

Article

The Consumption Analysis of Economic Media at the Regional Level in a Developing Country

Andreea Nistor ^{1,*} and Eduard Zadobrischi ^{2,3,*} 

¹ Faculty of Economics and Public Administration, “Stefan Cel Mare” University, No. 13. Str. Universitatii, 720229 Suceava, Romania

² Department of Computers, Electronics and Automation, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, “Stefan Cel Mare” University, No. 13. Str. Universitatii, 720229 Suceava, Romania

³ Department of Computer Science, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Gh. Baritiu St. 26–28, 400027 Cluj-Napoca, Romania

* Correspondence: andreea.nistor@usm.ro (A.N.); eduard.zadobrischi@usm.ro (E.Z.)

Abstract: This research aims to analyze how the media can favor economic development at the regional level, observing how mass media reports on the economy are relevant to Romania’s population, and if the content provided stimulates economic development action. Mass media is one of the main channels of information for many companies, and the acquisition of correct and qualitative information generates informed decisions. Additionally, the mass media has the role of producing changes in the behavior of the consuming public, and in its culture, and can improve its educational level. Although the variety of information sources, which has been improved over time by technology, does not guarantee their use, the mass media, through the information it provides, can change attitudes and values, and lead to a higher standard of living. The present study includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, which look at the media and its effects on companies. Through two surveys, data were collected on how the population relates to the information obtained from the mass media, as well as how the mass media is used by the companies in the Northeast Region of Romania. The benefits and challenges that companies encounter while using social networks have thus been determined. Additionally, the qualitative method was used, in order to be able to observe whether there are significant differences in the use of social networks to develop an emerging business, in terms of the male-female ratio.

Keywords: companies; media impact; economic impact; regional development; services and products; social networks; social media



Citation: Nistor, A.; Zadobrischi, E.

The Consumption Analysis of Economic Media at the Regional Level in a Developing Country.

Sustainability **2022**, *14*, 16140.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su142316140>

su142316140

Academic Editor: Chin-Yi Fang

Received: 31 October 2022

Accepted: 29 November 2022

Published: 2 December 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The mass media, through its messages, represents an important pillar in the development of the economy, which has the role of informing and educating [1], equally developing, and sensitizing the public. These messages transmitted by the mass media can be direct or indirect, presenting different ways of disseminating information, so that regardless of their latent or indirect effect, the messages are distinct, depending on the audience’s field of activity [2]. Sanchez [3] analyzed the various ways of disseminating information shown by the mass media, investigating the messages conveyed in economic and business environments, involving their structure, as well as determining the development of the public from an economic point of view.

As for regional media, it provides communities with opportunities by structuring its information and content based on its audience. A good deal of information held by the community comes from the mass media, and experiences as well as how people reason about those experiences are mass-mediated [4]. Therefore, people’s attitudes toward others or towards social or institutional events are influenced by the information provided by the

mass media. This information can be communicated to a large audience through advertising, and in this way, people can assimilate and act on it. In other words, communication through mass media can be conceptualized as an application of general communication, and when done properly a series of relevant theories of communication can be outlined [5]. These theories can be used to carry out different communication campaigns, essential in influencing people's beliefs, behaviors and feelings. In this context, the media has a total influence on economic and developmental areas, and media messages can motivate organizations to invest in advertising.

The mass media have the ability to enhance the quantitative expansion of the productive capacity of an economy, by improving the standard of living. Combining social and economic goals has broadened the definition of development, so that, in addition to conventional growth goals, long-term development goals emphasize the environmental dimension, sustainability, as well as people's participation in development projects [6]. By including long-term aspects, the effectiveness of any large-scale project, which involves a series of institutional changes and presents a direct impact on society, increases. These institutional preconditions include a number of factors such as specialized workforces, managerial competence, strategic planning capacity, transportation facilities, flexible workforces, motivation, and government bureaucracy [7].

The present study includes both qualitative and quantitative research, and looks at the mass media and its effect on companies, their audiences, and the types of publications. The mass media in Romania play an important role in social and political aspects, being able to exert the same influence on the development of the regional economy. Likewise, the content offered by the mass media to citizens, whether it is entertainment, news, or other information, must be relevant and constructive, generating economic benefits as well [8]. However, often, the mass media in Romania, both national and regional, does not report problems that could determine regional economic development. The national mass media emphasizes the developed cities and towns in a certain region, and this issue requires a more thorough approach to understand why the mass media fail to help the development of towns in underdeveloped regions as well, considering that much of the economically relevant content focuses on developed regions and cities.

Regarding the relevance of the research, mass media can be an important factor in development, and thus, program managers could be motivated to construct messages in a motivational way, with the aim of involving the population in the development of the regional economy. This research also specifies how the media can be used constructively to convey messages aimed at creating opportunities for people in a particular region, while assessing whether the messages conveyed by the media are being received as expected by the public.

1.1. The Importance of Research

One of the objectives of the present research is represented by the awareness of the role that the mass media plays in the economic field, by indicating the gap that mass media organizations could explore in order to select their market. New media provides a number of platforms, designed to help companies to distribute important information to consumers, thus contributing to the communication process. Through social media, companies have the opportunity to engage in a more dynamic environment in terms of their approach, so entrepreneurs have a very important role in building a relationship between companies and potential customers. In this way, companies can develop their innovation capabilities to transform already existing knowledge into new ideas and approaches in order to prevent risks arising in new investment. In other words, this transformed knowledge has the effect of developing new knowledge that allows the company to select both its audience and its market.

In addition, another objective of this study is represented by the fact that the mass media can be used to contribute in a constructive way to the economic development process, offering help in creating a favorable environment for those interested in the development of

the regional economy, thus representing a pole of governments' awareness of the economic media. In other words, the government could implement a program of cooperation with the media, in order to increase economic performance. Thus, information can more easily reach the public through the media regarding existing opportunities and programs at the executive level. So, the language used by the media could represent a tool for informing the population, because it would be accessible and intelligible to the public, with the possibility of dispersing information in remote or rural areas.

At the same time, the third objective is to encourage the understanding of communities, which use mass media only for the purpose of entertainment, given that these communication channels can also be used for information activities, which can generate opportunities for regional development.

1.2. Analysis of the Media Economy

The study of the mass media economy received a rather important boost after the economic crisis of 2008, when many companies recorded significant losses of income, especially in the field of advertising, and were thus facing considerable staff reductions. Services such as print, accompanied by a broadcast or cable, have not recovered from the economic crisis, as more and more digital competitors appeared, which managed to attract a significant number of listeners, readers, or viewers. Media economics looks at the interaction between companies and the individual, reflecting the economic interests of capital, prices, labor [9], and other policies involving the study of media in the field of economics.

