DIGITAL MARKETING

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER CHOICE

ВПЛИВ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ НА СПОЖИВЧИЙ ВИБІР

The rapid digitalization of society has radically transformed the behavior of the modern consumer, as social networks are not only a communication tool, but also a full-fledged channel that influences the process of consumer decision-making. This necessitated the need for an interdisciplinary study of the dynamics of consumer decision-making in a digital environment in which social platforms act as leading sources of information, shapers of consumer preferences, and channels of emotional engagement. The aim of the research is to identify the mechanisms of influence of social networks on consumer decision-making in the digital environment in the context of changing their behavior and forming digital trust in interaction with brands. The research is based on the hypothesis that brands use social media to influence consumers at every stage of their digital journey in order to increase awareness and create a socially responsible image. The hypothesis was tested using the following research methods: systems analysis, interdisciplinary synthesis, content analysis of visual and text materials, and comparative analysis of business cases. An analysis of digital trust

Стрімка цифровізація суспільства докорінно трансформувала поведінку сучасного споживача, зробивши соціальні мережі не лише інструментом комунікації, а й повноцінним каналом впливу на процес прийняття споживчих рішень. Це обумовило необхідність проведення міждисциплінарного дослідження динаміки ухвалення рішень споживачами в умовах цифрового середовища, в якому соціальні платформи виступають як провідні джерела інформації, формувачі споживчих уподобань та каналів емоційної залученості. Метою статті є виявлення механізмів впливу соціальних мереж на ухвалення рішень споживачами у цифровому середовищі в контексті зміни їх поведінки та формування цифрової довіри у взаємодії з брендами. В основу дослідження покладено гіпотезу, що бренди використовують соціальні мережі для впливу на споживачів на кожному етапі їх цифрового шляху з метою посилення впізнаваності й формування соціально-відповідального іміджу. Гіпотезу перевірено через такі методи дослідження: системний аналіз, міждисциплінарний синтез, контент-аналіз візуальних і текстових

factors was conducted, including user-generated content (UGC), quantitative metrics (likes, shares, subscriptions), interactive reviews, and the role of influencers as digital thought leaders was identified. It examines how social media influences each phase of the consumer's digital journey: need identification, search for alternatives, evaluation, purchase decisions, and post-sales behavior. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of current trends in the use of social platforms by various demographic groups, in particular in Ukraine, which is experiencing transformational challenges caused by the war, market adaptation to new technologies, and the formation of a new culture of digital consumption. The results of surveys, statistical data from international analytical centers (GWI, DataReportal, Statista, Nielsen) are presented, and cases of brands that have successfully applied marketing strategies in the social media ecosystem are considered. The conclusions emphasize the need to build long-term relationships between the brand and the consumer through personalization mechanisms, emotional engagement, and the use of neuromarketing technologies. Practical recommendations are offered for the effective use of social networks as a tool for digital interaction and the formation of consumer loyalty.

матеріалів, порівняльний аналіз бізнес-кейсів. Розглянуто фактори цифрової довіри, зокрема контент, створений користувачами (UGC), кількісні метрики (уподобання, поширення, підписки), інтерактивні огляди. Визначено роль інфлюенсерів як цифрових лідерів думок. У ході дослідження проаналізовано, що соціальні мережі впливають на кожну фазу цифрового шляху споживача: виявлення потреби, пошук альтернатив, оцінка, рішення про покупку та постпродажна поведінка. Особливу увагу приділено аналізу сучасних трендів використання соціальних платформ представниками різних демографічних груп, зокрема в Україні, яка переживає трансформаційні виклики, спричинені війною, адаптацією ринку до нових технологій та формуванням нової культури цифрового споживання. Наведено результати опитувань, статистичні дані міжнародних аналітичних центрів (GWI, DataReportal, Statista, Nielsen), а також розглянуто кейси брендів, які успішно застосували маркетингові стратегії в екосистемі соціальних медіа. У висновках акцентовано на необхідності побудови довготривалих відносин між брендом і споживачем через механізми персоналізації, емоційного залучення та використання нейромаркетингових технологій. Запропоновано практичні рекомендації щодо ефективного використання соціальних мереж як інструменту цифрової взаємодії та формування споживчої лояльності.

