

Influence of social media on digital marketing

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Influencia de las redes sociales en el marketing digital

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media has become a central phenomenon in everyday life and in the economic sphere in recent years. Globally, connection time has increased by nearly 60 % in seven years, with Latin America being the most active region, reaching an average of 212 minutes per day. Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 led this consumption, with record figures in Argentina exceeding 250 minutes per day. In this context, Instagram has positioned itself as one of the most influential platforms. Created in 2010 and acquired by Facebook Inc. in 2012, the social network has reached billions of monthly active users. In addition to its communicative function, it has facilitated the construction of digital identities and virtual communities, generating a key space within the so-called ‘attention economy.’ Influencers emerged as decisive actors in this digital ecosystem. Defined as opinion leaders capable of establishing close ties with their audiences, they managed to influence consumer behaviour and user decision-making. Studies showed that a high percentage of consumers trusted their recommendations, especially Latin American millennials. Influencer marketing evolved from a complementary strategy to a central focus of digital campaigns. Its ability to segment audiences, reduce costs and offer clear metrics led to investment in digital advertising surpassing traditional advertising for the first time in 2020. Thus, social media ceased to be mere communication channels and became economic and cultural ecosystems where influencers played a strategic role.

Keywords: Social Media; Instagram; Influencers; Digital Marketing; Advertising.

RESUMEN

El uso de las redes sociales se consolidó en los últimos años como un fenómeno central en la vida cotidiana y en el ámbito económico. A nivel global, el tiempo de conexión aumentó cerca del 60 % en siete años, siendo América Latina la región con mayor actividad, alcanzando un promedio de 212 minutos diarios. Los jóvenes de entre 16 y 24 años lideraron este consumo, con cifras récord en Argentina que superaron los 250 minutos diarios. En este contexto, Instagram se posicionó como una de las plataformas más influyentes. Creada en 2010 y adquirida por Facebook Inc. en 2012, la red social alcanzó miles de millones de usuarios activos mensuales. Además de su función comunicativa, facilitó la construcción de identidades digitales y comunidades virtuales, generando un espacio clave dentro de la denominada “economía de la atención”. Los influencers surgieron como actores decisivos en este ecosistema digital. Definidos como líderes de opinión capaces de establecer vínculos cercanos con sus audiencias, lograron influir en comportamientos de consumo y en la toma de decisiones de los usuarios. Estudios mostraron que un alto porcentaje de consumidores confió en sus recomendaciones, especialmente los millennials latinoamericanos. El marketing de influencia evolucionó de estrategia complementaria a eje central de las campañas digitales. Su capacidad de segmentar audiencias, reducir costos y ofrecer métricas claras llevó a que la inversión en publicidad digital superara, por primera vez en 2020, a la tradicional. Así, las redes sociales dejaron de ser meros canales de comunicación para convertirse en ecosistemas económicos y culturales donde los influencers desempeñaron un rol estratégico.

Palabras clave: Redes Sociales; Instagram; Influencers; Marketing Digital; Publicidad.

INTRODUCTION

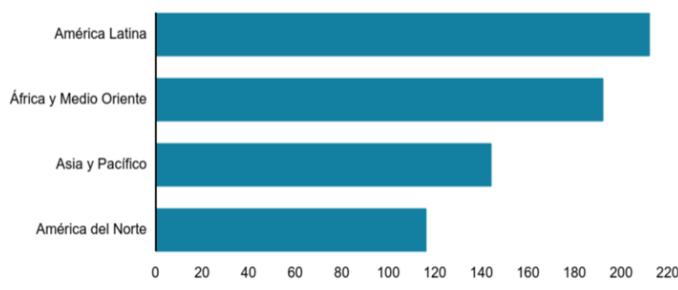
The exponential growth of social media users in recent years has resulted in various content creators building massive communities and achieving enormous reach through their digital channels.

