

Social Media Marketing Communication in Real-Estates Industry: Size and Regional Differences

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Abstract: In context of the real estate market, the majority of transactions is mediated through intermediaries. Therefore, effective marketing services are essential for achieving optimal results in selling and renting of apartments. While some marketing principles are universal, the real estate sector has specific characteristics and needs an adaptation of strategies for effectively targeting audiences. This study aims to identify the nature of marketing communication within social networks in the real estate sector, including differences of the size of apartments and different regions. Even though each estate is unique, approaches to marketing communication can be heuristically diversified. The study uses content analysis of advertisements for the sale of small and large apartments in premium locations in Prague and in other commonly sought-after locations in the Czech Republic. This involved selected advertised apartments in the period of 2023 to 2024. Individual advertisements were divided into the 4 aforementioned groups and significant factors were descriptively analyzed. It was found that the groups exhibit certain common traits within marketing communication.

Keywords: real estate marketing; social network marketing; customer service; customer value

JEL Classification: M31; M37

1. Introduction

Nowadays, marketing on social networks for the real estate market is extensively used (e.g., Ayodele et al., 2015; Aytakin & Keskin Demirli, 2017; Belniak & Radziszewska-Zielina, 2019; Boudlaie & Moghadam, 2021; Tsakiridou & Karanikolas, 2019). Marketing in the real estate has its own specifics. These are particularly the distinct features and strategies that are tailored to the character and needs of this sector. Key elements of marketing in the real estate industry may include: visual presentation, placement on the website – online presentation, paid advertising on social networks, reputation, and references. Real estate marketing can be characterized as a dynamic system that requires continuous monitoring of trends and adapting strategies in accordance with current market needs. The latest wave of adapting the marketing strategy includes presentation of what? on social networks. Of the total volume of all transactions in the real estate market, approximately half of them are negotiated through a broker. With rising property prices, the amount of broker's commissions also increase, therefore ordinary citizens try to sell the real estate property "on their own", while they do not have sufficient experience with the specifics of the real estate market.

Since March 3, 2020, a new law on real estate brokerage (Law No. 39/2020 Coll.) has been in effect in the Czech Republic, which establishes conditions for providing real estate services

and thereby protects ordinary citizens. Until this time, the real estate brokerage was not regulated by law. The real estate brokerage brings high earnings, therefore there is demand for this profession, especially among individuals envisioning high profits for little work and time, which contributes to the disintegration of the profession. If the possibility of promoting real estates through social networks (where anyone can advertise) has been introduced, then knowledge of marketing strategy provides a significant added value to the success of the sale realized. In the real estate industry, personal relationships, trust between clients and brokers are key elements.

Social networks are gradually becoming a part of people's daily activities in large part of the world. For example, from 2005 to 2015, the representation of social network users in the United States rose from 10% to 76%, among the young group (18-29 years) this number was even 90% in 2015 (Perrin, 2015). At the same time, social networks offer marketing opportunities for individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises (Franco et al., 2016; Ioanid et al., 2018; Nobre & Silva, 2014; Pentina et al., 2012) and large enterprises (Jummani & Shaikh, 2019; Maiorescu et al., 2020). With the increase in e-commerce, the importance of social networks as a suitable platform for promoting real estate items is also emphasized (Dumpe, 2015). For instance, currently, real estates can be advertised directly through the Marketplace application on the social platform Facebook.com (Facebook Marketplace, 2023).

Although the role of social networks in marketing communication used for transactions in the real estate sector is significantly increasing, this topic has not yet received sufficient attention (there is only a limited number of publications in the field). At the same time, existing publications have not specifically addressed factors related to different apartment sizes and regional differences. For this reason, the aim of the study is to identify the key elements of marketing communication on social networks in the real estate sector, including those affected by the size of apartments and regional distinctions.

2. Methodology

2.1. *Research Questions*

The widespread adoption of e-commerce has led to the implementation of multichannel distribution and omnichannel retailing. At the same time, various kinds of regional disparities have been documented in the Czech context in the past, either directly related to the real estate sector (Hromada, 2023) or informational disparities (Bachmann, 2010).

