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“Present and Future Challenges in Regional Development in theAdriatic-Ionian Region”

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Ancona, Italy

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9th REDETE Conference

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Social Media Communication Habits of Emerging Adults with Brands during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Monika Arsova[1]
Mila Mitreva[2]
Tamara Jovanov Apasieva[3]
Katerina Fotova Čiković[4]

Abstract

This study examines the social media communication habits of emerging adults regarding their communication with brands, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research was done through online questionnaires (Google Forms) on a sample of 284 emerging adults, aged 18-29. The paper integrates three different social media in the analysis – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, as a unique combination of media that were researched during this period. The results show that emerging adults prefer using Facebook and Instagram in their communication with brands and have used them in the past six months, while Twitter is rarely used for this purpose. The frequency of usage of Facebook and Instagram is mostly every day. The results of the relative importance of social media for brand communication with emerging adults show divided opinions, with one part perceiving them as important media for communication and another part of the respondents, as less important. On the other side, most emerging adults find that their preferred social media – Facebook and Instagram are good sources of information for products or services. Additionally, they state that brand communication on these media has a positive influence on their purchase decision. The results show that the communication between brands and emerging adults is not one-way, but mainly an interactive process in which the respondents engage with the content of the communication messages by clicking on it to see more. Based on primary research, this study can be of use to the companies in crafting informed communication strategies and plans, that best suit the habits of their potential consumers in the ongoing and future crisis of similar nature.

Keywords: social media, communication, emerging adults, brands, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

1. Introduction

Social media has evolved over the last decade to become an important driver for acquiring and spreading information in different domains such as business, entertainment, crisis management, and politics (Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Ross and Neuberger, 2018). The power of social media lies in the fact that in one second when the information is released, it can be seen by thousands of people - potential consumers. Today in the world more than 59% of the world's population are online users, thus the message can be conveyed the fastest and most securely through social media (Johnson, 2021).

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The growth of social media usage opens new opportunities for analysing several aspects of communication (Golder and Macy, 2011). One of those aspects is online communication which has left a big mark in recent decades. In the world of online communication, emerging adults and adolescents seem to gravitate toward social media (Chan, 2015). Social media provide them with guidance and recommendations from others and enable them to share experiences, locate goods and services, and make purchases (Wang, Chen, Ou and Ren, 2019). The daily life of emerging adults includes social media in order to satisfy their various needs and desires with their use.

The importance of social media is undoubtedly growing for the end users, and businesses as well. For example, Facebook in 2020 had a total of 10 million active advertisers, and more than 1.9 billion active daily users or 2.9 billion active monthly users. (Statista, 2020; 2021) Instagram as a newer social media from Facebook is gaining many consumers, and the predictions are that in 2023 the number of users is predicted to reach 1.2 billion, from 815 million in 2019. (Statista, 2022) Twitter ads can reach 5.8% of the world population over age 13 and their advertising audience is 192 million monetizable daily active users worldwide. (Statista, 2022) However, even though Twitter is seen as one of the leading social media for usage during events and live tweeting, it has been losing market share to its competitor Instagram. The growth in the use of social media "has increased the pressure on businesses to deliver advertising messages to their target audience as fast as possible" (Mitreva, Arsova, Jovanov-Apasieva and Fotova-Čiković, 2022). Businesses have incorporated new (online) ways and channels focusing dominantly on advertising on social media (Dar, Ahmed, Muzaffar, Nawaz and Zahid, 2014).

The use and increased presence on these platforms from both sides of the market - demand and supply, have been observed in the last two years with the outbreak of the pandemic caused by Covid-19. The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath make social media one of the most important media for communicating with the brands they prefer.

In addition to changes in preferred media for communication, changes have been observed in the behaviour as well. All the uncertainties that came with the pandemic have changed the way consumers behave and these new consumer behaviours cover all areas of life—the way people work, learn, communicate, travel, shop and consume, live at home, entertain themselves, and/or deal with health and wellbeing (Kohli, Timelin, Fabius, Moulvad-Veranen, 2020). In terms of consumer buying behaviour, Covid-19 has seriously changed it, consumers are buying more essentials and taking advantage of shopping online (Warner-Søderholm, Bertsch, Sawe, Lee, Wolfe, Meyer, Engel and Fatilua, 2018).

Pandemic communication is known as the form of marketing communication between brands and their customers in a period of uncertainty, present not only in the whole country but the whole world, which is distinct and more significant due to the great deviations from the status quo influenced by the changes in customers' preferences, their propensity to consume and save, purchase habits and behaviour (Koksal and Ozgul, 2007). During a crisis, the consumers search more for essential product information, thus resulting in an increased focus on advertisements for essentials, health and hygiene products across different media (Accenture, 2020). On the other side, for non-essential product categories, advertising exposure has mainly been restricted to digital platforms (Bajaj, 2020). Moreover, social media are long considered one of the most important platforms for reaching customers as well as other stakeholders (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014).

