

The Challenges of Content Creation in Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Marketing in Central and Eastern Europe

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Bachelor's Thesis
Degree Programme in
International Business
2020



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Degree programme International Business	
Thesis title The Challenges of Content Creation in FMCG Marketing in the CEE Region	Number of pages 54
<p>This Bachelor's Thesis examines the challenges content creators face when creating content for the marketing purposes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The primary objective of the study was to identify the challenges the content creators face in their work.</p> <p>The study includes a theory section and an empirical section.</p> <p>The theory section discusses the characteristics of the region, the characteristics of the marketing strategies and the challenges identified in the existing literature. The empirical part focuses on the challenges identified by marketing content specialists.</p> <p>The study was based on qualitative methods. First a literature analysis was conducted. Second, theme interviews were carried out with four specialists experienced in Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) marketing for the CEE Region. The research showed that CEE-based FMCG marketing content creating specialists face numerous challenges in their work.</p> <p>While the literature substantially suggests general challenges, such as the "multi-channel campaign success challenge", the interviewees pointed more specific challenges, such as the rising significance of the zero waste trend in marketing.</p> <p>Nevertheless, as this study dealt only with a small number of interviewees and their insights, the results should not be taken as the ultimate image of FMCG marketing content creation in the CEE Region.</p>	
Keywords Marketing content creation, Fast Moving Consumer Goods, Central Eastern Europe	

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business taught at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and specifically for the major of Marketing. The purpose of the chapter is to overview the background of the topic, the research objectives, the methodology applied, the key concepts, the international aspect, the benefits and benefitting parties. Since the thesis does not have a case company, a perspective of a benefit for a potential case company is demonstrated.

1.1 Background

According to the definition of Corporate Finance Institute, one of the largest financial analyst training and certification programs providers, the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods are “products that are highly-in demand, sold quickly, and (are) affordable” Also known as Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) – they are the products that go off the shelves of stores quickly – the consumers use them on a regular basis. (Corporate Finance Institute 2020.) The category can include packaged food, toiletries, beverages, stationery, over-the-counter medicines and many other kinds of goods that the consumers purchase and use daily.

The term Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) includes the following countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Czech Republic. (French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies 2016.)

The competition in this sector is especially fierce, ranging from variously priced store-owned brands to major international players.

In this thesis the goal is to focus on the diversification of marketing methods used by the latter – the companies that sell their products regionwide. There are many challenges marketers face when promoting the goods around the region, even when the product has a well-established, recognizable brand – namely the cultural complexities, the matter of selecting the correct advertising tools, or the budget.

The topic will be valid as long, as the FMCG sector exists, so as long, as the customers have their basic needs to fulfil, and as long as at least some of them are willing to fulfil these very needs.

The diversification is one of the key competition methods used by the companies when creating the product awareness, an essential factor in successful FMCG promotion. The companies race to make their content more appealing, more relatable and sales-driving – combining all these three criteria is undoubtedly a major challenge.

FMCG is a segment of products that are essential in day-to-day life, and the daily consumption of virtually every person in the world relies on the products the sector covers. It is hard to imagine living without over-the-counter painkillers, tissues, bottled drinks or packaged food.

Considering the international business point of view – the FMCG sector is a truly international sector. In fact, the word “global” is more appropriate – companies such as Nestle, Procter & Gamble or Pepsico pursue their operations around the globe. (Consultancy.uk 2018.) Furthermore, as of 2011, Nestle has employed 328 000 people – more than companies like Toyota Motor Corporation, Hitachi or United Parcel Service. (CNN Money 2012.)

In other words, not only the FMCG companies provide the customers their essential consumption products, but also they employ vast numbers of people.

1.2 Research Question and Investigative Questions

This thesis aims to improve the understanding of challenges that content creators face in their working lives – when creating FMCG marketing content in the CEE region. The outcome of the thesis is a highly-informative, precise and thorough literature review on the topic, backed up with empirical study consisting of interviews with the CEE-based FMCG marketing content creators speaking themselves.

The thesis could be used by a CEE-based FMCG company to improve or redesign their marketing communications, and thus making their advertising efforts more effective. It could also be used to avoid controversies – as a section of the thesis will cover that topic.

Research Question (RQ): **What challenges do content creators face when generating content for marketing purposes on FMCG for the CEE region?**

Investigative Questions (IQs):

- IQ1: What are the cultural aspects to consider in the CEE region countries?
 IQ2: What should the content creators have in mind, when aspiring to create safe (controversy-free) content?
 IQ3: How should content creators design the marketing strategy, in order to differentiate it from competitors' actions?
 IQ4: Comparative analysis – how does the desktop knowledge compare to content creators' responses?

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework (necessary concepts, theories and models) and outcomes	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ1: What are the cultural aspects to consider in the CEE region countries?	Cultural studies, case studies of companies' failed international marketing communications, cultural studies, cultural guides for businesspeople, cultural perception, cultural bias, interview data Outcomes: a cultural overview of the CEE region from the business perspective, with a special focus on FMCG marketing	Literature review, content creators interviews (empirical study) Qualitative interviews of content creators	2
IQ2: What should the content creators have in mind, when aspiring to create safe (controversy-free) content?	The perception of controversies, the cultural approaches to the taboos, do's and don'ts of marketing from the cultural point of view Outcomes: a useful (from a company perspective) paragraph on safe, controversy-free FMCG marketing	Literature review Qualitative interviews of content creators	2

	content in the CEE region		
IQ3: How should content creators design the marketing strategy, in order to differentiate it from competitors' actions?	Marketing strategy, marketing strategy differentiation, product advertising distinguishing Outcomes: an examination of possible marketing strategies that focus on differentiating the product on the market	Literature review	2
IQ4: Comparative analysis of the results of IQs 1-3 – how does the desktop knowledge compare to content creators' responses?	Comparative analysis, the concept of theory vs. hands-on experience	Comparative analysis	4

1.3 Demarcation

While considering the areas of focus, the following ideas appeared:

The cultural challenges of advertising the FMCG products. Essential when taking the perspective of a marketing content creator. The cultures in the CEE countries differ from each other significantly – on one side there is Estonia, while on the side there is Croatia. Different languages, different religions, different national taboos.

The methodological challenges in applying the correct marketing methods – the choice of both digital, and non-digital marketing methods is abundant. One has to know the effectiveness of these very methods, and one has to have the know-how of using them efficiently.

Adjusting the marketing methods to the cultural criteria – combining the knowledge of both the culture, and the methodological know-how.

Successful diversification of the marketing strategy – as mentioned before in the Background paragraph, the diversification is one of the key methods of

distinguishing the content from competitors' offering. It is also a serious strategical issue, that requires management knowledge.

The controversies of FMCG marketing – especially cultural controversies, case studies of FMCG companies that did not prepare for their marketing campaigns well enough, and thus their campaigns have failed, and their reputation has worsened.

Empirical part – a couple of interviews with CEE-based marketing content creators employed by FMCG companies, where the challenges are described by them themselves.

The areas to be avoided:

Marketing methods that do not apply to FMCG products (have not been used in FMCG marketing before). Only on the methods that have been already used are considered, so only the valid data is used.

The diversification of marketing strategy outside of the FMCG sector, and/or CEE region. Since this is a thesis with a very specific focus, the FMCG marketing in the CEE region – it should consider the FMCG and CEE region only.

Marketing controversies in other industries. While it might sound tempting to research on that topic, other industries have different principles and information regarding those very controversies might not give any added value to the thesis.

Any other information unrelated to the topic, especially when surveying.

Thesis data should be precise and to-the-point, both in the research part, and in the empirical part.

1.4 International Aspect

The topic is truly international, as it provides a multinational outlook of the problem. FMCG products are sold in every CEE country. Often they are either very similar to each other, or they are the same, yet the marketing communication is what differs the situation from country to country. The cultural differences are considered, and a certain focus is applied – as in the GLOBBA program, where these differences, that together create diversity, are the backbone of the whole GLOBBA concept.

1.5 Benefits

There is no case company per se, but the topic itself does apply to various clients. A B2B company, so for example a refreshment provider for events should definitely be on time with the marketing practices of FMCG companies – ultimately the refreshments offered at events are advertised by the sole practise of handing them out or selling them – and how event attendees perceive the brands matters greatly.

B2C customers – two perspectives could apply. One would be the B2C companies that simply sell their end product to an individual buyer, just like majority of FMCG companies do – and in that case an overview of the general diversification of global FMCG marketing is certainly a good thing to have. The other perspective is the end customers themselves – some people might want to explore the topic of controversies and general challenges of FMCG marketing, as the biggest FMCG companies are well established in their customer awareness.

Speaking of the stakeholders – once again, there is no company. But if the end product of the work, the thesis would enable any FMCG company to learn from the controversies and mistakes other companies have done, then that would be a huge stakeholders' benefit – controversies not only affect the brand image, but they may also affect the sales.

The GLOBBA program - it is an interesting topic for the current or future students, especially those, who instead of focusing on the state-of-the-art businesses, such as tech start-ups (like many people do) prefer to focus on the more traditional sector. The traditional sectors also deserve their fair representation. The thesis could also be used as a course material, as a support or a source of a FMCG marketing case study.

1.6 The Anticipated Results

The expected end result of the thesis is a highly informative literature review, backed up with empirical study, concerning the challenges of advertising the CEE-sold FMCG products, and the diversification processes and practicalities. The thesis is expected to be a beneficial material for companies, that would have the challenges, the overview of digital and non-digital tools and the controversies from

the past at a glance, but also it is expected to be a beneficial material for GLOBBA students, or consumers with high awareness interested in the sector.

1.7 Key Concepts

Speaking of the key concepts of the paper, there is a couple of concepts, ideas and phenomena that are the integral parts of the topic. Once I brainstormed, I came to a conclusion, that the following are the key concepts:

FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) – as mentioned before, according to the definition of Corporate Finance Institute, one of the largest financial analyst training and certification programs providers, the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods are “products that are highly-in demand, sold quickly, and (are) affordable” Also known as Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) – they are the products that go off the shelves of stores quickly – the consumers use them on a regular basis. (Corporate Finance Institute 2020.)

CEE (Central Eastern Europe) Region – also as mentioned before, it is an economic and cultural region of Europe. The term includes the following countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Czech Republic. (French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies 2016.)

Marketing strategy – “At the most macro level, *marketing strategies* focus on manipulations of the marketing mix variables – product, price, place and promotion. According to that definition, setting a strategy consists of selecting a price for a product, designing an advertising campaign, then deciding on a plan of distribution.” (Schnaars 1998, 18.)

Digital marketing – in the major’s understanding often limited to internet advertising actions, however Girchenko and Ovsiannikova remind us that “Despite many touchpoints between these two categories, there are principle differences as well. For example Internet marketing can be used only for that audience, which has an access to the Internet, or, in other words, which is online. In its turn digital marketing has much wider scope because covers offline audience as well, using for that different digital channels from everyday environment of people. There are cellphones and downloaded applications, tablets and personal computers, digital television, outdoor advertising on the LCD screens, POS and self-service terminals,

and the huge diversity of other digital tools, which can be used for sharing marketing information. (Girchenko, Ovsianikova, 2016.)

Non-digital marketing – there are many non-digital channels that companies can use to advertise their products. For instance, the aforementioned Girchenko and Ovsianikova suggest us the examples of non-digital marketing channels as “the channels of traditional marketing (analog television, radio, periodicals, leaflets, billboards, exhibitions etc.” (Girchenko, Ovsianikova, 2016.)

Ambient marketing – the non-standard marketing actions. These actions are also known as the guerrilla marketing – “the concept of guerrilla marketing subsumes a set of different innovative advertising instruments which aim at gaining a large effect [...]” (Hutter, Hoffmann, 2011.)

Cultural perception – according to the definition selected by Alesha Hayes, the Canadian Business Development Coordinator for the Indigenous Perspectives Society, “Cultural perspective refers to the way that individuals are shaped by their environments as well as social and cultural factors. Such factors include a person’s nationality, race and gender.” (Indigenous Perspectives Society, 2016.)

1.8 The Phenomena of Culture and Marketing

The aforementioned “Phenomena of Culture and Marketing” form the foundation of conceptual basis necessary to understand the thesis problem better. Each of the IQs has its phenomena, as described below.

IQ1: The concept of national cultures is the backbone of the thesis topic. **Cultural studies** – especially on the cultures that the FMCG companies find the most challenging to adjust their communications to is the essential part to understanding the core of the problems. Also the studies/sources where **cultural misconceptions**, such as the bias or oversimplification are explained are helpful, as it makes understanding the causes of controversies much easier.

Speaking of controversies, there is a separate IQ covering the subject. **Case studies of failed marketing campaigns** or **failed marketing communication projects** are a great source of knowledge – especially when it is possible to connect the dots with the cultural misconceptions.

