

# IMPACT OF THE CORONA CRISIS ON MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOCUSED ON TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT:

Tourism and travelling are among the most affected sectors of national economies worldwide due to the pandemic caused by a disease called COVID-19. Nowadays, we still cannot accurately predict the effects of this negative impact. Although the pandemic arrived relatively unexpectedly, it was still likely to be expected to occur. Perhaps that is why, in this scheme, Nassim Nicholas Taleb described it as a 'white swan', something that will almost inevitably occur in the future. Anyone who describes a pandemic as a 'black swan' may not have understood the topic well and is trying to clarify the related issues based on insufficient information resources. This study deals with the changes that the new situation has brought to the environment of regional marketing and marketing communication, especially in tourism. The work evaluates the mathematical analysis of data obtained from entities operating in marketing communication in regional marketing and tourism. Based on predetermined hypotheses, this research includes the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of subjects' responses, providing a comprehensive explanation of the various impacts of the pandemic on the activities of entities whose main activity is to intersect with marketing. It seems interesting that not all changes are negative.

## KEY WORDS:

coronavirus, crisis communication, marketing communication, regional marketing, territorial marketing

## 1 Introduction

Marketing as a scientific discipline, whether focused in general or later on specifics typical for the application in the conditions of place, regions or tourism, has developed dynamically in recent decades, along with the political, business or technological environment. The biggest challenges in this area have always reflected specific interests, especially of an economic nature. The primary motivation in implementing marketing policies for the key players was mainly economic benefit based on efficiency, achieving desired market position, or prestige. It has been shown that long-term efforts in this area can be fatally affected by unforeseen adverse events with global impact.

Undoubtedly, such is the ongoing pandemic with far-reaching consequences and unclear perspectives. In 2019, a new disease appeared in the world, which fully developed in 2020. Since then, it seems that humanity has been continuously fighting it, showing its abilities and strengths. This threat, which was able to change the whole world quickly, meant a big change for the creators of regional marketing. The disease grew into a pandemic and affected many aspects of the national economies of the world. Globally, it harms macroeconomic indicators such as GDP growth and the employment situation due to the application of strict or less strict anti-pandemic measures. It can be stated that the most severe consequences of the pandemic have been manifested in the tourism sector. Regional marketing policymakers are not only fighting for a better market position or a more prestigious kiosk location at a trade fair, but their problems are often existential. This situation seems to be extremely difficult because it seems to be very challenging to save something that has practically disappeared in a short time. The pandemic has created a situation that regional marketing policymakers need to adapt to because only then will they become a successful part of the new upcoming era. However, to do this, we must deeply know the pandemic, its causes, effects, and the theoretical and practical basis for its recurrence.

Fear of an outbreak of a pandemic has a long history<sup>1</sup> because the events leading to influenza pandemics are recurring biological phenomena and cannot be prevented in reality. Pandemics appear to occur at 10- to 50-year intervals due to the emergence of new virus subtypes from virus recurrence.<sup>2</sup> As the global population grows and unexpected events occur,<sup>3</sup> the transmission of new viruses to the human population will likely occur more frequently. All our society can do is take precautionary measures to act quickly as soon as we suspect an outbreak. We should also seek to learn from the consequences of a pandemic to prepare our society for a flexible response to environmental change. As we are in the middle of a pandemic, it is challenging to estimate its long-term effects on society as a whole. It is all the more difficult to estimate its effects on the way and direction in which regional marketing development will develop.

Although several pandemics have hit society in the past, it is difficult to estimate the long-term economic, behavioural or social consequences, as the current situation has no precedent in modern and globalised society. Existing studies suggest that the last Millennium's major historical pandemics have usually been associated with a consequent low return on assets.<sup>4</sup> In the post-pandemic period, we tend to have less interest in investing and more interest in saving our capital, which results in reduced economic growth and all the connected consequences. Changes in people's behaviour associated with the outbreak of a pandemic appear to be closely related to personal protection, such as face masks, and not to general behavioural changes.<sup>5</sup> Human life in late modern society seems to be more focused on solving current problems than those that may occur in the future.

## 2 Global Pandemic and Its Consequences for Selected Aspects of Regional Marketing

The pandemic changed the supply and demand of households, which connected with regional marketing, was also reflected in tourism, which is the main focus of this study. The atypical nature of this crisis – a crisis following a pandemic caused by a highly transmissible pathogen – has significantly decreased travel demand and has created a great deal of uncertainty about future passenger behaviour<sup>6</sup> when travelling on holiday or

1 STÖHR, K., ESVELD, M.: Will Vaccines Be Available for the Next Influenza Pandemic? In *Science*, 2004, Vol. 306, No. 5705, p. 2195.