Since communication is a core business activity (Jovanov, 2018; Jovanov, Sofijanova, Davcev, Temjanovski and Mitev, 2019), companies must pay attention to and plan their communication with consumers, accordingly, recognizing the importance and the need for the inclusion of social media as a channel for communication and distribution in a professional manner. Social media should be a part of their marketing strategies if the brand is to remain successful or become successful in the future.

Information about the preferences and behaviour of emerging adults as the next generation of the working force and financially independent consumers, can help businesses craft better strategies and improve their market competitiveness, thus enabling them to earn greater profit and create employment as a result.

This study aims to help companies regarding their communication and advertising decisions depending on the media usage by consumers in a time of crisis. Primary market research data provides an insight into the habits and behaviour of their consumers, consequently aiding them in the process of funds and resource allocation to relevant media, which are proactively used by the consumers. As a result, this can create savings, and at the same time, improve the visibility of their messages and increase the chances to attract new consumers, retaining the existing ones and generating profit. The old habits of advertising and focusing mainly on traditional methods, cannot create good results for every type of product or service, especially in times when consumer habits are continuously and radically changing. The companies are well-advised to follow market trends and information concerning the consumers' preferences and their habits and behaviours.

Additionally, this paper is of significance because it fills the gap in the research on consumers' behaviour regarding media usage during times of crisis which is scarce, and especially in terms of focusing and incorporating different social media in one study, as shown in the literature review.

2. Literature review

In the past two decades, consumers have increasingly turned to use of social media sites „to search for information and turning away from traditional media, such as television, radio, and magazines" and the social media have gradually become "new channels of brand communication" (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Moreover, social media has certainly altered how societies communicate and have transformed perceptions and attitudes (Duffett, 2015). The emergence of social networking technologies altogether has provided brands with "an opportunity to lure new customers and retain the existing ones" (Adhikari and Panda, 2017).

The unprecedented crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic also referred to as "the major global health event of 2020" (Marzouki, Aldossari and Veltri, 2021), has impacted every aspect of people's lives including the communication channels, preferences, online shopping behaviours and social media communication habits with brands (Ali Taha, Pencarelli, Škerháková, Fedorko, and Košíková, 2021). Namely, during the pandemic, young adults prefer to use social media for meeting their needs in „getting information, communicating, socializing, leisure activities and shopping" (Onat-Kocabiyik, 2021). The pandemic and the social distancing protocols have influenced the increase of messaging on Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram by 70%, whereas the use of Twitter hit new records. A 61% increase in the use of social media platforms has been assessed as a result of users needing to stay in touch with families, friends and colleagues (Holmes, 2020; Onat-Kocabiyik, 2021). This has caused substantial growth in e-commerce, considering that many consumers transferred to online shopping (Dubbelink, Herrando and Constantinides, 2021). After the COVID-19 outbreak, lockdown measures have been deployed globally (Marzouki, Aldossari and Veltri, 2021) and the spread of the virus around the world affected the inception of our so-called "new normal", i.e. social distancing, alteration of our habits and preferences, and the alteration of our social media habits.

Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012) claim that social media offers more opportunities for marketers and brand managers "to cooperate with consumers to increase the visibility of brands". In their study, they have focused on investigating differences in brand-related user-generated content (UGC) between Twitter (a microblogging site), Facebook (a social network) and YouTube (a content community). They have conducted a content analysis of 600 UGC for two retail brands. Their findings indicate that YouTube has a culture of consumers' self-promotion, Twitter is least likely to feature consumer self-promotion, whereas Facebook is placed somewhere in between these two.

Duffett (2015) has explored the impact of Facebook advertising on cognitive attitudes amid Generation Y in the emerging country of South Africa. In this study, the main question is whether the largest social medium's marketing communications "effectively reach" young adults in South Africa and the findings indicate that "Facebook advertising has a favourable effect on the awareness and knowledge hierarchy-of-effects model levels" among young adults in South Africa.

Duffett (2017) has investigated the influence of social media marketing communications on young consumers' attitudes, i.e. on Generation Z at colleges and high schools in South Africa. Moreover, the study explores the impact of several additional factors such as usage (access, length of usage, log-on frequency, log-on duration and profile update incidence) and demographic (gender, age and population group) variables on young consumers' attitudes towards social media marketing communications and found that "social media marketing communications had a positive on each attitude component among adolescents, but on a declining scale".

