



THE USE OF SOCIAL PLATFORMS FOR BUILDING LONG-TERM CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE B2C SEGMENT

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Abstract:

This article analyses the importance of social platforms in creating long-term customer relationships in the B2C industry. The shift in the role of social media platforms from a source for sharing marketing communication to a full-scale digital engagement platform that enables the development of behavioral, emotional, and value-based relationships between the brand and the consumer is analyzed. The influence of content strategies, communication personalization, and content formats on the level of audience engagement and the sustainability of customer relationships is analyzed. Great emphasis is placed on engagement as a measure of the quality of interactions and the role of engagement in relation to trust-building. The topic of models of customer loyalty on the digital frontier and their expression on social platforms is explored, and the shortcomings of quantitative methods of measuring engagement are outlined.

JEL: M31, M37

Keywords: social platforms, business-to-consumer, long-term customer relationships, audience engagement, customer loyalty

1. Introduction

In the context of the digitalization of consumer markets, social platforms (SP) are becoming one of the main channels of interaction between companies and audiences in the business-to-consumer (B2C) segment. Their functional capabilities go beyond information dissemination and advertising impact, forming an environment for continuous dialogue, feedback, and the joint creation of value between the brand and the consumer. In this regard, they are viewed as an infrastructural element of long-term customer relationships rather than as an auxiliary tool of marketing communications.

The relevance of this study is determined by changes in consumer behavior models, in which purchase decisions are increasingly shaped by emotional brand

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perception, the level of trust, and the degree of engagement in the digital environment. Under conditions of high competition and saturated B2C markets, traditional demand-stimulation mechanisms are losing effectiveness, giving way to strategies focused on customer retention and the formation of stable behavioral patterns.

Content acquires particular importance in the context of building long-term relationships as the primary carrier of brand-audience communication. Its regularity, personalization and relevance determine not only the level of user engagement, but also the depth of emotional connection, which directly affects the formation of loyalty.

Despite the widespread practical use of SP in B2C strategies, theoretical approaches to analyzing their role in forming long-term customer relationships remain fragmented. A significant part of the existing research focuses on short-term performance indicators, while the mechanisms of sustainable loyalty and their transformation in the context of social networks require systematic scientific research. The purpose of this study is to study the specifics of using SP to build long-term relationships with customers in the B2C segment.

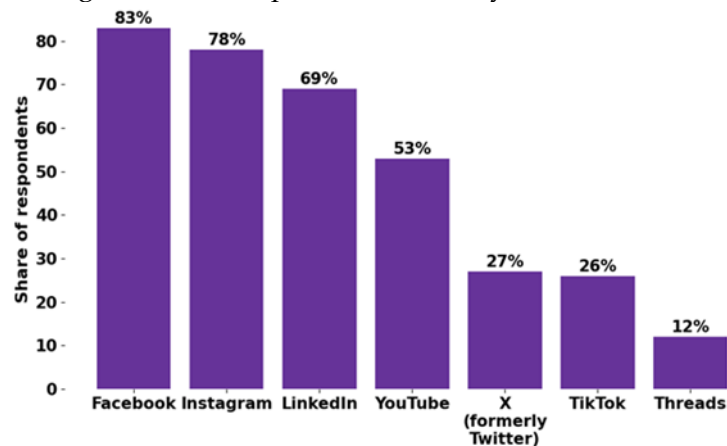
2. Main part

2.1. Social platforms as a tool for building long-term customer relationships

In the context of the digital transformation of consumer markets, SP have evolved from a supplementary communication channel into an independent strategic tool of B2C marketing. Their integration is driven not only by the growth in the number of users but also by qualitative changes in the logic of information consumption. According to data presented in the Digital 2025 report by DataReportal, the number of people using social networks to search for information about brands continues to grow rapidly. In the fourth quarter of 2022, this indicator amounted to 47,7 %, and by 2024 it had reached 50 % and, according to forecasts, will continue to increase [3].

The role of SP in marketing is associated with the ability to build continuous and adaptive interaction with consumers in the digital environment. Their significance as interaction channels is also confirmed by industry survey data. Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn were the most actively used platforms for marketing communications in January 2025, according to a Statista study, indicating a concentration of B2C interactions on platforms with high audience engagement potential (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Leading social media platforms used by marketers worldwide, 2025 [8]



This approach allows brands to more accurately align the content of communication with the current expectations and behavior of the audience. This interaction logic is fundamentally different from traditional marketing channels (Table 1).

