

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON BRAND PERCEPTION: TRENDS, FORMATS AND DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

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- Traditional media, also referred to as mass media (for example television, radio, print media, cinema, telephone).
- New media, based on digital technologies (for example computers, smartphones, tablets, internet services, websites, electronic mail, social networks).

The most extensive and most dynamically developing group within new media is represented by the internet. Its individual segments can be classified under the term internet platforms, which include, among others, web browsers, search engines, directories, product comparison tools, discussion forums, and other types of online services.

A distinct category is formed by social media and social networks, which introduce a social dimension of interaction into the online environment and enable the connection of individuals, groups, or organizations. At the same time, they play a significant role in the process of creating and maintaining social ties and allow users to actively participate in the creation, modification, and commenting of content [11]. Handley notes that social media emerged as a natural consequence of technological progress and the evolution of communication practices, as individuals sought new, more effective, and more flexible ways of connecting with one another in the digital environment [5]. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as a group of internet applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, thereby fundamentally transforming traditional forms of marketing communication [6].

They enabled fast, convenient, and time-efficient interaction regardless of users' geographical distance. According to Kuchta and Jankovič, "social media enable individuals, groups, and organizations to connect with one another and communicate in real time through text, images, audio, video, or a combination of these forms. It is a broader concept encompassing all online platforms that allow the creation and distribution of one's own content and interaction with the content of other users. The category of social media also includes social networks, which represent a subcategory of social media." [11].

Among the most commonly used social media are platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, and YouTube. Social media can take various forms, including online forums, online profiles, podcasts,

Abstract

Social media represent a key tool of digital marketing that enables brands to interactively communicate with customers, build brand awareness, and support loyalty. The article analyzes current trends in social media, content formats, and the effectiveness of combining organic and paid reach. It emphasizes the importance of strategic platform selection, personalized content, and the integration of modern technologies, such as social commerce and artificial intelligence, in shaping brand perception and achieving a competitive advantage in the digital environment.

Key words: branding, social media, digital marketing, brand

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The aim of the article is to examine the role of social media in modern marketing and their impact on consumers' perception of brands, to analyze current trends and formats of marketing communication on social networks, and to identify factors that influence the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. The article focuses on understanding how the combination of organic and paid posts, multimedia content formats, and technological innovations contribute to building customer loyalty, increasing engagement, and supporting sales in the digital environment.

Media represent an integral part of individuals' everyday lives and significantly influence the functioning of the social sphere. They fulfil the role of communication channels and tools through which information is produced, distributed, and received. In the contemporary media environment, several types of media can be distinguished, differing in forms of communication, technical means, and the nature of the content conveyed. Traditionally, they are divided into:

image and video platforms, email communication, instant messaging, music-sharing applications, blogs, text messages, and tools such as Google Reader and Google Docs.

The concept of a social network is characterized by Kuchta as a digital space in which a user creates a personal profile, produces and shares content, and at the same time can consume and interact with the content of other users [11]. As stated by Kenton, social networks are platforms based on social media technologies and serve to maintain contact with friends, family, or customers; therefore, they can have both social and commercial uses [8]. In the context of business activities, social media play an important role in the process of forming and maintaining the relationship between a brand and its customers. However, their effectiveness depends on the way in which companies strategically use them. Mangold and Faulds point out that social media function as a hybrid element of the marketing mix, as they combine the characteristics of traditional marketing communication with elements of interpersonal communication and electronic word-of-mouth [13].

Handley states that social platforms such as Facebook or Instagram provide brands with space to interact with target audiences, build online communities, and systematically share content [5]. In this way, organizations can create more personal and intensive relationships with their customers, provide them with relevant and valuable content, and influence their behavior at individual stages of the decision-making process.

