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Original scientific paper

THE IMPACT OF WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON THE EFFICIENCY OF E-COMMERCE

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Abstract

Creating websites and social media marketing is an integral part of business activities in companies. The emergence of modern technologies has caused major changes in the operation of companies. Websites and social networks have become extremely popular because they offer many opportunities to companies and users. These are important tools that every company should use in carrying out their marketing activities, because no media can convey information faster than them. Social networks serve companies to build better customer relationships and enable the creation of a recognizable brand.

In this paper, special emphasis is placed on the research on how Macedonian companies are aware of the impact of the website and social media marketing in building relationships with consumers and increasing the effectiveness of e-commerce.

From the research we can see that the implementation of modern digital technologies is needed as well as the integration of communication and sales channels which are important factors for business success in the market. The concept of increasing the effectiveness of e-commerce is based on the use and support of Internet technologies and directing most of the company's transactions to transactions through the company's website.

Keywords: website, social networks, effectiveness, communication, e-commerce.

JEL classification: M30; M13; L26

INTRODUCTION

The operation of companies in market conditions and their profit orientation implies a constant struggle for its place in the market by offering a wider and better range of products and services in relation to the competition. In order for the company to be able to respond to the needs of its customers and to ensure continuous development, it is necessary for all activities to be based on social media marketing and creating an interactive website. Given the growing role and importance of the Internet, every company, whether global or local, must incorporate the Internet into their communication plan. Social networks have changed the world of marketing. They represent the ways in which content is created, linked to and shared over the Internet and can be used as an integral part of marketing campaigns. In order to keep up with the growing digital

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audience, traditional media have had to adapt to constant change. This changed the way messages were posted and the way sales were made. The social network Facebook as the most popular social network provides direct addressing to consumers, which leads to generating sales and profits of the company. Implementation of modern digital technologies as well as integration of communication and sales channels are important factors for business success in the market. Whether building a brand, creating and maintaining a positive image of the company or informing customers about existing and new products or services, it is crucial for companies to know the ways for better communication with customers.

The Internet, most importantly websites and social networks, have changed the communication with costumers and now important information is available very quickly. The website of the companies and their social media allows them better customer relationships and effectiveness in e-commerce. The company website should provide information, promotion and placement of brochures, then ordering, payment and delivery of products or services over the Internet. The website should attract as many users as possible. Companies should approach the application of marketing search concept that will enable them to improve the quality of the website and better positioning among the numerous online offers. Website buyers have the opportunity to see the comments and experiences of those users who have previously purchased or used a product or service from that company. Social media marketing and company website should be just as successful as the classic forms of marketing. If our website is well optimized for search engines like Google and others, it will appear in the search results and thus bring in new potential customers. Today there are many companies that have high sales volume as a result of good internet marketing.

The ability for consumers to buy or collect information about products and services from the comfort of their own home means increased sales for many companies. An online presence can make small businesses more competitive and give them new opportunities. Small businesses with an Internet presence improve their ability to connect with a large number of suppliers and customers that would not otherwise be possible in their local area.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WEBSITE FOR COMPANIES

Companies without a website in modern business are the same as a person without an identity (Pozzi 2012). The internet is a huge encyclopedia of information and gives us many opportunities and new ideas on how to expand the market of our business, enabling us to see the websites of our competition. The website of each company includes detailed information about the offer and prices of certain products or services, business contacts and location maps. The web design of the company is a visual appearance of the page that should contain an emotional dimension, because it affects the visitors and causes positive or negative reactions to them. The positive experience of the website visitors depends on the content of the website and the ease of searching, as well as the selection of an appropriate menu, which will be continuously updated and timely information that will be tailored to the individual requirements of the visitors (Lewes 2010).. The design and content of the company's website influences the customer's decision to buy a product.

If the companies' website is interactive it will allow visitors to access the purchase of certain products.

A professional and well-designed website will promote the business well on the Internet. Most customers today have a habit of doing their initial research online before going shopping. It is therefore important that every company, regardless of its size, has its own well-designed website (Susskind, et al 2000). Also of a very high importance is that potential customers can contact the company through the website and find answers to product questions. The website also adds value to the brand and is an additional medium for communicating with customers. If we create a website that works and presents the information well, but does not look attractive or is not in line with the client's brand, no one will want to use it. Also, if we create a website that has an attractive design but is difficult to use or inaccessible, people will automatically shut it down.

