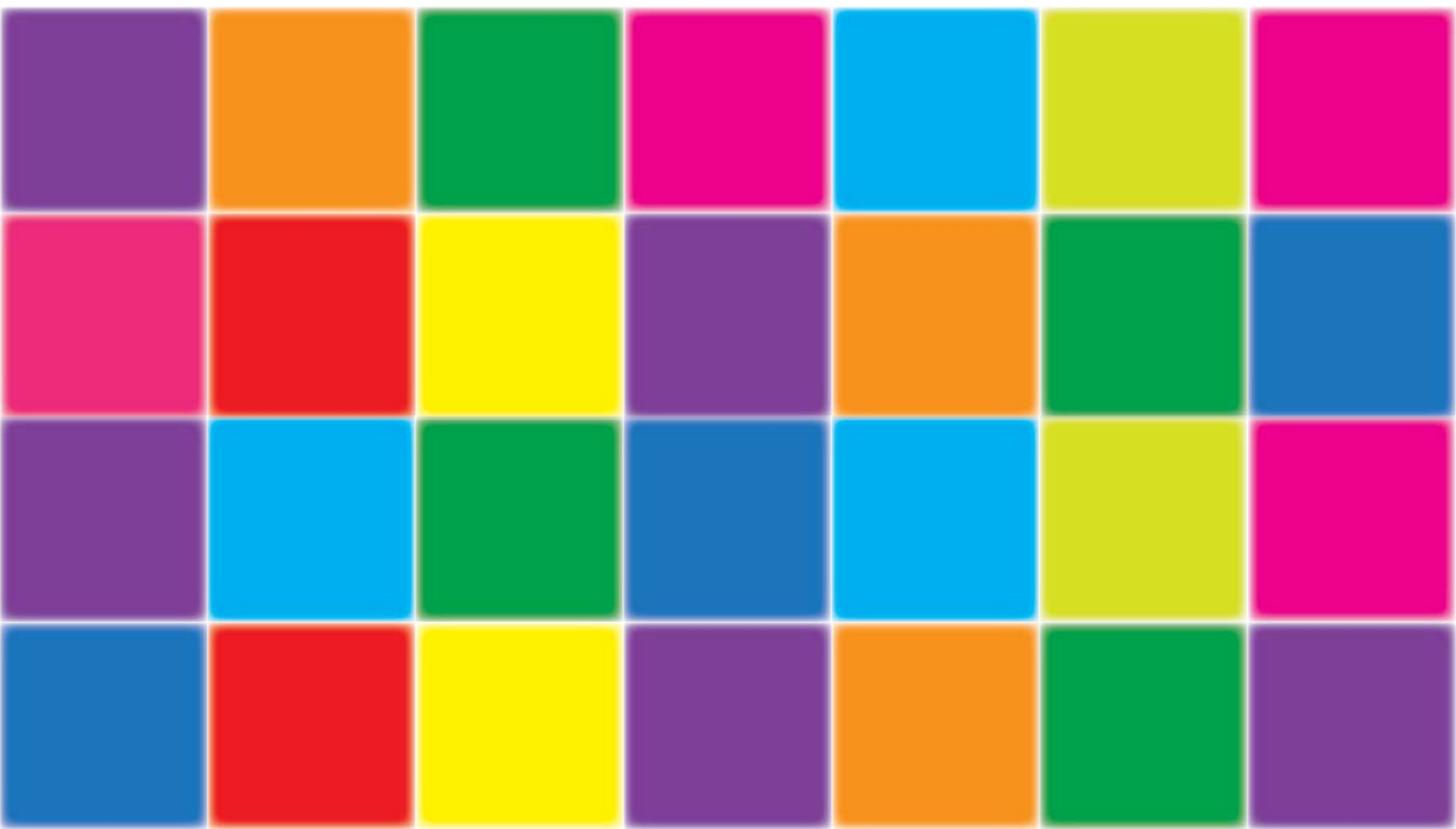




Final Report of the Tekes Research Project 2008-2010

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PREFACE

Global brands are known even in the smallest villages far from urban areas. However, the image of a brand is not always perceived according to the intentions of its developers. Different symbols, heroes, rituals, values, cognitive skills and a person's knowledge base modify behaviour and perceptions and the message transmitted by the brand may be interpreted differently by other cultures. Hence, the following questions are essential when thinking about brands in the international context.

What associations do certain brands evoke in us? How do cultural differences affect these impressions? How can a brand image be developed and marketed more efficiently in an international context?

In this project we have developed a web-based research method to seek answers to those questions and to test and evaluate brands in international markets. The results reveal those elements in the visual material of a brand which will be interpreted by consumers in differing ways due to cultural differences, and the importance of target group marketing. From the researchers' and designer's point of view the project has been challenging and creative and the end product has the potential to become a useful method for further studies.

The project was cross disciplinary and several experts from the fields of marketing, media studies, design and user interface research participated. We would like to express our gratitude to all the people and organisations who participated in the project - without you the project would not have been possible. We are grateful to TEKES for providing us with the opportunity to conduct the ImageTestLab project and to all the four companies that sponsored our research project and were actively involved in it. We would also like to thank all those respondents in Finland, Sweden and Russia, who participated in the test and shared their opinions and time during all stages of the process and helped us to develop a useful and user friendly research method.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the ImageTestLab project was to inspect how brands and images should be studied in the context of international business and culture and to develop a web-based evaluation method and evaluate and test the brands of the participating companies. Literature reviews, workshops and benchmarking were used to determine a valid set of questions and tasks for the method under development. The usability of the developed method was tested before the international pilot project was conducted in Sweden and in Russia.

There are several studies concentrating on brands, brand image, brand identity and brand research methods. However previous studies show that there are not many studies focused on international branding from the perspective of intercultural communication since studies seem to focus more on branding ethics, political factors and business regulations. Culture deeply influences variations in consumer behaviour in a variety of ways as symbols, rituals, values and heroes vary in different cultures and semantics and perception strongly affect interpretations. This is why companies should pay attention to the appearance of visual material when they enter international markets. Ready made research methods that can evaluate the material of a brand are rare, therefore this project focuses on developing and testing a method to study associations based on the visual material of brands.

Visuality was one of the main features we wanted to implement through our method. The test should be pleasant, easy to use and provide valid data for brand research but also work equally well in different cultures and in different languages. Therefore, we had to pay attention to the meaning of the tasks, words used and the image bank chosen in order to be able to use the method fluently in most cultures. Several different types of questions and tasks were considered during the development process in order to make sure we had a valid selection. The method was evaluated by the research group and the participating companies. The questionnaire was tested twice with other subjects before the international test was conducted. The difference between the tests was that the first two were done in order to improve the usability and comprehensibility of the test and the international test was also aimed at evaluating the brand image of the participating companies. The method was evaluated according to the responses of

the international subjects and how useful the participating companies found the results they received from the test.

All the tests showed that the method was found to be creative and innovative. The subjects liked the visual aspects of the test and the ability to choose from the images instead of having text based questionnaires. The length of the test was the main disadvantage. The usability of some of the tasks was found to be a little bit clumsy and the translations were not always successful. To summarise, the participating companies found that the results provided support for the image they expected to have and confirmed their assumptions rather than surprised them. The results revealed useful information on both small details and general details, and the participating companies liked the innovative and creative approach of the whole study. The cultural differences revealed were not striking but small details were quite clear. The results emphasised the importance of visibility and images and elements in them and the importance of target group marketing.

In future the method will be used as a tool to evaluate brands in international markets. One of the improvement ideas was that the test should be edited into shorter questionnaires aimed at different target groups: customers, company workers, company respondents. It is also meant to be used for different purposes: testing the logotype, the appearance and elements of the product, the marketing campaign. These tests are potentially fast and cost-effective tools for collecting data internationally and evaluating and discussing the results with other stakeholders.

1 INTRODUCTION

A deep understanding of markets and customers is very important when creating a successful brand. Brand management, especially the management of an international brand is very challenging due to differences in countries and cultures. Due to the fact that brand is all about images the understanding of how different cultures interpret the same image is vital when consumers attempt to define the value of a brand. This explains why we need to recognise and understand consumer motives and preferences at a deeper level.

Gad (2001) talks about the importance of measuring and targeting the perception of the brand in the mind of the customer and has developed a model called Brand Mind Space. By analyzing several successful brands he found that there are four main categories or dimensions that brands are based on. The first is the functional dimension which refers to the benefit for the customer. The second dimension is the social one: customers base their purchase decisions on their perception of which brand best conveys their social identity to other people. The third dimension is the mental one which refers to personal meanings, identity and the personality of the customer. A brand can be used to support one's self-esteem and other important personal values. Finally, the spiritual dimension refers to the larger systems of which customers are a part: for instance, environmental and ethical values are examples of spiritual meanings that can be found in brands such as The Body Shop. The most important message of The Body Shop is that products are not tested on animals and the brand is mostly based on ethical and spiritual dimension.

Li (2001) has analysed the development of an international brand by studying the meaning associated with this Finnish brand in China. Li's research is based on a model where the objectives of the company and the consumers' meanings related to the brand are gathered together, classified and compared with each other. Li (2001) brings forth three separate brand levels which should be measured. These levels are the concrete product or service, brand name and brand meanings and values:

"From a brand manager's perspective, the first layer of branding is to think about the product or service itself. For example, what is its philosophy? What are its attributes? What are the rewards for the buyers or users? How about its design and colour in the consumer's eyes? The second layer of branding is to think about the brand name. Does it match the product or service philosophy? How does it translate into other languages? Are there likely to be any misunderstandings when it is translated into foreign languages? The third layer of branding is to think about the values or associations of the brand. What values are necessary or useful to add? What kinds of associations are desired? How can those values be added? How can the associations be realised? What do consumers think about these values? These three layers, moving from the first to the third, become less and less controllable by the marketers. Brand managers generally have some strategies and solutions to the problems in Layers One and Two

(Jeannet and Hennessey 1995:71-73). It is, however, difficult to ensure that the consumers perceive and view favourably the values added by the marketers. Therefore, a considerable amount of studies have focused on the third layer...”

The results found by Li (2001) revealed that the brand’s profitability was affected by the cultural differences that existed between the company and consumers. The research provided evidence that while the Finnish company tried to build an individualistic value into the brand, this was in conflict with the value of collectivity respected by Chinese consumers. The result was that Chinese consumers evaluated the Finnish brand as a weak one while the competitive brands with a focus on collective values obtained a much stronger market position.

The results found by Li (2001) are a good example of why companies should measure the meanings and values of their brands. There are several research methods which can be used to measure this, e.g., brand recognition and the meanings and dimensions that brands contain. We can use both direct and indirect methods. In the direct methods customers are asked directly what they think about the brand. In indirect methods customers are asked to reveal their free associations. Also visual methods can be used, such as photo sorting where respondents are asked to categorise photos and say which photos are related to a brand and why.

In this project we aim to help Finnish companies measure their brand in international markets by developing a web-based method. Using the method in a web-based testing environment has several advantages such as cost-efficiency and the rapid gathering of brand information, being able to test brands without restrictions on time and place and having a method which can be easily customised and localised in order to attain objective consumer knowledge. The background of this project idea lies in the project called Visual, which was conducted by Muova from 2002 to 2004. The aim of Visual was to evaluate the ability of the small and medium sized companies’ preferences and resources in relation to building up and controlling brand images internationally. In the project, The Brand Manual was developed by focusing on the holistic image of the brands instead of giving specific information such as where to place the logo, which colours to use at trade fair stands etc.

1.1 ImageTestLab project 2008-2010

Western Finland Design Centre Muova coordinated a research project financed by Tekes (Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation) and four participating companies: Urho Viljanmaa Ky / J alas (<http://www.jalas.com>), Oy KWH Mirka Ab (<http://www.mirka.fi>), Oras Oy (<http://www.oras.com>) and Ruukki (<http://www.ruukki.com>).

The project, ImageTestLab - Evaluating Brands in International Markets, had the aim of developing and testing a web-based research method for international brand management. The cultures used to test the results of the research were in Sweden and Russia, and they were chosen by the participating companies. The project started in October 2008 and ended in May 2010.

There were several stakeholders participating in the project. One of them was MediaCity, which is a research and development unit in the field of digital content. Their main activities lie in the fields of cross media content and format development as well as user experience and audience research. MediaCity is an independent unit of Åbo Akademi University, situated in Vaasa, Finland. MediaCity used their knowledge to test the web-based questionnaire and its usability. The web-based survey was conducted by Dreamnet Solutions Oy, which provides user oriented applications for internet applications.

Annika Hissa, the director of Muova, operated as the project leader. Researchers from Muova: Tanja Oraviita, Sonja Pitkäjärvi, Sanna Peltonen and Minna Teirilä, worked as project researchers. The other project participants were Miika Peitsaro, Ilja Sillman, Toni Puronvarsi, Nadiia Puchko, Martina Frantzen and Laura Volkmar (graphics). Anette Bengs, Kimmo Rautanen and Susanne Sperring represented MediaCity.

1.2 Main objectives

The purpose of the ImageTestLab project was to explain and analyse the role of brands and images in the international business context. In this project we developed a web-based research

method which companies can apply for gathering and analysing international brand and marketing knowledge. The project objectives are:

1. Inspect how brands and images should be studied in the international business context
 - Which associates brands evocate in us?
 - How do cultural differences affect these impressions?
 - How can a brand image be developed and marketed more efficiently also in international context?
2. Develop a web-based evaluation method
3. Evaluate and test the brands of the participating companies

The internationally tested web-based method for brand evaluation was completed and is now a Muova product. The participating companies received an analysis of their brand's image that had a comparative approach as their brand images were tested in two different cultures. The results of the test show to what extent the messages in the images were perceived as the companies intended and, where they were not perceived as intended, it indicated the cultural elements they should address.

1.3 The progress of the project and the structure of the report

The project began with a literature review of the brand image research techniques, the effects of the culture of the home country on the visual material of the brands and the web-based questionnaire and its challenges. At this phase, the possibilities to use existing survey tools and services instead of making our own were reviewed. The participating companies were interviewed to determine a general view of their own intentions and their brand identity.

For collecting ideas from other stakeholders a workshop was organised. The questionnaire was developed and designed based on the gathered information. To ensure the questions were relevant and understandable the paper version of the questionnaire was tested (in a small scale project) at the beginning of June 2009. When the web-based version was finished at the end of

September its structure and usability were tested by MediaCity. Changes were made based on the results of both tests.

Suitable visual material was gathered from the participating companies and they were applied to the questionnaires. International testing was conducted in Sweden and in Russia and the first links were sent via e-mail at the beginning of December 2009.

Since cultural differences were an important aspect of the study, cultural background information was collected from Sweden and Russian. Additionally, analysis of the visual material of the magazines from the field of design, art, architecture and culture was carried out. The aim was to reveal the basic features emerging from these cultures and use them as a basis when analysing the results of the questionnaire from the participating companies.

Reports to the companies were made according to wishes of the companies. In the final workshop the results and their utility and the potentiality of the method were discussed. By analysing these results we wanted to find out about the method and how well it succeeded in what it was designed for; evaluating brands in international markets. The schedule of the project is presented in table 1.

	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	THE QUESTIONNAIRE	ANALYSIS
2008			
November	Analysis of brand research methods: evaluation of the methods		
December			
2009			
January	Company Interviews	Developing the test: questions and tasks	
February			
March			
April	Collecting culture background information	Visual version of the test	
May			
June	Testing of the content		
July			
August	Executing the web based questionnaire		
September			
October	Pre testing of the web based questionnaire		
November			
December	Conducting the international testing		
2010			
January			Analysis of the results
February			Research report writing
March			
April			Company reports
May			Project finished

Table 1. Project schedule

This project report loosely follows the same structure and consists of an introduction, theoretical background information and a description of the project and its progress. The report is divided into Part I and Part II to distinguish the two objectives of the project and also to make it easier to perceive the holistic image of the whole project. In Part I the theoretical frameworks are presented. In chapter 2 the background information concerning the brand, brand image and cross cultural brand research is presented. Other background information including a web-based questionnaire is presented in chapter 3. In Part II the development process of the method is presented and in chapter 4 the questionnaire, based on the data gathered in previous studies and project team ideas, is presented. Chapter 5 consists of the reports of the testing of the web-based questionnaire and the results. In chapter 6 we present the conducting of the international testing and the results. In chapter 7 the results of the project are summarised.

PART I

2 BRAND

This chapter concentrates on the research data gathered from existing studies. Information about the brand, brand identity, brand image and cross cultural brand research methods are studied. The aim of the theoretical background study is to reveal the core elements of the brand. The literature review reveals those elements that every brand should be based on and what aspects we should draw attention to in order to develop a valid test to cover all the relevant fields when evaluating brands internationally.

So what is a brand and what does it mean? A brand is an entity of name, term, sign, symbol, trademark, logo, sound, colour, package, product design.... The purpose of a brand is to identify the maker, to assure the customer who the maker is, to provide legal protection, to capitalise on a reputation for quality and in modern society it is used to reduce the primacy of price on the purchase decision and to change the bases of differentiation (Li 2001: 18–19).

Brands exist primarily – if not entirely – in the minds of consumers. Brands are all about perception. What really matters for a brand is that it connects with its target audience (Gad 2001: 92). A brand is the consumer's idea of a product (Blackston 1992: 79).

Branding is marketing communication for consumers which aims to set up an image by designing and promoting certain products and services, their brand names, and additional values and associations. It is accomplished mainly through product design, packaging, brand naming, pricing, distribution, sales promotion, point-of-sale display, after-sales service, advertising, direct mail, personal contact, sponsorship, public relations, exhibitions and other marketing activities (Christopher & McDonald 1995: 202–204).

According to Li (2001) three interrelated aspects of branding from the consumers point of view are usually found in the branding literature:

- Brand image
- Brand association
- Brand equity

2.1 Brand identity and brand image

Brand identity is something a company wants its brand to have and it is developed to give consumers a clear idea of how it should be perceived. However, brand image means the image that a customer has about a brand in reality. Usually companies want to bridge the gap between brand identity and brand image.

Nandan (2005: 268) has studied the differences between brand identity and brand image (see table 2)

BRAND	
BRAND IDENTITY	BRAND IMAGE
Company	Customer
Identity is sent (encoding)	Image is received (decoding)
Represents firm's reality	Represents perception of the consumer

Table 2. Differences between brand identity and brand image (Nandan 2005: 268, modified model).