Multidisciplinary research has been encouraged by the demand for social and computer-mediated relationships, and the emergence of social networks in the mid-2000s [10], which generated a rapid evolution of technology, attracting a wide range of consumers. Social media can be defined as a set of technologies that are computer-mediated, and so interactive. Social networks have the ability to facilitate the sharing of career-relevant information, as well as other forms of expression. The present work aims to analyze the socio-economic impact that mass media has on regional development, and the relevance of the subject is given by the exponential growth of social media, which has a significant impact on the business environment [11]. In order to achieve favorable results, many companies have adopted various strategies to promote their services or products, recruit employees, stimulate the sales process, as well as attract new customers. In this case, geopolitics is important to defining international relations, which are determined by geographical factors.

The technology used in social media is presided over by artificial intelligence, which has the role of activating, through methods and theories, a series of computer systems, which are determined by reasoning. Social media is operated on a number of platforms, depending on the predominant field of activity, and in the case of companies, websites and social networks are the most used by users seeking to promote their services and products [12]. Twitter is a microblogging site frequently used by companies, who have the opportunity to express their ideas with a defined number of words, while websites or social networks can act as promoters for the marketing process, sharing announcements or different information intended to reach the consumer. In this way, an interdependent relationship is created between the company and consumers, with both communicating their needs [13]. Additionally, the analysis of the feedback provided by consumers to the products or services of a company is essential to facilitating their access to the market, and one of the most used platforms is Facebook, due to its large number of users. The communication process is an important aspect of social networks, and online platforms facilitate the process, making it more efficient. In this context, a link is created between traditional communication methods and new media, through marketing, which has the effect of valorizing services or products.

A number of factors [14] that lead to GDP growth determine economic development, such as human resources, technological resources, physical capital, and natural resources. Additionally, physical capital or infrastructure supports trade and economic development,

and natural resources can create dependence on other countries. Technological resources represent one of the essential factors for economic development, and social networks are part of the technological resource, which leads to economic influence. There is also a negative relationship between mass media and economic development, meaning that fake news distributed on social networks can affect economic growth, through an effect on buyer behavior, a decrease in investment, or a considerable decrease in tourism [15]. At the same time, when variables such as marketing are introduced, economic development is influenced in a positive way. In other words, the present study offers decision-makers the opportunity to understand the impact that social networks exert on economic development, while providing a structured review aimed at providing an overview of the positive or negative impacts of social networks on economic development at the regional level.

Geopolitics is closely related to economic development, meaning a political framework can have a positive or negative impact on the economy. Indicators such as taxes, interest, and exchange rates can influence the relationship between geopolitics and economic growth. If the geopolitical conditions are not favorable, then economic differences come into play [16]. In this context, social networks can exert an influence on geopolitics and economic growth.

1.3. Consolidation of the Media Market in Society

Development has always been considered a collective enterprise that requires the participation of society. In other words, the media does not operate in an independent way, but depends on its audience, and the audience depends on the media for easy access to information [17]. Each type of content is tailored to a specific audience, with different media aspects aimed at meeting diverse needs. The public chooses, rejects, and assimilates aspects of the mass media according to the needs produced by the individual's psychological structure or environment. The selection and presentation processes of news content are normally guided by the desire to help readers or listeners understand the gist of events [18], and the main question is whether the choice made by a news compiler is appropriate to the audience's needs. Thus, communication with the public is intended to develop new partnerships with the mass media, which has the objective of consolidating, supporting, and expanding programs and services. In this context, the mass media remains a relatively unexploited and latent medium for promoting discussions of economic and social impacts, as well as environmental issues. Even though the development process of the economy might be quite different in some aspects, the mass media can help, and the corporate and government departments in metropolitan organizations inform how they can develop [19].

Over time, thanks to technological progress, a series of changes have occurred in traditional mass media, through the distribution of information through electronic means, which have the ability to generate long-term fundamental, economic or social transformations. The most common term used to describe the emerging social order of an economically developed state is the information society [20], which refers to the increasing dependence of individuals and institutions on information and communication to function actively in all areas. The act of communication can have both a private and personal character, as well as a public meaning that can generate social, political and economic values, and can be seen both as an act of necessity or a fundamental right, as well as an optional private indulgence. These dimensions of communication contribute to the output of the product offered to the public, as the media arranges its content according to the target audience, and it should provide information that leads to the economic development of its audience [21]. The media can also work towards economic dispensation in stimulating the target audience by arranging or making economic reports and treating the content in a way that creates interest among people.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study includes both qualitative and quantitative research, and looks at the mass media and its effect on companies, their audiences, and the types of publications.

The mass media in Romania plays an important role in social and political aspects, being able to exert the same influence on the development of the regional economy. Likewise, the content offered by the mass media to citizens, whether it is entertainment, news, or other information, must be relevant and constructive, and generate economic benefits as well. However, many times, the mass media in Romania, both national and regional, does not report on problems that could determine regional economic development. The national mass media emphasizes the developed cities and towns in a certain region, and this issue requires a more thorough approach to understand why the mass media fail to help the development of towns in underdeveloped regions as well, considering that much of the economically relevant content focuses on developed regions and cities.

In this context, in order to answer the research problem, a questionnaire was applied, which was distributed both online, via <https://my.surveio.com/> (accessed on 12 April 2022), and physically, within some companies in the Northeast Region. The survey was conducted online, and 326 responses were received to the applied questionnaire, with a sample consisting of 179 women and 145 men. Responses were collected until 2 June 2022, and the survey identified a number of determinants that measure the degree of the media's influence on people, including both fake news and economic topics, which are the basis of development. In other words, we used quantitative research, which focuses on collecting numerical data to explain the phenomenon of mass media consumption. The questions are designed in such a way that they can be manipulated and analyzed statistically. Compared to qualitative research, the approach is much more logical and critical, with the survey consisting of closed questions. The survey consists of a series of sections focusing on media consumption, the type of social networks used, the influence of social networks on the purchase of products and services, fake news shared online, as well as a series of questions on the contribution of mass media to the economic development of a country. Qualitative research was used in this study, using a series of instruments, which used closed questions represented by Equation (1):

$$n = \frac{X^2 * N * P * (1 - P)}{(ME^2 * (N - 1)) + (X^2 * P * (1 - P))} \quad (1)$$

where n represents the sample size, $X^2 = Chi$, the square for the specified confidence level, N represents the proportion data analyzed, and ME is the desired margin of error (expressed as a proportion).

