peters in Jugo, 2012, 21). Education of the public and its inclusion in decision-making processes in the energy sector is still not a common phenomenon in Croatia, although progress is visible, mostly in the promotion of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. The media is the main information intermediary between the general public and each individual, including the energy sector. "The media are by no means just a mere factor in the transmission of information, which the term itself, etymologically speaking, incorrectly indicates, but they actively participate in the construction of social, political, economic, cultural and every other reality, but at the same time they are also a product of those same realities." (Hromadžić 2014, 18). An informed public is important for every sector, including energy, and according to Plenković, media communication has always been connected with education (Plenković 2014, 15).

In the age of different media communication channels, information is made easier, on the one hand, because it enables the provision of information from different sources (television, radio, newspapers, online portals, social networks, etc.). At the same time, it is also difficult, because it often sets before the general public the difficult task of distinguishing the relevant from the irrelevant, the true from the false. "Communication is sending a message from one point and reproducing it correctly or approximately correct at another point." (Zgrabljčić Rotar 2020, 52). If the recipients of the information are a poorly informed public, then this exact public cannot perceive the information as important and cannot identify with the sector topic itself. How important it is to deal with the public was emphasized by Glotz, who criticizes the communication science of this inability (Glotz in Kunczik 2006, 30). Therefore, the conclusion is drawn from the fact that one sector, in this case, the energy sector, without clear communication cannot transmit messages well to the general public, which then remains uninformed, and for topics and/or projects where public involvement is crucial, implementation is lacking.

The last major research on "Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency - 2003" was conducted in 2003. The research was conducted by a PhD Julije Domac and M.Sc. sc. Velimir Šegon from the Hrvoje Požar Energy Institute in cooperation with Assoc. dr. sc. Krešimir Kufrin from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, and Biljana Kulišić, B.Sc. oec., Ekoliburnia

## 2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this work is to determine the level of public awareness of energy transformation topics and to show how important an informed public is for the energy sector.

Based on the objective given, the following hypothesis has been set: an informed public is important for the energy sector. For research purposes, a survey was conducted with the help of the [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com) tool in the period from January 4 to 16, 2023. The survey was posted on social networks, where its reach was achieved by sharing, and it was accessed by 572 respondents aged 18 to 65 from the Republic of Croatia. It was conducted anonymously and voluntarily. The obtained research results will be seen in the context of previous research, one of which was conducted in December 2003 on 1,500 respondents in the area of the city of Rijeka and Zagreb, and the second in 2009 in the city of Zagreb, which was attended by 400 respondents. Both kinds of research will be analysed in order to compare data and draw conclusion.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the research will be used the method of analysing the conducted survey, previously conducted surveys on the subject of informing the public about important energy topics and concepts, and analysing the content of relevant literature. Firstly, the analysis of the content of the survey conducted in January 2023, conducted by the author of the article, will be undertaken. The data was collected through an online survey conducted with the help of the qualtrics online tool. The survey was carried out in the period from January 4 to 16, 2023.

The survey questionnaire was conducted anonymously and voluntarily and consisted of 3 introductory, 3 general and 27 thematic questions distributed in four thematic units to evaluate the level of information of the public through fundamental energy issues and terms. The survey was attended by 572 respondents aged 18 to 65 in the Republic of Croatia.

The first part of the questionnaire consists of 3 introductory questions which aim is to obtain information about the public's knowledge about energy transformation, the public's attitude towards the green agenda and green policies in general, and the degree to which the public perceives the threat from climate change. Respondents were offered response variables from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 4 thematic areas: Energy transformation and climate; Energy use and the objectives of the Green Deal; Investments, incentives and subventions and behaviours and habits. Within thematic areas, respondents were asked 27 questions to which they could give answers according to the Likert scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The third part of the questionnaire determines the type of residence, level of education and age of the respondents who participated in this research.

The purpose of an online survey conducted on 572 respondents was to examine how familiar the public is with the fundamental concepts of energy transformation, i.e. energy and climate, but also how much knowledge they have about legal regulations.

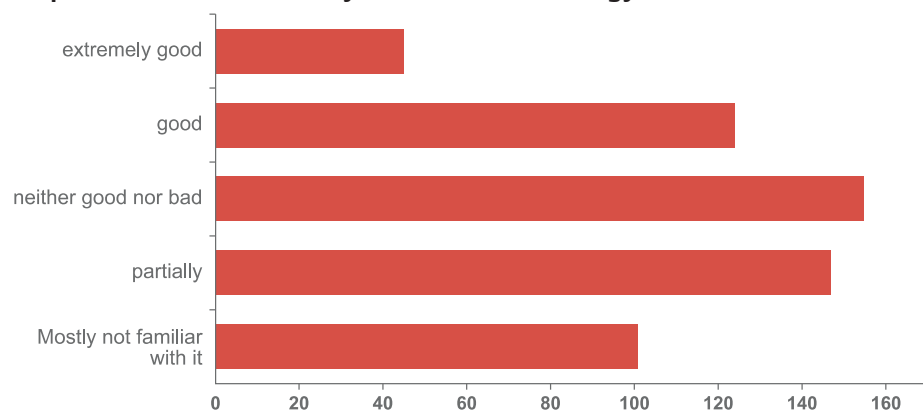


After the analysis of the conducted survey, the data and conclusions obtained from the large survey finished in December 2003 entitled "Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency - 2003" conducted by Dr. sc. Julija Domca and M.Sc. Velimir Šegon from the Energy Institute Hrvoje Požar in cooperation with Assoc. dr. sc. Krešimir Kufrin from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, and Biljana Kulišić, B.Sc. oec., Ekoliburnia will be analysed. After the analysis of the obtained results of the above-mentioned research, we will approach the analysis of the results of the survey conducted in August 2009, which was conducted by the Regional Energy Agency of North-western Croatia in cooperation with the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb, the Department of Sociology in the City of Zagreb, and which was attended by 400 of the respondents.

### 3.1. The results of the survey conducted in the period from January 4 to 16, 2023

In the survey participated 572 respondents in the age group from 18 to 65 both voluntarily and anonymously. Survey question number 1 asked the respondents to assess their level of knowledge about the energy transformation. According to the obtained results, most respondents answered that they were informed "neither well nor badly", exactly 27.1 % of them. 25.7 % of respondents were partially informed and 21.6 % were well informed. 17.6 % of respondents believe that they are not informed about the subject, and 7.8 % of respondents consider themselves extremely well-informed.

**Graph 1: To what extent are you familiar with energy transformation?**



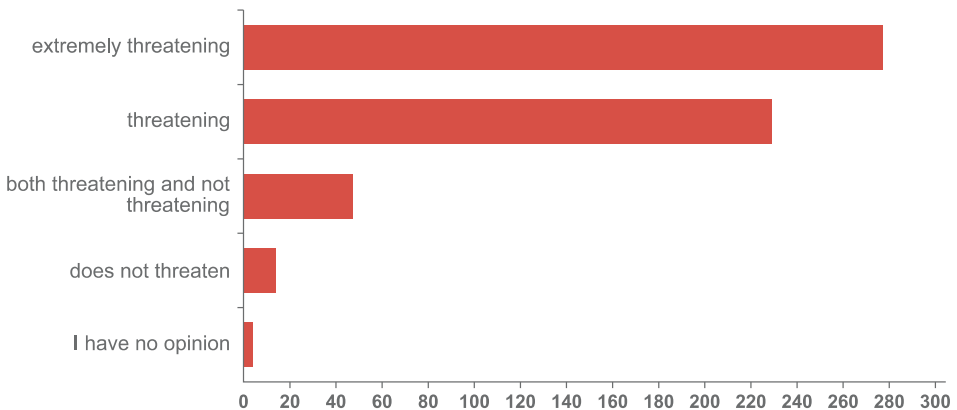
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	To what extent are you familiar with energy transformations?	1.00	5.00	3.24	1.20	1.44	572

Source: Survey 2023.

With the second question, an answer was obtained about the respondents' attitudes towards Green policies, in which 50.2 % of respondents expressed a positive attitude, and 28.8 % of respondents expressed an extremely positive attitude. 15.4 % of respondents have neither a positive nor a negative attitude, 4.4 % express a negative attitude towards the green agenda and green policies in general, and 1.2 % of them have an extremely negative attitude.

From the first group of questions, Q3 aimed to check the attitude of the respondents to what extent they consider the threat from climate change, whereby the majority of respondents, 48.4 % expressed a strong threat and 40 % of them a threat from climate change. 8.3 % of respondents believe that climate change is both threatening and not threatening, while 2.4 % believe that it is not threatening and 0.7 % of respondents have no opinion on the subject.

**Graph 2: In your opinion, to what extent does climate change threaten the quality of life on the planet?**



Source: Survey 2023.

The first topic area, Energy and climate, sets before respondents 7 questions. For the first question, which states that I am energy literate, 42.1 % of respondents agree with the statement, 38.1 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 9.9 % of respondents disagree, 7.1 % of respondents strongly agree, while 2.6 % of respondents strongly disagree.

The second question under the same topic tries to get an answer in which percentage of respondents agree or disagree with the statement about the importance of an informed public when it comes to energy transformation. 46.3 % of respondents agree on the importance of information, 40.7 % strongly agree, 5.9 % strongly disagree, 5.7 % neither agree nor disagree, while 1.2 % of them disagree.

The claim that energy transformation will slow down climate change shows that the majority of respondents, 52.6 % of them consider the statement to be true and

agree with it, 23.4 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 11 % of respondents strongly agree, and almost to the same extent they disagree, precisely 10.5 % of them. 2.5 % of respondents strongly disagree with the statement.

