

The Impact of Digital Marketing and Digital Transformation on Brand Promotion and Brand Positioning in Kosovo's Enterprises

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Abstract

Digitalization is very important for every company in today's fierce competition. The development of Information Technologies has helped companies change means of reaching their clients and changing their working practices. The paper tries to assess digital marketing (DM) and digital transformation (DT) techniques that impact enterprises in Kosovo in the process of their brand promotion and brand positioning using google analytics, social media, e-commerce, search engines, mobile apps, or other digital channels. DT is profoundly important to every company, yet the correlation between DT, brand promotion, and brand positioning for Kosovo's enterprises has not been researched a lot. With the DT, many companies are redefining business procedures and marketing strategies. The research will collect data using a survey with 150 companies generated by the Kosovo Business Registration Agency. Partial Least Square is used to analyse the collected data. Structural Equation modelling is used to assess the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables used in the research proposed model. A moderation effect is used to test whether COVID-19 or the company's size is linked to the usage of DM and DT. The results are expected to reveal that DM and the digitalization process of enterprises affect brand promotion and brand position. The findings also imply that social media are widely used relative to other marketing channels. Companies that use DM and invest more in technology have better chances to promote and position their brands.

Keywords: digital marketing, digital transformation, brand positioning, brand promotion, Kosovo

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Introduction

In today's world, where access to information is easy, and the supply for various products is high, loyalty and trust are crucial reasons consumers will buy certain products (Mishra et al., 2016; Pratminingsih et al., 2013; Alhabeeb, 2007). The right marketing strategy is crucial for any company. As technology advances rapidly (Customer relation management, salesforce, google analytics, etc.), e-electronics, brand promotion and brand positioning play an important role in digital marketing and transformation (Melović et al., 2020). Brand positioning is defined as a process of creating own image, positive association, and values in consumers' minds to create a sustainable trademark image (Fayvishenko, 2018). Different target groups prefer a certain form of online or traditional advertising. For Millennials, digital marketing is highly effective, motivating them to visit a website and write online reviews (Smith, 2012).

There is a lack of research for the Kosovo market on this topic and transition countries. The current research was conducted by Sadiku (2019) on higher education and digital transformation, while Limani et al. (2018) researched banking systems and digital technology adoption of Electronic Data Interchange. Some research has been done on brand awareness, showing an increasing trend of enterprises creating a brand for their products (Ukaj, 2016). Other research measures the effects of e-marketing on brand loyalty, showing that e-marketing communication is a key factor in building a brand image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty towards brands of mobile operators in Kosovo (Mullatahiri et al., 2019). However, there is no research on the impact of digital transformation and digital marketing on branding and positioning, per se.

Digitalization is under-studied for the Kosovo market. Computers were initially used for financial records mainly, but the Kosovo market was moving fast on adopting new technology. An open data source shows that internet penetration in Kosovo was 91% in January 2021, an increase of 9,7% since January 2020. Kosovo has much higher internet penetration than North Macedonia (82%) and Albania (69,6%). In addition, 103% of the total population had a mobile connection, while the number of social media users in Kosovo in January 2021 was equivalent to 56,9% of the total population (Hootsuite et al., 2019). These facts show the importance of digitalization for any aspiring companies who wish to work on brand promotion and brand positioning by using digital marketing tools and digital transformation.

On the other hand, 15% of the Kosovo population makes an online payment. Traditional businesses need to rethink their strategies from five perspectives: costumers, competition, data, innovation, and value. In today's world, companies suffer from attention. Therefore, we intend to shed some light on the impact of digital marketing on brand promotion and brand position and digital transformation on brand promotion and brand position for the Kosovo market. Pandemic COVID-19 was used as a moderator effect to test the impact on digital transformation.

The next part presents the background literature on digital marketing, digital transformation, brand position, brand promotion, and the effect of Covid19 for developing the hypotheses. The following parts present the methodology, the results of the data analysis, a discussion, and conclusions of the findings. The paper ends with theoretical and practical implications derived from the study, and finally, the limitations of the study.

