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EDITED BY

Patricia Núñez-Gómez,
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

REVIEWED BY

M. Dolores Méndez-Aparicio,
Independent Researcher, Madrid, Spain
Pitri Yanti,
Indonesia University of Education, Indonesia

*CORRESPONDENCE

Nathali Pantigoso-Leython
✉ npantigosol@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

RECEIVED 03 October 2025

REVISED 12 November 2025

ACCEPTED 17 November 2025

PUBLISHED 05 December 2025

CITATION

Linares-Cazola J and
Pantigoso-Leython N (2025) Search engine
optimization as a strategy and its
effectiveness in positioning retail brands in
Peru.

Front. Commun. 10:1718005.

doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2025.1718005

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Search engine optimization as a strategy and its effectiveness in positioning retail brands in Peru

José Linares-Cazola¹ and Nathali Pantigoso-Leython^{2*}

¹Academic Department of Business Administration, Universidad César Vallejo, Chimbote, Ancash, Peru, ²Academic Department of International Business and Management, Universidad César Vallejo, Chimbote, Ancash, Peru

This study focuses on the effectiveness of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies in increasing the positioning of retail brands in Peru. The study used a mixed approach, with consumer focus groups to analyze browsing trends. For SEO metrics were taken from: majestic.com, gtmetrix.com, sitioweb.grader.com, among others. A total of 642 questionnaires were administered, validated by Cronbach's alpha of 0.948. The analysis using the multiple ordinal regression model allowed us to examine the positioning of SEO as a strategy to improve the CBP (Classic Brand Positioning). The findings reveal that both strategies are not dependent, but complementary. The SEO can be a powerful tool for increasing a brand's initial visibility, while CBP ensures that such visibility translates into long-term trust and loyalty. SEO is more tactical and results-oriented, while CBP builds value over time. Finally, both strategies can be integrated. It would be a combination strategy of SEO to complement with real positioning marketing in the mind of the consumer.

KEYWORDS

marketing, branding, consumers, electronic commerce, SEO

1 Introduction

Digitalization has transformed communication and commerce, allowing consumers and brands to interact globally through the internet (Abhishek and Agarwal, 2020). In this context, the retail sector, key in the retailing of consumer goods, has evolved significantly with the adoption of digital technologies, including e-commerce platforms, mobile applications and data analytics (Karpagam and Bharathi, 2022; Wilson et al., 2024). However, despite the growth of e-commerce and digitization in the retail sector, many brands still face difficulties in effectively positioning themselves in search engines. The lack of SEO strategies limits the digital visibility and competitiveness of companies. This problem is accentuated in emerging markets such as Peru, where many companies do not have sufficient knowledge or resources to implement advanced digital optimization techniques. As a result, brands that fail to position themselves in the top search results lose business opportunities and reduce their reach in an increasingly saturated digital ecosystem.

Additionally, classic brand positioning (CBP), traditionally based on offline marketing and advertising strategies, faces challenges in the digital era. While CBP has been fundamental for building brand identity and recognition, its effectiveness is limited when it is not complemented by digital strategies such as SEO. The connection between classic brand positioning and SEO is grounded in cognitive psychology theories that demonstrate search engine visibility is not merely a technical matter, but a strategic extension of mental brand positioning (Dou et al., 2010; Baye et al., 2016). The disconnect between the two methodologies can create a gap in consumer perception, affecting the consistency and reach of the brand message. In this sense,

the lack of integration between SEO and CBP can diminish the ability of brands to consolidate their presence in both the digital and physical realms, reducing their impact in an increasingly competitive market. The impact of the pandemic accelerated the digital transition of retailers, boosting their web presence and consolidating strategies that optimize the consumer experience (Papanagnou et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). Within these strategies, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become an essential tool to improve the visibility of brands and strengthen their positioning in a highly competitive market (Ologunbe and Obafemi, 2023). SEO allows businesses to appear in the top search results by optimizing keywords and improving the structure of their websites (Celaya, 2017). Its effective implementation can increase digital traffic and boost business conversions. However, there is a latent dilemma, is it enough to count on SEO strategies to achieve the appreciated success in the highly competitive market or is it still possible to depend on classic brand positioning (CBP) as a strategy that maintains a power in this highly changing market. In any case, in the current scenario it is SEO that contributes to CBP or conversely it is CBP that underpins SEO. This dilemma has been addressed in this study.

Globally, the retail sector has shown steady growth, as seen in India, where it reached a value of US\$ 1,200 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach US\$ 2,000 billion by 2030 (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2024). In the United States, despite economic fluctuations, 65% of the leaders of the sector forecast 5% growth in 2024, highlighting digitalization as a key opportunity (Bachman and Barua, 2024). In Latin America, the retail sector grew by 5% in 2023, with Brazil and Mexico leading the way in digital expansion (Bernuy et al., 2023; Mastercard, 2024). In Peru, retail growth has been driven by foreign investment since 2010 (Capizzani et al., 2012). In 2024, the sector's sales reached S/. 4,011 million, favored by key commercial events (García, 2024a). Internet penetration in the country is 74.7%, with an online sales volume of US\$ 13 billion in 2023, ranking sixth in the region (Kemp, 2024; CAPECE, 2024). The main online commerce platforms in Peru include Falabella.com, Mercado Libre and AliExpress, with Falabella.com leading thanks to its varied product offering (Similarweb, 2024; García, 2024b).