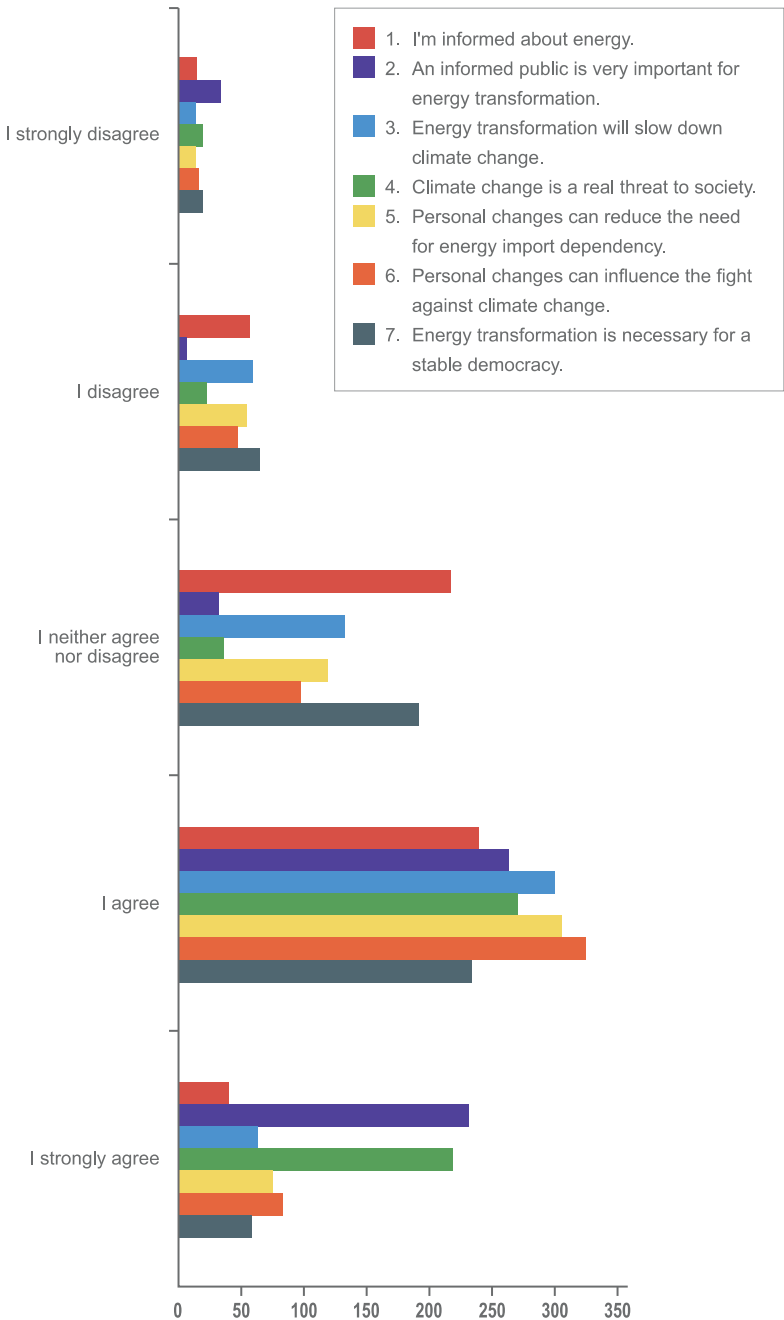
In the questionnaire, 47.5 % of respondents agree that climate change represents a real threat to society, and 38.5 % strongly agree. 6.5 % neither agree nor disagree, 4 % disagree and 3.5 % strongly disagree.

Under the topic of energy and climate, respondents were asked a question about assessing their own responsibility, so they answered the question of whether they think that personal changes can affect reduced dependence on energy imports. 52.7 % of respondents agree with the statement, 20.9 % neither agree nor disagree, 13.3 % strongly agree, while 9.6 % disagree and 2.4 % strongly disagree that their behaviour can influence the above.

The penultimate statement refers to personal changes in the field of combating climate change. 56.9 % of respondents agree, 17.1 % neither agree nor disagree, 14.7 % strongly agree, 8.4 % disagree, and 2.8 % strongly disagree.

The last statement refers to the energy transformation and its necessity for a stable democracy. 41.1 % agree with the statement, 33.7 % neither agree nor disagree, 11.4 % disagree, 10.3 % strongly agree, and 3.5 % strongly disagree.

Graph 3: Energy transformation and climate



Source: Survey 2023.

The second thematic unit of the survey questionnaire is the use of energy and the objectives of the Green Deal. The six statements have been set in order to show the respondents' attitudes and levels of information on the mentioned subject. 38.8 % of the respondents claim that they are not familiar enough with the national energy strategy documents on the subject of energy production/consumption. 27.4 % of them neither agree nor disagree with the statement, 17.7 % agree and consider themselves familiar, while 12.2 % strongly disagree and 3.8 % strongly agree. The second statement is the public's familiarity with national energy production and consumption (categories of energy sources), of which 32.5 % of respondents disagree with the statement, 29.2 % neither agree nor disagree, 24.8 % agree, 10.4 % strongly disagree, and 3.3 % strongly agree.

To what extent the respondents themselves follow global discussions and literature on the topic of energy production/consumption revealed that the majority of respondents, precisely 31.9 % neither agree nor disagree with the statement, 31.6 % disagree, 26.2 % agree while 6.5 % of them strongly disagree, and 3.7 % strongly agree.

The fourth question featuring the subject of public awareness of national energy production and consumption refers to EU energy directives and strategic documents, under which the majority of respondents, 37.4 % of them answered they disagree that they are informed about the topic, 22.2 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 22.0 % consider themselves informed, 14.2 % strongly disagree while 4.2 % strongly agree.

The penultimate statement refers to being informed about where to find written versions of EU energy directives and national strategic documents. According to the respondents' answers, an almost equal number both agree and disagree with the statement. 33.6% of respondents agree while 30.4 % disagree. 15.6 % neither agree nor disagree, 10.8% strongly disagree and 9.6 % strongly agree.

The awareness of the impact of the energy sector on the life of the respondents was expressed by 56.1 % of respondents who agreed, and 20.1 % of them who strongly agreed. 15.9 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement, 6.6 % disagree, and 1.2 % strongly disagree with the statement.

The third thematic unit of the second part of the survey refers to Investments, incentives and subventions, in which 36.7 % of respondents expressed that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement that their household is energy efficient, while 28.8 % disagreed with the same claim. Of the total number of respondents, 28.5 % agreed, 3.3 % strongly agreed, and 2.6 strongly disagreed.

The majority of respondents, 67.6 % of them, confirmed that they are aware of areas in which they can improve the energy efficiency of their household, and 11.4% strongly agreed. 14.3 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 5.9 %

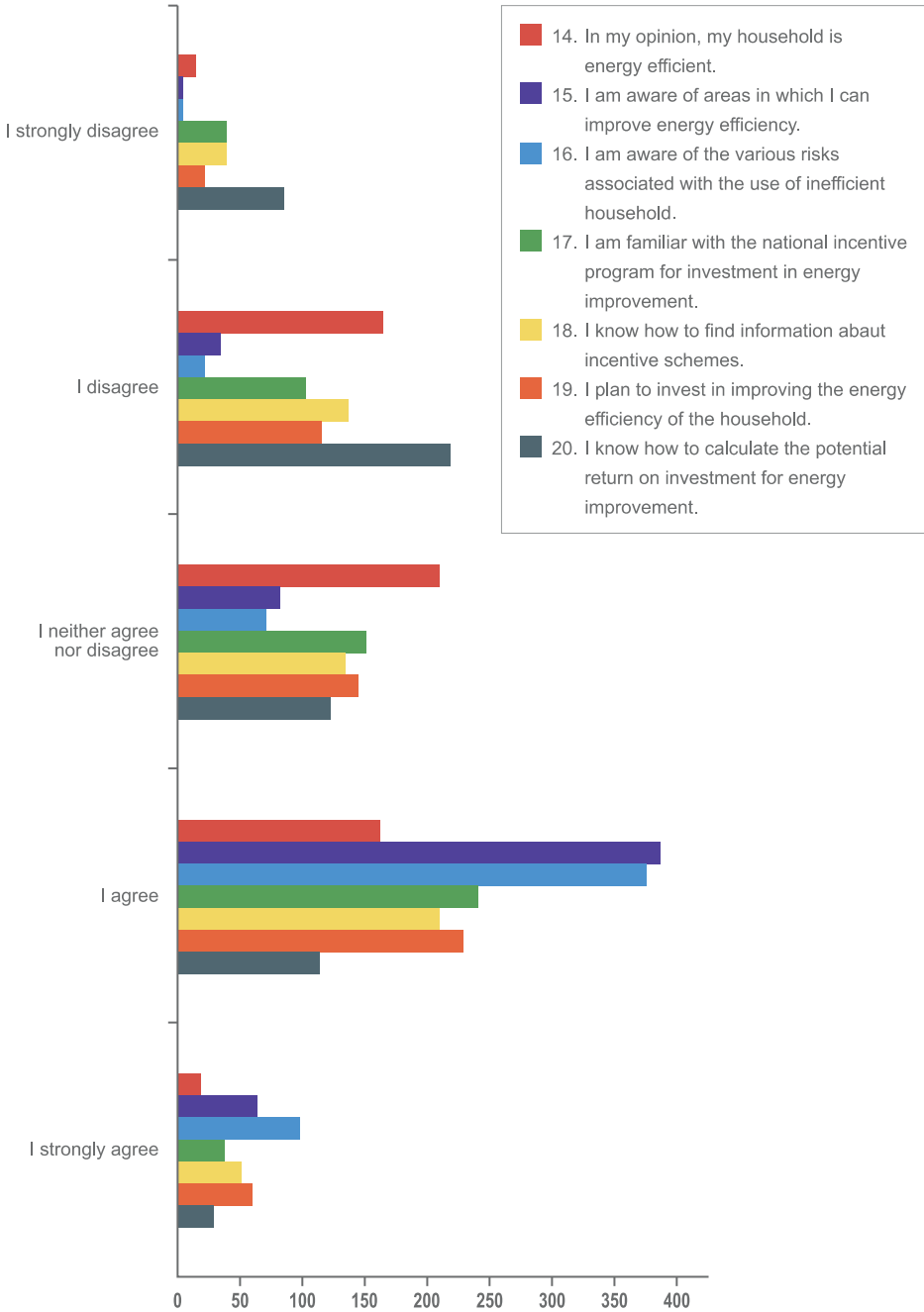
disagree that they are aware and 0.7 % strongly disagree. Regarding the awareness of risks related to the use of inefficient household appliances, 65.9 % of the respondents agreed, and 17.1 % strongly agreed. 12.4 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 3.8 % disagree, and 0.7 % strongly disagree, which is the same percentage as in the previous question. 42.1 % of respondents are aware of the national incentive program for investing in improving household energy efficiency, while 26.4 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree that they are aware of the aforementioned. 18% disagree and consider that they are not familiar, while 6.8 % strongly disagree and 6.6 % strongly agree.

