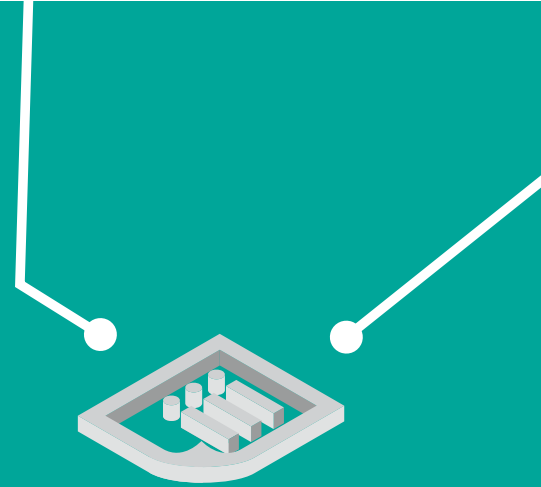# Improve the customer journey and increase audience insight through visual language:

**A guide for marketing strategists, market insights professionals, and social media experts**
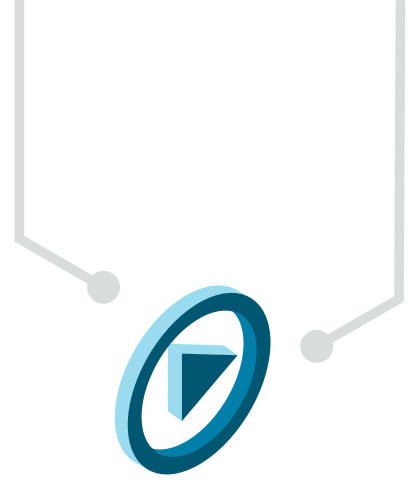
metia

Glimpz|t

# Contents

# Introduction

Your customer experience may be tuned to rational and logical decision making but is it tuned to the subconscious triggers that build an emotional connection between your brand and your customers?

Over thousands of years, humans have developed a complex set of senses and triggers which help us negotiate our environment. The senses that warn you to be alert as you walk down a dimly lit street, have been refined and developed to protect us – instinctively – just as a smiling face will cause us to relax.

The subconscious mind gathers and processes this environmental intelligence to generate the emotional response based upon our prior experiences. All of this happens within seconds.

But what does this have to do with customer experience ("CX")?

Organizations create subconscious experiences with their clients every day, these are all based on emotional responses. In Metia's research

and consulting activities exploring, designing and improving customer journeys, we've found that the organizations that can manage the entire customer experience, by connecting with their customers on an emotional level will reap enormous advantages.

And it's not just our own experiences. According to analyst firm Forrester, emotion was the #1 contributor to customer loyalty in 94 percent of industries studied, even surpassing effectiveness and ease of use.

**Emotion** was the **#1 contributor to customer loyalty** in 94% of industries studied

This modern commercial experience is supported by academic research, the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) introduced the science behind visual imagery. The market research tool was initially developed through a graduate course at the Harvard Business School in the early 1990s and was patented in 1995 by Dr. Gerald Zaltman. According to Zaltman, the ZMET revealed the technique "to get at hidden knowledge—to get at what people don't know they know."

The key to success in this emotional world is not only uncovering what signals are being evoked in your customers (throughout the customer journey), but also understanding how to provide them with the emotions you want them to experience. If you want your customers to feel "valued", you need to understand your customers' value system, their strongly held beliefs, and even their desires. Then apply this understanding to every CX touchpoint.

In our experience, one of the most effective methods to understand your customers is through their reactions and preferences exposed by their relationship to different forms of visual content (both pictures and videos). Similarly, visual content is also able to create lasting and memorable experiences. The reasons are simple. Not only is the old axiom "a picture is worth a thousand words" true, but visuals are the new language of consumers— just ask SnapChat, Instagram or Youtube. This visual language is both rich in human emotion and exposes how we truly perceive the world.

