REVIEW ARTICLE

Impact of social networks on purchases, strategies for digital e-commerce: a systematic review 2018-2024

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to analyze the influence of social networks marketing strategies on purchase decisions and their effectiveness in the context of e-commerce. To this end, a systematic review was conducted of relevant scientific papers published in the last eight years that focused on the aforementioned topic. Information was collected in the Scopus and Scielo databases, applying the following inclusion criteria: open access papers addressing the variables of social networks, purchase decisions and e-commerce, which were published between 2018 and 2024. As a result of this process, 28 studies were selected, leading to the conclusion that social networks play a fundamental role in digital marketing, facilitating interaction with consumers and the adaptation of commercial strategies. There is also evidence of significant growth in e-commerce, which is empowering consumers and optimizing online transactions.

Keywords: social media; purchase decisions; e-commerce; digital marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media is transforming communication by changing the way people access information and share their travel experiences. Moreover, these platforms allow companies to interact directly with consumers, adapt to new realities, evaluate customer satisfaction, implement improvements and promote their services (Caldevilla *et al.*, 2021). The constant interaction between users of these virtual communities has made social networks one of the most influential phenomena in recent years (Cruz & Miranda, 2020).

In this context, e-commerce is emerging, encompassing any commercial transaction of goods or services that is conducted digitally. This model benefits from technologies and processes that connect businesses, consumers and communities, enabling efficient and cost-effective electronic transactions. The Internet plays a crucial role in this development, thanks to its wide reach, low cost and ease of access, which facilitates the rapid and accurate transmission of information (Darsono *et al.*, 2019). This interactivity not only fosters a deeper understanding of products but also turns consumers into active participants, influencing the purchase decisions of others (Shih *et al.*, 2024).

Social commerce has established itself as a key element of the global economy, playing a fundamental role in the commercial activities of multinational companies. A prominent example is Alibabagroup.com, which offers a wide variety of products to consumers in more than 190 countries each year. This demonstrates that social commerce transcends national borders, positioning itself as a viable option for both local and international shoppers (Hu & Zhu, 2022).

In 2017, Amazon and eBay dominated 66% of the German e-commerce market, while online retail sales accounted for 41% of the global total, an increase of 17% since 2008. Annual growth of more than 10% is forecast for 2018. This e-commerce boom has been driven by new technologies such as chatbots and voice assistants, as well as the integration of social networks. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, with millions of active users, have become key tools for online sales, generating direct interactions and purchase decisions, further reinforcing this growth (Attar *et al.*, 2022).

There is extensive literature that focuses on this topic and is organized as follows:

Social networks and e-commerce

Social media has revolutionized e-commerce by positioning itself as a fundamental marketing platform where users interact directly with brands and influencers. The latter have a significant influence on purchase decisions due to their ability to build trust and credibility among their followers. Companies are leveraging this connection to promote their products and expand their market reach (Ao *et al.,* 2023).

The impact of social networks on e-commerce has intensified with the emergence of technological innovations such as improved networking systems and automated services, as well as the expansion of international financial markets and the growth of online commerce. These advances have been particularly beneficial for e-commerce businesses, as they have facilitated easier and broader access to a global marketplace through social platforms. These platforms allow consumers to interact directly with brands, as well as comment and share product information (Paredes *et al.*, 2023).

Social networks and consumer behavior

Consumer behavior analyzes the factors that influence the decision to purchase a product or service, following several stages: identification of a lack, recognition of needs, motivation to act, specific desires, learning about how to satisfy these needs (influenced by culture and social environment), attitudes towards available options, economic conditions (which influence purchasing power) and the existing commercial infrastructure (which influences purchase location choice) (Kwan *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, customer behavior involves a complex process that begins with the user's recognition of a need or desire, which leads to the search for information and alternatives to satisfy them (Henríquez *et al.*, 2021).

Nowadays, consumers have developed new consumption habits and have become more reflective, influenced by the vast amount of information available on different digital pla-

tforms. The introduction of new information technologies has changed their behavior. This new type of consumer, highly informed thanks to the Internet and social networks, can access numerous opinions about the products they want to buy and also offer their own comments (Cueva *et al.*, 2021).

