



**UNIVERSIDADE
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AN ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN'S EAGLE DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY: FROM HUMAN-CENTERED MARKETING TO CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISING

Análise da estratégia de marketing digital da American Eagle: Do marketing centrado no ser humano à publicidade controversa

Projeto de Graduação

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the challenges of modern marketing through an analysis of the digital marketing strategy of the clothing brand American Eagle and its Fall 2025 campaign. In the highly competitive denim market, American Eagle stands out through a human-centered marketing strategy that builds a strong emotional connection with consumers. Thanks to its strong presence on social media, its popularity among younger generations, and its optimistic brand personality, American Eagle promotes the values of inclusivity, authenticity, and self-acceptance. However, in August 2025, the brand shifted its communication strategy, generating a controversy that quickly spread beyond national borders. Was this controversy beneficial or detrimental to the brand? This study highlights the importance of developing a digital marketing strategy that aligns with the values and expectations of its consumers.

Keywords: American Eagle - Digital Marketing - Brand Identity - Human-Centered Strategy - Controversy

Resumo

O presente estudo tem como objetivo destacar os desafios do marketing moderno através da análise da estratégia de marketing digital da marca de vestuário American Eagle e da campanha de outono de 2025. Na intensa concorrência do mercado do denim, a American Eagle distingue-se por uma estratégia de marketing centrada no ser humano, que cria uma forte ligação emocional com o consumidor. Graças à sua forte presença nas redes sociais, à sua popularidade junto dos jovens e à sua personalidade otimista, a American Eagle divulga os valores da inclusão, da autenticidade e da aceitação da própria identidade. No entanto, em agosto de 2025, a marca dá uma reviravolta no seu discurso, criando uma polémica que atravessa fronteiras. Controvérsia lucrativa ou não? O presente estudo permite destacar a importância de construir uma estratégia de marketing digital em consonância com os valores dos seus consumidores.

Palavras-chave: American Eagle - Marketing Digital - Identidade de marca - Estratégia Centrada no Humano - Controvérsia

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List of Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AE: American Eagle

AEO Inc.: American Eagle Outfitters Inc.

B2C: Business-to-consumer model

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

1. Introduction

In the United States, the denim market is highly competitive due to the symbolic value of jeans in American culture. This value, associated with freedom, independence, and universality, attracts numerous players seeking to capitalize on the timelessness of denim jeans. In this context, the American Eagle brand, present in the market since 1977, differentiates itself from its competitors through a human-centered marketing strategy that takes into account the social, economic, and environmental concerns of its consumers. In the era of Marketing 4.0 described by author Philip Kotler, consumers feel the need to establish strong emotional connections with brands, which encourages brands to develop inclusive marketing strategies that build a community in which consumers, beyond geographical and demographic boundaries, feel included. Through the analysis of American Eagle's marketing strategy and its Fall 2025 campaign, this study aims to demonstrate that, in a market saturated with information and driven by the rapid change of trends, the representation of consumers' values occupies a central place in purchase decision-making. The choice of American Eagle is justified by its popular personality, which targets Generation Z youth through a strong presence on social media and an optimistic personality that encourages its consumers to be themselves and to accept themselves as they are. During its advertising campaign promoting a denim outfit, the brand adopts a provocative discourse in which the product becomes the symbolic support of the white female beauty ideal, reproducing gender stereotypes and naturalizing social inequalities by considering that there are good and bad genes for wearing the product. This study aims to demonstrate that this campaign departs from the brand's overall strategy, capitalizing on the ideological confrontations that divide American society. The object of study is structured around four areas: first, Chapter 2 contextualizes the challenges of marketing in a competitive market; second, Chapter 3 presents American Eagle's strategy in response to the challenges of the modern world; then, Chapter 4 analyzes American Eagle's digital marketing strategy, ranging from human-centered marketing to advertising controversy; finally, Chapter 5 provides a constructive critique of the change in discourse adopted by the brand.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature while bringing a cross-disciplinary perspective that applies concepts from business management, digital marketing, and the analytical tools of semiology.

2. Marketing Challenges in a Competitive Market

Marketing has undergone numerous transformations to adapt to the changes brought about by the integration of new technologies into the daily lives of individuals and businesses. This chapter highlights the evolution of marketing strategies induced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution while analyzing the dynamics of the denim market to reveal the importance of digital marketing as a means of differentiation. In the first part of this Chapter 2, the transformations of marketing will be examined through the perspective of author Philip Kotler, renowned for his numerous works on the evolution of marketing. In the second part of this Chapter 2, the competitive environment of the denim market will be analyzed using Porter's Five Forces model developed by Michael Porter in order to assess competition within an industry.

2.1 Marketing Transformations

Author Philip Kotler, considered the father of modern marketing, highlights the transformations of marketing: from product-oriented marketing during the first and second phases of the Industrial Revolution; to consumer-centered marketing at the beginning of the digital revolution; and finally to human-centered marketing, which considers consumers as human beings endowed with a mind, a spirit, and a heart (Kotler, 2011). These transformations have led companies to develop a true brand identity and to communicate values that appeal to the hearts of consumers. Marketing is no longer simply the promotion of a product or service; it has become the promotion of a personality. Brands become friends of consumers and develop human characteristics in order to differentiate themselves. This transformation is part of what author Klaus Schwab considers the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab, 2016). It is characterized by the extensive integration of digital technologies into the daily lives of consumers and businesses. Digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, blockchain, virtual reality, and connected devices blur the boundaries between the physical and digital worlds. In this context, digital marketing appears as a fundamental asset for reaching consumers who are increasingly present online. Digital marketing can therefore be defined as all practices aimed at promoting products, services, or brands through online channels such as social media, websites, mobile applications, or search engines. It helps strengthen brand visibility, improve customer relationships, and gain market share. Following his work *Marketing 3.0*, Philip Kotler published *Marketing 4.0*

to highlight an additional stage of this transformation in which consumers seek to satisfy a social need (Kotler, 2017). This book begins an important journey with a series of books that explore this perspective in which purchasing decisions are no longer motivated solely by rational or emotional factors such as product characteristics or a brand's environmental concerns; they are also influenced by the community. The hyperconnectivity fostered by social media encourages individuals to interact continuously and to share the values of the community to which they belong. Thus, brands no longer simply seek to meet the needs of an individual consumer; they aim to create connections among consumers, encourage engagement, and strengthen their sense of belonging to a group. Digital marketing therefore helps reinforce consumer community engagement by encouraging connectivity between individuals.

