

## SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY: THE INTENSITY AND CONTENT OF THE MARKETING ACTIVITIES

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### ABSTRACT

In today's modern shipping business environment, there is a shift from traditional to digital marketing. Social media has the most significant potential for companies to reach consumers; thus, this paper aims to discover the intensity and content of the marketing activities of shipping companies through social media. Two different types of companies, the container and multi-purpose ones, are the objects of research, primarily analyzed based on the number of followers,

posts, likes, comments, and shares on social media.

The results show the highest intensity of Facebook usage for shipping companies. It was also discovered that shipping companies actively use Facebook, and this form of online representation is considered more precise regarding brand awareness and public engagement. The content analysis revealed that shipping companies have no intention of selling services using social media. Namely, there are limited network-building or customer relationship efforts, but activities in Corporate Social Responsibility activities, Employee Brand Management, and Sustainability increase.

The paper revealed that shipping companies use digital marketing toward the internal public and employees, increasing marketing and human resource management activities.

This paper opens up the possibilities of a more significant application of marketing in the shipping industry, bearing in mind the trends of digitization of maritime operational processes and supply chains.

**Keywords:** social media, marketing in shipping, content analysis

### INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of internet technologies has greatly transformed communication in society, as well as the business operations of companies, making the internet an important strategic tool. This implies that the ever-present use of the internet initiates a shift from traditional marketing approach to digital marketing approach (Melović, Jocović, Dabić, Vulić, & Dudic,

2020). In today's modern business environment, digital marketing occupies a crucial position because its development and utilization offer numerous advantages for companies, such as market presence increased, cost reduction, result measurability, personalization, openness, and improved communication (Melović, et al., 2020). In that sense, the use of digital marketing in business strengthens competitive advantage and achieves set of business objectives. Furthermore, consumers can access information anytime and anywhere they want through digital media (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatema, 2015), making them more active participants than ever in the decision-making process.

There are numerous elements of digitalization that companies utilize in their operations, ranging from mobile marketing, search engine optimization, email marketing, banners, blogs, however, there are referenced studies confirming that social media has the greatest potential for companies in terms of reaching consumers who use social media (Korschun, & Du, 2013; Mangold, & Faulds, 2009). All the mentioned forms have multiple benefits, with social media being particularly important from the perspective of the topic analysed in this paper. Therefore, the correlation between the marketing effects of social media activities on shipping companies business is the subject of analysis in this paper. The main advantage of social media lies in enabling companies to increase their target market and reduce costs (Watson, Watson, Pitt, Berthon, & Zinkhan, 2002; Sheth, & Sharma, 2005), which directly correlates with the principles of shipping business.

Container companies have more effective advertisements than others, so this paper's primary research question is: *What is the difference between container and multipurpose shipping companies' digital marketing activities?* While a significant number of studies have analysed the role of digital marketing in modern business, the specific value of this paper lies in the comparative analysis of container line companies and shipping companies that have different types of vessels in their fleet, aiming

to determine differences in the intensity of marketing activities through social media. In this way, a scientific contribution is made to the existing literature, while the research results can be of importance to decision-makers in maritime companies to enhance their business through social media marketing.

This study analyses two shipping companies, one of which is a leader in terms of digital marketing activities, A.P. Moller - Maersk container company. A.P. Moller - Maersk is a company dedicated to container transportation and logistics. It is also a leader in container shipping. It employs around 88,000 people in 130 countries. It owns and manages approximately 750 vessels both owned and managed.

The second company, BSM, is an international company that not only manages its own vessels but also offers vessel management services to shipowners. Currently, it manages a fleet of approximately 650 different types of vessels.

