

Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing Trends in Kosovo

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Abstract

With the ever-increasing development in information and communication technology and the spread of the internet into personal computers and mobile devices, the promotion of products has become an essential component in the new digital age, mostly thanks to digital marketing. Every day, companies increasingly share information on the internet to connect with customers through social media, digital advertising, email marketing, and online brochures, enabling the transition from traditional marketing to digital marketing. Through digital marketing, companies promote their products and services using social networks and inform their customers through personal messages about the characteristics of the products they offer on the market, which directly affect and increase sales. Following global tendencies and practices, Kosovo companies increasingly use digital marketing to communicate with customers and promote products and services primarily through social media. Nowadays, regardless of whether a company produces and sells high-quality products and services, promotion through digital marketing is one of the most important things a business needs to do. Kosovar companies follow this trend of promoting products and services through digital marketing, mainly social media marketing. This paper discusses the transition from traditional marketing to digital marketing in Kosovo. We examine the trend of using digital marketing, mainly social media marketing by Kosovar citizens and businesses, based on the results of surveys conducted by the Regional Cooperation Council 2022 edition of the Balkan Barometer for citizen and business perception in Western Balkan Countries. The goal of this paper is not only to determine the growing trend of digital marketing and social media marketing but also to evaluate their impact on increasing sales of products and services for Kosovar businesses compared to other Western Balkan countries.

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Introduction

An outstanding advantage of Electronic Commerce is its capacity to align products and services with specific consumers. This type of match is a component of personalised marketing, where each consumer is treated individually to align marketing and advertising efforts with their specific profile and preferences. Electronic Commerce can connect consumers with products and services, as well as advertising, through customisation or customisation of these offerings (Efraim et al., 2006).

In the 20th century, the advent of radio introduced a new era in advertising, providing advertisers with a completely novel means to connect with potential customers. Additionally, television emerged, causing another upheaval in the advertising landscape. By the end of the century, the internet, which hackers and early adopters initially used, had evolved into a valuable tool for commerce and communication, benefiting millions of people. The era of digital marketing was initiated (Ryan et al., 2022).

There is often confusion between digital marketing and internet marketing. Digital marketing refers to the method of advertising and promoting a brand, service, or product via the Internet. Digital marketing distinguishes itself from traditional marketing by utilising internet platforms and strategies that allow businesses and organisations to closely track the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns, often in real time. This enables them to gain deeper insights into what strategies are effective and what strategies are not.

Digital marketing refers to all marketing activities that utilise electronic devices or the Internet (Cook et al., 2019). Businesses utilise various digital platforms such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to engage with existing and potential customers. Marketing has always focused on effectively engaging with your target audience in the appropriate location and at the optimal moment. In order to effectively sell your product or service, it is crucial to engage with your target audience in the online spaces where they are already active, in addition to employing traditional marketing methods (Cook et al., 2019). At first, utilities and businesses perceived the Internet as a means to enhance their visibility on various platforms, prompting them to seek ways to optimise their platforms and client services promptly. In contemporary times, online marketing platforms have become an essential and integral component of marketing, particularly in the context of the emerging field of digital marketing (Pineiro-Otero et al., 2016).

Currently, the world is more interconnected than ever before through e-commerce, communication, travel, and the current moment. The globalisation pattern is transforming. Tangible commodities were the primary focus of commerce and were mostly limited to developed economies and major transitioning corporations. Digital platforms enable the increased involvement of countries, smaller firms, and utilities (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016). While a company's products and services can outperform those of its competitors, it is crucial to effectively communicate its superior quality to customers in order to achieve success. In such instances, digital marketing takes precedence, serving the purpose of not only informing our clients about the excellence of our products and services but also highlighting our competitive advantages in comparison to our rivals.

This article examines the shift from conventional marketing to digital marketing in Kosovo. We analyse the use of digital marketing, namely social media marketing, by individuals and businesses in Kosovo. This analysis is based on the findings of surveys done by the Regional Cooperation Council as part of the 2022 edition of the Balkan Barometer, which focuses on the perception of citizens and businesses in Western

Balkan Countries. The objective of this research is to analyse the rising trajectory of digital marketing and social media marketing and assess their influence on boosting sales of products and services for businesses in Kosovo in comparison to other nations in the Western Balkans.

