



THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE DECISIONS: A REVIEW OF MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

Digital marketing has transformed how businesses engage with their customers and how it impacts their decision-making process. The aim of this narrative integrative literature review is to study the impact of digital marketing strategies on the customer buying process throughout the customer lifecycle. It covers key digital marketing techniques such as social media marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, influencer marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, online reviews, electronic word of mouth marketing, personalised marketing, artificial intelligence marketing, video marketing and omnichannel marketing. The review is based on literature ranging from 2016 to 2025 and focuses on the various stages of the consumer decision-making process, starting with the need recognition stage and ending in post-purchase behaviour. It also creates a conceptual model through which digital marketing strategies are connected with the key mediating variables such as customer engagement, perceived value, brand image, perceived usefulness, and customer experience, and trust. Additional factors that moderate the model include privacy concerns, digital literacy, product type, consumer characteristics, platform credibility and cultural context. The results indicate that digital marketing effectiveness is not solely reliant on technology, but also on trust, transparency, content quality, and ethical marketing practices. The paper ends with the conclusion that digital marketing is best realized through a range of techniques being deployed strategically, taking into account customer experience, building trust, consumer privacy and the short-term need to convert and long-term to build brand loyalty and customer retention.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Customer Purchase Decisions, Consumer Behavior, Social Media Marketing, E-Commerce, Online Reviews, Digital Advertising, Purchase Intention, Marketing Strategies, Customer Journey, E-WOM, Personalization, AI Marketing

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital transformation has transformed marketing in many ways in the past twenty years. With the advent of the internet, smartphones, social platforms, search engines, and AI, the digital world has become connected, giving brands a unique opportunity to engage consumers in ways they could not do so in the past (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Traditional marketing was largely one-way communication via television, radio and print, but has increasingly evolved to become interactive, data-driven and personalised digital communication.

Today's consumers are more connected, informed, and active than ever. They utilize various channels simultaneously to seek information, produce material, share experiences and shape others in online communities (Kapoor et al., 2017). This transformation has brought new opportunities to marketers, but new challenges too. Organisations can leverage digital platforms to reach specific audiences, gather real-time information about consumer behaviour and provide personalised experiences on a large scale. Meanwhile, consumers are inundated with information, advertising fatigue, and privacy concerns are on the rise (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

There have been three phases of digital marketing. In the beginning, it was mainly focused on basic online advertising and website optimisation. Social media has since evolved into a significant communication medium, and brands and consumers can directly interact and communicate through social media (Li et al., 2020). More recently, artificial intelligence, machine learning, advanced analytics, and automation have made hyper-personalisation and more advanced customer journey management possible. As a result, modern digital marketing has become a complex system of technologies, platforms, and strategies that reaches consumers through many different touchpoints (Hanelt et al., 2020).

1.2 Problem Statement

Although digital marketing is widely adopted by the Organisations around the world, there are still some significant gaps in understanding the impact of digital marketing on customer purchase decisions. The literature shows a number of complicating factors. Digital marketing includes many different strategies such as social media marketing, content marketing, influencer marketing, online reviews, etc., which work through different psychological mechanisms and yield different results (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Second, digital marketing can only be effective if there are complex interactions between marketing strategies, consumer psychology, technology, trust, privacy concerns, and contextual factors. Third, the pace of change of digital platforms, technologies and consumer behaviour makes it challenging to develop long-lasting theoretical frameworks (Buhalis et al., 2023).

Moreover, existing research tends to focus on single digital marketing activities and the impact on the purchase process within individual touchpoints, rather than recognizing the impact of digital marketing when considering the customer journey as a whole (Rooderkerk et al., 2023). Also, it is still unclear if digital marketing is more about short-term transactions or long-term customer loyalty and brand equity (Bilgin, 2018). There have been ethical queries about personalization versus privacy, algorithmic transparency, manipulative practices, fake reviews, influencer authenticity and data security (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

The lack of unified knowledge requires a thorough critical review that can integrate results obtained from different digital marketing approaches, behavioural theories of consumers and contextual variables to further the theoretical knowledge and practice of digital marketing.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

Aim: To critically review and synthesize research on the effects of digital marketing on customer buying decisions and to determine the key digital marketing strategies, theoretical mechanisms, mediating/moderating factors, and gaps in the research.

Objectives:

1. To explain digital marketing and the development of digital marketing in the digital era and in the modern business environment.
2. To conduct a comprehensive review of key digital marketing tactics that can impact the decision to purchase.
3. To investigate the impact of digital marketing on each of the consumer decision making process stages.
4. To develop theoretical understandings of the effect of digital marketing on consumer behaviour.
5. To explore and examine between the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decision, the key mediating factors (engagement, trust, perceived value, brand image, customer experience) and moderating factors (privacy concern, digital literacy, consumer demographics, product type, platform credibility, cultural context) were identified.

6. To design and formulate an integrative conceptual framework with the linkage of digital marketing strategies and customer purchase decisions.
7. To pinpoint missing areas of research, future research directions, and managerial implications of digital marketing practice

1.4 Significance of the Review

This review can be of benefit to a number of stakeholders. It provides marketers and brand managers with a wider picture of the impact digital marketing strategies can have on sales – and when. It provides insight into strategies that can be implemented in ecommerce and retail companies to integrate digital marketing campaigns throughout various stages and channels of the customer journey.

The review is also applicable to small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) since it demonstrates how digital marketing can be adapted to a more targeted and resource efficient approach. It combines the latest industry trends and best practices that can help digital strategists and digital marketing agencies plan and make more informed decisions.

The review is of value to academics and researchers who wish to understand the gaps in theory and to identify areas for further research. It also poses ethical and regulatory challenges for policymakers regarding consumer privacy, algorithms transparency, and digital advertising. Consumers can also gain from this knowledge, as if they understand the ins and outs of digital marketing it will enable them to take a more critical approach when evaluating marketing messages and make a better-informed buying decision.

1.5 Scope of the Review

This review concentrates on digital marketing strategies and their effect on customer buying decisions in the business-to-consumer (B2C) scenario in digital times (about 2016–2025). The review covers online consumer behavior, social media marketing, search engine marketing, content marketing, influencer marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth, personalized and AI-driven marketing, video marketing and omnichannel marketing strategies. Purchase decisions are assessed for different consumer segments, product categories and geographic contexts, taking into account contextual differences.

It covers peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, academic books and high-quality conference papers; empirical studies, conceptual papers and theoretical contributions; literature from 2016-2025, with seminal papers that set the foundation of the theories; and studies that focus on psychological, behavioral, technological, and contextual factors that affect purchase decisions in digital environments.

The review does not include: non-academic sources that are not scholarly or of high quality; purely technical papers that focus on technology implementation but do not include consumer behaviour; traditional off-line marketing literature unless it is compared with the digital marketing; or studies that are not related to marketing or consumer behaviour.

2. Narrative/Integrative Review Methodology

This article uses a critical narrative and integrative review method using secondary academic research. It does not involve a systematic review and formal quantitative synthesis, but instead it synthesizes thematically diverse literature and looks for patterns, theories and frameworks that explain how digital marketing impacts on purchase decisions.

2.1 Literature Search Strategy

Literature was found by systematic search of major academic databases that included Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, Wiley and Sage. Some of the keywords used were: digital marketing, customer

purchase decision, customer decision making, consumer behavior, purchase intention, social media marketing, influencer marketing, online reviews, e-WOM, digital advertising, content marketing, SEO, mobile marketing, personalized marketing, AI marketing, e-commerce, omnichannel marketing, digital customer journey, website conversion, consumer decision making, and a combination of these.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed articles published in recognized journals in marketing, consumer behavior, business management, digital commerce, information systems, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, high-quality academic books and book chapters, empirical studies that examined digital marketing and purchase decisions, conceptual and theoretical contributions, studies from 2016–2025, with preference given to the most recent studies, and studies that focused on marketing strategies in digital environments and their impact on consumer decision-making.

