

USER EXPERIENCE IN DIGITAL RETAIL: TRENDS AND USER PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

In the digital age, user experience (UX) and customer experience management (CEM) are becoming key elements of successful retail. The aim of this paper was to investigate how contemporary digital trends, such as artificial intelligence, personalization, omnichannel approach and environmental sustainability, shape consumer perception, behavior and satisfaction. The theoretical framework of the paper draws on recent literature in the field of digital retail, UX design and customer experience management, and the research part is based on a survey conducted on a sample of 102 respondents. The research results show that users most often shop via mobile applications and web stores, while physical stores are increasingly losing their importance. Personalized user experience, clarity of information and platform responsiveness were identified as the most important factors for a positive shopping experience. More than half of the respondents consider personalization very important, while almost the same number value the environmental responsibility of the brand. In addition, respondents value a simple and intuitive interface and speed of service the most, which indicates the importance of quality user design. Digital retail requires a strategic approach to the customer experience, which includes technological adaptation, emotional connection with users and sustainable business. This paper confirms that these aspects are crucial for the competitiveness of brands in today's digitalized market, and offers a foundation for further research in the field of consumer behavior and digital transformation of retail.

Keywords: *customer experience, customer experience management, digital commerce, personalization, sustainability*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has significantly changed the way consumers buy and companies sell products and services. The development of technology, changes in consumer behavior, the rise of online shopping and the increasing emphasis on sustainability have created a new, dynamic retail environment in which classic sales models are no longer sufficient. Retail is no longer limited to physical space, but is increasingly moving into the digital sphere, in which different channels – physical stores, web shops, mobile applications, social networks – are integrated into a single customer experience. Technological advances, especially in the areas of artificial intelligence (AI), user interface (UI) and user experience (UX), have fundamentally reshaped the way companies communicate with consumers, tailor their offerings and shape their purchasing behavior. Digital sales today mean simplicity, accessibility and personalization. Thanks to the ability to be online 24 hours a day, seven days a week and access to a global market, companies have more opportunities than ever to innovate and grow. However, in an environment where consumers expect fast, personalized and intuitive service, it is crucial to understand how user interface and user experience design elements shape their perception, engagement and purchase decisions. In this context, the role of user experience (UX) and customer experience (CX) is becoming crucial for the success of brands. Modern consumers are not only looking for a quality product, but also a pleasant, personalized and easy experience throughout the entire purchase process – from the first interaction with the brand to after-sales services. This includes emotional reactions, brand perception and satisfaction at every step of the customer journey. Making purchasing decisions in a digital environment is a circular journey that begins with the initial consideration, active evaluation (the process of researching potential purchases), closure (consumers buying brands), and post-purchase, brand experience. In addition to design aspects, the application of artificial intelligence is also of increasing importance, enabling advanced analytics, process automation, and personalization of the user experience. Through recommender systems, chatbots, predictive analytics, and other AI tools, companies can better understand consumers, anticipate their needs, and design experiences that are both efficient and emotionally engaging. This creates space for hyperpersonalization, customer support automation, and real-time content customization. Sustainability is also increasingly important, as reflected in customer preferences for environmentally friendly brands and packaging. Customer Experience Management (CEM) is becoming a core strategy that enables companies to ensure consistent, high-quality, and emotionally engaging interactions across all touchpoints – physical, digital, and hybrid.

This paper aims to explore contemporary trends in digital sales, with an emphasis on the importance of user and consumer experience as key success factors. The paper also analyses the role of technology in shaping these experiences. The paper aims to show that digital sales are more than just a transaction – they are a dynamic process that reflects a paradigm shift in consumer behavior and the strategies of modern companies. In such an environment, adaptability, innovation and understanding of

user needs become key success factors. The paper presents the results of a research conducted on user and consumer experience in digital commerce and the key elements that influence them. The importance of understanding the shaping of consumer experience is crucial for their satisfaction and repeat purchases, and companies need to respond to the growing expectations of increasingly demanding consumers.