Hidalgo and Sánchez Briones (2021) have analysed Facebook as the „social network with the greatest interaction for the promotion and commercialization of goods and services"and its use as a social media marketing tool during the COVID-19 pandemic in Manabi, Ecuador. Their findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected social media, i.e. the social media sites have strengthened their position "as a result of the declared social confinement in the world". Moreover, they found that Facebook "impacts the purchase decision, while allowing promotion strategies as an interactive link between companies and consumers".

Mason, Narcum and Mason (2021) have conducted exploratory research on a sample of 327 consumers to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers' social media marketing behaviours in the United States. Their findings suggest an increase in the use of social media „as a tool for identifying products, collecting information on products, evaluating products, and making product purchases ", thus highlighting the „growing importance of social media marketing" since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ali Taha, Pencarelli, Škerháková, Fedorko and Košíková (2021) have explored the use of social media and its impact on the shopping behaviour of Slovak and Italian consumers (on a sample of 937 respondents) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, their results revealed "statistically significant differences in the use of social media during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of various demographic factors as well as a relatively weak relationship between the social media used and the purchase in the e-shop promoted on the social media". Namely, they found that WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Skype were the most used media in Italy, whereas Messenger, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and MS Teams in Slovakia. Moreover, they found YouTube to be the most used social media (regardless of respondents' gender, education, age, and country of origin), followed by WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Messenger.

Dubbelink, Herrando & Constantinides (2021) have proposed a framework in order to answer the question of how can businesses and brands, amidst and after the COVID-19 pandemic, adapt their social media marketing strategy to create positive brand equity. Their findings provide the first insights into COVID-19's impact on consumer behaviour and they indicate that user-generated content brings many benefits to both businesses and consumers. Moreover, they claim that the trend of interactive and influential consumers in the decision-making process has sustained and increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nagpal and Gupta (2022) have assessed the impact of the pandemic communication efforts on brand-specific outcomes while testing the roles of brand attitude and product category. The obtained results reveal "a positive and significant impact of communication during pandemic on all three brand outcomes under investigation".

Even though the literature regarding the impact of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc. on consumers' behaviours is vast and ever-growing, research and evidence on the habits and usage of social media as a tool for communication during the COVID-19 pandemic are quite modest and recent research have shown the need for additional work in this area (Brennen Simon, Howard and Nielsen (2020); Pérez-Escoda, Jiménez-Narros, Perlado-Lamo-de-Espinosa and Pedrero-Esteban, 2020).

Furthermore, the authors could not find any studies about communication media habits of emerging adults with brands incorporating Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in any of the globally relevant scientific databases. This paper is an attempt to bridge this gap.

3. Methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly affected people's daily lives and it has visibly impacted media consumption as well. Considering the change in everyday activities, the transformation in the organization of work and education activities, and the increased time spent at home, without any social contacts, it created a need for analysis of how and where (on which media) have people in the role of consumers spent most of their time.

In this study, the media of interest are social media (three different media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), which are integrated into one study in order to obtain a broader picture of the habits of the chosen sample. The decision on researching and investigating the social media communication and habits of emerging adults is due to the existing gap in the literature regarding such studies on one side, and the need of the companies for updated data on communication trends, on the other.

The sample analysed in this paper consists of 284 emerging adults, aged 18 – 29 years. The size of the sample for the chosen generation (age group) is above the national standard for representative samples of 0.5%, since the total population between 15-29 years of age is 480828 (State Statistical Office, 2022), and the size of the sample according to the State Statistical Office standard for representative samples would be 240.

Based on the research from Arnett (2000), the category (i.e. generation) of emerging adults includes youth between 18 and 29 years old, which are in the phase of the end of adolescence going towards young-adult responsibilities of a stable job, marriage and parenthood. Emerging adults are the generation of consumers that has experienced the biggest changes and advancements related to social media, the internet, smartphones and other technological advancements, which became their identity (Singh and Dangmei, 2016). They are characterized by a high degree of adaptability, flexibility and openness to change. According to Arnett (2014), emerging adults are in the age of self-focus, which comprises of making choices about what to study/do, where to go, and who to be. Their behaviour is expected to continue changing in near future, including a greater degree of technical-technological discoveries as well as inclusion and usage of new social media that will be available to them.

