

INNOVATIONS IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS IN SLOVAKIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *The main purpose of the article was to describe selected factors of hotel business in the Slovak Republic in the years 2001 to 2020 and identify the economic impacts of measures related to the pandemic crisis COVID-19 in 2020. At the same time through selected marketing tools. Paper is also focused on innovative marketing tools used in the hotel business during a pandemic time and their impact on business effectiveness. To analyze the situation in the hotel business in the Slovak Republic, we used a statistical method of comparison within the period under study. To obtain qualified answers to the stated research goals and subsequent research questions, we statistically processed available data on the number of domestic and foreign visitors, as well as the capacity of accommodation facilities in the monitored period. Subsequently, we carried out research in the hotel sector using the method of controlled structured interviews. The results were processed through exploratory factor analysis, based on which we were able to evaluate marketing tools with the most significant impact on efficiency in the hotel business in the Slovak Republic. The measures taken in connection with the coronavirus COVID-19 caused significant economic impacts on the hotel business in the Slovak Republic, as in 2020 the number of foreign visitors dropped to 20-year lows. The analysis of the environment in the hotel business for the period under study showed that the impact of measures within the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the number of visitors, the amount of revenues and the number of accommodation facilities. The research of structured interviews with accommodation facility managers showed that the use or non-use of marketing activities (websites, PPC advertising, social media) had a significant effect on the reduction of revenues. The findings of the analysis of the environment clearly show that the relaxation of the economic measures in the summer of 2020 increased the number of domestic visitors to a higher level than in the same period in 2019, but there was no increase in the number of foreign visitors. We can state that if the epidemic comes under control, there will be a massive increase in the number of visitors and thus an increase in revenues. In case, that Slovak hotel managers would use innovative marketing tools more in the future when communicating with potential customers, it is highly probable that their potential losses would be lower in the next crisis.*

Keywords: hotel sector; sustainability; pandemic COVID-19; Slovak Republic; marketing activities.

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1. Introduction. Most experts agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has had the most devastating impact on tourism in the 21st century. However, tourism has also been negatively affected by terrorist attacks in 2001, the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the financial crisis of 2008-2009 (Aldao al., 2021). All visitor service businesses know that business models need to change (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Haywood (2020) says that to help communities in these and other endeavors, the professoriate is obligated to rethink its role in these times of crisis. The collective of authors (Farzegan at al., 2021) emphasizes that tourism is an open system that is characterized by a high degree of interconnectedness with the environment. Several authors point out that hotels can manage crisis situations more effectively by using the latest trends in marketing communications. As the authors Malachovsky & Knizka (2015) state, proven methods and practices for tourism and hotel industry offer opportunities to accelerate development and increase competitiveness. The global economic and financial crisis has had a major impact on the development of tourism. Despite the downturn in tourism performance in 2008, the growth in the share of foreign exchange earnings from tourism in GDP remained at 2.5% in 2011. This growth was similar across the Slovak economy (Kozakova & Palkechova, 2015).

2. Literature Review.

2.1 Tourism and COVID-19 in Europe. Countries across Europe are trying to cope with the situation in different ways. The most important fact of the number of measures taken is the fact to what extent tourism creates values within the country's GDP. As an example, we can cite Spain, where the tourism sector is of major economic importance, as it generates more than 2.6 million jobs, comprising 12.8% of the country's total employment, and contributes 12.3% to its GDP (Moreno-Luna at al., 2021). In their scientific contribution, which analyzed individual regions in Spain, the authors came to the conclusion that the evolution of domestic tourism in campsites, represents, together with rural accommodation, another key opportunity for the recovery of the Spanish tourism sector (Moreno-Luna at al., 2021). Travel restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic have decimated the tourism industry, which is one of the most important sectors of the European economy. Europe is the first tourist destination in the world. Hotels and restaurants are expected to see their revenue drop by 50%, travel agencies by 70% and airlines by up to 90%. The situation is particularly difficult for countries that depend on tourism, such as Spain, Italy, France, and Greece (EU, 2021).

Many European companies weakened by the crisis cannot face state-subsidized competition from third countries. The Parliament therefore recalled that the same rules must apply to all to avoid the disruption of the internal market and unfair competition from the outside. At the same time, the EU also issued guidelines for member states regarding foreign direct investments, so that they should always be scrutinized. The aim is to protect EU companies and critical assets, especially in areas such as health, medical research, biotechnology, and infrastructure, which are vital to our security and public order. On June 19, Parliament adopted a resolution on transport and tourism in 2020, calling for further steps to support small and medium-sized enterprises affected by the crisis and a budget to help the sector. MEPs said the crisis should be seen as an opportunity to modernize EU tourism to make it more environmentally friendly and socially responsible in the future (EU, 2021).

