

Behavioral Economics and Consumer Decision-Making in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral economics has become increasingly relevant in understanding consumer decision-making, especially within the digital age where online platforms, algorithms, and real-time interactions heavily influence behavior. Unlike traditional economic models that assume rational decision-making, behavioral economics accounts for cognitive biases, heuristics, emotions, and social influences. In the digital environment, factors such as personalized content, targeted advertising, scarcity cues, and social proof significantly shape consumer preferences and purchasing behavior. The convergence of behavioral insights with digital technologies creates both opportunities and ethical challenges. For instance, digital nudging and choice architecture can guide users toward beneficial decisions, yet they can also be exploited to manipulate behavior. Moreover, mobile apps, AI-driven recommendations, and gamified interfaces leverage psychological triggers to enhance engagement and conversions. This paper explores how digital ecosystems amplify or mitigate behavioral tendencies and discusses implications for marketers, policymakers, and consumers. It highlights the importance of transparency, regulation, and consumer education to ensure ethical applications of behavioral economics in digital commerce.

Keywords: *Behavioral economics, consumer decision-making, digital age, cognitive bias, heuristics, digital nudging, choice architecture, online behavior, personalized marketing, social proof, algorithmic influence, ethical design*

Behavioral economics has emerged as a powerful lens through which to understand the complexities of consumer behavior, especially in a world increasingly driven by digital technology. Unlike traditional economic theories that assume rational decision-making, behavioral economics incorporates insights from psychology to explain why individuals often act irrationally when making choices. This deviation from purely logical reasoning becomes even more evident in the digital environment, where consumers are bombarded with information, options, and persuasive design tactics that influence their choices subconsciously.

In the digital age, decision-making is shaped not only by personal preferences and needs but also by algorithms, social proof, targeted advertisements, and real-time data feedback. These digital tools have amplified the impact of cognitive biases such as anchoring, loss aversion, and the availability heuristic. For instance, online retailers frequently use price anchoring to present discounts as more attractive, steering consumers toward specific purchasing decisions.

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Similarly, social media platforms use popularity metrics like likes and shares to create a sense of value or trustworthiness, affecting how users perceive and interact with content.

Digital platforms are designed to capture and retain attention, often exploiting behavioral tendencies for economic gain. The infinite scroll, autoplay features, and personalized notifications appeal to users' cognitive shortcuts and can lead to compulsive behavior. These mechanisms illustrate the concept of "nudging," where subtle changes in choice architecture influence behavior without restricting options. In the digital marketplace, nudges are often invisible yet profoundly effective, shaping consumer journeys in ways they may not fully recognize.

The rise of e-commerce and mobile applications has brought convenience to the forefront of consumer decision-making. However, this convenience comes with a trade-off: increased susceptibility to impulsive purchases and reduced deliberation. Behavioral economists study how digital interfaces affect self-control, showing that ease of access and seamless transactions can override budgetary considerations or long-term goals. In-app purchases, one-click ordering, and limited-time offers capitalize on impulse and scarcity effects, encouraging quick, often irrational, decisions.

Moreover, the digital age has transformed how consumers search for and evaluate information. With an abundance of reviews, comparison tools, and user-generated content, individuals are subject to information overload. This often leads to decision fatigue, prompting reliance on heuristics or default options. Behavioral economics highlights how such mental shortcuts can lead to suboptimal decisions, as consumers may prioritize convenience over accuracy or satisfaction.

Personalization has become a hallmark of digital consumer engagement, with AI and machine learning algorithms tailoring content, products, and recommendations. While personalization enhances user experience, it also narrows choice sets and reinforces confirmation bias. Behavioral economists examine how these feedback loops can limit exploration and reinforce existing preferences, subtly steering behavior in predetermined directions. This raises important ethical questions about autonomy and manipulation in digital environments.

