Make them want it

The new science of consumer behaviour in the algorithm age

Dr M NANDA



BlueRose ONE .com
Stories Matter
New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS
India | U.K.

Copyright © Dr M Nanda 2026

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS
www.BlueRoseONE.com
info@bluerosepublishers.com
+91 8882 898 898
+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-81-6744-901-6

Cover design: Varun Narayan, Shariq Ansari
Typesetting: Simran Maurya

First Edition: October 2026

Preface

I have spent roughly thirty years studying consumer behaviour - in classrooms, through research papers, through formal studies, and much of what I know came from standing quietly in supermarkets and watching shoppers!

I have watched someone pick up a product, examine it, put it back, pick up another, compare the two, hesitate, and finally put both back. I have seen people walk into a store wanting one thing and walk out with something completely different. I have spoken to consumers ignore products that marketers had spent months passionately discussing. I have witnessed an ordinary-looking product fly off a shelf while a beautifully designed product gathered dust. And over the years, I began to realise that the most interesting part of marketing happens in that tiny moment when a human being stands in front of a product and thinks - "*Should I?*"

That moment has fascinated me for most of my professional life, and I can confess it has probably become an obsession, and not in the dramatic sense, but just that I have never really stopped 'observing'.

Even when I am supposedly shopping, I am watching; when I am travelling, I am noticing; when someone is telling me about a new product, part of my mind is asking what the consumer might actually do!

I have irritated friends with this! They would occasionally call and say, "*Dr Nanda, can you just look at this brand?*" And I would, of course, look, but then I would probably give them ten unsolicited observations, three ideas they hadn't asked for and at least one completely unreasonable suggestion!

I hope some of those ideas were worth the tolerance, and fortunately, many worked! Many didn't! I am grateful for both!

Multiple failures taught me something success never could! It taught me to become suspicious of my own ‘certainty’.

I have made this mistake myself, and have believed that because an idea looked brilliant on paper, consumers would naturally love it. Obviously, they didn't!

I have seen products with excellent logic fail because the behaviour required was wrong; have seen strong brands lose momentum because they made consumers think too much; have seen businesses spend heavily to create awareness when the real problem was desire; have seen marketers celebrate the first purchase while completely forgetting to ask why someone would ever come back. Those experiences changed me!

Over the years, I became less interested in asking whether an idea was clever and whether it would actually change behaviour. That shift took years!

More than a decade ago, I had written research on impulse buying and on online consumer behaviour, and at the time, these subjects appeared fascinating to me because they revealed something traditional marketing often missed - consumers don't always move through a neat sequence of need, evaluation, comparison and purchase, sometimes they simply react, sometimes context overwhelms intention, sometimes convenience beats consideration, sometimes emotion arrives before logic, and sometimes the consumer cannot explain the purchase even to themselves.

The research papers were only one part of the journey, for almost two decades, I have been building my own notes - scribbles, loose sheets, conference notes, research observations, PhD notes - written in margins, captured after meetings, questions I couldn't answer, things I observed in stores, things I saw consumers do that contradicted what textbooks said they should do. I would write something down - believe it for a while, but then observe the market shift slowly - a technology would appear, a new consumer behaviour would emerge, a business would succeed for a reason I hadn't anticipated - and I would destroy the old idea and start again! That process has been going on for years!

In fact, when I moved to Bangalore three years ago, I carried an embarrassing amount of this intellectual debris with me! As we moved

homes, I collected old papers, diaries, conference notes, research material and those little pieces of paper on which I had written some thought that seemed terribly important at the time. I promised myself that once I settled into the new home, I would organise everything.

Somewhere in that chaos was the history of how I had learnt to think about consumers, and this book grew from that history! That is why I call this my life's work!

I don't believe everything in these pages will remain perfect! I fully expect the consumer to prove me wrong again! That is one of the privileges and dangers of studying human behaviour - human beings refuse to remain still long enough for a theory to become comfortable!

But I have tried to put into this book what I have learnt, questioned, tested, discarded, rebuilt and observed across a career! I have tried to go beyond the familiar language of marketing - we have spent decades talking about awareness, positioning, communication, campaigns and conversion, and I know all of these matter, but I think we have been looking at the wrong end of the telescope - the consumer doesn't experience our marketing plan!

The consumer experiences a moment, a desire, a choice, a product, a price, a delivery, an experience, a memory - and then, perhaps, another purchase!

My book gradually moves away from traditional marketing language and towards something I believe is much more fundamental - behaviour, desire, decision, identity, habit, and systems. The Universal Purchase Equation came from that search! It came from my long-standing desire to understand whether the apparently chaotic world of consumer behaviour has an underlying structure, and I believe it does.

But I also believe the equation becomes useful only when we respect its limitations. Different categories behave differently - the weights change, the context changes, in fact the consumer changes! The denominator changes in meaning, but the human being remains at the centre!

That is why I helped design from the universal equation into category playbooks - quick commerce behaves differently from fashion; fashion behaves differently from electronics; food behaves differently from high-value purchases; services behave differently from enterprise

buying. Yet I don't believe we need a completely new psychology for every category. We just need to understand how the same human forces express themselves differently.

Perhaps that is what I have been trying to do throughout my career - not collect marketing tricks, but understand patterns!

I believe, the marketer of the future cannot remain merely a 'communicator'. I want you to see consumers differently, walk into a supermarket and notice the hesitation, look at a product and wonder where the consumer is doing unnecessary mental work; see a repeat purchase and ask what made it inevitable; see a premium product and ask what identity it enables; see a new category and ask what behaviour it is asking people to change; look at an advertisement and ask whether it is creating attention or merely occupying space.

See, after thirty years, I still remain a student! I am not handing you a finished truth, but sharing a way of looking, a way of questioning, a way of connecting what we observe in consumers to what we build as businesses!

I hope you take these ideas into categories I have never worked in and discover something I didn't see. And that is ultimately why I wrote this book - to give you a starting point, to help you improve upon my thirty years of watching, thirty years of questioning, thirty years of research, consulting, mistakes, successes, conversations, scribbles, discarded theories and renewed curiosity!

All of it has led here!

I am still watching, still taking notes, still changing my mind, still learning from the person standing three shelves away from me in a supermarket, looking at two nearly identical products and deciding which one to put into the cart! After thirty years, I still want to know why! That is probably why I wrote this book, and perhaps why I will never quite stop writing it in my head!

Table of Contents

Part 1: Before They Think **1**

1. Physics of Attraction 4
2. Steal the First Second 25

Part 2: How Desire is Created **45**

3. Scroll-Born Desire 47
4. The Collapse of Decision Making 66
5. Discount Vs Premium - The Dual Brain 77

Part 3: How Buying Has Changed **90**

6. The Buy and Show Loop 93
7. The Identity Purchase 105
8. Habit is the New Loyalty 120

Part 4: The New Rules of Buying **133**

9. The Quick Commerce Brain 136
10. Friction Kills More Than Price 146
11. Visibility is Value 157

Part 5: The Marketer's Playbook **171**

12. Design for the Scroll, Not the Shelf 174
13. Build for Desire, Not Just Need 188
14. Reduce Thinking, Increase Buying 202
15. Engineer Social Proof 217
16. Price as Signal, Not Barrier 231

Part 6: Execution systems **245**

17. Designing for Conversion 248

18. Building Demand in the Algorithm Age 262

19. Winning the Second Purchase 276

Part 7: The purchase formulas **290**

20. The Universal Purchase Equation 291

21. Category Playbooks 306

22. The Marketer's Checklist 331

Epilogue 336

Part 1
Before They Think

I believed that people think before they buy, that they compare options, evaluate features, maybe read a few reviews, and then arrive at a decision that feels logical and well considered!

And then one completely normal evening, I walked into a store to buy something I actually needed, something specific that I had already decided in my head! *But what did I walk out with?* I walked out with a pair of bright orange socks that had absolutely no connection to my original plan or, if I am being honest, to my age and personality!

I was not searching for socks, and had not left home thinking - *"Today I shall transform my ankle region into a traffic signal"*.

But somewhere between what I had gone to buy and the billing counter, those socks appeared! And suddenly my brain created a completely unnecessary fantasy - I imagined the socks slightly visible while sitting in a meeting, I imagined someone noticing them and also imagined myself becoming *"the kind of person"* who wears orange socks confidently!

Understand this carefully - I bought a 'temporary' upgraded identity!

That is modern buying powered by 'impulse'!

And almost every consumer on Earth is doing versions of this all day - a man enters a supermarket for milk and exits carrying imported dark chocolate covered almonds because the packaging whispered - *"You are stressed, sophisticated, and deserve small luxuries"*; someone opens Blinkit for bread and mysteriously purchases Korean ramen, vitamin gummies, cold coffee, and scented candles! A college student walks into a mall intending to *"just look around"* and returns home with sneakers expensive enough to require emotional justification for the next six months. A middle-aged uncle who spent ten minutes arguing with an

auto driver over ₹40 suddenly says - *"Fine, add the extended warranty also"*. *Why?* Because context changes behaviour!

See, impulse buying is not stupidity, but emotional vulnerability meeting excellent timing. That is all!

And modern life has made us 'permanently' vulnerable!

Consumers today are tired, distracted, overstimulated, slightly anxious, socially comparative, algorithmically manipulated, and chronically exposed to other people's lifestyles! We are always looking around!

Which means the human brain is now operating like an open browser with many tabs running simultaneously!

Tabs that scream - *"Save money"*, *"You deserve better"*, *"Your school friends are doing suspiciously well"*, *"Limited period offer"*, *"Glow-up"*, *"Low stock"*

Civilisation, it seems, is now being governed by push notifications! And businesses that understand this are printing money!

The old marketing belief was that consumers move logically through decisions, awareness, interest, evaluation, and finally purchase.

What remains of above is mostly theory today! Unfortunately, reality looks more like this - scroll, pause, curiosity, tiny emotional reaction, purchase, and self-justification!

See, the justification always comes later! Always! Human beings are extraordinarily talented at explaining purchases after making them.

A person buying ₹9,000 sneakers says - *"Good shoes are an investment"*. A person buying a luxury water bottle says - *"I need to stay hydrated"*.

Clearly, this is not investment or hydration, but 'identity' theatre!

And I am not mocking consumers! I am protecting businesses from misunderstanding them!

Because often, I see companies still behave as if consumers are calmly studying product specifications like engineering professors!

On the contrary, consumers are wandering through life collecting emotional support objects - some purchases represent reward, others represent aspiration, recovery, belonging, or even control.

Ask yourself - *Why does someone buy an expensive notebook they will barely use?* The answer is simple - because even productivity has become an 'aesthetic'! *Why do people buy gym wear before becoming consistent at the*

gym? Because purchasing the outfit creates temporary psychological ownership of the future self. *Why do people buy premium coffee machines and then continue ordering coffee outside?* Because the machine was never about coffee, but about becoming the kind of person whose kitchen suggests stability.

This is why impulse buying is no longer a side effect of commerce, but the 'engine' of commerce! Especially today, because modern shopping environments are scientifically engineered to weaken resistance - colours, placement, urgency labels, recommendations, music, lighting, packaging, one-click payments, and EMIs.

"Only 2 left". "People near you also bought this". "Best seller". "Trending". Human beings are fighting billion-dollar behavioural systems using a brain that still gets excited when bubble wrap makes sounds, and we are losing badly! And yet most businesses still focus too heavily on rational communication with features, specifications, technical superiority, corporate-like messaging.

Meanwhile the consumer bought the competitor's product because it *"felt nicer".* That sentence destroys boardrooms! But it is 'so' true!

Consumers process the world emotionally, and perhaps logic enters later carrying paperwork!

That is why this section of the book matters so much! Before studying loyalty, or brand love, or performance marketing, or conversion funnels, or retention strategy, there's a need to study - the first glance, the first interruption, the first emotional spark, and the tiny irrational reaction that says - *"I was not planning to buy this, but suddenly I want it".*

The businesses that understand how to engineer that feeling will dominate the future of commerce.

1.
Physics of Attraction

Most marketers and businesses believe consumers buy after 'thinking'. That belief is costing them fortunes!

See, the truth is far less flattering to human intelligence - the vast majority of buying decisions begin before conscious thought ever arrives.

Long before a consumer compares features, reads reviews, evaluates pricing, or creates those wonderfully rational explanations they later tell friends and family, something else happens first - they react.

A colour catches attention, a shape feels different, a package looks premium, a face appears trustworthy, a product feels familiar, a message interrupts the scroll, and so the brain moves before logic has even put on its shoes!

Readers, this is the hidden world of modern commerce, a world where milliseconds matter more than minutes, where attention is won before persuasion begins, where attraction is not a creative exercise but a commercial weapon, and where products often succeed or fail before consumers have processed a single fact.

I would say that the challenge for businesses today is that consumers rarely or no longer encounter products in calm environments, but encounter them while distracted, while scrolling, while commuting, while procrastinating, while comparing their lives to strangers on the internet, while trying to remember why they opened their phones in the first place.

In such environments, nobody owes your brand any kind of attention, nobody arrives prepared to listen, nobody is waiting patiently for your value proposition, instead you get a glance, or sometimes even less!

See, that glance determines whether anything else gets a chance to happen!

Before we discuss desire, pricing, identity, loyalty, social proof, or buying behaviour, we must understand the moment that comes before all of them - the first 'reaction', the first 'interruption', and the first 'emotional' signal.

I will help you explore why certain colours stop people, why shape influences perception, why consumers often choose products that make them feel slightly more interesting, and how design quietly influences behaviour without asking permission. We will also examine the brutal reality of attention in the age of infinite scrolling, where your product is no longer competing against another product, but competing against 'everything' - a comedian, a cricket clip, a celebrity scandal, a singer, a puppy, a conspiracy theory, a recipe, or a meme - all at the same time!

Remember, modern marketing is no longer about convincing people, but about earning the right to be noticed. And if you understand what happens before consumers think, you begin understanding what truly drives 'impulse' buying.

Not logic, not features, not specifications, but the small, powerful reactions that quietly shape almost every purchase we make.

The First Glance Economy

A terrible thing has happened to the human attention span, we no longer look at products, but surely 'collide' with them! I feel that is the first truth modern businesses must accept!

Let me explain!

Consumers today are not walking through stores like thoughtful scholars comparing craftsmanship, material quality, and long-term utility while soft music plays in the background! Instead, they are 'overstimulated' civilians trying to survive 27 sensory attacks per minute, and in this environment, the 'first glance' has become economically powerful!

Possibly more powerful than the product itself!

I realised this many years ago at an airport!

Airports are fascinating because they temporarily convert ordinary human beings into financially unstable philosophers - a man who says *"₹300 for popcorn? Impossible"* inside a multiplex will suddenly purchase almonds in cylindrical packaging for ₹1,850 at an airport because the environment has psychologically informed him that basic arithmetic is beneath him now! *Agree?*

I was walking past a premium travel accessories store when I saw a backpack.

Nothing extraordinary about the product itself, but the bag stood there under warm lighting. It had minimal design, muted colours, perfect structure, confident silence, and before my brain asked a single intelligent question, another part of my mind had already whispered - *"This is a competent person's backpack"*. That was enough! Not durability, or pricing, or even storage capacity! Competence! That feeling entered first!

This is how modern buying works!

Today, consumers do not process first, but they react first!

'Meaning' enters later because the human brain is constantly making lightning-fast assumptions based on visual signals long before logic arrives with its tiny calculator!

Expensive, cheap, modern, trustworthy, premium, safe, bold, young, intelligent, healthy, luxury, mass-market - all these impressions are often formed within seconds! Perhaps even faster!

Notice, that is also probably why two identical products can produce completely different emotional reactions simply because one uses matte packaging, cleaner typography, softer colours, or better spacing!

Fundamentally, presentation changes 'perceived' reality, and in fact, entire industries survive because humans confuse 'appearance' with value.

Look at bottled water! Civilisation somehow reached a point where water itself developed branding personalities! One bottle says - *"I hydrate"*, another says – *"I meditate, own linen clothing, and eat quinoa daily"*. Same species of water, but different emotional packaging! Here's what happens in reality - consumers 'always' react instantly to those signals whether they admit it or not!

This becomes even more dangerous in digital environments because screens have compressed decision-making violently! Inside a supermarket, at least consumers physically encounter products, but in online, products are fighting for survival inside rectangular videos moving at terrifying speed under a scrolling thumb! Which means products no longer get evaluated, but get filtered, rejected, ignored, skipped, dismissed, and occasionally 'noticed'.

That moment of notice is everything!

See, the first glance is not about selling, but about 'surviving' elimination!

Can your product visually interrupt the consumer before the consumer unconsciously discards it? That is the real question now, because modern

consumers are not carefully *"discovering"* products anymore, but reacting to visual interruptions while mentally multitasking!

A person watching Netflix simultaneously shops for skincare, someone sitting in office boredom suddenly buys desk organisers, a teenager scrolling reels buys sneakers because the colour looked emotionally undefeated!

Notice that we don't pause life to evaluate these things deeply!

The visual entered first, emotion reacted second, and logic arrived last carrying fake explanations!

And 'sadly' companies underestimate this constantly!

They still believe consumers read! No! Consumers 'glance'!

They believe consumers compare! No! Consumers 'eliminate'!

They believe consumers analyse features! No! Consumers absorb visual 'feeling'!

Even before the language begins, the brain has already started forming conclusions, and that is why colour matters so much! Colour differentiation 'essentially' creates interruption - a bright orange packet inside a sea of white packaging creates pause, a dark matte bottle among glossy competitors creates curiosity, a strangely shaped chocolate box creates memory! 'Difference' enters the brain faster than information!

This is one reason why even luxury brands often behave with extreme visual discipline. See, luxury is not only about product quality, but is controlled visual confidence! The product looks like it has no 'financial' anxiety!

Meanwhile many brands panic visually - too many offers, too many colours, too many labels, too many badges screaming - *"new"*, *"bestseller"*, *"50% extra"*, *"advanced formula"*. 'Calmness' itself becomes the differentiation!

And then there is shape! Humans react emotionally to geometry far more than they realise! Rounded shapes feel safer, sharp edges feel aggressive, thin products feel sophisticated, and heavy products feel important. *Why do some phones immediately feel premium when held?*

Simply because weight often creates psychological seriousness, and the brain says - *"This object has consequences"*.

It might sound ridiculous until you realise billion-dollar companies obsess over these details because tiny sensory reactions massively influence buying behaviour! Nothing in modern commerce is accidental anymore! The first glance is 'engineered' carefully.

Restaurants engineer it, apps engineer it, fashion brands engineer it, quick-commerce platforms engineer it, even cafés design beverages for camera visibility before taste!

Why? Because attention has become the 'gateway' to revenue! And remember, attention is no longer earned slowly, but 'has to be' captured instantly or lost permanently!

That is the 'first glance' economy!

A world where consumers react before thinking, judge before understanding, and feel before analysing. Which essentially means the businesses winning today are not merely building products, but successfully building 'immediate' emotional reactions!

Because if the first glance fails, nothing after it matters!

Colour as Disruption

I once watched a fully grown man buy a neon green toothbrush with the seriousness of someone selecting life insurance! There were at least forty toothbrushes hanging in front of him - white ones, blue ones, professional-looking ones, dental-clinic-looking ones, toothbrushes claiming advanced gum technology, and then suddenly - this radioactive green thing! It looked less like oral care and more like night traffic control! Naturally, he picked that one!

Why? Because increasingly colour is not just a decoration, but becoming an 'interruption'.

Let's start on the other side, where one of the biggest misunderstandings in branding and product design - companies often discuss colour like interior designers discussing curtains! *"Blue means trust". "Red means excitement". "Green means freshness"*, meanwhile 'overstimulated' consumers are going crazy over colours and visual contrast!

Note that the human brain notices 'difference' before meaning! Always!

Before consumers understand your product, before they evaluate quality, before they compare pricing, their brain asks a simpler question - *"Why did my eyes stop here?"* Colour answers that question faster than language ever can!

And modern commerce is now entirely dependent on interruption!

Walk through any supermarket and you will witness a visual warfare - hundreds of products screaming simultaneously from shelves - bright yellows and oranges, aggressive reds, premium blacks, natural greens, luxury whites, and not to forget the organic browns trying desperately to communicate 'moral' superiority! Every packet wants attention, every bottle wants desire, every snack wants emotional custody of your life and the wallet! Consumers are not *"shopping"* inside these

environments, but surviving visual assault! Which, I believe, is why 'unexpected' colour becomes so powerful!

A purple ketchup bottle works because ketchup trained us psychologically to expect red; a matte-black toothpaste tube suddenly feels premium because toothpaste has historically behaved like a hospital; a pale minimalist energy drink among loud fluorescent competitors feels modern precisely because it refuses category behaviour.

You know what, the brain notices 'rebellion'! Especially controlled rebellion, and this is why some products suddenly dominate shelves despite being objectively 'ordinary'. They visually interrupt expectation, and that interruption creates curiosity!

I realised this years ago while observing a premium chocolate brand launch. The entire category looked predictable - dark brown packaging, gold fonts, cocoa imagery, and European sadness! Then a year later, one brand entered with soft pastel colours that looked more suitable for luxury skincare than chocolate! Suddenly the product felt different, not because consumers tasted it, most had not, but the colour changed assumption before experience even began! Consumers unconsciously thought - *"This seems modern". "This feels premium". "This does not behave like regular chocolate".* Colour had already begun selling the story!

This becomes even more interesting and dangerous online or inside digital environments where colour works like 'psychological' electricity!
People scrolling social media are not consciously absorbing content anymore, but reacting to movement, contrast, faces, and colour disruptions at frightening speed! A strange colour palette can stop a thumb before some words even enter your thoughts!

Think about how quickly your brain reacts when you see something visually unusual online. Not necessarily beautiful, but just different - a pale beige burger brand in a sea of loud fast-food reds; a luxury perfume advertisement using clinical white instead of sensual black; or a sneaker campaign using brutal orange! Your eyes pause first, your brain explains later!

That pause is 'commercially' priceless!

The funniest part is how irrational humans 'become' around colour association - people genuinely believe black products are more premium even when the product inside is identical!

For example - put ordinary tissues inside matte-black packaging and suddenly consumers behave as though the tissues attended private Doon school! Gold packaging still hypnotises entire populations globally despite centuries of evidence that humans cannot emotionally handle shiny things responsibly!

Minimal white packaging now signals sophistication because consumers associate visual silence with supposed 'confidence'! Meanwhile bright multi-colour packaging often creates *"mass-market"* assumptions even before pricing appears! Notice that the product has not spoken yet, but colour already has!

Even food changes psychologically through colour! A milkshake in a glass bottle feels more artisanal, dark coffee cups make coffee feel stronger, pastel dessert boxes feel Instagrammable, before tasting even begins!

Would you agree if I say - half the modern café industry survives because lighting and colour convinced consumers they are having an emotional experience instead of consuming overpriced sugar near indoor plants! Challenge me if you dont!

As a marketer with interests in human psychology, I know for sure that humanity is incredibly easy to manipulate visually. And yet many businesses still treat colour selection casually.

A founder spends eighteen months building a product and then chooses packaging colours during a tired Tuesday evening meeting while someone says - *"Let's make it blue. Blue is safe"*.

Dear readers, mark my words - *"Today, safe is invisible!"*

Consumers simply do not 'notice' safe anymore! Their brains have adapted to ignore visual familiarity because modern environments contain too much information. Which means colour must now do more than look good and must create 'interruption'.

But, let me warn you, interruption does not mean chaos! Some brands misunderstand this completely and create packaging that doesn't work in the right direction. See, too much colour can create distrust, too much brightness might appear cheap, and too much visual noise will surely create exhaustion. So, our goal is not madness, but strategic disruption, a controlled visual break, something slightly unexpected, slightly emotionally magnetic, and slightly difficult to ignore.

Remember, the modern consumer is not calmly evaluating products, but rapidly filtering reality, and colour is often the very first thing forcing the brain to pause long enough for desire to enter.

Shape and Form as Behaviour Triggers

A few years ago, I bought a bottle of water because it looked expensive!

Same water, same biological outcome, still hydration, but the bottle was tall, sharp, minimal, and oddly satisfying to hold. Suddenly I was no longer drinking water, but participating in lifestyle propaganda! That is the power of shape!

Human beings do not react only to products, but also react to 'form'. And form manipulates us far more deeply than most businesses understand and estimate. The human brain does not merely "*see*" shapes, it also emotionally interprets them - rounded forms feel safe, sharp forms feel aggressive, thin forms feel elegant, heavy forms feel important, tiny forms feel premium, large forms feel valuable, symmetry feels trustworthy, and irregularity feels artistic!

Obviously, consumers rarely say these things aloud and nobody stands in a supermarket whispering - "*This yoghurt container possesses emotionally reassuring curvature*". Yet the reaction still happens, silently, instantly, and powerfully. This is why geometry influences buying behaviour so much, and once you notice it, you cannot unsee it!

Look at luxury perfumes. *Why are so many perfume bottles thick, heavy, and geometrically controlled?* Because weight and structure create psychological seriousness, and somehow the bottle feels consequential! Now compare that to cheap plastic packaging that bends emotionally when touched. The brain immediately senses lower value before the product even performs.

Humans constantly mistake physical sensation for product truth, and that confusion built entire industries.

Today, even food changes through shape. A square chocolate piece somehow feels richer than a badly broken uneven one, thin fries feel gourmet, chunky fries feel comforting, round ice cream tubs feel friendly, tall cans feel modern, mini desserts feel premium because humans associate smallness with exclusivity! *Aren't we unbelievably dramatic?!*

And then there is the strangest phenomenon of all - people assign personality to objects based on shape. Cars look *"angry"*. Buildings look *"confident"*. Phones look *"premium"*. Sneakers look *"fast"*. *How?* Just geometry!

A slightly sharper angle changes emotional interpretation completely. This becomes even more important in modern impulse buying because consumers are no longer deeply analysing products, but seemingly 'reacting' to sensory shortcuts. Shape becomes one of those shortcuts.

Take smartphones. Most consumers cannot technically explain processor architecture, refresh rates, or chip performance, but they absolutely react to physical form - flat edges suddenly feel modern, slimness feels advanced, minimal camera layouts feel premium, rounded corners feel approachable, and the entire purchasing decisions now happen through tactile emotional suggestion disguised as design. And businesses know this!

That is why product teams obsess over curves, edges, grip, proportions, thickness, and balance like sculptors preparing artefacts! Because the shape of an object silently changes the 'meaning' of ownership.

I once watched a café completely transform customer behaviour simply by changing cups! Earlier, they served coffee in ordinary ceramic mugs, then they switched to these matte, cylindrical cups that looked like they belonged in documentaries! Suddenly customers began photographing coffee! Same coffee, but different geometry. The form changed 'perceived' experience.

And modern commerce is increasingly driven by perceived experience!

This is why Apple became terrifyingly powerful, not merely because of technology, but because they understood form 'emotionally'. Their products often looked calmer than competitors - less panic, less clutter,

and less visual shouting. The geometry itself communicated 'confidence'.

Meanwhile other brands kept adding more buttons, more curves, more textures, and more unnecessary excitement, much like products trying desperately to prove themselves!

See, consumers feel this tension instinctively - clean form feels intentional, messy form feels uncertain.

And then comes memorability. Shape is one of the fastest ways for products to become mentally 'sticky'.

Why do some bottles become iconic globally? Why are some snack containers recognisable from across a room? Why do certain luxury shopping bags create emotional reactions before branding becomes visible?

Distinctive form 'always' creates instant recognition!

The brain remembers unusual geometry faster than information, and this is why some brands defend shape legally - not logos, but shape, because form itself becomes brand memory.

Even children respond to this powerfully! A strangely shaped candy instantly feels more exciting, animal-shaped biscuits create emotional attachment, curved juice bottles become *"fun"*. Adults pretend they are more rational, but they are not! We just upgrade to minimalist kitchen appliances that make us feel psychologically organised for maybe a day or two!

But here is where it gets fascinating - the most successful forms often balance familiarity and surprise simultaneously - too familiar becomes invisible while too strange becomes uncomfortable.

Remember, consumers want 'controlled' novelty, something different enough to feel fresh, but familiar enough to feel safe. This explains why many radically designed products fail!

Consumers do not want complete behavioural disruption, but want 'safe' experimentation, and keeping this balance matters enormously in impulse buying because consumers make ultra-fast emotional decisions based on sensory comfort - if a product looks difficult, confusing,

awkward, or socially risky, the brain quietly steps away, whereas if the form feels intuitive yet distinctive, curiosity enters.

See, today curiosity is commercially expensive and also explosive, especially in the age of social media, because now products are not only consumed, but are also displayed!

I think I can conclude confidently that shape has acquired a second job - camera performance! A visually unique product travels further online; interesting geometry photographs better; memorable forms become shareable; and distinctive silhouettes become identity signals.

Consumers increasingly buy products that look good existing in public. And it means geometry is no longer just industrial design, but marketing, psychology, social currency, and emotional engineering.

Remember, the modern consumer reacts to shape before logic begins, before features, before pricing, and before any form of comparison. The body feels first, and the mind explains later!

Safe Rebellion Buying

Most consumers do not want transformation, but a controlled experimentation with plausible deniability!

This is why a man who has worn only black, blue, and very boring grey shirts for eleven consecutive years suddenly buys white sneakers and behaves like he has re-winded to the past - not because the sneakers changed his life, but because they allowed him to feel 'slightly' different without terrifying himself!

That is safe rebellion buying, one of the most powerful forces in modern commerce!

See, consumers constantly want identity expansion, but only within emotionally manageable limits - nobody wakes up randomly and becomes a completely different human being through one purchase.

Real buying behaviour is subtler - tiny rebellions, small upgrades, and controlled departures from routine, the consumer wants to feel evolved, not unrecognisable! And businesses making billions have used this perfectly. Their most successful products are not radically different, but are familiar with 'attitude', like a slightly bolder colour, a cleaner design, a modern shape, a smarter package, and a mildly daring choice that says - "*I have changed… but everybody relax*".

This is why safe rebellion sells so beautifully in India, because Indian consumers live inside constant social observation of the family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and relatives who somehow, sometimes appear during major purchases like economic auditors! Which also means people want individuality without social instability - a college student buys chunky sneakers instead of formal shoes. Rebellion, but acceptable rebellion. A middle-aged banker who spent twenty years dressing 'same' suddenly buys a linen shirt and grows a beard. Safe rebellion. A woman who has always used practical handbags suddenly buys one

bright luxury handbag that serves absolutely no organisational purpose whatsoever. Safe rebellion again!

In above, nobody is overthrowing civilisation, but just negotiating identity upgrades, and products become the tools for those negotiations.

This is why slightly unusual brands often outperform completely unconventional ones.

Consumers do not want total unfamiliarity because it creates risk. Risk of judgement, regret, looking foolish, or social misalignment, the brain hates these risks.

But slight difference? That feels exciting! Which is why modern consumers are constantly buying products that let them feel interesting without becoming controversial.

Today, the greatest commercial zone is not extreme rebellion, but socially survivable uniqueness, and that is where desire becomes massive.

Let's look at the coffee culture - most people did not suddenly become passionate about coffee beans harvested at difficult altitudes in remote mountains, but what they actually wanted was participation in a modern identity. Holding the cup mattered, posting the café mattered, the aesthetic mattered, the feeling mattered, and I can say, the coffee simply became the 'ticket'. Notice how the transition happened safely - consumers did not jump from roadside chai directly into becoming coffee loving philosophers sitting in cafés. No! First came cold coffee, then café culture, then aesthetic cups, then artisanal menus! Such an 'identity' evolves through gradual product adoption. Safe rebellion, as I call it.

Fashion works the same way! That is why slightly oversized clothing exploded globally - it felt new, relaxed, modern, creative, but still wearable. Meanwhile truly extreme fashion remains mostly trapped inside runway shows attended by people pretending to understand. See, consumers flirt with rebellion, but they do not marry it!

Even technology products follow this behaviour. People often buy *"creative-looking"* gadgets not because functionality improved

dramatically, but because ownership signals personality evolution - transparent earbuds, minimal keyboards, retro cameras, mechanical watches, or foldable phones - all these products whisper - *"You are not ordinary"*.

That whisper has always been commercially lethal, and the smartest brands understand clearly that people often want the 'feeling' of rebellion more than actual change! That is why buying itself becomes emotionally satisfying!

A person purchasing expensive gym wear feels healthier before exercising, someone buying premium notebooks feels more organised before writing anything, and similarly a man buying a leather duffel bag immediately imagines himself becoming the kind of person who travels purposefully instead of carrying plastic bags containing tangled chargers! The product creates temporary identity simulation!

And honestly, I have witnessed modern commerce depends heavily on this illusion, from close quarters. I can confidently tell you that consumers are not merely buying utility anymore, even in products that are personal, but buying possible 'selves'. Perhaps possible disciplined self, or possible attractive self, or possible successful self, or a possible sophisticated self.

Products and purchases are acting like emotional auditions for future identity!

But remember, the key is 'safety'. Too much transformation also scares people!

That is why successful disruption usually arrives disguised as 'familiarity' - the product must feel adventurous enough to excite, but safe enough to justify.

Keeping this balance is everything, if you wish to succeed commercially.

Even food brands understand this now! Consumers want *"healthy indulgence"*, *"guilt-free desserts"*, *"protein ice cream"*, *"organic chips"*, but can you notice the psychology underneath! Check carefully and you will find that people want rebellion with emotional insurance - *"I am indulging… responsibly"*.

Today our civilisation has become incredible at negotiating with itself, and intelligent brands constantly 'ace' at engineering these negotiations.

A luxury watch with sporty styling; a bold sneaker in neutral colours; a premium electric vehicle designed to still look socially respectable; a dramatic lipstick shade packaged elegantly enough to feel tasteful - everywhere you look, businesses are selling controlled identity 'expansion'.

Simply because the consumer does not actually want chaos, but want 'permission'. A permission to feel newer, cooler, younger, more expressive, and more modern, but without risking social rejection. And that is why the most successful products often sit exactly between normal and daring - recognisable enough to feel safe and different enough to feel emotionally rewarding. That tiny 'middle' zone creates astonishing impulse buying!

Remember, when consumers encounter products that help them become slightly more interesting versions of themselves without emotional danger, resistance collapses, and so the purchase suddenly stops feeling irrational. Instead, it starts feeling necessary, not for survival, but for identity!

Translating Design into Conversion

There is a tragic species of product that exists everywhere in modern business.

Beautiful failures! Products that look incredible in brainstorming sessions, amazing on 3D renders, *"sexy"* inside pitch decks, and emotionally thrilling during design reviews conducted by people wearing white sneakers and saying things like - *"We wanted to disrupt the category language"*.

But then absolutely nobody buys them!

And I have seen many such, in fact launched a few myself and fell flat on my face!

See, attraction without conversion is merely decoration, and this is one of the biggest mistakes most companies make today - they confuse design appreciation with buying behaviour!

Please understand that consumers are not judges at an art competition, but tired human beings making fast emotional decisions under lots of distraction.

Which means design has only one real job - 'move' behaviour! And not focus to impress the management, the marketing team, other designers in the community, or win awards, or generate LinkedIn applause from brand consultants using phrases like *"visual storytelling ecosystem"*, but 'sell'.

Today, packaging, product form, communication, colour, copy, placement, pricing presentation, and other visual structures, have all become part of one psychological system, and that system must answer a brutally simple question immediately - *"Does this make me want to move closer or move away?"*

I realised this years ago inside a supermarket while observing shampoo shelves - one brand had gorgeous packaging, minimal, elegant, premium typography, and looked expensive, but nobody touched it. Right beside it stood another product with clearer hierarchy, stronger contrast, easier readability, and one giant emotionally comforting phrase - *"Hair Fall Control"*. Consumers attacked it like hair survival equipment! That day reminded me of something very important - clarity beats elegance. And surprisingly often, because consumers do not reward business effort, but reward life ease!

Many businesses accidentally create friction through overdesigned experiences. See, luxury works only in luxury environments, but in mass it kills sales - a customer standing in a supermarket aisle is not there to decode your artistic philosophy, but just wants fast emotional reassurance.

This is why translating design into conversion requires understanding behaviour, not aesthetics alone. Every visual element must help 'movement'. Movement toward curiosity, toward trust, toward desire, and eventually toward a 'purchase'! Nothing should merely *"exist beautifully"*.

Purchase, dear marketers, is the only truth.

The design must quietly communicate - *"You are making a good decision"*, because that emotional reassurance matters enormously because consumers constantly fear regret, especially during impulse buying. Remember - most purchases happen before complete logical certainty exists, and that means design must reduce psychological resistance instantly. And the businesses winning today understand how tiny design decisions massively influence behaviour.

See, conversion is not one moment, but accumulated emotional 'flow', and friction destroys flow faster than price. That is why some consumers abandon carts over ridiculous reasons - too many fields, confusing layout, weak visuals, unclear sizing, poor product photos, distrust, or excessive effort. The brain quietly says - *"Too much work. Leave"*. Modern consumers are extremely sensitive to effort because digital life has trained them to expect speed everywhere - a product page now has seconds to communicate value before attention escapes

permanently into another app - this is why visual hierarchy matters so much. The brain must know where to look instantly. Strong image, clear message, visible value, and easy action - that is good behavioural design.

And honestly, some businesses sabotage themselves spectacularly, by creating packaging impossible to read, or websites that look like puzzle competitions, or advertisements where nobody understands what is being sold until the final three seconds.

One of the funniest examples of this is modern restaurant menus! Some cafés now design menus with such aggressive minimalism that ordering coffee begins feeling like decoding ancient manuscripts! Tiny fonts, abstract names, and such low clarity that consumers become anxious, and lose confidence.

Remember, the best-selling environments are rarely the most artistic, but the easiest to emotionally navigate.

See how Apple stores understand this deeply! Notice how little visual confusion exists - clean tables, clear presentation, space to touch, minimal resistance, and an environment that says - *"This decision is simple"*. That feeling increases buying behaviour massively!

Another lesson to remember - confused consumers delay, overwhelmed consumers exit, distracted consumers abandon, but emotionally guided consumers continue moving!

Great design is not about making products look attractive, but also reduce hesitation and shorten the distance between interest and action. The design must therefore work 'instantly'.

Can the consumer understand it fast? Trust it fast? Desire it fast? Imagine themselves owning it fast? That is the instant attraction test, and businesses that pass this test consistently create extraordinary conversion power because they understand something many companies still refuse to accept - people do not buy when they fully understand, but when the experience feels emotionally frictionless enough to continue!

2.
Steal the First Second

At this point, we have understood something deeply uncomfortable about modern commerce - people are not calmly entering buying decisions anymore, but are reacting. Colour interrupts them, shape manipulates them, packaging creates assumptions, and tiny visual signals trigger emotional movement before logic even arrives.

Let's now move into something even more dangerous! Attention itself!

Because attracting the eye is no longer enough, but you must also survive the scroll. And that changes marketing completely!

Earlier, brands competed against other brands - a biscuit competed against another biscuit, a shoe competed against another shoe, but today your product is competing against stand-up comedy clips, celebrity gossip, cricket highlights, conspiracy theories, dance reels, relationship advice from emotionally unstable strangers, and a dog or cat being trained!

That is the battlefield now!

Modern consumers do not enter digital spaces intending to buy, but seeking stimulation, which simply means attention today is not thoughtful, reflexive, fast, emotional, and automatic. I would say people no longer *"pay attention"*, instead, their nervous systems react to interruption. This is why so much advertising fails despite massive budgets. Not because the product is bad, or strategy is weak, but because the communication behaves too slowly for modern human behaviour - the consumer has already scrolled away before the brand even finishes introducing itself dramatically!

In this part, we are going to understand one of the most important realities in modern impulse buying - attention is no longer earned

politely, but is stolen - through contrast, movement, curiosity, human emotion, relatability, and through creative disruption powerful enough to interrupt automatic scrolling behaviour for even one ‘second’! And that one second is worth millions!

In the modern economy, the first second decides whether the rest of your marketing gets permission to exist!

Attention is a Reflex

A friend once unlocked his phone to check air tickets and somehow end up purchasing a miniature waffle maker! Not a large waffle maker, a miniature one, the kind of appliance that's personal.

What fascinated me was not the purchase itself, but speed! There was no planning, no evaluation, no comparison, no meaningful internal debate.

One moment he was checking ticket prices and around 5 minutes later he was emotionally committed to becoming *"someone who occasionally makes waffles"*.

This is modern attention! Not focused, not intentional, not conscious, and neither curious, but 'surely' reactive!

Sadly, that is the biggest behavioural shift businesses still underestimate.

For decades, marketing operated under the assumption that consumers deliberately paid attention - television ads interrupted scheduled viewing, billboards occupied predictable roads, newspapers held captive reading time, and consumers sat still long enough for messaging to unfold. That world is history!

Today attention behaves more like nervous system 'activity' than conscious decision-making because we no longer calmly direct focus, but simple and easily twitch toward stimulation! If that sounds dramatic, spend ten minutes observing your own behaviour online. You open one app and immediately get dragged through twenty unrelated emotional environments - a cooking video, a political argument, a skincare recommendation, a breakup quote, a cricket clip, a finance influencer explaining investment, an ad for ergonomic pillows - the brain is not processing deeply anymore, but just reacting rapidly, and that has changed the rules of commerce completely.

Businesses still think consumers *"see"* advertising, but in reality, most consumers barely register it consciously. Instead, modern platforms

train people into 'reflexive' scanning behaviour. Thumb moving, eyes filtering, brain rejecting, swipe, swipe, swipe….

The consumer isn't asking - *"Would I like to thoughtfully engage with this communication?"* Instead, the brain is asking - *"Stimulating or boring?"*

And that decision happens frighteningly fast, which is why attention has become so brutal!

Your product no longer gets respectful consideration, but just gets milliseconds! And those milliseconds are always 'emotional', not intellectual!

This is why many brands fail despite having good products, intelligent positioning, and expensive campaigns - they communicate too slowly, build toward attention instead of triggering it immediately. Sadly, the consumer has already disappeared into another reel where somebody is ranking mangoes!

Modern scrolling behaviour has rewired expectation itself - humans now expect immediate stimulation continuously. Every pause feels suspicious, every delay feels irritating, every slow introduction feels unnecessary.

See, even entertainment has adapted. Look at how aggressively modern videos behave - fast cuts, large captions, movement every few seconds, and a spray of emotional hooks every now and then. *Why?* Because creators discovered something terrifying - if attention is not captured instantly, the brain escapes automatically.

People often believe they are *"choosing"* what to watch or buy online, but in reality, platforms are shaping reflexes constantly - the consumer does not consciously decide to stop scrolling. Something interrupts the pattern.

Businesses that understand this dominate impulse buying, because impulse purchases rarely begin with rational evaluation, instead they mostly begin with interruption.

A woman scrolling peacefully suddenly sees a handbag colour she has never seen before. Pause.

A man sees a watch advertisement showing not the watch, but the lifestyle surrounding the watch. Pause.

A teenager notices sneakers worn by someone who looks socially confident online. Pause.

These pauses are commercially explosive - a product that successfully disrupts scrolling behaviour gains entry into the brain, and once inside, logic can begin working. But first, the reflex must trigger!

Even shopping platforms now operate around reflex behaviour.

Notice how modern commerce aggressively reduces thinking time - one-click buying, instant recommendations, auto-filled payments, *"Frequently bought together"*, *"Only 2 left"*. These systems are not encouraging careful decision-making, but accelerating reflex action and shortening the distance between stimulus and purchase!

Remember, human beings are easiest to influence before reflection begins - which means attention today is not merely visual, but emotional vulnerability in motion. This is also why relatability has become so powerful online. Perfect advertising often performs worse than emotionally familiar content, and consumers stop for things that feel human - a real face, an awkward moment, a surprising line, and the brain reacts because it senses emotional relevance before conscious understanding forms. That is the reflex!

Once you understand this properly, you begin seeing modern commerce differently - you realise consumers are not moving through clean marketing funnels anymore, but drifting through emotional triggers!

Remember, interruption leads to curiosity which leads to engagement which then leads to desire, and that desire searches desperately for justification to make the purchase!

This is why 'reactive' attention is now the most valuable parameter in business.

The modern consumer is no longer calmly observing the market, but scrolling through stimulations at speed, and the brands that want to survive this brutal important truth must understand that attention today is not earned through patience, but captured through reflex!

Competing Against Everything

Most businesses still tell themselves - *"Our competition is other brands in our category"*. No! Your competition is literally anything more interesting than you!

A few months ago, I was trying to buy formal shoes online. Three minutes later I was watching a video of a Japanese man restoring a 1984 rice cooker! Then came a reel about airport fashion, then a stand-up comedy clip, then a woman reviewing perfumes, and so on. Forty-two minutes passed, I still had no shoes!

This is the modern marketplace!

Consumers are not moving through clean buying journeys anymore, but wandering through digital chaos while businesses scream for attention simultaneously. This means your product is no longer competing only against products, but against all forms of digital 'stimulation'.

That sounds absurd until you realise this is exactly how attention behaves now.

The consumer does not enter Instagram thinking - *"I shall now carefully evaluate premium backpacks"*. Remember, the consumer enters looking for a break, distraction, emotional relief, novelty, validation, entertainment, or temporary escape from existence, and your product appears in the middle of that psychological traffic. Which means category logic has already collapsed!

Earlier, businesses fought inside predictable environments - soap brands fought other soap brands on television, and car brands fought other car brands in newspapers. Now everyone fights the algorithm! And the algorithm rewards only one thing consistently - engagement!

This creates a terrifying reality for businesses because consumers now compare your communication not against your industry standards, but

against the most emotionally stimulating content they saw five seconds earlier.

This is why traditional advertising structures fail increasingly online, because modern attention environments reward immediate emotional activation, and not patient communication. This is also why influencers became commercially powerful so quickly, because they did not feel like advertisements, but felt more like usual content. And consumers enter digital platforms searching for content, not marketing. People avoid ads consciously, but consume content voluntarily!

The smartest brands have stopped asking - *"How do we advertise?"*, and started asking - *"How do we become interesting enough to survive the feed?"*

In many cases, products now succeed because they behave like 'media'!

Let me explain for food brands today - a dessert is no longer competing only on taste, but on visual drama, camera friendliness, Instagram visibility, shareability, meme potential, packaging aesthetics, and online conversation.

A boring but delicious dessert loses frighteningly often against an average dessert that photographs beautifully!

The modern consumer increasingly experiences products socially before physically - people often see products online repeatedly before ever touching them, which means perception begins before usage!

This is why even serious industries are becoming entertainment-driven! Finance creators dance while explaining taxation, and doctors make comedy reels about vitamin deficiencies!

Everyone is adapting to the same truth - information alone no longer holds attention, but emotion does, movement does, story does, personality does, curiosity does, and even outrage does!

This creates another important behavioural shift, that I solidly believe is true! Consumers no longer separate *"shopping time"* from *"entertainment time"*. The two have merged!

People discover products while laughing, while procrastinating, while emotionally spiralling at 1 AM, while watching random content with absolutely no purchase intention! Impulse buying randomly explodes

in these environments because the brain is psychologically 'open' and 'unguarded'.

See, that is why modern commerce feels so unpredictable - a product can suddenly explode because one reel captured attention properly.

Businesses that fail to understand this continue making category-perfect communication that nobody notices today. They still benchmark competitors obsessively while completely ignoring the real battlefield - the feed, and the scroll - the infinite river of stimulation where consumers now spend enormous portions of their lives!

This is why *"good marketing"* often performs badly, meanwhile some teenager filming skincare products under bedroom lighting accidentally creates more consumer desire than a ₹12 crore advertising campaign - not because production quality improved, but because 'relatability' beat polish, and the consumer 'reacted'. That is the metric that matters now - reaction!

Can your product stop automatic scrolling? Can it emotionally interrupt surrounding content? Can it create enough curiosity to earn one extra second?

Because that second is where impulse buying begins, and if your business understands that they are competing not against categories but against the entire entertainment economy, their approach changes forever.

Suddenly design changes, communication changes, packaging changes, launch strategy changes, even product naming changes!

Everything becomes attention-aware!

Remember, modern consumers are not shopping inside stores anymore, but shopping inside 'distraction'!

The New Attention Triggers

A few years ago, businesses believed attention came from information - simply tell the consumer the features, explain the benefits, present the value proposition, add a smiling family, add the logo, and finished!

Modern attention does not behave rationally anymore, instead, it behaves 'biologically'! People react before they understand, and the things they react to are surprisingly primitive - movement, faces, contrast, emotion, curiosity, and relatability. The modern brain is not calmly evaluating content, but scanning aggressively for stimulation worth interrupting the scroll! And what that means is businesses now live or die based on attention 'triggers', and not advertising budgets.

I realised this properly while sitting beside a teenager in a café. This boy was scrolling at terrifying speed! Nothing survived more than one second - luxury brands, travel videos, fashion campaigns, or news clips. Scrolled and gone!

Then suddenly he stopped. A man in the video simply whispered - *"Bro, nobody realises this…"* Attention captured!

That tiny curiosity gap defeated million-dollar campaigns within seconds, and this is the modern consumer behaviour!

The brain is no longer asking - *"Is this important?"*, but *"Is this emotionally incomplete enough that I need resolution?"* That is why curiosity works so powerfully! See, humans hate unfinished information, and that explains why people click videos titled - *"You are charging your phone wrong". "Three signs your body is stressed". "What airlines don't tell passengers".*

Modern attention is constantly being fuelled by psychological 'incompletion'. The brain wants closure, and businesses that understand this communicate differently - they stop announcing products, and create open loops of 'curiosity', not manipulation.

A skincare brand saying - *"Our formula contains Vitamin C"*. Forgettable!

But a creator saying - *"This ingredient is why your skin still looks tired"*, get a definitive pause, because it creates emotional tension, and that captures attention.

This is also why contrast has become brutally powerful!

The human brain always notices disruption before meaning, something visually or emotionally different forces the nervous system to react automatically.

A quiet advertisement inside loud content, or a loud advertisement inside calm content; a minimalist product in a crowded category; a strangely honest sentence among polished corporate messaging. This 'difference' creates interruption, and interruption creates 'opportunity'.

This is why black packaging became premium, because it interrupted category expectation. It is also why some creators suddenly explode online - they speak slower, or dress differently, or use silence unexpectedly, or behave unlike surrounding content, and the consumer brain notices these pattern breaks instantly. Remember, attention is fundamentally pattern interruption.

Motion works similarly! But motion alone is not enough anymore. The internet is overloaded with movement, and today movement must also carry emotional relevance. Which brings me to talk about the most powerful trigger of all - human presence! Nothing captures attention like another human being, especially when displaying recognisable emotion - fear, excitement, embarrassment, confidence, joy, or confusion.

Humans are 'biologically' obsessed with humans, and this is why product-only advertising increasingly performs poorly online - consumers stop for faces faster than objects - a founder speaking honestly often outperforms polished campaigns, a customer reaction video beats technical explanation, or a creator using a product casually feels more persuasive than cinematic advertising.

Why? Because the consumer brain trusts social signals faster than brand signals! A face creates emotional context instantly and even an eye contact changes attention behaviour. People are more likely to stop scrolling when somebody appears to speak 'directly' to them -t hat tiny illusion of 'personal' relevance matters enormously in commerce.

I must also add that this is also why relatability became commercially explosive. For years, we marketers, tried to make advertising to look aspirational - perfect homes, perfect bodies, perfect lighting, perfect lifestyles, and then suddenly consumers became exhausted by perfection!

But today, relatable content often outperforms polished content because it feels psychologically safer - a slightly messy room, natural language, awkward humour, or visible imperfection. These signals create familiarity and that reduces resistance! Consumers think - *"This person is like me"*.

Remember, that emotional bridge is incredibly powerful in impulse buying because trust enters faster, and this is why internet-native brands communicate differently now, and sound conversational, self-aware, emotionally fluent, and some even deliberately behave less *"professional"* because excessive polish creates distance, and the modern consumer is pretty suspicious of perfection!

Let me also mention emotional intensity - one of the strongest attention triggers on Earth - people stop for emotional energy, excitement, drama, transformation, shock, humour, or unexpected honesty. See, emotion always cuts through cognitive overload because the brain prioritises emotionally charged information automatically, and this is why 'outrage' spreads faster than nuance.

Emotion also creates urgency inside attention systems, but perhaps the most important thing to understand is that these triggers rarely work alone - the strongest modern communication combines multiple triggers simultaneously - a relatable human, saying something emotionally incomplete, with visual contrast, delivered through movement, inside a culturally familiar context. That combination becomes extremely difficult for the brain to ignore!

This is exactly why so many traditional advertisements fail today, because they communicate correctly but trigger nothing - no tension, no curiosity, no interruption, no emotional relevance - the consumer sees it and continues scrolling mechanically!

Meanwhile a creator filming from their bedroom suddenly drives massive sales because they instinctively triggered human attention systems properly!

This obviously frustrates many corporations because they still believe attention comes from authority. It does not! Not anymore!

Attention, today, comes from 'reaction', and that is the new economy!

Marketers that understand these triggers stop designing communication for boardroom approval, and instead design for nervous system interruption.

Remember, the modern consumer is not sitting patiently waiting to discover products, but are drowning inside content, and so only the emotionally magnetic content survives their attention.

Creative that Interrupts

Most advertising today dies within half a second, not because the product is weak or because the marketing budget was too small, but because nobody stopped! That is the modern tragedy of communication - businesses still create advertising as though consumers are politely waiting to be persuaded, but they are not! Consumers are escaping, scrolling, skipping, muting, filtering, and mostly ignoring!

Modern audiences treat advertising the way people treat strangers trying to hand out flyers near traffic signals - avoid eye contact, keep moving and try and protect emotional energy! Which means marketing can no longer behave like a lecture, and must behave like an interruption!

Remember, if your communication cannot break automatic behaviour, the rest of your strategy never gets permission to exist, and this is why so much "*good advertising*" performs terribly today!

It perhaps communicates correctly but surely enters too softly - beautiful cinematography, thoughtful messaging, elegant storytelling, but still the consumer scrolls away to watch a barber remove blackheads from somebody's forehead. That is your competition now! Not merely other brands, but 'human stimulation' itself!

See, stimulation obeys different rules from persuasion. Persuasion assumes attention already exists, but interruption creates attention first. That is a massive difference!

Traditional advertising believed communication should unfold gradually - introduce the problem, build emotion, reveal the solution, and close with branding. Modern digital behaviour destroys this structure immediately, because today the consumer decides within seconds whether something deserves continued attention!

The 'beginning' now matters disproportionately - not eventually interesting, but 'immediately' interesting. This is why internet-native

communication feels so different from old advertising - it begins mid-energy, no warm-up, no patience, and no slow build!

A creator opens with - *"This is why your coffee tastes terrible"*. Pause.

Attention captured!

Humans are 'naturally' drawn toward incomplete emotional situations - conflict, mystery, shock, unexpected honesty, and social danger - these things interrupt our autopilot life.

Remember, interruption is the first job of creative now, and not explanation, because explanation comes later.

Modern consumers are actively defending themselves from communication overload, and every day people encounter thousands of attempts to influence behaviour - ads, notifications, offers, emails, creators, recommendations, pop-ups, *"Limited time only"*, *"Last chance"*, or *"Sale ending soon"*.

For years, the human brain has adapted defensively and so now, it filters aggressively - which means ordinary communication disappears instantly!

Any safe communication dies fastest, and that is why creative work today must create behavioural interruption - something emotionally impossible to fully ignore. Humour works, surprise works, tension works, relatability works, pattern breaks work, but let me also tell you interruption does not always mean loudness! Some of the strongest interruption comes from unexpected calmness - a quiet visual inside chaos, a simple sentence inside clutter, a strangely human moment inside polished advertising.

This is why some luxury brands perform brilliantly with restraint, and while every other brand screams, they just whisper! That whisper becomes psychologically magnetic, because interruption is fundamentally about breaking expectation.

A few years ago, I saw an advertisement that simply showed a tired father sitting silently inside a parked car eating ice cream alone before going home, and it worked brilliantly because it felt emotionally true, and some consumers stopped because they recognised themselves!