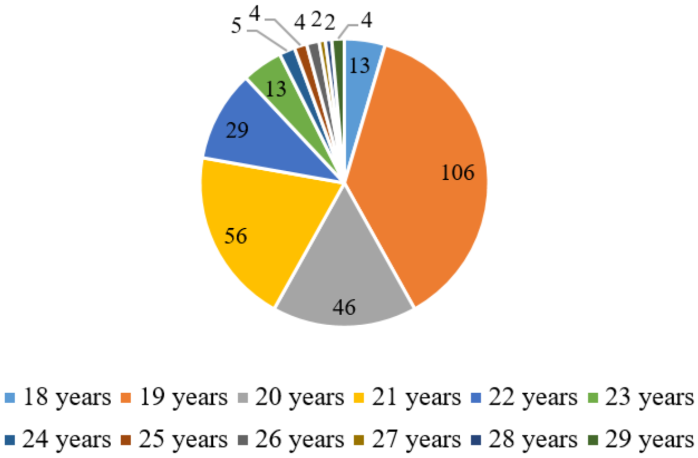
The study is conducted through primary and secondary data collection. A questionnaire was developed, which included a variety of questions with nominal, ordinal and interval (Likert) scales. The survey was conducted with the usage of the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was distributed through Microsoft Teams to emerging adults which are students at the Faculty of Economics at the state university Goce Delcev – Shtip, Macedonia, who were present in online classes at the time of distribution.

Participants were asked to answer questions divided into subgroups: 1. Provide demographic information, such as age, year of study, available monthly income and work status; 2. Information about their previous experience with brand communication on social media; 3. Information about the frequency of usage of different social media; 4. Perception of the significance of social media for communication with brands; 5. Perception of the quality of social media as a source for product or service information; 6. Perception of the influence of social media brand communication on their purchase decision; 7. Engagement with the communication messages on social media.

The collected data are analyzed on the base of descriptive statistics in combination with relevant information from the existing academic literature. The aim of this study is to provide more in-depth insight into the current trends in social media habits and communication with brands under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, through a combination of primary and secondary research.

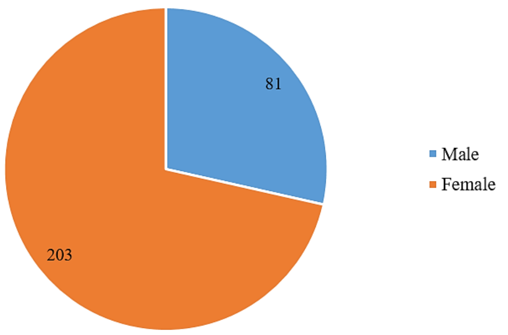
The sample includes 284 respondents from the generation of emerging adults. The analysis of the demographic data shows that most of them are 19 years of age, followed by respondents aged 21, 20 and 24 (Figure 1). Regarding gender, 203 (71.5%) are male, while 81 (28.5%) are females (Figure 2). Most of the respondents, 144 (50.7%) are in their first year of studies, followed by fourth-year 58 (20.4%), third-year 46 (16.2%) and second-year 33 (11.6%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Age



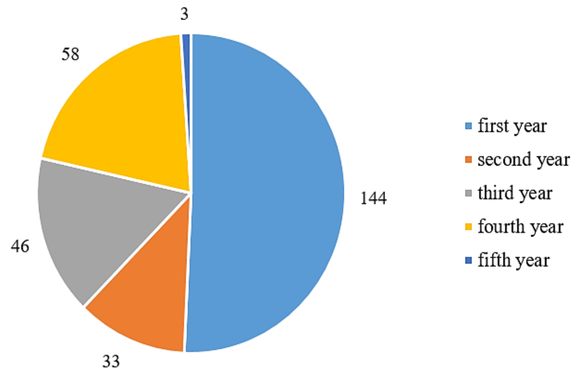
Source: Authors' research

Figure 2: Gender of respondents



Source: Authors' own research

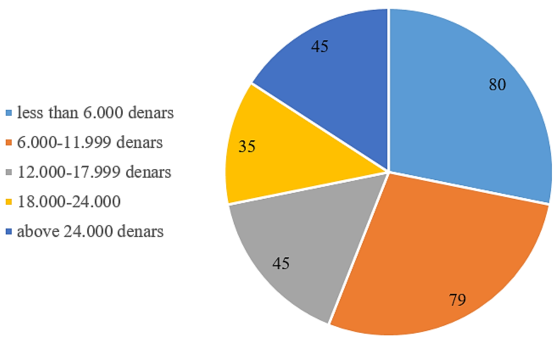
Figure 3: Year of studies



Source: Authors' own research

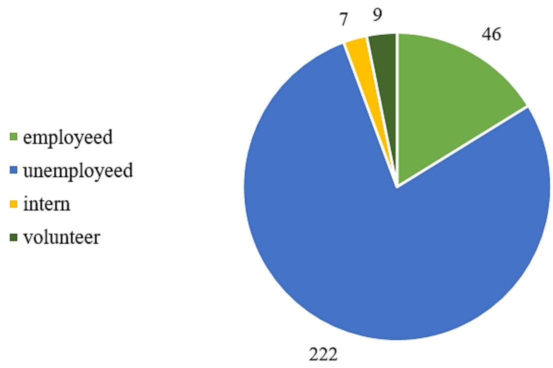
Additionally, regarding the available monthly income of the respondents, most of them (28%) have a low available monthly income (less than 6000 denars i.e. less than 100 euros), followed by the one's with income between 6000 and 11.999 denars i.e. between 100 and 200 euro (27.8%) (Figure 4). From the work status of the respondents, the majority are unemployed 222 (78.2%), followed by the number of employed 46 (16.2%), and the remaining 5.6% are the ones who were interns or volunteers (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Available monthly income



