ONE NATION,
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America is ideologically split—
should marketing keep
the peace?

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National Tether

Even during the Olympics, typically a time to unite and cheer on our country's greatest athletes, Americans are struggling to find common ground. A cursory check-in on reaction to Simone Biles' exploits in Tokyo will show you just how wide that chasm has grown.

Americans are divided on just about everything—including whether the greatest gymnast of all time let us down in competition (she didn't). With such yawning fissures across social, economic and political lines, the 26th edition of The CMO Survey asks the question: Do marketers think they share a responsibility to promote national unity?

Findings from three separate surveys (page 8) show a geniune reluctance to do so among marketers, while Duke University MBA students and a small sampling of U.S. consumers are split on what they expect from companies on that front.

"[Companies] have the platform to reach a lot of people … to make an impact," said one consumer. "We are a very divided country. People listen to advertisements from companies they trust," said another. For others, however, the bottom line should be the main focus: "A company is there to make profit."

What do you think? Has your organization taken steps to advocate for togetherness?

JULIAN ZENG
Omni-Channel Content Manager
jzeng@ama.org

'You're Either With Me or Against Me'

This edition of Marketing News features an article by Duke University's Christine Moorman on the current disposition and mindsets of senior marketers across the country on the topic of national unity. Moorman and her co-author, Duke MBA student Quinn Garber, uncover some profound takeaways on what is arguably one of the most important issues of our time. I will admit, I was shocked to read the findings, that a disproportionately low number of marketers have an inclination to use their brand resources and platforms to promote national unity among the population at large.

Our country, our institutions, and our citizenry face a complex set of crosscurrents in the world today.

Several years ago, I wrote a blog titled "The Rise of Individualism" that examined the societal tension between individualism and collectivism. It was only a fantastic coincidence that the example I used then—vaccines—has become a real-life dispute as yet another test of the country's unity in the constant balancing act between self-interest and the greater good.

Later, I would write a blog titled "Make Yourself Useful" that clearly cut against trend, advising against positioning a brand around social issues where there are otherwise legitimate and divergent points of view. Why unnecessarily divide your addressable market into something smaller? The math alone makes the case. The opportunity to grow a brand is maximized when many different-minded people are brought together, who collectively can be satisfied by a powerful and unifying solution for something in their lives. It's this orientation that allows products, services and platforms to become standards in our culture that serve everyone.

It is antithetical to me that we have properly placed such an emphasis on inclusion when many brand owners are telling us, "But not you, if you don't agree with our social views." I quickly added that my position must not be mistaken or perverted to imply a firm doesn't need a moral center and duty to comport themselves according to universal values of decency. I went on to say that social impact is not a strategy, it is a responsibility—unless your organization was born from it or is expressly a social agency devoted to it. For brands and corporate citizens, the calculus is different. Social impact is a moral imperative, not a marketing plan. Solving a relevant problem or inventing a new source of enjoyment, comfort, satisfaction or solution is purposeful. And yes, just being useful in such a way ought to be religion enough.

The 2021 Parlin Award winner, J. Walker Smith, made a compelling case as to the important distinction between purpose and politics in the June 2017 edition of Marketing News in an article titled, "Brands with Purpose. Not Politics."

I see the findings in Moorman's article to be a troubling signal that we are at risk of free-falling deeper into a world where the crosscurrents of individualism vis-a-vis collectivism are being convoluted further by the tension between broadly positioned inclusive brands and tribal brands (distinguished by their "You're either for me or against me" social stands, often on issues for which there are legitimate alternative points of view).

The result is an irreducible Gordian Knot that represents a "bow" on division.

Has the American culture lost its self-awareness and negative capacity, meaning they could be wrong and certainly others may see the same thing differently? Are we all experiencing a real world "Prisoner's Dilemma" in which cooperation and unity has been devalued? (The "Prisoner's Dilemma" is a standard example of a game analyzed in game theory that shows why two completely rational individuals might not cooperate, even if it appears that it is in their best interests to do so.)

All the same, Moorman and Garber's article is important, and I hope it inspires more intellectual curiosity and additional research that impacts and advances both marketing theory and practice.

Our job at the AMA and, I believe, our responsibility as a discipline of both science and art, is to raise important and managerially relevant issues for marketers that in turn throw light on the intersection between marketing and public policy. Whatever you think about this perspective, you're welcome at the AMA.

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Seeing Yourself on Screen

Four ways to improve your digital body language as a marketer

BY ERICA DHAWAN | ERICA@COTENTIALGROUP.COM

Digital communication can be exhausting. Take Jack, a mid-level manager, who just got an email from his boss. It bugs him—or is he overthinking things? The last sentence—"That'll be fine."—ends in a period. It seems to dominate the screen, a black bead, a micro-bomb, lethal, suggestive and—Jack would swear—disapproving. Boss is pissed. But is he really? Did Jack screw up? If so, how? Is he reading into things? If he's not, how can he work for a boss who's so oblivious about the implications of a period?

When punctuation and shorthand set us off into bouts of uncertainty, self-doubt, anxiety, anger, self-hatred and mistrust, we can be sure we're living in unmapped times.

None of us need a linguistics degree to know that the ways we communicate meaning today are more confusing than ever. Why? Well, our understanding of body language is almost exclusively informed by face-to-face interactions.

No traditional expert in body language could have predicted that today, the majority of our communications would be virtual. Contemporary communication relies more than ever on how we say something rather than on what we say. That is, our digital body language. When the internet came along, everyone was given a dais and a microphone, but no one was told how to use them. We all just picked things up as we went along. And the mistakes we've made along the way have had real consequences in business.

In May, I published a research study with strategy and insights firm Quester called "The Digital Communication Crisis" to understand the challenges that we all face in workplace digital communication. Through a survey of almost 2,000 office workers, we found that over 70% experienced some form of unclear communication from their colleagues. This leads to the average employee wasting four hours per week on poor or confusing digital communications, which adds up to an average annual amount of $188 billion wasted across the American economy.

What is implicit in body language now has to be explicit in our digital body language.

Each of us as marketers may have different expectations and instincts about whether we should send a text versus an email, when to call someone, how long to wait before we write someone back, and how to write a digital "thank you" or apology without seeming insincere. These seemingly small choices create impressions that can either enhance or wreck our closest relationships in the workplace (not to mention in our personal lives).

Most of today's boardrooms, workplaces and classrooms minimize the conditions necessary to foster and augment clear communication, leading to widespread distrust, resentment and frustration. There are more far-flung teams. There are fewer face-to-face interactions. There is virtually no body language to read (even today's video meetings are scarce of eye contact or hand gestures).

How Can We Stay Connected When a Screen Divides Us?

The answer lies in understanding the cues and signals that we're sending with our digital body language, and learning to tailor them to create clear, precise messages. What was implicit in traditional body language now has to be explicit with digital body language.

By embedding a real understanding of digital body language into your workplace, communication processes

can provide both the structure and the tools that support a silo-breaking, trust-filled environment. This skill, in turn, will lead to enormous efficiencies and a new communication ideal, one where the language and punctuation we use across all mediums is careful, conscious and considered, and we're always mindful of how our recipients might respond.

Below are four principles of basic digital body language signals and cues we send out every day that you can learn to employ and perfect in your own life.

1 THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Not all communication channels are created equal. Knowing how and when to use each one depends on the context. Every channel brings with it a set of underlying meanings and subtexts, and knowing how to navigate this array of hidden meanings is a telltale mark of digital savviness and—ultimately—professionalism.

If you're stuck, ask yourself: How important or urgent is your message? And to whom are you communicating? If so, what's better—email, Slack, the phone or a text?

And remember: You're not bound to one or two communication channels. Switching between channels is a good way to indicate a shift in urgency of a message, or even to denote the closeness of a relationship.

