THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL BRAND COMMUNICATION ON E-BRANDING: AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract: This empirical study delves into the intricate dynamics between brand digital communication and e-branding levels, concentrating on brand engagement with consumers through digital platforms like social media, email, and mobile marketing. By scrutinizing brand communication strategies and consumer perceptions, the research aims to deepen comprehension of how digital communication shapes brand establishment and sustenance in the online sphere. The methodology involves scrutinizing data from surveys conducted among 856 consumers in the Republic of Serbia actively engaging with brands on digital platforms. Various analytical methods were employed, including statistical tests (ANOVA, Std Beta, RSquare), correlation analysis, hypothesis validation, and multiple regression equations, alongside qualitative analysis to pinpoint pivotal factors and mechanisms influencing brand perception through digital communication. Research findings underscore a significant positive influence of digital communication on e-branding levels. Robust brand communication with consumers on social media and via email emerged as pivotal in fostering a favorable brand image among consumers. Furthermore, it was revealed that brand interaction with consumers through digital channels can directly impact brand loyalty and purchasing behavior. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of e-branding. It offers practical insights for devising effective brand digital communication strategies to enhance brand perception and forge enduring consumer relationships in the digital realm.

Keywords: digital communication, social media, email, m-marketing, e-branding

Field: Social Sciences, and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical research model, outlined with variables (Figure 1), sets the foundation for defining the subject, problem, objectives, and hypotheses. Independent variables encompass social media, email, and m-marketing, while e-branding serves as the dependent variable. The research inquiry revolves around maximizing the effectiveness of digital marketing channels—specifically social media, email, and m-marketing—to advance e-branding and enhance consumer brand perception. The research subject involves scrutinizing how the utilization of these channels impacts e-branding levels. The primary aim is to explore the relationship between employing social media, email, and m-marketing as brand communication channels and the consequent e-branding level. The research focus is on unraveling how these channels shape consumer perceptions of brands in the digital realm. The main hypothesis H0: Research, exemplified by (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), underscores the significance of social media in the business landscape, indicating a notable influence of social media, email, and m-marketing on e-branding levels. They accentuate how an engaged brand presence on social platforms can positively shape brand development and consumer engagement. Moreover, (Audrezet & Parguel, 2018) propose that brands employ social media to cultivate consumer communities, facilitating interactions that enhance brand perception. Similarly, (Hajli et al., 2014) suggest that active brand participation on social media platforms strengthens the consumer-brand relationship, emphasizing the importance of such engagement in fostering stronger bonds between consumers and brands. As per (Kim & Ko, 2012), the influence of marketing activities on social media on consumer economic values, particularly within the domain of luxury fashion brands, affirms the positive effect of brand communication through social platforms on brand perception. The integration of new technologies into online communication channels poses a sustainability challenge to brand identity, given its emerging significance among modern consumers, such as leveraging artificial intelligence for identity promotion and e-branding, as suggested by (Escobar-Farfán, Cervera-Taulet & Schlesinger, 2024). Technological advancements, alongside the growing trends of globalization and heightened awareness regarding socio-cultural and socio-political issues, propel innovations in corporate branding, demanding rapid adaptation from organizations to maintain competitiveness, as articulated by (Cuomo & Foroudi, 2023). From these premises, hypothesis H1 emerges: Extensive utilization of social media in brand communication positively influences e-branding levels. Merisavo & Raulas (2004)

