Retail Monitor 2026:

Success in Social Commerce

Swipe, Watch, Buy: Winning the Social Commerce Race

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Social commerce is no longer just "a sponsored post on Instagram". It is a new route to revenue – one where the shopper discovers, evaluates, and buys in the span of a one-page scroll. Globally, social commerce is projected to reach EUR 1.28 trillion in revenue by the end of 2030[1]. This PwC Retail Monitor 2026 explores the current state-of-play of social commerce and outlines key metrics and strategies for retailers to drive success in this evolving channel.

Social commerce describes the journey from discovery to purchase via social platforms. This includes shoppable content such as posts, reels, and pins, creator affiliate links, live shopping formats, and in-app or retailer's own checkout options. Globally, nearly one in five online shoppers (18%) are likely to purchase through well-established platforms such as Facebook, closely followed by Instagram and TikTok (both 17%)[2].

This article looks at what is changing, and what it means for retail leaders who expect results beyond pure reach. Social commerce is maturing on its own terms: creator-driven, live-focused, increasingly more regulated, and payment-diverse. Retailers that understand the market momentum, the social platform specifics, and how to create a seamless customer journey embedded in their value chain can turn social commerce into a sustainable revenue generator rather than a growing marketing cost without a clear return.

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Why social commerce matters now for retail

Social commerce is reshaping how consumers discover, evaluate, and buy products. Consumers are increasingly blending inspiration and transaction into a single journey, turning social platforms into an entry point to retail. For retailers, this shift directly affects how operations are organised, customer experience is designed, and ultimately how customer relationships are built and maintained.

Our 2024 Retail Monitor[3] illustrated how this shift towards social shopping is already influencing physical store operations. Retailers have been exploring features that reflect the growing overlap between shopping and content creation, such as designated areas in-store for recording social media content. At the same time, around 25% of retailers expect to hold no inventory in their physical stores by 2030, signalling growing reliance on alternative fulfilment models and on customer journeys that increasingly begin outside the store, for example in a social feed.

One of the most prominent accelerators is video led and creator-driven social commerce which is shaping how customer experience is designed. When discovery happens through video, retailers need to provide content that shows products in use, answers practical questions, and makes it easy to buy at or close to the point of discovery. And when customers are ready to purchase, retailers need accurate fulfilment indicators, a reliable checkout interface, and in-the-moment customer support. If customers discover products in a feed but still want to try them in person, stores need to deliver on that promise through product availability, quick try-outs, knowledgeable staff, and seamless omnichannel checkout and return options.

These experience dynamics are also impacted by generational habits which influence how social commerce customer relationships are formed. Younger shoppers, such as Gen Z and Millennials, increasingly start their product searches on social platforms and are more comfortable using in-app checkout. This means that the first touchpoint with them may be a creator, a comment thread, or a direct message rather than a website visit. Older shoppers are catching up in discovery but more often complete their purchases on a retailer's website or in a physical store. The implication is that the relationship with this shopper can be lost or won during the handoff moment.

The lesson is straightforward: social is already a mainstream buying channel for younger customers and a powerful discovery channel for everyone else. This increases the number of customer touchpoints and provides opportunities for retailers to turn that social discovery into repeatable, owned customer relationships.

The upsides are concrete. A shorter path from "I've just seen it" to "I've bought it" can increase and speed up conversion compared with sending customers from a post to a slower mobile product page. Creators help retailers reach communities that are difficult to access through traditional advertising, while the direct link from content to checkout improves visibility into what actually drives sales. Testing cycles are also accelerated, as social formats allow merchandisers to quickly test bundles, price points, and messages and learn from engagement and sell through. These effects are not limited to online channels. Well-timed content can drive customers into stores for pickup, events, or demonstrations. For retailers, this results in higher conversion and incremental sales, better visibility into what works (and what doesn't), and the ability to run promotions with more precision which protects margins rather than relies on blanket discounting.

