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Measurement and Impact of Virtual and Digital Marketing as a Distribution Channel in Business

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Abstract

Purpose: Marketing and especially distribution channels has proved challenging for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) worldwide due to its exorbitant cost. The objective of this study is to access the role and impact of digital marketing as a new distribution channel in companies located in Kosovo. **Research design, data and methodology:** To achieve the objective of the research, data was collected from 64 respondents/participants working in different organizations and sectors. **Results:** The result of the data collected showed that digital marketing plays a huge role and an effective medium in distribution of products and services, and helps in boosting sales of companies. The results showed that this form of marketing helps with retention of customers and cost effectiveness. **Conclusions:** The managerial implication of this study is that it is believed that customers in the topical conversation region are impacted by Kosovo businesses and their online marketing initiatives. The results of this study suggest that marketers and managers should take advantage of social media in order to accomplish the study's main objective. However, for enhanced productivity and high-level effectiveness of Digital marketing in Kosovo, there should be proper sensitization on the available digital marketing options and how it can be done.

Keywords: Marketing, Distribution, Customers, Social media, Digital marketing.

JEL Classification Code: M30, M31, M37.

1. Introduction

Because of the competitiveness of the market, businesses need to attract and keep consumers in order to be successful. Businesses usually desire to grow the size of both their client base and their asset base. The key tenet of the marketing concept is that its use increases earnings, according to Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick (2013). The effect of marketing on crucial company metrics like profit growth, according to

their argument, serves as an acid test rather than being an abstract concept.

Market routes and distribution channels are two other terms for the same thing. A collection of interdependent organizational entities that participate in the movement of goods and services from suppliers to consumers is referred to as a distribution route. One method to link and organize the agencies and middlemen through which one or more streams are moving is to view the distribution channel's

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functional component as a means to connect and arrange it. (Garbaski, 2000).

To maintain their long-term viability and ability to compete globally, businesses must become corporate organizations. According to a research by Ayyagari et al. (2007), over 60% of formal positions in the manufacturing sector in both developing and industrialized countries are held by small and medium-sized businesses. Any country that wishes to have a thriving economy must first support firm expansion; as a result, more incentives must be offered in this direction. One of the essential components of every business enterprise's expansion is the generation of income via sales.

This might be achieved through marketing their goods and services to get greater recognition and boost demand relative to those of rivals. As a consequence, depending on a firm's size, resource availability, and length of existence, various marketing strategies will be required. Major companies often have a lot of opportunities due to their successful marketing campaigns, which allow them to operate multi-channel marketing operations and be widely recognized (Dwivedi et al., 2021). But smaller and moderate businesses have comparatively limited marketing options owing to a shortage of capital. The ability to grow for small and medium-sized businesses is limited since they mostly depend on physical marketing and concentrate their energies on the few sites they can oversee.

Small company owners often take part in marketing activities in an impromptu, informal, bottom-up manner, as O'Donnell (2011) pointed out. In order to accomplish their objectives, company owners may create customized marketing strategies. Studies show that a company's strength is likely to affect how quickly it implement electronic channels; small firms typically embrace digital technology at the slowest rates, while huge corporations tend to possess the required information and means to effectively incorporate digital networks and developments. The strength of company tends to affect how fast it implements electronic channels; small firms typically embrace digital technology at the slowest rates, while huge corporations are more likely to have the knowledge and resources required to successfully incorporate digital networks and developments.

Since it often happens, customer growth and retention are crucial to any company's life cycle. As a result, one of your marketing goals should be to increase your consumer reach. Successful small businesses have long used in-person marketing to promote their products and services. The fundamental goal of marketing has changed from the exchange of commodities to the provision of services, involvement, interactions, and client relationships as digital marketing has grown (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Technological advancements, fresh marketing approaches, and ongoing

media environment modifications have made this transformation possible.

Today, a lot of businesses see the utilization of digital marketing platforms as fundamental to their plan in increasing business performance (Ukaj & Bibuljica, 2019). Entrepreneurs with small businesses now possess a highly practical and effective means of marketing their products or services. To market the business and its products and services, including media channels, site optimization, audio-visual material, and much more, the firm may use a number of tools and media, including smart phones, tablets, television, and other gadgets. To find the ideal strategy for maximizing the effectiveness of digital marketing, businesses should create creative consumer engagement and specific advertising techniques (Mahmutovi, 2021). Additionally, Bretton (2015) contends that marketing has to fully understand the concept of the user experience since there is such a strong connection between customers and businesses on the global market.

