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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING TECHNIQUES IN CREATING USER EXPERIENCE AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF JOINT CREATION (CO-CREATION)

Uloga i značaj tehnika digitalnog marketinga u kreiranju korisničkog iskustva i angažovanju kupaca u procesu zajedničkog stvaranja (ko-kreiranja)

Abstract

Modern business conditions, characterized by the accelerated development of technique and technology, resulted from the globalization process, have completely changed the environment in which companies operate. The era of the Internet is characterized, on the one hand, by new business models, which have conditioned the digitization of business and especially marketing, and, on the other hand, consumers who are "loud and active", save their time, want quick feedback, individual offers and, consequently, participation in product design or service. In this regard, the subject of research in this paper involves correlational tests, on the one hand of respondents' attitudes towards digital marketing techniques and, on the other, their willingness to accept promotional content on the Internet, make a purchase decision, access electronic transactions and participate in interaction with company. The aim of the research is to analyze the contribution of digital marketing techniques in the creation of user experience and customer engagement in the process of joint creation (co-creation). A total of 335 respondents participated in the research conducted through a survey method. The results of the research show that the marketing content that companies place through digital marketing techniques influences consumers' decision to buy a certain product, while the quality and the way the marketing content is placed affect their loyalty. Also, user experience and customers' willingness to participate in different segments of co-creation are conditioned by the application of the mentioned techniques, as well as by interaction with the company through which customers can share their opinion and creativity, but also express their needs and wishes regarding the characteristics of products and services, which represents a way of personalizing the company's offer. The potential for business improvement through the application of digital marketing techniques is great, that's why investments in the aforementioned techniques represent an investment, not an expense.

Keywords: *digital marketing techniques, user experience, co-creation, social media, email, mobile marketing, website, search engine advertising*

Sažetak

Savremeni uslovi poslovanja koje karakteriše ubrzani razvoj tehnike i tehnologije, nastao kao posledica procesa globalizacije, u potpunosti menjaju okruženje u kojem preduzeća funkcionišu. Eru Interneta karakterišu, s jedne strane novi poslovni modeli, koji su uslovlili digitalizaciju poslovanja i posebno marketinga i, s druge strane, potrošači koji su „glasni i aktivni“, štede svoje vreme, žele brzu povratnu informaciju, individualnu ponudu i posledično učešće u dizajniranju proizvoda ili usluga. S tim u vezi, predmet istraživanja u ovom radu su korelaciona ispitivanja, s jedne strane stavova ispitanika o tehnikama digitalnog marketinga i s druge strane, njihove spremnosti da prihvate promotivni sadržaj na Internetu, donesu odluku o kupovini, pristupe elektronskim transakcijama i učestvuju u interakciji sa kompanijom. Cilj istraživanja je analiza doprinosa tehnika digitalnog marketinga u kreiranju korisničkog iskustva i angažovanju kupaca u procesu zajedničkog stvaranja (ko-kreiranja). U istraživanju sprovedenom kroz metod anketiranja učestvovalo je ukupno 335 ispitanika. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da na odluku potrošača o kupovini određenog proizvoda utiče marketing sadržaj koji kompanije plasiraju putem tehnika digitalnog marketinga, dok kvalitet ali i način plasiranja marketing sadržaja utiču na njihovu lojalnost. Takođe, korisničko iskustvo i spremnost kupaca da učestvuju u različitim segmentima zajedničkog stvaranja uslovljeni su primenom navedenih tehnika, ali i interakcijom sa kompanijom kroz koju kupci mogu da podele svoje mišljenje i kreativnost ali i izraze svoje potrebe i želje u pogledu karakteristika proizvoda i usluga, što predstavlja put personalizacije ponude preduzeća. Potencijal unapređenja poslovanja kroz primenu tehnika digitalnog marketinga je veliki, zato ulaganja u pomenute tehnike predstavljaju investiciju, a ne trošak.

Glavne reči: *tehnike digitalnog marketinga, korisničko iskustvo, ko-kreiranje, društvene mreže, elektronska pošta, mobilni marketing, veb-sajt, oglašavanje na pretraživačima*

Introduction

Facing an extremely unstable, competitive and unpredictable environment, companies are forced to adapt to existing and to develop new strategies based on the digitization of their activities. The use of modern information and communication technologies is one of the key factors in achieving competitiveness, productivity and business efficiency [8, p. 43]. Given that the digital transformation has caused a gradual but almost complete change in traditional patterns of production, decision-making, communication, promotion, distribution, purchasing, designing and product development, the importance of digital technology that is talked about every day and which is, increasingly, the subject of numerous researches and analysis, involving scientists from different fields is completely justified.

It is a real challenge to find a way to integrate digital marketing into the strategic marketing function and towards business goals in the time of fast development of new technologies and the tendency of today's customers towards digital sales channels and media [17, p. 306]. Particularly relevant in the last two decades, the digitalization of marketing has created a new business horizon in which two-way communication and promotion through the Internet, replacing going to the store with sit-back shopping, meeting the growing needs for personalization of the product and service offers, intensive involvement of customers in the process of co-creation, as well as the characteristics of digital marketing, represent the foundation of the survival and development of a company. In the sphere of electronic business, digital marketing has become so important that modern business cannot be imagined without it and therefore the possibilities of applying digital marketing do not depend on the size of the company, so even small and medium-sized companies have the obligation to keep up with trends, acquire digital literacy and develop effective digital marketing strategies [28].

Given the fact that active and "loud" consumers are increasingly present today and they communicate daily with companies whose products they are buying and using and who want to participate in product design, and on the other hand companies, through the use of the Internet and

digital technologies, strive to find consumers on the right place, at the right time and with the right message, the subject of research in this paper is the role and importance of digital marketing techniques in attracting new and retaining existing customers, creating user experience and engaging consumers in the co-creation process. Given that digital marketing occurs due to technological changes and the influence of technological changes on consumers [28, p. 2], the motive of the research is of a dual nature and stems from the mutual connection and conditioning of two extremely current processes, on the one hand digitalization and, on the other, the marketing function, profiled as one of the most important business functions in the company.

Literature review

We live in a time where power is being redirected from the organization to the consumer, who plays an increasingly important role, who is active, engaged and has control over communications, while on the other hand, it is increasingly difficult to build brand trust, and communications and recommendations represent a kind of currency [8, p. 44]. Given that communication with customers is extremely important for the creation of a base of loyal customers, digital marketing, or as it is more often called Marketing 4.0, represents the foundation for the realization of marketing goals.

