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Efficiency of Online Advertising Strategies on Romanian Social Networking Websites

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Abstract
Social networking websites have constituted the backbone of online marketing campaigns for the last decade. The advertising budgets migrated to online tools steadily since the end of the last century, and for the past decade they became the preferred tool for most marketing campaigns around the world. Romania's market had caught a little late on this trend, but for the last few years marketers have tried to make up for lost time and transferred most of their budgets in online, and advertising on social networking websites constituted the bulk of their efforts. The aim of our study is to determine the impact of online advertising in social networking websites on Romanian consumers and to determine if there are any significant differences to related regional markets.

1. Introduction

In Romania, online advertising has developed a lot, so more and more companies have been determined to focus and invest in various marketing campaigns and find the best strategies to reach out the users quickly and efficiently. Consumers have been open to this phenomenon, but it should be noted that there is a difference between attractive ads that persuade the user to act (buy the product, go to the site for more information, distribute, etc.) and annoying ones (ads which appear even after they are closed by that person because they are not of interest).

Social media has revolutionized the way business people market. More and more companies are abandoning traditional marketing due to high costs. To promote a product or service, it is much easier to use social media advertising, precisely because it gives companies the opportunity to convey the information they want to a well-defined audience in a personalized way.

Companies focus on using social media, especially as they can get valuable information about customers, so they can stimulate demand, creating offers according to the wishes of users. Social media advertising is considered effective, precisely because it offers people personalized spots according to the preferences of the target audience.

The study presented shows how the most used tool for online advertising, social media, is effective in influencing decisions to buy a product or service. This research also aims to determine which is the social media channel, where users get in touch with most commercials.

2. Online advertising

Efficiency is a widely used concept in business. Linguistically, efficiency is defined according to Explanatory Romanian dictionary as "the ratio between the results obtained in economic activity and the efforts made", but from an economic point of view it has many more meanings. A common definition of economic efficiency is "the lowest unit cost provided" (Levihn, 2016, p.1155).

Among the oldest methods of promoting sales are advertising spots that were placed outdoors, such as billboards, various flyers through which companies promoted themselves (Orzan et al., 2013). Over time, this industry began to develop more and more and to take on a new look. Many companies are beginning to realize that a business becomes profitable if they choose to make commercials to persuade people to try the product by example, using influential people who are in the company's values (Evans, 2008, pp. 359-340).

Through online advertising, companies can transmit, using as an online communication channel, useful information about the company, services and products, but also about the events they will participate in, thus creating a permanent and personalized connection with the user (Grosseck, G., 2006, p.243). In carrying out an online advertising strategy on social media, the target audience must always be taken into account, because this is the only way to create a clear, concise message that reaches the target audience.

In recent years, online advertising has revolutionized the way companies send messages to people, especially since the use of the Internet brings many opportunities that marketers need to take advantage of. Today, the emphasis is on personalized commercials, and this is based on a complex infrastructure composed of a variety of intermediate entities and technologies (Jimenz et al., 2016).

There are divided opinions about the effectiveness of online advertising. Most companies believe that online advertising is no longer a fad, but rather a necessity and that it is very important, and if it is used properly, it benefits both companies and customers. In 2019, according to a report made by certain specialists in the field, it shows that advertising spots accounted for a percentage of 50.3% of total advertising spending on average, in 2021 reaching an increase of about 6 percent compared to 2019. Due to the fact that online advertising is on the rise, more and more companies have migrated to the online environment, and an example of an internationally known company that has invested over 500,000 euros in such advertising between 2016-2017 is Coca Cola, a company that also operates on the Romanian beverage market. Nivea HairCare is another company that, through conversion, transforms users into buyers, investing approximately 400,000 euros in online advertising. However, there are small exceptions that consider that online advertising is not as effective for their field of activity, as they rely on traditional advertising because the target audience does not constantly use the Internet. Protector & Gamble has reduced online advertising budgets by up to $ 200,000 million, investing money in the traditional one (Ewijk et al., 2021, pp.272-273).

2.1. Social media advertising

Some authors define social media as the totality of web-based applications, offering the possibility to content users (Hamouda, 2018, pp. 426-429), other authors define social media as a group of applications based on the Internet, having ideological and technological elements of Web 2.0, allowing the exchange of content between people (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010 quoted in Ratten, 2020, p.61).

