

6.6: Consumer Journey: The Circular Model

McKinsey.com (2000) also proposes a competing model, a **circular model** for the consumer journey. The model is circular because consumers enter a loyalty loop, where they move between using a product or brand, buying this product or brand again, participating in post purchase activities, and so on. The McKinsey model has the following stages:

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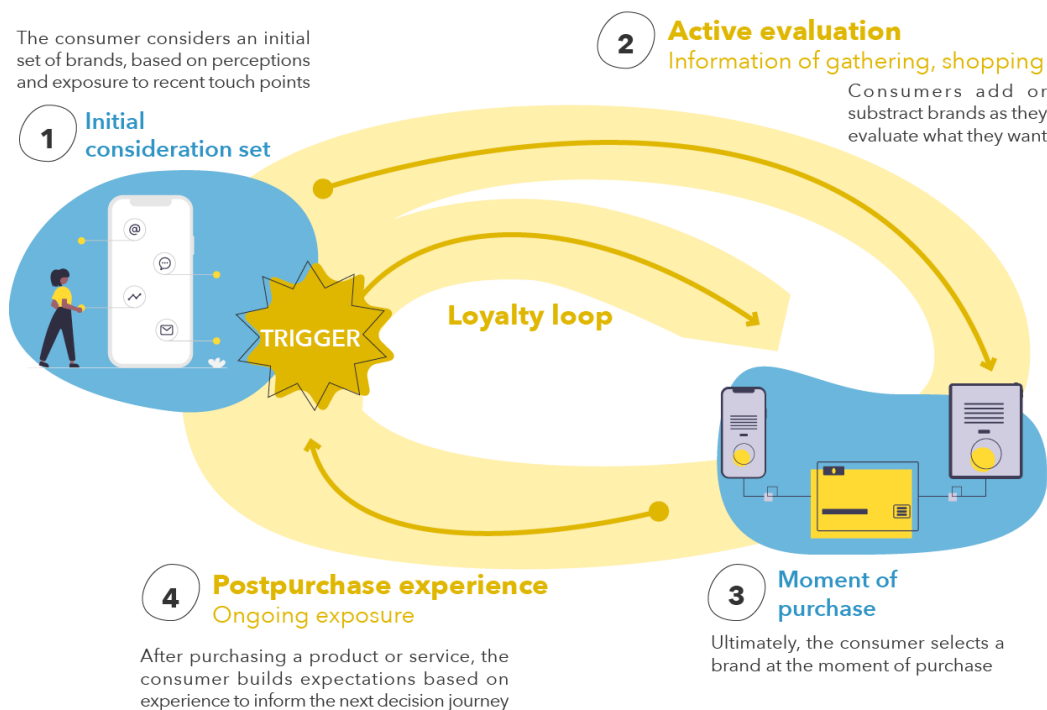


Figure 6.6 Consumer Journey: The Circular Model

1. Trigger: The consumer experiences a need, problem, or want to achieve a goal, which initiates their journey
2. Initial consideration set: The consumer considers an initial set of brands, based on their experiences, brand perceptions, and exposure to recent touch points. For the initial consideration-set, the most influential touchpoint is company-driven marketing, such as advertising, direct marketing, sponsorship, and the likes. See [a graphic representation here](#).
3. Active evaluation: This is a new stage introduced by McKinsey. At this stage, the consumer actively evaluates their options through information gathering and shopping. Often, consumers will do information gathering online. It is at this stage that consumers *add* brands to their consideration set. We are not in a funnel model anymore. This is the first difference of importance for digital marketers: It means we can enter consumers' consideration-set without having to do awareness-generating campaigns. If we help consumers make their decisions or if we have reviews online, for example, they can consider us. McKinsey finds that the most influential touchpoint for this stage is consumer-driven marketing, such as word-of-mouth, the information found during online searches, and reviews.
4. Moment of purchase: The consumer selects a brand, which they purchase.
5. Post-purchase experience: The consumer builds expectations based on their experience after purchasing a product or a service. This will inform the loyalty loop. A second important difference with the funnel journey happens at this stage: Consumers start creating content for brands (i.e., the 'consumer-driven marketing' efforts I refer to in stage '3'). Think about products or services you bought recently: Maybe you posted [a picture about it on Instagram](#), maybe you wrote a review [on Yelp!](#), or maybe you participated in some company-supported marketing activities (Instagram, 2024; Yelp, 2024).

These two important revisions to the journey—the expansion of the consideration set during active evaluation and the importance of consumers in participating in consumer-driven marketing at the post-purchase stage—open up many content-based possibilities for digital marketers. As we remember, our goal in digital marketing is to *represent the customer*: What are their needs? Goals?

Problems? How can we help them address these? Our objectives are not to sell products or talk about our brand. Rather, we will see that we make sales online by supporting consumers throughout their journey—helping them understand their problem, helping them evaluate solutions, and helping them better understand our product.

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