

SOCIAL MEDIA IN USE: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH

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Abstract

Information technologies have caused radical changes in many areas, they have also changed marketing activities. Today, marketing activities are carried out in digital environments, facilitating the work of companies and helping consumers around the world. Consumers get the right information and data about products and services much easier and faster, as well as access different forms of entertainment. Therefore, it can be said that the place of traditional marketing today has been replaced by digital marketing. This paper tries to shed some light on how consumers of Western Balkans and specifically in

Kosovo, use social media and how those shape their attitudes, based on the uses and gratifications approach. This is the first paper from this region, which analyzes social media, based on the previously mentioned approach. Since research in the region was prohibitive for us, we selected a sample of 200 consumers from Kosovo, active on social media. The findings of this paper serve managers in better attracting online customers through social media.

Keywords: *social media, Kosovo, Internet, informativeness, entertainment, gratification*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Internet, the widespread use of digitalization, and especially social media (SM) platforms provide companies with new environments for communication and development of their

business activities (Balta-Peltekoğlu and Demir-Askeroğlu, 2020, p.3). Information technology and Internet services have marked a rapid development in the Western Balkans, especially in Kosovo, but these countries are still far behind in the number

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of computers and Internet users, development of e-government services, etc. when compared to EU countries (Krstic and Dzunic, 2014). Lack of awareness of the need for faster development of the information society is the main obstacle to the wider use of information technologies in the Western Balkans (Mitrović, 2015). Despite these barriers, there is a constantly increasing number of social media users (Neziraj and Berisha-Shaqiri, 2018; Rrustemi et al., 2020).

According to Plenković and Mustić (2019), the Internet or social media are used more by young individuals. Social changes, especially those caused by ethnic conflicts, various pandemics, technological and economic revolutions create the basis for the use of this media by people of all ages, levels of education, and social positions. So nowadays, social media usage has become imperative. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe is the best indicator of how different people use social media, other sources of communication, and the Internet to perform and obtain essential services and other gratifications. Kosovo has a younger population, compared to other countries in the Western Balkans. Therefore, in terms of social media usage, Kosovo stands slightly better than other countries in this region.

Gupta (2013) claims that social media have a major impact on product purchasing behavior. Factors that influence the buying process on social media are information about the product, communication with friends, and the level of product involvement on social media. As products are sold through the Internet, they cannot be physically examined, which leads to the need to examine product data and share the perceived product details. Marketing on SM

has an impact on the perception and behavior of product selection by buyers, decision making, and buyer opinion, from the pre-purchase data collection phase to determining buyer behavior after the purchase process (Williams et al. 2012).

In addition to informing themselves and making purchases, consumers want to pursue their pleasures. The uses and gratifications approach helps understand the motivation of consumers to use the media. This theory is applied to radio, television, the Internet, and social media (Roy, 2008). According to Lariscy et al., (2011), the essence of this theory is that individuals are looking for media that best meet their needs and influence the achievement of their satisfaction. In this paper, we apply this approach to analyze the motives and reasons for the consumer use of social media, in the context of the Western Balkans, more specifically Kosovo. This enables a more detailed understanding of the consumer behaviors and intentions to use the Internet and social media to obtain information and shop for various products and services. This study presents conclusions of professional relevance for the development of digital online shopping and activities in the Western Balkans region, specifically in Kosovo. Data were collected during the period October 2020- December 2020, during the COVID-19 crisis. The objectives of this paper are to:

1. study and evaluate the concept of social media channels and the uses and gratifications theory;
2. study the consumer attitudes towards social media and how they are influenced by the entertainment gratification gained from social media channels;
3. study the consumer attitudes towards social media and how they are

influenced by the informativeness gratifications gained from social media channels;

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social media

A considerable amount of information is pushed and retrieved every day through various social media, which enable different consumers to be informed about developments in local and international markets (Mladenovic and Dolenc, 2016, p.189; Ziyadin et al., 2019). According to Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), social media is built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. So, Jukić and Svete (2018) define social media as technologies based on Web 2.0 that promote engagement with citizens, businesses, and various organizations. The era of social media started in 2003. The first social media was LinkedIn launched in 2003. Facebook and Myspace were launched in 2004, Youtube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006 (Pradiptarini 2011). Pollák and Dorčák (2016) claim that social media is a sociological term that was created in the middle of the twentieth century to describe the social structure of groups, linked together by common interests, competition, friendship, religious orientation, etc.

