

HORSE AND CARRIAGE, MOONLIGHT AND ROSES, SUN AND SURF?

**Using projective techniques in a
computer/web assisted interview to tap
into the emotional effect of advertising**

**Neil Sharman
John Pawle
Peter Cooper**

This paper outlines a novel approach to researching a Surf washing powder promotional press ad that ran in *The Sun* newspaper in the UK. This ad campaign promoted a Golden Jubilee competition run by Surf. The issue being addressed was the extent to which the tone of voice and communications of the brand advertising was complemented by the tone of voice of the medium in which it was placed. Surf is a laundry brand positioned in emotional terms as a friendly, playful, extrovert, fun brand and the advertising execution was playful and humorous. *The Sun* as the most popular tabloid newspaper in the UK, is also positioned as playful, fun and extrovert. The question posed for research was the extent to which there was emotional synergy created by the media placement and whether this could be measured and indeed quantified.

PREFACE

For many years advertising agency planners have made the point that advertising measurement is too mechanistic and does not provide enough qualitative feel. Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, said in his keynote speech to the ESOMAR Congress in Barcelona,¹⁾ “count the beats of your heart not the fingers of your hand ... Current efforts to measure emotion just don’t cut it. They take the frameworks created for the rational mind and try to apply them to the deep mysteries of emotion. No wonder it’s tough to isolate effects. No wonder it’s tough to interpret results.”

This project was an attempt to address these issues and to use novel computer based projective interviewing techniques to measure the emotion surrounding the Surf campaign and to examine the interaction with the emotional cachet surrounding *The Sun* newspaper. We could describe this technique as the use of emotional metrics.

INTRODUCTION

Let us first of all consider the decision making process involved in buying washing powder. You go into a supermarket on autopilot and buy your usual brand. Little or no conscious rational thought goes into this part of your routine because little thought is required. If your usual brand isn’t available you may then switch into a more considered and rational frame of mind and buy a brand that is cheaper or has a promotion running. But why does so little rational thought go into choosing your washing powder brand? At the end of the day all washing powders get your clothes clean so there must be other emotional or cognitive processes at work.

After reading this far I’d be surprised if you were shaking your head in denial – but are these statements as true as we may assume?

REPERTOIRE BRANDS – INTUITIVE CHOICES

Firstly the Target Group Index (TGI) tells us that 70% of Surf users also use other washing powder brands. Not all these consumers are shopping and changing because of price or promotion. Also, you can bet that these shoppers would describe their brand hopping as whimsical rather than some great ‘Road to Damascus’ brand conversion.

But then that is the nature of a market in which functional brand performance is very similar. Heath²⁾ says that we make a choice between similarly performing brands intuitively, unscientifically and irrationally. Intuition acts as a gatekeeper for any decision and the way we reference intuition is through a system of ‘somatic’ markers. Somatic markers work on a subconscious level

and could include, for example, the description ‘German’, which conjures up associations with efficiency.

Heath gives toilet paper as an example. Kleenex and Andrex have similar products but with ‘puppy’ as an emotional marker Andrex taps into associations of ‘family’ and ‘loving’. He gives this as the reason that Andrex outsells Kleenex three to one in the UK.

In the case of Surf the markers relate to friendly playfulness – and these markers strongly differentiate Surf from other washing powder brands. ‘Fun and playfulness’ may seem a bit far-fetched. However shopping for washing powder is dull, after all. These markers work on a subconscious level. You may feel only tedium when you shop for washing powder, but the little men inside your head are actually hard at work.

Cooper and Patterson³⁾ describe it thus: “Overall, branding and advertising provides secret attractions and fascinations to the unconscious mind, which are enjoyable, compulsive and irrational to the conscious mind”. Advertising has the power to work on this subconscious, emotional level. “Advertising is capable of all things reason is not”.

EMOTIONS MATTER

Why is appealing to subconscious emotions so important? Kevin Roberts says emotion leads to action, reason only to conclusions. “Emotion and reason are intertwined”, he argues, “but when they conflict – emotion wins every time”.⁴⁾

In 1988 Langmead and Gordon⁵⁾ interviewed beer drinkers about their brand choice. One respondent said he didn’t know why he drank Hoffmeister, he just did. However, under hypnosis, he explained that he drank Hoffmeister because he wanted to feel as good as the bear in the advertisement. Emotion, not reason, was the decision driver. Conventional research would not have uncovered that.