In addition, in this research, the descriptive approach and another survey were used to collect the necessary data on the consumption of mass media among companies. Thus, the purpose of this questionnaire was to obtain a series of data, as it was distributed both online, via <https://my.surveio.com/> (accessed on 12 April 2022), and physically, within some companies in the Northeast Region. The main objective was to gain knowledge about how media is used by companies in the Northeast Region, as well as to determine the opportunities and risks faced by companies through the use of media. The sample consists of 164 questionnaires distributed both online and physically. Most of the study participants were contacted by email, answering the questions both online and in written form. In the current research, social networks were used as some beneficial research tools and not just as a simple phenomenon. Through Facebook groups such as "Group of Entrepreneurs from Romania" or "Journal of Entrepreneurs—Start-Up Romania", the questionnaire link was distributed so that we could obtain the desired results in the present research. This method helped us recruit more respondents to the survey.

Additionally, in the case of the two questionnaires, a comparative analysis was included, determined by the Mann-Whitney U test. This analysis aimed to observe the differences in emerging economies regarding the use of social networks by both women and men. In this context, we were able to observe that there was no significant difference in the use of social media tools for the development of a business between women and men.

In this research, most of the respondents' primary purpose for using the internet was entertainment, and e-mail, banking, and news ranked last in the respondents' preferences, as represented by Equation (2):

$$U = \frac{m}{t} \quad (2)$$

Thus, we define the utility of information as U , and this is equal to the value of the meaning that the consumer of the information infers, which we denote as m . This interpretation must be divided by the total time required for the user to consume the information, denoted as t . We can say that this representation is abstract, but we do not have extremely accurate methods, and therefore we must use marginal utility aimed at the economy. We present all data on a scale and classify the data theoretically. This scale depends on the individual, and can be used in comparative models to interpret the process of the assimilation of information (Figure 1).

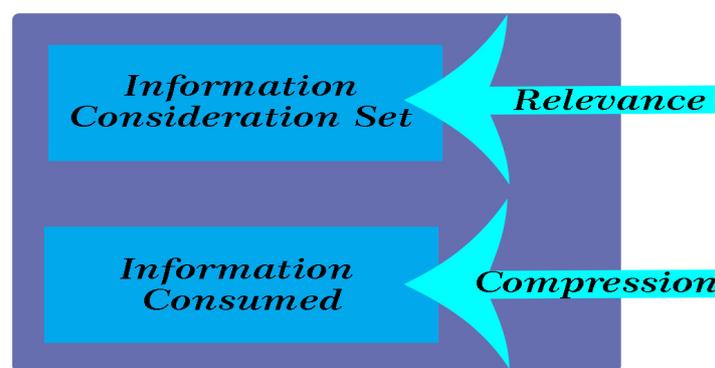


Figure 1. Illustration regarding the relevance of the set of information-based considerations, highlighting the utility of compression that improves the information itself.

In the applied questionnaire, more than 40% of the respondents mentioned that they had never been influenced to purchase products or services following recommendations from new media, and more than 50% stated that they had been influenced, which led us to analyze the profiles of the consumers and the buyers with the help of Equation (3):

$$C = c + bY \quad (3)$$

where C represents the total consumption of information by users and c is the autonomous consumption that occurs as a result of contextual influences from information in the online environment. Induced consumption is represented by bY , and it is influenced by every increase in financial influence, which is directly proportional to the need to buy. Thus, there is also a profitability threshold that must be related to the revenue collected, and later a concept of savings is established, but this is not part of the aggressive marketing campaigns practiced by a large part of online merchants.

3. Results

The first part of the survey had the purpose of finding out which media channels the respondents use most often. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information regarding gender and age—55% of respondents were female and 45% male. Regarding the information on the age of the participants in this survey, 28% of the respondents were between the ages of 45 and 54, and 26% of them were between the ages of 35 and 44. The third largest respondent group, which covered 20%, was aged between 26 and 34 years, and respondents from the 18–25 age group were present in the survey at a proportion of 14%. At the same time, people under the age of 18 also expressed their opinions in the survey, at a proportion of 6%. Respondents between the ages of 55 and 64 participated in the survey at a proportion of 4%, and 2% were over 65 years of age.

3.1. Quantitative Results

The purpose of this part of the survey was to find out which media channels the respondents used most often. Thus, Table 1 provides an overview of the most frequent answers given by people in the Northeastern Region of Romania, as well as the less frequent ones regarding media consumption. Alternative dates were given, but the respondent had the opportunity to name others, which were not listed. According to the respondents, the internet, followed by television and radio, is the most used media tool. Thus, 85% of respondents spent most of their time on the internet, 67% of them watched various television channels, and 33% of respondents used the radio as a source of information. At the opposite end, magazines were cited by only 14% of users, and print media by 15% of users, these two channels being the least consumed by the respondents in the study.

Table 1. Overview of the most frequent answers given by people.

No.	Questions Addressed to Respondents	Frequent Answers	%	Less Frequent Answers	%
1.	What types of media do you consume most often?	Internet	85	Written press	14
2.	How much time per day do you spend on media?	Internet	More than 4 h a day	Magazines	Less than an hour a day
3.	What is the purpose of media consumption?	Entertainment	29	E-mail, news	3
4.	Which social networks do you use most often?	Facebook	74	LinkedIn	2.20
5.	Have you been influenced to buy a product or service based on information received from social media?	Yes	59	Not	41
6.	During the last three visits on social networks have you noticed advertisements?	Yes	78	Not	22
7.	Do you think that advertisements displayed on social networks are relevant to your interests?	Sometimes but not always	70	Not	30
8.	Why do you choose to click on an ad or advertisement?	It is relevant	63	I am not sure	37
9.	Do you watch publications or programs regarding the economic situation?	Yes	77.8	Not	22.2
10.	What topics are you interested in?	News	70.4	Business	18.5
11.	Could the media be more involved in informing people about the economic situation of the country or their region?	Yes	89	Not	11
12.	Do you think the media can contribute to the economic development of a country?	Yes	81.4	Not	18.6
13.	Do you think that Romania has publications that can contribute to economic development?	Yes	70.4	Not	29.6

Regarding the time spent every day on media channels, 194 respondents mentioned that they spend more time on the internet—more than 4 h a day—and 37 of them stated that they spend more than 4 h on TV. On the other hand, respondents spend less than an hour consulting magazines and newspapers (294 respondents and 256 respondents, respectively). At the same time, 94 of the respondents spend less than an hour watching television channels, 211 of them listen to the radio for less than an hour, and 11 of the people included in the survey indicated that they spend less than an hour on the internet. Mass media is a means of communication that a large audience can use simultaneously.

