Louder than words

Using pictures for segmentation

The German original of this article was first published in Research & Results, issue no. 5/2015.

Pictures are often used when we are lost for words – also in market research. Based on a study investigating Europe's future, Andreas Jütting and Michael Koch show how the picture gallery „VAL|**LERY**" can be used to measure (unconscious) emotions, motives, and attitudes.

A segmentation is used to identify preferably homogenous consumer groups, that nevertheless differ greatly from each other. The segments identified as most desirable for the company are presented with segment-specific offers, in order to meet their needs better than the competition. The variables used for segmentation are usually a mix of psychographic variables like emotions, motives, attitudes, or lifestyle variables as well as (buying) behaviour variables, sociodemographic variables, and variables describing information behaviour. The goal is to identify segments that are stable over time and may be approached by means of the existing marketing mix, while providing a good explanation of the noticeable buying behaviour at the same time.

In order to being able to use the psychographic variables for a segmentation, comprehensive statement batteries are applied. However, they tend to fatigue respondents rather quickly and consequently the answers are often of lesser quality. Moreover, due to the explicit nature of this surveying technique, the questions are predominantly assessed rationally; therefore unconscious phenomena can hardly be discovered.

Pictures - An Approach to solution

Nevertheless, pictures can be used to uncover unconscious phenomena like emotions, motives, or affective attitudes, since a certain picture is usually preferred for rather unconscious reasons. Additionally, pictures also show a high activation potential among participants and counteract respondent fatigue. The pictures allow the respondents to express aspects that are often difficult to put into words. By choosing pictures, one is able to respond without having to use socially desirable answers. Therefore we resorted to our validated picture gallery „VAL|**LERY**" for the question how the future of Europe is seen from a personal point of view.

The interpretation of pictures is often ambiguous, since the respondents may each associate very different things with one and the same picture. Therefore Produkt + Markt has developed a probability model to assign pictures to property dimensions. The probability model allows the numeric depiction of pictures and dimensions at the same time. For example, as soon as a person has chosen two pictures, he or she is assigned a fixed profile of properties according to the underlying dimensions, based on the model and the chosen pictures. A second person who has chosen different pictures has usually a different profile of properties. Since these profiles can be compared to each other, it is also possible to define a distance dimension that measures the „distance“ between these people. The procedure remains analogous for more than two people as well. With this approach, it is now possible to conduct a cluster analysis based on quantitative data to segment the respondents with the help of pictures.

Example survey on „Europe’s future“

In order to review the possibilities that a segmentation with pictures offers, 653 people were surveyed in a nationwide online poll. „What is your personal view on Europe’s future development?“ – To answer this question, the respondents were able to select four to six suitable pictures from a set of 40. On average, this took the respondents less than one minute.

As a first result, one receives a simple image cloud on all respondents. It shows all respondents’ inner vision of Europe’s future. There it becomes apparent that images representing chaos, defeat, discipline, and trust were often chosen in addition to pictures symbolising laws and bureaucracy (fig.1).

Altogether, the cluster analysis identified the following four segments: security, bureaucracy + order, trust + care, and environment. While the cluster „bureaucracy + order“ is the biggest with 44 percent, the other clusters are almost the same in size (fig.2).

The differences between the segments manifest themselves in the different assessments of the dimensions and therefore can be seen in the respective image clouds. Thus the segment „bureaucracy + order“ in fig. 3 strongly features images that are attributed to the dimensions bureaucracy (38 percent), order (13 percent), and expertise (11 percent).

In contrast, the cluster „trust + care“ is dominated by pictures that are attributed to appropriate dimensions like trust (27 percent), care (16 percent), safety (12 percent), security (9 percent), and sociability (8 percent) (fig.4).

These generically depicted clusters show that the respondents actually have very different views on Europe’s future: Bureaucracy on the one hand, trust and care on the other.

If one compares the segments described above with segments identified traditionally based on sociodemographic variables like age, gender, education, income, or occupation, there aren't any significant connections. Hence one gets to see the respondents in a completely different light, which would not be possible if there had been a „traditional" explicit segmentation.

Identifying undiscovered segments

The validated picture gallery VAL|**LERY** and the corresponding probability model allow us to segment the respondents by their choice of pictures, taking into account the individual profiles instead of just counting the rates of occurrence. In addition we also obtain segments that differ greatly from those identified in segmentations relying on traditional variables. Whenever a cluster analysis yields questionable segments, implicit segmentation with pictures is a clear alternative in order to identify undiscovered segments.

Now a classification of respondents by means of pictures can take place completely analogous to segmentations conducted using traditional segmentation variables. There the respondent respectively makes a selection from the previously used pictures.

Fig. 1 *Source: Produkt + Markt*

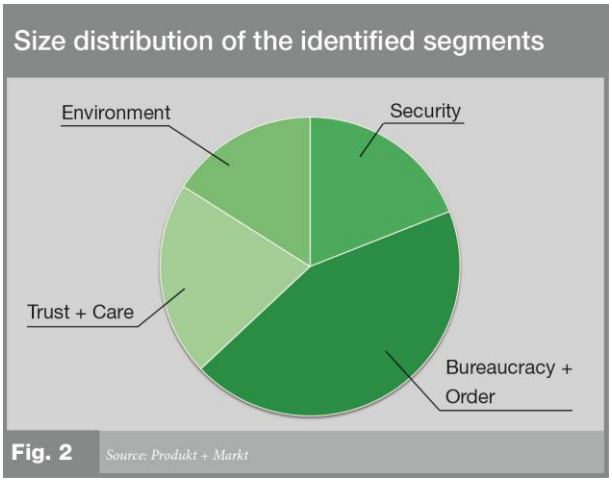
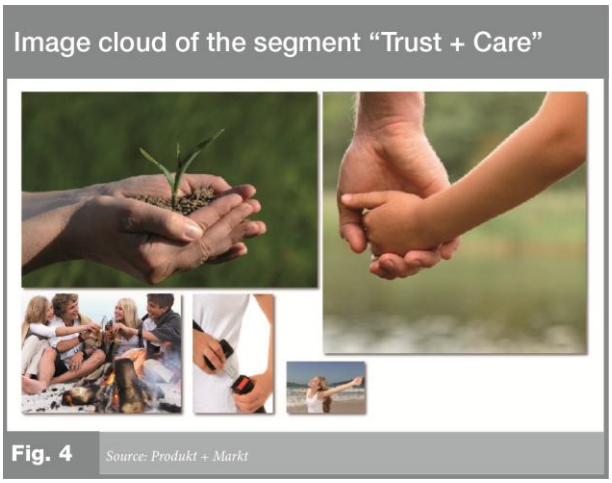


Fig. 2 *Source: Produkt + Markt*



The Authors

Andreas Jütting has been with Produkt + Markt since 2006. He works in the department of Research & Development focusing on advanced statistics as well as developing tools and software.

Dr. Michael Koch joined Produkt + Markt in 2007. He is responsible for the development of tools and models in the department of Research & Development.

www.produktundmarkt.de