Globally, the time spent on social media has increased by an average of almost 60 % in the last seven years.

Consumers in Latin America are more connected than in other countries around the world and spend an average of 212 minutes per day on social media, according to a study by GlobalWebIndex.

Uso de redes sociales

Tiempo de pantalla diario en minutos



Fuente: GlobalWebIndex, 2019

BBC

Figure 1. Illustration of social media use by continent

Source: Fernando Duarte.⁽¹⁾ Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-49634612>

The increase in time spent on social media seems to be driven by its use by a specific demographic group: people aged 16 to 24, with young Argentines aged 16 to 24 having the highest average usage in the world at 257 minutes per day.

Instagram, the social network created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and now owned by Facebook Inc, is one of the fastest growing in recent years.

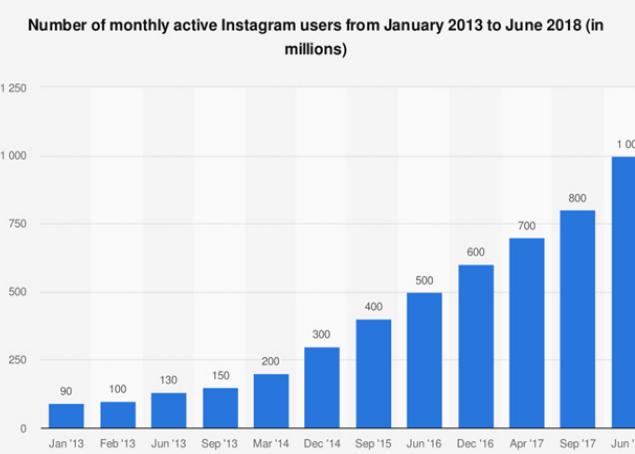


Figure 2. Illustration of the number of Instagram users

Source: Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/>

Users consume dozens of pieces of content daily on Instagram, leading them to make decisions and carry out both digital and physical transactions.

All of these behaviors are strongly influenced by opinion leaders (influencers). They are capable of impacting hundreds of thousands of people, directing traffic from one platform to another, and altering consumption patterns.

Influencers are a powerful tool for major brands worldwide and are essential in million-dollar marketing campaigns. Digital media is becoming increasingly profitable for investing in advertising. Its CPM (cost per thousand impressions) is lower than that of any traditional media, and results can be measured and analyzed more clearly. That said, in recent years, there has been a decline in advertising investment in traditional media such as radio, TV, and outdoor advertising, as many companies are allocating increasingly larger budgets to digital advertising.



Figure 3. Illustration of advertising investment in different media

Source: Retrieved from: <https://www.extradigital.es/la-inversion-en-publicidad-digital-supera-a-la-tradicional-por-primeravez-en-2020-nac/#:~:text=Seg%C3%BAn%20se%20recoge%20en%20el,ca%C3%ADda%20del%2017%2C2%25>

DEVELOPMENT

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of millions of people worldwide. As Ros⁽²⁾ points out, it constitutes a true “communication revolution” in that it has changed not only the forms of personal interaction but also the way content is

consumed, produced, and distributed. In this sense, they are not just technological platforms, but sociocultural environments in which identities, meanings, and social practices are negotiated.

The intensive use of social media has shown exponential growth in recent years. According to GlobalWebIndex, the

average global connection time grew by almost 60 % in seven years, placing Latin America as one of the most active regions, with an average of 212 minutes per day. Duarte⁽¹⁾ reinforces this idea by showing that Latin American youth between the ages of 16 and 24 lead global digital consumption, reaching peaks of up to 257 minutes per day.

Within the digital ecosystem, Instagram has established itself as one of the most influential social media networks. Created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and acquired by Facebook Inc. in 2012, it has experienced sustained growth, reaching billions of monthly active users. The platform is part of what is known as the “attention economy,” where the ability to capture and retain the user’s gaze translates into symbolic and economic capital.