The paper is organized into five sections. After the introduction, it provides an overview of previous theoretical background regarding social media, presented as one of the strategic tools for positioning container line brands, along with a literature review that provides the motivation for this study. Methods of work provides insights into the analysis of shipping companies' activities on social media. The results and discussion sections present the effects of marketing activities by shipping companies on social media, as well as the internal marketing activities of Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (further BSM) company. Finally, the paper ends with conclusions and recommendations for future research in this field.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that marketing is increasingly finding application in the maritime industry and is more intensively used by companies that show the best business results in the market.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For shipping companies, awareness of marketing as a business philosophy is still developing (Šekularac-Ivošević, 2021). The use of social media is an integral part of the

digital transformation phenomenon in the contemporary business world (Dwivedi, et al., 2021). It is examined that social media platforms are more popular among B2C (business-to-consumer) companies compared to B2B (business-to-business) companies. However, in recent years, B2B online communities, including employees, clients, industry experts, and general consumers, have continued to increase. It has been recognized that this form of advertising helps B2B companies increase brand awareness, humanize their companies, establish better connections with clients and experts, and potentially boost sales (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014). The three most well-known social media platforms used by B2B companies are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Nowadays, companies use social media not only to provide information about their company or brand but also as part of their marketing strategies to enhance user experience, increase sales and user engagement, and raise brand visibility, among other goals. In that regard, the following effects of social media on B2B companies are examined in the literature (Dwivedi, et al., 2021):

- Customer satisfaction,
- Intention to buy and sales,
- Customer relationships,
- Brand awareness,
- Knowledge creation,
- Corporate credibility,
- Acquiring new customers,
- Salesperson performance,
- Employee brand management,
- Sustainability.

Melović, Ćirović, Vukčević, & Mitrović Veljković (2022) states that the application of digital marketing, as a component of marketing strategies of enterprises, is particularly prominent in-service industries, and social media stands out as a significant indicator of online advertising for businesses.

A limited number of research has focused on investigating social media application in the maritime business (see Table 1). It is noticeable that research on the use of social media is usually focused on container shipping and is more recent. Altuntaş Vural, Baştuğ, & Gülmez (2021)

mention the efforts of leading container shipping companies to build sustainability in their services through their presence on social media. The results of the research, particularly regarding Twitter accounts, show that container shipping companies prefer to position their brands closer to economic and environmental aspects, and less so to social sustainability. In the literature, social media is presented as one of the strategic tools for positioning container lines' brands. Namely, Surucu-Balci, Balci, & Yuen, (2020) discovered that the content of social media posts (e.g., vividness level, fluency of tweets, content type, tangibility of company resources in the tweet, existence of a link, and existence of call-to-actions) significantly influences stakeholder engagement in container shipping. Wang, Wong, Li, & Yuen (2021) analyzed the communication on sustainability in the maritime industry on social media and its related public reactions, and they found that the information provided on social media allowed the public to figure out the essential contribution of the shipping industry to global sustainability. D'agostini (2022) investigated the marketing orientation of topics published on Facebook by the two largest European shipping companies, A.P. Moller - Maersk and Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC). It was found that despite differences in priority domains, the companies have a common goal of conveying messages on social media to strengthen their brand value in line with their marketing strategies. Turkish maritime companies largely share posts on Facebook about corporate image, which receives positive reactions from followers (Baruönü, & Sanri, 2019).

Katona, & Sarvary (2014) focused on B2B social media using the example of the largest container company, Maersk Line. By developing a social media strategy since 2011, Maersk Line has focused on four its aspects: communication, customer support, sales, and internal usage. The company first launched its online presence through the social network Facebook, where it gained significant attention from followers. Afterwards, company expanded its presence to other social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+, Vimeo, Flickr, Pinterest,

Tumblr, and its social media home base called Maersk Line Social. Maersk Line segmented the social networks, accordingly, using Facebook for visual and conversational interaction with users, Twitter primarily for business news, Instagram for entertaining content, and LinkedIn, as the most corporate platform, to attract clients. The company's presence on social media improved users' perception of the company, saved money in terms of customer service, and had a cultural effect in terms of knowledge sharing instead of knowledge protection. Container shipping companies' preferences lean towards emotional appeal and informative content, with a lesser preference for direct sales messages through social media. Additionally, it has been discovered that video content is more viral than photos (Bitiktas, & Tuna, 2020).

