Inbound marketing and online purchase intention: A PLS-SEM approach in the cleaning products industry

Inbound marketing e intención de compra online: un enfoque PLS-SEM en la industria de productos de limpieza

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Abstract
This study analyzes the impact of inbound marketing (IM) strategies on online purchase intention (PI) among consumers of cleaning products. A non-experimental, cross-sectional approach was adopted, applying partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected through online surveys with 675 customers of five companies in the sector. The results demonstrate that inbound marketing exerts a significant influence on attitude toward behavior (ATB) and, to a lesser extent, on subjective norms (SN), both determinants of online purchase intention. Furthermore, the study concludes that inbound marketing improves the perceived value of the product and strengthens consumer trust through personalized content strategies.

Keywords: e-commerce, consumer behavior, digital marketing.

Resumen
El presente estudio analiza el impacto de las estrategias de *inbound marketing* (IM) en la intención de compra online (PI) de consumidores de productos de limpieza. Para ello, se adoptó un enfoque no experimental y transversal, aplicando el modelo de ecuaciones estructurales por mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM). Los datos se recopilaron mediante encuestas en línea a 675 clientes de cinco empresas del sector. Los resultados demuestran que el *inbound marketing* ejerce una influencia significativa en la actitud hacia el comportamiento (ATB) y, en menor grado, en las normas subjetivas (SN), ambos factores determinantes de la intención de compra en línea. Además, el estudio concluye que el *inbound marketing* mejora el valor percibido del producto y fortalece la confianza del consumidor a través de estrategias de contenidos personalizados.

Palabras clave: comercio electrónico, comportamiento del consumidor, *marketing* digital.

Introduction

Currently, two key aspects of consumption stand out: the increasing frequency of online commercial transactions and a greater focus on individual health. This trend has led to the emergence of new producers and consumers of cleaning products on digital platforms (Wathanakom, 2023; Bermúdez Sosa & Duque-Oliva, 2022; Kędzierska-Szczepaniak & Minga, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

E-commerce has established itself as an essential tool for the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries. Its expansion has been facilitated by access to digital infrastructure, the development of online markets, and an increase in digital literacy within the business sector (Paun et al., 2024). As SMEs adopt e-commerce technologies, they are able to overcome geographical barriers, expand their customer base, and optimize operational efficiency (Türkeș, 2024; Veiga et al., 2024).

The rise of digital technologies and the relevance of online channels have enabled companies to reduce operational and transaction costs, enhance customer experience, and strengthen their competitiveness against larger corporations (Campos-Dávila et al., 2024; Paun et al., 2024). This growth has positively impacted SME sales and has driven innovation in marketing strategies (Türkeș, 2024; Veiga et al., 2024).

Businesses have reoriented their marketing strategies to respond to new consumer needs and concerns (Onofrei et al., 2022; Triani & Siregar, 2022; Kotler et al., 2017). This shift has resulted in innovative approaches such as inbound marketing (IM), which focuses on attracting, engaging, and delighting customers through valuable content and personalized experiences (Kannan & Li, 2017; Roy et al., 2017). However, many small businesses lack the necessary expertise to effectively manage these strategies (Bermúdez & Duque-Oliva, 2022; Nekmahmud et al., 2022).

Inbound marketing is designed to attract visitors through techniques such as content marketing, social media, and search engine optimization, aiming to transform them into loyal customers and brand advocates (Chandra, 2019).

In this context, consumer behavior theory posits that both internal factors—such as needs, desires, and motivations—and external factors, including cultural and social influences, shape purchasing decisions (Schiffman et al., 2010). The latter align with the Persuasion Theory, which underscores the impact of stimuli such as advertising, authority, and scarcity on the desire to acquire (Raza & Zaman, 2021).

Thus, inbound marketing prioritizes attracting potential customers through quality content and multichannel interactions, surpassing traditional approaches (Halligan & Shah, 2010). Additionally, it acts as a catalyst for external factors during the "Attract" phase. With the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), the generation of relevant content and personalized experiences is enhanced (Bilal et al., 2024; Bashynska et al., 2019). In the "Engage" and "Delight" stages, this strategy is grounded in relational marketing theory, which emphasizes building lasting relationships to create sustainable value (Baytar et al., 2020; Schiffman et al., 2010).

In this regard, it is pertinent to discuss purchase intention (PI), defined as the probability or favorable disposition of a consumer to acquire a specific product or service (Schiffman et al., 2010). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, this concept is structured around two key dimensions: attitude toward the behavior (ATB) and subjective norms (SN) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970).

