



# the consumer mindmap<sup>®</sup>

DECODING DECISION-MAKING IN AN ERA OF NEW INFORMATION

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## executive summary

Today's consumers have access to more information than ever before. Long gone are the days when consumers had to rely on one product review or a single recommendation from a friend as they considered purchases.

Increased access to information has transformed how consumers learn about and evaluate potential purchases. But even though research and planning methods have changed, models that explain the decision-making process have remained relatively the same. To understand what consumers need throughout their decision-making process, marketers must also evolve from traditional funnel and path-to-purchase models.

Enter the MindMap®. The MindMap offers a more nuanced understanding of the mindsets consumers work through when making decisions and the factors that affect them throughout the process. Using the MindMap, marketers can address the needs of consumers by targeting them with messaging that matters and give them the information they need during the decision-making process. The MindMap focuses on a consumer and content approach, so the model can be applied to any audience and offers insight for industries ranging from foodservice and finance to travel and tourism.

So, if you're looking for the inside track on your target audiences, ditch the funnel and let us show you how the MindMap can help you better understand the decision-making process, reach your customers when it matters and deliver the content they need.

# background

## BREAKING DOWN THE TRADITIONAL FUNNEL

The consumer decision-making process and path to purchase have long been perplexing topics, often resulting in more questions than answers. Many models have been created to illustrate how consumers evaluate and select purchases, while others attempt to demonstrate how marketers and businesses can influence consumer decision-making. Even though there are a variety of models available, questions still exist about how this process actually works and if current models are truly articulating it.

Linear and tactic-focused models are currently the most popular methods of visualizing how consumers make decisions. Both models are easily understood but their effectiveness is limited. Linear models lack fluidity and illustrate the decision process as phases that work independently, portraying that consumers “graduate” from phase to phase. Tactic-focused models center on marketers instead of consumers, lacking actual insight to how consumers work toward decisions. And neither model acknowledges the impact of previous knowledge and emotion on decisions.



THE LINEAR FUNNEL MODEL IS BROKEN.



Models in the past have used step-by-step, linear representations to explain how consumers make decisions; however, as anyone who’s ever made a decision knows, it’s anything but linear or systematic. Today’s consumers are inundated with reviews, results and recommendations. Adding to the complexity, choices can be made, unmade or even rearranged after reviewing information across sources and devices.

Adults make approximately 35,000 decisions a day (Hoomans, 2015) and have access to more information than any time in history (SINTEF, 2013). Increased access to information is changing how consumers review and consider decisions.

**As consumers change, how we model and consider the decision-making process should change as well.** With a cluttered media landscape and consumers seeking an abundance of information, it’s important for marketers to have a more accurate picture of how decisions are made and how the process can be influenced.

# a limited view of consumer decision-making

Psychological research tells us that emotion is at the core of what drives our decision-making capabilities. Humans cannot make decisions if they cannot access their emotional capabilities to help them weigh options and select preferences (Damasio, 1994). Along with the impact of emotion, people also contend with mental pitfalls that are created by their finite base of knowledge and experience. Challenges such as availability bias (Thompson, 2013), peer influence and the urge to uphold the status quo sway consumers from rational decision-making (McFadden, 2013).

*Psychological research tells us that emotion is at the core of what drives our decision-making capabilities.*

**The linear construction of many current models contradicts how the decision-making process occurs and assumes that all consumers take the same path to purchase.**

But humans do not work through one phase at a time or consider information in a vacuum. Instead, consumers take in new information, access previous knowledge and evaluate simultaneously (Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2017). The process often uses a blend of mental actions working together, with the consumer mentally moving back and forth to determine the usefulness of information.

The omission of emotion and knowledge in current models ignores the mental work consumers do while making decisions and, in turn, limits marketers' ability to understand the process and how they can influence consumers. The rigid construction of current models also proves problematic since they don't account for the unpredictability of how consumers move through the process. These limitations lead us to reconsider and reimagine how we model decision-making.