Exclusion criteria: Non-academic blogs, opinion pieces, and sources lacking scholarly credibility; purely technical studies on technology implementation with no focus on consumer behavior; studies that focus only on traditional offline marketing; unrelated technology or computer science papers without marketing focus; publications in predatory or non-reputable journals; studies with fundamental methodological flaws; and non-English language publications (with limited exception for foundational work).

2.3 Study Selection and Data Extraction

By iterative searching and screening, 29 peer-reviewed studies that were highly relevant were identified and synthesized. The culminating study is a mix of landmark studies covering consumer behavior, digital marketing strategy, e-commerce, social media marketing, influencer marketing, e-WOM, AI and personalization, customer experience and omnichannel marketing. The following key aspects of the studies were examined: theoretical frameworks used, marketing strategies examined, methodologies used, key findings on the influence of the purchase decision, mediating and moderating factors, and identified research gaps.

2.4 Limitations of Methodology

The present study is a narrative integrative review, meaning that it does not involve a meta-analysis to obtain effect sizes or perform quantitative statistical synthesis. Instead, it thematically synthesizes themes, theories, and frameworks. Research publication bias might make it more likely that studies showing positive outcomes of digital marketing are published. Some literature is likely to be quickly out-of-date due to the rapidly evolving digital platforms and technologies. There is considerable variation in context, populations, methods and operationalization of important constructs across studies. The review highlights recent high-quality empirical studies and theory, and recognizes the limitations of comprehensiveness.

3. Conceptual Foundations

3.1 Defining Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is defined as the marketing communication, promotion, customer engagement, and value creation activities that are carried out using digital technologies, digital platforms, and internet-mediated channels (Dwivedi et al., 2020). This includes all marketing efforts that involve digital platforms such as websites, search engines, social media, email, mobile apps, digital advertising networks, and new technologies like AI and AR.

Digital marketing has come a long way. Initial notions were limited to the online advertising and website presence. Digital marketing today is defined as a multi-faceted, holistic marketing system that involves strategy, technology, data analysis, personalization, customer engagement and relationship management (Hanelt et al., 2020). Consumer-centricity, data-driven decision

making, omnichannel integration, real-time personalization and interactive two-way communication are all hallmarks of modern digital marketing, replacing the broadcast model. The features of digital marketing are: interactivity, allowing brands to communicate with consumers; measurability, with web analytics and real-time performance measurement; targetability, to precisely target audiences; personalization, to deliver customized content and offers; accessibility, to ensure constant 24/7 consumers access; cost-effectiveness, compared with traditional marketing; speed, to quickly adapt campaigns; and data richness, to understand the consumers.

3.2 Understanding Customer Purchase Decisions

The consumer decision making process refers to the various stages that a consumer goes through from the point of problem recognition to post-consumer evaluation. The classical model, from the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard and Kotler frameworks, outlines the following stages: need recognition (when the consumer notices a difference between his or her actual situation and a desired situation); information search (consumer searches for information about the options available to them); evaluation of alternatives (consumer compares the options against the criteria they have established); purchase intention (consumer develops a likelihood of purchase); purchase decision making (consumer actually purchases); post-purchase evaluation (consumer evaluates the satisfaction); and loyalty and advocacy (consumer repurchases or recommends to others).

But modern studies acknowledge that consumers' buying process is increasingly complex and non-linear. Today's consumers do multi-channel searches, go back to the evaluation phase, feel decision anxiety, and are swayed by peer recommendations, reviews and social proof (Rooderkerk et al., 2023). In addition, digital environments allow for constant comparison, simple comparison of the options and impulsive purchases arising from emotional appeals, time pressure or social influence (Leong et al., 2018).

There are various ways through which digital marketing can impact these stages. In need recognition, digital marketing raises awareness by using targeted ads, social media presence, and influencer messaging (Kumar et al., 2024). SEO and content marketing, as well as comparison sites, provide access to product information during search. Alternative assessment is impacted by online reviews, ratings, product videos, and social proof during evaluation (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Website usability, payment security, urgency tactics and personalization impact conversion during the purchase decision and actual purchase. Post-purchase impact of email follow-up, loyalty programs, and review requests on satisfaction, repeat purchase, and advocacy (Li et al., 2020).

3.3 The Digital Customer Journey

The digital customer journey refers to a series of touchpoints and interactions consumers experience with brands in both digital and physical space (Rooderkerk et al., 2023). In contrast to traditional linear purchase funnels, modern customer journeys are: Non-linear, customers may be aware, consider and buy from a channel and return to it later; Multi-Channel, customers can be reached via websites, social media, emails, mobile applications, search engines and physical stores; Omnichannel, the channel has to be integrated so that the customer experience is seamless across all channels; Interactive, there is communication between the customer and the channel; Continuous, customers keep seeking information even after purchase.

Key customer journey touchpoints are: awareness channels (search engines, social media, influencers, display ads, word of mouth, brand website); consideration channels (product comparison sites, reviews, videos, social media, websites, email); decision channels (websites, mobile apps, social commerce, online retailers); post purchase channels (email, loyalty

programs, customer support, social media, review platforms); and advocacy channels (social media, review sites, influencer partnerships, word of mouth).

Digital marketing strategies are used throughout this journey, targeting various touchpoints and goals. The digital customer journey is crucial because key actions for effective marketing include: meeting consumers at the right points of the customer journey, providing relevant content and messages at each stage of the journey, creating brand consistency throughout the channels, and measuring impact across the full customer journey, not just individual channels (Rooderkerk et al., 2023).

4. Theoretical Framework

There are several theoretical models that suggest the impact of digital marketing on consumer purchasing behavior. This section summarises the main theoretical approaches.

4.1 Consumer Decision-Making Models

Traditional models of consumer decision making give basic understanding of the role of digital marketing in consumer buying. These models describe the purchase process as a rational one of problem recognition, information search, evaluation, decision making, and post purchase assessment (Kim et al., 2018). Digital marketing works at every stage via: targeting messages and social proof to create awareness and stimulate need recognition; using content, SEO, and comparison tools to guide a person through the information search phase; leveraging reviews, testimonials, and product information to influence evaluation; and using website design, payment options, and urgency signals to influence purchase decisions.

Consumer choices, however, are found to be a combination of rational and emotional processes in psychological studies (Leong et al., 2018). People use heuristics (mental shortcuts) to make their decisions, feel pressured by social norms, feel stressed by decision making, and make planned and impulsive purchases. Digital marketing is now more concerned with emotional appeals, social proof and gamification than just product information.

4.2 Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory

Influences in digital marketing can be explained with great power using a framework derived from environmental psychology, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model is an environmental psychology-based framework that has great explanatory power regarding digital marketing influences (Kim et al., 2018). This model posits that stimuli are digital marketing activities such as website design, social media content, ads, videos, and reviews; organism factors are consumers' cognitions, emotions, perceptions, attitudes, trust, and engagement; and responses are purchase intention, actual purchase, loyalty, and advocacy.

In the context of digital marketing, S-O-R theory implies that the stimuli in digital marketing (content quality, visual design, social proof, personalization) lead to psychological reactions (positive emotions, trust, engagement, perceived value) which in turn affect purchasing behavior. This approach focuses on the importance of psychological processing and interpretation of the stimulus to digital marketing effectiveness. For example, a given ad could evoke different emotions based on the consumer's trust, past experience, and perceived authenticity (Gomes et al., 2025).