Difference between traditional marketing and digital marketing

Similar to other nations, firms in Kosovo have employed conventional marketing methods for an extended period. As the Internet becomes more widespread and social networks are used more frequently, the shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing is increasingly taking place.

Globally, there is a prevailing tendency towards transitioning from conventional marketing methods to digital marketing. Kosovar enterprises are likewise embracing this pattern to market their goods and services to customers. There is a growing trend of shifting away from traditional marketing channels such as TV, radio, print media, and billboards towards digital marketing channels like email marketing, content marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), mobile marketing, and social media advertising.

Numerous small enterprises face the challenge of choosing between traditional and digital marketing due to budget constraints that allow them to invest in just one of the two options. The decisions they must make are challenging: Which marketing strategy would yield superior revenue outcomes? What criteria should they use to assess and make a judgement on the effectiveness of marketing? Which individual or organisation should I rely on for my marketing needs? Is it advisable for me to undertake the task independently?

Acquiring the appropriate terminology involves utilising actual advertisements in various journals, papers, and magazines, which is a traditional and effective marketing method. Additional instances encompass leaflets distributed in mailboxes, advertisements broadcasted on television and radio, and large outdoor advertising displays. Conversely, when a company allocates resources to create a website and promotes its brand using various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, this approach is referred to as digital marketing (Cave et al., 2016).

The traditional marketing tactics complement our emphasis on digital marketing. They are unable to work independently of one another. We exclusively utilise physical copies of marketing materials to enhance our connection with a contact, referral partner, or client. Our company does not allocate funds towards television or radio advertisements. However, we do provide pamphlets to individuals who express interest in our services (Lemel, 2021).

Social media platforms are accessible to businesses of all sizes, allowing them to advertise their products and establish brand recognition. Small business owners who lack the financial resources can benefit from promoting their firms using non-traditional media. Given the limited resources of small enterprises, the objective is to maximise the efficiency of these resources. To accomplish this objective, small businesses can utilise social media more economically compared to traditional media (Lemel, 2021).

Traditional marketing has been slower to adapt compared to digital marketing, which provides customers with novel opportunities such as customised messaging or responses to a search query. The primary distinction between traditional and digital marketing is in the customer-centric approach of digital marketing, which provides personalised messaging and tailored responses to client inquiries (Istvancic, et al., 2017).

Companies can use several marketing strategies to promote their product or service. Traditional advertising and social media marketing have distinct advantages and downsides. One benefit of conventional advertising is its ability to effectively target a local audience through television or radio. Conversely, traditional advertising presents challenges in terms of quantification. It is significantly more expensive in comparison to social media marketing, which is more cost-effective and offers greater ease of measurement (Källbäck, 2019).

Traditional marketing refers to the employment of non-digital methods to promote a corporate entity's products and services. Digital marketing refers to the promotion and sale of products and services through digital platforms to reach consumers (Yasmin et al., 2015). Table 1 shows the following comparisons.

Table 1

Traditional marketing and digital marketing comparison

Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
Traditional marketing includes print, broadcast, direct marketing, and telephone	Digital marketing includes online advertising, email marketing, social media, text messaging, affiliate marketing, search engine optimisation, pay-per-click
No interaction with the audience Results are easy to measure	Interaction with the audience Results are, to a great extent, easy to measure
Advertising campaigns are planned over a long period Expensive and time-consuming process	Advertising campaigns are planned over a short period Reasonably cheap and rapid way to promote the products or services
The success of traditional marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach a large local audience	The success of digital marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach some specific number of local audience
One campaign prevails for a long time	Campaigns can be easily changed with ease and innovations can be introduced within any campaign
Limited reach to the customer due to a limited number of customer technology	Wider reach to the customer because of the use of various customers technology
24/7 year-round exposure is not possible No ability to go viral	24/7 year-round exposure is possible Ability to go viral
One way conversation Responses can only occur during work hours	Two ways conversation Response or feedback can occur anytime

Source: Yasmin et al. (2015).

Digital marketing channels and advertising on social media

A marketing channel can be described as a collection of trade interactions that generate consumer value in the process of acquiring, consuming, and disposing of products and services (Pelton et al., 2016). This notion suggests that trading connections arise from market demands as a means of fulfilling market demands.

