

A SIGNIFICANT MANAGERIAL CHALLENGE OF ONLINE MARKETING IN GASTRONOMIC SECTOR DURING THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: The popularity of online marketing has increased mainly due to several restrictions that affected businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in popularity is also associated with the possibility of addressing multiple target groups of consumers, a key source of income for businesses during the pandemic, thanks to which they survived. Despite the increased popularity and use of online marketing, it can still offer new and innovative solutions, so its potential is far from exhausted. The main aim of the paper is to determine the perception of online marketing in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic by Slovak consumers. The secondary data sources were scientific research, annual reports of companies, statistical databases and professional publications. A questionnaire survey was conducted to find out the perception of online marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of Slovak consumers. General scientific methods were used for data processing, and mathematical and statistical methods in evaluating data from the survey. To achieve the paper's main goal, research hypotheses were formulated and subsequently verified based on the theoretical background and survey results. Based on the findings of the research, it is obvious that most Slovak consumers perceived the increased use of online marketing communication in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic positively, and they increased the intensity of online shopping in restaurants. Finally, managerial implications of online marketing are indicated based on the analysis and questionnaire survey results.

Key words: online marketing, pandemic COVID-19, restaurants, consumers

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Introduction

At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, online marketing was an important tool of modern marketing communication for many businesses, which, thanks to it, could make a profit, despite many restrictions. The pandemic changed the everyday life of people and businesses and how consumers communicate and search for information.

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Addressing current and potential customers was key during the pandemic, and businesses moved their business activities to the online environment, where consumers spent most of their time during restrictions. Due to high competition, businesses have been forced to develop new and innovative promotional options. The pandemic has caused an increase in the use of online marketing, even by businesses that previously used it only partially. For most entrepreneurs, the use of online marketing was the turning point that decided whether to keep the business or go bankrupt.

The origin of the growing popularity of online marketing even before the arrival of the pandemic can be found in the fact that in a constantly evolving society, traditional forms of marketing communication for businesses have ceased to be sufficient. This lack was caused by the advent of the internet and the associated new forms of promoting products and services. Many companies have started to prefer online marketing communication mainly due to its simplicity, less financial burden and the possibility of obtaining direct feedback from the customer. Since online marketing was first used, its popularity among companies has steadily increased. Companies try to keep up with the gradual development of online marketing in order to stay in constant contact with customers. Therefore, online marketing communication is necessary to increase or maintain the competitiveness of companies. New platforms, technologies and tools are emerging every day in the world of online marketing. The advantage of products and services sold online is mainly their availability, as they are practically always available.

Literature Review

Already in the nineties of the last century, several authors pointed to the benefits resulting from the use of online marketing. According to Arnold (1994), online marketing can be used to sell a wide range of products and services, mentioning three basic online marketing tactics. The first tactic is defined as a library model that contains free information. The second tactic is a commercial model offering free information, but the user is expected to pay for value-added services. The third tactic is the multimedia model. This tactic lures users to a range of paid services. He also highlighted that the importance of online marketing would rapidly increase in the future.

From a different point of view, Hayes et al. (1997) pointed out the emerging main benefits of online marketing, which allows for reaching a potentially larger audience of customers at a fraction of the cost of traditional means. They assumed that this form of marketing could expand the business geographically. In contrast, Chaffey et al. (2000) defined online marketing as using the internet and digital technologies to achieve marketing goals. This definition does not touch on an important aspect – the relationship with the customer.

Agrawal et al. (2004) described that marketing decisions are usually made based on marketing research, which is carried out using direct mail, wiretapping in shopping malls and monitored telephone calls. However, these marketing methods require

significant time and financial effort for businesses to ensure accurate research results. The mentioned authors come up with a new solution to this problem, describing a new approach to conducting online marketing research based on several concepts, namely active learning, paired control and experimental groups and implicit and explicit experiments. These concepts allow for quick, systematic and cost-effective marketing research, which is essential for properly targeting an online marketing campaign. In the context of the above, it is necessary to mention measuring the effectiveness of online marketing campaigns. According to Goodwin (1999), this is a key area of online marketing. The reason is that marketers' needs are only partially met, and therefore they demand more proof of the impact of their campaigns. Goodwin defines performance measurement as an underdeveloped and insufficient role that needs to be improved based on market research.