SALES IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT – TRENDS, IMPORTANCE OF USER AND CONSUMER EXPERIENCE

The digital transformation of business has led to the strong development of online sales, which enables buying and selling without physical contact, with the support of digital technologies. A particular growth in online commerce was recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic, when consumers massively switched to online shopping, stimulating the development of numerous e-commerce platforms. E-commerce includes the sale of goods, services and information via the Internet Zwass (2024), but also broader digital business activities, including B2B and internal transactions. According to the Electronic Commerce Act, it represents an information society service. The key advantages are global availability, an expanded product offering and the possibility of targeted access to specific consumer groups. Thanks to analytics and data on user behavior, it is possible to personalize the shopping experience through recommendations, customized discounts and targeted campaigns. Such insights allow companies to optimize strategies, increase engagement and improve sales results in the long term. Collecting data on consumer behavior further enriches this process, providing insight into market trends, optimizing pricing strategies, and increasing overall business efficiency (Terho et al., 2015). According to the CRO Commerce 2023 study, online shopping in Croatia is experiencing steady growth. Today, as many as 75% of Croatians shop online, and 40% of them do so regularly, which is very close to the European average of 45% of regular online shoppers. It is important to note that regular shoppers make as many as 84% of all online purchases, which clearly demonstrates their importance for digital sales. Online sales in Croatia currently account for 13% of total retail sales, which is getting closer to the European average of 15.4%. If we compare the data with previous years, clear progress is visible – the number of online shoppers increased from 68% in 2022 to 75% in 2023, which confirms the growing trust of consumers in digital commerce. Also interesting is the so-called "first-time buyer syndrome", which refers to the tendency of customers, after making their first online purchase, to be very likely to do so again and gradually develop the habit of regular online shopping.

Rapid technological developments, changing consumer behavior and a growing focus on sustainability are key factors shaping the future of retail. Digital transformation, already deeply rooted in the industry, is increasingly complemented by environmental awareness, creating a dynamic environment for both brands and consumers. From artificial intelligence that enables personalized user experiences, to sustainable practices that reduce environmental impact – the trends shaping 2025 are changing the

way we buy, sell and experience retail (Kendelić, 2025). Further integration of all sales channels (omnichannel approach), i.e. orientation towards improving the experience of customers who use multiple channels (physical stores, online stores, mobile applications, social networks, etc.) in their shopping process. For example, a customer can start researching a product on a mobile application, purchase a product on a website, and then pick it up in a physical store. A prerequisite for such integration is, of course, the connection of all channels and the sharing of user data. Content personalization is becoming the standard – customers want messages and offers tailored to their interests. Audience segmentation is key to successful campaigns, especially on Facebook and Instagram. Some of the trends in the development of digital trade for 2025:

- Video ads dominate on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, while local influencers and authentic stories build consumer trust.
- Flexible delivery and the ability to choose a delivery option significantly increase customer satisfaction. It is recommended to offer customers the choice of a delivery service or the possibility of collection via a parcel machine.
- Flexible payment methods such as installment payments, cryptocurrencies, and Apple and Google Pay can significantly increase conversions, especially among younger customers.
- AI chatbots improve customer support - it is recommended to start with basic functions and gradually build on them.
- Due to regulatory changes such as GDPR and the abolition of third-party cookies, the importance of collecting zero-party (voluntarily given) and first-party data (collected directly from the webshop) is increasing. The integration of this data with CRM, advertising platforms and email marketing becomes crucial.
- Google introduces AI answers in searches - it is important to optimize content for better visibility (snippets, blogs, structured data).
- Retail Media Networks are also becoming relevant in our country - use advertising tools on marketplaces such as Amazon and Zalando.
- Sustainability is increasingly important - emphasize environmentally friendly practices and packaging in communication with customers.
- Sales analytics and its integration with advertising platforms is key to success. Using tools like GA4 to build audiences and use them in Google and Meta Ads campaigns, while tracking real attribution (not just the last click), allows for better understanding of the purchase journey and more effective campaigns.
- Metaverse and augmented reality (AR) in communication with the target
- Generation Z and Alpha - Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and Alpha (born after 2012) are becoming the most influential segment of consumers where the focus should be on authenticity, sustainability and technology in shaping marketing strategies.

