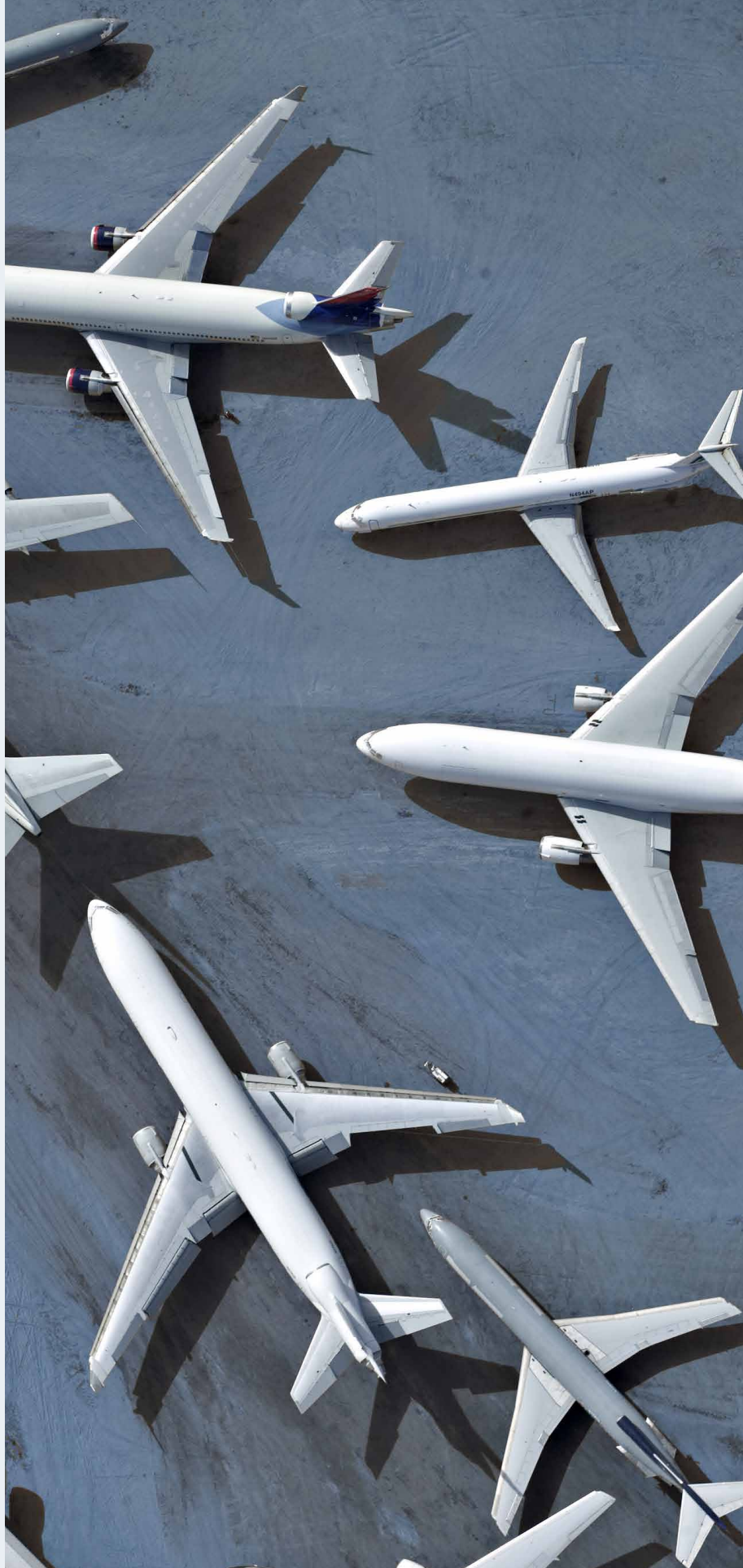


PULSAR 

Report – October 2017

Content for a Captive Audience

Understanding the
mindsets of the
airport traveller



Opportunities for Engaging Travellers

Air travel, particularly in the United States, gets a pretty bad rap. Whether it's the scandal with United Airlines, the horrendously long lines for security, the indignation of waiting in line to get practically undressed for a TSA agent, or the food... there's a lot to complain about. Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have said our airports are "like from a Third-World country" – it's not even a bipartisan issue. Clearly, there is a lot to be done here.