Given that the majority of respondents answered that the internet is the most used media channel, the presence of respondents in the online environment is determined by a series of topics, which present various objectives aimed at satisfying certain needs.

The variety of media channels target different audiences, and in turn, the audience has the option to choose and select between them, so an audience may vary depending on the political direction of a channel or its content [22]. The purpose of this part of the survey was to find out which social media channels respondents use. Facebook, the mobile messaging app WhatsApp, and YouTube were the most used social media platforms by respondents, followed by Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and LinkedIn. It was surprising that none of the respondents named another social media platform. Regardless of the social media platform, promoting products and services is done in an easy way on social media. In this context, respondents were asked to provide some information regarding the purchase of products based on information received from social media. In total, 41% of respondents indicated that they were not influenced to purchase products or services based on recommendations from social media, and 59% mentioned that they were influenced to some extent to purchase products based on recommendations from social media.

In the same context of purchasing products or online services, respondents were asked if in their last three visits to social networks they noticed product placement, and 78% of people answered in the affirmative to this question, while only 22% of them said they did not notice product placements on social media visits. In total, 70.4% of respondents indicated that sometimes, the ads displayed on social networks are relevant to their interests, while 30.6% of people who participated in the survey stated that ads are not at all relevant to their interests. In terms of interest in a particular ad, respondents were asked why they might choose to click on an advert when they come across it on social media, and 63% of them mentioned that they are often relevant to their interests, while 37% of survey participants said they do not access media advertisements. According to the researchers, mass media is considered a mediator of general information, from a collective level, and in this context, we constructed the question regarding the consumption of economic news among the respondents; 77.8% of respondents stated that they follow programs or publications related to the economic situation, while 22.2% of them indicated that they do not follow such programs or publications.

Regarding interest in topics related to the economic situation, approximately 70% of respondents stated that they follow economic news, while 40.7% of them stated that they are interested in economic updates. Moreover, economic documentaries proved to be interesting for the respondents, as 37% of them indicated that they watch these programs, while 18.5% of the respondents also mentioned that they are interested in current affairs. At the opposite pole are those who are not at all interested in programs or topics related to the economic situation—18.5% do not follow any kind of program related to the economic situation. In addition, people believe that the media should be more involved in informing the population about the economic situation of their country or region, while 11% of them think that the media should not be involved in information activities regarding the economic situation. Regarding the media's contributions to the economic development of a country, 81.4% of the respondents indicated that the media can contribute to development, while 18.6% of the respondents indicated that the media cannot contribute to the economic situation of a country.

In the last question of the survey, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they feel that Romania has publications that can contribute to economic development. Thus, 70.4% answered affirmatively, and 19.60% stated that Romania does not have publications that can contribute to economic development. The purpose of this study was to understand the mass media consumption among the population of the Northeast Region of Romania, which proved to be a good communication tactic.

3.2. Consolidation of the Media Market in Society

Media can be used in various ways to improve business performance, through both online presence and traditional media. In this context, Safko [23] indicated that media is obviously determined by the efficiency of marketing strategies, as well as the communication process. Evans [24] also stated that for many organizations, the use of social media supports the marketing process and communication with the public, facilitating direct links between customers and stakeholders.

Another objective of using social media is given by the fact that it can attract customers more easily, building loyal relationships. Social networks within businesses can be used for various purposes. First, they can be used as a company communication channel, which has the ability to facilitate business-customer interaction. Second, social media has the power to act as an advertising and promotion channel, which includes lower economic costs [25]. Third, companies use media to innovate their own products or services. Fourth, they can educate existing customers, and at the same time represent a good means of attracting new customers.

The companies that participated in the research came from different fields of activity, varying both in terms of financial criteria and in terms of the number of employees (or annual turnover). In this context, we found 13 marketing companies, 12 companies whose main activity is education, 11 accounting companies, 23 tourism companies, 3 journalistic companies, 32 ITC companies, and 21 consulting companies. Additionally, 7 insurance companies, one real estate company, 8 transport companies, 3 sports companies, and 31 companies from other fields than those specified in the survey participated in this study. Thus, in Figure 2, the field of activity of each company participating in this study is specified.

