Proceedings of ICMRED 2025 Symposium: Effective Communication as a Powerful Management Tool
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/184/2025.BL23219

# *The Consumer Decision Journey in the Digital Age: How Brands Influence Consumer Behavior Online*

**Shuai Xu**

*Management School, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom*
*s.xu19@lancaster.ac.uk*

***Abstract:*** The usual marketing funnel no longer safely reflects consumer behaviour in the modern era. Customers prefer to participate in the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ), a more repetitive and straight- ahead decision- making method. This analysis examines how businesses can impact buyers from when a customer becomes aware of a product until the purchase. As a result of the expansion of digital marketing, strategies like social media marketing, personalized advertising, search engine optimization (SEO), influencer marketing, and user-generated content (UGC) have gained more and more attention. This research uses the CDJ of McKinsey to observe how businesses can improve digital marketing to improve user experience and build brand loyalty. Moreover, it examines the impact of word- of- teeth marketing and online reviews on developing consumer trust and offers suggestions for controlling myths. But this review advises businesses to improve their digital marketing strategies, improve customer relationships, and get a competitive advantage in an increasing market.

***Keywords:*** Consumer Decision Journey, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Brand Influence, Online Engagement.

## 1. Introduction

Consumer behavior has changed significantly due to the rapid rise of digital technology. Conventional firms have relied on a distinct marketing funnel that follows users from knowing to getting. Recent research, such as those conducted by McKinsey, has demonstrated that decision-making in the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) style is more effective and regular. People can immediately communicate with producers via a range of website services, including search engines, social marketing, online reviews, and personalized advertising, before making a purchase decision.

Due to the expansion of net classes, people now have more power over how their purchases are made. They regularly check for product information, consider alternatives, and talk with organizations before deciding. User-generated material (UGC), influencer marketing, and specific recommendations are now a significant portion of consumer decision-making on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WeChat. As online connections replace conventional one-way ads, firms may modify their marketing strategies to consumer-driven marketing and generate personalized, engaging actions. Businesses must be aware of this change in today's competitive setting.

Customer differentiation has been thoroughly studied in advertising and consumer behavior studies. Like the marketing funnel, standard versions conceptualized decision-making as a horizontal

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shift from data to purchase [1]. McKinsey's Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) design challenges this idea by giving user choice- doing as a more active and continuous process that is greatly influenced by virtual relationships [2]. Consumers constantly review models, look for information net, and add in post-purchase behaviors that impact lengthy-term business relationships, according to the CDJ. Santos and Gonçalves provide a detailed study of the basic principles of choice-making and addressing the growing impact of common devotion and trust-building in client choices. They point out that today's consumer trip focuses on customer-powered relations across various letters.

Due to the rise in digital marketing, companies have switched from standard marketing to information-driven, very interesting, and certain promotion tactics. Businesses can use these online methods to get customers' attention at critical decision points to keep advertising details important and powerful. Bala and Verma studied retargeting ads, behavioral segmentation, and predictive analytics, maintaining their influence on consumer solution- effort, especially in the effective examination time [3]. Businesses with good business personalities and data-driven marketing strategies are more likely to replicate customers, according to their research [3]. SEO, social media marketing, influencer marketing, and AI-powered customization significantly impact getting routines because of Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick [4].

Consumer behavior recommendations aid in changing consumer options. According to Kardes, Cronley, and Cline, customer decision-making is influenced by internal factors, cultural influences, and previous experience [5]. Customers may favor a particular company by focusing solely on advertising or typical marketing strategies. This is in contrast with the CDJ program, which suggests that customer choice-making is an achievement and influenced by several factors, generally contributing to repeated evaluations before buying decisions are made [5].

The importance of brand trust, understanding, and commitment has become even more crucial due to the customer's present decision-making. Bernardo and Associates The most important element of maintaining brand loyalty is, according to reports examining the relationship between brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust [6]. Consumers are more likely to work with and continue supporting organizations they consider to be trusted, equitable, and politically responsible. Like this plan, Becerra and Badrinarayanan introduced the concept of brand evangelism, where greatly engaged people consciously promote models through the term-of-mouth and cultural media promotion [7]. They claim that brand recognition and respect, which finally boosts UGC (user-generated data) and friend tips, are the main drivers of this trend.

