"WHEN BRANDS BECOME ANIMALS"

"An exploration on the use of qualitative techniques
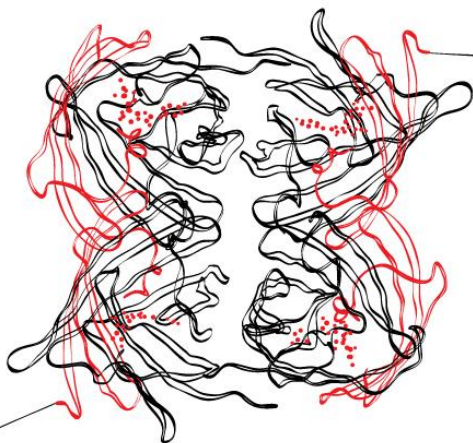in measuring brand's images"

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Market researchers increasingly use qualitative methods to measure consumers' perception towards brands. Upcoming are associative techniques whereby researchers aim at a deeper understanding of thoughts and emotions concerning particular market products. The purpose of this research is to explore the added value of using metaphors in determining one's perception towards a brand. Furthermore, it was explored whether mentioned attributions differed per low and high involvement product categories

Design/methodology/approach: In order to collect data, three different research techniques were used; an interview about one's opinion of six brands, an associative technique in which participants had to link those six brands to one of ten predetermined animals and a combination of those in which first an interview was conducted about the brand whereby participant subsequently had to associate those brands to a self-chosen animal.

Findings: This research revealed an added value of using metaphors in brand image research when participants were able to choose their own metaphors. However, choosing between a compiled dataset of metaphors revealed less attributions of brands in comparison with the other two methods. Also, no great differences were found between associations of participants towards high and low involvement products.

Keywords: Brand image, Associative techniques, Brands, Consumer behavior, Qualitative research, Low involvement, High involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Each day, new brands are introduced all over the world. Extensive ranges of new products and services are offered and therefore brands are more homogeneous than ever before. Differences between products become smaller and it seems more difficult to differentiate them. The process of choosing a brand is not only about its products anymore. Even though consumers do not have much knowledge about a brand, the brand evokes a certain feeling through which people imagine what a brand is like.

There is an increasing importance of what brands mean to consumers and to what extent it influences one's image. In today's highly competitive business environment a well-positioned brand image is of great importance since it might influence consumers' attitude regarding quality, buying behavior, loyalty, and competitiveness of companies (Vanhamme et al. 2012).

For companies, knowledge about consumers' image perception is of great importance. A well-defined corporate identity and clear understanding of the external and internal image of an organization or brand ensures that strategic decisions are easier to make. A brand without self-awareness can be compared to a blindfolded archer trying to hit the bulls-eye. Measuring image perception can be carried out by both quantitative and qualitative methods. Most social researchers use quantitative methods to measure a brand's image. Quantitative methods have the advantage that it reaches a great amount of people. Moreover, it is a great tool to explain phenomena based on what is already known about the topic (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). However, those methods often measure explicit or socially desirable attitudes were implicit attitudes reveal more underlying motivations of consumers. Thereby, those consumers' motivation and deeper feelings are of great importance for brands in order to operate successfully. More and more marketers have used qualitative techniques (including projective techniques) in order to reach those underlying motivations (Hussey & Duncombe, 1999). Those techniques are effective tools for gaining an in-depth, holistic understanding of consumers' attitude and perceptions. Literature enumerates several types of qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, projective techniques and participant observation. Increasingly is the mention and use of associative techniques, however, less information can be found concerning the added value of using metaphors in comparison with interviews. In addition, prior literature did not explored whether choosing of pre-determined metaphors reveals more or less information than devising a metaphor. The aim of this research is to explore the effectiveness of using metaphors in measuring a brand's image.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to understand the term brand image this section describes its definition and enumerates qualitative techniques to measure consumers' perception. It also summarizes information found in prior research. Emphasis will be placed on associative techniques and the added value of using animals as metaphors. It also illustrates the use of qualitative methods, such as associative techniques, in measuring this concept. Furthermore, the use of metaphors will be clarified and differences of brands' attributions in low and high involvement environments will be explored.

Brand image – definition

When consumers become acquainted with new brands they automatically form an impression about it. Those impressions reflect brand's characteristics when recalling a brand and forms a perception based upon both functional meaning (quality, service, price) as emotive meanings (Martineau, 1985). Numerous definitions of brand image have been proposed over the last decades. Where some scholars referred to diverse conceptualizations of brand image by the use of terminology, others mentioned phrases to refer to similar or identical concepts (Lee, James, & Kim, 2014) such as "brand personality" and "brand character". According to Dowling (1986) "An image is the set of meanings by which an object is known and through which people describe, remember and relate to it. That is the net result of the interaction of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings and impressions about an object" (p.110). Keller (2008) describes brand image as "Consumer perceptions of any preferences for a brand, measured by the various types of brand associations held in memory" (p.636). Nowadays, more emphasis is given to the consumers' associations and beliefs regarding the brand as brand image (Anselmsson, Bondesson, & Johansson, 2014).

In all definitions, brand image involves an associative memory network whereby the image is linked to consumers' memories. Those associations are often related to the physical and behavioral attributes of the firm. Aspects such as the brand's name, its products and services, traditions, ideology and corporate buildings generate emotions which lead to a certain perception (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001). These aspects can be influenced by the company itself. However, changing a company's image is not always possible since people hold images about brands in mind (Dowling, 1986). This image varies among people due to their beliefs, ideas, feelings, impressions and so on. Moreover, a brand has multiple images which differ over time (Dowling, 1988).

When defining brand image perception, several aspects are of importance (Vos, 1992): 1) it is an experience which is held in people's mind, 2) it is personal and 3) time bound,4) it can vary from vague to lively and from limited to extensive, 5) it corresponds in small or large extent with the identity of an organization, 6) it is formed by (personal or indirect) experiences, 7) it contains impressions and evaluations of an organization and lastly, 8) it might influence people's behavior.