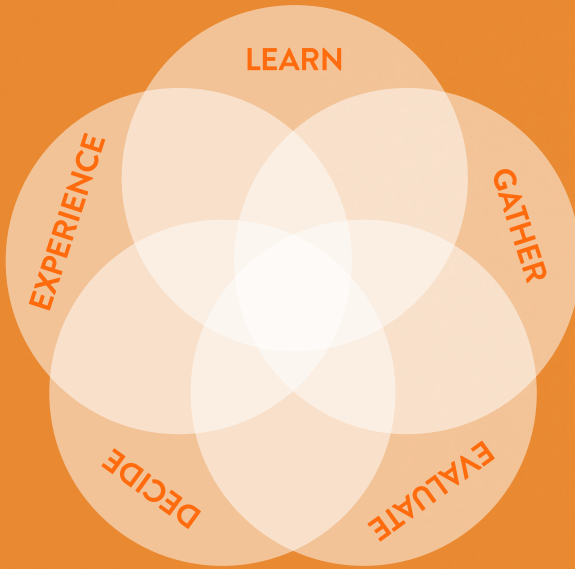


# four things a decision-making model needs

Current models lack aspects that thoroughly explain the consumer decision-making process, both in construction and content.

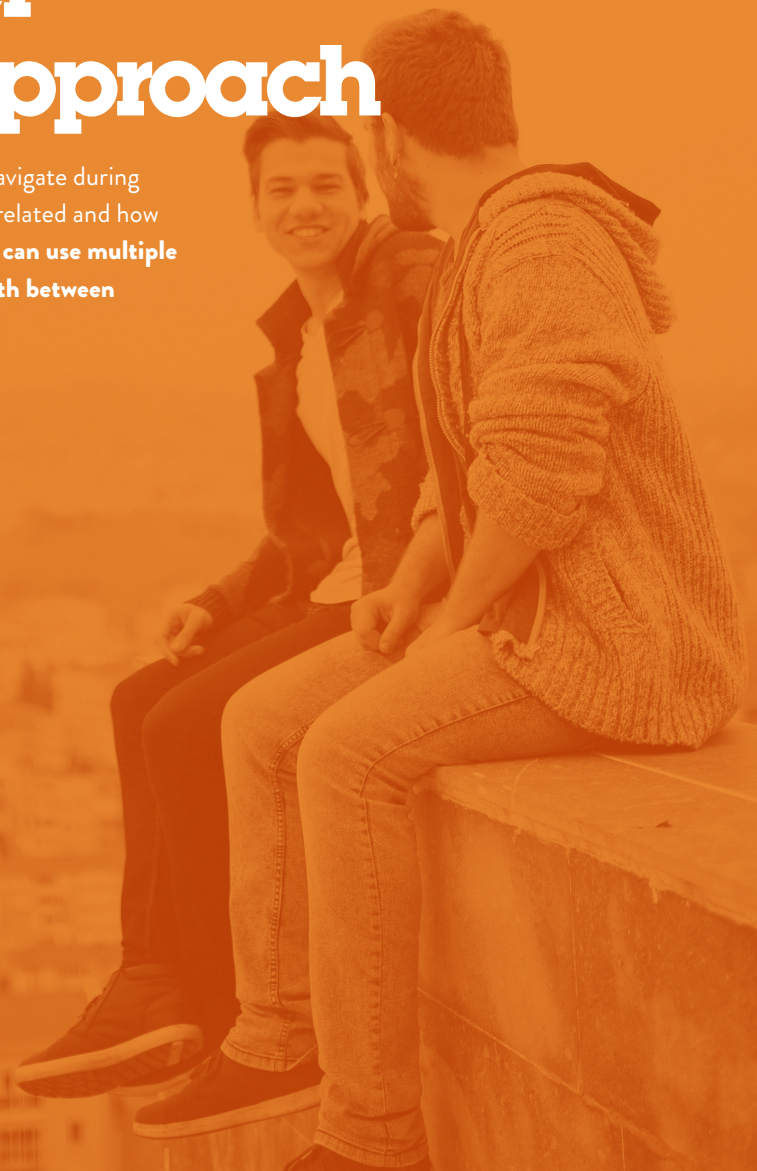
- 1 An effective model should be **consumer focused** and offer a clear and accurate explanation of the decision-making process.
- 2 A decision-making model must also explain how the decision path can be **different for each consumer**, including how previous experience, emotion and new information work together in the process.
- 3 A decision-making model must show **how consumers are inspired** to start the process and move in and out of their opinions, emotions and experiences in a fluid fashion.
- 4 A decision-making model should **illuminate how consumers work through decisions** to align marketing in a personalized and relevant way.