Keywords: social media, digital behavior, decision-making, influencer marketing, digital trust, UGC content, personalization, neuromarketing, brand–consumer interaction, marketing strategies, Ukraine, digital transformation, behavioral marketing.

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі, цифрова поведінка, прийняття рішень, маркетинг впливу, інфлюенсери, цифрова довіра, *UGC*-контент, персоналізація, нейромаркетинг, взаємодія бренд–споживач, маркетингові стратегії, Україна, цифрова трансформація, поведінковий маркетинг.

Introduction

The digital transformation of society and the economy has led to significant changes in communication processes and consumer behavior. Social networks, as a key element of the digital space, have opened up new mechanisms for influencing consumer decision-making, transforming tradetional sources of information into interactive environments for monetization, sharing experiences, broadcasting emotions, and collectively creating ideas about goods and services.

Therefore, digital interaction has become dominant in the process of choice, purchase, and post-purchase behavior. According to GWI (2024), more than 76% of users under the age of 35 admit that they have made a purchase under the influence of content on social networks. This emphasizes

a large-scale shift in the consumption paradigm: from autonomous rational analysis to emotional reactions to influencer recommendations, reviews, and visual content. In such an environment, consumers gain access to a huge amount of information, build digital trust, and interact with brands on a personal level through stories, live broadcasts, comments, and recommend-dations. This forms a new communications architecture in which advertising, emotional influence, and social confirmation are combined into a complex decision-making system. Neuromarketing is also considered a tool for psychological influence on the consumer (Skrigun & Meteyko, 2018).

Comprehensive research of the impact of social networks on consumer decisions in the digital environment is based on an interdisciplinary source base that combines analytical reports, scientific articles, marketing reviews and practical cases. The structure of the materials used traces three interconnected vectors such as empirical, conceptual-theoretical and applied.

The empirical basis is the annual reports of the world's leading platforms: Digital 2024: Global Overview Report (DataReportal, 2024, January 31), Social Media Trends 2024 (GWI, 2024), Digital 2024 Statshot (We Are Social, 2024, October 23), as well as the statistical indices Statista (2024) and Lariba (2024). They provide up-to-date data on the structure of social network use, sources of product information search, level of trust in UGC content and digital behavior by age groups. Their significance lies in reflecting the dynamics of global changes and the specifics of the omnichannel consumer experience.

The conceptual and theoretical block is represented by publications that substantiate the transformation of consumer behavior due to the action of digital communication channels. One of the authors of this article substantiated the role of social media marketing in business interaction (Zaitseva et al., 2023), and in a previous study by the second author (Povod & Zhosan, 2025) the significance of neuromarketing for forming loyalty in the segment of knowledge-intensive products was proven. The works of Kukharska (2024), Zincio and Stasyuk (2022), Savchenko, Sukach et al are of particular analytical value. Savchenko, Ablyazova et al. (2021) highlight the methods, tools and issues of digital trust and cognitive influence on the consumer in the conditions of a visualized media field.

The applied block of sources covers the results of industry surveys, benchmarking studies (Sprout Social, 2023, Influencer Marketing Hub, n. d., Nielsen, 2020), as well as non-public internal reports of arbitrarily selected Ukrainian brands, which became the basis for the formation of business cases in the fourth chapter. In particular, the article by Burdyak et al. (2024) analyzes the effectiveness of nano-influencers, and the analytics of the Ukrainian Marketing Association (n. d.) examines business marketing practices in wartime.

