

Anna Zaušková – Simona Ščepková

# **GROUNDWELL: THE CORNERSTONE OF INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA**



Wolters Kluwer

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Title:       **GROUNDSWELL: THE CORNERSTONE OF INTERACTIVE  
COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## **prof. Ing. Anna Zaušková, PhD.**

Anna Zaušková has been working in the field of academia since 1978. She has been a member of the FMC UCM team since 2008. In her teaching and research work she specializes in innovation and project management, in particular metrics mapping innovation and eco-innovation potential, innovation and eco-innovation performance, innovations in marketing communication, use of innovative communication tools in innovation and eco-innovation processes, innovation projects, innovation ecosystems, partnerships and clusters. Recently, prof. Zaušková has been doing research in innovative communication tools (online, crossline, phygital, SoLoMo) and their use in eco-innovation promotions, as well as groundswell-influenced communication aimed at presenting eco-innovation processes and eco-products online. Her views on research are becoming a “new school of thought”. Her works and results were published in several scientific monographs, journals indexed in the WoS and Scopus databases, at international scientific conferences and they are also a frequent topic of discussion among scientific societies and associations of which she is a member.

## **Mgr. Simona Ščepková**

Simona Ščepková currently works as a full-time PhD candidate at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava. She is a graduate of the same faculty. Her scientific activities mainly focus on the issue of the groundswell in the context of technological interference, digitization, digital marketing communication, as well as innovative marketing communication. While studying, Mrs. Ščepková also worked in several advertising agencies in Slovakia where she gained also some hands-on experience. Most recently, she worked as a Linkbuilding Account Manager at the digital marketing agency Weblauncher, where she gained practical experience in SEO. Currently, her research focuses mainly on groundswell among eco-innovation-oriented Slovak business entities. She plans to pursue this research also in the future. Her works and results were published in journals indexed in WoS databases, but also in several others partner and international scientific journals and also at national and international scientific conferences.





# INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, discussions among Internet users, especially those on the social media, have become quite dynamic. Although there are countless communication platforms available to users where they can express their opinion, it is important to realize that opinions that are published on the Internet are never private information, even if shared during a private conversation, for example through Messenger. According to the Human Rights Handbook, “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This right can only be limited for very serious reasons”<sup>1</sup>. We are often direct witnesses of name-calling and vulgar insults on social media. The right of one person ends where the right of the other person begins<sup>2</sup>. It is more than obvious that by publishing one’s own opinions through publicly available social media one can influence the opinions of other people, or even damage the good reputation of business entities. This trend has been gathering pace over the past couple of years and is currently becoming more and more visible. Social media opens up space for the emergence of a sociological and psychological phenomenon known as the groundswell.

The groundswell can be described as a significant factor in marketing communication. The consequences this effect entails for all activities of persons or institutions are far-reaching. Negative attitudes towards government institutions in Slovakia have become even more profound over the last years. People do not trust representatives of political parties, nor official media outlets. In times of crisis such as the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in the neighbouring Ukraine, people are forced to follow certain rules. News, often negative, presented by private and commercial media make people stop trusting the media and look for other sources of information, thus giving rise to the groundswell. As it stands, the groundswell is nowadays a socially accepted trend. Those who create the groundswell, support it and spread it may not even be aware of the consequences that this might bring. With regard to the above, it is therefore important

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<sup>1</sup> *Human Rights Handbook – Freedom of Expression and Media.* (online). Available at: <<https://www.humanrightsguide.sk/sk/oblasti/sloboda-prejavu-a-media>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

to discuss the current methods of eWom marketing, i.e. marketing communication based on the principle of sharing and exchanging information not only about products and services, but also values that customers hold.

The online world offers many stimuli for interaction, scattered across different web platforms. An Internet user (a user of a specific social communication platform), can easily gain a sense of security when establishing relationships, arguing with others or building a position in the virtual social ladder. It goes without saying that we behave more boldly and communicate more openly and assertively on the social media. It is the social status that is one of the driving forces behind the groundswell. The more likes a post gets, the more popular we feel. This feeling of being important boosts confidence in some people and some of them even think they have become communication leaders. A communication leader attracts other users and form their own communities, depending on what the original source of problem is, e.g. Facebook page *Fanúšikovia úžitkových vozidiel Volkswagen* (Fans of Volkswagen vehicles)<sup>3</sup> or politically-oriented group like *Mladí proti fašizmu*<sup>4</sup> (Youth against fascism). The founder of the social network Facebook Mark Zuckerberg published a Facebook post<sup>5</sup> on January 11, 2018 stating that Facebook, starting in 2018, will focus more on communities, because users of the social network want to get news feed mainly from people who are close to them, whether it is their acquaintances, family or people who hold similar values, or are interested in the same things.

Digital transformation has brought along enormous advantages not only for customers but for business entities, too. One of them is generativity. The aim of the scientific monograph you are holding in your hands is to provide readers with information and knowledge regarding the groundswell. The groundswell, in our opinion, is a prerequisite for interactive communication between business entities and the public (not only on the social media). The monograph would be of great help to, researchers as well as students and business entities who wish to dig deep and understand the nuances of the communication process.

Budapest  
November 2022

Simona Ščepková  
On behalf of the Authors

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<sup>3</sup> The group *Fanúšikovia úžitkových vozidiel Volkswagen* (Fans of Volkswagen vehicles) has a total of 630 followers on the Facebook social network as of September 20, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> The group *Mladí proti fašizmu* (Youth against fascism) has a total of 51,000 followers on the Facebook social network as of September 20, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See the post in question published on January 11, 2018 available on the Facebook page of the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

# 1 WHAT IS GROUNDSWELL

Digital technologies made it easier for us to access various information. This, however, might lead to the feeling of being oversaturated and, paradoxically, a sense of uncertainty and mistrust. Convincing a customer to buy a product they have never seen can be a challenging task not only for marketers. Does it make sense for business entities to reach out to their customers via the Internet when the place is full of hoaxes and fake news? More and more people declare that they do not trust government institutions and the media. The concept of groundswell is thus coming to the forefront as the question of trust takes the central stage. The scientific monograph you are holding in your hands right now discusses the effect groundswell might have on business entities and other subjects in the years to come.

In the book *Groundswell* (2008), a world-wide bestseller, the authors Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff<sup>6</sup> state the following: “what happened to other business entities will happen to you”. The authors infer that the way employees talk about their employer on My Space would be frowned upon had the employer read any of that. As the time goes by, newer technologies and means of communication replace the older ones, just take the pioneering project My Space (created in 2003). The authors refer to this phenomenon as the groundswell. With regard to the dynamic growth of digital technologies and digitization of many processes, the power groundswell winds has been growing steadily, also thanks to communication platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or Twitter. The growing number of cyberattacks, but also aggressive communication style on social networks (such communication style was adopted also by government institutions, members of parliament and non-parliamentary political entities) is alarming. The groundswell effect is able to reach large groups of people in a short time (in an online environment), be it positive or negative.

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<sup>6</sup> LI, CH. – BERNOFF, J. *Spodná vlna. Ako podnikat' a víťaziť vo svete, ktorý zmenili sociálne médiá (Groundswell. How to do business and win in a world forever changed by social media)*. Bratislava : Eastone Books, 2010, pp. 9-10.

## 1.1 Groundswell development assumptions

According to the results of the latest international survey (year 2022) that took place in 28 countries and involved more than 36,000 respondents, it can be stated that trust in government institutions and the media is decreasing all over the world (not only in Slovakia)<sup>7</sup>. However, the position of the media is also worrying, as 46% of respondents consider the media and 48% of respondents identify the government as the driving force behind the current wave of society polarization. This is like a “vicious circle” and we, as a society, are a hamster running endlessly on his little wheel – to the point of disgust. The scepticism on such a scale has its roots in intolerance and overly-shared disputes between government institutions. The survey results show that 58% of people will buy products from selected brands based on their beliefs and values<sup>8</sup>. According to a recent Forbes survey<sup>9</sup> only 16% of US adults trust newspapers a lot or quite a lot, and 11% trust TV news. This is historically the lowest level of trust ever recorded (since 1993). The decline in the rating has been the most significant in the last two years (2021-2022).

In Slovakia, however, trust in the media hit all-time low, too. Extremely low trust in traditional media appears as a newly emerging phenomenon. According to the findings of a quantitative survey by E. G. Kriglerová, A. H. Chudžíková and J. Kadlečíková, the prevailing feeling among people is that the media<sup>10</sup> are owned by politicians or interest groups, and therefore it is impossible to trust the information they provide. In the following section, we outline the level of trust citizens of the Slovak Republic have in the media. It should be noted, however, that the media can be perceived as a tool for shaping and manipulating the public opinion with the aim of inducing fear (this phenomenon was prevalent in 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>11</sup> caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus). The results of the survey indicate that people have different opinions on the issue of trust in the Slovak media. While young people are gradually moving away from watching traditional

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<sup>7</sup> KEHOE, S. *Trust in government: a stark divide*. [online]. [2022-08-28]. Available at: <<https://www.edelman.com/>>.

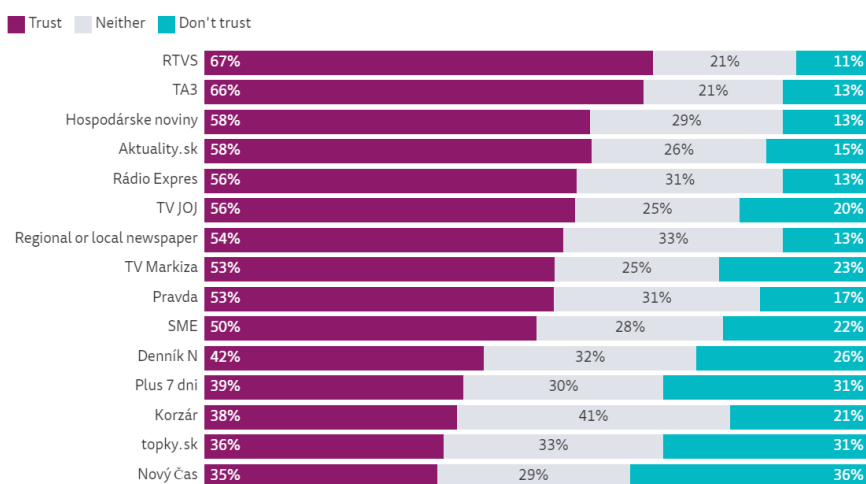
<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> PORTERFIELD, C. *Americans' Confidence In Media Falls To Record Lows, Poll Finds*. [online]. [2022-09-02]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/>>.

<sup>10</sup> See also: VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. – MINÁRIKOVÁ, J. *Pandémia COVID-19 a slovenský mediálny trh (The COVID-19 pandemic and the Slovak media market)*. In Kvetanová, Z. – Piatrov, I. – Martovič, M. *Marketing Identity 2020 COVID-2.0*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2020, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> See also: *How Covid-19 is affecting trust in journalism and the media*. [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available at: <<https://www.marketingweek.com/>>.

media, some residents of the Slovak Republic (especially those living in the capital of Slovakia) are prone to verifying information using several sources of information, employing critical thinking methods. Others (mostly living in Banská Bystrica and Prešov) turn away from traditional media completely and are more likely to trust alternative media (mostly on the Internet) because they perceive them to be more trustworthy. Older people seem to distrust traditional media. Nevertheless, they cited them as a source of information about events in Slovakia and in the world.<sup>12</sup> Statistics published by Reuters<sup>13</sup> aimed at the credibility of the Slovak media yield the following findings (see Graph 1).



Trust = % scored 6-10 on 10-point scale, Don't trust = 0-4, Neither = 5. Those that haven't heard of each brand were excluded.

**Graph 1 Ranking of the Slovak media according to the trustworthiness among population in %**

Source: Digital News Report, 2022.

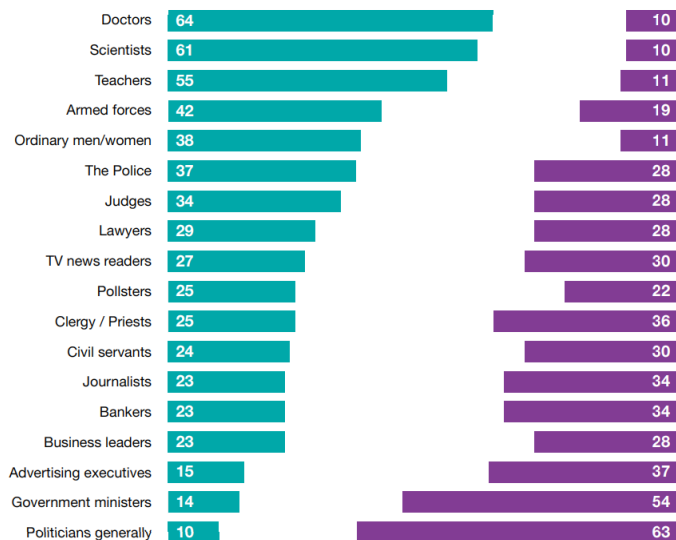
The public broadcaster RTVS is ranked highest (67% of people trust RTVS, 21% have no opinion, 11% do not trust RTVS). The second most trusted media

<sup>12</sup> KRIGLEROVÁ, E. G. – CHUDŽÍKOVÁ, A. H. – KADLEČÍKOVÁ, J. *Kvalitatívny výskum hodnôt na Slovensku – Analýza fokusových skupín (Qualitative research of values in Slovakia – Analysis of focus groups)*. [online]. [2022-08-17]. Available at: <<http://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Kvalitatívny-vyskum-hodnot-na-Slovensku.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> HEČKOVÁ – CHLEBCOVÁ, S. – SMITH, S. *Digital News Report – Slovakia*. [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available at: <<https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>>.

in Slovakia is TA3 (66% of people trust TA3, 21% have no opinion, 13% do not trust TA3), followed by *Hospodárske noviny* (58% trust *Hospodárske noviny*, 29% have no opinion and 13% do not trust *Hospodárske noviny*). The least trusted media in Slovakia is *Nový čas* (the most read online newspaper in Slovakia – according to the Google search data). Who to trust then? With regard to the above statistics, the most trustworthy media include RTVS, TA3, *Aktuality.sk*, *Rádio Expres*, TV JOJ. However, it is difficult to say who we can trust in 2022.

With regard to the above, the analysis of Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism<sup>14</sup> that aimed at monitoring the general credibility of specific figures such as doctors, scientists, government institutions, the media, etc. offers interesting findings. Graph 2 shows that the majority of respondents (as much as 19,570 – 64%) trust doctors the most. Scientists came second with 61%, followed by teachers with 55% and armed forces with 42%. The last three positions belong to advertising executives (15% of respondents trust them while 37% do not), government ministers (14% of respondents trust them while 54% do not) and politicians generally (10% of respondents trust them while 63% do not).



Graph 2 **Global trustworthiness ranking 2021**

Source: Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Monitor, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> HEČKOVÁ – CHLEBCOVÁ, S. – SMITH, S. *Digital News Report – Slovakia*. [online]. [2022-09-16]. Available at: <<https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>>.

In the process of finding an answer to the question who the most trustworthy authorities in the society are, we could pinpoint doctors, scientists and teachers. These three authorities are able to create groundswell and influence other community members to take notice of it. Disregarding the fact that some doctors use social communication platforms to promote paid content (e.g. cooperation with pharmaceutical companies), doctors in general are perceived as figures who have the society's welfare at heart. It is also expected that doctors would not share and spread speculative and manipulative information. However, if they do, medical associations should act swiftly and revoke medical license of doctors who share information that could have adverse effect on people's health.

## 1.2 Credibility of institutions in the context of the groundswell

In order to comprehend the ideas discussed in the scientific monograph, the term "groundswell" should be explained first. The previous section and the latest statistics pointed out the problem that stems from the decreasing trust not only in government institutions, but also the media (including public ones). From today's point of view, we note that the question of eroding trustworthiness in institutions is far-reaching. The problem may arise as a result of a failing information verification structure. From the point of view of transparency and the principles of journalistic ethics, the media should provide verified information, and disparage the existence of various alternative media which benefit from the lack of analysis and poor journalism.

The term groundswell was defined for the first time by Ch. Li and J. Bernoff (2008) as follows: "Groundswell is a social trend where people use social technologies to get what they need from each other rather than from traditional institutions such as companies".<sup>15</sup> The definition was revised by many authors, often holding differing opinions. Some authors claim groundswell is widespread and widely acceptable. We can only agree with that, otherwise there would be no research into it. The authors stated that people use technology to get what they need.

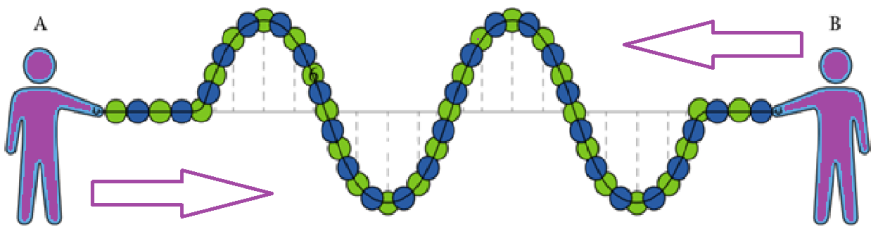
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<sup>15</sup> LI, CH. – BERNOFF, J. *Spodná vlna. Ako podnikat' a víťaziť vo svete, ktorý zmenili sociálne médiá (Groundswell. How to do business and win in a world forever changed by social media)*. Bratislava : Eastone Books, 2010, p. 10.



*Groundswell is able to replace official communication platforms and institutions.*

The question remains how to introduce the groundswell into the communication process so that it is accepted by the public without doubts. First of all, it is necessary to explain the term groundswell. Using abstraction, we can clarify a complex mechanism in a simple way. To better understand the term groundswell, let's discuss how a wave is formed.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 1 How waves are formed by people**

*Source: Nagwa, 2022.*

Figure 1 shows the “lifespan” of a wave. Using the two figures and several small colourful balls, our aim is to put two important factors into perspective. The first factor is the boundaries, i.e. the two guardrails. The wave is created by two people: person A and person B. The wave would exist even if we removed one of the figures, be it left person (A) or the right person (B). Had we removed them, the wave would have died naturally. However, since there is the other figure, the wave bounces back and forth between the figures. Between the two figures holding the wave there are several small balls that create one line a perfect wave. Even though that the balls are not identical from a visual point of view (they differ in colour), they form one complex line with peaks and dips. The resulting wave moves along the length and transfers the kinetic energy from the person A to the person B. The

<sup>16</sup> See also: CLAUSS, G. F. – KLEIN, M. – ONORATO, M. Formation of Extraordinarily High Waves in Space and Time. In *International Conference on Offshore Mechanics and Arctic Engineering*. 2011, Vol. 2, pp. 417-429.



small colourful balls form a wave. An important part of the depicted process are tiny green and blue balls that flow between people (forming the wave). If we remove these balls, we will not be able to see the line of the wave. The colourful balls depicted represent unofficial communication sources interpreting various information. Using the above abstraction, we see that there are many unofficial sources (social networks, community groups, discussion forums, databases, websites, blogs, open-source projects and many others.). Now that the mechanism of wave-formation is clear, we should focus on explaining the groundswell.



*Groundswell is any action put into motion not by an official institution, but third parties – people who are interested in a specific issue and would like to share their opinion.*

I. Piatrov states that the two-way flow of information and the interactive nature of social networks contributed to the emergence and development of the groundswell.<sup>17</sup> Public debates frequently give rise to the uncontrollable spread of inaccurate, distorted and false information<sup>18</sup>, due to secondary interpretation of events or information by other actors involved. Given that the concept of the groundswell is closely connected with the trust issues, in particular lack of trust in state institutions, governments, and the media, it should be noted that the groundswell is in no way a symbol of transparency. People tend to trust people who remind them of themselves. With the changing position of the social media user in the digital space, interests of the social media user change as well. Due to various external factors, the social network user who was just a passive recipient of information becomes an active content creator. Compared to mainstream media, digital media opens up space for active user involvement. Social media users and website visitors can comment, like and share posts or express their agreement or disagreement using emoticons.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> PIATROV, I. Social networking sites as a potential for the groundswell effect. In HORECKÝ, J. – SOCHOROVÁ, L. (eds.). *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu*, Brno (Social dilemma 2021 New approaches to knowledge management and protection on the Internet, Brno): Právní institut s. r. o., 2021, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. – MADLEŇÁK, A. – ŠVEC, M. Security Risks of Sharing Content Based On Minors By Their Family Members On Social Media In Times Of Technology Interference. In VRABEC, N. (eds.). *Media Literacy and Academic Research*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2021, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> ŠČEPKOVÁ, S. – ZAUŠKOVÁ, A. – KUBOVICS, M. Vplyv spodnej vlny na podnikateľské subjekty (The impact of the groundswell on business entities). In HORECKÝ, J. – SOCHOROVÁ, L. (eds.). *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu (Social dilemma 2021 New approaches to knowledge management and protection on the Internet)*. Brno : Právní institut s. r. o., 2021, p. 35.

According to Forbes<sup>20</sup> we should generally trust boring people. With regard to the groundswell, communities that are reliable, responsible, conscientious and without any major emotional fluctuations are considered to be trustworthy. However, the opposite is often true, as people tend to trust opinion leaders who are charismatic, funny, and have great social skills. These people are exemplary speakers and leaders. However, the leader of the group can also be a psychopath<sup>21</sup>, so it is important to employ critical thinking.

### 1.3 Online environment – where the groundswell takes place

The groundswell effect<sup>22</sup> is the most profound in the online environment, in particular on social networks, discussion forums, blogs and vlogs, comment sections of websites of official institutions where users and customers share their own opinions and thoughts without being asked by that particular institution to do so. In order to understand the groundswell in the online environment, it is necessary to define the online environment in terms of marketing communication. Online marketing communication is sometimes also called digital communication, as a specific digital carrier is needed to facilitate the exchange of data. According to L. Gelinas et al., the three major advantages of online communication include information, socialization, emotions<sup>23</sup>. Fast spread of information can undoubtedly be seen as one of the main reasons why the trend of digital natives<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> CHAMORRO-PREMUZIC, T. *Prečo veríme nesprávnym ľuďom? Aj inteligentní ľudia veria zlým partnerom a politikom* (Why do we trust the wrong people? Even intelligent people trust wrong partners and politicians). [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.sk/preco-verime-nespravnym-ludom-aj-inteligentni-ludia-veria-zlym-partnerom-a-politikom-2/>>.

<sup>21</sup> BODDY, C. R. Psychopathic leadership a case study of a corporate psychopath CEO. In *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2017, Vol. 145, No. 1, pp. 153-156.

<sup>22</sup> See also: JURIŠOVÁ, V. – ŠUVERÍKOVÁ, T. Ako sa vyhnúť Streisand efektu v komunikácii značky s publikom na sociálnych médiách? (How to avoid Streisand effect in brand communication with the audience on social media?). In HLADÍKOVÁ, V. – MADLEŇÁK, A. – KUPEC, V. (eds.). *Sociálne médiá a marketingová komunikácia: Eko-evolúcia alebo eko-revolúcia* (Social media and marketing communication: Eco-evolution or eco-revolution), Praha : NOL nakladatelství odborné literatury, 2022, p. 122.

<sup>23</sup> GELINAS, L. – MORRELL, W. – WHITE, S. A. – BIERER, B. E. Online Research Participant Communication: Balancing Benefits and Risks. In *Ethics & Human Research*, 2021, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> KUOPPAMÄKI, S. Digital Home: Life Transitions and Digital Domestic Practices in Later Life. In ZHOU, J. – SALVENDY, G. (eds.). *Human Aspects of IT for the Aged Population. Social Media, Games and Assistive Environments*, HCII : Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 2019, Vol. 11593. p. 396.

is gathering pace. This is also closely connected with the other two areas, namely socialization and emotions. It is thus obvious that the main role of social networks is to allow users to create groups, establish new communication channels and share experiences.