However, we should also celebrate the good things about air travel; in the last 100 years we have amassed a rich cultural folklore around this subject. There's the one involving catching people at the airport (having bought "whatever the cheapest ticket is!") to proclaim your undying love for someone right before they board their flight (the logistics of this cliché have always bothered me, but I digress.) Or more unrealistically, the one about being seated next to someone incomprehensibly charming (and not outstandingly annoying) on a plane.

Clichés aside, there is something inherently magic about travel, as Louis alluded to. This isn't just limited to planes—train travel, road trips, long bicycle rides, boat rides—maybe as humans we are still befuddled by the idea of moving faster than our little feet can take us (6 mph on a bad day.)

Provided you've made it to the airport and got through security with time to spare, the airport is a fascinating space of transition—rather than movement. You're about to embark on the magic of air travel.

At their best, airports are a unique place where cultural norms and personal routines are shirked for the time being: not dissimilar to the suspension of rituals on vacation. Everyone is there for the same reason – to get somewhere.

With this in mind, we took to Twitter to find out what these positive airport experiences are, specifically wanting to know what people say in the moment in 140 characters or less. The results are quite interesting and heartening; I know that (despite my crippling travel anxiety) I am looking forward to my next airport stint a little more.



A Year of Positivity

With this in mind, we took to Twitter to find out what these positive airport experiences are, specifically wanting to know what people say in the moment in 140 characters or less. The results are quite interesting and heartening; I know that (despite my crippling travel anxiety) I am looking forward to my next airport stint a little more.

→ Overview

Contrasting general travel discussion in 2015 with positive experiences in air travel, it's clear to see that they don't follow the same pattern, except for an end of year spike. However, it's encouraging that positivity is a constant throughout the year.

Even these simple metrics can show that when planning your year's content, there are spikes for when people talk about travel; but not for people talking positively. This indicates positive content can be pushed year-round.