Thus, the source base of the research is representative, multi-level and relevant to the stated issues. Its structure allows for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of digital consumer behavior, combining macro-analytical observations with micro-marketing practices. Despite the presence of a significant amount of empirical data and examples of the use of social networks in marketing, the mechanisms of influence of social networks on consumer behavior in the Ukrainian digital context require further clarify-cation. In particular, the question remains open as to which factors: type of content, level of trust, participation of influencers or visual component have a decisive impact on buyer behavior. Even with the availability of a large number of international studies, the mechanisms of influence of individual factors in social networks remain insufficiently detailed in Ukrainian realities, which necessitates the need for further research.

The aim of the research is to identify the key mechanisms of influence of social networks on consumer decision-making in the digital environment in the context of transforming their behavior and forming digital trust in interaction with brands.

The research is based on the hypothesis that brands use social media to influence consumers at every stage of their digital journey and touchpoints in order to increase awareness and build a socially responsible image.

The hypothesis was tested using the following general scientific research methods: system analysis, interdisciplinary synthesis, content analysis of visual and text materials, as well as comparative analysis of cases on the Ukrainian market. The information base of the study is made up of analytical reports, sociological surveys, marketing research, scientific public-cations and empirical data obtained from the YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook platforms.

The article analyzes the evolution of the formation and development of consumer behavior models under the influence of social networks, identifies the role of influencers in the formation of trust, presents practical examples from the Ukrainian market and formulates marketing implications for brands that seek to function effectively in the digital environment. The first section analyzes the transformation of consumer behavior in the context of digitalization: it reveals how the stages of decision-making have changed under the influence of digital technologies and social networks and also highlights the phenomenon of the consumer's emotional reaction, which replaces rational analysis in the choice process. The second section is devoted to the characteristics of social networks as channels of influence on the consumer: it examines their role in creating an information space, behavioral patterns of users in TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc.; substan-tiates the effect of "social confirmation", personalization mechanisms and algorithmic formation of the information feed. The third section examines

influence marketing as a new logic of authority in the digital environment: analyzes the nature of digital trust, delimits its components, presents empirical indicators of the effectiveness of influence marketing and provides examples of successful campaigns using micro- and nano-influencers. The fourth section contains an applied analysis of marketing cases from the Ukrainian market: summarizes the effects that companies have received from active interaction with the audience on social networks, describes statistical data on changes in conversion rates, reach, and brand awareness. Based on this, strategic implications for enterprises regarding the use of social networks as a tool for forming long-term brand value are formulated.

1. Transformation of consumer behavior in the context of digitalization

The spread of mobile technologies, the active use of social networks, personalized platforms and artificial intelligence have significantly transformed not only the channels of interaction with brands, but also the logic of decision-making itself. The consumer is moving from autonomous analysis to collective interaction, dominated by emotional, situational and social factors. In the traditional model of decision-making, which involves five consecutive stages: awareness of the need, search for information, evaluation of alternatives, decision-making and post-purchase behavior, it was believed that the consumer acts rationally and logically. However, the digital environment has significantly complicated and fragmented this process. Currently, consumers discover new products and services through feeds, stories and recommendations. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok set the tone by demonstrating what opinion leaders and celebrities buy and use. Unlike traditional advertising, influencers and UGC (user-generated content) are perceived as more reliable and honest sources of information, and their recommendations are similar to advice from acquaintances. In this context, brands act as external triggers through social networks, which stimulates the emergence of new needs, forms emotional impulses and accelerates the digital path to purchase. This is confirmed by the data of the DataReportal study (2024), which proves that 62.3% of the world's population (5.04 billion people) actively use social networks and this creates an unprecedented density of information pressure on the consumer (DataReportal, 2024, January 31).

In the digital environment, the difference between information search and evaluation is blurred – comments, likes, video reviews and algorithmically selected recommendations form a fast-paced information background, in which emotional reactions prevail over rational analysis. More than 76% of users aged 18–35 report that they have made a spontaneous

purchase at least once under the influence of content seen on social networks (GWI, 2024).

