
Exploring the emotional territory for brands

Received in revised form.

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Abstract

It has become a truism that brand marketing is in the business of selling emotional connections rather than product benefits. Because of the relatively small number of primary emotions, however, brands in the same categories often end up standing for the same sort of emotions. Let us face facts: telecoms brands either connect or empower people; most whisky brands tend to occupy the emotional territories of maturity or discernment; cleaning product brands have at their core the idea of the good carer, be it mother/father/spouse/self; many vodka and pre-mix vodka brands play within the territory of transgression. Therefore, the key questions to ask about these brands are: What kind of connecting or empowerment? What kind of maturity? What kind of carer? What kind of transgression? It is this specific differentiated expression within an emotional territory that makes the difference between success and failure for brands. This paper highlights a different approach to exploring these emotional territories through using research stimulus (called Brandcepts) that can actively help respondents to make the sort of fine distinctions in the world of emotional territories that they would never be able to make on their own.

Keywords:

Brandcepts,
emotional
territories, *qualis*
(what kind of ...?),
brand positioning,
brand extension

INTRODUCTION

Revisiting the purpose of qualitative research

It has become a truism that brand marketing is in the business of communicating and selling emotional connections and benefits rather than just products and services. If only because of the relatively small number of primary emotions, however, brands in the same sort of categories tend to stand for the same sort of emotions:

- all telecoms brands either connect or empower people
- most whisky brands tend to occupy the emotional territories of maturity or discernment
- cleaning product brands have at their core the idea of the good carer, be it mother/father/spouse/self

- several vodka and pre-mix vodka brands play within the territory of transgression.

The relatively easy job is defining what emotion or emotions are to be sold. The difficult job is coming up with the particular nuance within an emotional territory that can resonate with a particular brand and thereby create a memorable and compelling connection with consumers. Indeed, it is the specific differentiated expression of what sort of transgression, what sort of connecting or empowerment, what sort of maturity or what sort of good mother/father/carers that makes the difference between success and failure for brands. Of course, this is the integral *purpose* of qualitative research: to make fine distinctions within particular properties

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or characteristics. Hence the derivation of the word qualitative, from *qualis* (what kind or type of?), as opposed to the derivation of the word quantitative, from *quanto* (how many?) (Barnham, 2003). One of the key purposes of group discussions is to get consumers to consider questions such as:

- What kind of indulgence is the Magnum brand?
- What kind of specific *Australianness* is Fosters?
- What kind of sense of humour code is appropriate to Smirnoff Ice and how might this be different from one appropriate for WKD?
- What kind of cooking enjoyment is Knorr and how is it different from the cooking enjoyment of Maggi?
- What kind of sociability should Stella Artois stand for and how would this compare with the sociability of Carlsberg? (Derived from Barnham, 2003)

Difficulties in meeting this purpose

One of the key issues for consumers in struggling to respond to these questions is that they are inherently difficult to answer. First, because it is expecting discussion group respondents to become instant experts in deconstructing fairly abstract concepts and it takes attendance at a lot of group discussions to get to that level of aptitude. Secondly, because the type of stimulus used to encourage the exploration of these questions is often not useful in helping consumers to articulate the all-important distinctions upon which brands can position themselves successfully. The kind of stimulus used to answer these sorts of question in group discussions tends to fall into two generic types:

- *Mood boards*: a collection of images designed to evoke a certain emotional territory, lifestyle, need-state, feeling, mood, ambience, etc.
- *Concept/positioning statements*:

written text designed to explain a particular benefit, brand connection, proposition, etc.

Figure 1 shows examples of these types of research stimulus, here combining the mood board collection of images with multi-layered concept statements. Used individually or together, mood boards and concept/positioning statements are often unhelpful in enabling consumers to answer the *qualis*, 'what kind of' questions. This is because they commit the seven deadly sins of brand development (Woods, 2003) as shown in Table 1.

DEVELOPING AND USING STIMULI TO CREATE AN EMOTIONAL MAP FOR BRANDS

Brandcept stimuli

A different approach to creating and using research stimuli is therefore needed. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate an approach to research stimuli that can actively help respondents to make the sort of fine distinctions in the world of emotional territories that they would never be able to make on their own. This involves creating three-dimensional stimuli that can explode the emotional territory areas into tangible realities to which consumers can respond effectively and dynamically.

Advertising is the popular language of brands. Not only is it usually the most visible and direct means of communicating brand messages, but also consumers have been trained since birth to think and to talk about brands through the language of advertising. Advertising is particularly good at bringing to life particular benefits, emotions and insights about people's lives in an appealing and three-dimensional way, and communicating these benefits, emotions and insights in ways that can be understood clearly and immediately. This language of advertising therefore needs to be the

consumers into articulating these insights, benefits and emotional territories.

- These adcepts are called *brandcepts* because they are expressions of what a brand *might* be. They are *not* attempts to create advertising. As such, they represent stimuli designed to get people to make the sort of fine distinctions in the world of emotional territories that they would never be able to make on their own. The sort of distinctions that they would never be able to make with only a few concept statements and accompanying mood boards.
- In a typical project of this nature, a large number of different *brandcepts* would be created. Maybe eight to ten for a specific area within an emotional territory like empowerment (see Figure 2 for an example).
- In all, up to 100 brandcepts explore adjacent emotional territories (see Figure 3).

