



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND PURCHASING DECISIONS

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Abstract. *The article is devoted to the study of the influence of social networks on consumer behavior and mechanisms of purchasing decisions in conditions of increased subjective risk. The purpose of the study is to analyze how social platforms transform consumer behavior in the field of professional services, in particular in the legal segment, where decisions are accompanied by high emotional load and information asymmetry. In the course of the scientific study, general scientific methods of cognition were used: analysis, synthesis, generalization, modeling, comparative method, systematization, empirical observation and case analysis. The results of the study show that social networks are no longer just a channel for informing or promoting services and are increasingly playing the role of a behavioral "buffer" – an environment in which the consumer gradually adapts to the complexity of the service and forms basic trust in the provider. It is concluded that for segments with a high level of subjective risk (in particular, immigration law), the key barrier is not a lack of information, but psychological unpreparedness to contact. It is shown that the systematic presence of an expert in social networks through explanatory, personalized and repetitive content reduces consumer anxiety, modifies his cognitive state and transfers the decision from the plane of service comparison to the plane of subjective confidence. It is studied that the effectiveness of communication in such a model is based not on classical advertising incentives, but on the formation of cumulative presence - long-term interaction with content, which prepares the consumer for contact with a specialist. The practical value is the possibility of using the proposed conceptual scheme for designing marketing communications in industries where purchasing decisions are made in the context of increased emotional stress and significant consequences of a wrong choice.*

Keywords: consumer behavior, social networks, trust, legal services, content marketing.

Introduction

Social networks have become one of the key environments for the formation of consumer attitudes. Today, they combine information, communication and commercial functions in a single digital space. As a result, consumers not only receive advertising messages, but also observe the experience of other users, interact with brands and opinion leaders, which directly affects the level of trust in the product and the intention to make a purchase. Studies [1; 2; 6] show that trust, perceived authenticity of content and the reputation of influencers significantly increase the likelihood of a positive purchase decision. At the same time, short video formats and visual content contribute to rapid emotional engagement and simplify the perception of information about the product, which also strengthens purchasing intentions [3; 4].



The process of making a purchase decision on social networks is multifactorial and includes cognitive, emotional and social mechanisms. Content marketing influences attention, memorization and assessment of the usefulness of the product, while social approval in the form of reviews, likes and comments forms a sense of reliability and reduces perceived risk [7; 9]. Issues of privacy and data security play a separate role, which can both stimulate and inhibit purchasing activity depending on the level of trust in the platform [8]. Thus, social networks influence not only the choice of a specific product, but also the general pattern of consumer behavior, including brand loyalty and repeat purchases [5; 10].

Literature Review

The impact of social media on consumer behavior is well-documented in international studies. In particular, Iffah NU [1] shows that influencers influence trust and digital purchasing decisions by reinforcing the value of personalized content. Kothari H. et al. [2] emphasize the role of credibility and authenticity of social messages as key determinants of trust and behavioral responses. Liu Y. and Wang M. [3] demonstrate that short video content shapes perceived value and increases purchase intentions through cognitive and emotional states. Similarly, Luo C. et al. [4] indicate the mediated role of trust in the transition from interest to behavioral response under the influence of video content.

Macías' work Urrego JA et al. [5] demonstrate the impact of social platforms on all stages of the consumer journey, where advice, reviews and experiences of other users become benchmarks of quality and reliability. Sachu B. et al. [6] within the framework of source credibility theory show that perceived competence influences purchase intention, and Shkeera AS et al. [7] prove that cognitive engagement through content marketing mediates behavioral responses. Tripathi A. [8] focuses on trust and privacy as determinants of purchasing behavior. Yang Y. [9], Zhang Q. and Abdullah F. [10] emphasize that social networks integrate recommendations and experiences into a single information flow.

Despite the sufficient amount of literature on this topic, there is a lack of systematic material that would combine cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of



the influence of social networks on purchasing decisions. Therefore, using various methods of scientific knowledge, the information was analyzed, grouped, systematized and presented in the light of the research topic.

Methodology and Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study is based on the author's strategy, developed and implemented by the researcher within the framework of the Law Office of Olena Manilich case. The specified strategy is conceptually based on modern scientific research in the field of consumer behavior, the formation of digital trust, content marketing, the theory of source reliability and cognitive-emotional models of decision-making in conditions of increased subjective risk.

The study applied general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, abstraction, comparison and systematization to correlate empirical observations with the theoretical provisions of modern scientific concepts. The modeling method was used to conceptualize social networks as a "behavioral buffer" that precedes direct contact with a specialist. At the same time, despite the reliance on verified scientific approaches, the practical operationalization of the strategy – content structure, narrative logic, regularity of publications, platform adaptation, and a system of pain-oriented triggers – was developed by the author independently and tested in real market conditions. Thus, the proposed methodology is a hybrid model that combines theoretical justification with the author's practice and demonstrates the possibility of an empirically confirmed, but methodologically different from classical advertising approaches, content-oriented influence on consumer behavior.

