

Brand Performance on Social Media in Spain: A Longitudinal Analysis 2024–2025.

Mayorga-Escalada, Santiago.

Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (Spain)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0866-0316>

Abstract

Social media has become a central infrastructure for brand communication in the contemporary digital environment. However, the progressive maturation of the social media ecosystem—characterized by content saturation, algorithmic sophistication, and intensified competition for attention—has substantially transformed the dynamics of interaction between brands and users. This study provides a longitudinal analysis of brand performance on social media in Spain during the 2024–2025 period. The research adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and longitudinal approach, based on secondary analysis of aggregated data from a sample of 196 brands across various economic sectors with active presence on major social platforms. The results reveal sustained growth in brands' digital communities, accompanied by a significant reduction in both publication volume and average interactions, confirming a structural decline in organic reach. Moreover, notable differences emerge by sector and platform, alongside the growing centrality of communication efficiency as a strategic indicator in a context increasingly focused on resource optimization.

Keywords

Social media; digital branding; engagement; communication efficiency; brand communication.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, social media has undergone a process of institutionalization and democratization, positioning itself at the center of contemporary communication systems (Campis, 2023). Initially conceived as platforms for interpersonal interaction and informal content exchange, social media has evolved into a complex ecosystem where social, economic, cultural, and technological dynamics converge (Oliveira, Capriotti & Zeler, 2022). In this

context, brands have found in social media a privileged space for implementing communication strategies, constructing symbolic meaning, and establishing sustained relationships with their audiences (Guerra et al., 2024).

Academic research has addressed this phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Early studies highlighted social media's potential to facilitate bidirectionality, dialogue, and active user participation, contrasting with the unidirectional communication models of traditional media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Later, more structural approaches emphasized the need to understand social media as systems with platform-specific functional logics, where variables such as identity, conversation, reputation, and visibility operate differently depending on the platform (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

In branding research, social media has been conceptualized as a space for co-creating symbolic value, in which users not only consume brand content but actively contribute to the construction of meanings, narratives, and associations (Gensler et al., 2013; Schau et al., 2009). From this perspective, brand communication on social media cannot be understood merely as an extension of traditional advertising; rather, it constitutes a dynamic relational process involving interaction, participation, and negotiation of meaning (Zuccherino, 2021).

However, as the social media ecosystem has matured, new tensions and limitations have emerged, challenging early assumptions about communicative effectiveness. Several studies have documented a progressive decline in the organic reach of brand content, associated both with message saturation and changes in platform distribution algorithms (Appel et al., 2020; Voorveld et al., 2018). These transformations have led some authors to describe a growth paradox: brands accumulate increasingly large communities but achieve declining levels of relative interaction.

Within this context, the concept of engagement has gained growing centrality in digital communication research. Initially used as a quantitative indicator of interaction, engagement has been progressively redefined as a multidimensional construct integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016). On social media, engagement is interpreted as a manifestation of users' active involvement with brand content and has been empirically linked to key variables such as brand attitude, purchase intention, and loyalty (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Recent literature, however, warns that average engagement on social media tends to decline as competition for attention increases and content production becomes more professionalized (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). This trend raises important questions for both theory and practice in digital branding, challenging the sustainability of strategies based solely on community growth or publication volume (Anderski et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, other indicators, such as virality and communication efficiency, have gained prominence in assessing brand performance on social media. Virality, defined as the capacity of content to be shared by users, has traditionally been associated with organic diffusion and social value (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Communication efficiency introduces an optimization logic that is particularly relevant in a context of limited resources and increasing reliance on paid investment.

Methodologically, these transformations underscore the need for longitudinal studies capable of analyzing the structural evolution of brand performance beyond static snapshots (Zarco-Alpuente, 2025). While much of the literature relies on case studies or cross-sectional analyses, longitudinal approaches allow identification of sustained patterns, long-term trends, and structural changes within the digital communication ecosystem (Lara-Felix & Cervantes-Aldana, 2023).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Defining research objectives is essential for articulating the development of the study. In digital communication and social media branding, precise objectives are particularly relevant due to the complexity of the ecosystem and the diversity of performance indicators.

