

Image Collage Research Study: Jeans Boutique Website

Erin Casserly, William Cole, Aronya Waller

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Instructor: Lucy Holman

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SUMMARY

A Baltimore City boutique, specializing in jeans for men and women, is seeking to create a website for its store. The main goals for the website are to attract customers and sell its products. In order to determine the most effective website design, our research team conducted image collage research sessions with three different participants.

METHODOLOGY

Standard user studies such as interviews and observations study what people say and do externally, but newer methods focus on the users' internal feelings, emotions and thoughts – elements that are usually not be assessable to the researcher. The image collage method seeks to draw these internal elements to the surface by engaging the participants in the construction on an artifact – the image collage.

For our image collage session, we recruited three participants – two females and one male. The participants are all currently living in Baltimore City. The demographic breakdown is as follows:

Participant Name	Age	Occupation
Mia	18	College Student
Jason	28	Outdoor Guide
Randi	28	Music Teacher

Our team then provided each individual with a series of photographs and presented them with the following task:

“We are creating a website for a boutique that sells jeans. This boutique would probably be located in Baltimore City in a location like Fells Point or Federal Hill.”

The participants were asked to choose the images that most and least represented what they would want from this type of website. They were instructed to glue their chosen images onto a blank piece of poster board and write brief summaries of why they chose them next to the images – creating an image collage.

Three themes, two positive and one negative, were prevalent throughout the interviews and represented in their final collages. These provide insight on how the website could most effectively be presented.

POSITIVE THEMES

The following themes represented imagery and emotions that the participants related to the jeans boutique website the most.

FUN AND SOCIAL

All of our participants associated images of fun and social activity with the jeans boutique website, and the findings indicate that these themes go hand-in-hand with shopping. The female participants both chose the image of two women with shopping bags. One participant remarked that the women in the photo were just like her and her friends when they go shopping and “people watch.” The other female participant said that the image showed a good place for her and her girlfriends to go and buy jeans. Both implied that shopping together with friends is a fun, social activity.



this picture reminds me of how
my friends and I act while we are out
shopping. We sit and people watch after



Social Activities

The male participant also selected an image that focused on social activity, the image of several people together at sunset. He described the photograph as one where people “could be wearing all types of jeans” and said that the sunset makes people feel warm and happy and that these were feelings that made people want to shop.



warm and simple. I thought this would be a good header because its simple and interesting to look at.

Overall, Participants chose images of activities that they could do with friends (while wearing jeans). The general feeling was that you could wear jeans to do a variety of fun things with your friends.

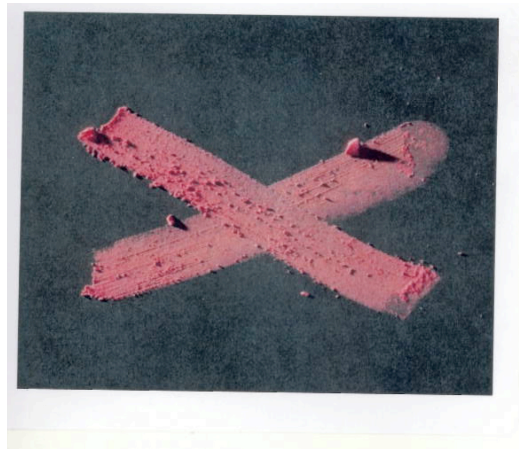
SOCIAL STATUS (EXCLUSIVITY)

The theme of fashion as an elevation of social status was also prevalent throughout the imagery that the participants chose. The image of kids on a bus was one participant's favorite because to her it represented the idea of "having a new thing that everyone else wants – so all the kids are jealous and staring at you."

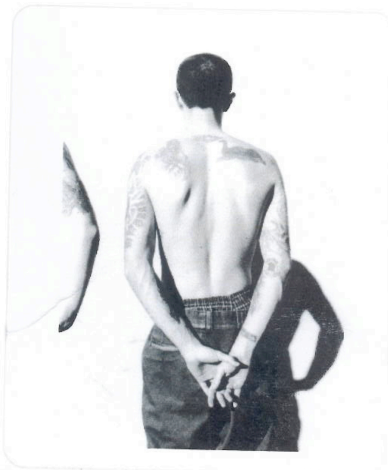


Standing out in a crowd → people being envious of what you bought

Jeans from a specialty boutique was viewed as an exclusive item, an item to be bought by a person of a certain social status. One participant even chose the images of a red “X” and a “Do Not Enter” sign because she said the images represented “the thrill of doing something you’re not supposed to.” A couple participants also chose black and white images because they seemed high-end or “artsy fartsy” because the description of “boutique” gave them a feeling of a place that was fancier than a regular store and therefore higher socially or more exclusive.

