



## The crucial role of psychological techniques in digital marketing to influence consumer behavior

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### Abstract

This paper examines the utilization of psychological techniques in digital marketing to influence consumer behavior and enhance engagement. The study begins with an exploration of key definitions related to psychological techniques in digital marketing. A comprehensive literature review follows, encompassing relevant theories and research that shed light on the effectiveness of these techniques. The review includes studies on persuasion and personalization. By integrating psychological insights into marketing strategies, businesses can effectively engage with their target audience, foster brand loyalty and drive conversions.

**Keywords:** Psychological techniques, digital marketing, consumer behavior, persuasion, social influence, personalization

### Introduction

The use of psychological techniques in digital marketing is a highly relevant and evolving field of study. Digital marketing is increasingly becoming a dominant form of marketing in the digitally transforming world and the ability to persuade customers to become leads or buyers is essential for the success of any business. The use of psychological principles can be highly effective in influencing online consumer behavior and decision-making. In digital era, marketers have access to an array of tools and techniques to engage with consumers and drive sales. However, to effectively capture and retain the attention of online audiences, it is crucial to understand the psychological underpinnings of consumer behavior (D'Andrea, Viglia, 2021) <sup>[8]</sup>. Psychological techniques in digital marketing leverage insights from cognitive, social, and behavioral sciences to influence consumer decision-making processes and improve marketing outcomes.

There are various psychological techniques that can be used in digital marketing, such as persuasion and personalization among others. These techniques have been extensively studied and applied in the field of consumer psychology, and their effectiveness in digital marketing has also been demonstrated through empirical research.

### Definitions and context

#### 1. Psychological Techniques

Psychological techniques refer to a range of strategies, tactics and methods used to understand and influence human behavior, thoughts and emotions. These techniques draw upon principles and theories from psychology to shape individuals' perceptions, attitudes and actions. Psychological techniques aim to tap into the cognitive and emotional processes of individuals to elicit specific responses or outcomes (Duff, Sar 2015) <sup>[9]</sup>. They may involve persuasion, behavioral modification, cognitive restructuring, or emotional regulation. They are used by marketers to appeal to consumers' cognitive and emotional processes. These techniques utilize insights from psychology to influence consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, ultimately

influencing purchasing decisions. By utilizing insights from psychology, digital marketing can design interventions and marketing strategies that target specific psychological mechanisms.

#### 2. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital channels, platforms, and technologies to promote products, services and brands. It encompasses various online marketing strategies and tactics aimed at reaching and engaging target audiences through digital means. Digital marketing leverages digital channels and tactics to connect with customers, build brand awareness, drive website traffic, generate leads, and ultimately achieve marketing objectives in digital realm (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) <sup>[6]</sup>. One of the most important tactic in digital marketing is search engine optimization (SEO) aim to optimize websites and content to improve visibility and ranking on search engine result pages and driving organic traffic (Makrydakis, Skopeteas, 2022) <sup>[16]</sup>. Another tactic is pay-per-click advertising (PPC), place targeted ads on search engines or other websites, paying only when users click on the advertisements, to drive traffic and generate leads. Social media marketing is a popular tactic utilizing social media platforms to engage with target audiences, build brand loyalty and drive website traffic or conversions. Also important is content marketing which creates and distributes valuable and relevant content, such as blog posts, videos, or infographics, to attract and engage target audiences and email marketing that by sending targeted and personalized emails to nurture leads, build customer relationships and encourage conversions or repeat purchases. Affiliate marketing is a field where affiliates promote the merchant's products or services, influencer marketing, collaborating with influential individuals or social media personalities to promote products or services to their engaged audience and mobile marketing tailoring marketing efforts to reach audiences on mobile devices through mobile apps, responsive websites, beacons, SMS (Hwang, Kim, 2020) <sup>[13, 23]</sup>.