According to Teo (2005), online marketing revolves around five basic elements of success: attracting users, gaining their interest, retaining users, learning more about their preferences and connecting with users to provide them with customized interactions. Ashworth and Free (2006) describe that the technology used in online marketing has improved to a level where the collection, improvement and aggregation of information are instantaneous. However, this improvement in technology, which is aimed at collecting information about customers, brings with it several issues related to customer privacy.

Similarly, many other authors explore the impact of online marketing on consumers. Grant (2005) conducted a study comparing people's relationships with new digital and more traditional forms of media. The study examined the mediated relationships emerging in the everyday lives of teenagers aged 13-17. The study confirmed that marketers are using digital media and online marketing as a new type of marketing communication to target this consumer generation.

It is possible to state that the online marketing environment still represents a relatively new and largely unexplored type of marketing communication. Zhang et al. (2007) suggest that there are relationships between gender, consumer impulsivity, purchase intention, and actual purchase behavior in an online marketing environment. These relationships represent an important factor that is not yet well understood.

According to Orzan et al. (2009), online marketing represents creating and maintaining a relationship with a client through online activities facilitating the exchange of products, services and ideas in order to satisfy the needs of both parties. In online marketing, the marketing specialist constantly interacts with the manufacturer, distributor and customer. According to Bostanshirin (2014), online marketing is cost-effective, flexible, fast and has a global impact on customers. It is focused on interaction and building relationships with customers.

At the same time, the internet has provided a place for online marketing where companies compete with each other, and online shopping has become an important part of consumers' daily lives; online reviews have also become beneficial, providing consumers with useful information about a product before purchasing it (Lin et al.,

2011; Chen et al., 2018). Firms that started using online marketing communication in their early days gained valuable experience and expertise that gave them a competitive advantage (Harris et al., 2008). Online marketing has rapidly penetrated the world of the advertising industry. Multinational companies have started investing millions of dollars in online marketing. Big companies like Google, Yahoo and Bing have started providing online marketing solution options (Chaudhari et al., 2012). Among the key indicators of online marketing development is the growth of Internet users (Lizbetinova et al., 2019). As mentioned, online marketing is a relatively new type of communication that primarily brings Internet users to certain websites to buy or order certain products or services. Presentation through websites is the main subject of online marketing. However, online marketing often also includes tools outside the Internet (Schwarzl and Grabowska, 2015). Also, according to Kumar (2019), online marketing includes multiple elements compared to traditional business marketing, mainly due to the additional channels and marketing mechanisms that are available on the internet. In the online marketing, products and services can be promoted through websites, social media, email, blogs and mobile applications. Similarly, Sambyal and Kaur (2017) claim that businesses using online marketing are aware that it should also be integrated with offline marketing. They add that this is important because consumer behavior is changing online, and data from communications inform how to market to consumers. Therefore, online marketing professionals must have developed four core skills: measurement and analytics, audience research, cross-channel integration and social media. Online marketing occurs mainly on the internet, but it also occurs in the mobile-phone environment and other online channels (Desai, 2019; Hammou et al., 2020). According to Hossain and Rahman (2017), online marketing is growing day by day, and an important part of it is its tools that allow businesses and customers to connect anytime from anywhere. Mohelska and Sokolova (2018) also agree with the above, stating that the present brings a boom in information and communication technologies, and if companies want to survive in the competitive battle, they must use the potential that is offered to them. At the same time, they emphasize the main advantage of online marketing communication, which is the relatively simple measurement of online activities. On the other hand, Pilik and Ahmadov (2020) detect not only the advantages but also certain disadvantages of online marketing. The biggest advantages include global reach, low costs and the ability to customize an online marketing campaign. On the other hand, online marketing also brings certain disadvantages, such as being time-consuming, high competition, and problems with security and privacy protection problems. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the online marketing concept includes finding the right mix of online marketing strategies to reach the target market and translate into sales. In the recent period, marked by the impact of the pandemic, online marketing was perceived as a very effective tool for communicating with customers and managing relationships with them. The reason is that online marketing is a process that works

on Internet channels with a high frequency of use. It represents a dynamic process in which companies and existing or potential customers use the internet to create and exchange value and products, which can change from year to year as it is influenced by ever-changing market trends and unexpected effects of the macroenvironment (Visser et al., 2021; Pradt, 2021). For that, currently, it is necessary to create a plan (strategy) for the online marketing section even before creating a marketing plan (White, 2021).

