Using Package Survey Data To Guide Qualitative Research and Inform Future Descriptive Analysis

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Introduction

From Food to personal care products - sensory science has grown to capture advanced details of consumers' experiences with various products. The direct interaction between a consumer and a product frequently begins when a consumer interacts with a product's packaging. For both Food and Non-food - the packaging can be defined as the material(s) around the product intended to identify, contain, and protect the product inside. Product packaging can be made from various materials such as plastic, cardboard, glass, etc., or a combination of materials. Packaging for Food and Non-Food products varies in features that are functional, informative, and/or serve aesthetic purposes. These features influence purchase decisions and can influence acceptance of products inside the packaging.

This research aims to define consumer packaging sensory preferences and important features in Food and Non-Food packaging through a two-phase study. Phase 1 explores understanding how consumer sensory needs differ between Food and Non-Food packaging. Phase 2 consists of focus groups to learn and list the most important Food and Non-Food packaging features. It is hypothesized that consumers desire similar features in Food and Non-Food packaging. The research will result in a preliminary list of Food and Non-Food packaging features generated from consumer responses.

Phase 1 – Online Survey

Methods

- Recruit: 106 consumers (18+), participated in IHUT the past month.
- Consumers completed an online survey deployed using RedJade® software.
- The survey collected categorical and open-ended verbatim on general consumer behavior regarding packaging.
- 35 questions focused on packaging importance, features, impact on willingness to purchase, the difference between Food and Non-Food packaging, and the amount of packaging.
- Examples of questions:
  - "How important to you is the packaging for Food Products?" (5-Point)
  - "Which of the following features do you look for in Non-Food Packing when making a purchase? Please select all that apply." (CATA)
  - "Do you look for different things or have different needs between Food Packaging and Non-Food Packaging?" (Yes/No + Verbatim)

Phase 1 Results

- Questionnaire data showed that some Food packaging features were more important to consumers than Non-Food packaging – printed information (nutrition, claims, etc.), Food safety, and Food freshness.
- Similar features were important between Food and Non-Food packaging including the ability to read information, opening ability, and resealability.
- 85% of consumers said that Food packaging was important to them, with 59% reporting for Non-Food.
- Difficult-to-open containers are not a major deterrent in Food and Non-Food packaging for consumers.
- Based on the results, a moderator guide was created for focus groups to understand further the similarities and differences between Food and Non-Food packaging and define the consumer-important features of all packaging.

Phase 2 – Focus Groups

Methods

- Recruit: 26 consumers, 4 groups of 5-8 adults (18+).
- Consumers were not members of the same household, did no IHUT testing in the past 3 months, did not participate in Phase 1, ok with verbal responses, and audio/video recording.
- Consumers spent approximately an hour with a moderator and no stimuli - discussing Non-Food and Food packaging.
- The discussions were guided by 12 questions and probes focusing on important packaging features, visual appeal, purchase decision influences, and differences between Food and Non-Food.
- Examples of questions:
  - "What are the top 3 most important features about Food packaging that would affect if you would purchase or not?"
  - "What makes a Non-Food package visually appealing?"
  - "Do you look for different things with Food and Non-Food packaging?"

Results

- Consumers discussed transparency (clear parts), resealability, durability, and features related to opening/closing as important Food packaging features.
- Non-Food packaging was more important to be functional (in storage, transport, and dispensing) and easy to dispose of.
- Results showed that the features that have the most impact on packaging appeal were: Ease of Opening, Ease of Closure, Ease of Dispense, Thickness, Durability, Readability, Visual Complexity, Size, Seal Strength, Amount of Packaging to Product Ratio, Color, Rigidity, Functionality, and Texture.

Conclusion

The study had an exploratory focus utilizing two data collection methods combined to gain further insight into Food and Non-Food packaging. Differences between Food and Non-Food packaging and the important features of all packaging were outlined. The next steps of our research involve working with a Spectrum™ trained Descriptive Analysis panel to create a ballot and protocol on these features with cardboard packaging and then expand to additional types of packaging.

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