Marketing Through Social Networks - Analysis of the Presence in Social Media of Romanian Consumers

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Abstract

Social networks have become an indispensable communication tool, both in terms of communication between people and when we refer to marketing communication (between suppliers of goods and services and potential customers). The tools used for online communication through social networks have developed so much in recent years that companies can now select the categories of people they address based on several socio-demographic characteristics to make the communication process more efficient. However, there are many questions about the effectiveness of promotional messages transmitted through social networks when we think about the time spent by people on social networks, the devices from which they access the networks and especially the age groups that use the most, many such social networks. In this article, a study was conducted based on technical information and national statistics from official sources to complete a picture of marketing efficiency through social networks.

Keywords: social media marketing; consumer behavior; social media users;
J.E.L. classification: M31

1. Introduction

This article outlines the evolution of the Internet in online marketing, along with how companies ensure the relationship between seller and buyer through various methods that analyze consumer behaviour and needs. The increased development of the Internet has brought new challenges and benefits for producers, retailers and nonprofit organizations, opening the door to a new method of rapid promotion, with low costs, having the advantage of being able to access a broad or specific audience, which defines this new concept in the history of marketing previously. Nowadays, a message can reach an impressive number of people in seconds or minutes. Social media sites are this great advantage through interactivity, where the proximity between the brand and the consumer is formed, through specific social systems, with costs modelled on the promotion needs of the seller, for choosing the category of consumers targeted.

A way to sell and promote the products of a company or a brand much faster and easier was born after the rapid development of technology and the formation of the basis of online marketing. Promotion through social networks has become a real trend, and to understand this phenomenon, we must first understand what social networks are and how we can integrate them into our promotion strategy. " Marketing is a well-developed methodical discipline with rules that are always changing in response to the requirements and evolutions that occur inside and around it" (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012, p.4444).

"At this time, marketing should not be interpreted in the traditional sense of "speaking and selling." "- but in the new meaning of addressing the demands of customers. Customers will buy swiftly if the marketer knows their demands, produces items that provide greater value and pricing, and distributes and advertises them efficiently."(Kotler and Armstrong, 2010, p.29).

2. Theoretical background - Social Media Marketing

Online marketing is the form of marketing used on the Internet to promote various advertising messages to different consumers (including email marketing, social media, graphic advertising and mobile advertising). Online promotion involves a publisher, who integrates campaigns into the online environment, as well as an advertiser (Genunche, 2018, p.19). In the mid-1990s, the Internet underwent a surprising evolution in most industrialized countries. It began to be used by a growing number of people, even with the technical difficulties of that time. According to statistics, the number of Internet users has risen sharply from 90,000 to 304 million. As of July 2001, there were 137 million users in the United States alone, 83 million in Europe, and the remaining 72 million in the rest of the world. In 2007, Internet surfers reached 315 million in Europe, 233 million in the United States, and in Asia, in China alone, 700 million (Sinescu, 2007, pp.1-2). In 2021, the most significant companies worldwide are present on the Internet, especially on social media.

According to Ratchford (2019, p.38), the Internet itself has produced an explosion in terms of the analysis made by companies on consumer behaviour. Product reviews, blogs, social media data, video data, purchase history, and many other methods. These details are essential in terms of analyzing the marketing mix, their personalization and security. Advanced computing techniques, efficient algorithms, and a variety of data storage and highlighting solutions are required. According to Roy, Datta and Basu (2016, p. 4), the rapid development of the technology behind the Internet has brought new challenges and opportunities for applying new online marketing concepts. Numerous topics related to the Internet are studied at the level of academic research.