Measures taken by the EU during the corona crisis related to tourism:

a) Massive economic incentives - The European Commission proposed a massive recovery package worth 750 billion euros to revive the crisis-hit European economy. In addition, it also revised the long-term EU budget for the years 2021-2027. In this recovery plan, which it called Next Generation EU, the Commission expects to borrow money from international financial markets. The EU has a very good credit rating here, so it will receive much lower interest rates than individual states would receive if they borrowed on their own. The European Parliament has supported this plan but demands that the environment be taken into account during the economic recovery and that the recovery package should not be a burden for future generations. Member state leaders reached an agreement on a long-term budget and recovery plan in mid-July. The MPs welcomed this agreement, but they do not like the reduction of the amount that should be distributed through grants. According to the Parliament, the new long-term budget does not adequately reflect priorities such as the European Ecological Convention or the digital agenda, and it warned that if the budget does not undergo adjustments, it will not give its approval.

b) Aid for small and medium-sized enterprises - Small and medium-sized enterprises make up 99% of business entities in the EU. Their survival is therefore a condition for the survival of the entire European economy. The EU therefore released 1 billion euros from the European Fund for Strategic Investments. This should motivate banks and funds with special guarantees to provide liquidity to at least 100,000 European small and medium-sized enterprises.

c) Mitigating the risk of unemployment - The crisis also had an unprecedented impact on unemployment, which rose rapidly during the past months. To maintain jobs, the EU has established a 100-billion-euro solidarity instrument called SURE to provide financial assistance to member states. They can get the money through very favorable loans and use them to finance national short-term programs. There are also special measures against youth unemployment.

d) Support of tourism and culture - One of the sectors that suffered significant damage during the corona crisis is tourism. Europe is the top tourist destination in the whole world. The EU therefore adopted several measures to help this sector during the crisis, as well as a package for its revival. New measures were also introduced for air, rail, road, and ship transport. Almost all cultural activities have been cancelled due to pandemic measures. The Parliament therefore requests targeted assistance for this sector as well (EU, 2021).

2.2 Tourism and COVID-19 in the Slovak Republic. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were problems in the business environment in Slovakia, which also related to tourism. At that time, experts pointed to the poor results of financial indices analyzed by tourism businesses. At that time, experts pointed to the unfavourable results and trends of financial indicators in the monitored tourism enterprises - travel agencies, hotels and restaurants in Slovakia. "Failure of financial health is manifested by low profitability, often negative, relatively low liquidity, high indebtedness and long maturity of liabilities" (Pachingerova, 2001). Tourism has been heavily affected by the property and financial crisis. The global crisis also had a significant influence on Slovak economy and tourist industry. "It stopped the high dynamic of development of Slovak tourism in 2006, 2007 and in the first half of the year 2008" (Senkova, 2010). However, the pandemic measures related to COVID-19 had the greatest impact. As the authors (Motevalli-Taher & Paydar, 2021) point out, in addition to the various financial costs to countries, the global pandemic has also left in its wake a number of serious damages and casualties. The situation arising from the spread of coronavirus in Slovakia was a test for all. Its consequences have been felt most by entrepreneurs in the category of small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed persons. "Small and medium-sized enterprises are the pillar of the Slovak economy, accounting for 99.9% of the total number of business entities and contributing to more than 50% of gross output and value added" (MOF SR).

State aid scheme within the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic Allocations:

- 2020 – 100 million EUR de minimis;
- 2021 – 125 million EUR de minimis;
- 2021 – 37.5 million EUR grand scheme;
- 1st stage – completed (April 2020 – October 2020);
- 2nd stage – last applications in the payment process (November 2020 – March 2021);
- 3rd stage – payments are currently being made for applications from the first days after the opening of the new 3rd stage (April – May 2021). The total recognized as eligible and paid out as of 13/09/2021 was: the number of applications received was 16,070 and the volume of applications received was EUR 133,825,000. The share only for the segment of gastro and accommodation services – listed as the main economic activity represents approx. 60% of all applications. The amount of the planned subsidy of the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic for 2022 is EUR 8,613,696.51. Table1 contains an overview of subsidies provided by the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic from 2012 to 2019.

The investment in this component is partly for the completion of the tourist infrastructure for year-round activities, the expansion of the seasonal offer of sustainable nature tourism services in the protected area and the construction of new tourism infrastructure in the region. The allocation is in the amount of 16 million. EUR (cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic). Therefore, the main research objective of the presented contribution was to analyze the economic impacts of measures related to the global COVID-19 corona crisis on business in the hospitality sector in the Slovak Republic during the observed period of the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, as part of the research, we will deal with the use of marketing tools in the Slovak hotel business during the pandemic measures, its degree of influence on the financial decrease in sales and their mutual influence.

Table 1. Overview of subsidies provided by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic

Year	Grant/claim provided
2012	3 281 302,64
2013	3 392 752,79
2014	3 707 589,46

Continued Table 1

Year	Grant/claim provided
2015	4 457 141,85
2016	4 352 259,08
2017	5 055 412,83
2018	5 669 956,05
2019	6 408 882,39

Sources: developed by the authors based.