Based on research gathered by the Metia Insight and Analytics team, together with our partner Glimpzit, an innovative visual analytics platform, this co-authored report will help you understand the power of visual language, how innovative new technologies can be used to understand it, and, finally, how to apply this understanding for the greatest impact on your bottom line.
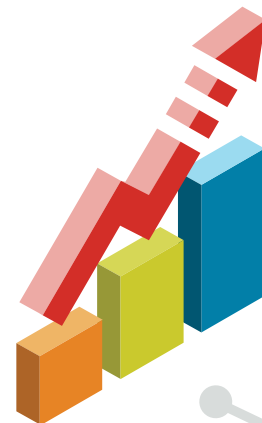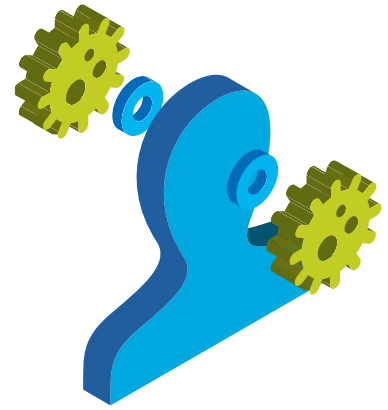
# Understanding the customer journey

> "Journey mapping connected me deeply with the priorities of our online students. The personas we built have become a key decision-making tool, and I now have a clear pathway to evolving our online learning experience."
>
> **Rose Cameron**
> Director of Innovation

When thinking about developing your brand, products, and messaging (i.e., the entire CX journey), it is vital to understand your current and potential customers. To achieve this, what approaches do you use today?

**Data through customer's eyes**
Qualitative techniques can be adept at uncovering human emotions: such as focus groups, online qualitative communities, ethnographic studies, customer interviews. Quantitative approaches such as surveys bring the implied authority of statistical evidence. Alternatively, you might apply hybrid passive data collection methodologies such as text-based social media listening.

These techniques can be valuable in understanding individual aspects of your customer journey, but they suffer from an inherent limitation: they can't uncover emotions, at scale. This prevents any one of them from being used as an all-encompassing methodology. Take, for example, online qualitative communities. Even though they can be effective at discovering how a group of customers feels about a new product idea, they can only be executed with a very limited number of participants.

## Balancing emotion vs representation

The following graphic summarizes these limitations on the two critical but competing dimensions: Emotion (how good they are at uncovering emotions toward a product or service) and Representation (how well the feedback represents the population you are trying to reach).



## Challenges that exist

Additionally, these traditional techniques suffer from the following drawbacks:

- **Not verifiable:** There's a disconnect between what people say and how they feel. Customers across the board have a tough time describing what aspects of the customer experience resonate with their emotional motivations.

- **Mobile:** Old methodologies just do not work on mobile. Imagine the pain of a respondent who has to fill out a survey question, or respond to a questionnaire on a community site via a tiny mobile screen.

- **Memory, especially emotional memory, can be fleeting:** One of the best ways to solicit insightful data would be to conduct studies in the moment of truth. However, creating true consumption environments is

very costly, if not virtually impossible. Metia observes that companies often settle for the second-best thing, namely, answering questions from memory, which are unlikely to reflect true emotional responses.

- **Lack of publicly available data on a large number of product categories:** This is especially true in the case of pure text-based social media. For example, while you might have millions of conversations on the Internet regarding U.S. presidential elections, rarely would people hop onto Facebook to talk about their favorite network infrastructure provider, or least favorite toothpaste.

- **Human factors:** Finally, when it comes to direct solicitation techniques, there are the obvious drawbacks, such as respondent fatigue, human resources required for execution, and the time it takes from design, to execution, to analysis, to actually get to the point of taking action on the results.
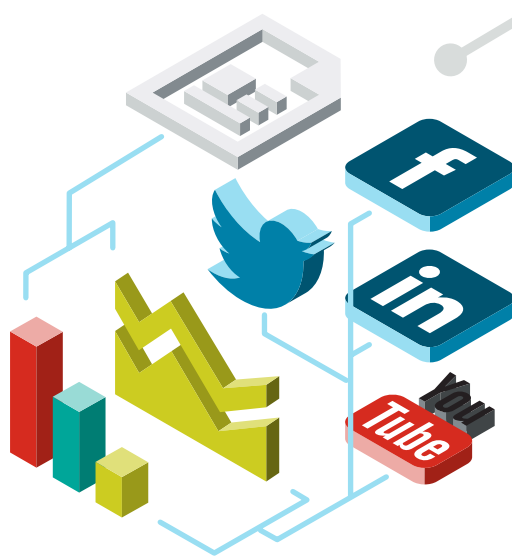
## Where to start

So, what can companies do? How can they address these limitations?

The answer lies in user-generated visual data, be it directly solicited or passively mined. Visuals are inherently more verifiable (people don't tell you what they do, they show you). They require very limited effort from respondents to effectively capture the moment of truth (responding at home on their phone using their camera). They also provide much richer context (a person enjoys Budweiser at home, but craft beer at parties) and, best of all, images are highly emotive.

By gathering visual data and applying big data analytical techniques, emotional tendencies and triggers are revealed through your customer's eyes. The common phrase "I see what you mean!" makes that aspect literally quite clear. You can read more about the power of visuals here.