IQ2: The **controversies**. An argumentation is incomplete without solid examples, and in that case **well-documented case studies of FMCG marketing campaigns** make a great support.

IQ3: An examination of possible marketing strategies that focus on differentiating the product on the market is the desired answer to the investigative question. Concepts such as **marketing strategy, marketing strategy differentiation, or product advertising distinguishing** form the knowledge base to the answer of the question.

IQ4: An in-depth **comparative analysis** of the desktop knowledge and the content creators' responses helps to understand what the actual challenges are, also it verifies the quality of the sources.

The theories, concepts and phenomena in bold form the solid theoretical framework, as they help to understand the ideas behind IQs. The key concepts introduce the reader into the core of the topic one by one, and thus enable understanding the topic from the very beginning.

Moving to the demarcation, I have a list of a couple of topics that I should not focus on – they are mostly the opposites of my actual IQs. Here are the sub-topics with the appropriate theories, concepts and phenomena to be avoided.

1. Marketing methods that do not apply to FMCG products (have not been used in FMCG marketing before) – that is a concept that I need to research thoroughly. FMCG products are advertised in a number of ways, however there might be certain, very specific marketing methods that can be applied to certain products only – and these are the methods that should not be given too much attention.
2. The diversification of marketing strategy outside of the FMCG sector – the diversification per se is a broad concept. Narrowing it to the FMCG sector not only makes the concept thesis-related, but also helps to understand the complexities in the context.
3. Marketing controversies in other industries – while they might be tempting to write about, as virtually each industry has its controversies, that often simply leave us astonished – the thesis concerns the FMCG products only.
4. Any other information unrelated to the topic, especially when surveying. At a certain point, the interview conversation might go off-topic – and my job is to make sure that the questions are answered and that the data is recorded properly.

Table 2. Theory table

Article title	Link to the article	Credibility
No one size fits all: developing a global brand marketing strategy	https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2016/aug/04/developing-global-brand-marketing-strategy	Alison Martin is a marketing & communication director of Kantar UK and

		Ireland – a customer knowledge and insight company operating in 100 countries
Perspectives: 3 Things Big FMCG Marketers Need to Do to Win Again	https://www.nielsen.com/be/en/insights/article/2017/perspectives-3-things-big-fmcmarketers-need-to-do-to-win-again/	The Nielsen company is a brand in itself, one of the most-known research firms in the world

The articles were review by the fellow Thesis Planning Course peer, Camilla Sinisalo.

Search words and search strings:

Table 3. Search words and search strings table

Search word	Search string
Marketing actions	Digital/non digital, ambient, guerrilla, FMCG marketing actions
Cultural challenges of advertising	In the FMCG sector, in particular markets of interest (e.g. Estonian, Czech, Slovak)
Adjusting the marketing methods	To cultural criteria, to cultural perception, visually
Diversification	Efficiently, in order to differentiate, to stand out from the crowd
FMCG marketing controversies	FMCG marketing campaign/communications controversies, failed marketing campaigns/communications, controversial marketing campaigns/communications, failed marketing strategies
Advertisement perception	Cultural point of view, cultural impact, bias

The theory figure:

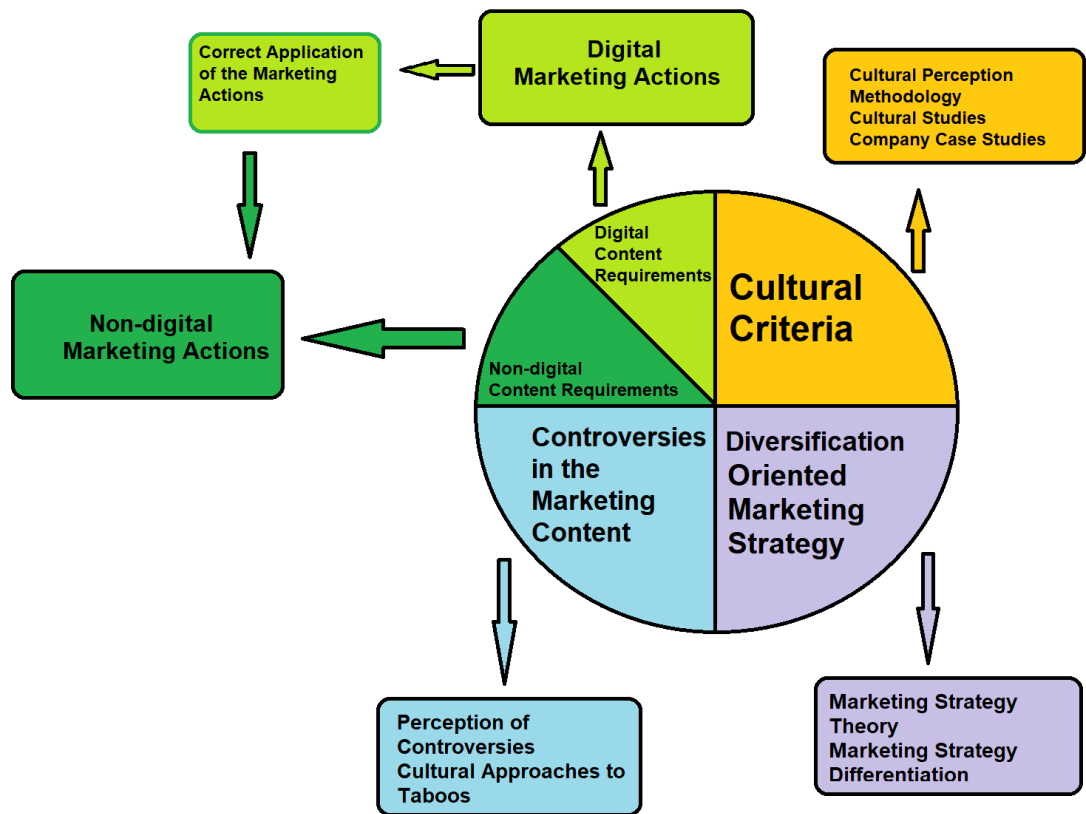


Figure 1. Knowledge Base

The Knowledge Base (Figure 1.) comprises of the following parts:

The Non-Digital Content Requirements and **The Digital Content Requirements**. Connected by the **Correct Application of Marketing Actions**. These two subparts are very similar to each other, and in fact they form the method and method application part of the Theoretical Framework. This is why they are both in green, but in different shades – the essential concept is the same, but the details vary significantly.

The Cultural Criteria and the **Cultural Perception Methodology, Cultural Studies and Company Case Studies**. CEE stands for Central-Eastern Europe, a region that has a lot of cultural complexities that vary from country to country. It is the culture that makes the CEE countries considered as one region – hence why the part with its points is there.

Differentiation-Oriented Marketing Strategy. FMCG marketing content creators have to design the marketing strategy with a focus on the diversification – in order to distinguish the product’s advertising from the competitions’ actions. That applies to

FMCG marketing in the CEE region as well. Company case studies help understanding the concepts better.

Controversies in the Marketing Content. In order to avoid them, it is important to know how the controversies are perceived in the countries targeted, or how are the taboos perceived – whether the attitude is relaxed or very strict.

2 Research Methods

The approach is qualitative. The Theoretical Framework is based on both desktop research and empirical data – and in case of the particular topic studied it is easier to apply qualitative methods, since the challenges are abstract and individual concepts. There is existing literature that is going to be a good foundation for the desktop research part, and it is the literature that gives an objective outlook on the problem that is being researched.

The empirical part, which is interviewing the actual CEE-based FMCG marketing content creators is qualitative as well. Quantitative methods require more respondents CEE-based FMCG marketing content creators as a surveyed group are not as countable as for instance university students.

The answer to that is qualitative approach. Surveying a couple (3 to 5) CEE-based FMCG marketing content creators is not only doable, but it also provides substantial results. As I mentioned before, the “challenge” is an abstract concept as it is – each person has a different perspective, and I am ready for each answer to be completely different from another.

Also designing the quantitative survey questionnaire would be, as there is always a risk of manipulating the answers simply by suggesting them, and the interviewed people should be as honest as possible, and as unbiased as possible.

The theoretical information – knowledge on the practicalities of the industry in the region and its specifics is necessary, as well as being very familiar with the theory I mentioned before – among others, such concepts as the cultural biases, oversimplification, marketing actions or diversification.

The empirical part needs preparation as well so that the questions are not out of place and random. The necessary knowledge regards the companies the interviewed people work for, the marketing actions, the most significant products. They are the right people to provide information as they are simply the insiders of the business. The people were chosen because it is the closest that one can get to the FMCG CEE marketing content creation, the only step closer to that would be actually becoming such a specialist themselves. Their hands-on knowledge they have gained during their work lives and the content creating know-how makes them great informants, and due to their career experiences – they can provide perspectives one would not probably even think of, without having professional experience in the industry.

Regardless of the specific questions – their points of view are crucial. Hands-on experience of the industry and the knowledge they gained in the practical way ensure that their opinions are credible. With the individual point of view of each of the couple informants, conclusions will be drawn.

Three to five informants is the right amount, with five being the perfect. For example, once a tendency in the answers is observed, having five informants enables to use the concept of an absolute majority – which is a very handy concept when working on data. For instance, three of the five interviewed content creators find “X” to be a challenge in their work life, so the absolute majority finds “X” to be a challenge in their work life. However – three also enables the use of the concept.

In order to construct the research design the RQ was applied to a Qualitative Research Design Model proposed by Maxwell (2004, 5). The outcome was the following construction:

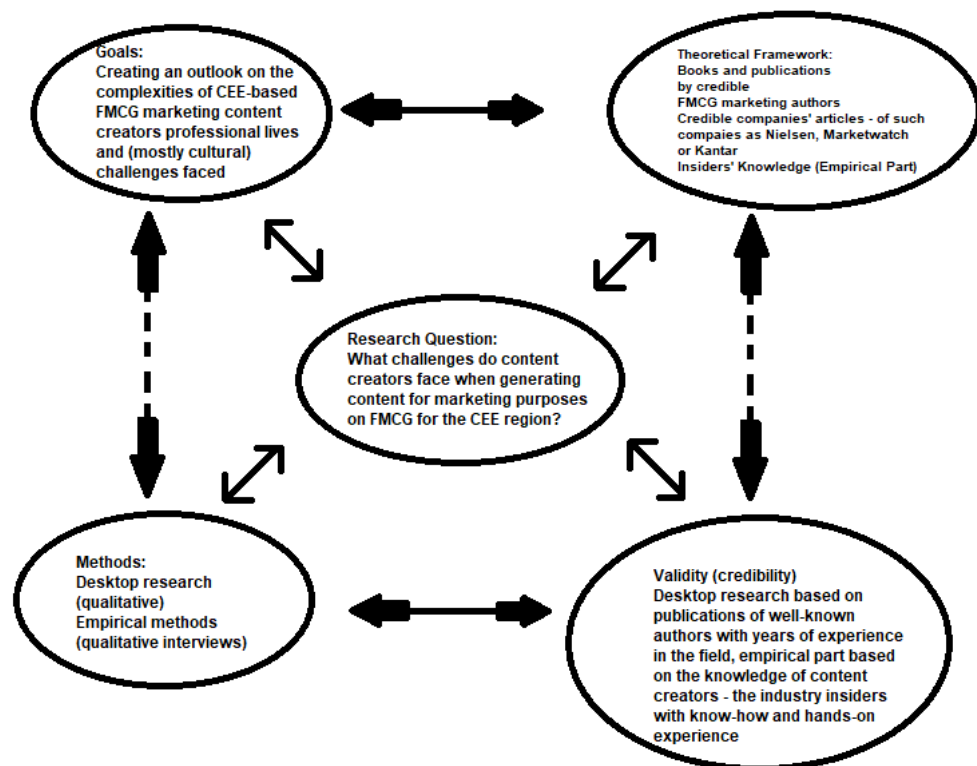


Figure 2. Qualitative Research Design

The Qualitative Research Design presented consists of the following parts:

The goals. Creating an outlook on the complexities of CEE-based FMCG marketing content creators professional lives and (mostly cultural) challenges faced – that is

the goal of the research, to present the challenges and give them a detailed overview to make them understandable – and understand them.

Theoretical Framework – as mentioned in the design, books and publications by credible authors articles written by the representatives of credible companies, and the last, but not the least – the empirical knowledge provided by informants. A decision was made to shorten the part in order to not overly complicate the whole design construct.

Validity (*credibility*) – the desktop research based on publications of well-known authors with years of experience in the field, empirical part based on the knowledge of content creators, so the industry insiders with know-how and hands-on experience. The experience in both these knowledge sources shows clearly – and ensures the credibility is there. Moreover, all of the knowledge sources, both the desktop knowledge and empirical knowledge is topical and timely – not only valid, but also credible.

