Modern forms of promotion and the possibility of its exploitation in cities

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Abstract

Nowadays, the development is strongly influenced by modern technologies. Progress in information and communication technologies leads to the emergence of new forms, channels, and tools of promotion, but also to the new possibilities of their application in the territory. The article deals with the current topic of modern forms of place promotion and their use in the cities of the Slovak Republic. The aim of the paper is to examine the use of selected modern forms of place promotion and to identify the possibilities of their more effective use in branding and building competitiveness of the city. The paper defines modern forms of marketing communication based on a theoretical overview based on literary research of international academic and professional source. Subsequently, we use the method of empirical research to identify the use of place promotion tools. The research sample consists of 141 cities (all Slovak cities) in the Slovak Republic in 7 size categories from 1,000 inhabitants to more than 100,000 inhabitants. The research findings map the implementation and use of place promotion as an important factor of city development as well as a prerequisite strengthening the competitiveness of cities at the national and international level.

Keywords

Promotion, marketing communication, city, modern technologies, city branding

1. Introduction

In the turbulent and developing current time period, characterised by the process of globalisation, which brings uniformity, it is not possible to build a competitive advantage only on the quality of a territory and the associated hard localisation factors. It is necessary, and in many cases, even necessary to offer something unique, specific, or something that will appeal to a specific market. Recently, there has been an increasing need to strengthen the competitiveness of a territory, especially through image and brand belonging to the soft localisation factors. Even though these attributes of a territory are qualitative, intangible and more or less subjective, they offer a certain potential for differentiation of territories, which, from the point of view of many traditional localisation factors, show an ever-increasing degree of similarity.

With the development of modern information and communication technologies, the forms, tools and channels of marketing communication are changing dynamically. The role of modern forms of promotion in cities is growing significantly. Modern forms of promotion create a new - interactive space for communication with current and potential consumers of the city, whose change their consumer behaviour based on information. Modern forms of promotion create opportunities for creating the image and place brand too, as they affect the recognisability of the territory as a brand. So their introduction into the "life" of cities is not just a choice but a necessity and a key prerequisite for success and competitiveness on the market of cities.

The aim of the paper is to examine the use of selected modern forms of place promotion and to identify the possibilities of their more effective use in branding and building competitiveness of the city. The article is divided into four chapters. In the introduction, we explain the need to deal with modern forms of promotion in cities. The second part of the article theoretically defines modern forms of promotion. The third part defines the methodology and data used. The fourth part of the article presents the results of the analysis of the use of selected modern forms of place promotion on the example of all Slovak cities. In the conclusion, we summarise the results of the research and point out the possibilities of their more effective use in branding and building competitiveness of the city.

2. Modern forms of promotion

The development of new technologies influences all spheres of society. The most evident is an impact at the lowest level, which is the closest to citizens, visitors, entrepreneurs, etc., so it means in cities and towns. The transformation of communication at local level in line with technological progress has several positive effects, such as improving cooperation and communication between the city and current consumers of the city, reaching

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potential consumers of the city, city branding, strengthening the position of the city at the territory market, increasing overall competitiveness. Modern forms of communication are and will be an important indirect factor of the cities' development.

To the most progressive and more and more frequently used tools belong websites, discussion forums, blogs, chats, social media and influencers activities, mobile applications, various kinds of events (real or virtual), etc. Promotion mix used by cities informs about the products or other activities of the cities and in synergy with other marketing tools it influences the behaviour of target groups to perceive them positively, to buy or to consummate the product. The communication should also provide feedback and the ability to correct the errors in realised marketing strategy. Feedback is a source of impulses and the basis of collective learning (Ježek, Rumpel, Slach, 2007). It allows the global coverage, low distribution costs and interactivity, thanks to which consumers can react retrospectively.

The summary of promotion tools used by the cities including these ones which are based on modern ICTs and internet presents table 1.

Table 1. Tools of promotion by Vaňová, Vitálišová, Borseková (2017).