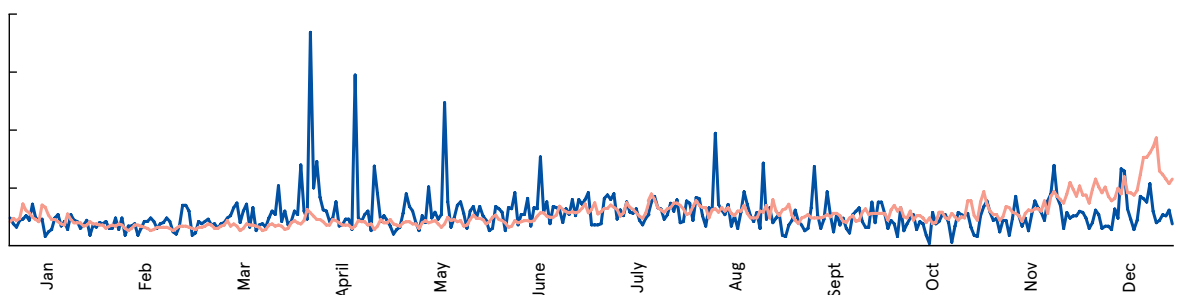
→ The hypothesis

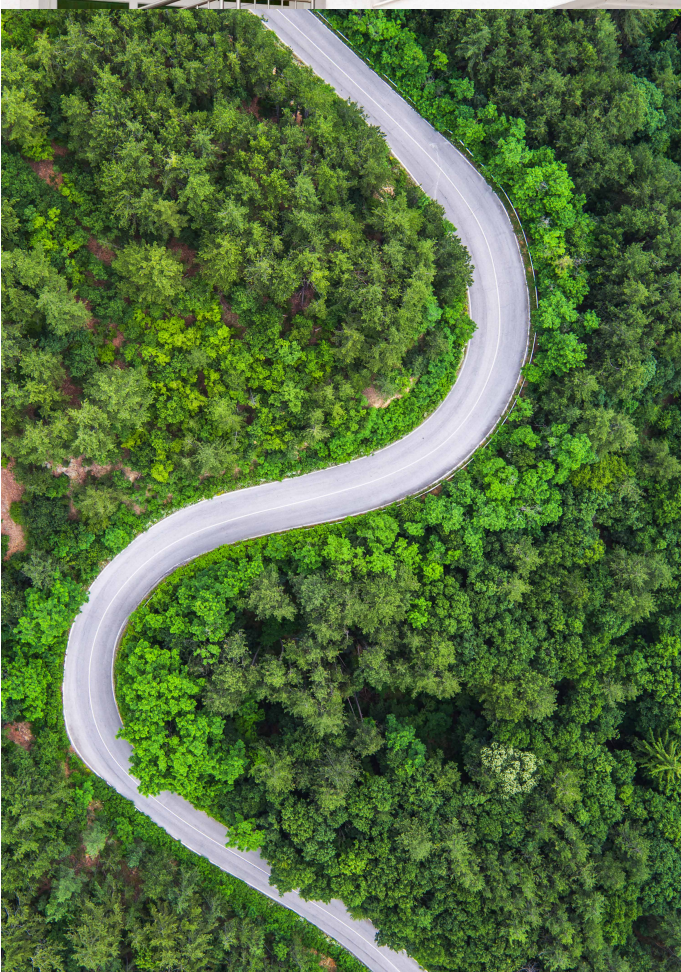
We looked at the past year in positively worded tweets at the airport; hypothesizing a few activities to listen to specifically, based on what we know you can do at airports: watching, relaxing and listening specifically. As these are universal actions, not restricted to an airport, we must now ask, how do people confined to an airport infuse these activities with positivity?

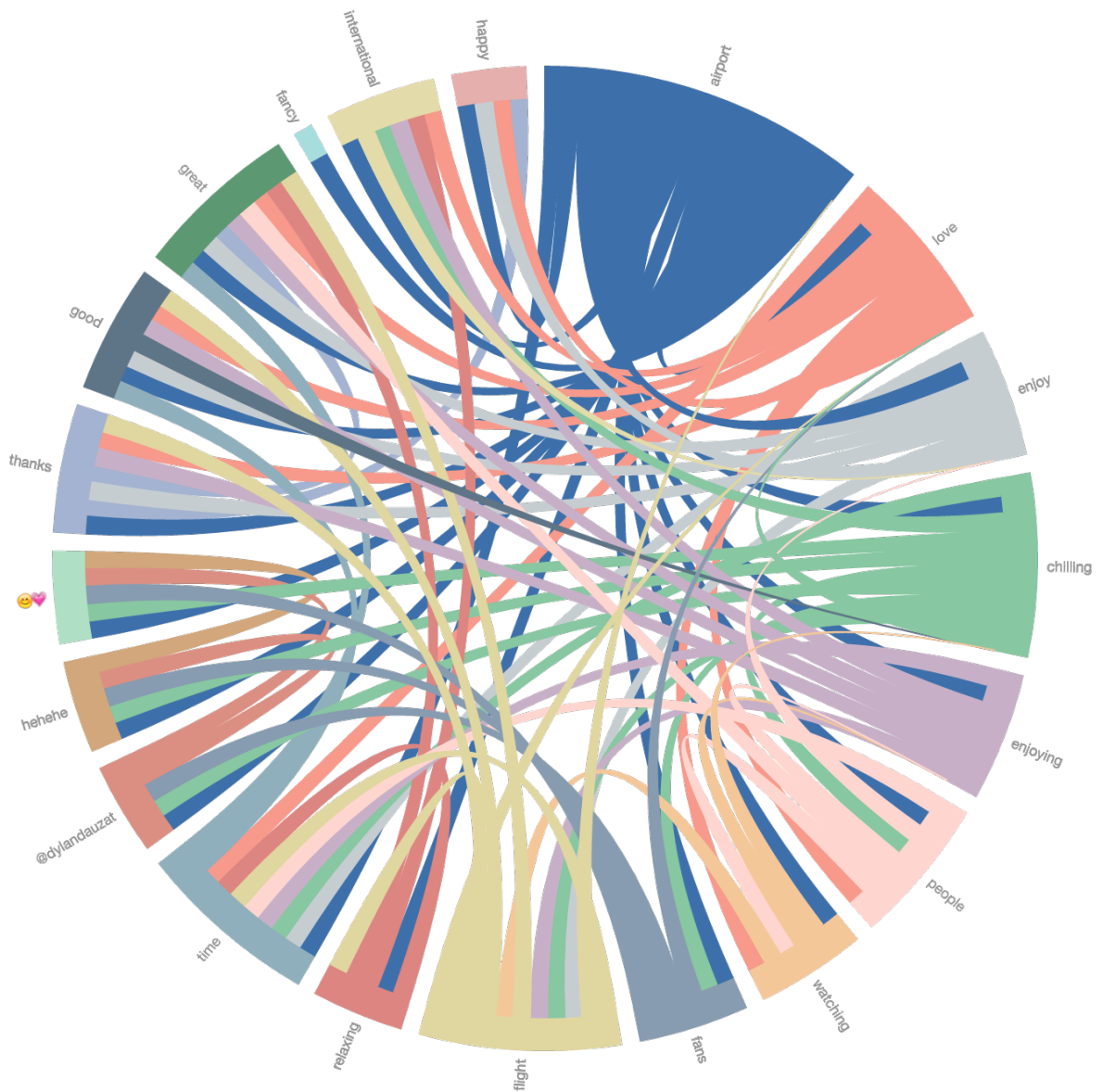
It is to be expected that the activities and their subsequent enjoyment would be based on the content of the activity. As such, watching would be made enjoyable because you're finally catching up on "The Handmaids Tale"; after not being previously finding the time to, or that the airport experience has been greatly improved by a delicious coffee you are drinking. But did this play out according to the data?

