



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE


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## Differences in the usage of online marketing and social media tools: evidence from Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs

**JEL Classification:** L26; L81; M31

**Keywords:** online marketing; social media; SMEs; Czech Republic; Slovakia; Hungary

### Abstract

**Research background:** Because of the rapid improvements in advanced technological tools and widely usage of the Internet among the world, most of SMEs in various countries have become able to apply their marketing activities through online marketing and social media platforms that are less costly for them. Since SMEs encounter many financing constraints, these marketing options might be very beneficial for them to use for their marketing activities. However, socio-economic and cultural factors differ in each corner of the globe.

**Purpose of the article:** This paper aims to investigate international differences between usage of online marketing and social media platforms by SMEs.

**Methods:** The authors of this paper have selected 1156 Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs from Cribis database by employing random sampling method. An online questionnaire was directed by the researchers to have responses from managers and owners of SMEs. To find differences in selected variables, the researchers perform ANOVA analyses with Post-Hoc tests in SPSS statistical program.

**Findings & Value added:** Regarding the size of businesses, Hungarian SMEs in both size categories: micro and small-medium sized, apply social media platforms in their operations more than Czech and Slovakian SMEs. When it comes to marketing activities, some similarities are in existence depending on size and age of SMEs. In detail, propensities of Slovakian and Hungarian older SMEs (that have been operating more than 10 years) and microenterprises to apply online marketing channels are higher than Czech older SMEs and Czech microenterprises. Corresponding to social media usage, Czech and Slovakian SMEs and older enterprises do not differ. But Hungarian SMEs and older Hungarian firms are more prone to apply social media channels than Czech and Slovakian SMEs and older Czech and Slovakian enterprises. This paper is a unique study that makes comparison between some Central European countries' SMEs that are in the Visegrad Group regarding their usage of their online marketing and social media tools. Thus, this paper also fulfills some gap in the marketing literature.

## Introduction

SMEs are of prime importance to improve countries' economic conditions, since they provide many contributions such as reducing unemployment rates and increasing value addition and income from exports. But when these firms aim to grow their operations, most of SMEs face financial problems since they lack resources and assets. To overcome financing issues and barriers of growth, they look for alternative ways. Under these circumstances, online-digital marketing and social media tools might provide them with new opportunities to reach more potential customers and to make more effective promotions for their products and services by making them face lower advertisement expenses comparing to traditional marketing channels. For these reasons, usage of digital marketing channels and social media tools enable SMEs to grow at lower costs. In this regard, this paper focuses on online marketing activities and social media usage of SMEs.

According to some studies, digital marketing tools, social media, emails and web pages are most popular options for SMEs when making marketing for their goods (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Abed *et al.*, 2016). The usage of social media and digital marketing tools by entrepreneurs makes them behave not only more innovatively, but also competitively against their rivals. By doing so, they also improve their market shares in different nations, thus, they can improve their number customers by receiving more opportunities that global marketing provides (Omar *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, usage of these marketing channels by entrepreneurs causes SMEs to make more technological investments. For these reasons, SMEs can improve their

performances by having better financial conditions. Management capabilities and business satisfaction can also be increased to a large extent.

Although social media and other online marketing tools such as websites, emails and SMS are categorized under digital marketing tools, depending on their communication ways (one-way or two-ways), this paper divides them into different constructs as online marketing activities and social media usage. Websites, SMS, banner advertising and e-mails are one-way online communication tools that enable firms to have tight control over their marketing activities (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015) and are also called e-media and technology enabled marketing tools (Kallier, 2017).

On the other hand, social media usage makes business have lighter control over their firms. Different from one-way online communication tools such as websites, social media provide two ways to communicate as customers can also get easier contact with marketer firms (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010; Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015). Social media platforms are also called “user-generated communication” (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019; Odoom *et al.*, 2017; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011) and social networks and marketing activities of firms via those networks are defined as social network marketing and technology-enabled marketing tools by some researchers (Kallier, 2017; Werdani & Djoko, 2018; Sangi *et al.*, 2018). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Messengers (Kallier, 2017; Werdani & Djoko, 2018; Sangi *et al.*, 2018), Google, Youtube (Crammond *et al.*, 2018), LinkedIn (Abed *et al.*, 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015), Pinterest (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015) are some examples of social network marketing channels that businesses use.

The decision of firms regarding their usage of different marketing tools carries vital importance for their communication and contact with their clients so their incomes and profits. However, due to having various features such as size and experience, competencies, capabilities, strategies and opportunities and obstacles that SMEs can have also differ (Abed *et al.*, 2016). A positive relationship between usage of the technology, its adoption and size of the firm has been confirmed by some researchers (Del Aguila-Obra & Padilla-Meléndez 2006; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). According to Barnes *et al.* (2012) and Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), since larger firms have better financial conditions, they are more able to use novel technological platforms and they also have more awareness regarding these digital tools. On the other hand, Michaelidou *et al.* (2011) explain in their studies that there are not any significant differences between larger and smaller SMEs when using Social Networking sites. But except for those studies that analyse the differences between characteristics of firms, this paper focuses on another determinant factor that might influence online

marketing activities and social media usage of SMEs, namely, international differences.