Literature Review

The importance of digital marketing is constantly growing. A study shows how industrial companies characterized by complex selling processes can harness Web analytics to validate how digital marketing activities benefit their businesses. The article suggests that the benefits gained from marketing are determined by how an organization exploits the metrics systems under specific circumstances (Järvinen, 2016). Digital marketing does have a positive impact on brand promotion and brand positioning. Investing in digital marketing transforms to brand promotion and brand positioning. Moreover, the size of the company influences digital marketing and digital transformation. In other words, the larger the company, the higher the impact of DM, DT on brand promotion and brand positioning.

The number of social media users in Kosovo is increasing, where over 90% of the population uses it regularly. Findings from Çizmeçi et al. (2015) indicate that digital marketing communication, which creates proactive content (Facebook, Instagram & Twitter), will become more important in the future. A consumer data collection was analyzed by Krishnaprabha et al. (2020), which demonstrates that digital marketing activities have a high influence in building brand awareness as well as digital marketing activities allow on perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty. For micro-businesses, the degree of partnership and information are linked to organization context, whereas the level of training, service delivery, customer fulfillment, and competition are interrelated to the environment (Eze et al., 2020). For large companies, the investment in social media is increasing. However, the return of investment is a concern, leaving a question mark on how many likes and shares are translated to sales.

Nonetheless, there is a strong impact of social media on large companies as a digital marketing tool (Bogea et al., 2018). Investment in social media is important for brand promotion. Research by Yu et al. (2019) shows that previous experience with a brand's social media site is key to increasing clients' favourable site evaluation. It also demonstrates that having previous experience purchasing through social media will increase the brand promotion more than those who didn't have such experience. Another perspective from users was studied by Jibril et al. (2019), which shows that online-based-brand community on social media positively impacts consumer-brand engagement and user-brand relationship.

Word of mouth (E-WOM) still has an impact on brand experience. Recent research shows that the motivation of value co-creation positively affects the brand experience. E-WOM moderates the relationship between customer equity and brand experience (Yu et al., 2020). Thus, we come with the following hypotheses:

- H1: Digital marketing has a positive impact on brand position
- H2: Digital marketing has a positive impact on brand promotion

New technology or digital transformation (DS) has become an important tool that most businesses must adopt accordingly (Morakanyane et al., 2017). The digital transformation is defined by Fitzgerald et al. (2013) as the use of new digital technologies, such as social media, mobile, analytics, or embedded devices to enable major business improvements like enhancing customer experience, streamlining operations, or creating new business models.

A study by IDG (2019) shows that 63% of organizations say delivering an excellent customer experience as measured by customer satisfaction scores defines success as a digital-first business. Another study conducted by KPMG (2018) indicates that 67% of CEOs said that acting with agility is "the new currency of business; if we're too slow, we will be bankrupt". Technology is moving fast, while businesses are not always able to follow. Recent research by Guenzi et al. (2020) found that 75% of

managers said that tools (from CRM to digital signature) are an integral part of the modern sales process, but only 15% said these tools were effective. So, for digital transformation to succeed, sales managers need to be selective, focusing on issues that have the biggest impact on their selective goals. The importance of brand loyalty and brand positioning was studied for different brands in Pakistan, revealing that a good marketing strategy can increase the market shares, particularly for new entrants. Even big companies like Coca-Cola and Gucci created a brand image and brand positioning through the investment of digital marketing (Ahmed et al., 2015).