Methods – as mentioned before, desktop research (mostly online databases such as Google Scholar or HH Finna) and the phone interviews with informants.

And the last, but not the least – Research Question, the backbone of the thesis topic – What challenges do content creators face when generating content for marketing purposes on FMCG for the CEE region?

The part above is the components part of the research design. Now how about practice? The practical part is mostly researching by using the search words and search strings that I have worked on in the Task 3. Verifying the credibility can be done by additional research on authors and their other publications.

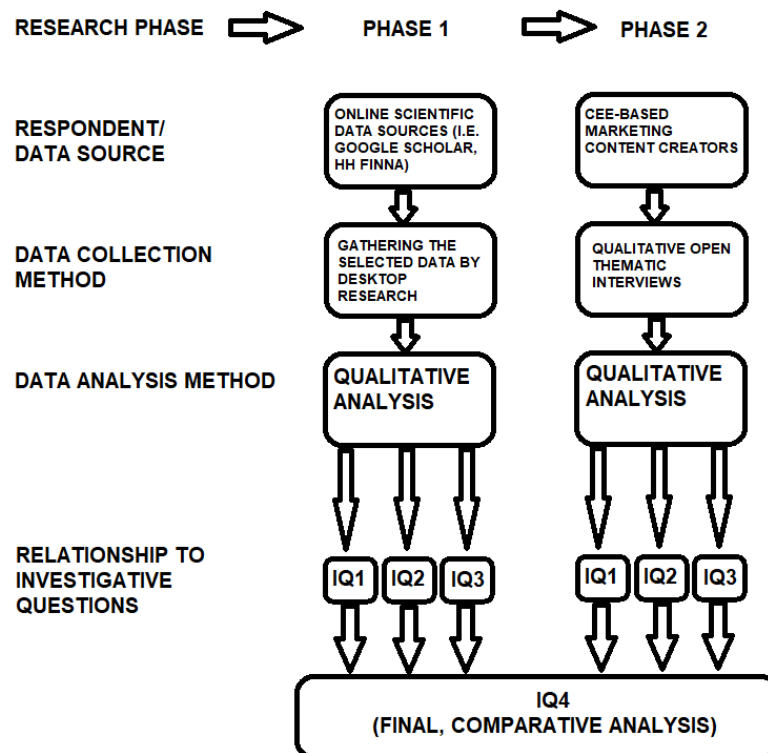


Figure 3. Research Phases

Two data collection tools are planned. For the desktop research (as I mentioned before a couple of times – the foundation of the Theoretical Framework) the online document databases are going to be researched, such as Google Scholar or HH Finna. No traditional libraries are going to be used. The reason is the fact that during the current public health situation libraries are closed. Online researching is also incomparably more efficient to traditional book research.

Speaking of the empirical part – phone calls. They are easy to record and they are the easiest to establish. While in case of a Zoom or a Skype Besides, again the current public health situation does not allow to meet people. Should the situation allow face to face meetings – it is much safer discuss over the phone, and it is definitely less time consuming than an actual F2F interview.

Furthermore, there is a couple of theory- and IQ-linked themes being considered:

1. The impact of cultural predispositions on the perception of marketing communications.
2. The effectiveness and appropriateness of marketing actions targeted at focus groups created on national basis.
3. The overview of the local FMCG markets from the target representant's perspective.
4. The reception of largest FMCG companies' marketing communications.

In every scientific work, the credibility is key. The first focus is the quality of sources. The solid theoretical framework and its successful application is what creates the credible image. Apart from the solid sources and professional language, an emphasis is put on the researching process and referencing – a thesis does not even seem reliable without correct references.

Transparency is another aspect – elaborately justifying the decisions made, steps taken and conclusions drawn is what builds the transparency. The Gantt chart was created in order to organize the thesis workflow.

2.1 The Central and Eastern Europe Cultures in Context of Marketing Content Creation

Despite the Hofstede analysis was initially designed for the purpose of organizations (and to show the correlations between the national cultures and organizational cultures) it is a very useful tool in the case of the CEE cultures in context of FMCG marketing content creation. Not only the tool compares the cultures and their features, but also it can help answering the question – what features do actually these cultures have, and what features should the marketing communication in these countries have?

According to Corporate Finance Institute, the Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions theory was “developed by Geert Hofstede, is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries and to discern the ways that business is done across different cultures.” (Corporate Finance Institute 2020.).

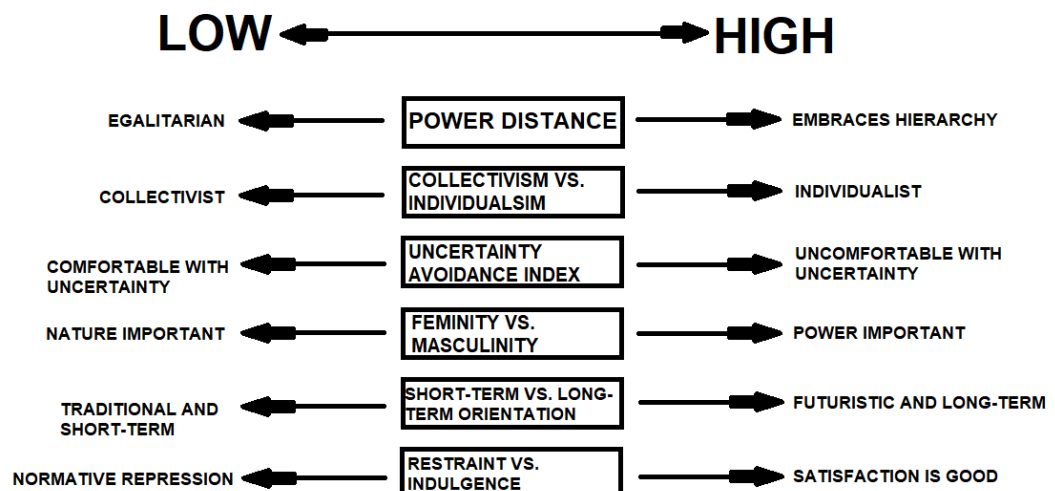


Figure 4. Elements of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (adapted from Hofstede Insights 2020.)

The Power Distance refers to the way nationals perceive the formal power mostly – the societies with low Power Distance are more egalitarian and equality-oriented, while the countries with high Power Distance embrace structured hierarchy more.

The Collectivism vs. Individualism part refers mostly to the approach to the personal goals – if the person has the “I” point of view, or the “We” point of view. Societies with high individualism embrace the needs of a human as an individual, while societies with high collectivism focus on the general good more.

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index refers to the state of uncertainty in the society, so a state in which the future is hardly predictable or the predictions are likely to be inaccurate. Certain societies cope well in such conditions, while for others it can be a complete disaster.

Feminity vs. Masculinity – “tough vs. tender” (Corporate Finance Institute 2020.).

The societies that are more feminine have more fluid gender roles and focus on the general quality of life more, while the masculine societies focus more on the general achievements.

Short-term Orientation and Long-term Orientation. That is the most self-explanatory element of the method. In certain societies the outlook on future and general planning is more short-term (traditional) while in the others the perspective is more futuristic and long-term.

Restraint vs. Indulgence. That part refers to the freedom of doing what one is willing to and general enjoyment of life – the restraint societies regulate that through social norms, while the indulgent societies have a relaxed attitude to those concepts.

Now that the dimensions are described, the results of a comparative analysis can be presented. What was used was the Hofstede Insights Country Comparison Website. Due to technical limitations (it was impossible to compare all 11 countries at once) so the countries were divided into three groups:

1. The Baltics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia):

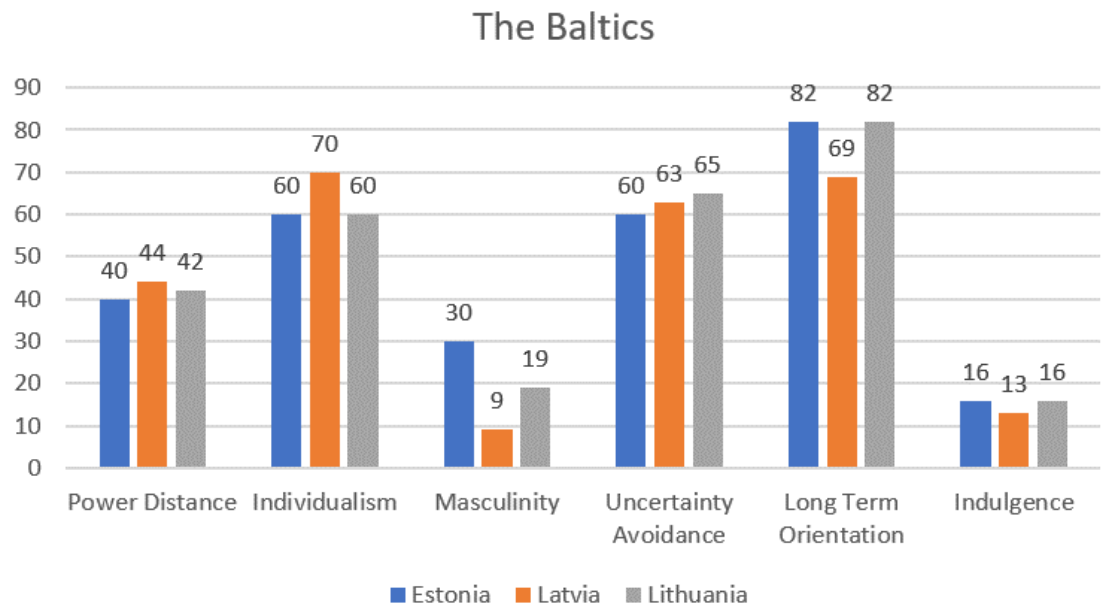


Figure 5. Hofstede Insights comparison of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (adapted from Hofstede Insights 2020.)

2. The Balkans (Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia):

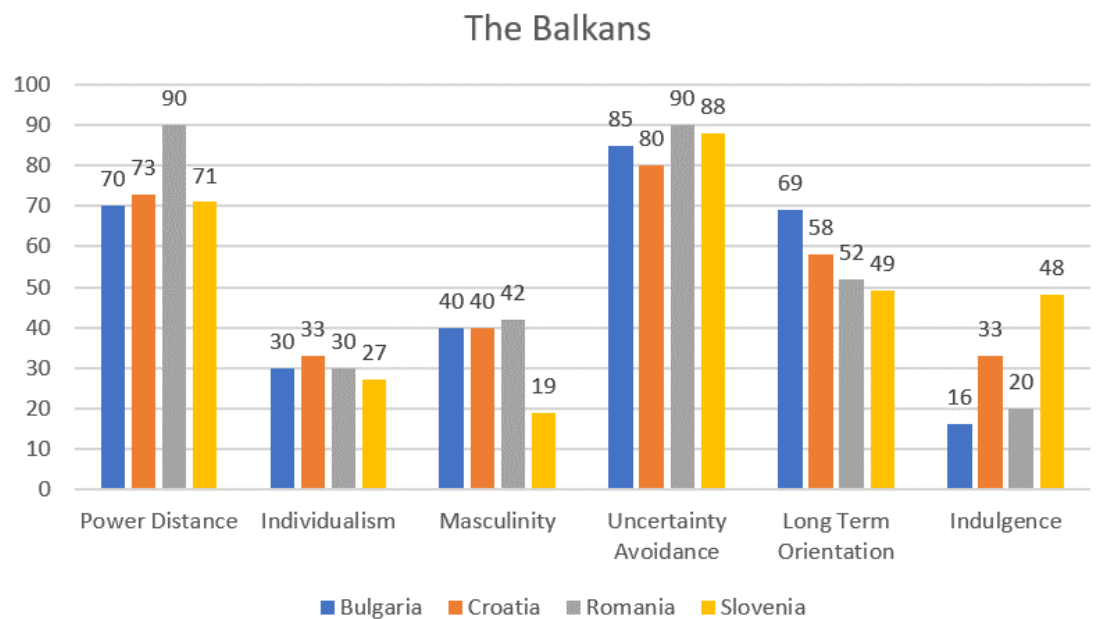


Figure 6. Hofstede Insights comparison of Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia (adapted from Hofstede Insights 2020.)