Corresponding to international differences, although most of SMEs from different countries face similar difficulties such as issues in the usage and adoption of social media tools and marketing activities through online platforms (Sangi *et al.*, 2018), some empirical studies clarify that the usage of social media and digital marketing channels by SMEs differs in various geographical regions (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019; Sangi *et al.*, 2018). This is because SMEs might face various judicial environments, security implementations (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019), risk levels, costs (Sangi *et al.*, 2018), cultural values and norms (Hofstede, 2001; Furrer *et al.*, 2000; Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011) by operating in various nations. In this regard, this study purposes to find online-digital marketing activities and social media usage of SMEs from different countries, namely the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

Although the percentage of value added by Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs are similar in these countries (56%, 55.1% and 54.1% of total value addition) and the contributions of SMEs in the work force account for 66.4%, 72.7% and 68.3% of total labour force, respectively (European Commission, SBA fact sheet the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, 2019), they operate in nations with various cultural values. Moreover, social media and smartphone usage of citizens in these nations can be different, and trust of individuals to these online marketing and social media platforms can also vary in these countries. For these reasons, propensity of SMEs to apply those specified marketing operations might also differ. By considering these facts, this paper tries to find the answers of following research questions: “Do online marketing activities of SMEs differ regarding the country where they are located?” and “Does social media usage of SMEs differ regarding the country where they are located?”.

To find the answer of these questions, the researchers collected data from 1156 Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs. These SMEs were selected by random sampling method, and the chosen firms completed a questionnaire survey that was created by the researchers. Then, the researchers performed ANOVA analyses with Games and Howell test to find whether differences exist between SMEs from different nations and which countries' SMEs have more propensity to apply online marketing, social media tools.

The rest of the research is presented by following sections. Literature review clarifies the most essential points of related studies regarding the main focus of this paper. The details about the research data and the methods that the authors apply are provided in Methodology and Data section.

Section 4 emphasizes the findings of this paper, while section 5 provides discussions about these results and support them with some potential reasons and policy implications. In conclusion, the paper clearly summarizes the main important points of the paper.

## **Literature review**

Marketing activities such as marketing communication enable consumers to receive some benefits such as being more informed about products and services that they would like to buy. Since they become aware of details about these goods and services, their willingness to purchase them increases and all these facts make firms receive more income, which develops their businesses (Cacciolatti & Fearne, 2013). In the last two decades, developments in digital information and communication technologies not only provide advantages for entrepreneurs to face with reduced marketing costs, but also enable them to increase their revenues and to develop their business operations by being informed about current trends in national and international markets and having more knowledge about their industries (Ramli *et al.*, 2015; Omar *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, digital marketing tools connect vendors and purchasers to contact, share their knowledge and stimulate buying behaviors of costumers (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019).

To perform their marketing campaigns via online platforms and devices, most of businesses do not only apply one digital marketing channel. In this regard, sales mix tools come to existence and they might consist of some online platforms and communication ways such as sending SMS, e-mails, creating websites, using telemarketing and Google Adwords. Regarding websites, a firm's website can be explained as its online shop or online existence in digital platforms. Like larger companies, SMEs can also increase their brand awareness by creating their own website via web pages (Christodoulides, 2009; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). The websites of businesses not only give information about products or services of these firms but might also provide more details about history, location, contact numbers and strategies of firms via internet (Kallier, 2017).

Corresponding to AdWords campaigns, by using this marketing channel, SMEs can not only decrease their marketing expenditures, but also cope with some problems regarding the visibility of their websites. Thus, firms can expand their markets by contacting more consumers from different countries by enlarging the time that clients spend in companies' web page. It is also another important indicator that shows how the campaign

entitled by firms efficient in drawing consumers' attention (Moral *et al.*, 2014).

E-mail is another essential marketing tool. It can be sent through the Internet not only to promote and advertise company's goods and services of businesses, but also to provide more detailed information about its products (Kallier, 2017; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Yaseen *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, e-mails also enable firms to build close relationship with their clients and direct and motivate consumers to use companies' websites (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Like other digital marketing tools, emails also provide some opportunities for businesses to reduce the costs of marketing activities (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019). Although emails are one of the types of most frequently used digital marketing tools, they are an example of one-way communication (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015), and many people perceive them as spam emails (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019). Hence, managers and owners of SMEs should consider these issues when they apply this marketing tool.

SMS also has vital importance in the marketing activities of firms, since it can directly reach potential consumers. Although individuals can change their email addresses frequently, people usually use the same mobile phone numbers for a long time. Moreover, marketing teams need to stimulate individuals to access firms' website. Since businesses can send SMEs to individuals immediately, they not only save their time in marketing, but can also reach a broad spectrum of customers. SMS also enables enterprises to reach target customers in at certain times. Comparing to other marketing media tools, SMS also make businesses bear lower marketing costs (Viehland & Brink, 2006). However, according to Yaseen *et al.* (2019), firms apply SMS advertisements less often than some of the other marketing tools.

