An Overview of Luckin Coffee's Innovative Digital Marketing Model and its Impact on Consumer Behavior — A CAB Model Perspective

Yuting Wu*

College of Liberal Arts, Journalism and Communication, Ocean University of China, Qingdao, 266100, China

*Corresponding author: wyt9928@stu.ouc.edu.cn

Abstract. This study examines Luckin Coffee's innovative digital marketing model and its impact on consumer behavior through the lens of the Cognition–Affect–Behavior (CAB) framework. Drawing on annual reports, industry analyses, and academic literature, the author analyzes how Luckin integrates cognitive priming, affective resonance, and behavioral nudges across social media, private traffic, and omnichannel platforms. Key findings reveal that (1) cognitively consistent visual and narrative cues foster emotional engagement; (2) platform-embedded interfaces and real-time algorithmic prompts streamline consumers' pathway from perception to action; and (3) strategically engineered affective triggers—such as limited-edition products and immersive brand storytelling—convert emotional arousal into habitual purchase behavior. The synergistic operation of these pathways amplifies user stickiness, accelerates decision-making, and extends customer lifetime value. The conclusions offer both theoretical contributions—extending CAB's application to platformized brand ecosystems—and practical guidelines for digital-first brands seeking to architect integrated marketing strategies that balance personalization, scalability, and cultural embedding.

Keywords: List the; keywords covered; in your paper.

1. Introduction

As global social media usage continues to surge, the influence of digital marketing is expanding rapidly. The 2025 Global Digital Marketing Industry Trends White Paper reports that social media users now exceed 5 billion, over half the world's population, and are expected to reach 5.7 billion by 2025. The rise and rapid adoption of new technologies are reshaping marketing ecosystems, pushing brands to target users more precisely, innovate in content and engagement models, and transform consumer behavior, industry structures, and brand-consumer dynamics.

Within this landscape, Luckin Coffee stands out as a pioneering Chinese digital-native brand. Founded in 2017, Luckin rapidly scaled through ambitious expansion and digitalization, reaching 3,680 stores and RMB 1.493 billion in sales by Q3 2019, with 9.3 million monthly active users in China. However, a financial fraud scandal in early 2020 led to a stock collapse and NASDAQ delisting. Following a restructuring effort launched in 2021, Luckin regained momentum, reporting RMB 13.293 billion in net revenue in 2022 (a 66.9% increase) and climbing to RMB 34.475 billion by 2024. Its store count grew from 8,214 to 22,340 over the same period, and monthly active customers rose by 48.5%.

New product launches became key to its strategy, with 119 new offerings in 2024 and nearly 3 billion cups sold annually. Luckin's digital marketing innovations—such as collaborations with Genshin Impact, Black Myth: Wukong, Maotai(China's iconic luxury liquor, famed for its strong, complex flavor), and endorsement deals with Liu Yifei—demonstrated sharp consumer insight and set new consumption trends.

In a context of accelerating digital marketing evolution and increasingly fragmented consumer behavior, understanding how brands leverage digital innovation to expand reach and reshape consumer perception is critical. Luckin offers a valuable case for examining how digital marketing reshapes consumer cognition, emotions, and purchase decisions.

This study, grounded in the CAB model, analyzes changes in consumer decision pathways under digital interventions, contributing to research on consumer behavior in the digital era. Practically, the Luckin case offers a blueprint for Chinese brands navigating digital transformation and brand revitalization, highlighting strategies for breakthrough and sustainable growth.

By addressing the reconstruction of brand-consumer relationships and optimizing digital conversion efficiency, this research aims to advance both academic theory and practical marketing insights.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Digital Marketing

Digital marketing has been widely recognized as a transformative force in shaping consumer behavior and business strategy. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick emphasized that the integration of digital technologies into marketing practices enables highly targeted, personalized engagement across multiple platforms [1]. Similarly, Kannan and Li highlighted that digital marketing's dynamic nature demands continuous adaptation of strategies to keep pace with rapidly evolving and increasingly diversified consumer expectations and technological innovations [2].

2.2. Theoretical Framework of Consumer Behavior

Over time, various consumer behavior models have emerged, each shedding light on different facets of the decision-making process. Early models, such as those developed by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, focused on how consumers process information and make decisions in a structured manner [3]. These models viewed the consumer journey as a linear sequence, where information leads to attitudes, which in turn guide behavior. Similarly, Howard and Shet provided a comprehensive approach that emphasized the psychological and environmental factors shaping consumer decisions, highlighting the role of external influences such as marketing and personal experience [4].