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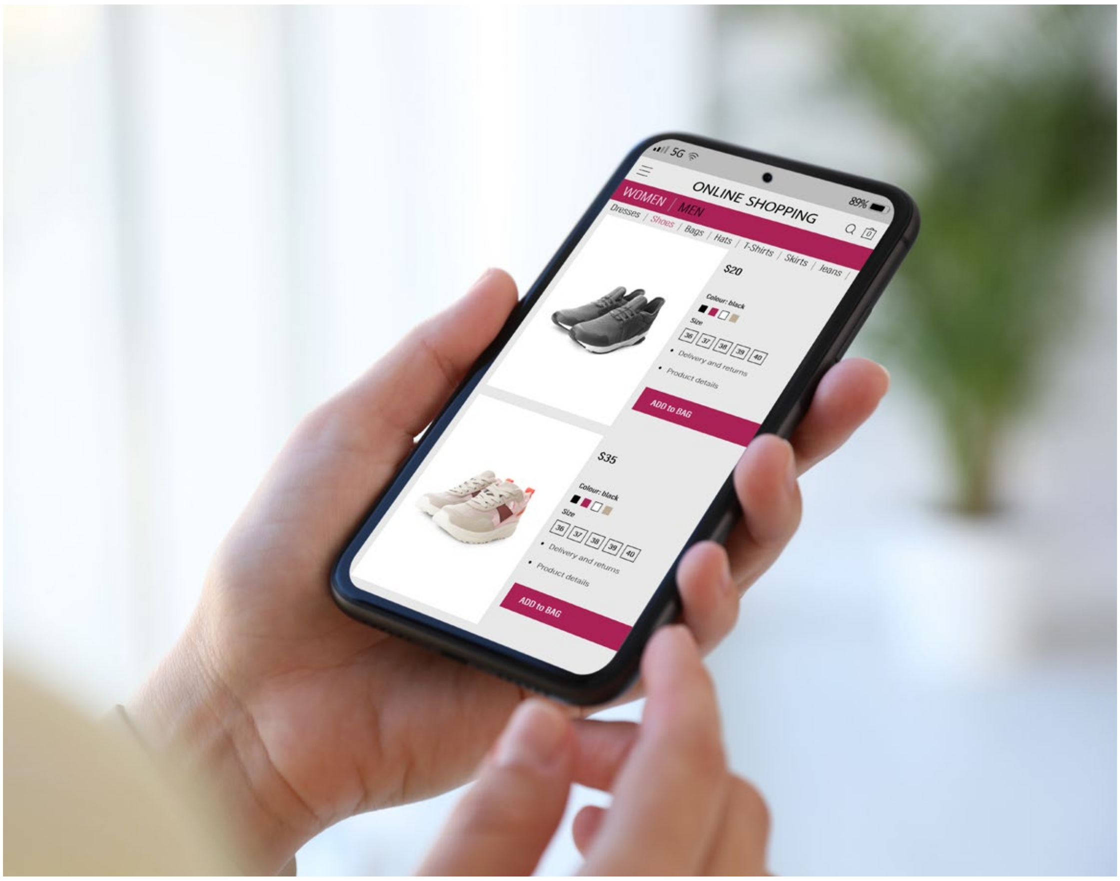
Challenges

While the opportunities are abundant, there are also substantial challenges to address. Operationally, catalogues and inventory must stay in sync with what is promoted through social channel. And when a viral post suddenly spikes demand, fulfilment must be able to handle that surge without degrading the customer experience.

The rapid rise of Dubai style chocolate bars illustrates this dynamic. Within a short period, the product went viral on TikTok and pushed the product from niche indulgence to global demand. Attention surged instantly, but production did not. Larger brands faced long lead times around product development, pistachio sourcing, quality assurance, and rollout. By the time supply caught up, imitation products crowded the market and demand normalised. What began as social driven scarcity quickly turned into saturation, highlighting the growing gap between how demand emerges and how retail operations are built to respond.



Consumer data confirms that fulfilment and reliability are key pain points in social commerce, with 35% of shoppers experiencing long delivery times and 25% reporting discrepancies between ordered and received products[4]. As a result, trust remains a critical factor. This is reinforced by research showing that nearly 80% of shoppers consider accurate product content availability essential to purchase decisions, with discrepancies between displayed and delivered products directly driving returns[5].

The emergence of agentic commerce could further raise the bar for retail operations, as AI agents begin to place orders autonomously, increasing the need for real-time inventory accuracy, reliable fulfilment, and consistent product data across channels.

Data ownership presents another pressure point. While in-app checkout reduces friction and makes purchasing easier, it can also limit the customer data available to retailers. Without a clear strategy to encourage ‘follows’, messaging opt-ins, or loyalty connections, retailers risk generating anonymous transactions they cannot build on. In an increasingly omnichannel environment, this can significantly limit the ability to steer the business, personalise experiences, and build long-term customer relationships.

A market that can’t be ignored

Despite operational and trust constraints, social commerce is proving it can deliver significant upside across markets, with faster conversion, better attribution, and more precise promotion. At a global level, social commerce is scaling rapidly, and Europe is no exception. European consumers are increasingly comfortable with buying through social channels. As a result, the European social commerce market generated EUR 135 billion in 2025 and is projected to grow at a 15.6% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) through 2033[6]. These numbers point to a structural shift, not a passing trend.

