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Identifying user preferences from the point of view of using selected social networks

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Abstract
Marketing is an indispensable part of social media. Social media have essentially been created for marketing purposes because social media makers do not profit from the use of these media but, in particular, from the promotion of companies that pay for them. Social media provide multiple forms of promotion through their services, depending on a particular type of social media and one of them is the popular social network. Their potential in business is obvious, but often it happens that businesses try to get as many customers as possible, which means taking a step in the wrong direction. Choosing a suitable social network should therefore be a relevant component of the marketing plan of any organization that has decided to pursue its business activities where its potential customers are. Knowing the opportunities offered by these networks leads to well-set strategies and consequently to the effective achievement of business goals.

Key words: Marketing, YouTube, Communication Platforms, Social Networks

1. INTRODUCTION

The constantly evolving online communication medium is the social network in today's digital world. They provide broad-spectrum capabilities, they function as a primary tool not only for entertainment or communicating with friends but are increasingly a necessary part of marketing. These online platforms can also be a valuable support element for various other offline marketing activities. Thus, social network is, among other things, a place where maximum profits can be made for business activities.

Social networks, as part of social media, make it possible to see how a customer perceives the product, service or the brand itself. This is a fact that is both important for the users themselves who are looking for the right product or service as well as for organizations that offer their products and services on the market. Marketing in a social media environment for organizations means understanding and learning, market observation, experimentation, audience guidance, assessment and evaluation (McPheat 2011).

2. BASIC THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social networks, as part of social media, are unmistakable advantage when compared to other media and it is possible to talk about their strong potential. Many companies that have their profiles on social networks are aware of this fact. Subsequently, through these profiles, they share information about events, actions, products, etc. (Karlíček and Král 2011).

Janouch (2011) states, that social networks are a narrower concept than social media and content is created and shared by users. Social networks mean places where people meet, creating a circle of friends or joining a community with common interests. Social networks are also referred to as community networks or just simply communities.

Not only Janouch, but also many other professionals dealing with this issue, such as Bednář or Sterne, share a similar view. The meaning of the definition of this issue is in most cases identical, and therefore we can generally say that it is a sort of interconnection of a certain group of people with different manifestations that affect each other.

But if we want to go into the details about what the term itself means, Boyd and Ellison (2007) are often cited. They understand the social network as a link to a website that allows users to create a network of people with who they want to share information, news, comments, photos or other forms of content. They further argue that social networks consist of three basic parts. They have a public or semi-public user profile, a set of links to other users within the system and the ability to view their own list of friends as well as those created by other users within the system.

Brož et al. (2011) defines social network as a linked group of people in which they interact. Links in these groups bring new opportunities such as rapid dissemination of information and the ability to organize different events. As there are several types of social networks, there are also different social network types and categories.

According to the average user, the social network is a simple application that lives inside our computer or web browser (Ryan 2011). On the other hand, Peacock (2010) states, that social networks are one of the most used aspects of the web. Many businesses, organizations, communities and families use social networks, which enables them to better communicate with others and connect with the public. Obee (2012) claims that the social network is any website that allows us to express, share or otherwise communicate with other members of the website. Social media are those that allow us to interact online with friends or foreigners. Marko (2010) states, that social networks on the Internet allow people to share their lives and work even though they do not live with each other. If we have an Internet connection, we also have universal access to people on the planet, information, but also the ability to inform our customers.

According to Frey (2011), through social networks it is easy to publish public relations news and articles. In a social networking environment, the organization has the ability to publicly express itself, identify with others, express its feelings or appeal to the value of – consumers – fans.

In a narrower, more modern and predominant way, Velšic (2012, p. 3) defines a social network as a "service on the Internet, which allows members to create personal (or corporate) public or partial public

ECONOMY & SOCIETY & ENVIRONMENT

profiles, communicate together, share information, videos, chat and do other activities". In other words, it is a "structure that represents either individuals, groups or organizations. These bonds are interconnected. This bond does not necessarily mean friendship or partnership, but also shared opinions, hobbies, sexual relations or etc." (Velšic, 2012, p. 3).

The power of social networks is now indisputable for business. Sládek (2013) says that "companies are still taking advantage of the social networking power only marginally, especially through the offer of likes". To begin with, feedback on how to expand the number of fans in building a good name and the brand itself helps, but we need to realize that "the growth potential is quickly exhausted and in some phases, IT solutions are needed, which the customer feedback can analyse and use efficiently" adds Sládek (2013). From the above definitions, it is obvious that one of the basic social networking features is the ability to connect and share content with other users. However, Gray (2014) also highlights the fact that social networks should not become a substitute for real time spending with people.

