



Original Article / Orijinal Makale

Understanding Unconscious Thoughts of the Self: Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation Technique in Qualitative Research

Benliğin Bilinçdışı Düşüncelerini Anlamak: Nitel Araştırmada İmgesel Metafor Çıkarımı Tekniği

Perlin Naz CÖMERT¹, Yonca Deniz GÜROL²

Department of Business Administration, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, Türkiye
Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, İşletme Bölümü, İstanbul, Türkiye

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 30 October 2023

Accepted: 21 December 2023

Keywords:

Metaphor, imaginative metaphor elicitation, zaltman metaphor elicitation, forced metaphor elicitation, qualitative research

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Hakkında

Geliş tarihi: 30 Ekim 2023

Kabul tarihi: 21 Aralık 2023

Anahtar kelimeler:

Metafor, imgesel metafor çıkarımı tekniği, zaltman metafor çıkarım tekniği, zorlayıcı metafor çıkarımı tekniği, nitel araştırma, metafor çıkarımı

ABSTRACT

Qualitative studies unveil the profound characteristics of human experiences. Particularly, qualitative studies using metaphor elicitation techniques have the opportunity to explore unconscious thoughts which reflects participants deepest thoughts and feelings about a concept. As most human thinking is unconscious, research tools analyzing unconscious thoughts are necessary especially in social sciences. In this article, metaphor elicitation techniques are explained and their implementation is depicted stage by stage. In this context, the process of using each technique is described in detail and related examples are presented. Finally, a relatively new technique used by Nardon & Hari (2021), Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation is explicated and the importance of this new technique is emphasized by encouraging future studies to use this technique.

Cite this article as: Cömert, P. N., & Gürol, Y. D. (2023). Understanding Unconscious Thoughts of the Self: Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation Technique in Qualitative Research. *Yıldız Social Science Review*, 9(2), 64–72.

ÖZ

Nitel çalışmalar insan deneyimlerinin derindeki özelliklerini ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Özellikle metafor çıkarım tekniklerini kullanan nitel araştırmalar, katılımcıların bir kavram hakkındaki en derin düşünce ve duygularını yansıtan bilinçdışı düşüncelerini keşfetme fırsatına sahiptir. İnsan düşüncesinin çoğu bilinçsiz olduğundan, özellikle sosyal bilimlerde bilinçdışı düşünceleri analiz eden araştırma araçlarına ihtiyaç vardır. Bu makalede metafor çıkarımı teknikleri açıklanmakta ve uygulanışı aşama aşama anlatılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda her tekniğin kullanım süreci ayrıntılı olarak anlatılmış ve ilgili örnekler sunulmuştur. Son olarak, Nardon & Hari (2021) tarafından kullanılan ve nispeten yeni bir teknik olan imgesel metafor çıkarımı tekniği tanıtarak ve gelecek çalışmalarda bu tekniğin kullanılması teşvik edilerek bu yeni tekniğin önemi vurgulanmıştır.

Atıf için yazım şekli: Cömert, P. N., & Gürol, Y. D. (2023). Understanding Unconscious Thoughts of the Self: Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation Technique in Qualitative Research. *Yıldız Social Science Review*, 9(2), 64–72.