Tool	Aims	Forms
Public relations	Increasing trust, changing attitudes and behavior, persuading of subjects, building an image.	Direct (interpersonal communication, meetings, informal meetings, publications), indirect (media, events, annual reports, sponsorship, lobbying, information services, bulletins, etc.)
Advertising	Present and promote the city's product (s) through the media for fee.	Communication channels (internet, printed materials, multimedia), promotional materials (leaflets, brochures, maps, calendars, postcards, publications, posters, tourist guides, videos, banners, etc.)
Sales promotion	Support the goals of the communication mix with short-term incentives aimed at activating of will to buy or sell.	Price benefits for entrepreneurs, participation in exhibitions and fairs, presentations to journalists, removal of bureaucratic barriers, etc.
Personal communication	To offer the area to potential visitors, residents, investors, entrepreneurs, etc. through a verbal presentation.	Creating and maintaining personal relationships, formal or informal presentation, sales contracts, personal friendships, etc.
Events	Increase customer and media interest in the city.	Social (balls), cultural (concerts, theaters), sports (tournaments), corporate (company days), historical (festivities), gastronomic (food preparation), business (exhibitions), educational (conferences), information (open days) and other events
Virtual communication	Communicate with customers with precise targeting.	Blog, banner, text links, e-mail, chat, audiovisual communication, social networks.
Direct mail	Address a precisely defined target segment.	Telephone, post office, internet, e-mail, teleshopping.
Word-of-mouth	Exchange information with a direct link to the territory and its products.	Communication between persons.
Buzz communication	Make a buzz.	Interesting, unusual and often controversial topics that would have the potential to cause excitement between consumers and the media.
Virtual communication	Achieve exponential growth of product awareness by non-managed dissemination of information among people on the internet.	A message (in the form of an image, animation, video) with promotional content that attracts so much attention from consumers that they send it and spread it.

Tool	Aims	Forms
Guerilla	Rise an attention.	A surprising, original and unconventional campaign with a low budget.
Product placement	Promote the city intentionally and for fee.	Placing the territory in a positive context in an audiovisual work.
Mobil communication	Communicate fast with the customers.	Phone calls, SMS messages, applications.

Source: Vaňová, Vitálišová, Borseková (2017).

For the empirical research in the Slovak cities we select following modern tools of promotion:

Websites and website promotion are a part of internet marketing. There are different synonyms of the term used in literature, e.g. on-line marketing or web marketing. Website is a collection of texts, multimedia components, images, etc., arranged in a document which is placed on a web server and made available via the internet. (Stuchlík, Dvořáček, 2000). The purpose of a website is to build a brand, to provide information about products and activities for all interest groups. They also provide a selling advertising space for products and services over the Internet (Janouch, 2010).

Mobile communication includes various formats and principles of mobile marketing communication through text messaging or applications. The advantage of mobile marketing communication is a possibility of accurate targeting of a campaign (information about the consumer's identity, behaviour, personal preferences and geographic location), the ability of mediate direct interaction between the advertiser and recipient, high operability in real time, simple and quick updating, high user comfort, low cost, large scale use and, last but not least, simple measurability (Vaňová, Vitálišová, Borseková, 2017).

Chat allows electronic communication between the Internet users in real time, or online discussions with several users at the same time.

Location placement is a form of hidden promotion. It is a placement of territories (cities, states, tourist destinations) in works of art, such as movies, series, video games, entertainment shows, songs, etc. The degree of explicitness of what the territory should be may vary. Location placement is carried out for a fee.

Blog is a form of Internet communication, that allows publication of promotional texts, attaching audio files available to a greater number of stakeholders– we can speak of millions – practically free of charge.

According to Janouch (2014) and Das, Mondal (2020), blogs are simple text pages without graphics, representing the personal opinions of the author and at the same time creating platform for further communication. The author usually aims at his topics with a certain group of users and deliberately provokes discussion. The popularity of this form marketing communication results mainly from the need of people to communicate, to draw information and confront their views with the environment. Blogs are being used more and more often also large by companies resp. territories, contributing to them not only the staff of the communication departments, but also the top official's management and employees (Foret, 2011; Přikrylová, Jahodová, 2010).

