

THE MARKETING CHAT PODCAST with Angela Kelly Smith

Understanding Changes in Consumer Behavior with Michael Solomon

Kelly: My guest today, Michael Solomon literally wrote the book on understanding consumers. Hundreds of thousands of business students have learned about marketing from his books, including *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, and Being*, the most widely used book on the subject in the world. Michael's mantra is, we don't buy products because of what they do, we buy them because of what they mean. He advises global clients in leading industries, such as apparel and footwear, financial services and e-commerce, sports and transportation, on marketing strategies to make them more consumer-centric. Some of his clients include Calvin Klein, Under Armor, eBay, the Philadelphia Eagles, BMW and United Airlines. As a professor of marketing in the Haub School of Business at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and an industry consultant, Michael combines cutting edge academic theory with actionable real-world strategies. He helps managers get inside the heads of their customers so they can anticipate and satisfy their deepest and most pressing needs today and tomorrow. An executive at Subaru said it best, "The man is a scholar who is current and streetwise." Welcome, Michael. I am so happy to have you here today.

Michael: Hey Kelly, thanks so much for having me on. I appreciate it.

Kelly: Absolutely. So what drew you to academia and specifically marketing?

Michael: I always like to say it beats working for a living, but my father was an academic, my uncle was an academic; I always just kind of knew I was going to go on that path. But what I discovered actually in the course of my graduate training when I was getting my PhD in psychology is that there are so many real world fascinating issues out there that this stuff applies to. I was really eager to get it out there and get it on the road. There are so many issues in marketing that are related to the psychology of the buyer. Obviously, if we don't understand what's going on in our buyer's heads, then we're not going to be in business for very long. So, I've always tried to keep one foot on the academic side doing basic research, but definitely one foot in the real world by doing consulting and keynotes and so on. And I think both are very important.

Kelly: Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Michael: Yeah, early on when I was a young grad student, back, literally in the last century. Doesn't that sound strange?

Kelly: Yes, it does. Last millennium.

Michael: Yes, that's right. I was, for example, doing a lot of research on the area of physical attractiveness, which in other words, how do people treat us differently based on our physical appearance. And as you might guess, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that does happen. But what I realized is that virtually none of the work that was being done was looking at us from, I guess you might say the neck down. In other words, it all had to do with facial features. And there's an enormous amount of research on that, but I said, well, yeah, but you know in the real world, when we get out of the laboratory, we see the whole person, we don't just see their face. And I wonder if cues

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from their rest of them from the way their bodies are built, but also more importantly, what we put on our bodies, what we put in our bodies, how do those things influence the way we feel about ourselves and how others feel about us.

And so much to the horror of my professors at the time, I proposed a dissertation to look at what was called at the time, the dress for success phenomenon. You may remember, but the idea that what we wear actually influences who we are. I'll spare you the details, but I did develop my dissertation on that topic and was able to show that in fact, clothing does have a big impact on how we feel about ourselves. For example, in a job interview setting, and I think everybody probably knows that, but it had never been proven empirically. And so, it was very satisfying to apply things that I had been learning in theory, and to see that they really made a difference in the real world, and so I never look back. My first job was in a business school as a marketing professor, and I've been a marketing professor now for about 40 years at different institutions.

There's always a fine line between publishing and academia in peer review journals and all that, and then doing things that managers find relevant. And there's often a big gap between the two as you might guess, but there really doesn't have to be, because everything that we're looking at is reflecting stuff that's going on in the real world. How we think about ourselves, how we decide who somebody is just based on looking at them for literally a second or two. These are psychological principles that have an enormous ramifications, especially if you're in business, whether a small business or you work for a big company. Again, at the end of the day, and you can have the best product, it works really well, on and on. But if people don't perceive it as something that's really going to benefit them directly and that somehow resonates with who they are as an individual or as a member of a group in our society; the marketing graveyard is full of products that worked really well, but they didn't resonate with people for one reason or another. They failed to show people why they were providing a relative advantage.

