

Episode #30

YOUR CONSUMER VOICE

with
Nexxt Intelligence president
Kathy Cheng



<https://talkabouttalk.com/30-consumer-voice>

Learn 5 ways you can exercise or amplify your consumer voice. Market researcher Kathy Cheng of Nexxt Intelligence talks A.I. and chatbots, how firms can use augmented reality (AR), and the new market research, including why we shouldn't call these consumer participants "respondents," but rather partners or co-creators.

SHOWNOTES

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Key Learnings

Automated advertising is starting to take off. This is where firms blast out several ads with various insights and see what works. They create algorithms to change the placement of the ads (how frequently and where and how they are played).

Market researchers are using AI and AR – not just with automated advertising, but also testing products and advertising campaigns using latency measures, augmented reality, goggles, other sensory measurement techniques. It sounds like a super fun focus group, doesn't it?

Firms are actively trying to make consumer research more interactive and enjoyable – for example by using **gamification**, to sharing insights in real time, to using humour with **chatbots**.

Kathy advocates **making consumer research into part of the consumer experience** – which obviously should all be positive. So seeking to go beyond Q&A survey, into something much more interactive. That means **no longer calling these consumers “respondents.”** But rather participants, partners, and ultimately **co-creators**.

5 ways you can exercise or amplify your consumer voice:

1. **Participating in consumer research or in a consumer panel**
2. **Voting with your money**
3. Engaging in **word of mouth**
4. By **Formally documenting** your experience
5. And by **asking the firm** how you can amplify your consumer voice.

Just like all of our other (personal) interactions, we should **try to generate a good ratio of positive to negative** comments in the marketplace. Watch the valence. We don't want everything to be negative. So every time you complain as a consumer about something, make sure you leave a compliment about something else.

References & Links



Kathy Cheng & Nexxt Intelligence

- LinkedIn – <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kathycheng/>
- Nexxt Intelligence – <https://nexxt.in/>
- Incabot – <https://nexxt.in/incabot/>
- Recommendations:
 - Waking Up with Sam Harris – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw7XBKhZJh4>
 - Making Sense with Sam Harris – <https://samharris.org/podcast/>

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- Andrea – Andrea@TalkAboutTalk.com

Dr. Andrea's Commentary

Hey there. I am your communication coach, Dr. Andrea Wojnicki. Please call me Andrea. Welcome to Talk About Talk. This is where you check in to improve your communication skills – both professionally and personally. This week, we're talking about **how to use our consumer voice**.

Here's the thing. I've studied and worked in marketing for most of my adult life. But I am a true consumer advocate. And I am a big fan of consumers actively participating in the marketplace, exercising their consumer voice – to get what they want and what they need.

So what do I mean exactly, by “using your consumer voice”? Well, I mean being heard in the marketplace, be it with your reactions to products and services you have consumed, and even with your input to product improvements or even product development. It's about being heard as a consumer.

By the end of this episode, I promise you will have learned a LOT – first, from our guest expert, [Kathy Cheng](#), the founder & president of [Nexxt Intelligence](#), a tech-oriented market research company that helps firms identify real, actionable insights from consumers like you and me. Let me just tell you that after you hear from Kathy, your head will be spinning – mostly from the opportunities we have as consumers nowadays compared to even just 10 years ago. Don't worry, I will summarize everything for you! Then, I will share with you a list of five distinct ways that you can exercise your consumer voice so that you can be a more successful and satisfied consumer.

OK – let's start with the conversation with Kathy Cheng.

Once you hear Kathy, you will see that she is enamored with consumers and with technology. And that reminds me, wait till you hear her answer to my rapid-fire Q about “what is your communication medium preference for

casual conversations. Most guest experts on Talk About Talk say “face to face” or on the phone or chat. Not Kathy. She is more hi-tech. You’ll see.