Brand image and self-congruence

Brands develop and manage strategies to gain a specific image. Conveying this image to the target market is an important marketing activity. Brands strive for congruence between their image and the target groups' self-image (Aaker, 1991). Currently, consumers do not only buy products for what they are or do but also for what they mean and add to the self-concept (Levy, 1959). According to Hosany and Martin (2012) self-image is the idea, conception, or mental image one has of oneself. Self-image congruence refers to the cognitive match between consumers' self-concept and product/brand image (Hosany and Martin, 2012; Sirgy et al.,1997,2000; Sirgy and Su, 2000). Onkvisit and Shaw (1994) describe self-concept as a gathering of an individual's ideas, thoughts and feelings concerning themselves in relation to other objects. Thus, one's self-concept includes all the self-relevant attributes of the individual (Kaltcheva, Patino, & Chebat, 2011).

Using a certain product or brand symbolizes the self-image of people. Symbolism often refers to connotations of the unconscious. According to Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), many definitions of symbolism "imply that some personal or social meaning or value must be consciously attached to the product, and that products, as symbols, will only be used if they reinforce the consumer's self-concept" (pp.111-114). Thus, consumers buy specific products and brands they believe to possess symbolic images similar and/or complementary to their self-image (Heath & Scott, 1998).

Conveying information about consumer's self-image is more and more important since it predicts future behaviors (Achouri & Bouslama, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to understand the target group's perception towards the brand. It might be difficult for brands to gather information about the self-image of its target group. Once the brand has information about consumer's feelings, thoughts and perceptions, Value can be created by subjective, implicit product aspects that are attributed to the object through processes of associations. If perceptions are positive and the image of the company fits the self-image, it is highly possible consumers buy the brand.

Low - high involvement

One's associations and perceptions of images can vary from holistic, general impressions to highly detailed evaluations of products, brands or organizations. Therefore, Poiesz (1989) distinguished three approaches with respect to the image concept; high level of elaboration, medium level of elaboration and low level of elaboration. The higher the amount of involvement, the higher the level of elaboration and the more complex the image is constructed. In the higher level of elaboration, image is a complex and structured network of meanings all stored in memory. In the medium elaboration level, image is a theoretical and operational equivalent of an attitude whereby the image is equal to the attitude, the weighted sum of views. In the lower elaboration level, image is only a global and overall impression of the brand compared to its competitors.

Not all product categories require high involvement. Often, consumers' buying decisions do not involve extensive information searching (Atkinson& Rosenthal, 2014) and evaluation of the product. Most buying decisions are made spontaneously and contain less cognitive action. The latter mostly occurs in low involvement product categories. Product involvement refers to a person's perceived relevance of an object, based on their inherent need, value, and interests (Soloman, 2012; Choi, Hahn & Lee, 2012). The higher the level of involvement, the more the consumer actively searches for more information. Value equity, described as product quality, price, and convenience, is relatively important in the buying decision for high involvement products, where brand equity is more important in purchase decisions for low involvement products (Choi, Hahn & Lee, 2012). According to Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt (2011) brand equity encompasses brand image (e.g., perception of service quality) and brand familiarity. The latter implicates that brand image is more important in low involvement products categories. Examples of products in those categories are food, shampoo, toilet paper, drinks and soap. Since the level of involvement often differs in high and low involvement environments it is possible that consumers associations also differ. In addition, perhaps consumers' perceptions and associations are differently imposed. If this is the case, brands can respond to it by emphasizing attributions consumers mentioned.

Measuring brand image

As mentioned before, a key element for a long-term business consumer relationship is the way consumers perceive the brand and which associations they have with the brand (Fournier, 1998). For brands, most important information can be found in the underlying motivations and meanings in the higher level of elaboration. In order to reach this information, qualitative

techniques and open research methods are effective tools to use. Prior scholars have already used several methods to gain insight into the content and organization of brand images. However, marketing researchers have not used a consistent measurement technique to assess consumer perceptions of brands (Low & Lamb 2000). Moreover, most of those techniques are not standardized (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). In the past decades, some scholars measured brand image as a whole whereas others compared it to a competitors image (Boivin, 1986) or with one's self-image (Sirgy, 1985). In conclusion, most studies focused on the comparison of the retailer's perspective versus the image perception of the consumer (McClure & Ryans, 1968).

Researchers have not agreed which method is the most appropriate to measure brand image. However, a trend can be found towards the use of quantitative techniques (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Common is Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale with five dimensions and 42 items. Brand personality refers to "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" and is often related to brand image. Quantitative methods have the advantage of involving a greater number of subjects and due to standard means, the research can be replicated, analyzed and compared with similar studies. However, such studies are very narrow and therefore results are limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative perceptions. Respondents are not capable to explain their choices and clarify their feelings. Furthermore, those scales can only be applied to brands with common personalities, which most brands are not (Low & Lamb 2000). Not only Aaker's scale can be criticized, also many other developed scales are too specialized for general use or are too long for application in another setting. Consequently, it is difficult to determine if the various aspects they measure are separate dimensions of brand associations (multi-dimensional) or if they are simply indicators of brand associations (uni-dimensional).

Contemporary scholars emphasize the usability of conversational, projective and matching techniques which are all qualitative research methods. These techniques were already used a decade ago. Examples are Boivin's (1986) three stage 'free response' approach to brand image (collection, coding and scoring of free verbalizations) and Durgee and Stuart's (1987) research in which participants compared brands to people, countries, occupations, fabrics, activities, cars, animals and magazines. Qualitative methods have been lauded for their ability of revealing underlying emotions. It is possible to uncover people's feelings and thoughts by asking them direct questions in an interview. However, this does not always work. Sometimes people do not feel comfortable revealing their deeper lying emotions to a

stranger, which might lead to socially expected answers. Furthermore, some questions are difficult to answer because the real thoughts and feelings are buried deeper in people's consciousness. According to Hofstede, van Hoof, Walenberg and de Jong (2007), "people typically do not have the standard vocabulary to extensively discuss and explain their views on the image or personality of a certain brand or product" (p.301). Useful techniques for reaching deeper lying feelings and attitudes are projective techniques). Morrison et al. (2011) describe in their book 5 types of categories. Those techniques are enumerated and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
Types of projective techniques

Projective technique	Explanation
Association	Connecting the research object with words, images or thoughts.
Completion	Finishing sentences, stories or arguments.
Construction	Answering questions about the feelings, beliefs or behaviors of other people, completing speech bubbles in a cartoon
Choice ordering	Ranking product benefits
Expressive	Role-playing, story-telling, drawing or other creative activities.