Brand identity is how a company seeks to identify itself (Margulies 1977). Brand identity also makes the brand unique (Kapferer 1997). According to Harris & de Chernatony (2001) brand identity is made up of following components:

- Brand vision
- Brand culture
- Positioning
- Personality
- Relationships
- Presentations

Kapferer (1997) divides brand identity into the following components:

- Brand personality (human personalities that can be attributed to the brand)
- A brand's inner values (its cultural facet)
- A brand's relationship facet (style of behaviour)
- Brands and the reflected consumer facet (the typical user)
- A brand's physical facet (its material distinguishing traits)

For other brand identity frameworks see Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000 or Keller 1993.

Brand image is the set of beliefs held about a particular brand (Kotler 1988: 197). Brand image is not the individual traits of the product but the total impression in the minds of the consumers (Ditcher 1985). Consumers form an image of a brand based on the associations they derive from it, which are informational nodes linked to the brand node in their memory and therefore contain the meaning of the brand for the consumers (Keller 1993: 2). Brand image is a set of associations, usually organised in some meaningful way (Aaker 1991: 109). To summarise: Brand image is a consumer-constructed notion of the brand (Nandan 2005: 267).

Keller (1993) outlines three dimensions of brand associations (figure 1) which can be used to measure brand image:

A: Attributes, which can be:

- specific (size, colour...)
- abstract (brand personality attributes: youthful, durable...)
- product related (attributes unique to the type of product or service)
- non-product related (packaging, user imagery, usage imagery)

B: Benefits (consumer perception of the needs that are being satisfied)

- basic consumer needs are:

Functional needs

Symbolic needs

Experiential needs (Park et al 1986)

- products can solve consumers':
 - functional demands
 - hedonic demands
 - symbolic demands (Woods 1960)

C: Attitudes (consumers overall evaluation of a brand), which can be:

- cognitive (knowledge & beliefs)
- affective (emotions & feelings)
- conative (likelihood to buy) (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000, Lutz 1991)

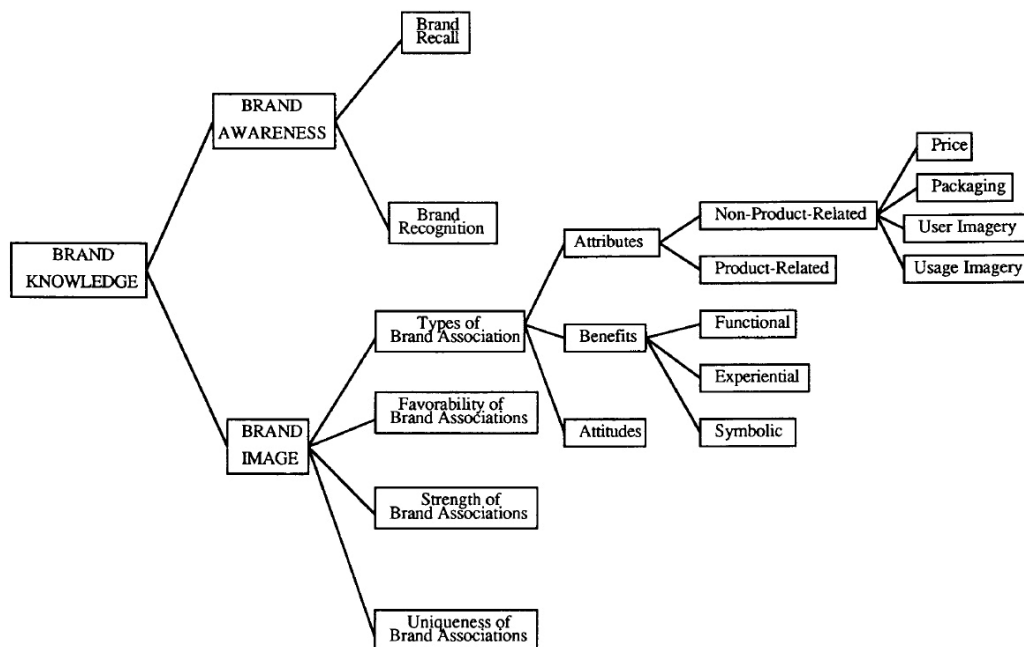


Figure 1. Dimensions of brand knowledge which can be measured (Keller 1993: 7)

De Mooij (1998: 34) also sees a brand as a network of associations, which she divides into these categories:

- brand name and signals
- products
- places, occasions, moments, moods (these elements relate to when the product is used)
- users

- values
- attributes (e.g. quality)
- visual images (package and logo)

2.2 Research and evaluation of brand image

There are probably hundreds of ways how to measure a brand. Von Herten (2006: 216) divides brand research into two categories. One evaluates a brand's financial value (financial-based perspective) and the other evaluates customer response to a brand (customer-based perspective). In the ImageTestLab we have focused on the customer-based perspective.

According to Gad (2001: 131) traditional methods of measuring brands do so in terms of awareness, attitude and knowledge. Awareness measuring covers how well known a brand is; attitude measuring seeks to evaluate whether the brand generally has a positive or negative perception in the market; and knowledge measuring assesses whether the audience can connect the brand to the correct products or business, or what they know about the brand (Gad 2001: 131).

Gad (2001: 131) also notes that traditional brand research is very general, and even if it is broken down into more detailed information it is very difficult to know what to do with it, or how to relate it to beneficial action. Although there may have been more thorough attempts to improve brand research, he has found this whole field rather conservative and unimaginative. That has led Gad (2001: 131) to claim that brand research and measurement should be integrated into the development of a brand. Therefore the ideal research instrument is the same as that used to create a brand; its product development, activities, communication and design.

Gad's (2001) solution to the problem of measuring a brand is a model called Brand Mind Space (see figure 2). By analyzing several successful brands he found that there are four main categories or dimensions that these brands are based on.

Customer Research Instrument

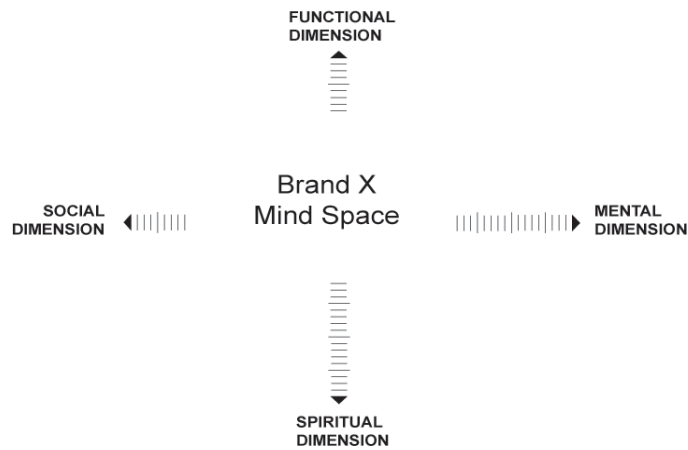


Figure 2. The Brand Mind Space (Gad 2001: 132)

The first is the **functional dimension** which refers to the perceived benefit for the customer (physical quality, taste, style, efficiency, unique features of a product or service). All brand builders who depend heavily on the functional dimension sooner or later face the problem of diminishing difference.

The second dimension is the **social dimension**: customers base their purchase decision on their perception of which brand best conveys their social identity to other people. In the social dimension the brand quite often creates a cult around itself; it becomes a social insignia, or a prop in the lifestyle play of an individual.

The third dimension is the **mental dimension** which refers to personal meanings, identity and personality of the customer. A brand can be used to support one's self-esteem and other important personal values; it builds value in the mind of its users.

Finally, the **spiritual dimension** refers to the larger systems of which customers are a part: for instance, environmental and ethical values are examples of the spiritual meanings found in brands like Body Shop. The spiritual dimension describes what a brand stands for (Gad 2001: 93–100).

Basically every individual customer has individual Brand Mind Space. Gad (2001: 133) claims that customer research based on the Brand Mind Space can be very valuable for determining the strength and, indirectly, the value of a brand.

All these dimensions are also tools for developing brand content. Although it must be noted that many of these dimensions have aspects that are subconscious the question is how to reach them.

Laakso (1999: 112) states the following questions which should be used when analysing a brand's image:

- what kind of images do consumers have about a brand?
- what kind of associations do consumers connect to a brand?
- how does a brand differ from its competitors?
- how has a brand's image has changed over time?
- does it matter who you ask when you questions about a brand?
- what kind of benefits do consumers feel they get by consuming a brand?

We can research images by asking consumers both direct or projective question. In direct methods customers are asked directly how they like a brand. In projective methods customers are asked to reveal their free associations, for instance "if this brand was an animal, which animal it would be" (see figure 3).



Figure 3. Projective research methods on brand image (Laakso 1999: 105)

Keller (1993: 14) presents the different measurement alternatives (see table 3)

Measurement of Brand Knowledge Constructs Related to Customer-Based Brand Equity*		
Construct	Measure(s)	Purpose of Measure(s)
Brand Awareness		
Recall	Correct identification of brand given product category or some other type of probe as cue	Capture "top-of-mind" accessibility of brand in memory
Recognition	Correct discrimination of brand as having been previously seen or heard	Capture potential retrievability or availability of brand in memory
Brand Image		
<i>Characteristics of brand associations</i>		
Type	Free association tasks, projective techniques, depth interviews	Provide insight into nature of brand associations
Favorability	Ratings of evaluations of associations	Assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
Strength	Ratings of beliefs of association	Assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
<i>Relationships among brand associations</i>		
Uniqueness	Compare characteristics of associations with those of competitors (indirect measure) Ask consumers what they consider to be the unique aspects of the brand (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations are not shared with other brands; assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
Congruence	Compare patterns of associations across consumers (indirect measure) Ask consumers conditional expectations about associations (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations are shared, affecting their favorability, strength, or uniqueness
Leverage	Compare characteristics of secondary associations with those for a primary brand association (indirect measure) Ask consumers directly what inferences they would make about the brand based on the primary brand association (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations to a particular person, place, event, company, product class, etc. are linked to other associations, producing secondary associations for the brand

Table 3. Measurement of brand knowledge (Keller 1993: 14)

Kansei Engineering

When researching associations and mental images one of the most fascinating used in product design is Kansei Engineering method. It is developed in the University of Hiroshima by Mitsuo Nagamachi in 1970's. Kansei engineering (also called sense engineering) is a consumer oriented product design method aiming to improve ergonomics and usability. The purpose of the web-based method is to translate consumer's feeling and image for a product into visible design elements. The method has been successfully utilized in Japanese car industry, electrical appliances, construction and clothing. Consumers do not buy just things they need but they acquire products which are suitable for their purposes in esthetical, functional and economical ways. They search for the product with the personality and character. (Nagamachi 1995).

2.3 Brand equity

Researchers can also measure brands from the brand equity point of view. Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbols, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service given to a firm and/or to that firm's customers (Aaker 1991: 15). Brand equity is the totality of what consumers, distributors, dealers and competitors feel and think about a brand (Bovee & Arens 1992: 182).

Compared to the definitions of brand association brand equity has a broader meaning because it is not restricted to the consumers' perspective (Li 2001). However for Keller (1993) brand equity means consumers' brand associations included:

- brand awareness
- brand knowledge
- brand image

Brand equity translates into customers' loyalty and their willingness to pay a premium price for the brand, which positively influences financial performance (Lassar et al 1995: 11, 13). According to Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) brand equity can be grouped into four dimensions (see figure 4). These four dimensions guide brand development, management and measurement.

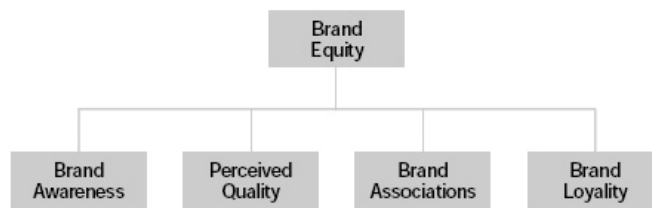


Figure 4. What is brand equity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000).

Brand awareness is an often undervalued asset, however, awareness has been shown to affect perceptions and even taste. People like the familiar and are prepared to ascribe all sorts of positive qualities and properties to items that are familiar to them. Perceived quality is a special type of association, partly because it influences brand associations in many contexts and partly because it has been empirically shown to affect profitability. Brand associations can be anything that connects the customer to the brand. It can include user imagery, product attributes, use situations, organisational associations, brand personality and symbols. Much of brand management involves determining what associations to develop and then creating programmes that will link the associations to the brand. Brand loyalty is at the heart of any brand's value. The concept of brand loyalty is to strengthen the size and intensity of each loyalty segment. A brand with a small but intensely loyal customer base can have significant equity.

Several other models based on worldwide market research have been developed to measure brand equity. For example The Brand Asset Valuator Framework (Amber 2003: 50) is based on consumer perceptions using a 32 item consumer questionnaire that measures four main areas:

- Differentiation: how distinctive is the brand in the marketplace?
- Relevance: how relevant is the brand to the consumer?
- Esteem: how highly does the consumer regard the brand?
- Knowledge: how well does the consumer understand what the brand stands for?

Lassar et al (1995) present their own customer-based brand equity measurement tool, which measures five main areas (in comparison with other brands in the same category):

- performance

- social image
- value
- trustworthiness
- attachment (see descriptions and questions Lassar et al 1995: 13–16)

Yoo & Donthu (2001) have tried to develop a consumer-based brand equity scale that is cross-culturally generalised to examine the following issues:

- brand loyalty (3 questions)
- perceived quality (2 questions)
- brand awareness associations (5 questions)

They also have four questions (in addition to brand equity) on attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions, product category involvement and brand purchase experience (for the complete list of questions see Yoo & Donthu 2001: 14)

In Yoo & Donthu's (2001) model brand equity items were asked about before the items on brand attitude and purchase intention to reduce the halo effect common to multi-attribute attitude models, in which subjects distort their perceptions when expressing their overall attitudes before they evaluate the details that contribute to the attitudes. However it should be kept in mind that different cultures place different levels of importance on the dimensions of brand equity.

2.4 Brand personality

Another way to evaluate brand image is to measure brand personality. Brand personality is an important part of brand identity which effects brand image.

Brands may have an overall personality that may be more important to the consumer than mere technical facts about the product (Gardner & Levy 1955). In the late 1980's it became ever more difficult to differentiate brands on the basis of performance, so brand personality started to mean all that was not bound to the product's use (performance, benefits, attributes, etc. (Azoula et al 2003: 145). Aaker (1997) claims, that the symbolic use of brands is possible

because consumers often give brands human personalities, Keller (1997: 97) provides further support for this by stating that “brand personality reflects how people feel about the brand, rather than what they think the brand is or does”.

A large number of variables have been mentioned in the literature on influencing brand personality: brand name, brand symbol or logo, celebrity endorsements, colour, shape, country of origin, price, music, packaging, sales promotion, etc (Opoku 2006: 17). Most of the research papers on brand personality are based on Aaker’s (1997) scale of brand personality. He has provided insights as to how the Big Five model of human personality structure might be used to develop a reliable scale to measure brand personality across all product categories. Aaker’s (1997) key dimensions of human characteristics associated with a brand (the question used was; if a brand was a person, how would it be described?) are:

- sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful)
- excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)
- competence (reliable, intelligent, successful)
- sophistication (upper-class, charming)
- ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough)

Although Aaker’s scale is a useful concept, according to Azoula et al (2003: 144) the current scale of brand personality does not in fact measure brand personality, but merges a number of dimensions of a brand identity (like product performance) which need to be kept separate. The present brand personality scale merges all the human characteristics applicable to brands under one blanket word – personality – thus losing the distinctiveness of brand identity as personality is only one feature. Also the adjectives used to describe human personality may not be relevant to all brands. Therefore, in order to measure brand personality, research should keep in mind that brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands (Azoula et al 2003: 149, 153). It should also be kept in mind that Aaker’s scale has been found not to be perfectly stable in all cultural contexts (Opoku 2006: 20). Also De Mooij (2003: 194) states that brand personalities developed in one culture are not necessarily relevant for other cultures. The extension of brand values from one culture to another where they do not fit will not make for effective advertising. Also a study by Caprara et al (2001: 377–378) found that the factors used to describe human personalities appear to be inappropriate for

describing brands. Findings also suggested that, despite the fact that Aaker's (1997) proposed applications would require measuring personality at the individual brand level, the framework cannot be generalised to individual brands within one product category. Besides the critique, Aaker's framework can be used as the base for developing a qualitative research method.

Furthermore, other critiques of the measurement models that use verbal questions can be found. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that many aspects of branding (for example advertisements) do not operate on a cognitive level (Zambardino & Goodfellow 2007). The inability of consumers to express themselves led qualitative researchers to adopt non-direct methods such as projective techniques, however these techniques have not overcome the fundamental issue of cognitive bias, which is rooted in the way we ask questions rather than in the precise questions that we ask (Zambardino & Goodfellow 2007: 30–31). That is why there are also non-verbal methods, which are trying to sidestep the traditional cognitive interface:

- behavioural methods
- physiological methods
- nonverbal self-reporting methods

Behavioural methods measure facial, vocal and body movement reactions and emotions. Physiological methods measure the autonomic nervous system that accompanies emotions (like pulse, brain activity etc.) The autonomic nervous system methods are not able to measure the impact of multiple emotions and are impractical for many marketing measurement purposes. However, nonverbal self-reporting instruments, often based on the use of visual images of emotional states, offers potential (Zambardino & Goodfellows 2007: 32–33).

When creating a map for brand identity Gad (2001: 102–103) introduced Brand Code, a model which could be used as a mantra for companies; something that is internal, not used outside, a secret weapon to guide everybody in everyday work situations (see figure 5).