Digital technology not only introduced a new digital channel that enables utilities to engage with customers in various ways, but it also inherently influenced changes in customer behaviour. Modern consumers possess a greater amount of knowledge, can readily retrieve that information, and have a wider array of choices when it comes to making purchases (Pires et al., 2022).

The five primary digital channels currently in existence include (1) websites, (2) search engines, (3) email, (4) social media, and (5) online advertising (Pires et al., 2022).

1. Website. Currently, websites function as a channel for companies to communicate with customers. They enable the provision of links to other company channels, such as social media or other platforms, and function as a means of authentication for companies. Companies that have a good image and reputation arouse consumers' trust in the products or services launched by the company. These are platforms through which consumers can order, give or review recommendations for different products and services marketed by a certain business company. Users can also be registered on these portals and receive recommendations based on their purchase history; however, it is not necessary to register on a page to perform the operations previously mentioned.
2. Search Engines. Search engines are channels used by consumers in the search process to search for information about a product or service, know more about a given company and its suppliers, compare prices, and compare product features. After consumers enter an expression, hyperlinked result lists are presented, which redirect the consumer to the companies' pages. A set of techniques called search engine optimisation is used to try to increase their ranking, generate traffic on their websites, and make consumers visit their pages. Search engine web-based software is trying and looking at how to improve their search and make them easier for better results towards customer behaviour, helping the latter to spread the word about their content.
3. E-mail Marketing. Email marketing is one of the most important digital channels. The effects of sending an email are associated with face-to-face communication. They can be defined as "sending of commercial and non-commercial messages to a detailed list of receivers, respectively e-mail addresses, who belong to a set of target segments. It also is one of the most efficient strategies in brand building, consumer relationship development, customer acquisition, and sales promotions. It confers several advantages to companies, namely: low cost of audience reaches; direct communication with consumers, which encourages action by the latter; less time for marketing campaign development; the possibility of a message with personalised content; possibility to test different email approaches and integration with other digital channels. This tool also helps to create customer databases and group them by profiles according to their preferences and buying behaviours.
4. Social Media. The proliferation of social media has caused companies to strengthen their focus on these channels, redefining the way companies reach, communicate and interact with consumers. Social media gives customers the opportunity to give reviews and thoughts on products and services. The sharing of content in real-time facilitates the dissemination of information and develops social contact between people. The use of social media plays a crucial role in digital marketing. Companies' incorporation of these channels maximises interaction, offers accurate information about products, makes personalised product recommendations based on the customer's profile, and suggests on-trend products, influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Social media encompass

social networking platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, blogs, forums such as Reddit and Tumblr, and company websites.

5. Digital Advertising. Digital advertising includes all messages issued by an entity that unambiguously identifies who is issuing them or the offer they contain. Digital advertising can be done on search engines, social media, or websites, and its cost generally follows three alternatives: cost per click, cost per thousand views, or cost per acquisition (Pires et al., 2022).

Social Media Marketing

Social media networks are a hub for information, connectivity, and relationships. Effectively communicating through these platforms can reduce the sales cycle and connect businesses with their customers. When individuals share various issues and content on social media, they are sharing the emotions that good content evokes. It's not surprising that consumers respond well to educational content that builds trust, establishes a relationship, and provides value before attempting to sell (Cook et al., 2019). The popularity and diversity of social media platforms and users continue to grow.

Remarkable success can be achieved by businesses through great social media marketing, creating loyal brand advocates and generating leads and sales. Having a larger and more engaged audience on social media networks makes it easier to accomplish other marketing objectives. Social media networks are now an essential part of marketing strategies, and failing to utilise them could result in missing out on a significant opportunity to boost sales (Istvancic et al., 2019).

Social media refers to a collection of web-based software and services that enable users to gather online and engage in various forms of social interaction, such as exchanging, discussing, communicating, and participating. These interactions may include text, audio, images, video, or a combination thereof. Social media also facilitates the creation of new content, sharing and recommending existing content, reviewing and rating products, services, and brands, and discussing current topics of interest (Ryan & Jones, 2019).