The findings of the analysis of the environment clearly show that the relaxation of measures in the summer of 2020 increased the number of domestic visitors to a higher level than in the same period in 2019, but there was no increase in the number of foreign visitors. We can state that if the epidemic comes under control, there will be a massive increase in the number of visitors and thus an increase in sales (Anguera-Torrell et al., 2020). Nhamo et al. (2020) sees a solution in governments waiving some taxes and fees as part of a relief package for the sector. The tourism sector also includes many small and medium-sized enterprises that needed special stimulus packages if they were to remain viable, as they are more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic. As stated by Duric & Potocnik Topler (2021), environmental sustainability is increasingly seen as one of the most important functions of a hotel business, as well as communication and marketing, which attract more hotel guests. Results from researchers and tourism practitioners show that luxury hotels have adopted environmental practices that address energy efficiency measures, reduce water consumption, waste and carbon emissions, and control, protect and maintain fauna and flora (Pereira et al., 2021).

According to the authors (Torres-Bagur et al., 2019), hotel associations could focus more on activities such as information days and knowledge-sharing meetings to help hoteliers learn about the options available. This period offers many opportunities for marketers to make their relevance to the company (Hoekstra & Leeftang, 2020). Research has shown that companies that actively pursue a multi-channel strategy, in which they combine offline and online channels, achieve more positive results in terms of share of wallet (Melis et al., 2016) as well as in terms of revenue (Pauwels & Neslin, 2015).

According to Kantar's market research, consumers were rather conservative after the COVID-19 outbreak (Tan, 2020), resulting in a sharp decline in firms' earnings in the first quarter of 2020. COVID/19 pandemic create necessity for motivation in innovations that are used in marketing. This dimension highlights the degree of impact a firm is suffering during the crisis. Prior research suggests that risk-taking activities are responses to firms' performance feedback (Chen & Miller, 2007) (Chrisman & Patel, 2012). According to the behavioral theory of the firm (Cyert & March, 1963), if a firm's performance is lower than its expected level, the firm has a strong incentive to initiate problematic search. Marketing innovation strategy is suitable for corporate innovation with low dependence on external resources (Gandia & Gardet, 2019).

Companies that choose a specific strategy must leverage their existing resources and capabilities such as integrating the benefits of their legacy business into the new business (Makkonen et al., 2014). For firms whose primary products cannot be provided online, it is much more appropriate to adopt a collective strategy to achieve innovation in the business (Wang et al., 2020). During a crisis, companies may introduce market innovations to meet the new needs and expectations of their customers (Narayandas et al. 2020). For example, firms explore new product lines to produce goods that are particularly needed in this pandemic crisis (Obal & Gao, 20220). In addition, firms can also redesign and develop new prototype solutions. (Guillen, 2020; Kang et al., 2021).

2.3 Innovation in marketing communication. In today's highly competitive business environment, utilizing innovative marketing communication tools is crucial for companies to effectively engage with their target audience and establish a strong brand presence. One such tool that has become a vital part of integrated marketing communication is social media. Social media platforms provide a unique opportunity for companies to connect with their consumers and influence their attitudes towards their brand. By leveraging social media, companies can actively engage with their target audience and gain valuable insights into their preferences and feedback (Zubielqui et al., 2019, Ram & Liu, 2018). Authors Lukowicz & Strzelecki (2019) believe that the proper use of social media in business allows for greater efficiency in business. Authors Mount & Martinez (2014) point out despite the increase in the use of social media, there are few research studies focusing on the use of social media for innovation.

3. Methodology and research methods. The main research goal of the presented paper was therefore to analyze the economic impact of measures related to the global pandemic of COVID-19 on business in the hotel sector in the Slovak Republic in the period under review in 2020. The secondary research goal of the

paper was to analyze the extent and effectiveness of the use of marketing tools in the Slovak hotel industry during pandemic measures as a tool for the elimination and renewal of business.

Within the set main research goal, we aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What were the situation in the hotel industry in the Slovak Republic and the Slovak regions with focus on visitor's number and revenues? What was the impact of the economic measurement during the 3rd quarter of 2020?

RQ2: What are the key marketing tools used by accommodation facility managers to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the hotel industry in the Slovak Republic in 2020?

RQ3: How effective were the marketing activities used in the hotel industry during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Slovak Republic in 2020?

The data collection itself consisted of two parts. The first part of the research contains an analysis of general statistical data related to tourism in the Slovak Republic, such as the number of visitors and capacity of accommodation facilities in 1998-2020 and 2001-2020. decrease in attendance and revenues of accommodation facilities. We assumed a break between 2019 and 2020, caused by COVID-19. We then subjected to the statistical analysis the development of accommodation revenues in the fourth quarter in 2018 to 2020. Data were obtained from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (SO SR). The data are shown in Figures 1-3. In the second part of the research, a guided structured interview was conducted, which is one of the most used research methods in the social sciences. As part of the research, we conducted 155 structured interviews with selected managers of Slovak hotels in the fourth quarter of 2020. The hotel facilities were selected in terms of the geographical distribution of the country, including the different types of facilities (hotel, guesthouse, motel, hotel etc.). For data collection, we used a guided structured interview, which was conducted in an indirect electronic form (telephone or online). The data obtained from the structured interview were also analyzed by exploratory factor analysis. First, we statistically evaluated general issues such as the location, type, and revenue reduction of participating facilities. Subsequently, we examined the impact of selected factors on the reduction of sales in the scales, namely a reduction of up to 50% and a reduction of more than 70%. Since this is a unique interview instead of a confirmatory factor analysis, an exploratory one was used with regard to the fact that we are discovering the effects of individual factors on the participating facilities. In conclusion, we interpreted the obtained data and formulated specific proposals and recommendations.