### 3. Consumer behavior and engagement

Consumer behavior refers to the study of individual consumers, groups and organizations and the processes they undergo when select and purchase products or services. It encompasses the psychological, social and cultural factors that influence consumers' decision-making processes and behaviors. Understanding consumer behavior is essential for marketers as it helps them develop effective marketing strategies, create targeted messaging and build strong relationships with target group. Consumer behavior involves several key elements such as perception which concerns how consumers perceive and interpret information from their environment, including advertisements or brand messages. Motivation also, underlying drivers that lead individuals to take action or make certain choices based on needs, desires, goals and aspirations (Solomon, 2019) <sup>[19]</sup>. Attitudes that influenced by personal beliefs, values and experiences drive consumers evaluations and opinions about products and brands. Important elements are also decision making process which may involve problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives and post-purchase evaluation, and social and cultural influences that shape preferences and purchasing decisions based on family, culture and societal norms on consumer behavior. Consumer behavior online refers to actions, attitudes and decision-making processes of consumers as they engage in various activities and interact with online platforms, websites, social media and digital communication channels. Consumer behavior online is influenced by all traditional above factors while consumer involves activities such as online search, product evaluation, comparison shopping, online purchases, post-purchase evaluations, and interactions with online communities and influencers (Smith, Johnson, Brown, 2022) <sup>[18]</sup>. Understanding psychological techniques that affect consumer behavior online is crucial for digital marketers to develop effective marketing strategies, create engaging online experiences and tailor their offerings according to the needs and preferences of online consumers. Consumer online engagement behavior for digital marketing refers to the active participation and interaction of consumers with digital marketing efforts and online brand experiences. It encompasses the range of actions consumers take, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and reviewing content, as well as subscribing to newsletters, participating in online discussions and providing feedback. It also includes consumers' willingness to engage with branded content, promotions, contests and influencer campaigns (Tang, Xiao, Zhang, Yang, 2021) <sup>[21]</sup>. In the context of e-commerce consumer engagement refers to actions such as browsing product catalogs, reading reviews, adding items to the cart, making purchases, giving feedback and sharing recommendations, contributing to a personalized and interactive shopping experience.

#### Literature Review

##### 1. Persuasion Techniques

Persuasion techniques are widely used in digital marketing to influence consumer behavior. The theory of persuasion, as proposed by Cialdini (2006) <sup>[7]</sup> "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion," outlines six key principles of persuasion that are widely referenced in the field of marketing. These principles provide insights into the psychological factors that influence people's decision-making processes. The six principles of persuasion are presented in detail below.

##### a. Reciprocity

This principle suggests that people feel obligated to return favors or acts of kindness. When someone does something for us or gives us something, we tend to feel a sense of indebtedness and are more likely to comply with their requests in the future. Usual psychological techniques in real-world digital marketing are free content and downloads, free trials and freemium models and personalized discounts. Many businesses offer online free content such as e-books, whitepapers or guides in exchange for the user's contact information using channels like search engine network advertisements, social media and website apps. By providing valuable resources at no cost, companies tap into the principle of reciprocity. Consumers feel obliged to reciprocate the favor and are more likely to engage online further with the brand, such as making a purchase or subscribing to a newsletter or share, like or comment a post on social media. In digital realm, offering free trials or freemium models (basic version for free, premium features at a cost) is another effective way to trigger reciprocity. By allowing consumers to experience a product or service without an immediate financial commitment, digital marketers create a sense of indebtedness. If users find value in the free version, they are more likely to upgrade to the paid version. In the context of inbound digital marketing personalized discounts and exclusive offers based on consumer preferences or past purchases is a strategy that leverages reciprocity (Li, Huang, 2021) <sup>[15]</sup>. By personalizing incentives, businesses show they have invested effort in understanding the customer's needs and preferences. This personalized approach enhances the sense of reciprocity, increasing the likelihood of a purchase.