Adoption, however, tells a more nuanced story. In 2023, only about a quarter of European social media users had completed a purchase directly on a social platform, which was well behind the U.S. and Asia-Pacific (APAC), of respectively 39% and 30%[7]. This suggests Europe’s social commerce market is scaling on the back of engaged early adopters, with the mass-market wave still ahead. But the gap is closing fast.

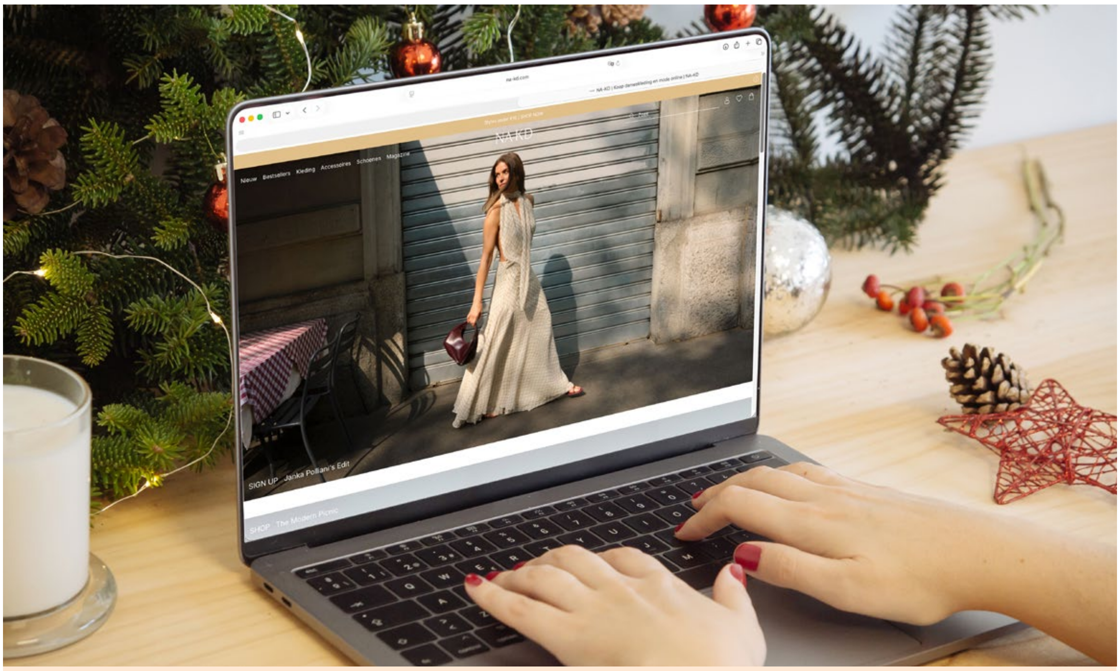
Recent launches show how quickly adoption can accelerate: within a year, TikTok Shop has reached over 15% shopper adoption in Germany and now ranks among the top-15 online retailers[8]. This momentum, however, still lags far behind China, where social commerce is fully embedded in everyday shopping, highlighting how early Europe remains in its maturity curve.

The data further shows that consumers are warming up to creator-driven commerce. In selected European countries, around 70–80% of consumers trust influencer recommendations, reflecting the growing role of creators in the buying journey[9]. Gen Z leads adoption, with 53% having purchased new products via social platforms, and 68% having discovered new brands this way[10]. Millennials follow closely behind. Together, they are normalising a shopping experience that starts and ends within a social feed.

TikTok Shop is the platform at the forefront of this trend, having become essential for reaching the 18-34 demographic and adding approximately €31 billion to the European economy in 2025[11]. Live shopping, shoppable posts, and in-app storefronts are now standard features, driving both engagement and conversion.

Mobile is the backbone of this shift. It already accounts for 66.8% of Europe's digital advertising market value, and social commerce is overwhelmingly a mobile-first experience[12]. Livestream formats are accelerating growth particularly in fashion and beauty, where brands are beginning to report measurable revenue shares from live sessions. Retailers who have not optimised for mobile discovery, browsing, and checkout are competing at a disadvantage.

The message for European retailers is clear: social commerce is no longer a tactical experiment. It is becoming a major line of business.