2 POTTER, C. W.: A History of Influenza. In *Journal of Applied Microbiology*, 2001, Vol. 91, No. 4, p. 572.

3 MORELLE, R.: *30,000-Year-Old Giant Virus Comes Back to Life*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-26387276>>.

4 JORDÁ, Ó., SINGH, S. R., TAYLOR, A. M.: *Longer-Run Economic Consequences of Pandemics*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.frbsf.org/economic-research/files/wp2020-09.pdf>>.

5 FUNK, S. et al.: The Spread of Awareness and Its Impact on Epidemic Outbreaks. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2009, Vol. 106, No. 16, p. 6872.

6 LI, J., NGUYEN, T. H. H., COCA-STEFANIAK, J. A.: Coronavirus Impacts on Post-Pandemic Planned Travel Behaviours. In *Annals of Tourism Research*, 2020, Vol. 86, No. 1, Article 102964. Published online first. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102964>>.

faith,<sup>7</sup> making the tourism sector particularly vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> In tourism, 120 million jobs worldwide are at risk due to coronavirus. Developing countries, and especially women in them, are severely affected. The crisis is a massive shock to developed economies, but it is a state of emergency for developing countries. Many of these countries are heavily dependent on tourism. In Africa, tourism accounted for 10% of total exports in 2019. Due to closed borders, empty hotels and cancelled flights, the number of foreign tourists decreased by 56% globally in the first five months of year 2020. For the whole year, it could fall by 78%. For tourism, that would mean a loss of between 910 billion and 1.2 trillion dollars. Besides, tourism businesses are mostly small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have extensive financial reserves. Women, young people and illegal workers are particularly at risk. Women constitute more than half of all tourism employees.<sup>9</sup> However, at the local level, this situation may have created new opportunities, for example in that a large number of people have chosen to protect their safety or comfort for the consumption of tourism products 'in the domestic environment', as has been the case in tourism in Hungary, for example.

Hungary's domestic tourism not only reached but also exceeded the figures from the year before the pandemic, and based on preliminary reservations in the summer months of 2020, the occupancy rate in Hungarian accommodation facilities in the summer months also appeared to be excellent. In July, 1.2 million domestic guests stayed in domestic accommodation establishments, which is 160,000 more than in July 2019; so many Hungarian tourists never stayed in Hungary from July to August. The most popular destination was Lake Balaton, where 40% of the total summer national consumption was realised. The second most visited tourist area is the Mátra-Bükk tourist area, followed by Debrecen, Hajdúszoboszló and Lake Tisza. During the summer, the pre-booking data for September was also very favourable, according to which rural accommodation was almost full during each weekend and this trend was expected to continue until mid-October. The Hungarian State Tourist Agency, which launched its new campaign in the summer to draw attention to the tourist-cultural-gastronomic possibilities in the autumn-winter-spring period, also has a great deal of credit for this tendency. However, the fact was that accommodation in the capital still suffered from low occupancy, despite the improving development of the disease. In Budapest, however, an average of 96% of tourism revenues come from foreign guests and tourists, and summer turnover was significantly lower than in 2019. The Hungarian Tourist Agency (MTU) states that it tried to help entities in this field as soon as possible. About 14,000 private accommodation establishments have been allocated a total of more than 40 billion forints for development. 155 people entered the tourist guide competition. Except for six entities all of them won; they were paid out in September. MTU also emphasised that another tender for the renewal of outdoor beaches had been launched, and another 80 beaches could be renewed for the following season for 3 billion HUF.<sup>10</sup>

The example of Hungary shows that crises can help some sectors. However, it also documents that the response of supply and demand to crises significantly depends on whether supply can meet demand under changed conditions with substitute or complementary goods, such as those in which the demand side was interested initially. However, as a result of a crisis, it has lost the possibility of consuming such goods. In other words, whether the supply of tourism can replace substitute goods with what consumers have lost or are afraid of as a result of the crisis. However, in the example of Hungary, it can be seen that coordinated central government interventions can also help to meet demand in uncertain times, for example, in the form of tender renewals or coordinated marketing management that has potential to bring consumers of goods in tourism closer to the possibilities of the offer. During that particular period, we did not find exact macroeconomic data to say precisely how the pandemic had a widespread impact on local tourism in Slovakia. However, it has brought about several changes that both regional policy creators and marketing ones have had to adapt to.

7 SVOBODA, J., ŠALGOVIČOVÁ, J., POLAKOVIČ, A.: Religion and Tourism in Slovakia. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 6, p. 125.