Social media have a tremendous impact on all sectors of the economy because they have transformed consumers from passive recipients of corporate messages to active creators contributing their online creations (Alizadeh and Mat Isa 2015). Authors like Mabić and Gašpar (2018) define social media categories as follows: Sites of social networking, blogs, virtual games, projects of a cooperative nature, content communities, and virtual social environments.

It is difficult to draw a clear line between the concepts of digital and social media, as social elements are constantly being integrated into interactive digital media. According to Järvinen et al. (2012), social media, viewed as elements, platforms, and integrated digital marketing tools facilitate social interaction between firms and consumer networks. Digital marketing refers to the use of all kinds of digital tools and social media that enable firms to foster interactions with consumers. There are many differences between social and traditional media, but Barišić and Vujnović (2018) claim that the main difference is that social media provides communication to people, while in classical media this connection is impossible. The main differences between social and traditional media are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Differences between social and traditional media

Traditional media	Social media
Mass marketing	Marketing 1-on-1
Metrics: reach/frequency	Metrics: engagement
Closed system	Open system
One way communication	Two-way communication
Professional content	Content generated from the brand and the user
Paid platform	Free platform
Proper content	Authentic content
Available during working hours	Available 24/7
Passive participation	Active participation
Formal communication language	Informal communication language
The top-down strategy	Bottom-up strategy
Planned creation	Real-time creation
Controlled communication	Unstructured communication
Making decisions: Economic	Making decisions: Community
Contributors: Famous people	Participants: Users/consumers

Source: Barišić and Vujnović (2018).

Companies can increase interest in their products by being creative through customer engagement on social media channels. Facebook is very effective in terms of advertising because it stores information of all its users. This enables firms or the marketing department to reach specific markets by creating company pages on social media (Paquette 2013). In addition, Facebook has more than one billion active monthly users (Vučković and Bebić 2013), whose attitudes are influenced by social media advertising, either positively, or negatively (Talih Akkaya et al., 2017; Rrustemi et al., 2020).

According to Assaad and Gómez (2011,) creating social media groups, focusing on

commercial products and services, is a well-known method for building brand loyalty, setting up exit barriers, and facilitating viral marketing through customer testimonials. Engaging the customers and defining their needs on a personal level, by encouraging them to participate enthusiastically on social media is vital to success. Dahnil et al. (2014) emphasize that, by utilizing social media user data, companies can predict the future buying behavior of their customers more accurately, increase product brand popularity, attract new customers, create awareness, increase sales, and build loyalty. Also, SM usage does not require a large financial investment and comes at a relatively low cost.

Table 2. Social media types, their purpose, and examples

Social media	Purpose	Examples
Blogs	A weblog where the user can post whatever they want.	Bryanboy, Seaofshoes
Microblogging	Combined social networking	Twitter
Forums	Online discussion on specific topics and interests	Next Gadget
Social Networks	People create personal pages or connect with friends	LinkedIn, Facebook
Wikis	A database where people add/modify information	Wikipedia
Podcasts	Files like Audio or video are available by subscription	Yahoo, Apple iTunes
Content Communities	People organize/share particular kinds of content	Flickr, YouTube

Source: Karimi and Naghibi (2015).

The influence and function make social media channels different from each other. Reputation and sales levels are greatly influenced by social media, with even the company survival in a dynamic and global market could be influenced by social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Madni 2014). Therefore, marketers appreciate and consider many different opportunities, offered by social media and implement new social initiatives in the digital environment, at a higher rate than ever before (Neti, 2011).

According to Vinerean et al. (2013) marketing in social media will be successful, once the right strategy is formulated to serve the consumers in the social media environment, where reputation systems are used to create brand loyalty. Followers of brand pages on social media channels want to be loyal to a certain brand. with social media marketing being an effective tool for developing relationships with customers and building brand loyalty within the social media-based brand community (Ismail, 2017; Szolnoki et al. (2018). However, while Bilal et al (2014) emphasize that social media have a positive impact on the consumer buying process in the clothing industry, Todua and Jashi (2015) claim that social media is widely used by consumers,

but has little impact on their purchasing decisions.

