

Zsolt VARGA – Nóra NYIRŐ

## THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE: MEDIA CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN THE PARTICIPATORY CROSS-MEDIA ERA

The paper aims to identify actual media audiences of different mass- and non-mass media types through identifying those audience clusters consuming not different but differentiable media mixes. A major concern of the study is to highlight the transformation of mass media audiences when technology, digitalization and participation behaviors are able to reshape traditional audience forms and media diets, which may directly affect the traditional media value chain and in turn the thinking and decision making of media managers. Through such a kaleidoscope the authors examined media use and consumption patterns using an online self-reported questionnaire. They developed different media consumer clusters as well as media consumption mixes. Based on the results of the study the authors can state that internet use is today's main base of media consumption, and as such it is becoming the real mass media, replacing television. However this "new" media has a completely different structure, being more fragmented with smaller audience reach. At the same time, television is keeping its audience. However, there are emerging segments self-reporting non- or light television viewing. This is how the question of the viewer-television relation among different television viewer clusters evolves. At the same time only gaming exhibited demographic differentiation of audiences based on gender.

*Keywords:* media consumption, media audience clusters, digital media, gaming, media management

The audience as a whole – and particularly its members as individuals – constitutes the last piece of the value chain in media management literature. The media market value chain is changing in parallel with the changing media consumption habits of mass audiences. Although there is interdependence between the changes in media markets, technology and transforming audiences, we will examine this process from the audience perspective.

As the majority of traditional media companies (and thus media managers) still aim to reach and deal with mass audiences, we aim to identify media consumption-based audience clusters among Hungarian internet users in this paper. We have integrated gaming as a new and emerging media industry segment into our analysis. Foremost, we use an integrated approach of traditional mass media consumption and newer digital

media types and then present our findings through a kaleidoscope view.

We aim to document emerging media audiences and their relation to mass media channels as well as to give an overview of the potential new segments, which provide directions for decision makers in media management.

### Theoretical Background

The value chain concept and its modified version in participatory cross-media environments helps create the market context for audience segment identification. Content providers on the media market and media companies exert their influence through the packaging of pieces of individual content (e.g., articles, videos, shows, films, series, etc.) and content within and

around these (e.g., commercials, trailers). Through this sorting, selection and packaging of content, providers deliver continuous quality control and thus build up their own brand, creating brand value for their channels.

In the age of multi-channel media and multi-channel television, i.e., in the analogue world, the mass audience breaks up and group and/or individual tastes are served by numerous thematic channels (McQuail, 2000). This era began in the 1980s in the American and European markets. Content supply grows in parallel with the number of channels and a fragmentation and polarization of the audience gets under way.

The digitalization of the multi-channel model allowed access to an even broader range of media types and channels. More and more content is available, although generally still at a definite moment. For example, the entry of digital technology into the television market brought computer hardware and many television-related applications, like recording video onto hard disk by means of a digital video recorder, as well as recording concurrently live programs without the need for an additional storage device (e.g., cassette, disk, etc.) (Nyirő, 2011).

Should we emphasize the most influential mass media (regarding audience volume and advertising income) – namely television – it is worth recalling Negroponte's hypothesis (1995), formulated in the early 1990s. In his forecast on digitized media consumption Negroponte argued that the future of television is in on-demand video. In a period where each viewer has his/her own channels – which are playlists of content compiled by the users themselves – traditional television viewing will lose its justification. Time shifting would disappear as, by reaching content producers directly (be they professionals or civilians (web 2.0)), this phenomenon would only apply to live broadcasts. At the same time, his "My channel" hypothesis overlooked the transaction costs to individual viewers that are rather high as editing an own-program flow (by selecting, rating, compiling numerous available programs) would require considerable and time-consuming effort from the user. Taking into account that most viewers are far from being perfectly informed on the program flow available, transactional costs would be so high that viewers could not bear them. Thus, in practice, viewers left program editing to the channels' programming divisions.

The emergence of the participatory media culture has led to a new media paradigm, where multiplatform audiences are redefining the role of the media industry. This development needs to be analyzed in terms of

multiplatform and cross-media content production, and interaction between the media industry and the audience (Noguera et al., 2013).

Media companies are changing their production and distribution routines – especially through digital platforms – because of the increasing opportunities for audience participation, in more and better ways that are still not optimized by the media. Today's media market is a co-produced landscape, within which audience and media are interchanging their roles constantly (Noguera et al., 2013).

The concept of value chain analysis covers the vertical deconstruction or disaggregation of the various processes and relationships in the industry. It is possible to technically separate the stages required in the production of any good or service. Examination is conducted by breaking the industry's activities up into a number of different stages of functions usually signifying different market players and organizations behind them: this process is called vertical deconstruction (Doyle, 2002).

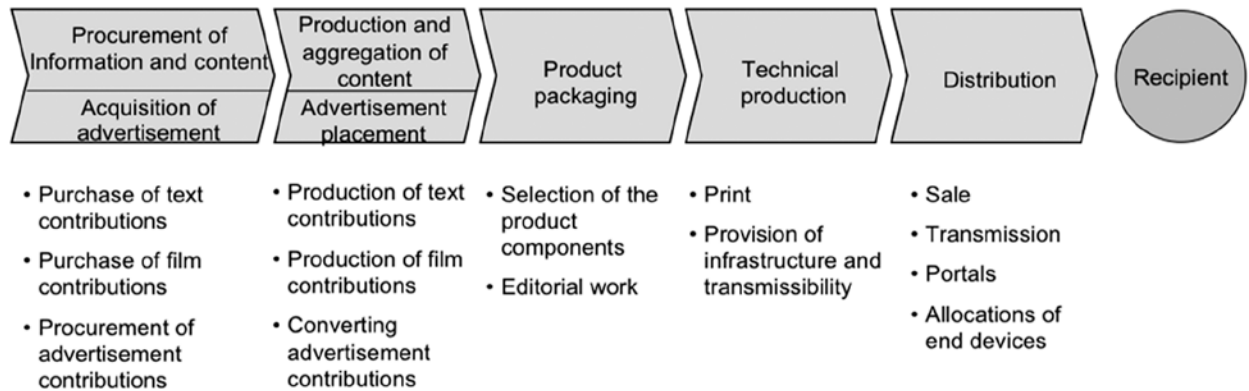
In the case of media industries, there are three stages of deconstruction in the supply or value chain. These stages are production (content creation), packaging (newspaper, magazine creation) and distribution (physical and digital). The process begins with writers, journalists, musicians and news production companies creating content for journals, newspapers or magazines. In the traditional supply chain, the producers' output takes the form of inputs for a succeeding packaging stage. Publishing houses aggregate content as well as assemble it into a media product (newspaper, magazine, news website, etc.) or service that can be sold to customers, sometimes producing the material as well. Finally, the audience receives the content through physical or electronic or digital distributors. For example, in the case of the print industry, readers get their content via subscription into their mailbox, buy it at newsstands or get it free of charge at distribution points. Recently, audiences have accessed it online via internet or mobile.

The value chain model in the convergent, cross-media environment of the media industry can be described through a more complex, five-stage model (see Figure 1) offered by Wirtz (2011).

The following are the first four stages in the model described: content creation or procurement; advertising acquisition; content aggregation; advertising placement. A new phase of technical production appears as even material production now requires an electronic format (e.g., book production). It is necessary to finish technical production (be it physical like printing, or a technical edition of the digital content) before distribu-

Figure 1

The value chain of the media industry (Wirtz, 2011)



tion can begin. Media companies have several options in distribution and a wide range of platforms to deliver to recipients or the audience. With conditional access, consumers or recipients or audience members may have to pay for access to the media product and content elements at the final stage (Wirtz, 2011).

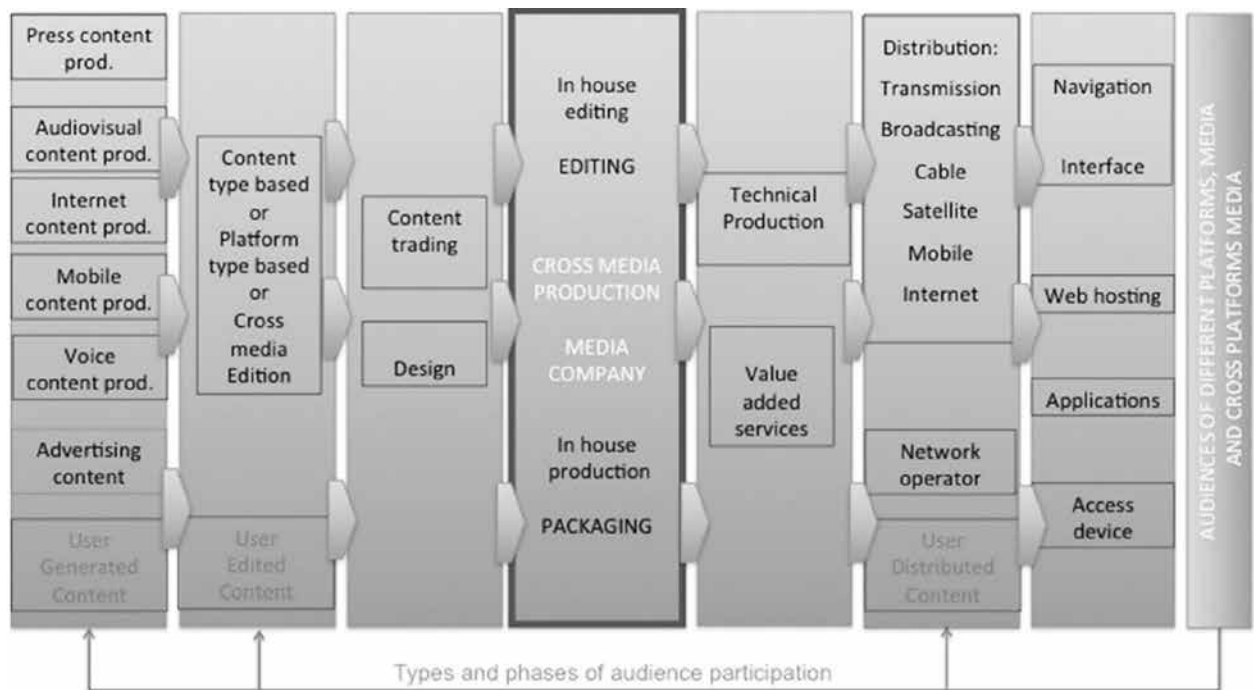
Another value chain model called the multimedia value chain model was introduced in media industries (Wirtz, 1999). Emphasis on technology driven by new stakeholders is part of the model. Such stakeholders act as value-added service providers through navigation and interfacing, thus offering tools for consumers to access media content. Sabat (2002) highlighted how

the mobile wireless environment has more specialized roles and entities compared to present, traditional media companies. In order to transfer content on a mobile wireless platform it is necessary to work together with mobile wireless content service providers and network infrastructure providers as well as user interface and access device producers.

By including all the new stakeholders of traditional media companies and keeping in mind that today the production of digital (online and mobile) content is inevitable, we can consider the participatory cross-media value chain model proposed by Noguera et al. (2013). (see Figure 2)

Figure 2

Model of participatory cross-media publishing house value chain – including sharing and distribution by users (Noguera et al., 2013: p. 182.)



In our empirical study we have emphasized media consumption habits and patterns of the Hungarian internet user audience. We aimed to identify new clusters and the segment structure of media audiences. The identification of these segments have implications for traditional media companies as well as for cross-media companies in order that they may reshape and orient their platform mix and content mix based on the profiles of clusters.

## Research questions and propositions

In this study we aimed to identify different media consumption patterns among Hungarian internet users. Based on the theoretical background as well as our previous research, our main hypothesis was that the perception of a solid, somewhat simple audience is no longer viable in the cluttered media landscape of the present.

We presumed that besides the widespread use of the internet, television will become less popular and the consumption of audiovisual content (films and series) will split according to platform. We think that the less-documented use of digital games might have an emerging role in media consumption patterns as well.

Our main research question was:

***What type(s) of media audience clusters can be identified in today's participatory cross-media environment in Hungary?***

In addition to the main research question we had several sub-questions and propositions regarding new audience structure and its characteristics.

We also aimed to find answers to the questions of what the main defining media types are in cases of audience clusters, and how media mixes of different clusters are structured and composed.

We proposed, however, that all clusters will reveal multimedia mix-based consumption, but that there will be one or two leading media types which drive the media consumption of the given cluster. We also presumed that gamers would appear as a clearly separate and well-identifiable cluster.

We also had a sub-question focusing on multi-screen usage, so that how and to what extent different media platform screens (tablet, PC, laptop, TV) compete and characterize audience clusters became another area of interest. We aimed to find out if there are audience segments clearly associated with one or few screens or whether they are all multi-screen users in which no clear pattern may be identified.

## Data, variables and sample

### *Questionnaire and variables*

Data collection was conducted online with a self-reported questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through social media channels using snowball methodology. The sample is not representative but serves as the basis for an exploratory study of the kaleidoscope view of Hungarian internet users and younger age groups.

The questionnaire consisted of four different parts: media consumption as analyzed in the current paper (17 items), a general media gratification block (9 items), a specific video game gratification block (20 items) and a demographic block (4 items).

We chose and generated the items based on a previous study (see Nyiró et al., 2012). We did not try to cover all media consumption situations, but focused on screen-related actions and emerging new media consumption habits. The items reflect the media forms and content consumed by youth. We aimed to get the most accurate data without making the process too abstract for respondents. It is clear that most of the scales are nominal; we used them as metrical scales, accepting the limits of the research.

### *Description of the sample*

University students and various respondents reached through social networks filled out the questionnaire in May of 2012. Participation in the survey was voluntary. University students received extra credit for various courses, while others were not offered any incentives. The sample consisted of 450 respondents. However, different questions received a varying number of answers, due to incomplete answers. The university sub-sample was composed of 297 respondents, while the social network sub-sample was composed of 153 respondents. As seen below, the social network sub-sample also included a very high ratio of university students, and thus we integrated and analyzed the two sub-samples together, considering it homogenous enough for the university student age group and life stage.

There were 194 (43%) men and 256 (57%) women in the sample; the average age of respondents was 24. The youngest respondent was 17, the oldest 45. The mode of the sample was 20 (119 respondents). See Table 1 for a detailed description of the two sub-samples.

### *Methodology*

We examined the sample's media consumption habits in three steps. First, exploratory factor analysis was used to reduce the number of variables. Then, cluster

Table 1

**Description of the two sub-samples.**  
Source: own tables

Variable	University sample		Social network sample	
	n	%	n	%
Female	172	58	84	55
Male	126	42	68	45
Student	294	99	135	89
Not student	4	1	17	11
No full time job	290	97	67	44
Full time job	8	3	85	56
Living with parents	183	61	52	34
Living alone	39	13	36	24
Living with friends	76	26	64	42
Ages: 17–25 years	285	96	59	39
Ages: 26–45 years	13	4	92	61

analysis was utilized to identify groups with different media consumption patterns. Our aim was – in line with the methodology used – to identify relatively homogenous groups in the sample based on the different forms of media consumption. We used the factor analysis approach to rally the variables that had a high correlation, thus the cluster analysis was not biased by these correlations. In addition to cluster analysis, we explored the factors with a multidimensional scaling method to understand the nature of the factors identified (Sajtos et al., 2007).

## Results, discussion and limitations

### Results of the factor analysis

The descriptive statistics of media consumption variables are available in the Appendix (see Table 1). We reduced the initial 17 items to 6 well-differentiated factors with the aid of factor analysis. The main indicators of the factor analysis were the following: KMO=0,598; the result of the Bartlett test: approximate Chi-square=929,205; degree of freedom=120; significance 0,000. The six factors explain 59,419% of the variance, which is an acceptable level. The variables are eligible for factor analysis, although their quality is mediocre. We conducted main component analysis. The correlation matrix and the main component analysis matrix are available in the Appendix (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Variables were grouped along the six factors and one variable (book reading) was left out from the analysis. Leaving out book reading was motivated by the lack of correlation with any other form of media consumption pattern. It is likely that it was interpreted too widely, and students did not use it coherently (it might have included reading college textbooks, pulp, or serious literature as well).

New variables were formed along the factors: the longest figure of cohesive variables was taken for the new variable. We chose this method instead of the simple average because of the characteristics of the variables and our goal of measuring frequency. The new variables expressed the following consumer patterns:

- net use: internet: e-mail, browsing or active presence on social sites – *factor of online activities, expressing internet use,*
- watching TV: watching films or series on TV – *entertaining and recreational content on TV sets,*
- new entertainment forms: watching series and films but not on TV; listening to music, but not on radio – *television content and music consumption on non-traditional platforms, probably PC or laptop,*
- video gaming: gaming on mobile phone or computer (with installed games or through web browsers) – *gaming activity on a digital platform,*
- non-traditional media: board games with friends, gaming on consoles or visits to the cinema – *rarely done activities or those that are not represented in the sample, very different media compared to the prevalent ones,*
- old school media: reading a newspaper or magazine, listening to the radio – *according to the literature, media that is used by the older generation; in other words the use of traditional, long-established media.*

The factors above represent conventional audience research traditions. There is no audience research methodology for gaming as kind of media consumption. Gaming is explored only through ad-hoc research projects. In the United States of America, the Ipsos group provides detailed consumer data on product, publisher, buying and gaming levels. The gaming console is not as widespread in Hungary as it is in the USA, Western Europe or the Far East. Board games are the hobby of a small segment, and due to their characteristics, such games cannot be played often. The descriptive statistics of the new variables composed along the factors are available in the Appendix (see Table 4).

### **Results of the cluster analysis**

We conducted cluster analysis to find patterns of media consumption. Our aim was to group respondents into homogenous subgroups, and so to be able to identify relevant target audiences based on their media use and media consumption patterns.

#### *Analysis of the sample*

For the first step of the cluster analysis we tested the sample for salient values. This step is necessary because these salient values might affect the clustering process. It is more difficult to identify correspondence between other elements, and these correspondences might be distorted as well. We examined the sample with single linkage, nearest neighbor method and Euclidean distance. Only two responses stood out at first glance, however, according to the dendrogram, the degree of difference was not so much as to justify leaving out these two respondents.

#### *Determining the number of clusters*

Based on the elbow criterion, we tried to analyze two, three and four clusters (see Figure 2 in Appendix), and based on the size and standard deviation of groups we chose the four-cluster variant. We used the Ward method of cluster analysis. We did not choose the two-cluster solution because the homogeneity of the clusters was higher than for the entire sample in four out of six instances. (We found a higher number of less homogenous clusters when trying the three-cluster solution, and the four-cluster solution carried more information on television viewing and gaming.) The four-cluster solution produced clusters with decent sample sizes (196, 127, 58, 69).

Cluster centroids, standard deviations and sample sizes are summarized in Table 5 in the Appendix.

The four clusters by media use compared to the total sample can be described as follows:

Cluster 1: the largest with 196 members (43,6%), 'Gamer', almost non-TV viewer.

- not so homogenous compared to the total sample regarding internet use,
- not differentiated from the total sample regarding new media use,
- less frequent TV viewer compared to the total sample,
- notably more frequent gamer than the total sample,
- less homogenous compared to the total sample regarding the use of non-traditional media,
- no difference from total sample regarding old school media.

Cluster 2: large, with 127 members (28,3%), 'Avoider', avoids TV and gaming.

- no difference from total sample regarding internet use,
- not so homogenous compared to the total sample regarding new media use,
- less frequent TV viewer than the total sample,
- less frequent gaming than the total sample,
- no difference from total sample regarding non-traditional media use,
- no difference from total sample regarding old school media use.

Cluster 3: smaller, with 58 members (12,9%), 'Versatile', TV viewer and gamer, who is open toward old school media types as well.

- no difference regarding internet use compared to the total sample,
- no difference regarding new media use compared to the total sample,
- views TV more often than the total sample,
- does gaming more often than the total sample,
- regarding non-traditional media use, they do not differ from the total sample,
- uses old school media more often than the total sample.

Cluster 4: smaller with 69 members (15,4%), 'Prisoner of TV', TV viewer, avoids gaming.

- less homogenous in internet use compared to the total sample,
- no difference regarding new media use compared to the total sample,
- views TV more often than the total sample,
- does gaming less frequently than the total sample,
- regarding non-traditional media use, they do not differ from the total sample,
- less homogenous compared to the total sample regarding the use of old school media.

The clusters do not differ from each other regarding internet use or non-traditional media use.

#### **Demographic description of clusters**

For the nominal variables we created cross-tables. ANOVA analysis was run for age. We confronted the variables with clusters, but the significance level and/or number of cells circumvented the possibility of analysis except in one case. In the case of gender, the significance level and the number of cells were adequate. Regarding gender, the Cramer V result of 0,32 suggests a moderately strong relationship (Sig=.000). The cross-table is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Gender and clusters cross-tables. Source: own table

			Ward Method				
			1	2	3	4	Total
Gender	women	Count	79	85	35	57	256
		% within Gender	30,9%	33,2%	13,7%	22,3%	100,0%
		% within Ward Method	40,3%	66,9%	60,3%	82,6%	56,9%
		% of Total	17,6%	18,9%	7,8%	12,7%	56,9%
	men	Count	117	42	23	12	194
		% within Gender	60,3%	21,6%	11,9%	6,2%	100,0%
		% within Ward Method	59,7%	33,1%	39,7%	17,4%	43,1%
		% of Total	26,0%	9,3%	5,1%	2,7%	43,1%
Total	Count	196	127	58	69	450	
	% within Gender	43,6%	28,2%	12,9%	15,3%	100,0%	
	% within Ward Method	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% of Total	43,6%	28,2%	12,9%	15,3%	100,0%	

Gaming is a masculine activity and the results of proportions of clusters 1 and 4 confirm this common belief. In clusters 2 and 3 the proportion of women is larger, being 66,9% female to 33,1% male, and 60,3% female to 39,7% male respectively. Therefore, they often avoid TV and gaming simultaneously, and choose media from a wider pallet. Other demographic variables did not meet the required significance level and/or the number of the cells was inadequate, so we may conclude that no difference is identifiable based on other demographic data.