→ Positivity Happens Throughout the Year

- Positive air travel
- Travel discussion general







→ Keywords

First – a quick look at how these words relate to one another, paying close attention to ‘Watching’, ‘Listening’ and ‘Relaxing’. By studying these key facets of any experience, we can see themes start to emerge... One particularly heartening keyword connection we see is ‘love’ and ‘people’ being used in tandem often.

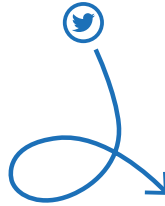
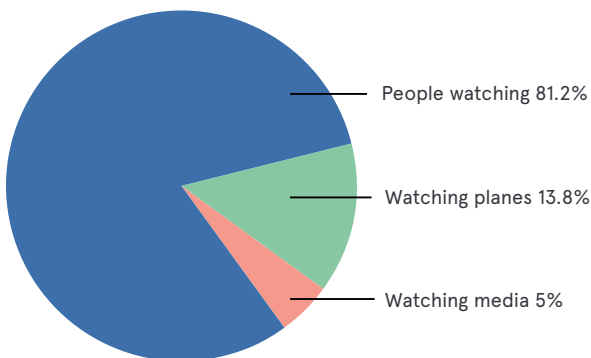
“The airport is one of my favourite places to be. I love people watching!!!! I love trying to imagine where everyone is going and why.”

@AutumnLavis

→ '500 channels and nothing to watch'

Watching: We expected to see the majority of people mentioning 'watching Netflix' (or similar) and then some the remainder others 'people-watching'. However...

More than 80% of the volume about 'watching' at the airport is about people watching. Interestingly, it's not about passively watching people go about their business – instead it's people inventing their own narratives for those they're watching at the airport; reality itself is suspended and we become the world's authors.



It seems we all have an anthropologist and an author inside of us that comes alive at the airport. People ask questions like: Where are these people from? Where are these people going and why? How does it make them feel?