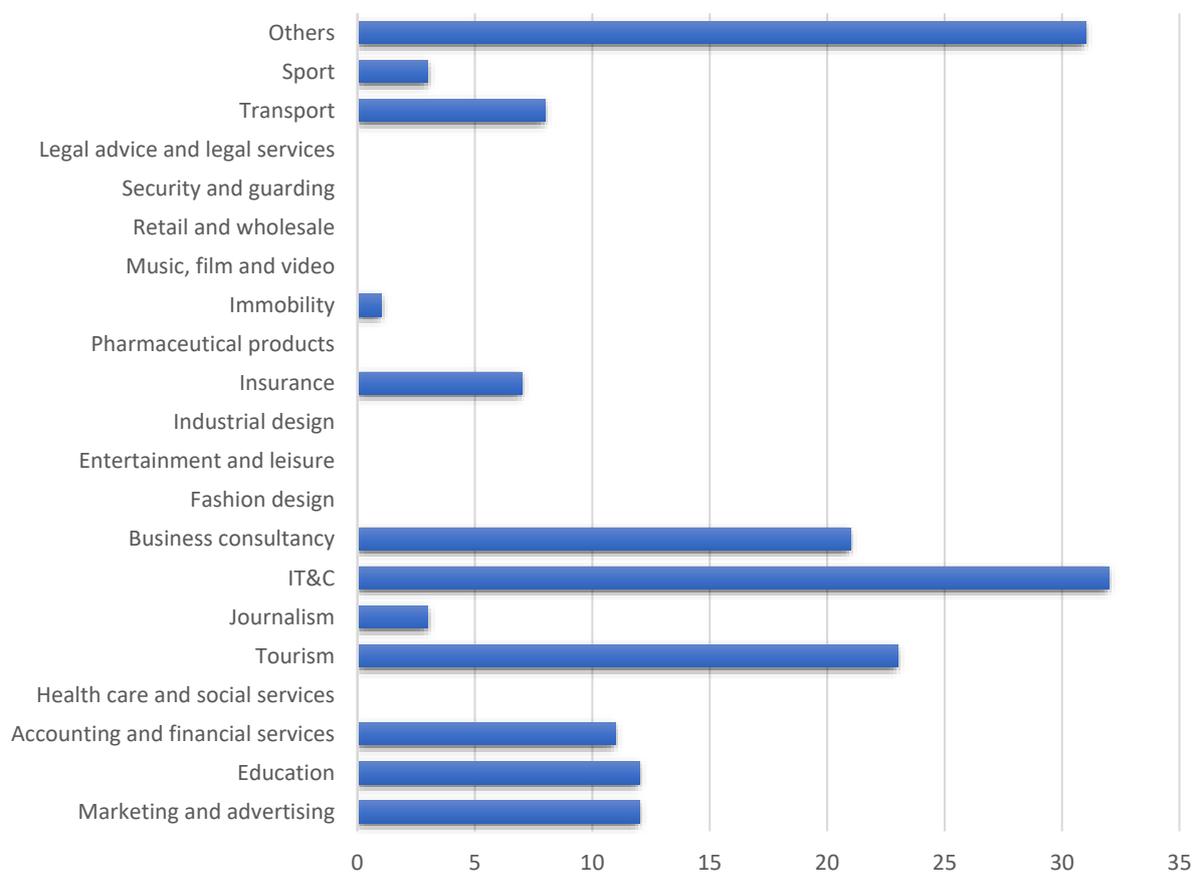


Figure 2. The field of activity of the companies.

Most of the companies included in the survey operate on a small scale—48 companies had up to 10 employees, and 36 companies had a number of employees between 10 and 20. In addition, 29 companies had between 20 and 50 employees, 31 companies had between 50 and 100 employees, and 20 companies operated on a large scale with more than 100 employees. Figure 3 shows the number of employees the companies have.

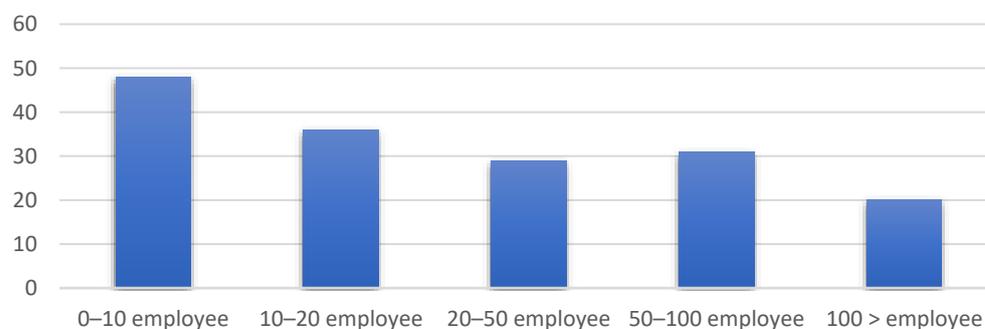


Figure 3. The numbers of employees.

The study that, in the Northeast Region, 126 companies out of 164 use social networks for the purpose of business development, and 38 of them indicated that they do not use social networks. The graph shows a tendency to intensify the use of media; therefore, businesses that have grown over time have been proven to no longer use social media so frequently. For companies with a smaller number of employees, the percentage of social media usage was higher. In other words, larger businesses seemed to no longer show such a great interest in social media, just like small companies, and the media played a rather important role in not using social media. Table 2 provides an overview of the most frequent answers provided by companies, as well as the less frequent ones.

Table 2. General presentation of the answers provided by the companies.

No.	Questions Addressed to Companies	Frequent Answers	Number of Firms
1.	Companies that use social media for commercial purposes	Yes	126
2.	The purpose for which companies use social media	Implementation of e-marketing	55
3.	The reason why companies do not use media	Lack of human resources in the marketing field	58
4.	The media most often used for commercial purposes	Social networks	86
5.	The advantages brought by social media to companies	Getting new customers	71
6.	The most common platform used by companies	Facebook	77%
7.	Changing consumer perception of a particular product or service through social media promotions	Yes	116
8.	Social media helps to recruit employees	Sometimes	88
9.	Monthly administrative investment in mass media	EUR > 1000	71
10.	Social media helped business during the COVID-19 pandemic	Yes	53
11.	Media can contribute to the development of a country's economy	Yes	107

Among the most common purposes for which companies use mass media were those that focus on increasing customer awareness of the products or services that companies promote, followed by the implementation of the marketing process, such as the announcement of news and promotions [26]. To the same extent, mass media is also used for building relationships with customers, as well as attracting new potential customers. Another use of

mass media is developing customer loyalty, improving the company's presence on search engines, as well as analyzing customer feedback on the company's products or services. At the same time, the media is used by companies to respond to customers after the sales process, and to reduce marketing and advertising costs [27]. Nine of the companies mentioned that the purposes for which they use the media are other than those entered in the survey.

According to the results of the questionnaire, one of the main reasons why most companies do not use social media is that they did not notice concrete advantages and opportunities. Additionally, most of the survey participants (58) stated that they do not have the required human resources to develop marketing strategies in social media, and two of the companies said that the media tools are not relevant to their business.

The next question examined the media tools most frequently used by companies, and 52% of them indicated that they use social networks most often, while 28% of them stated that they use blogs, such as WordPress, Blogger, TypePad, LiveJournal, etc. In addition, 17% of the companies that participated in the survey stated that they use shared sites most often, and another 17% stated that they use other types of media than those specified in the questionnaire. The most significant advantages and opportunities that the media brought to companies were promoting products and services online, obtaining new customers, the possibility to communicate with existing customers, increasing visits to their pages or online stores, promoting information about the company, as well as understanding customer preferences. Additionally, no other company indicated another benefit in the "Other" category. Figure 4 shows the main benefits that social media tools have brought to companies.



Figure 4. Benefits of social media tools.

To the next question in the survey, most companies (77%) answered that Facebook is the most used social media tool, followed by Instagram (65%), Twitter (54%), and YouTube (48%). In addition, 39% of companies indicated that the new platform TikTok is extremely attractive for their company's aims, and 36% of respondents mentioned that they use LinkedIn, followed by WhatsApp. In total, 10% of companies indicated that they use other platforms, without mentioning which platforms. For this question, respondents could choose several options. The next question "Do you think consumers' perceptions of a particular product or service can be changed through social media promotions?" was designed in such a way that respondents can express their opinions using a scale from 1 to 10, regarding their perceptions of a particular product or service, and whether they can be changed through social media promotions. Thus, most respondents (116) answered positively to this question, with an answer of 10. Additionally, 13 respondents stated that consumer perceptions can change through promotion on social media, placing this on a scale of 9, and one respondent each opted for the other scalar numbers, in descending order, from 8 to 1. At the same time, two of the respondents mentioned that consumer perceptions cannot be changed by promotions on social media, placing this on a scale of 2. Figure 5 shows consumers' views of social media promotion.

