

Globalna pandemija i digitalni marketing: Trendovi i perspektive

Global pandemic and digital marketing: Trends and perspectives

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Apstrakt: Globalna pandemija Covid-19 virusom uzrokovala je probleme i značajne izazove u svim segmentima poslovanja. Izuzetak nije ni digitalni marketing koji je, iako se bazira na primeni informacionih tehnologija čime njegovo funkcionisanje nije bilo vitalno ugroženo, pretrpeo značajne transformacije. Iako je na početku pandemije većina oglašivača značajno smanjila sredstva namenjena digitalnom oglašavanju i odložila lansiranje marketinških kampanja, kompanije su uspele da konsoliduju svoje budžete i organizuju poslovanje u skladu sa novonastalim okolnostima. Zahvaljujući ubrzanom digitalizaciji, došlo je do ekspanzije elektronske trgovine i porasta sadržaja kreiranog za digitalne kanale, usled činjenice da su mere kako fizičkog, tako i socijalnog distanciranja sav fokus komunikacije i robno-novčane razmene preusmerile na digitalno okruženje. Usled eksponencijalnog povećanja vremena koji su ljudi proveli na digitalnim medijima (a posebno na društvenim medijima) u 2020. godini, udvostručena je i konzumacija onlajn sadržaja na globalnom nivou. Posledično, došlo je i do povećanja obima sadržaja kreiranog od strane korisnika, povećanja broja digitalnih kampanja, ali i promene tona marketinške komunikacije koja se bazira na izražavanju empatije i solidarnosti. Uzimajući u obzir da su i pre pojave pandemije digitalni marketing karakterisale intenzivne promene, cilj ovog rada je identifikacija ključnih tendencija na tržištu digitalnog marketinga koje su nastale usled pojave globalne pandemije. U radu je analiziran ekonomski aspekt, odnosno uticaj pandemije na rast tržišta digitalnog marketinga posmatran kroz ukupan utrošak sredstava za digitalno oglašavanje na nivou 28 zemalja Evrope. Takođe, posmatran je i aspekt prilagođavanja marketinške komunikacije novonastalim pojavama u društvu, kao što je život i rad k(od) kuće te rastuća izolovanost usled mera socijalnog distanciranja. Rezultati istraživanja doprinose povećanju literaturnog opusa iz oblasti digitalnog marketinga dajući sistematičan prikaz nastalih promena u ovoj oblasti, ali i trendova u razvoju digitalnog marketinga koji se anticipiraju u narednom periodu.

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

JEL klasifikacija: M31, M37

Abstract: The global pandemic of Covid-19 has caused issues and significant challenges in all spheres of business activities. Digital marketing is no exception, which, although based on the application of information technologies and thereby its functioning was not vitally jeopardized, has undergone significant transformations. Although at the beginning of the pandemic, most advertisers significantly reduced the funds intended for digital advertising and postponed the launch of marketing campaigns, companies have managed to consolidate their budgets and organize their business activities in accordance with the new circumstances. Due to the accelerated digitalization, there has been an expansion of e-commerce and an increase in content created for digital channels due to the fact that physical and social distancing measures have shifted all focus of communication and money transactions to the digital environment. As a result of the exponential increase in time spent with digital media (especially social media), global online content consumption has doubled in 2020. Accordingly, the expansion of user generated content and an increase in the number of digital campaigns occurred, alongside with the change in the tone of marketing communication based on the need to express empathy and solidarity. Taking into account that even before the pandemic, digital marketing was

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characterized by intense changes, the aim of this paper is to identify key trends in digital marketing that have arisen due to the global pandemic. The paper analyzes the economic aspect, i.e. the impact of the pandemic on the growth of digital marketing observed through the total spending on digital advertising at the level of 28 European countries. Also, the aspect of adapting marketing communication to the new phenomena in society, such as living and working at home and rising isolation due to social distancing measures, was observed. The results of a research conducted in this paper contribute to the growing body of literature in the field of digital marketing by providing a systematic overview of the changes that have occurred, as well as development trends that are anticipated for the future period.