Social networks are used worldwide. According to a study by Arora and Predmore (2013, pp.117-119), over 86% of people aged between 18 and 19 currently have an account on a social network, 72% of those aged between 30 and 49, about 50% of those between the ages of 50 and 64 and about 34% of all people over the age of 65 have an active account on a social

network. If in the beginning the role of these social networks was to spend free time with loved ones, in the meantime it has become an effective communication tool for companies as well (Sporea et al. 2020).

Some time ago, companies communicated with their customers through traditional advertising, using flyers, newspapers, television or various magazines through which they wanted to capture their attention. Today, social media is considered the most popular marketing tool that can create long-term relationships between users and companies (Ruane and Wallace, 2013 quoted in Logrosen and Grunden, 2014).

According to a study conducted in 2015, it is found that companies have spent about $ 24 billion worldwide on social media advertising, and 65% have been used in advertising on Facebook. They use social networks as a bridge between themselves and users because through them they gather valuable information about their customers, which can be used for the benefit of companies, thus managing to satisfy the wishes of consumers, personalizing online communications (Aguire et al., 2016 , p.3).

With the increase in the number of users on social media, according to a study, impulsive purchases on the Internet have also increased, so that about two thirds of the European population buy their products and services online (Stoica et al., 2015), being largely influenced by advertisements on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. However, although the number of people acting has increased, people are very informed about what they are buying, documenting themselves before making a decision (Argoncillo and Orus, 2018).

What is interesting about social media platforms is that they have different characteristics, and companies can publish information in different forms. For example, on Facebook, information is usually published to reach the general public, where people can comment, share or react, instead on platforms such as Instagram, you should use attractive content, funny, as short as possible, which in a few seconds to say the story behind the commercial (Deller, 2019, pp.151-152).

Social media is considered the virtuous world of people, becoming a central element in people's lives, sometimes more important than real life (Pentescu et al., 2014). The number of users on these platforms is constantly growing, an example of a platform that has increased a lot is Facebook, in 2008 it had an active user number of 69 million worldwide, so that in 2019 it will increase to 2,45 billion users (Ruggieri et al, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the TikTok platform developed in China had a big growth. In January 2018, 54 million active accounts were opened, and 3 years later, in 2021, the number of users reached 689 million. What led to this huge increase was the COVID-19 pandemic because people were forced by circumstances to find different leisure activities during quarantine (Mashiyane, 2020, p.22).

LinkedIn is a platform where companies meet with individuals for different reasons, the most predominant being the professional reason. More than 443 million members exist on this platform worldwide. Through this platform a strong connection is established, and users can find a job much easier and can get in direct contact with the desired company to find out the necessary information (Mocchi, Bissola and Imperatori, 2017, pp.110-112). This platform is used to promote vacancies and to promote the values of companies, being a simple method of connection.

YouTube is the most famous video content platform in the world. Over 78% of all people, according to a study conducted by Tafesse (2020, oo 1689-1691) choose to watch a video clip weekly. That is why many companies have started to invest in this time of promotion to increase their notoriety, especially since it is considered one of the most effective tools that helps to grow the digital marketing segment (Bishop, 2018).

Twitter is another application widely used by both companies and users, so due to its features, you can send hashtags of keywords to identify a topic of interest in a timely manner. Depending on the person's searches, this platform is constantly updated with personalized content Grasso, 2022, pp.77-80).

2.2. Online advertising on social media and companies

Social media is the most popular communication channel of the 21st century. The number of users increasing from 2019 with a percentage of 9% annually. The impact that the use of online advertising on social media has had can be seen in the fact that there have been large increases in online advertising spending. According to a study, it is noted that if in 2018 about 73.8 billion US dollars were invested worldwide, by 2023 the value is expected to reach about 186.7 billion dollars (Bitiktas and Tuna, 2020).

In 2020, according to another study, it is found that the activity in the online environment of a company and the visibility it manages to establish with users or investors, is an important factor in its activity. The migration of companies in the online environment is constantly rising, and their favorite platforms are Facebook and Instagram, where there is a large part of those who can become potential customers, regardless of the field in which the company operates (Hassan and Wang, 2021, pp. 26-27).

When establishing a marketing strategy that the company must apply, the social network where the information must be transmitted is always taken into account, because depending on the message they want to convey, the best is taken into account. alternative. According to some authors, social networks are considered as hybrid elements of the promotion mix. It is much easier to identify potential customers, because using the personalization method, advertising spots mostly reach people interested in the products or services offered by the company (Virtanenm Bjork and Sjostrom, 2017, pp. 468-471).

