

E-commerce and organic products, consumer behavior, sustainability, and digital marketing strategies

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Comercio electrónico y productos orgánicos, el comportamiento del consumidor, la sostenibilidad y las estrategias de marketing digital

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the current commercial landscape in Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, is being redefined by e-commerce, which has positioned itself as a key strategic factor. **Objective:** to characterize the viability of e-commerce for the marketing of organic products.

Method: a review of the available literature was conducted in databases such as SciELO, Scopus, and ClinicalKey, from which a total of 14 related articles were consulted. Empirical methods such as logical history and analysis and synthesis were used.

Results: the consumption of organic products in Ecuador shows a positive trend, driven primarily by the perception of health benefits and higher nutritional content. Despite this, low overall consumption persists, with the main barriers being high price and limited physical availability. E-commerce is positioned as the most strategic channel to overcome these limitations, given the exponential growth of online sales in the country. The success of an online organic store lies in the implementation of digital marketing strategies that emphasize transparency, traceability, product quality, and sustainability.

Conclusions: the digitalization of commerce offers a significant opportunity to expand the organic products market in Ecuador, transforming the challenges of distribution and access. To capitalize on this potential, online retail offerings must adopt a rigorous, customer-centric methodological approach grounded in comprehensive sustainability, using digital marketing as a key tool for consumer education and trust building.

Keywords: E-commerce; Organic Products; Digital Marketing; Sustainability; Consumer Behavior.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el panorama comercial actual en América Latina, y particularmente en Ecuador, está redefinido por el comercio electrónico, que se ha posicionado como un factor estratégico clave.

Objetivo: caracterizar la viabilidad del comercio electrónico para la comercialización de productos orgánicos.

Método: se realizó una revisión de la bibliografía disponible en bases de datos como SciELO, Scopus y ClinicalKey de las cuales se consultaron un total de 14 artículos relacionados, se utilizaron métodos empíricos como el histórico lógico y de análisis y síntesis.

Resultados: el consumo de productos orgánicos en Ecuador muestra una tendencia positiva, impulsada principalmente por la percepción de beneficios para la salud y el mayor contenido nutricional. A pesar de esto, el bajo consumo general persiste, siendo la principal barrera el precio elevado y la limitada disponibilidad física. El comercio electrónico se posiciona como el canal más estratégico para superar estas limitaciones, dado el crecimiento exponencial de las ventas en línea en el país. El éxito de una tienda online de orgánicos radica en la implementación de estrategias de marketing digital que enfaticen la transparencia, la trazabilidad, la calidad del producto y la sostenibilidad.

Conclusiones: la digitalización del comercio ofrece una oportunidad significativa para expandir el mercado de productos orgánicos en Ecuador, transformando el desafío de la distribución y el acceso. Para capitalizar este potencial, las propuestas de tiendas en línea deben adoptar un enfoque metodológico riguroso, centrado en el cliente y fundamentado en la sostenibilidad integral, utilizando el marketing digital como herramienta clave para la educación y la construcción de confianza con el consumidor.

Palabras clave: Comercio electrónico; Productos Orgánicos; Marketing Digital; Sostenibilidad; Comportamiento Del Consumidor.

INTRODUCTION

The historical background of organic product consumption began in the 1940s, when the first movements around agriculture and responsible consumption began. In the following decades, with the industrialization of agriculture and the use of agrochemicals, interest in organic products continued to grow, especially in Europe and North America. In the 1990s, organic product certification was formalized, increasing consumer confidence in the quality of these products. With the advent of the Internet and e-commerce in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the marketing of organic products through digital platforms became popular, providing consumers with a convenient way to purchase healthy foods.⁽¹⁾

Public health and environmental sustainability have become central pillars of the global agenda, profoundly transforming the consumption habits of modern society. In this context, the demand for organic products has experienced steady growth worldwide, driven by growing awareness of the harmful effects of pesticides and synthetic chemicals in food. Organic foods are characterized by responsible production, contributing to environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources.⁽²⁾

Despite recognition of its intrinsic benefits, the penetration of organic products in the markets of many countries, including Ecuador, remains limited. The main challenge lies in low consumption, a phenomenon that can be explained by a lack of information about the real nutritional value of these foods and by the mistaken or real perception of a higher cost compared to conventional products. To reverse this situation, it is essential not only to educate the population about the specific benefits for health and well-being, but also to improve availability and access through efficient sales channels.⁽³⁾

In Colombia, e-commerce has experienced significant growth thanks to technological advances and rapid communications. This has provided more job opportunities for both small and large entrepreneurs, as well as greater competitiveness in the market. However, there is also interest in positioning products through virtual stores.

