

Impact of sensory marketing



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Existing research studies on sensory marketing efforts focus on the broad influence of sensory stimuli on consumer reactions to different brands. This research study narrows down the focus of sensory elements to olfactory and auditory stimuli and tries to analyze the effect of these stimuli on consumer emotions. Further the relationship between emotions generated out of these sensory stimuli and consumer purchase decision is being established.

INTRODUCTION

With ever increasing clutter in the advertising space as multiple brands vie for consumers' attention simultaneously, capturing the consumers' attention has become more challenging than ever for marketers today. Marketers realize the need for an alternative mechanism to capture consumer mind share in order to enhance brand awareness.

Research shows that 99% of all marketing communication is based on what consumers see and hear. Scientific studies have proved that as human beings, 75% of our emotions are connected to what we smell rather than what we see and hear. Marketing in general seems to have neglected this very important sense, given the fact that branding is all about building emotional relationships between a product and the consumer.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SENSORY MARKETING APPROACH

Marketers are finding new ways to build stronger connections to their customers and drive preference for their brands by employing scent, sound and material textures in immersive customer experiences. Sensory marketing is an emerging business discipline that applies analytical techniques to amalgamate the use of sensory stimuli such as scent, sound

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and texture in order to develop strong brands that are more memorable for customers than conventional visual branding techniques alone.

Brands develop strong memories in consumers through content and communication cleverly packaged to appeal to our five senses. This results in stronger bonds between consumers and brands. The table below (a result of a survey by Brand sense) shows the importance of consumer emotions with respect to each of the five senses and the percentage marketing spend of Fortune 500 companies with respect to each of these senses.

Figure 1: Perceived importance of senses versus marketing spend by Fortune 500 companies

Sense

% identifying each sense as “very or somewhat important”

% spend against the senses by Fortune 500 companies

Sight

58%

84%

Sound

41%

12%

Smell

45%

2%

Touch

25%

1%

Taste

31%

1%

Source: Brand sense

Sensory marketing applications

Marketers from varied industries from automobile to food and leisure to entertainment have leveraged sensory branding in the last few years. One of the first movers to employ sensory branding is the Singapore Airlines, with its patented fragrance ‘ Stefan Floridian Waters’, becoming its trademark and a standard company scent. The hot towels served to the customers & perfume worn by flight attendants is standardized to this aroma to create an enthralling & memorable in-flight experience.

Cinemas have traditionally uses the aroma of popcorn to arouse the unique feeling of being in a movie hall. The breakfast cereal company, Kellogg’s has patented a crunchy sound and feel of eating cornflakes that is unique in its own way. Mercedes-Benz had set up a division to work on the sound of its

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car doors to increase the perception of high quality among its consumers. Similarly many companies have tried to subtly exploit the impact of sensory perceptions in building their brands and ensuring better consumer loyalty.

Purpose and scope of the study

The purpose of this study would be to analyze at a basic level what impact sensory branding has on the purchase behaviour of consumers. Hulten, Bertin (2012) aims to depict shoppers' touching behaviour in relation to the introduction of visual and olfactory sensory cues at point-of-purchase in a retail setting. The findings demonstrate that sensory cues exert a positive impact on consumers' desire to touch. Sensory cues frame consumers' affective responses and decision making through involving the sense of touch.

This study will aim to see to what extent and how multi-sensory marketing efforts have a positive impact on the consumer during his purchase decision making process. It would also look at cases of how marketers have leveraged sensory branding to positively influence consumer behaviour and present what are the key takeaways that marketers in particular can act on in order to increase brand awareness and induce trials.

IMPACT OF SENSORY MARKETING ON PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR:

EXISTING RESEARCH

Academic research has shown that different sensory impressions impact consumer behaviour and perceptions of goods and services. The sense of sight is the most powerful one for discovering changes and differences in the

environment and is the most common sense in perceiving goods or services. Impressions of sound have been analyzed empirically by Garlin and Owen (2006), Sweeney and Wyber (2002). The sense of sound is linked to emotions and feelings and the sense impacts brand experiences and interpretations. The sense of smell is related to pleasure and well-being and is closely connected to emotions and memories. The sense of taste is the most distinct emotional sense and often interacts with other senses. The sense of touch is the tactile one, related to information and feelings about a product through physical and psychological interactions.