From the perspective of port business, research on major European ports has shown

that they extensively use social media to connect with stakeholders and spread corporate messages, particularly in the domain of social responsibility. Findings indicate that Twitter is widely used in port business, followed by LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Vitellaro et al., 2022). Çalışkan, and Esmer (2018) in their study on container port concluded that LinkedIn is the most preferred platform in terms of the number of port accounts, and that the most attractive posts go beyond topics related to port services, infrastructure, and investments. Ports tend to share messages focusing on raising environmental awareness, sustainability, social issues, safety, and security. Bitiktas, & Tuna (2020) conclude that the phenomenon of social media in maritime industry is still being evaluated, thus exploratory research is the most suitable method.

Table 1. Overview of literature in the field of digital marketing applied in the maritime industry

Research area	Authors
Digital marketing in shipping in the context of sustainability, primarily environmental and economic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Altuntaş Vural, et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Wang, et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Katona, &amp; Sarvary (2014)</li> </ul>
Social networks in the context of strengthening the brand of shipping company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D'agostini (2022)</li> <li>• Altuntaş Vural, et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Surucu-Balci, et al. (2020)</li> </ul>
Social networks in the context of improving the perception of the company among customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Katona, &amp; Sarvary (2014)</li> </ul>
Social networks in the context of strengthening the corporate image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baruönü, &amp; Sanri (2019)</li> </ul>
Social Network Segmentation in Container Shipping: Facebook - visual and conversational interaction with users, Twitter - business news; Instagram - entertainment content; LinkedIn - attracting clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Katona, &amp; Sarvary (2014)</li> </ul>
Ports share more messages focusing on raising environmental awareness, followed by posts on sustainability, social issues, safety, and security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vitellaro, Vitellaro, Satta, Parola, &amp; Buratti, (2022)</li> <li>• Bitiktas, &amp; Tuna (2020)</li> <li>• Çalışkan, &amp; Esmer (2018)</li> </ul>

Source: Authors

## METHODS OF WORK

In this study, the authors explored the content of all activities of shipping companies on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In line with the available and relevant literature, an inductive content analysis of online posts was applied

(Çalışkan, & Esmer, 2018). All posts were manually reviewed, and researchers identified meaningful marketing concepts. Accordingly, all company posts on social media were searched using the following theoretically grounded keywords (Dwivedi, et al., 2021):



- Customer satisfaction (satisfactory, clients' needs, experience)
- Intention to buy and sales (order, price, purchase)
- Customer relationships (loyalty, partnership, relation)
- Brand awareness (logo, visual identity, popularity)
- Knowledge creation (innovation, development, education)
- Corporate credibility (CEO, success, news)
- Acquiring new customers (quality, reliability, new customers)
- Personal performance (awards, certificates, personnel)
- Employee brand management (HR, people, employees)
- Sustainability (ecology protection, sustainable, digital).

Also, a case study is used, which analyses typical examples of shipping companies that have leading positions on the market.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Social Media Activity

This paper represents the marketing activities of A.P. Moller - Maersk and Bernhard Schulte Ship management (BSM) companies on the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in 2021. Table 2 includes the number of followers, posts, comments, and shares of the companies researched. These activities were considered in relation to previous research papers (Kolcubaşi, & Akyar, 2019; Bitiktas, & Tuna, 2020; Vitellaro et al., 2022).