Companies nowadays are aware of the advantages of digital marketing. In order to better satisfy client requirements, businesses will need to combine conventional and internet marketing tactics (Gáti et al., 2018; Elezaj & Livoreka, 2022). Additional technological advancements have given marketers more commercial options for operating their websites and fulfilling their corporate goals. The implementation of technology in the process of marketing so as to enhance better understanding of customers in a bid to meet their demands can be described as digital marketing.

Advertising materials, extra sales platforms, direct discounts, customer service, business or brand image, personalization, publicity, inventory monitoring, and marketplaces are a few of the tactics that might improve direct marketing. For instance, providing digital goods and services may be completed in half the time. Distribution across borders might potentially face significant restrictions (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013).

The premise of organizational transformation is that organizations must quickly adapt new technologies in the era of the digital economy since doing so gives them the opportunity to experiment with new products, services, and business models. Companies force employees to quickly adapt and learn new skills. After this adaptation period, improvements to strategy and structure are made. The nature of the work itself must also alter simultaneously. Since few people in the digital economy will have traditional job security, these workers will need to be very adaptive (Chaffey, 2011).

In this research, we'll look at the metrics used to assess digital marketing and how they affect a firm's success. It is worthy of note that scholars in this field have taken similar results into consideration. The aim of this research is to look

at how companies in Kosovo utilize digital platforms, mainly as an advertising tool, and to determine the extent to which customers' choices (of purchasing a particular item or service) are affected after seeing such products (goods or services) advertised on one or more media channels.

1.1. Objective of Study

- The impact of digital marketing as a distribution channel in Business.
- To examine the various digital marketing tools and techniques used by Kosovo companies.
- To evaluate the impact of digital marketing capacity to boost sales.

1.2. Research Questions

- How has digital marketing been effective in retaining customers in Kosovo companies?
- What are the various tools and techniques used by Kosovo companies for digital marketing?
- How has digital marketing impact Kosovo companies' capacity to boost sales?

1.3. Hypothesis

The following hypothesis will be examined in this study:

- H1:** Digital marketing has an impact on increasing sales and the number of customers of Kosovar companies
- H2:** The sector of the company and the money set aside for digital marketing investments are positively correlated.
- H3:** There is no statistical difference between sizes of different Kosovo business organizations and their location.

1.4. Research Gap

There are many studies evaluating the impact of digital marketing. However, there is limited study on the effectiveness of digital marketing in customer retention as well as evaluating a relationship between company size and the various digital marketing tools and platforms. This study gives a clearer view towards this area of research.

2. Literature Review

The marketing communication plan involves targeted digital activities. However, as digital technology may be used for both dissemination and communication, the line between the two is blurred. The technology's flexibility reveals how sophisticated it is (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013). Additionally, the definitions of numerous categories

of economic activity are changing as a result of digital technology.

A variety of concepts and definitions have been offered in prior study on digital marketing. One definition of digital marketing, according to Nashan (2006), is the use of digital devices (computers), such as personal computers, mobile phones, and other gadgets to increase marketing. Digital marketing techniques may imitate many conventional media channels and marketing communication components, hence broadening the marketing mix. As a result, studies have already shown how much of an influence the internet will have on the world. Many businesses have been motivated to rethink how they use technology as a result (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013).

Through the use of digital channels, consumers may build or shape how brands communicate with them, for example, by specifying the platform and content they would want to see. Digital platforms may also offer methods and services for editing the media material. Thus, it is anticipated that digital technology will have an influence on company structures, the types of promotional tool, and the media that will be required of all marketing organizations. Due to this significant shift away from traditional media and advertising, companies are searching for methods that network operators can clearly communicate their digital marketing strategies.

This change in emphasis demonstrates the necessity for marketers to comprehend what consumers want from them and how to use technology to promote their marketing goals. In addition, the growth of e-commerce paved the way for the emergence of the mobile marketing channel. Mobile advertising is thus one of the most important activities in mobile marketing (Ninevi et al., 2012). Smartphones have significantly changed e-commerce since they were first introduced. Mazurek et al. (2006) asserts that these technologies have a substantial influence on how business processes are handled. These gadgets include a number of applications that provide a range of services, boosting the flexibility, mobility, and effectiveness of device users in both personal and professional domains (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

New internet applications may now be used thanks to the widespread use of wireless and mobile networks. E-commerce conducted using wireless devices is referred to as "mobile marketing," "E-commerce," "m-business," and "ubiquitous computing." The main features of commerce are: mobility, wide range, uniformity, accessibility, and localization of products and services. Online stock trading, online trading, internet banking, micro-transactions, online gaming, purchasing and service, online bidding, chat systems, and B2B are some of the most prevalent trade m apps. Online Metrics, according to Bala and Verma (2018), is the most crucial component of digital marketing. In

essence, web analytics aids businesses in gathering, measuring, understanding, analyzing, planning, reporting, and forecasting online actions for business. It's important to distinguish between web analytics and web statistical data.