The aim of the article is to analyze the mechanisms of influence of social networks on the formation of consumer behavior and the process of making purchasing decisions in the context of professional services with a high level of subjective risk. To achieve the goal, three main tasks will be performed during the study: to analyze the role of social platforms at different stages of the consumer journey; to investigate the psychological and cognitive factors of forming trust in the service provider through content on social networks; to summarize the practical results of the case from the perspective of transforming the logic of making purchasing decisions.



Research Results

Within the Law Office of Olena Manilich case, the author assumes that the key problem of marketing communications in the immigration law niche is not the lack of information about the service, but the high level of subjective risk and emotional stress of the consumer. The author's methodology is based on the interpretation of the purchase decision as a process of gradual reduction of anxiety through the formation of a sense of control over the situation and predictability of the result. In practical terms, this is implemented through a systematic presence in social networks with a focus on explanatory content that reproduces the logic of legal procedures, typical errors and scenarios of case development, which allows the client to form an idea of the complexity of the process and the role of the lawyer in it even before the consultation.

Within the framework of this methodology, social networks are considered not as a channel for stimulating instant conversion, but as an environment for long-term monitoring of the expertise of the service provider. The author deliberately abandons aggressive advertising formats in favor of a repetitive expert narrative, which allows the potential client to go through the stage of informal acquaintance with the specialist, reduce information asymmetry and form basic trust even before direct contact. This approach corresponds to the specifics of high-stakes services, where decisions are not made impulsively, but require long-term cognitive and emotional preparation.

A similar approach to advertising implementation is described in Macías' work. Urrego JA, García Pineda V. and Montoya Restrepo LA, which substantiates the multidimensional impact of social platforms on the consumer journey. In particular, the authors identify the following key functions of social networks in the process of making a purchasing decision [5]:

- impact on all stages of the consumer journey - from awareness of the need to post-purchase evaluation;
- forming quality and reliability benchmarks through feedback;
- the need to align the brand's communication presence with the consumer's decision-making logic, not just with reach indicators;
- reducing the cost of searching for information thanks to the influence of



influencers ;

- increasing brand engagement and increasing purchase intention through social interaction mechanisms and a sense of social presence [5].

In his study, Tripathi notes that trust in content and privacy concerns are significant factors influencing consumer decisions on social networks [8]. On the one hand, users are interested in the convenience of purchasing goods and services through digital platforms, on the other hand, they are aware that their actions (views, likes, comments) are public or at least traceable , which reduces the subjective feeling of privacy. Under such conditions, transparency of communication on the part of the seller and clear rules for processing personal data serve the function of reducing perceived risk, especially in the case of services and goods with high consumer involvement. The role of informative and interactive content that accompanies the user at the stages of information search and comparison of alternatives, gradually forming a readiness for direct contact with the service provider, is emphasized. Therefore, it is advisable to consider content interaction as a preparatory stage, separate from the direct act of purchase, which should take place in conditions of greater predictability and confidentiality.

In the practice of implementing an author's content strategy when promoting goods and services through video platforms on the American market, the focus is on studying the audience's behavioral reactions and creating videos that appeal to typical fears and problems of the target group. Such " relevance triggers " contribute to the user's fixation on certain thematic interests, which are subsequently taken into account by the algorithms of recommendation systems. As a result, a content environment with recurring plots and expert images is formed, which strengthens the perception of the specialist as an accessible and competent subject, able to offer a practical solution to the problem faced by the consumer.

The theoretical basis of this approach is consistent with the source credibility theory, according to which the decisive factors in the formation of purchase intentions are the expertise and reliability of the communicator, while attractiveness is of secondary importance. The study by Sachu B., Sengottaiyan K. and Rathinaswamy J.



confirms that the perceived competence of the source has the strongest relationship with purchase intention, especially in the service sector, where consumers expect rational argumentation and professional explanations [6].

In turn, Iffah N. notes that influencers “humanize” the brand through personalized narrative content integrated into the audience’s daily practices, which increases emotional trust and perceived relevance of messages. This format of communication supports the long-term formation of trust, which is critical for making complex and high-risk purchasing decisions. [1]

The effectiveness of the chosen model is illustrated by the organic growth of the audience on the TikTok social network.

