

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #31

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Announcer: Welcome to the Marketing Munchies Podcast series hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week Bridget and her guests will share information, insights, research-based findings, and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now, let's join our host, Dr. Bridget Behe.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Hi, and welcome back to the Marketing Munchies Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Bridget Behe. I am delighted to have Mel Knuth again. She is a doctoral student at Texas A&M University in the Horticulture Department. She and I and Charly Hall and Tom Fernandez and Pat Huddleston have been working on a series of papers that mainly have to do with consumer response to drought and their attitudes and perceptions about plants, especially in a period of drought. But, what Mel and I want to talk about today I think is a really interesting left-hand or right-hand turn on some of these water conservation and plant interest factors. Welcome back, Mel!

Melinda Knuth: Thanks!

Dr. Bridget Behe: Let's talk about your literature review in the paper that you found by Sime and colleagues back in 2004.

Melinda Knuth: When we were doing the initial literature review related to water conservation and attitude perceptions, we kind of fell upon an article by Sime et al 2004. That was kind of the first article we found that related to landscape perceptions and attitudes for Australians. As we looked more into the literature of what we could find about the United States, we kind of found that there was a lack of information related to how Americans felt from a perceptual and attitudinal standpoint related to landscape desire and landscape importance for themselves.

Dr. Bridget Behe: I think it's really exciting, because now we have some work that's published that talks about the importance of landscaping from the consumer perspective. Let's talk about the analysis that you did that generated four factors related to landscaping importance. What were they?

Melinda Knuth: They were aesthetically pleasing landscape, active landscape use and enjoyment, non-landscape use and no enjoyment, and low landscape maintenance desire.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Talk first about the aesthetically pleasing landscape. What kind of things were in that particular factor?

Melinda Knuth: We asked our participants a series of questions related to how they felt, and these were on a scale. What the questions that were in our aesthetically pleasing landscape factor were things such as "I enjoy a lush landscape." "I want a vibrant landscape." "I like large areas

of garden beds in my property.” Things that have to do with the aesthetics and how their home or their landscape looked.

Dr. Bridget Behe: And so you adapted these from the Sime paper which now it actually came together in our research which is a good thing, because when your results are similar to somebody else’s published study that means that there is some consistency in the work. So then the second factor was...

Melinda Knuth: Active landscape use and enjoyment.

Dr. Bridget Behe: What kinds of things were in that particular factor?

Melinda Knuth: For that kind of factor it was “I enjoy working with plants outdoors.” “It’s a valuable way to spend my time.” “I get great satisfaction from working outdoors in my landscape.” Things related to actively interacting with their landscape and enjoying it.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yeah, I see that active part really is a big piece of that. I remember Pine and Gilmore’s book called *The Experience Economy*, and one of their dimensions was active or passive. So, what was the third factor?

Melinda Knuth: That was inactive landscape use and no enjoyment.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Ugh! That sounds like the Debby Downers of the horticulture industry. What kinds of things were in that factor?

Melinda Knuth: For people like that it is kind of an interesting predicament for them, because they feel pressured socially to have nice landscapes and to interact with their landscape but they really don’t enjoy it. They do it just because they want to impress their neighbors or they feel a social obligation to do it. Their questions in that factor were things such as, “I hardly ever use the outdoor space in my home.” “I never entertain friends outdoors.” “The outdoor space in my house is an important place for my leisure activity. That one had an extreme negative association. They didn’t feel at all that they would use their outdoor space for their leisurely activities. They would rather stay indoors or go somewhere else.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yeah, so they really do sound like the Eeyores of the horticulture consumer world. Then what was that fourth or last factor?

Melinda Knuth: That one was low maintenance landscape desire. These kind of people really, they want as minimal amount of effort as possible for maximum result. So, these kind of people want a landscape with low maintenance. They want to use no supplemental irrigation, landscape that uses plants with low water requirements. Again, kind of the low amount of effort as possible.

Dr. Bridget Behe: That fits in well with some of the previous studies that we talked about that you worked on. Where the plant people who were buying plant material who were interested also were interested in water conservation. I think it was really fun that we took these factors and we did another consumer segmentation scenario. It was again interesting to me that we only came up with two clusters. That usually doesn’t happen. Usually you have four or five, and as we talked

about in the last podcast, having those two kind of puts them at polar opposites. Let's talk about how the clusters were decided or defined. How did you make those separate cluster groups?