4. Results. Statistical analysis of the tourism environment in Slovak republic As part of the analysis of development trends in the hotel sector in the Slovak Republic, we recorded the following phenomena: From Figure 1 it is possible to observe a clear trend of gradual increase in the number of domestic and foreign visitors in the Slovak Republic over the last 20 years, which stopped in 2019. In 2020 we recorded a significant decrease in the number of domestic and foreign visitors compared to the previous period. The development of foreign visitors gradually increased until 2019, until it reached the value of 2,475,094 foreign tourists, but in 2020 this number fell to the value of 854,011 foreign visitors. Within the category of domestic visitors, who have long exceeded the number of foreign visitors, there was a de-crease of up to 1,601,844 between 2019 and 2020, from 2,355,996 in 2019 to 3,957,840 in 2020.

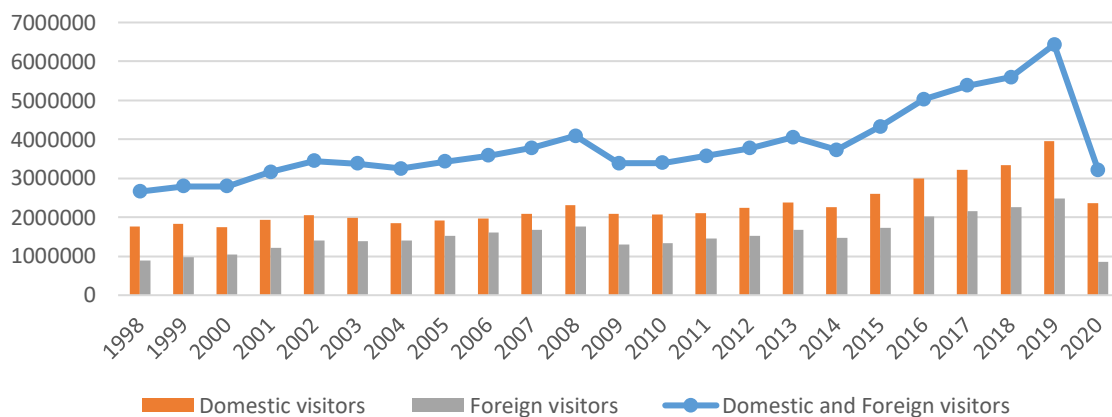


Figure 1. Development of the number of visitors (domestic vs. foreign) in the years 1998-2020 in the Slovak Republic

Sources: developed by the authors based on (DataCube, n.d.a).

Within the analysis of regional attendance, the most visited region in Slovakia is the Zilina Region and the lowest number of visitors is interested in the Trnava Region. The number of accommodation facilities in the region is also adapted to this fact. Within the period under review in 2019 and 2020, there was a decrease in attendance in all regions. More figure 2. The above statistical data are also confirmed by the research of a team of Slovak experts led by Stefko: "Although Slovakia is not yet well known on the international tourism market, regional specificity and variability predetermine the Slovak area for the development of tourism, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. Based on the values of the calculated indicators, it seems that Slovakia still has the opportunity to develop tourism sector in all regions" (Stefko et al., 2018).