Table 1: Features of communication in social networks and traditional channels in the B2C segment [1, 2]

Comparison criteria	SP	Traditional communication channels
The nature of the interaction	Two-way, interactive, involving dialogue and audience participation.	One-way, message-oriented.
Feedback rate	High, close to real time.	Low or delayed.
The level of personalization	High, provided by algorithmic segmentation and analysis of user behavior.	Limited, based primarily on demographic characteristics.
The role of the consumer	An active participant in communication, a co-author of content and a bearer of reputational influence.	Passive recipient of information.
Control over communication	Partially distributed between the brand and the audience.	Fully controlled by the brand.
Measurability of effectiveness	Multilevel, includes behavioral and emotional engagement metrics.	Mostly quantitative (coverage, frequency).
Impact on loyalty	Forms stable behavioral and emotional bonds.	It has a limited impact on long-term loyalty.
Reputational risks	High, due to the publicity and speed of information dissemination.	Relatively low.

The comparison of communication approaches makes it possible to conclude that SP form a qualitatively different environment for interaction with consumers, in which the sustainability of customer relationships is determined not by one-time contacts but by the consistency and continuity of communication. The long-term effect is achieved through the accumulation of interaction experience, whereby each subsequent brand message is perceived in the context of previous ones, reinforcing the overall perception of the value of the relationship.

2.2. Content strategies in building sustainable customer relationships

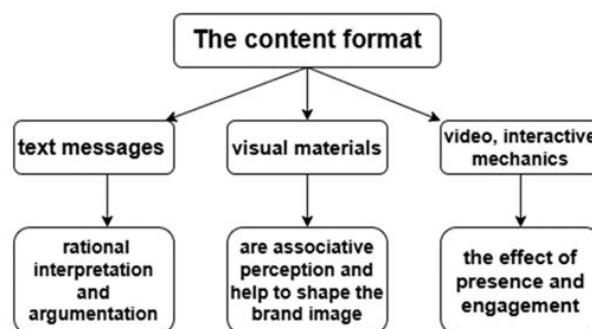
Within SP, content work is viewed not as a set of individual posts but as a managed mechanism for shaping a sustainable consumer experience. This means the deliberate communication structuring for the purpose of securing the long-term presence of the brand within the digital context of the user, as well as the reinforcement of the relationship.

The consistency of content is among the factors needed for sustaining engagement and it defines interaction rhythm in relation to preventing interruptions of communication. With irregular publications, the brand is perceived as an occasional source of information, and the audience quickly switches to alternative incentives in conditions of high competition for attention. On the contrary, stable frequency contributes to the formation of expectations and habitual consumption of content, increasing the likelihood of repeat responses and contributing to audience retention in the long term. At the same time, scientifically based regularity does not imply an increase in the volume of messages, but rather the maintenance of a predictable presence and semantic coherence of communications.

A further increase in the stability of relationships is achieved by **personalizing messages and adapting content to user behavioral patterns**. In a digital environment, consumers exhibit noticeable behaviors, including topic selection, frequency of interaction, format preferences, and time and context of device use. These signals can be used to refine communication scenarios. Personalization in this case implies a transition from standardized messages to those corresponding to specific interests and stages of interaction with the brand, which reduces the perception of mass communication and increases perceived relevance.

Special attention should be paid to the impact of content formats on the emotional perception of a brand, as this factor largely determines the transition from engagement to loyalty. It defines a way to encode meaning (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The impact of content formats on the emotional perception of the brand



Since SP operate in conditions of fierce competition for attention, the format becomes not only a shell, but also a factor determining whether the message will be noticed, correctly interpreted and emotionally «perceived» by the audience. It follows

from this that his choice should be determined not by the preferences of the brand, but by the goals of a particular communication stage.

An illustration of the principles discussed is provided by the **case of the aesthetic medicine clinic Mediva, implemented by the creative marketing agency Shadow**. Within this project, SP were used not as a channel for isolated promotional posts but as a structured mechanism for maintaining the brand’s continuous presence in the user’s digital environment. The combination of a regular posting rhythm, message personalization, and careful format selection contributed to higher engagement and inquiries, resulting in increased client inflow and a positive return on the campaign.

Together, regularity, personalization, and format adaptation form a holistic content strategy focused on sustainable relationships rather than one-off reactions. This approach creates conditions under which communication on SP becomes not just an informational impact, but also a tool for the systematic formation of long-term interaction with customers in the B2C segment.

2.3. Audience engagement as an indicator of the quality of customer relationships

The observable outcome of consumer–brand interaction and, at the same time, an indicator of the quality of emerging relationships in the B2C segment is **audience engagement on SP**. It reflects the degree of active user participation and their willingness to invest attention, time, and social capital in interacting with content. In both practical and research contexts, this indicator is of particular importance, as under conditions of digital competition it signals relevance, perceived value, and the potential sustainability of the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Engagement metrics in social media form a multi-level measurement system, in which individual user actions differ in significance and semantic weight (Table 2).

Table 2: Levels of user engagement in digital communications [5, 7]

The level of engagement	Typical user actions	The nature of the participation	Interpretation of the signal
Low (reactive)	Like marks, quick reactions.	Minimal cognitive costs, spontaneous interaction.	Initial approval of the content, recognition of the message.
Medium (conscious)	Comments, saves.	Conscious cognitive processing, interest in content.	The intention to return to the content, engagement at the level of meaning.
High (proactive)	Reposts, creating user-generated content in response to a brand.	Active participation with social and reputational involvement.	Transferring the message to your own social environment, high level of trust and identification.

