

4 Frameworks for Mapping Customer Decision Journeys

Selecting the right journey framework ensures actionable insights



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Overview

Whether you're a CPG brand manager or a B2B marketer, your customer's decision journeys are complex, dynamic and easily disrupted by new options and inputs – online and offline. Today's path to purchase for consumers, business professionals and healthcare decision makers is influenced by technology and media that didn't even exist a few years ago.

If you want to create impactful and efficient marketing strategies to attract, convert and retain your customers, you must be equipped with, an accurate understanding of their decision journey today.

Customer decision journey mapping helps brands develop strategies by answering three key questions:

1. What are the strategic touchpoints in the decision journeys?
2. What are the content expectations at these touchpoints?
3. What are the friction points and desired experiences for customers?

Decision journeys can vary significantly within a category thanks to a variety of factors. Think of the journey framework as the scaffolding upon which the customer journey is built. At SKIM we have identified four journey frameworks that capture our clients' most common customer journeys. We use a range of research methodologies to effectively map the customer decision journey. However, selecting the correct framework for our client's industry lays the groundwork for the most accurate, and actionable customer journey maps.

Four frameworks for mapping customer decision journeys

The Planned Journey



The (Disrupted) Habitual Journey



The Ecosystem Journey



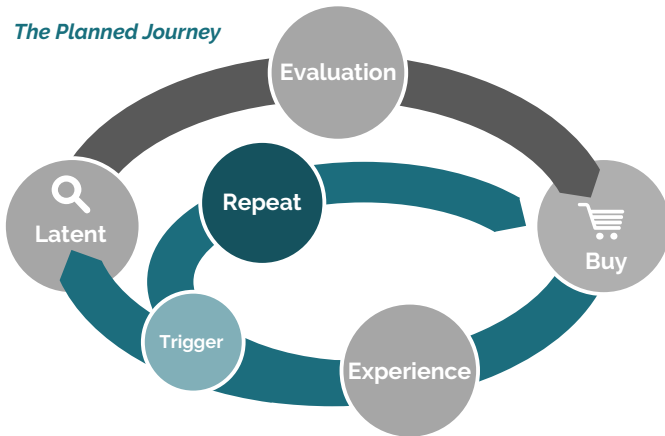
The Patient-Centric Journey





Framework #1: The Planned Journey

The Planned Journey



Applicable industries

Automobiles, financial services, telecommunications and consumer electronics

What it looks like

The planned journey is characterized by a longer decision journey that unfolds in stages wherein customers research products and services purchased relatively infrequently. Viewing the journey through latent, evaluation, and buying stages can reveal new ideas for optimizing the customer experience. Familiar or popular brands may dominate the initial consideration set in the latent stage, but as consumers discuss choices with others and conduct research online, they may conclude that another brand better meets their needs in a later stage.

When to use it

The planned journey framework works best when consumers tend to deliberate on their choices over an extended period of time. The key to this framework is to identify distinctive stages in the decision journey and connect the dots across those stages.

“Resources should be aligned with the most influential touchpoints at different stages.”

Framework in action

Telecom is an incredibly competitive space where a significant amount of money is spent on advertising. However, the shelf life of new advertising is short and often measured in the unit of weeks. A major US telecom company realized they were lacking a foundational understanding of how consumers choose wireless providers, while their marketing and advertising teams were occupied with tactical executions and competitive responses. To inform their strategic direction, SKIM conducted a category-specific consumer decision journey mapping exercise.

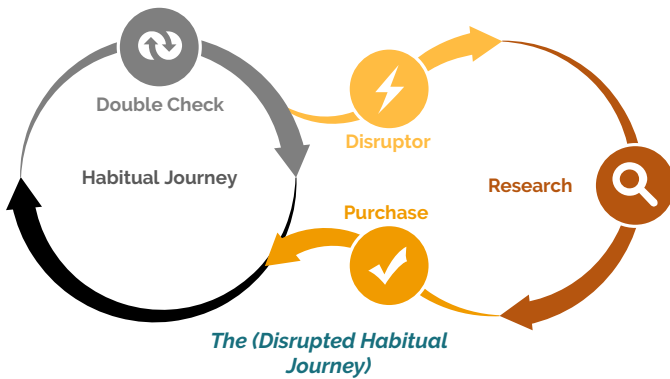
Our study uncovered that “network” and “value” were the dominant drivers of brand consideration in the latent phase. Moving into the buying phase, the most important drivers were “plan” and “data.” Using a staged model, we can see how information needs evolve as the customer journey progresses.