Antonio Damasio⁶⁾ stated that 80% of human decisions are in practice unconscious. In his book *Descartes’ Error*, on practical decision-making, he sets out to show how emotions are biologically indispensable to decisions. In people with normal brains, their decisions are ‘weighted’ by emotions and this enables them to take decisions quickly according to how they feel. He observes how some of his patients with damaged pre-frontal lobes (which are the part of the brain which influences emotion) are in contrast robot-like and almost incapable of taking decisions.

Heath and Howard-Spink 2000⁷⁾ discuss the power of emotion in brand decision making and point out that the way people store and process brand communication messages involves low involvement cognitive processing.

Low involvement processing is a passive method of learning carried out at an instinctual and semi-conscious level and is primarily image based. High involvement processing is by contrast rational and factual, uses logic and hence is conscious and language based, i.e. you think through your decisions in a rational way. The point they make is that while most brand decisions are the result of low involvement processing, the majority of research is only capable of accessing high involvement processing.

Branthwaite and Swindells⁸⁾ develop this argument further. Most information is handled as 'episodic knowing' and is processed passively and automatically imprinted in the brain. By contrast some information is more deeply processed in an active way which they call 'semantic knowing'. This type of processing uses conscious verbal and intelligent reasoning based on 'facts' and 'truth'. The extent to which advertising is processed as episodic knowledge rather than semantic knowledge depends on the medium and the style of advertising. Thus TV is more image and story based and is therefore processed primarily as episodic knowledge. Press advertising particularly when it is information rich may be processed partially as semantic knowledge. However press advertising is also automatically imprinted and rich in emotional language. The image based emotional effect that we were testing in the Surf promotional campaign in *The Sun* was both episodic and semantic in nature. Branthwaite and Swindells conclude that individual depth interviews (IDIs) are more appropriate than group discussions to test advertising executions. This is because the absence of peer group pressure allows the respondent to focus on individual emotional assimilation and interpretation, thus accessing episodic knowledge. Groups by definition rely on a shared, negotiated response which results in a shift towards high involvement semantic processing but this is not the way that people process advertising messages in the real world.

Our problem then was, with consumers unaware of their subconscious motivations, how could we ever hope to research the emotional nature of the Surf advertising communication quantitatively in advertising research? Indeed there has been a constant dialogue amongst advertising planners about how quantitative pre-testing can measure emotions and therefore provide the diagnostics required to give feedback that is useful in the creative development process.

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWERS

QualiQuant International Ltd. was chosen by News International to do this work because of their interesting approach to this predicament. In using their PC/Web based methodology, the interviewer is virtual. This gives the respondent a lot of freedom and encourages spontaneity and creativity. It allows emotions to emerge because there is not an interviewer present. The presence of an interviewer can force the respondent into a more rational mode resulting in rational processing of the material being tested.

Using our virtual interviewer the respondents in this case were asked to perform various free associations tasks such as word and picture association. They also completed playful tasks such as dragging and dropping images onto relevant brand or subject areas. They were also encouraged to pour their hearts out in the plentiful projective areas allocated to collect qualitative comment. Thus this kind of interviewing involves the interviewee in projective questions such as playing out imaginary dream scenarios. The PC/Web interface is ideal for this because of its interactive and visual nature and thus we allow respondents to stay in low involvement processing mode.

In this project we aimed to uncover the emotional markers at play in a promotion that Surf ran in *The Sun*. Our objective was to show whether this promotional ad was efficiently communicating Surf's brand values amongst Sun readers in a mass market, female, 25-45 core market. Interviewees had to be regular readers of *The Sun* or other tabloid newspapers and were recruited on the street for central location research. The central locations used were venues in various UK shopping centres. Once in the location respondents were shown to a PC – most finding it easy and interesting to complete the tasks on screen. Indeed because this type of interview is quite involving and fun it is possible to sustain a longer interview than is the case with most self completion computer and web interviews.

The promotion in question was typical of *The Sun* mood as shown in figure 1.

The ad spoofed a Sun column known as the White Van Man column. Readers were invited to send in a photograph of their man in white pants and Surf launched a tireless search for the nation's favourite White Pants Man. This final accolade would be awarded to the reader who sparkled most in only a pair of spotless pants based on a vote by readers. A new BMW Mini was the prize; the promotion was linked to an on-pack promotion with gold banners proclaiming 50 Spotless Years of Surf. By chance this was the exact number of years Queen Elizabeth was celebrating as the period of her reign in her similarly grand Golden Jubilee – a happy, if not entirely unintentional, coincidence for *The Sun* and Unilever (Lever Fabergé) who market Surf.

