
SENSORY MARKETING-INVESTIGATING THE USE OF FIVE SENSES

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ABSTRACT

For three decades' marketers in a variety of industries have been building expertise in reaching consumers through the five senses. New research indicates that we are about to enter an era in which many more consumer products companies will take advantage of sense-based marketing. Due to increasing competition among various companies the good quality of products or services no longer remains the only criteria for selection. Consumers nowadays are looking forward to a wholesome experience while shopping. They are attracted towards products that appeal to their senses and develop an emotional connect. For this not only the product attributes but the environment at the point of purchase influences their decision. Marketers began the use of senses to create an edge in their products and services. Therefore, in the present study an attempt has been made to introduce the concept of sensory marketing and exploring the use of five senses in marketing products and services. Previous literature has been reviewed to find the level of impact the senses have in influencing the consumers' decision and whether their presence actually impacts the buyers' decision. Lastly a question has been raised regarding the ethical use of sensory marketing.

Key Words: Sensory marketing, five senses, products, influence, consumer behaviour.

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

American Marketing Association defines sensory marketing as ‘marketing techniques that aim to seduce the consumer by using his senses to influence his feelings and behaviour’. According to Oxford English Dictionary sense is ‘any of the faculties, as sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch, by which humans and animals perceive stimuli originating from outside or inside the body’. In marketing, scattered research on the role of the senses in consumer behaviour has been brought together under the rubric of sensory marketing, that is, ‘marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment, and behaviour’ (Krishna, 2012). The rapidly accumulating empirical findings are often surprising and difficult to account for within the amodal model of the human mind that has dominated psychology and consumer research since the cognitive revolution of the 1970s. In the 1970s, the development of general models of information processing provided an integrative framework for the conceptualization of human memory, judgment, and decision making (Krishna and Schwarz, 2014). People perceive the world through their senses but the representations they construct from sensory inputs are not necessarily valid reflections of stimulus properties, a fact that gave rise to an enduring interest in illusions of sensory perception from early philosophy to current neuroscience. Many articles that examine atmospheric effects on consumer behaviour credit Kotler (1973-74) for initiating the literature stream. Kotler was the first to use and define the term ‘atmospherics’ as the intentional control and structuring of environmental cues. In the past two decades, some consumer behaviour researchers have incorporated elements of vision, touch, audition, smell and taste in their research. Some of this research also used sensory perception for mood manipulation. In a way, 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. Sensory marketing is trying to create the perfect sensory stimuli (Shabgou and Daryani, 2014) and achieve the greatest impact on buying behaviour of consumers.

The Five Senses

Vision: Vision is till date the most studied sensory domain within consumer research. Colours and shapes are the first way of identification and differentiation. The choice of colours and forms in the conception of a product, the layout of a point of sale, the realization of promotion campaign are key factors of success (or failure), well understood by marketers. Studies on colour have provided evidence as to how certain colours in ads are more likely to lead to positive attitudes. However, colour is still an underexplored aspect of vision (Elder *et al.*, 2010). The sensory marketing provides an excellent opportunity to use colour and lighting as the tool to form the product’s differentiation. The colours may create emotional connections resulting in differentiation of the products, acquired competitive advantage, reinforced loyalty, and increased sales, shorter perception time of the brand mark, longer stay of consumers in the store, created

positive emotions and relation with the consumer, encouragement to buy on impulse, and increased number of intentions to go shopping again (Sliburyte and Skeryte, 2014).

Audition: Audition is a sense that requires no effort to operate. People have no control over the auditory stimuli they perceive, although they have some control over which stimulus they are attending to. This non-voluntary perception of sounds can make the fit (congruence) of an auditory stimulus like music with either the environment or other auditory stimuli, problematic. In large department stores, supermarkets, bars, restaurants, and other locations, sound incongruence cannot be avoided. If the same music is played everywhere in the store, there will be some parts of the store where the music will not fit. If different music is played in different parts, then the different music themes are very likely to not fit with one another (Elder *et al.*, 2010). Considering that in general, music congruence has been found to have positive effects for product and ad evaluations.

Olfaction: The existence of a scent is generally accepted as having a positive impact on consumer attitudes, in both ambient form, such as in stores and other environments, or in a more direct form, such as those infused in products. Among the cognitive moderators potentially involved in these effects, perceived congruence is the most frequently reviewed one. In general, it is defined as a contextual fit between the scent and the product category.

Touch: Touch research in marketing is, in many respects, still in its early stages. Touch is rarely ambient, meaning that consumers must make an effort to experience haptic stimuli. Three aspects of the purchase experience determine motivation to touch: the product, the consumer, and the environment. The need for touch (NFT) arises due to two reasons, firstly as an instrumental need and second autotelic or fun touch (Peck and Childers, 2003). Once a consumer is induced to touch, consideration turns to how he or she interprets the haptic stimuli. This is likely a complex function of product attributes, individual characteristics, and situational factors. Unfortunately, touch is not feasible in all consumption contexts. The most notable is online shopping, where consumers must rely entirely on visual stimuli.