* Sorumlu yazar / Corresponding author

*E-mail address: perlincomert@gmail.com



1. INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is mainly involved with exploring humans' experiences and their reflections in an interpretive approach (Jackson et al., 2007). Although quantitative research is more suitable to examine questions of prevalence, generalizability, and calibration, qualitative approach is distinctive by its ability to focus on description, interpretation and explanation (Bluhm et al., 2011). The main purpose of qualitative is to discern the meaning of actions by uncovering deep-rooted and fundamental features of phenomena and human experiences (Jackson et al., 2007). Qualitative studies clarify individuals' experiences and the way they interpret their experiences (Bluhm et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2007). There are various kinds of qualitative data collection techniques (Jackson et al., 2007). Interviewing is a method used in qualitative studies that encompasses a set of techniques to collect data from participants (Jackson et al., 2007). Metaphor elicitation techniques are utilized in interviews to explore unconscious thoughts and feelings related to a topic in study (Matheson & McCollum, 2008). Although, most data collection techniques examine participant's experiences, metaphor elicitation techniques have a different significance in uncovering unconscious thinking. Zaltman (2003) highlights that most thinking is unconscious and therefore research tools that are able to uncover participants unconscious reflections are required. As a matter of fact, unconscious thinking is observed to influence judgments, feelings and behaviors (Woodside, 2008). Woodside (2008) pointed out the limitations of conscious thinking-based subjective personal introspection (SPI) which include the effort of participants to be politically correct, appear sane, or feel good. Thus, creating research methods on a basis of unconscious thinking is necessary to get rid of these restrictions. Thus, metaphor elicitation techniques assist in uncovering unconscious meanings, thoughts, feelings in metaphors. In this sense, previous studies elicited metaphors using Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), Forced Metaphor Elicitation Technique (FMET) and Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME). The difference IME presents that by using IME, interviewers act as a facilitator for participants to make sense of their situation and reach new understandings related to the topic in study. So, IME makes the interaction between the interviewer and participant a therapeutic process rather than just being an impartial channel in which the informant transfers information to the interviewer (Nardon & Hari, 2021). Recent growing acknowledgment in interview research underlines that interviewer affects the sensemaking process of participant and generates self-reflection opportunities to make new understandings possible (Nardon & Hari, 2021). In an attempt to make this new, useful technique more prevalent in social science studies, this article aims to review techniques of metaphor elicitation and facilitate recognition of this new technique IME.

2. METAPHOR AND METAPHOR ELICITATION TECHNIQUES

The word metaphor is consisted of Greek words meta (beyond) and phéro (transfer) (Casula, 2022). Metaphor is defined as the representation of one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thus, metaphors are used to replace an abstract concept with a concrete one (Casula, 2022). Metaphors are conceptual representations of deeper thoughts (Ellis & Ibrahim 2021). For instance, when we say Anna is a goddess instead of saying Anna is beautiful, we use a metaphor (Casula, 2022).

Zaltman (1997) underlined the usefulness of metaphors in research by highlighting their role in surfacing hidden knowledge and unconscious thinking. Research in psychotherapy indicates that the utilization of explicit metaphors leads patients to render unconscious experiences more conscious, because they can surface cognitive processes (Zaltman, 1997). Thus, research methods should aim to disclose the hidden meanings behind metaphors (Zaltman, 1997). In this respect, skilled questioning is necessitated in the use of metaphors to elicit profound meanings which are difficult to express by standard research procedures and focus group sessions. In qualitative studies, metaphor elicitation techniques as a tool used in interviews, lead participants to describe the topic under study using metaphors (Nardon & Hari, 2021). As observed in previous studies, metaphor elicitation has been utilized to uncover the hidden meanings, emotions, thoughts centered around a research topic. Here, we examined metaphor elicitation techniques Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation (ZMET), Forced Metaphor Elicitation (FMET), Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME).

2.1. Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation (ZMET)

Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation (ZMET) is defined as a hybrid methodology that involves semi-structured, in-depth, personal interviews focused on visual representations that the participant contributes to the interview (Coulter et al., 2001). Understanding consumer's deep thoughts and feelings more thoroughly requires analyzing non-verbal communications such as facial expression, physical gesture, attire and scent (Lee et al., 2009). In this respect, ZMET approach elicits the implicit mental images which represent the participant's most profound thoughts and feelings about a research topic (Lee et al., 2009). ZMET not only maps the cognitive structure in people's mind, but also elucidates the real meaning representations of these structures (Lagerkvist, et al., 2015). Since individuals' deep thoughts and language are based on images, ZMET approach uses pictures that are produced by participants to explore hidden thoughts related to the concept under study (Lagerkvist et al., 2015). ZMET aims to examine metaphors that customers use in everyday language (surface metaphors) as a way to engage them and facilitate customers to articulate deeper opinions

