The Marketing Power of Instagram: A Content Analysis of Top Hotel Enterprises in Kyrgyzstan¹

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Abstract

In recent years social media is deeply integrated in our everyday lives. Especially, Instagram has gained popularity as a communication and marketing tool among social networks. Many companies are trying to develop an Instagram marketing strategy in order to connect with customers and increase their productivity. Main purpose of this study is to evaluate Instagram marketing strategy of five and four star hotels in Kyrgyzstan by using content analysis method. For this purpose, the posts between 15.11.2017-15.05.2018 of four and five star hotels which have Instagram official pages with maximum number of followers were examined. Instagram pages of the hotels were analyzed according to criteria such as number of shared posts, theme and format of these posts, number of likes and comments to these posts etc. According to the findings majority of posts are in image format and published in Russian language. It can be said that hotels in Kyrgyzstan do not fully use the marketing power of Instagram.

Keywords: Social Media, Instagram, Hotel Industry, Kyrgyzstan.

Instagram'ın Pazarlama Gücü: Kırgızistan'daki Popüler Otel İşletmelerine Yönelik Bir İçerik Analizi

Özet

Son yıllarda sosyal medya günlük hayatımıza derinden entegre olmuş durumdadır. Sosyal medya ağları arasından özellikle İnstagram, popülerliği yükselen pazarlama ve iletişim aracı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Günümüzde birçok işletme müşterileri ile iletişim kurabilmek ve etkili olabilmek için İnstagram üzerinden pazarlama stratejileri geliştirmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Kırgızistan'da faaliyet gösteren dört ve beş yıldızlı otelerin İnstagram üzerinden yürüttükleri pazarlama faaliyetlerini içerik analizi ile değerlendirmektir. İçerik analizi İnstagram sayfalarında takipçi sayısı bakımından önde gelen otellerin 15.11.2017-15.05.2018 tarihleri arasındaki paylaşımlarını kapsamaktadır. İşletmelerin İnstagram sayfaları paylaşımların sayısı, konusu ve formatı, bu paylaşımlara karşı beğeni ve yorumlar gibi kriterlere göre incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, paylaşımların ağırlıklı olarak fotoğraf formatında ve Rusça olduğu

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görülmüştür. Bulgulardan yola çıkarak, Kırgızistan'da otel işletmelerinin pazarlama aracı olarak Instagramın gücünden yeterli düzeyde yararlanamadıkları söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Instagram, Otel Endüstrisi, Kırgızistan.

Introduction

The internet including social networks has become an integral part of our lives. According to official figures from the Internet World Stats (2018), the number of internet users worldwide has reached more than 4.2 billion. The most popular social networks ranked by number of active users are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn (Statista, 2018). As a marketing tool, these networks are of great importance for business. Marketing on social media can help to increase brand recognition and sales, to engage with a broad audience with little or no cost. Moreover, thanks to social media, businesses all over the world have the opportunity to communicate and interact with customers, understand their needs and wants, collect valuable customer feedback.

The principal sector of the economy in Kyrgyzstan is tourism, so the usage of social media for business promotion is a great of importance for hotel enterprises operating in this sector. Promoting business on Instagram is a new phenomenon. Companies started using this social media only a few years ago. Therefore, limited academic research exists on this topic. The aim of this study is to evaluate Instagram marketing effectiveness of five and four star hotels in Kyrgyzstan by using content analysis method.

Hotel Industry in Kyrgyzstan

According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (KNSC), the number of entities operating in the tourism sector rose from 8085 in 2012 to 11012 in 2016. Table 1 shows the distribution of entities by type of service. As seen, there are 1137 hotel enterprises including legal entities and individuals, which accounted for nearly 10% of total tourism firms as of January 2016.

Table 1. The distribution of tourist firms (legal entities and individuals) by type, 2012-2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Hotels	782	881	966	1075	1137
Tourism firms and recreation facilities	718	800	843	877	918
Restaurants	3552	3958	4306	4744	5112
Travel agencies	2926	3121	3300	3502	3732
Resorts, sanatoria facilities	88	89	90	89	94
Nature parks and reservations	19	19	19	19	19
Total	8085	8868	9524	10306	11012

Source: KNSC, 2016. Tourism in Kyrgyzstan, 2012-2016

Among 1137 hotel enterprises only 168 are legal entities. The majority of these hotels are based in the capital city of Bishkek (62%) followed by Issyk-Kul region (15.5%), Jalal-Abad oblast (6.5%) and Osh city (6%) in 2016. As seen, the number of hotel enterprises is increasing every year.

