

EXPERIENTIAL EQ

GOING BEYOND DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE
POWER OF EMOTIONS IN EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING



EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING, DONE RIGHT, IS ABOUT SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST SHOWING UP.

It's about understanding what your audience is looking for—not who they are on paper. What deep, emotional needs do they bring to an event? What do they want to get out of it? What memories do they want to take home? Why are they there?

GMR Marketing's proprietary, in-house research and analysis of the consumer psyche has uncovered an entirely new framework for understanding human emotion in the experiential space—and a deeper, better, way for brands to create connections that last.

POST-TRUTH + TRUST

In today's post-truth world, trust is at an all-time low. People are skeptical of institutions, corporations, the media, and of course marketing—only 19% of consumers believe what marketers tell them about products. They prefer to bypass messaging and try things themselves, or rely on the recommendations of friends, family and social influencers.



In this environment, the power of hands-on, physical experience with brands is undeniable. Marketers are flocking to experiential for good reason. But as we seek to connect with consumers in person and on deeper emotional levels, we've been leaning too hard on big data for clues to consumers' attitudes and behaviors—exhaustively documenting the what people do, but missing the why.

Age, gender, income, education. The data is precise, and it's endless. It's also one-dimensional. A middle class, GenZ female doesn't attend Lollapalooza—an uber-social music fan who wants to blow off steam and feel the energy of the crowd does. And everyone she's dancing alongside has their own, individual, deeply human reason for being there.

Live experiences are about human moments. And people come to these moments with very human needs—needs that are not one-dimensional, but rather complex, emotional and overlapping.

Marketers need to meet people there. We need to move past a strict reliance on statistics and instead humanize brand behavior. By augmenting data with emotion, we get to the heart of the people we're trying to reach. This starts with understanding not what our audience does, but why—seeing them as human beings, not merely “consumers.”

UNCOVERING “WHY”

Humans hold the key to live experiences

If data alone can't tell us why humans crave live experiences, what can?

People. The people who seek out these experiences, who leave their homes, family and work, who spend money, who plan ahead, who travel to events to be there in person when

they could far more easily tune in through the lens of a Snapchat story or a Periscope stream.

So we hit the road, visiting live events across North America. From the runway to the rodeo, college sports to metal festivals, and everything in between.

We spoke to over 2,000 experience seekers and collected data through person-on-the-street interviews, on-site surveys, and online panels.

We found that the reasons people seek out events and experiences are emotional and complex. They are also

universal, deep and important. And they transcend the arbitrary boundaries of fixed cohorts.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Experiential EQ is proprietary research and analysis conceived and powered entirely by GMR Marketing's in-house Strategy team. Conducted over the course of many months, our data comes from firsthand field interviews, field surveys and online panels of 2,000+ experience seekers at 15 different types of events.

GMR Strategy is a powerhouse team of marketers, strategists and psychologists within GMR, who dig into the “why” of branding and brand experiences every day. Experiential EQ is part of the team's work to yield strategy as an applied science across marketing processes, tools and campaigns—including proprietary approaches to consumer psychology at live events, sponsorship and partnership measurement, experiential efficiency/efficacy benchmarks, and quantification of brand memory and recall.

CONSUMER (HUMAN) INSIGHTS

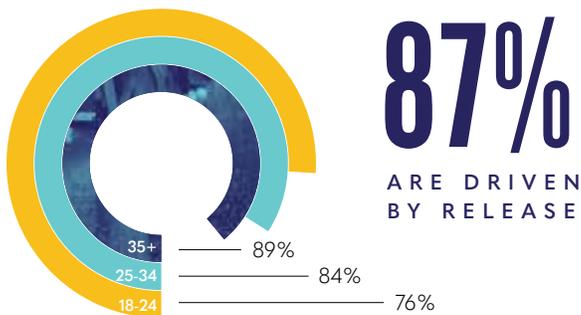
EMOTIONAL NEED STATES

Deep human needs drive experience seekers

Our research identified four primary emotional need states that drive people to seek out experiences at events: release, enrichment, belonging and identity.

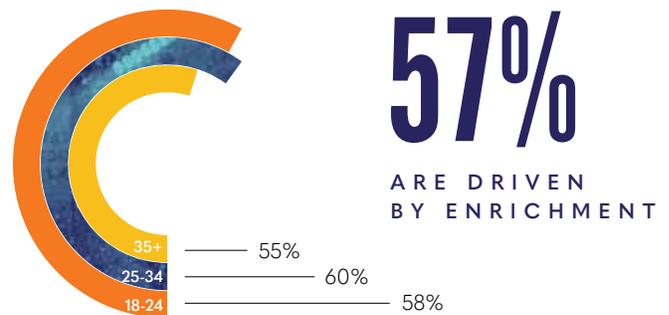
RELEASE

The escape from daily life, using experiences to help cope with societal pressure, demands and stressors. Attraction to other fans or the lifestyle, simple fun, and just being present and in the moment are all forms of release.



