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Tweets, Hospitality, and the Coronavirus

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Special Edition: COVID-19 Crisis



Picture sources: [Atlanticcouncil.org](https://atlanticcouncil.org); Twitter

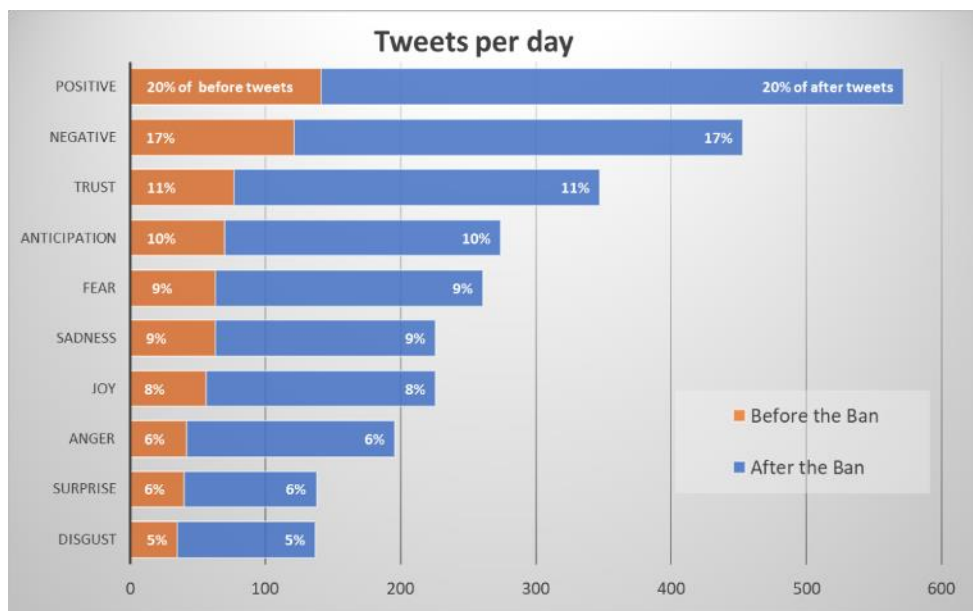
A few weeks back on March 11, 2020, the U.S. federal government signed a proclamation on restricting immigrants and nonimmigrants from the European Schengen Area who pose a risk of transmitting the Coronavirus. The proclamation became effective two days later on March 13, which restricted travel from a majority of the countries belonging to the European Union such as Austria, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland to name a few (NAFSA, 2020).

Unfortunately, the most recent travel ban to European countries was the 3rd enacted ban by the US government in trying to contain the virus since January 31. All of this raises the question as to how consumers are responding to the travel bans due to COVID-19 for hospitality industries. To answer this, we conducted a preliminary sentimental analysis by digging into not only what consumers have tweeted across the hospitality sector on Twitter, but how these tweets have shifted since the latest ban was enacted on March 13th. In total, we investigated a sample of over 6K tweets over a 10-day period (March 9 through March 18th) around the latest travel ban.

positive (tested), catch, fear, loss, dead and sick ranking amongst their most words tweeted. Not surprisingly, with Italy and China amongst the original coronavirus hot spots, these two were on-top of consumers' minds. With the viral impact hitting abruptly, consumers also heavily tweeted words such as shut, canceled, closed, stay, and hold which shows consumers are overwhelmingly concerned about how the impact put their travel plans up in the air or canceled them altogether.