I must say, that is another modern shift businesses underestimate - relatable truth often interrupts more effectively than polished fantasy! See, consumers are drowning in performance online - perfect lives, perfect productivity, perfect fitness, perfect success, so when communication suddenly feels honest, it feels real!

Remember, consumers instinctively move toward emotional humanity, especially younger audiences. For sure, Gen Z has developed extremely sensitive advertising detection instincts, and the second communication feels fake, over-scripted, or emotionally manipulative, rejection begins immediately!

Which means modern creative must feel 'native' to attention environments, and not inserted artificially into them! Modern communication works best when it behaves like participation rather than broadcasting! The audience should feel invited into something emotionally familiar and not targeted by messaging artillery.

Even product demonstrations changed because of this! Earlier advertising showed ideal usage, but now the strongest product content often shows imperfect, real-life behaviour - messy kitchens, casual conversations, awkward humour and unexpected outcomes - all this imperfect human texture creates engagement, which matters more than production value now.

Today, sustainable attention comes from emotionally intelligent communication, and this is also why storytelling has also changed! Modern storytelling is no longer linear, but 'modular', and so every few seconds communication must renew attention again - a visual change, a surprising sentence, a shift in pacing, a moment of vulnerability, or a reveal, otherwise the brain escapes!

Remember, creative strategy can no longer focus only on 'messaging' alone, and must focus on behavioural survival. *Can this stop the scroll? Can this interrupt emotional autopilot? Can this create enough curiosity to continue?* Only after these questions are solved does persuasion matter!

This changes launch strategy too! Today The best modern campaigns are not built like advertisements, but like cultural moments - something people notice voluntarily, share voluntarily, and talk about voluntarily - because voluntary attention is now the most valuable asset in commerce!

Nobody shares *"effective messaging"*, instead people share emotional reactions, and that is the future of creative work - not polished persuasion, but engineered interruption powerful enough to enter human attention systems before the next swipe arrives!

GTM for Attention

Most product launches fail before the product even gets a chance to fail, because it never entered public attention strongly enough to matter!

Such invisible products do not lose, but just evaporate!

Modern GTM strategy has still not emotionally accepted this reality, and most businesses continue planning launches as though consumers are patiently waiting for announcements. *"Launching this Friday"*. *"Excited to unveil"*. *"Introducing our latest innovation"*. Wonderful!

Meanwhile the internet is watching celebrity breakups, cricket controversies, conspiracy theories about seed oils, and a man explaining productivity while walking barefoot on grass at sunrise!

You must never forget that your launch is entering a psychological war zone where attention decides survival first, and not quality!

Earlier, GTM meant distribution planning, media buying, retail execution, sales enablement, and market penetration. All important, but now there is another layer sitting above everything - 'stopping' power. *Can the launch interrupt public attention strongly enough to create behavioural entry?* Because if consumers do not stop, the rest of your marketing system never activates!

Modern GTM is no longer just market entry, but is 'attention' engineering, and it changes how products must launch entirely. You cannot merely *"announce"* anymore, instead you must create psychological interruption - something noticeable enough to survive the feed or emotionally alive enough to generate movement.

This is why internet-native brands behave differently during launches - they do not reveal products quietly, instead they build tension first by hints, leaks, creator seeding, curiosity, visual fragments, and speculation. The launch begins before the launch, simply because attention grows through 'anticipation'!

Humans are emotionally vulnerable to incomplete information, and when curiosity begins building socially, the product 'acquires' energy before availability even exists. This is why sneaker drops became cultural events, why phone launches feel cinematic, why certain beauty brands sell out before consumers fully understand what the product even does!

The product becomes secondary temporarily, and attention becomes primary. And honestly, most businesses still launch products with the emotional energy of tax documentation! A few 'usual' LinkedIn posts, one press release, and an email - *"We are delighted to announce…"* Modern launches require, what I term as, 'momentum' architecture - a sequence of emotional touchpoints engineered to repeatedly pull consumers back toward the product.

Remember, visibility can no longer be singular, but it must accumulate! This is because modern consumers rarely react deeply during first exposure, and generally react through repeated recognition. One sighting creates awareness, while repeated sightings create legitimacy, and constant sightings create inevitability! That is how attention converts into demand - the brain begins thinking - *"I keep seeing this everywhere"*. That sentence is commercially explosive, because repetition creates perceived importance, and we unconsciously assume visible things matter!

A product appearing repeatedly across platforms starts feeling socially validated even before purchase happens because consumers think - *"This must be good"*. *"Everybody seems to know this"*. *"This brand is becoming big"*. See how visibility itself becomes persuasion!

As marketers, we need to build smart GTM systems around this behavioural truth! Not just one campaign, but layered presence through - creators, reels, short-form video, community conversations, launch moments, visual repetition, social proof loops, influencer seeding, unexpected placements, memes, and even packaging visibility - everything must work together to increase stopping frequency!

This is why launch timing matters more than many companies realise because you are not launching into empty space, but entering 'existing emotional traffic' where cultural mood, platform behaviour, and audience energy matters. Hence, a launch competing against a massive

cricket final or major political event may disappear instantly regardless of quality, meanwhile the same product launched during a quieter cultural moment suddenly gains disproportionate visibility.

I would strongly advise to note that consumer attention has 'timing' dynamics, which is why the strongest marketers understand this rhythm and know when audiences are emotionally available.

Let's now shift to the most underestimated GTM principle of all - the product itself must contribute to attention. This is where many businesses still think incorrectly, and believe attention comes only from marketing. Instead, the product should help create visibility - packaging should photograph well, design should trigger curiosity, naming should create memorability, usage should encourage sharing, and experience should generate conversation.

The strongest modern products contain built-in distribution behaviour and people naturally talk about them, show them, post them, and notice them.

That also reduces dependency on paid advertising massively!

Look at modern food culture - restaurants no longer design only for taste, but for visibility - dramatic presentation, distinctive interiors, camera-friendly plating, and signature visuals.

Today, every customer can become potential media inventory, as they can now distribute products socially through content! Which means stopping power must exist beyond advertising, and must exist inside the product experience itself.

This is why modern commerce merged 'product' and 'marketing' together. The product, the packaging, customer experience, unboxing, and the founder personality are all marketing, because everything contributes to attention loops. Even customer reactions become part of distribution now, and this also explains why controversy sometimes accelerates growth online. Strong emotional reactions increase visibility mechanically, and because algorithms reward engagement, not emotional balance, emotionally flat brands disappear fastest!

The best GTM systems, according to me, combine - interruption with credibility, visibility with consistency, excitement with reassurance, novelty with familiarity - because consumers must first stop, then care,

then remember, and then desire - this sequence powers modern impulse buying.

Today, products should no longer enter markets quietly, instead must first enter consumer attention ecosystems, from multiple avenues. And so, the very first battle is - *Can you stop human beings long enough for desire to begin?*

Part 2
How Desire is Created

In Part 1, we examined something most businesses still refuse to accept - people do not begin with logic, but with a 'reaction'! Before a consumer thinks, something else happens first - they feel, and that feeling is where impulse buying begins.

But attracting attention is only the first battle! Attention alone does not explain why a person who went online to buy toothpaste suddenly purchases a protein shake, a desk lamp, a coffee frother, orange laces for shoes, or and a set of ceramic storage jars that make their kitchen look better!

The 'desire' is born between seeing and buying!

Modern desire behaves very differently from how it did even ten years ago. Consumers once discovered products intentionally - they searched, they compared and they evaluated.

Today, products discover consumers! An algorithm places something in front of you repeatedly, a creator mentions it casually, a friend posts it, a review appears, a reel demonstrates it, a recommendation follows, and suddenly a product that did not exist in your world yesterday feels strangely important today! You never searched for it, and yet somehow you want it!

That is the mystery I will help unpack in this section. We will explore how feeds replaced discovery, how algorithms manufacture familiarity, how influencers borrow trust on behalf of brands, and why repeated visibility often matters more than product superiority. But attention and desire are only half the story, because the modern consumer is also becoming a faster decision-maker, not necessarily a better one.

People no longer evaluate endlessly, but use shortcuts - ratings have replaced research, creators have replaced experts, comparison has replaced analysis, and convenience has replaced certainty - the goal for many consumers is no longer to make the perfect decision, but to make a decision and move on with life.

And finally, we will examine one of the strangest contradictions in buying behaviour. *Why does the same person chase discounts on Monday and proudly overpay for status on Saturday? Why do consumers sometimes hunt value and sometimes hunt identity? Why does a ₹200 discount create excitement while a ₹20,000 premium price can create desire?* Because inside every consumer live two very different buyers - one wants savings, and the other wants significance. Understanding both is where real commercial advantage begins!

Remember, in modern commerce, being wanted is far more powerful than being seen.

3.
Scroll-Born Desire

There was a time when buying began with searching - you needed something, you went looking for it, you compared options, gathered information, and eventually made a choice. That process made sense!

The problem is that modern consumers no longer behave that way! Today, some of the most successful products in the world are purchased by people who never intended to buy them in the first place!

Nobody wakes up thinking - "*Today I need a portable espresso machine, a standing desk lamp, a luxury water bottle, Korean sunscreen, and a rechargeable neck massager*". Yet millions of these products get sold every year, not because consumers searched for them, but because consumers 'encountered' them!

We have entered the age of scroll-born desire!

An age where products are discovered 'accidentally', 'repeatedly', and 'emotionally'! The social 'feed' has quietly replaced the search bar as the primary engine of consumption. Products no longer wait patiently to be found, but 'chase' consumers. They appear in reels, in recommendations, in influencer videos, in comment sections, in 'people also bought' suggestions, in algorithmically generated moments that seem random but rarely are!

And the more often something appears, the more important it begins to feel!

Let's explore one of the most powerful forces in modern commerce - the creation of desire before intention exists.

I will help you examine how algorithms manufacture familiarity, why repeated exposure creates emotional momentum, how creators lend trust to products, and why visibility has become one of the most

valuable assets in business. Most importantly, we will uncover a reality that many companies still fail to understand - being available is no longer enough!

A product hidden from the feed is invisible, and hence would not get chosen, because in the modern marketplace, desire is rarely born in stores, but is born while scrolling!

Discovery Has Been Replaced

For most of human history, buying sequence was beautifully logical - need first, discovery second, and purchase third.

Today that sequence has been completely inverted - now discovery often arrives before need!

I realised this one evening when a friend proudly showed me a machine that folds clothes. Naturally I asked him the obvious question - "*How long were you searching for this?*" His answer was fascinating - "*I wasn't".*

Of course he wasn't!

The product appeared in his feed. Then appeared again. Then again.

Then a creator demonstrated it. Then another creator demonstrated it.

Eventually a desire formed! Only after desire appeared did logic begin constructing explanations.

And this is exactly how modern consumption increasingly works - consumers do not discover products anymore, but 'encounter' them, and it is one of the most important behavioural changes of the digital age.

Look, search and feeds are fundamentally different psychological environments. Search begins with intention, while feeds begin with exposure.

Search says - "*I know what I want*", while feeds say - "*Let me show you things you never knew you wanted"*. The commercial implications of this difference are enormous - think about how many products you have purchased in the last few years that were never part of an active search - a new kitchen gadget, a skincare product, a notebook, a watch, a coffee accessory, a fitness tool, or a desk organiser - the product entered your awareness before the desire existed!

That is the power of feed-based discovery - the feed is not waiting for your needs, but constantly proposing new ones.

This is why modern commerce feels so different from the commerce many businesses still believe they operate in. Companies continue asking - "*How do consumers find us?*" Increasingly, that is the wrong question! A better one would be - "*How often do consumers accidentally encounter us?*"

Because today, the frequency of encounter shapes buying behaviour more than many brands realise.

Let's go deeper - a search engine is essentially a library, while a feed is a casino. The library waits patiently for requests, but the casino constantly offers possibilities! One environment rewards intention, while the other rewards curiosity. And remember, curiosity works faster especially when impulse buying enters the picture!

The brilliance of feed-based systems is that they introduce products into moments where consumer resistance is naturally 'low'.

People are relaxed, distracted, entertained, emotionally open, bored, stressed, or procrastinating - and these are extraordinarily powerful buying environments, because the consumer is not 'evaluating' products formally, but simply 'experiencing' them.

And experience always shapes desire faster than analysis!

This explains why categories that once required deliberate consideration now thrive through casual exposure - beauty products, fitness accessories, home décor, fashion, snacks, or consumer technology - many purchases now begin not with problem-solving but with 'imagination'!

The consumer sees a product and suddenly starts imagining a different version of life - a cleaner desk, a healthier body, a better-looking kitchen or home, a more stylish wardrobe, or a more organised routine - the product becomes a visual shortcut to a future identity!

And the feed delivers thousands of these identity proposals every week, and this is why modern desire often feels spontaneous!

But it is rarely spontaneous, instead, I would say it is accumulated - built gradually through repeated exposure - the consumer sees something enough times that it starts feeling familiar, then familiarity becomes comfort, then comfort becomes curiosity, and finally curiosity becomes 'want'!

By the time the purchase happens, the consumer often believes the decision was entirely their own! Which is precisely why feed-based discovery is so powerful - it does not feel like selling, but more like 'noticing'! And consumers perhaps trust what they notice far more than what they believe was sold to them.

I believe, another consequence of this shift is that many businesses still overestimate the importance of 'availability'. A few years ago, being available used to be enough! But today 'visibility' matters more!

A brilliant product hidden from consumer attention might as well not exist, but meanwhile an average product appearing repeatedly inside relevant feeds acquires momentum - not because it is better, but because it is present!

The feed has created a strange new commercial reality - consumers today are increasingly buying from memory, not from search! And memory is always built through repeated exposure!

This then means that market share is no longer determined only by distribution, but determined by mental 'presence'. *Who occupies space inside the consumer's mind before the buying moment arrives?* That battle often gets won long before a search ever happens. In fact, many searches today are merely confirmations of desires already planted elsewhere!

In most cases - the feed starts the conversation, and the search finishes it!

That is a very different world from the one marketers grew up studying!

And it also explains why so many businesses struggle despite having excellent products, because they optimise for discovery while consumers increasingly live inside encounter-based environments.

Which brings me to the most important lesson of this chapter - the search bar has not disappeared - people still search, but search is no longer where many desires begin, but where they arrive!

The real birthplace of modern desire is 'inside' feeds, recommendations, accidental encounters, and those strange moments when consumers meet products they never intended to find and somehow end up wanting them anyway!

That is not discovery, but desire arriving before intention!

Algorithmic Amplification

A few years ago, and after watching a video, I developed an intense interest in mechanical keyboards. I had never owned one, neither did I need one. I was perfectly capable of typing on the keyboard already sitting on my desk. But this video I had watched where a man pressed a few keys, click, click, just kept appearing - again and again, that was it!

No productivity breakthrough but just keyboard sounds!

How did this happen?

The answer perhaps is not influence, but 'repetition'!

One of the greatest misunderstandings in modern marketing is the belief that consumers buy things only when they are convinced. I would say very often they buy things because they become 'familiar'!

And familiarity is where algorithms become frighteningly powerful! Algorithms do not merely show content, but also manufacture significance!

When any idea, product, trend, behaviour, creator, or object repeatedly enters your world, your brain begins making a dangerous assumption - "*This must matter*". Not because somebody proved it matters, but because you keep seeing it!

See, humans have always used repetition as a shortcut for importance - if everyone in your office or family discussed something repeatedly, it probably mattered! The modern algorithm has weaponised this ancient mental shortcut! Today many desires are slowly assembled through repeated exposure - the first few encounters creates awareness, the next few create recognition, the next creates familiarity, then curiosity, and next few create legitimacy! Somewhere after that, 'desire' quietly enters the room and makes the purchase! The consumer often mistakes that desire for personal discovery, but I call this the 'inevitability' effect - a product appears so frequently that ownership starts feeling less like a choice and more like a near future event.

You stop asking - "*Do I want this?*" and start asking - "*When should I buy this?*"

This is why algorithmic amplification is transforming buying behaviour globally.

Today, a successful algorithm can expose consumers to the same product dozens of times across multiple contexts.

Let's think about fashion - most fashion trends are objectively bizarre when they first appear - the first time people see them, they often react negatively. "*What is that?*" "*Who would wear that?*" "*This looks ridiculous*".

Three months later the same people are considering a purchase! Not because the product improved, but because familiarity reduced resistance, and the strange became normal, the unusual became expected, and the expected became desirable.

Note that repetition performs this transformation constantly, and also changes emotional interpretation. And algorithms are essentially repetition machines!

Many businesses still misdiagnose growth, because they assume consumers buy because the message was 'brilliant' but most of the times the consumer judges the message as average. But the repeated visibility being exceptional leads to a purchase!

There is a reason the world's largest technology companies invest billions in recommendation systems, because recommendations do not just predict behaviour, but also shapes it. A recommendation engine is really a 'familiarity' engine as it decides what repeatedly enters your consciousness. Consumers frequently choose what feels familiar even when superior alternatives exist, and the algorithm understands this better than most marketers!

Which is why such repetition often beats persuasion!

Very clearly, a product seen twenty times usually has an advantage over a product seen once, even if the second product is objectively better. That reality makes many marketers and founders uncomfortable, but consumers do not evaluate markets like judges at a science fair! Instead, they navigate through mental shortcuts formed by repetition!

A consumer believes they independently discovered a new skincare routine.

Meanwhile millions of other people were exposed to the exact same content sequence! The desire feels 'personal', but in reality, the distribution was 'industrial'.

Remember, modern demand is increasingly manufactured through visibility systems rather than traditional persuasion systems - the algorithm does not care whether something is useful, but whether something generates 'engagement'. If engagement remains high, exposure increases, familiarity grows, resistance falls, and purchase probability rises.

A remarkable amount of modern commerce follows this sequence.

This is why many products now feel culturally unavoidable before they become commercially dominant, as people encounter them repeatedly across different environments, which makes them develop some social gravity. Slowly, other consumers begin recommending it voluntarily, posting about it voluntarily, and discussing it voluntarily. The algorithm then amplifies these behaviours further!

This is the hidden engine behind many modern consumer phenomena - not superior products or revolutionary innovation, but amplified familiarity.

Of course, repetition alone is not enough! A terrible product exposed repeatedly may generate awareness but eventually disappoint! The product still matters!

But before the product gets a chance to prove itself, visibility often determines whether consumers even consider it.

Remember, markets are not always won by the best product, but often by the most repeatedly encountered product. And this brings us to one of the most important ideas in modern buying behaviour - consumers do not wake up wanting most things, but this wanting is frequently 'manufactured'.

Mostly slowly, quietly, exposure after exposure, encounter after encounter, until one day the consumer finds themselves happily standing at a checkout screen!

Influencers as Desire Accelerators

One of the strangest businesses in human history appeared almost accidentally! For thousands of years, people became influential because they achieved something - they built empires, won wars, discovered medicines, created companies, wrote books.

Then one day the internet arrived and somehow a woman organising her refrigerator became capable of selling ₹50 crore worth of products!

Yet if we look beyond the humour, something fascinating is happening - influencers are not powerful because they sell products, but because they 'lend' trust. And I must say, trust is one of the most expensive assets in commerce.

The reason this matters is simple - consumers approach brands with suspicion.

Every advertisement is expected to praise itself, every product page is expected to exaggerate, and every company is expected to claim superiority, and consumers know this, creating a credibility problem!

Imagine meeting someone at a party who spends thirty minutes explaining how intelligent, attractive, successful, and interesting they are. Most people would slowly back away while pretending to answer an urgent phone call!

That is essentially what many brands do every day, but influencers changed this dynamic completely! See, consumers perceive influencers differently, not as the product, but as an intermediary that feels 'safer'. Consumers often do not think - "*I trust this protein powder*", *but* "*I trust the person talking about this protein powder*". The product borrows credibility it has not earned itself!

That borrowed trust dramatically reduces resistance which in turn creates desire.

This is why influencer marketing is often misunderstood - many businesses think influencers exist to create awareness, but awareness is merely the visible outcome, while the real function is 'acceleration'.

Influencers magnificently compress trust-building timelines - a brand that might have taken years to gain credibility can suddenly gain legitimacy through association!

Think about how quickly this happens - a consumer follows a creator for months, maybe years, they watch daily routines, travel videos, opinions, recommendations, life updates, and so gradually a relationship forms! Not a real relationship, a perceived one, where the consumer feels familiarity. This familiarity creates comfort and trust. Then one day the creator recommends a product. The product immediately enters a trust-rich environment and purchase decision becomes easy and fast!

Observe, consumers live inside an environment saturated with information - every day brings more products, more choices, more reviews and more opinions. Perhaps, the problem is no longer access to information, but deciding who 'deserves' belief.

Influencers solve that problem, by becoming trust shortcuts!

Imagine you want to buy running shoes, there are hundreds of options, thousands of reviews, endless comparisons, and so the evaluation process becomes exhausting. Then a creator you have followed for three years says - "*These are the shoes I use*". Suddenly complexity collapses, because the creator has effectively reduced decision effort. And reducing effort often matters more than increasing information.

This is why creators outperform traditional celebrities in many categories! See, celebrities create visibility, while creators create proximity! Consumers may admire celebrities, but feel connected to 'everyday' creators. And you must remember that buying behaviour follows connection more readily than admiration! A film star recommending a product may feel aspirational, while a creator recommending a product feels personal. The psychological mechanisms are completely different - one inspires, while the other reassures. Today, reassurance drives an astonishing amount of modern purchasing behaviour!

Let's go deeper!

There is something even more important happening beneath the surface - influencers do not merely transfer trust, but also transfer 'context'.

A product sitting alone on a shelf communicates very little, but the same product inside somebody's life communicates much more. Consumers see how it is used, when it is used, and why it is used! The product suddenly acquires a story - a coffee machine is just a machine, until somebody shows morning rituals around it; a notebook is just paper, until somebody connects it to productivity and achievement; a skincare product is just a formulation, until somebody connects it to confidence and transformation.

Influencers function as context creators and make products feel relevant, and relevance is a major ingredient of desire! This becomes especially powerful because most consumers do not buy products, but buy 'possibilities'. A future version of themselves, a healthier version, a more organised, successful and attractive version - creators constantly demonstrate these future identities! Now, before every marketer reading this runs toward influencer budgets with reckless enthusiasm, there is an important warning - always remember that borrowed trust is not the same as owned trust! Borrowed trust arrives quickly, while owned trust takes time. A weak product can temporarily benefit from influencer credibility, but eventually reality catches up. Consumers may buy once because of trust transfer, but they come back because of product experience.

The best brands, instead use influencers as accelerators, not crutches, and understand creators can start desire, but only the product can sustain it.

And yet, despite this limitation, influencer-driven commerce remains one of the most powerful forces in modern buying behaviour because it aligns perfectly with how humans naturally make decisions.

People have always relied on other people - recommendations from friends, advice from neighbours, and suggestions from family. I would say influencers are simply the digital evolution of that ancient behaviour!

At its core, the influencer economy is not really about content, but about delegated trust - consumers increasingly outsource belief to people they already follow. And once trust enters the equation, desire moves much faster - much faster than advertising, much faster than product specifications, and many times faster than corporate messaging.

Because in the modern marketplace, consumers often do not ask - "*Is this product good?*", but something far simpler - "*Who is telling me it is?*"

Product Visibility Strategy

A founder once told me something with enormous confidence. "*Our product is available everywhere*". He expected me to be impressed, but I wasn't because 'availability' and 'visibility' are no longer the same thing. And modern businesses confuse the two constantly!

A product can be available in every major city, every marketplace, every retail channel, every e-commerce platform, every quick-commerce app, and still remain commercially invisible - consumers cannot buy what they never notice!

That sounds obvious, yet companies spend millions building distribution while spending far too little understanding visibility.

Visibility simply means the product exists inside the consumer's mind!

And in the age of feeds, algorithms, creators, recommendations, and endless content, mental visibility often matters more than physical availability.

Think about this honestly - *How many products sitting on Amazon have you never seen?* Millions! They are available but also invisible!

See, availability creates possibility, and merely allows a purchase to happen, while visibility creates probability and increases the likelihood that it will happen. Businesses that understand this grow dramatically faster!

For decades, market strategy focused heavily on distribution - get into more stores, more retailers, more locations, more shelves - that logic made perfect sense in a world where physical access was the primary challenge.

Today, access is rarely the problem! Attention is!

Consumers can purchase almost anything within minutes because the internet solved the access issue. Now the battle has shifted toward awareness and memory - which means modern GTM strategies must

answer - *How often does the consumer encounter the product before the buying moment arrives?* Because today, buying rarely begins at checkout, but in the consumer's memory. A consumer standing in front of ten options usually chooses from a surprisingly small mental shortlist, and products or brands 'already' occupying awareness receive preference, and most of the times, products outside awareness barely enter consideration.

This is why repeated visibility matters so much! The first exposure introduces, the second reminds, the third legitimises, The fourth creates familiarity, and the fifth starts building preference.

Human beings are remarkably uncomfortable choosing things they have never seen before. We pretend to be adventurous, but we are not. Most consumers are professional familiarity seekers, and that comes from repeated visibility.

This is why some brands feel much larger than they actually are - not because they sell more, but simply because they 'appear' more. This visibility creates perceived scale - a brand encountered repeatedly across platforms starts feeling important, and consumers start assuming - *"This company must be doing well". "This brand seems to be everywhere". "People must be buying this".*

Notice what happened - visibility quietly transformed into credibility, and then credibility transformed into demand!

This is the hidden power of visibility strategy, because your goal is not merely to reach consumers, but to repeatedly enter their environment through different contexts, moments, and different platforms - the same brand, the same recognition, the same memory building gradually over time.

This is also where many companies make a costly mistake - they launch a campaign, run it briefly, and then just 'disappear', and then wonder why sales remain weak!

The problem is not always communication quality, most often it is visibility 'continuity'.

See, consumers rarely buy after one encounter, and most of their desire develops through accumulation when a creator mentions a product, weeks later another creator mentions it, then a friend posts about it,

followed by it appearing in a recommendation list. Then a review surfaces, and suddenly the product feels 'established'. Not because the consumer researched it deeply, but simply because visibility created perceived legitimacy, and this is why, I always say - consistency beats occasional brilliance in marketing.

A spectacular campaign that disappears may create temporary attention, but sustained visibility creates memory. And memory drives buying behaviour.

The strongest brands understand this intuitively!

So, dear marketers - do not think in campaigns, but in 'presence' - *Can consumers keep encountering us naturally? Can the product remain visible between purchase cycles? Can the brand remain mentally available even when the consumer is not actively shopping?* These questions are increasingly more important for you than traditional advertising metrics.

Hopefully you can now see that this also explains why content has become such a strategic weapon. Content extends visibility beyond paid media - every video, every creator collaboration, every customer post, review, share - all contribute to 'mental' presence.

Note that the objective is not simply communication, but 'recurrence'. The consumer should feel - "*I keep seeing this*", because repeated encounters reduce uncertainty which is one of the biggest barriers to purchase.

See, people always trust what feels familiar, and not necessarily what is superior. That reality frustrates many founders, especially the founders with genuinely excellent products, because most believe quality should naturally create growth!

Unfortunately, consumers rarely discover quality automatically! 'Any' quality needs visibility! Let me explain - the best product hidden in obscurity loses to the good product consumers encounter repeatedly, not because consumers are irrational, but because consumers are human - we use recognition as a decision shortcut.

This becomes even more important inside impulse-driven categories - fashion, beauty, food, consumer electronics, fitness, home products. Here, the consumer often makes rapid decisions, relying heavily on

memory, alone. Human memory relies heavily on exposure, and exposure relies heavily on visibility.

This is why most GTM strategy, today, must begin with a simple realisation - distribution answers where the product can be bought, while visibility answers whether the consumer will think about buying it at all.

In a world where multiple algorithms continuously compete for consumer attention, visibility is no longer a marketing function, but a growth function, a brand-building function, a sales function, a demand-generation function.

The brands that are continuously winning today are not necessarily the most available, but the most repeatedly encountered.

Remember, the consumer does not choose from everything that exists, but from everything they remember!

Designing for Feed Environments

For most of business history, products lived on shelves, but today they live inside feeds! That single change has quietly rewritten the rules of product design, marketing, packaging, communication, and even brand strategy.

A few decades ago, if a customer wanted to buy biscuits, they went to a store and stood in front of a biscuit shelf, and every biscuit around them was a competitor. The context was simple - the customer was already in buying mode, was already paying attention, and was already looking.

That world was wonderfully convenient!

Today a protein bar appears between a wedding video, a political argument, a stand-up comedian, a cricket clip, a skincare tutorial, and a dog trying to catch bubbles!

Your product no longer appears inside buying environments, but inside 'distraction' environments.

Sadly, most products are still designed for shelves while consumers now encounter them inside 'feeds'.

That change needs a very different skill. See, the shelf rewarded visibility, while today, the feed rewards 'survivability'. A product can look fantastic sitting on a supermarket shelf and become completely invisible inside a mobile screen.

Likewise, a product that dominates digital attention may perhaps look ordinary in physical retail.

Many traditional businesses struggle online because they optimise for physical discovery while consumers increasingly experience products digitally first. In many categories, the first encounter no longer happens in a store, but inside a five-inch screen moving at frightening speed!

And when attention lasts only seconds, our design priorities must also change dramatically - *Can the product remain recognisable when it becomes*

tiny? This sounds trivial until you realise how many brands fail immediately. Complex packaging, small text, intricate details, subtle visual distinctions - all disappear inside feeds, and the consumer never sees them.

Modern products increasingly need what I call 'thumbnail' strength - *Can the product remain identifiable when reduced to the size of a postage stamp?*

Successful digital-native brands understand this instinctively - simple shapes, bold visual signatures, and clear recognition cues. They know consumers rarely encounter products at full size anymore, but in fragments, and so must communicate 'identity', clearly!

Earlier packaging existed primarily to support retail sales, but now it often functions as media - consumers photograph it, creators feature it, customers post it, and reviewers showcase it.

The package has become 'content'!

This explains why many modern brands look dramatically different from traditional brands, through bolder colours, cleaner structures, distinctive forms, and higher contrast.

As designers and marketers, we must remember the phone feed is not a museum, but fast traffic. So, you either design to stand out or be prepared to disappear!

The same principle applies to communication. Many businesses continue to write messages as though consumers are reading brochures! We must realise that our prospective consumer does not owe our message thirty seconds, in fact, our communication must earn every additional second by being sharper, using one clear idea, one clear emotion, and one clear reason to continue.

Feed-native brands must understand that complexity creates abandonment, confusion gets scrolled past, but only clarity survives.

I keep reminding teams about why visual hierarchy becomes so important, because when consumers encounter content, they do not absorb everything simultaneously. Their attention lands somewhere first, then somewhere else, and then some other place! The strongest designs control this sequence deliberately, while the weakest designs leave it to chance.

But perhaps the biggest shift involves product aesthetics themselves!

Products increasingly need to perform socially, not merely functionally. For years businesses focused on utility. From - *Does the product work?*, to - *Does the product look interesting when somebody shares it?*

Notice this in beverages, desserts, consumer technology, home décor, and fashion - most successful ones are now designed with visibility behaviour in mind. See, consumers increasingly experience products publicly, and public experiences always reward visual distinction.

A product designed only for usage is incomplete, while the one designed for 'usage and visibility' gains an additional growth engine - consumers become distributors, content becomes reach, reach becomes awareness, and awareness becomes demand - the cycle reinforces itself.

Let's now discuss 'context' - the most overlooked element of feed design.

See, products do not appear alone anymore, but surrounded by everything else happening online. This clearly means the environment influences perception - a message that feels powerful inside a presentation may feel lifeless inside a feed, or a visual that works beautifully on a website may disappear completely between hundreds of competing pieces of content.

As marketers, instead of asking - "*Does this look good?*", ask - "*Does this survive where consumers will actually encounter it?*"

The teams that understand this create systems that remain visible despite distraction, and they design for interruption, recognition, memory, and most importantly, for reality.

Remember, the future of commerce belongs to products that can survive the feed, and not just the shelf, and the difference between those two worlds is now worth millions!

4.
The Collapse of Decision Making

A few years ago, I was advising a content marketing company that had a problem which, at first glance, looked like a content problem, and that's why they had come to me!

Their blogs were well written, research was solid, team was talented and they published consistently. In fact, if effort alone determined success, they should have been celebrating! But instead, traffic was disappointing, engagement was weak, and conversions were nowhere near where they needed to be.

The founders were understandably frustrated!

One afternoon, they showed me a particularly detailed article they had published - it was nearly 3,000 words long, packed with insights, statistics, examples, expert opinions, and enough information to qualify as light academic research. The team was proud of it, and honestly, they should have been, It was excellent work. Then one of the founders asked me a simple question - "*Why aren't people reading this?*"

My answer turned out to be much more uncomfortable than anyone expected.

People were reading it, but just not the way we imagined! Analytics showed the average time spent on the article was far shorter than it should have been, and most visitors never reached the middle. Only a very few reached the end, and most barely made it past the first screen.

At first, this felt depressing, but then it became fascinating, because what we were witnessing wasn't poor content consumption, but 'modern' content consumption.

The consumer wasn't behaving irrationally, but exactly as the modern world had trained them to behave - they weren't reading, but scanning;

weren't evaluating, but filtering; weren't following a journey, but hunting for signals.

That realisation is a must for every marketer!

"Your biggest competitor, today, isn't another content company, but the consumer's thumb".

Suddenly it made sense! Every piece of content was competing against a swipe! And we all knew, swiping is remarkably easy!

Over the next few weeks, we changed our approach completely - instead of assuming consumers would patiently process information, we started assuming they would aggressively eliminate information. Instead of asking, "*How do we explain more?*" we started asking, "*How do we reduce effort?*" Instead of creating content that rewarded careful reading, we created content that rewarded fast scanning - headlines became clearer, visuals became stronger, key ideas became impossible to miss, and important insights moved higher. And so, complexity reduced, decision effort reduced, and engagement improved!

I would say that the content now became easier to consume.

Consumers were not rejecting information, but were rejecting effort.

The lesson learnt should also stay with you!

See, content is everywhere - in e-commerce, retail, SaaS, luxury, grocery shopping, but consumers are no longer making decisions the way marketers believed they were. Today, consumers are drowning in information!

The modern consumer doesn't suffer from lack of information, but from too much information.

And honestly, after looking at the average person's daily digital environment, I completely understand why - by the time someone sees your product, they have already processed hundreds of messages, dozens of recommendations, multiple notifications, and enough content to fill a small library.

The consumer arrives cognitively exhausted!

Which means the brands that win are no longer the brands that provide the most information, but the ones that reduce the most effort.

The future belongs to the company that helps consumers make fewer decisions. And that is where our story begins!

Thinking Has Been Outsourced

I recently watched a friend purchase a ₹1.2 lakh television without entering a single electronics store. No showroom visit, no comparison sheet, no discussion with experts, and no technical understanding of refresh rates, display technologies, processing chips, or sound systems. Instead, he watched three YouTube videos for the brand and said model, read a few reviews, checked the star rating, looked at the comments, and completed the purchase!

The entire decision-making process took less time than many people spend choosing which movie to watch tonight! That is modern buying!

And let me summarise the biggest behavioural shift of the last decade - consumers have outsourced their thinking.

For most of commercial history, businesses assumed consumers would evaluate products, gather information, compare alternatives, study differences, assess value, but in reality, that behaviour is almost disappearing! Not because consumers became lazy, but because consumers became overloaded! Think about the average consumer today - every category has exploded with options - hundreds of shampoos, sneakers, mobile phones, protein powders, insurance plans. Even buying toothpaste now feels like preparing for a chemistry examination - whitening, sensitive, herbal, ayurvedic, activated charcoal, salt, clove, advanced repair, total protection, ultra protection, maximum protection!

At some point consumers stop analysing, not because they want to, but because they have to. The human brain has a limited daily thinking budget, and consumers have decided to spend that budget on work, family, health, finances, relationships, and occasionally arguing with strangers on social media! And so, very little of that budget remains available for choosing a moisturiser!

This creates a fascinating opportunity for businesses.

The companies winning today are not helping consumers think more, but think much less. Read that sentence again, as it is one of the most important ideas of my book!

The old marketer asked - "*How do I provide more information?*" while the modern marketer asks - "*How do I remove decision effort?*" Those are completely different philosophies, and this is where reviews, ratings, creators, influencers, testimonials, rankings, awards, and social proof become so powerful. See, they are not information tools, but 'confidence' shortcuts, and consumers use them to borrow 'certainty'.

Let me explain - imagine you are standing in front of two restaurants - one is empty, and the other has a queue. You know nothing else. *Which one feels safer?*

The queue becomes borrowed confidence, the crowd has done the thinking for you. By the way, this behaviour is ancient, the internet simply scaled it!

Today, five thousand reviews become the queue, a creator recommendation becomes the queue, a bestseller badge becomes the queue, a "*Most Purchased*" label becomes the queue!

Consumers increasingly rely on signals rather than analysis!

Businesses that understand this design their entire go-to-market strategy differently.

Let me make this practical - suppose you are launching a skincare brand. Most founders immediately focus on ingredients - Vitamin C, Niacinamide, Peptides, Formulations, etc. *Important?* Absolutely!

But consumers are not cosmetic chemists! What they are really asking is - "*Can somebody reassure me that this works?*" That is a confidence question, not an ingredient question! The solution therefore changes! Instead of creating another product page full of scientific jargon, create 'evidence'!

Reviews, before-and-after results, creator trials, customer stories, usage demonstrations - and reduce uncertainty while increasing confidence!

The same principle applies everywhere.

If you sell software, show adoption; if you sell food, show popularity; if you sell services, show outcomes; if you sell consumer products, show people using them!

Do not merely explain value, but 'prove' that others already believe it!

This is where many businesses accidentally sabotage themselves, by spending enormous energy describing themselves! Consumers do not care about that, and all they want is reassurance! The fastest route to reassurance is social proof, and not self-praise!

I often tell marketers and founders something that makes them uncomfortable - your customer trusts strangers more than they trust you! And honestly, they should! You are paid to love your product, and the customer knows that!

But another customer, or a creator, or a reviewer, or a friend - those sources feel 'independent', and therefore they feel 'credible'.

Which means your job is not merely to create a great product, but to also create visible confidence signals around it! This is the solution!

If thinking has been outsourced, then businesses must become confidence 'architects'. Every touchpoint should answer one question - "*Can I make this decision feel safe?*" Not exciting, not innovative, but first 'safe'!

Simply because safety accelerates action!

The easiest way to increase conversion today is often not just improving the product, but improving the 'confidence'. More reviews, more testimonials, more demonstrations, more case studies, more visible usage, more proof, and less explanation!

Consumers are drowning in information already, and what they need is certainty. And today, certainty is increasingly being borrowed from other people, especially other customers.

The companies that understand this stop behaving like lecturers, and start behaving like guides - they do not ask customers to think harder, but they remove the need to think at all!

That is the real collapse of decision making, and for smart businesses, it is not a threat, but a growth strategy!

Buying By Elimination

A few months ago, I needed a new laptop, and like every responsible modern consumer, I began by opening fifteen browser tabs! One for reviews, one for comparisons, one for YouTube videos, one for specifications, one for "*Top 10 Laptops in 2026*", one for "*Top 15 Laptops in 2026*", one for "*Top 20 Laptops in 2026".*

Apparently, the internet believes consumers have unlimited time and a deep passion for spreadsheets, but three hours later I had learned a lot! I had also purchased nothing!

Eventually I did what almost every consumer does - I stopped comparing and started eliminating! Too expensive. Close tab. Too heavy. Close tab. Poor reviews. Close tab. Confusing warranty. Close tab. Weak battery. Close tab.

Within minutes I had reduced twenty-seven options to three! And from those three, I picked one!

That is the point - consumers do not buy by choosing, but by eliminating!

For decades, businesses imagined consumers standing in front of products evaluating them carefully, and almost like judges in a talent competition - comparing strengths, weaknesses, and value.

In reality, modern consumers are doing something very different! They are trying to escape complexity and the goal is not to find the perfect option, but to remove enough options until one feels acceptable!

This changes how products should be designed, how pricing should be presented, how websites should be built, how sales should work, and how brands should communicate - because the moment you realise consumers eliminate rather than evaluate, your job changes completely. You stop asking - "*How do I become the best option?*", and start asking - "*How do I avoid being eliminated?*" That is a far more useful question!

Think about online shopping - a customer visits a product page. Most businesses imagine the customer is looking for reasons to buy, but often the customer is looking for reasons to 'reject'. The consumer is not conducting a deep evaluation, but is removing 'risk'.

Remember, every buying decision today is really a risk-reduction exercise. The winner is frequently not the most impressive option, but the option that creates the fewest concerns, and this is why some average products outperform superior products! Not because they are better but because they are 'easier'!

And this is where I want to shift from diagnosis to prescription!

Because once you understand elimination behaviour, you can design around it. My rule is simple - every business should identify the top five reasons customers say no, and then remove them systematically. And please, not through advertising but through 'design'.

Let's take an example - imagine you sell premium cookware. The traditional marketer focuses on product superiority - material quality, heat distribution, manufacturing process, useful information, etc.

But what are the actual elimination triggers? Too expensive, too complicated, or difficult maintenance! *Will it last? Is it worth the money?*

Instead of adding more features, address the eliminators!

Lifetime warranty, easy-clean demonstration, side-by-side durability comparison, EMI option, and visible customer reviews.

Notice what happened - we did not increase persuasion, but reduced rejection, and that is far more powerful! I call this 'friction' hunting!

Most businesses spend their time hunting for new customers, but I advise you spend my time hunting for friction, because friction kills sales faster than competition! The consumer is already tired, overloaded, distracted, and the moment friction appears, elimination begins!

This is why many beautifully designed websites fail - they look impressive, but they make consumers work with too many menu options, too many product variants, too many technical terms, and too many decisions!

Consumers don't enjoy thinking nearly as much as marketers believe they do!

See, every additional decision increases fatigue, every additional choice creates hesitation.

One of the most famous examples of this principle comes from restaurants.

Have you ever opened a menu that feels longer than a government policy document? Twelve soups, thirty starters, forty-seven mains, nine pages of beverages - at some point hunger becomes administration, and the customer stops enjoying the experience!

The same thing happens online - too much choice creates paralysis, too much information creates delay, and too much complexity creates abandonment!

Which brings me to one of the most useful concepts I teach marketers - don't increase confidence, but work on reducing doubt.

Increasing confidence is difficult, but reducing doubt is often easy! A clear guarantee reduces doubt, a visible rating reduces doubt, a comparison chart reduces doubt, a simple return policy reduces doubt, or a transparent price reduces doubt! Consumers often buy the moment doubt falls below a certain threshold and not when confidence reaches perfection!

Look at the most successful consumer brands today - many are not information-heavy, but just decision-light - their messaging is clear, pricing is clear, product hierarchy is clear, and their buying journey is clear. And so, the customer never feels lost.

Businesses that understand this become dramatically more effective - they stop overwhelming customers, and start guiding them. They stop adding information, but start removing uncertainty, or the excessive need of trying to impress!

So, if you remember only one lesson from this chapter, remember - consumers rarely buy because they found the perfect option, but because they successfully eliminated everything that felt harder!

Your job is not to become impossible to resist, but to become impossible to reject!

And that is a much easier path to growth!

Sales and Conversion Design

For years, businesses have been obsessed with one question - "*How do we convince customers to buy?*"

It sounds reasonable, but I don't agree! I feel it is the wrong question, because most consumers are 'not' standing at the edge of a purchase waiting to be convinced! They might be at the edge of a purchase looking for a reason to stop thinking, and that is a completely different problem.

I learned this lesson years ago while helping a very famous retailer improve conversion. The management team spent weeks discussing advertising - better campaigns, offers, stronger messaging. Everything sounded intelligent!

Then we watched customers, and what we discovered was almost embarrassing - the problem wasn't persuasion, but exhaustion!

Customers were arriving ready to buy, and then the business was making them work for it with too many options, too many plans, too many explanations. And so, too many decisions! The company was accidentally turning a purchase into adult homework!

This is one of the biggest mistakes in modern business - companies assume conversion happens when consumers become 'more' convinced. On the contrary, very often conversion happens when consumers become 'less' confused. That 'learning' can be worth millions in revenue!

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 taught us - consumers are distracted, overloaded, and so they borrow confidence; consumers eliminate options, and want shortcuts; and yet many businesses continue behaving as if customers have unlimited patience and an MBA in comparative evaluation!

Let me put this differently - imagine you walk into a restaurant and ask for coffee, the waiter responds - "*We have 14 varieties. Would you like Arabica, Robusta, Medium Roast, Dark Roast, Single Origin, Estate Blend, Natural Process, Honey Process, Washed Process, Filter Coffee, Cold Brew, Nitro Brew, Hand Brew or Pour Over?*" Congratulations! Your coffee

order has become a thesis project! At some point the customer simply wants somebody to say - "*Try this one. Most people love it*". Decision made, stress removed, and conversion achieved.

This is the real job of sales design - not increasing choice, not increasing information, but increasing buying momentum!

See, every purchase is a flow, and every interruption inside that flow must be eliminated.

Think about how often businesses accidentally interrupt buying momentum - a website asks for account creation before purchase - momentum dies!

A pricing page creates confusion; a sales presentation introduces five different plans with tiny differences; a restaurant menu resembles a telephone directory; an insurance form requires information about your ancestors, blood group, and possibly your favourite childhood cartoon - momentum dies!

You must always keep in mind that every unnecessary decision reduces buying energy and consumer's enthusiasm!

The smartest companies protect that enthusiasm carefully, by becoming deceptively simple! They are not simple because simplicity looks good, but because simplicity converts.

Think about the most successful quick-commerce platforms - they understand something ancient about human behaviour - the consumer does not want groceries, or food, but wants groceries or food without effort!

I would go further and say that the consumer does not even want convenience, but the absence of friction.

And this principle applies everywhere - whether you sell software, insurance, clothing, furniture, courses, or financial services. Your conversion rate is often a reflection of how easy you make progress feel, and not how persuasive your marketing sounds.

This is why I often tell founders and marketers - stop optimising persuasion, and start optimising momentum! Those two things are not the same. Persuasion asks - "*How can I make the customer believe?*", while momentum asks - "*How can I help the customer continue?*"

Momentum is usually much more valuable, because once a customer starts moving forward comfortably, the purchase begins feeling inevitable.

Now let's make this practical!

When I evaluate a business, I ask these five questions - *Can the customer understand the offer immediately? Can the customer identify the best option immediately? Can the customer trust the business immediately? Can the customer estimate the risk immediately? Can the customer buy immediately?*

Every "*no*" is a conversion and design problem, not a marketing problem.

For example, many businesses proudly offer ten pricing plans. I usually recommend fewer. Many businesses provide many product variants. I usually recommend guidance. Many businesses write lengthy explanations. I usually recommend clarity.

See, consumers rarely reward complexity, but instantly reward relief! And, always remember, relief comes from 'certainty'!

The most powerful phrase in sales is not - "*This is the best product*", but is - "*This is the right choice*", because the first statement requires evaluation, while the second removes it.

Instead of asking consumers to navigate complexity, you should create pathways - recommended plans, bestsellers, editor's picks, most popular options, starter bundles, or customer favourites.

Businesses & Marketers must become decision architects, and not merely information providers - guide the customer, reduce uncertainty, remove friction, create confidence and maintain momentum.

Not just convincing people, but helping them move forward so smoothly that saying yes feels easier than thinking further. And I am certain, in the modern economy, that is the most powerful competitive advantage of all.

5.
Discount Vs Premium - The Dual Brain

I have spent a large part of my career listening to marketers complain about discounting. *"Consumers only want discounts". "Nobody values brands anymore". "People have become too price sensitive". "Everything is a race to the bottom".*

And then, almost in the same week, I hear another conversation. *"Consumers are willing to spend ₹1.5 lakh on a phone". "People are paying ₹400 for coffee". "Premium brands are growing". "Luxury consumption is booming".*

At some point, these two conversations started bothering me, because they were both right! And that creates a problem!

Because if consumers are truly obsessed with discounts, why are they buying premium products at record levels? And if consumers are becoming increasingly premium, why do they suddenly transform into highly trained forensic accountants when a product goes from 20% off to 15% off!

For years, marketers have tried to choose a side in this debate - either consumers are price sensitive, or they are premium seekers; either discounting works, or brand building works; either value wins, or aspiration wins.

The problem is that consumers have absolutely no interest in participating in this debate! They happily do both! In fact, they often do both on the same day or even the same hour!

A few months ago, I was sitting with a marketing pro friend who spent ten minutes comparing prices of dishwashing liquid across apps because one platform offered ₹12 more savings than another. This

exercise involved calculations, screenshots, and a level of dedication! Later that evening, the same person ordered a pair of sneakers that cost nearly twelve thousand rupees, without any comparison or research or any emotional struggle - just two clicks and payment completed!

Watching this was like seeing two completely different consumers sharing the same body!

And that is when I realised I must write about it! This is one of the biggest mistakes marketers make, when they assume there is a single consumer mindset! There isn't, because the modern consumer is not one person, but a collection of moods! Sometimes they want to save, sometimes they want to indulge, sometimes they want to feel smart, sometimes they want to feel successful, sometimes they want to feel responsible, or sometimes they simply want to feel good! The same individual can move between all these states before lunch!

This chapter is about understanding that contradiction, or perhaps more accurately, understanding why it isn't a contradiction at all!

Because what appears irrational on the surface becomes surprisingly logical once you stop looking at price as a financial decision and start looking at it as a behavioural one!

Most pricing discussions, for us marketers, begin with numbers, but consumers rarely begin there, instead they begin with 'meaning'!

A discount means something, a premium price means something, a limited-time offer means something, an EMI means something, a subscription means something, and those meanings often matter more than the actual numbers attached to them! A marketer might see a 25% discount, while a consumer might see permission! A marketer might see a ₹2 lakh watch, while a consumer might see achievement! A marketer might see a twelve-month EMI plan, while a consumer might see affordability! See, how the same number, can have different interpretation!

What fascinates me most is that many consumers don't actually want the cheapest option, but the option that makes them feel the 'smartest'!

The cheapest option often creates anxiety - *Why is it so cheap? What am I missing? Will this disappoint me?*

On the other hand, the most expensive option creates a different kind of anxiety - *Am I overpaying? Will people think I'm showing off? Will I regret this later?*

So, consumers spend an extraordinary amount of time trying to find a story they can comfortably tell themselves! Not the cheapest, not the most expensive, but the one that feels 'right' - and that feeling has become even more important in a world where purchases are increasingly 'visible'.

Twenty years ago, many purchases disappeared into private life, but today, even purchases 'travel' - they appear in Instagram stories, in WhatsApp groups, in office conversations, and many times they become unboxing videos, recommendations, and signals! A product is no longer just something you own, but increasingly something you 'communicate'!

Which changes the role of pricing completely! *Doesn't it?*

I say, price has to stop being just a 'transaction' variable, and has to become a 'social' variable, a 'behavioural' variable and an 'identity' variable!

This is one of the reasons premium-consumption has exploded across categories. People are not always buying better products, but often they are buying better stories! Stories about progress, success, taste, or about belonging to a particular tribe! And interestingly, the same consumer who wants those stories also wants the thrill of getting a deal! Because discounts create their own story - the story of being clever, of winning, of not being fooled, and most importantly the story of getting more than everyone else!

Now, both stories are powerful, and I can see consumers have become remarkably skilled at switching between them!

In this chapter, I want to explore that duality in detail - look at why the same consumer can obsess over saving fifty rupees and then spend fifty thousand without hesitation; examine how discounts work not merely as pricing tools but as behavioural engines that trigger urgency, action, and self-justification; explore why premium pricing often increases desirability rather than reducing it, and why expensive products sometimes become easier to buy than affordable ones.

We will also dive into one of the most important shifts in modern consumption - the disappearance of payment pain! EMIs, 'Buy Now Pay Later' schemes, subscriptions, and flexible payment systems have quietly changed the psychology of purchasing in ways many marketers still underestimate.

I would say, the price has not disappeared, but the feeling of the price has! And that may be one of the most important consumer shifts of our time!

By the end of this chapter, my goal is not to help you understand pricing, but to help you understand 'people'! Because pricing strategies change, promotions come and go, categories evolve, but the human need to feel smart, successful, justified, rewarded, and occasionally a little indulgent remains remarkably consistent!

I believe, the marketer who understands those emotions will always outperform the marketer who only understands the numbers!

So, let me help you discover that the modern consumer is far less interested in what something 'costs' than in what paying that price allows them to 'feel'!

The Dual-Mode Consumer - Why Discounts Still Work in a Premium World

One of the biggest mistakes I see marketers make is assuming that consumers have a fixed relationship with money. They don't!

We know that consumers do not wake up in the morning and decide that they are either price sensitive or premium seeking, but move between those states constantly, sometimes within the same shopping trip, sometimes within the same app session, and occasionally within the same five minutes!

I call this the 'Dual-mode' consumer!

The modern consumer operates in two very different modes - the first is what I call 'Hunt' mode, and the second 'Flex' mode!

Let me explain - a few years ago, price sensitivity was often linked to income, but today, I see highly paid professionals spending fifteen minutes searching for coupon codes before ordering food, and then spending ₹25,000 on a weekend getaway without blinking! I also know people who will bargain to save ₹5 per kilo on vegetables and then happily spend ₹4,000 on dinner because "*the ambience was worth it!*"

Fellow marketers, the old rules have collapsed - consumers are not asking, "*Can I afford this?*", but asking, "*Which version of me is shopping right now?*"

When the Hunt mode consumer appears, saving money feels 'rewarding'. Please note, not 'necessary', but 'rewarding'!

A consumer comparing prices across Blinkit, Instamart, Zepto, and BigBasket is not always trying to save money because they need to, but often because it feels like winning! A ₹40 discount on a grocery basket worth ₹2,000 is economically insignificant for many urban consumers,

but emotionally, however, it feels fantastic! The consumer seems to feel they have beaten the system and won!

This is why marketers who think discounts are only financial tools are missing half the story - discounts are emotional devices that create movement, urgency, permission, and most importantly, they create 'action'!

I have seen friends postpone a purchase for three months and then buy within three minutes because a "*Limited Time Offer*" appeared on the screen!

Did the product suddenly become better? No!

Did the need suddenly become greater? No!

What changed was the consumer's own 'justification'! The discount gave them a satisfying story! A person spending ₹8,000 on shoes without a discount often feels slightly guilty, but the same person spending ₹8,000 on shoes that were originally ₹12,000 feels smart! The transaction is identical! But the emotion, that is completely different!

Fellow marketers, discounts are not just price reductions, but behaviour engines, that can create urgency, action, justification and closures. The best discounts are not reducing price, but reducing 'hesitation'.

The challenge and irony is that many brands become addicted to this tool because it works so well - the moment sales slow down, somebody suggests a discount; the moment inventory builds up, somebody suggests a discount; the moment targets look difficult, somebody suggests a discount!

Eventually consumers become trained, and trained consumers are dangerous, because now they stop buying your products, and start buying your offers!

I have seen this happen repeatedly across categories - consumers know exactly when sales will arrive, they know festive offers are coming, they know year-end discounts are coming, they know platform-wide sales are coming, and the brand keeps thinking it is driving demand.

This is where Hunt mode becomes problematic - consumers stop reacting to products and start reacting only to incentives.

Which is why every marketer must also understand the Flex mode!

This is the mode where consumers are not trying to save, but trying to 'signal' - to reward themselves, to feel successful, or to feel different! This is why someone who negotiates aggressively while buying a washing machine can purchase an iPhone at full price! Note that the categories are different, the emotions are different, the stories are different, and therefore the behaviour is different! The consumer is not buying a phone, but buying reassurance, status, confidence, belonging, or an imagined identity!

Another scenario - I have seen consumers reject a ₹2,000 watch because it felt cheap and buy a ₹22,000 watch because it felt meaningful! Seemingly, the higher price actually increased their 'confidence'!