Figure 1
SURF PROMOTION

ADVERTISMENT FEATURE

Surf ARE YOU OUR WHITE PANTS MAN?

Send us a photo of your fella in his whitest undies and win him a super MINI

10 TOP TIPS WHEN WASHING WITH Surf

1. Always use your hands to apply the suds of Surf to your clothes. Never use a washing machine. Surf is designed to be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

2. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

3. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

4. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

5. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

6. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

7. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

8. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

9. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

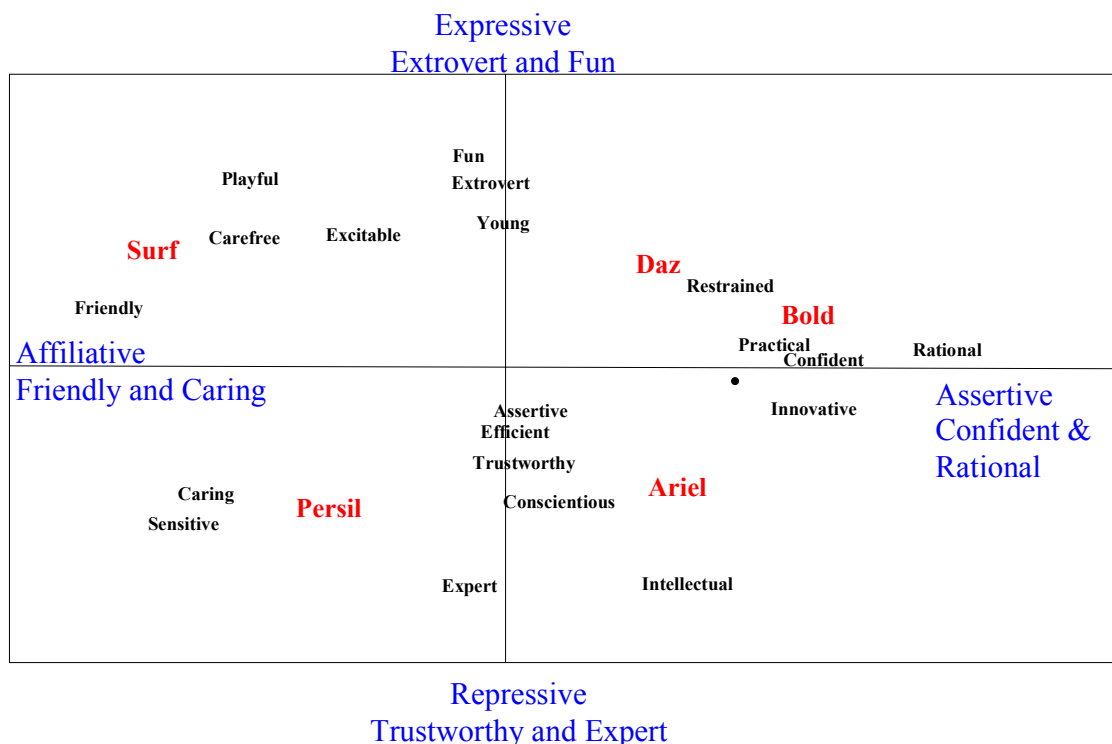
10. To get the most out of your Surf, use it on your clothes. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand. It's the only detergent that can be used in the hand.

CELEBRATING 1952 **50** SPOTLESS YEARS 2002

THE BRAND MAP

The research findings plotted washing powders on a brand map as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2
WASHING POWDER BRAND POSITIONING