However, with the rise of digital marketing, it became clear that these early models could not fully capture the increasingly fragmented and context-specific nature of contemporary consumer behavior. The digital landscape, where consumers interact with brands across multiple touchpoints, necessitates a more flexible and contextually responsive analytical framework. The Cognition-Affect-Behavior (CAB) model offers a more flexible approach, acknowledging that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors interact in ways that are not always linear [5]. This model helps explain the complex paths consumers now follow, particularly in social media and e-commerce environments, where consumer decisions are influenced by an array of contextual and emotional triggers—such as algorithmically curated content, peer-generated reviews, brand storytelling, and platform-specific cues like time-limited offers or interactive features. These triggers create a dynamic feedback loop in which cognition and affect are continuously recalibrated, shaping behavioral outcomes in real time.

Recent advancements in marketing theory, such as the work of Batra and Keller, have further emphasized the need for marketing strategies that respond to these new patterns. They argue that effective marketing communications must account for the evolving ways in which consumers engage with content and brands [6]. In a similar vein, Voorveld et al. explored the role of platform type in shaping consumer engagement, noting that the interaction between consumers and brands differs significantly across various digital environments [7]. Specifically, they distinguish between social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), brand websites, and mobile apps, each offering different affordances for interactivity, personalization, and control. This insight is crucial in understanding how the digital context influences consumer behavior, where interactions are increasingly personalized and dynamic.

3. Overview of Luckin Coffee's Innovative Digital Marketing Strategies

3.1. Platform Innovation

Luckin Coffee's rapid ascent in China's competitive coffee market is largely attributed to its innovative platform strategies, encompassing social media engagement, private traffic operations, and omnichannel integration.

3.1.1 Social media engagement

Luckin Coffee has effectively leveraged social media platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), Bilibili, and Weibo to engage younger demographics. Collaborations with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) have amplified brand visibility and resonance. Notably, the partnership with influencer Luxiu Li led to a significant surge in brand engagement, with Bilibili views reaching 1.84 million and a 775% increase in Baidu search index during the campaign period compared to baseline.

Furthermore, Luckin's co-branded products have garnered substantial attention. The 'Sauce-Flavored Latte', a collaboration with Kweichow Moutai, sold over 5.42 million cups on its launch day, generating revenue exceeding 100 million yuan.The virality of this product was fueled by user-generated content on platforms like Weibo, where consumers shared their experiences and opinions, positioning the product as a culturally iconic beverage.

3.1.2 Private traffic operations

To foster customer loyalty and reduce reliance on traditional advertising, Luckin has developed an extensive private traffic ecosystem through WeCom and its official app. By 2021, the company had established over 9,100 WeChat groups, attracting more than 1.8 million users. These groups are managed by a virtual assistant, 'Lucky' ,who disseminates personalized promotions and product recommendations based on user location and preferences. This private trafffic strategy has led to a 30% increase in monthly purchase frequency and a 28% rise in weekly repurchase rates among group members.

3.1.3 Omnichannel integration

By seamlessly integrating online and offline touchpoints, Luckin's omnichannel strategy enhances the customer journey with greater convenience and consistent service experiences. Customers can place orders through the app or social media platforms and pick up their beverages at physical stores, ensuring a consistent and convenient experience. Additionally, the company has implemented unmanned retail strategies, including smart vending machines and self-service coffee machines, to increase accessibility while improving operational efficiency.

3.2. Content and Format Innovation

Luckin Coffee has effectively utilized various innovative marketing strategies to distinguish itself in a highly competitive market.

One of the key strategies is its collaboration with IP brands, which has significantly contributed to the brand's appeal among younger consumers. For instance, the collaboration with well-known IPs such as Loopy and the popular character Butter Bear in limited-edition products helped Luckin tap into a diverse consumer base. According to a report by Lingyu, the Butter Bear collaboration led to a 15% increase in sales during the promotion period, highlighting the effectiveness of such partnerships [8]. These collaborations offer novelty and align the brand with cultural trends, boosting engagement among Gen Z and millennial consumers [9].

In addition to IP partnerships, Luckin Coffee has capitalized on celebrity endorsements to amplify its marketing impact. Celebrity-driven campaigns, such as those featuring Liu Yifei, have been shown to improve consumer purchase intention and brand attraction, especially among young urban consumers. Data from a 2023 survey indicated that 32% of respondents were more likely to purchase Luckin products after seeing celebrity endorsements, with a notable uptick among the millennial and

Gen Z populations [8]. By aligning itself with high-profile personalities, Luckin reinforces its trendy, modern image, which resonates well with its target market.