3. The Slavic countries and Hungary (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary):

The Slavic Countries and Hungary

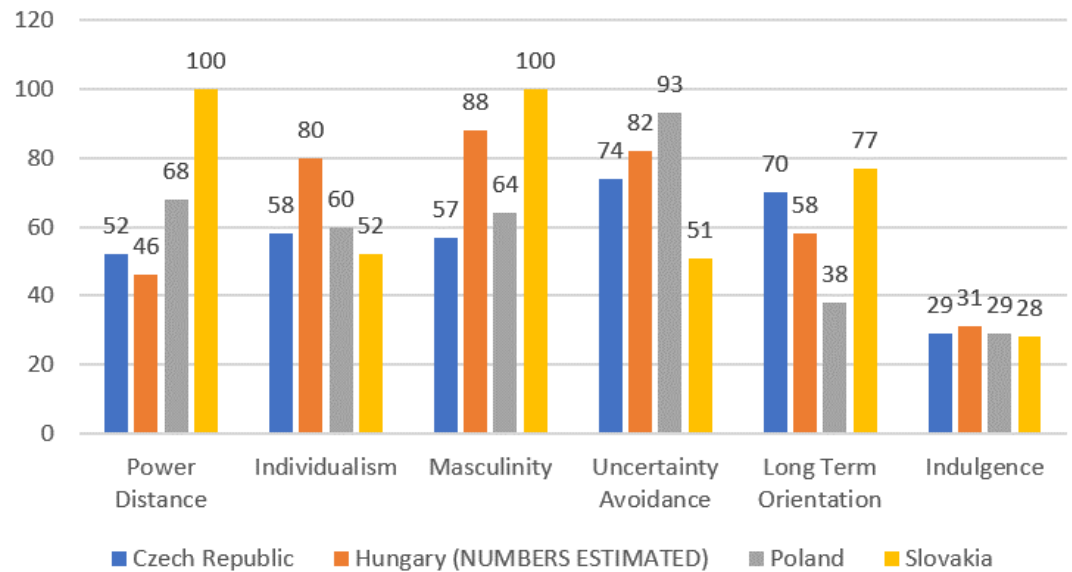


Figure 7. Hofstede Insights comparison of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (adapted from Hofstede Insights 2020.)

Below are the crucial findings:

1. The Baltics. While the majority of numbers are within a similar section, Latvia's considerably lower masculinity, higher individualism and lower long term orientation stand out visibly. These are one of the factors that distinguish that country from its other Baltic neighbors, and these are also the factors that might influence the way product advertising is communicated significantly.
2. The Balkans. What stands out there clearly and is visible at a glance, is the Romanian Power Distance Index – possibly due to historical reasons. Nevertheless, Slovenia is the country that differs the most from the other members of the group I have created – the society has a rather feminine approach, the power distance is the lowest in the group, while the indulgence is highest. These are again the factors that will certainly distinguish the Slovenian marketing communication from i.e. Bulgarian marketing communication.
3. Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary. We can see how different all of these countries are – even the neighboring Czech Republic and Slovakia, two separate countries that used to be one (Czechoslovakia) not long ago. Besides the obvious linguistic differences, each country has its own, very different qualities.

To conclude the analysis – all of these countries vary. The marketing communication pursued in these countries should be contextual, it should consider all of these qualities in order to be appropriate and successful. Using such models as the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions helps to find, identify and understand the differences existing in the region.

In context of marketing, the differences are “bound to have an enduring relationship with the individually-held values in these countries: differences in historical, religious, politico-ideological and economic developments are likely to be indicative of value differences at the national level in Eastern Europe.” (Lascu, Manrai & Manrai, 1996, 147.)

In other words, companies (so also FMCG companies) in the CEE region should apply contextualized marketing strategy, with the context being the cultural aspects of countries. A great definition of contextualized marketing strategy is “a strategy that’s guided by the behaviors and conditions surrounding your marketing efforts so all content is relevant to the person receiving it” provided by a marketing specialist, Amanda Nielsen from New Breed Marketing (New Breed Marketing 2019.).

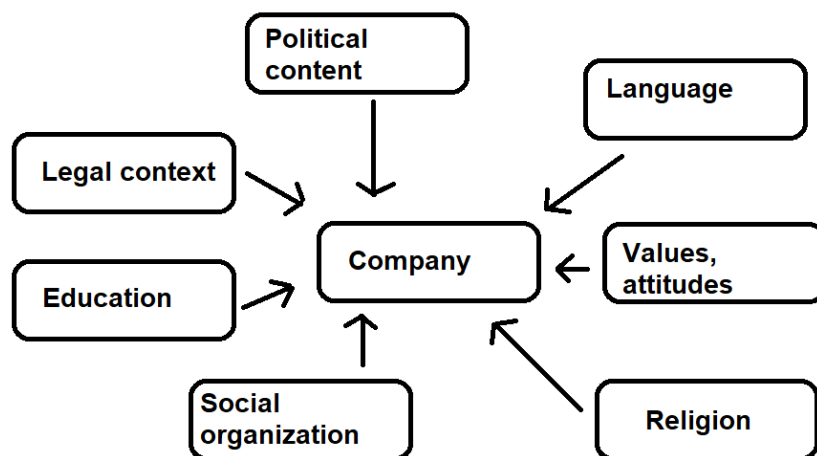


Figure 8. The Company in Cultural Context (adapted from Marinov, Marinova, Manrai & Manrai 2001.)

The diagram above was quoted from the “Marketing Implications of Communist Ideological Legacy in Culture” written by Marinov et al.

It shows the cultural factors companies have to face when either entering a new market and designing their marketing strategy to fit the new conditions, or simply building their marketing communication.

In the epicenter of the diagram is the company itself. The factors (in the clockwise order) are:

1. The political content – an important, but also a controversial factor. In principle, it is better to avoid political citations or inspirations – while it might attract positive attention of certain groups, it might also attract negative attention of other groups.
2. The language – not only using the national language as it is, but also adjusting the word selection to the target group. We must not forget that each language, including the languages spoken in the CEE region has many varieties.
3. The values and attitudes – that is something the Hofstede model analyzes, but the knowledge of values and attitudes is one of the soft competences that marketing specialists should gain empirically, in order to understand the target market fully.
4. Religion – another controversial factor. Each of the CEE countries has a different general attitude to the religion in the society. While holiday-themed commercials might be a great idea, other concepts regarding the religion might not be the wisest moves.
5. Social organization – the way society is organized matters significantly. The communist legacy had a huge impact on what the social organization is like in the whole CEE region – especially the considerable social inequalities. While selecting their target groups, the company should have in mind the groups of society consists of – for instance, whether the product should be affordable and if that very quality should be underlined, or should the product be premium-ranged and thus available for the wealthier, yet smaller focus group of better-situated people.
6. Education – the education greatly influences the perception. The marketing content creators must ensure that the representants of focus groups understand the message fully.
7. Legal context – the actions of a company (including the marketing actions) should always be according to the letter of the law. In case of the marketing actions, possible violations could include the copyright violations, which is undoubtedly something each company, regardless of the industry should avoid. Not only such actions affect the reputation of the company, but also they are simply unethical.

To conclude – once creating marketing content, one should take an account of the cultural importance. When a region is considered, certain similarities, such as the languages, history or common cultural phenomena might be misleading – extensive analysis of values and attitudes is necessary, so that marketing actions are relevant and the effects of those very actions are substantial.

2.2 Creating the Non-Controversial Content

According to the definition of Merriam-Webster, an American dictionary publishing company, a controversy is “a discussion marked especially by the expression of opposing views” (Merriam-Webster 2020.). In other words – a controversy is a topic or a subject that raises discussion, especially a discussion that is featured by

opposing views on that very topic. The latter, more practical definition is what *de facto* is used to define the controversy – and discussions on controversial marketing campaigns, these days taking place usually online, are in fact very common. Another term that is also associated with controversy is inappropriateness. While certain types of controversies can create good PR and good traffic around the product and the company, the inappropriate controversies only make the company's reputation worse, and that is something that takes years to build. One should be especially careful, as what has been built for years, could be significantly affected by one decision – or even ruined.

That precaution applies to marketing content creators too. As often they are responsible for both the creative aspects of campaigns, and the implementation aspects, they should be especially careful.

But what raises discussion and is inappropriate in one country, could be completely fine in another. As mentioned in the paragraphs before, a marketing specialist should know the values of the culture of the focus group campaign is targeted too. Every national culture has its distinctive clichés that are difficult to understand for the outsiders, or the ones having less topical knowledge on the cultural. Not only these very clichés are difficult to understand for the ones being unfamiliar – but also they are difficult to explain.

While generally in the Western world the most controversial subjects are related to individuals' and groups' personal criteria, such as the race, the religion, the ethnic background or the sexual orientation (and other criteria, on which discussing, or to which relating in advertising could be considered inappropriate or controversial) in the CEE region, or in other words, in the Eastern Europe – the taboos are different. Obviously, using such personal criteria as the ones mentioned above raises discussions. The Western influence on the perspective on those very criteria is clearly visible and irreversible.

A research showing the examples of highly-controversial topics in the CEE countries was carried out. In four cases (Estonia, Latvia, Croatia and Slovenia) it was impossible to find case studies described in English. One of the reasons for that could obviously be the sizes of the markets. A decision was made to avoid using internet translators, as they could misinterpret certain contexts, that could be simply impossible to translate without human's interaction. On the other hand, the case examples of the biggest markets are provided.

Below are the results of the research conducted:

Bulgaria – Zagorka Beer

Zagorka is one of the major breweries in Bulgaria. It produces beer under its own brand name – Zagorka. The company is famous for its 1990s advertisement that was dishonorable for women. In their 2001 spring TV advertisement a young man was repairing his VW Beetle. He laid under the car, he reached for the tool that was next to the car. A pair of female legs then kicked the tool. When he was searching on the ground with his hand, he found a bottle of Zagorka beer. Then the next scene shows them both enjoying the beer, with male voice-over saying “What does a human being need? A new car, a nice woman, and one good beer.” (Kirpalani, Garbarski, Kaynak 2009.).

The advertisement is wrong on many levels, but the most inappropriate part of the advertisement is obviously the sentence voiced-over – using its logic, a woman is not a human being. Besides the obvious, ethical inappropriateness, we should not forget that not only men drink beer, and this kind of marketing can affect sales seriously – it is absolutely understandable, if a woman in Bulgaria decides to buy a different brand.

Hungary – Coca-Cola

In 2019, the marketing department of Coca-Cola HBC Hungary issued a campaign with a “Love is Love” theme. The campaign included photos of LGBTQ+ people sharing Coke bottles together. With the photos also came a slogan – “Zero Sugar. Zero Prejudice.” Referring to the diet version of the drink, Coca-Cola Zero. The campaign met the negative feedback of the Fidesz party representatives – the ruling right-wing/conservative party – one of the party representatives has even called for boycotting Coca-Cola’s products until the campaign is cancelled, however Coca-Cola did not withdraw the project.

What is more, there were no news of sales dropping significantly, the Hungarians continued to buy their soft drinks as usual. The moral that comes from that case study is that the political response is not always the customers’ response – as in that case, in spite of the political boycott of the company and its products, the customers kept buying them as they would normally do. (Ward 2019.)

Lithuania – *Using religious symbols*

While it does not target a specific product, a study conducted by Gineikene, Zimaitis and Urbonavicius (2009) states that irrelevant use of religious symbols in advertising has a negative effect on the perception of the commercial. What was used in the empirical study was an example of a beer commercial, where the wooden figure of Jesus scratches the vinyl record, with the copy text saying “it is time for do-gooders to rest”. (Gineikene, Zimaitis & Urbonavicius 2009, 49.)

I have mentioned religion as a personal criterium in the paper before. In that case however, it is not only the religion – it is also the inappropriateness, and the motive being completely out of context – not only the religious people are offended, but the majority of people, who do not understand the message (with a certain dose of probability, it can be said that only the copywriter understood it) are confused. However, that is a great lesson for marketing content creators – not only should the commercials be inoffensive, but also they should be understandable and relatable.

Poland – Theraflu

A famous paracetamol-based over-the-counter anti-influenza medicine produced by Novartis. Its 2011 commercial states that it is “No. 1 for influenza in the world” – in fact, there was a couple lines of small-lettered text on the bottom of the screen, every time the ad was aired. It was impossible to read through that text while the commercial lasted, and the text referred to the slogan. The Polish Committee of Advertising Ethics pronounced the commercial misleading, as the company has not provided sufficient evidence – in what criteria was the Theraflu number one for influenza in the world – sales? Effectiveness? (Makowska 2018, 73.)

Romania – ROM Chocolate Bar

ROM is a Romanian brand of a chocolate bar. Its packaging simply shows the Romanian flag. In 2011 the authorities of the company have noticed a decreased interested in the product, with young people favoring American chocolate bars, such as Mars or Snickers. The advertising campaign conducted by McCann Erickson, American advertising agency included changing the Romanian to American flag on the packaging. The change was highly discussed, the number likes on ROM's Facebook fan page increased by 300% and ROM became the most popular chocolate bar in Romania again.