The attitude toward behavior reflects the subjective evaluation a consumer makes about a product, associating it with positive or negative perceptions during the purchasing process. This attitude is measured through factors such as perceived product attractiveness (Baek & Kim, 2022), perceived prices (Bermúdez & Duque-Oliva, 2022; Büyükdağ et al., 2020), perceived benefits (Baek & Kim, 2022), perceived efficiency (Wathanakom, 2023), and trust in the product (Widayat et al., 2023; Vo Minh et al., 2022).

Subjective norms, on the other hand, represent the external influence exerted by others on consumer decisions (Schiffman et al., 2010; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970). These norms manifest through the opinions and recommendations of family, friends, experts, opinion leaders, and social trends (An Ngo et al., 2023; Garzon et al., 2021). This phenomenon acts as emotional and informational support that enhances consumer confidence and directly affects purchase intention, even through comments on the perceived usefulness of the product (Makmor et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022).

Regarding inbound marketing and its impact on online purchase intention (PI), the state of the art demonstrates that IM operates as an external stimulus through the creation of relevant content on social media, leading to positive customer experiences (Moslehpour et al., 2021). Studies confirm that IM can alter purchase intention by improving consumer outlook (Vasquez-Reyes et al., 2023; Garzon et al., 2021). For instance, research by Chandra (2019) indicates that IM strengthens product quality perception, thereby increasing PI. A specific case in Peru revealed that IM applied to fast food businesses generated significant interactions: 61.39% of customers acknowledged that social media content influenced their expectations, 47.5% interacted through reactions and comments, and 63.4% shared and recommended the companies' content (Vasquez-Reyes et al., 2023).

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is formulated: H1. Inbound marketing has a significant effect on the online purchase intention of customers of SMEs engaged in the production and marketing of cleaning products.

Returning to the dimension of "attitude toward behavior" (ATB), it critically depends on factors such as consumer perceptions and the variety of products or services, elements that generate perceived value and exert a direct influence on purchase intention (Baek & Kim, 2022). Additionally, the factor of health awareness and vital risks is included, whose positive effects on PI have been empirically supported in recent research (Wathanakom, 2023).

Additionally, aspects such as the intrinsic quality of the product, consumer trust, brand recognition and image, and even the country of manufacture act as catalysts for changes in consumer attitude, enhancing their purchase intention (PI) (Pratama et al., 2023; Widayat et al., 2023). In this regard, research by Baytar et al. (2020) shows that consumers exhibit a greater preference for genuine products over those presented through augmented reality, suggesting that this tool does not necessarily increase PI.

Another factor influencing PI is perceptions regarding discount models and promotions, particularly those that include giveaways or product add-ons, which generate incremental effects on purchase willingness (Bermúdez Sosa & Duque-Oliva, 2022; Büyükdağ et al., 2020). Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated: H2. Inbound marketing has a significant effect on the attitude toward behavior dimension of online purchase intention among customers of SMEs engaged in the production and marketing of cleaning products.

Regarding the "subjective norm" (SN) dimension, elements such as positive reactions on social media (e.g., "likes"), comments, and suggestions from third parties significantly influence attitudes toward the brand, trust, information seeking, and online purchase intention (Vasquez-Reyes et al., 2023; Garzón et al., 2021). Additionally, the impact of digital influencers, the quality of information, customer recommendations, and live broadcasts, whose positive effects on PI have been widely documented, should be considered (An Ngo et al., 2023; Onofrei et al., 2022). However, authors like Park et al. (2021) caution that online reviews can exert significant, albeit not always predictable, influence on PI. Based on the above, the hypothesis is established: H3. Inbound marketing has a significant effect on the subjective norm dimension of online purchase intention among customers of SMEs in the cleaning products sector.

Finally, considering all the aforementioned points, this research analyzes the effect of inbound marketing strategies on the online purchase intention of customers of Peruvian companies dedicated to the manufacturing and marketing of cleaning products. The participating companies have a presence in both traditional and digital channels, with a greater emphasis on in-person marketing.

Methodology

This study adopted a non-experimental, deductive, and cross-sectional design, where data were collected at a single point in time to analyze the impact of inbound marketing strategies on the online purchase intention of customers. This approach allowed for the evaluation of relationships between variables in a real-world context, reinforcing the external validity of the findings.

Data collection was conducted in five representative companies within the studied sector, involving 675 customers. To ensure sample diversity, the questionnaire was administered through multiple modalities: in-person surveys, online forms (Google Forms), emails, and telephone interviews. These strategies facilitated the inclusion of a wide range of ages and socioeconomic profiles, ensuring a heterogeneous and representative sample of the

target population. The sampling was non-probabilistic and intentional, prioritizing demographic and socioeconomic representativeness.