Multichannel distribution refers to the strategy of reaching customers through multiple, independent channels such as physical stores, online platforms, mobile apps, and social media. The goal is to maximize the reach and provide customers a higher latitude of liberty through broadening the variety of options. Omnichannel retailing has evolved from this multichannel distribution by integrating all channels in order to offer a consistent customer experience across them.

For these reasons, the goal of this work will be achieved through addressing the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1. What online platforms and their nature are used for sales communication in the real estate sector?

RQ2. What differences exist in sales communication throughout the variety of apartment size groups and distinct regions?

2.2. Research Sample

For the purpose of this study, we selected offers for the sale of apartments on the most renown real estate websites. The selected cases included small and large apartments, i.e., in the category of 1+1 (or 1+kk) and 3+1 (or 3+kk) in premium locations in Prague compared to a standard location in a medium-sized city. A total of 150 advertisements for the sale of these apartments were analysed from each category. The data were analysed during 2023 up to the beginning of 2024. Among them premium locations are understood as apartments in Prague in parts of Staré Město, Nové Město, Josefov, Malá Strana, and Hradčany, while standard locations are assessed as average locations, particularly in a medium-sized city without negative aspects such as increased crime. These include broader city centers such as in Mladá Boleslav, Litoměřice, Beroun, Roudnice nad Labem, Hradec Králové, Jihlava, Tábor.

2.3. Evaluation Criteria

In the first step, we accessed the most renown real estate website *sreality.cz*, then we verified whether any communications of the same objects exist elsewhere. Subsequently, the advertisement was analysed according to the criteria of visual, textual and technical content. The visual content includes such aspects as home staging, visualization of the future state, or photography. The textual content includes such aspects as increasing value for the customer – video tour, information whether it is a direct sale or if the price includes commission, information on market rent in the location, description of the property condition (completeness of information about the property, energy efficiency of the building), etc. The technical content is related for example to the floor area and heating.

2.4. Technical Terminology

Several aforementioned technical terms which are used in the real estate marketing, are necessary to be clarified for the purposes of our analysis. (Wei et al., 2022)

Home staging (HS) – the process of preparing and designing a property to increase its attractiveness to potential buyers or tenants. The aim is to make the property as attractive and appealing as possible to potential buyers or tenants, which typically leads to a faster sale or lease and potentially a higher price. The HS process includes steps and strategies such as adjusting the interior and exterior of the property, removing excess furniture or personal items, using suitable furniture and decorations, lighting and colour scheme, to create an attractive and neutral space that potential buyers or tenants can more easily imagine as their home. HS is commonly used in the real estate market and can be an effective strategy for maximizing property value and accelerating the sale or lease process.

Visualization of the future state (VFS) – the process of creating a visual presentation of a real estate property after its potential reconstruction, representing what it could look like in

the future. This concept is commonly used in marketing when selling the properties, as well as in other sectors, e.g., urbanism, architecture, design, information technologies, and others. These VFS are created to help customers to better understand and visualize what the outcomes of a given project or change might be. VFS provides an idea of what something that does not yet exist might look like. VFS are processed by experts using computer systems.

Photography (Ph) – a way to present a property for sale. Ph are the basis of every offered property. Previously, Ph were created with professional photographic equipment, today also with mobile phone, and the exteriors and surroundings are usually taken with a drone.

Floor area (FA) connected with a ground plan is usually used in context of the real estate construction, referring to the total FA in a given property. It is the area covered by the floor of the property, expressed in square meters. It is the total area of all rooms in the apartment.

Heating method (HM) – a method that achieves an increase in the temperature of the interior space of an apartment. There are many different HMs that vary in the energy source used, in its effectiveness, costs and also by other factors.