4.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model is a model that is used to explain consumer technology adoption by two perceptions: perceived usefulness (consumer's belief that technology benefits performance) and perceived ease of use (consumer's belief that technology is easy to use) (Dwivedi et al., 2017). In the digital marketing arena, consumers are more likely to use digital

channels and buy when they feel digital channels help them find information and are easy to use.

TAM has been expanded to include other factors, including perceived risk, trust, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Blut & Wang, 2019). The extended models provide a better understanding of the adoption of new digital marketing technologies, such as mobile commerce, chatbots, and AI-powered recommendations. For instance, in the case of mobile shopping, the perceived usefulness of mobile apps, trust for paying through mobile and social support for mobile shopping must be present (Dwivedi et al., 2017).

4.4 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, purchase intentions and purchases depend on three variables: purchase attitude (the evaluation of the consequences of a purchase), subjective norm (the perception of social pressure to purchase) and perceived behavioral control (self-efficacy regarding the ability to purchase) (Belanche et al., 2020). When applied to digital marketing, this model proposes that these factors affect purchase decisions in a digital marketing via three mechanisms: shaping attitudes by providing positive product information and social proof; activating social norms with influencer endorsements, testimonials and user generated content; and bolstering perceived behavioural control by making it easier to use websites, clear how to use them and provide customer support.

An example of this is a social media marketing campaign that includes Product reviews and messages from users created by peers, which impacts attitudes, norms and control all at once. The multi-faceted influence is the reason why social proof is so powerful in a digital environment (Shu-yi et al., 2022).

4.5 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model 1980 suggests that digital marketing messages pass through two channels: central route processing, which means that the arguments and merits of the message are carefully and deliberately evaluated; peripheral route processing, which involves using simple heuristics, credibility cues, and emotional appeals without considering the message's content (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019).

This is important for digital marketing, as each strategy engages a different processing route in the ELM. For high involvement products, consumers are more likely to process the message at the central route which involves seeking in-depth product information, reading reviews, and comparing specifications (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Low-involvement products tend to be processed in the peripheral route, which is dominated by the attractiveness of the visuals, celebrity endorsements and emotional appeals (Leong et al., 2018). To create a successful digital marketing campaign, you need to know how consumers are going to search for a specific product or service, and adjust your messaging to suit.

ELM applications are shown in the research of online reviews. Detailed, substantive reviews are most helpful for high-involvement purchases and promote central route processing. In the case of low involvement products, the rating scores can be more important than long product reviews (Ismagilova et al., 2019).

4.6 AIDA Model

The AIDA model is a modification of the AIDA model, which describes the process of marketing communication as a series of steps: Capture attention, create interest, develop desire, and prompt action (Kumar et al., 2024). Digital marketing strategies can be aligned with the AIDA stages: attention is captured with display advertising, social media content, and posts by influencers; interest is sparked with content marketing, product videos, and testimonials; desire

is created with benefits highlighting, scarcity tactics and customer reviews; action is triggered with simplified purchasing, time-limited offers, and payment convenience (Duffett, 2017).

4.7 Social Proof and e-WOM Theory

According to the social proof theory, individuals seek to determine what is appropriate behavior by observing others, especially in uncertain situations (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). In digital marketing, consumer buying decisions are significantly affected by the “show me what people are buying and how it makes them feel”, which is made visible by online reviews, ratings, testimonials and social sharing. Electronic word-of-mouth is the consumer-generated review, rating and recommendation that is shared electronically.

Studies reveal that e-WOM can affect consumers' purchase decisions in several ways: credibility when the review is from a seemingly authentic consumer; social proof when many people purchased and were happy with the product; information diagnosticity when the review offers specific, helpful information; reviewer expertise and trustworthiness; and emotional arousal when the review evokes emotional responses (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Positive and negative e-WOM have been shown to affect the likelihood of a purchase, although some studies have found that negative reviews can actually improve credibility by adding authenticity and balance (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019).

5. Major Digital Marketing Strategies Influencing Purchase Decisions

This section reviews digital marketing strategies and how they can impact on the purchase decision.

5.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing involves brand presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok and Snapchat), creation and sharing of its content, community management, collaboration with influencers, and paid social advertising (Li et al., 2020).

Mechanisms of influence: Social media can affect the decision-making process in various ways (Kumar et al., 2024). Brand awareness and visibility is achieved with consistent brand activity and content sharing. Customer engagement builds through engaging content, customer responsiveness and community engagement which fosters psychological bonding and brand preference (Bilgin, 2018). Social proof is seen in likes, shares, user-generated content, and the feedback from other users, which helps minimize the perceived risk. The use of social media platforms for influencer endorsements taps into the parasocial relationship and perceived source credibility. Content created by the user adds authenticity and a sense of belonging to other users. Social networks can be used to deliver targeted ads that allow for precise audience segmentation and personalization.

Empirical Findings: Studies indicate that social media marketing has a significant impact on purchase intention (Ismael et al., 2025), especially in younger audiences and low involvement products. The effectiveness, however, will vary significantly by platform; engagement with content on Instagram will differ from LinkedIn or TikTok, given platform-specific user behaviors and content norms. Furthermore, the correlation between social media engagement and real-world sales is not always clear – increased engagement is not always followed by increased sales.

Strengths: low cost reach, two-way communication, real time community building, and rich behavioural data. Some of the drawbacks are consumer mistrust of branded content, ad fatigue, fake engagement numbers and the inability to directly tie social media activities to sales (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

5.2 Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing

Optimizing websites to rank highly in the organic search results for relevant keywords is known as Search Engine Optimization (SEO). In addition to SEO, search engine marketing (SEM) also involves paid search advertising (pay-per-click ads in search results).

Mechanics of Influence: Search marketing affects the buying process by shaping consumer visibility of the product when consumers are actively looking for it. At the information search stage of the decision making process, consumers usually start by using search engines, so search visibility is essential to attract consumers who are ready to purchase. The rank of a website impacts on how it is perceived as authority and credibility – higher rank means legitimacy. With SEM, you can bid for visibility of high intent keywords and target consumers in active purchase mode. Quality landing pages help to reduce friction between ad click and purchase action, thereby optimizing conversion.

Empirical Findings: Studies have shown that both SEO and SEM can be effective in generating traffic to websites and conversions, with paid search typically yielding quicker results and organic search generating sustainable traffic over time.

Advantages and disadvantages: Advantages are reaching intent-based consumers, measurable ROI, and scalability. Disadvantages are that costs per click can increase as more people click through, they may not control the consumers that aren't actively searching, and they can be affected by algorithm changes.

5.3 Content Marketing

Content marketing is the practice of creating and sharing valuable, relevant, consistent content (blogs, articles, videos, infographics, whitepapers, podcasts) that captures the attention of an audience, fosters trust and has a positive impact on purchase decisions.

Content marketing affects the buying process in a number of ways: Mechanisms of Influence. Content reaches consumers at the beginning of the purchase cycle via search and social discovery, where awareness creation takes place. Education and information provision enable consumers to evaluate products; they inform them of the benefits, applications, and differentiators of the products. Building thought leadership positioning builds brand authority and expertise, which improves trust. As consumers come back over and over for valuable content, there is an increase in psychological connection, which leads to engagement and relationship building. When content shows product quality, safety, and reliability, then it creates a reduced perceived risk. Conversion facilitation is when content drives consumers through steps of the decision-making process and calls to action are integrated into content.