8 REDDY, M. V., BOYD, S. W., NICA, M.: Towards a Post-Conflict Tourism Recovery Framework. In *Annals of Tourism Research*, 2020, Vol. 84, p. 14. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102940>>.

9 *V cestovnom ruchu je tento rok pre koronavírus celosvetovo ohrozených 120 miliónov pracovných miest*. Released on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://e.dennikn.sk/minuta/2015224>>.

10 *A tavalyinál is jobb eredményt ért el a belföldi turizmus júliusban és augusztusban*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://koronavirus.gov.hu/cikkek/tavalyinal-jobb-eredmenyt-ert-el-belfoldi-turizmus-juliusban-es-augusztusban>>.

An overview of how consumers in Slovakia have reacted in recent months can be provided by the Association of Travel Organisations research carried out in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>11</sup> It shows that the situation connected with the spread of COVID-19 can have severe consequences for tourism in Slovakia. In April 2020 more than half of service providers in Slovak destinations considered dismissing employees, and even some employees have already been dismissed. The survey shows that Slovaks think of the term of summer vacation as a holiday by the sea. While our hotels and facilities, which survived this period, took strict anti-pandemic measures, it cost them considerable funds. In the media, the possibilities of opening borders and the benefits of summer holidays abroad were mentioned. It also turns out that most Slovaks would rather not go on vacation anywhere if they cannot go to the sea. According to the survey results, half of the companies do not intend to close down; the others have either decided to close their business or cannot estimate the situation. Tourism entities also stated in the survey that they currently solve and face existential problems. According to the AOCR,<sup>12</sup> local governments and municipalities also expect difficult times in connection with the deteriorating economic situation in Slovakia, suffering from a significant shortfall in share tax revenues in 2021. At the same time, they lost income from accommodation tax due to the general closure of facilities as per government regulations.

With the example of Slovakia, we observe the importance of state policy and support for tourism, as well as support for the promotion of tourism. The parallel is visible in particular in contrast to Hungary, which is taking steps to build what tourism has to offer; the government in Slovakia calls for Slovak tourism and the economy, apart from the state, to be sponsored and financed mainly by local inhabitants going for holidays within the country. The survey also pointed out that the government aid package did not cover many companies. The fundamental difference is thus visible in the fact that, unlike the Hungarian consumer, who was satisfied with Lake Balaton instead of the Balkan during the coronavirus, Slovak tourism does not represent a sufficiently attractive substitute for the opportunities that coronavirus cut off from the inhabitants. However, the mentioned facts do not mean that the offer of tourism in Slovakia is bad, although we dare to say that the potential of tourism in Slovakia is not fully exploited at all, or it is not possible to fully exploit due to industrialisation, political influences or cultural conditions in certain areas. The reason can be found in the decentralisation of marketing management in tourism,<sup>13</sup> as well as in the possible low regional identity of the Slovak population,<sup>14</sup> but also in several other factors, such as job insecurity and low income, health and safety concerns, or missed opportunities could be used by marketing communication even in times of crisis.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, as far as communication in regional marketing is concerned, it is a consequence of the absence of the concept of tourism and decentralisation of entities in it on the one hand, but also the creation of a non-uniform but even more creative and unique marketing concept of some entities on the other. An example could be the activities of the Košice and Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Regions. An example of successful marketing communication is the account on social networks from OOCR<sup>16</sup> Region Gron, an artificially created social construct and the smallest OOCR in Slovakia created to develop the Region through support activities and marketing communication. Websites and marketing communication on social networks

11 TASR: *Koronavírus vážne ovplyvní cestovný ruch na Slovensku*. Released on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/794693/koronavirus-vazne-ovplyvni-cestovny-ruch-na-slovensku/>>.

12 Remark by authors: The abbreviation means "Association of Tourism Organisations".

13 Remark by authors: In Slovak Republic, the support of tourism is taken care of by various entities, which are often coordinated with each other to a very low extent, and their origin may also allow for changes in government politicians when changing different governments. We can mention organisations such as KOOCR and OOCT, which are regional tourism organisations for management at various administrative levels, Tourist Information Centres, Local Action Groups, Micro-Regions, Clusters, etc.

14 DARÁZS, T.: Marketingová komunikácia v kontexte regionálnej identity. In MADLEŇÁK, A., MURÁR, P., LABUDOVÁ, L. (eds.): *QUO VADIS MARKETING*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2020, p. 30-39.

