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Differences between Instagram and Facebook Sponsored Posts for Small Hospitality Businesses

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Abstract

In today's age of technological advancement and rapid change, much of the communication takes place on social networks, which offer a great opportunity for customer interaction. Social media is a popular and widely used marketing tool for communication between buyers and sellers. Advertising on social networks is relatively low, which is attractive to businesses, especially smaller ones. This paper aims to study the differences between sponsored content ads on the social networks Facebook and Instagram, using the example of a small hospitality business. The experiment consists of the same text and image posted on the social networks Instagram and Facebook and a post booster run through a mobile app adapted for smartphones. The results show that the promotion of the restaurant business positively affects increasing the number of followers on this page. There are also large differences in response between promoted and non-promoted posts, with promoted posts having a significantly higher response. Differences between Instagram and Facebook are listed, and recommendations for further research are given.

Keywords: social networks; marketing communication; advertising

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Introduction

With the development of technology, communication via the Internet is becoming increasingly important. Social networks represent a market opportunity for companies. They must have a presence there: companies are increasingly communicating information about products and services through social networks, including advertising, managing user-generated content, etc. (Shao et al., 2009; Kumar et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Mayrhofer et al., 2020). Moreover, it is easy to promote user engagement through social media (Barhemmati et al., 2015; Tussyadiah et al., 2018). In this way, companies directly engage with consumers, which is the main advantage of social networks over traditional media (Belanche et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020).

In recent years, the importance of advertising on social networks has been recognized, and companies are increasingly investing in this relatively new technology (Plume et al., 2018; De Jans et al., 2020). This is supported by the fact that social media advertising is the second largest market for digital advertising (Statista, 2022), accounting for 33% of all digital ad spending in 2022 and growing by nearly 20% each year (HootSuite, 2022). In 2021, Facebook and Instagram were marketers' most-used social media platforms (Statista, 2022). Belanche et al. (2019) point out that consumers' attitudes toward sponsored content, ad intrusiveness, and loyalty are three key characteristics that determine the effectiveness of social media advertising. In addition, sponsored content on social networks increases marketers' revenue by providing value or satisfaction to consumers (Sheiner et al., 2021) by embedding ads in the feed of the user's social network, where engagement is at the highest level (Plume et al., 2018).

Many scholars have studied the characteristics of social networks, the factors that determine their use, and social network behavior (Currás-Pérez et al., 2013; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Parra-López et al., 2011; Schroeder et al., 2015). Yet, there is limited research on social media advertising (Plume et al., 2018; De Jans et al., 2020). Given the current opportunities to optimize sponsored content, our study contributes to a better understanding of the choice of advertising platforms. Therefore, this paper investigates the differences between sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram, using a small hospitality business as an example.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a theoretical framework for social networks is presented. Then, the research questionnaire is formulated based on the literature reviewed. The methods used are explained, and the research results are presented in the following section. The final section concludes the study, discusses the limitations and makes suggestions for future research.

Literature background

Social networks are one of the fastest-growing communication technologies in the Internet environment. They are defined as a "kind of network that reflects the social structure of its nodes and their interdependencies, such as the friendship of people, co-authorship of researchers, and collaboration between different parties" (Peng et al., 2018). In the digital environment, they include the creation of virtual communities that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content (Valos et al., 2017). The complexity of social networks arises from various communication channels, which are classified into several specific groups (Tuten, 2021): Social Community, Social Publishing, Social Commerce, and Social Entertainment.

Importance of social media

Social networks are present in the lives of all Internet users daily, as evidenced by the fact that there are currently more than four and a half billion active social network users, representing 58.4% of the world's population and spending an average of 147 minutes per day on social networks (Digital 2022). The most popular social network is Facebook, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram, three of which are even owned by Meta Company (Chaffey, 2022). Among the main reasons for using social networks is the satisfaction of functional, social, and psychological needs (Currás - Pérez et al., 2013), while the benefits of social networks are manifested mainly in the interaction, sharing, and exchange of information between users (Ištvančić et al., 2017).

The benefits of social networks accrue not only to users but also to businesses, which have recognized their importance as a communication and advertising medium. On the one hand, potential consumers receive more and more information about companies' products and services through Internet communication. On the other hand, companies collect more and more information about consumers to customize and personalize their advertising. The collection of information shared by companies improves communication and better targeting (Kumar et al., 2016) and allows companies to engage directly with consumers.