2 PUNCTUATION IS THE NEW MEASURE OF EMOTION

In our digital world, our screens filter out the non-verbal signals and cues that make up 60%–80% of face-to-face communication, forcing us to adapt the emotional logic of computers. We're rendered cue-less.

By way of compensation, our communication style relies on punctuation for impact. In an effort to infuse our texts with tone and to clarify our feelings, we might use exclamation points, capital letters or ellipses, or else hit the "like" or "love" button on messages we receive. But instead of clarity, sometimes our reliance on punctuation and symbols can generate more confusion.

My advice when it comes to punctuation and symbols: Use them judiciously.

If you're worried about your digital tone, one way to clarify your feelings digitally is through the direct, easy-to-understand language of emojis. While emojis may be a learning curve for some, they can be critical to enhancing workplace efficiency and cultivating a corporate culture of optimal clarity.

3 TIMING IS THE NEW MEASURE OF RESPECT

Face-to-face interactions require that both parties be available at the same time. This is less possible today, with most of us scrambling to keep up with our various inboxes.

This often means that communication happens at a slower pace. And in a digitally reliant world, the slightest pause between messages takes on an almost operatic meaning.

The thing is, most of the time a non-answer means nothing at all; the other person is simply tied up, doing something else, didn't notice she'd gotten a text, had her volume turned off or forgot where she put her phone.

Still, we can always help ease anxieties around timing expectations by encouraging communication norms and best practices for your office. For example, leaders can mandate a response time for email—within the hour, particularly if it's time sensitive or client-facing—to ensure team-wide accountability.

4 'TO,' 'CC' AND 'BCC' ARE THE NEW CUES OF INCLUSION

Think of an email as a sporting event. You and whomever else in the "to:" box are the athletes. If you don't "cc:" or "bcc:" anyone, you're just practicing, rallying before a match or throwing the ball around with a friend. When you add observers to the cc, suddenly other people begin to fill the stands. Add more people to the bcc, and you're now swelling the VIP box seats with scouts, coaches and recruiters. From here, the stakes go up. If you choose to reply only to the other athlete, you're having a private conversation no one else can hear, whereas "reply all" is equivalent to a booming voice coming in the overhead speakers that the entire stadium can hear.

Reply alls, ccs and bccs are necessary in most workplaces, but ask yourself who really needs to be included. This involves discernment, because some people insist on being a part of everything. Reply all should be limited to high-priority information you want to share with the entire team: meetings, announcements, agendas and enterprise-wide information. Always be conscious of the level of power dynamics and trust levels with your recipients—and avoid jumping to conclusions when you receive a message that catches you off guard.

With few face-to-face interactions with colleagues or classmates these days, there is virtually no body language to read. Understanding digital body language in marketing is essential for those of us who are committed to making strong relationships and making a mark, even in the swell of conference calls, emails, texts and Zoom engagements. Not only can it enhance your interpersonal interactions and liberate you from the fear and worry that digital communication inspires but it can give you a competitive advantage on your team grounded in transparency and empathy. **MN**

Erica Dhawan is a leading expert on 21st century collaboration and innovation. She is an award-winning keynote speaker and the author of the new book "Digital Body Language."

Marketers Reluctant to Promote National Unity

Results from the latest edition of The CMO Survey show that many marketing leaders are divided on the responsibility of brand activism to promote national togetherness

BY CHRISTINE MOORMAN AND QUINN GARBER | DUKE UNIVERSITY

President Biden and congressional leaders have issued repeated calls to build greater national unity at a time when the U.S. is intensely divided socially, economically and socially. The nation continues to grapple with difficult issues such as COVID-19, the debate over reopenings and vaccine disinformation; election challenges and controversies; police violence targeting African Americans; and a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans, among others.

Concurrently, corporate activism in America has reached its highest levels of acceptability among marketing leaders, according to recent findings from the 26th edition of The CMO Survey. It may seem like an opportune time for companies to jump in and promote national unity—but results from the survey indicate that marketers are unwilling to do so.

When asked how important it is for companies to use marketing to promote national unity, marketers themselves are divided. On a seven-point scale where 1 represents "not at all," and 7 "very important," the average across respondents was right in the middle (4.0). This lukewarm response is not because marketers are undecided, but because their opinions differ widely, with the largest group (22.8%) reporting it is "not at all important" for companies to use marketing to encourage national unity. B2C services companies and organizations with a sizeable portion of internet sales tend to believe it is slightly more important (4.4 and 4.3, respectively).

This tepid response turns to outright rejection, however, when marketing leaders are asked to report the extent to which their own company's marketing activities were or are being used to encourage national unity, where 1 is "not at all," and 7 is "a great deal"—the average drops to 2.2, and a full 57.4% indicated "no activity" and only 4% reported "a great deal of activity."

Of the 42.6% of marketers who reported that their companies are taking some action, **48.8%** put unity messages at the forefront of marketing.

22.8% of marketing leaders say it is "not at all important" for companies to use marketing to promote national unity, compared to **9.3% of U.S. consumers and Duke MBA students.**

Of the 42.6% of marketers who reported that their companies are taking some action, 66.3% said the activities consisted of eliminating divisive language in their marketing—48.8% noted they put unity messages at the forefront of marketing, 22.5% cited molding their brand around the idea of national unity, and 8.8% introduced new products and services focused on unity.

Are Marketers Right to Sit on the Sidelines?

To answer this question, we followed up this edition of The CMO Survey with two smaller surveys involving a sample of 127 U.S. consumers and a second group of 55 MBA students from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University. We report the results of these two follow-up surveys together because the results were remarkably similar. Specifically, when we used the same seven-point scale and asked about the importance of companies using marketing to promote national unity, the average score was 4.3 for both general consumers and MBA students. However, compared to marketing leaders, these results were far less polarized—only 9.3% said it was "not at all important," compared to 22.8% of marketers. Further, when asked more directly whether they believe companies should or should not use marketing to encourage national unity, 63% of consumers and 60% of students responded "yes"—a stark contrast to the 57.4% of marketers who indicated that their companies are doing nothing on this front.

The reasons behind this positive consumer and student sentiment include both principle-based and more consequentialist viewpoints. Forty-one percent pointed to companies' power and the size of their following, noting that companies have an outsized influence on markets and that they should use it to increase unity. One consumer said, "They have the platform to reach a lot of people. They have the money to make an impact." Another keyed in on trust: "We are a very divided country. People listen to advertisements from companies they trust."

Some 40% also highlighted America's need for unity and said encouraging it was simply "the right thing to do." Conservatives

in favor of such activism keyed most strongly on this reasoning. One such conservative said, "It creates a better world. I think a lot of companies recently have tended to pick certain sides, which alienates half the country and creates further division, so a company that focuses on unity would help make America a better place to live." Another consumer said, "I think that companies have a responsibility to strengthen the society they profit from. It's easy to divide people, and those that unify us will increase their market share while benefiting society." Other common reasons include a belief that such promotion is good for business (24%) and that it is important for companies to represent the community they are in (7%).

For the almost 40% who said they did not believe companies should use marketing to encourage national unity, 62% took a "shareholder approach," saying companies need to be focused on growing their primary business or on making a profit. Twenty-five percent took it a half-step further, saying companies should stay out of national or political issues altogether. A quarter also said it felt inauthentic to stress unity messages. One consumer comment captured both sentiments: "A company is there to make profit. I find it disingenuous for companies to join in social issues to make a profit. Companies should be there to donate or contribute to the general good of society such as giving for the poor or other disenfranchised groups."