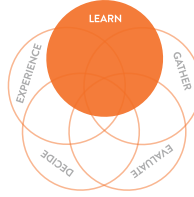




# the consumer mindmap<sup>®</sup> approach

The MindMap interconnects the mindsets consumers navigate during the decision-making process, showing how they're interrelated and how fluidly consumers can move between them. **Consumers can use multiple mindsets at once, skip mindsets or move back-and-forth between mindsets as they progress toward making a purchase.**





## LEARN

We acquire information both consciously and subconsciously throughout our lives. This acquisition of information creates knowledge. **The Learn mindset acknowledges that consumers come into the decision-making process with previous experiences that will influence decisions.** The consumer's base of knowledge informs their emotions, beliefs and biases, and will be accessed when evaluating and determining the worth of new information.

The Learn mindset is created by factors that marketers can and cannot affect. A consumer's opinion of a product can be influenced by sources that are outside of our control, such as news stories, conversations with friends or movies. Likewise, marketers can affect perception by inserting our brands into the day-to-day lives of consumers, having a consistent presence and optimizing messaging to position ourselves in the way we wish to be perceived.

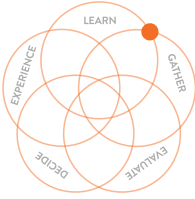
An example is how individuals think about purchasing an automobile. People don't typically think about buying a car until they need to, but they're constantly learning about vehicles through commercials, their friends' purchases and even cars that are featured in movies and on TV. This information may not be utilized at the time but is stored away and subconsciously helps us create opinions and emotions associated with brands.

### INFLUENCING THE LEARN MINDSET

*In the Learn mindset, we must think about what consumers know about our product and how we can impact overarching perceptions. Examples of this could be:*

- High-impact billboards people see on their commute
- Disruptive efforts at a sporting event
- PR efforts that tell a brand's in unique ways

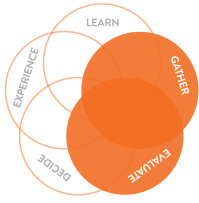




## TRIGGERS

Triggers are another aspect that previous models have not addressed. **Triggers are external events that evoke an emotional response and create wants or desires in the consumer.** Going back to our automobile example, a trigger could be something as common as being served a striking ad online or seeing a friend's new car. A trigger could also be a life event, like having a child and needing a bigger vehicle or getting a raise that allows you to upgrade your ride. Triggers can take a wide variety of forms and exist all around us. When thinking of ads as triggers, we not only have to consider if our messaging will be seen, but if our ads are distinct enough to stand out from the competition and impactful enough to be remembered by consumers.





## GATHER & EVALUATE

Once a trigger has spurred the need to make a decision, individuals begin to take inventory of what they already know and what outside information they will need to make the decision. **The Gather and Evaluate mindsets are separate but should be considered together because as a consumer begins to gather information, they are evaluating simultaneously.**

The consumer will also tap the Learn mindset during evaluation, using previous knowledge and emotion to assist in the assessment of new information. This process links the Learn, Gather and Evaluate mindsets, with the individual accessing all three simultaneously.