And if you look at just about every successful brand out there, and I spend a lot of time looking at what brands do, that's either good or bad, but ones that are successful, and this is true of not just of the Proctor and Gambles and Nikes of the world, but this is true of small businesses too. The ones that have developed a brand that tells a story that people want to hear, those are the successful brands. The reality is, and there are exceptions to this, but the reality is, you know what, just about everything that's out there today, if it's made by a respectable company is probably going to work reasonably well. I'm not saying everything works perfectly, but most consumers and this drives brand managers crazy. But when you ask consumers, here's five different brands in category X, which one do you prefer? The answer that we all hate to hear is, "Yeah, they're pretty much all the same." But that's the answer you get a lot. The only time you don't get that answer is when you've got a brand like a Nike or a Lululemon or Ford, or you can make your own list. But companies that have told a story about the brand, because that is what consumers buy. They buy a story and furthermore, they buy a story that is somehow connected to the story that they themselves are trying to tell.

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Kelly: Yes, that really reflects their identity as you discuss in your book. And I'll go ahead and mention that *The New Chameleons: How to Connect with Consumers Who Defy Categorization*, and we'll go into that in detail today. But we want products that reflect a part of who we are, whether that's like you were mentioning in our dress. And that's, I think a huge example, so Nike is reflecting part of who we are. I love Apple products and I do think they work better, but I've got used to PC in more than 20 years, but I pride myself on being an Apple person. It does reflect part of my identity, even software that I use. I'm an Adobe person, so that reflects part of my identity. So, I'm totally jive with what you're saying about that.

Michael: Yeah. It's the central part of what brands are about. And it's always surprising to me. I mean, there are many marketers who have figured that out, but there are many who haven't and they still think they're selling functionality, but what they're selling is meaning, and there's a big difference.

Kelly: Absolutely in your book, *The New Chameleons*, you write about consumers having changed over the past decades and their buying behavior is changing. And so, how marketers just can't easily categorize consumers like they used to be able to. For example, as Yuppies, which was a big thing in the eighties or treehuggers or any other simplified categories. So, can you say more about that please?

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. Market segmentation, that's marketing 101, you know, we teach that almost the first day of class. And it's a concept that has worked really well for a very long time. It was actually initially developed by General Motors back in the thirties and forties. And they had this insight that Henry Ford was famous for saying, "My customers can have any color car they want, as long as it's black." [...] people, General Motors said, "You know what, not everybody wants the same car. And we are now an affluent enough society where we can develop different products for different kinds of people." And so this notion of having a separate kind of car, Chevrolet versus a Buick versus Oldsmobile, Cadillac, et cetera, that really paved the way for a lot of great stuff.

But the problem is that as you noted, we've changed quite a bit since that time. And most notably, we've moved from what we can think of as broadcasting society to a narrow-casting society. So back in the day in the sixties, if you wanted to reach the American public, if you brought a commercial on let's say the *Ed Sullivan Show*, you could be pretty sure that you'd be getting a pretty big chunk of Americans tuning in on a Sunday night. Fast forward to today, obviously there are very few of those mass events, maybe the Super Bowl or the Olympics. But what we see is that our culture has fragmented into many, many, many different little sliver and people are much more proactive today about finding those sliver about connecting with others who share their love of some obscure hobby or a brand or something. And so, we can no longer just take the practices that were developed.

And again, it did make sense. I'm not saying that they didn't make sense; if the efficiencies, at least in terms of cost are huge when you're trying to talk to a million people versus a thousand people. But it just doesn't work that way anymore because

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we, and when you talk to your customers, certainly when I talk to my students, they push back against this idea of being part of a market segment. When I say to them, you're all men and women in your twenties, you live in a certain place, you go to a private liberal arts school, blah, blah, blah. Therefore, you are all in the eyes of marketers identical to one another. And they of course say, no way.

Kelly: No!

Michael: That's the last thing they say.

Kelly: Especially as young people, they're old Zoomers and young Millennials, yeah.

Michael: Yeah. And by the way, not just them, many of us who are older than that, we're in a constant process of invention. And certainly the pandemic, if anything, just threw gas on the fire because sitting at home with nothing to do, what we, again, obviously what the internet does is it allows us to vicariously explore a lot of other lifestyles that we would never encounter in the real world unless we travel a lot. And so, that allows people to - it gives them a sense of what is possible beyond their own little kind of groove. They want to get out of that segment, and so today, one term that I use in the book a lot is we talk about the postmodern consumer. And this is someone who is not comfortable fitting into established categories. They're borrowing things from a lot of different lifestyles. And they're often looking for products that are borrowing characteristics from different lifestyles. And that's something I talk about a lot in the book because there's a lot of potential.