Some liberals believed unity messages could backfire, using high-friction words such as patriotism, nationalism and xenophobia to portray how they believe it might ultimately lead to further polarization. A few consumers and students also pointed out that many influential companies are global. That creates further complexity in approach and messaging. A national unity message risks not only falling flat with its intended U.S. audience, but also creating controversies overseas due to different cultural norms, beliefs and expectations

How Should Marketers Respond?

Marketers are in a tough spot: Many consumers may want or even expect some

level of activism, but there are risks of action and inaction. What should marketers do? Every business school student knows the answer is almost always "It depends," because each company has unique customers, history and capabilities. But there are some important ways for marketers to think about this issue.

Reasons to Promote National Unity

- **CORPORATIONS ARE ABLE TO SHOULDER MORE RESPONSIBILITY:** The New York Times recently stated that calls for unity from corporate America carry some of the "symbolic heft" for Americans. As reported in the Times, the chief executive of PwC, Tim Ryan, is part of a cadre of firms and business leaders who vowed to suspend donations to congressional members who opposed certification of Electoral College results. He promoted a message of unity: "I believe this is the best country in the world, and we can't let all that go to hell in a handbasket," he said. "We need to stabilize. We need certainty."

- **CORPORATIONS HAVE SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IN THE MARKETPLACE:** The Edelman Trust Barometer says companies are in great position to make a difference and CEOs are the ones who need to step up. Edelman's annual research report says businesses have become more trusted than government agencies, NGOs and the media. Business is seen as the only institution that received a positive score in competence and ethics. Edelman asserts that this is driven in part by hyper-partisanship and growing distrust in leadership across many institutions, even including religious leadership. Given this void of trust in other institutions, 61% of respondents said they felt CEOs should step in and take the lead—very similar to the 63% of our survey respondents who felt companies should encourage unity.

- **CORPORATIONS CAN ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT:** The most acceptable type of brand activism—to encourage citizens to vote—was deemed appropriate by 92.9% of marketers and has been pursued by

the likes of Farmers Insurance and Coca-Cola, perhaps because it is seen as benign. "Getting out the vote" is similar to "national unity" because both seem non-partisan and universally beneficial, meaning it might be a safer route. In fact, looking across both our customer and student samples, liberals and conservatives are almost equally likely to believe marketing should encourage national unity (61% and 59% respectively).

Reasons Not to Promote National Unity

- **MARKETERS WORRY THAT CORPORATE ACTIVISM MAY BE POORLY RECEIVED:** Activism is generally not highly acceptable among marketers despite rising levels and high-profile headlines. Politically focused brand activism is considered acceptable by just 27.7% of marketers—the highest level in The CMO Survey history since we began asking the question three years ago when it was 17.4%. Further, the kind of activism that marketers believe is appropriate varies. Again, encouraging citizens to vote is deemed highly appropriate, but only 43.5% say it is appropriate to support specific legislation and 26% approve making changes to products or services, allowing executives or employees to speak out, or using marketing communications to speak out on issues.

- **CORPORATIONS NEED TO CUSTOMIZE THEIR MESSAGING:** Marketers cannot be everything to everyone. Advanced technology and data analytics continue to be implemented to segment consumers and personalize products, services and messaging. Following this trend, some might argue that companies may be better off considering the social interests of specific segments of their customers, rather than emphasizing a broad-based focus on national unity.

- **UNITY MESSAGES MAY BE TOO SIMPLISTIC:** Unity may be seen as too traditional or even naive to the point that it would be more dangerous for brands to promote it than to take a bold stance on a more divisive topic. Recent, well-

Politically focused brand activism is considered acceptable by just **27.7% of marketers**
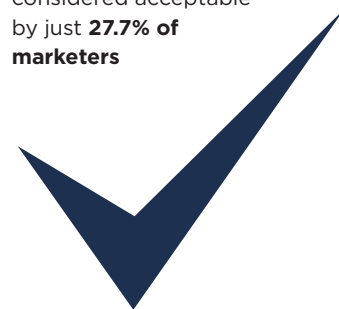
Encouraging Americans to vote is considered appropriate by **92.9% of marketers**
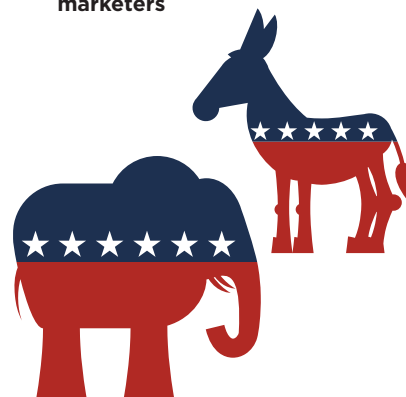
Liberals and conservatives both equally believe marketing should encourage national unity **(61% and 59%)**

documented attempts by brands such as Gap, Oreo and Pepsi to promote national unity through ads that feature their products as symbols or catalysts in bringing America together were met with tremendous backlash across social and traditional media outlets. Critics say these ads are full of empty promises, are self-serving, promote further divisiveness or ignore the realities of modern America. Regardless of what you think of their execution, the takeaway seems to be to tread lightly.

• **UNITY MESSAGES MAY BE SEEN AS HYPOCRITICAL:** National unity is difficult to uphold when it conflicts with your company's specific needs. Despite coalition promises to suspend donations to election objectors, the Los Angeles Times documented a number of companies that have already reneged on that promise due to pressures to lobby for their own company needs. Business growth, it seems, trumps conviction, which could alienate consumers more than if companies had not taken a stand at all.

• **UNITY MESSAGES MAY BE DIVISIVE:** Brand activism may not inherently be very unifying. While we previously indicated promoting voting was largely similar to promoting national unity, in 2020 it was also distinctly different in important ways. In fact, promoting voting proved to be quite partisan and divisive with complications stemming from COVID-19, mail-in ballots and allegations of voter fraud.

How Marketers Can Successfully Promote Unity

If you intend to promote unity, here are our recommendations. First, strategize how you can make your push toward national unity seem genuine. This likely means that your company does more than just talk about national unity; instead, take actions that support unification across multiple fronts that customers and investors can observe. Unlike Pepsi or Oreo's salesy approach where a brand becomes a uniting hero, actions will likely come across as more genuine if they go beyond the normal benefits of your product or service and are not so directly tied to profits.

Second, seek alignment with your current customers' needs and aspirations for their relationship with you. This likely involves doing research to understand how customers will interpret your message and actions. Pretesting different strategies with customers is one way to reduce the risk. Such pretesting would have likely revealed the flaw in Jeep's attempt to use Bruce Springsteen in "The Reunited States of America" Super Bowl ad, which relied heavily on Christian symbols and caused an avalanche of criticism.

Similarly, it is important to understand how your customers think about unification. Do they see it as forcing relationships with political and social adversaries or creating a bridge to understanding so that disunited parties can move forward together? There is quite a bit of distance between those two inferences, which can vary widely by brand.

Third, do not forget to study your potential future customers. They are likely younger, more progressive, and more likely to align with companies doing the civic footwork they value. Some 46% of millennials and 42% of Gen Z members expect brands to speak out, while only 32% of Gen X and 21% of baby boomers do. Of course, when ethnicity is considered, these metrics change considerably. Most Hispanics, LGTBQ+, Asian Americans and African Americans expect brands to choose sides on social positions.

Fourth, if you are not going to promote unity, consider the following points. Will you hurt your company, its brand position and future revenues if a competitor puts marketing dollars behind this cause? How will inaction send signals to current and future employees about the type of company they work for and its values? Will you damage morale, contribute to a divisive workplace, harm recruitment or face more attrition due to your lack of engagement? Employees are increasingly using social media to take employers to task for their apathy—or voting with their feet.