As Tuten and Solomon (2014, pp.19-20) show, online commerce has started to appear as an alternative to radio and television, with consumers starting to buy and learn about products through the online environment due to accessibility. This "boom" was beneficial for manufacturers, retailers, and nonprofits because it was able to provide speed, cost efficiency, and access to a smaller audience so that a small company with limited inventory was able to be discovered around the globe, the Internet was able to provide access to these markets, which led to the emergence of niche products available to a small and specific audience. Specific advertising messages were easier to communicate through different ads that appear on different sites, in front of the potential consumer, who provides access to the company's website. Search advertising has increased during this time, making it possible to capture the niche market and the main one. Email marketing has also been adopted, which is an alternative to telemarketing. Micu et al. (2017, p.1094) find that for marketers, technology has managed to facilitate and cheapen the process of promoting products through Facebook or other applications. They take advantage of the Internet to personalize their offers, be more convenient, and access new categories and new landmarks. Companies need to gather information about the consumers they are targeting as they guide consumer behaviour. The analysis of feelings and opinions related to a particular brand or service is vital to understanding the attitude imposed by the consumer.

According to Tuten (2020, p.3), social networks are the online means of communication, transport, collaboration and cultivation between interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility.

Within demographic groups, several trends appear in the analysis of the use of social networks:

- Age differences: Young adults (aged 18 to 29) are ubiquitous on social media, while older adults (65+) still discover the secrets of the Internet.
- Gender differences: Women and men use social networks to the same extent.
- Socio-economic differences: People with a higher level of education and income open the way to social networks.
- Differences of race and ethnicity: No differences.
- Environmental differences: People living in rural areas use social networks at a lower rate than those in urban and suburban areas (Perrin, 2015, p.3)

Social media marketing, according to Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017, p.124), is an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that leverages social networks (typically in conjunction with other communication channels) to achieve organizational goals through providing value for stakeholders. Social media marketing covers an organization's strategic decisions regarding its goal (from defenders to explorers), culture (from conservatism to modernity), structure (from hierarchies to networks), and governance (from hierarchies to networks) (from autocracy to anarchy).

"Almost everyone with access to the Internet can easily read a blog, send a tweet, write a review, leave a comment, or update their Facebook status." Social media material has exploded as a result of these communication technologies. In September 2010, Facebook was listed as the most popular web site, with 39.2 percent of Internet users visiting it; YouTube came in second with 31.8 percent. More significantly, traffic to these sites continues to rise, putting the most popular media sites against one other while growing their daily unique visitor count"(Sigala, Christou and Gretzel, 2012, p. 74).

A significant advantage of social media sites, compared to traditional media, is the interactivity resulting from this new environment. There is a general theory in the academic literature that the involvement and closeness between consumer and brand must be observed beyond this interaction to form an advantage in contact with the brand (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). As stated by SI (2016, pp.1-2), the concept of promotion on social media is attributed only to organizations or companies that deserve the attention of a community, where specific social systems are used. Over the years, the costs of such a type of promotion continue to rise.

Factors such as monthly income, gender, types of products consumed, promotional offers or types of products can affect future consumer preferences in the context of online shopping, so this category of sites has become an extremely accessible tool for a wide range of products. However, through the available mechanisms to attract consumers and the massive level of data processed and recorded daily to the detriment of these platforms, making it much easier for a company to boost its profit and production, regardless of the field in which it operates (Varma, Dhakane and Pawar, 2020).

"Social media benefits include: Brand reach and awareness, consumer interactions through transactions, notifications and reputation management." (Neti, 2011, p.165)

Some other benefits of using social media in your marketing strategy are explained by Lad-Khairnar (2021, p.174-175) in his study as follows:

1. Raising brand awareness - By 2020, there will be more than 3.2 billion individuals using social media worldwide. Due to the large number of people who use social media, it is becoming increasingly important for businesses to share their content, products, and perspectives via one or more platforms that can help increase brand awareness. By increasing involvement, social networks have been demonstrated to add to brand exposure. Remarks, preferences, acts, and replays are all examples of social interaction. Furthermore, social media assists businesses in increasing brand recognition by directing visitors to the company's website.