One could use ROM as an example of positive, inoffensive controversy – while some people could think of replacing the Romanian flag with American flag, it is only

a design of the wrapping. The non-standard approach to making the bar the most “American” resulted substantially. (Fisher 2011.)

Slovakia – Absolut Vodka

16.5 million interactions in social media is quite a number – especially in case of a country like Slovakia, whose population is only 5.5 million people.

The campaign “Slovak mothers, great daughters you have” has its name borrowed from a traditional Slovakian song. The advertisement features a young woman that has features typically associated with people of African descent, wearing traditional Slovakian links in her hair. The text in the bottom of the visual said „*Our skin has a different color, but we’re all Slovaks. Diversity suits us. Natalia, Bratislava (capital city of Slovakia)*“.

The campaign was obviously very controversial, and raised a lot of discussion, especially online – plenty of local influencers have expressed their minds on the topic. In spite of the countable negative reception, the sales have elevated by 117%. (Blanaru 2019.)

The companies should always be aware, that there will be some negative reception of their unusual adds. However, as it can be seen on the example of Absolut Vodka – these kind of controversies could bring substantial results.

Czech Republic – Zenonade

Zenonade is a Czech “relaxing drink” – a beverage that, opposed to energy drinks like Red Bull, is meant to have calming and relaxing properties.

Zenonade’s 2013 video commercial (with subtitles in English – the company had plans to grow internationally) featured a cabin crew member in a plane telling herself that all the passengers were going to die. “While pointing at passengers, she tells herself, “I’m going to be the first to leave this plane, and you’re all going to die.” As the camera scans the cabin, she says, “Dead. Dead. Dead.” She then points at herself and says, “Alive.” As a voice on the intercom says, “We wish you a pleasant flight,” the stewardess flashes a ghoulish grin. The tagline reads: “Zenonade: At Your Own Risk.” (Robson 2013.)

Fueling the plane anxiety is not the only controversy that comes with Zenonade – the other is the fact that the product was introduced to the market while not being

tested, which was stated clearly in the commercial's YouTube copy. While the advertisement itself is simply unpalatable, the other controversy can have dangerous effects – and then comes the true responsibility.

To conclude, the term “controversy” is very broad, especially in case of marketing content creation. A controversy can be positive and create interest around the brand that results in increasing popularity and sales, but it can also be a source of confusion, misunderstandings, criticism or hate. Marketing content creators should remember about the taboo topics (the Lithuanian religion case) and possible negative consequences of their actions, such as raising confusion (Zenonade) or demotivating a potentially-large consumer group to the brand (Zagorka).

The positive controversies however should not be feared – as it can be observed by the example of Absolut Vodka or ROM.

2.3 Differentiating the Product Advertising through Marketing Strategy

As mentioned in the introduction before – the CEE region consist of several different countries. Each of them has its own diverse culture, which brings plenty of challenges – especially when referring to marketing. It is no other in case of the FMCG, which, as many other industries is being advertised and marketed heavily.

“National cultures still remain different and businesses have to explore and recognize the cultural context to design and implement successful marketing strategies.” (Marinov & al. 2001, 7).

The subchapter starts with the analysis of “Effective use of marketing technology in Eastern Europe: Web analytics, social media, customer analytics, digital campaigns and mobile applications” (Jayaram, Manrai & Manrai, 2015). I found the article to be a great source of very topical knowledge – using the digital marketing, method by method, in Eastern Europe. The CEE region is developing very quickly, which obviously has a correlation to the use of internet and social media – in other words, the media where digital marketing can be implemented at its best. In the current times of a quick development and rising use of Internet, the marketing content creators have to seriously consider the needs of those groups. Obviously there is no difference in the FMCG sector – just like in other industries, FMCG companies can use the wonders of modern technology world to advertise their products.

However, there are also the non-digital methods. In some countries to this day the use of internet is associated mostly with the young people, while the older generations keep on having their daily newspapers and TV programs as their primal sources of information. The content creators in an industry like the FMCG industry that approaches to reach the focus group as broad as possible must remember that still, especially in the CEE internet is not yet everything.

The ageing of European population is has been a widely discussed problem, with the CEE region being no different than the rest of the continent. What comes along with the ageing of population is the Silver Economy concept – the concept of the branch of economy that is dedicated to sustain the needs of the elderly. That very concept should be considered also when creating marketing communication content in the FMCG industry – especially the methods to reach the elderly people. While in countries like Finland or Sweden more and more pensioners use the Internet daily, in the Eastern Europe it is not at all uncommon for the elderly people to not even have the Internet connection in any form.

On the other hand need for diversifying and using more advertising methods through different channels is a great opportunity for marketing content creators to express their creativity – having to invest in the non-digital methods too also means that non-digital campaigns have to be carried out. On the other hand, obviously the costs increase.

One of the big challenges – using a correct method

What is mentioned clearly at the very beginning (in the abstract actually) is the “microclimate” that young, technology-aware consumers create, along with the market conditions and the country specifics – these very conditions and specifics actually determine certain marketing techniques and methods to be more effective than others.

In spite of the presence of the technologically-savvy young consumers, who use the internet and social media, there are still people for whom using the internet is not a usual thing and other forms of advertising targeted at them reach them better. Once the perspective of an FMCG company is taken, observation can be made: these products are made to be sold in big quantities and quickly – so the broader the focus groups, the better. The marketing campaigns should also target broad focus groups – so that the chances of selling more volumes are bigger. At that point one of the challenges can be easily formulated:

In the FMCG industry in Central-Eastern Europe, the region of both aging population, and the technologically-savvy young consumers, the challenge is to design the marketing strategy accordingly – so that it targets and reaches both groups successfully.

On one-hand are the state-of-the-art technologies and methods, such as the SEO (Search Engine Optimization) strategies or Instagram commercials with cost-per-click fees, while on the other are the traditional methods – radio commercials, TV advertisements, or sometimes even newspapers. Another thing that is also worth mentioning is ambient/guerrilla marketing – the non-digital, and non-standard marketing actions whose purpose is to attract a lot of attention through unusual activities. Undoubtedly creating a successful campaign that does well in both kinds of channels, or all kinds of channels is a big challenge – not only from the creative point of view, but also from the logistical (such as the delivering and distributing the non-digital, physical materials) timely (the competition might act much faster and steal all of the potential or existing customers' attention) and financial point of view – as always at a certain point of managing the enterprise, including its marketing aspects – money will become scarce.

In the “Marketing Implications of Communist Ideological Legacy in Culture” Marinov et al. mention that “word of mouth” communication, so the phenomenon where one individual spreads a message about a product to another is a cultural feature, that is common across the region – that is another thing marketing content creating specialists should remember – for example designing the name of the product so that it is easy to remember or pronounce could be one of the actions, where the “word of mouth” is considered. (Marinov & al. 2001, 19.)

One of the big challenges in the content creating is also oversimplifying the national cultures and applying the overly standardized marketing strategies that not always suit the market conditions perfectly. “These countries cannot be treated as a homogenous market; local competitors have relevant cultural knowledge and should be expected to quickly adopt new marketing skills and technologies.” (Jayaram & al. 2015, 125).

2.4 The Influence of Communism on Consumers' Marketing Perception in Central and Eastern Europe

This is an analysis of "Marketing Implications of Communist Ideological Legacy in Culture in the Context of Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparison of Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine" by Marin Marinov, Svetla Marinova, Ajay K. Manrai and Lalita Manrai (2001).

According to the French National Institute's definition the CEE Region does not include Ukraine – so only the data regarding Bulgaria and Romania will be referred to.

One of the key examples of the influence of communist legacy on the people's general perception is education. The Soviet state emphasized technical education, so many people, especially those who remember these times anecdotally, are well educated, especially when it comes to technology. While the technological processes used when making packed food or drinks might not be that important, technical features of, for instance, batteries for small electronic devices might be a great point to emphasize when creating the marketing communication. On the other hand, emphasizing the technicality of i.e. brewing process when advertising beer might be a great and unusual idea of advertising the product – so that could also apply to the FMCG products in the most typical, traditional understanding.

Another challenge that can be easily identified there is the technical communication in advertising – the advertising done in that manner should be very specific. It is favorable to focus on technical aspects of the products. The "hard numbers" when it comes to such information are highly favored, but the challenge by itself is designing the marketing communication so that it is not overcrowded with specifically technical information – in other words, the technical information must be "digestible".

As an example, here are some of the characteristics Bulgarian and Romanian advertising markets have, after being heavily influenced by the communist ideological legacy:

Bulgaria				
Industry	Consumer Behavior	Products and Brands	Distribution	Marketing Communication
Food and Beverages				
(Major MNCs: Nestle, Kraft Jacobs Suchard, Danone, Coca-Cola, Interbrew, Heineken)	All market segments Quality/price awareness Middle and low end market segments - preference to local brands	Global, international, regional and upgraded local products and brands	Own distribution networks Contacting out with retail outlets	Intensive advertising using all media sources and promotional events Locally-adapted marketing communication
(Private and state-owned local companies)	Middle and low end market segments Price sensitivity	Local brands and brand development	Contracts with retailers	Locally-designed ads emphasizing the quality of Bulgarian products
Romania				
Industry	Consumer Behavior	Products and Brands	Distribution	Marketing Communication
Food and Beverages				
(Major MNCs: Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Kraft Jacobs Suchard, Nestle)	All market segments Quality/price awareness	Global, international, regional and upgraded local products and brands	Own distribution networks Contacting out with retailers	All media sources and promotional events Locally-adapted marketing communication
(Private and state-owned local companies)	Low end market segments - preference to local brands Price sensitivity	Local brands and brand development	Contracts with retailers Distribution through large number of kiosks	Using all media sources Locally produced ads emphasizing the quality/price ratio

Figure 9. Marketing Characteristics in Various Industries in Bulgaria and Romania, only *Food and Beverages* considered (adapted from Marinov, Marinova, Manrai & Manrai 2001.)

The crucial rows of the tables are obviously the “Food and Beverages”, as both food and beverage products are within the FMCG industry. In spite of these two countries sharing similar history (both being parts of the former Soviet bloc) being in the same socio-economic region (the CEE region) and the same geographical region, we can see certain differences.

At the first sight the “Food and Beverages” sections of both tables look oddly similar, however there is a number of important differences in them:

1. The kiosks. As it turns out, selling FMCG products through small kiosks in Romania is more common – this is something that clearly is a marketing opportunity in the country, especially in the non-digital way – for instance, wrapping the windows of the kiosk or placing posters on the walls – kiosks are generally very visible, many people visit them.
2. The intensive advertising. That is something that appears in Bulgaria, where FMCG companies use virtually all methods of advertising.
3. The local patriotism. Emphasizing the quality of Bulgarian products is what is very much favored in the country, while in Romania it seems to not be of such particular importance.

Dumping price strategy is one of the strategies major FMCG companies use to advertise their products in Bulgaria, as a response to the competition.

For instance, in Bulgaria the concept of “value for money” is understood differently than in the countries of the European West. Western consumers are generally used

to paying more for high quality, while in Bulgaria the products in general are expected to be “cheap and good quality”. The factors that influence such mindset are undoubtedly the purchasing power, which in the Eastern Europe is generally lower, and the competition – the Eastern European market quickly became highly competitive once it has opened for the liberal economy.

As pricing is undoubtedly one of the elements of marketing, a certain focus should also be applied to that aspect. For instance, namely the Bulgarian and Romanian markets are the markets where product affordability is one of the essential aspects when making a purchasing decision. And while in a society there are always groups of people who are willing to pay more for the high-quality product, an FMCG company should focus on the first, general group – in order to sell the products in big quantities and quickly, as it is intended.

To conclude, being able to understand the environment, segment the markets and meet the needs of consumers is being able to design and carry out a successful marketing strategy in the Eastern European (CEE) countries. And obviously – it is no other in case of the FMCG industry.

The market conditions in the CEE countries, which are heavily influenced by the history (namely the communist legacy the whole region still has) and the factors of national cultures can be taken with a different perspective – as opportunities instead of challenges. More non-digital marketing actions can be implemented within the advertising campaigns, in order to gain broader focus groups.

Pricing, which, as mentioned, is one of the elements of marketing can be one of the great instruments of diversifying not only the offering, but the whole image of communication in these countries – especially in the countries where good price/quality relationship is especially valued.

And the last, but not the least – the qualities that come with national cultures. Knowing them, and addressing them properly not only allows marketing specialists to create successful advertising campaigns, but it also enables them to diversify those very campaigns strategically – for example, creating the communication in a way that addresses indulgence, power distance, or other Hofstede Dimensions-sourced criteria that can be found in the national cultures.