By reviewing the literature, it has been noticed that digital, Internet, online, E-marketing and web marketing are often viewed as synonyms, however, Veleva and Tsvetanova note the difference among the above-mentioned terms and point out that digital marketing, as a more complex term with a wider aspect of meaning, includes the marketing activities of an organization that are an integral part of the overall marketing strategy, and not only various digital channels and new but also traditional techniques and tools are used for their implementation [34]. On the other hand, the same authors state that the Internet and online marketing have a very close meaning to the concept of digital marketing, but that their primary orientation is focused only on interacting and attracting the attention and interest of the users based on the

opportunities offered by the Internet environment. Smith and Chaffey view e-marketing as a way of thinking and a way of positioning the consumer in the center of online activities, which can effectively identify, predict and meet consumer needs [31]. Miller defines web marketing as a set of different components: online presence (website), search engine marketing, online advertising, blog marketing, online public relations, multimedia marketing, and social media marketing [21]. Although there is a tendency in the literature to equate the terms analyzed, the differences in conceptual definitions are evident and indisputable, therefore, for the purposes of this work, the term digital marketing will be used, as the most comprehensive and complex one that includes all other terms. In this regard, Chaffey defines digital marketing as the use of information and communication technologies to support marketing activities in order to meet consumer needs [5]. Similarly, Mahmutović states that Marketing 4.0. represents the achievement of marketing goals through the use of the Internet and other digital technologies in business [19]. Quinton and Simkin believe that digital marketing enables consumers, businesses and other stakeholders to create exchange and access digital content [27]. Summarizing the above-mentioned definitions, we notice that digital marketing primarily includes the implementation of modern technology in order to meet the consumers' needs, and as Jevremović et al. state, includes the following:

- Applying these technologies which form online channels to the market: Web, email, databases, mobile/wireless and digital TV;
- Support marketing activities aimed at achieving profitable acquisition and retention of customers within a multichannel buying process and customer lifecycle;
- Through using marketing tactics recognizing the strategic importance of digital technologies and developing a planned approach to reach, migrate, and retain customers to online services through ecommunications [14, p. 186].

Noticing the changes caused by the development of digital marketing, both for the company and consumer, Kotler and Keller highlight as the greatest, but also at the same time the most important changes for consumers as following opportunities:

- The use of the Internet as an extremely powerful tool for finding information and efficient shopping;
- Search, communication and shopping available on the go and 24 hours a day;
- The possibility of active and two-way communication with companies (reception of marketing and sales materials, notifications about coupons, the possibility of writing a review, etc.);
- Social networks through which consumers can express their opinions and loyalty;
- The possibility of rejecting marketing activities that consumers consider inappropriate (there us the possibility of blocking online messages, ignoring advertisements and avoiding marketing incentives), [16, pp. 16-17].

Various digital marketing techniques are used in order to realize the mentioned opportunities and as such to contribute to the achievement of marketing goals, which, with a properly formulated marketing strategy, contribute to attracting new and retaining existing customers, but their role in creating a user experience and engaging consumers in co-creation is particularly noteworthy. Among the others, Veleva and Tsvetanova highlight the following as the most important digital marketing techniques:

1. Websites
2. E-mail marketing
3. Social media
4. Mobile marketing and
5. Search engines advertising [34].

Today's belief is that companies that are not present on the Internet do not exist at all, so the presence of the companies on the Internet is very significant. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 83.5% of households uses the Internet, while the 100% of companies that took part in research uses the Internet in the Republic of Serbia in 2022 [29].

Websites as an extremely up-to-date technique of digital marketing influence the user experience and enable the company to present and sell products and services on the Internet, communicate with the target group, identify the needs and wishes of consumers, as well as their involvement in the process of joint creation

(co-creation). Lalević points out that the environment for placing products on the market is a strategic determinant in digital marketing and the creation of an adaptable site is crucial, so that consumers can virtually research, order and monitor the availability and delivery of products and services [18]. Entrepreneurs should design a website that will be an expression of their activity, history, product, vision and at the same time attractive at first glance and interesting enough to actuate the visitor to visit it again [11]. There are corporate and marketing websites and while the corporate websites usually offer basic information about a company's history, mission and philosophy, products and services and are created to support customer-initiated interactive communication, the marketing websites are designed to engage customers in seller-initiated interaction, and which will bring them closer to purchase or to other marketing outcomes [3]. E-mail marketing has been considered one of the most effective methods of online marketing which enables sending promotional messages to internet users [4], as well as interactive communication between the company and its consumers. Chittenden and Rettie recognize electronic mail as a major tool for customer retention, primarily due to its advantages in terms of speed and low marketing costs [7]. Considering the fact that consumers treat their inbox as a personal domain, the same authors point out that as long as companies do not abuse this privilege they have the ability to build profile, awareness and, ultimately, a profitable relationship with persons they communicate with [7].

Njegomir emphasizes the importance of social media and states that with their help, marketers can build or join online communities, invite consumers to participate in something and thus create long-term marketing assets in that process [26]. Although the same author points out that Social Networks, as one of the forms of social media, have a non-commercial purpose [26], Bostanshirin believes that marketing through the mentioned technique is especially promising for small businesses because it increases their competitive advantage and therefore becomes more and more a priority [4]. This is supported by the fact that small entrepreneurial firms that are at the beginning of their life cycle start their Internet sales through social networks. Opening a Facebook page has become a business

requirement for many companies [24]. For entrepreneurs, feedback from their consumers and service users about the level of satisfaction and user experience is particularly important, that's why Milić, among others, states low costs and interaction with consumers as one of the most significant advantages of social media [20], [13].

Mobile marketing is developed with the expansion of mobile technologies, and it uses mobile devices as the main interactive way of communication between the company and the user [32, p. 21]. The Mobile Marketing Association, as a world professional organization for mobile marketing, defines this term as a set of practices providing organizations opportunities to connect with their target market in an interactive and relevant way with and through any mobile network or device [23]. Research shows that 95.5% of the population used a mobile phone [29] in the Republic of Serbia in 2022 year therefore the intensive growth of this form of communication and sales is completely justified. In mobile marketing, entrepreneurs can use: text and MMS messages, mobile applications, mobile web, location services, social media and advertising to connect with consumers through their "smart" phones or tablets [32]. As an advantage of the mentioned technique, Njegomir states that mobile devices give entrepreneurs the opportunity to personalize their messages, advertisements and applications based on demographic, geographic and other characteristics of consumer behavior, thus ensuring more relevant messages and better targeting, while saving limited financial resources [26].

Search engine advertising is paid for by businesses that are interested in displaying ads for their products, services and sites alongside search engine results. Businesses bid for keywords, and their ad is displayed when the keyword is queried in the search engine [12]. Companies must carefully approach the selection of keywords and the success of this technique often requires the development of a special plan, because as Steel states, the display of a company's ad next to or above the search results depends on how much money that company has offered and on the algorithm that the search engine uses to determine the relevance of an ad for a specific search [33]. Although the advantage of the mentioned technique seems to be reduced to the informative function, marketers believe

that consumers who have already expressed interest by starting a search on the Internet are the primary potential consumers [26], therefore, paid ads at the top of the search results are an effective digital marketing technique that can help the company in the creation of its consumer base.

