

THE GREAT IDEAS MINDSET

**THE PROVEN CASE
FOR CO-CREATION**



Sharp

×

Lancaster
University



CO-CREATION: BIG PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS, BIG BRAND IMPACT.

**THIS PAPER EXAMINES
NEW ACADEMIC
RESEARCH BY LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY THAT PROVES
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
CO-CREATE BY SHARP AS
A METHODOLOGY FOR
BRAND AND CAMPAIGN
IDEA GENERATION.**

Founded in 2009, The SHARP Agency works with bold leaders of brands with change on the agenda. As a brand performance agency, we know co-created work produces brilliant results.

What is co-creation, why is it so different from traditional methods and what could it do for you?

Read on to find out.

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WHAT IS CO-CREATE BY SHARP?

CO-CREATE BY SHARP IS A BESPOKE CO-CREATION METHODOLOGY THAT WE'VE BEEN USING TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS FOR OUR CLIENTS FOR OVER 15 YEARS.

It's the strategic foundation of our creative thinking, but it isn't just insight gathering, focus groups or research. It isn't crowdsourcing either. It's a collaborative process that engages end users and stakeholders to directly shape marketing and brand outputs.

Expertly moderated in-person or virtually, each co-creation session sees multiple small groups of participants work on a series of tasks tailored to the client's challenge and objective. The final activity involves each team devising and presenting their creative solution before the wider group votes for their favourite idea.

Then, working in unison, our strategy and creative teams use those seeds of ideas to create stand-out, compelling and commercially rigorous propositions and campaigns.

For over fifteen years, we've been helping clients like Cotton Traders, the NHS, Lonza, HomeServe, and Best Western Hotels solve complex business challenges.

Our bespoke process, suite of tools and interactive exercises supercharge collaborative creativity.



The Impact of Co-Create by SHARP

- Driving outstanding revenue growth for you
- Responding to your changing customer base
- Knowing the right strategy with certainty
- Being agile and keeping you ahead of the competition

The Results of Co-Create by SHARP

40%
MOM increase on target acquisitions
Barbour ABI

16%
Uplift in brand awareness
HomeServe

100%
increase in spontaneous awareness
Cotton TRADERS

BEST EVER
Facebook campaign performance
BW | Best Western Hotels & Resorts



HOW IT WORKS

WE HAVE DEFINED AND REFINED OUR 'CO-CREATE BY SHARP' METHODOLOGY INTO A PROVEN PROCESS, THAT WORKS SEAMLESSLY IN PERSON OR VIRTUALLY.

It is based on five core principles that unlock actionable insight, community driven creativity and customer advocacy in a few short hours of intensive collaboration, participation and ideation.

5 Core Principles

UNIQUE

No two business challenges are the same – so neither are two Co-Create by SHARP workshops.

- 2-3 hours
- Virtual, in-person or hybrid
- Tailored to your objectives

DIVERSE

Co-Create by SHARP allows brands to make meaningful connections with their audience by collaborating with them.

- Accurate recruitment
- Customers and consumers
- Internal stakeholders and partners

DEMOCRATIC

The end point of our Co-Create by SHARP workshops is to pull together customer opinions on the creative itself – filtering favoured, workable ideas to the top.

- Teams share their **BIG ideas at the end**
- Sessions often end **with a vote**
- Results are **actioned in the next stage**

PLAYFUL

Everyone is inherently creative. And there's no such thing as a bad idea.

- Takes place in an **inclusive and inspiring space**
- **Group thinking exercises**
- **Expert moderation elicits literal and lateral thinking**

A BLUEPRINT

Once a Co-Create by SHARP session has finished and ideas have been collated, it's the job of the SHARP strategists and creative teams to develop these seeds of thought into a powerful brand or campaign.

