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**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A STRATEGIC BUSINESS TOOL:
TO BE, TO SPEAK, AND TO ENGAGE**

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Annotation: This article examines the strategic role of social media in the modern business environment. Social platforms have become a key instrument that has fundamentally transformed traditional approaches to marketing, communication, and brand development. The study highlights the importance of social media in strengthening brand image, establishing sustainable audience engagement, and enhancing consumer trust. Using the international brand L'Oréal and the Kazakhstani brand SenSulu as case studies, the article analyzes communication strategies, the impact of influencers and user-generated content, as well as the integration of artificial intelligence technologies in managing customer interactions. Scientific research and statistical data demonstrate the positive influence of brand activity on social media on financial performance. The findings reveal the interconnection between social media engagement, audience trust, and a company's economic efficiency, while also proposing a systematic approach to managing digital communications.

Keywords: social networks, strategic marketing, audience engagement, digital communication, brand management, influencer marketing.

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**ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ЖЕЛІЛЕР - БИЗНЕСІНІҢ СТРАТЕГИЯЛЫҚ ҚҰРАЛЫ:
КӨРІНУ, ШҚІР АЙТУ ЖӘНЕ АУДИТОРИЯНЫ ТАРТУ**

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Андатпа: Бұл мақалада әлеуметтік желілердің қазіргі бизнес кеңістігіндегі стратегиялық рөлі қарастырылады. Әлеуметтік медиа маркетинг, коммуникация және бренд қалыптастырудың дәстүрлі тәсілдерін түбегейлі өзгерткен негізгі құралға айналды. Зерттеу әлеуметтік желілердің бренд имиджін қалыптастырудағы, аудиториямен тұрақты байланыс орнатудағы және тұтынушылар сенімін арттырудағы маңызын айқындайды.

Мақалада халықаралық L'Oréal және қазақстандық SenSulu брендтерінің мысалында коммуникация құру стратегиялары, инфлюенсерлер мен пайдаланушылар контентінің ықпалы, сондай-ақ тұтынушылармен өзара әрекеттесуді басқаруда жасанды интеллект технологияларын қолдану тәжірибесі талданады.

Ғылыми зерттеулер мен статистикалық деректер әлеуметтік желілердегі белсенділіктің

брендтің қаржылық нәтижелеріне оң әсерін көрсетеді. Зерттеу қорытындылары әлеуметтік желілердегі белсенділік, аудитория сенімі және компанияның экономикалық тиімділігі арасындағы өзара байланысты анықтап, цифрлық коммуникацияларды басқарудың жүйелі тәсілдерін ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: әлеуметтік желілер, стратегиялық маркетинг, аудиторияны тарту, цифрлық коммуникация, брендті басқару, инфлюенсерлік маркетинг.

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СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ КАК СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЙ ИНСТРУМЕНТ БИЗНЕСА: БЫТЬ, ГОВОРИТЬ И ВОВЛЕКАТЬ

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Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается стратегическая роль социальных сетей в современном бизнес-пространстве. Социальные медиа стали ключевым инструментом, радикально изменившим традиционные подходы к маркетингу, коммуникации и формированию бренда. Исследование раскрывает значение социальных сетей в укреплении имиджа бренда, установлении устойчивых связей с аудиторией и повышении доверия потребителей.

На примере международного бренда L'Oréal и казахстанского SenSulu анализируются стратегии построения коммуникации, влияние инфлюенсеров и пользовательского контента, а также применение технологий искусственного интеллекта в управлении взаимодействием с потребителями.

Научные исследования и статистические данные демонстрируют положительное влияние активности брендов в социальных сетях на их финансовые показатели. Результаты исследования выявляют взаимосвязь между активностью в социальных сетях, уровнем доверия аудитории и экономической эффективностью компании, а также предлагают системный подход к управлению цифровыми коммуникациями.

Ключевые слова: социальные сети, стратегический маркетинг, вовлечение аудитории, цифровая коммуникация, бренд-менеджмент, инфлюенсер-маркетинг.

Introduction

In the 21st century, social networks have become the foundation of the digital economy and a new public sphere of business. Their combined audience exceeds five billion users, turning social platforms into the largest communication and marketing market of modern times. Unlike traditional media, social networks provide brands with the opportunity to establish direct contact with their audience, build dialogue, and instantly respond to shifts in public sentiment.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the potential of social networks as a strategic business instrument through the case studies of the global brand L'Oréal and the Kazakhstani brand Sensulu. The analysis is based on three conceptual dimensions - **presence** («to be»), **communication** («to speak»), and **engagement** («to engage») - which together form an integrated system for managing a brand's digital image. The paper examines theoretical foundations of communication in the digital environment, practical mechanisms for building trust and engagement, as well as concrete examples of strategy implementation in both global and national practices.

Research methodology:

The methodological basis of the study combines theoretical analysis and empirical case studies aimed at identifying strategic patterns of brand communication on social media. The work was carried out using a qualitative approach that focuses on interpretive content analysis, engagement strategies, and digital reputation management. The following methods were used in the study: comparative case analysis, content analysis, discursive analysis, review of digital analytics, and comparative synthesis. The methodological approach is based on the principles of systematicity, interdisciplinarity, and contextuality, which ensures a comprehensive reflection of both global and local aspects of digital brand communication.

