



The Role of Social Media in Marketing for Albanian Small Meat Processing Farms: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: *Social media has become an important tool for Albanian farmers in the field of marketing, helping them grow their small businesses in various ways. Social media is key to providing transparency and showing consumers how their food is grown and raised.*

This study aims to investigate the social media and online marketing strategies of selected small meat processing farms in Albania. A comparative analysis was carried out on two farms: "Istrefi meat shop" and "Vellezerit Allgjata" Farm. The study used information from the farms' Instagram page and conducted a benchmarking analysis.

The results showed that both farms were successful in reaching their target audience and keeping them engaged. Still, it is suggested that companies should engage more with their followers and share more post information that resonates with customers

1. INTRODUCTION

Natural eating is a practice that has become less common in households due to the globalized and processed food market of today's world. Communities have become disconnected from their food, and are often unable to fully appreciate it. As noted by Holden (2017), "Today, many Americans only experience food as an industrial product that doesn't look much like the original animal or plant". However, in recent years, social media has made it possible for companies to be more transparent with their customers, allowing them to see where their food is coming from.

The coronavirus outbreak has caused a new type of farming lifestyle content to become increasingly popular, encouraging people to live simpler lives and stay home more often. Social media, particularly Instagram, has become an outlet for buyers to see where their food is sourced and raised. Kim and Kim (2021) found that there is a strong correlation between an influencer's expertise, authenticity, and homophily, leading to trust, loyalty to the influencer, positive product attitude, and purchase intention. Personal relationships and genuine connections have become crucial in building trust and influence, with social media platforms providing a solid base for companies to build their brand.

Social media plays a significant role in the food industry, as it provides clarity and honesty to the consumers of a business. Exposure to the private side of a business allows for a deeper understanding of what goes into the farming and raising of plants and animals, as well as the

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building of relationships with consumers. It is critical for small businesses, such as farms, to have a presence on social media to increase their customer base.

The purpose of this study is to examine the social media and online marketing strategies of two selected meat processing small businesses in Albania: “Istrefi Meet shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm. A comparative analysis was conducted on their Instagram pages. The results showed that both farms are successful in reaching their target audience and keeping them engaged. It is advised that both companies should communicate more with their followers and post content that resonates with customers.

The study will try to answer the following question regarding the online marketing and social media strategies employed by “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm in Albania:

- Which social media channels are currently utilized by both farms?
- What type of content is shared on their respective social media channels?
- What is the nature of the digital interaction between the farms and their customer base?
- To what extent are the current social media channels used by the farms effective?
- To what extent is the content shared on the social media channels of both farms effective?
- To what extent is the digital relationship between the farms and their customer base effective?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing through social media is a cost-effective and powerful approach that businesses of all sizes should use. According to [Son and Niehm \(2021\)](#), social media marketing differs from traditional practices as it relies heavily on local and regional markets, making businesses vulnerable to economic instability. However, social media enables businesses to overcome geographical limitations and reach more consumers, building trust and transparency in the company through relationships with clients. Social media is a strategy that can enhance retention and attract new business, allowing for a completely new connection with consumers ([Black, 2019](#)).

In addition, social media allows for two-way communication to respond to customers, better addressing their interests and inquiries about products and services ([Son & Niehm, 2021](#)). Furthermore, social media has a significant impact on consumer purchase trends, with consumers making purchases based on influence from social media, rather than traditional marketing techniques and campaigns ([Kumar & Greene, 2017](#)). Brands become more “humanized” by humanizing their brands, which creates more favorable attitudes among consumers and improves brand performance ([Gensler et al., 2013](#)).

Small businesses have an opportunity to establish long-lasting relationships with consumers, and social media marketing provides a platform that exposes small businesses to potential customers and nurtures their existing customer base cost-effectively and efficiently ([Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014](#)). Allowing customers to feel more involved in the company builds brand loyalty and increases sales. Consumer engagement through social media is highly collaborative and experiential, and it stems from a sense of belonging to the group, highlighting the importance of the social aspect of consumer engagement ([Brodie et al., 2013](#)). The consumer engagement process is initiated primarily by consumers seeking information, which is highly interactive and experiential, including learning, sharing, advocating, socializing, and co-developing ([Brodie et al., 2013](#)).