The implications for the telecom provider and other brands mapping a Planned Journey are clear:

- > Brands need to measure performance metrics at various stages of the journey, not just overall performance.
- > Brand messaging must evolve as consumers move from one stage to another.
- > Resources should be aligned with the most influential touchpoints at different stages.



Framework #2: The (Disrupted) Habitual Journey



Applicable industries

CPG and OTC goods such as health and beauty, household consumables, pet food

What it looks like

The defining characteristic of the disrupted habitual journey is the shopping trigger. For example, you should consider if this a routine reorder, or is the consumer choosing a different product? In general, a disrupted journey in which a consumer switches products presents an opportunity for your brand; it involves a certain level of active research and is therefore no longer low-involvement (a hallmark of habitual purchases). That is not to say that CPG consumers aren't subject to influence during comparatively short habitual purchases. We call this "the double-check moment."

When to use it

The habitual journey framework is most relevant when consumers make frequent purchases with relatively low involvement. A routine is established, but it can be easily disrupted if the cost of switching is low. When disruption happens, consumers go out of their routine and engage active research. It represents a huge opportunity for brands where category involvement is generally low. It is important to focus on the disruptive moments and the journey following it.

Framework in action

A global beauty brand selected to acquire new omnichannel insights into the beauty and facial care category to support a new e-commerce product launch. Our research revealed a clear omnichannel behavior pattern and oversized digital influence within this habitual journey, although the majority of purchases still take place in brick-and-mortar storefronts.

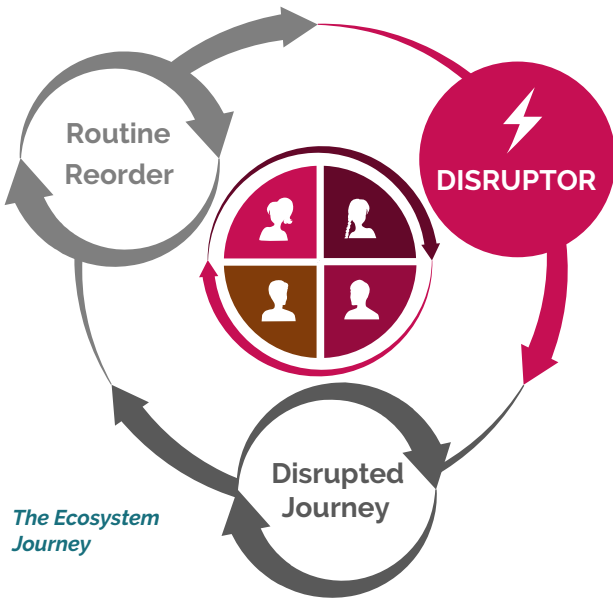
In the U.S., a majority of beauty product consumers who purchase in a physical store began their journey with a digital touchpoint. Consumers often bypass search engines and go directly to Amazon and online specialists to explore the range of products available, read reviews and compare prices, even for offline purchases. For many offline purchases, a decision is made prior to going to the store, which suggests early opportunities to influence consumers. However, when consumers switch products, they are in more active mode of research and show a completely different pattern of touchpoints from the routine purchase. Consumers engage less deal-seeking activities, but focus more on content-rich touchpoints. For brands, the implications are profound:

- > Search optimization is no longer limited to the search engine and should be extended to Amazon and other online retailers
- > Amazon and other top online retailers to serve as a showroom, consumer research hub and curator of trusted reviews — even though most purchases still happen in-store.
- > It is important for brands to evaluate their strategies for auto shipping and subscription as it takes consumers away from "double check" in a routine journey
- > Finally, brands need to focus on the consumers' content needs in a disrupted journey and re(design) a better experience across their touchpoints and together with retailers.

"Search optimization is no longer limited to the search engine and should be extended to Amazon and other online retailers."



Framework #3: The Ecosystem Journey



Framework in action

A B2B multinational company set out to create a seamless omnichannel customer experience as a core strategy. But there was a significant knowledge gap and cross-functional disagreement on where, when, and how customers make decisions in this digital age. SKIM conducted a global customer journey research study and we found that a majority of customers engage in internal cross-functional investigations when a disruption occurs. At this point, decision-makers actively look for information online beyond the usual distributor engagement, which is more dominant in a typical re-order. End-user input at this stage becomes much more important.

"...a majority of customers engage in internal cross-functional investigations when a disruption occurs."

