
***Perceptions of the Private Vehicle in the US:
Public Identity vs. Private Space***

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Real-Time Rides
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Meaning of the Car in American Culture

Many studies beginning at least by the 1930s

- Primary use for marketing
- Car became a statement or metaphor for its owner's public identity
- A symbol of individual expression of self, class and role within the public space
- But little research on the meaning of the car's interior



“Ride-along” In-car Exploration Study

Goal to explore *activities and behaviors within* the car

- Conducted in 2003
- 18 Families living in Chicago, San Francisco and Dallas / Ft. Worth
- Used ethnographic method from Anthropology

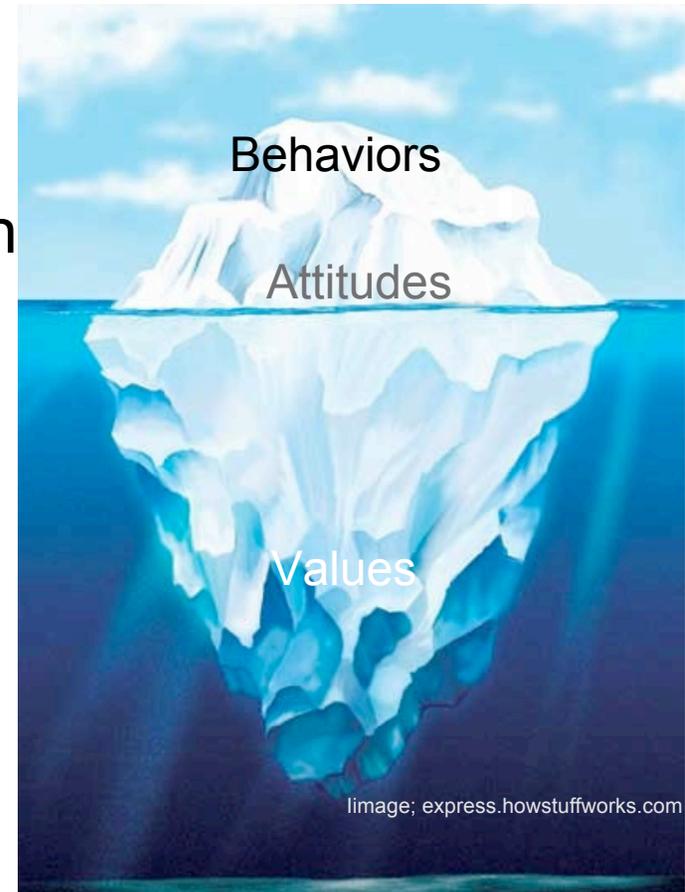


Ethnographic Method

Provides an approach for connecting to a group and learning about their mental models of shared values and beliefs, and frameworks for action based on those mental models.

- Behavior - interaction, problem-solving, ritual
 - Thought - attitudes, beliefs, values
- Shared by all members of the society or group
- Manifested as patterns

Cultural Iceberg



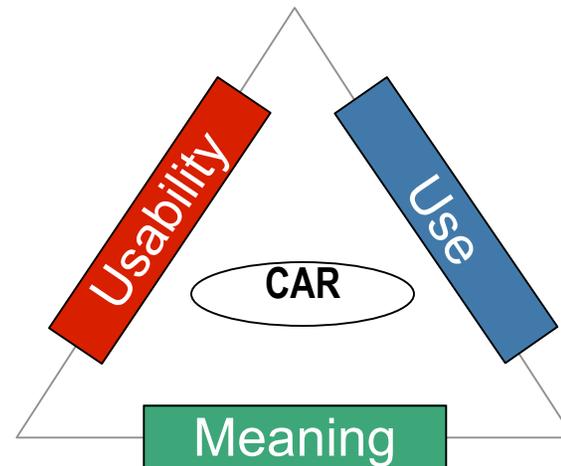
Car Metaphor: Use Usability & Meaning

Like every object, the car has three elements Use, Usability and Meaning that together create its Metaphor

Found that the car interior had a different metaphor than its exterior.

Helps us understand

- How shared, culturally understood metaphors shape behavior in and out of the car
- Why people don't always do what they say



Car Metaphor: Exterior

Metaphor of car exterior owner's status and identity

- Use: transportation
- Usability: ease of handling, performance, safety
- Meaning: projection of public self



Car Metaphor: Interior

The car interior is considered private or “off-stage” space

- Use: for private activities
- Usability: Comfort, entertainment, food storage
- Primary Meaning: Living Room or Family Room



Understanding the Public vs. Private Car

Theory from Goffman (1956)

Everyone has a public and a private identity

Public identity is associated with our “on-stage” image. How the we want the world to see us.

Private identity is our “off-stage” self. How we are “behind the curtain.”

The car provides context



Car Interior: Private Space, Family Space

- A place to relax in comfort
- Home entertainment center: Listen to the news, music, book-on-tape or watch a movie:
- Spend quality time with the kids
- Have a snack or lunch with a friend
- Take the family on vacation
- Invite a date
- Talk to a friend



Implications for Ride Sharing

The private space metaphor is a potential barrier to wide-scale ride sharing. May explain safety concerns, flexibility issues

Questions that need to be addressed

- Is ride-sharing an invitation into your living room?
 - Do people see it as an intrusion into personal, private space?
 - Who would you invite “in”?
 - What is proper etiquette for ride sharing? As Host? As a Guest?
 - What alternative metaphors are available?
 - What technical may overcome or neutralize the metaphor?
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