In the contemporary digital era, marketing approaches have shifted from universal mass strategies toward personalized practices that require a deeper understanding of individual customer needs and the delivery of content tailored to their preferences. Consumers have a wide range of options, which increases their expectations regarding transparency, authenticity, and added value from brands. In this context, building a personal connection between consumers and brands is the result of targeted customer segmentation based on various factors that determine their purchasing decisions.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TRENDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The popularity of social media at the global level shows a long-term upward trend. Based on the analysis of data for the year 2024 [15], it can be stated that:

- Social media are used by 5.22 billion users, representing 63.8 % of the world's population; within age groups, 60.7 million users are aged 12–27 years, 68.8 million belong to the Millennial

generation, and 36.4 million are members of the Baby Boomer generation.

- Approximately 80 % of users access social media via mobile phones or tablets.
- The average daily time spent on social networks is 2 hours and 19 minutes.
- The most widely used platforms include Facebook (3.07 billion users), YouTube (2.50 billion), Instagram (2 billion), and TikTok (1.60 billion).

The analysis further shows that businesses worldwide invest substantial financial resources in social media, primarily in advertising activities. Total spending on social media reached 227.2 billion USD in 2024. As many as 77 % of marketers use retargeting advertising on Facebook and Instagram platforms as one of their key marketing strategies to support brand development.

Identifying current trends in this field represents a complex task. As stated by Pertovčiková, the rapid dynamics of the online environment and the continuous emergence of new trends force companies to continuously monitor the digital market in order to maintain a competitive advantage and respond adequately to developments in market competition [14]. Dwivedi point out that over the past decade, social media have transformed from communication tools into complex ecosystems of digital value that integrate marketing, sales, customer experience, and real-time analytics. Social networks have also evolved into fully fledged sales channels, so-called in-stream shopping, and according to expert forecasts, this trend is expected to continue strengthening [4]. Examples include platforms such as Facebook Marketplace or the Price Tags feature on Instagram.

Among the key marketing trends at present are user attention, podcasts, voice search, video-first content, the use of artificial intelligence, and the integration of e-shops with social networks. These trends reflect the ongoing transformation of digital marketing, which is closely linked to technological progress, changes in media consumption, and the increasing level of digitalization of society.

User attention represents a crucial determinant of success in digital marketing communication. As a result of information overload and the fragmentation of the media landscape, the time span during which users are willing to devote attention to commercial content is shortening. Therefore, companies are increasingly investing in visually attractive, dynamic, and personalized formats in order to achieve immediate feedback and engagement.

Podcasts have become a significant element of audio marketing. Research shows that podcast listeners demonstrate a higher level of concentration and trust in content, which allows

brands to build long-term relationships with customers and strengthen their loyalty. Moreover, podcasts provide space for native advertising, which is perceived as less intrusive than traditional advertising formats. The expansion of smart home assistants has led to a rapid increase in voice search. Its growth significantly influences approaches to search engine optimization, as users employ more natural, conversational formulations when making voice queries. This creates a need to adapt SEO strategies so that they are compatible with the language models of voice assistants.

Visual forms dominate marketing communication, primarily due to the concept of video-first content. Video content generates the highest levels of interaction, has the ability to convey the emotional component of a message, and supports longer user retention. An empirical study by Voorveld confirms that multimedia content on social networks significantly increases user engagement, with the strongest effect achieved by formats that combine images, video, and interactive elements. Short videos, live streams, and interactive formats have become key tools in the competitive struggle for audience attention [16].

Generative artificial intelligence is also experiencing significant growth and is being used for the creation of marketing content, the personalization of communication, the prediction of customer behavior, and the automation of campaigns. Thanks to its ability to analyze large volumes of data in real time, artificial intelligence supports more effective decision-making and the optimization of marketing processes.

Finally, the integration of e-shops and social networks is fundamentally changing traditional purchasing behavior. Social networks are no longer merely inspirational media but are transforming into fully fledged sales channels within so-called social commerce. The integration of shopping features allows customers to complete the entire purchasing process without leaving the platform, which significantly shortens the decision-making cycle and increases conversion potential.

