Projective techniques

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SUMMARY

Projective techniques are qualitative methods that reach the subconscious of respondents by asking them to interpret information or complete tasks, which circumvent normative responses that create social desirability bias. This chapter outlines five techniques: collage, choice ordering, word association, photo elicitation and a scenario expressive technique.

INTRODUCTION

Projective techniques are qualitative research methods used in psychology and market research, which ask respondents to engage in tasks, that will allow the researcher to interpret the underlying reasons for their behaviour. This involves, for example, constructing a story from a stimulus; ranking or ordering and assigning importance to understand preferences; associating words or personifying a brand; assuming the role of another person or object through role-play, acting, drawing, storytelling, or painting; or completing a partially presented stimulus, such as a sentence, story, argument or conversation. These facilitate expression by allowing respondents to express themselves more subtly, fairly and more comprehensively. Projective techniques are useful where socially desirable answers are received in response to sensitive subjects and when researching feelings, beliefs and motivations of an ethical nature. They have the ability to uncover the sub-conscious of

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respondents by circumventing rational normative responses or by gaining access to information, which they were not consciously aware of. Although projective techniques can overcome social desirability effects, there are challenges in their use. Not least, because few researchers explain their procedures in detail or discuss limitations, which can lead to failures in selecting appropriate techniques, knowing how to implement them correctly or how to interpret the findings.

Tourism and hospitality researchers have seldom used projective techniques, yet there is evidence they can be applied to provide depth to a number of consumer behaviour and marketing issues. Prayag (2007) used word association, brand fingerprint and brand personification to study multisensory aspects of destination image, while De Carlo, Canali, Pritchard, & Morgan (2009) employed brand fingerprint and brand personality, when designing culture into a city brand. Walmsley & Jenkins (1992) used cognitive mapping to understand how tourists learn about destinations visited. Brickell (2012) found that projective techniques have particular validity for collecting data from tourism host communities, that would feel intimidated by more formal data collection methods. Along the same lines, Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley (2013) used arts-based expressive techniques to empower communities to represent the multiple meanings they ascribe to tourism. Schänzel (2010) found projective techniques to be relevant to study multiple perspectives in family holiday dynamics. Lundberg (2008) used projective techniques to collect stories of critical incidents in the delivery of tourism services to facilitate the sharing of critical work situations. Davies, Ritchie, & Jaimangal-Jones (2014) discussed the benefits of visual methodologies to understand cross-cultural experiences from event participation that are difficult to measure with other social impact assessment methods.

Westwood (2007) provided an earlier account of the benefits of projective techniques for tourism studies, hence in this chapter we shall focus on reviewing some techniques in detail. This chapter introduces five techniques (collage, list of values, word association,

photo elicitation and scenarios) as suitable data gathering tools in situations where social desirability bias is likely to occur.

COLLAGE

Collage is a constructive technique that combines forms, pictures or materials such as magazines, books and newspapers, to engage the participants to express themselves through instructions such as '*express what you think about brand x, y or z*' or questions such as '*what evokes the ideal point of sale?*' and '*what images depict your feelings, emotions and experiences?*' The richness of the collage depends on the materials used, the time respondents have and the location where the task is completed. Through reordering, reassembling and transforming component images, more elements are generated, with new or hidden thoughts, emotions and associations triggered. No artistic skills are required in the collage construction, but time and space impact on respondents' willingness to participate.

The collage technique produces verbal vs. non-verbal and conscious vs. sub-conscious knowledge (Koll, von Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010; Woodside, 2006). Visual stimuli and right-brain activation bypass the more rational procedures in order to elicit more sub-conscious aspects. Having initially stimulated non-verbal activity, the technique then stimulates verbal responses when probed for meaning. This allows for more in-depth information to be elicited, with personal experience often being added by the creators. The technique is often used for brand personification (Hofstede, van Hoof, Walenberg, & de Jong, 2007) where the brand is a stimulus for retrieval of knowledge (Koll et al., 2010), or where consumption metaphors are elicited (Colakoglu & Littlefield, 2011). It is also used in qualitative studies of destination image to generate psychological characteristics or emotional expressions (Prayag, 2010; Prebensen, 2007).