The elements and functionality of a website design should function as a cohesive whole. The design must not be an obstacle but it should be a link between the user and the information. When creating and editing content on the website we should pay attention to the following (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014):

- To use the simplest language when writing and the clearest way of expression in the posts to the users;
- The texts should be as concise as possible;
- It is necessary to offer an appropriate replacement for audio or visual content;
- Standard document forms should be used;
- In order for the text to be understandable, it is recommended to use pictures and drawings.

2. BASIC DESIGN COMPONENTS USED TO CREATE AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

The interactive website is an opportunity to establish different relationships of visitors with the company through the content of the website (Papasolomou, and Yioula 2012). Establishing the visitor's relationship with the website is an expression of his trust in the company and its business, which leads to establishing online transactions.

Basic components of web design used to create an interactive website are (Coviello, Winklhofer, and Hamilton 2006):

- **Layout** - This is how the visual elements, ads, texts and content of the website are placed. In the Internet world, the key goal is to enable users to easily find the data and content they need. This means that when creating a website we need to put ourselves in the user's position to see if we can easily fit into the layout we have created.
- **Color** - The choice of colors depends on our purpose and target customers. We can choose a simple black and white design, or a design that is composed of multiple colors. When choosing colors we need to be positively perceived by the users, to comply with our brand and to use web safe colors.
- **Graphics** - Graphics include logos, photos, icons, videos and anything that enhances the visual identity of a website. In order to be pleasantly perceived

by the users, the graphics need to be inserted properly. It should be in line with the colors and contents of the website, but we should be careful not to overload the website as it will not look fine and will load slowly. Uploaded photos should be optimized in advance and should not be large if we want the website to load quickly.

- **Fonts** - Using a variety of fonts can enhance the design of your website. Most web browsers can only read a certain number of fonts, known as "secure web fonts". On "Google Fonts" you can find all the fonts that are accepted by all web browsers, among which there are really great fonts that are free and allowed to use (Koushiki 2015).
- **Content** - Content and design can work in perfect symbiosis to enhance the message to be conveyed through the website. Texts should always be relevant and useful to the reader so that they can be understood. Content should be well-optimized so that users can easily find it when searching. The content must meet certain criteria. This means that the length of the text and keywords should be specified, etc.
- **Navigation** - The architecture, menus and other navigation tools in web design should be created according to how users search and browse web pages. The aim is to make it easier for users to use and search the entire process and to always be able to easily find the content or service they are looking for.
- **Creating a user-friendly interface** - The website should look attractive and modern, but you should always think about how it will affect users. Each type of business has its own theme that should be presented through the design of the website.
- **Multimedia** - Relevant video and audio content in the design can help users understand information more easily and quickly. This can make users stay longer on the website.
- **SEO** - The website should be quality SEO optimized for multiple search engines, such as: Google, Bing, Yandex, etc. This way you can increase the number of visits to the website. SEO is a complex process that involves a huge number of steps (Lipsman et al. 2012). Therefore, if we need a website and we do not have any knowledge in that area, it is best to hire a professional company that really knows how to create a website that will increase our sales.
- **Technology** - Advances in technology give designers the opportunity to add animations, and build interactive designs that are interesting to use, dynamic and professional.
- **Interactive design** – The increase of active participation of users by adding fields for commenting and creating quizzes that will help with finding out the opinion of the users on a particular topic. Visitors can be converted easily into customers via email forms and e-newspapers.

3. THE POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE OPERATION OF COMPANIES

Social media advertising replaces traditional advertising through traditional media such as television, radio or print media because of the benefits provided by the internet and social media (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp 2012).