In this scenario, search engine optimization is presented as a key strategy to strengthen the classic positioning of retail companies in Peru, maximizing the visibility and competitiveness of brands in an increasingly digitized environment. The study of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in the retail sector has been addressed in various international contexts, providing evidence of its impact on the visibility and positioning of brands in digital environments. In this regard, Bellm compared the long-term effects of dynamic and static SEO strategies in the e-commerce of the brand "Camel Active" (Bellm, 2024). Through a retrospective quantitative analysis based on tools such as SISTRIX, Google Search Console and Google Analytics, it was found that dynamic SEO, characterized by continuous trend-driven updates, significantly increases user visibility and engagement compared to static SEO or no SEO optimization. In a similar vein, Ologunbe and Ebenezer designed a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for Jumia Group (in Africa) and ASDA UK (United Kingdom), highlighting the creation and distribution of engaging content, social campaign management, PPC ads and persuasive emails (Ologunbe and Ebenezer, 2023). According to the authors, investing in SEO allows companies to reduce their dependence on paid advertising and generate sustainable organic traffic over time.

Constant optimization of content and monitoring of keyword trends were found to be determinant in maintaining and improving search engine rankings.

In the Indian context, Sainy, Sinha, and Jha evaluated six fashion retail websites using tools such as Google Trends, Similarweb and Semrush (Sainy et al., 2022). It was concluded that keyword optimization and site performance are essential factors to ensure high search engine rankings. Myntra, for example, obtained the best results in organic traffic and CTR (+30%) after improving its SEO strategy. On the other hand, Abhishek, Kumar, and Agarwal found that 94% of retail consumers in Uttar Pradesh use search engines for product information, suggesting that information obtained through SEO can modify perceptions and purchase decisions (Abhishek and Agarwal, 2020). In contrast to these studies, research on retail SEO in Latin America is scarce. Alva designed a proposal for the implementation of digital marketing with a focus on On-Page SEO for the company Capre SAC, finding that this strategy was financially viable, with a NPV of S/ 120,238.73 and an IRR of 85.97% (Alva, 2022).

2 Theoretical review of the study variables

Brand positioning is about creating a unique image and perception in the consumer's mind, which is essential to stand out from the competition in a crowded marketplace. Understanding the theories behind brand positioning is key to implementing effective strategies in today's dynamic market environment. Some theories emphasize the importance of a brand's unique attributes and their strategic placement on the consumer's "mental map." For example, brand positioning can be visualized as the average placement of a brand's products on a perceptual map, guiding consumer decisions (Ke et al., 2020). This highlights the need for credible differentiation in an increasingly homogeneous market, and underlines that a distinctive and difficult-to-imitate position is essential for competitive advantage (Blankson, 2016). To achieve this, it is important to identify the target market, analyze the competition and establish points of similarity and difference (Brzaković et al., 2018). Herrmann and Huber, on the other hand, suggest a value-based approach, where positioning is defined by how brand attributes are linked to consumer values and behaviors (Herrmann and Huber, 2000). Aligning brand values with consumer needs and maintaining consistent communication are critical aspects of a successful positioning strategy (Kron et al., 2010).

Several brand positioning approaches are proposed in the literature, each with its own methods and perspectives. One modern approach uses online brand networks, leveraging social network data to analyze a brand's positioning in relation to its competitors. This auto-mated and scalable method employs network metrics, such as centrality and distinctiveness, to create perceptual maps (Malhotra et al., 2019). Traditional methods, on the other hand, emphasize understanding consumer perceptions and leveraging a brand's strengths. The strategy is based on market feedback and the brand's ability to stand out (Коржова, 2022). Integrating marketing and communication is also fundamental, as it helps to align values, identity and image for a solid positioning strategy, supported by case studies and practical exercises (Kosteljik and Alsem, 2020). In addition, qualitative methods, such as focus groups and ethnographies, explore consumer psychology and cultural contexts, offering valuable insights

for distinctive brand positioning (Morais, 2020). Strategic positioning management involves a structured process with several stages, from analysis to implementation and evaluation, ensuring an integral approach to maintain brand stability and value (Garachkovska et al., 2021).

The idea of “positioning” was popularized in 1990 by Al Ries and Jack Trout, who describe it as a strategy that begins with the product or service and ends in the mind of the target consumer (Ries and Trout, 2012). Positioning represents how the brand is perceived by its customers (Kotler, 2001; Armstrong and Kotler, 2013), which is reflected in how consumers choose and prefer the brand (Shafiee et al., 2020). Beyond functional characteristics, positioning includes the mental connections and benefits that influence purchase decisions (Iorgulescu and Marcu, 2019). This is vital for companies as it helps them meet the challenges of a globalized market and satisfy changing consumer expectations, generating a strong image and value (Syzykova and Azretbergenova, 2024).

Brand positioning is established through its three dimensions, visibility and brand recall. Brand visibility plays a crucial role in enhancing brand presence and recognition. This includes the strategic placement and design of logos on packaging, which can significantly influence how the consumer perceives and pays attention to the brand. Advanced techniques such as logo detection and prominence mapping help measure how much attention a brand generates in its designs (Hosseini et al., 2024). Visibility is also essential for marketing strategies, as it impacts sales performance and provides a competitive advantage. Social media, in particular, plays a critical role, enabling real-time interactions with consumers and maintaining brand visibility in a digital environment (Shaikh et al., 2018). In rural and semi-urban areas, where traditional media have less reach, in-store retail strategies can enhance brand visibility (Khaled, 2010). Brand recall is the consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from memory when prompted in different situations. It is an essential aspect of brand equity that influences consumer behavior and purchase intent. Marketing strategies, such as the use of brand ambassadors, can strengthen associations and enhance recall among the target audience (Hartono and Pribadi, 2023). In advertising, the use of interactive images that combine visual and verbal elements can improve retention in consumer memory (McKelvie and MacGregor, 2009). In addition, brand recall is related to recognition and associations, which positively impacts customers' purchase intention (Memon, 2016).