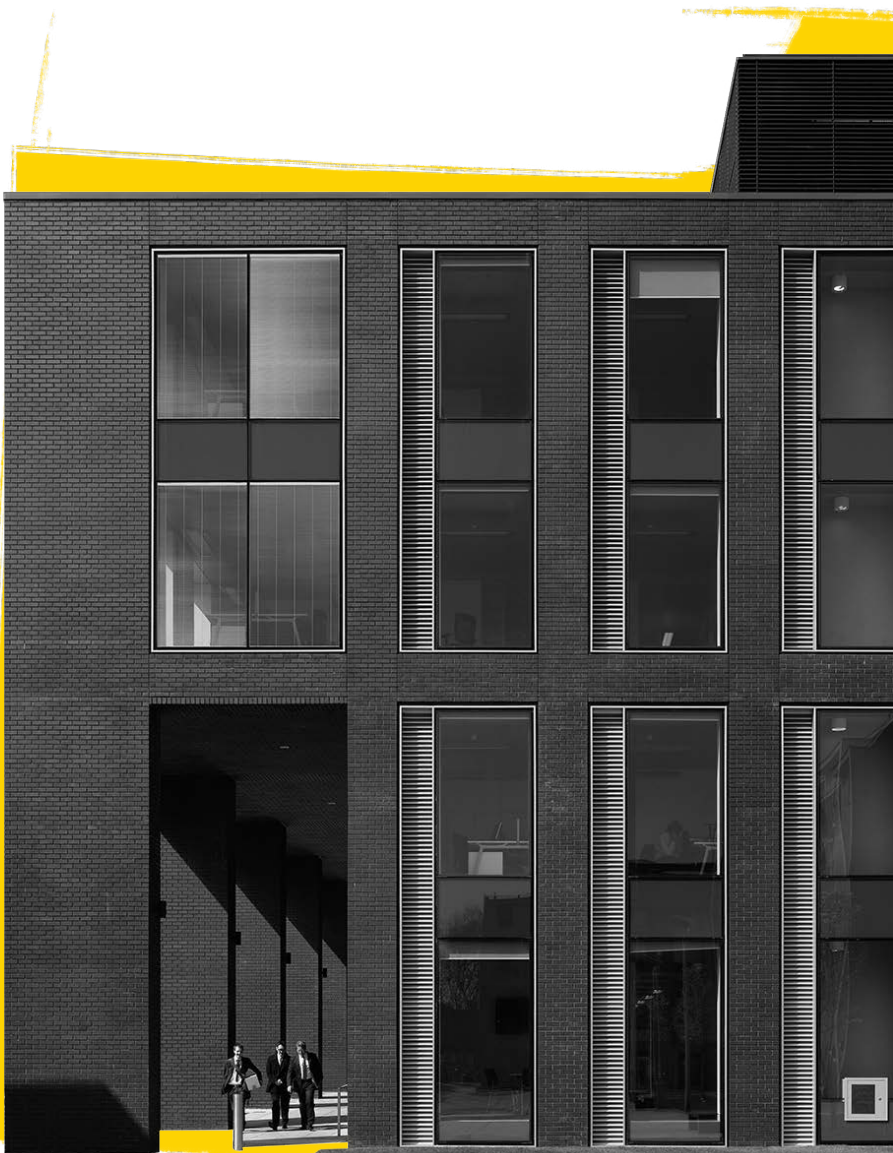
- **Insights from the workshops shape ideas**
- **Effective strategy and cut-through creative**
- **Co-created work delivers higher ROI and customer response**

THE ACADEMIC BACKING

OUR PROCESS IS BACKED BY THE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT LANCASTER UNIVERSITY.

The results were already proved. But we needed to find out why the co-creation process delivers such outstanding results.

Independent researchers spent three months uncovering this, and the answer lies in our human psychologies. This white paper explains how.



CO-CREATION WAS FOUND TO DELIVER:

**TRUER
PROPOSITIONS**

**EXPLOSIVE
CREATIVE
THINKING**

**BIGGER
IMPACT
FOR BRANDS**

Because it produces a unique mindset and favourable psychological conditions in participants that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

**Paving the way for better work
and better results – at pace.**



THE HYPOTHESES

RESEARCHERS COULD SEE FROM SHARP'S DEMONSTRABLE TRACK RECORD THAT CO-CREATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS APPEARED TO ADD VALUE TO INSIGHT GATHERING AND IDEA GENERATION, DELIVERING MORE EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS.

THEY SOUGHT TO PROVE THIS IN THEIR FIELDWORK.

Furthermore, they wanted to discover why and how the process delivers more effective campaigns. A review of SHARP's existing work and results, along with a comprehensive literature review, built on these thoughts to deliver **two hypotheses**.

HYPOTHESIS ONE

CO-CREATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS IS A MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO DEVELOP MARKETING AND BRAND CAMPAIGNS.

It has been shown in the world of academia that reactive research methods (i.e. more traditional techniques such as surveys and focus groups) are limited in the meaningful insight they can derive. Kristensson et al. (2008) suggests that these methods limit the opportunity for free thinking and **limit creativity**. In addition, Shotton (2018) notes that responses to direct questioning could be driven by post-rationalisation rather than actual motivations, and are therefore problematic.

Arya et al. (2021) looks at the case of co-creation specifically, and explains that consumer engagement through co-creation adds **significant value to insight**. Such engagement of course cannot be found in traditional market research methods.

The hypotheses? Given the academic research available, and the results that Co-Create by SHARP has proven, **co-creation with stakeholders is a more effective way to develop marketing and brand campaigns**.

HYPOTHESIS TWO

CO-CREATION IS SUPPORTED BY A PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM THAT PRODUCES HIGH PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT.

As we've already seen, it is thought that customer engagement through co-creation adds the 'spark' to deliver more meaningful insight.

But why does co-creation produce such high levels of participant engagement? Researchers believe that co-creation may be supported by a psychological mechanism that produces an **engaged and motivated participant mindset**.