Associative techniques

Many years ago, the psychoanalyst Freud found that not all of his patients could be hypnotized and thus he developed an additional technique; the free association technique. This technique aims at the unconscious mind of people by asking to report whatever words, images or thoughts come into mind. In this way, "the psychoanalyst is eliciting the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic; that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p.15). Associative and projective techniques are often used in clinical psychology. Nowadays, market researchers also use associative techniques to gain a deeper understanding of thoughts, feelings, and fears about particular market products (Boddy, 2005; Gong, 2012). Revealing underlying emotional motivations might be useful in analyzing consumers' image perceptions of a brand. The most well known associative technique is to ask people to name all associations with the brands. Another

technique, a more visual one, is asking people to express their feelings by the use of images. Participants have to look at images of people, objects or animals and then subsequently connect those images to their thoughts or to brands. This technique aims on the metaphors people use in order to explain their feelings. Participants do not have to give a motivation or explanation for their decisions when assigning animals to brands until they have assigned all pictures to brands. Afterwards, they explain the reason behind the connection. In this way, participants primarily reveal emotional and unconscious feelings from the higher elaboration level.

Metaphors

"*He's cold as ice*", "*It's raining cats and dogs*" and *"I've got a broken heart"* are all metaphors we use on daily basis in order to strengthen our message or to make a statement. These expressions have one thing in common: a situation is compared to a real thing, although the situation is not actually that particular thing. A metaphor is a tool to express abstract concepts, by linking to direct bodily experiences with the physical world (Akpinar, & Berger, 2015). A good metaphor provides people the ability to think and talk productively about something that they were not previously able to (Kendall-Taylor, Erard & Haydon, 2013). People use metaphors as a figure of speech, in which they replace one idea or object with another to suggest an analogous relationship (Carpenter, 2008, p.274).

Although, there are multiple forms of metaphors, often they refer to, for many individuals, common schemes (Akpinar, & Berger, 2015). Those schemes and concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. In defining our everyday realities, this conceptual system thus plays a central role (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), even though we are not always aware of this system. However, our language reveals information concerning those systems. Especially, metaphors are rooted in our ideas and objects that are more familiar to us and thus represent deeper lying systems and concepts (Seiler, 2013). In conclusion, metaphors can be used to strengthen a message or to give information about things we do not want to talk about. Furthermore, it reveals information about people's minds and concepts they are not aware of. Thus, research techniques whereby participants use metaphors to explain their feelings might be an effective tool to reach deeper feelings and attitudes.

The purpose of this research is to explore the added value of using metaphors in determining one's perception towards a brand. Three qualitative methods have been used in

order to gain information about one's associations with brands; 1) an interview, 2) a new introduced combination of an interview and an associative technique and 3) an associative technique. According to literature the associative technique reveals most underlying feelings, emotions and thoughts and it is therefore expected that condition three provides most attributions.

METHOD

Procedure

As mentioned before, prior literature focused on the effectiveness of associative techniques. It is said that assigning brands to animals foster the creative associative process and will reveal more information about brands. However, less information can be found concerning the added value of using metaphors compared to an interview, when describing brand. In addition, prior literature did not explored whether choosing of pre-determined animals reveals more or less information than devising an animal. This research will explore differences between those techniques.

In order to collect data, the research techniques have been applied in February and March in the Netherlands. Participants were recruited through the personal network of the researcher and were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. All methods started with questions about one's age and education level.

Condition 1

In condition one, questions were asked regarding participant's attitudes, feelings, opinions and associations towards the six brands.

Condition 2

In condition two, the same method was used as in condition one. However, after revealing their emotions, participants were asked to compare the brands with self chosen animals. Consequently, participants clarified their choice and names common characteristics.

Condition 3

In contrast to condition one and two, condition three did not start with an interview concerning one's perception. Participants were exposed to eight cards with animals and six

cards of brands and had to link them. They were asked to spend as much time as they felt was necessary and after linking those cards, they clarified their choice. The set of animal cards was compiled on the occasion of a comparative study of Hussey and Duncombe (1999). This study investigated the use of cars and animals in order to gain information about a brand's image. In selecting the pictures of animals guidelines suggested by Hussey and Duncombe (1999) were followed. These guidelines include the following:

1. The pictures had to be neutral to avoid respondents' bias.
2. The photographs needed to be different from one another on at least one crucial element.
3. The range of pictures should cover all extremes, from wild, jungle animals to domestic pets.

Based on the above guidelines, pictures were selected by entering the animals' name in combination with 'white background' in Google Images (www.google.com). From these images high quality photos were chosen and all scaled to the same size. All photographs contained a neutral white background and the animal in a neutral position (Appendix 2).

Participants

A heterogeneous group of 36 persons participated in this study, 12 participants per condition. Several requirements were included in the selection criteria: each participant had 1) an age between 20 and 30 years, 2) an education level of higher professional education or university and 3) Dutch as a native language. These criteria were required to make sure all participants were able to understand the interviewer and were familiar with the 6 chosen brands. Both men and women were able to participate in this study. All these requirements were chosen in order to compose a heterogeneous group. Table 2 reveals a mean age of 24 in condition one, 25 in condition two and 23 in condition three. Looking at the mean number of females and males in each condition and the level of education, it can be stated that the groups are quite alike. 77,8 percent of the participants had a scientific education level.

Table 2
Age, sex and education level of participants per condition

			Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	Sd
Age			24	2	25	3	23	2
Sex	Male	Count	5		4		4	
	Female	Count	7		8		8	
Level of education	Higher professional education	Count	3		3		2	
	Scientific education	Count	9		9		10	

N=36

Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, all conversations were transcribed verbatim, leading to 36 transcribed interviews pages. Each interview was analyzed in order to design a code scheme (Appendix 1). All attributions were listed and divided into sub attributions (Appendix 3). After designing this code scheme, all statements have been coded in ATLAS.ti software. Double attributions mentioned per participants per brand were removed in order to gain a list with unique attributions.