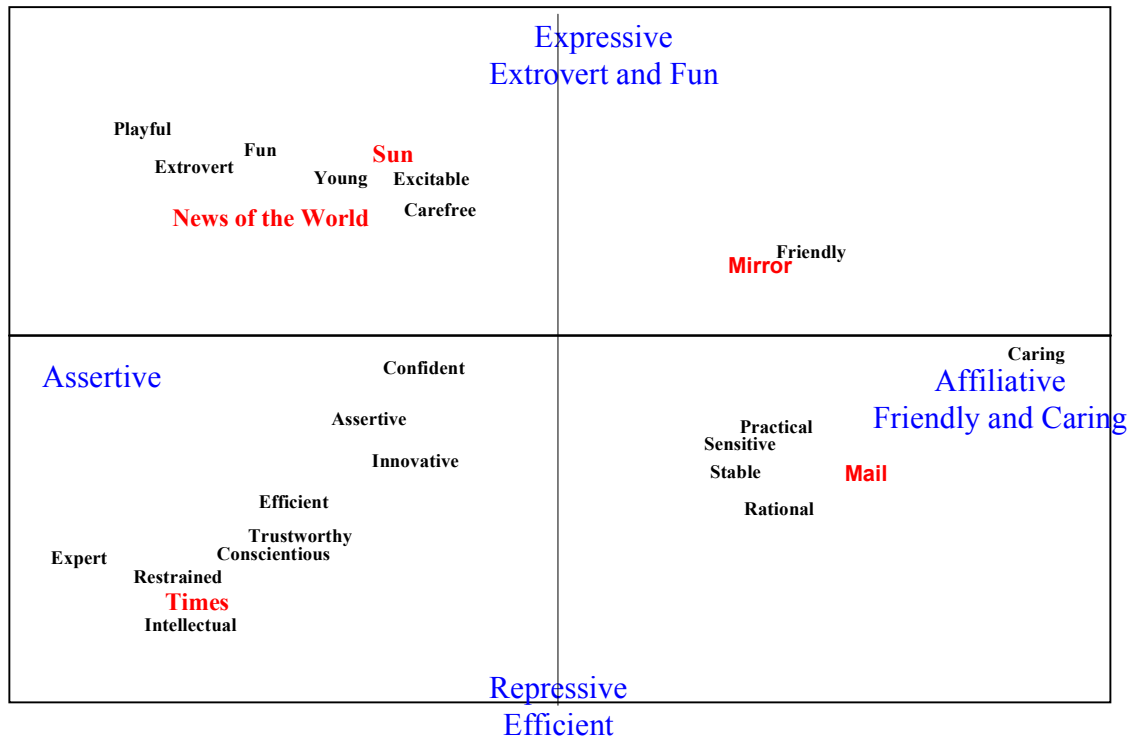


These are the associations at play when people select their washing powder of choice, their conscious mind dulled, their unconscious mind racing. Bold and Daz are relatively restrained and rational, Ariel is more conscientious and trustworthy, Persil caring and sensitive, and Surf, as mentioned, is playful and friendly. In this sense it is a differentiated market and this segmentation is one the industry has worked with for some time.

The qualitative feedback reflected this. A typical projective comment about the product was “Surf is fun loving and very quirky, a little bit unusual”, and about the creative, “the car and the woman gave it an attitude of fun and young people enjoying themselves”

Mapping newspaper brands in the same way showed synergies with *The Sun* as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3
NEWSPAPER BRAND POSITIONING



Both *The Sun* and Surf are playful, fun and excitable. The specialist methodology using emotional metrics used here also allowed us to link the research to mediaDNA,⁹⁾ the research tool (jointly owned by News International and other media) that quantifies the personality strands of media vehicles. This showed a strong similarity between the way Surf users view Surf and the way Sun readers see *The Sun*.

So, if the synergies were strong, and the creative treatment reflected that, would we have expected that the Surf ad would have scored well in terms of recall figures?

The overall level of Surf advertising recall was higher amongst Sun readers (40% vs. 35% unprompted) but this was recall of any advertising, irrespective of medium. However most unprompted recall of washing powder advertising related to TV. This is typically the case. If you ask consumers to think of any washing powder ads, then TV will be most salient and top-of-mind. In the UK there is strong recall of TV theme ads such as Daz 'Doorstep Challenge' and Surf 'Birds of a Feather'.

SO, IS TV MORE EFFECTIVE?

Let's challenge the assumption that high ad recall means effective advertising – quite a challenge considering the many campaigns assessed in this way. Research by Millward Brown¹⁰⁾ identified a difference in the way information is gleaned from press and TV advertising, a difference that impacts on ad recall and showcases the value of press.

TV ads, they found (following on from the work by Branthwaite and Swindells), tend to be learned episodically, as a story, whereas print ads are more likely to be scanned for points of interest. In press the information becomes something the reader 'knows' about the brand and this is less likely to be remembered as a story and therefore be top-of-mind. However it is still firmly imprinted or 'marked' in the unconscious mind. Immediately you can see where the power of press advertising lies.