For retailers to achieve effective brand positioning through SEO, it is essential to optimize several key elements that increase online visibility and differentiate the brand in a competitive digital marketplace. A comprehensive SEO approach includes optimizing points of differentiation, creating valuable content, focusing on keywords, and building quality links (Ahmad et al., 2022). Understanding how people perceive positions in search results can help retailers improve favorability and brand recall, especially among users who tend to trust the order of results (Dou et al., 2010). The SEO optimization process involves several stages: product tracking, indexing, ranking, and results delivery (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). For this, there are specialized tools that facilitate keyword segmentation (Google Trends, SISTRIX, Keyword Surfer), content creation (ChatGPT, Copilot) and website performance monitoring (Google Search Console, Google Analytics). SEO strategies include On-Page and Off-Page optimization. On-Page SEO encompasses content optimization, loading speed and link structure, while

indicators such as Google PageRank and the robots.txt file play a key role in website tracking and indexing (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; TREI, 2024). In Off-Page SEO, Alexa PageRank and backlinks are determining factors in improving domain authority (Shahzad et al., 2018; Panchal et al., 2021). In addition, social networks can generate valuable backlinks and increase the relevance of a website.

The Cognitive Schema Theory in Search Engine Marketing (SEM), proposed by Dou and colleagues in 2010, constitutes the most widely cited conceptual framework connecting CBP with SEO strategies. Grounded in cognitive psychology, this theory posits that users possess a “mental schema” regarding the significance of ranking order in search results, wherein SERP position functions as a positioning signal that directly influences brand perception (Dou et al., 2010). Thus, higher rankings not only enhance recall but also foster favorable brand evaluations, even for less recognized brands. The mechanism underlying this connection suggests that traditional positioning defines the desired position of the brand in the consumer's mind, while SEO operates as a tool to project that positioning within the digital environment. Users, when interpreting search positions through their cognitive schema, tend to associate top results with higher quality, relevance, or authority, thereby reinforcing the desired positioning. In practice, this theory suggests that firms must align their keywords with brand attributes, optimize their content to achieve prominent positions, and utilize SERP ranking as a digital extension of their traditional positioning strategy. Complementarily, the Brand Equity and Organic Traffic Theory by Baye et al. (2016) expands this perspective by asserting that brand equity influences SEO both directly, through user preference for established brands, and indirectly, as algorithms favor sites with greater authority (Baye et al., 2016).

This bidirectional relationship between brand equity and organic positioning is grounded in specific algorithmic and behavioral mechanisms: brands with higher brand equity attain superior organic positions due to user behavior signals (CTR, dwell time, bounce rate) that algorithms interpret as quality indicators (Fishkin and Høgenhaven, 2013), and simultaneously, these superior positions reinforce brand equity by increasing exposure and positive brand associations (Keller, 2013). Specifically, brand awareness serves as the foundational level of the brand equity pyramid (Keller, 2001), establishing the mental presence necessary for consumers to include the brand in their consideration set (Nedungadi, 1990), while brand associations, strengthened by the relevance and quality of positioned content, determine perceived differentiation and relative preference vis-à-vis competitors (Aaker, 1996).

Within the framework of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Asante et al., 2022), organic marketing practices, such as SEO, function as the Stimulus, generating consumer attention (Iqbal, 2024). This attention is processed through the Organism (which encompasses brand perception or CBP), subsequently triggering a Response manifested in brand awareness and behavioral engagement. SEO directly drives organic visibility and enhances brand awareness, while CBP acts as a crucial mediator between digital stimuli and customer commitment (Asante et al., 2022). Furthermore, search engine visibility reinforces components of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), such as awareness and brand associations, which serve as precursors to engagement propensity (Deza-De-Souza-Ferreira et al., 2025).

Therefore, a positive causal chain exists wherein SEO leads to Brand Awareness, which in turn associates with Customer

Engagement, although this effect is partially mediated by internal psychological processes (Asante et al., 2022; Iqbal, 2024). Nevertheless, CBP is identified as the central mediator, as brand perceptions (quality, associations) define the quality of valuable engagement generated, and awareness alone proves insufficient (Mane, 2016; Iqbal, 2024). Mechanisms such as psychological engagement and relationship equity are essential for connecting SEO-generated attention with behavioral outcomes (Mane, 2016). The strategic implication is that brands must integrate SEO and CBP, ceasing to view SEO as an isolated technical tactic and managing it instead as a strategic positioning channel (Asante et al., 2022). The alignment between brand value proposition and target keywords is fundamental for driving higher-order variables (awareness and engagement) that determine long-term success.

This study seeks to analyze the impact of SEO on the positioning of Peruvian retail brands during 2024, addressing specific strategies and their effectiveness. The specific objectives are: (1) to describe the SEO positioning strategies employed by Peruvian retail brands in 2023, and (2) to evaluate the classic brand positioning of retail brands. Consequently, it was proposed as a research hypothesis that search engine optimization, as a strategy, is effective in the classic positioning of retail brands in Peru 2024.