Part of the respondents, 36.9 % think they know how to find information about incentive schemes, 23.9 % disagree, and 23.4 % neither agree nor disagree. 8.9 % of respondents strongly agree, and 6.8 % strongly disagree.

About plans for investments to improve household energy efficiency in the next one to five years, 40.2 % of respondents agreed with the statement, 25.3 % neither agreed nor disagreed, and 20.1 % disagreed. Of the total number of respondents, 10.5 % strongly agree with the statement that they are planning investments in the near future, and 3.8 % strongly disagree.

When asked about knowledge of calculating the potential return on investment for improving energy efficiency, 38.3 % of respondents disagreed with the statement, 21.5 % neither agreed nor disagreed, 19.9 % agreed, and 15 % strongly disagreed. Only 5.2 % of respondents strongly agreed.

**Graph 4: Investments, incentives and subventions**



Source: Survey 2023

The last thematic area covered by research is the behaviours and habits of respondents. 60.6 % of respondents agree with the statement that they are familiar with the concept of sustainable energy use, 18 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 14.34 % of respondents strongly agree, while 5.2 % disagree, and 1.7 % of them strongly disagree.

62.9 % of respondents are familiar with the term climate change and strongly agree with the statement, while 30.4 % strongly agree. 4.3 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree, 1.6 % disagree, and only 0.7 % strongly disagree.

When it comes to being informed about the work of energy companies, 34.6 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement, 29.4 % disagree, and 26 % agree. Of the total number of respondents, 5.4 % strongly agree, and 4.5 % strongly disagree.

41.9 % of respondents consider the energy sector more important than the tourism sector, and they agree with this statement. 33.9 % neither agree nor disagree, and 12.6 % strongly agree. 8.9 % of respondents disagree, while 2.6 % strongly disagree.

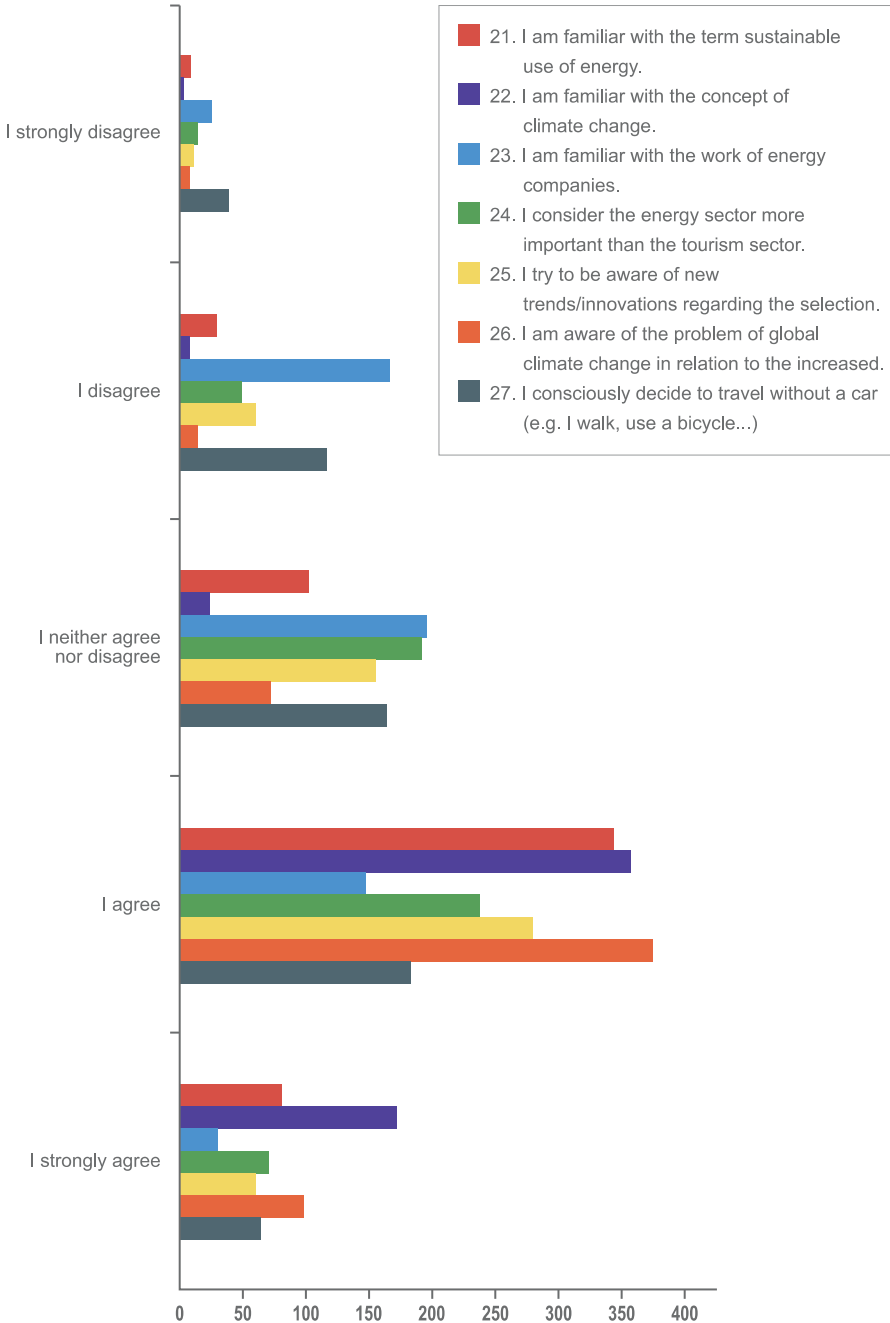
To the claim what percentage of respondents tries to be familiar with new trends regarding the choice of a sustainable lifestyle, 49.3 % of them agree with the statement and 27.4 % neither agree nor disagree. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement and those who strongly agreed with it, in this case, is equal and amounts to 10.7 %. 1 % strongly disagreed.

The penultimate question is summarized in the statement about the awareness of the problem of global climate change in connection with the increase in energy consumption and pollution in society. 65.91 % of respondents agreed with the statement, while 17.3 % strongly agreed, 12.8 % of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, 2.4 % disagreed, and 1.6 % strongly disagreed with the statement.

The last question of the fourth thematic unit of the survey questionnaire aimed to find out how many respondents consciously decide to travel without a car and thereby make an additional daily contribution to climate and energy protection. 32.3 % of the respondents agreed and 28.9 % neither agreed nor disagreed. 20.6 % of the respondents disagreed, while 11.4 % strongly agreed and 6.8 % strongly disagreed with the statement.



**Graph 5: Behaviours and habits**



Source: Survey 2023.

The questionnaire ended with an overview of the type of housing in which the respondents live, and according to the results, 75.9 % of the respondents live on their property, 13.1 % of them rent, and 11 % share a household with their parents. Moreover, with regard to the level of education, 81.6 % of respondents stated that they have a higher education, while 17.8 % have a secondary education, 0.3% have no education, and 0.1 % have a primary education.

In the survey participated 572 people, of which the largest number of respondents, 37.2 %, belongs to the 35-45 age group; then follows the age group 45 – 55 years, which was declared by 30.2 % of respondents. 15.6 % belong to the 25-35 group and 12.59 % to the 55-65 group. Only 4.2 % of respondents were in the first age group, that of 18-25 years.

### **3.2. Results of the December 2003 survey**

In December 2003, a large survey was conducted on 1,500 respondents entitled "Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency - 2003". The research was conducted by a PhD Julije Domac and M.Sc. Velimir Šegon from the Hrvoje Požar Energy Institute in cooperation with Assoc. dr. sc. Krešimir Kufrin from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, and Biljana Kulišić, B.Sc. oecc. Ekoliburnia.

The analysis carried out had two main conclusions, the first of which is the unequivocal support of the public in the use of those energy technologies and energy sources that reduce negative impacts on the environment, even in the case of a higher price of produced energy, and the relatively weak public awareness of both general aspects of energy production and consumption, as well as on specific aspects related to the use of renewable energy sources. The survey covered the urban population of Rijeka and Zagreb, whereby 600 people were interviewed in Rijeka and 900 in Zagreb. (Social ecology, 2004. Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. Attitudes and opinions of residents of Zagreb and Rijeka.). In its conclusion, the research indicates the further need for surveying residents in order to create an educational program that would enable more active involvement of citizens in projects in the area of the energy sector.

