A new indirect approach for capturing emotion in product research

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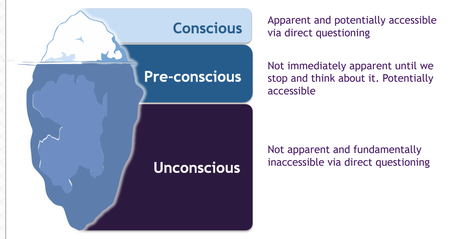
It's generally recognised that much of what influences our behavior isn't apparent to us.

It follows therefore that direct questioning is unlikely to reveal all of the emotions that drive product choice, making it difficult to predict longer-term, in-market performance for new products.

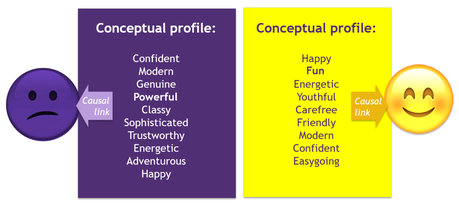
Figure 1:
Freud's Classification of thoughts/memories (iceberg metaphor)



Stafford-Clark, D. (1965). What Freud really said. New York: Schocken Books.

Much of emotion resides in the unconscious, where it is fundamentally inaccessible. Conceptual associations reside largely in the preconscious where they are potentially accessible.

Figure 2:
Which colour is bright and cheery and which is sombre?

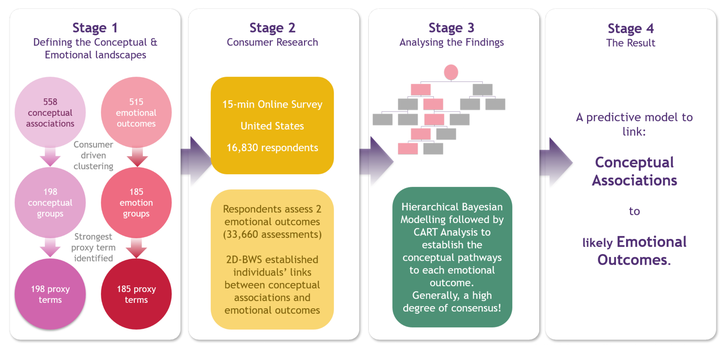


Thomson, D.M.H. (2016). Conceptual Profiling. In H. Meiselman (Ed.), Emotion measurement. pp. 256-261. Cambridge, UK: Woodhead

All 'objects' (products, brands, packaging, colours, etc.) have conceptual associations. Figure 2 lists the conceptualizations generally associated with yellow and purple and the obvious aspects of the emotional outcomes typically engendered. Causality is assumed between conceptual associations and emotional outcomes.

Further assuming such relationships are generalizable and can be modelled, it should be possible to use the conceptual profile of a 'product' to predict the emotional outcomes that it's likely to trigger, without the need for direct questioning (Figure 3).

Figure 3:
Linking conceptual associations to emotional outcome



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Stage 1: Words (English - US and British idioms) were used to capture as much as possible of the conceptual and the emotional landscapes, yielding two vast lexicons of ~ 1000 terms each.

Via successive iterations of qualitative research (US and UK), the lexicons were first honed down to 558 conceptual and 515 emotion terms. Within each lexicon, terms were grouped on the basis of phenomenological equivalence, yielding 198 conceptual and 185 emotion groupings. Finally, participants selected proxy words to label each cluster.

Stage 2: 17,000 online respondents (USA) used Best-Worst Scaling[1] to link conceptual associations to emotional outcomes (34,000 assessments in total).