3 Materials and methods

This applied research employs a mixed-methods approach with a cross-sectional descriptive design, executed between January and December 2024 in two stages: a qualitative phase based on focus groups, and a quantitative phase utilizing surveys. The mixed-methods design enabled a comprehensive understanding of SEO's impact on brand positioning within the Peruvian retail sector: the combination of focus groups, SEO metrics, and surveys facilitated the analysis of consumer behavior and the effectiveness of digital strategies in the domestic market. A sequential mixed-methods cross-sectional design (QUAL→QUAN) was adopted due to its appropriateness for analyzing the relationship between SEO strategies and brand positioning within a delimited timeframe; the qualitative component identified the discovery and trust signals that consumers attribute to search results and refined the data collection instrument for the CBP variable within the Peruvian context; building upon this foundation, the quantitative component estimated the magnitude of associations between SEO indicators and positioning metrics, incorporating categorical covariates to enhance internal validity. Concurrently, the inclusion of objective SEO metrics (organic visibility, average position, organic CTR, and technical health, among others) enabled the triangulation of findings and the reduction of self-report biases. Although the study was conducted throughout 2024, each unit of analysis was observed only once, thereby maintaining its cross-sectional nature. This design proves optimal for an applied purpose that demands understanding, with explanatory depth (QUAL) and estimative precision (QUAN), the contemporary association between organic search engine performance and brand positioning, without attempting to infer temporal causal effects.

3.1 Qualitative stage: focus groups

The qualitative phase aimed to explore the behavioral characteristics of digital consumers regarding website search, in order

to guide the structuring of the questionnaire and ensure a closer approximation to reality in data collection; consequently, participants with prior online purchasing experience were selected through purposive quota sampling by age (18–36; 36–54; 54–72), gender, and socioeconomic level, forming three groups of 10 participants ($n = 30$) belonging to socioeconomic strata B, C, and D according to the national socioeconomic classification. Incomes were self-reported and expressed in Peruvian soles (PEN/month; see Table 1). The sessions were conducted in person, with an approximate duration of 60 min each, following a discussion guide that addressed search habits, brand recall, purchasing behavior, and website recommendation; within this framework, questions such as “When you decide to purchase online, do you have a specific retail brand in mind or do you use terms related to the good or product?” were included, whose responses enabled the identification of search trends, behavioral patterns, and determinants of purchase decisions. The moderator, an organizational psychologist with a neutral role, conducted and facilitated the sessions, ensuring appropriate climate, timing, and ethical considerations to produce valid, in-depth, and diverse data. For the analysis, content analysis was applied, organizing the terms and expressions used in the conversation according to categories and frequencies linked to digital search. Given its exploratory nature, the scope is not nationally representative, and the findings lack inferential character.

3.2 Quantitative stage: surveys and analysis of SEO metrics

3.2.1 Selection of SEO metrics

To evaluate the impact of SEO on retail brand positioning, ten key metrics were selected based on prior studies (Seyfabad and Fard, 2019), encompassing both On-Page SEO (internal site optimization) and Off-Page SEO (external factors influencing domain authority). The metrics were: Domain Authority (DA), which predicts a portal's capacity to rank in search engines (Mmeje, 2025); Page Authority (PA), which assesses the relevance of a specific page (Mmeje, 2025); Load Time (LT), duration until the page becomes fully interactive (NitroPack, 2025); Referring Domains (RD), number of unique domains linking to the site (Camarena, 2025); Trust Flow (TF), quality and reliability of inbound links (Majestic, n.d.); Page Size (PS), total weight of code and content (Google, n.d.); Page Speed (PV), complete loading time (Google, n.d.); Keywords (KW), terms that categorize and position pages; Domain Rating (DR), measurement of domain authority based on quantity and quality of links (Ong, 2025); and Citation Flow (CF), volume and influence of inbound links (Majestic, 2025). To link this selection with the effectiveness of traditional brand positioning, understood as the stable occupation of a differentiated,

TABLE 1 Consumer groups selected for the focus group.

Age groups	<i>n</i>	NSE	Average income (PEN/month)
[18–36]	10	B	7,020.00
[36–54]	10	C	3,970.00
[54–72]	10	D	2,480.00

Self-reported income; currency: Peruvian soles (PEN); SES according to national classification.

relevant, and credible mental territory that translates into salience, preference, and choice, a framework comprising three constructs was adopted: link authority, on-page relevance, and page experience. Authority metrics (DA, DR, TF, CF, and RD) capture external validation and social proof (quality, quantity, and diversity of references), sustaining credibility and esteem vis-à-vis alternatives; relevance metrics (KW and PA) materialize the clarity of the attribute or benefit the brand seeks to own (points of difference and points of parity), align language with search intent, and favor query-content matching; and experience metrics (LT = INP, PV, and PS) operate as signals of perceived quality and processing fluency (speed and stable interaction), consolidating positive evaluations at first contact. Collectively, these 10 metrics are not direct signals of brand equity, but function as antecedent indicators that increase the probability of exposure, consideration, and choice in search scenarios and, therefore, reinforce the traditional pillars of positioning (salience, relevance/differentiation, and credibility), with the advantage of being publicly available, comparable, and methodologically traceable for cross-brand studies. In summary, and in line with [Rashid et al. \(2024\)](#), search engine optimization (SEO) strategies operate as direct determinants of brand positioning in digital environments by enhancing visibility, perceived relevance, and consumer trust toward the brand.

3.2.2 Extracting values from SEO metrics

Specialized tools such as Majestic, GTmetrix, Jigsaw W3C, Qualidatrat and SEO Centro were used to obtain the values of each metric.

3.2.3 Parameter definition and data analysis

Each metric was classified according to predefined ranges to determine its impact on brand positioning. Thresholds were established based on previous studies and references from specialized portals ([Seyfabad and Fard, 2019](#)).