2.2 Analysis of the Competitive Environment of the Denim Market

According to the market study published by Mordor Intelligence, the global jeans market was valued at USD 101.32 billion in 2025 (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). The market is largely dominated by players such as Levi Strauss & Co., Gap Inc., H&M, Todd Shelton, Raleigh Denim, and many others. This intense competition is due to the symbolic value of jeans in American culture, which transcends generations and appeals to people of all genders regardless of social class. Because of its history, timelessness, and diversity, jeans attract businesses and increase the challenge of distinguishing a product made primarily from cotton and indigo from those of competitors. Porter's Five Forces analysis model, created by Michael Porter, highlights the attractiveness of the denim market and the intensity of competition. First, the threat of substitute products, represented in Figure 1, is high due to the abundance of lower-cost alternatives, particularly fast-fashion retailers and the second-hand market. This situation strengthens consumers' bargaining power, as they can easily compare prices and offers through digital platforms. In contrast, suppliers' bargaining power is relatively low since textile suppliers are numerous around the world. Entry barriers constitute an advantage for established players because new entrants must make significant investments to develop their production capacities, distribution networks, and brand awareness. Despite this, the intensity of competitive rivalry remains very high. The rise of fast-fashion retailers and the slowdown in household purchasing power encourage a permanent price war among the market's major players. Thus, as illustrated in Table 1, the attractiveness of the market is moderate. Consumers can easily compare prices, market alternatives are

numerous and inexpensive, which forces companies to lower their prices while simultaneously increasing their investments. Finally, the denim market is a highly competitive environment in which digital marketing appears to be a powerful differentiation tool for increasing visibility and strengthening consumer engagement through loyalty programs, applications, or a strong presence on social media. The following chapter analyzes the positioning of the AE brand, one of the leaders in the denim jeans market for Generation Z. The brand targets the mass-market segment by offering good-quality products at affordable prices. In order to remain a market leader, the brand therefore faces the challenge of maintaining and expanding its market share by lowering its prices to attract consumers from its competitors.

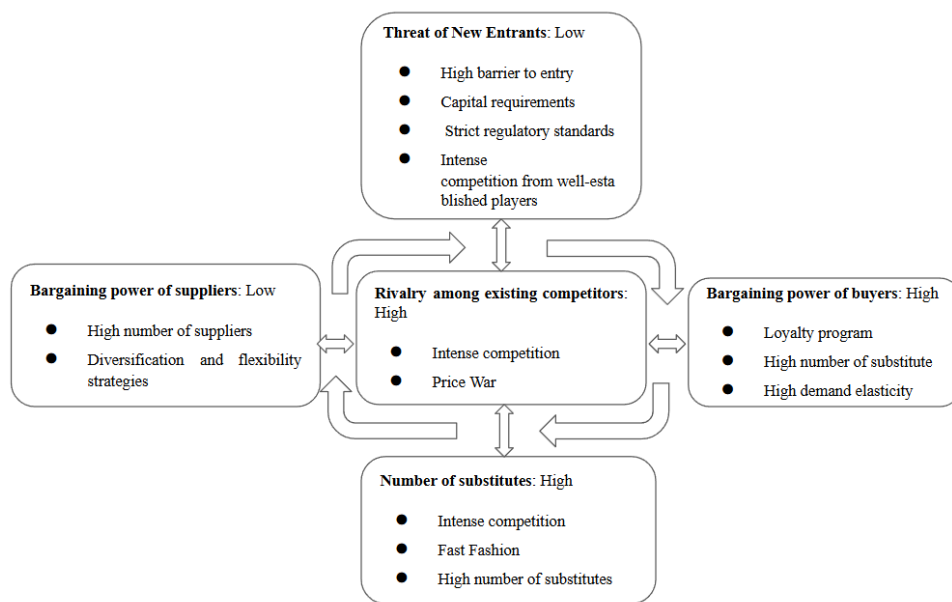


Figure 1: Porter's Five Forces Model of Denim Market

Porter's Five Forces Model	Denim Market
Competitive rivalry	High
Bargaining power of customers	High
Bargaining power of suppliers	Low
Threat of new entrants	Low
Threat of substitute products	High
Market attractiveness	Moderate

Table 1: Porter's Five Forces Model of Denim Market

3. American Eagle in the Face of the Challenges of the Modern World

This chapter aims to analyze American Eagle's positioning within the highly competitive denim market. It highlights the brand's overall strategy for differentiating itself from its competitors in the face of current geopolitical instability, intense competition, and declining household spending. The first part of Chapter 3 presents American Eagle by emphasizing its heritage and the values embedded in its brand identity. The second part of Chapter 3 analyzes American Eagle's internal strategy in order to understand its overall strategy in response to the challenges of the modern world.

3.1 Presentation of American Eagle

Since its creation in 1977, the brand has evolved to embody far more than a simple player in the denim market: today, it symbolizes a relaxed spirit, a pursuit of authenticity, and an engaged community. This section explores the pillars that have shaped American Eagle, from its heritage to its current mission, including its brand identity, which strengthens consumer engagement and trust.