As with many issues, there is no single position for organizations to take regarding national unity. Perhaps, then, it is best to take the advice of Polonius in "Hamlet," who urges his son, "To thine own self be true." You can do so by using your organization's brand as a north star for deciding how to navigate the fractured marketplace, work to heal divisions and create greater community among the consumers you serve. **MN**

Christine Moorman is the T. Austin Finch, Senior Professor of Business Administration at Fuqua School of Business, Duke University. Quinn Garber is a Duke MBA student, consultant and CX professional who uses analytics to help organizations achieve their missions.

The CMO Survey collects and disseminates the opinions of top marketers in order to predict the future of markets, track marketing excellence and improve the value of marketing in firms and in society. To view a complete set of reports for The CMO Survey, visit cmosurvey.org/results.
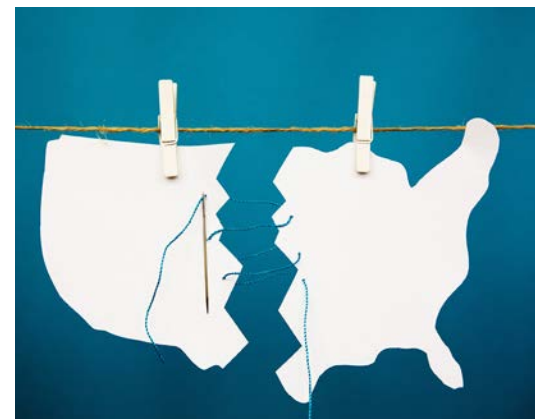
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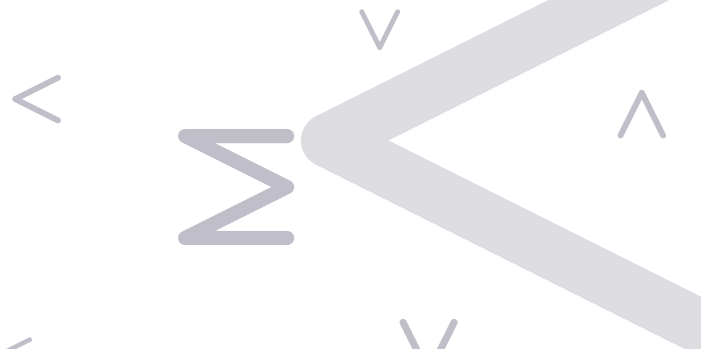
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'Where Do You Want to Go for Dinner?'

The true costs of attempting to seem easygoing

BY SAKSHI KORDE AND MARIA LANGLOIS

Think of the last time you made plans for dinner with a friend. The planning process may have unfolded something like this: You ask them which restaurant they would like to go to, and typically, they respond in one of two ways—either by suggesting a preferred restaurant or by stating, "I am okay with any restaurant; you can decide." Which answer would you prefer to receive? Would you prefer that your friend explicitly provide their preference or that you make the decision yourself?

Drs. Peggy Liu and Kate Min's 2020 Journal of Marketing Research article is motivated by one such conversation. Liu and Min have been good friends since their time at Duke University. During annual conferences, they would make plans to have dinner together, and more often than not, this scenario would play out with the response "Anywhere is fine; you decide." Liu noted that the asymmetry between what the requester expects and what the responder expresses is a curious phenomenon, and this observation ultimately inspired their investigation.

Interestingly, the authors' research indicates that most often you (the requester) would like to elicit explicit preference expressions from your friend (the responder). In contrast, most often, your friend responds with "anywhere is okay with me," with the aim of seeming agreeable. The authors investigate the consequences of this asymmetry in desired (by you) versus actual preference expression (by your friend) in such joint consumption decision contexts.

Joint consumption decisions, wherein two or more consumers share the consumption of products or services, are commonplace in daily life. The authors' research demonstrates that in such joint consumption decisions, consumers take on two unique roles: the requester, who solicits preferences from the other consumer, and the responder, who is expected to respond to the preference expression request. The consumers in these two unique roles exhibit distinct motivations, which drive the desired versus actual preference expression. Ultimately, a form of social "friction" can occur when the responder volleys the joint consumption decision burden back to the requester, who often made the request in the first place to abdicate responsibility for making the decision.

The authors describe that the unintended friction resulting from this interplay creates two types of social costs. First, the likelihood of the requester initiating future social engagements with the responder reduces significantly (i.e., instead of increasing the likability of the responder, this lack of preference expression reduces the desirability of including the responder in future joint consumption decisions). Second, this asymmetry creates preference costs for the responder, as the responder's true preferences were left unspecified.

The authors demonstrate that this preference expression asymmetry applies to a wide variety of contexts, such as joint consumption decisions for restaurant cuisine, movies and museums. This phenomenon also occurs when joint consumption decisions are made in groups as well as dyads. Additionally, the authors demonstrate how this asymmetry is mitigated when the strength of the requester's true preference is high (i.e., if the requester has a strong preference, they will be happy if the responder does not express their preference). In summary, this manuscript offers novel insight into the underlying psychology of the joint consumption decision-making process, thus providing consumers information they can use to enhance the quality of their everyday social consumption interactions.

Q In your research, you introduced a novel "requester–respondent" joint consumption decision-making framework. What inspired this research idea? Could you also share some insights on other roles consumers can take in such joint consumption decisions?

A We have been good friends for many years since our years in the Duke marketing Ph.D. program. We usually get together every year at conferences to have dinner together with each other and a few other friends. Such dinners are usually prefaced by a round of emails between us all, in which someone asks where the others want to go to dinner, and everyone else responds that anywhere is fine with them. After one of these experiences, Peggy noted that this asymmetry between what the person asking was hoping for (some preferences from everyone) and what other people were saying was really interesting. So, she asked Kate if she would like to work on this idea together.

Although we focused on the requester–respondent roles, distinguished by which consumer is asking for consumption preferences and which consumer is being asked for consumption preferences, there are many other role differences in joint consumption that could be examined. For example, one person could pay for the other person/people, or one person could be more of an expert in the joint consumption domain than the other person/people.

Q Lowe et. al. (2019) indicate that joint consumption decisions are influenced by individual orientations (selfish vs. altruistic). Is it possible that certain individual orientations (e.g., social anxiety, which has been shown to induce decision avoidance behavior) could moderate the preference expression of responders?

A We didn't focus on consumer individual differences in our research, but it certainly seems possible and likely that individual differences play a role in consumers' likelihood of preference expression. For example, it is possible that selfish people are more likely to express their preferences than altruistic people. Interestingly, in our context, if that were the case, it would suggest a situation in which selfish people might actually be more likable than altruistic people—because we find that people like those who express their joint consumption preferences.

Q In the "real world" (with no experimental intervention), do you think that responders may question the intent behind requesters' requests, such that the initial requests are perceived as a strategy for the requester to satisfy their own initial focus on seeming likable and easygoing?

A We haven't tried probing what responders think is the intent behind requesters' requests. There is probably variation in responders' likelihood of reading further into a requester's request. Many responders probably take the requester's question at face value—as a genuine question about one's preferences. However, it is possible that with

repeated interactions, especially if the responder knows that the requester has a strong preference in that domain, a responder might believe that the requester genuinely isn't interested in their preferences but is simply trying to be nice.

Q Do you anticipate similar outcomes in romantic and dating contexts? How might gender dynamics influence this process?

A We focused on friendships, and we found similar results across friendships and more distant relationships (e.g., friend-of-friend interactions). However, examining whether similar dynamics exist in romantic and dating contexts would also be interesting. We do think that similar dynamics could exist, as requesters likely still would prefer to receive a response, and responders would still want to convey their likability and easygoingness. We speculate that this tendency to want to appear likable and easygoing might be stronger among women than among men in heterosexual dating relationships, at least in the early days. There is some interesting work by Hasford, Kidwell, and Lopez-Kidwell in JCR (2018) that distinguishes between whose food preferences dominate during the initial relationship formation stage versus the relationship maintenance stage within heterosexual relationships.