Taste: The sense of taste has received sparse attention within the consumer behaviour literature. Food is an essential component of human existence, with much of our daily efforts devoted to ensuring that we have sufficient amounts for our needs. However, beyond this subsistence perspective, food, and more specifically the sense of taste, provides us with some of our greatest pleasures. Prior literature on the topic of affect and cognition, as it relates to taste, suggests that many taste experiences are primarily affective, with cognitive or informational components muting enjoyment during consumption. In general, taste perceptions tend to be affectively driven, with more attention to sensory cues leading to heightened affective responses (Elder *et al.*, 2010).

2. Review of Literature

Kotler (1973-74) introduced the term 'atmospherics' as a way of relating to a commercial environment and its physical factors, distinguishing between the aural, olfactory, tactile and visual

dimensions of a store. In his definition of an atmosphere, the human senses play a major role and store atmosphere is described in sensory terms. In this regard, sound, sight, scent, taste and touch are the major sensory channels. Later Milliman (1982) critically reviewed the literature available and presented an empirical study that examined the effects of background music on in-store shopping behaviour. The results of the tests indicated that the pace of in-store traffic flow was significantly slower with the slow tempo music than for the faster tempo music. The higher sales volumes were consistently associated with the slower tempo musical selections while in contrast, the lower sales figures were frequently associated with the faster tempo music. Milliman (1986) also presented an empirical study that examined the effect of background music on the behaviour of restaurant customers. The empirical study presented in this paper is based upon the theoretical model presented by Mehrabian and Russell and further developed by Russell and Pratt. From the results it was evident that the slower, perhaps more soothing background music created a more relaxing environment for the customers. Spangenberg, Crowley & Henderson (1996) reviewed theoretically relevant work from environmental psychology and olfaction research and conducted a study examining the effects of ambient scent in a simulated retail environment. In the study, the authors found a difference between evaluations of and behaviours in a scented store environment and those in an unscented store environment. They found that although the presence or absence of a scent consistently affected evaluations and behaviours, the nature of the scent itself appeared to be less important. Turley and Milliman (2000) in their study indicated that atmospheric variables influence a wide variety of consumer evaluations and behaviours. They focused on the research conducted over the years on the effects of facility-based environmental cues, or 'atmospherics', on buyer behaviour. They concluded that the five sensory stimuli in the environment of the store have positive effect on shopping intention, time spent in the environment, mood, satisfaction, spent money, product involvement, enjoyment and arousal. Chebat and Michon (2003) conducted a study in a shopping mall to test the effect of ambient scent and concluded that the odour directly affects the impression of buyers and has a considerable influence on consumers' behaviours. Also, smell and odour significantly impact on perceptions of product quality and environment. Lindstrom (2005) showed the role senses play in selecting brands. Results revealed that 99 percent of all brand communication currently focuses on only two of the senses – sight and sound. Many companies have to date been totally unaware of their major sensory touch-point advantages, the special tactile feeling of the product, the characteristic smell or the interesting taste. If a company understands how important the senses are in establishing an emotional connection, they may very well find the component that will catapult their brand ahead of the pack of competitors. Peck and Wiggins (2006) also pointed out that touch has potentially significant implications for store atmospherics, in the form of in-store and point-of-purchase displays. Researchers claim that displays can encourage touch and result in an interaction with products that customers would otherwise have ignored. This could increase impulse and unplanned purchases. Another study by Peck and Childers (2006) examined the influence of touch on impulse-purchasing behaviour. The authors investigated the link between impulse purchasing and