The Brand Code™
The Definition of the Brand

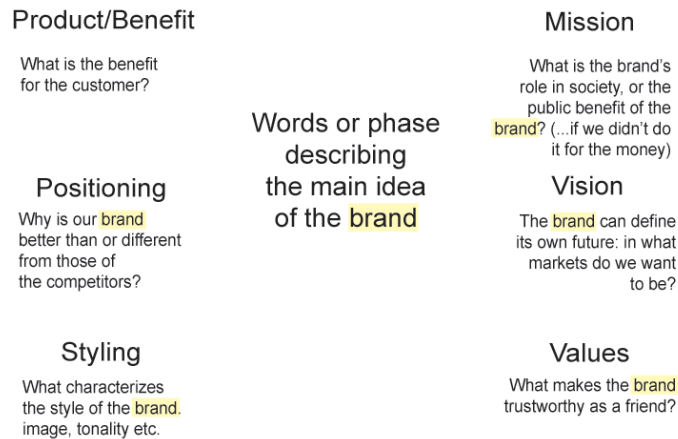


Figure 5. The definition of the brand identity (Gad 2001: 103)

Laakso (1999: 100) has suggested elements that should be analysed when the question of brand identity is concerned. They are the brand's roots, strengths and weaknesses. MUOVA has created a framework of its own to define brand identity.

Muova's map of brand identity consists of six parts:

- The values of the company
- Customers
- The benefits and values provided for the customer
- The core of the brand / theme of the brand
- Brand personality
- Market position

The brand identity map summarises the brand in terms of its background factors. The result is the theme of the brand. This is beneficial because a clear and general image of the core elements of the brand is helpful when intensifying marketing and design activity. Through the visual map it is also easier to communicate with external partners.

The following aspects need to be examined:

- the background of the brand

- why there is a need to build up a brand

The values of the company:

- field of business
- mission: why the company exists
- vision: what the company wants to be in the future
- values of the company
- how are these values seen in the activities and products of the company
- are the values distinguished and contemporary

The aim is to specify the values of the brand and possibly also the value base inside the company. The results reveal how the employees of the brand see their own company.

It is also important to examine who are the customers, who are the users and what is the target group of the brand. This reveals the kind of image the customers have of the brand. The aim is to clarify the understanding of a brand's current situation and function and use that as a basis when specifying targets. This also brings up ideas and methods for further use.

When examining the benefits and values that a brand provides to its customers the following questions are asked:

- what are the most important features for the customer? Which factors mostly influence the purchase decision?
- why do customers buy the product?
- what does the product mean to the customer?
- what are the concrete benefits provided?
- and what are the emotional and symbolic benefits provided?

The aim is to raise those aspects that are essential to the customer, so that it can use them in the future.

An examination of the core of a brand, its name and how to specify it in just twenty words clarifies the contents of the promises that a brand promotes. The basic aim is to define the target by clarifying the promises of the brand.

In the brand personality phase the meanings and values the brand wants to be associated with are gathered. Questions like; what kind of person, character or celebrity the brand would be? are asked. These results may function as guide points when planning communication and developing design issues.

In addition, the following questions are asked; what is the position of the brand related to its competitors, what would its best position be, what kind of dimensions are wanted and useful when the company's own brand is considered, how is the brand distinguished from its competitors, what kind of possibilities does the brand have in its current situation and how does the company think its competitors will work in the future? These questions are useful when defining the market position of the brand related to its competitors.

Wheeler (2003: 60) lists background material sources that can be examined when attempting to learn more about a company (in addition to interviews):

Mission	Existing marketing research
Vision	Cultural assessments
Values statement	Employee surveys
Value proposition	CEO speeches
Organisation chart	Press releases
Strategic planning documents	News clippings
Business plans	History
Marketing plans	Domains
Annual reports	Intranet access (see also interest group magazines)

Another list developed by Wheeler (2003: 69) uses background information sources in order to understand brand identity:

- Brand identity
 - all versions of all identities ever used
 - all signatures, marks, logotypes
 - company, division, product names
 - all taglines
 - all trademarks owned
 - standards and guidelines
- Sales and marketing
 - sales and product literature
 - newsletters
 - advertising campaigns
 - investor relations materials

- annual reports
- seminar literature
- PowerPoint presentations
- Business papers
 - letterhead, envelopes, labels, business cards
 - fax forms
 - invoices
 - proposal covers
 - folders and forms
- Internal communications, miscellaneous
 - employee communication
 - ephemera (T-shirts, pens...)
 - holiday greetings
- Environmental applications
 - external and internal signage
 - store interiors
 - banners
 - trade show booths
- Electronic communications
 - website
 - intranet
 - extranet
 - videos
- Retail
 - packaging
 - promotions
 - shopping bags
 - menus
 - merchandise
 - displays

Wheeler (2003: 61–62) also provides ideas for interviewing and lists 15 core interview questions for stakeholders:

1. What is your mission? What are your three most important goals?
2. Why was this company created?
3. Describe your product or services.
4. Who is your target market?
5. Prioritise your stakeholders in order of importance. How do you want to be perceived by each audience?
6. What is your competitive advantage? Why do your customers choose your product or service over others? What do you do better than anyone else?
7. Who is your competition? Is there a competitor that you admire the most, and why?
8. How do you market your product and services?
9. What are the trends and changes that affect your industry?
10. Where will you be in five years? In ten years?

11. How do you measure success?
12. What values and beliefs unify your personnel and drive their performance?
13. What are the potential barriers to the success of your product or service?
14. Place yourself in the future. If your company could do anything or be anything, what would it be?
15. If you could communicate a single message about your company, what would it be?

After the interviews and the scanning of branding material, the main value of the company should be identifiable (Li 2001: 67).

2.5 Cross cultural brand research

Culture is a complex whole of the values, beliefs and behaviour of a group of interacting people (Li 2001: 12). When developing messages we think automatically. We produce what fits our own patterns of learning. This is often done irrespective of the vocabulary of the receivers of our messages, who do not belong to our own culture (De Mooij 1998: 91). Culture consists of two components, one visible (behaviour, products) and one invisible (value, norm) (Li 2001: 13). According to Li (2001: 10) it is not an easy task to study and understand the impact of culture on branding. Not many studies have been done on this issue, secondly no ready-made method exists. Most of the work has been done on global branding ethics, political factors and business regulation. Only a few studies have focused on international branding from an intercultural communication perspective (Lin 2002: 17). De Mooij's study (1998) was one of the first systematic explorations of branding from an intercultural communication perspective. There is still substantial variation in consumer behaviour across nations and this has not been significantly reduced. Variation is found in all aspects of consumer behaviour: in the consumption of packaged goods, in the ownership of durable goods, and in media behaviour (de De Mooij 2003).

International marketing studies generally fall into two camps: globalisation or localisation (Li 2001: 25). Slowly, International marketing scholars are ready to accept that international marketing requires attention to cultural differences. However they have not yet fully accepted that the models of brand development and what constitutes a powerful brand might be

different in other contexts. In contrast, consistent with the historical and cultural examples mentioned previously, if researchers view branding as a culturally malleable mode of communication, they can think more productively about the way a cultural context should influence branding activities (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 94). According to De Mooij (2003: 183) there is still substantial variation in consumer behaviour across nations, which is not disappearing. Variation is found in all aspects of consumer behaviour: in the consumption of packaged goods, in the usage and ownership of durable goods, and in media behaviour.

Table 4 summarises the differences between standard research on brands and branding and culturally informed research on brands and branding (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 102–103).

	Standard Branding Research	Culturally Informed Branding Research
Premises	Branding is a universal technique	Branding is a culturally inflected way of arranging the world
Analytical approach	Culture as exogenous: Marketers adapt brands to cultural environments Psychological: Brands are sets of associations Economic: Brands are information signals	Culture as endogenous to marketing activities Brands as cultural forms Contextual Historical Polycentric Symbolic: mythic landscapes
Units of analysis	Nations: global Country of origin and reception Consumer perception and associations Individual people	Combination of different geographical units (nations, cities, regions, localities) Brand meanings as they are produced in a network of participants (consumers, influencers) rather than in individual minds Brand narratives

Table 4. Differences between branding research (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 103–104)

Researchers in the field (e.g. McCracken 1993, Christopher & McDonald 1995) argue that brands are vested with cultural values. McCracken (1988: 83–88) listed some cultural values that can be vested:

- notions of traditions
- trustworthiness

- excitement
- love of country
- authenticity
- purity
- family
- nature

Li (2001) has listed five cultural aspects that hinder the global standardisation of branding in the world. They are:

- values (some can be more significant than others)
- symbols
- nonverbal communication (gestures)
- lifestyle (unlikely to be unified)
- and the country-of-origin (erasing this can be a shock in some countries)

So far only Hofstede's (1991) 5-dimension model has been used to explain that people who have different values will perceive branding in different ways (De Mooij 1998). Hofstede's study is also presented in chapter 3.4. The dimensions are:

- PDI - power distance index
- IDV – individualism vs. collectivism
- UAI - uncertainty avoidance index
- MAS – masculinity vs. femininity
- LTO - long term orientation vs. short term orientation (added later)

According to Li (2001: 35) Finland is a nation with a low power distance, low masculinity, high uncertainty avoidance and individualism. Nordic people in general pay less attention to social status because of their feminism (De Mooij 1998). Cultures that are high in individualism tend to seek variety and hedonistic experiences, whereas cultures that are high in collectivism correlate more with conformity and group behaviour (Erdem et al. 2006: 36). Roth (1995) finds support for the hypotheses that collective cultures consider brands that reinforce group membership and affiliation more attractive, whereas individualistic cultures favour brands that reinforce their independence and provide individual gratification. A study by Erdem et al (2006: 34) provides

strong empirical evidence that the positive effect of brand credibility on choice is greater for consumers who rate high on either collectivism or uncertainty avoidance. Credible brands provide more value to collectivist consumers because such consumers perceive these brands as being of higher quality (i.e., reinforcing group identity). Credible brands provide more value for high-uncertainty-avoidance consumers because such brands have lower perceived risk and information costs (Erdem et al 2006: 34).

Recent scholarship has recognised some of the difficulties in Hofstede's (1991) approach. For example most researchers generally end up researching some subset of the global youth segment. The next result is that the more dramatic cultural differences that mark the majority of the world's people and certainly the four billion at the "bottom of the pyramid" exclude them from theoretical and managerial attention (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 89).

The division of the world into nationally bounded societies has become so intuitive in international marketing that researchers rarely question the salience of nations and national loyalties as key variables. However, cultural interpenetration, migration, resurgent regionalism and ethnic identity politics (in both developed and developing nations) make using the nation as the only frame of analysis in international marketing very problematic. Accordingly, many scholars have labelled the continued use of national framing in research "methodological nationalism" (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 91).

Rokeach (1973) has created a value hierarchy, which demonstrates that values can be seen through attitudes and behaviour. However people are not generally able to list their own values (Lin 2002: 44). Some of them are not conscious of them, so it is difficult to discuss or observe them (Hofstede 1991: 9). It is also hard to interpret what people say and whether values are the same across cultures (Lin 2002: 44).

Misunderstanding can take place if the values of marketer and consumer are different. Hence, it is necessary to examine all elements of branding, namely product, brand name and additional values (Li 2001: 49). Li (2001) has analysed the development of an international brand by studying the meanings of a Finnish brand in Chinese markets. This research is based on a model where the objectives of the company and the consumers' meanings related to the brand are

gathered together, classified and compared with each other. Li (2001) brings forth three separate brand levels which should be measured. These levels are:

1. Concrete product or service
2. Brand name
3. Brand meanings and values

From a brand manager's perspective, the first layer of branding is to think about the product or service itself. For example, what is its philosophy? What are its attributes? What are the rewards for the buyers or users? How are its design and colour seen from in a consumer's point of view?

The second layer of branding is to think about the brand name. Does it match the product or service philosophy? How does it translate into other languages? Are there any misunderstandings due to it being translated into foreign languages?

The third layer of branding is to think about the values or associations of the brand. What values are necessary or useful to add? What kinds of associations are desired? How can those values be added? How can the associations be realised? What do consumers think about these values? A brand whose values do not match those of the culture of the receivers will be less favoured than its rivals or it will be misunderstood and therefore less effective (Li 2001: 74).

These three layers, moving from the first to the third, become less and less controllable for marketers. It is difficult to ensure that the consumers perceive and favourably view the values added by marketers. Therefore, a considerable amount of studies have focused on the third layer. This recognition of the three layers of branding separates out the impact of culture and helps to examine it more comprehensively (Lin 2002: 38).

The branding material Li (2001: 56) herself used in her research method included:

- brand name
- logo
- slogan
- products
- selected advertisements (to present the added values visually)

- company gifts (see complete list of the questions: Lin 2002: 131–143)

The results found by Li (2001) show that brand profitability is affected by the cultural differences between the company and consumers. The research proved evidence that while the Finnish company tried to build an individualistic value into its brand, this was in conflict with the value of collectivity respected by the Chinese consumers. The result was that Chinese consumers evaluated the Finnish brand as a weak one while the competing brands with a focus on collective value gained a much stronger position. The results found by Li (2001) are a good example of why companies should measure the meanings and values of their brands.

Erdem et al (2006: 47-48) list various benefits related to considering meanings and values when marketing. Companies could take advantage of cultural differences in brand equity formation in many ways. For example, companies could work with product positioning that matches cultural values (e.g., emphasising brand attributes that invoke either risk reduction or social acceptance). Companies could also execute communication campaigns that reinforce a brand's ability to either reduce risk or generate group identification (e.g., showing brand consumption occasions in which such abilities comes into play). These communication campaigns could also add elements that represent a brand's trustworthiness (e.g., messages with ideas such as "you can always count on brand X" for high-uncertainty-avoidance countries or "you will always be part of it" for high-collectivist countries). Finally, brand extensions could be perceived as categories in which either risk or collective identity matters.

Cayla and Arnould (2008: 86) state that branding research in the future will need to be contextually and historically grounded, polycentric in orientation and acutely attuned to the symbolic significance of brands of all types. At the moment the tools and theories of international marketing remain insufficient for analysing the complexities of a globalising world and the role of brands in it (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 86).

In the managerial and the academic literature, experts often describe branding as a universal technique. The writings of branding gurus and marketing academics (e.g., Aaker and Joachimsthaler 1999; Keller 2004) implicitly assume that the principles of building a strong brand are basically the same across cultures. This idea of branding as a universal technique

reflects the pervasive idea that marketing belief is universal, an idea found in early definitions of marketing. Common ways to think and write about brands are intimately tied to the Western imaginary of marketing. The core components of the imaginary are the primacy of the individual person, the importance attached to individual desires, the belief that all thinking about society should begin with individual people, and that society should exist for their mutual benefit (Cayla & Arnould 2008: 87-88)

When comparing two different cultures a researcher must ensure:

- equivalency of samples
- equivalency of language and terms
- equivalency of measures (De Mooij 2005: 87-90).

3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The chapter presents the background information gathered during the project to support the solutions and decisions made. The benefits and challenges of the web-based survey tools are being investigated along with other relevant issues. A short review of semantics and perception is presented since these fields were found to be essential when doing a cross cultural research. Visuality is one of the main assets in our survey tool. Phenomenology is a philosophy and research method which has been applied when analyzing the results.

3.1 Conducting International or multicultural web-based research – challenges and guidelines

Writer: Anette Bengs

Conducting web-based research across cultures is economic in the sense of time and money. It affords the collection of large amounts of data, and the method is relatively unobtrusive. However, there are challenges and issues that need to be considered when conducting web-based multicultural research. Cultural differences that generally exist regarding behaviour, emotional processes, cognitive processes etc. also affect the appropriateness of employing different kinds of research methods, research procedures etc. Cultural differences have, for

instance, been found regarding people's motivation to answer surveys, familiarity with materials (Serpell 1979), and problems in rating scales (such as cultural meanings when constructing meaning, or determining social comparison effects, and examining response sets) (Heine et al. 2002).

Challenges

Hence, when conducting studies across cultures, there is a risk of bias that obstructs the analysis and comparison of data collected from different cultural groups (including both objective and projective methods) (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). There are mainly three types of bias that the researcher needs to be aware of and take into consideration when conducting multicultural studies (Van de Vijver 2000; Van de Vijver & Poortinga 1997). These are construct bias, method bias and item bias, which are further explained below.

Construct bias

When the construct measured is not identical across cultures, researchers talk about construct bias (Van de Vijver 2000). Construct bias can be caused by the:

- Incomplete overlap of definitions of the construct across cultures
- Differential appropriateness of (sub)test contents (e.g. the skills required do not belong to the repertoire of one of the cultural groups)
- Poor sampling of all relevant behaviours (e.g. short instruments)
- Incomplete coverage of the construct (e.g. not all relevant domains are sampled)

Method bias

Method bias includes sample bias, instrument bias and administration bias (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). Sample bias refers to sample differences in the relevant background characteristics (education, motivation etc.) (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). Instrument bias, on the other hand, refers to the participant's familiarity with methods of measurement and test settings (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). Administration bias refers to differences in environmental administration conditions and ambiguous instructions for study participants (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). Sources

identified for method bias have been summarised by Penga, Nisbett and Wong (as cited in Matsumoto & Hee Yoo 2006) as:

- Differential social desirability (e.g. the tendency to answer questions in a way that makes oneself look good)
- Differential response styles, such as extremity scoring (the tendency to use the ends of a scale regardless of item content) and acquiescence (i.e. the tendency to agree rather than disagree to items on questionnaires)
- Differential stimulus familiarity
- A lack of comparable samples (e.g. differences in educational background, age, or gender composition)
- Differences in the physical conditions of the researches administration. Differential familiarity with response procedures
- The reference group effect (e.g. people make implicit social comparisons with others when making ratings on a scale, rather than relying on direct inferences about a private, personal value)
- Tester/interviewer effects
- Communication problems between the respondent and the tester/interviewer in either cultural group.

Item bias

Item bias refers to the situation in which participants from different cultures react diversely to an item, although they have the same underlying psychological construct (Hofer & Chasiotis 2004). The reasons for item bias include:

- Poor item translation
- Inadequate item formulation (e.g. complex wording)
- Item(s) may invoke additional traits or abilities
- Incidental differences in the appropriateness of the item's content (e.g. the topic of the item of an educational test was not in the curriculum of one cultural group)

When conducting web-based studies across cultures the matter of bias is even more complicated (Kuzawinski 2002). The risk of biases and issues to consider in web-based

multicultural studies are related to: differences in internet access and computer literacy, interpretations and norms and internet laws. The populations to be investigated have to be adequately represented by the internet users, the translations need to be accurate and it is required that local norms are acknowledged. Also, factors such as date, time, number formats, the use and interpretation of symbols, colour, images, and functionality play important roles when conducting international research (del Galdo 1990; Russo and Boor 1993).