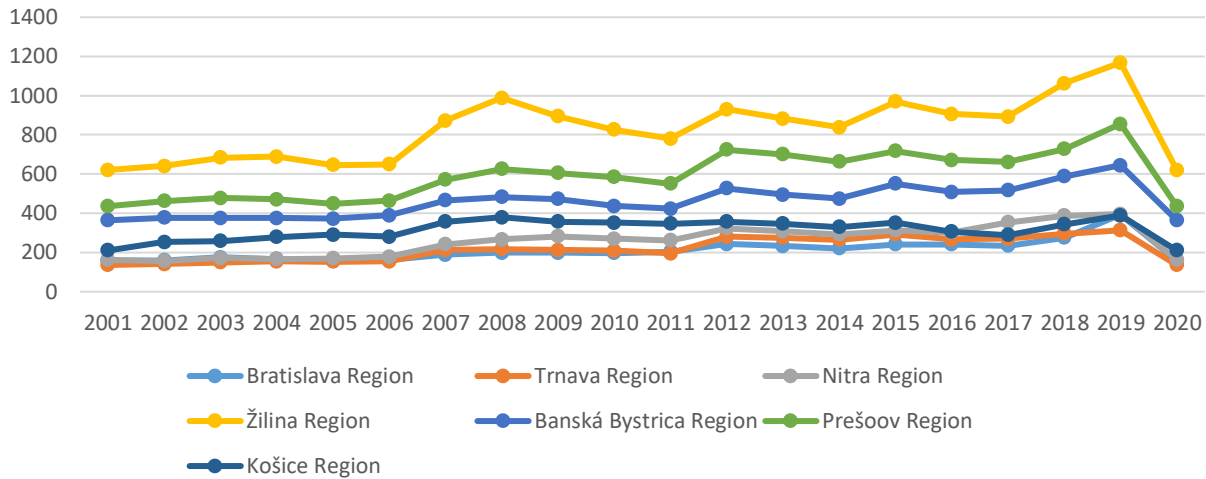


Figure 2. Development of capacity and performance of accommodation establishments: by region of the Slovak Republic - annual data 2001-2020
 Sources: developed by the authors based on (DataCube, n.d.a).

As can be observed from figure 3 in 2019 there was the highest growth in visitors and sales in the Slovak Republic. The turning point was the second quarter of 2020, when there was a dramatic decline in both examined variables. However, the relaxation of measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a radical increase in sales of EUR 1,035,332. The reintroduction of measures in the fourth quarter of 2020 again increased sales and the number of visitors to accommodation facilities.

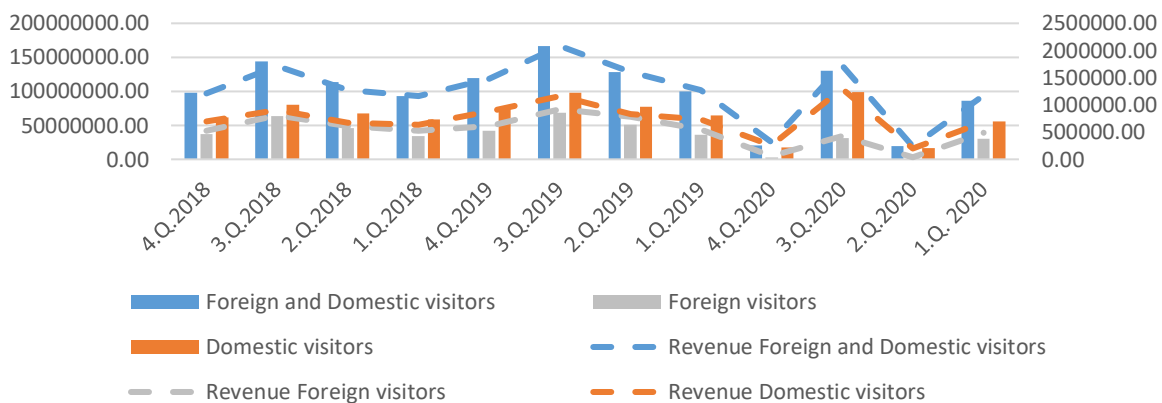


Figure 3. Development of revenues and number of visitors in the Slovak Republic for accommodation in the years 2018–2020 by quarters in millions of EUR
 Sources: developed by the authors.

Within following research, we could answer to the first research question RQ1. From Figure 1. we can see a gradual increase in the number of domestic and foreign visitors until 2019. Dramatically, a decrease in the number of domestic and foreign visitors is observed during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Thus, the total number of visitors decreased by more than 3 million compared to the previous year. Another impact of COVID-19 pandemic can be observed also across all Slovak republic Regions that are shows by

Figure 2. The largest decrease in the number of visitors was recorded in the Bratislava Region, while the number reached only 19.41% of the number of visitors in the previous year. The lowest percentage of visitors compared to 2019 is observed in the Zilina Region, where the number of visitors reached only 12.23% compared to 2019. To be able to analyze in detail the difference in individual quarters, we decided to include a statistical analysis for selected years 2018-2020, which can be seen from Figure 3. The re-search clearly showed that the strongest period in the context of the development of sales and the number of customers is 3 quarters and thus the summer months. An interesting finding is the fact that the number of domestic visitors in the 3rd quarter of 2020 exceeded the number of domestic visitors in the 3rd quarter of 2019. This phenomenon can be attributed to the easing of economic measures within the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns of Slovak visitors traveling abroad. This phenomenon could be observed in several countries around the world as we mention in literature overview. The key issue will be the development of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential change in visitor behavior. We can assume that some domestic visitors, after experience, will decide to explore foreign countries to a greater extent, which will cause them to lose domestic tourism. However, it is possible that visitors will reconsider their travel requirements and decide to travel around the Slovak Republic. In the second part of the research we conducted 155 structured interviews with managers of selected Slovak hotels in the fourth quarter of 2020. The research sample consisted of the following types of accommodation facilities: hotel (85), guesthouse (54), private accommodation (7), apartments (3), cottage (3), spa hotel (1), common areas (1), boutique hotel (1).