3. Results

3.1. *The Nature of Online Platforms Used in the Real Estate Industry*

The online platforms used for marketing communication in the real estate sector include various media. Real estate agency websites are the key tool for presenting property listings. Nowadays, the basic photo documentation is standard for every advertisement, gradually expanding into the detailed visualization of the entire property including its surroundings. In most cases, photographs are taken especially with wide-angle lenses. Over the last 5 years, photographs are also conventionally taken by drones.

Social platforms such as Facebook or Instagram are not yet standardly used for marketing in the real estate sector in the Czech Republic. So far, less than 20% of all advertisements are published at social networks. The potential of social networks in the real estate sector has not yet been fully discovered. In the Czech Republic, verified real estate servers such as sreality.cz, are still most commonly used. However, it cannot be stated that marketing at social networks does not exist; on the contrary, social networks plays the role of a mediator between the user and the real estate server. The reason is that social networks are now a part of everyday life.

3.2. *Differences in Marketing Mommunication – Small Apartments in Lucrative Locations in Prague*

These are primarily apartments intended for subsequent rental. Short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb or booking.com usually prevail over long-term rentals. The information about the current renting is rarely provided, only in the case of long-term rentals. In the case of short-term rentals, information on the price for renting an apartment per night is not provided. Mostly, these are apartments in historical brick buildings. In the case that the apartment is not occupied, home staging is usually used. For the apartments which stand before reconstruction, the visualization of the future state is commonly used (see Figure 2). The visualization is well processed, and at first glance, it is not apparent that it is a graphic

created using specialized software. In some cases, a floor plan is included, especially for apartments with complex layouts (see Figure 1). The description of individual apartments is mainly designed to highlight the attractiveness of the location with the possibility of hassle-free subsequent rental. Advertisements often start with phrases like "Profitable investment," "Invest in housing in the heart of Prague," "Unique opportunity to purchase an investment apartment." For advertised apartments in historical buildings, sometimes the history of the building itself is mentioned. Luxurious elements are also cited for the apartments. In case of the apartments in good condition, a recent renovation is often mentioned, while for older apartments, it is usually stated that the property is in good condition. Photographs are taken especially with wide-angle lenses with above-standard brightness. Drones are not used in this category. The description of apartments in this category is extensive. The description usually contains only the positives of the specific property. In most cases, the street where the apartment is located is mentioned. From the attached map, it is then apparent what the conscription number is (in the text, the conscription number is mentioned sporadically). On the other hand, is a rule that the floor on which the apartment is located is mentioned. Information about the elevator or room orientation is nevertheless also sporadic. We have found that the advertisements of apartments with attractive views have this benefit mentioned in the description. For a part of the advertised apartments, photographs of the surroundings are included, especially when they are nearby the historical part of Prague. Technical parameters always include floor area. The method of heating is mentioned in the textual part of most advertisements, or the method of heating is apparent at the photo documentation. Energy efficiency is not often stated. Contributions to the maintenance fund are mentioned sporadically. The price info usually mentions also whether the price includes a commission or not, or whether it is a direct sale from the developer. Advertisements are written in Czech, sometimes also in English.



Figure 1. Example of a floor plan (sreality.cz, 2023a)



Figure 2. Example of future state visualization for reconstruction (sreality.cz, 2023a)