Various companies use different strategies of brand promotion and brand positioning. A study shows that the usage of sports celebrities is an effective competitive source in brand positioning, which gives a competitive advantage over other competitors (Malik et al., 2014). As consumer behavior plays an important role in digital marketing strategy, firms are co-creating content with their consumers. The evidence shows that marketers must focus on relationship-based interaction with their customers to improve digital marketing engagement (Tiago et al., 2014). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

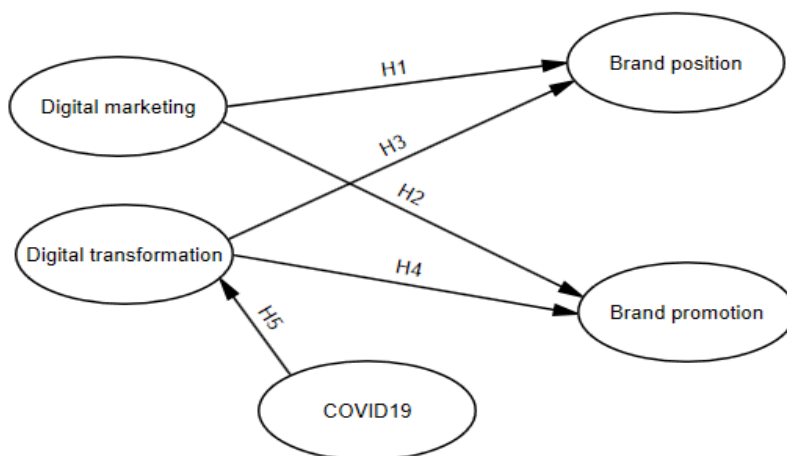
- o H3: Digital transformation has a positive impact on brand position
- o H4: Digital transformation has a positive impact on brand promotion

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many problems to various companies in their business activities. Even though companies' digitalization has started earlier as a need for companies to offer online services and connect with customers, COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of the process of digitalization of companies. Thus, digitalization supports companies in overcoming problems caused by COVID-19 (Almeida et al., 2020). Because of many country lockdowns, many organizations and people have been forced to modify their working practices (Pandey et al., 2020), leading to an inevitable must for the use of digital technologies. Thus, COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of digitalization technologies (Pinzaru et al., 2020). Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis:

- o H5: COVID19 has a positive impact on digital transformation

Based on the above, we have a research proposal model as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure1
The Research model



Source: Authors' work

Methodology

The study's objective is to explore the impact that digital marketing and digital transformation have on brand promotion and brand position among companies in Kosovo. A structural questionnaire has targeted all sizes in Kosovo, micro, small, medium, and large companies. The questionnaire was sent to 150 companies and collected 120 questionnaires, and the response rate was 80%. The data were collected through a web-based survey (using google forms) distributed online. The questionnaire was translated to Albanian, and respondents were asked to answer a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Of the respondents, 47.5% belong to micro-sized companies, 32.5% to small-sized companies, 16.5% to medium-sized companies, and 3.5% to large-sized companies. Regarding the industry type of companies, 30% are in the production sector, 37% in services, and 33% in trade.

Table 1
Demographic profile

Company size / Industry type	Frequency	Percent
Micro	57	47.5
Small	39	32.5
Medium	20	16.5
Large	4	3.5
Production	36	30
Services	44	37
Trade	40	33
Total	120	100.0

Source: Authors' work

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS and Partial Least Squares (PLS) with Smart PLS for assessing the measurement model and structural equation modelling (SEM). The respondents were assured their anonymity and confidentiality. The scales for measuring digital marketing, digital transformation, brand position, brand promotion, and COVID-19 were developed to review the existing literature (Table 2).

Results

To assess convergent validity, the outer loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) must be reconsidered while assessing the convergent validity of the reflective constructs (Zeqiri et al., 2020). Hair et al. (2017) suggested a general rule for outer loading to be 0.708. In cases when the outer loading of an item is between 0.4 and 0.7, it needs to be removed if we want to achieve a good model fit. Therefore, the convergent validity evaluates the factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability. As shown in Table 3, the Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.651 to 0.843, signifying that all values are above the recommended value of 0.60 accepted threshold for social sciences research (Ursachi et al., 2015). In addition, composite reliability values vary from 0.827 to 0.906 exceeding the proposed value of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) values range from 0.552 to 0.762, which all are over the recommended value of 0.50 (Fornell et al., 1981). Therefore, convergent validity was achieved based on the results in Table 3.