Authors such as Přikrylová, Jahodová (2010); Frey (2011); Rajčák, Rajčáková (2012); Scott (2013); Das, Mondal (2020); Kim et al. (2019) and others to modern forms of marketing communication also include *digital advertisements*, which are the oldest and at the same time the most frequently used form Internet advertising. These include flashing, moving, or static image ads bars that carry a specific advertising message and are clicked on by the user redirected to the advertiser's website. Digital advertising can take various forms, types, sizes and locations from static combinations of text and images, through cartoon animation using photos, audio and videos, which currently have the greatest potential, as they are best able to attract users (Foret, 2011; Scott, 2013; Příkrylová et al., 2019). Digital advertisement is placed on high-traffic sites - on the search service servers (portals) and servers focused on the selected area.

The *events* increase the interest of customers and the media in the area where the event takes place. The events that organizations, institutions, companies or territories organize for their customers, represent an innovative and creative approach to building a brand and credibility and friendliness in relation to current and potential customers of the territory. Events are a non-personal form of promotion, through which the organizer of the event sends a predetermined message to the target audience. Managed events as modern forms of promotion evoke emotions, lead the target group to active participation, engagement and thus mediate an intense emotional experience, increase and attract the attention of consumers and potential customers of the territory and the media. People associate the emotions and memories associated with the event with the territory where the event took place. Positive experiences evoke the need to communicate about the event on social media, which builds the brand of the territory, shapes the image, increases attendance and, ultimately, the overall competitiveness (Vaňová, Vitálišová, Borseková, 2017).

Social media platforms are the world's most visited websites with significant growth potential. According to Statis (2018), in 2018, 2.62 billion people worldwide used the social media platforms at least once a month, and the

average time spent was 135 minutes a day. Social media consist of the community of users, people or organizations that have something in common. For instance, it can be real friendship, kinship, employment, hobby, interests, or a particular social problem. Such users are interconnected and share information. Communication takes place on the Internet with the access from a computer or a mobile phone.

Social media provide a lot of opportunities for interaction with citizens through plug-in applications, groups and fanpages. Each social media is specific and has its specific users. Social media give the users a chance to share their ideas, contents and relationships online. The user can create, comment and post their own content and share it with the others. The users' posts can have the form of a text, a video, animation, images, photos, etc. The concept of social media creates vast possibilities for presentation of city and its brand. Creative and interactive communication brings the product, place or brand to attention. In addition to these activities and the provision of standard information, e.g. on city administration, cities use social media mainly as the opportunity for monitoring attitudes and opinions in social media discussion forums, conducting informal surveys, creating databases of potential consumers, viral marketing (Das, Mondal, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Přikrylová et al., 2019; Labanauskaite et al., 2020). On the other hand, customers can attach videos, photos or comments to their profiles. They can also have discussions managed and possibly entered by the discussion group administrators. In this way information is spread to people who would probably not get it otherwise.

In order to communicate on social media effectively, according to Janouch (2014), Labská et al. (2014) the communication must be implemented actively and up-to-date, which requires considerable financial resources to ensure quality human resources which will be devoted to activities in a systematic, comprehensive and targeted manner.

Kollárová (2014) divides social media into three platforms: social networks (Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, etc.); blogs (WordPress, Blogger) and discussion forums (Google Groups, Yahoo Groups, Answers). Experts from the Cite agency (2012) also assign other platforms to the mentioned platforms, namely: microblogs (Twitter, Posterous, Tumblr, etc.); online rating sites (TripAdvisor, Zagat, Google Places); social bookmarking (StumbleUpon, Delicious, Digg); podcasting; social knowledge and Wiki (Wikipedia, Quora); geo-location services (FourSquare); shared multimedia (YouTube, Instagram, Last.fm, SlideShare). These types of social media also include platforms for sharing photos, chats, games, but also business networks, etc.

3. Methodology

The paper deals with the current topic of modern forms of promotion and their role in the cities. The aim of the paper is to examine the use of selected modern forms of place promotion and to identify the possibilities of their more effective use in branding and strengthening competitiveness of the city.