3.2.4 Survey

For the quantitative phase, the target population comprised online purchasers and non-purchasers residing in Peru (aged 18 years and older). A non-probabilistic quota sampling design was applied (city with retail presence, age, and gender). Sample size: 644 valid interviews were collected through a structured 42 item questionnaire, available via Google Forms. The sample size was determined by applying the formula for calculating a percentage with a sampling error of ± 3.9 percentage points at 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), assuming simple random sampling and a large population. The administration ensured confidentiality and anonymity of responses. In addition, to test the relationship between both types of positioning and in turn the influence of SEO strategies on classic brand positioning, a standardization of the data obtained from the independent variable was performed by converting it to numerical data. The dependent variable has been converted to levels (very high, high, medium, low and very low) by means of percentage values obtained from the questionnaire applied to the users, and the database was prepared to use the Multiple Linear Correlation test by means of the SPSS-25 software. It should be noted that the research has considered informed consent for both the Focus

Group and the questionnaire. It also guaranteed the reliability of the data provided by the participants.

4 Results

4.1 Description of user trends in online shopping

[Table 2](#) shows the responses obtained from the focus group regarding online product searches. It is highlighted that younger consumers use social networks and specialized platforms to discover products. Shopping experience and brand trust influence the intention to recommend websites. Older age groups show greater caution and distrust in digital shopping.

A consistent pattern was observed across all three groups: search begins with the product and its attributes (not necessarily with a brand), the store is recognized and recalled primarily through visual elements (logo, colors, images) and offers, and the choice leans toward the online channel when it promises speed, ease, and time savings, although this depends on the product type. Trust functions as a decisive filter: purchase and recommendation occur when there has been positive personal experience or third-party references; therefore, even when top options appear in the listing, many decisions are contrasted and prioritize “trustworthy sites.” Discovery and recall originate primarily from social media (with television serving as support in Group 3), and repeat purchases cause the preferred retailer to “appear” more frequently when using habitual keywords. In summary, effective online retail positioning rests on visual salience, seamless experience, and social proof, rather than mere SERP position, and operates within a circuit that reinforces recall → trust → choice → recommendation.

4.2 SEO positioning of retailers in Peru

[Table 3](#) analyzes 10 indicators of SEO strategies in six retailers. The following key points were identified: Domain Authority: R-5 leads with a score of 88, followed by R-2 and R-6 with 86. Load Time: R-5 has the best load time (2.7 s), which improves user experience. Keywords: R-2 has the highest number (300), indicating a robust SEO strategy. Trust Flow: R-2 and R-6 stand out with values of 21 and 20, respectively.

4.3 Classic brand positioning in the consumer's mind

Through surveys of 642 users, consumer brand recognition was determined ([Table 4](#)):

R-6 leads with 42.1% of mentions. R-2 is in second place with 28.2%. R-1 is remembered by 8.6% of consumers. Comparing with SEO positioning, it is observed that the best positioned retailers in searches do not necessarily coincide with those most remembered by consumers based on classic brand positioning ([Table 5](#)).

Comparatively, having a good position in search engines SEO positioning does not guarantee a position in the consumer's mind. On the contrary, the classic brand positioning guarantees a consumer presence in search engines.

TABLE 2 Distribution of the focus group participants according to their opinions regarding the search of pages to buy on the Internet.

Thematic unit	Conceptual definition	Emerging categories	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. Visual brand factors	Identity elements that enable store recognition and recall (logo and colors, images and product presentation, visible offers).	Visual identity and promotions in the foreground anchor brand recall.	✓	✓	✓
2. User experience (fast/easy)	Perception of speed, ease, and frictionless purchase flow. (Sub-themes: speed, simple purchase, time savings).	Speed and ease are triggers for choice and recommendation.	✓	✓	✓
3. Trust and recommendations	Decision based on perceived trustworthiness and recommendations. ("trustworthy sites," third-party references, positive personal experience).	Trust is a prerequisite for click, purchase, and recommendation; references validate the choice.	✓	✓	✓
4. Discovery and media channels (social media/TV)	Sources of retail awareness and recall. Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), TV as support, favorites.	Social media serves as the gateway; TV still influences certain segments.	✓	✓	✓ (TV more)
5. Search strategy and decision-making	How users initiate and decide in search engines. ("product + attributes" query, comparison, no blindness to SERP top).	Search is generic (product first), and decision-making filters by trust and contrasts options; SERP position alone is insufficient.	✓	✓	✓
6. Channel choice by product type	Channel preference conditioned by product type and urgency. (online for speed/deals, physical for certain categories).	Online wins through convenience, but boundaries exist by category/risk.	✓	✓	✓
7. Retail visibility in habitual searches	Presence of preferred store when using their keywords. (appears if habit exists, conditional loyalty).	Loyalty and repetition favor the retailer "standing out" in future searches.	✓	✓	✓

Focus group.

TABLE 3 Distribution of SEO strategy metrics for each retailer under study.

No.	SEO metrics	R-1	R-2	R-3	R-4	R-5	R-6
1	Domain authority (DA)	56.0	86.0	56.0	88.0	72.0	86.0
2	Page authority (PA)	42.8	82.1	39.9	45.6	22.6	83.7
3	Time to load (TL)	7.7 s	19.6 s	28.2 s	2.7 s	6.5 s	13.5 s
4	Reference domain (RD)	1.6 K	1.7 K	973.0	372.0	113.0	1.1 K
5	Trust flow (Flow of trust) (TF)	20	21	14	17.0	11.0	20.0
6	Page size (PS)	8.2 MB	3 MB	5.03 MB	4.5 MB	11.7 MB	744 KB
7	Page speed (PV)	36.1 sg.	22.7 sg.	28.2 sg.	22.9 sg.	34.6 sg.	6.6 sg.
8	Keywords (KW)	131.0	300.0	28.2 s	2.7 s	6.5 s	13.5 s
9	Domain rating (DRT)	71	60	66	52	71	65
10	Citation flow (CF)	35	40	31	21	20	41

Prepared by the authors. Source: Specialized portals.

