



Understanding digital consumer behaviour: The role of social media, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices

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Abstract

The rapid digital transformation has fundamentally altered how consumers search, evaluate, and engage with brands. Understanding digital consumer behaviour has therefore become essential for marketers seeking to design effective online strategies. Drawing insights from foundational concepts in digital marketing, including website engagement, social media participation, and strategic digital marketing practices, this study examines how these components collectively shape consumer behaviour in the online environment. Website experience—including usability, content quality, and interactivity—plays a critical role in capturing consumer attention and driving engagement. Social media platforms further influence consumer attitudes through peer recommendations, online communities, and interactive brand communication. In addition, strategic digital marketing practices such as targeted content, data-driven personalization, and integrated channel strategies significantly enhance consumer engagement and conversion intention. Using existing literature and a conceptual framework approach, this study explores the relationships between these variables and proposes testable hypotheses for future empirical analysis. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of digital consumer behaviour and offer implications for marketers aiming to optimize their digital presence and enhance customer engagement across digital touchpoints.

Keywords: Digital consumer behaviour, social media engagement, website engagement, digital marketing strategy, online customer experience, digital interactions, consumer decision-making

Introduction

The rise of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed how consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and interact with brands. With the increasing penetration of the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms, consumers today operate in an environment where information is abundant, easily accessible, and highly interactive. Digital channels have reshaped the traditional linear buyer journey into a dynamic, multi-touchpoint experience in which consumers continuously engage with brands through websites, social networks, search engines, and digital communities. This shift has driven marketers to develop a deeper understanding of digital consumer behaviour to effectively design strategies that influence attitudes, engagement, and purchase actions.

Digital marketing literature highlights that consumers now expect personalized, seamless, and value-driven online experiences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022) [2]. Ryan and Jones (2009) [8] explain that digital media empowers individuals to engage, communicate, and share content in ways that were previously unimaginable, making consumer participation an essential element of modern marketing strategies. As consumers increasingly integrate digital technologies into their daily routines, website engagement emerges as a key determinant of online behaviour. Factors

such as website usability, navigation structure, content quality, and interactive features significantly influence consumers' perceptions, satisfaction, and intention to revisit or purchase.

Social media also plays a central role in shaping digital behaviour. Social platforms enable real-time conversations, peer recommendations, and user-generated content that collectively influence attitudes and brand trust. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2019) [5], social media environments have become powerful ecosystems for community building and engagement, providing marketers with new opportunities to foster dialogue and co-create value with consumers. Ryan and Jones (2009) [8] further emphasize that social networks have transformed consumers from passive content recipients into active participants who shape brand narratives and influence others' decisions. Strategic digital marketing practices—such as targeted campaigns, data analytics, personalization, and integrated communication—serve as the backbone of effective consumer engagement. When applied cohesively, these strategies help brands understand behavioural patterns, deliver relevant messages, and enhance the overall consumer experience. As Smith (2021) argues, strategic alignment across digital touchpoints increases engagement and strengthens consumer-brand relationships.

Given these developments, understanding how social media engagement, website experience, and strategic digital marketing practices collectively influence digital consumer behaviour is crucial. This study aims to explore these components and provide a conceptual foundation for explaining the behavioural responses of modern consumers in online environments.

Review of Literature

Digital consumer behaviour has emerged as a critical area of inquiry as organizations increasingly rely on digital channels to attract, engage, and retain customers. The following review synthesizes research under three major thematic areas aligned with this study's focus: (1) Digital Consumer Behaviour, (2) Social Media Engagement, (3) Website Engagement, and (4) Strategic Digital Marketing Practices. Each theme integrates past research findings, theoretical insights, and practical implications.

1. Digital Consumer Behaviour

Digital consumer behaviour refers to the processes through which individuals search, evaluate, and make decisions in online environments. The shift from traditional communication to interactive digital media has dramatically changed consumer expectations and purchase dynamics.