We used the collage technique to investigate the influences upon tourists' perceptions of climate change and tourism. Research in the field does not lend itself to the use of magazines and scissors, therefore a tablet with 144 images was employed. The

images were selected from arising themes and sub-categories from consumer behaviour, ethics, and climate change literature. Respondents could select and create their collage from this bank of images. The respondent information cards used two parts. Part I (with the image software) – '*This activity requires you to drag and drop images into a pile in answer to the question – what and who influences your ideas on climate change?*' Part II (with the audio software) – '*Now tell me something about the images you have selected. Why have you selected these images? What do these images mean to you? How do these influence your ideas on climate change?*' This technique was somewhat successful at eliciting information on the external influences that inform the respondents' perceptions on climate change. In the interpretation stage both images and narrative could be independently analysed for patterns and themes. In the narrative, similarities between the destinations included broader themes around responsibility and environment.

However, further work on the instrument is needed. Respondents selected a wide range of images for the collage, but during the discussion stage, they only targeted individual images, or discussed the collage as a whole. As top-of-mind thoughts were required, prompts during the discussion were avoided, preventing further exploration. Although there had been no specific design need for the researcher and respondents to interpret the images in the same way, it became evident that some interpretation of the respondent selected images would be useful. Difficulties particularly arose in the interpretation stage with allocation of narrative to different categories of photos. Most respondents were very interested in completing the activity (due to the novelty of using a tablet, at the time). Although the tablet achieved considerable time, space saving, and documentation benefits, the functionality of the picture software had an impact. Intervention from the researcher was required regularly.

LIST OF VALUES CHOICE ORDERING

The List of Values (LOV) model is a choice ordering technique that measures values, which are the guiding principles and foundations of attitudes and behaviour. Values are central to daily life and their measurement assesses what people find important to them. The LOV distinguishes between the internal and external values that deal with the importance of personal and non-personal factors in the fulfilment of values. The nine basic LOV values are: sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment in life, warm relationships with others, self-fulfilment, being well-respected, excitement, security, self-respect and sense of accomplishment (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986). Studies suggest three dimensions- security, belonging and respect form the external dimension values; fun and enjoyment, and warm relationships form the internal/interpersonal values; self-respect, accomplishment, self-fulfilment and excitement form the individual/internal values (Chryssohoidis & Krystallis, 2005; Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005).

Although the LOV is the principal instrument for values research and considered to be superior particularly where non-psychologists carry out the research, the design has been called into question. Firstly, as the nine values are listed without descriptors, this leaves the door open to subjective interpretation by the respondent, perhaps making it an invalid measure of value salience. Secondly, respondents may lack complete awareness of what their values are and could select any option available. Thirdly, the highest ranked or rated value determines the dominant value, but attributing behaviour to a single value fails to consider the more complete understanding.

The employment of LOV aimed to determine the values that underpin tourists' decisions to visit disappearing destinations. The highest-ranking value was balanced through respondents selecting one most important value and one least important value (a potential solution to social desirability bias). Software was utilised to present four questions for completion by tapping the screen and recording narrative. Question one '*How important are these values to your everyday life?*' was accompanied by a list of values and their descriptors, with an importance scale. Question two '*Which value is the most important to*

you?' listed all nine values and question three recorded '*Why is 'this' the most important value for you?*' Question four '*Which value is the least important to you?*' listed all nine values and question five recorded '*Why is 'this' the least important value for you?*'

The LOV was successful at eliciting information on the values that underpin tourists' decisions to visit disappearing destinations. The common themes were social factors, 'being' and self-fulfilment. The social theme was noted across the values and suggests a human need is being satisfied: love – "*it's nice to feel loved*"; family – "*it's nice to feel part of a family unit*"; groups – "*valued as a member of the group*". The rationale for "*being*" or the "*reason to be alive*" appears to be self-fulfilment, which *"[is] crucial to living a full and happy life*". In the scaling exercise more values were nominated as very important, with warm relationships, self-fulfilment and sense of accomplishment nominated as the "most" important values overall. The "least" important value was excitement.

WORD ASSOCIATION

Word association is the most frequently used associative technique and demands little from respondents. The interviewee provides top of mind awareness words that they feel are related to the word or research object provided. The activity can be administered orally or in writing and the responses can be gathered in various combinations. These include four written responses to each of twelve orally administered words; a single oral or written response to 100 orally administered or written words; multiple oral responses within 25-seconds of the orally administered stimulus word; and the requirement to list twelve associates against a stimulus word listed twelve times (Soley & Smith, 2008). Although there appear to be no restrictions on the number of stimulus words (or phrases) that can be used, clear instructions are needed. The instructions for single discrete responses range from '*Answer as quickly as possible the first word that occurs to your mind*' to the more prescriptive '*Start with the first word; look at it; write the word it makes you think of; then go*

to the next word." Extensions of the word association techniques include word sorting and sentence completion.