**Table 1 – Performance indicators of the communication model in TikTok
(case Law Office of Elena Manilich)**

Indicator	Characteristic	Interpretation from the perspective of marketing effectiveness
Growth period	≈ 6 months	Indicates a stable dynamic of organic growth without short-term surges caused by paid traffic
Subscriber growth	> 130,000	Indicates the high relevance of the content to the information needs of the target audience
Promotion type	No paid advertising	Confirms the effectiveness of the content strategy and algorithmic support from the platform
Publication frequency	During peak periods — several videos per day	Provides high brand visibility and accelerates the accumulation of statistically significant audience reactions
Compliance with platform algorithms	High (indirectly confirmed by coverage)	Indicates optimization of video format, duration, and topic for TikTok recommendation mechanisms
Audience feedback	Permanent, at the level of individual publications	Allows you to test hypotheses about themes, narratives, and presentation styles in an applied experiment mode
The nature of the content creation process	Iterative, experimental	Content serves as a behavioral testing tool, not just information

The novelty of the model lies in the interpretation of social networks as an environment for forming the prerequisites for a purchase decision, rather than a channel for directly stimulating a transaction. In the case, communication is focused on gradually reducing the uncertainty characteristic of legally significant decisions and is



aimed at changing the cognitive state of the consumer – from fragmented search to a structured understanding of processes, risks and roles. Social platforms perform the function of a behavioral "buffer" that prepares for personal appeal, rather than replacing it with an advertising message.

This approach is consistent with the results of Macías Urrego JA, García Pineda V. and Montoya Restrepo LA, who show the impact of social media on all stages of the consumer journey, in particular on the pre-purchase stage of forming needs and selection criteria, where recommendations, reviews and brand content reduce information uncertainty and increase decision confidence. The authors emphasize the need to focus strategies on the logic of decision-making, and not only on reach indicators, which conceptually supports the reorientation of social media from a promotional channel to a behavioral training environment [6].

The case strategy combines educational content, narrative presentation of experience, and systematic repetition of contacts, forming a cumulative effect of gradually increasing readiness to apply. Short video formats are used to normalize complex legal procedures through a focus on explaining the process, which reduces cognitive load and increases the sense of control over the situation. Similarly, Luo C., Hasan NAM, and Zamri bin Ahmad AM prove that the usefulness, convenience, and entertainment of videos build brand trust, which mediates the transition from interest to behavioral response, and practically oriented content reduces uncertainty and increases willingness to interact [4].

An important element of the model is the personification of expertise through the stable presence of a specific specialist, which creates predictability and psychological comfort in choosing a consultant. This is consistent with the findings of Liu Y. and Wang M., who, based on S–O–R models and probabilistic information processing, show that informative and entertaining content first forms internal cognitive and emotional states, and through them affects purchasing intentions; under conditions of high decision significance, consistent meaningful content is more effective than one-time advertising stimuli [3].

Content strategy focuses on engagement and retention metrics as indicators of



audience psychological readiness for further action, rather than formal visibility metrics. Similar conclusions were reached by Shkeera AS, Sharabati A.-AA, Samarah T., and Alqurneh MIM, who show that the impact of content marketing on behavioral responses is mediated by cognitive engagement – attention, perception, and information processing, while superficial exposure has a limited effect [7].

The fundamental difference between the author's strategy and classic advertising is the public demonstration of expertise through real interactions with users, which creates the effect of social confirmation of competence. Trust is formed through observation of the process of professional activity and the logic of responses, and not through declarative promises. This is consistent with the results of Kothari H. et al., who establish that authenticity, social signals and transparency of communication reduce alertness and increase the persuasiveness of content, facilitating the transition from the perception of advertising to the formation of trust. [2]

The messages in the case are based on typical situations of uncertainty and fear, characteristic of the field of immigration law, which increases the relevance of the content and reduces the cognitive barrier through the use of everyday language and specific scenarios. The activation of emotional and cognitive triggers helps to maintain attention and form the prerequisites for a trusting attitude towards the expert. This logic is consistent with the approaches of Zhang Q. and Abdullah F., who show that empathetic and personalized content that satisfies the needs for relatedness and competence reduces perceived risk and increases willingness to further interaction, mediating the transition from attention to stable engagement. [10]

In the process of implementing the model, the client's journey has been transformed from a rational comparison of formal service characteristics to a choice based on subjective trust in a specific specialist. Content on social networks began to perform the function of the initial interpretation of the client's problem situation and the formation of an idea of the appropriateness of contacting this particular expert.

One of the noticeable consequences of the implementation of the content-oriented communication model was the reduction of the need for a long and active search for alternative service providers.



