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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES IN WESTERN BALKANS: EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS FROM KOSOVO

Digital marketing activities through social media are being developed extensively by firms in the Western Balkans region, therefore the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of social media marketing activities on increasing sales of SMEs in the Western Balkans, with special emphasis on those of Kosovo. Using a sample of 100 manufacturing SMEs, we have researched the impact of digital marketing activities which are carried out through social media, on increasing the sales or turnover of these SMEs. The achieved results were analyzed through probit regression. The results show that facebook is mostly used for business activities in these SMEs. Also, the analyzed SMEs give a lot of importance to the opinions and comments of consumers expressed on social media. They design their business policies based on the comments and opinions received from online consumers. This empirical research provides data on the implementation of social media marketing activities by SMEs in the Western Balkans region.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Social media, Kosovo, Western Balkan, SMEs.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkan region consist of the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro (Jusufi and Bellaqa 2019: 74; Jusufi and Lubeniqi, 2019; Jusufi et al. 2020; Jusufi and Ukaj, 2020; Qorraaj and Jusufi, 2021). According to Qorraaj (2018) this region constitute a small market, so its development depends on regional cooperation and their integration into the EU. In 2017, the European Union proclaimed the Regional Economic Zone for the Western Balkans. This initiative would enable faster economic and political integration of this region in Euro-Atlantic structures (Sanfey and Milatovic 2018, 1; Ajdarpašić and Qorraaj, 2019; Jusufi and Ajdarpašić 2020: 108; Jusufi and Ramaj, 2020). It should be noted that, the EU has supported in particular Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina in achieving economic and political stability.

To be competitive in a fiercely competitive market, most businesses in this region are geared towards developing business activities in the digital environment, particularly on social media. It can be said that social media as a concept of electronic platform, where people can interact and have conversations on a variety of common issues, using computers and the internet become an integral part of the activity of firms and clients in the Western Balkans (Gerguri, 2016). The benefits of access in all areas through social media are great and due to their availability and wide access, they result in better interaction and communication with the target market and customers by firms in this region. Firms need to adapt to new customer behavior by creating effective marketing campaigns that attract people to their business, thus increasing their sales and turnover (Barišić and Vujnović, 2018).

The internet and its services are very popular and used by the majority of the population and firms in Kosovo and other Western Balkan countries (Daku and Azizi, 2018). Social media marketing has drastically changed the traditional concept of doing business (Petkovska-Mirchevska et al. 2017: 38; Amon-Prodrik, 2014). This was particularly evident during the period of firms dealing with the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to many countries, Kosovo has several advantages in using social media for business purposes. The countries of the Western Balkans, in particular Kosovo, have a young population. Young people are well versed in information technologies. This, if used well by local governments, would create an advantage for local firms because local firms will have the opportunity to hire skilled workers and skills to use digital technologies. These young people will enable these firms to carry out most of their business activities in the social media environment.

*Table 1.*RELATIVE PROPORTION OF PLATFORM USERS TO THE TOTAL
POPULATION OF THE COUNTRY

Western Balkan country	Facebook fans	YouTube subscribers	Twitter followers	LinkedIn follower
Albania	5.50%	0.001%	0.011%	0.33%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4.97%	0.004%	0.014%	0.013%
Kosovo	11.52%	0.019%	0.022%	0.25%
North Macedonia	2.34%	0.01%	0.021%	0.28%
Montenegro	7.50%	0.007%	0.48%	0.06%
Serbia	9.06%	1.21%	0.4%	0.22%

Source: Levkov et al. 2015

The table above shows that a large percentage of the population of the Western Balkan countries are users of social media. Some studies such as the study of Rrustemi et al. (2020) have shown that many businesses and clients are extremely engaged in social networks to achieve their business goals, such as increasing sales, marketing their products, finding good quality brands, etc. Many consumers from Kosovo follow the activities of various firms on social media or in the digital environment. In addition to tracking their ads, online consumers also express their opinions, whether positive or negative, about the products and services of these firms. It is essential for businesses to develop digital marketing strategies, where social media is the focal point of commercial activities. All firms need to intensify their marketing activities on social networks if they want to expand their clientele.

