

EVALUATION OF FRANCHISE SYSTEM WEBSITES: THE EVIDENCE FROM CROATIA

ALEKSANDAR ERCEG^{id} IVAN KELIĆ^{id} ANTUN BILOŠ^{id}

ABSTRACT

This paper mainly aims to provide in-depth research on how Croatian franchisors utilise the possibilities of the digital environment in terms of their digital presence. The main focus of digital presence analysis is set on franchisors' official website and supporting communication channels. For research, this paper focused on creating and testing a specialised evaluation model. The proposed model is dominantly based on three applicable models (Martinez & Gauchi, 2010; Rao & Frazer, 2005; Stefanović & Stanković, 2014) and revised according to the situational factors. A redesigned model was used to evaluate websites of Croatian franchisors, mainly focusing on the provided information, website usability, communication possibilities, and promotional activities. This research paper offers two main outcomes. The first outcome is the redesigned evaluation model, which was applied and tested with several provided improvement guidelines. The second outcome is the comparative analysis of the selected Croatian franchisors in terms of their digital presence and its relationship to several market-related indicators. The paper presents a literature review on franchising e-presence worldwide. The research results presented in this paper offer a better insight into the use of websites by Croatian franchisors. Based on their use, certain conclusions can be made. Consequently, a contribution is made to theoretical research about franchising in Croatia and can serve as a framework for further research in the region. Based on the findings of this paper and the information provided by Croatian franchisors about their products and/or services to current and potential buyers, investments in websites result in wider franchising networks and greater success in the market.

KEY WORDS

franchising, franchisor, Internet, websites, Croatia, e-commerce

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INTRODUCTION

In today's global and competitive world, customers can use opportunities created by the online presence of sellers (Shanthi & Kannainah, 2015; Reddy & Raju, 2016) and possibilities to change channels

(Verhagen & Van Dolen, 2009; Madan & Yadav, 2018). In this market environment, franchisors have to choose appropriate e-commerce strategies to achieve success (Perrigot & Pénard, 2013).

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The paper mainly aims to provide in-depth research on how Croatian franchisors use the Internet for promotion and recruitment to their franchise system. The first part of the paper gives a literature review connected with the franchising business model and e-marketing. The second part presents the current franchising status in Croatia, which is the foundation of this research. The third part of the paper looks at websites of Croatian franchisors and examines them with score distribution per variable and website. Based on research results, a proposal is made on how Croatian franchisors can use their websites to expand their franchise systems. The final part presents the conclusion and proposes further research activities.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. FRANCHISING

Franchising is a global business model that allows established companies to grow and expand geographically and start-up entrepreneurs to launch new ventures (Erceg, 2017). Boroian and Boroian (1987) defined that franchising occurs when a company (franchisor) licenses its brand and the way of doing business to another company (franchisee), which agrees to work following the franchising contract. Other authors defined franchising based on a different emphasis, such as trade and/or service mark (Spinelli, 2004) or a legal relationship between the parties (Emmerson, 1980) etc. The relationship between a franchisor and franchisees includes not only the product, service, and trademark, but the

entire business format itself: a marketing strategy and plan, operating manuals and standards, quality control, and continuing two-way communication (Lafontaine, 1992). Companies use this business model to expand geographically without the need for extensive resources or expenditures (Alon, Alpeza & Erceg, 2010; Kavaliauskė & Vaiginienė, 2011).

Franchising offers advantages for both sides. It is a confirmed business model with market recognition ensured by the brand (Maitland, 2000) and franchisee training compensating for the potential lack of knowledge and experience (Spasić, 1996). Further benefits include the franchisor's development programme and lower risk of failure (Shane, 2005). Franchising can be used by a franchisor for expansion, i.e., to achieve faster growth with lower required capital and making use of the economies of scale. The other party, i.e., a franchisee, provides money, managers, and time (Maitland, 2000). A franchisor aiming for higher revenues from royalties faces a potential disadvantage due to the franchisee's objective to maximise earnings and control expenses (Shane, 2005). A franchise system brings franchisees advantages through location selection, standardised products and services, and lower risk of failure (Maitland, 2000; Szajt, 2013). Nieman and Barber (1987) stated that extreme control by franchisors could be a significant disadvantage for franchisees, while Selnew (1998) indicated further disadvantages, such as overdependence on the franchise system.

