

“SENSORY BRANDING IN INDIA”

Ms. Neeraj Kumari*

Abstract

From a managerial perspective, sensory marketing can be used to create subconscious triggers that characterize consumer perceptions of abstract notions of the product (e.g., its sophistication or quality). I define “sensory marketing” as “marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior.” Given the gamut of explicit marketing appeals made to consumers every day, subconscious trigger which appeal to the basic senses may be a more efficient way to engage consumers. The understanding of these sensory triggers implies an understanding of sensation and perception as it applies to consumer behavior—this is the research perspective of sensory marketing. This review article presents an overview of research on sensory perception. The review also points out areas where little research has been done, so that each additional paper has a greater chance of making a bigger difference and sparking further research.

Keywords: Marketing, brands, senses, competition, consumers, products.

* Assistant Professor (Department of Humanities & Management), FET, Manav Rachna International University, Faridabad, India

Introduction

Remember the Aamsutra campaign started by Pepsi for its brand Slice!!!! The TVC opens with Katrina at her sensuous best, decorating a room with flowers and candles in anticipation of a beautiful, romantic evening. As she slowly settles down, the viewers realize that she is really getting down to enjoying her favorite mango drink Slice. The next few moments are just about her and her indulgence with the new delicious taste and sweet aroma of Slice. The way in which Katrina handles the Slice bottle and the manner in which the drop of Slice falls in her mouth caressing her lips was to further enhance the Slice experience into dimensions of pleasure, sensuality and indulgence. This TVC was the first one to make the experience of having a mango drink completely sensorial whether through its feel, aroma or taste.

With strong competitors in the market like Coca-Cola (Mazza, Aam Panna), and Parle Agro (Frootie) and no substantial differentiating factor, the use of sensory marketing in the new TVC has allowed Slice to rise above the clutter in the mango-based fruit drink market.

If you look at it in isolation, the entire exercise can be quite gimmicky, but if executed well, a brand could tap into a more complex sensory network to create and enforce an enriching brand experience that goes beyond pure audio and visual.

With competition in the consumer markets reaching new heights, more and more products are entering the market and filling the shelves. In this situation, the question that the companies face is, how does one get the edge? Savvy brands are finding ways to engage all consumer senses to strengthen the brand experience. The approach is called **Sensory Marketing** - integrating all of the senses into the marketing program. Sensory branding is based on the idea that we are most likely to form, retain and revisit memory when all five senses are engaged. By going beyond the traditional marketing media of sight and sound, brands can establish a stronger and longer-lasting emotional connection with consumers.

In his recent book “Brand Sense”, renowned Brand Guru, Martin Linstorm claims that about 83% of all commercial communication appeals to only one sense—our ego. “That leaves a paltry 17% to cater to the other four senses. This is extraordinary given that 75% of our day-to-day emotions are influenced by what we smell, and the fact that there’s a 65% change of mood when exposed to a positive sound...” He also notes that only 3% of Fortune 1000 companies have

given thought to using smell in their marketing or branding, despite the claim that 75% of our emotions are generated by what we smell. Lindstrom's basic point is simple - brands that appeal to multiple senses will be more successful than brands that focus only on one or two.

The Five Senses

Sound has the power to impact our mood and sway our buying habits. Researchers have found that the pace of background music affects customer perceptions of wait time, spending and turnover in stores and restaurants. Fast music decreases spending in a retail environment, but increases turnover in restaurants. Kellogg's Rice Krispies have the classic "snap, crackle, pop," which was carefully developed in sound labs. Mercedes-Benz is famous for having a full department dedicated to the sound of opening and closing of doors.

When it comes to sensory marketing, our **Touch** experience includes material, surface, temperature, weight and form. The original glass Coke bottle is a quintessential example of form marketing, becoming an instant icon when it was first released.

Out of all the senses, **Smell** is the only one with a direct link to the brain. As Dr. John Medina explains in Brain Rules, "Every other sensory system must send a signal to the thalamus and ask permission to connect to the rest of the brain. Smell signals bypass the thalamus and go right to their brainy destinations." Product scents go far beyond the obvious shampoos and candles. Cadillac uses a focus-group tested signature scent called Nuance, launched in 2003.

Sight, of course, is the most common marketing medium. Color, architecture and graphic design theory are all well-studied in the marketing industry.

Edible (**Taste**) advertising is making slow headway, overcoming what one advertiser called the "ick" factor.