Marketing as a business function in the company makes its contribution to the creation of user experience and the engagement of consumers in the process of co-creation, given that it emphasizes the customer to the fore. However, the presented characteristics of digital marketing technique, as well as consumers' behavior today, indisputably confirm that the contribution of the mentioned techniques is far greater than traditional marketing techniques. Namely, the Nielsen-Norman Group views the user experience as all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products [25]. Allam et al., point out that user experience's unit of analysis is very flexible, and it can be a single aspect of "an individual end-user" interaction with a "standalone application" or aspects of "multiple end-users" interactions with the "company and its merging of services from multiple disciplines" and therefore we must understand how the user feels about the system [1]. Given that Veleva and Tsvetanova, as the primary advantage of digital marketing, emphasize a high level of interactivity – the possibility for interactive communication with consumers [34], and that on the other hand, user experience is related to the interaction between the company and the consumer, the correlation between digital marketing techniques and user experience is obvious. The connection between digital marketing and user experience can also be observed through the increasingly frequent meeting of consumer expectations and needs precisely through online interaction and services, because as Ćuzović and Labović state, there is a kind of competition on the stage between companies that base their competitive recognition and business performance on novelties that brings with it modern informatics and electronics, while the number of users who communicate and buy via the Internet is constantly growing [9].

In addition to the connection with the user experience, the advantages of digital marketing highlight its contribution to the engagement of consumers in the co-creation process. Doorslaer defines the process of co-creation as a partnership

with the customers where value is created by both the firm and the customer can get involved at just about any stage of the value chain [10]. Co-creation is creating an experience environment in which customers can have an active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences and product may be the same, but customers can construct different experiences [10]. Veleva and Tsvetanova point out that digital marketing creates opportunities for developing new business models and strategies such as mass customization, co-creation and consequently provides the opportunity to be more responsive to their needs and understandings [34]. In this regard, companies use various digital techniques in order to allow customers to write a review, share their experience, select the features or functions they want their product to have, choose the method and time of delivery, etc.

Research methodology

In accordance with the presented analysis of the theoretical basis, the authors present the subject of research which, as stated in the introductory part of this paper, refers to the role and importance of digital marketing techniques in building a base of loyal consumers, as well as the advantages of using them in creating a user experience and engaging customers in the process of joint creation. The aim of this research is multiple and is reflected primarily in the analysis of the respondents' presence on the Internet, with special reference to the frequency and purpose of its use, and therefore the examination of the respondents' opinions and attitudes about the techniques that are the subject of the analysis, specifically: websites, social networks, mobile marketing, search engine advertising, and email marketing. Also, the aim is to analyze the reaction of the respondents to the promotional content placed through the aforementioned techniques, as well as the examination of their willingness to accept it. The subjects of the special analysis are the factors that determine, on the one hand, the decision to purchase products or services and, on the other hand, loyalty to a particular brand. Considering all the above, the author's goal is to analyze the contribution of the quality of online services and interaction with the company, to examine

the contribution of digital marketing techniques in the creation of user experience and co-creation, with special reference to the respondents' views on the possibility of writing a review via digital platforms, as well as on their willingness to participate in the same.

The basic hypothesis put forward by the authors of this paper is as follows:

- The decision of respondents, primarily Internet users, to choose and purchase a certain product is conditioned by the promotional content available to them through digital marketing techniques, while their user experience is conditioned by the quality of online services.

In addition to the basic one, the authors also define auxiliary hypotheses:

1. Respondents who are more often present on the Internet are more willing to accept promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques;
2. Respondents of different age groups are not equally ready to interact with the company and approach the realization of electronic transactions;
3. Digital marketing techniques contribute to the creation of user experience;
4. Respondents show a high degree of willingness to participate in surveys sent to them by companies through various platforms, especially through e-mail, mobile applications and websites;
5. Respondents who accept the use of digital techniques try to express their opinion, creativity and imagination, as well as their needs for products or services, through reviews on digital platforms;
6. Respondents who write reviews on digital platforms are more willing to take part in different segments of the product co-creation process and consider co-creation useful for the offer personalization.

335 respondents participated in the research process, conducted in the period from April to June 2023, in municipalities on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The research was conducted through a survey, actually through a questionnaire that contained 30 questions in total and was distributed to randomly selected respondents on paper and electronic form (Google Forms). The questions

in the questionnaire are classified into five groups. The first group (consists of 9 questions) includes basic information about the respondents: gender, age, marital status, municipality where they live, level of education, work status, average income, number of household members. The second group (10 questions) is related to the use of the Internet, and as such contains questions related to the frequency and purpose of Internet use, attitudes, reactions and readiness of respondents to accept promotional content marketed through the analyzed techniques, as well as the factors that determine the decision about purchases and consumers loyalty. The third group of questions (5 questions) is aimed at examining the views of the respondents on the implementation of electronic transactions, but also on the motivational factors that influenced trust building. The fourth group includes one question presented in the form of a scale for measuring the quality of online services [35, p. 1163] and contains 20 items in total distributed in 6 analyzed dimensions, namely: reliability (3), responsiveness (3), employee competence (3), ease of use (3), product portfolio (4) and security (4), while the answers are shown on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree). The fifth group (5 questions) is related to the quality of interaction with the company and the importance of being able to write a review in creating the user experience and engaging customers in the co-creation process. In this regard, the last group contains questions related to respondents' willingness to write reviews on digital platforms, their opinion about their contribution to the personalization of the offer, as well as questions about their willingness to participate in certain segments of joint creation of products or services.

Furthermore, the methodology of the work is focused on the review of the literature and through the method of comparison a comparative analysis of the obtained results and previous research on the mentioned topic was performed. The IBM SPSS Statistics-version 26 platform was used for data processing. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and the Pearson correlation coefficient were performed in the mentioned platform.

Results of the research

A five-point Likert scale, from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree, was used to determine the views of the respondents on the influence of the quality of online services on the perception and creation of user experience, as well as to analyze the views on digital marketing techniques, the importance of reviews and customer interactions. Cronbach's α coefficient values ranged from 0.928 to 0.943, which shows high reliability and internal agreement of the observed scales.

The gender structure of the sample shows that 186 women (55.5%) and 149 men (44.5%) took part in the research. Although respondents from various municipalities throughout the Republic of Serbia (out of a total of 31 municipalities) participated in the survey, the largest number of respondents came from Kosovo and Metohija, namely from: Leposavić (22.1%), then Kosovska Mitrovica (14.9%), Zvečan (13.7%), Zubin Potok (6.6%) and Gračanica

(3%), while a significant number of participants came from Raška (7.8%), Belgrade (4.8%) and Niš (3.3 %).