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

JEL classification: M31, M37

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has induced significant challenges to almost all of the aspects of business activities. In order to overcome the negative effects of the ongoing health crisis, the business sector has turned to digital technologies and application of advanced ICT solutions (Lazić et al., 2021) due to their potential to significantly improve competitiveness and business processes (Domazet et al., 2018). Along with the increased usage of digital technologies in everyday lives, the world population spend most of their time being connected. According to official data (Statista, 2021a), as of January 2021 the total number of active internet users on the global level accounts for 4.66 billion with 4.2 billion in social media alone. It is estimated that approximately every second person in the overall global population uses at least one social network. Facebook is still the most popular one, currently recording more than 2.89 billion active users.

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

After the initial drop in ad spending during 2020, advertisers did not go blind in 2021 but continued to invest. According to official statistics (Statista, 2021b), ad spending in the global digital advertising market is projected to reach 463,814m USD dollars in 2021. Search Advertising is estimated to represent the largest market segment with overall share of more than 30% (Statista, 2021b). When it comes to European digital advertising market, despite the negative effects of the ongoing global health crisis it recorded growth of 6.3% in 2020 (IAB Europe, 2021). Nevertheless, the pace of growth of European digital advertising market during the previous year is considered to be the slowest in recent history, even compared to the global recession induced by the outbreak of financial crisis in 2008.

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

The paper consists of 5 sections. After the introductory remarks, the second and third section have been devoted to the analysis of the impact of the ongoing health crisis on life and business, as well as digital marketing. Forth section highlights the main trends observed in European digital advertising market during the year 2020. Fifth section concludes.

2. The impact of Covid-19 outbreak on life and business

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

On March 6 2020, state health authorities reported on the first COVID-19 case detected in Serbia. Consequently, numerous restrictions were introduced, such as temporary ban on entry into Serbia for foreign citizens coming from areas with intensive coronavirus transmission, and eventually state borders closure, followed by a declaration on state of emergency (srbija.gov.rs). As no mass gatherings were allowed, companies were advised to introduce work from home arrangements wherever possible. All non-essential services providers faced partial or complete cessation of business. Consequently, all public events as well as business gatherings with domestic and foreign partners, new product and campaign launching, promotional activities and other special events were postponed or cancelled.

As a result of multiple-day curfew and police hour movement restriction, people were forced to organize their life and work at home, changing drastically their daily routine. More than ever before, people spent their time online, using digital technology for different day-to-day purposes. From home office arrangements to career development, education and self-improvement, telehealth and well-being to entertainment and other leisure activities, digital environment has become a go-to spot for any personal or professional occasion.

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

Due to supply chain disruptions and stay-at-home regulations, the demand for clothes plummeted and textile industry has witnessed an unprecedented drop in the second quarter of 2020, which was twice as bad compared to the worst quarter of the 2009 economic and financial crisis (-37%) (euratex.eu). Fashion industry giants had to close some of their retail stores as global pandemic drove sales online. Moreover, the demand for clothing worn outside dropped, and a new trend of comfort dressing was set, making fashion companies promote garments such as loungewear and shackets, as Zoom video calls only revealed the upper part of persons' outfit. Parallel with health concerns were the efforts towards achieving healthier lifestyle, which resulted with growth of activewear over 35% in digital orders during Q1 of 2020 (deloitte.com).

During Covid-19 pandemic, entertainment industry has also witnessed major disruptions. Over 9000 cinemas across the EU were closed and just about 2500 in the US, generating the loss of 5 billion USD on the global box office, which was projected to soar up to 15 and 17 billion USD due to stopped or delayed production, cancelled premieres, film festivals and special events (europarl.europa.eu). On the other hand, in 2020 global home and mobile entertainment market growth amounted to 23.0%, year to year, reaching 68.8 billion USD revenue which was driven by digital content (motionpictures.org). In 2020, streaming service Netflix has seen an increase of around 37 million new subscribers globally and 24% growth in annual revenue, year to year (wsj.com).

As some sectors were losing revenue amidst Covid 19 crisis, others suddenly became much more validated. It is the case of self-improvement and personal development industry, as online courses achieved exponential growth during pandemic. Coursera's CEO has revealed some staggering pandemic related statistics from 2020, which show a growth of 644% in enrollments over 30-day time

compared to 2019, and more than 5 million post Covid new user registrations (DeVaney et al., 2020). Other research indicated that 35% of Netflix subscribers use this platform for educational content, thereby changing the manner in which knowledge and information are acquired (Kohli et al. 2020).