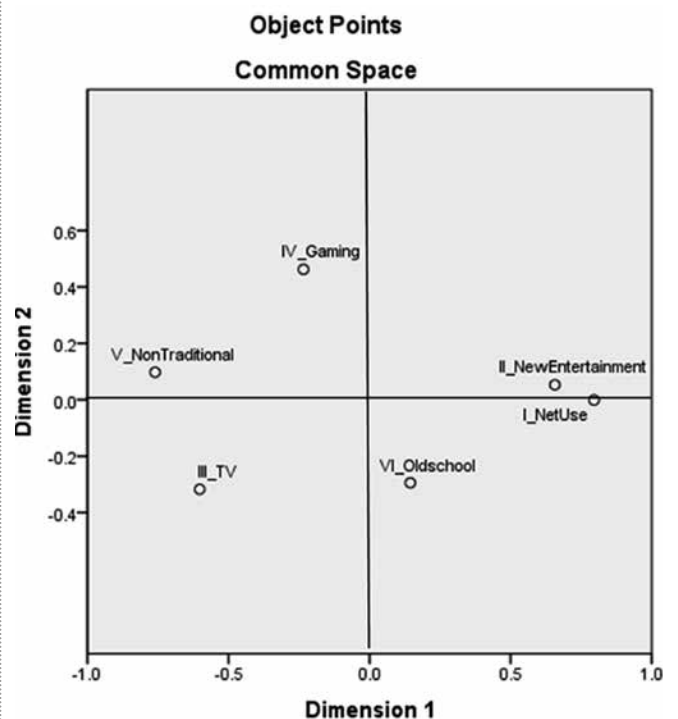
### Results of multidimensional scaling

For multidimensional scaling, we used the PROXSCAL module of SPSS, creating the factors and the matrix, then measuring and depicting the Euclidean distance. We examined the previously identified six factors: net use, TV viewing, new entertainment forms, video gaming, non-traditional media and old school media. The two-dimensional fitting was good: the value of stress was 0, 0458. The alignment can be seen in Figure 3. Factors are divergent enough: the farthest are traditional media and internet, while the closest are new media forms and the internet. The first dimension expresses the frequency of use: the internet and new media forms were the most frequently used media while non-traditional media were the forms used least often. A possible explanation of the second dimension is the interactivity of the media: video games are highly interactive, while television and other old school media (radio, newspapers and magazines) can be described

as lacking interactivity. Another possible explanation for the second dimension is the novelty factor of the media: in the analyzed population, television is an old medium, while internet and new media types connected with personal computers are somewhat newer, but video gaming is the most recent media form (including mobile gaming).

Figure 3

Results of the multidimensional scaling. Source: own figure



We will now answer our research question by interpreting the results. It is important to study the different media in the context of other media consumption. Distinct groups can be identified based on media consumption patterns among youth, even though given the lack of a representative sample we are unable to generalize our statements.

Avoidance of television is a new pattern among young people. While the white-collar attitude of 'living without television' might be a reason, attractive programs (films and series) are difficult to catch in the set program structure of broadcasting, and the presence of commercial breaks makes the experience annoying. For the studied group, internet and the personal computer is the primary media platform. There are two distinct ways of avoiding television, as seen by the confinement of 'Avoider' and 'Gamer' Clusters.

In the latter case, video gaming is a notable alternative and takes a leading role alongside other media in the respondents' life. For the former case, the audience avoids gaming as well as television. Both groups can be described with similar media consumption patterns regarding other media types. The role of gender is important in this case: in the 'Gamer' group, males are overrepresented, while 'Avoider' group exhibits of a higher share of women. The difference in gender has a significant role in attitudes toward video games: however, data from other cultures suggests this will change. In the United States, where video games have a longer history, the ratio of gender in gaming is more balanced (ESA, 2011).

We can differentiate a third group, the 'Versatile'. They play on digital devices and watch television more often, choosing old school media more often, while using the same amount of internet, new media and non-traditional media forms. The higher proportion of women is in line with the academic literature and audience data. Use of print media decreased less in the past few years among women than men, and is a part of this factor.

Finally, television viewing and an almost total lack of gaming characterizes the fourth group. Regarding gender, this is the most feminine of the clusters, with the highest proportion of women compared to the other clusters. In other aspects they are not different from the total sample.

Our results tally with the experiences of audience researchers: among younger age groups, women are more open toward traditional media, while men are more open toward digital technologies. Those women who are as open as men to digital technologies

might choose from a wider selection of media types. We found the results of the multidimensional scaling important as well, especially the second dimension. The frequency of use or 'popularity' of media types among the young is self-explanatory. However, the distance between video games and old school media is interesting. Among young people, not only is television considered an antiquated media, but gaming is considered by some to be a real alternative for entertainment.

### Limitations

The non-representative nature of the sample limits our ability to generalize the results, and the methodology of cluster analysis bears some limits as well. The steps of the cluster analysis are only one of the many different approaches that researchers might apply. The expansion of media consumption variables or use of a different scale might affect the results.

The current study is based mainly on university students' and active social network site users' responses, who lead very different lifestyles with different media consumption habits. Their lifestyle, attitudes and media behavior is different from that of the general public in many ways, thus the results of the study must be explored in other age groups and life stage groups as well.

In the future, a more detailed and metric scale should be used to measure media consumption habits, which would serve as better input data for cluster analysis. The contact of media platform and activity sets limits to generalization regardless of considerations of the qualitative results. Non-traditional media types must be reviewed, because their nature makes them very distinctive compared to other media types: some of them are expensive, time-consuming or require the presence of other people.

The recent spread of smartphones and tablets makes them an important platform that should be researched in the future as well, because they have the potential to recolor the media pallet of the audience.

### Managerial Implication

The most important added value of our study is that we provide insights about media consumption changes and the mix of media use of a young age group audience. The results show that a larger grouping of audiences may be executed now, so that it is feasible to identify relevant media consumer segments as mass audience subgroups.

The identified audience segments have a few common characteristics regarding internet use. It seems that internet use is today's main base of media consumption, so the real mass media today is not television but the internet. However, we have to keep in mind that internet as a medium has a completely different structure than television and it means far more fragmented content consumption and thus smaller and fragmented audience reach. We can state that the internet as a platform and media channel is inevitable for any audience and may be the best way to reach and attract other audience types as well.

Moving on to the next "big" media, i.e., television, we face quite a different media audience picture. There are still segments that are highly dependent on television and that allocate a great deal of time to its consumption, while there are others who claim to be almost non-viewers. This means that based on television consumption self-perception the media audience has become a mixed audience. For media managers this is an important conclusion, as being in the television industry they have to keep in mind how and to what extent different audience clusters relate to television and how intensively they consume television content. We can identify different media mix usage patterns among different segments, which may give some indication for television managers on how to reach and attract those moving into less television-oriented consumption directions. Also, we can see that old school and traditional media use and consumption are present in different audience segments.

Based on the clusters' demographic characteristics we could not identify any specification of the different audience clusters, except for the relation between gender and gaming. This proves that audiences are much more content, psychographic or other pattern-related. The traditional demographic-based segmentation approach has much less relevance than believed to this point.

An overall conclusion is that the kaleidoscope of media consumption patterns provides media managers with a challenging picture and audience market: we cannot claim that there exist clear, unique and very homogenous media audiences. We are undergoing a

transition in a booming digitalization era. An interesting audience segment structure is provided by cluster and MDS analysis, which may serve as an indicator of audience consumption trends, interrelations between media types, and inter- and cross media consumption habits. This is especially the case for young people in higher education, who form the foundation of future consumer groups.

## References

- Doyle, G. (2002): Understanding media economics. London: Sage
- Entertainment Software Association (2011): 2011 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data, The Entertainment Software Association, [http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA\\_EF\\_2011.pdf](http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2011.pdf), Retrieved: Jun 5, 2013
- McQuail, D. (2000): McQuail's mass communication theory. London: Sage
- Negroponte, N. (1995): Being digital. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Noguera J.M. – Villi M. – Nyirő N. – De Blasio E. – Bourdaa M. (2013): The role of the media industry when participation is a product. in: Carpentier, N., Schröder K., Ch., Hallett, L. (eds) (2013): Audience Transformations: Late Modernity's Shifting Audience Positions. London: Routledge
- Nyirő N. – Nagy G. – Markos-Kujbus É. – Varga Zs. (2012): Internet and only the Internet?, EMMA Conference, Budapest, February 10–11, 2012
- Nyirő, N. (2011): Media technology innovation acceptance and diffusion. Doctoral thesis. Budapest: Corvinus University of Budapest
- Sabat, H.K. (2002): The evolving mobile wireless value chain and market structure. Telecommunications Policy, Vol. 26, No. 9–10: p. 505–535.
- Sherry, J. – Lucas, K. (in press): Video Game Uses and Gratifications as Predictors of Use and Game Preference. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University
- Wirtz, B.W. (2011): Textbook – media and internet management. Heidelberg: Gabler Verlag
- Wirtz, B.,W. (1999): Convergence processes, value constellations and integration strategies in the multimedia business. International Journal on Media Management, Vol. 1, No. 1: p. 14–22

## APPENDIX

Table 1

Correlation matrix of media consumption variables

	film_TV	film_nonTV	sorozat_TV	sorozat_nonTV	boardgame	movie	book	print	mobilegaming	AAAgaming	browsergaming	consolgaming	net_socialmedia	net_browsing	net_email	radio	music_nonradio
film_TV	1,000	-,045	,604	-,200	,006	,059	-,063	,054	,051	,033	-,044	,068	,054	,000	,009	,153	-,113
film_nonTV	-,045	1,000	-,121	,507	,150	,262	,015	-,050	,142	,125	-,015	,214	-,009	,019	-,036	,022	,170
sorozat_TV	,604	-,121	1,000	-,129	-,011	,038	-,019	,033	,009	-,021	,031	,034	,041	-,033	-,043	,077	-,043
sorozat_nonTV	-,200	,507	-,129	1,000	,066	,075	-,015	-,106	,213	,181	,075	,151	-,022	,021	-,065	-,100	,159
boardgame	,006	,150	-,011	,066	1,000	,218	,165	,032	,055	,132	,042	,199	-,055	-,158	-,051	-,030	-,010
movie	,059	,262	,038	,075	,218	1,000	-,025	,052	,102	,024	,006	,346	-,034	-,106	-,080	,124	-,050
book	-,063	,015	-,019	-,015	,165	-,025	1,000	,240	-,068	,021	,036	-,111	-,077	,032	,022	-,016	,056
print	,054	-,050	,033	-,106	,032	,052	,240	1,000	,057	-,001	,059	-,058	,023	,091	,064	,150	,055
mobilegaming	,051	,142	,009	,213	,055	,102	-,068	,057	1,000	,254	,245	,242	,110	,008	,031	,021	,142
AAAgaming	,033	,125	-,021	,181	,132	,024	,021	-,001	,254	1,000	,309	,203	-,052	,029	-,069	-,110	,078
browsergaming	-,044	-,015	,031	,075	,042	,006	,036	,059	,245	,309	1,000	,118	,061	,047	-,019	-,055	,071
consolgaming	,068	,214	,034	,151	,199	,346	-,111	-,058	,242	,203	,118	1,000	-,035	-,133	-,150	-,016	-,027
net_socialmedia	,054	-,009	,041	-,022	-,055	-,034	-,077	,023	,110	-,052	,061	-,035	1,000	,280	,248	,067	,136
net_browsing	,000	,019	-,033	,021	-,158	-,106	,032	,091	,008	,029	,047	-,133	,280	1,000	,472	,033	,122
net_email	,009	-,036	-,043	-,065	-,051	-,080	,022	,064	,031	-,069	-,019	-,150	,248	,472	1,000	,064	,056
radio	,153	,022	,077	-,100	-,030	,124	-,016	,150	,021	-,110	-,055	-,016	,067	,033	,064	1,000	,082
music_nonradio	-,113	,170	-,043	,159	-,010	-,050	,056	,055	,142	,078	,071	-,027	,136	,122	,056	,082	1,000

Table 2

Rotated component matrix

(n=450, KMO=0,598; described variance=59,419%)

Rotated Component Matrixa	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
MediaUsagenet_email	0.809	-0.093	-0.071	-0.071	-0.003	0.02
MediaUsagenet_browsing	0.791	0.041	-0.042	0.044	-0.145	0.012
MediaUsagenet_socialmedia	0.614	0.068	0.116	0.065	-0.052	0.067
MediaUsagefilm_nonTV	0.024	0.772	-0.048	-0.036	0.312	-0.014
MediaUsagesorozat_nonTV	-0.028	0.765	-0.147	0.152	0.058	-0.192
MediaUsagemusic_nonradio	0.082	0.509	-0.07	0.194	-0.329	0.371
MediaUsagefilm_TV	0.048	-0.101	0.875	-0.003	0.078	0.061
MediaUsagesorozat_TV	-0.027	-0.082	0.869	0.039	-0.044	0.015
MediaUsagebrowsergaming	0.027	-0.098	-0.045	0.758	-0.002	0.04
MediaUsageAAAgaming	-0.043	0.102	0.009	0.704	0.097	-0.153
MediaUsagemobilegaming	0.09	0.264	0.093	0.581	0.14	0.131
MediaUsagemovie	-0.035	0.151	0.065	-0.08	0.746	0.183
MediaUsageconsolgaming	-0.106	0.176	0.122	0.264	0.625	-0.102
MediaUsageboardgame	-0.078	-0.039	-0.097	0.105	0.613	0.011
MediaUsageprint	0.053	-0.214	-0.084	0.155	0.062	0.705
MediaUsageradio	0.043	0.089	0.184	-0.198	0.058	0.697

*Daiva SIUDIKIENE*

## PLAYING AND CREATING AUDIENCES: MEDIA USERS-GENERATED CONTENT QUALITY ASSESSMENT

**Internet is defined as highly democratic medium, which is growing at the result of media users' generated content. Theoretical insights of various authors regarding improvement of media users-generated content quality are discussed in the article. This problem reflects not only ever-changing media use models but is also related with fierce discussions on media regulation issue. Developing initiatives reveal attempts to deal with media content quality issues and encourage more frequent discussions of how it should be done and how it could affect the modes of interaction between media companies and media users in the future.**

*Keywords:* media usage, media content, media regulation, quality assessment

Rapid internet development in the last several decades radically changed media use models. Today, it is impossible to talk about media content without analyzing audience-generated content problems, because audience activity is one of the crucial reasons of media landscape changes.

Investigating transformation of media usage patterns it is obvious that traditional media contents created in technical, economic, political and information environments no longer exist and the audience activity is one of the main reasons of the media landscape transformations. On the one hand, the lack of censorship lets treat the internet as a very democratic space without any existing editorial board or other control mechanism. Media users generated content is very valuable for its high quality, especially in the niche media, which bring together professionals and expert communities. Essence of the new media is a model based on cooperation, teamwork and sharing of information. Therefore, the audience transformation trends influence a blurring distance among the professional media creators and the media users. But on the other hand, virtually there are no barriers to place the low-quality messages (shoddy comments, misleading information, etc.) into the public space. The quality of the media content is being recognized as a problem both as the scholars, as well the media companies worldwide. For

example, such cases, as the filmed images of rape or murder uploaded on Youtube, show that some regulatory mechanisms are needed. What criteria define high-quality and low-quality media content? What might be done for the media content improvement?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the emerging initiatives on the regulatory of the media users-generated content. The European Union's Audiovisual Media Service Directive or Google's Public Policy Blog reveal the positive initiatives both the political forces and media companies in setting regulations on broadcasting and for content viewed on other platforms, like the internet or mobile phones.

### **Epoch of Freedom and Dilettantism: Activity as a Play and Playing Audiences**

Majority of post-modernism theoreticians when discussing in their writings social-economic transformations of the late-20th century mentioned the new era, new times, new epoch, new media were seen as the axis of which. Thus the new-born phenomenon and its influenced epoch changes were given distinctive ideological load. New media were named as the major factor in explaining on-going global information and communication change processes. New media marked new stage of media development which is associated with the

birth of digital technologies, but many representatives of academic world note that not new technologies play the vital role but rather their induced changing communication models and new information presentation and receipt modes (Breen, 2007; Kyong Chun, 2008).

New media have radically transformed a system of media content organisation and distribution, as well interaction among the media and their audiences. Digitisation and the media convergence processes generate new practices and media usage patterns. Audiences live in the media-saturated environment and their choices have completely different nature and logic that were typically characterized in the era of traditional media. Moreover, new media and pop culture suggest various practices related with consumption-related activities and daily living of audiences. On the back of it, the new phenomenon like social network websites created the preconditions to emerge a wide open space for self-realization and self-actualization of media users. The new media environment is recasting the notion of audience for covering a wide range and multifaceted activities of media users. Playful nature today is acquired by any serious business activity, since the aspect of individuality appears in it. Penetration of play into serious business fields is taking plays nowadays. Even business world, market sectors became closely inter-related with a play, certain tension which is characteristic to any playful action. But the epoch of freedom is followed by the period of dilettantes (Хренов, 2005: p. 25.). Human being finds himself/herself in uncommon elements and activity fields. He/she is searching, making mistakes and gets disappointed often. New media practices integrate into all daily social activities, but are mainly oriented to leisure time. It is time when many people become experts. Individuals update their profiles, change and upload photographs, make lists of favourite films, TV shows or music. They play games, chat, watch other people's comments about their favourite games, choose clothes and other products, which help to express their individuality (Willett, 2008). Time spent with media is associated with creation, pleasures, and mainly, freedom. New media as democratic media induce an epoch of freedom when all aspects of human activity assume a playful nature even though the professional spheres are associated with the game.

In the new multimedia environment the range of activities of modern audiences has become highly extensive and multi spectral, therefore the whole range of new roles performed by modern media users can be discussed. New modes of audience and media interaction are testified also by much bigger number of

terms than before used to define audience members and their new roles: user, customer, player, producer, visitor, gifter, fan, friend, voyeur, learner, and participant (Davis – Michelle, 2011: p. 560.). Furthermore, media user is media creator, consumer and content distributor at the same time, while media users-generated content and social media transform modern media system. One of the crucial changes marking modern epoch is media users'-generated content development.

The development of new media depends not only on media companies but as well on media users because of their media competence, creativity and initiatives. Therefore, the most meaningful concepts should be recognized those which indicate the creative potential of audiences. In addition, the media user can be defined as a creator, a user and a distributor of the media-generated content at the same time.

### Media Users Generated Content Quality Assessment

Over the past five years, the media users-generated content (UGC) has become one of the most dominant forms of media content in the world and connections to social networks have enormous potential for communication, information exchange, advertising, business development, etc.

User-friendly environment, low cost of media content control tools, simple content upload tools determine fast growth of media content forms and scope. Such social website platforms, like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* or *Wikipedia* become inseparable part of many people's daily life, which changes trends of communication processes S. Livingstone emphasizes that if before people grew up watching the same television programmes and dramas, so modern generations unite into social networks and their identity is shaped by virtual communities (Livingstone, 2010). *Participatory*, or also called *Gaming*, *Do-it-yourself*, etc. culture development could explain fast development of social media and growth media users-generated content scope related with them. Media users-generated content consists of various media formats: social networking, image and video sharing, wikis, blogs, online discussion forums, social Q&A sites and products reviews. According to G. Lastowska, various information forms which can be presented to audience can be named as content, and in broad meaning they synonymously mean creative work (Lastowska, 2010). A. Bruns gives 4 main users generated content characteristics:

- a shift from creation-dedicated individuals or teams of them to collaboration and continued

content supplement in pursuit of its further improvement,

- changing roles: content creators become participants, while their range varies from amateurs to professionals,
- artefacts are no longer products in traditional sense: they are always unfinished and subject to on-going supplement – evolutionary and repeating model,
- content generation is based on free collaboration regime rather than on obligations (Bruns, 2007).

Modern *Do-It-Yourself* culture type uplifts and even romanticizes a modern user to some extent, but it is useful to conduct a more comprehensive discussion of the problems of media users-generated content quality and factors affecting them. On one hand, substantial part of media content is useful and of good quality, in particular in niche media, which unite professional and expert communities interested in exchanging ideas and knowledge. Notices in digital environment are not complete, they are open to adjustment and supplement. It is the essence of modern operation of interactive media, which is based on collaboration, team work and information exchange. Beside, news ports increasingly use messages of media users, often sent from the epicenter of events. On the other hand, public space is practically open for low quality messages to enter (spam, information degrading human dignity, valueless comments, misleading messages, etc.). Notwithstanding the opportunity given by internet to the users to carry out their activities and share their ideas much easier, intellectual property is subjected to increasing number of violations. Global nature of internet determines the location of intellectual property violations in electronic medium not to be limited to one country but rather crossing the state borders. This makes the search for adequate solutions for improvement of media content quality even much harder.

This time leaving the problem of information quantity growing in geometrical progression aside, the most relevant problems regarding quality of media users-generated content must be two: intellectual property violations, information reliability and ethical problems of information. According to M. Kiškis, basically, intellectual property violations in electronic medium should be qualified same as conventional intellectual property violations, and in some cases electronic violations should be qualified even as more dangerous (Kiškis, 2011). Many countries have the above-mentioned offences included into their criminal and administrative codes. Attempts are made to tackle this type

of offences by legal means, while content quality issue urges search for technological solutions. Major technical protection modes include filtering, blocking and content control. Technological possibilities enable internet control, which is free and global by its very nature, control of internet in various levels, but a question arises, what legal control is and to what extent it can be applied. In this context, one of the most pressing issues is the question, who must have the duty to exert control and whether such control does not infringe fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Another problem that is more difficult to handle is inaccurate and unreliable information spread by the media users themselves. Both in daily life context and in professional life, users search for information which would be authentic, reliable, provided by experts of the field in question, valid. From the massive amount of online information media users try to find the most suitable, most extensive content satisfying their needs. Scientific articles are reviewed before publishing them online, while all the other materials usually are placed without checking, they are full of mistakes and inaccuracies. *Yahoo!* research discovered that major part of users-generated information is boring and dull that nobody reads it, save for information prepared by marketing experts trying to make information useful, interesting and attractive (*Yahoo! Advertising Solutions*, 2013). As it is noticed by M. Anderka et al., that researched Wikipedia content problems, the community of virtual encyclopedia authors is highly heterogeneous, covering people of different educational background, age, culture, language abilities and experience, i.e. totally different to paper encyclopedias which were compiled exclusively by experts (Anderka et al., 2012). This can obviously explain arising problems of media content quality and, according to G. Lastowska, can be linked with respective behaviour models. Majority of people creating media content do not receive any material remuneration for their activities, but they are motivated by the possibility of self-expression, playful nature of this interactive activity, which at the same allows to become known to a wider circle of people and establish more social contacts, which are turning into important social capital in modern society.