This is where many founders become uncomfortable, and assume higher prices create resistance. No! Most of the times, it creates 'attraction'.

The question is not whether the consumer can afford the premium, but whether the premium 'means' something!

If the higher price signals quality, achievement, taste, expertise, exclusivity, or identity, consumers often become surprisingly willing to pay it!

This creates a very important lesson for marketers - stop segmenting consumers into "*discount buyers*" and "*premium buyers*", because that consumer does not exist anymore! The same person is both!

When consumers are buying commodities, everyday necessities, replenishment products, and routine purchases, Hunt mode often dominates.

When consumers are buying identity products, reward products, social products, and visible products, Flex mode comes into play.

For Hunt Mode categories, your job is to reduce hesitation, create urgency, create momentum, create easy justification, and make action feel smart.

For Flex Mode categories, your job is very different - you must increase meaning, increase visibility, increase emotional value and make paying more feel worthwhile!

You should know when to create savings and when to create aspiration, and also know when to offer a discount and perhaps more importantly, when not to!

Because the future belongs to marketers who understand that consumers are not 'consistent', but 'contextual'. They are not 'irrational', but 'emotional'.

And they are not permanently price sensitive or permanently premium seeking, but simply switching between different versions of themselves all day long!

Premium is Easier to Buy Than You Think

One of the strangest things I have observed in modern consumer behaviour is that expensive products are often easier to sell than affordable ones! That might sound completely wrong until you start paying attention!

Most marketers assume that higher prices create resistance, and logic suggests that the more expensive something becomes, the harder it should be to buy. Yet when I look around urban India today, I see consumers happily spending ₹1.5 lakh on phones, ₹80,000 on handbags, ₹12,000 on sneakers, ₹300 for coffee, ₹800 for haircuts and ₹2,000 for candles!

Clearly something else is happening!

The problem is that marketers often think about price as a financial decision, while consumers frequently experience price as an emotional signal. The higher price is not simply telling them what the product costs, but what the product 'means'.

A few years ago, I was helping a company understand why one of its premium products was outselling a cheaper alternative that was objectively excellent.

The cheaper version performed well - the reviews were good, the quality was solid, and the value proposition was stronger. No missing points, and on paper, it should have won. Instead, consumers kept choosing the more expensive option! When we spoke to buyers, the answer was surprisingly simple - the premium version felt "*serious*". That was the exact word many of them used - not better, or smarter, or more useful, but *"serious"*. Clearly, the higher price had created meaning, and transformed a product into a signal!

We often talk about products solving problems, but remember many products today solve for 'identity' - a watch tells time, but nobody spends ₹50,000 on a watch because they are worried about being late; a luxury handbag carries things, but nobody buys it because they require a more expensive place to store a wallet; a premium car moves people from one location to another, and so does a far cheaper car, but the difference lies in what the purchase communicates!

The product, thus, becomes visible evidence of a story - a story about success, or achievement, taste, or even belonging. And once a product enters the identity business, pricing starts behaving very differently. In fact, lower pricing can sometimes damage the story!

Imagine walking into a luxury boutique and finding that every product is suddenly discounted by 70% - the rational part of the brain should be delighted, but the emotional part immediately becomes suspicious - something feels wrong and seems like the signal has weakened or the meaning has changed.

This is one of the most important lessons for marketers - if your product's value comes partly from identity, status, expertise, aspiration, craftsmanship, exclusivity, or achievement, then price is not merely a revenue decision, but a positioning decision! The price has to be your silent communication, and it has to become a part of the product.

However, there is another force changing premium consumption that is even more fascinating. Consumers have not become dramatically richer, but payment has become dramatically easier, and those are not the same things. I still remember when buying something expensive involved a very painful moment - you looked at the full price, thought about it, paid the full price, and then you emotionally recovered from the full price!

Today that experience is disappearing - consumers increasingly buy through EMIs, subscriptions, financing plans, instalments, auto-renewals, and Buy Now Pay Later systems that quietly remove friction from the process! See, the price did not change but the experience of the price has changed! And that changes behaviour enormously - a ₹1.5 lakh phone sounds expensive but a ₹4,200 per month sounds manageable; a ₹60,000 television feels significant, but a ₹1,999 per

month feels surprisingly reasonable; a ₹25 lakh car sounds intimidating, but a monthly EMI of ₹34,200 sounds easy!

See how effortlessly the transaction has been converted from a wealth decision into a cash-flow decision!

And so, the consumers are no longer asking, "*Can I afford this?*", but increasingly, they are asking, "*Can I accommodate this payment?*" Smart marketers understand the difference!

I often tell founders that consumers do not buy products, but today they buy payment experiences - if you can make the payment feel smaller, smoother, more predictable, and less painful, you can dramatically increase adoption without changing the product itself!

This is why subscription businesses, SaaS, streaming platforms, and premium smartphones exploded - the innovation was not always in the product, but also in how the consumer paid.

So, what should fellow founders, marketers and product leaders learn from all this? The first lesson is that premium products should never be sold primarily through functionality. See, functionality gets compared, but identity gets desired! If you are building a premium product, spend less time explaining what it does and more time understanding what owning it says about the consumer.

The second lesson is that price should reinforce meaning. A premium price must feel justified not through features alone but through narrative, visibility, craftsmanship, exclusivity, community, and emotional reward. Remember, consumers do not pay more for products but for 'significance'!

The third lesson is that payment design has become as important as product design. Many businesses spend years perfecting products while treating payment as an operational detail, and that is a big mistake. EMIs, subscriptions, memberships, financing, bundles, deferred payments, and flexible plans are behavioural tools, as they reduce resistance, hesitation, and pain

Finally, understand that premium buying is not always about extravagance, as most consumers are not trying to impress the world, but trying to tell themselves a story! A story that says they are progressing, or have achieved something, or they belong somewhere

they aspired to be. The brands that understand those stories win, and increasingly, the brands that make those stories easier to pay for win even faster!

Remember, in modern consumer behaviour, the most successful marketers do not simply create desire, but create desire that feels attainable.

To close this part, I am reminded of a tea brand from North East India that I once advised. When I first met the founders, they had a list of things they wanted to do - new flavours, more SKUs, influencer campaigns, festive gift boxes, subscription models, loyalty programmes, retail expansion, and export enquiries. At one point, I felt the business plan had more pages than their tea catalogue! The problem was simple - the tea was excellent, but almost everything else was distracting them from that fact!

So, we did something that felt unusual - instead of doing twenty things reasonably well, we decided to do three things exceptionally well. We sourced only from a handful of estates, and redesigned the packaging so that it looked premium enough to sit on a corporate CEO's desk but authentic enough to remind people where it came from!

And we priced it 'confidently', and there were no discount festivals - no buy-one-get-one offers, and no desperate attempts to manufacture demand!

The tea was allowed to be what it was - a premium product from a place already famous for producing some of the world's finest tea!

What happened in the next few months was one of my favourite business lessons - consumers did not ask for more flavours, but just asked for larger packs! Consumers did not negotiate on price, and did not wait for discounts!

In fact, we saw them gifting and recommended the tea!

The business grew not because we did more things, but because we stopped doing unnecessary things.

That experience taught the founders something they have carried ever since.

Many businesses struggle because they are trying to compensate for weak positioning with excessive activity - more campaigns, more offers, more features, and so much more noise.

The best brands, I have seen, rarely win because they do everything. Instead, they win because they understand exactly which few things matter, and then have the discipline to ignore everything else.

In a world obsessed with doing more, that may be the most underrated competitive advantage of all!

Part 3
How Buying Has Changed

A few years ago, I was having dinner with a founder friend and his team when something unusual happened! The food arrived, but not one person at the table touched it! Nobody reached for a spoon, and nobody even looked particularly hungry, instead, six people reached for their phones!

Angles were tested, plates were rotated, and glasses were moved. One person stood up, another leaned sideways, and a third rejected an image he took, because the lighting wasn't emotional enough!

Meanwhile, the food sat there getting colder. Eventually somebody said, "*Okay, done*". Only then did the eating begin!

I was quietly watching, and admitting that something fundamental had changed about consumption itself, because for most of human history, buying ended when ownership began - you bought the shirt and you wore the shirt; you bought the watch and you wore it; you bought the car and drove it - end of story.

Today, ownership is often the beginning of the story!

The purchase is not complete when the consumer buys, but gets completed when the consumer experiences it, shares it, displays it, discusses it, recommends it, reviews it, posts it, photographs it, and occasionally builds an entire online personality around it!

Somewhere along the way, products stopped being products, and themselves became media, and consumers also stopped being consumers, and became broadcasters!

This is important to note, as marketers!

People are not sharing because platforms exist, but because people want to share! And let me tell you - that desire is much older than Instagram!

Humans have always wanted to signal status, belonging, achievement, taste, expertise, and identity. It's just that the tools have changed, but the instinct remains!

What has 'definitely' changed is the scale - a person buying a coffee in Bangalore today can influence purchasing decisions in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Singapore, London, and Toronto before finishing the drink!

And once you understand this as a marketer, you begin to see buying differently.

Consumers are no longer asking only, "*Will this work?*" but asking much more - *Will this be noticed? Will this say something about me? Will this fit my identity? Will this be worth sharing? Will people like it? Will people like me for liking it?*

Those questions sound superficial until you realise how much purchasing behaviour they influence!

See, a running shoe is no longer just sports equipment; a laptop is no longer just a productivity tool; a coffee brand is no longer just a beverage; a skincare routine is no longer just skincare - products increasingly live inside 'social' systems, that behave and operate very differently from traditional markets. Value is no longer created only by usage, but also by visibility!

A product that gets seen often feels more valuable, a product that gets shared often feels more desirable, and a product that gets discussed often feels more important!

This creates entirely new challenges for marketers, founders, and product leaders!

Because suddenly the product itself is not enough! The experience matters, the packaging matters, the unboxing matters, the recommendation matters, the community matters, and very importantly the story after the sale matters!

In many categories, the marketing department has spent decades obsessing over acquisition while completely ignoring what happens next. The consumer buys and marketing team celebrates and moves on.

The problem is that consumers don't move on! They keep talking, or they keep silent, and those two outcomes create dramatically different businesses!

This part of the book is about understanding what happens after the purchase decision. We are moving beyond attraction, beyond evaluation, and beyond transaction and entering the world of visibility, identity, and habit. We will explore why consumers increasingly buy things that help them express who they are; examine why belonging to a category tribe can be more powerful than product superiority; deep dive to look at why some products become habits while others remain occasional purchases. And perhaps most importantly, we will understand why the most valuable customer is no longer the one who buys once, but the one who keeps showing, sharing, recommending, and returning.

Because the biggest change in modern consumer behaviour is not how people buy, but what happens after they buy. And that story, as many marketers are discovering, is often far more valuable than the sale itself!

6.
The Buy and Show Loop

A few months ago, I was having coffee with a young founder when his phone suddenly disappeared from the table! Not stolen, though!

A friend sitting across from him picked it up, placed it next to a coffee cup, adjusted the angle, and took three pictures. The phone was then returned to its owner without a single comment about processor speed, battery life, storage capacity, or any of the things the manufacturer had spent millions communicating. Nobody discussed the specifications, but everybody spoke about the colour!

A week later, I noticed something equally strange - a relative had purchased an expensive air fryer. Not only had she posted a picture of the air fryer, but she had also posted a picture of the box the air fryer came in, followed by a picture of the first thing cooked in it, followed by a picture of the kitchen corner where the air fryer now lives! At this point, I was beginning to suspect the air fryer had its own social media manager!

And that's what I want to tell you - the product was not the event, but the ownership was!

For most of business history, companies worried about getting consumers to buy, but today, something very different is happening - consumers are turning purchases into content, ownership into communication, and everyday products into tiny public announcements about who they are, what they like, and occasionally how much EMI they are willing to tolerate!

The sale is no longer the finish line, but for many categories, it is the starting gun!

This chapter is about understanding what happens when buying becomes visible, when products become social signals, and when customers quietly become marketers without ever applying for the job!

Today, the consumer doesn't just buy, they buy and show, and repeat it multiple times! And businesses that understand this loop grow very differently from those that don't!

Consumption is Public

I don't think social media changed consumer behaviour. I think social media exposed consumer behaviour.

Humans have always displayed what they owned - long before Instagram even existed, people displayed jewellery, watches, clothing, homes, cars, collection of books, and even dinnerware. The wealthy displayed wealth, the educated displayed education, the sophisticated displayed taste, and the successful displayed success. Human beings have been broadcasting their identities for thousands of years, but the difference today is that the audience became much larger! Today, your purchases can be seen by people you haven't met, people you barely know, and occasionally people you actively avoid!

The audience exploded, but the behaviour remained.

This is why I believe marketers often misunderstand what is happening when they say consumers are "*showing off*". Most consumers are not trying to show off, but trying to 'show up'!

Showing off is about superiority, but showing up is about existence!

People increasingly use products to participate in conversations about who they think they are!

Doesn't that change the purpose of buying itself?

A few years ago, I was speaking to a young founder who sold speciality coffee online. His concern was straightforward - the coffee was genuinely excellent, customers loved it, reviews were strong, but growth was slower than expected. During our discussion, I asked him a question - "*How often do people post your coffee online?*" He looked confused and asked - "*What does that have to do with taste?*"

Exactly! That was the problem! I exclaimed.

He was still operating in an old-world model where product consumption ended at consumption. But increasingly, consumption no longer ends with usage. It shouldn't!

Consumption now creates media - the coffee is photographed, the mug is photographed, the brewing process is photographed, the packaging is photographed, the shelf where the coffee sits is photographed. At some point, I wouldn't be surprised if consumers start photographing the receipt, too!

And while I might sound ridiculous, I wish to point to something deeper - many products today are consumed twice, first physically and then socially.

The physical consumption satisfies the need, but the social consumption satisfies the identity, and both matter! Because products increasingly operate in two markets simultaneously.

The first market is the traditional market. *Does it work? Is it useful? Is it reliable? The second market is the visibility market. Does it travel? Does it get noticed? Does it create conversation? Does it generate social value?*

This second market is where many modern brands quietly win, and many traditional brands quietly lose.

The ground reality is tough - a product can be excellent and still be invisible! We all know that invisible products struggle to grow!

I once advised a founder from my hometown whose business sold handcrafted leather goods. The craftsmanship was exceptional, the materials were excellent, the pricing was fair, but the problem was that 'nothing' about the product encouraged 'visibility'. Customers loved the products, but rarely talked about them, and so his business only generated satisfaction but no amplification!

See, today, consumers increasingly discover products through other consumers, and not just through advertising. Historically, marketers tried to create awareness before purchase, but today, many consumers create awareness after purchase! The customer has become the media, the distribution, the key influence, and all this, without intending to!

And once you understand this as a marketer or a founder, you start looking at products differently - you stop asking only whether the

product delivers value, but start asking whether the product creates stories!

Because stories travel, while features rarely do!

Nobody excitedly tells their friend that a backpack contains three internal compartments and reinforced stitching, but they definitely tell their friend about the backpack they carried on a solo trip through Japan!

The story travels, while the feature stays behind!

This is one reason premium and luxury brands have become so powerful! It isn't merely because they make good products, because many other companies make good products. Premium and luxury brands create social narratives - the purchase becomes a statement, the statement becomes content, the content becomes visibility, the visibility becomes demand, and the cycle continues.

What fascinates me most is that consumers themselves often don't recognise they are participating in this system! Ask someone why they posted a picture of their new watch, new shoes, new laptop, or new coffee shop visit - the answers are usually innocent! "*I just liked the picture*". "*It looked nice*". "*I wanted to share it*". And all of those answers are true, but underneath them sits a deeper reality - people increasingly consume products as part of 'identity' construction, and products help tell the story. These stories help shape perception and that reinforces their perceived identity. It's common human behaviour for decades! The tools changed, but the psychology didn't!

For marketers, I would say, this creates a very important lesson - you are no longer building products only for consumption, but also for observation, for discussion, for recommendation, and for visibility!

The question is no longer, "*Will consumers use this?*", but "*Will consumers talk about this?*"

Such products will generate awareness without media spend, generate trust without advertising, and also generate demand without direct selling!

Not because the company became a better marketer, but because the customer did!

The teams that understand this shift will design very differently in the future, and will immediately stop treating the sale as the end of marketing, and will recognise that the moment after the purchase is often more valuable than the purchase itself!

Remember, buying is no longer the final act, but the first piece of content for your product!

Products Grow Faster When They are Designed to Be Seen

One of the most dangerous assumptions a marketer can make today is believing that product value ends at product usage! That was true for a long time, but today, the product enters a second economy after purchase.

I call it the 'visibility economy', and many brands still don't realise they are competing in it!

A few years ago, I was guiding a premium food brand, where the founders were obsessed with ingredients, sourcing, manufacturing quality, freshness, certifications, and operational excellence. All of those things mattered, but when I asked a simple question, the room became quiet. "*What happens after the consumer opens the package?*" Nobody had thought much about it!

The focus had been entirely on getting the first sale, and the consumer experience after purchase was almost treated as an operational detail.

And yet that is where some of the most important marketing happens today, because consumers increasingly create value 'after' buying!

The traditional marketing model assumes that awareness creates purchase, but the modern model often works differently - purchase creates visibility; visibility creates awareness; awareness creates new purchase; and the cycle repeats. This is the 'Visibility' loop, and once you see it, you cannot unsee it!

Ok, let's think about how many products you discovered in the last year because someone else owned them, or because somebody used it, carried it, wore it, photographed it, recommended it, or displayed it! That visibility created curiosity; curiosity created consideration; consideration created purchase; and which created more visibility!

The most successful consumer brands increasingly understand that every customer is a potential media channel. Sadly, brands obsess over influencers while completely ignoring the fact that thousands of

ordinary customers collectively generate far more visibility than a handful of paid creators. But that only happens if the product is 'designed' correctly, and this is where many businesses make a critical mistake - they think consumers share products because consumers are social, but that is only partially true! Consumers share products because products help consumers tell stories about 'themselves'! That is so important to remember!

See, nobody shares a coffee, but a lifestyle; nobody shares a watch, but success; nobody shares sneakers, but identity; nobody shares a meal, but an experience. And once you understand this, product design starts looking very different. The question is no longer - "*How do we make a better product?*", but - "*What story does this product help the consumer tell?*" That is a much harder question, but also a much more valuable one for any marketer.

This is why I increasingly tell founders to stop designing products and start designing 'moments', because a product sitting on a shelf does not create growth, but a product creating a moment does!

Think about some of the fastest-growing brands across categories - the most successful ones are rarely the most functional, but often the most visible!

The product itself creates conversation, the packaging creates curiosity, the unboxing creates anticipation, the experience creates discussion, and everything is designed to leave behind a 'story'!

I remember advising a startup where the founders wanted to improve customer acquisition through digital advertising. Instead, we spent weeks discussing the box! Which initially felt ridiculous to some! After all, nobody starts a business dreaming about cardboard! Yet, I insisted and repeatedly told them that the packaging was the first physical interaction the consumer had with the brand. The product was hidden, but the box was visible, and so, we redesigned the experience around anticipation and discovery rather than delivery! Within months, customer-generated content increased dramatically - people were photographing the packaging, sharing the experience, and talking about it! Not because we asked them to, but simply because the experience itself was worth sharing!

That is a very important lesson for marketers and founders - the best shareability strategies are invisible - consumers should never feel like

they are being asked to create content, but the experience itself should naturally create the impulse!

This is where many brands fail, as they try to 'manufacture' sharing! *"Tag three friends"*. *"Post and win"*. *"Share to participate"*. These tactics can create activity, but they rarely create advocacy.

Remember, real advocacy emerges when consumers genuinely feel that sharing improves their story! The goal is not to incentivise visibility, but to 'deserve' it. And that requires 'design' - every consumer product today should be evaluated using a simple question - *"Would somebody naturally talk about this?"* Not because they were paid, or were asked, or were rewarded. *Would they simply want to?*

That desire usually emerges from one of five places - the product looks remarkable, or the product feels remarkable, or the experience feels remarkable, or the outcome feels remarkable, or the product says something remarkable about the consumer.

If none of those exist, visibility becomes difficult, and hence expensive!

Remember, the future belongs to products that generate their own distribution - which means marketers, founders and product leaders need to expand their definition of 'design'! Design is no longer just aesthetics, usability, or just packaging, but design has become 'amplification'!

Every element of the product should answer one question - *"How does this increase the probability that somebody will 'naturally' notice, discuss, recommend, or share this?"*

Today, every share creates awareness, every awareness creates curiosity, every curiosity creates consideration, every consideration creates purchase, and every purchase has the potential to restart the loop!

You should also now start building visibility systems, because they grow faster than products ever can.

That is the real lesson of modern consumer behaviour - consumers do not simply buy value anymore, but they themselves create value! And the smartest brands, marketers, founders make sure that value is visible!

Marketing Beyond Purchase

One of the mistakes in marketing is believing that a sale is proof of successful marketing. It no more is! Instead, a sale is just a proof that marketing got an opportunity!

What happens next determines whether the business grows.

For decades, companies have organised themselves around acquisition - teams celebrate new customers, dashboards celebrate conversions, investors celebrate growth, and sales teams celebrate closures!

Everybody celebrates the moment money changes hands!

The company moves on, but the customer does not! The customer is just getting started! This is why I often tell founders that businesses have become obsessed with the wedding and forgotten the marriage!

An extraordinary amount of effort goes into attracting consumers, persuading consumers, converting consumers, and closing consumers. Then, once the sale happens, the attention 'suddenly' disappears!

A consumer who has just bought from you is 'entering' a very important phase, where they are evaluating - whether they made the right decision, whether they trust you, whether they will return, whether they will recommend you, or whether you become a memory or a habit.

Most companies never consciously participate in this phase, and assume the product will do the work! Sometimes it does, but most of the time, it doesn't!

See, consumers don't remember experiences the way businesses think they do, instead they remember stories, and stories are formed 'after' the transaction.

I have seen mediocre products succeed because they created great post-purchase experiences, and have also seen excellent products fail because the relationship ended at checkout. The difference was never the 'sale', but everything that happened after it.

Think about the brands you genuinely recommend to friends, not the brands you buy, but the ones you recommend. That is a much higher standard!

Somewhere along the way, those brands gave you something more valuable than utility, they gave you confidence! Confidence that if somebody followed your recommendation, you would not look foolish, and that confidence is not created during advertising, but during ownership. This is why the most valuable marketing asset in the world is not awareness, but 'conviction'.

A consumer who believes, a consumer who returns, a consumer who recommends, or a consumer who advocates - those consumers are not created through campaigns, but through post purchase experiences.

The irony is that many marketers spend years trying to optimise the first interaction while completely ignoring the second, third, fourth, and fifth interactions, even though those later interactions often determine the lifetime value of the customer.

Remember, the first sale creates revenue, the second creates confidence, the third sale creates habit, the fourth sale creates trust, and eventually trust creates advocacy. And advocacy is the phase where marketing becomes exponential - a company talking about itself is marketing, while a customer talking about the company is multiplication.

The most powerful part of advocacy is that customer recommendations arrive 'pre-loaded' with trust, and no advertisement, billboard, or campaign can compete with that. Humans trust humans! Always have, and always will!

This is why I believe the future belongs to companies that stop viewing marketing as a department and start viewing marketing as a customer experience 'system'. Every email, delivery, package, interaction, support conversation, follow-up, product improvement - every 'customer moment' becomes marketing!

Not because it is promotional, but simply because it is 'memorable'.

The companies that will dominate consumer advocacy will not necessarily be the companies with the biggest advertising budgets, but the ones that create the strongest post-purchase stories! Stories that

consumers willingly retell, proudly recommend, and choose to become part of!

Remember, when that happens, the customer stops being the outcome of marketing, and becomes the 'source' of marketing. That is also the moment a business begins to compound!

Real growth happens when somebody buys from you, comes back, brings others with them, and feels good about doing it. The first purchase proves you can make a promise, and everything after that proves whether the promise was worth believing. And that is why the real marketing begins after the sale!

7.
The Identity Purchase

A few years ago, I attended a business conference where almost everyone claimed to be unique.

This was fascinating because, after about thirty minutes of observation, I realised that most of the room was carrying the same laptop, wearing the same style of sneakers, drinking the same coffee, using the same productivity apps, and discussing the same podcasts.

At one point, I genuinely felt that if somebody accidentally mixed up all the backpacks outside the conference hall, civilisation might collapse!

What made the situation even funnier was that nobody believed they were following a crowd, and each person felt completely 'individual'!

One founder proudly explained how his choice of laptop reflected his creative thinking. Five minutes later, another founder made exactly the same argument using exactly the same laptop!

Then came the coffee discussion - one person ordered oat milk because it aligned with his lifestyle. Another ordered oat milk because it aligned with her values, and then a third ordered oat milk because it aligned with his fitness goals. The cow milk drinking folks, meanwhile, had completely disappeared from the conversation!

As I sat there watching all this unfold, I realised something important - people rarely buy products, instead they buy stories about 'themselves'!

The laptop was not technology, the coffee was not a beverage, the sneakers were not footwear, but each purchase was quietly communicating something!

Competence, creativity, success, health, taste, modernity, belonging, and perhaps most importantly, aspiration!

Most consumers are not buying products that reflect who they are today, but buying products that reflect who they 'hope' to become tomorrow!

Years ago, that insight had changed the way I think about consumer behaviour - the biggest purchases in our lives are often not functional decisions, but are 'identity' decisions.

This chapter is about understanding that hidden layer beneath consumption, where products become symbols, brands become tribes/communities, and buying becomes one of the most powerful ways people construct, signal, and occasionally reinvent who they are!

Products as Identity Markers

A few years ago, I was helping a large stationary brand understand why consumers were choosing one premium notebook brand over another. Both products were well made, both were similarly priced, and both solved exactly the same problem. They were just notebooks - you opened them, wrote in them, and closed them - end of functional story!

Yet, I was told, consumers behaved as if they were choosing between two entirely different worlds! One consumer group described their notebook as "*professional"*. Another described theirs as "*creative*", and a third described theirs as "*minimal"*. The fascinating thing was that none of these characteristics existed inside the paper - the notebook had become something else - it had become an 'identity' marker.

That project clearly states one of the most misunderstood ideas in marketing, because most marketers believe products communicate value. They do, but increasingly, products communicate 'people'. And that is a far bigger job for marketers!

When consumers buy something today, they are often answering a question that has very little to do with the product itself! They are answering -

"*What kind of person am I?*", or perhaps more accurately - "*What kind of person would I like others to think I am?*"

That may sound superficial until you realise how much of modern consumption is driven by exactly this mechanism. Consider something as simple as a water bottle - twenty years ago, a water bottle was a container, but today, a water bottle can communicate fitness, sustainability, discipline, wellness, environmental consciousness, corporate sophistication, outdoor adventure, creativity, or premium lifestyle! The water inside remains remarkably similar, but the story around the water changes completely, and consumers increasingly buy the 'story'!

I see this everywhere - a founder carries a particular laptop, a consultant prefers a particular notebook, a gym enthusiast uses a particular bottle, a traveller carries a particular backpack, and a professional wears a particular watch! If you ask them why, the answers often begin with features, but the real reasons usually live elsewhere. The product fits the identity, reinforces the narrative, and tells the world something!

What fascinates me is that consumers rarely make these decisions consciously.

Nobody wakes up and says, "*Today I will purchase an object that subtly communicates competence and ambition"*. Instead, they simply feel attracted to products that align with the story they already carry about themselves, or the story they wish they carried.

See, products are not always expressions of existing identity, but very often they are investments in future identity!

A young professional buying premium formal shoes is not necessarily expressing who he is, but may be expressing who he hopes to become! The first luxury watch is often purchased years before the owner feels successful enough to deserve it, or the expensive gym membership arrives before the fitness, or the premium kitchen appliance arrives before the healthy lifestyle, or the sophisticated bookshelf arrives before many of the books are actually read.

Consumers are constantly purchasing evidence of 'future' selves, and this is one reason traditional segmentation is becoming increasingly ineffective!

Demographics like income, age, and geography tell us something, but identity tells us much more!

I have met twenty-five-year-olds who buy like fifty-year-olds, and also sixty-year-olds who buy like twenty-five-year-olds!

I have seen consumers with modest incomes save for premium products because the purchase carried emotional significance.

I have seen wealthy consumers reject expensive products because they did not align with how they viewed themselves.

Remember, identity frequently beats demographics! Also remember that consumers do not buy categories, but buy symbols! The category

exists inside the company, but the symbol exists inside the consumer's mind!

Let me explain - a motorcycle company may think it sells motorcycles, but the consumer may think it sells freedom. A skincare company may think it sells formulations, but consumer may think it sells confidence. A coffee company may think it sells beverages, but consumer may think it sells sophistication.

The moment you understand the symbol, as a marketer, the product starts making sense, but the moment you ignore the symbol, the consumer starts looking irrational!

This is where many product teams make a critical mistake - they focus almost entirely on performance. Look, performance matters, but performance alone rarely creates attachment. It is identity that creates attachment!

Consumers can admire products for their functionality, but love them for what they say about them. Doesn't this explain why some technically superior products struggle while less capable competitors thrive!

The winning product is often better aligned with identity, and the consumer is not comparing specifications, but comparing stories. And stories are much harder to displace!

I once mentored a brand after they had spent enormous effort improving product features - the upgrades were genuinely meaningful, yet adoption barely moved! When the team spoke to consumers, the problem became obvious - the company had improved the product, but the consumer had never hired the product for performance alone, and thought the product's real job was signalling 'expertise'. The upgrades improved capability, but did not improve signalling! As a result, consumer behaviour barely changed!

That experience taught me something I have never forgotten.

Let's go deeper - the product consumers think they are buying is often different from the product they are actually buying - a consumer may purchase a running shoe, but what they may actually be buying is discipline; a consumer may purchase an electric vehicle, but what they may actually be buying is progressiveness; a consumer may purchase

premium tea, but what they may actually be buying is refinement; a consumer may purchase a luxury pen, but what they may actually be buying is seriousness.

This matters enormously because it changes how marketers should think about 'growth'. Instead of asking - "*Who buys our product?*", start asking - "*What identity does our product help consumers perform?*"

That question often reveals opportunities that demographics never will!

I believe the businesses and brands will not win because they are the loudest, but because they become useful 'identity' tools, and will help consumers communicate ambition, creativity, expertise, taste, sustainability, achievement, belonging, rebellion, discipline, wellness, intelligence, or any of the hundreds of identities modern consumers constantly manage!

Today, identity itself has become more complex - the same consumer can be a corporate executive in the morning, a fitness enthusiast in the evening, a foodie at night, and a traveller on weekends! Each identity creates different purchasing behaviour, each identity seeks different products, and so each identity searches for different symbols! This means marketers must stop thinking about products as solutions to problems. That is too old and too narrow!

The most successful products solve identity needs, which are often stronger than functional needs.

Remember, consumers do not merely buy products to use them, but to understand themselves, express themselves, and increasingly, they buy products to become themselves.

That is why identity has become one of the most powerful forces in modern consumer behaviour, not because products have changed, but because the role products play in people's lives has changed completely!

Consumers Want to Belong and Be Different at the Same Time

One of the strangest things about modern consumers is that they desperately want individuality while spending most of their lives trying to find people exactly like themselves!

Let me illustrate - I was watching a group of young professionals discuss technology, and within fifteen minutes, I could figure almost every product they owned - the laptop, the phone, the smartwatch, the earbuds, the productivity apps, and even the coffee brands! They laughed about being unique individuals while looking increasingly like members of the same digital family. And yet, none of them felt they were copying anybody, in fact, each person felt distinct! That is because consumers are not trying to be different from everyone, but trying hard to be different 'within' a group!

For decades, marketers assumed competition happened between brands, but increasingly, competition happens between 'ecosystems'.

Consumers no longer buy isolated products, but they buy 'membership', signalling their entry into a particular world, and once consumers enter that world, their future purchases become surprisingly predictable!

I have seen this repeatedly across categories.

A consumer buys their first premium running shoe, and soon they start following running influencers and content creators. Then they buy performance apparel, a smartwatch, hydration system, nutrition products, and even marathon registrations! What began as a shoe purchase quietly became identity adoption!

The same thing happens in technology, fashion, biking, gaming, wellness and outdoor adventure. See, the consumer is not building a product collection, but a self-image.

This is where many fellow marketers make a mistake, and think their competition is the product sitting next to them on the shelf! Very often the real competition is an entirely different identity ecosystem, because consumers allocate time, money, and attention toward identities they want to strengthen!

A person investing heavily in fitness may spend less on luxury dining, a person investing heavily in travel may spend less on home décor, or a person investing heavily in technology may spend less on fashion - the battle is often not between products, but between versions of self!

But here is where things become even more interesting - once consumers join a tribe, they immediately begin trying to differentiate themselves inside it! This is the paradox - people want belonging, and also want uniqueness, simultaneously.

A runner wants to be recognised as a runner, but not as a generic runner! A coffee enthusiast wants to be part of coffee culture, but not in exactly the same way as everyone else! A technology enthusiast wants the tribe, but also wants personal distinction! And this creates one of the most powerful forces in modern consumption - consumers buy common identities and uncommon expressions!

Look at fashion - thousands of people may follow the same aesthetic, yet every individual adds a small twist - a different sneaker; a different watch; a different bag; a different colour; a different accessory - notice that the identity is shared, but the expression is 'personalised'!

This is why limited editions work! This is why customisation works! This is why colour variations work! This is why creator collaborations work!

Consumers are constantly searching for ways to remain part of the group while maintaining a sense of 'individuality'.

And smart brands understand this paradox, and so do not force consumers to choose between belonging and differentiation - they try and provide both!

Such brands try and create a recognisable identity ecosystem while allowing personal interpretation.

Now, let's think about what this means for marketers. See, most traditional positioning discussions begin with differentiation from

competitors, and that is important. But there is another question that is often more valuable - "*What tribe does this product help consumers join?*" Because if consumers cannot answer that question, adoption becomes difficult.

See, humans are social creatures, and constantly look for signals about where we belong. The best brands make that decision easy.

But then comes the second question - "*How does the consumer express individuality within that tribe?*" This is where product strategy becomes critical - colour choices, styles, variants, limited editions, personalisation, accessories, or community rituals - all these elements allow consumers to create distinction without leaving the group.

The future belongs to brands that understand this dual need - not individuality, not belonging, but both! Because modern consumers are not searching for uniqueness, but 'recognised' uniqueness, as they want to stand out, but only among people who understand why they are standing out.

Brand Positioning for Identity

One of the most useful questions I ask founders is - "*If I remove your logo, what kind of person would still buy your product?*"

The room usually becomes quiet, because most businesses can describe their product, or customer, but only a very few can describe the identity their customer is trying to build. And yet, I must tell you, that is often where the real battle is being fought. For years, marketers have been taught to position products around benefits - faster, stronger, healthier, cheaper, smarter, more durable, more efficient and those things matter, for sure, but they rarely create 'devotion'!

Remember, 'identity' creates devotion. The reality is that consumers don't wake up wanting a product benefit, but 'wanting' to become a certain kind of person.

See, nobody wants protein, but want to be fit; nobody wants a productivity app, but want to be organised; nobody wants a luxury watch, but want to feel successful; nobody wants premium tea, but want to feel refined.

The product is often just the vehicle, and the identity is the destination!

Many years ago, I was working on a premium kitchen appliance brand - the company was communicating exactly what most marketers would communicate - power, features, technology, performance, innovation, and this communication was perfectly logical. But the problem was that consumers were not buying logic, but buying 'aspiration'.

When we spoke to customers, nobody proudly talked about wattage, or nobody invited friends home and said, "*Come and see my advanced motor technology*". What they talked about, instead, was something entirely different - they talked about becoming better hosts, better cooks, more sophisticated homeowners! The product was sitting in the kitchen, but the identity was sitting in the consumer's 'mind'. And the identity was driving the purchase!

This learning should completely change how you think about positioning. Today, positioning is not about where your product sits in the market, but where your 'customer' sits in society.

Strong global brands understand this intuitively. Let's look closely at their communication - they rarely spend much time describing the product, instead, they describe the 'person'. Sometimes directly, sometimes subtly, but always intentionally. The message is never - "*Here is what we make*", but - "*Here is who you become"*. That distinction separates functional brands from identity brands.

A functional brand says - "*Our shoes are comfortable*", while an identity brand says - "*People like you wear these"*.

A functional brand says - "*Our coffee is premium*", while an identity brand says - "*People like you drink this"*.

A functional brand says - "*Our vehicle is efficient*", but on the contrary an identity brand says - "*People like you drive this"*.

Notice that the product remains the same, but the positioning changes completely. And what is remarkable is how quickly consumers understand these signals, simply because human beings are extraordinarily good at reading social cues! We can often identify who a brand is for within seconds, not because the company explicitly says it, but because the company communicates it through hundreds of tiny signals - the imagery, language, colours, pricing, ambassadors, retail environment, packaging, or the collaborations - everything contributes!

Remember, identity positioning is rarely created through one campaign, but through consistency, and this is where many businesses get confused - they aim for broad appeal, want to include everyone, want maximum market size - so they create communication that is intentionally 'neutral'. The result is usually disastrous, because when a brand tries to speak to everybody, it often ends up meaning very little to anybody!

See, identity always requires 'specificity' - people must be able to recognise themselves, or recognise the person they aspire to become.

I often see this problem with startups! Their communication sounds like it was approved by a committee determined not to offend anyone! Every sentence is safe, every message is generic, every promise is universal, and so, every piece of communication becomes forgettable!

In reality, consumers don't remember brands that describe products, but always remember brands that describe ‘people’.

The strongest positioning strategy, I have always used, is surprisingly simple - define the identity first and then build everything around it.

Not the customer demographic, but the customer identity. Remember, those are different things - a demographic tells me the consumer is a 32-year-old urban professional, while an identity tells me the consumer sees themselves as ambitious, progressive, health-conscious, and achievement-oriented.

One of those descriptions helps marketing, the other transforms marketing!

Once identity becomes clear, decisions become easier - product, pricing, communication, and partnership decisions, all become easier!

Everything aligns around a central idea - *Who is this helping consumers become?* And equally important - *Who is this not for?*

That second question is where courage enters positioning! Strong identity brands inevitably exclude, not aggressively or intentionally, but naturally!

See, every identity creates a boundary, every tribe creates an edge, every signal attracts some people and repels others - and that is perfectly healthy.

In fact, shall I say, it is often necessary, because the goal is not maximum relevance, but ‘meaningful’ relevance!

As marketers you must understand a profound truth about modern consumers - people do not merely buy products to solve problems, but to reinforce ‘stories’. Stories about who they are, about who they were, and stories about who they hope to become!

The most successful positioning strategy is therefore not built around product superiority, but around identity clarity, because when consumers see themselves in a brand, the conversation changes. You are no longer competing on features, or price, or awareness, but competing on ‘belonging’.

And belonging is one of the most powerful forces in consumer behaviour.

Product Strategy for Identity

One of the biggest shifts I have witnessed in consumer behaviour over the last decade is that products have slowly moved from solving problems to 'constructing' identities! That might sound completely philosophical until you begin to notice it happening in real life!

A few years ago, I was helping a lifestyle brand rethink its portfolio strategy. The management team had spent hours discussing features, materials, pricing, competitors, distribution, margins, and category trends - all important discussions, yet something was missing, and at one point, I asked a simple question - "*If all your products disappeared tomorrow, what part of your customer's identity would disappear with them?*"

Nobody had an answer, and that was the problem!

Note that consumers increasingly don't buy products one at a time, but assemble identities one purchase at a time! Look at your own life - the phone you carry, the shoes you wear, the watch on your wrist, the notebook on your desk, the car you drive, the coffee you drink, the luggage you travel with - none of these decisions happen in isolation, but together, they create a 'picture'.

And consumers are constantly 'curating' that picture!

The most successful brands understand this, while the weakest brands are ignorant about it.

When marketers discuss product strategy, the conversation often revolves around performance - *What features should we add? How do we improve quality? How do we outperform competitors?* No doubt, these are necessary questions, but identity-driven categories require another question - "*What kind of person does this product help create?*" Because once identity enters the equation, product strategy changes completely!

Take naming. Sadly, most companies treat naming as an exercise in 'memorability', but consumers experience naming very differently, and use names as identity shortcuts. Think about how many product names sound like badges rather than descriptions - explorer, creator, pro, ultra,

elite, reserve, signature, studio, performance, adventure, master - these names are rarely describing the product, but surely describing the customer!

A consumer buying a "*Pro*" version is often purchasing more than functionality, they are purchasing a professional self-image.

The same principle applies to design - many organisations still believe design exists to make products attractive. I think that is far too narrow, as the real job of design is to help consumers recognise themselves, or recognise the person they aspire to become.

A rugged SUV does not merely communicate transportation, but communicates capability. A minimalist laptop does not merely communicate technology, but communicates clarity. A handcrafted leather journal does not merely communicate stationery, but communicates thoughtfulness.

Shall I say - the product becomes a 'mirror', and consumers buy 'reflections' they like!

This is why some brands create extraordinary loyalty without having extraordinary products! Simply because the consumer is not loyal to the product, but to the identity the product supports!

I once helped a premium tea brand from north-east India - the temptation was to compete on flavour profiles, sourcing stories, production methods, and quality credentials. I figured that every tea company was already doing that, so instead, we focused on something else - *Who drinks this tea?*

Not demographically, but psychologically - *What kind of person chooses this tea over everything else available?* The answer changed the strategy!

Suddenly the conversation was not about tea, but about discernment, taste, sophistication, mindfulness. The product remained exactly the same, but the identity became clearer. And that clarity created demand!

Remember, consumers rarely buy what a product is, but buy what ownership 'says'! This is where communication becomes incredibly important! See, most advertising still talks about products, while identity-driven brands talk about 'people'.

Look carefully at the strongest brands in the world - their communication often spends surprisingly little time discussing features, instead, they paint pictures of lifestyles, aspirations,

communities, ambitions, and beliefs, while the product quietly sits in the middle, almost like a supporting actor!

This happens because consumers are not asking - "*What does this do?*", but are increasingly asking - "*What does this say?*" And marketers need to answer that question - clearly, repeatedly, consistently.

This is why I say, product strategy can no longer be separated from communication strategy, or design strategy, or naming strategy, or community strategy, because they all serve the same purpose - reinforcing identity.

The strongest brands create alignment across all of them - the name signals identity, the design signals identity, the packaging signals identity, the communication signals identity, the experience signals identity - everything points in the same direction. And when that happens, consumers understand the brand instantly, not intellectually, but emotionally! And this emotional understanding travels much faster than rational understanding!

I believe this is where many future consumer brands will be built - not around categories, but around identities.

The old question was - "*What market should we enter?*", while the new question, I suggest, is - "*What identity should we serve?*"

Remember, consumers don't wake up wanting another product, but wanting to feel ambitious, creative, disciplined, successful, sophisticated, adventurous, healthy, confident, knowledgeable, modern.

The product is simply the vehicle, but the identity is the destination! The marketers who understand that will stop designing products for consumption, and will start designing products for 'self-expression'.

That is a very different game! And increasingly, it is the game that wins!

8.
Habit is the New Loyalty

A few months ago, I decided to conduct a completely unscientific experiment on myself! I opened my phone and started looking at the apps I use most often. Then I asked a simple question - "*Which of these do I genuinely love?*"

The answers were surprisingly!

My most-used food delivery app? I don't love it. *My most-used cab app?* I definitely don't love it. *My cloud storage provider?* I couldn't even tell you its latest logo. My music app and grocery app were not much better.

Yet I keep using them, again and again, and again! At first, I assumed this was loyalty! Then I realised it was something else - laziness! Not the dramatic kind of laziness that prevents people from going to the gym, but the highly efficient, deeply human kind of laziness that says, "*Everything is already set up here, so why complicate life?*" My payment details were saved, my preferences were saved, my addresses were saved, my playlists were saved - the apps knew me better than my family.

Switching from these apps would require effort! And effort, I must tell you, is one of the biggest competitors in marketing!

This became even clearer one evening when a friend proudly announced that he was extremely loyal to a particular food delivery platform! Ten minutes later, he ordered from a competing platform because it had a ₹75 coupon! The loyalty lasted exactly as long as the discount did not appear!

That is what I keep telling fellow marketers that you often confuse repeat behaviour with emotional commitment! Consumers don't always come back because they love a brand, but because the brand has

become part of a ‘routine’. These routines are far more powerful than affection.

This chapter is about understanding that difference, because the future belongs not to the brands consumers admire the most, but to the brands consumers repeat without thinking.

Loyalty is Overstated

One of the biggest fallacies in marketing is the idea of customer loyalty.

Not because loyalty doesn't exist, it does, but because marketers dramatically overestimate how much of their business is driven by it!

I have been through presentations celebrating customer loyalty - charts showing repeat purchases, retention rates, customer lifetime value, and occasionally a colourful slide explaining how consumers "*love the brand*".

Every time I see that word "*love*", I become slightly suspicious, because consumers are much less romantic than marketers think!

A few years ago, I conducted an exercise with a group of consumers, by asking a simple question - "*What is your favourite grocery app?*" The answers came instantly - people had favourites, strong favourites, passionate favourites!

Then I asked a second question - "*What would make you switch tomorrow?*"

The answers came even faster - faster delivery, lower prices, better availability, one-click checkout, coupons, a subscription offer.

The "*love*" disappeared surprisingly quickly!

What I discovered was something that reinforced my belief in the most important lessons of modern consumer behaviour - consumers often repeat purchases not because they are loyal, but because they are 'lazy'.

Now before anybody gets offended, let me clarify - I am lazy too! You are probably lazy too! Human beings are designed to conserve effort, and so the brain constantly looks for shortcuts. It prefers familiar routes, familiar apps, familiar products, familiar decisions - not because it loves them, but because they require less work. And I advise that should change how marketers should think about retention. See, most loyalty

programmes are built on an emotional assumption - consumers love us, but most repeat purchases are built on a behavioural reality - consumers don't want to think.

Think about your own behaviour - *Why do you repeatedly order from the same food delivery app? Why do you repeatedly buy the same toothpaste? Why do you repeatedly use the same streaming platform? Why do you repeatedly visit the same coffee shop?*

Sometimes it is because you genuinely prefer it, but much more often, it is because the alternative requires 'effort'! You already know how this works, your preferences are saved, your payment method is saved, your address is saved, your history is saved, your choices are remembered, and so, the decision is frictionless. Please note that frictionless decisions mostly become repeated decisions!

I had a similar experience while working with a consumer brand that was obsessing over customer loyalty - the management team wanted stronger emotional campaigns, more engagement, more brand love, much more affinity - all reasonable goals. Then we examined actual customer behaviour - the strongest predictor of repeat purchase was not emotional attachment, but was 'convenience'. Customers who experienced the easiest purchase journey returned most frequently, and not the customers who scored highest on brand affection. That insight changed our strategy, and now instead of asking, "*How do we make consumers love us more?*", we started working on, "*How do we make repurchasing effortless?*" The results were immediate, because behaviour often beats emotion!

This is where I think many businesses misunderstand companies like Amazon.

People often say consumers love Amazon, but I am not convinced. I would say - consumers love not having to think. That is very different.

The platform remembers everything, the payment is seamless, the recommendations are relevant, the delivery is predictable, and the effort is minimal. Consumers return because the 'process' has become a 'habit'.

And habits are far more valuable than loyalty, always.

A loyal customer may occasionally leave, but a habitual customer often doesn't even evaluate alternatives, and that is an extraordinary competitive advantage.

Which brings me to a question I increasingly ask founders - "*Are customers loyal to your brand, or are they loyal to the routine?*"

See, routines are often more durable than emotions - a consumer may stop loving a brand, but consumer rarely notices a habit.

Consider how many subscription businesses have quietly built empires using this principle. Streaming platforms, software products, fitness memberships, coffee subscriptions, meal plans, cloud storage, music services - most consumers don't actively choose them every month, because the choice was made months ago, and the habit continues automatically!

The subscription transformed a repeated decision into a default behaviour, and defaults are incredibly powerful! This is why I believe subscriptions represent one of the most important consumer 'innovations' of the last two decades, not because they changed pricing, but because they changed effort. The consumer no longer needs to remember, and anything that removes remembering increases repetition!

The same principle applies to reminders - many marketers think reminders are communication tools, but I would say they are behavioural triggers. A reminder arriving when the consumer needs a product feels helpful, but a reminder arriving randomly feels annoying!

The best lifecycle marketing systems understand timing better than messaging - a skincare brand should know when the product is likely running low, a coffee brand should understand consumption frequency, a pet food brand should predict replenishment cycles, a supplement brand should know when stocks are disappearing!

Remember, the future of retention is not communication, but 'anticipation'.

The brand that remembers before the consumer remembers has a tremendous advantage.

Which brings me back to loyalty. I am not suggesting loyalty is irrelevant, because strong emotional connections absolutely matter. But most marketers frequently start at the wrong end - they try to create love before creating habit! That is backwards! See, habit comes first, and love comes later - consumers usually repeat before they adore!

In fact, many relationships with brands evolve exactly like human relationships - familiarity creates comfort; this comfort creates trust; trust then creates preference; and preference creates attachment. Notice how the repeated behaviour often arrives before the emotional commitment.

So, I would worry less about loyalty programmes and more about 'behavioural' design - make buying easier, make reordering easier, make discovery easier, make payment easier, make remembering unnecessary.

The brands that want to win in the next decade will not necessarily be the most loved, but will be the easiest to repeat. And, I can tell you with confidence, that in modern consumer behaviour, repeated action is often far more valuable than declared affection!

Consumers may tell researchers they love a brand, but what matters is what they do on Tuesday morning when they need to buy again. That moment reveals the truth! And the truth is often surprisingly simple! People don't repeat what they love, but what is easy!

The Invisible Purchase

One of the most interesting lessons I learned about retention came from observing something that looked completely ordinary. A colleague of mine drinks the same green tea every morning. Not occasionally, not frequently, but every single morning.

One day, I asked him why he preferred that particular brand. I was expecting a passionate answer about taste, sourcing, health benefits, antioxidants, or some deeply researched nutritional advantage. Instead, he looked at me and said something remarkably simple - "*I don't know. It just appears when I need it*". Bulls eye! Because he wasn't describing a product, but a 'system'. And increasingly, the brands that win are not the brands consumers prefer, but the ones that appear at exactly the right moment with exactly the right amount of effort required.

Most marketers think retention is about creating stronger emotional bonds.

I think retention is increasingly about creating stronger behavioural 'shortcuts'.

Consumers don't buy when they need products, but when 'need' meets 'opportunity'. That intersection is what I call a 'trigger' moment, and most companies and marketers are terrible at understanding it.

Let's imagine a consumer who buys protein powder. The traditional marketer thinks about the product, but the smarter marketer thinks about the routine - *When does the consumer use it? When does the jar start running low? When does replenishment become necessary? When is the consumer most likely to notice the shortage?*

Because that is where the next sale actually happens! Not in the advertisement, not in the branding campaign, not even in the awareness funnel, but in the moment of need.

The problem is that consumers rarely announce these moments! Nobody wakes up and says - "*Today at 4:15 PM I will enter a replenishment state*".

Life doesn't work that way, instead 'need states' emerge quietly! The toothpaste feels lighter, the coffee jar looks emptier, the pet food container reaches the bottom, the shampoo bottle starts producing that suspicious sputtering sound that signals the end is near, and suddenly a purchase becomes necessary!

This is where many brands lose customers, and not because competitors are better, but because competitors are easier!

I have seen this repeating across categories - a consumer happily uses a product for years, then one day the product runs out. The preferred brand isn't immediately available, but another option is. Purchase complete. Habit gets broken, loyalty gone, no drama, no dissatisfaction, no brand crisis, but just 'convenience'.

This is why I increasingly believe that retention has less to do with persuasion and more to do with 'timing'. I can confidently say that the future belongs to brands that understand consumption cycles better than consumers themselves!

Hence, a great retention strategy is not asking - "*How do we convince consumers to buy again?*", but "*How do we arrive exactly when buying becomes necessary?*"

While it sounds simple, and so evident, but it isn't! It requires understanding behaviour at a much deeper level. *When does usage happen? How frequently? Under what conditions? At what times? In what contexts?*

Because habits are rarely driven by products, but strongly driven by 'situations'. The consumer does not think - "*I want coffee*", but probably - "*It's 7 AM*". The consumer does not think - "*I need a ride-hailing app*", but - "*My meeting starts in twenty minutes*". The consumer does not think - "*I need a food delivery platform*", but - "*It's raining and I don't want to cook*".

The trigger 'always' comes first, and the product follows!

The smartest companies design their entire retention strategy around these trigger moments!

Understanding triggers is only half the battle! The second half is eliminating 'effort'! And this is where some of the successful businesses, we know from the last decade, have quietly transformed consumer behaviour.

Look at what has happened to decision-making - addresses are saved, payments are saved, preferences are saved, previous orders are saved, recommendations are personalised, subscriptions are automated, replenishments are scheduled, and so the consumer is gradually being removed from the purchasing process. That may sound extreme, but think about it - the greatest compliment a consumer can give a brand today is not -

"*I love this*", but "*I don't even think about it anymore*".

I would say that is 'behavioural' gold, because every decision requires energy, effort, and attention. Amazon, Netflix, Spotify, Swiggy, and Blinkit understood this, and increasingly compete on convenience architecture, not merely product superiority, within their respective categories!

This creates a very important lesson for marketers and founders - retention is no longer primarily a communication challenge, but a design, systems, and a behavioural challenge. The question is no longer - "*How do we remind customers we exist?*", but "*How do we make returning easier than reconsidering?*" Because once reconsideration begins, competition begins, and so, the ideal retention strategy is not one that persuades consumers repeatedly, but the one that eliminates the need for repeated decisions altogether. That is why reordering, subscriptions, reminders, saved preferences, and one-click purchasing matters! All of them achieve the same objective of reducing cognitive effort.

If you want your business to be successful in the years ahead, focus less on building stronger brands and more on building stronger behavioural systems. To be a winner you must know when consumers are ready to buy, and your brand must appear before competitors do, and make the next purchase feel almost inevitable.

Remember, the ultimate goal of retention is not loyalty, but becoming the easiest answer at the exact moment the question appears.

The Reliability Advantage

A few years ago, I asked a group of consumers a simple question - "*What is the most reliable brand in your life?*" The answers were interesting - some mentioned technology brands, some mentioned food delivery apps, some mentioned coffee chains, and some mentioned streaming platforms.

What fascinated me was not the brands they named, but the reason they named them. Almost nobody said - "*They have the best product*", or "*They have the best advertising*", or "*They have the most innovative features"*.

Instead, the answers sounded remarkably similar - "*It always works*", "*I know what to expect*", "*It never disappoints*", "*It is dependable"*. That observation should completely change how you think about customer retention!

Most marketers spend enormous amounts of time discussing excitement, differentiation, innovation, disruption, and surprise. On the flip side, consumers, meanwhile, are often looking for something much simpler - predictability.

See, most habits are not built through excitement, but through 'reliability'.

In fact, if you think about your own habits, very few of them are exciting! The coffee you drink every morning is not exciting, the route you take to work is not exciting, the app you use most frequently is not exciting, the grocery platform you repeatedly order from is not exciting, but they are all simply 'dependable'. Remember, dependability is one of the most underrated forces in consumer behaviour.

Let me share my experience of helping a subscription-based business - the management team wanted to improve retention and naturally the discussion focused on adding more features, more engagement campaigns, more rewards, more content, and more communication,

and all were reasonable ideas. Then I made them analyse the behaviour of long-term customers - *What kept them staying?* The answer surprised everyone! Not features, or promotions, or loyalty programmes, but reliability. The service arrived when expected, the quality remained consistent, the experience remained familiar, basically the company kept its promises. That was it! The customers were not staying because they were constantly delighted, but because they were rarely disappointed. This is a very important distinction and you must note it!

Many marketers focus on creating moments of delight, while consumers often care more about the absence of frustration. See, a customer can forgive an ordinary experience, but they rarely forgive an unreliable one!