The purpose of this study is to analyze social media marketing activities in the Western Balkans region, with particular emphasis on Kosovo. Therefore, this paper is of special importance for researchers and researchers in the field of marketing because it contains complex values for an interesting topic. Especially the current situation, where most businesses from all over the globe are paralyzed as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, best reflects the importance of social media and activities in the digital environment, where those businesses that have resources and technology more easily can overcome the consequences of this pandemic and can more easily adapt to the new reality of digital life.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 *A critical review of Digital Marketing*

As a new field, there is not enough literature on digital marketing activities in the Western Balkan countries. The concept of digital marketing is about the use of technologies in marketing activities. Synonymous with this concept is also online marketing. This concept also has to do with the use of social media to communicate with consumers in order to achieve business objectives (Järvinen et al. 2012; Kovač and Žabkar, 2020; Rrustemi et al. 2020).

Meanwhile Kannan and Li (2017) claim that the term digital marketing has evolved over time from a specific term that describes the marketing of products and services using digital channels, to an umbrella term that describes the process of using digital technologies to gain customers and influence preferences of customers, in brand promotion, in customer retention and sales growth. Digital marketing can be seen as activities, institutions and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers. Digital marketing as an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to create, communicate, deliver and support value together for all customers.

According to Grubor and Jakša (2018), this ability to adapt through digital solutions enabled firms to capture customers on social media, collect, store, search, change course, manage, analyze and visualize all information and reach potential. full of personalized marketing campaigns. Investing in technology-based marketing innovation and shifting business to the digital environment provides numerous business improvements and a window of new options for a firm.

Today most firms use digital marketing as part of their strategy so that the success or failure of firms in their activities depends heavily on the quality of digital marketing tools (Patruti-Baltes, 2015; Alghizzawi, 2019). With the spread of social media in the business world, many companies are shifting traditional marketing activities to the digital environment with the goal of achieving business objectives (Taken-Smith, 2011). The following table shows the differences between these two concepts.

Table 2.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MARKETING

Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
Traditional Marketing activities include telephony, broadcasting, direct mail and the like.	Digital marketing activities include social media, web site advertising, email marketing, text messaging, affiliate marketing, internet search engines, pay per click.
In traditional marketing there is no interaction with customers.	Digital marketing activities provide interaction with customers
The results of traditional marketing activities are easily measurable.	The results of digital marketing are largely easy to measure
Traditional marketing advertising campaigns are planned for a long period of time	Digital marketing advertising campaigns are planned for a short period of time
The process of traditional marketing activities is expensive and time consuming	Digital marketing activities are reasonable, inexpensive and fast to promote the products or services of the enterprise
Traditional marketing strategies can be considered successful if the enterprise reaches a large local audience.	Digital marketing strategies can be considered successful if the enterprise the enterprise reaches specific local audiences.
The campaign of traditional marketing activities prevails for a long period	Campaigns of digital marketing activities can be easily changed while innovations can be made in any campaign
Traditional marketing activities reach a limited number of customers because the technologies used are limited	In digital marketing activities various technology is used so it can reach a larger number of customers
Exposure to these activities throughout the year is not possible due to limited capacity	Exposure to these activities throughout the year is possible due to abundant capacity
There is no possibility of going viral	There is possibility of going viral
Communication is one-way	Communication is two-way
Feedback can only arrive during business hours	Feedback can arrive anytime

Source: Yasmin et al, 2015.

The dynamics of consumer behaviors influence companies to reformulate their marketing strategies, especially to design strategies in the digital environment. Digital marketing enterprise activities can be classified according to per-

ceived benefits and use of digital marketing. Developing and improving digital marketing activities depends on marketing managers focusing on actions based on their customer relationships. (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). So the digital environment requires the formulation of specific Marketing strategies to meet the needs of customers.

