

Belás, Jaroslav; Gavurova, Beata; Novotna, Lenka; Smrčka, Luboš

## Article

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## EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENCES IN USING MARKETING TOOLS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SMEs IN THE VISEGRÁD GROUP COUNTRIES

Jaroslav Belas<sup>1</sup> , Beata Gavurova<sup>2\*</sup> , Lenka Novotna<sup>3</sup> ,  
and Lubos Smrcka<sup>4</sup> 

*Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic*  
*Technical University of Košice, Košice, Slovak Republic*  
*Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, České Budějovice,*  
*Czech Republic*  
*Prague University of Economics and Business, Prague, Czech Republic*

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### Abstract

The main aim of the study is to examine the differences in the use of the marketing tools in the management of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Visegrád Group (V4) countries. The research was carried out via questionnaires, which were distributed to small and medium-sized firms in 2020. We obtained 1585 observations, which comprised the answers of business owners and managers. Binary logistic regression was used to process the data. Currently, firms rarely use the classic tools of the marketing mix. These tools are used to a minimal extent in construction and services. Proactive tools of the marketing mix are mostly used in transportation and retailing, and the least in manufacturing, construction, tourism, and other areas of business. Online marketing tools are mostly used in retailing, tourism, and services, and are less used in agriculture, construction, and transportation. The analysis results confirmed the differences in using the marketing mix tools depending on the age of the firm, the age of managers vs. entrepreneurs, and gender. The study results provide valuable information for creators of marketing conceptions, and for creators of regional and national development strategies. Similarly, these results encourage the creation of new marketing concepts and methodologies to evaluate their economic effects on firms and society.

**Keywords:** marketing mix, classic marketing tools, sustainable marketing, business strategies, business sustainability, business environment.

**JEL Classification:** M21, L19, L26.

\* Corresponding author, **Beata Gavurova** – e-mail: [beata.gavurova@tuke.sk](mailto:beata.gavurova@tuke.sk)



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## Introduction

The quality of the business environment is considered as the key condition in the long-term competitiveness of firms and the growth of each market economy. The business environment is impacted by many factors, such as the economic and political environment, infrastructure, innovations, technologies, specific links of firms in a given sector, etc. Firms need to create new business models that are able to satisfy market requirements, in order to respond to a changing business ecosystem within which they operate. Present business strategies that focus only on increasing sales and consumption do not yield the expected results (Abdul Rahim et al., 2015).

Business success is related to long-term sustainable development that takes into consideration many dimensions. Firms realized that sustainability can help them create a new source of competitive advantage, increase the firm's value, and maintain consumer loyalty. As a consequence of constant changes in the business environment, the firms are forced to redefine their strategies, especially marketing ones. Marketing strategy is a concept of the firm's long-term planning of activities and tactics, and it is simultaneously a key to achieving its targets in the competitive environment (Amin, 2021).

Marketing strategies are also important in the implementation of specific steps of the firm in practice, and they always rely on the results of marketing analyses (Idris, 2021). Each firm has its principal business strategy, which forms the basis for its functioning and success. The change in a competitive environment may bring various unpredictable situations that have an impact on various areas of a firm, such as competitiveness, price, product, relationships with customers, etc. (Krajčík, 2021). Specific approaches and unique strategies must be applied in order to respond to such situations.

The creation of new marketing strategies requires the definition of new marketing tools. Present, so-called classic (traditional) marketing tools focused on the seller's interest rather than the buyer's interests. It was criticized by the scientific and research community (Civelek et al., 2021c). The negative perception of marketing had been increased by defining marketing as those activities that satisfy the needs and wishes of the buyers. Classic marketing tools are more often considered to be adverse to the concept of sustainable development.

The new concept of so-called "sustainable" marketing will require a re-evaluation of traditional marketing management approaches and the implementation of the principles of social, ecological, and economic business sustainability. It will be necessary to create marketing opportunities that would make firms successful either via proactive search for competitive advantages or via passive reactive approach by means of compliance with legislation and ethical principles. The new form of marketing management will impact the formation of new attitudes toward customers, consumption, and lifestyle. New and proactive marketing tools will reflect on environmental aspects and innovation efficiency aspects.