It has been suggested that participant engagement in brand co-creation could be linked to **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** and **Implicit Self-Esteem Theory (ISET)**.

The Theories

SELF DETERMINATION THEORY

Self Determination Theory concerns people's innate psychological needs. It suggests that people become self-determined, and ultimately self-motivated, when their needs are met for:

- **competence:** reflected in mastery or skill in a given task
- **autonomy:** reflected in control over one's own behaviour, the freedom to express oneself
- **relatedness:** reflected in one's sense of belonging to a 'tribe' or group are fulfilled (Adams et al. 2017).

IMPLICIT SELF ESTEEM THEORY

Implicit Self Esteem Theory is regarded as a significant component of personality, cognition and human behaviour (Falk & Heine 2014).

It proposes that **a person with high self esteem will feel positive about anything associated with them – from their friendship circles to the brands they buy and feel aligned with.**

Given the challenging but positive and inclusive workshop element of co-creation, researchers predicted that **the co-creation process may create a fertile ground for both self-determination (SDT) and for incorporation into one's self concept or identity (ISET).**

THE METHODOLOGY

A QUALITATIVE EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN WAS USED TO INVESTIGATE THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

Three types of interviews were conducted with different participant profiles, including co-creation participants, SHARP team members and SHARP clients.

Interviews were designed to gather insights about co-creation perceptions from every person involved in the process. A qualitative design allowed interviewees to express freely their co-creation experience with The SHARP Agency:

Step 1: Process observation

Step 2: Interviews.



OUR METHODOLOGIES

STEP 1: OBSERVATIONS

RESEARCHERS FROM LANCASTER UNIVERSITY GAINED EXTENSIVE EXPOSURE TO THE CO-CREATE TECHNIQUE BY PARTICIPATING IN THE END-TO-END PROCESS FOR A PERIOD OF THREE MONTHS.

They attended Co-Create by SHARP workshops and followed the entire strategic and creative process – from brainstorming sessions to final delivery of the creative visuals and messaging.

STEP 2: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWS WERE CARRIED OUT WITH THREE GROUPS AND DELIVERED A 360° VIEW OF THE CO-CREATION IDEA GENERATION PROCESS.

Past Co-Create Participants

- End users and stakeholders
- The idea generators
- The spark that ignites a thought

SHARP Internal Team

- Strategic and creative teams
- Bring the ideas to life
- Turn into stand-out, persuasive campaigns

SHARP Co-Create Clients

- Lead client contacts
- The judges of the ideas
- Accountability for campaign effectiveness and impact

THE GREAT IDEAS MINDSET

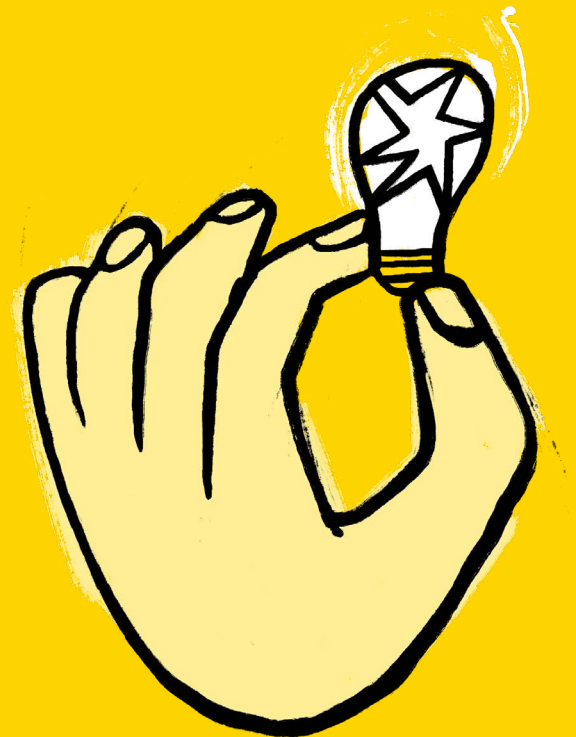
CO-CREATION PARTICIPANTS BECOME SELF-MOTIVATED TO SHAPE BRAND FUTURES.

Researchers found that the structured co-creation process and moderation style creates an environment in which participants can become direct brand contributors, creating a brand self-connection (following Implicit Self Esteem Theory).

What's more, following Self Determination Theory, they found that participants became competent, autonomous and related – producing a self-motivated and self-determined mindset, resulting in high engagement.

When you couple this with the enhanced creativity we'll discuss later in detail, it results in the **Great Ideas Mindset**.

To reach the Great Ideas Mindset, the researchers found that there are **four big motivators** at play, each one translating into psychological benefits.



MOTIVATORS

TASKS CHALLENGE CREATIVE THINKING, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Within co-creation sessions, SHARP design team-based tasks that require analytical and creative ‘quick thinking’, all based around real-life scenarios or client questions. These tasks challenge the knowledge and skills of participants and are a welcome break from the norm of everyday work life – allowing participants to achieve **competence**.