A multi-sensory brand-experience takes place when more than one of the five senses contributes to the perception of sensory experiences (Hulten, 2009). The author defines multi-sensory brand experience as follows: a multi-sensory brand-experience supports individual value creation and refers to how individuals react when a firm interacts, and supports their purchase and consumption processes through the involvement of the five human senses in generating customer value, experiences, and brand as image.

Sensory marketing model

Sensorial strategies

In relation to the five human senses

Sensors

Scent sensors

Sound sensors

Sight sensors

Taste sensors

Touch sensors

Sensations

Atmos-pheric

Auditory

Visual

Gastro-nomic

Tactile

Sensory expressions

The multi-sensory brand experience

Customer equity

Figure 2: A model for sensory marketing

Source: Hulten, Bertin (2009)

A sensory marketing model takes its point of departure in the human mind and senses, where mental flows, processes and psychological reactions take place and result in a multi-sensory brand-experience. An individual's personal and subjective interpretation and understanding of a multi-sensory brand-experience is referred to here as experiential logic. This means that,

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for each individual, the logic contributes to forming behavioural, emotional, cognitive, sensory, or symbolic values.

According to Hulten, Bertin (2009), this consumer experience becomes an image, forming the mental conceptions and perceptions of interactions and inputs in the service process, which constitutes the final outcome of the multi-sensory experience within a brand perspective. This perspective is defined here as an individual's beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and opinions about a brand, based on the overall experience.

Sensors aim at communicating sensations and sensory expressions that reinforce the multi-sensory brand experience for the customer. Sensations aim at expressing a brand's identity and values as something distinctive and sensorial, in facilitating the multi-sensory brand experience.

Influence of olfactory stimulation

Hyojung Ho et al (2010) show that consumers understand the relation between specific product and smell by experiencing and learning. By this biological responses and the principle of classical conditioning that build through repetition, olfactory stimulation influences people's attitude directly. And also, information from organ of smell can have an influence on people's behaviour unconsciously by hypothalamus which controls an autonomic nerve and the endocrine system.

The author shows that fragrance can create various kinds of positive emotion but the positive emotion cannot directly influence on willingness to buy in other product types. However, fragrance can be used for motivating to purchase. In addition, fragrance results in a wide variety of positive emotion

on fashion goods. Fragrance can be used on marketing strategy as each product's concept. Moreover, in the case of high technology product, satisfaction was the highest. And also, Consumers feel pleased and impressed from products with fragrance regardless of its product type.

Auditory stimuli and consumer behaviour

Park and Young (1986) examined the effect of music (present, absent) and three types of involvement (low involvement, cognitive involvement, affective involvement) on the formation of attitudes toward a brand in the context of TV commercials. Music increased the brand attitude for subjects in the low involvement condition but had a distracting effect for those in the cognitive involvement condition. Its effect for those in the affective involvement condition was not clear. They argue that music acted as a peripheral persuasion cue.

The relationship between the fit of the mood induced music (happy or sad) and the purchase occasion (happy or sad) and its effect on purchase was studied by Alpert, Alpert, and Maltz (2005). While mood induced by music did not exhibit a main effect on purchase intentions, its interaction with fit was significant. The authors conclude that when music is used to evoke emotions congruent with the symbolic meaning of the product, the likelihood of purchase is increased.

Haptics as a sensory marketing tool

Terry and Childers (2003) show how haptic information influences emotions and consumer purchase behaviour. Haptic information, or information attained through touch by the hands, is important for the evaluation of

products that vary in terms of material properties related to texture, hardness, temperature, and weight. The authors develop and propose a conceptual framework to illustrate that salience of haptic information differs significantly across products, consumers, and situations. The authors use two experiments to assess how these factors interact to impair or enhance the acquisition and use of haptic information.

Barriers to touch, such as a retail display case, can inhibit the use of haptic information and consequently decrease confidence in product evaluations and increase the frustration level of consumers who are more motivated to touch products. In addition, written descriptions and visual depictions of products can partially enhance acquisition of certain types of touch information. The authors synthesize the results of these studies and discuss implications for the effect of haptic information for Internet and other non-store retailing as well as for traditional retailers.