In this context, social networks not only serves as a means of direct communication and marketing, but also as a tool for market research and brand reputation management. Platforms such as Twitter have become essential tools for gauging public opinion and studying market reactions, providing companies with vital data on consumer preferences and trends (Paredes *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, this study highlights the significant impact that social networks is having on today's consumer habits. These platforms allow companies to interact directly with consumers, offering personalized and effective marketing strategies that drive online sales. In addition, analyzing the data generated by these interactions helps companies optimize their campaigns and adapt to changing market trends, providing a competitive advantage in the dynamic e-commerce environment.

Given the limitations identified in the existing literature, this study aims to address these gaps through a systematic review of research published between 2018 and 2024. By organizing the review into more coherent thematic sections and focusing specifically on the intersection of social networks and e-commerce, we aim to provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date view of the impact of social networks on purchase decisions.

With the increasingly prominent role of social networks in e-commerce, there is a need for a detailed and systematic understanding of how marketing strategies implemented on these platforms influence digital consumers' purchase decisions and e-commerce effectiveness. There is a knowledge gap regarding the extent and manner in which these strategies influence consumer behavior and business outcomes in different contexts and cultures.

To address this problem, the following research question was formulated using the PICO methodology, as detailed in Table 1.

Question: Among digital consumers, how do social networks marketing strategies influence purchase decisions and e-commerce effectiveness?

The overall goal of this study was to comprehensively and systematically analyze the influence of social networks marketing strategies on digital consumers' purchase decisions and e-commerce effectiveness. To achieve this objective, findings and scientific evidence published in the literature between 2018 and 2024 were reviewed and synthesized. The following specific objectives were achieved: 1) Provide a deeper and more up-to-date understanding of the impact of social networks on consumer behavior, and 2) Provide insights that can guide companies in designing more effective digital marketing strategies*.*

By directly linking the need to understand this phenomenon with the specific objective of the research, we aim to fill existing gaps in the literature and make significant contributions to both academia and business practice in the areas of e-commerce and social networks marketing.

METHOD

This research is consistent with a systematic review, which is a methodology whose purpose is to gather all empirical evidence that meets predefined inclusion criteria in response to a specific research question (Jiménez *et al.,*

Table 1
PICO Methodology

P = Population	I = Intervention	C = Comparison	O = Outcome Results
Digital consumers	Marketing campaigns in social networks.	Not applicable	Change in purchase decisions and the effectiveness of e-commerce

Note. Prepared by the author, 2024.

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2021). The study focused on analyzing the influence of social networks marketing strategies on purchase decisions and e-commerce effectiveness, for which information was collected from relevant scientific papers published between 2018 and 2024.

Database search process

A comprehensive bibliographic research was conducted in the Scopus and SciELO databases, selected for their relevance and broad coverage of high-impact scientific publications. The search strategy included the use of Boolean operators as well as a variety of keywords and synonyms to ensure the breadth and comprehensiveness of the results obtained.

Initially, the following search terms were used:

- "Redes sociales" AND "decisión de compra".
- "Social networks" AND "purchase decision".
- "E-commerce" AND "purchase decision".

In order to broaden and refine the search, additional keywords and synonyms have been included:

- "Social media" OR "social platforms" AND "purchasing behavior"
- "Digital marketing" AND "purchase intent"
- "E-commerce" AND "social networks influence"

In addition, specific filters were applied to the databases:

- **Year of publication:** 2018-2024
- **Document type:** Scientific papers
- **Language:** Spanish and English

Filtering and selecting results

For this study, a PRISMA flowchart was used to describe the study selection process in a systematic literature review. Initially, 180 studies were retrieved from a database, of which 176 were retrieved from Scopus and 4 from SciELO. After removing 2 duplicates, 178 papers were screened. In the first phase, none were discarded after reading the titles.

The papers were then further assessed for eligibility. During this process, 129 studies were excluded because they were not open access, 13 because they were published before 2017, and 8 because they did not meet the required document type. Following this assessment, 28 studies were selected for the systematic review, as shown in Figure 1 .

The flowchart provides a clear and detailed overview of the filtering and selection process used in the literature review, reflecting the systematic and rigorous methodology used to identify the most relevant and recent evidence on the topic under study. In this process, 26 papers were selected from the Scopus database and 2 from SciELO, ensuring a solid and diverse basis for the analysis.

Inclusion criteria

- Scientific papers analyzing the variables of social networks, purchase decisions, and e-commerce.
- Papers published in indexed and peer-reviewed journals.
- Papers in Spanish or English.
- Papers published between 2018 and 2024.
- Full access to paper text.