Table 2. The distribution of hotel enterprises (legal entities) by location, 2012-2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Batken region	3	4	5	5	5
Jalal-Abad region	10	10	10	10	11
Issyk-Kul region	24	24	24	26	26
Naryn region	7	7	4	4	4
Osh region	3	3	3	3	3
Talas region	1	1	1	1	1
Chuy region	3	3	2	3	4
Bishkek city	73	80	86	94	104
Osh city	8	10	11	11	10
Total	132	142	146	157	168

Source: KNSC, 2016. Tourism in Kyrgyzstan, 2012-2016

The number of hotels functioning at the end of 2016 has reached 176 units, 164 of these hotels are year round, while 12 are seasonal. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of hotels are private (97%) (KNSC, 2016). The main performance indicators of hotels are presented in Table 3. As seen, majority of accommodated people are residents. The number of visitors is increasing every year. The average cost of hotel services per day is more expensive for non-residents. In terms of financial performance, the hotel industry received around 1759.8 million Soms² in 2012, while 3560.7 million soms in 2016, so the revenue is also increasing every year.

Table 3. The main indicators of hotel enterprises, 2012-2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of hotel enterprises	114	146	171	184	176
Number of accommodated person (in	194.9	205.9	205.0	222.1	219.4
thousand)					
Residents	148.1	160.3	158.5	161.1	146.3
Non-Residents	46.8	45.6	46.5	61.0	73.1
Average Cost Per Day (İn Soms)					
For Residents	1081	1109	1182	1386	1277
For Non-Residents	1508	1521	1552	1512	1464
Number of visitors	194902	205947	205010	222088	219442
Revenue (in million soms)	1759.8	2232.9	2761.9	3211.8	3560.7

Source: KNSC, 2016. Tourism in Kyrgyzstan, 2012-2016

Literature Review

Social networks prove to be a powerful tool which connects people with companies. The number of businesses operating in social media is increasing every year. In this regard, there is a fierce competition between companies for attracting more users. As noted above, Instagram is one of the successful and prosperous social platforms for marketers. There are currently more than 25 million active business profiles with 200 million users visiting these accounts every day (Instagram for Business, 2018).

 $^{^2}$ According to the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan $\,$ 1 USD $\,\$=69.83$ Som, http://www.nbkr.kg/index.jsp?lang=ENG , 17.12.2018

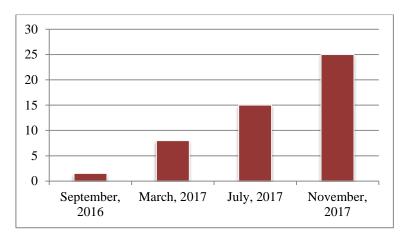


Figure 1. The number of active business profiles on Instagram (in millions) Source: Statista, 10.05.2018

Social Media Examiner surveyed more than 5700 marketers to understand how they are using social media to grow and promote their businesses. According to the results, 92% of marketers claimed that social media was important for their business. Facebook (94%), Twitter (68%), LinkedIn (56%) and Instagram (54%) were the top four platforms used by marketers. In addition, 63% of marketers planned to increase Instagram activities and 71% wanted to learn more about Instagram (Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 2017).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which users share, co-create, discuss and modify usergenerated content. Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms for marketing purposes.

A large number of studies have been conducted on social media marketing in the past few years. Some research examined the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool (Divya & Regi, 2014; Bashar et. al, 2012; Neti, 2011) while others investigated the impact of social media activities on business growth and company performance (Grizane & Jurgelane, 2017; Abuhashesh, 2014; Shabbir et. al, 2016; Singh & Sinha, 2016; Grenier et. al, 2014) and consumer choice (Hajli, 2013; Bronner & Hoog, 2012). The findings of these studies revealed that social media positively effects business growth, company performance and consumer choice.