Suggested solutions and guidelines:

In order to overcome or decrease the risk of bias in multicultural research, Triandis (1983) stressed the importance of implementing multiple methods. He poses the following criteria for the effectiveness of methods in cross-cultural research: appropriateness, replicability, depth, and ethical acceptability. Recommendations given in the research literature for conducting web-based cross-cultural studies include:

- Extensive piloting of materials and by a local research team plus input from them (one should plan for several revisions to one's material)
- Use alternative scale formats (e.g. scenarios, direct ratings)
- Use multiple, complementary methods
- Examine data for response sets
- Beware of long surveys and complex language
- Combine these methods to show convergence
- Design the lowest common denominator of browser, processing power and Internet connection
- Include a covering letter,
- Use clearly stated questionnaires
- Remember the assurance of a respondent's confidentiality
- Consider ethical issues (Warwick, 1980)
- Forge partnership with local collaborators
- Pilot tasks and instructions

The following guidelines regarding translations have been provided by Brislin (1980), Cha, Kim, and Erlen, (2007), and Van de Vijver & Leung (1997):

- Use short, simple sentences

- Avoid the use of metaphors
- Employ the active voice
- Repeat nouns instead of using pronouns
- Avoid the subjunctive mood (e.g. could; would)
- Use specific words (e.g. chickens v. livestock)
- Avoid double-barrelled sentences
- Avoid words that are vague (e.g. frequently)

A literature review on cross-cultural research conducted by Schaffer and Riordan (2003) resulted in the following guidelines for conducting studies across cultures:

1. Develop the cross-cultural research question
 - Use an emic-etic (derived etic) approach
 - Incorporate culture into the theoretical framework
 - Use other delimiters besides country to operationalise culture
 - Measure Hofstede's cultural value dimensions directly in the specific research context

2. Align the research contexts
 - Determine the equivalence of the samples
 - Match samples
 - Statistically control for sample differences
 - Explicitly describe sample characteristics in studies
 - Be thorough in the administration of surveys
 - Implement uniform survey administration procedures
 - Provide explicit instructions and examples in a consistent fashion across samples
 - Establish levels of rapport while maintaining standardisation and consistency
 - Explicitly describe the procedures used to establish uniformity in survey administrations

3. Validate the research instruments
 - Ensure there is semantic equivalence
 - Use back-translation

Avoid the use of figures of speech, terminologies, and phrases that are common to only one culture

Be cognizant of words/phrases that elicit cognitive or affective states

Use surveys in pilot studies

Consider both insiders' and outsiders' perspectives

Explicitly describe the procedures used to establish semantic equivalence

Ensure scaling and conceptual equivalence are performed

Use covariance structure analysis

Use item response theory

3.2 Semantics

Visual elements play an important role in how a brand is perceived and understood. We desire to find products relevant to our polymorphic needs, whether they are functional, social or emotional. Products function as vehicles of communication and self-expression while revealing the user's identity to the external world and arousing personal pleasure (Karjalainen 2004: 8).

Signs are products, processes and things which carry information and transmit messages (Eco 1974). However, the meaning cannot be understood if the social and cultural connection is not known (Väkevä 1987). Signs and symbols can thus lose or change their meaning in another culture. In other words; cultural and emotional elements guide attention that influences the interpretation of a sign/symbol and its associations.

According to Peirce a sign is formed from three elements (figure 6):

Object (or semiotic object) is the concept or subject matter, which the sign indicates (e.g. a dog)

Sign (or representamen) is the visual part of a sign - e.g a word, mental and visual images, sounds); e.g. the word dog

Interpretant (or interpretant sign) is the meaning arising from a sign (agreed and also culturally bounded)

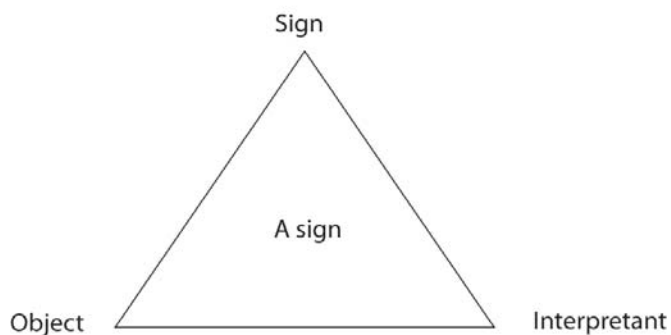


Figure 6. Peirce's triangle

Signs can be simple or complex and they may have multiple contemporary meanings. The complexity of associations is increased by the fact that the relation between the sign and the object of reference is bidirectional. Associations created by the identity references of the design are simultaneously connected to specific brand identity attributes. Furthermore, the existent set of brand identity attributes, and the set's historical representation, affects the interpretation of a design, and thus adds provisional biases to the process of signification (Karjalainen 2004)

A customer's experience with a product is affected by a variety of factors. Cagan & Vogel (2002: 64), distinguish five main attributes (aesthetic attributes) that contribute to the experience provided by a product:

- Visual:** the visual form must relate shape, colour and texture to the context of the product and the target market
- Tactile:** the physical interaction of the product, primarily focusing on the hand but also including any other physical contact between the product and user, must enhance the experience given by the product
- Auditory:** the product must only emit appropriate sounds and eliminate undesired sounds
- Olfactory:** The product must have an agreeable smell, providing appropriate aromas and eliminating undesired odours
- Gustatory:** products that are designed to be eaten, used as utensils,

or may otherwise be placed in the mouth (e.g. a child's toy) must have an optimum flavour or no flavour at all.

Due to their various aspects, products and brands are regarded as symbols, and people communicate with the help of symbols (Urde 1999). Design and other cues are meant to communicate through signs and to create meanings. However the interpretation of design characteristics is, in any case, dependent on the perceivers' subjective perception. A brand's DNA consists, in the sense of metaphorical use, of definable elements (Karjalainen 2004: 224-225). These elements should be therefore perceived in all elements, products and visual material related to the brand.

3.3 Perception

Culture, experiences, memory and outer elements (e.g. sounds) guide attention and perception. Learnt things and experiences accumulate and guide attention further. Culture further modifies the actions and thinking of individuals because it models individuals' mental schemes. This is how an individual constructs information and knowledge about symbols, values, habits, beliefs, behaviour and artefacts.

Neisser's Perceptual Cycle is a useful tool for the analysis of perception and inner processing models (see figure 7).

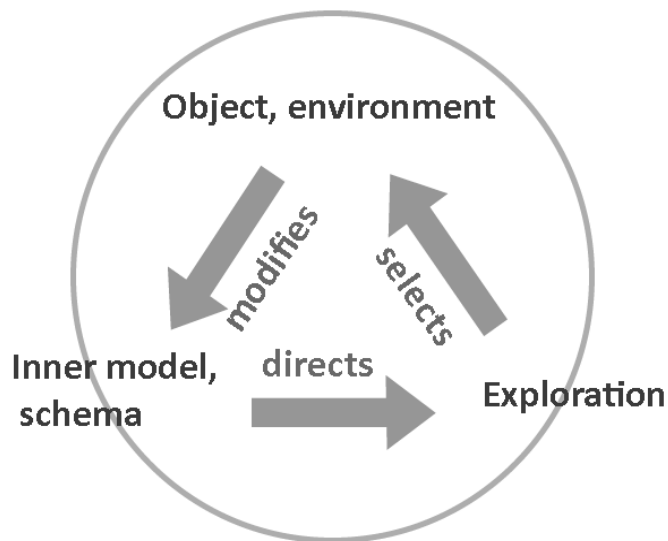


Figure 7. Perceptual cycle

(<http://sites.google.com/site/rongasanne/2.havaitseminen>)

The perceptual cycle demonstrates the actions of an individual and especially the interaction of the inner models (schemas) and environment. According to Neisser, perception is a circle that continuously changes. Concentration on as well as the search for information are guided by inner models, schemas. Perception continuously changes and as a result existing knowledge is broadened, modified and becomes more accurate. Our previous experiences influence our perception in new situations. Previous knowledge and experiences construct our inner models, which influence our perceptions, conclusions and adaptations to new things. Marketing strategies utilise these inner models .

(<http://sites.google.com/site/rongasanne/2.havaitseminen>).

The fact, that the actions of individuals are guided by inner models has its pros and cons. The asset is that only those things which are relevant to the situation are perceived. Concentration can be centred on some actions while others are missed. When a situation changes we may also concentrate on the things missed. Functions can be automatic because of our mental models. For example, an experienced pianist is able to keep up a conversation while he/she is playing the piano. However, one of the disadvantages is that schemas are tied to situations. Similar situations activate the same models even if they are not suitable for the situation in question. It

is difficult to change mental schemas which have been developed in the early stages of a person's life or are otherwise settled. Strong mental schema may also prevent people from seeing new innovative solutions.

(http://kirja.psykologia.verkkopolku.com/file.php?a=kirja.psykologia&f=28042006_luku1%5B1%5D.pdf)

Lindroos et al (2005) have illustrated how images work in everyday life (figure 8).

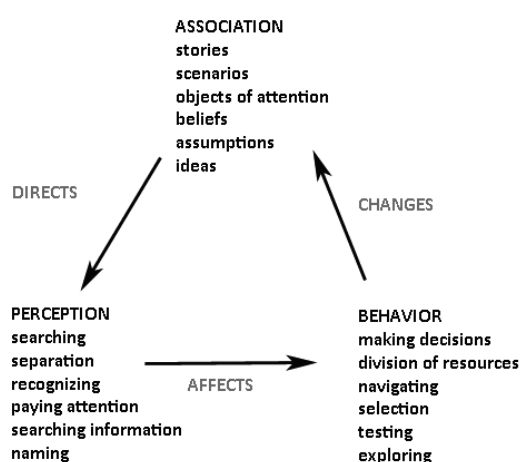


Figure 8. Effect process of an image (Lindroos et al 2005: 23)

3.4 Visuality

All reality perceived through the sense of sight is visual perception (Seppänen 2002: 36). Most of the visual communication, 70-90 per cent, is non verbal. Visual symbols have a more profound influence on both experiencing and memorizing things than linguistic communication has. (Aaker 2000: 124). Seppänen (2002) has a more loose definition of visuality. He notes that also dreams, fantasies, illusions and many verbal representations are considered visual. Visuality is part of the language in metaphoric sense. Visual and linguistic communication are interlaced in many ways. However it is not always clear that visual perception could be turned into the linguistic system without problems. For example, we are able to see and recognize several colours and tones in the colour spectrum which do not have a name. Also a piece of art may

bring out feelings which cannot be described with words. It seems that linguistic communication has a limited coverage when describing meanings like mentioned above. (Seppänen 2002: 36-37).

Visuality creates meanings through semantics (see chapter 3.2). **Denotation** of a word or phrase is a part of its meaning and the most commonly perceived meaning of the sign: like a rose in a picture. At the second stage of signification is **connotation** which means subjective cultural and/or emotional coloration of a specific word or phrase: rose is a symbol of romanticism, passion, certain colour environment or past decades. Visual element is regarded as a clean connotative element. Therefore interpretations based on the visual elements may be considered to be more clean and free of bias than written questions. In written questions and tests also the question itself and its form guide the answering and interpretation. Visuality and images may provoke more creative and intuitive answers.

Metaphor is a way to understand or explore things with the help of another thing. When interpreting visual metaphors the context is important. According to Forcewill there are three different contexts to define visual metaphor: visual, linguistic and cultural. Visual context is related to the content of the visual image and linguistic context refers to the e.g. words within the image. Cultural aspect means all conversations, fears, norms and phenomenon related to the topic of the visual image. (Seppänen 2002: 187-188). Interpreting cultural metaphors demands profound knowledge of the culture in question.

Some of the things or forms and associations related to them are universally similar. Differences occur due to cultural backgrounds and cognitive skills. Segall, Campbell & Herskovit (1966) pointed out that the basic process of perception is similar for all mankind, only the content differs because of the different perceptual inference habits. In particular each individual combines their previous experiences and skills when reacting and interpreting to a given stimulus. (Segall, Campbell & Herskovit 1966). Through verbal explanations and comparing them to cultural dimensions (see chapter 3.4 Hofstede) it might be possible to elaborate and define cultural interpretation.

Visuality is not just a random flow of images in person's mind. It is formed through constructions and orderings. Seppänen (2002) calls this visual ordering which is found in physical environment, in objects and in forms and contents of visual representations. Visual order is always made through human activity. People modify and construct visual representations in different social context. For example, taking and choosing a photo for a newspaper is restricted by many commonly known but also unspoken rules. These rules create the visual ordering of the newspaper which all the stakeholders share and interpret similarly. Therefore visual ordering includes stable and shared cultural meanings. (Seppänen 2002: 35-36).

Things and visual elements familiar to the perceiver are easily noticed. Perceiver's culture, emotions and experiences influence what is perceived, what is found important and what catches the attention. Living in a certain culture structures cultural schemas and some of them become automatic (e.g driving a bike). New information is easier to remember and understand when it is connected to something already existing (Nisbet & Shucksmith 1988: 39). Also emotions guide the attention and perception (Phelps 2006). It was suggested earlier that visuality provokes more emotions both directly and indirectly, than linguistic forms do. High emotional content promotes and facilitates focusing the attention.

In 1999, Rolf Jensen defined the concept of the Storytelling Society. In the Storytelling Society, consumers pay more attention to the relationship between products and their own lifestyles. The products must be pleasurable and appeal to the consumer's feelings. Stories are a vital part of culture and human life. Stories structure meaningful unities and place cultural lists, codes and symbols to a context. Stories are used in various ways: passing on traditions and culture, education, symbols and their explanations, metaphors, entertainment, sharing information, warnings and as a therapy. Since stories are full of cultural schemas, symbols and stereotypes it is easy to accumulate the information and facilitate memorizing through stories. Also visuality holds a strong position in stories. Brands are telling their own stories through their visual material and other dimensions.

3.5 Cultural differences

In this chapter we look at how cultural values have been studied worldwide. We introduce three different approaches to the cross cultural research. It is not an easy task to categorise countries based on culture and some even suggest it is impossible. People are not generally able to list their values (Li 2001). Some of them are not conscious of them and thus it is difficult to discuss or observe them (Hofstede 1991). However by investigating the results of these studies we are able to create some kind of overall image of the two cultures chosen for our survey.

Hofstede's culture dimensions

Hofstede's model is a useful description of the relation between value and culture. Hofstede (1991: 9) distinguished four manifestations of culture: symbols, rituals, heroes, and values. In Figure 9, these are depicted like the layers of an onion. Symbols represent the most superficial manifestation of culture, values the deepest, while heroes and rituals are somewhere in-between. Hofstede defined these concepts as follows:

- **Symbols** are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning recognised only by those who share a culture.
- **Heroes** are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a society, and thus serve as role models for behaviour.
- **Rituals** are the collective activities considered socially essential within a culture: they are carried out for their own sake.
- **Values** are broad tendencies to prefer a certain state of affairs to others. Values are learned implicitly but not consciously. People are not consciously aware of the values they hold, so it is difficult to discuss or observe them (Li 2001:43)

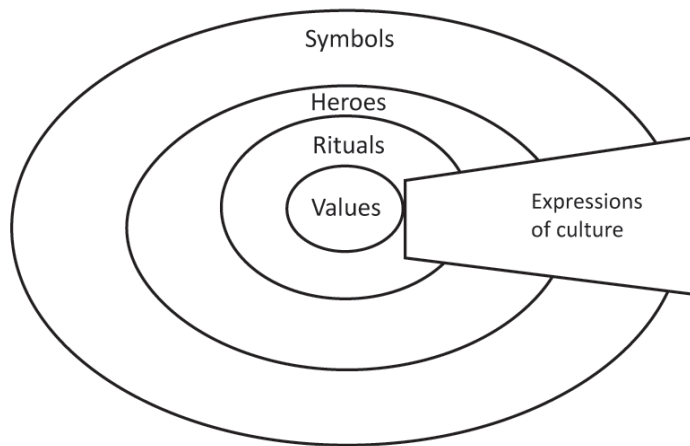


Figure 9. Values are embedded deeply in culture (Hofstede 1991: 9)

Hofstede's five dimensions are:

- PDI **Power distance** (distribution of power in the society)
- IDV **Individualism** (individual vs. collectivism)
- UAI **Uncertainty avoidance index** (society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to the search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programmes its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, differing from the usual.)
- MAS **Masculinity** (the distribution of sex roles in the society, and the dimension of hard vs. soft values in the society)
- LTO **Long term orientation** vs. versus **short-term orientation** (added later) (Hofstede 2001)

When viewing the cultures chosen for this study, Sweden and Russia, we can see where the biggest differences between these two cultures emerge. In table 6 a few examples of the cultures' scores according to Hofstede's study are presented.

PDI	IDV	UAI	MAS	LTO
Russia: 93	USA: 91	Russia: 95	Italy: 70	The NL: 44
France: 68	The UK : 89	France: 86	Germany: 66	Finland: 41
Italy: 50	The NL: 80	Italy: 75	The UK: 66	France: 39
USA: 40	Italy: 76	Germany: 65	USA: 62	Italy: 34
The NL: 38	France: 71	Finland: 59	France: 43	Sweden: 33
Germany: 35	Sweden: 71	The NL: 53	Russia: 36	Germany: 31
The UK: 35	Germany: 67	USA: 46	Finland: 26	USA: 29
Finland: 33	Finland: 63	The UK: 35	The NL: 14	The UK: 25
Sweden: 31	Russia: 39	Sweden: 29	Sweden: 5	Russia: -

Table 5. Culture scores according to Hofstede's study (Hofstede 2001)

Russia scores 93 in the Power Distance Index but Sweden scores 31. Features related to the high scores in the PDI are awareness of power and status, adoring and revealing one's power, respect for parents and the obedience of children, homogenous values in society and the low amount of contrasting religions and social theories. The use of power is not necessarily based on personal achievements or even related to the law. When scores are low in the PDI, the features related to that are informality, democracy, equivalency between individuals and emphasising the status and reward earned by personal achievement. For the Uncertainty Avoidance Index Russia scores 95 and Sweden scores 29. This means features related to Russia, a culture avoiding uncertainty, are resisting change, avoiding risk taking and failure, worrying about the future and suspicion of novelties and foreigners. Such societies are mostly conservative and such countries may be aggressive towards other countries. Cultures that are tolerant of uncertainty (such as Sweden) support different lifestyles, opinions, nationalities and sexual orientation. Risk taking is high and people live one day at a time. Such countries are often old democracies, where economic growth has been slow since World War II (Hofstede 1984).