Usually, social media marketing programs focus on creating unique content that attracts interest and encourages users to share it with their friends and content. This is a situation where your business is being marketed by your customers, who share it with others, each of them knowing that the message has come from a trusted source to either support or oppose your industry or the brand itself (Suleiman et al., 2022).

Social media marketing is one of the most prominent media channels in Kosovo, with the largest number of users compared to other digital media marketing channels. In this paper, we will focus on the current trends in using social media marketing for Kosovo businesses to promote their products and increase sales.

The effectiveness of social media marketing is determined by measuring the return on investment (ROI). Traditional marketing poses a challenge when measuring ROI for a print ad compared to a digital one, as print ads address a broader audience. On the other hand, digital marketing enables advertisers to target specific audiences, making it easier to attribute each sale to a particular ad. Other methods to measure ROI include attributing multiple people and programs, market mix modelling, and implementing test and control groups (Sharma).

The effectiveness of social media marketing can be evaluated through both financial and non-financial measures. However, certain benefits associated with social media marketing are challenging to quantify in terms of monetary value and are better evaluated using non-financial measures. Measuring ROI in a financial sense requires determining the amount of money invested in a company's social media

marketing efforts and the amount of money generated in return, which can be challenging to ascertain. When brands sell products directly to online consumers, they can explicitly link social media marketing campaigns to financial outcomes. However, when brands do not sell directly to online consumers, it can be challenging to determine whether revenue is attributable to social media marketing campaigns (Costa e Silva et al., 2020).

When measuring social media marketing effectiveness, it is essential to consider consumers' interactions and reactions as a variable in the calculation. Social media marketing's primary objective is conversion, which refers to how effectively consumers' engagement on social media sites influences their purchasing decisions. According to the literature, measuring social media marketing effectiveness is more complex than measuring it on traditional platforms because of the variable of "human interactions." Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that the number of fans, followers, and brand mentions are not the most critical indicators of social media marketing effectiveness since these metrics may appear favourable on paper but may not reflect reality (Pradiptarini, 2011).

To understand the efficacy of your social media marketing campaigns, you will need to get a grasp of the basic social media metrics. This data is drawn from the following:

- Engagement: Clicks, comments, likes and replies.
- Reach: How many people have seen content
- Impressions: The number of times a post from the page or profile has been seen
- Followers: How many people have subscribed/followed your page or profile
- Video Views: How many people have seen your video content
- Mentions: Number of times your profile has received a mention from followers
- Tags: Number of people that add your profile or hashtag to a post
- Reposts: How many people post your content on their page
- Shares: How many people share your content directly with their network
- Profile Visits: How many people open/visit your page (Digital Marketing, the ultimate guide)

Research

On a daily basis, it is evident that Internet connectivity has become an essential component of individuals' lives, and engaging with the Internet and cell phones has become a customary practice. The prevalence of internet and social media usage in Kosovo has led to an increasing adoption of Social Media Marketing due to users' prolonged online presence. This form of marketing has proven to be highly efficient in enticing customers and boosting sales. Additionally, it has streamlined business operations by allowing consumers to view the items or services supplied by businesses and make purchasing decisions with ease.

The majority of major firms in Kosovo employ social media marketing to advertise items and boost sales. They inform their clients via social media marketing about the range of products available and provide the option to make purchases in their stores or have the purchased items delivered to the customer's address.

Many firms in Kosovo engage in e-commerce, selling products exclusively online through social networks. Customers can purchase these things online, and local postal operators handle the distribution. The price of the product includes the cost of the door-to-door delivery service provided by the postal operator.

The commonly utilised social media platforms in Kosovo include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and Twitter.

In order to illustrate the various degrees of social media usage in Kosovo, we rely on data acquired from the Digital 2022 study in Kosovo and the Balkan Barometer 2022.

The Digital 2022 report on Kosovo reveals that 97% of the total population has access to the internet. In January 2022, there were 1.72 million internet users out of a total population of 1.78 million in Kosovo. The report revealed that in January 2022, there were 1.04 million social media users in Kosovo, accounting for 58.50% of the entire population.

