

# Advantages and Barriers of Virtual Businesses in Iran Using Domestic Messaging Platforms and Instagram

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## Abstract

This research examines the barriers and advantages of using Instagram along with Eitaa or Rubika in virtual businesses. Employing a qualitative approach, data was collected from 12 virtual business owners through semi-structured interviews and purposeful sampling. The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, facilitated by MAXQDA software and coding methods.

The results indicated that the advantages of utilizing Eitaa and Rubika include reduced internet consumption, the potential to attract governmental and religious clients, the ability to address issues related to accounts or channels, and financial support. The advantages of using Instagram primarily involve ease of building trust. Collectively, the benefits of all three messaging platforms encompass the ability to attract customers from various parts of the city and country, learning from the profiles/channels of successful individuals, gaining information, employing strategies to attract clientele, and the opportunity to connect with new collaborators.

The general acceptance of Instagram among the audience and the user-friendliness of domestic messaging applications compared to Instagram are considered additional benefits of these platforms. However, businesses also face challenges, including restrictions and regulations on content creation and advertising, audience limitations, the impact of political and social crises, competition, warnings from authorities, governmental restrictions, unethical behavior from audiences and competitors, and systematic issues such as messaging app bugs, lack of financial support, insufficient features in domestic messaging applications, and ideological constraints.

This study offers solutions to improve the utilization of these messaging platforms and to assist businesses in better leveraging the capabilities of Instagram, Eitaa, and Rubika.

## Keywords:

Eitaa,  
Instagram,  
Rubika,  
Virtual Businesses,  
Thematic Analysis.

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## **Introduction**

The advancement of human life from the era of mass production to the age of communications and information, as well as the movement of countries towards knowledge-based and informational societies, has transformed all aspects of economic, cultural, industrial, and social activities. Among these developments, virtual social networks have experienced significant growth (Talebpour et al., 2014), attracting many businesses due to their features such as constant access, removal of time and space limitations, global reach, flexibility, and multimedia capabilities (Karimian et al., 2017). This has led to changes in consumer buying behavior (Yang et al., 2024). One of the most popular social networks, Instagram, has more than 1.6 billion users worldwide (Kemp, 2023), with 46.89% of Iran's population using it (Statcounter, 2024). Given this popularity, many businesses have started their activities on this platform. However, alongside this, some online business owners have expanded their activities on local messaging platforms like Eitaa and Rubika, responding to audience needs and adapting to domestic conditions due to the larger user base compared to other local platforms. According to statistics from 2023, Rubika has about 40 million users and Eitaa has about 30 million users (Tasnim, 2023).

Being present on local messaging platforms such as Eitaa and Rubika, in addition to international platforms like Instagram, offers businesses opportunities for growth and increased revenue. However, business owners also face challenges and barriers, and understanding these challenges and planning to optimize their use is essential. This study seeks to answer the question: What are the advantages and barriers for Iranian businesses in using local (Eitaa and Rubika) and foreign (Instagram) messaging platforms?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The social marketing theory emphasizes building relationships based on shared values between businesses and customers and uses tools such as social media to improve customer experience and enhance interactions. Simultaneously using both local and international messaging platforms can increase fast feedback and communication, enhancing customer trust and sales volume (Baran & Davis, 2017; Kotler & Roberto, 1989).

The Hierarchical Effects Model focuses on the customer acquisition process, from awareness to action, while McLuhan's Global Village concept highlights the role of social networks in reducing geographical borders and influencing user behavior. These networks, as tools for transmitting information and shaping culture and user behavior, provide businesses with opportunities to send targeted messages to both local and international audiences (Baran & Davis, 2017; Zolghadr & Ghasemzadeh-Araghi, 2012).

Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling competitors. By analyzing competitors' activities on different messaging platforms, businesses learn new methods for brand and business development, and use these patterns to promote their own growth (Baran & Davis, 2017). Finally, the Technology Acceptance Model indicates that if businesses perceive the usefulness and ease of use of a messaging platform, they will be more likely to adopt it and encourage others to participate as well (Ningtyas & Kurniawan, 2024).

## **Methodology**

In this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 online business owners active on Instagram and Eitaa or Rubika. The interviews were conducted purposively via telephone contact, and after obtaining informed consent, the interviews were recorded for analysis. Data were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and

MAXQDA software (version 2018). Subsequently, main and subcategories were extracted and compiled into a comprehensive report.

