Multisensual Package Design: Does the so Called Multisensual Enhancement Exist in a Marketing Context?

Dariah Lutsch\(^1\)\(^2\) / Andreas Scharf\(^3\)\(^4\) / Cornelia Zanger\(^2\)

Background
In recent years, the subject of “multisensual stimulation” in the context of marketing, including aspects such as packaging design, product design and product placement, has experienced growing attention. In this context, the expression “multisensual enhancement” was coined – meaning an augmentation of a neural response to sensory input of one modality by input of another modality. Hence, the more modalities are addressed with a congruent message the stronger the neural response is following an exponential increase. Besides, little is known which factors have a major impact on the success of a multisensual stimulation.

Objectives
The overall objective is to verify the existence of the “multisensual enhancement” in a marketing context. Besides, the effect of a multisensual stimulation on purchase related factors moderated by the consumers’ need states are to be analysed.

The multisensual approach
Face lotion packages that comprised the sensual modalities optics (colour and style elements) and haptics (surface texture of the material) were developed which - in combination with their presentation (acoustics: background music and olfaction: ambient odour) - resulted in a multisensual stimulation that was capable to different degrees of activating one of two need states that are relevant in the face lotion market. With the help of 10 in-depth interviews two important need states could be identified that influence the purchase behavior of face lotion. These need states are the need for affiliation and the need for achievement.

Overall, it was expected that a need state congruent multisensual stimulation is better liked by consumers with a high respective need state than by those with a low need state and that a need state incongruent stimulation will result in a higher overall liking by respondents with a high need than an incongruent stimulation. Apart from that, it was assumed that the more sensual modalities receive a congruent message, the more the neural networks in which products and brands are stored will be activated.

Methodology & Sample
Data collection: To answer the research questions an experiment was conducted that took place in a sensory lab (in Goettingen, Germany). The interviews were computer based and took 20 minutes. The sensory modalities including optics, haptics, acoustics and olfaction served as the independent variables of this survey. In total, a 2x2x3x3 design was used varying the sensory stimuli as shown in Table 2 which results, according to a factorial design, in 36 combinations of the stimuli used.

Field work: July 2010
Sample: In total, 360 women aged from 18 to 65 were recruited for this survey via telephone. To avoid age effects, age was used as a quota variable dividing the sample into 50% younger (18 to 35 years) and 50% older respondents (36 to 65 years). All participants participated voluntarily, did not reject Nivea as a brand and used face lotion on a regular basis.

Operationalization
Overall, it was assumed that the more motive congruent stimuli communicate one consistent message the better neural networks can be activated. The neural activation was operationalized by measuring the reaction time a respondent needed to indicate whether presented words and pictures (which stand either for the “need for affiliation” or “need for achievement”) fit to the presented face lotion package or not (see Figure 2).

Results
A conducted regression analysis shows that an increase of involved stimuli causes a decrease of the reaction time for motive congruent stimulations and is thus an indication of an increased neural response, the so called “multisensual enhancement”. Table 2 illustrates the motivational system “affiliation”, when only two sensual modalities are presented (white package with velvety haptics) the reaction time to express the packages’ fit to words and pictures that stand for “affiliation” was in average 18.2 milliseconds longer than the reaction time over all stimuli. When a third modality was added (either Nivea ambient odour or calm music) the reaction time was even 32.2 milliseconds faster than average. By adding the fourth sensual modality the reaction time was further drastically reduced. (Need for Affiliation: \(F(1,72) = 4.073, p = 0.047, R^2 = 0.054, n = 72\); Beta: -0.233; Need for Performance: \(F(1,72) = 2.221, p = 0.111, R^2 = 0.033, n = 72\); Beta: -0.180. To avoid person related effects that might influence reaction time, only ipsative times were used for the analysis)

Conclusion
The research confirmed the assumption that the more sensory modalities are addressed by a congruent message, the better neural networks can be activated. Furthermore, it could be shown that a multisensual stimulation has to be congruent and fitting the target groups’ need to be successful. As a general point of learning, we can conclude that, in contrast to a widely held opinion in marketing practice, not the “whether” but the “how” of implementation of a multisensual stimulation is in the end the most important issue influencing success.

References:


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1 isi GmbH; Ascherberg 2, 37124 Rosdorf, Germany; dariah.lutsch@isi-goettingen.de
2 Chemnitz University of Technology, Department of Marketing, Tössinger Weg 7, 09127 Chemnitz; Zanger@whartech.tu-chemnitz.de
3 University of Applied Science Nordhausen, Weinberg 4, 99754 Nordhausen, Germany; scharf@fh-nordhausen.de