According to Reyes (2022), research objectives should respond to a clearly identified theoretical problem and be empirically addressable through observable, operationalizable variables. This study's objectives are grounded in the need for a longitudinal perspective to analyze the structural evolution of brand performance on social media, surpassing the cross-sectional approaches prevalent in much prior research. This aligns with Nieborg et al. (2024) and Recuero (2024), who emphasize that social platforms should be understood as dynamic systems subject to continuous transformation in their operational logics.

General Objective (GO). To analyze longitudinally the performance of brands on social media in Spain during 2024–2025, in order to identify structural trends within the social media ecosystem and contribute to theoretical understanding of digital branding in mature communication contexts.

Specific Objectives (SOs). Based on the general objective outlined, the following specific objectives are formulated, which allow the research problem to be broken down into concrete analytical dimensions that can be addressed empirically.

(SO1) Examine the quantitative evolution of community size, publication volume, and interactions of brands on social media to identify growth, stagnation, or decline patterns characteristic of the current maturity phase of the ecosystem.

(SO2) Analyze sectoral and platform-based differences in terms of engagement, virality, and communication efficiency, to understand how sector characteristics and platform structure influence brand communication effectiveness.

(SO3) Interpret the empirical results in light of major theoretical frameworks in digital branding and strategic communication, deriving theoretical and practical implications for brand management on social media in a context of maturity and resource optimization.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive, and longitudinal design focused on analyzing brand performance on social media. In digital communication and social media marketing research, studies based on large volumes of secondary data obtained from monitoring tools have become a widely accepted approach for analyzing brand and audience behavior on social platforms.

A non-experimental design based on secondary aggregated data analysis was adopted, with a descriptive-explanatory approach. The aim is not to establish direct causal relationships but to identify patterns, trends, and significant differences in brand performance over time. The longitudinal design enables comparison of the 2024–2025 period with historical series available since 2017, allowing identification of sustained trends and structural shifts in key social performance indicators (Viloria-Rodriguez, 2024).

Data were sourced from the 2025 Social Media Brand Observatory, an annual initiative measuring systematic brand performance across major social platforms in Spain. Data collection was conducted using Metricool, which retrieves information directly from official platform APIs. Brand selection followed criteria of advertising relevance and active social presence, supported by data from Adjinn, ensuring sample representativeness.

The analysis period spans from June 1, 2024, to May 31, 2025, covering a full annual cycle and minimizing potential seasonal biases associated with specific campaigns or events. The sample comprises 196 brands active on Spanish social media, representing over twenty economic sectors. A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling method based on communication relevance and advertising investment volume was employed. While this limits statistical generalizability, it is appropriate for analyzing meaningful brand activity on social media.

Data included platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, TikTok, and Threads. Variables were structured around six key indicators widely used in social media marketing and digital branding literature (Castro-Higueras, 2024):

Table 1. Variables for measuring brand activity on social media.

Variable	Definition / Metric Criterion
Community	Total followers, fans, or subscribers per brand on each platform; used as a measure of potential brand communication reach.
Publications	Total content published by brands during the period, including organic and paid content.
Interactions	Sum of all user actions on brand content, including likes, reactions, comments, shares, reposts, and views with interaction.
Engagement	Ratio of interactions to community size; indicates relative user involvement.
Virality	Ratio of shared content relative to community; reflects organic content dissemination potential.
Eficiencia comunicativa	Average interactions per publication; evaluates performance in terms of resource optimization.

Source: Own elaboration based on Castro-Higueras (2024).

The combination of these indicators makes it possible to move beyond unidimensional approaches focused exclusively on community size and to adopt a more comprehensive view of brand performance on social media.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. In addition, a longitudinal perspective was incorporated by comparing the results for the 2024–2025 period with historical series available since 2017. This temporal comparison makes it possible to identify structural trends, such as the evolution of average engagement, the progressive reduction in publication volume, and changes in brands' communication efficiency.

RESULTS

The analysis of the results is structured around the main performance indicators of brand communication on social media: community size, publication activity, interactions, engagement, virality, and communication efficiency. This structure responds to the need to provide a systematic and coherent reading of the data, avoiding fragmented interpretations and enabling a comprehensive understanding of the structural evolution of the social media ecosystem in the Spanish context.

Table 2. Longitudinal evolution of the main brand performance indicators on social media (2017–2025).