With respect to Social media platforms, they are not only used to provide closer contacts with business and clients, but also enable businesses to communicate with each other, especially for their promotional activities. These closer contacts enabled by social media platforms also provide confidence (Abed *et al.*, 2016; Sangi *et al.*, 2018), especially from validated accounts (Foux, 2006). Moreover, social media platforms increase brand loyalty and awareness for consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Abed *et al.*, 2016). Thus, firms increase their sales and number of their clients (Sangi *et al.*, 2018; Kwok & Yu, 2013), performances, growth and competitiveness (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Shideler & Badasyan, 2012).

The usage of these online social media platforms also enables firms to face lower marketing costs, as businesses do not have to make a huge amount investment (Dahnil *et al.*, 2014; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011; Kallier, 2017) and spend more money for traditional media, thus, firms might save

their costs (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Hanna *et al.*, 2011). By enabling the usage of different marketing strategies, social media also causes firms to apply various promotional activities, and firms can direct information that they share with their clients via these platforms (Odoom *et al.*, 2017).

Cultural differences might be a vital reason for the variations among SMEs from different nations regarding their usage of marketing tools and strategies (Gati & Bauer, 2019; Yaseen *et al.*, 2019). This is because the culture not only has influence on the manner of life depending on individuals' usage of different digital tools (Yaseen *et al.*, 2019). Also depending on cultural values and norms, firms might behave differently when making promotions for their firms (Gerpott *et al.*, 2016; Valaei *et al.*, 2016). Thus, online marketing actions and social media usage by investigated SMEs might also differ.

Corresponding to the indicators or indexes of cultural differences that enable to show differences among nations, Hofstede's cultural factors are a well-known phenomenon that might first come to mind. These factors, such as individualism-collectivism, power distance, and long-term orientation, have been used by many researchers from various disciplines to indicate variations among different countries (Ključnikov *et al.*, 2019; Kreiser *et al.*, 2010). Hofstede's cultural dimensions have also been considered as effective factors in marketing studies (Diehl *et al.*, 2003; Valaei *et al.*, 2016). Some studies have confirmed the impact of individualism-collectivism, short-long term orientation and power distance on advertising activities (Soares *et al.*, 2007), innovation (Yeniyurt & Townsend, 2003; Soares *et al.*, 2007) and invention stage (Černe *et al.*, 2013; Valaei *et al.*, 2016).

Concerning individualism, people in an individualistic culture do not have close ties with each other; thus, it can be assumed that their social relationships will not be as close as the interactions between individuals in nations that have collectivist cultures (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011; Valaei *et al.* (2016). For instance, Ketkar *et al.* (2012) have proved the existence of a negative relationship between individualistic behaviors of executives of firms and their face to face contacts with their suppliers. Similarly, SMEs that have managers and owners with more individualistic behavior might prefer using online marketing activities and social media activities to make promotions about their firms instead of having face to face conversations with their potential customers. Accordingly, Valaei *et al.* (2016) have substantiated the positive association between individualism and firms' activities regarding online advertisements. In this regard, it can be assumed that SMEs in countries with more individualistic culture might



apply online marketing activities and social media more than SMEs that operate in countries with less individualistic behavior.

Corresponding to long-short term orientation, people living in a nation with long term orientation have plans with long duration. Since individuals in a country with short term orientation are more prone to rushing to conclusions, they can be influenced by new trends quickly to use new technologies (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Furthermore, firms in short term orientation cultures would like to hit their targets as soon as possible. In this regard, they are not patient to wait for long term purposes and when they cannot achieve their goals, they are more likely to change their marketing activities to draw awareness of their potential customers. Thus, it is more likely for SMEs that operate in a nation with short-term orientation to find new strategies and apply new methods by using online marketing tools or social media platforms.

On the other hand, according to Hofstede (2010), individuals in countries with lower power distance are more likely to behave autonomously and freely compared to people who live in nations with higher power distance. By analyzing the relationship between power distance and the usage of the Internet and mobile phone and other communication vehicles, Matusitz and Musambira (2013) have proved the positive relationship among these variables. Similarly, Valaei *et al.* (2016) also certify that a positive relationship exists between power distance and firms' actions towards online adverts. Due to the evidence mentioned above, it can be proposed that SMEs operating in countries with lower power distance might be more prone to drive online marketing and social media tools.

Moreover, social media participation of individuals and their smartphone usage in a country can also be other important indicators to illustrate the differences between various nations regarding social media usage and making online marketing activities. According to Eurostat (2019), 65% of people that are between 16 to 74 years old participated social media in 2018. But this percentage is lower in the Czech Republic and Slovakia being 56% and 49%, respectively. Furthermore, the number of smart phone users are also depicted in the table. However, trust is also a substantial factor that might influence individuals' internet usage, online commerce (Crabbe *et al.*, 2009; Li & Yeh, 2010; Cui *et al.*, 2020) adoption, and acceptance of novel technologies (Belanche *et al.*, 2014; Shin *et al.*, 2018) mobile payments (Lu *et al.*, 2011; Cui *et al.*, 2020). Regarding trust to the Internet, the percentage of populations in the analyzed nations has also been demonstrated in Table 1.