4.4 Classic brand positioning in the consumer's mind

For the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and positioning analysis, the ten SEO metrics have been grouped into three theoretical constructs (authority, relevance, and experience) according to their technical nature and their relationship with consumer behavior and classical brand positioning (CBP). This has led to the following classification: Associated indicators: Domain Authority (DA) measures the overall capacity of the domain to rank in search engines. Referring Domains (RD) number of unique sites linking to the domain; indicates popularity and reputation. Trust

Flow (TF) evaluates the quality of inbound links; reflects site trustworthiness. Domain Rating (DRT) global authority index derived from links; synthesizes quantity and quality of backlinks. Citation Flow (CF) measures the influence or volume of links, without weighting their quality (complement to TF). These indicators are equivalent in CBP: "Credibility" or "esteem" external validation that supports the perceived strength of the brand. Relevance: These metrics are linked to thematic clarity, alignment between content and search, and the "core brand promise," a pillar of differentiation and coherence in CBP. Associated indicators: Page Authority (PA) determines the relevance or importance of a specific page in response to a query. Keywords (KW) express the degree of

alignment between site content and user search intentions. CBP equivalent: “Relevance and differentiation” clarity in the attribute or benefit that the brand seeks to own. Experience: Groups the metrics that directly impact the perception of technical quality, ease and speed of use, associated with the emotional or sensory component of positioning (fluency, appeal, satisfaction). Associated indicators: Load Time (LT) → speed at which the page becomes interactive (Core Web Vitals). Page Speed (PS) → overall loading performance, perception of agility. Page Size (PZ) → content weight, which influences user experience and accessibility. CBP equivalent: “Perceived quality and experience”—contributes to positive evaluation and brand preference (Table 6).

Calibration of case analysis data:

Data calibration (0 = low value, 1 = high value) was performed in order to construct the cross tabulation and apply Fisher's exact test. The same six brands (Saga Falabella, Oechsle, Ripley, Metro, Tottus, Plaza Veja) and the 10 SEO metrics were used, considering that the high value will be “1” when above the sample average, and “0” if below (Table 7).

Taking the above aspects into account, we proceeded to perform the QCA test used to identify causal combinations of conditions (variables) that lead to a result (such as high positioning). It is useful when dealing with a moderate number of cases ($n = 10\text{--}50$) and categorical or ordinal variables. In the study, there are six cases. Consequently, the data was prepared by generating the adjusted calibrated matrix table (Tables 8, 9).

TABLE 4 Distribution of the population according to the positioning of retailers in consumers' mind.

	Frequency	Percentage
Do not buy on internet	120	18.7
R-6	270	42.1
R-2	181	28.2
R-4	2	0.3
R-3	3	0.5
R-1	55	8.6
R-5	11	1.7
Total	642	100.0

Questionnaire applied to consumers in Peru.

The identified configurations indicate the combinations of sufficient conditions to achieve high positioning ($Y = 1$): Authority + Relevance + Experience → $Y = 1$ (Oechsle, Plaza Veja); Authority + Experience → $Y = 1$ (Metro); Relevance + Experience → $Y = 1$ (Saga Falabella). The insufficient configurations ($Y = 0$) correspond to cases where technical experience alone is insufficient to achieve high positioning (Tottus, Ripley). The most consistent combinations explaining high positioning always include the High Experience variable, which suggests that this condition is necessary. Authority and Relevance act as alternative sufficient conditions, reinforcing brand visibility. In competitive contexts, the convergence of these three dimensions consolidates organic presence and brand perception (Table 10).

Domain Authority (DA) $p = 0.4$ not significant. Although the infinite odds ratio suggests that sites with high domain authority tend to coincide with high positioning, the small sample size ($n = 6$) prevents statistical confirmation. Page Authority (PA) $p = 0.0667$ → is closest to significance, which indicates a clear positive trend: pages with high authority are associated with better positioning. This result reinforces that on-page relevance influences ranking more directly. Load Time (LT) $p = 0.4$ → not significant. No statistical evidence is observed, although the trend ($OR = \infty$) suggests that faster pages tend to coincide with better positioning. Referring Domains (RD) $p = 0.4667$ and $OR = 0$ → some cases with many referring domains do not necessarily exhibit good positioning; this could indicate low-quality links or insufficient thematic coherence. Trust Flow (TF) $p = 0.4667$ → no significant relationship, although with a positive trend (higher trust tends to coincide with better positioning). Page Size (PZ) $p = 0.3333$ → not significant; the slight trend indicates that moderate to low sizes may favor performance, but this is not conclusive. Page Speed (PS) $p = 0.4$, $OR = 0$ → indicates an inverse relationship: sites with higher speed do not necessarily achieve better positioning; this could reflect differences in infrastructure or heavy visual content. Keywords (KW) $p = 1.0$ → no evidence of association. Keyword density or quantity does not directly explain positioning, which suggests that semantic intent is more relevant than quantity. Domain Rating (DRT) $p = 1.0$, $OR = 0.333$ → no significant relationship; this may be due to homogeneity in values among large brands. Citation Flow (CF) $p = 0.4$ → not significant, although it maintains a positive trend (sites with more citations tend to have higher positioning). High Authority (construct) $p = 0.4667$ → the combination of authority metrics still does not achieve statistical association; this reinforces

TABLE 5 Comparative table between SEO positioning and classic retail brand positioning in Peru.