Marketing managers in cooperation with stakeholders will also consider those topics that are related to recycling, fair trade, use of alternative energy sources, ecological materials, energy saving, biodiversity, etc. The firm's ability to implement a sustainable marketing strategy will predominantly depend on the nature of the sector, the type of production, and on the product itself, the size of the firm, the business culture, management, attitudes toward competition and a brand, etc. It requires the building of strong analytical capabilities, examination, and revelation of all determinants of competitiveness and firm risks, and the

creation of a qualitative prognostic platform to create active and effective marketing strategies that reflect on permanent changes in the business environment, globalization changes, impacts of economic and pandemic crises, etc. (Pomering, 2017). These consistent facts motivated the team of authors to carry out this research that aims to examine the differences in using the marketing tools in the management of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Visegrád (V4) countries.

## 1. Review of the scientific literature

Many research studies examine various dimensions and differences in using the marketing tools (Civelek et al., 2020; Civelek et al., 2021a; Vavrecka et al., 2021) in order to define the frameworks for the development of new ones or to modify already existing marketing strategies. These research studies declare an increasing interest of research teams in examining the issue of sustainable marketing that aims at creating a stable and competitive business environment.

Adamska (2020) examined the application of various types of communication tools in the processes of creating values for customers in the SMEs sector. This is because SMEs are open to using innovative methods to draw their customers' attention, and to obtain a competitive advantage against their larger-sized rivals (Civelek et al., 2021b; Kolková & Ključnikov, 2021). To increase customer lifetime value, it is very important to examine the determinants that have an impact on the development of corporate communication. The study results confirm the necessity for a differentiated approach when using communication tools with corporate clients. It will positively impact the client capital management process.

These findings correspond to the results of the following study by Brink (2017), who examined how business-to-business (B2B) in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can manage the antecedents of the application of social media for potential contributions to the business. The results of qualitative research showed a disparity between the declared effects of social media use and their limitations in the practical contexts of B2B. The author suggests as the solution for this issue a developed model that integrates advantages of organizational processes in a company and advantages of social media.

Teck-Young and Spickett-Jones (2020) pointed to the significance of marketing communication agencies that specialize in the development of creative ideas and marketing communication campaigns for SMEs. These agencies may even support the creation of effective marketing strategies in SMEs. Especially in SMEs, a specialized marketing team may be absent, as opposed to other large companies. Also, such agencies efficiently help to provide a flexible response to changes in communication processes when conditions change in the external business environment.

In the study by Kowalska (2020), the author advised on the differences in using the communication mix tools (5P) in countries with different socio-economic conditions according to the concept of sustainable development. The author also examined the differences between the developed country and the developing country (Poland and Sri Lanka). Sustainable marketing mix activities are considered more important by SMEs managers in Sri Lanka than by SMEs managers in Poland. Pomering (2017) considered the importance of research of theoretical aspects of sustainable marketing with an emphasis on environmental aspects. Therefore, the author recommended the conceptualization of the

marketing mix by adding the following components: promise, principles, and partnership. It enables highlighting the relations with interested parties that play an important role in the marketing systems.

The study by Kumar et al. (2016) confirmed this fact as it identified and classified stakeholders and examined their positions in relation to sustainable marketing. The authors suggested that it is important to create and use classified stakeholders schemes, which would display clear links to individual dimensions of sustainable marketing. Wieland (2018) examined the mutual dependencies between monetary and product policy in SMEs in relation to a standardized approach to marketing management. The author considered a structured marketing mix as the basis for a successful marketing mix. In addition, the author provided instructions on how to correctly identify the policies of the marketing mix and their mutual dependencies and how to successfully manage such a structured marketing mix.

Yulia et al. (2020) evaluated the following economic obstacles in the companies: fluctuated sales, lack of manpower, unachieved targeted turnover, high competitiveness in the industry. It is inevitable to set optimal marketing strategies and optimal marketing mix to solve these economic problems. Therefore, the team of authors examined how such a marketing mix can impact the marketing strategy and can help to create optimal purchasing decisions for consumers. The case study presented by the authors emphasized the priorities of the marketing mix in the following order: promotion, product, place, and price. Direct marketing, public relations, mass media, and social media are considered as the priority of promotion. Furthermore, the study resulted in the necessity to examine sectoral specificities to create an optimal marketing mix that would increase company welfare.

The facts mentioned above correspond to the results of the study by Nurendah and Rainanto (2019). These authors pointed to the great importance of the correct setting of the marketing mix to build competitive advantages for SMEs. Competitive pressures vary between the sectors, and also within the sectors. Thus, it is important to constantly examine business opportunities and to set adequate strategies of the marketing mix for them. It supports the creation and use of new forms of marketing tools (Chebli et al., 2021; Kutlu and Ayyildiz, 2021).

Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) examined the factors that influence the selection and use of digital marketing channels in SMEs. The authors led the research among Finish SMEs, while the findings showed that Finish SMEs do not use the full potential of new digital tools. Therefore, these SMEs do not obtain all advantages that such tools offer. In addition, the authors saw a challenge for SMEs that have not understood the fundamental change in the character of communication that requires digitalization. The study appeals to the necessity to strengthen the knowledge of digital marketing within SMEs. These findings correspond to the study by Ismail et al. (2018), where the authors hypothesized that traditional marketing is not as efficient as in the past, and it is insufficient to provide a competitive environment for the companies in the present business environment. Thus, the authors suggested a solution that resulted in the implementation and use of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) in all companies that want to obtain competitive advantages in an unpredictable market. However, the practical implementation strategies of EM for SMEs are still not mentioned, despite various research on the EM and its characteristics.

Abdul Rahim et al. (2015) compared issues related to traditional marketing versus EM. The authors examined the impact of changes in the marketing procedures in traditional marketing

and EM and their impact on SMEs' efficiency. SMEs managers should focus on the implementation of innovative marketing practices that are specific to SMEs to achieve greater sales and growth capacity. Business uncertainty and decreasing efficiency of traditional marketing are related to the creation of more innovative marketing practices within EM (Ismail et al., 2018).

Globalization impact and business internationalization will be the next impulse in the development of tools within EM. Sulaiman and Masri (2017) examined the relationship between consumers' preferences and components of the 4P marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) in order to verify, whether the marketing mix can significantly influence the consumers' preferences. In the study, the authors found a significant and positive relationship between 4P and consumers' preferences for health supplement products. Similarly, it will be important to examine other aspects in addition to the 4P components, such as perception, attitude, culture, and others.

Many specialists recommend interconnecting the business strategy with other approaches, such as dynamic capabilities theory and the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing framework, when developing marketing concepts. This would reveal other economic links and their impact on the development of efficient marketing tools that lead to increased competitiveness in SMEs (Bocconcelli et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2018; Amin, 2021). Maro'ah et al. (2018) informed in significant limitations of conventional product marketing, has a limited scope of marketing, puts more emphasis on the validity of low prices and less attention to quality; etc. Thus, the authors recommended examining and applying further principles in marketing that are theistic, ethical, realistic, and humanistic in a combination with the following variables: product, place (distribution), price, people, promotion, process, and physical evidence.

The impact of marketing tools is examined in a relation to SMEs' competitiveness, and also to their efficiency and price strategies (Duffett et al., 2020). Amin (2021) examined the impact of promotion, price strategies, and product marketing strategies on the business performance in SMEs. The results of the study confirmed the impact of these strategies on SMEs' performance, which would support a process of a further increase in the quality of products, and it would create optimal price strategies. SMEs' performance and marketing strategies' impact were examined by Idris (2021), who also confirmed the impact of the marketing mix on SMEs' performance.

It is recommended to create marketing strategies based on 4P combinations and 4C (consumer, cost, convenience, and communications) in order to increase the performance of the companies. Similarly, Mac-Kingsley and Pokubo (2019) confirmed these economic links between marketing mix and performance, while the authors emphasized the need for sectoral differentiation in future research of these links. The performance of a company is also influenced by customer loyalty, which is directly related to customer satisfaction (Hu et al., 2021).

Sudari et al. (2019) examined the impact of the marketing mix on customer loyalty by measuring customer satisfaction. The study results declared that product, promotion, place, and price have a positive impact on customer satisfaction in the examined SMEs in about 68.9% of the sample. Customer loyalty is influenced by product, promotion, place, and price in about 61.7%. The recent economic crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic put pressure on adjusting the company strategies and creating such marketing tools that would enable companies to thrive during changing business conditions (Strakova et al., 2021).

Anghel et al. (2013) pointed out the necessity of quantifying the impacts of economic crises on strategic marketing management in SMEs. The crises impacted the companies in changing their processes. However, innovations and technological advances put pressure on the development of marketing tools and strategies (Hassan and Lee, 2021; Balaz, 2021; Kurar, 2021). The marketing mix and strategies in SMEs can be efficient if the companies adapt to the present competitive environment (Tekin and Turhan, 2020; Ferencakova et al., 2020).