Exclusion criteria

- Duplicate papers.
- Papers not directly related to the study topic.
- Papers without full text access.
- Papers published prior to 2018.

The decision to include only open-access papers is based on the need for detailed and rigorous analysis of the studies. Full-text access ensures the **transparency** and **reproducibility** of the research, allowing other researchers to verify and extend the results presented. Although this decision may limit the number of papers available, the quality and integrity of the information have been prioritized to ensure the methodological soundness and reliability of the results obtained.

Figure 1
PRISMA systematic literature review flowchart
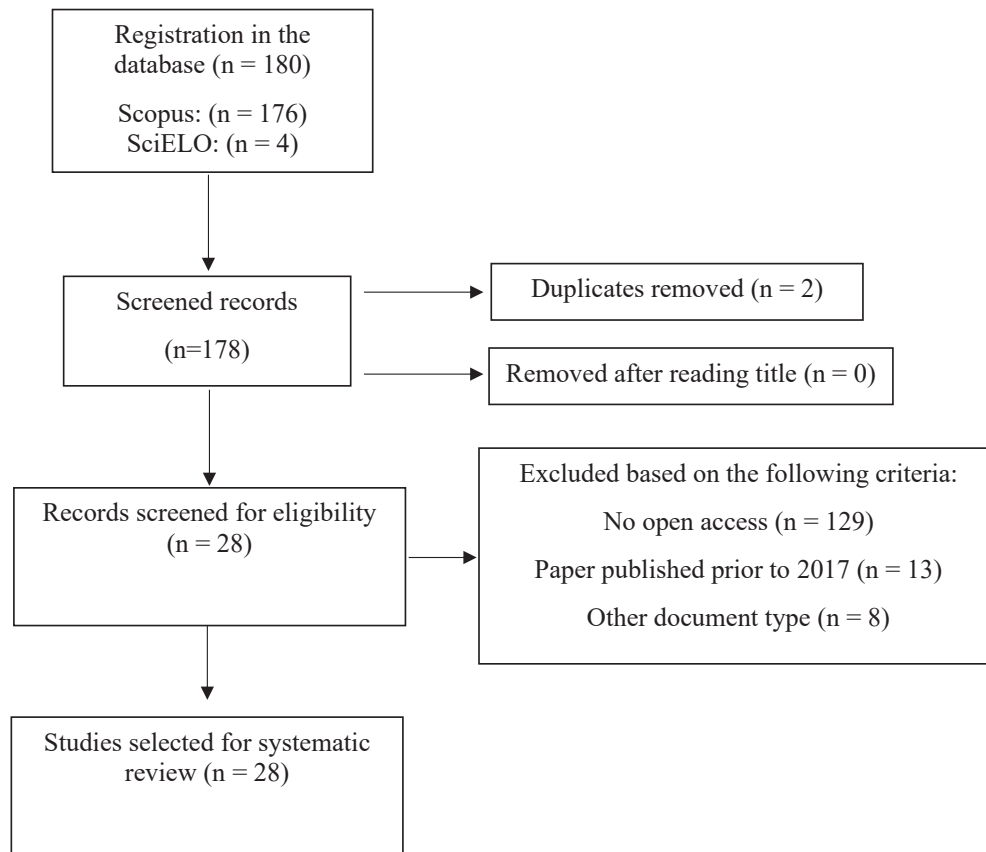
Note. Prepared by the author, 2024.

Analysis of selected papers

The analysis of the 28 selected papers was performed using a data matrix in **Microsoft Excel**, in which the main characteristics of each study were recorded:

- Authors and year of publication.

- Objectives of the study.

- Methodology used.

- Results and conclusions.

RESULTS

The 28 papers that were selected have been divided into the following subject areas, as can be seen in Table 2.

When it comes to the **impact of eWOM on purchase decisions**, several studies have provided significant evidence on how this phenomenon influences consumer behavior. Nadroo

et al., (2024), in India, found that identification with the significant other (PSI) enhances indirect expression and triggers a positive cycle of eWOM and bandwagon effect, which increases online purchases. Meanwhile, Mendoza and Moliner (2022) in Ecuador found that the perceived credibility of information shared on social networks increases its acceptance, which in turn increases purchase intention in the cosmetics sector.