How can this enormous number of

stimuli be productively used in research interactions?

- The brandcepts are arranged in a gallery — a large room — according to theme or emotional territory area. Research participants then tour this gallery of *brandcepts* and pick out a small number each (up to five) that appeal to them personally.
- These brandcepts are then discussed in group discussions. The size of an eight-participant group ensures a wide coverage of *all* the different areas. The aim of the brandcept stimulus is to enable people to articulate where they think a brand can go and where they think a brand could stand through talking the language of advertising.
- A further advantage of this approach is that participants themselves are choosing what they want to talk about. This avoids the negativity of much new product and service research when consumers are simply brought in to comment on something that has effectively been decided and



Figure 2: Examples of brandcepts



Figure 3: Further examples of brandcepts

specified in detail and now simply requires some simple tweaking or consumer ‘check’.

These brandcepts are created as follows.

- Using the same tools and techniques as advertising itself. Especially those approaches that are used at

the beginning of the creative development process since the emphasis here is to produce a wide variety of different approaches that can encourage an exhaustive exploration of a particular territory (see Table 2).

- The guiding principle is not perfectly formed and finished

Table 2 Tools and techniques for creating brandcepts

A different perspective	Presenting a brand from the viewpoint of other things or events associated with it
Types of humour	Cruel humour, out of context, hyperbole, at the expense of others, funny peculiar, mild irony, self-deprecation, wit, etc
Before and after	The difference between before using the product and after equals the value of the product
Exaggeration	Exaggerating product features, solutions and problems that emphasise potential benefits
Defying expectation	Doing the opposite of what people might expect
Leaving things out	Omitting something as a means of emphasising it
Paradoxes	A paradox is when the very existence of a thing negates the conditions that make that existence possible
Challenge	Provoking, inciting, stimulating, etc
Mixing and matching	Combining or associating different things
Communication for other brands	Eg ads from other successful campaigns from other markets and/or categories
Fantasies	Fairy tales, fables, dreams, etc
Stereotypes	Stereotypes, cliches, etc
Story-telling	What sort of story could involve the brand?
Double meanings	Opportunities for ambiguity or double meanings in the brand
Word play	Integrating words into the picture in an unusual way

(Adapted from Pricken, 2002; Saunders, 1997a and 1997b)

- advertising ideas but stimuli that should get a reaction from people. Like advertising itself, this brandcept stimulus should provoke, shock, excite, amuse, seduce or inform.
- Because brandcepts are stimuli, they are deliberately produced in a rough format — simple typed or even hand-written lines, images often self-consciously appropriated from other sources. Respondents need to see these brandcepts as works in progress because that way they will become part of that process of co-creation through using the brandcepts as a means of giving a voice to the different ideas and motivations that exist within people. If fully finished examples are produced then people are simply passing judgment on the finished work of others rather than acting as co-creators of the concept themselves.
 - Some articulate the Third Age idea of the new maturity (life begins at 60) (4–6)
 - Some suggest the passing of experience and wisdom from father to son (7–8)
 - Some assert the extra social and sexual confidence of maturity (9)
 - Some associate maturity with particular qualities such as discernment, wisdom or friendship (10–12).

In their best-selling book, 'The Atlas of Experience', the Dutch cartographers, Louise van Swaaij and Jean Klare (2000) created a detailed set of maps, following the conventions of a conventional atlas, that charted the emotional realm of feelings, experience and imagination. For example, in their map on the idea of 'home', 'safe' is portrayed as a city. 'Normal', 'comfort' and 'welcome' are nearby towns. 'The couch' and 'cosy' are adjacent ranges of hills. A nearby bay is named 'safe haven' and the open sea beyond it is called the 'sea of possibilities'. In a similar way, what a collection of these brandcepts can do is to provide lots of different ways of looking at and talking about a particular territory. Used as stimuli, they can then allow research participants to pinpoint the specific part of the emotional and experiential territory that is most appropriate for a particular brand. There are three key uses of this approach:

Using the brandcept stimulus as an emotional map for brands

What this range of stimuli provides is the makings of a detailed mental map consisting of different potential expressions of an emotional territory. Consumers can then determine which of these potential expressions — where on the emotional map — resonates most strongly with the brand being considered.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, many whisky brands occupy the territories of maturity. Following are some examples of brandcepts exploring the emotional territory of maturity (Figure 4) that can help to identify a particular area for a particular whisky brand or a brand from a completely different category wishing to play in this area.