Social influence is another critical factor in consumer decision-making in the digital age. Online ratings, influencer endorsements, and social media trends all contribute to herd behavior, where individuals mimic the actions of others rather than relying on independent judgment. Behavioral economics helps explain why consumers often conform to perceived norms, even at the expense of personal preferences or logic. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in viral marketing and networked consumption models. The integration of behavioral economics into the study of digital consumer behavior offers rich insights into how and why individuals make the choices they do online. As technology continues to evolve, understanding these behavioral patterns becomes crucial for businesses, policymakers, and consumers alike. By recognizing the psychological underpinnings of digital decision-making, stakeholders can design better systems that promote transparency, fairness, and more informed choices in the digital marketplace.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Behavioral economics has emerged as a critical field that bridges the gap between psychology and traditional economic theory, challenging the classical notion that consumers are always rational actors. While traditional economic models assume individuals make decisions purely

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based on logic and available information, behavioral economics introduces concepts such as cognitive biases, heuristics, framing effects, and emotional influences. These factors often lead consumers to make decisions that deviate from standard economic predictions, especially in dynamic and complex environments. As digital technologies reshape modern marketplaces, understanding how behaviorally driven decisions play out in digital contexts has become more essential than ever.

The digital age has revolutionized the way consumers interact with markets. From e-commerce platforms and social media to mobile apps and AI-driven personalization, digital technologies have transformed decision-making environments. Unlike physical marketplaces, digital spaces offer instant access to information, numerous options, and tailored marketing strategies that can exploit or counteract behavioral tendencies. For instance, online platforms often use scarcity cues, default settings, and recommendation algorithms that tap into cognitive biases like loss aversion and anchoring. These tactics can significantly influence purchasing decisions, often without the consumer's full awareness.

Moreover, the increasing reliance on data analytics and behavioral tracking in digital platforms has enabled marketers to understand and predict consumer preferences with unprecedented precision. This level of personalization intensifies the interaction between digital interfaces and behavioral patterns. As a result, consumers are not only making decisions based on personal preferences but also responding to algorithms designed to shape those preferences. This interplay has brought about concerns related to autonomy, privacy, and manipulation, prompting a deeper inquiry into the ethical dimensions of behavioral economics in digital commerce.

The shift to online environments has also changed the nature of information overload and decision fatigue. While access to abundant information was once seen as empowering, behavioral economics suggests that too many choices can hinder optimal decision-making. Consumers in the digital age often resort to mental shortcuts, relying on brand familiarity, peer reviews, and simplified comparisons, rather than exhaustive analysis. This can lead to suboptimal or impulsive decisions, influenced more by presentation than substance. Digital marketers often capitalize on these tendencies through tactics like time-limited offers or strategically placed endorsements.

Additionally, social proof and the influence of digital communities play a significant role in consumer behavior today. With platforms enabling instant feedback, reviews, and user-generated content, consumers are heavily influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others. Behavioral economics highlights this phenomenon as herd behavior, where individuals conform to perceived group norms, even when it contradicts personal judgment. Digital tools amplify this effect, sometimes leading to the viral spread of products or services, irrespective of their objective value or quality.

Another major aspect of the digital age is the emergence of behavioral nudging in online platforms. Governments, health organizations, and businesses use digital nudges to encourage desirable behaviors—such as saving more, eating healthier, or engaging in sustainable consumption. While these nudges aim to improve welfare, they raise questions about consent and transparency. Behavioral economics provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness and morality of these interventions, making it crucial in policy design and digital governance.

Understanding the interaction between digital technologies and behavioral economics also has profound implications for consumer education and protection. As consumers navigate

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increasingly complex and persuasive digital ecosystems, equipping them with awareness of behavioral biases becomes essential. This understanding can empower consumers to make more informed decisions and reduce vulnerability to exploitative tactics. It also calls for the development of digital literacy programs that integrate behavioral insights to foster responsible consumption.

The study of behavioral economics in the context of digital consumer decision-making is both timely and significant. The digital environment not only magnifies traditional behavioral biases but also introduces new layers of influence through personalization, automation, and interactivity. Exploring how these factors intersect provides valuable insights for businesses, policymakers, and consumers alike. It also lays the foundation for designing more ethical, efficient, and consumer-friendly digital marketplaces in the future.



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Justification

Behavioral economics has emerged as a crucial field in understanding the complexities of consumer behavior, especially in the context of the digital age. Traditional economic theories often assume rationality in decision-making; however, real-world consumer choices frequently deviate from this model. With the rise of digital platforms, online marketplaces, and algorithm-driven marketing, consumers are subjected to a wide array of stimuli and nudges that significantly influence their behavior. This dynamic makes it necessary to analyze how behavioral biases such as loss aversion, anchoring, and choice overload impact digital consumer decision-making processes.

