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Travel Industry Ranked Last for the Fourth Consecutive Year in MBLM's *Brand Intimacy 2019 Study*

Southwest Airlines Again Topped Industry Followed by JetBlue and Alaska Airlines

NEW YORK — May 15, 2019 —The [travel](#) industry ranked last out of the 15 industries studied for the fourth consecutive year in MBLM's [Brand Intimacy 2019 Study](#), which is the largest study of brands based on emotions. Southwest Airlines again topped the industry followed by JetBlue and new entrant, Alaska Airlines. The top 10 for travel industry was rounded out by: Delta Airlines, Air Canada, Air France, American Airlines, British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and United Airlines. Brand Intimacy is defined as the emotional science that measures the bonds we form with the brands we use and love.

The industry's poor showing correlates with recent decline in financial performance. [Statistica](#) shows that net profit of commercial airlines worldwide has declined. In 2017, global profits were \$37.7 billion, compared to \$32.5 billion in 2018. According to the International Air Transport Association's [Economic Performance of the Airline Industry](#), the post-tax profit of airlines in North America fell from \$18.7 billion in 2017 to \$14.7 billion in 2018. The industry's continued poor performance in MBLM's study correlates with the decline in its financial performance.

"Travel brands continued to disappoint in our 2019 study," stated Mario Natarelli, managing partner, MBLM. "These brands have become associated with inconvenience and mistrust, as consumers have become frustrated with baggage fees, delays and cancellations. The airline approach appears more transactional than relationship oriented, which we believe would be a much more compelling strategy and one that creates stronger bonds and more powerful connections."

Other significant travel industry findings in the study include:

- American Airlines was the #1 brand for millennials
- JetBlue ranked first for users 35 and older and for those with incomes of \$100,000 or more
- Southwest Airlines was the #1 brand for users with incomes under \$100,000
- Delta Airlines was the top brand for women
- Air France placed first for men

In 2019, the industry is showing some small signs of improvement; however, they continue to be transactional. For example, Delta recently implemented free Wi-Fi in all cabins on 55 U.S. flights. Alaska Airlines updated the passenger cabins of its A321 jets with seats from Recaro, a German manufacturer of seats and buckles. On the other hand, American Airlines, Delta, United and Alaska Airlines all raised their ticket prices in May, and continue to "nickel and dime" customers for basic amenities, including checked bags.

In an article also released today, "[Southwest Airlines Continues to Soar](#)," MBLM analyzes the solid performance of Southwest. The airline leads the travel industry in its ability to build the strongest kinds of bonds with users, its level of Brand Intimacy with those earning less than \$100,000, and its percentage of users who have been using the brand for more than 10 years. It also has a broader appeal amongst age groups than other brands in the industry and goes out of its way to be intimate with its passengers. Its heart logo, "LUV" ticker symbol and company mission all take the brand a step ahead of its competitors in creating relationships that are powered by emotion. If other airlines can learn from Southwest in making

decisions, commitment and programs that resonate emotionally with their passengers, perhaps Brand Intimacy will take off for the travel industry as a whole.

The *Brand Intimacy 2019 Study* contains the most comprehensive rankings of brands based on emotion, analyzing the responses of 6,200 consumers and 56,000 brand evaluations across 15 industries in the U.S., Mexico and UAE. MBLM's reports and Data Dashboard, which features a brand ranking tool, showcase the performance of almost 400 brands, revealing the characteristics and intensity of the consumer bonds.

To view apps & social platforms industry findings, please click [here](#). MBLM also hosted a webinar on the industry, a recording of it can be found [here](#). To download the full *Brand Intimacy 2019 Study* or explore the Data Dashboard click [here](#).

Methodology

During 2018, MBLM with Praxis Research Partners conducted an online quantitative survey among 6,200 consumers in the U.S. (3,000), Mexico (2,000), and the United Arab Emirates (1,200). Participants were respondents who were screened for age (18 to 64 years of age) and annual household income (\$35,000 or more) in the U.S. and socioeconomic levels in Mexico and the UAE (A, B and C socioeconomic levels). Quotas were established to ensure that the sample mirrored census data for age, gender, income/socioeconomic level, and region. The survey was designed primarily to understand the extent to which consumers have relationships with brands and the strength of those relationships from fairly detached to highly intimate. It is important to note that this research provides more than a mere ranking of brand performance and was specifically designed to provide prescriptive guidance to marketers. We modeled data from over 6,200 interviews and approximately 56,000 brand evaluations to quantify the mechanisms that drive intimacy. Through factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and other sophisticated analytic techniques, the research allows marketers to better understand which levers need to be pulled to build intimacy between their brand and consumers. Thus, marketers will understand not only where their brand falls in the hierarchy of performance but also how to strengthen performance in the future.

To read a more detailed description of MBLM's approach, visit its [Methodology page](#).

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About MBLM: MBLM has invented a new marketing paradigm, Brand Intimacy, delivering expertise and offerings across three areas of focus: Agency, Lab and Platform. With offices in seven countries, our multidisciplinary teams help clients build stronger bonds and deliver optimized marketing outcomes and returns for the long term. To learn more about how we can help you create and sustain ultimate brand relationships, visit mblm.com.