You might throw up your hands and say, "Oh, if we can't segment people, what's the use?" But the reality is there's a lot of potential today, especially to involve these postmodern consumers in defining the brand themselves. So when people say to me, what's the biggest development in marketing over the last say decade or two decades? My answer is easy. It's internet 2.0, and you've probably heard that term. It's this idea that people aren't just passively getting information from companies; they are contributing to that conversation in really amazing ways. And it's so important for brands to understand that they have two assets that they usually overlook; first is their customers and second is their sales people. And by assets, like sources of intelligence sources of what's going on in the market, how are people responding to these products? Don't be afraid to involve your customers in that conversation because in this postmodern era, they want to be involved and they are volunteering in droves to be involved, and to overlook that source of intelligence would be a crime, I think.

Kelly: That sounds like an entirely new and innovative way to use customer engagement in creating or evolving at least a brand. And what I'm picturing one way to do that is on social media. Wendy's I think does a good job with that using their brand voice and chatting on Instagram - or sorry, Twitter, with their customers and with followers. Customers and clients are really engaging with brands on social media. And they're not just sitting back listening and liking. They're actually commenting and replying. Am I right in this that they are helping to evolve the brand and interpreting the

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brand on their own, which consumers have done for decades interpreting the brand on their own. But now it sounds like they're actually contributing to the brand.

Michael: Well, they're contributing to the brand, whether or not the brand wants them to. Many brands they've figured out that, well, once you've opened Pandora's box, which we definitely have; once something's out on the internet, you're never putting it back. So there are some brands that really encourage this. And by the way, not just in terms of testimonials and stuff, but even for example, literally new product ideas. You think of a company like Lego, for example, really excels here where they have a panel of something like 10,000 people around the world who are just Lego fanatics, and they get rewarded for submitting new ideas. Why don't you make this Lego? Why don't you do that? And so by syncing with what their customer-base wants, they've done a tremendous job. And others as well as you mentioned, and part of it is just damage control.

For example, I think Delta Airlines is one of the first to start monitoring what people are tweeting at airports, which is usually nothing good. And then they assigned a team to respond, to say, "Oh, we feel your pain. We're working on it." And sometimes that's all we need is just, I guess, condolences from the company, but at least acknowledgement that they're listening. We want to be listened to. We want to be heard. And again, the brands that don't understand that think they still own their brand; when I say in my keynotes usually is you don't own your brand anymore, just get over it. You're a co-owner, but your customer is also a co-owner of the brand. And you can either welcome that or you can fight against it, but either way, they're going to do it.

Kelly: The customers, the biggest brand ambassador that you have.

Michael: Absolutely. Especially your so-called heavy users, you're roughly 20% or so of your base that are typically going to be your brand fanatics.

Kelly: Very true. So the book is called *The New Chameleons*. So, why do you use that term? What on earth do reptiles have to do with consumer behavior?

Michael: Good question.

Kelly: I love chameleons, so great phrase here.

Michael: Obviously, it's a metaphor and we know what chameleons are capable of doing. They change their skin color to adapt to the environment over and over again. And I think that metaphor really describes what people are about today in terms not of changing our color, obviously, but changing our identities and playing multiple roles and trying new things. And we know the situation that you're in has a huge impact on the products and services that you buy. And so, at the very least, and at least a few big companies are starting to understand this. And so, for example, you might have some food like snack food companies; the biggest ones now is organizing their marketing function around occasions rather than brands. If you think about tailgating as a cultural

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experience that many of us share, there are certain products that are consumed heavily, beer being one of them, of course, but also picnic supplies and stuff like that. And recognizing that that is a stimulus, that's a cue for consumption, organizing yourself around giving people what they need to live that experience.