Analysis of literature with respect to impact on consumer behaviour

The research studies analyze show that consumers are heavily using their senses in order to perceive the quality of the product and associate it with positive emotions. The perception of different marketing stimuli consists of emotional and cognitive processes, which take place within the consumer. According to the findings of these studies, sensory stimuli deriving mainly from the product and the packaging such as colors, modern style, pleasant smell, velvety texture and closure packaging sound, influence brand perception positively leading to a stronger (rational and emotional) bond between the brand and the consumer.

Marketers need to pay attention, apart from the “ traditional means” of the marketing mix (advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion), to other very important “ sensory means”, such as product scent and texture, store atmosphere (including store music), sounds deriving by their products. Sensory marketing is a relative new concept, which involves the creative synergy between marketing, psychology, neuroscience and neuropsychology. If marketers clearly understand this new concept and try to utilize the knowledge of similar to this study researches, then they can offer a unique buying experience to their consumers, significantly increasing the probability of selling their products.

IMPACT OF SENSORY MARKETING – ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INVOLVED

Sensory marketing framework

Sensory marketing is an application of the understanding of sensation and perception to the field of marketing -to consumer perception, cognition, emotion, learning, preference, choice, or evaluation. (Aradhna Krishna, 2011). A framework can be constructed which conceptually explains the process of sensory marketing:

Figure 3: A conceptual framework of sensory marketing

Sensory Perception

Product Stimulus

Emotion

Behavior

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Attitude

Learning

Cognition

Source: Krishna, Aradhana (2011)

It is to be noted that sensation and perception are stages of processing involved in sensory marketing. Sensation happens when the stimulus has an impact on the receptor cells of a sensory organ-this part is neurological in nature. Perception is the awareness or understanding of sensory information.

Analysis of sensory marketing variables

Based on the framework above, it's possible to identify the variables that can be used to study sensory marketing.

Stimuli created through any one or any combination of the five senses (touch, auditory, olfactory, vision, taste) can be identified as the antecedent variables.

Sensory stimuli – Touch

If the hedonic aspects of touch can increase persuasion, the use of touch in marketing may be more broadly applicable than previously believed (Joann Peck & Jennifer Wiggins, 2006). It is widely believed that the role of touch is limited to providing information to the customer about the physical attributes of the product; however this kind of touch can be used effectively only in contexts in which customers are able to physically evaluate the product. But the use of touch as a hedonic tool has the potential to be

applied to a broad set of products and even services and in a wide variety of contexts which include but are not limited to package design, print advertising, direct mail advertising, and point-of-purchase displays.

Sensory stimuli – Olfactory

There have been studies which have dealt with the relationship between ambient scent and memory. Morrin and Ratneshwar (2003) showed that ambient scent increased recall and recognition of brands seen. Earlier studies on this topic also suggested that ambient odors result in memories and affect elaboration on product information and choice. According to Bosmans (2006), ambient scent can lead to emotion-based semantic connections with memories (e. g., roses and babies) and result in improving product evaluation.

Stimuli – auditory

There have been various studies on the effect of auditory stimuli on marketing programs. A lot of marketing communication is auditory in nature – for e. g. radio and television advertising messages, jingles and songs. There is also prevalence of ambient music in retail spaces, hotels, restaurants and airplanes. Also marketers create and deploy signature sounds for products for unique identification for their brand such as the sound for the Windows OS that one hears each time we boot a PC.

Ismail M. El Sayed, Dalia A. Farrag, Russell W. Belk (2006) concluded that the type of background music played in malls had a distinct effect on the shopping behaviour of the visitors. They used the Stimulus-Organism-

Response paradigm to ascertain the impact of auditory stimuli on purchase behaviour.

Stimuli through vision and taste

AydinoÄyllu and Krishna (2011) demonstrate that size labels adopted by food vendors can have a major impact on consumers' size judgments and consumption (actual and perceived), since

consumers integrate the actual size information from the stimuli, with the semantic cue from the size label.

The consequent variables identified are enhanced customer awareness about the brand, increase in brand recall, better brand recognition and customer purchase behavior – whether the stimuli actually leads to the customer purchasing the product.