### Debates: Media Regulation vs Self-Regulation

Media users themselves have limited possibilities for organising media content quality control, but necessity for regulatory instruments is recognised all over the world.

When analyzing debates between media regulatory supporters and opponents, complexity of the problem must be considered – role of economic, social, cultural motives when dealing with these problems. Media regulation supporters first of all highlight the problems of infringement of intellectual property rights and content quality (cheap content – costs cheap). Besides, they argue that recently human right to privacy has been in particular brutally infringed, and this problem needs to be dealt with even if some privileges had to be taken away from media companies (O’Neill, 2011).

While supporters of media self-regulation emphasize supremacy of freedom and democracy, which from the very beginning of new media operation were named as their main characteristic feature. Argument that Internet secures the right to information for every single media user cannot be denied. Websites created by nobody else but media users contain information about unethical activities or low quality products of large business corporations, for example, that expensive branded cosmetics is stuffed with chemicals, while have of ingredients of advertised organic toothpaste were oil-based products. A. Puddephatt highlights also human right to self-expression and free expression of one’s opinion, which are obviously secured by modern media (Puddephatt, 2011). Besides, it is noted that media themselves are capable of assessing and controlling their distributed information. But based on the conducted research P. Organisiciak and others state that with a small number of exceptions, majority of content websites do not provide their users with content control possibility (Organisiciak et al., 2010). J. Van Dijck referring to Galloway also states that even if content is named as generated by users, it does not mean that users are in full control of the product they created, since technological and social protocols are controlled by Internet companies (Van Dijck, 2009:51). Furthermore, it is stated that media companies not only fail to exert active filtering of improper content and provide possibilities of free expression of word to media users, thus brutally infringing other people’s rights and dignity, but they also use information as a weapon in the battle for influence and power. According to U. Ulfkotte, freedom of information has been gradually turning into the truth of clients, when it is not the truth itself that matters but rather something that is considered by majority as truth (Ulfkotte, 2013). Evidently, economic motives operate in this perspective. M. Ingram is right saying that such giant companies, like Amazon, Yelp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and many others are growing and expanding only thanks to media users’ involvement and collaboration, therefore In-

ternet companies are closely related with their users (Ingram, 2010). G. Lastowska also mentions that the past essence of a business model of media companies lying in sale of professionals’ generated information is undergoing transformation into design and distribution of tools enabling media users to create content (Lastowska, 2010). Therefore, the author names these phenomena not only as cultural revolution but also as today’s business model of media companies. Majority of countries are familiar with necessity for media regulatory mechanism introduction, but this process causes lots of questions.

In modern stage of media development the most important thing is that destructive communication influence problems have fallen into the focus of attention of both scholars and practitioners and various solutions of these problems are considered and discussed at global scale.

### **Initiatives on Incentivizing of High Quality of Media Users Generated Content**

Solutions of problems cover various issues, starting from technological aspects and finishing with formulation of political institutions’ directives. Media companies are working on installation of filtering systems, international expert groups are developing recommendations on effective use of virtual resources, media users create web pages, on which their comments are placed and rating systems are organised to assess the quality of content presented.

Going back to content quality assessments, it should be noted that in order to be able to assess media content quality, certain uniform system of standards is needed. Thus, one of the most urgent issues today is – based on which criteria high-quality and low-quality content could be defined, on the basis of which content improvement initiatives could developed. Usually classification system, clear criteria and standards are used to assess quality. P. Posch and H. Altrichter notice that quality is a relative term, which can be understood differently by different groups (Posch – Altrichter, 1997, in: Altrichter, 1999). It means that every author has his/her own purposes, system of values, amount of knowledge and skills, attitude to quality. Various theories and assessment methods are available on virtual space. Beside, assessment process closely depends on understanding of the role of the assessor. Assessor can also be limited by his/her own experience, knowledge, professional background. (Attwell, 2006). Because of two different users’ positions, quality assessment criteria

can be defined differently depending on what should be considered as the most important aspect of media operation: commercial success, big number of visitors or accuracy of contained information. The European experience is outlined by the directives of the European Union institutions.

European Commission states in its issued communiqué that activity of the media remains being the key prerequisite for European citizens to gain better understanding of the world and to participate in democracy and cultural life, while media literacy can substantially contribute to achievement of the goals set by the Lisbon European Council set in 2000 for the European Union, which is important for development of more competitive knowledge economy (Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions No COM (2007) 833:2). The Commission in its recommendations given to the European Parliament and European Union Member States note that users media literacy needs to be developed, which contains at least three tasks:

- giving young audiences tools to develop a critical approach to commercial communication, enabling them to make informed choices,
- raising awareness and knowledge among all interested parties about self- and co-regulatory measures and mechanisms and about the development and implementation of codes of conduct,
- encouraging public/private financing in this area with adequate transparency (Communication No COM(2007) 833:6).

The communiqué of the Commission shows that consensus of all countries concerned and equal involvement in creation of uniform democratic and ethical media space are sought. European citizens' awareness development remains priority aspect in the European Parliament's directives, by implementing European audio-visual policy (European Parliament's resolution on Television Without Frontiers of 6 September 2005 (89/552/EEC). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also supports the position that media companies, libraries, archives, museums must contribute to citizens' media competences, not only among urban but also among rural communities and of socially less protected group members (Scott, 2009). UNESCO's goal is that various broadcasters groups, publishing associations and other organisations at the global scale would commit themselves to observe common principles of media lit-

eracy and ethics, while prepared guidelines highlight the necessity of close collaboration between media organisations and media users in jointly dealing with content improvement issues, because only various ideas and coordination of different positions would enable the best outcome. In implementing this mission, substantial role is placed on highly qualified professionals in developing methodical guidelines for both media companies and media users. In this context, content assessment recommendations given by educational sector experts in selecting sources are worth mentioning. A lot of attention in them is focused on identifying elements determining the content value: authorship, links presented by the author to respective institutions, text update date, provided sources, etc. In one of the European Commission's initiated projects The QuatroPlus, pursuing media content quality it has been defined positive and negative media content characteristics. The following characteristics to be evaluated as positive were named:

- valuable consulting content,
- content with clear educational value,
- promoted humanistic values,
- environmental issues discussed,
- supporting children's rights,
- entertainment and games.

Negative characteristics included the following:

- user's generated content (vague authorship),
- unreliability of information,
- violence propagation,
- personal data protection breaches,
- propagation of anorexia, drugs, illegal activities,
- vulgar language,
- hidden advertising,
- instigation of hatred, racism xenophobia (The QuatroPlus Project, 2009).

When looking from the audience studies perspective, it should be answered the relevant question: what strategies are followed by media users themselves when choosing media content. Researches conducted in various countries show on which features media users judge the quality of online information content. Summarizing various sources Metzger distinguishes such remarkable factors in evaluation processes of online resources for media users: presence of date stamp showing information is current, source citations, citations to scientific data or references, author identification, author qualifications and credentials, presence of contact information, absence of advertising, presence of privacy and security policies, certifications or

seals from trusted third parties, professional, attractive, and consistent page design, including graphics, logos, color schemes, easy navigation, well-organized site, sponsorship by of external links to reputable organizations, notification/presence of editorial review process or board, absence of typographical errors and broken links, professional-quality and clear writing, download speed, etc. (Metzger, 2007: p. 2082.).

If the media content problems have been resolving through reglamentation of quality, the other sore point – the privacy infringement cases. The hot topic is not new and exists not only in the virtual space. Some kind of that could be seen in the traditional media, especially on the press in the announcements of the misleading or very private information about celebrities. Even though such tendencies are condemn by the public at large the tabloids argument is always the same that the audience is needed for such information. Analogical processes go on now in the virtual space when the legal disputes are launched against the internet commentators for their insulting homophobic comments. In this case some kind of the educative effect can be presumptive for all active commentators. But who would effect the authors for their video or texts propagating violence and destruction, especially harmful for young people and emotionally unstable persons? Such video as shooted in Asia countries with the rape images and distributed over the video share websites induce the requirements for the stricter media control. Therefore, such tendencies are needed deeper analysis of the situation.

Summing up the above it should be noted that the most valuable insights of the scholars can be treated those which are dealing the following questions: what should be done in encouraging the media users to generate qualitative and valuable content? How to raise the quality of amateur content? How can users contribute to assessing quality content? Arguments in the going discussions underline necessity of the collaboration by all acting parties in the organisation and distribution of media content. As U. Hasebrink noticed, media users can participate in the regulatory processes as well and in the discourse on media quality (in general) and media diversity (in particular), because only users can define the best kind of media could serve the public (Hasebrink, 2011).

Contemporary trends show that the media users have been the key driving force in the today's media development. Experience how to deal with the negative manifestations of them, even on the global scale, is not really abundant. Scientific literature draws attention to close relation between user-friendly media usability

and growing amount of media user-generated content. After debates among the scholars about the shifting roles of media users in the recent media landscape the further step is the initiation of deeper analysis of the best practises and main factors in incentivizing of high quality of media user-generated content.

### Highlights and Future Perspectives

Today, the main practices of combating illegal and harmful media content comprise legal and technological means. When analysing content control possibilities and observing examples of some countries, one can see that internet service providers have technical possibilities available for implementing any preventive media content filtering and monitoring. But any content censorship encounters the shortage of legal measures, since no agreement has been reached on what basis such censorship should be applied. Precondition for practical application of such measures is expressive definition of harmful, improper, inaccurate content criteria and responsibilities shared among media companies, content creators and distributors. Ongoing national law harmonisation with international law is creating the basis for explanation of virtual crimes and offences.

But it must be noted that one of the key activity directions in tackling these problems named in the EU communique include media users' education and their awareness raising. Practitioners and theoreticians should lead more active discussions in this direction in particular. Media literacy development is often oriented to youth critical thinking development, instead it should include also the issues of media users' ethics and responsibility. People must be able not only to use media technologies or know how to satisfy their information and communication needs, but they should also understand their, as media users' rights and duties. Development of understanding of irresponsible actions in virtual world should be an important preventive measure.

EU communiqué suggest awareness raising campaigns among mass media information actions, which would be carried out considering the best practice and experience of other countries, as well as partnership support among the main stakeholders (governmental authorities, press and mass media groups, IPT associations, consumer organisations, interested persons in the field of education) and promotion of their dialogue. Discussions among media theoreticians, practitioners and audience members, as media content co-authors,

initiated in public space would allow to draw public attention to urgency of these problems and to search for common points in tackling media quality improvement problems. Increasing number of cases of private information leakage into public space and infringement of human rights shows the necessity for this kind of discussions. Media users must be aware not only of problems that may arise in virtual space but also of possible ways to deal with them. Suggested measures enable media users themselves to take active part in creation of quality virtual space and self-regulating mechanisms.

Scientists' mission in this whole context should be creation of awareness rising material and initiation of exchange experience.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to define the main problems related with the media users generated content.

Due to the declining profitability of traditional media, the business strategies have been transferring to the internet with the supreme focus to the social and niche media. Consumption of audiences is growing because of the media usability and adaptability for the media users to create and distribute their own content. In today's media stage of development, it should be noted that media usage is closely related with the individuals' daily routine and becomes more diverse than in the era of mass communication. Time devoted for media usage is longer than ever before. Moreover, virtual space is open not only for the individuals, but also to the legal entities, the public authorities and so on. They act as tantamount parties as the authors alongside with the media organisations in the content creation processes. The quality of media content is under discussions not only among the professionals which emphasize the insalubrious effect of the users generated content as value shifting and depreciatory of the professional information. Activities of all acting agents of the media sector are related to the further media propositions. Therefore, in was stated in this article that all parties should participate in shaping media policy. It was proposed that the scientific discussions as the initiatives of the media organizations, the political institutions, the media users are on the stage when the collaborative leads are needed.

The scientific insights analyzed in this article serve as the guidelines for further composing of the theoretical and empirical research background focused on incentivizing of high quality of the media users generated content.

## References

- Altrichter, H.* (1999): Quality Features in Action Research Strategy. Change: Transformation in Education, Vol. 1, No. 2.
- Anderka, M. – Stein, B. – Lipka, N.* (2012): Predicting Quality Flaws in User-generated Content: The Case of Wikipedia. [http://www.uni-weimar.de/medien/webis/publications/papers/stein\\_2012i.pdf](http://www.uni-weimar.de/medien/webis/publications/papers/stein_2012i.pdf), Retrieved: 13 Oct, 2013
- Attwell, G.* (ed.) (2006): Evaluating e-learning: A guide to the evaluation of e-learning. Evaluate Europe Handbook Series Vol.2, [http://www.pontydysgu.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/eva\\_europe\\_vol2\\_prefinal.pdf](http://www.pontydysgu.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/eva_europe_vol2_prefinal.pdf), Retrieved: March 20, 2013.
- Breen, M.J.* (2007): Mass Media and New Media Technologies. Media studies: key issues & debates. ed. Devereux, E. London: SAGE Publications
- Commission of the European Communities* (2007): Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions: A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment
- Davis, Ch. – Michelle, C.* (2011): Q Methodology in Audience Research: Bridging the Qualitative/Quantitative 'Divide'? Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies, Vol. 8, No. 2: p. 559–593.
- Eastin, M.S. – Daugherty, T. – Burns, N.M.* (2010). Handbook of Research on Digital Media and Advertising: User Generated Content Consumption. New York: Hershey
- Hasebrink, U.* (2011): Giving the Audience a Voice: The Role of Research in Making Media Regulation More Responsive to the Needs of the Audience. Journal of Information Policy, Vol. 1, No. 1: p. 321–336.
- Ingram, M.* (2010): The Downside of User-Generated Content. BloombergBusinessweek. Technology. [http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/mar2010/tc20100325\\_944655.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/mar2010/tc20100325_944655.htm), Retrieved: 2 Apr, 2013.
- Kiškis, M.* (2011): Intelektinės nuosavybės teisinė apsauga elektroninėje erdvėje. Vilnius: Mykolo Romerio universiteto Leidybos centras, 2011.
- Криволап, А.* (2011): Девальвация медиа-активизма: от «DIY» до «I Like». in: Международный журнал исследований культуры: научное электронное издание. <http://www.culturalresearch.ru/ru/media/73-devact>, Retrieved: 28 Apr, 2012
- Chun, W.H.K.* (2009): History of New Media. International Encyclopedia of Communication. [http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405131995\\_chunk\\_g97814051319959\\_ss38-1](http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405131995_chunk_g97814051319959_ss38-1), Retrieved: 20 Feb, 2009.
- Kumar, K.* (2005): From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 253 p. ISBN 978-0-06311-85598

- Lastowska, G.* (2010): User-Generated Content and Virtual Worlds. *Vanderbilt J. of Entertainment and Tech. Law*, Vol.10, No. 4, 893-917. [http://www.jetlaw.org/wp-content/journal-pdfs/Lastowka\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.jetlaw.org/wp-content/journal-pdfs/Lastowka_FINAL.pdf), Retrieved: 1 Apr, 2013.
- Livingstone, S.* (2010): Youth Participation: What Have We Learne, What Shall We Ask? Keynote lecture, Digital Media & Learning Conference, February 20, 2010. [http://dmlcentral.net/sites/all/files/resource\\_files/Digital\\_Media\\_and\\_Learning\\_conference\\_keynote\\_Livingstone\\_final.pdf](http://dmlcentral.net/sites/all/files/resource_files/Digital_Media_and_Learning_conference_keynote_Livingstone_final.pdf), Retrieved: 12 Oct, 2011.
- Metzger, M.J.* (2007): Making Sense of Credibility on the Web: Models for Evaluating Online Information and Recommendations for Future Research. *Journal of the American Society For Information Science And Technology*, Vol. 58, No.13: p. 2078–2091.
- O'Neill, O.* (2011): The Rights of Journalism and the Needs of Audiences. University of Oxford. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Reuters Memorial Lecture. [http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/presentations/The\\_Rights\\_of\\_Journalism\\_and\\_Needs\\_of\\_Audiences.pdf](http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/presentations/The_Rights_of_Journalism_and_Needs_of_Audiences.pdf), Retrieved: 15 Mar, 2013
- Organisiciak, P. – Reed, K. – Hibbert, A.* (2010): Shortcuts and Dead Ends: Control Issues with Online User-Generated Content. University of Alberta. [http://www.cais-acsi.ca/proceedings/2010/CAIS080\\_OrganisiciakReedHibbert\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cais-acsi.ca/proceedings/2010/CAIS080_OrganisiciakReedHibbert_Final.pdf), Retrieved: 15 Mar, 2013
- Puddephatt, A.* (2011): The Importance of Self Regulation of the Media in upholding freedom of expression Communication and Information. UNESCO. <http://global-partners.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Importance-of-slef-reg-English.pdf>, Retrieved: 15 Mar, 2013
- The QuatroPlus Project* (2009): Project sponsored by the Safer Internet Unit of the European Commission to promote quality labelling. <http://www.quatro-project.org/qualitylabels/who>, Retrieved: 11 Oct, 2012
- Ulfkotte, U.* (2013): Taip meluoja žurnalistai. Vilnius: Mintis
- Van Dijck, J.* (2009): Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society*. Vol. 31, No. 1: p. 41–58.
- Yahoo! Advertising Solutions* (2013): Storytelling Across Paid, Owned, and Earned Media. <http://advertising.yahoo.com/article/what%E2%80%99s-your-story-.html>, Retrieved: 10 Mar, 2013
- Willett, R.* (2008): Consumer Citizens Online: Structure, Agency, and Gender in Online Participation in Youth, Identity, and Digital Media edited by Buckingham, D. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: p. 49–70.
- Хренов, Николай А.* (2005): “Человек играющий” в русской культуре. Санкт-Петербург. 608 p. ISBN 5-89329-753-9.

## THE AUTHORS OF THIS ISSUE :

**Zsolt Varga**, Ph.D. student, Budapest Corvinus University, Media Marketing Communications and Telecommunication Department; **Nóra Nyirő**, Ph.D., Account Director, OMD Hungary; **Daiva Siudikienė**, Ph.D. student, Vilnius University, Communication Faculty; **Tamás Csordás**, Ph.D. student, Assistant Research Fellow, Corvinus University of Budapest; **Mirkó Gáti**, Ph.D. student, Assistant Research Fellow, Corvinus University of Budapest; **Angela Chang**, Assistant Professor, Communication Department, University of Macau; **Tamás Bokor**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest; **Dóra Horváth**, Ph.D., corresponding author, Associate Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest; **Ariel Mitev**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest; **András Bauer**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest

### VEZETÉSTUDOMÁNY

ANGELA Chang

## WHAT THE AUDIENCES OF PERFORMING ARTS FIND MOST IMPORTANT

– AN EXAMINATION OF THE ATTITUDINAL  
AND RELATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The audiences of performing arts events are changing, together with wider economic and cultural changes. A questionnaire survey of three folklore performances was conducted in 2008, and yielded a response of 1,470 theater audience members in Taiwan. Traditional folklore performances are usually seen as appealing by old male viewers. However, the findings showed that the audiences of the performances comprised fewer men and a considerable number of women. With the successful transformation of the art organization in relationship marketing, young and collegiate respondents were shown to be frequent and loyal viewers of this folklore performance. The school channel in this study was found to be an effective way to disseminate performance-related information to the young audiences. In addition, age was found to be the predictor for building relations of the emotional bond. This paper contended that building relationships required emotional bonds with the art organization. For long-term true relationships, it was suggested to be driven by the goal of directed emotional quality perceived by the audiences. The discussion on the future studies and limitations were concluded<sup>1</sup>.

*Keywords:* relationship marketing, audience, folklore, attitude, performing arts, Taiwan

Folklore performing arts can clearly play an important role in strengthening the sense of pride, identity, and prosperity of a community. One of the folklore performing arts, Taiwanese opera, originated in Taiwan in the late seventeenth century, flourished in Fujian Province in mainland China, and has been spreading to communities that share the same dialect of Fujian in Southeast Asia (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia). Taiwanese opera is a typical type of folk art that defines local characteristics and styles by incorporating literature, music, dancing, and fine arts. The performance of Taiwanese opera has served as a bridge for Chinese and non-Chinese audiences and recently undergone a transformation by continually absorbing the Western-style elements of theatrical arts and the martial arts movements of Chinese opera.

Performing arts organizations are often underdeveloped in the marketing and management fields. To cope

with a diversified audience in a transitional society, performing arts organizations must adapt to survive. Since different modes of performance are related to various types of audience experience, this study focuses on surveying how audiences access and respond to the folklore performance, and how social relations with performing art organization are affected. One of the objectives was to determine whether social relations through different media channels (e.g., word-of-mouth, newspaper, television, and the internet) are formed and affected. In addition, this article attempted to establish a relationship between the audience and a performing arts organization by offering insight into the attitudes of different audience groups. It intends to enhance our understanding of audiences seeking pleasurable experiences when attending performing arts events and contribute to the genre of audience studies.

## Literature Review

Relationship marketing encourages managers to seek innovative ways to create mutually beneficial relationships with audiences. In marketing research, a relationship is defined as any interaction, repeated actions, transactions, deals, and episodes that can be justified by certain barriers of relationship termination, with clearly perceived benefits and financial incentives. Furthermore, a relationship has been determined as an emotional bond with an organization, and is important for a consumer when emotional value is necessary for a real relationship (Chang – Chieng, 2006; Palmer – Bejou, 2005). Because the scope of a discussion on relationships is broad, the research must be restricted by incorporating communication, public relations practices, and brand-marketing theories.