Theoretical analysis

1. Theoretical Foundations of Digital Marketing and Trust Formation

Modern social networks are not merely platforms for information exchange, but complex ecosystems of interaction where corporate identity is shaped and long-term relationships with audiences are cultivated. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2020), social platforms perform a triple function - informational, dialogical, and transactional. This means that social media not only deliver messages but also create environments for sharing experiences, emotions, and actions.

Research by Deloitte Digital (2023) confirms that 80% of medium and large companies consider social networks a strategic function influencing sales, reputation, and sustainable growth.

The traditional “4P” model (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), proposed by Philip Kotler, has evolved into “4C” in the digital era — Customer Value, Cost, Convenience, and Communication, where communication and engagement take central roles. Brands no longer control the message — they initiate dialogues co-created with consumers.

According to McKinsey (2024), 71% of consumers trust recommendations and user-generated content more than corporate advertising. This shift from institutional to personalized trust reflects the increasing weight of peer opinions over brand authority. Consequently, companies must build authentic communication systems through storytelling, influencer collaborations, UGC (User-Generated Content), and emotionally resonant visual narratives appealing to audience identity.

Social networks also provide analytical tools for monitoring sentiment, engagement, feedback, and brand perception. Brodie et al. (2023) and Kapitan & Silvera (2024) argue that digital consumer loyalty depends on the brand’s ability to demonstrate transparency, social responsibility, and cultural sensitivity.

Hence, digital marketing theory rests on three principles: authenticity, interactivity, and social involvement. These principles form the foundation of a new reputational model in which the brand becomes a participant - not the center - of communication.

From a theoretical standpoint, digital presence can be interpreted as a form of «image architecture», where visual, semantic, and emotional components are unified into a coherent perception system. According to DataReportal Global Overview (2025), an average user spends more than 2 hours and 30 minutes per day on social networks, and around 70% of consumers make purchasing decisions after encountering a brand via Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. Thus, digital presence is no longer optional - it is a condition of existence within the information economy. Effective digital strategy depends on maintaining a consistent visual and semantic identity — corporate style, tone of voice, recognizable formats, and rhythmic content patterns.

2. Practical Mechanisms and Instruments of Social Media Promotion

Modern social media have evolved from informal communication platforms into global marketing ecosystems where brands interact with consumers not only through advertising but via engagement, feedback, cultural participation, and visual storytelling. Effective SMM (Social Media Marketing) requires comprehensive planning, analytical thinking, and continuous monitoring of audience behavior.

According to Choi et al. (2023, Journal of Interactive Marketing), the success of digital communications depends not only on product quality but on whether the brand is perceived as reliable and emotionally relatable. In this sense, digital reputation becomes a company's most valuable asset — a dynamic construct shaped through ongoing dialogue with users.

• Evolution of Communication Strategy in the Digital Age

In traditional marketing, brands played the role of message initiators; today, they are only one of many participants in dialogue. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Pinterest allow brands to “be heard,” but responsibility for outcomes lies in authenticity, tone, and substance of communication.

Algorithmic systems amplify content that generates interaction - comments, shares, saves, and collaborations - making engagement rate the key metric of success. Sprout Social (2024) found that users perceive brands as “social actors,” expecting sincerity, openness, and responsiveness to trends. Brands using a more human, informal communication style experience 35–40% higher engagement - proving that emotional resonance drives digital success.

• Content Marketing as the Core of Digital Interaction

Content marketing forms the foundation of SMM strategy, focusing on value creation rather than pure promotion. Successful content builds on brand narrative, uniting mission, aesthetics, social stance, and user experience. Deloitte Digital (2023) notes that brands implementing systemic content strategies build stronger customer relationships by making communication inseparable from identity. Authenticity - expressed through real people, stories, and initiatives — drives trust.

Recent trends reflect “human-centered branding,” where focus shifts from products to values and emotions. Kaur & Arora (2024) emphasize that consumers now assess not only functional benefits but also cultural and ethical positions — on ecology, equality, and justice. Content thus becomes a means of social positioning, not merely promotion.

• Algorithmic Reputation and Audience Analytics

Algorithms now tailor user experiences by mapping behavioral patterns. Brands must therefore analyze reach, impressions, CTR, engagement rate, and sentiment analysis.

According to McKinsey (2024), short-form videos (under 30 seconds) increase interaction by 47% compared to static posts. The key metric remains sentiment score - the tone of comments and brand mentions.

Digital analytics not only measure activity but provide strategic feedback. Brands that respond quickly, correct mistakes, and communicate transparently earn higher trust, while mechanical communication erodes reputation.

• Influencer Partnerships and Community Building

Collaboration with influencers remains essential. However, brands are shifting toward micro- and nano-influencers, who maintain smaller but more loyal audiences. Kapitan & Silvera (2024) report that micro-influencer content generates 2.6 times more trust than official brand posts. The essence of influencer cooperation lies in co-creation - making users co-authors of brand narratives. This fosters belonging and loyalty. Effective SMM also involves nurturing brand communities - spaces where users engage with shared interests. These communities transform into informal communication arenas where the brand moderates rather than dominates. Brodie et al. (2023) identify community engagement as the most reliable indicator of sustainable trust.

