

Consumer Media Habits of Emerging Adults vs. Media Investment Trends of Companies during Covid-19

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the habits of media usage by the consumers in the period during the Covid-19 pandemic on one side, and the trends of investment in different media for marketing purposes, on the other. The analysis was conducted through online questionnaires (via Google forms) on a sample of 284 respondents from the generation Z (emerging adults). This paper puts accent on two types of media - television as traditional media and Facebook as social media. The results show that most of the respondents have used both media - TV as well as Facebook for communication with companies, in the last six months in the pandemic. Regarding the relative importance of the media for advertising, the respondents consider social media to be more important media for advertising when compared to TV. Usage characteristics show that 57.4% of emerging adults use TV on daily basis, mostly an hour per day, while 89.9% use Facebook every day, at least two hours per day. On the other side, according to the existing empirical data, during the pandemic, most of the companies have invested more in social vs. traditional media for their marketing activities, thus keeping in line with current market trends. Considering the analysis of consumers' preferences, this paper can assist the companies in making informed and better marketing investment decisions in the ongoing and future crisis.

Keywords: marketing, investment, consumers, media, respondents, TV, Facebook

1. Introduction

After a historic and challenging year of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers around the world have become more reliant than ever on media for entertainment, information, and social connection. Consumers are adding more devices and screen time into their daily life (Koetsier, 2020). Today, consumers themselves are becoming editors of advertisements and promoters of a variety of products, as a new way of communication with companies and the wider public.

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One of the biggest changes that has happened regarding different media usage is the emerging use of social media as a source of information. Consumers look at social media as a way of informing, not only entertainment (Westerman et al., 2013). This provides a basis for development of social media advertising in companies, as a part of their promotional mix. They must use their financial resources to properly advertise in order to retain consumers and attract new ones.

As research shows, there are changes in consumer behavior regarding the usage of media. That is, their way of informing and using media in their daily life has changed, and especially in generation Z (emerging adults) as the representors of the future work force and employed consumers. This generation prefers to play video games, stream music, and engage on social media, often simultaneously, rather than just watch TV or movies. Generation Z wants to be communicated with visually and with short, bite-sized content. Their limited attention span means companies can never stop working on their advertising (Gyan & Jyotsna, 2020).

All these changes encourage changes in the investment of companies in the advertising media. Successful businesses and those who want to conquer new markets must undoubtedly direct their investments in the right direction that will enable them to accomplish their goals and company vision. Research shows that many companies have made changes in their financial investments, i.e. most of them start advertising their products / services on social media nowadays. It is necessary to make in-depth analyses on where to invest more funds and how to develop good marketing strategies and plans (Ospina, 2019).

The purpose of this paper can guide companies in making advertising decisions in connection to media usage in time of crisis. Market research data will help them make an informed strategy for allocating funds to relevant media that are more used by the consumers and thus, improve the visibility of their messages as well as increase the chances to attract consumers and retain the existing ones. Old habits of advertising dominantly on mas media, i.e. TV and focusing solely on traditional methods, cannot provide good results for every type of product or service in times when consumer habits are continuously and drastically changing. The companies should follow market trends and information for the item being advertised as well as target consumer preferences and their habits and behaviors.

2. Literature review

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on all the aspects of the economy and on social life as we knew it. The lockdowns throughout the world and the social distancing mandates have altered the consumer habits of informing, media usage, buying as well as shopping. Consumers have improvised and adapted to the new scenario, and have developed new habits. It is expected that these new habits will come to light due to technology advancement, the change in demographics, as well as the new and innovative ways consumers cope with setting boundries between work, leisure, and education (Sheth, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic could be observed as Taleb's (2008) "Black Swan Event", i.e. a single shocking event that has the power to change the world. In his book, Taleb (2008)

analysed the human responses to this kind of shocks and how they prevail toward ‘critical reverse prediction’, i.e. humans after such a shock rationalize it and think about whether they could have done something to prevent that event from happening (He & Harris, 2020). Covid-19 is such a ‘Black Swan Event’ and the world will probably never be the same as it was before it occurred. The pandemic impacted all areas of life, societies and economies have largely been brought to a standstill, and almost every country was facing a recession at one moment during the crisis (Hoekstra et al., 2020). Euronews (2020) described the effects of the crisis on the world economy as the most unprecedented impact since the Great Depression (1929-1930). He & Harris (2020) state that this pandemic is “one of the most significant environmental changes in the modern marketing history” and predict it could also have a great impact on consumer behaviour and ethics and basic marketing philosophies.