(Zaltman, 2008). “I feel like a *prisoner* in that store” and “My *only way out* was to buy something,” can be given as some of the examples of the aforementioned surface metaphors (Zaltman, 2008). These surface metaphors operate as evidence which facilitate the identification of a more profound and implicit understanding or viewpoint related to the topic in study (Zaltman, 2008). In this sense, they can be utilized by marketers or researchers to discover essential emotions regarding a topic. In this context, ZMET interview allows to capture consumers’ freely expressed thoughts and feelings related to the specified topic, as the data is informant-oriented rather than being researcher-oriented (Coulter et al., 2001). ZMET interview is based on the idea which considers metaphor as a central element of thought (Coulter, 2006). When the researcher desires to examine consumer behaviors but has little previous research as a reference, ZMET is suggested as a good choice (Lee et al., 2009). For instance, Coulter et al. (2001) examined consumers’ impressions of advertising and using metaphors. It has been discovered that, consumers attach positive metaphors to advertising (such as teacher, counselor, enabler etc.) and consider advertising as an entertainer and a stimulator for economic growth (Coulter et al., 2001). Similarly, Lagerkvist et al. (2015) used ZMET method to explore the content of consumers’ mental models related to food safety of vegetables.

In a ZMET interview, the researcher introduces a topic/issue and asks the participant to collect images that

could reflect how he/she thinks about the topic (Coulter et al., 2001; Matheson & McCollum, 2008; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995;). After the participant collects images and brings them to the interview, the interviewer asks him/her to describe those images (Matheson & McCollum, 2008; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Then, the interviewer asks ZMET laddering questions which are used to explore metaphors deeper. These questions facilitate participants’ process of gaining a clearer understanding of their thoughts and feelings (Matheson & McCollum, 2008). After the first image is examined using the laddering questions, another image is chosen for discussion. When the interview was completed, the researchers either kept the images that the participant brought or they took the photos of the images because these images would be used in the analysis to delve into the meanings of the interviewee’s statements. All interviews are transcribed and dominant themes are underlined (Coulter et al., 2001).

Table below reflects the stages to implement ZMET technique by using 10 ZMET steps identified in (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Technique is used in a guided conversation which contains 10 steps. However, only a subgroup of these steps is implemented in any study and the inclusion of these steps to any study depends on the essence of the problem and the designed utilization of data (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Table below explains all ten steps (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995):

Table 1. Stages of Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation (ZMET)

Stages	Description
Stage 1	Generally, 20 participants are selected to participate to the study.
Stage 2	Guidelines and instructions related to research topic are explained to the participant. Then the researchers ask the participant to collect images that could reflect how he/she thinks about the topic (Matheson & McCollum, 2008). The aim is to examine informants’ thoughts, feelings, perceptions about the topic. The participants are informed that they could bring any kind of images that can be photos taken by them or images that are taken from journals, artworks, brochures, etc. A personal interview is scheduled for approximately seven to ten days later.
Stage 3	After the participant collects images and brings them to the interview, the interviewer asks him/her to describe those images (Matheson and McCollum, 2008). After the participants are informed about the format of the interview, there are 10 steps (stages) of the interview (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995; Hancock & Foster, 2020).
Stage 4	Then, the interviewer asks ZMET laddering questions which are used to explore metaphors deeper. These questions facilitate participants’ process of gaining a clearer understanding of their thoughts and feelings (Matheson & McCollum, 2008). This personal interview contains a guided conversation which takes approximately two hours and is recorded.
Stage 5	After the first image is examined using the laddering questions, another image is chosen for discussion. All interviews are transcribed and emerging themes are underlined.
Analysis	Transcribed interviews might be transferred to a computer software program in an attempt to identify ideas mentioned in the interview. Interview transcripts are examined to discover frequent themes or constructs.

Interviewer's Guide

Interviewing Techniques to ensure comprehensiveness:

- Restating informants' comments
- Summarizing

Laddering Questions Examples

First question that digs deeper into the details of metaphor is, “How does this image relate to your thoughts and feelings about [topic of study]?” images (Matheson & McCollum, 2008).

Example of Laddering Questions:

What do you mean by [metaphor]?

What does [metaphor] give you?