3.3. Further Marketing Communication Differences – Small Apartments in Standard Locations in Medium-sized Cities

These apartments are mostly intended as starter homes or for childless couples. The apartments' adverts are linked with the impression of the possibility of permanent living. The information that the apartment is suitable as an investment is only sporadically provided. These apartments are commonly in panel or brick buildings. Their home staging is rarely used. In case of developmental projects the visualization of the future state is standardly used, while for apartments which are used for living, only the current state documentation is provided. Only in a few cases the apartment's floor plan was included. The description of individual apartments is balanced regarding the location and the property's condition. Advertisements often start with common phrases like "Apartment for sale offer," "We offer an apartment," or "Looking for a quiet apartment in this location." The information about the age of the apartments normally used for living is not very common in the advertisements. It is usually stated that the apartment is in good condition. In case of the apartment, which is in its original condition, this is frequently mentioned that for instance in the following manner: "the apartment is in its original maintained condition, suitable for reconstruction." It is also expressly stated that it is a new building if it is the case. Photographs are mostly taken with standard lenses; but small rooms are specifically photographed with wide-angle lenses. Drones are only rarely used in this category (see Figure 3). The description of apartments in this category is usually simple, customer-oriented in order to encourage them to come and see the apartment in person. In most cases, the street where the apartment is located is mentioned. It is nevertheless not always apparent what the conscription number of the building is even from the attached map. The floor on which the apartment is located is standardly mentioned. The information about the elevator or room orientation is nevertheless less common. The photo documentation often includes the surroundings (e.g.,

a possibility of parking in front of the building or a playground). The view from the window is only sporadically included. The floor area is always mentioned among the technical parameters. The method of heating is mentioned more often in the textual part of most advertisements, or the method of heating is apparent from the photo documentation. The energy efficiency is not often stated and also obligatory contributions to the maintenance fund are mentioned sporadically. The price info usually mentions whether the price includes a commission or not, or whether it is a direct sale from the developer. The advertisements are always written in Czech.



Figure 3. Example of photograph with the apartment highlighted, taken from a drone (sreality.cz, 2023c)

3.4. Yet Another Marketing Communication Differences – Large Apartments in Lucrative Locations in Prague

These are apartments intended for own living or for subsequent rental. In the case of rentals, short-term leases such as Airbnb or booking.com prevail. The information about the rental amount is seldom provided. Mostly, these apartments are located in historical brick buildings. The home staging is prevalent and visualizations are not uncommon. The visualizations are well processed and at first glance, it is not apparent that they are graphics created using specialized software. In some cases, floor plans are included. The description of individual apartments is primarily designed to highlight the attractiveness of the location. Partially, the advertisements mention the potentialities of the apartment in question. The advertisements also often start with common phrases like "Apartment sale," "We offer an apartment for sale in the center of Prague," and the like. Occasionally, there is a mention of barrier-free access. The advertisements of the apartments in historical buildings sometimes mention the history of the building itself. Luxurious elements of the apartments are noted if it is the case. As concerning the apartments in good condition, recent renovations are mentioned, while in case of older apartments, it is usually stated that the property is in good condition. Their photographs are taken with standard lenses, while small rooms (bathrooms,

corridors) are captured with wide-angle lenses. The vast majority of photographs are artificially illuminated in order to show that the apartment is lightened by sun (see Figure 4). Drones are not used in this category. The descriptions of apartments in this category are usually extensive, they usually balance description of the location and the condition of the apartments. The descriptions primarily content the positives of the specific property. In most cases, the street where the apartment is located is mentioned. Sometimes, the conscription number is apparent at attached maps (in the text, the conscription number is usually not mentioned). It is a rule that the floor on which the apartment is located is mentioned. The information about the elevator is usually provided. The information about the room orientation is mostly exceptional. The descriptions usually do not miss highlighting the significant places in the surroundings especially historical monuments. Technical parameters always include the floor area but usually do not distinguish between the floor area of the apartment in question and the balconies, terraces, loggias, or cellars. The method of heating is mentioned in the textual part of most of the advertisements or it is apparent from the photo documentation. The energy efficiency is not often stated. Obligatory contributions to the maintenance fund are mentioned sporadically. The price info usually mentions whether it includes commission or not or whether it is a direct sale from the developer. The advertisements are written in Czech and occasionally in English.