Table 2. Social Media Activities of Shipping Companies

Social media/ Company	Activities	A.P. Moller – Maersk	Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM)
<b>Facebook</b>	Followers	3.052.099	11.952
	Posts	724	102
	Likes (reactions)	426930	10026
	Comments	10818	102
	Shares	38445	945
<b>Twitter</b>	Followers	110.800	2.223
	Posts	323	40
	Likes (reactions)	55152	428
	Comments	1805	18
	Shares	7133	103
<b>Instagram</b>	Followers	301.000	13.800
	Posts	318	57
	Likes (reactions)	1226774	14882
	Comments	16874	110
	Shares	-	-

Source: Authors

Observing the activities on social media, the container company A.P. Moller - Maersk is the most active on Facebook. The analysis shows that this container company attracts the attention of followers the most on Facebook, followed by Instagram and Twitter. Furthermore, in terms of the total number of posts, Facebook is in the lead, while Instagram and Twitter have a relatively similar volume of posts. These results can be explained by the fact that Facebook was the first social network launched by this company, and they actively

started digitally representing their business in 2011 (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014). However, when analyzing user reactions, the highest number of likes was recorded on Instagram, followed by Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, commenting on posts is most frequent on Instagram, followed by Facebook, and least on Twitter.

In a case study, Katona, & Sarvary (2014) state that the visibility of A.P. Moller - Maersk company on Instagram was enhanced by the introduction of hashtags (#maersk). On

the other hand, Twitter was initially used for publishing hardcore shipping news and more corporate-related posts, which influenced a narrower circle of interested followers.

Analyzing the activities of Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM) on social media, we conclude that Instagram and Facebook are the most attractive networks in terms of the number of followers, while Twitter is less appealing. In terms of the number of posts, Facebook holds the leading position, followed by Instagram and then Twitter. BSM company's posts receive the most likes on Instagram, followed by Facebook, and the least on Twitter. Regarding comments on posts, Instagram and Facebook are at a similar level, while Twitter is the least represented in this activity.

Comparing these two companies, it is noticeable that Facebook has an advantage as

a social network. This conclusion is in line with previous research indicating that shipping companies actively use Facebook, and this form of online representation is considered more precise in terms of brand awareness and public engagement, as well as having a wider audience even in the B2B context (Bitiktas, & Tuna, 2020).

### Marketing Effects of BSM Maritime Company's Activities on Social Media

After analyzing the content of all posts in 2021 for the BSM company, the data can be systematized in the Table 3. The determination of codes relied on the expertise of the authors who have expert knowledge in the field of marketing, which can be considered partly subjective but certainly a scientifically grounded approach.

Table 3. Marketing effects of BSM shipping company's activities on social media

Category	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Customer satisfaction	1	0	0
Value creation	6	5	0
Intention to buy and sales	0	0	0
Customer relationships	1	0	0
Brand awareness	7	8	2
Knowledge creation	7	4	2
Corporate credibility	6	4	4
Acquiring new customers	2	0	1
Personel performance	9	3	3
Employee brand management	19	2	11
Sustainability	14	3	10
Corporate Social Responsibility	30	11	24
<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>57</b>

Source: Authors

According to Table 3, the BSM company has no intention of selling services using social media, as confirmed in the literature (Bitiktas, & Tuna, 2020). Additionally, there

are no network-building or customer relationship efforts, but there has been an increased CSR activity.

Table 4. CSR on social media for BSM company

CSR	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Happy holidays /maritime days	12	11	8
Charity, ecology, human rights	6	0	3
Gym and health / vaccination of employees	12	0	13
<b>Total posts</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>

Source: Authors

During the content encoding process, we discovered the following additional marketing effects compared to the initial setup in the literature, which we categorized as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). As an example of CSR for Facebook, we found that the most commonly posted topics are happy holidays/maritime days, charity, ecology, human rights, gym and health/vaccination of employees. The newly discovered marketing effect from social media for BSM networks is presented in Table 4.

Based on data given in Table 4, it can be concluded that the results of this research confirm the findings in the literature, as the Twitter network does not disclose the extent of CSR activities compared to other networks (Altuntaş Vural et al., 2021).