Some of the advantages are the speed with which we can reach consumers and the large number of Internet users and a large free customer base, from children, adults, business people, artists, small businesses and large corporations and charities. There is almost no person or business entity that does not have a social media and uses it daily. For a business, knowing its customers is crucial, no matter what the business is. Through social networks, it is possible to gather important information about customer profiles, their interests and habits and use this information not only to personalize the content, but also to improve the business. Speed and quality of social networks is one of the most important advantages when we have something new to share and make everyone see it. Information is never fresher and more up-to-date than on social networks (Descotes, and Delassus 2015). Social networks help to gain new customers (Ries, and Ries 2004). Because they help rank the search engines, a company that has social networks is easier to find on the Internet, and network profiles direct users to the official website (assuming people like what they see). There is nothing more useful than having feedback, and with the help of social networks it is possible to easily and quickly find out what customers think about us and our company, products and services. Communicating with clients on a personal level helps to build long-term relationships that will ensure the success of the company (Malthouse et al. 2004).

In order for social networks to be effective and lead to the best results, it is necessary to hire a person who has knowledge of digital marketing and who knows what he is doing, and all this is a long-term investment. When it comes to business, social media is not a game for fun, but a serious tool needed for a successful business. There is no use in opening an official profile on social networks if the information is not shared constantly, if there is no interaction with customers (if the communication is exclusively one-way) and if interesting and current content is not published.

Based on the data and the number of users that social networks have, the conclusion is that they play a very big role in people's lives and as such are a medium that no company should omit from its own planned marketing activities.

4. EFFECTIVENESS OF E-COMMERCE

The concept of e-business is based on the use and support of Internet technologies and directing most of the company's transactions to transactions through the website. The development of e-commerce was influenced, among other things, by the rapid growth of the Internet, the emergence of new information and communication technologies, the low cost of their implementation, the ability to connect with hundreds of millions of people, the interactive nature of communication and the like (Back, et al 2015).

Today e-commerce has many advantages over traditional trade transactions. These benefits are numerous, both for companies and for customers and society.

The most important benefits of e-commerce for companies are (Meyer, Gremler, and Hogreve 2014):

- e-commerce enables the seller to meet a large number of customers around the world by engaging a small amount of capital and operating costs;
- distribution marketing channels can be drastically reduced or eliminated, while at the same time making products cheaper and giving sellers higher profits. Some intermediaries are eliminated thanks to indirect marketing and one-on-one sales;
- e-commerce allows to reduce inventory and facilitate the supply chain, the process begins with an order using the delivery system "on time"; it enables production at the customer's request and reduces inventory costs;
- services and customer relationships facilitate interactivity and one-on-one communication, at low cost, e-commerce can reduce the time between paying and receiving products and services;
- e-commerce reduces telecommunications costs because it is much cheaper than special value-added networks (VANs);
- e-commerce enables new business models that increase competitiveness and profitability;
- advertising can be enriched with photo, audio and video that change frequently; can reach large audiences and be customizable.

The main advantages that buyers have in e-commerce in companies (Mikolon, et al. 2015):

- e-commerce often provides customers with cheaper products and services that they buy in many places and have the ability to quickly compare prices online;
- e-commerce provides customers with more choice; they can choose from many products due to the large number of different vendors;
- e-commerce allows customers to shop or make other transactions continuously throughout the year, from almost any location;
- customers can receive meaningful and detailed information and other notifications at the moment, rather than, as in the past, days or weeks;
- e-commerce allows people to participate in virtual auctions so that shoppers can get unique products and antiques that they would otherwise have to travel to for a long time;
- e-commerce allows customers to interact with other buyers and sellers in the e-community and exchange ideas and experiences.

A good website and brand trust can increase the effectiveness of e-commerce, which means that customers can make reservations or make purchases through the website. When we look at the customer data empirically, we can conclude that some of them visit the websites to get certain information, but half of them contact the company via e-mail in order to receive additional information and useful tips. This statement confirms that companies should work both online and in a traditional way, because there are customers who want online shopping but also customers who want traditional shopping.

Websites need to be updated regularly and it is necessary to remove outdated content, add new ones, change names, facts and the like. The most important feature of any website is its informative component.

Indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the corporate website are the feedback we receive containing (Lopes, et al 2022):

- number of visits,
- how many pages are downloaded from a website,
- duration of the total time the visitor spent on the website,
- registered users: how many users have registered to use the website,
- termination; what percentage of visitors started interacting with the website but did not complete it,
- number of clicks: what is the percentage of users who clicked on a banner or other form of Internet marketing when visiting the site.

E-business includes the realization of e-commerce, transactions for buying and selling through the website, but also a complete strategy of redefining the old business models with the help of technology, in order to provide the greatest benefits for the buyer and maximum profit.