Consumer-product communication strategies have also been identified as the essential vehicles of brand loyalty. Redmond et al. emphasized the value of interactive content, actual-time conversation, and specific marketing for corporations looking to develop lengthy-term client relationships [8]. According to their studies, organizations that engage with customers through social media, resolve ideas, and personal contacts have better customer retention and passion by Davis Mersey et cetera [9]. Additionally, it was noted that AR (augmented reality) shopping experiences, live loading, and AI-driven personalization can increase consumer trust and the certainty of purchasing decisions [9]. According to their studies, engaging promotion tactics like genuine-time devotion and electronic material testing drastically improve customer confidence and conversion rates.

Beyond digital marketing and product commitment, sustainable consumer behavior is extremely important in order option. Due to Trudel, more individuals are analyzing ethical business practices and ecologically friendly businesses [10]. According to his study," Corporate social responsibility (CSR), green marketing, and sustainable production processes have significant effects on brand perception and consumer loyalty" [10]. To maintain business dependability and customer value, companies may also include healthy activities in their digital marketing techniques.

This study examines how the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) is affected by digital marketing. It is interesting in learning how user-generated content, SEO, and influencer marketing change trust,

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engagement, and devotion. Additionally, it examines how concepts like trust and sustainability may be applied to digital marketing. Businesses are supposed to guide consumers and foster lasting relationships.

## 2. Current strategies

### 2.1. Search and personalization tools

Some people begin with a search engine. Search engine optimization (SEO) helps a brand appear at the top when people search for things. In my opinion, the best benefits are more popular. Brands use keywords, quick sites, and evident pages. Thanks to these, users can identify the product more quickly.

Brands even use personalized ads. For everyone, these advertisements change. They display information based on past searches, areas, or age. For instance, people might eventually see advertisements for shoes if they look at them. Advertising becomes more valuable as a result. Additionally, it facilitates quicker decision-making. Brands may also use letters and online resources to promote their products. This facilitates and enhances the browsing experience.

### 2.2. Social engagement and influencer marketing

There is a lot of time spent on social media. Brands article photos and videos using software like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. They respond to questions and respond to comments. People are taught more about the product thanks to this. Additionally, it promotes confidence.

Some companies collaborate with celebrities. Bloggers are those who have a large following. They describe goods and demonstrate how they are used. Some people believe bloggers because they listen to them. When an influencer likes a good, their followers may consider it too. This increases brand approach and sales.

### 2.3. User involvement and retargeting

People enjoy reading different people's reviews and photos. User-generated content (UGC) is what this is known as. Photos, movies, and rankings are included. True people are more trustworthy than advertisements. They feel more secure purchasing the item when they hear positive testimonials.

Some people go to a manufacturer's website without purchasing anything. Retargeting advertising encourages their return. Eventually, these advertisements appear on other websites or apps. They serve as reminders of what was witnessed. Individuals may gain and make purchases as a result. People can switch between searching and buying with these resources.

### 2.4. Experience and trust-building

When individuals buy online, they want quick assistance. Companies use live chat or chatbots to respond to questions. Time is saved, and people feel better. They are more likely to purchase if they receive assistance right away.

Some companies make use of online testing equipment. For instance, they can see how their attire or spectacles look on them. Some companies answer questions and show products through live movies. Individuals feel more assured when using these devices. They even aid in quicker decision-making.

What a manufacturer stands for even matters to people. Some companies emphasize fair employment and the atmosphere. People prefer to purchase from caring companies. People may enjoy these brands more and continue to purchase from them when a product shares these communications online.