Nowadays, various social networks enable market research, segmentation, and positioning, all to attract as many new users as possible and build a long-term relationships with regular users of products and services (Hanaysha et al., 2021). A common feature of all social networks is that they depend on user-generated content, often associated with the company's products and services. Such content can significantly impact consumers' perceptions of the company (Litterio, 2017). According to Shao (2009), users on social networks can generate content by consuming it (reading or viewing but not participating in it), participating in its creation (by commenting), and producing content (by creating and posting unique content). In addition, word of mouth (WOM) plays a central role in the online dissemination of product and service information, "where its intangibility makes sharing the experience even more important to consumers" (Nobre et al., 2014). Social networks play a very important role in decision-making as they are great sources of information, especially in tourism and hospitality, where consumers rely heavily on eWOM (Leung et al. 2017). Social networks have become the most common tool for sharing experiences during and after travel (Schroeder et al., 2015; Zeng et al., 2014) and for seeking recommendations from people who have already experienced the destination (Salehi-Esfahani et al., 2016; Jadhav et al., 2018).

Interaction between consumers and businesses, which occurs through communication, is important in shaping the corporate image. Hence, businesses seek to build a strong and positive image in the minds of consumers through communication (Cheung et al., 2019). Social networks not only enable better communication with consumers but also have a positive impact on shopping habits in the commercial consumer market. According to recent research, as many as 82% of commercial consumers said that social networks positively influenced their purchasing decisions (Rakshit et al., 2022).

Social media marketing

One of the world's most popular digital marketing tools is social media marketing, which refers to "the use of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and share offerings that are of value to a company's stakeholders" (Tuten, 2021, 19). Since social networks enjoy great popularity among users, social network marketing is used to create company profiles on various social

networks and publish the widest possible range of organic and paid content. Although social networks allow free advertising of products and services, the main challenge for companies is attracting the audience's attention. For example, the reach of organic posts on Facebook is less than 10% of users who like the Facebook page, so advertising is necessary to reach the target audience (Hanlon, 2019). Key benefits of social media marketing include (Icha et al., 2015): improved sales, increased visibility, growing business partnerships, leads generated, reduced marketing spend, improved search rankings, increased traffic, market insights, and development of loyal fans. Improved traffic, lead generation, and growing fan loyalty are considered the top benefits of using social networks for marketing purposes (Statista, 2022). It also facilitates segmentation and identification of target consumer groups that tend to become brand promoters (Ryan, 2021).

Social media advertising

The importance of advertising via social networks as a fundamental tool of digital marketing communication is evident from the following data. As the second largest digital advertising market, social network advertising generated \$153 billion in global revenue in 2021, and this figure is expected to grow to over \$252 billion by 2026 (Hootsuite, 2022). In 2021, Facebook and Instagram were the most used social platforms by marketers worldwide (Statista, 2022). In addition, Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and Whatsapp, saw a 10% increase in ad impressions in 2021 (Hootsuite, 2022). Nearly 50% of Internet users said they would buy a particular product or service based on social advertising (HubSpot, 2022).

One of the most popular advertising techniques on the Facebook platform is sponsored posts (Facebook, 2022). A sponsored post "is a form of native advertising, a term used to describe any paid advertising that is transmitted through digital channels, is integrated into the media, and whose format and wording fit into the overall design of the page" (Sheiner et al., 2021, 643). Recent studies have found that effective sponsored posts positively influence audience recall, brand attitudes, and engagement outcomes (Belanche et al., 2019; Huang, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020) and increase marketer revenue (Sheiner et al., 2021) as one of the most important advertising formats in social networks, in-feed native ads (Huang, 2019) focus on disrupting the user's online experience as little as possible by appearing unobtrusively in the feed, just like any other post, with the exception that the word "sponsored" is listed under the company name (Sheiner et al., 2021). In applying the optimal strategy of native advertising and selecting social network platforms, Huang (2019) found that more positive attitudes toward the brand and higher purchase intent resulted from advertising on different platforms, reducing the intrusiveness of repetitive ads. Belanche et al. (2019) compared advertising effectiveness between Facebook Wall and Instagram Stories. They found that the more dynamic social media formats (e.g., Instagram Stories) promoted users' attitudes toward an ad more than the more static formats (e.g., Facebook Wall and Instagram Wall). Regarding the behavioral components of sponsored posts, previous studies have confirmed that the congruence of the social message of sponsored Facebook posts had direct effects on psychological engagement, while the incongruence of the personal message of sponsored Facebook posts had direct effects on behavioral engagement (Sheiner et al., 2021). Furthermore, Plume et al. (2018) showed that the intention to share tourism-related sponsored ads on Facebook was directly influenced by altruism, entertainment, sociability, and information seeking.