As information is gathered and evaluated, the consumer creates a set of options that may fulfill the wants that were triggered. The set of options changes as the consumer gathers and evaluates new information, with options moving into the set or being eliminated as the consumer continues to move back and forth through the first three mindsets. **As options are being evaluated, the consumer uses the new information, previous knowledge and emotion to imagine the experience each option may offer, along with determining if the experience fulfills the consumer's desires.**

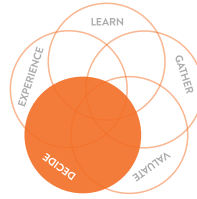
As the individual gathers and evaluates information, what they want may change as well – becoming clearer or evolving based on what the consumer is learning from new information and what they imagine the experience with the product will be like. For example, a consumer's desire may evolve from wanting a car to wanting an SUV with four-wheel drive because they believe the vehicle fits their lifestyle and will make winter driving easier.

While it's true consumers can always gather more information, in these phases, evaluation is based on what they're learning and what they already know – they're working with relatively limited resources. This reminder reiterates the importance of crafting messaging that's clear, easy to distinguish and easy to find.

### AFFECTING THE GATHER AND EVALUATE MINDSETS

*As described previously, the Gather and Evaluate mindsets work together. When entering the Gather mindset, consumers will be taking inventory of what they know about the decision and determining the information they need to answer their questions. The Gather and Evaluate mindsets require us to answer consumers' questions with efforts that not only educate and inform, but also help consumers to imagine the experiences they can have with a product. Efforts could focus on:*

- Showcasing well-known products or attractions
- Educating consumers about little known hidden gems and local favorites
- Sharing unique, first-person perspectives, reviews and stories



## DECIDE

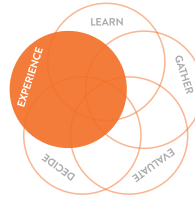
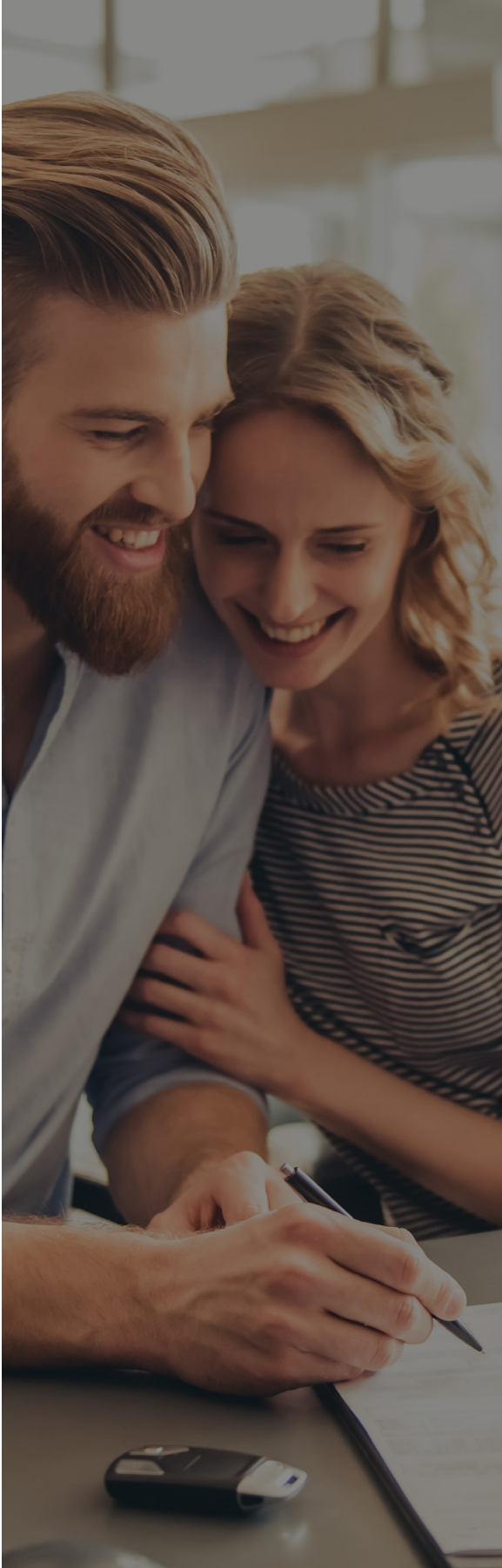
Eventually the consumer will need to make a decision, selecting the best option from the decision set. **Once a decision is made, new wants and questions arise, and the consumer continues to seek information.** Purchasing an automobile is a great example of this chain reaction. In this mindset, a consumer purchasing a car will need even more details about the vehicle, including color options, additional features and where they can make the purchase. This is an example of how the Decide mindset can interact with the Learn, Gather and Evaluate mindsets. As this happens, the consumer continues to imagine what the selected experience will be like and how the subsequent decisions will impact the experience they hope to have.

