Facial Coding and Body Language
Emotion Analysis in Action

An Illustrative Study: LGBT vs. Gen Pop Print Ad Evaluation

“Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge” – Plato

Prepared by

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Introduction

- Life Stage Research Insights and Solution Partners Consulting are collaborating on a qualitative research methodology incorporating emotions research—facial coding and body language analysis—with qualitative research.
- To demonstrate the application and benefits of this approach an illustrative study was conducted.
- The research objective of the study was to assess consumers’ emotional reactions to print ads targeted to general population vs. LGBT consumers
- To assess facial expressions, seven emotional expressions are employed and measured based on Paul Ekman’s facial coding system. To monitor body language, the same seven emotions that are measured via facial expressions are also captured along with seven others.

How Our Approach Adds Emotion Advantages

Most qualitative research focuses just on what consumers are telling us about how they think or feel.

Our analysis uncovers the actual emotions consumers are experiencing. This is accomplished through a systematic coding process of respondents’ facial expressions and body language.

This allows for deeper understanding than traditional qualitative research. We get inside the consumer’s true state of mind to capture underlying emotions which may...
- Contradict their verbal statements
- Reinforce their verbal statements
- Reveal the intensity of their feelings

Our emotions research provides a more accurate and robust perspective of your consumers’ reactions and attitudes.

Unlike verbal responses, emotions cannot be regulated and provide genuine insight into your consumers’ core, heartfelt feelings.
Methodology

Print Ads Tested

- A popular hotel chain was identified that advertises to both general market and LGBT consumers with dedicated print advertising campaigns.
- Two ads were selected – one portrays an LGBT couple and one features a straight couple.

Method/Sample

- 12 in-depth (one-on-one) interviews were conducted among general population and LGBT consumers:
  - 6 general population consumers
  - 6 LGBT consumers
  - In addition, the participants were recruited to ensure a range of ages and gender

Interviewing

- Interviews were conducted in Chicago on May 14, 2015.
- Interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes.

Discussion Topics

- Ads were evaluated in terms of:
  - Overall thoughts, impressions and feelings
  - Main point playback
  - Like and Dislikes
  - Persuasion - ability to impact attitudes and potential usage of the brand being advertised

Analytical Notes:

- For this summary, emotion codes are reported for only Overall Thoughts/Impressions and Persuasion.
- Percentages are reported to facilitate interpretation of respondents’ aggregate emotions but are not projectable given small base
- Emotions are not static, thus respondents can exhibit multiple emotions to a given question
- Emotion graph color code: Green = positive emotion, Yellow = neutral emotion, Red = negative emotion
- Intensity of emotion: noted if “high” or “low”

Emotions Measured

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facial &amp; Body Language Emotions</th>
<th>Additional Body Language Emotions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Joy</td>
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<td>Disgust</td>
<td>Interest</td>
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<td>Fear</td>
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<td>Surprise</td>
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<td>Contempt</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
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<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Anxiety/Discomfort</td>
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<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Disapproval/Disagreement</td>
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Conclusions and Applications of Facial Coding & Body Language Emotion Analysis

This study illustrates how adding facial coding and body language emotion analysis to a typical qualitative research study provides deeper insights that go beyond findings based on consumers’ conscious (or stated) responses, uncovering new dimensions to the findings or confirming them.
Key Highlights From Emotion Analysis

- Gen Pop ad generates a positive response but is not particularly emotionally engaging nor persuasive to the gen pop audience. The Gen Pop ad creates a predominantly negative emotional reaction among LGBT consumers.

- LGBT ad elicits very favorable emotions, particularly among LGBT consumers but also among general population consumers. The positive emotions are indicative of the ad’s ability to be persuasive and create positive interest in staying at the hotel brand.

- Executional elements, such as a phrase or visual, can be interpreted as exclusionary and can create negative emotions, even among its intended target.
Gen Pop Ad Among Gen Pop Respondents

- Verbal responses suggest that Gen Pop consumers had mostly favorable impressions of the Gen Pop ad, even while outlining some potential drawbacks to it. The ad strongly suggests the hotel is a place to go to relax, enjoy a spa weekend, be with your spouse and perhaps have a romantic weekend together.

- Facial expressions were consistent with what respondents reported verbally, confirming most were happy or surprised. Body language suggested interest. This suggests the brand has potential to create affinity with its audience.

- But, one notable respondent, a single female that potentially reflects a sizeable segment for the hotel chain, displayed emotions of sadness, anxiety/discomfort and neutrality, even though she had not verbally expressed these feelings.

- Use of the line “couples only” resulted in these negative emotions. For most Gen Pop consumers “Couples Only” implied a get away from work, family and other stresses. However, this respondent reported feeling this statement excluded her because she is currently single.

Green = positive emotion, Yellow = neutral emotion, Red = negative emotion
In terms of the research process...

- Verbally, she politely pointed this out. Based solely on what she said, this did not appear to be a major concern.
- However, facial coding indicated the depth of her negative emotional response was much greater than she was able to verbalize or perhaps even knew herself.

These emotions create potential dissonance with the brand and its consumers—more importantly, the depth of emotional response was observed only through emotions coding.

The Gen Pop ad was not particularly motivating to Gen Pop consumers, nor did it positively impact perceptions of the hotel.

The ad satisfied consumers’ expectations of the brand, so the majority appeared neutral to positive in response to the ad when questioned about potential use and their attitudes. In part this may be due to the brand’s strong reputation and past usage by respondents.
LGBT consumers’ response to the Gen Pop ad was more nuanced - verbally they said many of the same things Gen Pop consumers reported. But their emotions revealed deeper, negative feelings about the ad.

Similar to the single female’s response, LGBT consumers also responded less favorably to the “couples only” claim, with many feeling it was exclusionary and unwelcoming to LGBT consumers.