According to data provided in Meta's advertising resources, there were 869.20 thousand Facebook members in Kosovo in 2022, which accounts for 49.00% of the total population in early 2022. Nevertheless, Facebook has imposed an age restriction, allowing only individuals aged 13 and older to utilise its platform. It is noteworthy to emphasise that in 2022, 61.00% of the population in Kosovo who meet the eligibility criteria will utilise Facebook (Kemp Simon, 2022).

According to data provided in Meta's (Kemp Simon, 2022) advertising resources, there were 582.90 thousand Instagram users in Kosovo in 2022. This accounts for 32.80% of the entire population in early 2022. Nevertheless, Instagram has imposed an age restriction, allowing only individuals aged 13 and older to use its platform. It is noteworthy to mention that in 2022, 40.90% of the "eligible" population in Kosovo utilises Instagram (Kemp Simon, 2022).

According to data given by LinkedIn (Kemp Simon, 2022), there were 82,000 LinkedIn users in Kosovo in 2022. This accounts for approximately 4.60% of the total population at the beginning of the year (Kemp Simon, 2022).

According to Kemp Simon's data, in 2022, Twitter had approximately 85.20 thousand users in Kosovo, which accounts for about 4.80% of the total population. Twitter has an age restriction policy that only allows users aged 13 and above to access its platform. In Kosovo, about 6.00% of the eligible audience will use Twitter in 2022, according to Kemp Simon (2022).

It was projected that by 2022, digital advertising expenditure would account for 60% of the overall expenditure on media advertising, which is approximately twice the proportion recorded in 2013. According to UNCTAD's 2021 report, the combined market share of the top five digital platforms in terms of total digital advertising spending is projected to surpass 70 per cent.

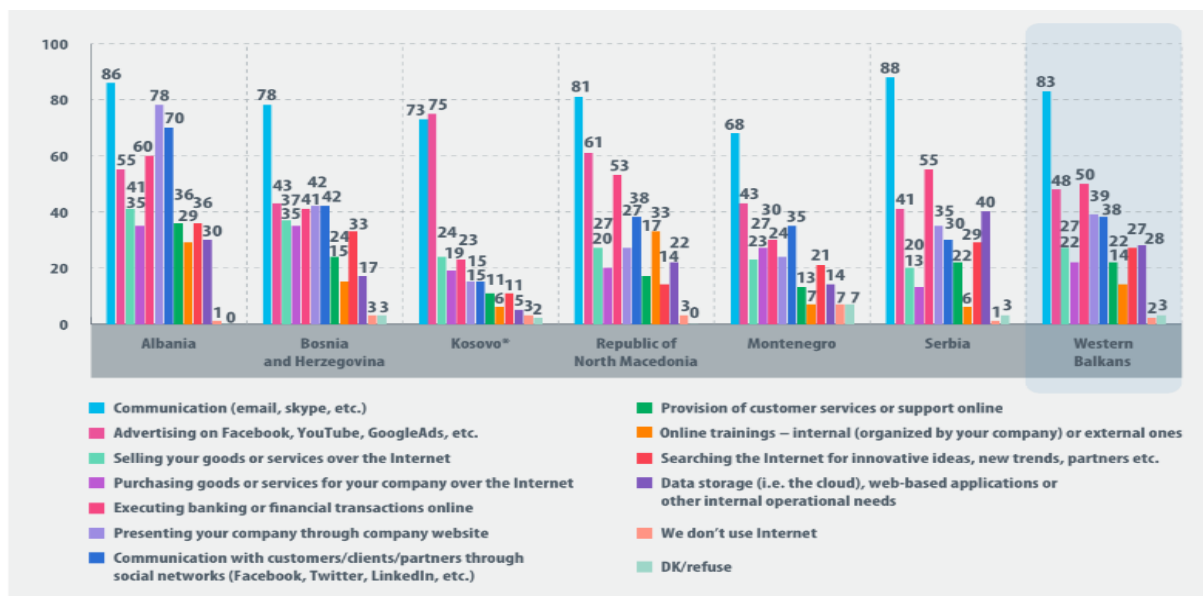
This paper presents the findings of a survey conducted between mid-February 2022 and mid-March 2022 by the Regional Cooperation Council 202 edition of the Balkan Barometer. The survey included 6029 citizens and 1203 business owners or executives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. It aimed to gather citizen and business perceptions of the region.