“THE STAKEHOLDERS THAT WE INVITE ALONG ARE SCIENTISTS. THEY’VE NEVER REALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN A PROCESS LIKE THIS. AT FIRST, YOU CAN SEE THEY’RE NOT QUITE SURE. BUT ONCE THEY GET GOING, THEY REALLY ENJOY IT.”

Commissioning client, Lonza

POSITIVE FEEDBACK MAKES THE CONSUMER THE JUDGE

In addition, SHARP co-creation sessions usually incorporate a voting mechanic as it draws to a close. Participant teams present their work to gain feedback, and then are encouraged to vote for the best idea. But crucially – participants cannot vote for their own idea, so **further enhancing competence through a positive feedback loop**.

“RATHER THAN EMAILING, IT WAS NICE TO ACTUALLY HAVE DISCUSSIONS IN PERSON AND HAVE THAT BACK AND FORTH ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE TEAMS.”

Co-creation participant

NO IDEA IS A BAD IDEA: PARTICIPANTS EXPRESS FREELY WITHOUT FEAR OF FAILURE

At the start of any co-creation session, moderators at SHARP stress that there is just one rule in sessions: “no idea is a bad idea” – empowering all participants to contribute.

The researchers found that participants and clients alike felt that this inability to fail created a safe environment in which participants were free and **autonomous** to share thoughts.

“I LIKED THE ACTUAL TASKS THAT WERE THOUGHT-PROVOKING, AND I SUPPOSE THERE’S NEVER A CORRECT ANSWER; IT’S JUST WHAT YOU’RE FEELING. SO, THEY’RE ALL GOOD, FUN, AND MADE YOU THINK ABOUT THE BRAND.”

Co-creation participant

TEAMWORK MAKES CO-CREATION INCLUSIVE AND ENGAGING

Whether virtual or face to face, Co-Create by SHARP participants always work together in small ‘table teams’ of groups comprising of between three to six participants. The researchers found that participants really enjoyed the teamwork aspect and that this made the environment relaxed and inclusive, and contributed to a sense of relatedness.

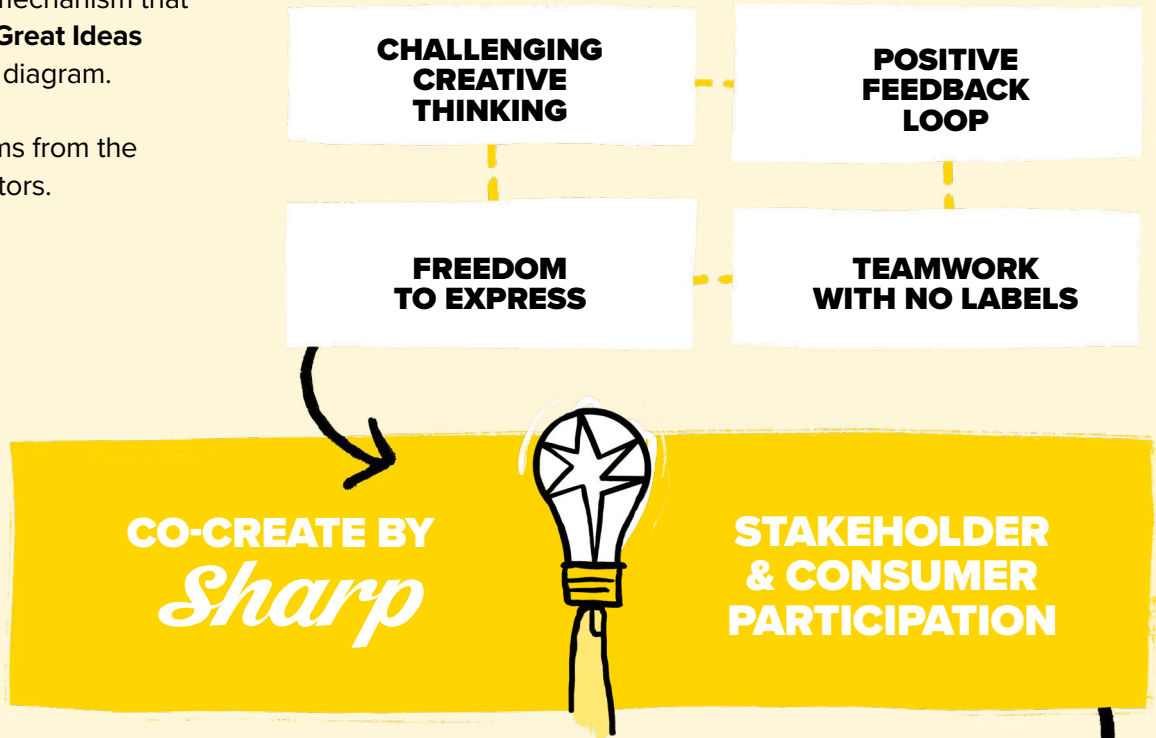
“WHEN YOU’RE IN A TEAM, YOU’RE WORKING THROUGH IT TOGETHER, YOU GET TO INTERACT WITH OTHERS. I ALWAYS THINK THAT’S A GOOD THING.”