Models of marketing simulations for SMEs, as affordable tools for improving the knowledge in the process of creating strategic marketing plans, may help the effective development of such plans (Pistol and Tonis, 2014). The results of the above-mentioned studies emphasize a need for further research of those aspects that have an impact on the development of new marketing concepts and that support the development of a methodological platform to quantify economic and non-economic impacts of their implementation. Also, these results present topics for subsequent research and comparative analyses.

## 2. Research methodology

The presented analysis consists of 1585 observations comprising the answers of business owners and managers in Visegrád countries. Data were collected using a questionnaire, which was distributed to SMEs in 2020. Data are well equilibrated, meaning that for each country we have approximately the same amount of observation. More precisely, the questionnaire was answered by 454 subjects in the Czech Republic, 399 subjects in Hungary, 364 subjects in Poland, and 368 subjects in the Slovak republic.

In the presented analysis, we focus our interest on the sectorial differences in marketing mix management. We present three statements that formed the marketing mix management component of the questionnaire:

1. Our company primarily uses classic tools of communication mix – exhibitions, fairs, printed advertising, and billboards (Classic marketing communication).
2. Our company primarily uses proactive sales mix tools – direct mailing, SMS campaigns, telemarketing (Proactive marketing tools).
3. Our company primarily uses online marketing tools – modern websites, banner advertising, PPC (PPA) campaigns, Google AdWords, Facebook, etc. (Online marketing tools).

The respondents expressed their consent to the proposed statement on a five-level Likert scale with the following response scaling: 1: Strongly agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neither agree nor disagree, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly disagree. In the first part of the analysis, we focus on the description of the type of marketing mixes used in respective sectors. The second part of the analysis uses binary logistic regression. The respective regression models are described in the next subchapter. Using regression analysis, we strive to determine the variables that influence the use of a given type of marketing communication for the companies included in our sample. Binary logistic regression is a specific type of regression analysis where a dependent variable is categorical and obtained two values, 0 – in case of non-occurrence of the phenomenon, or 1 – in case of occurrence of the phenomenon. To be able to determine whether an explanatory variable has a significant impact on the occurrence of the studied

phenomenon, we must take probability theory into account. Generally, we can express the relationship between the variables as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{Pr}{1-Pr}\right) = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^n \beta_i \times x_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Pr$  expresses the probability that observed phenomenon occurs,  $1-Pr$  express the probability of non-occurrence of the observed phenomenon,  $\beta_0$  is the constant of the model,  $\beta_i$  are estimated regression coefficients, and  $x_i$  is the set of explanatory variables.

### 3. Results and discussion

Table no. 1 contains correlation coefficients between answers about the type of marketing communication mix usually used in the respective company.

**Table no. 1. Correlation matrix**

Type of marketing communication mix primary used		Classic marketing communication	Proactive marketing tools	Online marketing tools
Our company primarily uses classic tools of communication mix – exhibitions, fairs, printed advertising, billboards.	Coef. Sig.	×	.340** .000	.148** .000
Our company primarily uses proactive sales mix tools – direct mailing, SMS campaigns, telemarketing.	Coef. Sig.	.340** .000	×	.355** .000
Our company primarily uses online marketing tools – modern websites, banner advertising, PPC (PPA) campaigns, Google AdWords, Facebook, etc.	Coef. Sig.	.148** .000	.355** .000	×

We note that there is no strong correlation between the answers of sample firms, which means that the marketing management styles differ. If a firm uses primarily classic tools of communication mix – exhibitions, fairs, printed advertising, billboards, it is probable that the same firm does not use proactive sales mix tools or online marketing tools. Figure no. 1 presents the average answers of firms' owners and managers, for the three statements that we focus on.