We defined the modern forms of promotion and their relationship with place branding and city competitiveness based on the deep literature review. We verified use of identified modern forms of promotion by empirical research on a sample of all 141 towns and cities of the Slovak Republic in 7 size categories (Table 1) from 1,000 inhabitants to more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Table 2. Number of the Slovak cities by size categories

Designation of categories	Group of cities	Size categories of the cities	Number of the cities
1	Slovak cities	100,000+	2
2	Slovak cities	50,000-99,999	8
3	Slovak cities	20,000-49,999	29
4	Slovak cities	10,000-19,999	33
5	Slovak cities	5,000-9,999	45
6	Slovak cities	2,000-4,999	22
7	Slovak cities	1,000-1,999	2
Total			141

Research was conducted during two weeks from 16.11.2020 to 29.11.2020. In the first phase of the primary research, we identified used websites; mobile applications; discussion forums, chats, blogs; digital advertisement and event by cities. In the second phase of the primary research, we verified the utilisation of the social media by cities. The research includes official city profiles identified by city name directly on individual social media platforms. We examined a total of 22 social media by observation: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Ivoox, FriendFeed, LinkedIn, Delicious, Slice, Formspring, Flicker, Google+, Customizable, Trhowplie, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Blogger, Tumblr, Pinterest, Xing, Vimeo and Snapchat.

4. Modern forms of promotion and the possibility of its exploitation in Slovak cities

There are no doubts about the important role of communication within the development of cities. From the marketing point of view, the communication is a core of city promotion. The tools of city promotion are strongly influenced by the development of new technologies. Referring to the theoretical framework of the paper we researched in the Slovak city the implementation of following tools: websites; mobile application; location placement; events; discussion forum, chats, blogs; digital advertisement. The exploitation of these tools by all Slovak cities presents figure 1.
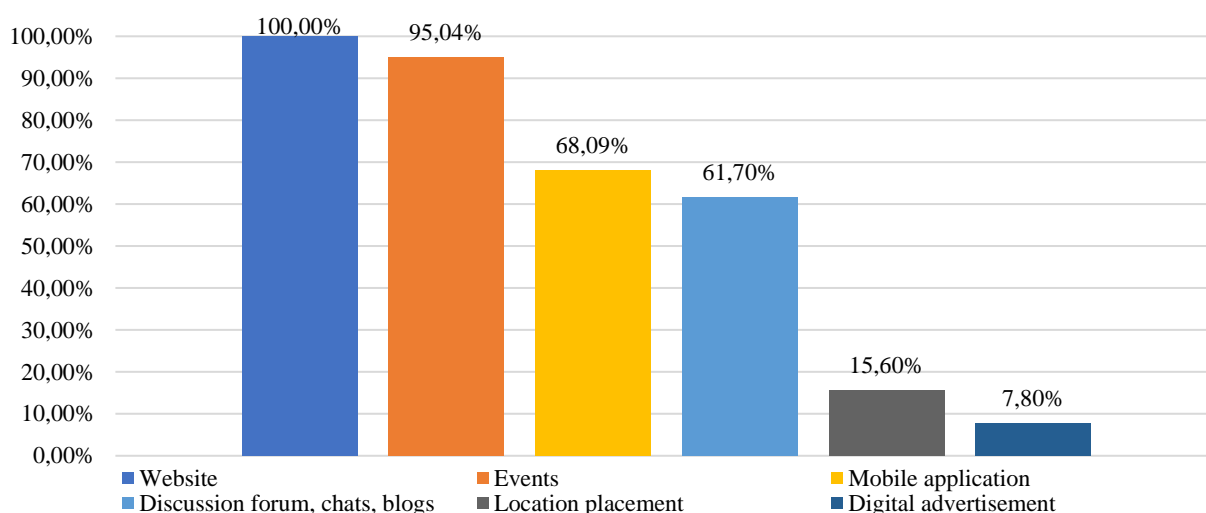

Figure 1 Modern forms of promotion implemented in Slovak cities
Source: own research

The figure 1 shows that the most used tools is a website. All Slovak cities have their own website presented the city, its services and government, what confirms the fact that the website of the city is a necessity in modern society as well as a common part of municipal communication. The second most used tool is an organisation of event (95.04 %; 134 cities). More than 50% of cities use also mobile application, discussion forums, chats and blogs. In case of mobile applications, the most often they are in a form of standardised application delivered by private companies with accustomed features for each city (e. g. mobile application SOM (I am), V obraze (In picture)). Discussion forums, chats and blogs are usually the part of city's websites with aim to provide space for citizens asking questions, identifying the common problems, etc. To the least exploited tools belongs digital advertisement and location placement. We assume that it can be caused by the financial costs of these tools which are an important criterion in decision making of local representatives.