For instance, if “genie in a bottle” is given as a metaphor reflecting weakness or inability, the researcher would inquire, how does the “genie in a bottle” relates to your thoughts and feelings about powerlessness? The respondent might answer that the genie was trapped in the bottle until the bottle was rubbed, so that genie could get away. From this statement, researchers can elicit some metaphors and key words such as “trapped”, “rubbed”, “escape”. Then, researchers might ask “What do you mean by trapped?” and they might examine the significance of the Word trapped since it was related to the metaphor selected by the participant. Meanwhile, the investigator analyzes how the metaphor is evolved, how it was conveyed, and what areas were still arising. In this sense, the interviewer chooses consecutive laddering questions based on what was said what would be said. Each image is talked over with the participant using the laddering questions until the investigator considers that the metaphor is completely analyzed. Generally, this happens when the informant says something to the effect of, “because I am,” “because I live,” “because I was born,” or the opposite, “because I would die,” “because I would be no longer,” or “because I would be gone.” Here, those declarations regarding life or death, being or not being are conveyed when the examination of metaphor has been taken to its end. When the initial image was investigated utilizing the laddering technique, the interviewee was invited to select an additional picture to discourse on. The identical laddering approach is utilized for all of the pictures and when apparent associations emerged between diverse images in statements of the informant, those were also discussed (Matheson & McCollum, 2008).

10 ZMET STEPS

1. **Storytelling:** This step gives participants the opportunity to tell a story.
2. **Missed Issues and Images:** In this step, researchers ask informants to explain any subjects for which it was difficult or impossible for the participant to come up with an image.
3. **Sorting Task:** Researchers invite participant to convert his/her collected images into meaningful groups and to describe every group.
4. **Construct Elicitation:** In this step, to elicit constructs from participants, the interviewer uses an altered version Kelly Grid technique (determining how any two of three stimuli are similar to each other but different from the third stimulus) and laddering technique (a set of probing questions aiming at surfacing variables thus generating a set of causally connected constructs).
5. **Most Representative Image:** In this stage, the participant identifies the image that the best depicts his/her feelings.
6. **Opposite Image:** The participant is asked which images might depict the contrary of the assignment he/she was provided.
7. **Sensory Images:** Researchers ask the informants to utilize different senses to express what does and does not symbolize the topic being examined.
8. **The Mental Map:** In this step, the interviewer reassesses all of the constructs examined and asks the informant if the constructs are correct portrayal of what was meant and if any significant ideas are absent. Thus, the participant generates a map to demonstrate connections between crucial constructs.
9. **The Summary Image:** Here, the interviewee generates a summary image utilizing his or her own images to convey his/her essential issues. Digital imaging techniques can promote the generation of the digital image.
10. **The Vignette:** Researchers invite the informant to create a vignette or a short video that facilitates expression of significant issues regarding the topic under study.

Source: Hancock & Foster (2020), Matheson & McCollum (2008), Zaltman & Coulter (1995)

2.2. Forced Metaphor Elicitation (FMET)

Forced metaphor elicitation technique (FMET) is used to facilitate the emergence of unconscious assumptions and feelings about self and reveal how those beliefs and emotions are related to product and brand choices (Woodside, 2008). FMET involves the zoomorphic representations of self and it aims to understand human behavior in terms of animal behaviors (Woodside, 2008). Specifically, participant selects an animal that carries the characteristics of him/her. Participants' reports regarding the features and behaviors of these animals empowers the arise of the products and brands that can fulfill the needs of those features and behaviors. In fact, it has been suggested that most participants can easily identify the animal that represents themselves (Woodside, 2008). In addition, it has been emphasized that visual measures, unlike verbal measures tend to elicit a nonconscious, implicit knowledge (Woodside, 2008). For instance, a consumer's inclination to buy a certain product might stem from her unconscious memories about her mother buying that product (Woodside, 2008). In this respect, Woodside (2004) and Woodside et al. (1986) suggested Forced metaphor-elicitation technique (FMET) to surface and analyze metaphors which are used by consumers implicitly. FMET involves four stages that base on a zoomorphic explanation of self (Woodside, 2008).

In a nutshell, participants mention two animals; first animal represents the participant the most, and second is the animal that participant would want to be. For example, a participant to study named Ana selected a small dog that represents her the most, as small dog is cute, fun and friendly. Those traits give information regarding which brands Ana can associate herself with. One such brand that Ana identifies is VW Beetle. On the other hand, the animal that Ana would like to be is a dolphin which is depicted by her as friendly, beautiful, playful, intelligent, and fast swimmer. The characteristics of dolphin matches with a brand that she admires Lexus RX Hybrid. Therefore, brands can

benefit from uncovering these characteristics in an attempt to associate with people's zoomorphic, unconscious desires.