The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World

The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World (see figure 10) is the well-known result of the world values survey. A number of variables were condensed into two dimensions of cultural variation: traditional and secular-rational values and survival and self-expression values.

- Traditional values are: the importance of parent-child ties and deference to authority; absolute standards and traditional family values; the rejection of divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide; high levels of national pride; a nationalistic outlook
 - Secular-rational values have the opposite preferences to the above
- and
- Self-expression values: a high priority for environmental protection; a tolerance of diversity and rising demands for participation in decision making in economic and political life; the tolerance of minorities or out-groups, including foreigners, gays and lesbians and gender equality; child-rearing has an emphasis on imagination and tolerance
 - Survival values emphasise the opposite preferences to those above
- (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>)

The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World

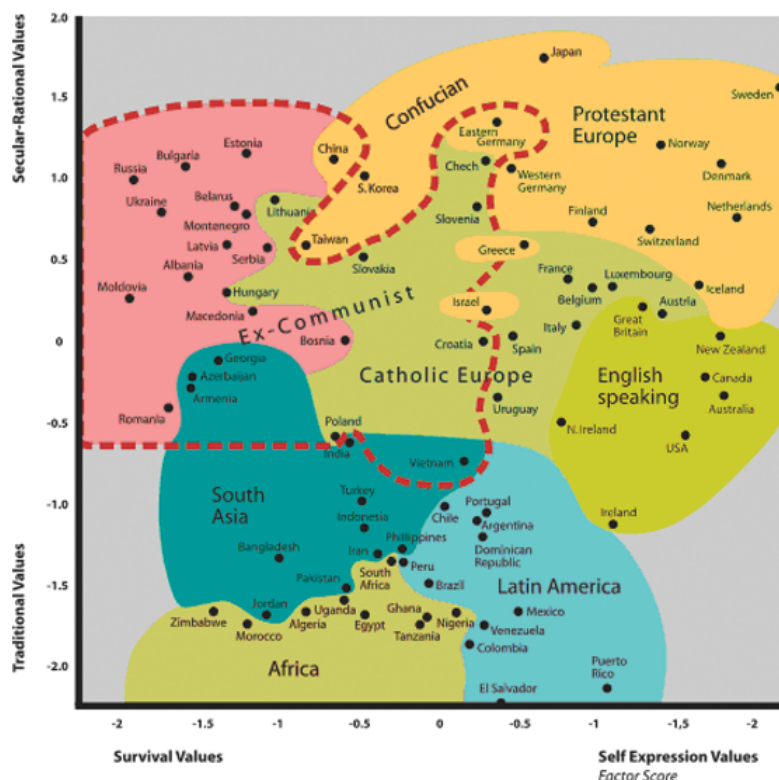


Figure 10. The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World
(<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>)

The transition from an industrial society to a post-industrial society shows as polarisation between survival and self-expression values. Secular-rational values are found in almost all industrial societies. An increase in wealth also increases self-expression values since more people take survival for granted. The movement in society shifts from having an emphasis on economic and physical security towards having an increasing emphasis on subjective well-being, self-expression and the quality of life.

Schwartz's value map

Schwartz (1992) developed a theory of the universal content and the structure of values in order to establish universals in their meanings. If they were not universal, comparisons of value priorities became worthless. He drew up a value map based on a survey of over 20 countries. He found that there are two categories of values: one serves individual interests and another serves collective interests. In addition, people have different attitudes toward time and changes. Schwartz then set up two sets of bipolar dimensions: self-transcendence versus self-enhancement and openness to change versus conservation. He put eight value types into this matrix and these were in binary opposition to each other. He argued that the value map is culture free and continued to test its validity in different countries (Li 2001: 44). Figure 11 presents the dimensions and how the countries are situated in Schwartz's culture map.

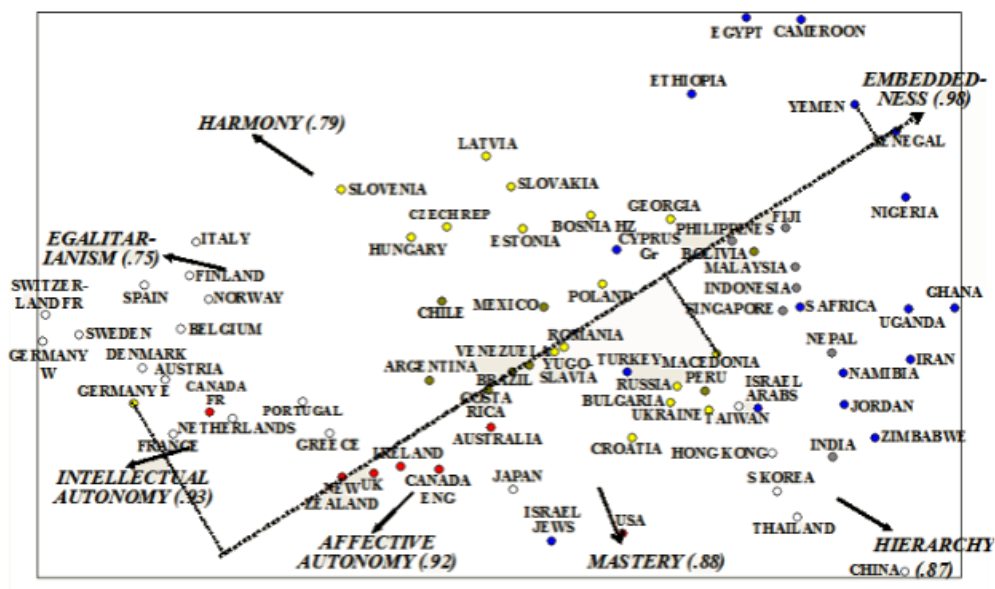


Figure 11. Schwartz's culture map

- In **embedded** cultures, people are viewed as entities embedded in collectivity, which find meaning in life largely through social relationships, through identifying with the group, participating in its shared way of life, and striving toward shared goals. Such values as social order, respect for tradition, security, and wisdom are especially important.
- In **autonomy** cultures, people are viewed as autonomous, bounded entities who find meaning in their own uniqueness and who are encouraged to express their internal attributes (preferences, traits, feelings, motives). We distinguish two types of autonomy, intellectual and affective: Intellectual autonomy encourages individuals to pursue their own ideas and intellectual directions independently (its important values are curiosity, broadmindedness, creativity). Affective autonomy encourages individuals to pursue an affectively positive experience for themselves (its important values are pleasure, an exciting life, a varied life). Organisations in such cultures may be relatively open to change and diversity. They are likely to treat their members as independent actors with their own interests, preferences, abilities, and allegiances.
- The polar solution we label cultural **hierarchy** relies on hierarchical systems of ascribed roles to ensure responsible behaviour. It defines the unequal distribution of power, roles, and resources as legitimate (its important values are the values of social power, authority, humility, wealth).
- The polar alternative labelled cultural **egalitarianism** seeks to induce people to recognise one another as moral equals who share basic interests as human beings. It emphasises the transcendence of selfish interests in favour of voluntary behaviour that promotes the welfare of others (its important values are equality, social justice, responsibility, honesty).
- The cultural orientation we label **mastery** encourages active self-assertion in order to master, change, and exploit the natural and social environment to attain personal or group goals (its important values are ambition, success, daring, competence).
- **Harmony**, emphasises fitting harmoniously into the environment (its important values are unity with nature, protecting the environment, a world at peace) (Ashkanasy, N. N., Wilderom, C. & Peterson, M. F (Eds.), 2000).

3.6 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement whose ideas are widely used in scientific studies. Phenomenology is usable in all descriptive studies especially when interpreting perceptions. (Tietojätti 2001: 269-270). In ImageTestLab project we used qualitative research methods with phenomenological aspect when analysing the results of the international survey.

Phenomenology means knowledge and the classification of phenomenon. Phenomenology was developed in the beginning of the 20th century. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered a principal founder of the movement and his influence is very strong, even today. Husserl's student Martin Heidegger is also known as a developer of phenomenological philosophy although these two scientists did not always agree. Phenomenology is considered difficult to understand because of the several interpretations of Husserl's writings (Husserl 1995: 14; <http://filosofia.fi/node/4936>). Husserl's basic idea was to explore intuitive experiences and reveal the essence of these experiences (Husserl 1995: 78).

Phenomenologists are cautious in their attitude to naturalism, which is also called objectivism or positivism. They tend to emphasise cognition and believe that also ideal objects like numbers and conscious life itself can be made evident and thus known.(www.phenomenologycenter.org).

Phenomenological method

When doing qualitative research the research subject is the phenomenon for the researcher. Phenomenology especially emphasises that phenomenon as a meaning provides valid scientific information and reveals more than just a person's way of seeing and exploring things. Phenomenology is supposed to distinguish the following things from each other: a researcher's own knowledge and the genuine meaning of the phenomenon they are studying. Previous knowledge, assumptions and theoretical frameworks are excluded and the subject is presented as it is (Varto 1992: 85-86)

Phenomenological research has been criticised for being subjective and relying too heavily on personal perceptions. Additionally, sample sizes might be smaller than in quantitative data collections. Research data often consists of large amounts of disorganised data and different

kinds of references like interview transcriptions, unstructured notes or personal texts and notes. Reading through all such material helps to reveal the essence of the phenomenon. These ideas are often criticised by scientists who are used to relying on large samples and quantitative data collections. Stan Lester (Lester 1999) emphasises that conclusions are not necessarily the right kind of word for a summary in phenomenological research. This is because that suggests a finality that is not capable of being defended. A more perceptive insight would be to indicate that a study is not coming to a firm conclusion, but points to implications or ways forward which make sense if the interpretation referred to is an accurate or useful one (Lester 1999).

Phenomenology investigates experiences and experience is seen as a person's relationship to his/her own reality and environment. Experience is formed through meanings which makes meanings to the main subject in phenomenological research. Since phenomenological theory of meanings consider that every individual is part of society and collectivism, by investigating the experience of the individual it is possible to reveal something of the whole society. When studying the research data, phenomenologists emphasise the importance of intuition and understanding the relationships between meanings. (Laine T. 2001).

PART II

4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The chapter describes the development process of the web-based research tool. The questionnaire was tested twice before the international test described in chapter 6. The tasks were revised and modified after both pilot tests. Suitable questions and tasks were collected from the literature and a workshop organised by the stakeholders. All of the questions and their background are explained and examined individually.

4.1 Construction

Background information

Background information helps when making categories during the analysis and assures researchers of the quality of the sample (equal gender distribution, age groups, social groups etc.). The following basic information is asked: nationality, gender, age, profession, number of family members and how many of them are children. Also, the participants' consumer profile is asked for and they are asked to select the types of innovations that suit their personal style. We applied the diffusion of innovations model developed by Everett Rodgers (1995) to build up five consumer types:

Innovators "I am open-minded, and create and detect new phenomena. I am an experimental risk taker. I am not afraid of what people think of me. "

Early adopters "I am curious about novelties and actively look for and use those. People often follow my example. I would rather be IN than OUT"

Early majority "I am practical, considerate, and look for effective and good solutions. I am interested in novelties and follow trends from magazines and market leaders."

Late majority "I do not run after every new thing, but some things I like. I would rather wait and see how the things work before trying something. I do not like going to extremes. I like security."

Laggards "I am not so much interested in new things. I like the way things are and do not follow trends. Familiar things, neighbourhood, friends and family are important to me."

The names of the consumer categories were not mentioned when a correspondent selected a category that best identifies them. The categories presented are not meant to be in any hierarchy and each of them is as good as any other.

The respondents were asked to select from the list of values the most suitable ones for describing themselves. Also areas of interests were asked for in order to find out more about the lifestyle of the respondent.

The values presented to the respondents:

- Reaching goals
- Success and fame
- Money, fortune and goods
- Retaining a good public image of oneself
- Family
- Home
- Relationships with friends
- Equality between people
- Health and wellbeing
- Slow pace of life
- Religion
- Free time
- Tolerance towards different thoughts, beliefs, lifestyles
- Constancy of familiar habits, traditions and things
- Challenges in life
- Risk taking
- Freedom of choice of life style
- Nature and environment
- Taking care of those less fortunate
- Sense of duty and responsibility
- Honesty and sincerity
- Expressing oneself

Search for pleasures

Influence of other people: what other people think of me

The areas of interests the respondents were asked about:

Sports

Outdoors

Culture

History

Science

Technology

Media

Food

Handicrafts, craft and do-it-yourself work

Gardening

Travelling

Society and politics

Nature and animals

Charity

Friends

Films

Chilling

Other _____

At the beginning of the test a respondent's state of mind is asked for and this is indicated with the aid of smileys or emoticons and a scale. This question is repeated after the test to see what kind of influence the questionnaire has had on the respondent's happiness or sadness.

At the early stage participating companies suggested that those who are customers or potential customers of the company could be tested separately. Therefore for those who answer as company representatives we added a few different questions. They are asked the business area of their company and the company they work for, its size, the locality or globality of the company. They were then asked to place the company on a scale and select whether it was a pioneering or a traditional company. The participating companies then chose which background profile they wanted to use for their own subjects.

Free associations

Logo

The first question dealt with the logo of the brand and respondents were asked to write down the first thing/things that came to their minds when seeing the logo. The answer might be a word, a phrase or a product. There are no right or wrong answers to this kind of question. The aim is to collect free associations about the logo and its appearance and the results describe how and where a logo or a brand name guides the respondent's thinking. The information provides a reference on how culture influences the interpretation of a logo and brand and also reveals the kind of words respondents use to describe the brand. It is important not to think about the question too much and to answer it intuitively. At this point it is relevant to ask if the respondent is familiar with the brand.

Product

The next question included a picture of the product/products and the respondents indicated the first associations and impressions that brought to mind . The aim was to have a real assessment of the respondents through free associations. The respondents were also asked to assess the products on a scale in order to obtain quantitative data on salient points and characteristics and then briefly explain their choices. The scale used was strongly agree/ agree/ quite agree/ neither agree nor disagree/ quite disagree/ disagree/ strongly disagree.

The characteristics the respondents were asked about:

- Appealing
- Quality
- Economical
- Innovative
- Reliable
- High design
- Easy to use
- Ethical
- Sustainable
- Suitable for the purpose

Marketing material

The visual marketing material was presented next and this could be a still picture, a short video, advertisement or website. The respondents gave, in their own words, their first impression. A quantitative data collection was included to discern the characteristics and attractiveness of the visual material to the respondents. In this task word pairs were used and respondents were asked to choose which of the words better suited the brand and by how much. The aim was to evaluate the correspondence between image and identity.

Suitable word pairs:

Local	Global, international
Interesting	Indifferent
Original	Generic/ A mass product/ Part of a mass
Distant	Approachable and supportive
Amateur	Professional
Cautious	Daring
New on the market	Traditional/Long history
Innovative	Safe/Security seeking
High design	Low design
Uses the latest technology	Uses standard technology
Extrovert, open	Introvert, closed
Reliable	Unreliable
Flexible and agile	Stiff and rigid
Responsible/ ethical	Indifferent
Individual	Collective, social
Collaborator, listening to the customers	Vendor, focused on the products
Human oriented	Technical
Customisation	Standardisation
Saves time and effort	Consumes time and effort

Choosing the area, colour coding

Visual marketing material like screenshots from the website, advertisements or still pictures were presented and respondents were asked to mark on the image the areas that best suited the questions asked. Positive areas were marked with a smiley face and negative ones with a sad face. Colours like green and red can be used as an alternative. After picking up the area they were asked to explain their choice. It should be noted that this works best if there is no limitations on the size or shape of the chosen area. The questions asked were what catches your eye, what gives you an idea of its credibility and professionalism, what describes its quality and what describes how pioneering this is? The same picture was used for all the questions. The aim

was to collect comments about the first impression of the respondents. Qualitative data was used to estimate the characteristics and how interesting the material was to the respondents. The material helped the companies to evaluate the correspondence between the image and its identity. Semantic factors are also highly visible in this task. When representing the results the areas chosen most often are highlighted and they are easy to examine and present.

Packaging

The testing focus varies among the companies and packaging, premises or points of sale can be tested. The task includes a picture and the respondents were asked what comes to mind when seeing the material presented. Quantitative data was also collected and the general impression given by the material was also asked for. Quantitative data was collected by using the statements: In general I think packaging is... The respondent then marked how much he/she agreed with the statement. The scale used was strongly agree / agree / quite agree / do not agree nor disagree / quite disagree / disagree / strongly disagree / cannot say. The words asked change according to the testing focus (see table 5).

Packaging	Premises/fair stand	Presentation at points of sale	Marketing material, advertising
Ecological, Informative Outstanding Suitable for the purpose Matching the product and the brand image, User friendly Appealing	Matching the product and the brand image, Approachable Informative and user friendly Appealing Outstanding Professional Modest	Matching the product and the brand image, Approachable Informative and user friendly Appealing Outstanding Professional Modest	Matching the product and the brand image Informative and user friendly Appealing Outstanding Professional Ecologic Modest Approachable

Table 6. List of words asked

Country

This question examined which country or area the respondent thought that the company/brand came from. An explanation option was included. There was a list of all the possible countries and some regions to help the association. After that the respondents were asked to list about three to five values related to the country chosen. To stimulate the associations, the logo or

other earlier presented images could be used. The aim was to find out the impressions of the country of origin based on the company's material. The explanations also reveal the country stereotypes and the associations the respondents have about that culture.

User profile

The task consisted of an image bank with cultural coding. The respondent assembled a user profile using the given images (pictures or persons). At least one or a maximum of five images was chosen. Then the respondents were asked to describe the selected pictures in only a few words. A respondent could use his/her own words or choose from the list of adjectives given. The results show a collage of the user of the brand and the explanation given provides information about how the users of the brand are seen and perceived and whether they are negative or positive.