One of the questions aimed to determine the respondent's assessment of the level of information when it comes to saving energy, the impact of energy plants on the environment, and familiarity with the plans of the Government of the Republic of Croatia on energy production. The results showed that respondents are ill-informed about Croatia's plans, precisely 60 % of them. They also were not informed enough about the impact of energy plants on the environment. On the other hand, the respondents in the mentioned survey showed how well-informed they are regarding the economic use of energy. In conclusion, the authors of the survey did not question the level of information through the media, but only determined the degrees of information on certain energy topics.

### 3.3. The results of the August 2009 survey

400 respondents participated in the survey conducted in August 2009 in the area of the City of Zagreb. The research was carried out as part of the project "Socio-cultural aspects of the public's attitude towards renewable energy sources", which - with the support of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia - was carried out at the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb. The aim of the research was to determine the attitudes and opinions of the citizens of the City of Zagreb on the use of renewable energy sources and the application of energy efficiency measures (Kufirin 2009). The data were collected through a survey conducted using the technique of individual oral interviews (face-to-face). The results obtained through this research also showed that the respondents believe that they are the best informed when it comes to savings and more efficient use of energy in the household (46 % believe that they are "well" or "extremely well" informed). However, a low level of public knowledge is mainly about the topics concerning the use of renewable energy sources and alternative fuels, measures for more efficient use of energy in the city of Zagreb and plans for the construction of new power plants in Croatia. On none of these topics, the answers "good" and "extremely good" were recorded with a frequency higher than 10 %. (Kufirin 2009). In the conclusion of the survey, it is stated that "A strong desire for additional information on energy issues was expressed: regardless of the topic, at least three-fifths of the respondents expressed this need, and more than four-fifths showed interest in 5 of the 8 topics offered." In the centre of interest are topics related to the use of energy in the household, which suggests that interest in energy topics is primarily motivated by energy bills issued." (Kufirin 2009)

## 4. DISCUSSION

If we compare the results of the research carried out in 2003 and 2008 and the results obtained from the research from 2023, we can conclude that the public is ready to accept changes, however, neither then nor today is informed enough with national plans in the field of energy production and consumption, nor with strategic incentive plans, which should be reflected in the energy strategic document. The results confirm the hypothesis that an informed public is important for the energy sector, because it is precisely the lack of information that is holding back the energy transformation in this case, specifically Croatian society, which is supported by the latest Eurostat report from 2022, according to which Croatia is the second worst per capita in the EU when speaking about the installed capacity of solar power plants (Eurostat 2023).

From then until 2023, no survey of a similar nature was conducted, therefore the 2023 survey represents the latest one with a population of 572 respondents cov-

ering the entire territory of the Republic of Croatia. A sample of this size allows conclusions to be drawn with an acceptable margin of error.

The obtained results of the survey in 2023 show that for the further implementation of energy projects it is important to inform the public about national policies and measures and to familiarize the public with national strategic projects. All this is possible with the assumption that the strategic frameworks of the national government exist. The public, which is informed about the situation within a particular sector and has relatively good knowledge about key events that affect the life of every individual, is ready for changes that are possible with a clear vision and plan of the state.

The answers received suggest that the public is half-informed about the topic. Furthermore, answers suggest that respondents feel the threat from climate change, but they also have a positive attitude towards the green agenda and policies.

The reasons behind relatively poor information can be different - low interest in the mentioned topics, insufficient, deficient and sporadic information that citizens receive from competent services and institutions and through the mass media, narrowly economic and "private" interest in energy topics - which cannot be reliably determined based on this particular survey. What can certainly be determined is the insufficient level of information from the responses of the respondents.

It must also be noted that the self-assessment of information should not be unconditionally considered as an objective indicator of the actual level of information, since such an assessment is not independent of various "intervening" variables such as personality traits. Nevertheless, the results that are shown indicate the relative relationships of information about certain topics and suggest groups of topics about which level of information is on a similar level.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the aforementioned research and available data, it follows that it is important for citizens to understand the problems and decisions that concern them, and the results of the conducted survey showed three key things: a) The majority of respondents consider the energy sector more important than the tourism sector and are aware of the impact of the sector on everyday life, b) The majority of respondents recognize their own responsibility in preventing climate change and are ready to switch to energy-efficient and renewable energy sources, even though the calculation of return on investment is not clear to the majority c) The majority of respondents are not informed enough about national energy production and consumption, as well as the energy strategy.

The benefits of an informed public are visible in every sector. For example, a well-informed public can make good financial decisions that can improve their

economic well-being. An informed public can also make better health and safety decisions, which can lead to improved public health outcomes. This is best illustrated through the COVID-19 pandemic and the acceptance or non-acceptance of the decisions of health institutions and experts. In addition, an informed public can help promote civic participation and foster a more engaged society. It follows that when the public is informed, they are more likely to participate in the decision-making process, which can help lead to better policies. An informed public can also help make the public aware of the problems facing our society, which can help create better solutions that benefit everyone. Despite the importance of an informed public for every sector, several challenges need to be overcome in order to ensure that the public has access to the necessary information.

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of access to quality information. In today's society, there is an abundance of information available, but it is often unreliable or incomplete. This can lead to a situation where the public is not aware of important information that could be used to make better decisions.

Another challenge facing an informed public is the negative effect of misinformation. With so much information available, it can be difficult to determine which sources are reliable and which are not. This can lead to the spread of false information, which can have a serious impact on public decision-making. Finally, the difficulty in obtaining accurate information on time can also be a challenge for an informed public. As the news cycle moves quickly, it can be difficult to keep up with the latest developments in each sector. This can lead to the public having an incomplete or outdated understanding of current trends. Ethical principles should be followed here.

The third, perhaps the most important challenge to overcome is the existence of national plans and strategies that the public will be familiar with and will be able to follow and act in accordance with them, as well as make their own plans at the levels of their lives.

Numerous strategies can be used to develop an informed public. The first step should be to provide information materials that the public can easily access. This can include newsletters, brochures, websites and social networks, and traditional media (television, radio, print) that are regularly updated with accurate information. In addition, organizing informative events and workshops can be a great way to spread knowledge and understanding. To ensure that this information reaches the right people, it is important to build relationships with community members and establish a network of people who can spread information and serve as resources for the public. In this way, people can easily access relevant information and stay up to date with the latest trends and developments in each sector. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that the language used is clear and easily understood by the public. We often witness situations where communication

is carried out in professional language that is not comprehensible to the general population. It is equally important to communicate information attractively and interestingly way to keep people interested and motivated to stay informed.

These strategies can help create an informed public that can make the right decisions and improve the success of each sector. The more informed the public is, the better equipped it is to make decisions that will benefit society as a whole. In addition, an informed public can also benefit the sector in terms of security. A well-informed public can help detect and report any suspicious activity that may be taking place in the sector. This can help prevent any malicious activity, such as fraud and theft. An informed public is crucial for every sector, as well as for society in general.

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# DIGITAL CHANNELS AS A MARKETING METHOD IN SLOVENIAN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Sabrina Simonovich, Ph.D. Candidate**

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Digital channels as a form of marketing are becoming the main way of marketing communication for companies worldwide. It is not hard to see why: real-time communication, which establishes them as an effective marketing method. Ratten (2014, 1) concludes that as more businesses utilise emerging technology, this has shaped the way that social e-enterprises are functioning. The aim of this thesis is to focus on the link between digital marketing and social entrepreneurship in Slovenia, offering a new perspective on the role of digital marketing in the development and success of social entrepreneurship. **Methods:** The study includes a quantitative and qualitative method: a digital survey of all the social enterprises in Slovenia and a literature analyses of the previous studies. **Results:** The results will contribute to the existing literature on digital marketing and social entrepreneurship. **Discussion:** Social enterprises work for social benefit and are therefore less market-oriented. For this reason, it is possible that they do not use enough new and more effective marketing methods, which may affect not only their successful operation but also the service user's awareness of the social benefit orientation of the social enterprise and his/her indirect support for such enterprises.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, digital marketing, marketing methods, digital communication, digital channels

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*"Social entrepreneurship is a form of entrepreneurship that responds to problems in society with its products and services and creates social benefit. Through their activities, social enterprises contribute to the innovative solution of social, economic, environmental and other social problems and provide jobs and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Social entrepreneurship means the permanent performance of social entrepreneurship or other activities under special employment conditions, namely through the production and sale of products or the provision of services on the market, but making a profit is not the main goal of the activity. The main purpose of social entrepreneurship is to employ long-term unemployed persons and to engage them in such a way that they independently generate income and provide for their own survival within the framework of social entrepreneurship." (Government of Slovenia, social enterprises)*

Digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. Digital marketing's development since the 1990s and 2000s has changed the way brands and businesses use technology for marketing. As digital platforms are increasingly incorporated into marketing plans and everyday life, and as people use digital devices instead of visiting physical shops, digital marketing campaigns are becoming more prevalent and efficient. [...] Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers. This can also be referred as 'online marketing', 'internet marketing' or 'web marketing'. Digital marketing is defined by use of numerous digital tactics and channels to connect with customers where they spend much of their time: online. From website to business's online branding assets - digital advertising, email marketing, online brochures, and beyond -- there's spectrum of tactics falling under the umbrella of digital marketing. Digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. Digital marketing methods such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Content Marketing, influencer marketing, content automation, campaign marketing, data-driven marketing, e-commerce marketing, social media marketing, social media optimization, e-mail direct marketing, display advertising, e- books, and optical disks and games are becoming more common in advancing technology. Digital marketing now extends to non-Internet channels that provide digital media, such as mobile phones (SMS and MMS), callback, and on-hold mobile ring tones. [...] Digital marketing's development since 1990s and 2000s has changed way brands and businesses use technology for marketing. As digital platforms are increasingly incorporated into marketing



plans and everyday life, and as people use digital devices instead of visiting physical shops, digital marketing campaigns are becoming more prevalent and efficient. In 2007, the concept of marketing automation was raised to solve the problem above. Marketing automation helped companies' segment customers, launch multichannel marketing campaigns and provide personalized information for customers. However, the speed of its adaptability to consumer devices was not fast enough. Digital marketing became more sophisticated in the 2000s and the 2010s, when the proliferation of devices' capable of accessing digital media led to sudden growth. Statistics produced in 2012 and 2013 showed that digital marketing was still growing. With development of social media in the 2000s, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, consumers became highly dependent on digital electronics in daily lives. They expected seamless user experience across different channels for searching product's information. The change of customer behavior improved the diversification of marketing technology. Worldwide digital marketing has become the most common term, especially after the year 2013. Digital media growth was estimated at 4.5 trillion online ads served annually with digital media spend at 48 % growth in 2010. An increasing portion of advertising stems from businesses employing Online Behavioral Advertising (OBA) to tailor advertising for internet users, but OBA raises concern of consumer privacy and data protection. Digital Marketing Tactics and Examples: Digital marketers are in charge of driving brand awareness and lead generation through all the digital channels - both free and paid - at company's disposal. These channels include social media, the company's own website, search engine rankings, email, display advertising, and the company's blog. The digital marketer focuses on different key performance indicator (KPI) for each channel so they can properly measure the company's performance across each one. Digital marketing is carried out across many marketing roles today. In small companies, one generalist might own many of the digital marketing tactics described above at the same time. In larger companies, these tactics have multiple specialists that each focus on just one or two of the brand's digital channels. [...] Online PR: Online PR is practice of securing earned online coverage with digital publications, blogs, and other content-based websites. It's much like traditional PR, but in the online space. The channels you can use to maximize your PR efforts include: Reporter outreach via social media Engaging online reviews of your company, Engaging comments on your personal website or the product or services in the current technological market with all its pros and cons." (Desai 2019, 196–200)

"Digital marketing is one type of marketing being widely used to promote products or services and to reach consumers using digital channels. Digital marketing extends beyond internet marketing including channels that do not require the use of Internet. It includes mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), social media

marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing and many other forms of digital media. Through digital media, consumers can access information any time and any place where they want. [...] Digital marketing is a broad term that refers to various promotional techniques deployed to reach customers via digital technologies. Digital marketing embodies an extensive selection of service, product and brand marketing tactics which mainly use Internet as a core promotional medium in addition to mobile and traditional TV and radio." (Afrina et al. 2015, 72) Marketers are faced with new challenges and opportunities within this digital age. Digital marketing is the utilization of electronic media by the marketers to promote the products or services into the market. The main objective of digital marketing is attracting customers and allowing them to interact with the brand through digital media. This article explores the domains of digital marketing channels, specifically e-mail marketing, social media marketing, and website marketing to understand how they can contribute to growth for the social enterprises business and social mission visibility.

## **2. PURPOSE AND GOALS**

The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the utilization and goals of digital marketing and examines factors that influence the adoption and use of digital marketing channels in social enterprises in Slovenia. The result should give also an answer about the reasons they may exist for a poor use of digital channels in marketing purposes.

## **3. METHODS**

The data comprises a digital survey that was sent to all social enterprises in Slovenia. There are 263 social enterprises in Slovenia and 192 of them answered to the survey. The data has been collected between september and december 2022 from that 192 social enterprises that answered the survey, who had been found on the Slovene Social Enterprises list on the web site of the Government of Slovenia. The social enterprises has been contacted by e-mail, some of them invited to answer to the sent interview also by a phone call. A structured interview in a digital survey form has been chosen for this study as a quantitative method, an open-response survey question was added to the survey and a literature analyses of the previous studies has been chosen as a qualitative method. In fact no similar study has been found to be done for social enterprises marketing digital channels in Slovenia, but some of them in other countries has been done and resulted useful to compare the study steps and results. The analyses method used was simple as the survey possibilities were just few, so the results has been collected and a percentage calculated.

The survey contained 5 concrete structured questions and 1 open-response question:

- To the question if they are you using digital channels for the marketing purposes of their social enterprise, the possible answer was "yes" or "no".
- To the question which digital channels do they use for this purpose, they should mark one of the possible answers (Mail, Web page, Social networks)
- To the question how often do they use digital channels for marketing purposes, they could choose between 1-3 times a week, more than 3 times a week, 1-2 times a month and less than once a month.
- To the questions if they think their choice of digital channels for marketing purposes is effective and if they in any way monitor the response of their customers in connection with their posts through digital channels, the possible answers was "yes" or "no".
- And, finally, the question if they think their social enterprise is investing enough time and knowledge in digital marketing and if not what is the reason, was an open-response question.

#### 4. RESULTS

The results undoubtedly showed a poor investment of social enterprises in digital marketing, mostly due to lack of resources.

- To the question if they are you using digital channels for the marketing purposes of their social enterprise, 170 of 192 social enterprises answered "yes" (88,5 %).
- To the question which digital channels do they use for this purpose, 153 social enterprises answered that they are using e-mail marketing (79,7 %), 114 social enterprises are using a web page (59,3 %) and 168 social enterprises are using social networks (87,5 %).
- To the question how often do they use digital channels for marketing purposes, 56 social enterprises are using digital marketing 1-3 times a week (29 %), none of them are using digital marketing more than 3 times a week (0 %), 112 social enterprises are using digital marketing 1-2 times a month (58,3 %) and 24 social enterprises are using digital marketing less than once a month (12,5 %).
- To the questions if they think their choice of digital channels for marketing purposes is effective, 144 social enterprises think their choice of digital channels for marketing purposes is effective (75 %).
- To the question if they in any way monitor the response of their customers in connection with their posts through digital channels, 174 social enterprises doesn't monitor the response of their customers in connection with their posts through digital channels (90,6 %).

- At the question if they think their social enterprise is investing enough time and knowledge in digital marketing and if not what is the reason, 190 social enterprises's opinion is that they should invest more in digital marketing, but the main problem that makes this impossible to them is resource-related. They mainly don't have one person in the company that is employed just for the marketing and they have a lack of time and knowledge for it (98,95 %).

The main results of the study reveal that the interviewed companies mainly utilize various digital marketing communication channels. Some of them prefer one digital marketing communication channel to another contingent on their product or service and targeted customers. The study revealed different objectives of online marketing among the social enterprises with brand building, advertisement for the products or services and raising awareness. The utilization of online marketing among the case social enterprises depended on the resource-related, owner-manager, and environmental factors. Resource-related reasons were found to be prevailing for the interviewed social enterprises that make a greater adaptation of digital marketing difficult. The results also show that the interviewed social enterprises doesn't have consistent digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies and doesn't analyze the marketing actions consequences. The reasons for that were also linked to resource-related factors. Very similar results were found in other countries studies (Taiminen and Karjaluoto 2015, 650; Key 2017, 27; Chinara 2018, 2)

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that social enterprises seem not use the full potential of the new digital tools, and so are not deriving benefit from the opportunities they provide. Furthermore, the results also raise the question of whether social enterprises managers have understood the fundamental change in the nature of communication brought about by digitization. Social enterprises seem not to be keeping pace with digital developments, mostly due to the lack of knowledge of digital marketing. Most of the studied social enterprises do not apply the full potential of the new digital channels and hence are not benefitting fully from them. Existing research into marketing approaches employed by non-profit organisations (NPOs) shows that marketing is still undervalued. Previous research suggests that to develop business value and achieve a competitive advantage, IT infrastructure must be appropriately designed, employed, and realistically applied. Many similar studies outside Slovenia showed the same results. (Awiagah et al. 2015, 831; Shea et al. 2017, 224; Zafar and Mustafa 2017, 202; Riera and Iijima 2019, 88; Nazmul et al 2021, 345) Poor IT skills and awareness are also seen as barriers to the success of a social enterprise. Digital transformation, driven by technological advances and changing customer requirements, is stimulating the use of digital marketing.

11 % of Swiss organizations regard digital marketing as a key investment area as part of their overall digital transformation strategy, with over one third of Swiss organizations currently investing in new sales and marketing tools. SME are lagging behind LE and generally do not use digital marketing tools, channels, and platforms. Barriers that prevent SME from adopting higher digital marketing tools are cultural change, limited resources/high costs, technology, and expertise. (Peter and Dalla Vecchia 2021, 259) Interactivity helps social enterprises in many ways in personalizing and co-creating their offerings, building trust among key stakeholders by showcasing transparency and authenticity, and spreading good words to a wider audience in a cost-effective way. Social enterprises use innovative ways such as using an app to maintain transparency about their offerings and operations or showcasing their social impact and offerings through digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and their websites. For instance, videos featuring their innovative offerings and initiatives can go viral through apps like Whatsapp and let people know about these organizations. The digital marketing tools are more suitable for social enterprises as they face challenges such as lack of resources and well-established distribution setup. (Bandyopadhyay and Ray 2019, 255) Another point of view is that social media platforms, with over 3.96 billion active users across the world, can facilitate social enterprises to develop social networks and integration with vulnerable people in society, understand their social needs and provide solutions with minimum cost and time (Abedin et al. 2019, Cheung et al. 2019). Using social media platforms, social enterprises can more effectively raise funds from diverse crowds and thereby deliver greater value to the disadvantaged segment of a population (Presenza et al., 2019). Researches on social media platforms and social enterprises performance falls into three key clusters: "social media, social collaboration, and social marketing", "social media and crowdfunding", and "social media and crowdsourcing". (Imran et al. 2022, 3) According to Imran et al. (2022), social enterprises face the challenge of access to adequate financial resources and therefore need to adopt a lean digital marketing strategy in a competitive marketplace. Digital marketing through social media is one of the most cost-effective ways for a social enterprise to make an impact on the digital community (Imran et al. 2022) There are no inherent costs associated with setting up a social media account on any of the most popular social media networks such, but you do need to consider the resources required to undertake the work (Imran et al. 2022). Furthermore, there is a massive and active following on major social media channels with figures well into the billions. Direct digital marketing is used to send ads, to build brand and customer loyalty, to build customer trust and to make brand awareness. Company can promote its products and services by using this element of digital marketing easily. It is relatively low cost comparing to advertising or other forms of media exposure. Company can bring