Empirical Findings: Research validates content marketing leads to awareness, leads and sales. The key factors of content marketing success are content quality, content relevance to audience, consistent publication schedule, search optimization, and content optimization for customer journey stages.

Pros and Cons: The advantages are its low cost compared to paid ads, the long-term SEO benefits, the thought leadership positioning and the building of the relationship with the audience. Challenges are long timelines for results, hard to show direct ROI, and content clutter.

5.4 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a practice that includes collaborating with social media influencers who have built a reputation and following to promote products or generate sponsored content (Hughes et al., 2019).

The source credibility of an influencer is one of the mechanisms that affect the purchasing process, especially if the influencer is considered an expert in the product category that is being

marketed (Saad et al., 2025). This is because audiences perceive that they are connected to the influencers in one-sided relationships, or parasocial relationships (Reinikainen et al., 2020), which makes the influencer recommendation seem like a peer recommendation. Persuasion (Xu & Pratt, 2018) is greater when the influencer is similar to the audience (homophily). The strength of influence is dependent on authenticity and perceived endorsement sincerity (Kumar et al., 2024). When audience interacts with influencer content, they engage with brand messages. Social proof with influencers indicates quality and social acceptance.

The research findings indicate that influencer marketing has a significant impact on purchase intention, especially among younger consumers, fashion/beauty products, and low-involvement products (Saad et al., 2025). But it is very important to consider the influencer's perceived authenticity, congruence of influencer image and product, target audience characteristics, and posting style.

Strengths are audience relationship, perceived authenticity over brand advertising and audience alignment. Some of the challenges include the high cost of hiring established influencers, the inability to control the messaging from influencers, measurement difficulties, and consumer skepticism about paid endorsements (Kumar et al., 2024).

5.5 Email Marketing and Marketing Automation

Email marketing involves sending promotional, informational, and relational messages directly to customer email addresses. Marketing automation is a type of software that automates email sequences, personalization and customer journey orchestration.

Mechanisms of Influence: When email marketing is directed to customers in their preferred environment, then it has a direct influence on purchase decisions. Segmentation and personalization enable businesses to adjust the content to align with the interests, actions and position in the buying cycle of customers. Lifecycle communication also has a big part to play. For instance, a welcome email can help introduce new subscribers to the brand, an abandoned cart reminder can remind customers to finish their purchase and follow-up emails after a purchase can help keep them engaged. Promotional offers can provide customers with a clear reason to purchase, and regular and meaningful communication can help to establish trust over time. Email can also smooth out the wrinkles by providing direct purchase links and product information for customers.

Empirical evidence: Email marketing has proven to be very ROI rich, and sometimes even outperforms other online marketing efforts in terms of conversion rate. Personalized and segmented e-mails tend to be extremely successful compared to broadcast e-mails.

But there is a fine balance between the effectiveness of email and list quality, message relevance, sending frequency (no one wants to be inundated) and value proposition.

The advantages are that it is available to be customized, it can be measured, it is cost-effective, it is long-lived and it allows for direct access to the customers. Challenges include list deliverability, unsubscribe rates and some consumers' perception of intrusiveness.

5.6 Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is the term used to describe mobile apps, SMS marketing, push notifications, mobile-optimized websites, location-based marketing, and mobile commerce.

Mechanisms of Influence: Mobile marketing affects the purchase decision by making consumers connected all the time, "ubiquitous access". Immediate notifications via push notifications or SMS create urgency and top-of-mind awareness. Location-based targeting is the ability to provide relevant offers when consumers are close by retail locations. App-based loyalty programs offer a pay-for-purchase incentive and make it more costly for consumers to

switch. Seamless mobile commerce enables one-click purchasing with saved payment information. Behavior pattern based personalization for mobile users.

Empirical findings: Mobile has emerged as the leading channel for digital purchase behavior and mobile commerce is on the rise, experiencing significant growth (Belanche et al. 2020). Mobile App Engagement Correlates with Purchase. When delivered close to purchase locations, location-based mobile delivers an increase in conversions. But there are also drawbacks to mobile, such as the fact that screens are smaller, some consumers' data plans may be too costly, and notification fatigue.

Strengths: ubiquity, personalization capability, immediacy of communication, convenience; **Limitations:** none. There are limited sizes of contents, user attention span, and battery life issues.

5.7 Online Reviews and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Online reviews and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) consist of consumer-generated ratings, testimonials and recommendations that are published on review websites, social media and e-commerce platforms (Ismagilova et al., 2019).

Mechanisms of Influence: Online reviews have the power to sway the purchasing decision because when the potential customers read positive reviews from previous customers, it reduces the perceived risk of purchasing the product (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Quality is indicated by the star ratings and the valence of the reviews. Product information based on consumer experiences details the product information to answer concerns and clarify attributes of the product. When there are several reviews and it is evident that the product is popular, social proof can be used (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). When reviews include specific and concrete information, perceived helpfulness, rather than general praise or criticism, (Furner et al., 2016).

Empirical Evidence: Meta-analysis indicates that online reviews have a significant effect on the purchase intention (Ismagilova et al., 2019). All the following factors have a negative impact on purchase likelihood: Volume, Average rating, Rating distribution and Review specificity. Interestingly, some negative reviews actually add to the credibility by presenting a balanced perspective (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). Yet, perceived reviewer credibility and review features (specificity, recency, extremity) and level of product involvement (Ismagilova et al., 2019) are significant factors in the review process. Consumers lose trust and platform credibility due to fake reviews.

Strengths: High credibility as a peer, lots of information about consumer experience, ability to address specific concerns. The weaknesses are that it is susceptible to fake reviews, it can be manipulated by a competitor's review and there is too much information when the reviews are too many (Furner et al., 2016).

5.8 Personalized and AI-Driven Marketing

Personalized marketing is the process of creating content, product recommendations, pricing and marketing messages based on customer data and algorithms that reflect the individual preferences and behaviors. AI in marketing utilizes artificial intelligence and machine learning for marketing automation, predictive analytics, dynamic pricing, customer segmentation, and engaging with customers via chatbots.

Mechanisms of Influence: Personalization relates to relevance and is the delivery of messages, products and offers to individual preference. Time saving to find relevant products – efficiency. Value when offers and content are perceived to be tailored to personal interests. Websites that customize user experience based on user attributes. Using ML algorithms to make predictive recommendations to suggest products that are likely to interest individuals, based on their

habits. Real-time personalization adapts the customer experience as users navigate a website or app. Research shows that personalized product recommendations can increase conversion rates and average order value. AI-powered chatbots improve customer service by making interactions quicker and more satisfying (Adam et al., 2020). Dynamic pricing boosts revenue but undoubtedly has implications for the fairness of prices to consumers at times.

There are challenges with personalization. It is essential that data are of a high quality and models are accurate in order to be effective, and that experience is transparent and controllable from the consumer's perspective. There's a fine line between customization and the intrusion, and privacy is a significant factor. The advantages are evident: experiences become more relatable, interactions become more efficient and more customers are converted and have a more positive experience. However, personalisation comes with its own restrictions. There are ongoing privacy and data security concerns, concerns about algorithmic bias that may impact fairness, reduced opportunities for discovery and serendipity, and concerns that consumers are being monitored (Puntoni et al., 2020).

5.9 Video Marketing and Short-Form Content

Video marketing encompasses product demos, customer testimonials, brand stories, and didactic videos on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts.

Videos are emotionally charged, appealing to customers with visuals and sound to produce responses, which can lead to sales. These are more informative than static content, giving products in use, emphasising features and explaining any possible concerns better. The emotional bond created with consumers and the detail-oriented information provided makes video a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior.