Furthermore, Luckin's brand events, such as the annual 'Coconut Latte' celebration, have proven to be highly effective in driving consumer engagement. These events not only provide a platform for the brand to connect with its audience but also create a sense of exclusivity and urgency. During the 2023 'Coconut Latte' anniversary event, the company reported a 20% increase in foot traffic to stores, which translated into a 10% increase in total sales for the event period [10]. This type of marketing, which combines product innovation with engaging brand activities, has led to significant increases in both sales and brand loyalty.

3.3. Data-Driven Personalization

Luckin Coffee has significantly advanced its data-driven personalization strategies, leveraging AI and big data analytics to refine customer engagement. According to its 2024 annual report, Luckin processed over 30 billion transaction records to optimize product recommendations and promotional targeting [11]. Through real-time data analysis, Luckin dynamically adjusts menu offerings, pricing, and discount strategies based on regional consumption patterns. For instance, during the 2024 summer campaign, location-specific promotions boosted cold drink sales by 18% in southern cities like Guangzhou [12]. Furthermore, the company's 'smart recommendation engine' within its app suggests products based on individual purchase histories and preferences, leading to a reported 23.5% increase in average order value [11]. Distinct from its private traffic operations, this personalization focuses on algorithmic learning and predictive analytics, enhancing customer lifetime value without direct manual interaction. These innovations demonstrate how hyper-personalized, scalable data systems can not only drive incremental revenue, but also strengthen brand responsiveness, consumer trust, and long-term market positioning in highly competitive consumer markets.

4. Consumer Behavior Analysis Based on the CAB Model

The CAB model explains consumer behavior through three intertwined layers. The Cognitive stage reflects what people know or believe about a brand—factual elements and mental associations that influence how marketing content is received [13]. The Affective layer involves emotional responses, including enjoyment, affinity, or trust [14]. The final Behavioral dimension refers to decisions to buy, revisit, or recommend, usually shaped by previous cognition and affect. In this review of Luckin Coffee's digital marketing strategies, we focus on three interaction routes: from cognition to emotion (C→A), where detailed messages stimulate affect [15]; from cognition to behavior (C→B), where information alone may prompt action [16]; and from emotion to behavior (A→B), as consumers act on emotional attachment [17,18]. These pathways help assess how Luckin's online communication builds loyalty and brand strength.

4.1. The Cognitive-to-Affective Pathway (C→A)

Luckin Coffee meticulously manages three core dimensions—premium quality, digital sophistication, and local relevance—across all its communications. Its social-media posts employ a consistent blue-and-white palette, generous whitespace, and minimalist layouts to convey a "digital premium" impression, thereby easing users' processing fluency [15]. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, audiences in high-involvement contexts will process well-structured information via the central route, yielding durable shifts in emotion.

This principle is vividly displayed in the Sauce-flavored Latte campaign. On Weibo, related hashtags amassed over 230 million views, and the official origin-story video surpassed 140 million plays. By interleaving handcrafted brewing sequences, coffee-cherry close-ups, and skilled barista shots, Luckin first establishes product authenticity and then builds anticipation for its East–West fusion. As viewers click and watch, they naturally move from mere recognition of craftsmanship to a warm emotional expectation of "tradition meets innovation."

Moreover, Luckin's Chu Orange Latte short videos layer in human-touch vignettes—farmers picking fruit at dawn, children playing among the groves, and elders savoring fresh citrus—which together drew over 5 million likes and comments. Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer argue that consumer emotions are socially constructed responses, activated by cultural context rather than simple physiology [19]. By weaving these everyday scenes into its narrative, Luckin cultivates a collective sentiment of harvest celebration and harmonious living. As CEO Guo Jinyi notes, 'Event marketing must connect with consumers through stories imbued with genuine warmth.' In doing so, Luckin guides its audience seamlessly from clear cognitive cues to rich affective resonance, demonstrating the C→A pathway in full effect.

4.2. The Cognitive-to-Behavioral Pathway (C→B)

In markets where brand differentiation increasingly hinges on participation rather than persuasion, cognition no longer operates as a static transmission of facts. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic, socially situated interface—interlacing brand perception with identity negotiation, algorithmic cues, and context-aware nudges. This reconceptualization of cognition as "programmable participation" is particularly evident in the marketing architecture of Luckin Coffee, a China-born market disruptor whose rise coincides with new forms of cognitive framing and behavior automation.