This is why 'consistency' creates habit. The human brain loves certainty, and every time a product delivers exactly what the consumer expects, uncertainty decreases, and trust increases. Also, over time decision effort decreases, and the next purchase becomes easier, then easier again, and eventually automatic.

That is how habits are formed! Not through one extraordinary experience, but through hundreds of predictable ones!

Think about a coffee chain - the customer may not be buying the world's greatest coffee, but what they are buying is certainty. The coffee will taste familiar, the environment will feel familiar, the experience will feel familiar, and basically the risk is low, or shall we say the predictability is high! And predictability is often more valuable than excellence. Consumers feel that even excellence occasionally disappoints, but consistency rarely does!

Today many businesses accidentally sabotage retention by obsessing over acquisition! They create offers, launch campaigns, generate attention, and then they fail at delivering a consistently reliable experience. The customer might return once, or twice, but then disappears. Not because the product was bad, but because the experience became unpredictable!

Remember, unpredictability is the enemy of habit, and that's why the strongest retention systems therefore begin with reliability. Only then do they layer on communication.

This is where subscriptions, reminders, replenishment systems, and lifecycle marketing become powerful. Most marketers think these are communication tools, I don't! I think they are confidence systems, and their real purpose is not to send messages, but to reduce uncertainty.

A subscription says - "*You don't need to remember*", while a reminder says - "*You don't need to monitor*". A replenishment system says - "*You don't need to worry*", while a lifecycle programme says - "*We know where you are in the journey*". Notice what all of these are doing - they are reducing work, and that is often the fastest route to retention.

Please note that habit formation will always happen in two stages. First, deliver consistent value, and second, make repeating the experience effortless. Sadly, most companies focus only on the first! But matured ones master both! This is why some businesses become almost invisible parts of consumers' lives - the streaming platform renews automatically, the cloud storage renews automatically, the coffee subscription arrives automatically, the pet food gets reordered automatically, the software licence renews automatically - the consumer is not actively choosing every month, but the system is choosing for them!

And that is where retention reaches its highest form, not when customers remember you, but when they no longer need to!

For marketers, this is a profound shift in thinking! Instead of asking - "*How do we make customers more loyal?*", you must ask - "*How do we make the next interaction more certain?*" Similarly, instead of asking - "*How do we generate more engagement?*", ask - "*How do we reduce more effort?*" Instead of asking - "*How do we surprise customers?*", ask - "*How do we become more dependable?*"

Note that loyalty is often a retrospective explanation! Consumers say they are loyal because the relationship has lasted. What actually sustained the relationship was usually something far less glamorous - consistency, reliability, and ease.

I would advise that the future of retention will not be won by the brands that create the most excitement, but by the ones that become the most trusted 'routines'. The brands that arrive when expected, deliver what was promised, reduce effort every time, and quietly become part of everyday life.

That is the ultimate competitive advantage - not being loved, but being relied upon.

Part 4
The New Rules of Buying

A few years ago, I was sitting in the departure lounge of an airport, watching people do something that had absolutely nothing to do with flying.

Nobody was looking at the aircraft, and nobody seemed particularly interested in the destination. Almost everyone was looking down - one person was buying headphones, another was ordering groceries for home, someone was booking a hotel, a young couple was comparing baby strollers, a gentleman in a business suit was reading reviews of espresso machines, and hundreds of people were physically sitting in one place while mentally shopping in ten different markets. That image reminded me that consumers no longer enter shopping environments, but shopping enters consumers!

For decades, marketing was built around a simple assumption - if you wanted consumers to buy, you had to bring them to a place where buying happened - a market, a mall, a dealership, a supermarket, or a website.

The consumer travelled and the product waited, but today, the product travels! The consumer simply continues living!

Today, buying has escaped the boundaries we once built around it. It no longer waits politely for Saturday afternoons, monthly salary credits, festive seasons or planned shopping trips, but quietly inserts itself into ordinary moments - while waiting for a cab, watching cricket, replying to emails, standing in a queue, talking to friends, lying awake at midnight wondering whether a better pillow might finally solve your stiff neck!

Also, shopping has become less of an activity and more of a background process running continuously alongside life. That might sound like a

technological shift to most, but I think it is something much deeper - it is a psychological shift!

For most of history, consumers had to create opportunities to buy, but today, opportunities create consumers.

This is why I believe one of the biggest mistakes marketers still make is thinking of buying as an event. Buying is no longer an event, but a 'condition'. A consumer is almost always partially available to purchase something, and not because they are constantly spending, but because they are constantly 'evaluating'. A recommendation from a friend, a product on somebody's desk, a beautifully designed package, a passing conversation, a creator demonstrating something without trying too hard, a restaurant serving an unfamiliar beverage, a neighbour parking a new electric car - every one of these moments quietly updates the consumer's internal map of the market.

Long before money changes hands, opinions are already moving!

That is why, I believe, the next decade of marketing will belong to companies that understand something psychologists have known for years - human beings rarely make decisions in isolation, because every decision borrows information from the environment - we look around before we look within, we observe before we conclude, and we imitate before we innovate! Not because we lack intelligence, but because the human brain was designed to survive by learning from other humans.

Today, technology has amplified that instinct beyond anything previous generations experienced - every day, consumers now observe hundreds of tiny behavioural signals - what colleagues wear, what neighbours drive, what strangers photograph, what creators recommend, what friends reorder, what families celebrate - most of these observations disappear almost immediately, but some don't. Some quietly accumulate until one ordinary afternoon the consumer says - "I've been thinking about buying this".

The fascinating part is that they often haven't been thinking, but they've been 'absorbing'. Note this thinking is deliberate, but absorption is always invisible, and that is why I have become increasingly uncomfortable with one phrase that marketers use all the time - consumer decision-making. It suggests that buying is primarily an act of conscious reasoning, but after spending more than three decades

studying consumers and advising businesses, I have reached a different conclusion! I believe consumers spend far less time making decisions than they spend becoming ready for decisions. And 'readiness' is where markets are won! By the time the consumer consciously decides, much of the work has already been done - the brand has either become familiar or remained invisible, the experience has either reduced effort or created resistance, the product has either found a place in the consumer's mental world or failed to enter it - the final purchase is simply the visible outcome of thousands of invisible psychological adjustments that happened beforehand!

That is what this part of the book is really about!

Not marketing tactics, or retail trends, or digital platforms, but about understanding the invisible architecture that now sits underneath almost every purchase. The new rules of buying are not changing because consumers have become less rational, but because the world around consumers has become infinitely more intelligent! Products now compete in environments that predict, recommend, remind, personalise, anticipate and respond! I think the consumer has not acquired a new brain, but acquired a new 'environment'!

The marketers who continue studying only consumers and their thinking process will eventually fall behind, while the marketers who begin studying the environments that shape consumers will build the brands that define the next decade!

That is the territory we are about to enter.

9.
The Quick Commerce Brain

One Saturday evening, my wife asked me - "*Do we have coriander?*"

Now, this is not a question about coriander, but whether you have been paying attention to life! I confidently replied, "*Of course we do*".

Five minutes later, after opening every possible container in the kitchen, I realised we had everything except coriander. Twenty years ago, this would have been mildly disappointing, dinner would simply have adapted, and someone would have said, "*It's okay, we'll manage*".

But something interesting has happened to us. Nobody said, "*We'll manage*". Somebody said, "*Order it*".

Ten minutes later, coriander arrived at my doorstep. Nobody celebrated. Nobody even found it remarkable, and the meal continued as if coriander had always been destined to appear exactly when required. That evening, should tell you that consumers have quietly crossed an invisible line. They no longer plan their homes the way their parents did.

I can say, my mother could probably survive a small natural disaster with the number of groceries she stored in the kitchen. She knew exactly how much rice, flour, sugar, tea, and cooking oil was available at any point in time. Running out of something was treated almost like a personal failure.

But today, many urban consumers don't maintain inventory, but maintain confidence that whatever is missing can arrive before it becomes a problem, and that is a completely different way of living! Quick commerce has not simply changed delivery, but changed how we think, how we remember, how we plan, and perhaps most importantly, how we decide.

This chapter is not about ten-minute delivery, but what happens to consumer behaviour when waiting begins to disappear, planning becomes optional, and every forgotten item is just one tap away.

The Death of Waiting

The biggest change in consumer behaviour over the last five years is not quick commerce, or ten-minute delivery, or dark stores, or AI recommendations, because all those are 'outcomes'. The real change happened much deeper, inside the human brain - somewhere along the way, consumers stopped measuring time, and started feeling it.

I might have made it sound like a philosophical observation, but it is actually one of the most commercially important shifts of our generation.

I myself realised this while standing outside my apartment in Bangalore waiting for a grocery delivery. The app confidently informed me that my order would arrive in eight minutes, and so naturally, after four minutes I opened the app again. Nothing had changed! After another ninety seconds, I checked again, then again. Then I opened the live map, zoomed into the rider and wondered why he had taken a left turn instead of a right. At some point I caught myself behaving like the concerned parent of a teenager returning home! The poor delivery partner was carrying tomatoes, and not a donor heart! Yet my brain had quietly decided that eight minutes was an eternity.

That evening I laughed at myself, but also realised something profound - the delivery had not become slower, but my 'perception' of waiting had become shorter. That is the difference!

For decades, marketers treated waiting as a logistical problem, but today it has become a psychological problem.

See, consumers don't experience time objectively, instead they experience 'expectation'. If I tell you a parcel will arrive in seven days and it arrives in seven days, you feel satisfied. If I tell you it will arrive in ten minutes and it takes fourteen, you feel disappointed! Objectively, fourteen minutes is still astonishingly fast, but psychologically, the promise has already been broken!

This is why I believe quick commerce is one of the most misunderstood business models in modern marketing. Companies think they are selling speed, but they are not! They are selling 'certainty', and even more importantly, the elimination of waiting. Because consumers rarely celebrate speed, but surely celebrate not having to wait.

Think about what has quietly disappeared from our lives - waiting for photographs to be developed, waiting for bank transfers, waiting for movie tickets, waiting for restaurant tables, waiting for taxis, waiting for customer support, waiting for groceries, waiting for music downloads, waiting for software updates, and many more!

Every year, another pocket of waiting disappears, and every time it disappears, something fascinating happens - consumers never become more patient elsewhere, instead their expectation simply shifts!

Nobody says, "*My groceries arrive in ten minutes now, so I'm happy to wait two weeks for furniture*". No! The new expectation quietly spreads!

Speed in one category becomes the benchmark for another!

That is one of the most dangerous behavioural shifts marketers underestimate, because consumers no longer compare brands only within categories, but they now compare 'experiences' across categories.

Amazon taught them one-click purchasing, and so now every website feels slow. Netflix removed buffering, and so now television feels slow. UPI made payments instantaneous, and so now filling out banking forms feels prehistoric. Blinkit made groceries arrive in minutes, and so now a thirty-minute wait for almost anything feels strangely uncomfortable!

Notice what happened - as marketers, your competitor is no longer another grocery company, but is 'every' fast experience the consumer had this week!

Doesn't that change strategy completely?

I often tell founders that they are no longer competing against products, but competing against the fastest experience in the customer's memory! That 'memory' becomes the benchmark, and not your category!

This also explains why delays feel so emotionally disproportionate today - a package arriving one day late does not merely create inconvenience, but creates cognitive conflict - the consumer thinks -

"*Everything else in my life has become faster, so why hasn't this?*" The disappointment has less to do with time, but everything to do with 'broken' expectation.

This is why I increasingly advise companies to stop asking - "*How do we become faster?*" and start asking - "*Where does waiting still exist?*"

Remember, sometimes the greatest innovation is not reducing delivery time, but reducing uncertainty! Showing accurate inventory, displaying real-time progress, giving proactive updates, making payments effortless, removing forms, reducing approvals, helping consumers avoid queues, helping consumers avoid decisions, helping consumers avoid anxiety - because waiting is rarely about clocks, but about mental occupation!

See, the consumer is not counting minutes, but carrying unresolved intention, which consumes attention! The brands that remove that tension create extraordinary competitive advantage.

This is why I can tell you that the future will not belong to companies that merely deliver faster, but to the ones that systematically eliminate waiting from every stage of the customer journey. Waiting to discover, compare, decide, pay, receive, replace, and resolve complaints.

See, every minute of such unnecessary waiting quietly taxes the consumer's mind. The companies that remove those invisible taxes will not simply gain market share, but will redefine what consumers consider normal.

And that, I say, is perhaps the most powerful lesson of all - consumers are not becoming impatient, but becoming accustomed to a world where waiting increasingly feels unnecessary. And once that belief takes hold, there is no going back!

Remember, the future of marketing will not be won by the fastest brands, but by the brands that make waiting disappear.

The Outsourced Pantry

One of the biggest assumptions consumer companies have carried for decades is that households like planning. I don't think they ever did. They simply didn't have a choice.

Growing up, shopping was almost an event - families prepared lists, someone checked whether there was enough cooking oil, enough toothpaste, enough detergent, enough rice, enough tea. Weekends disappeared inside supermarkets with overflowing trolleys and the occasional family argument over whether three bottles of ketchup really qualified as a "*good offer*".

The pantry was not just a storage space, but insurance! If you forgot to buy something, you lived with the consequences until the next shopping trip!

So, consumers became planners! Not because they enjoyed planning, but because the system demanded it.

Quick commerce quietly destroyed that system!

Today, I don't think urban consumers are buying groceries differently, but surely, they are thinking differently! The modern consumer no longer asks -

"*Do I have enough?*", instead the question has become - "*Can I get it quickly?*"

That sounds like a tiny shift, but is actually a completely different behavioural model - the pantry has moved from the kitchen to the smartphone.

Consumers are no longer storing products, but storing access. That is why basket sizes are shrinking while transaction frequencies continue to rise.

Marketers often interpret this as a logistics trend, but that is incorrect! It is a cognitive trend! Consumers are gradually outsourcing memory, as they no longer need to remember that coffee is running low. They

simply notice it, order it, and move on! The same thing happens with milk, bread, eggs, ice cream, pet food, shampoo, batteries, baby products, medicines, and fresh vegetables - planning is slowly being replaced by availability.

This changes something fundamental - for decades, marketing tried to increase the size of the shopping basket, but today, the more important question is often - "*How often can I become part of the consumer's routine?*"

Because frequency creates familiarity, familiarity creates preference, and preference eventually creates habit - this is a much stronger growth engine than persuading consumers to buy one extra bottle of ketchup every month!

I often tell founders that they should stop measuring only share of wallet, and start measuring share of moments. Those are very different metrics!

A brand that appears in twenty different buying moments may become far stronger than a brand that appears in two large monthly purchases.

The future positively belongs to brands that become part of everyday life, not occasional stock-up missions.

This shift also changes how products should be designed.

Historically, companies optimised products for shelves, but now they must optimise them for search results - on a supermarket shelf, consumers discover products visually, but on a quick commerce app, products are discovered through tiny thumbnails, search bars, recommendations and previous orders.

The product is no longer competing against the entire category, but competing against 'attention' measured in seconds.

Packaging therefore has a new responsibility - it is no longer designed only to look attractive from three feet away, but be recognisable on a six-inch screen!

A beautiful package that becomes unrecognisable as a thumbnail is no longer beautiful enough.

The same applies to assortment.

For years, brands believed that more choice meant more growth, but quick commerce is teaching us something different - choice without clarity slows decisions. Consumers entering a ten-minute commerce

platform are rarely in an exploratory mood, but in 'completion' mode. They just want confidence, and not complexity. That means your hero products become even more important, your naming becomes even more important, your pack architecture becomes even more important, because every additional second required to identify the right product increases the possibility of abandonment or substitution.

Availability also acquires an entirely new meaning.

Traditionally, marketers worried about numeric distribution - *How many stores carry my product?* But today another question matters just as much - "*Am I available at the exact moment the consumer remembers me?*"

See, remembering has become the new shelf - if your product is unavailable when that memory appears, consumers rarely postpone the purchase, instead they quickly substitute. The penalty for being out of stock has become dramatically higher because the consumer's mindset has changed - the consumer is no longer shopping, but solving - and solutions cannot be postponed!

This also explains why pack sizes are evolving. Smaller packs, single-serve formats, instant-use formats, meal kits, ready-to-cook products, grab-and-go packaging - all these innovations have one thing in common - they reduce the gap between desire and consumption. That gap is becoming one of the most important variables in modern marketing. The companies that want to win will increasingly design products around immediacy rather than inventory, access rather than ownership, and replenishment rather than stockpiling!

If I were advising a consumer brand launching today, I would ask five questions before discussing advertising - *Can the consumer find it in under five seconds? Can they recognise it instantly on a phone screen? Is the hero SKU obvious? Is it available when the need appears? Can it fit naturally into a spontaneous purchase?*

Those questions would tell me more about future growth than many traditional brand metrics. See, quick commerce has not merely changed retail but also changed household behaviour - consumers are no longer building pantries, but building confidence that whatever they need will always be one tap away. And once consumers begin trusting access more than storage, the rules of product strategy change forever.

GTM for Instant Demand

I no longer believe the best marketing creates demand, and this is one of the biggest changes I have made in my own thinking over the last few years.

I now believe the best marketing captures demand that has just been born!

Traditional marketing assumes that consumers move through a predictable journey - they become aware, develop interest, compare options, evaluate alternatives, and then they purchase. That journey still exists, but increasingly, another kind of buying is becoming more important - demand that did not exist five minutes ago.

Think about your own day - you weren't planning to eat ice cream until somebody mentioned dessert; you weren't planning to order coffee until the rain started; you weren't planning to buy batteries until the television remote stopped working; you weren't planning to buy mosquito repellent until you heard the first mosquito near your ear at bedtime - modern demand is often born in moments, not in plans!

I think that changes the entire idea of go-to-market!

For years, GTM was built around launching products, but today, GTM must increasingly be built around entering moments, and that is a much more dynamic way of thinking.

I realised this while advising a food brand entering quick commerce. The first instinct was familiar - large campaigns, influencer collaborations, brand awareness, and mass communication. Then I asked a question that completely changed the discussion - "*When exactly does somebody crave this product?*" Not who buys it, not why they buy it, but 'when'. That question transformed the strategy, because craving has a clock, need has a location, and consumption has a context - and those three things rarely happen randomly!

A cup of tea does not compete equally at every hour of the day. Ice cream behaves differently on a hot Sunday afternoon than it does on a

rainy Tuesday morning. Energy drinks perform differently before workouts than after office hours. Instant noodles become a completely different category during late-night study sessions.

See, in all above, the product has not changed, but the buying moment has!

I increasingly believe marketers should stop defining categories by products and start defining them by 'occasions'.

Consumers do not wake up saying - "*I feel like participating in the salty snacks category*", but they think - "*I'm watching a match*". Or "*I'm working late*". Or "*Guests have arrived*". Or "*My child just came back from school*". Or "*My headache has started*". Or "*My friends are coming over*".

Life creates occasions, and today these 'occasions' create demand! The brand that understands the occasion reaches the consumer before the competition even realises a buying moment exists.

This is where hyper-local marketing becomes far more powerful than mass marketing - a message sent to everybody is rarely urgent, but a message sent to the right neighbourhood, at the right hour, under the right conditions, feels almost intuitive.

Imagine the possibilities - a sudden downpour begins - umbrellas, tea, pakoras, soup mixes and rainwear quietly become relevant! The temperature crosses forty degrees - cold beverages, ice cream and sunscreen suddenly enter active consideration! India wins a cricket match - celebration categories explode! Schools reopen - stationery, lunch boxes, snacks and water bottles move together! Examinations begin - coffee, energy drinks and healthy snacks acquire new meaning! The marketer who sees these patterns is no longer reacting to demand, but is preparing for it.

I believe artificial Intelligence will make this even more powerful - the next generation of GTM will not ask - "*Who is the customer?*", but - "*What is happening around the customer right now?*" Location, weather, time, calendar, previous purchases, household composition, local festivals, traffic conditions, and more - every one of these variables changes buying probability, and together, they create what I believe is the future of marketing - context-first marketing, not demographic-first or geographic-first.

But please also remember, timing alone is not enough, the second ingredient is 'urgency'. Unfortunately, urgency has become one of the

most abused words in marketing, because everything is "*last chance*", "*limited period*", "*ending tonight*". And so, consumers have become remarkably good at detecting artificial urgency! Real urgency, on the other hand, does not come from the seller, but from the 'situation' - the milk has run out; guests are arriving in thirty minutes; the birthday was forgotten; the medicine is finished; the baby needs diapers, etc. Those are genuine moments of urgency! See, the smartest GTM strategies don't manufacture urgency, but they recognise it.

It also changes how product portfolios should be designed. Today, every brand should ask itself - "*What problem becomes urgent?*" Not every problem deserves instant commerce - a sofa rarely does, while a forgotten birthday gift might. A washing machine probably doesn't, while a phone charger absolutely does. Categories will increasingly be defined by urgency rather than industry, and that is where I think many businesses are still looking in the wrong direction - benchmarking against competitors, while consumers in the category benchmark against situations!

Let me share and leave you with one thought that has fundamentally changed how I think about growth. For decades, marketers asked - "*How do we create demand?*" I think the better question today is - "*How quickly can we recognise demand the moment it appears?*" Because in a world where consumers can buy almost anything within minutes, demand has become incredibly short-lived. It appears, gets fulfilled, and disappears!

The company that recognises that tiny window first wins - not because it had the better advertisement or bigger budget, but because it was present at the exact moment the consumer stopped planning and started needing.

That is the future of Go-to-Market - not launching products into markets, but entering lives at precisely the right moment.

10.
Friction Kills More Than Price

A few months ago, I decided to buy a new pair of running shoes online.

I found exactly what I wanted in less than three minutes - the colour was perfect, my size was available, the reviews were excellent, and for once in my life I didn't even feel guilty about the price. Everything was going suspiciously well. I clicked "*Buy Now*". The website politely informed me that I needed to create an account. Fair enough! I entered my email - "*This email already exists*". Wonderful! I clicked "*Forgot Password*". An OTP arrived, and I entered it. "*OTP Expired*". I requested another. This one arrived, and eventually, I logged in, only to discover that my saved address belonged to the house I had moved out of three years earlier. I updated the address, selected the size again, added the shoes to the cart again, reached the payment page again, then came my favourite sentence in all of e-commerce - "*Sorry, this item is now out of stock*".

At that precise moment, something extraordinary happened! I didn't buy another pair, didn't search another website, didn't wait for the stock to return, but I closed the laptop and made myself a cup of tea, convinced that my old shoes had suddenly become perfectly acceptable!

My desire for the shoes hadn't disappeared, but my energy had!

That evening, I realised something I had never quite articulated before - businesses often think they lose customers because of price, but sometimes they lose them because they ask for one click too many, one form too many, one decision too many, and one interruption too many!

See, consumers rarely abandon purchases dramatically, but they simply become tired, and then they don't compare, or negotiate, or complain, but quietly disappear!

This chapter is about those invisible moments - the tiny pieces of friction that slowly drain buying momentum, and also why removing effort has become one of the most powerful growth strategies in modern marketing.

The Momentum Economy

One Saturday afternoon, I and my wife, walked into a premium furniture store in Bengaluru, with absolutely no intention of buying a recliner. We were "*just looking*".

A young salesperson greeted me, but to his credit, he didn't begin with, "*Sir, what are you looking for?*" Instead, he simply asked us to sit and try! That was clever! Within ten minutes, we had tried four recliners! Then I was comparing leather finishes, discussing lumbar support, and debating colours!

Somewhere during those twenty minutes, I had mentally become the owner of one particular recliner - I could already see it in my living room. I had decided!

A small talk with my wife, and the purchase was over! Or so I thought! The salesperson then disappeared to check stock. Five minutes became ten. He returned and said they had one piece left, but it was in another warehouse! Someone else had to confirm. Then another person needed to approve the transfer, and they wanted an advance payment! I nodded!

But then they asked me to come back the next day because "*the billing system was updating*". That was it! We just walked out!

See, nothing had changed about the chair, nothing had changed about the price, nothing had changed about my need, but everything had changed about my enthusiasm! By the time I walked out of the store, I was no longer imagining the recliner in my living room, but craving for an afternoon nap!

The desire had quietly evaporated!

A week later, I bought a different recliner from another store. Not because it was better or cheaper, but simply because they didn't 'interrupt' me!

That experience must also teach you something you should never forget - consumers rarely abandon products, instead they abandon 'momentum'.

And once that buying momentum disappears, the consumer starts thinking again! This 'thinking' is dangerous, because thinking always invites comparison & hesitation. Hesitation, nine out of ten times, invites postponement and eventual abandonment.

This is why I now believe 'friction' is one of the most misunderstood ideas in marketing. Companies & marketers think friction is a design problem, but it isn't! I would say it is an 'energy' problem, because every consumer begins a purchase with a certain amount of psychological energy. Curiosity creates some, desire creates more, and urgency creates even more!

Then the company slowly starts spending that energy - one registration form, one unnecessary pop-up, one complicated filter, one confusing navigation menu, one unexpected delivery charge, one captcha, one payment failure, or one mandatory app download!

Every one of these seems insignificant in isolation, but collectively they become expensive, not because they consume time but because they consume 'motivation'.

I increasingly believe that consumers do not calculate effort mathematically, but 'emotionally'. Adding thirty seconds to a checkout rarely kills a purchase, but breaking the emotional rhythm often does! Note how consumers will happily spend three hours watching product reviews on YouTube before buying a camera, yet abandon an online purchase because the checkout process suddenly asks for information that feels unnecessary - the time wasn't the problem, but the interruption surely was!

Today momentum had been replaced by 'administration', which is one of the least inspiring experiences known to humanity!

This also changes how marketers should think about customer journeys - for years we have mapped funnels, awareness, interest, consideration, and purchase. I now think we should map energy instead! *Where does excitement increase? Where does confidence increase? Where does uncertainty appear? Where does motivation disappear?* Because those points determine conversion far more accurately than traditional funnel diagrams, and

the irony is that many businesses spend millions creating demand and then quietly destroy it themselves!

An extraordinary advertising campaign leads to a complicated website; a brilliant product lands on a confusing marketplace page; an excellent retail display leads to a billing queue! The marketing worked, but the momentum didn't survive!

I have seen this happen in physical retail as well. With such experiences retailers often believe they lost a customer, but more accurately, they lost the buying moment!

The moment is far more fragile than we marketers can imagine!

This is why the smart companies will compete differently. I believe they will obsess over preserving momentum, and so will remove decisions instead of adding options; reduce forms instead of collecting more data; remember preferences instead of repeatedly asking questions; eliminate waiting instead of apologising for it. And most importantly, they will understand that every additional interaction must either increase confidence or reduce effort, and if it does neither, it probably shouldn't exist!

This principle extends far beyond digital experiences - product packaging, retail layouts, customer support, warranty registration, returns, or service appointments.

See, everything either protects momentum or destroys it, and marketers should start measuring that. Don't just be fixated on conversion rates, click-through rates, but also momentum preservation. *How many consumers reached the point of desire? How many reached the point of purchase with that desire still intact?* I must warn - that gap is where enormous amounts of revenue quietly disappear!

Ask this one question before anything else - "*Where does your customer's excitement begin to leak?*" Find that answer and fix that leak!

Remember, consumers are looking for uninterrupted progress, and the brands that understand this will stop designing journeys, and focus on designing uninterrupted momentum, which in the next decade, may become one of the most valuable assets a brand can own.

Trust is the Fastest Checkout

One of the biggest misconceptions in marketing is that trust helps consumers buy. I don't think it does, but it does help consumers stop doubting. And that, in my experience, is a very different psychological process.

For decades, marketers have believed trust was something that brands built slowly through advertising, reputation, and consistent communication. While those things certainly contribute, I have come to differ and believe that the real value of trust is much more practical - trust removes work!

Every time a consumer feels uncertain, the brain creates another task.

"*Is this genuine?*" "*What if the size doesn't fit?*" "*Will I be able to return it?*" "*Will it arrive on time?*" "*What if the product is damaged?*" "*Will customer support even answer?*" Notice something interesting - none of these questions are about the product, but about the consequences of making the wrong decision - and that is where trust quietly becomes one of the most powerful conversion tools ever created.

A few years ago, I was advising an online lifestyle brand that sold premium priced products. The founders believed their biggest challenge was pricing, as competitors were cheaper, discounts were more aggressive, and acquisition costs were rising. I then spoke to some of their customers and asked the right questions! Price wasn't the first concern, and in fact it wasn't even the second!

The first question almost everyone asked was remarkably similar - "*If I don't like it, can I return it?*" Consumers were not asking for permission to buy, but for a permission to make a mistake!

The moment we improved the return policy, simplified the exchange process, and made the promise impossible to miss, conversion improved far more than anyone expected. See, the product had not changed, the price was same, but the consumer's confidence had changed!

Hopefully that experience also teaches you something - the easiest way to increase sales is often to reduce the fear of buying. Not increase desire, but just reduce fear!

Most companies spend millions creating excitement while leaving anxiety completely untouched! Consumers stand at the checkout carrying two emotions at the same time - "*I want this, but what if this goes wrong?*" The first emotion belongs to marketing, while the second belongs to trust! The company that resolves the second usually wins!

This is why I believe 'returns' are one of the greatest marketing inventions of the digital era, but most businesses still treat returns as an operational cost.

I see them as a marketing investment - a generous return policy tells consumers something far more powerful than any advertisement - "*We are confident enough to let you change your mind*".

That confidence is contagious, and consumers borrow it from brands only!

The same applies to guarantees - a guarantee is not really about product quality, but about transferring risk! The company quietly says - "*If this decision goes wrong, we will carry part of the pain*". The consumer immediately relaxes, and that reduction in psychological burden is often worth more than another five percent discount!

Think about what happened in e-commerce. Consumers were initially hesitant to buy shoes without trying them, clothing without touching them, furniture without seeing it, jewellery without holding it. The breakthrough did not come because products became dramatically better, but because buying became less risky - easy returns, easy exchanges, cash-on-delivery, verified reviews, delivery tracking, trusted payment gateways - all of these innovations did one thing, they reduced uncertainty.

See, 'uncertainty' is one of the greatest sources of friction in any buying journey, and so the same principle applies to delivery assurance.

Years ago, companies proudly announced that products would be delivered "*soon*". Today, consumers expect precision - tomorrow by 10:30 AM; delivered in 14 minutes; your order is three stops away; your rider is approaching from the east.

The consumer is not merely tracking logistics, but tracking confidence, and so the more visible the process becomes, the less imagination fills the gaps.

And imagination is dangerous, because when consumers don't know what is happening, they invent stories. "*The package is probably lost*". "*They must have forgotten*". "*This company is unreliable*". Transparency prevents those stories from forming, and this is why trust has become a design problem as much as a branding problem.

Every interaction should quietly answer one question - "*Is it safe to continue?*"

A clear return policy answers it; visible customer reviews answer it; authentic user photographs answer it; reliable delivery estimates answer it; responsive customer support answers it. Even small details answer it - a verified seller badge, a secure payment icon, an installation promise, a warranty card that is easy to understand instead of requiring a law degree - each one removes a tiny layer of hesitation.

Note, consumers rarely abandon purchases because of one giant concern, but because of several small uncertainties that accumulate until buying no longer feels comfortable. If you remove five small doubts, you often don't need to create five new reasons to buy! The consumer was already interested, and all they needed was reassurance!

This is why I increasingly believe trust should not be managed by a branding team alone, instead it should also shape product design, packaging, customer service, logistics, technology, retail operations, and communication - every department either adds friction or removes it. Trust is simply the mechanism that makes removal possible!

So, if you are launching a business today, take my advice - spend as much time designing confidence as designing the product itself, and always remember - products create desire, while trust protects desire.

Consumers, today, can switch brands with a single swipe, and so the companies that reduce uncertainty fastest often win long before price, features, or advertising even enter the conversation. The easiest purchase is rarely the cheapest one, but the one that feels safest.

The Invisible Yes

One of the questions I ask founders most often is - "*At what point does your customer actually decide to buy?*"

Almost everyone points to the checkout page, and I always disagree! By the time a consumer reaches checkout, the decision should already be over.

Checkout is not where buying happens, but where buying gets documented!

See, consumers don't enjoy buying, but they surely enjoy imagining ownership! The closer you keep consumers to that feeling, the higher your conversion. The moment you pull them into administration, comparison, paperwork or unnecessary decisions, you begin pushing them away from ownership and back towards thinking. This 'thinking' is dangerous, because it rarely produces desire. In fact, it produces questions, hesitation, delay, and abandonment.

This is why I no longer think of user experience as design, but as emotional engineering - its purpose is not to make screens beautiful, but to protect 'conviction'. Every interaction should quietly answer one question - "*Should I keep moving?*" If the answer is yes, momentum survives, but if the answer becomes, "*Wait... what does this mean?*" or "*Why are they asking this?,* or "*I'll complete this later*"*..*, the buying journey has already started breaking apart.

This learning should change how marketers should evaluate every customer touchpoint - a product page is not there to provide every possible detail, but to increase confidence; a pricing page is not there to display numbers, but to reduce uncertainty; a checkout page is not there to collect information, but to complete momentum. Every page has one psychological job - move the consumer one step closer to 'certainty', and not one step closer to more information.

This is why I believe companies ask consumers to make far too many decisions - colour, size, variant, delivery option, gift wrapping, insurance, membership, coupon code, referral code, notifications, warranty, feedback, review - every choice appears harmless, but together, they become exhausting!

Behavioural psychologists call this decision fatigue. I think we marketers should call it lost revenue, because every unnecessary decision quietly asks the consumer to reconsider whether continuing is worthwhile!

See, the best buying journeys don't overwhelm consumers with freedom, but curate confidence! Look at the businesses that have mastered this - Apple stores don't present fifty versions of the same experience; luxury hotels don't ask ten questions at check-in; the best restaurants don't hand you a menu the size of a telephone directory! The world's best experiences are often carefully edited, not expanded!

The same principle applies digitally. The highest-converting journeys increasingly have one characteristic in common - they feel inevitable. Every step naturally leads to the next, every interaction answers the previous question, every screen reduces uncertainty instead of introducing new complexity. The consumer never feels pushed, and so the consumer simply keeps moving. That is extraordinary design, and it is extraordinarily difficult! Because most companies build buying journeys around business processes, while the best companies build them around human psychology.

The finance team wants information, legal team wants confirmations, operations team wants verification, marketing team wants customer data, and technology team wants authentication - individually, every request is reasonable, but collectively, they become friction!

Consumers don't see departments, instead they experience one journey!

Which means somebody inside the company must become the ‘protector’ of simplicity!

I increasingly believe that this is one of the most strategic roles in modern business - not designing better interfaces, but designing fewer decisions. Because every decision you remove preserves confidence. Every form you eliminate preserves momentum, every unnecessary

click you delete preserves intent, and preserved intent converts into revenue!

I want marketers to carry a simple lesson from this chapter - the easiest sale is not the one where the consumer says "*yes*", but the one where nothing along the journey gives them a reason to say "*no*".

That, I would say, is the invisible power of great user experience! The customer never notices it, but they simply arrive at the end wondering why buying felt so effortless, and that is exactly how it should feel.

11.
Visibility is Value

A few years ago, I was driving to the airport with one of my colleagues when we stopped at a traffic signal. While waiting, my colleague suddenly pointed at a café across the road and said, "*We should try that place sometime*".

I looked at the café, it wasn't new, and in fact, I had driven past it dozens of times. Curious, I asked him, "*Have you been there before?*" "*No*". "*Then how do you know it's good?*" He paused for a moment and smiled. "*I don't know if it's good. I just keep seeing it*".

That answer kept me wondering for days, not because it was unusual, but because it was painfully honest - he hadn't read reviews, or checked ratings or the menu, and hadn't even looked inside, yet the café had earned something far more valuable than awareness - it had earned 'familiarity'.

Over the next few weeks, I started noticing the same pattern everywhere!

A new tea brand sitting on a colleague's desk; the same luggage brand at the airport, again and again; one particular smartwatch appearing in meeting after meeting; a skincare brand quietly occupying bathroom shelves whenever I visited friends' homes. None of these brands were shouting or running dramatic campaigns in front of me, but they were simply 'present'.

And then one day, I caught myself doing exactly what my colleague had done - I was browsing online for luggage before a family holiday, and without consciously thinking about it, I clicked on the brand I had been seeing repeatedly over the previous few months. Not because I remembered an advertisement, or that somebody had recommended it,

but simply because it no longer felt unfamiliar! That was the moment I realised something that has fundamentally changed the way I think about marketing - consumers often don't choose the brand they know the best, but the brand that has quietly become part of their everyday world.

Note, visibility, when repeated naturally enough, stops feeling like marketing, and starts feeling like reality. And once something feels like reality, the brain rarely questions it.

This chapter is about understanding that invisible transformation, where repeated presence becomes trust, familiarity becomes preference, and simply being seen often enough quietly changes what consumers decide to buy.

The Familiarity Engine

One of the first questions marketers ask in almost every brand review meeting is remarkably predictable - "*Do consumers remember us?*"

I have slowly stopped asking that question, not because memory is unimportant, but because it has become far less important than we think.

Instead, I ask something else - "*How many times does a consumer accidentally meet your brand in a normal week?*"

The modern consumer lives very differently from the consumer we studied in the past years! Earlier, memory mattered because opportunities to see brands were limited - you saw an advertisement, you visited a store, you remembered the brand, and you bought it later.

Today's consumer rarely depends on 'memory', instead the world keeps reminding them. Think about your own life - you open Instagram, a running shoe appears, you close it; you open YouTube, the same shoe appears in someone's travel vlog; later in the afternoon, Amazon quietly recommends it; that evening your friend walks into the office wearing exactly the same pair; by the weekend, the shoe has not become memorable, but become 'familiar'.

See, memory requires effort, familiarity requires repetition, but the human brain prefers familiarity - because repeated exposure quietly reduces uncertainty.

I worked on this while helping a consumer brand understand why one competitor continued growing despite spending relatively little on traditional advertising! Initially, everyone assumed the answer was superior media planning, but it wasn't - the competitor had quietly built something much more powerful - the brand was everywhere the consumer naturally spent time - it appeared in cooking videos, grocery apps, influencer kitchens, inside recipes, during checkout

recommendations, and in conversations. No single appearance was dramatic, but collectively, they became impossible to ignore!

While nobody consciously decided to trust the brand, but the brain slowly stopped treating it as unfamiliar. Note, that is how visibility works today - it is not one loud message, but hundred quiet encounters!

For decades marketers measured awareness, and it was a useful metric because media itself was concentrated - television, radio, newspapers, billboards - the objective was simple - reach enough people often enough. Today's media environment has become fragmented beyond recognition, because consumers don't live in one medium, but they constantly drift.

WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn, Netflix, Blinkit, Spotify, YouTube, Reddit, Amazon, quick commerce, retail shelves, office conversations, community groups, search results - the modern consumer doesn't move through a marketing funnel, but moves through an ecosystem of ‘encounters’!

That means awareness itself is becoming unstable, and visibility is becoming continuous!

This changes one of the oldest assumptions in marketing! Companies often believe every impression should persuade, but I think that expectation is unrealistic, as most impressions have a much smaller job, to simply exist. The first encounter creates recognition, the second reduces unfamiliarity, the third creates comfort, the fourth creates curiosity, and the fifth finally earns attention.

Consumers rarely decide because they saw a brand once, instead, they decide because the brand gradually becomes part of their mental landscape, and that is why repeated visibility matters more than dramatic visibility!

This also explains something I have observed repeatedly while advising founders - many startups launch with spectacular campaigns - for two weeks, everybody talks about them, but three months later, nobody sees them. The campaign succeeded but the visibility system failed!

Large companies often make the opposite mistake by optimising for reach. I increasingly advise them to optimise for ‘recurrence’, because

the objective is not to reach ten million consumers once, but to naturally appear before one million consumers fifty times! Remember, visibility compounds, while awareness fades.

This also changes how we think about retail! The best shelf is no longer necessarily the one that sells the most, but the one that gets noticed repeatedly. The best influencer is not necessarily the one with the largest following, but the one who naturally integrates the product into everyday life. The best advertisement is not always the most creative, but the one that consumers keep 'accidentally' encountering, because consumers increasingly distrust interruption, but they welcome discovery. The future belongs to brands that become part of the consumer's environment instead of constantly demanding attention!

I believe we have entered an era where marketers should stop asking - "*How memorable was the campaign?*", and instead ask - "*How unavoidable is the brand?*" Not unavoidable through repetition alone, but through relevance - visible during cooking, shopping, travel, conversations, search, ownership, purchase, and inside other people's lives. Because modern buying is rarely triggered by remembering, but by recognising something that already feels familiar.

If you are planning to launch a brand in near future, I suggest that you spend less time trying to create unforgettable advertising, and spend much more time designing unavoidable visibility!

The brands that win will not necessarily be the ones consumers remember, but the ones consumers keep meeting, and eventually, what they meet repeatedly begins to feel like the obvious choice! That is not advertising, but behavioural architecture.

The Evidence Economy

One of the first things I do when evaluating a new consumer brand is something that often surprises the founders. I don't start with the product, or advertising, or pricing, but with the online 'comments'. I read them because they reveal something much more valuable than opinions - they reveal behaviour. *Did people feel compelled to respond? Did somebody photograph the product? Did somebody recommend it without being asked? Did somebody complain passionately? Did somebody compare it with another brand? Did somebody buy it for a second time? Did somebody argue about it?* Every one of those actions is 'evidence', and it has quietly become one of the most valuable currencies in modern marketing.

For decades, brands had built trust by making promises, but today, consumers build trust by observing other consumers.

I noticed this a few years ago, while advising a young founder launching a premium food product. The team spent weeks perfecting the advertisement. The advertisement generated attention, but the business really started growing only after ordinary customers began posting photographs of how they actually used the product! And most of it was far from being professional or perfect! One customer served it at breakfast, another packed it into a child's lunchbox, and a few used it during picnics and parties! None of these images were visually superior to the campaign, but were 'behaviourally' superior!

Because they answered a much more important question - "*What happens after somebody buys this?*"

See, advertising can tell consumers what a product promises, but only other consumers can demonstrate what ownership looks like!

That is why I believe we have entered what we know as the 'evidence' economy. Consumers are surrounded by claims - every shampoo promises healthier hair, every smartphone promises innovation, every

airline promises comfort, every coffee claims to be premium - the claims have become so similar that consumers increasingly ignore them! Instead, they look for evidence, not the scientific kind, but simple 'human' evidence. They ask questions like - "*Who else is buying this?*" "*How are they using it?*" "*Would someone like me choose this?*" "*What happened after they bought it?*"

I would say that shift changes the role of product design! For years, designers focused on usability and aesthetics, and those remain essential, but today there is another responsibility - design should generate evidence!

Think about some of the fastest-growing products in the world. They don't simply function well, but naturally create moments that people feel like sharing. And not because the company asks them to, but because the experience itself feels worth documenting!

A beautifully plated dessert, an unusually shaped perfume bottle, a travel backpack with a brilliantly designed opening system, a skincare product that visibly changes colour during use, a luxury package that feels too elegant to throw away - notice that consumers are rarely sharing the product, but sharing the 'experience' the product created for them!

This is why I often tell product teams that every product should answer - "*What will the customer do with this after the purchase?*" Not functionally, but socially! *Will they photograph it? Will they recommend it? Will they talk about it? Will they compare it? Will they proudly display it?*

Remember, evidence alone is not enough, because it becomes powerful only when it 'accumulates'! One review is interesting, but one thousand reviews create confidence! One creator discussing a product creates awareness, but hundreds of ordinary consumers quietly using it create 'inevitability'. This is where many companies misunderstand influencers! See, influencers can create attention, but only communities create belief! The strongest brands are not built because one famous person recommends them, but because recommendation becomes 'normal', and consumers repeatedly encounter the same product in different contexts, through different people, over different periods of time. One friend mentions it, then a colleague, then a neighbour buy it,

then a creator, then a restaurant serves it, then it appears in somebody's kitchen - individually, each encounter is weak, but collectively, they become strongly persuasive! That is what I call a social proof loop!

Every new customer creates fresh evidence, and that attracts new customers.

Those new customers create even more evidence, and eventually, the product begins marketing itself through human behaviour rather than corporate communication.

This also changes how marketers should measure success! Stop asking only - "*How many people saw our campaign?*" Instead, also ask - "*How many people gave other consumers evidence that we exist?*"

See, a million impressions disappear, but a thousand authentic demonstrations continue influencing future purchases long after the campaign ends.

I suggest you spend less time asking - "*How do we tell consumers we are good?*" and much more time asking - "*What experiences will naturally make consumers demonstrate that we are good?*"

Remember, the future belongs to brands that generate 'evidence', and not merely messages, because advertising can create attention, but only evidence creates confidence. And confidence is what ultimately moves consumers from curiosity to purchase.

In the coming decade, the brands that grow fastest will not necessarily speak the loudest, but simply leave behind the most convincing trail of human behaviour.

The Context Network

One of the questions I ask almost every founder is - "*Where does your customer first meet your product?*" The answers are surprisingly predictable! "*Our website*". "*Modern retail*". "*Amazon*". "*Blinkit*". "*Our distributors*". "*Our Instagram page*".

Technically, all of them are correct, but behaviourally, almost all of them are incomplete! See, consumers rarely think in channels, but always think in 'contexts'. That change has become one of the biggest changes in modern marketing!

I realised this while speaking to a young professional who had recently bought an expensive standing desk, and out of curiosity, I asked him where he had discovered the brand. He paused for a few seconds and replied - "*I honestly don't remember*". That answer fascinated me!

Consumers used to remember advertisements, but today, they just remember 'accumulation'.

He eventually reconstructed the journey! A productivity YouTuber happened to be using the desk, then a colleague mentioned it during an office conversation, he also remember it appeared again while browsing LinkedIn, a week later, YouTube recommended another video featuring the same desk, then he noticed it in a co-working space, and finally, when he searched online, the brand appeared on an e-commerce platform!

Which one of those sold the product? Probably none of them, but surely all of them!

That is how modern distribution works! The sale is rarely created by one channel, but by repeated presence across multiple contexts.

This is why I increasingly believe marketers should stop drawing customer journeys as straight lines, because consumers don't travel in

straight lines anymore. They just ‘wander’ - their journeys aren’t in some funnels, but inside an ecosystem!

The companies that understand this stop asking - "*Which channel performs best?*" Instead, they ask - "*In how many different parts of the customer's life do we naturally exist?*" See, modern distribution has very little to do with logistics, but so much to do with ‘presence’. Presence during - work, entertainment, travel, shopping, conversation, search, ownership. Every additional context reduces unfamiliarity, and that helps quietly increases purchase probability!

This is why I believe one of the most important marketing metrics of the next decade will not be market share, but ‘context’ share - *How many meaningful moments in a consumer's life naturally expose them to your brand?* That question is far more powerful than asking how many stores stock your product.

Let’s understand this with an example of a premium chocolate brand. The traditional marketer wants wider retail distribution, while the modern marketer asks a different set of questions - *Can the brand appear in airport lounges? Can it become part of corporate gifting? Can cafés serve it? Can luxury hotels place it in guest rooms? Can it appear inside festive hampers? Can influencers naturally consume it rather than endorse it? Can restaurants incorporate it into desserts? Can it become a recommendation on quick-commerce apps before weekends?*

Notice what has happened - the product is no longer travelling through channels, but travelling through life!

That should also change the product strategy - products that survive only inside one distribution channel are increasingly vulnerable, while products that appear naturally across multiple contexts become difficult to ignore! I have seen this happen repeatedly - a tea brand that only exists on supermarket shelves remains a tea brand. The same tea appearing in boutique hotels, premium offices, airport lounges, cafés, gifting collections, wellness retreats and online subscriptions gradually becomes part of a lifestyle. See, the product didn't become better, but the context became richer.

This is also why partnerships are becoming more valuable than advertisements! Every partnership introduces your product into an

entirely new behavioural setting - a fitness brand collaborating with marathon events, a notebook brand appearing in design schools, a coffee brand becoming part of co-working spaces, a skincare brand working with boutique hotels - these are not merely distribution decisions, but context decisions. The consumer does not remember the channel, but surely remembers the 'situation'. And situations travel much further than media!

If you are working on building some consumer brand, then I suggest that you spend less time asking - "*Where else can we sell?*" and much more time asking - "*Where else can we belong?*"

Because I know for sure that the future of distribution is not about occupying more shelves, but also about occupying more 'moments'! The brands that dominate consumer choice will not necessarily have the largest retail footprint, but also the largest behavioural footprint! Their products will quietly appear wherever consumers live, work, celebrate, travel, create, entertain, learn and connect, and after enough encounters, something remarkable happens - consumers stop asking - "*Where did I discover this?*", and instead, they begin wondering - "*How have I not owned this already?*"

That is the highest form of distribution, not reaching more places, but becoming part of more lives.

Winning the Moments that Matter

One of the questions I ask marketing teams during strategy workshops is deliberately unfair! "*If I cut your media budget by seventy percent tomorrow, where would you still choose to be visible?*" The room usually becomes very quiet, because that question forces a completely different way of thinking! See, most Go-to-Market plans are built around channels - television, retail, digital, quick commerce, influencers, events, pr, outdoor, search, etc, and the list becomes longer every year!

But we all know, consumers don't wake up thinking about channels, instead they move through moments, and that's where opinions are formed!

That distinction must change the way you think about GTM!

A few years ago, I was advising a young consumer brand that wanted to "*build awareness*". That phrase sounds perfectly reasonable until you ask one simple question - *Awareness where?* The founders had no shortage of ideas - Instagram, YouTube, Retail stores, food festivals, marketplaces. Every suggestion made sense, yet something felt wrong!

So, we stopped discussing media and started discussing behaviour - *When exactly does somebody become open to this product? What is happening in their life at that moment? Who are they with? What are they doing? What problem are they trying to solve?*

Those questions transformed the entire strategy, because consumers are not equally receptive all day! A parent buying breakfast cereal at 8 p.m. thinks very differently from the same parent browsing social media at midnight, or a traveller waiting at an airport thinks differently from someone sitting in an office meeting, or a student during exam week is not the same consumer as that student during summer holidays. See, the person hasn't changed, but the 'moment' has!

That is why I say modern GTM should begin with behavioural moments, not media plans! The objective is no longer maximum exposure, but maximum 'relevance'!

I have experienced that the strongest brands are not visible all the time, but visible at the right time so consistently that consumers assume they are everywhere! Think about a premium coffee brand. *Does it really need to advertise continuously throughout the day?* Probably not! What matters is whether it appears during the moments when coffee naturally enters the consumer's mind - morning routines, office breaks, long drives, late-night work, or weekend conversations - those moments carry far greater commercial value than random impressions scattered across the day!

I often tell founders that consumers do not remember advertisements, but remember 'coincidences' - the advertisement appears exactly when they were thinking about buying; a friend mentions the product just after they noticed it; the brand appears while they are searching for alternatives; the product is served at a restaurant the same week they were considering it - to the consumer, these feel like coincidences! To the marketer, they should be carefully engineered 'encounters'!

Artificial Intelligence will make this even more precise. I can assure you marketing will soon shift from audience targeting to 'moment' targeting! Not simply who the consumer is, but what the consumer is experiencing - the weather, the location, the time, the occasion, the previous purchase, the stage of life, or the emotional state - every one of these variables changes 'receptivity'. That clarifies the future GTM plan will look less like a media calendar and more like a behavioural map!

I suggest, this also changes how success should be measured, because most dashboards ask - *How many people did we reach?*, while a much better question is - *How many buying moments did we successfully enter?*

Because entering a buying moment creates disproportionate impact, and so you don't need to dominate the entire day, but just need to dominate the few 'minutes' when the consumer becomes receptive.

Hope you agree that philosophy also protects brands from wasting enormous amounts of money!

I think being present in the wrong moment is almost as ineffective as being absent, because visibility without relevance is simply expensive decoration!

So, build your GTM plan around five questions - *When is the consumer most receptive? Where does that moment naturally occur? Who influences that moment? What emotion dominates that moment? How can my brand arrive without feeling like an interruption?* Those five questions would shape every investment, not because channels are unimportant, but because channels are only vehicles, and moments are the destination.

The companies that wish to dominate consumer's attention will not try to become omnipresent. That is neither practical nor necessary, and so they will become 'omni-relevant'. Their products will appear wherever consumers form opinions, wherever needs quietly emerge, and wherever decisions begin taking shape.

Remember, growth does not belong to the brand that is seen everywhere, but to the one that is present whenever seeing actually matters.

Part 5
The Marketer's Playbook

Every few years, the business world announces the arrival of a "*new consumer"* - the digital, mobile, omnichannel, AI consumer! I have never been particularly comfortable with these labels because they tempt us to believe that consumers have changed more than marketers have!

I think the opposite question is far more interesting - *Has the marketer changed enough to deserve the new consumer?*

Over the years, I have realised that businesses rarely lose because consumers become unpredictable, instead they lose because they continue solving yesterday's problems with yesterday's instincts!

See, the world changes quietly, while the marketer often changes ceremoniously!

A few months ago, I was at a friend's place watching a young architect explain the design of a new house to him. He wasn't showing furniture, or discussing paint colours, and wasn't even talking about expensive marble or imported fittings, instead, he kept asking one strange question - "*How do you live?*"

Not - "*What kind of house do you want?*", but "*Tell me about your mornings".*

"*Where do your children leave their school bags?*" "*Who makes the first cup of tea?*" "*Where does everyone gather when relatives visit?*" "*Who wakes up first?*" For almost an hour, they never discussed the house, but life. Only after understanding behaviour did he begin drawing walls!

On my way home, I couldn't stop thinking about that meeting, and wondered perhaps great marketers should behave more like 'architects', because architects don't begin with buildings, but with behaviour.

Marketing, unfortunately, often does the opposite, and we begin with campaigns, media plans, product launches, content calendars, promotions, and somewhere along the way, we hope consumer behaviour will fit inside what we have already created! Perhaps that is why so much marketing feels increasingly loud but surprisingly ineffective! It is answering questions that consumers are no longer asking!

One thought has become stronger in my mind with every passing year - the future will not belong to marketers who know the most tools, because every tool eventually becomes available to everyone, and AI will accelerate that reality. Soon, almost every company will create excellent advertisements, beautiful videos, professional designs, compelling copy, sophisticated targeting - technology will democratise execution! Ironically, that will make human 'judgement' more valuable than ever before, because I firmly believe that tools do not decide what deserves to exist. People do!

The real advantage will no longer come from producing marketing faster, but from understanding people more deeply. And that requires a different kind of marketer - not someone obsessed with channels or tools, but with behaviour; not someone asking - "*How do I increase impressions?*", but - "*What invisible force inside the human mind am I trying to influence?*"

See, a product is no longer just a product, but becomes a 'belief' - the package becomes a first conversation, the price becomes a signal, a review becomes borrowed confidence, a purchase becomes public identity, and a second purchase becomes trust made visible. Seen individually, these feel like marketing activities, but together, they become a 'system'.

I have gradually come to believe that exceptional marketing is rarely the result of exceptional campaigns, but the result of exceptional systems producing ordinary excellence every single day. Remember, one campaign may create fame, but a system creates businesses that survive for decades.

I wrote this part of the book a bit different! Until now, we have spent time understanding how buying has changed, why consumers behave differently and what psychological forces shape modern decisions, but

now we move into a different territory - not what consumers are becoming, but what marketers must become.

This is not a collection of tricks, nor is it another checklist of tactics that will become obsolete after the next platform update, but I build these chapters around a much more enduring belief - marketing is no longer the department responsible for communicating value, but the discipline responsible for 'designing' value so clearly that consumers understand it almost instinctively.

That is a higher standard, and also a far more exciting one, because when marketing reaches that level, it stops feeling like persuasion, and starts feeling like 'understanding'.

And in my experience of 30 years, businesses rarely fail because they lacked creativity, but because they misunderstood consumers.