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

3. Trends in European digital advertising in 2020

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

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

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

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

Figure 1. Share of European digital ad spend by market, %

Source: IAB Europe, 2021.

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

Figure 2. Total digital ad spend in European market, bn EUR

Source: IAB Europe, 2021.

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

Figure 3. Digital ad annual growth rate in the year 2020, %

Source: IAB Europe, 2021.

The growth of European digital ad market recorded in 2020 differed among formats: with the rise of 9.1% Display recorded the biggest annual growth rate, followed by Paid-for Search with annual growth of 7.8%. Total rise of Display was driven mostly by video (+16.3%) and social (+15.9%) mainly because of the soar of e-commerce and brand advertising.

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

In general, social media are the most effective channels to communicate with the target audience. According to official statistics (Statista, 2021c), the average time spent on social media in 2020 amounted to 145 minutes a day.

Figure 4. Overall Display spend in Europe by formats, %

Source: IAB Europe, 2021.

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

Figure 5. Digital ad spend by device 2017-2020, %

Source: IAB Europe, 2021.

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

4. The impact of Covid-19 trends on digital marketing campaigns

Besides e-commerce acceleration, increased focus on digital advertising was also a result of the need to manage marketing and advertising budgets in a more cost-effective manner. Due to movement restrictions and limited financial resources, brands had to give up on expensive advertisements filmed in studios which have big production value. Marketers' focus was shifted towards creative strategies which include user generated content, real-life setting and organic distribution which implies

engagement with an online following without paid promotion. User generated content is a powerful storytelling tool which helps in bridging the gap between companies and consumers (Vukmirović et al., 2020). It creates a sense of community for consumers which motivates them to be loyal and support companies and their brands.

The idea to include consumers into digital marketing strategies creation was motivated by the extended time in isolation. It has made people search for ways in which they could spend their time in a more clever way than worrying, thereby immersing in creativity and creating content. Moreover, people felt the urge to contribute to their communities by sharing relevant information, supporting local businesses through social media posts or appealing to responsible behavior. Being separated from family and friends resulted with increased time spent in digital social interactions. In order to satisfy the need for social interaction, people turned to social media platforms in search for the sense of collective belonging. Accordingly, marketers tried to make the best of the unfavorable situation that the world found itself in through campaigns which call for unity and connection in uncertain times. More time spent at home provided people with the opportunity for introspection and reconsideration of their lifestyles, personal relationships, life expectations and the need for personal growth and development.

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

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

Pandemic has also brought to surface many issues of social inequality or has made them even more severe. Polarized social and political climate has put an additional burden on companies in already challenging times. As consumers expect companies to be inclusive, more sensitive to social issues and embrace diversity, more focus has been put on changing or adapting their key messages. In practice, this approach is known as diversity marketing, which was a 2020 trend and continued to be relevant in 2021 (hubspot.com). Empathetic marketing is what advertisers are expected to cultivate in the period of pandemic as consumers want to see values associated with kindness and caring in marketing

campaigns. In the upcoming period, in line with the challenging society we live in, purpose-driven marketing will remain relevant. As its main idea is to base marketing strategy over a social cause that is in accordance with the company's fundamental values, organizations will have many opportunities to organize their promotional activities around current social, health or environmental issues. Accordingly, engaging NGOs in marketing plans and digital marketing strategies is predicted to be a 2022 trend, including product placement, affiliate marketing activities and percentage of sales donations (inc.com)

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

5. Conclusion

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

The other aspect of this analysis concerned key trends in the tone and feel of advertising. In the unprecedented circumstances brought by global pandemic, people searched for comfort, understanding and support. Because of social isolation, people spent much more time online, making it an ideal opportunity for marketers to establish or strengthen mutual bonds through empathetic and encouraging messages. By introducing user generated content in a larger extent to their digital marketing strategies, advertisers expressed more appreciation and care for their consumers. As no end to global pandemic is in sight, it is to believe that these trends will remain relevant in the upcoming period. Even when the pandemic abates, trends from the previous period will continue to shape global marketing. Companies and brands will have to stand behind values that their consumers find important and foster relationships based on trust and integrity.

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

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