5. REASERCH

In order to see the impact of the website and social media marketing on the effectiveness of e-commerce, a survey was conducted in 57 small and medium business companies in the Republic of Northern Macedonia from different areas. Data collection was done based on a survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was distributed to employees in managerial positions in companies, marketing managers. From the conducted survey, only a part of the questions that are crucial for this research have been singled out.

One of the key questions was: What does your company website provide? According to the answers, the following data were obtained:

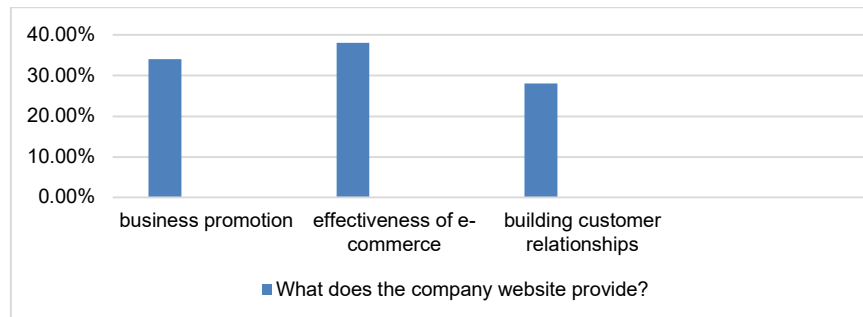


Figure 1. Percentage view of what the company website provides

According to the obtained data, 38% of the respondents believe that the website enables the effectiveness of e-commerce, 34% of the respondents believe that the website

promotes business and 28% of the respondents believe that the website enables the building of customer relations.

When asked what the positive experience of the visitors of your website depends on, the following data were obtained:

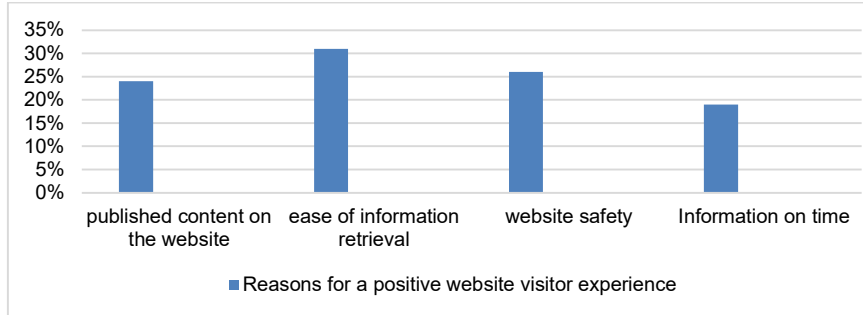


Figure 2. Percentage presentation of the positive experience of the visitors from using the website

According to the obtained data, 24% of the respondents think that the reason for the positive experience of the website visitors is the published content on the website, 31% of the respondents think that the reason for the positive experience of the website visitors is the ease of searching for information, 26% of respondents believe that the reason for a positive experience of website visitors is the security of the website and 19% of respondents believe that the reason for a positive experience of website visitors is the timely provision of information. This shows that companies are aware of how to provide a positive experience to visitors to their website, and this will be achieved by continuous and timely publication of information on the website, ease in searching for information and of course a very important factor is the security of visitors when using company websites.

When asked what are the basic components of web design that your company pays attention to when creating an interactive website, the following data were obtained:

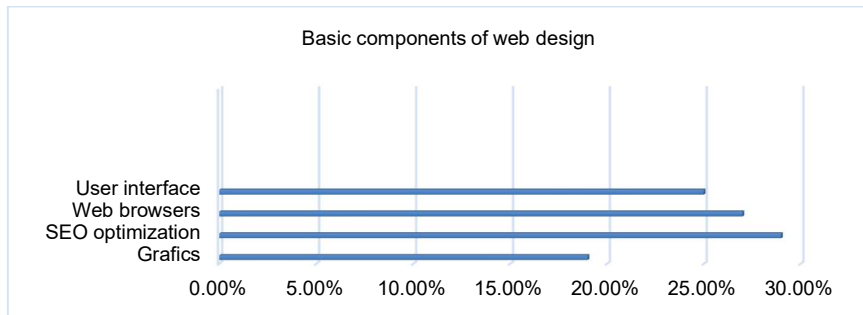


Figure 3. Percentage view of the basic components of web design when creating a website