Year	Community size	Publication volume	Total interactions	Engagement (%)	Virality (relative index)	Communication efficiency
2017	362.767	5.228	477.480	9,51	1,2	91
2020	575.315	850	129.899	1,88	0,6	153
2023	1.643.234	2.885	2.509.399	2,48	0,8	870
2025	1.550.009	1.722	679.309	0,90	0,4	394

Source: IAB Spain (2025)

- Evolution of community size.

The data show sustained growth in the average size of brands' digital communities, consolidating a trend already observed in previous periods. In 2025, the average community per brand exceeds 1.5 million followers, representing a significant increase compared to the values recorded in 2017 and 2020.

This growth confirms that social media continues to be a priority space for audience accumulation and brand visibility. However, from a qualitative perspective, an increase in the number of followers cannot be automatically interpreted as an indicator of greater communication effectiveness.

Sectoral analysis reveals relevant differences in community size. Sectors such as sports, automotive, and retail concentrate the largest communities, whereas other sectors—such as publishing or beauty and personal care—present smaller but potentially more specialized communities (niche or highly segmented audiences).

- Evolution of publication activity.

In contrast to the growth of communities, the results show a significant reduction in the average volume of publications produced by brands during the period analyzed. In 2025, the average number of publications per brand fell to approximately 1,700 pieces of content per year, representing a decline of more than 40% compared to some previous periods.

This decrease confirms a relevant shift in brands' social media presence strategies. As opposed to earlier approaches based on high publication frequency, the data suggest a transition toward more selective and strategic models, oriented toward resource optimization and the prioritization of specific formats, platforms, and types of content.

- Evolution of total interactions.

The analysis of interactions reveals one of the most significant findings of the study. Despite the growth of communities, average interactions per brand experienced a marked decline, standing at around 680,000 annual interactions in 2025, well below the levels recorded in 2023.

This phenomenon empirically confirms the so-called growth paradox, whereby brands reach increasingly large potential audiences but generate a relatively lower volume of active user responses.

Sectoral analysis shows that sectors with the largest communities do not necessarily lead in terms of relative interaction volume, highlighting the need to move beyond simplified quantitative approaches and to adopt more sophisticated metrics for evaluating social media performance.

- Evolution of engagement.

Engagement emerges as one of the most critical indicators in the analysis. In 2025, average engagement stands at around 0.9%, representing a substantial reduction compared to previous periods and levels similar to those observed in pre-pandemic stages. This decline confirms a structural trend already identified in the reviewed literature, according to which, as the social media ecosystem matures, relative engagement tends to decrease (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Sectoral analysis reveals differentiated patterns. Sectors such as sports, publishing, and beauty and personal care display engagement levels above the average, suggesting that emotional intensity, thematic affinity, and content specialization play a key role in activating user participation.

- Content virality.

Virality, measured through the ratio of shared content relative to community size, continues to show a sustained downward trend. This result indicates a lower user propensity to share brand content organically, a phenomenon that can be associated both with message saturation and with increased selectivity in social recommendation.

From a theoretical perspective, these results are consistent with the arguments of Berger and Milkman (2012), who emphasize that virality depends on specific emotional and social factors that are not always present in brand communication. In a highly professionalized environment, content tends to be perceived as strategic or commercial, which may limit its potential for spontaneous diffusion.

- Communication efficiency.

In contrast to the downward trend observed in other indicators, communication efficiency displays more heterogeneous patterns. In certain sectors and platforms, a lower publication frequency is associated with higher levels of interaction per piece of content, suggesting a more efficient use of communication resources.

This finding is particularly relevant from a strategic perspective, as it reinforces the idea that, in a mature ecosystem, content quality and platform-context alignment are more decisive than sheer activity volume. Communication

efficiency thus emerges as a key indicator for assessing the real performance of brand communication on social media.

- Platform-based results.

Platform-level analysis confirms a functional specialization within the social media ecosystem. Facebook maintains its leadership in terms of community size but exhibits relatively low engagement levels. Instagram stands out as the platform with the greatest capacity to generate relative interaction and communication efficiency, while YouTube reinforces its role as a space for the consumption of high-value, longer-form content.