The franchising business model has a significant impact on the world economy. Based on Schwartz (2016), franchising accumulates almost USD 1.6 trillion, involves more than 2.2 million companies,

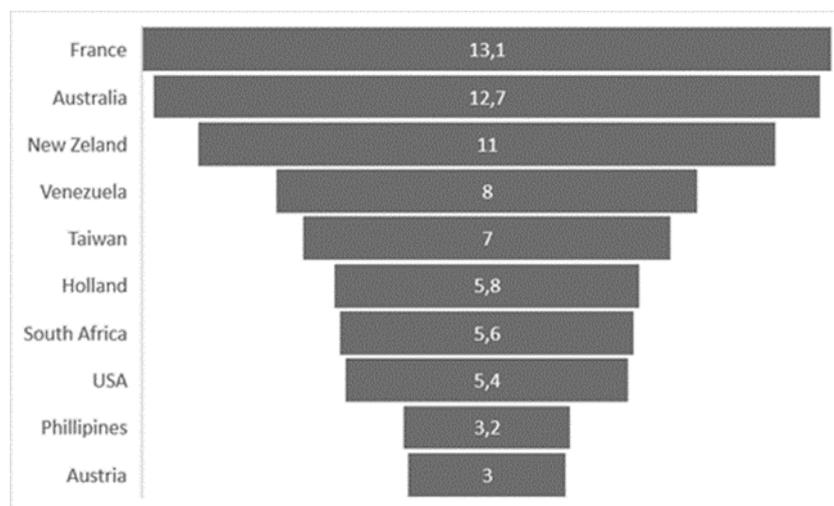


Fig. 1. Contribution of franchising to the country's GDP

Source: elaborated by the authors based on Schwartz (2016).

employs nearly 20 million people, and its economic output comprises an important share of the national GDP averaging 4% (Fig. 1).

Franchising is gaining acceptance as a global growth strategy (Baena, 2018). According to the World Franchise Council (U.S. Commercial Service, 2018), franchising is present in all parts of the world, with China ranking first by offered franchise brands (4 500), followed by South Korea (4 288) and the USA (3 828). Chen (2019) stated that the popularity of franchising business models is still growing, giving rise to new e-business models. Thus, franchising systems must accept new technologies and adapt their operations to the growing needs of consumers and buyers.

1.2. ELECTRONIC MARKETING

Electronic marketing can be defined as the marketing activities of a company implemented through information and communication technologies. Many authors agree that information technologies have fundamentally changed marketing activities (Persaud & Azhar, 2012, p. 418). Numerous definitions of e-marketing have been suggested over the years. Considered as a supplement of marketing information systems, electronic marketing can be defined as the process of creation, pricing, distribution, and promotion of goods aimed at profitably satisfying customer needs and desires by using digital technologies and the Internet (Ružić et al., 2009, p. 62). According to authors, electronic marketing is the use of marketing information technologies in the process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers, as well as in customer relationship management, to the benefit of both the organisation and its stakeholders.

Electronic marketing campaigns are becoming more frequent and better organised, as digital platforms are ever more incorporated into marketing plans, and “electronic marketing is the opportunity of electronic communication, which is performed by the marketers, to give your support to the goods and the services towards the marketplace” (Aswathy & Vishnu, 2019, p. 7557). Consequently, electronic marketing makes it easier to define strategic target consumer groups and act faster and more flexibly adapting marketing activities to their specific needs.

The importance of electronic marketing for companies resides in “changes in the ways that today’s consumers gather and assess information and make purchasing decisions, in addition to the channels they

use for this process” (Leefflang et al., 2014). According to Key, “Internet has produced new efficiencies in the commoditization of information, and electronic marketing channels refer to Internet systems that can simultaneously create, promote, and deliver value from producers to consumers through digital networks” (Key, 2017). Therefore, applications for databases and technologies for contacting consumers provide electronic marketing with more detailed insight into the characteristics and behaviour of consumers. Unlike the traditional, analogue offline marketing, the most significant advantage of the digital marketing is to “be able to reach the target audience by using interactive media, and the most important difference between electronic and offline marketing is that in digital marketing the data is used properly” (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

The essential benefit of the marketing information system is the ability to monitor a company’s market environment more effectively, and specifically, customer relations, to assist managers and salespeople in meeting their marketing objectives (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002, p. 98). Some authors suggest that the evolution of web technologies “has generated significant business opportunities for business organizations and their customers” (Lopez & Bonilla, 2014, p. 2). The primary component is to attract consumers and retain the best. A business that uses technologies becomes more transparent and open to the public by bringing out the research results, product specifications, encountered problems, new ideas and thoughts from partners included in the process. Furthermore, “customers additionally help businesses to improve their services while exchanging information about the services or products” (Sharafi et al., 2019, p. 120). From this viewpoint, vital technological strides are visible from the transition from web 2.0 to web 3.0 technologies and semantic search of content (Crespo et al., 2010; Lies, 2019). This approach provides additional value to products and services and can be used by businesses in electronic marketing strategies.

1.3. FRANCHISING AND E-PRESENCE

The academic research of franchising and e-presence (e-marketing, e-commerce, etc.) is still scarce. However, the importance of these topics is growing. The existing research can be divided into (i) the examination of franchisor’s website contents and (ii) factors that enable the implementation of the franchisor’s e-commerce website (Pénard & Perrigot, 2017).

Based on their research, Plave and Amolosch (2000) found that the franchising system usually uses one of the following four models for Internet presence (Fig. 2).