From the point of view of business entities, social networks play a crucial role as they help them reach a large audience in a short time, allow them to create organic content, viral marketing campaigns, increase website traffic, obtain valuable information and gather feedback from customers, create paid campaigns thank to which business entities can acquire new customers and also build awareness. Emotions are a unique category of benefits that the online environment offers. The art of creating such marketing strategies that will appeal to the recipient of the advertisement within the first few seconds is difficult to master, as average consumers are confronted with a number of (competing) products and brands every day. In order to attract consumers and distract them from the activity they primarily wanted to engage in online, they must create an innovative and inspiring campaign design that would appeal to the emotional side of a person. What role does the groundswell play here? In the online environment, the groundswell becomes e-groundswell (electronic groundswell). The prefix “e-” is of a huge importance here. If an Internet user closes a pop-up window, signs out of a social network, leaves a blog, a website, or turns off a vlog, the opportunity to create the groundswell disappears. Once the connection is restored, the groundswell effect may or may not occur. According to S. Ščepková et al., the groundswell could be characterized as a recipient and creator of content on social media, discussion forums, blogs or websites.<sup>25</sup>



*The way the groundswell works in the online environment is reminiscent of waves – information can make ripples in the information continuum or gather pace and become a tsunami.*

Whether or not the groundswell will have a dramatic impact depends on actors who create it. In some cases, the groundswell fails to gather pace and, therefore, has only a minimal or no impact on a particular business entity. Today's

<sup>25</sup> ŠČEPKOVÁ, S. – ZAUŠKOVÁ, A. – KUBOVICS, M. Vplyv spodnej vlny na podnikateľské subjekty (The impact of the groundswell on business entities). In HORECKÝ, J. – SOCHOROVÁ, L. (eds.). *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu (Social dilemma 2021 New approaches to knowledge management and protection on the Internet)*. Brno : Právní institut s. r. o., 2021, p. 35.

online world is full of negative comments, aggressive behaviour, name-calling, infested with trolls and spammers. In this regard, we are talking about people, i.e. actors of the groundswell, who can create, amplify and change the groundswell with their actions.

From the point of view of marketing communication, the groundswell represents a large audience that is open to interaction. However, it is important to state that due to differing opinions, confrontations cannot be ruled out. The position of the groundswell cannot be underestimated, as the effect it can create can be destructive, be it a brand or business entity. Specific communities create the groundswell on purpose, pursuing own agenda. Individuals standing behind the groundswell can, under certain circumstances, be sanctioned, it is possible to demand compensation from them or even exclude them from the community. However, the community cannot be neutralized and prevented from spreading its ideas as easily as an individual. Each member of a community can contribute his opinion to the already existing groundswell or can create it himself using his strong argumentative skills. However, we can talk about the groundswell only if several members of the community are present.



*Every individual can contribute to the groundswell information file. Even though an individual can create the groundswell, he cannot keep it alive for a long time. Therefore, he needs the support of people who identify with his opinion and decide to share this opinion further.*

### 1.3.1 Social media open the door to the groundswell

Social media platforms allow users to chat, share information, and create web content. Social media have many forms, e.g. blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networking sites, photo or video sharing sites, instant messaging services, podcast sites, widgets, virtual worlds, and many others. Billions of people around the world use social media to share information and connect with each other. On a personal level, social media make it easier for people to stay in touch with friends, family or old acquaintances, but also to learn new things, pursue their interests and, last but not least, have fun. On a professional level, social media can be used to learn new things, deepen one's knowledge in a certain field and build a professional network by connecting with other professionals (LinkedIn). It is the environment of social media where the groundswell is created, modified and

transformed. People in various community groups or on discussion forums interact with people who have similar or the same opinions, thus contributing to the creation of the groundswell. These people do not need to obtain information from official institutions, it is the opinions of the lay public shared on the social media that is sufficient for them (often impractical and even dangerous). In addition, social media allow business entities to have a conversation with the audience, get feedback from customers and promote their brand.



*The groundswell in the social media environment can be interpreted as follows: groundswell include activities such as commenting, sharing, liking a post or videos or advertisements on social networks (the groundswell can interact in a similar way with an advertising message).*

Social media represent communication distribution platforms, much like the Internet, mobile devices and tools as brands use them to advertise and present themselves. It is clear that social media has become a mainstay of many people's daily lives. They can be a useful tool<sup>26</sup>, especially when it comes to getting information from a single source and in a short time. Social media made lives of ordinary people<sup>27</sup> much easier. Interactivity and an open space for creating communities that interact with each other are backbones of social media. According to D. Ryan,<sup>28</sup> social media can be characterized as Internet software services that offer their users the opportunity to share their own opinions and thoughts, discuss various topics, but especially to interact with other social media users. Many entities use social media mainly to present themselves and communicate with their target audience. This is also a driving factor behind the exponential growth of social media use. From the point of view of marketing communication, social media offer countless possibilities, in particular the opportunity to get to know the target audience, open and interactive communication, improve the SEO, increase website traffic, help with A / B testing of products and campaigns (interactions with the audience).

<sup>26</sup> WESTERMAN, D. – SPENCE, P. R. – VAN DER HEIDE, B. Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of Information. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2014, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> See also: CHAFFEY, D. *Global social media statistics research summary 2022*. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>>.

<sup>28</sup> RYAN, D. *Understanding digital marketing: marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation*. 3rd edition. London : Kogan Page, 2014, pp. 53-66.

### 1.3.2 Conversation Prism 5.0

When discussing the groundswell, the conversation circle, which is known as Conversation Prism 5.0. (see Figure 2) should be discussed. The first Conversation Prism was created by B. Solis back in 2008. The model is a visual map of the social media users and landscape, showing the dynamics of interaction among online communities. Socialization is a natural human need. People not only need to form new relationships, but also develop their creative abilities.<sup>29</sup> This model builds on the study of digital ethnography, tracks the dominant position of social networks and categorizes them in terms of use and user experience on a day-to-day basis. The reasons for using the Conversation Prism 5.0 method vary. The goal is to strike up a conversation about social media, in particular Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn or Tumblr.



Figure 2 Conversation Prism 5.0

Source: eDigital Digital Marketing Agency, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> See also: SODA, G. – MANNUCCI, P. V. – BURT, R. S. Networks, Creativity, and Time: Staying Creative through Brokerage and Network Rejuvenation. In *Academy of Management Journal*, 2021, Vol. 64, No. 4, p. 26.

It seems that Conversation Prism 5.0 and the groundswell effect are closely related. Using the model, business entities can analyse, evaluate and especially compare the activities and online conversations of all parties involved in the creation of communication funnels. This model will help institutions, especially those technology-clueless ones, in generating new business opportunities by showcasing possible technological solutions (such as social networks). In this concept, the analysis and interpretation of conversations that take place on the Internet is dynamic, varied and alive, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of dispersion, which can cause changes in the way the actors of the model behave. The social environment in which opinions about various institutions are created and formed is interactive, and therefore it is necessary for institutions not only to observe the dynamics of the opinions of social network users, but also to interact with the communities, so as supplement their communication strategy.

### 1.3.3 Network effect

Following on from what has been said so far, it is necessary to mention the network effect. The network effect is the phenomenon by which the value or utility a user derives from a good or service depends on the number of users of compatible products. E-commerce sites, such as Etsy or eBay, have increased in popularity as they allowed users to take an active part in the communication process to a double effect – raising awareness of business entities and non-aggressive fan base building. It is understandable that some business entities are not able to achieve the number of users needed for the network effect to take hold. Congestion is a negative network effect where too many users can slow down a network, reduce its usefulness, and frustrate the remaining network users. Social media (Facebook, Twitter and others) is an example of a network effect. An important determinant of the network effect is accessibility. The more users are on social networks at a specific time, the more likely the audience is to be involved in the communication process. The network effect stands behind an exponential growth of users of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube. The changes that take place as a result of the networking effect are also worth noticing. With the increased interaction between social media users, the social media advertising is also gaining in popularity. The increase in the number of ads published means higher revenue for social media websites. As a result, websites evolve and are able to offer its users more services. Some of the leading, fastest-growing companies that owe their success to the network effect are



Apple<sup>30</sup> and Airbnb<sup>31</sup>. The network effect makes it possible for individuals to interact and socialize without the intervention of official institutions. Let us take a simple task, shopping in a supermarket, as an example – when consumers see that a product of a particular brand is selling quickly (there are only a few pieces of that product on the shelf), they tend to evaluate this information as an incentive to buy, because they assume that when the said product is so popular, others must be satisfied with it. It is assumed that positive network externalities could lead to a network effect.

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<sup>30</sup> See also: *Apple Music – Locking Customers in Through Network Effects*. [online]. [2022-09-21]. Available at: <<https://d3.harvard.edu/platform-digit/submission/apple-music-locking-customers-in-through-network-effects/>>.

<sup>31</sup> See also: *Trust Eats Network Effects at Airbed & Breakfast*. [online]. [2022-09-21]. Available at: <<https://d3.harvard.edu/platform-digit/submission/trust-eats-network-effects-at-airbed-breakfast/>>.



## 2 E-REPUTATION AS AN AFFERENT RESULT OF THE GROUNDSWELL ACTIVITIES

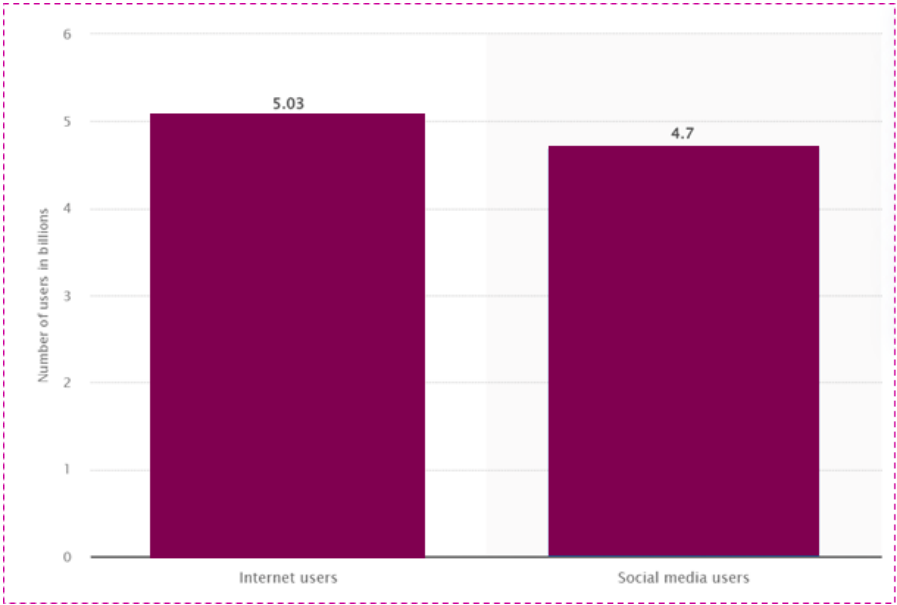
Consumer behaviour is constantly changing. We try to keep up with the progress of digital technologies. The number of digital natives is increasing year by year. As a result, it is important to pay attention to new inventions and tools, especially those in the field of social communication. Web 2.0 has brought along a space where users can gather, socialize and communicate. It is the virtual community of consumers that brings businesses innovative ideas and introduces newer and more dynamic ways of communication to the wider internet community. The groundswell brings many, often critical stimuli, which can be of great importance to businesses, especially if business entities shy away from implementing new ideas and rather work with years-proven, but often outdated, processes. In this chapter, we take a look at some digitization-related statistics. Moreover, the chapter also discusses selected marketing topics, trending communication platforms, and provides a critical view of the opportunities that digitization may bring. *If handled well, the groundswell can bring enormous benefits to businesses. Therefore, it should not be cast aside.*

With regard to the current trends in digitization and its possible development<sup>32</sup>, it is obvious that digital technologies are evolving faster than we do. Just take Industry 4.0 and its flagships like data centre, security, augmented reality, robots, big data, IoT, integrations and 3D printing. These might even prove to be a threat in the 22nd century. Based on the statistics and analyses by Broadband-search from 2022 (see Graph 3), it is clear that the current number of active Internet users has risen to more than 5 billion. The number of social media users is growing proportionally, and according to the same statistics, there are currently more than 4.5 billion social media users globally. Digitization affects us much

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<sup>32</sup> See also: ZAUŠKOVÁ, A. – KUSÁ, A. – KUBOVICS, M. – ŠČEPKOVÁ, S. – URMÍNOVÁ, M. Current state and prediction of the future of digitization as a part of Industry 4.0. In *Serbian Journal of Management*. 2022, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 116.

more than we realize. We are so immersed in technology that we don't have time to realize how digital tools affect us. Digitization also affects business entities, political leaders, artists and the educational system. Below is up-to-date statistics showing the growth curve of active internet users. We can see that the current number of active internet users (data valid for 2022) is at the level of 5.03 billion and the number of active social media users is at 4.7 billion.



Graph 3 The number of Internet and social media users (on a global scale)

Source: Broadbandsearch, 2022.

## 2.1 Digital transformation and digitization

The digital transformation entails a major change in the business model as such. F. Banfi and other authors state that digitization helps increase the purchasing power of consumers through new free services, while improving the availability of quality products and services.<sup>33</sup> New services can expand the fan base.

<sup>33</sup> BANFI, F. – BRESSAND, F. – HAZAN, E. – LABAYE, E. *Closing France's €100 billion digital gap*. [online]. [2022-10-07]. Available at: <<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/closing-frances-100-billion-digital-gap>>.

Fans could be converted into customers – customers are one of the prerequisites for making a profit. At the time of growing popularity of digital technologies, most business entities are introducing or planning to introduce innovations in the form of technological novelties. However, certain rules apply even in the field of implementation of technological innovations. Before any innovation is implemented, it is necessary to draw up an innovation model. Apart from taking into account the current economic standing of the business entity (available machines, equipment, people, finances, premises, etc.), the innovation model should also take into account two basic variables – where we are and where we would like to go.

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the main driving forces behind the digital transformation. As a result of the pandemic, developed and technology-oriented countries began to use new technologies especially in sectors like education<sup>34</sup>, healthcare<sup>35</sup>, e-commerce<sup>36</sup>, but also in many other sectors. We live in the digital century. Forbes<sup>37</sup> points out the importance of digitization. Would you make an appointment with a doctor who is tens of kilometres away from you without using your computer or phone or tablet? Of course, everything can be questioned and counterarguments are always at hand. Let us look into the issue from another point of view. Is it possible to eat without cooking? Yes, in today's digital age it is possible. All you need to do is to make a few clicks in the Bolt Food app. The same goes for ordering a taxi – your ride is just a few clicks away (Bolt application). Simple, fast and effective. Using your smartphone, you can connect with someone on the other side of the world, you can turn the heating or air conditioning on or off (if you have a smart home). There are various online learning platforms, it is even possible to graduate from some universities without having to attend lectures in person. In 2022, we can do many activities through a smartphone. It is remarkable how digitization makes life easier for people and institutions.

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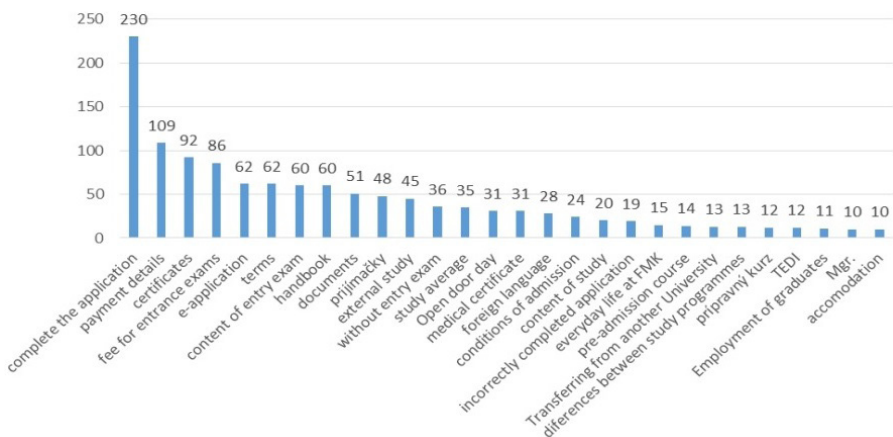
<sup>34</sup> Education responses to COVID-19: Embracing digital learning and online collaboration. [online]. [2022-09-05]. Available at: <<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/education-responses-to-covid-19-embracing-digital-learning-and-online-collaboration-d75eb0e8/>>.

<sup>35</sup> KIM, S-H. – SONG, H. *How Digital Transformation Can Improve Hospitals' Operational Decisions*. [online]. [2022-09-07]. Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2022/01/how-digital-transformation-can-improve-hospitals-operational-decisions>>.

<sup>36</sup> BERTHENE, A. *Coronavirus pandemic adds \$219 billion to US ecommerce sales in 2020-2021*. [online]. [2022-09-01]. Available at: <<https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/article/coronavirus-impact-online-retail/>>.

<sup>37</sup> REISS, R. *After Q1 2020, Digital Transformation Is No Longer an Option*. [online]. [2022-09-19]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertreiss/2020/03/30/after-q1-2020-digital-transformation-is-no-longer-an-option/?sh=3ea744ca584c>>.

P. Murár<sup>38</sup> states that the Faculty of Mass Media Communication UCM (hereinafter referred to as FMK) implemented an “online chat” function on the website to promote the university. The aim was to estimate how many website visitors make use of chat support so as to estimate staffing requirements for providing support via chat and identify key terms of interest of prospective students interested in studying at FMK. The pilot phase of online chat testing was launched on January 1 and lasted till March 31, 2016. During this period, 1,396 enquiries were resolved through the chat. The issues that visitors to the school’s website inquired about via online chat (Graph 4, lower right in the orange rectangle) are shown in Figure 3. In 230 cases people were interested in “fill in the application”, 109 people were interested in the “payment details”, and 10 people were interested in “TEDI Employment of graduates” as well as “Mgr. accommodation”.



Graph 4 Categories of questions asked in the online chat

Source: MURÁR, P. Chat as a communication-marketing platform for academic institutions. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2016, Vol. 12, No. 5, p. 113.

The research of P. Murár is a fine example of tools implementation. The “online chat” function proved to be a popular website feature at the time of testing, and that is why this function is still available on the faculty’s website today (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

<sup>38</sup> MURÁR, P. Chat as a communication-marketing platform for academic institutions. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*. 2016, Vol. 12, No. 5, p. 111.

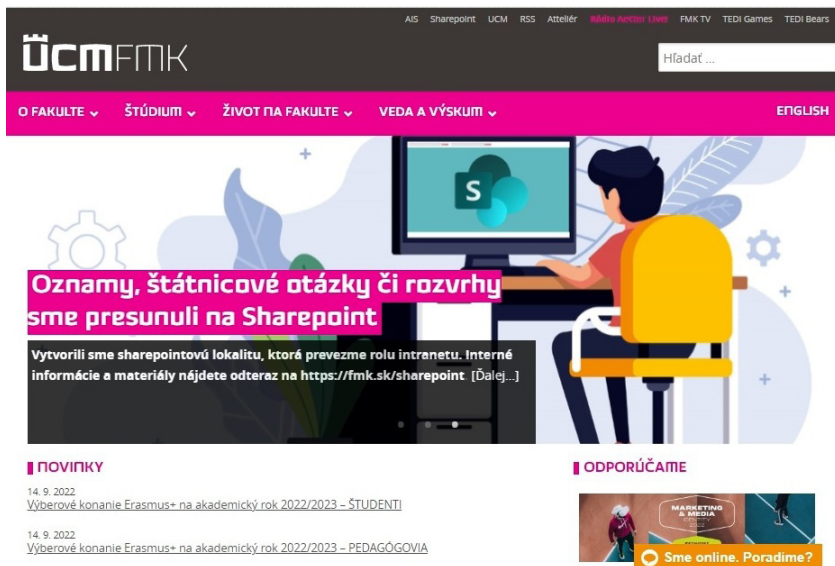


Figure 3 FMK website and chat window (bottom right)

Source: FMK UCM, 2022.

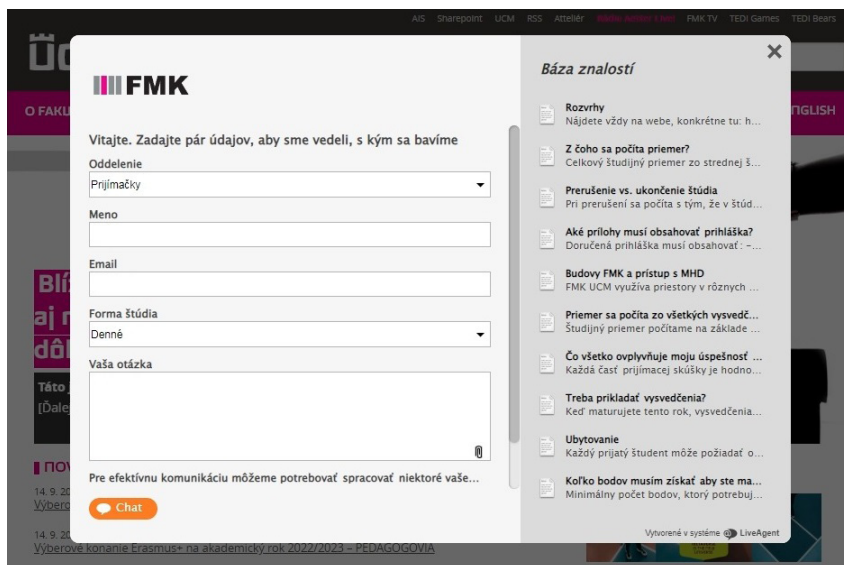


Figure 4 Chat window on the FMK's website

Source: FMK UCM, 2022.

Changes in the environmental performance caused by the boom in digitalization mean further research into the issue is necessary. Publications, Internet posts and discussion forums, all point to the fact that digitization entails two-fold effect. M. Ghobakhloo and M. Fathi state in their study<sup>39</sup> that digitization might be a useful tool in reducing electricity consumption, as it contributes to energy efficiency through the use of smart energy production and distribution devices. J. Chen et al.<sup>40</sup> share a similar view, as they point out that the carbon emission rate in China has decreased since the new technological devices were implemented. The two above research studies serve as an example of good practice in the deployment of digital technologies and the digitization in the field of environmental sustainability<sup>41</sup>. However, examples of good practice could also be found in other industries, too. The technological infrastructure improves the coordination and standardization of processes also in the field of travel<sup>42</sup>, financial services<sup>43</sup> and in many other sectors of production and services.

Innovations and new technology affect us more than we realize. Technologies shape our world from morning till evening. In the morning, we wake up to an alarm clock that we set using an application on our phone. Although this is a smart solution, the problem is that we look at our mobile device immediately after waking up (and not just until the moment we turn off the alarm clock). However, the fact that many people prefer a smartphone instead of a classic alarm clock may not seem to be a problem. The use of touch screen devices, e.g. smartphones or tablets is becoming increasingly common among teenagers. With the advancing technology, we find it convenient and increasingly normal to pay for groceries or buy theatre or cinema tickets or even train tickets via smartphone using Apple Wallet / Google Wallet or bank applications. In their paper, Horwood

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<sup>39</sup> GHOBAKHLOO, M. – FATHI, M. Industry 4.0 and opportunities for energy sustainability. In *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 2021, Vol. 295, Art. No. 126427.

<sup>40</sup> CHEN, J. – GAO, M. – MA, K. – SONG, M. Different Effects of Technological Progress on China's Carbon Emissions Based on Sustainable Development. In *Business Strategy and Environment*. 2020, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> See also: DE GIACOMO, M. R. – FREY, M. How do eco-innovations affect the change of the sustainable business model? Case studies on green energy projects. In *Sinergie Italian Journal of Management*. 2022, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 261.

<sup>42</sup> *The new tourism trend – How digitalisation is revolutionising the travel industry*. [online]. [2022-10-06]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/storyworks/travel/the-new-tourism-trend/technology-redefine-tourism-industry>>.