According to Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8], digital technologies allow consumers to access information instantly, compare alternatives, and engage with brands across multiple touchpoints, making behaviour more complex and dynamic. Digital consumers now play an active role in content creation, feedback, and value co-creation. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022)^[2] argue that digital behaviour is driven by convenience, personalization, and real-time connectivity, which influence both cognitive and emotional responses.

Research also highlights that digital consumers are highly influenced by online communities, peer-generated content, and social proof, which often outweigh traditional advertising in shaping attitudes (Solomon, 2020)^[9]. The decision-making process is no longer linear but cyclical, involving continuous engagement through websites, social media, search engines, and email platforms (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016)^[6].

Overall, digital behaviour is shaped by trust, perceived usefulness, user experience, and the ability of digital platforms to meet consumer expectations.

2. Social Media Engagement

Social media has become one of the most influential drivers of digital consumer behaviour. Engagement on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) enhances brand visibility, stimulates interaction, and shapes consumer perceptions.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2019)^[5] define social media as internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, making it a powerful engagement ecosystem. Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8] note that social networks empower consumers to voice opinions, participate in conversations, and form digital communities that significantly influence brand sentiment. Multiple studies highlight that social media engagement improves brand loyalty, emotional connection, and purchase likelihood (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2016)^[4]. Consumers rely heavily on online reviews, influencer recommendations, and peer feedback when evaluating

products and services. Social media also facilitates two-way communication, which enhances trust and strengthens brand-consumer relationships (Ashley & Tuten, 2015)^[1]. Furthermore, interactive elements—such as comments, likes, shares, and live sessions—enhance engagement by fostering participation and involvement (Voorveld, 2019)^[12]. The immediacy and personalization of content further contribute to social media's influence on behaviour.

3. Website Engagement and Online Experience

A well-designed website serves as a central hub for digital interactions and significantly shapes consumer behaviour. Website engagement includes factors such as usability, navigation, content relevance, visual appeal, and interactivity.

Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8] emphasize that a website is often the first point of contact between a business and its customers, making it a critical element of digital strategy. Website quality influences consumers' perceptions of credibility, trustworthiness, and brand professionalism. According to Liu and Shrum (2019)^[7], interactive features enhance user involvement, satisfaction, and the perceived value of the online experience.

Research demonstrates that website engagement positively affects purchase intention and revisit behaviour. Good navigation structure, fast loading speed, and meaningful content improve satisfaction and reduce cognitive effort (Flavián, Gurrea, & Orús, 2016)^[3]. In contrast, poor usability or irrelevant content can increase frustration and lead to website abandonment.

Personalization also plays a key role. Studies show that tailored content, recommendations, and adaptive interfaces create a sense of relevance, enhancing engagement and increasing conversions (Tam & Ho, 2020)^[10].

4. Strategic Digital Marketing Practices

Strategic digital marketing integrates tools such as search engine optimization (SEO), targeted content, email marketing, analytics, and paid advertisements to influence consumer engagement.

Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8] highlight that digital strategy involves understanding the online consumer, selecting suitable digital channels, and aligning marketing objectives with platform capabilities. Strategic planning ensures coherence across touchpoints and optimizes resources for maximum impact.

Data-driven digital marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour. According to Wedel and Kannan (2016)^[13], analytics allow organizations to predict consumer preferences, personalize content, and improve targeting accuracy. Integrated strategies—combining SEO, social media, content marketing, and website optimization—provide a holistic user experience that enhances engagement and brand loyalty (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014)^[11].

Additionally, digital marketing strategy emphasizes customer-centricity. Personalized advertisements, retargeting campaigns, and segmented communications significantly improve behavioural responses and strengthen relationships (Batra & Keller, 2016).