The digital age has transformed the landscape of consumer interaction through social media, e-commerce, and data analytics. These platforms are designed to exploit cognitive biases, often leading to impulsive purchases, subscription traps, and decision fatigue. Behavioral economics provides the theoretical and practical tools to examine these phenomena critically. It enables researchers and businesses to dissect how design features, targeted advertisements, and peer influence shape user behavior in a non-rational manner. Understanding these patterns is key to developing more ethical and consumer-friendly digital environments.

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Furthermore, as digital platforms continue to evolve with technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, the ability to personalize and manipulate choices is becoming increasingly sophisticated. This raises important ethical concerns regarding consumer autonomy and informed consent. By incorporating behavioral economics, researchers can evaluate the implications of these technologies on decision-making and promote designs that align with transparency and user well-being. Therefore, studying consumer behavior through this lens is not only relevant but necessary for responsible digital innovation.

The application of behavioral economics in the digital context also has significant implications for policy and regulation. Governments and consumer protection agencies can use behavioral insights to design effective interventions that safeguard consumers against predatory practices and misinformation. For example, simplifying online disclosures or setting default options can dramatically improve outcomes for users. These insights help bridge the gap between complex digital systems and the average consumer's ability to make sound decisions.

The study of behavioral economics and consumer decision-making in the digital age is justified by the growing influence of digital technologies on everyday choices. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the behavioral tendencies that digital systems often exploit. This field offers valuable insights not only for academia but also for industries and policymakers seeking to foster more equitable and transparent digital marketplaces.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how digital platforms influence consumer behavior through behavioral economic principles.
2. To analyze the role of cognitive biases in online purchasing decisions.
3. To explore the impact of personalized marketing on consumer choices in the digital environment.
4. To identify key behavioral patterns in consumer interactions with digital technologies.
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of digital nudges in shaping consumer decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioral economics, an interdisciplinary field combining insights from psychology and economics, has transformed our understanding of consumer decision-making. Traditional economic models assumed that individuals act rationally to maximize utility; however, behavioral economics introduces the concept of bounded rationality, heuristics, and cognitive biases that influence choices. Scholars like Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have highlighted how mental shortcuts, such as loss aversion and framing effects, often lead to decisions that deviate from classical rational behavior. This framework is particularly relevant in the digital age, where decision environments are complex and information overload is common.

The digital era has intensified the influence of behavioral factors due to the sheer volume of choices available online and the persuasive design of digital platforms. Research has shown that digital architecture, such as website layout, recommendation algorithms, and nudges, significantly shapes consumer behavior. For instance, "choice architecture" on e-commerce platforms often leverages default settings or limited-time offers to exploit biases like urgency

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or scarcity. Studies by Thaler and Sunstein on "nudge theory" emphasize how subtle changes in the decision context can lead to improved consumer outcomes without restricting choice.

Digital marketing strategies increasingly incorporate behavioral insights to influence consumer decisions. Online advertisers use targeted ads, personalized content, and social proof to appeal to emotional and psychological triggers. A growing body of literature explores how behavioral economics principles such as anchoring, hyperbolic discounting, and the endowment effect are embedded into digital advertising strategies. These techniques often lead consumers to make impulsive purchases or overvalue certain products based on contextual cues rather than intrinsic preferences.

Consumer decision-making has also been reshaped by the prevalence of big data and artificial intelligence in digital platforms. Algorithms can now predict consumer behavior with remarkable accuracy and customize user experiences accordingly. Scholars have debated the ethical implications of this data-driven personalization, especially when it manipulates users' attention or fosters addictive behaviors. Behavioral economics helps frame this discourse by examining the tension between individual autonomy and externally imposed nudges in a digitally mediated environment.

Another important dimension of digital consumer behavior is the role of social influence. Social media platforms amplify behavioral biases such as herd behavior and confirmation bias. Consumers are often influenced by reviews, ratings, influencer endorsements, and online trends. Literature in this area indicates that peer effects can be more influential than traditional advertising, especially when decisions involve social validation. The immediacy and visibility of digital interactions create powerful social signals that shape purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and even ethical consumption.