Digital marketing has several advantages: Cost effectiveness, Easy measurability, easy adaptability, easy personalization, interaction, development effect, unlimited audience, duration, access to active users, dialogue with and between internet users, and content rich. Meanwhile the disadvantages are difficulties in case of slow internet connections, Campaigns in the digital marketing environment can be easily copied by different competitors, e-commerce does not allow the internet user to “touch” the product before buying it, internet marketing is not yet embraced by all people, due to the large number of scams related to virtual promotions there is a lack of trust in digital marketing activities, achieving measurable success depends heavily on the time it takes to implement digital marketing strategies (Todor, 2016). Authors like Cant and Wild (2016) argue that digital marketing is complementary to digital marketing in SME business activities. So according to them there are no differences between these two concepts, on the contrary they complement each other.

According to Kovač and Žabkar (2020); Gáti et al. (2018) social media is the most important channel for the development of digital marketing activities. However, despite technological developments, the success of digital marketing activities through social media depends on the possession of the customer account by consumer on social media as well as on their level of ability to use social media. Also Adi et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of digital marketing activities in increasing customer loyalty, in expressing positive and negative opinions from consumers about various products and services, etc. But the development of these activities faces similar barriers highlighted by the above authors.

According to the research of Girchenko and Ovsiannikova (2016) the main trends of digital marketing development in the future can be summarized in the following points: High level of development dependent on global scientific and technical progress trends as well as further trend for global coverage of business processes from digital channels. But the most important trend according to Saura et al. (2017) is that digital marketing will be the main instrument that will bring business growth in the coming years.

2.2 Social media marketing activities

Social media marketing is one of the most important components of digital marketing (Opreana and Vinerean, 2015). Social media marketing activities are not just about sending a message, but about getting and changing different opinions and alternatives (Drury, 2008). Vejačka (2017) emphasises that social media offers great opportunities for enterprises in different sectors. This applies to social media in general, micro-blogs and virtual worlds. Social media, by many digital marketing researchers is thought to be the most effective medium for organizing digital marketing campaigns, as well as for launching new products in the market. The most common uses of social media are in various fields such as marketing communication, loyalty programs, marketing research, etc (Yadav et al, 2015; Poddar and Agarwal, 2019).

According to Bala and Verma (2018) consumers search more online to find the best offer from retailers compared to traditional or conventional marketing methods. The growing use of social media is offering new opportunities for marketers in the digital environment because many customers are taking advantage of social media activities. Marketers are paying a lot of attention to consumer motives in the digital environment because through the knowledge of consumer motives the factors that influence consumer behaviors for certain brands on social media are revealed. The cost of digital marketing is effective so it has a huge impact on the business world.

Lesidrenska and Dicke (2012) emphasizes that firms not only introduce their new products online but more important to them is building a relationship with potential customers at a very early stage of product development. The most important means of communication in industrial marketing are digital marketing channels. But companies have not yet made the most of them. Companies use these to increase customer relationship communication, boost sales, and build customer awareness. Despite the latest developments in the world of technology and e-business, Karjaluoto et al. (2015) in their study claim that companies still do not use social media properly. Social media should be part of companies' digital marketing channels more than traditional marketing tools.

According to the research of Balathandayutham and Anandanatarajan (2020), people who are older than 45 years, buy more through social media in the digital environment than people who are under 45 years old. These individuals have a better level of purchasing knowledge in the digital environment. An additional element of AIDA should be added to determine the impact of social media on modern marketing. This is how the AIDA version is created, including social media. This new version is called AIDAT: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action and Show. The

additional 'T' indicates that the consumer must inform others about the products and services used (Charlesworth, 2015).