According to Junfeng et al. (2022), UX design is the process of creating products and services that provide users with meaningful and relevant experiences. This includes everything from branding and design to functionality and usability. As stated by Zarour and Alharabi (2017), UX goes beyond mere ease of use – it aims to understand user needs, habits and motivations and build a user journey that is intuitive, pleasant and efficient. UX designers use tools like user research, creation of personas, wireframes and prototypes to ensure that the product meets the real needs of the user. Gada and Chudasama (2024) point out that UX focuses on building systems that not only work, but also delight users, thereby increasing satisfaction, loyalty and business success. In the digital age, where user expectations are high, UX becomes crucial for differentiation in the market (Roth, 2017). User experience (UX) deals with the people who interact with the product and the experience they get from that interaction. It is measured by metrics such as: success rate, error rate, abandonment rate, task completion time and clicks to completion (Lowden, 2014). In a world of increasingly strong competition, quality user experience is becoming a key tool for retaining consumers. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping the way brands interact with customers – from personalized recommendations and predictive analytics to automated support. According to predictions, by 2025 as many as 95% of user interactions will be supported by AI technologies (Servion, 2018). AI enables a deeper understanding of consumer habits, preferences and behavior by analyzing data from a variety of sources – from previous purchases to social media activity. The result is hyperpersonalization – communication at the right moment, on the right device and with the right message, which significantly increases user engagement and satisfaction (Solis, 2017).

Customer experience (CX) refers to the overall perception and emotional experience that the consumer acquires through all interactions with the brand, including pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases. This encompasses all touchpoints – from the first exposure to the brand to customer support after purchase – and includes factors such as ease of use, speed of service, personalization and alignment of expectations with what is delivered. According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), consumer experience is "the internal and subjective response of the customer to every direct and indirect contact with the company". Direct contacts include initiated interactions during the purchase, while indirect ones refer to unintentional encounters such as recommendations from other users or brand communication. Trust in technology and brand plays a key role – the more secure consumers feel, the higher the likelihood of long-term loyalty (Keiningham et al., 2017). In addition, AI enables the integration of advanced solutions such as augmented reality, smart stores and automated payments, further enhancing the shopping experience (Kozlova et al., 2021). Finally, artificial intelligence benefits not only companies, but also consumers themselves – through a simpler, faster and more personalized shopping experience. In this context, UX and AI design, supported by AI technologies, become key to achieving competitive advantage in the digital economy of the future. Customer Experience Management (CEM) is a strategic approach that focuses on the entire consumer experience during all touchpoints with a brand – before, during and after the purchase. The goal of CEM is to understand the needs, expectations and emotions of consumers

and create consistent, positive and valuable experiences that encourage loyalty. It is crucial to monitor interactions at all levels of the purchase journey and use the right metrics to measure satisfaction and engagement. CEM is a holistic approach that manages brand perception and ensures emotional connection with users and focuses on feelings and experiences, all with the aim of creating long-term value and differentiation from the competition. Customer Experience Management (CEM) is a strategic approach to creating positive and consistent interactions with consumers at all touchpoints. The key is a deep understanding of user needs and behavior, personalization of offers, a consistent experience across all channels and active collection and analysis of feedback for continuous improvement. CEM is based on creating an emotional connection with consumers and ensuring an experience that not only meets but exceeds their expectations. Providing a positive customer experience is essential for growth, increasing market share and increasing efficiency (Buis, et al., 2023). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is coming as an essential innovative tool for personalizing and customizing products to meet specific requirements (Khrais, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The research on the elements of user experience in digital commerce that affect the consumer experience and the application of artificial intelligence was conducted via a questionnaire over a period of one month, in March 2025. The questionnaire was created based on the results of the literature review from the previous part of the paper. It consisted of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, the questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, level of education, employment status and monthly income. The second part of the questionnaire related to questions about the user experience, personalization in the store using AI, experience with delivery and payment, sustainability and trust and management of the consumer experience. The questionnaire also listed statements with which the respondents expressed agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - completely disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree and 5 - completely agree). The survey questionnaire was created in the form of a Google forms form and distributed through social networks and e-mails by sharing a link to the form. 102 respondents (N=102) participated in the research. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Based on the theoretical literature review, the following research questions were posed:

1. How are digital trends, such as artificial intelligence and personalization, shaping the user and consumer experience in retail?
2. What are the key elements of successful customer experience management (CEM) in a digital environment?
3. To what extent do consumers recognize and appreciate the personalized user experience enabled by new technologies?
4. How important are environmental aspects and sustainability to the consumer experience in digital retail?

5. How do UX design and UI technologies contribute to overall user satisfaction in a digital shopping environment?

The results of the conducted research were analyzed with descriptive statistics and presented graphically and tabularly, followed by an interpretation of the results and a discussion. After analyzing the results, the limitations of the research, recommendations for further research and the conclusion of the paper were presented.

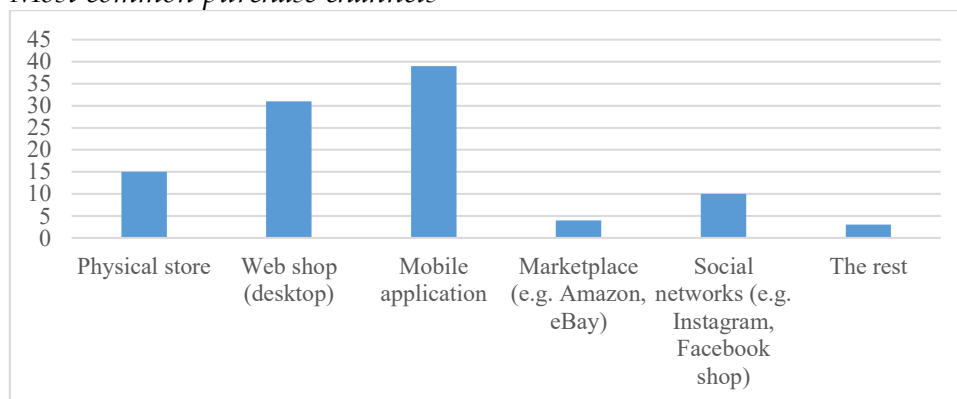
RESEARCH ON DIGITAL SHOPPING AND USER EXPERIENCE

102 respondents participated in the research, of which 72% were women and 28% were men. 13% of respondents were aged 18 to 25, 25% were aged 26 to 33, 30% were aged 34 to 41, 16% were aged 42 to 51, 8% were aged 52 to 61, 2% were aged 62 and over, and 6% were under 18. In terms of education, the majority of respondents have completed college or university education (36%), followed by respondents who have obtained a master's degree in a profession or science, 32%, followed by respondents with a secondary education (18%). 8% of respondents have completed a doctorate in science and 6% have completed primary school. According to the employment structure, 47% of respondents are employed, 25% are unemployed, 18% are students, 4% are retired, while 6% of respondents indicated other. In terms of monthly income, the majority of respondents, or 31%, earn a monthly income of 1,401.00 to 1,700.00 euros, followed by respondents with an income of 1,700.00 euros or more, 21%. 20% of respondents earn between 1,101.00 and 1,400.00 euros, 16% of respondents earn between 801.00 and 1,100.00 euros, and 12% of respondents earn less than 800.00 euros per month.