3.1.1 Its History

American Eagle Outfitters Inc. (AEO Inc.), led by Jay Schottenstein, is based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States. AEO Inc. is a multinational company operating in the United States, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. Specializing in ready-to-wear clothing and fashion accessories, the company owns several clothing brands such as Aerie, Unsubscribed, Offline, Todd Snyder, and American Eagle (AE). AE was created in 1977 by brothers Jerry and Mark Silverman before being acquired by AEO Inc. in 1991. It mainly sells jeans in a casual and trendy style for young American men and women. The brand operates 829 stores across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Over time, AE has modernized itself to reach a young and universal audience. As shown in Figure 2, since 2018, the official logo has simply been the brand name "American Eagle." The typography is universal and refined to embody a minimalist vision that targets an audience that values simplicity and quality.

The image shows the official American Eagle logo, which consists of the words "AMERICAN EAGLE" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font. The letters are widely spaced, giving it a clean and minimalist appearance.

Figure 2: Official American Eagle logo

3.1.2 Its Brand Identity

In the era of Marketing 4.0 theorized by Philip Kotler, brand identity represents a major competitive advantage for maintaining market share. According to the article of Christian Michon, brand identity constitutes a fundamental element in building the relationship between a company and its consumers (Michon, 2000). It is based on a set of distinctive signs, values, and representations that enable a brand to be easily recognized and differentiated from its competitors. A strong brand identity encourages consumer identification with the brand and contributes to the development of a lasting emotional attachment. Thus, brand identity conveys a system of values that is deeply embedded in the company's representations. This system of values influences consumers' perceptions of a product and determines whether they will prefer it over a similar offering. As illustrated in Figure 3, AE embodies the relaxed and timeless spirit of American denim. Its purpose is to offer fashionable and accessible clothing that allows young people to express who they truly are. The brand has historically specialized in the manufacturing of jeans, combining craftsmanship and innovation. It inherits the imagery of American denim, a symbol of freedom, adventure, and independence. AE has an optimistic and dynamic character that is expressed through a close relationship with its customers and strong values of authenticity, inclusivity, and freedom of expression. Thus, AE possesses a strong brand identity that reinforces consumers' attachment to the brand's imagery.

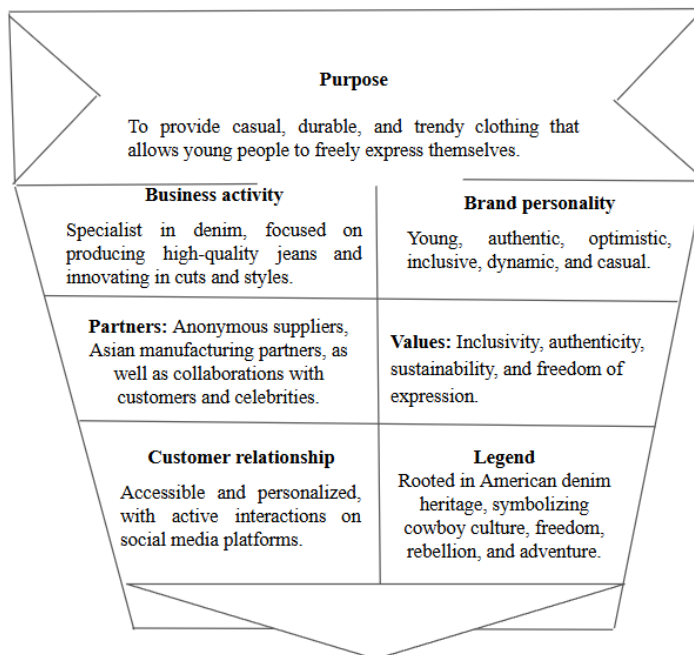


Figure 3: Diagram illustrating American Eagle brand identity

3.1.3 Its Mission

The mission of AE is to enable everyone to express their true personality by selling comfortable clothing of good quality and at an affordable price. (Quote from the AE website: “Fueled by optimism, our brands are designed to empower our customers to be their real, authentic selves”) The brand promotes acceptance and self-expression, confidence, and diversity. It acts as a true friend by encouraging its consumers to accept themselves without artifice. It differentiates itself from its competitors by targeting a young audience aged between fifteen and twenty-five. AE’s main objective is to become the denim brand that offers the trendiest jeans, of the best quality, at an affordable price on the market.

3.1.4 Its Industry Sector

AE operates as a business-to-consumer (B2C) company by selling jeans, T-shirts, shoes, and other fashion accessories in stores and through its online sales platform “<https://www.ae.com>“. AE provides same-day delivery services and offers the possibility to buy online and pick up in-store. Its platform also provides virtual fitting tools, personalized recommendations, and an exclusive loyalty program on the application. According to AEO Inc.'s annual report published in 2025, the company reported total net revenue of \$5.3 billion in 2025. AE is a key pillar of the company, generating a total revenue of \$3,367,033 in 2025. Its revenues, mainly based on household spending, are sensitive to fluctuations in demand.

3.2 Internal Analysis of American Eagle

The internal analysis of AE makes it possible to identify the brand’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats within its environment. This analysis helps identify the assets on which AE can rely to maintain its competitiveness in the denim market despite intense competition and global economic disruptions.

3.2.1 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is an analytical tool used to assess the internal and external factors that influence a company’s performance. It is based on the identification of strengths (3.2.1.1) and weaknesses (3.2.1.2), which relate to the internal environment, as well as opportunities (3.2.1.3) and threats (3.2.1.4), which arise from the external environment.

Table 2 presents the SWOT analysis of AE in order to highlight the elements that support its competitive advantage as well as the challenges faced by the brand.

3.2.1.1 Its Strengths

Due to its long-standing presence, AE stands out from its competitors thanks to its brand awareness and customer loyalty. The diversity of its products meets the expectations of young consumers and adapts to changing trends. AE also differentiates itself by responding to consumer environmental concerns. Indeed, the brand aims for carbon neutrality by 2030 and offers an eco-friendly “Real Good” collection made from recycled materials. Then, its omnichannel distribution strategy combines the “AEMobileApp” mobile application, an e-commerce website, and physical stores. The mobile application strengthens customer loyalty by offering exclusive discounts and implementing a points-based system accumulated with each purchase. As shown in appendix A, its website is intuitive and easy to use, providing detailed product descriptions for greater transparency. In addition, AE adopts an effective inbound marketing strategy that naturally attracts consumers and strengthens customer loyalty. Finally, AE reinforces its community ties by allowing consumers to identify with the brand through its strong social media presence, partnerships with influencers, and its customer ambassador program.