The current commercial landscape in Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, is being redefined by e-commerce, which has positioned itself as a key strategic factor. Active use of the internet globally reaches 62,5 % of the population, a figure that rises to 75 % in the Latin American region. In Ecuador, sales through digital platforms have shown exponential growth, estimated to reach \$5 billion in 2023, representing a 25 % increase over the previous year. This reality underscores the potential of e-commerce as a powerful tool for promoting and marketing organic products.⁽⁴⁾

The consumption of organic foods is on the rise in many countries, such as Switzerland and Denmark, and it is important for the general population to be aware of the health and sustainability benefits of these products. Likewise, e-commerce presents a key opportunity to promote and market these foods, both in Colombia and Ecuador. It is necessary to continue strengthening this trend and promoting the supply of organic foods through new sales channels, such as online stores. E-commerce has implemented state-of-the-art digital innovations, which have increased its use from mobile devices, facilitating online shopping and boosting e-commerce.⁽⁵⁾

The study of online stores and their importance in today's market is relevant due to the growing use of digital platforms

for purchasing organic and essential products. Previous research has determined that this increase in the use of online stores has allowed companies to continue growing, indicating that it is an expanding market with potential for development. In addition, the implementation of computer systems that adapt to the needs of companies and allow them to control the sale of organic products is crucial. These types of studies are essential for identifying the best strategies for managing operations in digital stores, focused on maximizing the quality of product delivery, ensuring both speed and security.⁽⁶⁾

The intersection of these two megatrends: the growing interest in organic food and the expansion of e-commerce. Although there is a marked inclination towards purchasing healthy products, the absence of specialized distribution channels and adequate communication strategies limits market expansion.

In view of the above, the objective of this article is to characterize the viability of e-commerce for the marketing of organic products.

METHOD

An integrative literature review was conducted, combining a synthesis of theoretical and regulatory literature. For the theoretical and regulatory basis, academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Dialnet were consulted. Priority was given to articles published in indexed journals, specialized books and h, and official documents from regulatory bodies. The synthesis was carried out in a narrative form, critically contrasting the findings of the case study with the theoretical-regulatory framework established in the literature, identifying consensuses, discrepancies, and gaps in application. The terms "e-commerce," "organic products," "digital marketing," "sustainability," and "consumer behavior" were used as keywords in the article. A total of 14 references addressing different characteristics related to the topic in question were selected.

RESULTS

Companies interested in entering e-commerce have at their disposal a variety of tools that must be combined in a joint marketing action. The purpose of digital marketing in e-commerce should begin at the planning stage of the virtual store. There are four basic areas of digital marketing tools for e-commerce: search marketing (SEM) refers to the use of sponsored link programs, such as Google AdWords and SEO processes; display marketing is the strategy that uses banner ads on blogs and portals through the network; relationship marketing is linking on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest; and content marketing is the creation of quality content for publication on a blog or website.⁽⁷⁾

The advantages of virtual businesses are the globalized market expansion that can be achieved and the speed with which business is conducted. The use of new technologies and innovation has created changes that have improved communication between customers and companies. When establishing a digital marketing project in a company, it is advisable to consider the following phases: strategic marketing, marketing mix, marketing plan, and control phase. Among the benefits of e-commerce are getting to know the consumer better, distinguishing our brand from the competition, identifying opportunities, and quickly detecting opportunities that allow us to grow and reach new markets, among others.⁽⁷⁾

Analysis and synthesis of scientific evidence confirm the

existence of a dynamic market niche for organic products, whose expansion is intrinsically linked to the adoption of e-commerce platforms and ethical, sustainability-focused digital marketing strategies.⁽⁸⁾ Studying organic food consumers is crucial to creating any successful digital sales platform. The purchasing decision in this segment is not purely economic, but is deeply influenced by psychological and social factors.⁽⁹⁾

The main motivation for consuming organic products is health. In surveys conducted with consumers in Ecuador, 38,80 % say they consume or would consume these products because they are healthy, followed by 25 % who do so because of their higher nutritional content and 18 % because they are free of chemicals and pesticides. This preference remains despite the fact that organic products tend to have a higher value than non-organic products.⁽³⁾

It is important to note that individuals make rational decisions based on maximizing their personal interests. In the context of the proposal, this theory can be applied to understand consumers' purchasing decisions and how they are influenced by the perceived benefits of organic products, as well as how consumers make purchasing decisions and how they are influenced by internal and external factors. In the context of the proposal, this theory can be used to analyze the factors that motivate consumers to buy organic products and how the online store can influence their purchasing behavior.⁽¹⁰⁾

The most significant barrier to mass consumption is price, which limits purchases to segments of the population with greater purchasing power or value awareness. Additionally, availability or access is a problem, as organic products are not always available in all supermarkets or traditional markets. In the specific case of nuts (walnuts, almonds, pistachios), consumer preference is directly linked to the search for healthier snacks with high nutritional value, where consumers weigh the monetary cost against the perceived long-term health benefits.⁽¹¹⁾