Thereafter, in order to maximize the reliability of this study, a second coder was asked to code 8 percent of the data. He coded one randomly selected interview of each condition by using the code scheme. In this way the clarity of the scheme was tested. Assigned codes were compared and a Kappa of .710 was found between the results of both coders in condition one. In condition two, a Kappa was found of .703 and in condition three a Kappa of 0.684. In conjunction with the second coder, several elements of the codebook were adjusted and an agreement between the two coders was reached.

RESULTS

Analyzing results of this research requires an understanding of the overall impression the participants responses made. In all conditions, this means an analysis of the types and numbers of attributions attached to all brands. These attributions, also known as core values, represent the essence of the brand and are set characteristics that identify psychical, character and personality traits of the brand.

In each condition, main and sub attributions, results per brand (high and low involvement) and the process of giving information were analyzed. It is not only of importance to explore outcomes of statements given in the interviews. Furthermore, the process of giving answers should be taken into account when analysing differences between the three research methods. The ease of giving answers, the level of pleasure during the method and other factors such as comfort are important as they might all influence participants answers and in the end the completeness of participants perception towards the brand.

Table 3
Number of statements per main attributions per condition

Main attributions:	Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3		
Mean	61		80		37		
sd	15		25		14		
	count	%	count	%	count	%	Total
Competitors	29	5	28	4	20	5	77
Effect on human	13	2	19	3	1	0	33
Features brand	196	33	288	39	159	42	643
Features of products	102	17	135	18	79	21	316
Experiences	37	6	36	5	9	2	82
Use	39	7	48	7	14	4	101
Feeling	124	21	139	19	66	17	329
Marketing	40	7	45	6	25	7	110
Name associations	9	2	6	1	8	2	23
Total:	589		744		381		1714

N=36

Table 3 represents the number of attributions per condition. In total 1714 unique statements are made in all conditions. Most statements concerning attributions of the brands were made

in condition two, 744 in total. Condition one revealed 589 statements and Condition three revealed the fewest attributions; 318. As this table also reveals, it seems that condition two revealed twice as much attributions as condition three. Condition one also revealed more attributions than condition three. An ANOVA was conducted to test whether differences between the conditions were significant. According to Table 4, all conditions significantly differ from each other and did not reveal the same number of attributions.

Table 4
Multiple Comparisons between groups

Conditie	Conditie	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
con 1	con 2	-19,500*	7,539	,043	-38,51	-,49
	con 3	23,667*	7,539	,011	4,65	42,68
con 2	con 1	19,500*	7,539	,043	,49	38,51
	con 3	43,167*	7,539	,000	24,15	62,18
con 3	con 1	-23,667*	7,539	,011	-42,68	-4,65
	con 2	-43,167*	7,539	,000	-62,18	-24,15

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The next part of this paper will set forth the results per condition to clarify what participants stated and to explore the main differences per research technique. Furthermore, the information given about all brands will be compared in order to test whether participants reveal more information of high involvement brand in comparison with low involvement brands.

Condition 1

In condition one, twelve participants were interviewed and asked to name all associations and feelings towards 6 brands. The average duration of the interviews was 10 minutes and 589 statements were made by 12 participants, an average of 8,18 attributions per brand.

As Table 3 reveals, most statements have been made concerning features of the brand in this condition. Participants mainly gave information concerning the brands' target group, the origin of the brand and the types or variances of the brands. Attributions such as quality of the brand, prices and popularity were named too.

Several statements were made about the origin of the brand. Participants mainly referred to the country of origin when discussing car brands: "*I think about Asia, China, Hong*

Kong. I don't know from which country it is but that's my association". Several associated that country to a certain level of quality: *"That's German! German cars are reliable!"*. Furthermore, many statements concerning one's feelings regarding the brand and features of the products were made. However, no one-sided view of participants' attitude was found. Where one participant said about one of the brands: *"If I may be honest, I really find it a bad brand. The cars are really ugly and I think it doesn't really work"* the other stated: *"Decent cars. They are safe, giving me a feeling of trust. It does not implicate luxury or status or something but it is fine to me"*. From all conditions, most statements concerning one's experiences with the brand have been made in condition one. As Appendix 3 reveals, 22 statements were based on own experiences with the brands. Others mentioned experiences based on the use of people in their inner circle such as family or friends: *"It reminds me of my neighbors, my mother always ran with that woman. I often played with her daughter. They also had that car"*. Most of those associations related to a good feeling for the participants, a few did not: *"Ugh, it reminds me of my ex boyfriend."*

Table 5
10 most mentioned sub attributions in condition 1

Sub attributions	Number	Main attribution
Attraction	53	Features brand
Target group	41	Features brand
Type / variant	40	Features brand
Origin - country / time / genesis	28	Features brand
Place/moment of use	23	Use
Brand	22	Competitor
Own experiences	22	Experience
Tv/radio commercials	22	Marketing
Ingredients / components	21	Product
Flavor	21	Product

Table 5 enumerates the most mentioned sub attributions in this condition. Most statements concerned one's feeling of attraction towards the brand either negative, positive or neutral. Besides features of the brand, participants also mentioned the moment or place of use. This attribution was mostly associated with drinks; *"It is often served in the hospitality industry. And you can drink it on party when you don't want to drink alcohol!"*. In total, 22 statements have been made concerning competitors of the brand. In this case, participants often referred

to brands discussed before in the interview: "*I think it is more trendy than Citroën and Opel*" or "*Funny, it reminds me of Crystal Clear and also of Taksi*".

Process of condition 1

In condition one, participants directly named several attributions of the brand. However, the number of those attributions was not high. With an average of 5 attributions, the interviewer had to ask further questions in order to generate more information and statements concerning attributions. Multiple respondents stressed the fact that they could not mention more associations. When asking participants what more comes to mind several participants named more attributions, others were not capable to give more information: "*A dark man who is dancing, everyone Dubbelfrisss! Orange package, much sugar comes to mind. Lemonade and supermarket. That's it. Can't remember anymore.*" Noteworthy is the fact that many participants compared brands to prior tested brands.