Q What are the main takeaways you hope your audience (marketing practitioners, researchers, and consumers) will take from this paper? Also, is your lab pursuing any interesting research projects which will expand the findings from this research?

A First, we hope that consumers will easily recognize these kinds of interactions in their everyday lives and correct for them, especially when they are in the responder role: Simply put, express your joint consumption preferences when you're asked for them. Second, we think there is a lot of work to be done on joint consumption and the dynamics of how consumers arrive at a decision together. We hope more researchers will do work on this important area. Third, although this is primarily a theoretical paper with consumer welfare implications, we hope that marketing practitioners interested in joint consumption recognize that understanding how consumers arrive at decisions about joint consumption is important—in fact, there are even digital apps that help a person arrive at a decision about what restaurant to eat at. Our research suggests that such decisions can be even harder for joint consumption.

We are both currently working on other research projects that, broadly speaking, look at how consumers navigate social interactions in the consumption space, such as making choices that affect other people and making choices that shape other people's judgments of them. **MN**

Multitouch Attribution in the Customer Purchase Journey

Online marketing channels have proliferated widely during the past two decades. They now complement traditional offline outlets but also draw significant marketing dollars away from offline channels.

BY P.K. KANNAN AND HONGSHUANG (ALICE) LI

Given the myriad purchasing options customers encounter today, their omnichannel journey can be long and winding. Customers often encounter multiple marketing messages in various formats across different channels before making purchases. A recent Salesforce survey shows that the average consumer communicates with a firm via 10 channels before conversion.

Today's expanding marketing channels yield voluminous data on customer touchpoints. With significant granular and integrated data now available, many marketing managers wonder how they can best assess their channels' and ad messages' ability to affect conversion events— whether they are leads, website sign-ups, or purchases. Senior executives frequently ask:

- How should a purchase be allocated to various marketing channels when digital touchpoints reveal a complex customer journey?
- What factors should influence credit assignment?
- Are heuristic credit allocation methods sufficient for most contexts?
- When do heuristics fail, and when do we need more sophisticated methods?

For example, when a conversion event occurs on a website or at a store, should marketing managers give credit to the first media or channel touchpoint on the customer journey, the touchpoint that successfully closed the journey, or all touchpoints evenly? And how should credit assignment vary from one customer to another or across segments?

Managers must correctly measure advertisement medium and channel touchpoint contributions to conversions to determine their marketing efforts' return on investment. Researchers and practitioners have therefore developed and implemented various multitouch attribution models.

Conversion Event Attribution Models

Multitouch attribution (MTA) models provide estimates to allocate conversion credit to some or all of the media/channel touchpoints customers encounter in their purchase journey. Single-touch models, such as last-touch attribution and first-touch attribution, do not account for all events leading to conversion. But they are easier and less expensive to implement than other models.

Weighted attribution models assign a fraction of each conversion credit to multiple or all customer touchpoints using defined rules, such as equal weight, exponential weight, etc. Rule-based attribution models focus only on customer journeys ending in successful conversion events and ignore the others. Many variations of weighted attribution models have evolved, with some using sophisticated algorithms based on machine learning.

The availability of granular customer journey data has also led to academic interest in customer journey models with more rigor and generalizability. Li and Kannan (2014) offer a three-stage Bayesian statistical model measuring the marginal contribution of six online marketing channels—display, email, referral, direct, organic search and paid search—to purchases. The model captures consumers' channel consideration, visits, and actual purchases. Analysts can estimate the attribution model using all customer journeys, regardless of conversion, and validate it through field experiments. Unlike rule-based heuristic models, Li and Kannan's approach considers all possible channel combinations chosen by consumers or enabled by firms, allows time-decayed touchpoint impact to carry to the same marketing channel or spill over to another channel, and uses Shapley value to calculate each channel's marginal contribution by averaging its incremental contribution in all possible combinations.

Choosing a Model: Cost, Budget and Product/Market Changes

Firms must consider the number of channels they use and their typical customer journey length when choosing attribution models. Companies with few channels and touchpoints require only simple models. Firms must also weigh model implementation and maintenance costs, as well as coordination costs across marketing silos.

Firms can experiment with feasible attribution models, compare outcomes and choose the optimal approach for their needs. For example, Li et al. (2016) analyze a small online firm's experiment with alternative heuristics—the last- and first-touch attribution models—and how the models impact budget allocation across different search keywords. The researchers find weighting average last- and first-touch attribution leads to improved budget allocation to keywords and higher ROI. Li and colleagues conclude sophisticated attribution models are not always necessary and even simple heuristics can help firms get closer to optimal allocation.

Many marketers mistakenly believe they must allocate significant budget to channels receiving large attribution credit for conversions. Danaher and van Heerde (2018) argue that attribution estimates look backward, as they are conditional on past budget allocation and resulting customer journey touchpoints. They conclude firms should base budget allocations across channels on investment elasticities in each channel rather than attribution estimates.

Managers must also consider their outcome of interest (e.g., new product awareness or total sales) when selecting an attribution model (Lobschat, Osinga and Reinartz 2017). Attribution model choice not only affects a firm's marketing performance assessment, but it can also lead to competition among publishers and motivate advertisers to bid aggressively (Berman 2018).

Customer Segment, Creative and Device Attribution

Marketing executives increasingly need to measure cross-channel impact in specific contexts accurately. For example, researchers have investigated marginal advertisement performance across multiple latent customer classes (Chae, Bruno and Feinberg 2019), various ad formats and content (Bruce, Murthi and Rao 2017), and devices (De Hann et al 2018). Firms can also measure ad performance among multiple sub-brands belonging to the same parent and different purchase outlets (Danaher et al. 2020). In other words, firms can group touchpoints by channel, device, campaign, customer segment, message format, and other classifications suited to their marketing objectives.

Marketing managers today have access to increasingly fragmented and unstructured big data, but heightened customer privacy concerns often lead to aggregated and less granular information. Solving the attribution problem is therefore complex but indispensable. Multitouch attribution models empower managers to understand their advertising effects' direction and size, making them more informed when allocating marketing dollars across all channels. **MN**

Delivering Serendipity

When chance encounters in the marketplace enhance consumer satisfaction

BY AEKYOUNG KIM, FELIPE M. AFFONSO, JULIANO LARAN AND KRISTINA M. DURANTE

Netflix knows you are tired of choice. The streaming service recently introduced what might be the perfect hack: a shuffle button that eliminates choice and plays a randomly selected program for the consumer. Under COVID-19 restrictions, the newly homebound were happy to have so many programming options, but this faded over time. A new Journal of Marketing study suggests that being able to choose can backfire because deliberate choice erases the magic of serendipity.

Recall a time when you heard a beloved song come across the radio or stumbled upon a favorite movie while channel surfing. These accidents become "happy" because they lead to feelings of serendipity, which our new research shows heighten enjoyment. When a product, service or experience is positive, unexpected and involving

chance, our research team reasoned that this would generate congruent feelings. Consumers would feel that the encounter was a good surprise, make attributions to chance, and feel lucky that it happened—which we collectively call "feelings of serendipity." Using a series of experiments, we set out to test our contention that marketers can create serendipity in the marketplace.