The instrument was designed based on prior literature and adapted to the study's context, specifically evaluating inbound marketing, purchase intention, and the dimensions of attitude toward behavior and subjective norms. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through evaluations by five experts in inbound marketing and e-commerce, achieving an Aiken's V coefficient of 1.0. To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 65 participants, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.944, indicating high internal consistency of the scales used.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The validity of the model was verified through factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), ensuring convergent and discriminant validity. Path coefficients were examined to identify direct and indirect effects, employing bootstrap resampling techniques to determine statistical significance. All processing was conducted using SmartPLS software (business trial version).

The study was conducted in Peru, with data collected from customers across various regions and economic sectors linked to the mass-market cleaning products. This geographical approach provided a representative perspective on consumption dynamics within the Peruvian context, ensuring that the results are applicable to the design of marketing strategies in the sector.

It is noteworthy that all participants provided informed consent before data collection, ensuring anonymity and the option to withdraw at any time. The questionnaire and raw data are available upon request from the first author, in compliance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

Results and discussion

The study analyzed data from 675 customers belonging to five Peruvian companies, with a gender distribution of 218 men (32.3%) and 457 women (67.7%). The results provide key evidence regarding the influence of inbound marketing strategies on purchase intention, with an analysis segmented by gender, age group, occupation, and economic sector. This segmentation allowed for the identification of differentiated patterns in consumer responses, enriching the understanding of market dynamics in the studied context.

Table 1

Factor loadings and convergent validity

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	218	32.3
	Female	457	67.7
Age Group	18-24 years	145	21.5
	25-34 years	278	41.2
	35-44 years	162	24
	45+ years	90	13.3
Occupation	Employees		
Sector	Students	410	60.7
	Entrepreneurs	180	26.7
	Others	50	7.4
	Retail	35	5.2
	Manufacturing		
Age Group	Health	250	37
	Education	180	26.7
	Others	120	17.8
	18-24 years	80	11.9
	25-34 years	45	6.6

According to the demographic data presented in Table 1, the sample included 675 respondents with diverse distribution, where women represented 67.7%, highlighting their predominant role in cleaning product purchasing decisions. Regarding age distribution, 41.2% of participants fell within the 25 to 34 years range, a key demographic for inbound marketing strategies due to their consolidated purchasing power and high engagement in digital channels.

In terms of occupation, employees constituted the majority group (60.7%), followed by students (26.7%), while entrepreneurs and others represented smaller proportions. Regarding sector activity, participants from the retail (37.0%) and manufacturing (26.7%) sectors predominated, reinforcing the relevance of these sectors in shaping purchase intention within the cleaning products market.

Table 2
Variance (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.702
Attitude toward Behavior (ATB)	0.715
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.731
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.727

According to the results presented in Table 2, all variables exhibit AVE values exceeding 0.5: inbound marketing (IM) at 0.702, attitude toward behavior (ATB) at 0.715, subjective norms (SN) at 0.731, and purchase intention (PI) at 0.727. These data confirm that a significant proportion of the variance in the observed variables is explained by their respective latent variables, validating the convergent validity of the model.

The highest AVE value corresponded to subjective norms (SN), suggesting that this construct plays a determining role in shaping purchase intention. This finding is particularly relevant considering that 68% of the sample comprised women, a segment that, according to previous studies, tends to be more influenced by social factors and collective perceptions in their consumption decisions.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity

Variable	IM	ATB	SN	PI
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.838	0.752	0.709	0.732
Attitude toward Behavior (ATB)	0.752	0.845	0.766	0.784
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.709	0.766	0.856	0.748
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.732	0.784	0.748	0.842

As shown in Table 3, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The values on the diagonal (representing the square root of the AVE) were always greater than the correlations between constructs. For example, the square root of the AVE for inbound marketing (IM), 0.838, was greater than its correlations with attitude toward behavior (ATB): 0.752, subjective norms (SN): 0.709, and purchase intention (PI): 0.732. This confirms that each construct is unique and measures distinct aspects within the model, validating that inbound marketing and purchase intention are clearly differentiated concepts.

Table 4
HTMT Ratios

	IM	ATB	SN	PI
IM	-			
ATB	0.823	-		
SN	0.784	0.853	-	
PI	0.801	0.887	0.865	-

Table 4 shows that all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.9, confirming the discriminant validity of the model. In particular, the HTMT between attitude toward behavior (ATB) and subjective norms (SN) recorded a value of 0.853, suggesting a strong yet conceptually differentiated relationship between both constructs. These results validate that the variables maintain distinct conceptual identities, despite exhibiting significant interrelations within the proposed theoretical framework.