And then when they go to a different experience, maybe it's an office party, let's say, that requires maybe a different set of products. So the chameleon is someone who is not content just to be told by marketers, you're a 30 something woman who lives in the suburbs and therefore you're like everybody else. These are people who are experimenting with identities all the time. And of course, a lot of that experimentation is going on online as well, so we don't want to forget that today our virtual selves are probably as important as our physical selves, in terms of the self that the marketer needs to talk to. And when you think about it, it's a little scary. But when you think about, when you look at the number of hours per day, that the average young person in particular is looking at a screen, that number has been rising steadily. I believe it's over 11 hours a day now - looking kind of a screen that could be well.

That number some years ago when they first started measuring, it was I think about six hours a day. When people were up in arms "six hours a day, our civilization is going to crumble." Now we're up to almost twice that, and maybe we are crumbling, I don't know. But clearly when you're thinking about a strategy to reach your customers, it's likely that you have to be really omnichannel. You've probably heard that term. You have to be agnostic. You have to be media agnostic and understand that your customers are looking for cues from you about who they are, both when they're online and when they're offline.

Kelly: Yeah. Very true. I love that about playing with our identities; they're constantly evolving. And it's not just young people anymore. We think of teenagers as trying on different hats and really figuring out who they are. But I'm in my fifties, 53, and my peers, especially midlife women, we're empty nesters, not all of us. And so, now what do we want to do in this stage of our lives? And so, it's fun now to be trying on different hats. Or if you're after a divorce or something like that, it's like, okay, I was this for all those years now, what do I get to be? Who do I get to be?

Michael: Exactly. Exactly. You know, I spend a lot of time in the book talking about basic categories that we use to describe people that are totally obsolete today. One of them is old versus young. Because young people in some ways are thinking like older people, especially with their focus on social justice and all of that. But a lot of older people are like you say, they're kind of getting their second wind, maybe their third wind and they're reinventing themselves. They're having a retirement Renaissance where they're becoming a totally different person - what have you. And so again, these very basic categories that are very comforting to us because they're so simple are going away in this postmodern world. Male versus females and other one I talk about a lot. Black versus white, rich versus poor; these categories don't make a lot of sense anymore, even though much as we'd like to think that they do. So for example, male versus female, that's an obvious one. No matter what you think about what's going on in our

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society today, there's clearly a lot of conversation about, is there such a thing as a male versus a female? Or are we all a combination of the two or maybe we're something totally different. Facebook alone gives you something like 50 or 60 different ways to describe your gender. It doesn't make sense to say, "Well, you know, my customers are women or my customers are men" these days.

Kelly: Yeah, very true. So what do you think is the single biggest obstacle facing marketers today? Is there just one?

Michael: There are certainly many. It's definitely a interesting time to be in marketing. But I think to me, the biggest challenge is engaging your customers in an environment where there are so many other things competing for their attention. I've actually developed an entire online course just on boosting customer engagement, because it's so crucial. And if I talk to an audience and I often say, "Well, how many commercial messages do you think you're exposed to in a single day from any source; online, billboards, radio?" And some people say, "Oh, I don't know, 100, 200, 500." Well, the answer is closer to four to 5,000 a day. Now, obviously we don't actually notice most of those, but that's the point, we notice very few of them. And so, what do you do just to get noticed? That's 90% of the battle right there, and getting people to engage with what you are offering is so important because we tune out, by necessity, we tune out almost everything that we're exposed to.

But again, those brands that have figured out that there are different paths to engagement, but you need to pick one of them. You need to pick a way to somehow relate your brand to the project or the story that people are trying to tell. And if you do, you will be successful. Of course, the timing has to be right. To think about a brand like Lululemon, for example, these guys figured out - they looked at what was going on in the culture, they saw that the women were buying some athletic wear, but it was ugly, it wasn't really what they wanted. And there was this huge kind of groundswell of interest going on in wellness and even spirituality; people flocking to yoga classes, et cetera. And so, they saw that at some point and said, "Well, they need something to wear," and the rest is history.

So we have this new athleisure category, which again is a hybrid. It doesn't fall into a traditional category of apparel, but it's hugely successful. And in the book I give other examples of that in different industries; getting out, breaking out of these boundaries and these categories is crucial because if you stay in a well-established category, you're competing with everybody else who's been in that category for years and years. And some of them are quite big and successful. If you define a new category, you get to define the rules. So, to the extent that you can kind of break out of that and say to people, "Look, this is a product that combines different things." I don't know, it's a shampoo, but also puts highlights in your hair. I don't know.