3 Research Design

Population and Sampling

The initial goal when planning the thesis was to interview 3 to 5 specialists – CEE marketing content creators. What mattered was the experience gained while working on the content that was designed for the industry and the region.

The attempt to interview the number between 3 and 5 was successful – 4 specialists agreed to answer my questions. What was quite surprising was the amount of people who promised to answer the questions, but failed to do so – it was not at all uncommon. Furthermore, many messages were ignored. Interviewing a very specialised, busy and not especially countable focus group was definitely a challenge.

To introduce the population, yet not raise any unnecessary data protection questions, I decided to replace their names with the letters of alphabet – A, B, C and D appropriately. Other sensitive data such as age and gender is also omitted – as these criteria are not within the scope of the research.

A – a scholar specialising in buying behaviour and marketing that has advised many FMCG companies operating in the Polish market. A person of great, topical knowledge, who turned out to also be very much on current with the present marketing trends – also in the industry in the region.

B – an advertising agency copywriter that has worked on the digital sides of the FMCG industry marketing campaigns in Poland. A person with a special focus on digital methods and the use of state-of-the-art technologies in marketing.

C – an advertising agency director and scholar that has worked on many FMCG industry marketing campaigns in Poland. A very experienced specialist that has not only created the content themselves, but also advised many companies of the industry.

D – a businessperson running their business with own brand over-the-counter/diet supplement product, including also the marketing part, with the product being also present in the CEE market. The person has an experience of marketing in every CEE country.

Below are the questions that were asked to the participants of the empirical research:

1. How do you think, what cultural motives should never be used in the marketing communication in Central Eastern Europe?
2. How do you think, what other motives (graphic motives, words or phrases) should be avoided in the marketing communication to avoid controversies? In other words - what should be avoided, in order to avoid controversies?
3. Strategic question - what can you do with your product marketing strategy, in order to differentiate it from competitors' offers?

A – the interviewee was first contacted on the 13th of July 2020 via LinkedIn. The interviewee agreed to answer the questions via LinkedIn private messages – and has done so on the very same day.

B – the interviewee was first contacted on the 12th of July 2020 via Facebook Messenger. The interviewee has specified that the most convenient form of answering the questions is to receive the questions copy-pasted in the Messenger directly. The response came through the same channel, on the same day – 12th of July 2020.

C – the interviewee was first contacted on the 13th of July 2020 via LinkedIn. The interviewee specified that the most convenient form of answering the questions is to receive the questions in either a document attached to the email, or the questions copy-pasted into the email. The response came as an answer to the email on the 20th July 2020.

D – the interviewee was first contacted on the 13th of July 2020 via LinkedIn. The interviewee has specified that the most convenient form for them is to receive a Microsoft Word document, where they could answer the questions directly and send the file back. The filled document was sent back on the 15th of July 2020 – so the answers came on that day, the 15th of July 2020.

In order to conveniently present both the questions and the answers, in other words, present the sampling part, the results were presented in the model as below.

Question 1:

A: Primarily, the religious motives – they are quite dangerous – because insulting one's religious beliefs is legally prosecuted in Poland. The most dangerous motive is a crucifix and the character of Jesus. However there were cases (even recently) that the motive of a nun was considered unethical – because the clergy person should not be used for promoting the products. Personally however I don't think, that religious motives should not be used in the marketing communication – however, one must do it skillfully. In principle any other motives, if they do not violate human's dignity could be used. A big part of the conservative Poland loves the family motive. Liberal environments have nothing against any motives. We are precisely divided in half – so as it turns out, even the political motives divide our society. So in fact, everything depends on the focus group we want to reach.

B: Avoid them: - God - Death Welcome: - Home - Love - Power.

C: I feel that using the cultural motives in the marketing communications should obey the general rules and social norms agreed by the society for the broadly understood marketing. The brand communication should not stigmatize, exclude or call for aggression towards any group of the society.

I believe (if we can consider that a cultural motive) that the inclinations referring to the Second World War should not be used in the marketing communication in Poland. I still remember the campaign of the energy drink brand Tiger (Maspex Group) from two years before, when on the day of the remembrance of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising the post appeared. The post in social media, which included a picture of a middle finger with a bow on it, with a slogan – the 1st of August (The Remembrance Day) – “screw the past, future matters”. The meme was quickly deleted from Tiger's Instagram, but the company stood in front of a serious image crisis and had to undertake immediate drastic actions.

As Poles we can be proud of many exceptional achievements in the fields of literature, art and science – known and appreciated all over the world. I believe that it is worth to remember of these successes and build the communication based on them. I would also not be afraid of using the folk motives – flowers, simple geometrical patterns and the richness of colors are the characteristic elements, due to which the pattern is immediately recognized and identified with Poland. For now the folklore is a market niche, but I am convinced that the brands could use it more often successfully.

D: I think certain sensitive political topics should not be used in marketing communication as well as anything which might disrespect the feminism, family values as well as anything imply to disvalue Polish pride as Poland had suffer long historically with Russia, Germany and Sweden that if anything would reminded of those time, which might bring negative effect. Historically Poland is more of a

feminist society which women usually have pretty much power in the family, therefore, if any advertisement may show anti-familism might bring negative emotions as well.

Question 2:

A - The conservative part of the society is alert to using: religious motives, LGBT+, eroticism. The liberal part of the society is alert to women's rights, stereotypes, racism, violence. It is impossible to quite generally state what to avoid – it depends on the focus group. In Poland you can always expose yourself to someone.

B – Political references.

C - By answering that questions what I see automatically are the controversial commercials created by United Colors of Benetton created since the eighties. The director of brand creation was Oliviero Toscani, who received a free hand in creating the brand's image from the firm's owners.

He was on the position until the 2000. In that time he managed to shock the fashion world with a couple of loud campaigns, and Benetton has officially stopped promoting their brand by controversial campaigns in 2015.

The topics of the commercial, in spite of being over a dozen, or even several dozen years matches the taboos of Polish society perfectly: the racism, religion, homosexuality, violence, ecological catastrophies or wars are some of them. I am also afraid that the current political landscape of Poland does not support building tolerance – also in the marketing communications.

D - Any word, hint or sentences or humours about stolen cars been to Poland, such should be avoided, graphic would be any signs related to Hitler or Soviet Union times.

An analysis of the answers given (and a comparison of the answers and the challenges acknowledged by desktop research) is provided in the chapter 3.4 – Data Analysis.

Question 3:

A – It is impossible to answer that question – it is easier to point the communications schemes – and everyone who breaks those schemes – will be different. Recently quite differentiating was the use of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in the marketing communications and building the community, because the Poles are

strongly divided (by the systems of their beliefs and values). The ecology in Poland grows, zero waste trends stopped to only be a niche trivia – mostly thanks to young people. A new format of Rossmann (*a drugstore chain selling mostly cosmetics*) is very differentiating: <https://label-magazine.com/wnetrza/artykuly/rossmann-otworzyl-w-lodzi-flagowy-pro-ekologiczny-sklep>.

B – If we have a payment model as a subscription, it is good to share the cost information as a daily payment. It reaches the customer better.

C – In the FMCG marketing communication I would like to point two tools – POSM (Point of Sales Materials) and ontrade actions. The producers race in the quality and creativity in the latter to differentiate from the competition and attract the consumer's attention. Store fridges with see-through LED screens, on which the communicates are shown are examples of constant looking for the points of contacts on the customer – product line. In the consumer activities however it is possible to notice the constant mixing of the offline events with the digital communication and moving the communication to the internet largely.

The COVID-19 pandemics has highlighted the other two elements, which in my opinion are worth remembering. First, what changed was the marketing strategy of enterprises – any planned activities must be measurable and sales-convertible. Second, we know how powerful, leverage-building and differentiating (from competition) tool is a well-planned, introduced and working e-commerce.

D – Using a strategy which can touch the heart of people there, find out the weakness of your competitors and the strength of your products and focus on the needs and demand of your buyers and focus your strength (your product niche) It will be good to make SWOT of your own products vs your competitors to find your niche and differentiate yourself from your competitors.

The data collection was carried out while interviewing the respondents. All of the interviews were outrun online – three of them via LinkedIn chat, and one of them via Facebook Messenger. The respondents were selected based on their experience in the field. Three of the interviews were carried out in Polish, and then they were translated into English – as accurately as possible.

Data Analysis

The answers were presented in the model as above in order to simplify analyzing. The answers to each question will be analyzed qualitatively.

1. How do you think, what cultural motives should never be used in the marketing communication in Central Eastern Europe?

Two of the four interviewed mentioned the general religious motives – specifically, the motives of the Christian religion, such as the character of Jesus or the crucifix, which should come as no surprise – the whole CEE region is predominantly Christian. In certain countries, such as Poland (where the vast majority of population is Catholic) the religion has a particularly significant role in the general belief system of the society – hence why using religious motives is such a taboo. One of the interviews said that one could use the religious motives – but skillfully. We should not forget that for example the Santa Claus, a character that is used widely all over the world is a westernized version of the Russian clergyman Saint Nicolas.

Also two of the four interviewed mentioned history. What is the essence of the current geopolitical and cultural state of the region is the common past – the communism. Using the example of Poland again, two interviewees mentioned the motives related to the turbulent times of the past, as the things one should avoid when designing their marketing communication.

What is more, on the contrary, the motives related to the family and home are very welcome – three of the four interviewees (so the **absolute majority**) mentioned these motives as something that could be successfully used in the marketing communication.

Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned the general influence of the country's political landscape and the divisions that are in the society as the marketing communication creating indications.

Other motives named as avoidable included “anything that would violate human's dignity”, death, disvaluing the national pride and anti-feminism.

The motives pointed as favorable were the general motives of love, power, folk patterns in the graphics.

2. How do you think, what other motives (graphic motives, words or phrases) should be avoided in the marketing communication to avoid controversies? In other words - what should be avoided, in order to avoid controversies?

Two of the four interviewees mentioned racism, religion, homosexuality and violence as the motives to be avoided, as on the example of Poland, they should be avoided due to the fact that they are the social taboos.

The stereotypes were mentioned twice – especially the negative stereotypes that are stigmatizing the nations.

Other motives mentioned were the political references, eroticism, religious motives (again), LGBT+ related communication, communication violating women's rights, wars, ecological catastrophes, communism-related communication, WW2 communication – especially related to the Nazism.

3. Strategic question - what can you do with your product marketing strategy, in order to differentiate it from competitors' offers?

Surprisingly in that part it was difficult to analyze the answer in the manner as before, as each answer was completely different – a brief list with the core of the answers provides a better outlook on the problem.

1. The use of CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility in the marketing communication.
2. The use of ecology, namely investing in the zero waste trend, as it is no longer a niche.
3. If the payment model is a subscription (as there are various goods that are provided in the subscription model) it is better to share the subscription fee information as a daily cost, as it reaches the customer better.
4. The use of Point Of Sales (*non-digital*) Materials, such as store fridges with see-through LED displays.
5. Trade marketing actions.
6. Moving the digital communication to the internet largely.
7. Having a well-planned, introduced and working e-commerce sales system.
8. Finding the weaknesses of the competitors, strengths of the products, focusing on the needs and the demands of the buyers. Finding the market niche and differentiating from the competitors.

Both the desktop research part and the empirical research was conducted with an utmost focus on the reliability, validity and relevance. In order to ensure that all of the criteria is met (so that the research results are reliable, valid and relevant) the steps described below were taken.

The desktop research was based on using high-quality sources, accessed through various online databases. The background conditions of the region and the industry is provided, so that the whole thesis has a factual, relevant support. An emphasis was put on keeping the paper topical, so that the paper itself and its content is within the demarcation that was set at the planning stage. Already the planning stage the special emphasis was put on the quality of sources when researching. Credibility was the key criteria, when selecting the source – for instance, that is the reason why the essential definition of the CEE Region was taken from the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. At that stage journals were used widely

– such as the Asian Journal of Marketing. Also knowledge resources provided by companies were used – namely by Nielsen or Market Watch. As I found the journals and scientific articles to be more efficient to use, and to bring more specific, yet compressed knowledge – the use of books was infrequent, to the point that one could describe these uses of books as isolated incidents.

A well-recognized models, such as the Hofstede Cultural Dimensions were also used. The predominant surname that one can find in the references is Manrai, to be specific, Ajay K. Manrai – a Delaware University professor. One of the professor's points of scientific interests is in fact the FMCG marketing in the CEE region. Manrai has published many valuable papers on the topic, some of which were used as the resources to that paper. Another author whose scientific contributions were very helpful to build the foundations of the knowledge was Marin Marinov – an Aalborg University specialist, whose particular scientific focus is the marketing in the emerging markets – including the CEE. The examples of controversial marketing campaigns were researched predominantly by using the search engines, such as Google.