Customer awareness

As a result of stimuli through any of the senses, the awareness of a product/brand can be enhanced in the customers' minds.

Brand recognition (learning)

Sensory stimuli is more often deployed by marketers in their products in order to ease the process of recognizing a brand for a customer. Auditory and visual stimuli in the form of packaging are more often used to enable a customer to recognize a brand with a higher level of ease and convenience.

Brand recall (memory)

Marketers also use sensory stimuli as a tool to facilitate a high level of brand recall among the customers. A typical example is that of the Intel Pentium processor sound or even the Britannia's jingle in the Indian market.

Purchase behavior

Though sensory stimuli can help in awareness and recall, it is ultimately the conversion into a purchase that is the ultimate goal of marketers of any product. Barry J. Davies, Dion Kooijman and Philippa Ward (2003) show a model of how environmental stimuli in the form of ambient scent can affect the shopping behaviour of consumers in a retail set up.

Figure 4: Model of the Influence of Ambient Scent on Consumer Responses

Moderators

Approach avoidance reactions

Affective response

Perceived ambient scent

Objective ambient scent

Source: Barry J. Davies, Dion Kooijman and Philippa Ward (2003)

Variables for study

The variables chosen for this study would be auditory and olfactory stimuli on the antecedent side and customer purchase behavior on the consequent side.

Antecedents Consequences

Kind of stimuli

Vision Brand awareness

Taste Brand recognition

Purchase behavior

Auditory Brand recall

Olfactory

The scope of research would be to identify how marketers have deployed the use of auditory and olfactory stimuli in products, services or environments (shopping malls, etc) to influence the customer purchase behavior. The study will also analyze the two major intermediate variables involved in the process – perception of the stimuli and emotions and cognition happening at the customer's mind.

ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF AUDITORY AND OLFATORY STIMULI ON PURCHASE DECISION

Research proposition

This paper proposes that olfactory or auditory stimuli deployed by marketers in products or retail environments actually lead to positive emotions and cognitive reactions about the brand for the consumer. Further these cognitive and affective beliefs lead the consumer to the actual purchase decision.

To analyze the validity of the above proposition, we examine the case in two different stages:

- Influence of olfactory and auditory stimuli in creating positive emotions/affective beliefs in consumers
- Influence of positive emotions on actual decision to purchase

Relationship between olfactory stimuli and affective reactions in the consumer

The sense of smell is considered to be the most closely related to emotional reactions. The olfactory bulb is directly connected to the limbic system in the brain, which is the system related to immediate emotion in humans (Wilkie 1995). 75% of emotions are generated by smell (Bell and Bell 2007).

Consequently, smell represents a direct line to feelings of happiness and hunger and is a sensory bandwidth that cannot be turned off (Wilkie 1995; Vlahos 2007). Thus, from a marketer's perspective, smell has an instantaneous good or bad effect on our emotional state which, as some research has shown, ultimately affects our shopping and spending behavior.

Figure 5: How Objective Ambient Scents Interact with the Perceptual Process

- Organizing
- Assimilation
- Covert objective
- Objective
- Conscious level of awareness scent
- Sensing
- Attention

- Reacting
- Response
- Reacting
- Response
- Sensing
- Attention
- Ambient scent
- Organizing
- Assimilation

Source: Bradford and Desrochers (2009)

The neurological substrates of olfaction are especially geared for associative learning and emotional processing. Marketers can link a scent with an unconditioned stimulus eliciting the desired response and eventually prompting a conditioned response from consumers (Herz 2002). Further, since the olfactory bulbs are part of the limbic system and directly connect to the structures that process emotion (the amygdala) they also strongly related to associative learning (the hippocampus) (Herz 2002). No other sensory system has this type of intimate link between emotion and associative learning (Herz 2002).

Relationship between auditory stimuli and affective reactions in the consumer

Ambient sound, such as music heard in hotels, restaurants, retail stores, and supermarkets, can influence consumer mood, actual time spent in a location, perception of time spent, and actual spending. For instance, stereotypically French versus German music has been shown to affect the choice of wine-

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shoppers bought more French (German) wine when French (German) music was played (North, Hargreaves, & McKendrick, 1999); classical music has been shown to enhance pleasure, whereas pop-style music to increase arousal (Kellaris & Kent, 1993).