2. Lead generation and drive conversion - Promoting and sharing products on social media is a fundamental way to improve leadership, change support, and increase awareness, as companies advertise only to people interested in the product.

3. Cultivating client connections - By interacting with and recruiting social media followers, the business will be able to establish long-term ties with them. Interacting with consumers based on posts, replying to their questions and comments, and aiding them are all ways to do so.

4. Beating opponents - Social media is an excellent tool for keeping track of competitors, whether it's their social media strategy, the items they advertise, the missions they carry out, or their level of customer connection.

The following indices of social networks are also included in this study:

- Participation: This includes things like clicks, comments, likes, and reactions to social media posts. There are additional sites that have clear categories of engagement, such as Instagram posts that are "saved" and Pinterest pins that are "fixed."
- REACH: The number of individuals who have seen any of the page's or profile's content.
- Followers: This is the total number of people who have clicked the "follow" button and can view your page's material in their news feeds.
- Impressions: These are the times when you see a post on your profile or feed page and decide whether or not you want to click on it.

- Views: This is the number of views on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, or any social media platform with video capabilities.
- Visits to the profile: The number of persons who have visited the social media page.
- Mentions: This displays the times that users cited the profile in their posts.
- RePosts: When someone reposts a piece of material on their profile, it is known as a repost.
- Shares: These are the posts that other users and followers share with their organization.

"Companies may have dialogues and interactions with people who follow them on social media platforms. Followers and potential consumers may develop a sense of loyalty as a result of this intimate engagement. Furthermore, by selecting which sites you follow on social platforms, the items may reach a highly specific target demographic" (Bajpai, Pandey and Shriwas, 2012, p. 215); these interactions represent the first role of social networks in the growth of the brand or company.

As Mangold and Faulds (2009, p.359) point out, social media's dual function in promotion is unique: customers may utilize it to engage with one another. Companies' control over the content and transmission of information is limited by customers' capacity to communicate with one another. This shift in information ownership has a significant impact on how consumers receive and respond to market information.

3. Research methodology and findings

In this article, a study was made on the official statistical information available in Romania regarding the degree of use of social networks, both by consumers and by companies. The purpose of the research was to update the information on social media marketing, and among the objectives were: measuring the use of social media by consumers, measuring the use of social media by companies (used for social media communication marketing), identifying the most used devices for accessing social networks and identifying the most used social networks by consumers.

Among the results and information identified, we can highlight the following:

Regarding the use of social networks (for promotion and communication) by companies, in Romania, the data show that most companies use means of communication through all social networks, while a very low percentage use only blogs or posts in microblogs.
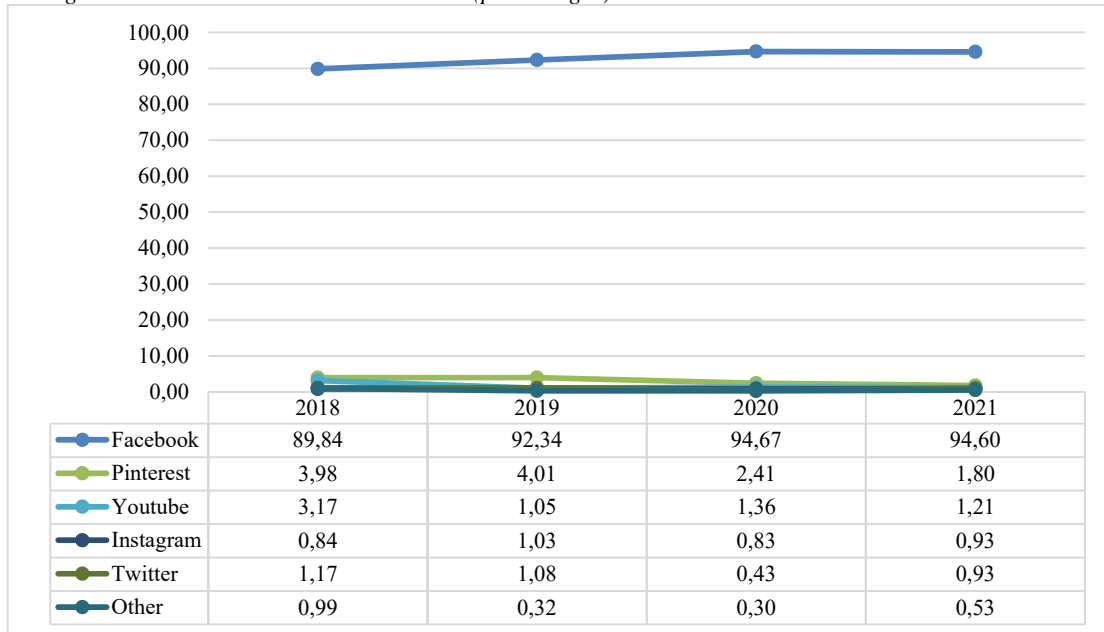
Figure no. 1. Social media use by type, Internet
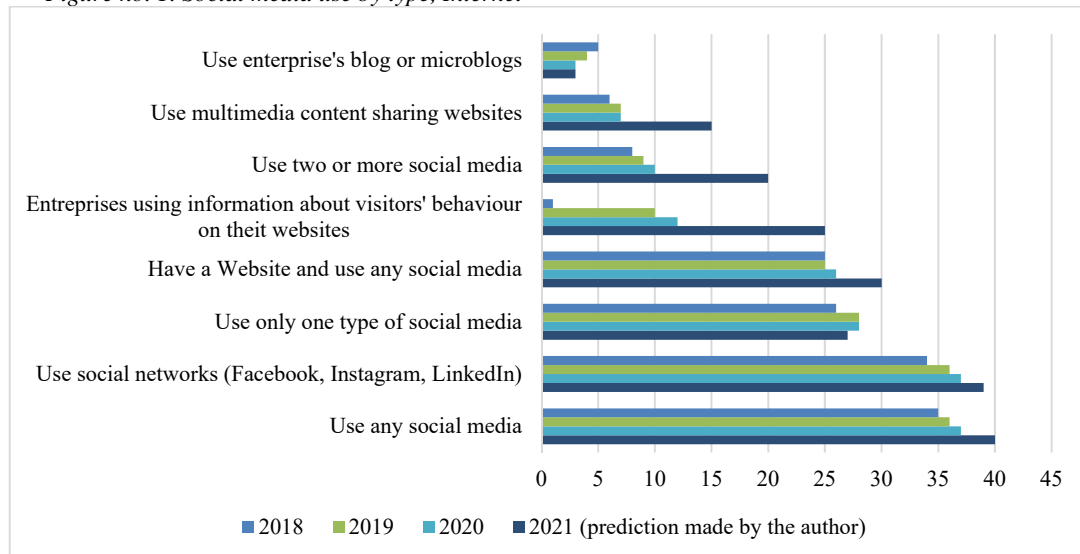
Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat (graphic made by the author)