Let me also assure you that the marketer who understands people deeply will always find new tools, while the marketer who only understands tools and completely depend on them will constantly be searching for the next one! Remember and beware, the coming decade will not belong to the fastest marketer, or the loudest, or even the most creative, but to the one who understands human behaviour so profoundly that every product, every message, every experience and every decision quietly feels as though it was designed for one person - the customer!

That is the playbook we are about to build.

12.
Design for the Scroll, Not the Shelf

A few months ago, I was sitting in a café waiting for a friend who, like many successful people, believes time is merely a suggestion!

To pass the time, I opened a shopping app, and within a few minutes, I had "*seen*" hundreds of products - running shoes, backpacks, coffee makers, perfumes, t-shirts, travel mugs, headphones, books, etc. If someone had asked me what I had just looked at, I would have struggled to answer!

Then something strange happened - a backpack made me stop! I don't remember the brand, or the price, or the features it had, but what I remember is that my thumb stopped moving! That tiny pause lasted perhaps two seconds! Then I continued scrolling!

Later that evening, in my thinking time, I couldn't stop thinking about those two seconds - *Out of hundreds of products, why had that one interrupted me?*

It certainly wasn't because I had carefully evaluated it, because there wasn't enough time, as I had reacted before I had thought.

A few days later, I tried a small experiment - I opened the same shopping app and deliberately searched for products I already knew well. As I scrolled through the results, I realised something that most marketers rarely discuss!

I wasn't looking at products, but looking at miniature versions of products! Tiny rectangles, tiny bottles, tiny shoes, tiny packets, tiny bags - some instantly caught my eye, while most simply disappeared into the endless river of scrolling! That was the moment I realised that

product design had quietly changed forever! For decades, companies designed products to win on shelves, where consumers could walk around them, pick them up, compare them, and spend time with them, but today, the first battle is fought before the consumer has even seen the real product!

It is fought inside a thumbnail, inside a feed, inside a marketplace, or inside a screen where a thumb is moving much faster than the eye! And that tiny version of your product now has one extraordinary responsibility - it must earn a 'pause'! Not a purchase, or admiration, but just that very important pause, because if the scroll never stops, the story never begins!

This chapter is about understanding how product design, packaging, branding, creativity and marketing have all entered a world where the smallest version of your product often becomes the most important one.

The Thumbnail Brain

For almost all of marketing history, products were designed to be experienced at full scale, but today's products rarely receive that luxury - they first appear as something barely larger than a postage stamp, or sometimes on a six-inch phone, sometimes inside a carousel, sometimes squeezed between a friend's holiday photographs!

I increasingly see marketers designing products for shelves while consumers are discovering them through thumbs, and that mismatch is becoming expensive, because the consumer's first interaction is no longer physical, but visual. And visual, today, does not merely mean beautiful, but instantly recognisable!

This is where I think many product teams make a fundamental mistake, and believe visibility begins after the product is manufactured, but it doesn't. Instead, it begins while the product is being designed! A colour chosen in the design studio determines whether the product disappears into a feed six months later. A shape approved during product development determines whether the thumbnail becomes recognisable. A logo placement decided in a meeting room influences whether somebody notices the product while scrolling at midnight.

See, these design decisions have quietly become media decisions! Think about how consumers actually shop today - they don't walk past your product, but scroll past it, and that single change alters almost every traditional design principle.

A beautifully detailed package may become meaningless when reduced to a thumbnail; elegant typography may disappear completely; subtle textures become invisible; fine craftsmanship cannot compete because it literally cannot be seen! Only strong visual signatures survive reduction, and this is why I have started asking product teams a question that almost nobody expects - "*What happens when your product becomes one centimetre tall?*"

Because one centimetre is often where the first commercial battle takes place!

I have seen companies spend months perfecting packaging that looked magnificent in boardrooms and almost identical to competitors inside marketplace listings! Conversely, I have seen products with surprisingly simple packaging dominate because they remained unmistakable even when viewed for half a second.

See how recognition has become more valuable than decoration! This also changes how we should think about innovation, too!

For decades, marketers asked - "*How can we make the product better?*", but today another question deserves equal importance - "*How can we make the product recognisable before it is visible?*" That sounds impossible until you observe brands that already do it - you recognise the silhouette before the logo; you recognise the colour before the name; and you recognise the shape before the details - the consumer brain identifies patterns long before it reads information!

That is why products increasingly need what I call a 'visual' fingerprint! Something so distinctive that the consumer can identify it almost subconsciously.

This is particularly important because attention itself has changed! Most of today's marketers still imagine that consumers first look, then evaluate. I think the sequence has reversed completely - consumers first eliminate, and only then do they look!

Your product is not competing for purchase, but for permission to be examined, and that permission lasts less than a second!

If the product fails there, everything else becomes irrelevant!

The greatest advertisement cannot rescue a product that never earns the pause! The best pricing cannot help a product that disappears in the scroll! The strongest distribution cannot compensate for visual anonymity!

This is why I believe the next generation of product design will begin with a very different prototype - the thumbnail prototype.

Shrink your product until it becomes almost unfair, place it among fifty competing products, scroll past it quickly, and ask one question - "*Does*

my thumb hesitate?" If the answer is no, your consumer probably won't either!

Remember, the future of consumer marketing will not begin on store shelves, but with 'motion', on moving screens, inside moving feeds, and in minds that are moving even faster. The brands that win will not necessarily have the best products, but will surely have the imagery of products that can survive becoming very, very small, because in the age of infinite scrolling, the smallest version of your product often decides the biggest outcome.

The Product is the Advertisement

One of the first questions I ask product teams is - "*Where does your package spend most of its life?*" Almost everyone gives me the same answer - "*On the shelf*". That answer was correct fifteen years ago! Today it is dangerously incomplete, because the modern package spends very little time on a shelf, but far more time inside people's lives!

Think about the last premium coffee you bought, or a bottle of sparkling water, or a protein bar, or a skincare product, or a carton of oat milk. *Where did you actually see it?* Perhaps on somebody's office desk, inside a refrigerator, on a café table, during a Zoom meeting, in the background of a YouTube video, inside someone's travel bag, or on a kitchen counter when a friend offered you coffee. See, the shelf is no longer the destination, but merely the departure gate! The package travels much further than the product ever did before, and that changes its responsibility completely!

For decades, packaging had three jobs - protect the product, communicate the product, and help sell the product, but today it has acquired a fourth responsibility - keep representing the brand long after the sale.

I feel that may be the most valuable job of all, because consumers increasingly spend more time with owned products than shopping for products! And every owned product quietly becomes advertising, and interestingly, not paid advertising, but environmental and behavioural advertising!

Last month I visited the office of a startup founder, our meeting had absolutely nothing to do with beverages! Yet sitting on his table was a beautifully designed bottle of sparkling water, and guess what, we ended up discussing the bottle for almost five minutes! The company had not advertised itself to me, but the package had! The founder had simply left it on the table, and the bottle was doing all the work!

See how the most valuable advertisement for a product is often the product itself.

This changes how we should think about ‘packaging’ - it is no longer competing for attention only once, but competes every single time somebody else sees the product after purchase. Shall I say - every product has two audiences - the buyer and the observer! Most companies design almost exclusively for the first, but the fastest-growing brands increasingly design for both!

Intelligently designed products don’t need advertising all the time! They enter consumer conversations naturally! That is because visual differentiation has become much more valuable than visual beauty!

See, beautiful products are everywhere, but ‘recognisable’ products are rare.

Many design teams spend months making products attractive, but I increasingly ask them - "*Can somebody recognise this from across the room?*" and also "*Can somebody recognise it without reading the logo?*"

That is where true visual equity begins! The strongest consumer products possess what I call ‘instant’ recognisability - you don't need to inspect them, instead you identify them! That recognition may come from colour, shape, proportions, typography, or material - the source doesn't matter, but the speed does! Remember, recognition happens before evaluation! Always!

This is increasingly important because consumers are surrounded by visual clutter - thousands of products, packages, messages - standing out no longer means shouting louder, but becoming ‘unmistakable’!

See, many brands attempt differentiation by adding more graphics, icons, badges, colours, more text, more claims, and more information, but ironically, the strongest visual identities often achieve the opposite - they remove!

Remove confusion, decoration, visual noise, and so what remains becomes ‘memorable’! I have often told product designers that subtraction is one of the least appreciated marketing strategies! Every unnecessary element competes with the one thing consumers should remember! And this philosophy extends far beyond packaging - it influences product shape, lid design, bottle profile, handle design,

opening mechanism, texture, and even the sound a product makes when it closes. Note that every sensory cue contributes to recognisability.

The future belongs to products that consumers can identify almost instinctively, not because they have seen an advertisement, but because they have encountered the object repeatedly in real life. That is where packaging becomes media; every kitchen counter becomes another impression; every office desk becomes another impression; every airport lounge becomes another impression; every restaurant table becomes another impression - the product is no longer waiting to be discovered in a store, but continuously introducing itself to new consumers through the people who already own it.

If you are working with a consumer brand, ask one question before approving the final design - "*Will this still be recognisable after the purchase?*"

Because that is where the next customer is often born!

The future of packaging is therefore not about protecting products, but multiplying visibility. The package is no longer the last stage of manufacturing, but has now become the first stage of marketing!

Living Creativity

One of the questions I ask almost every marketing team is - "*When was your campaign completed?*" The answer is usually very precise. "*Last Friday*". "*Last month*". "*Before Diwali*". "*Just before the launch*".

I then ask a second question - "*When did your consumers stop changing?*"

Nobody answers, because everybody knows the answer - they never did!

That simple contradiction between two answers explains why so many campaigns lose effectiveness so quickly.

See, consumers wake up slightly different every day, while brands continue speaking as though yesterday's message is still today's reality!

For decades, we treated creativity like architecture - we designed it, approved it, built it, launched it and moved on. That approach worked when markets changed slowly, but today's markets behave much more like weather than architecture! The environment shifts constantly - conversations change daily, visual culture changes weekly, language changes monthly, humour changes overnight, and attention changes by the hour! Meanwhile, many companies still spend six months producing campaigns that remain untouched for another six months! The mathematics simply no longer works!

I witnessed this while advising a consumer brand that was preparing for a major product launch. The team proudly presented one "*final*" campaign. I remember asking - "*Final until when?*" They looked puzzled, because I wasn't questioning the quality, but the assumption! *Why should creativity ever become final?* Consumers certainly aren't final, their interests aren't, their conversations aren't, and so aren't their behaviours! *So, why should marketing become frozen?* That project eventually changed direction completely - instead of building one campaign, we built what I called a creative 'system' - a collection of ideas rather than a single idea! Different headlines, different imagery,

different product stories, different formats, different contexts, and different emotional triggers - every week, something new entered the market. Not because the previous work had failed, but because the consumer had moved.

That shift should also transform the way you think about creativity - creative work should not be treated like a finished painting, but like software - always improving, always adapting, and always learning. The objective is no longer perfection, but 'relevance'.

This also changes the role of testing! I have never liked the phrase A/B testing, as I feel it makes creativity sound like a laboratory experiment! Consumers do not experience marketing as variables, but as 'feelings'. Instead of asking - "*Which advertisement performs better?*" I think marketers should ask - "*What changed in consumer behaviour this week that our creativity has not yet noticed?*" That is a far more strategic question to ask, today! Sometimes the answer is visual, sometimes cultural, seasonal, generational, and sometimes it is surprisingly small. A new phrase, a new colour preference, a new creator style, a new format - tiny changes accumulate, and the brands that notice them first quietly become more relevant.

This is why I believe the future belongs to organisations that stop organising creative work into campaigns. Remember, campaigns have beginnings and endings, but consumers have neither! They exist inside continuous streams of influence, and that's why I say marketing should too!

Now, that requires a different organisational mindset - creative teams should not ask - "*What are we launching next?*", but "*What are we learning today?*"

Those are entirely different businesses, one produces content, while the other produces adaptation!

Artificial Intelligence is making this gap even more obvious - soon, consumers will not merely receive personalised advertisements, but receive personalised creative evolution - products will be photographed differently, stories will be told differently, and messages will be adjusted differently, not once every quarter, but potentially every hour.

That future belongs to companies that have already accepted that creative excellence is no longer about producing the perfect advertisement, but building the perfect learning system.

If I were building a marketing organisation today, I would celebrate one metric above almost everything else - learning velocity. *How quickly does the organisation notice change? How quickly does it understand it? How quickly does creativity evolve because of it?* Because I believe that consumers don't just reward finished creativity, but 'relevant' creativity also. And remember, relevance has become a moving target! The marketers who continue chasing perfect campaigns will always arrive slightly late, while the marketers who build living creative systems will never need to catch up because they will already be moving with the consumer. That, I believe, is the future of creative strategy!

One Promise

One of the most revealing meetings I have ever attended had almost nothing to do with marketing! The product team was presenting the next generation of a consumer product, tech team had a roadmap, marketing was waiting patiently for its turn, the design team had its own presentation, operations had timelines, and sales had another.

For nearly three hours, every department explained its strategy beautifully.

Then I asked a question to all my teams - "*Can somebody tell me where the consumer will experience the handover from one department to another?*"

See, consumers never experience organisations the way organisations experience themselves. They never think - "*This feature belongs to Product*". "*That message belongs to Marketing*". "*This delivery issue belongs to Operations*". "*This onboarding belongs to Technology*".

They experience one thing - the brand, and that is all! Everything else is invisible! And yet companies continue organising themselves as though consumers understand organisational charts!

Consumers don't buy departments, but buy promises. And while that may sound obvious, yet I don't think businesses fully appreciate its consequences, though! Because a promise is never created by advertising alone - advertising merely announces it! Only the product proves it!

Imagine watching a beautiful commercial for a new premium smartphone. The photography is stunning, storytelling is emotional, music is unforgettable, and so you decide to buy it. Then the phone overheats, or the battery drains rapidly, or the camera app crashes. *What happened to the advertising?*

Nothing, but it simply became irrelevant! The product had become the real communication.

The reverse is also equally true - sometimes companies produce average advertising for extraordinary products, but in this case consumers forgive the communication because the experience tells a better story than the campaign ever could.

This is why I have slowly stopped thinking about marketing as a communication function, instead I feel marketing is expectation 'management', and the product is expectation 'fulfilment'!

The consumer never separates the two, and so my advice is neither should companies. One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is treating product development as something that finishes before marketing begins. I think that sequence belongs to another era, because in modern consumer businesses, marketing should begin while the product is still being imagined! Because some of the biggest marketing decisions are made long before the first advertisement exists - *Should the product be instantly recognisable? Should it photograph beautifully? Should it invite conversation? Should it feel premium when held? Should it create delight when opened? Should it encourage repeat use? Should it reduce effort?* None of these are communication decisions, and yet every one of them influences growth, and that is why I increasingly believe product teams are becoming marketing teams, and vice-versa - the boundaries are dissolving!

I experienced this while advising a premium consumer brand, where the discussion had reached a familiar stage - marketing wanted a bigger launch campaign, while the product team wanted one more month to improve the experience. Eventually, someone asked me which side I supported. My answer surprised them - "*I support the consumer*", because the consumer will never know which department won the argument! The consumer will only remember whether the promise felt true, and that is the only scoreboard that matters!

This is where I think many organisations waste extraordinary amounts of energy. Marketing tries to compensate for weak products, while product teams assume marketing will somehow make consumers understand complicated products. Similarly, sales teams promise what operations struggle to deliver, while customer service apologises for decisions it never made. Every department works harder, and so the consumer becomes more confused.

The strongest companies behave very differently and obsess over consistency - the promise made in the advertisement appears in the packaging, the packaging continues inside the product, the product continues inside the service, the service continues inside customer support, the support continues inside the next purchase. Nothing feels disconnected, or as if it came from another department - everything feels like one conversation. That consistency creates something much more valuable than satisfaction - it creates belief that compounds!

This has become even more important because products themselves are now media, because many consumers who use your product becomes a potential storyteller! That story is not shaped by the marketing department, but by the 'total' experience - if the product delights, the consumer tells one story; if the packaging disappoints, the consumer tells another; if the delivery is confusing, another story begins; while if customer support solves the problem brilliantly, the story changes again.

Remember, the brand is no longer written by marketers, alone! It is written through thousands of interactions! That is why I believe one of the most important organisational changes of the next decade will be the disappearance of the wall between product and marketing! The companies that continue treating them as separate functions will struggle to deliver coherent experiences, while the companies that treat every design decision as a marketing decision, and every marketing promise as a product decision, will build brands that feel remarkably trustworthy!

If there is one lesson I want every founder, product manager and marketer to carry from this chapter, it is - consumers never judge your marketing, but they judge whether your product kept your marketing's promise. And the moment those two become indistinguishable - your product stops supporting your marketing, and becomes your marketing! That is where the strongest brands of the future will be built.

13.
Build for Desire, Not Just Need

A few years ago, I visited the home of an old friend who had recently renovated his kitchen, and as most proud homeowners often do, he insisted on giving me a complete tour! He showed me the cabinets, the lighting, the countertops, an intelligent refrigerator, and soft close drawers! Inside one of the drawers were six chef's knives. I couldn't resist asking, "*How many vegetables are you planning to cut at the same time?*" He laughed and said - "*So you noticed! Hmm*".

I picked up one of the knives - it was beautifully crafted, perfectly balanced and, judging by its appearance, I asked - "*What makes this one special?*" His answer surprised me! "*I don't know if it's better. I just enjoy using it*". He hadn't talked about sharper blades, steel grade, durability, edge retention or manufacturing technology, instead he spoke about 'enjoyment'!

A few minutes later, I realised the irony - my friend hardly cooked, his wife quietly smiled from across the room, a smile that only spouses truly understand! The knives had not solved a problem, but surely had fulfilled an 'aspiration'. Probably, made him feel like the kind of person who appreciated good cooking, good design and good craftsmanship. Whether he actually cooked was almost a secondary detail!

On my drive back home, I started thinking about how many products around us follow exactly the same pattern!

Nobody needs premium sunglasses to see better, nobody needs designer luggage to reach another city, nobody needs an expensive fountain pen to write a shopping list, nobody needs a luxury watch to know the time, and yet millions of consumers willingly buy them.

And this happens not because the need is greater, but because the desire is!

Let me tell you something that should shape much of your thinking about consumer behaviour - needs explain why markets exist, but desires explain why markets grow.

If marketers only understand needs, they will build useful products, but if they understand desires, they will build products that people dream about, save for, recommend to friends and proudly bring into their lives!

That is the journey we are about to begin.

The Desire Gap

One of the first things I ask founders when they describe their product - *"What need does it solve?" The answer usually arrives within seconds - "It saves time". "It improves health". "It makes cooking easier". "It increases productivity". "It helps people sleep better"*. Every answer is logical and sensible, but every answer makes me slightly nervous, because if solving needs were enough, markets would be remarkably boring!

Think about your own home - *How many water bottles do you own? How many pairs of shoes? How many watches? How many coffee mugs? How many bags? How many notebooks? How many T-shirts?*

From the perspective of need, the answer for most of these categories should probably be one, or maybe two, yet consumers continue buying! Not because the need returned, but because desire did!

Remember, that distinction sits at the heart of modern consumer behaviour! For decades, marketing has comfortably spoken about need creation and need fulfilment, but I have gradually come to believe that markets rarely grow because of needs. They grow because companies become better at manufacturing desire.

See, a need has a finish line, but a desire doesn't! You become thirsty, so you drink water, and the need disappears. You don't suddenly feel the urge to buy six different brands of bottled water because your body required six litres at exactly the same moment! Yet consumers happily buy a premium insulated bottle, a sleek glass bottle for the office, a gym shaker, a travel flask, and a designer tumbler! The body needed hydration, but the mind desired a new 'expression'!

That is why I think marketers often spend too much time studying needs and too little time studying aspiration. Needs are surprisingly stable, while desires evolve continuously!

Twenty years ago, nobody desired wireless earbuds, because the need was simply to listen to music; nobody desired an electric standing desk,

because the need was merely to work; nobody desired a smartwatch, because the need was simply to know the time.

Companies did not discover hidden needs, but they expanded desire!

Needs answer one question - "*Will this solve my problem?*", while desires answer a different one - "*Will this improve my life?*" Those are not the same conversation, because one removes discomfort while the other creates anticipation. See, I must tell you - anticipation is where premium categories are built, and this completely changes how products should be designed!

I used this lesson while leading a premium kitchen brand - the management team kept describing their products in terms of functionality - more durable, more efficient, better heat distribution, improved engineering - all impressive achievements. But none of the consumers are expected to proudly introduce a guest to the thermal conductivity of a frying pan! Instead, they want to host, cook together, learn new recipes - trying cuisines they had never attempted before! The pans were not solving a functional problem, but consumers had purchased them for an emotional ambition! That immensely successful and talked of project permanently changed the way many think about product strategy!

See, products solve problems, but brands expand possibilities! The stronger the possibility, the stronger the desire! This is why categories that appear highly functional often become surprisingly emotional - cars stopped being transportation decades ago, coffee stopped being caffeine, running shoes stopped being footwear, laptops stopped being computing devices.

Even grocery categories are changing - olive oil is no longer just cooking oil, but a healthier lifestyle; tea is no longer simply a beverage, but a ritual; protein is no longer nutrition, but has become identity! Note how the function remains, but the desire grows around it!

This also explains why two products with almost identical functionality can command dramatically different prices, because one satisfies the need, while the other satisfies the imagination! And imagination, my friends, is almost always willing to pay more!

Many businesses struggle because they define themselves too narrowly by just asking - "*What need are we solving?*" I prefer another question - "*What future is the customer hoping to move toward?*"

That future may be healthier, more successful, more creative, more organised, more sophisticated, more adventurous, or more admired. Whatever it is, the product becomes a bridge, and not merely a tool!

This is where desire becomes incredibly powerful - desire does something that needs cannot, it creates 'voluntary' attention!

Nobody scrolls through hundreds of videos because they desperately need another pair of sneakers, or spends evenings watching beautifully filmed coffee-making videos because their existing coffee machine has stopped functioning, or visits automobile showrooms every weekend because transportation has suddenly become impossible. Instead, people do these things because desire is enjoyable!

Need asks for resolution, while desire invites exploration! One closes a journey, while the other begins one!

As marketers, we often celebrate products that remove pain, but forget to celebrate products that create aspiration! Remember, aspiration has no natural limit, and it continuously expands. And businesses that understand aspiration stop competing inside existing categories, and redefine the categories themselves!

So, if you are planning to launch a consumer brand soon, you should certainly understand the need, because ignoring it would be foolish, but I would suggest that you spend much more time understanding the desire growing around that need. Remember, the need may get you into the market, but the desire is what will help you lead it.

Consumers buy products because they need solutions, but they recommend products because they desire what those products allow them to become.

In the coming decade, the companies that understand that difference will not merely satisfy customers, but will also create entirely new reasons to buy.

The Story Consumers Want to Tell

One of my favourite exercises during brand workshops is to ask everyone in the room one question - "*After buying your product, what story will the customer tell someone else?*" Marketers understand storytelling very well, but the problem is they think about the wrong storyteller! Marketing has spent decades trying to perfect the brand's story, the founder's journey, the heritage, the craftsmanship, the technology, the ingredients, or the innovation.

Important? Absolutely! *Sufficient?* Increasingly, no!

Because consumers don't walk around repeating your brand presentation, but they talk about themselves! And always themselves!

Think about the last time a friend showed you a new purchase. Perhaps it was a watch, or a coffee machine, or a bicycle, a jacket, a laptop, or a holiday. *Did they begin by explaining the company's vision?* Of course not!

They must have said things like - "I've been wanting something like this for years". "*I finally decided to invest in myself*". "*This fits my lifestyle perfectly*". "*I wanted something that would last*". "*It just feels like me*". Please notice that while the product enters the conversation, yet the consumer remains the hero! That observation should change the way you think about marketing forever - products don't become desirable because they have compelling stories, but because they help consumers tell compelling stories about 'themselves'! That is a completely different objective, and you must remember it.

A while ago, I was working with a premium lifestyle brand - the team had spent months developing a beautiful campaign about craftsmanship, the photography was truly stunning, I myself helped them write an elegant copy, and the video production quality was exceptional. Then we interviewed customers - almost nobody repeated the craftsmanship story, but instead, customers kept saying - "*It made me feel more confident*". "*I wear it to important meetings*". "*My friends*

noticed it". "It feels like a reward after years of hard work". The campaign celebrated the product, but the consumers celebrated themselves. *Isn't that distinction profound?*

I have always encouraged marketing teams to stop asking - "*What story are we telling?*", and instead ask - "*What story are we 'enabling'?*"

See, that is where desire begins. Desire rarely comes from product specifications, but comes from imagined identity - consumers picture a future version of themselves - more stylish, more organised, more adventurous, more accomplished, more creative, more health-conscious, or more sophisticated!

Notice, how the product quietly becomes a supporting character in that imagined future!

That is why aspirations are so powerful, because they are not fantasies, but are rehearsals! Every purchase is a small rehearsal for the life the consumer hopes to live - a beautifully designed notebook is rarely about paper, but about becoming the kind of person who finally gets organised; a premium chef's knife is rarely about cutting vegetables, but about becoming someone who enjoys cooking; a hiking backpack is rarely about carrying clothes, but about becoming more adventurous.

See, consumers don't buy the object, but permission to believe in the next version of themselves!

This is also why trends spread so quickly! Many marketers think trends are driven by novelty, but let me assure you they are driven by 'possibility'. Every trend quietly asks the same question - "*What kind of person might I become if I joined this?*" Some people answer yes, and some no! Either way, the decision has very little to do with the product itself, but has everything to do with 'identity'.

Remember, that changes the role of storytelling! Storytelling should never begin with features, but begin with 'transformation'! Not, "*What does this product do?*", but "*Who does this product help the customer become?*"

The strongest brands understand this instinctively, and their advertisements rarely end with the product, but with a feeling, a future, a relationship, an achievement, or a moment of pride! Because those are the things consumers 'actually' remember!

If I were building a consumer brand today, I would ask my team - "*If the customer removed our logo from this story, would they still want to tell it?*"

If the answer is yes, the campaign has genuine power, because the consumer has become the protagonist and the product has become the enabler!

That is exactly how it should be!

The future of marketing will not belong to the companies with the most beautiful brand stories, but to the companies that help millions of ordinary people tell more interesting stories about themselves! That is where aspiration lives, desire grows, and where the strongest brands are ultimately built!

Beyond Product-Market Fit

One of the phrases that has probably been overused more than almost any other in the startup world is ‘product-market fit’! Founders celebrate it, investors ask for it, accelerators teach it, consultants analyse it - everyone agrees it is important!

The traditional definition is also fairly straightforward - customers buy, they come back, the business grows, and that is certainly one version of success!

I don't think it is enough anymore, because modern consumer markets have introduced a new reality - products no longer grow only through transactions, but also through ‘conversations’.

See, today a product can have excellent repeat purchases and still remain commercially fragile if nobody talks about it. Equally, another product may have fewer customers initially, but every customer brings three more through conversations, photographs, recommendations and demonstrations.

Which business has the stronger future? For me, the answer is obvious, and so, I increasingly believe that the real test of Product-Market Fit is not whether consumers buy your product, but whether they feel an irresistible urge to ‘mention’ it.

That urge cannot be manufactured through referral programmes alone, instead it must be designed ‘into’ the product.

Recently I was advising a young consumer brand where the founders were obsessed with making the product marginally better than competitors. Slightly stronger materials, slightly better performance, slightly longer durability - everything was incremental. I asked them - "*What about this product would somebody naturally mention over dinner?*" That conversation changed the entire development process, and now instead of adding another feature, we started searching for ‘moments’. Moments of surprise, delight, curiosity, moments that made somebody

say - "*You have to see this*". That single shift had a profound impact, because people rarely recommend products for being competent, but for being memorable.

You must remember that competence satisfies consumers, but unexpectedness travels with them! Think about the products people spontaneously discuss - a suitcase that follows its owner, a notebook whose pages can be erased and reused, a bottle that reminds you to drink water, a backpack that opens completely flat like a suitcase, a coffee machine that remembers everyone's favourite drink, a lunchbox that keeps hot and cold food separate without becoming enormous.

Notice something - people don't begin by discussing specifications, but they begin with - "*You won't believe what this does*". I would say that sentence is marketing! And see, it does not originate in the marketing department, but in product design!

This is why I believe the next generation of product-market fit will increasingly be measured by conversation 'density' - *How often does the product become the topic instead of merely the purchase? How frequently does ownership create demonstrations? How many first-time buyers become storytellers?*

Those questions tell us whether the product possesses social energy, because social energy compounds - one conversation creates curiosity, then curiosity creates trial, a trial creates ownership, and ownership creates another conversation - that loop becomes remarkably difficult for competitors to interrupt.

Many companies misunderstand what makes products talk-worthy, and they assume it requires radical innovation. I would say it often doesn't!

Sometimes it is one beautifully solved problem - a tiny design decision, an unexpectedly thoughtful detail, an elegant opening mechanism, a magnetic closure, a refill system that feels satisfying, or a packaging that transforms into storage - the point is not extravagance, but 'discoverability'.

I strongly suggest, every product should contain at least one feature that consumers enjoy discovering and even more importantly, enjoy demonstrating. That is where desire begins to spread organically.

This philosophy also changes the relationship between product teams and marketers. Marketing should not spend months searching for something interesting to say, instead the product itself should arrive carrying interesting things to say. Remember, the greatest campaigns are often hiding inside the product itself, and marketers must simply uncover them!

I often tell product teams that every design review should include one question - "*Would somebody interrupt a conversation to show this to a friend?*"

Not because it is expensive, luxurious, or fashionable, but because it is genuinely interesting. If the answer is yes, the product possesses a quality that no advertising budget can easily replicate - natural 'advocacy' - that is one of the rarest competitive advantages in modern business. Consumers will always trust demonstrations far more than declarations! And so, the future will belong to products that make ownership feel 'participative' - products people don't merely consume, but also display, recommend, photograph, explain, lend, gift, discuss, and celebrate!

Those behaviours are no longer outcomes of great marketing, but the evidence of great product 'thinking'.

If you are building a consumer brand, stop asking whether the product fits the market, and ask whether it fits the 'conversation'.

See, the markets are becoming increasingly crowded, and so conversations are becoming increasingly valuable. The companies that dominate the next decade will design products that enter both! And once a product becomes part of everyday conversation, it stops competing for attention, and people start carrying it there themselves.

Launch the Feeling First

One of the biggest mistakes I see companies make is believing that a product launch begins on launch day, but I sincerely think it doesn't! If the first-time consumers hear about your product is the day it becomes available, you haven't launched a product, but you've just announced 'inventory' in the channel!

Let me be a bit profound and say - a launch is not the beginning of selling, but the end of building anticipation, and that distinction has become even more important in a world where consumers discover hundreds of new products every week.

Think about how most companies launch - the product is kept secret, the development happens behind closed doors, marketing prepares the campaign, and sales prepares distribution - everything remains hidden until one dramatic morning when somebody proudly says - "*We are excited to announce…*"

The problem is that consumers are not excited! Just the company seems to be!

Excitement cannot be transferred through a press release, but must be gradually accumulated.

I recently witnessed the launch of a premium consumer product - the team had created a beautiful campaign, wonderful photography, powerful messaging, a significant media budget - everything looked perfect!

A question constantly troubled me - "*Why should consumers care today?*" Because all their communication was about the product, and very little was about the anticipation. So, instead of introducing the product, I suggested they introduce the problem first - we started conversations, shared observations, created curiosity, and allowed people to notice the frustration we had quietly accepted for years. Weeks later, when the product finally appeared, consumers didn't feel interrupted, but felt

relieved! The launch didn't create demand, but released demand that had already been building!

That, dear marketers, is a completely different outcome!

I increasingly believe that the best launches begin long before anyone sees the product - they begin with a question, an observation, a tension, and a possibility - something that gently changes how people look at the world!

Once consumers start noticing a problem, they begin searching for solutions on their own, and the smartest brands don't rush to provide the answer! Instead, they let curiosity mature!

Think about some of the most successful products introduced over the last decade - very few appeared out of nowhere, and long before they became available, people were discussing them, guessing features, sharing rumours, debating prices, and comparing expectations.

The product had not entered the market, but had successfully already entered the 'culture', and that is where anticipation becomes commercially powerful!

See, consumers do not enjoy waiting, but they do enjoy 'expecting', because it creates emotional ownership before physical ownership! People begin imagining - where they will use the product, how they will show it to friends, how it will improve their routine, or what it says about them. Notice how the purchase begins mentally long before money changes hands.

That is why I feel, anticipation is one of the few marketing assets that appreciates with time and every meaningful encounter adds another layer.

A carefully placed prototype, a founder interview, a designer explaining the thinking behind one feature, a customer testing an early version, a retailer quietly hinting that something interesting is coming - none of these communicate the entire product, but they communicate 'momentum'. The launch slowly becomes a story that consumers follow instead of an announcement they receive!

This also flips the role of go-to-market! Traditional GTM plans often revolve around dates, launch week, media week, retail week, or

influencer week. I increasingly believe GTM should revolve around emotional stages!

First, create curiosity, but not by hiding information, but by revealing a meaningful tension, and focus on helping consumers see something they hadn't noticed before.

Then create participation - invite people into the journey - show prototypes, collect reactions, celebrate early users, and make consumers feel that the product is evolving with them, not merely for them.

Then create expectation - not through exaggerated promises, but through repeated evidence that something genuinely valuable is approaching.

Now by the time the product arrives, consumers should already understand why it matters!

Finally, make the first experience unforgettable - a launch is not complete when somebody places an order, but complete when the first customer says,

"*You have to see this*". That sentence marks the transition from company-driven marketing to consumer-driven momentum, and that is the real objective, because the strongest launches don't end with the first sale, but trigger the first conversation. I strongly suggest that you should spend less time asking - "*How do we create the biggest launch?*", and much more time asking - "*How do we create the longest anticipation?*"

The companies that dominate the future will understand that products are copied, features are copied, prices are copied, and even advertising is copied, but anticipation is much harder to imitate because it is built over time, through trust, curiosity and emotional investment.

You will witness in the coming time, the brands that grow fastest will not be those that surprise the market, but the ones that prepare the market so well that when the product finally arrives, buying feels less like discovering something new and more like completing a journey that consumers had already begun in their minds.

14.
Reduce Thinking, Increase Buying

A few years ago, I walked into a neighbourhood bakery to buy a birthday cake for my colleague. The person at the counter smiled and asked, "*What kind of cake would you like, Sir?*" and I replied with confidence - "*Chocolate*". He smiled again and said - "*We have Belgian chocolate, Dutch chocolate, dark chocolate, milk chocolate, truffle chocolate, hazelnut chocolate, mousse chocolate, sugar-free chocolate, premium chocolate, Belgian truffle, chocolate fudge, chocolate overload and chocolate almond*". Five seconds earlier, I had wanted a cake, and now I apparently needed a degree in chocolate! As I was trying to process, an elderly gentleman walked in behind me. Without looking at the display, he simply said, "*Give me the one most people buy*". The salesman pointed to a cake, the gentleman paid and he left. The entire transaction took less than thirty seconds. I was still standing there, carefully evaluating the difference between Belgian chocolate and Belgian truffle! Eventually, I did exactly what the elderly gentleman had done. I asked, "*Which one do customers usually like the most?*" The salesman smiled, pointed at the same cake, and I bought it. On my way home, I couldn't stop thinking about what had just happened! I had entered the bakery believing that more choice would help me make a better decision, but instead, I had happily outsourced the decision to a complete stranger - not because I was incapable of choosing, but because I was tired of evaluating! That evening, another thought crossed my mind - perhaps consumers are not looking for brands that give them endless choices but for the ones that quietly remove unnecessary choices. The modern consumer, man or woman, doesn't wake up hoping to make a hundred brilliant decisions before lunch! In fact, quite the opposite! See, the consumer is carrying hundreds of decisions already, and every unnecessary choice we add,

every comparison we force, every feature we explain, every form we ask them to fill and every tiny moment of hesitation we introduce quietly taxes their ‘mental’ energy. And maybe that is the real competition today, not between one brand and another, but between one brand that respects the consumer's mental energy and another that unknowingly keeps asking for more of it. I have written this chapter about that invisible battle, because in the coming years, the brands that simplify thinking will increasingly become the brands consumers choose without thinking.

The Hidden Cost of Thinking

A few years ago, I walked into a supermarket to buy toothpaste, I reached the aisle, picked up the first tube I recognised, and was about to put it into my basket when I noticed another variant - "*Advanced*". Then another - "*Professional*". Then I looked and saw "*Whitening*", "*Herbal*", "*Sensitive*", "*Complete Care*", "*Total Care*", "*Advanced Total Care*", "*Expert Complete Protection*". By the time I had read the first ten packs, I stood there smiling, not because the products were bad, but I felt that every company believed that adding another claim would make choosing easier! Instead, every new claim quietly asked me another question - "*Do you have sensitive teeth?*" "*Should you care about whitening?*" "*What if Complete Care isn't actually complete?*" "*What exactly is Advanced Protection protecting me from?*" The irony was almost beautiful - the companies were trying to increase confidence, but had accidentally increased 'doubt'! I eventually bought the same toothpaste I had intended to buy during the first ten seconds, not because I had compared every option, but probably because I had become mentally exhausted.

That day I realised something I wish more marketers understood - consumers don't suffer from a lack of information, but from an excess of 'evaluation'.

For decades, marketing has behaved as though every additional piece of information improves the buying decision. And so, we have added more features, more benefits, more comparisons, more variants, more specifications, more choices, and more proof, with the assumption that informed consumers make better decisions.

Today, I am beginning to believe the opposite! I am convinced that consumers make faster decisions when they stop feeling responsible for analysing everything! Think about how much evaluating an ordinary person does before lunch - which message deserves a reply, which route

has less traffic, which meeting matters most, which notification can wait, which streaming platform to watch, which restaurant to order from, which payment app to use, or which headline is worth reading - the modern brain is making hundreds of tiny judgements before the working day is even half over! Then marketers arrive with another request - "*Please evaluate my product carefully*". Most consumers quietly reply - "*Not today*". This is one of the reasons I believe we have misunderstood simplicity. Most people think simplicity means fewer features, cleaner packaging, and shorter communication. See, those things certainly help, but behavioural simplicity is something much deeper - it is the deliberate 'removal' of evaluation!

Imagine two restaurants - the first hands you a menu containing 186 dishes - every cuisine imaginable and every possible variation. The second restaurant has fifteen carefully selected dishes - the chef smiles and says - "*Everything here is our speciality*". *Where does your confidence appear first?* The answer is evident, not because one menu is objectively better, but because one menu quietly says - "*We've already done the difficult thinking for you*".

The strongest brands behave exactly like that second restaurant - they edit before the consumer arrives, they remove before the consumer notices, they decide before the consumer has to! That is not limiting choice, but more importantly 'protecting' energy!

I have often asked product managers - "*Which decision can your customer stop making because your product exists?*" Notice that I didn't ask - "*What problem does your product solve?*" Problems are obvious, but decisions are expensive!

A navigation app does not merely help you reach a destination, but removes the daily decision of which route to trust. A music streaming service does not simply provide songs, but removes the burden of building a library from scratch. A meal subscription is not selling food alone, but quietly removing hundreds of tiny conversations that begin with - "*What should we cook tonight?*" All such greatest products have helped in reducing invisible labour of 'thinking' for the consumer.

This has enormous implications for product strategy, because companies frequently add features because they can, while consumers often reject products because they don't want to learn.

Over my career, I have seen beautifully engineered products fail because the first experience felt like orientation - every button had a purpose and every feature had logic. Every capability impressed the engineering team, while the consumer simply wanted to make coffee, or switch on the air conditioner, or just connect a speaker! See, technology has reached a point where capability is no longer the biggest competitive advantage, but consumer 'comprehension' surely is! The company that requires the least explanation increasingly wins.

Look around your own home - the products you use most frequently probably have something in common - you rarely think about using them! That is not an accident, but 'exceptional' design. Remember, the highest compliment a consumer can give a product is not - "*This has amazing features*", but - "*I never had to read the manual*".

That sentence should make every marketer smile, because the consumer has just described 'frictionless' understanding.

Sadly, as marketers, we have become obsessed with creating differentiation. Sometimes differentiation comes from addition, but I must advise increasingly, it will come from subtraction - removing one feature, removing one decision, removing one comparison, removing one moment of uncertainty - every 'removal' quietly accelerates buying.

If there is one question I want every founder, marketer and product leader to ask before launching anything - "*Where is my customer doing unnecessary thinking?*" Don't begin with advertising, pricing, distribution, but begin with answering the above question - because every unnecessary thought delays action, every delayed action invites doubt, and every doubt invites comparison. And comparison is where many perfectly good products quietly lose customers they had already convinced.

The companies that define the next decade will not necessarily build smarter consumers, but will build smarter 'environments'. Environments where buying feels natural because thinking has already

been respectfully done on the consumer's behalf! That is not manipulation, but is ‘service’.

Today, attention is scarce, time is fragmented and mental energy has become one of the world's most valuable resources, and so helping people think less has become one of the most valuable products any company can ever create.

The Confidence Shortcut

One of the most interesting observations I have made over last decade is that consumers rarely ask the question marketers think they ask! We assume they stand in front of a shelf wondering - "*Which product is the best?*"

Most of the time, that isn't the real question! The real question is much quieter - "*Which choice is least likely to make me regret it?*"

This is how we should think about product strategy - buying is rarely a search for perfection, but a search for 'confidence'.

A few months ago, I was helping my son buy a laptop. Within fifteen minutes we had narrowed the options to four models. On paper, the differences were almost laughably small - one had a slightly brighter display, another had marginally better battery life, a third had a newer processor, and the fourth was recommended by almost every review we read.

After nearly an hour of discussion, my son looked at me and said, "*Which one would you buy?*" He wasn't asking because I knew more about processors, but was asking because he wanted to 'borrow' confidence! And that is exactly what consumers do every day!

When someone buys the "*Editor's Choice*" product, they are borrowing confidence; when they order the restaurant's "*Chef's Special*", they are borrowing confidence; when they select the "*Most Popular*" plan on a software website, or when they ask a salesperson, "*What do most people buy?*" they are borrowing confidence - the consumer still makes the decision, but no longer feel alone while making it!

For decades, we marketers have believed that giving consumers more options demonstrates customer focus, but today, excessive choice often demonstrates a lack of leadership.

Imagine entering an ice cream store with fifty flavours. At first, it sounds wonderful, but five minutes later, people begin reading descriptions and get lost in them! Now imagine another store with twelve flavours, each one carefully selected, clearly explained and confidently recommended. *Which experience feels easier?* The first offers more freedom, while the second offers more certainty. Please note, consumers frequently mistake certainty for quality. That is why thoughtful curation has become one of the strongest competitive advantages in modern marketing!

Great brands edit before customers evaluate, and this is where defaults become surprisingly powerful. Many marketers think of defaults as interface decisions, but I must say they are psychological 'commitments'.

A default communicates something subtle - "*If you aren't sure, this is probably the right place to begin*". See, how reassuring that feels! Not because the brand is forcing a decision, but because it is reducing the fear of making the wrong one!

The same principle applies to recommendations, and the best ones are not designed to increase average order value, but to reduce mental effort.

Note that a recommendation should feel like advice from someone who genuinely understands the customer's situation, and not a desperate attempt to sell one more product. Consumers recognise the difference immediately.

The same thinking explains why intelligent bundling works so well. Companies often bundle products to increase revenue, but consumers buy bundles for a completely different reason - bundles reduce planning!

Think about a new parent shopping for a newborn. The parent doesn't necessarily know every item that will be needed during the first month, and so a thoughtfully assembled starter kit removes dozens of tiny decisions. The bundle is not merely a collection of products, but a collection of removed uncertainties.

The same principle appears in - a travel kit, a home office setup, a beginner's photography package, a skincare routine, or a cricket starter set for children.

The value is rarely the discount, but is that someone has already connected the dots!

This is why, I advise product managers to ask - "*How many decisions can we respectfully remove?*" instead of - "*How many options should we give the customer?*" I suggest that you ask the right question to make better products, better websites, better stores, better sales conversations and even better innovation!

I think, AI will make this philosophy even more valuable. Many marketers assume AI will produce infinite personalisation and therefore infinite choice, while I believe the opposite will become more important!

The best AI will quietly remove unnecessary options, and will learn enough about the consumer to present three relevant choices instead of thirty!

Not because technology is limiting freedom, but because intelligence is increasingly measured by what it chooses not to show!

That is the future of recommendation - not more information, but better judgement.

Remember, consumers don't expect brands to make every decision on their behalf, but they do expect brands to make difficult decisions feel easier!

It requires confidence without arrogance, guidance without pressure, and direction without manipulation - the companies that master this balance will build something much stronger than convenience - they will build trust, because every time a customer feels "*That was easier than I expected*", they are not just completing a purchase, but quietly giving the brand permission to guide them again.

The Cost of Explaining

One of my favourite hobbies is standing quietly inside electronics stores, and watching people trying to understand them! A young couple is comparing two washing machines, an elderly gentleman is trying to choose between three smart televisions, a college student is looking at wireless earbuds. Then a salesperson walks over, and then something almost magical happens - for the next eight minutes, the customer receives an education - processor, AI mode, dual inverter technology, adaptive sensing, dynamic calibration, intelligent optimisation, seamless connectivity, quantum enhancement, and neural processing! By the end of the explanation, everyone has learned several impressive words, but still, nobody looks more confident!

That scene repeats itself across industries - a skincare brand explains seventeen ingredients, a financial service explains twelve investment options, a software company explains twelve features, or a health supplement lists thirty benefits. Companies often mistake explanation for persuasion, but consumers rarely do!

See, the human brain is constantly asking a different question - "*Can I understand this quickly enough to feel comfortable buying it?*" and not - "*Can I understand everything?*" None of us understands every technology inside our smartphones; very few people understand how modern cars actually work; and almost nobody can explain how a payment reaches another bank account in three seconds! Yet we use these products every day! Understanding every detail was never the requirement, but understanding enough to feel confident was!

That is where communication becomes one of the most misunderstood disciplines in marketing. Most organisations believe communication exists to transfer information, but I think its primary purpose is to transfer 'confidence', and those are not the same thing.

Note that information increases knowledge, while confidence increases 'action'. A product brochure can contain perfect information and still fail commercially if consumers leave feeling uncertain. Meanwhile, another brand may communicate only three ideas, yet those three ideas remove the biggest doubts in the customer's mind.

This is why I believe marketers should stop asking - "*What else should we tell consumers?*", and instead ask - "*What is the one thing consumers absolutely must understand before they feel comfortable buying?*" Everything else is secondary!

Recently, I advised a consumer appliance company - the engineering team proudly showed me a product presentation with nearly forty slides - every feature had been documented, every improvement explained, every technical achievement celebrated. The work was truly detailed.

Then on my request, we invited some existing customers to the office, showed them the deck, and asked - "*What makes this product different?*" One of them smiled and politely replied - "*I know it is supposed to be better".*

That was all she remembered! Forty slides had been reduced to one uncertain sentence! See, consumer memory has priorities, and so people remember conclusions, not explanations!

That insight changed the brand's communication completely, and now instead of beginning with technology, we began with one obvious improvement the customer could immediately recognise. The technology still mattered, but it became supporting evidence rather than the headline. Sales conversations became shorter, and so customer confidence increased, resulting in improved conversions. Nothing had changed inside the product, but I had just helped them change the order in which the brain received information!

This is where I think many marketers underestimate clarity!

See, clarity is not about using fewer words, but about removing competing thoughts - every message should have one destination!

The consumer should never wonder - "*What exactly are they trying to tell me?*", because that uncertainty is expensive. Every additional interpretation creates another decision, and that requires energy.

The strongest communicators understand that attention is fragile, and so they don't ask consumers to assemble the message themselves but do the assembly before communication begins.

This also changes how we think about product names, feature labels, package claims, website headlines, advertising, and retail displays. Every one of them should answer - "*What am I really looking at?*" If that answer takes too long, the opportunity begins to disappear!

With artificial Intelligence clarity is even more valuable, and consumers are comparing products faster than ever before. AI assistants are summarising features, comparison tools are removing information asymmetry, and search engines are answering technical questions instantly.

The organisations that wish to succeed will communicate like exceptional teachers, not because they know the most, but because they make difficult ideas feel surprisingly obvious!

If you are building a brand today, you should establish one rule before approving any campaign, package or website - if a consumer cannot explain the product to a friend after thirty seconds, the communication is not yet finished. Because the greatest compliment a customer can give a brand is not - "*They told me everything*", but - "*I understood it immediately*".

In the coming decade, information will become abundant, and hence clarity will become scarce, and like everything scarce, it will become extraordinarily valuable.

The Last Three Percent

One of the biggest myths in business is that salespeople sell!

I don't believe they do, and at least not in the way we have traditionally imagined. Think about your own purchases over the last few years. *How many were truly sold to you?* Not introduced, or recommended, or advertised, but actually sold. Probably very few!

By the time you entered the store, clicked on the product page or spoke to the salesperson, you had already completed almost ninety-seven percent of the journey - you knew the category, had compared alternatives, had watched reviews, had asked friends, had imagined owning the product, and had even decided how you would justify the purchase to your spouse, your parents or, in many cases, your own conscience! The decision was almost complete, and only one small doubt remained.

See, modern selling is no longer about creating conviction, but about discovering that last remaining doubt and quietly removing it!

That doubt is rarely the same for every consumer - one customer worries about reliability, another worries about installation, someone else worries about maintenance, another wonders whether a newer model is about to be launched, a parent worries whether the product is safe, a business buyer worries about after-sales support, and a first-time buyer worries about making an expensive mistake. See, the product may be identical, while the hesitation is not! This is why I believe sales enablement has been misunderstood for years.

Companies spend enormous amounts of time teaching sales teams what to say. Instead, I think they should spend far more time teaching them what uncertainty to look for.

Recently, I was consulting for a premium consumer durable brand, that had invested heavily in training - the sales teams knew every technical

specification, every product comparison, every feature, every competitive advantage, yet conversions varied dramatically from one showroom to another! When I started observing customer conversations instead of measuring sales reports, the answer became obvious - a few highest-performing salespeople did something surprisingly simple - they spoke less, listened longer, and within the first few minutes, they had already identified the customer's real hesitation. Everything that followed became focused - the conversation felt shorter, the customer felt understood, and the purchase felt easier. On the other hand, the weaker performers followed the brochure!

That insight changed the training process completely, and so instead of organising sessions around products, I organised them around 'hesitation'.

What should you do when the customer fears buying the wrong size? What should you do when the customer is comparing premium versus value? What should you do when the customer is buying the category for the first time? What should you do when two family members disagree? The discussion moved away from selling, towards decision-making. That is where, I believe, sales creates its greatest value.

The same philosophy applies far beyond physical retail - an e-commerce product page is a salesperson, a chatbot is a salesperson, an AI shopping assistant is a salesperson, a review section is a salesperson, a comparison table is a salesperson, and even your packaging becomes a salesperson when it sits on a retail shelf. Every one of them has exactly the same responsibility - remove uncertainty.

This is why, I believe, the future of sales enablement is not about giving channels more information, but giving them better 'judgement'!

Retail partners should know the three doubts that stop customers most often, while the customer support teams should know how to reassure without overwhelming. Similarly, marketplace listings should answer the questions consumers hesitate to ask, and AI assistants should recognise uncertainty before consumers articulate it - every selling environment should behave like a trusted 'guide' rather than an enthusiastic persuader.

I also suggest that marketing should work differently with sales. Marketing often celebrates awareness, while sales experiences hesitation. Marketing understands aspiration, while sales encounters anxiety. One sees the dream, while the other sees the final obstacle. Neither can succeed without the other.

The strongest organisations therefore build a continuous learning loop - sales teams don't merely report numbers, but they report 'hesitation' - every objection becomes product insight, every repeated question becomes communication insight, every abandoned purchase becomes design insight - and that information flows back into product development, marketing, packaging and customer experience. The company becomes progressively easier to buy from, and that's exactly what true sales enablement is!

Not just better scripts, but a smarter organisation.

So, please ask every salesperson one question at the end of every week – *"What was the last question customers asked before they decided to buy?"* The answer to that question would probably improve my product, my communication and my marketing far more than another dashboard full of sales numbers!

Always remember, sales lives at the edge of the 'decision', hears the hesitation that no survey captures, and also sees the uncertainty that no analytics platform measures. Hidden inside those final few seconds is where remarkable growth often begins!

The companies that succeed in the next few years will not build better sales teams simply because they know more, but will build better sales teams because they understand one timeless truth - consumers rarely need one more reason to buy, but definitely need one less reason to hesitate.

15.
Engineer Social Proof

One Sunday morning, I decided to take a long walk in Cubbon Park, Bangalore, and about halfway through the walk, I noticed something curious - a young man had stopped near a large banyan tree and was looking up into the branches. Within a minute, another person stopped. Then another. Then a family. Then even a cyclist got off his bicycle, and within five minutes, nearly thirty people were standing there, all staring into the same tree. Naturally, I joined them! I looked up with complete seriousness, determined not to be the only person who seemed clueless, and for almost thirty seconds, I searched every branch - a rare bird perhaps, a monkey, a beehive, maybe even a snake, but nothing!

Finally, I asked the gentleman standing next to me, "*What are we looking at?*" He smiled rather sheepishly - "*I don't know. I came because everyone else had stopped*". We both laughed!

A few more people arrived, and one of them confidently pointed towards the top of the tree. Immediately, everyone adjusted their gaze in that direction, including me. Still nothing!

Eventually, I asked the original young man - "*What was there?*" He looked genuinely surprised and said - "*My drone got stuck in the tree*".

That was it! The mystery was over!

People smiled, shook their heads and quietly walked away.

As I continued my walk, I realised I had just witnessed one of the oldest human behaviours playing out in the middle of a park! None of us had stopped because we possessed information, but because other people had already stopped. The crowd itself had become evidence that something was worth noticing!

That morning had nothing to do with marketing, yet it explained marketing beautifully! Consumers rarely begin with certainty, but begin by looking 'sideways'. *Who else bought it? Who else is using it? Who else trusts it? Who else believes it is worth their time?*

Long before consumers believe brands, they observe people, and when enough people move in one direction, 'belief' quietly begins to feel like common sense.

That invisible force is one of the most powerful growth engines in modern business. Because it doesn't just influence buying, it also legitimises it!

I have written this chapter about understanding how that happens, why some products become conversations while others remain advertisements, and how the strongest brands engineer trust without ever appearing to ask for it.

Borrowed Belief

I was standing outside a restaurant in Delhi with a friend - we had finished a meeting, it was well past lunchtime, and both of us were hungry enough to agree on almost anything. The road offered plenty of choices - there was a beautifully designed café with almost no customers, and next to it was a much older restaurant that looked as though its interior had not been updated since decades - plastic chairs, faded signboard, no dramatic lighting, nothing that would ever win a design award - yet people were waiting outside.

I looked at my friend and asked, "*Which one?*" and he pointed at the crowded restaurant without thinking! I smiled and asked the obvious question - "*But what if the food is actually better in the empty one?*" He laughed - "*Maybe it is*", and then he said - "*If nobody is eating there, I don't want to be the first person to find out*".

That sentence has nothing to do with restaurants, but it explains one of the strongest forces in consumer behaviour - human beings are not only looking for information, but looking for reassurance that somebody else has already survived the decision. That sounds humorous, but is also remarkably true!

Think about how we buy today - before booking a hotel, we read reviews; before watching a series, we ask friends; before buying headphones, we watch strangers on YouTube; before choosing a doctor, we search patient experiences; before trying a new café, we check photographs posted by people we have never met - notice something very interesting - we already have enough information, the product page explains the features, the website explains the specifications, the company explains the benefits - yet we continue searching!

Why? Because information answers one question - "*What does the product claim to be?*", but other people answer a far more important one - "*What actually happened after someone bought it?*"

That difference has become the foundation of modern consumer psychology. For decades, companies tried to reduce uncertainty by speaking louder - bigger campaigns, bigger promises, and bigger endorsements, and consumers quietly moved in the opposite direction! They began trusting ordinary people!