The photo of a situation in which the brand is used

The respondent was asked to imagine taking a photo of a situation in which the brand is being used and describe the photo they would take and what kind of situation that would be. For example location (home, inside- outside...), particular time of the day, the atmosphere, what happens, what kind of activity is occurring (informal or formal, social or individual...) and what else is there (people, animals, things...) in the scene. The descriptions reveal situations associated with the use of the brand and reveal the positive emotions, respect, level of activity and appreciation involved.

Employee profile

The respondent selected from the given images at least one and up to a maximum of five persons whom he/she thinks could work for the company /brand and also described their lives in a few lines. The same image bank with cultural coding was used in the earlier task when the user profile was given. The results consist of visual material describing the associations perceived of the company. The associations may reveal how the company takes care of its employees, whether there is a good spirit in the company, are employees proud of their employer etc.

Brand personality

As a logo or visual material may be used as the stimulus of associations the respondents were asked to think what the brand would be if it were something else. Something else refers here to an animal, music, car, story, colour, feeling/emotion, scent/smell or character/celebrity. An additional question was which other products or brands would be associated with the brand in question? The respondents were asked to briefly explain their answer. An image bank was included in some of the questions like animal and car, but there was always an option to write down the answer. Too many pictures may, of course, guide responses too much and limit and bias the associations made. It needs to be noted that some questions provide answers that might be too local (e.g. story) and are therefore difficult for a researcher to analyse, especially if the survey is conducted in a foreign culture. The possibility to select the colour from the colour wheel was suggested as colours have so many tones and interpretations. Answering just "red" does not necessarily describe which kind of red the respondent means. That is why explanations are extremely important in these questions. However this task does help to discover how the respondents feel about a brand, and how they see it.

Thought bubble

This material consisted of a logo and picture of a person with a thought bubble or in a comic strip scenario. The respondents were asked to write a caption for the comic strip and define and write down who is the character and what the person thinks when seeing the brand. Visual elements like different characters, and different thought bubble shapes might be included to help the respondent to indicate the desired tone and attitude. The aim was to reveal feelings and beliefs towards the brand and for the respondent to speak truthfully since they were speaking through a character.

A speech bubble task followed the same idea and it consisted of two characters talking about the brand and revealed word-of-mouth behaviour.

Brand personality and values

The values of the brand were asked for in a dart board task. The respondents were guided to estimate their overall impression of the brand. The closer to the centre of the dart board they placed the dart the more they related the value asked about to the brand itself. The aim was to

reveal brand personality and find out if values associated with the brand are the same as the company's values and what it desires to be associated with. Overall the task reveals values associated with the brand.

The values used: to assess brand personality

Sincere and honest
Down-to-earth
Competent
Respectful
Genuine
Determent
Conscious
Ambitious
Sophisticated
Imaginative and creative
Spirited
Curious and continuously developing
Masculine
Social
Caring
Active
Competitive
Efficient
Helpful
Humble
Serious
Open and transparent
Ecologic
Fair
Solves customers' problems and helps them to succeed
Socially responsible

Picture coding

This material consists of the image bank with its cultural coding, while the attributes tested are collected from the brand interviews. Images are sorted out according to the asked for attributes. The attributes are words like innovative, technical or trustworthy and they are chosen by each brand to represent whatever they think is essential for them. The aim of the task is to test our own image coding, reveal culture differences and help the interpretation of the answers. The word pairs are same as those used in the list in the earlier question about marketing material.

Matrix

A two-dimensional matrix is built from the pictures chosen in the previous task. The logo of the brand is placed in the most suitable place in the matrix. The aim is to combine the visual elements with the verbal associations.

The logos of three to five competitors to the company being researched were inserted one at a time and the respondent was asked to place them in the most suitable order in the matrix. Thus, it was possible to see all of them together and analyse their relationship to each other.

Additional questions

The additional questions were different for client companies and customers and both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered. The scale used was absolutely yes/ quite possibly yes/ neutral/ probably not/ absolutely not/ cannot say. The aim is to find out what the brand users really appreciate.

Customers:

1. Would you buy/ use the brand?
2. Would you recommend the brand to others?
3. The service I receive from the company suits my culture (yes....no; scales). Why/ why not?
4. What is unique in the company? What should the company develop/ improve?

Company respondents:

1. Would you recommend the brand to others?
2. The service I receive from the company suits my culture (yes....no; scales). Why/ why not? (using scale)
3. What is unique in the company? What should the company develop/ improve?
4. Why have you selected this brand? What is the most important reason for using the brand?

Company presentation

At the end a short company presentation was included. The field of the brand and marketing area were told and the brand's origins revealed. Also the size of the company, its years in existence and country of origin were revealed. At first the company presentation was supposed to be a brief for other questions and divide the respondents into two divisions: those who do not know the brand and those who are familiar with it. After thinking about this for a while we decided that the company presentation would be better at the end since the aim of the whole

questionnaire was to study associations related to the visual material. In this case it would not matter if the respondent knew the brand or not as we would expect him/her to have something to say – at least intuitively.

In addition, some kind of profile of the participant, like a collage of the pictures selected on the base of the answers or the background information, might be included at the end of the test. This would function as a small reward.

We went through the test over and over again to come up with the most suitable order for the tasks. It seemed wise to start from the logotype of the brand and proceed to the products and marketing material. Also videos or flash might be included in some of the tasks but there is always a risk of them not working properly. Internet connections and updates vary and influence the ability to see the intended material. The aim was to build up the image of the brand by revealing a little bit more of it in each task. In the association tasks participants saw all the material and they should have had some kind of general impression of the brand in their minds. This should be helpful at least to those not familiar with the brand. In the beginning the amount of tasks was very large but material was selected to ensure only the most suitable ones were used for the final questionnaire.

4.2 Visual theme

Since the survey is meant for use in different cultures and countries other issues need to be considered. Fang and Rau (2003) have been researching cultural differences between China and the USA using portal web sites and they discovered that culture has a significant impact on the perception and usage of the same page due to cultural differences in cognitive styles. Also other studies emphasise the importance of not just changing the language of the web pages when entering a new market in a different country but also stress that usability is not the same thing in every culture (Smith, Dunckley, French, Minocha, Chang 2004).

The three types of bias represented by Van de Vijver and Poortinga (1997) are construct bias, method bias and item bias. They are explained by details in chapter 3.1. When designing a

multicultural questionnaire we used these preferences as guidelines. Web-based surveys are easy to discontinue if they are tedious, demand too much effort or the internet connection fails or is too slow. This was another reason why it was challenging to keep respondents' concentration levels the same throughout a test, especially when the amount of questions in our survey was large and we would use images whose upload time would vary. However, we did not wish to drop any questions as that would have invalidated the test.

The design of the ImageTestLab questionnaire was kept neutral and simple so it should be easily customised and localised. Due to the fact that several pictures, video or flash were used with the questions the background was better when it was solid colour and consisted of neutral objects. The layout of the questions was also changeable and since the language was chosen for each country the space has to be flexible and the font resized for most languages. Word lists could be placed either horizontally or vertically to create variation and different kinds of layout. In open questions the picture was at the top and the answering box was under it. When selecting pictures for a user or an employee profile several options for representing different cultures, ages and professions are available. Smiley faces and green and red colours were considered to be, if not common, at least known in most cultures. The dart board was thought not to be as well known in foreign countries as it is in Finland but in future surveys there might be options for that task.

When the tasks were placed on the visual background the whole questionnaire seemed much lighter and shorter than the version with just questions and explanations together. It was also easier to see and change the structure and order of the questions.

4.3 Testing the content

Before the web-based version of the questionnaire was conducted we decided to test the content of the test in English. The brand used in this test, called a paper test, was the Finnish company Valio, which produces dairy products and is probably known and most used by the participants of the test.

The test was conducted over one week and nine subjects participated in completing the questionnaire. The subjects were both Finnish and Swedish speaking, males and females and their ages were between 20 and 55. The subjects participated in the test in Muova. After they had filled out the questionnaire they were interviewed. We asked, for example what they liked about the tasks, were the questions and words understandable, the relevance of the tasks, the layout of the pages and the duration of the test. They were also given a lottery ticket as a reward for their time and effort.

The general impression received from the group about the questionnaire was positive. The subjects felt that it was user-friendly, visually clear and attractive and that the instructions were mostly understandable and not too difficult. Using visual material was considered 100% positive. The images made associations and finding words easier and made the test seem shorter and less boring. It was also considered suitable for the purpose. Generally, testing took 45 to 180 minutes per participant, which was considered too long and time consuming. We assumed the online version could be done much faster. The ideal duration should be no more than 30 minutes.

The first paper test was found to be very important. Based on the results we revised the instructions and changed words which could be interpreted in multiple ways, reduced the length and discarded some tasks considered inessential. The order of the questions was rearranged since it was discovered that questions requiring more time were best when set at the beginning of the process and easier and faster tasks at the end. The structure of the test was considered flexible enough to maintain attention, while on the other hand it required reorientation. It also became clear that both qualitative and quantitative questions should be included and that they should be given in roughly equal amounts. Open questions are important for this kind of survey but it was found to be important to choose carefully where to use them in order to avoid frustration. Especially in associative tasks, it was sometimes found difficult to explain the answer as the answer might have been very intuitive. The repetition of the similar words was revised.

The area marking task was positively received and the subjects also wished to explain their choices since this possibility was not yet included. The image sorting task in which subjects were asked to combine images with words like interesting, innovative, et cetera was seen as mostly

easy but generally irrelevant since it did not bring any extra value but required many resources. At this point this task was left out. The matrix and dart board were liked because they were easy to do. The subjects wished to compare the results with other participants at some points of the survey. It was planned to attach a visual mood board of the participant based on his/her answers at the end. However, it was found quite difficult to make this kind of collage of images, since the information given by the subjects did not really provide enough material for that. The language (English) was slightly problematic for some subjects. The tasks which demand extra imagination like the thought bubble and the describing of the situation in which the brand was used were considered to be difficult for some people. However, the test showed the opposite as almost all subjects filled out those tasks. The profile of the user was found to be a positive idea although it was difficult to build a proper profile collage based on the small amount of background information. The test was then modified based on the results.

In general the subjects liked the questionnaire and they felt that the tasks were interesting and innovative. The very first tests also gave us some hints of the kind of answers people give to the kinds of questions that produce associations. The results showed that people have very similar associations to Valio, probably due to their background (as all lived in Finland and have used Valio's products) and the images built in their minds were also known from Valio's marketing campaigns.

4.4 Conducting the web-based questionnaire

Before we contacted a partner to help make the web-based tool the existing on-line survey tools and services were benchmarked in order to find out if it would be possible to use them instead of making our own. The requirements for the end product were:

- Expandable support for multiple languages and editable survey layouts
- Extensive reporting and data collection should be possible for each test/question/user etc.
- Extensive data export options from the survey database (PDF, Excel, email etc.)
- Dynamic content (database-driven implementation)

- The results data and statistics of the tests must be saved in the database
- The database must also contain a user register with the account information of all users

Existing web-based survey tools and services concentrate mostly on text based questionnaires and the use of multimedia content is not common. The ability to modify layout and visual elements are limited and solutions which utilise multimedia extensively are not database-driven online applications. However utilising existing survey tools is cost-effective and faster at developing a solution adequate for the requirements. Nevertheless, there might be difficulties in customising the tool enough to match all the project requirements and this would be more expensive and would also be dependent on third-party products and services.

Another option would have been to develop a new solution in order to develop an innovative, versatile and end product that could be expanded and acquire new information concerning brand research. Meeting all the requirements of the project would be possible and the end product could be used and modified for multiple purposes in the future. However, this option would demand more time and resources than using existing tools.

After considering these two options it became clear that developing a new solution would suit the project better. Enhancing the questionnaire's visual quality, its images and customisation features were the main themes arising from our questionnaire. Another consideration was that the end product would remain a product controlled by Muova.

The information technology company Dreamnet Solutions Oy, from Vaasa, developed the web-based questionnaire. In the very first meeting a specialist from Dreamnet informed us that some of the tasks were more laborious than we had thought. In order to meet the requirements set by the budget and schedule the questionnaire was revised again and we searched for simpler solutions to some tasks. It was important that we could use the system on our own, customise surveys, modify them, see the collected data, move the data to other applications and restore previous studies.

Dreamnet started working for the questionnaire in August 2009 and the first version was finished by the end of September. After that the pre-testing of the method was conducted by MediaCity and during this phase the Valio brand was used as the test brand.

5 PRE TESTING CONDUCTED BY MEDIACITY

Writer: Anette Bengs

In the beginning of October 2009 the iDTV Lab conducted a usability and user experience study of the web-based brand research method developed within a project called ImageTestLab – Evaluating Brands on International Markets. The test was conducted in the iDTV Lab audience research laboratory at Åbo Akademi in Vaasa. Ten people participated in the study, five men and five women, aged between 22 and 61 years. The study evaluated the usability of the web-based research method, defining the extent to which a user can use a certain product to reach defined goals in a useful, effective and satisfactory way. Aside from the actual use of the product, the study also sought to ascertain the user's experience, i.e. how they perceived the product.

The study consisted of a practical section where the participants were asked to complete the task of answering the questions according to the web-based brand research method. It further included a post-test questionnaire and an interview during which the test users answered general questions about the method. During task performance the participants' eye movements and behaviour were registered and the participants were encouraged to "think aloud" while they were doing the assignment.

Participants in the study

Ten Swedish speaking adults participated in the usability test, five women and five men. The mean age of the participants was 36.5, the youngest being 22 years and the oldest 61 years. Five participants had an academic background and five participants had a non-academic background. One of the participants was previously familiar with the brand research method, also nine out of the ten participants used a computer and the Internet at least once per day. One participant used the computer and Internet several times per week, but not daily.

Structure of the test

The iDTV Lab called individuals within the target group and asked them to participate in a lab based usability study. None of the evaluators were informed about the details of the web-based brand research method or the brand being evaluated before the test.

At the lab the test participants were asked to first complete the web-based brand research questionnaire. During task performance the participants' eye movements were registered with an eye movement camera. All mouse clicks, keyboard use and screen events were also recorded. The test subjects were in direct contact with the test staff and could comment freely during the test or ask for translations if they had difficulties understanding the questions or response alternatives, which were in English. The test was followed by a short questionnaire and an interview in which the individuals were asked to comment on the test's usability in general and the pros and cons of the method. The persons were also asked to comment on how they felt while completing the web-based brand research questionnaire. As the participants tested the web-based brand research method individually, ten test sessions were arranged.

Results

The opinions, experiences and thoughts of the participants are presented in this report. The results contain the analysis of questionnaire responses, interviews and observations (including eye movements, task performance, and spontaneous comments) made during the task performances. Excerpts from the interviews are also presented in the results. The transcriptions of the interviews can also be found in Appendix 1. In the first section of the results, section 4.1, the participants' general impressions and experiences of the web-based brand research method are reported. In section 4.2, the results regarding the usability, functionality and structure of the web-based brand research method are presented. In section 4.3 the participants' opinions, performances and the experiences of the different types of questions are reported and discussed.

Impressions and experiences of the web-based brand research method

The general impression of the web-based brand research method was positive. The participants found the method to be interesting, fun, novel and quite different from traditional questionnaires and the previous web-based research methods they had encountered. Other positive elements that the participants mentioned were the ease of use and the simplicity of the

method. However, some participants found the method to be slightly difficult because of uncertainties regarding what to evaluate in certain questions (i.e. was it the brand, the content, the products or the package that were supposed to be thought of when answering the questions). The use of English also contributed to the difficulties experienced. Also, a few usability issues were found and commented on by the participants.

When the participants were asked to specify what was good about the web-based brand research method, the following answers were given:

Nice layout

Nice colours

The use of pictures

Interesting questions

When asked about the negative aspects of the method the following answers were given:

The questionnaire was too long and too time consuming.

It was not always clear what had to be evaluated (i.e. the brand, the products in the pictures, the product range as a whole, the content or the packaging).

It was not always obvious how to answer certain kinds of questions (e.g. the matrix question) or which button to press, i.e. OK or Next.

The questions requiring written answers were experienced as tedious, time consuming and too many.

The pictures were too small.

The graphic could be more appealing (3/10 participants). There were difficulties in answering specific questions that the participants did not find relevant to the Valio brand or diffuse questions which they did not really understand (e.g. the question where an orange character is used as a stimulus for associations).

When the participants were asked to rate the questionnaire on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 equals failed and 5 equals very good, the mean value was 3.1 and the mode (i.e. the most frequently given value) was 4. The percentages of responses for each alternative are presented

below. As the results show, one participant (10%) rated the method 2, two participants (20%) rated it 3, three participants (30%) rated it 3.5, and four participants (40 %) rated it 4.

Subjective experiences of the method

The results further show that the test participants experienced quite positive emotions when completing the questionnaire. On a scale from 1 to 9, where 1 indicates that very negative emotions were experienced and 9 that very positive experiences were experienced, the mean value was 7.2. As shown on the scale below the mode was 7, which was given by four (40%) participants. A further two participants (20%) rated the emotional experiences of the method as 8 and two (20%) as 9 which implies that the subjective emotional experience of the method was positive.

The majority of test participants reported that they felt calm when answering the questions. Only two participants experienced some frustrations while answering the questions. This was due to a lack of clarity and ambiguity about what to evaluate (i.e. the brand, the products in the pictures, the product range as a whole or the content) and about what was expected of them.

Mental effort

When asked about how much effort the participants expended on the method on a scale from 0 (did not require any effort at all) to 220 (required a great deal of effort), two participants rated the method as 30 (= hardly required any effort), four participants rated the effort as 40 (= required just a little effort), one as 70 (= required some effort), one as 100 (=required quite a bit of effort), one as 120 (quite demanding) and one as 135 (=demanding), with a mean value of 64.5 (=required some effort). The sense of the method requiring some effort was again due to uncertainty and a lack of clarity about what to evaluate, what was expected and the usability issues mentioned later in the report.

Opinions about appearance and layout

The general impression of the appearance and layout of the web-based brand research method was good. The participants particularly liked the use of pictures and the colours were generally perceived as nice, neutral, soothing, and pleasant. The attractiveness of the method was rated as 4.9 on a scale from 1 (=not attractive at all) to 7 (=very attractive) and the mode was 5. The

percentages of the different responses are shown below. According to this, one participant (10%) rated the attractiveness of the method as 3, one participant (10%) rated it as 4, seven participants (70%) rated it as 5, and one participant (10%) rated the attractiveness as 6.