Research Gap (Paragraph Form)

Although extensive research has examined digital consumer behaviour, several gaps remain in understanding how

multiple digital touchpoints collectively shape online decision-making. Prior studies often focus on individual components such as social media engagement, website experience, or specific digital marketing tools in isolation, without exploring their combined influence on consumer behaviours such as trust, engagement, and purchase intention. Existing literature also tends to emphasize either social media interactions or website usability, overlooking the strategic role of integrated digital marketing practices that guide consumers across platforms. Additionally, most studies primarily investigate engagement metrics rather than the behavioural and psychological mechanisms that drive consumer responses in digitally connected environments. While Ryan and Jones (2009) ^[8] highlight the transformative nature of digital media in shaping consumer interactions, empirical research that links these interactions to coordinated strategic marketing practices remains limited. There is also a lack of updated research addressing contemporary digital behaviours shaped by personalization, cross-platform connectivity, and data-driven strategies. This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining how social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices jointly influence digital consumer behaviour, offering a holistic perspective that existing literature has not fully addressed.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to understand how different digital touchpoints influence modern consumer behaviour. Based on the research gaps identified, the following specific objectives are formulated

1. To examine the influence of social media engagement on digital consumer behaviour.
2. To assess the role of website engagement and online experience in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions.
3. To evaluate how strategic digital marketing practices (such as personalization, integrated communication, and targeted content) affect consumer engagement and decision-making.
4. To analyze the combined effect of social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices on overall digital consumer behaviour.
5. To develop and propose a conceptual framework explaining the multidimensional factors influencing digital consumer behaviour.

Hypotheses Development

Based on the theoretical foundations and literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed

H1: Social media engagement positively influences digital consumer behaviour.

This hypothesis assumes that active consumer interactions through likes, comments, shares, peer recommendations, and digital communities enhance consumer trust, attitudes, and behavioural intentions.

H2: Website engagement positively influences digital consumer behaviour.

A user-friendly website—featuring quality content, easy navigation, interactivity, and personalization—is expected

to improve consumer satisfaction and increase their likelihood of engaging or purchasing.

H3: Strategic digital marketing practices positively influence digital consumer behaviour.

Data-driven personalization, integrated campaigns, targeted content, and analytics-driven strategies are expected to enhance consumer engagement and influence decision-making.

H4: Social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices jointly have a significant positive effect on digital consumer behaviour.

This hypothesis addresses the holistic impact of digital touchpoints, proposing that coordinated digital strategies create stronger behavioural responses than isolated practices.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a secondary data-based research design to examine the role of social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices in shaping digital consumer behaviour. Since digital marketing is an extensively documented field, secondary data provides a rich foundation for understanding emerging patterns, theoretical developments, and industry practices. The analysis draws upon previously published academic articles, industry reports, digital marketing frameworks, and authoritative textbooks, including Ryan and Jones' *Understanding Digital Marketing* (2009) ^[8], which offers fundamental insights into consumer engagement across digital platforms. Peer-reviewed journal articles from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were reviewed to synthesize existing empirical findings related to online consumer behaviour, social media influence, website experience, and integrated digital strategies. Industry publications from reputable sources, including Statista, Deloitte, McKinsey, and global digital marketing reports, were also examined to capture recent trends and behavioural insights relevant to the digital landscape.

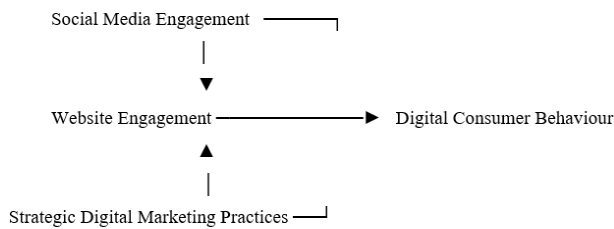
A qualitative content analysis approach was used to identify recurring themes, conceptual patterns, and theoretical relationships within the literature. The collected secondary sources were evaluated based on relevance, credibility, and recency to ensure research rigor. The selected materials were systematically analyzed to develop a conceptual understanding of how various digital touchpoints collectively influence consumer perceptions and behaviours. Since the study relies exclusively on secondary data, no primary survey or experimental procedures were conducted. Instead, existing empirical evidence and theoretical models were integrated to propose relationships between the study variables and develop hypotheses. This methodological approach is appropriate for conceptual research that aims to build theoretical clarity, provide integrative insights, and lay the foundation for future empirical investigations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built on the assumption that digital consumer behaviour is shaped by multiple online touchpoints that work individually and collectively to influence perceptions, engagement, and behavioural outcomes. Based on the reviewed literature,

three major predictors—social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices—are proposed to have both direct and combined effects on digital consumer behaviour.

Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework is grounded in the understanding that digital consumers interact with brands across multiple online platforms, and each interaction contributes to shaping their attitudes, trust, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. Social media engagement is conceptualized as a key influence because modern consumers rely heavily on interactions through social networks, peer-generated content, and digital communities. Prior research shows that likes, shares, comments, reviews, and influencer-based messages create strong emotional and cognitive responses, making social media a powerful driver of consumer perception and behaviour.

Similarly, website engagement is included as a central predictor because websites often serve as a brand's primary digital interface. A well-designed website—with high usability, relevant content, interactive features, and personalization—enhances user experience and builds trust, which significantly influences online decision-making. Website engagement also determines whether visitors remain on a site, revisit it, or convert into customers.

The third predictor, strategic digital marketing practices, refers to an organization's ability to integrate digital tools—such as SEO, targeted content, analytics, personalization, and multi-channel communication—into a coherent marketing strategy. These practices strengthen consumer relationships by providing relevant information at the right time and through the right platforms. Literature highlights that strategic alignment across channels creates a seamless consumer journey that enhances engagement and influences behavioural intentions.

The framework assumes that these three variables do not work in isolation. Instead, they interact and collectively contribute to shaping digital consumer behaviour, which includes attitudes, trust, engagement, purchase intention, and loyalty. Thus, the model proposes both direct effects (H1, H2, H3) and a combined effect (H4) of the predictors on overall consumer behaviour. This integrative framework fills a gap in past research, which often examines these predictors separately rather than holistically.

Practical Examples and Case Insights

1. Nike: Social Media Engagement through Community Building

Nike offers one of the strongest examples of social media-driven consumer engagement. The brand consistently uses Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to inspire conversations around fitness, motivation, and personal achievement. Hashtag campaigns like #JustDoIt and #YouCantStopUs encourage user-generated content, allowing consumers to

share personal stories that reinforce Nike's brand identity. This active participation generates emotional engagement, leading to increased trust, loyalty, and purchase intention. The case demonstrates how interactive content and community participation influence digital consumer behaviour.

2. Amazon: Website Engagement through Personalization and User Experience

Amazon sets global benchmarks for website engagement through its fast-loading interface, intuitive navigation, personalized product recommendations, and robust search filters. The platform uses data analytics and AI to understand browsing patterns and adjust recommendations in real time. This seamless experience reduces user effort and builds trust, making consumers more likely to revisit and purchase. The success of Amazon shows how website usability and personalization significantly shape digital behaviour, validating your study's second variable.

3. Starbucks: Strategic Digital Marketing through Omnichannel Integration

Starbucks integrates its website, mobile app, loyalty program, and social media platforms to create a completely unified customer journey. Through the Starbucks Rewards App, consumers receive personalized offers, earn points, and make payments effortlessly. Their "order-ahead" feature, push notifications, and tailored promotions demonstrate how strategic integration of digital tools enhances convenience, engagement, and repeat purchase behaviour. This case demonstrates how cohesive digital marketing practices improve overall consumer behaviour.

4. Airbnb: Trust Formation through Website and Social Media Synergy

Airbnb relies heavily on both website engagement and social media presence to build trust in a peer-to-peer marketplace. The website features detailed property descriptions, high-quality visuals, host reviews, and verified profiles—elements that reduce consumer uncertainty. Simultaneously, Airbnb uses social media stories and traveler content to emotionally inspire potential users. This combination enhances credibility and strengthens consumer willingness to book, illustrating the combined effect of your three predictors on behavioural outcomes.