Word association examined tourists' knowledge of climate change and associated impacts through the assessment of memory, in order to check knowledge and highlight confusion or contradictions. Four key words (or phrases) were selected, which were determined to be within the realms of expertise of the respondent. *Global Warming* aimed to determine respondent's general knowledge of global warming or climate change. *Climate Change Impacts on Tourism* aimed to determine if respondents are aware of the impact of climate change on the tourism resource. *Tourism Impacts on Climate Change* aimed to determine if respondents recognise the impact of tourism (such as transport) on the climate. *Maldives* aimed to determine if respondents recognise the impact of climate change on the Maldives (it gradually disappearing due to higher sea levels) or whether classical conditioning would result in a list of destination features and benefits, despite the leading design. Each key word (or phrase) was given its own dedicated screen and then listed six times with adjacent spaces for completion. Using the onscreen (or external) keyboard, respondents were requested to '*Type in the spaces provided, words or phrases brought to mind by* '(*stated word or phrase*)'. *If you are unable to complete every box, mark any empty box with an X*.'

Word association was very successful at eliciting information on tourists' knowledge of climate change and associated impacts. The *Global Warming* responses included climate change impacts and the need for greater awareness of the issues (due to a lack of learning). Only the Svalbard results touched on the importance of global warming and the science (from fact to uncertainty), whilst the Venice respondents considered impacts to be more localised. The responses to *Climate Change Impacts on Tourism* varied between the destinations. Venice indicated an income reduction for the destination economy and Svalbard a zero impact on the local community. This suggests the Svalbard respondents are environment-centric and the Venice respondents society-centric. This centricity is somewhat

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played out in the *Tourism Impacts on Climate Change* responses. Svalbard indicated tour company precautions for the environment and Venice indicated corporate greed.

Most respondents were unable to produce six responses to each of the four keywords (or phrases), but they tried, which would suggest a lack of top-of-mind knowledge. However, despite prior reassurances that there were no right or wrong answers, some respondents appeared irritated or sought disengage with the activity, perhaps because they felt their knowledge was being tested or beliefs challenged. In these cases, only one response per keyword (or phrase) was given (such as "*more research needed*" and "*critically important*") suggesting some general level of knowledge on climate change.

PHOTO-ELICITATION

Photo-elicitation is a constructive, semi-projective technique, which includes photo interviewing and photo-expression. These can elicit clearer responses than questions alone can achieve, as the images can elicit emotional and attitudinal responses. Words alone use less of the brain's capacity than images and words, with text or the combination of text and images achieving different results. Photo interviewing seeks to elicit cognitive evaluations about real situations and photographs are far less ambiguous than fantasy-based thematic apperception measures. The images represent significant behaviour or places, with respondents asked to explain what they see and they construct their own responses. Photo-expression is participatory research where the respondent takes photographs of what is important to them, while photo interviewing techniques require the respondents to explain what they see in the photographs presented to them. Whereas photo interviewing reflects the interests of the interviewer (who selects the photographs), photo-expression reflects the interests of the respondents. The SHOWED questioning procedure consists of five questions, which lead respondents to think about problems and solutions: 'what do you *See* here?', 'what's really *Happening* here?', 'how does this relate to *Our* lives?', 'why does this

problem, concern or strength _Exist_?' and 'what can we _Do_ about it?' (Soley & Smith, 2008:105). We tested both techniques.

Photo interviews aimed to examine tourists' beliefs of climate change and the associated impacts. Initial image sourcing indicated a single photograph was unlikely to elicit any discussion. Therefore, there was a need for the images to be more contrived; photographs of a flooded versus dry Piazza San Marco in Venice, and a comparison of ice level reductions in the Arctic, with an 80-year gap. These images were used with a modified SHOWED procedure '_What do you think is happening in these pictures? '_How do you think these relate to our lives?_' and '_How could we resolve any problems suggested by these pictures?_' Answers however were vague or non-specific due to a halo effect (respondent's holiday destination = positive qualities) and an assumed lack of belief in the relationship between climate change and tourism.