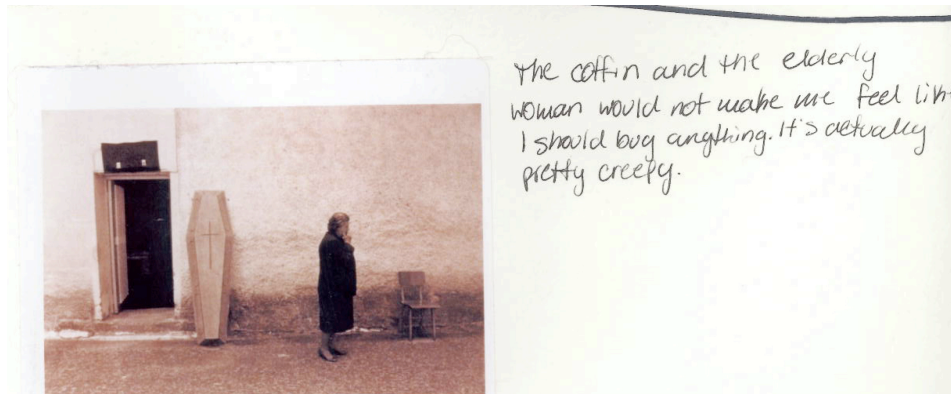


playing off the word
boutique I was looking
for pictures that I thought
would emphasize that word
and be more artistic



NEGATIVE THEMES

Negative emotional responses can be very powerful. Participants were very quick to identify images they did not want to associate with the proposed website. The standout theme here was death: all three participants selected images of funerals, as well as other images directly connoting death.



They also chose images that relate more indirectly to death: a soldier (suggesting war), a premature baby (suggesting a struggle to survive), and elderly people (suggesting reaching the end of life).



A baby clinging to life doesn't bring any thoughts of death to mind

Overall, these images evoked emotions of both sadness and fear, and participants used words like “creepy,” “morbid,” and “worry” to describe them.

The death theme serves as an inverse of the positive themes of fun, happiness, and social activity (although not directly mentioned by participants, death implies loss and, perhaps by extension, loneliness). One participant made a telling remark while discussing her negative images: “I guess it’s the things we should be worrying about like hunger and suffering babies and things like that, but you’re on a fashion website instead of donating your money....” This suggests that shopping for clothes, as a luxury activity, also carries an element of guilt. In addition to eliciting feelings of fear and sadness, in this particular context, images of death and other “serious” themes alienate the visitor by making him or her feel frivolous or self-indulgent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the image collage findings, the goal of the website should be to simultaneously evoke the Fun/Social and Exclusivity emotions in a way that also communicates the purpose of the site. The website should focus on imagery and language that embodies fun and friendship. From our research, our team found that people believe that they can wear jeans for a range of activities – from hiking outdoors to getting dressed up and going out. The website should focus on the idea that, “No matter what you do in jeans, it is all about the fun and the friends.” Since the boutique is located in Baltimore City, the proposed website would do best to feature its target group in a variety of scenes around the city in their brand of jeans. For example, I could show images of people swinging in Patterson Park, partying on boats, walking around the Inner Harbor, or shopping in Fells Point.

Since the subject of our research was a jeans boutique as opposed to regular store, the research found that users believe that the website should have a more chic, higher-end feel to it and could benefit from having some form of exclusive access to it. This could be through passwords, VIP rewards or tier-level pricing for the jeans. Furthermore, as the website premieres new designs, it could build up suspense and interest with an air of mystery by peaking curiosity with “Do Not Enter” signs and coming soon splash pages before the premiere. This adds to the thrill of what many cannot have.

As explained earlier, negative emotional responses can be powerful, but there are cases where they could be used for benefit. Our research found that death is not associated with selling fashion, but images with an artistic format can enhance the jeans’ brand. Our research team recommends contrasting the feeling of elitism against basic human needs and survival. In a “What Not to Wear” art gallery, the website could show black and white images that represented death, such as older or less vibrant, healthy people. In all of the images, the people would be wearing inferior brands of jeans. The images would never show the faces of the people. Instead, they would show their backs and highlight the brand of jeans. While these images would not show anything too morbid, they would still symbolize the idea of death and the inferiority of lower-quality jeans.

APPENDIX A: MIA'S IMAGE COLLAGE



The "x" in the picture makes
me want to know why it's there.



This picture reminds me of how
my friends and I act while we are out
shopping. We sit and people watch after

This do not enter sign
makes you wonder why it's
there and what ~~was~~
could be behind it.



The picture of
the two girls
lying down and laughing
reminds me of my
friends and I just
like the previous picture.



This picture reminds
me of death and
I would not associate
shopping with death.



The coffin and the elderly
woman would not make me feel like
I should buy anything. It's actually
pretty creepy.

APPENDIX B: JASON'S IMAGE COLLAGE



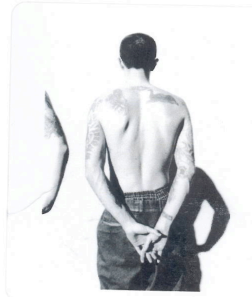
If the store
is going to be in
the city then
the notice should
use a city shot. it
granted one is
calm and over is
sunny so I may
only go
of over



more and simple. I thought this
would be a good header because its
simple and interesting to look at



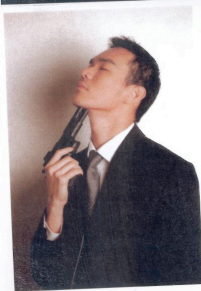
playing off the word
boutique I was looking
for pictures that I thought
would emphasize that word
and be more artistic