Nonetheless, many companies still insist on journey-mapping their customer experiences and tracking activities across physical stores, ecommerce sites, and social media using traditional techniques in their attempts to improve customer satisfaction. Why?

Two factors have until recently held back this simple yet seemingly revolutionary solution: the lack of large volumes of easily accessible visual data and the difficulty of interpretative analysis. Fortunately, thanks to rise of the visual web and advances in machine learning technologies, this is no longer the case.
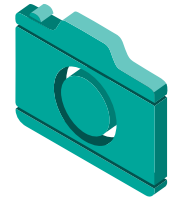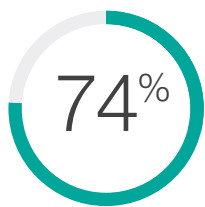
# The new language
of consumers

## Power of visuals

The rise of communication through visual content has been one of the most phenomenal changes inspired by pervasive access to the Internet and the mobile phone. Platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, and Snapchat are so popular that consumers, especially millennials, are abandoning text and letting pictures and videos do the talking.

Over 1.8 billion photos are uploaded and shared on social media every day. This number is rapidly growing: in fact, according to Syndacast, by the end of 2017 it is expected that 74 percent of all communication on the Internet will be visual. And the reason for that? Visuals are a perfect medium to showcase how we perceive the world on an acutely personal level.

Visuals have rapidly become the default means of communication among younger generations. But the dismissal of this wider trend as being merely the preferred distraction of idle teenagers, neglects the broad adoption of visual communication among many segments. It also ignores the emergence of visual imagery as a powerful language.

Images represent a language on par with written or spoken languages—and one that transcends cultural and traditional linguistic boundaries. This is not new but the ability to communicate through images was previously limited to artists and artisans. New technology and social media have democratized this capability.

## Connecting through data

For companies, this rich collection of "human data" is a huge untapped resource of insights— insights that reveal key moments of truth, and provide clues about how to influence the emotions of your customer.

When brands connect deeply with their customers, they create a level of loyalty that's greater than any points system. By applying this new visual language to inform marketing strategies ensures customers are met with compelling, consistent, and relevant experiences every step of the purchasing path.

**74%**

of all **communication** on the Internet **will be visual**

# Decoding the visual language

How can modern marketers become fluent in this new visual language? It's relatively easy to perform operations such as calculating confidence intervals and correlation strengths from quantitative survey questions, but how do you analyze consumer video commentaries?

### Revealing the solution

Even if you are already gathering videos as part of your ethnographic studies, there is only so much video that can be watched, edited, and transcribed manually.

Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (or machine learning) have made the task of analyzing this inherently unstructured qualitative data automated and scalable. Tools such as Glimpzlt's AI engine can analyze any form of visual content and automatically tag (or code) its contents. By contextually correlating any accompanying text or audio with the visual, it is possible to decipher the personal insight

behind every piece of visual data. For example, electronics manufacturer Sonos was able to extract eye-opening insights from the visual data for fundamentally improving the in-store customer experience, resulting in major improvements to both product awareness and overall sales.

### Evaluate and adapt

Now that marketers have a way to decipher the human emotions that are exposed through visuals, how can they use this knowledge to create a stellar customer experience?

# Connecting emotionally with your customers
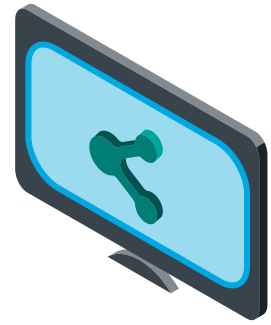
The context in which consumers communicate and consume content has shifted. They are increasingly moving outside the traditional marketing funnel and changing how they research and buy products. Consumers are spending more time online and demanding that the products they buy fulfil both their utilitarian and emotional needs.

## Changing your approach

For businesses, making emotion a key element of the CX strategy requires a deliberate effort. Designing an emotional **Journey Map** is a powerful tool that allows businesses to understand and improve the customer experience.

An example is a project Metia undertook for Penn State University, which applied this strategy to its "virtual quad." The school's objective was to drive lifelong loyalty through meaningful emotional connections within the online student journey. Through a combination of rich data sources, ethnographic understanding, and visual language, Metia developed clearly defined and meaningful student personas and a visual Journey Map. The Journey Map identified the key emotional moments that united campus-based students during their studies. Metia then translated them into equivalent experiences and moments of truth that could take place within the online environment. The details were explained in the Penn State University case study.