Review of Literature

Physical attractiveness is an important determinant of a person's success and fortune in life (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986, Jeffes 1998, Dimitrius & Mazzarella 2001, Patzer 2006,). Studies

have even shown that babies prefer beautiful faces (Bower 1987, Etcoff 2000) whilst in children's fairy tales beauty has always been associated with good, kindness and an endless list of positive traits. The importance placed on beauty in society has without a doubt spelt success for the beauty industry.

Senses and emotions are cited as essential factors in successful product & service branding strategies. Successful brands are mentioned to encapsulate and exude sensory and emotional appeal, in winning the hearts and loyalty of the consumer (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997, Schmitt 1999, Lindstrom 2005).

Pooler (2003) illustrates the prevalence of both sensory and emotions experienced by consumption. He defines the simple, daily act of buying a cup of coffee has since been replaced by a complete therapeutic experience; where the customer gets an emotional lift and a sensory experience.

Sensory studies in understanding consumer choices and preferences has long been undertaken by both researchers and corporations on a wide range of products; ranging from food to household items and cars (Lindstrom 2005, Peneau, Brockhoff, Hoehn, Escher and Nuessli, 2007, Prinz, De Wijk, 2007,).

Sensory appeal has attributed to creating brand success, consumer relationship and loyalty (Schmitt 1999, Gobe 2001, Roberts 2004, Lindstrom 2005).

According to Lindstrom (2005), brands that appeal to multiple senses will be more successful than brands that focus only on one or two. The early works that display the awareness of sensory impact and implications can be linked to aesthetics. Aesthetics forms the foundation of sensory branding. Incorporating aesthetics and appealing to the senses of the consumer create consumer and brand loyalty, saves costs, increases productivity and affords protection from competitive attacks (Schmitt and Simonson 1997).

Aesthetics, a term introduced in 1735 by German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten was to mean "the science of how things are known via the senses (Kivy 2004). David Hume, a

Scottish philosopher propagated in *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757) that aesthetics surpassed mere senses as it ropes in individual taste and emotions. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) introduced the element of subjectivity and sensory judgments. Hence, aesthetic value is recognized as to encompass all three realms of sensory, emotional and subjectivity or the intellectual.

Various researches are extensively undertaken to delve further into the aspects of sensory and consumer choice. Music played in stores witness the increase in sales, attracts and retains more consumers (Gorn 1982, Bainbridge 1998,). Pleasant fragrances are one aspect of the physical environment that can make people feel somewhat happier Study found that shoppers exposed to pleasant odors such as perfume, cookies, coffee are not only in better moods but also likely to engage in amiable and even altruistic behavior (Knasko 1985, Baron 1998,).

Peneau, Brockhoff, Hoehn, Escher and Nuessli (2007) found that consumers evaluated texture (rather than flavor) as the main importance in determining produce freshness. In another 'sensory related' research using custard showed bite-size to influence perception of products thus food packaging and spoons should be manufactured to the 'right' bite size (Prinz, J.E., De Wijk, R.A, 2007).

Color names were found to influence the propensity of purchase; where consumers reacted favorably to unusual color and flavor names as they expect marketing messages to convey useful information (Miller and Kahn 2005).

According to Underhill (1999) almost all unplanned purchases are results of the shopper experiencing the product – through touch, smell, sight, taste or sound.

The modern lifestyle has witnessed the 'aestheticisation' of everyday life – smells and sensory appeal in our everyday lives; both products and services (Paterson 2005, Dennis, Newman, & Marsland, 2005).

Mittal and Sheth (2004) used the metaphor consuming as an experience in describing how consumers consume. Sensory branding strategies have been deployed successfully across a myriad of products and services, for instance in the services sector, Singapore Airlines successfully introduced and incorporated its renowned Stefan Floridian Waters, a distinct scent which is sprayed in the cabins as well as the towels (Lindstrom 2005). P&G launched their 'gender-specific' toothpaste called Crest Rejuvenating Effects. The box was shimmery and had a hint of vanilla and cinnamon specifically targeted at the female consumers (Aaker, Kumar and Day 2004). Godiva revamped its image and unveiled Art-Nouveau stores that promised customers a sensory experience with chocolate (Gobe 2001). Starbucks has definitely transformed the act of consuming coffee to a sensory and emotional experience; fusing jazzy music, the earthy, warm, relaxing colors of the interior to coffee bean packaging - smooth, straight, soft – almost a “buttery feel” (Schmitt and Simonson 1997).