Condition 2

In condition two, an interview was conducted whereby participants consequently had to link brands to animals. The average duration of the interviews and the associative technique was 25 minutes. 744 attributions were mentioned in this condition by 12 participants, 10,33 per brand. 562 unique attributions have been mentioned by 12 participants, before comparing the brand to an animal. Once participants conceived an animal, 182 unique attributions were added to the response. This means, an addition of approximately 15,67 statements per person, an average of 2,53 statements per person per brand.

Similar to condition one, condition two also revealed most attributions concerning features of the brand (Table 3). Participants in this condition mentioned the brands' target group mostly. Moreover, they often mentioned the conspicuousness and uniqueness of the brand; "*I think about inconspicuous, because the brand for me is not so big and striking, I think of an inconspicuous animal*". Especially in this condition, this attribution was often mentioned and it therefore seemed an important factor when choosing an animal: "*Let me think, I think about inconspicuous, because for me the brand is not so big, so I think of a nondescript animal.*"

Table 6

10 most mentioned sub attributions in condition 2

Sub attributions	Number	Main attribution
attraction	50	brand
target group	47	brand
color	38	product
striking factor / uniqueness / stubbornness	32	brand
type / variant	30	brand
origin - country / time / genesis	28	brand
popularity / appearance	28	brand
ingredients / components	26	product
sportsmanship / speed	26	product
tropical / holiday / summer	25	feelings

When analyzing sub attributions Table 4 indicates that most statements have been made concerning the attraction of the brand and its target group. Participants often first mentioned the attraction of the animal and only later on the attraction of the brand: "*It is a beautiful animal to watch, I also have that feeling when I see that brand, it attracts me*". Furthermore, some mentioned the attractiveness of the brand by using the animal as a metaphor: "*A goldfish is... it looks nice, but it's also quite... It's not such an animal you say oh I find really cool. Or I find really ugly. It is more like: okay it's there*".

Table 7
Chosen animals in condition 2

High involvement brands		Low involvement brands	
Opel	Guinea pig	Taksi	Monkey
	Golden retriever		Cockatoo
	Gray pigeon		Parrot
	Dog		Panther
	Pig		Monkey
	Rhino		Cockatoo
	Feral Pigeon		Spider monkey
	Panda		Dog
	Donkey		Monkey
	Elephant		Toucan
	Guinea pig		Lion
	Ant		Chimpanzee
Citroën	Horse	Crystal clear	Butterfly
	Parakeet		Monkey
	Porcupine		Killer whale
	Horse		Canary
	Kuala Beer		Gazelle
	Peacock		Hummingbird
	Naked mole rat		Goldfish
	Panther		Lioness
	Lion		Sea horse
	Sloth		Dolphin
	Zebra		Female buffalo
	Golden retriever		Fish
Toyota	Tiger	Dubbelfrisss	Rabbit
	Bear		Flamingo
	Dolphin		Parakeet
	Salamander		Watervlo
	Labrador		Guinea pig
	Killer whale		Parrot
	Fox		Cow
	Labrador		Peacock
	Ka Bird		Dolphin
	Hyena		Dog
	Ant		Kangaroo
	Rhino		Chimpanzee

Table 7 indicates that the majority of the metaphors differed from each other. Where one relates one of the brands to a peacock the other associate it with: *"A naked mole rat! Because the animal is ugly, really ugly. But it is a fast animal, a real rodent. Also, if you've looked at the Impossible films, years ago, you can see that it is a surprising creature".* Thus, no pattern

19

was found in using metaphors in this condition. Associations with animals are personal and might be seen as just a tool to clarify emotions, feelings and thoughts.

The use of an animal as a metaphor was mainly used to strengthen one's prior response whereby several new attributions were mentioned. One of the participants mentioned: *"It's not a tiger or whatever, but it's a bit of an old fashioned animal and that's this brand too. And a cow is straightforward. A cow stands there a little bit and does not want to behave too popular. He just wants to chill in the meadow, making some milk"*. This participant mentioned the image of the brand by using a metaphor, in this case a cow. This metaphor did not only reveal the trendiness of the brand, it also said something about the level of specialty. Also other participants added attributions while talking about another: "*A zebra is a herd animal, very fast, but quite robust. A zebra has its eyes sit on the side and has much visibility, so it reminds me of the glass roof and plenty of space. Also zebras live in great plain areas, and they need a lot of space*". Enumerating characteristics often led to other attributions of the brand.

Process of condition 2

In condition two, participants first found it difficult to name several unique attributions of the brands. Furthermore, when asking them to link those characteristics to an animal, participants had to think a while. However, once they found an animal it became easier to enumerate more unique characteristics of the brand. Participants found it a pleasurable and funny method: *"Oh my gosh, I made such strange comparisons between those brands and animals. First I thought it was going to be a boring interview, but I really liked it!"*. During the interview, some participants mentioned an animal spontaneously. However, after asking for a clarification they found it difficult to illustrate their opinion: *"When you think of the characteristics of the snake and the brand, do you think they are comparable? No, in that case not. A snake is often a predator, basically always. From that perspective it has not so much to do with this brand. Let me think about a better animal"*. Subsequently, all participants mentioned a better animal suiting their perception. Another participant after the interview: *"I often get interviewed at school, most of the time I just say things the interviewee wants to hear. In this case I really had to think hard but I think due to the comparison of the animal, I could tell more features of the brands, I think"*.

Condition 3

In condition three, 12 participants were asked to link the brands to 8 animals. Consequently, the interviewees had to clarify their choices. The average duration of the process in which participants connected the brand to the animals was 4 minutes. The process thereafter in which participants explained and clarified their choice, took about 7 minutes. 381 attributions were mentioned in this condition by 12 participants, 5,29 per brand.

According to Table 4, even in condition three participants mostly mentioned features of the brand, 159 in total, and its product, 79 attributions. Mainly in this condition, participants mentioned the strength of the products; "*I thought of a powerful brand, and in my opinion they also have powerful products. And the lion is also a powerful animal, so that's why I put it there.*"Worth mentioning is the fact that only one participant mentioned the effect of the brand on a human: "*Anyway, I think of something healthy*". According to Table 8, most mentioned attributions in condition three were the target group. Furthermore, 19 statements have been given about the size of the brand in condition three. Interestingly, the associations of the size of the cars were linked to the size of an animal: "*In terms of the size, it also fits the panda. A panda is not small, a panda is not big*". From 19 statements concerning the size of the brand and animal only two were made about the drinks. Those statements were associated to the package of the products: "*I always got it to school, those little packages. Small, a rabbit is also small*".