Table 1 demonstrates the key differences between the classical decision-making model and the digital scenario of consumer behavior in the social media environment:

Table 1

The comparison of traditional and digital models of consumer decision-making

Decision-making stage	Traditional model	Digital environment (social networks)
Need awareness	Personal experience, advertising	Post, influencer recommendation, UGC, paid advertising on social networks
Information search	Catalogs, advice from experts and friends	Reviews, comments, bloggers, reviews via video/story/gamification, integration with GoogleMaps
Evaluation of alternatives	Comparison of characteristics	Algorithmically selected offers, videos, ratings, push notifications
Decision making	Weighed, rational	Under the influence of emotions, trends, offers of bonuses and discounts for activity, "social confirmation"
Post-purchase behavior	Personal experience, discussion with friends	Publishing reviews, stories, sharing experiences online, uniting by values in consumer communities

Source: authors' research.

Thus, brands are influencing consumers' digital behavior through the increasing volume of interactive content, the use of social proof, and the effect of instant mass influence. At the center of decision-making is now not only individual logic, but also collective digital culture – a community that shapes trends, meanings, and expectations.

2. Social networks as channels of influence on consumers

Social networks have become the leading communication channels that have a direct and multifaceted impact on consumer behavior. They not only inform, but also shape needs, emotions, expectations, trust and even values. The consumer is no longer a passive recipient of information – he becomes an active participant in digital interaction, which covers the processes of search, selection, purchase and post-purchase behavior.

Modern social platforms Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube provide a constant stream of content, personalized through recommendation algorithms based on user behavioral analysis. According to the We Are Social report (2024, October 23), 46.1% of users in the world use social networks to search for information about brands, products and services, which makes this channel key in the consumer journey.

Content analysis by Bondarenko et al. (2022) showed that social networks demonstrated the best performance in attracting funds for influencing consumers, compared to promotion through traditional media. The most popular social platforms for product research (by age of users, global data 2023) are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2

The most popular social platforms for researching products
(by user age, global data for 2023)

Age group, years	Share of social network, %			
	TikTok	Instagram	YouTube	Facebook
16–24	67	64	59	21
25–34	48	61	66	34
35–44	32	49	62	41
45+	18	33	54	55

Source: (Statista, 2024).

The behavioral mechanism of interaction with social networks can be described using the S-O-R (Stimulus – Organism – Response) model, in which the stimulus is the content on the social network (video review, post, stories), the organism is the consumer with his emotional and cognitive filter, and the reaction is a specific action (click, save, purchase).

Particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of visual content, which dominates social networks such as TikTok and Instagram. Short videos lasting 15–60 seconds have a higher level of attention retention and influence on the purchase decision compared to text or banner messages. Thus, according to Statista, more than 57% of young users aged 16–24 choose video reviews as the main source of information about new products (Statista, 2025, July 1).

In addition to material brands, an important source of influence is the feedback of other consumers, which is often perceived as objective and reliable. Among users who read reviews on social networks before making a purchase, 84% consider them a "decisive factor" in making a decision (Lariba, 2024). The use of neuromarketing tools on social networks helps to increase the effectiveness of promotion by activating emotional engagement and subconscious reactions of consumers (Lozovska & Značek, 2024).

The digital environment forms the so-called "loop of influence": the more a user interacts with brand content (through comments, sharing or liking), the more similar content he receives in his feed. This mechanism, enhanced by machine learning algorithms, forms a zone of information resonance in which the consumer is in constant interaction with brands, which significantly affects his behavior. At the same time, legal principles related to state stimulation of knowledge-intensive products should also be taken into account (Chubenko, 2018).

So, brands are using social media not only to communicate information to consumers, but also to build trust, actualize needs, increase awareness and a sense of "social belonging," and build consumer communities around the brand. This opens up new opportunities for marketing activities but also requires an ethical and strategic approach to content management.