5. Sephora: Influencer Marketing and Social Media Interactivity

Sephora uses beauty influencers on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to create tutorials, unboxing videos, and honest product reviews. These interactions act as trusted sources of information, shaping consumers' buying decisions more effectively than traditional advertising. Sephora's Beauty Insider community also allows users to share tips, reviews, and experiences, strengthening engagement. This case shows how social media engagement and peer influence directly affect purchasing behaviour.

6. Netflix: Behaviour Prediction through Data-Driven Digital Marketing

Netflix uses advanced analytics and machine learning to track what users watch, how long they watch, and what they

search. The platform then sends personalized recommendations and tailored trailers across email, mobile, and social platforms. This strategy significantly increases viewer retention and engagement, proving that strategic, data-based digital marketing practices influence digital consumer decisions.

7. Coca-Cola: Social Media Virality and Consumer Sentiment

Campaigns like “Share a Coke” show how brands can turn social media into a powerful tool for engagement. Consumers were encouraged to post pictures of personalized bottles, generating massive user-generated content. This viral effect boosted emotional connection and brand loyalty, demonstrating how interactive social content can shape digital consumer behaviour at scale.

Discussion

The findings derived from the reviewed literature and the proposed conceptual framework suggest that digital consumer behaviour is shaped by multiple interconnected online touchpoints rather than isolated interactions. The discussion highlights the significance of each predictor—social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices—and explains how these elements jointly influence consumer perceptions and behavioural outcomes in digital environments.

First, social media engagement emerges as a powerful driver of digital consumer behaviour because consumers increasingly rely on social networks for information, validation, and interaction. As noted by Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8], digital platforms have turned consumers from passive observers into active participants who influence brand narratives and co-create value. This aligns with broader digital marketing literature indicating that user-generated content, online reviews, influencer communication, and community involvement strengthen trust, shape attitudes, and enhance purchase intentions. The discussion therefore reinforces the hypothesis that social media engagement plays a crucial role in driving online behavioural responses.

Second, website engagement plays an equally influential role by shaping the consumer’s overall experience with a brand. Websites function as the primary digital interface where consumers explore products, evaluate information, and make purchase decisions. Literature shows that usability, design quality, relevant content, and interactivity directly enhance satisfaction, reduce cognitive effort, and increase conversion likelihood. Ryan and Jones (2009)^[8] emphasize the importance of the website as the “hub” of digital marketing activity, and the discussion supports this view by highlighting that website engagement significantly contributes to behavioural outcomes such as repeated visits, trust formation, and purchase intention.

Third, strategic digital marketing practices amplify the influence of both social media and website engagement by ensuring coherence, personalization, and targeted communication across platforms. Modern digital consumers expect seamless transitions between channels, relevant content, and timely interactions. As data analytics, SEO, personalization tools, and integrated communication become more advanced, brands can tailor experiences with greater precision. This strategic alignment strengthens consumer engagement throughout their journey, supporting

the hypothesis that digital marketing strategy significantly affects behavioural decisions.

The conceptual framework further suggests that the combined effect of these digital elements is more powerful than their individual contributions. Digital consumer behaviour is influenced by the cumulative experience across platforms—how consumers move from social media to a website, how they encounter personalized campaigns, and how consistently a brand communicates its value. The discussion shows that when digital touchpoints work together cohesively, they create a persuasive environment that enhances trust, involvement, and purchase intention. This integrated perspective fills an important gap in prior research, which often examines these factors independently rather than holistically.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the idea that digital consumer behaviour is multidimensional and shaped by consumers’ dynamic interactions across various digital environments. The framework presented in this study highlights the importance of understanding these interactions collectively and offers valuable insights for both academics and practitioners.