Kelly: You know, yeah. Oh no, those like purple shampoos that don't leave your hair purple, but they accentuate your blonde, maintain your blonde or your gray, and gray today is a huge thing. Women are letting their hair go natural now, meaning silver and

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gray. Yeah, perfect. And Lululemon example is fabulous because that is something that women are buying, not because of what the products do, but yeah, because of what they mean as you write in the book.

Michael: No, absolutely. And I suspect there are people out there who buy their stuff who have never been near a yoga mat, but they want other people to think they have. That's okay.

Kelly: Yes, very true. Well, and yoga wear can be comfortable. And that's why it fits into that athleisure wear like you said, so you don't have to wear it just for yoga.

Michael: But remember that that's a term that didn't exist probably five years ago, and yet we all talk about it today. So, that shows you how quickly these categories can change.

Kelly: Yeah. So when you write in the book about blurring lines between producers and consumers, that's what we're talking about, is it about consumers contributing to evolving the brand?

Michael: That's certainly a part of it. The traditional model of product development is you never want the customer to see it until it's absolutely perfect. And that is no longer the case today. Today, what we like to say is everything is in beta, everything is evolving. And so, a big mistake that marketers make is they put a product out there and then they think it's done and they might even resent or shut down people who say, "Well, actually, if you did this, instead of that, it would be a little better." But when you look at more and more companies that are getting into this, buying into this notion and recognizing that their customers are probably their best source of intelligence, as I said earlier, because they're the ones on the front lines actually using the products, it can make a world of difference.

And ironically, it's industrial marketing, it's B2B companies that figured this out way before B2C companies. So if you look in, let's say the aeronautics industry or the chemical industry; what you see is that, believe it or not, the majority of ideas for new products were suggested by the customers of those companies, customers of the companies that make the airplanes or make the chemicals because the customers are able to say, "Yeah, you know, it would be great if your product did X." And so, if you adopt this attitude that you really... well, what I like to say is you just change a small word. You move from marketing to marketing with. If you just make that little change in your mind, it really is a totally different mindset to be in because now you're no longer hiding that product until it's absolutely perfect. You're recognizing that there're going to be iterations of it. And look, we're all just humans. Whenever you ask someone for their opinion, they're flattered, they want to be part of what you're doing. So by asking customers for their opinion about what you're working on, you're just going to make them more engaged in what eventually comes out of the pipeline.

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Kelly: Very true. And that's something that small businesses and entrepreneurs like solo entrepreneurs who are outsourcing, that's something that has always made them particularly nimble because they can put out a service or product and pivot and tweak it, sort of quietly. Because like you said, corporations work on something for months, roll it out when it's "perfect". While we can put out something and it's like, okay, that's not working quite well or it's in beta and then change it, and it's just no big deal because we are so nimble. And I love what you're saying that now big companies are realizing, no, we have to do that too.

Michael: Yeah. It's a great point. And so often a startup, somebody will say, "Oh, am I ever going to compete against the Proctor and Gambles of the world?" And the answer I give them is very similar. You have a huge advantage because if you want to talk to your customers, you just walk out in the front and then say, "Hey, what do you think?" P and G's going to have to commission a huge survey, pay people like me to run the survey. It's like turning a battleship, and that's why some of these big companies have gone to this more nimble or sometimes called agile marketing kind of approach, which actually more closely resembles an entrepreneurial unit that operates within the confines of a bigger company.

Kelly: Yeah, I've got a nimble little sailboat and yeah, I can just turn it on a dime.

Michael: There you go, yeah.

Kelly: I'm fascinated about what you write in the book about, of merging of flesh versus machines. Can you tell us about that please?

Michael: Yeah, I've been actually giving some keynotes about this. It's really fascinating to see, again, these two categories that we've always assume are separate, but popular culture has talked for years about this merging of the two, especially science fiction movies about robots that take over the world and living back in the fifties and so on. But today we're so fascinated. We have, again, TV shows like Westworld and many others, this idea that we are becoming like robots and robots are becoming like us. So robots are becoming more lifelike and we can talk about that, but we are also becoming more like machines in the sense that our bodies are literally becoming a platform for machinery. And when you think about the various artificial parts that many of us are walking around with, and I don't just mean a fake hip or something like that or a pacemaker, even let's say contact lenses or something that like a wearable that goes onto your body that monitors your vitals, just like a machine has dials that you can know what's going on.