- Some of the brandcepts focus on the quality of patience both in literal product terms and in terms of emotional maturity (1–3)
- *Brand positioning*. To create consumer-defined brand positioning that is more differentiating (both for existing branded products and services and for new ones).
- *Brand extension*. To explore the potential for a particular brand based on applying the core emotional benefit of the brand to other areas — *the power of adjacency*. Once there is clarity over a particular brand essence, it is then

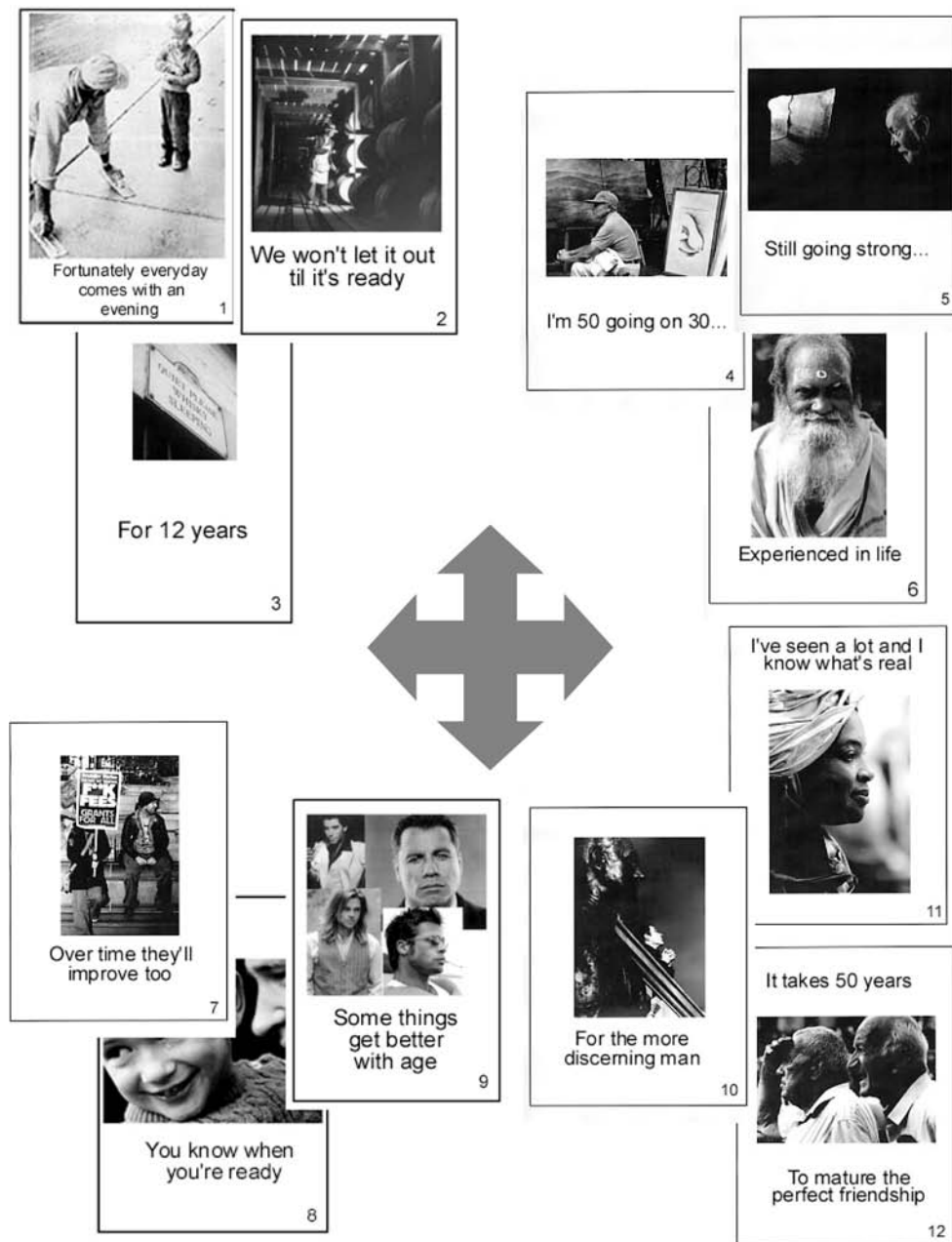


Figure 4: Exploring maturity

possible to explore within that essence what is *emotionally* adjacent to where that brand is currently. In other words, which particular categories or sectors could be best suited to a brand extension. As the examples of brands like Caterpillar, Harley Davidson and Tesco demonstrate, it is emotional brand fit *not* functional competence that is at the core of this power of adjacency. This is therefore the best

means of establishing the optimum area for new extension of a brand.

- *Exploring trends.* To explore the potential of a particular emotional territory or area of human activity and then assess how to map particular brands within that territory. For example, opportunities within female sociability — what gaps exist within the emotional landscape of this concept, or using the example of the