Source: Authors' own research

Figure 5: Work status



Source: Authors' own research

4. Results and discussion

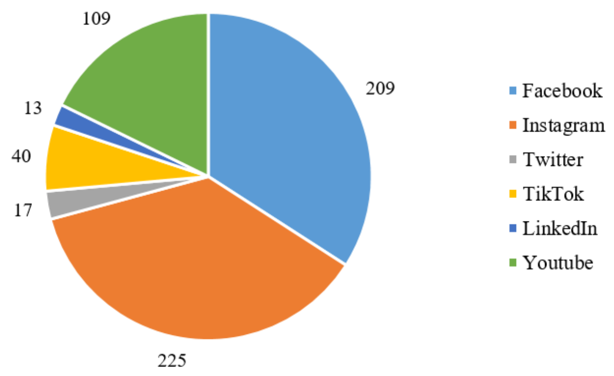
The development of the living standard and the strength of the economy, in general, relies on the ability of the (business) sector to be resilient and adaptive in ways that can ensure the creation of profit in order for them to be sustainable and long-lasting creators of jobs. One of the crucial business activities in this process is efficient and effective communication with the existing and potential consumers. Strong brands are developed through carefully monitored media consumption patterns of the consumers and their implementation in the strategy and communication plans of the companies (Mitreva, Arsova, Jovanov-Apasieva and Fotova-Cikovic, 2022).

Thus, understanding the behaviour of the new generations, such as the emerging adults' generation, is an important part of increasing the possibilities for the development of improved communication strategies and tactics and the choice of the optimal media investment, when it comes to brand development and, promotion of the products and the business itself. The first step in this process is the understanding of the current trends and the patterns of behaviour of the consumers, i.e. the way these emerging adults think and behave concerning the usage of social media. This is important since emerging adults are the generation that uses various types of media, with the main disadvantage of having a limited budget and is often unemployed, especially since the occurrence of Covid-19 (BLS, 2021).

As the analysis of the demographic data shows, most of the respondents are unemployed and have a limited (low) available monthly income. This implies that these consumers might not be able to immediately or promptly purchase a product or brand that they see and like on a certain medium, and companies could need additional communicational tactics in order to support the initial communication message.

Regarding the respondents' previous experience (in the past six months) in communication with companies on social media, as we can be seen in Figure 6, they mostly communicate with brands on Instagram (225 or 79.2%), followed by Facebook (209 or 73.6%), then YouTube (109 or 38.4%) and Tik Tok (40 or 14%). Twitter and LinkedIn are used rarely to communicate with brands. This is in line with previous research, that puts Facebook and Instagram at the top of the most used social media for communication with brands, alongside YouTube (Ali Taha, Pencarelli, Škerháková, Fedorko and Košíková, 2021).

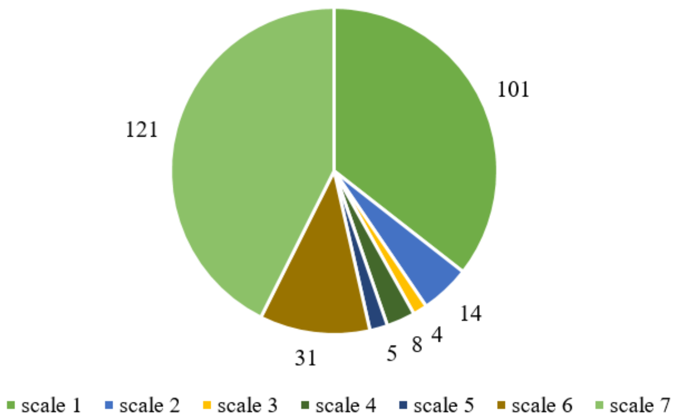
Figure 6: Prior experience with communication with brands on social media



Source: Authors' research

The participants' perception of the importance of social media as a channel for communication with brands was ranked on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represents the most important medium and 7 is the least important medium. The results, presented in Figure 7, show that cumulatively (scale values 1, 2 and 3) around 42% (119) perceive social media to be an important medium for communicating with brands. On the other side, cumulatively (scale values 6 and 7) 152 (53.5%) respondents don't think of social media as an important medium for communicating with brands. This is a somewhat unexpected result since the previous experience shows that most of these emerging adults use social media for communication with brands. This finding might be a result of a negative communication experience or a possible overload of information through social media, which in turn creates a negative perception of the importance of the medium for communication with brands. This calls for further examination of the reasons behind this perception of social media as not a very important medium for brand communication.