Not because ordinary people are always correct, but because they have no obligation to impress us! A company is expected to say its product is excellent, but a customer has earned the right to be disappointed. That possibility makes the praise 'believable'.

I often tell founders that every advertisement begins with a disadvantage - the consumer already knows you paid for it. A customer recommendation begins with an advantage - the consumer assumes it was voluntary.

See, voluntary behaviour has extraordinary persuasive power, and this is why I increasingly believe social proof is misunderstood!

Most marketers think it is something you collect - ratings, reviews, testimonials, or case studies, but I think social proof is something you 'design'.

The question is not - "*How do we get more reviews?*", but the better question is - "*What kind of product experience naturally makes people feel like talking?*"

Imagine two products - the first performs exactly as expected, the customer is satisfied, and life continues. The second solves one annoying problem so elegantly that the customer immediately messages a friend - "*You're not going to believe this*".

One has better marketing, but the other created a story worth repeating!

I have seen this happen repeatedly - a beautifully designed travel organiser that makes airport security surprisingly easy; a kitchen appliance that cuts preparation time in half; a notebook whose pages wipe clean with water; a children's lunchbox that genuinely keeps food warm until school ends - the products themselves become 'conversation' starters!

Not because the marketing department instructed consumers to share them, but because the experience quietly demanded to be shared!

Also, please note engineered social proof does not begin on Instagram. No!

It instead begins in product development! *Why do consumers often pay attention to small behavioural signals that companies completely overlook?*

A crowded café, a waiting list for a new restaurant, a colleague carrying a particular backpack, the same running shoes appearing on different people over several weeks, the same coffee machine appearing in three different offices - none of these are formal recommendations, but 'observations'.

Remember, observations always feel honest, because the human brain has always learned by watching other humans. Technology has not changed that instinct, but has simply multiplied the number of people we can observe every day.

If you are planning to launch a consumer brand, I would suggest that you spend far less time asking - "*How do we convince people that our product is good?*" and would instead ask - "*What experience can we create that people cannot resist mentioning?*"

See, trust is no longer built when the company speaks, but when customers unknowingly become evidence. That is the real purpose of social proof - not to increase credibility, but to reduce courage - the consumer should never feel like the first person crossing the bridge, and instead feel that thousands of people have already crossed safely, smiled at the other side, and quietly invited them to follow!

That is when belief becomes effortless, and in modern markets, effortless belief is one of the rarest and most valuable assets a brand can ever own.

The Believability Network

For years, marketers have been obsessed with one question - "*Which influencer should we work with?*" I think we are asking the wrong question, and a better question is - "*Who can make our product feel believable?*"

A few years ago, a founder proudly told me that his company had signed one of India's biggest digital creators. The campaign looked spectacular - millions of views, hundreds of thousands of likes, and the numbers were impossible to ignore. But, three months later, sales had barely moved!

Around the same time, I was advising another consumer brand with a marketing budget that was almost embarrassingly small - they couldn't afford celebrities, and couldn't afford the biggest creators. Instead, something interesting happened - a nutritionist began recommending the product to her patients; a few running coaches started using it; a handful of café owners stocked it; food bloggers cooked with it; customers posted recipes; parents packed it into children's lunchboxes; and a chef casually mentioned it in a YouTube video without making it the hero of the conversation.

No single person changed the business, but together, they transformed it!

See, marketing has traditionally searched for one 'loud' voice, while today consumers increasingly trust a thousand 'quiet' ones, because belief grows differently from awareness. Remember, awareness can be created by one spectacular campaign, but belief is accumulated, and arrives with small observations - a friend recommends it, a colleague uses it, a creator explains it, a customer photographs it, a restaurant serves it, a doctor mentions it, a neighbour buys it - none of these moments is decisive, but collectively they become overwhelming.

This is why I believe we have entered the age of the 'believability' network.

Every person who talks about your product performs a different psychological role - the famous creator introduces, the expert explains, the enthusiast demonstrates, the customer validates, the friend normalises, the retailer reassures, the community sustains. Yet, most brands mistakenly expect one influencer to perform every one of these jobs. That rarely happens!

Remember, trust is always layered - a celebrity may create curiosity, an expert creates confidence, a customer creates relatability, a friend creates permission - each one solves a different uncertainty inside the consumer's mind. That means your marketing should never depend on one voice, but should resemble an orchestra - different instruments, with different timing, playing one melody!

I have often asked founders to perform a simple exercise - forget follower counts for a moment, and instead, draw every person who naturally talks about your category. The list becomes surprisingly long - professionals, teachers, parents, collectors, retailers, reviewers, repair technicians, chefs, athletes, students, early adopters, communities.

Remember, every one of them possesses a different kind of credibility, and the strongest brands learn how to 'activate' each layer. Note that I didn't say *"pay"*, I said *"activate"*, simply because credibility is earned before it is amplified.

That brings me to a misbelief regarding user-generated content - many companies treat UGC as free advertising. Consumers don't!

Consumers create content for completely different reasons, and they post because something delighted them, or they discovered something useful, or they solved a problem, or they felt proud, or they wanted to help someone else, or sometimes, they simply wanted to tell a good story.

Remember, nobody wakes up hoping to create marketing material for your company, but hoping to express themselves.

The brands that understand this ask - "*What experience would naturally make somebody want to share this with another human being?*" That question changes product design, packaging, unboxing, service, customer

support, and retail experience - every interaction becomes an opportunity to create a story instead of merely completing a transaction.

I believe that the smart marketing folks will not measure campaigns alone, but will measure 'conversations'. *How many new stories entered the world this week because our product exists?*

AI will make this even more important - machines will soon generate advertisements that look flawless, and every brand will have beautiful videos, perfect images, and excellent copy. Ironically, as artificial content becomes abundant, human behaviour will become even more valuable - a slightly imperfect photograph taken by a real customer may carry more persuasive power than an expensive studio campaign; a casual recommendation from a trusted professional may outperform a celebrity endorsement; a genuine experience will increasingly become the rarest form of media.

If you are working on building a strong brand today, stop asking - "*Who is our influencer?*", and rather ask - "*How many different kinds of believers does our brand have?*"

See, while influence creates attention, it is belief that creates momentum.

And momentum is never built by one famous voice, but when thousands of different people, for thousands of different reasons, quietly arrive at the same conclusion - "*This product is worth talking about*".

That is the moment marketing stops feeling like marketing, and starts feeling like culture.

The Second Product

I have developed a shopping habit that surprises many people - whenever I am about to buy something 'expensive', I almost never begin with the product description. I begin with the one-star reviews!

The product page tells me what the company hopes the product will become, while the reviews tell me what the product actually became after entering people's lives, and those are two very different realities.

I suspect millions of consumers now shop exactly the same way.

Think about your own behaviour - *When was the last time you bought a washing machine, a pair of running shoes, a coffee machine, luggage, headphones or even a restaurant meal without looking at reviews?*

More interestingly, think about how you read those reviews - very few people start from the top and read everything, instead we hunt, we search for patterns! If fifty people independently praise the battery life, we believe it; if thirty people complain about installation, we notice it; if one person says the product exploded while making tea, we politely assume they probably had an unusual morning! See, how consumers are not counting reviews, but looking for 'consistency'. That observation completely changes how I think about review systems - reviews are not pieces of content, but are pattern-recognition engines! The consumer is quietly asking - "*What keeps happening after people buy this?*" and not - "*What does this company promise?*" The market has moved beyond promises, and now looks for repeated outcomes.

That is why I believe reviews have become the second version of the product, the first being the one designed by the company's engineers. Both influence sales, but most of the times the second influences sales even more!

A few years ago, I helped a funder who was building a consumer appliance brand - his product had excellent engineering, customer satisfaction scores were strong, yet online conversion remained lower

than expected. When we stopped analysing ratings and started reading reviews something fascinating emerged - customers loved the product, but they simply weren't describing it in the language that future buyers cared about. The reviews said things like - "*Excellent product*", "*Highly recommended*", "*Very nice*". Perfectly positive, but almost completely useless!

They answered none of the questions a new customer was actually asking - *How noisy is it? Can my parents use it easily? Is installation genuinely simple? Does it still perform well after six months? Will customer service answer the phone?* The product wasn't suffering, but the conversation around the product was. So, instead of asking customers to "*please leave a review*", we redesigned the experience! After a few weeks of ownership, we asked simple questions based on real buying anxieties. *What surprised you most? What were you worried about before buying? What turned out to be easier than expected? Would you buy it again?* We weren't collecting opinions anymore, but documenting experiences. And so, the quality of reviews improved dramatically, and so did conversions! Nothing had changed about the appliance, instead we had simply improved the product's second life!

I can say, this is where many companies misunderstand credibility, and chase perfect ratings. Consumers chase 'believable' ratings - a product with fifty flawless reviews often feels suspicious, while a product with thoughtful praise, a few reasonable criticisms and genuine responses from the company feels human! Remember, even perfection creates doubt, while authenticity always creates confidence.

One of the most damaging habits I see is companies treating reviews as 'reputation' management - deleting criticism, arguing with customers, writing artificial responses, and trying to make the conversation look cleaner than reality. Consumers recognise that immediately! The absence of criticism often feels less trustworthy than criticism itself, because experienced buyers know something very simple - no product is perfect! The interesting question is not whether problems exist, but how consistently the company responds when they do! That response itself becomes social proof!

AI will make review systems even more influential - soon, bots will summarise thousands of reviews into a few sentences before consumers

ever visit your website. That means companies will no longer compete only on ratings, but on recurring themes. If the same strength appears repeatedly, AI will notice, and if the same weakness appears repeatedly, AI will notice that too!

The future therefore belongs to businesses that engineer consistently positive experiences rather than isolated moments of delight - because patterns survive summarisation, while outliers don't.

You must stop thinking of reviews as a marketing activity, and instead treat them as one of the most important product development systems in the company - every review is a design meeting; every repeated compliment is a competitive advantage; every repeated complaint is a product roadmap; and every honest customer is quietly helping you build a better version of the product than you could ever build alone.

The companies that understand this will stop asking - "*How many stars did we receive?*" and will instead ask - "*What story are thousands of customers writing together?*" In the coming decade, consumers will increasingly buy that story before they buy the product itself.

Belong Before You Broadcast

For decades, the formula for launching a consumer product was remarkably straightforward - build the product, create the campaign, book the media, call the influencers, launch, measure, and repeat. That model worked when brands controlled attention, but today, attention belongs to consumers, and more importantly, belief belongs to communities.

I believe that changes the role of go-to-market completely!

A few years ago, a friend invited me to review the launch strategy of a consumer brand. The presentation was impressive – television, digital, outdoor, public relations, influencers, marketplace promotions, retail activation - everything a modern launch was expected to include.

After almost an hour, I asked one question - "*Which community is already waiting for this product?*" No one from the team had the answer, and not because the team had forgotten communities, but because they had assumed communities would appear after the launch. And so, I suggested something different - *What if the launch begins there? What if the first objective is not to reach millions of consumers? What if it is to earn the confidence of a few thousand people who genuinely care about the category?*

I can't ever forget that conversation went for 6 hours and we changed the entire plan! It was decided that instead of launching to everyone at once, we will launch to a handful of communities that already lived with the problem the product was solving.

After identification of these groups, we spent time listening before speaking; invited early users to test the product; encouraged honest criticism instead of rehearsed praise. We then improved the product and the communication with the help of those conversations.

When the official launch finally happened, the campaign was no longer introducing an unfamiliar product, but a product that people had

already been discussing! The launch didn't feel like an announcement, but like the next chapter of a story!

This is where I believe many marketers misunderstand communities.

Communities are not audiences with common interests, but are groups with shared experiences - a runner trusts another runner, a new parent trusts another parent, a photographer trusts another photographer, a gamer trusts another gamer, a chef trusts another chef. Shared experience creates a level of credibility that advertising can never purchase, and that is why communities should never be treated as another media channel, but as 'belief' networks.

The strongest brands understand this instinctively, and so - before they try to become famous, they become useful; before they ask people to buy, they help people learn; before they chase reach, they earn respect.

I always advise businesses that communities should not be the final stage of marketing, but the first stage of product development! The most valuable people inside a community are not those who praise your product, but the ones who improve it!

Remember, every difficult question makes the product stronger, every honest criticism sharpens the positioning, and every suggestion reveals a hidden opportunity. By the time the wider market discovers the product, hundreds of tiny improvements have already taken place. The community has quietly become part of the design team, and that is one of the greatest competitive advantages a young brand can possess.

This implemented, also changes the purpose of campaigns.

Campaigns should no longer attempt to manufacture trust, but should reveal trust that already exists. Imagine the difference - one advertisement says - "*Our product is trusted"*, while the other simply shows thousands of people already using, discussing, modifying and recommending the product.

The first asks for belief, while the second demonstrates it! Consumers have become remarkably good at recognising the difference!

Soon, AI will make authentic communities even more valuable - algorithms will generate beautiful advertisements, write compelling headlines, produce flawless videos - those capabilities will become widely available. What AI cannot manufacture is years of genuine

participation inside a community - it cannot instantly create shared history, or invent authentic relationships, and cannot fabricate collective experience without eventually being exposed.

That means human communities will become one of the few competitive advantages that become stronger, and not weaker, in the age of AI.

So as a marketer, the first question you ask shouldn't be - "*How much media can we afford?*", but - "*Whose trust must we earn before everyone else notices us?*"

Remember, every category already has its believers, experts, enthusiasts, teachers, critics, collectors, and early adopters - win those people first! When they begin speaking voluntarily, campaigns become more effective, retailers become more confident, creators become more interested and customers become less hesitant, and momentum no longer needs to be purchased, but begins to build itself.

That is why I believe the future of go-to-market belongs to brands that stop thinking like broadcasters and start thinking like participants!

Don't enter a market asking for attention, but enter a community intending to contribute! Attention may follow, but trust almost certainly will!

And in the coming decade, trust will remain the only marketing asset that competitors cannot copy overnight.

16.
Price as Signal, Not Barrier

A few years ago, I was travelling through Coorg with a couple of friends. Like every sensible tourist, we eventually stopped at a roadside shop selling honey.

The owner had arranged nearly fifteen bottles on a wooden shelf. Some were priced at ₹250, some at ₹450, and one bottle, sitting quietly in the corner, carried a handwritten tag ₹1,800. Naturally, that was the first bottle everyone picked up! Not to buy, but to inspect. One of my friends looked at the old shopkeeper and asked, almost accusingly, "*What makes this one so expensive?*" The gentleman smiled, he didn't begin talking about bees, didn't mention purity, didn't quote laboratory reports or explain floral sources, but simply said, "*That one is from one season. Once it finishes, I have to wait another year*". Nobody discussed price thereafter.

Something fascinating happened instead, the conversation changed, and nobody was comparing ₹250 with ₹1,800 anymore. We had all started discussing whether waiting an entire year made the honey special. One friend even said, "*Actually, when you think about it, it doesn't sound that expensive*".

Nothing had changed in those thirty seconds - not the bottle, not the honey, not the price, but only the 'meaning' of the price had changed!

As a marketer, on the drive back, I kept thinking about that little shop - the old gentleman had never tried to defend the price, but simply explained the value behind it.

Most companies believe consumers first see the price and then decide whether the product deserves it. I have gradually come to believe the opposite! I believe consumers first try to understand what the price is trying to tell them - *Is this premium? Is this ordinary? Is this rare? Is this trustworthy? Is this overpriced? Is this a bargain?*

The number is merely the ‘messenger’, while the individual interpretation is what shapes the decision!

That is why pricing has never been just about mathematics, but always been about ‘psychology’. A price does much more than determine what consumers pay - it quietly influences what they expect, what they assume and, very often, what they ultimately experience. This chapter is about understanding that hidden language of pricing, because the most successful brands don't simply decide what to charge, but what every price should mean.

The Price Story

One afternoon, I was shopping in a premium mall in Bangalore when I noticed two stores, almost opposite each other, both selling white T-shirts, both claiming exceptional cotton, speaking about craftsmanship, and promising comfort. In one store T-shirt cost ₹799, while in the other it cost ₹7,900. What fascinated me was not the price difference, but the consumer behaviour.

Nobody entered the ₹7,900 store asking - "*Why is this so expensive?*", instead, they entered trying to discover - "*What makes this worth ₹7,900?*"

At the ₹799 store, the opposite happened! People asked - "*Is there any discount?*" "*Will there be a sale next week?*" "*Can I get another colour?*"

Same category, but completely different conversations!

That tells us consumers do not react to numbers, but react to the story those numbers tell! Also, that may be one of the biggest misunderstandings in pricing, you live with!

Most companies believe pricing is a finance decision, but price is one of the strongest communication tools in marketing - long before a consumer touches the product, the price has already started speaking. It quietly says - "*This is probably risky*". "*This is ordinary*". "*This is for everyone*". "*This is a bargain*". "*This is probably reliable*". "*This is premium*". "*This is exclusive*". "*This is not for everyone*". "*This is an investment*".

The product has not yet spoken, but the price already has!

See, price is one of the earliest signals the brain receives. Think about what happens when you are browsing online - you don't begin by reading every specification, but your eyes almost instinctively move towards the price. Not because you have already decided whether you can afford it, but because you are trying to understand what kind of product you are looking at.

Price acts as a shortcut for interpretation - it tells the brain where to position the product before the product has earned that position!

A few years back, I consulted with a consumer appliance brand - the engineering team had genuinely built an outstanding product, marketing agency had created an elegant campaign, the retail experience felt premium, but then, almost at the last moment, someone suggested lowering the launch price dramatically to increase adoption. It sounded sensible - lower price, more buyers, simple! Still, I suggested that we do some prelim consumer research. And as I had expected, people became suspicious, and several participants actually asked - "*If this is really a premium product, why is it cheaper than the others?*" That question completely changed the brand's thinking - the lower price had not increased value, but reduced credibility! The company wasn't losing money because the product was expensive, but because the price and the promise were no longer telling the same story!

That project permanently changed the way the brand thought about pricing.

See, consumers don't evaluate prices in isolation, instead they compare stories - a ₹50 cup of tea at a roadside stall feels expensive, while the same ₹50 inside an airport feels almost invisible! A ₹20 bottle of water in a supermarket feels normal, while the same bottle in a luxury hotel barely gets noticed! Nothing changed about the product, but the context changed the meaning of the price!

That is why pricing can never be separated from positioning - every price creates an expectation, and the experience must fulfil it! Price and product should feel as though they were written by the same author!

This is also why consumers often become emotionally attached to expensive purchases - when someone buys a premium watch, they don't spend the next six months trying to convince others that they paid too much, in fact, quite the opposite! They begin searching for evidence that they made the right decision - they notice the craftsmanship, appreciate the finishing, and admire the details. The higher the investment, the stronger the desire to justify it!

Also note that price doesn't end the psychological journey, instead very often, it begins it. That is why premium brands rarely apologise for

being expensive, and spend their energy making the price feel meaningful!

One of the biggest mistakes I see founders make is asking - "*What is the lowest price consumers will accept?*" I think the better question is - "*What price best expresses who we are?*" Remember, every product has a personality, every brand has an ambition, every customer has an expectation, and price is where those three meet. If they disagree, confusion begins, but if they align, confidence follows!

AI has made price interpretation even more fascinating, today, every consumer can compare prices instantly, every marketplace expose alternatives within seconds, every AI assistant identifies cheaper substitutes. Ironically, this means the cheapest product will not automatically become the winner. The products that will succeed are those whose prices carry the clearest meaning. Consumers will increasingly ask - "*Why does this deserve to cost more?*" The brands with convincing answers will continue to command premiums, while the rest will slowly become commodities.

I suggest you spend as much time designing the meaning of the price as deciding the amount itself, because consumers rarely remember exact prices, but always remember how those prices made them feel - fair, premium, exclusive, accessible, luxurious, or questionable. Those feelings remain long after the number has been forgotten!

In the coming years, pricing will become less about arithmetic and more about psychology, because the most successful brands will never compete on who charges the least, but on who communicates value most clearly before the consumer even picks up the product.

The Memory Price

Many years ago, while working with a consumer durable brand, one festive season sales were slower than expected, and the obvious solution appeared - run an aggressive promotion, increase the discount, and push inventory. The numbers looked wonderful, retailers were delighted, and consumers also responded immediately. The quarter ended with applause!

But, three months later, the applause disappeared, and sales slowed again. The sales team suggested another promotion, and retailers started asking when the next offer would arrive. Consumers started postponing purchases because they had quietly learnt something - "*If I wait a little longer, the discount will return*". Nothing had changed about the product, but everything had changed about the customer's memory. That was the day the brand realised that it had not trained consumers to buy, but to 'wait'.

That may be the biggest hidden cost of discounting - companies believe they are changing today's behaviour, but in reality, they are rewriting tomorrow's expectations. Every promotion leaves behind a psychological residue, and consumers rarely remember the exact amount they paid, but they remember the pattern - "*This brand is always on sale*". "*This is worth waiting for*". "*This product never sells at full price*". "*This is probably overpriced*".

Those memories become future pricing inside the customer's mind!

That is why I have gradually stopped thinking of discounts as pricing tools. They, instead, are learning tools - every discount teaches the market something. The question is - "*What exactly are you teaching?*"

Take two fashion brands - one runs a 'Flat 50% Off' campaign every six weeks, while the other almost never discounts, but once a year introduces a carefully planned members-only event with limited quantities and exclusive designs. Both increase sales, but they educate

consumers very differently. The first teaches - "*Waiting is rewarded*", while the second teaches - "*Participation is rewarded*". One creates price sensitivity, while the other creates 'belonging'!

This is why I believe marketers should stop asking - "*How much discount should we give?*", and instead ask - "*What behaviour are we trying to create?*"

See, discounts can encourage many different behaviours - trial, stocking up, store visits, app downloads, membership, repeat purchase, category entry, and inventory clearance - every objective requires a different pricing strategy. Yet many businesses use exactly the same discount for completely different problems. That is not strategy, but a habit, and one of the most expensive one for any business!

I have often noticed another interesting phenomenon - consumers rarely become loyal to discounts, instead they become loyal to whoever discounts next! Think about quick commerce - one app gives ₹100 off, while another offers free delivery, a third offers cashback - consumers move effortlessly between them. The discount has increased transactions, but not increased attachment or loyalty.

See, Price promotions are exceptionally good at accelerating decisions, but remarkably poor at building preference. Genuine preference has to come the product, the experience, the convenience, the identity, and the trust. Discounts should amplify those strengths, but never replace them!

This is where premium brands behave differently - the smartest premium companies don't avoid incentives, but they redesign them. Instead of reducing the price, they increase the experience - complimentary personalisation, limited editions, exclusive access, extended warranties, private previews, members-only collections. The customer still feels rewarded, and the product's perceived value remains intact. The conversation shifts from - "*I saved money*", to - *"I received something special"*, and that is a far healthier memory to build!

Today AI is making pricing discipline even more important – consumers increasingly receive alerts the moment prices fall, and soon price-tracking tools will become invisible assistants because historical pricing will be available instantly - that means every discount will leave a stronger digital footprint than it does today! Companies will no longer

compete only against competitors, but will compete against their own pricing history!

That should make every marketer think carefully before approving the next promotion! I would insist that you ask this question before your discount reaches the market - "*When this promotion ends, what will the customer believe our product is worth?*"

Remember, the future of pricing is not decided during the sale, but after it! Intelligent brands will certainly know how to create demand through promotions, but the truly exceptional ones will know something even more valuable - how to increase sales today without teaching customers to expect lower prices tomorrow. That is where great pricing stops being arithmetic, and becomes behavioural design.

The Power of Being Selective

One of the most interesting conversations I had was with the founder of a young premium consumer brand. He looked worried, and said - "*We need to grow faster*", he said. "*So, what's the plan?*" I asked.

"*We're thinking of lowering prices. That should increase volumes*". It sounded perfectly logical, but was also exactly the wrong move!

So, I asked him another question - "*Why did your first customers buy you?*" He smiled - "*Because we were different*".

So, I asked - "*And if everyone starts buying you?*" His smile disappeared, and that silence explained the entire problem.

Many companies believe premium is a pricing strategy. No, it's not!

Premium is an 'admission' strategy - the consumer is not paying only for the product, but also paying for the 'feeling' that the product has been 'selective' about whom it chooses.

Think about the places people proudly talk about - the restaurant that is impossible to get into, the waiting list for a new electric car, the limited-edition sneakers that disappear within minutes, the boutique hotel with only twelve rooms, the café that refuses to open fifty outlets despite constant demand - notice that scarcity is not creating desire by reducing supply alone, but it is increasing 'meaning'.

The product quietly tells the consumer - "*Owning me says something*", and that is where premium truly begins!

For years, marketers have been taught that growth means reaching more people, and that is certainly true for many categories, but premium brands must play a different game - they are not trying to become visible to everyone, but to become meaningful to the 'right' people.

I was advising a speciality tea company - the founders were under pressure to enter every retail outlet they could find - more stores meant more sales, at least on paper! Instead, we took a different route - we

chose fewer stores, but chose the right ones - inside boutique hotels, independent cafés, premium bookstores, airport lounges, and curated gourmet retailers.

The objective wasn't distribution, but 'context' - every place where the tea appeared quietly reinforced the same message - "*This belongs here*".

The product hadn't changed, but its surroundings had!

Consumers interpreted that as 'quality'. Not because anybody told them, but because the environment whispered it!

So, remember - premium brands are judged as much by where they refuse to appear as by where they do.

See, every sales team wants another retailer, every distributor wants another market, every quarter demands more volume, and yet every new point of availability asks another question - "*Will this increase revenue while quietly reducing meaning?*" Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes it is dangerously yes! This is why scarcity is frequently misunderstood!

Scarcity is not about making products difficult to buy, because artificial scarcity is usually transparent and consumers recognise it immediately.

On the other hand, real scarcity comes from discipline - limited production because craftsmanship genuinely requires time, limited editions because creativity deserves renewal, carefully selected retail because experience matters, selective collaborations because partnerships define perception.

The strongest premium brands never apologise for saying no, because every "*no*" strengthens a future "*yes*".

Storytelling plays an equally important role - most companies tell stories about themselves, but premium brands tell stories about 'standards'. They rarely say - "*Look how successful we are*", instead they quietly communicate - "*This is why we refused to compromise*". Consumers don't admire perfection, but admire conviction!

That is why some of the world's most respected premium brands are surprisingly boring in their communication - no dramatic offers, or loud claims, or desperate promotions, or constant reminders.

Remember, confidence rarely shouts! It behaves as though it has already been chosen!

There is another lesson that I believe marketers often overlook - premium customers are not buying superiority alone, but they are also buying 'judgement'. When somebody chooses a premium chef's knife, they are saying - "*I care about cooking enough to notice the difference*". When someone buys a handcrafted notebook, they are saying - "*Details matter to me*". When someone serves a rare tea to guests, they are saying - "*I have taste*". The product becomes evidence of 'discernment'.

That is why premium positioning should never begin with price, but should always begin with 'values'. *What standards does this brand refuse to compromise? What kind of customer naturally appreciates those standards? What behaviours reinforce those standards after the purchase?*

Price simply becomes the final expression of those answers.

Premium brands don't survive because they possess better features alone, but because they possess stronger meaning! Meaning cannot be copied by reducing the price, because it is accumulated through consistency, restraint, and through careful choices made over many years.

I always ask my team one question before discussing pricing - "*What are we willing to deliberately leave behind in order to protect what we stand for?*"

Because I believe that premium is never built by adding everything, but by refusing many things - refusing unnecessary discounts, inappropriate partnerships, wrong channels, and refusing to chase every customer!

Consumers may never know every decision you refused to make, but they will feel the result. And that feeling is what allows a product to command a premium long after competitors have started competing on price.

Remember, the brands that endure are not the ones that become available to everyone, but the ones that remain worth aspiring to.

The Value Chain

A few years ago, I was invited to help a company whose sales had suddenly stopped growing. The first meeting was fascinating - their finance team believed prices were too low, marketing believed the brand needed a bigger campaign, sales believed the products were overpriced, the product team wanted more features, and customer service wanted faster deliveries.

Everyone had a different diagnosis, everyone was partly right, and everyone was also missing the real problem!

I remember, after listening for almost the entire day, I drew a straight line across the whiteboard, at one end, I wrote - "*What we promise*", and at the other end, I wrote "*What the customer experiences*". Then I asked the room a simple question - "*How many different departments influence everything that happens between these two points?*" The answers came quickly - product, design, manufacturing, pricing, marketing, sales, distribution, retail, customer support, technology, operations. Exactly!

So why were we trying to solve a revenue problem by changing only one of them?

'Revenue' is one of the most misunderstood words in business, and most organisations think revenue is an outcome of selling more units or increasing prices. I think otherwise, I feel revenue is the cumulative result of hundreds of tiny decisions made across the company.

A designer chooses a material that makes the product feel more premium, or the pricing team decides not to chase an unnecessary discount, or the marketing positions the product with confidence instead of exaggeration, or the sales explains value instead of negotiating only on price, or the customer support solves a problem so well that the buyer recommends the brand, or finance protects margins that allow the company to continue investing in quality - every one of

these decisions adds a few drops of value, and revenue is simply where all those drops eventually collect!

That is why I have never liked discussions where pricing is separated from branding, or branding is separated from product, or product is separated from sales - consumers never experience those separations, instead they experience one continuous judgement - "*Was this worth what I paid?*"

Think about two coffee brands charging exactly the same price. One is beautifully packaged, consistently available, served by knowledgeable staff and associated with thoughtful storytelling, while the other appears on random shelves, has inconsistent quality, confusing communication and retailers who immediately offer discounts.

The price is identical, but the revenue potential isn't! Because one brand has created confidence long before the consumer reaches the cash counter, while the other begins negotiating after the consumer has already started doubting - that difference has nothing to do with numbers, but it's about alignment.

I see organisations allowing every function to optimise its own objective - finance protects costs, marketing chases reach, sales chases volume, product chases innovation, operations chase efficiency - each objective makes sense on its own, but together, they often produce confusion! It's a big mistake.

Imagine a premium product supported by aggressive discounting, or a value product advertised like a luxury brand, or a beautifully designed product sold through retail environments that communicate the exact opposite - consumers notice these contradictions instantly! They may not articulate them, but they feel them! And whenever consumers feel inconsistency, value begins to leak!

I often tell leadership teams that every business should periodically conduct a 'value' alignment audit. Ask the same question across every department - "*What promise are we asking the customer to believe?*" The answers should sound remarkably similar - if product talks about craftsmanship, marketing should celebrate craftsmanship; if sales talks about reliability, customer support should demonstrate reliability; if pricing suggests premium quality, distribution should reinforce premium availability. When every function tells the same story

consumers also stop questioning the price. And that happens not because price has become cheaper, but because it has become logical, and that is the real objective of revenue strategy - not maximising price, but maximising 'coherence'!

Winners stand out not necessarily because they have the lowest prices or the highest specifications, but because their entire business tells one consistent story. That consistency will become increasingly valuable because consumers will continue to make comparisons.

So, don't ask whether teams in pricing, marketing, product and sales are aligned through meetings, but whether they are aligned through the customer's experience.

I believe and suggest that revenue should never be managed as a financial outcome alone, but as a 'behavioural' outcome. When product creates genuine value, marketing expresses it honestly, pricing reflects it confidently, sales reinforces it consistently and service protects it after the purchase, revenue stops feeling like a target, instead it becomes the natural consequence of trust. And trust, unlike discounts or promotions, compounds year after year!

I would say, that is the most profitable strategy any business can build.

Part 6
Execution systems

Over the years, I have met hundreds of founders, marketers and business leaders who proudly showed me their strategies - beautiful presentations, detailed market research, powerful & impressive positioning statements, deep & sophisticated consumer insights, growth roadmaps stretching over five years, and yet, whenever I looked at them, I found myself asking the same silent question - "*Where exactly does this strategy become a human decision?*"

That is a question we rarely ask, probably because strategy feels exciting, and 'execution' feels operational.

Somehow, I don't see them that way, and have gradually come to believe that execution is not the opposite of strategy!

A few years ago, I engaged a master carpenter build me a dining table. Before touching a single piece of wood, he spent almost an hour measuring, marking and quietly staring at the timber. Frustrated, I asked him, "*Why are you taking so long before you even begin?*" He smiled without looking up - "*If I rush this part, every mistake will become expensive later*". Then he said something I have never forgotten - "*I don't build tables with my hands, but with my eyes*".

I still remember and recall that line because I think businesses make exactly the opposite mistake! We admire ideas, celebrate launches, applaud creativity, but forget the real and practical experience that consumers will have!

See, consumers never buy strategies, but buy 'experiences' - a positioning statement hidden inside a boardroom, a brilliant consumer insight that never changes a product page, an outstanding brand purpose that never changes the way a customer feels after opening the package - none of these have any commercial value!

That is why I believe execution deserves much greater respect than it receives!

Remember, execution is not the final stage of business, but the 'only' stage customers ever experience - they never see your internal debates, never attend your marketing meetings, never admire your PowerPoint slides - but simply experience thousands of tiny moments - a headline, a package, a recommendation, a checkout page, a delivery, a notification, a conversation, or a second purchase - those tiny moments quietly answer one enormous question - "*Can this company be trusted?*"

Remember, trust is never built in one spectacular moment, but it simply accumulates, almost invisibly. Also note, one helpful interaction rarely creates loyalty, and one disappointing interaction rarely destroys it. But thousands of small moments, repeated over months and years, eventually become what we call a brand.

Perhaps that is why I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the phrase "*customer journey*". It sounds as though customers move neatly from one stage to another - awareness, consideration, purchase, or loyalty.

See, reality is far messier!

People leave, return, forget, rediscover, recommend, complain, compare, switch, and come back again - human behaviour is always wonderfully non-linear, and the companies that succeed are not those that control every step, but the ones that respond intelligently to every moment.

As I was writing this book, another thought kept returning to me - technology has changed almost everything, AI writes advertisements, algorithms distribute content, platforms personalise experiences, automation manages relationships, and yet beneath all this extraordinary technological progress, the human brain continues asking surprisingly 'ancient' questions - *Can I trust this? Will this make my life better? Is this decision worth making?*

See, everything else is merely a different way of answering those three questions, and that is why I don't believe the future belongs to companies with the most technology, or with the biggest marketing budgets, but to companies that translate human understanding into

thousands of consistently excellent decisions. That is execution! Not activity, not busyness, not endless campaigns, I define execution as the disciplined ability to ensure that every small interaction quietly strengthens the same belief inside the consumer's mind.

This part of my book is therefore not about marketing tactics, but about 'behavioural' architecture - understanding how ideas become habits, how products become preferences, how customers become advocates and how businesses stop depending on occasional success and start building systems that create success repeatedly.

Remember, markets don't reward the companies with the smartest strategies, but with strategies that become almost invisible because they are experienced so naturally, so consistently and so effortlessly that consumers never notice the strategy at all! Instead, they simply notice that choosing the brand feels like the easiest decision they could have made.

And in my experience, that is the highest compliment any marketer, founder or business leader can ever earn.

17.
Designing for Conversion

A few months ago, I visited an old bookstore in Bengaluru that I had not entered in years. The owner recognised me immediately - "*Sir, after a long time!*" We spoke for a few minutes before I started wandering through the shelves. I wasn't looking for any particular book, in fact, I wasn't planning to buy one at all. Then something happened - an elderly gentleman walked in, picked up a book from a display near the entrance, flipped through a few pages, smiled, paid for it and left - the entire visit probably lasted less than two minutes. Curious, I walked over to the owner and asked, "*Is that your best-selling book?*" He smiled and said, "*No*". "*Then why is it right at the entrance?*" His answer - "*Because people who don't know what they want usually need somewhere to begin*".

That small sentence explained something I had been observing in marketing for years - consumers don't always need more choices, rather sometimes they simply need a starting point!

The owner continued arranging books while we spoke. "I've tried putting expensive books there. Didn't work! I've tried putting new arrivals there. Didn't work either! These books work because they are easy to pick up. Once people buy one book, they relax. Then they come back another day for similar or the difficult ones".

On the drive home, I kept thinking about that conversation. The bookseller wasn't organising shelves, but designing decisions!

He understood that buying rarely begins with commitment, but always begins with comfort, first!

That made me question something we often celebrate in marketing - we proudly talk about traffic, clicks, reach, awareness, and engagement,

but none of those things pay the bills! Businesses grow only when somebody moves from "*This looks interesting*" to "*I'll take it*".

Most companies and marketers spend years perfecting products and campaigns, yet surprisingly little time understanding the invisible moments between 'curiosity' and 'commitment' - a photograph that answers an unspoken question, a sentence that removes a hidden doubt, a layout that makes the next step feel obvious, or a checkout that doesn't interrupt confidence.

I suggest that conversion is not a button, or a payment gateway, or even the purchase itself, but the quiet art of making the next decision feel easier than the previous one!

That is the journey we are about to explore, because the companies that follow this won't simply attract more consumers, but will understand how to help them keep moving forward.

The Moment the Search Ends

For years, marketers believed conversion happened at the checkout, or perhaps on the payment page, or when someone clicked the 'Buy Now' button. The more you observe consumers, the more you realise that you've been looking at the wrong moment!

The real conversion happens much earlier, when in the instant a consumer silently decides - "*I don't need to keep looking anymore*".

A few months ago, I was helping a friend buy a sofa, and like every modern consumer, we started online. Within ten minutes we had opened seventeen browser tabs - some looked premium, some affordable, and some fashionable. Every website seemed determined to tell us everything - Italian fabric, German springs, engineered wood, handcrafted frame, five-layer cushioning, anti-sag technology, limited-period offer, forty-two colour options, and three hundred customer reviews! By the time we reached the tenth website, we were tired!

Then, one website made us stop, not because it contained more information, but because it demanded less effort - the first photograph immediately showed the sofa inside an ordinary Indian living room, and not an apartment in Milan, or a penthouse overlooking the sea. The headline simply explained who the sofa was built for, the colour choices were already curated, the dimensions were visualised against common furniture, the delivery promise was obvious, and the reviews answered exactly the questions we had in our heads! Within five minutes we had stopped opening new tabs!

The company hadn't convinced us, but had quietly removed our need to continue searching! That, I believe, is what conversion actually is!

Most marketers think conversion is the art of increasing desire, but I suggest conversion is the science of reducing uncertainty until curiosity has nowhere left to go! See, consumers don't wake up wanting to buy, but wake up wanting to make good decisions!

Today, every product page, retail shelf, catalogue, landing page, salesperson, advertisement, package, or offer - participate in one invisible competition - "*Can I become the point at which the customer stops searching?*"

Consumers today have almost unlimited alternatives - another website is one swipe away, another review is one click away, another creator is one scroll away, another comparison is generated by AI in seconds.

The cost of continuing the search has almost disappeared!

Ironically, this makes the cost of hesitation much higher for brands - every unanswered question becomes another search, every confusing headline becomes another search, every missing photograph becomes another search, and every vague product description becomes another search!

The consumer doesn't necessarily reject your product, but simply postpone choosing it! And postponement is one of the most expensive forms of rejection!

Let's talk about first impressions. Most companies believe first impressions are visual - beautiful photography, elegant typography, and premium colours. See, those things certainly matter, but they are not the first impression. The first impression is psychological - the consumer asks only one question during the first few seconds - "*Does this feel easier than continuing my search?*", and that question determines almost everything that follows.

This is why I have become increasingly sceptical of the phrase "*attention-grabbing*". See, attention is temporary, but relief is memorable!

The strongest first impressions do not shout, but 'reassure', and quietly communicate - "*You're probably in the right place*".

That sentence is never written, but the brain still hears it!

This is also the reason why so many beautifully designed landing pages fail. They mostly try to impress before they orient - consumers don't arrive wanting inspiration, but wanting certainty - *Who is this for? Will it solve my problem? Can I trust it? What happens next? How difficult is this going to be?* The faster those silent questions disappear, the faster buying begins!

Note, I didn't say the faster the consumer becomes ‘excited’, because excitement is unpredictable, but confidence is designable!

I have often asked product teams to perform an exercise, before launching a product page. Ask - "*At which point will the consumer stop opening competitor websites?*" Everything on the page should contribute to answering that question - the first image, the first sentence, product demonstration, customer reviews, comparison table, the guarantee, or the delivery promise - every element should reduce the need for another search!

That is what first impression engineering actually means - ending the uncertainty that keeps the journey going.

If you run a business, or are planning for one, I suggest you judge every website, every retail experience and every advertisement using one simple question - "*Does this make people continue searching, or does it make them stop?*" Because conversion is rarely won at the checkout, but won at the exact moment the consumer decides that continuing to search is no longer worth the effort! That, more than any button colour, headline or advertising trick, I believe, is where the future of conversion truly begins.

The Silent Salesperson

When I ask business professionals and founders - "*Who is your best salesperson?*", most people immediately start naming individuals, their National Sales Head, their star distributor, their best-performing retailer, sometimes even the founder himself! I usually answer - "*I disagree*".

Today, for millions of consumers, the best salesperson in your company doesn't attend meetings, doesn't travel, doesn't negotiate and certainly doesn't receive incentives. That amazing salesperson is your 'product page'!

A consumer discovers your product at 11:30 in the night while lying in bed.

There is no salesperson, no retail promoter, no friend standing beside them, or no founder explaining the vision. There is only one thing representing your entire business - a single page on a screen. That page has to introduce the product, build confidence, answer doubts, handle objections, justify the price, reduce risk, create desire, and quietly ask for the order. If it fails, nobody from your sales team even gets an opportunity to recover the sale!

That is why I have slowly stopped calling it a product page!

Unfortunately, most product pages behave like product catalogues, and for that reason consumers don't need them!

Consumers need 'conversations'!

A while ago, I was helping a young D2C founder whose product was genuinely impressive - professional photographs, elegant colours, perfect typography - the design agency had clearly done an excellent job, but within thirty seconds, I realised something - the page was trying to answer questions the consumer had never asked! At the same time, it ignored the questions that actually mattered! The page proudly displayed twelve product features before telling me why I should care,

explained the manufacturing process before explaining who the product was built for, and celebrated technology before solving anxiety! That day reminded me of something I have observed repeatedly - consumers do not browse product pages in the order companies design them, but according to the order of their own thoughts. After repeated observation and improvements, that order is remarkably predictable!

The first question is never - "*What are the specifications?*", but - "*Am I in the right place?*" If that answer feels unclear, the consumer leaves, but if the answer feels obvious, the journey continues! The second question isn't - "*How many features does it have?*", but - "*Will this make my life noticeably better?*"

Only after that comes - "*Can I trust this?*", then - "*Is it worth the money?*", then - "*What happens if something goes wrong?*"

Notice that features appear surprisingly late in the conversation, yet many companies begin with them.

I often tell product teams that consumers 'interrogate' product pages! Every scroll is another question, every image is expected to remove one uncertainty, every headline should answer one doubt, every review should calm one fear, and every comparison should eliminate one alternative!

If a section doesn't reduce uncertainty, it's failed its core purpose!

Images on the product page should never merely show the product, but should answer questions - show how large it is, how someone actually uses it, show where it fits inside my home, show what changes after I own it, show my problem disappearing.

The biggest mistake companies make is photographing 'products', instead of photographing 'better futures'.

Copywriting suffers from the same misunderstanding, and most product descriptions sound like résumés - award-winning, innovative, advanced, premium, and world-class! Those words impress the marketing team far more than the customer! Whenever I write product copy, I ask myself - "*If I removed every adjective from this page, would the consumer still understand why the product matters?*" If the answer is no, the copy is hiding behind vocabulary instead of creating clarity.

I have another rule - every product page should have a few villains. Not competitors, but problems! The consumer must clearly understand what enemy the product is helping them defeat - clutter, delay, back pain, bad sleep, messy kitchens, plastic waste, weak coffee, dry skin, poor posture, or low confidence. Without a visible enemy, the product quietly becomes unnecessary!

Layout also deserves far more attention than most marketers give it. See, consumers don't experience a page from top to bottom, but their attention constantly jumps, pauses, returns, and skips! A well-designed page doesn't force the eye to work, but gently ‘guides’ it, almost like an excellent salesperson who instinctively knows when to speak, when to demonstrate and when to remain silent. That is why white space sells, because it allows important thoughts to breathe.

With AI we all can write excellent product descriptions, generate beautiful images, and optimise layouts within seconds, and ironically, that will make psychology even more valuable!

If you are building new product pages, don’t begin with design software, but begin with a sheet of paper. On it, write every question a consumer silently asks before buying, and then make one promise - no question should survive to the checkout unanswered. That will win you the sale!

Remember, the greatest product pages don't persuade people to buy, but quietly remove every reason not to.

Don't Break the Buying Rhythm

One of the most expensive assumptions in e-commerce is that the shopping cart is where buying decisions are made. That's not correct, because by the time a product reaches the cart, the consumer has already crossed several psychological barriers - they have noticed the product, become curious, imagined owning it, justified the price, and have decided that life might actually be a little better with it.

The cart is not where desire begins, but where desire is 'tested'.

A few months ago, there was one of those big online sales that seem impossible to avoid. My wife was shopping and was just a few thousand rupees short of the minimum amount needed to unlock an additional discount. Like most husbands in such situations, I was summoned to contribute! "*Is there anything you need?*" she asked. I remembered a pair of blue trousers I had seen a film star wearing in an interview some time earlier. It wasn't a dramatic colour, but just one of those shades that quietly looked elegant. I had been searching for something similar ever since. So, I started browsing - one brand, then other, different shades of blue appeared, and nearly half an hour later, I finally found one that looked right and added it to the cart. The website then asked me to sign in. I had forgotten my password, so the OTP, and then the password reset, logged in again, back to the cart, but now the additional discount had disappeared because the sale timer had ended! And suddenly, I didn't want the trousers anymore!

See, nothing had changed about the product. The colour was still perfect, the fit was still right, the price difference wasn't substantial, but the buying momentum had vanished. The desire had not been killed by price, but by interruption, and my emotional momentum disappeared!

That is a lesson many digital businesses still fail to understand. Consumers often don't abandon carts because they stop wanting the

product. They abandon carts because the journey becomes harder than the desire itself.

Consumers do not move through the buying journey as a series of logical steps, but as a 'continuous' emotional rhythm. Once that rhythm is interrupted, something dangerous begins to happen - they start thinking again! And thinking is where competitors quietly re-enter the conversation!

I often tell marketing teams that the shopping cart is not a storage basket, but an emotional waiting room! The consumer has already decided that your product deserves serious consideration, and so, your responsibility is now remarkably simple - don't make them put more effort or make them reconsider!

Unfortunately, many companies do exactly that! Unexpected delivery charges, mandatory account creation, complicated coupon codes, long registration forms, confusing payment options, hidden conditions, or repeated confirmations - every one of these introduces an opportunity for hesitation!

I have always believed that checkout design has very little to do with technology, but has everything to do with 'psychology'!

Most organisations optimise checkout for the company, instead I advise them to optimise it for the consumer's 'emotional' state - *What is the customer feeling at this exact moment?*

Customers are not looking for inspiration anymore, but just seeking 'reassurance'! *Is my payment secure? Will it arrive on time? Can I return it easily? Have I chosen the right size? What if something goes wrong?*

Every successful checkout quietly answers these questions before the consumer consciously asks them.

Notice what I didn't mention - buttons, colours, or fonts! The strongest checkout experience is one where the consumer never feels alone, and that is why trust signals should not be treated as decorative elements!

A return policy is not legal text, but emotional insurance; delivery dates are not logistics, but confidence; customer reviews near the payment page are not marketing, but reassurance arriving exactly when anxiety reaches its highest point.

Timing also greatly matters - the same information shown at the wrong moment has very little value, but shown at the right moment, it removes the 'final' hesitation.

There is another mistake I frequently see - companies become obsessed with recovering abandoned carts - emails, SMS reminders, discount codes, retargeting advertisements. I understand why, but I think they are solving the wrong problem. Instead of asking - "*How do we recover abandoned carts?*", better to ask - "*Why did we create the hesitation that caused the abandonment in the first place?*" That question leads to much better businesses - sometimes the answer is price, but more often, it isn't! Mostly it is trust, unexpected effort, confusion, or simply one unnecessary question that nobody needed to answer!

The most successful companies don't become experts at recovering abandoned carts, but at 'preventing' abandonment, and that is a far more profitable capability! Remember, understanding human hesitation isn't a technical problem, but an emotional one.

If you have to redesign every checkout experience today, I suggest, you begin with one simple principle - protect buying momentum at all costs. Every click should increase confidence, every screen should reduce uncertainty, and every interaction should quietly reassure the consumer that they are moving in the right direction.

Note, the checkout is not the place where customers decide to buy, but where they decide not to change their minds, and in my experience, those are two very different psychological journeys. If you understand this, then you won't merely build faster checkout systems, but will build buying experiences that feel so natural that consumers hardly notice they have reached the end.

That, I believe, is what great conversion design really looks like.

Beyond the Dashboard

A sentence that I would happily ban from modern marketing meetings - "*Our conversion rate is 2.8%"*. Everyone nods, someone compares it with last month, someone compares it with industry benchmarks, and someone asks how to increase it. The meeting ends, but nothing meaningful has actually been learned!

See, conversion rate is an outcome, but not an explanation!

Imagine walking into a hospital where the doctor says - "*Your temperature is 102 degrees"*, and then quietly leaves the room. You would immediately ask - "*But why?*" Marketing teams rarely ask that second question! Instead, they celebrate or worry about numbers without understanding the behaviour creating them!

Note that consumers don't disappear randomly, but leave at moments where confidence quietly collapses. That collapse always leaves a trail, and our job is to find it.

I was recently reviewing the online business of a consumer brand. The dashboard looked healthy, traffic was increasing, advertising efficiency was improving, and people were adding products to their carts. Yet revenue had stopped growing. The first reaction inside the company was predictable!

"*We need more traffic"*. I disagreed, and asked the team to stop looking at the dashboard for a moment and instead watch recordings of real customers using the website. Doing so, we learnt more than weeks of reporting had taught us!

One customer kept zooming into product images because they couldn't judge the size, another searched repeatedly for delivery information, someone abandoned the page because the return policy was difficult to find, another compared two products for several minutes before giving up completely.

The dashboard had recorded abandonment, but not recorded confusion!

Remember, data tells you 'where' consumers stopped, but behaviour tells you 'why' they stopped. I suggest that the two should never be separated!

One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is measuring the business from the company's perspective - visitors, clicks, bounce rate, session duration, conversion, and revenue - those numbers certainly matter. See, consumers don't experience journeys through metrics, instead they experience them through 'emotions' - curiosity, confidence, doubt, relief, trust, and satisfaction.

I increasingly believe that the future of conversion analytics lies in measuring emotional transitions rather than digital events. *Where did curiosity become interest? Where did interest become confidence? Where did confidence become hesitation? Where did hesitation become abandonment?*

Those are the moments that deserve executive attention, because everything else is merely arithmetic.

I have often asked marketing teams to replace the question - "*How many people dropped off here?*" with "*What uncertainty was born here?*"

If thousands of people leave after reading the pricing page, don't immediately change the price, instead find out what the price failed to explain. If people abandon the checkout, don't immediately redesign the button, instead find out which doubt appeared at that exact moment. If visitors leave after reading product details, perhaps the product isn't weak, but perhaps the story isn't complete! With this mindset, you will see that analytics stops blaming customers, and starts understanding them.

This also transforms experimentation - many companies proudly say they run hundreds of A/B tests every year. Mostly 'random' experimentation - changing button colours, moving banners, or rearranging icons - those experiments may occasionally improve performance, but rarely improve understanding!

The experiments that should excite you should begin with behavioural hypotheses - "*I think customers hesitate because delivery feels uncertain*". "*I think they are struggling to compare products*". "*I think they cannot imagine*

the product in their own home". See, how the experiment now has a purpose! You are no longer testing pages, but testing human psychology!

That creates learning that survives far beyond one campaign - the ability to ask the right question before looking at the data, because soon AI can detect patterns, but only thoughtful marketers can decide which patterns actually matter!

I would suggest that you create a rule that every dashboard must answer three questions - *What happened? Why did it happen? What did we learn about human behaviour?* The first question improves reporting, the second improves marketing, and the third improves the business.

Remember, every conversion is far more than a completed transaction - it is evidence that a human being travelled from uncertainty to confidence, and every failed conversion is simply the same journey interrupted.

The organisations that dominate business understanding don't win because they collect more data than everyone else, but because they become better interpreters of human hesitation!

That is where the future of analytics truly lies - not in measuring clicks, but in understanding people. And once you understand why people stop believing, improving conversion stops feeling like optimisation, and becomes the natural consequence of removing one uncertainty after another until buying feels like the easiest decision the consumer makes all day.

18.
Building Demand in the Algorithm Age

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in the departure lounge at Bengaluru Airport waiting for a delayed flight, and like everyone else, I had surrendered to the oldest airport pastime in the world - watching people!

A young boy, probably no older than ten, was sitting across from me with his mother. He wasn't talking much, and was simply watching the people walking past. After a few minutes, he tugged at his mother's sleeve and asked, "*Why is everyone carrying the same bottle?*"

I looked up, he was right! In the space of barely ten minutes, I counted six people carrying exactly the same insulated steel water bottle! Different ages, most probably different professions, and for sure different cities!

His mother smiled and casually replied, "*It must be a good one*".

She had absolutely no evidence, or hadn't read reviews, didn't know the brand, but had simply observed repeated behaviour and reached a conclusion!

As marketers, we often think demand begins when consumers see an advertisement. Perhaps it doesn't! Perhaps demand begins when consumers notice a pattern! See, algorithms are often blamed for making products popular, but I believe they are doing something much simpler - they are accelerating patterns that already exist.

The airport didn't create that bottle's popularity, neither did the algorithm, but 'people' did! The algorithm merely made that behaviour easier for millions of others to notice!

We spend enormous amounts of time trying to understand algorithms - how often to post, what time to post, how many hashtags to use, and what format performs best. Surely all those questions matter, but they all come after a much bigger question - *Why would human beings repeatedly choose to engage with this in the first place?* Simply because algorithms don't manufacture demand, but magnify it! They don't invent conversations, but discover them!

Some of the most successful brands aren't experts at pleasing algorithms, but very good at creating human behaviour so consistently that algorithms have no choice but to follow!

That is the journey this chapter is about - not how machines think, but how human behaviour quietly teaches machines what deserves to be seen.

Stop Chasing the Algorithm

One sentence I hear almost every week - "*The algorithm has changed".*

Instagram's, YouTube's, Amazon's, Flipkart's, LinkedIn's, and Google's algorithm - almost every disappointing marketing result is eventually blamed on an invisible algorithm!

When I ask "*What exactly changed?*", no one has an answer! Because very few people actually know! The algorithm has quietly become the modern marketer's favourite excuse!

See, algorithms don't decide what people want, instead people decide what people want! Algorithms simply notice it much faster than we do.

A few months ago, I was sitting with my niece, who was visiting me in Bangalore. She was scrolling through Instagram while we waited for dinner. Without saying a word, she paused on one video, watched it completely, read the comments, visited the creator's profile and then returned to the video and sent it to three friends. The next five videos she saw looked remarkably similar, and so she said - "*My feed already knows me".*

I smiled and replied - "*No. Your behaviour just told it everything".*

That conversation perfectly describes how modern demand is built. Most marketers think algorithms distribute content, but that's not correct.

I believe they distribute 'behaviour'!

The algorithm is constantly asking one question - "*What did humans collectively decide was worth spending time on?*" and not - "*Which company spent the most on advertising?*" or "*Which brand has the best product?*"

Algorithm watches behaviour - *Did people stop scrolling? Did they watch? Did they save it? Did they share it? Did they comment? Did they return? Did they click? Did they buy?*

The algorithm is not judging your creativity, but measuring human reactions!

For years, marketing operated like broadcasting - we created campaigns, we interrupted consumers, we bought media, and we hoped attention would follow!

Algorithms have quietly reversed that relationship! Today, attention comes first, and distribution comes much later - the algorithm rewards 'evidence' before it rewards 'ambition'!

