



Brexit: Teaching Young Researchers About Segmentation

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Few would have thought Brexit could teach young researchers about segmentation fundamentals. However, The Brexit Diaries by [BritainThinks](#) did exactly that.

What are The Brexit Diaries?

Between January-March 2017, 52 Leave voters and 48 Remain voters kept a mood diary describing their reactions to Brexit media coverage. Based on the data from these 'news diaries' it became clear that it was more intuitive to think of the British electorate in 4 smaller segments vs. just Leave and Remain. These segments are:

- *Diehards*: feel vindicated and liberated by Brexit after years of feeling disenfranchised
- *Cautious Optimists*: moderate Leave voters, still holding some reservations about Brexit
- *Accepting Pragmatists*: moderate Remain voters – will make the most of a disappointing result
- *Devastated Pessimists*: feel shocked about the result with no positivity towards it

But what does this case study teach you about segmentation?

1. Segmentation allows for more personal and effective communication

Splitting a population into smaller groups with shared characteristics, allows for more targeted communication. It is the opposite of a general, mass-marketing approach.

The Brexit segments have vastly contrasting ways of discussing Brexit and opposing perceptions of news events. General messaging would be quickly dismissed in such an emotionally charged area.

Londoners have seen a variety of brands speaking directly to certain Brexit segments. [HSBC](#) and [Ancestry](#) are some of those doing this now with recent campaigns targeting specific audiences who may be more

sympathetic towards messaging based around themes of globalisation and international relationships. By including a segmentation in their marketing strategy HSBC and Ancestry can decide which segment of their customer base they would most like to target.

2. Segmentations can be reapplied to a range of research questions

The Brexit Diaries demonstrates that once a segmentation has been done it can be applied to future research. Building a clear idea of the groups which make up a population, or customer base, provides a framework for which future research questions can be asked and answered.

For instance, when *The Brexit Diaries* was in field, Theresa May appealed to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Brexit segments (all but the *Devastated Pessimists*). Rather than simply quoting her approval rating, the segmentation provided a framework to allow insight into Theresa May as a product. It was revealed that she had successfully connected to one extreme majority (*Die-Hards*) without alienating the two moderate segments, with the *Devastated Pessimists* considered out of reach. It's worth noting that appealing to most Brexit segments does not necessarily translate into electoral success. This is down to Brexit being but one of many salient political issues. What it does tell us that in the context of the Brexit Theresa May was favoured by most.

3. Segmentation elevates data into something more tangible

Bringing data to life is an ongoing research challenge. Segmentation can help tackle this problem. Segmenting a population allows us to represent groups with specific names, icons, avatars, films, to help personify them. This gives research users the tools to better remember specific characteristics and behaviour. Insights attributed to segments will hold a stronger place in the audiences' mind compared to those about a more general, unnamed group.

Even segment names – *Die-Hards*, *Cautious Optimists*, *Accepting Pragmatists* and *Devastated Pessimists* – tell you a story about how the population view Brexit. Segment specific icons and colours tied related to these opinions help to turn segmentation data into a compelling narrative.

4. Segmentation makes research more interesting

Segmentation's range of strengths allow it to raise research to a more engaging level. It adds longevity and an emotional connection.

The segmentation of the Brexit Diaries turned research from a binary conversation into a flowing narrative. Throughout the research, segments allow the audience to build characteristics onto a framework. As the research progresses, the audience begins to be able to predict and infer how certain segments might respond. Overall, the audience gets a much better feel for the research than if a segmentation hadn't been done. As young researchers, communicating the nuanced understanding gained from a study is a skill we must all work towards.

What was important for us as young researchers is that the trigger for us evaluating and thinking about segmentation was a current affair and not just theory. Sometimes it is easy to get bogged down in the theory behind many of our key research skills. What this whole process has taught us is that getting real life inspiration and examples from real world events can be the best way to gain the encouragement to explore and understand key theoretical research skills in depth.

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