Even though the 21st century has already been experiencing explosion of Internet-based messages and social media marketing, this trend has become even more apparent in 2020, when the social lives of people throughout the world had to change. The outbreak of Covid-19 and all the changes it brought shifted not only the consumer behavior but also consumer media consumption. According to *Influential’s* Covid-19 Media Impact Report (2020), social media consumption went significantly up in 2020, and this can be explained through the consumers’ desire to connect. Their report suggests there was „a 29 percent increase in time spent on social media, 184 minutes per day up from 143 minutes per day across all social platforms. Instagram and YouTube saw the biggest increases - 32 percent and 44 percent, respectively.“

Mangold & Faulds (2009) state that ‘social media is a hybrid element of the promotional mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another’. Social media are also defined as a form of media that “describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). Social media have transformed the role of media in consumers’ lives by breaking the fourth wall between „media providers and media users and facilitating genuine dialogue“ (Logan, 2014). Additionally, advertisements and advertising messages on social media can be observed as „potential communication exchanges between advertisers and consumers“ (Ducoffe, 2000).

Logan (2014) has explored the antecedents to young (emerging) adults’ intentions to follow brands on social media, in particular on Twitter and Facebook. The findings of this study are contrary with the planned behaviour of technology acceptance model and show that the perceived ease of use directly affects users’ intentions to follow brands on Facebook and Twitter; peer pressure is crucial in the decision to follow brands on Facebook and Twitter and consumers’ attitudes toward following brands on Facebook and Twitter do not directly affect their intentions to follow brands.

Dar et al. (2014) examine the perception of value of advertising on Facebook and television in both male and female students on a sample of 300 students of University of Gujrat. Their

findings suggest that Ducoffe's Ad Value is not fit for both Facebook and television and that irritation and entertainment are factors that directly affects attitude toward advertisement.

Logan et al. (2012) investigated the advertising value perceptions among females for both traditional (television) and social media (Facebook) on a sample of 259 students of major USA universities. Their findings are in line with both Dar et al. (2014) and Logan (2014) and show that Ducoffe's Ad Value model is a good fit for assessing advertising value in social media or television. They found entertainment and informativeness significant in assessing advertising value for both traditional (television) and non-traditional media (SNSs); irritation has insignificant role in value assessment, but it was found to directly impact attitude towards advertising, which is a critical juncture in the consumer purchase cycle.

Unlike the social media, traditional media have been neglected by researchers in the past decade since the Social Media experienced increased usage and growth. Namely, traditional media have undoubtedly been the main advertising media in the 1990s. Television has tried to adapt and implement technological advancements, but despite their best efforts, they seem to have lost considerable advertising revenue to online media (Hanekom & Scriven, 2002).

Up until the 2000s, advertisers have considered television as the ideal medium providing them with an opportunity to send dramatic and quite effective advertising messages by using both sight and sound, along with a diverse range of graphics technology. Even though the success of many television commercials in the past could be assigned to the repetitive process of airing them and familiarizing consumers with the product, there are some downsides to advertising on this media. The advertising messages are momentary, costly, not targeted and often cluttered together in a short period of time, which confuses and annoys viewers and potentials consumers (Hanekom & Scriven, 2002).

However, television grants high-quality both audio and visual advertisements that are appropriate for product categories, which require physical presentation (Sama, 2019). It is important to highlight that television or search advertising is supposed to create awareness and therefore is crucial in the early phase of the decision journey, whereas social media is more important in the late stage of the consumer decision journey, when the consumers communicate with other users and advocate a product (Eisend, 2018).

Bayer et al. (2020) name traditional media such as television and newspapers as offline advertising. Even though these mediums cannot link an immediate sale with the advertisement and cannot inform if targeted customers have been reached, it can better differentiate a brand from its competitors in the minds of consumers by building brand awareness, consideration, and liking because of its better implementation opportunities.