3.2.1.2 Its Weaknesses

Despite its strengths, AE remains heavily focused on denim. This dependence increases the company’s vulnerability when consumers reduce their spending. The brand is also reliant on the U.S. market, which represents the largest share of its revenue. This strong dependence increases the impact of political instability on its margins. In addition, the brand depends on foreign suppliers for the manufacturing of its jeans, making it vulnerable to rising tariffs, increased import costs, and supply chain disruptions. The company’s extensive international operations also expose it to foreign exchange fluctuations, which can negatively affect profitability. Furthermore, increasing regulatory requirements regarding data privacy and cybersecurity require substantial investments to ensure compliance and protect customer information. The environmental cost of denim production is also high, requiring greater efforts and higher production costs to adopt sustainable practices such as the use of recycled materials and the reduction of water and energy consumption. Finally, its digital marketing strategies primarily target young people, thereby missing potential older and more financially

stable consumers. Despite its strong presence on social media, AE has significant visibility gaps on search engines, which may reduce its online performance and limit customer acquisition compared to its competitors.

3.2.1.3 Opportunities

The brand's opportunities allow it to strengthen its image and customer loyalty, particularly through the use of AI to automate and personalize loyalty programs. Technological advancements also enable it to optimize production, its distribution chain, and marketing strategies, while improving the performance of its e-commerce platform. Growing consumer demand for personalized and sensory shopping experiences creates opportunities to enhance customer engagement and differentiate the brand from competitors. The brand's environmental initiatives position it as an eco-responsible company in response to growing demand for environmentally friendly and ethically produced products. By investing in sustainable materials and resource-efficient production processes, AE can strengthen its reputation and attract environmentally conscious consumers. Finally, the brand can target new demographic segments and expand into new geographic markets in order to diversify its revenue streams and reduce its dependence on both the U.S. market and the denim category.

3.2.1.4 Threats

AE's external environment is competitive and politically unstable, exposing it to numerous threats that may disrupt its productivity and profitability. First, established brands and fast fashion companies exert pressure by offering lower-priced products and investing heavily in online advertising and technological innovation, which forces AE to reduce its margins in order to increase visibility, improve platform performance, and offer product promotions to compete with pricing pressure. In addition, regulations and geopolitical tensions increase the risk and cost of imports, while international conflicts disrupt supply chains and raise transportation and raw material costs. Rising inflation and high interest rates reduce household purchasing power and decrease demand for non-essential products such as apparel. The company is also exposed to exchange rate volatility due to the international nature of its operations. Furthermore, natural disasters, pandemics, and climate change-related events may disrupt sourcing and production activities. Growing consumer expectations for personalized shopping experiences and environmentally responsible products require continuous investments in technology,

innovation, and sustainable practices, placing additional pressure on the company's costs and margins.

SWOT Analysis American Eagle	
Strengths: • Strong reputation and high customer loyalty • Product diversity • Environmental commitment • Efficient omnichannel distribution: physical stores and e-commerce platform • Loyalty program: point-based system for each purchase • Intuitive and functional website with interactive tools such as virtual fitting rooms • Engaged community: customer ambassador program, strong presence on social media and influencer partnerships	Weaknesses: • Dependence on denim U.S. market and foreign suppliers • Exposure to supply chain disruptions and import cost fluctuations • Exposure to foreign exchange rate fluctuations • High costs associated with sustainable production practices • Significant investments required in data privacy and cybersecurity compliance • Primarily targets young consumers • Visibility: SEO and SEM ranking
Opportunities: • Technological innovations to personalize customer experiences, loyalty programs and optimize production and marketing • Growth of e-commerce and digital retail channels • Increasing consumer demand for personalized shopping experiences and sustainable products • Expansion into new geographic and demographic markets	Threats: • Intense competition • Geopolitical tensions: higher production cost • Regulations • Rising digital advertising costs • Inflation: decline in household purchasing power • Climate change • Exchange rate volatility affecting profitability of international operations

Table 2: SWOT Analysis of American Eagle **3.2.2 Recommendations**

The brand, already well established online, can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the sector in order to mitigate the impact of the threats affecting its activities. Indeed, by strengthening its production capacities in the United States, the brand can reduce its dependence on foreign suppliers. Moreover, AE could invest more in online SEO by targeting keywords such as “best jeans,” “best value jeans,” and “eco-friendly jeans” in order to avoid being overshadowed by competitors on the first page of search engines. In addition, the brand could orient its social media content toward older audiences by collaborating with influencers aged between twenty and thirty years old to target new, more profitable and less saturated segments. AE could also increase its investment in outbound marketing for its premium and eco-friendly denim line by placing advertisements in magazines such as Vogue, Elle, and Harper's Bazaar to target

the premium market. Furthermore, the brand could collaborate with other companies, such as footwear or jewelry brands, to attract new consumers. AE could also invest in paid digital advertising on YouTube, Google, Facebook, and Instagram to rapidly increase its visibility. Thus, by strengthening its digital marketing strategies, the company can consolidate its position in the denim market and target customers with higher income.

3.2.3 Overall Strategy

AE seeks to create an environment in which young people can identify with the brand and express their personality through products that are comfortable, affordable, and aligned with their values. This ambition is reflected in each pillar of its strategy, particularly through its differentiation based on closeness to its community (3.2.3.1), its positioning that emphasizes simplicity and inclusivity (3.2.3.2), precise targeting of younger generations (3.2.3.3), and a marketing mix that combines digital experience, engagement, and accessibility (3.2.3.4). This strategy enables the brand to maintain its competitiveness and strengthen its relationship with its consumers.