Earning credibility by using real customer reviews or expert demonstrations (Hughes et al., 2019). Capturing attention in an attention-deficit digital world. Memorability: video content has been shown to be better remembered than text. Social shareability with engaging video content resulting in organic reach via sharing.

Empirical Evidence: Video content is demonstrating especially high engagement rates and conversion impacts, particularly product demonstration and tutorial videos. Short-form video platforms (SFA – TikTok) are emerging and becoming increasingly popular for younger users (Barta et al., 2022). The effectiveness of video, however, relies on the production quality, length of video for platform, authenticity and the fit with the platform culture (Barta et al., 2022).

Strengths: Emotional engagement, information richness, memorability, strong conversion effects. **Limitations:** Emotional engagement, information richness, memorability, strong conversion effects. Production costs and resource requirements, effectiveness of the platform to platform, and viewer fatigue are some of the limitations.

5.10 Omnichannel Marketing

Omnichannel marketing is the coordination and synchronisation of customer experience at every touch point, the integration of online and offline channels to offer a seamless experience to the customer, thus allowing them to shop flexibly across channels (Roederkerk et al., 2023).

Mechanisms of Influence: Omnichannel methods impact purchases by eliminating the friction of switching channels. Greatly enhance trust through consistent brand experience over channels. Flexible channel for different consumers' preferences. Greater convenience with features such as 'buy online, pick up in store'. Single inventory visibility for products, which allows customers to search for products by location.

Empirical Evidence: Research indicates that omnichannel customers tend to have a higher lifetime value and satisfaction than single channel customers (Roederkerk et al., 2023).

Omnichannel shoppers do "webrooming" (research in online before purchase in-store) and "showrooming" (examine in-store before purchase online). Effective omnichannel, however, demands a lot of technology integration, inventory coordination and organisational alignment (Rooderkerk et al., 2023).

Strengths: Increased convenience, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Challenges include complexity and cost of implementation, inventory management challenges and organizational silos that prevent integration (Rooderkerk et al., 2023).

6. How Digital Marketing Influences the Purchase Decision Process

This part explores the impact of digital marketing on each step of the consumer decision-making process.

6.1 Need Recognition

Need recognition is when consumers realize that there are discrepancies between their actual and ideal state. Digital marketing has a multiplicity of ways to affect recognition.

Targeted advertising helps to make people aware of products and their value and awakes hidden needs (Kumar et al., 2024). For instance, a display ad that advertises a vacation package might spur a desire to travel. Content from influencers about lifestyle goals elicits a need for recognition. Content marketing is teaching consumers something they didn't know. Social media trends and viral content is a way to create awareness on new product categories. Recommendations of products that are recommended based on the user's actions, even if not actively looking for them. Remind consumers of products they have seen in the past to keep them top of mind, retargeting campaigns.

The manipulative need creation, however, is a concern, especially in the case of influencer marketing that promotes the use of products that may have little value or negative environmental consequences (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

6.2 Information Search

In the information search stage, consumers look for information concerning the options and characteristics. This is a time when digital marketing plays a key role.

SEO ensures that consumers can find the websites when they search for the products/information they want. Content marketing provides educational resources addressing consumer questions. Product websites with detailed specifications, features and benefits. Comparative sites for systematic alternative evaluation. Peer experience information obtained from online reviews (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Social media where consumers ask questions and seek peer recommendations. Influencer-generated content that offers curated recommendations and reviews.

The study reveals that consumers are increasingly turning to the digital arena as sources of information, especially search engines and review sites. But as consumers are inundated with large amounts of information, often conflicting, the information overload can present challenges (Furner et al., 2016).

6.3 Evaluation of Alternatives

In the process of the evaluation of alternatives, consumers make comparisons based on criteria specified. This is highly impacted by digital marketing.

Online reviews allow for a detailed comparison of product attributes, quality and value, according to user experiences (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Price comparison websites enable easy price evaluation. Product videos and product demonstrations of products being used. The endorsement of the products by influencers that are experts or peers (Kumar et al., 2024). Social proof as ratings, reviews and usage statistics indicating popularity (Reyes-Menéndez, et al., 2019). Information about a brand's reputation that can be found online through searching and

brand reviews (Bilgin, 2018). Case studies and user testimonials of the effectiveness of products.

Digital marketing provides an alternative low-cost evaluation system, which gives consumers a choice. It can, however, lead to decision paralysis if too much information is provided (Furner et al., 2016).

6.4 Purchase Intention

Likelihood of purchase is created by the consumer during the purchase intention formation stage. There are a number of factors that can affect intentions in digital marketing.

Perceived value created by content, pricing information and testimonials, through understanding benefits relative to costs. Affection for brand, website, and seller based on website design, feedback, return policy, and customer reviews. Social proof by ratings, reviews and belief that the purchase is a good one, based on social signals (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). Limited-time offers, stock indicators, or exclusivity statements (Leong et al., 2018). Discounts and promotions to make it easier to perceive the price. Display of personalized products and prices. Clear return policies, guarantees and security information to reduce risk perception.

6.5 Actual Purchase Decision and Transaction

At the time of the actual buying, the consumers switch from intention to action. Purchase is made directly possible with digital marketing because:

User-friendly website that is easy to navigate, products are easy to understand, and the checkout process is streamlined. Multiple Payment options, clear pricing and security assurance that payment is convenient. Optimization for mobile to provide a smooth shopping experience on mobile devices. Availability of customer support, whether by chat, email or phone, that helps to reduce purchase friction. Express delivery, click and collect or flexible returns. Look for trust indicators like SSL certificates, money-back guarantees, and trusted payment methods. Follow-up e-mail, loyalty programs, and responsiveness of customer service are also important post-purchase digital touchpoints that influence satisfaction and repurchase intentions.

6.6 Post-Purchase Behaviour and Loyalty

Digital marketing has a continued impact on satisfaction, retention and advocacy after the sale. Follow-up emails confirming order, tracking information and asking for feedback. Rewards, discounts or exclusive content for repeat purchases through loyalty programs. Prompt response to customers' problems via social media, email or chat. Check reviews and suggestions on review sites and social media, asking customers to leave reviews (Bilgin, 2018). Consumer photos, customer testimonials, and innovative product applications (Kumar et al., 2024). Social media engagement: keeping the brand visible and facilitating community engagement (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019).

Post-purchase e-WOM is very important. Positive customer reviews and recommendations can be a source of positive information search and evaluation that will lead to future customers' satisfaction, thereby creating reinforcing cycles of digital marketing influence (Furner et al., 2016). On the other hand, unaddressed problems lead to negative reviews that hurt the brand's reputation and turn off potential customers (Bilgin, 2018).

7. Mediating and Moderating Factors

The impact of digital marketing on purchase does not happen seamlessly and uniformly. This relationship is mediated or moderated by a number of psychological, technological and contextual factors.

7.1 Customer Trust

Trust is an important mediator. Digital marketing is not sales; the consumers should have confidence in the brand, website, in the seller, and the payment system. Building trust involves a consistent message, clear policy, secure payment options, honest reviews, and customer service and a strong brand reputation. They also feel more at ease when they see a well-designed Web site, an understandable privacy policy and no suspicious elements. Trust can fade fast when a website is not well designed, policies are not clear, or reviews are less than positive. This diminishes the overall effectiveness of digital marketing.

7.2 Brand Image and Reputation

The image of a brand is another mediator in digital marketing effectiveness. Having a well-known brand helps in the success of digital marketing as when a customer has faith in a brand, they are more likely to interact with and buy from it.