Kankovska and Vlckova (2022) and Basuki et al. (2022) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected all business areas and caused multiple problems and great challenges for many companies. And just marketing innovations, such as using different forms of online marketing, helped them recover from the pandemic and eliminate its negative consequences (Wang et al., 2020).

Bezakova and Tomova (2020) emphasize the negative impact of the pandemic on restaurants, which, as a place where a large population meets, were identified as potentially dangerous in terms of the spread of the virus, and for that reason, strict restrictions were applied to companies in this sector. Due to the increased demands on marketing in these companies, necessary changes and innovations were made in service provision and online communication.

The impact of digital transformation on further research in the field of marketing was highlighted by many authors, including Nosalska and Mazurek (2019). In this view, Mohammad (2022) examined online marketing in restaurants. He discovered that it is a factor in increasing competitiveness and market share. Besides that, online marketing significantly affects customer loyalty in restaurants and delivers added value for customers.

Similarly, Botelho et al. (2022) highlighted the benefits of using online marketing, especially social media tools, while comparing food delivery services before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vita et al. (2021) deal with the impact of online marketing on consumers' behaviors during the pandemic. They found an increase and positive feedback on this type of communication, mainly by mobile device consumers.

It is, therefore obvious, as Davidaviciene et al. (2021) also found out in their research, that online marketing still has a growing tendency. When using online marketing, customer buying behavior is affected mainly by product design and shopping security.

It is evident that the global popularity of online marketing increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly because most companies were forced to move their business to the online space due to anti-pandemic measures. Companies invested more funds in digital tools and technology, and they noticed an increase in the effectiveness of online marketing campaigns. Therefore, online marketing campaigns were more effective during the crisis than before, thanks to the fact that most people spent more time at home. The time spent at home affected the use of social networks and the viewing of online media; the intensity of both media thus significantly increased.

Despite this, there is still insufficient research focused on online marketing in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Slovak conditions. For this reason, the present research is aimed at the perception of online restaurant marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic by Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with it. In an effort to achieve the main goal of the paper, based on the theoretical background and survey results, research hypotheses were formulated and subsequently verified:

- Hypothesis 1: More than 50% of Slovak consumers perceived the increased use of online marketing communication in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Hypothesis 2: More than 50% of Slovak consumers increased the intensity of online shopping in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Hypothesis 3: More than 50% of Slovak consumers were satisfied with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.
- Hypothesis 4: More than 50% of Slovak consumers evaluated the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic positively.
- Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant dependence between the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.

Research Methodology

The main aim of the paper is to determine the perception of online marketing in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic among Slovak consumers. This includes providing the theoretical background and analysis of online marketing from the viewpoint of Slovak and foreign authors. Based on the analysis and questionnaire survey results, managerial implications of online marketing are indicated.

The important sources for secondary data were scientific research, annual reports of companies, statistical databases and professional publications. In order to find out the perception of online marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of Slovak consumers, a questionnaire survey was conducted. The questionnaire survey aimed to determine consumers' attitudes and satisfaction with online marketing in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic. To determine the sample size, the base file representing the population older than 18 was obtained from demographic statistics of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The confidence interval of 5% was determined, and the confidence level was 95%; thus, the error rate of 5 % was admitted. The sample size of 384 respondents was calculated. The actual number of respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey was 413. The time required for the survey was May 2022. The survey took the form of questionnaire method through e-mail communication. The quantitative assessment method was applied to process the survey data.

General scientific methods (i.e., excerption, description, comparative analysis, deduction and induction) were used for data processing and mathematical and statistical methods in evaluating data from the survey.

The marginal rate of 50% used in the hypotheses was set as the expression of the simple majority (Macfie and Nufrio, 2006).