3.2.3.1 Differentiation Strategy

The brand's overall strategy is differentiation. AE focuses on good-quality products at affordable prices in order to target a young audience with medium incomes. The brand distinguishes itself from its competitors through a consumer-centered approach by creating a true personality that fulfills the emotional needs of young people in search of identity.

3.2.3.2 Positioning

Thanks to the relaxed and comfortable style of its jeans, its environmental commitment, and its strong engagement with its community, AE positions itself as an optimistic brand that values authenticity and simplicity by selling affordable, good-quality products. This positioning differentiates it from ultra-fashion brands that promote an unattainable ideal of beauty.

3.2.3.3 Target Audience

The main target groups are young people and students in search of identity, both men and women. The age range is between 15 and 25 years old. These young consumers come from middle-income households with limited spending budgets. They are

sensitive to promotions and loyalty programs. Despite the brand's international expansion, the majority of its consumers live in urban areas such as large student cities in the United States.

3.2.3.4 Marketing Mix Strategy

The main product of AE is denim jeans in various forms such as mom, skinny, baggy, slim, and wide-leg cuts. The brand also offers a premium AE77 range and an eco-friendly "Real Good" collection. In addition, the brand sells dresses, T-shirts, underwear, and shoes. Its website, listed in appendix A, offers numerous interactive features aimed at improving the user experience, such as virtual try-on, personalized recommendations, a messaging service that allows customers to request product advice from employees, and a review section where users can post photos and share feedback on products. The loyalty program available on the mobile application allows users to benefit from exclusive discounts and accumulate points for each purchase. Product prices are affordable. A pair of jeans costs between forty and seventy dollars. The premium range allows the brand to sell higher-priced products without increasing the price of basic items. The brand targets middle-income consumers who seek quality at low prices. AE regularly offers promotions such as buy-one-get-one-free deals or discounts. The distribution chain is omnichannel, combining a mobile application, the e-commerce website "<https://www.ae.com>" and more than 829 physical stores located mainly in the United States within major shopping malls. Customers can browse collections on social media, try items in-store, and pay online to receive products directly at home. In-store returns are easy, which streamlines the supply chain and improves the customer experience. AE also provides same-day delivery services. The brand relies on its presence on social media and collaborations with influencers who share its values to reach Generation Z. Thus, AE's marketing mix strategy shows that the brand is close to its community and adopts a strategy to make most products accessible to its audience through a consumer-oriented approach that combines digitalization, and engagement.

4. From Human-Centered Digital Marketing to Advertising Controversy?

In the era of Marketing 4.0, digital marketing is no longer limited to the promotion of products; it constitutes a means for brands to communicate values, build an identity, and develop lasting relationships with their communities. AE has distinguished itself through a human-centered approach that promotes authenticity, inclusivity, and self-acceptance among a young and connected customer base. This chapter analyzes the brand's digital marketing strategy through the study of its buyer persona (4.1), its search engine optimization strategies (4.2), its inbound and outbound marketing practices (4.3), as well as its presence on social media (4.4). It also examines the advertising campaign "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans," which marks a turning point in the brand's communication strategy (4.5). This analysis will make it possible to understand how a company founded on values of inclusivity can use controversy to increase its visibility, thereby raising the question of the ethical limits of digital marketing and the consistency between brand identity and digital marketing strategy.

4.1 Buyer Persona

Name: Jane
Gender: Female
Location: Philadelphie, United States
Occupation: Student
Income: \$ 3500
Education: Bachelor's in civil law
Marital Status: Single

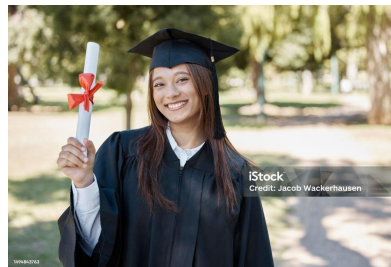


Figure 4: Royalty-free image, Pixabay

Figure 4 represents the buyer persona that can be associated with the brand. It corresponds to Jane, a 19-year-old student at the University of Law in Philadelphia. She is very active on social media and loves sharing her daily life. She spends time on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, following news from influencers and celebrities. Her motivations for purchasing clothing are mainly driven by the latest trends. She buys clothes not only for their appearance, but also to feel comfortable, confident, and to stand out. She prefers brands with an authentic personality and a strong heritage.

4.2 SEO and SEM strategies

AE's SEO strategy is mainly based on the referencing of its own collections, such as "Real Good Jeans", "Sydney Sweeney Picks", and "AE77 Premium Jeans". This allows the brand to increase the visibility of its products for targeted searches. However, the brand does not appear on search engines when more generic keywords are used, such as "jeans", "denim", or "fashionable jeans". Market leaders such as Zara or Tommy Hilfiger dominate the top positions. In addition, AE does not use a SEM strategy to promote its products on Google Ads or YouTube Ads. Thus, the brand's communication strategy relies mainly on social media. The brand makes very limited use of SEM approaches, which involve high advertising costs. This strategy is risky because its visibility is limited and requires greater investment in advertising campaigns. Therefore, campaigns in collaboration with celebrities represent the highest marketing investment for the brand. For example, the campaign with Sydney Sweeney was one of the most expensive investments in terms of marketing expenditure for the company.

4.3 Inbound and Outbound marketing

The brand's promotional strategy enables it to maintain a continuous dialogue with its customers, thereby strengthening the brand's closeness to its consumers. Indeed, AE's digital marketing strategy is based on both inbound and outbound marketing strategies. Inbound marketing aims to naturally attract consumers, while outbound marketing is a direct action that reaches out to consumers to encourage purchasing. For its inbound strategy, the brand relies on social media to highlight content that encourages consumers to share their own photos wearing its products, notably through hashtags such as #AEJeans and ambassador programs (AE x ME). This user-generated content (UGC) plays an important role as it creates an authentic and customer-oriented brand image. In contrast, for its outbound marketing strategy, the brand uses push notifications and emails to offer exclusive and time-limited deals, as well as loyalty benefits and personalized promotions for birthdays or holidays. Thus, AE's inbound strategy helps build long-term consumer engagement, while its outbound strategy helps to quickly stimulate sales among its loyal customer base.