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents are between 26 and 35 years old (36.1%), while the approximate participation of those who are surveyed is between 16 and 25 years old (33.1%). The educational structure shows that they are mostly respondents with bachelor's degree (34.9%), with master's degree (14.0%), and doctoral degree (2.1%). The analysis of work status found that the participation of respondents who are unemployed dominates (35.2%), while the cross-analysis shows that it is a student population, i.e., respondents who are still studying. The largest number of respondents earns income in the amount of 40,000 to 60,000 dinars (28.1%), and the cross-tabulation shows that those are temporary and permanent employees (30.4%).

The data shown in Table 2 also show that the use of the Internet is growing exponentially, considering that all respondents use the Internet. 84.8% of them use it regularly on a daily basis. Also, looking at the past month, we conclude that the participation of respondents who use the Internet 6 or more times a day (43%) dominates, while the participation of those who use it 2-3 times per day (27.5%), and 4-5 times per day (23.9%) is significant. The respondents were asked the question "For what purpose do you use the Internet?", and the largest number of respondents answered for getting information (71.6%) and for communication with other people (69.3%), while education (42.1%), entertainment (38.5%), and shopping (36.1%) were chosen by smaller number of respondents. In order to support above-mentioned results, there is a fact that the majority of respondents use social networks 30 minutes to an hour and a half per day (34.3 %) given that social networks have an informative, but also an interactive function.

The respondents were asked the question "What is your attitude towards the use of digital marketing

Table 1: Structure of the sample according to age, level of education and work status

	Variables	Number of respondents	
		N	%
Age	16-25	111	33.1
	26-35	121	36.1
	36-45	60	17.9
	46-55	34	10.1
	More than 55 years old	9	2.7
Level of education	Primary education	2	0.6
	Intermediate education	98	29.3
	College for applied studies	64	19.1
	Bachelor's degree	117	34.9
	Master's degree	47	14.0
Work status	Doctoral degree	7	2.1
	Unemployed	118	35.2
	Temporary employees	102	30.4
	Permanent employees	102	30.4
	Entrepreneur (the owner of his/her own business)	3	0.9
	Retiree	10	3.0

Source: Authors' research

Table 2: The use of the Internet by respondents

Number of respondents	Questions									
	Do you use the Internet?					How often did you use the Internet last month?				
	No, never	Sometimes	Several times a month	Several times a week	Regularly on a daily basis	Once a week	Once a day	2-3 times a day	4-5 times a day	6 or more times a day
N	0	16	5	30	284	6	13	92	80	144
%	0	4.8	1.5	9.0	84.8	1.8	3.9	27.5	23.9	43.0

Source: Authors' research

techniques (marketing via website, social networks, search engines, mobile applications and e-mail)?”, and the largest number of respondents give an answer that they agree with the use of the mentioned techniques, specifically 49.3% of them points out that they accept in most cases, and 25.1% fully accept the use of them. Considering that the mentioned techniques are mostly used for the placement of promotional content, respondents were asked the question “How do you react to promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques?”, to which the majority of respondents answered that they notice content placed in that way, however 46.3% of them notice, but partially accept the same, while 22.1% of respondents fully accept promotional content placed through the aforementioned techniques. Analyzing the respondents’ opinions on which technique they consider most suitable for placing promotional content, it was found that 49.3% of respondents consider social networks the most suitable technique, then 28.7% of them vote for a website, and 13.7% of them consider Internet browsers

as the most suitable. The subject of a special analysis was the evaluation of respondents to what extent they are personally ready to accept promotional content placed through different digital marketing techniques. Regarding this, the participation of those who rate their readiness with the highest rate in order to accept promotional content via social networks (44.5%), websites (33.7%) and mobile applications (29.3%) dominates, which can be justified by the fact that an increasing number of companies use the above-mentioned platforms for promotional purposes.

The importance of digital marketing techniques is confirmed by the data shown in Figure 1, which clearly show that the decision to buy a certain product among the majority of respondents is conditioned by the company’s promotional content placed through digital marketing technique. Through cross-analysis, it was established that it is primarily a matter of respondents who accept promotional content placed through the mentioned techniques, so it is not surprising that the decision to buy is conditioned by the same factors. The

Figure 1: Respondents’ attitude toward the question “Is your decision to buy a certain product conditioned by the company’s promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques?”

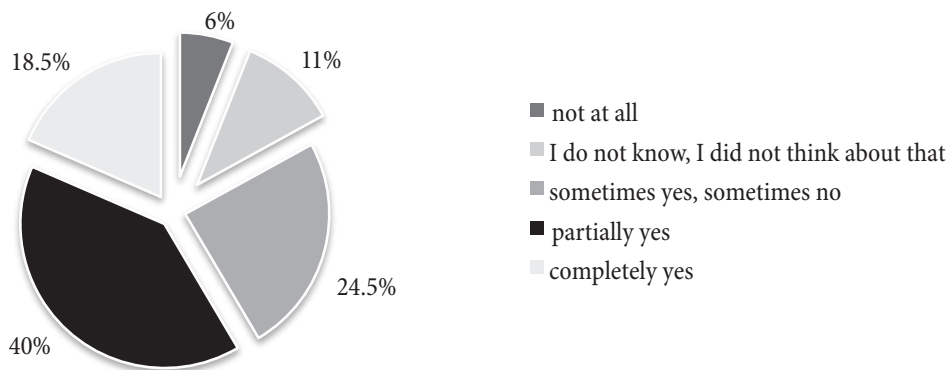
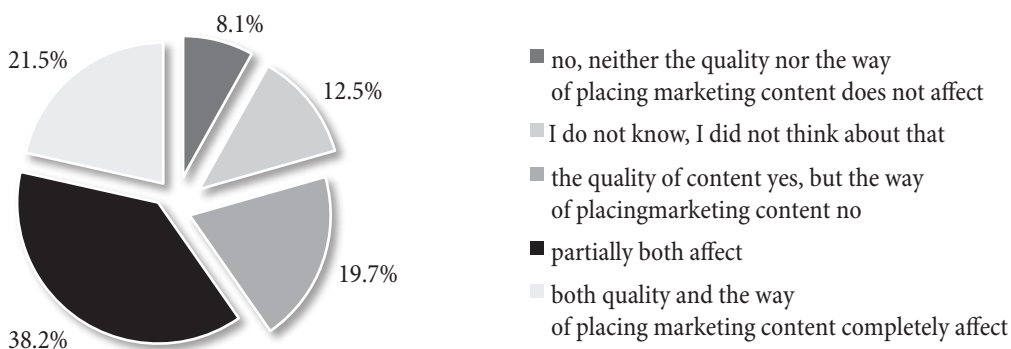


Figure 2: Respondents’ attitude toward the question “Does the quality and way of placing marketing content affect your loyalty to a particular product or brand?”