15 For example, see: DEUZE, M.: The Role of Media and Mass Communication Theory in the Global Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 5; BUTORACOVÁ ŠINDLERYOVÁ, I., HOGHOVÁ, K.: Brand Marketing of Regional Products – A Potential of Strategic Tool in Regional Development. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 164-185; JANOŠOVÁ, D.: *Regional Marketing from the View of Selected Factors*. Katowice: UNIKAT 2, 2017, p. 119; MENDELOVÁ, D., ZAUŠKOVÁ, A.: Innovation in the Slovak Advertising Environment. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 39; JURISOVÁ, V.: Budovanie značky v online prostredí. In *MMK 2015: Mezinárodní Masarykova konference pro doktorandy a mladé vědecké pracovníky: Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní vědecké konference*. Hradec Králové: Magnanimitas, 2015, p. 318; ČÁBYOVÁ, L.: *Marketingová komunikácia v médiách*. Łódź: Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2012, p. 211.

16 Remark by authors: The abbreviation means "Regional Tourism Organisation".

of the organisations *Kraj.sвета* (focused on tourism within Košice Region) and *Za horami, za dolami* (focused on tourism in Banská Bystrica Region) are examples of implementing a long-term marketing concept that is well planned, actively organised and which can adapt to unexpected situations such as a global pandemic. In the very concept of marketing of the given organisations, it is possible to identify modern marketing's basic starting points. An example is creating spokespersons representing a certain region for effective storytelling and creating a specific regional identity.<sup>17</sup> Another successful example is the flexible involvement of diverse crucial players in the tourism market from all sectors to create a unified concept of the tourism product in a particular region.<sup>18</sup>

If we mention the activities of the regional tourism organisation Región Gron, they are concentrated in the area around the towns of Nová Baňa and Žarnovica. It is how this organisation communicates and the subject and content of the communication, which predisposes it to be mentioned in this research. The aforementioned towns are located in an area with uncertain regional positioning.<sup>19</sup> The result could be the creation of a new 'brand' or name of the region, in the area known as Dolné Pohronie, and Tekov adjacent to the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. One passing through this region from west to east may notice an increased concentration of mountains and heavy industry, but it cannot be said that this region is notable for its tourist attractions to such an extent as 'Liptov'. The activities of the mentioned site and the organisation are interesting because they build the region's marketing communication on products that often cannot even be called tourist attractions or create new tourism products. It can be said that their atypical activity in the field of marketing communication in tourism, intended for visitors who do not spend the night in the area, but also for local people, who allow getting to know their region, contributes to building a valuable brand and strengthening the region. Such a regional identity can ultimately also contribute to a more valuable brand of the region for tourists. Certainly not the last example of quality work is the National Tourism Organisation's activity representing Slovakia, especially abroad, but in 2020 it was also involved in an advertising campaign focused on holidays in Slovakia. However, this organisation pays for a heterogeneous concept of tourism, both marketing and political, because it would certainly be much easier to create a 'product sales strategy' if it were a product of a comprehensive concept.

The fact is that despite all the positives of the reality that the organisation of tourism and related marketing communication in Slovakia operate on a 'free market', or their management is organised at a lower than the state level; there is a need for a unified organisation of at least some specific areas. A single organisation would at least make it possible to obtain the data needed for effective development or to provide assistance in coordinating less efficient organisational units. The rationale for this need is, for example, that while the management of tourism organisations in Košice or Banská Bystrica often carries out effective activities aimed at regional development and emergency management with the participation of external marketing agencies, there is no effective tourism organisation in the Nitra Region. Its regions with a rich cultural and natural offer for tourism are not effectively promoted, the number of visitors to the region is below average,<sup>20</sup> the building of regional identity is absent and entities active in the field of tourism are not supported by any significant synergistic tool with development in the region.

Many similar examples of the missed potential opportunities of certain areas or existing organisations can be found. Lack of information is also a significant problem of inconsistency and insufficient communication. While, for example, it is possible to obtain secondary information from the website of the Statistical Office of Hungary to evaluate the state to which marketing communication must adapt when promoting regions, in Slovakia, we must obtain primary data from the creators of marketing communication in regional marketing, update on the changes the new situation has brought for them, from which the overall impact of the corona crisis on tourism and regional marketing can be approximated, but only secondary.

17 *Za horami, za dolami. Banskobystrický kraj*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <[https://www.zahoramizadolami.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Za-horami-za-dolami\\_brozura\\_A5.pdf](https://www.zahoramizadolami.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Za-horami-za-dolami_brozura_A5.pdf)>.

18 *Zobud'sa v Košickom svetovom kraji*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.krajsveta.sk/pokrocily-objavitel>>.