Table 8
10 most mentioned sub attributions in condition 3

Sub attributions	Number	Main attribution
target group	26	brand
brand	19	competitor
size	19	product
strength / robustness	19	product
striking factor / uniqueness / stubbornness	18	brand
sportsmanship / speed	18	product
quality	17	brand
ignorance	16	feelings
seriousness / playful	16	brand
origin - country / time / genesis	12	brand

According to Table 9, no great patterns can be found in assigning the brands. Although, there is more consensus on some brands than on other. For example, participants agreed on the fact that Taksi is not a bear, elephant, cat or panda. However, perceptions of participants in this condition differed amongst the other brands.

Table 9
Number of animals in condition 3

Opel	Elephant	5	Crystal clear	Cat	3
	Bear	3		Bear	2
	Panda	2		Panda	2
	Lion	1		Squirrel	2
	Monkey	1		Elephant	1
				Lion	1
				Monkey	1
Taksi	Monkey	6	Toyota	Cat	3
	Lion	2		Elephant	2
	Rabbit	2		Squirrel	2
	Squirrel	2		Bear	1
				Lion	1
				Monkey	1
				Panda	1
				Rabbit	1
Citroën	Squirrel	3	Dubbelfrisss	Cat	4
	Bear	2		Monkey	2
	Rabbit	2		Panda	2
	Cat	1		Rabbit	2
	Elephant	1		Lion	1
	Monkey	1		Squirrel	1
	Olifant	1			
	Panda	1			

As mentioned before, using an animal as a metaphor might be seen as just a tool to clarify emotions, feelings and thoughts. However in this condition, participants often found it difficult to associate the animals to the brands.

Process of condition 3

Before conducting the interview, participants of condition three were enthusiastic and curious towards the research method. However, during the linking process, participants gave signals of confusion due to the limited offer of animals. One participant: *"Why those animals? Do you know how hard this is? I want to link Crystal Clear to a horse but it's not here. That's a*

shame". Some participants found it difficult to clarify their choice of animal: *"I can't remember why I compared Dubbelfrisss to the monkey. Oh I'm sorry but I forgot everything. This is very difficult, you know that? I compared the animals just based on my first impression."*. Thus, participants were often not capable to explain their feelings and to clarify their choice when talking about their connection. It seems that in this condition, participants primarily thought about the characteristics of the animals. Mostly about one or two specific characteristics. When the interviewer asked participants to give more associations with the brand without focusing on the animal, more information was given: *"Yeah, mm... In that case, I think the brand is quite reliable. I mean, I haven't heard bad things about it, and I don't have bad associations in mind. I think a monkey is also reliable"*. Furthermore, several participants forgot the fact why they had chosen that specific animal: *"I find them clumsy cars and I think a Panda's that too. They are slow and... Oh shit I have lost everything. That's it for the moment, maybe I'll remember it later"*. Overall, participants had problems with the association between the animal and the brand. They were more focused on the characters of the animals instead of thinking about the brand. Once the interviewer asked to think about the brand, more information was given.

Results per involvement category

In this research, perceptions towards six brands were measured. From those brands, three were low involvement brands (Taksi, Crystal Clear and Dubbelfrisss) and three high involvement brands (Opel, Citroën and Toyota). Concerning the comparison of the statements about the different brands, results show that most attributions were assigned to the brand Dubbelfrisss, in total 310 attributions (Appendix 4). The number of attributions assigned to the other brands seems equal; Citroën 280 statements, Crystal Clear 303 statements, Taksi 290 statements, Opel and Toyota both 289 statements.

Table 10
Number of statements per main attributions per brand

Condition	1		2		3	
Involvement	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Competitor	19	10	19	9	11	9
Effect on human	13	0	19	0	1	0
Features brand	66	130	116	172	70	89
Features products	65	37	81	54	35	44
Experiences	18	19	21	15	4	5
Use	33	6	33	15	11	3
Feelings	59	65	83	56	38	28
Marketing	27	13	33	12	22	3
Name associations	5	4	3	3	6	2
Total	305	284	408	336	198	183

Table 10 reveals that most statements concerning attributions have been assigned to low involvement brands, 911 statements in total. 803 characteristics were mentioned concerning high involvement brands. In each condition more features of brands were mentioned about the high involvement brands. In addition, in condition one more statements have been made concerning one's experiences and feelings of high involvement brands. Besides that, in condition three more details concerning features of the products were revealed of high involvement products. Noteworthy, most statements about participant's feelings were given in condition two. Overall, it can be stated that low involvement products excite more associations than high involvement products.

Differences between techniques

From all main attributions, participants mostly enumerate features of the brand (643 attributions), its products (316 attributions) and their feelings (329). Noteworthy, in the first and second condition participants made numerous statements concerning their feelings regarding the brand (124 and 139), in condition three only 66 statements were made about participants feeling: *"I have a bad feeling about Dubbelfrisss. Why bad? Because it is a drink with lots of sugar which is ultimately not healthy"*. No great differences were found in the

number of statements regarding competitors of the brands and associations with the brands' name.

As shown in Table 10, participants mostly mentioned features of the brands. However, in condition three participants mentioned the target group of the brands more instead of the extend of attraction. In contrast to condition one and two, fewer statements have been given concerning the amount of attractiveness of the brand in condition three.

When comparing the ease of enumerating attributions in each condition, all participants initially found it difficult to reveal their thoughts. The interviewer often asked further questions to reveal more information. In condition two, participants were asked to associate the brands with animals and instantly they found it difficult. However, once they came up with an animal several attributions were added. In contrast to condition two, participants in condition three found it difficult to name attributions of the brands during the whole process. Often, they were thinking about characteristics of the animals and forgot to think about the brands. Besides that, the limited number of provided animals confused them. Some participants even told the interviewer the offered animals were not suitable for the brands.