Cross-country differences impact the manner of usage of the Internet and social media for communication purposes. People all over the world have different needs and values, which affects their social media behavior. Numerous studies have explored the impact of cultural diversity on SM usage. The use of SM can be focused on advertising and informing consumers about products, promotions, events, etc., and, on the other hand, conducting a dialogue with consumers, answering questions, and reacting quickly to negative thoughts and comments. Therefore, social media have a great potential to be a marketing communication tool in the international market, but they need to be used in the right way and tailored to specific markets and consumers (Bartosik-Purgat 2019).

2.2. Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory

The uses and gratifications theory has its origins in the communication literature and its origin can be traced to the functionalist perspective on media communication, which was developed in 1940 in research on the effectiveness of the radio (Luo,

2002). Rubin (1994) claims that the main purpose of the U&G theory is to explain the psychological needs that affect individuals' reason for using the media, as well as to explain the identification of the positive and negative consequences of individual media use. Constandinides and Geurts (2005) state that the capacity to use websites and the reliable elements of websites or social media, such as elements of pleasure and entertainment, are the main factors that influence online consumer behavior. Also, Bagga and Bhatt (2013) found seven key factors that are important in consumer buying behavior. These factors are desire for social communication, website features, online advertising, recreation, ease, privacy, and information search.

According to Katz et al. (1974), the main assumptions of this theory are that the audience is quite active, therefore the use of media is objective-oriented. The audience choices are based on past experiences, intentional and motivated; hence, individuals select the means of communication to satisfy and meet their desires and needs. The media compete for meeting the individual's needs. The final assumption of this theory is that judgments about the cultural significance of the media must be eliminated, while the orientation of the audience should be analyzed.

Hanjun (2000) states that an important prominent advantage of the Internet and SM is interactivity, while the activity of the audience is the essential element of the U&G approach, which makes it a relevant theoretical basis for the study of social media. Ruggiero (2000) argues that the rapid development of the Internet and SM has strengthened the U&G approach, since there is a higher level of interaction with the individuals, as compared to the traditional media. Eighmey and McCord (1998), Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999), and others have used this theory to analyze the consumer experience in online shopping on various websites. Luo (2002), Ko et al.,

(2005), as well as other authors, have identified the main dimensions of this theory, which are entertainment gratification and informativeness gratification.

Luo (2002) states that entertainment gratification is a very important determinant of social media use. Kim and Forsythe (2007) show that consumers aim to have fun while shopping online. Therefore, social media tries to create many entertainment opportunities for consumers to motivate them to use SM as much as possible. Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2001) concluded that recreation is the most important reason that drives many consumers to visit different websites again. Ducoffe (1995) has analyzed the relationship between consumers' attitudes towards the Internet and the entertainment value of a website. His results show that this relation is positive. If a customer is entertained by certain websites, or social media, their attitudes towards them will also be positive.

Shavitt et al. (1998) claim that the gratification that the customer gains from a website have a great impact on the formulation of these customers' attitudes. Lim and Ting (2012) suggest that consumers should have a fun online shopping experience. Therefore, websites and social media need to include gratification elements to motivate online consumers to revisit them. According to Adi et al. (2017), behavioral orientation, or utilitarian and hedonistic motivations, have a positive impact on the user's intention to browse products on social media channels, in particular the specific aspects of these elements. Browsing social media relates to word of mouth. According to the mediation analysis method, social media browsing mediates the relationship between online shopping orientation and consumer expression on social media. Therefore, entertainment gratification has a significant impact on consumer orientation towards social media, which leads to the following formulation of the first hypothesis:

H1: Consumer attitudes towards social media are positively influenced by the entertainment gratification they gain from social media.

According to Chen and Wells (1999), the informativeness construct is concerned with the degree to which online media provides users with useful information, which is, also, one of the most important motives for Internet and media use (Maddox, 1998). Bauer and Grayser (1968) argue that the ability of certain media to provide users with the right information is the fundamental reason for media acceptance. Therefore, media should supply coherent and appropriate information, to be selected by individual users. Chandwani (2016) emphasizes that usage of social media is very effective and important in influencing the buying behavior of different consumers. Communities on SM talk to each other and share their experiences by writing reviews and evaluating the others' reviews. Companies have begun to obtain information on online customer interactions, analyze the impact of friends and family on the buying process, and improve sales (Kim and Srivastava 2007).