The rapid development of social media has led more and more companies to change the way they approach people (Chae, Mattaney and Sheu, 2020, pp. 74-75). One advantage of using the internet is that it is a cheap and fast method. Overcoming time and space barriers in maintaining a stable and long-term connection with both current and potential customers (Yee et. al, 2021, pp.517-519).

In Romania, it is found, according to a study made by EY Romania, that out of the total number of companies operating on the Romanian market, approximately 78% use social networks as a promotional tool, and of these, about 50% use this method of approximately 3 years. In the preferences of Romanian companies when it comes to posting on platforms, the most used are Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. Multinationals repeatedly use social media. It is worth mentioning that although in Romania approximately 78% of the total active companies use social networks, the level is much lower than the global one, which is almost 100%.

The revolution of the online market is the merit of the Amazon company, developed in 1995 and which has come to sell any type of product at this moment. The model approached by the company is an example for all companies that want to assert themselves in the online market. Amazon managed something considered impossible for that time, namely, to remove the barriers of real interaction, giving customers a personalized and unique experience even if they were not face to face with them (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012, p.494).

Kaufland is another example of a company that, through social platforms, maintains a permanent connection with users, posting various photos, contests, current news, videos every day to arouse customers' curiosity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a record use of social media channels. Many people had to find a way to spend their free time in isolation or quarantine, so they began to

spend more and more time in the digital world, with companies taking advantage of this opportunity to post more. More than 58% of teens and about 48% of adults, according to a study, spent much more time during the pandemic than before the pandemic began (Vranken, Brimmel, Vandenbosch and Trekels, 2022).

3. Research methodology

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the effectiveness of social media as an online advertising tool used by Romanian companies in influencing the consumer's behaviour of purchasing a product or service promoted by these methods.

The main objectives of the research

Objective 1: Determine the percentage of respondents who trust social media advertising.

Objective 2: Determine the main elements that attract the consumer to an advertisement on social media.

Objective 3: Determine the main factors that can influence them in the decision to purchase a product or service in social media.

Objective 4: Determine the effectiveness of promoting companies in social media.

Objective 5: Determine the channels in the online environment where respondents observe advertising spots most often.

Objective 6: Product categories that regularly appear on social media.

**Objective 7**: Determine the reasons why companies choose as a way to promote social media.

The questionnaire is the basic tool for the research to be a successful and distinctive one. The questionnaire consists of a set of questions, planned to produce the data necessary to achieve the objectives of a marketing study (Cătoiu, 2009, p.327). The questionnaire was filled in by more than 100 people

4. Analysis and interpretation of results

The questionnaire was transmitted through the online environment, with the help of the http://www.isondaje.ro/create/ website, between May 15 and May 26, 2022, and the collected data were analysed personally. It could be completed at any time by respondents and shared online, on social networks: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and E-mail.

In order to systematize the information in the questionnaire, the recommendations for filling in, the way of creating the graphs and tables, but also the encoding of the questions, important in the process of gathering the information, were used.

Following the dissipation of the questionnaire, it was filled in by 110 people.
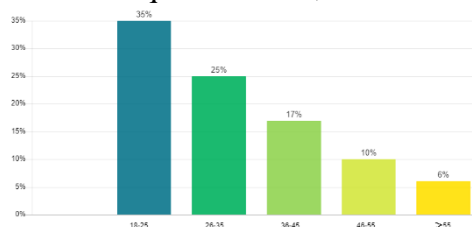
Figure 1. Age of respondents

As shown in Figure 1, most of the people who participated in the questionnaire were between 18-25 years old, female, mostly from urban areas, the last school graduated being in proportion of 38.5% high school and 36.5% Faculty - Bachelor cycle, having the occupation employee, with an income between 1501- 3900 lei.

Out of the total number of respondents, 41% have complete confidence in the products and services promoted in the online environment and only 2% do not agree with the fact that they are trustworthy.

29% of the total respondents consider that the main element that attracts them in the construction of an advertisement is the emotion transmitted by it, on the second place being with a percentage of 24% the content, on the third place, with a percentage of 18% the text of the ad, and on the last place the scenario used in its realization.