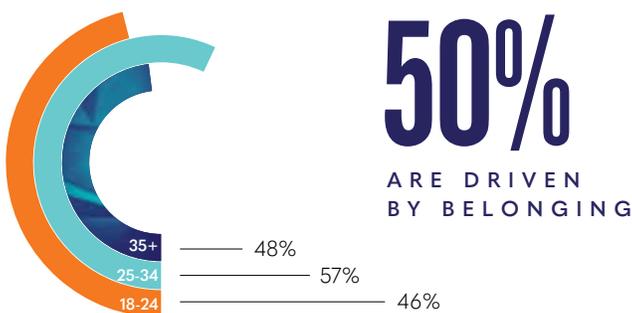
ENRICHMENT

The growth that comes from digging in deep on a vertical, or simply discovering or learning something new. This may include novelty and surprise, knowledge and personal growth, and creativity and experimentation.



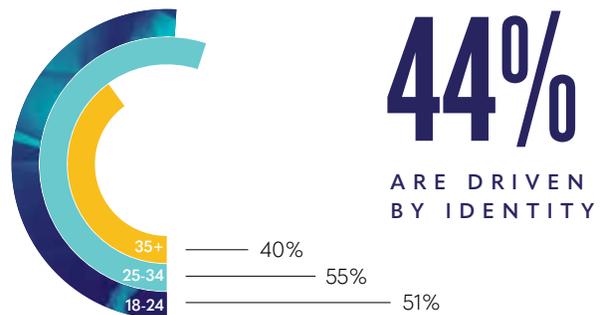
BELONGING

The acceptance as a natural member of a group, or part of a chosen collective with common tangible/intangible interests. This may be a unifying mindset, a shared passion, or a support system that emerges in an event setting.



IDENTITY

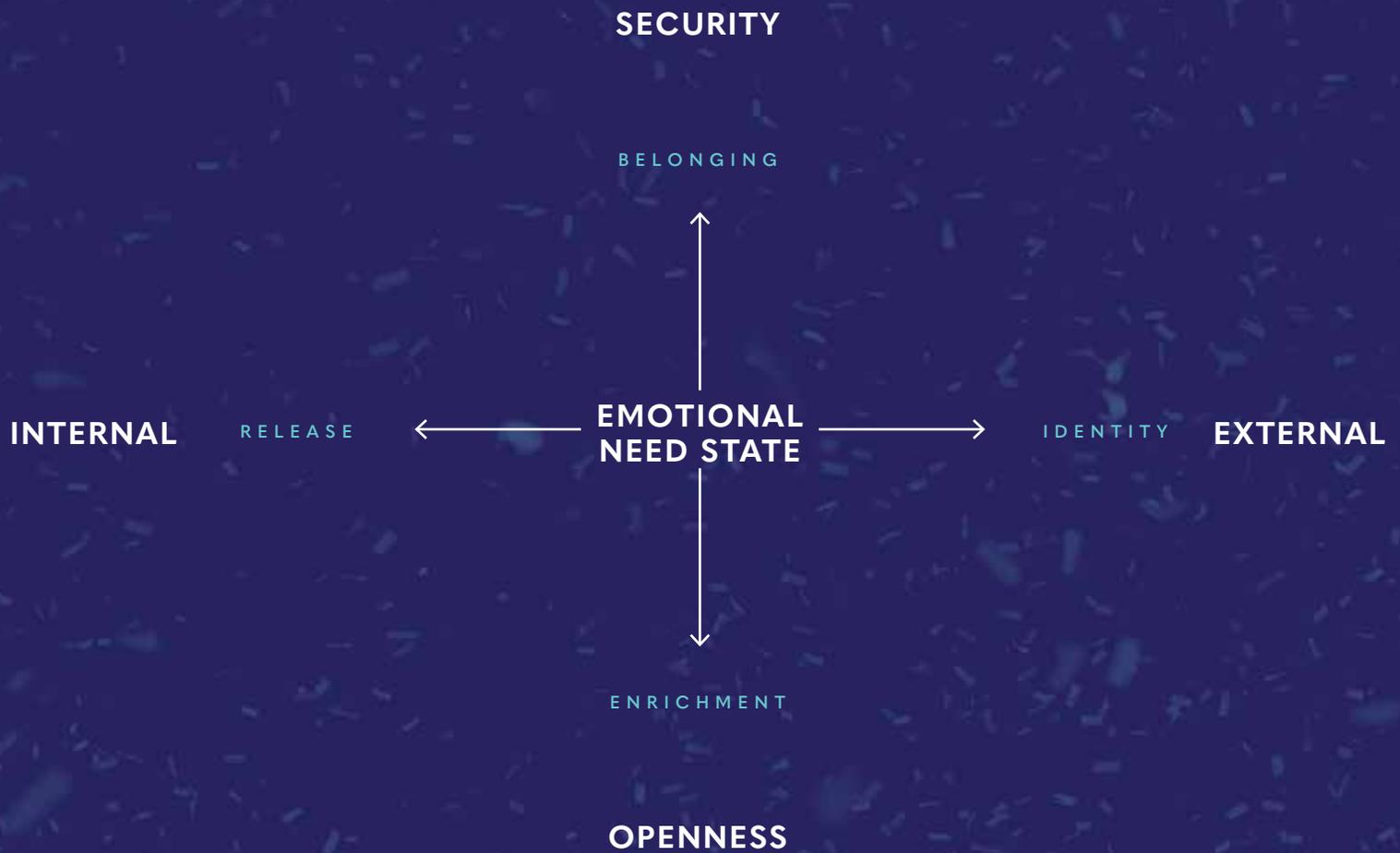
The qualities, beliefs and values that make a person or group unique and different from others. Traditions, external proofs, and aspirations all fall into this category.