SEO positioning			Classic brand positioning (CBP)		
Position	Retails	Strong points	Retails	Frequency	%
1	R-5	Best load time (2.7 s), high domain authority (88), good Domain Rating (52)	R-6	270	42.1
2	R-6	High page authority (83.7), optimized page size (744 KB), good Citation Flow (41)	R-2	181	28.2
3	R-2	High number of keywords (300), good Trust Flow (21), high domain authority (86)	R-4	2	0.3
4	R-1	Good Domain Rating (71), acceptable page size (8.2 MB)	R-3	3	0.5
5	R-4	Good Domain Rating (71), acceptable page size (11.7 MB)	R-1	55	8.6
6	R-3	Good Domain Rating (66), acceptable page size (5.03 MB)	R-5	11	1.7

Survey to Internet shoppers.

TABLE 6 Classification summary.

Construct	Associated metrics	Concept linked to classical positioning authority
Authority	AD, DR, TF, DRT, CF	Credibility/esteem (external validation)
Relevance	AP, PC	Differentiation/benefit clarity
Experience	TC, VP, TP	Perceived quality/usage fluency

Authors' elaboration.

the need to analyze link quality, not just quantity. High Relevance (construct) $p = 0.4 \rightarrow$ shows the same trend as PA: on-page relevance is the component closest to a significant relationship. High Experience (construct) $p = 1.0 \rightarrow$ not significant, possibly because experience metrics (LT, PZ, PS) have compensatory effects among themselves. In conclusion, we can affirm that there are no statistically significant associations ($p < 0.05$) due to the reduced sample size ($n = 6$). However, consistent trends are observed such as: Page Authority (PA) and on-page relevance are the factors closest to correlating with high positioning. Global authority metrics (DA, CF, TF) show positive patterns, but not significant ones. Technical experience metrics (LT, PS, PZ) appear to have a moderate or neutral effect within this group of large brands.

5 Discussion

The focus group shows that digital natives, whose ages range from 18 to 36 years, born in the digital era, make more purchases online than other users, use social networks as a means of commercial information (ads, offers, products and services), remember the pages by their logos and colors, recommend the pages to family and friends, make purchases on the first page that appear in search and for greater security seek references before buying, however, they have had negative experiences. For this digital segment directly applies the importance of SEO strategies, which give greater visibility to the platforms generating higher sales (Ologunibi and Obafemi, 2023). Whereas the digital by adaptation, whose ages are between 36 and 54 years, make online purchases by searching through Google considering characteristics or brand of the product or service. However, they also start from advertising or ads that appear on social networks, and for greater security they are careful to search for reliable, recognized and easily accessible pages, which provide clear information of what they are looking for with reference images. This agrees with the assessment that there are cyber consumers who search by words related to the product, for which keywords are of utmost importance (Celaya, 2017). Among the digital forced, who are between 54 and 72 years old, 33.34% do not buy online, 3 out of 10 do not make purchases, preferring physical stores, although they have had search experience. However, they have abandoned the purchase before making the payment; buyers make their purchases by searching through Market Plaza, Facebook or Google, as well as by searching with the characteristics of the product and accessing the pages that appear in the first places. However, they look for suggestions from friends to have confidence or security; they maintain an attitude of insecurity and distrust, they consider that the Internet does not

TABLE 7 Cálculo de los promedios (Referenciales).

Metric	Overall average
AD	74
AP	52.8
TC	13.4
DR	243
TF	17.2
TP	129.6
VP	25.2
PC	80.3
DRT	64.1
CF	31.3

Authors' elaboration.

provide any guarantee. All this confirms that keywords put on the Internet attract users to products and content in general, making them change their perception and inducing them to purchase them (Abhishek and Agarwal, 2020). This shows the great potential to be placed in the first places of search, this segment is not so devoted to online shopping, however, being in the first place can take advantage of these forced digital users.

Participants shop online, mainly looking for the product they want and its characteristics, as well as images that are close to what they want to buy in the most recognized pages for them (Saga Falabella, Ripley, AliExpress, etc.). The means by which they generally find out this information are social networks, among the most used ones Facebook; they prefer those pages that through a link direct them to catalogs or processes for purchases. They usually recognize and remember the pages by their logos and offers and recommend the use of these pages to family and friends and that they usually enter the first link that comes up when they search but after that they look for other references to be able to compare. They prefer to make purchases virtually and also use applications of the pages for easy access, however, despite taking into account references before buying, they indicate that they have been victims of cyber theft and have had at least one bad experience with purchases. They confirm that social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter) are the ones used to access the pages where to buy. The findings suggest that digital marketing and SEO strategies should be adapted to the search habits and security perception of each segment. The trust and usability approach highlights the importance of generating intuitive user experiences that reinforce purchase intent (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Likewise, technology adoption theory stresses that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are key determinants in the adoption of digital platforms, which explains the distrust of older consumers (Davis, 1989).

The results of the classic brand positioning of retail companies in Peru corroborate its relevance as a fundamental aspect in consumer perception. Considering that positioning is visualized as the average or mean location of a brand's products on a perceptual map (Ke et al., 2020). The case of Oeschle, which holds the second place, despite not having branches throughout the country, corroborates the statement that brand positioning depends not only on the availability of the product, but also on how the

TABLE 8 Adjusted calibrated matrix.