##### b. Commitment and consistency

The principle of commitment and consistency is a powerful persuasion technique utilized in digital marketing. People have a deep desire to appear consistent in their words, beliefs and behaviors. Once people make a commitment, whether explicit or implicit, they tend to stick to it to maintain their self-image. Using this principle involves getting initial voluntary commitments from individuals, which then makes it easier to gain further compliance (Braca, Annye, Dondio, Pierpaolo, 2022) <sup>[4]</sup>. This principle has impact on consumer behavior using opt-in and subscription strategies, loyalty programs and memberships, user-generated content and reviews, personal goal setting and progress tracking. Marketers use opt-in strategies to gather email addresses or encourage users to subscribe to newsletters or updates. Once consumers commit to providing their contact information, they are more likely to remain consistent with their decision and engage further with the brand. Digital marketers often plan loyalty programs or memberships that require customers to sign up and commit to being part of the program. By joining and receiving exclusive benefits, individuals feel a sense of commitment and are more likely to remain consistent and repeat purchases. Encouraging customers to provide reviews, testimonials or user-generated content about their positive experiences with a brand leverages the commitment and consistency principle. Once individuals publicly express their satisfaction, they are more likely to remain consistent with their positive perceptions and continue supporting the brand. According to the statements of Digital Marketing Manager at United Colors of Benetton «*We wanted to*

include User Generated Content in our strategy because we believe that by showing off our brand through UGC, we can communicate a more immediate connection with our customers... User Generated Content provides an additional inspiration and a rewarding feeling...» user generated content is a priority of this global brand. Also at Bubbleroom, a popular Swedish fashion retailer, the responsible Head of Social has highlighted that «...the demand for more original and authentic content was increasing, especially within our target groups, which are mostly Gen Z and Millennials, from a sales perspective, you can clearly see the reward in using UGC... during the past six months that the average order value is 120% higher...» (Flowbox, 2022) <sup>[10]</sup>. Digital platforms often employ techniques that encourage users to set goals or track their progress. By committing to achieving specific objectives, online consumers are more likely to remain consistent with their efforts and engage with the platform over time.

### c. Social Proof

Social proof or influence is a powerful psychological force that plays a crucial role in digital marketing. People often look to others to determine what is appropriate or correct in a given situation. The principle of social proof states that when individuals are uncertain about what to do, they are more likely to follow the actions or opinions of others, especially when they perceive those others as similar to themselves or as experts. Digital marketers leverage social influence by incorporating testimonials, user-generated content and social media endorsements to foster trust and credibility, ultimately driving purchasing decisions. One of the most common and effective online technique of social proof is customer reviews and testimonials. Positive online reviews and testimonials from satisfied customers can significantly impact consumer behavior increase the likelihood of purchase and reduce product return rates (Zhu, Zhang, 2016) <sup>[24]</sup>. This tactic is applied by Amazon which displays customer reviews and ratings for products, which helps potential buyers make informed decisions. Influencer marketing is another prominent application of social proof. Brands collaborate with social media influencers who have a large number of followers and engage with their audience. When influencers endorse a product or service, their followers perceive it as a validation, leading to increased trust and interest in the offering. User-generated content is also an effective way to incorporate social proof into digital marketing strategies. When consumers share their experiences, photos or videos related to a brand or product it creates authenticity and trust. The famous brand 'Starbucks' with "White Cup Contest" encouraged customers to decorate their white cups and share their designs on social media. This campaign generated significant user engagement and created a sense of community among Starbucks customers. Real-time notifications that showcase online the actions of other users can also influence consumer behavior. For example, showing pop-ups that indicate the number of people who have recently purchased a product or signed up for a service creates a sense of urgency and social validation. Another case that demonstrates how social proof technique are actively used in digital marketing to influence consumer behavior is Booking.com, one of the largest online travel agencies, that effectively uses this technique by displaying messages such as «9 people are viewing this hotel right now» to prompt users to make a booking.

### d. Affinity

This principle emphasizes that people are more likely to comply with requests from those they know, like and trust. Factors such as physical attractiveness, similarity and compliments can significantly influence liking. Building rapport and establishing positive online relationships are crucial for successful persuasion. Physical attractiveness in digital marketing involves using visually appealing elements to capture attention and create positive associations with a brand or product. Apple's product design exemplifies the use of physical attractiveness. The sleek and elegant appearance of Apple devices, such as iPhones and MacBooks, contributes to their desirability and creates a positive perception of the brand. Consumers are more likely to be drawn to visually appealing products and develop a liking for them. Similarity persuasion techniques involve highlighting shared characteristics between consumers and a brand or its representatives, fostering a sense of familiarity, relatability and likability. Spotify utilizes the similarity technique by creating personalized playlists based on users' listening habits and preferences. By curating music that aligns with their individual tastes, Spotify establishes a connection with users and enhances their liking for the platform. This personalized approach increases engagement and encourages users to continue using the service (Berger, Milkman, 2012) <sup>[1]</sup>. Compliments are positive statements or praise that can enhance liking by creating a sense of validation and boosting self-esteem. Sephora, a cosmetics retailer, incorporates compliments into their digital marketing strategy. Through personalized emails or targeted ads, Sephora compliments customers on their beauty or style choices. By acknowledging and appreciating their individuality, Sephora fosters a likable and positive association with the brand, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Tong, Walther, 2011) <sup>[22]</sup>.