Source: Authors’ research

fact that 24.5% of respondents had a neutral attitude (the decision to buy a product is sometimes conditioned by promotional content, and sometimes not) can be justified by the existence of other factors such as: product value, delivery conditions, payment method which influence purchase decision.

The majority of respondents point out that their loyalty to a certain brand is partially influenced by the quality and way of placing marketing content (38.2%), while more than one fifth (21.5%) of respondents consider that their loyalty to a certain brand is completely influenced by the quality and way of placing marketing content (Figure 2). The authors start from the assumption that the use of digital marketing techniques affects the getting of new and retention of existing customers, which is confirmed by the data indicating that the decision to purchase, as well as the loyalty of respondents, is conditioned by the use of the mentioned techniques.

We analyzed the opinion of respondents on the importance and influence of the mentioned dimensions on the perception and creation of user experience with the scale on the quality of online services, through

several segments: reliability, responsiveness, employee competence, ease of use, product portfolio and security. The results shown in Table 3 clearly show that, for the majority of respondents, the mentioned variables from all areas are particularly important for the process of perceiving and creating user experience. In this regard, companies need a properly formulated marketing strategy, the implementation of which will create a quality package of online services that is in line with the needs and wishes of consumers. Following up on the segments that influence the creation of the user experience, the respondents were asked the question “Does the interaction with the company whose products you buy, as well as the possibility to write a review, affect your user experience?”, and 38.5% of the respondents answered that it influences partially, while 22.7% of them stated that it influences completely, and only 5.1% of respondents had a negative attitude (no, not at all). It is about the dominant participation of respondents who are ready to communicate with the company and express their opinion, creativity, imagination, needs and wishes, but also share their experiences through leaving reviews via digital platforms.

Table 3: Respondents' opinion on the importance of the quality of online services for the perception and creation of user experience

Variables	Respondents' answers [*]				
	%				
	1	2	3	4	5
The company performs the service correctly for the first time.	2.4	12.5	27.5	41.8	15.8
My online transactions are always accurate.	1.2	8.1	20.9	47.8	22.1
The company keeps my records accurately.	1.8	11.3	28.4	35.8	22.7
I get quick responses to my requests via email.	1.5	12.5	22.1	41.5	22.4
The company quickly resolves any issues I encounter.	1.8	9.3	28.1	38.8	22.1
The employees of the company provide me with fast service.	1.8	10.4	26.0	38.5	23.3
The employees of the company have the knowledge to answer to my questions.	1.8	9.6	22.1	44.5	22.1
Employees of the company properly solve all problems that arise.	1.8	8.1	27.8	40.3	22.1
The employees of the company meet my requirements.	1.8	9.6	23.0	46.3	19.4
Using a company website requires a lot of effort.	8.7	13.7	23.3	34.0	20.3
The organization and structure of online content is easy to follow.	0.6	4.8	19.1	43.3	32.2
It is easy for me to make a transaction via the company's website.	1.5	5.4	16.4	45.1	31.6
All my service needs are included in the menu options.	0.3	9.3	18.2	43.9	28.4
The company offers a wide range of products.	1.2	6.9	14.6	43.6	33.7
The company provides services with the features I want.	0.9	8.1	17.0	42.1	31.9
The company provides most of the services with features I need.	1.2	6.0	18.2	43.3	31.3
The company will not abuse my personal information.	2.7	6.3	17.6	40.9	32.5
I feel safe while doing online transactions.	2.1	8.7	15.2	40.3	33.7
I feel safe providing sensitive information (for example credit card number) for online transactions.	2.4	10.7	16.7	38.2	31.9
I feel that the risk associated with online transactions is low.	2.7	7.2	18.2	38.2	33.7

Source: Authors' research

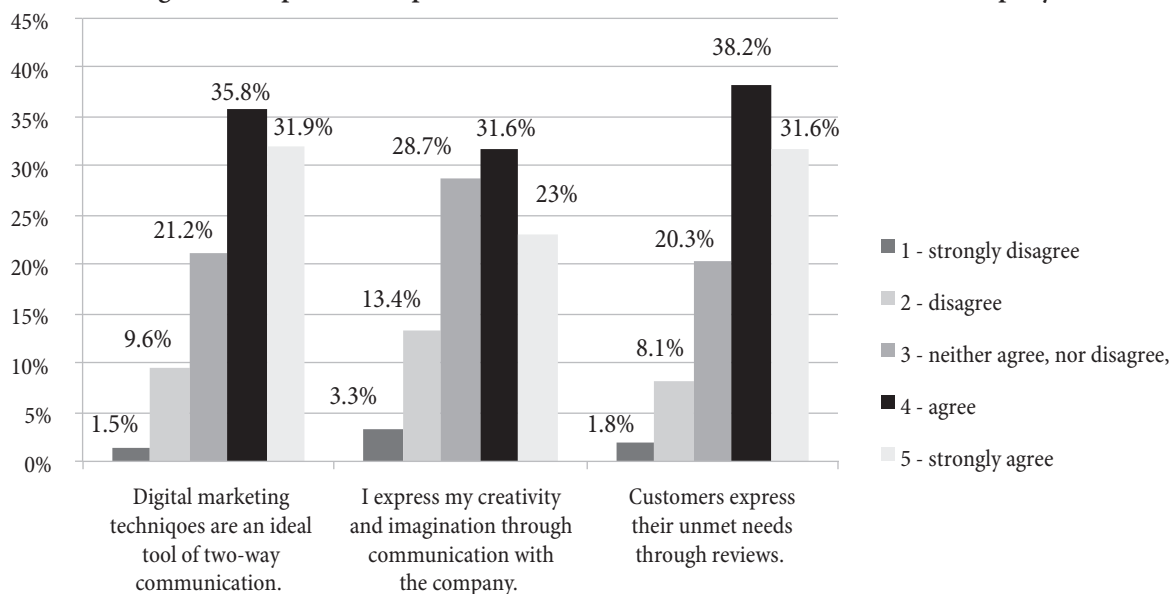
* 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – neither agree nor disagree; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree.