The growth of a business entails a shift in size over time (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007). Several characteristics of growth have been identified, which are as followed: global expansion, the creation of new locations, the entrance of new businesses and clients, the increase in the volume of products and services, and mergers and acquisitions (Brush et al., 2009). A company expands as a result of increasing customer demands for its goods or services, which first takes the form of higher sales and, consequently, an investment in supplementary manufacturing equipment so as to meet up customers' demands.

The efficient use of the resources and know-hows that organizations rely on to enable growth often leads to company development. These comprise knowledgeable skills, resources, as well as financial counseling (Ištvančić et al., 2016). Market analyses and advancements have a big impact on growth, and there's a good chance that tiny, creative businesses will be able to grow more rapidly than big companies.

Teruel-Carrizosa (2010) contends that the market system has an impact on a company's capacity to develop, particularly for those currently in operation since they often display more universal traits and experience faster growth than industrial firms. Ukaj et al. (2022, p. 9) in their study reported that "digital marketing activities have impacted their sales growth". Unlike service businesses, which often leave the market more quickly, industries need significant investment. Small companies may range greatly in size and prospective expansion, and the owners are conscious of the fact that if the firm is unable to manage this growth, issues may arise that might eventually result in its demise (Gvili & Levy, S.2018).

Therefore, well-managed expansion will help businesses accomplish their goals. The term "sales growth" describes an organization's rise in revenue over a certain period of time. Increased product prices, increased product sales, or a combination of the two may be the cause of this. Price increases may not really improve sales; rather, they may only be an effect of rising prices. Online Metrics offers businesses studies and various perspectives to consider in relation to company, as opposed to straightforward monitoring. Google Analytics, Spring Metrics and Chartbeat are a few of the crucial online analytics applications. It should be mentioned that there isn't much information in the books about how digital marketing affects businesses in emerging nations. As a result, the research and results of this article will significantly advance this crucial area of business (Bala & Verma, 2018).

3. Empirical Data and Analysis

In addition to having a straightforward tax system, Kosovo has relatively low taxes when measured against those of other countries. In Kosovo, the VAT is 18% and the corporation tax is 10%. Despite not being a member of the Eurozone, Kosovo uses the euro as its official currency. Kosovo ranks among the top 15 nations in the world for "starting a company." Longer workdays are common for many Kosovars. Many people do in fact work on the weekends and during holidays.

The average monthly wage in Kosovo has been around 430 euros since 2014. Seven out of ten Kosovars are under the age of 35. Kosovo is ranked 57th out of 190 nations for business ease. When they were ranked 86 in 2014, they were one of the economies that had advanced the most. The information technology, wood, clothing, agriculture, and mining sectors are only a few of the many opportunities in the nation.

Due to the fact that its economy is still growing, Kosovo has a small number of firms. As a result, Kosovar firms are few, especially industrial ones (Jusufović et al., 2020). To provide empirical and measurable data, a quantitative approach has been used in this study. We used the Kosovar Ministry of Trade database to choose the companies at random. The companies from "Peje, Prishtine, Ferizaj, and Gjilan" were examined in this research. We utilized a stratified sample approach to determine the size of the different business organizations included in the research since there is a large variation across SMEs.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Sampling Method

Answering the study issues requires sampling. This research uses non-probability sampling, which is one of the most popular sampling techniques. Proportional selection may lessen prejudice because every person of the community has an identical chance of being selected. However, this method requires a lot of effort and resources because sample errors could occur. We will investigate the effects of virtual and digital marketing as a dissemination route in business as part of this research using non-probability techniques. Convenience selection is a method used to choose participants who are ready and able to take part in the study.

3.1.2. Data Collection

Questionnaires are the most popular method used by academics to gather quantifiable data from interviewees. It is possible to collect data from a large number of people and groups who use digital marketing as a tool for their product promotion. The poll was finished as a Google form, and the

surveys were sent out via email, SMS, or social media share. Followers on social media who have expressed interest in taking part in our studies are also reached and given the proper connection.