The implementation of other modern forms of promotion in cities by size categories presents figure 2. The second most used tool, almost in all cities beside the size category 2000 – 4999 inhabitants, is an organization of events. Still more and more cities has also own mobile application for various purposes – for citizens, tourists, for parking, for buying travel tickets etc. The share of cities with the mobile application is lower in smaller cities – from 45,45% till 69,70% in cities to 19 999 inhabitants. Only cca ½ of these cities use also discussion forums, chats and blogs. In bigger cities (from 20 000 inhabitants) are these forms of promotion used more frequently (cca 90 % of cities). As we already mentioned, the utilisation of modern promotion tools in cities can be significantly influence by sum of allocated financial resource for this purpose. The bigger cities with higher budget can spend much more money for promotion as small cities with limited financial possibilities. Moreover, in bigger cities also the communication department is usually the regular part of municipal authorities, so the management of all promotion activities can be realised more systematically as well as effective.
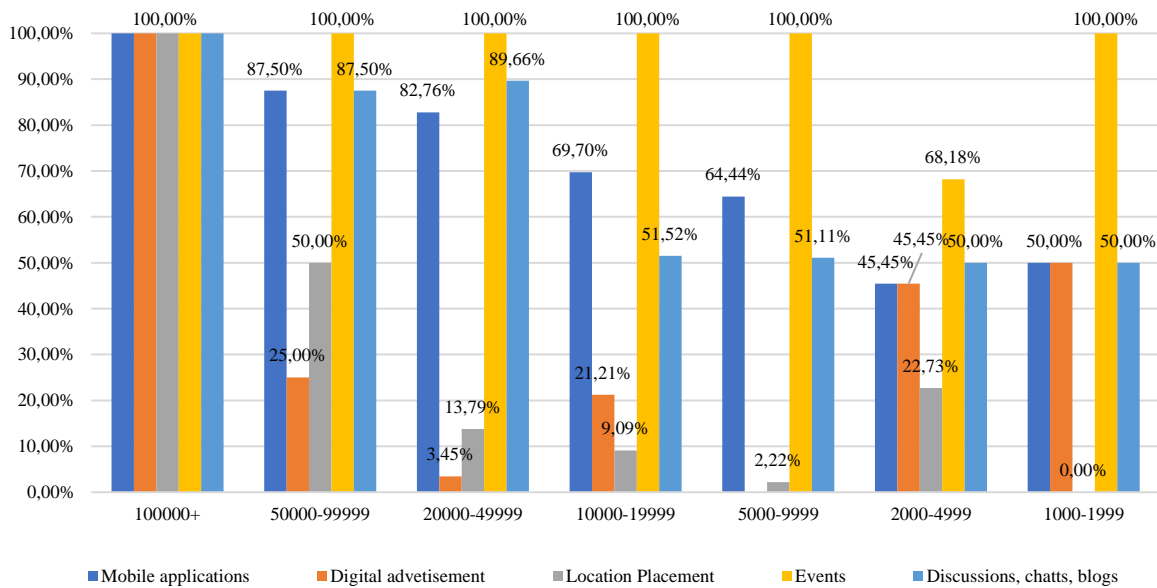
Figure 2 Exploitation of the other forms of promotion by Slovak cities and the size category
Source: own research