Co-creation participant

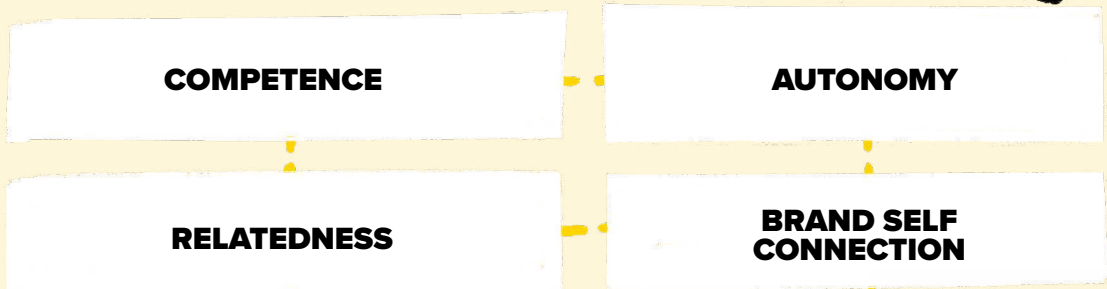
We've summarised the psychological mechanism that produces **The Great Ideas Mindset** in this diagram.

Everything stems from the four big motivators.

THE BIG MOTIVATORS OF CO-CREATION:



THE FOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS:



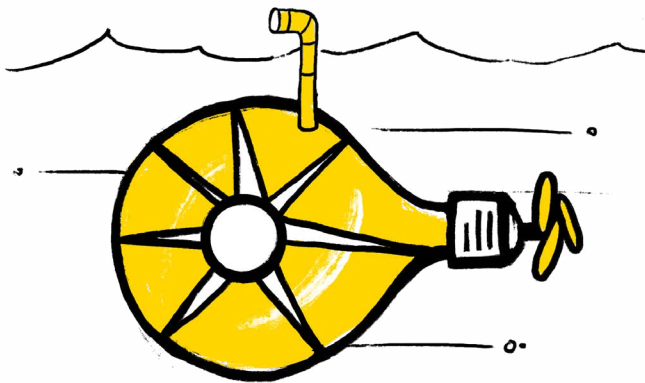
THE PROVEN IMPACT:



ENHANCING CREATIVE THINKING

FOLLOWING ON, RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS PRODUCED BY CO-CREATION DELIVER ENHANCED CREATIVITY.

Both clients and creative teams alike agree that co-created ideas deliver more depth and creativity because of the place Co-Create by SHARP participants are working from – **The Great Ideas Mindset** – and the magic that can happen when consumers and the Agency work directly together.



“IN MOST INSTANCES OF MARKETING, I FIND THAT CO-CREATE IS A BETTER METHOD. BECAUSE IT JUST HAS THAT CREATIVE TWIST TO IT, A SURVEY OR STANDARD FOCUS GROUP JUST DOESN'T DRAW OUT THE ANSWER THAT YOU NEED... WHEN YOU NEED THAT CREATIVE EDGE, WE GO TOWARDS A CO-CREATE.”

Commissioning client, MPS

“CO-CREATION LETS YOU EXPLODE YOUR THINKING, DO A LOT MORE WITH SOMETHING, AND CREATE SOMETHING VERY DISTINCTIVE.”

Copywriter, The SHARP Agency

CO-CREATED IDEAS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE

RESEARCHERS ALSO DISCOVERED THAT IDEAS THAT ARE CO-CREATED WITH STAKEHOLDERS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THOSE THAT ARE NOT.

Specifically, enhanced effectiveness was evidenced in four key areas.

1. RESULTS

All clients report better results from co-created campaigns, in terms of measurable metrics like reach, lead generation and lead quality.

“WE WERE ABLE TO MEASURE WITH THINGS LIKE INCREASED LINKEDIN FOLLOWERS OF A ROLE WE WERE TARGETING, SOCIAL MEDIA REACH, ALSO QUALITY LEAD GENERATION TO THE CAMPAIGN WORK THAT WE DID WITH CO-CREATE.”

Commissioning client, Barbour ABI

2. BRAND CONSISTENCY

Clients report that using co-creation as an integral part of their brand and campaign development process ensures consistency of message and delivery of campaigns.

“HAVING SHARP’S CO-OPERATION MEANS THAT WE’RE CONSISTENT WITH THE APPROACH, THE OUTPUT, AND THE EXECUTION OF CAMPAIGNS.”