complete attention of the customer by creating attractive mix of graphics, text and links on the products and services. (Imran et al. 2022). "A social enterprise needs to determine about how social media fits into the digital architecture of the enterprise and how social media transforms the social enterprise. Through effective use of social media, companies have captured substantial efficiencies in customer care with reductions in handling time and cost per case of more than 30 percent. Enterprises have been able to increase their participation in collaboration by more than 200 % and increased revenue by more than 100% through social business strategy implementation. These enterprises have been able to attain this by building and implementing a digital social collaboration platform in less than three months." (Nxumalo and Chiweshe 2019, 25) "Today, social media marketing is one of the most important digital marketing channels. It is a computer-based tool that allows people to create, exchange ideas, information and pictures about the company's product or services. According to Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type. Social media marketing networks include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Through Facebook, company can promote events concerning product and services, run promotions that comply with the Facebook guidelines and explore new opportunities. Through Twitter, company can increase the awareness and visibility of their brand. It is the best tool for the promotion of company's products and services. In LinkedIn, professionals write their profile and share information with others. Company can develop their profile in LinkedIn so that the professionals can view and can get more information about the company's product and services. Google+ is also social media network that is more effective than other social media like Facebook, Twitter. It is not only simple social media network but also it is an authorship tool that links web-content directly with its owner. Text Messaging is a way to send information about the products and services from cellular and smart phone devices. By using phone devices, company can send information in the form of text (SMS), pictures, video or audio (MMS). Marketing through cellphone SMS (Short Message Service) became increasingly popular in the early 2000s in Europe and some parts of Asia. One can send order confirmations, shipping alerts using text message. Using SMS for campaigns get faster and more substantial results. Under this technique, companies can send marketing messages to their customers in real-time, any time and can be confident that the message will be seen. Company can create a questionnaire and obtain valuable customer feedback essential to develop their products or services in future." (Afrina et al. 2015, 79)

It depends on the type of product or service obviously, which digital channel is for the social enterprise most suitable. And a social enterprise can also obviously use more different digital channels to promote it's service or product. It is a challenge to study further, which digital channel is more effective for one or the

other product or service. But what are the possible activities of digital channels for marketing purposes?

"Use of the following activities of channels is characteristic for the digital or Internet marketing: 1. Contextual Advertising – a type of online advertising, which uses the "context algorithm" for detection of the target audience by showing the advertisement to the users searching for the products/services related to the respective topics or going to the websites related to the respective products/services; 2. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – a set of activities aimed at improving the position of the company in the search results of Internet search engines thus attracting additional users to the company website; 3. Social Media Marketing – three aspects of the social media marketing are the most important: advertising in the social media, which could be viewed as a part of the contextual advertising; content marketing or activities with the purpose for creating a database with loyal users with the help of communication materials as well as the aspect of public relations involving communication with the users in social media; 4. Affiliate Marketing or so called performance-based marketing involves advertising in the partner resources using commissions for each conversion as a monetization model, namely, when the desired action is completed by the user attracted by the advertiser's partner; 5. Website development – on the Internet website works as a selling tool of the company as well as a platform for the communication with customers; therefore the website which is built according to the psychology of the internet users can ensure higher marketing results. Furthermore, several of the above mentioned marketing tools use a website for forwarding information." (Sceulovs and Lorens, 2017, 2) Stephan (2016, 20) highlighted that digital consumer behavior research is growing due to increased technology use, information from social media is a major influence on consumer decision making, research should consider how consumers are impacted by their digital environments and this study results are in harmony with those highlights, adding a need to share more financial sources for marketing in social enterprises, because it is the main reason of a poor marketing through digital channels.

With digital marketing, consumers can engage with the company's various activities. Consumers can visit company's website, read information about the products or services and make purchases online and provide feedback. There are clear informations about the products or services. The prices of products or services are very clear through digital marketing channels and this makes prices very transparent for the customers. Company may regularly change the prices or gives special offers on their products or services and customers are always in advantages by getting informed instantly via digital channels.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to the theory of social enterprises' marketing strategies and barriers, and suggests practical lessons in managing social enterprises and the development of marketing strategies. This study could also stimulate future research focusing on the use of different online marketing platforms by social enterprise's customers or users. It would be worthwhile to examine whether or not different marketing options (i.e., social media, digital marketing) meet this objective by addressing the issue from a customer viewpoint. Future research could take the views of other stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, and others. Also, in future studies, researchers can follow different strategies (i.e., mix methods), theories (i.e., technology adoption model), or analysis processes (such as content analysis) which may provide further insights into the subject area.

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# JOURNALIST'S INTERPRETATION OF VACCINATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Dubravka Jakšetić, Ph.D. Candidate

Alma Mater Europaea – European Center Maribor, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

The paper presents the research that was carried out with the aim of determining the method of media reporting on the vaccination against Covid-19 and its effectiveness. The aim of the paper was to determine how well the media reports were supported by scientific evidence. The articles of the daily newspapers Večernji list and Dnevnik published on the web were analyzed. These newspapers are in the territory of the Republic of Croatia (Večernji list) and the Republic of Slovenia (Dnevnik) and have a long tradition of publication. The survey covers the period from the start of vaccine availability in our areas from January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021. The analysis includes the number of articles on vaccination and article sentiment. Within the mentioned articles, an analysis was made of articles in which the source of scientific research is clearly highlighted and articles that represent only the interpretation of journalists without referring to relevant scientific sources. The research confirmed that there is a statistically significant difference in the representation of affirmative, negative and neutral articles about vaccination against Covid-19 in the daily newspapers Večernji list and Dnevnik, and that there is a statistically significant difference between published newspaper articles about vaccination against Covid-19 compared to articles in which scientific research is used as a source.

**Keywords:** vaccination, SARS-CoV-2, journalistic interpretation, articles on vaccination

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vaccination against Covid-19 at a broader societal level in the world started on January 5, 2021, but at the same time, anti-vaxxer movements have also emerged. The media was heavily involved in reporting on vaccination, and the rapid spread of (mis)information about Covid-19 led to a flood of information about the virus, where it was difficult to separate truth from misinformation, which was given a new term - infodemia (Focosi et al. 2021, 1568) (Lacs 2022, e341). Given that the vaccine has been developed in several places around the world, in different countries, using different technologies, against viruses that are constantly mutating, without such clinical trials, which are necessary for the introduction of new drugs and vaccines and require at least five years of testing through the legally prescribed four phases of clinical trials, and thus, given the speed without adequate scientific evidence, opened the way to different interpretations and manipulations by the vast majority of self-proclaimed experts, creating a fertile ground for journalistic reports without any evidence, especially scientific evidence, and therefore a discrepancy in reporting. This was largely due to journalists, who were mostly lost in a sea of information and guided by the criterion of utilitarianism.

Most of the media coverage of vaccination has not always been based on scientific evidence, but on a series of information that crisis authorities have interpreted to the public without much opportunity to check the scientific and professional evidence. In the new situation, during the pandemic, most of the crisis staff, including those from the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia, have, ex officio, communicated to the public the views and lessons learned so far regarding the vaccination against COVID 19. Although the instructions of the Crisis Staff emphasized scientific facts, much of the (mis)information could be read through the media, especially social networks, where science was often interpreted by laymen. Inadequate information leads to polarization of society, disruption of interpersonal relations (which was an example in the case of pro and anti-vaxxers), and lack of trust in health authorities. A longitudinal study conducted by MIT University showed that fake news on Twitter spreads faster than true news, and the user is 70 % more likely to forward fake news than true news (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 2017)

The public's attitude towards science was often ambivalent. Science has brought new knowledge and made life easier, but the power that knowledge brings with it has also raised questions about the ethics of science and the work of scientists. This is why the approach of the journalism profession in interpreting science is of utmost importance, as the media has a significant impact on educating and informing the population and shaping public opinion.

The work of journalists is governed by media laws (the Media Law and the Electronic Media Law), which, among other things, regulate the prerequisites for the

implementation of the principle of freedom of the media, the right of journalists and other participants in public information to freedom of reporting, and access to public information.

In addition to other factors related to the characteristics of post-modern society, the various regularities of media production lead to communication noises that can affect the public's interpretation of information. This is particularly pronounced with the emergence of new media, leading to a completely changed relationship between science and the media. The reason for this is that the indiscriminate nature of online information sources is destroying the function of the traditional mass media and journalists as 'gatekeepers'. Although such a process implies democratising potentials at first sight, it implies the possibility of expressing completely wrong and unfounded opinions, especially when it comes to science (Pavić and Šundalić 2017, 35).

The aim of this paper is to determine how the media reported on the covid-19 vaccination, its impact on the health of those vaccinated, to evaluate the sentimentality of the articles and to establish whether and to what extent the reports were supported by scientific evidence.