Killian and McManus (2015) were engaged in the study of four Cs of integration. Social platforms vary in terms of purpose, so a cohesive product brand personality is created on each platform by following the four Cs of integration: Adaptability, sustainability, dedication and care. Stockdale et al. (2012) emphasizes that SMEs increase business value by increasing customer turnover on their digital sites or social media groups. Business value is also generated by increasing customer engagement, then through greater knowledge of the features of the SME customer base. Value will also increase through the provision of information and knowledge that will enhance the reputation of the enterprise, and through confidence building. This will affect the enterprise to create a competitive advantage in the market. Also, according to them, community formation ensures more long-term loyalty from customers, but this requires more confirmation in a variety of industry contexts. Also, according to them, the formation of the community on social media enables more loyalty from consumers in the long run. But this requires more confirmation in a variety of industries.

According to Derham et al. (2011) the value of SMEs' use of digital marketing or social media stems from four factors: Efficiency, novelty, lock-in and complementarities. Facebook and its use in business activities has provided value for SMEs. This social media has solved the problem of communication with customers that was intended. Since Facebook offers the opportunity for consumers and SMEs to be direct, many comments and opinions on products and services can be obtained and provided more easily. However, their study did not provide any evidence of any facebook impact on SME performance. Even authors like Ho (2017); Wijaya (2017) claimed that consumers use social media to express opinions about the products of various companies that are traded online. Therefore, companies should convey these opinions to their groups, in order to design a business strategy based on the criticisms, needs and requirements of online customers.

McCann and Barlow (2015) focused on studying the impact of use of social media by SMEs on its return on investment (ROI). SMEs find some social media applications more valuable than others. SMEs need to include the use of social media within their business strategy. Also through quantitative and qualitative data to measure the impacts of this data on turnover and investment. Throughtout hierarchical logistic regression Wamba and Carter (2016) analysed usage of social media by SMEs. Their results provide evidence that the age and experience of the manager, SME innovations, the size of SMEs, and the industry sector play a major role in mastering social media. Meanwhile, Zabin (2009) claims that social media marketing increases the return on marketing investment, so the firm benefits greatly from social media marketing activities.

According to Stelzner (2012) social media marketing expands the clientele of firms as well as reduces the marketing costs of the firm. Hunjet et al. (2019) confirmed that the use of social media has influenced the online shopping to increase steadily increasing the profit of companies that use these media. Their research proves that some platforms are extremely important in the information search phase when selecting the product, but the research has also confirmed the importance of the published user generated content versus FGC when selecting the product. The paper has confirmed unfathomable role of social media in product selection and highlighted their importance in the individual stages of the selection process.

From this literature review it can be concluded that digital marketing, in particular digital marketing activities on social media are of particular importance for the development of business activities of SMEs and various firms. Over time digital marketing activities will largely replace traditional marketing activities.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In this research, we tried to analyze the impact of digital marketing or social media activities on increasing sales of Kosovo SMEs. Therefore, in this research are included 100 exporting SMEs of Kosovo which sell their products in Kosovo, in the market of the Western Balkans and in that of the EU. Kosovo as a country of the Western Balkans, has undertaken important political and economic reforms since 1999 (Gashi 2017: 87; Qorraj and Jusufi 2018: 65; Qorraj and Jusufi, 2019). But despite this, Kosovo has a limited number of manufacturing enterprises as well as those that export to foreign markets. Almost 90% of enterprises in Kosovo are commercial and service enterprises. So far, the digital marketing activities of manufacturing companies have not been analyzed. Therefore, this research is probably the only one that the object of study is the digital marketing activities of such enterprises. The sample of 100 manufacturing enterprises constitutes 50% of these enterprises because according to the data of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Kosovo in 2019 there were about 200 manufacturing enterprises.

The interview was conducted personally by the authors of the research. The interview took place at the locations of these enterprises and lasted approximately 40 minutes. Marketing managers have answered the questions posed, while in some companies even production managers. The questionnaire did not include questions related to the personality of these individuals. These enterprises are from 7 regions of Kosovo. Since Prishtina is the economic, political and administrative capital of Kosovo, over 50% of these enterprises are from Prishtina. While the rest of the companies are from Mitrovica, Prizren, Gjiilan, Peja, Ferizaj and Gjakova.