The survey results display responses from the business sector regarding a certain question. Figure 1 indicates that the firms in the region have a high demand for internet usage. 83% of enterprises reported utilising the Internet for regular communication, a usage rate comparable to that of other Western Balkan economies, with the exception of Kosovo, where 73% of enterprises employ the Internet for routine communication.

Kosovo enterprises exhibit a significantly higher proportion of advertising on social media, with 75%, compared to the average of 48% in Western Balkan Countries. However, the percentages for selling products or services over the Internet (24%) and purchasing goods or services for the company over the Internet (19%) are nearly equivalent to those of Western Balkan Countries (27% and 22%, respectively) (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022).

Figure 1

How companies use Internet in Western Balkan countries (All respondents - N=1203, multiple answers, %)

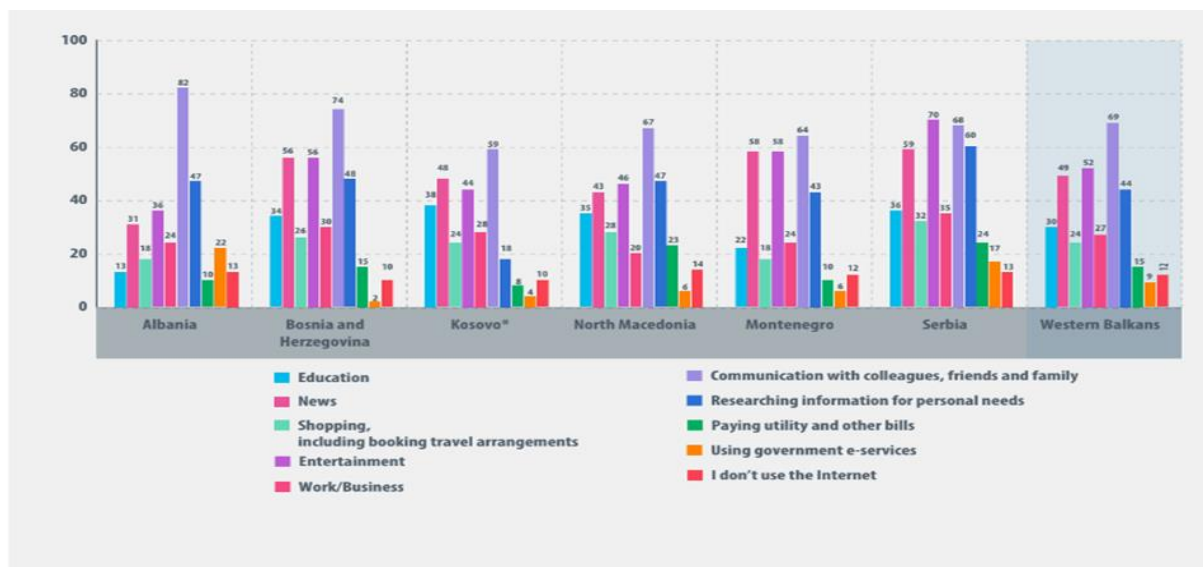


Source: Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022

Based on Figure 2, 24% of respondents from Kosovo utilised the Internet for shopping, including making travel arrangements. This percentage is equivalent to that of Western Balkan Countries. Additionally, 28% of respondents used the Internet for work or business, which is 1% higher than the 27% reported for Western Balkan Countries (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022).

Figure 2

How individuals used the Internet (All respondents, n=6029, multiple answers, %)