both an environmental encouragement to touch and an individual preference for autotelic touch. Overall, individuals higher in autotelic NFT purchased more impulsively than their lower autotelic NFT counterparts. In addition, for both higher and lower autotelic individuals, the environmental salience of touch information induced by the “feel-the-freshness” point-of-purchase sign increased impulse purchasing behaviour. Garlin and Owen (2006) synthesized the results of existing empirical studies into the effects of background music in retail settings. Among the many in-store elements purported to impact patrons, background music is a leading feature of academic enquiry. Meta-analysis was used and the studies that were included had studied background music affects on patrons/clients/staff; showed a direct or clear indirect affect on purchase behaviour or customer loyalty; and had reported sample sizes, outcome statistics or information such as group means and standard deviations. The final sample for analysis comprised 148 data points from 32 studies. Effects that were examined included, genre, tempo, volume, mode, complexity, familiarity and liking and absence–presence of music. A conservative approach to the analysis revealed small-to-moderate, yet quite robust effects in terms of background music. Vida (2008) on consumer irritation hearing, determined that the perception of music has positive results in the consumer experience and after the evaluation of store, the goods seems desirable and finally much more time and money is spent in the store. The findings confirmed that the right music can affect the behaviour of buyers. Krishna, Elder & Caldara (2010) in their research examined the effect of presence of smell on haptic (touch) perceptions resulting in sensory experience and aesthetic pleasure. Two separate studies were conducted for this purpose. In study 1, the authors explored the interaction of smell and touch within the domain of texture. In study 2, the semantic aspect of smell–touch they considered was temperature (hot–cold) and also they explored its effect on perceived effectiveness. It was found that multisensory semantic congruence will moderate the impact of smell on haptic perceptions, with congruence leading to more positive evaluations than incongruence. Rodrigues, Hulten & Brito (2011) reviewed theoretically relevant work from marketing, branding and consumer psychology and demonstrated that in the literature, there was a gap with respect to how consumers perceived and actually experienced a brand as image through the human senses. The article discussed how to delve deeper into the customer’s mind and treat them in a more personal manner by differentiating and expressing a brand. Moreover, it discussed the concept of sensorial strategies in contrast to transactional strategies and relational strategies and considered how a sensory marketing model can be regarded as an alternative to conventional marketing models. Krishna (2012) presented an overview of research on sensory perception. In a way, 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. This review is structured around this conceptual framework. The author explains the effect that each sense -touch, smell, sound, vision and taste have on the perception of consumers and further their decision making. Sliburyte and Skeryte (2014) through empirical research revealed that colour perception only partially depends on demographic factors. The main purpose of the research was to investigate the colour perception in marketing decisions. The results of the

empirical research showed that the consumers' colour perception in marketing decisions may affect their buying decisions, thus it is considered that it is meaningful and even necessary to differentiate the product, to increase the competitive advantage, to strengthen loyalty, and to increase sales in order to form the distinctiveness of the trademark. Krishna and Schwarz (2014) delineated key assumptions of the information processing paradigm and then discussed some of the key conceptual challenges posed by the research generally appearing under the titles of embodiment, grounded cognition, or sensory marketing. Most of the reported findings were difficult to reconcile with standard models of judgment and decision making and reinforced the need to reconsider human cognition as grounded in the sensory experience resulting from goal directed interaction with the world.

3. Purpose of The Study

To study the use of five senses in marketing products and services.

4. Use of Five Senses in Marketing Products and Services

In the prevailing society, which is characterized by information overload, a lack of time and complication of everyday life, it is believed that it is no longer possible for firms to support brand strategies exclusively through transactional marketing or relational marketing as before. Instead, sensorial strategies, based on the sensory marketing model, should be used by understanding how sensory cues and stimuli impact consumer behaviour through the human senses (Rodrigues, 2014). People perceive the world through their senses and because of this sensory information and the accompanying subjective experiences play a key role in human action and cognition, even in domains that seem abstract and far removed from immediate sensory inputs (Krishna and Schwarz, 2014). The sensory strategies differentiate the products and services, approaching the consumer's mind and senses both from a cognitive point of view, and from an emotional one. Vision is the most importance of the senses, followed by smell, sound, taste and touch. Vision plays a significant role in the perception of a product and studies have shown that a person who has been exposed to a product would prefer it over similar choices, even in cases when the person cannot actually remember seeing the product. Factors affecting through vision are for example logo, design, use of colours, and lighting. For example, the majority of us can recognize Coca-Cola by its red and white logo. Colours are fundamental in the perception of a brand and can highlight the most important attributes and associations to a product or a brand (Uddin, 2011). Colours can establish emotional links the outcome of which may be: product differentiation, gained competitive advantage, increased loyalty, and boosted sales (Sliburyte and Skeryte, 2014). In addition to colours, the lightening in a store is designed to fortify the brand identity and reflect values held by the brand. Researchers had suggested that ambient brightness was associated with ambient heat and fostered more extreme affective responses through that association (Xu and Labroo, 2013). The next important sense is smell, which is the only sense that cannot be turned