Kelly: My Apple watch.

Michael: Yes, exactly. So we're seeing this steady merge between the two, and as some companies are looking to, I was going to say, hire robots, they're looking to deploy robots as sales people. But then again - and we have people who are falling in love with robots. There's a guy in Japan who married his robot. There's plenty of that going on as

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well. It's a fascinating time. And we're going to see this explosion in the shipment of what are called service robots. And these are the things that help you, for example, the market for assisted living, you know, nursing homes and so on, robots to help the elderly with daily tasks. That right there is a massive market that is very active right now. But there are others, and so the question over time becomes, not only who do you look to for advice. And that's very interesting because some of the biggest fashion influencers right now are made up, they're avatars. They don't exist in the real world, but they have thousands and thousands of followers. Even some of the biggest models that you see are really computer generated.

Kelly: I had no idea.

Michael: Yeah. Yeah. And that's becoming an interesting industry.

Kelly: Do their followers know that? They must!

Michael: Oh no, their followers do know it. They love that.

Kelly: Oh my gosh. I had no idea.

Michael: They've been on the covers of fashion magazines and so on.

Kelly: Oh no.

Michael: And so, this is probably a topic for another day, but it's interesting that what's appealing about them is that they can be made to look so perfect with a few key strokes. But on the other hand, other than that, our society is moving toward more realism in advertising, where we have companies like Airy and Third Love and so on showing real women and Dove and so on. And so it's interesting that we can't... people don't want to look at perfect blemish free supermodels anymore if they're human, but when they are artificial, then it becomes okay.

Kelly: Yeah, that's amazing. Okay, so when you talk about young shoppers, you describe them as having a hive mind now.

Michael: Yes.

Kelly: What is that about?

Michael: That's a reference. If you're not a Star Trek fan -

Kelly: I love Star Trek.

Michael: And by the way, most of my students have never heard of Star Trek.

Kelly: Oh no. Oh gosh. You have to fix that.

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Michael: Yeah. Yeah. But you know, the hive mind meant it was the idea that people were being assimilated by this alien race called the Borg into one big machine. Their brain -

Kelly: Resistance is futile.

Michael: You're feeling like you know what I'm talking about. That to some extent is I think a good metaphor for the way kids are thinking today. Now, they're not being taken over by an alien race or anything like that. But what they are doing is, they're merging their decision, making abilities in with other people. So back in the day, in the sixties and seventies, it was all about do your own thing, be an individual. Even if many of us wound up picking the same things, we all thought we were individuals. We all picked the same pair of tie-dye jeans, you know?

Kelly: On your own, you chose it on your own.

Michael: On your own. But today there's not even a pretense of that. This is a generation that, for at least some of them, and you've probably seen, they go to a restaurant and they can't touch their food that the waiter put down until they post a picture of it on Instagram. And we sometimes call that food porn. I mean, there's even a name for that. And so, there's this notion of validation by your network is extremely important. Not to say we, you know, we always wanted to be validated by people, but today that validation is coming much earlier in the process. In the old days, I might go and buy a jacket and I bring it home and I try it on for you. And you say, "What were you thinking? You know, bring that back right away."

Today it's more likely that I try on the jacket either virtually, putting it on a virtual self or I go to a store and I try it on, take a picture of that, send it out to my network and say, what do you think, should I buy this jacket or not? And then all my BFFs come back and say, "No, it makes you look too fat" or something like that, "put it away." And I don't buy the jacket. But what's going on is there's this hive mind where people are plugged into, it's not just kids, kind of 24/7 where we're constantly being bombarded with product information in our social feeds. So again, back in the day, we wanted that information, but we had to go look for it. We had to go to Patagonia's website and see what they were selling. Whereas today, we just have to look at the feeds that are coming in on our Instagram posts and other platforms. And you know, there's influencer X and she's using brand Y, "Oh, I haven't thought about it, but actually I could use some brand Y."