The statistical hypothesis testing method was chosen because it is one of the most important statistical inference procedures. Statistical hypotheses testing is defined as a statement of the assumption of unknown parameters in the basic set, which is formulated as a statistical hypothesis, and its validity is verified by statistical procedures based on selected characteristics. The role of statistical hypothesis testing is to decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis regarding the basic set following the information from the available choice. In verifying the hypotheses, the methodology of statistical hypothesis testing was met (Rimarcik, 2007).

The test statistic for hypotheses 1– 4 was calculated by using the method of testing a single proportion by one-tailed testing because it is commonly used (Ruxton and Neuhauser, 2010; Lombardi and Hurlbert, 2009). For hypothesis 5, Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools. A contingency table, where the frequencies are arranged depending on both characters, was made to determine the dependence. Using Cramer's V, the intensity of the association dependence between the variables was measured (Lombardi and Hurlbert, 2009; McHugh, 2013).

Research Results

From the total number of respondents in the sample set (413), 214 (51.8%) were female, and 199 (48.2%) were male. Regarding the age distribution of respondents, 43 (10.4%) respondents were Baby Boomers (aged 58 – 76); 112 (27.1%) were Generation X (aged 42 – 57); 154 (37.3%) were Millennials (aged 26 – 41), and 104 (25.2%) were Post-Millennials (aged 18 – 25).

From the survey results, it is obvious that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest number of respondents ordered food and drinks online once a week, 37.7%, especially Millennials. 20.2% of respondents order more than once a month, 17.2% of respondents chose the answer several times a week, and 14.1% of respondents once a month. The smallest group (10.7% of respondents) chose the option less often. Thus, it is possible to claim that most respondents used the online option of ordering food and drinks once a week.

Next, it was found out which portal the respondents used most to order food and drink online. As the most popular option for ordering food was communication by phone, this option was preferred by most respondents, 30.4%. The most represented age category in this answer was 24.2% of the Baby Boomer generation respondents. The second most frequent answer of the respondents was ordering through the Bistro portal, 20.9%. The use of this portal was chosen by most respondents of Post-

Millennials. Among the answers with a greater representation was the use of the Wolt portal; this option was chosen by 56 17.2% of respondents. The less popular ones included the possibility of ordering food via social networks 8.9% and restaurant websites 22 6.7%. The smallest number of answers was obtained by the Boltfood portal, which was chosen by 6.4% of respondents. 58.8% of respondents think that the online marketing activities of restaurants increased by more than 25%, especially Post-Millennials and Millennials chose this answer most often. According to 33.6% of respondents, online marketing activities increased by 25%. A smaller group of answers consisted of respondents who chose the option that online marketing activities increased by more than 5%. The responses to the question regarding which online marketing activities of catering establishments decreased during the pandemic were small and negligible. Based on the results of this question, it was confirmed that catering establishments were forced to transfer their business to the online environment during the pandemic. The survey results show that 48.2% of respondents answered that their online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic increased by more than 25%. The second most frequent answer of the respondents was that the intensity of their online purchases increased by 25%; this option was chosen by 22.7% of respondents. Less represented were responses in which respondents said that the intensity of online shopping remained the same (13.5% of respondents) or increased by more than 5% and less than 25% (13.2% of respondents). The results confirmed that respondents began to buy more food from restaurants through the online environment during the pandemic. The respondents were more satisfied with obtaining information from the online environment; almost 70% of respondents answered positively, mainly Millennials and Post-Millennials. 25.4% of respondents were not satisfied with the method of obtaining information about companies from the online environment. The result found that obtaining information about restaurants from the online environment suits respondents more than obtaining information during a personal visit to a restaurant. Finally, it was investigated how the respondents evaluated the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most respondents (42.3%) chose the answer well, and 29.4% of respondents chose excellently. The average rating was chosen by 21.2% of respondents. The smallest number of respondents had negative evaluations (7%). The results show that most respondents were satisfied with the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The method testing a single proportion was used to verify the statistical hypotheses 1– 4. The results of verifying these statistical hypotheses are shown in Table 1.