Brand	AD	AP	TC	DR	TF	TP	VP	PC	DRT	CF	TC_adj	TP_adj	Authority high	Relevance high	Experience high	Y_posi
Saga Falabella	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Oechsle	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Ripley	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Metro	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Tottus	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Plaza Vea	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1

Authors' elaboration. Source: SEO metrics analysis.

TABLE 9 QCA—Tabla de Verdad (Calibración ajustada).

Authority high	Relevance high	Experience high	Y_posit (High positioning)	n_cases	Representative brands
1	1	1	1	2	Oechsle, Plaza Vea
1	0	1	1	1	Metro
0	1	1	1	1	Saga Falabella
0	0	1	0	1	Tottus
0	0	0	0	1	Ripley

Authors' elaboration. Source: SEO analysis.

TABLE 10 Adjusted fisher results (TC/TP inverted).

Variable	Outcome	2 × 2 Table	OddsRatio	p_value
AD	Y_posit_A	[[3, 0], [1, 2]]	,inf	0.4
AP	Y_posit_A	[[4, 0], [0, 2]]	,inf	0.0667
TC	Y_posit_A	[[3, 0], [1, 2]]	,inf	0.4
DR	Y_posit_A	[[2, 2], [2, 0]]	0,0	0.4667
TF	Y_posit_A	[[2, 0], [2, 2]]	,inf	0.4667
TP	Y_posit_A	[[4, 1], [0, 1]]	,inf	0.3333
VP	Y_posit_A	[[1, 2], [3, 0]]	0,0	0.4
PC	Y_posit_A	[[3, 1], [1, 1]]	3,0	1.0
DRT	Y_posit_A	[[1, 1], [3, 1]]	0,333	1.0
CF	Y_posit_A	[[3, 0], [1, 2]]	,inf	0.4
High authority	Y_posit_A	[[2, 0], [2, 2]]	,inf	0.4667
High relevance	Y_posit_A	[[3, 0], [1, 2]]	,inf	0.4
High experience	Y_posit_A	[[3, 1], [1, 1]]	3,0	1.0

Authors' elaboration.

consumer’s mind perceives it (Ries and Trout, 2012). Oeschle shows that its differentiation has managed to consolidate its identity and a strong recall, despite the fact that its physical presence in the territory is smaller than that of its competitors. This highlights the importance of developing a credible differentiation to maintain a competitive advantage (Blankson, 2016). On the other hand, retailers such as Metro (1.7%) and Ripley (0.5%), which showed low recall, suggest that investment in marketing strategies and brand visibility can influence consumer perception. Brand positioning is established by aligning consumer values with brand attributes (Herrmann and Huber, 2000). Under

this postulate, Plaza Vea as a brand has achieved a better alignment with consumer needs, unlike other brands. In addition, visibility plays a key role in its consolidation in the consumer’s mind (Hosseini et al., 2024). The strong recall of Plaza Vea and Oeschle implies that effective strategies have been developed to improve their visibility in the Peruvian market.

SEO analysis should be approached from the perspective of information architecture and semantic relevance. A well-defined internal link structure improves search engine indexing, while the importance of load time in user retention has been emphasized (Mmeje, 2025). Keyword optimization remains an effective strategy,

but recent studies suggest that user experience and content quality are gaining more weight in search ranking (Google, 2022). This confirms the theory about brand building, which states that positioning in the consumer's mind depends on experience and emotional associations, beyond simple search engine visibility (Keller, 2001). While SEO generates immediate exposure, classic positioning requires consistency in communication and customer satisfaction over time. The fact that SEO does not guarantee brand recall calls into question the effectiveness of a purely tactical digital strategy. Strategic marketing requires a combination of visibility (SEO) and emotional differentiation to achieve sustainable positioning (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Consequently, retailers should consider a holistic approach that combines optimization strategies with coherent brand narratives. Another relevant aspect in the discussion is the impact of SEO on brand positioning. Search engine optimization can influence brand visibility and differentiation (Ahmad et al., 2022). However, the results suggest that classical brand positioning in the consumer's mind is not always directly related to SEO positioning. This confirms claims about how consumers tend to trust search rankings, but this does not necessarily guarantee long-term brand recall (Dou et al., 2010).

6 Conclusion

SEO is an effective tool for capturing immediate traffic, but it does not guarantee a lasting relationship with the consumer. Brand positioning requires a holistic approach based on user experience and value differentiation. Marketing strategies must integrate SEO with classic brand positioning to generate sustainable impact. The perception of security remains a key factor in the adoption of e-commerce in older segments. However, the segments according to age groups present different behavior for both search and purchase. There are three distinct segments: the spontaneous digital natives in their purchases, reinforcing their behavior with shopping experiences; the digital by adaptation, reserved in insecure purchases and demand additional information to buy, looking for recommended pages; the forced digital do not make purchases regularly online, are very insecure and totally distrustful of online shopping. The study has limitations in that it only considered retail samples in the food (03) and clothing (03) sectors and could have been extended to other sectors. Another limitation is the size of the sample (06), which limits the possibility of generalization. These findings allow us to rethink the current conception of SEO and brand positioning, promoting a more strategic vision aligned with consumer perception. What makes us presume that both strategies should seek points of coincidence to complement each other strategically in order to achieve results of greater presence in line with the perception of digital users.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession number(s) can be found in the article/supplementary material.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Escuela de Administración de la Universidad César Vallejo (Res-olution of the Vice-rectorate for Research N° 155-2023-VI-UCV). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

JL-C: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. NP-L: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. This research was funded by Universidad César Vallejo, grant number RVI N° 035-2024-UCV. The APC was funded by Universidad César Vallejo.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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