In the case of free presence, the franchisee develops a website without any restriction. In contrast, the total prohibition model forbids a franchisee from having any online presence. The second and third models provide franchisees with more or less control of their Internet presence. In the second model, the franchisor allows the franchisee to control the content of their website since the Internet is seen as a way of communication. In the third model, the franchisor develops the website and assigns sections to franchisees. Cedrola and Memmo (2009) summarised areas, in which opportunities could be created for franchising by using the Internet as (i) a tool for communication with end-users; (ii) an e-commerce tool for promotion and sales; (iii) a tool for recruitment; (iv) a tool for communication with the franchisee network; and (v) a tool for education and information used instead of or together with traditional methods.

Today, many franchisors worldwide have significant online presence using their websites, their Facebook page, a Twitter account, or other social networks (Pénard & Perrigot, 2017), and this represents the tool for communication with end-users. Franchise systems use different social networks to communicate with their customers (current and potential) to provide information about products and/or services users need or want to buy. Also, franchise systems use their websites more extensively for distribution and sales of their products and services as an addition to their physical stores.

Franchising and e-commerce have found their place in many academic disciplines, such as economics, organisational theory, marketing, and information technologies (Plave & Miller, 2001; Kremez et al., 2019b). Although the alignment of e-commerce and franchising should increase performance, these business models can be seen as fundamentally opposite. The franchising business model is seen as an effective distribution system that attracts capital by giving exclusive territorial rights to franchisees. Cliquet and Voropanova (2016) stated that e-commerce widened the geographical reach, increasing the number of

customers. In franchising, one of the key benefits is a protected territory (Dixon & Quinn, 2004), which is not the case in e-commerce. Based on this, the franchise system had an initial problem accepting e-commerce in the same way as non-franchising companies (Plave & Miller, 2001). E-commerce can provide an efficient distribution method for retail and service companies (Madan & Yadav, 2018). However, many franchise systems had difficulties implementing e-commerce strategies to accommodate the needs of their clients (Kremez et al., 2019a).

Compared to other business types, franchising systems find it more complicated to coordinate different e-commerce activities and uphold the brand image. The complication arises from the need for franchisors to create an e-commerce strategy that can efficiently integrate their brand policy, marketing strategy, and distribution and maintain a good relationship with franchisees (Cedrola & Memmo, 2009). These activities must be innovative to create an optimal strategy to secure benefits from e-commerce opportunities for both parties (Chen, 2016) without any conflict with competition laws or franchise agreements (Knack & Bloodhart, 2001). Although some studies (Plave & Miller, 2001) state that e-commerce is suited for franchising due to the recognised brands and existing physical stores, others (Watson et al., 2002) underline that it could lower the need for franchising as a way of geographical expansion. According to Dixon and Quinn (2004), e-commerce will merge traditional and online retail methods. Franchising can use e-commerce for operations improvement and profitability. Combining traditional and online retail can be a challenge for franchisors. Chen (2016) noted that advice offered by Internet consultants have resulted in some conflicts between franchisors and franchisees since the consultants failed to appreciate the franchising relationship and proposed a wrong e-commerce strategy.

Lopez-Fernandez and Perrigot (2018) investigated the use of franchisee recruitment through the franchisor's websites. They examined the website content and its connection with the chain growth in terms of new potential franchisees. Their study classified information following its symbolic and functional benefit concerning the franchising system brand.



Fig. 2. Four different ways for franchising to be on the Internet, based on the franchisee's level of autonomy
Source: elaborated by the authors based on Plave and Amolosch (2000).

The mentioned studies (Plave & Miller, 2001; Dixon & Quinn, 2004; Cedrola & Memmo, 2009; Cliquet & Voropanova, 2016; Frazer et al., 2016) helped to create a snapshot of e-commerce acceptance in franchising systems within different geographic situations. Still, there is a persistent need to better understand the logic behind choosing an ideal method for e-commerce implementation, especially within recognised franchise systems, which are frequently developed on the basis of traditional marketing exchange methods.

2. FRANCHISING IN CROATIA

Franchising in Croatia can be divided into two phases before and after independence. The first phase started in the late 1960s with the arrival of Diners Club International to former Yugoslavia (Alon, Alpeza & Erceg, 2010). They were followed by some domestic companies like Ina (several gas stations) and Varteks (Levi's franchise) (Erceg, 2017). The arrival of McDonald's in the mid-1990s coincided with the start of the second phase of franchising in Croatia. Soon after, Croatian companies started with franchising activities, i.e., Kraš as a franchisor and Sportina and Tekstilpromet as master franchisees for fashion franchise systems (Erceg, 2018). Subway and Fornetti followed next, and shopping malls attracted other franchise systems, such as Calzedonia and Geox (Erceg & Čičić, 2013).

In Croatia, fashion and food (restaurants and fast food) are two leading industrial sectors in terms of

the franchising presence (Fig. 3). They are followed by real estate agencies (Re/Max and Century 21) and foreign language schools (Helen Doron Early English) (Erceg, 2018).