off. It is the sense with the greatest emotional impact since smell transfers directly to the limbic system, the part of the brain where the emotions are handled, which is the most ancient and primitive part of the brain (Uddin, 2011). The sense of smell emotionally affects humans up to 75 per cent more than any other sense. Studies have shown that smell, of product and sales environment, is actually more important than sight and sound in the purchasing process. Associations to smell are highly individual implying that what is positive for one person can be negative for another. This is thus important to consider when using smell as a strategic tool, since the intended reaction may vary between individuals and cultures. An ambient scent is an environmental scent that is not necessarily directly related to a brand but instead is more of an atmospheric tool to affect the mood of consumers (Uddin, 2011). For example, Singapore Airlines introduced Stefan Floridian Waters which is an aroma that has been specifically designed as part of Singapore Airlines. This way the plane smells fresh when you board, and the scent is spread every time an attendant walk past. Ambient scents can be used to attract customers to products in a store by influencing their mood and associations. Another example is of Woodland which uses its signature leather fragrance in stores and at its various corporate offices. For a scent to be efficient as a marketing tool, it has to be congruent to the context in which it diffused (Krishna *et al.*, 2010). An excellent example of sensory branding in India is the 'Aamsutra' campaign run by PepsiCo for its fruit flavoured soft drink brand, 'Slice'. The imagery is perfect — a fairytale-like orchard setting, a dreamy beauty seduced to the brink of delirium by the thick, yellow-orange, fruity, aromatic ambrosia-like liquid bursting out of a ripened mango and landing right on her lip. Viewers can almost smell a faint aroma of ripe mango when they watch the advertisement. This is the effectiveness of sensory branding if done intelligently (Chatterjee, 2014). The third sense is that of audition or in simple words sound. Sound helps to generate mood by creating feelings and emotions. Together with sight, sound is used as the traditional element in brand-building process. The combination of these is referred to as audio-visual branding and it is the ground of marketing efforts for most of the companies today. Apart from the use of ambience music at points of purchases, the distinctive sound of a brand is an important aspect to consider since making product attributes brand specific, will increase differentiation from the competition. For example, in India, Royal Enfield uses the 'thumping' sound to distinguish its motor cycles from the rest. As seen from the review it was found that a more soothing background music created a more relaxing environment for the customers. Effects that have been examined include, genre, tempo, volume, mode, complexity, familiarity and liking and absence–presence of music. New Zealand fair trade banana supplier All Good Bananas ran an unusual audio campaign at a New World supermarket in Auckland to encourage shoppers to purchase its products. The customers could hear a 40-second message, played on a loop, from a directional speaker above them. The one-off campaign ran for three weeks in one store, with sales increasing by 130 per cent (Holosonics, 2010). The fourth sense is touch. Touch is also the first sense to develop in the womb and the last sense one loses with age. When vision and hearing are taken away, touch is the most important mean to identify and manipulate objects. However, relatively little marketing consideration has been given

to this sense yet touching involves action to a greater degree than any other sense. The weight and material of the product are important factors in the sensory process. The texture of a material influences our emotions and hence our perception. Kellogg's, the breakfast cereal experts believed that taste was as affected by the textures we eat as the flavour of the food. Rice Crispies that do not snap, crackle and pop are quite simply considered to be stale, even though the taste has not changed, and they may still be perfectly good to eat. So, it was not surprising that Kellogg's considered the crunchiness of the grain as having everything to do with the success of the breakfast product (Lindstrom, 2005). The last sense to be discussed is that of taste. Even though we eat constantly, we are not very good at discerning one taste from another when using only our sense of taste. In terms of advertising affecting taste, an ad emphasizing multiple sensations (taste, touch and smell) results in better taste perception than one emphasizing taste alone. A person can be exposed to aroma without including the taste but it is practically impossible to taste something without smelling it. To strengthen the perception of a brand all the senses should ultimately be included, but there are a limited number of brands, which actually include taste in their branding strategies today. However, taste should not be deserted in branding process since adding this extra dimension will lead to a stronger emotional connection for the consumer. Even if a product is not directly linked to oral use, the taste aspect could still be included by offering something to eat or drink at the point of purchase, or by including cafés and restaurants within a store, which create a pleasant atmosphere resulting in the costumers feeling more relaxed. Creating a consistent integration of the five senses in the communication, product and services is thus vital, as it will help to enhance the product and strengthens the bond between consumers and the brand. The strength of this bond depends of the strength of the synergy between the senses which can be used by marketers as an efficient tool in differentiating their products and services.

5. Conclusion

The previous literature indicated numerous influences of the five senses on the consumers' behaviour. As the senses affect an individual emotionally they help in creating a bond between the consumer and the products or services. The memory of this bond is long lasting and thus leads to repurchase and spending more time a particular retail setting. Marketers began the use of senses to create an edge in their products and services as in today's competitive world consumers not only demand good quality but a wholesome experience. The five senses-sight, smell, hear, touch and taste help in giving this wholesome experience by influencing the consumers subconsciously. Different studies showed varying levels of impact of each of the senses with most of the times the impact being positive and leading to better sales and positive image of the particular brand. In the times to come companies using the senses to appeal the customers will go beyond relationship marketing and thus carve a niche for themselves and become profitable. There is however an ethical aspect to be considered as to what levels the use of the senses allows the free will of customers to function.

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