Across multiple consumer domains (online subscription services, museums, movies, food consumption and music), creating serendipity through positive, unexpected, chance encounters increased satisfaction, enjoyment, perceptions of meaningfulness, willingness to pay, willingness to recommend a service, and interest. For example, members of subscription box services (e.g., Birchbox, Stitchfix) enjoyed their assortment more when they received a random selection of products compared to members who made selections themselves. A similar phenomenon occurred during our curated experiments. For instance, we measured consumer satisfaction using two platforms; one delivering movie recommendations and another delivering music recommendations. Compared to a condition where consumers chose for themselves, enjoyment increased when consumers received a movie or song delivered at random from a set of alternatives the researchers had previously selected. Increased enjoyment occurred because the randomly delivered product was thought to be a good surprise, attributed to chance and luck. In other words, serendipity was born.

This good news suggests that marketers can capitalize on the power of serendipity to increase consumer satisfaction. To do this, marketers must go beyond surprising consumers, because serendipity is not just a pleasant surprise. To test the depths of serendipity, we began to carefully remove one or more of the "ingredients" to see if the serendipity effect would go away. First, we found that when an encounter was negative, consumers no longer felt increased enjoyment. In fact, there was a boomerang effect. A negative encounter that was unexpected and attributed to chance was perceived to be even more negative.

Second, when we increased and decreased the degree of randomness, we also exacerbated and attenuated serendipity. Consumers who viewed a movie trailer that was described as randomly selected from 100 possible options enjoyed it more than when it came from a menu of 10 options, which made it seem less random. Moreover, making consumers aware that a marketer was selecting the options also decreased serendipity and enjoyment, because now it was clear that someone was behind the curtain and the selection was not random.

Finally, we reasoned that educating consumers about a product or service would eliminate the serendipity effect. Coming to learn more about a product not only eliminates unexpectedness (a key ingredient for serendipity), but can create a sense of expertise that leads consumers to

think they have the knowledge to make better choices. In one experiment, we used a platform that recommends functional music that can enhance focus. Approximately half of the participants in this study were provided with information on which attributes increase a song's ability to increase people's concentration. When consumers were educated this way, encountering music from the platform in a serendipitous way later on (via random chance) no longer enhanced enjoyment. This suggests that aficionados may not appreciate marketplace serendipity as much as the rest of us.

In today's marketplace, which affords an abundance of choice, our research provides marketers with insights on how to build some magic into marketplace encounters. When attempting to enhance serendipity, companies may sometimes want to increase perceptions that an encounter is the result of chance or randomness. For example, consumers may enjoy some unexpected events more as part of vacation packages or enjoy product samples that arrive randomly without a lot of information. Companies should also eliminate marketing communications that highlight the targeting process, avoiding telling consumers that a product was especially selected for them based on what the company knows about their preferences. In such instances, an attribution to chance is replaced by attribution to being watched and targeted by the company. **MN**

Stop Saying 'I'm Sorry'

How social media complaint resolution can backfire and harm your brand

BY ALIREZA GOLMOHAMMADI, TAHA HAVAKHOR, DINESH K. GAURI AND JOHANN JOSEPH COMPRIX

A new study in the Journal of Marketing investigates complaint publicization on social media. Increasingly, consumers use social media platforms like Twitter to make complaints and firms respond to these complaints. For example, a recent survey shows that from 2016-2018 complaints and responses to them increased by 250% on Twitter. The use of social media for complaints is expected to increase further as younger consumers air their complaints online instead of calling customer support phone lines. On Twitter, a firm's responses to complaints brings them to the top of the firm's page and makes them accessible to the firm's followers. Before this, only the followers of the consumer would have seen the complaint. In addition, further responses to complaints bring them to the top of the Twitter page each time. These features of Twitter give responses to complaints additional publicity.

Prior research on firm responses to complaints on other forms of social media has found benefits to responding quickly and transparently while showing empathy when responding (i.e., responses by firms mitigate the negative effect of the complaint). However, on some platforms like Twitter, responses to complaints make them more visible. Our research team calls this phenomenon complaint publicity. We find that firms responding to complaints on Twitter exhibit lower firm values and daily stock returns around tweets and receive more complaints in the future. Responding to complaints also lowers the effectiveness of a firm's other tweets (those not associated with complaints).

We conducted two separate studies of firms' Twitter communications. To collect our sample, we identified the 375 of the S&P 500 firms that had Twitter pages. We then developed a Python engine to scrape information from Twitter for these firms and crawled each organization's pages to collect their tweets and responses to others' tweets. In the first study, we found that responses to complaints are associated with lower firm value (measured by Tobin's Q). In the second study, we focused on firms that were responding to complaints stemming from product recalls. Of our 375 firms, we identified 107 that had product recalls. Product recalls provide a nice setting for our tests because their severity is disclosed (allowing us to control for it) and they are exogenous (i.e., they are unexpected and are not associated with our dependent variable other than through the independent variable), which allows us to test for causality between complaint responses on Twitter and their effect on firms.

In the second study, we find that responses to complaints surrounding product recalls are significantly associated with lower daily abnormal returns and a higher volume of future complaints for firms following open- versus closed-complaint response strategies. In both studies we controlled for other brand equity, accounting and financial measures. Our results consistently show that complaint response publicity has negative implications for firms using Twitter to respond to complaints and outweighs any positive benefits from being seen as responsive to consumer complaints. We also provide evidence that firms can mitigate these negative implications by using closed-response strategies.

We recommend that managers avoid long interactions about customer complaints on social media to reduce complaint publicity. Firms can employ open- or closed-response strategies on Twitter. We define an open-response strategy as one where firms handle more than 75% of complaints through multiple exchanges on Twitter. We define a closed-response strategy as one where firms handle more than 75% of complaints through one public message on Twitter, inviting the complainant to continue the complaint handling process in private. We find that closed-response strategies mitigate the effect of complaint publicity. Most platforms have specific features that managers can use to reduce potential complaint publicity. For example, firms on Twitter can reduce the amount of exposure that complaints get by "pinning" positive tweets to the top of the page, which leaves less space for responses to complaints to potentially fill. Overall, when responding to complaints on social media, managers should consider and potentially avoid platform-specific features that can make complaints more public. **MN**

Matching Ad Messaging to Consumer Mindset

Using text to unlock the power of online searches in the consumer journey

BY RILEY T. KROTZ AND GARRETT M. SHIPLEY

What makes consumers click on search engine results or online ad content, and what can marketers do about it? In their recent publication, "Construal Matching in Online Search: Applying Text Analysis to Illuminate the Consumer Decision Journey," Ashlee Humphreys, Mathew Isaac, and Rebecca Wang sought to address this very question. Marketers tend to focus their digital advertising efforts on consumers near the end of their consumer journey (i.e., the purchase stage). Still, other parts of the consumer journey can also influence purchases (e.g., the search stage). Based on their research, Humphreys et al. found that targeting consumers at the beginning of their journey can

also increase click-through rates. Through a combination of six studies, including a pilot study, a survey, three lab experiments, and one field experiment, the authors explore different mindsets and goals that consumers assume during their journey and demonstrate how marketers can use this information to increase click-through rates and satisfaction.

The key is a fluency-driven matching effect. At different stages of the decision journey, consumers adopt different mindsets (i.e., abstract vs. concrete). Based on these mindsets, consumers tend to generate textual search queries that match their respective mindsets—what's called a fluency-driven matching effect. For example, a consumer in an abstract mindset would be more likely to use more abstract language when searching for product information. Conversely, concrete language would be more likely when a consumer is in more of a concrete mindset. As a result, marketers can increase consumer satisfaction by matching search engine results or online ad content to their mindset.

Specifically, the authors note that when consumers are at the beginning (versus the end) of their decision journey, an eventual purchase goal may appear farther away and seem more psychologically distant. At this stage, consumers display a more abstract construal and are more satisfied with abstract results in their online search. However, as consumers progress along their decision journey and become closer to the actual purchase, these psychological distances—and thus, consumer mindsets—may change. At this stage, consumers display a more concrete construal

and are more satisfied with concrete results in their online search. But how can marketers determine the mindset of consumers at specific points in time? The authors provide evidence that these mindsets can be detected by analyzing written text. These findings provide actionable insights to marketers who can increase their online marketing strategy by matching their search engine results and ad content to a consumer's mindset.