People are different in what motivates them—no two are alike. The same experience often satisfies a different need for individuals attending as a group.

What's more, these need states are shared across all people regardless of demographics or psychographics.

There may be some correlations to life stage— younger people are more likely to say they are looking for self-expression and older are more often looking for release—but overall, individuals feel these emotional need states universally.



THE SPECTRUM OF NEEDS

Emotional need states fit into a logical framework

The four emotional need states fit into a spectrum of opposing scales.

INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL

One end of the scale represents internal need, whereas the other end represents the need for external validation or proof.

Release is an internal need. Letting go of stress and engaging in simple fun rebalances our coping systems. It's an important, and very commonly held, emotional need state.

Identity, while still attached to internal needs, can't exist in solitude—it's reliant on others' recognition.

SECURITY VS. OPENNESS

The other scale balances security vs. openness.

Belonging is about security, reinforcing a connection to the past or to a network of people who share a common interest. It's deeper than just fitting in, and touches people's need to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Enrichment is about growth: people seek new things that add new dimensions to their life and help them evolve to a future state. It's more likely to require risk through trial, which is the catalyst for growth.

THE HUMAN ROLE OF MEMORIES

Memories are central to human experience + identity

Humans are in a constant state of memory gathering. Some memories are more important than others, and at the end of our days, the life we've lived, the memories we've collected, make up our personal stories. They are who we are.

Some things happen to us, but many of the things we remember most fondly come from intentional experiences—we want more of something, we seek out moments that satisfy our whys.

When people attend an event, they aren't just seeking to have these needs met for the days—or sometimes just hours or minutes—the event is underway. They're building memories.

ANTICIPATION

Anticipation is an accelerant—it's unique to live experiences and is critical to the pre/during/post-event journey.

People plan their event experiences days, weeks, even months in advance.

- Tickets
- Travel
- Accommodations
- Itinerary
- Meetups
- Matching outfits

Anticipation is usually just as important as the actual event, making experiential an opportunity to engage with an unrivaled amount of enthusiasm.

POWER OF PERSONAL

Event seekers prefer to bypass messaging and try brands and products for themselves. In an era of skepticism, the value of hands-on, physical experience with brands is undeniable.



SAY THE NEED TO SEE, FEEL, TOUCH AND TRY PERSONALLY IS IMPORTANT



RELY ON THE SECOND-HAND EXPERIENCES OF FRIENDS OR ACQUAINTANCES

BRAND BEHAVIOR (IMPLICATIONS)

MARKETING AS MEMORY MAKING

The science of memory can strengthen the art of brand experience

Branding stripped down to its most basic element is an effort at memory building. As marketers, we work to make our brands ever more memorable, relevant and compelling. Entering peoples' memories in positive, meaningful and lasting ways builds the awareness, affinity and purchase that lead to advocacy.