I often tell marketing teams to stop trying to understand the algorithm, and start understanding the human behaviours the algorithm 'rewards'.

Every successful platform, despite looking different on the surface, ultimately values remarkably similar signals - curiosity, completion, conversation, sharing, return, and satisfaction. Note, those are not technological metrics, but behavioural ones, and that is why I believe algorithms are not replacing consumer psychology, but thankfully 'exposing' it!

Think about what happens when a product demonstration suddenly spreads across social media. People don't watch because an algorithm pushed it, but the algorithm pushes it because people watched!

Remember, human behaviour always comes first, and technology merely accelerates its visibility!

Doesn't this learning have enormous implications for product marketing?!

Many companies begin by asking - "*What kind of content does the algorithm like?*" I think that is the wrong question, because algorithms have no preferences, but humans surely do!

The better questions are - *What behaviour will this piece of content naturally create? Will people pause? Will they smile? Will they feel surprised? Will they forward it to a colleague? Will they save it because they might need it later? Will they argue about it? Will they buy because it solved an uncertainty?*

Every one of those behaviours becomes a signal, and the algorithm simply observes the signals!

I have often noticed another mistake - brands optimise for reach, while algorithms optimise for relevance!

A million people briefly seeing your content is far less valuable than fifty thousand people genuinely interacting with it! See, relevance compounds, while reach evaporates!

This is why small creators often outperform global brands, because they understand a community deeply enough to create behaviour. Large organisations frequently create communication, but behaviour always wins!

AI is quietly making this even more fascinating - algorithms now understand not only what we watch, but how we watch - how quickly we pause; where our attention slows; what we replay; what we ignore; what we compare; and what we discuss afterwards.

I am sure marketing will gradually become less about demographics and increasingly about behavioural patterns. The companies that succeed will not be those that master algorithms, but those that master people!

If you are running a consumer brand, I would suggest that you remove the word 'algorithm' from every marketing meeting for six months! Instead, question repeatedly - "*What human behaviour are we trying to create?*" Because if you answer that question brilliantly, algorithms eventually become your distribution partners, while if you chose to ignore that question, no algorithm can save you!

The future of marketing will not belong to those who chase changing platforms, but to those who understand timeless human behaviour.

Algorithms will continue to evolve, platforms will continue to change, technology will continue to surprise us, but human psychology will remain remarkably consistent! The marketers who remember that will never spend their careers trying to outsmart algorithms, but they will build products, stories and experiences that people naturally choose to engage with!

And when enough people do that, the algorithm has only one job left - to notice.

The Familiar Surprise

One of the questions I ask almost every marketing team is - "*How many times should consumers see your brand before they remember it?*"

Someone says six, someone seven, someone quotes an old advertising study, someone says, "*It depends"*!

Then I ask a different question - "*Why do people happily watch the same cricket highlights twenty times, but skip your advertisement after seeing it twice?*"

See, repetition has never really been the problem, but 'predictability' has!

Think about your favourite singer - you don't ask them to release a completely different kind of music every month, instead you expect a familiar voice, a familiar style, and a familiar emotional experience. But you also expect a new song, and not the same song!

Imagine if Arijit released the identical track every Friday with only the title changed, then surely, within a month, even his biggest fans would stop listening!

Now let's imagine the opposite - every song is sung by a different person, in a different language, with a completely different style. You might admire the creativity, but you would struggle to recognise the artist!

Great musicians understand something that marketers often forget - identity should remain stable, but expression should keep evolving.

That, I suggest, is one of the most important lessons in building demand during the algorithm age.

For years, marketers worried about repeating themselves, but today, many brands suffer from the opposite disease - they reinvent themselves every week - one campaign is emotional, the next is funny, the third is educational, the fourth follows a social media trend, the fifth

suddenly talks about sustainability, the sixth looks as though it belongs to an entirely different company. See, every campaign is individually creative, but collectively, they become 'forgettable'.

On a friend's request, I was reviewing the social media strategy of a fast-growing consumer brand from Delhi - the creative quality was excellent, every post looked professionally designed, videos were well produced, yet something felt strangely empty! When I covered the logo and removed the brand name, I couldn't tell they all belonged to the same company, as each piece of content was trying to become famous on its own, and none of them was strengthening the memory of the brand!

That observation completely changed our discussion and strategy, and instead of asking - "*What should we post next?*", I asked - "*What should people remember after seeing fifty different posts from us?*"

With that in mind, we transformed the content strategy - the visual language stayed consistent, the tone remained recognisable, the central idea never changed, only the stories changed, the examples changed, the situations changed. The brand stopped producing isolated content and started building cumulative memory.

As a marketer you must also stop misunderstanding consistency! Consistency does not mean repeating the same advertisement, but means repeating the same 'belief'.

Think about Apple - different products, different campaigns, different years, yet one central philosophy quietly connects almost everything they communicate. The same is true of Nike, Patagonia, LEGO, Amul, or Asian Paints - the execution evolves, but the identity remains unmistakable!

See, today algorithms reward fresh and original content, while human beings reward familiar meaning, and so the companies that understand both will dominate success - variation keeps attention alive, but consistency keeps memory alive, and neither works particularly well without the other!

If every post looks identical, consumers become blind to it, while if every post looks unrelated, consumers never build recognition! The magic happens in between!

I sometimes compare it to meeting an old friend - every time we meet, the conversation is different - different stories, different experiences, different jokes, yet I never wonder who that person is, because their personality remains wonderfully familiar.

Brands should behave exactly the same way!

This philosophy matters even more today, because AI can generate endless content - thousands of images, hundreds of videos, and unlimited headlines - the temptation will be to produce more!

I suggest to win you must produce better connected ideas, because consumers don't remember content, but they always remember patterns. Every campaign, every product launch, every customer experience should strengthen a pattern. And when that happens consistently, the pattern becomes the 'brand'.

If you are leading a marketing team, I would create one simple rule for you - before approving any advertisement, video, article or social post, ask - "*Does this introduce a new expression of our existing belief, or does it introduce a completely new belief?*" If the answer is the second, you should probably reject it. Not because it lacks creativity, but simply because memory is built through accumulation, not 'constant' reinvention.

I strongly feel that the brands that thrive in the algorithm age will not be those that produce the most content, but those that repeat themselves endlessly, and master the art of becoming familiar without becoming boring!

I believe that is an extraordinarily difficult balance, and also one of the strongest competitive advantages a marketer can build.

Consumers scroll past thousands of messages every day, and so recognition will be earned through consistency, attention sustained through variation, and demand created when both work together so seamlessly that consumers don't even notice the pattern being built inside their minds.

Marketing is No Longer a Campaign

I enjoy asking CEOs - "*How many days last month did your brand exist?*"

The answer is almost always the same. A puzzled look, and then someone says, "*What do you mean? We exist every day*". "*No*". *Your company exists every day. Does your brand?*"

There is a difference! Many companies mistake operations for presence!

The factory, office, finance, supply chain operates every day. The brand, however, appears only when there is a product launch, a festival campaign, a celebrity endorsement or an occasional social media post, and then it disappears again. Weeks pass, sometimes months, and the consumer moves on.

That is not marketing, but 'intermittent' broadcasting!

I realised this many years ago while advising a consumer brand that was genuinely frustrated. "*We launch excellent campaigns*", the marketing head told me, "*They always perform well*".

He was right, the campaigns were beautifully executed - professional films, strong media buying, and excellent creativity, yet sales grew in sharp spikes and then quietly fell back to where they had started. I would say that their business wasn't building momentum, but was just renting attention!

That meeting fundamentally changed how they think about marketing - they stopped seeing campaigns as the centre of growth, but as 'accelerators'. The engine had to be something else.

I want you to think about the brands that quietly occupy our minds today. They are everywhere, not in an irritating way, but in a natural way. One day you see a recipe using their product, the next day someone in your office is carrying it, a creator casually mentions it during another conversation, a customer uploads an unboxing video, a retailer recommends it, an article discusses the category, a podcast

references it, a chef uses it, and a friend forwards something about it! See, none of these moments is spectacular, but together, they become 'unforgettable'. That is what I call market presence!

See, I didn't call it content! Because consumers don't experience content, but they just experience repeated 'encounters'.

The human brain has an interesting habit - it begins trusting things that appear repeatedly across different contexts, not because repetition proves quality, but because repetition signals 'survival'.

If we keep encountering the same product in different places, our brain quietly concludes - "*This must matter*". That conclusion happens long before we consciously decide to buy.

This is why I believe marketers should stop measuring content output, because nobody wins because they produced four hundred posts instead of two hundred!

The real question is - "*How often does the consumer naturally encounter our brand while living life?*"

A brand may produce enormous amounts of content and still remain strangely invisible, and another may produce relatively little, yet appear repeatedly because every piece enters meaningful conversations! That distinction has become even more important in the algorithm age, because algorithms don't reward 'effort', but they reward 'relevance'. Also, consumers don't reward frequency, but reward 'familiarity'.

I often tell marketing teams that they should think less like publishers and more like city planners!

Let me explain, a city planner doesn't ask - "*How many buildings can we construct this month?*", but - "*How do people naturally move through this city?*", and then they place roads, parks, transport and services along those journeys. Marketing should work exactly the same way!

Don't ask - "*What should we post tomorrow?*", but - "*Where will our customer naturally be thinking about this category tomorrow?*"

The answer may not even be social media, it may be YouTube, WhatsApp, Reddit, or a retail shelf, an email, a podcast, AI shopping assistant, or even a friend! The objective is not to publish everywhere, but to appear 'naturally' wherever buying decisions 'quietly' begin!

There is another shift that I believe will define the next decade. Marketing teams have traditionally worked in campaigns - thirty-day plans, ninety-day launches, quarterly calendars, but consumers don't live in campaigns. Instead, consumers live continuously - their needs don't pause because your campaign ended on Sunday evening, and their curiosity doesn't wait until the next quarter. Their buying journey continues every single day! Perhaps marketing should too - not louder, but simply more 'consistently'!

See, as AI makes creating content almost effortless and infinitely abundant, 'presence', and not production, will become the real competitive advantage. Because consumers won't remember the company that created the most content, but the company that consistently appeared whenever the category became relevant.

And so, I suggest you replace one KPI immediately and instead of asking - "*How much content did we produce this month?*", *start asking* - "*How many meaningful moments did our brand become part of?*" Because that is where demand quietly grows - not inside campaigns, but inside 'lives'.

To succeed in the coming times brands will not necessarily need the largest marketing budgets or the biggest creative agencies, but will simply have to become impossible to avoid. And not because they will interrupt consumers more often, but because they will appear so consistently, so naturally and so helpfully that consumers gradually stop experiencing them as marketing at all!

They will simply become part of the category itself, and once that happens, demand no longer has to be manufactured, but it begins to sustain itself.

Win the Week, Not the Day

One of the biggest mistakes I see companies make is believing that launch day is the most important day in the life of a product!

I remember sitting with the leadership team of a consumer brand just a few days before a major product launch. The room was full of excitement, the media plan had been approved, influencers had been signed, retailers were ready, the website had gone through rounds of testing, and everyone was discussing what would happen on launch day!

I interrupted the conversation and asked - "*What happens on Day Eight?*"

Nobody answered, and so I asked again - "*What story will consumers discover about this product eight days after the launch?*"

The company had planned the announcement, but had not planned the 'momentum'.

That meeting changed their entire go-to-market strategy, and now instead of concentrating seventy percent of the budget on one spectacular day, we redesigned the launch around six weeks!

Every week had a different job - the first week created curiosity, the second answered objections, the third focused on demonstrations, the fourth celebrated early customers, the fifth highlighted unexpected use cases, the sixth amplified real stories coming back from the market. See, the product didn't disappear after launch, but became more interesting every week!

Remember, algorithms don't reward events, but reward patterns, and a sudden spike in attention is exciting, but a sustained pattern of attention is 'influential'.

Today, I can say with confidence that consumers have changed, platforms have changed, and algorithms have certainly changed - the

market now rewards brands that remain interesting long after the announcement is over!

We can compare product launches to lighting a campfire - most companies pour all the fuel onto the fire at once, and for a few minutes, the flames become spectacular, but then they disappear.

See, the objective isn't to create the biggest flame, but to keep the fire alive long enough for other people to gather around it.

That should change how you think about go-to-market - the launch should never begin with advertising, but with 'assets'. Not marketing assets, but 'conversation' assets!

Before introducing a product, your team should answer a few questions - *What will reviewers discuss that we never mentioned? What will customers photograph without being asked? What feature will creators naturally demonstrate? What misunderstanding will inevitably appear in the market? What surprising behaviour might emerge after people begin using the product?*

Those questions become the content engine for the weeks that follow. The launch stops depending on the marketing department, and starts feeding itself through conversations.

This is where many organisations misunderstand visibility. See, visibility is not about being seen once by millions of people, but being 'rediscovered' repeatedly by the right people. The first encounter creates awareness, the second creates familiarity, the third creates confidence, the fourth often creates action - that sequence cannot happen if the brand disappears after launch week!

There is another point you should remember - every launch should be designed as though consumers will enter at different moments - some people will discover the product on day one, others on day fifteen, others after two months - every one of them should feel as though they arrived at exactly the right time.

That means your marketing cannot rely on one spectacular announcement, but must function like an ongoing story where every chapter is satisfying even if someone begins reading halfway through.

See, AI is already helping every company create launch videos, advertisements, websites and social posts at extraordinary speed, and that means execution quality will become less of a differentiator.

‘Momentum’ will become the differentiator - the brands that continue generating meaningful conversations, authentic demonstrations and new reasons to return will gradually become the brands algorithms prefer to distribute.

So, spend far less time asking - "*How do we make the biggest launch?*", and instead ask - "*How do we make the market discover something new about this product every single week?*" Because products no longer compete for one moment of attention, but for ‘sustained’ curiosity.

When every week gives consumers another reason to notice, another reason to share and another reason to return, visibility stops being purchased, and starts becoming inevitable. That is the future of go-to-market - not louder launches, but longer conversations.

19.
Winning the Second Purchase

A few years ago, I was working with a tea company in Guwahati. The founders were passionate, and the tea was genuinely exceptional. Every tasting session ended with people loving it - "*This is fantastic*"; "*So much better than what I drink at home*"; "*I'll definitely buy this*" - the room would be full of smiles!

On paper, it looked like success. Yet, a few weeks later, many of those same consumers quietly returned to the tea they had been drinking for years.

At first, it made no sense to me. The new tea tasted better, had a stronger story, was sourced beautifully, and people had genuinely enjoyed it.

So why did they go back? The answer had very little to do with tea!

One evening, while sitting with one of the founders over a cup of Assam tea, I asked him - "*When people return to their old brand, what exactly are they returning to?*" He immediately began talking about price, distribution and availability. I shook my head! "*I don't think they're returning to a brand, instead they're returning to a routine*". That sentence changed the direction of our conversations.

For years, those consumers had started their mornings with the same familiar aroma - the same kettle, same cup, same flavour, and the same conversation with family before leaving for work. They weren't merely consuming tea, but were living a ritual. Our product wasn't competing with another packet of tea on a supermarket shelf, but with years of habit! Suddenly, the challenge looked completely different, and we stopped asking - "*How do we get more people to try the tea?*", instead we asked - "*What will make them brew it again next Monday morning?*"

See, the first purchase is often driven by either curiosity, a recommendation, an attractive package, a tasting session, a discount, or a moment of excitement. The second purchase demands something much deeper - the product must quietly earn a permanent place inside someone's life.

That is where most businesses are truly built, because attracting a customer once is marketing, but becoming part of their routine is ‘strategy’.

In the years ahead, technology will make first purchases easier than ever before - AI will personalise advertisements, algorithms will identify perfect audiences, platforms will optimise every campaign - the first purchase will become increasingly efficient. The second purchase, however, will remain wonderfully human - it will still depend on trust, memory, habit, satisfaction, and the quiet feeling that life is just a little better because this product became part of it.

That is what this chapter is about - not how to convince someone to buy again, but how to build a business that customers don't quietly drift away from after the excitement of the first purchase has faded.

The First Sale is Not the Proof

One of the biggest mistakes marketers make is believing that the buying journey ends when the payment is successful, whereas in reality, the first purchase is merely a prediction, but only the second purchase is the 'verdict'.

The first purchase says - "*I think this product will improve my life"*, but the second purchase says - "*It actually did"*. That difference has become one of the most overlooked ideas in modern marketing.

A few years ago, I ordered an expensive office chair after spending nearly three weeks researching it - I compared brands, read dozens of reviews, watched videos, measured my desk, and convinced myself that I was making a rational investment in my back. When the chair finally arrived, I opened the box with genuine excitement, but within ten minutes, that excitement disappeared - the instruction manual had absurd English, the screws looked almost identical, and the diagrams resembled abstract art! Took me more than an hour to assemble it! By the way, the chair itself turned out to be excellent.

The company had spent months persuading me to buy, but spent almost no effort helping me feel intelligent after buying!

Remember, consumers don't evaluate products only by performance, but by 'confirmation'!

Every buyer is quietly asking one question after the purchase - "*Did I make the right decision?*" - because after every purchase - the consumer immediately begins searching for evidence that justifies their decision.

Notice what people do after buying a new car - they suddenly start reading articles praising the model, watch ownership videos, join owner communities, and notice the same car everywhere on the road! Parents do the same after choosing a school; founders do the same after buying software; and professionals do the same after purchasing an

expensive laptop. Consumers are not looking for more information, but for 'reassurance'!

While psychologists call this post-purchase rationalisation, I think of it a bit differently, and term it as value 'reinforcement'.

The purchase has already happened, and now the brand has one responsibility - help the customer feel increasingly confident that the decision was wise. Unfortunately, many companies disappear immediately after receiving the payment, and the only communication the customer receives is transactional - order confirmed, payment received, your shipment has been dispatched, delivered, and then silence.

The customer is paying more attention to your brand during the first few days after purchase than almost any other time - they are opening the box carefully, trying the product, learning its features, showing it to family, discussing it with friends, and most importantly looking for validation.

This is precisely when the brand should become most helpful, and not by trying to sell another product, but by 'strengthening' the decision already made.

Imagine two companies - the first delivers the product and quietly disappears, and the second sends a thoughtful welcome message from the founder, a simple setup guide, three tips that make the first experience better, a short video explaining one feature most customers overlook, a message a week later asking - "*How is it fitting into your routine?*" Notice that none of these communications is trying to create another sale, but focussed on creating a feeling of confidence. That feeling eventually becomes loyalty, because expectation and experience finally meet, and if they align, trust grows.

If they don't, no advertising campaign can repair the disappointment.

Today, companies have become remarkably good at customer acquisition, but many remain surprisingly average at customer confirmation.

Remember, acquiring customers creates revenue, but confirming their decision creates advocates.

We marketers should use AI to make post-purchase experiences dramatically more personal - imagine a coffee machine that notices how often you use it and sends brewing suggestions based on your habits; a fitness watch that celebrates meaningful improvements instead of simply displaying numbers; a skincare brand that adjusts guidance according to weather conditions where you live; a furniture company that sends care tips exactly when the product begins showing signs of normal wear.

See, that is no longer customer service, but continuous value creation - the product keeps proving itself long after the payment!

If you lead a consumer brand, ask your team this one question before approving any launch - "*What will our customer believe about us seven days after the purchase?*" Because by then, the excitement has faded, and reality has arrived, and that is where the 'relationship' truly begins!

I suggest, you start by helping customers repeatedly discover that the promise was smaller than the reality. And when that happens, something remarkable occurs - the customer stops wondering whether they made the right decision, and begin wondering why they didn't make it sooner! That is the moment the second purchase quietly begins.

Buying Happens Before the Need Returns

One of the most common questions I hear from marketing teams is - *"When should we remind customers to buy again?"*

I think we are asking the question far too late, because by the time a customer realises they need the product again, they have already entered the market. And once someone enters the market, competitors enter with them. That is a race you should never have started!

I have gradually come to believe that the smartest companies don't compete at the moment of need, but at the moment of 'forgetting'.

A few months ago, I was making coffee one morning when I noticed the packet of coffee beans felt unusually light. I shook it, enough for another day or two, I thought. Then I forgot about it! Three mornings later, I opened the container and realised there was barely enough coffee for one cup. That evening, while returning from work, I bought whatever brand happened to be available in the nearest store - not because it was better, or cheaper, but because it was there.

The brand I had been buying regularly lost a customer without making a single mistake, because it simply wasn't present at the moment I needed to replace it.

I hope the above incidence shapes your thinking, because consumers rarely switch brands because they suddenly fall in love with another product, but very often, they switch because the previous brand failed to arrive at the right moment - and that, I hope you realize, is a completely different problem!

For decades, marketers have treated repeat purchase as a loyalty issue, I somehow now increasingly see it as a 'timing' issue, apart from being a loyalty issue also.

The question is not - "*Does the customer like us?*", but - "*Will we be mentally available before another option becomes physically available?*"

One of the biggest myths in marketing is that reminders exist to remind people, but they don't! I believe they exist to reduce the effort of 'remembering'! Think about all the things you regularly forget - replacing water filters, ordering printer ink, buying pet food, renewing medicines, changing razor blades, restocking detergent, replacing batteries - none of these products disappears because consumers dislike them, but simply because life is busy. The human brain is designed to notice urgent problems, not slowly emptying bottles! That is why great reorder systems never feel like advertising, but like thoughtful timing.

I remember working with a consumer products major that was struggling with repeat purchases. The instinctive solution was predictable - "*Let's send more promotional emails*". Instead, I took another path and asked - "*When does the customer first begin thinking that they might run out?*"

Notice that I didn't ask when they actually run out, because those are very different moments. After studying usage patterns, we discovered - most customers didn't reorder when the product finished, but reordered when they became uncertain that it would last until the next shopping trip.

That small insight completely changed the communication strategy, and the messages no longer said - "*Buy again now*", instead, they quietly asked - "*You might be reaching the point where it's worth checking your supply*". The response improved dramatically, because the timing respected human behaviour.

This is where I believe many brands misunderstand nudges - a nudge should never feel like pressure, but always like 'assistance'.

The customer should think - "*I'm glad they reminded me*", and not - "*Why are they trying to sell me again?*" That emotional difference determines whether the brand feels helpful or intrusive.

I believe, the future of reorder marketing will become far more intelligent - AI will know roughly how quickly households consume different products; connected devices will know when supplies are running low; subscriptions will become adaptive rather than fixed;

retailers will predict replenishment before consumers consciously notice depletion.

But, let me also say - technology alone will not create better relationships, judgement will, and the companies that succeed will understand the rhythm of their customers' lives!

See, every category has its own rhythm - coffee follows mornings, skincare follows routines, pet food follows habit, vitamins follow discipline, cleaning products follow weekends, office supplies follow work cycles - the marketer's job is not to interrupt those rhythms, but to quietly fit into them.

So, stop asking - "*How do we increase repeat purchases?*", and instead, ask - "*At what exact moment does our customer first begin wondering whether they have enough left?*" That moment is where the next sale is won, because the brand arrives before uncertainty turns into inconvenience.

People don't always remember to buy, but always appreciate brands that remember for them. And that is why, I say, the future of repeat purchase will not belong to the loudest reminder, but to the most thoughtful one - because when timing feels almost human, buying stops feeling like another task, and simply becomes the natural continuation of a relationship that was already working.

Become Part of the Customer's Story

I have always disliked the words "*customer engagement*". While they sounds impressive and appear in almost every marketing presentation, yet very few people stop to ask what they actually mean. Most companies quietly interpret engagement as - "*How often can we contact the customer?*"

I think that is the wrong objective! The better question is - "*How often can we genuinely improve the customer's experience after the purchase?*"

A few years ago, I downloaded a fitness app, and like millions of people, I began with extraordinary enthusiasm, and the first week was wonderful, because every workout felt like a small victory! Then the messages began - "*Don't miss today's workout*". "*You haven't logged in*". "*Your friends are making progress*". "*Special offer ends tonight*". "*Upgrade now*". "*Limited-time membership*". Within three weeks, the app knew remarkably little about my fitness journey, but knew everything about its sales targets! Eventually, I turned the notifications off, not because I had stopped caring about fitness, but because I felt the app had stopped helping me become fitter, and had become another advertiser, for themselves and even other brands, living inside my phone!

That experience completely changed the way I think about lifecycle marketing.

Most companies assume communication should continue because the relationship exists. On the contrary, I believe communication should continue only if it creates 'new' value!

Remember, the purchase is not permission to interrupt forever, but an invitation to remain 'useful'.

Think about the brands that people genuinely enjoy hearing from - a language-learning app celebrating your hundredth day, a banking app warning you about an unusual transaction before you notice it, a travel app reminding you that your passport expires in six months, a coffee

machine sending cleaning guidance just before performance starts declining, a skincare brand explaining how routines should change with the season. None of these messages begins with - "*Buy now*", but with - "*We thought this might help*". The communication feels like companionship!

I often tell marketing teams that every message after the purchase should answer one question before it is sent - "*Will the customer's day become even slightly better because of this?*" If the answer is no, don't send it!

Consumers don't need more notifications; they need fewer but better ones! This is where lifecycle marketing is frequently misunderstood - many organisations build communication calendars - day one, day three, day seven, and so on, and the messages are perfectly scheduled, too. The customers don't live according to marketing calendars, instead they live according to the 'moments' in their routines - a parent buying baby products has different questions during the first week than after six months; someone purchasing a coffee machine thinks differently after making one hundred cups than after making one; a first-time car owner worries about different things than someone who has driven the vehicle for a year.

Great lifecycle marketing follows the customer's journey, and not the company's timetable!

That also changes how you think about communication channels - email is not a strategy, WhatsApp is not a strategy, push notifications are not a strategy - they are merely delivery mechanisms. The real strategy is understanding 'when' the customer is most receptive and 'what' they genuinely need at that moment. Sometimes an email is perfect, while sometimes a WhatsApp message feels more personal, and sometimes silence is the best marketing decision you can make.

One of the biggest mistakes I see is companies treating every customer exactly the same after purchase - the first-time buyer receives the same message as the loyal customer; the expert receives the same advice as the beginner; the heavy user receives the same reminders as someone who barely uses the product. Technology has made personalisation possible, but many brands still communicate as though every customer is identical. AI is changing this dramatically - brands now understand

how people actually use products and communication responds to behaviour instead of fixed dates! The message arrives because the customer has reached a meaningful moment. That is where lifecycle marketing becomes extraordinarily powerful, as it begins to feel less like automation and more like 'attention'.

I suggest you also completely redesign how post-purchase communication is measured in your organisation - stop celebrating open rates alone, or click-through rates, instead ask - "*Did this communication increase the customer's success with our product?*"

Remember, the true purpose of lifecycle marketing is not maintaining contact, but maintaining progress. Make sure your communication becomes so timely, so relevant and so genuinely useful that customers stop experiencing it as marketing altogether.

Let them experience it as something far more valuable - a brand that continues helping long after the sale is over.

If you do this correctly, the second purchase is no longer something the business has to chase, but becomes the natural next chapter in a relationship that has continued to create value every step of the way.

Measure Relationships, Not Revenue

Every month, someone proudly announces - "*We crossed our revenue target"*. The room applauds, the board is happy, and investors smile.

Let me ruin that moment by asking - "*How many of those customers wanted to come back?*"

Suddenly, the conversation changes, because revenue and growth are not the same thing - a business can keep growing its revenue while quietly destroying its future. While that may sound contradictory, but it isn't!

Imagine two companies - the first acquires one hundred thousand new customers every year, and almost none of them return. The company survives only because it spends more and more money acquiring 'replacements'. The business looks healthy, until advertising costs increase, or a new competitor enters, or funding becomes expensive - and then the cracks begin to appear.

Now imagine another company - it acquires only fifty thousand customers, but sixty percent of them buy again, then 90% buy again. The customers also recommend the brand to friends. The second company appears slower, but in reality, it is becoming stronger every year, while the first company is filling a leaking bucket, the second is building a reservoir.

That is why I want you to stop asking - "*How many customers did we acquire?*", and instead, ask - "*How many relationships did we create?*"

Recently, I advised a consumer products company - every monthly review looked identical - revenue, market share, distribution, advertising spend, customer acquisition - everything seemed under control. Then one afternoon I asked the analytics team to answer a question they had never been asked before - "*How many customers would genuinely notice if our brand disappeared tomorrow?*" Nobody had measured that! They knew sales, traffic, impressions, conversion, but

had never tried to measure emotional dependence. That discussion changed our dashboards completely, and so apart from looking at acquisition, we also began studying behaviour.

How quickly did customers return? How often did they recommend us? How many purchased additional categories? How long did they remain inactive before finally leaving? Which customers were becoming stronger? Which relationships were quietly weakening? For the first time, we stopped measuring transactions, and started measuring relationships, and that completely changed our decisions.

Companies become obsessed with lagging indicators - revenue, profit, market share - those numbers are important, but they are like looking in the rear-view mirror while driving! They tell you where you've been, but don't tell you where you're going!

The future belongs to leading indicators - customer confidence, repeat behaviour, recommendation, engagement after purchase, time between purchases, cross-category adoption, and organic referrals, because these behaviours appear long before revenue reflects them.

That is why I believe retention metrics should answer only one question - "*Is our relationship with the customer becoming stronger or weaker?*" Everything else is detail.

There is another mistake I frequently see - companies measure customers individually. See, consumers rarely behave individually! Relationships keep evolving - someone may stop buying for three months because they moved to another city; another customer may suddenly double purchases because their family has grown; someone else may recommend your product to ten friends while buying very little themselves. The future of retention analytics will therefore become behavioural rather than financial. AI is already being put to use to not merely report who bought yesterday, but also identify who is slowly drifting away, to recognise changing habits, predict declining engagement, detect emerging loyalty, and suggest the right intervention at the right moment. But remember, even then, technology will not answer the most important questions - *Why are customers staying? Is it convenience? Trust? Identity? Habit? Community? Superior experience? Or are they simply staying because they haven't yet found an alternative?* That remains the responsibility of marketers, and those

answers determine the future of the business far more than this month's sales report.

So, start asking - "*What percentage of our customers would genuinely miss us if we disappeared tomorrow?*" Because that single number captures something every business ultimately wants - relevance.

Smart companies will become experts at remaining important in people's lives, because revenue follows importance, and retention measures it. And when a business begins measuring the strength of its relationships instead of merely the size of its sales - growth stops being something the company has to chase, and becomes the natural consequence of customers choosing, again and again - to continue a relationship that consistently makes their lives a little better.

Part 7
The purchase formulas

20.
The Universal Purchase Equation

I have always been fascinated by equations! Not only because I enjoy mathematics, but I actually enjoy what equations do - it takes something that appears impossibly complicated and reveals the simple structure hidden beneath it. A good equation doesn't make the world simpler, but more 'understandable'. That is why I have often wondered why marketing has so few equations. Probably because we have frameworks, funnels, matrices, customer journeys, canvases, and models!

Every consultant seems to invent one, and every conference introduces another! Most of them are useful, but very few of them explain one fundamental question - *Why does one person buy while another walks away?*

As marketers and business leaders, we often explain every success differently.

"This product won because of branding", *"That one succeeded because of pricing"*, *"This campaign worked because of creativity"*, *"The product failed because distribution was weak"*. Each explanation may be correct, but they leave us with a frustrating problem - if every success has a different explanation, then every new business begins with uncertainty.

See, doctors have physiology, engineers have physics, economists have mathematics, but marketers often have 'opinions', and over the last thirty years, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with that!

I think, for sure, behind millions of buying decisions, there must be a handful of behavioural forces that appear again and again - not just because consumers are predictable, but because the human mind is remarkably consistent. Technology, platforms, products change, but people don't change nearly as much as we think.

That belief led me to one simple question - *If buying had an equation, what would it look like?*

This chapter is my attempt to answer that question!

But not with academic theory, or complicated mathematics, but with an equation built from years of watching ordinary people make extraordinary decisions. Once you understand the equation, you stop seeing purchases as isolated events, and begin seeing them as outcomes. And when buying becomes understandable, building businesses becomes a little less mysterious and a lot more intentional.

The Equation That Changed My Mind

One of the most memorable parts of my PhD was not collecting data, or reviewing hundreds of research papers, or staying awake at two in the morning, but was building 'regression' equations!

For months, my life revolved around equations - age affected this, income influenced that, education changed something else - one variable strengthened the relationship, yet another weakened it!

Every equation was an attempt to answer one simple question - "*What really causes human behaviour?*"

When the equation finally made statistical sense, I remember feeling an almost childish excitement! There it was - thousands of questionnaires, months of research, hundreds of hours of analysis - reduced to one elegant equation. It felt magical!

Ever since, I have loved equations because they force complexity to become simple. A good equation doesn't ignore reality, and also reveals the invisible structure hidden inside reality!

Over the last thirty years, I have worked across consumer durables, technology, water purifiers, kitchen appliances, sustainability, retail, B2B, B2C, startups and global brands - I have watched products become overnight successes, and also watched products that looked absolutely brilliant disappear without leaving a trace.

Every failure came with a different explanation - poor marketing, wrong pricing, weak distribution, bad timing, inferior product, or low awareness.

Every success also had its own story - excellent branding, great innovation, perfect positioning, or strong execution.

The more businesses I worked with, the more difficult everything became, until one day, I realised maybe all these explanations were true. But maybe they were only pieces of a much bigger equation!

Every time I advised a founder, launched a product, studied consumer behaviour or simply stood in a supermarket watching people make decisions, I made notes on 'behavioural' observations.

Sometimes it was only one sentence - "*People don't compare products until something forces them to think*". Another day it was - "*Visibility creates familiarity before it creates trust*". On another page - "*People don't buy the best product. They buy the product that feels easiest to justify*".

Over the years, those notes became embarrassingly large - thousands of observations, different industries, different countries, different consumers. Yet every few pages, I would stumble upon the same behavioural forces wearing different clothes.

One rainy Sunday in Bangalore, I pulled out those notebooks from different stages of my career - some were almost two decades old! I wasn't looking for anything in particular, but simply reading.

The observations weren't random, in fact, they felt pretty organized!

I wasn't reading hundreds of ideas anymore, but looking at the outline of one remarkably simple equation - not academic, not statistical, but a 'behavioural' equation.

An equation that seemed capable of explaining why a college student buys sneakers, why a family buys a refrigerator, why an enterprise buys software and why someone spends thirty-five rupees on a cup of tea without thinking twice.

I closed the notebook, not because I thought I had discovered something revolutionary, but because I realised I had spent years searching for complicated answers while consumers had been quietly following a surprisingly simple pattern all along!

That is what I want to share with you now!

An equation that I wish somebody had shown me when I began my career, because once you understand it, buying stops looking mysterious, consumers stop looking unpredictable, marketing stops feeling like guesswork, and perhaps, for the first time, thousands of ideas that we have explored throughout this book begin to connect into one complete picture.

Let's build that equation together.

The Equation I Was Never Looking For

Three years ago, when I moved to Bangalore, I packed my entire professional life into cardboard boxes. My wife looked at the mountain of paper and asked a perfectly reasonable question - "*Are you really carrying all this?*"

I smiled and said, "*There must be something useful in there*". The truth was, I wasn't even sure myself!

Then one rainy Sunday afternoon, I finally opened the first box, and then the rest. And after days of reading and organising all the papers slowly stopped feeling like separate memories - I realised how I had unknowingly been running another regression for the last twenty years!

I picked up a blank sheet of paper, and instead of writing another observation, I wrote a single question - *What really has to happen inside a human mind before a purchase occurs?*

Over the next few hours, I kept grouping ideas together. Some variables survived, but many disappeared. Then, almost unexpectedly, an equation began to emerge - a behavioural equation.

One that could explain why someone buys a ₹20 cup of tea, a ₹20 lakh car, enterprise software worth crores, or even an idea.

This is the equation I arrived at -

Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Desire x Awareness x Trust x Ease x Justification x Moment}}{\text{Risk x Habit x Uncertainty}}$$

As I looked at it, another thought crossed my mind - three variables that marketing books frequently celebrate were missing!

The first was 'need'. I omitted it deliberately, because I know for sure that people don't buy because they need, instead they buy because they 'decide'.

Human history is full of purchases that solved no real need - luxury watches, designer handbags, sports cars, collectibles, premium tea, business-class tickets, and even the first smartphone many of us bought wasn't driven by need, but by desire, identity, aspiration and curiosity. See, need explains survival, but does not explain modern buying.

The second omission was 'visibility'. I have realised long ago that visibility is not something that exists inside the consumer, but in the marketplace. Visibility influences awareness, strengthens trust through familiarity, increases the chances of entering the consideration set, but visibility, by itself, never makes anyone buy! Consumers don't purchase what is merely visible, but what has become 'mentally' available!

The third omission was 'competition'. Competition certainly changes business outcomes, but consumers rarely make decisions by calculating the number of competitors in the market! Competition only matters when it changes one of the variables already in the equation - a competitor creates greater desire, or more trust, or less risk, or more ease, or better justification. Competition is therefore not a behavioural force, but simply another influence acting upon the real behavioural forces.

I must confess the more I stared at the equation, the more uncomfortable I became! Because it looked too simple! *Could thirty years of studying consumer behaviour really reduce to this?*

So, I began testing it - against products I had launched, against brands I had advised, against companies that had succeeded spectacularly, against companies that had quietly disappeared, against products that should have succeeded but didn't, and against products that had no business succeeding, yet became market leaders.

The equation refused to break!

While it didn't explain every nuance, I believe no equation ever does, but it explained something much more valuable - the invisible forces that almost every purchase had in common. See, consumers are wonderfully complicated, while their buying is surprisingly elegant!

The rest of this chapter is my attempt to explain why.

The Equation Never Changes, Only the Coefficients Do.

One of the biggest misconceptions about consumer behaviour is that different industries follow different rules. I don't believe they do!

A person buying a cup of tea and a company buying enterprise software are both making decisions inside the same human brain - the chemistry is different, but the psychology isn't!

That was perhaps the most surprising realisation I had while developing this equation. For several weeks, I kept trying to create different equations for luxury, FMCG, B2B, technology, healthcare, and services.

Surely, they couldn't all work the same way, but the more I tested them, the more they refused to become different - the equation remained stubbornly constant! Only one thing kept changing - the importance of each variable.

That immediately reminded me of my PhD - in regression analysis, the equation remains the same, the coefficients don't!

See, income may explain more in one model, education may dominate another, age may suddenly become insignificant, but still the structure survives. Only, the influence changes!

Consumer behaviour, I realised, behaves in exactly the same way - the equation is universal, while the coefficients are category-specific. After months of thinking and challenging my own thoughts, that was a profoundly liberating thought for me! Because it means marketers don't have to learn an entirely new psychology every time they enter a new industry - they simply have to understand which force deserves the greatest attention!

Imagine a luxury watch - desire carries enormous weight, while justification becomes fascinating because the buyer is rarely justifying the watch, instead they are justifying the identity it represents. Ease hardly matters - nobody abandons a ₹15 lakh watch because checkout required one additional click, or they have to drive 15 kilometres to a showroom!

Now think about a bottle of drinking water ordered through quick commerce.

The equation is identical, but the weights have completely changed - ease suddenly becomes enormous, as the consumer is thirsty now. Desire exists, trust matters, yet an extra ten-minute delivery promise may reduce purchase probability far more than a beautifully designed label.

See, the equation didn't change, but human priorities did.

The same pattern appears everywhere - when parents choose a school, trust becomes extraordinarily heavy; when someone buys perfume, desire often outweighs functional value; when a hospital is selected, perceived risk dominates almost every other variable; when purchasing enterprise software, justification becomes almost as important as the product itself because buying decisions rarely belong to one individual.

The fascinating and noteworthy part is not that variables change, but that they never disappear, and even the smallest coefficient still belongs to the equation.

That has quietly changed how I diagnose businesses - earlier in my career, when a product struggled, my instinct was to ask - "*What's wrong?*"

Today I ask a completely different question - "*Which variable is carrying too little weight?*" That question always leads to a better conversation.

Perhaps desire is weak; or awareness exists but trust hasn't caught up; or consumers desperately want the product but habit keeps pulling them backwards.

Perhaps every variable is healthy except one invisible source of friction that nobody inside the company noticed.

See, how the business no longer looks broken, but just 'unbalanced'. And we all know that unbalanced systems can be corrected, but broken systems often get abandoned.

I sometimes compare it to cooking - every dish contains salt, and that's why no chef asks whether salt belongs in the recipe. The question is always - "*How much?*" A dessert uses very little, soup uses much more, pickles use even more, but the ingredient remains the same - only its proportion changes!

Consumer behaviour follows remarkably similar logic - the variables remain constant, only their proportions create the category.

Perhaps that is why I have gradually become suspicious of marketing advice that begins with - "*In this industry"..!*

Human beings do not suddenly become different because they walk from an automobile showroom into a supermarket! They remain wonderfully human!

They simply value different things at different moments! That, I believe, is one of the most overlooked ideas in modern marketing - we spend enormous energy searching for new equations, and very often, we already have the right one! Sadly, we are solving it with the wrong coefficients!

If my equation is universal, then understanding a new category no longer begins with inventing a new framework, but begins with answering one beautifully simple question - *Which variable matters most here?*

The next chapter is my attempt to answer exactly that, by showing how the same behavioural equation quietly changes its centre of gravity as consumers move from one category to another. That, in my experience, is where strategy stops being theory and starts becoming diagnosis.

Behavioural Diagnosis Before Business Decisions

One of the unintended consequences of modern business is that we have become remarkably good at prescribing solutions before making a diagnosis!

Sales slows down - *"increase advertising"*; conversion drops - *"redesign the website"*; competition launches a new product - *"reduce prices"*; customer acquisition becomes expensive - *"increase the marketing budget"*.

Notice what all these decisions have in common - they are all treatments, and not diagnoses!

If a doctor prescribed medicine before understanding what was making the patient ill, we would question the doctor's competence, but in business, we call it *"decisiveness"*!

Over the years, I have realised that companies rarely suffer from a lack of action, but most suffer from a lack of 'precision'.

Two businesses may both experience falling sales, one needs better distribution, and the other may need greater trust. One has created desire but made buying difficult, and the other has built awareness but failed to create aspiration.

For both above, the disease is completely different!

That is why I no longer begin consulting assignments by asking - "*What is the problem?*", but instead, I ask - "*Which behavioural force has quietly become the weakest?*"

Let me be a bit dramatic - think of the purchase equation as a suspension bridge, where every variable is a supporting cable. After every few months, we naturally assume the bridge needs strengthening, but

engineers don't reinforce every cable equally, instead they first identify which one has lost tension!

Business deserves the same discipline. The instinct inside organisations is to improve everything - more advertising, more offers, more features, more channels, more content, more salespeople, or more influencers. Sometimes that works, but usually, it simply makes the organisation 'busier'!

I suggest you better ask - "*What is the smallest intervention capable of changing customer behaviour?*" Isn't that is a completely different way of thinking because the objective is not activity, but 'leverage'!

I have often seen a single behavioural adjustment outperform a hundred tactical improvements - a confusing product name becomes clearer; a guarantee removes one hidden fear; a financing option changes affordability without touching price; a founder starts speaking publicly and suddenly trust increases; or a retailer changes the way a product is demonstrated and consumers begin understanding it instantly.

The business didn't transform, but one variable did! And because the variables inside the purchase equation are interconnected, strengthening one often changes several others - greater trust reduces perceived risk; greater ease reduces uncertainty; or a stronger desire makes consumers work harder to overcome habit - one intelligent adjustment creates a chain reaction!

That is why I have become increasingly sceptical of organisations that celebrate how many initiatives they launched during the year. See, any number of initiatives tells us very little, while the number of behavioural constraints they removed tells us almost everything!

Perhaps the real role of strategy is not deciding what to do, but deciding what 'not to touch' because every unnecessary initiative consumes attention, every unnecessary campaign consumes money, and every unnecessary product feature consumes complexity.

Remember, in business, complexity is always expensive, while precision compounds! This has fundamentally changed the way I think about business reviews - I no longer ask teams to explain declining sales, but ask them to defend their diagnosis - *Which variable became weaker?*

What evidence supports that conclusion? If we strengthen only that variable, what behaviour do we expect to change? Notice that these are not marketing questions, but scientific ones - they force us to separate assumptions from evidence, and replace opinion with 'observation'.

They also make strategy considerably more difficult, but infinitely more useful.

Beware, soon technology, powered with AI, will recommend thousands of optimisations every day - it will suggest headlines, prices, layouts, audiences and offers. The temptation will be to improve everything simultaneously!

The companies that wish to outperform everyone else will resist that temptation, because they will understand that great businesses are not built by making hundreds of random improvements, but built by identifying the 'one' behavioural force that is holding the entire system back!

Finding it is strategy, strengthening it is execution, and knowing the difference between the two may well become the defining advantage of the next generation of marketers.

From Marketing Framework to Organisational Reflex

When I first wrote the purchase equation on a blank sheet of paper, I made the same mistake that many leaders make after discovering a useful framework!

I thought - "*This will help marketers"*. A few days later, I realised how wrong I was!

Buying is not created by the marketing department, but by an organisation! That may sound obvious, but most companies don't behave that way!

Marketing builds desire, sales asks for discounts, product adds more features, finance increases prices, operations changes packaging to reduce costs, customer service writes policies to minimise complaints - every function makes perfectly rational decisions, but collectively, they create an irrational buying experience!

That is why I have gradually stopped believing that companies have marketing strategies. Instead, I say they have behavioural systems. Whether they realise it or not - every meeting changes behaviour somewhere, every policy changes behaviour somewhere, every product decision changes behaviour somewhere, every customer interaction changes behaviour somewhere.

The only question is whether those behaviours move in the 'same' direction.

Think about a rowing team - eight exceptionally talented rowers can still lose a race if each person rows to a different rhythm. Business works the same way - one department cannot compensate forever for another department that is quietly increasing resistance - marketing cannot endlessly create desire if product design keeps creating confusion; sales cannot build trust if customer service destroys it after the purchase;

pricing cannot create value if finance removes every flexibility that makes buying possible.

The equation, thus, belongs to everyone, and that, perhaps, is its greatest strength, as it gives every function a common language!

Imagine a product meeting where someone suggests adding five new features.

Instead of arguing about opinions, the team asks - "*Which variable in the purchase equation does this strengthen?*" If nobody can answer, perhaps the feature doesn't belong!

Imagine a finance meeting discussing a price increase. Instead of asking only - "*How much additional margin will we make?*", someone asks - "*Will this reduce justification more than it improves profitability?*"

Imagine an operations review, where packaging is redesigned to reduce costs.

Someone quietly asks - "*Will this increase uncertainty or reduce trust?*"

Notice what is happening, the equation is no longer a marketing model, but has become a 'decision-making' model for all stakeholders.

That is the shift I hope every organisation makes, because over the years, I have seen companies become trapped by departmental optimisation - every team proudly reports success - marketing delivered record reach, sales exceeded targets, procurement reduced costs, operations improved efficiency, technology launched new features - yet customers quietly stopped buying!

I believe the future belongs to organisations that stop asking - "*How is my department performing?*" and begin asking - "*How is our buying system performing?*"

As I come to the end of this chapter, I find myself returning to that rainy Sunday in Bangalore, sitting on the bed surrounded by old notebooks, thinking

I was organising papers. In reality, I was organising thirty years of observations into one simple belief - businesses don't grow because they become better at marketing, but because they become better at making buying feel 'natural'!

The purchase equation is not something to memorise, but to use, challenge, refine, adapt, argue with, and improve!

If, years from now or sooner, someone develops a better equation that explains human buying more accurately than this one, I will be delighted! Because the purpose of this chapter was never to give you the final answer, but to give you a better question!

Whenever a product succeeds, whenever a launch fails, whenever customers hesitate, whenever a category refuses to grow, don't begin by asking - "*What should we do?*", but begin somewhere much deeper - "*Which force inside the customer's mind have we failed to understand?*"

In my experience, every great business is built by answering that question a little better than everyone else, and that, perhaps, is the closest thing to a universal formula for growth that I have ever found.

21.
Category Playbooks

As I was writing this chapter, I kept thinking about the extraordinary number of people who had unknowingly become my teachers.

Over the last thirty years, I got opportunities that I could never have planned for myself. I have had the privilege of working with some remarkable organisations, consulting for many others, helping global companies understand and enter India, and helping Indian companies find their place in the world. I have spent time with founders trying to build their first product and with CEOs managing large businesses.

I have watched products fail despite brilliant engineering, and also seen ordinary ideas become extraordinary businesses. I have learnt from retailers in crowded markets, distributors in small towns, factory workers, designers, salespeople, research agencies, data scientists, consumers, mentors, colleagues, competitors, and even influencers.

Looking back, I realise something that fills me with gratitude, because every person I worked with, whether they realised it or not, quietly shaped the way I understand markets today, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

This chapter is, in many ways, my attempt to give something back.

Throughout my career, young professionals have often asked me questions that sound remarkably similar - "*How is marketing different in electronics*?" "*What changes when you move into food?*" "*How should someone think about luxury?*" "*Is B2B psychology completely different from consumer marketing?*"

There is never a perfect answer, because every category has its own history, economics, customers, and its own peculiarities!

That is why I want to begin with a small confession - I do not claim that the playbooks you are about to read are complete, nor do I claim they are the only way to understand these categories!

Human behaviour is far too rich to fit neatly into a few pages, because markets evolve, technology changes, consumers adapt, and so should these ideas!

What I hope these playbooks give you is something much more valuable than certainty. I hope they give you a starting point - a way of looking at categories through behavioural lenses rather than product lenses, a way of asking better questions before searching for better answers. If you disagree with some of these playbooks because your own experience has taught you something better, I will consider this chapter a success, because that is how knowledge should grow! One professional learns, shares, another builds upon it, and then passes it on again!

Perhaps that is the greatest responsibility we have as leaders, not merely to build successful businesses, but to leave behind ideas that help someone else build even better ones.

If these pages shorten your learning curve by even a few years, help you avoid one expensive mistake, or encourage you to look at consumers with a little more curiosity and a little less certainty, then every lesson I have gathered over the last thirty years will have found its true purpose.

So, think of these playbooks not as rules, but as conversations between two marketers - one who has walked a little further down the road, and the other who will almost certainly walk much farther than I ever could.

Quick Commerce Playbook

When I first started studying quick commerce, I made a mistake that, in hindsight, seems rather obvious - I analysed it as a retail business, compared it with supermarkets, e-commerce, and neighbourhood kirana stores. The comparisons made sense, but the conclusions didn't!

Simply because quick commerce isn't competing against any another retail format, but against 'time' itself. The more I observed consumers, the more I realised that almost every quick commerce order begins in exactly the same way - not with a shopping list, or planning, or even with intention, but with a tiny 'interruption'. Someone opens the refrigerator and realises there is no milk; guests arrive unexpectedly; the gas lighter stops working; the children suddenly want ice cream; the cricket match is about to begin and there are no chips at home; cooking is halfway through when someone discovers there is no cooking oil left - these are not purchases, but are interruptions looking for immediate resolution, and that changes the psychology completely!

Traditional retail gives consumers time to think, while Quick commerce survives by reducing thinking - the consumer is not asking - "*Which is the absolute best product?*", but - "*Can someone solve this problem before I have to think about it?*", and that is a profoundly different buying journey.

When I introduced the Universal Purchase Equation in the previous chapter, I made a promise - it wasn't another framework meant for one industry, but an equation built around how human beings make buying decisions.

Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Desire x Awareness x Trust x Ease x Justification x Moment}}{\text{Risk x Habit x Uncertainty}}$$

Let us examine the equation!

The first variable is 'Desire'. In most categories, desire develops gradually - you think about buying a new car, compare laptops, research insurance plans, discuss holiday destinations. Quick commerce is different - desire doesn't grow, but it appears! The milk is over, guests have arrived, batteries have died, no cooking oil - the desire is immediate, unexpected and emotionally stronger. It is no longer functioning just like desire, but 'Impulse'.

Then we come to two variables that begin behaving differently - 'Awareness' and 'Trust'. In traditional buying, consumers often separate the two. "*I know this brand*", or "*I trust that brand*" - Quick commerce gives the brain very little time to make that distinction, because the consumer is scrolling quickly through a small mobile screen, and so recognition becomes a behavioural shortcut. The mind quietly says - "*I've bought this before*", or "*I've seen this enough times*". That single thought carries both awareness and trust and the two variables merge into one. I call it 'Familiarity'. This is not simply brand awareness, but recognition strong enough to eliminate evaluation.

One variable remains exactly where it belongs - 'Ease'. In fact, I would argue its influence becomes even greater - every additional click, confusing search result, unnecessary filter, payment interruption, every second spent looking for a product - they all reduce the probability of purchase. Consumers don't use quick commerce because they enjoy shopping, but because they want shopping to disappear!

Now comes an interesting observation - 'Justification' almost fades into the background. When consumers buy a car, they justify; when they buy a luxury watch, they justify; when they purchase enterprise software, entire organisations justify, but Quick commerce rarely demands that conversation! Very few people sit on the sofa debating whether buying bread or tissues requires careful justification, because the purchase is too small and the psychological investment is minimal. Justification doesn't disappear completely, but its influence simply becomes insignificant compared to the other variables.

The next variable is 'Moment'. In the Universal Equation, the moment refers to timing - the right life stage, the right occasion, or the right need state, but Quick commerce compresses all of that into minutes - if the

purchase doesn't happen now, it often doesn't happen at all! The moment therefore becomes ‘Urgency’.

There is one more variable I deliberately introduce - ‘Availability’. Some of you may wonder why it wasn't part of the Universal Equation. See, availability is not a psychological force, but a market condition. The Universal Equation assumes that a consumer has the opportunity to buy, while Quick commerce reminds us that opportunity itself has become a competitive advantage! If the product isn't available within the delivery radius, there is no purchase to model. Availability therefore becomes an enabling condition specific to this category.

Now let us look at the denominator - the Universal Purchase Equation contains three forces that work against every purchase - ‘Risk’, ‘Habit’ and ‘Uncertainty’. At first glance, it may appear that these variables hardly matter in quick commerce. After all, consumers are buying milk, bread, chocolates or tissues, and not a luxury car or a new house. But that would be a mistake! The denominator doesn't disappear, but it simply changes its character. Let us begin with ‘Risk’. In most categories, risk is associated with losing money or making an expensive mistake, but in quick commerce, financial risk is usually very small, while behavioural risk, however, becomes surprisingly important!

"Will this arrive before I need it?" "Will I receive the right product?" "Will fresh fruits actually be fresh?" "Can I depend on this platform?"

See, the nature of the risk changes from *"Will I buy the wrong product?"* to *"Can I trust this moment to be fulfilled?"*

Now consider ‘Habit’! Throughout this book, I have argued that habit is one of the strongest forces in consumer behaviour, and Quick commerce strengthens it! Consumers reorder the same products, choose the same brands, use saved shopping lists, repeat previous orders - ‘Habit’ becomes both a strength and a weakness. If your brand is already inside the consumer's routine, quick commerce makes repeat buying almost effortless, but if it isn't, breaking existing habits becomes even harder because consumers have even less time to consider alternatives!

Then comes ‘Uncertainty’ - this variable quietly influences almost every purchase - an unfamiliar brand, a product image that doesn't look convincing, confusing titles, poor ratings, an unclear delivery time, etc

- the consumer rarely analyses these individually, but each one asks the same silent question - "*Should I take the chance?*" See, Quick commerce rewards certainty, and anything that introduces doubt slows the purchase. It is dangerous in a channel built around 'immediacy'.

Notice something important - categories don't rewrite consumer psychology, instead they merely change the weight and meaning of the variables that already exist!

After making these behavioural adjustments, the equation naturally evolves into the

Quick Commerce Purchase formula =

$$\frac{\text{Impulse x Familiarity x Ease x Urgency x Availability}}{\text{Risk x Habit x Uncertainty}}$$

That is why I have gradually come to believe that quick commerce is not really in the business of delivering products, but in the business of 'protecting' momentum. Every minute of delay, every unnecessary click, every additional comparison, every missing product, every tiny inconvenience gives logic an opportunity to replace 'impulse'. And impulse rarely wins once logic enters the conversation!