Sanchez *et al.,* (2018), in Spain, found that eWOM has a significant impact on purchase intention, with gender differences: women are more concerned with the quality and necessity of information, while men are more concerned with credibility. Eiras and de Almeida (2020), in Brazil, highlighted that positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) is essential to reduce risk perception and increase trust in leisure services among older consumers, directly influencing their purchase decisions.

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Table 2
Key findings and themes from the studies analyzed

Main Topic	Key Findings	Representative Studies
Impact of eWOM on purchase decisions	eWOM enhances positive consumer behavior and increases online purchases by influencing perceived credibility and usefulness, reducing risk and increasing trust. Social media facilitates this process by influencing purchase decisions through observational learning and effective communication management.	Nadroo *et al.,* (2024); Mendoza and Moliner (2022); Sánchez *et al.,* (2018); Eiras and de Almeida (2020); Qiu *et al.,* (2021); Han (2018); Barrera *et al.,* (2022); Seller and Laurindo (2018); Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2018); Zhao and Peng (2019), Sfodera *et al.,* (2020) and Shan *et al.,* (2019).
Consumer preferences and behavior in e-commerce	Consumers prioritize convenience and trust on e-commerce platforms, influenced by values and expectations, especially for environmentally friendly products. Product innovation, design and performance are also key drivers, while cultural, social, psychological and personal factors influence behavior and require business adaptations. Price and branding heavily influence purchase decisions, often overshadowing other factors like label of origin.	Hurtado *et al.,* (2023); Villalobos (2023); Noubar *et al.,* (2023); Sun and Ju (2023) ; Wang *et al.,* (2022); Chávez *et al.,* (2020); Zheng *et al.,* (2023) and Zhou *et al.,* (2020).
The role of social networks in brand awareness and loyalty	Social media advertising has a significant impact on brand awareness and purchase decisions. Interaction on these platforms builds brand preference and loyalty, especially among younger consumers. Brand communities build customer loyalty and trust, and effective social networks content management directly influences purchase decisions.	Nofal *et al.,* (2020); Núñez *et al.,* (2020); Seller and Laurindo (2018); Barrera *et al.,* (2022); Alcívar and Sánchez (2021); Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2018); Zhao and Peng (2019) and Rojas and Santivañez (2023).
Social networks marketing strategies (influencers, content management, brand communities)	Influencers significantly impact purchase decisions when they offer valuable content. Strategic content management on social networks enhances purchase decisions. Sensory marketing, such as olfactory marketing, aligns with brand identity and enhances customer experience. Social media serves as a platform for marketing strategies that encourage consumer engagement, and companies must adapt their strategies to effectively engage consumers and turn them into active brand advocates.	Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2021); Chávez *et al.,* (2020); Barrera *et al.,* (2022); Rubio *et al.,* (2023); Aydin (2019); Nadroo *et al.,* (2024) and Ebrahimi *et al.,* (2023).

Note: Prepared by the author, 2024.

In the United States, Qiu *et al.,* (2021) analyzed how social networks influences purchase decisions through observational learning, highlighting the importance of social ties and eWOM. Meanwhile, in South Korea, Han (2018) identified the perceived usefulness of eWOM and network connectivity as determinants of how consumers align with majority opinions online.

In Ecuador, Barrera *et al.,* (2022) revealed a positive correlation between strategic content management and purchase decisions, highlighting the impact of eWOM on tourism services. In Brazil, Seller and Laurindo (2018) demonstrated that brand communities and eWOM on social networks strengthen customer loyalty and trust, positively influencing purchase decisions.

Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2018), in Colombia, showed that social networks engagement enhances eWOM, which influences university students' information search and purchase intentions. In China, Zhao and Peng (2019) addressed how online reviews influence car-sharing users' purchase decisions, demonstrating that review quality affects perceived value and risk.

In Italy, Sfodera *et al.,* (2020) examined the influence of social networks on millennial supplement purchases, noting that these platforms act as a double-edged sword, providing both useful and unverified information that influences purchase decisions. Finally, Shan *et al.,* (2019), in China, analyzed how social networks influences purchase decisions through the propagation of multiple information cascades and proposed algorithms to maximize user influence and activation, which is directly related to the impact of eWOM on purchase decisions.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the importance of eWOM as a key factor in purchase decisions and highlight its influence across industries and cultural contexts.

