

Research Brief

A **Research Brief** is a brief summary of research findings.

GEORGETOWN INSTITUTE *for* CONSUMER RESEARCH | Sponsored by KPMG

A New Model of Consumer Engagement

THE PROBLEM

When marketers talk about consumer engagement it is often with a vagueness that both captures and confounds listeners. In the simplest sense, to engage a consumer is to occupy their attention or efforts. Beyond this basic prerequisite, consumers can seemingly be engaged through multiple mediums and to varying degrees. This ambiguity can be concerning as evidenced by questions that continually arise such as “Is engagement useful?” and “What qualifies as useful engagement?”

Some marketers like to conceptualize engagement as inherently useful; think of an analogy to marital engagement where the consumer-brand interaction is a precursor to brand commitment. But to others the haziness of the concept is a precursor to wasted resources more than anything productive. We suggest engagement is especially useful when it is designed to encourage behaviors beyond simply gaining and retaining attention. Specifically, marketers should work to motivate and enable consumers’ engagement to the service of behavioral objectives.

With respect to motivating engagement, marketers have long believed in the value of having satisfied consumers. The assumption is that they will be more motivated to engage with a brand. In fact, behavioral research has repeatedly demonstrated that people approach and engage things they like and distance themselves from things they do not like. But what determines if a consumer likes something? The traditional view espouses that consumers like the things they buy, and therefore the key to satisfaction lies not in bolstering their view of the product they bought but in minimizing usage complications and failures.

While we agree, there is an important aspect of liking one’s purchase that has been overlooked by marketers. Namely, marketers should create post purchase environments that enable consumers to feel good about the purchases they have made. By constructing post purchase environments that do this, marketers should improve customer satisfaction, by increasing consumers’ engagement.

FINDINGS

We know that consumers actively seek out information about purchases they have already made: The Georgetown Institute for Consumer Research found that 78% of consumers sought out information about their brand or product after making a purchase (including information from product packaging and product manuals). Further, 47% of consumers sought out information from sources other than the product packaging or manual, such as ads, online information from 3rd parties, or online information from the original brand.



Matthew Wilcox

*EVP, Global Planning Director;
Executive Director, Institute of Decision
Making.*

Matthew and FCB’s Institute of Decision Making seeks to understand how to activate instinctual triggers to influence consumer decisions in our clients’ favor.

in partnership with

Kurt Carlson
Chris Hydock
Ishani Banerji

GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY

McDonough
SCHOOL of BUSINESS

Of those searching for more information, 67% agreed with the statement that they were looking to reaffirm their purchase decision. Additionally, 88% agreed with the statement that they wanted to learn more about the product and 65% wanted to learn more about the brand.

This suggests consumers will embrace efforts to help them feel better about their choices, especially when these communications provide more information about the product they purchased. Perhaps the most telling statistic was that consumers who sought out more information reported being more likely to talk about their purchase, had more positive feelings toward the brand, and felt more connected to the brand. Students of cognitive mechanisms won't be surprised, as this is likely a case of choice-supportive and confirmation biases having an effect. These biases create a tendency to pay more attention and put more value on information that supports the choices we have made and the views that we have.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Accordingly, our data and these biases suggest that efforts should merge traditional product information and support with opportunities for consumers to reaffirm their purchase decision as well as engage with the brand. The exact design of such environments will depend on the consumer audience, the product, and what it means to make a 'good' decision given these factors. Generally speaking, the task is to provide an environment where consumers can use information to convince themselves that they picked the best product and made the right choice.

Once a consumer is motivated, the next task is to enable the maximal level of engagement. This must be done by providing the right tools and by ensuring the entire process is easy. In a world of social media and mobile technology enabling engagement may often seem automatic. However, a consumer that is very satisfied with your brand and who has "liked" you on some website is only passively engaged. The ultimate goal is for them to be actively promoting your brand, essentially as an unofficial spokesperson. Overlooked by many, most consumers are only mediocre brand custodians. For example, consumers may know why they chose a product but be unable respond to or educate others on alternative motivations. A richly cultivated product environment can help foster engagement by providing consumers with the knowledge necessary to intelligently interact with other consumers. Thus to enable engagement, one must equip the consumer with the information needed to act as a custodian of the brand.

Finally, human beings are cognitive misers and even though our mental resources remain scarce, we, as consumers, are being asked by brands to participate more and more. Research suggests that simplifying decision making, rather than amassing information and options is likely to yield success. Accordingly, it is just as important to provide an easy and efficient product environment that aids fluency in decision making as it is to provide consumers with engagement opportunities and information at every turn.

Regardless of its form, engagement will be the most useful when it is designed to help affirm to existing customers that they made the right choice and help prospective customers make the choice of your brand a "no-brainer". Doing so will produce confident and knowledgeable consumers that will continue to engage with both the brand and fellow consumer, and ultimately lead to your brand being chosen more frequently, by more people.

This Research Brief was written by Mathew Willcox of FCB's Institute of Decision Making and the Georgetown Institute for Consumer Research.

Key Points

- The ambiguity of engagement can be concerning to marketers.
- Consumers' desires to reaffirm their choices provides an excellent opportunity for engagement.
- Consumers who sought out more information reported being more likely to talk about their purchase, had more positive feelings toward the brand, and felt more connected to the brand.

The Georgetown Institute for Consumer Research, Sponsored by KPMG, develops innovative, ground-breaking research to illuminate the challenges and opportunities of understanding and marketing to consumers.

For more information, visit <http://consumerresearch.georgetown.edu>