



Reframing consumer decision-making: An integrated review of psychological, communicative, cultural, and digital influences on consumer behavior

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Abstract

Consumer decision-making has changed significantly as technological advances, cultural shifts, and changes in the communications environment change the way people process information and consumers make choices. This comprehensive review provides an overview of psychological foundations, communication theory, classical and contemporary decision-making models, cross-cultural research, and online behavior to provide a comprehensive understanding of modern consumer decision-making. Drawing on conceptual theory, integrated marketing communications, influencer marketing, nonlinear decision paths, cultural dimensions, and online decision models, this article presents a conceptual model that shows how these factors interact to shape consumer behavior. The review highlights the need for cross-cultural validation, research on emotional and algorithmic influences, and modern decision-making frameworks that reflect the realities of the digital consumption environment, and concludes with implications for future research.

Keywords: Consumer decision making, integrated marketing communications, influencer marketing, cross cultural consumer behavior, online consumer behavior, nonlinear decision-making models

Introduction

Consumer behavior has long been a focus of marketing and behavioral science, and early models described decision making as a rational, continuous process. However, over time, researchers have recognized that decision-making is deeply shaped by psychological states, cultural frameworks, communication dynamics, and the digital environment. Traditional linear models, while fundamental, do not fully capture the nonlinear and contextual paths that characterize modern consumer choices.

To address these complexities, this review integrates several major literature streams extracted from user-submitted research sources, including psychological research on conceptual level theory (Lynch & Zauberan, 2007) [3], integrated marketing communication (Mihart, 2012) [4], influencer marketing (Vidania & Das, 2021) [9], and classical decision-making models (Qazzafi, 2019) [7] (Panwar *et al.*, (2019) [5], nonlinear models and decision-making structures in the digital age (Stankevich, 2017) [8], cross-cultural consumer behavior (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), meta-analytic trends in consumer behavior (Peighambari *et al.*, 2016) [6], and online decision-making models (Darley *et al.*, 2010) [1].

By combining these perspectives, this article proposes a conceptual model that illustrates how multiple forces collectively shape modern consumer decision-making. This combination is designed to assist academics and practitioners seeking to understand, predict, and influence consumer decisions in increasingly complex markets.

Method

This study uses a narrative review methodology suitable for synthesizing important theoretical insights rather than an exhaustive systematic study. This corpus consists exclusively of peer-reviewed articles that have shaped contemporary understanding of consumer decision-making

in the fields of psychology, marketing, communications, culture, and digital commerce.

Results

1. Psychological basis of consumer decision making

Lynch and Zauberan's (2007) [3] commentary on conceptual level theory (CLT) shows how psychological distance influences decision making by changing mental representations from concrete to abstract and vice versa. Consumers tend to emphasize desirability and long-term benefits when evaluating decisions in the distant future. In contrast, short-term solutions emphasize feasibility and realistic limits. These dynamics explain phenomena such as the intention-action gap, changing preferences, and post-purchase regret. CLT therefore positions consumer decision-making as flexible, context-sensitive, and cognitively adaptive, rather than stable or uniformly rational.

2. Communication Impact: IMC and Influencer Marketing

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is presented by Mihart (2012) [4] as a holistic framework that coordinates all elements of the marketing mix to create consistent and synergistic messages that can influence consumer attitudes and behavior at all stages of decision-making. IMC increases brand consistency, improves message clarity, and builds trust. This is especially important in a competitive environment where consumers face information overload.

In addition to this, Vidania and Das (2021) [9] describe the rise of influencer marketing as a response to digital noise, advertising fatigue, and declining trust in traditional advertising. Influencers provide credibility, trustworthiness, and social proof, which greatly influences the information search and evaluation stage. Their influence reflects a broader shift toward peer-based persuasion and participatory communication ecosystems.

3. Classic and modern decision-making models

Kazzafi (2019) reformulates the traditional five-stage model of problem recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase behavior, emphasizing its continuous relevance for high-involvement decision-making.

However, Panwar *et al.* (2019) [5] suggest that models such as Anderson and Nicosia enhance this framework by incorporating feedback loops, relational trends, and firm-customer interactions.

Stankiewicz (2017) questions the linearity of traditional models and takes consumers on a non-linear, iterative journey shaped by “key moments” that are influenced by digital environments, peer interactions, situational triggers, and emotionally transformative.