2.3. Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME)

Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME) is an interviewing technique which creates knowledge on participants' experiences and allows them to take an active role in resolving or handling their complicated situation. Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME) has been used by Nardon & Hari (2021) in interviews to expedite sensemaking under exceptional and challenging occurrences. Nardon & Hari (2021) indicated that IME helps to generate knowledge regarding informants' experiences. They carried out interviews by using IME to explore 11 exchange and international students' challenges throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada (Nardon & Hari, 2021). In this respect, IME is used to create knowledge regarding their experiences while helping them solve the difficult dilemma that they were experiencing about the decision to stay or leave their then location (Nardon & Hari, 2021). This decision forced them to choose between different alternatives each consisting of diverse financial, emotional and social drawbacks and costs, eventually rendering them severely anxious. Here, they needed sensemaking of their situation, facing their own feelings and thoughts to make the best decision for themselves. In this sense, imaginative metaphors are primarily examined as valuable tools that can help individuals' sensemaking in organizational studies. Sensemaking, which can be defined as a continuous achievement through which individuals generate their actions and try to make them reasonably accountable to themselves and others, is especially essential in turbulent and ambiguous situations such as Covid-19 pandemic (Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Weick, 1995). Clearly, Covid-19 pandemic has caused a considerable amount of changes influencing the labor market and work routines. These developments, such as the pandemic,

Table 2. Stages of Forced Metaphor Elicitation (FMET)

Stages	Description
Stage 1	Participant is invited to paint or choose pictures of the animal which first comes to mind and which depicts the characteristics of the participant.
Stage 2	Participant is invited to say or write several aspects that first come to mind which best depict that animal.
Stage 3	Participant is asked to tell the thoughts about all of these characteristics that first come to mind. In addition, they are invited to tell what these features tell about the participant.
Stage 4	Participants are asked to convey a story that demonstrate the concepts and depiction of the characteristics that he/she just indicated.
Stage 5	Participants are requested to repeat all of the FMET stages one more time but this time concentrating on the animal which first comes to mind and which is admired by participants. So participants must choose an animal which "might be selected if you were an animal."
Stage 6	Participants are encouraged to think aloud what first come to mind when considering her/his own responses to the two sets of questions and to depict a personal anecdote that demonstrates the possible consequence after a comparison of the alternative selection behaviors.

lead to disruptions in individual's perspectives and abilities to make sense of new situations. Disruptions instigated by Covid-19 pandemic can be examined as "a sense-breaking situation" which includes a collapse of meaning (Nardon & Hari, 2021). Sensemaking explicates when encountered by conflicting occurrences how organizational members seek to negotiate and sustain meanings that facilitate rational reactions. Sensemaking generally refers to the processes by which individuals aim to comprehend vague or puzzling issues or events (Brown et al., 2015).

In this respect, Nardon & Hari (2021) emphasize that researchers can use the researcher-informant interaction as an opportunity to facilitate the sensemaking of participants related to the topic in study. It has been suggested that, interviewers are able to affect the interview process to facilitate informants' new understandings, so interviews are considered to possess a therapeutic influence rather than being an impartial interaction in which knowledge is transferred from informant to interviewer (Nardon & Hari, 2021). Therefore, by using IME, interviewers support informants to make their situation more tangible. Nardon & Hari's (2021) approach of metaphor use resembles metaphor use in coaching situations but diverges from coaching by allowing informants complete control of the process. By applying Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation technique, Nardon & Hari (2021) utilized two types of metaphors to render the interviewees' experiences concrete and easier to work with. First type of metaphor they used is the current way of being metaphor which is considered as a tool to help the participants to see themselves and their current situation clearly. The second type of metaphor is the alternative way of being metaphor to give them a vision related to possible alternatives which offers an alternative way forward, an alternative solution for the interviewee's problem (Nardon & Hari, 2021).

2.3.1. The Process of Using IME

Table 3 demonstrates an overview about how the IME technique might be used stage by stage.