Regarding the use of social networks by consumers, the identified data shows us that Facebook remains the most used social network, while the mobile phone is still the most used device.
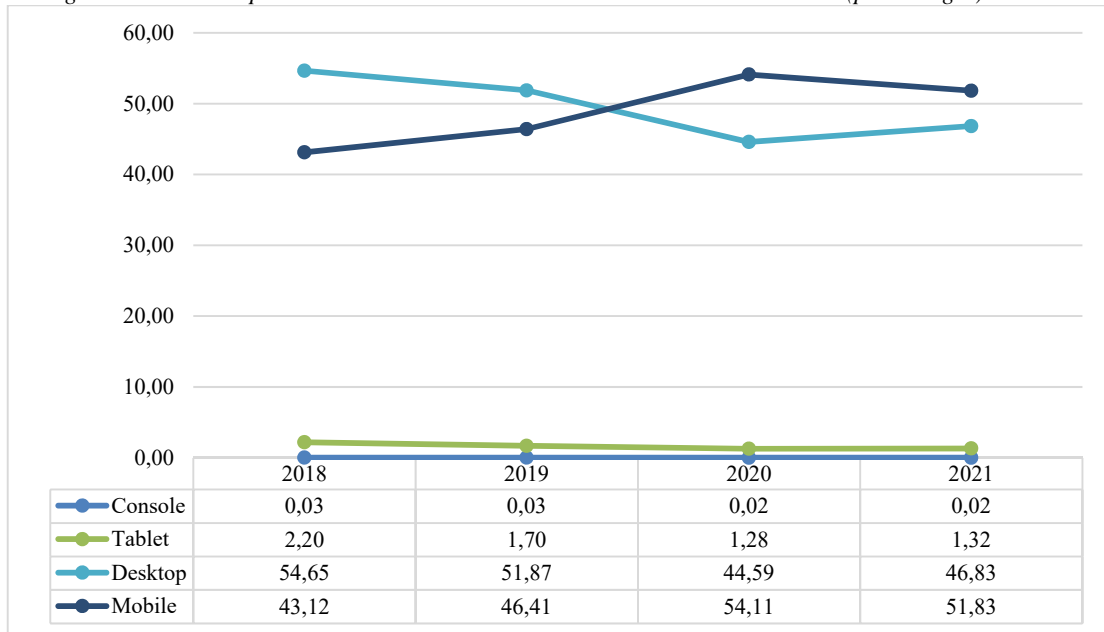
Figure no. 2. Social Media Stats Romania (percentages)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Facebook	89,84	92,34	94,67	94,60
Pinterest	3,98	4,01	2,41	1,80
Youtube	3,17	1,05	1,36	1,21
Instagram	0,84	1,03	0,83	0,93
Twitter	1,17	1,08	0,43	0,93
Other	0,99	0,32	0,30	0,53

Source: https://gs.statcounter.com/ (graphic made by the author)

In figure 2, we can see that Facebook was and remains the most used social network by consumers. It is evident that, in this case, it is the most interesting for companies that want to impact Facebook users with their promotional messages. Moreover, Facebook allows accurate targeting based on socio-demographic characteristics for any promotional ad or communication initiative.

Figure no. 3. Desktop vs Mobile vs Tablet vs Console Market Share in Romania(percentages)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Console	0,03	0,03	0,02	0,02
Tablet	2,20	1,70	1,28	1,32
Desktop	54,65	51,87	44,59	46,83
Mobile	43,12	46,41	54,11	51,83

Source: https://gs.statcounter.com/ (graphic made by the author)

In figure 3, we can see how the mobile phone as the primary device for accessing social networks underwent an evolution between 2019 and 2020, becoming today the most used device. Thus, companies that want to send promotional messages through social networks must consider the device used by consumers (respectively mobile phone) to adapt the content so that it is accessible and adaptable to any mobile device.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the rapid growth of the Internet has forced marketers to adapt their marketing strategies to keep up with the weather trends. Therefore, social media or online marketing is booming, and companies should pay more and more attention to it and even integrate it into the marketing mix as technology continues evolving. The analysis of the various indicators taken from the activity on social media can indicate the effectiveness of the marketing strategy used at present and can help improve it in the future. However, it is tricky to promote products or services because you cannot control how information is spread.

It can be seen that there must be a high degree of involvement from companies for social media marketing due to the evolution of the Internet, and implicitly of this concept, through the presence of companies and the intention to influence online. With the help of these tools, the seller quickly finds out the potential buyer's behaviour, landmarks, and influences through different algorithms and specific solutions necessary to maintain the data, implicitly bringing new challenges and opportunities in this regard. However, the advantages are commensurate with this phenomenon, offering a reasonable alternative for producers, retailers, and nonprofit organizations through social media and beyond.

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