Generating the Research Question

The impetus for this research came from the authors' recognition of a practical problem. During their online searches, the authors noticed that most online search ads use language that is concrete (i.e., specific and low-level)—and consumers rely on online searches for everything. However, this preoccupation with concrete keywords seemed to be at odds with their own experiences and goals when using search engines. Building on these observations, the authors discussed with some of their industry partners, who verified that many companies focus obsessively on bidding for concrete keywords like "buy" rather than more abstract keywords. Thus, the author team suspected that there might be an untapped opportunity for marketers at the early stage of the consumer decision journey that advertisers were missing out on by only focusing on concrete keywords.

Research Methodology

To test their idea, the authors combined laboratory experiments with a field study to ensure that the findings were valid and applicable to managers. Although combining research designs is often a challenging endeavor, when asked about the article, the authors noted that they "loved combining methods for this project." They maintain consistency across field and laboratory experiments by using text data in each study. The consistent use of text in each study strengthens confidence in their findings and makes their methodology easier to adopt by other managers and researchers.

However, marketing managers and researchers interested in analyzing consumer construal level, search queries or, more generally, text data don't need to go far. Throughout this research, the author team developed construalscore.com. The website allows users to enter strings of text used to calculate a construal score from 100 (abstract) to 700 (concrete). Provided that the marketer or researcher has insight into the stage of the decision journey that the consumer is at, this online tool can be used to align marketing communication with a consumer mindset. The authors provided two examples of the websites application outside of the scope of search queries.

"If a company is running a Twitter campaign focused on

Highlights from the Article

- Consumers adopt different goals along their decision journey, and marketers can detect these goals by analyzing the text of their online search queries.

- Consumers use search terms that match their mindset.

- Marketers can successfully target consumers early in their decision journey by matching key words to these mindsets.

- Marketers that use search query text to discern consumer mindset can move past bidding on concrete calls to action (e.g., "buy now!") for search advertisements.

- Consumers are more likely to click on search engine results and ad content that match their mindset. Satisfaction also increases!

building awareness, each planned tweet could be evaluated by the tool to ensure that the language matches with an awareness mindset, which tends to be relatively abstract. On the other hand, if a practitioner is planning an email campaign to convert leads into sales, they might check that potential email messages are sufficiently concrete for this latter stage of the consumer decision journey."

What Does This Mean for Managers and Researchers?

How can marketing practitioners be more aware of consumer mindsets? An essential step is determining where the consumer is in their decision journey. Consumers closer to the beginning of their decision journey are less

likely to be committed to a particular product and more inclined to learn more information. In this scenario, concrete communications (e.g., "buy now" or specific product details) may not be met favorably. Instead, marketers should reserve concrete language for consumers closer to the end of their decision journey and consider more abstract communications (e.g., details about product benefits) for consumers who are just getting started in their decision journey.

The benefits of aligning marketing communication with a consumer mindset extend beyond just the consumer's response to the advertisement to online search strategies. Marketers who consider more abstract terms in their search keywords aren't forced into bidding wars for concrete calls to action. Marketers increase click-through rates with a more positive consumer response and don't have to overpay for the keywords. As a result, marketers should consider the consumer mindset when planning their online search strategy.

In addition to providing actionable insights to marketing managers, this research also provides insights for the academic community. Specifically, the authors establish that construal level can explain some of the keyword popularity related findings of previous research. The author team has provided novel ways to use text

data—and has even made this process easier for others by creating a tool anyone can use when working with text and construal level.

Future Work on the Consumer Journey

The authors also provided their insights on future research possibilities in the areas of the consumer journey, text analysis and digital marketing. Through their holistic approach, the authors recognized that the consumer journey is not always linear and unidirectional. Consumers can go back and forth between different stages, and thus marketers need to find tools (such as text) that can help identify what goals a consumer has at a particular stage. The authors note that their model accounts for one signal—search query concreteness—but many other potential linguistic markers may serve as additional signals of consumer goals and mindsets. This is a potentially fruitful avenue for other marketing researchers to look into further. Additionally, there is scope for future research into the influence of the type of device used (i.e., a laptop or mobile phone) on the role of textual communication in online searches.

In the end, regardless of where consumers are in their purchase journey, it all boils down to mindset. **MN**

Better Segmentation for Better Insights

Steps to build marketing strategies on what matters most to your consumers

BY EMILY IZBICKI AND KELLY JASPER
SENIOR RESEARCH MANAGER; VP OF STRATEGY AND INSIGHTS, AMC GLOBAL

When brands want to connect more strongly with their customers to create tailored marketing strategies, one of the first things to do is segment the market. When done right, segmentation can provide a company cornerstone on which to build and grow—that true understanding of who makes up a customer base; a critical step in marketing's golden rule of "know thy customer."

Segmentation Overview

Traditional market segmentation is a strategy for dividing a broad target market into subsets of distinctive groups based on commonalities—customer similarities and what sets them apart from others. These shared traits,

or differentiating factors, could include needs, attitudes, behaviors, and even basic geographic and demographic information. Understanding the customer at this more granular level allows brands to zero in on priority segments and follow the ultimate Goldilocks principle—finding those "just right" opportunities to inform future marketing and positioning strategies.

Basing Customer Segmentation on Brand Goals

The question to ask before starting segmentation research is, "What are the customer segmentation goals for the brand or company?" Segmentation approaches have been around for decades, and there are different options out there on how to approach this process. Not only that, sometimes the research process tries to cover too many bases by asking too many questions to get the most information—more is more, right?

Not always—and definitely not in today's digital world

It is important to remember: In the end, segments need to be meaningful and sensible, aspirational yet attainable. By breaking down a big group into more manageable and accessible smaller groups, brands gain an understanding of the consumers in each cohort better. More information, yes, but moreover, quality information. A foundational study to help a brand build and grow must start with the selection of the right building materials to create a solid base.

Taking Market Segmentation One Step Further

Traditional market segmentation can show quite a bit about who a brand's customers are (and aren't), and works very well as an initial step to getting to know the customer. What a traditional market segmentation does not do, however, is answer or explore the specific reasons behind why these individuals buy a certain product or category.

For example, a brand or company may have a market segmentation that includes a group of active baby boomers and a group of internet-heavy millennial consumers—both of whom buy products within their product category and maybe even the brand specifically. But, the reasons behind why they buy may be entirely different. And lacking that piece of the puzzle diminishes the ability to truly understand customers and, of course, to provide them with the products and services that actually fulfill a need.

To make products, services and messaging truly meaningful, it's helpful to take traditional segmentation one step further and also segment customers based on why customers are purchasing certain products or brands in the category. This type of segmentation flips the focus from the "who" to explore the additional thoughts and behaviors that make up purchase decisions. To understand the ultimate motivations of customers, brands need to understand what they're asking the brand or product to do for them. This is an outcome—what outcome do your customers require from your products (and similar products in the category)? As Harvard University's Theodore Leavitt puts it, "People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!"

Gaining Better Consumer Insights Through Effective Segmentation

Getting to the right answer means starting with the right questions. To understand exactly why consumers buy products or services, utilize a segmentation structure capable of answering that question. To understand what truly makes consumers different, use a methodological approach capable of providing strong discrimination. This means segmenting consumers in a way that puts outcomes first.

A similar approach and overarching concept has been used for some time by market researchers supporting brand success, as indicated in Anthony W. Ulwick's theory around Jobs to be Done (JTBD). This new evolution of outcome-driven segmentation can be looked at as a three-step approach to clear and actionable insights.