Regarding **consumer preferences and behavior in e-commerce,** Hurtado *et al.,* (2023), in Ecuador, analyzed post-pandemic consumer behavior and found that social, psychological, cultural, and personal factors influenced the preference for traditional shopping over online shopping, suggesting that companies need to adapt to digital trends. Villalobos (2023), in Costa Rica, found that during the pandemic, convenience and trust in e-commerce were key motivators for food purchases. For their part, Noubar *et al.,* (2023), in Iran, highlighted that social networks increases the perceived value of green products, influencing social norms and increasing the purchase intention of green products.

Sun and Ju (2023), in China, found that consumers value space, energy efficiency, and design in new energy vehicles. This suggests that improvements in these areas could increase adoption. Wang *et al.,* (2022), in Pakistan, has found that origin label information is less important than price and brand in food purchase decisions, indicating a need to improve consumer understanding.

Chávez *et al.,* (2020), in Peru, concluded that influencers can influence millennials' purchase decisions, particularly through brand awareness and perceived authenticity. Zheng *et al.,* (2023), in China, explored how companies can use the structure of social networks to design optimal pricing strategies. They emphasized the importance of considering network influence and topology. Finally, Zhou *et al.,* (2020), also in China, studied the impact of social networks on electric vehicle purchase decisions and showed that it is key to influencing consumer perceptions and driving adoption, directly impacting preferences and behavior in e-commerce.

In the **Role of social networks in brand awareness and loyalty,** Nofal *et al.,* (2020), in Cyprus, revealed that social networks advertising significantly impacts brand awareness, positively influencing purchase decisions. Núñez *et al.,* (2020), in Spain, pointed out that children form connections with brands through digital media from an early age, and explored how children's interaction with social networks influences their brand preferences and loyalty.

Seller and Laurindo (2018), in Brazil, showed that brand communities on social media strengthen customer loyalty and trust. Barrera *et al.,* (2022), in Ecuador, showed that proper content management on social media directly influences purchase decisions for tourism services. Alcívar and Sánchez (2021), also in Ecuador, highlighted the crucial role of Facebook in the promotion and sale of products during the pandemic by facilitating the connection between the companies and the consumers.

Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2018), in Colombia, emphasized that social media allows companies to increase their visibility and brand positioning, and is an important tool for understanding and responding to consumer needs. In China, Zhao and Peng (2019) found that online reviews affect perceived value and risk, which influence purchase decisions. Rojas and Santivañez (2023), in Bolivia, found that ease of use and perceived usefulness in digital marketing through social media are significant factors that influence the purchase decision for women's clothing.

Regarding the **Influence of marketing strategies on social networks**, Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2021), in Spain, studied the impact of influencers on purchase decisions in the equestrian sector and found that they have a significant influence when they offer informative and educational content. Chávez *et al.,* (2020), in Peru, noted that influencers can have an effect on millennials' purchase decisions, although the influencer's credibility is not as decisive when the content lacks value.

Barrera *et al.,* (2022), in Ecuador, emphasized that managing social content in a strategic way helps drive purchase decisions. Rubio *et al.,* (2023), in Spain, identified olfactory marketing as a key tool to differentiate themselves in the hotel sector, improving the customer experience and aligning with brand identity. Aydin (2019), in Turkey, introduced the concept of social commerce (S-Commerce), combining e-commerce with social media to encourage user interaction and engagement.

Nadroo *et al.,* (2024), in India, recommended using factors such as PSI and eWOM to improve digital marketing strategies. Ebrahimi *et al.,* (2023), in Hungary and Iran, pointed out that companies need to adapt their strategies

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to effectively engage consumers on social media and turn them into active promoters of their brands.

These studies reflect the importance of social networks and marketing strategies in shaping consumer preferences, behavior and loyalty in the digital environment, highlighting their key role in influencing purchase decisions and building lasting relationships between brands and customers.

DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review confirm and extend the existing literature on the impact of social media on purchase decisions and e-commerce strategies. This study is consistent with previous research, such as that conducted by Nadroo *et al.,* (2024) and Qiu *et al.,* (2021), which highlights how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and the bandwagon effect amplifies online social influences, significantly shaping consumer behavior. However, this study provides a more up-to-date and comprehensive perspective by incorporating research conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as that of Hurtado *et al.,* (2023) and Villalobos (2023), which reveals an accelerated adaptation to online shopping and changes in consumer behavior that have not yet been studied in depth.