Photo-expression aimed to determine the motivations underpinning tourists' decisions. The respondents were primed to select three of their holiday photographs from Venice or Svalbard for use at interview. As the pilot established that respondents perceived no negative associations with their favourite photos, the SHOWED technique was further adapted. '_What is happening in your pictures?_' aimed to provide context. '_How do these pictures relate to your life?_' aimed to elicit information on needs and wants, or intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. '_Thinking about the location in your photographs, what possible environmental issues could you resolve?_' aimed at determining if the visit to the destination was related to it 'disappearing'. Photo-expression was successful at eliciting information on the motivations underpinning tourists' decisions. The results reflected the assumed content of the photographs (Venice = culture, people; Svalbard = wildlife, scenery). The narrative response to '_What is happening in your pictures_' and '_How do these pictures relate to your life_' equally elicited broad emotional and attitudinal responses, as opposed to the objective appraisal of reality. The question '_What possible environmental issues could you personally

resolve?' did not establish if any of the respondents had visited the destination, because it was disappearing.

All of the respondents participating in this technique did so, with gusto. Photo-albums, mounted wall photographs, and i-Pads were just some of the ways in which precious memories were presented. Nevertheless, the preciousness and quantity of memories doubtless accounted for some finding it very difficult to select just two holiday photographs, which were of interest (or importance) to them. Early interviewing experience also indicated that participants found the modified SHOWED technique to be too restrictive, in that they were strongly motivated to talk about their whole holiday. Their interviewing experience appeared to become more palatable, when they knew the researcher was interested in seeing their whole photo album or was prepared to listen to them regaling tales, once the interview was completed.

SCENARIO EXPRESSIVE TECHNIQUE

The Hunt-Vitell model was selected as an expressive technique, because of its use of scenarios to determine how respondents make decisions involving ethical issues and the extent to which they rely on ethical norms versus the perceived consequences. The model posits that ethical judgements affect behaviour through the intervening variable of intentions (Hunt & Vitell, 2006). Multiple versions of a scenario are created and a two-factor design is applied, 1) 'deontologically unethical situation' and 'deontologically ethical situation' and 2) 'positive consequences' and 'negative consequences'. The evaluation involves a comparison of perceived alternatives and norms that represent the individual's beliefs and personal values. Open-ended questions are used after each scenario to elicit information on the ethical judgement and intention choices made. Ethical judgements and intentions are considered better predictors of behaviour in situations where ethical issues are central and the model addresses the situation where individuals confront a problem perceived as having ethical content. Nevertheless, if individuals do not perceive a problem to have ethical

content, some elements of the model are not used. Limitations include order bias where scenarios are not randomised, and a lack of scenarios involving higher social costs such as energy consumption or recycling (Vitell, Singhapakdi, & Thomas, 2001).

We used this technique to investigate tourists' climate change ethics by analysing the narrative outcome of the choices made, based on each of four scenarios. These were unethical behaviour with positive consequences, unethical behaviour with negative consequences, ethical behaviour with positive consequences and ethical behaviour with negative consequences. Ethical judgements were directly measured using a seven-point Likert scale, through agreement or disagreement with the scenario, based on given statements designed to measure personal ethical judgement and the prevailing social norm. The personal ethical judgement statement was '*I consider Kai's actions to be very ethical*'. The social norm statement was '*most people would consider Kai's actions to be very ethical*'. Ethical intentions were similarly measured using a seven-point Likert scale, to determine if respondents (or most people) would act in the same way as the consumers in the given scenarios (Vitell et al., 2001). The personal ethical intentions statement was '*I would be likely to act in the same way as Kai did in this situation*'. The social norm statement was '*most people would be likely to act in the same way as Kai did in this situation*'. Instructions for the activity were followed by the four scenarios, which were grouped on one screen, before being presented individually. Each individual scenario screen included the four statements and the 7-point Likert scale. The final two screens recorded the narrative response to '*Based on your responses, why do you consider the actions of Kai to be either right or wrong?*' and '*Based on your responses, why do you consider most people would be likely to act in the same way as Kai?*'

The Hunt-Vitell Model was very successful at eliciting information, because the brevity of the four scenarios made them easily understood and generally well accepted by the respondents. The scaling part of the adapted model provided clear results for ethical judgements and ethical intentions. The questions for ethical judgement and ethical intention

were placed after the scaling of all four scenarios- '*Based on your responses, why do you consider the actions of Kai to be either right or wrong*' and '*Based on your responses, why do you consider that most people would be likely to act in the same way as Ka*i'. The respondents were able to compare and contrast ideas in their oral analysis and evaluation of the perceived problem, which included contradictions and arguments of the alternative acts related to duty, as well as the desirability or consequences of actions.