According to the values in Table 1, it can be concluded that Hungary's scores from long term orientation, power distance, individualism indexes, and the percentages from social media, smartphone usage and trust to internet are higher than are higher than in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Thus, it can be supposed that Hungarian SMEs might make more online-digital marketing activities and use more social media platforms in comparison with their Czech and Slovakian counterparts. Since the Czech Republic and Slovakia were the nations of former Czechoslovakia, the individuals could have similar cultural values and norms. Furthermore, by analyzing Czech and Slovakian SMEs Cepel *et al.* (2018) also confirm the fact that these businesses negatively perceive the technological implications in their nations. This might be another evidence confirming that more Hungarian apply online marketing and social media tools than Czech and Slovakian SMEs.

### **Research methodology**

According to European Commission (2003), the size of SMEs is classified as micro, small and medium enterprises depending on their number of staff headcounts. While microenterprises have workers around 0–9, the number of workers differ between 10 to 49 in small businesses. Companies that have around 50 to 249 employees are categorized as medium-sized enterprises. For the purpose of analysis, the researchers have classified SMEs as microenterprises and small-medium enterprises depending on their size. Regarding the age of SMEs, firms are categorized as older (SMEs that have been operating more than 10 years) and younger firms (SMEs that have been operating less than 10 years) (Family Business Institute, 2019).

The data collection was performed from September 2019 to March 2020. The research team applied a random sampling method to select respondents from Cribis database. Then, the researchers sent the link of the online questionnaire survey to the randomly selected respondents through e-mail. Managers and owners of SMEs were the respondents of these online questionnaires and they fulfilled the surveys on behalf of the enterprises that they own or work for.

To evaluate marketing activities of SMEs three following survey questions were selected by the researchers: “Our company primarily uses proactive sales mix tools — direct mailing, SMS campaigns, telemarketing”, “Our company primarily uses online marketing tools — modern websites, banner advertising, PPC (PPA) campaigns, Google Adwords, Adwords”, “We consider the active use of online marketing tools to be the most crucial

factor in reducing the likelihood of business failure.” On the other hand, four following questions from online questionnaire were used to measure social media usage of SMEs: “Thanks to social media, our business can respond more flexibly to market developments”, “Social media helps our business quickly share information with customers and partners”, “Our business has a clear strategy on how to use social media”, “Social media supports the growth of our company performance”. Five-point Likert scale was applied by the researchers to measure the responses of survey participants as follows: 1 — strongly disagree, 2 — disagree, 3 — hold no position, 4 — agree, 5 — strongly agree. The substantiations of the mentioned studies in literature review section, make the researcher to assume following hypotheses as follows:

*H1: There is a statistically significant difference between marketing activities of Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs.*

*H2: A statistically significant difference exists between social media usage of Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs.*

*H3: In comparison with Czech and Slovak SMEs, Hungarian SMEs perform more online marketing activities.*

*H4: Usage of social media platforms by Hungarian SMEs is higher than their Czech and Slovakian counterparts.*

5% level of significance is considered by the authors to support alternative or null hypotheses. P values (significance) that are less than the selected confidence level makes the researchers to support alternative hypotheses. On the other hand, null hypotheses of these alternative hypotheses assume the nonexistence of statistically significant differences among analyzed variables.

The sample of the analysis in this research are SMEs that conduct their business activities in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The same questionnaires were directed to those SMEs. The researchers collected fulfilled questionnaires from 454 Czech, 303 Slovak and 399 Hungarian SMEs. Thus, 1156 SMEs were analyzed to hit the purpose of this paper. The sample profile for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary is demonstrated in Table 2.

To evaluate whether dataset of this paper is normally distributed or not, the authors perform Skewness and Kurtosis tests. According to Hair et al. (2013), the values in Skewness and Kurtosis should vary between +1 to -1.

The results of normality test have been depicted in Table of Test of Normality. Since all values from the results of Skewness and Kurtosis tests in the Test of Normality table are between the specified range, it can be stated that the research data is normally distributed.

For these reasons, the researchers have applied one of parametric tests that enables to compare three different samples, namely, ANOVA analyses to evaluate whether a significant difference exists between SMEs from different countries regarding their marketing activities and social media usage. However, to find which countries' SMEs conduct more marketing activities and have more social media usage, the paper includes Post-Hoc tests in ANOVA analyses. Since, P values from Levene's test are lower than 5%, the variances are not equal between groups. Moreover, according to Field (2009), when sample size is not equal, Games and Howell Post-Hoc analysis can be applied. For this reason, Games and Howell test was employed in ANOVA analyses by the researchers to measure which countries' SMEs perform better in the selected variables. SPSS statistical software version 23 was run by the researchers to make analyses.

## **Results**

As already mentioned in methodology section, to investigate whether differences exist between Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs, ANOVA analyses had been performed by the researchers and the results regarding marketing activities and social media usage are presented in the Table 4.

As indicated in the Table 4, p values are lower than 5% level of significance (marketing activities:  $Df = 2$ ,  $F = 18.860$ ,  $p < .05$ ; social media usage:  $Df = 2$ ,  $F = 26.767$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, it can be explained that statistically significant differences exist between marketing activities and social media usage of Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs. This fact makes researchers to support H1 and H2 hypotheses that suppose the existence of significant differences among various nations' analyzed SMEs.