Digital marketing can help to develop a brand image through ensuring a consistent story, thought leadership content, community engagement and reputation management. Even though digital marketing can be costly, if there are any scandals, negative news coverage or miscommunication, it will impact the overall brand image and the effectiveness of the digital marketing campaign (Bilgin, 2018).

7.3 Perceived Value

The decision to buy depends on the value perceived (benefits/costs). Digital marketing is all about providing product value by content, customer endorsements and product demos. But when there is a low perceived value in comparison to the price, the influence of digital marketing decreases. Value in pricing for customers, package pricing and lifestyle positioning. No hidden costs or hidden value gaps as described in product descriptions.

7.4 Customer Engagement

Engagement is seen as a key driver of the relationship between digital marketing exposure and purchase intention (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). Just looking at an ad isn't sufficient. Those who engage with the brand through commenting, sharing, exploring interactive content, or joining brand communities, are more likely to form a deeper bond with the brand. This battle can generate purchase intent and it can boost customer lifetime value. Two-way communication, user-generated content, and community building are all key parts of digital marketing strategies designed to increase engagement and sales.

7.5 Digital Literacy and Consumer Sophistication

Digital literacy is a crucial part of the effectiveness of marketing. It is about the skills to assess online information, identify advertising strategies and confidently use digital platforms. More digitally literate consumers are skeptical of claims, fact-check information and are less likely to fall victim to manipulative marketing. They are sophisticated enough to make engagement more meaningful and ensure that your marketing initiatives are reaching an informed audience. Some consumers might not be as savvy with technology and thus be more vulnerable to false advertising or fake reviews, which could raise ethical issues. Digital literacy is affected by generational differences; younger consumers are more sophisticated in their digital literacy than older consumers.

7.6 Privacy Concerns

Moderation: Privacy concern on the effectiveness of digital marketing, especially personalized and targeted marketing. Consumers are becoming more and more on guard against intrusive data collection and targeted ads, which they perceive as being intrusive. Personalized ads still have low click-through rates due to the strong privacy concerns, less trust, and less purchase intent even when products are matched. The use of transparent data practices, transparent

privacy policies, and user control over data is a major step to reducing privacy concerns and increasing the effectiveness of digital marketing.

7.7 Perceived Risk

Worry about product quality, delivery, security of payment, and trustworthiness of the seller negatively moderates purchase decisions. There is a higher perceived risk of online than retail purchases because one cannot physically inspect the products. Digital marketing mitigates the perceived risk by providing in-depth product details, customer reviews, return policies, secure payment options, and guarantees. Stronger risk-reduction strategies are needed for high-risk product categories (luxury, electronics, and healthcare products).

7.8 Website Quality and User Experience

The quality of a website or app has a direct effect on how well digital marketing performs. A strong marketing message cannot fully make up for poor usability, slow loading speed, security doubts, or weak mobile optimisation. These issues frustrate consumers and can quickly reduce conversions. On the other hand, a well-designed website that loads quickly, is easy to navigate, presents information clearly, and feels professional can increase consumer confidence and make customers more likely to purchase.

7.9 Product Type and Category

The effectiveness of digital marketing also depends on the type of product being promoted. For experiential products such as jewellery, fashion, and cosmetics, visuals play a major role. Influencer endorsements and user-generated content are especially useful because they help consumers imagine how the product looks, feels, or fits into real life.

For more technical or complex products, consumers usually need more detail before making a decision. In these cases, expert reviews, educational resources, and clear product information are more effective. Low-involvement products can often be promoted through simple awareness campaigns and easy, impulse-friendly checkout processes. High-involvement purchases, however, usually require more information, several touchpoints, and stronger trust-building before a consumer is ready to convert.

7.10 Consumer Demographics and Psychographics

The effectiveness of digital marketing is moderated by age, income, education and lifestyle. Younger consumers are more likely to be interested in social media and influencer marketing, whereas older consumers might prefer email and search marketing. A higher-price consumer might be more interested in the premium brand and reviews, while a lower price consumer may be more interested in the discounts. There are demographic differences in cultural values, attitudes towards online shopping and adoption of technology.

7.11 Platform Credibility

Content credibility is influenced by the credibility of the platforms. Well-known review sites such as Amazon or TripAdvisor have greater impact than unknown ones like Bilgin (2018). People who use verified social media accounts and trusted influencers are more influential than those with anonymous accounts. A platform's reputation, its moderation, and transparency build trust in information for consumers (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019).

7.12 Content Quality and Relevance

Digital marketing is only as successful as its contents, and only as relevant as its contents. Content that is irrelevant, low-quality, or overly promotional/aggressive is overlooked or disliked. Quality, valuable, relevant content creates trust, shows expertise and encourages engagement and buying consideration. Content authenticity and matching consumer values boost influence.

8. Critical Discussion

8.1 From One-Way Promotion to Interactive Relationship Building

The nature of marketing communication has shifted from a one-way communication to a two-way communication or dialogue through digital marketing (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). Brands pushed out messages on tv ads, print media and billboards, while consumers were passively reached. Digital platforms give the consumer the ability to comment, share, question and co-create with brands. This transition puts consumers in more control, gives them more voice and requires brands to respond and be authentic. Brands that listen and engage a community reap greater loyalty and advocacy than those that broadcast. The problem with this attention, though, is that anything could go wrong and fast become a widespread social media issue that requires careful management (Bilgin, 2018).

8.2 Data, Personalization, and AI

The evolution of data analytics, individualization engines and artificial intelligence has shifted digital marketing from targeting audience segments to targeting individuals. AI algorithms can analyze the context of the browsing habits, purchase history, demographic data, and other factors to anticipate preferences and provide highly personalized content, product recommendations, and pricing. This is a level of personalization that increases relevance, engagement, and conversions.

However, there are ethical issues associated with such power. Data collection is a privacy concern if it is too much. The algorithms can take advantage of consumers' psychological vulnerabilities, and biases in AI technology can marginalize or discriminate against specific consumer groups (Islam et al., 2024). Balancing openness and honesty in personalization, with protection of privacy and putting consumers in control, is becoming a key ingredient in sustainable competitive advantage.

8.3 Trust and Credibility in Online Purchase Decisions

Trust is the key element in digital marketing, but this is always up for question. Consumers are not able to physically check out the products, check out sellers, and cannot always verify the security of payments. Trust should be built by brands on many levels – professional website, transparent policies, safe payment systems, honest reviews, fast responses, and reputation. Third party endorsements and user reviews boost credibility.

But false reviews, false claims and untrustworthy influencers can easily start to chip away at consumer trust. Regulatory rules are still missing, while platforms are increasingly becoming moderated to safeguard trust. Authenticity, transparency and trust are the attributes of brands which far exceed those that do so.

8.4 Balancing Personalization and Privacy

Personalization vs privacy is at the core of digital marketing. People want to be relevant, but need not be watched. GDPR and CCPA regulations make consent, transparency and control of users paramount. The challenge for brands is to strike the right balance between marketing effectiveness and privacy.

Consent, explicit first-party collection and clear policies with meaningful control by users puts concerns to rest. The new common is to personalize while keeping the data private and minimize sharing: providing personalized experiences while maintaining privacy and minimising sharing. Ethical data usage is not just about consumer protection, it's also about building trust and gaining a competitive advantage.

8.5 Conversion vs. Loyalty: Short-Term vs. Long-Term Strategy

Immediate conversions, such as sales, can easily be measured and can show digital marketing effectiveness. But, different approaches are needed for building brand loyalty and customer

lifetime value. Short-term strategies are based on urgency cues, discounts and impulse-based designs. Long-term strategies for loyalty emphasize providing value, building a community, maintaining a clear message, and being attentive to customers.