According to Fišer (2011), television is undeniably popular, but there is inevitable evidence that the internet is becoming a more important tool in the communication with consumers, especially with younger ones, such as the emerging adults from generation Z. The reason behind this is due to the fact that websites have the characteristics of traditional media plus the interactivity. The impression that the traditional media is gradually losing its popularity is widespread (Odun & Utulu, 2016). There are many studies investigating the consumers' ad

avoidance on television (Li, Edwards & Lee, 2002). Furthermore, many scholars found internet and social media should be considered more authentic, realistic and interactive source of advertisement, as opposed to the television advertising (Chen & Wells 1999; Li, Edwards, & Lee 2002; Dar et al., 2014). Miller (1996) suggests Internet and social media to be the „connecting source“ that combines the Television, news media, banners, pamphlets, radio and mail marketing (newsletters).

When it comes to spending and investment on advertising, the boom in the use of media has increased the pressure on businesses to deliver advertising messages to their target audience as fast as possible. This has skyrocketed the cost of advertisements and it has been beyond the budget in the past two decades. Advertisers and marketers have found new (online) ways and channels and have been slowly leaving the traditional ways of advertising, such as television and have focused on advertising on social media (Dar et al., 2014).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, this pressure got even worse. Advertising and media companies had to develop campaigns and marketing responses “in days when earlier efforts took months and years” (He & Harris, 2020). However, advertising, especially in mass media, has declined dramatically and advertising expenditures have declined about 10%, with television advertising expenditure declining by 25%. The advertising messages and communication was mostly targeted and devoted to the existing customers (Hoekstra et al., 2020). That is considered normal, especially in times of crisis, when companies tend to cut expenditures on communication, marketing and advertising. The advertising investments are considerably more sensitive to business changes and fluctuations than to the economy fluctuations (Deleersnyder et al., 2009). In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, both businesses and economies were deeply affected.

The advertising industry is facing a very challenging period ahead, since the advertising expenditures in 2020 have globally declined (Taylor, 2020). Notwithstanding, the situation is expected to further deteriorate, with a prediction that billions in advertising revenue will be lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Vorhaus, 2020).

Therefore, the flexibility and eagerness of businesses in the ad and marketing industry to adapt quickly to a changing environment is essential in the upcoming period (Taylor, 2020).

3. Methodology

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically affected the people’s daily lives and it clearly had an impact on the media consumption as well. Considering that most of the people started working from home and were spending their time with their families, without other social contacts, it opened space for analysis on how and where (on which media) they spent most of their time. Considering the movement restrictions, which lasted for months, it is possible that the people spent more of their time either watching TV or using social media to keep in touch with the outside world. Therefore, in this paper, the media of interest are TV as the traditional type and Facebook as the social type of media. Moreover, for the purpose of obtaining results regarding the consumer media habits, this paper is based on the primary

data, where the analysis was conducted through online questionnaires created in Google forms on a sample of students present at time on online classes, at the Faculty of Economics at the state university Goce Delcev – Shtip, Macedonia. In the paper, the collected data are analyzed through descriptive statistics, supported with information from the existing academic literature. The data of the outlook of the investment trends during the COVID-19 pandemic was obtained from the existing empirical data and academic literature.

The sample consists of 284 respondents from generation Z, i.e. emerging adults (in the age group from 18 to 24). In the analyzed sample, 71.5% (203) of the respondents were male, while 28.5% (81) were females (Figure 1). Additionally, most of the respondents, 50.7% were in their first year of their studies (Figure 2). Most of the respondents 78.2% were unemployed, followed with 16.2% being employed, while the remaining 5.6% included the respondents who were either interns or volunteers (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Gender of respondents