Table2
Research instrument description

Construct	Code	Item
Digital Marketing (DM)	DM1	We measure the influence of social media, which has an impact on brand promotion
	DM2	We measure the Google analytics, which has an impact on brand promotion
	DM3	Digital Marketing (social media, google analytics, webpage, etc.) has an impact on brand positioning
	DM4	The company uses social media as a form of band promotion
	DM5	The company uses a webpage as a form of band promotion
	DM6	The company uses SEO and google analytics to create a digital marketing strategy
	DM7	The company has implemented digital marketing in the last five years
Digital Transformation (DT)	DT1	Production or services which we offer have automated processes
	DT2	The company uses software systems for account purposes
	DT3	The company has dedicated employers in digital marketing
	DT4	The company has invested in technology that helps on digital transformation (tech defined as processes automation, continuous investment in new machines, e-commerce, CRM, salesforce et) in the last five years)
Brand Promotion (BP)	Bprom1	We do business promotion through sales agents, seasonal promotion, or campaigns for brand promotion
	Bprom2	The company offers personalized products
	Bprom3	We still use traditional marketing (sales agents, billboards, flyers, etc.)
	Brom4	Marketing through social media helps in distributing the information for the company's brand
Brand Position (BP)	BP1	Our company's approach is enough creative which is related to brand positioning
	BP2	Brand positioning of our company is different from our competitors
	BP3	We have a good communication form of brand positioning which is clear and acceptable by our clients
	BP4	We have identified what makes our brand unique
	BP5	Depending on our sales process, our company constantly works on brand positioning
COVID19	COV1	Pandemic COVID-19 had an impact on investing in the automatization of processes
	COV2	We started online sales as a result of COVID -19
	COV3	The company invested in digital marketing as a result of COVID-19
	COV4	From pandemic COVID-19, we plan the brand promotion through the website and social media

Source: Authors' work

Table 3
Construct reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand position	0.843	0.847	0.906	0.762
Brand promotion	0.651	0.717	0.847	0.736
COVID19	0.840	0.954	0.895	0.743
Digital transformation	0.744	0.778	0.854	0.662
Digital marketing	0.723	0.766	0.827	0.552

Source: Authors' work

This study evaluates discriminant validity by using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The HTMT values for all constructs must be below 0.85, as suggested by Hair et al. (2017). Table 4 shows the total HTMT value for all constructs below the recommended threshold of 0.85; therefore, all construct pairs have discriminant validity.

Table 4
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	BP	Bprom	COVID19	DT
Brand position (BP)				
Brand promotion (Bprom)	0.558			
COVID19	0.223	0.545		
Digital transformation (DT)	0.571	0.78	0.453	
Digital marketing (DM)	0.718	0.64	0.498	0.753

Source: Authors' work

Table 5 shows factor loadings, means, standard deviations, t-values, and VIF for all items in the construct. Outer loadings, as a rule, should be 0.708 or higher as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). Based on the values provided in Table 4, all item loadings range from 0.708 to 0.930; that is over the recommended threshold value. DM3 outer loading value is 0.542, but it can be kept since the minimum AVE value of 0.5 has been reached (Ramayah et al., 2018). To check the collinearity issue, VIF values are used to check if the model is biased. According to Kock (2015), VIF values greater than 3.3 indicate a collinearity problem. Thus, denoting that the model is biased.

Table 5
Factor loadings

	Loadings	Mean	STDEV	T-values	VIF
BP1	0.851	3.88	0.99	17.715	2.038
BP3	0.924	4.04	0.98	44.413	2.846
BP5	0.842	4.22	1.01	18.626	1.920
BProm1	0.912	3.29	1.36	37.87	1.304
BProm3	0.799	2.85	1.45	11.567	1.304
COV2	0.930	2.62	1.50	55.19	2.338
COV3	0.926	2.81	1.36	34.82	2.659
COV4	0.711	3.28	1.34	7.527	1.650
DM2	0.838	3.32	1.43	23.906	1.861
DM3	0.542	4.44	0.91	4.807	1.195
DM6	0.838	3.06	1.35	19.215	1.908
DM7	0.713	3.69	1.24	9.763	1.411
DT2	0.708	3.98	1.29	9.556	1.307
DT3	0.841	3.26	1.47	15.649	1.654
DT4	0.882	3.45	1.47	31.208	1.751

Source: Authors' work

To test the hypotheses, we used bootstrapping technique. This technique helps assess the structural model, R-square (R^2), beta, and t-values as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). The findings revealed support for all hypotheses (Table 6). Figure 1 presents the path model.