Figure 4. Example of a photograph of the view from the window on historical monuments (sreality.cz, 2023b)

3.5. Last Marketing Communication Differences - Large Apartments in Standard Locations in Medium-sized Cities

These apartments are intended for the own living of a typical family in the Czech Republic. Predominantly, these are apartments in panel buildings. The information about the possibility of renting is rare. If the apartment is rented, the amount of annual rent is then mentioned. The home staging is not widely applied. As concerning new apartments visualizations and floor plans are included. In case of older apartments floor plans are usually

absent. The descriptions of individual advertisements primarily focus on the apartment itself, marginally on its location. The advertisements often start with common sales phrases like "Apartment for sale," "We offer an apartment for sale", etc. Occasionally, barrier-free access is mentioned. As far as new constructions are concerned, this condition is mentioned. For older buildings, the condition is typically mentioned as good. The descriptions of an older property are minimalistic. The photographs are taken with standard lenses, while small rooms (bathrooms, corridors) are captured with wide-angle lenses (see Figure 5). Most of the photographs are artificially illuminated while drones are used exceptionally in this category. The description of apartments in this category is basic, the description of the apartment is usually prioritized over the description of the building and its location. The descriptions primarily contain the positives of the specific property. In most cases, the street where the apartment is located is mentioned. It is not always apparent from the attached map what the conscription number is not always apparent at attached maps (in the text, the conscription number is usually not mentioned). It is a rule that the floor on which the apartment is located is included. The information about the elevator is usually provided while the information about the room orientation is mostly exceptional. Technical parameters always include the floor area but it is usually not possible to distinguish what is the floor area of the apartment and what are balconies, terraces, loggias, or cellars. The method of heating is mentioned in the text part of most advertisements, or the method of heating is apparent from the photo documentation. The energy efficiency is not often stated and also the sum of contributions to the maintenance fund are mentioned sporadically. The price info usually mentions whether it includes commission or not, or whether it is a direct sale from the developer. The advertisements are written in Czech.



Figure 5. Example of standard photograph of apartment (sreality.cz, 2023d)

4. Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the real estate sector is strongly linked to specific locations and local markets. The location is often a key factor in buyers' decision-making.

Therefore, the marketing in the real estate sector is often focused on promotional activities in specific geographical areas. The sale of a property in question is a long-term process that can last several months. Even if a client decides to proceed faster, the transaction can be not concluded within legal deadlines related to the transfer of property ownership. The visual elements of the marketing in the real estate sector include photographs, videos, and property descriptions. These criteria are important because buyers often select properties based on their visual presentation. Thus, the study confirms the significance of the visual elements in the marketing communication, as previously indicated by the research of Belniak and Radziszewska-Zielina (2019).

Furthermore, we have found that the purchase of the real estate properties is often strongly connected to emotions. The marketing in the real estate sector frequently emphasizes feelings of home, security, and comfort. The emotional aspect plays a more significant role than in some other sectors. Similar conclusions are pointed out by the research studies of Xiao (2008) and Gotwaldová (2015). There are seasonal fluctuations in the real estate sector mentioned with higher demand for properties in summer, while the demand decreases towards the end of the year. Just like in other sectors, regulations related to advertising, contracts, and ethics must be adhered to. Some marketing principles are universal but the real estate sector has specific characteristics and needs which require the adaptation of common strategies for effectively targeting relevant audiences. The marketing at social networks often serves merely as a link to the websites of real estate agencies or real estate portals. The marketing communication elements must be implemented in compliance with the law, for example, the use of drones for photographing is legal only under certain conditions.

5. Conclusions

This study analysed the online platforms used in marketing communication in the context of the real estate sector in the Czech Republic. Moreover, it identified the differences in sales communication across the variety of apartment size groups and locations. Each broker has his marketing strategy that he applies. Based on our survey we have found that advertisements for the sale of similar apartments in similar locations exhibit similar characteristics. Similar marketing tools are applied in various different groups of apartment advertisements that share the same characteristics. Most brokers use a standard concept of marketing strategy. Some brokers create a specific marketing concept to differentiate their advertisements from those of other brokers. Creating a story about the offered property has recently started to appear in the advertisements. Our study also found that in the vast majority of offers, only the positives of the specific real estate property are highlighted. The information about negative factors is exceptional. With the increase in the offered price, the quality of marketing communication increases, which is influenced by the commission from the sale.

Conflict of interest: none.

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