Siau and Shen (2003) concluded that individuals seek high-quality, accurate, and useful information. Barkhi et al. (2008) claim that consumers create positive attitudes towards the media, which offer sufficient benefits to create unique solutions. Maddox (1998) has also reached similar conclusions, regarding the attitudes of individuals towards the media. Saravanakumar and Sugantha Lakshmi (2012) claim that social media provide brands with better communication with their customers and intensify their association with them.

Simultaneously, Asma and Misbah (2018) emphasize that marketing in social media networks provides consumers with relevant and abundant information, which is delivered more quickly. There is, also, an opportunity for the co-creation of value, with consumers becoming content producers.

As social media influences the mindset of consumers and their purchasing intent, social media platforms or channels are important at the information retrieval stage and the product selection process (Hunjet et al., 2019). However, the user-generated content, as compared to the firm-generated content, becomes especially important, when selecting the product.

Jashari and Rrustemi (2017) find that many consumers are affected by the information provided on the Internet, which has led to unplanned purchasing decisions. Their purchases are motivated and influenced by social media and their friends' ratings. Whiting and Williams (2013) show that businesses use social media to provide data about sales, product offerings; various events, birthdays, and parties; general information about themselves. The more they provide such information, the higher will be the tendencies of consumers to accept the social media use, which leads to the following formulation of the second hypothesis:

H2: Informativeness gratification provided by social media positively affects the behavior of consumers on social media.

The research framework model is presented in Figure 1.

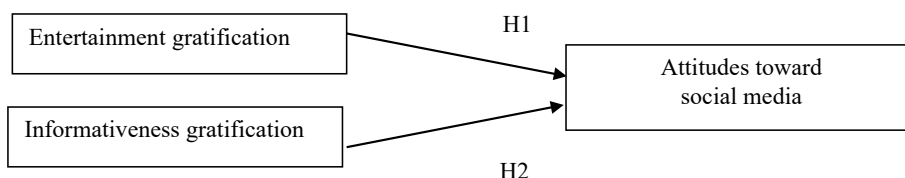


Figure 1. Research model

Source: Authors

3. METHODS

Data were collected through a questionnaire, during the period October-December 2020, i.e. during the COVID-19 pandemic, which motivated consumers to use the online media and participate in online shopping. According to Berisha-Qehaja and Kutllovci (2020), a questionnaire is an extremely important tool for collecting data in economic research. The questionnaire

consists of socio-demographic, social media usage, entertainment gratification, informativeness gratification, and behaviors on social media variables. A uses and gratifications approach includes additional elements, although we have used only two of those in the literature review and the definition of variables, i.e. entertainment and informativeness gratification. The following table shows variables, items, and measures.

Table 3. Variables, items, and measures

Variables		Variable measurement
Socio-demographic variables	Age	1-(20-24), 2-(25-29), 3-(30-34), 4-(35-39), 5-(over 40).
	Level of education	1-Low, 2-Secondary, 3.High, 4-Master of science Msc, 5- Ph.D. level.
Social media usage variables	Facebook usage	1-Very rarely, 2- Rarely, 3-Average, 4-Frequently, 5-Very frequently
	Twitter usage	
	Instagram usage	
	LinkedIn usage	
	Myspace usage	
Entertainment gratification variables	I become a fan of a company to take advantage of various discounts.	1-Always, 2-Often, 3-Sometimes, 4-Rarely, 5-Never
	I participate in competitions organized by various companies on SM.	
Informativeness gratification variables	I share information about products and services offered on SM.	
	I used social media to form an opinion about products and services.	
	I share the opinions and experiences of others regarding different products or services.	
Behavior on social media	I constantly follow the offers of various companies on SM.	
	I look at the advertisements for a product before I buy it.	
	I share brand links on SM to see others.	

Source: Authors

Our sample consists of 200 respondents, who are active consumers on social media and make their purchases influenced by SM, such as Instagram, Facebook, etc. They

pay attention to getting information about different products and services through SM. Convenience sampling was used to select consumers in this study. Every fourth

person, passing the entrance of a popular shopping center has been selected for a survey. All these respondents are from seven Kosovo regions: Prishtina, Gjilan, Mitrovica, Prizren, Peja, Gjakova, Ferizaj.