The significance level α was determined at 0.05. The test criteria were calculated according to the following:

$$T = \frac{p - \pi_0}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0)}{n}}} \quad (1)$$

By using the tables of the normalized normal distribution, the critical value for the right-tailed test (2) for hypotheses 1 – 4 was found:

$$T > z_{2\alpha} \quad (2)$$

Table 1 shows that the inequality applies in hypotheses 1 – 4, so hypothesis H_0 was rejected, i.e., the alternative hypothesis H_1 was accepted.

Furthermore, statistical hypothesis 5 was verified by using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.

Table 1. Verification of statistical hypotheses

Calculation of the sample proportion: $p = \frac{m}{n}$	Satisfaction with the condition $n * \pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0) > 9$	Test criteria	Critical field	Inequality	Acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis
Hypothesis 1: H ₀ : 50% of Slovak consumers perceived the increased use of online marketing communication in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic. H ₁ : More than 50% of Slovak consumers perceived the increased use of online marketing communication in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
p = 0.92	103.25 > 9	17.07	1.645	17.07 > 1.645	H ₀ rejected
Hypothesis 2: H ₀ : 50% of Slovak consumers increased the intensity of online shopping in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic. H ₁ : More than 50% of Slovak consumers increased the intensity of online shopping in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic.					
p = 0.71	103.25 > 9	8.54	1.645	8.54 > 1.645	H ₀ rejected
Hypothesis 3: H ₀ : 50% of Slovak consumers were satisfied with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools. H ₁ : More than 50% of Slovak consumers were satisfied with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.					
p = 0.69	103.25 > 9	7.72	1.645	37.72 > 1.645	H ₀ rejected
Hypothesis 4: H ₀ : 50% of Slovak consumers evaluated the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic positively. H ₁ : More than 50% of Slovak consumers evaluated the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic positively.					

p = 0.72	103.25 > 9	8.94	1.645	8.94 > 1.645	H ₀ rejected
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Source: Authors' own research, 2022

Hypothesis 5:

H₀: There is no statistically significant dependence between the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.

H₁: There is a statistically significant dependence between the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools.

A contingency table (Table 2) was made to determine the dependence, where the frequencies are arranged depending on both characters.

Table 2. Contingency table

Generation	Satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools					Sum
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	I don't know	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	
Post-Millennials	65	21	3	12	3	104
Millennials	72	45	5	20	12	154
Generation X	28	33	8	25	18	112
Baby Boomers	8	17	3	10	5	43
Sum	173	116	19	67	38	413

Source: Authors' own research, 2022

The condition has to apply that at least 80% of the theoretical numbers are greater than 5, and at the same time, any frequency cannot be zero, which is met in our case. The significance level α was determined at 0.05. The results of the statistical hypothesis testing are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	49.592 ^a	12	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	51.242	12	0.000
N of Valid Cases	413		

Source: Authors' own research, 2022

Finally, the intensity of the association dependence between the variables by Cramer's V was measured (Table 4).

Table 4. Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.347	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.200	0.000
N of Valid Cases		413	

Source: Authors' own research, 2022

Based on the comparison of the significance level with the p-value (Asymptotic Significance), hypothesis H₀ was rejected, i.e., the alternative hypothesis H₁ was accepted. It means a statistically significant relationship exists between the variables examined (the age of Slovak consumers and their satisfaction with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools). However, the intensity of the dependence of the variables, according to Cramer's V (0.200), indicates a relatively low dependency.

Discussion

As mentioned before (Bezakova and Tomova, 2020; Kankovska and Vlckova, 2022; Mohammad, 2022), restaurants were among the businesses most affected by the pandemic. This fact was also confirmed by the constantly changing and increasing anti-pandemic measures. Restaurants have faced various challenges since the beginning of the pandemic. Among the biggest problems was the limitation of personal contact with customers. Traditional forms of marketing were largely limited during the pandemic. Most restaurants responded quickly to the problem of closed establishments and moved their business to the online environment. Online marketing campaigns are becoming increasingly popular among Slovak consumers. Many consumers in Slovakia use to buy products from catering establishments based on the fact that they have previously seen them in an online marketing campaign. When comparing previously realized research with our survey results, it is possible to find several identical characters.