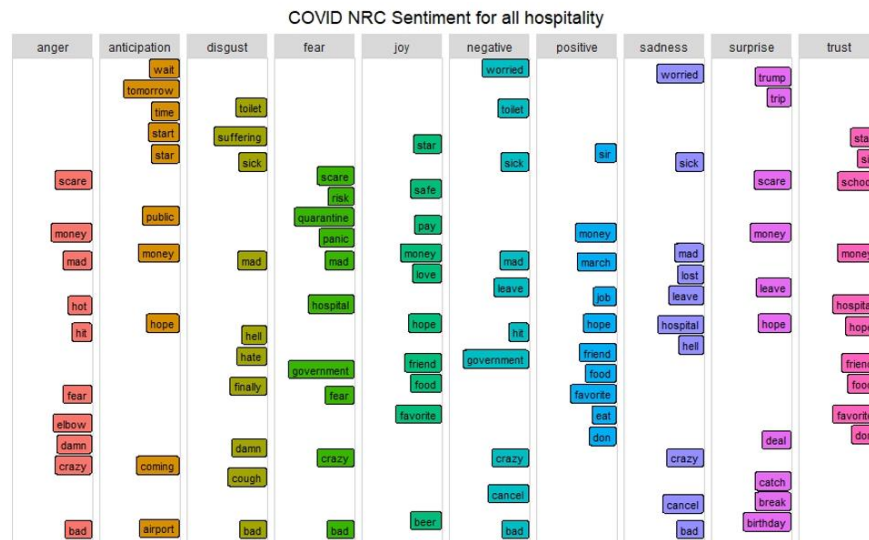
Picture source: Google images

By the looks of it, no sector of hospitality has been spared by the COVID-19 impact. When we break down the tweets further by the hospitality sector, we see that all five businesses had consumers that were either scared, worried or concerned about their plans. With the cruise industry being amongst the first impacted, consumers still have Princess being among the top of their minds as the most tweeted word for the cruise sector. Not surprisingly, given the abundance of nonrefundable bookings in airlines and hotels, refunds, cancels, and charges were at the top of consumers' minds. As consumers are being more forced to stay or cancel their plans, a positive growth movement has occurred, with a number of people supporting their local restaurants to help them get through these tough times.



Picture source: Sean Jung & Mark Legg

Immediately after the 3rd travel ban came in effect, the number of tweets drastically grew. Consumers became more vocal with their concerns on twitter at nearly 4 times as much since the ban on March 13th. To see if consumers' emotional sentiment changed with the ban enacted, we categorized similar words together that describe various emotional states using a popular NRC emotional lexicon (Mohammad & Turney, 2010). Our results showed that even though the ban has pushed consumers to be more vocal, we find their overall emotional sentiment changed minimally since the ban.



Picture source: Sean Jung & Mark Legg

When we dig further into the emotional sentiments that consumers tweeted about in our NRC chart, we found hospitality-related tweets mentioned words associated with disgust and fear. The viral impact has caused consumers to be on their toes with tweets showing concern with when hospitality businesses they frequent consume will return to normal business operations. This can be found from their tweets which showed a great deal of anticipation over their concerns on timing, waiting and financial issues with their upcoming plans.

In the midst of solving the outbreak of COVID-19, the U.S. has initiated several travel bans over the past three months. To our surprise we find that though people were tweeting more about COVID-19, the bans have not quelled consumers' fears in regards to their travel plans. There is still a great deal of anxiety amongst consumers in the hospitality business while people are eagerly waiting for the industry to recover from COVID-19. The analysis also shows that many of the tweets were related to cancellations and their unnerving effect on lives. Consumers have expressed their concerns over refunds and cancellation fees due to unforeseen travel plan changes from the coronavirus. Thus, it is essential that our industry have protocols in place to retain the service failures from unforeseen circumstances as these will undeniably come up again. Doing so can help us navigate difficult times such as these.

References:

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Sean Jung Ph.D. has recently joined the faculty in the fall of 2020 at Boston University School of Hospitality Administration. He received his Ph.D. in hospitality management from Purdue University, and holds a Master's degree in finance from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. Sean has diverse working experience in marketing research, consulting, and restaurant entrepreneurship. Starting as an intern at Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS), Sean has also worked at Deloitte consulting as an Intern/Business analyst in the Strategy and Operational (S&O) department analyzing costs and benefits for new business opportunities. Having an interest in the restaurant industry, Sean later worked in an ethnic chain restaurant as both a manager for one of the restaurant locations while working as a business analyst for new location opportunities. In 2014, Sean also co-founded a food cart that sold Asian fusion food in Wall Street.

Following his working experience, Dr. Jung's research is based on strategy management in hospitality and tourism. More specifically, Dr. Jung is interested in hospitality location strategies, strategy optimization, and machine learning applications in hospitality.



Mark Legg, Ph.D. recently joined the faculty in the fall of 2019 at Boston University School of Hospitality Administration, bringing two decades of analytical industry experience. His educational background includes a mix of mathematics and hospitality management with a Ph.D. in Hospitality Administration from Oklahoma State University and Bachelors and Masters degrees in Mathematics from SUNY at Buffalo (UB). Mark has spent the past two decades building industry-leading analytical solutions within the hospitality industry while assisting organizations with wriggling out as much value out of their data as possible. His experiences include building out an industry-leading corporate analytics department for an international hospitality organization to directing database, direct marketing, and CRM departments for one of the world's largest casino resorts.