19 DARÁZS, T.: Marketingová komunikácia v kontexte regionálnej identity. In MADLEŇÁK, A., MURÁR, P., LABUDOVÁ, L. (eds.): *QUO VADIS MARKETING*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2020, p. 30-39.

20 *Ubytovacia štatistika*. [online]. [2020-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/cestovny-ruch-7/statistika/ubytovacia-statistika>>.

### 3 Methods

The research part of the study aims to determine whether the global coronavirus pandemic impacted entities performing activities in the field of marketing communication focused mainly on tourism in Slovakia. The research also intends to show the nature of possible changes to the entities in the field of marketing communication.

Bearing this aim in mind, we conducted the inquiry in the third quarter of 2020 to bring together the changes that regional marketing creators had to face in the field of tourism. The research part was realised using an online questionnaire consisting of 19 questions. We used scaling questions, which allow an overview of changes in marketing communication, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions, which were the qualitative counterpart of quantitative questions and used the method of induction and synthesis to explain the nature of any changes.

52.6% of the research consisted of quantitative questions, which were evaluated by a weighted arithmetic average due to different numbers of possible answers. According to the nature of the responses, the weights of individual responses were distributed based on coding the respective responses into a ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ spectrum, which were most often divided into very positive, positive, neutral, negative and very negative. Subsequent recalculation made it possible to determine the percentage of the number of responses in the respective categories. The obtained data is displayed using descriptive and graphical display methods.

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i p_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i} = \frac{x_1 p_1 + x_2 p_2 + \dots + x_n p_n}{p_1 + p_2 + \dots + p_n}$$

X = Value  
P = Weight

Figure 1: Formula used for data processing

Source: YOO, B. et al.: *A Surrogate Weighted Mean Ensemble Method to Reduce the Uncertainty at a Regional Scale for the Calculation of Potential Evapotranspiration. In Scientific Reports, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 870, p. 2.*

The research focused on a predetermined sample of 137 entities operating in regional marketing in Slovakia, specifically in promoting tourism opportunities on social networks and websites. However, the research focused exclusively on entities other than end providers of tourism products. It means that it focused on entities other than accommodation providers or the operation of attractions in tourism. This questionnaire was designed especially for managers of social media accounts dedicated to regional marketing, regional promotion, development of Slovakia, or simply adding nice local photos from the regions to social media.

The research involved various subjects classified into 3 basic categories, which will be numbered in the next part of this study as follows:

1. An entity with a legal form, created to generate profit – a limited liability company, general commercial partnership, trade, etc.
2. Organisation or association of organisations created mainly for other purposes than generating profit – municipal tourism organisations, regional tourism organisations, Microregions, Tourist Information Centres, Local Action Groups, Municipalities, etc.
3. Natural persons – individuals sharing information and nice photos – the possibility of a profit from marketing activities, e.g., the *Instagram* account of *slovaktravelcouple* with a possible occasional income for presenting products and services on social media.

The characteristics of the research sample are presented in Figure 2.

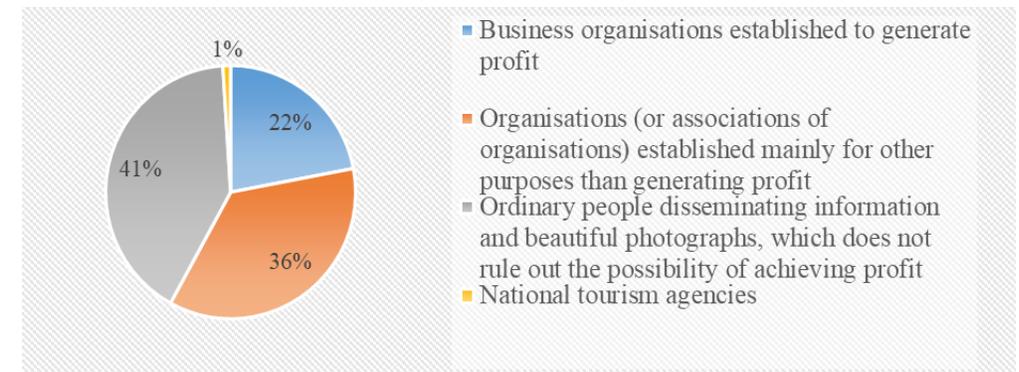


Figure 2: The characteristics of the research sample

Source: Own processing

It should be noted that several entities stated that they are active organisations with individual income. However, their communication on social media was based on sharing photos and inspirations in combination with the sharing of paid promotion; we reclassified these entities from the first to the third category. Also, some responses from the advertising agencies’ staff were assigned to the second option, as they carried out the activity to benefit the organisations belonging to the second option.