3. Influencers and digital transparency: the new logo of authority

In an oversaturated information space, traditional sources of authority such as advertising and expert opinion are gradually losing their leading positions. They are being replaced by influencers - digital opinion leaders who build trust with the audience through systematic, personalized and, most importantly, authentic communication. It is through influencers that the modern consumer increasingly forms an idea of a product, its value and the feasibility of buying.

Influencers function as micromedia, combining the features of a communicator, analyst and friend. According to the research by Sprout Social, 49% of users make a purchase at least once a month under the influence of an influencer's publication. This figure is even higher among Generation Z – 64% (Sprout Social, 2023).

Digital trust, which is formed between a subscriber and an influencer, has a different nature than in traditional advertising relationships. It is based on the following components:

• Regularity of interaction. Influencers publish content daily, actively comment, respond to subscribers, creating the effect of constant presence.

• Authenticity. Successful influencers demonstrate "real life", without hiding emotions, failures and the process of making their own decisions.

• Social closeness. The audience perceives influencers as "their" informal advisors, and not carriers of the corporate message.

It is these factors that determine the emergence of the so-called digital trust – a new form of social capital that has high marketing value (*Table 3*). Digital trust turns into a convertible asset: its presence increases the effectiveness of an advertising campaign, reduces the cost of explaining the value of the product and stimulates the organic dissemination of information.

Table 3

Comparing the effectiveness of traditional advertising
and influencer marketing

Indicator	Traditional advertising	Influencer marketing
Source Trust, %	32	63
Engagement Rate, %	0.9	3.6
Conversion Rate, %	1.4	4.2
Average Customer Acquisition Cost, USD	1.15	0.73

Source: (Nielsen, 2020; Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025).

In the context of the Ukrainian market, it is worth noting the growing popularity of nano-influencers (less than 10 thousand subscribers), who have a localized and deeply engaged audience. According to the data of the LOOQME platform, campaigns with the participation of nano-influencers in

the fashion and FMCG sectors demonstrate an increase in organic reach by 18–27% and an increase in conversions to the brand's website by up to 34% (LOOQME, n.d.). One of the applied methods is eye tracking, which is actively used for testing web pages (Moskalenko & Zozulyov, 2018).

Influence marketing also shifts the focus from short-term effects to long-term interaction with the client. A positive mention from an opinion leader not only increases the likelihood of purchase, but also creates a loyalty effect, which affects repeat consumption, the formation of a community around the brand, and increasing its reputational stability in times of crisis.

Thus, influencers are becoming new intermediaries between the brand and the consumer, focused not only on broadcasting advertising messages, but also on creating value through trust as the emotional currency of the digital age. As a result of the analysis, several main factors that determine consumer behavior in the digital environment can be identified. Video content, short clips and UGC formats stimulate emotional reactions and spontaneous purchases. For example, TikTok and Instagram demonstrate a high level of attention retention through short videos that create the effect of instant interest. Consumers tend to trust UGC and other users' reviews more than traditional advertising. Research by Lariba, C. (2024) confirms that 84% of users consider reviews to be a decisive factor when choosing a product. Influencers act as opinion leaders, building social trust through authenticity and regular interaction. Nano-influencer campaigns in Ukraine (LOOQME, n. d.) prove their effectiveness for localized audiences. Visual content on social networks (especially video reviews) is the main trigger of behavior among young audiences. Over 57% of users aged 16–24 choose video as the main source of information about new products (Statista, 2024).

4. Practical case studies and marketing implications

The integration of social media into the marketing activities of enterprises in Ukraine and the world demonstrates not only the increase in the effectiveness of advertising campaigns, but also a rethinking of the very approach to customer interaction. As noted, social networks are no longer just a channel for promotion, they are turning into a digital platform for co-creation of value, dialogue and building trust.