Further, similar to the single female, when questioned about their ability to relate to the ad, LGBT consumers politely say they are used to not seeing themselves in ads, but they still understand what the ad is saying. Typically, this is enough information for advertisers.

But, facial coding and body language analysis reveal a deeper, negative emotional response to the ad: Based on their facial expressions, while some were happy, surprised or neutral, there was greater incidence of contempt, disgust and anger. Similarly, body language registered greater incidence of disapproval/disagreement and anger.

As such, this ad creates dissonance between LGBT consumers and the hotel. Not surprisingly, LGBT consumers are much more likely to be receptive to hotels that either overtly welcome them or do not in any way imply they are exclusive to straight couples.
LGBT Ad Among LGBT Respondents

- As one might expect, LGBT consumers responded extremely well to the LGBT ad. Favorable responses to the ad relate to the brand speaking to LGBT consumers as well as for its aesthetic appeal. These elements seemed to work seamlessly to promote the hotel.

- The ad communicated multiple messages about the hotel, such as being a welcoming place for LGBT consumers, being “hip” and “trendy” and other functional benefits of the hotel—i.e., its cleanliness, multiple amenities, etc.

- Facial expressions and body language were highly in sync with LGBT consumers’ verbal responses. Further, they also suggested a high degree of emotional connection with the ad and the hotel.

- Facial expressions indicated LGBT consumers were both happy and surprised. Body language conveyed interest, happy as well as joy and agreement.

- Two points are also notable from these data:
  - High strength of emotions for being happy and displaying interest, indicating LGBT consumers are internalizing the message, thus creating a bond between the hotel and LGBT consumers.
  - No negative facial expressions and body language observed in LGBT consumers’ response to the LGBT ad.

- The ad appeared to positively impact perceptions of the brand as well as interest in staying there—this was apparent from both verbal responses as well as through emotions coding. Many reported viewing the hotel chain in a new light, assuming it was now targeting younger, professionals.

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Gen Pop consumers also reacted very favorably to the LGBT ad, finding it more appealing and motivating than the Gen Pop ad. This was somewhat apparent through discussion but confirmed via facial coding and body language coding:

- Gen Pop consumers appeared more animated and engaged when discussing the LGBT ad vs. the Gen Pop ad. The majority were intrigued by the contemporary look and feel of the ad, more so than to the relaxed mood of the Gen Pop ad.

- Similarly, when discussing interest in staying at the hotel, Gen Pop consumers registered expressions of being happy and displayed high interest in terms of their body language.

- Further, a comparison of body language in response to being questioned about interest in staying at the hotel shows slightly greater interest displayed via body language in the LGBT ad vs. the Gen Pop ad.
Implications Based on Facial Coding and Body Language Analysis

- Facial Coding and Body Language Analysis has proven beneficial in both confirming the qualitative findings and identifying consumers’ deeper emotional reactions, both positive and negative.
- The following recommended actions may not have been identified or thought significant based only on traditional qualitative.

1. **Delete or revise the phrase “couples only” in the Gen Pop ad**
   - The phrase is a negative to LGBT consumers and a segment of Gen Pop consumers.
   - *Traditional qualitative may only have raised a “red flag” about this phrase, whereas facial and body language coding reveal the phrase has unintended, negative consequences, striking consumers at a deep emotional level.* The phrase has the potential of alienating single Gen Pop consumers and LGBT consumers.
   - Consider alternative phrasing such as “Couples Getaway” or “Weekend Getaway.”

2. **Consider adapting the look/feel of the LGBT ad to Gen Pop advertising to attract young, urban professionals**
   - The Gen Pop ad does not seem to generate excitement in the brand.
   - Gen Pop consumers responded extremely well to the LGBT ad, primarily due to its contemporary look and feel. *This was confirmed through emotions coding.*
   - The imagery in the LGBT ad may have the potential to move the brand in a more youthful direction, making it more appealing to young, urban professionals and putting the brand in the competitive set with smaller, boutique style hotels.

3. **Leverage successful niche campaigns, such as the LGBT ad tested in this study, with Gen Pop consumers**
   - The LGBT ad has the potential to also generate positive response among Gen Pop consumers (at least in a liberal urban environment), *as reflected in their positive emotional response.*
   - Promoting inclusion and/or diversity may resonate well and represent upside “spill over” to a broader audience than just the niche LGBT target.
The Team:
We combine deep market research acumen and expertise in emotions research

Curt Fedder, Life Stage Research Insights
- Curt Fedder specializes in qualitative research and consulting. After working for 30+ years in both client and vendor roles on consumer, retail and B2B brands, he started his research consultancy, Life Stage Research Insights, in January 2014.
- An expert designing and interpreting both qualitative and quantitative research, he has held research positions across a variety of industries with major brand organizations such as BP, Kraft Foods, Nextel, Alberto-Culver and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Curt has worked in a variety of categories including CPG, food and beverage, insurance, wireless technology, beer, alcohol and household care.
- Curt holds a Master’s Degree from Northwestern University and is trained in facilitation and ideation techniques. He is published in JAR and Marketing News and is a frequent industry conference speaker.

Meagan Peters, Solution Partners
- Meagan Peters’ expertise is in applying emotion theory and methodological techniques to both qualitative and quantitative research. Trained in facial coding and body language analysis, she has published her academic research on emotions as well as presented it at Stanford’s School of Business.
- As a Research Manager at Solution Partners Consulting, Meagan has worked in a variety of industries including CPG, apparel, household appliances, financial services, and hospitality. Meagan has completed an online qualitative methods course, Riva moderating training and ideation training.
- Meagan holds an M.S. in Business Administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and a B.A. in Sociology and Communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.