According to several authors (Kukec, 2016; Erceg, 2018), 180 franchise systems are currently operating in Croatia with 17 500 employees at 1 000 different locations. Out of 180 franchise systems operating in Croatia, 25% are of Croatian origin. The biggest ones are Surf'n'fries (fast-food with more than 60 locations worldwide), Aqua (souvenir shops with 55 sites), Centar Energije (utilities with 15 locations in Croatia), and Mlinar (bakeries with more than ten locations worldwide) (Erceg, 2018). Beside traditional franchise systems in Croatia, there is one for-profit micro-franchising system Čuvar sjećanja (a burial ground management system with 10 locations in Croatia) (Erceg & Kukec, 2017).

Currently, Croatia has no legal regulation for franchising. This is not uncommon globally as only 30 countries have legally regulated franchising. In the Croatian legal system, franchising was mentioned in the Trade Act of 2003, but the term "franchising" was omitted in the amendments of 2008 (Erceg, 2016). In the remaining part of the European Union, franchising is currently defined as a vertical agreement between franchisors and franchisees partially regulated under the Vertical Block Exemption Regulation (Erceg, 2018).

Since franchising is developing as a business model in Croatia, it is also gaining importance as an academic research topic. The research about franchising can be divided into legal (Pražetina, 2005; Gorenc,

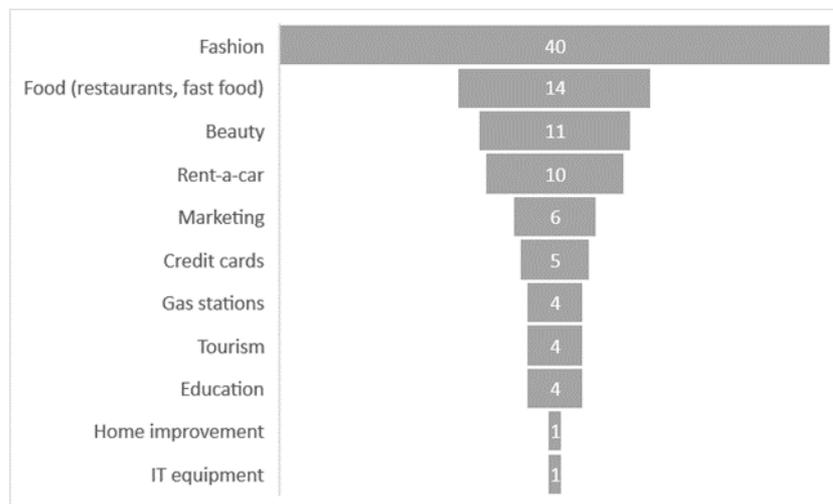


Fig. 2. Four different ways for franchising to be on the Internet, based on the franchise's level of autonomy
Source: elaborated by the authors based on Plave and Amolosch (2000).

2011) and economic parts. Under the financial topic of franchising, researchers examine franchising as a generator of development (Baresa, Ivanović & Bogdan, 2017), perceptions of different stakeholders about franchising in Croatia (Alon, Alpeza & Erceg, 2007; Alpeza, Erceg & Oberman Peterka, 2015), the importance of promotion for franchising (Buljubašić & Borić, 2014), the role of innovation in franchising (Ziolkowska & Erceg, 2016), and social franchising (Perić & Erceg, 2017).

3. WEBSITE USABILITY AND CONTENT

Usually, usability is described simply as ease of use of any given product or device. At the same time, web-usability stands for the capability of a website to be used quickly and effectively by its users (Shackel, 2009). The concept of usability in terms of website usage is fundamental when considering the significance of Internet information space and its growing adoption rate in the last two decades or more. Besides, the website content has been and still is related to website quality from several different standpoints and research goals (Rocha, 2012; Abdallah & Jaleel, 2015; Chiou, Lin & Perng, 2010). Websites are expected to provide a satisfying experience to their users (Esmeria & Seva, 2017). Furthermore, user expectations are growing at an accelerating pace. Several articles related to website usability evaluation will be briefly discussed below.

From the very beginning of the wide Internet usage in the 1990s, the idea behind web-usability gained momentum but also sparked a research interest. Jakob Nielsen is among the most influential researchers who focused on the usability topic. Nielsen is a widely cited and acclaimed author (Nielsen, 1995; Nielsen, & Loranger, 2006; Nielsen & Pernice, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2019), often referred to as “a top reference in web usability” (Martínez-Sala, Monserrat-Gauchi & Alemany-Martínez, 2020). Many studies and research efforts base their frameworks for usability testing on these principals. Furthermore, there are many different dimensions, through which the usability of websites can be evaluated (Kaur, Kaur & Kaur, 2016). However, it should be noted that the assessment of usability standards is highly time-sensitive due to the nature of everchanging user interaction with the available Internet information space.