conducted a study and found that email has a favorable impact on customer loyalty. Tracking consumer responses over time authors (Nguyen, Johnson & Tsiros, 2023), identified strategies addressing email's influence on e-branding. (De Mooij, 2015) explored brand perception via email across different cultures, highlighting commonalities and disparities in consumer reactions to email marketing campaigns globally. (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012) underscore the significant role of email marketing in enhancing brand image and fostering customer loyalty, stressing the importance of consumer engagement in determining email campaign efficacy. They suggest that consumer emotional responses are linked to email marketing efforts. (Kucuk, 2023) notes the dynamic evolution of digital marketing tools, requiring ongoing adjustment and alignment. (Kumar, 2024) emphasizes digital technology's pivotal role in various economic sectors, nurturing strong customer relationships and enhancing practical experiences. From these findings, hypothesis H2 arises: Using email as a brand communication channel positively impacts e-branding levels. Research indicates that mobile marketing campaigns can increase website visits, social media brand engagement, and consumer conversion rates. Furthermore, research has pointed out that personalized messages delivered through mobile devices can be particularly effective in enhancing the bond between the brand and consumers. In essence, the efficient execution of m-marketing can have a positive impact on e-branding levels by boosting consumer engagement, improving brand perception, and fostering consumer loyalty within the digital realm. An analysis by authors (Kim & Han, 2014) offers deeper insights into how m-marketing influences website traffic, highlighting a significant correlation between mobile marketing campaigns and increased visits to brand websites. This underscores the need for marketing professionals and researchers to maintain a constant awareness of the importance of m-marketing campaigns in bolstering brand visibility online. Studies conducted by (Lee, Lee & Kim, 2013) underscore the significance of tailoring m-marketing strategies to suit specific cultural traits, which can result in heightened levels of consumer engagement. The effective utilization of m-marketing across diverse cultural contexts contributes to enhancing consumer engagement and strengthening the bond between the brand and its consumers. The substantial role of m-marketing in driving consumer conversions and its provision of valuable insights for managing m-marketing campaigns efficiently to enhance consumer conversion rates are underscored by (Wang et al.,2019, Gupta et al.,2017), through an analysis of in-depth interviews with consumers, suggest that personalized mobile messages influence brand perception and strengthen brand-consumer relationships. This suggests that m-marketing can be tailored to resonate better with consumers and bolster brand affinity. (Singh, Singh & Dhir, 2024) emphasize the significant impact of social media, online branding, online advertising, and post-service quality on the competitiveness of the hospitality industry. Crafting m-marketing content that fosters trust is crucial in influencing purchasing decisions on social platforms, as highlighted by (Gonçalves & Rosinha, 2023). From these findings, hypothesis H3 arises: Effective implementation of m-marketing contributes to an elevation in e-branding levels.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants in this study consisted of 856 users: of social media, recipients of marketing emails, and mobile device users exposed to marketing campaigns. For this research, respondents were not profiled based on: gender, age, or education, which could be planned for further studies. It was sufficient for them to have experience using: social media, mobile devices, email, m-marketing, and e-branding. An e-Questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was utilized. The e-Questionnaire was administered online via the Internet. Statements in the e-Questionnaire were formulated based on the authors' experiences outlined in the introduction section of the study. Correlation analysis was employed to explain the relationship between the independent variables: social media (abbreviated as A), email (abbreviated as B), and m-marketing (abbreviated as C), and the dependent variable e-branding to identify potential influences. Regression analysis was conducted to assess the influence of the mentioned independent variables on the dependent variable and to predict changes in the dependent variable based on changes in the independent variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare differences in the mean values of the dependent variable among different independent variables and groups. The theoretical systemic research model is depicted in (Figure 1). For easier analysis and presentation of results, the following abbreviations were introduced: social media (abbreviated as A), email (abbreviated as B), and m-marketing (abbreviated as C), with the dependent variable e-branding denoted as (D).

Figure 1. Theoretical Systemic Research Model
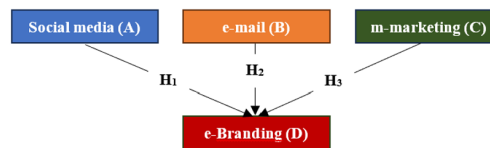
Source: Author's research

3. RESULTS

Based on the guidelines used to identify factor loadings based on the sample size required for significance, we can conclude that for a sample of 856 respondents and based on a factor loading significance of 0.30 for a sample size greater than 350, it is considered significant. This is because the obtained Cronbach's coefficient for all statements in the study is $\alpha=0.93$. This coefficient is higher than the theoretical value, which is desirable. According to the rule of internal consistency, the obtained Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha=0.93$ is greater ($\alpha<0.9$), indicating excellent consistency. Both indicators demonstrate good reliability and internal consistency of the scale for the sample of 856 respondents, across all statements within the set research variables (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's Coefficients α if any of the variables are excluded

Variable	Size	Cronbach's coefficient α	Indicator
A	0.88	$(0.7<\alpha<0.9)$	good consistency
B	0.89	$(0.7<\alpha<0.9)$	good consistency
C	0.95	$(\alpha<0.9)$	excellent consistency
D	0.89	$(0.7<\alpha<0.9)$	good consistency

Source: Author's research

In (Table 2), the mean values and standard deviations for all variables are provided. The independent variable C has the highest mean value of 4.50 with a standard deviation of 0.42, while the dependent variable D has the lowest mean value of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.42.