<sup>43</sup> BENNI, N. *Digital finance and inclusion in the time of COVID-19: Lessons, experiences and proposals*. Rome : FAO, 2021. pp. 5-14.

and Anglim reported<sup>44</sup> that 65% of young adults,  $n = 393$ , spent more time on their smartphone than they thought and 54% of students surveyed reported that they use their smartphone when they should be doing other things. However, it is also worrying to find that the daily use of these devices has an impact not only on the mental and physical health<sup>45, 46</sup> but also on behaviour<sup>47</sup>, sleep quality<sup>48, 49</sup> (children sleep less than adults), musculoskeletal symptoms<sup>50</sup>, relationships,<sup>51</sup> as well as cyberbullying. Digital technologies make life and business activities easier for people and institutions, but the question remains whether they do more harm than good. The next chapter focuses on the way people socialize, the reasons why we try to assert our opinion on social networks and what impact it can have on society.

## 2.2 Communication on social media

Social communication (or pragmatic language) refers to the way children (and adults) use language to communicate with people in different social situations. Through social communication people form friendships and build social relationships with other people. Social communication is also important in academia, as many school activities rely on group work and peer-to-peer communication.

<sup>44</sup> HORWOOD, S. – ANGLIM, J. Self and other ratings of problematic smartphone use: The role of personality and relationship type. In *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2021, Vol. 116, Art. No. 106634.

<sup>45</sup> ABI-JAOUDE, E. – NAYLOR, T. – PIGNATIELLO, A. Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health. In *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 2020, Vol. 192, No. 6, p. E138.

<sup>46</sup> See also: LANAJ, K. – JOHNSON, R. E. – BARNES, CH. M. Beginning the workday yet already depleted? Consequences of late-night smartphone use and sleep. In *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 2014, Vol. 124, No 1, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> NASUTION, M. Factors affecting smartphone addiction in children. In *Proceeding International Seminar on Islamic Studies*. 2021, Vol. 2, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup> WANG, P-Y. – CHEN, K-L. – YANG, S-Y. – LIN, P-H. Relationship of sleep quality, smartphone dependence, and health-related behaviors in female junior college students. In *PLoS ONE*. 2019 Vol. 14, No. 4. p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> SCHWEIZER, A. – BERCHTOLD, A. – BARRENSE-DIAS, Y. – AKRE, CH. – SURIS. Adolescents with a smartphone sleep less than their peers. In *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 2017, Vol. 176, p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> EITIVIPART, A.-CH. (eds.). Musculoskeletal Disorder and Pain Associated with Smartphone Use: A Systematic Review of Biomechanical Evidence. In *Hong Kong Physiotherapy Journal*. 2018, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 86.

<sup>51</sup> SCHOKKENBROEK, J. M. – HARDYNS, W. – PONNETA, K. Phubbed and curious. The relation between partner phubbing and electronic partner surveillance. In *Computers in Human Behavior*. Vol. 137, Art. No. 107425.

Social skills enable people to communicate clearly and effectively with others. We use our social skills when we notice social cues in the people and situations around us. We pay attention to what others are doing and what their reactions might mean.<sup>52</sup>

There has been a lot of discussion about the issue of branding on social media. Facebook has over 955 million active users who log in at least once every 30 days. Half of these active users log in every day. On average, consumers spend nearly one-third of their daily time “consuming” social media. Because of the popularity and ability of virtual communities to connect diverse and like-minded people and businesses, some researchers enthusiastically encourage businesses to create profiles on social media and use them to their advantage. On the other hand, brands can be labelled as “unwelcome guests” on social media, suggesting that social media is for connecting people with people, not brands with people. The issue of the relevance of the presence of business entities on social media remains unresolved and opens room for further research.

### 2.2.1 Important social skills

Research suggests that social skills children show in kindergarten are good predictors of their success in adulthood. While the academia (schools) is primarily considered a place where children learn to read, write and count, it is also a place where children develop their social skills. Thanks to social communication skill we are able to form friendships and build social relationships with other people. Social communication is also important in academia, as many school activities rely on group work and peer-to-peer communication. In the later school years, these basic social communication and pragmatic language skills pave the way for the development of higher-level language skills that enable us to use abstract thinking, deductive verbal reasoning, and understand connections and associations between concepts (e.g. advanced verbal stock, word relations).

#### **Main social communication skills:**

1. *using language for different reasons*: also refers to using language in different ways, such as greeting (e.g. hello), sharing information (e.g. “I’m going to the store”), demanding / requesting (e.g. “I would like some more juice, please”), protest (e.g. “No, thank you”), etc.

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<sup>52</sup> HADLEY, P. A. – SCHUELE, C. M. Facilitating Peer Interaction. In *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1998, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 27.



2. *changing and adapting language according to the social situation or listener*: refers to the way we change the language we use depending on the context. For example, we talk to a child in a different way than to we talk to an adult or to a friend or to a teacher.
3. *following the conversation and speaking rules*: these “rules” are often implied and not explicitly taught. They include eye contact, taking turns when speaking, staying on topic, using and understanding facial expressions and body language, and understanding social norms such as keeping an appropriate distance from the speaker. It is important to note that these rules may vary from one culture to another.

Social networks are social platforms that belong to a broader group referred to as social media.<sup>53</sup> There is no doubt that consumer behaviour is constantly changing due to various life and societal situations. We believe that the digitization of society does not bring only positive changes. Each change also entails certain risks. When talking about risks in online space, cyberbullying<sup>54</sup> is undoubtedly a serious issue. Cyberbullying was classified as a criminal offense on 1 July 2021. At this point, it is important to point out the fact that the number of digital users is growing rapidly. One of the latest statistics<sup>55</sup> published by datareportal.com points to an increase in social media users. In this regard, one can argue about the changes in the behaviour of the society on a global level. Predicting the future behaviour of the next generations is almost impossible. The statistics on the number of Internet users show that in January 2021, there was 4.66 billion users around the world, which is 316 million, or 7.3% of users more than in 2020. Global Internet penetration is currently at 59.5%.<sup>56</sup>

Social media and social networks are closely related to the “being online” trend. To proceed any further, both terms should be defined. According to A. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, social media can be defined as a grouping of pages, programs or applications based on the ideological and technological nature of Web 2.0 accessible via the Internet.<sup>57</sup> The essence of social networks is to share emo-

<sup>53</sup> KRAJČOVIČ, P. – RADOŠINSKÁ, J. – VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds). *Slovník vybraných pojmů z masmediální a marketingové komunikace (Dictionary of selected terms from mass media and marketing communication)*. 1st Edition. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2021, p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> See also: KURUCOVÁ, Z. Nebezpečné fenomény na sociálnych sieťach (Dangerous phenomena on social networks). In *Pedagogická revue*. 2019, Vol. 2, No. 66, p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> KEMP, S. *Digital 2021: Global overview report*. [online]. [2022-08-02]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> KAPLAN, A. – HAENLEIN, M. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. In *Business Horizons*, 2010, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 61.

tions, opinions and experiences of users<sup>58</sup> with other users of a specific social network or a selected community of people.<sup>59</sup> According to C-H. Tseng and L-F. Wei the growing number of customers who shop and communicate online represents new opportunities mainly for building and maintaining long-term relationships, as well as for obtaining feedback quickly. Business entities benefit from customers who share positive feedback and write reviews based on their own experience with the product on social media or business entity's websites.<sup>60</sup> The issue of writing reviews and sharing of opinions among users of social networks will be addressed in the next part of the scientific monograph.

Communication on social networks is often automatically associated with a lot of expectations among consumers. Some consumer expectations may be fulfilled, while some consumers report being disappointed, which is the opposite effect than what business entities probably hoped for.<sup>61</sup> In our opinion, it is desirable to create a space for users of social networks where they can express their own opinions and ideas. If the business entity offers its customers and fans a space to express their thoughts, consumers feel that their opinion is important. This helps build and maintain a good relationship between the customer / fan and the business entity. Social media are an irreplaceable factor in the citizen journalism as they are a source of information and tips on various topics.<sup>62</sup> Comments left by potential customers also support brand building and boost brand awareness.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. – TOMOVÁ, M. Online marketing communication of restaurants in context of COVID-19 pandemic. In KVETANOVÁ, Z. – BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. – MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity 2020. COVID-2.0*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> See also: MANDYBUR, J. *Facebook accused of targeting "insecure" children and young people, report says*. *Mashable*. [online]. [2022-10-31]. Available at: <<https://mashable.com/article/facebook-leaked-report-advertising-children>>.

<sup>60</sup> TSENG, C.-H. – WEI, L.-F. The efficiency of mobile media richness across different stages of online consumer behavior. In *International Journal of Information Management*. 2020, Vol. 50, p. 355.

<sup>61</sup> BEŇO, I. Zabudnime na mýty spojené so sociálnymi sieťami. Nemusíme byť aktívni všade a stále, buďte tam, kde je aj váš zákazník (Let's debunk the social networks myths. We don't have to be active everywhere and all the time, be where your customer is). In POLGÁRI, Š. (eds.). *123 typov pre online a affiliate marketing (123 tips for online and affiliate marketing)*. Bratislava : Affiliate network Dognet, 2020, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> KAČINCOVÁ PREDMERSKÁ, A. – ŠVECOVÁ, M. Komunikácia novinárov na sociálnych sieťach: vlastná iniciatíva alebo povinnosť? (Communication of journalists on social networks: own initiative or obligation?) In BUČKOVÁ, Z. – KAČINCOVÁ PREDMERSKÁ, A. – RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L. (eds.). *Megatrendy a médiá 2019 – Digital Universe (Megatrends and media 2019 – Digital Universe)*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2019, p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. – TOMOVÁ, M. Online marketing communication of restaurants in context of COVID-19 pandemic. In KVETANOVÁ, Z. – BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. – MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.). *Marketing Identity 2020. COVID-2.0*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2020, p. 25.

Social networks offer a space for bringing together communities and creating their own content called UGC (user-generated content). In 2021 there were 4.20 billion social media users worldwide. In 2020 alone, the number increased by 490 million, which represents a year-on-year increase in users of more than 13%. Based on available data, this is an increase by 53%.<sup>64</sup> The increased interest in social networks also reflects the eagerness of their users to use them regardless of age.<sup>65</sup>

The statistics above focused on digitization at the global level. As reported above, the number of people using the Internet increased by an average of 7.3%, and the number of social media users increased by more than 13% globally. Below are statistics regarding digitization in the Slovak Republic. The data reported hereunder are based on statistics from the European Statistical Office Eurostat, which states that the number of Internet users increased by 6% year-on-year in 2020, i.e. almost 90% of the population of Slovak Republic uses the Internet.<sup>66</sup> In comparison with global data, Slovakia does not lag behind other countries, because the given data do not differ from the European average. The survey conducted by the agency Go4insight on a representative sample of 1,000 respondents aged 15 to 79 show that 86% of the population uses social media at least once a month, while 61% of Slovaks use social media on a daily basis<sup>67</sup>. The statistics also show that the use of social media is the most popular activity of the majority of Slovaks. The use of social networks is one of the most frequent activities that Slovaks do on the Internet.

By interpreting the previous statistics, we determined the current state of social media use not only globally but also in terms of Slovak users. Based on the synthesis of the above statistical data, it could be stated that not only Slovaks but also people around the world are becoming increasingly interested in the online world, as reflected in the growing number of new social media users, active or

<sup>64</sup> KEMP, S. Digital 2021: Global overview report. [online]. [2022-08-02]. Available at: <<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>>.

<sup>65</sup> *Social Media – Statistics & Facts*. [online]. [2022-10-28]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/>>.

<sup>66</sup> *Internet používa 9 z 10 Slovákov. Najčastejšie vyhľadávame informácie o koronavíruse a ako finančne zvládnuť pandémie (9 out of 10 Slovaks use the Internet. Information about the coronavirus and how to manage the pandemic financially are the most sought-after terms)*. [online]. [2022-10-27]. Available at: <<https://www.finreport.sk/ekonomika/internet-pouziva-9-z-10-slovakov-najcastejsie-vyhladavame-informacie-o-koronaviruse-a-ako-financne-zvladnut-pandemie/>>.

<sup>67</sup> *Koľko Slovákov je na sociálnych sieťach (How many Slovaks are on social networks)?* [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.go4insight.com/>>.

passive visitors to discussion forums, YouTube video followers and online shoppers. As more and more consumers spend time online, business entities should re-evaluate their communication strategies. Lot of business entities created their own e-shops and use digital platforms to expand their business activities and make their marketing activities more attractive. Many business entities have realized that by focusing exclusively on offline marketing communication tools they may lose not only regular but also occasional customers. Digital platforms and social media have become immensely popular over the last 2 years. According to recent trends, there is nothing stopping these platforms from gaining in popularity. Given the results of the studies we were working with, we can predict that the number of people using social media will continue to grow rapidly in the next 5 years, thus giving more space to the groundswell. Therefore, it can further be assumed that groundswell might soon become a strong aspect in the communication mix of business entities. It is also assumed that the groundswell can later significantly change the way information is provided, thus herald further changes in the way business entities communicate in online space.

As we near towards the end of the sub-chapter, the most important findings should be summarized. Social networks vastly impact our lives, that goes without saying. Therefore, it is understandable that also business entities adapt their communication strategies to reflect this and move to the online environment. The digital transformation and its global impact brought to the forefront the groundswell trend. Groundswell is most profound on popular social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. The analyses and theoretical studies show that social media helps business entities keep in touch with social media users, thus boosting their prospects. On a global scale, the penetration of social media, the increasing number of social media users, but also the advancement of the functions of popular social networks drive digitization forward. Based on the above information, we believe that it is important to explore the issue using selected methods of scientific research and interpret important knowledge and conclusions based on the findings reached.

## **2.3 Reputation management**

The issue of building and maintaining good reputation is a challenge, especially these days as hoaxes and critical or even aggressive opinions dominate the online world. Building a positive image among fans is not an easy task as a business entity has only a limited power over it. The fact that the lifespan of the written opinion published on the Internet is long and the time it takes for information

to disseminate is short, may (or may not) contribute to the improvement of public opinion on certain issues. Criticism or false accusations spread offline do not have as damaging an effect on business entities as those spread online and, thus, do not have such powerful devastating effects. The online world is a great place for the groundswell to grow and spread. Negative information published online have the power to change the opinion of those who read it, e.g. a person we follow or are friends with on the social network leaves a negative comment. Information published online could be there for a long time<sup>68</sup>. Social media are able to influence the opinions and thoughts of consumers, thus inferring a loss of control over the spread of information by individual media users. As business entities face enormous pressure from commenting and discussing contributors, their reaction to information spread this way is extremely important as it may give rise to the groundswell. Problems with reputation management are nothing new and since the rise of social media, these problems are even more common. Reputation management on social media has been subject of countless studies. The groundswell proved to be an issue in PR management reputation management, too. The groundswell is powerful enough to influence public opinion. In such a case we talk about influencer groundswell.

### 2.3.1 Dialectics of reputation management relationships

Reputation in general represents an important aspect in business-consumer relationship. The twenty-first century is all about digitalization. Digitalization is a phenomenon studied by many experts who also deal with predictive models. The digital age has brought consumers many advantages, mainly fast availability of large amount of information. One of the most important determinants of reputation is the repeatability of (positive) information. Positive reviews have a power to persuade undecided consumers to buy a product with positive review and thus shorten their purchase journey. There are many ways in which customers who have tried a product or service can voice their opinion (negative, positive and critical). The social network Facebook (Meta) is one of the most popular social media platforms. Reputation management is a continuous process the aim of which is to maintain favourable relations with the audience, and mitigate the impact of any problematic situations. There exist three reputation models. The first is a favourable reputation. A favourable reputation of the business entity encourages other consumers (mostly those who do not yet know the brand) to be

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<sup>68</sup> SHELTON, P. – RAUSCHNABEL, P. – HONEYCUTT, J. M. *The Dark Side of Social Media: Psychological, Managerial, and Societal Perspectives*. Amsterdam : Elsevier Science, 2019, p. 54.

active and loyal. Being active means buying a product / service, giving a “like” to a post, spreading the groundswell and other positive activities. The second is a negative reputation. A negative reputation taking a hold of online communication platforms (blogs, social networks, discussion forums, open-source projects) can negatively affects the business entity, damage its reputation, reduce profitability, and cause costly financial problems that might result in bankruptcy.

### **2.3.2 Building a positive image in the online environment**

A positive online reputation is a sign of quality not only for the younger generation of customers (Generation Z) but also for other generations. If people talk about a business entity online, this digital footprint is preserved and, due to the mechanism of the complex algorithms of the Google search engine, the business entity can get a better position in the search ranking. Nowadays, online reputation largely influences not only the purchasing decisions of customers (online reputation also have an impact on purchasing decisions made offline environment) but also their overall behaviour, in particular people share their personal experiences with the business entity with family members, friends and acquaintances, or with total strangers via social media. In view of digitalization of business and innovations brought by technological development, business entities should invest time, money and energy in maintaining and improving their reputation (offline and online) as it is reputation that stimulates consumers in their decision to invest their funds in products and services. Since currently many companies do not pay much attention to this fact, it is necessary to point out advantages it brings and basic principles it stands on.

Offline reputation management has been researched from every side possible. A specific aspect of assessment and criticism in the offline world is ephemerality. Opinions voiced are not captured on any medium, they stay only in the memory of their recipients. The advent of technology meant that information could be stored on digital carriers that can be preserved for tens to hundreds of years. The life of information in the online environment is almost eternal, and, therefore, might represent a threat in some situations. Reputation turbulence is a prerequisite for a decrease in trust. This can adversely affect the company’s reputation for a long period of time. The reputation of business entities also depends on the behaviour of consumers, who leave a digital footprint in the online environment. An important tool in online reputation management is online reviews.

Online reviews forever changed the way we shop. They not only affect the way consumers shop but also how businesses react to customer’s feedback.

Online reviews are so powerful that they are able to change the functioning of marketing systems at the micro, meso and macro levels. From a marketing perspective, online reviews can be compared to native advertising. For a better understanding of the issue, we have to clarify what native advertising is. The term native advertising refers to a form of advertising that adapts to the content of the distribution platform. It has been a part of marketing for many years, but it is currently coming to the fore mainly thanks to the fact that consumers are becoming increasingly immune to advertising. Native advertising placed online (or even offline) usually does not feature any distracting elements, which means that recipients sometimes do not notice that the advertising is an advertising. The native advertising could be broken down to the following elements: native advertising in the feed, native advertising in search engines, native advertising in videos, sponsored listings. Let us take a closer look at each of those. Native advertising in the feed represents a typical example of native advertising in search, where the sponsored content is directly embedded in the actual content published, like public relations articles (PR articles), sponsored posts on social networks (most often found on the social networks Facebook and Instagram). This type of advertising must be placed within similar-minded content, so that the context is not disturbed and the ad looks natural. The second type of native advertising is native ads in search engines. The best example (and one of the classic ones) is the PPC (pay-per-click) format. The hierarchical structure, colour, content structure and size and display method of ads corresponds to organic search results. The third type is native advertising in videos, which means product placement. Product placement – often referred to as a non-intrusive advertising format, is a method of advertising placement that is mainly used by market leaders such as Apple or Coca-Cola. In practice, product placement represents an unconventional way of presenting a specific brand, while the recipient (in the context of the film, we can speak of the viewer) does not notice that a product of a specific brand was placed in the content he consumes. This is an unconventional way of placing native advertising. Product placement is popular in films. It can either be done through active display (the product is used – e.g. an actor drinks Coca-Cola) or passive display – a product is placed in the background of the event. The last form of native advertising is sponsored listings. Similar to PPC advertising formats in search engines, sponsored listings have the same format as those organic. Sponsored listings are popular with price comparison websites such as Heureka, Pricemania or Kauf, as well as advertising portals. A collaboration between a publisher and an advertiser could also be considered a form of native advertising, even though it forms a separate category. We have outlined several approaches to the issue of positive image building in



the online world. Now, we will focus on the R (regularity) -R (range) -R (reaction) methodology. Regularity, in this case, is the continuous mapping of content published online (it is difficult to monitor any situation in the offline world on a regular basis). Range means the possibility of reaching out to the target groups (audience), thus enticing them to share their user experiences with the product or service *en masse* and help build positive reputation. Last but not least – reaction. Reaction points to the necessity to respond to questions, praise or other form of written communication published by online users (social networks, blogs or other websites).

### **2.3.3 Principles of building a positive image (not only) in the online environment**

Due to the growing popularity of social media, providing services and products via these platforms is becoming a matter of course. Business entities can quickly and efficiently solve customer problems via social networks. By doing so, they create and maintain a loyal customer base. Research by Convince & Convert<sup>69</sup> states that 42% of consumers expect a response to a social media complaint within 60 minutes, and nearly one-third expect a response as early as / up to half an hour, depending on the context. Monitoring social media platforms and responding quickly to criticism can help businesses build strong relationships with customers. In the following section, we list 9 model situations that, in our opinion, can help businesses build a positive reputation online:

1. building a strong corporate culture and maintaining positive relations at the workplace,
2. building partnerships and cooperation with partners who hold the same values,
3. the priority is the customer's feeling when he leaves the store or visits the website or reads a post on social networks,
4. products and services are intended for all customers, regardless of education or income = the goal is to communicate that products and services are intended for all consumers,
5. communicate in a friendly way regardless of the nature of comments,
6. building trust with employees and provide them with room for growth and development,
7. create valuable content that will benefit the target audience,

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<sup>69</sup> KLEIN, E. *How to Choose the Right Platform for Your Social Media Marketing*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-media/how-to-choose-the-right-platform-for-your-social-media-marketing/>>.



8. discuss problems and suggestions for improvement with the public (e.g. through social media) and make use of and implement recommendations,
9. lead a dialog, but especially listen to what people say.

By taking account of the previous nine principles, it is possible to minimize impact negative comments might have on the reputation of a business entity, thus averting crises or controversies.

## 2.4 WoM marketing or the traditional way of building a positive image

The abbreviation WoM – Word of Mouth means any oral communication between the originator of the information and its recipient. With regard to marketing communication, this process can be described as a means of oral disseminating information about products or services of specific business entities and brands by utilizing recommendations, reviews and assessments of specific products and services. In order to set the communication strategy right, understanding consumer behaviour is key. By collecting feedback from the audience, the business entity can obtain valuable information, recommendations and improvement tips. All these can directly affect the final output the business offers in the market. The word-of-mouth was especially relevant in the time before digitization, that is, before new electronic communication channels were created. Consumers, a lot of times unknowingly, spread word of mouth just by talking about products and services. By doing so, they are contributing to native advertising. At the same time, WoM, in its very essence, is very similar to the groundswell. Groundswell is an informal way of sharing information.<sup>70</sup> While WoM is a targeted effort of a consumer interested in a particular product or service, groundswell is a set of sophisticated activities that are pre-planned and hierarchical.

For a better understanding of the issue, let us present an example. We decide to buy a laptop of a particular brand because we are not satisfied with our old laptop. We will bring up this issue during a coffee break talk with our friend. We will not mention the brand, as we have not yet done our research. Based on her own positive experience, a friend recommends a laptop of a specific brand. We accept her opinion, but we do not identify with it. We decide to visit a discussion forum (e.g. Modrý koník). After posting a discussion post and reading through answers, we want to find out whether information shared by the friend of ours is

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<sup>70</sup> For a better understanding of the issue of the groundswell, we recommend re-reading the Chapter 1.

true – buy a high-end laptop to save time (faster processing time). In the meantime, the discussion post will give rise to the groundswell. As we are still not sure whether investing in a high-end laptop is the right choice for us (we are still not convinced of the credibility of the friend's claim), we will decide to turn to social media and seek help there. By publishing a post on various technology and innovation-oriented groups on the social network Facebook, we want to verify the claim of our friend, i.e. whether the laptop of the specific brand is a really good choice for us. Users of the social network comment on the post, share their experience, and also comment on comments of others, thus heating the discussion up and creating hostile atmosphere.

