

Using data to inform customer journey planning from a cultural perspective

By [Virginia Alvarez](#)

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We are moving swiftly towards a data revolution, to a reality where data will not only help us understand the world but will determine many of our most basic interactions and experiences. On the flip side, restrictive privacy laws, the adoption of privacy tools, the reduction of third-party cookie data, and a focus on data sustainability mean that the way data is gathered and used will not remain the same.



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So, as quickly as we're headed towards a more data-powered world, marketers should be planning how they're going to adapt their tactics to effectively define and engage their audiences.

Organisations have long relied heavily on behavioural data to segment their target markets. But audience segmentation and customer journey planning of the future will demand more from marketers. They'll need to know who their audience is and what inspires them as individuals. Brands will need to resonate with consumers on a personal level.



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To do so effectively, they'll need to understand how cultural norms and nuances play into people's purchasing decisions - an influencer of consumer behaviour that has, until now, been largely overlooked by marketers.

To do that, organisations will need to move beyond their reliance on a surface-level demographic view of their customers and dig deeper to understand consumers on a human level; to truly gauge what drives decision making.

Mapping out a human-centric customer journey

The Cognitive Intelligence team at Wunderman Thompson believes that one of the greatest results of digital developments and changes to data access is that the customer journey is becoming less ad centric and more people-centric. We view this as the chance for marketers to deliver more meaningful engagement with their customers and to develop direct, valuable relationships with them to inspire growth.

For this to happen, it is important to address the consumer journey in a way that is highly actionable; to understand the needs of the audience in a way that is addressable for tailored messaging, coupling this with behaviour signals for hyper-personalized experiences at each stage of the journey to better action on needs, behaviours, and so on. By creating audiences that account for consumers' motivations to buy, we can further tap into their innate needs and address them in an emotionally resonant way, to inspire them to make the desired behaviour change.



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So, for brands to engage with consumers more empathetically and to gain brand equity, they need to humanize audiences by developing clear insight into customers' emotions and what inspires them. Each day, different intrinsic values determine what consumers see as favourable. These value systems shape what consumers think about, their ambitions, the brands they gravitate towards, and ultimately drive people's decisions and all the actions they take.

Understanding culture and its impact on consumer mindset and behaviours

Naturally, the source of people's inspiration differs, and culture undoubtedly plays a large part in this. After all, culture guides our perception of the world and therefore shapes our behaviour.

National culture - the "common ground" like values, norms, and behaviours shared by a country's population - is the most obvious source of difference. In spite of the world's increasing connectedness, there are various traits that are truer, generally speaking, among some nations than others and motivational needs that over-index within specific cultural contexts.

But the definition of culture can't be limited to national identity. Culture is also defined by experiences, values, attitudes, and beliefs. Various factors - far more intricate than a people group's place of residence - influence culture. These include linguistic norms, social background, profession, religion, age, and gender, to name a few.



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So, while it could be said that consumers may share common cultural views based on their nationality, there is a far broader set of factors that affect consumers' mindsets. Ultimately, the most important thing is looking within a given population to understand the distinct mindsets that drive an audience—an audience that might at first glance look homogeneous.

Inspiring different mindsets

The Cognitive Intelligence team at Wunderman Thompson is focused on leveraging the insights from human behaviour and psychology into brand inspiration. What our efforts have brought to light in a new way is how mindsets are driven by different values, inspired by different experiences, and therefore are attracted to different brand offerings.

For example, some are motivated by having a good time and spoiling themselves. Their interest is sparked by social events of all kinds - travelling, shopping, or dining out - and they expect instant gratification. Other groups are driven by curiosity, independence, and creativity; by benevolence, making others' lives better; or by the pursuit of equality and the preservation of the environment and would therefore be drawn to offerings or moments in time that resonate with their mindset, like being in nature or giving back. While these may seem like amorphous, emotional values, they represent the crucial subconscious foundation for a person's personal and consumer decisions.



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Interestingly, certain mindset groups are more prevalent in specific countries. For example, those who tend to indulge in spoiling themselves would predominantly be identified in societies where luxury is seen in terms of purchasing power. But mindsets ultimately span national borders and are adopted as "cultures" around the world, largely as a result of the internet and international travel.

Using data to effectively engage different cultural groups

Going forward, failure to acknowledge the importance of culture in customer journey planning and business building will put brands at a competitive disadvantage. Culture is one of the major factors that enable marketers to drive greater engagement and relevance among their target markets. But, since culture is so multifaceted, how are organisations able to gain the insight they need to understand their audiences through this lens?

Advances in data science and analytics are unlocking the ability to predict and measure people's different sources of inspiration—and technology developments are enabling marketers to act upon them.

The approach that brands followed a decade ago to map out their customer journeys—which involved finding efficiency through broad averages—is being replaced with the ability to anticipate consumers' propensity to inspiration and to create inspiring experiences. Data teams are able to build predictive models to determine how best to inspire growth and power communications, media, and customer experiences around the world.

Inspiration doesn't have to be personalized, but it should always be personal, and the use of data helps marketers speak to millions of people in a way that feels truly individualized. For this to work, it's critical for marketers to close the gap between theoretical insights and actionable data, which is what our day-to-day work around audience typologies and different consumer mindsets aim to do.

Gaining this kind of data-driven awareness of consumers' innate needs and what inspires them will enable brands to be more resonant in their messaging; it will equip them to meet their audiences with personal and culturally relevant content and to create cohesive experiences. It will help brands to inspire growth, encourage loyalty, enhance engagement, and,

ultimately, gain greater mindshare and ROI. Ethically and sustainably leveraging data to understand cultural differences, various mindsets, and what inspires individuals is not only paramount to human-centric customer journey mapping, but it is the key to marketing success in 2021 and beyond.

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