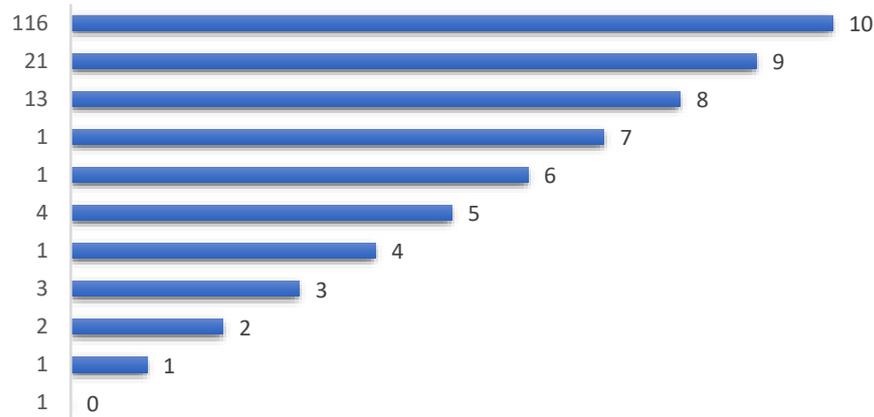


Figure 5. Changing consumer perceptions through social media.

According to the applied survey, 54% of companies indicated that sometimes social media helps them recruit employees, and 32% of the companies mentioned that social media always helps them recruit employees. Additionally, 14% of respondents mentioned that they recruit their employees through social networks quite rarely, and 13% of them specified that social media has never helped them recruit their employees. On a scale from 1 to 10, 69 of the companies placed on a scale of 10 the fact that social networks helped them to develop their business, 41 of the companies placed this on a scale of 9, while 28 companies placed on a scale of 8 the proposition that social networks support the development of their business. Additionally, two companies placed this aspect in seventh place, and three companies scored it 6. In descending order, from 5 to 2, each company specified that social networks were less useful in developing their business. At the same time, 10 companies mentioned that social networks did not help their business development at all, scoring this 1.

3.3. Qualitative Results

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 53% of respondents indicated that social networks helped companies a lot, while 47% of the companies mentioned that the online part, represented by the social networks, did not help them in any way. The main characteristic of social networks is represented by the freedom of expression of companies. The most effective form of communication media used by companies has proven to be social networks, as well as sharing sites for businesses to express themselves to their customers, and media content such as images and videos has the visual ability to present and convey information in a coherent way. Small businesses have the opportunity to expose themselves in an authentic way to customers, in order to create a closer connection. Furthermore, Floors stated that for small businesses, positioning attributes are not an asset from the point of view of competition, because they can be taken over by other companies. On the other hand, small businesses have the opportunity to make gains through the precise differentiation of their own brand, as well as connecting with customers in an emotional way, and these emotions will have more and more influence on the customer in their choice decision.

In Table 3, a series of preliminary results are presented regarding the U Mann-Whitney test, showing a difference between the two probabilities. Some peaks were observed in terms of emerging economies. According to the U Mann-Whitney test, some hypotheses were formulated, according to which there are no significant differences in the use of Facebook to develop a strong and emerging business between men and women.

Table 3. U Mann–Whitney test results.

	Group 1 Users	Group 2 Companies	U	Z	P
Using Facebook for communication	326	128	2418.4	−1.1859	0.000182
Use of Facebook for services only	148	100	3753.1	2341.4	0.003412
Use of Facebook only for marketing	100	20	5311.7	2851.1	0.006231
Positive exposure in relation to social networks	78	128	1413.4	−5312.6	0.000145

We can say that the Mann–Whitney U test is non-parametric and highlights the null hypothesis, which randomly selects the values of X and Y for two distinct populations. Therefore, the probability that X is greater than Y can be equal to the probability that Y is greater than X. Thus, non-parametric tests can be used with more samples, but as regards their validity in analysis processes with different dimensions and unevenly correlated concordances with ROC curves—since we are talking about data collected from the online environment without exact validity—there is no certainty. If the development of this alternative hypothesis tends towards a stochastic model but disturbs the other declination, the null and alternative hypotheses must be applied to obtain valid data. We can say that all the observations made on the independent groups are ordinal responses, that is, they respond to at least two observations, but one of them is larger in terms of parameters. Concluding this hypothesis, there is a significant difference in the analysis results of the medians and the change in the interpretation of the evaluations through the differences in central tendency between the two groups, even if sometimes it tends to zero or not.

4. Discussion and Limits of Research

Estimating investment in the media has been a problem for many companies, so in this regard, there are a number of available guides for measuring the effectiveness of the media and, implicitly, of social networks. This advice can be identified in different sources, such as researchers and specialist persons, as well as in scientific articles or books. At the same time, the research tools used to measure the benefits of social media actions vary from Hootsuite to Google Analytics. Media companies can suppress their production capacity and realized strategies, depending on how media works at the enterprise level, and social networks are not a decision-making factor in a company, but are only channels or tools by which marketers can implement their established plans. Therefore, a well-defined strategy is a factor that increases the effectiveness of a company's social media marketing.

Social networks contribute to business development, and social media advantages are perceived according to age level [28], this aspect being a control parameter. According to the second questionnaire, social networks and marketing campaigns are predominantly used by small companies, and in the case of the first questionnaire, marketing was primarily for elderly people. Therefore, awareness of the advantages of social media differs by age [29]. Facebook has proven to be the most used platform, both among companies and among users; therefore, some of the most important benefits of social media are those related to the good implementation of marketing, as well as the possibility of a marketplace, which allows the generation of sales and purchases, but also informational exchange [30]. Both in the first applied questionnaire and in the second, similar answers were given regarding the most used social networks. Thus, Facebook is the application used most often, which allows for both building a better communication relationship and carrying out employee recruitment campaigns. In other words, communication through new media is an important factor, which highlights its magnetism.

The benefits of using social media for economic development are also estimated depending on time and the geographical consistency of social media use; therefore, they can also help form a geographical assessment of economic growth [31]. This aspect is an

important one for analyzing the prospective opening of a local business, by identifying the relevant human and geographical resources.

Using data collected from more than 90 companies, researchers [32] indicated that a culture of innovation, made up of solid organizational knowledge, generates positive results in terms of a company's development. At the same time, another study indicated that following the collection of data from the respondents, innovation can be inferred to have a positive impact on organizational performance [33]. In the case of our sample of 326 companies, it was demonstrated that innovation refers to the differentiation of attributes that generate competitive interest in a brand's personality. Additionally, connecting with customers from an emotional point of view gives rise to a series of emotions in the consumer, which will have a greater influence on their wish to buy [34].