X (Twitter), meanwhile, maintains a high publication frequency but with limited impact in terms of interaction, suggesting a growing disconnect between activity and communication performance on certain platforms.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm and extend the trends observed in the literature on digital branding and social media communication, providing empirical evidence for the 2024–2025 period in the Spanish context. First, the sustained growth in the size of brands' digital communities indicates that social platforms continue to function as a privileged channel for visibility and audience accumulation. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the central role of social media as a communicative infrastructure for brands (Campis, 2023; Guerra et al., 2024). However, qualitative evidence suggests that the mere accumulation of followers does not automatically translate into greater communication effectiveness, thus confirming the warning raised by Oliveira, Capriotti, and Zeler (2022) regarding the need to consider relational and qualitative dimensions of digital interaction.

Regarding publication volume, the results show a significant reduction compared to previous periods, indicating a shift toward more selective and efficient strategies. This trend supports the hypothesis that, in mature and content-saturated environments, brands must prioritize resource optimization and content relevance over publication frequency (Appel et al., 2020; Anderski et al., 2023). The decrease in publication volume is combined with a decline in average interactions, evidencing the growth paradox, whereby audience expansion does not guarantee proportional levels of active participation. This pattern aligns with the findings of Voorveld et al. (2018) and Tafesse and Wien (2018), who document a structural decline in relative engagement within saturated digital ecosystems.

Engagement analysis confirms that user involvement is at a lower level than in previous periods, with an average of 0.9% in 2025, reaching values similar to

those observed in pre-pandemic stages. This result is consistent with literature suggesting that ecosystem maturity and content professionalization tend to reduce active user participation (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2019). Sectoral differentiation—where sectors such as sports, publishing, and beauty and personal care show higher engagement—suggests that thematic affinity, emotional intensity, and content specialization act as key drivers of participation, in line with Berger and Milkman's (2012) arguments on the relevance of emotional and social factors in virality and engagement.

Virality exhibits a sustained downward trend, reflecting users' reduced propensity to share brand content organically. This phenomenon can be explained both by message saturation and by the perception of brand content as strategic or commercial, which limits its potential for spontaneous diffusion (Schau et al., 2009; Zuccherino, 2021). Nevertheless, communication efficiency emerges as a critical indicator, revealing that in some sectors and platforms, lower publication frequency is associated with higher interactions per piece of content. This finding suggests that content quality, contextual relevance, and strategic orientation are more decisive than quantity, reinforcing the need for more sophisticated approaches to evaluating brand communication performance (Castro-Higueras et al., 2024).

Finally, platform-level analysis confirms a functional specialization of the social media ecosystem. Facebook maintains its leadership in community size but with low engagement levels. Instagram generates high relative interaction and communication efficiency. YouTube consolidates its role as a space for the consumption of high-value, longer-form content. By contrast, X (Twitter) displays a high publication frequency with limited impact. These findings reflect the structural differences across platforms and underscore the need to adapt communication strategies to their specific logics, as highlighted by Kietzmann et al. (2011) and Gensler et al. (2013).

Overall, the results depict a landscape in which brands must balance community growth, qualitative interaction, and communication efficiency, prioritizing strategies based on valuable and relevant content for users within a context of increasing saturation and professionalization. The maturity of the social media ecosystem is shown to structurally transform the criteria of success in digital brand communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis conducted and the results obtained, which provide a solid empirical and qualitative foundation, the following conclusions are drawn:

(SO1) The results confirm that although brands' digital communities have grown steadily, both publication volume and average interactions have declined

significantly, evidencing the growth paradox. This indicates that the mere accumulation of followers does not guarantee greater communication effectiveness and reinforces the need to measure relative and qualitative indicators beyond absolute metrics.

(SO2) Significant differences are observed across sectors and platforms. Sectors such as sports, publishing, and beauty and personal care show higher engagement and communication efficiency, while platforms such as Instagram stand out for relative interaction and Facebook for community size. These findings underscore the importance of adapting digital branding strategies to the nature of the sector and to the structural characteristics of each platform.

(SO3) The results corroborate theoretical frameworks on social media maturity, content professionalization, and the multidimensional nature of engagement. Communication efficiency emerges as a key indicator that complements traditional analyses of reach and participation, providing a more comprehensive approach to brand management in mature digital environments.