DISCUSSION

This research explored the use of qualitative methods in measuring image perception. The findings in this study were conducted through 36 interviews, divided per 12 into three conditions, in which questions were asked about one's perception of 6 brands. Condition one consisted of a semi-structured interview. Condition two consisted of a semi-structured interview and an associative technique in which participants had to use a metaphor (in the form of an animal) to clarify their perception. In condition three an associative technique was used to reveal perceptions of participants.

Regarding the number of attributions given in all conditions (1714), it can be stated that a significant difference were found between the three conditions. According the numbers given in each condition, condition one revealed 589 attributions, condition two 744 and condition three the fewest, 381. Merely taking into account the numbers of statements, condition three is least effective in revealing attributions. In contrast to what was expected, interviews revealed more attributions of the brand than an associative technique in which consumers had to choose between predetermined animals.

This main purpose of this research was to explore the use of metaphors in measuring brand image. Results reveal that using a metaphor can be a great added value or a great limit in creating associations. Using a metaphor is mostly effective when people are able to determine their metaphor in the response to their feelings and thoughts. This technique provided people the ability to think further than their primary thoughts, which confirms the statement of Kendall-Taylor, Erard & Haydon (2013). They stated that a good metaphor encourage the number of information people give. This research revealed that confusion occurs when participants are forced to use predetermined metaphors. They are more focused on characteristics of the metaphor instead of thinking about the brand. One expectation of this research was that research techniques in which participants use metaphors are effective tools to reach deeper lying feelings and attitudes. Results of this research partly confirmed this expectation. Furthermore, it was expected that metaphors are also used as a strengthen tool for one's message. Both in condition one and two metaphors were used to strengthen an attribution mentioned before in the conversation: "*Well a fox is a predator, but it's not a lion.*"

Most mentioned main attributions in all conditions were features of brands. As Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) stated, much associations of consumers are related to the physical and behavioral attributes of the firm such as the brand's name, its products and services, traditions and ideology and so on. According to Martineau (1985), consumers form impressions about brands which reflect the brand's characteristics. These perceptions are based upon both functional as emotive meanings. In line with that statement, participants in this research also revealed a wide range of attributions such as quality and price (functional), experiences and thoughts (emotive). However, when comparing results it can be argued that participants revealed more functional attributions of brands. Furthermore, perceptions of participants differed from each other which confirmed Dowling's saying (1988) that images vary among people.

Noteworthy, statements about the attraction of the brand were mainly made in condition one and two. In condition three, merely 11 statements were made about one's perception towards the attractiveness of the brands. According to Levy (1959), consumers buy products not only for what they do but also for what they add to the self-concept. Statements concerning the attractiveness of the company reveal the congruence between the brand's image and self-image of participants. Therefore, it can be stated that condition one and two might reveal more information about this congruence. Brands with knowledge about these kinds of perceptions can respond to it with marketing strategies.

In research of Hofstede, van Hoof, Walenberg and de Jong (2007) it was stated that people do not have a standard vocabulary to extensively discuss and explain their views on a brand's image. Results of condition one, an interview, confirmed this expression. Participants found it difficult to keep talking about the brand. Most of them only revealed 5 attributions. However, when asking more questions about their feelings and associations several statements were added. This research technique revealed fewer attributions than an interview in combination with an associative technique. In contrast to what was expected, the interviews revealed more attributions than the associative technique without the interview.

It can be considered that in condition three, participants were more focused on the characteristics of the animals instead of the brands; "*Mm, first I thought of the animals and their characteristics. Then I linked it to the brands you gave me*". It seems that they were less capable of mentioning multiple attributions. Even though participants in condition two initially found it difficult to compare the brand with an animal, this condition revealed most statements.

In all conditions, many statements have been made regarding features of the brands whereby most of them were given about high involvement brands. However, more attributions of the products were assigned to the low involvement brands. In addition, statements concerning the use of and the feelings towards the brands, the marketing and name associations were made more often by low involvement brands. It can be stated that participants primarily associate features of the brand with the brand when high involvement is required in the buying process.

Limitations and future implications
One of the greatest hallmark but also limitation of qualitative research is subjectivity. Even though the code scheme was tested on reliability, misinterpretation and observer bias could occur in methods such as interviews and projective techniques. In addition, results cannot be generalized to large populations, due to the subjective nature and the small number of respondents. Furthermore, it is difficult to make systematic comparisons. As the number of participants was only 36, further research could focus on a greater number of participants to increase the reliability of the results.

As this research revealed a significant difference between the numbers of statements given in all condition, further research may explore whether the technique used in condition always reveals more attributions. Since this technique was newly composed the reliability and

it's applicability in other brand image researches can be explored. Given that the current work has demonstrated a potential for using metaphors combining with an interview as part of a technique for measuring brand image, the next practical step would be to determine whether the attributions are congruent with the actual image of consumer. In addition, it should be tested whether there is a relationship between the number of attributions and the level of importance of those attributions.

Other low and high involvement products can be used to test whether the greater number of statements regarding low involvements was accidentally higher or if it always reveals more attributions. Besides that, it can be explored why participants reveal more attributions of low involvement brands.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the added value of using metaphors in measuring brand image. Three different research techniques were used; 1) an interview about one's opinion about six brands, 2) an associative technique in which participants had to link those six brands to one of ten predetermined animals and 3) a combination of those in which first an interview was conducted about the brand and whereby participant subsequently had to associate those brands to a self-chosen animal. Expected was that an associative technique reveals most statements concerning deeper lying feeling, emotions and attitudes towards brands. However, results of this research reveal that a combination of an interview and an associative technique provides more attributions of the brand. Participants find it easier to first tell about their associations and consequently choose an animal. This technique reveals more attributions of the brands and in most cases more relevant information for the researcher. In condition three, in which participants directly linked brands to predetermined animals, more difficulty was found in finding associations. Participants got confused and were not able to think further than several corresponding characteristics. Furthermore, it appeared that the information was more superficial. This is in contrast with prior literature which suggested that an associative technique reveals deeper lying feelings.

Altogether, the results of this study indicate that an interview reveals more statements concerning attributions of a brand than an associative technique. Using a metaphor is solely more effective when participants choose a metaphor, instead of choosing between predetermined metaphors.