"i love people watching at the airport, like who are u? what's ur story? where u from??"
—@hennydijon

"The airport is one of my favourite places to be. I love people watching!!!! I love trying to imagine where everyone is going and why."
—@AutumnLavis

"You aint seen true love till your at the airport watching couples reunite"
—@happyfet13

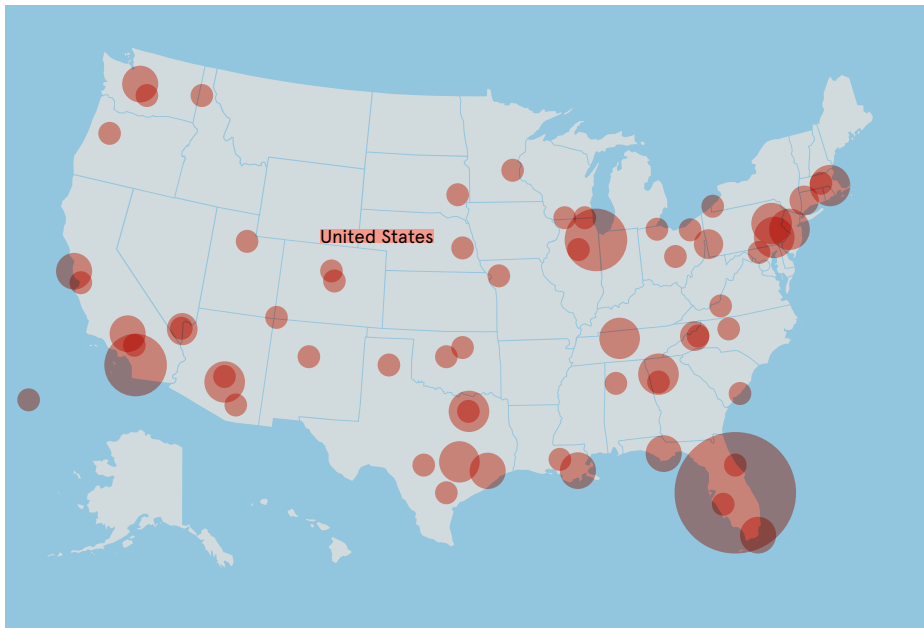
Alongside this, we see an inner child emerging as well. The research shows that almost 14% of people that mention "watching" at an airport are talking about watching planes. It seems that there is something still absolutely mind boggling and cinematic about the miracle of flight.

"Watching planes fly in at night at an airport is so relaxing"
—@_Jmills_

"At the airport, watching planes take off while listening to 80's love ballads. It's like I'm actually in the music videos."
—@LancetheFresh

✳ Watching planes is a moment of pause; it's a moment to appreciate the journey you are about to embark on. It's a time to gain perspective, turn yourself from a cranky curmudgeon into an astronaut, newly infused with a childlike wonder.

Is there an opportunity for airports to leverage this behavior even further? Perhaps colorful wraps on planes are more delightful than we thought! We don't think about airports typically as being visually pleasing places (in the US anyway) but maybe that's because we focus on where the airport is, and not the purpose of the airport itself.



Where people are
talking about relaxing

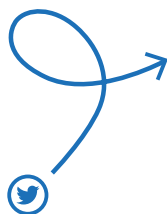
We're going to miss the flight!

→ Relaxing

We were further curious to see how people actually manage to relax at airports. It's hectic, you're fighting with other travelers for the outlet to juice up your devices, and you're probably dealing with a wicked sugar crash from inhaling a bag of Peanut Butter M&Ms.

At first we wanted to look at where people talk about relaxing...

Aside from Florida and California which are characteristically better at relaxing, the dispersion is varied.



However, when you dig into why people relax, it turns out, people rarely get to just be and do as they please. The majority of your life you are somewhere for a reason.

Users say it themselves best:

"9 hours into airport and chill, and only 16 more till my first flight. it's actually really relaxing aching literally NOTHING to have to do."