The achieved results are processed through the Probit Model in SPSS. The probit model is used in cases where the dependent variable has 2 categories. The probit regression equation is as follow:

$$P(Y_i = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Type of social media} + \beta_2 \text{Use of social media for business purposes} + \beta_3 \text{Considering consumer comments on social media} + \beta_4 \text{Organizing contests on social media} + \varepsilon_i)$$

The following table presents the variables, their categories and the reference category. Through our analysis, we have tried to find the impact of these variables on the dependent variable which represents sales growth during the period 2016-2019.

Table 3.

VARIABLES DESCRIPTION

Dependent variable	Variable categories
Increase the level of sales	1 (if the sales growth), 0 (otherwise)
Independent variables	Variable categories
Type of social media	Facebook (reference category), 1. Twitter, 2. Instagram, 3. Snapchat;
Use of social media for business purposes	Always (reference category); 1-Often; 2-Sometimes; 3-Rarely; 4-Never;
Considering customer comments on social media	Excellent (reference category); 1- Good; 2-Fair; 3-Poor; 4-Very poor;
Organizing contests on social media	1-Yes, 2-No

Source: Own study.

So, we will analyze how much digital marketing activities through social media have influenced the sales growth of 100 manufacturing SMEs during the three-year period. Representatives of these SMEs were asked if their sales had increased during this period. It should be noted that all these SMEs are active users of social media for business purposes. The results achieved through the probit model and their commentary will be presented in the following section.

From the literature review it can be stated that based on the evidence of various authors digital marketing is used to achieve the business objectives of many enterprises. Theoretical evidence also showed that the success of firms depends

on the use of social media within their business strategy. So social media has influenced the growth of sales of many companies. The question of whether online consumers express their opinions on products marketed online on social media has found theoretical consideration in the papers of some authors.

The literature has shown that they express their positive or negative opinions on social media and that these opinions should be analyzed by enterprises in order to improve and formulate their business strategy. A review of the literature has shown that most authors claim that facebook is mostly used by social media to achieve business goals. These evidences obtained from the literature review have served as a guide for the formulation of our objectives.

The major objectives of the survey were to:

1. Identify the role and importance of digital marketing activities through social media in increasing the sales of analyzed SMEs;
2. Identification of social media which is mostly used by SMEs to carry out digital marketing activities;
3. Identify how SME managers take into account the positive and negative customer comments expressed on social media;
4. Identify the importance of various contests organized by SMEs in sales growth.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, descriptive statistics of our model variables will be presented first. The following table presents the answers given by the respondents of the 100 SMEs surveyed. As can be seen, 62% of SMEs surveyed responded that their sales increased during the three-year period, while the rest responded that their sales did not increase. Meanwhile, 78% of companies have stated that they use Facebook the most from social media. This same result has been confirmed by several other researches which are presented below, where even in these researches Facebook is presented as a social media which is mostly used by different businesses.

Table 4.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variables	Frequency	Percent
<i>Sales growth:</i>		
1- if the sales increased	62	62.0
0- otherwise	38	38.0
<i>Type of social media:</i>		
Facebook	78	78.0
Twitter	13	13.0
Instagram	8	8.0
Snapchat	1	1.0
<i>Use of social media for business purposes:</i>		
Always	66	66.0
Often	28	28.0
Sometimes	4	4.00
Rarely	2	2.0
Never	0	0.0
<i>Considering customer comments on social media:</i>		
Excellent	52	52.0
Good	42	42.0
Fair	5	5
Poor	1	1
Very poor	0	0.0
<i>Organizing contests on social media:</i>		
Yes	59	59.0
No	41	41.0

Source: Own calculations.