When asked about the frequency of online shopping, the survey results indicate that the largest number of respondents (43.8%) shop online monthly, which indicates that online shopping has become part of a regular consumer routine. 37.5% of respondents shop very often – weekly or even more often – which indicates the increasing digitalization of consumer habits and trust in online sales. Only 2.5% of respondents never shop online, while 18.8% do so very rarely, which means that the share of those who do not use digital shopping is extremely small.

The most frequently used shopping channel among respondents is mobile applications, which are used by 38.2% of participants, while 30.4% use web stores via computer. These data indicate a strong consumer orientation towards digital shopping channels. Physical stores still have their importance, with a share of 14.7%, but it is evident that more and more users prefer faster and more flexible digital options. Shopping via social networks is used by 9.8% of respondents, and marketplace platforms such as Amazon and eBay are used by 3.9%. The category "Other" makes up the smallest share with 2.9%. These results confirm the growing importance of mobile and online channels in modern shopping behavior. The structure of the responses is shown in Figure 1.

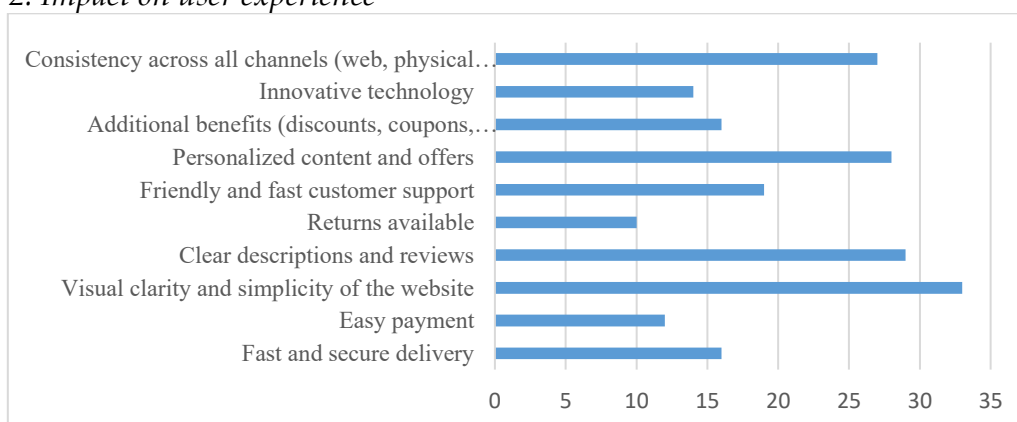
Figure 1. Most common purchase channels



Source: author's processing based on research results

Analyzing the respondents' answers to the question about the most important elements of a positive user experience, it is evident that the largest number of respondents opted for visual clarity and simplicity of the website, which was highlighted by 16.2% of respondents. This is followed by clear product descriptions and reviews (14.2%) and personalized content and offers (13.7%). Consistency of experience across all channels, including the web, physical stores and apps, is important for 13.2% of respondents, while friendly and fast customer support is important for 9.3% of respondents. Fast and secure delivery, as well as additional benefits such as discounts, coupons and loyalty programs, were both selected in 7.8% of cases. Innovative technology accounts for 6.9%, easy payment for 5.9%, and the smallest share of responses refers to the possibility of returning products – 4.9%. These results indicate that users value the clarity of information, personalization and a consistent user experience the most, while logistical and technical aspects, although important, take up a slightly smaller share in the perception of the quality of the user experience. The structure of the responses is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Impact on user experience