BRAND PERCEPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Today's consumer market is saturated with a large number of brands; therefore, customer perception is shaped primarily by brand quality and value, customer experience, and marketing activities. Branding represents a fundamental tool for the identification of goods in the marketplace. According to Klepochová and Korčoková, brands act as accelerators of business activities, as they carry added value and function as a company's distinguishing sign that consumers often prefer [10]. A brand encompasses not only an identity expressed through a name, logo, colors, or symbols,

but also a broader value framework and the company's philosophy.

Marketing communication and the selection of appropriate communication channels play a key role in strengthening brand value. These choices differ depending on whether a company operates in a B2B or B2C market, as each requires distinct communication approaches. As stated by Klepochová and Korčoková (2024), building brand awareness involves creating a desirable brand image, shaping positive associations, and fostering customer loyalty. Keller (2013) emphasizes that brand perception is the result of a long-term process of forming consumers' mental associations, which arise from repeated interactions with the brand through various touchpoints, including digital and social media. Brand awareness is reflected in a consumer's ability to identify individual brand elements such as the name, logo, symbol, jingle, characters, mascots, musical motifs, packaging, or websites across different contexts. The selection of these elements should be based on the company's strategic focus, the characteristics of the target group, geographical scope, and other relevant factors [10].

Kingsnorth identifies two fundamental approaches to reaching customers on social networks. Organic reach represents an unpaid form of communication that is visible primarily to a brand's existing followers. Its purpose is to disseminate information through content such as photographs, videos, or text posts published on the brand's official profiles [9]. Social networks use various mechanisms to support organic visibility, for example regular posting, interactive stories, direct messages with followers, or the creation of content formats with high sharing potential. These activities can significantly contribute to increasing the reach of a company's profile.

Paid reach is based on investing financial resources in promotion, either through sponsored posts, advertisements in stories, or through collaborations with influencers. As this represents a cost item, it is essential to choose an effective communication strategy that ensures at least a return on investment. Paid campaigns are subject to the algorithms of individual platforms, which analyze users' interests, behavioral history, and interactions.

Empirical research confirms that personalized advertisements on social networks have a significantly positive impact on perceived brand value, attitudes toward advertising, and consumers' purchase intentions, especially when they are perceived as relevant and non-intrusive [2]. Based on these data, platforms are able to recommend optimal target audiences to companies and thereby support advertising personalization.

One of the key advantages of online advertising on social networks is the ability to

precisely target specific users based on demographic and behavioral data such as age, gender, interests, or online behavior. Such targeting enables companies to optimize the reach and effectiveness of advertising campaigns by displaying ads only to relevant audiences. Advertising content can take the form of images, videos, or text, with each format adapted to the specifics of the respective platform. Social networks set their own technical and visual requirements for advertising, which differ, for example, between mobile applications and web-based versions of platforms. Various types of advertisements are used on social networks.

Native advertisements represent paid posts that are visually and contextually aligned with the platform environment. According to Kuchta, native advertising can take the form of a social media post, a full article, product placement in a video or film, a promotional post, a discussion post, a moderated discussion, or recommendations of thematically related content [12].

Banner advertisements are used primarily in advertising campaigns, and their effectiveness is often measured by the CTR (Click-Through Rate), which indicates the ratio of clicks to the number of ad impressions. Paid advertisements of the PPC (pay-per-click) type are displayed through an auction-based system in which advertisers compete for the placement of their ads. The cost per click depends on the platform, the type of advertisement, and the level of competition. PPC advertising formats include banners, text posts, videos, animated images, and pop-up windows.

Marketing communication on social networks is carried out through various types of posts that enable companies to build relationships with existing customers while also reaching new ones. Among the most common formats are articles, PR articles, stories, images, videos, and others.

Articles are a common format on social networks, and their quality and content significantly influence audience interaction. The selection of an appropriate topic, headline, and visuals can help strengthen relationships with customers and stimulate discussion. Articles should be concise, factual, and, in the case of corporate profiles, also professional in nature. They may include images, videos, audio recordings, or infographics. Users can read them without distracting elements such as advertisements, which increases the likelihood of sustained attention. Articles remain online unless removed by the author and are also accessible through search engines such as Google.