By providing the readers with the model situation we wanted to clarify the way the word-of-mouth marketing works and spreads. We deliberately set the issue in three different environments. In the first part, we defined the classic WoM marketing (two friends talking about a specific product, expressing their opinions and sharing experience). The second part took place online – on a discussion forum, where people exchange their opinions and share experience without knowing each other. As participants do not know each other, and do not know each other's communication style, that may give rise to misunderstandings and a lot of aggression. The third part of the example also takes place online – on social networks. A post inquiring other people's experience with a laptop of a certain brand was posted in technology and innovation-oriented groups (seeking expert advice) on Facebook. A discussion under the post lives its own life. Some people's replies are brief and factual, some people just react by using available buttons under the post (like, a heart, etc.) while some resort to criticism, verbal abuse (in some cases not at all related to the original topic) or show borderline aggressive behaviour that is disrespectful at best. This is the right time to ask why some people resort to aggressive and critical reactions on social media. A social group<sup>71, 72</sup> can be defined as two or more individuals who interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and collectively have a sense of unity. However, a community is not the same as a social group. A community can be defined as a community of people who, regardless of differences and different character traits

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<sup>71</sup> An issue of social groups is discussed in greater detail in: DE SOUTER, L. – BRAEM, S. – GENSCOW, O. – BRASS, M. – CRACCO, E. Social group membership does not modulate automatic imitation in a contrastive multi-agent paradigm. In *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*. 2021, Vol. 74, No. 4, p. 751.

<sup>72</sup> An issue of social groups is discussed in greater detail in: LEVINE, M., (eds.). Identity and Emergency Intervention: How Social Group Membership and Inclusiveness of Group Boundaries Shape Helping Behavior. In *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 2005, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 451.

or personality assumptions, can openly communicate and cooperate in order to achieve common goals. Typical for communities<sup>73, 74</sup> is also a specific geographical area (they are located in a specific limited area) and achieving common goal (e.g. creating a student project for the purpose of obtaining a grade and completing a course). As we have already talked about the online world, let us focus on eWOM issue in greater depth.

### 2.4.1 eWoM marketing as an influencer marketing tactic

With Internet gaining in popularity, WoM marketing gave rise to eWoM marketing (electronic-of-mouth). eWOM or electronic word of mouth is the sharing of information about a product or service in the form of social media recommendations, online reviews, or influencer-generated content. The difference between the classic word-of-mouth and electronic-word-of-mouth models is the way opinions are presented. It is clear from the context that eWOM spreads through digital technologies. Let us look closer at the issue of eWoM marketing.

The model is closely related the UGC (user generated content), as well as to the native and viral advertising strategy. Electronic communication has become a go-to type of communication, especially in recent times, and business entities that want to remain relevant in a dynamically changing market environment must adapt. One of the risks the eWoM marketing model poses is mainly the question of credibility. The first chapter of the scientific monograph discussed the issue of people's trust in the media, marketing and government institutions.

Innovations in the field of new communication platforms, as well as new consumer trends, require means factors that are able to influence the perceived credibility and acceptance of e-WoM shall be analysed on a regular basis. A trio of researchers – A. Menendez, J. R. Saura, J. G. Martinez-Navalon<sup>75</sup>, investigated the acceptance of information through eWoM marketing. The researchers investigated and analysed five factors that can influence the credibility and accept-

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<sup>73</sup> We recommend studying the issue of communities: VILLALBA-GARCÍA, C. – JIMENEZ, M. – LUNA, D. – HINOJOSA, J. A. – MONTORO, P. R. Competition between perceptual grouping cues in an indirect objective task. In *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 2021, Vol. 74, No. 10, p. 1727.

<sup>74</sup> MCKAY, L. 'Left behind' people, or places? The role of local economies in perceived community representation. In *Electoral Studies*, 2019, Vol. 60, Art. No. 102046.

<sup>75</sup> REYES-MENENDEZ, A. – SAURA, J. R. – MARTINEZ-NAVALON, J. G. The Impact of e-WOM on Hotels Management Reputation: Exploring TripAdvisor Review Credibility With the ELM Model. In *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers*. 2019, Vol. 7, p. 68869.

ance of this concept. On a research sample of 221 participants, using the elaboration likelihood model and PLS-SEM, the researchers focused on five key factors: a) volume of e-WOM; b) credibility of the source; c) degree of extremism; d) consumer involvement; e) perceived credibility of e-WOM. The results of the study point to the fact that four factors have a significant effect on perceived credibility, thus affecting the adoption rate of e-WOM. Therefore, they listed all five factors as key aspects of the perceived credibility of e-WOM marketing. The results of the study provide meaningful practical recommendations for managers in the field tourism, including recommendations regarding online presentation and the draft of an innovative communication strategy model.

R. Syed<sup>76</sup> discusses the issue of reputation in the context of digital technologies. She states that social media users can spread their opinions and attitudes through their online activities. These activities do not pass through any type of control mechanism, thus resulting in a disruption of the structure and directly affecting the relevance of the data provided. Empirical studies show that eWOM's effectiveness depends on the platform it is spreading across, products it concerns and metric factors. For example, the effectiveness of eWOM on social media platforms is stronger when eWOM receivers can relate to the person who spreads the eWOM. However, the homophily principles referred to above do not affect the effectiveness of eWOM for e-commerce platforms. Moreover, while eWOM has a stronger effect on sales of new-to-market tangible goods, the effectiveness of eWOM for services is different. Regarding the eWOM metric, eWOM volume has a stronger effect on sales than eWOM valence. Even though negative eWOM does not always threaten sales, high variability seems to represent a certain degree of threat.

### **2.4.2 A practical demonstration of the way online reputation management works**

The second chapter of the scientific monograph outlined the issue of the online world and digitization, and helped us lay a groundwork for the issue of online reputation management. Online reputation is thus an opinion, idea or concept that people form about an institution, brand, company or person based on their own experience. People write about products and brands on the Internet, that is more than obvious. Therefore, it is essential to monitor the behaviour of users

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<sup>76</sup> SYED, R. Enterprise reputation threats on social media: A case of data breach framing. In *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*. 2019, Vol. 28, No. 3, p. 266.

online and respond to what they have to say by reacting consistently, quickly, with insight and with humour, especially in heated situations. Next, we will focus on some model situations. Using Google statistics and search results, we want to point out the current aspects of people's behaviour online.

The following figure (Figure 5) shows that 50% of respondents said that images are the decisive element for them when shopping online. In practical terms, this means that placing images of products on Google increases audience reach and engagement. In turn, audience reach and engagement proportionally correlates with a purchase intention.

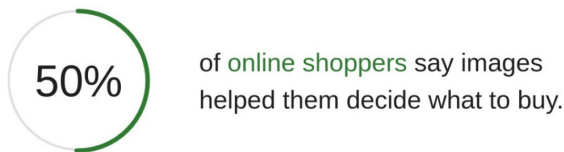


Figure 5 **Images help consumers decide what to buy**

Source: Think with Google, 2022.

The following picture (Figure 6) shows the relationship between online shopping and shopping in brick-and-mortar stores. Online marketers may also take advantage of people's locations. If a business places an online ad based on location, a user browsing Google may be shown a specific business entity after entering specific attributes, thus creating groundswell effect on social media.



Figure 6 **Association between pre-purchase search and brick-and-mortar store selection**

Source: Think with Google, 2022.

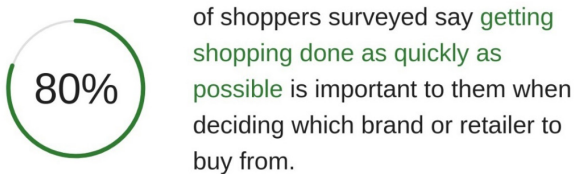
Figure 7 indicates that people use Google to search for information before making a purchase, either in-store or online. With this in mind, it is possible to argue about the nature of the Google search. Given the results of the above statistics (59% of people research a purchase they plan to make), marketers should focus on placing advertisements in search engines, as search engines bring users answers to their queries.



**Figure 7 People use Google to research a purchase before making it**

*Source:* Think with Google, 2022.

Figure 8 tells about the speed of purchases, with 80% of people stating that getting shopping done as quick as possible is crucial for them when deciding on their shopping options. In order to get the shopping done as fast as possible, marketers must make sure that customers are not disturbed by various determinants that could divert him from completing the purchase when shopping.



**Figure 8 The speed of purchase process is a key factor when choosing a brand or retailer**

*Source:* Think with Google, 2022.

The above statistics pointed out the importance of online communication strategies, as these have an impact on the perception of the business entity. In this regard, the issue of online branding should be pointed out. Online branding means building a positive reputation by conveying certain values and characteristics that

help consumers identify the brand and differentiate it from the competition. In today's competitive environment, regular communication on social media is no longer enough, as consumers form their own opinions and share them publicly. It is also important to mention that customers search for information about particular brands online. This means that they have access to information which help them make decisions in specific situations easily and quickly. One of the most valuable sources of information is content generated by other users (so-called user generated content), that is, what people write about brands in reviews and on social networks. These public reviews go a long way in building a business's reputation in the online world. When potential customers don't like what they learn about a business on social media, they seek out competing businesses.

### 3 INTERNET DISCUSSION AS A NEW FORMAT OF COMMUNICATION (OF BRANDS)

Marketing communication that takes place online differs from the one that takes place offline. K. Grančičová and D. Hrušovská<sup>77</sup> state that the biggest differences are changes in the communication mix, as these drive the shift in the importance of individual communication tools of business entities. In the past, business entities paid attention and poured financial resources to above the line advertising while below line advertising was perceived more as a supporting tool. Therefore, sales support, direct marketing as well as public relations were not considered as important as today<sup>78</sup>. However, this is a thing of the past now as in today's online-oriented world the classic tools of marketing communication are taking a backseat, as consumer behaviour has changed dramatically over the past decade.

#### 3.1 Digital marketing in the context of the groundswell

Digital marketing communication, i.e. communication through digital or electronic media, has come to the fore especially over the last 5 years. The predictions regarding increasing demand for digitization by consumers has turned out to be true, especially following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased popularity of digital technologies and social media in various

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<sup>77</sup> GRANČIČOVÁ, D. – HRUŠKOVÁ, D. Tradičné nástroje verus nové formy a trendy v marketingovej komunikácii podnikov na Slovensku (Traditional tools versus new forms and trends in marketing communication of businesses in Slovakia). In *Trendy v podnikaní – vedecký časopis Fakulty ekonomické ZČU v Plzni (Trends in business - the scientific journal of the Faculty of Economics ZCU in Pilsen)*. 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> ARUNPRAKASH N. – ASWIN KANNA, G. S. – ARAVINDH RAJ, G. – DR.VASUDEVAN, R. A. Comparative Study On Digital Marketing Over Traditional Marketing. In *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*. 2021, Vol. 12, No. 11, p. 6485.



areas of life herald a new era and signalled that the current marketing communication strategies must change. For a better understanding of the issue of digital marketing communication, it is necessary to define basic terms such as digital influence, digital consumer, target digital communication and digital communication strategy.



*Digital influence means how often people connect to the Internet through various digital technologies in one day / the dependence on the use of the Internet (for example a person browses the Internet using a technological device 3 hours a day<sup>79</sup>).*



*The digital customer uses digital technologies – mobile device, Ipad, tablet, computer or laptop and tools – social networks, websites, SEM, Paid Links, etc. to search for products or services.*



*The goal of digital communication should be in line with the main communication goal of the business entity. The digital communication strategy should bring the expected benefit in the digital environment in which the specific campaign was placed. In general, the campaign should meet the pre-planned measurable attributes (the goal cannot be said to have been achieved if the values are lower than those pre-planned).*



*A digital communication strategy defines a long-term plan that defines digital communication and the tools that need to be applied to achieve the main communication goal in the digital environment. It is a set of tactics that helps businesses / marketers achieve marketing goals through digital marketing tools.*

Digital platforms and tools of information and communication technologies (ICT) such as mobile devices or tablets, social media, electronic billboards, and various innovative SMART technologies have an irreplaceable place in today's dynamically developing environment. Digital tools bring business entities solutions to a number of problems – how to make their communication more

<sup>79</sup> For up-to-date information on the time spent by users browsing the Internet, check the latest statistics at [datareportal.com](http://datareportal.com).

interactive, how to build a long-lasting relationship with customers<sup>80</sup> and how to maintain a positive image. Innovative methods of digital communication help business entities spread their marketing message in an effective and at the same time dynamic way. In this regard, several connections should be pointed out. By introducing digitalization in the field of communication business entities can target and educate their target audience in a way not possible before.



*Business entities can create incentives for building and maintaining communities that are more informed and interactive thanks to digital forms of communication.*

Digital marketing conceptualizes marketing communications distributed through electronic platforms of any type of technological device<sup>81</sup>. According to N. Patel<sup>82</sup>, digital marketing can be defined as the act of promoting products and services that are “transmitted” through digital media, including social media, SEO, e-mail, mobile devices and mobile applications. Any form of marketing that involves electronic devices is considered digital marketing. A. S. Krishen and other authors define digital marketing as “the use of ICT-based technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence), platforms (e.g. social networks), media and devices to expand the scope of marketing within physical and virtual spaces in order to improve relations with customers by empowering, informing, influencing and engaging consumers”<sup>83</sup>. Digital marketing can also be referred to as global digital marketing because of its dynamic penetration of global markets. Global marketing strategy is a sales strategy designed for a specific product or a specific service taking place in the world market, also affecting other micromarkets of the territory. Digital marketing tools over the past few decades have accelerated the implementation of various processes. By deploying electronic media, it is possible to implement marketing strategies that are based on data, as well as relational and interactive aspects, principles of

<sup>80</sup> CHERYL, B.-K. – NG, B.-K. Protecting the Unprotected Consumer Data in Internet of Things: Current Scenario of Data Governance in Malaysia. In *Sustainability*. 2022, Vol. 14, No. 16, Art. No. 9893.

<sup>81</sup> GHORBANI, Z. – KARGARAN, S. – SABERI, A. – HAGHIGHINASAB, M. – JAMALI, S. M. – EBRAHIM, A. N. Trends and patterns in digital marketing research: Bibliometric analysis. In *Journal of Marketing Analytics*. 2022, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 158-172.

<sup>82</sup> PATEL, N. *What Is Digital Marketing?* [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://neilpatel.com/what-is-digital-marketing/>>.

<sup>83</sup> KRISHEN, A. S. – DWIVEDI, Y. K. – BINDU, N. – KUMAR, K. S. A broad overview of interactive digital marketing: A bibliometric network analysis. In *Journal of Business Research*. 2021, Vol. 131, p. 184.

socialization, computerization and entertainment. As a result of the adoption of innovative devices and technologies in digital marketing communication, it is possible to provide recipients of information with greater possibilities, greater comfort and, ultimately, the ability to overcome time and space restrictions. Digital marketing uses various forms of AI<sup>84</sup> and IoT<sup>85</sup> to achieve pre-planned marketing goals. Entities capitalizing on the principles of digital marketing (international ones like eBay, Booking.com, iTunes, Alibaba, Amazon Marketplace, Airbnb or Uber and Slovak one like Alza, Zl'avomat, Zl'ava dňa, Glami, Podmaz) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) are gradually replacing classic conventional marketing communication methods. Digital marketing is a multidisciplinary domain that keeps evolving. Digital marketing not only capitalizes on the classic electronic technology tools, but also helps advance ICT<sup>86</sup> tools. The business-to-customer, business-to-business, customer-to-customer communication is closely related to digital marketing. Communication is not only about transmitting information, it is also about conveying emotions and subjective attitudes and opinions about specific areas, topics or products and services. However, the transfer of the above can only take place after the individuals enter into the communication process. The first prerequisite for digital communication is a contact. The next chapter shows the ways communication can take place in a digital environment, and what are the basic prerequisite for the creation of the groundswell.

### 3.2 Digital communication mix and the emergence of the groundswell

To really understand the topic, it is important to start with the terminology. The term digital marketing and the term online marketing differ from each other. Different are also the tools these use. The biggest problem here is the understanding of digital marketing and its tools. We have addressed the issue of digital marketing on the previous pages. Therefore, we will briefly describe online marketing.

The aim of the marketing communication is to present and promote products, services and, ultimately, business entities. However, with the advent of new

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<sup>84</sup> *AI* (Artificial intelligence) is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems.

<sup>85</sup> *IoT* (The Internet of Things) describes a network of physical objects called “things” that are embedded in the form of sensors, software and other technologies, for the purpose of connecting and exchanging data with other devices and systems via the Internet.

<sup>86</sup> *ICT* (Information and Communication(s) Technology) is a set of technologies that are currently being developed to make information and communication more efficient.

technologies, business entities have had to adapt to the changing market conditions and tight competition. Therefore, many business entities have moved a significant part of their communication mix to the online environment. Marketing on the Internet or online marketing means reaching out to the target audience using online means of communication. In order to better understand the differences between the individual terms, let us start with pointing out the main benefits that online marketing brings. Thanks to online marketing communication, business entities can reach out to their potential or already existing customers and lead a dialogue. From the point of view of a long-term communication strategy, offering customers the opportunity to interact with the company seems like a suitable communication model. Another key feature offered by online marketing is getting feedback and insight<sup>87</sup> from customers. Online marketing allows marketers to keep better track of and evaluate individual campaigns as well as interactions (e.g. interaction with social media users or website visitors). Another advantage of online marketing regards finances. Thanks to the precise specifications of the target segment of individual advertising campaigns (through precise targeting of the audience), the online environment is a great place to place unpaid online advertising (groundswell works on the same principles). To better understand the differences between online and digital marketing, a simple summary is essential. Online marketing takes place on the Internet, and, therefore, the Internet connection is needed. Digital marketing, on the other hand, does not strictly imply the Internet connection is needed as the marketing communication can take place through digital technologies = new media like digital means of communication, devices placed outdoors and in stores and digital signage. The next part discusses digital marketing tools. According to P. Marc and M.D. Vecchio<sup>88</sup> social media, websites, SEM are considered to be important parts of digital marketing. D. Chaffey<sup>89</sup> includes Integrated Planning, Content Marketing, SEO, Paid Media, Social media marketing, E-mail marketing – Marketing Automation and Multi-channel Analytics among the key techniques of digital marketing<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> *Insight* in this context is understood as an internal impulse, i.e. the motivation, needs and desires of the target group (consumers and customers). Consumer insight can therefore be described understanding and interpretation of customer data, behaviour, and feedback.

<sup>88</sup> SEM (Search Engine Marketing) is a collective term for marketing activities in search engines.

<sup>89</sup> CHAFFEY, D. *8 business-critical digital marketing trends for 2019*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.smartinsights.com/managing-digital-marketing/marketing-innovation/business-critical-digital-marketing-trends/>>.

<sup>90</sup> PETER, M. K. – DALLA VECCHIA, M. The digital marketing Toolkit: A literature review for the identification of digital marketing channels and platforms. In DORNBERGER, R. (eds). *New trends in Business Information Systems and Technology, Studies in Systems, Decision and Control*. Berlin : Springer, 2021, p. 253.

On the contrary, A. Warokka and the other authors<sup>91</sup> present a more comprehensive model of digital marketing tools, in which they include Landing Page Conversion, Organic Search Engine Placement, Social Media, Data Mining, Link Building, Global Reach Internet Marketing, Google Analytics, Video Marketing, SEO, PPC, CRM, Database Contacts, Local Search Marketing, E-casting, AdWords to be key. Given the aforementioned categorizations of digital marketing tools, the following section will focus on, from our point of view, the most important tools which give rise to the groundswell.

### 3.2.1 Tools that allow the formation of the groundswell

Digital marketing tools offer multiple opportunities for the groundswell to emerge. Social media, one of the tools of digital marketing communication, allows its users to share information, create content, modify it, evaluate or share it further. By doing so, social media users create new communities and space for the emergence of the groundswell. The following section defines important digital marketing tools which may give rise (unintentionally) to the groundswell even without the knowledge of business entities.

#### 3.2.1.1 SEO

Search Engine Optimization includes strategies, practices and methods which help improve a website to increase its visibility in the Internet search engines. It is a digital marketing tool that focuses on improving visibility and overall search position, thereby increasing organic traffic to a specific website. SEO is an increasingly popular and sought-after tool, especially in times of fierce competition.



*In terms of SEO, the groundswell can be understood as a set of organic activities, i.e. an organic search that starts by entering key words into a search engine, continues with browsing through individual search results (web pages) and ends at the end of the search process.*

<sup>91</sup> WAROKKA, A. – SJAHRUDDIN, H. – SRIYANTO, S. – NOERHARTATI, E. – SADDHONO, K. Digital marketing support and business development using online marketing tools: An experimental analysis. In *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*. 2021, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 1182.

## How search engines operate

At first, we will define what search engines are and how they work. Understanding this is an important prerequisite before diving into the issue of website optimization. The term search engine does not only imply the most famous web browsing tool – Google<sup>92</sup>. Internet users browse through a large number of websites every day using various search engines. These websites are then stored in search databases of search engines for a certain period of time. The search engine uses this database to offer search results and, sometimes, the engine itself offers search suggestions. This process takes into account a number of factors. One of these factors is indexing. Indexing makes use of web crawlers. The role of the crawler is to follow individual web pages, then download the data, which it stores in the database and then index them. The problem arises if a web page is not indexed. The search engine fails to retrieve information about the page, and, as a result it does not display it in the search results (it is not displayed when a specific keyword query is entered). If we use the Google search engine to search for information, the results that are displayed are only those that the Google database knows. This means that we do not see everything that is on the Internet at a given moment, but only what Google has managed to look at so far. That brings us to the evaluation of websites by individual search engines. This process can be understood as an algorithm that assesses the importance of a web page based on the usefulness of the link and its relation to all the other pages that are already indexed in the search engine. This brings us to the most important issue in this regard – what results search engines display to Internet users. The first search results show the so-called paid search results that are marked as “Advertising” and only after that are the organic search results.

### 3.2.1.2 Paid Search

Paid search allows businesses to advertise within sponsored listings where an advertisement is displayed in a pre-specified area of the search results page along with other (organic) search engine results. Paid search provides space to business entities that wish to go up SERP<sup>93</sup> and land their ads on relevant pages to increase website traffic. The most common form of paid search is

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<sup>92</sup> *Most visited websites in 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-16]. Available at: <<https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/most-visited-websites>>.

<sup>93</sup> *SERP* (Search Engine Results Page) means the page that a search engine returns after a user submits a search query.

PPC<sup>94</sup>. Using the paid search digital marketing tool, which includes PPC campaigns, business entities can secure for themselves advertising space. The principle of the pay-per-click model is simple – business entities do not pay for the advertisement until someone clicks on it. This makes the PPC an affordable way of advertising which ensures that the advertising only reaches those users who are actively searching for services or products of a specific business. There are several different factors that determine where an ad will be placed and displayed on the Google SERPs. These factors generally include:

- a) *bidding*: companies themselves bid on prices, phrases and specific keywords that are related to their business activity. In the end, the bidders with the highest bid secures the highest position in the search engines.
- b) *addons*: businesses can include telephone numbers, links to websites and other relevant information on their websites.
- c) *quality*: Google rates ads and landing pages and allocates them quality score based on how useful the landing pages of a particular business are and rates their relevance.
- d) *keywords or phrases*: has a significant impact on the position in the SERP.

### 3.2.2 Social media and the rise of the groundswell

We already outlined the issue of social media in the previous chapter. In this part, we pay attention to specific tools social networks have at their disposal in terms of the groundswell. Over the last five years, social media has gained in popularity due to various factors<sup>95, 96</sup>. Social media are a direct follow-up to social networks. Many people use these terms interchangeably, which is incorrect, as these are two separate things. The term social media generally refers to platforms that allow the creation, downloading and sharing of content. Social media are a space for creating and building relationships between their individual users.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> PPC (pay-per-click) is a model of digital advertising where the advertiser pays a fee each time one of their ads is clicked.