The visual material implemented in the questionnaire was found to be good by all the participants. However, two out of the ten participants found the pictures to be too small and two participants commented on the graphics, wishing for an improvement in this area. Also, several participants commented on the picture of the three Valio products. They pointed out that they had a tendency to evaluate the three particular products when answering the questions instead of the whole brand or product range. Some suggestions for improvements made by the participants were that there could be more products, and that they could be placed closer together if the purpose was to evaluate a whole range of products. Furthermore, they suggested that in the questions where the brand or company was evaluated it would be better to show a picture of a brand logo instead of products.

Usability, functionality and logic

In general, nine out of the ten participants found the web-based research method to be easy to use and intuitive. However, a few of the participants felt mildly irritated and frustrated due to some questions being unclear regarding what to evaluate (i.e. the brand, the products in the picture, the content, packaging etc.). On a scale from 1 (=poor pragmatic quality) to 7 (=excellent pragmatic quality), the pragmatic quality, i.e. functionality and ease of use, was rated as 4.6 and the mode was 5. Below the percentages of the different responses are presented. According to the scale 1 participant (10%) rated the pragmatic quality of the tool as 3, three participants (30%) rated it as 4, four participants (40%) rated it as 5, and two participants (20%) rated the pragmatic quality of the method as 6.

Some more specific usability issues found from the observations made during the task performance and from the post-test interviews are presented below.

Next-buttons and OK-buttons

Only one person made the mistake of pressing Next instead of OK during task performance although both buttons were simultaneously shown on several pages. The rest of the participants

(9/10) found it to be quite clear and obvious that they should press OK because this button was closer to the question. However, only one person, apart from the one making the mistake during task performance realised that by pressing OK you would continue to similar questions whereas pressing Next would take you to the next section of questions. Nine out of the 10 participants thought it would be better to have only one button on the same page and when asked about which one they preferred the majority answered that it would be better and more logical to use the green Next button, throughout the questionnaire.

Clicking or “drag and drop” functions

In several questions the participants were asked to give answers by placing a smiley, brand logo or darts on an image or matrix of some kind by clicking on the area of the image or matrix he/she wanted to place it on. During task performance it was obvious that eight out of ten participants first tried to drag and drop the smiley or brand logo in order to answer a particular question. However, after a while they did realise that they had to click on the image or matrix instead. In the interviews the participants said that it felt intuitive to use the “drag/drop” function. Also, as one participant commented, it would have made it possible to try out different places before dropping the logo or smiley. The suggestions for improvements regarding these kinds of questions were to either change the “click” function to a “drag/drop” function or to more clearly state in the instructions that a logo or smiley is placed in an image by clicking on the image.

“Back”-buttons

About half of the participants thought it would be good to add a “back button” to the pages in the questionnaire in order to be able to go back and check or change earlier answers and questions.

Length of the questionnaire

It took between 50 to 90 minutes for the participants to complete the web-based version of the questionnaire. two participants completed the questionnaire in under 60 minutes whereas seven participants completed it within 60 to 75 minutes, and only one person took 90 minutes. However, considering that the test was in English, and not in the participants’ mother tongue some caution has to be used when interpreting the time that was required. Most of the

participants did feel that the questionnaire was too long and time consuming. However, about half of the participants said that it did not feel like it had taken as long to complete the questionnaire as it actually did.

When asked about how much time the respondents would be willing to spend on filling in a questionnaire like this one at home six participants said that they would be willing to spend approximately 30 minutes. Of these, four participants pointed out that the questionnaire has to be interesting and/or personally rewarding otherwise they wouldn't be willing to spend more than 5 to 15 minutes. three participants would be willing to spend 10 to 15 minutes on a questionnaire like this one and one participant wouldn't be willing to spend more than 5 minutes.

Placement of the main questions

Only one participant found the questions in the upper blue field to be easily noticeable, whereas nine out of the ten participants found the questions to be a bit difficult to notice. The participants having difficulties focused more on the middle area and the white space of the screen. Only after realizing that they did not understand what was expected of them did they look for the question in the upper blue field. This required a bit of learning and conscious effort in order for these participants to notice and/or remember to read the main questions in the upper blue field. As one participant said "you really have to think about reading the questions in the blue field".

Below (figure 12) is an example from the eye tracking data, which illustrates the problem discussed above. The hot spots, i.e. the red, yellow and green areas of the page, in image 1 below are the areas that the participants have focused on. The red areas are areas which the participants have been looking at the most, the yellow areas have received lesser attention and the green areas are areas that have received the least attention from the participants (except for the uncoloured areas, which received no visual attention at all). This data is from the first 10 seconds after entering a new page. When entering a new web page, for example, it is usually thought to be crucial that the most important elements are noticed within the first ten seconds in order for the page to be considered as effective, efficient, easy to use and intuitive. As the eye

tracking data below shows, the question in the upper blue field on the page has received very little attention compared to the middle area.

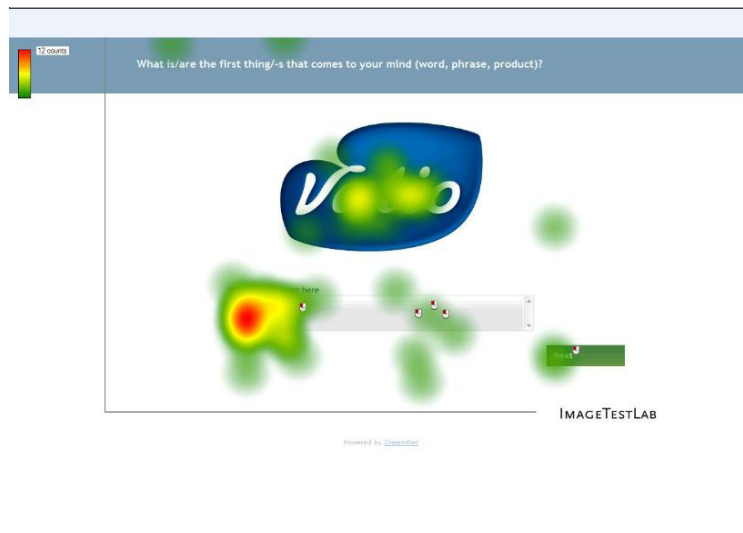


Figure 12. Hot spots of the participants' attention during the first 10 seconds after entering the page

In figure 13 the gaze plots of four participants are presented. Different coloured gaze plots represent the different participants' eye movements during the first 10 seconds after entering the page. As the data shows, only one person has read the question in the upper blue field.

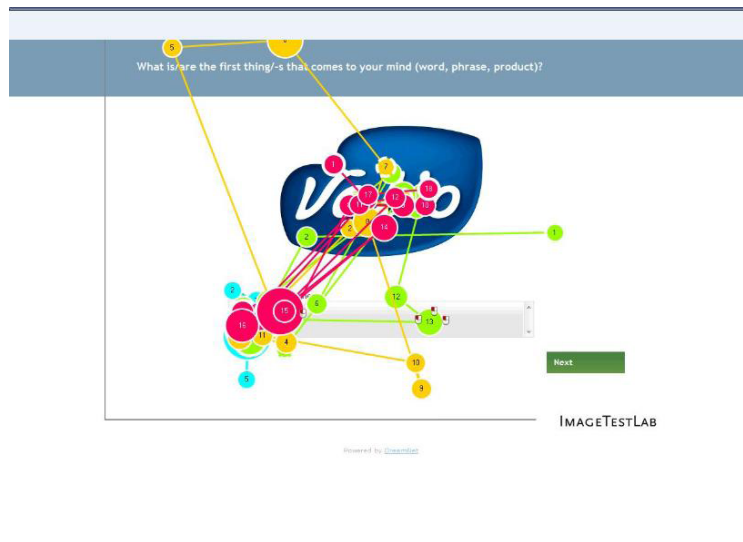


Figure 13. Four participants gaze plots during the first 10 seconds after entering the page

Time line

When asked about whether or not it would be good to include a timeline in the questionnaire in order to clarify how many questions have been completed and how many questions there are left, most of the participants could not say if it would be a positive thing or negative thing. They did realise that the inclusion or exclusion of a timeline would have both benefits and drawbacks. On one hand it might be motivating but on the other hand it might not be motivating. Only two of the participants said that they definitely would have preferred a timeline of some kind. The rest were unsure about how a timeline would affect them and whether or not it would motivate them to complete the whole questionnaire or not.

Instructions

The instructions were generally found to be clear, however some were experienced as unclear due to difficulties in understanding what exactly to evaluate (i.e. the brand, the products in the picture, the packages etc.). The instructions were also found to be unclear due to English being the language used. Two out of the ten participants thought the instructions were very clear, whereas the rest found the instructions in some of the questions to be slightly unclear.

Structure

The structure of the method was found to be logical by eight out of ten participants. Two participants who did not find it to be logical pointed out that it was unclear how to interpret some of the questions and that it was difficult to understand what to evaluate. One of them also found the whole questionnaire to be slightly messy.

Opinions and comments about specific questions**Open questions**

There are quite a lot of open questions requiring written answers in the web-based brand research method. Only 2 participants thought it was good to be able to specify the answers given. However, the rest of the participants thought there were too many questions of this kind and they also found the questions difficult to answer sometimes. They thought it would have been easier to answer the questions by choosing from an existing list of alternatives with an "Other" option. Several participants mentioned that they would not have answered the

questions requiring written answers if they had filled in the questionnaire at home. Also, during the task performance sessions several participants asked if they really had to answer the open questions. They were encouraged to do so in order for us to measure the time required to complete the entire questionnaire.

Questions targeting the participants' interests, values etc.

The questions in the beginning of the questionnaire, consisting of lists of alternatives on a white background, were found to be clear by seven out of the ten participants. The questions, instructions and the way to answer each question were clear and easy to understand. However, three participants discovered that they could choose an alternative by clicking on the text by trial-and-error. Suggestions for improvements regarding these types of questions were:

The text should be clearer and easier to read, either by enlarging the text or by adding more space between the alternatives in the lists

Framing the alternatives

Numbering the alternatives

Adding boxes to tick

Scales using slider controls

All the participants liked answering the questions which used a slider. The questions were experienced as simple, easy to use, and intuitive.

Questions using smileys/emoticons to mark positive and negative elements of an image

In this question participants were required to mark the different areas of an image of a Valio web-page in order to answer different questions, such as "What catches your eye". The areas were marked by placing a positive, green smiley on the areas given when giving a positive answer to a question and a red, sad smiley in order to give negative answers about an image. This question was found to be quite easy to understand and answer by the participants. However, eight out of ten participants tried to drag-and-drop the smileys instead of just clicking on the image in order to place them there. Seven of the ten participants also thought it would be better if both the green, happy smiley and the red, sad smiley would be simultaneously visible on the same page. For three participants it was not instantly obvious that the first

question was followed by another question. Instead they thought that they had to answer the first question several times by marking more areas in the image. They did not read the questions in the upper blue field. Further, there were contradictory results regarding the question of whether the participants wanted to be able to change the placement of the smileys and/or mark several areas per question. Three participants thought there were too many questions of this kind, three thought it was unclear that there were different questions, and four participants thought some of the questions were difficult to answer. Several participants also found it easier to mark positive areas rather than negative areas.

Questions using pictures of different persons as response alternatives

In these questions participants were asked to choose a certain amount of pictures from a broad range of alternatives in order to answer the questions “Who could use the brand” and “Who could work in the company”. According to most of the participants, this question was easy to understand and simple to answer. Some participants thought there were too many pictures and that several pictures were quite similar. They would have preferred a smaller amount of pictures of a larger size. However, about half of the participants went through all of the pictures whereas half of them just skimmed through the pictures. Further, it was unclear to some participants that they had to explain why they had chosen each of the pictures individually. About half of the participants gave one answer explaining why they had chosen a whole group of pictures. According to these participants the different pictures should be framed or enhanced more clearly. Also, most of the participants found out by accident that the images can be enlarged and they thought that clearer instructions should be added.

Questions using an orange character as a stimulus for associations

In this task the participant was asked to write down who he/she associates the orange character with and what the character thinks of the brand. The majority of test participants (7/10) found this question to be diffuse or strange. Most of these found the orange figure to be diffuse and did not really “see” anything they could associate it with. It was also unclear to some of the participants what they were supposed to think about when answering the question (i.e. the company, the brand, the pictures of products shown earlier, the content etc.). However, three participants found this type of question to be fun and easy to answer. Further, the following

question consisting of two orange characters was perceived as clearer and easier to answer but most of the participants did not relate the characters to the previous question.

Association tasks

The questions containing pictures of animals, cars etc., which should be associated with the brand, were found easy, simple and fun by seven participants. Only one participant found it difficult to answer the questions. The association tasks requiring written answers were experienced as “overkill” by two participants. They thought it was difficult to associate a product such as milk with a feeling and further to explain why. Several participants thought about the three Valio products in the picture instead of thinking about the brand when completing the association tasks.

Dart task

For this question the participants were required to throw darts into a dart board in order to answer the extent to which they agreed with different statements. The question was considered to be easy to use, nice and fun by seven participants whereas three participants would have preferred to answer the questions by using another type of scale.

Matrix task

This question required the participants to place different brands, including Valio, in a matrix consisting of four fields and two opposite word pairs (technical-human oriented and innovative-security seeking). About half of the participants found it quite easy to complete this task while half of them found the question problematic and difficult to understand. A few of the participants had difficulties understanding whether to place the brands on the lines or whether they should place them in the white fields in the matrix. It was mainly the participants with non-academic backgrounds that had difficulties with this question. It was noted by two participants that some brands might be both technical and human oriented, for example Apple, so it might be difficult to place these kinds of brands in a matrix like this one. Also, several participants tried to drag-and-drop the brands instead of clicking on the matrix in order to place them there.

Summary

For the iDTV Lab, MediaCity conducted a usability and user experience study of the web-based brand research method developed within the ImageTestLab project. A total of ten adults participated in the study, five women and five men aged between 22 and 61 years. Five of the participants had a non academic background whereas five participants had an academic background. They were all quite experienced users of computers and Internet. During the practical part of the test the participants completed the web-based brand research questionnaire while their eye movements, behaviour and spontaneous comments were registered. The task performance was followed by a short questionnaire and an interview that asked how the user experienced the web-based research method and its general usability as well as the pros and cons of the method.

The method was generally evaluated as easy to use, simple, fun and novel. However a few issues were identified. The participants perceived the questionnaire or the method to be too long and too time consuming. It took on average of one hour to complete the whole questionnaire, but the participants would have been willing to spend only 30 minutes or less on filling in a questionnaire like the one given at home. However, the language used in the questionnaire was English, hence not the participants' mother tongue, which might have influenced the time required to complete the entire questionnaire. Another issue relating to the time required to complete the questionnaire was the amount of open questions requiring written answers. Eight out of the ten participants experienced the answering of these types of questions as tedious and time consuming. A further issue, which confused the participants, was the existence of one Next button and one OK button on the same page. The majority of participants preferred the consistent use of the green Next button. Also, the main question in the upper blue field required a conscious re-orientation of attention when entering a page. Nine out of the ten participants reported that they had at some point forgotten about the questions in the blue field and only remembered to look for them when they did not understand what to do by looking at the information in the middle of the page. Suggestions for improvements made by the participants were to move the questions down to the middle area with a white background or to somehow make the questions in the blue field more noticeable. Furthermore, the participants had sometimes difficulties understanding whether they were supposed to evaluate the brand, the products in the pictures, the content or the packaging etc., and pointed out that this should be

clearly stated in the instructions. In addition, several participants also mentioned that it was not always obvious how they were supposed to answer certain types of questions they had not encountered before. This was particularly obvious regarding the matrix task and the task where a question was answered by placing a happy and a sad smiley on the image of a web page. Generally the participants intuitively tried to drag and drop things that required them to move something and place it on an image or matrix of some kind. However, when realising that it did not work the majority discovered that they should click on the image in order to place a logo, smiley or other element on an image by trial-and-error.

The variety of different types of questions used in the method was generally regarded a positive and motivating. The participants particularly liked the questions that used a slider control and questions with response alternatives to click on. They also appreciated the questions which included pictures. Questions that were experienced as diffuse or strange by some of the participants were the matrix, the question using an orange character as a stimulus for associations, and the dart task. However, several participants did like the dart task. The task requiring participants to choose pictures of persons who might work in the company or who might use the brand were considered easy. According to some participants, there were too many pictures to choose from whereas others thought the amount was acceptable. However, about half of the participants went through all of the pictures whereas half of them just skimmed through the pictures. Furthermore, the task following the selection of pictures was to give separate explanations for why each of the pictures had been chosen. Several participants did not realise this and gave one explanation for the chosen pictures as a group, pointing out that they did not notice that one image at a time was framed. To conclude, the opinions about and experiences of the web-based brand research method were positive. The method was regarded as fun, novel and interesting. The issues of the usability test were seen as quite easy to correct, and thus improving its usability and making the method even more user friendly and intuitive was planned.

6 INTERNATIONAL TESTING

Before conducting the international test the questionnaire was again modified according to the results of the usability study described above. In figure 14 the layout of the test and the changes made are shown. The main question remains in the same place but the background was changed from blue to white. We also changed the placement of the logo and the Next button to make more space for the images. The questions and instructions were revised and the importance of reading them through was emphasised.

Figure 14. The layout of the questionnaire (ImageTestLab)

This chapter describes how the international testing was conducted and the results gained. We will investigate positives and negatives of the web-based research method and explore each question in order to gain information about how they were perceived, what kind of information they provide and relevant they are for the whole questionnaire.

The questionnaire was tested in Sweden and in Russia due to wishes of the participating companies. In Sweden the sample included subjects from both the countryside and the city. In Russia participants were collected from three cities: Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Novosibirsk. The background study review of Russian culture revealed that people are quite different in cities and in the countryside. That is why it was important to remember that the results only covered Russian cities. The sample represented all age groups from under 20 to over 60 and social

classes in both countries. Especially in Russia it was important to have the questions in Russian since elderly Russians are not familiar with English. Basic computer skills and internet access were demanded. Our aim was to have at least 100 responses for each company in both countries. As for the amount of company respondents we did not think of any certain number.