Caldwell (2001) proposed the buying-consuming experiences in attending performing arts which were impacted upon by a variety of factors acting as behavioral triggers and constraints. These important behavioral factors included intrapersonal, interpersonal, product, and situational aspects. To consider behavioral triggers in attending performing arts, the intrapersonal factors included items of aesthetics, social class, age, experience, occupation, gender, and personality whereas interpersonal factors highlighted variables of number of companion, relationship with companion, and art taste similarity with companion. In addition, product and situational factors were about attributes of performing arts, available time and money that impact upon attending occasions. Caldwell proposed the general living system theory in achieving an understanding of lived experiences within realities perceived by performing arts patrons.

Chang and Chieng (2006) attempted to clarify the consumer-brand relationship by defining individual experience, brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image. They concluded that the causal effect of brand experience affecting the brand relationship was largely achieved through the independent variables such as brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image. Hall (2009) investigated the authenticity of reality programs and their relationships to audiences' involvement, enjoyment, and perceptions and concluded that each form of audience involvement contributed to their enjoyment. The information regarding behavioral outcomes can potentially form the basis for ongoing activities.

Other researchers examined the relationship between relational bonds, consumer trust, and commitment under the moderating effects of corporate websites frequented by customers (Lin – Weng – Hsieh,

2003). They argued that the characteristics of users employing the services provided on a performing arts website are different from those of non-users, and that relational bonding strategies produce different effects on the two audience groups. The concepts of one-to-one marketing and relationship marketing are no longer merely theoretical. The characteristics of users employing the services provided from the official website of a performing art organization can be different from those of non-users, and that relational bonding strategies can produce different influences to both user and non-users groups of performing arts.

Audiences comprise different demographic and psychographic groups that form around a specific show or a certain type of activity, and can be understood by observing their emotional involvement, the motivation behind their intention to attend, and the activities that result from the performance. Johnson – Garbarino (2001) compared three types of audiences' – those of the simple audience, the mass audience, and the diffused audience in contemporary society. The distinction among simple, mass, and diffused audiences provides a different perspective for observing the internal and external stresses within these paradigms. Johnson and Garbarino also examined the differences in attitudes and future intentions and found that single-ticket buyers and occasional subscribers differ slightly for the off-Broadway arts organization. However, regular subscribers differ from the other two groups on most of the measures, which are in the high levels of satisfaction, trust, commitment, and positive future intentions to the organization and production.

Petr (2007) indicated that occasional theatergoers do not become subscribers chiefly because of the number of shows and the level of consumption. Watching television is typically a low-attention event, whereas the theater is a high-attention medium. When members of an audience attend a performance, they concentrate their energy, emotions, and thoughts on the performance, and attempt to obtain from that performance some meaning. A detailed analysis of the relationship concept is seldom found in the literature, and a solid understanding of what can be defined as a relationship and what the main elements are for determining a relationship are absent. Such a gap affirms the problem of the topic being analyzed; thus, this study investigates this problem, in relation to the multiple dimensions of the relationship concept by applying them to the subject of traditional performing arts.

Several researchers contested that true relationships are substantially more important than repeated visits or the purchases of goods and services of a com-

pany. Long-term real relationships require emotional bonds with an organization, and the identification of such bonds is the focus of the consumer's perception (Damkuvien – Virvilait, 2007; Hume – Mort – Winzar, 2007). The most frequently applied marketing strategies concentrate on behavioral manifestations (i.e., repeated purchases or visits), but do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional elements of a relationship. Relationship marketing theory should include commitment, interdependence, interactions, collaboration, and emotional bonds as important criteria for ensuring a long-lasting relationship.

### Research Questions and Procedures

An audience's attitude, behavior, and association toward the arts organization, and performance were surveyed by the following four research questions:

- RQ1. Who are the current audiences of folklore performing arts? What are their demographic and behavioral manifestations?
- RQ2. How do audiences access performance information?
- RQ3. What are the audiences' seeking pleasurable experiences when attending performing arts events? Will these experiences influence their association?
- RQ4. What are the audience's emotional elements of the relationship? How do the emotional bonds of the audience with an organization motivate them for future attendance?

The measurement structure was based on a questionnaire design adapted from earlier studies by Caldwell (2001) and Johnson – Garbarino (2001) regarding four factors: (a) individual accessibility and experience for attending the performance, (b) the attitude, involvement, enjoyment, and perception of the performance and performing arts group, (c) the relationship with the performers and the arts group, and (d) the association with the performance and the arts group for identifying the predictors of future intentions. The survey comprised 39 questions and basic seven demographic questions (i.e., age, sex, education level, occupation, living area, income and language use).

Immediately before a performance, questionnaires were distributed to all audience members with tickets at three regional theaters, each located in a different urban city. During the intermission and after the show, all respondents were reminded to submit the questionnaire for a small reward that had been purchased in a stationery store. Through partnership with the arts group, 2,400 questionnaire surveys were distributed to

the theater audiences in November and December of 2008. Volunteers were trained to receive the questionnaires with a quick check and to provide assistance to elderly attendees or illiterate respondents in filling out the questionnaire. Invalid samples were eliminated, yielding 1,470 successfully completed questionnaires.

One of the largest and long-lasting performing arts groups, Ming-Hua-Yuan (MHY), was recruited in this study. Members of the MHY founder's family include producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors and actresses, and the family spans three generations. This family-run company, on average, produces 50 stories and provides approximately 20 days of performances in theater and over 120 outdoor stage performances per year.

### Research Results

The demographic profiles of the respondents' characteristics are as follows: gender (332 males: 22.6%, 1,138 females: 77.4%), age (21 years or younger: 26.9%; 22-40 years: 37%; 41-59 years: 27.4%; 60-78 years: 7.7%; 79 years or more: 1%), education level (master's degree: 8.3%; bachelor's degree: 49.5%; high school: 32.8%; elementary school: 8.7%; illiterate: 0.7%). Approximately half of the respondents (49.5%) have a college bachelor's degree. The age ranges from 8 to 83 years, and the average age of the audience is 32.4 years. The respondents' profiles revealed that the age groups (41 to 59 years and 21 years or younger) comprised the majority of respondents and 75% of them were from the same canton.

Regarding language proficiency, 48% of the respondents can manage fluent Mandarin, comparing to another two of major Chinese language subdivisions (Taiwanese, 42% and Hakka, 1.3%), and foreign language (English, 7.4%; Japanese, 1.1%). For the respondents' occupation, students (34.2%) comprised the majority, followed by government employees and teachers (19.3%), housewives (11.2%), and business people (4%).

For the income level of the respondents, most respondents (39.3%) earn approximately NT\$10,000 (US\$335) or less. The survey shows the trend of a greater decline percentage of the number of attendees indicating a higher monthly income. Only 4% of respondents earned NT\$70,000 (US\$2,345) or more every month. In addition, the result reports that most audience members (16.4%) paid NT\$800 (US\$27) for tickets, followed by 13.4% who spent NT\$300 (US\$10), 13.2% who spent NT\$1,000, and 3% who purchased the most expensive tickets NT\$1,200 (US\$40). The indoor theater showing the MHY performance adopted a low-price strategy to promote folklore performances to

young audiences. It is well known that 90% of MHY performances are shown on outdoor stages, and are all free of charge. The theater ticket income might not be the main motivation for this arts group.

The capability of audience members to access sources of performance information for retrieving MHY performance information, word-of-mouth (WOM) is the most popular method (33.4%), followed by internet blogs (18.5%), out-of-home advertisements (i.e., posters and banners; 16.8%), and newspapers (9.6%).

spondents it was their first time attending the MHY performance. The range of prior experience for attending is from 0 to 80 times for the year 2007. The trend indicates a steep decline at four times per year for attending the Taiwanese opera performance. To a certain extent, the results can be used to segment the audience members into the following five groups: non-users, occasional attendees (1-3 times) per year, regular attendees (4-6 times), frequent attendees (7-9 times), and loyal attendees (10 times or more).

Table 1

**Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their attitudes toward the performance and performers**

Attitude variables	Age								
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	Total
I enjoy watching Taiwanese Opera	Disagree	5.7%	0.9%	1.3%	0.5%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.4%
$\chi^2=45.674, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	20.5%	22.7%	13.6%	11.8%	8.9%	8.6%	19.4%	15.9%
	Agree	73.8%	76.4%	85.1%	87.7%	89.8%	91.4%	80.6%	82.7%
I am familiar with MHY artists	Disagree	13.6%	5.7%	4.8%	1.9%	5.0%	0%	0%	5.1%
$\chi^2=45.685, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	28.8%	31.9%	25.8%	24.6%	20.8%	12.3%	20.0%	26.1%
	Agree	57.6%	62.3%	69.4%	73.5%	74.2%	87.7%	80.0%	68.8%

Table 2

**Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their agreement of involvement with the performing arts group**

Perception Variable	Age								
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	Total
I am a loyal MHY audience	Disagree	8.8%	3.4%	2.6%	0%	2.5%	0%	0%	2.8%
$\chi^2=85.37, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	21.9%	34.4%	21.6%	14.3%	11.9%	5.2%	12.9%	21.5%
	Agree	69.3%	62.3%	75.8%	85.7%	85.5%	94.8%	87.1%	75.7%

However, performing arts websites were also found to provide an important forum for audiences. In addition, through lectures, workshops, and seminars, schools have been an important channel for educating and circulating performing arts information to staffs, faculties, students, and their parents.

Regarding the audience's attending experience, the result shows the trend of accompanying an attendee to the performance. More than half of the respondents (55.6%) attended the performances with their family members, and this was followed by friends or schoolmates (29.9%), colleagues (6.2%), and lastly, by themselves (4.7%). This shows that the current audiences of theater goers are not individual attendee, and Taiwanese folklore is welcomed by the families of attendees, and attending alone might not be popular.

For attending MHY performance in the past one year of 2007, most respondents indicated that they had attended only once (27.9%), whereas for 18.4% of re-

To understand the audience's attitudes toward the performance and the performing arts group, Table 1 shows positive attitudes associated with the Taiwanese opera in general according to the different age groups. Among them, up to 91.4% of attendees from the age group of 56-65 years strongly agree that they enjoy Taiwanese opera, followed by the age groups of 46-55 years (89.8%), 36-45 years (87.7%), and 26-35 years [85.1%;  $\chi = 45.674, df = 12, p < .001 (sig. = .000)$ . The finding also indicates that the older age groups (56-65 years and 66 and older) show higher familiarity with the MHY performers, which reached statistical significance ( $\chi = 45.685, df = 12, p < .001$ ). This supports the notion that the positive attitudes of different age groups toward performing arts significantly and positively influence the art groups association.

To portray the audience's relationship with the performing arts group, Table 2 displays the agreement of involvement with the performing arts organization ac-

according to the age of the attendees. Among them, aged 56-65 years have the highest agreement (94.8%) in identifying themselves as loyal audience members of MHY, followed by attendees aged 66 years and older (87.1%), attendees aged 36-45 years (85.5%), and attendees aged 46-55 years (85.7%;  $x = 85.37$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

For the mediators of emotional bonds of the audience with a performing arts organization, Table 3 shows the brand image of the performing arts organization as perceived by attendees according to their age. Most respondents (aged 36 years or older) perceive MHY as a patriotic symbol, with high agreement ranging from 95.6% to 100%. However, attendees aged 15 years or younger displayed the lowest agreement on this issue (82.8%;  $x = 29.488$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The emotional bonds of the audience with an organization motivate them for future attendance. Table 4 displays future intentions for attending any of MHY

performance according to the age of the attendees. Most respondents (aged 16 years and older) exhibit stronger positive tendencies of future intentions for attending the MHY performance, whereas the youngest audience group (aged 15 years or younger) displayed the lowest agreement (85.3%;  $x = 36.229$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This supports the statement that a higher attachment by attendees to the show exhibits a stronger tendency to return for future performances. Furthermore, by using regression analysis, it supports the prediction that age is the predictor (3%,  $r^2 = 0.2$ ) for the emotional bond with the Taiwanese opera organization. Older attendees tend to show greater loyalty and a stronger bond to the folklore performance.

Table 5 shows the different ages of the attendees and their varying preferences in ways to access information on the MHY performance. The cross-tabulation analysis showed that the WOM method is the main mode of

Table 3

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their association with the brand image

Brand Image Variable	Age								Total
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	
MHY legacy has shaped important Taiwanese culture	Disagree	3.4%	1.2%	2.6%	0.9%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.6%
$x^2=29.488$ · $df=12$ · $p<.01$ (sig.=.003)	Neutral	13.8%	7.0%	7.5%	2.8%	3.2%	3.4%	0%	6.1%
	Agree	82.8%	91.8%	89.9%	96.2%	95.6%	96.6%	100%	92.3%

Table 4

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees versus revisit intentions

Future Intention	Age								Total
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66& above	
I will recommend MHY performance to others	Disagree	3.4%	0.9%	2.2%	0%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.2%
$x^2=36.229$ · $df=12$ · $p<.001$ (sig.=.000)	Neutral	11.2%	4.0%	1.8%	2.9%	1.9%	1.7%	0%	3.5%
	Agree	11.2%	95.1%	96.1%	97.1%	96.8%	98.3%	100%	95.2%

Table 5

Cross-tabulation of respondents' age and their source of access

Age	Word-of-Mouth n (%)	Outdoor Ads n (%)	Blogs n (%)	Official site n (%)	Newspaper n (%)	School n (%)	Others n (%)	Total n
15& Less	62(53.9)	37(32.2)	20(17.4)	15(13)	15(13)	12(10.4)	15(13)	115
16-25	147(45.4)	89(27.5)	79(24.4)	35(10.8)	24(7.4)	91(28.1)	30(9.3)	324
26-35	87(38.8)	32(14.3)	104(46.4)	30(13.4)	8(3.6)	12(5.4)	24(10.7)	224
36-45	97(49)	42(21.2)	61(30.8)	23(11.6)	24(12.1)	14(7.1)	20(10.1)	198
46-55	66(43.1)	38(24.8)	22(14.4)	22(14.4)	42(27.5)	12(7.8)	18(11.8)	153
56-65	30(60.8)	18(38.3)	3(6.4)	1(2.1)	11(23.4)	0	3(6.4)	47
66&Above	21(84)	3(12)	0	0	4(16)	1(4)	2(8)	25
Total	510	259	289	126	128	142	112	1086

communication for all audience groups, except for the respondents in the age category of 26-35 years. Outdoor advertisements such as banners and posters are especially important for the three age groups of 66 years or older (84.5%), 56-65 years (60.8%), and 15 years or younger (53.9%), whereas internet blogs are considered useful for the audience age groups of 26-35 years (46.4%), 36-45 years (30.8%), and 16-25 years (24.4%).

The school channel is an effective way to disseminate performance-related information to young audiences (under 25 years of age), especially for the age group of 16-25 years (high school students). Newspaper advertisements and reviews are influential for middle-aged (46-55 years) and elderly groups (56-65 years and 66 years or older). Performing arts websites were found to be more available to younger respondents (aged 55 or younger) than to their older counterparts (aged 56 or older). The relationship between gender and the satisfaction level was determined by using the *t* test. Gender is the only variable that reached statistical significance. The male attendees generally provided a higher score for performance, the arts organization, and the performers, compared to their female counterparts ( $t = 6.677$ ,  $df = 1253$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

#### Results of ANOVA on the education level and the satisfaction level

	Education level	n	Mean	SD
(A)	Illiterate	9	47.11	4.485
(B)	Elementary	101	47.09	5.499 (D)
(C)	High school	399	45.88	5.574
(D)	College	626	45.11	6.345 (-B)
(E)	Post-Graduate	104	46.07	5.476
	Total	1239	45.61	5.979

Table 6 shows the relationship between the education level and the satisfaction level, determined employing ANOVA. Regarding the satisfaction level, attendees with an elementary school diploma comprised the most satisfied group ( $m = 1.98$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $sig. = .048$ ), followed by attendees with a collegiate education with a bachelor's degree.

Table 7 shows the relationship between the education level and emotional bonding with MHY, which was determined employing ANOVA. The attendees with an elementary school diploma showed the highest and most positive level of emotional bonding, followed by the group with a junior or senior high school education ( $m = 0.74859$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $sig. = .027$ )).

## Discussion and Conclusion

For the purpose of this study, MHY was an apt case because they retain consistent attendees while also recruiting increasingly larger numbers of young and highly educated audiences to participate in the cultural activity of Taiwanese opera. Traditional folklore operas are usually seen as appealing mainly by older male viewers as the piercing tones and intricate wordplay. However, one of the findings shows that frequent and loyal folklore performing arts audiences comprise mostly young students and women who are employed and have a collegiate education. The age of these young students and employed women attendees ranged from their twenties to their fifties. All audience groups were shown to rely mainly on WOM, including young students as well as elder attendees. The majority of the student groups (aged 16-25 years) usually obtained MHY information through WOM (45.5%), followed by through their school (28.1%), internet blogs (24.4%), and outdoor advertisements (16.8%), but less frequently from newspapers (7.4%).

Audiences with prior experiences of the performance and the performing arts group can be categorized into five groups: first-time attendees, occasional attendees, regular attendees, frequent attendees, and loyal attendees. Whereas occasional ticket buyers consider that the most important source of the performance information is traditional media channels (i.e., WOM, out-of-home advertisements, and newspaper reviews), frequent and loyal audiences rely on both new social media and traditional media to obtain information on the performance. The frequent and loyal audience groups differ from the other groups on most of the analyzed factors, but vary mainly in the high levels of involvement, satisfaction, commitment, and positive future intentions regarding the production. In addition, the different age groups attending the

Table 6

Table 7

#### Results of ANOVA on the education level and the emotional bonding

	Education level	n	Mean	SD
(A)	Illiterate	8	13.5000	1.69031
(B)	Elementary	98	12.8980	2.59456 (C)
(C)	High school	395	12.1494	2.33501 (-B)
(D)	College	603	12.5257	2.14830
(E)	Post-Graduate	102	12.2941	2.15989
	Total	1206	12.4196	2.25725

show and then attached to the show exhibit stronger tendencies to recommend the production to others.

In the past, the relationship between artists and audiences relied mostly on face-to-face communication and were geographically close. Because of the rapid development of internet technology, online communities have emerged as a form of networking to maintain social relationships based on mutual emotional bonds. This type of community can be formed regardless of geographical and physical constraints. The application of new media has undoubtedly changed the relationship between the performing arts industry and its audiences. Academic circles are currently reevaluating how to define a community, and most of this practice is largely due to the presence of affordable and accessible communication technologies. The internet brings people together from all over the world. For this study, a virtual community was considered the aggregation of the audiences and artists of performing arts events interacting based on a shared interest, where the interactions are at least partially supported or mediated by technology and guided by certain protocols and norms. Online communities are virtual societies that can be formed for any interest, and they are, for instance, established to discuss celebrities and performances.

We can no longer assume when watching a local folk art performance that it will be performed repeatedly in the same manner as it has been for centuries, and that the performers and audiences are participating for the same reasons that previous generations had participated. The folklore performance of Taiwanese opera has historically played the role in strengthening the sense of pride, identity, and prosperity of a Chinese community. The indoor theatre performance served as a space of dreaming for both audiences as well as artists whose past experiences stir present and future artists to imagine newer and even bolder ways to dream through performance. For long-term relationships bonding, it was suggested to be driven by the goal of directed emotional quality perceived by the audiences.

In conclusion, audiences have a significant relationship with performers, and they themselves perform in various contexts. This notion of performance thus offers an alternative theoretical framework for the microanalysis of audience practices. Therefore, when analyzing the interactive relationship between audiences and performers, this study recommends approaching the motivations and activities of audiences from the context of the community in which those audiences participate. One of the limitations of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized to the wider

market of performing arts outside of folklore culture. For future studies, an international-scale survey and comparisons with other folklore performing arts are recommended.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is supported by University of Macau research grant  
References

## References

- Caldwell, M.* (2001): Applying general living systems theory to learn consumers' sense making in attending performing arts. *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 18, No. 5: p. 497–512.
- Chang, P.L. – Chieng, M.H.* (2006): Building consumer-brand relationship: A cross-cultural experiential view. *Psychology and Marketing* Vol. 23, No. 11: p. 927–959.
- Dalakas, V.* (2009): Consumer response to sponsorships of the performing arts. *Journal of Promotion Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1–2: p. 204–211.
- Damkuvien, M. – Virvilait, R.* (2007): The concept of relationship in marketing theory: Definitions and theoretical approach. *Economics and Management* (December): p. 318–322.
- Hall, A.* (2009): Perceptions of the authenticity of reality programs and their relationships to audience involvement, enjoyment, and perceived learning. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Vol. 53, No. 4: p. 515–531.
- Hume, M. – Mort, G.S. – Winzar, H.* (2007): Exploring repurchase intention in a performing arts context: who comes? and why do they come back? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 12, No. 2: p. 135–148.
- Johnson, M.S. – Garbarino, E.* (2001): Customers of performing arts organization: Are subscribers different from nonsubscribers? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 6, No. 1.: p. 61–77.
- Lin, N.P. – Weng, J.C.M. – Hsieh, Y.C.* (2003): Relational bonds and customer's trust and commitment – A study on the moderating effects of web site usage. *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 3: p. 103–124.
- Palmer, A. – Bejou, D.* (2005): The future of relationship marketing. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, Vol. 4, No. 3: p. 1–10.
- Petr, C.* (2007): Why occasional theatergoers in France do not become subscribers. *International Journal of Arts Management*, Vol. 9, No. 2: p. 51–62.
- Rentschler, R. – Radbourne, J. – Carr, R. – Rickard, J.* (2002): Relationship marketing, audience retention and performing arts organization viability. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 2: p. 118–130.