3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The main goal of the research was to identify the dynamics of consumer preferences in relation to communication platforms and digital devices when purchasing in the online environment. For a more detailed specification of the changing shopping habits, the main objective of our research was at the same time to decompose it into three sub-objectives:
- Examine how the Internet platforms get information about goods and services.
- Find out which digital devices are used by respondents for purchasing online.
- Define which social networks Slovak consumers prefer the most.

Based on the main and partial objectives of the research conducted by us, the following research hypothesis was formulated:
    H1: The differences in the frequency of visitors in case of the YouTube social network between generation X and Y are statistically significant.
To fulfil our defined research goal, we conducted a questionnaire survey located in the Slovak Republic in the period from 21st of February, 2016 to 6th of March, 2016. Due to incomplete completion, 23 questionnaires were excluded. The data obtained was evaluated using the Microsoft Office suite, more precisely the Excel spreadsheet editor. The IBM SPSS Statistical Software was used to process mathematical and statistical analyses. Due to the scale of the questionnaire, we used a simultaneous parallel profile test and correlation analysis.

The survey carried out within the framework of the questionnaire survey can be considered representative in relation to the SR population. Specifically, the survey consisted of 414 respondents, of which up to 256 (62%) were women and 158 (38%) were men. Respondents were, in terms of age category, divided into consumers of generation X (36-52 years old) with a 72% share and generation Y (16-35 years old) with a 28% share. 10 respondents reached the primary level of education. Secondary education without a school leaving examination is represented by 14 respondents (3%) and secondary education with a school leaving examination is represented by 156 (38%). More than half of respondents (57%) involved in the survey were people with a higher level of education. At the same time, it is the most numerous group of all respondents. In terms of economic activity, the survey was attended by almost the same number of employees working in the public sphere (26%) as well as in the private

ECONOMY & SOCIETY & ENVIRONMENT

sphere (27%). Students were representing 28% of all respondents (114). The group of self-employed or entrepreneurs represented 13% of the respondents. The survey was also attended by unemployed people, who formed less than 4%. The option "Other" was marked by 14 respondents. Among them were women on maternity or men on parental leave, an invalid retiree, a bus driver, a community worker or people working abroad.

4.   RESULTS

Using the questionnaire, we found out how often respondents are buying via the Internet. More than half of the people (57%) have marked "Several times a year". Up to 148 people with 35% share buy products in the online environment "Several times a month". The survey sample also consisted of consumers who shop products in e-commerce somewhat more often, "Several times a week". This group represents less than 5% of all respondents. 12 respondents (3%) do not buy products via the Internet at all.
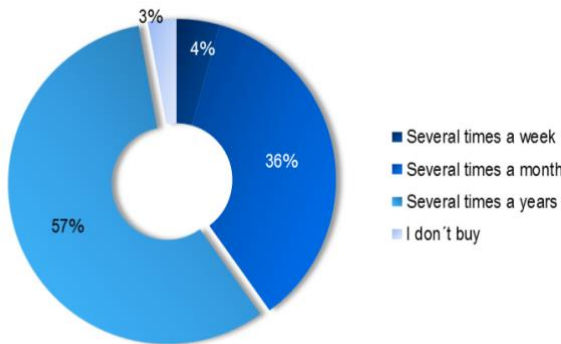

Chart 1 Frequency of purchase
Source: Own elaboration

We looked at which devices are used by respondents when purchasing online. Looking at Chart 2, it is clear that among all devices, the most preferred one is the notebook to buy products online. 69% of the respondents use it unambiguously and another 7% is inclined to this option. Nearly the same number of people (22%) buy through smartphones and desktops. They chose the option 4 (Rather yes), representing 8% of the respondents, whereas only 5% for the desktop.

As far as the use of digital devices the tablet is definitely among the last ones. Only 13% of the respondents use it, who responded positively to this item, while 9% of the consumers chose the option 4 (Rather yes). In the case of phablet and PDA, such type of digital devices are unknown among the respondents that is the reason why they did not answer to this question. Only a small number of people knew, of which it is evident that around 92% of the population is certainly not using it for purchasing online.
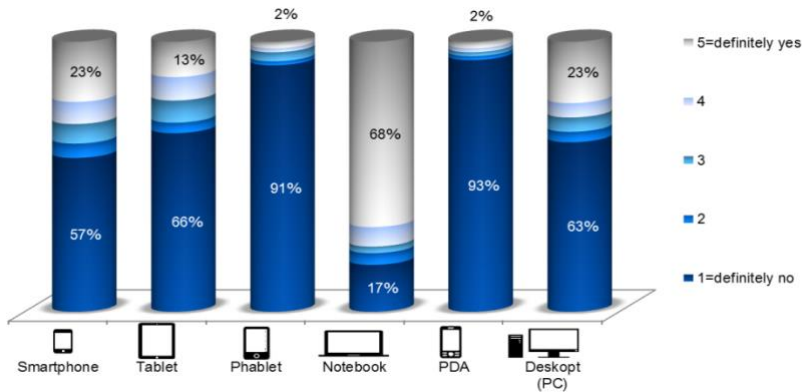
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Chart 2 Preferred devices for online purchasing
Source: Own elaboration