Commissioning client, Lanza

3. SPEED OF DELIVERY

Co-creation is agile and can move at pace, particularly compared to traditional research methods. Using co-creation gets all the key stakeholders in the room at the outset: key clients, consumers, the creative and strategy teams – meaning everyone is aligned and ready to hit the ground running.

Finished ideas flow faster when they’ve been co-created with consumers in the first stage.

“WHAT I’VE EXPERIENCED BEFORE IN TERMS OF THAT WHOLE COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IS THE EFFICIENCIES IN TIME, AND ALSO THAT THE END PRODUCT IS MORE EFFECTIVE.”

Commissioning client, Barbour ABI

4. DE-RISK OF FAILURE

Co-created ideas are tested by the audience at their very conception, so their risk of failure is vastly reduced. Researchers found that clients consider co-creation a safe and robust methodology that removes guesswork from the process.

“THIS CAMPAIGN RUNS IN MANY COUNTRIES. WE NEEDED IT TO BE RIGHT, WE COULDN’T RUN THE RISK OF GUESSING. SO ALL OUR TACTICAL CAMPAIGNS ARE BASED ON THE BRAND CAMPAIGN. SO, IT MUST BE RIGHT. THE CO-CREATE HAS HELPED US FORM THE BRAND FOR THE BETTER.”

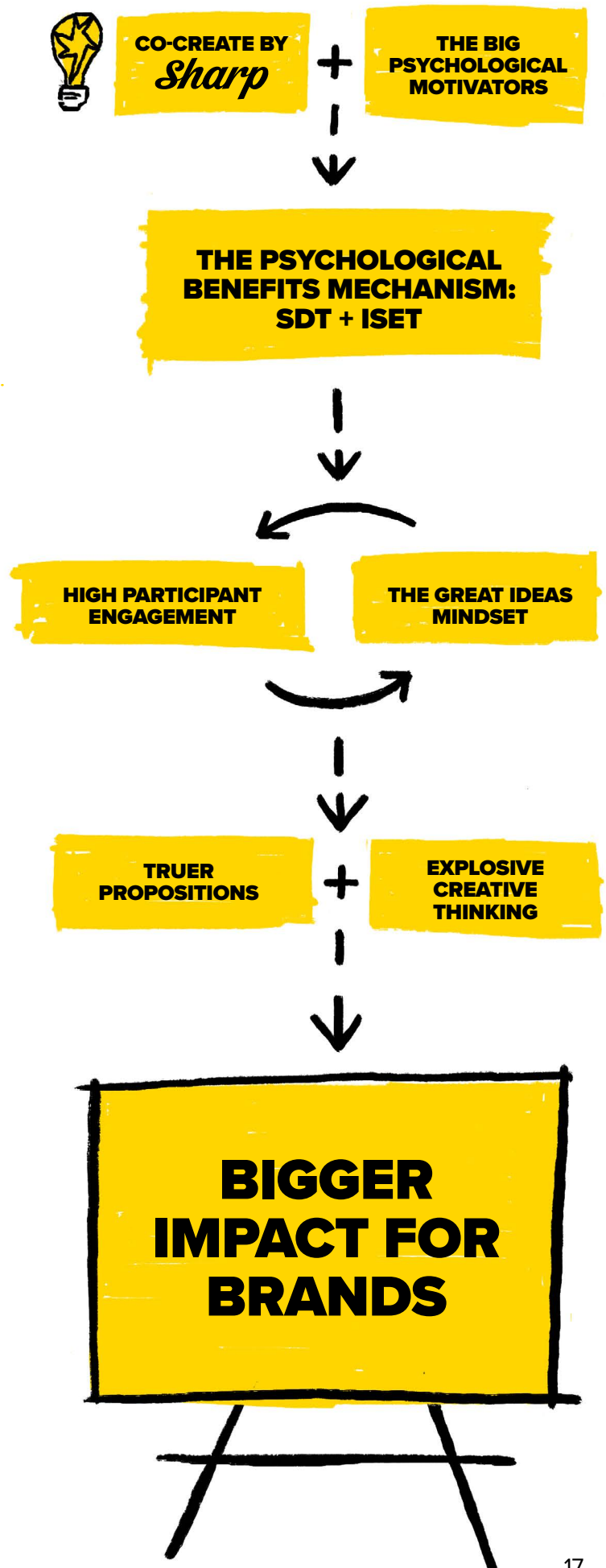
Commissioning client, MPS

THE IMPACT CHAIN

IN CONCLUSION, THE RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT THE CO-CREATION PROCESS DELIVERS A CHAIN OF BENEFITS – AN IMPACT CHAIN – WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATORS ACTING AS A CATALYST.

Participant engagement in the sessions creates the Great Ideas Mindset, delivering truer propositions and better creative thinking from the Agency team – culminating in enhanced effectiveness and bigger impact for brand clients.