In the context of public relations, so-called PR articles also appear on social networks. These represent a form of advertising in which a medium provides space for a company to publish an article that is integrated into editorial content [3]. Sources

of textual content may include in-house production, outsourcing (the use of external entities specialized in content production), press releases from other companies or institutions, or the lawful use of content from other entities in accordance with copyright law.

Stories represent short videos or photographs with a duration of up to 30 seconds that depict events from everyday life. Posts can be prepared in advance or recorded in real time. The content may be supplemented with music, text, stickers, or other visual effects. Stories are typically displayed for 24 hours, after which they are automatically deleted, although some platforms allow them to be saved on the user's profile until removed by the author. Images are an important visual element of social networks. Kuchta identifies the most common forms as follows [11]:

- Banners – static images or animated GIFs that display a series of visual elements.
- Posts – visual content often accompanied by text that increases user engagement.
- Cover images – eye-catching images used in articles to enhance visual impact and attract audience attention.

Sources of images include original photographs, graphics, or outsourcing. The effectiveness of visual content is evaluated based on the number of views, comments, and user interactions. Video is very popular among users, although its production is more demanding and requires specific skills. It combines image and sound and enables information to be communicated effectively and engagingly within a short time. Social networks tend to prefer native videos over content from external sources.

A special form includes so-called reels, which may have a duration of 15, 30, or 60 seconds. Videos can be prepared in advance or created directly within the application in real time, with the option to add music, text, and other elements. Live videos allow users to respond immediately through comments or sharing and are used, for example, for webinars, interviews, press conferences, lectures, or training sessions.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to examining the issue of the impact of social media on brand perception is based on a combination of qualitative content analysis, comparative analysis of digital platforms, and secondary quantitative analysis of available statistical data. The selected methodological design reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the examined topic, which lies at the intersection of marketing communication, digital media, and brand management.

The aim of the methodological procedure is to systematically identify and analyze current trends in marketing communication on social media, dominant content and advertising formats, strategic approaches to organic and paid reach, and their potential impact on shaping brand perception in the digital environment. The methodology builds on the theoretical foundations of the article, which emphasize the importance of social media as complex ecosystems influencing brand awareness, customer experience, and consumers' purchasing behavior.

The paper is conceived as a theoretical-analytical study, the aim of which is not to test hypotheses through primary data collection, but to synthesize and interpret existing findings from relevant academic literature, empirical research, and analytical reports. This approach makes it possible to capture broader developmental trends and identify recurring patterns in the field of digital marketing and branding. The methodological procedure includes several interrelated steps:

- Systematic collection and critical selection of relevant scholarly sources, including monographs, scientific articles indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, conference papers, and analytical reports,
- Secondary analysis of quantitative data related to social media usage, marketing investments, and consumer behavior in the digital environment.
- Qualitative content analysis of marketing communication on social media aimed at identifying dominant trends, formats, and strategic approaches.
- Comparative analysis of selected social platforms in terms of their marketing potential and specific characteristics.

The qualitative content analysis focused on identifying dominant trends in marketing communication, classifying the most frequently used content formats (video content, stories, reels, podcasts), analyzing the use of technological innovations (generative artificial intelligence, social commerce, voice search), and comparing approaches to organic and paid reach. The analysis was based on a conceptual framework of brand perception that emphasizes the role of repeated interactions, content personalization, and the relevance of marketing communication.

The comparative analysis was applied to selected social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube) in order to compare their marketing opportunities, audience characteristics, dominant content formats, and content distribution mechanisms. The comparison made it possible to identify differences in the strategic use of individual platforms in the context

of brand building and customer engagement. The secondary quantitative analysis provided an empirical background for interpreting trends, particularly in the areas of growth in the social media user base, consumer behavior, and investments in digital advertising. These data were used to support the analytical conclusions and to place the qualitative findings within the broader context of digital marketing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the marketing possibilities of individual social media platforms confirms that each platform has its own specific advertising interface and tools for creating paid campaigns. An exception is represented by integrated advertising ecosystems such as Meta, which encompasses the Facebook and Instagram platforms and enables ad management through a unified advertising interface [11]. This model simplifies campaign planning and supports more efficient allocation of marketing budgets across multiple channels.