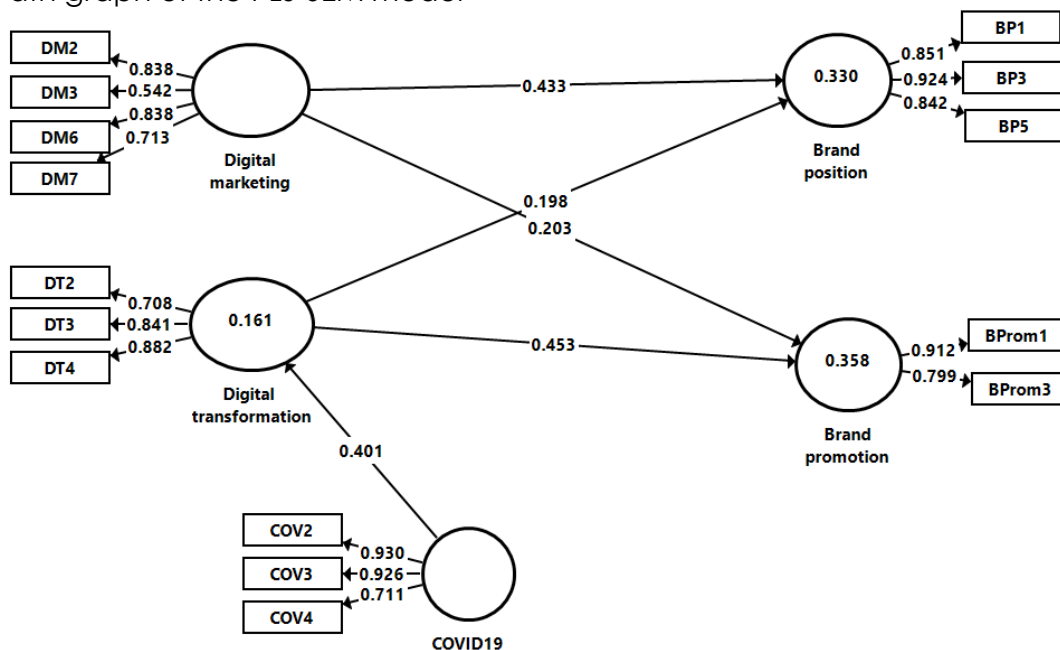
Table 6
Hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	STDEV	T-values	P-values
H1 Digital marketing -> Brand position	0.433	0.105	4.133	0.000
H2 Digital marketing -> Brand promotion	0.203	0.097	2.086	0.038
H3 Digital transformation -> Brand position	0.198	0.094	2.101	0.036
H4 Digital transformation -> Brand promotion	0.453	0.076	5.954	0.000
H5 COVID19 -> Digital transformation	0.401	0.065	6.142	0.000

Source: Authors' work

Figure 2 presents the path diagram. Digital marketing (DM) positively affected brand position (BP) (path coefficient = 0.433, t-value = 4.133, $p < 0.000$). Thus, H1, is supported. H2, Digital marketing (DT) has a positive significant effect on Brand promotion (Bprom) (path coefficient = 0.203, t-value = 2.086, $p < 0.038$). In addition, H3 is also supported, i.e., digital transformation (DT) has a positive significant impact on brand position (path coefficient= 0.198, t-value = 2.101, $p < 0.036$). Furthermore, digital transformation (DT) has a significant positive effect on brand promotion (path coefficient= 0.453, t-value = 5.954, $p < 0.000$). Finally, H5 is also supported. Findings reveal that COVID19 has an impact on digital transformation ((path coefficient= 0.401, t-value = 6.142, $p < 0.000$).

