

Implementing Descriptive Panel Methods in Sensory Focus Groups

Alex Thomas¹; Gautreau, Oliver²;
 SAM Sensory and Marketing International GmbH
¹Albulastrasse 57, 8048 Zurich, Switzerland;
²16, rue Martel, 75010 Paris, France;

achieving more actionable recommendations for product development

INTRODUCTION

Descriptive methods such as QDA and qualitative exploration are commonly used for separate purposes. Collecting qualitative insights on sensory product perceptions in Focus Groups (FG) is reasonable, but limited by the lack of ability of naïve consumers to specifically define the sensory stimuli and to evaluate products in a proper way.

Implementing the experience of descriptive panel methods in product related qualitative exploration allows the examination of products and the concept behind them in a more comprehensive way. This approach enhances standard FG output, creating added value on actionable recommendations for further product development.

SOLUTIONS

A high grade of customization through the implementation of different descriptive panel methods (which can be combined) in Focus Groups with their advantages and disadvantages exposed as follows:

	Sensory Panel Method	Focus Groups with Product Testing	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best for:
Possible combinations according to varying requirements	No sensory method applied	1 product tested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naïve consumer opinion • Naïve consumer wording • Understanding of consumer target • Explore "sensory fit to product concept" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small consumer-sample • No reliable sensory input • No solid base for product improvements 	 Collection of general Insights
	Pre-selection based on sensory and verbalization capabilities	e.g. 1 product tested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naïve consumer opinion • More precise and reliable sensory feedback • Better understanding combination of product perception • Explore "sensory fit to product concept" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small consumer-sample • More selective consumer sample • Higher cost 	 Understanding complex products
	Selection of the right stimuli	Different products evaluated in a monadic sequential order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naïve consumer opinion • Identifying product differences • Impact of sensory stimuli on product experience • Comprehensive feedback for product improvements • Explore "best sensory fit to product concept" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small consumer-sample • Limited number of products • No balanced rotation design • Time intense • Higher number of focus groups recommended 	 Action standard for product development
	Direct and indirect comparison exercises	Different products evaluated in pairs or alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying product differences by comparison • Focus on predefined product properties • Explore "sensory fit to product concept" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small consumer-sample • Time intense exercise • Forced situation, not real 	 Comparison between similar products
	Sorting, Napping etc.	Different products evaluated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of consumer perceptions • Better understanding of product category • Understanding of liked and disliked products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small consumer-sample • Time intense • Less focus on single product 	 Understanding categories

CONCLUSION

Implementing sensory panel methods in Focus Groups can bring many advantages: more reliable feedback, a better understanding of the consumers perceptions, focus on product strengths and weaknesses or test the "sensory fit to product concept".

Applying and/or combining different sensory methods in Focus Groups allows best solutions to various customer requirements with reasonable

pricing. The ideal solution has to be identified according to the desired output considering the advantages and disadvantages of every used method.

Implementing sensory panel methods in Focus Groups can be used to keep your budget under control and costs down.