3.1.3. Data Collection Instrument

There are numerous data-collection tools accessible, each with a unique set of benefits and drawbacks. There are three different methods to distribute electronic poll questionnaires: Participants can be asked to complete a survey by being sent an email, being shown a website poll, or being asked to complete a survey in an electronic contact environment. Due to the quickness and accessibility of the Internet, researchers and survey respondents can complete the survey at their own leisure and ease. Due to the instrument's low setup and operation expenses, it is a no-brainer. In order to collect data for this study, a survey will be sent to anyone who is willing to take part in the study article. Due to these measures, the data will be screened when it is gathered to provide the research's most thorough and pertinent outcome. As a result, the researchers intend to gather information from at least 60 participants using a variety of methods in order to perform this study.

3.1.4. Data Analysis

The data collected is analyzed using SPSS, a statistical program commonly used in social science research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

According to the data analyzed and table (1) below there were 64 participants in the survey overall, of which 45 were males while 19 were females (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender of participants

	Participants	Percentages
Male	45	70.32%
Female	19	29.68%
TOTAL	64	100%

Table 2: How long have you been using digital marketing Platforms?

	Frequency	Percentages
1-5 years	39	60.93%
6-10 years	10	15.62%
Less than 1 year	15	23.45%
TOTAL	64	100%

As shown in the Table 2 above, more than half of the respondents said they had been using digital marketing

platforms (60.93%) for one to five years, while 15.62% said they had been using digital marketing platforms for six to ten years, and 23.45% said they had been using digital marketing platforms for less than a year (Table 2).

Table 3: Who is the designated person responsible in managing digital marketing section of the company?

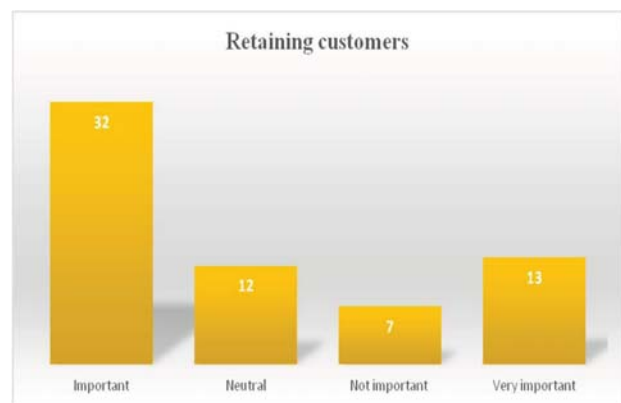
	Frequency	Percentages
Outsourcing	24	37.5%
Employee	40	62.5%
TOTAL	64	100%

Outsourcing (media agency) is responsible for 37.5 percent of respondents' posts or in charge of the digital marketing department of the company, whereas employees are responsible for 62.5percent of respondents' digital marketing department (Table 3).

Table 4: Digital marketing usage frequency

	Frequency	Percentages
Daily	17	26.56%
Monthly	22	34.38%
Weekly	25	39.06%
TOTAL	64	100%

According to the data in the table (4) above, 26.56% of respondents said their company use digital marketing daily, 34.38% said they use digital marketing platforms monthly, and 39.06% said they use digital marketing platforms weekly (Table 4).



Source: Ukaj et al. (2023) [Unpublished dataset]

Figure 1: Digital marketing effectiveness in retaining customers

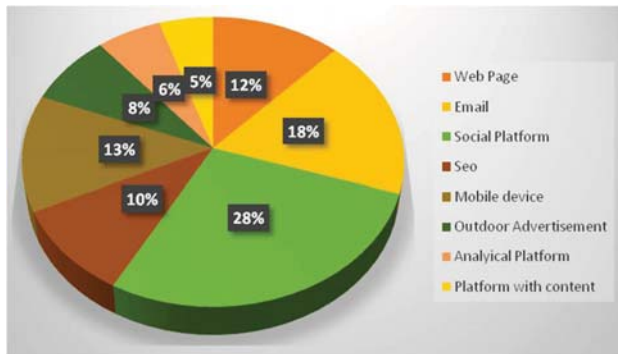
32 of respondents claimed that digital marketing has a very important role to play in customer retention, while another 12 said they had no opinion. In contrast, 7 of the respondents answered that the impact of digital marketing is not significant in maintaining clients, while 13 stated that

the effect of digital marketing is highly significant (Figure 1).