If you are working with a quick commerce company, don't begin with discounts, advertising, assortment, but first put this equation on the wall of every meeting room, and then ask only one question - *Which variable are we weakening today?* Because once you understand this equation, quick commerce stops looking like a logistics business, and starts looking like a 'behavioural' business disguised as logistics - the warehouses, the riders, the algorithms, the dark stores, the technology - they are all extraordinarily important, but they are only the 'visible' machinery, while the real business is happening inside the human mind, in the few fleeting seconds between - "*I need this"*... and "*Order placed"*.

Fashion & Lifestyle Playbook

I have often joked with my family that if marketing had not become my profession, fashion probably would have! I have always loved well-made clothes, beautifully crafted shoes and brands with 'character'!

Over the years, my wardrobe has grown far beyond what any sensible person would call "*necessary*". My son inherited the same weakness. My wife, I'm quite certain, surpassed both of us long ago!

Living with fashion enthusiasts teaches you something no consumer research report ever can - people almost never buy clothes because they need clothes, instead they buy because something about that product makes them feel a little different about themselves. That is why I always say fashion is one of the 'purest' expressions of consumer psychology, because it is one of the few industries where 'identity' is often more important than 'utility'.

Over the years, I have spent countless hours walking through stores, not because I was shopping, but because I was observing - *Who stopped? Who hesitated? Who bought immediately? Who walked away?* The more I observed, the more convinced I became that fashion is one of the least rational categories in business! And I don't mean that as criticism, but as admiration - fashion has the remarkable ability to make people buy something that they already have! Very few people buy another white shirt because the previous one stopped working! Very few people buy another pair of shoes because walking suddenly became impossible!

See, something else is happening - people are not buying clothing, but buying 'identity'. That is where I begin with the Universal Purchase Equation.

Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Desire} \times \text{Awareness} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Ease} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

Let's first discuss 'Desire'. In most categories, desire is linked to solving a problem, but fashion behaves differently, because the product rarely solves a problem, but creates a possibility of 'feeling' younger, or more confident, more elegant, more successful, or more expressive. Desire therefore becomes something much more specific - it becomes 'Aspiration'. Consumers are not simply asking - "*Do I like this?*", but - "*Is this the person I want to become?*"

The second variable is 'Awareness'. Fashion has taught me that awareness alone is almost meaningless - a brand may be well known and still fail to become desirable. What transforms awareness into purchase is watching other people embrace it - seeing colleagues wear it, seeing creators style it, seeing athletes, actors or even strangers carry it naturally. Awareness therefore evolves into 'Social Proof', not because consumers blindly imitate others, but because fashion has always been a social language - before we wear something, we often need evidence that it belongs in the world we wish to enter!

The third variable is 'Trust'. It simply changes its meaning - consumers rarely worry whether a shirt will function, but surely think whether the brand understands taste, whether the quality matches the promise, or wearing it will make them feel as good as they 'imagine'. Trust therefore shifts from functional confidence to 'Brand Credibility'.

Next, let's talk of 'Ease'. Unlike quick commerce, ease becomes less dominant as most consumers are willing to spend time browsing fashion. Discovery is part of the experience - trying different styles, comparing colours, or imagining combinations. Ease still matters, but its influence reduces, so much so that sometimes a little exploration actually increases excitement.

Then comes 'Justification'. This variable becomes surprisingly important - fashion is full of emotional purchases that later seek rational explanations like - "*I'll wear it for work*". "*It was on sale*". "*The quality is excellent*". "*It will last for years*". The purchase usually begins with emotion, and the justification follows immediately afterwards!

One variable, however, deserves far more importance than it receives in most marketing discussions is 'Moment'. See, fashion is deeply contextual - wedding season, festivals, vacations, a promotion, college admissions, the beginning of summer, the arrival of winter - a consumer may love the product today and still postpone the purchase because the

moment isn't right. Always remember, in fashion, timing often unlocks aspiration!

Now let us look at the denominator. Let us begin with 'Risk'. Unlike electronics or automobiles, the greatest risk in fashion is rarely financial, instead it is social! Consumers quietly wonder - "*Will this suit me?*" "*Am I dressing too young?*" "*Is this appropriate for work?*" "*Will people like it?*" "*Will I feel confident wearing this?*" See, the product isn't frightening, but the judgement might be. That is why fashion brands spend so much effort helping consumers visualise themselves wearing the product - every photograph, every model, every creator and every trial room exists to reduce that perceived social risk.

Then comes 'Habit'. Fashion has one of the strongest habit loops of any category - consumers return to familiar fits, same brands, same colours, same stores, and same price range - it explains why someone may own twenty shirts and still buy the twenty-first from exactly the same brand! Habit creates comfort, and breaking that comfort requires a compelling reason - a new trend, a trusted recommendation, an admired celebrity or simply a life event that encourages consumers to redefine themselves.

Finally, there is 'Uncertainty'. Fashion is full of unanswered questions - "*Will this fit properly?*" "*Will the colour look the same in daylight?*" "*Will I actually wear it?*" "*Will it still look fashionable next year?*" See, unlike many other categories, consumers are often uncertain not about the product, but about themselves. That is why generous return policies, easy exchanges, size guides, virtual try-ons and authentic customer photographs have become so important, because they don't merely improve the shopping experience, but also reduce uncertainty.

The denominator hasn't changed, but the expression of each parameter has!

Risk becomes social acceptance, habit becomes style loyalty, and uncertainty becomes self-confidence.

After looking at every variable, this is how I would adapt the Universal Purchase Equation for fashion.

Fashion & Lifestyle Purchase Formula =

$$\frac{\text{Aspiration} \times \text{Social Proof} \times \text{Brand Credibility} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

Notice that I have simply translated each variable into the language of fashion.

That, I believe, is the real value of the equation - it doesn't force every category to behave identically, but helps us understand 'why' they behave differently.

If I had to summarise - consumers rarely buy clothes to cover their bodies, but to reveal their identity.

The fabric is important, the fit is important, the quality is important, but they are rarely the beginning of the purchase. The purchase begins much earlier, when a consumer sees a version of themselves, they would like to become.

One lesson my own wardrobe has taught me over the years is that fashion is surprisingly irrational - I have stood in front of a wardrobe full of perfectly good shirts and still convinced myself that one more was somehow essential.

Was it rational? Absolutely not. *Was it human?* Completely.

I was buying the feeling that came with it - the anticipation of wearing it to an important meeting, the quiet confidence it might give me, the possibility that it represented a slightly better version of myself.

That is why I have gradually stopped calling fashion an apparel business, but an aspiration business.

If you are building a fashion brand, I suggest, you should spend far less time discussing collections and far more time understanding cultural movements - *How are young professionals redefining success? How are women redefining elegance? How are men redefining confidence? What does comfort mean today? What does luxury mean to a generation that values experiences as much as possessions?* Those questions matter far more than predicting next season's colour palette.

Because fashion does not begin in factories, but in 'society' - it emerges from the desire to be seen, to belong, to be admired, or perhaps, just for a moment, to become the person we imagine ourselves to be.

The brands that understand that are no longer selling apparel, but selling identity. And identity has always been one of the strongest forces in consumer behaviour.

Electronics & Durables Playbook

When I look back at my career, I realise that I have spent a large part of it around electronics and consumer durables - televisions, kitchen appliances, water purifiers, small domestic appliances, smart devices - every few years, the products changed dramatically, but the consumers didn't! That, perhaps, is the biggest lesson this industry has taught me!

I heard people would often say the electronics business is driven by technology, but I always disagreed! I believe technology only enables the purchase, while human aspiration completes it!

Take a moment and think about the electronics in your own home. *Does your television still work? Yes. Does your refrigerator still cool? Almost certainly. Does your washing machine still wash clothes?* Of course it does.

Then why do people replace them?

That question fascinated me for years! The answer isn't hidden inside the product, but inside the consumer!

Electronics are rarely replaced because they stop functioning, but because our definition of "*good enough*" quietly changes! The television that once looked enormous suddenly feels ordinary, the kitchen that once looked modern now appears dated, the mobile phone that once felt unbelievably fast now feels irritatingly old! See, nothing happened to the product, but everything happened to our 'expectations'!

That is why I always begin with the Universal Purchase Equation.

Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Desire} \times \text{Awareness} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Ease} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

Now let us see how this equation behaves in electronics.

The first variable is 'Desire'. In most technology companies, desire is interpreted as the desire for a better product, but I think that is too narrow. See, consumers rarely wake up wanting a television with a better processor, or a refrigerator with another cooling technology, or a

washing machine with three additional wash programmes. Instead, they want a better experience, a more beautiful living room, a smarter home, less waiting, less effort, more comfort, and sometimes, if we are completely honest, they also want the quiet confidence that comes from owning something exceptional.

A seventy-five-inch television is rarely purchased because fifty inches stopped working, but because it changes the room; changes how guests experience the home; and how the owner feels every evening while watching a film.

See, the purchase is no longer about the screen, but about the life surrounding the screen. Desire therefore evolves into 'Life Upgrade'.

The second variable is 'Awareness'. In electronics, consumers already know most of the leading brands, but what they struggle with is understanding the differences. And so, one of the biggest mistakes I see in this industry is the obsession with specifications - eight cores, 120 hertz, 5K nits, quad cooling, etc. Most consumers don't dream in numbers, but only in 'outcomes'. Consumers don't buy eight gigabytes of RAM, but a laptop that never makes them wait. They don't buy a brighter display, but a television that still looks beautiful in a sunlit living room. They don't buy a quieter motor, but a peaceful Sunday morning. The role of marketing is therefore not to simplify technology!

The third variable is 'Trust'. This becomes even more important because electronics are expected to live with us for years. Consumers are asking - "*Will I still be happy with this decision three years from now?*" Trust therefore becomes 'Future Confidence' - confidence that the product will last, service will be available, software will continue to evolve, and the company will stand behind its promise.

Then comes 'Ease'. Consumers are willing to spend time researching electronics. What they dislike is confusion - too many specifications, too many model numbers, and too many technical words that sound impressive but explain very little! The easier it becomes to understand the product, the easier it becomes to justify buying it!

Then comes 'Justification'. I believe this is one of the strongest variables in electronics, because consumers emotionally decide to upgrade! Then they begin collecting rational reasons - "*It consumes less electricity*". "*The EMI is manageable*". "*We'll use it every day*". "*The old one has served us well*". "*This will last another ten years*". See, emotion opens the door, and logic politely follows behind!

The final variable is ‘Moment’. Electronics rarely exist in isolation - a new home, a renovation, a wedding, a promotion, festive season, a bonus, etc,. Now let us look at the denominator, and begin with ‘Risk’. The consumer isn't only worried about spending money, but are worried about making an expensive mistake. "*Will a better model launch next month?*" "*Is this already becoming outdated?*" "*Am I buying the right brand?*"

Technology moves quickly, and so nobody wants to feel left behind immediately after buying.

Then comes ‘Habit’. Brand loyalty in electronics is remarkably powerful. Families often stay with the same television brand for decades, the same mobile ecosystem, the same appliance company. Habit creates familiarity, and familiarity creates confidence. Breaking that habit requires more than a better specification. It requires a better ‘story’.

Finally comes ‘Uncertainty’. *Should I buy online or visit a store? Should I wait for the festive sale? Should I spend a little more? Will I actually use these features?* Remember, every unanswered question postpones the purchase.

And postponed purchases are often lost purchases.

After adapting the Universal Purchase Equation, I arrive at the Electronics Playbook.

$$\text{Electronics Purchase Probability} = \frac{\text{Life Upgrade} \times \text{Awareness} \times \text{Future Confidence} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

See, technology is merely the evidence that tomorrow can be better than today. The brands that get this stop competing on specifications alone, and begin competing on something much more powerful - helping consumers imagine a future they genuinely want to live in, and when people fall in love with that future, the product almost sells itself.

Food & Health Playbook

I don't think food companies compete only with other food companies, instead they compete with the consumer's last meal. That may sound strange, but think about your own life - a heavy lunch often leads to a light dinner, a week of disciplined eating suddenly earns a weekend dessert, one indulgent evening is followed by a promise to *"eat healthy from tomorrow"* - yesterday's decision quietly shapes today's purchase.

Very few categories behave like this - breakfast influences lunch, lunch influences dinner, and dinner influences tomorrow morning!

Food is not a series of independent purchases, but a continuous conversation between 'desire' and 'discipline'. Also, people don't simply eat to survive, but they eat to celebrate, reward themselves, to reduce stress, socialise, to remember home, to feel healthier, and sometimes all within the same day!

Food & Health Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Craving} \times \text{Conscience} \times \text{Mental Taste} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Ease} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

My eyes kept returning to the very first variable 'Craving'. The more I thought about it, the more uncomfortable I became, because craving alone cannot explain why people buy food. If it could, every supermarket trolley would contain chocolates, pizzas, ice cream and soft drinks. But it doesn't! Neither can health explain food purchases, because if health alone drove behaviour, obesity would not be one of the world's fastest-growing challenges!

Somewhere between these two extremes lies the real consumer, and that is why I replaced 'Desire' with 'Craving' × 'Conscience', together. Every food purchase is a negotiation - between two versions of ourselves - the person we are at this moment, and the person we hope to become. One wants pleasure, while the other wants discipline.

I have always believed that the greatest food brands understand which side of that conversation they belong to - an indulgent dessert should never pretend to be medicine, while a health product should never apologise for being healthy. Consumers don't expect every product to do everything, instead they expect authenticity.

I call the second variable 'Mental Taste' instead of awareness, because food is the only category I know where the consumer begins consuming the product long before taking the first bite! The photograph, the colour, the texture, the memory, the imagination - everything happens inside the mind before anything reaches the mouth! Good food photography activates memory - you don't simply just see melted chocolate, but you almost taste it. That is why I believe the food industry doesn't market products, but engineers 'anticipation'.

Then comes 'Trust'. Every food company eventually asks consumers for permission - to enter their body, to become part of their family's routine, to be served to children - that is an extraordinary responsibility! Consumers rarely forgive food that betrays their trust.

Next variable is what our industry often underestimates 'Justification'. Food marketers believe they are selling nutrition, or taste, or convenience, but they are actually selling permission - *"High protein". "No added sugar". "Baked, not fried". "Made from whole grains"*. These statements certainly communicate product benefits, but they also perform another job of making consumers feel comfortable about a decision they already wanted to make! See, marketing in food, at its best, doesn't remove guilt, but reduces it!

Now let us turn to the denominator. 'Risk' in food is deeply personal because consumers aren't only asking whether the product tastes good, but whether it deserves a place inside their lives. Every food scare, every misleading claim and every broken promise leaves a mark that advertising cannot easily erase.

Then comes 'Habit'. I don't think there is another category where habit is stronger. Most of us don't choose our first food habits - we inherit them - the tea we drink, the spices we enjoy, the breakfast we expect, the festival sweets we wait for - food habits are often family traditions disguised as consumer behaviour. Changing them is one of the hardest challenges in marketing!

Finally comes ‘Uncertainty’. "*Will I like it?*" "*Will my family accept it?*" "*Will I buy it once and never again?*" That uncertainty explains why tasting counters, trial packs and free samples continue to work even after decades of marketing innovation - sometimes one trial bite achieves what an expensive advertising campaign cannot!

The longer I work in this category, the more convinced I become that food companies are not really competing for market share, but for rituals! Because the day your product becomes someone's morning routine, post-workout habit or Sunday family tradition, the purchase disappears!

And in my experience, rituals are among the strongest forms of consumer loyalty any brand can ever hope to build.

B2B & Enterprise Playbook

"*B2B is completely different from B2C*". Every time I hear it, I smile, and then I usually say something that surprises people - "*B2B is dead*".

That doesn't mean businesses are dead, but the phrase 'business-to-business' is misleading! Businesses don't buy. People inside businesses buy! A procurement manager buys, a CIO buys, a plant head buys, a CEO buys, a finance controller buys, a project manager buys - even when an organisation signs the contract, every decision along the way was made by a human being!

That single realisation changes the way we look at enterprise marketing! When we say, "*The customer wants*"..., we often imagine a company, but there is no such thing!

Companies don't have emotions, but people do! Companies don't fear failure, but people do! Companies don't worry about making the wrong recommendation, but people do! Behind every purchase order is someone protecting a career, a reputation and a future.

That is why I have never believed that B2B marketing should become less human, instead I believe it should become more human!

The equation I finally arrived at reflects exactly that.

Enterprise Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Business Value} \times \text{Credibility} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Ease of Adoption} \times \text{Business Justification} \times \text{Strategic Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

The first variable is 'Business Value'. Notice that I didn't call it features, or technology, or innovation. Nobody buys enterprise software because it has another dashboard! Nobody buys industrial equipment because it contains another sensor! Every enterprise purchase begins with one simple question - "*What changes if we say yes?*" *Will revenue grow? Will costs reduce? Will productivity improve? Will customers become happier? Will employees work faster?* If the answer is unclear, nothing else matters!

The second variable is ‘Credibility’. Enterprise buyers don't trust presentations, instead they trust evidence, case studies, existing customers, industry reputation, pilot projects, and references. Awards matter, but proof matters more, because credibility answers a very important question - "*Has somebody like me already trusted you?*"

Then comes ‘Trust’. This is where many organisations confuse contracts with confidence. A signed agreement doesn't create trust, instead trust creates signed agreements! It is built over months, sometimes years - through conversations, transparency, technical competence, keeping promises, responding when things go wrong. Enterprise relationships survive because trust survives, and not because contracts do.

Then comes ‘Ease of Adoption’. I deliberately avoided calling this "*Ease*". In enterprise businesses, buying is rarely difficult, but ‘changing’ is. Every new solution asks an organisation to learn something, integrate something, abandon something, and train someone. The easier you make organisational change, the easier the purchase becomes! Technology adoption is rarely a technology problem, but mostly a human problem!

Let’s now move to ‘Business Justification’. I sometimes think enterprise marketing exists for this variable alone - every buyer eventually has to answer one question - "*Why should we spend this money?*" The stronger that answer becomes, the easier every internal meeting becomes! Return on investment, payback period, productivity, compliance, risk reduction, or growth. See, the proposal is simply the document, but the real justification is the sale.

Then comes ‘Strategic Moment’. I have seen some excellent products fail because they arrive at the wrong time - no budget, wrong priority, leadership transition, organisation restructuring, or competing initiatives. Sometimes the best sales decision is not pushing harder, but is waiting for the right moment!

Now let us look at the denominator.

‘Risk’ behaves very differently in enterprise businesses - the buyer isn't only risking company money, but risking professional credibility - a failed decision may be remembered long after the project ends, and that makes enterprise buyers naturally conservative.

Next is ‘Habit’. Organisations build habits just like consumers do! Yes! Existing vendors, existing software, existing processes, existing ways of working - *"We've always done it this way”*.

Finally comes ‘Uncertainty’. *"Will implementation succeed?" "Will employees actually use it?" "Can this company support us three years from now?" "Will this decision still look intelligent next year?"* - every unanswered question slows momentum. That is why the best enterprise marketers don't simply explain what their solution does, but they systematically remove uncertainty until saying yes feels safer than saying no.

The longer I have worked in enterprise businesses, the less I believe organisations buy products, instead they buy ‘confidence’! The confidence that their decision is commercially sound, that implementation will succeed, and that the person recommending it will not regret doing so.

That is why I no longer think of B2B as Business-to-Business, but as ‘Human-to-Human’, conducted inside organisations. The contracts may carry company names, but the decisions never stop being human.

High-Value Purchases Playbook

I often asked audiences - "*Why do people buy a luxury watch?*"

The answers are almost always predictable - "*Quality*", "*Craftsmanship*", "*Precision*", "*Legacy*". See, all of them are correct, but none of them are complete, because if quality alone sold luxury watches, everyone would wear the same watch! If craftsmanship alone mattered, consumers would buy only the technically best product! But we all know, they don't! High-value purchases are rarely about what the product 'does', but about what the purchase 'means'!

High-Value Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Personal Significance} \times \text{Evaluation} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Clarity} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Right Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

That is why I deliberately chose 'Personal Significance' as the first variable. A luxury apartment is rarely just real estate, but years of sacrifice becoming visible; a luxury car is not merely transportation, but a personal milestone; an expensive holiday is not simply travel, but a memory parents want their children to remember twenty years later. See, all high-value purchases almost always become chapters in people's lives!

The second variable is 'Evaluation' and this is where the category separates itself from almost everything else. See, consumers don't compare products, but compare futures - "*Which decision will I still be proud of five years from now?*" That changes the role of marketing, and so the objective is not to make your product look better than competitors, but to help them become more certain about their own decision.

Then comes 'Trust'. In my experience, premium brands are not built by convincing consumers they are extraordinary, but by becoming 'predictable'. The customer knows exactly what to expect - the service, the quality, the ownership experience, or the resale value. Trust simply reduces consumer's emotional effort.

The next variable is ‘Clarity’. Notice I didn't write ease, because buying a luxury home should not feel fast, or buying a premium car shouldn't feel rushed! Consumers actually enjoy exploring possibilities, and what they don't enjoy is confusion, complex pricing, hidden conditions, conflicting advice, unanswered questions - the clearer the decision becomes, the more comfortable the consumer becomes.

Then comes ‘Justification’. I sometimes think this entire category survives because of this one variable, because the emotional decision is often made surprisingly early, and the weeks that follow are usually spent collecting reasons to support it - *"It's an investment". "The resale value is strong". "We'll use it for years". "This is something we've earned"*. Don’t consider it as hypocrisy, because that is how human beings reduce cognitive conflict - we buy emotionally, but explain it rationally!

The final variable is ‘Right Moment’. I would say that high-value purchases have their own calendar - a promotion, a successful business year, a wedding, retirement, or a personal achievement. Sometimes nothing changes in the product, but life simply creates ‘permission’.

Now let us look at the denominator. ‘Risk’ becomes intensely emotional! Consumers are not only afraid of losing money, but are afraid of making a decision they cannot easily undo, because the more permanent the purchase feels, the greater the perceived risk!

Then comes ‘Habit’. It may sound surprising, but premium buying is deeply ‘habitual’ - families often buy the same automobile brand across generations; the same jeweller; the same architect; or the same financial advisor - trust slowly becomes tradition, and breaking that requires far more than a better product!

Finally comes ‘Uncertainty’. *"Am I buying too early?" "Should I wait?" "Will something better launch next year?" "Will I regret not choosing the other option?"* Consumers are often uncertain even after deciding to buy, and their uncertainty shifts from ‘whether’ to buy, to ‘what’ to buy, and that is why reassurance is one of the most underrated skills in premium marketing.

The longer I have worked with premium products, the less I believe they compete on price. In fact, I think price is often the least interesting part of the conversation - people remember how a purchase made them feel long after they forget what they paid for it!

As a marketer if you understand this, your brand will endure. You must understand that you don't sell expensive products, but help people mark important moments in their lives - and when a purchase becomes part of someone's life story, it stops being measured only in money, and gets to be measured in meaning.

Services & Experiences Playbook

The biggest difference between a product and a service is remarkably simple.

A product is bought 'after' it can be evaluated, but a service is bought 'before' it can be experienced. See, when you buy a shirt, you can touch the fabric; when you buy a car, you can take a test drive; when you buy a television, you can compare picture quality. *But how do you evaluate tomorrow's legal advice? Or next month's consulting engagement? Or a holiday that hasn't happened yet? Or a surgery you hope you never need again?*

You can't! You are buying a 'promise', and that is why I always suggest that services are not sold, but are 'believed'.

Services & Experiences Purchase Probability =

$$\frac{\text{Expected Outcome} \times \text{Reputation} \times \text{Trust} \times \text{Clarity} \times \text{Justification} \times \text{Right Moment}}{\text{Risk} \times \text{Habit} \times \text{Uncertainty}}$$

The first variable therefore becomes 'Expected Outcome'. Nobody buys consulting because they enjoy consultants; nobody buys insurance because they love insurance; nobody checks into a luxury resort because they admire hotel buildings - people buy what they believe their life will look like afterwards - more growth, better health, less stress, more confidence, better memories. The service is simply a bridge between today's 'problem' and tomorrow's 'outcome'.

The second variable is 'Reputation'. I deliberately chose this word instead of awareness, simply because awareness tells me you exist, but reputation tells me what people say after they have experienced you! In services, reputation is accumulated evidence, and so it cannot be manufactured overnight.

Then comes 'Trust'. I don't think there is another category where trust carries so much weight - the customer is paying today for something they cannot verify until tomorrow, and hence that requires an extraordinary leap of faith.

Which is why expertise matters, credentials matter, testimonials matter, referrals matter, but above all, consistency matters. Every interaction either strengthens trust or quietly weakens it.

Then comes 'Clarity'. I have seen brilliant service companies lose business simply because they explained themselves poorly. Remember, consumers are surprisingly patient with complexity, but impatient with confusion. *What exactly will happen? Who will be involved? How long will it take? What will success look like?* The clearer the journey becomes, the smaller the perceived risk becomes.

Then comes 'Justification'. Whether someone is hiring an architect, choosing a university, selecting a consulting firm or booking an expensive holiday, the conversation inside the mind is remarkably similar - "*This will be worth it*". "*This is an investment*". "*This will save me time*". "*This is the right decision for my family*". Note, the stronger the outcome, the easier the justification!

Finally comes the 'Right Moment'. Services are rarely purchased continuously.

I would say - life creates demand - a promotion creates the need for executive coaching, a new business creates the need for legal advice, marriage creates travel, children create education, illness creates healthcare. The service doesn't create the moment, but life does.

Now let us look at the denominator. 'Risk' is unusually high because services cannot be inspected before purchase. The customer is not merely risking money, but risking time, opportunity, relationships, and sometimes even their future.

Then comes 'Habit'. Consumers often remain loyal to the same doctor, the same lawyer, the same accountant, the same salon, the same hotel - not because alternatives don't exist, but because trust, once earned, becomes habit. And simply because habit is incredibly difficult to break!

Finally comes 'Uncertainty'. "*Will this actually deliver what I expect?*" "*Will they understand my situation?*" "*What happens if things go wrong?*" That uncertainty explains why referrals continue to outperform advertising in almost every service business. When uncertainty is high, people borrow confidence from someone they already trust.

The longer I have studied and helped service industries, the more convinced I have become that services are not really intangible, but their outcomes are simply ‘delayed’. Remember, customers don't buy expertise, but buy confidence in a future they cannot yet see.

As a marketer, if you understand this, then stop selling services, and start reducing uncertainty for their prospects! And perhaps that is the most valuable service any brand can ever provide.

22.
The Marketer's Checklist

I have never been a great believer in checklists that make people feel productive! I have seen teams that can tick fifteen boxes and still launch something nobody cares about! I have seen beautifully researched products fail, and heavily funded campaigns disappear without a trace! I have also seen a few ordinary product becoming habits!

So, when I say checklist, I don't mean a document that sits inside a marketing folder, but 'five' questions I would want you to ask yourself before putting your name behind a product, campaign, launch or brand, and seek honest answers that survive contact with the consumer. But let me explain why I believe each of these matters.

1. Attention Check - Does it stop the scroll?

I would actually make this question more brutal - *If I remove the brand name, logo and media budget, is there anything here that deserves attention?*

That is the real test!

We have entered an era where attention is no longer something brands can simply buy, because there is too much content, too many creators, too many brands, too many opinions, too many notifications, and increasingly, too much AI-generated content that looks perfectly acceptable but feels completely interchangeable!

This is creating a strange problem - marketing has become easier to produce and harder to notice - a beautifully written caption is no longer remarkable; a polished video is no longer remarkable; a professionally photographed product is no longer remarkable - simply because the consumer has seen thousands of them!

So, I would ask three questions - *Is there a surprise? Is there a tension? Is there a reason to care now?* If the answer to all three is no, you don't have an attention problem, but an 'idea' problem. And I would rather discover that before spending the money!

See, attention is not about shouting louder, but about creating a small interruption in an otherwise predictable stream. The best marketing doesn't say - "*Look at me*", but creates a moment in which the consumer says - "*Wait. What is that?*" That is even more important as now AI is making content production almost infinite - when everyone can produce more content, the scarcity shifts from 'content' to 'consequence'. The marketer who understands that will stop asking - "*How much content should we produce?*" and start asking - "*What is worth interrupting someone for?*" That is the first check, and if the answer is weak, I would stop!

2. Desire Check - Does it create want?

See, attention is not purchase success, and so if even if I can make you look at something you might still have absolutely no intention of buying - a spectacular advertisement can generate millions of views and almost no demand! That is why the second question is much harder - *After seeing this, does the consumer want something?* Not understand or remember something, but 'want' something. In fact, I would go one step further - *Have we created a desire for the product, or merely explained why the product is good?*

Marketing teams often become obsessed with communicating features, while the consumer is asking a different question - "*Why should I want this?*"

That desire may be functional, emotional, social, aspirational, and even be irrational! A larger television can create a desire for a more impressive home; a new phone can create a desire to feel current; a premium watch can create a desire to mark an achievement; a quick-commerce order can satisfy an immediate craving; a health product can create hope.

Remember, desire is always psychological, and therefore always ask - *What changes in the consumer's life if they own this?* If the answer is only - "*They get the product*", you haven't found the desire yet!

There is another test I find particularly useful - *Would someone want this if nobody were advertising it?* I believe that question separates genuine desirability from 'manufactured' excitement.

3. Ease Check - Is it effortless to buy?

'Buying' friction has become invisible. Sometimes it is a slow website, an unclear price, too many choices, an impossible return policy, and sometimes the greatest friction is psychological - "*Should I really spend this much?*" "*Will this work for me?*" "*What if I make the wrong choice?*"

So, I don't define ease as fewer clicks, but less mental work between 'wanting' and 'owning'. See, a premium purchase may require twenty minutes of evaluation and still feel easy, while a ₹500 usual purchase can feel exhausting. The question is therefore not - "*How quickly can we get the consumer through checkout?*", but - "*How many decisions are we forcing the consumer to make that we could have made easier?*"

Do I need to compare twelve variants? Do I need to understand technical terminology? Do I need to calculate the discount? Do I need to find the return policy? Do I need to create an account before I can even understand the offer?

Remember, every unnecessary decision is an opportunity for doubt, and doubt is often the quietest form of friction, you can present to a customer!

I would therefore test the entire journey as if I knew nothing about the product, not as a marketer or product manager, or the person who designed the website, but as a first-time buyer. If I need someone from the company to explain how to buy the product, we haven't made it easy enough.

4. Visibility Check - Will people show it?

This is where I strongly suggest that the marketers to move beyond the old idea of word of mouth. People don't simply recommend products anymore, but they display, photograph, unbox, post, review, wear, share them, and turn consumption into 'content'. That creates an

entirely different opportunity, and so please ask - *Does the product give the consumer anything worth displaying?* Not necessarily because it is beautiful, but sometimes it is surprising, or signals taste or achievement, useful enough to demonstrate, or the experience itself is worth sharing, or the story behind the purchase is the content.

This matters immensely, because the most efficient marketing asset may no longer be the advertisement we create, but the 'evidence' consumers themselves create after buying.

But there is also a warning here, I must suggest, - don't try and manufacture fake shareability, because putting a neon wall inside a store doesn't automatically create a brand people want to talk about!

Instead remember, a product becomes visible when being 'associated' with it gives the consumer some 'value'. That value could be status, identity, entertainment, utility, belonging, knowledge, humour, or simply the pleasure of discovery. I would therefore ask - *If I remove our media budget, can the product create any of its own visibility?* If the answer is no, you may have built a product that needs perpetual advertising to remain alive, and that can work, but it will be expensive!

On the other hand, a stronger product naturally carries some of its marketing with it.

5. Habit Check - Will they come back?

This is where marketing finally meets economics! I have said before - the first purchase is exciting, but the second purchase is evidence, and the tenth purchase is a business! A consumer trying your product once proves curiosity, their coming back proves value, and their coming back repeatedly proves that the product has found a place in life!

And this is where many marketing colleagues fool themselves! They celebrate acquisition, downloads, first orders, trial, but they don't ask - *"What happens after the consumer has experienced us?" Does the product become useful enough to repeat? Does it become enjoyable enough to repeat? Does it become convenient enough to repeat? Does it become emotionally meaningful enough to repeat? Does it become part of a routine? Or does the consumer simply move on?* Remember, habit cannot be manufactured by CRM alone, a WhatsApp reminder cannot create genuine value, an

email cannot manufacture satisfaction, a loyalty programme can reward repetition, but it cannot create a reason to repeat indefinitely.

The product 'itself' has to earn the second purchase, and then earn the third. That is why I suggest you measure something beyond retention, and look for behavioural dependence! Note, I don't mean addiction, but dependence in the everyday sense, and ask - *What would become inconvenient if the product disappeared tomorrow?* If the answer is nothing, the brand hasn't become important enough, but if consumers notice its absence, we have something!

Remember, the real achievement of marketing is not getting someone to say *"yes"*, but making that 'yes' continue to make sense after the excitement has disappeared.

So, the checklist I leave you with is more of a 'five checks' single chain - Attention creates the opportunity, then desire creates the pull, then ease protects the decision, then visibility extends the decision beyond the buyer, and finally habit turns the decision into growth.

And if one of those links is weak, you shouldn't immediately spend more money on marketing, but go back and ask whether the problem is actually the marketing! See, when consumers don't buy, the marketer's first instinct is to communicate better, but after all my own years, I have learnt that sometimes the more courageous answer is to 'build better'. And that, to me, is where marketing finally stops being promotion and becomes what it should always have been - the 'disciplined' art of making something worth choosing.

Epilogue

Don’t Sell Anymore

There is a moment in the Bhagavad Gita that I have often thought about, particularly when I think about what marketing is becoming!

Arjuna is standing on the battlefield, overwhelmed by doubt. He knows how to fight, has the skill and the weapons, even knows what is expected of him, and yet, he cannot act! Krishna Bhagwan Ji does not solve the problem by giving Arjuna a better weapon, neither does he advertise the war. Krishna Bhagwan Ji also does not create a clever argument designed to overpower Arjuna, but he does change something much deeper - he changes the way Arjuna sees the world, his responsibility within it, and ultimately his own role in what is about to happen. The decision still belongs to Arjuna! Because, for sure, the greatest form of influence is not making someone do something, but helping someone see differently enough to choose differently.

I think marketing has reached a similar moment! For decades, we have been taught to think about products, brands, consumers, campaigns, positioning, communication and conversion, and so we became extraordinarily good at asking - "*How do I sell this?*"

But today, the consumers have more information than ever. More choices, easy comparison, and many more voices competing for their attention. The old advantage of knowing more, saying more or communicating more loudly is disappearing, and what remains is something much more fundamental - *Can we change behaviour? Can we make someone desire something they can genuinely benefit from? Can we make a difficult decision easier? Can we help someone express who they are becoming? Can we change what they expect from a category? Can we make a better way of living feel normal?*

That is why I have deliberately called this final section - ‘Don't sell anymore’, because I don't think the marketer's job ends with the transaction. The transaction is merely the visible evidence that

something deeper has happened inside the consumer - a belief has shifted, a preference has moved, a behaviour has changed, an identity has been expressed, an expectation has been raised. And sometimes, if we do our work exceptionally well, a small part of the consumer's world becomes ‘better’.

That is what we must discuss now - making their lives better!

You Shape Behaviour

For years, like many marketers, I always asked myself - *How do I make people buy this?* But after decades of working with consumers, products and brands across categories, I have come to believe that the question itself is too small! I don't think the marketer's job is to make people buy, but to 'shape' what people do next!

Consider what happens when a new product enters someone's life. A consumer sees it, thinks about it, tries it, purchases, uses it, repeats it, perhaps recommends it, and perhaps also replaces an old behaviour with a new one!

The purchase was only one moment in that sequence, and the real marketing happened in everything that followed.

This is why I somehow don't trust how we measure marketing. We celebrate impressions, clicks, leads, conversions, market share, but 'behaviour' is often happening somewhere beneath all these numbers!

Did someone change what they eat? Did a family begin using a dishwasher? Did a consumer move from cash to digital payments? Did someone start ordering groceries differently? Did a professional adopt a new software workflow? Did a household begin drinking a different kind of water?

These are not merely purchases, but 'behavioural' shifts. And once I began looking at marketing this way, I started seeing something I had missed for years - the smartest brands don't merely persuade people to choose differently once, but they try and make a different behaviour feel increasingly natural.

I believe that is a much higher form of marketing!

Think about quick commerce - its greatest achievement isn't that consumers can receive a packet of biscuits quickly, but the deeper achievement is that it has changed what consumers consider "*shopping*". Earlier, we planned, but now, we summon! That is behavioural change!

Streaming didn't simply sell subscriptions, but changed the meaning of television. Similarly, food delivery didn't merely create another channel for restaurants, but changed our relationship with the kitchen. Smartphones didn't just sell computing power, but how we communicate, navigate, pay, photograph, and work.

In all above, while the product was the visible part, but the behaviour was the real innovation. That is why I would now ask every marketer a different question before launching anything - *What behaviour are we trying to create, strengthen, weaken or replace?* And not "*What message are we going to communicate?*" That comes later! First let's understand the behaviour!

What does the consumer do today? Why does that behaviour exist? What emotional reward does it provide? What friction protects it? What habit keeps it alive? What would have to become true for the consumer to behave differently? And most importantly - *Is the new behaviour genuinely better for the consumer, or merely better for our sales forecast?*

See, consumer behaviour can certainly be manipulated, but manipulation is not the same as marketing. Let me explain - a marketer can create urgency where none exists, manufacture scarcity, exploit insecurity, design addictive loops, make cancellation difficult, hide complexity, and use psychological weaknesses to extract another transaction. All of these may produce behaviour, but they do not necessarily create value.

I believe the marketer of the present and future has to become something more sophisticated than a persuader - a behaviour architect.

Someone who understands that every product is effectively asking the consumer to change something. Sometimes the change is tiny, and sometimes it is enormous - a new toothpaste changes almost nothing, but a new financial product may change how someone saves; a new mobility platform may change how a city moves; a new health product may change a family's daily routine; a new technology may change an entire profession.

The greater the behavioural change, the greater the marketer's responsibility to understand the human being on the other side of the transaction.

And this is where I think traditional marketing has been too obsessed with the moment of purchase. We have built extraordinary machinery around acquisition, but behaviour doesn't end at checkout.

Please always ask - *Does the consumer actually use the product? Does the product fit into real life? Does the behaviour survive inconvenience? Does it become easier with repetition? Does the consumer eventually stop thinking about the behaviour because it has become normal?*

That final stage is where I believe marketing becomes truly powerful, because the ultimate objective is not persuasion, but 'normalisation'. When a new behaviour becomes normal, marketing has succeeded so completely that marketing itself becomes invisible.

See, nobody advertises brushing your teeth every morning, or nobody needs persuasion to search something on Google - nobody thinks of these as "*consumer behaviours*" anymore! They are simply life! That is the destination!

This is the most important shift I want to note - don't ask how to sell the product, but ask what you want the consumer to do differently because the product exists. Then work backwards, and design the product around a behaviour. Then design the experience around it. Then develop the communication. Then work the distribution for it. Then design the economics around it. Then design the habit around it.

When all of these pieces reinforce the same behaviour, you start changing lives, however modestly.

And that, is how I now define marketing - Marketing is not the art of getting people to buy what we make, but the discipline of making a better behaviour easier, more desirable and more natural to choose.

You Engineer Desire

If shaping behaviour is where marketing begins, desire is where the real battle starts! Consumers don't move simply because something is useful, but when something becomes meaningful enough to want.

We often talk about consumer needs as though they are waiting inside people, ready for marketers to discover them! Sometimes they are, but you must have noticed that the most powerful markets in the world were built around desires that did not previously exist in their present form.

See, need explains necessity, but its desire that explains movement. And desire is far more interesting, because it is not something a marketer finds, but something a marketer can 'engineer' responsibly.

This is where marketing becomes almost architectural - you are not creating the building, but the doorway through which the consumer can suddenly see a different life!

Think about what happens when a consumer encounters a product that creates genuine desire. They imagine! A better kitchen, a more confident appearance, a healthier body, a more productive workday, a more beautiful home, a more exciting holiday, or a more successful version of themselves.

See how the product becomes a bridge between 'who I am' and 'who I could be'.

That is why I have never been satisfied with the traditional distinction between rational and emotional buying, because almost every purchase contains both!

Emotion says - "*I want this"*, while reason later asks - "*Can I justify it?*"

That is precisely why the marketer's job is not simply to communicate benefits, but to understand which 'future self' the product makes believable.

This is also where I think many brands misunderstand aspiration! See, aspiration is not necessarily luxury! A homemaker may aspire to spend less time cleaning; a young professional may aspire to feel confident in a meeting;

a parent may aspire to give a child better opportunities; a retired person may aspire to travel independently; a student may aspire to belong!

Desire is not about making people dissatisfied with who they are, but showing them a 'possibility' they find worth moving toward.

And yes, there is a fine ethical line here - a marketer can say - "*You are incomplete without our product*", or "*Here is something that could make your life better*". Those are not the same philosophy, because the first exploits insecurity, while the other creates possibility. I suggest that you should always choose the second! Remember, sustainable desire does not come from making people hate their present, but from making the future feel attractive.

There is another lesson I must share - desire needs distance. If the desired future feels impossible, it creates fantasy rather than purchase, while on the other hand if it feels too ordinary, it creates no excitement.

The marketer has to find that narrow psychological distance where the consumer thinks - "*I could actually have this*", and that is where aspiration becomes action!

This is why product design, pricing, packaging, distribution, storytelling and experience cannot be treated as separate from desire - a product can be desirable in an advertisement and undesirable in reality; a premium brand can create aspiration but destroy it through poor service; a beautiful product can create desire but lose the purchase through an impossible price; a brilliant campaign can make people want something that the product cannot deliver.

Desire has to survive the 'entire' system, and that is why I use the word 'engineer' deliberately!

Engineering is not decoration, but the disciplined arrangement of variables so that something behaves differently. You engineer desire by understanding - what people already value, what they secretly aspire to, what they fear losing, what identity they want to express, what social signals matter to them, what future they can imagine, and what

evidence will make that future believable. Its then you must build the product and the experience so that the promise is actually delivered.

The deepest mistake a marketer can make is to create desire for something the organisation cannot consistently satisfy. I would say - that isn't marketing, but borrowing demand from the future. Eventually, the consumer collects the debt, and trust disappears. That is why repeat purchase falls, as the brand becomes expensive to maintain.

So, I would leave you with a very different definition of desire - desire is not the gap between what people have and what they don't have, but the distance between who they are and who they believe they could become.

Our job as marketers is not to exploit that distance, but to understand it.

And, when we have something genuinely valuable to offer, to build the bridge.

You Design Decisions

Today, the marketer is increasingly designing the environment in which the decision gets made. Think about a supermarket shelf - two hundred products may be available, but the consumer rarely evaluates all of them! The shelf architecture has already made decisions for them - placement, packaging, colour, price, size, promotions, familiarity. The consumer happily believes they chose, but in reality, much of the decision environment was designed before they arrived.

The same thing happens online - the order of products, the recommendation, the number of choices, the way a price is presented, the comparisons, etc - none of these is the purchase, but together, they shape the probability of purchase.

This is why I find the word 'choice' slightly misleading! Consumers don't make decisions in a vacuum, but inside environments, which can be designed!

Consider something as ordinary as buying a television, and give a consumer twenty models and say, "*Choose*". You haven't created freedom, but more work! Now organise those same twenty televisions around three meaningful needs - best for cinema, best for gaming, best for a large family room. The consumer's decision becomes easier! See, nothing about the products changed, but the decision architecture changed, and that is a very powerful idea! Sometimes the best marketing intervention isn't another persuasive message, but removing one unnecessary decision!

And I have seen this repeatedly across categories - a restaurant that recommends what to order; a fashion website that says, "*Complete the look*"; a quick-commerce platform that remembers your previous order; a software company that recommends the right plan rather than displaying ten; a financial service that explains the difference between two products instead of forcing the customer to interpret twenty. These

are not merely convenience features, but forms of marketing, because every unnecessary decision creates cognitive load, ultimately creating hesitation!

There is another side to this that marketers need to take seriously - good decision design should not trick people into buying. There is a world of difference between reducing cognitive effort and exploiting cognitive weakness. Making the right choice easier is good marketing, while making the wrong choice difficult to reverse is not. Pre-ticked boxes, hidden charges, artificial countdowns, confusing cancellation processes, misleading comparisons - these may improve a short-term conversion number, but will damage the relationship underneath it.

I would rather design a decision environment in which the consumer can say yes confidently than one in which the consumer says yes and later wonders what happened!

Also, now AI is increasingly recommending what we watch, what we buy, where we travel, which products we compare and perhaps even what we should not consider, and so the marketer of the future therefore won't simply compete for attention but to influence the recommendation layer between attention and action.

So, start asking - *What choices can we eliminate? What can we recommend? What should be the default? What needs comparison? What needs explanation? Where does uncertainty appear? Where does the consumer hesitate? Where can we reduce mental effort without reducing informed choice?* And perhaps most importantly - *Are we helping the consumer make a better decision, or merely making our preferred decision easier?*

I don't think consumers need more persuasion, but they need help for better decisions, and the marketer has an extraordinary opportunity to help create them.

When we do that well, the consumer doesn't feel marketed to, instead feel understood, and feel that the product was somehow easier to choose than everything else. That is designing the 'path' along which a good decision becomes the natural decision.

You Enable Identity

"*People buy what they need*". They don't, not always, because people also buy what they believe says something about them, and sometimes, that is far more powerful!

The car outside the house; the phone on the table; the shoes someone wears into a meeting; the coffee they order; the school they choose for their children; the hotel they stay in; and even the brands they deliberately refuse to buy - consumption has become a 'language' - we now use products to tell other people who we are.

But there is something even more interesting happening - we also use products to tell 'ourselves' who we are!

That is where, I think, the role of marketing has evolved - we are no longer simply positioning brands, but 'enabling' identity.

Think about a young professional buying a premium laptop. Of course, the processor and the battery matter, but somewhere underneath the functional evaluation may be another thought - "*This is the kind of professional I am becoming*". A person buying running shoes may not simply be buying footwear, but may be buying evidence that they are now a runner. Similarly, someone joining a gym isn't necessarily buying access to equipment, but a possible identity - "*I am someone who takes care of myself*".

That distinction is extraordinarily important, because people don't always buy products that describe who they are, but often buy products that help them become who they want to be!

This is where I think much of traditional segmentation becomes inadequate, because we divide consumers by age, income, gender, location, or occupation. But two forty-year-old consumers earning the same income can behave completely differently because they are trying to construct different lives - one wants to be adventurous, while another wants security. One wants to be seen as sophisticated, while another

wants to remain understated. One wants to belong, while another wants to stand apart.

Remember, demographics describe people but identity explains behaviour.

This is why brands can become so powerful - a brand can give people a vocabulary for themselves - *"Apple person", "Runner", "Minimalist", "Luxury traveller", "Health conscious", "Environmentally responsible", "Foodie", "Entrepreneur"*. These identities are not always formally declared, but they simply influence choices. And once a product becomes connected to identity, the consumer begins protecting the relationship.

That is why brand loyalty can sometimes look irrational from the outside, but the consumer isn't merely defending a product, but defending a piece of themselves!

This also explains something I have seen repeatedly in my career - consumers will sometimes reject a technically superior product because it doesn't fit the person, they believe themselves to be. That should make every product manager uncomfortable, because superiority on a specification sheet does not guarantee psychological relevance - a product can be objectively better and subjectively wrong or unsuitable.

The marketer's job, therefore, is to tell people - *"Who does this product allow you to become?"*

That opens an entirely different territory - a fashion brand can help someone feel more confident; a financial brand can help someone feel responsible; a technology brand can help someone feel ahead; a health brand can help someone feel disciplined; a luxury brand can help someone mark achievement; a social platform can help someone feel connected - the product becomes an instrument of self-construction!

See, identity isn't only about individual expression, but also about belonging.

Sometimes consumers buy brands because they want to stand out, and sometimes they buy them because they don't want to stand out!

Both are identity decisions! A teenager wearing what everyone else wears is expressing belonging, while a professional deliberately choosing something unconventional may be expressing independence.

The same product can therefore mean completely different things to different people.

That is why I believe in asking - "*What identity is this consumer trying to express, protect or become?*" And perhaps that is where marketing reaches its most human point!

We spend so much time trying to understand what people buy, instead I think we should spend more time understanding 'why they want to be the person who buys it'. Because the deepest purchase isn't always of a product, but sometimes also a small vote for the person we believe we can become.

And when a brand earns the privilege of participating in that transformation, it has moved far beyond selling - it has become part of someone's identity.

That is a much more powerful position.

You Build Systems, Not Campaigns

A campaign has a beginning, and an end, while a system doesn't, because it loops and learns - a consumer sees an advertisement that creates attention. The product creates desire, and the experience makes the decision easier. The purchase creates data. The product slowly creates a habit. The habit creates another purchase. The second purchase creates advocacy, which creates visibility. Visibility brings another consumer into the system.

That is where I believe the marketer of the future has to operate - not at the level of the advertisement, but at the level of the 'loop'!

So, start asking - *If the campaign creates demand, can the product fulfil it? If the product fulfils it, does the consumer return? If the consumer returns, do we learn something? If we learn something, does the product improve? If the product improves, does the next consumer have a better experience? If the experience improves, does acquisition become easier?*

That is a 'system'. And once you start seeing marketing this way, you begin to notice that many organisations have brilliant campaigns sitting on top of broken systems - they spend millions creating demand and then make the customer wait; they create desire and then confuse the buyer; they acquire customers and then disappear after purchase; they celebrate downloads but don't measure usage; they generate trial but don't build habit; they run loyalty programmes when what they really need is a better product.

And sadly, and eventually, the campaign gets blamed!

This is why I now increasingly believe that marketing should sit much closer to product, technology, sales, operations, data and customer experience.

Not because marketing needs more meetings, but because the consumer does not experience the organisation in departments. The consumer

experiences one journey, and simply say - "*I didn't like the experience*". That is the reality the organisation has to respond to.

And you start with assessing the quality of the system underneath - *Who understands the consumer better? Who learns faster? Who converts insight into product improvement? Who removes friction faster? Who identifies behavioural changes earlier? Who closes the loop between what consumers say and what they actually do?*

I believe this is where marketing is heading, and so, the marketer must become less of a campaign manager and more of a system architect - you should build mechanisms that 'continuously' sense, interpret, respond, learn, adapt, and improve. The most interesting word here is 'continuously', because consumers don't stand still - their expectations change, also technology changes, culture changes, competitors change, distribution changes, algorithms change, and even the meaning of value changes.

A marketing system that was perfect yesterday can become irrelevant tomorrow, and so the system must 'learn'. This is where data becomes more than reporting. A dashboard merely tells me what happened, but a learning system helps me understand what to do next. If conversion falls, don't merely report the fall, instead find the behavioural friction. If repeat purchase falls, don't simply increase promotions, instead understand why the product stopped fitting the consumer's life. If acquisition becomes expensive, don't automatically spend more, instead ask whether the proposition has become less desirable. If a competitor suddenly grows, don't simply copy their campaign, instead ask what has changed in consumer behaviour that made their model possible.

The system should constantly ask questions, and then change. That is the opposite of campaign thinking! Campaign thinking asks - "*What should we communicate this quarter?*", while a system thinking asks - "*What should become better because we exist?*" That second question is also much more valuable, as it forces us to think beyond communication, and forces us to think about the product - the experience, the price, the channel, the technology, the people, the data, the repeat behaviour - the entire chain of value creation.

The future of marketing will not belong to the organisation that communicates the most persuasively, but to the organisation that learns the fastest from human behaviour and redesigns itself accordingly. See, a campaign asks people to respond, while a system responds to people.

And when I look back at everything I have learnt across products, brands, markets and consumers, I find myself returning to one simple thought - the marketer's greatest creation should not be a campaign that people remember, but should be a business that gets better every time someone interacts with it.

That is when marketing stops being an expense attached to growth, but becomes part of the mechanism that creates growth.

The marketer should always stand inside this living system, watching consumers behave, learning from what they do, and constantly asking one final question - "*What should we change now?*" Because the best marketers of the future will not be the people who know how to launch more campaigns, but the people who know how to build businesses that no longer need campaigns to create momentum. That, to me, is when marketing becomes a system of growth rather than a function of promotion.

You Market to Change Their World

I want to end this book with an idea that is larger than marketing - *What becomes different in a person's world because your product, service or brand exists?*

I have come to realise that the most powerful companies don't merely occupy markets, but 'alter' them. They change what consumers expect, change what consumers consider convenient, change what people believe is possible, change habits that once appeared permanent, and eventually, change what society considers normal.

Think about what happened when the smartphone became part of everyday life. The biggest achievement wasn't selling millions of devices, but making a completely different way of living feel 'ordinary'. The same happened with online payments, streaming, food delivery, Quick commerce, digital banking, cloud software. These businesses did not simply win customers, but also changed the environment in which future customers would make decisions.

Once that happens, the competitive question changes, and you are no longer asking - "*How do we get consumers to choose us?*", but - "*What will consumers expect from everyone after experiencing us?*"

If your product makes delivery faster, you haven't merely created convenience, but may have permanently lowered consumers' tolerance for waiting. If your brand makes information transparent, you may have changed what consumers expect from an entire category. If your service makes personalisation effortless, you may have made generic experiences feel inadequate. If your product makes healthy behaviour easier, you may have changed what people believe healthy living can look like.

That is how markets move - consumer by consumer, expectation by expectation, one new behaviour at a time!

The future advantage will also increasingly belong to companies that can change the consumer's 'reference' point - once consumers experience something better, yesterday's experience becomes unacceptable. Once they experience instant delivery, three-day delivery feels slow. Once they experience intuitive software, complicated software feels broken. Once they experience personalised recommendations, generic choices feel lazy. Once they experience transparency, hidden fees feel dishonest.

This is what great marketing can do - it can 'permanently' raise the standard!

And when the standard goes levels up, you don't merely create demand for your product, but create a world in which your product makes sense. That is why I chose the word 'change'. Not influence, not persuade, not promote, but change! Because influence can be temporary - a campaign can influence me for thirty seconds; an offer can influence me until tomorrow; a celebrity can influence me until the next celebrity arrives. But when you change someone's expectations, you change their future decisions.

There is also something deeply human about this! Every meaningful product begins with someone looking at the world and thinking - "*There must be a better way*". A better way to communicate, a better way to travel, a better way to cook, a better way to learn, a better way to work, a better way to shop, a better way to live.

The product is simply the physical expression of that 'belief', and perhaps that is what I have been trying to understand throughout my career without having the words for it - marketing, at its highest level, is not about getting people to want what we have made, but about understanding what could make their lives better, and then helping that possibility become real enough for people to choose it.

That is a very different philosophy, because it puts enormous responsibility on the marketer. Because if we can shape desire, we can also manufacture insecurity; if we can design decisions, we can also manipulate them; if we can shape behaviour, we can also exploit it; if we can influence identity, we can also make people feel inadequate.

So, the final question are - *What are we making people become? What changed because we were here?*

Perhaps you made healthy food easier to choose; perhaps you gave small businesses access to technology that was once available only to large corporations; perhaps you made a category more transparent; perhaps you gave people confidence; perhaps you removed an unnecessary frustration from millions of lives; perhaps you simply created a product that made someone's ordinary day a little better.

It doesn't have to change the world in the grand sense, but has to change someone's world, and that is enough. And if enough marketers begin thinking that way, markets change, industries change, expectations change, lives change.

So, after everything I have written in this book, I would leave you with a thought that has become increasingly important to me - don't enter a market merely to take a share of it, but with the ambition to leave it different.

The greatest marketers I have encountered were never simply selling products, but changing what people believed was possible.

When people begin living differently because something you created exists, you have moved beyond marketing, and you have created change.

That, to me, is the highest purpose of a marketer.