The Swedish fashion retailer NA-KD is a clear example of social commerce mastery in Europe. Its success is driven by a disciplined, creator-led model that resonates strongly with Gen Z. Rather than treating social as a pure awareness or browsing channel, the brand works structurally with credible creators (from nano-creators to larger influencers) to produce platform-native content that drives discovery and conversion to its own checkout. By prioritising trust and commercial impact over reach alone, NA-KD shows how social commerce can scale in Europe through strong execution.

Platform strategies: where discovery meets conversion

In Europe's social commerce scene, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Each platform has its own unique way of guiding customers from discovery to purchase, forcing brands to use different content, develop specific operational skills, and weigh distinct commercial trade-offs.

Persona 1: The Scale Seeker

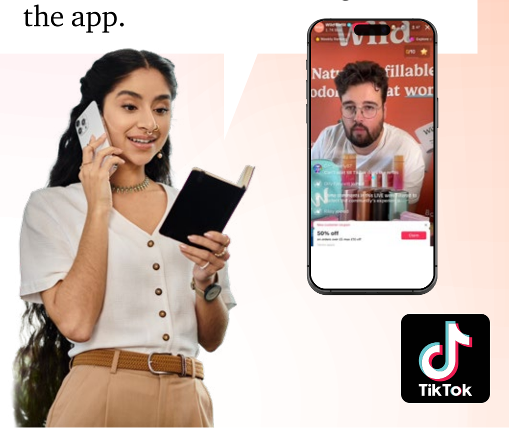
A brand focused on maximizing reach across broad audiences, driving traffic to owned channels.

I want to reach millions of Millennials and Gen Z and drive them to my webshop.

Persona 2: The Trend Chaser

A brand targeting younger shoppers with native, in-app shopping experiences that keep them engaged on-platform.

I want to sell directly to Gen Z without them ever leaving the app.



Persona 3: The Trust Builder

A brand selling complex or premium products that need explanation and demonstration to convert.

My products need explanation – customers need to see, understand, and trust before they buy.

Persona 4: The Catalogue Curator

A brand using lifestyle inspiration and curated collections to guide intentional purchases.

My customers plan with intent – I want to inspire them with my collections.

Navigating Europe's unique landscape: regulation and payment trends

Beyond platform strategies, two structural forces shape how social commerce operates in Europe: payments and regulation. Both introduce complexity that does exist in milder forms in other continents. For European retailers however, these are the operational foundations on which platform strategies succeed or fail.

Payments across the European market remain fragmented. While cards still dominate by total transaction value, payment methods are split over multiple channels. Mobile wallets now account for more than 30% of global e-commerce transactions, and Buy Now, Pay Later services like Klarna are gaining traction by offering consumers flexibility through instalment payments[13]. Messaging-led commerce, such as WhatsApp, is powerful for consultation and service but typically hands off to retailer websites for payment.

This fragmentation matters for social commerce because omnichannel retailers must accommodate payment habits that vary not just across countries but across channels, with ease of purchase being one of the strongest drivers of social commerce adoption. Consumer data shows that 38% of online shoppers cite ease of purchase as a key reason to increase their use of social commerce, while a further 21% specifically point to faster and more seamless payments[14].

Regulation adds another layer of complexity for retailers scaling social commerce in Europe. The Digital Services Act (DSA), applicable across the EU since February 2024, enforces ad transparency for influencer partnerships, requires platforms to verify seller identities, and mandates non-personalised feed options for users. Combined with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), retailers are faced with a dual compliance challenge, particularly around personalised advertising where the two regulations intersect, requiring dedicated legal and technical attention.

For retailers, this means that transparency and regulatory compliance are not just legal obligations, they are commercial prerequisites. Brands that treat transparency as a feature rather than a constraint will have a measurable advantage.

The winning playbook: five models driving social commerce success

Amid these dynamics, the question for retailers is no longer whether to play in social commerce, but how to do it with the right level of control and operational fit. In practice, five dominant models emerge as the blueprint for success, each reflecting a different approach to value creation and control in the social commerce journey.