Table 5: Effectiveness of Digital marketing in boosting sales

	Participants	Percentages
Yes	49	76.56%
No	15	23.44%
TOTAL	64	100%

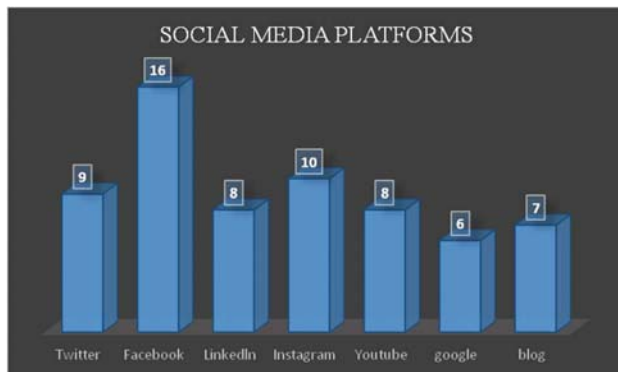
According to the data in the table (5) above, 76.56% of respondents said digital marketing has been helpful in boosting sales of their company while 23.44% said that the use of Digital marketing has not been helpful or useful in boosting the sales of their company (Table 5).



Source: Ukaj et al. (2023) [Unpublished dataset]

Figure 2: Tools for digital marketing

When questioned about which digital marketing technologies they often utilize, businesses responded that they use websites 12% of the time, emails 18% of the time, social media platforms 28% of the time, search engine optimization (SEO) 10% of the time, mobile devices 13% of the time, outdoor advertisements 8% of the time, analytical platforms 6% of the time, and content platforms 5% of the time (Figure 2).



Source: Ukaj et al. (2023) [Unpublished dataset]

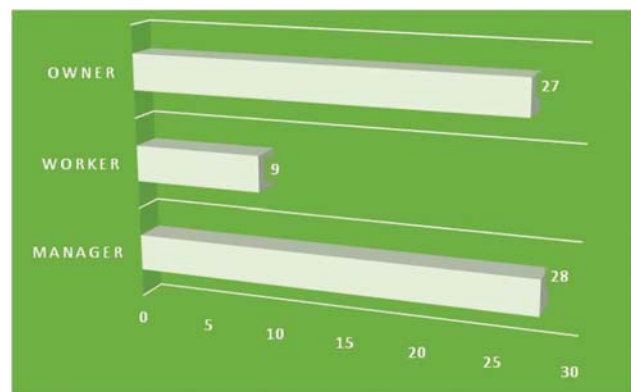
Figure 3: The various social media networks utilized in digital marketing

The numerous social media channels that were utilized by various Kosovo businesses are listed in the figure above (Figure 3). When businesses were asked which social media site they used for digital marketing, 9 reported using Twitter, 16 reported using Facebook, 8 stated that they utilized LinkedIn, 10 reported using Instagram, 8 said they used YouTube, 6 said they employ Google, and 7 said they used blogs.

Table 6: Correlation between the area of the business and the size of the business.

Chi square test			
	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2 sided)
Pearson chi square	6.342 ^a	9	.705
Likelihood Ratio	7.145	9	.622
No of valid cases	64		

The aforementioned findings above demonstrated that there is no discernible relationship and that their statistical significance between the sizes of different Kosovo businesses and their locations (Table 6).



Source: Ukaj et al. (2023) [Unpublished dataset]

Figure 4: Roles and statuses of the individuals in their respective firms.

According to the graph above (Figure 4), there were 64 participants; 28 of them are managers, 27 are business owners, and 9 are workers.

Table 7: Technologies used in digital marketing dependent on the capacity of the company.

	Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.
Website	0.528	0.534
Email	1.572	0.385
Social media	1.748	0.261
SEO	1.618	0.473
Mobile device	2.137	0.159
Outdoor advert	1.388	0.230
Analytical platform	1.753	0.017*
Content marketing	3.27	0.438

The aforementioned table (7) demonstrates that there is a statistically significant relationship between analytical platforms and company size, but the other digital marketing tools, including websites, emails, social media platforms, and others, did not (Table 7).

Table 8: Association between the firm's industry and the amount of money allotted for digital marketing.

Correlations		
	Sector	Money
Pearson correlation	1	.465
Sector sig (2-tailed)		.409
N		64
Pearson correlation	.465	1
Money allocated Sig (2-tailed)	.409	
N	64	

According to the aforementioned Table 8, there is often a positive association between the organization's industry and the budget set aside for investments in digital marketing. The outcome demonstrates that there is a correlation between the two parameters.