Also the dictionary definitions were used when necessary, as in the case of the term “controversy”. The term might seem obvious, but in order to avoid any reader's misinterpretation the dictionary definition was provided. The source in that particular case was the website Merriam-Webster – a widely-known company famous for its expertise of preparing dictionaries targeted to the use of American students.

The empirical research was based on interviewing the individuals with specific, hands-on experience that are able to point certain challenges the industry in the region has and also provide other information objectively, yet supported by their own expertise as marketing specialists. The four interviewees were selected based on their marketing experience and their willingness to answer.

To conclude, not also the reliability, validity and relevance were the key criteria when researching, but also the topicality, applicability, and overall quality of the sources.

4 Results

4.1 Desktop Knowledge and Content Creators' Responses – Comparative Analysis

Both the desktop and the empirical research resulted in accessing many conclusions, which were next divided into the Desktop Knowledge and the Content Creators' Responses.

Since the Desktop Knowledge and the Content Creators' Responses resulted in entirely different answers – the base of the comparative analysis will be the differences - the differences of the knowledge provided by scholars specializing in marketing, and the knowledge originating from the content creators' responses.

The differences come from the fact that these two groups providing the data, the scholars and the interviewees have different points of views. While the scholars have the broader outlook that enables them to look at the problem from a broader, analytical perspective, the interviewees are people with hands-on experience who specialize in the marketing content for the FMCG in the CEE. Should any touch points appear between the knowledge originating from the scholars' publications and the interviewees answer – they will be identified and thoroughly described.

The Desktop Knowledge Challenges:

1. **The methods selection and application challenge.** Adjusting the selection of methods so that it suits the products, and the focus group best.
2. **The diversified age focus group challenge.** Using the correct marketing methods so that it suits both the young, technology-aware consumers and the older consumers, who might not be that proficient in technology. Both groups have to be reached successfully.
3. **The multi-channel campaign success challenge.** Creating a successful campaign that does well in both (digital and non-digital) kinds of channels, or all kinds of channels is a big challenge – not only from the creative point of view, but also from the logistical (such as the delivering and distributing the non-digital, physical materials) timely (the competition might act much faster and steal all of the potential or existing customers' attention) and financial point of view – as always at a certain point of managing the enterprise, including its marketing aspects – money will become scarce.
4. **The mistake challenge (oversimplifying the national cultures).** Applying the overly standardized marketing strategies that not always suit the market conditions perfectly. “These countries cannot be treated as a homogenous market; local competitors have relevant cultural knowledge and should be expected to quickly adopt new marketing skills and technologies.”

5. **The technical communication challenge.** Another challenge that can be easily identified there is the technical communication in advertising the advertising done in that manner should be very specific. It is favorable to focus on technical aspects of the products. The “hard numbers” when it comes to such information are highly favored, but the challenge by itself is designing the marketing communication so that it is not overcrowded with specifically technical information – in other words, the technical information must be “digestible”.

The Challenges pointed by interviewees:

1. The use of religious motives, especially those related to Christian religion. Two of the four interviewees mentioned them, however one has pointed that **one could use religious motives in the marketing communication – however one should do so skillfully.** One could think of using the religious motives in the seasonal campaigns, around the time of religious holidays for example.
2. The use of historical motives – especially those relating to the turbulent times of the WW2 and the communist era. Two of the four interviewees mentioned using these motives as a no. Generally building the marketing communication on historical motives could be successful, but **such controversial topics should definitely be avoided – and for some creators, that can be a challenge that requires further research in order to find motives that are more applicable.**
3. The influence of the political landscape of the country – the politics divide societies into specific groups that share certain values – **creating a campaign that can successfully target focus groups of various values and beliefs is yet another challenge.**
4. The general impact of social taboos on creating the marketing campaigns – one should remember that such concepts as death, devaluing the national pride, anti-feminism, racism, religion, homosexuality and violence. The list could go on – the specific criteria depend on the national culture itself, and that is something that one can learn best holistically – by being in touch with the culture. **The challenge is to be informed well enough – what are the social taboos in the particular social group, even if the group is as broad as a whole society?**
5. Using the stereotypes – while humorous marketing campaigns are generally memorable and welcome, it is not a rarity to find people who would feel offended by exposing certain national stereotypes – especially the ones stigmatizing the nations. **The challenge in using the stereotypes (if one decides to do so) in the marketing campaign is to find out what stereotypes are generally seen as a burden, and what stereotypes can be considered amusing.**
6. **A constant search for new customer-product touchpoints in order to find new possibilities of placing the marketing content.** For instance, the use of Point Of Sales (*non-digital*) Materials, such as store fridges with see-through LED displays.
7. **New consumption forms** – as more and more products are provided as services with periodic payments, the marketing content creators have a challenge of advertising the subscriptions successfully, so that such crucial information as the subscription fee is “digestible” for the customer.
8. **Moving the digital communication to the internet largely.** The trend reported by one of the interviewees is moving the general digital marketing actions to the internet. One could interpret that as a diminishing role of the television in advertising, which creates a different point of view strategy wise – especially in the FMCG industry, where the broader the focus groups, the

better. **Designing the communication so that the appropriate emphasis is put into the online marketing actions, and that the appropriate emphasis is put into the TV, even if its importance is on the fall is yet another challenge.**

9. **Having a well-planned, introduced and working e-commerce sales system.** Planning, introducing and operating on an e-commerce system is challenging, as it is a huge change in product offering of a company that requires resources – specialized, knowledgeable people and funds.
10. **The Corporate Social Responsibility Trend in Marketing –** the CSR trend is on the rise, also in the CEE countries. Consumers pay more and more attention to concepts such as fair trade – implementing these into the communication can be challenging, as it requires factual knowledge about the company’s CSR, **it requires the knowledge that answers the question – “Is the company in fact able to use its CSR policies as an advantage in the marketing communication?”**
11. **The Zero Waste Trend in Marketing –** a marketing communication involving the zero waste trend might bring substantial results in sales improvements, as in the case of the CSR trend – the zero waste trend is on the rise in the CEE countries as well. As in the case above, the potential controversies that would result in promoting the zero waste trend, while not implementing zero waste actions would not only affect the sales, but also the overall image of the company. **In other words – one has to be sure that the company is subject to promote itself with the zero waste trend.**

Once the challenges were put together, a correlation table (to be found below) was created.

The column on the left represents the Desktop Knowledge Challenges, while the column on the right represents the Interviewees’ Challenges – that correspond with the Desktop Knowledge Challenges. Only the correlating challenges were considered – should there be a Desktop Knowledge Challenge with no Interviewees’ Challenge correlation – it was then omitted.

Table 4. The Comparison of Challenges

The Desktop Knowledge Challenges:	The Correlating Challenges pointed by the Interviewees:
The methods selection and application challenge	Moving the digital communication to the internet largely
Multi-channel campaign success challenge	A constant search for new customer-product touchpoints in order to find new possibilities of placing the marketing content New consumption forms Having a well-planned, introduced and working e-commerce sales system

Technical communication challenge	New consumption forms (i.e. the technical aspects of subscriptions)
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To conclude, certain challenges provided by the scholars, and gained through desktop research had corresponding equivalents. Other challenges provided by the scholars had no corresponding equivalents which could be the result of the specifics – the practicalities of each marketing content creator differ, some of these challenges were often either very broad (oversimplifying the national cultures) or very specific, such as the diversified age focus group challenge.

The tendency also appeared in the other set of challenges, the challenges pointed by the interviewees – they were often very specific, unrelatable to the (mostly) broader challenges provided by the scholars, yet they provided a new outlook on the problem.

4.2 The Challenges Identified

In order to simplify the presentation of the identified challenges – an Excel table (with a division on the Desktop Knowledge, and the Interviewee Knowledge sections) was created.

Below are the challenges that were identified through a combined research – the desktop research and the empirical research, consisting of four, thematic open interviews.

No.	Desktop Knowledge Challenges	Explanation
1	The methods selection and application challenge	Adjusting the selection of methods so that it suits the products, and the focus group best
2	The diversified age focus group challenge	Using the correct marketing methods so that it suits both the young, technology-aware consumers and the older consumers, who might not be that proficient in technology. Both groups have to be reached successfully
3	The multi-channel campaign success challenge	Creating a successful campaign that does well in both (digital and non-digital) kinds of channels, or all kinds of channels is a big challenge – not only from the creative point of view, but also from the logistical (such as the delivering and distributing the non-digital, physical materials) timely (the competition might act much faster and steal all of the potential or existing customers' attention) and financial point of view – as always at a certain point of managing the enterprise, including its marketing aspects – money will become scarce.
4	The mistake challenge (oversimplifying the national cu	Applying the overly standardized marketing strategies that not always suit the market conditions perfectly. "These countries cannot be treated as a homogenous market; local competitors have relevant cultural knowledge and should be expected to quickly adopt new marketing skills and technologies."
5	The technical communication challenge	Another challenge that can be easily identified there is the technical communication in advertising the advertising done in that manner should be very specific. It is favorable to focus on technical aspects of the products. The "hard numbers" when it comes to such information are highly favored, but the challenge by itself is designing the marketing communication so that it is not overcrowded with specifically technical information – in other words, the technical information must be "digestible".
No.	Interviewees Challenges	Explanation
1	The skillful use of religious motives	The use of religious motives, especially those related to Christian religion. Two of the four interviewees mentioned them, however one has pointed that one could use religious motives in the marketing communication – however one should do so skillfully . One could think of using the religious motives in the seasonal campaigns, around the time of religious holidays for example.
2	The skillful use of historical motives	Especially those relating to the turbulent times of the WW2 and the communist era. Two of the four interviewees mentioned using these motives as a no. Generally building the marketing communication on historical motives could be successful, but such controversial topics should definitely be avoided – and for some creators, that can be a challenge that requires further research in order to find motives that are more applicable.
3	The influence of the political landscape of the country on marketing communications	The politics divide societies into specific groups that share certain values – creating a campaign that can successfully target focus groups of various values and beliefs is yet another challenge.
4	The general impact of social taboos on creating the marketing campaigns	One should remember that such concepts as death, disvaluing the national pride, anti-feminism, racism, religion, homosexuality and violence. The list could go on – the specific criteria depend on the national culture itself, and that is something that one can learn best holistically – by being in touch with the culture. The challenge is to be informed well enough – what are the social taboos in the particular social group, even if the group is as broad as a whole society?
5	Using the stereotypes in the marketing campaign	Using the stereotypes – while humorous marketing campaigns are generally memorable and welcome, it is not a rarity to find people who would feel offended by exposing certain national stereotypes – especially the ones stigmatizing the nations. The challenge in using the stereotypes (if one decides to do so) in the marketing campaign is to find out what stereotypes are generally seen as a burden, and what stereotypes can be considered amusing.
6	A constant search for new customer-product touchpoints in order to find new possibilities of placing the marketing content	For instance, the use of Point Of Sales (<i>non-digital</i>) Materials, such as store fridges with see-through LED displays.
7	New consumption forms	As more and more products are provided as services with periodic payments, the marketing content creators have a challenge of advertising the subscriptions successfully, so that such crucial information as the subscription fee is "digestible" for the customer.
8	Moving the digital communication to the internet large	The trend reported by one of the interviewees is moving the general digital marketing actions to the internet. One could interpret that as a diminishing role of the television in advertising, which creates a different point of view strategy wise – especially in the FMCG industry, where the broader the focus groups, the better. Designing the communication so that the appropriate emphasis is put into the online marketing actions, and that the appropriate emphasis is put into the TV, even if its importance is on the fall is yet another challenge.
9	Having a well-planned, introduced and working e-commerce sales system.	Planning, introducing and operating on an e-commerce system is challenging, as it is a huge change in product offering of a company that requires resources – specialized, knowledgeable people and funds.
10	The Corporate Social Responsibility Trend in Marketing	The CSR trend is on the rise, also in the CEE countries. Consumers pay more and more attention to concepts such as fair trade – implementing these into the communication can be challenging, as it requires factual knowledge about the company's CSR, it requires the knowledge that answers the question – "Is the company in fact able to use its CSR policies as an advantage in the marketing communication?"
11	The Zero Waste Trend in Marketing	A marketing communication involving the zero waste trend might bring substantial results in sales improvements, as in the case of the CSR trend – the zero waste trend is on the rise in the CEE countries as well. As in the case above, the potential controversies that would result in promoting the zero waste trend, while not implementing zero waste actions would not only affect the sales, but also the overall image of the company. In other words – one has to be sure that the company is subject to promote itself with the zero waste trend.