Among American travelers on social media, 46% are active on Instagram, a 350% increase since 2013. 55% of travelers on Instagram indicate that the platform is important for their personal use. 18% of all travelers consider social media posts from destinations or travel service providers during the inspiration stage of vacation planning, 11% seek advice and ratings, 8% compare prices and features and 5% make reservations (Hotelmarketing, 2018).

There are several recent studies on social media marketing in hotel industry. Bayram et al. (2016) examined Instagram posts of 15 top hotel enterprises in Turkey by content analysis method. Shared photos of hotels on Instagram were categorized into 11 themes: "food and beverage", "landscape", "hotel services", "entertainment", "exterior space", "announcements", "swimming pool", "sea, sand and sun", "inner space", "heritage" and "guests". According to the results, the most shared photos were related to food and beverage, landscape and hotel services. Moreover, the findings revealed significant differences between posts of city and coast hotels. While coast hotels mostly shared with

"sand, sand and sun" and "food and beverage" related images, city hotels shared with photos related to landscape and hotel services.

Leung et. al (2015) explored the marketing effectiveness of two different social media sites (Facebook and Twitter) in the hotel industry. The results revealed that Facebook and Twitter demonstrate the same marketing effectiveness, suggesting that hotel managers use the same marketing tactics for both sites.

Hashim & Fadhil (2017) examined how five star hotels in Malaysia use Facebook to engage with their customers. The results indicated that hotels are not utilizing Facebook as its fullest potentials to engage with customers.

Arika & Moronge (2017) investigated the effects of social media marketing on organizational performance in the hospitality industry in Kenya. The study surveyed a total of 70 employees working at Kenyatta International Convention Centre. The findings revealed that usage of social media increases brand awareness and sales, improves customer service and helps to monitor brand reputation. Moreover, social networking sites have a positive influence on performance in hospitality industry.

Guillet et. al (2016) evaluated the social media marketing efforts of 133 hotel brands in China. More specifically, this study examined how hotels disseminate information, engage with customers and distribute products through social media. According to the results, the hotels mostly use social media in order to collect and disseminate information rather than for marketing purposes. Also, the majority of hotels actively and consistently use Sina Weibo and Wechat platforms for their social media marketing.

Chan & Guillet (2011) examined the marketing performance of 67 hotels in Hong Kong on 23 social media. The results indicated that the most frequently used social networks by hotels are Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, the hotels mostly use social media in order to promote discounted products and services, to respond to customers' complaints and questions and to run different contests.

Dieck et. al (2013) explored how four and five star UK hotels have implemented social media networks into their marketing strategies. The data was obtained from interviews with 14 hotel social media managers, 2 hotel PR agencies and 16 hotel guests using social media pages. According to the findings, four and five star UK hotels use social networking sites in order to maximize competitive advantage, connect with customers and attract them.

Högberg (2017) examined the usage of social media by 14 hotel organizations in seven European countries within an international hotel chain and the effects of social networks on organizations. The results showed that the hotels mostly use social media for marketing activities, information sharing, collecting information and knowledge, inspiration and brand values, internal communication and managing user-generated content. Also the study illustrated that Facebook and Instagram are the most commonly used social media platforms.

There are also studies which examined the effects of Instagram marketing on brand creation and purchase decisions in different industries. Lavoie (2015) explored how Dunkin' Donuts use Instagram to strengthen their brands. For this purpose, 12 posts on Dunkun' Donuts Instagram account from April 2014 to March 2015 were analyzed. Instagram posts were divided into the categories of textual elements of captions and visual elements of pictures and videos. The former is

composed of hash tags, brand name, products name, a call to action, and season or holiday. The captions were analyzed to see whether they were positively or negatively framed. Visual analysis looked at several categories, such as type of visual, name, logo, color, products, season or holiday, emotional appeal, food, people, activity, and fun/friendly imagery. The study found that Dunkin' Donuts used its brand name, logo, colors, and images of its products on Instagram to create a strong brand presence.