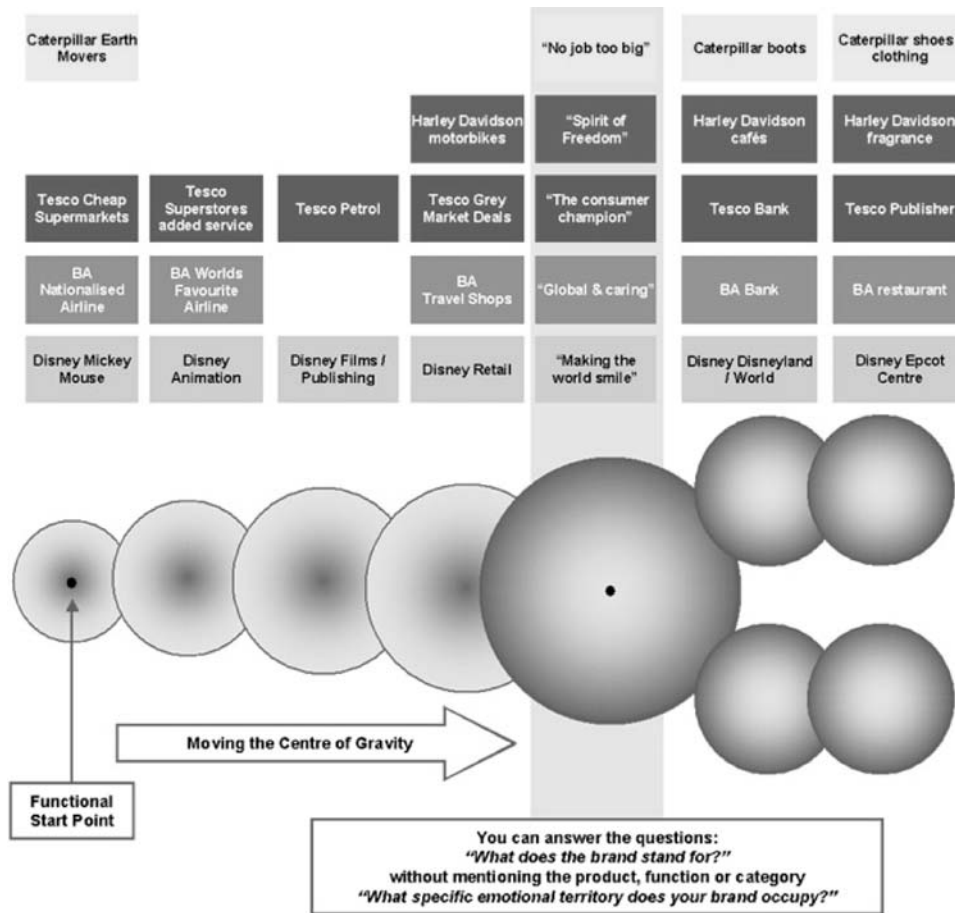


Figure 5: Brand extension

theme of 'slow food', what opportunities can be created from this emergent trend borne of people's need for a more balanced life.

THE PRINCIPLES OF BRINGING ALIVE THE EMOTIONAL POTENTIAL OF BRANDS

This approach to bringing alive the emotional potential of brands is informed by three key principles:

- Principle 1: Creating and using stimuli that reflect analytical rigour and focused creativity
- Principle 2: Creating and using stimuli that reflect people's actual experiences of brands
- Principle 3: Creating and using stimuli that encourage qualitative learning.

Principle 1: Stimuli that reflect analytical rigour and focused creativity

In his book 'Absolut: Biography of a Bottle', which tells the story of the development and success of Absolut vodka, Carl Hamilton describes how Gunnar Broman, the adman behind the genesis of the brand, set about creating a positioning for his new brand:

'Broman started to work his way through his "platforms". Every marketing line needed a platform, and Broman had five: Country of Sweden Vodka, The Blonde Swede, Royal Court Vodka, Damn Swede Vodka, and pure vodka . . . The most striking thing about Broman was the number of angles of attack. An American agency would have presented no more than two or three basic plans, perhaps even just one plan with variations. All the drafts he would present that day were simple ideas. Broman strongly believed

that if any campaign was to be effective, the client must understand the concept behind the campaign' (Hamilton, 1994).

If the last sentence is re-worded to read '*the consumer must understand the concept behind the brand*', then this is also an effective explanation of the approach to creating Brandcepts. The idea here is to go both *broad* and *deep*:

- Broad, in terms of exploring a wide range of different territories, as Broman advocated
- Deep, in terms of exploring a wide range of different angles and nuances *within* each territory. Every conceivable expression of the different brand themes is brought to life, allowing consumers, in subsequent research, to provide the detailed explanation that is necessary to get them to define, in three dimensions, the heart of the brand opportunity.

This idea advocates a philosophy based on the fusing of analytical rigour and focused creativity. It suggests that powerful 'big ideas' are not the product of enigmatic genius as many creative agencies assert, but rather the outcome of a rigorous, exhaustive and disciplined process. Here, creativity serves as a process that is managed and focused by the underlying ideas and business opportunities that inform that creativity. It thereby erodes the distinction between thinking and creativity. Many creative agencies have traditionally institutionalised this dualism — planners think, creatives create — for successful brand development they both should be part of a seamless process of *rigorous creativity*.

The other principle advantage of this work is that, instead of simply determining which specific emotional territory is most suited for a particular brand, it explores exhaustively *within* that particular emotional territory in order to find out which particular

expression of that emotional territory is most suited for that brand. Defining what the territory *is*, that is the relatively easy part. The difficult part is coming up with a sufficiently magical expression of that territory that can provide compelling brand differentiation and irresistible consumer appeal. As explained in the introduction to this paper, cleaning brands have at their core the idea of the good carer, be it mother/father/spouse/or the self. Yet the key is to uncover which particular area of this territory is most effective for a particular brand, and then explore *within* this territory to find the most motivating place within that area. Figure 6 shows example of a set of brandcepts exploring within the particular theme of 'The New Domesticity'.