Anyway, I thought this would be a cool place to start, since Kathy’s firm is on the cutting edge of what market researchers are doing to help firms, help brands, better understand their consumers’ wants and needs. In other words, her market research firm identifies, interprets and amplifies consumer insights so that her clients can better meet ***our*** needs, as consumers. So don’t be intimidated. This is inspiring stuff. Let me tell you about Kathy.

Kathy Cheng is a leading researcher, moderator, and ethnographer in Canada’s multicultural and newcomer markets. She co-authored “Migration Nation: A Practical Guide to Doing Business in Globalized Canada,” the first and only book that helps organizations plan for growth and relevance in the increasingly multicultural Canada. That sounds like a great topic for another episode, doesn’t it?

Kathy developed and led cultural research practices at Environics and Ipsos before starting up [Nexxt Intelligence](#). She is now the Founder and President of Nexxt Intelligence Inc., an insight-tech company that builds a full-service suite for marketers and insight managers to understand their customers and employees in-depth and at scale, through engaging conversational research experiences delivered by [IncaBot](#), a user-centric chatbot designed and trained for market insight and feedback purposes.

Interview Transcript

Andrea Wojnicki: Thank you so much for joining us, Kathy.

Kathy Cheng: Thank you, Andrea. Thank you for having me.

AW: So from a consumers perspective, what may we have noticed when we're online, maybe when we're shopping or doing research, in terms of AI and marketing and communications.

KC: AI is really part of our daily life. When we search in the past, you type in the word, but now we can even just put in an image, the computer can find some clothing that you'd like to buy the exact same thing to find the store that where you can find that...

AW: Wait a minute, I hadn't heard of this! So if I take a picture or a screenshot of something, I can enter it in or somehow upload it?

KC: Yeah, I believe Target is really big on that. If you upload a picture, you see a friend that your girlfriend has a really nice dress and you really like it and you want you wonder where you can find it, you can probably upload that picture and then ask the search engine to tell you where you can find the exact same dress or something similar.

AW: So are you going to like a general search engine like Google? Or are you going to the target website for that?

KC: The Target website is probably the best place to read less specifically. But Google artwork for example. Yeah, now I can just put a picture of the artwork, and then Google can find similar artworks or exactly the piece and then can tell me a little.

AW: Okay, my brains' exploding! Honestly, I did not foresee that this is where the conversation was going. But it's fantastic. So that reminds me of the app. Shazam that recognizes music. If you press the button, it listens. And then it tells you what the music is. And it's the same idea except visual?

KC: It's definitely changing. And I see my kids, how they interact with their phones, computers, it's totally different. They are part of the computer, I find they are real partners. They're playmates. They are asking questions, just like asking their buddies. The technology we're building, it was actually inspired by a conversation I heard my son was having with Siri, I thought that was just incredible. Because in our world, we really want to engage consumers so that we can understand them fully. But it's challenging because nobody wants to keep talking to someone who wants to understand where do you bank? How much do you have in this checking account thatnobody wants to do that. Right? So seeing a child interact with Siri asking all kinds of silly questions. As an entertainment it myself, I just thought, Wow, that is really inspiring. What if we could try to understand people with that kind of interaction?

AW: Can you tell us a little bit about the technology that you're using for your company?

KC: We're building a chatbot for research purposes, or research is, in simple terms, really try to understand people I think micro targeting is what is very good at online or offline. It's again, not too long ago, I believe people were complaining. How come it's creepy? I just searched a pair of shoes. Now the shoe stores chasing me I see advertising every day. It is creepy. How can you do something like that? Recently, there is an article 80% of consumers expect the internet to know what they want now. Yeah, it's just fascinating how people shifted. Now they expect the internet to know what they're looking for. That only delivers better services, right?

AW: You could go one step further. You could actually be strategic, you can pre shop. So what are some of the things that marketers are employing AI for online?