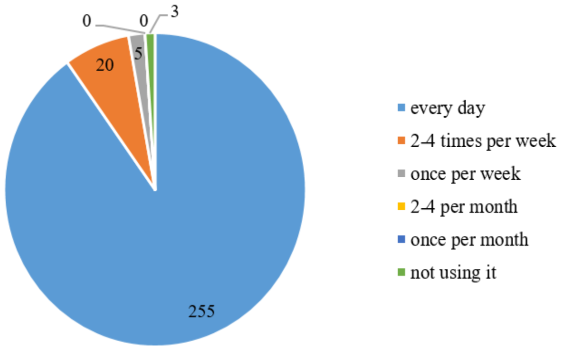
Figure 7: The relative value of social media as a medium for communication with brands



Source: Authors' research

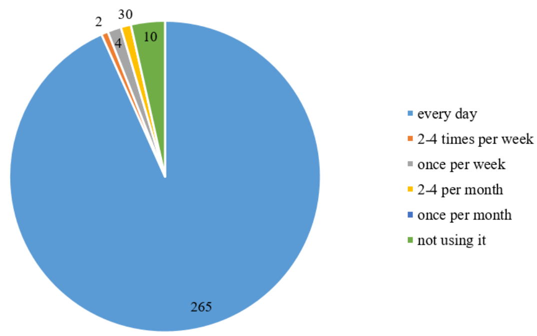
The study also examined the frequency of usage ("from every day" to "not using it at all") of social media from the respondents. In Figure 8, the frequency of usage of Facebook shows that most of the emerging adults 255 (90%) use this medium every day, followed by 20 (7%) that use it as a medium for communication 2-4 times per week. This means that brands can easily access most of the emerging adults if they include Facebook as a channel for communication. The results are similar for the social network Instagram. Namely, as shown in Figure 9, even more respondents 265 (93.3%) use Instagram every day as a medium for communication. This result suggests that brands can easily access emerging adults on Instagram, as well.

Figure 8: Usage of Facebook



Source: Authors' research

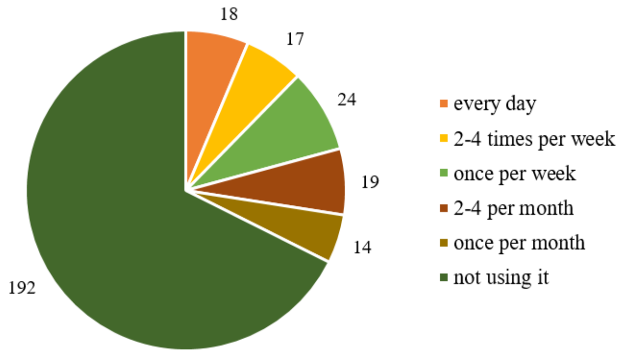
Figure 9: Usage of Instagram



Source: Authors' research

On the other side, the results show a different situation for Twitter. Figure 10 shows that most of the emerging adults 192 (67.6%) do not use Twitter as a medium for communication. Only 18 (6%) use it every day, followed by 17 (5.9%) that use it 2-4 times per week. The result is also in line with the previous experience of the respondents (Figure 6), which shows Twitter as a rarely used medium for communication in the past six months. This result presents Twitter as a less attractive medium for brands to include in their communication with emerging adults since it is not used very often and can make communicating with them less efficient.

Figure 10: Usage of Twitter



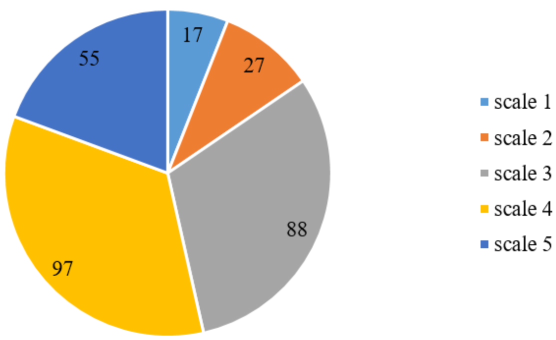
Source: Authors' research

Furthermore, in connection to the presented habits of the respondents towards more frequent use and preference of certain social media (Facebook and Instagram) for brand communication, we provide a more in-depth insight into their perception and behaviour regarding these media.

Based on their perception, the respondents have rated (on a scale of 1 – totally disagree to 5 – totally agree) the eligibility of Facebook and Instagram as a source of information regarding product or service information and their purchase intention i.e. the willingness to buy products or services based on the brand communication on these media.