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Mass media plays an extremely important role in the population, in terms of both the educational side and economic development. A number of media principles have been analyzed, and the most common tools used by the respondents were found to be the internet and television, followed by radio. Additionally, regarding the time spent by the respondents with mass media, it has been proven that the internet has gained ground again, with most of the respondents stating that they spend more than four hours on the internet. Regarding the purpose of media consumption, it was shown that respondents prefer entertainment content, followed by educational content, and then political or economic content. Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the most used platforms by respondents, followed by Instagram and TikTok, and in the case of ads for products and services on social media, respondents said they were most often influenced to purchase products by online content.

We also set out to study the adoption and use of social media by companies in the Northeast Region of Romania. The survey method was used in the empirical research process, and it showed that 76% of companies were using social media, to the detriment of traditional media. In addition, the most remarkable benefits of mass media have been found to be those that focus on high customer awareness of a particular brand, as well as opportunities to communicate and promote themselves online. The most difficult challenges for companies were finding time and qualified staff to interact with customers through social media, and measuring the effectiveness of social networks and their contribution to business development.

Regarding the Mann-Whitney U test, it was possible to observe the male-female ratio in the use of social networks, and especially Facebook, which turned out to be the most used social media platform. In this context, there were no significant differences in this ratio of Facebook users, in relating to the development of a strong and emerging business.

The limited resources and problems related to the lack of time and qualified personnel for media promotion can be solved by outsourcing; if company managers are not used to implementing campaigns or marketing strategies, this may require support from outside the companies. Marketing and advertising can be done by companies that offer professional services in this direction, and if the companies are open to new experiences, they can also collaborate with students from economics faculties to offer new perspectives and ideas, and this could significantly contribute to the improvement of marketing strategies. A good collaboration between companies and students could be realized in various forms, such as internships, part-time jobs, etc. The more flexible companies are in terms of decision-making and the implementation of changes, the more able they will be to adopt new, creative ideas about the use of mass media or social networks, which involve much lower costs compared to other types of media.

The selection of research participants was the main limitation here in providing accurate information about how they receive media messages. Due to the diverse scope of the population, the selection of those who use print media and broadcast media as their primary source of information was challenging, as the focus was on how the public reacted

to media messages. Another difficulty encountered was in the collection of questionnaires, which were not returned due to resource limitations.

5. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

According to the first objective, an important feature of social media is that it gives companies a chance to communicate and present themselves to their audience in the most beneficial way. Additionally, new media is among of the most productive means of communication, through which users can receive relevant content from companies, characterized by information transmitted in an orderly manner. Social media allows small and medium-sized businesses to get in front of customers or potential customers in an authentic way. According to the questionnaire, those who were most open to the use of media communication were small companies, and the main reasons for companies using new media, and in particular social networks, involved the degree of responsibility that customers have regarding existing products and services, the implementation of marketing strategies, the development of a good relationship with customers by gaining their trust, as well as search engine optimization.

Therefore, according to the second objective, collaboration between the government and media could lead to the creation of applications intended to provide the population with interesting and relevant content to develop their human resource, through quality education and by developing school-level networks that exhibit a high degree of global connectivity. In other words, the executive of a country that does not try to involve the population in development strategies by giving them the available resources will not be able to produce development at the national and regional levels.

In conclusion, the theoretical issues referred to in the specialized literature also apply to the use of social media tools. Social networks act as a tool, which can provide feedback and facilitate relationships with customers, so the media communication channels most widely used by the companies that participated in the survey are social networks, and the least used was found to be podcasts, due to the fact that for regional entrepreneurs, they are often inaccessible from the public's point of view. In addition, the most remarkable benefits of mass media have been found to be those that focus on high brand awareness among customers and opportunities to communicate and promote themselves online, and most surveyed companies predicted that the use of social networks will gain momentum in the coming years. The most difficult challenges for companies were finding the time and qualified staff to interact with customers through social media, and estimating the yield of social networks, as well as their contribution to business progress. Another challenge faced by both the respondents in the first chapter and the companies participating in the study in the second chapter was the widespread presence of fake news, an increasingly persistent phenomenon in the online environment.

Using the data presented in the present analysis, this research proposes a sampled analysis of mass media consumption in the Northeastern Region of Romania. Thus, as part of this research, an analysis was carried out on a sample of 326 people—180 women, and 146 men—to determine the role that the mass media has in society, while at the same time determining the active role that the mass media plays in economic development. In this context, the study reviews the specialized literature on the media's accountability, with an emphasis on its transmitted messages. In this research, the most frequent media channels used by respondents, the purpose of using mass media, as well as the determination of the user to purchase products from the online environment following their promotion, are presented. We have also proven that the media has great power over the process of economic development, and the respondents were interested in the main topics related to the economic content, suggesting that the media should be more involved in this direction.

Using the second applied questionnaire, the consumption of mass media in the Northeast Region was again determined, but here at the level of companies, applying a series of questionnaires to a sample of 164 respondents. The study can confirm that media can be used in different ways to improve business performance, both through online presence and

through traditional media, facilitating the process of communicating with the public and strengthening the connection with the pre-existing audience. New media has been proven to have the ability to build strong community bonds based on loyalty and trust.