*Tamás CSORDÁS – Mirkó GÁTI*

## THE NEW (MARKETING) ROLE OF FIRMS AS MEDIA CONTENT PROVIDERS

– THE CASE OF SME'S STRATEGIC SOCIAL MEDIA  
PRESENCE

**In the new social media context, it is gradually more common to say that each party can itself be considered a media content provider, firms included (through their brand pages). This tendency is reflected in a rising professional field called “content marketing”. This study incorporates the perspective of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into the scope of social media (SM) as a marketing communications and media content distribution system. In an exploratory content analysis of 20 official SM brand pages with 1281 analyzed posts the authors study how SMEs respond to the advent of a new paradigm of marketing communications with special attention to their usage of media-specific contents. SM impels companies to eventually rethink the traditional one-way communication flow of their marketing messages and to incorporate a new, two-way communication into their marketing strategy, where (their engaged and involved) users can create, modify, share and discuss content related to the firm’s activity. This study’s preliminary results show that diffusing content generally acts for SMEs as a facilitator to involve fans by offering a thematized space for them to manifest themselves in company-related topics. Therefore, content adds to the firms’ possibilities of brand positioning by offering a reflection of fans’ company- and content-related behavior, which is a supplementary source of information.**

*Keywords:* social media (SM), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), content marketing, marketing communications, media content distribution system

Social media (hereafter: SM) in a wider perspective is a pool of various two-way communication platforms that enables the free flow of ideas, information and values on the internet. In this sense, all actors present on the platform as users, be they individuals or organizations, account for only one of many information producers (Smith, 2009). Moreover, in the SM environment, information is generated and disseminated to multiple directions and social contexts mainly by users. While the SM platform acts as a media channel, content is largely created by productive users (or producers (Bruns, 2008)) whereas active, involved users participate in the dissemination of those pieces of content that catch their interest. In this sense, SM – as opposed to traditional broadcast media – is a highly bottom-up phenomenon. As a social networking platform SM is an environment

where users are there to connect with each other and organize themselves around themes and topics of their interest (Piskorski, 2011).

However, by its very logic, SM provides a suitable environment for the presence and spreading of (electronic) word-of-mouth which equally makes it a target medium for marketers even more that regardless whether or not a firm actively participates online, users are constantly talking online about companies and services as these are simply part of their everyday life and conversations. As a marketing tool, SM is a highly audience-focused medium: as brands are a part of a conversation, people wish to hear solutions to their problems instead of product offers (Bottles – Sherlock, 2011). Piskorski (2011) posits that a social media strategy differs largely from what can be referred to as a

digital marketing communications strategy. Whereas this latter is the digital manifestation of a somewhat traditional way of marketing communications (i.e. broadcasting commercial messages) with an extended possibility for users to provide direct customer feedback, leads or even purchases, SM is about letting users improve their own social status (e.g. relationships, esteem, etc.) through (but not exclusively) various spaces, activities, discussions, etc. managed by the firm. Thus even by becoming fans of or following firms on different SM sites, this does not necessarily reflect users' intention to connect to the firms themselves rather the intention to share with other members of the social sphere their enthusiasm towards the products of the given brand and benefit from the personal and/or social satisfaction that comes with being a member of the given community.

In a promotional environment where clutter becomes commonplace (Ha – McCann, 2008) and where the majority of users do not wish to participate directly to any firm's promotional activity (Van Dijck – Nieborg, 2009), firms face a new challenge in their marketing communications namely that advertising produces more scattering loss than targeted reach. In this perspective, content and through it, content marketing marks the advent of marketers as media content producers (see e.g. Emarketer, 2013), competing for users' discretionary spare time and audience to convey their marketing communications messages which would otherwise likely be lost in this clutter of traditional messages. By being both a marketing communications tool and a media content distribution system, SM adds a new way of thinking to marketing businesses but it also requires a new approach from marketers.

In order to engage users and to generate any form of participation on the firms' behalf, firms themselves need to be engaged (Nyirő et al., 2011) and create a strategic framework (Csordás et al., 2014) for communicating to and with their customers, potential customers and with other users positively involved to participate in the marketing processes of the firm. This latter target group of involved non-consumers hints that firms here will equally need to focus on what could be referred to a secondary target group, that of a media audience.

### **Brand communities and value co-production**

The positive membership mentioned beforehand and the role of firms and brands within can be put in parallel with the theory of brand communities (e.g. Muñoz – O'Guinn, 2001) and more widely with that of tribal marketing (Cova – Cova, 2002).

Brand mentions and brand-related activities can emerge from various types of communities, group activities, fashion trends, etc. originating from people gathering around given themes, activities, hobbies, etc. These gatherings are referred to as postmodern tribes in the literature (Cova – Cova, 2002). These are communities with chosen and dynamic memberships, which brings along the characteristic that within one tribe and at the same time, there is a number of active members involved in the building and maintaining of a framework and institutions for the community (e.g. organizing and promoting events for a sport) but there are also other, less active, but interested parties who still identify themselves by and through the various norms, values, beliefs and behavioral patterns related to the community. Marketing in postmodern tribes can be best characterized by the process of value creation through organizing, executing, sharing, promoting, etc. the values and experiences of the community and therefore contributing to its existence (Kates, 2004; Muñoz – O'Guinn, 2001). In this respect, marketing activities necessarily embrace user participation as a means and channel of legitimation within the tribe and by the latter, which in turn becomes an integral part of brand positioning (thus, for example, the existence of brands which are associated with a given activity as a whole (e.g. Vans for skateboarding)).

Brand communities – as any other community – are characterized by common norms, values, beliefs and behavioral patterns, but are special in the sense that they are informal, geographically unbound communities organized around a sole focal product and/or brand (Muñoz – O'Guinn, 2001), which most often can be referred to as “love brands” (Batra et al., 2012). In this case, brand meanings are directly co-created within these groups by the users as much as by the focal firm. Participation in brand communities (e.g. Facebook brand pages) focuses on acts of consumption, reflected through brand stories, anecdotes, symbols; moreover the groups possess an own, brand-specific language all of which to mark the group's cohesion (Antorini, 2007). One characteristic feature of love brands is that users not only like, but often love and/or adore them, have close emotional ties with these brands, regard them as necessary parts of their lives and therefore are genuinely disposed to recommend them to their acquaintances in every way possible (brand evangelists (Scarpi, 2010)). Brand communities enable a new source of information for new potential consumers of a brand. This source of information, although still biased, is not company-generated, and goes through a filter of opinion leaders present within brand communities who equally add a personal relevance and narrative to brand

and brand-related messages which makes fans a special – exemplary and exceptional (Busse – Gray, 2011) – source of audience. Members of online brand communities are producers who generate content related to their consumption. These pieces of content (spreading from an alternative, peer-to-peer consumer support activity, online discussions to various types of entertainment content related to the brand) can be considered the essence of online brand communities.

Brand communities and consumer tribes are therefore (online as well as offline) social networks where members enjoy spending their free time. Online manifestations thereof are the different brand fan pages and brand- and community-related user-generated content. However, the large majority of consumers do not consciously belong to brand communities (Kates, 2004), brand and consumption meanings at the same time appear embedded in their daily lives, and along their needs. As mentioned beforehand, SM spaces are organized around themes of interest and tribes and as such, brands (through brand pages) can equally be a focal theme of one or more thereof, but still in competition with other brands, user activities and tribes.

### **SME marketing and marketing by networking**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (hereafter: SMEs) can benefit from SM in various ways. For instance, these firms are situated at what can be referred to the long tail of the advertising industry, that is, they are ruled out of traditional media advertising as it bears too important barriers of entry (e.g. lack of capital, patent and license requirements, lack of distribution channels), SMEs are therefore forced to communicate more creatively and cost-effectively with their target audience. In this sense they can be characterized by less market power, capital and managerial resources than bigger firms but equally by more flexibility and innovativity in, among others, their marketing communications activities (McCartan et al., 2003; Carson et al., 1995; Mackintosh – Tynan, 1994; Carson, 1993). These firms' marketing activity can be characterized as usually intuitive, unstructured, informal and reactive, adapting itself to industry norms (Gilmore et al., 2001; Carson – Cromie, 1989). Moreover, beside an industry-specific marketing activity SMEs tend to present a manager-/owner-specific side as business as usual remains very much affected by the company owner's personality. In this sense, SMEs provide an interesting ground for research in the highly personal(ized) sphere of SM. SMEs can respond to the advent of a new paradigm of marketing communications with special attention to their using media-specif-

ic contents (with a contextual value both relevant as a piece of marketing information and as a 'consumable' piece of media) in order to create added value to their engaged fan base and friends thereof.

Nevertheless, SME marketing is a combination of three different factors, which characterize them substantially (Hill, 2001): (1) the existence of personal relationship networks, (2) a strong sales focus of the firm, and (3) low consciousness of formal marketing methods. These factors however do not take into account the current industry trends. One of these trends is the effect of networking on SMEs (Hill, 2001). Relationship building among customers and other stakeholders of a business can be improved by different gains of ICT solutions, making it possible to measure the value of relationships to the firm (Halliday, 2011). SM enables this kind of measurement, enabling the analysis of customer relationships with the SMEs in a different perspective. In the SM environment, "firms have to involve customers less by selling to them, more by genuinely creating a two-way flow of information in order to play a role more in creating value with them rather than in delivering value to them" (Halliday, 2011: p. 247.). In this sphere, customer experience is gradually growing in importance. In a media space, where SMEs make use of earned media (e.g. word-of-mouth) besides paid and owned media opportunities (Corcoran, 2009), content on the SM brand page can be managed through more personal contact and greater social embeddedness to increase customer experience. Schmitt (1999) states that consumers are less rational entities who care about functional features or benefits and more emotional human beings who are more interested in achieving pleasurable experiences. Small business owners (i.e. entrepreneurs) have (through being personally and emotionally involved) an ability to make use of their own personal networks (Hill, 2001), including their networks in the SM sphere.

According to Bonnemaizon (2007: p. 57.): "[t]he future of relational marketing will depend on the ability to play with communities that can either destroy a firm or strengthen it. Between now and 2015, identifying consumers' experiences or those of a group of consumers, will create a marketing that is truly relational. This will be a wonderful challenge for any firm that understands the complexity of a relationship which will be increasingly facilitated by current and future modes of communication". In the SM sphere, these kind of communicational opportunities seem to become real for companies, where every single SME can be unique and different, creating its own SM brand page, manifesting itself as a predestinated kind of "marketing brand" (Hill, 2001: p. 175.).

## Research questions and methodology

SM can help companies rethink the traditional one-way communication flow of their marketing messages and add a new two-way communication flow into their marketing strategy which is more consumer-centered than for example traditional customer services, direct mail or personal selling and at the same time convenient to manage and relatively cost-effective. In this sense users are given a direct platform on the web to share and discuss, but also to create and modify company-related content. Just like traditional media having two-sided markets, businesses present in SM and harnessing information or intelligence from SM might develop a similar type of two-sided market structure, with a “media audience” interested in the contents the company shares on SM, making the company itself a sort of “broadcaster”, and its “target audience” made up by the consumers of the firm’s products or services. As the two sets only partially intersect, beyond the traditional business value of a consumer appears or strengthens a new type of value for the firm, that of the audience’s social value. With the aim of examining the possibilities for SMEs to embrace this new communications channel, our departing research questions were as follows:

- Q1. What does the consumer gain from the firm’s SM content generation process?
- Q2. What is the value of SM content marketing in a media perspective?
- Q3. What is the value of SM content marketing for marketing communications?
- Q4. Can SM marketing communications be interpreted as media content?

In a first exploratory approach, a holistic content analysis was conducted on a selection of official brand pages on Facebook. The selection of a B2C (business-to-consumer) context (i.e. official Facebook brand pages) is merely based on the assumption that con-

tent marketing is more appropriately observable in a B2C environment, where consumers act and react to companies’ SM activities in a more multi-faceted way than, for instance, in a B2B environment (Williamson, 2010). Each of the observed companies were SMEs (according to the definition of the European Commission, i.e. enterprises with 1-249 employees (EC, 2009)) thus appropriate for our research problem.

Being a holistic qualitative study of digital content and communities, our approach can be regarded as a netnography (Kozinets, 2006). Besides analyzing textual content, we equally extended our attention to semi-otic (see e.g. Antorini, 2007) and visual (see e.g. Schau – Muñiz, 2006) elements observable on the analyzed surfaces.

The scope of our study was narrowed to one distinct sector in order to provide for the sample a more homogeneous environment for more transparent and comparable analysis. “Eating and cooking motivates people very easily, and this is visible on their Facebook pages, too. A restaurant or confectionery communicating properly with their fans can attract them without serious campaigns” (Lévai, 2012: p. 42.). In a service marketing approach (see e.g. Langeard et al., 1981), Facebook fan pages can equally extend the core experience of regularly going to the given restaurant and contribute to what can be referred to as the experience “concept” (Sundbo – Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008) of these firms in the online context, which is in a way a particularly interesting extension of capacity for a firm and activity limited in time and space of service.

In this view we proceeded to a content analysis of 20 service firms in the Hungarian HoReCa (Hotels, Restaurants and Catering) sector, and more specifically, brand pages of individual restaurants (i.e. not pertaining to any chain or franchise) in Budapest selected in a process of purposive sampling (see e.g. Wallendorf – Belk, 1989), focusing on their posts that triggered the most activity on their brand page.

Table 1

### Research design and methodology

Objectives	Methodology	Sample characteristics	Industry	Inclusion criteria	Period of analysis
Analyzing the SM content generation in providing value for media and marketing communications purposes.	Online content analysis, data mining	3559 fan comments to 1281 posts on 20 standalone Facebook brand pages	Services, HoReCa (restaurants)	Brand page with more than 100 fans; businesses that are not part of a restaurant chain (SME criterion)	Posts published between Jan 26 and Mar 26, 2013 (2 months)

Source: own elaboration

## VEZETÉSTUDOMÁNY

In determining what accounted for as “more active” we took into account the number of fans, and compared these to the number of likes and shares of each post. All posts and related comments that appeared during the period of analysis (Jan 26-Mar 26, 2013) were included in the data mining and analysis. Our study is based on the observation of ca. 3600 fan comments to ca. 1300 posts (*Table 1*). In the following, we chose to alter the name of each analyzed brand page, replacing it with their numerical code within our sample database (e.g. [1] stands for Analyzed Business Unit #1) and to include a date with each quote.

## Findings



When content analyzing social media brand pages the number of fans of each page is the first metric that one has access to. These pieces of data enable us to know the general popularity of each brand (e.g. [1] has the most fans within the sample with 22,725 fans in contrast to [20] with “only” 609 fans. However the “power of like” (Lipsman et al., 2012: 1) is a very subjective metric, as “[...] typical approaches that focus on raw fan counts, or the total number of engagements on a given piece of content, fail to depict the potential and realized scope of SM brand impressions” (Lipsman et al., 2012: p. 23.). It is then more reasonable to evalu-





ate the general relation of people who talk about the company to those who like the company but are not generating any discussion in the topic (e.g. [12] has 2,488 fans with a respectful amount of people talking about them [5199], although [2] has 21,075 likes with a relatively small group of fans [433]). These general metrics referred to as quasi-statistics (Maxwell, 1996: p. 95.) help us to begin our analysis and to get an initial picture of the sample and evaluate the relative weight of a topic. We then chose to further analyze posts that generated the most activity from the whole sample and view them as contents containing different amount of information concerning the exact activity of the SME (HoReCa). The measure of activity-generation is based on the relative number of likes, comments and shares of each analyzed post.





SM activities on the analyzed pages show peculiar differences when it comes to using social media as a marketing and/or a media channel. In the sample of SM posts by restaurants, content generated showed different types of information for the audience, that we categorized based on their informative content or on their entertaining nature, giving the content a connection to the basic activity of the firm in some cases, or ignoring this connection otherwise. A summary of our findings are presented in Table 2, followed by a detailed analysis of its most important elements.

Table 2

Information types of the analyzed posts and examples

Informative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>pictures and/or comments of physical products (foods, drinks, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [1], Jan 26, 2013: “night sandwich # [1] # Tally-ho!” (+link to picture) [<i>see picture 1 beside</i>]</p> <p>e.g. [12], Mar 23, 2013: “Don’t forget that “madártej” [“Hungarian floating islands”] doesn’t plump, because is it made from birch sugar! It is the same delicious as the one with sucrose, but it is OK for people suffering from diabetes! We ‘re waiting for you, try it: [12]” (+link to picture) [<i>see picture 2 beside</i>]</p> <p>e.g. [5], Mar 08, 2013: “Daily menu main dish :)” (+link to picture)</p> <p>e.g. [6], Mar 19, 2013: “Have you ever tried our Borsche Turbo baguette? It’s brutal... We used to say that if you eat it you fall asleep, or we don’t wish you “Enjoy” rather “Good night!” There’re so many delicious things in it...”</p>	<p>picture 1:</p>  <p>picture 2:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>information about price reductions, promotions</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [15], Feb 04, 2013: “LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! We’ve opened our reservations for February 14th. Limited Valentine! Good price, 5 course menu: 3.900Huf. Let the feelings burn!”</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>daily menu (on a day-to-day basis, containing extra price reductions and other promotions)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [19], Mar 05, 2013: menu: “goulash from the Alföld, carrot cream soup with ginger”</p> <p>e.g. [15], Mar 05, 2013: menu (+link to picture with a traditional Hungarian menu) [see picture 3 beside]</p> <p>e.g. [18], Mar 04, 2013: “...Thirsty Wednesday! Only once in a month! You can choose from beers, wines, spirits and long drinks – and drink it for half price! Book a table, if you listen to us!”</p>	<p>picture 3:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>event information (when, where, in what topic)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [4], Mar 20, 2013: Flavors of Transylvania weekend! (+ link to event)</p> <p>e.g. [15], Mar 11, 2013, Kitchen Exhibition 2013 (+ link to event)</p> <p>e.g. [15], Feb 27, 2013: “You can meet us at the cooking show on Saturday! Come and taste!” (+ link to event)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>information about the opening times</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [9], Feb 23, 2013: “We open in 40 minutes! Weekend is coming :) Enjoy!”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>reference to the news about the company</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [3] Jan 21, 2013: “You will never get used to it!” (tudas.fm)</p> <p>e.g. [15], Jan 20, 2013: “You ‘ll find us at the newspaper stands tomorrow!” (+link to picture) [see picture 4 beside]</p> <p>e.g. [10], Mar 11, 2013: “Dinner at [10] in Budapest: jamie goone’s wine blog”</p> <p>e.g. [14], Feb 02, 2013: “[14] has ridden in on its white rocking-horse!” (player.hu)</p>	<p>picture 4:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>recruitment</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [3] Mar 22, 2013: [3]</p> <p>e.g. [6] Mar 03, 2013: [6]</p>	
<p>Entertaining</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>atmosphere generation (daily music, artistic pictures or photos, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [11], Mar 21, 2013: “Before opening”, (+link to music video of Bobby McFerrin: Don’t worry be happy)</p> <p>e.g. [11], Mar 16, 2013: “Before opening”, (+link to music video of Adele: Set fire to the rain)</p> <p>e.g. [12], mar 22, 2013: We’re closed today. Plan a little sally tomorrow, maybe to [12]”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>pictures and/or comments of the chefs (making a dish, preparing a meal, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [17], Jan 31, 2013: “...and when he is focusing on the next meal...” (+link to picture) [see picture 5 beside]</p> <p>e.g. [12], Mar 14, 2013: “Good morning everybody! We ‘re doing our best to make you choose from our wonderful dishes! Come in! [12]”</p> <p>e.g. [4], Feb 26, 2013: “Laci is working at the moment... :)” (+link to picture) [see picture 6 beside]</p>	<p>picture 5:</p>  <p>picture 6:</p> 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>pictures and/or comments of the SME building (the building, a new design, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [13], Feb 22, 2013: "inner design of the restaurant" (+link to picture) [<i>see picture 7 beside</i>]</p>	<p>picture 7:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>pictures and/or comments of funny things (e.g. a baby eating a cake, a cartoon, a joke, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [8], Mar 26, 13: "Spring not available" [reflecting on the unnaturally long winter] (+link to meme picture)</p> <p>e.g. [13], Mar 01, 2013: "Winter is over! Spring is here at last and the new menu! Hurry up, because it will last only three months!"</p> <p>e.g. [12], Mar 20, 2013: "Elvis drinks coffee, too. Drop in for a coffee to us, maybe you will meet! You 're welcome in [12]!" (+link to picture) [see picture 8 beside]</p> <p>e.g. [3] Mar 26, 2013: "Good morning! Now that there's only a few days left till Christmas, I hope everybody is OK with presents! Keeping up the atmosphere, our first 100 guests get 100 free APPLE products!" (+link to picture showing an apple fruit with an apple ipod's characteristic lines painted on it) [<i>see picture 9 beside</i>]</p> <p>e.g. [6], Mar 26, 2013: "If it's snowing, are you coming to [6]? We're organizing a trip to Perinbaba, because we'd like to grab this rotten pillow from her hands to have sunshine, good weather and to be able to put out the benches! We're waiting for you today :!!!!"</p>	<p>picture 8:</p>  <p>picture 9:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>pictures or comments of special events (e.g. Women's day, Easter, Christmas, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [6], Mar 08, 2013: "Dear Ladies! We'd like to salute you on Women's Day! :) Come to our place today to make this day for You even more beautiful! With Love, [6]"</p> <p>e.g. [18], Mar 08, 2013: "[18] wishes beautiful and very happy Women's Day to every woman!" (+link to picture)</p> <p>e.g. [4], Mar 08, 2013: "We wish our dear readers a happy Women's Day!" (+link to picture) [see picture 10 beside]</p>	<p>picture 10:</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>games (making recipes, virtual cooking, etc.)</b></li> </ul> <p>e.g. [12], Mar 15, 2013: "Competition between fans who share the link of the company with their friends. The award is a cake!"</p>	
<p>Notes: <i>Notes between brackets and/or in italic are added by the authors. Non-textual contents related to the referred posts are described following each example in parentheses, preceded by a "+" sign. The respective names of the businesses are replaced in every case by their numbers in our sample database.</i></p>	

Source: own elaboration

### When content is equivalent with the SME's activity

A remarkable amount of posts concern the SME's very main activity. Posts based on the service or the product itself abound (e.g. [1], Feb 05, 2013; Feb 18, 2013; [8], Mar 06, 2013: give information about a physical product and receive numerous shares and comments, mostly about suggestions for redesigning the package [product information and information about its attributes]). Further comments enquire about the physical place of the SME and how to find it, usually with de-

tails of the opening hours (place information). Other user-generated questions arise in connection with the price of the product, or equivalently, the marketing communications channels are present in the SM posts (promotion information, e.g. [6], Feb 01, 2013: promotion of the firm's webpage on its Facebook page).