The theme of 'The New Domesticity' was developed out of growing evidence of a return to a new era of domesticity as the cultural tide in the USA, the UK and Europe moved away from the 'career woman' aspiration. In 2000, an American professor of law, Cheryl Mendelson, published the first systematic guide to household management for over a century. 'Home Comforts' was a runaway best seller in the USA and had a simple and compelling philosophy at its heart:

'When we turn our thoughts to how our houses should feel, we are doing something that our mothers did and their mothers before them. We're acting on a desire to return home. To a haven, a place to protect ourselves and the ones we love' (Mendelson, 2000).

In the UK, in 2002, Vogue columnist Rita Konig, a self-acclaimed 28-year-old domestic diva, published her spin on household management, 'Domestic Bliss'. This offers practical advice on everything from entertaining and wrapping presents, to doing chores and handling builders. These post-Martha Stewart [US lifestyle guru] figures are teaching a new generation of women the little things that mothers once

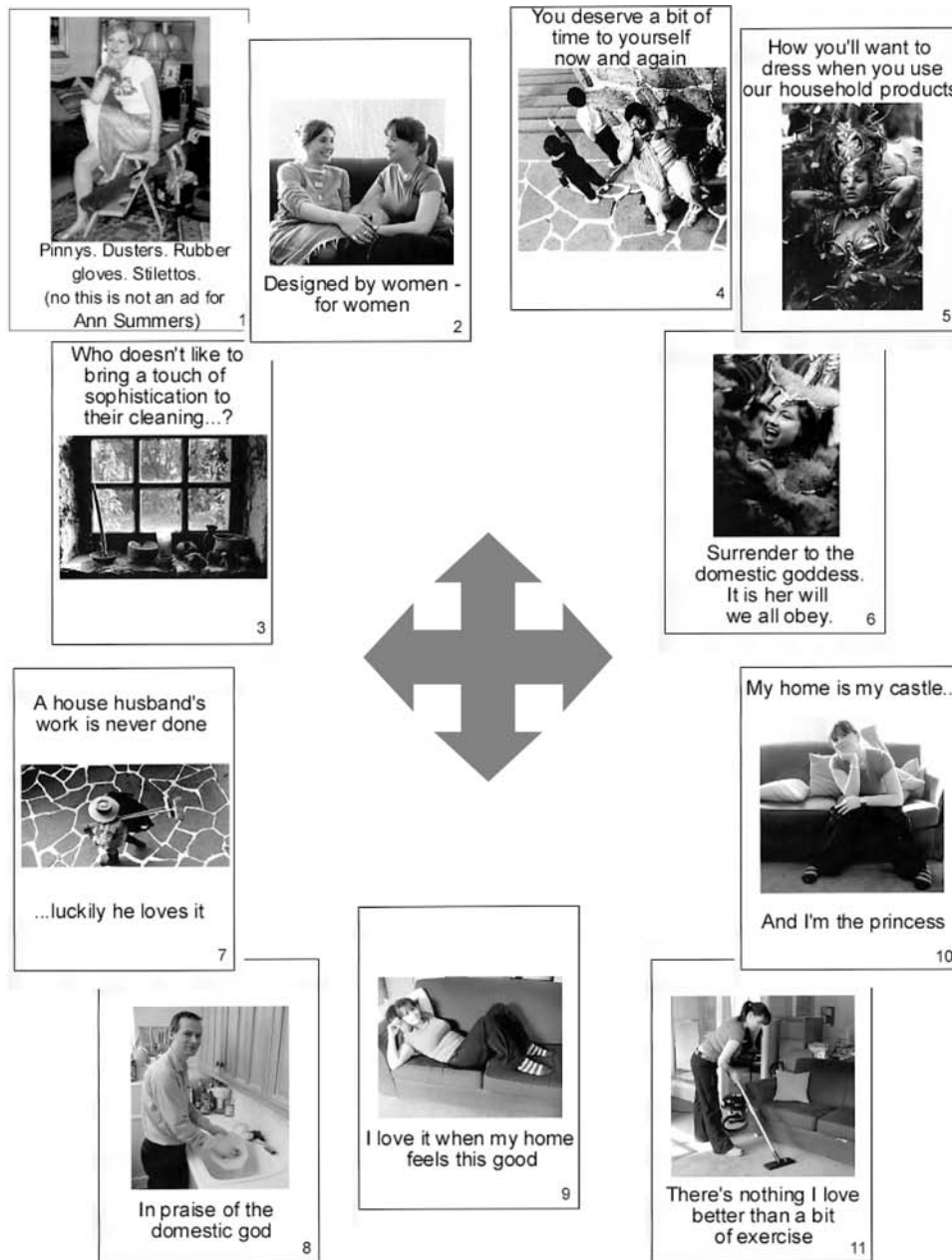


Figure 6: Exploring new domesticity

passed naturally onto their daughters. They also build on the idea that the home is an extension of a woman's personality — it is as important to her that her home is admired as much as she is. Significantly, consumers are increasingly proud to assert this outlook and is also reflected in the popularity and emphasis of 'domestic' television. While the celebrity chefs of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s always cooked in the studio (remember the *Galloping Gourmet?*) or in their restaurants

(*Ramsay's Boiling Point*), today's celebrity chefs like Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver cook at home. The focus is more on creating the domestic aesthetic than on the food.