• Emotional Storytelling and Visual Identity

Visual language has become a universal communication tool. Emotional storytelling creates associative memory linking brands to specific emotional states. Choi et al. (2023) highlight that stories grounded in authenticity and social relevance build deeper trust.

Visual communication follows the principle of “emotional aesthetics,” aligning design, color, rhythm, and structure with emotional intent. For instance, L'Oréal blends scientific precision with aesthetic self-expression, while Sensulu emphasizes naturalness, ethnic motifs, and

eco-minimalism.

- **Targeting and Personalization**

Targeted advertising adapts messages to audience demographics and behaviors. Effectiveness increases when combined with personalized content.

Statista (2024) notes that dynamic targeting boosts conversion by 32%. However, excessive automation risks “digital fatigue.” Ethical personalization must feel like care - not surveillance.

- **Reputation Management and Crisis Communication**

In digital ecosystems, brands are vulnerable to reputation crises. Online Reputation Management (ORM) has become indispensable.

According to Deloitte (2023), brands that respond to negative mentions within 24 hours restore trust three times faster. Transparent communication and acknowledgment of mistakes signal maturity and accountability.

- **Social Responsibility and Value Positioning**

Modern consumers expect brands to embody social meaning - supporting ecology, inclusion, or cultural heritage. McKinsey (2024) reports that 62% of consumers prefer brands sharing their values, even at higher prices. Thus, value messaging should be integrated, not staged as PR.

- **Localization and Cultural Relevance**

Global networks demand cultural sensitivity. Ignoring local context undermines trust. **TikTok** demonstrates that campaigns using local language and humor raise engagement by 40–50%. Hence, effective SMM combines global aesthetics with local cultural codes.

Results and discussion

Integrating social values into marketing strategy is increasingly vital. The 21st-century consumer views a brand as an ethical actor responsible for both product quality and societal impact. This is evident in L’Oréal’s campaigns promoting inclusivity and diversity, and Sensulu’s focus on ecological awareness and cultural identity.

Social networks have transformed business–society communication. Content now serves as the core of branding, trust-building, and identity creation. According to Sprout Social Index (2024), posts expressing values and social positions receive 48% higher engagement than promotional messages.

Engagement is the key indicator of digital communication success. HubSpot (2024) shows that visual posts generate 2.3 times more reactions than text, and short videos retain audience attention 80% longer. Engagement operates on three levels - passive (views, likes), active (comments, polls), and transformational (UGC creation), where users become brand co-authors.

L’Oréal exemplifies a multilayered digital strategy based on the model “to be - to speak - to engage.” Its expressive level includes visual campaigns in Instagram and YouTube; the engaging level involves challenges and influencer collaborations (#WorthIt, #LorealParisFamily); and the transactional level integrates social commerce, enabling direct purchases. According to L’Oréal Annual Report (2024), over 35% of marketing investments are allocated to digital channels. The company applies AI to analyze emotional tone and personalize offers in real time, ensuring precise communication and higher conversion. By contrast, Sensulu - a Kazakhstani brand - utilizes social networks to emphasize authenticity and locality. Its Instagram and TikTok presence centers on natural aesthetics, minimalism, and ethnic design, building trust through transparency and cultural connection. Collaborations with local influencers and production stories strengthen engagement.

Both cases illustrate that success in social media depends not on scale but on strategic quality. Brands must treat digital communication as a structural business function. Strategically - aligning content goals with KPIs; organizationally - integrating marketing, PR, and HR; technologically - applying big data and AI to forecast audience behavior.

Thus, modern digital interaction forms an ecosystem where presence, communication, and engagement constitute a continuous relationship cycle. Social media are not merely tools of

promotion - they are spaces where cultural and economic brand capital is built.

Conclusion

Social media are no longer just communication channels - they have evolved into an independent socio-economic system where new principles of interaction between brands and consumers emerge. Every visual, comment, or story contributes to corporate reputation.

The key law of the digital age is that brand effectiveness is measured not by quantitative indicators such as followers or reach, but by the quality of dialogue and depth of trust. In a world where attention is scarce, trust becomes the new currency defining a brand's real value.

L'Oréal demonstrates how global corporations can merge AI, visual aesthetics, and social mission into one ecosystem, while Sensulu proves that local brands can compete through authenticity and cultural capital.

Ultimately, social networks are the core of the modern business model - where technology, culture, and humanity converge. Companies that learn not only to "be present" but to "live digitally" transform communication into a source of sustainable growth, community building, and long-term loyalty.

In the coming years, social media will remain the main arena for shaping reputational, cultural, and economic capital - where emotions and data, technology and meaning, converge. In this new ecosystem, successful brands will be those that understand: **to be** means not only to speak, but to listen; not only to sell, but to inspire trust; not only to exist online, but to become part of their audience's life.

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