To give a detailed overview of the Nardon & Hari's (2021) interview process, we explain how they used Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME) in their study step-by-step:

They initiated the interview by examining participants' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and developing a connection with them. After participants described the primary challenges, they pinpointed an objective or a desire to examine further. One of the participants, Tim, mentioned the challenges that he experienced, "I put in a lot of work, and I've gotten some good grades. I tried my best at school to get to the position that I want to be. And then, all of a sudden, it just feels like, boom. It had to end. Within a few hours, I had to, basically, pack up and leave. So, it's the idea of not leaving on my own terms and not having the proper goodbyes that I wanted. So, that's the hardest part". After, the interviewer and the participant determined an

attainable objective or desire, which in Tim's case is generated as "being better able to find satisfaction in virtual connections".

As soon as the goal is identified, a current way metaphor is elicited through questioning and encouraging participants to discuss the metaphor in detail. This stage is illustrated with the example of the participant named Emily. An Exchange student, Emily was distressed related to her decision to stay in Germany during the outbreak and identified her goal as being better able to make decisions and to be relaxed with the ambiguity concerning these decisions. Once she expressed her anxiety and identified her goal, the researcher encouraged her to experience the feeling of making decisions in an atmosphere of uncertainty and asked her about the images that came into her mind. Accordingly, she mentioned that a storm came to mind while making those hard decisions. Researchers asked probing questions that encouraged her to describe the storm more precisely: where she was in the storm, who was she in this storm, when there was this storm, what was she doing, was she watching the storm? By answering these questions, the informant could see her situation in a tangible way, which led her to understand her situation and her behaviors more clearly. With the researchers' questions, she explained that she pictured herself as standing outside of the storm and that she was overthinking and feeling alone. As illustrated in this example, imaginative metaphors reveal behaviors that were hidden beneath the way they make sense of their situation. Once the researchers arrived at a saturation describing the participants' way of experiencing the pandemic, they applied the same stages to lead participants in imagining an alternative way metaphor.

In the next stage, Tim, who indicated that his current way metaphor was Lost Sailor, determined that his alternative way metaphor was a Far-reaching Satellite. Lost sailor metaphor depicts his disappointment that he would not be able to make connections with other people and that he would feel lonely. Nevertheless, in his alternative way metaphor, he could understand how he could solve his problem by acknowledging that he does not need to see people face-to-face to establish communication and rapport. Accordingly, he constructed an action plan for himself to be like a far-reaching satellite and communicate with people virtually. He realized that he had an obsession or stubbornness for human connection. By the time he realized that, he embraced new assumptions and new understandings and he accepted that he could not change this difficult situation (pandemic), but he could change the way he communicates and he would not have to feel lonely. He underlined that, thinking with these metaphors helped him to change his mindset and guided him to find a solution for his problem.

In the last stage, after reaching a new understanding of his experience, Tim could generate action plans. His alternative way metaphor described the target that he wanted to reach. So, in this stage, he reflected on what he could do to become more like the far-reaching satellite. With the

Table 3. Stages of Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation (IME)