Unlike previous studies that have focused on specific markets or regions, this review covers the period 2018-2024 and includes research from diverse countries and cultural contexts. This allows us to identify not only common trends, but also key differences in how social media is impacting different markets and consumer segments. For example, while Ebrahimi *et al.,* (2023) highlight the role of these platforms in consumer engagement in Hungary and Iran, Mendoza and Moliner (2022) show how eWOM affects purchase decisions in the cosmetics sector in Ecuador. This diversity of evidence is an asset to understanding the phenomenon internationally.

Based on the results obtained, it is possible to propose practical recommendations for e-commerce companies to improve their interaction with their consumers through social media. First, as suggested by Barrera *et al.,* (2022) and Alcívar and Sánchez (2021), it is essential to develop strategic content management, focusing on the creation of informative, entertaining and high-quality posts that encourage user participation and engagement. Second, harnessing the power of influencers and eWOM can increase the reach and effectiveness of marketing campaigns; studies such as those conducted by Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2021) and Chávez *et al.,* (2020) support this strategy by demonstrating the positive impact of influencers on purchase decisions. Third, companies should implement data and social media analytics tools to better understand their consumers' preferences and behaviors, allowing for more effective personalization of offers and communications, as suggested by Zheng *et al.,* (2023) and Sun and Ju (2023).

Likewise, it is essential for companies to foster trust and perceived usefulness in their e-commerce platforms. According to Villalobos (2023) and Rojas and Santivañez (2023), ease of use and perceived security on websites increase purchase intention. Therefore, investing in improving user experience and ensuring secure transactions can lead to greater conversions and customer loyalty.

As for the limitations of this study, the restriction to open access papers may have excluded relevant studies published in restricted access journals, which may affect the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the findings. In addition, the heterogeneity of the cultural and economic contexts of the selected studies may make it difficult to generalize the findings globally.

In order to overcome these limitations, future research would benefit from expanding the range of sources consulted, including papers with restricted access and additional databases. Comparative analyses across regions and cultures could also be deepened, and empirical studies could be considered to complement the findings of the reviewed literature. Integrating mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media affects e-commerce.

CONCLUSIONS

Among the key findings was that social media plays a fundamental role in shaping marketing strategies due to its ability to interact directly with consumers, assess their satisfaction and promote services. The high level of interactivity and the amount of time people spend on these platforms on a daily basis highlight their impact on digital communication and marketing.

In addition, consumer behavior in the digital age is complex and influenced by a variety of factors, highlighting access to a wealth of information through digital platforms. As a result, retailers are adapting their sales strategies to digital in order to meet changing customer expectations.

Similarly, e-commerce has experienced significant growth, taking advantage of technologies that facilitate efficient and cost-effective transactions over the Internet. The interactivity of digital platforms not only allows for a better understanding of products but also empowers consumers to influence the purchase decisions of others.

This systematic review study recommends that companies use social media to engage with consumers and assess their satisfaction, adapt their digitization strategies to meet the expectations of increasingly savvy customers, and leverage available technologies to conduct efficient transactions. Incorporating artificial intelligence and data analytics to personalize marketing strategies is critical. In addition, interactive tactics such as influencer marketing and electronic word-of-mouth should be encouraged and their effectiveness continuously monitored to remain competitive in a constantly evolving digital marketplace.

Marketers are advised on the importance of integrating advanced analytics and machine learning tools to better understand consumer preferences and behaviors. This information can be used to optimize the personalization of content and offers, increasing the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns.

In terms of future trends, technological advances and changes in consumer behavior are likely to continue to transform the way we interact with social media and, as a result, the way we shop online. For example, the rise of augmented reality and artificial intelligence could revolutionize the online shopping experience, offering more realistic product simulations or personalized experiences based on predictive analysis of user behavior.

In conclusion, the importance of using artificial intelligence and data analytics in future digital marketing strategies cannot be underestimated. Not only do these technologies allow for highly granular personalization of the user experience, but they can also anticipate market trends and adjust strategies in real time to maximize campaign efficiency. Analyzing large volumes of data from social media interactions can provide valuable insights into campaign effectiveness and support more informed strategic decision-making.

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Conflict of Interest

Author Contributions

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