KC: There's **automated advertising** service, like a machine can create, can write the copy, can buy media, can eventually just launched a campaign? It does require a huge amount of data. What you would do, then it's almost like working with an agency, you would tell the machine what you want, who you'd like to target? What's the message, main message you'd like to be delivered to your target audience. So whatever automated of advertising how it is significantly different from traditional advertising is because digital media can be a lot cheaper than traditional media. And the speed of changing different ads can be almost instant, there is an opportunity for you to put out like 100 ads, at the same time targeting different people, instead of doing an advertising test for you to decide which one works the best, before you do the advertising, you can just put it, put them out there and try different things. And

AW: whichever one gets traction, then you just push that one?

KC: yeah. And then just use just automatically delete the ones that do not do that well. So that in a way is **insight automation** already. That, to me is a very good example of CO creation, put the consumers in the process of creation. I think that's really, really amazing.

AW: Are there some product categories out there right now, where this is happening?

KC: I think **insight technology** is still fairly new, because it's hard. It's very, very hard. It's hard. And at the same time, it's really exciting, because in my mind, this is real artificial intelligence. Micro market marketing, that's very good. Somehow, I think at the end is computational. There are certain algorithm but at the end, everything's is algorithm. But I think I do see a difference between that kind of algorithm to predict what you might like, next, based on behavior data, versus an algorithm to understand the fundamental drivers, your past purchase behavior. So that's the insight technology of your past and your future - what you may be interested in. So that requires a lot more interpretation, creativity, **things that I would think only human can do. But now there is a possibility that machine can do as well. To me that's real, artificial intelligence.** Once that happens. That's, that's very interesting.

AW: Can you tell us anything specifics of probably without mentioning client names, but of projects that you're working on, just to illustrate what might be possible?

KC: I have to say, we're at the infancy stage, we're really pushing hard on that. What we're trying to work on is to understand people, typically we do a survey, we do qualitative research -- that's the natural language processing piece. That's the challenge that we really embrace. That's our next step. So that's where the chat bot plays a role. Because with the chatbot, the whole process is more social-like more natural, instead of bringing people to a very artificial setting, like a survey, because we don't communicate in a survey environment. We chat with people, we give them some real life scenarios...

AW: So are these customers or, or consumers of your clients or prospective consumers of your clients? Are they coming to your office and working on a computer?

KC: So there are two types of interactions, one that traditionally in the market research law, we still rely on panel companies, we tell them I want 600 Canadians, between 18 to

55. For example, I need to do a seven minute chat with a nationally representative sample of Canada, for example. So that's one way. There are limitations, because we know consumer panelists may not be representative of all Canadians, there is a certain demographic or psychographic, that will be on consumer panels, not everybody. The other approach is more organic. We just put the chat on social media. We did a campaign. So that was three years ago, it was the Olympics. So what the campaign was, do a short quiz to find out what kind of Olympian you are, hmm, it's almost like a personality test about our thing. It was all about culture, or the culturally different dimensions, we turn them into fun questions.

AW: So there was a hook there, the Olympics were fascinating. At the time...

KC: It was really fascinating how many people actually came to do the survey? It really It's a it's a happy story that we really enjoy. We ended up with 50,000 people. Wow.

AW: the word I'm thinking is gamify. It's like your gamified the survey?

KC: Yeah. **Gamification** can have something to do with technology, or it doesn't have to. I think that's a that's a there are market researchers who've focused very much on gamification, yeah. You can create very disguised surveys. It's, it's just a very fun game.

AW: There was a company on Facebook that was getting into trouble for doing that, right? Because they were getting people to answer questions, and then they were targeting them. And it would seem nefarious at the time.

KC: It could be it could be, yes. We need to do things in a way that is proper.

AW: Can you tell us a couple more examples? Whenever I think of chatbots, I think of this really annoying computer. When I signed my children up for soccer... This sort of attractive woman walks across the screen. It's bit creepy. And she says, Hey, there, I'm from this company, and I'm here to help you. Click, I've done this before, or go... And I'm like, Oh, my gosh, she's creepy. What is that?