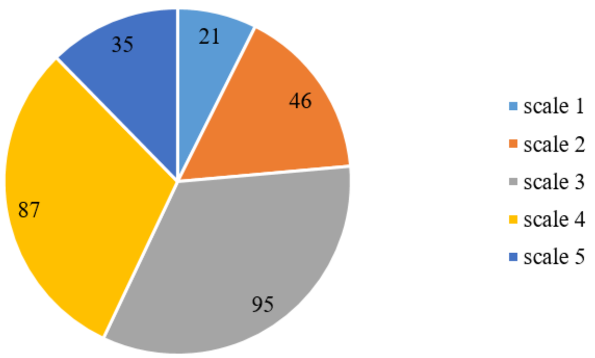
As presented in Figure 11, cumulatively (scale values 4 and 5), more than half of the emerging adults 152 (53.5%) in the sample agree that Facebook is a good source of product or service information, while only 44 (15.5%) disagree. Additionally (Figure 12), concerning their purchase intention, cumulatively (scale values 4 and 5) 122 (43%) agree that brand communication on Facebook has a positive influence on their purchase decisions which is in line with previous research (Hidalgo & Sánchez Briones, 2021), while only 67 (23.6%) disagree with this statement. From the results, we can see that emerging adults mainly show a positive attitude towards Facebook as a medium for communication with brands.

Figure 11: Facebook is a good source of product or service information



Source: Authors' research

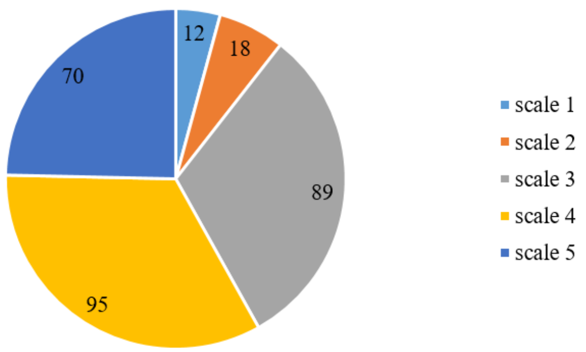
Figure 12: Brand communication on Facebook has a positive influence on my purchase decisions



Source: Authors' research

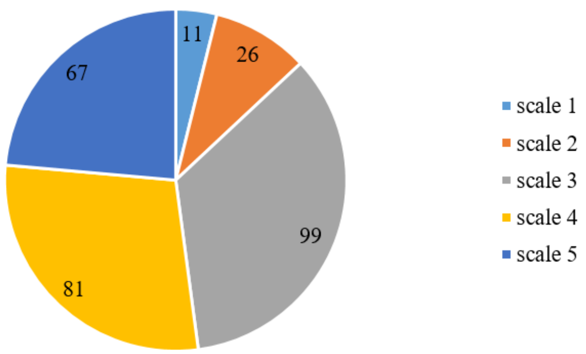
The results for Instagram as a medium for communication are similar to the results for Facebook. Namely, Figure 13 shows that cumulatively (scale values 4 and 5) most of the respondents 165 (58%) agree that Instagram is a good source for product or service information, and only 30 (10.6%) disagree. Accordingly, Figure 14 presents that cumulatively 148 (52%) also agree that brand communication on Instagram has a positive influence on their purchase decisions, while only 37 (13%) disagree. The results show that emerging adults have a mostly positive attitude towards Instagram as a medium for communication with brands.

Figure 13: Instagram is a good source of product or service information



Source: Authors' research

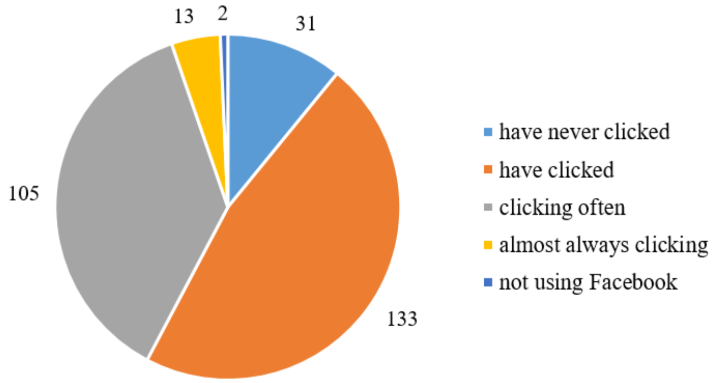
Figure 14: Brand communication on Instagram has a positive influence on my purchase decisions



Source: Authors' research

Moreover, the behaviour of emerging adults in communication with brands on the preferred social media Facebook and Instagram was analysed through their interaction with the brands' messages i.e. clicking on the content. The results (Figure 15) show that emerging adults mainly interact with brands based on their communication messages on Facebook, with 133 (46.8%) of them that have clicked on communication messages from brands, and 105 (37%) clicking i.e. interacting often. Only 31 respondents or 10.9% stated to never have clicked on communication messages from brands on Facebook. Emerging adults show generally reactive and responsive behaviour in the interaction with brand communication messages on Facebook.