Due to pandemics, the popularity of online marketing has increased. Consumers have registered an intensification of online marketing activities to a considerable extent, in some cases by up to 50%. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most respondents bought food and drinks from restaurants once a week. The intensification of activities connected to the online environment was not only noted at restaurants but also by consumers themselves, who were forced to use online food ordering based on the bad epidemiological situation. Online orders were more convenient for most consumers during the pandemic and quickly became popular. Consumers could order food from the comfort of their homes and did not have to visit the catering establishments directly. Some catering establishments started to use the possibility

of online orders and subsequent import only because the bad epidemiological situation did not allow them to sell directly to consumers.

Despite the ever-increasing use of digital communication tools, telephone order was the most used platform for ordering food and drinks in the given period. According to the survey, the ordering method by phone is mainly preferred by older generations of consumers, who may not yet have gotten used to ordering food using apps or social networks. Other authors pointed out the fact that online marketing can be realized by mobile phones, and it should be integrated with offline marketing (Kumar, 2019; Sambyal and Kaur, 2017; Desai, 2019; Hammou et al., 2020). Delivery services via apps were the most used platform for ordering meals among the younger generation of consumers. At the time of the pandemic, interest in following the online environment of restaurants and online ordering by consumers increased on average by 25%. The provision of information by restaurants was also important during the pandemic. Consumers preferred to obtain information in the online environment more than in personal contact with the restaurant. Perhaps also due to the simplicity, speed and clarity of such a method of obtaining information. This is consistent with the statement of Botelho et al. (2022) and Vita et al. (2021), who pointed out the positive feedback on online marketing by consumers during the pandemic.

Overall, most consumers were satisfied with the management of the functioning of restaurants and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of this research may be of great benefit when used in managerial practice. Based on the results of the marketing survey, which pointed out the positive feedback of using online marketing, restaurants should offer the option of online ordering even after the end of the pandemic, as it has become a popular and convenient way to order food for most consumers. The pandemic brought not only problems to restaurants but also innovations in certain areas. One such area was the delivery of products through delivery services, which are preferred primarily by the younger generation of consumers. It would be appropriate for restaurants to use delivery companies' services even after the pandemic's end. Consumers have become accustomed to ordering food and drinks through mobile applications, so it would be good to keep these options. However, traditional forms of marketing, which are more suitable for older generations of consumers, should not be forgotten either. During the pandemic, restaurants were forced to use various creative, new ideas to reach and engage consumers. From the given situation, they were also able to extract several positives and solutions, which we recommend they use even after the end of the pandemic. Based on marketing research, it is found that shopping convenience is the most preferred feature of online shopping among consumers. The overall convenience of online shopping also includes speed and the possibility of easily ordering products. Currently, many restaurants still do not use the possibility of directly ordering products through social networks. Therefore, it represents a suitable proposal. Cooperation with delivery companies such as Wolt, Foodpanda or Bistro

can be advantageous. Therefore, if the company does not offer the option of ordering through its website, it can redirect customers directly to the offer of a catering establishment within the delivery services.

Implementing the proposed measures brings several benefits for restaurants, for example, an increase in profit and overall sales, an increase in awareness of the company and its services. Increasing awareness of the company and the brand also improves the company's image, which is important for most customers when deciding to buy products. Another benefit for the business is building relationships with the customer, which are crucial for the proper functioning of the business because, thanks to this, the business can better meet customers' demands and satisfy their needs. During the pandemic, social networks also provided businesses with an important communication channel on which constant communication occurred, despite various restrictions. Through active communication on social networks, companies can obtain customer feedback or respond to their suggestions and comments. Based on this information, companies can obtain information about customer satisfaction, which can be used to improve the services provided.

Conclusion

The paper's main goal was to determine the perception of online marketing in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic by Slovak consumers. Based on the research findings, it is possible to claim that, in general, most Slovak consumers perceived the increased use of online marketing communication in restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased the intensity of online shopping in restaurants. Most of them were satisfied with obtaining information about the restaurants offered through online tools, especially generations of Millennials and Post-Millennials. Slovak consumers also positively evaluated the management of restaurants' functioning and their transfer to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These findings are important for theory because they complement previous research and provide a different perspective on the usage of online marketing during the pandemic (possibly used in the case of another crisis) in business practice, bringing new knowledge to the issue of online marketing and its perception of consumers during the pandemic.

