



THE FUTURE OF MARKETING IN ALBANIA: A COMPARATIVE OUTLOOK WITH OTHER BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolving landscape of marketing in Albania in comparison with other Western Balkan countries, emphasizing the transformative effects of digitalization, e-commerce, and social media engagement. Using secondary data and regional evidence from 2023–2025, it identifies three strategic trajectories for Albania’s marketing future: (1) accelerated digital transformation and mobile-first communication, (2) cross-border integration and e-commerce expansion, and (3) regulatory and trust-based constraints influencing platform adoption and youth engagement. The paper contributes to regional marketing scholarship by situating Albania within the broader European digital convergence process while offering actionable implications for practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: Albania, Western Balkans, digital marketing, e-commerce, social media, digital transformation, regulation

INTRODUCTION

Marketing in the Western Balkans is experiencing a phase of rapid digitalization, marked by increased internet use, mobile connectivity, and social media engagement. Albania demonstrates strong momentum toward digital channels but continues to face structural issues such as low digital payment adoption and logistics inefficiencies.

The period following the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated Albania’s digital transformation, encouraging both small and large enterprises to explore online marketing



and sales. However, challenges remain in data governance, digital literacy, and trust in online platforms. Policy shifts, such as Albania's temporary ban on TikTok in 2024–2025, exemplify the interplay between innovation and regulation in shaping the marketing environment.

Before analyzing the comparative data, the next section situates the study within the existing body of marketing and digital transformation literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical foundations in marketing emphasize innovation, adaptability, and customer-centricity. Kotler and Keller (2016) outline marketing as a dynamic process that must evolve with technological advances, while Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlight digital integration as the central component of strategic marketing management.

From a global perspective, scholars such as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) introduced the concept of *social media ecosystems*, underscoring how participatory communication redefines marketing communication flows. Bresciani and Eppler (2018) argue that visual and social storytelling have become essential to digital brand building. Tuten and Solomon (2022) expand on this by presenting social media marketing as a discipline integrating analytics, engagement metrics, and influencer collaboration.

In emerging economies, digital transformation has both accelerated growth and widened capability gaps. Jusufi (2023) identified digital marketing adoption in Kosovo as a significant competitiveness factor, though limited by digital literacy. Similarly, Levkov (2024) finds that education and skill development remain key predictors of marketing innovation in the Western Balkans. OECD (2024) emphasizes that uneven diffusion of technological skills is one of the region's major constraints.

Empirical studies from regional projects such as the *Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook* (OECD, 2024) and the *RCC Digital Economy and Society Index* (2024) confirm that while infrastructure has improved, SME-level integration of marketing analytics and CRM tools remains low. Kantar (2024) and Deloitte (2024) both note a gradual rise in the use of data-driven decision-making among leading firms but limited adoption among microenterprises.

Furthermore, international frameworks such as UNCTAD's *Digital Economy Report* (2023) highlight that developing countries like Albania need institutional support for e-commerce infrastructure, payments, and logistics. The *World Bank Digital Development Global Practice* (2024) also stresses that digital trust and cybersecurity are emerging as essential components of competitiveness.

Collectively, these sources suggest that Albania's digital marketing transition mirrors regional trends: infrastructure readiness is improving, but soft infrastructure—skills, trust, and governance—lags behind.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative and descriptive methodology relying primarily on secondary data (2023–2025). It integrates quantitative indicators and qualitative interpretations from the following:

- **Regional indices:** Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (RCC, 2024);
- **International reports:** World Bank (2024, 2025), Eurostat (2024), OECD (2024);
- **Industry insights:** GSMA (2024), Kantar (2024), Mordor Intelligence (2025);
- **Media and policy documentation** related to regulatory events (Reuters, 2024–2025).

Data triangulation was applied to align macro indicators (penetration rates, payment adoption, e-commerce size) with context-specific insights (youth behavior, policy reactions).

CURRENT STATE: DIGITAL ADOPTION AND MARKETING CHANNELS

Albania's digital ecosystem has expanded dramatically over the last five years. Internet penetration reached 85% in 2025, while social media accounts exceeded 1.4 million (DataReportal, 2025). The country's marketing channels have thus shifted decisively toward mobile and social media platforms.