Table 5

Composite reliability

Variable	Alpha	Reliability
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.891	0.923
Attitude toward Behavior (ATB)	0.903	0.930
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.887	0.916
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.874	0.905

Table 5 displays high internal consistency for the analyzed variables, as all composite reliability values exceed the threshold of 0.7. Specifically: inbound marketing (IM): 0.923, purchase intention (PI): 0.905, attitude toward behavior (ATB): 0.930, and subjective norms (SN): 0.916.

These results confirm that the variables accurately measure the core aspects of inbound marketing and its relationship with purchase intention. Furthermore, the high composite reliability indicates that the constructs maintain stability even when applied to different segments of the sample, reinforcing the reliability of the model.

Table 6

Hypothesis results

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	T	p-valor	Conclusion
H1. IM → PI	0.680	12.0	<0.001	Accepted
H2. IM → ATB	0.690	11.9	<0.001	Accepted
H3. IM → SN	0.472	4.3	<0.001	Accepted

The results in Table 6 confirm that inbound marketing (IM) has a significant impact on purchase intention (PI). The path coefficient for IM → PI is 0.680 with a p-value < 0.001, indicating a strong positive relationship. The coefficient for IM → ATB (0.690) is higher than for IM → SN (0.472), suggesting that the attitude toward behavior plays a more dominant mediating role. Additionally, the t-statistic values reinforce the statistical significance of these relationships.

In this context, the significant effect of inbound marketing (IM) on online purchase intention (PI) among customers of SMEs in the cleaning products sector is analyzed. These results align with the research of Moslehpour et al. (2021) and Vásquez-Reyes et al. (2023), who highlighted its effectiveness across various industries. These studies revealed that generating valuable content on social media not only improves consumer perception but also strengthens their purchase intention, findings that correspond with Kannan & Li (2017) and Roy et al. (2017) regarding the positive impact of IM on consumer interaction and engagement.

Moreover, the factorial analysis confirmed the validity of the evaluated dimensions, evidencing a strong influence of IM on PI (coefficient of 0.680, $p < 0.001$). These data reinforce recent research in digital marketing, such as that by Türkeș (2024). Notably, in countries like Romania, the effects of the pandemic and post-pandemic, combined with an 80% increase in internet penetration, remarkably accelerated e-commerce. This scenario underscores the importance of conducting market research to identify factors that drive business performance in digital environments.

Regarding the "attitude toward behavior" dimension, it is confirmed that perceptions of product quality, brand trust, and perceived benefits are key determinants of online PI. These results are consistent with Pratama et al. (2023), Widayat et al. (2023), and Baek & Kim (2022), who identified that specific product attributes directly influence purchase intention. Additionally, Bermúdez Sosa & Duque-Oliva (2022) and Büyükdağ et al. (2020) demonstrated that promotions and discounts positively impact PI, validating that consumers prefer incentives such as promotional bundles or value-added offers.

In terms of the "subjective norm" dimension, it is observed that the influence of third parties (family, friends, and social media interactions) significantly affects PI, in line with Schiffman et al. (2010) and Ajzen & Fishbein

(1970), who emphasize the role of socialization in purchasing decisions. Specifically, the results align with Garzón et al. (2021), who found that interactions such as "likes" and comments increase brand trust. Furthermore, An Ngo et al. (2023), Onofrei et al. (2022), and Park et al. (2021) corroborated that influencer participation and content quality are key to generating credibility. However, negative reviews were also found to affect PI, reinforcing the need for active digital reputation management.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that inbound marketing (IM) exerts a significant effect on the online purchase intention (PI) of consumers from Peruvian SMEs in the cleaning products sector, validating the importance of relevant content and segmentation on social media as mechanisms to strengthen consumer perception and motivate purchasing decisions. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes IM's ability to generate trust and engagement through user-centric strategies.

On one hand, it is confirmed that the attitude toward behavior—defined by perceptions of product quality, brand trust, and perceived benefits—has a greater influence on PI than subjective norms, such as social pressure from family, friends, or networks. However, the latter also prove to be determinants when factors like digital interactions or influencer participation come into play, highlighting the need for strategic digital reputation management.

From a practical perspective, it is recommended that SMEs in the sector direct their efforts toward IM strategies based on understanding their target audience, prioritizing personalized content and process automation. The presence of a majority segment of women (67.7%) and young adults aged 25 to 34 years (41.2%)—groups with high activity in digital environments—demands campaigns designed to leverage their consumption habits and communication preferences.

Additionally, the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) validates the proposed theoretical model, integrating attitudinal and social dimensions to understand online consumer behavior. This contribution is relevant both for the academic field, enriching existing conceptual frameworks, and for the business sector, providing tools to develop more dynamic and attractive e-commerce ecosystems.

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