—@PenySmite

"In yoga clothes, relaxing, Enjoying a good book, on the yoga room at the airport... #workflow"

—@NyinaBonita

(Guess there's no place like 'om')

It is during this relaxing period that users become increasingly positive about the airport experience:

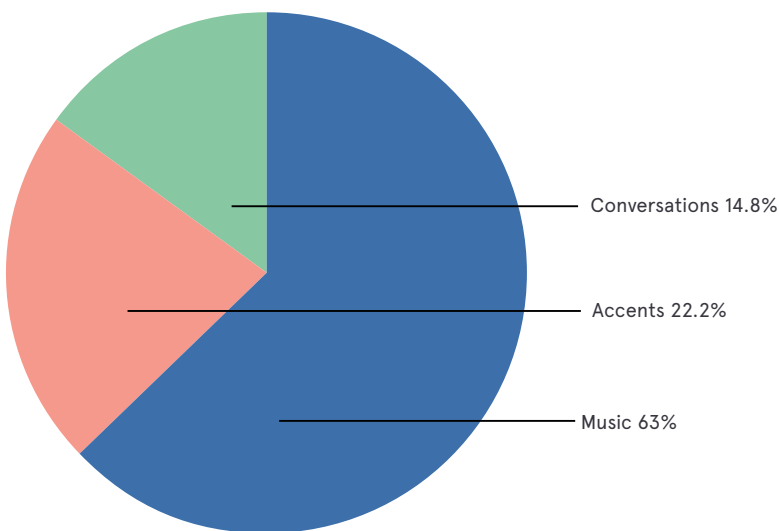
"Remind me to utilise the Sky Lounge at the airport 100% of the time that I fly. This is such a relaxing experience (thanks @Delta!) —@mysticfox1

This is where it becomes increasingly important to understand that people are resourceful, can make a boring or even stressful situation calming. However as this tweet shows us, spaces built to relax are definitely utilized and appreciated.

Muzak or Music?

→ Listening

Having established that the public like to relax and watch people, we now turn to what people listen to when they're in the airport. Do they attempt to relax against the low murmur of plane engines, people chatter and gate announcements, or plug their earphones in and jam to their favorite songs?



This is a useful learning about people in general: the times you might expect people to be turning inward, they actually might be doing something completely different. It's important to, when attempting understand a potential audience, to take a step back and think about them as humans first. We think it's important to step a back, understand motivations, understand circumstances that might dictate them, and contextualize audiences this way.



"Sitting in the airport listening to music so relaxing"

—@iRobertthomas

As above, music is a perfect medium for the airport, allowing the public, (whether they're relaxing and doing nothing or actively watching people) to soundtrack their experience.

For those with their headphones off, more than 20% of people partake in the cultural mixture afforded by airports by listening to accents.

@SilverpawFox assures that it's not eavesdropping:

"At the airport, listening to a guy with a British accent talk on the phone. Not eavesdropping, I just love British accents XD"

—@SilverpawFox

However, others are just straight up eavesdropping on conversations:

"I love listening to people's conversations in the airport."

—@_caitlynpaige



Airports Are Places Where We Can Inspire People

This whole exercise demonstrates the resourcefulness of people: turning an experience so many of us complain about into a positive one. Somehow people turn something very goal oriented (point A to point B) into something very romantic; a very negative conversation into a positive one.

Let's learn from them shall we?

- Rather than feel lonely when traveling solo, some choose to indulge in solitude. Travel marketing can learn from this: empower your travelers to feel confident!
- People are natural storytellers and they let the exposure to so many varied characters write the stories for them. Let's treat airports and ports of travel as places of inspiration rather a means to an end; how many advertising pieces have you seen about rushing at the airport?
- The airport might seem like a good time to get a solid binge-watch in, but some are learning from using their surroundings as stimuli. From the businesses & marketers in this space, can we make all airports more fun to look at or to interact with?
- On a similar note, people are letting amazement in and watching the sky: why not use planes as canvases?

About Pulsar

At Pulsar we take a unique approach to social media insights. We infuse our findings with qualitative understanding of people at large. When given a difficult challenge in a new or relatively hidden category, this qualitative lens is crucial.



**Contact Pulsar
to see what the
platform can
do for you...**

UK: +44 (0)20 7874 6577

US: +1 646-902-9394

www.pulsarplatform.com

info@pulsarplatform.com