

Attribute Elicitation Procedures: A Comparison of Four Techniques

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Abstract

Brand attributes are features that characterise a product or service (Keller 1993). Attributes are used to assess the performance and potential of a brand by measuring areas of Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE), such as a brand's image. Attributes also affect the validity of results obtained by marketing measures (Breivik & Supphellen 2003). For use in these measures, attributes need to be elicited from consumer memory.

There are few recent comparative elicitation studies in marketing literature (comparative examples include, Bech-Larsen & Nielsen 1999; Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1997). A lack of recent literature means new techniques have not been compared to past approaches. This thesis expands on current literature by replicating and extending past comparisons of elicitation procedures.

This research tests four methods for eliciting attributes:

- Free Elicitation (FE), which asks respondents to verbalise all attributes to their perception of stimuli (Kanwar, Olson and Sims 1981).
- Repertory Grid (RG), where respondents sort and comment on triads of stimuli based on their perceived (dis) similarity (Kelly 1955).
- Metaphor Elicitation (ZMET), which asks participants to collect stimuli that are perceived to represent aspects of the product category, but are not explicitly the product category. Discussion follows via an in-depth interview (Zaltman 1995).
- Projective Elicitation (PE), which draws on recall and projective techniques to focus on situations where consumers encounter the brand (Mariampolski 2001).

The aim of this thesis is two-fold: to determine how elicitation procedures differ, and to determine which technique(s) elicits better results for practitioner use. Attributes are compared across four variables: the number of attributes elicited, the types of attributes elicited, respondent evaluation to the process, and the use of multiple elicitation techniques.

The procedures were tested for two product categories: deodorant and quick service food. A total of 48 face-to-face interviews were carried out across 15 days by four trained researchers. Each participant completed two different elicitation procedures, one for each category, resulting in a total of 96 tests of elicitation procedures.

Results reveal that FE (M=30) elicits a significantly higher number of attributes than other techniques. ZMET (M=27) elicits slightly less attributes than FE, with RG (M=21) and PE (M=21) generating the least amount of attributes. Attributes generated via each technique were classified into one of three categories by two coders as per Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason (1993) and Steenkamp and Van Trijp (1997). Inter-coder reliability of 83% for deodorant and 84% for quick service food was noted. Attributes were further classified into one of four categories by three coders as per Hogan, Faulkner and Romaniuk (2012). Inter-coder reliability of 84% for deodorant and 87% for quick service food was noted. Results show that attributes are elicited in similar proportions across categories for both classification frameworks, indicating the no elicitation technique is better at eliciting a wide range of attributes. At the completion of each procedure, respondents were asked to evaluate the technique on nine criteria, drawn from McDaniel, Verille and Madden (1985). FE is the preferred method of elicitation, with statistically significant differences between RG and ZMET. Lastly, findings show that a combination of FE and ZMET techniques elicits the highest number of total attributes for a product category.

From 96 tests of elicitation it was found that respondent associations are better evoked from memory when respondents are provided with initial stimuli and have a less structured response format. This fits with the notion of cued retrieval and the spreading activation theory of retrieval of memory (Collins & Loftus 1975).

This research has limits of scope, as the two product categories used for testing are both frequently bought categories. Further research to extend beyond the two categories is encouraged, such as durables or services (as described in Sharp, Wright & Goodhardt 2002).