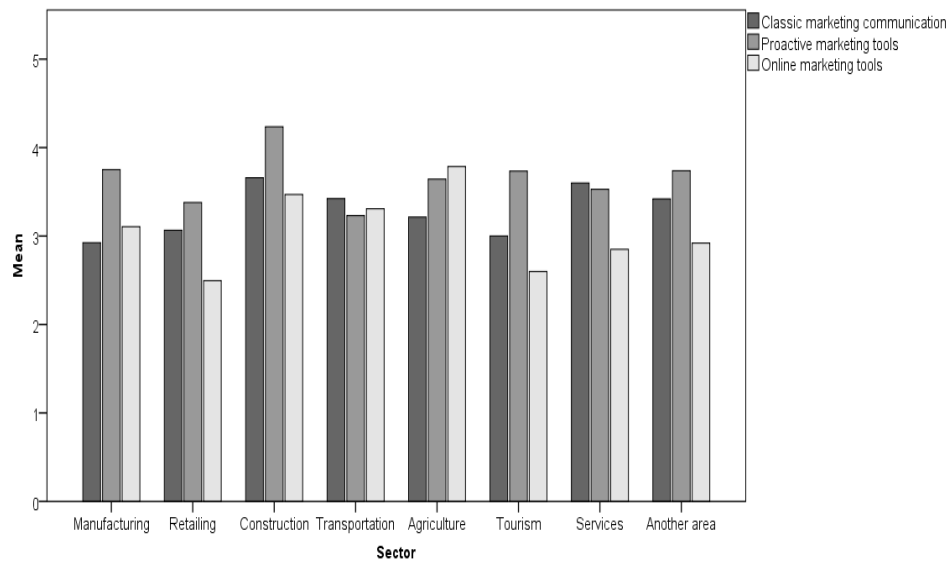
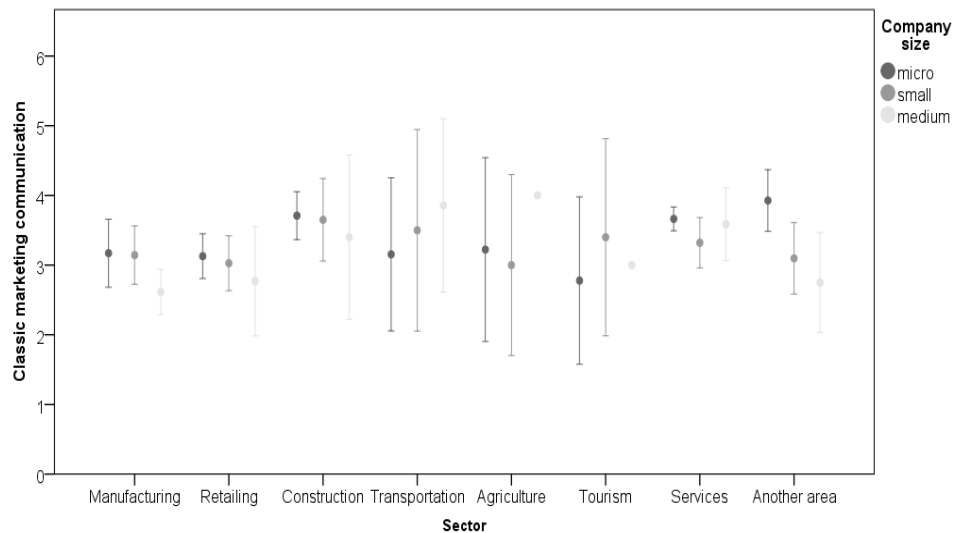


Figure no. 1. Marketing management setting within sectors

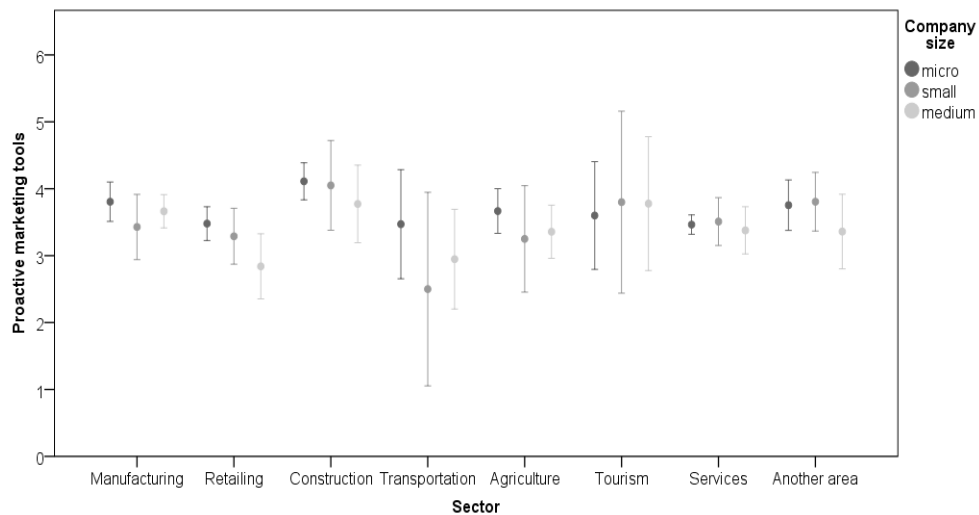
We note that the classic marketing communication mix is not mostly used in any sector and is least used in construction and services. Proactive marketing tools, such as direct mailing, SMS campaigns, and telemarketing are mostly used in transportation and retail and least used in manufacturing and construction, tourism, and other business areas. Online marketing is widely used in retail, tourism, services, and other areas and least used in agriculture, construction, and transportation. Figures nos. 2, 3, and 4 show the average scores of the responses regarding marketing management in individual sectors, depending on the size of the company.