Respondents from the research group came from the Bratislava Region (23), the Trnava Region (16), the Nitra Region (13), the Trenčin Region (11), the Zilina Region (23), the Banská Bystrica Region (36), the Košice Region (9), Prešov Region (24). The questionnaire contained 29 questions, which were variously scaled. For processing, we used questions related to the direct use of marketing tools. We analyzed the questions through IBM SPSS software. During the interviews, we first found out how the corona crisis in 2020 affected the personnel issue in the hotel, or whether they proceeded to lay off employees. With this question, we answered the main research goal, and supplemented the data obtained from the statistical analysis in the first research question.

In the 71 hotel establishments, they were forced to lay off employees in 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, while the remaining accommodation establishments were able to maintain their original staffing status. Subsequently, we verified the second research question, where we found out what most notable marketing tools used by hotel managers to minimize the impact of the crisis in the hotel industry in the Slovakia in 2020. During the corona crisis in 2020, the addressed hotels mostly used websites, social media and e-mailing from communication channels. It should be noted that in each accommodation facility they used a communication channel, several of them a combination.

Table 2. Overview of the use of communication tools in the hotel industry during the corona crisis in 2020 in the Slovak Republic

		Frequency	Frequency	Percent
Websites	didn't used	24	15.5	15.5
	used	131	84.5	84.5
PPC advertising	didn't used	125	80.6	80.6
	used	30	19.4	19.4
Social media	didn't used	40	25.8	25.89
	used	115	74.2	74.3
e-mailing	didn't used	92	59.4	59.4
	used	63	40.6	40.7
on-line advertising	didn't used	119	76.8	76.8
	used	36	23.2	23.3
Sales support	didn't used	130	83.9	83.9
	used	25	16.1	16.2
other	didn't used	138	89	89
	used	17	11	11

Sources: developed by the authors.

According to surveyed hotel managers, Facebook (113 hotels) and Instagram (73 hotels) used the most when contacting potential customers from social media, while 20 hotels did not use any social media. Several hotels used a combination of social media. Almost half (47%) of the surveyed managers in hotels were not

able to assess the effectiveness of implemented marketing activities in the hotel during the coronary crisis in the Slovak Republic in 2020. Another 42% of the addressed managers were very, more or less satisfied with marketing activities. or satisfied. Almost half (46%) of the surveyed managers in hotels think that the implemented marketing activities had a large or more impact on the number of customers and hotel revenues in 2020. The opposite opinion was not even a quarter of the respondents, while the remaining respondents could not assess the question.

Analysis gave us answer to RQ1. We can assume that the most notable marketing tools used by accommodation facility managers to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the hotel industry in the Slovakia in 2020 become Facebook and Instagram. Most of the communication managers decided to use advantage of online communication. Their communicated special offers, discounts and by using pictures promoted the added value of the location and facilities. We further subjected the above-mentioned statistical data obtained from the structured interview to an exploratory factor analysis, thus verifying the third research question, and we were able to find out how effective the marketing activities in the hotel industry were during the coronary crisis in the Slovak Republic in 2020. Means and standard deviations for all other items extracted from the survey and used in this study are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables of Interest

Variable	N	Means	SD
up to 50%	155	0.26	0.443
up to 70%	154	0.4	0.491
Websites	155	0.85	0.363
PPC advertising	155	0.19	0.396
Social media	155	0.74	0.439
E-mailing	155	0.41	0.493
On-line advertising	155	0.23	0.424
Sales support	155	0.16	0.369
other	155	0.11	0.314

Sources: developed by the authors.

Using the method of exploratory analysis, we examined the impact of selected factors on the reduction of sales in two cases, namely a reduction in sales of up to 50% and a re-duction of more than 70%. We choose these two options bases on the results from the survey. From Table 2, it is possible to see the significance of the first four variables in the case where sales decreased by 50%. In our case, the values are represented as follows: 1 website, 2 PPC advertising 3 social media and 4 e-mailing. The choice of four factors is confirmed by Sutin's graph. Significance was verified by KMO and Bratlet's test.

Table 4. Results of exploratory analysis - reduction of sales up to 50%

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Websites	2.352	23.519	23.519
PPC advertising	1.673	16.728	40.247
Social media	1.436	14.357	54.604
E-mailing	1.183	11.832	66.436

Sources: developed by the authors.

From Table 4 we see the factors that have the greatest impact on the reduction of sales to 50% 1 column - the intrinsic value of individual factors. Column 2 indicates the percentage of variability explained by a particular factor and column 3 indicates the total percentage of variability. For the analysis of the internal structure of the interview, an exploratory factor analysis was chosen, using the principal axis factoring method, orthogonal rotation Varimax. In the examined sample, we identified 4 factors whose intrinsic value (Eigenvalue) was higher than 1. The first factor explained 23.05% variability and the second 16.73%, together they explained a total of 39.78%, the third factor 14, 26% and the fourth 11.83%. In the case of a reduction in sales by more than 70%, it is possible to see from table 3, where we observe the significance of the three variables. In our case, the values are represented as follows: 1 website, 2 PPC advertising 3 social media. We verified the significance with KMO and Bratlet's test. We confirm the choice of three factors as in the first case with Sutin's graph. For the analysis of the internal structure of the interview, as in the first case,

exploratory factor analysis was chosen, using the principal axis factoring method, orthogonal rotation Varimax. In the examined sample, we identified 3 factors whose intrinsic value (Eigenvalue) was higher than 1. The first factor explained 26.35% variability and the second 19.51%, together they explained a total of 47.86% and the third factor 11.3% (Table 5).