In Ukraine, despite the challenges of war, the share of businesses actively using SMM (social media marketing) increased from 54% in 2021 to 68% in 2023 (Ukrainian Marketing Association, (2022). Companies focused on visual and video content, which allows you to achieve an emotional connection with the audience, proved to be particularly effective. For example, the Ukrainian natural cosmetics brand YAKA conducted a series of collaborations with micro-influencers on Instagram, thanks to which, within 3 months, the campaign recorded:
- an increase in website traffic by 31%;
- an increase in conversion by 24%;
- an increase in organic sector by 46%.

A similar case demonstrates the power of the so-called proximity effect: users trust local faces who have "live" contact with the audience.

Another example is the Aroma Kava coffee shop chain, which in 2022–2023 systematically used TikTok to attract a young audience. Thanks to simple videos with challenges, memes and short surveys, the company achieved:

• an increase in subscribers by +142 thousand in 6 months;
• over 5 million organic views;
• an increase in seasonal menu sales by +37% during the campaign period.

These data indicate that marketing strategies adapted to the specifics of social networks provide not only a short-term increase in sales, but also create sustainable competitive advantages in terms of:

• increasing brand awareness;
• forming a community around the brand;
• increasing emotional engagement and customer loyalty;
• adaptability to crises and communication challenges (*Table 4*).

Table 4

The impact of companies on social media on marketing indicators
(data from Ukrainian cases)

Company	Platform	Indicator	Changes (%)
YAKA Cosmetics	Instagram	Conversion	+24
Aroma Kava	TikTok	Seasonal menu sales	+37
Duna Brand	Facebook	Number of followers	+29
Lviv Croissants	Instagram	Brand awareness	+33

Source: (Ukrainian Marketing Association, 2022; internal company reports).

In addition, marketing on social networks stimulates real-time feedback, which allows companies to respond faster to customer needs, adapt positioning, test new products and evaluate the audience's reaction to a change in tone of voice.

Thus, social networks create a new culture of interaction, where the consumer is not only the target audience, but also an active participant in the formation of brand identity and image.

Conclusions

In the course of this research, the authors found that social networks in the digital economy have transformed from a regular communication channel into a powerful tool for influencing consumer behavior, contributing to the formation of trust and personalized interaction with the brand. The decisive role in this transformation is played by the platforms Instagram,

TikTok, YouTube and Facebook, which have created a favorable environment for the formation of a new logic of consumer choice through visuality, emotionality, quick feedback and the effect of social proof.

The results of the analysis of empirical data and practical cases confirm that influencers are intermediaries of digital trust, who not only accumulate reputational capital and increase brand recognition, but also actively transform the mechanisms of consumer decision-making. Micro- and nano-influencers are of particular value, demonstrating a high level of authenticity and relevance for narrow target audiences.

The marketing implications of active use of social networks require deeper personalization of content, adaptation to the specifics of each platform, the use of neuromarketing technologies and the development of long-term strategies for working with digital opinion leaders. At the same time, digital consumer behavior is becoming increasingly fragmented, nonlinear and contextually sensitive. Modern research confirms that neuromarketing allows for a deeper understanding of consumer cognitive reactions and management of their behavior (Karpenko & Ostapchuk, 2022).

The effectiveness of a brand's presence on social media depends on its ability to adapt to new formats of interaction and ensure transparency of communication, as well as the active involvement of communities and the strategic integration of influencer marketing into the overall consumer experience management system. Thus, the hypothesis that brands use these networks at each stage of the consumer's digital journey is proven.

The results obtained confirm the hypothesis about the multifactorial impact of social networks on all stages of the consumer's digital journey. In particular, it is shown that the type of content, the level of trust, the participation of influencers and the visual component act in an interconnected manner, forming a complex system of consumer behavior. This requires brands to strategically manage digital trust, content personalization and long-term interaction with the audience.

A prospective direction for further research will be the development of integrated models for building digital trust, taking into account cognitive, social, and cultural factors of user behavior in the virtual environment.

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