The practical implications consist of using research findings in already mentioned managerial practice.

The crucial limitation of this research is its territorial validity, i.e., national and cultural specifics of consumers from the Slovak Republic. So the applicability of the suggested recommendations regarding the usage of online marketing in restaurants based on research outcomes is justified only in specific conditions of the Slovak Republic. This means that it is not fully possible to apply these claims and recommendations to effective general practice. However, this limitation can be removed if the research is tailored to foreign consumers and national and cultural specifics are considered. In this way, research results could be considered relevant,

and they could be subject to subsequent verification in the specific environment, including foreign.

There is still space for further discussions on specific online marketing activities in restaurants, not only during the pandemic, and this issue has the great potential for further research. It would be appropriate to deeply examine and compare different generational cohorts' perceptions of online restaurant marketing during the pandemic.

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ISTOTNE WYZWANIE MENEDŻERSKIE MARKETINGU ONLINE W SEKTORZE GASTRONOMICZNYM PODCZAS PANDEMII COVID-19

Streszczenie: Popularność marketingu internetowego wzrosła głównie z powodu kilku ograniczeń, które dotknęły przedsiębiorstwa podczas pandemii COVID-19. Wzrost popularności wiąże się również z możliwością dotarcia do wielu grup docelowych konsumentów, co było kluczowym źródłem dochodu dla firm podczas pandemii, dzięki czemu przetrwały. Pomimo wzrostu popularności i wykorzystania marketingu

internetowego, wciąż może on oferować nowe i innowacyjne rozwiązania, więc jego potencjał jest daleki od wyczerpania. Głównym celem artykułu jest określenie postrzegania marketingu internetowego w restauracjach podczas pandemii COVID-19 przez słowackich konsumentów. Źródłami danych wtórnych były badania naukowe, raporty roczne firm, bazy danych statystycznych i publikacje branżowe. Przeprowadzono badanie ankietowe w celu poznania postrzegania marketingu internetowego podczas pandemii COVID-19 z perspektywy słowackich konsumentów. Do przetwarzania danych wykorzystano ogólne metody naukowe, a do oceny danych z badania - metody matematyczne i statystyczne. Aby osiągnąć główny cel artykułu, sformułowano hipotezy badawcze, a następnie zweryfikowano je w oparciu o podstawy teoretyczne i wyniki ankiety. Na podstawie wyników badań można stwierdzić, że większość słowackich konsumentów pozytywnie postrzega zwiększone wykorzystanie komunikacji marketingowej online w restauracjach podczas pandemii COVID-19 i zwiększyła intensywność zakupów online w restauracjach. Wreszcie, na podstawie analizy i wyników ankiety określono implikacje menedżerskie marketingu online.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing online, pandemia COVID-19, restauracje, konsumenci

COVID-19 大流行期间美食行业在线营销的重大管理挑战

抽象的：在线营销的普及主要是由于在 COVID-19 大流行期间影响了企业的一些限制。受欢迎程度的提高还与解决多个目标消费者群体的可能性有关，这是大流行期间企业的主要收入来源，因此他们得以幸存。尽管在线营销越来越受欢迎和使用，它仍然可以提供新的和创新的解决方案，因此它的潜力远未耗尽。本文的主要目的是确定斯洛伐克消费者在 COVID-19 大流行期间对餐厅在线营销的看法。二级数据来源是科学研究、公司年报、统计数据库和专业出版物。进行了问卷调查，以从斯洛伐克消费者的角度了解 COVID-19 大流行期间对在线营销的看法。一般科学方法用于数据处理，数学和统计方法用于评估调查数据。为了实现本文的主要目标，根据理论背景和调查结果制定研究假设并随后进行验证。根据研究结果，很明显，大多数斯洛伐克消费者在 COVID-19 大流行期间对餐厅在线营销传播的使用增加持积极态度，并且他们增加了在餐厅在线购物的强度。最后，根据分析和问卷调查结果指出了在线营销的管理意义。

关键词: 在线营销, 大流行 COVID-19, 餐厅, 消费者