Table 2 – Comparative characteristics of the author's approach and scientific concepts of the influence of social networks on the formation of consumer decisions

Aspect	Author's approach	Scientific approaches
The role of social media	Social networks perform a preparatory function: they help to understand the problem and reduce uncertainty before contacting a specialist.	Social networks influence the formation of customer needs
Purpose of communication	Focus on streamlining the client's perceptions and increasing their sense of control over the situation	Content reduces perceived risk and increases willingness to take further action
Content logic	Educational explanations and practical examples with repeated contacts build deferred trust	The cumulative effect of useful and emotionally relevant content promotes engagement intentions
Format and cognitive load	Short videos simplify complex procedures by explaining processes, not outcomes	Convenient video format reduces cognitive load and increases trust
Personification of expertise	The stable presence of one expert creates psychological closeness and predictability	Personalized sources increase persuasiveness, especially in risky areas
Building trust	Trust is based on observed consistency and openness of interaction	Authenticity and social signals enhance the perceived trustworthiness of a source
Performance evaluation	Engagement and repeat contacts are prioritized, not reach.	Cognitive engagement is a better predictor of behavioral responses than simple exposure
Focus on customer problems	Communication begins with typical fears and states of uncertainty.	Empathetic content reduces risk and increases emotional attachment
Time effect	The decision is postponed until the real need arises.	Repeated contacts build long-term intentions and loyalty
Customer journey changes	The choice of provider often occurs before an active search for alternatives	Social networks shorten the comparison stage and integrate into the entire selection process

Notes: Systematized by the author based on sources [2; 4; 3; 7; 8; 10]

The purchasing decision was increasingly formed within the already familiar information environment, provided that the brand was regularly present in the user's feed. This means that the stage of comparing options was partially replaced by the accumulation of trust in one specialist through repeated contacts with his content. In parallel, the format of the beginning of interaction also changed: instead of formal appeals through official channels, the share of short private messages and questions in comments increased. This type of contact is psychologically easier, especially for people who are in a state of uncertainty or increased anxiety. In the future, these



informal appeals gradually turned into the format of full-fledged consultations, which increased the likelihood of further cooperation. In addition, the effect of delayed appeal was recorded: users watched the content for a long time, remembered the brand and sought help only when a specific legal problem arose. Thus, social networks served as a preparatory environment in which initial ideas about the problem, possible ways to solve it, and the role of a specialist were formed, even before the consumer entered the formal market of legal services.

These changes are consistent with consumer decision-making models, in which social networks influence all stages – from problem awareness to provider selection, integrating information, social signals and brand communication into a single process. As Y. Yang notes, under conditions of prolonged exposure, the boundaries between phases are erased, and part of the search and comparative actions are transferred to the internal cognitive sphere even before the active phase of choice [9].

Overall, the case demonstrates that social networks contribute not only to information, but also to long-term modification of consumer behavior, changing the ways of interpreting risk, building trust, and the logic of responding to legally significant life situations.

Table 3 – Generalized behavioral and structural changes as a result of the model implementation

Specifics	Before the model was implemented	After implementing the model
Decision-making logic	Rational comparison of services, focus on formal characteristics and price	Choice based on subjective confidence in expertise and psychological comfort
Search and selection of alternatives	Active external search and long-term comparison of different providers	Reduction or elimination of the active comparison phase, pre-selection in social networks
First contact format and barrier to entry	Formalized communication channels with a high psychological barrier	Informal channels (messages, comments), reducing anxiety and the barrier to contact
Temporal logic of demand	Appeal immediately after an active search or under the influence of situational factors	Formation of deferred demand and appeal at the moment of real need
The role of content in the customer journey	Auxiliary information tool	Central environment for interpreting the problem and building trust
Type of interaction with the brand	Short-term and transactional interaction	Long-term relational interaction with cumulative impact

Note: Compiled by the author



The results summarized in Table 3 indicate the formation of a new logic of interaction between the consumer and the service provider, in which the decision to contact becomes a derivative of a long-term process of cognitive adaptation to a difficult situation, rather than a consequence of short-term marketing influence.

Conclusions

The key condition for effective communication in the legal services segment is to create in the client a sense of clarity and predictability of the process, rather than focusing on the direct promotion of the service. Explanatory content, focused on the logic of procedures and typical life situations, promotes the transition from a fragmented perception of the problem to a more structured understanding of it, which reduces emotional tension and increases the readiness for personal contact. Social networks in such a model act as a space for the gradual formation of cognitive confidence, where a potential client can adapt to the complexity of the legal context without direct pressure.

At the same time, the long-term personalized presence of an expert in the audience's information field changes the very logic of decision-making: the choice is increasingly based on the formed idea of the professionalism and work style of a particular specialist, rather than on an active comparison of alternatives at the moment of need. In this case, the content serves as a long-term behavioral anchor, which is activated when the problem becomes practical, reducing the distance between the awareness of the need and the actual request for help. Such dynamics indicate that social platforms can play a system-forming role in building trust and readiness for solutions in areas with a high cost of error.

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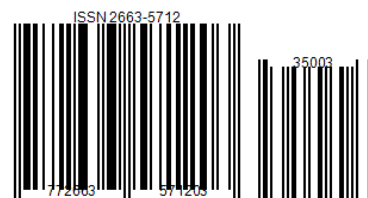
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