Heath gives Stella lager's 'Reassuringly Expensive' campaign as an example. This campaign was born in 1982 in UK newspaper supplements. It did not arrive on UK TV until 1990. During that eight-year window it achieved very low ad awareness. A failure? Well no, research showed strong image communication (high quality, prodigious strength). The brand values had been communicated, even if people couldn't readily bring to mind where that impression had come from. If you were Stella's brand manager, no doubt you would have been quite happy with that.

So press is effective at communicating brand learning points. For this reason it can be effective at differentiating in competitive markets, especially when the differentials are within the brand personality rather than being more tangible price or promotion differences – exactly the sorts of differentials that Surf were hoping to reinforce with this campaign in *The Sun*.

QUANTIFYING EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT

The technique used was insightful because it was able to quantify the emotional affinity readers felt to Surf. Fifty-two percent of Surf users who read *The Sun* felt close to the brand compared to just 43% of Surf users who read other tabloids. This gap is explained perhaps by the fact that the brands share distinct emotional markers that appeal to core readers.

Sun readers saw Surf as more extrovert and playful and were more likely to describe their closeness in terms of warmth, acceptance and comfort. Other tabloid readers see Surf more as excitable, and describe their relationship with less warmth. What is appealingly playful and extrovert to one audience is just giddiness to another.

Another key objective was to check whether the creative smoothly conveyed the shared brand values between *The Sun* and Surf or whether the communication had worked more efficiently to reinforce emotional values?

This is where the projective techniques came into their own. In a projective question which used bubble diagrams a dream sequence was used. Respondents were asked to imagine *The Sun* and Surf coming to life as people and getting married. The respondents were shown a bride and groom, with blank speech and thought bubbles, and asked to fill in their words and thoughts.

What did this projective game achieve? Well, it shows the nature of the relationship between the two brands as perceived through the eyes of the core audience. The many rich and outspoken answers were then categorised into relationship cluster groups. We looked at which were the most prominent clusters and whether they were positive or negative. The key question here was the extent to which the creative execution actually used reflected the strongest type of relationship and therefore achieved the widest resonance? Thus we were also able to give future guidance on the tone of voice for future ads in *The Sun*.

RELATIONSHIP IMAGERY

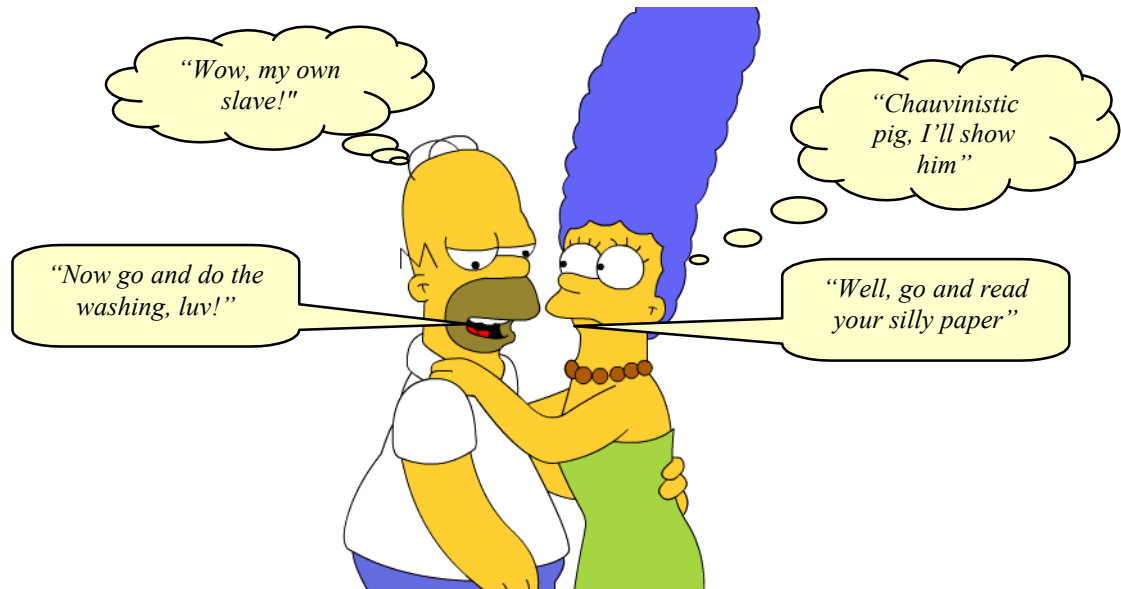
As an example of using projectives to uncover perceptions of relationships in this kind of interview imagine asking people to describe a marriage between the British and American governments. The responses would, no doubt, give us a rich view of the public perception of the relationship on both sides of the Atlantic. Is Blair perceived as a guiding and respected power alongside Bush or as more passive and unquestioning? Does this vary according to which side of the Atlantic you are living on? Is it an *entente cordiale*, a marriage of equals, a marriage of convenience or a sham? Using a dream projective we would get several shades of answer and these could be clustered to show the breadth of opinion and which opinion is strongest – good directional information for government PR.