Music in a store also influences shopping pace-slower music produces slower shopping and results in more purchases since customers progress at a slower pace as they move through the store (Milliman, 1982). When consumers enjoy the background music, they feel they have spent less time shopping relative to the actual amount of time they have spent in the store; if they dislike it, despite the short amount of time they have actually spent in the store, they claim to have been there for much longer (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000; but, see also Kellaris & Kent, 1992).

Influence of positive emotions on consumer purchase decision

The relationship between pleasant emotions and purchasing behaviors is relatively well supported in the retail literature (Donovan and Rossiter, 1994). In particular, the Mehrabian-Russell model (1974), which explains the relationship between environments, intervening variables, and behaviors relevant to retail setting using a Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm, has received the widest usage to explain shopping emotions in consumer research. According to the Mehrabian-Russell model, three emotional responses of pleasure-displeasure, arousal-non arousal, and dominance-submissiveness mediate people's approach or avoidance reactions to environments. (Lee and Yi, 2008).

APPLICATIONS OF OLFACTORY MARKETING TO STIMULATE PURCHASE

Sensory analysis is a scientific discipline which is now employed by all the leading brands and also companies who are trying to enhance their brand identity. Because, Consumers' perception is as good as reality (Lindstrom, Martin (2010): p106), added (non-edible) aromas prove to the scientists that buyer behaviour is absolutely influenced. Nestle, coca-cola, Carlsberg add aroma to the packaging on their products. Exposed, unwrapped foods are how leading supermarkets and shops entice their consumers, an example of this would be the in store environment at Wholefoods.

More specific examples include; the Florida hospital which has a seaside centre in which they use scent machines to circulate the smell of sea, coconut and vanilla, with the notion that patients will be soothed and not cancel their appointments. (Hulten, Bertil, Niklas Broweus & Marcus van Dijk, 2009) The Hyatt hotel chain in Paris used their French history of great perfumers and combined that with detailed sensory brand analysis to create their own signature scent. Their scent brand was developed by French perfumer Blaise Mautin for the

Park Hyatt Vendome hotel in 2002 and it incorporated eighteen ingredients. It was ultimately described as fresh cement poured over raw oak plank, plus fresh, ever-so-slightly cinnamony pastry dough with the olfactory texture of thick, rich tan silk (Hulten, Bertil, Niklas Broweus & Marcus van Dijk (2009): p64). Such detailed descriptions are there to serve our need for developed language around olfaction, due to the fact that our confidence and communication around scent is still developing. That said, olfactory memory

is not semantic but episodic and customers only come into contact with the experience not the description.

APPLICATIONS OF AUDITORY MARKETING TO STIMULATE PURCHASE

Much of marketing communication is auditory in nature-one hears radio and television advertising messages, jingles and songs; one also hears ambient music in retail spaces, hotels, restaurants and airplanes; then, there are signature sounds from products such as the sound for the Intel Pentium chip that one hears each time one starts a computer or the sounds for Motorola or Verizon cellphones. Importantly, even when one reads a word, one hears the word as well-if the language is phonetic in nature, then the words that one reads enter a phontactic loop before being encoded in the mind, similar to spoken words.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusion

The findings from the research point to the fact that there is a positive relationship between olfactory and auditory stimuli deployed by marketers in products or retail environments and the emotions that the customers go through in the purchase situation. Also the different studies analyzed show that positive emotions generated by sensory experiences lead to a higher probability of actual purchase decision by the customer. Thus, it can be concluded that sensory marketing efforts do have a direct impact on the purchase decision of the customers.

Limitations and future research

This research is only limited to analyzing the effect of sensory marketing efforts on consumer purchase behaviour. However there are other variables on which sensory stimuli could have different positive or negative effects on – brand recognition (especially in the case of auditory stimuli used for sonic branding), brand recall (mostly achieved through rich visual stimuli) or just consumer perception of the brand. Future research can focus on the effect of each of the individual sensory stimuli independently on these different consequent variables. Also this research has largely focused on conscious sensory approaches to marketing. However this study can be extended to the increasingly prevalent subliminal approaches taken by marketers to reinforce the brands subconsciously in the minds of consumers.