

Masters of Business (Research)

The Impact of Packaging Elements on Consumers' Unconscious Emotions

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ABSTRACT

Product proliferation and cluttered shopping environments create an important role for packaging at the point of purchase. Effective packs should fulfil the following criteria:

- a) Stand out from the shelf—i.e., be easily noticed (Pieters, Rik, Rosbergen & Wedel, 1999; Underwood, Klein & Burke, 2001);
- b) Be quickly recognised (Wakefield et al., 2002); and
- c) Elicit positive affect (Nancarrow, Wright & Brace, 1998; Underwood, 2003; Silayoi, Pinya & Speece, 2004) in order to facilitate choice.

From the perspective of consumer behaviour, these three criteria coincide broadly three reactive categories—i.e., affective, cognitive and behavioural responses. Consumer attention to and recognition of packs are cognitive responses. Consumer choice is a behavioural response. To most of the packaged goods, it is important for the pack to be seen, be identified and hopefully be chosen eventually.

Past research has shown that packaging can elicit consumers' affective responses (Nancarrow, Wright & Brace, 1998; Underwood, 2003; Silayoi, Pinya & Speece, 2004). Moreover, affect has long been recognised as one of the two important constructs, along with cognition, that influence consumers' cognitive responses and drive customer behaviour.

This research looks beyond cognitive measures influenced by affect, such as attention and recognition, and investigates how different packaging designs impact consumer affective responses at an unconscious level. The study is divided into two stages. In stage one, simultaneous emotional responses are measured using physiological devices—i.e., skin conductance (SC) and facial electromyography (facial EMG). This is followed by the measurement of emotional responses (stage two) using a self-report

method (Self-Assessment Manikin, SAM). In both stages, three packaging elements, i.e., colour, font and image, are combined in a systematic way into archetypical packages. Participants were recruited to a lab to view those different packages displayed on a monitor. The results obtained using physiological measures showed that packaging can evoke affective responses through image, but not through colour and font. However, results from the self-report measures find that image, colour and font all have significant effects on consumers' affective responses.

This research represents one of the first studies to investigate customers' affective response to different images, colours and fonts on a package using physiological measures. The research reveals that affect exists as an important dimension in consumers' responses to packaging design. It also demonstrates the distinction between two sets of results obtained by physiological measurements and self-report methods. This distinction suggests that consumers' unconscious emotional response is measured differently by physiological devices as opposed to typical self-report methods. Self-report methods show a conscious response to changing colours, images, and fonts, while measurement of the unconscious responses show only a response to image. However, unconscious measures showed an interaction between some of the elements, but the self-report measures did not.

The discussion provides practical guidance to the design and measurement of packages that aims at evoking positive consumer affective response in order to attract more attention, be more recognisable, and to facilitate consumer choice.