Figure 11. The Summary of Challenges

The above consist of all the challenges that were identified through the research process. To conclude both the table and the research process itself – the combined (desktop/empirical) research has resulted in identifying 16 challenges, ranging from

very broad challenges, such as the one regarding oversimplifying the national cultures, to very specific, such as using Point of Sales Materials in the marketing communication. As these challenges have already been compared, and the correlations between them were identified – repetitions will not be made.

5 Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

The subchapters 4.1 (Comparative Analysis) and 4.2 (The Challenges Identified) provides us the image of a certain discrepancy between the knowledge of the scientific sources accessed by the desktop research, and the empirical research, that is interviewing the people that have a special relationship with the subject of the research.

One of the reasons of such discrepancy could be the different scope these two groups of sources provide – one has more general and analytic outlook that considers the subject as a broader problem, while the other gives us very specific answers that come from the hands-on experience. As generally specialists, not only in the industry considered, but in the general understanding are professionals with particular proficiency in a certain subject – hence why the perspective is not as broad, but particularly specific.

As I have mentioned in the subchapters before – certain correlations between the challenges pointed appear.

These correlations include for instance the methods selection and application. As the world and its development is at an astonishingly fast pace, more and more marketing methods appear, both digital, and non-digital. Some of these methods gain relevance, for instance the new social media marketing channels, such as Instagram or TikTok, to name the digital methods, or to name the non-digital methods - all of the forms of advertisements that use the surfaces of the means of public transport, or the infrastructure – it is virtually impossible to imagine modern cities without buses and bus stops bearing advertisements. On the other hand (as one of the interviewees has observed) a trend of moving the majority of digital advertising to the internet can be observed, which leaves the television as less relevant than it was before.

Another aspect of great importance to which great attention was paid was the multi-channel campaigns and their successes. This is a problem that is tied closely, or even results from the first correlation - nowadays the marketing campaigns have to use many channels, in order to reach many focus groups of different characteristics. Hence why the companies do not stop to search for new methods, new customer-product touchpoints that enable the marketing specialists to use their creativity, and

that enable the companies to market their products more efficiently. In the ideal scenario – with the substantial and measurable influence on sales.

There are also new consumption forms and subscriptions are not a rarity anymore, also in the branches of retail that one could consider as the FMCG – we could think of oral care products, shaving instruments or other cosmetics. While marketing the regular, classic FMCG goods that are bought exactly when needed, the marketing of subscription offers differs significantly – as the consumption forms differ.

Another point, or a subpoint of the multi-channel campaigning to which a certain dose of attention was paid was the e-commerce sales and marketing. The current situation that changes the world when that paper is being written (the COVID-19 pandemics) highlights the need of implementing the e-commerce systems as a part of the offering. The customers demand buying their goods and services online, also in the case of FMCGs – it is now not at all uncommon to be able to order one's groceries online all across Europe, and these very groceries still consist of the Fast Moving Consumer Goods.

Another common challenge (common in a sense that both the literature authors and the specialists with hands-on knowledge point) to which attention is paid is the technical communication challenge. AA batteries are Fast Moving Consumer Goods, razors (one could think of Gillette that keeps surprising their customers by adding even more blades) are also Fast Moving Consumer Goods. These are some of the examples of marketable items whose features are technical, and highlighting these features in the marketing communication is what customers demand – as such language that highlights these features has been used for years successfully. The challenge of not overcrowding the marketing communication with the technical features of the marketed good or service is presenting the data appropriately and skillfully. One technical information that can cause particular difficulties in advertising is the subscription, and to be exact – the subscription payments and conditions. It is a challenge once again related to the previous challenge. If we take an example of the Gillette razor with multiple blades that comes as a revolution to the market, the number of blades is no less important than the conditions of the subscription of, for instance, oral care subscription company.

The challenge however remains the same – to market the technical information, that is often presented in numbers skillfully.

To conclude, comparing all of the challenges identified at the very first take seemed to be unreliable – as it also seemed that the challenges identified by the broad scientific outlook do not always apply to the reality of the FMCG marketing specialists, and that the challenges identified by the people of hands-on experience are even too specific, and focused on a particularly narrow problems.

However, the discrepancy comes from the difference of perspectives – a person analyzing the whole image of the industry will always have other observations that a person analyzing their own, individual work that they specialize in. One could think of that as a big, yet very detailed pie chart. While the first group, the authors mostly focus on the biggest numbers of each piece of the pie chart, the specialists focus on their own, small piece – hence the difference of perspectives.

5.2 Recommendations

There are two recommendations that I would like to make in the paper – one is general work of Ajay K. Manrai, the University of Delaware professor, whose two publications (mentioned later in the references) I have used vastly. Professor Manrai specializes in the marketing with a cultural context – which makes his works an exceptional source of topical knowledge in topics like the one of the paper presented. Both of the publications were very helpful and enabled me to create the comparative analysis and draw the correlations between the challenges observed by the authors (including Manrai, actually) and the challenges observed, or experienced by the people of hands-on experience in marketing content creation in the FMCG industry in the CEE Region.

The other recommendation I have are the works of professor Marin Marinov – his comparative analysis of Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine was a great source of topical knowledge as well, including the consumer behavior in these countries or the consumer preferences. Also other notes pointed by professor Marinov were very helpful in understanding the market conditions of these countries. Albeit I have not used the knowledge regarding Ukraine, because as per French National Institute of Statistic definition it is not classified as a country from the region, the comparative analysis of the other two countries were very helpful – and the whole analysis was not only scientifically worthy, but also interesting to read from a marketing point of view.

Perhaps one would not consider that a recommendation *per se*, but articles written by major analytical companies such as Nielsen or Kantar that I have used while planning that paper can be very helpful, especially when taking a broader perspective on the subject – as I have done while carrying out the desktop research.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As a person that has definitely not mastered the very broad subject of FMCG marketing in the CEE region, but as a person, that has created the paper presented I have a couple of insights that I believe would be very beneficial for individuals or companies planning to research the topic further.

First and foremost, narrowing the scope of the research down as much as possible. That is going to make the final thesis very specific and useful. Should we imagine a case scenario: an American FMCG company, that is not yet present in a certain CEE market, plans to enter that particular market and base their marketing communications on the digital actions – for instance the Instagram Advertisements, Facebook Advertisements and website banners. Knowing the challenges even before approaching the research on one's own can be a great timesaver. What is more, that means being more prepared to entering the market than the competitors – and this is one of the factors that can considerably influence establishing the position and reputation of the company in a new market.

What I have also observed is that quite little attention is paid to the potentially controversial topics in marketing in case of certain CEE countries – for instance Estonia, Latvia, Croatia or Slovenia are some of the countries that seem to be omitted when researching for theses regarding the marketing controversies in these countries. That can be influenced by the size of these markets – each of them is relatively small, compared to Poland or Romania, but for big multinational FMCG corporations even the smallest markets matter. As the language of the paper is English, I have, in fact, limited my desktop research efforts to the resources in that language – as I thought that online translators might not always convert the content into English properly.

In other words – the controversies in marketing in the cultural scopes of Estonia, Latvia, Croatia or Slovenia are definitely the topics to be considered as topics of

scientific interest – English analyses of these cultures in the marketing context would benefit future authors greatly, and significantly ease the whole process.

What results from the point above is the manner of writing – I would suggest writing the thesis in a guideline manner, so that anyone who is going to access the thesis and wishes to make real use of it can do so quickly, efficiently and easily.

Speaking of the desktop research, I have only used the information accessible online. Libraries (especially the physical libraries that have collections of books in CEE national languages) might be a great source when one focuses on a particular, specific market, for instance the aforementioned Estonian, Latvian, Croatian or Slovenian market. These methods however bear the difficulty of translating – should one not read in that language themselves, working on such a source will be very challenging. The Internet however presents a very vast choice of sources anyway. Another thing regarding that is the current situation – the physically-located libraries are often subject to the national restrictions, which can significantly harden the already challenging experience, as long as the COVID-19 pandemics lasts.

Emphasizing the empirical research more. In the topics where the cultural background plays a crucial role the empirical research is priceless. Information that one will not be able to find in the scientific sources can be accessed, and empirical experiences can be described.

5.4 Validity, Reliability and Relevance

Once the research and the analysis through the results were completed, it was possible to self-evaluate the efforts that were put into the research that was later used as a knowledge foundation of the paper.

One of the key values when researching and writing the paper was validity – so in other words, the topicality of the sources used. Fortunately the topic covered (FMCG marketing) was not a topic that would be neglected by publication authors before – so finding great topical sources, such as those written by Manrai or Marinov was possible.

Even at the planning stage the validity of sources was key. Even when the research was not as developed as in the later stages of the thesis work, a certain emphasis

was put on the validity – hence why the articles published by reputable companies (such as Kantar or Nielsen) were used.

Also reliability was one of the criteria to which particular emphasis was applied – and a great example of that could be the definition of the CEE which came from the French National Institute of Statistics. In other words, the credibility of used sources was considered – for instance the aforementioned professor Manrai is a professor at the University of Delaware – which is a brand in itself.

What helped with keeping the relevance in research were the demarcation criteria – all of the research was done in order to explain the thesis problem. While (as predicted) some of the concepts that came into life while writing seemed tempting (such as considering the Ukrainian market, and the situation of the FMCG marketing in the country) the topicality of the research was kept.

Speaking of the empirical part – a certain dose of flexibility was needed in order to provide the answers to questions. The reason for that was the overall difficulty in receiving the answers from the individuals, that could be particularly and precisely considered as FMCG marketing specialists in the CEE. While interviewing the respondents, or while looking for the respondents what was noticed was the general unwillingness to answer the question – which could be the reason of time constraints. On the other hand, also marketing students were asked to answer these questions (many of whom worked in the marketing departments of FMCG companies), and their unwillingness to answer, often combined with promising to answer and failing to do so – was especially surprising. Although some of the respondents were not exactly and precisely the FMCG marketing specialists in the CEE – they were all individuals who had plenty of experience and knowledge in the field, and in the particular region, hence why the reliability, validity and relevance was also ensured and kept in the empirical part of the thesis.

5.5 Reflection on Learning

While working on the research, both desktop and empirical, I have learned plenty about the practicalities of FMCG marketing content creation in the CEE region. Considering the regions rather turbulent past (in comparison to other subregions of the EU, namely the Nordics and the Western Europe) there were many reasons

coming from the research and the learning process itself, such as how diverse the societies are, and how different the countries are, or in other words – how differentiated the countries are. Obviously the market sizes differ (which influences the offering) but so does the purchasing power, and what I personally found to be the most interesting – the buying behavior.

What I found to be the biggest benefit of the research and the process of working on the paper itself was the cultural knowledge. It is not a common knowledge to realize what are the buying behaviors of individual residing in the CEE region. Knowing that the commercials or advertisements in Romania or Bulgaria should have the technical specifications of products, should there be any specifications that are of particular importance for the potential buyers, and of particular interest of the buyers. But one should also remember that overcrowding the campaign with the technical aspects can be quite troublesome and tiresome for the audience – that includes also the FMCG sector, as for instance the shaving razors or AA batteries can be fairly qualified as within the sector – the costs are relatively low, they are meant to be used (usually) immediately after purchase and are mostly the goods of daily use for most people – hence the qualification.

But that is just an example. Another piece of information, or simply knowledge that I found to be especially valuable is the matter of controversial motives that one should either operate with very skillfully, or avoid at all cost – analyzing case studies helped me to understand the ideas of the controversies, and as it turns out, there is many more eyebrow-raising topics than the ones we typically consider the most controversial – be it the individual, sensitive criteria of people (race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity). Also the references to the culture itself are quite a sensitive topic, as well as anything regarding the violence (also wars) or the history of nations. Also stereotypes are risky – there is a potential risk of offending large groups of people who have more serious approach to such topics.

What also came to a surprise was the fact that national sources (written by the CEE-based, or CEE-originated authors) seemed to be not as countable as the foreign sources – namely the American, including the great quality works of Ajay K. Manrai that I have mentioned in the chapters before.

And the last, but not the least – the dissonance between the challenges observed and recorded in the desktop research, and the challenges observed by the FMCG,

CEE-based marketing specialists with hands-on experience. The differences of perspectives enabled me to notice the abundance of the challenges, both the general that one can observe from the broader perspective on the region, and the very specific challenges that one can only observe by either gaining the hands-on experience themselves, or interviewing the people involved. While carrying out the research, I managed to perform the latter – and I think it did provide a great insight of how do the practicalities of marketing content creation in the CEE look like – especially considering the FMCG industry.

To conclude the reflection on learning, I find my general learning process to be very beneficial, as the knowledge I have gained during the research process, and during the writing process would not be so easily accessible – the FMCG marketing in the CEE region is a very specific topic in which there is still plenty to explore – which can be the potential road sign for the future researchers.

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