Also 66% of enterprises stated that they always use social media for business purposes. These evidences show that social media is widely used by manufacturing businesses in Kosovo. From the literature review it was understood that different consumers express their opinions in the online environment specifically in enterprise groups on social media regarding the products of these enterprises. This variable indicates that the managers of these businesses are aware of developments in the online market. Simply forward opinions or comments whether positive or negative to consumers about the products used. The last variable is evidence related to the organization of various activities by enterprises on social media. Through

this variable we have tried to assess whether companies organize different disputes on social media and how much this organization has an impact on their business activity, ie how much they affect sales growth. Over 50% of companies organize contests on social media to draw consumers' attention to their products or brands.

Cronbach's Alpha shows the reliability. The variables of our model have reliability and give a pretty good picture of the problem analyzed.

Table 5.

TEST OF RELIABILITY

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's based on standardized items	Items
0.715	0.717	5

Source: Own calculations.

In our paper the pseudo R2 is 0.31. In our research we will use LR chi2. The value of this test is 29.11. Prob> chi2 has the value 0.05. This value indicates that these coefficients are very significant in our analysis. So our research has significance. Meanwhile, the Wald test has a value of 28.09. All of these tests show that our model is statistically significant.

Table 6.

PROBIT RESULTS

Variables	B	Stand. Error	Wald	df	Signific.	Exp (B)
<i>Type of social media:</i>						
Facebook (reference category)						
Twitter	1.166	1.036	1.223	1	0.106	2.752
Instagram	0.567	0.512	1.291	1	0.142	1.450
Snapchat	0.633	0.611	1.184	1	0.236	0.963
<i>Use of social media for business purposes:</i>						
Always (reference category)						
Often	0.481	1.343	0.139	1	0.024**	1.851
Sometimes	0.380	1.204	0.371	1	0.256	1.632
Rarely	0.182	1.102	0.310	1	0.310	0.942
Never	0.109	0.825	0.005	1	0.345	0.238
<i>Considering customer comments on social media:</i>						
Excellent (reference category)						
Good	1.185	1.237	0.461	1	0.039**	2.560
Fair	0.569	1.105	0.039	1	0.213	1.752
Poor	0.698	1.036	0.091	1	0.402	0.872
Very poor	0.652	0.574	0.072	1	0.169	0.543
<i>Organizing contests on social media:</i>						
Yes	1.425	1.128	1.236	1	0.152	1.859
No	1.268	1.119	1.123	1	0.143	0.985

Notes: **significant at 5%.

Source: Own calculations.

The first variable provides data on the type of social media most used by these SMEs for business activities. Facebook is a reference category which is not included in the calculation. According to the results achieved, only the last category has no direct connection with the reference category. Also from the obtained data it can be claim that facebook is the most platform which is used by SMEs in the development of digital marketing activities by these SMEs. Such results have also been achieved by various authors in their research.

Siricharoen (2012); Pradiptarini (2011) have achieved the same results. According to them, facebook is the dominant media which is used by various companies for business purposes. Facebook is very important for most businesses be-

cause thanks to this media, businesses reach a larger audience thus increasing their sales. Shabbir et al. (2016) also emphasize in their study the importance of social media, especially Facebook, in increasing the turnover of enterprises, especially SMEs, but according to them the managers of these businesses should have clear strategic objectives before launching promotional and advertising campaigns on social media.

Meanwhile, the second variable is related to the use of social media for business objectives. Quite a large number of SMEs surveyed stated that they always use social media for business objectives. Also, the first category of this variable represents significance in our model. In conclusion, it can be said that Kosovo SMEs use social media a lot for business or marketing purposes of their outputs. So social media, in particular facebook is quite popular in conducting digital marketing activities in the Western Balkan countries. Despite the fact that Kosovo businesses are in the initial stage of using social media, Beqaj et al. (2019) in their empirical research have obtained similar results where most managers of enterprises that use social media have superior education, use appropriate and low cost strategies. Annabi et al. (2012) have also achieved evidence for the use of social media for business purposes, where they have emphasized that social media has an irreplaceable role in achieving business goals.