Stages	Description	Example
Stage 1	Examination of subjective experience: In this stage, researchers start the conversation by asking participants about their experiences and challenges related to the topic in question. In that context, researchers are informed about the participants' life experiences and they can establish a connection with the participants. In addition, in this stage, researchers investigate patterns and behaviors regarding challenges identified.	Nardon & Hari (2021) asked for informants' subjective experiences and challenges about Covid-19 pandemic.
Stage 2A	Identification of a goal or desire: After participants indicated their challenges, researchers incite informants to pinpoint an objective or a desire to examine further.	In Nardon & Hari's study, exchange student Tim identified the goal of accepting that he had to leave because of COVID-19, although it feels hard to leave, given all his efforts to prepare for his exchange year.
Stage 2B	Identification of a more targeted goal or desire: The goal that was identified by the informant Stage 2 has to be transformed into a more targeted goal. So researchers ask participants to pinpoint an attainable objective or desire that is under his control.	For Tim, the goal of accepting becomes the goal of "being better able to find satisfaction in virtual connections".
Stage 3	Eliciting current way metaphor: Once a goal is determined, researchers elicit a current way metaphor from informants by consecutive questioning and leading participants to elaborate the metaphor in a very detailed way. So, participants describe a metaphor that explains their situation and researchers ask questions about the metaphor to make it look more tangible and detailed.	Emily, an exchange student who was feeling stressed regarding her decision to stay in Germany, identified "to be better able to make decisions and to be comfortable with the uncertainty associated with these decisions" as her goal. To elicit the current way metaphor, the researcher asked her what it was like to be in this situation and the images that came to her. As a result, she identified the metaphor of a thoughtful walker in the storm.
Stage 4	Eliciting alternative way metaphor: When saturation is reached regarding the current way of experiencing the pandemic, researchers repeat the same process to invite informants to imagine an alternative metaphor to describe the target situation the informant desires to reach.	Tim's current way metaphor was the Lost Sailor which indicates that he felt lost and lonely in the ocean without face-to-face connection. He realized that he had an assumption that face-to face encounters are indispensable. But in his alternative way metaphor, he conceptualizes a new metaphor of Far-reaching Satellite where a connection is possible from a distance.
Stage 5	Generation of an action plan: After the alternative way metaphor is indicated, the participants are invited to determine an action plan to resolve the problem. Thus, they organize an action plan to quit being like the current way metaphor and become like the alternative way metaphor.	Tim stated that, as he understood more clearly his current situation and his targets, he came up with ideas about how to reach his goals. Therefore, he indicated that he could be more open to communication and take the initiative to call people.

Source: Nardon & Hari (2021).

researcher's question of, "What are the actions you can take to become more like the staellite?", Tim acknowledged what he had to do and determined precise actions he could carry out. For example, he indicated that he would be more open to communication and take the initiative to call people. He realized that he had to take a concrete step to change his current situation.

In a nutshell, imaginative metaphor elicitation protocol consists of following stages;

1. Examining subjective experience
2. Identifying a goal or a desire
3. Eliciting current way metaphor
4. Eliciting alternative way metaphor
5. Generating an action plan

2.3.2. Analysis

After finishing each interview, they analyzed the data utilizing an inductive approach and they undertook the process of coding and theorizing (Nardon & Hari, 2021). Data is analyzed using an inductive grounded approach; therefore, primary findings guided further data collection. Researchers developed a summary for each interview and comparable tables between and across interviews. During data collection and analysis, the investigators took notes, which examined their growing understanding of the method's effect on informants. They conducted a repetitive coding and theorizing process. The researchers read the transcripts various times, discussed the coding scheme frequently, and recognized new codes by consensus. By numerous iterations, they classified advantages perceived and identified by informants (Nardon & Hari, 2021).

2.3.3. Benefits

Eventually, Nardon & Hari (2021) identified the benefits of IME, which are explained below:

1) Expressing and reconceptualizing the experience by depicting it more concretely.

When participants generate a metaphor to describe their experiences, they discover their behaviors in new forms. For instance, a participant depicts her need for a job as a metaphor of the person who waits for the door to be opened, which reflects the passivity of her actions in job search. Instead of knocking the door (accomplishing her goal), she passively waits for the door to be opened by someone else. She further explained that metaphors helped her position herself as a fictional character who looks like her, which enabled her to see things more clearly. Thus, metaphors lead her to make her experience more apparent and more tangible and to evaluate her situation without judging or fearing.

2) Recognizing problematic assumptions and behaviors,

Nardon & Hari (2021) underlined the role of metaphors in removing participants from their present understanding and stimulating them to reflect in other ways. By using metaphors, participants became more aware of their own assumptions, beliefs and behaviors. For instance, one of the

participants Tim's metaphor of Lost Sailor revealed his feeling of solitude and his supposition that he had to be face-to-face with someone to develop a connection.

3) Acquiring a refreshed sense of empowerment to handle difficult situations.

Once participants could find an alternative metaphor to make sense of their situation, they could recognize new ways to handle difficult situations they were facing. For example, Tim imagined a far-reaching Satellite as a new metaphor to handle the restricted mobility caused by COVID-19 measures.