Melinda Knuth: We took the actively interested in landscape and the inactively disinterested, more of the Eeyores of the group, and we put them into a cluster analysis. As a result, we had two cluster segments come out of that.

Dr. Bridget Behe: What did you call those two cluster segments?

Melinda Knuth: We call them enjoy landscape activities and the compulsory landscape activities.

Dr. Bridget Behe: So we have got those two groups of people. One that really enjoys it and one that felt like they were obligated to do it or it was a compulsory activity. How different were they demographically?

Melinda Knuth: Demographically, it kind of mirrors what we were doing in our previous paper with the two clusters. The enjoy landscape activity actually spent more than the compulsory landscape activity. They have a slightly bigger household. They have more people who have a bachelor's degree than those who don't, and they have slightly more females in that category than in the compulsory category.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Having a higher income, slightly bigger household size, and being predominately Caucasian, made them more like a typical consumer or what we would consider maybe to be our core customer segment. The compulsory landscape folks were a little bit different in that they were slightly less educated, had slightly less income. It was interesting that they were just a little bit older. I thought they might have been a little bit younger, but that was not the case here. So, we did get some demographic differences between the two clusters. Now let's talk about their behavior, especially with regard to buying plants. Did we find any differences there?

Melinda Knuth: Absolutely. This is also very interesting, because the enjoy landscape activity actually spent about 70-80 dollars more per year than the compulsory. That might not seem like a lot, but if we look at that based on each other, it really is about twice as much as the compulsory. This is true if we look at previous years' activity as well. If we look into specific categories, of where they spent their money, such as looking at annuals, it appears that the enjoys landscape activities spends about four or five times as much than the compulsories than the people who do it out of obligation, which is really interesting.

Dr. Bridget Behe: We have got about 10-12 maybe sometimes 15 percent of the compulsory group buying plant material, where we found 80-85 percent of the active enjoying landscape buying the plant material. That's really interesting. Again, you know that actively enjoy the landscape activities is more like our core customer group. Let's go to their attitudes, because I think this is another really important dimension that particularly for marketing. As we look back on those other couple of factors that you defined with regard to landscape importance, what were some of the similarities or differences that you saw?

Melinda Knuth: When it comes to their attitudinal preferences we find that the people who enjoy landscape activities have a positive association with landscape pride, low input landscape, and water-sensitive landscapes. Versus the compulsory participants who have a compulsory landscape activity there is all negative associations with landscape pride, low-input landscape, and water-sensitive landscape.

Dr. Bridget Behe: I think what this means for the horticulture industry is people who take pride or really value the aesthetics, will spend more. They will be a lot more active in their landscape. Interestingly enough, they were also the ones that wanted that low-input landscape. When we think about moving forward with marketing messages, what would be some of the messages that you would suggest to garden retailers, even wholesalers and producers, what should they be saying to that active enjoyment of the landscape group?

Melinda Knuth: I would say that they really need to speak towards the attitudes of the consumers and have messages related to landscape pride. Such as “This will make your landscape really nice” or “These plants have low input so you only need to water them in the first season” or “These only need to be watered every so often.” Different messages that really speak towards the people who have lots of landscape pride, who want a low-input landscape, and who are really interested in a water-sensitive landscape. Versus trying to obtain the compulsory landscape activity people. They are not even spending half of what the enjoying landscape activity are doing. They really should not be spending their time trying to capture that small segment.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yeah, and back to the Pine and Gilmore book *The Experience Economy*, where they have that active vs passive dimension of experience, I think that is a really important one for marketers to think about too. It is pretty easy when somebody is coming into retail space (or even online), you could differentiate if they were actively interested in the activity or if they kind of felt like, “Oh, you know, this is something that I have to do.” I really am not out there enjoying it. It’s more obligation or compulsory. It wouldn’t take very many questions to figure out or each customer fit into when they were coming into a space or coming online.

I am just really excited about this particular paper and the marketing impact that it could have, especially as we move forward into periods of drought where we need to be a little more concerned about how we’re going to connect with consumers. How we are going to get them to continue to participate in the industry and keep it robust and viable.

I really appreciate all of your hard work on these papers, and I know Charly, Tom, and Pat do as well. I appreciate you coming back on the podcast this week!

Melinda Knuth: Of course! Thank you for having me!

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Announcer: Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchies Podcast. For more information or to download the transcript of this podcast, please visit, connect-2-consumer.org. That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T, dash, the number two, dash, C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R, dot, C-O-M.

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