The results of the comparative analysis show that individual platforms differ primarily in the nature of their user bases and their suitability for various marketing objectives. Facebook enables detailed demographic and behavioral targeting, making it suitable for a wide range of campaigns focused on both brand awareness and sales support. Instagram, as a visually oriented platform, supports emotionally driven communication and is particularly effective in the presentation of products and lifestyle brands. LinkedIn positions itself as the dominant platform for B2B marketing and professional communication, while TikTok, based on short-form video content, primarily reaches younger generations and enables the rapid dissemination of creative and authentic content.

The findings also confirm the growing importance of interactive content formats such as polls, quizzes, surveys, and personalized shopping recommendations. These formats not only increase user engagement but also provide brands with valuable data on customers' preferences, attitudes, and purchasing behavior. In line with the scholarly literature, it can be concluded that interactivity and user engagement represent key factors influencing brand perception and customer experience in the digital environment [16].

Investments in digital marketing tools such as content creation, email marketing, and active communication on social networks are identified in the analyzed sources as a significant source of competitive advantage. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on brands' ability to strategically combine individual approaches and flexibly respond to technological innovations and changing consumer expectations. Digital channels thus provide brands with opportunities for faster growth and the building of customer loyalty, but

only under the condition of proper targeting and integration of marketing strategies.

These findings correspond with the theoretical foundations presented in the preceding sections of the article, according to which brand perception is the result of long-term and repeated consumer interactions with a brand across various digital touchpoints. In this context, social media do not merely represent a communication channel, but a comprehensive tool for shaping brand identity, value, and trust. Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Targeted platform selection: Brands should focus their marketing activities on social networks that best correspond to their business model and the characteristics of their target audience, rather than inefficiently dispersing resources.
- Multimodal and personalized content: The combination of text, images, and video content, together with communication personalization based on demographic and behavioral data, increases engagement levels and supports customer loyalty.
- Combination of organic and paid reach: An effective brand-building strategy requires a balanced integration of organic activities focused on community building with paid campaigns that enable precise targeting and optimization of return on investment.
- Integration of social commerce and modern trends: Linking e-shops with social networks and utilizing video-first content, podcasts, and artificial intelligence shortens customers' decision-making cycles and increases the brand's conversion potential.
- Authenticity and sustainability: Emphasizing authentic content, transparent communication, and respect for environmental and ethical principles contributes to positive brand perception and long-term consumer trust.

CONCLUSION

Social media currently represent a significant tool of marketing communication through which brands can systematically build awareness, strengthen relationships with customers, and support their loyalty. The results of the theoretical and analytical parts of the article confirm that effective use of social media does not require a brand's presence on all available platforms, but rather a strategic selection of those channels that best correspond to the nature of the business and the profile of the target audience.

The dynamic development of the digital environment and the growing competition for users' attention place increasing emphasis on the quality, relevance, and diversity of content. Key factors of successful communication include authenticity, personalization, a consistent brand identity, and the use of visually oriented formats, particularly video content, infographics, and live streams. These formats not only increase user engagement but also foster an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer. The conclusions of the article also point out that social media cannot be perceived as the sole determinant of a brand's success in the market. Their effectiveness is conditioned by the broader context of the marketing mix, particularly product quality, functional value, and the overall customer experience. In this sense, social media function as a supporting mechanism that either strengthens or weakens brand perception depending on the consistency between the values communicated and the company's actual offering.

In the contemporary digital environment, the environmental and ethical dimensions of business are also gaining particular importance. The implementation of principles of sustainability, the circular economy, and the reduction of environmental impacts can significantly contribute to a positive perception of a brand, especially among value-oriented consumers. Transparent communication of these activities through social media thus represents not only a marketing tool but also a means of long-term trust and reputation building for the brand. In conclusion, it can be stated that social media play a key role in the process of shaping brand perception in the digital environment; however, their contribution is greatest when they are part of a well-considered, integrated, and value-consistent marketing strategy.

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