Besides this direct manifestation of the firms' marketing-mix, numerous posts give short notes about a particular type of fine food or beverage, or they add some kind of supplemental information adding to provide a unique nature to the business (e.g. [1], Jan 29, 2013: highlighting their specific, naturally manufactured and Hungarian dairy products as the positioning

of their activity or [4], Mar 01, 2013: the company uploads the weekend menu only on Facebook, privileging their fans present on the platform in this way).

Analyzed SMEs not only present their products, but sometimes organize games for their fans (e.g. [10], Feb 27, 2013; [2], Jan 31, 2013, Mar 06, 2013; [7], Feb 14, 2013, Feb 18, 2013: “Bizarre ice cream selection, who knows what’s in it?”). Many of them equally involve fans to comment on questions, to give ideas and play quizzes or vote for a product, while having a good time (i.e. satisfying their need for entertainment). In these cases, humor is usually present in posts, giving the opportunity for entertainment for the audience besides the provision of information (e.g. [18], Feb 26, 2013: “beer day”, the post contains a picture of a woman holding a big beer barrel). This kind of media content distribution emerges the presumption that SM content is more and more focused on not simply giving prosaic information of the SME and its marketing-mix, but rather trying to communicate with their audiences and generate buzz around a specific (mostly activity-related) topic.

### **When content is equivalent but diverse from the SME’s activity**

Another group of posts are equally based around the sector activity these firms operate in, but from a farther perspective than simply and tightly presenting the firm’s marketing-mix elements. Among these, posts share with the audience a story or give the details of an event (e.g. [7], Jan 29, 2013, Jan 30, 2013; [4], Jan 30, 2013: one chef of the restaurant was present and awarded at the Bocuse d’Or chef competition, representing Hungary as part of the cutting edge of gastronomy). These posts are in some way in the role of a PR campaign for the firm, or in other relations, these are the posts that make the invisible parts of the service provided visible by the aid of the social media platform (i.e. showing the organization and the process to the audience by giving news about the chef, who is normally not face-to-face to the customers).

Some SMEs create their own media content based around the theme of specific occasions (e.g. Valentine’s Day, falling into the period of analysis: [6], Feb 14, 2013; [20], Feb 14, 2013: a picture with two chicken hearts and a bard, wishing Happy Valentine’s Day to everyone) and filling it with a unique atmosphere and humor. This kind of content is not directly in relation with the firm, even though it can be related to the firm and adds a unique touch to its communications.

In some cases, SMEs only try to wish a message filled with positive content for their audience (e.g.

[10], Feb 21, 2013: “Enjoy your meal and have a nice day!”). In these cases, content is not really relevant, but somehow connected to the general activity of the SME (food, drinks and eating), and surprisingly generated a relatively high amount of buzz among fans.

### **When content differs from the SME’s activity**

The third category of posts and comments is not linked directly to the activity of the SME. These posts can be grouped around different aims (e.g. [2], Feb 20, 2013: the restaurant promotes another restaurant in the city, informing about the opening date, its location, etc.), but their main attribute is that the posts are not connected to the specific SME’s marketing-mix or marketing strategy. For instance, a few SMEs even during the period of analysis undertook their own recruiting activities on this very platform, looking for new employees (e.g. [3], Mar 22, 2013), adding the HR function to the existing Facebook brand page.

There are other cases when posts do generate a relatively high buzz, but are not really exact in their purposes (e.g. [20], Feb 01, 2013: a picture is showing the audience some food and a note that the chef has many presents from Lyon. Different question arise: who are the presents for? Why was the chef in Lyon? Why is the post on the firm’s Facebook wall?). Other categories of posts are about creating a media content which is entertaining (e.g. [6], Feb 19, 2013: “Béla”, the teddy bear is presented on a photograph among the employees of the restaurant, creating a relatively high buzz) and funny, but the main purpose is unknown, as most of these posts are not continued in any way. Therefore, these posts are not really linked to the SME, but are generating conversation about the topic on the brand page, making the SM content distributable and viable among the audience.

### **SMEs’ SM content and the virtual transmission of the invisible elements of services**

The posts can be categorized into different groups, based on their information content. Predominantly, and looking at the main company purposes, SM messages still contain the physical product itself (*see Table 2*). A lot of posts concentrate on the appropriate interpretation of the food or beverage and its production process, which is surely the main and most visible manifestation of the otherwise invisible and hard-to-grab services of restaurants. Referring to Kotler and Keller (2012) and Langeard et al. (1981), services are produced in a quite complex process. Beyond the marketing-mix of physical products (product, price, place, promotion),

there exist three additional marketing mix-dimensions for services, namely: people, physical evidence and process (Langeard et al., 1981). In the scope of our research, people refer to employees (waiters, cashiers) who are directly in contact with the customer and serve them face-to-face, so they are a significant factor of their impression. In the analyzed SM posts, they were rarely visible on the Facebook wall, because they are rather physically needed in the process and pushing them in SM does not seem to be predominantly useful. Physical evidences (e.g. furniture, design, hygiene) are more observable in the SM environment (e.g. at [13], Feb 22, 2013: inner design of the SME is shown to the audience, enabling the presentation of the physical manifestation not only face-to-face, but virtually, on the SM platform).

More interestingly, processes are the elements of the services, which are normally not visible to the audience, preventing them from looking “behind the curtain”. In the case of our research, chefs are good examples of the process, because they rarely cook their meals in front of the eyes of their customers. However, pictures and/or comments of the chefs quite often evolve among the analyzed posts, making avid fans initiates to a certain extent of the restaurant’s “tribe” (e.g. [17], Jan 31, 2013: “...and when he is focusing on the next meal...” e.g. [12], Mar 14, 2013: “Good morning everybody! We’re doing our best to make you choose from our wonderful dishes! Come in!”; e.g. [4], Feb 26, 2013: “Laci is working at the moment... :)”.

This result can modify the original servuction model (see Figure 1), where customers get their benefits from the whole provision of a service, which includes visible but also invisible parts (Langeard et al., 1981). By using SM the “invisible” processes become quasi-visible in the virtual sphere to the community on a Facebook brand page (e.g. showing them a picture or a short comment of the chefs’ latest creations), making it possible to contribute to customers’ sum of benefits by the whole service process. Therefore the customer can evaluate both the visible parts of the service (e.g. pictures or comments of employees, and physical evidence like furniture or design) and in some way the quasi-invisible parts (e.g. the inner state of the kitchen on a picture, which is normally not open to the public).

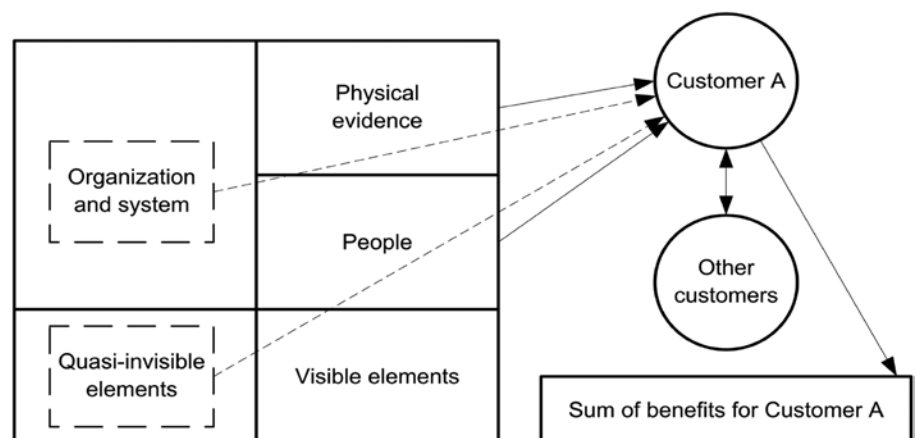
## Discussion

In sum, SMEs’ content on the SM platform is very varying in themes and has different relations with the company’s activity itself. The analyzed posts were the ones that generated the most activity on the Facebook brand page, i.e. creating the most likes, comments and shares from the audience. What comes as a surprise is that even these popular posts still basically inform about the marketing-mix of the given SME (product, price, place, promotion completed with service marketing’s people, process and physical evidence), and are a representation of an elemental positioning strategy, which differentiates the company and/or product from the competitors’ (Q3). Content is generally linked to the industry activity directly or indirectly, getting the fans up-to-date about important information concerning the firm, containing the visible and the fundamentally invisible parts of the specific service (e.g. giving the opportunity to look “behind the curtains”, presenting the kitchen, the chef, the life of the SME, etc.), therefore making it difficult to entirely interpret the analyzed firms’ SM communications as media content (Q4). However, by presenting these invisible parts of the service and the related processes (i.e. posting information, pictures, stories, etc. about the activity of the firms “ordinary” customers would rarely have access to), these firms are still able to use media content to contribute to creating added value to their fan community who already expressed their interest in the companies’ operations by becoming fans of their SM pages (Q2).

In this sense, SMEs still ought to use the SM platform as a media content distribution system which not only gives informative content, but entertains the audience in different ways (e.g. games, quizzes, votes, fun-

Figure 1

The servuction model in the SM sphere – the case of SMEs



Source: own elaboration, based on Langeard et al. (1981)

ny pictures and posts, etc.), letting users enjoy spending time on these firms' SM surfaces, and with the brand. SM therefore means an additional value for consumers who are generators of content in this sphere, enabling them to be a part of the content creation process hereby entertaining them at the same time (Q1).

As a managerial implication our exploratory study's results show that diffusing content generally acts for SMEs as a facilitator to engaging fans by offering a thematized space for them to manifest themselves in company-related topics. In another way round, content (and fans' response thereto) adds to the firms' (otherwise limited) possibilities of brand positioning by offering a reflection of fans' company- and content-related behavior. In the perspective of SMEs' low market power and level of capital, this might prove to be a supplementary source of information (e.g. to some extent, overcome inaccessible traditional marketing research activities) and a tool for engaging users, making them benefit from being part of the firm's "community" (e.g. to act as an accessible and relatively cost-effective yet customer-friendly relationship management tool).

As an exploratory study, our research bears a certain number of limitations. First, only one small area within the SME sphere was examined, our results need confirmation from other fields and sectors. Moreover, restaurants as business entities bear the advantage to more likely belong to what was referred to as a "love brand" and therefore be liked by a greater number of users on a social networking site like Facebook. However, this methodological consideration that enabled us to collect a sample of study for a preliminary study can be bypassed by examining what types of social media can be fit for companies in a given sector to be used a marketing communications channel (e.g. LinkedIn for professional, B2B companies) which is equally a possible topic for further research.

## References

- Antorini, Y.M.* (2007): Brand Community Innovation – An Intrinsic Study of the Adult Fan of LEGO Community. Copenhagen, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur
- Batra, R. – Ahuvia, A. – Bagozzi, R.* (2012): Brand Love. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 76, No. 2: p. 1–16.
- Bonnemaizon, A. – Cova, B. – Louyot, M-C.* (2007): Relationship marketing in 2015: a Delphi approach; *European Management Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1: p. 50–59.
- Bottles, K. – Sherlock, T.* (2011): Who Should Manage Your Social Media Strategy? *Physician Executive*, Vol. 37, No. 2: p. 68–72.
- Bruns, A.* (2008): The future is user-led: The path towards widespread produsage. *Fibreculture Journal*, 11. URL: <http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-066-the-future-is-user-led-the-path-towards-widespread-produsage/>, Retrieved: April 25. 2011.
- Busse, K. – Gray, J.* (2011): Fan Cultures and Fan Communities. in: *Nightingale, V.* (ed.): *The Handbook of Media Audiences*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell: p. 425–443.
- Carson, D. – Cromie, S. – McGowan, P. – Hill, J.* (1995): *Marketing and Entrepreneurship in SMEs: an Innovative Approach*. Harlow: Pearson Education
- Carson, D.* (1993): A philosophy for marketing education in small firms. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 9: p. 189–204.
- Carson, D.J. – Cromie, S.* (1989): Marketing planning in small enterprises: a model and some empirical evidence. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 5, No.1: p. 33–51.
- Corcoran, S.* (2009): Defining owned, earned, and paid media. Forrester – Sean Corcoran's Blog, 2009.12.16. URL: [http://blogs.forrester.com/interactive\\_marketing/2009/12/defining-earned-owned-and-paid-media.html](http://blogs.forrester.com/interactive_marketing/2009/12/defining-earned-owned-and-paid-media.html). Retrieved: 5 Jan, 2012.
- Cova, B. – Cova, V.* (2002): Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 36, No. 5: p. 595–620.
- Csordás T. – Markos-Kujbus É. – Gáti M.* (2014): The Attributes Of Social Media as a Strategic Marketing Communications Tool. *Journalism and Mass Communication*. (accepted for publication)
- EC* (European Commission) (2009): Commission staff working document on the implementation of Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. European Commission, Commission staff working document. p. 1–5.
- Emarketer* (2013): Content vaults to no.1 marketing priority for 2013. Emarketer, Feb 5, 2013, URL: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Content-Vaults-No-1-Marketing-Priority-2013/1009648>, Retrieved: 6 Feb, 2013.
- Gilmore, A. – Carson, D. – Grant, K.* (2001): SME marketing in practice. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 19, No. 1: p. 6–11.
- Halliday, S.* (2011): Relationship marketing and networks in entrepreneurship. in: *Nwankwo, S. – Gbadamosi, A.* (eds.): *Entrepreneurship marketing*. New York: Routledge
- Ha, L. – McCann, K.* (2008): An integrated model of advertising clutter in offline and online media. *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 27, No. 4: p. 569–592.
- Hill, J.* (2001): A multidimensional study of the key determinants of effective SME marketing activity: Part 1. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, Vol. 7 No. 5: p. 171–204.

- Kates, S.M.* (2004): The Dynamics of Brand Legitimacy: An Interpretive Study in the Gay Men's Community. *Journal Of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, No. 2: p. 455–464.
- Kotler, P. – Keller, K.L.* (2012): *Marketing Management*. 14th ed. Boston, MA: Prentice Hall
- Kozinets, R.V.* (2006): Netnography 2.0. in: R. W. Belk (ed.): *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing: p. 129–142.
- Langeard, E. – Bateson, J.E.G. – Lovelock, C.H. – Eiglier, P.* (1981): *Services marketing: New insights from consumers and managers*. Cambridge, UK: Marketing Science Institute
- Lévai R.* (2012): Facebook kalandozások. 20 magyar marketing sikersztóri a Facebookon (Facebook adventures. 20 Hungarian success stories on Facebook); Budapest: RG Stúdió Kft.
- Lipsman A. – Mudd, G. – Rich, M. – Bruich, S.* (2012): The Power of 'Like': How Brands Reach (and Influence) Fans Through Social-Media Marketing. *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 52, No. 1: p. 40–52.
- Mackintosh, S. – Tynan, C.* (1994): Marketing planning in small firms: an assessment and agenda for survival and growth. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 1, No. 3: p. 1–6.
- Maxwell, J.A.* (1996): *Qualitative research design*. London: Sage
- McCartan-Quinn, D. – Carson, D.* (2003): Issues which impact upon marketing in the small firm. *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 21, No. 2: p. 201–213.
- Muñiz, A.M. Jr. – O'Guinn, T.C.* (2001): Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4: p. 412–432.
- Nyirő N. – Csordás T. – Horváth D.* (2011): Competing by Participation – a Winning Marketing Tool. *CM, Communication Management Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 21, 111–139. URL: <http://www.cost-transforming-audiences.eu/system/files/pub/CM21-SE-Web.pdf>. Retrieved: 3 Jan. 2012.
- Piskorski, M.J.* (2011): Social Strategies That Work. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 89, No.11: p. 116–122.
- Scarpi, D.* (2010): Does Size Matter? An Examination of Small and Large Web-Based Brand Communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 24, No. 1: p. 14–21.
- Schau, H.J. – Muñiz, A.M.* (2006): A tale of tales: The apple newton narratives. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 1: p. 19–33.
- Schmitt, B.* (1999): Experiential marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1–3: p. 53–67.
- Smith, T.* (2009): The social media revolution. *International Journal of Market Research*, Vol. 51, No. 4: p. 559–561.
- Sundbo, J. – Hagedorn-Rasmussen, P.* (2008): The backstaging of experience production. in: Sundbo, J. - Darmer, P. (eds.): *Creating experiences in the experience economy*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.: p. 83–112.
- Van Dijck, J. – Nieborg, D.* (2009): Wikinomics and its discontents: a critical analysis of Web 2.0 business manifestos. *New Media & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 5.: p. 855–874.
- Wallendorf, M. – Belk, R.W.* (1989): Assessing Trustworthiness in Consumer Research. in: Hirschman, E. (ed.): *Interpretive Consumer Research*. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research
- Williamson, D.A.* (2010): Why Social Media Makes Sense for B2B Marketers. *eMarketer*, March 23, 2010, URL: <http://emarketer.com/blog/index.php/b2b-advantage-social-media/>, Retrieved: 1 Jun, 2012.

Tamás BOKOR

## MORE THAN WORDS – BRAND DESTRUCTION IN THE ONLINE SPHERE

The focus of this paper is brand destruction, however in a slightly different sense than the traditional marketing literature depicts it. The concept of brand destruction basically tends to be discussed either (1) as an accidental, counter-productive event in a campaign which leads to the ruining of the brand, or (2) an intentional act by competitors in the market, which results the same breakdown mentioned above. As this paper shows, there are other ways to consider as well, when speaking about brand destruction. An often overlooked type of brand destruction is a rather new phenomenon: destroying the brand by customers or business partners. The adequate scene for this case is the internet itself, especially different social media platforms, e. g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, etc. Also popular weblogs can play an important role in brand destruction made by customers or business partners (general cases related to social media are depicted in Lipsman – Mud – Rich – Bruich, 2012). This paper presents a couple of cases in the online field and focuses basically on online communicative activities, in which a brand's negative properties come to discussion. Both Hungarian and foreign examples are easy to find and they all demonstrate the growing power of consumers. This observation led marketing experts to start talking about the 'smooth seizure of power by consumers'. Whilst the critic of this concept is considered to be relevant, this paper describes the elements and methods of the 'seizure' – from an online social point of view. The key of handling brand destruction cases efficiently lies in the role of social media users. They are not only consumers, but the opportunity for producing online contents is in their hands as well – this fact results in the idea of 'prosumers'. Thus customers on social media platforms must be handled as a 'critical mass': as civic warriors with strong weapons in their armoury. No companies are allowed to feel safe, as the slightest error may well be punished by the crowd.

**Keywords:** online marketing, brand destruction, anti-branding, brand value, memes, social media, complaint forums, opinion leaders

One of the greatest challenges for marketing practice in the last decade has inevitably been the increase of internet usage. After a few years, web2 services developed fast and created a real crowd with serious impact on business companies – beside a good number of social institutes. Owing to the rising number of internet users, more precisely web2 users recently, there exists widespread belief among marketing experts that internet is a rather efficient tool and an adequate scene for building up company and/or product brands. Nevertheless, this belief seems to be one-sided, and the online marketing success beyond question is leastwise doubtful.

Everyday business experience clearly indicates that the process of building up brands requires both (1) consistent planning and (2) continuous attention during the implementation period. The former is necessary

for a coherent and articulated brand message; the latter serves the maintaining of consumers' constant attendance. Both assumptions have to tackle the problems rooted in the speciality of internet sphere.

By "internet" DiMaggio et al. (2001: p. 307.) refer to "the electronic network of networks that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval". A narrower concept, "web2" refers on a totality of platforms which allow users to create and share digital contents: "a collaborative medium, a place where we (could) all meet and read and write" (Richardson, 2009: p. 1.).

Furthermore, according to Ropolyi (2006), internet in general can be characterized by three main specialities, which describe web2-phenomena as well.

1. A great deal of contingency: as the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann claims, nothing is obligatory in the media (Luhmann, 2000). Everything can be the other way round, so nothing is inevitable the way it happens. Even if a marketing screenplay proved to be successful in mass media, web2 can make a surprise owing to its unpredictable trait.
2. Eventuality: virtually it is a positive phrasing of point 1. On the world wide web, everything can well be everything else, so there can be affable surprises and unpredictable successes. (Correlation of point 1. and point 2. is depicted by the dotcom-fever in the late 1990s. A complete overview can be seen in (Calhoun et al., 2005), a special field of this phenomena is depicted in (Muhammad, 2000) and another in (Rigby, 2012)).
3. Virtuality: this *terminus technicus* refers to two meanings. According to its Latin origin, virtuality means “worthy, outstanding” on the one hand, and “lifelike” on the other hand. Thus virtuality is eventually a virtual concept on its own. Internet platforms are virtual in the meaning of contingency (see above in point 1.), in addition, it is a word that describes the wealth of synchronic, mediated and anonymous world of internet, including web2.

The above-mentioned specialities aim to picture that internet is a field of unknown and unpredictable, in contrary to the traditional mass media. All these specific properties imply that brand-builders are facing some serious and inevitable problems and they have to handle them effectively. To reconcile the strictly managed process of internet marketing with the inherent properties of the internet constitutes serious challenge for management. Firstly we will define the exact concept of brand destruction then we will put online brand destruction in the frame of the general brand destruction concept. Furthermore, we will detail four subcases of online brand destruction. Afterwards, we will seek the proofs for the following research hypotheses:

- H1: online brand destruction shows at least four variances: destruction by a gate-keeper, destruction by an opinion leader, destruction by a consumer group and brand destruction by internet users (e. g. by creating memes).
- H2: although online brand destruction activities mentioned above in H1 can give a chance for companies to develop their communication, companies often do not make the best of this opportunity.

To verify or confute H1 and H2, we will present small case studies on this base to present each vari-

ances of online brand destruction. The method of our research is a qualitative analysis based on online articles, forums and memes.

### “Semasiology” of brand destruction

The focus of this paper is brand destruction in online marketing. More precisely: in this text we are writing about cases where experts are either bovine or unable to control the brand destruction process which evolves online. Firstly, concept of online brand destruction will be worked out, and then in the next subchapter, some case studies from Hungary and the Transatlantic Region will be presented.