Sagala & Rachmawati (2016) examined the effect of Instagram content on the customer purchase intention. The independent variable of the study is content factor consisted of bio, product's visual, endorsement, and caption on photo, hash tag, repost, and testimony. The data was collected from 140 students by using questionnaire method. The results revealed that Instagram account affects customers purchase intention. Furthermore, the study showed that the most influencing Instagram content toward customers purchase intention is Repost.

Salleh (2015) investigated the adoption and implementation of Instagram in restaurant sector by the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The study examined Instagram accounts of top 10 restaurant brands in Malaysia by using content analysis method. Accordingly, the presence and absence of Instagram pages, adoption date, number of followers, number of shared posts and their types were evaluated. The findings showed that only 7 of the 10 restaurants have an Instagram account and early adoption does not lead into early implementation.

Virtanen et al. (2017) examined the social media marketing practices of a startup company in Switzerland. For this purpose, the study measured the effects of these practices (i.e. following potential customers and liking and commenting on their posts on Instagram) on creating and increasing awareness of the company's business and gaining followers for the company's Instagram account. The results indicated that following potential customers' Instagram accounts is needed to gain more followers. However, the practice of liking and commenting on potential customers' posts was less effective than following to increase followers. It was needed only to stay in touch with customers.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to assess the Instagram activities of hotel enterprises in Kyrgyzstan. For this purpose, the posts between 15.11.2017-15.05.2018 of four and five star (10) hotels which are within the best hotel category for Kyrgyzstan advertised by Trip Advisor and which has Instagram official page and maximum number of followers are examined by content analysis method. Accordingly, the number of followers on hotels' Instagram page, the number of shared posts, the theme and format of these posts, the number of likes and comments to these posts are given.

Findings

The total number of followers, the number of shared posts since adoption and the accounts' name of hotels on Instagram are given below in Table 4. As seen, the minimum number of followers is 1594, while the maximum number is 41900. The average number of followers is 9633. Furthermore, hotel enterprises have shared on the average with 450 photos and videos on Instagram pages since adoption. While some hotels' posts have reached more than 1000, others shared with only 20 or less posts if to consider separately. Such contrast can be explained by the date of adoption and the frequency of use.

Table 4. The total number of followers and shared posts on hotels' Instagram pages

№	Name of hotel enterprises	Number of followers	Number of posts	Name of Instagram accounts
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	41900	193	park_hotel_bishkek_kg
2	Golden Dragon	14200	1728	goldendragon.kg
3	Jannat Regency	13200	1110	jannat.regency
4	Plaza Hotel	7873	221	plaza_hotel_kg
5	Maryotel	6538	201	maryotel_bishkek
6	Hyatt Regency	4471	598	hyattregencybishkek
7	City Hotel	2535	157	cityhotel_kg
8	Hotel Lulu	2200	33	lulu.bishkek
9	Garden Hotel	1818	244	garden_hotel_kg
10	Ambassador	1594	19	ambassador.kg
		min=1594 max=41900 \overline{x} =9633	min=19 max=1728 \bar{x} =450	

Based on the aim of the study, the number of hotels' Instagram shares and the percentage frequency of their formats in the last 6 months (15.11.2017-15.05.2018) are presented in Table 5. The majority of the shares are in an image format (78.9%), while only 21.1% are videos. The hotel enterprises mostly use Instagram to promote their services, share news, so for such purposes photos are more effective than videos.

Table 5. The distribution of shares according to image and video formats

№	Name of hotel enterprises	Number of posts	Percentage (%)	Image (%)	Video (%)
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	30	100.0	93.3	6.7
2	Golden Dragon	130	100.0	61.5	38.5
3	Jannat Regency	58	100.0	84.5	15.5
4	Plaza Hotel	39	100.0	89.7	10.3
5	Maryotel	64	100.0	84.4	15.6
6	Hyatt Regency	76	100.0	69.7	30.3
7	City Hotel	22	100.0	100	0
8	Hotel Lulu	20	100.0	95	5
9	Garden Hotel	44	100.0	84.1	15.9
10	Ambassador	19	100.0	100	0
	Total	502	100.0	78.9	21.1

The number of written comments to the posts, the number of likes for photos and the video view counts over the last 6 months are given in Table 6 in order to assess the relationship between hotels and their customers. Accordingly, the total number of likes for 502 posts is 37169, 910 comments

have been written to these posts and shared videos have been viewed 48703 times. The maximum number of likes is 13818, the minimum number is 656 and, the average value is 3717. As well as, the maximum number of comments is 302, the minimum number is 8, and the average number is 91. The number of maximum video views is 19503, the minimum video views are 186, and on the average 4870 times videos have been watched. In general, users communicate with hotels by liking rather than commenting. The number of likes and comments vary according to the number of followers on the hotels' pages.