Figure 5:
Matrix linking conceptual associations to emotional outcomes

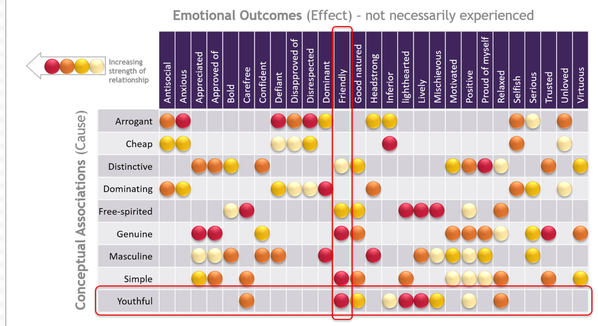

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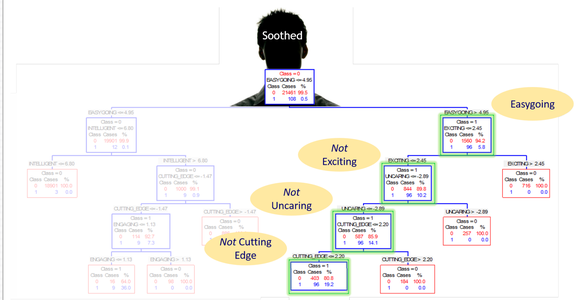
Figure 4:
Conceptual pathway leading to 'soothed' (emotional outcome)



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Stage 3: Hierarchical Bayesian Modelling supplemented the data matrix. Classification & Regression Tree (CART) Analysis modelled the conceptual pathways leading to each emotional outcome (Figure 4).

Stage 4: Figure 5 is a simplified excerpt from the matrix linking conceptual associations to emotional outcomes.

If, for example, something is conceptualized as **youthful**, it's likely to engender friendliness, light-heartedness and liveliness as emotional outcomes. Conversely, friendliness as an emotional outcome can be achieved by designing genuineness, simplicity, youthfulness, etc. into a product.

Practical example - Single Malt Scotch Whisky



The Glenlivet® is characteristically sweet, vanilla, confectionery and bourbon-like. Lagavulin® is strongly phenolic. Consequently, the sensory profiles and conceptual profiles of these unbranded whiskies are very different.

Conceptual terms on the right (Figure 6) are most strongly associated with Lagavulin®. **Traditional** evokes *good, determined, rested, excited, calm* and *exhilarated* as emotional outcomes. **Masculine** adds *resentful* and *solemn* whilst reinforcing *indignant*. **Distinctive** adds *attractive* and further reinforces *determined, good* and *solemn*. **Genuine** adds *grateful* and further augments *solemn*. **Serious** adds *trusted* and *headstrong*, whilst reinforcing *determined* and *solemn* in the final emotional destination.

Figure 6:
Conceptual profile of Lagavulin® (unbranded whisky) showing predicted emotional outcomes

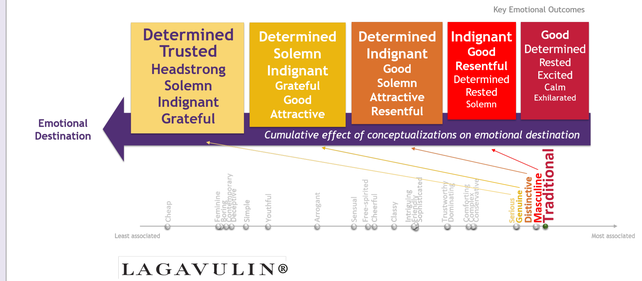

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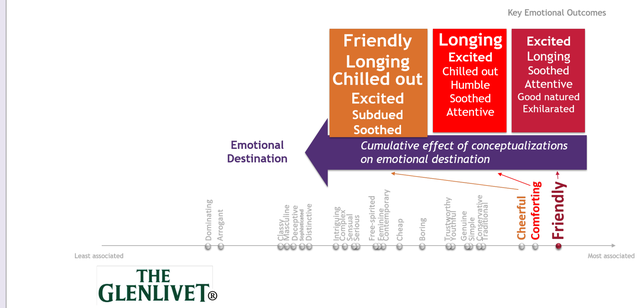
Figure 7:
Conceptual profile of The Glenlivet® (unbranded whisky) showing predicted emotional outcomes



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With The Glenlivet®, the conceptualization **friendly** delivers *excited, longing, soothed, attentive, good-natured* and *exhilarated*. **Comforting** adds *chilled-out* and *humble* whilst reinforcing *longing*. **Cheerful** adds *friendly* and reinforces *chilled-out, humble* and *soothed*.

The degree of +ve or –ve reward that these two very different emotional destinations deliver to individuals, across a spectrum of consumption scenarios, influences those individuals' longer-term relationships with the product.

This, more than anything else, is what we need to *predict* when creating new products!

[1] *Conceptual Profiling:* Thomson, D.M.H. & Crocker, C. (2015). Application of conceptual profiling in brand, packaging and product development. Food Quality & Preference, 40, 343-353.