Balancing these approaches helps brands achieve both quick results and enduring customer relationships. Focusing too much on short-term conversions – too much discounting, too much urgency, too much retargeting – can hurt the brand and its long-term customer value. There must be a balance between conversion and investments in relationships to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Many brands focus on short-term metrics at long-term cost (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019) and data is increasingly used to track both metrics.

8.6 Authenticity and Influencer Marketing Credibility

Parasocial relationships and perceived authenticity are two key factors that make influencers so powerful in the realm of purchasing decisions. Influencers are seen by consumers as trusted peers, not corporate spokespeople. But commercialization and fake influence tarnish credibility. When influencers disclose no affiliation, promote products in ways that are not genuine, or have followers who are fake, it undermines consumer confidence. Disclosure rules (#ad, #sponsored) are designed to safeguard consumers. Real influencers create real communities and strategic connections and retain credibility and influence. The audience is becoming more aware of the importance of authenticity in influencers, and they are more likely to trust a genuine voice than a deceptive one.

8.7 Information Overload, Advertising Fatigue, and Consumer Skepticism

As the volume of digital channels and advertising grows, information overload and advertising fatigue (Furner et al., 2016) are a result. There are thousands of ads that consumers see on a daily basis, causing them to become "banner blind," adopt ad blocking software, and become skeptical. Not all quality and relevant, too many ads don't hold attention and trust. Skepticism grows exponentially with fake reviews, misleading claims, and manipulative tactics. New tactics focus on fewer, more meaningful touchpoints, genuine storytelling, and delivering value rather than volume. Brands that cut through the clutter must be of the highest caliber, be relevant and have consumer respect. Ad blocking, subscriptions without ads and consumer preference for organic content are a reaction to the intensity of ads.

8.8 Digital Marketing Strategy Variation: SMEs vs. Large Enterprises

Small and medium businesses (SMEs) and large organizations have different levels of effectiveness and strategy in digital marketing. Large companies benefit from economies of scale, advanced analytics, a bigger team of creatives, and brand recognition. SMEs have limited budget, fewer staff and lack brand awareness. SMEs, however, have the advantage of agility, authenticity and community connection. With the advent of digital marketing, marketing has been made accessible to everyone, and SMEs can do the same with targeted marketing, content marketing, and community building on social media, and engaging with the community in an authentic manner with little or no budget. But SMEs are challenged with the capabilities of data analytics, content production and competition with paid ads. Strategic focus on niche markets, authentic storytelling and relationship building as opposed to mass-market approaches is well aligned with strengths of SMEs. Digital marketing is becoming more practical and is bolstered by more accessible tools that help SMEs achieve success.

8.9 Cross-Industry and Cross-Cultural Variation

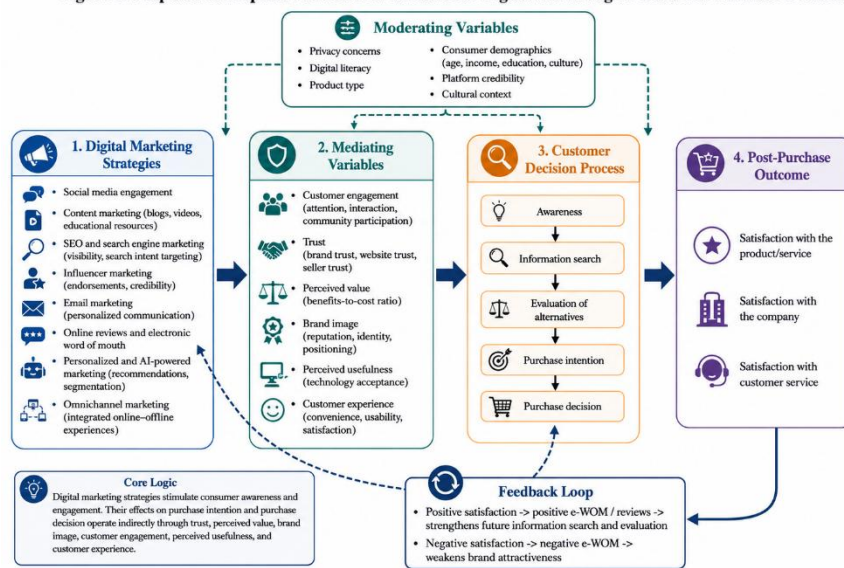
The effectiveness of digital marketing is highly dependent on the industry, culture and context of the consumer (Bilgin, 2018). Digital channels serve directly ecommerce, digital services and fast-moving consumer goods; industries in which the experience is more hands-on (furniture, automotive, fashion) have challenges and need omnichannel strategies where online and offline

go together. Digital adoption and marketing response is influenced by cultural values: Individualistic Western markets value personalization, collectivist cultures value group recommendations. There are cultural differences in platform preference, e.g. social media that is significant in one market may be insignificant in another. Language, aesthetics, norms of trust and regulatory environments vary widely. Global digital marketing is not a one-size fits all approach; it's about localization and cultural adaptation. Fast digital adoption countries are emerging markets that offer opportunities and difficulties because their infrastructure, digital literacy and trust structure varies from mature markets.

9. Proposed Conceptual Framework

From the analysed literature, a detailed conceptual framework is established that connects the digital marketing strategies with the customer purchase decision:

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework: Influence of Digital Marketing on Customer Purchase Decisions



Note. This framework is proposed from the reviewed literature and presented as a conceptual foundation for future empirical testing.

Dependent Variables (Business Results):

- Engagement on social media platforms
- Content marketing performance (blogs, videos, educational resources)
- Search engine optimization (SEO) and marketing performance (visibility, search intent targeting)
- Influence marketing performance (endorsements, credibility)
- Email marketing performance (personalized communication)
- Online reviews and electronic word of mouth (social proof, credibility)
- Personalized and AI-powered marketing (recommendations, segmentation)
- Omnichannel marketing performance (integrated online-offline experiences)

Mediating Variables (Psychological and Perceptual Mechanisms):

- Customer engagement (attention, interaction, community participation)
- Trust (brand trust, website trust, seller trust)

Perceived value (benefits-to-cost ratio)

- Brand image (reputation, identity, positioning)
- Perceived usefulness (technology acceptance)
- Customer experience (convenience, usability, satisfaction)

Moderating Variables (Contextual and Individual Factors):

- Privacy concerns (data collection sensitivity)
- Digital literacy (ability to evaluate online information)
- Product type (involvement level, risk, experience requirements)
- Consumer demographics (age, income, education, culture)
- Platform credibility (source trustworthiness)
- Cultural context (values, norms, communication preferences)

Independent Variable: - Satisfaction with the product/service, satisfaction with the company, satisfaction with the customer service.

The strategies of digital marketing help to stimulate the awareness and engagement of consumers. These strategies indirectly affect purchase intention and purchase decision via several mediators such as trust building, value perception, engagement and brand image. But the influence of marketing becomes a reality through moderating factors. The more personal the advertising, for instance, the more engaged the audience, but the more privacy concerns, the less effective. Likewise, an authentic endorsement from an influencer increases trust, and a low platform credibility decreases influence.

Feedback Loops: Positive e-WOM and e-WOM reviews as a result of post-purchase satisfaction leads to virtuous cycles at the information search and evaluation stage of future customers. If consumers are not satisfied, they will create negative e-WOM, which can harm the brand and make it less attractive to consumers. This feedback helps reinforce the long-term nature of digital marketing influence, as opposed to immediate conversion.