As specified in the methodology section, to find out which nations' SMEs perform better in selected variables, Games and Howell test was run with ANOVA analyses. The results of Games and Howell test were provided in Table 5. According to the table, all p values are lower than 5% significance level and as illustrated in the column of Mean difference (I-J), the volumes for Hungarian SMEs are higher for marketing activities comparing with the values of Czech and Slovakian SMEs. Thus, the paper supports H3 hypothesis, which assumes more online marketing activities of Hungarian businesses. Moreover, Slovakian SMEs perform better in online marketing

activities only in comparison to Czech SMEs. Thus, Czech SMEs have lower tendencies to make marketing operations in comparison with Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs.

Similarly, the findings from Post-Hoc analyses regarding social media usage of Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs are also demonstrated in Table 6. According to this table, perceptions of Czech and Slovakian SMEs do not differ, because the differences between SMEs in these countries are not statistically significant ( $p = .719 > 0.05$ ). On the other hand, Hungarian SMEs use more social media in their activities than their Czech and Slovakian counterparts ( $p = .000 < 0.05$ ) since the volumes of Hungarian SMEs in the column of Mean difference (I-J) are higher than SMEs from other nations. Hence, the researchers also support H4 hypothesis that presumes higher propensity of Hungarian SMEs' social media usage than Czech and Slovakian firms.

To find more details about these differences between Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs, the authors consider size of SMEs and perform this variable in ANOVA analyses. Firm size is categorized into two different groups as microenterprises and small-medium sized enterprises for analyses purposes. The results of the analyses considering firm size are depicted in Table 7.

As it is presented in Table 7, all p values are less than the significance level. Hence, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian microenterprises differ from each other regarding marketing activities and social media usage (p values for microenterprises regarding marketing activities and social media usage = .000 and .000, respectively). Corresponding to differences between social media usage and marketing activities of Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian small & medium enterprises, p values are also significant at 5% level of significance (.004 and .009, respectively). For this reason, the researchers describe that there are statistically significant differences between social media usage and marketing activities of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

Apart from the size of firms, the researchers also include the age of enterprises (length of doing business) to provide more details about the differences between Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs. The period of doing business is recoded into two different groups as less than 10 years and more than 10 years. According to the findings from Table 8, p value in this case is not significant ( $p = .104 > 0.05$ ). Thus, marketing activities of younger Czech, Slovak and Hungarian do not differ. On the other hand, since other p values are significant at 5% confidence level, it can be explained that social media usage significantly differs between younger SMEs and older

SMEs. Furthermore, differences in marketing activities among older Czech, Slovak and Hungarian SMEs are statistically significant.

To find out which countries' SMEs are more prone to perform marketing actions regarding their size and age, Post-Hoc analyses were run with ANOVA also for these cases. Corresponding to differences in size of SMEs from different countries, as indicated in Table 9, a lower number of owners and managers of Czech microenterprises have agreed or completely agreed with the analyzed statements of marketing activities than their Slovak and Hungarian counterparts. Furthermore, no difference exists between Slovak and Hungarian microenterprises regarding performing marketing activities in their operations.

Regarding the differences in small-medium sized Czech, Slovak and Hungarian enterprises, although Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Hungarian small-medium sized enterprises do not differ in marketing activities, Hungarian larger SMEs have more propensity to apply marketing activities than their Czech counterparts. When it comes to the differences in marketing activities regarding age of SMEs from different countries, no differences exist between marketing activities of younger Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs since all p values are higher than 5% significance level in Table 9. On the other hand, comparing to older Czech SMEs, more respondents in older Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs declare that they tend to do marketing activities. But both Slovakian and Hungarian older SMEs do not differ in their marketing activities according to the p values in Table 9.

Concerning social media usage, as presented in Table 10, perceptions of Czech and Slovakian microenterprises do not differ ( $p = .581$ ). However, Hungarian microenterprises use more social media in their activities than their Czech ( $p = .000$ ) and Slovakian ( $p = .001$ ) counterparts. Similarly, this case is also valid for small-medium enterprises segment. Regarding the differences between social media usage of older and younger businesses, Czech-Slovakian ( $p = .108$ ) and Czech-Hungarian ( $p = .235$ ) younger SMEs do not differ. However, when comparing Hungarian and Slovakian younger SMEs, usage of social media by Hungarian younger SMEs is higher than their younger SMEs Slovakia. On the other hand, social media usages of Czech and Slovakian older SMEs do not differ. However, Hungarian older SMEs are more interested in using social media for their operations than older Czech and Slovakian SMEs.

## Discussion

In this section of the paper, the authors will discuss the potential reasons of the differences among Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs. They will provide some policy implications by considering some significant determinant factors except Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the percentage of social media and smartphone usage and trust of individuals to internet. Concerning the differences between social media usage and online marketing of SMEs, some financial factors might be mounting evidence to explain these variations among examined SMEs in this study. For instance, Sangi *et al.* (2018) declare that SMEs operate in nations with high income have quick adaptations to use E-commerce activities comparing to other countries that have lower income levels. According to World Bank (2018), GDP per capita in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary are 23.078 \$, 19.442 \$ and 16.162 \$, respectively. Although Hungarian individuals have the lowest GDP per capita, the results of this paper affirm that Hungarian SMEs perform better in terms of the analyzed variables. For this reason, this paper opposes the result of Sangi *et al.* (2018). On the other hand, since this paper finds differences between various nations' businesses and their marketing activities through digital and social media tools, this paper finds similar results with some studies such as Yaseen *et al.* (2019), Gati and Bauer (2019), Gerpott *et al.* (2016) and Valaei *et al.* (2016).