In the next step of our research, we paid special attention to the social media. Referring to the theoretical framework of the paper, we examined the use of the following 22 social media in Slovak and European cities: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Ivoox, FriendFeed, LinkedIn, Delicious, Slice, Formspring, Flicker, Google+, Customizable, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Pon, Blogger, Tumblr, Pinterest, Xing, Vimeo, Snapchat. The use of these social media by all Slovak cities is shown in Figure 3.
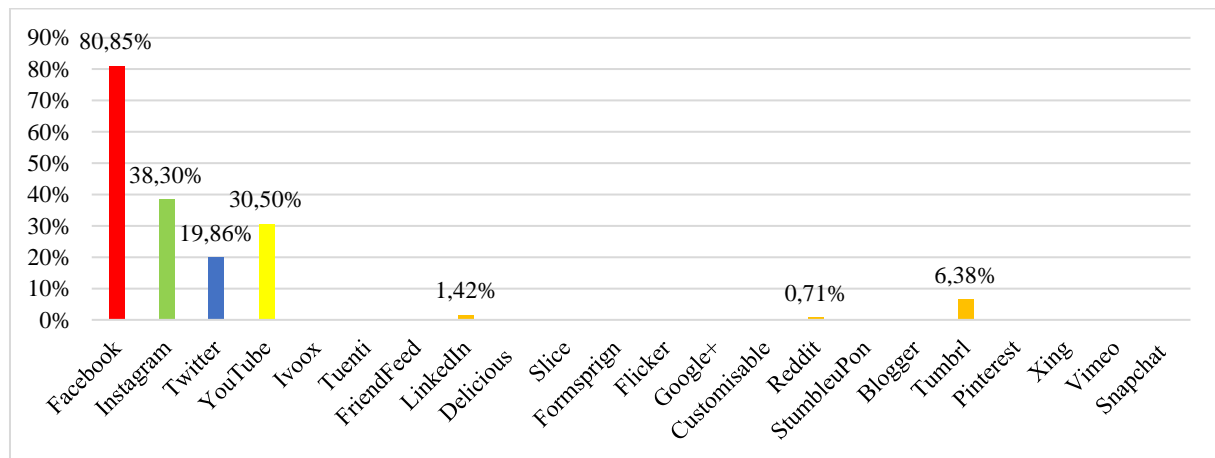

Figure 3 Use of social media by sample cities
Source: own research

As can be seen from the data in Figure 3, the most used social media on which Slovak cities have a profile are Facebook (80.85%), Instagram (38.30%), YouTube (30.50%) and Twitter (19.86%). Less than 7% of cities have a profile on the other 3 social media platforms. 15 social media platforms are not used by Slovak cities at all. The results confirmed the overall popularity of Facebook and Instagram among Slovak population. Surprisingly, the cities do not use more social media platforms oriented at publishing pictures, photos or videos, so their potential as an incentive to boost the branding or building image is still uncovered.
A more detailed analysis of the most used social media platforms by size categories of cities is shown in Figure 4.
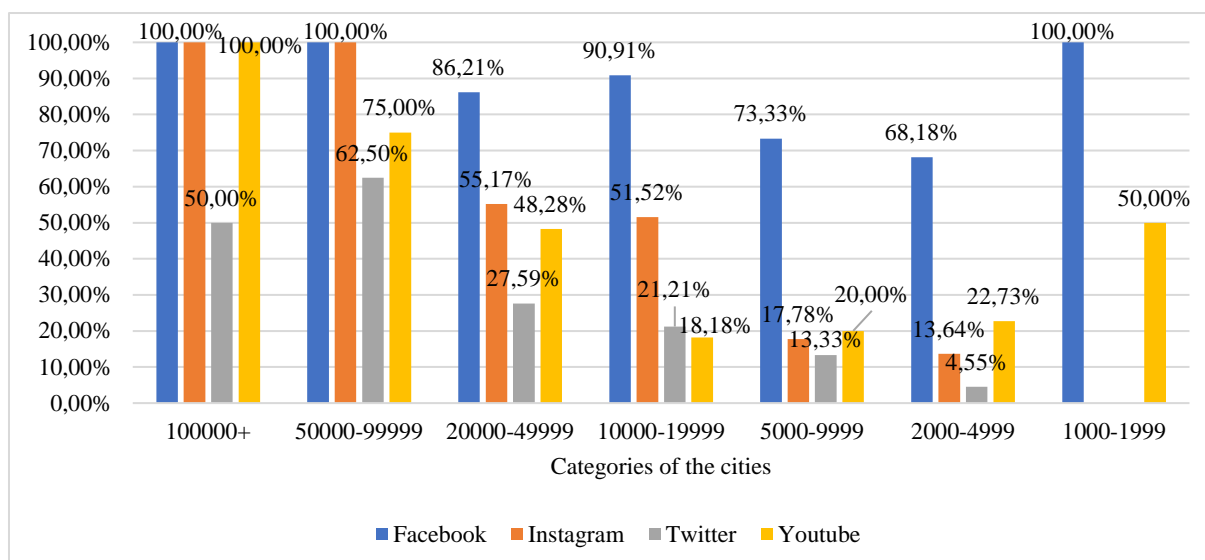
Figure 4 Use of the most used social media platforms by cities of individual size categories
Source: own research