The responses are measured by using the conventional Likert scales. Analysis of the obtained data was performed by using the SPSS statistical software. Initially, descriptive statistics were provided that provide information related to the profile of the consumers as well as the number of SM users. Multiple regression was performed to test the relationships between the variables. In the end, the One-Sample Kolmogorov Smirnov Test was used. Finally, the hypotheses presented in the literature review section have been verified.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive statistics

In the results section, descriptive statistics will be presented first, specifically the age of the respondents and their level of education. Chaturvedi and Barbar (2014) claim that SM has a huge impact on consumer buying behavior. Consumer behaviors on social media are influenced by their education, their income, their age, etc. So, the use of social media depends a lot on these factors. The following table presents the age of respondents by category.

Table 4. Age of respondents

Age	Number of respondents	Residual value
(20-24)	9	-54.0
(25-29)	7	-45.0
(30-34)	52	-89.0
(35-39)	84	51.0
(over 40)	48	70.0

Source: Authors

The study of Balakrishnan et al., (2014) deals with the impact of SM on youth shopping. Online communications, social media communities, and social media advertising are successful tools in promoting brand image and in the goal of buying consumers through SM. Managers to reach young age customers need to use social media as the best-selling tool. Plenković and Mustić (2019) claim that there are important differences in terms of age in the use of SM by

different consumers. There is also no data that a certain channel of SM is the most popular one. There is a belief that Facebook is mostly used by all groups of consumers. Similar results have been reported by Levkov et al. (2015) and Rrustemi et al. (2020).

Table 5 provides information on the level of education of the surveyed consumers, with the majority possessing a higher education degree.

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Table 5. Education level of respondents

Education level	Number of respondents	Residual value
Low	6	-76.0
Secondary	51	-59.0
High	108	80.0
Master of science	31	3.0
PhD level	4	-68.0

Source: Authors

Ahuja et al. (2003) attach significant importance to demographic factors, as they greatly influence consumer preferences in online shopping. In terms of social media usage, the following statistics show that Facebook is mostly used by these

respondents or consumers. All respondents claimed that they use Facebook, while 110 respondents used Twitter, 167 used Instagram, 78 respondents used LinkedIn and 74 respondents still used Myspace.

Table 6. Social media use

Type of social media	Very rarely	Rarely	Average	Frequently	Very frequently
Facebook	1	6	2	80	111
Twitter	9	7	14	8	72
Instagram	5	11	13	42	96
LinkedIn	1	1	49	20	7
Myspace	2	1	9	13	49

Source: Authors

These data show that social media is not used equally by all respondents. Some are used more such as Facebook and Instagram, while others are used less. The mean rank of each of the social media was also compared. Xhema (2019) emphasizes that the impact of social media usage on loyalty, tolerance, and experimentation is crucial

for enterprises because social media analytics enables marketers to monitor customer satisfaction before and after the purchase. Unlike other research, a study by Gul et al. (2004) found no significant relationship between customer buying behavior and SM usage.

Table 7. Comparison of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Myspace

Social media	Users	Mean Rank
Facebook	200	327.61
Twitter	110	251.26
Instagram	167	297.31
LinkedIn	78	183.15
Myspace	74	176.05

Source: Authors

Even though the countries of the Western Balkans still have low rates of economic development and low incomes, companies from the region have been successfully exporting software services to the EU markets. Therefore, the level of trade digitalization has increased in recent years. It can be argued that, with the perfection of technology, companies from this region can very quickly dominate even the nearby markets in providing marketing services through social media. Most companies in this region offer products and services in the digital or social media environment. Therefore, according to Stojkovic et al. (2012); Qorraj and Jusufi (2018); Jusufi and Lubeniqi (2019); Qorraj and Jusufi (2019); Jusufi et al. (2020), these companies need

to increase their production and trade volumes to be competitive on the EU market. Therefore, according to these authors, these companies need to increase their production base and trade volume to be successful in the EU (Farkas, 2017; Qorraj, 2018; Ajdarpasic and Qorraj, 2020).