The participants highlighted the beneficial characteristic of IME to provide a guided introspection to enhance self-awareness in establishing new meanings. Also, it has been recognized that, metaphors that represent participants' situations and feelings, make them think and see the whole situation through a different perspective, which gives them enlightenment. IME not only helps participants to reflect on their problems, but also it helps them find solutions or action plans. In this sense, IME utilizes participants' strengths and resources and asks questions that guide the participants to reflect on their desires and what they could do. In addition, IME facilitates the detection of negative beliefs and behaviors and the development of new abilities, solutions and action plans.

IME is suggested as a potent method for comprehending new and emotionally intense experiences by symbolically embodying complex challenges and rendering them more manageable toward action plans (Nardon & Hari, 2021). IME is emphasized as being especially beneficial in cases that necessitate sensemaking and mentality revision. Nardon & Hari (2021) emphasized that more studies are encouraged to authenticate the convenience of this method in different contexts. Also, it has been underlined that utilization of this method necessitates a skillful interviewer who can build a connection of trust with participants. Therefore, novice researchers are advised to get training before using IME to help research participants.

3. CONCLUSION

This article reviewed metaphor elicitation techniques and highlighted a new technique named Imaginative Metaphor Elicitation. As metaphor elicitation techniques offer distinctive benefits such as exploration and interpretation of unconscious thoughts, and feelings, they are valuable tools in qualitative studies (Woodside, 2008). In this paper, Imaginative metaphor elicitation (IME) is explained in detail and it has been underlined as a distinctive technique that facilitates participants' understanding of their own thinking by giving them an active role in interviews. We recommend future researchers to use these techniques more frequently in order to gain insights related to unconscious thinking, which reflects judgments and behaviors.

Contribution Rate of Authors: The First Author's contribution to the study is 70%, and the Second Author's contribution to the study is 30%.

Conflict of Interest Declaration: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Bluhm, D. J., Harman, W., Lee, T. W., & Mitchell, T. R. (2011). Qualitative research in management: A decade of progress. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48, 1866–1891.
- Casula, C. C. (2022). Stimulating unconscious processes with metaphors and narrative. *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 64, 339–354.
- Coulter, R. A. (2006). Consumption experiences as escape: An application of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique. In R. W. Belk (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing* (pp. 400–418). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Coulter, R. A., Zaltman, G., & Coulter, K. S. (2001). Interpreting consumer perceptions of advertising: An application of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique. *Journal of Advertising*, 30, 1–21.
- Ellis, G., & Ibrahim, N. (2021). Using metaphor elicitation with pre-primary children learning English. *ELT Journal*, 75, 256–266.
- Gioia, D. A., & Mehra, A. (1996). [Review of the book Sensemaking in organizations, by K. Weick]. *The Academy of Management Review*, 21, 1226–1240.
- Hancock, C., & Foster, C. (2020). Exploring the ZMET methodology in services marketing. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 34, 48–58.
- Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is qualitative research? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 8, 21–28.
- Lagerkvist, C. J., Okello, J. J., & Karanja, N. (2015). Consumers' mental model of food safety for fresh vegetables in Nairobi: A field experiment using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique. *British Food Journal*, 117, 22–36.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive Science*, 4, 195–208.
- Lee, T. R., Chen, S. Y., Wang, S. T., & Chang, S. E. (2009). Adoption of mobile location-based services with Zaltman metaphor elicitation techniques. *International Journal of Mobile Communications*, 7, 117–132.
- Matheson, J. L., & McCollum, E. E. (2008). Using metaphors to explore the experiences of powerlessness among women in 12-step recovery. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 43, 1027–1044.
- Nardon, L., & Hari, A. (2021). Sensemaking through metaphors: The role of imaginative metaphor elicitation in constructing new understandings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage Publishing.
- Woodside, A. G. (2004). Advancing from subjective to confirmatory personal introspection in consumer research. *Psychology & Marketing*, 21(9), 987–1010.
- Woodside, A. G. (2008). Using the forced metaphor-elicitation technique (FMET) to meet animal companions within self. *Journal of Business Research*, 61, 480–487.
- Zaltman, G. (1997). Rethinking market research: Putting people back in. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34, 424–437.
- Zaltman, G., & Coulter, R. H. (1995). Seeing the voice of the customer: Metaphor-based advertising research. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 35, 35–51.