Table 2. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for All Variables

Variable	A	B	C	D
Mean	4.39	4.50	4.44	4.37
Std Dev	0. 41	0.42	0.29	0.42

Source: Author's research

In (Figure 2), Pearson's correlation coefficients for all variables in the established theoretical model are presented. All directional links between variables are positive, indicating a positive correlation. The strongest correlation coefficient is observed between independent variables A and B, standing at 0.93, indicating a strong correlation. The coefficient of determination is 0.8649, suggesting that 86.49% of the variance in variable B can be explained by variable A. Conversely, the weakest correlation coefficient is found between independent variables A and C, with a value of 0.67, indicating a moderately strong correlation. The coefficient of determination is 0.4489 or 44.89%, indicating a moderately strong relationship between independent variable C and independent variable A.

*Figure 2. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient*
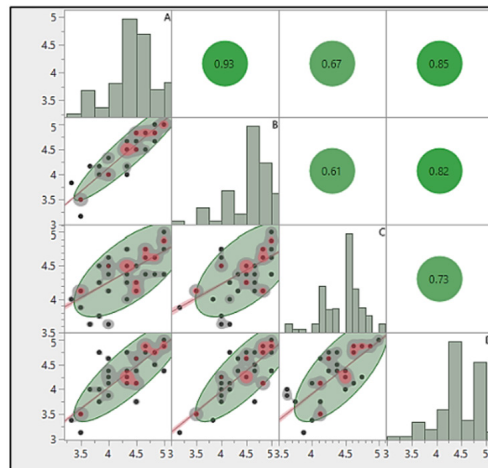
Source: Author's research

Based on the theoretical systemic model from (Figure 1), in (Table 3), ratings of the statistical significance of the influence individually for each of the independent variable's A, B, and C on the dependent variable D are provided for simple linear dependencies (ANOVA, interpretations for: Std Beta, RSquare in (%), variable correlations, hypothesis confirmation or attainment, and regression equations).

Independent variables	ANOVA	R / RSquare (%)	Connection of variables	Hypothesis	Regression equation
A	$[F_{(1,854)}=2179.12, p<0.0001]$	0.8476 71.84	Strong connectivity	H_{a1} – accepts A, affects D.	$y = 0.58 + 0.86 \cdot x_1$ $D = 0.58 + 0.86 \cdot A$
B	$[F_{(1,854)}=1748.02, p<0.0001]$	0.8196 67.18	Strong connectivity	H_{a2} – accepts B, affects D.	$y = 0.65 + 0.83 \cdot x_2$ $D = 0.65 + 0.83 \cdot B$
C	$[F_{(1,845)}=961.16, p<0.0001]$	0.7277 52.95	Strong connectivity	H_{a3} – accepts C, affects D	$y = -0.35 + 1.07 \cdot x_3$ $D = -0.35 + 1.07 \cdot C$

Source: Author's research

Based on (Table 4), graphs of simple linear regression equations for the dependent variable D in terms of the independent variables A, B, and C were projected (Figure 3). In (Table 4), for multiple linear dependency, an assessment of the statistical significance of the combined impact of independent variables A, B, and C on the dependent variable D is provided (ANOVA, as well as interpretations: Std Beta, RSquare in (%), component correlations, hypothesis acceptance or rejection, and multiple regression equations). The largest individual impact on the dependent variable D is by the independent variable A with 0.40, followed by the independent variable C with 0.30, and the smallest impact is by the independent variable B with 0.27. Based on (Table 5), a graph of the multiple linear regression equation D=f(A, B & C) was projected (Figure 9). The multiple coefficients of determination is 0.7728, indicating that 77.28% of the variance in the dependent variable D can be explained by the combined influence of independent variables A, B, and C. The multiple correlation coefficient is 0.8790, showing that the correlation between independent variables A, B, and C with the dependent variable D is strong and positive.

*Figure 3. Graphs of Simple Linear Regression Equations D=f(A), D=f(B) & D=f(C)*
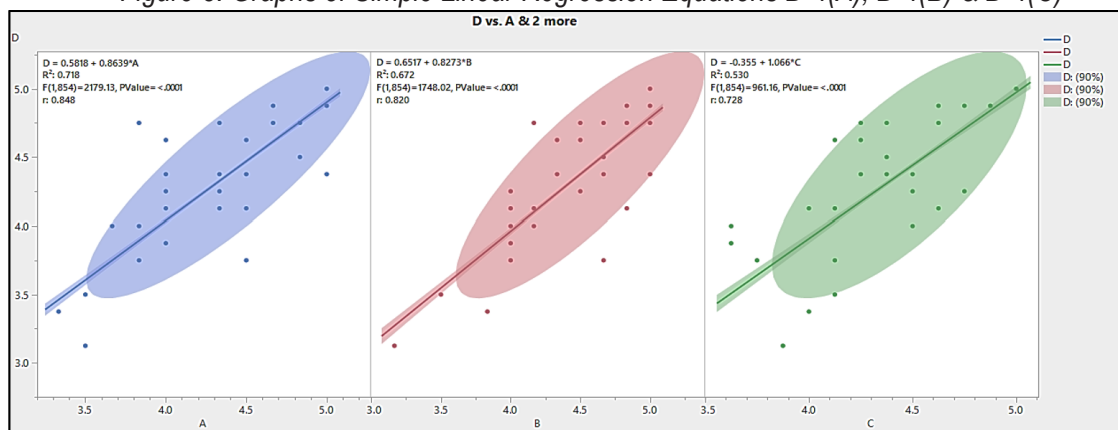
Source: Author's research