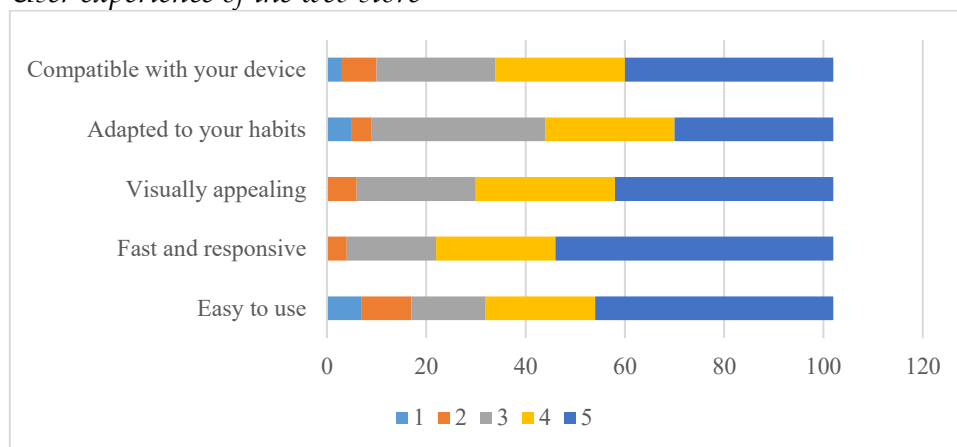


Source: author's processing based on research results

62% of respondents abandoned their purchase due to poor user experience, while 38% of respondents continued their purchase. Furthermore, respondents rated the

elements that were important to them in a web store. The structure of the responses is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *User experience of the web store*



Source: author's processing based on research results

Based on the responses collected, it can be concluded that respondents generally have a positive perception of the characteristics of digital commerce. The highest score (5) for ease of use was given by as many as 47.5% of respondents, while 21.8% rated this item with a score of 4, indicating a high level of satisfaction with the use of digital platforms. The same is true for speed and responsiveness – 55.4% of respondents rated it with a score of 5, and 23.8% rated it with a score of 4, indicating a good technical standard and functionality of the system. Visual appeal was also highly rated: 43.6% of respondents rated it with a score of 5, and 27.7% with a score of 4. However, slightly lower ratings were recorded in the category of “adaptation to user habits”, where only 31.7% of respondents gave the highest score, while a larger percentage (34.7%) opted for the medium score (3). Device compatibility shows good results, as 41.6% of respondents give a score of 5 and 25.7% a score of 4, while lower scores are rare. These results indicate that users value the simplicity, speed and visual quality of digital commerce the most, while personalization and adaptation to user habits are perceived as slightly less developed components. 55% of respondents noticed the use of artificial intelligence when making online purchases, and 29% are not sure whether it is artificial intelligence. The remaining 16% of respondents did not notice the use of artificial intelligence. The majority of respondents rated the use of artificial intelligence as very useful (51%) and somewhat useful (25%) in the user experience and experience of online shopping.

The majority of respondents attach some importance to the personalization of the offer when shopping online. 23% of respondents consider personalization to be very important, while 15% rate it as crucial, which together makes 38% of respondents who see personalization as a very significant component of the user experience. A further 23% of respondents consider personalization to be moderately important, while 22% state that it is not important to them. Only 18% of respondents consider personalization not important at all, which shows that it is a factor that, although not

crucial for everyone, still plays a significant role in shaping the user experience for most users. Personalization of the offer is recognized as an important element of digital commerce, with almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) assigning at least moderate importance to this feature.