One of our partial goals was to investigate the communication platforms that Internet users receive information about goods and services. The following Chart 3 shows the respondents' opinion**.** After counting the scale values 4 and 5 for each item we have evaluated what resources most respondents use when searching for product information. Subsequently, we have compiled the "TOP 5" on the ladder, where the first section is the e-commerce (51%), the second is the social network (49%), the third most frequently used sources of information are the price comparison portals (48%), the fourth are discount portals (42%) and the results of the questionnaire show that the fifth of our ladder are physical stores (39%).
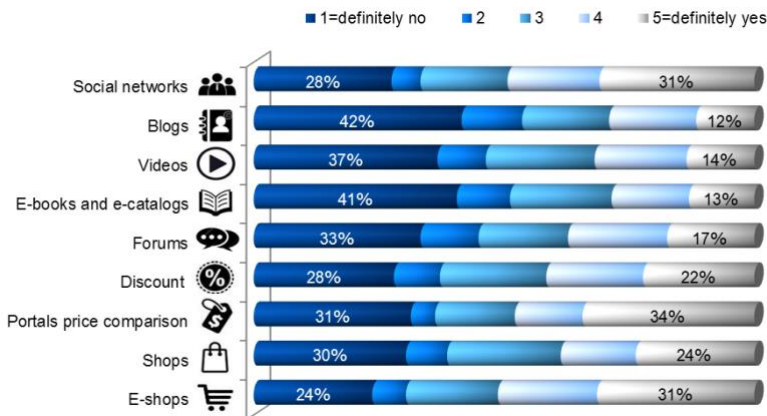

Chart 3 Resources for product information

Source: Own elaboration

In the survey, we also investigated which social networks Slovak consumers use the most. The results were surprising, but the widespread Facebook holds its first place in our country as well. More detailed survey results are shown below.

Table 1 Using social networks

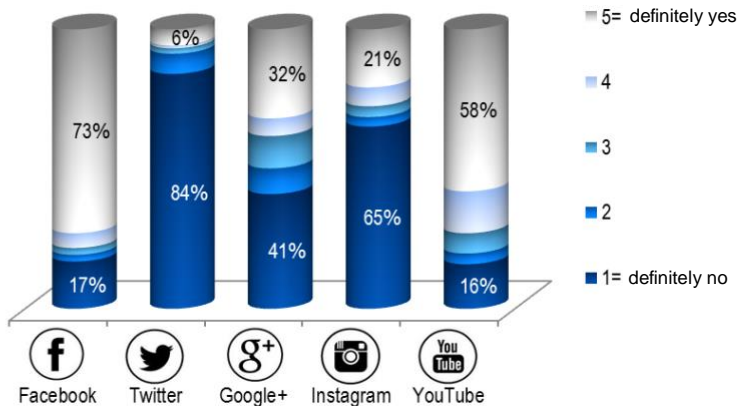| Social networks	1-Definitely no		2		3		4		5-Definitely yes	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Facebook	70	16.91%	10	2.42%	10	2.42%	22	5.31%	302	72.95%
Twitter	348	84.06%	30	7.25%	8	1.93%	4	0.97%	24	5.80%
Google+	170	41.06%	38	9.18%	48	11.59%	26	6.28%	132	31.88%
Instagram	270	65.22%	14	3.38%	16	3.86%	28	6.76%	86	20.77%
YouTube	66	15.94%	16	3.86%	30	7.25%	62	14.98%	240	57.97%

Source: Own elaboration

Chart 4 Using social networks
Source: Own elaboration

Perhaps the biggest surprise was that up to 80 people (almost 20%) do not visit the Facebook social network. Another 10 people (2%) abstained from neutral ratings. Nevertheless, there are a number of people (73%) who undoubtedly use this social network. Only 5% of the respondents chose the option 4.

Twitter as another relatively popular social network in the world is not that popular in Slovakia. 84% of the respondents said they definitely do not use it. With a huge difference from other social networks, on the contrary, less than 7% of the respondents use it.