To select appropriate advertising platforms, this paper focuses on the two leading social networks - Facebook and Instagram. Facebook is an information-oriented

network where ads are mostly static and structured (Belanche et al., 2019). The network has the largest number of monthly active users, the largest age group of 25 to 34 years, and 2.11 billion potential users that can be reached with ads (Hootsuite, 2022).

Instagram is a visual platform where users are encouraged to share images and short videos (De Jans, 2020), and it is considered an image-based platform (Johnson et al., 2020). It is considered a more dynamic platform than Facebook because of its ability to publish and promote the very popular Instagram Story and Instagram Reels (Belanche et al., 2019). However, Facebook has recently begun to have these capabilities as well. The total potential reach of ads on Instagram is 1.48 billion, with the largest age group between 25 and 34 (Hootsuite, 2022). Since Facebook has owned Instagram since 2012 (current company name: Meta), advertising for this social network is enabled through the Facebook platform or mobile app. When creating an ad, you can select goals (traffic, reach, brand awareness, etc.), set the desired budget on which the reach of the ad depends, the possibility to target users, the location (geographic reach of the ad), age group, gender, interests, and behavior of the target audience (Facebook, 2022; Instagram, 2022).

According to the reviewed literature, the main objective of this work is to fill the gap by studying the impact of advertising in social networks on improving a small hospitality business. Therefore, the objectives of this research are as follows:

(1) to study the effect of advertising on Facebook and Instagram; (2) to determine the influence of socio-demographic factors on advertising activity; (3) to compare the potential and achieved reach for the same sponsored post placed on two social networks, Facebook and Instagram.

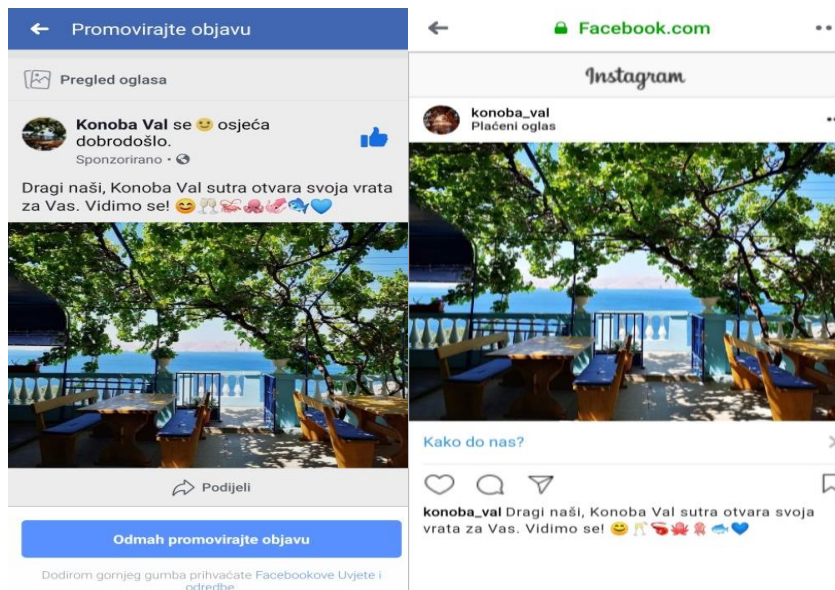
Methodology

To answer the research questions, an experiment was conducted. The same text and image promoting the soon opening of a small restaurant in Croatia were posted on Instagram and Facebook in July 2019. A post-booster run through a mobile app adapted for smartphones has been followed (Figure 1). This method of publishing ads was intended to explore the functionality and simplicity of advertising via a mobile device.

Facebook settings

The first step in posting a promoted post on Facebook was to select the ad's target. Of the "Get more messages" and "Increase engagement" options, "Increase engagement" is selected, which means that the post will be displayed to an audience that is expected to respond, share and comment on it. The next step was to select the buttons that would appear below the ad. The "How to reach us?" option is selected to direct users to the desired location. Then the location where the ad should appear with a radius of 36.1 km is selected, with a potential reach of 63,000 people who can see the ad. The ad will run for ten days, and the total budget is 15 euros. It is estimated that for this amount, between 514 and 1486 people will see the ad daily for ten days. In setting the criteria, the age and gender of the target audience, i.e., men and women aged 18 to 65+, and the areas of interest "food", "sea," and "Mediterranean diet" were set. The potential reach of the publication with these criteria is 52,000 people.