Social media remains the leading discovery mechanism for consumers across the region. Facebook and Instagram are dominant, while YouTube and TikTok have been essential for youth-oriented communication. The government's temporary TikTok restriction in 2024–2025 disrupted many marketing campaigns and exposed the fragility of platform dependency.

In e-commerce, Albania exhibits rapid growth yet remains constrained by reliance on cash-on-delivery and limited logistics capacity. Studies by Verified Market Research (2024) and Mordor Intelligence (2025) project continued double-digit growth rates, but the country's digital payment adoption remains far below the EU average.

COMPARATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ACROSS THE BALKANS

Strengths

1. **Mobile penetration and social reach:** GSMA (2024) reports over 100% mobile penetration in the region, allowing for cost-effective digital campaigns.
2. **Youth engagement:** Regional demographics are digitally active, particularly in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania, supporting influencer-based marketing.

3. **EU-aligned policy frameworks:** Regional cooperation initiatives such as RCC's *Balkan Digital Agenda* (2024) foster cross-border e-commerce development.

Weaknesses

1. **Digital payments lag:** OECD (2024) and UNCTAD (2023) both identify payment systems as critical barriers to e-commerce maturity.
2. **Low analytical capability:** SMEs in Albania rely heavily on intuitive marketing rather than analytics-based strategies (Deloitte, 2024).
3. **Regulatory volatility:** Rapid shifts in platform governance—such as data protection enforcement—create uncertainty in marketing planning.

TRENDS SHAPING THE NEAR FUTURE OF MARKETING IN ALBANIA

1. **Mobile-first transformation:** The dominance of smartphones fosters video-centric and AI-enhanced marketing. Platforms like YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels are expected to absorb displaced TikTok audiences.
2. **Hybrid e-commerce:** Integration of physical and digital touchpoints—such as local pick-up points—remains key to increasing consumer trust.
3. **AI and personalization:** According to McKinsey (2023), AI tools now enhance targeting and content creation, enabling cost-efficient campaigns.
4. **Cross-border integration:** Growing digital harmonization across the Western Balkans supports regional campaign scalability and multilingual marketing.
5. **Ethical and regulatory adaptation:** Transparency, consumer data protection, and sustainability messaging are becoming competitive differentiators (European Commission, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS AND FIRMS

Immediate Actions

- Develop **first-party data ecosystems** to mitigate risks from third-party platforms.
- Design **mobile-first content** with flexibility across formats.
- Improve **checkout experience** through diverse payment options, including e-wallets and microfinancing tools.

Medium-Term Capabilities

- Implement **marketing automation** tools for segmentation and analytics.
- Collaborate with universities for **digital skills development** programs.

- Foster **regional partnerships** to enhance logistics and advertising reach.

Policy Recommendations

- Support **payment modernization** and digital wallet adoption.
- Create a **predictable platform governance** framework to avoid sudden regulatory shocks.
- Promote **national campaigns** for SME digital transformation, emphasizing analytics and cybersecurity awareness (World Bank, 2024).

SCENARIO OUTLOOK (2025–2028)

Scenario	Key Features
Optimistic	Albania enhances digital infrastructure and education; firms leverage AI and analytics, achieving regional competitiveness.
Constrained	Payment and policy barriers persist; hybrid offline–online models dominate.
Hybrid	Moderate progress with selective innovation and partial convergence to EU standards.

CONCLUSION

The Albanian marketing environment reflects both promise and fragility. Mobile access and youth-driven digital culture are strong enablers of marketing innovation, while structural challenges—payment trust, logistics, and regulatory uncertainty—continue to limit digital maturity.

Compared with other Balkan countries, Albania’s digital trajectory is aligned with regional trends but more sensitive to regulatory interventions. Sustainable progress will depend on maintaining a balance between innovation and governance, supported by skill-building and infrastructure investment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper relies on secondary sources and does not include firm-level case studies or consumer surveys. Future studies should explore behavioral determinants of online trust, SME adoption of AI-driven marketing, and regional integration of cross-border campaigns. Longitudinal research would provide valuable insights into the evolving resilience of Albania’s digital marketing ecosystem.

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