In Figure no. 2 we see that the classic marketing communication (exhibitions, fairs, printed advertising, billboards) is mostly used by medium-sized companies in manufacturing, retailing, tourism, and other sectors. Also, the classic marketing mix is used by micro-enterprises in tourism. On the other hand, the least is the classic marketing mix used in micro and small enterprises in manufacturing, retailing, construction, transportation, medium-sized companies in agriculture, micro-enterprises in services, and microenterprises and small enterprises in other business areas.



**Figure no. 2. Classic marketing communication use and company size**

Figure no. 3 offers a look at the use of proactive marketing tools (direct mailing, SMS campaigns, telemarketing) in the given sectors. Proactive marketing tools are used by small firms only in manufacturing and transportation. Medium-sized enterprises use proactive marketing tools in the retail sector and other industries. Microenterprises use proactive marketing tools in the least. The most balanced situation regarding the use of proactive marketing tools can be found in the sectors of services and tourism.



**Figure no. 3. Proactive marketing tools use and company size**

Finally, Figure no. 4 presents data on the use of online marketing tools (modern websites, banner advertising, PPC (PPA) campaigns, Google AdWords, Facebook, etc.) within each sector. Online marketing tools are mostly used in the tourism sector and least in the construction sector. The most balanced situation regarding the use of online marketing tools can be found in the agriculture sector and other areas of the business. Medium-sized enterprises use online marketing tools mostly in retail, tourism, and services sectors, while small enterprises use online marketing tools in the manufacturing, transportation, and agriculture sector. As in the case of proactive marketing tools, micro-companies do not use online marketing tools on a wide scale.

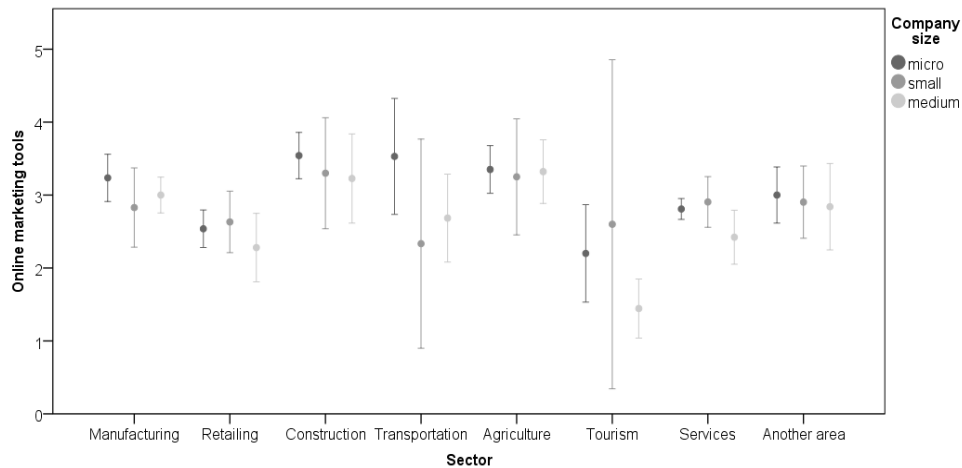


Figure no. 4. Online marketing tools use and company size

To better understand the factors that influence the use of each type of marketing tool, we use binary logistic regression analysis models. We present three models whose equations are as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{Pr(\text{classic marketing communication} = \text{yes})}{1 - Pr(\text{classic marketing communication} = \text{yes})}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n \quad (2)$$

$$\ln\left(\frac{Pr(\text{proactive marketing tools} = \text{yes})}{1 - Pr(\text{proactive marketing tools} = \text{yes})}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n \quad (3)$$

$$\ln\left(\frac{Pr(\text{online marketing tools} = \text{yes})}{1 - Pr(\text{online marketing tools} = \text{yes})}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n \quad (4)$$

with supposed explanatory variables Sector, Company size, Legal form, Age of the company, Age of the entrepreneur, Gender of the entrepreneur, and Position within the firm. Dependent variables obtain value 1, respectively, "yes," when the respondent ticked values 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, 0 if otherwise (values 3, 4, 5).