Through the third variable we wanted to get information about how these SMEs evaluate the comments of different clients on social media. According to Bartosik-Purgat (2019) consumers from many countries communicate through social media especially through facebook with companies that have groups on social media for different purposes. These consumers try to find information about various discounts and information about the services and goods offered on social networks. Another group of consumers is interested in advertising companies on social networks. There are also consumers who are interested in various disputes organized by companies on social networks. Our results also show that the analyzed SMEs value the communications, specifically the comments of the clients on social media. Even the “good” category is significant in our model.

Such results have also been achieved by Singh and Sinha (2017). According to them, consumers recommend different products to other consumers on social media. Even social media is so influential that it turns potential customers into loyal and current customers. All of these also affect the growth of brand awareness. Thus, Pollák and Dorčák (2016) emphasize that companies should make continuous efforts to increase the base of their users on facebook and other social media.

Matić-Šošić (2019) in her paper concludes that social media purchases are not much different from purchases that can be made through the official SME website. Thus, facebook and social media users are neutral when shopping on social media

or the SME website. Social media can be an effective sales channel. In short, it can be a place where SMEs create a positive image for the product and achieve sales growth. Despite advances in social media, consumers who trade on these media can feel insecure when sharing their experience and opinion regarding products purchased through digital marketing channels.

A significant number of these SMEs organize contests on social media. Also the statistical values of the fourth variable of our model show a positive feedback with the dependent variable. So with increase of value of independent variable, possibility of increasing the sales of these SMEs increases. Despite these results, this variable does not represent significance in our model. Through these innovative activities, these SMEs aim to increase their sales and turnover. These innovative activities are essential for increasing the business performance of all firms (Šlogar & Bezić, 2020). Such results have been achieved by Venkateswaran et al. (2019) in their study. But unlike the results of this paper, in their paper these activities of enterprises represent significance. So they have an extremely large impact on the organization of business and on increasing the turnover of businesses.

According to the authors Trkman and Trkman (2018), enterprise IT officials should have knowledge of software technology to organize such activities in enterprise groups on social media. To achieve this skill and ability, IT staff training must be done. These officials should always be up to date by constantly following the developments and advancements of social media. So follow the techniques and methods that measure the impact of social media on business growth.

5. LIMITATION AND DESIRABLE FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitation of this paper is that the paper includes data only for Kosovo SMEs. Better understanding and identification of digital marketing activities would be better if the SMEs of five other Western Balkan countries could also be analyzed. Involving five other countries in the research requires more time and cost. The countries of the Western Balkans have similar economic, social and cultural characteristics, so the results obtained from this research may have implications for other countries of the Western Balkans. It would also be good to include more variables in the research, related to the characteristics of the interviewed managers, for example, their education, experience in business and marketing, etc

Regarding the desirable future research streams, it can be stated that this paper is one of the few papers that has addressed the impact of digital marketing activities on the business performance of manufacturing enterprises in the West-

ern Balkans, with particular emphasis on those of Kosovo. Therefore this paper is important for digital marketing researchers. In the future there should be studies that would explore the impact of digital marketing activities separately in each Western Balkan country.

Future work should also include more econometric analyzes, which would further expand the digital marketing literature, especially for the Western Balkan countries. Future research should also include cross-cultural studies. Although the countries of the Western Balkans have similar characteristics, future studies should focus on investigating the impact of variables or demographic, cultural, religious characteristics on the development of digital marketing activities in these countries.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of digital marketing is quite widespread in firms in the Western Balkans region. A large number of SMEs and firms in this region have developed digital marketing activities to achieve greater turnover and sales inside and outside the region. Social media in particular facebook is widely used in the realization of digital marketing or social media activities. So facebook is widely used by SMEs in this region to make various ads, to exchange creative ideas and opinions with the audience, to organize various contests in the digital environment, etc. This is among the most important theoretical implications of our research because the reviewed theoretical evidence shows that facebook is widely used by various businesses. The results of descriptive statistics and the probit model, even in our paper have confirmed this theory.

