

Lydia Michael and “Brand Love”

Unveiling the Secrets of Customer Loyalty

BY SARAH KITTLE

In today’s rapidly evolving world, establishing and nurturing a brand that captures the hearts and minds of consumers is an art form. One individual who has masterfully embraced this challenge is Lydia Michael, an author and brand strategist whose groundbreaking book, “Brand Love – Building Strong Consumer-Brand Connections,” released on July 25, 2023, by Kogan Page, a leading independent publisher of business books, has taken the marketing world by storm.

However, Lydia is more than an author; she is also the visionary founder behind Blended Collective, an award-winning, multicultural marketing and brand consultancy based in Detroit, offering a range of services designed to help businesses thrive in the modern multicultural landscape. At the core of the company’s beliefs is the view that consumers connect with brands the same way they connect with people.

Anytime people come to Lydia asking for a logo, thinking that is “branding;” she and her staff educate their clients that “branding” is about identifying the entire brand-consumer experience beyond the visual identity. “To help people understand that a brand is more than a logo,” explains Michael, “it’s essential to highlight the experiences, emotional connections and values a brand represents.” One of the ways in which products sell is to have the customer identify with them and see themselves as sharing the same values as the brand. It’s that easy – and that difficult.

The company’s mission is simple yet powerful: to enrich brands and organizations with culture and emotion through marketing efforts. Blended Collective works closely with clients, harnessing the principles explained in “Brand Love” to create brand experiences and marketing efforts that resonate deeply with customers.

Lydia’s journey to becoming a prominent figure in the world of mar-



keting and branding began with a fervent interest in consumer psychology and a determination to comprehend why people form deep connections with certain brands. She was born and raised in Germany and is of Chaldean heritage, but Lydia refuses to fit in any cultural box. She sees the trait of adaptability as quite an asset in the current changing marketplace. Navi-

gating three cultures for the better part of her life has equipped her in the right way to do business in any cultural setting she walks into.

Armed with a B.S. degree in marketing and an MBA in International Management, she embarked on a mission to unravel the mysteries of brand loyalty after spending several years developing and marketing brands of jazz and hip-

hop recording artists internationally. Her relentless curiosity and unwavering dedication to the field led her to work with some of the world’s most iconic companies such as L’Oréal in Germany. “As customers,” says Michael, “many of our choices are based on our values and the cultures we grow up in.”

“Brand Love” stands as a monumental work that distills Lydia Michael’s decades of experience and research into a comprehensive guide for marketers, brand managers, and anyone in consumer-facing roles. The book serves as a revelation, offering fresh perspectives on how to construct and foster brand loyalty in the hyper-competitive landscape of today’s market with an intersection of culture and emotion, all while realizing the importance of the human behind the brand.

“The Eight Brand Love Stages”

Brand love is a powerful concept in marketing that represents the deep emotional connection consumers can form with certain brands. While there isn’t a universally agreed-upon framework for the stages of brand love, many experts have identified various phases in this process. Lydia’s “Brand Love Drivers” and “The Eight Brand Love Stages” model illustrate how consumers’ relationships with brands can develop and evolve over time using both rational and emotional elements in the journey.

Awareness: The journey toward brand love often begins with simple awareness. At this stage, consumers become familiar with a brand’s existence and may recognize its name or logo. This basic recognition is the foundation upon which all subsequent stages are built.

Familiarity: After becoming aware of a brand, consumers may start to develop a sense of familiarity. They’ve seen the brand’s products or advertisements more than once, and they might

have some knowledge of what the brand represents or offers.

Interest: In this stage, consumers actively evaluate the brand as a potential choice. They weigh the brand's attributes, benefits, and values against their own needs and preferences. It is the time for brands to listen to the consumer and ensure their needs are being met. A brand centers around your audience.

Likeness: Once consumers have considered a brand and its offerings, they may develop a preference for it. This means that the brand stands out as a favored choice among the options available, and consumers are more likely to choose it when making a purchase decision.

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Trust: This is the stage where brand intimacy begins to form. Consistency is key at this point. Once trust is broken, it is very difficult to rebuild.

Attachment: Beyond satisfaction, some consumers form deep emotional connections with a brand. They develop a sense of attachment, feeling a genuine fondness and affection for the brand. This emotional bond often extends beyond mere product usage and can lead to advocacy and loyalty.