According to the answers received from the interviewed persons, it can be seen that 93% of them consider that companies use the Internet as a method of promotion in order to better promote themselves, to increase visibility and notoriety in front of current and potential customers

35% of the total respondents most often notice the advertisements for the products / services offered by the companies operating on the Romanian market on Facebook and only 19% say that they notice such advertisements on TikTok.

It can be seen in Table 1 that there is a balance between the categories of products for which advertising is most often received, which proves that at the moment most Romanian companies regardless of the field of activity are present in the online environment. 20% of all respondents receive advertisements for clothing products, 17% for hygiene products, 15% for food products and only 14% for accessories and jewelry. Note that these ads also appear based on people's searches. For example, if someone searched for an evening dress on Google, as soon as they entered one of the social networks they will receive advertising for similar products).

Table 1. Express your opinion on the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
In the last month I purchased at least one product as a result of the influence produced by online advertising on social media?	2.9	3.8	9.6	39.4	44.2
I'm bothered by the ad spots that appear while watching a video on Youtube	3.8	9.6	27.9	28.8	29.8
The ads that appear on social media platforms are useful	1	1	25	34.6	38.5
I like it when I get ads based on previous searches	3.8	5.8	26.9	33.7	29.8

Online advertising turns out to be very effective because 44% of all respondents say they are in total agreement with the fact that they have purchased at least one product in the last month, influenced by social media advertisements, and only 7% say they disagree with this statement.

59% of all respondents say that they don't when bothered by the ad spots that appear while watching a video on Youtube. Over 50% of all respondents agree that the ads that appear on different online platforms from Romanian companies are useful because they find out useful information about what the campaign wants to implement, about the offers or about the next contests to be organized. Of the total respondents, most of them believe that social media advertising is useful if it is based on their previous searches.

There is a balance between the answers obtained from the 104 respondents, 25% consider that companies choose the method of promotion in the online environment to increase sales, 24% say they choose this method for the referee of the public, 19% for notoriety, 18% for the

fact that it is a means of fast communication and 15% for transmitting concise information about the services and products sold.

Table 2. Express your opinion on the following statements

Question		Where do you most often notice advertising spots for the products / services offered by the companies operating on the Romanian market?				
	Variants	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube	Total
In which product categories do you most often receive advertisements on social media?	Clothing products	7.0%	4.8%	3.9%	4.5%	20.1%
	Personal hygiene products	5.9%	4.1%	3.3%	3.8%	17.1%
	Food	5.1%	3.5%	2.8%	3.3%	14.8%
	Electronics and home appliances	6.2%	4.3%	3.4%	4.0%	17.8%
	Beauty products	5.3%	3.7%	3.0%	3.5%	15.5%
	Accessories and jewelry	5.0%	3.6%	2.7%	3.2%	14.5%
	Others	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.3%
	Total	34.6%	23.9%	19.3%	22.2%	100%

As a result, it can be observed in Table 2 that most of the respondents who answered the question "What categories of products do you most often receive advertising spots?", answered the question "Where do you most often notice advertisements for the products / services offered by companies operating on the Romanian market" that Facebook and Instagram are the main social media channels where they notice advertising spots, regardless of the product category.

Conclusion

Online advertising remains a very important topic in the reign of marketing, especially since the number of companies in Romania is increasing. They have several competitors and must find a way to differentiate themselves in front of consumers, using different types of campaigns focused on promoting products and services in the online environment. Their attention is directed to how the consumer behaves in society, but especially on his habits, desires and intentions, especially since they are constantly changing.

Through the research carried out, we have achieved the purpose of the paper, that of determining the efficiency of the use of online advertising tools in social media by companies in Romania and all hypotheses have been validated following the processing of data obtained from respondents.

What has made online advertising successful in Romania is the increase in the number of people who have access to the Internet, but also the willingness of Romanians in general to make online purchases. This trend has also been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of which the quarantine measures imposed by the Romanian Government offered no alternative other than the purchase of basic products (food and medicines).

The study found that most people are influenced by online advertising and that it matters a lot to them that an advertising spot conveys strong emotions, has quality content and is relevant to the product / service promoted. I recommend companies to use influencers in their advertising spots that have the same values as the company, so that the message is transmitted in an easier way to the user. I also noticed that for people the emotional part matters more and that even if they do not want a product or service, they purchase it if it conveys an emotion. All companies must keep a long-term connection with the customer and provide them with a unique experience every time, so it is recommended that companies send customers personalized offers based on purchases made by them and gifts on different occasions to turn them into loyal customers.

Acknowledgement

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