

PICTURES SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Towards a New Understanding
of Brand Choice

By Steven Naert | September 2020



IPSOS VIEWS

GAME CHANGERS



LEVERAGING VISUAL METAPHORS

Brand managers are faced with a wide array of business challenges: How can I better position my brand? How can I optimize my portfolio? Where can I find new growth opportunities?

Traditional quantitative research has relied heavily on stated responses, often using long and redundant lists of attributes. While there is still room for this kind of measurement, it does not adequately capture people's less conscious needs. People's decision making is often influenced by their intuition; therefore, it is important that we capture less conscious desires as well as the mental shortcuts people use when making brand decisions.

To evolve the traditional survey to capture non-conscious decision-making, we have developed a new metaphor elicitation technique to uncover implicit brand choice influencers. While metaphor elicitation has been used as a qualitative technique for many years, the approach we have developed uses a quantitative method – making metaphor elicitation efficient, scalable, and accessible.

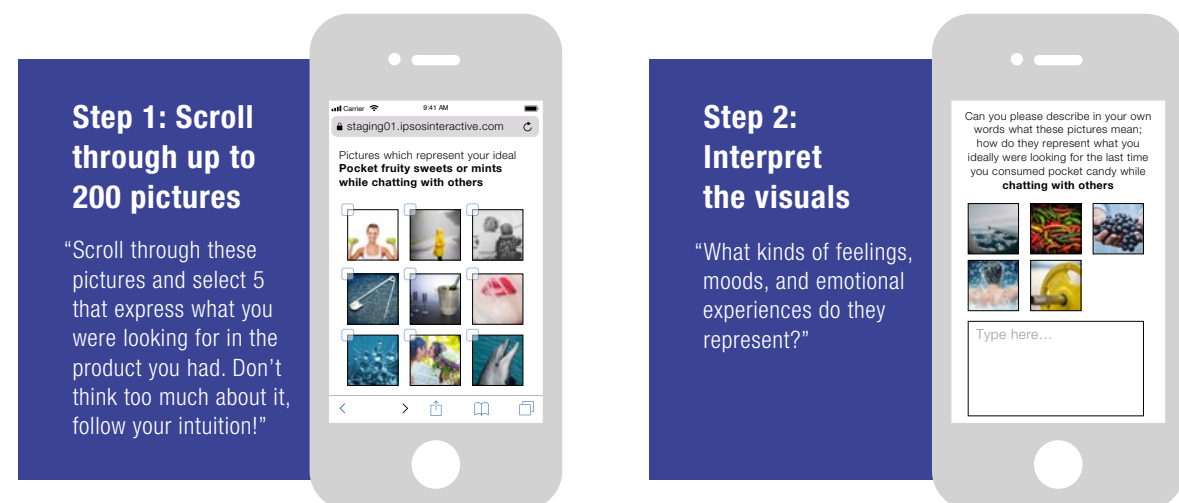
Our metaphor elicitation approach connects us to consumers through visual images and natural conversations, using a projective technique that helps respondents avoid rational

thinking. We ask respondents to react to a set of pictures, with each picture implying a range of specific values or emotional benefits. Because people easily recognize these values, these pictures make it easy for people to express themselves in a more intuitive way. By capturing spontaneous reactions to visual cues, marketers can gain a deeper understanding of feelings, moods, and emotional experiences – and thereby make decisions based on fundamental consumer needs. Moreover, the use of images is more engaging to respondents than traditional questions and more aligned to the visual culture in which we now live.

HOW IT WORKS

Using a device agnostic survey, respondents first scroll through the set of pictures using an interface which looks like an Instagram feed. First, we ask respondents to select up to five pictures to help them express how they feel about a product in a given situation. For instance, we may ask them to select five pictures that express what they expect from having a snack in front of the TV or going on a family holiday. Next, we ask respondents to explain what these pictures represent for them. In total, these two questions typically take less than two minutes to complete. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1 How it works



POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE PICTURES

We approach visual metaphors from two directions – positive and negative – depending on the business challenge.

