

Implicit Association Test:

Measuring the effect of the subconscious on a Mobile Phone Brand's value

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One of the lessons of Malcolm Gladwell's book "Blink" is intuition is a key feature of how we as consumers make decisions. Yet most of market research fails to measure this; traditional explicit techniques picking up conscious reflection but not the subconscious, intuitive and 'gut-reaction' responses that we know drive behaviour. For us at Beyond Philosophy this has been a key omission. The challenge is though, how do you measure the impact of subconsciously felt experience cues? This is the focus for our thought-leading research using IAT: to quote Blink.

'IAT is the kind of tool that hits you over the head with its conclusions... The IAT is more than just an abstract measure of attitudes. It's also a powerful predictor of how we act in certain kinds of spontaneous situations" Malcolm Gladwell, Blink: the power of thinking without thinking

Methodology for Measuring the Subconscious

'One figure which always surprises people is that the subconscious processes 200,000 times more information than the conscious mind without us having to focus on it and does that processing before our eyes have even recognised the person or object. It is disposed to process emotions even faster, around 10 times faster than our conscious mind', Dr Pete Jones

Beyond Philosophy used a methodology called Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure consumers' emotional response to a famous blue-chip mobile phone provider and investigate whether the emotional response drives value for that brand.

IAT is a specialised technique that measures consumers 'gut-reaction' or subconscious response to an experience. The way it does this is by measuring the speed with which a consumer associates a word (in this case a set of positive and negative emotion words) with the brand logo. Rather like the classic word association test this assumes that the faster the association the easier it is for the consumer to connect the brand with that feeling and vice versa. So, in the Credit Crunch the word 'Bank' and 'bad' might be expected to be easily and speedily associated by consumers. This is a very different test than might be undertaken in a normal rationally based survey where there is a risk that consumers might not tell the truth or simply be unaware of what that truth might be! In other words subconscious effects may be a better guide to behaviour and attitudes.

In our study, we undertook an online IAT with a group of 250 customers¹ to assess the extent to which consumers' subconscious feelings impact the brand experience. In particular, we were interested in understanding, to what extent subconscious feelings drive or destroy value (in this case: increase or decrease of brand satisfaction, preference, monthly spend, tenure, intention to continue using the brand, recommendation, level of general expectations met and level of service expectations met) and whether subconscious feelings express themselves differently than how they are normally structured i.e., are some emotion words more important than others. We also analysed consumer's emotional reaction to brand logos, i.e. pictures to see if certain emotions are evoked more easily than others when looking at the logo.

A highly significant feature of this research was that subconscious emotions explained recommendation by 50%. In other words, up to 50% of the reasons why customers recommend a brand lie in the subconscious emotional response. For anyone using Net Promoter® this is an important finding.

We would like to thank Dr Pete Jones of Shire Chartered Psychologists in providing us with the software and advice and Dr Nigel Marlow of London Metropolitan University for his advice and support.