Read on to discover more about how Co-Create by SHARP works, and for examples of the Impact Chain in action.



HOW CAN CO-CREATION 'FIND AND FREE' YOUR BRAND'S GOOD?

**WE'VE WORKED WITH A DIVERSE
RANGE OF CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS
AND STAKEHOLDERS TO SOLVE THEIR
COMPLEX BUSINESS CHALLENGES.**

**DISCOVER THEIR STORIES AND FIND
OUT HOW CO-CREATE BY SHARP
COULD BENEFIT YOU.**



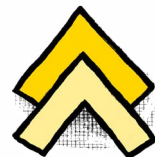
COTTON TRADERS



100% UPLIFT IN SPONTANEOUS AWARENESS



DOMINATING SEARCH RANKINGS FOR 'SWISHY SKIRT'



TURNOVER INCREASED £11M YOY

COTTON TRADERS IS A BELOVED HERITAGE BRAND IN THE UK. BUT ITS AUDIENCE WAS SHRINKING, AND THE YOUNGER FEMALE SEGMENT WAS BRAND-AWARE BUT DIDN'T CONSIDER COTTON TRADERS A STYLISH 'FOR ME' BRAND DESPITE THE EVOLVING CLOTHING RANGE.

The challenge

Change brand perception to reach a younger demographic and position the brand in their lives.

In-person co-creation sessions with the 55+ year-old target audience unearthed our primary insight: this audience has a vibrant life and needs clothes to match every occasion. From this, a new invigorating proposition and creative campaign was created: 'The style of your life' – injecting personality, versatility and style into all brand activity.

Every advert in the campaign featured a must-have hero piece and #5WaysToWear it.

The campaign launched nationally on 22 March 2020 and ran until 2023 across integrated TV, press and digital, delivering incredible results.

In 2022, the campaign delivered 100% uplift in spontaneous awareness, 32% decrease in 'dated and dull' brand associations and turnover increased £11M YOY.

The catchy and memorable product naming strategy also paid off. Cotton Traders dominated Google search results for 'swishy skirt'.

The Feedback

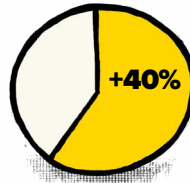
“DESPITE THE MOST CHALLENGING TIME IN OUR HISTORY, THIS CAMPAIGN CREATED BY SHARP HAS DELIVERED.”

Shona Jameson, CMO, Cotton Traders

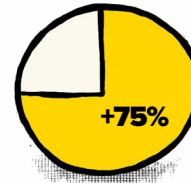
The Creative



BARBOUR ABI



INCREASE IN
TARGET CLIENT
ACQUISITIONS



INCREASE IN
LINKEDIN PAGE
VIEWS



SOCIAL
REACH

BARBOUR ABI, THE MARKET-LEADING PROVIDER OF CONSTRUCTION INTELLIGENCE, HAS CEMENTED ITSELF AS A VITAL BUSINESS TOOL WITH OVER 1.8 MILLION LIVE PROJECT LEADS AT ANY TIME.

The challenge

Its audience didn't know how Barbour ABI's leading construction expertise could positively impact their bottom line.

Virtual co-creation workshops with contractors, subcontractors, product manufacturers and recruiters quickly revealed Barbour ABI's advantage: the strength is the switched-on people behind its winning tech – data with the human edge. This became the core of tactical campaign activity.

Rebuilding Together

The double whammy economic fallout from Brexit and Covid hit the construction industry hard. We positioned Barbour ABI as the partner best placed to help its clients rebuild and get back on track through a direct mail (DM) and paid social campaign, along with a website refresh.

Ready to go

A second co-creation session with Barbour ABI's prospects and customers uncovered deep insights about 2021 perceptions in terms of threats and opportunities... with hopes resting on the Chancellor's big annual statement. Our three-phase digital campaign tapped into the build-up, reaction and ramifications of the 2021 Budget announcement, capitalising on one high search ranking factor at that time, Rishi Sunak.

The Feedback

“WE THINK OF SHARP AS A STRATEGIC EXTENSION TO OUR OWN MARKETING TEAM AND THAT'S THE WAY WE WORK TOGETHER. THE FINDINGS FROM OUR INITIAL CO-CREATE SESSIONS FORM A SOLID LAUNCHPAD – PACKED WITH THE PROOF POINTS THAT OUR TARGET MARKET REALLY CARE ABOUT.”

Kate Perrin, Marketing Director, Barbour ABI

The Creative



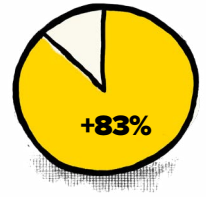
MPS



INCREASE TO
A 50+ NPS
SCORE



'RELIABLE' AS
UNPROMPTED
BRAND AFFILIATION



AGREEMENT OF
DELIVERY ON
BRAND PROMISE

MPS IS A LEADING GLOBAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT PROTECTION ORGANISATION FOR DOCTORS AND DENTISTS. BUT IN A CATEGORY DOMINATED BY BIG PLAYERS AND COMPLEX OFFERINGS, THE TIME-POOR AUDIENCE STRUGGLED TO SEE THE FULL VALUE OF A MEMBERSHIP.