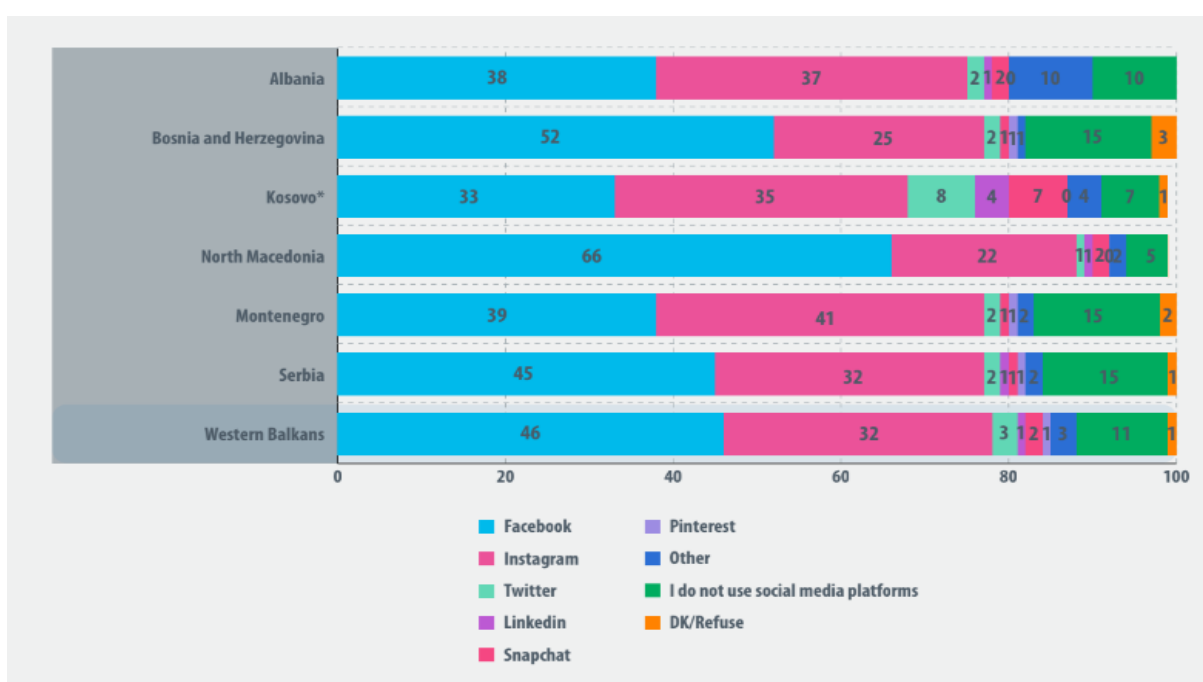


Source: Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022

Facebook is the most widely used media platform in the Western Balkans, with 46% of participants using it. Instagram is the second most popular platform, with 32% of participants using it. However, in Kosovo, there is a growing trend of using Instagram, with 35% of respondents using it, and Snapchat, with 7% of respondents using it. In the other countries of the Western Balkans, 32% of participants use Instagram and 2% use Snapchat. This indicates that young people in Kosovo primarily use Instagram and Snapchat, which make up the majority of the population. Facebook usage in the Western Balkan countries is, on average, 46%; however, in this case, it is only 33%. Other social platforms are approximately equal in quality or performance.

Figure 3

The most used social media platforms by individuals (Respondents who use the internet, N=5304, single answer, the share of total, %) (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022)