### e. Authority

People tend to follow the advice or instructions of individuals they perceive as authoritative figures or experts in a particular sector. Establishing credibility, demonstrating expertise and leveraging symbols of authority can enhance persuasive efforts. Digital marketers often employ various strategies to establish credibility, such as showcasing certifications, partnerships, or customer testimonials. One example is the use of trust badges and security seals on e-commerce websites to assure customers of secure transactions. A study by Böhm and colleagues (2016) <sup>[3]</sup> found that trust seals significantly increased consumers' trust and willingness to purchase online. Also digital marketers leverage content marketing to demonstrate expertise and provide valuable information to target groups. For instance, HubSpot, a leading inbound marketing software company, publishes educational blog posts, whitepapers and guides to position themselves as industry thought leaders. By consistently delivering high-quality content HubSpot establishes itself as an expert gaining trust and loyalty from its audience (Hall, 2016) <sup>[12]</sup>. As already noticed influencer marketing is a popular strategy in which brands collaborate with well-known individuals or celebrities to leverage their authority and reach. For example, Nike partnered with professional athletes like Serena Williams and Cristiano Ronaldo to promote their products. By associating their brand with these symbols of

authority, Nike enhances its credibility and influences consumer behavior (Bhat, Reddy, 2021) <sup>[2]</sup>. Airbnb uses several persuasion techniques to establish credibility and demonstrate expertise. They use user-generated content, including customer reviews, to showcase positive experiences and build trust. Additionally, the "Superhost" program distinguishes highly rated hosts, signaling their expertise and reliability. These credibility-building measures have been crucial in facilitating the growth of Airbnb's platform.

#### f. Scarcity

The principle of scarcity suggests that people assign more value to things that are perceived as rare, limited or in high demand. When individuals perceive something as scarce or exclusive, they tend to desire it more and fear missing out. Creating a sense of urgency or highlighting limited availability can be persuasive in motivating action. Many e-commerce websites use limited-time offers to create a sense of urgency and encourage immediate purchases (Lee, Lee, 2017) <sup>[14]</sup>. For instance, Amazon often employs a "Deal of the Day" promotion, where a specific product is heavily discounted for a limited time. This scarcity tactic motivates consumers to make a purchase quickly to avoid missing out on the deal. Also flash sales are time-limited promotions that create a scarcity effect. Websites like Groupon and Zulily use flash sales to offer discounted products or services for a limited period. Additionally, countdown timers displayed on e-commerce sites can create a sense of urgency, indicating that the deal will expire soon. These psychological techniques of digital marketing prompt consumers to make quicker purchasing decisions (Tafesse, Bell, 2015) <sup>[20]</sup>. Digital marketers often use scarcity by indicating limited quantities or stock availability. For example, travel booking websites often display messages like "Only 2 rooms left!" to create a sense of urgency among potential customers. This scarcity tactic encourages users to book quickly, fearing they may miss out on the opportunity. Ticketmaster, a leading ticketing platform, uses scarcity to drive ticket sales. They employ strategies such as "limited availability" or "selling out fast" messages to create a sense of scarcity and urgency. By highlighting the scarcity of tickets for popular events, Ticketmaster motivates consumers to purchase tickets quickly to secure their seats.