Esmeria and Seva (2017) provided a literature review of web-usability and argued that many research studies were focusing on the design of usability. However, no standard usability index is derived to evaluate the usability of websites. Martínez-Sala, Monserrat-Gauchi and Alemany-Martínez (2020) proposed the User Usable Experience model (UUX) as a unified evaluation model that suggests a three-dimensional approach and focuses on usability, graphic design, and navigability in tourism websites. The proposed model is based on previously conducted research (Martínez-Sala, 2015). The authors found a positive correlation between the three elements and continued to confirm the value of the proposed model. Also, usability evaluation may entail the usage of analytical tools that focus on the technical aspects of websites. Kaur, Kaur and Kaur (2016) relied on automated tools to evaluate the website usability level.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

It should be noted that different types of websites may require different usability characteristics and goals (Esmeria & Seva, 2017). The literature review on the evaluation of franchise systems websites resulted in a somewhat limited number of relevant papers, related research efforts, and similar scientific analyses at the time of the manuscript preparation. In fact, “defining the perfect usability heuristics to evaluate certain websites is far from being a crowded area for research” (Esmeria & Seva, 2017). This research created a specialised evaluation model that focused on franchise systems websites. The proposed evaluation model is dominantly based on three applicable models: Martinez and Gauchi, 2010; Rao, 2005; Stefanović and Stanković, 2014.

Martinez and Gauchi (2010) determined the degree of website quality primarily based on website usability from the point of view of an end-user. The research was based on websites from Spanish franchises in the field of Optics and Optometry. A series of indicators based on Nielsen’s usability heuristics (Nielsen, 1995) was used to measure website usability. In total, ten sets comprising 76 items were used: system status (3 items), language (3 items), user control and freedom (6 items), consistency and standards (3 items), error prevention (2 items), recognition rather than recall (3 items), flexibility and efficiency of use (6 items), minimalist design (6 items), help

solving error (3 items), and help and documentation (3 items). Every item was measured on a 3-point scale (from 0 to 2).

In contrast to the previous model, which focused primarily on website usability, the other two utilised models concentrated on website content and target audience orientation. Rao and Frazer (2005) examined websites of Australian franchise systems as a communication medium for various audiences but specifically focused on franchisee prospects and potential customers. Their analytical model consists of two sets comprising 21 items: franchisee solicitation and coordination activity (11 items) and promotion activity on franchisors' websites (10 items). Every measured item used a dichotomous scale (0 and 1).

A relatively similar approach was adopted by Stefanović and Stanković (2014). They examined franchise systems in Serbia, Croatia, Australia, US, and the UK while analysing the content of franchise system websites intended for two specific audiences: franchisees and end-customers. The model uses two sets comprising 16 variables: connecting with existing and potential franchisees (9 items) and establishing a relationship with end customers (7 items). Again, every item was measured on a dichotomous scale (Yes and No).

These three models served as an initial base for the development of the revised model for the evaluation of franchise system websites. The revised model adopts both approaches, the evaluation of website usability as well as the website content, but uses adjusted measures according to the situational factors. Namely, several items used in previous models were not applicable measures due to their obsolescence.

The revised evaluation model consists of two variable sets of higher rank combining the two approaches above:

- A — Website Usability (4 constructs with 19 items),
 - A1 — Design (8),
 - A2 — Navigation (5),
 - A3 — Language (3),
 - A4 — User-control (3).
- B — Website Content (2 constructs with 15 items),
 - B1 — For franchisees (8),
 - B2 — For end-customers (7).

Every item is measured on a dichotomous scale (0 and 1). At this point in the model revision process, no additional item or construct weights were used and calculated. The total model evaluation score (M_s)

per website is a sum of A (website usability score) and B (website content score). The overall score ranges from 0 to a maximum of 34, with a higher score suggesting a larger number of satisfied items, in other words, a better performing website. Due to the partially subjective nature of measured items, it is suggested that the grading of a particular item is conducted individually by several (preferably an odd number of) researchers followed by a group comparison and conclusion.

To interpret the acquired results, the mean score per item is observed. The fulfilment of the score criterion is calculated as an additional measure to estimate the level of fulfilled items against the possible maximum score ranging from 0–100%.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

A revised model was used to evaluate a sample of 40 Croatian franchisor websites, primarily focusing on website usability and content in terms of provided information, communication possibilities, and promotional activities. A convenience sample was generated from a list of companies that belong to Croatian franchise systems having in mind the distribution in various business sectors. Every website in the sample was measured for 34 items individually by three researchers to provide an adequate level of objectivity. The items with varying scores were highlighted and discussed between researchers until the agreement has been reached for all the items. Initial scoring was conducted during September and October of 2019, as well as several sessions of discussions regarding the items with varying scores.

