
Book review: Consumer behavior: A digital native

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by Jain, V. and Sheth, J.

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This book is written on the emerging trend of digital natives and online consumer behavior by the new-age customers who prefer to spend most of their time online and use the internet and social media for their product experience and interaction. The authors of this book have used case studies from Global and Indian scenarios to highlight the importance of the digital interaction between the native, i.e. the consumer and the service provider. The first five chapters of this book focus on the general aspects and salient features of the study of consumer behavior and its impact on the way in which corporations and organizations understand the information exchange process in lieu of the value being partaken by the digital native. This book is the result of many iterations and research publications compiled and assessed over the years by the authors spanning multiple countries and business environments. The study presented in this book focuses on the unique behavior of digital consumers in the online market.

In the first chapter, the authors talk about the basics of digital marketing and consumer behavior and bring out the evolution of consumer behavior over the decades. The authors explain the emergence of the new-age digital consumer or the digital native, who places utmost importance on the online experience and expects digitized customization. According to the author, India has emerged as one of the leading markets for online business, and the digital natives expect local connectivity and real-time consumer experiences on a regular basis.

The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework and models related to consumer perception and talks about a few case studies from the global context, such as Nokia. The chapter delves deeply into the theories and postulates around the concept of stimuli and perception. Also, an in-depth explanation is given for the relationship between the behavior of brands and consumer psychology. Again, the authors focus on a very basic explanation and try to link established theories on consumer behavior with the expected behavior of digital natives.

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The authors expand further into the psychological breakdown of the consumers in the online space in the third chapter by discussing the elements of learning and how digital natives would learn and absorb new pieces of information. The chapter uses interesting case studies like Indigo and OLX to explain how digital natives learn and experience new consumer interactions with companies which operate in the online marketplace. This chapter becomes highly theoretical and technical in the middle, where it explains the different theories related to learning. Toward the end of the chapter, the authors also touch upon the importance of memory and the role it plays in the process of learning. Important aspects of the Response Theory or the Neo Pavlovian Theory are discussed in detail in this chapter.

The authors then move to the concept of consumer motivation and try to understand the underlying impetus which drives consumers toward need-based buying behavior. The chapter then goes on to explain various classical motivation theories like the Drive Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and McGuire's Theory of Motivation for understanding the need assessment of the online consumer and the digital native. This chapter is able to succinctly bring out the relationship between arousal, cognition and attribution but seems to ponder excessively on the theoretical antecedents of the consumer's motivation and needs. The digital native is touched upon briefly toward the end of this chapter, and the case study on Axis Bank proves to be very helpful in understanding the theories discussed in the chapter in light of the practical behavior of digital consumers.

In chapter five, the authors focus on another basic aspect of consumer behavior, i.e. beliefs, values, lifestyle, attitude and personality. The opening case study tries to introduce the changing beliefs and attitudes of consumers of Starbucks. The case study looks at the importance of beliefs and attitudes in the service delivery context. The chapter again goes on to delve deep into these factors with a generic approach and touches upon the behavior of digital consumers briefly. This chapter, like the previous four chapters before, is very generic and gives an overview of the basic concepts related to consumer behavior. Theories on personality, such as the Freudian Theory, are also discussed in this chapter by the authors. Important concepts like the values, attitude and lifestyle (VALS) of consumers and marketing strategies were also explained in this chapter. The closing case study in this chapter on Flipkart-The Lifestyle and Persona of Indian Consumers was found to be useful in understanding the consumer mindset of Indian online digital natives.

As we move toward chapter six, the book starts truly explaining the role played by the online social media platforms and digital devices in altering the landscape of consumer behavior. The opening case study on KFC's social media strategy and campaign launched in the year 2013-14 was very helpful in explaining how the digital consumer is impacted by the prevalence and penetration of the digital platform. Integration of media and its influence on consumer behavior is an important topic discussed in this chapter, in which factors like the ease of accessibility and personalization, ease of information and sharing are discussed further. Additionally, online shopping and mobile behavior are very important concepts elaborated on by the authors using concepts like Research Online and Purchase Offline (ROPO) (and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)). This chapter very cogently raises the issue of consumer empowerment and enablement. Finally, the chapter discusses the importance of online research and explores the reasons which may compel the digital native to explore other brands and products.

