When Two Wrongs Make a Right: Using Conjunctive Enablers to Enhance Evaluations for Extremely Incongruent New Products

Abstract

The success of new incongruent products hinges largely on whether consumers can efficiently make sense of the product. One of the most efficient ways that people make sense of new objects is through feature-based association. Such associations often incorporate an enabler (e.g., the color green) to help make sense of a semantically related feature (e.g., vitamin enriched). Evidence from three studies suggests that marketers can strategically incorporate enablers in product design to help consumers make sense of an extremely incongruent feature. As a result, consumers tend to reflect more favorably on the product. Furthermore, the authors find that even if the enabler itself is incongruent and leads to lower evaluations on its own, when combined with an atypical feature the effect can still be positive. Thus, a small, but semantically meaningful adjustment in design can help marketers successfully introduce extremely incongruent innovations.