Figure 1
Sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram



Source: Author's work

Instagram settings

The first step is to select the destination I want to direct profile visitors. There are three destinations to choose from: "Your Profile", "Your Website," and "Your Instant Messages", of which the "Your Profile" option was selected. This option was chosen to increase the number of profile visitors on Instagram. The next step is to select the target audience, choosing between the three options offered, "Automatic", "Restaurants," and "Create your own", where Instagram itself targets a group of people similar to the existing followers of the Instagram profile. The geographic area where the ad will appear is selected, with a choice of regional or local. The local ad is placed within a 30 km radius with a potential reach of 23,000 people.

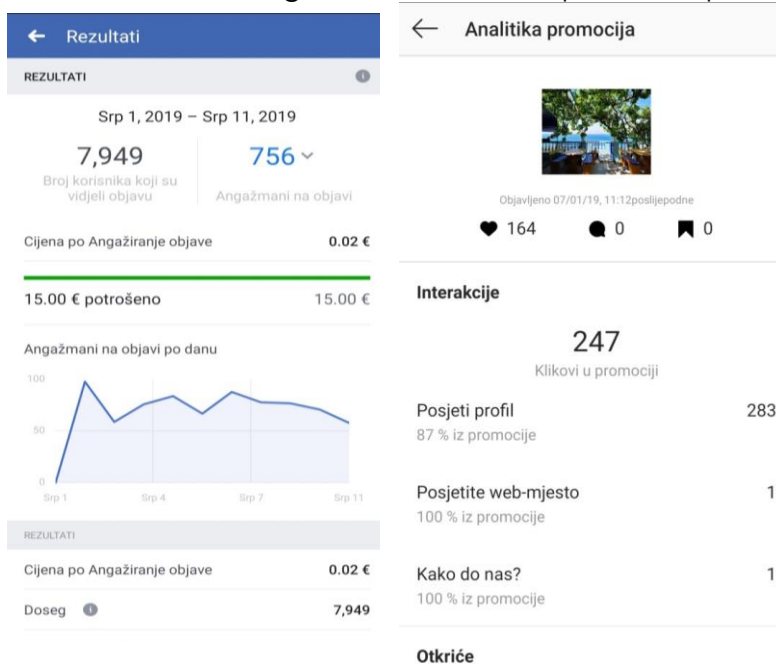
The total cost of the ad is €10 for ten days or €1 per day, and the estimated reach of the ad is between 1300 and 3300 followers. The socio-demographic selection conditions follow, i.e., women and men between the ages of 13 and 65 are selected, so the potential reach of the ad is 23,000 people. Under the "Create Target Audience" section, eight interests are selected (food, Mediterranean cold, fish, gastronomy, restaurants, food & wine, seafood, and seafood restaurant), so the potential reach of followers is 19,000.

Results

The total reach of the promoted post is 7,949, and refers to the number of people who saw the posted ad at least once (Figure 2). Of the total number of Facebook users who saw the post on Facebook, the sponsored post received 756 interactions, including 378 reactions, 226 clicks on the link, 145 photo views, four comments, two shared posts, and one saved post. Reach differs from impressions, which can include multiple ad views by the same people. The frequency per post is 1.88 and refers to the average number of times the post is viewed per person. The price is 0.02 euros. At the time the post was sponsored, no person had yet "liked" the page, i.e., no new followers of the page were created.

Analyzing the reach of the sponsored post by gender and age, the ad achieved the highest reach of 4,644 people for women, with 467 engagements recorded. The ad's reach for men was 3260 people, of whom 286 used the ad. This was followed by people who did not specify their gender on Facebook, with a reach of 46 people, of whom only 3 used the ad. Women achieved 62% engagement with the post sponsored on Facebook, while men achieved 38%. People aged 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 achieved 25% engagement with the Facebook ad, followed by a group of people aged 55 to 64 with 18%. People over the age of 65 accounted for 12%, and individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 accounted for 11%. The lowest number of contributions to the promoted Facebook post was made by people in the youngest age group (18 to 24 years), who contributed 10% of the posts.

Figure 2
Facebook and Instagram results of the sponsored post



Source: Author's experiment

The post on Instagram was clicked 247 times (Figure 2). The number of users who saw the post on Instagram was 6,097, of which 97% were not followers of the page, and 95% of the users visited the page via the promoted post. During the sponsored post, the Instagram profile recorded an increase of 15,929 visits, of which 81% were due to the promotion. Also, nine new account tracks were recorded on Instagram. The boosted post on the Instagram profile reached 164 likes. The post was not commented on or saved. One person visited the web page from the promotion. Also, only one person from the promotion clicked on the "How to reach us?" question that was part of the promoted post.