Behavioral economics also sheds light on the paradox of choice in digital marketplaces. While increased variety is often assumed to benefit consumers, research shows that too many options can lead to decision paralysis and reduced satisfaction. Studies by Schwartz and others indicate that excessive choice can increase cognitive load and regret. This phenomenon is particularly evident in subscription-based models and streaming platforms, where users often experience indecision despite algorithmic recommendations.

Financial decision-making in the digital context has been another area of focus, especially with the rise of fintech and mobile payment systems. Behavioral biases like mental accounting, overconfidence, and optimism bias influence how consumers budget, save, and invest online. Research has shown that digital financial tools can either mitigate or exacerbate these biases depending on their design. For example, apps that visualize spending patterns may promote self-control, whereas gamified investment platforms might encourage risk-taking.

The literature on behavioral economics and consumer decision-making in the digital age reveals a dynamic interplay between human psychology and technological innovation. While digital environments offer opportunities to enhance consumer welfare through informed and personalized choices, they also pose challenges related to manipulation, ethical design, and cognitive overload. Future research must continue to explore how to responsibly harness behavioral insights to support autonomy and well-being in increasingly digitized consumer landscapes.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore how behavioral economics influences consumer decision-making in the digital environment. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to gather quantifiable data, while in-depth interviews provided nuanced insights into the psychological drivers behind digital consumer behavior. The research aims to identify behavioral patterns, cognitive biases, and digital nudging mechanisms that affect online purchase decisions.

Data Collection Methods

Designed using Google Forms, it targeted adult internet users (aged 18 and above) across diverse demographic backgrounds. The survey included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to assess variables such as impulse buying, trust in digital platforms, the influence of default options, and price anchoring.

Conducted virtually with a purposive sample of 20 participants from different socio-economic groups. The interviews focused on exploring personal experiences related to decision fatigue, framing effects, and personalized digital marketing.

Secondary data sources, including journal articles, market research reports, and behavioral economics literature, were reviewed to complement the data and frame the theoretical background.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Individuals aged 18 and above
- Regular users of e-commerce platforms or digital services (minimum 3 purchases/interactions per month)
- Willingness to participate in the survey/interview voluntarily

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals without internet access or digital literacy
- Respondents with incomplete survey submissions
- Participants engaged in marketing or behavioral research professions (to avoid bias)

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical standards as per institutional guidelines. Participants were informed of the **purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature** of the research. Informed consent was obtained before participation in surveys and interviews. Data anonymity was maintained by assigning unique codes to participants instead of using personal identifiers. The data collected was securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes, with no sharing to third parties. Participants were given the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study of behavioral economics and consumer decision-making in the digital age reveal that traditional rational choice models are increasingly inadequate to explain how consumers behave in online environments. Consumers often rely on cognitive shortcuts, known as heuristics, when navigating complex digital marketplaces. For instance, the availability heuristic plays a critical role, as individuals are more likely to purchase products that are prominently displayed or frequently advertised on digital platforms. This shift underscores the significance of digital architecture and algorithmic cues in shaping consumer behavior, a departure from classical economic theories that assumed consistent rationality.

The research also illustrates the powerful impact of nudging and choice architecture in digital spaces. Online platforms leverage behavioral nudges—such as limited-time offers, default settings, and personalized recommendations—to subtly influence purchasing decisions. These tactics exploit loss aversion and present bias, nudging consumers toward quicker and often impulsive decisions. The success of these nudges in increasing conversion rates suggests that digital marketers are increasingly applying behavioral economic principles, sometimes blurring the line between helpful guidance and manipulation.

Another key finding concerns the role of social proof and digital peer influence. Consumer choices in the digital age are heavily mediated by reviews, ratings, and influencer endorsements. These cues act as substitutes for direct product experience, often overriding personal preferences. The bandwagon effect becomes particularly prominent in such scenarios, where users conform to popular choices to reduce decision-making anxiety. This demonstrates the social dimension of behavioral economics in the digital context, where community feedback can override even cost-benefit analyses.