Table 5. Results of exploratory analysis – reduction of sales up to 70%

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Websites	2.635	26.35	26.35
PPC advertising	1.951	19.513	45.863
Social media	1.13	11.304	57.167

Sources: developed by the authors.

From the results of both analyzes, we can state that if the hotel facility decided to use the potential of marketing tools to a greater extent, there was a significantly lower loss of sales. In the case of a reduction in sales of up to 50%, we observe the significance of 4 factors, while in the case of a reduction in sales of more than 70% only 3. In both cases, we can state that the most significant factor was the use of the website. The results of the factor exploratory analysis helped us to answer the third research question RQ3 and thus what was the effectiveness of the used marketing activities in the hotel industry during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Slovak Republic in 2020? Most effective online marketing tool that has proven impact on revenue is Facebook. The results showed that the use of marketing tools during the COVID-19 pandemic plays a key role in the hotel business. As mentioned, the innovative approach in marketing management through the benefits of online marketing tools is the right path to success.

5. Discussion. In finding the answer to the first research question, we found that in the Slovak Republic it was possible to observe a clear trend of gradual increase in the number of domestic and foreign visitors, which stopped in 2019, as in 2020 there was a significant reduction in domestic as well as foreign visitors. These are the worst results in the last 20 years for foreign visitors. In the second research question, we have come to the knowledge that all the addressed accommodation facilities used some communication tools, several even a combination of tools, the most common of which are websites, social media and e-mailing. We came to worse results in the analysis of the use of social media, as we found that 11% of accommodation facilities do not use social networks at all or did not mention any social network through which it communicates with potential customers. On the contrary, the most used social networks include Facebook and Instagram. As part of the third research question, we investigated the effectiveness of used marketing activities in the hotel industry, both from the point of view of hotel managers themselves, but also from the point of view of statistics. The effectiveness of marketing activities was assessed very satisfactorily, or more or less satisfactorily by more than a third of the addressed accommodation facilities. We see a fundamental problem in the fact that almost half of the addressed managers in accommodation facilities were not able to assess the effectiveness of marketing activities in the hotel during the coronary crisis in the Slovak Republic in 2020, which means that such findings are either not evaluated or do not understand their significance. However, it is interesting to note that almost half of the addressed managers in hotels think that the implemented marketing activities have had a very, more or less impact on the number of customers and hotel revenues in 2020, which means that hotel managers are aware of the importance marketing activities in communication with customers. The results of the exploratory analysis are also interesting, which showed that 4 factors had the greatest influence on the reduction of sales up to 50%: 1) websites; 2) PPC advertising; 3) social media; 4) E-mailing. In the case of the analysis of revenue reduction up to 70%, these were the biggest impacts: 1) website; 2) PPC advertising; 3) social media. From this we can conclude that the use of a larger number of marketing tools, respectively those of marketing tools, which represent a key role not only in the hotel business, has a positive impact on reducing losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we managed to prove by far the strongest factor was the use of the website, which may be associated with the need for presentation in the online space today. Several research studies have confirmed the reserves in the use of marketing communication in the tourism sector. The authors (Kukanja et al., 2020) conducted a survey of 574 tourism establishments and found that there were statistically significant differences in the use of different crisis management approaches during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. As stated by the authors (Marcekova & Malachovsky, 2015), which examined three-star and four-star hotels in selected regions of the Slovak Republic through the demand of random visitors, new trends are implemented only minimally within

tourism companies. There are also reserves in the Slovak Republic in the use of new marketing trends in spa companies. "The survey results point to the fact that analyzed subjects have not followed new trends adequately. The article outlines more possibilities how to bring new communication trends into the tourism practice" (Marcekova & Sajtlavova, 2015).

6. Conclusions. Based on the presented research results, controlled structured interview, and subsequent exploratory factor analysis, we can state the following conclusions:

- The measures taken in connection with the COVID-19 coronavirus had significant economic impacts on the hotel business in the Slovak Republic, as the number of foreign visitors fell to 20-year lows in 2020, and a significant decline was also recorded for domestic visitors, which was the worst in recent 7 years. This fact meant a significant reduction in revenues for most hotel facilities in the Slovak Republic, which forced almost half of the accommodation facilities to lay off employees, as they were unable to maintain their original staff status due to the ongoing coronary crisis.