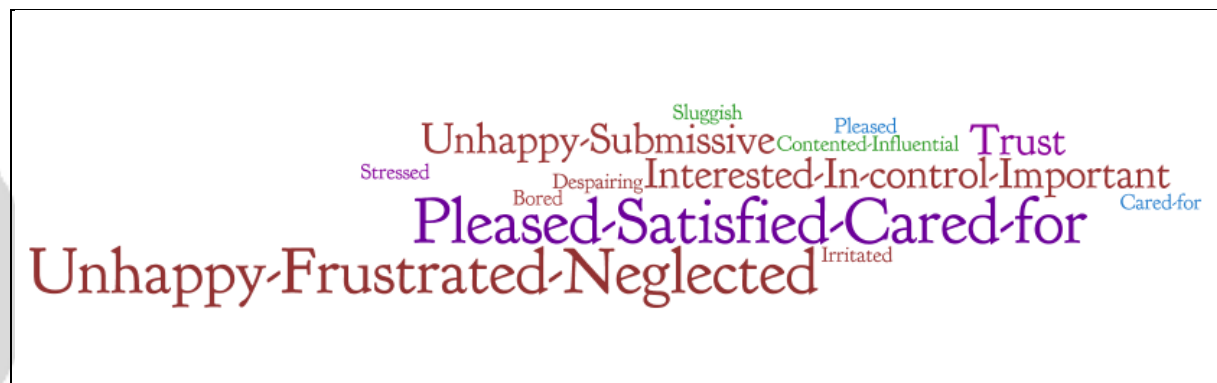
¹ Convenience sample

Measuring the effect of the subconscious

At the subconscious level, certain emotions are more important than others

- Even though our focus was on investigating the emotional response to a particular blue-chip mobile company, having collected responses from customers of other mobile companies, we were able to identify the universal patterns in customers' emotional dynamic. Customers were presented a total of 27 emotions, of which 10 were identified as relevant to the customer experience. Results showed that the emotions that resonate with mobile phone consumers at a subconscious level fall under two groups².
 - *Group 1 emotions:* pleased, satisfied, unhappy, frustrated and neglected.
 - *Group 2 emotions:* cared for, submissive, interested, important and in control.
- The group 1 emotions are related to a general sense of pleasure/displeasure coming out from the customer experience. They are not unfamiliar to most companies, as traditional customer research almost touches on them through satisfaction surveys. The insight comes from the fact that those are rarely addressed in a way that matters to the "subconscious mind" and is undetectable to the "conscious and rational" mind (such as the 4Ps strategy: Price, Product, Placement and Promotion).
- The group 2 emotions are however, less attended to by companies. These are in general the emotions related to the state of control (important, in control, submissive) shelter (cared for) and stimulation (interested). This particular group of emotions is seldom the focus of companies' effort. While in fact they represent a unique opportunity for differentiating from other brands and building an emotional bond with customers that will ultimately lead to loyalty.

Figure 1 the relative importance of each emotion (shown by size of word)



Management recommendations

We saw that in the mobile phone industry emotions subconsciously evoked by mobile phone brands tend to group into two buckets of feeling. One representing the pleasure/displeasure state and another, relating to the state of control/arousal. The latter one is where the key for differentiation lays because, as we learn later on in this report, emotions are proven to take a key role in the extent to which a customer prefers the brand, intends to continue using it, spends monthly with it or stays with it over time.

² Factor analysis was conducted on a convenient sample of 250 consumers, two factors explained 60% and 66% of variance respectively

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No matter the industry a company is in, the customer experience it provides is inevitably underpinned by emotions. Many companies do not consider, or cannot name the emotions they specifically evoke in customers. This is the reason why many go as far as merely maintaining the general pleasure/displeasure state to the expense of not differentiating from each other. But that's not all. Knowing where to go, doesn't necessarily take you there. These emotions work subconsciously. It is like: telling someone you love them and actually making them feel loved. More than often we don't recognise the feelings someone evokes in us, until they are gone. Likewise in companies, many of the feelings they evoke in customers are actually out of the customers' awareness. But nonetheless, they are affecting their decision making.

Subconscious emotional response to brand logos

Certain Brand Features resonate more positively than others

- Using the IAT we tested to see whether customers would associate a particular brand logo more easily to.
 - Logos that stood out as Positively Associated with the brand had a clear appearance and emphasised the design shape or single strap line



- Logos that stood out as Negative Associated with the brand had a cluttered appearance and a less clear shape.



Management recommendations

For marketing communications purposes, determining the resonance of features is a critical activity. This applies not just in a sense to what works well but also, what works well in comparison to the competition. As the brand experience is a subset of the Customer Experience this is a crucial audit activity to perform: and not just in logos but also for instance in packaging design.

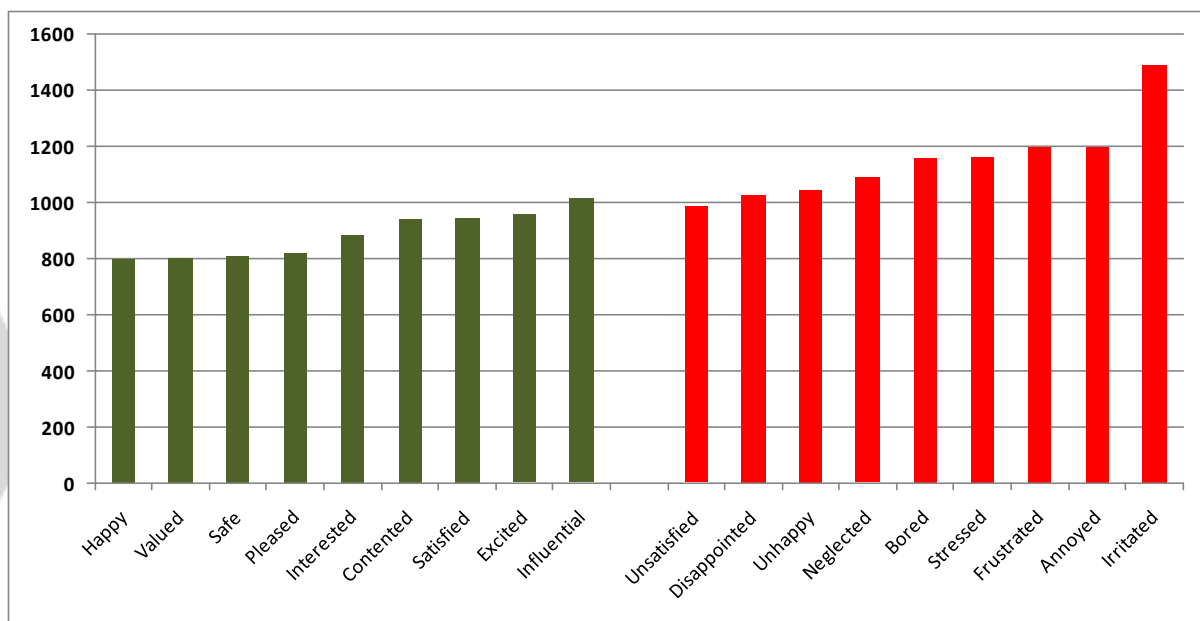
Blue-Chip Mobile Brand Buyers

Beyond Philosophy analysed consumers' emotional response to a particular blue-chip mobile brand. In addition, we investigated to see to what extent do certain emotions impact consumers' decision making.

