

Emotional Analysis Breakthrough in the Pandemic Age of Travel

New Insights Take Engagement to the Next Level

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While not a new marketing concept, segmenting one's high valued customers into clusters, cohorts or personas has been the cornerstone of direct marketing for decades. Simply put, these are groups of people who share common characteristics.

Micro Segmentation is a more granular form of segmentation, which aggregates smaller groups of customers into more focused segments, based on characteristics that could include demographics, psychographics, location, behavioral and transactional information. Marketers can then direct personalized messaging to each micro segment to maximize the impact.

I first used segmentation in the hospitality industry about 20 years ago, starting off with basic RFM (Recency, Frequency and Monetary) analysis, then progressing to more sophisticated analytics. This was predominantly to existing customer databases, making insights easier to manage and results easier to monitor. The bottom line is that by identifying and segmenting customers or prospects into smaller persona groups enabled a much higher degree of relevance consequently resulting in increased engagement and ROI.

The point is that working with an "owned" database was easier to manage. Looking outside of transactionally driven databases, and in particular, looking at destinations, one finds a much tougher challenge. The challenge was (and is) that these personas were created by surveys.

I was reminded of a Deloitte study that revealed that over two-thirds of study respondents stated third-party data about them was only 0 to 50 percent correct as a whole. One-third of respondents perceived the information to be 0 to 25 percent correct. This is unreliable as a single data source to make critical decisions.

Survey data often feeds sentiment analysis. What has been missing is a more crucial factor and that is emotional analysis. It has been difficult to find and measure, until now.

While running various travel sentiment studies undertaken by Tourism Alchemy during COVID-19, they were able to uncover that, by focusing on real time emotional analysis, a broader range of actionable insights surfaced. Then by applying micro segmentation to their analysis, certain persona characteristics emerged. They formed distinct persona segments that could be identified and communicated with, painstakingly peeling away the layers of the research onion.



This breakthrough emotional analysis research has tremendous implications on how marketers can leverage this type of actionable data especially if you are a DMO or marketing agency.

Is *emotion* the secret sauce?

Not all research companies are created equally. Most focus on surveys, which tend to deliver negative or positive answers to a question that supports indicative sentiment. As the Deloitte study noted, results

can be unreliable. In addition, those firms that manage Social Media listening, skim the surface and, as an example, listen to Twitter with disregard to context and allow loud and frequent Tweeters to dominate sentiment, but they represent only 2% of the general population. In my research, I found that Tourism Alchemy uses a proprietary algorithm stack that captures the unfiltered emotions from a variety of social platforms that include Social Media, news sites, and travel forums. Data is normalized to ensure that high-volume platforms such as Twitter don't dominate the results. Machine learning and smart humans continuously improve the analysis and uncover hidden insights in the data – all in real time.

NextGen technology that focuses on emotional analysis, has a broader attribution range that, in turn, fuels sentiment. This sets breakthrough standards in emotional drivers, accurately linking sentiment to topics, and granularity, using industry-specific models and context-aware analysis.

In plain speak, imagine watching your favorite football team. A sentiment survey would identify that you support the team. However, emotional analysis tells the more complex story that captures your fuller range of emotions in a game that swings from sadness to joy.

These finer emotional feelings are the key to building personas that can be targeted more effectively, especially when overlaid with sentiment data. To achieve greater success with engagement, one must go beyond what they like to do and who they are demographically by tapping into the emotional drivers.

As a real time example, the Tourism Alchemy study identified that windsurfers who enjoy farm-to-table dining, micro-breweries and typically drive to reachable destinations at short notice is a persona that can be identified and engaged with, and would respond positively to a custom message that talks to these characteristics. Complement this with the “Why” factor of emotionally driven decisions, adds another critical dimension to the traveler profile. It suggests that this group is passionate about the environment, nature, sustainable and responsible tourism and this is an emotional lever that talks to the tone and language of messaging. Emotional drivers are not found in surveys or focus groups. Armed with these aggregated insights, agencies can use established digital targeting tools as a way to better communicate with precision and a defined tone, feel and language.

Key Takeaway: tapping into NextGen tools to identify right fit persona's plus emotional analysis will drive increased engagement and improve ROI during COVID-19 and beyond.