KC: I think it's a chatbot. Maybe the designer wanted to be more human like the sense of humor. In our case, we actually really try to be very clear, this is a chatbot. And a lot of the programmed responses, we have our thing, like, if someone says, oh, you're just way too slow for me, then the bot will say I am my programmer, I tell my programmer, my programmer will make me better or something like that. Make sure that people understand this is a chatbot. But I think people have different philosophy in terms of using a chatbot.

AW: And that probably will change over time, too. Right? It'll become so widespread that it'll be, hey, I'm a better chat bot than that chat bot and I'm there, you know, the chat bots will be putting their hands up saying I'm the I'm a chat bot...

KC: I think it also depends on how it is used, I would think there is a big distinction between chatbots used for customer service purposes, versus for our purposes, market research discovery purposes. In our case, though, nobody wants to voluntarily talk to us to give their insights - that's just never going to happen. And second, we tend to in our industry, we tend to ask really boring questions. That's a real challenge for us.

AW: So why would a consumer fill in that survey?

KC: We make sure that the experience itself is motivating is interesting enough that they will probably get something out of it.

AW: Okay, so they're learning something, perhaps about themselves or perhaps about some other phenomenon?

KC: Yeah. We tried to incorporate some interactions in the chat. For example, if I ask you, do you like Starbucks or the importance? People say I like Starbucks, then was it? Oh, that's interesting. You're 65% of Canadians something -- at least to give you a perspective to know you are we try that? I think some clients like it, but otherwise don't. Yeah, especially, we always have a need to ask a lot of questions, sometimes even see that a waste of time, that interaction, I can ask the question,

AW: Interesting. Yeah. So because humans never really were writing down on sheets of paper for answering questions to each other, except for surveys. But humans are chatting with each other online. So you're just by definition, by changing the medium of the market research tool, you're bringing it one step or two steps closer to reality. So are you augmenting the written word with audio, any sort of audio or video with this?

KC: Again, that's a debate. In North America, at least we seem to have this impression that people don't necessarily like voice as much as texting. People seem to like texting more. In some other countries, people are more inclined to just click a button and then talk. And then either that can be translated instantaneously into, like a text, clip, or it doesn't it just stays as a voice clip. In some other countries, people are more inclined to do that. We can show them a video we always clients always want to know the spontaneous reactions, and that's the most accurate probably, we don't want them to overthrow the preliminary response.

AW: Yeah, just show them a video. Tell me how you feel.

KC: So I think another goal we'd like to achieve through this chatbot environment is try to get to the more spontaneous reactions. We try to get to the system one type of thinking as much as possible. We try to we like the latency, how to incorporate latency into interpretation. That's another behavior, behavioral type of data that can be interpreted, because like a scales, we researchers, we always like 11 point scale. show you an 11-point scale. Tell me: To what extent you agree or disagree on the statement. But I often look at the scale thinking really, what is the difference between six and seven? Is that really going to help? Yeah,

AW: exactly. Yeah. So so maybe the best question, maybe the best thing would be to do is to take a photograph of the person's facial expression. Right?

KC: That that we really like it like that. Not just that, but also eye-track right to see how much they really debate between different answers. So the faster you respond to this question, it can be an indicator or you're more certain that is your choice. Right? Why the second question, you probably debate it longer. So that means if there were there was a scale, you're more in the middle. If it is faster, you're more like, one of the ends. So yeah, it's just fun to have technology to play with. So you're...

AW: my mind is going the person is fully set up. You've got the MRI on their brain, you've got the eyeball trackers, you tend to be checking their heart rate. ... and then they can tell you one thing, but their body says something else.

KC: Yeah, there are car clinics ... They have new designs and invite people to come in to test the interior and all that that's a very important part type of research. But with virtual reality, we can just **put goggles on people** and then get them to see the interior without going to a place.