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Data

Independent variables	ANOVA	R / RSquare (%)	Connection of variables	Hypothesis	Multiple regression equation
A, B & C	[F(3,852)=965.89, p<0.0001]	0.8790 77.28	Strong connectivity	H_a – accepts A, B & C, affects D.	$y = -0.55 + 0.41 \cdot x_1 + 0.27 \cdot x_2 + 0.44 \cdot x_3$ $D = -0.55 + 0.41 \cdot A + 0.27 \cdot B + 0.44 \cdot C$

Source: Author's research

Figure 4. Graph of the Multiple Linear Regression Equation D=f(A, B & C)
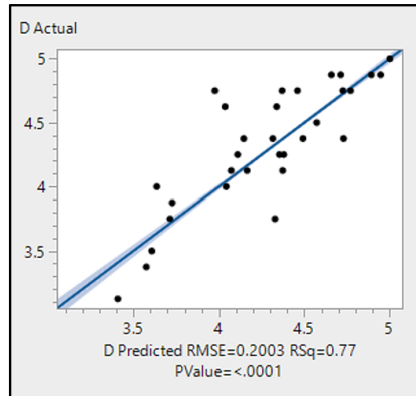
Source: Author's research

4. DISCUSSIONS

Based on the empirical research conducted on a sample of 856 participants in the Republic of Serbia, it is evident that as social media usage increases, the importance of e-branding grows concurrently. Social media platforms serve as crucial channels for direct brand-to-audience communication, pivotal for establishing an online presence and successful e-branding endeavors. Activities such as content sharing, user engagement, and community formation around the brand contribute significantly to enhancing brand perception and fostering customer loyalty in the digital realm. Thus, hypothesis H1, asserting the influence of social media on e-branding, is validated. Similarly, the surge in email usage corresponds to a heightened significance of e-branding. Email platforms serve as pivotal channels for direct brand-consumer interactions, facilitating personalized messages and direct engagement opportunities. Effective email marketing campaigns play a pivotal role in building and sustaining brand visibility among users, thereby positively impacting e-branding efforts. Consequently, hypothesis H2, which posits the influence of email on e-branding, finds support. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of m-marketing correlates with a heightened emphasis on e-branding. M-marketing initiatives enable brands to directly engage with users through mobile devices, delivering tailored messages and pertinent content. By leveraging mobile marketing campaigns, brands enhance their digital market presence and bolster brand perception among consumers, further propelling e-branding initiatives. Therefore, hypothesis H3, which suggests the impact of m-marketing on e-branding, is affirmed. As social media, email, and m-marketing continue to witness escalating growth and adoption, the significance of e-branding continues to ascend. This evolution presents brands with an extensive array of opportunities for engaging directly with their target audience and delivering customized messages.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Social media is crucial for e-branding as it enables direct communication between brands and their target audience. Activities such as sharing relevant content and engaging with users provide a platform for building and maintaining a brand community online. This research highlights that engagement on social media helps brands enhance their online presence and create a positive perception among consumers, thereby contributing to the development of e-branding. Email plays a key role in e-branding by facilitating direct communication between the brand and users through personalized messages. Through effective email marketing campaigns, brands can effectively reach their target audience by offering relevant and useful content that encourages interaction. Additionally, based on this research, in the case of the Republic of Serbia, it can be concluded that email enables brands to track and analyze campaign

results, allowing them to continuously improve e-branding strategies to adapt to the needs and desires of users. M-marketing also plays a crucial role in e-branding by allowing brands to directly reach their target audience through mobile devices. Through mobile marketing campaigns involving SMS messages, mobile apps, or mobile-optimized websites, brands can provide personalized and relevant content to users anytime, anywhere. This research emphasizes that direct engagement via mobile devices allows brands to build stronger connections with users and enhance their brand perception, contributing to the development of positive e-branding. By integrating these channels into a comprehensive strategy, brands can effectively build and maintain their online presence, contributing to strengthening brand perception and fostering consumer loyalty in the digital environment.

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