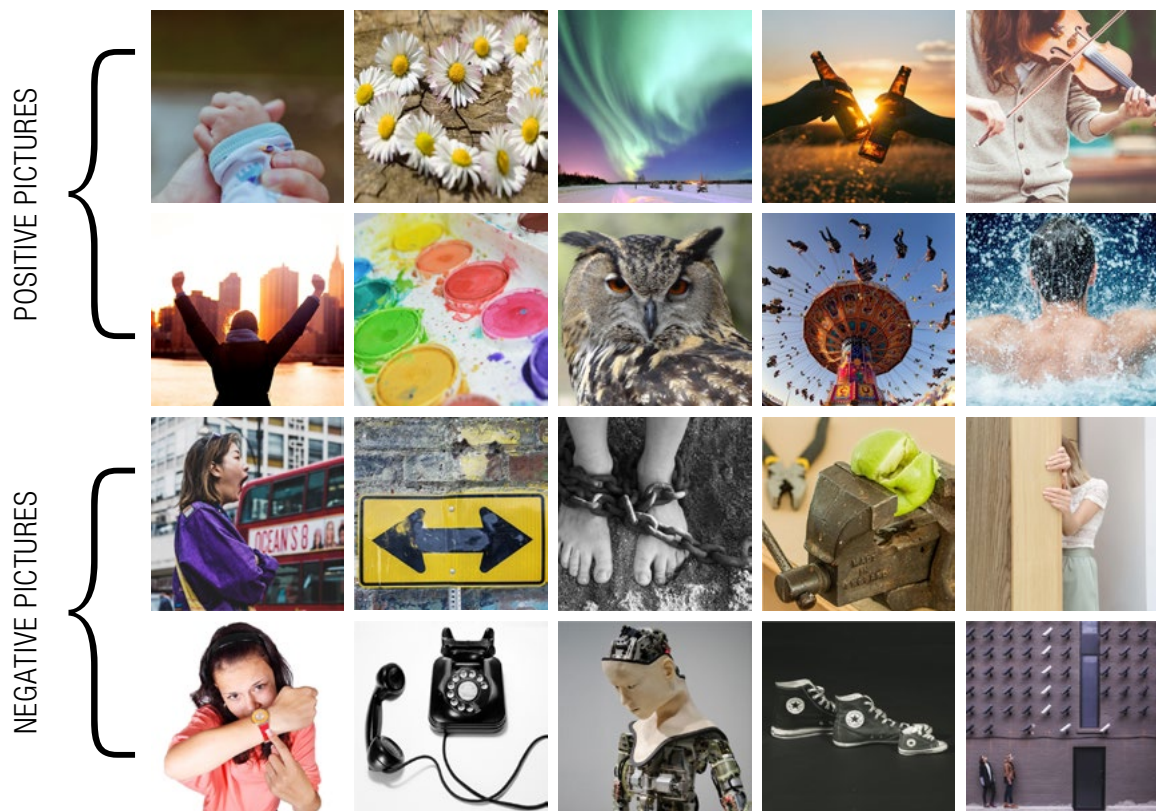
Positive Pictures

If the business challenge is to optimize the brand portfolio or brand positioning, fulfill consumers' current and known needs, or find white space opportunities – in other words, to uncover what people want from a brand – we use a collection of pictures (200 in total) that imply **positive feelings** (e.g., pictures of a baby, flowers, the Northern Lights). (See Figure 2.)

Negative Pictures

If the business challenge is to learn how to meet unmet needs or barriers – in other words, to uncover what people find frustrating and challenging and are not getting out of current brands – we use a collection of pictures (again 200) that imply **negative feelings** (e.g., pictures of yawning, time pressure, chains). (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2 Positive and negative pictures



HOW WE CHOSE THE PICTURES

We used a systematic approach to choose the pictures starting from a list of intended meanings covering 150 different values (e.g., thrill, harmony, obedience). This list was inspired by existing value scales developed by the likes of Milton Rokeach¹, Steven Reiss² and Shalom H. Schwartz³. We then enriched this list with values from our own needs and motivations research experience.