The strongest emotions are positive and allude to risk averseness

- Based on the raw time in milliseconds, Beyond Philosophy reviewed how quickly the Blue Chip Mobile Phone providers' consumers associate positive and negative words with the brand. The basic concept is, the lower the bar the faster the association. The faster the association-the more the customer feels that way towards the brand.
- Based on the Blue Chip Mobile Phone buyers only we found that: positive emotions differ from negative emotions in speed of association to the blue-chip brand.
- The more experiential emotions such as excited and influential are less felt in comparison to the more functional emotions such as pleased, safe, satisfied and contented.
- Feelings of being valued figure strongly amongst buyers alongside feelings of safety and happiness.

Figure 2 Speed in Milliseconds: good and bad emotions associated with the Blue Chip Brand



Management recommendations

When considering the emotions, the brand should be aware of the importance placed on valued, safe and interested alongside happy and pleased. Consideration should be given as to how these positive emotions are being evoked at the level of the subconscious experience and how the key negative emotions (based on speed) – unsatisfied, disappointed, unhappy and neglected are being controlled. The important point is that

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while some of these may not be driving or destroying value (see next pages) today, they are resonant and therefore have the potential to.

Slow associations with positive emotions destroy value

- Using predictive modelling, Beyond Philosophy found that the slower the positive subconscious emotional response, the lower the indicator of value the customer states (level of satisfaction, preference, continuation etc.). In other words, for example, the more difficult for your customers to associate "happy" with your brand, the less willing they will be to continue using your products/services. And while it seems quite natural that lack of happiness with the brand would have that effect, as displayed below (see table), the key emotion (the one impacting continuation the most) for this particular brand is the emotion "interested". This is a fact hardly anyone would assume, let alone deliberately focus on to drive continuation.
- The largest effect that positive emotions had was on Continuation of use, Expectations, Service Expectations, Customer Satisfaction and Recommendation. However, the effect was also felt behaviourally on Tenure and Spend per month.

A negative figure means that for a 'slower speed of association with this emotion word and the brand' the value indicator REDUCES by the stated amount on a 0-10 scale. E.g. if a customer starts feeling less interested about the brand and they become slower in associating this word with the brand, we can expect with a certainty that their intention to continue using that brand will decrease by 0.30 (on 0-10 scale) or their monthly spend decrease by 0.04 off the amount they are currently spending.

	Continuation	CSAT	Expectations	Recommendation	Service exp	Spendpm	Tenure
Happy	-0.17						-0.17
Valued		-0.19		-0.12		-0.02	-0.16
Excited	-0.08	-0.14			-0.15		-0.03
Contented	-0.19		-0.20	-0.15	-0.13	-0.03	
Interested	-0.30		-0.27	-0.23	-0.26	-0.04	
Pleased	-0.17		-0.19	-0.12		-0.02	-0.08
Satisfied	-0.13	-0.18	-0.21		-0.16		
Total	-1.04	-0.51	-0.86	-0.61	-0.70	-0.11	-0.44

Management Recommendations

To drive value, organisations must understand that these emotions (happy, valued, excited, contented, interested, pleased and satisfied) mean subconsciously, i.e. how are they elicited in the customer experience? A reduced list can be achieved if a specific value indicator is most important to the organisation. So for instance if Customer Satisfaction is all that matters then focus on valued, excited and satisfied. If you run Net Promoter programmes, focus on valued, contented, interested and pleased. Always bear in mind that what you are trying to understand is the subconscious touchpoints that drive and destroy these emotions – a programme of Moment Mapping or Emotional Signature is of best value in this sense.

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Slow associations with negative emotions drive value

- Through predictive modelling it is shown that, the slower the association with three key negative emotions the higher the value. This is shown over three key metrics – 2 attitudinal and one behavioural:
 - For a slower response on these negative emotions, Customer Satisfaction is predicted to rise by 0.54 on a 0-10 scale
 - For a slower response on these negative emotions, Recommendation is predicted to rise by 0.44 on a 0-10 scale
 - For a slower response on these negative emotions, Spend per month is predicted to rise by 0.08

A positive figure means that for a 'slower speed of association with this emotion word and the brand' the value indicator RISES by the stated amount on a 0-10 scale

	CSAT	Recommendation	Spend pm
Irritation	0.21	0.13	0.02
Disappointed	0.33	0.21	0.04
Stressed		0.11	0.02
Total	0.54	0.44	0.08

Management Recommendations

To drive value a deep understanding of what irritation, disappointment and stressed mean at a subconscious level is important. By focusing on reducing the effect of these negatively felt emotions, it is predicted that firms can increase their customer value.

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If you wish to discuss this study in further detail or any other areas on the Customer Experience, please [contact us](#) on the details below.

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