### **Findings**

The advantages of using the Instagram, Rubika, and Eitaa platforms include their usefulness and ease of use. Local messaging platforms like Eitaa and Rubika reduce costs by offering discounted internet rates and eliminating the need for VPNs, making access to businesses more convenient. Each platform targets a specific audience; for example, Eitaa is more appealing to government employees, while Rubika attracts a younger, teenage demographic. Instagram, with features such as global accessibility, algorithms, and advertising capabilities, helps businesses widely promote their products and utilize diverse ideas for growth. On Instagram, influencer marketing is more effective, while on Eitaa and Rubika, advertisements are mainly promoted through pinned sections and broader areas, where increased monitoring builds user trust. In addition to advertising, promotional exchanges and discounts are popular customer acquisition methods. In Rubika, businesses can receive financial rewards for increased activity, but Instagram does not offer such financial support. Due to its commercial nature, Instagram easily builds customer trust, whereas local messaging platforms require more effort in this regard. Addressing issues on local platforms is easier due to the presence of related organizations within the country, while on Instagram, the only solution is typically email, which is often ineffective. Additionally, the use of these platforms, due to their lack of dependence on VPNs and simpler designs for various age groups, makes it easier for businesses to operate. Ultimately, Instagram, with features like Explore, automatic post downloads, and continuous visibility by users, provides more opportunities for businesses to be seen.

Alongside the advantages, there are also various social and systemic barriers on these three platforms. Social barriers include content production limitations across all three messaging platforms. In Eitaa and Rubika, there are restrictions on certain topics, including dress codes, specific terms, and social issues like gender identity, materialism, and consumerism. These restrictions are less common on Instagram, where the focus is more on violent and disturbing content that could lead to account suspension. Additionally, Eitaa and Rubika mainly attract specific age, professional, and religious groups, which limits the target audience for businesses and reduces their revenue potential. In contrast, Instagram's broad audience diversity offers more opportunities to sell products to different age groups and professions. Another social barrier is the challenges caused by audience behavior, such as offensive comments or inappropriate suggestions. These issues are more prominent on Instagram, especially for women in business, whereas they are less frequent on local messaging platforms due to stricter monitoring. Furthermore, operating on Instagram requires understanding complex algorithms, necessitating that business owners take various training courses. Local platforms, on the other hand, are simpler to use and do not require special training. Finally, intense competition on Instagram often leads to the creation of meaningless content and the manipulation of audience emotions, adding to the challenges faced by business owners. Such competition is less visible on local messaging platforms. Moreover, governmental restrictions in Iran have made it difficult to use Instagram, as political and social events may disrupt access to the platform, requiring the use of VPNs.

**Systemic Barriers :**From a systemic perspective, Instagram allows business owners to receive feedback through comments on posts, a feature that Eitaa lacks. Additionally, upload speed and content size limitations on Eitaa and Rubika can affect user activity, whereas Instagram

does not impose content size restrictions. Due to the lack of content editing tools in Eitaa and Rubika, users typically edit their content on Instagram before uploading it to these platforms. Instagram also has ideological restrictions related to words and topics concerning crises and social issues in Iran. If these terms are used too frequently, user accounts may be suspended. In contrast, Rubika offers more financial support to businesses, providing them with funds to prevent their activities from being halted, while Instagram does not offer such financial backing and only provides a platform for activity.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the advantages and obstacles faced by online business owners on three messaging platforms: Instagram, Eitaa, and Rubika. In terms of advantages, Instagram provides a suitable platform for business growth with its sophisticated algorithms and diverse tools, allowing business owners to reach a wide range of audiences due to its extensive user base. Additionally, Instagram offers numerous educational resources on optimizing activities and expanding businesses, which can be valuable for business owners. On local messaging platforms (Eitaa and Rubika), advantages include the absence of the need for VPNs and easier access for Iranian audiences. Furthermore, these platforms are more cost-effective compared to Instagram, as business owners do not need to pay additional costs for advertising, training, or internet usage.

However, in terms of social barriers, there are significant differences between these platforms. Local messaging platforms impose more content and advertising restrictions, particularly concerning issues such as dress code, consumerism, and topics related to gender identity. Moreover, cultural and religious restrictions specific to age groups on these platforms may hinder business growth. While Instagram has fewer advertising restrictions, issues related to violence, controversy, and intense competition can create challenges for business owners. In terms of systemic barriers, similar problems exist across all three platforms. Eitaa and Rubika face issues such as slow upload speeds and content size limitations, which often drive business owners to turn to Instagram due to its better editing tools and upload capabilities. Additionally, ideological restrictions on Instagram, especially regarding social issues in Iran, may lead to account suspensions. Finally, issues like the lack of financial support on Instagram and software problems across all platforms are fundamental obstacles in the growth of businesses.

Overall, operating on Instagram and local messaging platforms each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Online business owners need to choose platforms based on their type of business and audience needs in order to achieve the greatest success with the fewest challenges.