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## 3. Case study: Nike's "You Can't Stop Us" campaign

### 3.1. Introduction

To better comprehend how digital marketing strategies affect consumer behavior throughout the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ), this book presents a case study of Nike's world plan" You Can't Stop Us". This battle, which was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, aimed to motivate, join, and participate in people worldwide. Nike combined stories, cultural values, influencer relationships, user-generated gladness, and personalized online tools to link consumers through each stage of the CDJ. This strategy clearly indicates how a company may use feeling, technology, and social media to enhance its market position and customer loyalty.

### 3.2. Awareness stage

Nike created global recognition by introducing a powerful picture titled" You Can't Stop Us", broadly shared on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other websites. Professional players and regular people were featured in the film, which seamlessly conveyed the concept of social movements, sports, and community. In a time of global problems, it focused on cohesion, variety, and endurance.

The film quickly became popular. In a short period, it received millions of views. Instead of being direct product advertisements, it was a concept of shared human experience. This helped Nike become a top-thought during the awareness stage, perhaps among audiences who were not common sportswear buyers. Beyond standard advertising, Nike expanded through the campaign's emotional and cultural values integration.

### 3.3. Consideration stage

Nike used a variety of digital stations to keep customers engaged after the battle attracted notice. Nike urged people to use hashtags like "You Can't Stop Us" to share their stories on social media. People felt more connected to the product due to participating in the campaign. Additionally, it produced a sizable share of user-generated content (UGC), increasing peer-to-peer influence and integrity.

Nike also collaborated with runners and influencers who posted personal variations of the plan or tied its information to their lives. Millions of followers benefited from these articles. Additionally, personal information was provided by Nike's software and based on user behavior and interests, such as product recommendations and training recommendations.

These methods supported the CD J's rounds of consideration and review. Customers were no longer merely watching the product; they interacted with it, received content that appealed to their interests, and witnessed how others supported the brand's message.

### 3.4. Decision stage

Nike used targeted advertising, retargeting resources, and game-based solution offers to shift consumers toward order. For instance, after ads for related products were displayed on different platforms to people who watched the strategy or visited Nike's site. These advertisements were based on user preferences, landscape, and visiting history.

Through its software, Nike even provided first access to product launches and limited-edition products, giving users a sense of exclusivity. This approach made people's purchases more urgent and persuasive. Consumers were able to quickly locate products that met their needs thanks to product advice on the website and in-app notifications.

Collectively, these resources facilitated the conversion of curiosity into motion. Consumers had a straightforward and customized process thanks to the campaign's inspiration.

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### 3.5. Post-purchase and loyalty stage

Beyond the order, Nike extended the trip. The Nike game continued to engage users after they made purchases. It provided specific progress tracking, fitness advice, and training advice. After the price, these functions added benefits and kept customers connected to the company.

Nike even promoted its environmental and social norms. For instance, it promoted goods based on recycled materials and promoted fairness and inclusion messages. These behaviors helped clients who shared those values form lasting emotional bonds with them.

Engagement was maintained through follow-up texts and social media posts. Following the sale, Nike continued to operate. It aimed to build a long-lasting relationship with its clients through consistent information, shared goals, and modern experiences.

## 4. Insights and prospects

### 4.1. Key insights

This research demonstrates that consumer decision-making is no longer linear or easy. Different people enter and go through the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ). Before deciding, they may jump between rounds or repeat activities. To do this, brands must always be in touch with their clients and always provide useful information.

According to one important finding, digital devices play a significant part in every CDJ period. Social media and SEO promote knowledge. Personalized ads and user-generated content provide consideration. Decision-making is promoted through solution recommendations, retargeting, and unique presents. Post-purchase devices like loyalty programs, software, follow-up emails, and loyalty programs keep people engaged and build lasting associations.

Another important aspect of faith is that it has always been more important. People who trust companies are more likely to make purchases. True reviews, social proof, influencer tips, and business values are some of the sources of this faith. Long-term users may be lost to brands concentrating solely on sales and neglecting relationship-building.

Additionally, purchasing decisions are influenced by thoughts and beliefs. People are more likely to stay engaged when a company's values are invigorated or aligned with its principles. Consumer securities can develop stronger ones with brands that care about sustainability, justice, or addition. These personal ties are more difficult to break than just the products or value.