STEP 1: DEFINING THE CUSTOMER OUTCOMES
Depending on the category, customers could (and should!) have hundreds of different outcomes for products. For example, when thinking of the fast-food/quick service restaurant (QSR) industry, outcomes could range from those focused on delivering convenience to others focused on offering variety. The outcomes include a mix of both emotional and functional requirements for a product or service and must be developed hand-in-hand with the end customer.

There are many different approaches to gaining customer feedback on their required outcomes for a particular product category, but one of the market research approaches that can work most effectively relies heavily on longitudinal creative qualitative techniques. This means connecting directly with customers by repeatedly asking them what you need to know (in almost a tête-à-tête style format) so you can understand a behavior or experience across time.

Understanding deeply how a brand's products or services fit into customers' everyday lives is critical to building out the extensive list of outcomes. When done right, the

research process should uncover 100 or more required outcomes for a single product category.

STEP 2: IDENTIFYING THE TOP OPPORTUNITIES

With the comprehensive list of outcome statements in place, it's time to start prioritizing which outcomes offer the greatest opportunity for growth and innovation in the category. Using Ulwick's approach as a guide, the market research process should quantitatively evaluate the overall importance of each outcome and how satisfied customers are with what's available to them today on being able to deliver on that specific outcome (i.e., whether an outcome is already being fulfilled).

Using the combination of Importance times Satisfaction and Ulwick's recommended formula, calculate an opportunity score for each outcome. This allows identification of which outcomes are currently underserved, appropriately served and overserved within the category. Then, the outcomes are prioritized.

This analysis may sound straight forward, but many factors need to be considered to ensure that the right outcomes are being prioritized. For example, look not only at the opportunity scores at the total customer-level, but also look to understand the top opportunities by brand-users and by the traditional consumer segments.

To quote Vanilla Ice, this is the point in the process where it is time to "stop, collaborate and listen." Just because the data has been gathered doesn't mean the full story is yet available. This is where art meets science and the perspectives of all key stakeholders (insights and innovation, brand teams, research and development, etc.) must be included to finalize the prioritized list of outcomes. When narrowing a list down from 100 to about 30 outcomes, work to ensure the outcomes being prioritized are not just unmet needs for the customers, but something the brand can actually deliver on.

STEP 3: SEGMENTING CUSTOMERS BASED ON PRIORITIZED OUTCOMES

With a list of approximately 30 prioritized outcomes offering the greatest opportunity for growth, it's officially time to let the segmentation begin!

With an outcome-driven segmentation, the approach can (and should) be much more streamlined, as long as the front-end work has already been completed. For example, if there is already a traditional consumer segmentation in place and the brand already understands the "who," all that needs to be included is that segmentation algorithm versus doubling up on all the profiling information. It's the perfect way to trim down the brutal battery after battery of rating questions we're used to seeing in segmentation surveys.

In Step 2, we learned that all of these outcomes are important—the traditional rating scale approach isn't going to provide that discrimination among segments needed.

So, what should be done? Use a distinct trade-off analysis and force customers to make the difficult decisions between which outcomes truly drive purchase decisions. This type of analysis is designed to quantify customers' values associated with different required outcomes to establish preferences. This approach is more fun and engaging to complete from a respondent standpoint than traditional ratings, which ultimately lends itself to higher-quality data.

Analytical clustering based on the trade-off results provides the basis for uncovering segments. Just as consumer profiles differ in a traditional consumer segmentation, the outcomes and asks of the product/ product category differ by group in an outcome-driven segmentation. Each group has different personal definitions of what they require (i.e., the outcomes they seek) from a product or product category.

The Outcome

This type of approach to market segmentation can give brands or organizations distinct segments and a clear understanding of the exact outcomes they must deliver on (and which outcomes they shouldn't worry about) to reach each segment. This approach can help brands or organizations with product development and innovation, marketing messaging and positioning, and packaging claims, among other product aspects. Connecting with customers through this segmentation approach ensures that brands are no longer left saying, "Well, this information is great to know, but now what?" Instead, they have a clear path to action that will positively impact their customers and their business. **MN**

Move Beyond 'Legacy Systems' for Understanding Brand (Dis)loyalty

BY REBECCA BROOKS | FOUNDER AND CEO, ALTER AGENTS

In the software industry, we hear a lot about "legacy systems," often in reference to outdated platforms and processes that have been grandfathered in and can't really handle modern software needs. The concept of legacy systems exists in the consumer marketplace as well, and the way brands interact with their audiences. By extension, the way the market research industry functions is part of an outdated algorithm.

As an industry, market research has spent the better part of the past few decades exploring

brand loyalty—often from a narcissistic viewpoint. Surveys have been filled with questions asking about awareness, familiarity and consideration. But these are navel-gazing, narcissistic questions. "Have you heard of me?" "How much do you know about me?" "Do you like me?"

While tweaks have been made along the way to at least try to keep up with changing consumer behavior, smart researchers know that the way consumers are interacting with brands is increasingly complex, and depends on a whole host of contextual circumstances. Consumer insights need to evolve as well, but we find ourselves in a straightjacket consisting of a legacy system based on loyalty research.

Breaking Free From Outdated Methodology

If the past year has done nothing else, it has shaken our "norms" to the core. Traditional ways of doing things have come into question—from the way schools are structured to the way we shop and from the way we work (both as employees and leaders) to what we prioritize in our daily lives. Things are speeding up, digitalization is touching every aspect of life and uncertainty has become the status quo. Market research is already responding to these transformations, catapulting its evolution to better meet the insights needs of today.

However, like all transitions, this one has been nothing if not messy. It lacks the tried-and-true framework of the past, on which we could fall back for guidance and comfort when it came to our consumer insights efforts. And the truth is, there is no new framework to which we can turn. If we examine the shopper journey alone, it has transitioned from a linear path to purchase, to one that is anything but linear, to one that can't be seen as any kind of path at all. In fact, even the word "journey" itself no longer feels applicable. Individuals are making decisions from places that are intensely unique—with unpredictable influences and a vast number of contextual circumstances at play. One of the least of these influences hinges on brand loyalty, something which multiple studies have shown is very low on the list (if on the list at all) of the decision-making process.

Market research must adapt. Extracting better insights means moving away from the kind of "brand narcissism" that leads to surveys full of questions about the brand that are disconnected from customers and their experiences. There are a few tangible things researchers and marketers can do to better understand their audience's motivations.

- Consider real-world behavior: People don't exist in a vacuum. Each person's contextual circumstances must be considered, and this sensibility must be brought to light in the way we conduct research. Bring the individual's experiences to the forefront and focus on them, and their unique situations, rather than the brand itself.
- Combine methodologies: We've found that multimodal research is absolutely invaluable in gaining holistic understanding. This can mean, for example, combining in-depth consumer interviews with quantitative surveys, and then layering on behavioral techniques such as agile neuroscience. Putting all these pieces together can give a three-dimensional view that goes far beyond legacy brand loyalty surveys.
- Look at the big picture to find connections: There are hundreds if not thousands of data streams out there, especially as digitalization continues to rise. Use them to your advantage and bring together consumer context, needs, and brand connection to capitalize on opportunities where you have a chance to connect with your customer.
- Align your offerings with your findings: The right data and insights can help you find those moments when you can meet a consumer's ever-changing set of needs and priorities. This is the sweet spot for which we are striving with new approaches and methodologies in consumer insights.

Traditional research models focused on brand perception and loyalty metrics are too restrictive to explore the essential "why" driving consumer behavior. Evolving your market research and consumer insights strategies to encompass the true decision-making process will help optimize your offerings to fit the mindset of today's customer. **MN**

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