- The research of structured interviews showed that all the addressed accommodation facilities in the Slovak Republic used at least one or more communication tools, the most common of which are websites, social media and e-mailing. The most used social networks include Facebook and Instagram.

- The implemented exploratory analysis showed that 4 factors had the greatest influence on the reduction of sales up to 50%: 1) websites; 2) PPC advertising; 3) social media; 4) E-mailing. In the case of the analysis of revenue reduction up to 70%, these were the biggest impacts: 1) website; 2) PPC advertising; 3) social media. The above results also correlate with the findings of structured interviews, which showed that almost half of the addressed managers in hotels think that the implemented marketing activities had a very, more or less impact on the number of customers and hotel revenues in 2020, which means that hotel managers are aware of the importance of marketing activities in communicating with customers. These findings therefore confirm the findings that the effective use of marketing tools not only helps to increase business revenues, but in times of crisis helps to eliminate the decline in revenue and losses.

In conclusion, it should be noted that if managers of Slovak hotels will use modern marketing tools to communicate with potential customers in the future, it is highly likely that their potential losses will be lower in the next crisis, because effective marketing communication increases the competitiveness and position of the company in tourism and contributes to the development of the region. "Tourism in Slovakia needs properly set growth targets for its long-term development, which must be based on the supply of tourism in Slovakia on the one hand and the current and expected demand on the other" (Malachovsky, 2014). Experts from Mexico have presented an interesting model of crisis management in tourism based on a process that integrates risks and crises (Gonzalez Herrera, et.al, 2020). According to Kucerova & Makovnik (2009), regional tourism policy is a prerequisite for the development of tourism in regions Slovakia as well as their competitiveness on the international tourism market.

The authors do not claim scholarly exhaustion of this issue, but have gained confidence that the paper has contributed to existing knowledge on how hoteliers used marketing tools during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The main limitation of this study is the limited geographical area of the Slovak Republic in which the research was conducted. The main proposal for future research is therefore the need to extend research to other Member States of the European Union. We think that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been so severe for the hotel and tourism industry in general that it is necessary to address this issue more intensively.

In conclusion, innovative marketing tools play a crucial role in today's business landscape. With the constant evolution of technology and the availability of various platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and others, companies have a wealth of opportunities to engage with consumers and gather valuable information about their behavior. By restructuring their marketing strategies and utilizing these tools effectively, companies can gain a competitive edge and drive their sales growth. Marketing innovation is closely tied to the four P's of marketing, including pricing strategies, product package design properties, product placement, and promotion activities.

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Інновації в маркетингових комунікаціях у готельному бізнесі Словаччини під час пандемії COVID-19

Основною метою статті є визначення факторів, що впливають на діяльність готельного бізнесу в Словацькій Республіці в період з 2001 по 2020 роки та визначення економічних наслідків заходів, пов'язаних із пандемією COVID-19 у 2020 році. Крім того, за допомогою обраних маркетингових інструментів, у статті досліджено інноваційні маркетингові інструменти, які використовувались у готельному бізнесі під час пандемії та їх вплив на ефективність його функціонування. Авторами використано статистичний метод порівняння для визначення трендів розвитку готельного бізнесу Словацької Республіки. На першому етапі дослідження оброблено динаміку внутрішніх та зарубіжних відвідувачів готелів, а також їх місткості. На другому етапі проведено контрольовані структуровані інтерв'ю. Результати були оброблені через пояснювальний факторний аналіз, на основі якого оцінено силу впливу маркетингових інструментів на ефективність функціонування готельного бізнесу в Словацькій Республіці. У статті зазначено, що заходи, пов'язані із коронавірусом COVID-19, суттєво вплинули на економічні показники функціонування готельного бізнесу в Словацькій Республіці, оскільки у 2020 році кількість зарубіжних відвідувачів впала до 20-річних мінімумів. Результати дослідження засвідчили, що вплив заходів в рамках пандемії COVID-19 суттєво вплинув на кількість відвідувачів, обсяги доходів та кількість готельних закладів у країні. Результати структурованих інтерв'ю з керівниками готельних закладів засвідчили, що використання або невикористання маркетингових заходів (веб-сайти, PPC реклама, соціальні медіа) суттєво вплинуло на зменшення їх доходів. Емпіричні результати підтверджують, що послаблення економічних заходів протидії коронавірусу COVID-19 у влітку 2020 року призвело до збільшення кількості внутрішніх відвідувачів, ніж у той же період 2019 року, але не було збільшення кількості зарубіжних відвідувачів. Авторами наголошено, що якщо ефективно управління заходами щодо протидії епідемії COVID-19 дозволяє нарощувати обсяг відвідувачів готелів і, отже, зростання їх доходів. У разі, якщо словацькі менеджери готелів у майбутньому більше використовуватимуть інноваційні маркетингові інструменти у спілкуванні з потенційними клієнтами, є велика ймовірність, що їхні потенційні збитки будуть нижчими в наступній кризі.

Ключові слова: готельний сектор; стійкість; пандемія COVID-19; Словацька Республіка; маркетингові заходи.