4.2. Discussion

The objective of the study was to measure and assess the impact of virtual/digital marketing as a distribution channel in Kosovo business enterprises. The study analyzed various aspects of the company in terms of their usage of digital marketing, e.g. as a distribution channel, the results showed that most of the companies that participated in the survey has been using digital marketing as a form of marketing and channel for quite some time, these results is consistent with that of Tritama and Tarigan (2016). The impact of digital marketing in terms of boosting sales was also analyzed in these study, and the results indicated that digital marketing plays a huge role in boosting sales in new channels of distribution, these could be as a result of the ability of digital marketing platforms being able to reach a lot of individuals or customers due to its wide reach, this result is consistent with that of Yasmin et al. (2015).

The role of digital marketing in retaining customers was also analyzed and the results showed that these form of marketing plays a huge role in helping retain customers, this could be as a result of being a user friendly approach for customers and individuals interested in a product, as well as better customer and seller relationship due do excellent customer service that can be rendered when using these form of marketing technique. The various tools and techniques used in digital marketing was also accessed and analyzed, the results showed that social media was the most used technique for digital marketing, this could be due to its cost effectiveness compared to other techniques and ability to

reach potential and existing customers or clients who are on social media, these result is however consistent with Tritama and Tarigan (2016) who indicated that social media creates brand awareness that results in strong influence on customer acquisition and retention as a new way of distribution if we look at this as a channel for sales. The relationship between the size of Kosovo enterprises (Small, Middle and large) and the area where the firm is located was also analyzed. The firms that participated in this study were located in four areas (Peje, Gijan, Ferizaj, Prishtine), the results indicated there was no statistical significance between the two variables. Hence, no relationship between them it however consistent with Njau and Karugu (2014).

5. Conclusion

The use of the internet by Kosovar companies is still in its infancy. Despite this, several Kosovar companies across all sectors are regularly growing their digital operations in line with broader societal trends. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all organizations must now execute or adopt all company processes online, especially when employing virtual marketing tools and technology. It is seen as a new way of distribution possibilities.

One of the elements contributing to the success of the company's goods offered in the market is the best administration of marketing networks or distributing channels. A business should also remember to appropriately upgrade a product over time so that it meets consumers' standards and is wanted by them.

The possibility made available by the development of networks and internet trade is also notable and should not be undervalued. It appears that the digital channel of distribution will be soon one of the most common types of distribution channel in Kosovo, because it minimizes expenditures connected with the expenses of transportation and business, and if you look from the customer viewpoint it reduces the period of a purchase of a particular good.

The study's results enable us to reach the conclusion that Kosovar companies must use digital marketing strategies in order to thrive. Data reveals that the majority of these firms use digital marketing strategies for both the selling of their products and services as well as for online customer communication. These statistics also show that the majority of Kosovar companies use online marketing over the long term to conduct their company operations.

Additionally, a sizable percentage of the companies who participated in the study's response said that they had a competent executive tasked with carrying out digital marketing strategies.

This shows that the most of Kosovo companies have comprehensive strategies in place for accomplishing their

digital marketing objectives and through new channels of distribution that enable technology. Simply stated, all of these operations they include social platforms or other digital marketing channels—are carried out in accordance with a well-considered plan.

The study's findings show that many of these companies spend a lot on digital marketing activities collectively, and that a sizable percentage of companies also set aside money specifically for these projects. Most considerably, a substantial percentage of companies recognize that digital marketing strategies have had an impact on their revenue expansion. This shows that Kosovo businesses have experienced the impacts of digital marketing as was expected.

Consumers in the subject-area of the conversation are thought to be significantly impacted by various businesses in Kosovo and their digital marketing initiatives. The results of this study suggest that supervisors, officials, and advertisers should take the added benefit of social media to accomplish the study's main objective. Customers have access to a variety of information-gathering options and methods due to the prevalence and widespread use of digital platforms.

Businesses may maximize their non-traditional marketing efforts on social media networks thanks to the introduction of increasingly thorough digital materials and tools. Social media must be used by businesses if they want to keep their consumers informed of the most important and recent trends and information. The likelihood of discussion and argument on social media is higher when new information is frequently published. When a brand's material is well-known in the thoughts of its customers, they are more likely to stay with it.

All firms in Kosovo should pay close attention to this indicator, especially those who have not yet made use of digital marketing techniques. These results provide important indications for the use of social media in particular as well as other digital marketing components since modern global circumstances demand the creation of aggressive approaches dependent on digital marketing.

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