Social media marketing can be highly advantageous to small businesses in terms of brand awareness, generating exposure and increasing traffic at a lower cost compared to traditional marketing

approaches (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014; He et al., 2017). Social media can also create online groups that give individuals a purpose within the company and lead to positive brand outcomes such as stronger engagement, loyalty, and purchase intentions (Kumar & Greene, 2017).

Effective agricultural marketing through social media not only attracts more customers and boosts sales, but also provides transparency and traceability for consumers to connect with producers (Aaditi, 2020; Morris & Penri, 2017). Consumers are becoming more conscious of where and how their food is produced, and social media allows producers to be part of the conversation surrounding controversial and emotional issues regarding farming practices, thus improving social capital and financial returns indirectly (Stanley, 2013).

Moreover, social media is not limited to two-way communication with consumers, but it can also connect people within the industry, allowing for problem-solving, creativity, and overall improvement of the food distributed to the public (Stanley, 2013). As the demand for transparency and morality behind food production increases, social media enables the agricultural industry to be more in touch with customer needs and viewpoints.

3. METHODS

The tool employed in this investigation was a set of best practices guidelines (refer to Appendix A). The objective of the tool was to examine the social media marketing methods used by two family-owned small businesses in Albania: “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm. The tool comprises six main categories, including the number of followers, the average number of posts per month, the average engagement on posts, the time of day when posts are made, and company interaction through posts.

To ensure the tool’s efficacy, a pilot study was carried out on a comparable small business, “Ferma ime” Farm. After the pilot, the language was refined to suit the research questions. Additionally, the tool was adapted to gather an appropriate amount of both qualitative and quantitative data. Conducting this pilot allowed to gain a deeper understanding of the content creation process for these businesses.

A comparative analysis was performed on “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm in Albania, utilizing the previously mentioned best practices guide developed for the “Ferma Ime” Farm. For this study, the data was collected from various social media sites run by both small business farms.

The procedure commenced with an analysis of the homepage of both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm’s Instagram pages. Next, further analyzed the data analytics of the posts. This is evident in questions two and three of the tool, which inquire specifically about the average number of posts per month and the average engagement on posts.

Next, it was investigated what time of day both companies typically posted their content and whether that impacted engagement. The final step of the process was to examine if and how both companies interacted and responded to customers through Instagram posts. Finally, both farms’ Instagram pages were analyzed to determine if they mirrored one another.

Throughout this process, analysis was predominantly conducted via the Instagram pages of both companies.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

“Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm are small agricultural businesses located in Albania that have adopted social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram to reach out to their audience. Despite their similarities in using social media as a marketing tool, both farms differ in their social media approach, follower count, and content style.

“Istrefi meat shop” Farm has a relatively lower follower count of 29,700 on Instagram as compared to “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm, which has 32,100 followers. While “Istrefi meat shop” Farm shares an average of 3.5 Instagram posts per month, “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm posts about 32.3 Instagram posts monthly. The two farms are equally active on Instagram stories, where they engage with their followers by frequently going live. However, “Istrefi meat shop” Farm’s content is more casual and less consistent in terms of aesthetics, while “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm adopts a more branded approach and uses the same marketing tactics across all social media platforms.

Both farms share content about their daily farm activities, family life, and the process of farming and raising food. They also engage their followers actively by sharing an average of 8 and 17 Instagram stories daily for “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm, respectively. Additionally, both farms sell their products through their shops and share the process of baking bread and the shops that sell their products through their Instagram stories.

When it comes to engagement, “Istrefi meat shop” Farm received a total of 572 comments on their ten most recent Instagram posts, which averages to 57 comments per post. On the other hand, “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm received 601 comments with their last ten Instagram posts, averaging 60 comments per post. Both farms respond to comments and communicate with their followers, with “Istrefi meat shop” Farm having an average of 1.3 responses per post, and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm having an average of 2.8 responses per post.