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table no. 2 (Classic marketing communication), Table no. 3 (Proactive marketing tools), and Table no. 4 (Online marketing tools), where only statistically significant variables are included. It is clear from Table no. 2

that, compared to proactive marketing tools and online marketing tools, the use of classic marketing communication is difficult to model. The only statistically significant variables are the age of the entrepreneur, respectively, manager, and position in the company. It can be said that, compared to 56 years and older, the classic marketing mix is used significantly more often by young entrepreneurs under the age of 35 years. Business owners use the classic marketing mix significantly more often than business managers.

**Table no. 2. Binary logistic regression - Classic marketing communication**

Parameter		B	Std. Error	Hypothesis Test			Exp(B)
				Wald Chi-Square	Df	Sig.	
Intercept		-.977	.1783	30.003	1	.000	.377
Age	≤35	.382	.2365	2.610	1	.106	1.465
	36–45	-.096	.2264	.179	1	.672	.909
	46–55	.054	.2334	.054	1	.817	1.056
	≥56	Ref.					
Position	Business owner	.579	.1690	11.759	1	.001	1.785
	Manager	Ref.					

The results for proactive marketing tools are given in Table no. 3. The age of the entrepreneur and the manager, respectively, is a statistically significant variable at all intervals. It can be said that compared to 56 - or older managers, younger entrepreneurs use significantly more proactive marketing tools. Even as their age increases, the use of proactive marketing tools increases. In the retail and transportation sectors, proactive marketing tools are used significantly more than in other areas. On the contrary, in the construction sector, proactive marketing tools are used less often compared to other areas. Young companies with a duration of fewer than three years use proactive marketing tools 52% more often than companies that have been on the market for ten years or more. Male entrepreneurs use proactive marketing tools 25% less often than women.

**Table no. 3. Binary logistic regression – Proactive marketing tools**

Parameter		B	Std. Error	Hypothesis Test			Exp(B)
				Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.	
Intercept		-1.525	.2953	26.668	1	.000	.218
Age	≤35	.525	.2493	4.432	1	.035	1.690
	36–45	.590	.2214	7.103	1	.008	1.804
	46–55	.649	.2200	8.719	1	.003	1.915
	≥56	Ref.					
Sector	Manufacturing	.034	.2831	.014	1	.905	1.035
	Retailing	.381	.2788	1.867	1	.172	1.464
	Construction	-.522	.3544	2.165	1	.141	.594
	Transportation	.798	.3937	4.107	1	.043	2.221
	Agriculture	.015	.3465	.002	1	.966	1.015
	Tourism	.258	.4781	.291	1	.589	1.294
	Services	.108	.2513	.184	1	.668	1.114
	Another area	Ref.					

Parameter		B	Std. Error	Hypothesis Test			Exp(B)
				Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.	
Duration of business	≤3	.413	.2269	3.318	1	.069	1.512
	3–5	-.158	.2497	.401	1	.527	.854
	5–10	-.145	.1954	.550	1	.458	.865
	10+	Ref.					
Gender	Male	-.279	.1434	3.773	1	.052	.757
	Female	Ref.					

Finally, results for online marketing tools (Table no. 4) show that, compared to 56-year-old entrepreneurs, younger entrepreneurs use online marketing tools to a lesser extent. Online marketing tools are used less in retailing and especially in tourism than in other areas. In the construction and agriculture sector, online marketing tools are used more than in other areas of business. Companies under three years of age use online marketing tools significantly less than companies that have been on the market for ten years or more. In limited liability companies, online marketing tools are used to a lesser extent than in other forms of business.

Table no. 4. Binary logistic regression - Online marketing tools

Parameter		B	Std. Error	Hypothesis Test			Exp(B)
				Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.	
Intercept		1.188	.3084	14.838	1	.000	3.281
Age	≤35	-.785	.2136	13.501	1	.000	.456
	36–45	-.746	.1861	16.070	1	.000	.474
	46–55	-.513	.1863	7.593	1	.006	.598
	≥56	Ref.					
Sector	Manufacturing	.150	.2455	.371	1	.542	1.161
	Retailing	-.408	.2482	2.700	1	.100	.665
	Construction	.634	.2897	4.797	1	.029	1.886
	Transportation	-.162	.3697	.192	1	.662	.851
	Agriculture	.516	.3088	2.786	1	.095	1.675
	Tourism	-1.477	.4835	9.338	1	.002	.228
	Services	-.121	.2195	.304	1	.582	.886
	Another area	Ref.					
Duration of business	≤3	-.539	.2214	5.927	1	.015	.583
	3–5	.161	.2200	.536	1	.464	1.175
	5–10	-.036	.1690	.046	1	.831	.965
	10+	Ref.					
Legal form	Sole trader	-.208	.2505	.690	1	.406	.812
	Limited liability company	-.467	.2414	3.737	1	.053	.627
	Joint-stock company	-.281	.3311	.721	1	.396	.755
	Another form of business	Ref.					