This research was conducted to research digital marketing activities on social media from the perspective of SMEs. It should be noted that this is one of the first researches on digital marketing activities for the Western Balkans region. So there is a lack of literature on digital marketing or social media activities in Western Balkan region, despite the fact that these activities have developed extremely much in recent years. Especially during this period when the COVID 19 pandemic has hampered the business activities of thousands of SMEs, digital marketing in particular social media has served as a long-term solution for these SMEs. This is also a theoretical implication of our work because from the literature review it is understood that digital marketing activities are extremely important in the development of business activities, the use of social media has a positive impact on increasing sales of many companies. So the results of our research are consistent with the theoretical evidence reviewed in the paper.

In this paper, empirical evidence is provided by Kosovo, because Kosovo not only has many similarities in mentality with other Western Balkan countries, but has a population that uses digital marketing extremely, especially social media. Empirical results reflect a reality that shows the use of social network quite a lot in business and trade relationships between consumers and businesses. SME managers pay a lot of attention to customer opinions whether positive or negative, which they express on social media. So through social media, consumers try to get the right and fair information about the product and service offered by different customers. This is one of the most important managerial implications of our paper. Every company should have an official or manager who will follow 24 hours on social media the opinions of online consumers about their products and brands. Always taking into account these opinions and criticisms, the strategy and business objectives related to the online activity of enterprises on social media should be evaluated and reviewed.

The data also show that SMEs organize many business activities on social media such as various competitions and contests. Through these activities, SMEs aim to increase the interest and attention of consumers for the products and services offered so that this then affects the increase of their sales and turnover. From all this, it can be concluded that SMEs in the Western Balkans conduct a lot of business activities in the digital Marketing environment, especially in social media which are widely used by the population of this region. So there is no essential difference in this area between SMEs in the Western Balkans and those in other regions of the European continent. This finding presents an important managerial implication as managers need to frequent innovative social media activities. So managers need to develop creative ideas related to various online discounts, organizing different games which will attract the attention of different customers, thus increasing consumer interest in the products and brands of these companies.

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RAZUMIJEVANJE MARKETINŠKIH AKTIVNOSTI DRUŠTVENIH MEDIJA NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU: EMPIRIJSKI UVID S KOSOVA

Sažetak

Digitalne marketinške aktivnosti putem društvenih medija intenzivno se razvijaju od strane tvrtki u regiji zapadnog Balkana pa je stoga svrha ovog rada istražiti utjecaj marketinških aktivnosti društvenih medija na povećanje prodaje malih i srednjih poduzeća na zapadnom Balkanu, s posebnim naglaskom na Kosovo. Koristeći uzorak od 100 proizvodnih malih i srednjih poduzeća, istraživali smo utjecaj digitalnih marketinških aktivnosti koje se provode putem društvenih medija na povećanje prodaje ili prometa tih malih i srednjih poduzeća. Postignuti rezultati analizirani su probit regresijom. Rezultati pokazuju kako se uglavnom za poslovne aktivnosti u tim malim i srednjim poduzećima koristi Facebook. Također, analizirana mala i srednja poduzeća pridaju veliku važnost mišljenjima i komentarima potrošača izraženim na društvenim mrežama. Svoju poslovnu politiku osmišljavaju/kreiraju na temelju komentara i mišljenja primljenih od online potrošača. Ovo empirijsko istraživanje pruža podatke o provedbi marketinških aktivnosti na društvenim mrežama od strane malih i srednjih poduzeća u regiji Zapadnog Balkana.

Ključne riječi: digitalni marketing, društveni mediji, Kosovo, zapadni Balkan, mala i srednja poduzeća.