The research results suggest that the two best performing websites are Image Haddad (#18) and Mlinar (#24), with an identical evaluation score of $M_s=26$, followed by a group of 16 websites with a score of over 20 ($M_s>20$). This combined group of 18 websites represents the highest scoring in the data set. An additional group of 19 websites scored between 16 and 20, while the remaining three websites scored 15 and less. The suggested score margins for website grouping were created on an arbitrary basis but related to the average scores.

The distribution of research results (Table 1) suggests that websites had an acceptable outcome in the usability section (A) with a mean score of $A_m=14.83$ ($sd=1.45$) out of a potential maximum of 19, meeting 78% of the potential maximum score criterion. Websites received generally good results for design

Tab. 1. Website evaluation score of selected Croatian franchisors

No.	COMPANY NAME (ALPHABETICAL ORDER)	A1	A2	A3	A4	A (SUM)	B1	B2	B (SUM)	Ms
1.	Aquamaritime	6	2	2	2	12	1	1	2	14
2.	BIJELI SVIJET d.o.o./LG	7	4	2	2	15	4	2	6	21
3.	Bike Express	5	3	2	2	12	2	2	4	16
4.	Business Cafe d.o.o.	8	4	1	2	15	6	1	7	22
5.	CAPACITAS CATENA j. d.o.o. (Body Creator)	8	4	2	2	16	4	3	7	23
6.	CARWIZ d.o.o.	7	4	2	2	15	4	5	9	24
7.	Cetury 21	7	4	2	3	16	5	3	8	24
8.	CHORIDIUM d.o.o. (ICE' N' GO)	6	4	2	2	14	0	1	1	15
9.	ClueGo	7	4	2	2	15	3	4	7	22
10.	Cognitum	7	4	1	2	14	2	2	4	18
11.	COMPETO d.o.o. (TORTE-I-TO)	6	4	1	2	13	1	3	4	17
12.	Diadema	8	4	2	3	17	2	5	7	24
13.	DIRECT BOOKER d.o.o. (BOOKER TOOLS)	7	4	1	3	15	5	4	9	24
14.	FMG d.o.o. (FUNNY CHIPS)	6	4	2	2	14	4	2	6	20
15.	GALEB dalmatinska trikotaža d.d.	7	4	2	2	15	3	6	9	24
16.	GRECA CENTAR d.o.o. (ČUVAR SJEĆANJA)	6	4	1	2	13	4	2	6	19
17.	Husse	8	4	1	2	15	5	4	9	24
18.	Image Haddad	8	4	1	3	16	4	6	10	26
19.	INA	8	4	2	3	17	3	4	7	24
20.	LAKA SPIKA d.o.o. (Helen Doron)	8	4	2	3	17	5	2	7	24
21.	LUMARIS STUDIO d.o.o. (TAKE ME HOME)	7	4	2	3	16	1	4	5	21
22.	Matić savjetovanje d.o.o. (WOMEN IN ADRIA)	8	4	1	2	15	0	2	2	17
23.	METAMORFOZA d.o.o. (MUZEJ ILUZIJA)	7	4	2	3	16	1	2	3	19
24.	Mlinar	8	4	2	3	17	4	5	9	26
25.	Museum of senses	8	4	2	2	16	1	3	4	20
26.	Nado Centar	7	4	2	2	15	2	3	5	20
27.	Narodne novine	7	4	1	3	15	2	5	7	22
28.	Nextbike	8	4	2	2	16	1	3	4	20
29.	PET-IT-DUO d.o.o. (GOOD FOOD)	7	4	1	2	14	1	4	5	19
30.	PLACE2DESIGN d.o.o. (PLACE2GO)	8	4	2	2	16	3	3	6	22
31.	SNF ADRIA d.o.o. (SURF'N'FRIES)	7	3	1	2	13	3	1	4	17
32.	TAHOGRAF d.o.o.	6	4	1	2	13	1	3	4	17
33.	Taxi Cammeo	8	3	2	3	16	3	4	7	23
34.	Tekstilpromet	7	4	2	2	15	1	2	3	18
35.	TINKER LABS	8	4	1	2	15	3	2	5	20
36.	Tokić	8	4	2	2	16	2	2	4	20
37.	UNITAS NEKTRETNINE d.o.o. (RE/MAX HRVATSKA)	7	4	2	2	15	3	2	5	20
38.	Vulco	6	3	1	2	12	2	2	4	16
39.	Xtravaganza	7	2	1	2	12	3	4	7	19
40.	Živa kava d.o.o. (VIVAScaffè)	7	4	1	2	14	0	1	1	15
	DESCRIPTIVES	A1	A2	A3	A4	A (SUM)	B1	B2	B (SUM)	Ms
	Mean score	7.15	3.80	1.60	2.28	14.83	2.60	2.98	5.58	20.40
	Standard deviation	0.80	0.52	0.50	0.45	1.45	1.57	1.39	2.31	3.18
	Min	5	2	1	2	12	0	1	1	14
	Max	8	4	2	3	17	6	6	10	26
	Fulfilment of score criterion (%)	0.89	0.76	0.53	0.76	0.78	0.33	0.43	0.37	0.60

