

ISOLATION INSPIRATION

How IAT is changing the way we think about
understanding consumer behaviour

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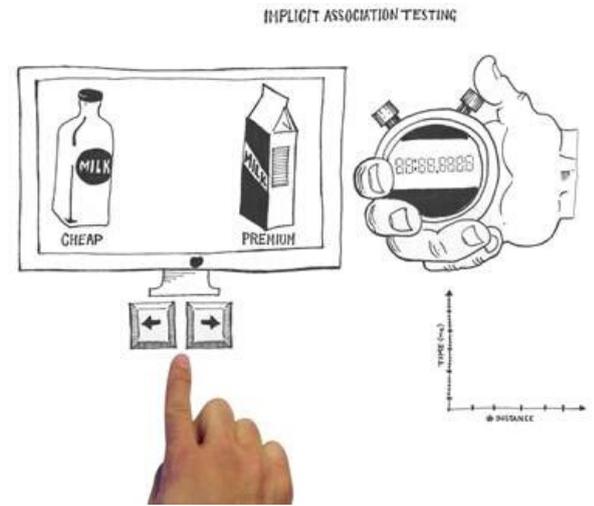


Discovery

Discovery Research has been providing the insights that fuel change for clients since 1996. We are here to help combine customer insights with industry knowledge to help move things forward for your brands

At Discovery, the behavioural biases involved in decision-making underpins our research philosophy, hence we are firm believers in looking to approaches that allow us to look at System 1 as well as System 2 thinking. We have been using IAT approaches as one way of doing this for the past few years and have seen some really useful results, especially when used to explain and overlay upon other survey data and qualitative methods. The following thought piece takes a look at why we think it has been an important evolution for research and why clients should be building it in to their consideration set.

From a broader standpoint, the industry has been evolving its use of behavioural and cultural understanding through different approaches ever since it started. From its roots in psychology, which very broadly speaking tended to focus upon a depth of understanding, to the recognition around patterns of behaviour and macro trends / data that provide the breadth of understanding, we have long been looking to unravel attitudes and behaviours. Behavioural economics provided a language for analysis and explanation of behaviours; and with it a subsequent understanding that has helped to demystify attitudes and behaviours. It is the ability to understand what people think as well as say and identify where they converge and diverge that really gets the creative thinking going at Discovery. BUT understanding people's unconscious, gut responses is difficult.



Research has seen a broad range of solutions from timed revealing of questions, facial coding and of course multiple touchpoints with consumers, to gain a more rounded understanding of their reactions. BUT research, especially survey based, is still typically designed to capture System 2 thinking, by allowing participants more time to react and consider their response to the questions being posed to them. In challenging this status quo a few years back we started to look into the role that Implicit Association Testing could play to further our understating of the subconscious influence and have been impressed by what we found, applied and were able to deliver to clients as a result.

IAT comes from academic research; social psychologists use it to determine the associations between a concept and different types of word, using the speed with which we do this to uncover the assumptions and biases related to that concept. The basis for this type of research relies upon the fact that 'feelings' offer mental shortcuts that draw upon information and emotion that has been 'absorbed' into the subconscious after seeing the materials being tested. A faster response suggests a stronger association between the stimulus and words tested, indicating what people are likely to do in the future. The words used in the task can be adapted depending on what you want to reveal – e.g. terminate vs remain, modern vs old-fashioned. By analysing the strength of these associations, you can understand the impact for your brand.



“Implicit tests have an important place within the range of methods we use to capture System 1 thinking – our toolkit also includes eye tracking and emotional response mapping from facial recognition. We’ve used IAT in situations where people can’t consciously predict what they’ll do, allowing us to help clients understand which communications will gain the best results. It is vital to think about and build these techniques into the approaches we undertake quantitatively.”



Discovery have been using IAT and other implicit techniques specifically to explore reactions toward brand and messaging within communication research. The additional layer of understanding and insight that this provides us with has helped to give clients confidence in changes applied and differences to the business made.

There are several types of implicit tests that we conduct, depending on what insights you need. We work in partnership with experts from the field of neuroscience to select the right implicit test to answer your research question. This could be a full IAT test, looking at word pairings. Alternatively, an Implicit Priming Test allows participants to see stimulus (e.g. an image of a logo or packaging), before completing a timed task, thus giving us insight into how easily your product can be found on a shelf or the associations people have with brands. At its most simplistic, even just timing fast responses to questions can give us insight into these neurological shortcuts.

Traditionally - and at its most stringent - IAT is conducted face-to-face to control for as many variables as possible. However, like many research methods, it has adapted well to online methodologies, meaning we can continue to conduct implicit testing research even during lockdown. We achieve robust sample sizes to account for any extra ‘noise’ in the data, asking participants to complete the tests in quiet environments to ensure full concentration.

“Not all decisions are rational”

So why choose IAT? Well, research has shown that implicit rather than explicit measures are often better at predicting consumer intentions, particularly when it comes to subtle differences. If explicit survey questions aren’t predicting customer churn or uptake as effectively as you want them to, it could be time to give IAT a go.

Perhaps one of the biggest areas that research is challenged with is based around the complexities of behaviour change. We know that simply telling people to change, or giving them information and expecting them to act upon it very often falls upon deaf ears.

LET’S USE A CURRENT EXAMPLE....

The government started the coronavirus communication very much with a sound nudge mentality – asking people to wash their hands for 20 seconds and associating a song to help embed an awareness of time needed for it to be effective and indeed injecting a little fun to the process. This in theory was a great idea, but also an example of where sometimes the situation requires more than a nudge. The speed of the virus spread meant that we needed a sledge hammer i.e. an enforced instruction – lockdown - from a higher power (and even then most premiership footballers have still struggled) for it to work. While this has meant that some have then questioned the effectiveness of nudging peoples behavioural change, it has become apparent that the situation we have found ourselves in supersedes the theory.



However, when applied to brands the ability to unlock the underlying motivations that you can tap into is still something that IAT can really help to establish and understand – sure it may not be the answer in isolation but as a layer to what we offer clients it unlocks a level of understanding that we would otherwise not establish. The right IAT approach can address the following questions:

- What personality traits does your brand have and how strongly do people subconsciously link these to your brand?
- How can your communications change the strength of these associations and attitudes?
- Which touchpoints fit well with your brand identity?
- Does your brand have mobility or is it stuck in a category (and if so, why)?

At Discovery we can complement IAT with other explicit measures for comparison and greater insight, such as follow-up interviews or a self-completion questionnaire, so you get the full picture of consumers' reactions. Indeed, apply this in conjunction with brand archetypes (vol4) and the outputs are an invaluable blueprint that you can then use to track and overlay when you are conducting more explicit reaction focussed research.

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