Applicable industries

Business-to-business

What it looks like

The ecosystem framework is characterized by multiple stakeholders including internal clients, distribution partners and end users, such as in B2B decision making. In order to understand this journey, we consider the entire ecosystem — as opposed to an individual decision maker. The key is to incorporate every stakeholders' involvement via the dominant decision-maker journey. In this setting, many purchases could be automated via e-procurement systems and reconsidered only after a disruption, such as a safety incident or a budget cut. The disrupted version of this journey is where most active research, investigation, trial and implementation takes place, making it a key focus of journey research.

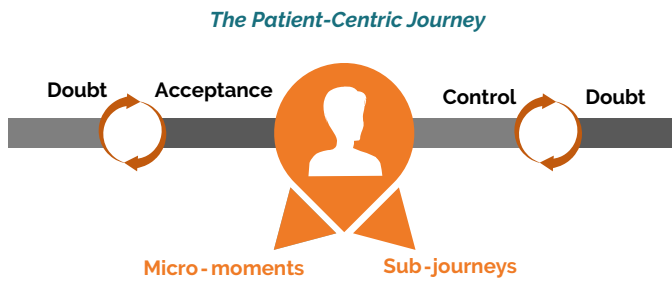
When to use it

The key to this framework is to understand when each stakeholder has the strongest influence in the B2B ecosystem and what content expectations occur at strategic touchpoints.

It is also striking that B2B decision-makers are increasingly influenced by their experiences as consumers. Companies such as Amazon, Uber, Starbucks, and even Airbnb are raising the bar for what we think of as a consumer experience, and decision-makers now expect other types of transactions to be comparable. B2B manufacturers and service providers are often called upon to recreate and realign commercial programs with strategic touchpoints, while adopting best practices from the consumer sector to meet customer expectations.



Framework #4: The Patient-Centric Journey



Applicable industries

Healthcare

What it looks like

The rise of patient consumerism means that patients are increasingly empowered by expanding information and choices. They are confident and willing to take greater control of their own health. In the past, the patient journey framework — despite its name — has taken more of a product-oriented view than a patient view. It was essentially a treatment journey. As the pharma commercial model evolves to become more patient-centric, a new framework is emerging that is centered around patient need-states, emotions and behaviors. Building upon this backbone, pharma brands can overlay clinical and treatment approaches and uncover gaps in patient experiences. This approach helps pharma brands realign brand messaging, digital assets and patient support programs with patient needs at sub-journeys and key moments.

When to use it

The key to applying this patient-centric framework is to look at a different starting point — patient need-states — regardless of treatment events or even disease indications. Sometimes, a co-morbidity from another disease reveals significant patient unmet needs, which would be missed with a traditional journey framework. A patient-centric view can avoid the tunnel-vision associated with a single disease, treatment or product. By prioritizing sub-journeys and key moments, this framework breaks the perception that a patient journey is a large-scale, check-off-your-list and once-in-a-commercial-lifecycle project. Instead, it becomes laser-focused and ongoing, creating immediate commercial impact even post-launch.

Framework in action

A truly patient-centric framework drives actionability of patient journey and experience research. A pharma brand engaged SKIM to conduct a patient journey research study to support a new product launch in the neurological space. Traditional qualitative journey research often lacks focus given the sample size limitation, so we started with patient need-states, as opposed to treatment events. Our research identified a new stage, completely defined by patients. This new critical stage, which occurs prior to symptom stage — the starting point of a traditional treatment-centric framework — would have been ignored, had it not been for a patient-centric approach. To drive the actionability further, our research focused on key moments for each patient need-state (as opposed to a wide range of potential leverage points) which brought focus to the qualitative research journey.

“A patient-centric view can avoid the tunnel-vision associated with a single disease, treatment or product.”

Every journey should start here...

Choosing the right journey framework is the critical first step in mapping your customer's current decision journey. As the continuously evolving omnichannel environment continues to disrupt established customer journey norms, brands from every industry segment are grasping for quick, actionable insights. Now that you know which framework is best suited for your brand, you are one step closer to uncovering which elements in their decision journey you can exploit in favor of your brand.

With SKIM you'll receive new insights and actionable recommendations to drive true transformation within your organization. Say goodbye to traditional tactics, set sales funnels and outdated insights - contact our team today.

skimgroup.com

About SKIM

SKIM people are research heavyweights specialized in customer decision behavior. Bridging the rational and emotional, we partner with leading companies like yours to understand and influence the customer journey across all channels. Clients trust us for our critical, whole-brained smarts – we convert tough business questions into easy-to-grasp reporting and actionable answers.



SKIM

decision behavior experts