<sup>95</sup> See also: NYAGADZA, B. – HANAYSHA, J. R. Impact of social media marketing features on consumer's purchase decision in the fast-food industry: Brand trust as a mediator. In *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*. 2022, Vol. 2, No. 2, Art. No. 100102.

<sup>96</sup> See also: SURYANI, T. – FAUZI, A. A. – NURHADI, M. Some-Q: A model development and testing for assessing the consumers' perception of social media quality of small medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In *Journal of Relationship Marketing*. 2020, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> LOSEKOOT, M. – VYHNÁNKOVÁ, E. *Jak na síť (How to – social media)*. Brno : Jan Melvil Publishing, 2019, p. 34.

From a historical point of view, it can be stated that the dynamic development of the Internet at the end of the 20th century and its subsequent transformation into a mass medium brought along modern communication methods and tools. The hidden potential of this new mass medium was discovered in the second half of the 80s, when the first social media applications took the Internet by storm, e.g. The Well and GENie (1985), Listserv (1986), the chatroom The Palace (1994). Sixdegrees.com was the first true social media site (1997) that perfected the way older sites worked. In 2001, Wikipedia, an open-source project was created. The social network Facebook, created in 2006, had a lot of predecessors. The social network Twitter (2006) threatened the existence of Facebook. Another big player entered the market in 2010 – the social network Instagram. In order to understand the issue of social media and the groundswell, it is necessary to explore the reasons why social media were created in the first place. One of the reasons for the emergence of social media is technological development. Today we know that social networks are the places where communities and groups are created, where users can create their public profiles, communicate with long lost friends from childhood, with people they know in real life (not from the virtual world) and also people with common interests. It is increasingly apparent that apart from connecting people (also in private, as evidence by the increasingly popular app Messenger)<sup>98</sup>, social networks has become (2020-2022 period) a place where misinformation, name-calling, arrogance, intolerance of the opposite opinion, racism and hate speech towards other ethnicities or minorities, e.g. LGBT community are booming. Therefore, taking an active approach towards communication with wider groups of the population has become highly relevant nowadays, especially in the current post-truth era, when objectivity and verifiability are being replaced by personal opinions and emotionally-biased information that dig deep into a person's consciousness. A worrying fact, not only for the professional public, but also for humanity as such, is the digital aspect in the context of information transparency. While in the centuries that were not dominated by digital and technological progress, the risk of mass dissemination of information (especially disinformation) was much lower. Nowadays anyone can influence anyone with their opinion. This fact is extremely disturbing.

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<sup>98</sup> See also: DIMAGGIO, P. – GARIP, F. Network effects and social inequality. In *Annual Review of Sociology*. 2012, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 95.



### 3.2.3 The impact of digitization and technological advancement in terms of the groundswell

X.-K. Loh et. al<sup>99</sup> studied technostress<sup>100</sup> and its impact on organism. The aim of the study was to verify several hypotheses, focusing on the following types of relationship: the relationship between social overload and technostress and exhaustion; the relationship between information overload and technostress and exhaustion; the relationship between life invasion and technostress and exhaustion; the relationship between invasions of privacy and technostress and exhaustion. Using an online questionnaire survey, they obtained 384 responses from university students. Based on the studied research results, the findings showed that technostress and burnout significantly reduce one's willingness to use social media in learning process, thus posing a high risk to all stakeholders in higher education. As students were exposed to several risks and threats as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to eliminate factors that negatively affect their mental and physical health. The conclusions of the study also indicate that e-learning can have an adverse effect on university students.

The above example points out the negative impact of the use of technology in the learning process of university students. It should be pointed out, however, that the technological advancement and the speed with which digitalization progresses also have an adverse effect on the rest of the public, too, i.e. on all people who are either active or passive users of social media. However, social media influence also those people who are not social media users.

The activities of Internet and social media users can create the groundswell effect. Even though the groundswell is more pronounced online, the offline world is affected, too. Social media affect our real life, even though many social media users do not realize it. Social media users leave behind so-called digital footprint. A digital footprint is an electronic trail that is created from data and information shared by users. Every user leaves behind such a trace every time they access the Internet or other electronic devices, e.g. social media such as Facebook or Twitter. A digital footprint can be passive or active. **A passive digital footprint** is created when

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<sup>99</sup> LOH, X.-K. – LEE, V.-H. – LOH, X.-M. – TAN, G. W.-H. – OOI, K.-B. – DWIVEDI, Y. K. The dark side of mobile learning via social media: How bad can it get? In *Information Systems Frontiers: A Journal of Research and Innovation*. 2021, Vol. 23, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> *Technostress* is associated with information and communication technologies. From a terminological point of view, technostress could be described as a feeling of overload or the inability to deal with emotional pressure of excessive use of digital technology with psychological and physiological manifestations.

information is collected about the user without them being aware that this is happening. This includes the type of device and the technology used: laptop or smartphone, IP address, which is stored in the database of the Internet connection provider or on the servers of the website operator. **An active digital footprint** is where the user has deliberately shared information about themselves on the Internet, for example on social media, discussion forums, etc. Addresses, information and data about oneself, family or friends that the user searches for or shares, as well as images and videos that are viewed, saved, commented on, shared, as well as music that a user listened to, can also be considered an active digital footprint. Users of geolocation services also leave an active digital footprint<sup>101</sup> using apps like Forsquare or Waze. Digital identity is closely related to the digital footprint. Internet users (especially social media users) create their digital identity by posting comments, adding posts, likes, by participating in various discussions and the like. Digital identity does not have to be, and often is not, an accurate or realistic reflection of a person. The digital identity is best explained on a simple example. A person regularly posts hateful comments on the social network Facebook, verbally abuses minorities, his comments are full of hatred and slander. At the first glance, it is obvious that this person suffers from a personality disorder and needs professional help. In real life (the world outside social media), that person is nice, kind, and none of his acquaintances would expect this person turning into a murderer of innocent people he does not know. Based on the above example, it is clear that digital identity is created as a result of the activities we carry out in the digital environment using technological means. Hate speech, according to the Humanrightsguide website, promotes “hatred and violence against an individual or group of individuals based on certain characteristics.”<sup>102</sup> The digital environment allows Internet users to build different digital identities. As outlined above, hate speech may prompt cybercriminals into action. A digital footprint is a permanent part of each person’s online existence.



*The groundswell effect creates an unerasable digital footprint in the digital environment. A digital footprint can affect perception, behaviour, decision-making or purchasing habits of people, business entities and the general public.*

<sup>101</sup> See also: ZAUŠKOVÁ, A. – REZNÍČKOVÁ, M. SoLoMo marketing as a global tool for enhancing awareness of eco-innovations in Slovak business environment. In *Equilibrium*. 2020. Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 141-150.

<sup>102</sup> *Freedom of expression & Media*. [online]. [2022-09-11]. Available at: <<https://www.humanrightsguide.sk/en/themes/freedom-of-expression-media/freedom-of-expression/hate-speech>>.

With regard to the digital footprint, it is important to discuss the issue of using social media as an emotional support tool in coping with stress (for example when handling the COVID-19 pandemic). The COVID-19 pandemic brought along unknown specific stressors (risk of being infected by potentially life-threatening disease and unemployment). As a result of lockdowns and restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus, people flocked to social media sites (an understandable turn of events). Based on Lazarus<sup>103</sup> and Folkman's<sup>104</sup> theory of stress and coping, we consider the obsession with following information about the coronavirus disease COVID-19 on social media to be a turning point that could have adversely affected the perception of the truth. Y. Sun et. al<sup>105</sup> state that although social media have also a positive effect on society, it is necessary to investigate the negatives that social networks bring to the society. To curb this trend, the scientific community should team up and draw up models or tools that would prevent and stop the spread of disinformation and hoaxes.

### 3.2.4 Aspects affecting the groundswell on the Internet

According to D. Mičuda<sup>106</sup>, sensational headlines are engaging and can attract even the poorest social media users. Thus, content adaptation algorithms can repeatedly show the same or similar content (even misinformation) and advertising campaigns to the same people. The layout and content of website make it difficult for users and message recipients to make sense of the content as a news portal now features not only news, but also advertising and UGC. Sensationalism and click-baits are attractive to customers to a certain extent and can induce Internet users to visit certain website. After all, all the customer-to-be has to do is click on or scroll and he instantly becomes an e-customer.

<sup>103</sup> See also: LAZARUS, R. S. *Fifty years of the research and theory of R. S. Lazarus*. 1st issue. New Jersey : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998. p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> See also: LAZARUS, R. S. – FOLKMAN, S. 1986. Cognitive Theories of Stress and the Issue of Circularity. In APPLEBY, M. H. – TRUMBULL, R. (eds.) *Dynamics of Stress. The Plenum Series on Stress and Coping*. New York : Plenum Press, 1986, p. 64.

<sup>105</sup> SUN, Y. – LIU, Y. – ZHANG, J. Z. – FU, J. – HU, F. – XIANG, Y. – SUN, Q. Dark side of enterprise social media usage: A literature review from the conflict-based perspective. In *International Journal of Information Management*. 2021, Vol. 61, Art. No. 102393.

<sup>106</sup> MIČUDA, D. Hranice pravdy – hoax ako nástroj dezinformácií v mediálnom prostredí (Limits of truth – hoax as a tool of disinformation in the media environment). In KVETANOVÁ, Z. – PIATROV, I. – MARTOVIČ, M. (eds.) *Marketing Identity 2020 – COVID-2.0*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2020, p. 112.

According to A. P. Adamson<sup>107</sup> and M. Sučanský<sup>108</sup> the most impressive way to sell a certain product is to create a viral sensation, as it is best stimulus for attracting and gaining the attention of social media user. The question remains whether the goal of sensational advertising campaigns is really just to attract attention, or whether there is a secret intention behind it. As a result of the increase in active users of social media<sup>109</sup>, it is assumed that people discuss various problems and events online much more often.

It could be said that before the pandemic (the period before 2020), social media users were less likely to get involved in discussions (that is, they were only passive recipients of information). When events that we do not anticipate in advance take on catastrophic proportions, they directly affect the information shared on social media or on websites. Over the course of the last 20 years, several scientific studies have researched the impact of catastrophic natural events such as earthquakes and hurricanes. However, only a few scientists have anticipated that the next natural catastrophe would be caused by a virus to which almost nobody had antibodies. This shook the very fabric of the society to its very core. The vast majority of studies that researched the impact of natural events and people's behaviour in the online environment did not however, address the problem of the emotional sentiment of new published on the Internet in the wake of a disaster. Emotional sentiment of information published online are often manipulated so as to influence as many people as possible. The problem, however, is that the source of such information is not only official institutions such as the media, or editors or copywriters but often it is an ordinary person whose opinions have the power to influence thousands of people (as such people often publish various articles or take part in online discussions). Such persons are labelled as active users of social media or the Internet. As we have already outlined, active users of social media share posts or comment them. If we talk about active users of social networks,<sup>110</sup>

<sup>107</sup> ADAMSON, A. P. *Digitálna značka: Ako sa najlepšie značky presadzujú v digitálnom svete (Brand Digital: Simple Ways Top Brands Succeed in the Digital World)*. Bratislava: Eastone Books, 2011. p. 27

<sup>108</sup> SUČANSKÝ, M. *4 metódy, ako čo najrýchlejšie zvýšite predaj na webe (4 methods to increase sales on the web as quickly as possible)*. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.marketing.sk/free-times/4-metody-ako-co-najrychlejsie-zvysite-predaj-na-webe>>.

<sup>109</sup> CHAFFEY, D. *8 business-critical digital marketing trends for 2019*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://www.smartinsights.com/managing-digital-marketing/marketing-innovation/business-critical-digital-marketing-trends/>>.

<sup>110</sup> Based on the continuous observation of the behaviour of individuals and communities on social networks, we can state that we notice the behaviour of users is getting more assertive and aggressive. Aggressive users incite other individuals to behave in the same way.

we refer to them as a swirling groundswell, as it gives rise to itself and gains in negotiation powers. In practical terms, this means that business entities will adapt to what the grassroots community demands. However, the groundswell effect can be liquidating for business entities. There have been cases where the business entity removed the product from the offer<sup>111</sup> and also suspended its online communication campaign altogether<sup>112</sup>. Neutral followers do not express their opinion on specific posts, and they also do not share posts on their own social media accounts or among communities they belong to. Although such users accept the information shared, they not to share it further. It could have been said that these are users without an opinion, but from the point of view of the groundswell, this community is just passive – they do not act on the information received and thus the information is not spread further, its spread is hampered. From the point of view of marketing, the phenomenon of the groundswell can be a benefit to business entities, but on the other hand, it also represents a risk not only to the marketing activities of the entity, but to its very existence on the market. However, it should be noted that many entities do not know about the groundswell effect and therefore are not aware of the potential risk it entails.

In his work, I. Piatrov states that many business entities are not aware of the positives that the groundswell may bring.<sup>113</sup> Our research showed that only a few business entities know about the existence of the groundswell effect and the ways it spreads. Piatrov further adds that “there are a number of brands for which the groundswell effect is very important”, especially when innovating products based on customer feedback.<sup>114</sup> According to M. Klementis, reviews on social

<sup>111</sup> See also: DANIŠKA, J. *Myslím progresívne, konám agresívne (I think progressively but I act aggressively)*. [online]. [2021-12-21]. Available at: <<https://strategie.hnonline.sk/news/marketing/2239867-oblubeny-kompot-narazil-na-kritiku-fanuskov-dovodom-je-status-na-facebooku>>.

<sup>112</sup> See also: *Oblúbený Kompot narazil na kritiku fanúšikov. Dôvodom je fotka Mikasa (Kompot faced criticism from fans. The reason is Mikas' photo)*. [online]. [2022-10-11]. Available at: <<https://dennikstandard.sk/64091/myslím-progresívne-konám-agresívne/>>.

<sup>113</sup> PIATROV, I. Sociálne siete ako potenciálny priestor pre vznik efektu spodnej vlny (Social networking sites as a potential for the groundswell effect). In HORECKÝ, J. – SOCHOROVÁ, L. (eds.) *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu (Social dilemma 2021 New approaches to knowledge management and protection on the Internet, Brno)*. Brno : Právní institut s.r.o., 2021, p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> PIATROV, I. Sociálne siete ako potenciálny priestor pre vznik efektu spodnej vlny (Social networking sites as a potential for the groundswell effect). In HORECKÝ, J. – SOCHOROVÁ, L. (eds.) *Sociální dilema 2021 Nové přístupy k managementu znalostí a ochraně na internetu (Social dilemma 2021 New approaches to knowledge management and protection on the Internet, Brno)*. Brno : Právní institut s.r.o., 2021, p. 28.

media (either positive or negative) have the power to influence especially those users who are not familiar with the business entity, or have visited the profile of the business entity to gain information about it.<sup>115</sup> The online world keeps offering new tools to address and interact with customers (social media users).

### 3.2.5 Online discussion forum as a place where the groundswell rises and gains in strength

The Internet is a place where information spread almost without restrictions. On the one hand, people can share whatever they want, all they need is the Internet connection and a technological device. There are no limits in the online world. Anybody can write anything. On the other hand, however, intolerant people can also share their views online (as outlined in the previous section). As people are free to publish whatever they wish, the question of a control mechanism comes to the fore. Consumers should learn how to employ critical thinking and verify the information they read on websites or on social media. Critical thinking becomes almost a necessity in the today's world full of hoaxes, misinformation and Internet trolls. Some people have troubles telling artificial intelligence (chatbots) apart from real people. Online discussion forums allow for validation of multiple members of a discussion thread or post at the same time. Validation means that an individual or group of individuals adopt and accept opinions and sentiment of a particular discussant and support them, thus confirming that their emotions they feel towards a particular issue are justified. For a better understanding of the issue, it is crucial to define basic terms such as discussion board, discussion forum, thread and discussion post.

- *Discussion board*: the main page where all discussion topics are collected.
- *Discussion forum*: collects all conversations about a specific topic of a discussion – for example, all reviews of a selected brand of lotion.
- *Thread*: a single conversation within a specific forum. Each forum can have several threads.
- *Post*: a specific response within a single discussion thread.

Discussion forums can also be used by business entities to place backlinks. Links to discussion forums are often placed by the business entity or a marketing agency hired by the business entity for this purpose. Ideally, however, it is

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<sup>115</sup> KLEMENTIS, M. Social Media Communication of Small Local Brands as the Future of Circular Economy. In KARPASTIS, CH. – VARDAS, CH. *Proceedings of the 7th European Conference on Social Media ECSM 2020*. Cyprus : Academic Conferences and Publishing International Limited Reading, 2020, p. 340.

discussion forum members who share links to the websites of business entities. Links are often posted when quality of products / services is discussed. Often, business entities do not even know about this type of promotion (it is free) as it is beyond their control. The question remains whether discussion forum members will remain prone to share a specific website without the right to a fee. There is a hidden added value to the link building. Backlinks increase the ranking of the website from the point of view of search engines, which means that the business can get a better position on the search results page organically. With regard to the above, it is also necessary to discuss review sites, as these differ from discussion forums. Review websites are closely related to the issue of e-reputation management. We have already addressed this issue in the second chapter. The reputation of a company, brand or specific product largely affects all business activities and can even affect the life cycle of a product or business entity. Being able to communicate effectively with customers can lead to increase in sales, repeated business, referrals and, most importantly, good reviews. Review websites are not a place to lead a discussion on a certain topic or get valuable advice to solve a problem. Instead, review websites enable consumers to share their opinions and ratings on products and services with the wider public. There are many options for customers to rate their user experience. The business entity can create a space for writing reviews in the interface of its own website, e-shop, or pay for an external website that would serve as a place where customers can express their opinions, write reviews or even compare products. In both cases, however, business entities should follow the reviews and regularly participate in discussion threads so as to respond to critical opinions that might pose a danger to or negatively affect the business entity and thus discredit it. At this point, the business entity may not know whether the critical posts were written by a competing business entity or a frustrated and dissatisfied customer. Either way, the concerned business entity should react as soon as possible. If the business entity responds regularly to any type of criticism, it gives the readers of the reviews a feeling that the business entity cares about the opinion of customers and is open to suggestions.

In general, link building is the act of building backlinks or off-page SEO, i.e. these are activities that take place on websites that link to the so-called landing page<sup>116</sup> and not directly on the website of a specific business entity. Having back-

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<sup>116</sup> *Landing page* is a special kind of entry page, i.e. a separate website. This term is mainly used in digital marketing, where a landing page is created specifically for a marketing or advertising campaign. When a user clicks on an advertisement or campaign (in the context of discussion forums it means clicking on a specific keyword), he will be redirected to the landing page of a specific brand / business entity.



links has a direct impact on search engine rankings. Although we outlined the issue of SEO in the previous part of this scientific monograph, the term link building has not been discussed yet. The link building process consists of five basic steps. The first step is keyword analysis. The analysis takes place in the Google search engine, directly on the website of a specific business entity (link building contractor). For keyword analysis, marketers use tools like Collabim and Mangools. This step is followed by the selection of suitable keywords. Based on the results of keyword analysis, marketers select those keywords that have the greatest potential to boost the business growth (cooperation with the client and acceptance of his preferences is important in this step). The third step is writing articles and placing specific links on the website. At this step, the link building strategy includes: content plan and article calendar, writing articles for external magazines and portals, writing a website-specific blog, placing articles with specific keywords in selected magazines and selected portals. The fourth step is all about writing and publishing posts on social media. In this context, we are talking about social link building. The goal of social link building is subliminal brand perception and diversification of the link portfolio for search engines. The fifth step is reporting and evaluation. With the help of reports, it is possible to evaluate all activities that were carried out in a specific period (usually, SEO specialists draw up reports once a month).

An online forum, also known as a discussion forum or message board, allows website users to interact with each other and discuss various issues, share opinions, or help find solutions to various issues and questions. The essence of online forums is social interaction between internet users with an aim to find a solution. Online discussions taking place on forums can be useful for those seeking help and advice. People are often less diplomatic online because they are more open. Free communities that are often created on discussion forums are characterized by diversity. Diversity might either lead towards robust pluralism or radical polarization of society.

### **3.2.6 An online review is the (best) advertising format**

The following section discusses the findings arrived at by the Exploding topics website<sup>117</sup>. According to statistics provided on the website, 93% of users say that online reviews have influenced their purchasing decisions. Previous statistics

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<sup>117</sup> See also: HOWARTH J. *81 Online Review Statistics (New 2022 Data)*. [online]. [2022-09-02]. Available at: <<https://explodingtopics.com/>>.



also confirm that reviews published on the Internet have become an important part of the purchasing process of most customers (not only in the digital environment). The fact that people are willing to trust complete strangers is an interesting finding and a crucial piece of information for marketing managers. All business entities should therefore strive to build a positive reputation online. The website also found that almost half of internet users post reviews online every month. The statistics also show that online reviews are an important aspect in the purchasing process (e-shops or Market places on social networks) and have a significant impact on purchasing decisions. It is up to customers to decide whether they leave a review after completing a purchase.

The review portal Trustmary<sup>118</sup> came with interesting finds: 58% of customers are willing to travel to buy a product from a company that has favourable reviews, and 62% of customers are very likely to make a purchase if they see photos and videos of other customers. M. J. Sánchez-Franco and J. L. Roldán<sup>119</sup> state that increasing product familiarity, trust and norms of reciprocity can be seen as a practical initiative that supports integration, thereby motivating customers to not overthink their purchasing decision. The authors of the study also suggest that the benefits of community involvement and integration can have long-term effects if companies apply tools to increase the level of familiarity in communities (e.g. discussion forums or social media). However, according to the authors of the study, it is important for business entities to focus on communities, but in particular individuals who already have direct or indirect experience with their products or services. We are of the opinion that building favourable reputation management among active members of discussion forums or social media users is one of the prerequisites for a sustainable competitive advantage as well as an optimal position on the market.



*In order for the business strategy to be successful, not only in the online world, it is necessary to collect, monitor, but especially get involved with the customer feedback. Active involvement means writing thank you notes, customer praise, giving discount for the next purchase, but also accepting a negative opinion and getting in touch with dissatisfied customers.*

<sup>118</sup> Online Reviews: Statistics That Will Blow Your Mind. [online]. [2022-11-02]. Available at: <<https://trustmary.com/reviews/>>.

<sup>119</sup> SÁNCHEZ-FRANCO, M. J. – ROLDÁN, J. L. The influence of familiarity, trust and norms of reciprocity on an experienced sense of community: an empirical analysis based on social online services. In *Behaviour & Information Technology*. 2014. Vol. 34, No. 4, p. 394.

Another important statistical finding that confirms our claim that online reviews are undoubtedly one of the best and most effective advertising formats is: “consumers expect high standards from the brands they do business with, with the majority saying they will not interact with a business or a product that has less than a 3.3-star rating”<sup>120</sup>. However, it is also important to discuss the manipulative aspect of reviews. Manipulative reviews, according to researchers S. Banerjee and A. Y. K. Chua<sup>121</sup>, differ from the organic ones by the composition of the sentences. According to their research, a manipulative review contains more verbs than an authentic review. Another interesting finding of the said research is the insignificance of the future tense. The so-called review hoaxers (people who purposefully spread manipulative reviews)<sup>122</sup> do not use the future tense.

### 3.2.7 Polarization among discussion participants

Polarization can be defined as the division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs in a specific environment. Polarization could also be perceived as a lack of shared knowledge (i.e., shared understanding and agreement). Importantly, these perceptions may be based on misunderstandings and misconceptions. However, we are of the opinion that a closer look at these micro-dynamics would bring us valuable knowledge on the origin of disagreements and subsequent escalation.

There are growing concerns about the polarization of society worldwide. Persons who strictly adhere to a specific ideology or who create an ideology out of something inherently non-ideological also contribute to the increasing polarization of the society. The polarization of society is also fuelled by the disintegration of the social structure, as stated by Ch. R. Crimston, H. P. Selvanathan, and J. Jetten.<sup>123</sup> The problem with trust in official institutions, as we have already outlined in the first chapter, is yet another source of polarization. However, in order to understand the state the current society is in (and thus its inclination towards

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<sup>120</sup> 2021 State of Reviews. [online]. [2022-09-02]. Available at: <<https://www.podium.com/guides/2021-state-of-reviews/>>.