The share of cities with official profiles on the most used social media differs quite significantly in individual categories of cities and decreases by the size category of city. Two largest Slovak cities, Bratislava and Košice make extensive use of all 4 social media platforms. Bratislava even have two profiles on social media platforms. One profile is aimed at the inhabitants of the city, the other is aimed at tourists or directly at the presentation of the city brand. Less than 55% of cites in categories with a population of less than 49,999 have a profile on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Twitter is the least popular platform in all Slovak cities. The presented results are in line with the most used social media in Slovakia – Facebook, YouTube, Instagram except Twitter, what is relatively less used social platform. The Slovak cities do not use enough the potential of Pinterest, TikTok or Snapchat which even popular as Twitter in Slovakia (Stratégie, 2021).

5. Conclusion

If we talk about city, we talk about it as a product and therefore it is necessary to communicate its significant elements using a coordinated system of marketing communication, by other words marketing communication strategy, that helps to identify and deliver the correct information to the target audience. The aim is to promote awareness of the city whose name is its brand and thus create the interest of the target audience in the city, increase the "marketability" of the city as well as the overall competitiveness. From this point of view, the importance of marketing communication is unquestionable.

With the development of information and communication technologies, the communication of a city is shifting especially to the virtual space, which provides to the city the opportunity to address wide public at the same time individually, maintain their attention for a longer time and provide personalised information and ultimately get feedback. The advantage of modern forms of promotion is to reach a large number of target audiences anytime and anywhere with proper management.

The main idea of the paper was to examine the use of selected modern forms of place promotion and to identify the possibilities of their more effective use in branding and strengthening competitiveness of the city. We oriented on the researching of following tools: social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, etc.); websites; mobile application; location placement; events; discussion forum, chats; digital advertisement.

In order to be effective in city's communication, it must be implemented actively, quickly, up-to-date and efficiently and on the other hand also with the respecting the limited financial resources of the cities for their marketing activities. The results of our research provide a partial picture of how Slovak cities use the potential of modern forms of promotion. The research confirms that the necessity for the cities is to communicate via own website, which use the citizens as a primary source of information about the news in the cities, in its policy and development activities. The websites are usually integrated with the additional forms of communication (e. g. discussion forums, blogs, chats, mobile applications, etc. In the Slovak cities, it is still not uncovered the potential of social networks in branding as well as in building competitiveness, except Facebook and partially Instagram. It can be influenced by limited personal capacities in city marketing department or in many cities even no special

employee(s) devoted to these tasks. The second reason can be also limiting in financial resources. If the city has an ambition to use social media as an integral part of marketing communication strategy similarly as a private company, the paid advertisement is necessary.

The Slovak cities use the majority of investigated tools, but level of their integration is questionable (except some city pioneers with the strategical approach to the city communication, e. g. Bratislava). Our researches show that more coordinated and strategical approach in marketing communication of cities should be implemented with special attention given to the new modern tools and its potential in branding and boosting city competitiveness. There is still space to develop the old promotion tools as well as to introduce the new ones or even better these ones that are verified by the practice in foreign cities as the beneficial ones.

Acknowledgement

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