4.4 Social Media Strategy

As shown in Table 3, AE has a total of 15,975 million followers across its social media platforms. The brand regularly publishes content on various platforms such as Snapchat,

Instagram, Facebook, X, and YouTube. On TikTok, AE mainly publishes short promotional videos featuring well-known Generation Z celebrities, such as the actors from the series *Outer Banks*, *My First Times*, *Stranger Things*, and *Summer of Us*, among others. The brand also shares popular video formats on the platform, such as behind-the-scenes content of advertising production, “how-to” videos, and haul videos with customer ambassadors under the hashtag #AEJeans. The brand also reposts influencer content that showcases its products in everyday life. Nevertheless, the brand’s recent collaborations show a willingness to target a more mature audience, notably through partnerships with Martha Stewart, an 85-year-old businesswoman, Travis Kelce, an American football player, and Sydney Sweeney, an actress from the series *Euphoria*. The Instagram account appears to be the brand’s main showcase, featuring highly professional photos and videos. On YouTube, AE publishes advertising campaigns edited into short videos ranging from thirty seconds to one minute. Models are minimally retouched in order to avoid idealized or superficial perfection, which enhances consumer identification with the brand.

Social Media	Number of American Eagle followers
Facebook	11 million
Instagram	3.8 million
X	511. 3 thousand
Youtube	69. 4 thousand
Total	15,975 million

Table 3: Number of American Eagle followers from Facebook, Instagram, X and Youtube platforms

4.5 Controversy as a New Strategy?

As with all advertising campaigns, this advertisement is a commercial persuasion strategy aimed at convincing the public to purchase the product. Nevertheless, the semiological analysis of the advertising campaign “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans” demonstrates that this campaign produces a dual narrative that trivializes power relations and naturalizes social inequalities.

4.5.1 Semiological Analysis of the Advertising Campaign “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans”

Semiology is “a science that studies the life of signs within social life,” according to linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who is considered one of the founding fathers of semiology. This discipline studies signs and systems of meaning in order to understand how individuals interpret the world around them. A sign can be considered anything that represents something for someone. There are different approaches to studying semiology, notably the approach developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, who created a model for the classification of signs. This approach is relevant for understanding the dual narrative of advertising campaigns. Indeed, it makes it possible to analyze both the message itself and its hidden meaning. In other words, the latent cultural values carried by the message. The objective of this section is therefore to conduct a brief semiological analysis of AE’s advertising campaign in order to highlight the underlying values conveyed by the advertising message. The Peircean approach distinguishes three categories that explain how an individual’s mind perceives surrounding phenomena and produces meaning (Liszka, 1996). The first category is Firstness, which corresponds to the domain of the pure or abstract qualities of elements that are perceived by the individual before any relation is established with something else. It refers to the direct experience of an impression, a feeling, or a perception. It relates to the emotional life of the receiver of the message. The second category is Secondness, which corresponds to the domain of action-reaction. In other words, it concerns the concrete existence of elements related to an environment. It refers to the practical life of the receiver, who connects one phenomenon to another. Finally, Thirdness corresponds to the effect produced by a sign on the receiver. This last category relates to the individual’s interpretation as they decode the message according to their own cultural codes. It refers to the intellectual life of the receiver.

In 2020, author Caraciola conducted a Peircean semiological analysis of the “Journey” advertising campaign by Louis Vuitton in collaboration with Catherine Deneuve (Caraciola, 2020). Her work made it possible to understand the effects of meaning produced in the receiver of the Louis Vuitton advertising message. Her study provides a concrete application of the Peircean theoretical approach to a specific corpus of analysis. The same methodology will be used to understand the effects of meaning produced in the receiver of AE’s advertising message for its campaign “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans.”

4.5.1.1 Peircean Approach

For its Fall 2025 campaign, AE published a series of short videos, ranging from 15 to 30 seconds, across its social media platforms. Appendix B of the present study shows images taken from the videos that were published on YouTube. The videos feature actress Sydney Sweeney, who is popular among Generation Z for her roles in the television series *Euphoria*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The White Lotus*. The actress is shown wearing a denim outfit in order to promote the comfort of AE jeans. All the signs present in the advertising campaign can be divided into three categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

From a qualitative perspective, the dominant color of the advertising campaign is blue. Blue evokes simplicity, youthfulness, and authenticity. These are impressions to which AE is strongly attached, particularly through its digital marketing strategy and its overall marketing strategy analyzed in the previous sections, which seek to demonstrate the youthful and authentic character of its brand personality. Blue is also present in the actress's eyes, making it possible to directly associate the blue denim product with the actress's physical characteristics. The lighting is soft and the background is neutral so that the actress captures the viewer's full attention. The actress appears in different poses, sometimes sitting, crouching, standing, or lying down, while the camera examines her body part by part, revealing either her skin or the fabric. The actress appears with natural makeup in order to reinforce the feeling of authenticity. Thus, the various elements of the video generate impressions of simplicity, softness, youthfulness, authenticity, and desirability.

From an indexical perspective, actress Sydney Sweeney is easily identifiable. Popular among young audiences, her media persona also contributes to the production of meaning within the advertisement. Sydney Sweeney addresses the camera directly as an indication of closeness to her audience. She states, "My jeans are blue," after explaining that "Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color." At the end of each video, the slogan "SYDNEY SWEENEY HAS GREAT JEANS," written in capital letters, appears before giving way to the brand name "American Eagle." The product and the actress constitute the central elements of meaning within the campaign. The successive close-up shots of her eyes, legs, chest, and hips draw viewers' attention to specific parts of her body rather than to the actress herself. This fragmentation prevents her from being perceived as a complete person. The actress appears as a material support through which the jeans are displayed.