AW: it sounds like fun.

It is actually Yes, it saves a lot of money.

AW: **More people might want to join these panels if they got to do cool things like AR**

KC: actually, that's the feedback we got from our panel company! They really love working with us because our survey make their panelists more engaged.

AW: And then they get to they have stories to tell their friends, guess what, I did this survey? And no, it wasn't just checking off boxes on a scale from one to five, it was actually putting goggles on my face, or it was actually whatever, interacting with the chat bot and it was the coolest chatbot you've ever seen. Hmm.

KC: I think the industry needs that kind of things needs to move toward an experience, **we're all talking about customer experience. We don't treat our respondents or participants in the way that we treat our customers really, we don't really pay enough attention to their experience doing research. But if they are not fully engaged, how can we rely on what they're telling us? I think the whole industry has realized it is a challenge, especially with the younger generation, they have no patience sitting there for to do a 30 minutes survey, that's just not happening.** But the reality is, a lot of the surveys, we have to track results, compare what has happened in the past 20 years, for example. So the methodology has to stay the same

AW: so do you think that some of those longitudinal surveys are just going to fade away? Because there are no respect audience who are willing to no valid respondents? Right?

KC: I would think Yeah, they will. I think they have been fading away already. And eventually, that's, that's not sustainable.

AW: Yeah. So this is the scary but exciting thing, right? So it's scary to be in market research. But it sure is exciting, because there's huge opportunities. But if you're going to hang on to your old ways, it is scary.

KC: Yeah, it is the topic of every industry meeting that we have basically, in the past, our industry is called market research industry, mass market research and analytics, basically, it's AI and how we can leverage technology to really understand people, but the industry is definitely shifting in a big way. Yeah, I what I have seen and I think will need to happen next is really response we call them **RESPONDENTS**, the term itself determines that we considered consumers respond to questions we marketers have. It's interesting. 20 years ago, I believe my mentor told me, she went to an SMR conference. And then they were talking about how the term respondent needed to be retired, right?

20 years after we're still using respondents, to our respondents. But I think it's this is just a word that we used to It's okay. But it should be the relationship between consumers and marketers, that is really shifting. Advertising automation, for example, we don't test. There is an alternative to just put the ads out there and then test the market by itself through the CO creation process at consumers will help vet the ads and the at the end of the day, that is already happening. Now the insight technology, how can we obtain real insights to really understand people? I think it has become clear that the only way to do that is you have respondents participate actively, as a partner instead of as a passive, respondent.

AW: So I'm going to ask you now the 5 Rapid Fire Qs that I ask every guest.

KC: OK

AW: First Q: What are your pet peeves?

KC: one thing I am really quite annoyed is seeing posts from people who are constantly bragging about their perfect life. First class, there's champagne...

AW: It's obnoxious.

KC: Yah. And cruel, I find.

AW: OK. second Q: What type of learner are you?

KC: Visual. Definitely. Totally.

AW: Q #3: Introvert or extrovert?

KC: Introvert. Some of my friends might find it odd for me to label myself as an introvert, but my job dictates that I do talk to people. I am a moderator. I do a lot of presentations What I have learned is that when I am tasked to talk, I can be quite effective. But if it is a random casual social setting, it draws a lot of energy from me.

AW: Fourth Q: Communication preference for personal conversation?

KC: These days I really love leaving audio messages using social media. I use **WECHAT** a lot. They let you to just record a short less than 60 second audio message. It's actually really handy because I can just talk to my friends... People are all around the world living in different times zones. It's not always easy to have a real time conversation. But with this feature, whenever I want to leave a message, I can do so and they will too, in the same fashion. And I think its better than texting because I'm not a fast typer. Also, I think it's more real life like. Because I hear the background of their life...

AW: You're the first person who has answered this way! Would you say it's like leaving a voicemail?

KC: In a sense I think it's better. It's a real conversation that doesn't have to happen at the same time.