The potential of digital marketing techniques for interactive communication is also recognized by the respondents, given that most of them (35.8%) perceive the just mentioned techniques as an ideal tool of two-way communication and a “place” where the voice of every customer is heard. Companies use the mentioned techniques in order to get feedback from their customers, and in order to recognize their needs and desires. In this regard, customer reviews are becoming an increasingly current technique that businesses are developing across all digital platforms. The importance of these is also recognized by the respondents who took part in this research because the results presented in Figure 3 show that the majority of respondents believe that through reviews customers express their unmet needs and wishes (38.2%), and the dominant are those who express their

creativity and imagination in terms of product features (31.6%) through communication with the company.

By agreeing with certain statements, respondents expressed their opinion on the usefulness of reviews and their willingness to participate in them. With the statement “*Reviews are extremely useful and can help to attract new customers.*”, 42.1% of respondents agreed, while 30.1% of them strongly agreed, and according to only 2.1% of respondents, reviews do not have the function of attracting new customers. In addition to this, the majority of respondents, specifically 46.8% of them (31.3% - agree, 15.5% strongly agree) agreed with the statement “*Whenever there is an opportunity to do so, I leave a review on the platforms used by the company.*”, while 6.9% of respondents do not express their opinion through reviews.

Figure 3: Respondents’ opinion on reviews and communication with the company



Source: Authors’ research

Table 4: Willingness of respondents to participate in different segments of co-creation

Segments of co-creation	Assessments on the respondents’ readiness’ %				
	1	2	3	4	5
Presenting a product idea.	3.6	14.3	23.9	24.8	33.4
Projection of the product in terms of features.	4.5	13.7	23.0	27.2	31.6
Participation in product prototyping workshops.	8.7	24.5	31.6	20.6	14.6
Distribution channel projection.	10.4	25.4	28.4	20.0	15.8
Participation in product testing workshops.	12.5	20.6	25.7	17.3	23.9
Participation in product promotion activities.	10.7	17.3	23.6	22.7	25.7

Source: Authors’ research

* 1 –insufficient grade; 2 – sufficient; 3 – good 4 – very good; 5 – excellent grade.

As already mentioned, customer reviews can be used to identify unmet needs and wishes of consumers, especially for the purpose of engaging them, which can contribute to the personalization of the company's offer. In this regard, surveys sent to the target market represent a way in which customers, existing and potential one can be involved in the process of joint creation, i.e., in the process of co-creation. Respondents were asked the question "Have you ever participated in surveys and expressed your ideas about product design and production?". Most of them answered yes once or twice (27.2%), while the number of those who have done it three or four times is significant (16.7%), but also those who have done it more than four times (11.6%). However, the participation of those who have never participated in surveys before (23.9%), precisely more than one-fifth should not be ignored either.

Analyzing the different segments of co-creation in which customers can engage (Table 4), it was found that the majority of respondents rate their willingness to participate in the presentation of the product idea (33.4%) as well as in the projection of the product in terms of characteristics (31.6%) with the highest rating. We are talking about the respondents who had a certain attitude regarding the statement "I prefer to visit websites or platforms where I have the possibility to choose product features or different purchase conditions." namely: 37.9% of them agreed, while 25.4% strongly agreed with the stated statement. Such results are expected, given that the possibility of product projection, as well as the choice of purchase conditions, is offered to customers today through various digital platforms. In addition to this, respondents rate their willingness to participate in product promotion activities (25.7%) with a high score. Also, this data is not surprising, given that the majority of respondents have a positive attitude towards the use of digital marketing techniques, and they accept promotional content placed

in that way, while on the other hand, their willingness to participate in surveys and customer reviews is growing intensively and must not be ignored. Joint creation, i.e., co-creation, is recognized by the respondents as a way of adapting the offer to the demands and needs of customers. In this regard, to the question "In your opinion, can the participation of customers in the process of joint creation of products/services help companies to adapt their offer to the demands and needs of customers?", the majority of respondents, i.e. 36.7% of them, answered yes, partially, and 35.3% yes, completely, while only 3.6% of respondents had a negative attitude (no, not at all).

Discussion

Whether and to what extent respondents' attitudes and opinions on digital marketing techniques and their impact on user experience and the process of co-creation directly depend on gender, age, level of education, work status, but also on other variables, was examined through correlation analysis. Also, the above-mentioned analysis was used to test the set hypotheses. For this purpose, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was performed for each variable individually.

There is a statistically significant relationship between the variables "Age" and "Do you use the Internet?" ($p = 0.000$), while the Pearson coefficient shows a negative relationship of insignificant strength ($\rho = -0.244$), which means that the older respondents less use the Internet than the younger ones. Also, it was established that the frequency of Internet use depends on the level of education, with a statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) and a Pearson coefficient of insignificant positive relationship ($\rho = 0.212$), which shows that respondents with a higher level of education use the Internet more often, which is a consequence of using the Internet for educational purposes,

Table 5: Relationship between respondents' attitudes towards the use of digital marketing techniques, age and frequency of Internet use

Variables	Age	How often did you use the Internet in the last month?
What is your attitude towards the use of digital marketing techniques?		
Sig. (2-tailed) p	0.000	0.000
Pearson corr. ρ	-0.272	0.243

Source: Authors' research

but also for business purposes, given that by the cross-analysis it was established that these are the respondents who are employed.

The results shown in Table 5 show that the respondents' attitude towards the use of digital marketing techniques is conditioned by their age, and the Pearson coefficient of a weak negative relationship shows that people who are older are less likely to accept the use of the mentioned techniques. On the other hand, the respondents' attitudes are also influenced by the frequency of Internet use, and the Pearson coefficient of a positive relationship of insignificant strength shows that respondents who use the Internet more often accept the use of digital marketing techniques to a greater extent.

Between the variables "What is your attitude towards the use of digital marketing techniques?" and "How do you react to promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques?" there is a statistically significant relationship with ($p = 0.000$), a Pearson coefficient of positive relationship of moderate strength ($\rho = 0.540$), which shows that respondents who support the use of the mentioned techniques, more often notice and accept marketing content placed through them. The results are in accordance with the opinion of a group of authors who pointed out a decade and a half ago that the use of digital techniques provides support for marketing activities by which the company attracts new and retains existing consumers, through simultaneous interaction through different channels [6].

The respondents' willingness to accept marketing content placed through different digital marketing techniques is conditioned by their opinion about the use of the aforementioned, as indicated by the data shown in Table 6. Namely, statistically significant relationships with the Pearson coefficient of different strengths show

that the respondents who have a positive opinion about the use of digital marketing techniques are more willing to accept marketing content available to them through websites, mobile applications, social networks, e-mail and Internet browsers. The correlation that shows the willingness of the respondents to accept promotional content is strongest with websites and social networks, which proves the remarkable potential of these techniques in the realization of promotional activities. The fact that companies in the Republic of Serbia recognize this is confirmed by the data that 84.9% of companies owned their own website [29] in 2022. On the other hand, the actuality of social media as a digital marketing technique is indicated by the fact that in the Republic of Serbia in 2022, participation in social networks took the third place with a percentage participation of 81.9% as a purpose of using the Internet.