(GO) The study reveals structural trends within the social media ecosystem: community growth, declining average interactions, reduced publication volume, and the increasing relevance of communication efficiency. These findings lead to the conclusion that, in a context of saturation and professionalization, the effectiveness of brand communication increasingly depends on content quality, platform-context alignment, and the ability to generate qualitative engagement, rather than on publication quantity or absolute community size.

REFERENCES

- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2023). Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms. *Journal of Business Research*, 166, 113905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113905>
- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R. *et al.* The future of social media in marketing. *J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci.* 48, 79–95 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral? *Journal of marketing research*, 49(2), 192-205. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.10.0353>
- Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of business research*, 66(1), 105-114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029>

Campis, E. S. (2023). Aplicación del Análisis de Redes Sociales para el estudio de las redes de comunicación en línea: evidencia empírica de Twitter. *Empiria: Revista de metodología de ciencias sociales*, (57), 165-188.

Castro-Higueras, A., Pérez-Rufí, J.P., Rodríguez-Vázquez, A.I., & López-García, X. (2024). Native Digital Media and Their Virtual Communities: Strategies for Interaction and in Participation Social Networks. *Profesional De La información*, 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2024.0015>

Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C., & Morgan-Thomas, A. (2016). Capturing consumer engagement: duality, dimensionality and measurement. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(5-6), 399-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1130738>

Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., & Wiertz, C. (2013). Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 27(4), 242-256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004>

Guerra, C. B. M., Erazo, T. E. E., Haro, E. R. H., & Valencia, P. A. V. (2024). Redes Sociales y su Impacto en el Entorno Digital de las Empresas. *Ciencia Latina: Revista Multidisciplinar*, 8(2), 831-857. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v8i2.10531

Hollebeek, L. D. (2019). Developing business customer engagement through social media engagement-platforms: An integrative SD logic/RBV-informed model. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 81, 89-98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.11.016>

IAB Spain (2025). XIII Edición del Observatorio de Marcas en Redes Sociales. IAB estudio de marcas. IAB Spain. Consultado el 13-09-2025 en: [XIII Observatorio de Marcas en Redes Sociales 2025 | IAB Spain](#)

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business horizons*, 54(3), 241-251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005>

Lara-Felix, J. H., & Cervantes-Aldana, J. (2023). Las repercusiones del Covid-19 en la comunicación y el comportamiento del consumidor: Un estudio longitudinal de la generación Z. *Revista de Investigaciones Universidad del Quindío*, 35(1), 84-101. <https://doi.org/10.33975/riuq.vol35n1.1135>

Nieborg, D., Poell, T., Caplan, R., & van Dijck, J. (2024). Introduction to the special issue on Locating and theorising platform power. *Internet Policy Review*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2024.2.1781>

Oliveira, A., Capriotti, P., & Zeler, I. (2022). El estado de la cuestión de la investigación sobre la comunicación digital de las universidades, Redmarka. *Revista de Marketing Aplicado*, vol 26, núm. 2, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.17979/redma.2022.26.2.9240>

Recuero, R. (2024). *A rede da desinformação: Sistemas, estruturas e dinâmicas nas plataformas de mídias sociais*. Editora Sulina.

Reyes, E. (2022). *Metodología de la investigación científica*. Page Publishing Inc.

Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of marketing*, 73(5), 30-51. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkq.73.5.30>

Tafesse, W., & Wien, A. (2018). Using message strategy to drive consumer behavioral engagement on social media. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35(3), 241-253. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-08-2016-1905>

Viloria-Rodriguez, A. F. (2024). *Comparación de metodologías utilizadas para abordar el problema de datos faltantes en estudios longitudinales*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Voorveld, H. A., Van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with social media and social media advertising: The differentiating role of platform type. *Journal of advertising*, 47(1), 38-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2017.1405754>

Zarco-Alpuente, A., Escrivá-Martínez, T., Romero-Suárez, M., & Baños, R. (2025). Criterios centrales vs. periféricos: Explorando la sobrevaloración de redes sociales y el uso problemático en un estudio longitudinal con adolescentes. *Adicciones*, 37(3), 255-268. <https://doi.org/10.20882/adicciones.2237>

Zuccherino, S. (2021). *Social Media Marketing: la revolución de los negocios y la comunicación digital*. Editorial Temas.