## Influencing emotions and behaviors

Once the various emotions evoked in customers have been mapped throughout their journey, the next task is to bring customers to the emotional state you want them to experience for a given circumstance.
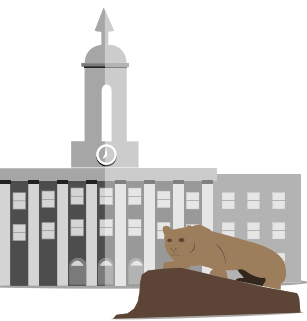
A customer journey map may indicate that your customers are feeling either elation or relief when reading about your product's new features. If you want to attract new customers, elation is the emotion to evoke. However, if they are existing customers clamoring for product improvements, relief may also be a good outcome.

## Accelerating the journey

Once an emotional Journey Map has been documented, it provides a strategic direction for the effective content marketing activities which can be used to accelerate customers through their desired journey.

Many Metia clients use content marketing as their largest and most effective customer acquisition activity. using an emotional Journey Map, marketers can build content strategies to drive digital awareness, engagement and deliver desired end outcomes. Whether running social media, email, or lead nurturing campaigns—image based content can be easily digested using this new visual language.

When publishing content, it's important to highlight and reinforce the key emotions you are trying to evoke to ignite attention and build deeper connections with customers.
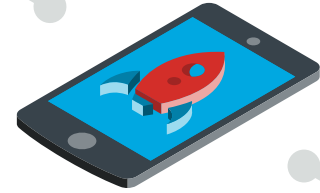
**61%**
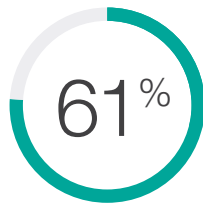
Most successful B2B content
marketers have a documented
**content marketing strategy**
(source: CMI)

**83%**
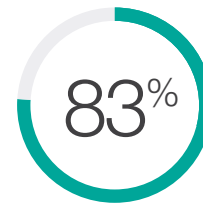
Say their content
marketing strategy is
**very effective**
(source: CMI)

# How to start applying visual language today

There are many ways to apply visual language within a business. From building a constant funnel of innovative product and marketing ideas, to mapping your customer's path-to-purchase journey, and even creating engaging visual contests.

To provide inspiration, a number of use cases are listed below, with links to follow for details. Each one illustrates how visual content can enhance your customer journey:

1. **Ideation and Concept Generation**
2. **Concept and Ad Testing**
3. **New Product Development**
4. **Understand Longitudinal Consumer behavior**
5. **Uncover Customer's Path-to-Purchase**
6. **Visual Marketing**
7. **Visual Contests**

# Adapting your methodology

As new technology and social media change our behaviors, so must marketers and market researchers adapt.

### A competitive edge that lasts a lifetime
New techniques for gathering and analyzing consumer data can help companies to act more effectively to ensure long-term customer loyalty and enhance their profitability.

Mastering visual language is no longer a "nice to have," but a "must have" for every company.

The rise of this new technique provides a great opportunity for marketers to communicate with consumers in their preferred language. Marketers don't have to change their work processes or existing system to leverage this new language. For example, if your business runs surveys, why not collect videos instead of open-ended text responses, or if your business is already listening to social media, make sure you're not leaving out the visual content from your analysis.

In our experience, brands find visual engagement to be better, faster, and cheaper.

If you need further guidance, get in touch to learn more about Metia's client case studies which detail successful applications of visual techniques by leading brands and businesses.

# About GlimpzIt

GlimpzIt is a platform that allows the world's top marketers and insights professionals to analyze and gain actionable customer intelligence from unstructured data (photo, video, and text).

Using machine learning technology, Glimpzit delivers the processing and analysis of qualitative data at quantitative scale, auto-generated marketing content, and real-time customer engagement opportunities.

GlimpzIt works with leading brands and agencies such as NBC, Johnson & Johnson, Paramount, Research Now, and Hallmark. To see how GlimpzIt can help your business, contact us at info@glimzit.com for a free demo and pilot.

Start a conversation with your audience, gather valuable human insights, and begin taking action now!

# About Metia

Metia Group is a global digital marketing agency with offices in London, Seattle, Austin, and Singapore. We employ over 130 digital marketing professionals; each is expert in a particular area of specialization.

Our clients include big corporations and ambitious businesses. We provide them with creative campaigns that reach across geographies, scale massively, can be deployed systematically, and measured relentlessly.

If you'd like to learn more about our capabilities and discuss how we could help you reach and engage your target audiences with focused, measurable campaigns, please contact us at info@metia.com.

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