### Internal Marketing Activities of BSM Company: Seafarer Blog

The BSM Seafarer Blog is an online internal marketing platform for employees in the company that includes the following modules:

1. Our Stories - anecdotes from the personal or professional lives of employees within the company.

2. Insights - short content related to innovation and company operations.
3. Successes - lists that include a crew promotion record, a list of crew members employed in the company for a certain number of years, and a list of newly built ships that have entered the company's management. They are usually published quarterly.
4. Wellbeing - content related to healthy lifestyles and disease prevention among seafarers.
5. Events - primarily focused on international events, but also including national and religious holidays.
6. Safety - a special module containing materials published by the LPSQ team.

The structure of the blog is given as in the Figure 1.

Table 5 indicates that the most significant number of posts is related to promoting success, which highly motivates employees of BSM company. Also, information about safety and well-being has a significant share in this internal marketing platform structure, which is also a priority in formulating the corporate culture of modern shipping companies.

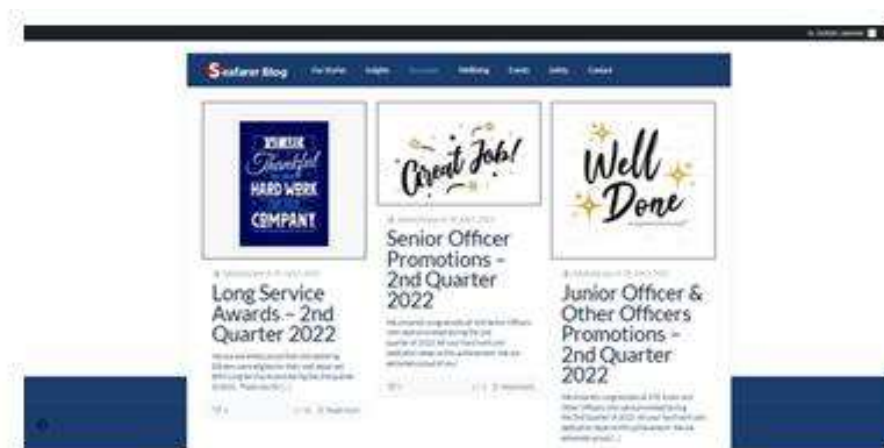


Figure 1. Seafarer Blog Display  
Source: Internal access to the platform

Table 5. Number of posts on internal BSM marketing platform

Year	Our stories	Insights	Successes	Wellbeing	Events	Safety
2022	7	3	21	12	14	21
2021	7	7	22	26	2	23
2020	13	10	19	12	7	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>63</b>

Source: Authors

## CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, a significant number of papers have been published on the topic of social media marketing. However, there is a considerably modest amount of research in this field regarding the marketing effects of social media activities in the shipping industry, which served as motivation for this study. Presenting a company on social media has become mandatory for those who want to improve their business and connect with existing or potential customers. The goal of social media marketing is to encourage communication with consumers, strengthen brand awareness, and enhance business performance.

The results presented in this paper indicate that digital marketing is less applied in BSM Company compared to A.P. Moller – Maersk Company, however, the research has shown that BSM Company has an internal marketing platform, which indicates international business operations and a good relationship with employees. Accordingly, this company is considered a leader in terms of human resource management. BSM company has developed an internal marketing platform dominantly on three bases: Success, Well-being, and Security.

The paper shown differences in the intensity of marketing activities on social media in favour of container operators. It was discovered that Facebook has primacy over Instagram and Twitter. However, the importance of Instagram is growing through the growing number of reactions (likes) on this platform. Although Facebook was implemented earlier, Instagram is still making progress. Special attention in the paper was given to new discovered field of application of marketing in the shipping industry, i.e., the

paper revealed the elements of Corporate Social Responsibility CRS.

Future research will be based precisely on discovering the reasons for the growth of social networks in the maritime industry and the indications of why Facebook is in the maturity phase, assuming the new generations of onboard personnel are more focused on using Instagram. Also, potential research will be directed to measuring the relationship between company size, the level of its representation on social media and business results achieved.

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