The interpretation of engagement metrics requires consideration of context. The same indicator may carry different meanings depending on the platform, publication format, industry, and the stage of customer interaction with the brand.

The transition from assessing engagement to evaluating the quality of relationships becomes possible when examining its connection with **trust** formation. It arises as a result of accumulated interaction experience, including the predictability of brand behavior, transparency of communication, and perceived compliance with audience expectations. Regular engagement, especially in forms requiring higher levels of participation, reflects not only interest but also a reduction in psychological distance between the consumer and the brand.

At the same time, using engagement as an indicator of the quality of customer relationships requires caution, since quantitative indicators do not always adequately reflect the depth of connection with the audience. The high level may be due to situational factors, including viral effects, provocative content, or external news events unrelated to the actual strengthening of brand relationships. In addition, some users demonstrate so-called «passive engagement», in which content is regularly consumed without visible reaction, which leads to an underestimation of the quality of interaction when using exclusively publicly available indicators. Finally, the algorithmic nature of SP and differences in content ranking mechanisms pose the risk of confusing the impact of communication quality with the technological effects of distribution. Thus, engagement should be considered as an important but not exhaustive indicator of the quality of customer relationships, requiring contextual interpretation and complementation with qualitative and dynamic indicators.

2.4. Models of customer loyalty in the digital environment

The evolution of the **loyalty** concept under SP conditions is manifested in a shift in emphasis from outcomes to processes. Loyalty begins to be viewed as a dynamic state that changes under the influence of regular micro-interactions. What becomes important is not so much its «presence» as a fixed attribute, but rather the trajectory of its formation, which includes stages of engagement, trust building, and sustained preference. At the same time, SP amplify the effect of publicity. Consumers evaluate brands not only based on their own experience but also by observing the experiences of other users, which accelerates both trust reinforcement and its erosion in the event of reputational failures.

Within the digital environment, it is appropriate to distinguish behavioral, emotional, and value-based models of loyalty as complementary levels. Their simultaneous development ensures the sustainability of customer relationships, as it combines the reproducibility of actions, emotional attachment, and the alignment of consumers' value orientations with brand positioning (Table 3).

Thus, these models are characterized by a multi-level structure and dynamic nature. In turn, SP serve as an environment in which these levels can develop in parallel and mutually reinforce each other, influencing both the duration of the customer life cycle and the sustainability of a company's competitive position in the B2C segment.

Table 3: Models of customer loyalty in the B2C digital environment [2, 9]

The loyalty model	Specifications	The main manifestations in social media	The role in forming long-term relationships
Behavioral	It is based on the repeatability of actions and habitual patterns of interaction.	Regular reactions to content, repeated requests, participation in promotions.	Ensures stable interaction and reduces the likelihood of outflow.
Emotional	It is associated with trust, affection and a positive perception of the brand.	Subjective comments, brand support, participation in discussions.	It forms the psychological stability of relationships and reduces sensitivity to alternatives.
Value-based	It is determined by the coincidence of brand and consumer values.	Support of brand initiatives, protection of its position, organic content distribution.	Creates long-term preference and enhances reputational capital.

The implementation of the described customer loyalty models can be observed in the practices of companies that use social networks as a tool for long-term interaction with consumers. For example, the experience of **Starbucks** demonstrates the application of a strategy focused primarily on the emotional and value-based levels of loyalty. Brand communications on SP are built around everyday consumer scenarios, user-generated content, and lifestyle-related narratives, which contributes to the formation of stable emotional attachment and audience identification with the brand. As a result, they are not used as short-term promotion channels, but as tools for maintaining constant interaction and embedding the brand in the consumer's daily digital environment [6].

Another example is the experience of **Nike**, where behavioral and value-based loyalty are combined. Brand communications are focused on supporting user activity, engaging consumers in digital communities, and providing personalized guidance throughout different stages of the customer life cycle. Through content adaptation and the use of interactive formats, sustained engagement is formed, which is transformed into long-term brand preference and reduced sensitivity to competitive alternatives [4].

The examples presented confirm that in the context of a developed B2C market, SP function as an environment for the simultaneous formation of behavioral, emotional, and value-based components of loyalty. Their use makes it possible to shift customer relationships from isolated transactions to sustainable digital interaction.

3. Conclusion

In the context of the digital transformation of consumer markets, the use of SP is becoming increasingly significant within the system of interaction between companies and audiences in the B2C segment. The analysis showed that they function not only as communication channels, but also as an environment for forming long-term customer relationships based on a combination of regular interaction with content and user engagement. It has been identified that loyalty in the digital environment develops as a

dynamic process influenced by behavioral, emotional, and value-based factors, which necessitates a systematic and adaptive approach to communication management.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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