Based on the obtained data, it can be noticed that 29% of the respondents think that the basic component of web design when creating a website is SEO optimization, 27% of the respondents think that web browsers are a basic component of web design when creating a website. 25% of the respondents think that the basic component of the web design when creating the website is the user interface and 19% of the respondents think that the basic component of the web design when creating the website is the graphics. The following information was obtained on the question that you most often publish on your website:

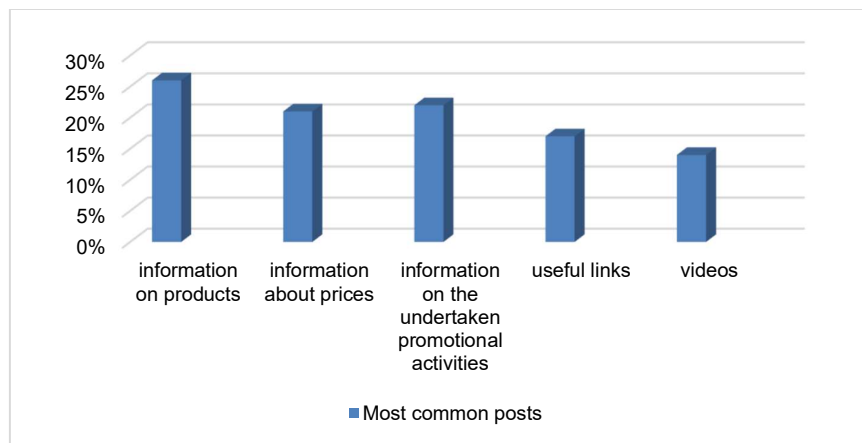


Figure 4. Percentage view of the most common announcements on the company website

Based on the obtained data we can notice that 26% of the respondents answered that the most frequent posting on the companies' website is information about the products or services, 22% of the respondents answered that the most frequent announcements on the companies' website are information about the undertaken promotional activities, 21% of the respondents answered that the most frequent announcements on the companies' websites are price information, 17% of the respondents answered that the most frequent announcements on the companies' websites are useful links and 14% of the respondents answered that the most frequent announcements on the companies' websites are videos.

When asked how the effectiveness of your company's website is measured, the following data were obtained:

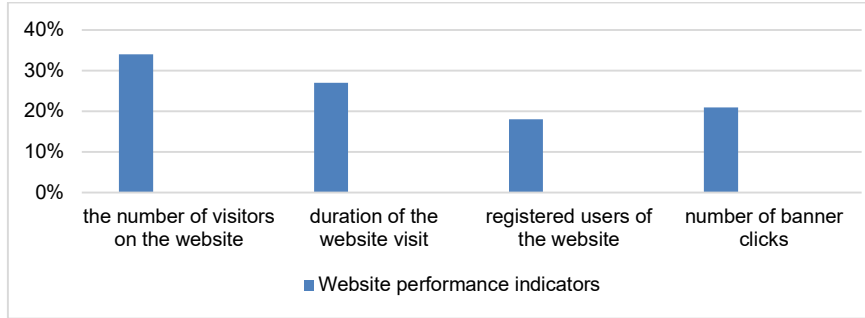


Figure 5. Percentage presentation of the performance indicators of the companies' website

Based on the processed data, 34% of the respondents think that the indicator of the efficiency of the website is the number of visitors, 27% of the respondents think that the indicator of the effectiveness of the website is the duration of the visit to the website, 21% of the respondents consider the indicator The efficiency of the website is the number of clicks on the banners and 18% of the respondents think that the registered users of the website are an indicator of the effectiveness of the website.