Live experiences are particularly fertile ground for memory making for several reasons:

MULTISENSORY CONNECTION

Experiences offer complex, multi-sensory, multi-dimensional engagements that reach people at a time of passion or emotion. And event attendees told us that this matters to them—72% agreed that the need to see, feel, touch and try personally is important. This gives the mind much more to work with—capturing people's attention and enhancing the memory process. It even allows for different learning styles.

DEMONSTRATING BRAND BEHAVIOR

Experiential gives brands the opportunity to not just tell people what they stand for, but show it. Don't just show up—participate. Brands that become active participants in an event by prioritizing emotions and storytelling are much more apt to be part of the memory of the event.

MOOD-STATE- DEPENDENT RETENTION

Psychologists have discovered that when someone is exposed to an idea during a specific emotional state, revisiting that emotional state at a later time makes the idea much easier to recall. This phenomenon, called mood-state-dependent retention,¹ suggests that there is a sort of fingerprinting for a brand (or brand experience) when it is located in an environment that heightens a person's interest and mood.

The same study that established mood-state-dependent retention found that people are more likely to attend events that match their emotional state.

In other words, people seek out the types of memories they want to make.

¹ Bower, G., Mood and memory, American Psychologist, 2/81

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS AT EVENTS

BRAND INFORMATION PRESENTED IN AN EXPERIENTIAL CONTEXT PRODUCES MEMORY TRACES THAT ARE STRONGER AND RICHER THAN THOSE PRODUCED BY OTHER FORMS OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION.

THE END RESULT:

BETTER BRAND RECALL AND BRAND PERCEPTION.



EARNING TRUST

+43%

SAY BRANDED SPONSORSHIPS ARE
A POSITIVE ADDITION TO EVENTS

PASSIONS

People seek out the memories they want to make

That act—seeking out an experience that relates to your underlying emotional posture—isn't a conscious one.

People aren't typically aware of their internal emotional need states. But they're very deliberate about the passions, interests and preferences to which they apply them.

Music, sports, lifestyle. Teams, bands, festivals, cooking classes, cruises.

These are our passions. They are the meeting ground of internal need and social context, of desire and fulfillment, of current self and future self. They are the subject matter of the experiences we curate—and the memories we make there.

And from a marketing perspective, passions are the real-life meeting ground between brand and audience. They're where marketers must be to become part of the memory. But as we've said before, and will say again—it's not enough to just show up at a passion point and expect to connect.