Figure2
Path graph of the PLS-SEM model



Note: DM1, DM4, DM5, DT1, COV1, BP2, BP4, Bprom2, Bprom4, and Bprom5 were removed from the model because of low loadings

The model explained 33 % of the variance in Brand position (BP) and 35.8% in Brand promotion (Bprom). The predictive relevance of the model was evaluated using Stone-Geisser's Q2 following a blindfolding procedure. The obtained values for BP ($Q^2 = 0.233$) and Bprom ($Q^2 = 0.240$) denoting a good predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017) (Table 7).

Table. 7 Determination of Co-efficient (R^2), Predictive Relevance (Q^2), and Effect size (f^2)

Constructs	Determination of coefficient	Predictive Relevance	Effect size (F^2)		
	R^2	Q^2	BP	Bprom	DT
BP	0.330	0.233			
Bprom	0.358	0.240			
DM			0.177*	0.041*	
DT			0.037*	0.201**	
COVID19					0.192*

Note: **BP**= Brand promotion, **Bprom**= Brand promotion, **DM**= Digital marketing, **DT** = Digital transformation; *Small effect 0 to 0.20, **Medium effect 0.20 to 0.50, ***Large effect more than 0.50

Source: Authors' work

Notwithstanding test model fit, model fit parameters need to be tested first. The Standard Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) values are 0.094, denoting that the model is a considerably good fit for the saturated and estimated models. The SRMR values less than 0.10 or 0.08 are considered a good fit (Henseler et al., 2014). The second fit index used in PLS-SEM is NFI needs to be above 0.9 to denote an acceptable fit (Ramayah et al., 2018). In our study, the NFI value is 0.687, below the proposed threshold.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship of digital marketing and digital transformation on brand position and brand promotion among different-sized companies in Kosovo. Moreover, the study attempted to determine the impact that DM and DT have on BP and Bprom. In addition, this research tried to find out the effect that the pandemic of COVID-19 has on the digital transformation of companies in Kosovo.

Our findings show that digital marketing predicts brand position. This finding is similar and is supported by previous studies (Bogea et al., 2018; Melović et al., 2020; Niculescu et al., 2019). Therefore, the findings approve our prediction that digital marketing is an important tool for supporting companies in their effort to position themselves in the Kosovo market. Next, the findings showed that digital marketing (DT) predicts brand position among companies in Kosovo, which is similar to other findings like Melović et al., 2020; Fejling et al., 2019). The findings also revealed that digital transformation is a significant predictor of brand position among companies in Kosovo. The finding is supported by Morakanyane et al. (2017) and other previous publications (Ahmed et al., 2015; Reinartz et al., 2019). Therefore, our findings confirm our prediction that digital transformation impacts brand position. Moreover, the findings showed that digital transformation predicts brand promotion. The findings are in line with other publications, like, Melović et al. (2020). Finally, the findings showed that the pandemic of COVID-19 had a positive and significant impact on the digital transformation process of companies in Kosovo. The result is supported by other publications (Almeida et al., 2020; Pandey et al., 2020; Pinzaru et al., 2020).

The significance of this research is to study the relationship between digital marketing and digital transformation on brand position and brand promotion motivation being the first study to focus on this issue in Kosovo. The study will also add to the literature a better understanding of the relationship between DM and DT and BP and Bprom on the other side. Moreover, this research provides some practical implications for companies and various other organizations to digitalize their business and marketing activities.

Last but not the least, the study has some limitations. The sample size is small, which cannot be generalized in other contexts. So, expanding the sample size could eventually lead to more reliable results from the research. Thus, further research can be expanded and using the company's size as a moderating variable to check whether the size of the company moderates these relationships, comparing more perspectives in their entrepreneurial motivation towards entrepreneurial. Finally, more extended research combining this model with other existing theories could provide more insights for future researchers.

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