### 1.1 Methods

The method used was an analysis of articles published in print editions and on the portals of two daily newspapers from two neighboring countries, Slovenia and Croatia. The Slovenian newspaper and portal was Dnevnik and the Croatian one was Večernji list. The criteria for selecting these newspapers were their long tradition of publication (Dnevnik since 1951 and Večernji list since 1959) and thus their relevance in the field of daily journalism. The research period is linked to the start of vaccination and is defined as January 1, to March 31, 2021 (vaccination in Croatia started on December 27, 2020), which represents a time of intensive vaccination campaign as well as its implementation. The analysis includes a quantitative analysis of the data: the number of articles and an assessment of the intonation of each article regarding the position on vaccination, divided into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Positive represents a judgment about the importance and positive effectiveness of vaccination, neutral does not include the author's judgment and negative represents a negative judgment. At the same time, it will be analyzed whether the scientific work that is the source of the article is clearly identified (reference or link to a reference) or whether it is a free interpretation by the journalist without reference to the corresponding scientific source.

## 2. RESULTS

The results in Table 1 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the reporting of the two daily newspapers, i.e. on their respective portals

(the Croatian Večernji list and the Slovenian Dnevnik). Almost 2/3 (65.7 %) of the articles published in Večernji List (Graphs 1 and 3) express positive attitudes towards vaccination, which is almost four (3.9) times more than in Dnevnik (Graphs 2 and 4). In Dnevnik, the neutral attitude of the authors of the newspaper articles is predominant, with almost 60 % (57.7%) of the articles, in contrast to Večernji List, which has 17.1 % of articles with a neutral intonation. This data shows that Večernji list has fewer negatively intoned articles (17.1 %) than Dnevnik (25.9 %).

**Table 1: Relation between positive, neutral and negative attitudes in Večernji list articles**

Positive, negative and neutral relation		Positive	Scientific	Interpretation
	Number	46	3	43
	Percentage (%)	65,71	4,29	61,43
Relation between scientific and interpretation		Scientific		Interpretation
	Number	3		67
	Percentage (%)	4,29		95,71

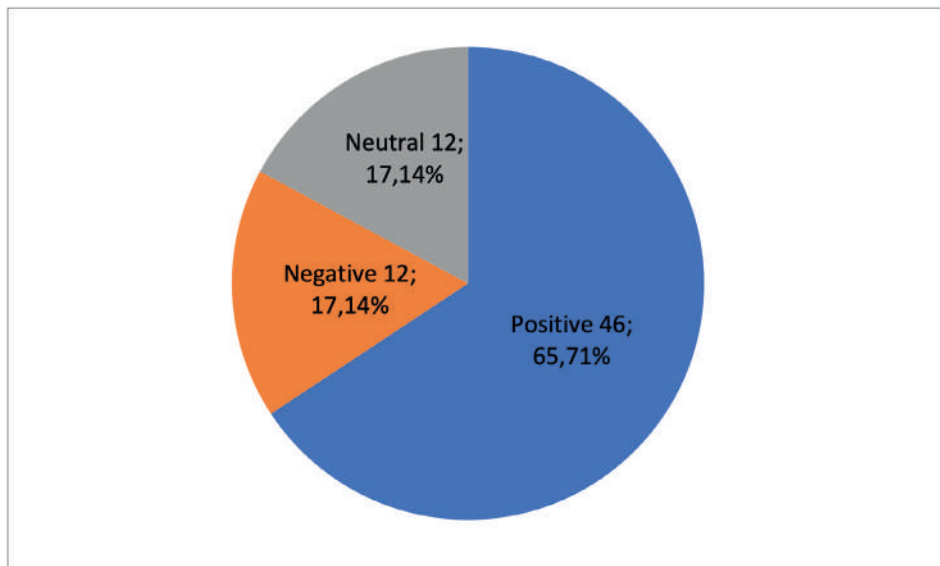
**Table 2: The relation between positive, neutral and negative attitudes in Dnevnik articles**

Positive, negative and neutral relation		Positive	Scientific	Interpretation
	Number	14	1	13
	Percentage (%)	16,47	1,18	15,29
Relation between scientific and interpretation		Scientific		Interpretation
	Number	2		83
	Percentage (%)	2,35		97,65

	<b>Negativ</b>	Scientific	Interpretation	<b>Neutral</b>	Scientific	Interpretation	Total
	12	0	12	12	0	12	70
	17,14	0,00	17,14	17,14	0,00	17,14	100,00
		<b>Total</b>					
		70					
		100,00					

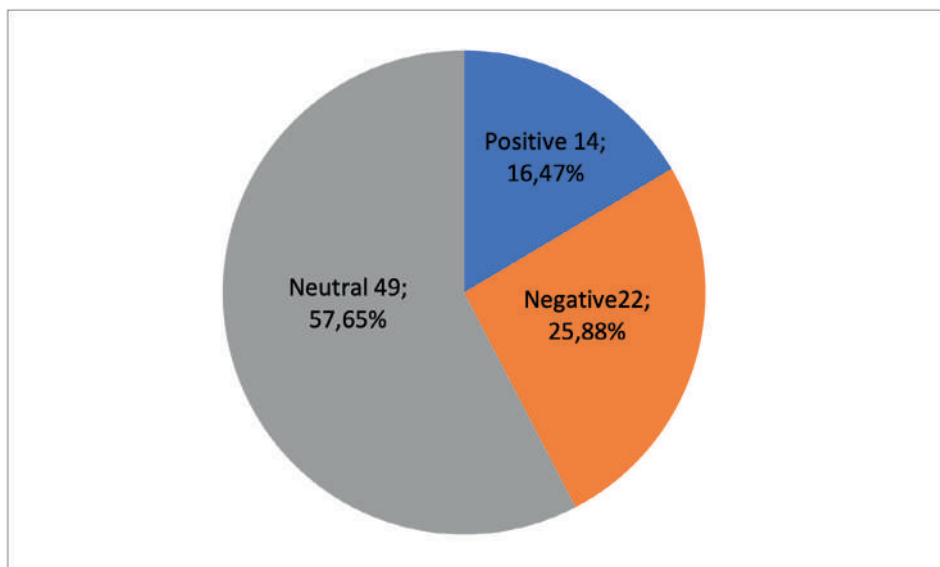
	<b>Negative</b>	Scientific	Interpretation	<b>Neutral</b>	Scientific	Interpretation	Total
	22	0	22	49	1	48	85
	25,88	0,00	25,88	57,65	1,18	56,47	100,00
		<b>Total</b>					
		85					
		100,00					

**Graph 1: The relation between positive, neutral and negative attitudes in Večernji list articles**



Source: own research.

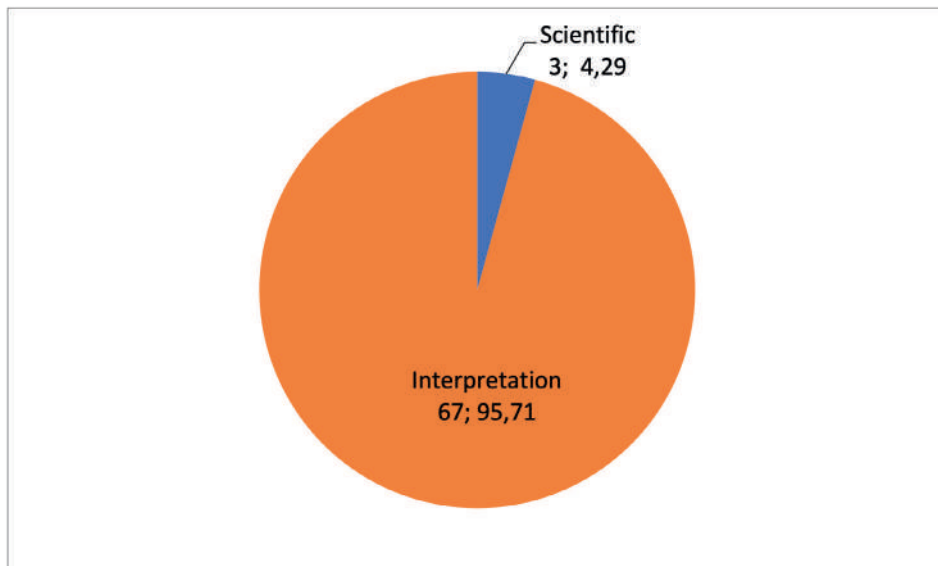
**Graph 2: The relation between positive, neutral and negative attitudes in Dnevnik articles**



Source: own research.

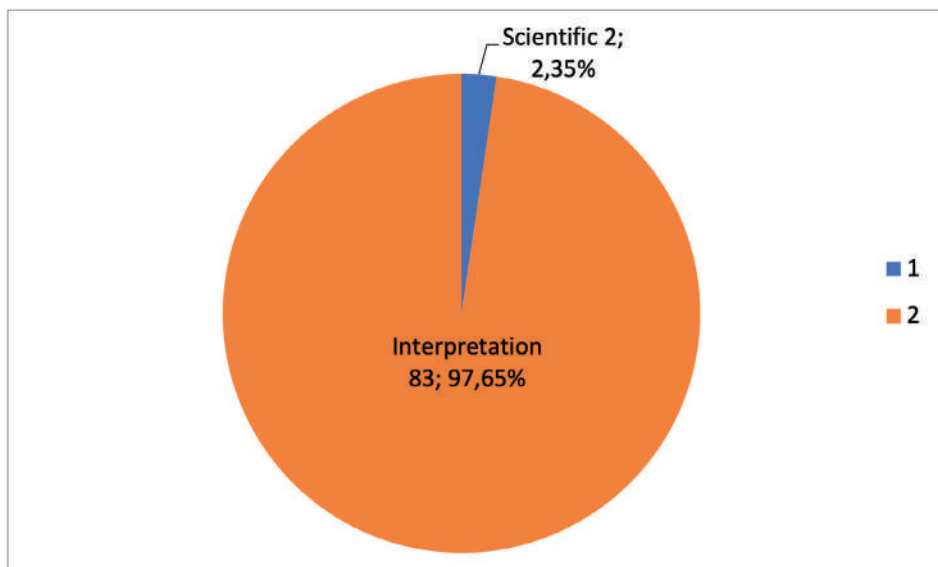


**Graph 3: The relation between the citations of the scientific source and the interpretation in the Večernji list articles**



Source: own research.