This idea is closely related to modern omnichannel behavior, where decision-making steps are blurred, duplicated, and repeated.

4. Cultural aspects and their influence

De Muij and Hofstede (2011) provide convincing evidence that culture influences nearly every aspect of consumer behavior, including self-esteem, motivation, communication preferences, risk tolerance, and brand perception. Consumers from individualistic cultures place more emphasis on individual preferences and distinct beliefs, while collectivistic consumers prioritize harmony, group norms, and trusting relationships. Cultures high in power distance interpret global brands as status symbols, while cultures high in uncertainty avoidance gravitate toward established brands and expert-endorsed information. These cultural differences fundamentally shape decision-making tendencies and communication effectiveness.

5. Online consumer behavior

Digital transformation represents a new set of decision-making factors. Darley, Blankson, and Lutge (2010) [1] adapt the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model to an online context and show how website quality, interface design, interactivity, and trust signals influence purchase attitudes, intentions, and outcomes.

Online environments are changing traditional decision-making procedures by increasing access to information, making choices more complex, and enhancing the role of social proof through digital reviews and communities.

Furthermore, Peigambari *et al.* (2016) report that although methodological challenges remain, such as overreliance on student samples and insufficient cross-cultural validation, academic influence on digital, emotional, and cultural influences in consumer behavior research is increasing.

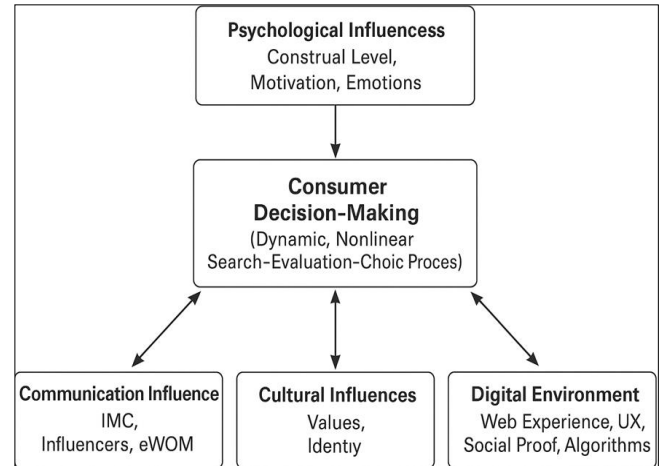
Discussion

The overall results show that consumer decision making cannot be fully understood by linear or monodisciplinary models. Instead, decisions emerge from interrelated psychological, communicative, cultural, and technological processes. Dynamics at the constructive level indicate that cognitive priorities change over time. BMI and influencer marketing emphasize the persuasive power of consistent, authentic communication. Cultural aspects highlight variations in behavioral trends among societies and population groups. Digital environments create new cognitive and experiential triggers that change traditional decision-making methods.

The convergence of these factors suggests that consumer decision-making should be modeled in a non-linear, context-sensitive, culturally-based, and digitally mediated manner. The conceptual model presented below reflects these interactions.

Conceptual Model Figure

Integrated Model of Modern Consumer Decision-Making



Model description

This model depicts the consumer decision-making process as a dynamic core formed by four interacting forces.

- Psychological influences control internal cognitive and emotional processes.
- Communication influence creates a persuasive signal through IMC and influencer networks.
- Cultural influences create fundamental values that guide interpretation and action.
- The digital environment changes the structure of access to information, perceptions of trust, and choices.

These forces work together to co-create modern decision-making.

Conclusion

This review shows that consumer decisions are shaped by a multidimensional constellation of influences that go beyond the classical linear model. Today's consumers navigate complex, non-linear journeys shaped by psychological interpretations, communication ecosystems, cultural values, and experiences with digital interfaces. Existing frameworks need to be adapted to reflect these realities, including emotional, algorithmic and cross-cultural aspects.

Future research should prioritize cross-cultural testing of decision-making models, investigate emotional and latent influences in digital contexts, develop standardized measures for authenticating influencers, and investigate how algorithmic curation shapes selection architectures. Such research creates models that are more relevant to today's consumer behavior, thereby improving both scientific understanding and practical marketing strategies.

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