Once our list of values was complete, we selected pictures to represent each of the values on the list. The bank of pictures can be used across the globe – with visual metaphor studies already conducted in 20 markets across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Middle East.

As we expose respondents to over 150 values to spontaneously react to, our metaphor elicitation approach generates more granular and specific insights than traditional approaches that feed respondents a list of defined attributes.

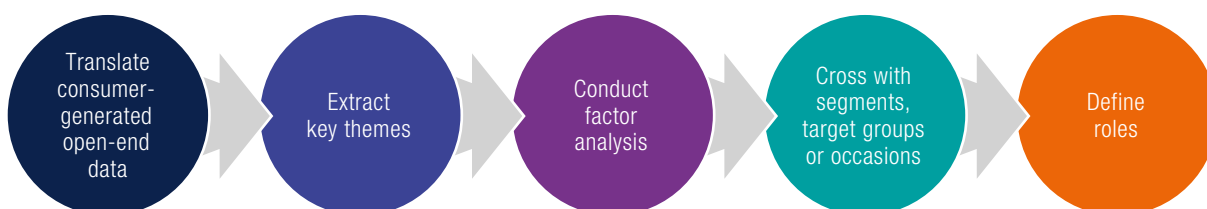
STRUCTURING UNSTRUCTURED DATA

The open-ended question we ask about what the pictures represent produces a vast amount of unstructured data. Therefore, we need an efficient and accurate way to analyze it.

So, how do we analyze this unstructured information?

First, we translate the data into the base language using an automated process. We then leverage advanced text analytics to extract key themes (the main verbal constructs people associate with each picture). Next, we review the key themes from the text analytics in conjunction with the visuals themselves and make any adjustments. Finally, we conduct a factor analysis and cross the factors with segments, target groups, or occasions. Armed with this information, we can define your brand's role (how they can be relevant to people's lives) and use these roles as a springboard to develop platforms that capture potential future directions for your brand. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3





METAPHOR ELICITATION IN ACTION

Metaphor elicitation adds a new and powerful dimension to segmentation, brand portfolio optimization, brand positioning, and white space identification.

A recent example of metaphor elicitation is a study we conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the Asian beauty market. Our focus was on women in China, Japan and Korea as these women influence beauty consumers across the rest of Asia and around the world. To capture the diversity and the commonalities across beauty consumers in these three countries, we used metaphor elicitation to conduct a segmentation analysis. Our overarching question was: What is the experience of being a woman today in China, Japan, and Korea – their aspirations, motivations, struggles, and triumphs?

Our metaphor elicitation approach grouped women into six consumer segments. We found each of these segments, in greater and lesser proportions, across China, Japan and Korea. Figure 4 illustrates just one of the segment profiles that was created using our metaphor elicitation approach. Based on just two survey questions (*Which five pictures express what you are looking for in a product?* and *What kinds of feelings, moods, and emotional experiences do those pictures represent?*), we were able to:

- Develop platforms (specific, granular expressions of a general need)
- Identify values
- Uncover the rich and real language that consumers use when talking about the category

Figure 4 The Striver Segment



GETTING TO DEEPER HUMAN MOTIVATIONS WITH METAPHOR ELICITATION

We recommend leveraging metaphor elicitation to capture important implicit drivers of brand choice. Because metaphor elicitation uses a projective technique, it helps respondents avoid over-rationalization and provides more intuitive responses. Moreover, it generates a deeper, more granular understanding of emotional benefits and provides rich data

that reflects how consumers (in their own language) really think and feel about products and brands. By getting a truer consumer-centric measure of influence, marketers can better position their brands, optimize their portfolios and uncover innovation opportunities.

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