Moreover, although, the level of GDP per capita is the lowest in Hungary, financing of SMEs can gain importance to overcome this fact, since SMEs are the main focus of this paper and financing opportunities and conditions can also be determinant factors that influence the usage of online marketing and social media tools by SMEs. As already specified in this paper, SMEs have low financial power (Bednarčík, 2014) lack of assets and resources of SMEs (Odoom *et al.*, 2017). Since SMEs have these disadvantages, to have easier adoption to these online platforms, they might need encouragements of governments and other external institutions that are the major players of their environment (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Karjaluoto & Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). For instance, the total amount of Government Loan Guarantees, Government Guaranteed Loans and Direct Government Loans were 625 million euro, 287 million euro and 4625 million euro in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, respectively in 2018. Moreover, the amounts of new SME lending were 3.55 billion euro, 3.46 billion euro and 10.69 billion euro in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, respectively. The lending SMEs' interest rates were 3.14%, 3%, and 2.44% in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, respectively (OECD, Scorecard, 2020 SMEs). These values might provide us

with strong arguments that Hungarian SMEs received more amount of financing and government supports by facing lowered interest rates in comparison with Czech and Slovakian SMEs. All of these facts might be the reason why Hungarian SMEs in this paper have had more propensity to use online marketing tools and social media platforms than Czech and Slovakian SMEs.

As one may remember, this paper also has considered age (length of doing business) and size of SMEs to provide more details about the differences between various nations' SMEs social media and online marketing usage. In this context, one of the findings of this paper is that Czech microenterprises' and older SMEs' tendencies to perform online marketing activities are lower than their Slovak and Hungarian counterparts. Concerning to larger enterprises (small and medium-sized firms), Hungarian enterprises have more probabilities of taking online marketing actions than their Czech and Slovakian counterparts. The reason for these differences can be related to the education level of the respondents. It is because of the existence of a positive relationship between education level and doing online marketing activities (Al-Azawei, 2018; Deryabina & Trubnikova, 2020). According to research data, the respondents in Slovakian and Hungarian microenterprises (76.02% and 83.2%) and older Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs (76.85% and 81.35%) are more educated than their Czech counterparts, since the percentages for highly educated Slovakian and Hungarian owners and managers are higher than the respondents from Czech microenterprises and older SMEs (46.21% and 51.34%). These percentages might be mounting arguments to support the potential reasons of these differences. Although the number of Czech firms that operate as e-business are no less than 37000 firms (Bartok, 2018) in comparison with Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs, Czech SMEs' usage is lower, as the analyses of the authors confirm it. Bednarčík (2014) analyzes Czech SMEs and prove the fact that these firms have misapplied the mix marketing communication tools and most of them have not used marketing surveys. It is another reason to indicate why Czech older SMEs and microenterprises might have had lower willingness to apply social media and online marketing channels.

With reference to details about social media differences concerning size and age of SMEs, the results of this paper confirm the fact that Czech and Slovakian respondents in both segments micro and small-medium sized, are less likely to apply social media platforms than their Hungarian counterparts. Moreover, Hungarian SMEs that have been operating more than 10 years have more willingness in using social media platforms than older Czech and Slovakian SMEs. The reasons for these differences among SMEs might stem from the age of the respondents. This is because there is



a negative relationship between social media usage and age of individuals; hence, younger people use social media platforms more than older individuals do (Giunchiglia *et al.*, 2018; Yildiz-Duran & Seferoglu, 2020). Since the percentages of younger managers and owners in older SMEs and in micro, small and medium-sized firms are higher for Hungarian sample (35.71%, 50% and 45.04%, respectively) than Czech and Slovakian sample (26%, 35%, 41% respectively) in this paper, this fact can be important fact to explain the differences.

To sum up, as government and other financing institutions supports for Czech and Slovakian SMEs are lower than financing amount that Hungarian SMEs might receive, more funding opportunities and amount of financing can be provided by Slovakian and Czech governments for SMEs. Moreover, credit conditions such as interest rates might be reduced to make Slovakian and Czech SMEs face lowered costs of credits. Courses and educational activities might be created to expand the awareness and increase the digital literacy of Czech and Slovakian entrepreneurs and managers, since they have not graduated from higher level institutions in comparison with Hungarian respondents. Moreover, these educations and courses should be given to older people too. Since their adaption to new technologies and new trends in social media and online marketing tools is not easy, all these supports might make older people increase the usage of these online tools. Governments and other public institutions might also collaborate with social media platforms, developers of online platforms and digital marketing communication channels to increase trustworthiness of these channels. All those facts might create better environment for SMEs to apply more marketing activities via online platforms and digital channels.