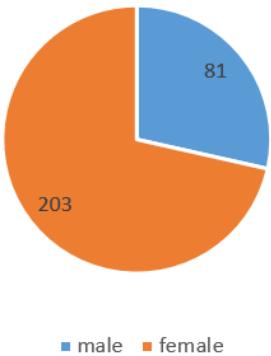
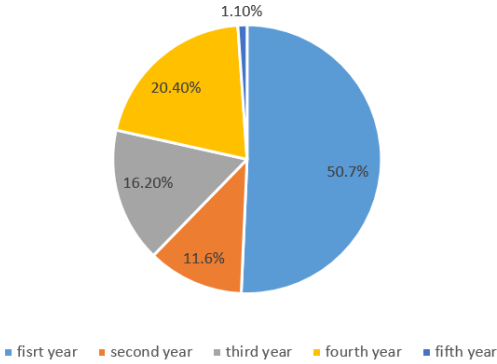
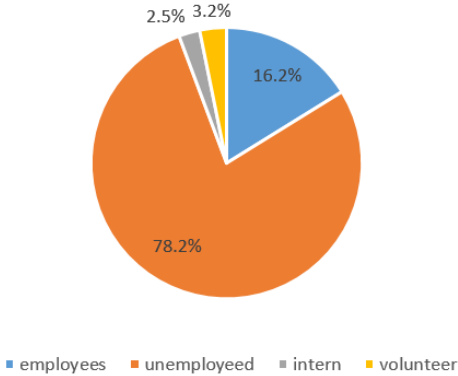


Figure 2. Year of studies



Source: Authors' own research

Figure 3. Work status of respondents



Source: Authors' own research

4. Results and discussion

Well-known brands and good marketing campaigns are created through well-developed media consumption patterns. Therefore, understanding the new generations, like generation Z (emerging adults) and working on satisfying their needs are factors that can help companies make the right media investment when it comes to promoting their business. However, the initial step requires understanding the way in which these emerging adults think and behave. This is crucial, because this generation is the one that mostly uses various types of media, with the main disadvantage of having a limited budget (are often unemployed, especially since the occurrence of Covid-19) (BLS, 2021). In Figure 4, most of the respondents (28.2%) have answered that their monthly income is less than six thousand Macedonian denars (approximately 100 EUR). This suggests that even if they see a good marketing campaign of a product that they like, they may not be able to purchase it immediately. Hence, if the success of the marketing campaign is measured by the number of clicks, this may create wrong perception of the number of people who are able to purchase the products or the service. Additionally, in Figure 5, 245 (86.3%) have answered that their previous experience (in the last six months) with advertising messages from companies on traditional media was mostly on TV. Moreover, when it comes to social media, 209 (73.6%) respondents have answered that they got most of the advertising messages in the last six months on Facebook.

Figure 4. Available monthly income

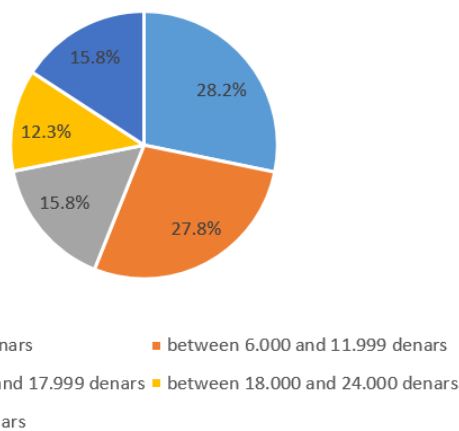
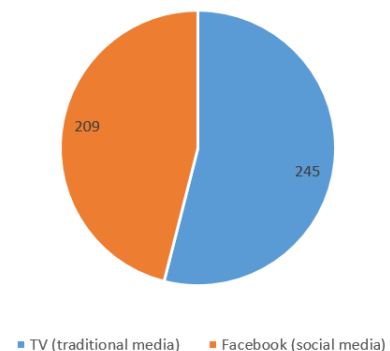


Figure 5. Received advertising messages in the last six months



Source: Authors' own research

Regarding participants perception of important channels for advertising, television as traditional type of media, was ranked on a scale from one (most important medium) to seven (least important medium). The obtained results, which are presented in Figure 6, show that the rankings are divided and relatively similar for each of the numbers for importance on the scale. Only 13% of the respondent consider TV to be the most important medium for advertising, 18.7% rank it with number 3 and 19.4% of the respondents agree that television should be ranked with number 5, as not very important medium for advertising. The young generation of consumers has divided opinion regarding the importance of the TV, with most of them agreeing that it is not the most essential medium for advertising.

The ranking for social media (Facebook) in Figure 7 show that 101 (35.6%) of the respondents agree that it is the most important source for advertising, while the rest have divided opinion. Some consider it to be important, but not that much (1.4%), others think it is not that important (10.9%), while the other respondents belong in a category with totally opposed views.