10. Managerial Implications**10.1 For Digital Marketers and Brand Managers**

1. Be transparent to build trust. Communicate brand values, policies, data practices and product information clearly. Be quick to respond to customer questions and concerns. Promote genuine customer reviews and testimonials. Invest in website security, professional design and trustworthy signals.
2. Responsibly use data-driven personalization. Use data to provide content and offers that are pertinent to the user; honor privacy concerns. Have clear privacy policies, ask for explicit consent, and give users control over data and personalisation. Avoid dark patterns or manipulative algorithmic design.
3. Leverage strategies throughout channels. Social, content or SEO alone are not enough. Multiplying the effects along the customer journey with integrated campaigns, which include SEO, content, social media, email, reviews and influencer partnerships. Maintain a consistent message and branding throughout channels.
4. Do not over advertise or manipulate. Do not intrude on consumer attention or privacy. Too many ads, too much intrusive tracking and too much pressure to buy now create a counter-reaction of ad blocking and mistrust. The quality and relevance of content is more important than the number.
5. Prompt genuine user-generated content and reviews. Actively solicit customer reviews, photos, and testimonials. Don't ignore negative reviews; respond to them in a professional manner. UGC serves as a valuable source of authentic social proof and fosters community. It is important to note that fake reviews and fake influencers ultimately harm credibility.

10.2 For E-Commerce and Retail Businesses

1. Ensure seamless website and mobile experience. Focus on user experience design, quick loading, easy navigation, secure payment and mobile optimisation. The actual costs of friction diminish conversion, irrespective of marketing quality.
2. Give clear product information and pictures. Good pictures, videos, descriptions and specifications help to lower perceived risk and facilitate evaluation. Let customer reviews and question and answer sessions resolve issues.
3. Be flexible about the time of delivery and return. Clear and user-friendly policies help to lower the perceived risk and boost customer confidence. Make sure that these policies are explicitly conveyed in marketing statements.
4. Develop loyalty programs and customer retention strategies. Repeat purchase and lifetime value can be enhanced at a lower cost than relentless customer acquisition through post-purchase engagement, such as emails, loyalty incentives, and personalized recommendations.

10.3 For Social Media and Content Managers

1. Creating meaningful communities and engagement. Focus on authentic interactions, reply to customers' comments, highlight customer-generated content and design inclusive spaces. Community engagement is more effective at fostering loyalty and advocacy than broadcast marketing.
2. Make valuable, relevant content. Content is engaging, trusted, and has organic reach when it's educational, entertaining, or inspiring, and it's geared toward the interests of its audience (not just promotion). Over time, people will be loyal to you if you are authentic and consistent.
3. Make strategic choices in selecting influencers. Collaborate with influencers with audience segments that match target customer and influencers with values that match brand. Focus on genuine influence and authentic endorsements over followers. Make sure there is adequate partnership disclosure.

10.4 For Small and Medium Enterprises

1. Pay attention to niche and targeted strategies. SMEs need to not match large brands' mass-market advertising campaigns as they have limited budgets. Rather, segment your audience and send personalized messaging, content marketing and community building.
2. Utilize storytelling and authenticity. The closeness of the SMEs to the owners and the passion for the products result in true brand stories that connect with the audience. This authenticity is becoming more important than corporate messages.
3. Focus on organic and community action. For resource limited SMEs, social media community building, content marketing, email nurturing and word of mouth referrals can yield higher ROI than paid advertising.
4. Utilize easy-to-use analytics tools. SMEs can use affordable analytics platforms to track campaign performance, understand customer behavior, and optimize strategies at a lower cost.

11. Future Research Directions

There are still large research gaps in digital marketing and consumer behavior:

1. Personalization and purchase using AI – know how AI personalization can impact decisions and long term outcomes
2. Privacy issues and consumer trust – explore balances between personalisation and privacy; effective privacy-respecting personalisation

3. Authenticity and purchasing intention – understand the characteristics of influencers that make them credible and persuasive
4. Short-form video marketing and impulse buying – explore the psychology behind purchasing due to TikTok and Reels.
5. Understand platform preferences and content preferences among Generation Z, as well as purchase drivers.
6. Understand how cultural values influence response to digital marketing strategies (cross cultural digital marketing)
7. Digital marketing in SMEs – constraints, effective strategies and success factors.
8. Omnichannel customer experience – analyse how well channels work together and what the outcomes of customer experience are
9. Negative e-WOM and brand trust – know the negative impact on purchase decisions and brand recovery strategies.
10. Consumer fatigue with targeted advertising – explore prevalence, impact and solutions
11. Sustainable and ethical digital marketing – explore consumer preferences and business models, balancing profit with ethics.

12. Limitations of the Review

This review is a narrative review using secondary academic literature, which has some limitations. First, it is not empirical. It does not rely on primary quantitative data or offer estimates of effect size for digital marketing strategies in terms of purchase behaviour. Second, the publication bias can cause an overestimation of positive digital marketing effects. Third, as the digital world, technologies and consumer behaviour rapidly evolve, some literature might lag behind practice and the time it will take for the impact of marketing to materialise.

Another drawback is that the effectiveness of digital marketing will differ depending on the industry, culture, and consumer segment. There can then be important differences within the context that are not picked up through broad generalisations. There are also numerous studies carrying out a correlation analysis, where establishing a clear causal relationship between the exposure to digital marketing and the purchase decision is more difficult. Lastly, this review unavoidably summarizes multi-layered and complex phenomena. There are a number of factors that influence individual customer decision making, and not all of them are digital marketing.

13. Conclusion

Digital marketing has transformed the way customers are discovering products, researching, comparing, deciding to buy, buying and then sharing their experience of the purchase. The digital communication from one-way to interactive, data-driven and personalised is a significant change in marketing communication and customer relationships (Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019). Digital marketing can impact customer purchasing decisions in multiple interconnected ways: visibility and awareness via social media and search, engagement via interactive content and online communities, trust via transparency and credible reviews, perceived value via customisation and valuable content, reduced risk via guarantees and testimonials, and convenience via mobile and omnichannel experiences.

But, digital marketing is not a one-size-fits-all solution and cannot function on its own. Mediating factors like trust, brand image, perceived value, and engagement play a pivotal role in its effectiveness. It is also influenced by moderating factors such as the concerns about privacy, digital literacy, product type and platform credibility as well as cultural context.

The tension between personalisation and privacy, quick conversion and long-term loyalty, and marketing innovation and consumer protection remains a common issue in both digital



marketing practice and academic research. Respect for consumers, transparency, and authenticity have become key conditions for building a competitive advantage.

For practitioners, the main lesson is clear: digital marketing should be multi-channel, customer-centred, and ethically responsible. Success depends not only on reaching consumers, but also on building meaningful connections with them. There are still several areas of research that are not covered in relation to AI in marketing, effectiveness of cross-cultural digital marketing, the impact of influencers' authenticity, the trade-offs between privacy and marketing, and digital marketing success in SMEs and emerging markets. Consumer confidence protection is an ongoing challenge for policymakers, alongside marketing innovation.

Finally, the future of digital marketing hinges on understanding that customers are not passive recipients of marketing messages, but active processors of information, critical evaluators, and community members. In digital times, brands that engage in a genuine manner, respect privacy, provide real value and establish trust will flourish. Manipulators, intrusive tracking, and information overload will increasingly come under consumer backlash and regulatory pressure. The evidence presented here shows that a successful digital marketing campaign is a blend of strategic sophistication and a customer-centric value-based approach: digital technology to serve real customers' needs, and real customers' needs to serve digital technology.

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