Thus, all these elements make it possible to associate celebrity with the product; the attractiveness of the celebrity's body with the product; and youthfulness with the product.

From a symbolic perspective, the slogan "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" is a play on words based on the linguistic ambiguity between the words "jeans" and "genes," which have very similar pronunciations in English. This interpretation can only function among English-speaking audiences. The discourse on genes, which are transmitted from generation to generation, is diverted in order to highlight both the garment and Sydney Sweeney's physical characteristics. Similarly, the color blue refers both to the color of denim and to the actress's blue eyes. When she states, "My jeans are blue," the sentence can be interpreted in two ways: the first refers to the color of the garment; the second refers to Sydney Sweeney's physical characteristics. The actress's name itself becomes a symbol. As in the campaign analyzed by Caraciola, the celebrity transfers to the product values already associated with her public persona, notably her popularity, attractiveness, media success, and youthfulness. Known for her role as Cassie in the television series *Euphoria*, the actress has often been subjected to the hypersexualization of her body, which corresponds to dominant beauty standards within the fashion industry. Furthermore, the slogan contributes to strengthening the imagined association between the product and its ambassador because it contains no reference to the brand itself, only Sydney Sweeney's name. The objective is not to increase the visibility of the brand but rather to continue associating Sydney Sweeney's characteristics with the product. Thus, the campaign creates a symbolic relationship between discourse on genetics and the value of the product. Sydney Sweeney's physical characteristics are presented as factors of universal beauty and desirability and are then associated with the jeans worn by the actress. The product therefore acquires a value that goes beyond its material properties and becomes part of an imaginary world of beauty, youthfulness, and social prestige.

4.5.1.2. The Effects of Meaning Produced in the Receiver

The semiological analysis of the campaign "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" demonstrates that the advertisement produces a dual narrative. The first is the intention to persuade consumers to purchase the product, namely the denim outfit. The second is the desirability of the white female beauty ideal, reproducing gender stereotypes by hypersexualizing Sydney Sweeney's body, which is fragmented part by part, and by trivializing power relations, presenting them as natural through the suggestion that there

are good genes and bad genes. The advertisement therefore no longer merely sells a pair of jeans; it produces a system of values in which the garment becomes the symbolic support of the dominant female beauty ideal represented in advertising.

4.5.2 Results of the advertising campaign

The analysis of this advertising campaign shows that AE's strategy was not to increase its visibility through the visual communication of the campaign itself, but rather through a cultural debate. According to a comparative analysis of advertising strategies published by Brand Vision Insights in 2025, the campaign generated significant media attention and measurable commercial impact across digital and financial indicators (Ani, 2025). Accumulating more than 150 million views across social media platforms, the campaign divided public opinion. On one hand, the campaign was highly praised for its boldness. Supporters of the American far-right, including the President of the United States, Donald Trump, praised the campaign and the end of "woke" culture, a term used to criticize the defense of minority rights. On the other hand, critics denounced the hypersexualization of the female body and the promotion of eugenics through the advertisement. The controversy crossed the borders of the United States and was widely shared on social media and in the media. It generated 40 billion impressions related to Sydney Sweeney worldwide. The stock price increased by 10 percent after the campaign's release, and AEO Inc.'s market capitalization increased by 40 percent. AE gained 700,000 new customers, 302,000 new followers, and increased its revenue by 103 million dollars. Within one week, the denim jacket and jeans were sold out. However, these numbers should be interpreted with caution, as in-store traffic decreased by 1.3 percent, while the brand's revenue increased by 2 percent, one percent less than in 2024, which recorded a 3 percent increase, as shown in Appendix C.

5. Discussion

The analysis of AE's brand identity has highlighted that the brand possesses a strong heritage that gives it an advantage over competitors that are less established in the market. Its brand identity aligns with its overall strategy, which strengthens consumer trust and engagement, leading them to prefer it over less familiar products. The internal analysis of AE has shown that the brand relies on a human-centered strategy: by addressing the environmental concerns of its consumers; by adopting an optimistic personality that resonates with Generation Z, who are in search of identity; by making its products globally accessible through its omnichannel distribution network; and by offering affordable prices to respond to household economic concerns. The analysis of AE's digital marketing strategy demonstrates that the brand is adapting to new marketing challenges by building an engaged community through: numerous social media posts in collaboration with celebrities or influencers who reflect its values of authenticity, optimism, and youth; its ambassador program, which directly engages consumers in promoting the brand; and finally hashtags and numerous online reviews available on its platform. However, as highlighted by the SWOT analysis, the brand remains vulnerable to threats affecting its economic environment. In order to mitigate the loss of revenue induced by political and economic instability in the United States, the brand has launched a new strategy based on provocation. The semiological analysis of the Fall 2025 advertising campaign shows that the advertising message conveyed values that are in complete rupture with what the brand had previously represented. The visual communication of the brand shows that the objective was not to increase brand visibility per se, but rather to capitalize on profits from a cultural debate. This approach is consistent with Philip Kotler's Marketing 4.0 theory, which emphasizes the importance of community in the valorization of a product or brand. Brands are discussed in public discourse, and consumers naturally participate in their promotion. Thus, AE has managed to take advantage of the social divisions polarizing American society by creating a deliberately controversial advertising campaign that would be debated in public discourse. In the short term, this campaign was a success, as it increased sales and visibility. However, in the long term, this campaign completely departs from AE's overall strategy. By adopting values that contradict its brand identity, it undermines the trust of part of its audience. Moreover, digital marketing strategies contribute to brand storytelling; by adopting a contradictory discourse, it weakens the