When asked which are the most commonly used social networks in your company, the following data were obtained:

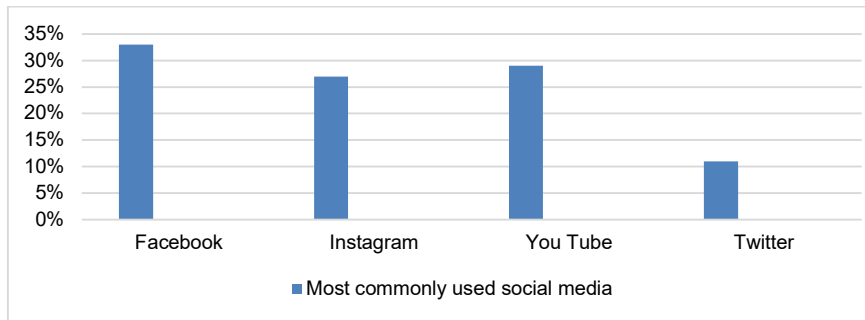


Figure 6. Percentage overview of the most commonly used social networks

According to the obtained data, the most frequently used social network and 33% of the respondents confirmed that it is Facebook, then with 29% it is You Tube, 27% it is Instagram and 11% it is Twitter.

When asked what is the most important advantage of using social networks in your company, the following data were obtained:

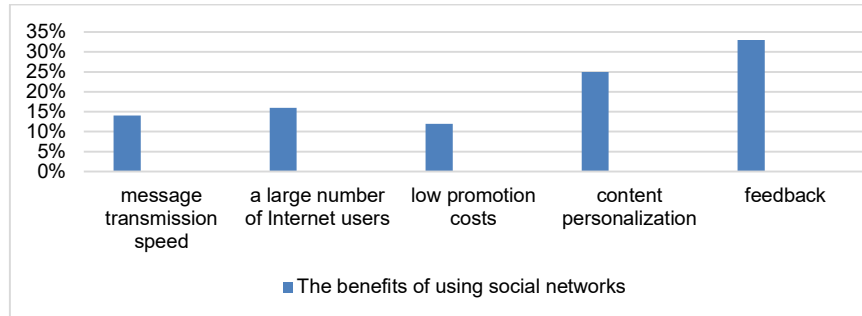


Figure 7. Percentage overview of the benefits of using social networks

Based on the processed data, 33% of the respondents think that the advantage of using social networks is the feedback, 25% of the respondents think that the advantage of using social networks is personalization of the message content, 16% of the respondents think that the advantage of using it is Social networks have a large number of Internet users, 14% of respondents believe that the advantage of using social networks is the speed of message transmission and 12% of respondents believe that the advantage of using social networks is the low cost of promotion.

CONCLUSION

The Internet, and above all websites and social networks, have changed the way the company communicates with customers and the necessary information is obtained very quickly. The corporate website and social networks enable companies to access customer relationship building and e-commerce effectiveness. The company website should provide information on products, promotion and placement of brochures, then ordering, payment and delivery of products or services over the Internet. The website should attract as many users as possible. Companies should approach the application of marketing search concept that will enable them to improve the quality of the website and better positioning among the numerous online offers. Website buyers have the opportunity to see the comments and experiences of those users who have previously purchased or used a product or service from that company. A professional and well-designed website promotes our online business. A good website should highlight the reasons why the customer should decide on our company before the rest of the competition. The Internet provides many opportunities for marketing activities that are only available online. It gives us new ideas on how to expand the market of our business, enabling us to see the websites of the competition. The information we get from the analysis of competing websites can be used to improve our business.

Companies use a combination of multiple social networks, but the most popular, and the most commonly used by the users are: Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. What traditional marketing can not achieve is achieved by social networks and enable the company to connect with customers. Each social network has its own audience. It is important to define our business goals, to choose the target audience and based on that

to choose the platform to which we will dedicate ourselves. To be successful it is not necessary to be on all social networks but to choose an appropriate social network that will contain all the key features.

According to the obtained results, the companies in the Republic of North Macedonia are aware of the advantages and necessity of using social networks, where the most important advantage is the personalization of the content of the message and the feedback from the target group. In order to be effective in e-commerce and to establish continuous communication with customers, it is necessary to have an interactive website and continuous posting on social networks. Websites must be functional and informative which will provide information about the products or services, their prices and promotional promotions, and of course they will also offer online sales which has a number of advantages.

Implementation of modern digital technologies as well as integration of communication and sales channels are important factors for business success in the market.

The concept of increasing the effectiveness of e-commerce is based on the use and support of Internet technologies and directing most of the company's transactions to transactions through the website.

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