Casaló et al.⁽³⁾ emphasize that Instagram not only fulfills a communicative function but also fosters processes of personal image building, digital identity, and belonging to virtual communities. Shared content, especially that generated by opinion leaders, has the potential to influence attitudes, preferences, and consumer behavior.

The influencer figure emerges as a key player in shaping trends and influencing user decision-making. According to Coobis⁽⁴⁾, influencer marketing has evolved exponentially, shifting from a complementary strategy to a central axis of digital campaigns. Influencers differ from traditional celebrities in that they build a more direct and “authentic” bond with their followers, which reinforces the credibility of their messages.

Casaló et al.⁽³⁾ conceptualize the influencer as a “digital opinion leader” capable of generating trust and directing the attention of mass audiences toward products, services, or ideas. This opinion leadership, transferred to the digital environment, is based on the perception of closeness and constant interaction with their communities. Consequently, influence does not come solely from fame, but from the ability to establish an emotional and conversational bond with followers.

In studies applied to the Latin American region, Palacios Molina et al.⁽⁵⁾ highlight that influencers are a decisive factor in the purchasing motivations of Ecuadorian millennials, who tend to consider digital recommendations as a reliable source of information when purchasing products. This evidence aligns with the findings of the Influencer Marketing Hub⁽⁶⁾, which reveal that 49 % of consumers trust influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions.

Influencer marketing is now one of the most profitable sectors in digital advertising. Its appeal lies in its ability to segment audiences, reduce costs compared to traditional media, and measure results in real time. Leticia Iserte shows that, for the first time in 2020, investment in digital advertising exceeded investment in traditional media, confirming a structural change in the industry.

A prime example of the economic power of influencers is the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, who, according to Infobae⁽⁷⁾, earns millions from Instagram posts, even exceeding the salary he receives from his sports club. This case demonstrates that social media serves not only as a communication channel but also as a direct monetization platform for public figures and content creators.

The rise of influencer marketing requires companies to define clear strategic objectives aligned with quantifiable metrics. Pursell⁽⁸⁾ recommends applying SMART goals (specific,

measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) to ensure the effectiveness of digital campaigns. This approach not only allows for the evaluation of return on investment but also enables the adjustment of actions according to consumer response.

Data systematization, digital analytics, and audience segmentation consolidate influencer marketing as a highly professionalized discipline, capable of generating significant returns compared to conventional media.

Social media, particularly Instagram, has become a central platform for identity building, social interaction, and the creation of new economic dynamics. Influencers serve as cultural and commercial mediators, establishing relationships of trust with their audiences that lend legitimacy to their messages. This process has driven the transformation of marketing, progressively displacing traditional media and positioning digital advertising as the dominant strategy in the contemporary ecosystem.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media, and Instagram in particular, have established themselves as a decisive space in everyday life as well as in the economic and communicative spheres. The increase in usage time, especially among young Latin Americans, reflects how these platforms have transformed social and consumer dynamics, placing themselves at the center of the so-called “attention economy.” In this context, influencers emerge as key players capable of shaping perceptions, directing trends, and generating trust in mass audiences, becoming strategic pieces within digital marketing.

The shift from traditional to digital advertising not only reflects a change in media consumption habits but also a profound restructuring in the way brands interact with their audiences. The ability to segment, measure results, and establish closer and more authentic links makes influencer marketing a highly profitable and professionalized tool. Consequently, it can be said that social media has evolved from a mere communication channel to a true sociocultural and economic ecosystem, where influencers play an indispensable mediating role in the creation of new forms of interaction, identity, and consumption.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

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Software: Juan Cruz Arocena, Javier Romero.

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Validation: Juan Cruz Arocena, Javier Romero.

Visualization: Juan Cruz Arocena, Javier Romero.

Writing – original draft: Juan Cruz Arocena, Javier Romero.

Writing – review and editing: Juan Cruz Arocena, Javier Romero.

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