The distribution of total 502 posts according to the languages is presented in Table 7. As seen, nearly 82% of posts are published in Russian; the posts in both Russian and English have a share of 13%. The proportion of posts in English and Kyrgyz languages are negligible, 3% and 1.4% respectively. There are almost no trilingual posts (published in Russian, English and Kyrgyz) and posts in both Russian and Kyrgyz languages. Russian is the second official language and the most widely spoken one in Kyrgyzstan, so the majority of posts are in Russian and the hotels' guests mostly come from foreign countries, so the posts mainly are in English, too.

One of the purposes needed to be considered in this study is the themes of posts. The total 396 photo-based posts within the last 6 months were divided into 6 categories such as T1 – hotel services, T2 –invitation to events organized in a hotel, T3 - announcements, news, promotions and discounts, T4 – food and beverage, T5 – congratulations and thanks, T6 – guests. The distribution of photos by themes is given in Table 8. Accordingly, the hotels mostly share with photos related to their services (24.7%), followed by invitations to events organized in a hotel (21.7%) and announcements, news, promotions and discounts (16.7%). While the photos related to congratulation and thanks have a share of 15.5%, food and beverage related photos' proportion is 14.6%. The less shared photos are related with guests, only 6.8%. Obviously, the hotels mostly use Instagram to promote their services, share news and attract more customers.

Table 6. The reaction of users to posts

№	Name of	Number of	Likes	Comments	Views
	hotel enterprises	posts			
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	30	13818	56	788
2	Golden Dragon	130	3583	140	16669
3	Jannat Regency	58	2530	49	7628
4	Plaza Hotel	39	1406	8	274
5	Maryotel	64	3343	302	2282
6	Hyatt Regency	76	4803	209	19503
7	City Hotel	22	1611	29	-
8	Hotel Lulu	20	656	73	186
9	Garden Hotel	44	4340	60	1373
10	Ambassador	19	1079	13	-
	Total	502	37169	910	48703
	min	19	656	8	186
	max	130	13818	302	19503
	\overline{x}	50	3717	91	4870

Table 7. The distribution of posts according to the languages

Nº	Name of hotel enterprises	Number of posts	Percenta ge (%)	RU (%)	ENG (%)	RU ENG (%)	KG (%)	RU KG (%)	RU ENG KG (%)
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	30	100.0	66.7	10	20	-	-	3.3
2	Golden Dragon	130	100.0	99.2	-	-	-		0.8
3	Jannat Regency	58	100.0	93.1	3.44	-	-	1.73	1.73
4	Plaza Hotel	39	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-
5	Maryotel	64	100.0	84.42	1.56	1.56	10.9	1.56	-
6	Hyatt Regency	76	100.0	15.8	7.9	76.3	-	-	-
7	City Hotel	22	100.0	90	5	5			
8	Hotel Lulu	20	100.0	70	10	5	-	5	10
9	Garden Hotel	44	100.0	100	-	-	-	-	-
10	Ambassador	19	100.0	100	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	502	100.0	81.5	3.2	13.4	1.4	0.4	0.1