These brandcepts therefore feature the following sub-themes:

- Some of the brandcepts focus on the 'returning home' theme articulated by writers like Cheryl Mendelson (2001) in the USA, and Rita König (2002) in the UK (1–3)

- Some make fun of the 'Domestic Goddess' theme, popularised by Nigella Lawson (4–6)
- Some champion the role of the *househusband* (7, 8)
- Some focus on the relaxation provided by the benefits of the brand (9)
- Some suggest a post-feminist reclamation of 'pride in the home' (10, 11).

A key part of this exploration through brandcept stimuli is to understand the areas where a brand cannot or should not go. In exploring what kind of Australianness is Fosters or what sort of indulgence is Magnum, it is equally helpful to explore what kind of Australianness is *not* Fosters and what sort of indulgence is *not* Magnum. In other words, a brand is defined as much by what it is not and what it cannot become, as by what it is and what it can become. Virginia Valentine calls this 'the theory of notness . . . The theory that we understand our world through a series of binary oppositions' (Valentine, 2002). By understanding a brand's *notness*, you automatically get to what the brand can and should be about. Another way of explaining this is to take an analogy from the art world. One of the first lessons often taught on a beginners' drawing class is that the spaces around the object to be drawn — ie what the object is not — are as important or even more important than the object itself, since it is these spaces that define the object. To quote from Betty Edwards's book 'Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain':

'Beginning students in drawing are curiously oblivious to the bounds of the

paper. Because their attention is directed almost exclusively toward the objects or persons they are drawing, they seem to regard the edges of the paper almost as non-existent, almost like the real space that surrounds objects and has no bounds . . . If care and attention are lavished on the negative spaces, the forms will take care of themselves' (Edwards, 1993).

Principle 2: Stimuli that reflect people's actual experience of brands

As highlighted above, one of the key problems with many of the stimuli used in brand development research is that it is artificial. When has anyone ever come across a mood board or a carefully crafted positioning statement in 'real life'? Never. A key advantage of using the brandcept stimulus is that it is *realistic*. In other words, it corresponds with the way that consumers are most used to interacting with brands, by using the language of advertising.

The total is more than the sum of its parts

All models of brand creation and development divide brand attributes into a series of different categories. James Donius's model of 'What makes a brand distinctive' (cited in Franzen and Bouwman, 2001), with its distinction between brand differentiators and boundary conditions, is particularly effective at categorising these brand attributes (see Table 3). This and other brand models are useful tools for analysing what consumers say about different brands; however, when stimuli used with consumers are designed to separate out these different brand associations it can be problematic. Yes, all brand-person relationships are a multi-layered network of identity

Table 3 What makes a brand distinctive

Cultural	'Symbol of our society'	Brand differentiators
Social	'Grew up with it'	
Psychological	'Says something about me'	Boundary conditions
Economic	'Value for your money'	
Functional	'Works better'	

connections, personalised brand memories, culturally shared meanings and surface utilitarian beliefs, but people respond to things as a *whole* not as a set of different components. In this context, the total is more than the sum of the parts. To use music as an analogy:

‘You can listen analytically to music and recognise loose notes, themes or even patterns. [But] If you really want to go into the deeper meaning of the piece, you have to turn off your analytical spirit and enjoy the consonance as a *whole*’ (Geursen, cited in Franzen and Bouwman, 2001).

So why, in this context, should brandcept stimuli be effective at exploring this total?

Three-dimensional stimuli

Much stimuli currently used attempts to break things up into different constituent parts. Mood board and concept statement stimuli attempt to deconstruct people’s responses by breaking them down into a set of different parts, as if that were the way in which people actually respond to things.

The emotional and the rational:

Within multi-layered concept statements and between concept statements and mood boards, there is the attempt to make a clear distinction between the ‘rational’ and the ‘emotional’ (for example, the boundary conditions and brand differentiators of Donius’s model cited in Franzen and Bouwman, 2001). Daniel Goleman, in his book ‘Emotional Intelligence’ has popularised the neurological work that has demonstrated how emotions shape and control the more rational parts of the brain.

‘Feelings are therefore typically *indispensable* for rational decisions. The connections between the amygdala (and related limbic structures) and the neocortex are the hub of the battles or cooperative treaties struck between head and heart, thought and feeling. This circuitry explains why emotion is so

crucial to effective thought, both in making wise decisions and in simply allowing us to think clearly. Dr Antonio Damasio, a neurologist at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, has made careful studies of just what is impaired in patients with damage to the prefrontal-amygdala circuit. Their decision-making is terribly flawed — and yet they show no deterioration at all in IQ or any cognitive ability. Despite their intact intelligence, they make disastrous choices in business and their personal lives, and can even obsess endlessly over a decision so simple as when to make an appointment.’ (Goleman, 1996).

Consumers make intuitive, emotional connections with brands and then make rational attempts to legitimise their ‘decisions’ when they are directly brought into contact with the tools of the market research process, namely the focus group, the in-depth interview and the survey. The problem with concept statements and mood boards is that they attempt to pull apart the rational and the emotional.