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between these variables. The general forms of the basic regression test are as follows:

$$Y \text{ (Behavior on social media)} = \text{Social media usage} + \text{Entertainment gratification variables} + \text{Informativeness gratification variables} + \epsilon$$

$$Y = 0.187 X_1 + 0.285 X_2 + 0.072 X_3$$

Table 8. Results of the multicollinearity test

Variables	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	R2
Social media usage variables	1.18	1.07	0.8302	0.1685
Entertainment gratification variables	1.20	1.03	0.8209	0.1433
Informativeness gratification variables	1.21	1.06	0.8014	0.1326
Behavior on social media	1.16	1.11	0.8011	0.1174

Source: Authors

The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test have the significance values of $p = 0.063$ and $p = 0.071$. These values are bigger than 0.05. Therefore, there is a

normal distribution. After the analysis of the statistical presumptions, the hypotheses were tested (see Table 9).

Table 9. Analysis of the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Supported/Not Supported
H1: Consumer attitudes towards social media products are positively influenced by the entertainment gratification they gain from social media	Supported
H2: Informativeness gratification provided by social media positively affects the behavior of consumers on social media	Supported

Source: Authors

As for the first hypothesis, study results have revealed significant correlations, where the results achieved are $\beta=0.285$, $p=0.000$, therefore the first hypothesis is supported. This shows that participation in social media groups depends on fun and entertaining elements, which requires the companies to use the interactive approach. Even though the companies provide information about their products and services to the target group on social media, without creativity and entertainment, there will be no success.

The informativeness gratification positively influences the behavior of online consumers in choosing their social media groups. Therefore, the second hypothesis is supported by the values of $\beta = 0.072$ and $p = 0.000$, which show that online consumers believe social media provide effective and appropriate information about various products that are in online channels.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has some implications for practice. From the empirical and theoretical data, it is shown that social media platforms or channels are used differently by consumers to get information and then based on this information to make decisions about online buying. As for the practical implications, the consumers from the Western Balkans, especially those in Kosovo, extensively use social media and are heavily influenced by digital marketing activities.

Although all social media are used by Kosovar consumers, they are not equally preferred for information and consumer decision-making. This is an important finding for professionals in this field. Empirical data show that Facebook is mostly used by social media by Kosovar consumers.

Facebook influences the behavior of online consumers the most. Therefore, in terms of professional implications, it must be said that firms need to develop their digital marketing activities more on Facebook than on other social media. Facebook is more popular among young people in Kosovo, so consumer behavior will be more influenced by this social media than other social media.

Statistical analysis shows that SM usage influences the purchase decisions of Kosovar consumers. We use only the entertainment and informativeness gratification constructs, due to the amount and value of practical information, which can be obtained from those. The level of education is very important for Kosovar consumers' online purchases since it determines the amount of their SM use and its influence on their buying behavior. Therefore, the associated variables have a positive influence on consumer information gathering and purchase decisions.

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DRUŠTVENI MEDIJI U PRAKSI: PRISTUP KORIŠTENJA I ZADOVOLJSTVA

Sažetak

Informacijske tehnologije su uzrokovale radikalne promjene u brojnim područjima života te su, također, dovele i do promjena u marketinškim aktivnostima. Danas se marketinške aktivnosti odvijaju u digitalnom okruženju, olakšavajući rad poduzećima, ali i pomažući kupcima širom svijeta. Kupci mogu dobiti prave informacije i podatke o proizvodima i uslugama mnogo brže i jednostavnije, ali i pronaći različite oblike zabave. Stoga se može kazati da je tradicionalni marketing danas zamijenjen digitalnim. U ovom se radu, korištenjem pristupa korištenja i zadovoljstva, pokušava prikazati kako potrošači sa zapadnog Balkana, posebno s Kosova, koriste

društvene medije i kako oni djeluju na njihove stavove. Ovo je prvi rad iz navedene regije, u kojem se analiziraju društveni mediji, korištenjem prethodno navedenog pristupa. S obzirom da nismo imali mogućnost provedbe istraživanja u cijeloj regiji, izabrali smo uzorak od 200 potrošača s Kosova, aktivnih u društvenim medijima. Rezultati ovog istraživanja mogu koristiti menadžerima u boljem privlačenju novih potrošača kroz društvene medije.

Ključne riječi: društveni mediji, Kosovo, Internet, informativnost, zadovoljstvo