So, it's not kind of an on demand sort of information feed; it's a constant feed where people are looking to know, how did other people review that before I go there?. How did people review that restaurant? How did people review that book? Did people like that CD that shows you how...? People like those music tracks that Beyonce just dropped; I'm not going to listen to it until I see what other people say. And that is a very important change that most marketers quite honestly haven't figured out yet.

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Kelly: Yeah, that makes sense. I have seen some places, so they allow reviews and some places will like online retailers, they will allow their buyers to post photos of them wearing the products. And I love that. I used to just ignore all of that. Now, I want to see those photos. I want to see what the item looks like on actual people before I buy it. Now, ideally I'll find someone who has a similar body type that I have, but yeah, I want to see.

Michael: When you said actual people, that's important, not just models.

Kelly: Yeah, exactly.

Michael: Yeah, this is an example of what sometimes called crowd sourcing, where you go to your consumers for ideas. And one of the first big kind of really breakthrough campaign, I think was back in 2009, where Burberry did this, they did a campaign called the Art of the Trench. And of course, there's the Burberry trench coat. And they invited customers around the world to post pictures of themselves wearing their trench coat in a certain - whatever their style is, however they tie the belt and so on. And that campaign just lit a fire under Burberry.

Kelly: I bet.

Michael: Now, it's a little more commonplace today, but at the time, over a decade ago, to see pictures of regular people, like you're discussing modeling the product and kind of giving it their own unique twist, because it's not meant to be worn in the same way, that's what brands have to understand today. Every brand has to be personalized and adaptable like Burberry figured out. So, it's a very powerful way, not only to get new ideas, but also for customers to get the kind of affirmation you're talking about, where you feel like I'm not the only one who doesn't know how to tie that belt on the trench coat.

Kelly: Right. Perfect. So before we end here, what are some strategies that a business can use to engage its customers?

Michael: Yeah. There's a lot of strategies. I have actually on my website, if anyone's interested, you can download a free, what I call "A brand resonance audit" it's on the first page, and there's something like 13 or 14 different paths to resonance. Resonance means that the product is really lighting up a fire in you in terms of how you feel about yourself, a brand resonates. I give some examples in there. So, being part of the brand allows you to be part of a community, for example. Well, I had a consulting client call CrossFit, if you have you've ever heard of it. It's all about the fanatical community there. It can be about insiders who know the story of the brand, and so they feel like they have insider status. If you're familiar with Mary Kay, the direct selling company; so much of that brand is built around Mary Kay herself, the woman who founded it. You'll see her picture everywhere you go in their headquarters and so on.

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And so, identifying with that brand is partly about identifying with her and the things she said about what women should do and not do, et cetera. So there are different paths, but the point is you've got to pick one. Of course, not everyone is suitable for every brand, but basically, there's different ways to engage people. You engage them with the product itself because it's innovative, you engage them with the message about the product or you create a situation where that product should be consumed, so you do something in the environment. You take over ax deodorant a few years ago, took over a beach house in the Hamptons when they had this huge party all summer, I wasn't invited. There was an example of activating the brand in the purchase environment. That's another way to create engagement. There's a lot of different things that you can do for all three of those approaches, but in each case it helps to know something more about the psychology of the consumer, how we perceive information, how we block out information. And again, as I said earlier, the single biggest challenge is just getting noticed.

Kelly: Absolutely.

Michael: And so, sometimes it's just literally the design of your messages. It can be something as basic as the color of the font that might break through, or it might be something much more elaborate than that.

Kelly: Yeah, very true. That sounds wonderful. So where can people find that guide to download?

Michael: Oh, if you just go to michaelsolomon.com.

Kelly: Great. Awesome.

Michael: If you scroll down about halfway, you should see a link to it. It's free to download.

Kelly: Fabulous. I will put that link in the show notes and on this episode's page on my website. Well, thank you so much for being here, Michael. This was awesome. Such a great conversation with you.

Michael: Yes, it was fun. Thank you so much.

Kelly: And thank y'all for being here today. I really appreciate it. And I'd love it if you would leave a positive rating and review, and you can leave comments on this episode's page on my website link in the show notes. I'll be back in just a few days, so see you next time on the Marketing Chat Podcast.