4.2.1 Social cognition as currency: from brand image to identity inclusion

Rather than building a purely rational image based on value-for-money, Luckin strategically embeds itself into contemporary youth culture through identity-charged collaborations. These include partnerships with fashion designers, anime IPs (e.g., Doraemon), Gen-Z celebrities, and artists. Such associations do not merely extend brand awareness; they assign Luckin a symbolic capital—a "node of taste"——within networked peer discourse, positioning the brand as a referential marker of social distinction and lifestyle alignment.

This is where cognition becomes socially and emotionally inscribed. As Simonson and Nowlis noted, consumer choices often oscillate between expressing individuality and aligning with group norms [20]. Luckin capitalizes on this tension by allowing its visual and interactive cues to act as affordable symbols of identity-compressing self-expression into accessible signals of belonging.

4.2.2 Operationalizing cognition: digital interfaces and real-time conversion

Luckin's digital interface is not merely an ordering tool but a conversion engine, calibrated for behavioral frictionlessness. Through continuous A/B testing, algorithmically optimized push notifications, time-sensitive promotions (e.g.first-cup deals, location-based coupons, flash sales), and dynamic product layouts, the brand re-engineers cognition as a gateway to immediate action.

Consider its "Morning Tea, Afternoon Coffee" strategy—a temporal nudge that not only promotes product usage but also scripts a normative behavioral rhythm, transforming routine consumption into a behavior aligned with the brand.In the Sheth et al. model of consumption values, behavior is driven by contextual ease and rational legitimacy [16]. Luckin exploits this principle by making participation feel not only natural but socially expected. In this sense, cognition is not about "knowing more," but about reducing the perceived cost of doing something familiar.

4.2.3 Behavioral engineering in a non-coffee culture: from exposure to routine

Crucially, Luckin's success hinges on its ability to transform coffee from a foreign concept into a daily habit in China's traditionally tea-oriented culture. Here, cognition becomes more than market education—it is cultural construction. The company deploys visual codes, social scripts, and behavioral incentives to normalize coffee consumption as part of everyday urban life.

Rather than positioning itself as a coffee company, Luckin operates as a "cognitive architect" — curating a "ready-to-execute" behavioral setting that fuses convenience, belonging, and temporal rhythm. This systematized approach to C→B translation suggests that in highly saturated markets, behavioral triggers are less about novelty and more about reducing the cognitive strain of choosing.

4.3. The Affective-to-Behavioral (A→B)

In the affective-to-behavioral (A→B) pathway of brand building, emotional priming emerges as a dominant force—particularly in today's fragmented digital attention economy. As Zajonc classically argued, affective responses frequently precede cognitive judgments [21]. Within saturated media environments, brands that create immediate emotional resonance are more likely to convert attention into sustained behavioral commitment.

Luckin Coffee serves as a compelling case. Its Coconut Latte (Shēng Yē Nǎtiě) disrupted the status quo not through rational differentiation, but through an affective jolt: a seemingly unorthodox fusion of coconut milk and espresso, rendered in a milk-tea hue that triggered consumer-generated descriptors such as "addictive," "healing," and "my substitute for milk tea" on social platforms. According to official figures, since its launch on April 12, 2021, the drink has surpassed 1.2 billion cups sold—translating to roughly 18 cups per second during business hours [22]. This speaks not to product utility alone, but to the seamless migration from affective pleasure to habitual behavior.

This emotional arc is extended and dramatized through Luckin's brand storytelling. In 2024, the company entered a strategic partnership with the Banggai Islands of Indonesia to develop an exclusive "coconut island," accompanied by the cinematic campaign Coconut Odyssey. Comedian Fu Hang starred in a silent visual narrative set to the nostalgic theme of Journey to the West. This sensory immersion—via tropical visuals, whimsical scripting, and symbolic rituals—anchored the product in broader emotional imaginaries of comfort, festivity, and cultural reverence.

As Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer argued, affect is not a static physiological reflex but a socially enacted dynamic process [19]. In line with this theory, Luckin's ecosystem of visual symbols and cross-media collaborations—from Loopy and Buttery Bear to IPs like Black Myth: Wukong—converts fleeting emotional reactions into cultural participation, forging a fluid channel between felt states and consumer actions.

Furthermore, in recent years, brands have increasingly relied on "emotional resonance and cultural depth" strategies to drive affective marketing. Keller noted that the more profound the emotional response, the more likely a brand is to convert consumers into loyal "brand advocates" through emotional connection [23]. Through strategic IP collaborations and creative initiatives like "Birthday Island," Luckin strengthens its emotional tone and cultural identity, effectively closing the loop between emotional engagement and behavioral conversion.