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APPENDIX 1 – Code scheme

Attributions	Sub attributions	Explanation: when the interviewee named …… (associated with the brand)
Competitors		
	Brands	A brand as competitor
	Products	A product as competitor
Effect on human		
	Health	The effect of the brand/product on human's health
Features brand		
	Adventurous	The level of adventurousness
	Target group	The brands' target group
	Sustainability / future-oriented / innovative	The level of sustainability of the brand, it's orientation on future and/or it's innovativeness
	Honesty / authenticity	The brand as honest
	Energy	The level of energy associated with the brand or it's energetic
	Intelligence	The level of intelligence
	Quality	The quality of its products or the brand in general
	Logo	Characteristics of the logo
	Striking factor / uniqueness / stubbornness	The amount of its Striking factor / uniqueness / stubbornness
	Origin - Country / time / genesis	Characteristics of the brands origin such as its history, country of origin or its genesis
	Popularity / appearance	The amount of popularity or appearance
	Price	Characteristics of its prices
	Segment / class	The segment of operation
	Seriousness / playful	The amount of seriousness/playfulness
	Strength brand	The strength of the brand
	Accessible	The accessibility of buying the brand
	Type / variant	Types, models, variances of the brands products
	Predictability	The predictability of the brand
	Feminity/masculinity	The amount of femininity/masculinity
Features of products		
	Functionality / goal pursuing	The products as functional and/or goal pursuing
	Size	The size of the products
	Ingredients / components	The ingredients and/or components of the products
	Color	The color of its products or an associations with a color
	Strength / robustness	The strength and/or robustness of the products
	Natural / authenticity	The products as natural and/or authenticity
	Flavor	The flavor of the products or related to the product
	Sportsmanship / speed	The level of Sportsmanship / speed of its products
	Trendy	The level of trendy/hipness of the products

	Security / stability	The level of Security / stability of the products
	Package	Characteristics of the packages of the products
	Shape	The shape of the products or the shape associated with the products
	Agility / movement	The level of agility/movement of the product
Experiences		
	Own experience	And their own experiences with it
	Personal circle	And experiences of others in their personal circle or related to them
Use		
	Buying intention	The level of buying intention
	Place or moment of use	The place or moment when you use the brand
	Reason of use	The reason why to use the brand
Feeling		
	Attraction	The amount of attraction towards the brand (both negative as positive)
	Specialty	The amount of specialty/uniqueness of the brand
	Fresh	The level of freshness
	Youth	When they have thoughts or associations with their youth or childhood.
	Match self-image	The amount of a fit with the brand
	Neutrality	Their feelings as neither positive as negative feelings
	Ignorance	When they have no clue what to tell about the brand, when they experience as unfamiliar.
	Tropical / holiday / summer	When they have feelings of summer, holiday, tropical and jungle.
	Trust	When they trust the brand or think it's reliable (trustworthy)
	Cheerful	When they feel/felt cheerfully when thinking about the brand
Marketing		
	Advertisement	It's advertisements
	Face - celeb	Names or characteristics of models/celebs of the brands
	Profiling brand	The view of the brand and/or how they want consumers to see them
	Tv/radio commercials	Tv/radio commercials
	Slogan	Features of the slogan
	Saving campaign	Its savings campaigns
	Sponsorship	It's sponsorship activities
Name associations		
	Name	Associations with the brands' name

APPENDIX 2 – Compiled data set of pictures of condition 3

APPENDIX 3 - Number of unique statements per condition

Number of unique statements per condition

Attributions	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Total
Competitors				
Brand	22	20	19	61
Product	7	8	1	16
Effect on human				
Health	13	19	1	33
Features brand				
Adventurous	1	0	6	7
Target group	41	47	26	114
Sustainability / future-oriented / innovative	4	17	8	29
Honesty / authenticity	1	11	2	14
Energy	0	1	6	7
Intelligence	0	3	9	12
Quality	16	21	17	54
Logo	12	8	0	20
Striking factor / uniqueness / stubbornness	14	32	18	64
Origin - Country / time / genesis	28	28	12	68
Popularity / appearance	10	28	10	48
Price	15	7	3	25
Segment / class	8	18	2	28
Seriousness / playful	0	17	16	33
Sportsmanship / speed	6	26	18	50
Strength brand	0	1	11	12
Accessible	2	4	0	6
Type / variant	40	30	5	75
Predictability	0	1	5	6
Feminity/masculinity	6	11	4	21
Features of products				
Functionality / goal pursuing	2	8	4	14
Size	12	15	19	46
Ingredients / components	21	26	8	55
Color	15	38	7	60
Strength / robustness	2	6	19	27

Natural / authenticity	1	0	4	5
Flavor	21	24	10	55
Trendy	6	7	0	13
Security / stability	4	6	4	14
Package	17	8	5	30
Shape	5	2	1	8
Agility / movement	1	4	6	11
Experiences				
Own experiences	22	22	8	52
Personal circkle	15	16	3	34
Use				
Buying behavior/intention	10	19	0	29
Place/moment of use	23	13	8	44
Reason of use	8	17	9	34
Feeling				
Attraction	53	50	11	114
Specialty	4	3	7	14
Fresh	9	14	4	27
Youth	6	10	5	21
Match self-image	3	7	1	11
Neutrality	3	2	2	7
Ignorance	14	11	16	41
Tropical / holiday / summer	14	25	10	49
Trust	10	11	10	31
Cheerful	10	13	5	28
Marketing				
Advertisement	1	1	2	4
Face - celeb	1	6	0	7
Profiling brand	7	12	11	30
Tv/radio commercials	22	16	12	50
Slogan	10	11	1	22
Saving campaign	2	2	0	4
Sponsorship	2	1	0	3
Name associations				
Name	9	6	8	23

APPENDIX 4 - Number of main attributions per brand

Table 9
Number of main attributions per brand

	Low involvement			High involvement		
	Taksi	Crystal Clear	Dubbel friss	Opel	Citroën	Toyota
Competitor	7	14	22	3	12	13
Effect on human	9	11	10	0	0	0
Features brand	68	96	88	124	135	166
Features products	73	68	50	53	46	41
Experiences	20	9	8	18	17	8
Use	23	23	30	6	8	11
Feelings	69	53	57	61	47	47
Marketing	17	23	43	23	7	3
Name associations	4	6	2	1	8	0
Totals	290	303	310	289	280	289