For organic consumers, trust is essential, and this trust is based on certifications. A review of studies on the organic nut trade in Ecuador, especially in provinces with export potential, reveals that, although there is experience in processing, access to international markets is restricted by a lack of knowledge about Fair Trade and the high costs associated with certification. An online store must communicate these certifications transparently, as the organic label is a sign of quality and a competitive differentiator that justifies the higher price to the consumer.⁽¹²⁾

The creation of an online store dedicated to organic products responds to the pressing need to facilitate access to a wider audience, overcoming the geographical and time constraints inherent in traditional channels.⁽⁴⁾ The Ecuadorian digital ecosystem has shown remarkable robustness in recent years, with 82,3 % of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) using the internet. This digital penetration, coupled with the rise of e-commerce, makes investing in online platforms a strategic decision with high potential for profitability. E-commerce facilitates buying and selling, as well as using the internet for pre- and post-sale activities such as customer service and supply chain management.⁽¹³⁾

E-commerce encompasses all commercial transactions carried out through telecommunications networks using electronic means. Thus, e-commerce includes not only the electronic purchase and sale of goods, information, or services, but also the use of the internet for pre- and post-sale activities. The digital economy has become one of the main drivers of

global growth. While many countries are in recession, the e-commerce sector continues to grow. Growth is particularly significant in start-ups that have launched a website, with social media facilitating sales.⁽⁶⁾

The online business model allows for market expansion that would be unfeasible for a traditional brick-and-mortar store. Digitization not only expands reach, but also facilitates informed consumer decision-making through detailed product descriptions, certifications, and visibility of sustainable practices. For organic products, where transparency is a fundamental value, a well-designed online platform can be an educational tool that informs about the benefits, the origin of the products, and the direct relationship with local suppliers.⁽¹⁰⁾

Likewise, strategic analysis and the design of a marketing and commercial plan are essential elements for the success of online stores. These studies help define the appropriate strategies for promoting and selling organic and essential products, taking into account market demands and preferences. The implementation of big data analysis techniques in e-commerce can help understand and predict consumer purchasing behavior, which is critical to the success of online stores.⁽⁵⁾

The success of an online organic store depends not only on the availability of the platform, but also on the implementation of effective and differentiated digital marketing strategies. These strategies should aim to build a strong brand (branding), differentiate based on quality and sustainability, and connect emotionally with consumers.⁽⁸⁾

Competition in the organic market is constantly growing, requiring clear and sustained differentiation. The branding strategy must go beyond social media presence, seeking to position the brand holistically. Product characteristics that customers value include reliability, durability, and, above all, the company's reputation and the quality of the ingredients. In the digital environment, this translates into the creation of a website with a clear and attractive design, and constant, segmented communication on social media. The original thesis proposes an approach focused on customer service and the provision of healthy and necessary information, which is vital for the food segment.

For organic consumers, sustainability and social responsibility are not just a marketing message, but a fundamental expectation that must be integrated into business operations. Online store strategies should include the use of eco-friendly packaging, waste reduction, and carbon footprint offsetting. These commitments must be communicated transparently and clearly on the platform and in all marketing campaigns, as today's consumers increasingly value companies with a genuine commitment to the environment.⁽¹⁴⁾

Digital marketing campaigns should be targeted, using data obtained from market research for proper segmentation of the target audience. This includes the use of predictive analytics to anticipate consumer needs and purchasing behaviors, allowing for the personalization of offers and maximizing advertising impact. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools should be integrated to effectively manage and analyze customer interactions, consolidating loyalty and optimizing the online shopping experience. Successful e-commerce is based on two-way communication, where the supplier and customer interact through web resources, formalizing an effective buying and selling process.⁽¹³⁾

The creation of an online store for the sale of organic products

in Ecuador is part of a context of market expansion and alignment with global trends in healthy and sustainable consumption. E-commerce is the most powerful tool for overcoming traditional barriers of high price and low availability, facilitating access to a wider and more conscious audience. The success of an e-commerce initiative in this sector is methodologically dependent on a rigorous analysis of consumer behavior.⁽⁴⁾ The creation of an online store dedicated to organic products responds to the need to facilitate access to these products for a wider audience, overcoming the geographical and time constraints of traditional sales. In addition, the digitization of the purchasing process not only expands the potential market, but also allows consumers to make informed decisions through detailed product descriptions, certifications of origin, and sustainable practices.

The synthesized evidence shows that, although price is a barrier, health motivation and nutritional value overcome this obstacle for a growing portion of the market. Therefore, the goal of any online store should be to maximize perceived value through transparent communication of certifications, origin, and sustainable practices, such as the use of eco-friendly packaging.⁽⁴⁾

CONCLUSIONS

The digitization of commerce offers a significant opportunity to expand the market for organic products in Ecuador, transforming the challenge of distribution and access. To capitalize on this potential, online store proposals must adopt a rigorous, customer-centric, and comprehensive sustainability-based methodological approach, using digital marketing as a key tool for education and building consumer trust.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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