Managerial Implications

This study offers several practical insights for organizations seeking to enhance their digital presence and influence consumer behaviour more effectively. First, businesses must recognize the strategic importance of social media engagement as consumers increasingly rely on these platforms for information, peer opinions, and brand interactions. Managers should design interactive and authentic social media content, encourage user-generated content, and collaborate with credible influencers to strengthen trust and engagement.

Second, organizations must invest in website optimization to ensure seamless user experiences. A website serves as the central hub of digital marketing, and factors such as fast loading speed, intuitive navigation, visually appealing design, and personalized content significantly influence consumer perceptions. Enhancing website interactivity—through chatbots, recommendation engines, and interactive tools—can increase satisfaction and encourage repeat visits.

Third, managers should focus on strategic integration of digital marketing practices. Rather than treating digital channels separately, firms must adopt a unified approach that synchronizes social media communication, content marketing, SEO, email campaigns, and analytics. A data-driven strategy enables businesses to tailor messages, segment audiences effectively, and engage consumers with relevant, timely content. The combined effect of integrating website experience, social media engagement, and data-backed digital strategies creates a holistic journey that strengthens consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase intention.

Overall, managers who embrace a coordinated and consumer-centric digital strategy are better positioned to succeed in a highly competitive digital environment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study offers valuable theoretical insights into the factors influencing digital consumer behaviour, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research relies exclusively on secondary data, which limits the ability to capture real-time consumer perceptions or test the proposed relationships empirically. The absence of primary data means that behavioural insights are based on previously

published findings, which may not fully reflect the most recent changes in digital technologies, platform algorithms, or consumer preferences. Second, the conceptual framework focuses on three key predictors—social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices—but digital consumer behaviour may also be shaped by additional factors such as mobile app experiences, privacy concerns, digital fatigue, AI-driven personalization, and cultural or demographic differences. These variables are outside the scope of the present analysis but could significantly influence outcomes.

Furthermore, the study is based on a broad synthesis of global literature, which may not account for country-specific or industry-specific variations in digital behaviour. Digital adoption levels, technological infrastructure, and cultural attitudes toward online engagement differ across regions and industries, potentially affecting the generalizability of the conclusions. Lastly, secondary data often reflects the perspectives and methodological choices of previous researchers, which may introduce interpretive bias or gaps not visible within this study.

Given these limitations, several opportunities emerge for future research. Empirical studies using primary data, such as surveys, interviews, or digital analytics, can be conducted to test the proposed hypotheses and validate the conceptual relationships. Future research may also incorporate additional variables—such as mobile engagement, trust in AI-driven recommendations, influencer credibility, or the role of online reviews—to build a more comprehensive model of digital consumer behaviour. Comparative studies across industries (e-commerce, education, hospitality, banking) or geographic regions could further enhance understanding of contextual differences. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in capturing how consumer behaviour evolves with changes in technology, platform norms, and digital marketing practices. By addressing these areas, future research can extend the current framework and contribute to more robust, data-driven insights into digital consumer behaviour.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of digital consumer behaviour by examining how social media engagement, website engagement, and strategic digital marketing practices influence consumer perceptions and decisions. The literature demonstrates that consumers today are highly interactive, information-driven, and influenced by online communities and digital brand experiences. Social media strengthens engagement through peer influence and real-time communication, while website engagement enhances trust and satisfaction by offering meaningful and user-friendly digital experiences. Strategic digital marketing practices further reinforce these effects by aligning content, personalization, and cross-channel integration.

The proposed conceptual framework highlights that digital consumer behaviour is not shaped by isolated factors but by the combined impact of multiple digital touchpoints. This holistic perspective fills an important gap in existing research and offers a foundation for future empirical studies. For practitioners, the findings underscore the need for comprehensive, data-driven, and consumer-centric digital strategies that integrate website design, social media interactions, and marketing analytics. As digital ecosystems continue to evolve, organizations that adapt quickly and

prioritize consumer experience across platforms will be best positioned to influence behaviour, build lasting relationships, and maintain competitive advantage.

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