The environmental responsibility of a brand is of some importance among consumers. The largest share of respondents, 29%, consider environmental responsibility to be moderately important to them, while 22% rate this component as extremely important, and 12% as very important. This means that a total of 63% of respondents assign at least moderate importance to the environmental aspects of a brand's business. On the other hand, 24% of respondents state that it is not important to them, and 15% that it is not important to them, which indicates that almost 40% of users still do not place a strong emphasis on sustainability when making purchasing decisions. Although environmental awareness is still not a decisive factor for all consumers, most still appreciate brands that behave responsibly towards the environment, which indicates the growing importance of sustainability in digital and physical commerce.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results indicate the increasing importance of digital commerce in consumers' lives, with online shopping becoming more common. The majority of respondents shop online monthly (35%) or even weekly or more often (30%), confirming the trend of increasing digital consumption and the need to adapt digital channels to these habits. When it comes to the most commonly used shopping channels, mobile applications dominate with 39%, followed by desktop web shopping (31%) and physical stores (15%). These results show how important it is to invest in the development of optimized and responsive mobile platforms, but also to maintain a physical presence for those consumers who still prefer traditional shopping methods. An analysis of the factors that contribute most to a positive user experience shows that respondents value the visual clarity and simplicity of a website the most (22.4%), clear product descriptions and reviews (19.7%), and personalized offers (19%) and consistency across all channels (18.4%). These elements point to the importance of UX design, but also to the necessity for brands to offer users relevant, personalized and consistent content across all channels. The evaluation of key characteristics of digital commerce further confirms the importance of the quality of the user experience. The highest scores (4 and 5) were given to items such as "Easy to use" and "Fast and responsive", which implies that the functionality and technical performance of web platforms have a direct impact on user satisfaction. Interestingly, the personalization of the offer and the brand's environmental responsibility have divided perceptions. Although 39% of respondents consider personalization to be very important or crucial, 40% of them rate it as little or not at all important. The situation is similar with environmental responsibility – although 63% of respondents indicate at least moderate importance, 39% still do not give this dimension a significant priority. These results indicate generational or value differences in consumer attitudes, which may be important for further market segmentation and targeted advertising.

The results of the conducted research indicate a high level of digital maturity of consumers, but also the need for strategic management of the user experience. Personalization, technical optimization, and sustainability are key differentiators in modern retail. Companies that successfully connect these components are more likely to retain customers and secure a long-term competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

The results of the conducted research indicate the increasing importance of user experience in digital commerce, especially in the context of personalization, visual clarity of websites and speed of service. Respondents most often shop via mobile applications and web stores, and they value a simple and intuitive user interface, clear descriptions and reviews, as well as personalized offers the most. Although environmental responsibility is not yet a key factor for most consumers, its importance is growing, especially among younger and more educated respondents. It is crucial that brands develop integrated strategies and user-oriented digital systems that enable a consistent and high-quality experience across all sales channels.

The conducted research aimed to examine how contemporary digital trends affect user and consumer experience and identify key elements of successful management of these experiences. Based on the results obtained, several important conclusions can be drawn, in the context of the research questions:

1. Digital trends, such as artificial intelligence and personalization, have a significant impact on shaping user and consumer experience. The results show that a growing number of users value personalized recommendations and digital solutions that enhance their experience, confirming the importance of investing in technological development.
2. Successful customer experience management (CEM) is based on several key elements: a clear and simple user interface, personalized content, consistency of experience across all channels, and quality customer support. These factors contribute most to user satisfaction and their long-term relationship with the brand.
3. Consumers increasingly recognize and value personalization – almost half of respondents state that personalized experience is very important or crucial to them, which indicates the necessity of integrating content customization tools into digital platforms.
4. Brands' environmental responsibility plays an increasingly important role in shaping a positive consumer experience. More than half of respondents emphasized that sustainability is at least moderately important to them, with it being more pronounced among younger and more educated consumers.
5. UX design and UI technologies directly contribute to user satisfaction – respondents highly rated the speed, simplicity, and visual appeal of digital platforms. This confirms the thesis that quality design is not only an aesthetic aspect, but a key element of the user experience.

Recommendations for further research include expanding the sample to include different demographic groups (e.g. older consumers, lower-educated groups or different regions), as well as conducting longitudinal studies that would monitor changes in consumer behavior over time. In addition, a qualitative approach (interviews, focus groups) is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and emotional aspects of the user experience. It would be useful to further investigate the impact of specific digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality, on consumer perception of value and loyalty.

Research limitations relate to the size and composition of the sample. Although the research was conducted on a sample of 102 respondents, the majority were women and people of middle age and higher education, which may affect the general representativeness of the results. Also, the research was limited to the perception and expressed attitudes of the respondents, without observing actual behavior during shopping.

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