In essence, Luckin is not merely vending beverages; it is strategically engineering affective cues to modulate consumer behavior. By foregrounding emotional priming as a mechanism of engagement, the brand effectively activates the A→B pathway, reaffirming the pivotal role of emotional resonance in shaping consumer action within platformized brand ecologies.

4.4. Integrated Effects and Strategic Implications

In the context of digital brand communication, the Cognitive–Affective–Behavioral (CAB) model does not operate through isolated pathways, but rather through interactive reinforcement that creates synergistic effects—amplifying consumer engagement, shortening decision cycles, and increasing brand loyalty. Luckin Coffee's branding strategy exemplifies this integration: the C→A pathway guides emotional investment through cognitive priming; the C→B pathway translates cognitive stimuli into behavioral responses; and the A→B pathway leverages affective triggers to cultivate behavioral inertia.When activated simultaneously, these pathways construct a multi-dimensional brand experience that not only enhances user stickiness but also extends customer lifetime value by embedding consumption into habitual, emotionally charged routines.

Specifically, the C→A pathway benefits from structural message consistency and visual coherence, which reduce cognitive load and amplify emotional resonance. The C→B pathway embeds cognitive stimuli within social and platform-based mechanisms, reframing behavioral decisions through contextual cues. Meanwhile, the A→B pathway leverages symbolic emotional markers—such as humor, intimacy, and identification—to establish long-term emotional memory systems and habitual engagement. This triadic mechanism of cognitive priming, affective resonance, and behavioral consolidation reflects the interplay of central-route persuasion and affective framing as proposed by Petty and Cacioppo [15], and is consistent with the multidimensional consumption value model by Sheth et al. [16].

In contrast, traditional brands such as Starbucks tend to emphasize offline spatial identity and third-place narratives to fulfill the C→A pathway. However, their digital conversion mechanisms in the C→B and A→B dimensions remain limited. Similarly, Manner Coffee builds strong cognitive impressions through minimalist aesthetics and boutique positioning, yet lacks a coherent affective semiotic system and robust digital activation structure, limited behavioral retention and reduced conversion rates.

From a strategic perspective, the integrated CAB framework suggests three key insights for digital-first brands:

Structural Design of Pathway Integration: Brands must architect cognitive prompts, emotional triggers, and behavioral nudges into a coherent sequence, optimizing continuity and logical closure across the journey.

Media Interface as Behavioral Conduit: In high-frequency touchpoint environments, the user interface and social content function as hybrid cognitive-behavioral triggers; thus, platform design must embed psychological and decision-making cues.

Cultural Embedding and Affective Tagging: Affective memory can be sustained through localized cultural narratives and emotional symbols, transforming A→B pathways into long-term emotional affiliation systems.

Taken together, Luckin Coffee does not advance consumer engagement linearly, but instead builds structural brand advantages by operating across intersecting points of the CAB model. The integration of these pathways not only extends the theoretical boundary of brand management but also provides a blueprint for navigating affective economies and participatory cognition in the digital era.

5. Conclusion

By operationalizing the CAB model's three routes in concert, Luckin Coffee has crafted a multi-dimensional brand experience that embeds consumption into consumers' daily lives. Cognitively, consistent brand aesthetics reduce decision friction; affectively, emotionally charged campaigns foster deep resonance; behaviorally, data-driven nudges enable seamless action. Together, these mechanisms yield enhanced engagement metrics-shorter decision cycles, higher repeat purchase rates, and increased average order values.

Managerial Suggestions include:

1.Integrated user journey design: Brand operation teams should align visual cues, emotional tone, and behavioral prompts within key user touchpoints. Embedding scenario-based videos in the app that end with limited-time offers not only strengthens cognitive recognition but also increases immediate conversion through layered stimuli.

2.Platform-specific content adaptation: Content strategists should adjust material formats and narrative logic based on platform typology. For instance, short-form lifestyle UGC aligns with Rednote's identity-based interactions, while Luckin's proprietary app is better positioned for delivering personalized discounts and order nudges.

3.Localized cultural embedding: Regional marketing units are encouraged to incorporate local dialects, customs, or humor into campaign elements. This cultural alignment fosters affective familiarity and enhances campaign memorability, especially during festival periods or regional promotions.

4.Transparency-centered personalization mechanisms: Algorithm teams should develop recommendation systems that allow users to understand why content is shown, provide one-click optout options, and ensure minimal tracking. These steps increase user trust without undermining targeting effectiveness.

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