

Your brand will thrive when you empathise with your customers

By [Virginia Alvarez](#)

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The pandemic and its economic fallout have changed our world for good. Consumers are reassessing their needs and values, adapting their behaviours, and adjusting how they make decisions. Marketers that invest in understanding how people's emotions and values are changing in the face of multiple national lockdowns and Covid-19 waves will position their brands to thrive in this volatile landscape.



Photo by Jacob Lund from Noun Project

To keep pace, brands need to move beyond demographics and focus more than ever on psychographics. In a world where emotions such as anxiety are running high and people are preoccupied with mental and physical health, brands need to take a closer look at how they fit into the consumer's personal life. In particular, they would be wise to focus on how consumers' values and motivations are changing.

Value systems influence human behaviour and shape what people want to hear from brands. At this time, we may see values such as freedom, togetherness, respect and time spent with their loved ones begin to trump socially oriented values like social status or materialism. Brands that can understand how their customer's values are changing will be able to influence them more effectively.

Consider the fact that 92% of respondents in a [survey conducted by Wunderman Thompson](#) said that they admire companies that are taking action to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus. This points to the emotional link consumers make with brands and the importance of fostering these links by aligning with their values.

The WT Inspiring for Growth consumer [study](#), meanwhile, shows that it matters how people feel about brands. Customers want brands to be inspirational (72%), but only 53% experience brand inspiration, presenting a major growth opportunity for brands. Furthermore, inspiration predicts 63% of a brand's ability to drive demand, 52% of brands' ability to command higher prices, and 48% of brands' ability to convert customers at the point of purchase.

Consumers at the core

Responsive, empathetic brands that put consumers at the core will be positioned to thrive in this landscape. Yet most companies have work to do before they reach this state. They depend heavily on demographic or behavioural data to understand their customers—which paints an incomplete picture of what really drives customers' decisions. They can see what customers are buying or not buying, but they have less insight into what actually drives the decision.

To truly understand customers, brands should dig deeper to unravel their unconscious motivations and emotional needs. This is where the concept of actionable and scalable audience targeting via cognitive intelligence has a key role to play. Supported by behavioural science principles, this approach identifies the intrinsic emotions and motivations that influence consumer choices, and thus enabling brands to understand why people buy what they do.

Using psychological principles to identify consumers' ever-evolving motivations and leverage emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence to model how changing values, emotions and motivations shape customer choice. It adds an emotional dimension to the data we already have about customers.

AI + behavioural science

By tapping into the capabilities and technology cognitive intelligence can offer, brands can drive a more human customer-centric audience strategy. This will be built on an intimate understanding of consumers' changing motivational mindsets, mapping the why behind the buy as well as identifying and quantifying winnable audiences.

Motivational audience strategies inform the creative process by highlighting the role of emotions. People are not only driven by their own beliefs and motivations, but also by their feelings. Emotions play a central role in the decisions we make. Humans are, as António R. Damásio, the neurologist said, "not thinking machines that feel, but feeling machines that think."

A meaningful connection with consumers' unconscious needs will not increase the brand's relevance, but also help it respond to moments of need at different stages of the consumer journey. Brands will be able to create better connections with consumers through engaging moments and content by delivering the right message at the right stage of the journey, and to the right audiences on the right channel.

One real world example showing how this works in practice is a healthcare company that wanted to help people to stop smoking. Every smoker is aware of the rational reasons to quit smoking - meaning that rational content has limited efficacy in bringing about behavioural change. But using data and strategy, it could identify their underlying motivations related to quitting and tailored experiences to their needs.

By hitting members of the audience with a message tailored to their motivations and emotional states—whether health-related fears or optimism about a smoke-free future - the company experienced a tremendous increase in influencing behaviour, compared to previous attempts. Simply put, it broke through the consumer's inertia with more "human" personally relevant content.

An edge for the future

Brands that lay a strong foundation for understanding consumers' needs and motivations during this uncertain time will be able to get an edge for the future. This is an opportunity not only to steer through what remains of the pandemic, but also to enhance their brand equity and customer loyalty for the future.

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