($A1m=7.15$, $sd=0.80$, $max=8$), as well as navigation ($A2m=3.80$, $sd=0.52$, $max=5$) and user-control ($A4m=2.28$, $sd=0.45$, $max=3$), while language received somewhat lower grades ($A3m=1.60$, $sd=0.50$, $max=3$). In contrast, the mean score for website content section (B) was considerably different, with a mean score of $Bm=5.58$ ($sd=2.31$) out of the potential maximum of 15, meeting only 37% of the potential maximum score criterion. The effect is especially apparent with content for franchisees ($B1m=2.60$, $sd=1.57$, $max=8$), while content for end-customers scored slightly better ($B2m=2.98$, $sd=1.39$, $max=7$). Simply put, website usability performed considerably better in comparison to website content, which apparently lacked expected content elements. In total, analysed websites had an average mean score of $Msm=20.40$ ($sd=3.18$, $max=34$), meeting 60% of the potential maximum score criterion.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Based on the conducted research and website analysis, several conclusions can be drawn. The observed franchise systems websites scored average results measured on the revised evaluation model scale; website usability had a considerably higher impact on the total score, while website content evaluation provided clear evidence for a significant room for improvement. These improvement possibilities are especially noticeable in the content section related to (potential) franchisees where approximately only a third of expected information was provided, on average. This issue has been detected as the biggest weakness of the observed website sample. Even though the items for measuring website usability are quite different from the website content, both aspects contribute to the website user experience and communication as well as the business goals of the given franchise system. A well-crafted franchise system website can be used as a reliable promotional tool in an integrated marketing approach (McClung et al., 2012).

Following the research results of Esmeria and Seva (2017), still, no standard usability index exists for usability evaluation, especially since different types of websites may require different evaluation approaches. Previous comparable research efforts suggest mostly similar findings. The utilisation of digital technologies and Internet-based possibilities is still at the development phase in franchise systems in Croatia (and similar markets). Websites of fran-

chise companies are more focused on providing information to end-users than on information and services to (potential) franchisees (Stefanović & Stanković, 2014).

The proposed evaluation model offers a more comprehensive approach to understanding the franchise systems website and their heterogeneous audiences, considering the content as well as user experience thought usability standards. However, there are several noticeable limitations to its concept and usage. Website usability is significantly influenced by time-sensitive web standards, which can drastically change and evolve in relatively short periods. Besides, the model does not use any item weighing after the measurement, which could have a direct effect on the score value and interpretation. The subjective nature of utilised items in the model may result in the need for a more significant number of researchers involved in the measurement process. Further research efforts should consider these limitations and provide some solutions through rigorous model testing.

CONCLUSIONS

Irrespective of advertising techniques used by a business, the current wealth of information demands creativity and the ability to change continually. The development of technology accepted by the general population resulted in businesses minimising their activities to a small number of sites in the online environment. Businesses receive information gradually and create their strategies. The collected information may be diverse, from segmentation of users accessing the online sites to the creation of a marketing campaign dependent on the preferences and interests of users. The model evaluation aimed to analyse the websites of franchisers in the Republic of Croatia from the standpoint of information provided to end consumers (B2C) and other businesses (B2B). Although consumers use rapidly developing technologies enabling them to receive information from different sources (social networks, specialised news portals, applications, platforms, etc.), websites can still be regarded as the starting point for information due to the proximity to the primary source of information, i.e., the franchiser. From a practical point of view, the majority of the observed websites have a relatively similar architecture in terms of the design, navigation, language, and user control. However, they provide different information. Thus, this paper can

help businesses as a guideline to distinguish between two levels of content they wish to distribute to businesses using their website, i.e., the information they provide to end consumers (B2C) and other businesses (B2B). From the scientific point of view, this paper expands the knowledge regarding the efficiency of websites used by franchises present in the Croatian market. Even though models (contracts) for leasing the management of the franchise, in most cases, pre-define forms of promotion (including the online promotion), the research found differences in the distribution of observed variables. The research limitations are related to the rapid advancement of technologies and continually changing architecture of websites. Every user has a different subjective view of the online content. In the context of the literature review, this paper presents an overview of the most significant notions tied to electronic marketing, with an emphasis on franchises. Even though data becomes obsolete relatively quickly, the paper presented and analysed options offered by technologies in doing business. The authors attempted to track online communication methods used by Croatian franchisors and research how they used electronic marketing tools (social networks, mobile applications, etc.) together with their websites. The level of measurement brought by electronic marketing presents a strategic component of efficiency. Combined with other techniques and marketing tools, it creates prerequisites for recognisability and competitiveness in offline and online environments.