### 4.2. Challenges in digital marketing

Every Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) action is aided by online advertising. However, problems are likewise present in each step. The key issues that correspond to the earlier items are shown in this section.

First, CD J's electronic devices are interchangeable but frequently change. How do sites, search engines, and social media frequently upgrade operations? What works now might not work the following year. Companies had frequently altered their plans. Various rules and designs apply to various platforms. This makes things more difficult.

Next, while data protection is a major concern, trust is very important. How do companies use their information? People want to know. People might stop believing in brands if they aren't clear about them. Additionally, regulations like GDPR instruct businesses on how to use their information. Businesses may be shrewd and sincere.

Fourth, people are guided by sentiments and beliefs but must also feel authentic. Some companies claim to support worthwhile reasons. However, they might stop buying if people don't believe them.

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Companies are required to follow their orders. Individuals do become enraged if they only use polite language.

Third, it's challenging to keep citizens interested in a long time. People may quit following a brand if the articles are dull, even if they do. People lose interest if the information only touches on sales. Brands may produce entertaining or useful content, not only advertisements.

Fifth, while posting articles can be beneficial, it can also be dangerous. Companies have no control over what users post in evaluations or comments. Some people may have offensive or improper posts. Businesses may closely look at these locations. They must maintain their safety and openness but never obstruct conversation.

Brands may continue to work even if modern tools increase the number of ways to communicate with people. They may speak truthfully, be willing to change and speak truthfully.

### 4.3. Future directions

How manufacturers use digital marketing and CDJ tactics may be affected by several changes. Second, real-time personalization and AI will expand. Brands may apply machine learning to provide the appropriate information at the appropriate time to the appropriate recipient. This may improve conversion rates, increase customer satisfaction, and improve relevance. Predictive analytics, bright suggestion systems, and chatbots will become the norm.

Next, interactive and participatory experiences like AR try-ons, life streams, and online stores will become more frequent. Thanks to these devices, users become more self-assured and make decisions more quickly. The more clients you "experience" a product online and explore it further, the better.

Next, consumers' expectations for sustainability and social duty will increase. Folks want to help organizations that care about society and the environment. Manufacturers may use their digital assets well and communicate these attempts. For instance, a company's social media impact or how a solution was created may encourage devotion.

Third, long-term ties will be more important than short-term sales. Customers will stay with brands that foster confidence and provide ongoing value through content, help, or community. Easy converters are no longer sufficient. Customers return with loyalty programs, steady commitment, and shared ideals.

And then, there will be more community-based marketing. More so than corporations, people believe other people. Brands may concentrate more on fan-based communities, peer reviews, forums, and UGC to pique customers ' interest and support. Societies assist brands in creating lifestyle, not just visitors.

The search terms "voice research" and "visual search" will increase in the fifth grade. Brands may optimize information for these formats as users use word assistants like Alexa or perform image searches on platforms like Pinterest and Google Lens. New actions and devices may require changes to seek techniques.

Finally, the importance of cross-digital-physical experiences will grow. Brands will use mobile software, QR codes, and location-based offers to join online adventures with in-store visits. This enables a smooth, personal experience that combines both digital and real-world contacts.

Listening, adapting, and making significant relationships are the potential of digital marketing. In an altering modern world, companies that remain trustworthy and kind and people will benefit.

## 5. Conclusion

This study looked at how client behavior during the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) is affected by modern advertising. It demonstrated how manufacturers can influence users from awareness to devotion using tools like SEO, social media, personal ads, influencers, and customer information. For

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example, consider Nike's strategy. According to the study, digital strategies are helpful at every stage of the trip. Important are brand values, emotions, private messages, and trust. More devoted consumers are derived from manufacturers that care about long-term relationships rather than just quick revenue. Companies should defend data, use real-time private tools, and display precise values in the future. These activities may aid in the establishment of powerful, long-term customer relationships. In a constantly evolving digital world, businesses may benefit from this.

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