PACKAGING - USING DETAILED SENSORY EVALUATION TO DRIVE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

C.V.Barnagaud[1], P.Mehring[1], C.A.Withers[1], S.Ferris[1], V.S.Mialon[2]
MMR Research Worldwide Ltd[1], MMR Research Worldwide Inc[2]

INTRODUCTION

We believe that brand owners often miss an opportunity to reinforce the unique and ownable benefits of their brands or products, forfeiting the ability to drive desire and deliver more rewarding consumer experiences, through packaging.

Packaging tends to be omni-present throughout the full user experience (Figure 1), so it's crucial that research goes *beyond* label design and graphics, with structure, texture and functionality representing a real opportunity to stand out.

Over the years sensory descriptive panel data, often in conjunction with consumer research, has helped FMCG companies develop products that delight their users[1].

But could descriptive panels be used to optimise packaging?



Figure 1: Packaging Consumer Touchpoints

METHOD & OBJECTIVES

A pilot study was conducted using one of MMR's descriptive panels in the UK, in order to:

- Understand key **sensory & functional differences** at a category level
- Explore links between sensory characteristics of packaging and **conceptual associations**
- Ensure packaging characteristics can be designed to **fit with desired brand positioning, as well as optimal functionally**

Body wash offers a category with great variety to clearly demonstrate the full benefits pack profiling can yield in this case study.

35 packs were selected to represent the UK market covering different technologies, shapes, dispensing mechanisms, desired positioning etc. and assessed in three stages (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Study Process

In-depth testing protocol was designed to capture all key usage moments (Figure 3), to gain the richest possible information. In total, 72 attributes were developed and scored by the panel for each pack.



Figure 3: Exhaustive Protocol

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

A Sensory PCA mapping identified four key groupings of dispensing mechanisms, whilst a conceptual PCA map identified clusters of associated terms and packs in the shower gel category. Combining sensory and conceptual results created a comprehensive category landscape, detailing the intersection of structure, functionality and emotion.

Pack profiling results can be used to:

1. UNDERSTAND HOW A NEW PACK FORMAT OR TECHNOLOGY FARES FUNCTIONALLY AND EMOTIONALLY VS. THE COMPETITION

New mousse technology was found to provide much more control over the dispensing flow, whilst avoiding clogging and dripping found in more traditional formats; a functional success in this category (Figure 4).

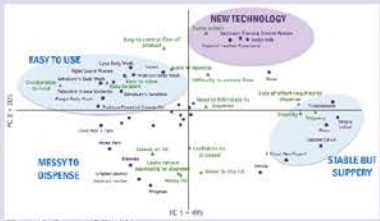

Figure 4: Sensory PCA Map

2. UNDERSTAND HOW TO MAXIMISE THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE PACK IN A GIVEN CATEGORY

A list of desirable design features can be compiled to enhance a given functionality.

3. EXPLORE DIFFERENTIATION FROM COMPETITORS

When comparing two products with a 'nourishing' positioning (Figure 5), their functional and conceptual profiles show clear differences. Dove overall delivered a stronger functional user experience as well as carrying a more positive and premium image.



Figure 5: Dove & Carex Profile Comparisons

4. INFORM THE STRUCTURAL PACKAGING BRIEF TO ENSURE FIT WITH BRAND MESSAGE

Exploring the extent to which the current pack structure fits with intended positioning, as well as understanding the additional equities that the pack might be communicating:

- Are they helping to differentiate the brand?
- Can they be played-up in communications?
- Are there negatives that need to be eliminated or counter-balanced?

For example, in the 'for sensitive skin' category, all packs were associated with being 'simple' and 'serious', which fitted with their intended positioning (nothing that can hurt the skin). However, some were not delivering 'caring' and 'honest' as well as key 'moisturising' packs, and were also associated with being 'cheap', 'boring', 'dull' and 'gloomy' which could be an issue, especially to achieve a premium positioning.

Structurally, they all share characteristics suggesting a strong design brief:

- Clear packs
- White/light aqua colours with minimal colouring overall
- Wavy shapes

However, that leaves a clear gap in the market for a sensitive skin shower gel bottle that communicates not only 'simple', but also 'caring' and 'honest' without being 'cheap' and 'boring'.

5. UNDERSTAND HOW A CHANGE IN PACK/ POSITIONING IMPACTS MESSAGE

In the kids category, it became clear that creating packs that are aimed at either parents (for babies/ toddlers) rather than the children themselves, required very different approaches structurally and emotionally.

CONCLUSION

This case study demonstrates the importance of sensory descriptive methods in providing granular information for packaging optimisation across FMCG categories. These methods ensure packaging can be aligned with the brand and product experiences, ultimately driving higher consonance across all consumer touchpoints.

References:

[1] Stone (2015) Alternative methods of sensory testing: advantages and disadvantages. Applications in New Product Development and Consumer Research.