ECONOMY & SOCIETY & ENVIRONMENT

Google+, operated by Google is famous among users. 38% of the respondents chose the option 4-5 (rather yes, definitely yes). The least used social network is Instagram. 69% of the respondents do not visit it at all. 114 (28%) of the 414 surveyed respondents said they actively use the visually-oriented Instagram social network.

The biggest video server - YouTube, has only confirmed its strong position in the media world. Although many people primarily use it to browse videos and few people see it as a social network with the ability to comment on posts, it is clear from the survey results that it can undoubtedly be one of the most popular social networks. More than half of the population (58%) definitely uses it and, on the contrary, it is used by only 16% of the respondents. Continuing the investigation, we continued to analyse the element with the highest correlation coefficient and therefore the relationship between the generations and the YouTube social network.
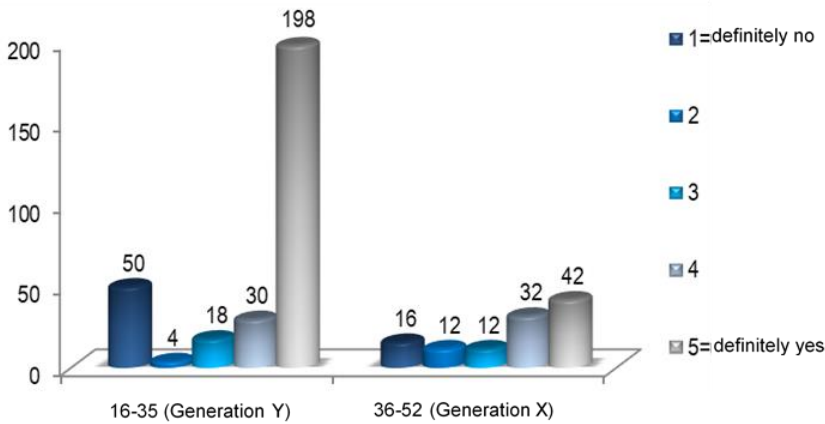

Chart 5 Frequency of using YouTube in terms of generation
Source: Own elaboration

It is clear from the chart that both generations visit the YouTube social network. However, given the size of the sample, we can assume that Y-generation, that is, younger people more often visit the social network than the older X-generation.

Table 2 Chi-Square Tests for using YouTube in terms of generation

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.626[a]	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	52.636	4	0.000

ECONOMY & SOCIETY & ENVIRONMENT

Linear-by-Linear Association	3.831	1	0.05
N of Valid Cases	414		

a. 1 cells (10.00 %) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.88.
Source: Own processing

For the need of complex analysis, it is also appropriate to define the deviation rate of the given set, more precisely to determine whether the older and younger generation (e.g. generation X and Y) is statistically significantly different in case of the YouTube social network by the number of visitors. For this issue, we chose the χ2 good compliance test at a Significance Level of 0.05.

Table 3 Correlation coefficient values for using YouTube in terms of generation

Symmetric Measures		**Value**	**Approximate Significance**
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.366	0
	Cramer's V	0.366	0
N of Valid Cases		414	

Source: Own elaboration

The preceding table defines the values of the correlation coefficient of the above elements as a strong dependence. Based on this, it can be shown that the number of YouTube social network visitors plays a relatively large role. In this case, we confirm the formulated H1 hypothesis. It is important to emphasize that while the two age cohorts examined by the YouTube social network are unambiguous, the results of the analysis between them confirm statistically significant differences. Y-generation consumers dominate over the X-generation on the largest video sharing network.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, it is possible to conclude at the end of this article that the most used source of information about goods and services is the e-commerce itself or the popular social networks. Within the preferences of online shopping devices, consumers prefer laptops, but also smartphones or desktop PCs. According to survey results, the most widely used social network is undoubtedly the Facebook and the other is the most popular video server for sharing videos - YouTube. The results of the analysis were revealed by the fact that both age groups use this platform, but younger consumers use it more often. Video or the largest YouTube video server is really a great interactive way to reach out to potential customers. In addition, it allows them to communicate with each other via commentary and discussion under the video. Businesses can use this platform and branding can actually be done in any way. The only important thing is to know the objective to be achieved through it.

The amount of available information and new technologies that are an indispensable part of human existence are currently creating a demanding consumer in the real-world consume and in this case standard marketing practices are not enough. Therefore, it is the role of brands and marketers, if they

want to succeed in today's extremely competitive world, they have to recognize the deep-rooted motives as well as disparate consumer preferences and, based on these findings, to subsequently reflect the necessary trends that require flexible implementation also in marketing communication tools.

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