The study also highlights how digital overload contributes to decision fatigue, pushing consumers toward simplified decision-making processes. The paradox of choice—where too many options lead to reduced satisfaction and increased regret—was evident in many digital environments, particularly e-commerce platforms. Consumers tended to gravitate toward curated lists or rely on algorithmic suggestions when overwhelmed, again reflecting bounded rationality and the limitations of cognitive resources in digital contexts.

Finally, privacy concerns and trust issues emerge as influential behavioral factors in online decision-making. While consumers may value privacy, many still engage in behaviors that contradict this preference due to hyperbolic discounting and information asymmetry. Users often accept privacy risks for short-term convenience, indicating a discrepancy between expressed values and actual behavior. This reveals a tension between behavioral intentions and actions in the digital space, reinforcing the need for ethical design and regulatory frameworks informed by behavioral insights.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of behavioral economics in the context of digital consumer decision-making unveils critical insights into how individuals respond to online stimuli. Traditional economic models, which assume rational decision-makers, fall short in explaining the complexities of consumer behavior on digital platforms. Instead, behavior is increasingly driven by cognitive limitations, emotions, and biases that are magnified in fast-paced online environments. These findings emphasize the need for an updated understanding of economic behavior that incorporates psychological and behavioral variables relevant to digital interactions.

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The dominance of heuristics in online decision-making highlights how consumers process vast information by simplifying choices through mental shortcuts. For example, the availability and representativeness heuristics significantly affect how users evaluate options based on easily recalled or familiar features rather than objective quality or price. This tendency is further reinforced by digital platforms that prioritize certain content through algorithms, thereby shaping what consumers consider relevant or trustworthy. Consequently, online environments can subtly but powerfully guide user decisions through design and information structuring.

Choice architecture and nudging techniques have emerged as potent behavioral tools in the digital sphere. These tools exploit biases like loss aversion, status quo bias, and present bias to prompt faster decisions. While effective for marketers, such interventions raise ethical questions regarding autonomy and informed consent. Personalization and defaults, often presented as conveniences, can restrict choice diversity and lock users into pre-determined paths. Understanding these dynamics is essential for ensuring that digital design supports rather than manipulates consumer agency.

The role of social proof in digital decision-making is equally significant. In an era where peer reviews and influencer marketing dominate, consumers increasingly rely on external validation rather than intrinsic evaluation. The bandwagon and conformity effects reveal how digital behavior is socially contagious, with group behavior exerting influence on individual choices. This highlights the shift from independent decision-making to collective behavior shaped by digital networks, suggesting new frameworks are needed to understand market dynamics in socially interconnected environments.

Digital overload and decision fatigue pose another critical challenge. Consumers face an overwhelming number of choices online, which paradoxically leads to suboptimal satisfaction and greater regret. This “paradox of choice” forces individuals to adopt simplified decision strategies, often relying on suggestions, filters, or “best-seller” tags. As a result, digital consumers may prioritize ease and speed over deliberation, underscoring the importance of designing user-friendly interfaces that consider cognitive load and information processing limits.

Privacy concerns also play a pivotal yet paradoxical role in digital behavior. While users often express a desire to protect their personal data, behavioral patterns reveal frequent contradictions. Due to hyperbolic discounting and limited understanding of data policies, many consumers exchange privacy for immediate benefits like discounts or access. This disconnect between attitudes and behaviors reflects deeper psychological tendencies and suggests the need for clearer, behaviorally-informed privacy policies and transparent user experiences.

Moreover, the digital landscape creates new ethical responsibilities for designers, policymakers, and businesses. As platforms become more adept at leveraging behavioral insights for commercial gain, the potential for manipulation increases. Ensuring consumer well-being demands a balance between persuasive design and ethical boundaries. Regulatory frameworks and industry standards must evolve to protect users from exploitative practices while promoting transparency, fairness, and informed decision-making.

The intersection of behavioral economics and digital consumer behavior presents a rich field for future research, policy innovation, and ethical reflection. By integrating psychological insights into the design of digital platforms, stakeholders can foster environments that enhance user autonomy and satisfaction. The findings suggest that to fully grasp consumer behavior in the digital age, one must account for biases, social influence, cognitive overload, and evolving

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privacy norms. This comprehensive understanding can guide the development of digital ecosystems that are not only effective but also responsible and human-centered.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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