<sup>121</sup> BANERJEE, S. – CHUA, A. Y. K. *A study of manipulative and authentic negative reviews*. [online]. [2022-10-27]. Available at: <[https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10220/20405/1/p76\\_Banerjee%20%26%20Chua.pdf](https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10220/20405/1/p76_Banerjee%20%26%20Chua.pdf)>.

<sup>122</sup> Review hoaxers use online review posts to present deceptive and misleading information to manipulate the public in a targeted manner (with a negative or positive effect on a specific business entity).

<sup>123</sup> CRIMSTON, C. R. – SELVANATHAN, H. P. – JETTEN, J. Moral polarization predicts support for authoritarian and progressive strong leaders via the perceived breakdown of society. In *Political Psychology*. 2022, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 683.

polarization), it is necessary to outline the historical milestones that could be seen as the main driving forces. Following on the Euractiv survey from 2017, it can be stated that the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic were mainly worried about the problems related to the decay of social values (83%), globalization (79%), corruption (77%), immigration (72%), and the rapid onset of innovations (68%).<sup>124</sup> The today's<sup>125</sup> polarization in Slovakia is mainly fuelled by political beliefs and opinions. Disinformation campaigns are part of the hybrid war currently underway. Online discussions are often the space in which cyberwar arises and the polarization of society is created. The reason is to maintain anonymity. Being anonymous gives people a sense of empowerment, and thus are more prone to write aggressive comments, which, in turn, fuels conflicts and further deepens polarization. Some authors<sup>126,127,128</sup> state that anonymity leads to a decrease in social presence, a state of deindividuation and a decrease in the sense of responsibility. The recent research by C. A. Roos et. al<sup>129</sup> however, presents a different approach to the issue of interpersonal dynamics of online text discussions. Instead of assuming that the online medium changes human psychology, which in turn leads to behavioural changes, their research focused on the direct impact of social media on social interactions and also on the psychological effects associated with these interactions. The results showed that even in the absence of real polarization (i.e. disagreement on a specific topic), people interacting online may still have a sense of emerging polarization due to the fact that they lack certain diplomatic skills. Due to the dynamics of inter-group social identity, different political groups are increasingly hostile towards each other. Social media create the feeling that polarization is becoming personal. The reasons are plentiful,

<sup>124</sup> GEIST, R. *Nedôverujeme vládam, médiám, firmám, ani mimovládkam. (We don't trust governments, media, companies, and NGOs).* [online]. [2022-10-31]. Available at: <<https://euractiv.sk/>>.

<sup>125</sup> See also: KOLLAI, I. The traditionalism–modernism value conflict in Hungary and Slovakia – a comparative analysis from a longue durée perspective. In *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. 2020, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 40.

<sup>126</sup> See: SIA, C.-L. – TAN, B. C.Y. – WEI, K.-K. Group polarization and computer-mediated communication: Effects of communication cues, social presence, and anonymity. In *Information Systems Research*. 2002, Vol. 13, No. 1. p. 82.

<sup>127</sup> See also: PU, J. – CHEN, Y. – QIU, L. – CHENG, H. K. Does identity disclosure help or hurt user content generation? Social presence, inhibition, and displacement effects. In *Information Systems Research*. 2020, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 310.

<sup>128</sup> See also: WILLIAMS, K. S. On-line anonymity, deindividuation and freedom of expression and privacy. In *Dickinson Law Review*. 2005, Vol. 110, No. 3, p. 687.

<sup>129</sup> ROOS, C. A. – POSTMES, T. – KOUDENBURG, N. The microdynamics of social regulation: Comparing the navigation of disagreements in text-based online and face-to-face discussions. In *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*. 2020, Vol. 23, No. 6, p. 904.

ranging from strengthening identity processes, through emphasizing the visibility of political conflict (which represents an inter-group threat) to rewarding extreme manifestations (reputation management). If we talk about society polarization in terms of social media, we should not forget to mention the aspect of visibility. Visibility means that the posts that people write or share on social media can be seen and commented on by their friends and their friends' friends, provided that the user sets their visibility preferences right. If a social media user has decided that his posts will be public, then we can talk about a wider reach. This wider reach is able to target also other (unknown) social media users.

### 3.2.8 Social proof and the groundswell effect

Online reviews are social proof in action. An important aspect of online reviews and discussions is (or should be) impartiality towards a specific business entity, i.e. that the reviewer does not work for the business entity the review pertains to and that the business entity has not promised the reviewer any financial compensation for his favourable review. In fact, potential customers may not believe the reviews, they may not even be interested in searching for products on the Internet. However, nowadays (perhaps thanks to digital technologies) people are interested in searching for products on the Internet and even actively write reviews themselves or share them if they agree with them.

When discussing the groundswell in terms of social media, it is necessary to define the issue of social proof<sup>130</sup>. One of the most important marketing communication tools is the recommendation of friends and family. According to Chatter Matters' Word of Mouth report<sup>131</sup> 46% of Americans say that a word-of-mouth recommendation from a friend or family member makes them more likely to purchase a product or service themselves. Online search took the first place with the value of 66%. Active or passive browsing of electronic discussions can also be included in this category. However, we consider it necessary to clarify the already outlined issue of social proof in more detail. With regard to marketing, social proof is concrete evidence that others have found value in the product or service they have purchased. Since people are more likely to buy a product that others have already bought (the snowball effect or the bandwagon effect), social proof can be a good way to increase conversions by showing customers how popular

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<sup>130</sup> See also: MA, J. – LI, F. S. Effects of psychological distance and social influence on tourists' hotel booking preferences. In *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*. 2022, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 397.

<sup>131</sup> See also: BAER, J. *17 New Statistics About Word of Mouth*. [online]. [2022-10-31]. Available at: <<https://www.convinceandconvert.com/>>.

the product or service is based on the previous user experience of other customers. On the Internet, social proof can take many different forms, like customer reviews or product reviews. From the point of view of a long-term marketing strategy, social proof is an essential marketing strategy due to several reasons. As already stated above, people are more likely to engage in an action, in this case we mean the purchase of a particular product, if other people (social media users or members of discussion forum) have done it or are doing it. The driving force behind social proof is groups of people who have done something or are satisfied with something and expressed their opinion about it (e.g. 8 out of 10 customers recommend the brand product for removing stains). It is obvious that even business entities could capitalize on the social proof – manipulate public opinion, not provide true information, embellish and exaggerate real facts for their own benefit. However, it is assumed that people writing would not deliberately deceive and manipulate the others just to make a bring more customers to a business entity. The driving force behind the social proof are usually ordinary people who have user experience with specific products or services. Social proof is a concept based on the idea of normative social influence, which states that people will conform in order to be liked by, similar to, or accepted by the influencer (or society). This also works in the online shopping process. People trust the recommendations of other people much more than the marketing message of the brand they want to buy a product from. The fact that social proof really works and has an irreplaceable role in the marketing communication of businesses, regardless the field, was confirmed by Nielsen's report, which state that 92% consumers around the world said they trust word-of-mouth, or recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising<sup>132</sup>. Also important in terms of the groundswell effect is the finding that 7 out of 10 people trust “consumer opinions posted online” even if they don't know the person who posted the opinion<sup>133</sup>.

### 3.2.9 Social proof examples

*User reviews and ratings:* positive reviews are one of the strongest forms of social proof. Most customers read online reviews before they decide to buy a product or service because reviews provide a real, public picture of the user's experience with the product and also reflect customer opinions. The better the rating

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<sup>132</sup> *Consumer Trust in Online, Social and Mobile Advertising Grows*. [online]. [2022-08-16]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2012/consumer-trust-in-online-social-and-mobile-advertising-grows/>>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

of the business entity (larger number of stars), the more social proof the business entity enjoys (this can be used in marketing campaigns or to build a favourable reputational image). Following on from the above, it is important to highlight the essence of user reviews. This is where the Nielsen's<sup>134</sup> report comes in handy. The results show that positive reviews are crucial for the success of an online store. However, each coin has two sides and user ratings and reviews are no different. A survey by the APEK<sup>135</sup> association indicated that a typical customer journey on the Internet begins on product and price comparison websites. Price and product comparison websites are the fastest and most effective way to acquire new customers and increase the turnover of the e-shop. The best-known price comparison website in Slovakia is undoubtedly Heureka. The website clearly displays prices of products from specific suppliers, as well as the price of shipping. Most importantly, Heureka has a user review section. This significantly simplifies the shopping process as product overviews, final prices, as well as e-shops are displayed at one place.

*Social media and reviews:* if customers share positive reviews of a particular brand on social media platforms, this user-generated content (UGC) has a significant impact on brand image building. Social media is a public platform where people can share their opinions and preferences to a mass effect. If social media users publish a positive review in which they evaluate products, services or activities of a business entity, other users of the social network will see that the products or services of a particular business entity are perceived favourably by others.

*Affiliate promotions:* is the process by which an affiliate (bloggers, social media personalities, and other content creators) earn a commission for marketing other person's or company's product. Affiliate marketing stands on four pillars: companies / advertisers, publisher / affiliate partners, affiliate system and customers. Affiliate marketing and its effectiveness are influenced by factors such as the quality of the product, the possibility of addressing a target group, communication between the company and the affiliate partner, but also a strong knowledge of the market and customer needs. However, it is crucial that business entities realize that creating a functioning system that will make them money is a difficult and lengthy process in any market (online world is no different). There are two ways a business entity can approach affiliate marketing: either the business entity

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<sup>134</sup> *Consumer Trust in Online, Social and Mobile Advertising Grows*. [online]. [2022-08-16]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2012/consumer-trust-in-online-social-and-mobile-advertising-grows/>>.

<sup>135</sup> *Studie: Prínosy e-commerce v ČR (Study: Benefits of e-commerce in the Czech Republic)*. [online]. [2022-07-23]. Available at: <<https://data.apek.cz/>>.

creates its own affiliate system or it becomes a member of an already existing affiliate network with own system for such sales purposes.

*Influencers:* influencer marketing is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing methods of customer acquisition. Influencer marketing is a form of endorsement in which companies utilize the users on social media with a high following who are known as influencers to promote their products and brand either on their blog or social media page. An influencer is able to influence other people (not only their supporters). This is a person who is able to influence potential customers by recommending a certain product or service through their own online communication. Influencer marketing is built on trust. That means people following the influencer must trust him or her. Influencers are celebrities of the digital world. The bottom line is that users of social platforms perceive an influencer as a friend, and therefore they do not perceive what influencers promote to them as advertising. People tend to trust influencers more than the regular advertising formats of business entities. An influencer can spark interest in a product in a non-intrusive way that does not at first look like direct advertising. At the same time, influencers can provide a reliable review of the product (the review often also contains information about the price, quality of the product or comparisons with other similar products).

## 4 TYPOLOGY OF THE GROUNDSWELL

Although the definition of socialization is undergoing a change, its core, i.e. imitating the behaviour and opinions of others (individuals / communities) remains the same. As has been stated above, the society is currently facing strong polarization and fragmentation. These two concepts are the direct opposites of socialization. Even though the people (especially on the Internet) are being increasingly divided, in parallel with it runs the process of integration into different groups that either hold the same opinion or enjoy a certain degree of consensus of opinions. There are several ways people integrate into groups. As this issue is one of the cornerstones of the groundswell, it is appropriate to explore (once more) what the concept means. The groundswell means an increase in the amount of public support for a particular issue without the meddling of public institutions. It is likely that the groundswell is also the result of the activities of dissatisfied people who decided to pursue a change with their activity. The involvement of the audience in such a form of communication is closely related to the degree to which members are willing to interact. The following part defines the concepts of consumer, online audience (consumer) and typology of the groundswell.

### 4.1 The contemporary consumer and the dynamics of changes in consumer behaviour

In the beginning, it is appropriate to define who the consumer is. A consumer is often referred to as a customer, but these are two different persons, actually. As stated by A. Kusá and P. Grešková, a consumer is a natural person, i.e. a direct consumer who procures for himself or someone else procures for him a certain economic unit for the purpose of direct consumption<sup>136</sup>. The consumer, thus, may or may not be a customer of a specific business entity. It

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<sup>136</sup> KUSÁ, A. – GREŠKOVÁ, P. *Marketingová komunikácia v kontexte hodnôt a nákupného správania generácie 50+.* (Marketing communication in the context of values and purchasing behavior of the people 50+). 1st Edition. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava, 2016, pp. 16-17.



is obvious that the behaviour of both consumers and customers is constantly changing under the influence of various aspects, which business entities should adapt to in their marketing communication. Currently, massive changes in the field of technology are underway, i.e. the way business entities communicate with customers is changing, there are also changes in the customers' lifestyles (personalization of products or services for specific customer needs), customers can discuss products on the Internet (this may result in increased quality demands, e.g. if a customer reads a negative review before having their own customer experience with the product, they are more likely to expect a lower quality product / service).

Businesses and brands should adapt their marketing activities to current market needs. According to the current research carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Republic, the Social Communication Research Institute of the Slovak Republic, the research agency MNFORCE and the communication agency Seesame entitled "How are you, Slovakia", Slovaks are mainly concerned about the following issues: rising energy prices and inflation (88.7% of respondents); the economic crisis caused by the war in Ukraine (83.6% of respondents), the state the Slovak healthcare system is in (81.2% of respondents), the popularity of extremist and anti-system groups in Slovakia (65.8%)<sup>137</sup>. In our opinion, however, the groundswell effect usually arises at a time when people feel threatened, frustrated and dissatisfied and wish to improve something (e.g. customers do not have enough information, the information is not true, or they had a negative experience and want to share it further, want to innovate the current business tactics). On a practical level, this means that business entities should continue in their marketing communication strategies and invite consumers to join in and even create brand-related content. It goes without saying that the public opinion is important for business entities. We live in a technologically dynamic century. Businesses often do not have room for experimenting, and therefore must regularly communicate with their customers, especially online (mass targeting). However, recent research by C. A. Ross<sup>138</sup> took a different approach to the issue of interpersonal dynamics of online discussions. Rather than assuming that the social media change human psychology, which in turn leads to behavioural changes, this research focused on the direct impact

<sup>137</sup> *Obavy Slovákov (What worries Slovaks)*. [online]. [2022-07-23]. Available at: <<https://www.akosamateslovensko.sk/tema/obavy/>>.

<sup>138</sup> ROOS, C. A. – KOUDENBURG, N. – POSTMES, T. Online social regulation: When everyday diplomatic skills for harmonious disagreement break down. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 2020, Vol. 25, No. 6, p. 385.

the social media have on people's social interactions and psychological well-being. The results showed that even in the absence of visible polarization (differing opinions on a specific topic), people interacting online may still have a sense of emerging polarization due to the fact that they lack certain diplomatic skills. On the basis of the above, it is important to point out that every successful marketing communication puts the needs of consumers first, so as to provide them with sense of belonging. In turn, consumers will spread word-of-mouth and recommend the brand – e.g. certificate “Verified by customers” on Heureka (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9 Certificate of trustworthiness on the website Heureka.sk – Verified by customers**

*Source:* Overené zákazníkmí, 2022.

Being seen in a positive light is crucial for any brand. However, it is important that business entities regularly examine and evaluate who their customers are and how their behaviour is changing. In order to understand the issue of contemporary consumer behaviour, some crucial aspects need to be addressed. An important feature of the current customer is inattention<sup>139</sup>. Business entities strive to attract and maintain the customer's attention, as doing so is getting much harder due to information overload on social media and almost<sup>140</sup> unlimited access to information in a short time. We operate with an assumption of limited attention, that is, the user of the social network cannot pay attention to all the information he is being fed. Therefore, more often than not, Internet users tend to read

<sup>139</sup> See: ZHENG, F. – GAO, P. – HE, M. (eds.). Association between mobile phone use and inattention in 7102 Chinese adolescents: a population-based cross-sectional study. In *BMC Public Health*. 2014, Vol. 14, Art. No. 1022.

<sup>140</sup> There are several conditions that serve as a limitation for obtaining information on social media (e.g. Internet access, technological device, social network account, etc.).

only the headlines<sup>141</sup>. The objective reality is that we currently have such a large amount of information at our disposal that there is information overload and lot of misinformation. Misinformation and disinformation often evoke apocalyptic visions in those who read them. Social science disciplines see misinformation and disinformation as a frequent phenomenon. In view of the above, misinformation and disinformation are a way to convey a message and attract the attention of the social media user, who, swayed by attractive-sounding messages, joins the communication process, thus triggering the groundswell effect without an official institution getting involved.



*Internet users, who themselves are creators of content (known as UGC)<sup>142</sup>, exert a specific pressure with their activity with a downward or upward dynamic. In an ideal scenario, this pressure should stimulate businesses to seek innovation in various areas.*

The creation of content by the users of a particular website, whether it is a social network or a discussion forum, represents a threat to a business entity to a certain extent. A negative review or a negative comment directed at a business entity may give a rise to the groundswell effect, often to the detriment of the business entity. One of the direct consequences is a loss of trust on the part of followers, customers and consumers, and subsequent lack of interest in purchasing products or services.

## 4.2 Groundswell categorization

Although the groundswell is not a person or a community of people, we consider the personality typology to be an essential part of groundswell concept. The groundswell, as an activity, is created by people, i.e. audience. The message recipients give rise to a wave that distributes information further. The following section discusses the typology of personality according to C. G. Jung and E. Spranger, whose theories will help us define the groundswell typology.

<sup>141</sup> *Psychologička: Keď čítate len nadpisy, je to ako keby ste jedli iba junk food (Psychologist: When you only read headlines, it's like eating junk food).* [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://bezpecnenanete.eset.com/sk/it-bezpecnost/ked-citate-len-nadpisy-je-to-ako-keby-ste-jedli-iba-junk-food-psychologicka-vysvetluje-aky-vplyv-ma-pretlak-informacii-na-mysel-a-preco-ludia-veria-nezmyslom/>>.

<sup>142</sup> *USG: user generated content means direct creation of content by users (for example, users of social media or readers of a blog or discussion participants).*

### 4.2.1 Personality typology according to Jung

In his research, C. G. Jung (1875-1961) focused on the balance between the attributes of self-realization and individualization. With his theories aimed at postulating the opposite types of attitudes of introversion and extraversion, he followed up on the teachings of the philosopher F. Nietzsche<sup>143</sup> and psychologist W. James. For a better understanding of the issue, we will only briefly outline the issues to which these researchers devoted their careers. In his works, F. Nietzsche focused on examining the psychology of oneself and self-investigation, consisting of a synthesis of constantly changing and competing opposites. W. James together with Ch. S. Pierce founded the school of American pragmatism. Pragmatism holds that both the meaning and the truth of any idea is a function of its practical outcome. The idea of W. James crucial for the scientific monograph hereunder is that there is rational to believe propositions even if we have little or no evidence to support our beliefs. According to James, indeterminism is a cornerstone of a worthwhile life. The key is to understand the freedom we have when we do something or make a decision (e.g. when we comment on the activities of other people in a specific environment). C. G. Jung believed that people's behaviour and experiences differ according to certain common characteristics that can be described as specific patterns of behaviour. However, he remained convinced that human behaviour and experience are consistent. He also defined preferences, which he referred to as differences between people's psychological attitudes and functions. One type of preferences relates to the individual's approach to other people, businesses. According to Jung, this preference could be defined as introverted (an introverted person) and extroverted (an extroverted person). With regard to the issue of the groundswell, it is important to interpret and analyse especially the extroverted type of person. A brief outline of an introverted person<sup>144</sup> should not be missing, though. An introverted person is more focused on himself; he is less willing to communicate with others, he focuses on his own inner experiencing of situations and places great importance on subjective factors such as thinking, observing, analysing and evaluating, pursues own intuition. An extroverted person is defined by qualities such as openness, willingness to join discussions, socialization, feeling of being superior and the ability to become a social mediator. With regard to the issue discussed herein,

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<sup>143</sup> STOLZ, S. A. Nietzsche's Psychology of the Self: the Art of Overcoming the Divided Self. In *Human Arenas*. 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 267.

<sup>144</sup> See also: COHEN, M. X. – YOUNG, J. – BAEK, J.-M. – KESSLER, C. – RANGANATH, C. Individual differences in extraversion and dopamine genetics predict neural reward responses. In *Cognitive Brain Research*. 2005, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 853.

extroverts could be defined as leaders of the groundswell. According to research by The Guardian, extroverted people are 25% more likely to get a lucrative job than introverts. Introverts, on the other hand can prove to be good leaders in the long run<sup>145</sup>. Although, from our point of view, it is not relevant to define people based on the personality typology when discussing groundswell, it is obvious that introverted people are less likely to create and fuel the groundswell effect, as their nature prevents them from doing so. However, it is necessary to point out that no individual is exclusively introverted or extroverted, it all depends on situation people find themselves in.

#### 4.2.2 Personality typology according to Spranger

E. Spranger<sup>146</sup> (1882-1963) understood psychology as a “science of meaningful life”, the aim of which is to search for and determine the meaningful connections in one’s life based on the so-called psychology of reason. He assumed that there is a system of classification that sorts humans by six basic cultural values: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. Based on prioritizing one of these principles, he defined three basic personality characteristics: a theory-oriented person, an economy-oriented person, and an aesthetic-oriented person.

Spranger defined the theoretical attitude as the approach of an individual who is motivated by the search for truth, has a desire for objective facts, systematizes, clarifies concepts, creates an intellectual world based on reason. Knowing the laws of the nature and relationships between people is of a fundamental value for him. However, Spranger included in this category, in addition to scientists, doctors, accountants, all those for whom information was key, for example I. Kant. According to the author, the economic attitude represents an approach where an individual puts the value of utility first, and considers money to be the highest good. From the point of view of nature, this is a person who is egocentric, thinking only of his own well-being. The economic attitude perceives value only in that which will bring direct benefit to a particular individual, his family and friends, while ignoring the noetic problems that may arise in the process of obtaining this benefit.

The aesthetic attitude, according to Spranger’s definition, sees the world in terms of beauty, symmetry and aesthetic appearance, while not looking at noetic

<sup>145</sup> FEATHERSTONE, E. *How extroverts are taking the top jobs - and what introverts can do about it*. [online]. [2022-10-02]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/>>.

<sup>146</sup> SPRANGER, E. *Types of men*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1929-01012-000>>.

problems. According to Spranger, an example of a person with aesthetic attitude was Lord Byron and O. Wilde. Such an individual perceives everything to be either harmonious or disharmonious, as if he could not see the reality for what it is, that things may not always be black or white. If an aesthetically oriented person perceives the world to be harmonious, he feels comfortable, and shows his content to the world. However, if such a person perceives the world as disharmonious, he feels uneasy and suffers. The social attitude is the attitude of an altruist, that is, a person who lives for others, who cherishes sympathy and love for other people. He looks for a piece of himself in other people, lives for others, strives for, so to speak, infinite love for humanity. An individual pursuing the social attitude is hard to define. On the one hand, Spranger emphasizes patriarchy, on the other hand, he highlights that only through love for one's neighbour can a person confirm the existence of this relationship. The attitude of power is characterized by the presence of vital energy and egocentrism. Therefore, the individual is interested in other people only for the purpose of manipulating them. The political attitude is based on the need to manage the lives of other people. For this person, hierarchical structures and power relations are the basis of life. An effective political type is likely to be perceived by others as an overly powerful and strong leader. One's tendency towards a tyrannical or more democratic style of leadership will depend on other factors as well. The religious attitude is primarily based on the search for the meaning of life. Such people tend to turn to religion, search for a higher truth, for a reason the world and people exist. A religious person looks for the highest values in the transcendent, in relation to God (like Francis of Assisi). Spranger's typology became the starting point for some empirical studies of values.