**Graph 4: The relation between the citations of the scientific source and the interpretation in the Dnevnik articles**



Source: own research.

### 3. DISCUSSION

Today, most scientists consider that appearing in the media to inform the public is a very important part of their work, as well as a professional duty. Scientific communities continue to regulate media contact with their members according to certain norms. Although there is now a greater influence of scientific organizations on public communication, the available data do not show a sudden change in communication practices or in the relevant beliefs and attitudes of scientists over the last 30 years, as highlighted in „The science-media divide revisited: Scientists as public communicators“ (Peters 2013, 14102).

In „New Media and the Public. Science“, nine out of 10 internet users in the United States turn to search engines to find information, and 60 % of the American public looking for information on specific scientific topics cite the internet as their primary source of information. This has created a new urgency for scientists to pay attention to these trends and to the emerging scientific literature on science communication in this new ‚online‘ world (Brossard and Scheufele 2013, 40).

In Croatia, the article Croatian Media Reporting on Vaccination and Vaccines during the Covid-19 Pandemic compared the reporting of two portals and found a difference in reporting: one portal used more critical frames, such as the social responsibility frame and the doubt frame, compared to the other, while the other used the strategy frame more (Abramović 2021).

The paper „News media narratives of Covid-19 in 20 countries: early global convergence and subsequent regional divergence“ finds that demand for media content increased during the pandemic (Ng et al. 2021, e0256358).

The media has a key role in warning the public about the pandemic, the progression of the disease and how to fight against Covid-19. Unfortunately, the media has had a harmful effect on human health, especially by spreading fear, panic, and excitement, as well as heart and mental illnesses. Daily news broadcasts in the media bombard the public with various facts about the spread of Covid-19 in Croatia and worldwide, which are presented in the article Media in the service of health (Zečević 2021, 994).

Three interdependent factors are behind the current distorted narrative of the Covid-19 pandemic: (1) the „publish or perish“ scientific culture, (2) misinformation spread by traditional media and social digital media, and (3) distrust of contact tracing technology and related privacy issues. The paper „Science, misinformation and digital technology during the Covid-19 pandemic“ shows how these three factors interacted and led to a negative public perception of science during the health crisis (Astobiza 2021, 68).

During the global pandemic, social media became an ally but also a potential threat, as the authors argue in „The positive and negative impact of social media in the Covid-19 era“ (Venegas-Vera et al. 2020, 561).

A number of important principles of effective risk communication can provide important scientific insights into how patients respond to the risks posed by coronavirus disease in 2019 (Covid-19). In „Crisis Communication and Public Perception of Covid-19 Risk in the Social Media Era“, the authors argue that social and cultural factors, immediacy, uncertainty, familiarity, personal control, scientific uncertainty, and trust in institutions and the media shape perceptions associated with infection (Malecki et al. 2021, 697).

According to media systems dependency theory, increased dependency on media to meet individual needs is disproportionate to the greater perceived importance of media in an individual's life and, consequently, to the stronger influence of media on individual attitudes and behaviour. In ‚Media and interpersonal channels uses and preferences during the Covid-19 pandemic: the case of the United States, Thailand, and Croatia‘, the authors argue that this addictive relationship intensifies during periods of uncertainty or crisis (Sheldon et al. 2021, e07555 ). Although several recent studies have focused on media addiction during health crises, such as SARS and H1N1 influenza, the findings from Eastern countries may not be confirmed in the other hemisphere. The study „Problematic Internet use, anxiety, depression and stress symptoms in adults with experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and earthquake: insights from a Croatian online survey“ aimed to recruit and examine how participants from three different continents used media during the Covid pandemic (Kovačić-Petrović et al. 2022, 802).

In Croatia and Slovenia, the different level of attitudes towards the five main actors in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Civil Protection Headquarters, Government, health system, scientists-researchers and media) is an important predictor of hesitancy to vaccinate. Risk perception was an even stronger predictor: people who perceived Covid-19 infection to be low risk were more than ten times more likely to hesitate to vaccinate than those who perceived it as high risk, as the authors found in the article „Determinants and reasons for hesitation about the 2019 coronavirus vaccine in Croatia“ (Bagić et al. 2022, 89).

The results show that Večernji List is dominated by articles with a positive tone, in contrast to the Slovenian Dnevnik, where Slovenian journalists showed a greater degree of neutrality compared to Večernji List, reporting only the facts without going into interpretations. journalists, which was much more useful and of a higher quality in terms of objectively informing the public. Given the unverifiability of much of the information on the epidemic and the impossibility of determining its date, journalists had to weigh up the (un)veracity of this information themselves, notwithstanding the fact that not a single fact was professionally, let alone scientifically, proven. The media were given a wide scope for manipulation, as there was no authority, i.e. a large part of them declared themselves as such, which would determine the facts that journalists would objectively convey to the public in a

relatively meritorious manner (Jokić-Begić et al. 2020). In our study, it is evident that there are negligibly few texts that refer to scientific sources, compared to the significant number of texts that are based on the individual interpretations of journalists.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this study, both hypotheses were confirmed: H1, that there is a statistically significant difference in the representation of affirmative, negative and neutral articles on Covid-19 vaccination in daily newspapers, and H 2: that there is a statistically significant difference between the published newspaper articles on Covid-19 vaccination in relation to articles using scientific research as a source. The results also show that the Croatian Večernji List is dominated by positively intoned texts confirming an affirmative attitude towards vaccination, while the Slovenian Dnevnik is dominated by neutrally intoned texts.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen health communication in times of crisis. A study from Mexico, „Media Agenda and Press Conferences on COVID-19 in Mexico: An Analysis of Journalists' Questions“, used journalists to analyze the media agenda of press conferences on Covid-19 in Mexico during the first two phases of the pandemic, and highlighted the importance of communication and journalists' interpretations of the questions, especially in times of crisis (Aguila Sanchez et al. 2021, 12067).

The results of our research open up questions and possibilities for new research on the relationship between science and the media, i.e. the interpretation of new knowledge that needs to be communicated to the population in an appropriate and objective way.

Media coverage of the COVID 19 vaccination has shown mixed public reflection and a significant presence of infodemia. This raises the question of who should assess whether a piece of news is fake or not, in order to at least somewhat narrow the space for journalists to potentially manipulate or misinterpret, as the authors state in two papers, „Social media as a platform for engagement in science and health: challenges and opportunities“ and „Science and social media: time for a reset“ (Dixon 2016, 57; Koenderman et al. 2021; Koenderman et al. 2021).

In reality, there are fewer people who deliberately spread disinformation than those who are unable to distinguish between relevant and false, and so unwittingly contribute to the spread of fake or incomplete news. This is why communication between scientists and journalists needs to be intensified as a necessary cross-sectoral collaboration to inform and educate the public.

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## REVIEWS

### Summary from the review:

#### **Book review, scientific monograph „EXPLORING THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE: THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON COMMUNICATORS“**

The relationship between media and science is a broad topic. The preface suggests a narrowing of the research communication process, which brings the media to the surface of the interest of science as a system of mediation without which, of course, there is no communication and no social community in any sense.

„Hunger for communication‘ (preface) brings a human being to the limits of moral behavior. Man becomes a slave to his own products, and manages information in such a way as to enable the technical segment of the world to manage himself.

A rift is created between the world of stereotypes created every day by information production systems for the masses, i.e. the mass media, and the awareness of the need for continuous education that could help bring the world of stereotype production under control. As Vesna Baltazarević concludes, there is no ‚absolute defense against the media‘, but there are ways to mitigate the pernicious dimension of the mass media’s influence. This primarily refers to media literacy. /.../.

Before us, therefore, is an interesting cross-section of scientific and professional reflection covered by the umbrella of the topic of the relationship between science and the media. Although the texts and researches are very different and sometimes almost incompatible in one whole - the study nevertheless brings interesting analyzes that will surely be the premise of some future researches, texts and books. Science is always looking for more and it will get more by relying on research that has given as much as was possible in some time in some circumstances. In this sense, I think that it is about interesting topics and works and that the published book will be an incentive for further efforts of the academic community.

I therefore recommend it for publication.

Prof. Ph.D. Sead Alić  
„North“ University

**Scientific monography review „Exploring the Changing Landscape: The Impact of Contemporary Media Communication on Communicators“**

Before us is another book from the scientific meeting organized by Alma Mater Europaea, Department of Strategic Communication Management and under the editorial baton of Professor Božidar Veljković.

The theme of this year's scientific meeting was „Media, science and ideology“, which is also the name of the publication.

The topic was not chosen by chance, because we live in the age of media-mediated communication, so our understanding and interpretation of reality largely depends on the relationship between media, science and ideology.

The papers published in this publication unequivocally show all the diversity and breadth of this correlation with intriguing research questions and answers, whereby the topic of the scientific meeting is not exhausted but open for additional reflections. We hope that the next scientific meeting will therefore be a continuation of the search for answers to the same topic.

The book is recommended to scientific, professional workers and students of social orientation.

Assist. Ph.D. Slobodan Hadžić  
Alma Mater Europaea – ECM







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