## **Conclusions**

The developments in novel technologies provide more opportunities for SMEs to create different marketing strategies through internet and digital platforms that most of consumers look for some products and services using the digital tools and mobile devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers. As the number of consumers who make online purchasing has increased rapidly especially in the last decade, most of firms have paid attention to these new online marketing channels and social media platforms to improve their sales and income. But SMEs that operate in various countries can have different tendencies to use these novel tools, since they operate under different circumstances such as diverse cultural values and norms, legal, political and economic environments. In this respect, this

paper purposes to find differences between SMEs from various countries regarding their usage of online marketing and social media tools.

To achieve this selected goal, 1156 Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs were randomly selected via Cribis database. Post-Hoc tests in ANOVA analyses were performed via 23 version of SPSS statistical software to find the differences in SMEs responses. The results of this paper confirm that statistically significant differences exist in the online marketing and social media usage of Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs. The potential reason for this finding might be related to credit conditions, the volume of SMEs' financing and governments financial supports.

Regarding online marketing activities, this paper also proves the fact that older and smaller (microenterprises) Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs are more prone to apply online marketing tools and social media platforms comparing to their older and smaller-sized Czech counterparts. Moreover, comparing to Czech and Slovakian larger enterprises (small-medium sized SMEs), Hungarian larger SMEs are more disposed to use online marketing channels. The education level of the respondents might be the reason for differences mentioned above regarding online marketing activities of SMEs in the same size and age categories.

Concerning social media usage, some statistically significant differences are also in existence between Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian SMEs in same size and age categories. For instance, the propensities of Hungarian SMEs in both size categories (micro and small-medium sized enterprises) to use social media platforms are higher than Czech and Slovakian micro and small-medium sized firms. Regarding the differences in the same age categories of SMEs, older Czech and Slovakian SMEs are less likely to apply social media channels for their marketing activities in comparison with their older Hungarian counterparts. Age of the respondents might be mounting evidence for the variations between social media usage of SMEs in the same age and size categories.

To increase the usage of online marketing and social media tools by SMEs and reduce the gap in the usage of these tools between countries, governments, policy makers, other financing institutions and universities should collaborate. By doing so, some trainings and courses might be opened to increase the digital awareness and quick adaption of SMEs' executives to use these channels. Moreover, better credit conditions, more financing opportunities and government supports can also be provided by policy makers to overcome these issues. As SMEs play a big role in the development of economies and growth of countries, these implications also make countries to achieve higher economic targets.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, these results make this paper to be sole in marketing literature since some differences among SMEs in three various countries in Central Europe have substantiated by the analyses of this research. However, this research has some limitations. As specified, this paper is limited with some online marketing and social media platforms. Further studies can include traditional marketing tools in their study to make comparisons between online-digital and traditional marketing channels. Moreover, larger businesses and SMEs can be analysed together to find the differences between these businesses. Lastly, various characteristics of SMEs such as sector, experience etc. can also be considered by researchers to look at the differences among SMEs from various perspective.

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## Annex

**Table 1.** Scores of Nations in Hofstede Index and Other Indicators

Countries	Long Term Orientation	Power distance	Individualism	Social media usage % (16-74 years old)	Smart phone user numbers in 2019	Trust to the internet by %
Czechia	70	57	58	56	6.2	48%
Slovakia	77	100	52	49	3.21	43%
Hungary	58	46	80	65	7.02	51%

Source: based on following indicators Hofstede Index, 2020; Eurostat, 2019; Statista, 2020.

**Table 2.** Sample profile

		Czech		Slovak		Hun	
		<i>n</i>	Share	<i>n</i>	Share	<i>n</i>	Share
<b>Firm size</b>	micro	290	63.88%	171	56.44%	268	67.17%
	small	107	23.57%	90	29.70%	73	18.29%
	medium	57	12.55%	42	13.86%	58	14.54%
	Total	454	100%	303	100%	399	100%
<b>Firm age</b>	up to 5years	55	12.11%	43	14.19%	85	21.30%
	6 to 10 years	64	14.10%	44	14.52%	62	15.54%
	more than 10 years	335	73.79%	216	71.29%	252	63.16%
	Total	454	100%	303	100%	399	100%
<b>Firm sector</b>	transportation	10	2.2%	9	2.97%	17	4.26%
	tourism	11	2.42%	15	4.95%	14	3.51%
	service	133	29.3%	99	32.68%	136	34.09%
	construction	63	13.88%	37	12.21%	30	7.52%
	manufacturing	79	17.4%	60	19.80%	66	16.54%
	agriculture	11	2.42%	1	0.33%	75	18.79%
	retailing	91	20.05%	60	19.80%	45	11.28%
	other	56	12.33%	22	7.26%	16	4.01%
	Total	454	100%	303	100%	399	100%

**Table 3.** Test of Normality

Variable	Variance	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% CI	Skewness	Kurtosis
Marketing activities	.964	2.7860	.98188	[2.7294 2.8427]	<b>-.048</b>	<b>-.705</b>
Social media usage	1.088	3.0043	1.04290	[2.9441 3.0645]	<b>-.142</b>	<b>-.700</b>