The purpose of websites focused on income cannot be categorised, as their purpose is often diverse, such as ‘a tourist challenge to motivate people to go to the mountains instead of doing useless and time-consuming activities during leisure’.

When asked about the intention of marketing communication on social media, in the second most present category, the nature of the answers coincided with the purpose of the given organisations’ existence. The answers were, for example:

- “Promoting the region.”
- “Promoting the region, raising its awareness, planned visits, etc.”
- “Promoting the region and local products.”
- “Promotion of the destination, creating a positive impression of Slovakia as a holiday destination.”
- “OOCR Slovenský raj & Spiš pages on Facebook and Instagram aim to increase awareness of our tourist destination among potential visitors, popularise its attractions, inform about news and attractions in it, events, the offer of services of OOCR partners, etc., in order to attract more visitors.”
- “Our goal is to promote the destination and its services or attractiveness in the Trnava Region and attract visitors to the destination. The purpose of the contributions is mixed, as we use different types of promotion and marketing procedures. It is also about information, paid cooperation, promotion and, last but not least, education at the level of broadening one’s horizons and presenting interesting historical or contemporary facts.”
- “Informing and presenting the travel potential of the region.”

The answers of subjects from the third category were also interesting, such as, for example:

- “Portfolio – author’s artistic experience”, “Travel blog”
- “Promoting Slovakia – mountains, nature, monuments, interesting places (...) The main goal was to inspire ourselves, now we inspire a larger community.”
- “We are an online community for women with the same interest in outdoor, mutual motivation and inspiration, the opportunity to participate in joint offline events”.

A separate category was created by websites and social media sites called *slovakiatourism* and *slovakia.travel*, which as a whole were called national tourism organisations, but their websites link to the currently no longer existing Slovak Tourism Agency and their goal is “Promotion of Slovakia as a destination for leisure and holidays at home and abroad”.

Part of the research process was to verify the following assumptions:

**A1:** The pandemic of the new coronavirus caused changes in the activities of entities performing activities in marketing communication focused mainly on tourism in Slovakia.

**A2:** The subjects perceive possible changes; we focused on the research subjects, as on average positive.

**A3:** There are significant differences in the corona crisis's perceived effects on different types of subjects.

**A4:** The surveyed subjects perceive through feedback from their target groups a specific increase in local awareness, belonging to the region, or increased regional identity.

**A5:** Organisations that would feel any adverse effects of the corona crisis connected with their marketing activities can respond effectively to the situation and fight to reverse the adverse effects.

## 4 Findings

The research was carried out in a questionnaire and consisted of 19 quantitative and qualitative questions. The research questions covered the following areas:

- the focus of marketing activities,
- change of traffic on the websites and pages on the social media of the surveyed entities,
- changing the reach of new social media posts,
- change in the nature of communications caused by possible changed conditions,
- change of target groups on which marketing activity in the online space are focused,
- quantitative change of the subject's activity in the online space,
- change of communication strategy and tactics in the online space,
- perceived correlation between specific activities of subjects in online and offline spaces and possible change of real attendance of selected areas, places, events, attractions, etc.,
- a change in the proportion of local people and tourists from more remote regions concerning marketing activities that address the recipients of marketing communication,
- change of local awareness of target groups of marketing communication of addressed subjects,
- using innovative ways of marketing communication.

The research shows that the crisis had the most negative impact on the effectiveness of marketing activities within the national travel agency activities, whose activities lost their target audience because the institution focuses on foreign visitors, but those lost interest in travelling.

Various profit-making organisations have stated in the research that, on average, they did not see a change or a slight positive change in the success of their marketing communication activities caused by the coronavirus. These organisations are challenging to compare because their activities change frequently.

Various, primarily municipal organisations such as OORC, KCR, TIC, MAS, etc. recorded on average a positive change in the impact of the corona crisis on their marketing activities, caused mainly by an increase in domestic tourism or a change in the character and interest of tourists in the regions.

The most significant positive change was recorded by entities engaged in creating local content on social media and the Internet in general. These subjects effectively and flexibly adapt their content to the given situation and offer the audience, for example, recommendations for domestic tourism, relaxation in the local environment, or gastronomic experiences. These entities, unlike the previous ones, are often not limited by what they can communicate. Their communication does not have to stick to the selected region or focus. The nature of the site depends mostly on their administrators' will, and the most critical attribute is the attractiveness of the posts, meaning that the means to achieve this goal may vary depending on the situation.