Figure 6. Relative value of TV as a medium for advertising

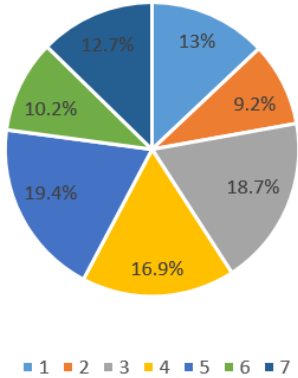
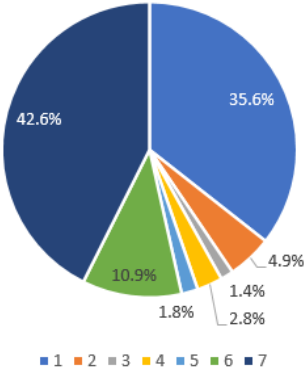


Figure 7. Relative value of social media (Facebook) as a medium for advertising



Source: Authors' own research

In Figure 8, regarding the frequency of usage, 163 (57.4%) respondents use TV every day, 64 (22.5%) use it 2-4 times per week, while the remaining respondents use it more rarely - either once per week, or only few times per month. Contrary to the divided opinion about TV, Figure 9 shows that most of the respondents or 255 (90%) use Facebook every day, 20 (7%) use it 2-4 times per week, 5 (2%) use it once per week and only 3 (1%) do not use Facebook at all. From the data it seems that the emerging adults are more interested in social media (Facebook), rather than the traditional one (in this case TV).

Figure 8. Usage of TV

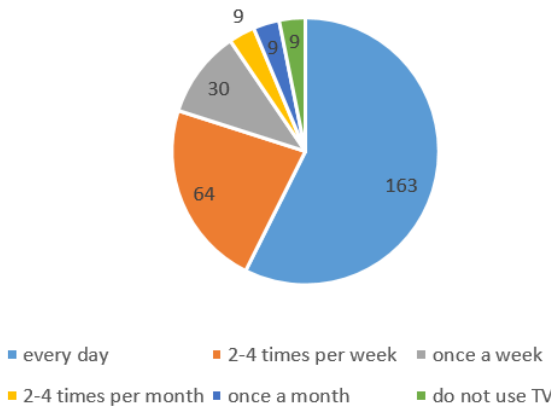
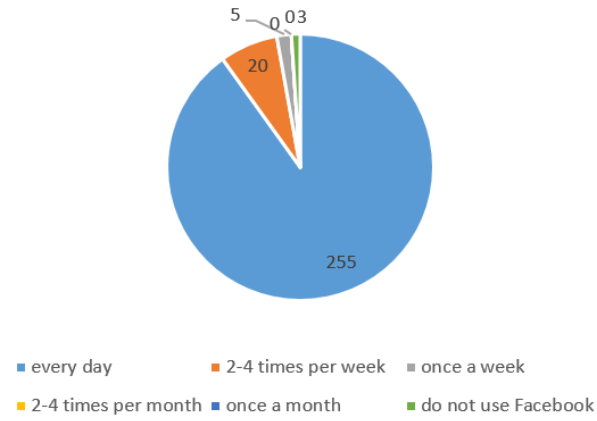


Figure 9. Usage of Facebook



Source: Authors' own research

Answering the question about duration, i.e. how long they have been using each of the media on daily basis, the respondents provided divided opinions regarding TV and Facebook. The

results for both medias are presented in Figure 10 and 11, from where it can be seen that 92 (32.4%) use TV less than one hour per day, 74 (26%) use it for two hours per day, 63 (22%) use it for three hours, 25 (8.8%) use it for more than five hours, while only 11 (3.9%) do not use TV at all. Contrary to these results, more from the emerging adults use Facebook longer than TV per day, i.e. 78 (27.5%) respondents use it less than hour per day, 85 (30%) use Facebook two hours per day, 35 (12%) use it three hours per day, 25 (8.8%) use it four hours per day, 58 (20.4%) use it more than five hours per day, and only 3 (1%) do not use Facebook at all.