We changed that. Working with medical professionals around the world, we unearthed the brand's one thing and co-created a series of global campaigns.

The challenge

We discovered a pivotal insight from in-person co-creation sessions with current and potential members on three continents.

What we found was healthcare professionals were unclear on the true worth of an MPS membership versus the competitor offering, and a one-size-fits-all approach wasn't going to work.

By your side

Their new proposition 'By your side for any eventuality' now sat at the heart of the brand and became the strategic and creative foundation for their global creative work and internal operations.

A global campaign with local relevance

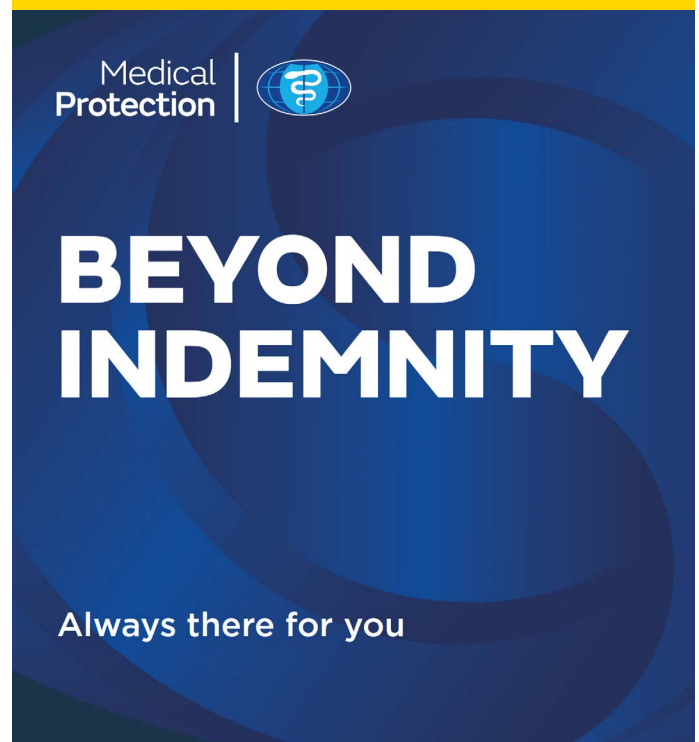
Taking direction from the insight, our strategic and creative teams developed a new global brand campaign, nuanced localised campaigns and devised a way to upweight the valuable risk prevention training which is available with every membership.

The Feedback

"SHARP ARE JUST A GREAT AGENCY TO WORK WITH, AND THEY REALLY DO DELIVER ON STRATEGY, CREATIVE AND RESULTS. THEY PUSH THE BOUNDARIES, WHICH IS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR ME IN TERMS OF MOVING THE BRAND ON."

Natalie Toft, Brand and Marketing Manager, MPS

The Creative



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ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS



Primary researcher

Ecuadorian born María Gabriela Vivero holds two degrees, one in Advertising from the Universidad de Las Americas (Quito, Ecuador) and an MSc Psychology of Advertising from Lancaster University (Lancaster, United Kingdom). Her interest in advertising stems from a fascination with consumer behaviour and how it connects to our human instincts and desires. She now holds the position as Junior Strategist here at The SHARP Agency.

What brought you to the UK?

“My professional journey began in a Latin American country. In Ecuador advertising is influenced by best practices in the north part of the continent (USA) as much as the south (Argentina). However, I wanted to expand my knowledge and knew there was so much more out there that I needed to learn, specifically about human behaviour and consumer decisions. I did some research and found a Masters degree program that perfectly combined the study of humans and brands at Lancaster University.”

Why co-creation and The SHARP Agency?

“After approximately 8 months into the MSc program, The SHARP Agency came in to one of my lectures and taught the class about co-creation in the industry and how they had designed a unique method to develop campaigns with stakeholder collaboration. SHARP’s perspective about co-creation intrigued me. I wanted to find out how it worked from a psychological perspective. What happens in people’s heads when participating in a co-creation workshop? Why are they motivated to participate? How effective is it for campaign development and brand building?”

Supervising researcher

Leslie Hallam, Qualitative Director, Course Director and Lecturer of Psychology of Advertising Masters Programme at Lancaster University.

Sharp

BRAND
PERFORMANCE

**CHANGING THE WORLD FOR AMBITIOUS BRANDS.
FREE YOUR GOOD.**



Reach out today to find out more:

Richard@thesharpagency.co.uk

thesharpagency.co.uk

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BRAND
PERFORMANCE



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