Concept of brand and the difference between product and brand is clearly articulated in marketing literature. As Kotler’s classic work claims: “People satisfy their needs and wants with products. A *product* is any offering that can satisfy a need or want, such as one of the 10 basic offerings of goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas. A *brand* is an offering from a known source. A brand name such as McDonald’s carries many associations in the minds of people: hamburgers, fun, children, fast food, golden arches. These associations make up the brand image. All companies strive to build a strong, favorable brand image” (Kotler, 2000: p. 6., emphasis added). As it can be seen, a strong brand is familiar and reliable, for consumers surely know what they can expect from it. It is easily understandable that competition between brands is a necessity for widening the clientele. Competition may involve different types of dynamic communicative actions, including brand destruction. Online communication channels let this dynamics speed up to real-time, instant activities among physically distant people.

The conception of brand destruction basically tends to be discussed either (1) as an accidental, counter-productive event in a campaign which results the ruining of the brand, or (2) an intentional act by competitor(s) in the market, which results the same breakdown mentioned above. (Fitting to this frame, early but fine case studies are available at <http://brand-destruction.com>.)

In this paper, the term “brand destruction” is discussed in a bit different sense than the traditional marketing literature depicts it, as there are other ways to consider speaking about brand destruction (*see delineated in Table 1.*). Firstly, it is imaginable that a company has to destroy its former brand in favour of its newer one, especially after a misfit campaign, or if self-repositioning is required in the market. This ver-

sion is quite rare *in vivo*, so it is difficult to find an example, but theoretically it is worth considering. The other and often overlooked type of brand destruction is a newly upcoming method: destroying the brand by customers or business partners. The perfect scene for this case is the internet itself, especially different social media platforms, e. g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, etc. Also popular weblogs can play an important role in brand destruction made by customers or business partners (general cases related to social media are depicted in (Lipsman et alii 2012)). Henceforth we will focus on chance-giving brand destruction variances which stem from the company's environment.

any financial loss. Product evaluation forums are used to let products to be rated and commented, in addition, helping consumers to select the best article according to their needs. This activity provides the company with a great deal of precious information.

4. The fourth premise is that in recent years, web2 did not count as a 'serious' resource: due to its possible anonymity, contingency, eventuality and virtuality (see above) marketing could not use it as a calculable channel for advertising products. This point of view, however, has been totally changed by now.

However, we have to add that these attitudes – especially the fourth one – are permanently changing, as it

Table 1

Types of brand destruction

Brand destruction		Source/location of origin	
		Inside the company	Outside the company
Aspect/impact	Negative/Ruining	Accidental, counter-productive event in a campaign, acted by the company itself	Intentional destruction by competitor(s) in the market (unethical market behaviour)
	Positive/Chance-giving	Destroy the company's former brand for a newer one; repositioning	Consumers' online anti-campaign; boycott; civic consumer protection problem communicated online; online anti-branding

Source: own draft of the paper's author

Notwithstanding that all of the four formations definitely exist in real life, until the recent years marketing research omitted to emphasize the importance of chance-giving brand destruction coming from the web2 users. At first, this kind of brand destruction may be inevitably negative, henceforth a short explanation is required why we claim this version to be positive or – put in other words – chance-giving.

Approaching web2, there are four traceable premises in traditional marketing.

1. The mere discussion about a product, brand or service may be crucial for companies (cf. the classic words of Mark Twain: "Do not care what they tell about you while they talk about you" – the real problem is just if no one cares about you: Nevertheless, contrary to the widespread belief and Mark Twain's bon mot, there is such thing that bad publicity in business).
2. Companies tend to think that web2 users' attack against a brand is normally not a well-organised, systematic action, so a good crisis communication plan has to be able to tackle any online surge.
3. Another wide-spread belief is that web2 allows companies to test and evaluate the consumers' reaction in a less hazardous set of circumstances compared to the real world – possible hazard is just some kind of negative reaction, negative discussion without

is mentioned above: online marketing is being the most growing and most inquired section of marketing practice, being used systematically for stepping up clientele. Although the power of crowd often gives unpredictable reactions (e. g. boycotts, online anti-branding), data retrieved from online activities are priceless for companies. Hereby we state that online brand destruction by consumers has its positive impacts on companies in *the end* of a brand destruction process, mainly due to the enormous data aggregation and the free-of-charge advertisement, even if the latter is a negative one. Briefly said with a platitude, every crisis gives a good prospect to develop ourselves – via online as well.

### Seizure of power by consumers: opinion leaders, gate-keepers and consumer communities

Increasing consumer power, accelerated by the rise of social media, threatens the foundations of branding (Cova – Aranque, 2012: p. 148.). This paper presents some cases in four fields, focusing basically on online communicative activities, in which a brand's negative properties come to the discussion. Both Hungarian and Transatlantic examples are easy to find and they all show the growing power of consumers. This observation led marketing experts to start talking about the 'smooth seizure of power by consumers' (Sas, 2008). Whilst the critic of this conception is considered to be relevant, this

paper describes the methods of the ‘smooth seizure of power’ – from an online social point of view. The four methods are 1.) online attack against a company by an opinion leader, 2.) a gate-keeper’s online attack against a company, 3.) a group’s more or less organised attack against a company, and 4.) creating online memes about a product or service (a more or less similar categorisation can be seen in Bokor, 2013: p. 34–53.).

The first example is based on an affair between a musician and an airlines company. Dave Carroll said his guitar was broken while in United Airlines’ custody in 2009. He alleged that he heard a fellow passenger exclaim that baggage handlers on the tarmac at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport were throwing guitars during a layover on his flight from Halifax Stanfield International Airport to Omaha, Nebraska’s Eppley Airfield. He arrived at his destination to discover that his \$3,500 Taylor guitar was severely damaged (Blitzer, 2009). Carroll said that his fruitless negotiations with the airline for compensation lasted nine months (Broken Guitar Song Gets Airline’s Attention, 2009). Finally Carroll wrote a song and created a music video about his experience, uploading it to the YouTube. “They say that you’re (United) changing and I hope you do, ‘Cause if you don’t then who would fly with you?” – asks the artist in the last two lines of the song. The video is over the 12,9 million views until March 2013.

The main lesson for the company was that a public figure – here Dave Carroll, “an award winning singer-songwriter, professional speaker, author and consumer advocate” (by [www.davecarrollmusic.com](http://www.davecarrollmusic.com)) – can initiate an impressive anti-campaign against a company, and the aggrieved reacts officially with serious detention. Having become aware of the song, United firstly offered Carroll a relief, which was rejected. After the song, United surrendered endeavouring to compensate the musician. In this case, major financial loss could not be set forth in the company’s pay-off, however the abstract brand price obviously decreased. In an ideal world, United Airlines could have learnt a lesson. But if any considerable change appeared in real life by taking care of passengers’ luggage – well, it is quite doubtful.

Another example was the outrageous case of Tamás Müller, online marketing specialist at Vodafone Hungary. In December 2009, as a freshman at his workplace, he forwarded (retweeted) an official Twitter post about a network breakdown at T-Mobile Hungary with the comment: “OK, call us!”. Vodafone human resource intervened on the spot and fired him with the justification of violating the rules of fair competition. Lots of people among web2 users got shocked at the company’s decision, despite that it was understandable from the

company’s point of view. In two days, Müller gathered thousands of fans online, and what is more, he got several job offers – including big multinational companies. The protest against his discharge took a peculiar shape of anti-Vodafone lobby. Blogs, thematic sites and news portals dealt with the case – even out of Hungary. There were no explicit opinions disregarding Müller’s behaviour: every single posts identified themselves with the account manager, and showed obvious solidarity.

The above-mentioned case exemplifies the significance of an opinion leader (Katz, 1955; Keller, 2003; Weimann, 1991) or a gate-keeper (McCombs – Shaw, 1976; Snider, 1967; Willis, 1987) in online brand destruction.

There are also cases when the seizure of power by consumers is indicated by a group, and not by a – more or less famous – person. A Hungarian web blog “Tékozló Homár” (“Prodigal Lobster”) makes for a good specific example. This colourful collection with a slogan “consume, lavish, suffer” gives place for posts by unsatisfied customers from many fields of industry and mainly services, furthermore it also presents embarrassing, wrongdoer or immoral advertisements. The most 12 keywords go about naive client (4123), advertisement (1001), “orally” (654, referring to the importance of sent-in material collected by customers), market garden (650), food (560), stupid text (553), hypermarket (498), customer service (407), bank (382), gadget (353), travelling (328), car (325) (number of tags in 31. March, 2013 are in brackets). There are also certain national and multinational companies among the tags, e. g. Apple, Asus, Auchan, DHL, ELMŰ (a Hungarian electricity distributor), E.On, IKEA, Intel, Malév (the former Hungarian national airflight company), MÁV (Hungarian State Railways), Nokia, OrangeWays, OTP (the biggest Hungarian bank), RyanAir, Samsung, Spar, T-Home, T-Mobile, Telenor, Tesco, Tigáz (a Hungarian natural gas provider), UPC, Vodafone, Windows, WizzAir and Zepter. They all have least 3, at best 35 tags. Hereby it is easy to see that consumers have certain “favourite” scapegoats to attack verbally in (and by) their posts. These can be distinguished into three main groups: typical Hungarian governmental organisations, energy provider companies, respectively multinational trade and service companies.

All posts in the “Prodigal Lobster” site have a two-sided, five-degree rating system: on the one hand, the editors rate all posts (“lobster factor”), on the other hand laic readers can do it as well. So a democratic deliverance method has been built up, which ensures a reliable quality rating among posts. There are no certain and official data about the visitors’ number. However, judg-

ing by the amount of comments (generally 25-400 per post) wide reading can be suspected regarding the size of Hungarian internet community. Thus the conclusion is that [homas.blog.hu](http://homas.blog.hu) is one of the greatest Hungarian consumer complaint forums, and perhaps the greatest of non-official ones.

Now let us see a set of examples for being attacked by a systematically organised virtual community. Several cases prove that nothing is too expensive for the sweet revenge in the eyes of frustrated clients. Groups of disappointed consumers often create websites emphasising negative properties of a certain company, even if their energy-consuming action requires serious financial investment as well. Disappointment can be established by a personal affair against the consumer and the company (see e. g. [whyvolvosucks.blogspot.com](http://whyvolvosucks.blogspot.com)), and can be influenced by social responsibility ([www.mccruelty.com](http://www.mccruelty.com) relating to McDonald's vicious hardball). Such anti-branding sites aim to point out the weaknesses of products and services, often referring to the importance of corporate social responsibility and "environment-friendly" market behaviour. In this sense, anti-branding sites' creators and followers are close to the classic non-government organizations.

As a paper from 2009 demonstrates (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009), all the *anti-branding* sites are based upon the same presumption, the trigger of consumer dissatisfaction. The above-mentioned authors describe anti-branding as a separate process distinct from product evaluation and complaint forums. Based upon this separation, through qualitative and quantitative methods they claim that "internet has created an empowered consumer through greater information access, instant publishing power and a participatory audience. This allows socially sensitive, ethical and expert consumers to launch meaningful anti-consumption campaigns that have visible market impact" (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009: p. 1125.).

Talking about "visible market impact", neither that paper nor this one do observe financial impacts; they focus only on abstract brand value. This may be an important similarity related to the judgement of brand destruction. However, there is another big difference between phrasing of the two papers: here anti-branding is only a variant of online brand destruction, whereas the above-cited paper sets out a complete, separated table on differences between complaint forums, product evaluate sites and anti-branding sites (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009: p. 1120.). Why we decided to handle all these phenomena (see in Table 1.) under a main concept of online brand destruction is the common origin, which is applied also to anti-branding sites: disappointment, which requires some kind of consumer revenge on companies. All the

tools and methods detailed in previous subchapter roots in this feeling, including anti-branding sites and online anti-branding campaigns. (Case studies about the dissatisfaction of "prosumers", their types and their motivations can be found in Bokor, 2013: p. 35-44.)

The fourth and last method of online brand destruction is generating memes in virtue of a spoiled campaign or company outlet. In 2011, Tesco Hungary set up a point collection loyalty action in which more than one million people could obtain Fila bags with discount ([hvg.hu](http://hvg.hu), 2011). Experts started to talk about "brand terror" because of the extremely increasing number of Fila bags on the streets, however, in short term, the action was worth both for the hypermarket and the sports equipment company. The only hazard was the obvious brand-wetting, but "it also did good for Karl Lagerfeld to shack up with H&M" (Lukács, 2011). Reflecting on the enormous amount of these bags, a good number of internet memes were born during the campaign, raising the notoriety of Fila (Orcifalvi, 2011). Opinions are therefore divided about the long-term impacts of this campaign on the brand, but the very discussion about Fila and Tesco was definitely a benefit for the concerned companies, especially talking about financial profit.

## Discussion and conclusion

This paper outlined a possible theoretical frame of online brand destruction effect. Our method was to create a conceptual framework and then present case studies from each variance, demonstrating the existence of all mentioned brand destruction activities. Thus, our first hypothesis (H1) is verified. Plausibility and reliability of case study based qualitative works is always doubtful, of course. Here and now we only aimed to depict that online brand destruction is more than anti-branding, for the former has a number of variation. A few examples have been hopefully enough to enlighten the diversified group of phenomena. In the second subchapter we detailed how companies sometimes can't handle well an online brand destruction activity. Thus H2 is partially verified, disregarding positive examples.

There are further options to broaden this research. In following years there will definitely be a strong need for working out a proper and reliable rating method of measuring financial loss by brand destruction. As we mentioned above several times, currently there is no such algorithm to resolve this problem. It would be worth inquiring the impact of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) on brand values. Google and other search engines' algorithms let cheat themselves by fake search results and intentional link-generation. Such cheating

aims to optimize the online presence and visibility of a website: either the company or the anti-branding site.

Qualitative research methods have to be involved into the inquiry of developing a company's presence on social media platforms. Attacked, criticized companies normally do not evidence in online complaint forums, so manifestation of critics is unilateral.

Another interesting topic is observing memes and their sharing via online. Who create these? What kind of goals can be detected by meme-generators? Who are the opinion-leaders and most active content-creators? Does meme-generation influence the brand value? If so, what ways does it manifest? Answering these questions will probably lead us to understand online marketing better.

Brand destruction in online sphere is more than words. Although it can be harmful for a company's brand value, the end can be favourable for the attacked company. Brand destruction effort namely can lead to the necessary change in a company's communication and behaviour, developing and fine-tuning its presence. While further inquiry is necessary to work out the details of this fine-tuning, we dauntlessly state that online brand destruction is eventually a chance for development, and a free of charge mirror picturing consumers' mainstream and segregated opinions.

## References

- Blitzer, W.* (2009): United Breaks Guitars; The Situation Room. CNN. Online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QDkR-Z-69Y>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013
- Bokor, P.* (2013): Márkarombolás online (thesis paper). Budapest: Corvinus University of Budapest
- Cova, B. – Aranque, B.* (2012): Value creation versus destruction. The relationship between consumers, marketers and financiers. *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 20, No. 2: p. 147–158.
- Calhoun, C. – Rojek, Ch. – Turner, B.S.* (2005): *The SAGE Handbook of Sociology*. New York: SAGE
- DiMaggio, P. – Hargittai, E. – Neuman, W.R. – Robinson, J.P.* (2001): Social Implications of the Internet. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27: p. 307–336.
- Divol, R. – Edelman, D. – Sarrazin, H.* (2012): Demystifying social media. *McKinsey Quarterly*, Vol. 2: p. 66–77.
- hvg.hu* (2011): Tefal lesz az új Fila táska. Online: [http://hvg.hu/panorama/20111028\\_tescp\\_pontgyujto\\_fila](http://hvg.hu/panorama/20111028_tescp_pontgyujto_fila), Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.
- Katz, E. – Lazarsfeld, P.F.* (1955): *Personal Influence, the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication*. Glencoe: Free Press
- Keller, E.B. – Berry, J.* (2003): *The Influentials*. New York: Free Press
- Kotler, P.* (2000): *Marketing Management*. Millennium Edition. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing
- Krishnamurthy, S. – Kucuk, S.U.* (2009): Anti-branding on the internet. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62: p. 1119–1126.
- Lipsman, A. – Mud, G. – Rich, M. – Bruich, S.* (2012): The Power of “Like”: How Brands Reach (and Influence) Fans Through Social-Media Marketing. *Journal Of Advertising Research*, Vol. 52, No. 1: p. 40–52.
- Luhmann, N.* (2000): *The Reality of Mass Media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Lukács, A.* (2011): Vigyázat, nyakunkon a márkaterror! Van önnek Fila-táskája? Online: [http://hvg.hu/panorama/20110824\\_ciki\\_vagy\\_nem\\_a\\_fila\\_taska](http://hvg.hu/panorama/20110824_ciki_vagy_nem_a_fila_taska), Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013
- McCombs, M.E. – Donald L. Sh.* (1976): Structuring the unseen environment. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 26, No. 2: p. 18–22.
- Muhammad, T.K.* (2000): Dotcom Fever. *Black Enterprise*, 30(8): p. 82.
- Orcifalvi, A.N.* (2011): Fila-táska után: scarlettjohanssoning, a fenékvillantós mém. Online: [http://hvg.hu/panorama/20110923\\_memek\\_scarlett\\_johanssoning](http://hvg.hu/panorama/20110923_memek_scarlett_johanssoning), Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013
- Richardson, W.* (2009): *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*. (2nd ed.). California: Corwin Press
- Rigby, R.* (2012): Lessons from the Dotcom Pioneers. *Management Today*: p. 40–44.
- Ritzer, G. – Dean, P. – Jurgenson, N.* (2012): The Coming of Age of Prosumption and the Prosumer. *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 56, No. 4: p. 379–398.
- Ropolyi, L.* (2006): *Az internet természete. Internetfilozófiai értekezés*. Budapest: Typotex
- Sas, I.* (2008): A “visszabeszélőgé”, avagy az üzenet Te vagy! *Médiakutató* (3). Online: [http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2008\\_03\\_osz/02\\_visszabeszelo\\_gep\\_uzenet](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2008_03_osz/02_visszabeszelo_gep_uzenet), Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.
- Snider, P.B.* (1967): Mr.Gates; revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949 case study. *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3: p. 419–427.
- Weimann, W.* (1991): The Influentials: Back to the Concept of Opinion Leaders. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2: p. 267–279.
- Willis, J.* (1987): *Editors, Readers and News Judgement. Editor and Publisher*, Vol. 120, No. 6: p. 14–15.
- Used links:  
 Broken Guitar Song Gets Airline's Attention. CBC News. Online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/music/story/2009/07/08/united-breaks-guitars.html>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.  
<http://www.sasistvan.hu/files/eloadasok/Hatalomatvetel.pdf>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.  
<http://branddestruction.com>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.  
<http://www.davecarrollmusic.com>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.  
<http://www.mccruelty.com>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.  
<http://whyvolvosucks.blogspot.com>, Retrieved: 27 Mar, 2013.

*Dóra HORVÁTH – Ariel MITEV – András BAUER*

## WINNING MEDIA STRATEGIES IN THE TIME OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

**At the time of the economic crisis cutting marketing and media expenses is a common corporate reaction. While this reaction is rather obvious, this may not be the winning option. To find out more about successful media strategies authors conducted a broad, multiple method research, including interviews with industry experts (N=6, leading decision makers), scrutiny of consumer narratives (N=100), content analysis of forum and blog entries (N=7086 comments) and focus group interviews (N=4). Research findings point to realignment in media spending namely better-targeted communications programs and more fragmented media choice, and besides, show the increasing role of audience participation, too. Authors argue that careful managerial efforts for harmonizing consumer problems and advertising content may result in finding the path from problem level to desired level in marketing communication practices even in crisis periods.**

*Keywords:* economic crisis, marketingcommunication strategy, media strategy

At the time of economic crisis companies tend to reduce advertising and media costs. This is a rather typical business practice as the impact of cutting these expenses may not be tracked immediately. Nevertheless, those companies that invest in media presence may gain noticeable communication advantage. Strategies that build on fragmented target-groups will not necessarily start with cost cutting. Instead, economic and psychological consequences may be approached by a better optimized media mix. The media mix is not to be considered as a pure combination of communication channels, but it also involves carefully changed communication content. While several companies lower their activities, others can consider gaining new markets by increased media spending.

To find out more about successful media strategies we conducted a multiple method research, including expert interviews (N=6, leading decision makers), consumer narratives (N=100), content analyses of forum and blog entries (N=7086 comments), focus group interviews (N=4). We recorded realignment in media spending: well-targeted communications programs, more fragmented media choice, and audience participation.

### **Corporate communication and media responses at the time of the economic crisis – literature review**

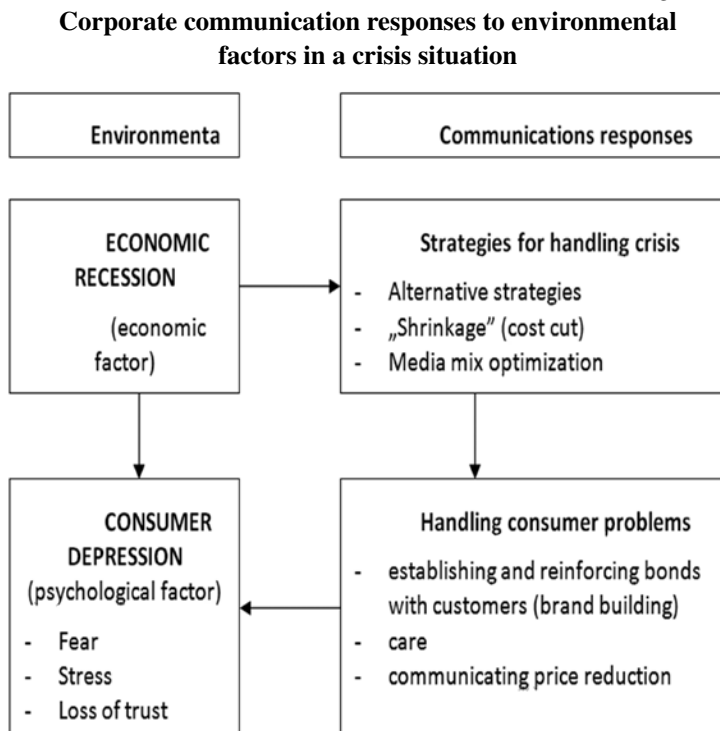
There is no dominant theoretical framework to address the phenomenon of economic crisis from media and marketing perspective. Research approaches take two views, one is deriving marketing strategic steps from consumer behaviour, and the other is a comparative competitive corporate overview. Roche et al. (2010) took a consumer perspective pointing out that the crisis modified consumers' buying patterns, and their attitudes of spending. It would be essential to explore for companies how major consumer segments were affected by the economic crisis, how they modified the structure of their spending, which products are still preferred. Most companies take little efforts, partly because of lacking appropriate tools. Still, companies showing a deeper understanding of consumers' thoughts and attitudes will gain competitive advantage (Roche et al., 2010).