The questionnaires were translated into the chosen languages and customised for each participating company. MediaCity had a large record of available subjects in Sweden and they were able to send the links in Sweden. In Russia, we collaborated with a partner company which provided us the agreed amount of subjects. Each of the participating companies delivered the e-mails to the company subjects they wished to participate. To make sure we had enough responses it was clear that some kind of reward should be considered. We decided to have a draw for 10 gift cards among the consumer participants in Sweden. In Russia each of the consumer participants was given a gift valued at about 6.5 euros. The links to the tests were sent via e-mail including a letter describing the test. A reminder was sent about a week later in case someone had missed the first one.

The international consumer survey started on the 3rd of December and finished on the 20th of January and the company surveys started on the 15th of December and finished on the 20th of January. The holiday season influenced the duration of the tests; many of the company respondents were not back in their office until halfway through January.

Most of the people answered within two days of receiving the link. We noticed that the reminder e-mail might not have been necessary in Russia since people did not understand its purpose and felt irritated by it. In Finland and in Sweden this is a common policy. We were able to follow the amount of answers while the survey was ongoing, which was useful since we were able to keep the sample size equal in both countries. If some of the questionnaires seemed popular in Sweden and not as popular in Russia, then the Swedish one could be shut down for a while. This then improved the comparability of the results. The translation of the answers into English also began at the beginning of this phase.

6.1 The responses

The amount of responses was larger than expected. We were unnecessarily worried about the length and laboriousness of the test. In Sweden about 2000 started the test and in Russia about 550. All of the companies received an equal amount of responses for their customised tests. Some of the answers were not valid and they were revised in analysing phase. The Internet connections seemed to be successful and we received only a few reports about connection failures. Also the questions and task were mostly understood correctly.

For company questionnaires we received very few answers and they were not valid for the analysis. The lack of responses may be due to the length of the questionnaire, the time of the year (holiday season) and the lack of reward. A great amount of respondents started the test and then stopped after a few questions. As company testing was not the main focus of the whole testing we decided to leave the situation as it was and concentrate on the customer respondents.

6.2 The results

For each of the participating companies a report on the results of the tests based on their own material was made. The results presented here are general descriptions of the results of the international pilot. A few examples are used to describe the answers but we do not mention which brand they are related to.

The web-based research method was revealed to be a rapid way for gathering information from a large amount of respondents. Most of the respondents answered one or two days after receiving the link. The method was cost-effective and the testing could be repeated easily. For example, if there were not enough responses for a valid report, a link could be sent again to the same respondents or new ones. The gathered data was stored and it was possible to go through it before the survey was closed. It was also possible to follow the amount of responses during the test to keep the sample sizes equal in both cultures.

However there were some problems with the method. As the link was sent via e-mail, a list of assumed respondents was needed. However, it is not always easy to acquire lists like these, especially in foreign countries. In Russia we solved the problem by contacting a company specialised in business in Russia. There might also be problems on how to get a proper sample: gender, different age groups, social groups etc. A sample size must be larger than the minimum amount of responses required since all of the invited do not necessarily take part or some of them might leave the test unfinished. As the test was quite long and some of the tasks laborious all the participants may not answer properly and this might be a problem when analysing the data. Non valid answers are difficult to distinguish especially in quantitative questions. When it comes to reward, some kind of present would seem to be almost obligatory. People are more willing to take part if they get something for themselves, even if it is only a chance to win something. Otherwise the amount of invitations would have to be extremely large to get the required sample.

6.3 Evaluating the method

Generally, the respondents in both cultures had a positive impression of the test. The respondents found the questionnaire to be different from those they had done before and liked it because of that. However, the length of the test was considered to be one of the main problems. Also, some of the questions were seen as irrelevant and people confused since they did not understand the point of them.

Associations: logo, product, marketing material, package/fair stand, country/region

The open questions, including images, revealed first impressions when seeing the brand and its visual material. The questions clearly, revealed associations and feelings related to the images and products even when they were not familiar. The respondents answered the test quite freely, in depth and spontaneously. They paid attentions to the colours, forms and positions, the spelling of the names and how they sounded when said aloud. The customer respondents seemed to answer with more detail than the company respondents; for example, the name of the brand reminded them of food or a movie or letters that were associated an Asian type of writing. They also analysed the images more precisely. The results clearly showed which

elements the respondents in the different cultures paid attention to, what they found appealing, what they did not like and what was found confusing. As was found out in background research familiar things catch the attention and e.g. familiar logotypes and elements were noticed and commented by respondents. The order of the questions was found to be relevant.

Quantitative data was collected to support the interpretation of the open questions. There were more responses received for this than for the open questions. However, some of the answers were not valid and it was almost impossible to determine which ones those were. The questions were situated in-between the open questions since they were considered to be easy and fast to answer. The positioning seemed to be successful in achieving the desired aim.

Area marking

In the area marking-task respondents marked the positive and negative elements of the image and explained their choices. The questions asked were:

- What catches your eye?
- What reveals its credibility and professionalism?
- What reveals its quality?
- What reveals its pioneering aspects?

The task revealed concrete elements about the images or web page. Although there were not many cultural differences perceived some of those were quite clear. The subjects in both cultures paid attention to the images on the page before looking at the text. The companies valued the utility of the task when designing images or web pages, choosing images and texts and placing them on the layout and deciding what they want to be perceived and noting what is important in different cultures.

Photo of a situation

The respondents were asked to describe a situation in which the brand is used. The logo of the brand was used as a stimulus for association. Most stories were positive and pleasant and some stories were really thoughtful and detailed. Stories revealed the places, situations, atmosphere and the time of day and also who the user might be, what they are like and what are they doing.

Examples of the stories:

“ Building a porch at home, summer, the sun is shining and there’s the smell of saw-dust”

Swedish respondent

“ Petrol station, a long-haul truck is being filled with oil, a strong-armed semi-nude man with his shirt off revealing a bulldog tattoo is under the car bonnet” Russian respondent

“ A tractor... a farmer seeking his wife” Swedish respondent

“A toilet at a gas station. Washing hands. Filthy. Functional” Swedish respondent

“A promotional event on the Silja Serenade boat for defending ecology” Russian respondent

“The workplace in full swing, a few people are busy working on a major engineering project, large automated machines are visible everywhere, it’s noisy” Russian respondent

“ A picnic for the whole family, everybody is resting, playing active games” Russian respondent

Speaking bubble

The respondents described who could be talking about the brand, in what situation and what they are saying. The stories were again positive and pleasant and especially for Russians it seemed hard to find anything negative to say. This task revealed who they are talking about and what are they talking about. For example, environmental issues were discussed between the seller and buyer, not between friends or workers. Workers liked to compare the products and their durability when friends, neighbours and couples recommended or borrowed products from each other.

User profile and employee profile

The respondents selected the images of the persons who they thought used the brand and who might work for the brand and explained their choices. A collage of images revealed the age, gender and profession of the perceived user or employee. The most popular images were quite similar for all the companies in both cultures. Bright colours may have attracted and influenced the choices. It would also have been relevant to ask who could not be the user or employee. In general the task was liked but the amount of images used was found to be too large. However there should be an adequate amount of options, since the brands tested will vary. In figure 15 the images used in the correct order are presented. The people marked with red squares were those most commonly seen as users and employees.

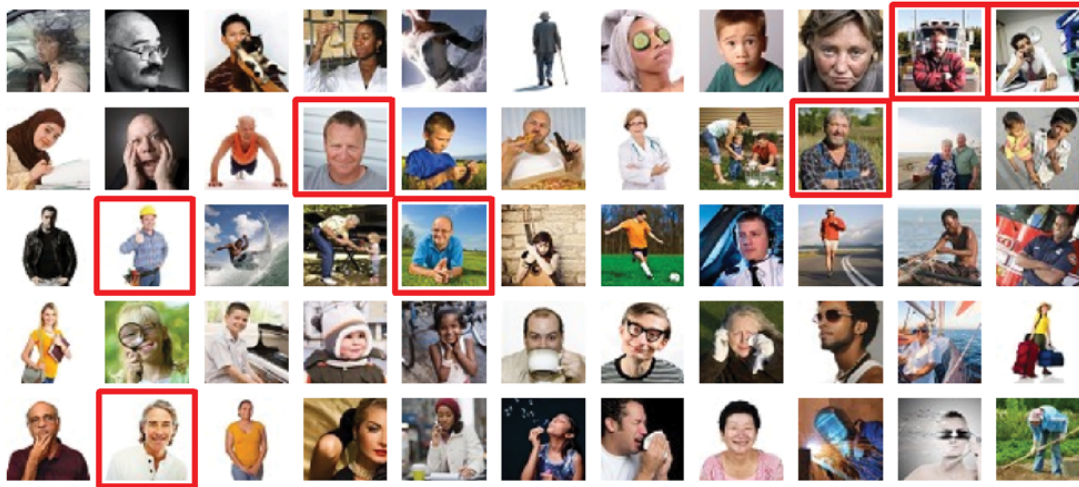


Figure 15. User and employee profile (ImageTestLab)

Brand personality

Respondents were asked which animal, car, feeling/emotions, character/celebrity, colour, scent/smell, music and other product/brand the brand would be and to explain their choices. There were ten options for animal and car and the rest of the questions were open questions. There might have been too many questions and since the task was placed at the end of the questionnaire the respondents may have started to lose their concentration. This task was also found to be the most irrelevant and people became confused since they did not understand the connection with the brand. The possibility to select from the images was appreciated, especially when analysing the results. Nevertheless, the selection of given images might be too leading and an option to write down the answer should be included.

We used the logo of the brand to stimulate associations. However, more images of the products and real advertisements could have been used to help create a general impression.

Brand values

This type of the question was quantitative. The respondents were asked to “throw a dart”. The closer to the centre of the dart board they placed the dart the closer to the brand they related the value asked about (see figure 16). The task was fast and easy to do and was placed at the very end of the test. The biggest problem was found in translating the words as they should be

interpreted similarly in both cultures for a valid analysis. It is suggested that very basic values like fair, genuine, creative etc. are used.

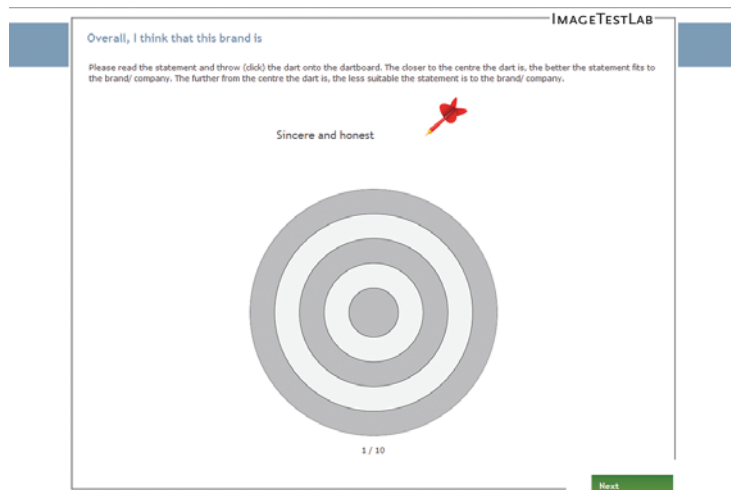


Figure 16. Dart board (ImageTestLab)

Matrix

In the matrix task respondents placed the brand and its competitors on a matrix. Two word pairs were chosen by companies. This task worked best for the company respondents since they probably also knew the competitors. It was difficult for those who did not know the brand and they might have answered based on the appearance of the logo. It was also difficult to distinguish whether real answers were given by those who just skipped through the task.

Additional questions

We also asked a few additional questions at the end of the test. However the reporting system was not finished for that section and proper results thus do currently not exist.

The order of the test was found to be successful. The laborious tasks were placed at the beginning and the easy ones were placed at the end of the test. The test will be modified according to the results of the international test; each question and its relevance and purpose will be revised. It was suggested that question groups are developed for different target groups; customers, the workers of the company or company respondents, and for different purposes; testing a logotype, appearance and the elements of a product or a marketing campaign. These

tests should be fast to complete but also be cost-effective tools when collecting data, especially internationally, and for evaluating and discussing the results with other stakeholders.

Because these international tests used all the questions it became clear as to which of them best suits each target group. The ability to distinguish the respondents who knew the brand from those who did not know was found to be important. The latter group will answer based on the images shown in the test and the first group will reflect their own personal experiences in their answers.

The cultural differences were not striking and they were seen mostly in specific details. Generally, Russians answered positively and it seemed hard for them to say negative comments. This may reflect the high PDI (Power Distance Index) in Russia and their appreciation of official agencies.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The first objective of this study was to investigate how brands and images could be studied in the international business context. A literature review revealed many ways to evaluate and measure brands internationally. Many studies came to the conclusion that culture indeed has a significant influence on branding and brand developers are becoming more aware of that. Since, in managerial and academic literature, experts often describe branding as a universal technique it became clear that differences in brand images perceived by the customers are due to their individual and cultural background. Only a few studies have focused on branding from a cross-cultural perspective and ready-made methods hardly exist. Muova's previous project called Visual (2002-2004) concentrated on this problem and revealed the importance of the visibility of branding and the perception of individuals and thus created an environment in which brand images could be tested. ImageTestLab developed this idea further by developing a web-based method for measuring and evaluating the brand in international markets.

Visibility of the ImageTestLab survey tool was one of the main assets and improvements compared to the previous studies. As was suggested previously, visibility could prevent bias created by questions with linguistic expressions since visibility provokes more authentic and intuitive answers. In cross cultural research, semantic interpretation has a significant influence on perception. Visual elements of the brand are interpreted differently in different cultures and their semantic contents differ. We used visibility to pass the cultural bias caused by linguistic limitations. For example, using indirect brand research techniques presented by Laakso (page 20) allows people to define the brand personality on their own. Explanation given reveals how it is perceived in a specific culture. When interpreting the answers of another culture it is vital to reveal the semantic meaning in them. This demands a profound understanding of the culture and its visual orderings. It could be considered to use authentic culture's representative when analyzing the results since researcher's perception is always saturated by his/her own culture.

ImageTestLab project confronted many challenges caused by cultural differences in a form of contacting and interacting with respondents and interpreting words and expressions. We agree with Li (2001) that it is not an easy task to study and understand the impact of culture on branding. Is it even possible to do cross-cultural brand research and what are the benefits of it?

This research revealed that it is possible and the survey tool has the potential to become a useful tool for evaluating brands. Hofstede's five dimensions (IDV, LTO, MAS, PDI, UAI) and semantic aspects (symbols, rituals, heroes and values) of culture all share high semantic value and provided a useful framework when interpreting the answers and making future plans for brand development and positioning. For instance, if the respondents found the brand used mostly in collective context it might be useful for a company to use elements emphasizing collectivity in their marketing activities. Or if the respondents associated the brand with a certain hero or character, they probably associate the brand with the traits and associated values of the hero/ character in the particular culture. Culture provides a framework for a brand to adjust to. It sets up its own connotations for the visual elements of the brand and research could reveal differences in these. According to Hofstede the values are the hardest aspect to reveal as values are learned implicitly but not consciously. Visual testing may be useful for revealing these unconscious values which are otherwise difficult to observe or discuss.

Brand is perceived by the consumer, and it is a mental space created in the mind of the consumer. Brand equity consists of dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. Our testing combines all of these dimensions and provides also additional dimensions, such as cultural aspects. It could be regarded as a cultural mind map of the brand. Since brand equity is the totality of what consumers, distributors, dealers and competitors feel and think about a brand, testing of the brand's visual elements in international context brings out deeper understanding of the brand and its value. Compared to Gad's Brand Mind Space (see page 18) consisting of functional, social, mental and spiritual dimensions, visual testing may reveal deeper and more insightful review for measuring the strength and value of the brand. Since many of these dimensions are subconscious and so far hard to measure, we suggest that as visuality has a tendency to provoke emotions, visual testing could be more emotionally loaded. In addition, visual testing could also reveal associations more efficiently than text-based tests.

The second objective was a web-based evaluation method which was developed and evaluated by testing the brands of the participating companies. As a research method the web-based tool succeeded in meeting the requirements set for the project. The end product can be customised, used in different cultures and in different languages, utilise multimedia content and store

gathered data for further usage and analysis. The international test revealed the benefits and disadvantages of the method and the questions that were very usable and the questions which were not.

The results revealed useful information on both small and general details, and the participating companies liked the innovative and creative approach of the study. The participating companies found that the results provided support for the image they had hoped to create and confirmed their assumptions rather than surprised them. The cultural differences revealed were not striking but small details were quite clear. However, these details build a whole image and are extremely important when thinking about the elements used in images simultaneously targeted at different cultures. The results further emphasised the importance of adjusting marketing and advertising material for a target group. Kansei Engineering is an affective method and it associates consumer's feelings to a specific product element (Nagamachi, 1995). As related to Kansei method our tool works quite similarly and reveals feelings related to the visuality such as colours and composition in the image. These findings may have significant benefits when developing the brand and efficient marketing also in international context. In relation to fulfilling De Mooij's (2005) preferences of equivalency for the samples, language/terms and providing methods of measurement for studying two different cultures we succeeded quite well. The biggest problems encountered were to do with the translation of the terms and ensuring that they were interpreted similarly in both cultures.

To conclude, ImageTestLab research framework is presented as a guideline for studying brands internationally. The framework consists of five phases:

1. Collecting background information
 - Brand identity – company interviews
 - Target culture review
2. Constructing and conducting the survey
 - Choosing the target group and/or respondents
 - Choosing the questions and testing material
3. Analysis of the results – brand analysis
4. Presenting the results
5. Discussion

In addition, we suggest that the visuality of the test improved the motivation of the respondents and made the test more fun. The responses were also very vivid and detailed and provided considerable information about various aspects of the brand. The use of images made the test seem light and effortless compared to text-based questionnaires. The web-based method enables the use of multimedia content and this is likely to be further exploited in the future. The web-based research method was fast, cost-effective and contains the possibility to collect information from a large amount of respondents nationally and internationally. However it must be noticed that we tested only two cultures and although they have differences, both share a Western lifestyle. In future studies it would be interesting to see how our method will work in Asian cultures where cognitive skills differ or in cultures where the level of computer skills is low.

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