As future research directions, we propose analyzing media consumption using the interview method. In this context, we aim to carry out interviews with entrepreneurs, at the regional level, to analyze how mass media has supported the promotion and sales growth of their brands. At the same time, we aim to conduct interviews with journalists from the mass media focused on economic topics, who could help us derive information regarding how the economy has been influenced in the recent period by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Therefore, the interview will be used as an applicability tool, which will be analyzed to confirm or deny the research hypotheses.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, E.Z. and A.N.; methodology, E.Z.; software, E.Z.; validation, E.Z. and A.N.; formal analysis, A.N.; investigation, A.N.; resources, E.Z.; data curation, E.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, A.N.; writing—review and editing, A.N.; visualization, E.Z.; supervision, E.Z.; project administration, A.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study as no personal information or data was collected. The study was sent to the groups and circles where companies/employers were found, and they did not have to enter the data or the name of the company, but only the field of activity and the area in which they operate. Even those who access the link related to the practical support within the Survio platform can analyze this information.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was waived due to the reason that the questionnaire was done anonymously, using platforms where the respondents did not enter personal data.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. World Bank. *The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development*. WBI Development Studies; World Bank: Washington, DC, USA, 2002; Available online: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15212> (accessed on 7 July 2022).
2. Zhang, N.; Huang, H.; Su, B.; Zhao, J.; Zhang, B. Information dissemination analysis of different media towards the application for disaster pre-warning. *PLoS ONE* **2014**, *9*, e98649. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
3. Sanchez, G. How the Media Shape Our Sense of Community. 2009. Available online: www.unm.edu/media_abstract.html (accessed on 10 July 2022).
4. Ureta, A.; Agirreazkuenaga, I.; Meso, A.K.; Tous-Rovirosa, A. The challenge of audience participation for regional media: Professional and organisational strategies for community development. In *Economía Política del Periodismo: Nuevas (y Antiguas) Lógicas de Producción y Consumo*; Elsevier B.V.: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2018. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. Anwar, A.; Malik, M.; Raees, V.; Anwar, A. Role of Mass Media and Public Health Communications in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Cureus* **2020**, *12*, e10453. [[CrossRef](#)]
6. Fallah Shayan, N.; Mohabbati-Kalejahi, N.; Alavi, S.; Zahed, M.A. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 1222. [[CrossRef](#)]
7. Shakeri, H.; Khalilzadeh, M. Analysis of factors affecting project communications with a hybrid DEMATEL-ISM approach (A case study in Iran). *Heliyon* **2020**, *6*, e04430. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
8. Reisach, U. The responsibility of social media in times of societal and political manipulation. *Eur. J. Oper. Res.* **2021**, *291*, 906–917. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
9. Raghupathi, V.; Raghupathi, W. Healthcare Expenditure and Economic Performance: Insights From the United States Data. *Front. Public Health* **2020**, *8*, 156. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
10. Abbas, J.; Aman, J.; Nurunnabi, M.; Bano, S. The Impact of Social Media on Learning Behavior for Sustainable Education: Evidence of Students from Selected Universities in Pakistan. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 1683. [[CrossRef](#)]
11. Tisdell, C.A. Economic, social and political issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Econ. Anal. Policy* **2020**, *68*, 17–28. [[CrossRef](#)]
12. Appel, G.; Grewal, L.; Hadi, R.; Stephen, A.T. The future of social media in marketing. *J. Acad. Mark. Sci.* **2020**, *48*, 79–95. [[CrossRef](#)]
13. Curran, K.; O'Hara, K.; O'Brien, S. The Role of Twitter in the World of Business. *Int. J. Bus. Data Commun. Netw. (IJBDN)* **2011**, *7*, 1–15. [[CrossRef](#)]

14. Esubalew, T.; Teshome, S.; Nsiah, C. The relative choice over destiny in a country's long-run economic growth and economic affluence. *Cogent Econ. Financ.* **2021**, *9*, 1949133. [[CrossRef](#)]
15. Olan, F.; Jayawickrama, U.; Arakpogun, E.O.; Suklan, J.; Liu, S. Fake news on Social Media: The Impact on Society. *Inf. Syst. Front.* **2022**, 1–16. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
16. Kamruzzaman, M.M. Impact of Social Media on Geopolitics and Economic Growth: Mitigating the Risks by Developing Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Computing Tools. *Comput. Intell. Neurosci.* **2022**, *2022*, 7988894. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
17. Kapoor, K.K.; Tamilmani, K.; Rana, N.P.; Patil, P.; Dwivedi, Y.K.; Nerur, S. Advances in Social Media Research: Past, Present and Future. *Inf. Syst. Front.* **2018**, *20*, 531–558. [[CrossRef](#)]
18. Carter, M.J. The Hermeneutics of Frames and Framing: An Examination of the Media's Construction of Reality. *SAGE Open* **2013**, *3*, 2158244013487915. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Conroy, N.J.; Rubin, V.L.; Chen, Y. Automatic deception detection: Methods for finding fake news. *Proc. Assoc. Inf. Sci. Technol.* **2015**, *52*, 1–4. [[CrossRef](#)]
20. Apurvakumar, P.; Pragma, L. Social Connectedness, Excessive Screen Time During COVID-19 and Mental Health: A Review of Current Evidence. *Front. Hum. Dyn.* **2021**, *3*, 684137. [[CrossRef](#)]
21. White, K.; Habib, R.; Hardisty, D.J. How to SHIFT Consumer Behaviors to be More Sustainable: A Literature Review and Guiding Framework. *J. Mark.* **2019**, *83*, 22–49. [[CrossRef](#)]
22. Elejalde, E.; Ferres, L.; Schifanella, R. Understanding news outlets' audience-targeting patterns. *EPJ Data Sci.* **2019**, *8*, 16. [[CrossRef](#)]
23. Safko, L.; Brake, D.K. *The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools, and Strategies for Business Success*; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2009.
24. Evans, D. *Social Media Marketing: The Next Generation of Business Engagement*; Wiley Publishing, Inc.: Toronto, ON, Canada, 2010.
25. Li, F.; Larimo, J.; Leonidou, L.C. Social media marketing strategy: Definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda. *J. Acad. Mark. Sci.* **2021**, *49*, 51–70. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Pentina, I.; Koh, A. Exploring social media marketing strategies in SMEs. *Int. J. Internet Mark. Advert.* **2012**, *7*, 292–310. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Rehman, S.U.; Gulzar, R.; Aslam, W. Developing the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) through Social Media (SM): The Modern Marketing Communication Approach. *SAGE Open* **2022**, *12*, 21582440221099936. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Dwivedi, Y.K.; Ismagilova, E.; Rana, N.P.; Raman, R. Social Media Adoption, Usage And Impact In Business-To-Business (B2B) Context: A State-Of-The-Art Literature Review. *Inf. Syst. Front.* **2021**. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Wakefield, M.A.; Loken, B.; Hornik, R.C. Use of mass media campaigns to change health behaviour. *Lancet* **2010**, *376*, 1261–1271. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
30. Mazzucchelli, A.; Chierici, R.; Di Gregorio, A.; Chiacchierini, C. Is Facebook an effective tool to access foreign markets? Evidence from international export performance of fashion firms. *J. Manag. Gov.* **2021**, *25*, 1107–1144. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Gherghina, Ş.C.; Botezatu, M.A.; Hosszu, A.; Simionescu, L.N. Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): The Engine of Economic Growth through Investments and Innovation. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 347. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Gomes, G.; Wojahn, R.M. Organizational learning capability, innovation, and performance: Study in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMES). *Rev. Adm.* **2017**, *52*, 163–175. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Lita, R.P.; Faisal, R.F.; Meuthia, M. Enhancing small and medium enterprises performance through innovation in Indonesia. *J. Hosp. Tour. Technol.* **2020**, *11*, 155–176.
34. Nistor, A.; Zadobrischi, E. The Influence of Fake News on Social Media: Analysis and Verification of Web Content during the COVID-19 Pandemic by Advanced Machine Learning Methods and Natural Language Processing. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 10466. [[CrossRef](#)]