Figure 10. Daily usage of TV

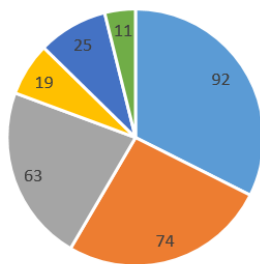
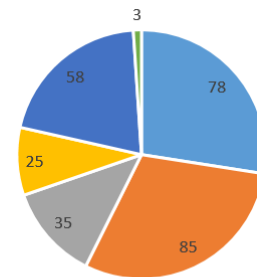


Figure 11. Daily usage of Facebook



■ <1 hour ■ 2 hours ■ 3 hours ■ 4 hours ■ >5 hours ■ do not use TV

■ <1 hour ■ 2 hours ■ 3 hours ■ 4 hours ■ >5 hours ■ do not use Facebook

Source: Authors' own research

Furthermore, on the question whether advertisement helps people to become better consumers, 95 (33.5%) of the respondents fully agree with this question, 101 (35.6%) agree, 62 (22%) neither agree nor disagree, 18 (6%) do not agree and only 5 (2%) do not agree at all. On the question about actual engagement with advertisement on social media, most of the respondents or 133 (47%) engage with the brands they like and have been clicking several times on different advertisements on Facebook, while 31 (11%) do not click (engage) at all.

Additionally, 74 (26%) of them, agree that advertising helps people to make better buying decisions, while only one respondent does not agree on this matter. Also, most of the emerging adults or 56.2% fully agree that advertising helps the companies to become profitable, 30.2% agree, 9.6% neither agree nor disagree, 3.2% do not agree and only 0.7% of the respondents do not agree at all. In addition, 91 (32%) of the respondents fully agree that advertising has positive effect on the economy and 105 (37%) agree about the positive effects of advertising on the economy.

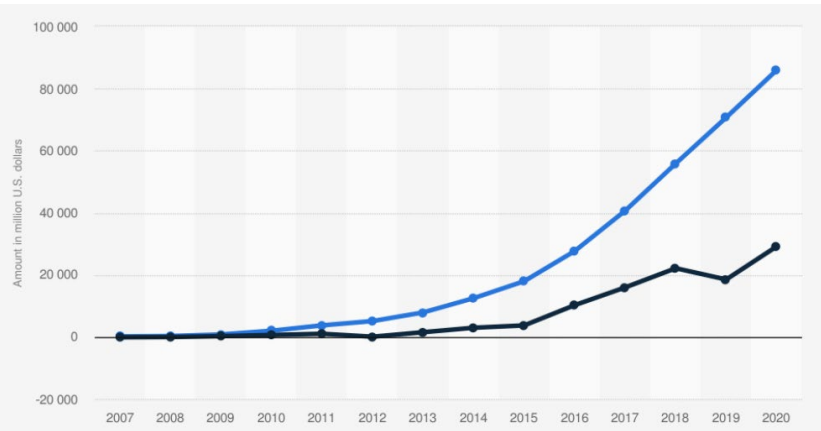
From the obtained results in this paper it can be noticed that the respondents have in some questions divided opinions. Nevertheless, the general perception about advertising is positive even in times of crisis and it can be concluded that according to the opinion of emerging adults, advertising assists consumers in making better purchasing decisions and helps the companies in advertising their products properly.

However, finding the right channel for advertising can sometimes represent a challenge. Considering that social media channels are computer mediated tools, the interest for them and

especially Facebook during the pandemic has increased drastically. This is because Facebook improves the interactive process in communicating a message and it shares similar role with the traditional media such as TV. Nevertheless, the results in this particular analysis on the Macedonian market, shows that both channels have complimentary roles in reaching the consumers and have been used by the emerging adults as a media for communication with companies and gathering information about their brands, products and services. However, it is worth mentioning that Facebook as a social media is perceived as a more important medium for advertising, in contrast to television (mass media).

The corona virus outbreak will undoubtedly have an effect in shaping the business strategies regarding telecommunication, media and entertainment sector. According to the data obtained from Statista (2021) in Figure 12, the Facebook’s revenues have been increasing throughout the years, reaching their peak in 2020. This shows that since the occurrence of the pandemic at the end of 2019, the advertising activities (through which Facebook makes most of its revenues) of the companies on social media, i.e. Facebook have increased. This can be expected considering that online advertising is cheaper comparing it to the traditional ads. According to Top Draw Inc. (2020) the average cost of reaching around 1000 people with online advertising varies around \$3-\$10 contrary to the traditional media where the average cost is more than \$22.