Basic hypothesis: The decision of respondents, primarily of those who use Internet, to choose and purchase a certain product is conditioned by the promotional content available to them through digital marketing techniques, while their user experience is conditioned by the quality of online services. Considering the fact that for the majority of respondents the purchase decision is conditioned by the promotional content that the company places through digital marketing techniques (58.5%) (Figure 1) and that the interaction with the company, as well as all the variables that express the quality of online services, are evaluated as very important for the creation of user experience (Table 3), we conclude that all the mentioned data stand for the authors' basic hypothesis. However, in order to prove the basic hypothesis, correlation analysis was used in order to examine the relationship between several variables, namely: "Do you use the Internet?", "Is your purchase decision conditioned by promotional

Table 6: Relationship between respondents' opinion about the use of digital marketing techniques and their willingness to accept content placed through certain techniques

Variables	Willingness of respondents to accept promotional content placed through the aforementioned techniques.				
	Content placed through websites	Content placed through mobile applications	Content placed through social networks	Content placed through e-mail	Content placed through Internet browsers
Sig. (2-tailed) p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pearson corr. ρ	0.278	0.281	0.333	0.193	0.190

Source: Authors' research

content placed through digital marketing techniques?” and “Depending on how the quality of online service affects your perception and creation of user experience, rate the degree of agreement or disagreement with the presented statements?” (six statements that are an expression of the quality of online services).

The statistically significant relationship between the observed variables shown in Table 7 shows that Internet users’ purchase decision is conditioned by promotional content available through digital marketing techniques, while their user experience is influenced by the quality of online services. Based on the presented results, the author’s basic hypothesis was fully confirmed. Following up the Mitrović’s view that it is not easy to suit the new online customers who have the power to constantly redefine the shopping experience they want to have, especially not today, in a world that is constantly “turn on” and that demands digital content, digital options and 24/7 availability [22], the authors recognize the potential for retaining existing and attracting new customers precisely in the application of digital techniques.

Auxiliary hypothesis I: Respondents who are more often present on the Internet are more willing to accept promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques. Between the variables “How often have you used the Internet last month?” and “How do you react to promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques?”, there is a statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$), with a Pearson correlation coefficient of weak positive strength ($\rho = 0.279$), which shows that respondents who are more often present on the Internet

are more willing to accept promotional content available to them through digital marketing techniques. We are talking about respondents who are ready to accept digital marketing techniques and use the Internet for getting information and shopping, and the stated results are not surprising and are on the side of auxiliary hypothesis I.

Auxiliary hypothesis II: Respondents belonging to different age groups are not equally ready to interact with the company and approach the realization of electronic transactions. A statistically significant relationship was determined by correlation analysis ($p = 0.002$), between the two variables “Age” and “I like to communicate with the company whose products I buy and use.”, with a Pearson coefficient of negative insignificant strength ($\rho = -0.170$), which points to the conclusion that older people are less likely to communicate with the company whose products they buy. In addition to this, the age structure affects the willingness of the respondents to carry out electronic transactions, actually online shopping. Namely, statistical significance ($p = 0.000$), exists between “Age” and the variable “Have you ever made a purchase via the Internet?”, while the Pearson correlation coefficient with a weak negative relationship ($\rho = -0.253$), shows that the older the respondents, the less ready they are to approach the realization of electronic transactions. The above results can be justified by the fact that older respondents grew up in an age when digital technology did not have the form it has today, and they often feel a certain amount of repulsion towards its use. In addition to this, digitalization, as a key global trend in the modern economy, has launched a new era of innovation in which technological progress

Table 7: Correlation analysis of basic hypothesis testing

Variables	Do you use the Internet?		
	Pearson corr. p	Pearson corr. ρ	
Is your decision to buy a certain product conditioned by the company’s promotional content placed through digital marketing techniques?	0.003	0.162	
The quality of online services*	My online transactions are always accurate.	0.000	0.238
	The company quickly resolves any issues I encounter.	0.024	0.124
	The employees of the company have the knowledge to answer to my questions.	0.000	0.193
	It is easy for me to make a transaction via the company’s website.	0.001	0.184
	The company offers a wide range of products.	0.001	0.173
	I feel safe while doing online transactions.	0.003	0.164

Source: Authors’ research

* Due to the length of the text, six variables that express the quality of online services (one from each dimension) are shown in Table 7, although by the correlation analysis it was established that there is a statistically significant relationship between the use of the Internet and 17 statements out of a total of 20.

results in the creation of new processes and products, but also significant changes, especially in marketing and organization [15], so in relation to this, older people need more time to overcome the use of digital techniques.

Auxiliary hypothesis III: Digital marketing techniques contribute to the creation of user experience. The importance of digital marketing techniques for the creation of user experience is analyzed through the customers' ability to choose the characteristics of products and services, which consequently leads to the personalization of the offer, which is the way of being satisfied consumers. Also, the subject of the analysis is the influence of the quality of the achieved communication on loyalty to a certain brand, which is often based on a positive user experience. Namely, 44.8% of respondents agreed with the statement "Compared to the traditional purchase model, digital marketing techniques provide customers with a greater opportunity to choose the product or purchase conditions they want.", while 24.5% of them completely agreed with the same statement. In addition to this, 61.2% of the surveyed respondents claim that interactions that are realized with the company through digital marketing techniques affects the creation of the user experience.

The statement that communication is extremely important in retaining existing customers is confirmed by the fact that loyalty to a certain brand in 40.9% of respondents is conditioned by the quality of the interaction with the company while as many as 34% of respondents had a more confident attitude and strongly agreed with the above mentioned statement. As a comparison, Roto and Kaasinen consider user experience as a term that describes the user's feelings towards a certain product, system or object during and after interacting with it, whereby different aspects influence the feelings, namely: user expectations, the conditions in which the interaction

takes place, as well as the ability of the system to meet the current needs of users [30]. In that case, the assumption that digital marketing techniques have an impact on the user experience is confirmed by the fact that the majority of respondents (67.8%) rate social networks as the platform which is the easiest way for achieving communication with the company, specifically 38.2% of them agreed, and 29.6% strongly agreed with the mentioned statement. Because of that, the stated results are in favor of auxiliary hypothesis III and therefore confirm it.