Five distinct relationship types were identified for Surf and *The Sun*. Most responses were positive and Sun readers were particularly positive and playful. To take an example the three most positive relationship types were:

Humorous Conflict

Homer and Marge in the Simpsons typify this kind of relationship. The quotes shown below are actual quotes from the interviews. However the characters are inserted to portray the tone of voice of open-ended comments in the bubble projectives, and were not shown to respondents at any stage.

Figure 4
HUMOROUS CONFLICT



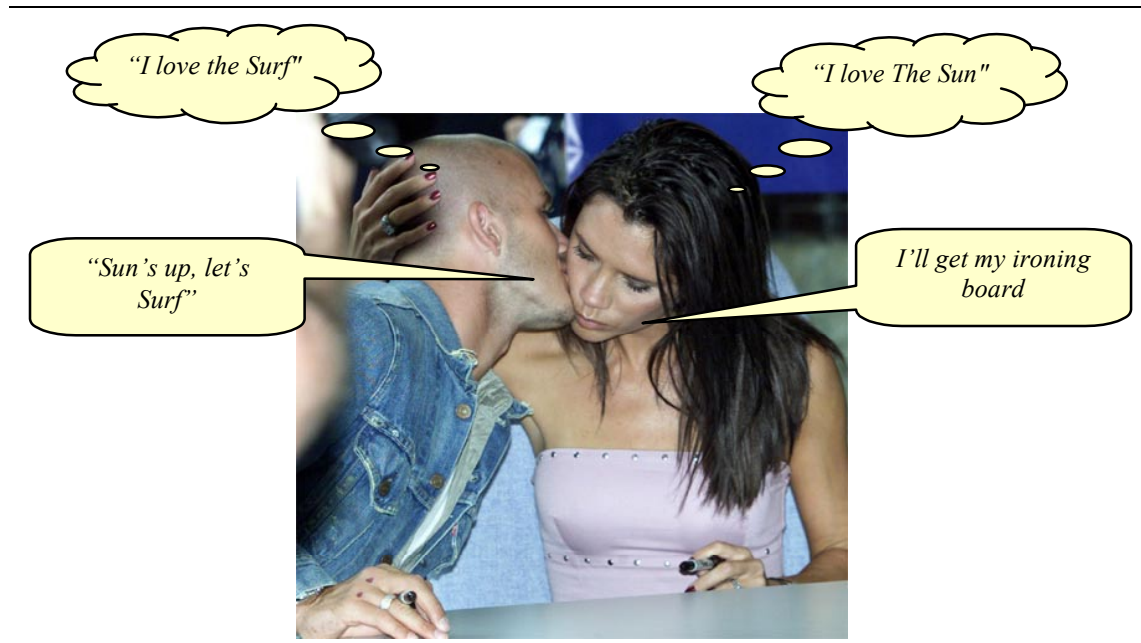
This relationship is based on opposites (and their attractions). *The Sun* plays the Homer character, down to earth, straightforward, humorous, a loveable joker. Surf plays Marge, giving as good as she gets and endeavouring to clean up his act. This relationship reinforces Surf's efficiency as well as communicating a positive and confident personality. A typical exchange would involve him encouraging her to do all his housework, wondering how far he can push it. She, in return, tells him to go and read his paper but thinks, "I'll soon have him round to my thinking" – and she probably will.

This was by far the most prevalent relationship amongst Sun readers and Surf users. Interestingly it was the relationship type least likely to be described by non-Sun readers indicating that a creative execution along these lines would work well in *The Sun* but perhaps not so well in other papers.

Harmony/Togetherness

The second most popular relationship type was Harmony/Togetherness, typified by the Beckhams. For those of you who are not football fans David Beckham is the England national football captain and Victoria Beckham is better known as Posh Spice latterly of the Spice Girls. Again these are actual quotes from a live interview.