Buyer decisions are significantly influenced by the economic situation, so when it becomes unpredictable consumers become uncertain (Flatter – Willmott, 2009).

The economic crisis has both financial and psychological impact on consumers, nevertheless the latter is not much considered in research (Ang et al., 2000).

From a psychological perspective, the *economic recession* implies *consumer depression*, because consumers as a result of the uncertain situation are afraid of losing their jobs, their investments or both (Figure 1). Companies, therefore, not only have to consider possible financial consequences, but the psychological impacts of recession, as well, and that is to be handled in different manners.

Figure 1



Source: authors' concept

Greater exposure to the economic environment induces dynamic changes in consumer habits, which at the same time creates new opportunities for companies that are able to understand and adapt to emerging economic and psychological status.

It is a question of strategy whether a company perceives crisis as a threat or an opportunity, as the first one limits possibilities, why the latter opens up new creative solutions. The two approaches – we could say pessimist or optimist views – depend on corporate philosophy that determines corporate strategic directions.

During recession consumer buying power decreases, and it is uncertain when recovery will occur. Consumers may react differently to the above phenomena. Some start saving, postpone buying products and services, or simply avoid buying situations. In those in-

dustries where customers are directly served, immediate decrease in sales is reported, while indirect decrease is observed in the relating industries. Consumers may immerse into self-production as well, doing several services (e.g. haircut or repair) for themselves instead of ordering them (Rampell, 2009).

When they perceive their income is uncertain consumers as a second reaction become more price sensitive (Chou – Chen, 2003) their preferences move in the direction of less expensive products. This may not be always the case since brand loyalty may prevail, brand can be considered as providers of safe havens in an uncertain situation. This may lead however to substitution, consumer compensate for spending less on other services such as going to a restaurant (Nguyen, 2011).

Beyond consumer reactions firms may follow different strategies. Srinivasan et al. (2005) investigated companies and their marketing managers, whether they were willing to increase their marketing efforts in the time of the economic crisis. They found that companies which have an entrepreneurial approach, consider marketing a strategic tool, and have access to appropriate resources use proactive marketing tools. This shows that even at the time of economic crisis increased marketing resources could lead to competitive advantage.

One such approach is the maintenance of pre-crisis advertising spending that can be beneficial from multiple perspectives. As several companies cut media and advertising spending consumers are exposed to less communication messages, therefore the impact of communication increases (Tellis – Tellis, 2009). Further, Albion – Farris (1981) argue that consumers are

a lot more receptive to advertising in a crisis period, as it may offer some relief and certainty in an otherwise stressful time to uncertain consumers. Consumers, who decrease their spending, tend to rely on advertising for making more certain decisions, therefore better remember advertising.

Both the literature and the recent research suggest consequently it is a better strategy to increase rather than decrease corporate advertising and media spending. Several experts (e.g. Welch, 2009) recommend aggressive advertising and media spending in crisis, still, majority of companies would consider advertising an avoidable luxury (Biel – King, 1985). Advertising effectively contributes to building strong brands, which establishes price advantage against competing brands, and makes the brand less exposed

to competition. Strong brands imply barrier of entry for new brands (Aaker, 1996). Graham and Frankenberger (2011) show that advertising brings long term advantage which far exceeds its costs. Those who insist on spending on media and advertising, not only establish their future turnover, but send positive, optimistic messages towards investors about future performance.

It is very important for companies to investigate how crisis reshaped consumer preferences and spending patterns, which products remained preferred. Most companies do not spend any effort on such a discovery, as they lack appropriate research tools.

## Research questions and methodology

To further explore this controversy in the Hungarian media scene we conducted a *multiple method research* (Table 1) where we explored companies' advertising and media strategies and accompanying consumer and audience expectations. The research contains expert depth interviews (N=6), consumer narratives (N=100), content analyses of forum and blog entries (N=88 blogs and forums, 7086 comments), focus group interviews (N=4 communication preferences x influence of the crises on one's life). The research took place in 2010.

Table 1

Research methodology and research topics

Methodology	Research topic	Sample size
In-depth expert interviews	Experts' point of view on advertising and crisis	N=6
Consumer narratives	Spontaneous consumer narratives about consumer buying decisions in an economic crisis, references to memories of choices, advertising and its media	N=100
Blog and Forum content analysis	Analysis of advertising and telecommunication related content at the time of analysis	N=88 blog and forum entries; 7086 comments
Focus group interviews	Discussion about perception of the crisis and advertising memories during the emerging crisis	N=4x8 (communication preferences x exposure to the crisis)

Source: authors' concept

It is also important to note the corporate perception of crisis and its prolonging impact that we recorded in previous research. Those companies that decreased their advertising spending, and kept on lowering cost even when internal financial indicators suggested the opposite have seen a result of lower sales. Longitudinal analyses clearly revealed the prolonged effect of the "advertising crisis". While immediate positive impact of investment in advertising is recorded in critical times, on the contrary decreased spending and retarded sales would be a long term issue. We have to note that long term positive impacts of increased advertising spending not only contributes to sales, but also improves corporate reputation among investors. Furthermore, its impact on consumer reputation would last as long as the end of the crisis period (2-3 years) (Graham – Frankenberger, 2011).

According to the American Marketing Association we enter the age of *austerity marketing*, which focuses on consumers who are reluctant to spend. This approach would introduce newer incentives among sales and coupons, which make them clear the major benefits (Sullivan, 2008).

## Corporate insights and media mix optimization

In this part we are reporting on general tendencies and later we point out specific actions taken by companies. It is a general reaction to reduce media and marketing costs, and such an act will have implications for the whole marketing organization. General cost cut without strategic reason would not bring favourable solutions. Still, most of the responses indicated immediate reduction of marketing and media costs:

*The marketing budget may serve as a possible source to cost cutting. A company can always say we are going to spend less on marketing communication. And they indeed say. This is especially true for the advertising scene. This started with clients' changing their monthly commission and turning to ad hoc commissions. (expert interview)*

However, some companies showed a long term approach:

*It is product quality, image and value that determine our strategy. During the time of the crisis we gave bigger emphasis to value, previously image dominated. Quality product characteristics with underlying*

*ing appropriate strong image could increase market shares. After decreasing in 2009 we increased our advertising spending in 2010, as we found this previous step strategically wrong. We expect general uncertainty for 2011, but we are also optimistic in some categories. (expert interview)*

However, advertising and media presence is necessary for reinforcing the diffusion of innovative products, higher spenders gain better results in the competition. Experts' opinion support that innovative companies should focus on long term benefits when they consider advertising and media costs. Beyond general approaches firms often pursue specific actions, such as less advertising, more sales promotions or using different media.

#### *Decrease of advertising spending*

Reduced advertising and media spending may be compensated by better targeted ads, which reach the real, interested targets that therefore increase advertising effectiveness. During the period of economic crisis the structure of advertising spending have also changed, which is a result of more dominant aggressive client negotiations, partly changing use of the media. The tendency is that traditional TV and print spending decrease, cable television and digital applications increase. The latter though also is subject to fashion trends, while we lack precise measures, digital media applications are not to be measured by traditional media indicators.

*The restructuring occurred before the crisis, which then become strengthened by the crisis. This is what we can see in the case of the new media (social media, virus or guerrilla applications). Besides that Hungarian marketeers do not build brands, but have short term perspective of 3 years, as long as their contract lasts. As a result of multinational firms increase price competition, Hungarian consumers are used to that brands are very similar, so they decide on the basis of price. (expert interview)*

Companies with stable positioning and clear brand strategy do not consider cost-cut and therefore price-cut as an adequate long term response to the crisis, as lower prices erode consumers' brand perceptions. Thus these companies in 2010 already increased their advertising and media spending. The advertising industry (ad agencies and media owners) try to compensate by price reduction, increased effectiveness and innovative solutions.

Advertising considerably contributes to the building of strong brands, which reduces price sensitivity

for our brands, and also decreases switching behaviour. Strong brands are barrier for entry for new market players (Aaker, 1996). As economic growth slows, many companies would try to increase their market share on the expense of their competitors. In such environment, more intensive advertising would limit the seriousness of competitive action and help to maintain sales (Tikoo – Ebrahim, 2010).

Advertising is not risky from the investors' point of view either. While investment in research and development is of high risk, strategic decisions, ads are less risky, which show results on the short run (Doukas et al., 1999). As a result of the economic crisis investors reconsider their future expectations (Johnson, 1999), accept only lower risks and start pursuing short term approaches, therefore prefer solutions that indicate positive results faster.

Advertising planning followed this above trend, which resulted trial and error solutions:

*Marketeers are in situation where costs cuts generated by the crisis and the emergence of the new media simultaneously occurred. New media is a new area that most are trying, they don't know how it works, but it's cheaper, so they "experiment." (expert interview)*

#### *Promotional actions to increase demand*

Decreasing consumption is the most obvious consumer reaction in critical times, therefore companies often use sales promotion actions to keep price sensitive customers. Price sensitive customers make more elaborated purchase decisions, for them, immediate financial rewards would work better than complicated sales programs, as they can see at the point of purchase that they saved a certain amount. On the other hand, continuous price based sales promotions would modify consumer expectations about price, and on the long run may however ruin the profitability of the company, which would lead to price wars (Quelch – Jocz, 2009).

*The change of advertising is very interesting. We have to better explain why a product worth buying during the time of the economic crisis and we have to modify proportion of claims – benefit, image, value – within one ad. For example we cut commercials into 25-5 seconds, and we repeat the major argument in the second part. The other solution is that we increase the portion of the cheaper (lower category) products within one product category. We also see that advertising style is in line with global trends – e.g. there are more emotional type of arguments instead of functional arguments*

*in the case of P&G for example in Hungary. But this has the precedent of 10 years consumer education, since then consumers became more receptive to emotional argumentation instead of functional arguments. (expert interview)*

#### *Use of alternative media*

The pressure to spend less on advertising made companies to find new alternative ways, new media to compensate for the lower general spending.

*Online applications can create connections across different communication channels, PR activities or a flashmob. If only apps can keep these under a unified concept, this would be the most efficient, more efficient than television. (expert interview)*

New media is not necessarily online, it is more part of the 360 degree marketing. Significance of TV, radio, press decreases, while online media exponentially increases, which makes more space for events, guerrilla marketing, ambient media and new applications. (expert interview)

Further, the crisis makes companies search for creative solutions, and reconsider their routine-like, habitual media channel choice practices. According to Roche et al. (2010) many companies have found that even with 30 % decrease in advertising costs could bring the same results, if traditional media channels were substituted by alternative media choice provided it reaches target audience.

Regardless of the economic crisis the use of alternative media increases and as their pricing is not well established yet, they seem to represent a cheaper option. On the long run, however, companies have to reconsider what tasks can new alternative, and old traditional media fulfil. For the moment still, it is television that is most efficient in reaching great number of target customers in mass consumer markets. Search engine optimization would bring better results in smaller scale, specialized sales efforts. SEO (search engine optimization) gives more precise targeting and reduces costs. Online search behaviour becomes important in consumer markets too, as it seems an autonomous move not a corporate initiative (it seems consumers' own choice).

*I don't go to the internet to watch advertising, but if I am interested in something it is quite different. In this case I need real information. (focus group consumer interview)*

Online comments, blog posts seem more reliable than classical corporate communication.

*If I search for information about a product or a service, most of the time I search for a related forum. I read what people say, and I am sure it is not manipulated. Maybe ten people contribute to the forum, eight write about the truth, so I will have real info about how good the product is. Those people will express whether you should buy or not buy the product. (focus group consumer interview)*

#### *Measurement problems*

One of the major problems of new media is the lack of established measurement system, while classical media – efficiency and effectiveness – is well measured. However lower costs of new media make market players more experiment with these new solutions.

*Yes, it is cheaper, so they play with it. Then we see what it worth. It is not such a big investment. I did not even know where the on half of the HUF 500 million went (of our classical advertising). The same goes for the new media choices but it is the half of HUF 5 million. (expert interview)*

*There is no such a system yet, that efficiently measures new media. We can record clicks, but it is not necessarily purchase. Using new media is cheaper; you reach the same segment for a lot smaller amount of money. Though, not all audience use new media. Some clients forget about 35+ plus age groups with lot higher purchasing power, which are more difficult and expensive to reach. And they are not new media users. (expert interview)*

*Social media. It is the trend today. Facebook applications become more important, those YouTube videos spread, there are more and more variations to disperse. If there is a corporate intent to have a YouTube video spontaneously spread, it will not. But we have to work hard, if one, out of 100 spreads, it is a success. I also see that PR becomes more important. (expert interview).*

#### **Consumer insights – harmonizing advertising content and consumer expectations**

More intensive exposure to the economic environment induces more dynamic changes in consumption habits, which is an opportunity for those companies who establish a better understanding of economic and psychological impacts. Based on consumer insights we aim to shed some light on the linkage of consumer behaviour and advertising.

The crisis destroyed the lower level Maslow needs, like subsistence, security and belonging. Dismissals, re-

strictions, increasing instalments devastated the security and cohesion of the home. Problems of the everyday are the dark side, while advertising brings some brighter views (Figure 2).

### Problem levels

Crisis-related consumer associations represent the dark side. The economic crisis not only implies economic consequences, but psychological problems. Dominant genre in advertising is tragedy, which is reality itself, tragedy of the everyday.

*The crisis can emerge not only at a material but also at an emotional level, as our state of mind gets into a temporarily hopeless state. This brings bad mood, in a bad case, depression. (consumer narrative)*

### Individual solution level

Individual problem solving is effective when the individuals can reshape their values from materialistic values, commitment to products to relations to other people. Therefore, the role of the family and relationships increase. Consumer restrictions result decreasing consumption, and reduced costs.

*Majority of the people in Hungary do not have stable financial background, their work is uncertain, as a result their income too. Many live from day to day, so family and belonging becomes a lot more important. (consumer narrative)*

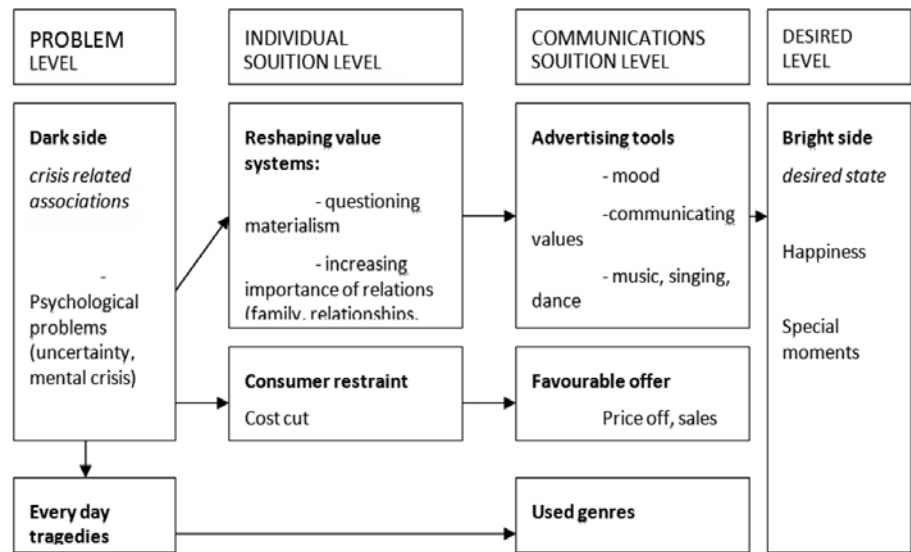
### Communication solution level

Rational corporate response to consumer restrictions is the more intensive communication of sales offers. Although this message is important, it has secondary importance compared to emotional arguments.

*We want humanistic treat and clever communication. I don't think it is too much. (focus group consumer interview)*

Advertising may offer solutions in such cases, using its tools, incorporating those values that are important during the time of the crisis. This has to be achieved in a way that the ad does not mention the crisis, which moves the target into depression, instead of kicking them out from there.

## Harmonizing consumer problems and advertising content in crisis time



Source: authors' concept

*The advertising should be positive, because positive feelings better makes us feel happier. (focus group consumer interview)*

Advertising gains the role of bringing light of hope. This may be maintained by creating the appropriate atmosphere, music and creativity. Although cost cuts in advertising may seem appropriate, mistakes in the argumentation is inexcusable for consumers. As a result, dominant genres in the advertising are comedy, romance and irony. Reminders to the daily tragedies are a refused strategy. Advertisers should portray the desired states.

### Desired level

Desired states are those happy moments, which keep the community together. Bring joy and love for people like Christmas time. One of the Xmas ads could capture people's desires and feelings.

*In my opinion the snow block that caused the traffic jam and stopping of the cars represent the crisis. There is no way back, it is very difficult to find a solution for the problem. Those people, who got stuck there, represent people victims of the crisis. The girl is at home in the warm flat. When she starts singing they get closer to each other with the boy who also stuck in the traffic jam. When the boy turns on the speakers of his car, and all people can hear the beautiful song of the girl, all the other people in the difficult situation can feel the calmness that the girl's song conveys. The voice of the girl represents hope. There is something good in all evil, all difficult situa-*

tions involve a way out. As the boy shares the “voice of hope” with everyone, creates a sense of belonging in the situation. At the time of the crisis cohesion is very important, as we can do more as a group than separate individuals. (consumer narrative, female)

Consumers frequently accuse the loans in the crisis, and those ads that make people buy more than they actually need. Instead of enlarged promises, they expect responsible communication. Consumers expect advertising to have an educative role in the future:

*I am mad at those advertisements that are not backed with responsibility. They say it is a washing machine, it washes well, but what, if not? If you purchased it from a loan, the knife is on your throat, ... you may approach the prison sooner or later. (focus group consumer interview)*

*I am frustrated by the fact that they ruin the life of those people (those who irresponsibly took big loans), and no one taught them, educated them about rational, responsible financial thinking. (focus group consumer interview)*

## Summary

Several companies see their appropriate adaption to the crisis in media spending reduction. However, such cuts will not solve the problem and even generate further ones. Strategies that build on fragmented target-groups will not necessarily start with cost cutting. Instead economic and psychological consequences may be approached by a better optimized media mix. The media mix is not to be considered as a pure combination of communication channels, but the consequently changing communication content. While several companies withdraw, others can consider gaining new markets by increased media spending. But this may also be reached by a more moderate price cut compared to competitors or more efficient media mix.

In the crisis the role of communication increases, which require better targeted media choice. Communication may show new directions and strengthen emotional bonds. These favourable communication effects would be more widely available in the mass media, as communication noise decreases, even the same level of media spending brings better results. In this situation, even a “one-way-type” communication establishes security for those who feel uncertain in the crisis and look for support. Creating relations then be achieved by well-targeted messages, increased interaction and new innovative solutions in the media mix.

## References

- Aaker, D. (1996): Building Strong Brands. New York: Free Press
- Albion, M.S., – Farris, P.W. (1981): The Advertising Controversy. Boston: Auburn House
- Ang, S.H. – Leong, S.M. – Kotler, P. (2000): The Asia Apocalypses: Crisis Marketing for Consumers and Business. Long Range Planning, 33: p. 97–119.
- Biel, A. – King, S. (1985): Advertising during a recession. in: Barwise, P. (ed.): Advertising in a Recession. London: World Advertising Research Center
- Chou, T.J. – Chen, F.T. (2003): Retail Pricing Strategies in Recession Economies: The Case of Taiwan. Journal of International Marketing, Vol. 1, No. 1: p. 82–102.
- Doukas, J. – Pantzalis, C. – Kim, S. (1999): Intangible Assets and the Network Structure of MNCs. Journal of International Financial Management and Accounting, 10: p. 1–23.
- Flatters, P. – Willmott, M. (2009): Understanding the Post Recession Consumer. Harvard Business Review, Vol. 87, No. 7/8: p. 106–112.
- Graham, R.C. – Frankenberger, K.D. (2011): The Earnings Effects of Marketing Communication Expenditures During Recessions. Journal of Advertising, Vol. 40, No. 2: p. 5–24.
- Johnson, M. (1999): Business Cycles and the Relation Between Security Returns and Earnings. Review of Accounting Studies, 4: p. 93–117.
- Nguyen, H.L. (2011): Consumer Behavior in Recession: Evidence from Finland. The Business Review, Cambridge, Vol. 18, No. 1, Summer
- Quelch, J.A. – Jocz, K.E. (2009): How to Market in a Downturn. Harvard Business Review, April: p. 52–62.
- Rampell, C. (2009): Outsourced Chores Come Back Home. The New York Times, (January 16)
- Roche, C. – Ducasse, P. – Liao, C. – Grevler, C. (2010): A New World Order of Consumption. Boston: The Boston Consulting Group
- Srinivasan, R. – Rangaswamy, A. – Lilien, G.L. (2005): Turning adversity into advantage: does proactive marketing during a recession pay off? International Journal of Research in Marketing, Vol. 22: p. 109–125.
- Sullivan, E.A. (2008): Austerity marketing. Marketing News, October 15: p. 13–14.
- Tellis, G.J. – Tellis, K. (2009): A Survey of Research on Advertising in a Recession. Marketing Science Institute Special Report, 09-205
- Tikoo, S. – Ahmed Ebrahim, A. (2010): Financial Markets and Marketing: The Tradeoff between R&D and Advertising During an Economic Downturn. Journal of Advertising Research, March: p. 50–56.
- Welch, J. – Suzy, W. (2009): Resolutions for the recession. Business Week, dated Jan 12.: p. 68.