The narrative determined how respondents make decisions (or believe others do) involving ethical issues. The contradictions between the scaling and narrative suggest that ethical judgements and intentions are not necessarily better predictors of behaviour. Some respondents felt that employing the same protagonist in each scenario was unrealistic, because "Kai" would not have taken all of the stated positions. Further, despite the researcher pre-advising that there were no right or wrong answers, some respondents appeared agitated when completing the scaling.

DISCUSSION

This chapter briefly outlined five projective techniques available to the qualitative researcher to better understand consumer behaviour. Projective techniques have considerable potential to study consumer behaviour and are widely used in commercial market research and psychology, but not in tourism and hospitality research. Westwood (2007) and Westwood, Morgan, & Pritchard (2006) reflected on the use of a range of projective and sensory techniques to make sense of tourist behaviours, praising them for their flexibility, unpredictability and the unique opportunity to find out what lies beneath the answers collected by more typical methods. Echtner (1999) outlined the advantages of using projective techniques for tourism marketing research by using semiotics and the study of signs and symbols to understand the meaning individuals give to experiences. The examples provided by the five projective techniques reviewed here are consistent with the

strengths and limitations of these reviews. Tourism and hospitality researchers can collect richer data from smaller samples by using projective techniques, which provide more flexibility and allow the combination of multiple projective methods to triangulate findings. The limitations are the highly resource intensive nature of rigorous analysis, ambiguous stimuli impacting on the complexity of data elicitation and codification, and variations in interpretation of the meaning of the results.

From our experience, word association and the scenarios were the most successful for operation of the instrument and eliciting information. Although the collage technique elicited a good level of data, it was the poorest performing instrument because of categorisation and software functionality issues. In both the collage and LOV any potential differing interpretations to images or text remain without clarification, as the requirement for top-of-mind responses precluded prompting. The photo interviewing and choice ordering techniques both had brevity of response and indicated a lack of belief in the relationship between climate change and tourism. The LOV was successful at highlighting the difficulties respondents had in justifying their own values selections. In contrast to this, the photo-expression technique was able to produce much more narrative, albeit unrelated to the specific questions asked – respondents were motivated to discuss their holiday photographs, which became an off-the-record activity at the end of the interview.

It is worth reflecting on how these techniques addressed social desirability effects or conscious filtering, this arguably being their main benefit in comparison to other research methods. Clearly respondents selected more images for the collage than they later discussed, but what is unclear is whether the decision not to discuss all of the selected images was due to social desirability. Socially desirable responses were given in the LOV and scenarios activities. In the case of the List of Values, the front-end results on importance differed from back-end results on the most or least important values. The results from the scenarios activity show evidence of contradictions within the scaling and between the scaling and narrative. In the photo interviewing technique the limited responses received could be

due to issues of social desirability, by avoiding identification of a shrinking glacier, for example.

The most successful instrument at reducing social desirability was word association, while the least successful was photo-expression. The word association keyword of Maldives resulted in a classical conditioning response, despite the leading design of the instrument. However, it was evident in the photo-expression activity that socially desirable responses were not reduced, because only positive narrative regarding personal holiday snaps was received. It would seem reasonable to suggest that any negative narrative would be an attack on self. Finally, it is worth considering that the word association and scenarios activities, which resulted in some respondents expressing irritation, could have been due to the desire to give a socially desirable response. We hope that these reflections, on the suitability of these methods to investigate consumer behaviour in ethical decision-making, will be of benefit to other tourism researchers.

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ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

Hunt, S. D., & Vitell, S. J. (2006). The general theory of marketing ethics: a revision and three questions. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *26*(2), 143. The general theory of ethical decision- making was first published by Hunt and Vitell in 1986 and revised in 1993. This article provides an overview of the model and addresses questions often asked by those using the model in research.

Kahle, L., Beatty, S. E., & Homer, P. (1986). Alternative measurement approaches to consumer values: the list of values (LOV) and values and life style (VALS). *The Journal of Consumer Research*, *13*(3), 405–409. This article compares and contrasts two methods of measuring values- LOV with VALS. The LOV was developed from the theoretical base of Feather (1975), Maslow (1954) and Rokeach (1973)

Soley, L., & Smith, A. L. (2008). *Projective Techniques for Social Science and Business Research*. New York: Southshore Press. This book provides a foundation and reference for researchers planning to use projective techniques in social science and business research. The underlying theories, instructions for methodological application and interpretation are invaluable.