Sensory preferences: Using stimuli such as picture-based mood boards and word-based concept statements as separate or loosely connected entities, privileges consumers with specific representational preferences. Neuro linguistic programming (NLP) indicates that individuals have representational preferences —ie everyone has a particular sense (visual, auditory tonal (sounds, kinesthetic), feelings, auditory digital (words)) which they tend to use most often when interpreting their experience. This raises important questions for research stimuli, especially since so many of the stimuli used in qualitative research is written and therefore has most direct appeal to only the small minority of consumers (less than 10 per cent) whose ‘lead system’ is auditory digital. (These sorts of people will spend a fair amount of time talking to themselves. They will want to know that something makes *sense*.) With this sort of stimulus, consumers with a visual, auditory tonal or kinesthetic

'lead system' will always struggle to *make sense* of material they would rather *see or hear or feel*.

Using brandcept stimuli, allows the process to go beyond simple semantics, since it involves *three-dimensional stimuli* that consumers can use to help them articulate compelling expressions of what a brand represents. This is particularly apparent in the use of words such as 'classic', 'love', 'sociability', etc where misinterpretation or diverse interpretation can undermine the brand. Consumer responses to brandcept stimuli can provide coherence and clarity to these floating signifiers by allowing consumers to make distinctions between different ideas that might on the surface appear to be very similar. It is these distinctions that can then provide the compelling differentiation that allows brands to fulfil their potential. Figure 7 shows examples of brandcepts designed to explore the meaning of the word 'classic' for a luxury brand. These multiple expressions of 'classic' allow discussion group participants to pinpoint precisely which expression of

'classic' is appropriate for this luxury brand as opposed to competing brands.

Realistic group discussions

If one of the advantages of using this type of stimulus is that it is more realistic/less artificial than some of the alternatives, this still leaves the inherent artificiality of the group discussion to be dealt with. In other words, eight strangers sitting in a facility or in the living room of someone they do not know, with only the help of a moderator and this brandcept stimulus to enable them to make the sort of insightful distinctions that are necessary for brand development. Indeed, a perennial challenge facing all qualitative researchers is how to develop a group dynamic that is conducive to extracting emotional and socially specific responses that go beyond the superficial. How to circumvent the 'nameless dread' inherent in any group of strangers where respondents shift uncomfortably in their seats and naturally default to the 'group' view? The key here is to convene groups that reproduce the social group that

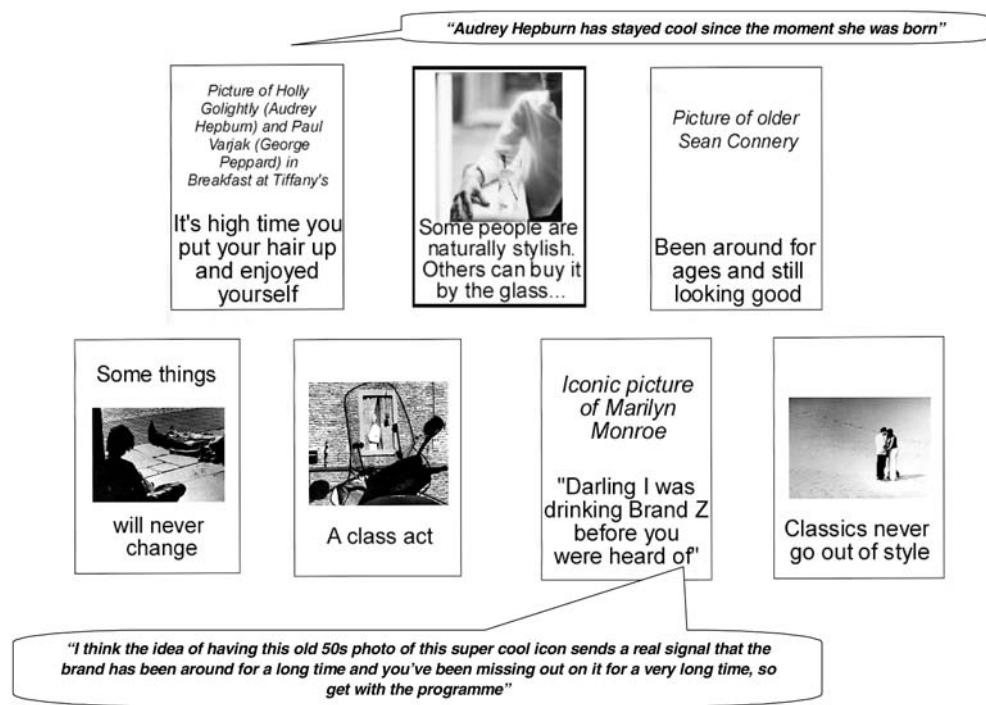


Figure 7: Exploring 'classic'

consumes different brands or the word-of-mouth groups that talk about different brand encounters, for example:

- the group of friends who go out together when researching long alcoholic drinks
- father/son dyads when researching malt whisky
- family groups when exploring family food brands
- class mates when discussing mobile telephony brands.

The key point here is using an environment in which people feel sufficiently comfortable and relaxed to share their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Being surrounded by familiar people fosters a degree of honesty that rarely exists in a traditional eight-person focus group. The other friends or family members in the room act as a human 'lie detector', making responses more 'real' rather than respondents expressing their 'idealised selves' in front of a room full of strangers.