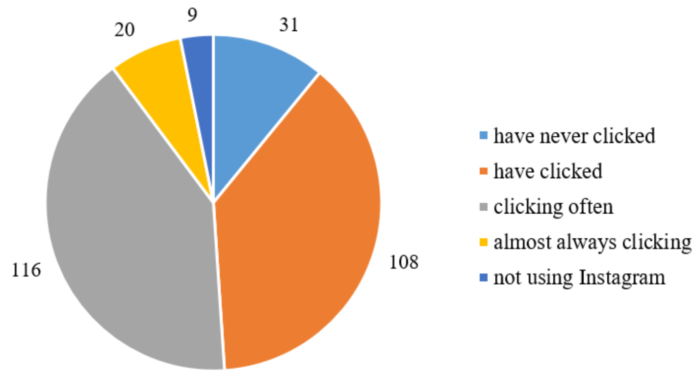
Figure 15: Clicking on the brands' communication messages on social media Facebook



Source: Authors' research

The behavior is similar to Instagram. From Figure 16 can be seen that 108 (38%) have clicked on communication messages from brands on Instagram, and 116 (41%) have been interacting often with the brands. Only 31 (10.9%) have never clicked on communication messages from brands on Instagram. Emerging adults show generally reactive and responsive behaviour in the interaction with brand communication messages on Instagram.

Figure 16: Clicking on brands' communication messages on social media Instagram



Source: Authors' research

5. Conclusion

The pandemic has been and continues to be a significant challenge for the people, the businesses and the world in general. Consumer behaviour and the way of doing business have largely changed and adapted to the measures imposed by governments. For a period of almost three years, consumers have largely spent time at home and in front of their screens, while businesses had to reorganize their operations, increase their digitalization and change their communication strategies and channels. As we head towards the middle of 2022, the pandemic is likely to stay for the long run and is expected to be a challenge for the future, thus continuously affecting and shaping behaviour and business strategies.

This paper analyses the social media communication habits of emerging adults with brands during the covid-19 pandemic, with the aim to fill the existing gap in the literature, and also provide information that can be useful for companies and their media choice for communicating with consumers.

The study shows that some previously started trends, such as digitalization of business operations, increased use of social media, increased investments from companies in social media channels etc. have been largely accelerated during the pandemic.

Based on the results of this study, we can conclude that most emerging adults as the next generation of financially independent consumers use social media for communication with brands, among other uses. The most preferred social media for communication with brands are Instagram and Facebook. These are also the most frequently used media from the emerging results, with everyday usage frequency. Twitter is the social media that is least preferred by emerging adults.

Research has shown that emerging adults perceive Facebook and Instagram as good sources of information about products or services, and state that brand communication on these media has a positive influence on their purchase intentions. The emerging adult's communication with brands is not only one-way communication but rather an interactive process in which they react to the communication messages of brands with engagement i.e. clicking on the content that is distributed through Facebook and Instagram.

Bearing in mind that brands should follow the habits and behaviour of the customers prior to creating their communications strategy, they are advised to focus on the media that are more frequently used by consumers. In the case of emerging adults' communication habits with brands on social media, the preferred and thus, proposed media for inclusion in the business communication activities of the companies are Facebook and Instagram. These media will enable them to reach the consumers with less effort and finance, compared to the effort to communicate on media that are less frequently used like Twitter, or not used at all.

The study states that understanding consumer communication behaviour and habits on different media platforms is crucial for the development of effective communication strategies that can result in attracting and retaining customers for the business. The findings from this study create a base for additional research on the topic, which can further contribute to generating a broader perspective of media usage and habits of consumers. This can provide businesses with the needed information to plan and implement communication strategies that best suit the needs of their target group during the ongoing crisis, as well as for the upcoming period following the pandemic.

Some limitations of the study are the sampling technique which relies on voluntary partaking which increases the selection bias, and the focus on one generation of consumers – emerging adults, which limits the possibility for generalization of the results on the population. However, we expect the results to be generalizable for the emerging adults nationwide since the size of the sample for the chosen generation is above the national standard of 0.5%. An additional limitation is the absence of a follow-up period for the respondents.

Future research should examine the reasons behind the perception of social media as less important media for communication with brands, as one part of the respondents have created such an indication. Also, additional social media can be included in the research in order to paint a clearer picture of the usage of the many different social media available. Future research can also examine a larger sample that will include other generations of consumers, so we can understand the communication behaviour on social media of the population in general. Moreover, a comparison between the communication habits of people with brands on different media and not only social media should be made. This could help us better understand which media are best for brand communication with their current and potential consumers, not only in time of crisis but after the crisis as well.

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