Figure 5
HARMONY / TOGETHERNESS



This relationship is loving and caring, typical exchanges included declarations of love and honeymoon images of 'Sun and Surf'. This relationship indicated a clear acceptance of *The Sun* and Surf relationship and belief in their compatibility. It doesn't include the quiriness or humour of *The Sun* and that is probably the reason why this relationship type was as popular with non-Sun readers as with Sun readers.

Mutual Innuendo

This was the relationship type that was most like the one being played out in the White Pants Man promotion. It is the sort of relationship projected in Roseanne. Again these are actual quotes from one of our interviews. (See figure 6.)

Here both *The Sun* and Surf are not opposites but two peas in a pod; Surf enters *The Sun*'s world and adopts her sense of fun. The result is playful, flirtatious and virile sexuality. Typical exchanges would include innuendo like "I'll watch the sun rise" and "I fancy a spin in the tumble dryer". It is also apparent that the type of response given here in the bubbles would not have been forthcoming if there had been an interviewer administering the interview.

Very much in the style of 'Mutual Innuendo', the White Pants Man creative showed a saucy looking lady judge in revealing white coat. Her manner matches the cheekiness of the winning Sun reader parading in his briefs.

Figure 6
HARMONY / TOGETHERNESS



So, the promotion reflected a relationship that Sun readers themselves thought appropriate and therefore made for effective synergistic communication of brand values. Appreciation of the promotion came across strongly in the research and response to the competition was high.

FINE TUNING

But, while successful, we were keen to obtain guidelines to fine tune future promotions such as this Surf promotion in *The Sun* to ensure maximum efficiency. The lesson was that Mutual Innuendo was not the most common relationship type identified. Humorous Conflict was more prevalent and this knowledge provides an avenue to explore when putting future creatives together.

So, what has this research achieved? Firstly it acknowledges the fact that people choose brands in a similarly performing market for reasons that are neither conscious nor rational. It taps into the emotional markers at play and gives an insight into the way the washing powder market is differentiated. The innovative methodology used allowed us to actually quantify emotions.

Secondly the research enabled us to show the strength of the fit between Surf and *The Sun* – and even to quantify this strength through a link to mediaDNA. In doing so we were able to show that Sun readers, compared to readers of

other tabloids, view Surf more warmly. Consequently *The Sun* is an ideal vehicle for promoting the fun and playfulness of Surf.

Thirdly, we showed that the promotion had communicated the desired brand values to Sun readers. This is a more realistic and meaningful indication of the success of the ad than simple ad awareness.

Finally it enabled us to judge the effectiveness of the relationship type being played out in the creative. This was an effective way to tap into the relationship that many readers perceived to exist between the brands. It also provided alternative routes to explore for future promotions. This included one route that *The Sun* feels may have even wider appeal and lead to even greater communication efficiency in the future.

In short we were able to give a realistic appraisal of the promotional campaign, getting to grips with the subconscious side of brand choice and inspiring ideas for future promotions. In so doing we have gone some way to answer Kevin Roberts call for better understanding and measurement of the emotions that override reason when it comes to stimulating action.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Power of Love. Keynote Speech by Kevin Robert. ESOMAR Congress 2002.
 2. R. Heath: *The Hidden Power of Advertising*
 3. P.Cooper and S. Patterson: *The Trickster: Creativity in modern advertising and branding. Admap and The MRS Conference, 2001.*
 4. The Power of Love, Ibid.
 5. W.Gordon and R.Langmaid: *Qualitative market research: A practitioners' guide.* Gower, 1998.
 6. Damasio: *Descartes Error*, Papermac 1994 & *the Feeling of What Happens – Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*, Vintage Books 1999.
 7. R. Heath and J. Howard-Spink: *And Now for Something Completely different – Current Thinking about the Brain Means we Need to Change the Way Brands are Researched.* MRS Conference 2000
 8. A. Branthwaite and A. Swindells: *Capturing the Complexity of Advertising Perceptions. Marketing and Research Today*, May 1997.
 9. MediaDNA: 'Matching brand profiles to media brands'. *Admap*, March, 2002.
 10. Millward Brown: *Ad awareness for Magazine Publishers of America*, 1999
-

THE AUTHORS

Neil Sharman is Senior Advertising Planner, New International Newspapers, Inc., United Kingdom.

John Pawle is Managing Director, QualiQuant International Ltd., United Kingdom.

Peter Cooper is CEO, CRAM International Ltd., and CEO, QualiQuant International Ltd., United Kingdom.