ARE MORE LIKELY
TO PURCHASE A
SPONSORING BRAND



HAVE IMPROVED
OPINIONS OF
SPONSORING BRANDS
AFTER A HANDS-ON
EXPERIENCE



EXPERIENCE TERRITORIES

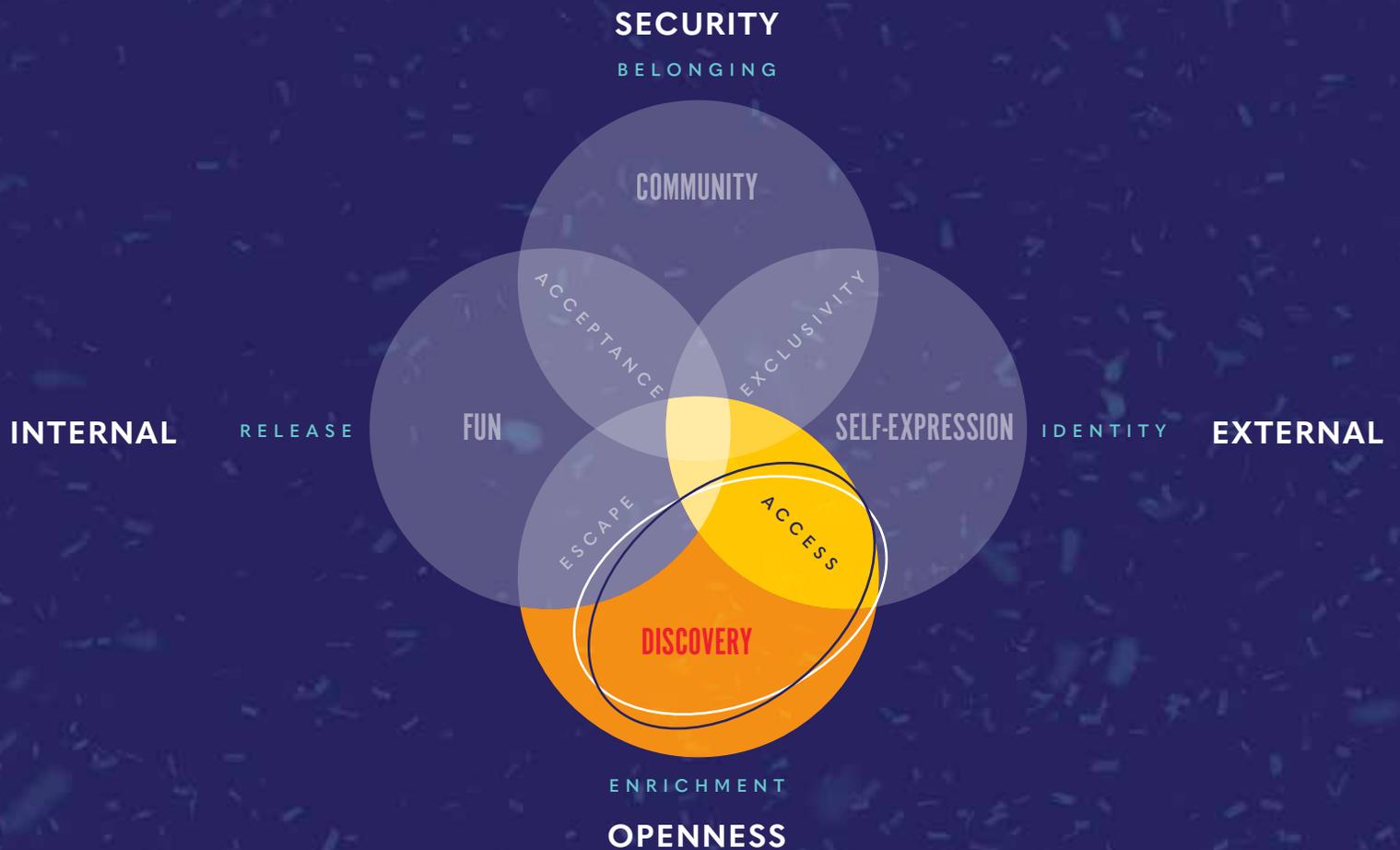
Brands can design experiences to meet specific emotional needs

Through our research, we've identified eight experience territories that relate to the four emotional need states.

Community	Discovery
Exclusivity	Escape
Self Expression	Fun
Access	Acceptance

Creating engagements that evoke and embody these interrelated emotional territories allows brands to meet their audience on the deepest levels—by speaking to their underlying emotional needs. This places the brand squarely within the emotional fulfillment of the live event and, thus, the memory making as well.





HOW IT WORKS:

01 COHORT INSIGHTS

Leveraging cohort data, we can identify the general attitudes of a given audience. Say, for example, we're looking at 25-34 year old entrepreneurs who are of higher income and education. They enjoy learning about other cultures, taking adult education courses, visiting museums, traveling and cooking at home as a source of creativity and expression.

02 EMOTIONAL NEED STATES

Projecting that data onto the emotional need states map, we get a more nuanced, humanized view of what they are looking for. This cohort's attitudes and behaviors align strongly with the need of enrichment.

03 EXPERIENCE TERRITORIES

Using the brand's natural identity and positioning, we can identify the appropriate experience territories to best meet this emotional need. Say our client is a boutique hotel chain. We' focus on meeting the enrichment need by cultivating moments of **discovery** and **access**.

This provides a much more targeted—and emotional—framework for developing every aspect of a live experience, from where and how we activate to the creative tone and storytelling.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Experiential marketing, done right, is about so much more than just showing up. It's about understanding what your audience is looking for—not who they are on paper. What deep, emotional needs do they bring to this event? What do they want to get out of it? What memories do they want to take home? Why are they there?

The four emotional need states we found through our research—belonging, identity, enrichment, release—are universal. Most importantly, they transcend one-dimensional thinking, speaking to the heart of the human why that drives people to actively seek out the live event experience.

Understanding 'why' gives brands an entry point for satisfying these needs—building engagements that drive relevance, spark emotional connection, and ultimately stimulate the personal memory making that will influence attendees long after the event is over.

WE BELIEVE EXPERIENCE MATTERS.

Understanding the why isn't easy. Human emotions aren't one-size-fits-all, and marketers must also be true to our brands. If you're looking for a partner to help you strike the right balance, GMR is ready to help you create a brand experience that connects.

Founded in 1979, GMR is an innovative global sponsorship and experiential leader, connecting brands and their consumers through shared passions. We change how people think, feel and behave through the power of experience. Experiences founded on data, rooted in insight, grounded in strategy, designed meticulously and executed flawlessly.

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