## Discussion

## Conclusions

At present, companies and society at large are aware of the social and environmental consequences of non-sustainable economic growth. Because of this fact, firms have to re-evaluate currently applied approaches to production and consumption. However, it is impossible to achieve changes in production and consumption systems without any change in marketing approach and activities. The firm has to re-evaluate the marketing mix elements in the creation of sustainable business strategies (Pomeroy, 2017).

Firm specifics, products and services portfolios, firm's market positions, and other conditions in the business environment place a high value on the individual marketing mix tools of the firm. Consequently, it is important to examine and reveal the differences between those marketing tools which are already used in firms, and to reveal their future potential. This study aimed to examine the differences in using the marketing tools in the management of SMEs in the V4 countries.

The results of the analysis brought interesting findings. If a firm primarily uses classic marketing mix tools, it is likely that it does not use proactive marketing mix tools or online marketing tools. Currently, classic marketing mix tools are used in the construction sector and in services to a minimal extent. Proactive marketing mix tools are mostly used in the sector of transportation and retail, while the least in the manufacturing sector, construction, tourism, and other areas of the business. Online marketing tools are especially used in retailing, tourism, and services, and the least in agriculture, construction, and transportation.

Proactive marketing tools are mostly used by small enterprises in the manufacturing and transportation sector. Other authors, such as Chebli et al. (2021), Kutlu and Ayyildiz, (2021), Yulia et al. (2020), Nurendah and Rainanto (2019), advise of the sectoral differentiation in using the marketing mix tools. Medium-sized enterprises use proactive marketing tools in retailing and other areas of the business. Microenterprises use proactive marketing tools the least of all types of enterprises. These findings fully correspond with the results of studies by Taiminen and Karjalainen (2015), Ismail et al. (2018), and Abdul Rahim et al. (2015).

Online marketing tools are used most in tourism, while in the construction sector they are used the least. Medium-sized enterprises use online marketing tools, especially in retail, tourism, and services. Small enterprises use online marketing tools in the manufacturing sector, transportation, and agriculture the most. Regression analysis results confirmed that classic marketing mix tools are especially used by younger managers and entrepreneurs. Owners of the firms prefer to use classic marketing mix tools to a higher extent than managers. It was determined, based on age preference, that younger managers use proactive marketing tools to a greater extent than older managers.

In retail and transportation, proactive marketing mix tools are used to a greater extent than in other sectors. On the other hand, in the construction sector, they are used to a lesser extent than in other sectors. These differences were also confirmed by the following studies Duffett et al. (2020), Amin (2021), Idris (2021), Mac-Kingsley and Pokubo (2019). The age of business also plays an important role in the preferences of using marketing tools. Young enterprises (under three years of age) use proactive marketing mix tools less than enterprises that have been on the market for ten years or more. Male entrepreneurs or managers use proactive marketing mix tools about 25% less than female entrepreneurs or managers.

Online marketing tools are used by younger entrepreneurs to a lesser extent than older managers, or entrepreneurs. These findings are fully consistent with the results of the studies by Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), Tekin and Turhan (2020), and Hassan and Lee (2021). This result is also compatible with the study of Ključnikov et al. (2021), since these researchers also indicate the higher usage of innovative tools by older entrepreneurs than their younger counterparts. However, other studies propose the opposite results by highlighting the higher usage of digital tools and online technologies by younger people compared to older people (Ključnikov et al., 2020a; Ključnikov et al., 2020b).

Online marketing is used in the retailing and tourism sectors less than in the construction and agriculture sectors. Enterprises below three years of age use online marketing tools less than enterprises that have been on the market for ten years or more. The limited liability companies use online marketing the least. All the above-mentioned differences reveal a necessity for individual setting of the marketing concepts in the firms that would consider the specifics of the enterprises and business environment, where such firms operate.

The analysis results bring valuable information to the creators of economic policies, regional and national strategic development plans, and to specialists who examine factors of the business environment and its determinants. The study results allow for the creation of an international comparative platform and the development of national and international benchmarking indicators in marketing management.

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