foundations of its community. AE's 2025 financial results show that this strategy did not significantly improve the company's financial situation. The money invested in the campaign could have been allocated to more sustainable strategies that strengthen the emotional bond between the brand and its consumers while reducing its vulnerability to political tensions, as suggested by the SWOT analysis recommendations. Furthermore, its competitor Gap Inc., in response to the highly controversial campaign, launched its own campaign that instead emphasizes inclusivity. This initiative has created a real denim war in which consumers take sides either with Gap Inc. or AE. Provocative advertising has already been used as a strategic tool to sell products; for example, the clothing brand Benetton is well known for its shock advertising. However, Benetton's advertisements are consistent with its brand identity, which aims to deconstruct preconceived ideas in society while promoting diversity and inclusivity. Thus, creating controversy that is in rupture with the values embodied in the brand identity and in the company's overall strategy does not contribute to building a sustainable strategy that strengthens consumer engagement and establishes a long-term competitive advantage.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the challenges of modern marketing. In a saturated and increasingly competitive denim market, shaped by the transformations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, brands must embody the values of their consumers in order to create strong emotional connections. American Eagle has distinguished itself through a human-centered approach, promoting inclusivity, authenticity, and self-acceptance values that particularly resonate with Generation Z. However, global economic disruptions and political tensions place AE in a critical situation where it must invest heavily to remain competitive in the market while facing declining returns. Digital marketing appears as a powerful tool to reach a broad audience, increase visibility, and stimulate sales. Nevertheless, American Eagle adopts a strategy that departs from its overall approach by launching an advertising campaign aimed at increasing visibility not through visual communication itself, but through cultural debate. This advertising campaign marked a turning point in the brand's discourse by celebrating a white female beauty ideal as a universal reference, thereby normalizing power relations and presenting them as natural. While this short-term strategy generated significant media attention and increased sales, it also triggered an international controversy from which competitors such as Gap were able to benefit by reaffirming their commitment to diversity and inclusivity. Thus, short-term profit alone cannot justify the adoption of values that contradict a company's historical identity. Brands no longer sell only products, but also identities and value systems, which grants them considerable influence over collective representations. Decision-makers must be aware that their strategic choices have consequences far beyond financial performance; they contribute to shaping mindsets, particularly those of younger generations who grow up using these messages as reference points. Finally, this study invites broader reflection on the role of brands in society. Should they merely reflect dominant values, or do they have a responsibility to help shape and evolve them? In a world where digital marketing has become a major cultural actor, advertising campaigns have the power to reinforce or challenge social inequalities. It is therefore up to companies to fully assess the impact of their strategies, not only on revenue, but also on society as a whole.

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Appendix A - American Eagle Website Interface

30% off all shorts! [Shop Women](#) [Shop Men](#) [Details](#)

Enable Accessibility

AMERICAN EAGLE *erie*

Q

AMERICAN EAGLE

New Women Men Jeans Shoes & Accessories Loungewear & PJs Aerie Clearance



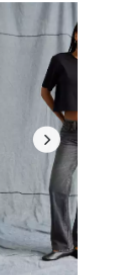
30% off all shorts! [Shop Women](#) [Shop Men](#) [Details](#)

AMERICAN EAGLE

New Women Men Jeans Shoes & Accessories Loungewear & PJs Aerie Clearance

Women / Bottoms /

Women's Jeans (163)



Low & Loose Jeans
Now Trending!
Low-rise with a wide leg.

Stovepipe & Straight-Leg Jeans
Classic straight fits.

Baggy & Wide-Leg Jeans
Available in Low-Rise
Super relaxed & laidback.

Flare & Bootcut Jeans
Available in Low-Rise
Add just the right kick.

Mom Jeans
Tapered & ankle-skimming.

Jeggings & Skinny Jeans
Available in Low-Rise
Go-tos that never go out of style.

Curvy
Say goodbye g&P

Bottoms

Jeans

Baggy & Wide-Leg Jeans

Stovepipe & Straight-Leg Jeans

Flare & Bootcut Jeans

Curvy Jeans

Pull-On Jeans

Jeggings & Skinny Jeans

Mom Jeans

High-Waisted Jeans

Low-Rise Jeans

AE77 Premium Denim

Save 25%



Save 25%



Save 25%





Taylor is 5'8" (1.73 m), wearing size 2 Long



Dreamy Drape Stretch

AE Dreamy Drape Strigid Low-Rise Ultra Wide-Leg Jean

A slouchy low-rise fit, made with an even wider leg. Plus, an elastic waist & drawcord for unreal comfort! This style runs large—consider sizing down for your regular fit.

Price: Now \$48.96 ~~\$69.95~~ Save 30%

Color:  Medium Tinted Indigo

Reviews: ★★★★★ 4.6 (1879)

[Size Details](#)

Size  — 1 +

 Add to Bag (Before It's Gone)

or 4 interest-free installments of \$12.24 by
 Afterpay  Klarna

 **100% Happiness Promise**
Return worry-free to any store or online within 30 days. [Return Policy](#)

Enter your location to see pick up options.

[Pick a Size](#)

At a Glance



Some Stretch



Low Rise



Comfort Stretch



 Going fast! 515 added to bag in the last 24 hours

Appendix B - Screenshots from the video Fall 2025 Campaign of American Eagle published on YouTube





Appendix C - Official table of total net revenue by segment of AEO Inc. in 2025

AMERICAN EAGLE OUTFITTERS, INC.				
NET REVENUE BY SEGMENT				
(Unaudited; Dollars in thousands)				
	Fourth Quarter Ended		Fiscal Year Ended	
	January 31, 2026	February 1, 2025	January 31, 2026	February 1, 2025
Net Revenue:				
American Eagle	\$ 1,019,033	\$ 1,000,935	\$ 3,367,033	\$ 3,385,231
Aerie	683,841	539,673	1,934,702	1,738,414
Other	65,910	74,906	226,027	243,907
Intersegment Elimination	(7,950)	(10,881)	(30,952)	(38,900)
Total Net Revenue	\$ 1,760,834	\$ 1,604,633	\$ 5,496,810	\$ 5,328,652