### 4.2.3 MBTI personality typology

This typology is crucial for understanding people capable of creating the groundswell effect. According to the MBTI, each person is said to have one preferred quality from each category. In total, there are 16 unique types – categories of personalities: ISTJ / logistician, ISFJ / defender, INFJ / advocate, INTJ / architect, ISTP / crafter, ISFP / artist, INFP / mediator, INTP / thinker, ESTP / persuader, ESFP / entertainer, ENFP / champion, ENTP / innovator-debater, ESTJ / director, ESFJ / nurturer, ENFJ / hero, ENTJ commander<sup>147</sup>. The MBTI typology<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> SIMKUS, J. *Myers & Briggs' 16 Personality Types*. [online]. [2022-10-01]. Available at: <[www.simplypsychology.org/the-myers-briggs-type-indicator.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/the-myers-briggs-type-indicator.html)>.

<sup>148</sup> PITTENGER, D. J. Cautionary Comments Regarding the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. In *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 2005, Vol. 57, No. 3, p. 213.

was defined during the WWII by researchers Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers who based it on the theory of C. G. Jung. Jung created a psychological theory based on which he divided people into two main categories – introverts and extroverts. He then paid attention to functions such as thinking, feeling, perception and intuition. On this basis, Jung came up with four temperament theory of personalities: a kind person (choleric), a pragmatic person (phlegmatic), a fun-loving person (sanguine) and an analytical individual (melancholic). Each of these temperaments has different characteristics, strengths and weaknesses or preferences and cherishes different values. Pragmatic and analytical people have great organizational skills and are facts-oriented. A kind and fun-loving person acts based on their subjective experience and places a great emphasis on their emotions. The kind and analytical type of a person could be described as less active, less assertive and needing more time for the decision-making process, while pragmatists and fun-loving people are more decisive, more realistic, that is, they stand firmly on the ground and tend to influence others (this is an important piece of information in terms of the groundswell). The MBTI test aims at categorizing personality types. The most basic personality typology is based on the division between introverts (I) and extroverts (E). This division is based on two main attributes: sense (S) and intuition (N). Information processing stands behind two categories: thinking (T) (meaning a person works with data, numbers and uses logic) and feeling (F) (person is empathetic and decisive). With regard to lifestyle, there is the following: (J) judging (people who plan and solve problems) and (P) perception (people who prefer to examine and evaluate existing objects and facts). Observing people (with regard to the groundswell, we talk about inactive people) keep all options open and like to work under pressure. On the basis of the above breakdown of temperaments, we can divide people into four groups: idealists, choleric, authoritative and benevolent.

- a) *Intuition plus Feeling / Empath (NF)* they are people looking for ideals. It is possible to define them as choleric, they are also authoritative, but often kind people. They are drawn to honour, eager to explore identity and like the company of other people. Sometimes they are called the Apollo archetype. Children of this category begin to communicate at an early age. They are very warm, considerate and empathetic towards others and try to understand them. Idealists care about relationships with people, they try to improve the world they live in, however small it might be. It is typical for them that they look for good qualities in everyone and at the same time they doubt themselves from a young age and need a lot of support. They like a personal approach, they are not competitive, and they achieve excellent results at school or at work.



- b) *Analysts (NT)* they are goal-oriented and logical temperament type. These people are very analytical, logical and ambitious, with leadership tendencies (the Promethean archetype). They like to solve problems and find connections between them. They are curious and analyse the problem in depth, are mostly objective and hardworking. Analysts can be introverted (keep their opinion to themselves) and extroverted (they express their opinion directly). They often expose illogical arguments and look for connections that others often miss. While studying, they do not like routine, detailed explanations or constant repetitions, but love intellectual challenges. They are vulnerable and unsure of themselves, doubting themselves very often. Although they are aware of their faults, they have a hard time admitting them publicly because they have a hard time tolerating failure and imperfection in others.
- c) *Explorer / Originator (SP)* they are sanguine, i.e. people who like to have fun. They like adventure, they are often free-spirited but kind-hearted (Dionysian archetype). They live for the moment, they adapt very quickly, are impulsive. They tend to be artistically gifted and skilled as well. People may perceive them as disorganized and chaotic, but that doesn't bother them at all. They like hand-on approach to learning, they like to try things first and then they try to find theoretical connections. They handle critical situations and also tolerate criticism well, because they are sure of themselves and are not influenced by other people's opinions. They quickly deal with difficult situations and then naturally adapt to a new environment. Meeting deadlines is a problem for them, and they don't like to work according to instructions.
- d) *Sentinel / Thinker (SJ)* are pragmatic and phlegmatic types. They like to follow systematic instructions (the Epimethean archetype). They like order and are good at keeping specific commitments. They are detail-oriented. They do not like surprises and like to feel that they are important to someone. They are conservative and do not stand out from the crowd. It can be assumed that SJ types like to create strong communities. Sentinel / thinker type of people are predisposed to create a strong groundswell effect as they act as an authority within the community. They are adaptable, but tasks that have not been agreed upon and planned in advance become problematic for them. They react sensitively to instability because they need a sense of security. It affects them adversely if they feel threatened. They like to work according to specific pre-known procedures and manuals, because they need to know that they are on the right path<sup>149</sup>. The

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<sup>149</sup> PITTENGER, D. J. Cautionary Comments Regarding the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. In *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*. 2005, Vol. 57, No. 3, p. 219.



personality typology according to the MBTI is combines individual preferences for the purpose of creating a specific personality.

We will briefly summarize the MBTI typology. This methodology is of great help when choosing a job position (it is also often used during job interviews). The end result means that people will understand themselves a little better so they can make a career choice that best fits their personality (what their strengths and weaknesses are). The methodology can also be helpful in the workplace, as managers are able to classify their subordinates and colleagues, and propose the most effective communication strategy. Those who strive to build and maintain well-functioning relationships or achieve impartial, non-critical and non-conflicting communication will also find this methodology useful. However, the MBTI does not explore one's intelligence, emotional intelligence and self-confidence. MBTI can often yield distorted results due to mood a test-taker find themselves in (children in their formative years (from 3 to 12 years old), violence in the family, an alcoholic parent, circumstances in which the child is forced to develop another personality for the sake of survival. In adulthood, the result may be skewed by work requirements due to which a person is forced to adopt personality traits differing from the character).

#### 4.2.4 Groundswell typology according to the authors of the publication "Groundswell"

Researchers from the research institute Research Gate Li and Bernoff<sup>150</sup>, who stand behind the book "Groundswell" state that, based on the socio-technological ladder, the groundswell can be categorized as follows: creators, critics, collectors, joiners, spectators, inactive.

- a) *Creators* are at the top of the ladder as these are social media users who publish posts at least once a month using online articles, blogs or websites. However, these people can also upload videos and audio files on portals such as YouTube.
- b) *Critics* react to online content by posting comments on blog sites, discussion forums, rating or review portals. Li and Bernoff state that there are more critics than creators, which stems from the nature of the activity – commenting on something someone has created is much easier than the actual process of creating something new.

<sup>150</sup> LI, CH. – BERNOFF, J. *Spodná vlna. Ako podnikat' a víťaziť vo svete, ktorý zmenili sociálne médiá (Groundswell. How to do business and win in a world forever changed by social media)*. Bratislava : Eastone Books, 2010, pp. 43-47.

- c) *Collectors save URLs and websites* that provide services in the field of social bookmarking and also vote for sites, use RSS in feed. According to the authors, collectors are for gathering information and organizing a large amount of data.
- d) *Joiners* join a specific group, such as MySpace<sup>151</sup> and build a relationship with others and maintain their profiles.
- e) *Spectators* are consumers, that is, recipients of what others produce, e.g. blog articles, reviews and discussions, comments, GIF or MEME, video content, podcasts.
- f) *Inactive* are people who do not directly participate in the creation of content, but are also members of the mass group that they create. The authors associate only the inactive online community with this category (not the whole population).

Categorizing the impact of the groundswell is crucial for business entities as it will help them understand it better. Business entities must first thoroughly analyse the market, which means not only competition and customers, but also other entities who, although not customers (potential or actual), can influence masses. People exposed to such influencers may or may not become future customers. In the following part we will define the colour typology of the groundswell.

### 4.3 Colour typology of the groundswell

For the sake of quick segmentation of the groundswell, we decided to outline four main categories of the colour typology of the groundswell.

- a) *Blue groundswell*: this type of the groundswell is spread through digital devices. The blue groundswell is created by individuals who use mobile devices for communication purposes. It is obvious that mobile devices can be used in different ways. However, the blue groundswell focuses exclusively on information exchange. Mobile devices were created primarily for the purpose of connecting people without the need for the physical presence of both actors of the conversation. It is important to draw attention to the fact that the groundswell often arises in the offline world. However, without the future involvement of other technological means, we cannot talk about the mass dissemination of information.
- b) *Yellow groundswell*: means passing on opinions and critical attitudes towards specific business entities in the environment of unofficial (privately-owned)

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<sup>151</sup> At the time the authors published the book “Groundswell”, MySpace was a popular social network. Today’s equivalent is the social network Facebook.

websites such as blogs and discussion threads. Yellow groundswell is formed by individuals who receive and transmit information through websites. Given the space the yellow groundswell takes place at, there are two types of the groundswell we distinguish. Firstly, we talk about publishing posts on private blogs created by individuals for the purpose of evaluating products and services of various official institutions (paid collaboration also falls under this category), but the essence remains that the name of the institution appears directly in a specific post. Secondly, the yellow groundswell also constitutes comments under posts published on unofficial websites such as private blogs. In comments, people express their opinions on activities carried out by the institution or rate business entities based on their own experience.

- c) *Green groundswell*: represents a collective designation of innovative creatives who voluntarily decide to start, engage in and actively support open-source projects. On a practical level, the green groundswell means the collective efforts of lay people who come together in one place for the purpose of creating their own project or service. In this case, the goal of the groundswell activities is to create a unique concept that can be constantly improved based on the observations and opinions of other Internet users, e.g. through the open-source platform GitHub. Those who take part in the groundswell become the creators of a unique project that can be adopted as a go-to solution to various problems. At the same time, these people have the power to influence official institutions in such a way that they can replace official software solutions with their own, thus giving rise to a fierce competitive battle. This type of the groundswell (coming from the outside, i.e. the initiators and contractors are people who are interested in software) supports innovative ideas. Some of these ideas can result in a unique software solution.
- d) *Red groundswell*: is a collective designation for social media users who influence public opinion with their activities on social networks. It can be activities such as writing posts, commenting on official as well as unofficial posts and statements of various institutions, sharing one's own opinion or the opinions of communities, building and supporting communities or creating and publishing various types of audio-visual content. The red groundswell has gained bargaining power over the past five years, mainly due to the growing number of social media users<sup>152</sup>. We are of the opinion that the red groundswell is extremely risky for business entities. Business entities should pay

<sup>152</sup> For summary information on the issue of social media and the groundswell, we recommend to study the second chapter of this monograph.

attention to the red groundswell on social media as it is capable of causing conflicting situations that can affect not only the communication strategy but also the future of the business entity's economic activity.

We introduced four types of the groundswell based on the colour typology. This typology will make it easier for business entities to identify the activities taking place within the groundswell. The groundswell often behaves unpredictably and impulsively, thus negatively affecting the communication of official institutions. Business entities should look for ways to cooperate with the groundswell or benefit from it to boost their economic growth.

## 4.4 Groundswell typology based on activation of relationships

The groundswell can be categorized based on different criteria (just like marketers categorize customers). In the simplest terms, the groundswell could be categorized into passive and active. Although the groundswell represents a specific set of activities, a new form of the groundswell is emerging. This new form of groundswell receives information from the active groundswell, but does not actively spread it further and assumes somewhat passive attitude. The passive attitude of the groundswell means that the groundswell does not spread the idea or information in the environment in which it originated. The passive groundswell is aware of a specific issue, but due to various factors (e.g. a phlegmatic personality features) it does not spread the groundswell further. However, it cannot be stated that the groundswell effect disappears as a result of such an attitude, far from it. In this regard, e-WOM and WOM should be taken into account (through e-WOM and WOM thoughts and opinions are spread from an individual to another individuals). Even though the groundswell is the strongest online (social media and websites that were created for the purpose of discussing ideas and sharing opinions), offline activities and their impact cannot be ruled out either. The passivity of the groundswell can also be manifested by changing the distribution path of information. This means that the social media user does not directly participate in the discussion or a specific open-source project,<sup>153</sup> instead, he spreads the information further among family members, acquaintances or friends who were previously unaware of the given issues. As a result of new knowl-

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<sup>153</sup> *An open-source project* means anybody is free to use, study, modify, and distribute a project for any purpose. Open-source projects are a typical example of the groundswell, as they allow for changes initiated by ordinary people – “someone like you”.

edge, the recipients of the message become a part of the groundswell. Based on the subjective belief, they can choose to join the groundswell, thus becoming active groundswell creators. It should be noted, however, that audience that is not engaged is not able to generate the groundswell. The groundswell is created only by those who are involved. Perhaps some will not agree with our statement, but we are open to discussions. In view of the ongoing research into the groundswell issue, the basic theoretical starting points of the issue of the groundswell should be clarified. Some authors would perhaps oppose our statement as it differs from the central and widely accepted idea of the groundswell – dissatisfaction and disagreement with the information presented by official institutions. Changes in the behaviour of Internet users are a prerequisite for dynamic changes in the behaviour of those who generate the groundswell. It is obvious that the rapid growth of digital technologies gave rise to a number of different communities with differing values. Tech savviness of Internet users varies. Thus, our relationship with technology differs across the spectrum, too. Therefore, the groundswell in this regard could be categorized as follows: friendly and hostile groundswell, wild and calm groundswell.

*The friendly groundswell* acts as a friend, someone people know and care about. This type of groundswell is suitable for a long-term communication strategy, as the friendly groundswell can positively influence the activity and profitability of business entities. The relationship between the groundswell actors can be described as cohesive, tolerant, helping and supportive. However, even the friendly groundswell can find itself in a crisis and may not always communicate only positive information. The fans of this type of groundswell should not exploit their position to the detriment of other actors. Business entities should reward individual actors for spreading friendly groundswell and even encourage it. The reward does not necessarily have to be a material product. Giving the groundswell room to grow free of pressure and restrictions, while not harming the good name of the business entity, helps it cement the good name and positive image of a business entity.

*The hostile groundswell* is the opposite of the friendly groundswell. In this case, the groundswell takes the position of an enemy that provokes conflicts and deliberately defames other people (business entities). Sometimes, the hostile groundswell is borderline legal. People have always been resourceful and knew how to use any new technology for their own benefit (for example, smartphones, apart from letting us get in touch with our loved ones, enabled people making anonymous phone calls). Even the earliest forms of written communication could not do without threatening letters or mocking inscriptions on walls and buildings.

With the onset of the Internet, and the rise of discussion forums and social media, cyberbullying has become a palpable problem. However, it should be noted that cyberbullying does not form a part of the groundswell. Social media are a heaven for cyberbullies as they act as a database full of information upon which cyberbullies thrive. Moreover, social media provide almost unregulated space where cyberbullies can thrive. The hostile groundswell means activities such as online slander (the purpose is to destroy the positive image of business entities or their reputation, thus strengthening the effect of the groundswell), disinformation spread, cyberstalking<sup>154</sup> and total exclusion from the online group without giving a reason. According to the Slovak portal webmagazin,<sup>155</sup> cyberbullying on social networks is one of the most common problems. Online harassment is currently a problem and a challenge for researchers. Therefore, our goal is to point out the ways in which the effect of the negative groundswell can be avoided. For this purpose, the actors of the groundswell, who act as the enemy, use various tactics and techniques to harass, humiliate, intimidate and control or bully their victims (including services or products).

*The rational groundswell* capitalizes on the principles of critical thinking and reflects on specific information and compares it. This type of the groundswell verifies individual sources of information. The rational groundswell, however, can become a friendly or a hostile groundswell. According to the MBTI personality typology, people base their decision either on rational thinking or emotions. Rational groundswell actors must first carefully evaluate the logical consequences of their decision, while emotional types make their decisions based on an emotional state they find themselves in. The rationally-oriented groundswell relies on logical thinking to reach a specific solution, i.e. a recommendation to change a specific product, an innovation proposal, etc. This type of groundswell tries to arrive at decisions that it believes will be fair, helpful or able to reveal unfair practical and false claims.

*The emotional groundswell* is based on emotions. Emotions have a profound effect on experiences, and vice versa, our experiences can affect emotions. Emotional persons are those who are in the grip of high emotion in the moment. An emotionally intelligent person is able to identify emotions and understand the role they play in influencing a person's thoughts, words, and actions. In order to

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<sup>154</sup> *Cyberstalking* is an aggressive use of the Internet or other electronic means to stalk or harass and individual or business entities and attack them with text, images, meme or GIF.

<sup>155</sup> See also: *Najčastejším problémom na sociálnych sieťach je kyberšikana (The most common problem on social networks is cyberbullying)*. [online]. [2022-07-12]. Available at: <<https://webmagazin.teraz.sk/>>.

understand the emotional groundswell, it is necessary to define what is emotional intelligence. The concept of emotional intelligence stands on self-awareness, that is being aware of one's own emotions, being able to analyse them and understand them. The emotional groundswell reacts to stimuli in two ways – immediately or over time. It is important to realize that if the groundswell reacts to a negative situation immediately after learning about it, a conflict may arise. The triggers may vary, one of them can be a fake negative review posted by a social network user on their timeline where they criticize the activities of a business entity, that the business never actually carried out. However, there are also advantages to the emotional groundswell, for example, feedback that is provided much earlier than is the case with the rational groundswell. Although such feedback may be biased, the emotional groundswell points to the feelings of users and consumers, and therefore it is fair to say that its position is irreplaceable.

## 4.5 Groundswell typology according to activities

New communication tendencies in the digital environment come hand in hand with the technological progress of the society. The groundswell is a phenomenon that is the result of the activities communities take. Communities are the driving force behind the groundswell. An important feature of the groundswell is participation. Individual actors of the groundswell participate and interact with each other, while it is not important whether they have unified opinions on certain issues or topics (from our point of view, it is impossible to agree about everything). However, the important thing is that they agree on things that matter. The most important factors are setting, education and other psychological and behavioural factors, often influenced by the groundswell leaders. Although we have so far not addressed the effect the groundswell has on ordinary Internet users, i.e. those who are not the driving force behind the groundswell, but notice it, it is clear that the groundswell actors and their activities are able to influence users of a particular platform – be it social media or discussion forums or other websites where users form communities. Given the activities of the groundswell actors, the groundswell can be broken down into:

- a) *passive*: visitor, ghost,
- b) *active*: hero, commentator-provocateur, fan, manipulator, critic, leader (emoticons, MEME or Gif audio files).

*The groundswell as a visitor* represents the first phase of groundswell activities. The groundswell effect can arise only if Internet users acquire certain knowledge directly on websites, social media or in various community groups or on

unofficial sites. The question is how the visitor / reader can contribute to the creation of the groundswell. The answer can be, for example, a search campaign. By clicking on the website or a specific keyword in the article, the website visitor will be redirected to the website, thereby increasing the position of the specific business entity in the Google search engine.

Although *the groundswell as a ghost* represents a passive member of the groundswell who is not an initiator or a follower of the communication flow, in an offline environment such a person can influence an individual or a group of people with his opinions, although he is not even aware of it. The claims of our friends, acquaintances or colleagues at work can easily get under our skin. Already in 1991, M. McLuhan, with a certain amount of irony, noted that advertising is like a drug that is able to hypnotize a person on subconscious level. According to him, when consumed,<sup>156</sup> advertising induces a state of hypnosis, that is, a feeling in which our sensory and critical perception are dulled. He also states that if the sender of the advertising message is someone the recipient knows (a friend, colleague or family member), the consumer lets the sender manipulate with their mind due to familiarity. On the basis of the above, it is clear that such a recipient of information does not think critically about the information, thus accepting the opinion without further questions.

The groundswell *as a hero* represents the first type of active actor of the groundswell. In our opinion, this is the most passionate actor of the groundswell, as he independently creates valuable content in several ways – publishes posts on social networks, writes blogs and reviews on websites or social media. Active creators of the groundswell also upload photos, videos, or music. However, the quality is very important in this regard, as not all content creators create quality content. Therefore, actors of the groundswell should create such content that would act as a direct response to the specific requirements and needs of the target audience (audience itself decides whether it will support and share the idea further). An important part of marketing communication still attractive these days is storytelling<sup>157</sup> (yet another

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<sup>156</sup> *Consumption* means the process of accepting advertising message, e.g. by reading a positive review on the Internet.

<sup>157</sup> In today's market saturated with advertising, *storytelling* is an essential technique for reaching the target audience and at the same time distinguishing one's business from dozens of similar business entities. Currently, storytelling is mainly popular in the online promotional events and advertising as the Internet is a suitable place for a more direct interaction with the audience. The story is told mainly using texts, images, videos or their combination. The most important thing is to appeal to the recipients of the story so much that they themselves will want to spread this story further (groundswell effect).



er means the groundswell can spread). A content creator can write stories. Posting to various community groups on social networks, but also creating and publishing content on a blog is one of the cornerstones of storytelling.

The groundswell *as a commentator* – provocateur also actively participates in the spread of the groundswell, even though he is not its direct creator. The purpose of the groundswell is the key aspect researchers and marketers should pay attention to. Provocateurs express their (usually critical) opinions on social media or websites in order to question, attack and defame authorities and official institutions. Often, such actors of the groundswell are perfectly informed about the current events, and thus official institutions have a harder time opposing them, thus cementing the position of a provocateur. A. Kalogeropoulos et al. reported in their research study<sup>158</sup> that people who are interested in hard news are more likely to comment on different news stories on social media news sites. L. Guo et al.<sup>159</sup> report that commercialization of the online news environment helped the rise of fake news and news that are engaging / appealing to the target audience. At the same time, the provocateur is also concerned with the aspect of competition, as he wants to be better than others. Due to lack of time (as he wants to be the first to share the story), the provocateur does not have enough time to verify the information, and thus publishes information on social media or discussion forums that is not verified. All the provocateur seeks is attention and sensations. In his post “Prečo trollovia trollujú” (Why do trolls troll?), D. Ondrušek<sup>160</sup> tells the story of two trolls who do not seem suspicious at the first glance. No one would say that these people can post hateful and threatening comments online. Their family and friends say that they are quiet, non-conflicting and polite (some may suffer from anxieties). We can hardly believe that such people are capable of committing a social murder. Ondrušek further states that both “victims” of trolling he studied are not able to tell the reason for their actions. All they can say is that they liked the fact that unknown people supported them with their likes and vocal praise and words of support. They felt that they had become the celebrities of the present time, celebrities whose fame is built on hate, bullying, name-calling and enticing social murder. Commenters – provocateurs engage in discussions and pursue different goals.

<sup>158</sup> KALOGEROPOULOS, A. – NEGREDO, S. – PICONE, I. – NIELSEN, R. K. Who Shares and Comments on News?: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis of Online and Social Media Participation. In *Social Media + Society*. 2017, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> GUO, L. China’s “fake news” problem: Exploring the spread of online rumours in the government-controlled news media. In *Digital journalism*. 2020, Vol. 8, No. 8, p. 1001.

<sup>160</sup> ONDRUŠEK, D. Prečo ľudia trollujú (Why do people troll)? In JURKOVIČ, M. – ČAVOJOVÁ, V. – BREZINA, I. *Prečo ľudia veria nezmyslom (Why do people believe in nonsense)*. Bratislava : Premedia, 2019, p. 131.