As we move to chapter seven of the book, the authors introduce the concept of reference groups. Traditionally, reference groups have always played a significant role in the development of consumer sentiments and have influenced the behavior of the consumer. In the context of the digital native, reference groups play a major role in influencing their decision-making process. The case study on Uber was used by the authors to explain the concept of sharing information between digital natives. Reference groups traditionally play a significant role in establishing a connection between consumers and organizations. The outer and digital manifestations of the consumers play a strong role in establishing the role being

played by reference groups in the decision-making process. Other dimensions like membership, social tie strength, contact type and attractions are also very important when evaluating the effect of reference groups on the behavior of the digital native.

As we move to chapter eight, the authors take up another important element of consumer behavior, albeit in the digital context, i.e. the influence of culture. Factors like family composition, education and linguistic roots of consumers play a major role in affecting the behavior of the digital consumer. Other important factors like the level of employment, social status and economic purchasing capacity also play a major role in shaping the preference of the digital consumer. An interesting observation in this chapter is the effect of caste-based dynamics and economic modalities on how consumers behave and respond to the marketing stimuli. This chapter throws light on various factors and parameters from daily life-like, fashion, lifestyle, family and others.

Chapter nine explores in detail the various theories and concepts related to the process of information processing. The digital consumer is studied from the Indian and Global contexts, and the various concepts and theories on information processing and explained elaborately. Theories like the Hypodermic Needle Theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action are explained with examples and scenarios. This chapter was very cumbersome in its explanation and took a lot of pain in trying to lay out all the theories around consumer psychology, semiotics and behavior.

Chapter ten touches upon the concept of the actual decision-making that digital consumers have to go through to arrive at a purchasing decision. Two relevant case scenarios are discussed in the TATA group and the online furniture industry to help the readers understand the complexities involved in the process. Concepts related to aesthetics, payment methods and warranties are explained, and their roles in the consumer decision-making process are highlighted with relevant examples. Problem-solving is an integral part of the decision-making process, and the authors go to great lengths in trying to explain how the various factors involved in this.

Toward the end of the book, chapter eleven touches upon the role of luxury branding and how various factors come together to influence the mind of the digital consumer. The role of celebrities is also discussed in this chapter, which was unique. The authors explain the exclusiveness of luxury brands and discuss theories surrounding them. Other factors, like reference groups, are also discussed in this chapter.

To conclude, it can be said that this book goes to great depths on this subject and brings out many aspects of the digital consumer behavior of the native. However, this book could have been made more engaging and interesting by addressing some of the points mentioned below:

The first point noted was that although the case studies discussed in each of the eleven chapters were interesting and engaging, it was observed that some of those case studies could have been more product- or sector-specific, i.e. the example of e-commerce sites and online portals could have been used more rigorously. The authors could have tried to give relevant Indian and Global examples. The theoretical aspects of the topics were discussed in detail, and in some cases, i.e. from chapters one to five, it was found that the authors could have been more digital specific, and the examples and theories could have been inclined more toward the online native, who was the intended target of this book.

Secondly, this book is a good effort in the relatively new domain of online digital marketing, and further research could be done on the behavior of the online consumer. This book has not touched upon the core subject concepts in the domain of digital marketing, such as content optimization, content creation (Bala & Verma, 2018), paid social media (Fulgoni, 2015) and the role of influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This book has focused primarily on the behavior of the digital consumer and should also try to focus on the various theories of literature on digital marketing in its subsequent editions (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2020). Most of the

research done for this book is related to classical consumer behavior and marketing, and these theories have been used to explain the behavior of digital consumers.

The third point noted was that this book could be a useful tool for the layman reader, who may not be well-versed in the concepts related to the behavior of the digital native. Subsequent editions of this book can delve further into important concepts of digital marketing like Omni-Channel Marketing (Cui *et al.*, 2020; Payne *et al.*, 2017), Game Theory (Kannan, 2017) and Generational Theory (Katunina & Kashtanova, 2018), among others. These theories should try to focus on the approach that companies can take when creating their digital marketing strategies for their digital natives in the online space. This book could be better projected as a possible link between the industry and academia, but with more suitable and relevant examples. More real-life examples may be used in the subsequent editions to establish the link between the industry and academia.

The fourth point noted was related to the topics of digital marketing and consumer behavior, which are relatively new areas of research in which the developments are happening at a break-neck speed. With the excessive use of social media and digitization in daily life, consumer interactions are becoming fleeting and faster than before. This book can be a precursor to more research to come in the areas of digital marketing and online consumer behavior. Organizations may need more research which can also be validated with data from different markets (and not just the Indian perspective).

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