Love: The ultimate stage in the brand love journey is, of course, brand love itself. At this point, consumers have a passionate, enduring affection for the brand.

Loyalty and Advocacy: At this point, consumers are not only loyal customers but also vocal advocates who enthusiastically promote the brand to others.

Brand love is a testament to the brand's ability to inspire deep emotional connections and long-lasting relationships with its customers.

Understanding these stages of brand love can help marketers develop strategies to nurture and strengthen these connections, leading to greater customer loyalty, advocacy, brand success and profit.

Key Themes

Emotional Connection: Lydia posits that successful brands transcend the realm of mere utility by forging profound emotional connections with their customers. Through captivating case studies, she demonstrates how brands such as Toyota, LEGO and Huda Beauty have mastered the art of establishing emotional bonds that go beyond transactions, resulting in loyalty that lasts a lifetime.

Authenticity: In a world where authenticity is highly treasured, Lydia underscores the importance of a brand's genuine voice and values. She explores how brands can effectively communicate their authenticity and resonate with consumers who are in search of authentic connections. One of the ways that her company, Blended Collective, demonstrates authenticity is that they only use their own original photos for marketing. No stock photos here.

Community Building: The creation of communities centered around a brand is a potent strategy, as Michael illustrates with examples from streetwear brands like The Hundreds. She provides actionable insights on how to foster brand communities that not only thrive but also actively support and engage with one another.

Humanization: Being human is a brand's biggest asset as customers look for companies that go beyond transactional value and know how to laugh and cry with you, building meaningful connections. The truth is consumers want brands who think and act like them. People connect with the human side of brands.

Culture: Humans look at the world based on the way they perceive it. For customers, many choices are based on their values. It is also true that customers view the world based on the cultures they grow up in and the cultures that surround them. This has an

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elias.kattoula@chaldeanfoundation.org
www.chaldeanfoundation.org



JACQUELINE RAXTER, LMSW, LPC
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM MANAGER

3601 15 Mile Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48310
TEL: (586) 722-7253
FAX: (586) 722-7257

jacqueline.raxter@chaldeanfoundation.org
www.chaldeanfoundation.org



SANA NAVARRETTE
DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

30095 Northwestern Highway, Suite 101
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
CELL (248) 925-7773
TEL (248) 851-1200
FAX (248) 851-1348

snavarrette@chaldeanchamber.com
www.chaldeanchamber.com
www.chaldeanfoundation.org



MARIAM ABDALLA
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH THERAPIST

3601 15 Mile Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48310
TEL: (586) 722-7253
FAX: (586) 722-7257

mariam.abdalla@chaldeanfoundation.org
www.chaldeanfoundation.org



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impact on their consumer behavior, attitudes, and lifestyle.

Impact and Reception

“Brand Love” has garnered widespread acclaim from industry experts, marketers, and thought leaders globally. It features over one hundred brands, case studies and interviews from multicultural brands and has become a cornerstone resource for those seeking to fathom the intricacies of brand loyalty and consumer devotion. Michael’s insights have been instrumental in guiding businesses to


reevaluate their brand and marketing strategies, enabling them to connect with consumers on a deeper and more meaningful level.

“Customers, especially the younger demographic like Gen Z, care about what brands think and say, as much as they care about the product or service they buy,” explains Michael. “They don’t want to just support a company anymore; they want a company that reflects who they are and what they believe.

With that said, whenever we go through moments of social change, brands should understand that they can be replaced at any given moment if their approach isn’t mindful and genu-

ine,” she further asserts. “During sensitive times, it’s important to continue to build trust and an ongoing, healthy relationship with customers.”

In this current world of uber scrutiny, one must be careful about what they say online. “All in all, companies shouldn’t be too quick to voice their opinion on social issues just to check the box,” warns Michael. “They should know what to say and when to say it, displaying a good sense of their emotional intelligence in a crowded marketplace.” Good advice for a medium that is known for its quick response time, one that requires “a balance of logic and emotion.”

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of consumer behavior, Michael’s visionary work remains a beacon, illuminating the path toward creating brands that resonate deeply and stand the test of time. In an era where consumers are inundated with choices, “Brand Love” is a reminder that, above all, it is the human and emotional bond between a brand and its customers that truly sets it apart. 

“Brand Love” is available for purchase on Amazon and anywhere books are available. Connect with Lydia Michael at BlendedCollective.com and LydiaMichael.com.