The groundswell *as a fan* means an audience that has a positive relationship with a particular institution and has decided to support it based on their own experience or conviction. A fan follows favourite businesses, brands or celebrities based on their own beliefs. It is typical of a fan to embrace innovation, provide constructive feedback, engage in discussion and create content. However, fans are not only found on official pages (social media and websites of a particular brand) but also on discussion forums, they also read blog posts or communicate through applications such as Messenger, create their own fan content like fan pages or discussion forums. The groundswell as a fan is encouraging and motivating, because it tries to improve the current situation of the business entity it cares about, and therefore, addresses its critical opinions directly to the entity and not to other, unofficial platforms. The actors are aware that this activity could adversely affect a particular business. Cooperation with this type of groundswell is crucial as it put business entities into favourable light. Businesses can send fans a newsletter, promotional leaflets, or provide their fans with a special mobile application where they can collect bonus points or another form of reward.

The groundswell *as a manipulator* may act as a good altruist, but in fact, the person is an aggressive dictator whose goal is to destroy a specific institution. This type of groundswell will resort to any means and tools necessary to achieve his goal. The manipulator<sup>161</sup> is aware of his qualities, and although he often places himself in the position of a victim, this is not the case. He uses various techniques to achieve his own goal (manipulates people).<sup>162</sup> This groundswell community acts so as to destroy the reputation of a particular institution, using lies and disinformation to do so. It is extremely difficult to expose the manipulator, be it an individual or a whole community and stop his attacks or aggressive behaviour. If the manipulator is an individual, stopping him is easier as the community fans can report his suspicious activities. This is when the institutions step in and start investigation. There are several main types of manipulators. According to E. L. Shostrom there are 9 types of manipulators: rag manipulator (his techniques are so effective that the victim feels sorry for the manipulator as the manipulator (the actual aggressor) puts himself in the position of the victim), the dictator (exaggerating his power. He dominates, orders, quotes authorities and

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<sup>161</sup> ERKINBOY, U. A. – TOHIRBEK, S. O. Using of Manipulative Methods in the Communication. In *Academia Globe: Inderscience Research*. 2021, Vol. 2, No. 5, pp. 146-147.

<sup>162</sup> A manipulator is often a very clever leader who can reach out to communities of people and influence them with so that they do all the hard work for him, for example, a manipulated community writes hoaxes about vaccines against the COVID-19, thereby defaming the specific institutions that produced the vaccine.

does everything to control his victims), calculator (strives by all means to calculate and control everything and everything. He deceives, confuses, cheats, tries to outsmart and double-check others), sticky (manipulator is a person who seeks to be under the control of another person, he wants to be controlled, led. He is too pushy, lazy and weak. He does not like to do something himself; he always waits for orders and he sincerely likes such orders), hooligan / bully (demonstrates aggressiveness, rigidity and malevolence. He controls those around him with threats), nice guy (exaggerates his care, love, kills with his kindness. In some ways, colliding with him is more harmful than with a bully. The good guy almost always wins), judge (emphatically critical and sceptical. He does not trust anyone, constantly condemns and is indignant, touchy and vindictive), protector the opposite of judge. Demonstrates his support and indulgence to mistakes. He spoils those around him, indulging them beyond measure, and also preventing his clients from standing up for themselves and gaining independence. Instead of minding his own business, he prefers to take care of others, taking lifelong guardianship over them), mobster (is similar to the dictator type of manipulator, but his behaviour stands out in that if there is an opponent who wrongs him, he becomes the archenemy). The groundswell prone to manipulations (this effect is created by manipulative people) is currently wreaking havoc on social media. Since the Internet is a tool, a tactic and also a territory, it is becoming an integral part of undermining public order. People are more likely to realize when they are being manipulated by an official institution than by their colleague, friend or boss. Manipulation online is all the more dangerous as when we speak face to face with someone, we employ certain skills that help us see through the manipulation. However, on the Internet, the situation is much more dire as when we read a comment or a review, there is a time shift between the time the comment was written and the time we read it. Therefore, we assume that had the comment been false, it would have been removed or debunked before we had a chance to read it.

The *groundswell as a critic* (complainant) is able to influence the very functioning of business entities, either in a favourable way (e.g. if such criticism is constructive and will help improve the way the business entity implements its activities) or in a negative way (negative comments and reviews). When searching for an answer to the above question, it should be noted that what we call “criticism” today is based on the Western school of rationalism, which constantly sought to transcend and criticize its own form, which resulted in the creation of its own alternatives.<sup>163</sup> A critic or complainant focuses primarily on pointing

<sup>163</sup> HABERMAS, J. *Dobiehajúca revolúcia (A catching up revolution)*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 1999, p. 203.

out shortcomings, while looking for these shortcomings in various areas. If he does not find a specific problem, he was aiming at first, he actively seeks other problems to point out. It is important to point out that this type of Internet users (creators of the groundswell) pose a huge risk to business entities, as they actively seek deficiencies in everything and then point them out, usually to the detriment of the business entity.

The *groundswell based on emoticons, memes, Gif or audio files* includes a community that creates audio-visual elements such as emoticons<sup>164</sup>, Gifs<sup>165</sup> or memes<sup>166</sup> and uses them in the official communication with institutions or mentions official institutions through these audio-visual elements. Due to the fact that both relationships and communication are increasingly moving to the digital environment, many people communicate with friends or family through digital applications. This also entails changes in the communication itself. The words we use are changing, new abbreviations are being created, and most of our messages are created using gifs, memes or emoticons, which has opened up space for the emergence of type new communication – communication through emoticons, memes and gifs. Communities can also create the groundswell effect using these non-verbal communication elements that complement and, in some cases, even replace the written message (post). Online communication continuously and systematically disrupts the pillars of personal cognition and norm-making, as favourable effects (likes as well as positive emoticons, memes or gifs) and negative effects (negative emoticons, memes and gifs) push people to decide which posts, situations, people or official institutions they like or not. New trends in marketing communication mean memes, gifs and emoticons have become an integral part of any marketing message.

Digital tools as means of communication have simplified everyday communication not only between individuals, but also between business entities and individuals. With the onset of the technological revolution, the traditional ways of communication have changed and now include digital technology platforms, websites, social media and various communication applications. Marketing communication is usually a two-way communication. That means if a business entity

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<sup>164</sup> *Emoticons* are punctuation marks, letters and numbers put together by various combinations of keyboard characters that are used to create pictorial icons (smileys) depicting a specific feeling, state or activity of a person (e.g. happy, angry, tired, typing).

<sup>165</sup> *Gif* or “*Graphics Interchange Format*” is a lossless format for image files that supports both animated and static images.

<sup>166</sup> *Meme*, an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations).

engages in a certain action (e.g. it starts a Facebook campaign on an innovative product packaging), it is possible that recipients of the message will react to it (users of the Facebook social network). The groundswell is a phenomenon that has been around for several years. However, as more and more people tend to share their opinions online, the groundswell effect will take a hold and grow in intensity. As stated by A. Madleňák<sup>167</sup>, there are several ways to entice dialogue between social media users. The interaction between the groundswell and business entities differs, though. Therefore, the groundswell should be broken down into categories to get a better grasp of it. The next chapter discusses the importance of cooperating with the groundswell.

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<sup>167</sup> MADLEŇÁK, A. Marketingová komunikácia podniku na sociálnych médiách ako predpoklad rozvoja aktivít „spodnej vlny“ (Marketing communication of the business entity on social media as a prerequisite for the development of the groundswell activities). In HLADÍKOVÁ, V. – MADLEŇÁK, A. – KUPEC, V. *Sociálne médiá a marketingová komunikácia: eko-evolúcia alebo eko-revolúcia? (Social media and marketing communication: eco-evolution or eco-revolution?)* Praha : NOL – Nakladatelství odborné literatury, 2022, p. 79.

# **5 ACTIVATION OF RELATIONSHIPS AND COOPERATION RESULTING FROM THE GROUNDSWELL EFFECT**

Regular interpersonal communication gives rise to the groundswell naturally. The digital world is no different, as the groundswell is becoming a natural part of online communication, too. Communication on social networks often pushes the boundaries, which is why the effect of the groundswell that arises on social networks and discussion forums is different. One thing, however, remains the same, that is open and uncontrolled spread of communicated messages. This part of the scientific monograph summarizes the key terms and provides an answer to the question of why it is important for business entities to pay increased attention to the groundswell (the digital age cannot do without the Internet – the home of the groundswell).

## **5.1 Causes and consequences of the groundswell effect**

The groundswell can help solve several problems. The positive groundswell is of great help to the business entity not only in terms of reputation but also performance. The negative groundswell, however, forces business entities to look for ways to improve the groundswell and make it less damaging. Social media, much like the Internet itself or mobile devices, are communication distribution platforms that provide space for the emergence and development of the groundswell. In the first chapter we have stated that the groundswell is able to replace the official communication platforms of institutions. However, we do not think that the groundswell has the power to completely replace information a business entity wishes to share. Rather, we see the groundswell as a suitable addition to the official communication mix of a business entity. In the following section, we will describe the reasons why the groundswell is so crucial for business entities.

Communities help businesses maintain a favourable reputation. Community members can create an effect which we call the groundswell effect. Communities can evaluate business entities on the Internet in written reviews or on the basis of rating (points or stars). By doing so, they help business entities build their reputation and image (whether positive or negative). Following their negative experience (shipping delays, undelivered goods), customers can form anger-fuelled communities. As a rule, such customers write negative comments on the social media, on various discussion forums or blogs, explicitly mentioning the name of a specific business entity. To every action there is always an equal reaction. In this regard, this might entail reduced interest in the products or services of the business entity or damaged reputation. In times when business entities are competing for customers and a strong follower base is a determining factor of success, it is essential to interact with the online audience (i.e. online communities). However, such interaction is never easy, especially if the groundswell is already negative.

The groundswell could be seen as a cornerstone of all online activities. To understand the groundswell, we need to study and understand tools that make it up and to understand the tools we need to make sense of the purpose the groundswell serves. The main driving force is the need to expose the problems customers or fans of individual business entities are having. It is obvious that one individual posting comments can be stopped (delete a comment, delete a message or post, report it and then block it), assimilated, bribed (in various ways) or sued (all of these entail consequences of their own). However, the Internet allows people to create communities. The essence of a community is to recruit new members. As the community base grows, it is very difficult to monitor all of its activities or even stop them. In this regard, the Streissand effect should be mentioned<sup>168</sup>. Although the Streissand effect is an “ancient history” event (year 2003), it is a great example of the groundswell in practice. The originator was Barbra Streisand herself. However, the Streisand effect in the context of the groundswell was already discussed by Li and Bernoff in their book “Groundswell” when they pointed out the necessity of cooperation with the groundswell. An important prerequisite for working with the groundswell is to know that the groundswell exists. Business entities cannot interact with the groundswell if they do not know about its existence, or they are not able to tell the groundswell activities apart. One of the main goals of this monograph is to define what groundswell is and how does it work.

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<sup>168</sup> *The Streisand effect* is a phenomenon that occurs when an attempt to hide, remove, or censor information has the unintended consequence of increasing awareness of that information, often via the Internet. Related terms include the Blowback effect and the Astroturfing effect.

Groundswell means a growth of strong feelings among a large group of people, in particular those people who are interested in a specific issue, without the involvement of official institutions.

Customers who use the Internet every day are internally motivated to share their opinions and thoughts on everyday situations with people they communicate on daily basis using their platform of choice. Some people leave comments to ventilate their frustration with their own life or voice their dissatisfaction. This gives rise to the groups of “haters”, whose activities can damage the reputation of a business entity or even threaten its existence. A hater is a person who expresses their disapproval towards a specific person, authority or business entity in an extreme way using derogatory language. This person writes hateful comments that can affect the person, product or service in a negative way, which is often the hater’s intention. Haters have the power to create negative groundswell. These individuals usually post comments or create discussion posts because they are dissatisfied either with a product or a service (often, however, their dissatisfaction is not objective and they are to blame for it, e.g. if they had high expectations of a cheap product).

## 5.2 Fluctuating groundswell effect

Whether we are talking about positive or negative comments, threats or defamation, the decisive factor for maintaining a positive image is the reaction of the business entity. Even though the way the business entity reacts is important, what is more important is the time it takes the business entity to react. The first impression is often decisive. Individuals who see the way the business entity and their fans interact on social networks form an opinion about the business entity and other members of the discussion. Subconsciously, we test, diagnose, evaluate and place in a certain category every new thing we encounter, be it a business entity or a community. This behaviour gives rise to the groundswell. This is best illustrated on an example. Business entity Rajo has published a video post on its Facebook page. In the video, Rajo promotes its new eco-friendly product packaging that reduces its carbon footprint by 21% compared to previous packaging materials. One follower of the brand criticized Rajo for providing incomplete recycling information. The follower is not sure what the packaging material is made of and which waste container he should use to dispose of the packaging. The business entity responded to this post within two days with a friendly communication style, making the commenter feel like his opinion matter (“thank you for the comment, we will definitely consider it”).





Figure 10 The reaction of the business entity Rajo to the comment

Source: Facebook, 2022.

The example clearly shows that situations like these can give rise to the groundswell (in this case it did not). We can see that the business entity responded to the customer's demands very politely, which did not leave any room for the groundswell effect to emerge, even though the reaction time<sup>169</sup> of the business entity was longer than is recommended. Social media can help business entities, but they can also destroy them. However, it is important for business entities to realize that the way they respond on the Internet shapes their reputation. If a business entity decides not to respond to comments, that may give rise to the negative groundswell. Below you can find an example of how the negative groundswell arises.

The following example concerns the business entity Kompot. Kompot published a post showing their product Bezcenná handra Heger (The useless rag Heger) with the caption "Reprint, anyone?". Reactions to this post were varied, but since Kompot is known for its peculiar way of communication and

<sup>169</sup> For more information refer to BARNHART, B. *Why you need to speed up your social media response time (and how)*. [online]. [2022-09-07]. Available at: <<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-response-time/>>.

humour full of irony and satire, it is obvious that the followers of this business entity are people who have a similar style of humour (or at least the vast majority of them). Here, however, we would like to draw attention to the comment (see Figure 11) praising this post: “Aaaaaa, it should have been out a long time ago”. The business entity Kompot reacted as follows “it was, they just sold out pretty quickly ... and we hoped that there would be no need for more. Boy, aren’t we naive?”. Other followers were visibly upset, posting comments like the following: “but he has a family!” to which the business entity replied, “I guess the traditional one?”. This style of communication perfectly reflects the image of the brand. In this case, however, this communication style may give rise to the groundswell that can help the business entity to gain new customers and followers, or vice versa, it can discourage current followers from ever buying from the brand again (even if the customers were satisfied with the products before).



Figure 11 Reaction of the business entity Kompot to comments

Source: Facebook, 2022.

The previous two model situations pointed out not only the communication styles of two business entities, but also different interactions between fans and

business entities. In both cases, the fans reacted to the product advertised by the business entity on Facebook. A negative PR of the business entity can trigger a chain reaction that can lead to the loss of customers, a decrease in sales, but especially a decrease in profit, which can be destructive for the business entity. This may happen if the business entity underestimates the effect of the groundswell, if the subject knows about the existence of the groundswell but decides to ignore its manifestations, or decides to use inappropriate language, thus further stimulating the effect of the groundswell. In such a case, groundswell is able to spread like a fire to other communication platforms. If this happens, we are talking about the groundswell overlap.

However, communities that come together to create a certain platform or innovation can create valuable content themselves. And not only that. They can also create, for example, an Internet search engine (Mozilla) or various open-source platforms (Wikipedia, Reddit, Python open-source projects such as OpenCV or the Library JavaScript for creating different user interfaces). Internet users nowadays don't just want to consume content, they want to be content creators themselves, which is an important prerequisite for the groundswell effect. One of the advantages of involving a community in solution creation is mainly the insight it brings to the project. The groundswell can be made by doctors, soldiers, policemen, saleswomen, teachers, but also students.

The business entity Mobilfox is a great example how a wide community can be involved in the problem-solving process. Mobilfox produces protection cases for smartphones (primarily for iPhones from Apple). The entity communicates with its followers on the social networks Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest and actively involves customers in the process of creating their own smartphone cases. Customers can choose the type of case according to the type of their smartphone and then create their own product design (users are free to write their own text, choose a specific font and add additional accessories like a lanyard to hang the smartphone case around the neck). The following image shows the benefits of custom design. Mobilfox encourages its customers to share their own smartphone case designs on social networks. In our opinion, this way of interacting with the audience is a suitable way to stand out from the competition. Even more so if you have an army of satisfied customers behind you and the quality of your products is guaranteed. This is an ideal combination to build your positive image on. In such a case, brand ambassadors and satisfied customers spread positive groundswell (they publish photos of their own mobile phone cases with the hashtag #mobilfox).

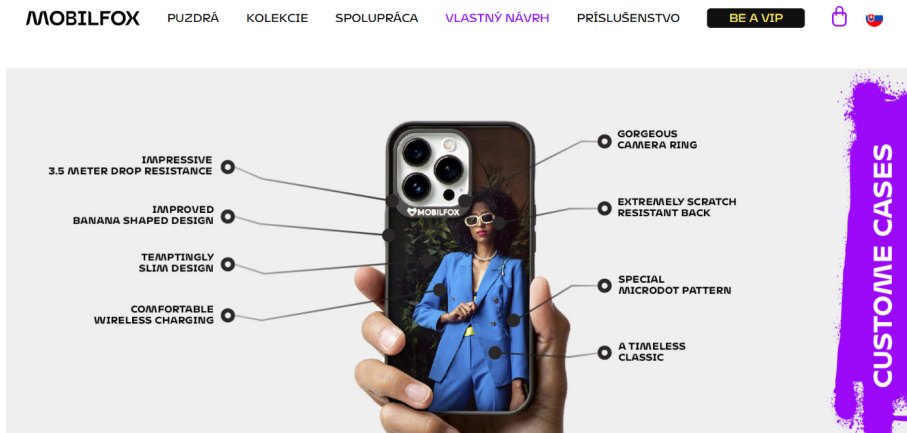


Figure 12 **How to get an individual interested in creating a unique case for a Mobilfox smartphone**

*Source: Mobilfox 2022.*

Towards the end of the section, let us summarize the key findings. Every individual who uses digital technologies and is also a user of the Internet or social media is an independent content creator. Social media users create different communities in which fans of a business entity, political parties or fans of a certain lifestyle (e.g. a community of tourists or zero-waste fans) come together. However, content creators are also found on other platforms, too. Given the type of content, these platforms may include podcast websites, video review websites, vlogs, blogs, or other websites where content creators reach out to their fans or those interested in the topic the content creator discusses. Man is a social creature and likes to socialize, so it is understandable that a content creator looks for opportunities to build his fan base. Fans support the content creator in various ways (commenting, sharing, liking, posting reviews, etc.). By doing so, they create the groundswell.

### 5.3 Interaction of the business entity with the groundswell

The groundswell overlaps when the groundswell actors talk about a problem (based on truth or fiction) a business entity is having on a communication platform of which the business entity in question is not aware. That is why it

is essential that business entities also monitor other communication platforms, i.e. media that are clearly serving as communication platforms for users of digital technologies. The business entity can intervene in the discussion only if it is aware of it. A great way to intervene in this discussion is to involve a disinterested person, e.g. an expert who will point out the relevance of the business entity's claim and thus prevent the uncontrolled spread of the groundswell.

Interaction with customers gives the brand a human face and credibility. However, business entities must realize that they do not have a full control over their image (the way they conduct business or communication style is just one part of the image). The image of the business entity is, to some extent, created by online communities that communicate about the business entity's activities or products on various communication platforms. It should be also noted that the groundswell can also influence the decision-making of business partners of the business entity. If a potential business partner reads on the social network Facebook that the business entity they are in talks with is intolerant towards its customers and belittles their opinions, disregards their product innovation suggestions, has aggressive style of communication, it might think twice about striking up a cooperation. Such behaviour might be to the detriment of the business entity. However, if a potential partner gets an impression that the business entity is customer-oriented, interacts with customers on social media, is open to accept suggestions, or even rewards its customers for coming up with new ideas, we believe that the potential partner will be interested in striking up a cooperation.

However, communication with customers or followers is an important source of information for journalists, as these people have the power to influence public opinion about a business entity. Any situation that becomes attractive to journalists can turn out to be a disaster for the business entity involved. Although the Streissand effect should not be underestimated, the problem can be blown out to monstrous proportions if the business entity encountered a similar problem in the past, for example, it is known for its aggressive and disrespectful communication style (slander, spreading disinformation, accusing followers of spreading misleading information, fake news, etc.), or does not communicate with fans at all.

Monitoring social media and getting involved in discussions is crucial, especially nowadays, when people are flocking to the Internet in huge numbers. In addition to working on its reputation management and building a long-term sustainable favourable image, the business entity can place backlinks in its comments and posts in discussion forums, which again increases the reach of its website. By building a positive image among the Internet users, the business entity can turn disinterested fans into passionate advocates of the brand who will defend

it face to face defamation claims of other users, thus halting the spread of negative groundswell. Not every feedback or comment written on the Internet is positive, that goes without saying. That is why it is important for the business entity to address any problems, however small they might be, at the beginning so as to prevent the growth and spread of the negative groundswell. Even though new information technologies, modern forms of communication and the Internet are perceived largely positively, they do entail certain risk for a business entity. Lies and false information spread uncontrollably thanks to digital technologies could make or break a business entity. The sooner business entities learn how to deal with it, the better for them.

# CONCLUSION

The rising popularity of digital technologies and online social networks affects different areas of everyday life. The situations such as the pandemic, increasing inflation, disinformation campaigns of politicians or war, and the communication style chosen by institutions to raise awareness about them has caused a decline in trust in official institutions. The 21st century is characterized by a fiercely competitive environment. While in the past business entities rushed to publish the most engaging advertising campaign, nowadays people are not interested in advertisements and do not want to pay attention to them. We dare to state that there is an advertising overload that causes the opposite effect the advertising intended to have. Business entities try to grab attention of consumers, but often lose in this race because of inappropriate communication style or even controversial advertising campaigns. The question is, how to reach the target audience in time where nobody has time for anything and trusts no one?

Over ten years ago, Li and Bernoff started to research the issue of the groundswell. In their book “Groundswell”, they defined what the groundswell is and outlined practical examples of this trend. However, what was missing was a set of terminological starting points that would clarify the essence and causes of the groundswell and the way it interacts with actors involved. The scientific monograph you are holding in your hands tries to answer the question of how to address the overly technologically-dependent audience. The issue of the groundswell is not new. The first groundswell emerged when the people started to talk to each other. The marketing communication tools should follow trends and adapt to them, keep up with customer demands. This means that if the customer is not interested in a particular product / service, marketers should strive to change it. This scientific monograph provides the reader with an insight into the issue of the groundswell. Using knowledge outlined herein, the reader should be able to define the effect of the groundswell and have a deep understanding of its processes, be aware of the fact that interacting with groundswell is the most crucial part of any marketing process. Considering the way business entities interact and communicate with customers (and the way customers communicate with other customers), it is necessary to open a discussion about the groundswell. The groundswell can prove to be enormously helpful to business entities, but only if



the entities are aware of this phenomenon. We have been dealing with the issue of the groundswell for the last two years, as we focused mainly on the groundswell effect on the social media, as this groundswell will gather in pace in the years to come.

Communities are able to build either a positive or negative image of an institution. The groundswell effect is created by individuals whom we call groundswell actors and their fans, that is, supporters, are called groundswell spreaders. When groundswell actors share posts or comments in which they review the products, services or simply state their satisfaction with the communication style of a specific business entity, this creates an optimal social climate in which business entities can improve their image or lose their face altogether (to the detriment of their image). Business entities should pay attention to what their customers and fans are doing on the social media and also many other communication platforms, e.g. they write about the activities and products of the business entity on discussion forums. Groundswell actors help business entities to present not only specific products but also their expertise that is important for a specific segment. No customer ever settled for a poor-quality product. When the business entity decides to respond to a customer review, it should do so in a dignified way, as not only the author of the review, but also other customers will read it and make up their mind regarding the business entity. One review is all it takes to make or break a business entity. We recommend all business entities to follow the activities of the online communities, search for forums where they are being discussed and react to complaints and comments of users and consumers. By doing so, business entities will give rise to positive groundswell and, after all, positive groundswell is what the business entity should care about.



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