AW: Fifth Q: Podcast or blog that you find yourself recommending the most?

KC: These days I'm really into **WAKING UP with Sam** Harris. His podcast is called **MAKING SENSE** I quite like it.

AW: I will leave links to those in the shownotes. I guess that's it. Thank you so much for sharing your insights!

KC: Thank you so much for having me.

Conclusion

Wow. Kathy really is on the cutting edge of market research, isn't she? And her answer to the rapid-fire Q about using WeChat – she is the first and only of 30 interviewees who has answer with something outside of face-to-face, phone or texting.

OK- Let me summarize a few things that she said, then get into the 5 ways that we can all exercise our consumer voice.

At the beginning, Kathy talked about **automated advertising**. This is where firms blast out several ads with various insights and see what works. They create algorithms to change the placement of the ads (how frequently and where and how they are played).

Kathy also talked a bit about how market researchers are using **AI and AR** – not just with automated advertising, but also testing products and advertising campaigns using latency measures, augmented reality, goggles, other sensory measurement techniques. It sounds like a super fun focus group, doesn't it?

And that was another of Kathy's points. Firms are actively trying to **make consumer research more interactive and enjoyable** – for example by using from gamification, to sharing insights in real time, to using humour with chatbots.

Ultimately, Kathy advocates making consumer research into part of the consumer experience – which obviously should all be positive. So seeking to go beyond Q&A survey, into something much more interactive. That means **no longer calling these consumers “respondents.”** But rather Participants, partners, and ultimately co-creators.

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Sounds good to me. Thank you Kathy! If you want to check out more you can go to the shownotes or check out her website Nexxt.in.

Now – the 5 ways that we can all exercise our consumer voice; Yes I am here to inspire and enable you as a consumer.

1. First – obviously after that interview, we can all see that by **participating in market research**, we are exercising our consumer voice.
2. This one is also obvious. **Vote with your money**. If you aren't satisfied with the service you are receiving, change service providers. If you aren't satisfied with something you bought. Take it back and demand your money back. Vote with your wallet.
3. Next – and if you know anything about me and my research, this is a key one. **Word-of mouth**. If you are dissatisfied, tell your friends. Post your stories – good and bad – on social media. Become a consumer vigilante with a big mouth.
4. Fourth, you can also more **formally reward (& complain) about great products and services directly to the company**. Sometimes we forget how simple and effective that can be. Personally, I find it very satisfying when I receive great customer service and I ask if I can speak with someone's boss, so I can tell them how great the service has been with a particular employee. You can also write a formal review on websites like Trip Advisor. Or Yelp or Homestars.
5. And last – this one might seem less obvious, but it can be extremely effective. **ASK THE COMPANY**. If you received fantastic service, you could say “how can I make sure this outstanding service is recognized?” Ask the person if you should write an email or a letter or an online review. Ask them how your voice can be amplified.

That's 5 ways you can exercise or amplify your consumer voice:

- **Participating in consumer research**,
- **Voting with your money**
- Engaging in **word of mouth**
- By **Formally documenting** your experience
- And by **asking the firm** how you can amplify your consumer voice.

Talk About Talk™ Shownotes

One last thought I leave you with. Just like all of our other interactions, we should **try to have a good ratio of positive to negative**. Watch the valence. We don't want everything to be negative. So every time you complain as a consumer about something, make sure you leave a compliment about something else.

Alright – that's it. that's all I have for you today. I hope you learned something about exercising your consumer voice.

I want to thank you so much for listening. Please subscribe to the podcast if you haven't already **and** I'd really really love it if you would subscribe to the weekly email blog. The list is growing, so thank you to all of you who have signed up and who have spread the word! It's easy – Just go to TalkAboutTalk.com to sign up for the blog and to access all of the past blogs – and podcasts.

Alright – That's it. Thanks again for listening and talk soon.

THANK YOU for listening!

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