The results of mathematical processing and a graphical evaluation of data from the quantitative part of the research questionnaire can be seen in Graph 2. From the research results, we can say that the average change in marketing activities in marketing communication of entities performing activities in marketing communication in regional marketing focused mainly on tourism in Slovakia was positive at the time of the survey realisation. However, it should be noted that the mathematical method used shows that although the average impact of the pandemic on the examined facts is positive, not all subjects have to record positive changes, as is the case, for example, with the National Tourist Agency of Slovakia.

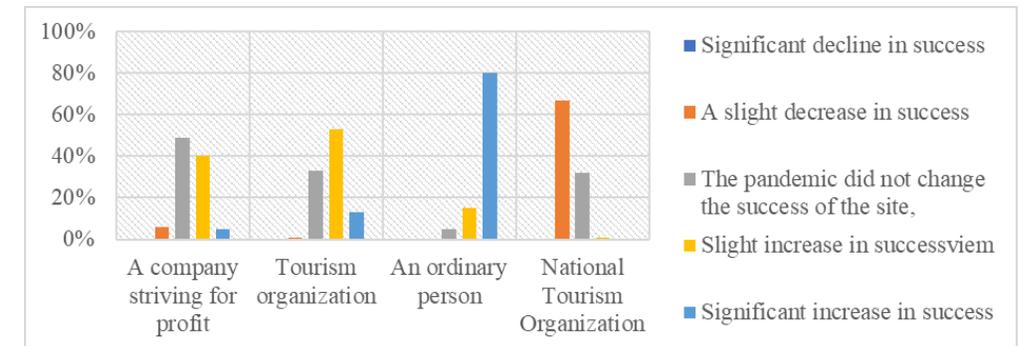


Figure 3: Share of answers as per the individual categories

Source: Own processing

The rest of the questionnaire consisted of qualitative questions and their corresponding answers, which illustrate the nature of the surveyed subjects' changes. From the collected answers, it is possible to determine the real nature of the change; there were also answers such as "The biggest change is that people have to wear face masks in the photos". However, based on induction, we can conclude that most 'opinion leaders' provided an offer for increased demand for inspiration, which often led to an increase in activity, an expansion of the portfolio of the information offered, for subjects witnessing a positive change in response to their activities or using new methods of communication. Likely, the findings are closely linked to the change in the willingness and travel options, contributing to the fact that people were more interested in the marketing communication of subjects closer to their residence or home.

The researched subjects also stated that they had noticed a significant increase in local awareness caused by the 'discovery' of home regions by their inhabitants. See Figure 4 which represents a graphical representation of whether the surveyed subjects think that the inhabitants of the regions of Slovakia have increased their local awareness or the feeling of being close with the domestic region.

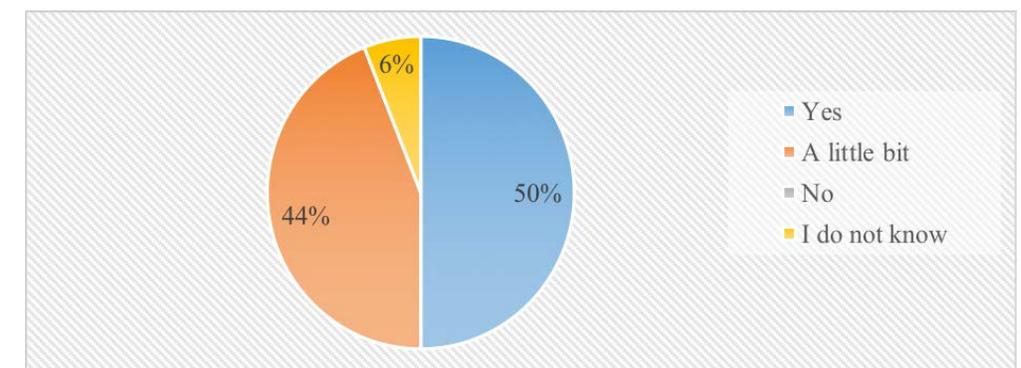


Figure 4: Share of answers to the question on the feeling of being close to the population with the region

Source: Own processing

The change in the increase of local awareness and adaptability of the researched subjects' offer is closely connected with another fact realised, which is that the subjects started to share more local content, content on local culture, nature and supporting regional identity. For those who said they had more success, the frequency of publishing local content also increased. 31% of the surveyed entities stated that they started to target their communication more at the local population as a result of the pandemic, which we consider to be a slight change in their target groups. As the most effective platform for visibility, the subjects most often mentioned *Instagram* and *Facebook* as platforms through which they share secondary information and promote events.