To increase engagement, both farms use Instagram polls to interact with their audience and hold giveaways and contests. Instagram polls also provide real-time data that can help them better understand their customers’ wants and needs, leading to more informed decision-making. By utilizing social media as a marketing tool, these small agricultural businesses in Albania can increase their reach and engage with their audience, leading to increased sales and brand awareness.

Instagram is proving to be a successful marketing tool for small farms in Albania, such as “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm. Both have built strong and loyal customer followings by using this platform, as [Kumar and Greene \(2017\)](#) found in their research that digital media is increasingly influential in purchasing decisions. People are motivated by personal information rather than traditional marketing tactics. Both farms frequently post on Instagram to keep their followers updated on their activities, and effective posting strategies allow them to connect with existing customers and attract new ones. Posting also brings transparency to the food production process, which is becoming more important to consumers. To keep their audiences engaged, both farms could consider involving buyers more through online polls and giveaways, which can also help to gain new followers.

The content posted on the Instagram accounts of “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm has a homely feel, reflecting their commitment to living off the minimum and

incorporating homestead practices into their daily lives. Aaditi (2020) found that buyers look for transparency and honesty when purchasing food, making social media an excellent outlet to showcase the work that goes into producing it. The “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farms is successful in creating aesthetically pleasing content, while “Istrefi meat shop” Farm could enhance the creativity of their page by using more consistent filters throughout their feed. Both farms post cooking tutorials using their own meat products, but “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm could share more of their products and less of their children’s lives, while “Istrefi meat shop” Farm could post more cooking videos using their cuts of meat. It’s essential to share personal aspects with followers, but not to overshare.

The relationship between farmers and consumers has developed from the latter’s desire to know the source of their food. Social media, as (Stanley, 2013) found, brings the farmer, consumer, and industry closer together, allowing for more authenticity, transparency, and engagement in business logistics. Two-way communication helps the consumer make purchasing decisions and helps farmers be more in touch with customers’ needs. While both farms acknowledge all comments, they could improve their response rates by answering questions from their followers.

The study had some limitations due to the time frame and scope, as only the latest ten posts were analyzed, and only seven days of Instagram stories were considered. All the sources used were online, which may limit access to new information not yet available online. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis offers valuable insight into social media marketing strategies for agricultural small businesses.

Overall, social media is an effective marketing tool, allowing consumers to experience the company and see what goes on behind the scenes in a personal manner. In the agricultural industry, it allows consumers to see how their food is raised and processed, enhancing the customer experience. Additionally, social media allows farmers to learn and support one another, contributing to the success of the industry. Small businesses, in particular, should embrace social media as a trend that is increasingly useful in the marketing industry.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm in Albania, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm use Instagram as their primary platform to communicate with consumers.
- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm post diverse content on their Instagram pages including daily Farm life, tutorials, and animal farming techniques.
- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm have established strong digital relationships with their consumers.
- While both farms effectively use Instagram as their main social media platform, they do not utilize other social media platforms.
- “Istrefi meat shop” Farm strikes a good balance between personal life and business, while “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm focuses too much on personal activities and not enough on meat processing.
- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm excel at engaging their followers through their posts.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Small agricultural businesses in Albania should explore and utilize social media platforms as a marketing tool.
- “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm should focus more on posting content about animal farming techniques and less about personal activities.
- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm should be more consistent in replying to comments on their posts.
- Both “Istrefi meat shop” Farm and “Vellezerit Allgjata” Farm should engage consumers by conducting online polls and hosting giveaways.
- “Istrefi meat shop” Farm should post more cooking tutorials using their cuts of meat.
- “Istrefi meat shop” Farm should improve the aesthetic quality of their photos and videos on their Instagram page.

Future research should study the engagement rates for a more extended period and examine a higher number of posts to obtain more precise data

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