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Appendix. 1. Revised evaluation model items

MODEL	CONSTRUCT	ITEMS
Website Usability	Design	The logo of the brand appears in a highlighted place on the page. It uses icons and consistent images. Good use of colours and elements of design. It avoids overload of elements in the web pages. New content is emphasised. Similar elements for different actions are not used. Compatible with different browsers. Mobile friendly <i>sum-design (max 8)</i>
	Navigation	It allows the quick return to the homepage. Links are clearly recognised. Contents are well categorised. Links, website headers, and menus are clear. It provides a website map. <i>Sum-navigation (max 5)</i>
	Language	It uses clear and precise messages. It offers a choice from different languages. It offers a choice for the disabled. <i>Sum-language (max 3)</i>
	User control	The technology used is compatible with that of potential users. It offers help to avoid errors It provides a way of contacting to make suggestions or comments. <i>Sum-user control (max 3)</i>
		<i>sum-usability (max 19)</i>
Website Content	For franchisees	Franchisor company background Franchisor services Franchise information section Franchisees testimonials Franchisees individual website links Franchise fees and costs Qualities required of prospective franchisees The connection between franchisees and franchisor via website <i>sum-franchisees (max 8)</i>
	For end-customers	Store locations Product and service information Franchisor employment opportunities Online ordering Online payment Promotion activities (coupons, discounts, gifts) Interactive customer pages <i>sum-customers (max 7)</i>
		<i>sum-content (max 15)</i>
		<i>sum-total (max 34)</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Appendix. 2. Company website addresses

NR	COMPANY NAME	WEBSITE ADDRESS
1	Aquamaritime	http://www.aquamaritime.hr/franchise_and_wholesale.php
2	BIJELI SVIJET d.o.o./LG	https://www.bijelisvijet.hr/
3	Bike Express	https://www.bike-express.hr/fransiza.html
4	Business Cafe d.o.o.	https://businesscafe.info/licences/
5	CAPACITAS CATENA j. d.o.o. (Body Creator)	https://bodycreator.com/fransize/
6	CARWIZ d.o.o.	https://www.carwiz.hr/hr/fransiza
7	Century 21	http://www.c21fransiza.hr/hr/
8	CHORIDIUM d.o.o. (ICE' N' GO)	https://icengo.eu/indexGB.html
9	ClueGo	http://www.cluego.eu/en/escape-room-franchise/
10	Cognitum	http://www.malacgenijalac.hr/
11	COMPETO d.o.o. (TORTE-I-TO)	http://torte-i-to.hr/
12	Diadema	https://diadema.hr/hr/fransize/
13	DIRECT BOOKER d.o.o. (BOOKER TOOLS)	https://www.direct-booker.com/
14	FMG d.o.o. (FUNNY CHIPS)	http://www.funnychips.eu/hr/funnychips_fransiza/default.aspx
15	GALEB dalmatinska trikotaža d.d.	http://www.galeb.hr
16	GRECA CENTAR d.o.o. (ČUVAR SJEĆANJA)	http://cuvarsjecanja.com/fransiza/
17	Husse	https://croatia.husse.com/join-our-franchise
18	Image Haddad	https://www.haddad.hr/postanite-nas-partner/
19	INA	https://www.ina.hr/
20	LAKA SPIKA d.o.o. (Helen Doron)	https://helendoron.hr/postanite-fransizer/
21	LUMARIS STUDIO d.o.o. (TAKE ME HOME)	https://takemehome.hr/
22	Matić savjetovanje d.o.o. (WOMEN IN ADRIA)	https://www.womeninadria.com/
23	METAMORFOZA d.o.o. (MUZEJ ILUZIJA)	https://muzejiluzija.com/
24	Mlinar	https://www.mlinar.hr/en/poslovanje
25	Museum of senses	https://museumofsenses.com/
26	Nado Centar	http://www.nado.hr/fransiza/
27	Narodne novine	https://www.nn.hr/hr/komercijala/ustroj/
28	Nextbike	http://www.nextbike.hr
29	PET-IT-DUO d.o.o. (GOOD FOOD)	https://goodfood.hr/
30	PLACE2DESIGN d.o.o. (PLACE2GO)	http://place2go.hr/fransize/
31	SNF ADRIA d.o.o. (SURF'N'FRIES)	http://surfnfries.com/
32	TAHOGRAF d.o.o.	http://www.tahograf.hr
33	Taxi Cammeo	https://cammeo.hr/hr
34	Tekstilpromet	https://www.tekstilpromet.hr/brand/o-maloprodaji/
35	TINKER LABS	https://tinkerlabs.hr/fransiza/
36	Tokić	http://www.tokic.hr/onama/
37	UNITAS NEKTRETNINE d.o.o. (RE/MAX HRVATSKA)	https://www.remax.hr/_/Croatia?Lang=hr-HR
38	Vulco	https://www.vulco.hr/hr/o-nama
39	Xtravaganza	http://www.xtravaganza.hr/o-xtravaganzi/
40	Živa kava d.o.o. (VIVAScaffè)	https://vivasbar.hr/

Source: elaborated by the authors.