Table 8. The distribution of photo-based posts by themes

№	Name of hotel enterprises	Number of photo- based posts	Percent age (%)	T1 (%)	T2 (%)	T3 (%)	T4 (%)	T5 (%)	T6 (%)
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	28	100.0	3.6	35.7	32.1	7.1	21.5	-
2	Golden Dragon	80	100.0	17.4	12.5	12.5	13.8	13.8	30.0
3	Jannat Regency	49	100.0	34.7	40.8	20.5	2.0	2.0	-
4	Plaza Hotel	35	100.0	25.7	28.6	17.1	-	22.9	5.7
5	Maryotel	54	100.0	24.0	26.0	26.0	5.5	18.5	-
6	Hyatt Regency	53	100.0	5.7	32.1	17.0	36.0	7.5	1.7
7	City Hotel	22	100.0	18.1	18.1	9.1	9.1	45.6	-
8	Hotel Lulu	19	100.0	36.8	-	21.1	10.5	31.6	-
9	Garden Hotel	37	100.0	35.1	-	2.7	46.0	16.2	
10	Ambassador	19	100.0	89.4	-	5.3	5.3		
	Total	396	100.0	24.7	21.7	16.7	14.6	15.5	6.8

The posts in video format were categorized into 5 themes such as T1 – hotel promotion, T2 – holidays congratulations, T3 – events organized in a hotel, T4 – food and T5 – other. According to the Table 9, the mostly shared videos are related to events organized in a hotel (51%), followed by promotion of a hotel (19.8%) and food (18.9%).

Table 9. The distribution of video-based photos by themes

№	Name of hotel enterprises	Number of video- based posts	Percenta ge (%)	T1 (%)	T2 (%)	T3 (%)	T4 (%)	T5 (%)
1	Park Hotel Bishkek	2	100.0	50.0	50.0	-	-	-
2	Golden Dragon	50	100.0	6.0	4.0	74.0	16.0	-
3	Jannat Regency	9	100.0	6.0	-	11.1	11.1	44.4
4	Plaza Hotel	4	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-
5	Maryotel	10	100.0	30.0	-	70.0	-	-
6	Hyatt Regency	23	100.0	4.35	17.45	39.1	39.1	-
7	City Hotel	0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-
8	Hotel Lulu	1	100.0	=	-	-	-	100.0
9	Garden Hotel	7	100.0	71.4	-	-	28.6	-
10	Ambassador	0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	106	100.0	19.8	5.7	51.0	18.9	4.6

The videos related to congratulations and in other categories have very small proportions, 5.7% and 4.6% respectively. There are so many events scheduled in hotels' restaurants and conference rooms, so hotels mostly try to share videos related to such organizations on their pages.

Conclusion

Social media is a great of importance for hotels in order to promote services, interact and communicate with existing and potential customers, exchange with information, understand customers' needs and wants. Users before choosing hotels firstly visit their social media pages and evaluate their services. In this case, the posts in image format have a great impact on customers' decision. However, it is not a full marketing power of Instagram.

The result of content analysis revealed that the hotels mostly share with photos related to *hotel services* (21.7%), *invitations to events organized in a hotel* (21.7%) and *announcements, news, promotions and discounts* (16.7%). Accordingly, the hotels mostly use Instagram to promote their services, share news, connect with customers and attract them. Furthermore, users communicate with hotels by liking posts rather than writing comments to posts. This indicates the low level of communication between hotels and users. The findings of this study are consistent with recent studies (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Bayram, 2016; Hashim & Fadhil, 2017; Högberg, 2017). In addition, the shares made by the hotels have average *3717 likes, which is only 38.5% of average* (9633) followers. Majority of posts are in *image format* and published in *Russian language*. Considering the fact that hotels' customers can be from all over the world, the fact that posts are mainly in Russian can be seen as a shortcoming. In order to take full advantage of the marketing power of Instagram, hotel enterprises in Kyrgyzstan should pay more attention to differentiate posts in terms of format and languages.

Today, social media is a powerful and low cost business tool for all enterprises. Marketing business on offline platforms is more expensive than digital marketing. Businesses can reach millions of customer for lower cost with the right social media strategy. So, the all entities including hotel enterprises in Kyrgyzstan should develop actionable social media strategies in order to improve communication with customers and effectively manage social media ages. In this case, researches on social media usage of enterprises should be continued and enterprises should increase investments in social media marketing.

One of the main limitations of this study is related the small sample size and this study examines only posts within the last 6 months. In this regard, the outcomes may not be representative of the whole industry in Kyrgyzstan. Future studies ought to thusly be extended by including more enterprises. Furthermore, there is need to conduct similar research in other entities in Kyrgyzstan.

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