## 2. Personalization

Personalization is a psychological technique widely used in digital marketing to engage consumers effectively. By tailoring content, recommendations and experiences to individual preferences, digital marketers can create a sense of relevance, connection, and perceived value (Chae, Kim, 2020) <sup>[5]</sup>. Personalization in digital marketing is rooted in psychological principles, such as the need for relevance, social validation, and individualization. By leveraging consumer behavior and preferences, marketers can create more engaging and meaningful interactions, leading to increased brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, conversions. The most commonly used versions of personalization are utilized in digital marketing to leverage consumer behavior are personalized product recommendations, dynamic website and content personalization, personalized email marketing, personalized retargeting advertisements.

#### a. Personalized product recommendations

E-commerce platforms like Amazon and Netflix use personalized product recommendations based on consumer behavior and preferences. These recommendations are generated using machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence that analyze past purchases, browsing history and demographic information. By offering personalized suggestions, digital marketers can enhance the relevance of product offerings, increase engagement and drive conversions (Ozdemir, Toker, 2021) <sup>[17]</sup>.

#### b. Dynamic website and content personalization

Websites can dynamically personalize content based on a visitor's behavior, such as their geographic location, browsing history or past interactions. For example, a travel website might display deals and promotions for destinations the user has previously shown interest in (Wang, He, 2020) <sup>[23]</sup>. By customizing the user experience, marketers can create a sense of individual attention, increasing engagement and desired actions.

#### c. Personalized email marketing

Email marketing campaigns can be highly personalized by segmenting subscribers based on their preferences, purchase history or browsing behavior. By sending targeted and relevant content, marketers can increase leads, open rates, click-through rates and conversions. Personalized email subject lines, product recommendations and exclusive offers based on consumer behavior can effectively engage recipients.

#### d. Personalized retargeting advertisements

Retargeting advertisements are used to reach consumers who have previously shown interest in a product or visited a website (Ge, Knijnenburg, Chen, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>. By utilizing data on past behavior, such as viewed products or abandoned shopping carts, marketers can display personalized advertisements to remind and entice consumers to complete a purchase. Personalized retargeting advertisements can significantly improve click-through rates and conversion rates compared to generic advertisements.

Spotify's discover weekly playlist is a prime example of personalization in digital marketing. Spotify analyzes a user's listening history, preferences and data from similar users to curate a personalized playlist every week. By providing users with a tailored selection of songs they are likely to enjoy, Spotify enhances user engagement, increases listening time and fosters a sense of connection with the platform.

## Conclusion

Psychological techniques in digital marketing provide valuable insights into understanding and influencing consumer behavior. The use of psychological techniques in digital marketing is a rapidly evolving area of digital marketing science. By understanding the principles of consumer psychology and applying them strategically in the digital space, marketers can effectively persuade customers to become leads or buyers and achieve their objectives. By understanding and applying principles from psychology, digital marketers can create more meaningful and personalized experiences, build trust and enhance conversions.

Establishing credibility and demonstrating expertise help to gain consumer trust, leading to increased brand loyalty and engagement. By showcasing certifications, partnerships and customer testimonials, businesses can establish credibility and position themselves as industry leaders. Demonstrating expertise through informative content and thought leadership further enhances the perception of competence and authority.

Leveraging symbols of authority, such as collaborating with influencers or celebrities, allows marketers to tap into the persuasive power of social proof. By associating their brand with respected individuals or trusted sources, businesses can influence consumer behavior and enhance their brand image. Creating a sense of limited availability or urgency, marketers can motivate consumers to take immediate action. Limited-time offers, flash sales and limited quantity indicators prompt consumers to make quicker purchasing decisions to avoid missing out on exclusive deals. Personalization, one of the most influential psychological techniques, allows marketers to tailor experiences and content to individual preferences. Analyzing consumer behavior and utilizing data, marketers can offer personalized product recommendations, dynamically personalize website content, send targeted email campaigns and deliver personalized retargeting advertisements. Personalization creates a sense of relevance, connection and individual attention, resulting in increased engagement, customer satisfaction and conversions. Overall, psychological techniques in digital marketing are instrumental in understanding and influencing consumer behavior. By leveraging credibility, expertise, symbols of authority, scarcity and personalization, businesses can effectively engage consumers, build relationships and drive desired actions, ultimately leading to business success in the digital landscape.

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