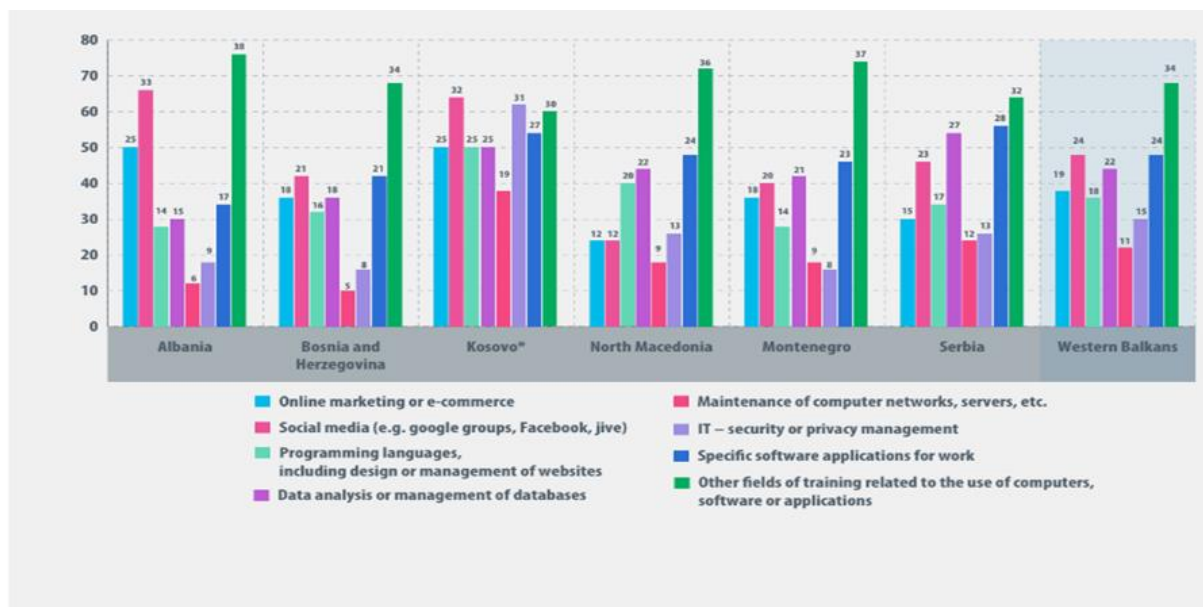


Source: Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022

Kosovo has a relatively high percentage of respondents, with 25% receiving training in online marketing or e-commerce and 32% receiving training in social media. This is significantly higher than the average percentages of 19% for online marketing or e-commerce and 24% for social media in the Western Balkans Countries.

Figure 4

Trainings to improve individuals' skills relating to the use of computers, software or applications in the last 12 months (Respondents who carried out training to improve their skills relating to the use of computers, software or applications in the last 12 months, n=1806, multiple answers, %) (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022)



Source: Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022

The significant surge in online sales, primarily driven by social media marketing and the demand for product delivery, has resulted in a substantial rise in the number of local postal operators operating in Kosovo in recent times.

The Regulatory Authority of Electronic and Postal Communication (RAEPC) maintains an updated registry of licenced postal operators authorised to offer postal services in Kosovo. According to the 2014 annual publication of RAEPC, 11 active postal operators provided both domestic and international postal services (RAEPC, 2014). In 2018, the total count of postal service operators rose to 15 (40). Due to the expansion of Digital Marketing services and Social Media Marketing, there has been a substantial increase in the number of companies providing postal services. The revised registry of RAEPC in February 2023 shows that there are 27 licenced operators for postal services handling linseed (RAEPC, 2014).

Conclusion

The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the widespread availability of the Internet, and the growing significance of advertising in Kosovo have facilitated the emergence of Digital Marketing.

In today's world, where practically everyone has access to the Internet, Digital Marketing has emerged as the paramount and efficacious means of promoting items and services for organisations.

Kosovo businesses are adhering to a global pattern of transitioning from conventional marketing to digital marketing. By utilising digital and social media marketing, Kosovar enterprises enhance their product and service sales and gain a competitive edge.

Businesses in Kosovo employ several channels to engage with clients and market their products and services, including websites, search engine optimisation, email marketing, digital advertising, and particularly social media marketing, which is extensively utilised.

Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing are cost-effective strategies that provide the opportunity to target specific audiences, gather feedback on product and service quality, monitor Return on Investment (ROI), and assess customer satisfaction for enterprises in Kosovo.

According to the Regional Cooperation Council 2022 edition of the Balkan Barometer for Citizen and Business Perceptions:

- Kosovo businesses are leading in Advertising on social media with 75% compared with 48% for average in Western Balkan Countries, but selling products and services over the internet and purchasing goods or services for the company over the internet are almost in the same percentage with Western Balkan Countries
- In Kosovo, 33% of people use Facebook, which is much less than the average of the Western Balkan countries, 46%. However, Kosovo has higher rates of using Instagram, 35%, and Snapchat, 7%. In comparison, 32% of Instagram and 2% of Snapchat users in the Western Balkans show the orientation trend of young people in the use of Instagram and Snapchat.
- Kosovo has 25% of respondents who got trained in online marketing or e-commerce and 32% of respondents who got trained in social media, which are higher percentages compared to an average of 19 % for online marketing or e-commerce and 24% for social media for Western Balkans Countries.

Since most Kosovo businesses typically have limited resources, the goal of Digital and Social Media Marketing is to enable interaction with the audience and a reasonably cheap way to promote products and services. Based on the presented data, we can assume that online businesses in Kosovo have a bright future and that Kosovo achieved a significant position in the Western Balkans region.

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