	Model	Description	Customer data ownership	Checkout & payment control	Brand & experience control	Scalability & operational simplicity	E2E customer journey
1	Platform-native retail	Brands sell directly within social platforms, where discovery, checkout and payment happen in-app.	☆	☆	☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆☆
2	Social-led, offsite checkout	Social drives discovery and engagement, while transactions take place on the brand's own e-commerce site.	☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆
3	Creator-commerce and affiliate program	Creators promote products through trusted content or affiliate links that drive traffic to brand's own checkout.	☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆	☆☆	☆☆
4	Community and Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) marketplaces	Consumers buy and sell directly within platform- or interest-based communities.	☆	☆	☆	☆☆	☆☆☆
5	Brand-owned live shopping	Brands host live-streamed shopping experiences on their own channels with fully owned checkout.	☆☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆☆	☆	☆☆

Low
☆
Moderate
☆☆
High
☆☆☆

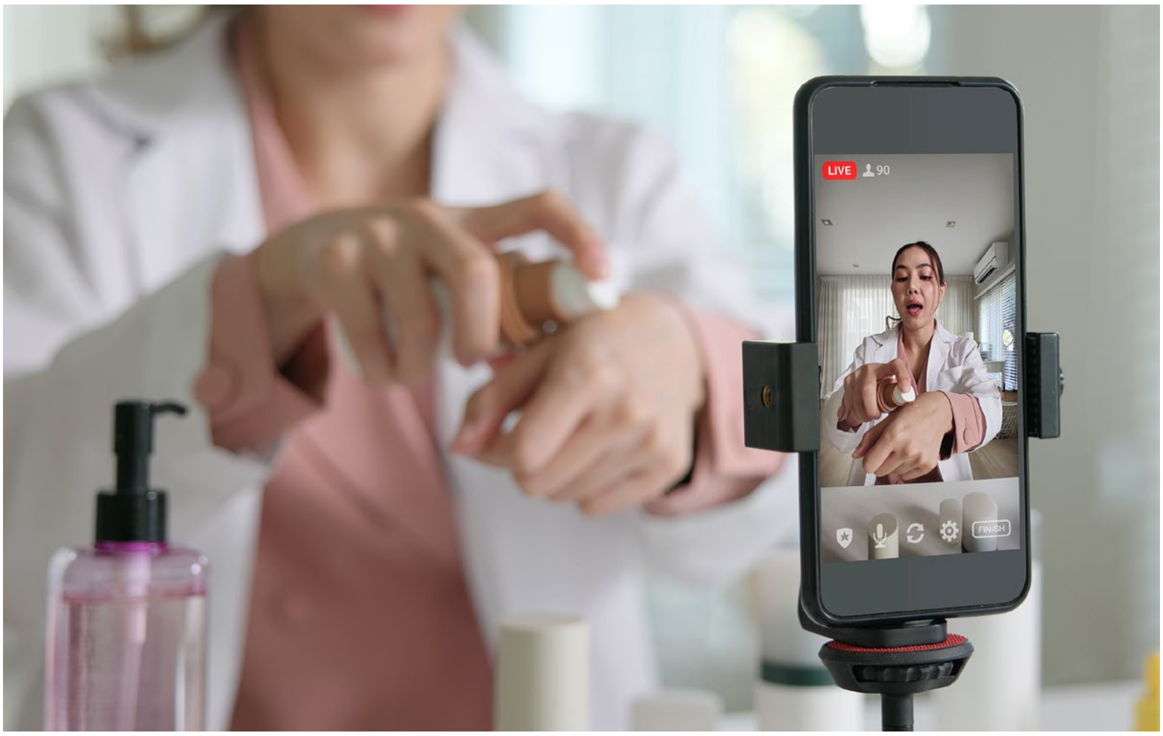
Crucially, the differentiator is in the execution: starting with clear ownership, repeatable ways of working, and metrics that tie content directly to commercial outcomes.

What's next for retailers

It is evident that social commerce has moved beyond a marketing experiment or a simple add-on to existing roles; it is becoming a standard retail channel that demands the same strategic discipline as any other line of business.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but success depends on clear choices. To win, retailers must align strategic objectives, brand positioning, and the role of social channels in the path to purchase with their ability to create relevant content, deliver consistent experiences, and operate with technological and regulatory maturity.

Retailers that will win are those who plan for frictionless digital-first journeys, work with credible creators who drive conversion rather than reach alone, and embed privacy-by-design from the start. Crucially, the differentiator is in the execution: starting with clear ownership, repeatable ways of working, and metrics that tie content directly to commercial outcomes. Done right, social commerce becomes a reliable growth engine, allowing retailers to scale fast without breaking the customer promise.



Endnotes

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10 Capgemini (2025) – What matters to today's consumer

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12 Marketline (2024) – Digital Advertising in Europe

13 Statista (2025) – Payments in Europe

14 Statista (2024) – Main drivers for increased social media purchases worldwide 2024

Contacts

Curious about what social commerce could mean for your organisation?
We are happy to explore the impact on the customer journey, channel strategy, and operating model tailored to your market context, ambitions, and level of maturity.

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