Figure 12. Facebook’s revenue and net income from 2007-2020



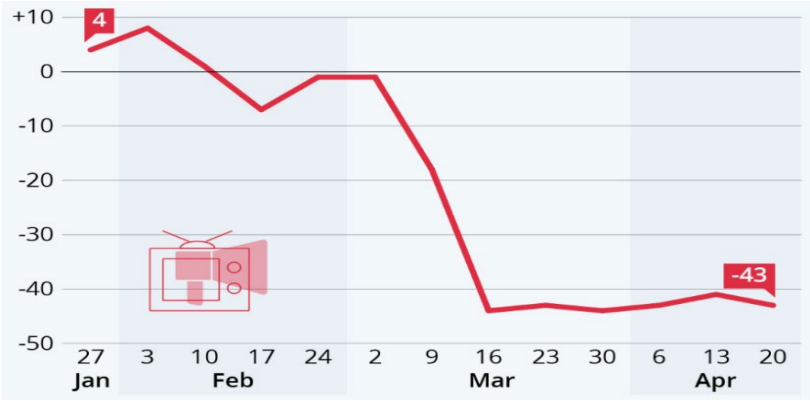
-Revenue (blue line) -Net income (black line)

Source: Statista website (2021) (a)

The pandemic also affected the television industry when it comes to advertising activities. According to iSpot Ace Metrix survey, in 2020 over 1200 brands were either first-time TV advertisers or they have returned to TV as an advertising channel after a few years break. Nevertheless, most of the companies have cut back the big-budget commercial productions and the gap between TV commercials and digital platforms advertising has started to increase. Automakers, pharmaceutical companies, liquor and retail companies are the main industries that have spent less on advertising during the corona crisis. On a global scale, retail companies have mostly cut in advertising compared between 2019 and 2020.

Figure 13 shows the percent changes in weekly ad spending for 22 industries such as autos, retail, liquor, pharmaceuticals and others. The results show that the most severe drop in TV advertising occurred in March 2020 and continued with this declining trend in the following months.

Figure 13. TV Ad spending



Source: Statista website (2021) (b)

From the results from secondary sources, we can conclude that companies gave priority to social media (Facebook) as an advertising platform during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Conclusion

The corona pandemic affected the life of people in a way that it pressured them to avoid socializing. Hence, people across the world ‘fixed’ their eyes on their TV or computer screens. Not only the day to day activities were affected, but the way businesses operate has changed as well. Heading to 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic still exists, and it will undoubtedly continue to shape the business strategies regarding communications, marketing, media and sales. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the consumer media habits and the media investment trends during the corona crisis. The results show that the pandemic has indeed accelerated some trends that were already underway. Most of the respondents in the conducted survey from a sample of emerging adults use Facebook as social type of media, as well as TV and they do believe that their purchasing behavior has been affected in some way through these channels. The respondents have divided opinions regarding some questions, but on some of them they have answered very similarly. For instance, half of the respondents claim they receive advertising messages mostly from TV, while only few more answered that they obtain such messages from social media. Most of them watch TV and are active on Facebook as a medium as well, however, they perceive Facebook as more important medium for advertisement than TV. Additionally, most of them use Facebook more often and longer than TV, making it a media where companies can reach their target consumers easier. Nevertheless, if possible, companies should consider using TV as a media for increasing the visibility of the brands at the beginning of their positioning, as well as for better differentiation from their competitors. The changing customer preferences and the need of

boosting customer engagement during the corona crisis affected the marketing approaches of many businesses worldwide. The existing data show that most of the companies shifted towards cheaper and more easily accessible marketing platforms, such as Facebook and reduced their involvement in more expensive TV marketing campaigns. Bearing in mind that the emerging adults have preference toward Facebook (social media) in comparison to TV (mass media), we can say that companies have managed to follow the trends of media consumption of consumers and have included social media as a part from their business strategy. It can be concluded that understanding the consumer needs and their behavior patterns is crucial for attracting and retaining customers. The data from this paper creates opportunity for further research in this matter, which is necessary for achieving business success during the ongoing crisis, but as well as for the upcoming years following Covid-19.

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