According to the gender and age structure, the boosted post has reached a 41% of men and 59% of women. The lowest reach in the oldest target group, 65 years and older, and the highest in the younger population, i.e., respondents aged 18 to 24 years and respondents aged 25 to 34 years.

Table 1 shows the differences in response between the promoted and non-promoted Facebook posts, as the number of responses during the sponsored post was 256, while on Instagram, it was 163.

Table 1

Comparison of Facebook and Instagram for non-sponsored and sponsored posts

	Facebook		Instagram	
	Non-sponsored post	Sponsored post	Non-sponsored post	Sponsored post
Like	22	256	16	163
Comments	0	11	1	0
Shares	0	4	-	-

Source: Author's experiment

Table 2 presents the differences between the potential and achieved reach, based on the calculation while selecting the target and after the duration of the sponsored posts, both on Facebook and Instagram.

Table 2

Comparison of Facebook and Instagram potential and achieved reach

	Facebook	Instagram
Potential reach	52000	19000
Achieved reach	7949	6097

Source: Research results

The following sections are discussed in terms of the results' implications.

Discussion

This paper conducted an experiment that produced the following answers to the research questions:

- (1) To study the effect of advertising on Facebook and Instagram

The effect of advertising on Facebook and Instagram is significant when comparing the same post that is not sponsored, especially in the number of reach and interactions on the sponsored post. The total reach on Facebook was 7949, while on Instagram was 6097 people.

- (2) To determine the influence of socio-demographic factors on advertising activity

The research analysis results show that Facebook is more suitable for middle-aged people (between 35 and 54 years old) because they showed the greatest interest in the sponsored post on Facebook. The sponsored post on Facebook attracted 197 people aged 35 to 44 (25% of the total) and the same number (197) of people aged 45 to 54 (25%), representing 50% of the total number of people who expressed interest in the post. On Instagram, the lowest reach of the publication was recorded in the oldest target population aged 65 and over, and the highest in the younger population, i.e., respondents aged 18 to 24 and respondents aged 25 to 34. On Facebook, 62% of women and 38% of men have reached the post, while on Instagram, the percentage of women was 59%, and that of men was 41%.

- (3) to compare the potential and achieved reach for the same sponsored post placed on two social networks, Facebook and Instagram

Both social networks calculated the assumed reach of the number of people. This number was not exceeded or reached in either case. In the case of Facebook, the actual number reached is much lower than the assumed number, so the difference is 44051 possible impressions. So only 15.28% of the assumed number was reached. For Instagram, the difference is 12903 missed impressions, so 32.08% of the targeted reach was achieved.

Conclusion

This work aimed to study the differences in sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram for a small hospitality business. The experiment on both social platforms shows that sponsored posts have a better reach, higher engagement, better visibility, and a higher number of shares than non-sponsored posts.

The research results confirmed that non-sponsored posts improved the social media presence on these platforms. Still, the potential reach achieved when engaging the audience was insufficient compared to the potential reach.

When examining the second research question, Facebook was more suitable for middle-aged individuals, while Instagram was better suited for followers between 18 and 34. In both social media, women outnumbered men.

Given that the importance of advertising on social networks is well recognised (Plume et al., 2018; De Jans et al., 2020), this research provides some useful, practical implications for better understanding sponsored posts in terms of Facebook and Instagram settings, audiences, and reach achieved. Social networks have proven to be more beneficial advertising mediums than traditional one-way media because they allow for interactive communication. The ability to receive user feedback and track their reactions opens up a faster and easier data transformation into information businesses can use for improvement.

A few limitations emerged during the research. First, the experiment used existing Facebook and Instagram pages with few followers and visitors. A new research interest could be generated by sponsored posts on new Facebook and Instagram pages, where such content could increase the number of followers who follow them closely. Short prior engagement on existing pages could lead to disinterest in future sponsored posts. Second, the period in which the sponsored ad was published was short and without repetitive posts.

On the other hand, an unequal part of the budget was used for advertising, 15 euros for Facebook and 10 euros for Instagram, as both sites had different settings. In line with previous research (Sheiner et al., 2021), it was possible to investigate consumers' perceived value and satisfaction among those who saw the sponsored post. Conclusions from this study will contribute to further exploration of theory and application of recommendations in practice.

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