Auxiliary hypothesis IV: Respondents show a high level of willingness to participate in surveys sent to them by companies through various platforms, especially through e-mail, mobile applications and websites. Although the majority of respondents are ready to participate in surveys sent to them by companies via digital platforms (46.8%), analyzing in particular mobile applications, e-mail and website as the platforms through which surveys are most often sent and where customers can express their opinions, it was found that respondents who participated in this research most often write reviews on websites, considering that 26.6% of them agreed, and 9.6% strongly agreed with the statement "I am happy to answer the surveys posted on the website of the company whose products I buy." On the other hand, mobile applications and e-mail as platforms for customer surveys took a smaller part, as 37% of respondents agreed with the statement "I ignore surveys sent to me by companies through mobile applications.", while 28.1% had a neutral attitude and more than one quarter had a negative attitude (25.1%), when it comes to the following statement "I respond to surveys sent to me by companies via e-mail." The stated results confirm the auxiliary hypothesis IV partially, and only in terms of the respondents' high willingness to respond to surveys sent to them through the website, while disputing it in terms of

Table 8: Correlation analysis of testing auxiliary hypothesis V

Variables	What is your attitude towards the use of digital marketing technique?	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson corr.
	<i>p</i>	<i>ρ</i>
I leave a review on the platforms that the company uses whenever it is possible.	0.000	0.262
I try to express my needs and wishes regarding the product through communication with the company.	0.000	0.248
I express my creativity and imagination regarding product features through communication with the company.	0.000	0.256

Source: Authors' research

mobile applications and e-mail. Bostanshirin also pointed out the limitations of using e-mail for consumer surveys, emphasizing the users’ possibility to ignore the received message, as the biggest disadvantage of marketing that is implemented via e-mail [4].

Auxiliary hypothesis V: The respondents, who accept the use of digital techniques, try to express their opinion, creativity and imagination, as well as their needs for products or services, through reviews on the platforms used by companies. The results shown in Table 8 confirm auxiliary hypothesis V, given that the positive correlation shows that respondents who accept the use of digital marketing techniques are more willing to write a review on digital platforms and thus express their creativity, imagination and needs for products and services. The importance of customer reviews is also pointed out by Cvjetković, who claims that one of the most significant characteristics of modern consumers in the Internet environment is their participation in virtual communities, where mutual interaction is achieved and consumers’ suggestions and criticisms are presented through interpersonal communication [8, p. 44].

Auxiliary hypothesis VI: Respondents who write reviews on digital platforms are more willing to participate in different segments of the co-creation process, and they consider co-creation useful for the personalization of the offer. There is a statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.000$), with the Pearson correlation coefficient showing

a weak positive relationship in almost all cases among observed variables, shown in Table 9, except in the segment of respondents’ participation in product testing workshops, where it expresses a positive relationship of insignificant strength. In relation to this, the mentioned results show that respondents who write a review on digital platforms whenever they have the opportunity to do so are more willing to participate in different segments of co-creation and at the same time see the engagement of customers in the mentioned process as an opportunity that the company can use to adapt its offer to the demands and needs of customers. In this way, the results of the correlation analysis support and confirm the auxiliary hypothesis VI. The fact that consumer engagement, especially through interaction, is extremely important, Doorslaer pointed out in 2011 year stating that through two-way communication that takes place more and more often online, customers can express their requirements for products and services, especially in terms of features, but also in terms of the way the product is distributed and promoted, whereby customers practically become “product managers” [10]. The importance of consumer interaction and engagement in the co-creation process was pointed out by Andrew and Galak a decade ago, highlighting the identification of consumer needs and wishes, monitoring of their preferences and consequently mass customization, i.e. individual targeting of consumers, as the opportunities available to companies through digital marketing [2].

Table 9: Correlation analysis of testing auxiliary hypothesis VI

Variables		I write a review on the platforms that the company uses whenever it is possible.	
		Sig. (2-tailed) <i>p</i>	Pearson corr. <i>ρ</i>
Participation in co-creation surveys	Have you ever participated in surveys and expressed your ideas about product design and its production?	0.000	0.397
	Presenting a product idea.	0.000	0.378
Segments of co-creation	Projection of the product in terms of features.	0.000	0.348
	Participation in product prototyping workshops.	0.000	0.333
	Distribution channel projection.	0.000	0.366
	Participation in product testing workshops	0.000	0.208
	Participation in product promotion activities.	0.000	0.283
Do you think that the participation of customers in co-creation can help companies to adapt their offer to the demands and needs of customers?		0.000	0.306

Source: Authors’ research

Conclusion

Based on the presented detailed theoretical analysis and conducted empirical research, it can be concluded that the development of modern information and communication technology has real and strong effects on both people and business trends of today. Namely, today's customers value their time more and more, they want quick feedback and an individual approach. Also, consumer satisfaction, as one of the key variables in marketing, represents the foundation of their loyalty and is increasingly measured by the quality of services, as well as the opportunities that companies provide to their customers online. In this regard, companies extensively use digital marketing techniques that have been proven as effective tool for marketing promotional content, interacting with consumers, identifying unmet needs, but also as a way to attract new and retain existing customers.

The results of the empirical research, carried out on a sample of 335 randomly selected respondents, show that the basic and almost all auxiliary hypotheses are fully confirmed, except for the fourth auxiliary which was partially confirmed. Based on the presented results, the following can be concluded:

1. The consumer's decision to accept and buy a certain product or service is conditioned by the marketing content that companies placed through digital marketing techniques and the same affect the user experience through the quality of online services, but also the interaction with customers;
2. The willingness of consumers to accept marketing content available through digital marketing techniques is influenced by their accessibility on the Internet, while the willingness to carry out electronic transactions and interact with the company is conditioned by the age structure of customers;
3. Positive user experience is conditioned by the application of digital marketing techniques, but also by interaction with the company through which customers can share their opinion and creativity, but also to express their needs and wishes regarding the characteristics of products and services;

4. Interaction with a company affects the opinion and loyalty of consumers to a certain brand, however, when it comes to surveys sent to them through different platforms, their willingness to answer them differs with certain digital techniques. Namely, consumers are more likely to respond to surveys sent to them through websites than through mobile applications and e-mail;
5. The possibility of writing a review, which is available to customers today through various platforms, represents the framework of creating a positive user experience and personalization of the offer, given that consumers who leave reviews more often are ready to take part and present their ideas in different segments of the creation and thus light the way for the personalization of the offer.

Websites, mobile applications, social networks, e-mail and Internet browsers, as digital marketing techniques give a contribution to the realization of the company's marketing goals, but also to the improvement of business, especially through the personalization of the offer, which is the key for creation of the base of loyal consumers. In this regard, we conclude that the above-mentioned techniques are ideal tools of two-way communication and that by using them the voice of every customer can be heard, which leads to achieving a double benefit for both companies and consumers, viewed through a positive user experience and a higher level of satisfaction. Realization of positive results by applying digital marketing techniques requires a properly formulated marketing strategy and especially the company's attitude that investing in the mentioned techniques is an investment, not an expense.

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