**Table 4.** The results of ANOVA test regarding marketing activities and social media usage

Variables	Countries	N	Mean	Std Dev.	95% CI	Between Groups		
						Df	F	P
Marketing Activities	Czech	454	2.5844	1.07761	[2.4850 2.6838]	2	18.860	0.000
	Slovak	303	2.8207	.84164	[2.7255 2.9158]			
	Hun	399	2.9891	.92194	[2.8984 3.0799]			
Social m.u.	Czech	454	2.8227	1.13272	[2.7182 2.9272]	2	26.767	0.000
	Slovak	303	2.8804	.90821	[2.7777 2.9830]			
	Hun	399	3.3051	.96439	[3.2102 3.4001]			

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 5.** The results from Post-Hoc Games-Howell Test regarding marketing activities

Country(I)	Country(J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Significance
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Slovakia	-.23625	.06997	.002
	Hungary	-.40470	.06847	.000
<b>Slovakia</b>	Czech Rep.	.23625	.06997	.002
	Hungary	-.16846	.06684	.032
<b>Hungary</b>	Czech Rep..	.40470	.06847	.000
	Slovakia	.16846	.06684	.032

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 6.** The results from Post-Hoc Games-Howell Test regarding social media usage

Country(I)	Country(J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Significance
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Slovakia	-.05768	.07449	.719
	Hungary	-.48245	.07181	.000
<b>Slovakia</b>	Czech Rep.	.05768	.07449	.719
	Hungary	-.42477	.07109	.000
<b>Hungary</b>	Czech Rep..	.48245	.07181	.000
	Slovakia	.42477	.07109	.000

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 7.** Marketing and Social media usage by firm size in different countries

Country	Indicator	<i>n</i>		Mean		Between Groups <i>Marketing Act.</i>	<i>d</i>	F	Sig.
		micro	small & medium	micro	small & medium				
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Marketing act.	290	164	2.5437	2.6565	micro	2	13.925	.000
	S.media usage	290	164	2.8267	2.8155	Small&medium	2	5.555	.004
<b>Slovakia</b>	Marketing act.	171	132	2.8441	2.7904	<b>Between Groups</b>			
	S.media usage	171	132	2.9240	2.8239	<b>S. media usage</b>			
<b>Hungary</b>	Marketing act.	268	131	2.9714	3.0254	micro	2	9.567	.000
	S.media usage	268	131	3.2733	3.3702	Small&medium	2	4.786	.009

Note: *n* is sample size.

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 8.** Marketing and Social media usage by firm age in different countries

Country	Indicator	<i>n</i>		Mean		Between Groups <i>Marketing Act.</i>	<i>d</i>	F	Sig.
		Firm age < 10 years	> 10 years	Firm age < 10 years	> 10 years				
<b>Czech</b>	Marketing act.	119	335	2.7675	2.5194	Firm age < 10 years	2	2.277	.104
	S.media usage	119	335	2.9517	2.7769	> 10 years	2	22.704	.000
<b>Slovak</b>	Marketing act.	87	216	2.6398	2.8935	<b>Between Groups</b>			
	S.media usage	87	216	2.6695	2.9653	<b>S. media usage</b>			
<b>Hun</b>	Marketing act.	147	252	2.9184	3.0304	Firm age < 10 years	2	6.544	.002
	S.media usage	147	252	3.1667	3.3859	> 10 years	2	26.281	.000

Note: *n* is sample size.

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 9.** Marketing Activities with multiple corporations in ANOVA-Games and Howell Tests

Country(I)	Country(J)	Mean difference (I-J)		Mean difference (I-J)		Significance		Significance	
		micro	small & medium	Firm age < 10 years	> 10 years	Micro	Size Small&med.	<10 years	Age >10 years
Czech	Slovak	-.30038	-.13390	.12766	-.37412	.003	.444	.609	.000
	Hun	-.42771	-.36894	-.15086	-.51102	.000	.004	.467	.000
Slovak	Czech	.30038	.13390	-.12766	.37412	.003	.444	.609	.000
	Hun	-.12734	-.23504	-.27852	-.13690	.301	.078	.058	.198
Hun	Czech	.42771	.36894	.15086	.51102	.000	.004	.467	.000
	Slovak	.12734	.23504	.27852	.13690	.301	.078	.058	.198

Note: *n* is sample size.

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.

**Table 10.** Social media usage with multiple corporations in ANOVA and Games-Howell Test

Country(I)	Country(J)	Mean difference (I-J)		Mean difference (I-J)		Significance		Significance	
		micro	small & medium	Firm age < 10 years	> 10 years	Micro	Size Small&med.	Age <10 years	Age >10 years
Czech	Slovak	-.09725	-.00831	.28214	-.18841	.581	.997	.108	.081
	Hun	-.44660	-.55468	-.21499	-.60905	.000	.000	.235	.000
Slovak	Czech	.09725	.00831	-.28214	.18841	.581	.997	.108	.081
	Hun	-.34934	-.54637	-.49713	-.42063	.001	.000	.000	.000
Hungary	Czech	.44660	.55468	.21499	.60905	.000	.000	.235	.000
	Slovak	.34934	.54637	.49713	.42063	.001	.000	.000	.000

Note: *n* is sample size.

Source: own calculations based on ANOVA analyses in SPSS.