Principle 3: Stimuli that encourage qualitative learning

'It's the analysis, stupid'. The most important part of the brandcept approach lies in the analysis of consumer responses to all stimuli. It is about taking the perceptions of the consumers and fusing these into the *answer*, not taking the *answer* fully fledged and often stillborn into a group of respondents, as can often be the case with concept statements and accompanying mood boards.

The material from research using this stimulus provides a particularly rich source for analysis. Producing so many different brandcepts provides an exhaustive source of different codes from the available culture that influence and shape people's responses to brands. The process gives consumers the scope to show how their individual and collective psychology — their attitudes and behaviour — affects their responses to brands. In turn a detailed map is

created of a particular emotional territory and the particular nuance that a brand can occupy both now and in the future is captured.

Qualitative learning

The author once had a client whose Chief Executive insisted that *every* group discussion or in-depth interview carried out by a research agency was carefully watched and scrutinised by at least one person from his company. He was convinced that qualitative researchers, if unsupervised in this way, simply made up their findings. This anecdote highlights the distinction within qualitative research between what Gill Ereaut describes as 'the *cognitive* school where the analytic focus is generally on summarising and evaluating what was said' and 'the *conative* style where emphasis is placed on interpretative activity carried out by the researcher both during and after the interviewing itself . . . and where there is a need for a period of formal analysis before decisions based on the research are made' (Ereaut, 2002). The Chief Executive, like so many clients, was unconsciously a member of the *cognitive* school, expecting the answers from a group discussion to be readily apparent to anyone who sits and watches a group. Of course, with stimuli like written statements, this is so often what actually happens as the group mind settles for one particular concept statement, perhaps tweaking it here and there, but fundamentally making a simple choice within the menu of stimuli that is presented to them.

By contrast, with brandcept stimuli, the approach is inherently *conative*. The discussion can evolve in any number of different directions, as consumers are encouraged to use the brandcepts to stimulate them to articulate where a brand can go. It also encourages each individual within the group to find stimuli that give a voice to their own personal preferences, thereby giving scope to creative disagreement and

dispute. This tends to lead to better articulations of what people actually love and hate, rather than a compromised answer that everyone can tolerate. It is the creative energy that consumers expend on a particular idea that is more often a useful indicator of something new and differentiating for a brand rather than simple expressions of approval or disapproval.

The analysis process is about creating a motivating story out of these consumer responses that can articulate the brand differentiators of Donius's model: the cultural, the social and the psychological) cited in Franzen and Bouwman, 2001). It also provides the basis for a more compelling *presentation* of research learning: one that is characterised by actual examples of brand communication. These can then be used as effective tools for subsequent creative briefs rather than the current trend of word-based creative briefs with all their inherent, semantic ambiguity. As Sheila Keegan writes in her paper 'A Lion in the Mist':

'We co-create stories with our research participants and we continue this process of making sense of it all afterwards, during the "analysis" and during the "presentation", in a way that is plausible and useful for the task we are engaged in. *And this is OK.* It's not something to be ashamed of. It is something to celebrate. "Discovering" things and categorising them is comparatively straightforward as it utilises a less evolved part of our brains than that involved in creative thinking' (Keegan, 2003).

As Keegan argues, this approach to qualitative work is inherently creative, it is about actively taking a brand forward. As such the term *research*, with its emphasis on *categorising*, can infer a lack of creativity. The emphasis instead should be on *learning* as something that is progressive.

'I think the problem lies in how we have come to view the meaning of the word [research]; dry, boring, inward looking, risk averse. Change the meaning to "learning" and you have a completely

different perspective. "Qualitative learning" sounds forward looking rather than constantly looking over its shoulder' (Keegan, 2003).

Of course, with this approach the pressure is on the researcher as they are a creative analyst rather than the designated interpreter of what consumers say.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that one of the key purposes of qualitative work in brand development is to come up with differentiated expressions for brands within particular emotional territories. Using stimuli such as brandcepts creates maps that can explode these emotional territory areas into tangible realities to which consumers can respond. Creating this type of research stimulus is informed by three key principles:

- *Principle 1:* Stimuli that reflect analytical rigour and focused creativity. Brandcepts go both broad and deep. Broad, in terms of exploring a wide range of different territories; deep, in terms of exploring a wide range of different angles and nuances *within* each territory.
- *Principle 2:* Stimuli that reflect people's actual experiences of brands. A key advantage of using the brandcept stimulus is that it is *realistic*. In other words, it corresponds with the way in which consumers are most used to interacting with brands, by using the language of advertising.
- *Principle 3:* Stimuli that encourage qualitative *learning*. The most important part of the brandcept approach lies in the analysis of consumer responses to all these stimuli.

If these principles are followed successfully there are three key uses of this approach:

- To create consumer-defined brand positioning that is more differentiating (both for existing

- branded products and services and for new ones)
- To explore the potential for a particular brand based on applying the core emotional benefit of the brand to other areas: *the power of adjacency*
 - To explore the potential of a particular emotional territory or area of human activity and then to assess how to map particular brands within that territory.

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