One of the most exciting findings from the research is that those organisations that have experienced a decline in their marketing effectiveness have most often taken no remedial action. However, those organisations that have experienced greater success in their marketing during the corona crisis have become much more active, such as by sharing more content or focusing on a broader range of target groups.

## 5 Conclusion

The research is limited because the results compare the subjective responses of the creators of marketing communication of organisations whose activity in the field of marketing communication is not the same; thus, the inquiry does not take into account the quality of activities affected during the crisis.

Considering the presented facts, it is appropriate to discuss the pros and cons of the free choice of organisations' activities providing regional marketing communication focused on regional development through tourism. Based on the above, it is evident that unified management of tourism promotion, as in Spain, Hungary or Slovenia, makes it possible to formulate and achieve a unified strategy at lower territorial levels than at the national level. However, decentralised management at the local level, as in the case of Slovakia, ensures development, parallels of which can be found in the fundamental lessons of the free market, which allows exceptional examples of good marketing support for tourism development, but does not ensure this development for every entity which sets support for such development as one of its main tasks.

It is essential to research the topic of marketing communication in regional marketing, ensuring the development of tourism. However, it is also necessary to understand the processes leading to a practical concept of managing these activities at the states' level and the smallest regions. Slovakia is an example of a country whose tourism strategy is not fixed or managed but provides space for innovative changes and creative solutions. However, such a fragmented strategy can be very vulnerable in times of emergency. That is why our research aimed at finding whether the global coronavirus pandemic impacted entities performing activities in the field of marketing communication focused mainly on tourism in Slovakia. The research results also showed the nature of the changes that occurred in the entities in the field of marketing communication. The research took place in the third quarter of 2020 and includes 137 pre-selected representative entities performing marketing activities in promoting tourism opportunities in Slovakia. The research results were processed by the mathematical method of weighted average and evaluated by logical induction and deduction methods, while the results are displayed using descriptive and graphical imaging methods.

From the research results, we can state that the average change in activities in marketing communication of entities performing regional marketing, focused mainly on tourism in Slovakia, was optimistic at the time of the survey. However, it should be noted that the mathematical method used shows that although the average impact of a pandemic on the facts examined is positive, not all participants were able to record positive changes, as is the case of, for example, the National Tourism Organisation. The researched subjects also stated that:

- a significant increase in local awareness was observed,
- subjects began to share more local content and content that brings local culture, nature and regional identity closer,
- the frequency of sharing local content has also increased compared to others,
- as a result of the pandemic, they began to target their communication more at local people, but at the level of 31% of respondents who mentioned this option, we rate the change in target groups as fair,
- as the most effective platforms for increasing visibility, entities most often mentioned *Instagram* and *Facebook* as communication means through which they share secondary information and promote events.

One of the most interesting findings for us was that those organisations that experienced a decline in their marketing effectiveness most often did not take any remedial action. However, those organisations that experienced greater success in their marketing during the corona crisis began to be much more active.

Based on the researched information processing, we conclude that our formulated assumptions A1, A2, A3, A4 were verified and assumption A5 was rejected. During the research, we encountered facts that could be the basis for future research, such as the need to research whether the benefits of a comprehensive managed concept of marketing communication of several organisations in regional marketing focused on tourism outweigh the benefits of a freely organised concept of marketing communication in travel, run by local organisations. It remains to be seen whether we could not put in place processes that would help even less efficient organisations succeed, learning by the example of those who are successful. Therefore, we consider it necessary to find out whether a model of marketing communication of municipal organisations focused on tourism could be created, which in the form of a handbook would provide recommendations for solving specific situations and a basis for the concept of marketing communication. It is also necessary to find out whether such a form of the apolitical possibility of development of the given subjects could contribute to the effective development of marketing communication in tourism. Finally, the question is whether, with such a large increase in local awareness in a crisis, it is not suitable to consider the greater involvement of local people in the organisation of tourism as objects of communication. Of course, this research also offers other possibilities for analysing the correlations of the obtained data, which could be the basis for further research.

An important finding of this work is a paradox that subjects in our research, most affected by the current crisis, are fighting the consequences the least – a parallel with the theory of natural selection following the principle of Charles Darwin. The conclusion is that we can only hope that the situation will improve. The average situation of Slovak entities operating in the field of tourism opportunities in Slovakia will contribute to others' development due to the crisis of bankrupt tourism sectors of the national economy. However, researchers, scientists and intelligence's roles are to actively contribute to this goal, not just hope for the best.

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