### LEVERAGING THE DECISION MINDSET

*As shown with the car purchasing example, one decision often creates the need to make subsequent decisions. Marketers must anticipate the subsequent questions consumers will have once an initial decision is completed and make sure the needed information is easily accessible. Marketers can capitalize on these types of needs by providing:*

- *Details and comparisons about options*
- *Tools that make purchasing easier and more intuitive*
- *Content that can help consumers attain the experience they've imagined*





## EXPERIENCE

In many linear models, the experience is considered the end of the funnel, but the MindMap views the Experience mindset as a more complex interaction that influences the four other mindsets.

As the consumer makes a purchase, the **Experience mindset feeds new information to the Learn mindset, confirming or rejecting the assumptions the consumer had imagined earlier.** This information becomes part of the Learn mindset and will be influential the next time the consumer is triggered to consider a purchase.

The Experience mindset influences the Gather, Evaluate and Decide mindsets as well. As the consumer is experiencing their purchase, the consumer will form new questions and need to seek out new information. For example, our car buyer may wonder how often the car should be serviced, if the car would look better with new rims or if the driving experience would be better with satellite radio. No matter the question, this is an opportunity to reengage the consumer and create deeper relationships with your customers.

### CAPITALIZING ON THE EXPERIENCE MINDSET

*The Experience mindset offers marketers abundant opportunities to engage with their customers and drive spending. Serving consumers information during the Experience mindset can influence their purchase in real time and spur additional spending by creating preferences as they decide the details of their purchase. This also influences consumers' knowledge about the product and will impact future purchasing decisions.*

# using the mindmap<sup>®</sup>

Consumers can be influenced in each mindset because they continuously need information throughout the MindMap.

**The key to using the MindMap is to focus on the needs of the consumer during each mindset. What are we saying to consumers, and does the content matter to them?** This puts the consumer and messaging first, placing the focus on how content can meet the needs of the consumer instead of the marketer.

Personalized messaging is more important than ever.

Content that is one-size-fits-all will be lost in the clutter and overlooked, but content that highlights personalized interests and offers pertinent information will persuade the audience to engage. With the MindMap we can understand consumers' needs on a deeper level, produce relevant content and speak to them in a more personalized fashion throughout their decision cycle.



# conclusion

The MindMap® offers a truer representation of how consumers make decisions. The fluidity of the MindMap illustrates how the decision-making process can be unique to each consumer – with consumers being able to jump from mindset to mindset, move back and forth or even skip mindsets altogether.

This more thorough understanding of the decision-making process also shows that consumers need information throughout the purchase journey. Considering each mindset, and how they work together, allows marketers to have a better understanding of the needs and type of information individuals will want during each touchpoint. Knowing what consumers need paired with the right timing lets us speak to them in a more personalized and direct way.





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