Nice shot but a soldier making me
think of horror, scary + brotherhood not
fashion



this is then design is gross
and that should say enough to

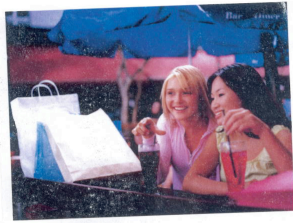


Pictures of Death
not good for any store
unless your an undertaker



A baby clinging to life doesn't
bring any thoughts of clothes to mind

APPENDIX C: RANDI'S IMAGE COLLAGE



①

Shopping for
social fun
reasons



②

I.A
as well



③

You can wear them
for different activities
↳ outdoorsy
fun
active



①



②

You can wear them for
different activities
" "



B

④

"Look so good in your jeans
that someone will want to
get you out of them"



⑤

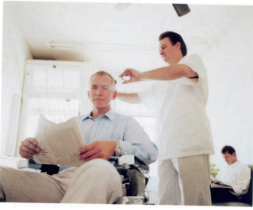
Standing out in
a crowd → people
being envious of what
you bought

A



③

Social Activities



①

Seems "stuffy"
and out of
fashion



②

A



③

Too Bizarre...



④

Morbid but in a
way that affects a
family → makes it
seem sadder instead
of "sexy morbid"



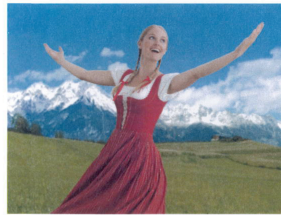
⑤

Lecturing about
spending money



①

Same
as A4



②

Same as
A3

B



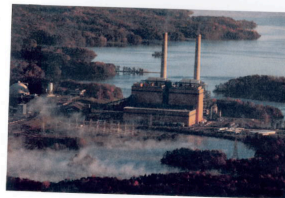
③

Can't see
connection
between
cute animals
and fashion



⑤

2



④

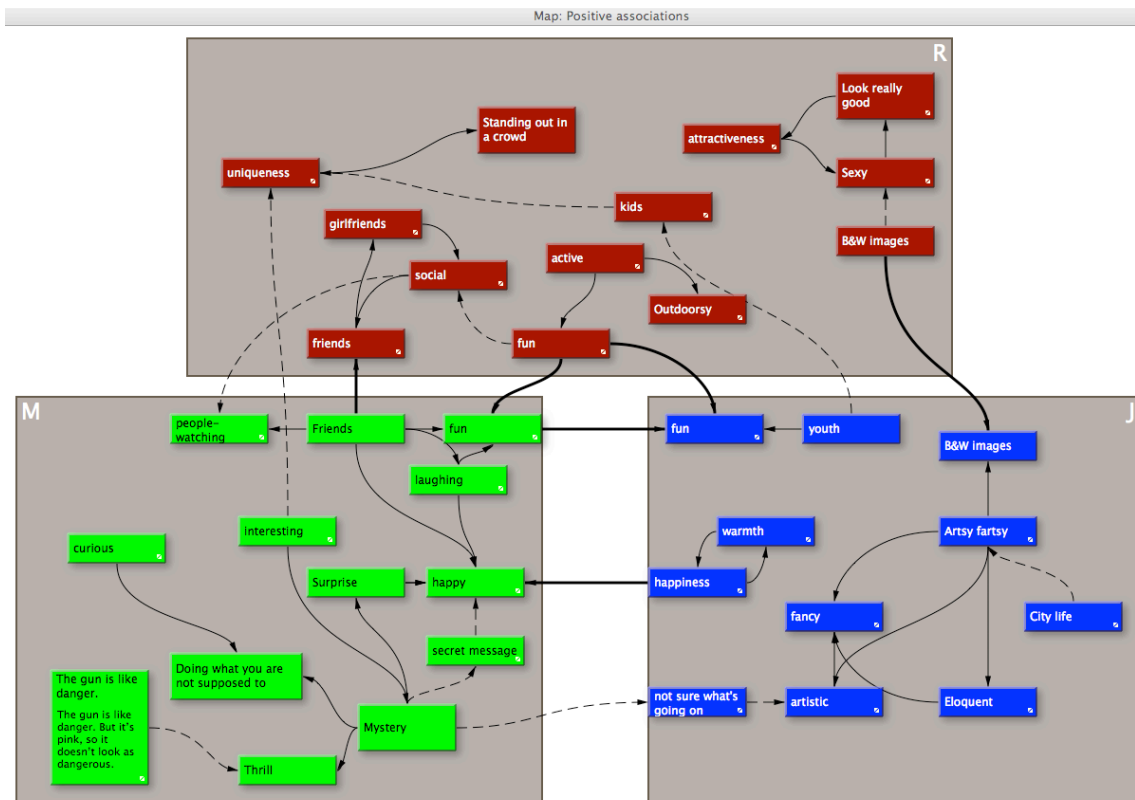
makes me think
about ~~were~~
clothes are made
↳ picture shows
factory impact on
nature



⑥

Suffering newborn...
Seems too
inappropriate

1. Positive association map



2. Negative association map