Lush cosmetics creates a total sensorial experience for the consumer, right from the scents and bright colors to shapes and textures (Clegg 2006). In 2002, the Sense of Smell Institute presented its Corporate Vision award to Lancome in recognition of Lancome's successful application of the science of aroma-ology to new product development and marketing strategies (Sense of Smell Org., 2002).

'Origins' acknowledges the importance of senses and it translates that belief in its mission of promoting beauty and wellness through good for you products and feel-good experiences. Clinique projected 'total' sensory appeal of dermatology backed skincare right from its faint green packaging (more antiseptic than minty) to the lab coat uniforms worn by the sales consultants (Israel 1985).

Childers (2008), out of the 81 sensory studies in consumer behavior focusing on taste, touch, smell, and hearing, over one third (28) have been published within the last 5 years. Clearly, sensory perception and sensory marketing is a growing field and there is much research yet to be done. The focus of this review is to summarize some of the research that has been done on the senses while pointing out gaps in the literature where more work is needed

Given the gamut of advertisements (ads) that consumers see every day for the thousands of products that are available in the marketplace, it seems that unconscious triggers, like those appealing to the basic senses, may be a more efficient way to appeal to consumers. Also, these sensory triggers may result in consumers' self-generation of (desirable) brand attributes, rather than those verbally provided by the advertiser. Such deductive engagement may be more persuasive versus deliberate statements (Sengupta & Gorn, 2002).

Wansink & Van Ittersum, (2003). Visual perception biases are important within the domain of consumer behavior because they affect judgments of product sizes and of consumption; these judgments in turn can also affect actual consumption. Further, visual biases can affect judgments of spaces and distance traveled.

Herz and Schooler (2002) found that odor-evoked memories are more emotion laden as it brings the person back to the original event as compared with the similar cue presented either verbally or visually. Schwartz (1973) highlighted the apparent relationship between sensory and emotions where in the resonance model he states that aesthetic appreciation has emotional undertones.

Ortony, Clore and Collins (1990) described emotions as valence reactions to events, agents, or objects, with their particular nature being determined by the way in which the eliciting situation is construed. The 'appraisal theory' (Lazarus 1994, Scherer, Schorr and Johnstone 2001) states that emotion results from how the individual believes the world to be, how events are believed to have come about, and what implications events are believed to have. The central tenet of appraisal theory is that emotions are elicited according to an individual's subjective interpretation or evaluation of important events or situations. While senses have the ability to evoke emotions (Cervonka 1996, Herz 1996) Emotions and feelings have been proven to influence thoughts (Frijda, Manstead and Bern 2000). The close relationship among cognition and senses and emotion forms the foundation in emotional branding.

Sherman, Mathur and Smith (1997) stated that the emotional state of the consumer as an important determinant in their purchase behaviors; pleasure was associated with the amount of money spent and consumer affinity for the store. Barlow, & Maul, (2000) indicated that the most

important aspect of customer experience is emotional rather than satisfaction measured in customer satisfaction surveys. The Japanese have a holistic view of products. They view the product as a complete package; between both tangible and intangible components. The concept of kansei applies throughout. Kansei encompasses the oneness of the product and the user. It factors in the intangible that gives confidence, comfort and ease to the consumer when using any product (Herbig 1995).

Emotional branding is about tapping into the heartstrings and emotions of the consumer to create lasting bond, loyalty and relationships. Gobe (2001) defines it as a cocktail of anthropology, imagination, sensory experiences and visionary approach to change. Emotional branding brings a new layer of credibility and personality to a brand by connecting powerfully with people on a personal and holistic level; it enables brands to carry a personal dialogue with consumers on the issues which are most meaningful to them (Gobe 2001). Feelings and the emotions evoked are the basis in creating successful, smashing brands as consumers form relationships with brands, not products, not corporations (Decker 1998).

Gobe (2001) stresses that conceptualizing a brand through personalization has become a very powerful way to build brand identity. Brand personality is viewed as a crucial element as it gives the brand a set of human characteristics that would link consumer to the brand (Schmitt, and Simonson 1997, Bowl by 2000, Gobe 2001). For a brand to be effective in the service industry, it needs to make emotional connections to employees and through them, to customers (Simmons 2004, Papadatos 2006,). Emotional bonds have to be made between the brand and the people. Listening to consumers and B2B customers talk about brand experiences reveals not only the rational product attributes that impress them, but also the emotional reactions (Mc Ewan 2005).

Sensory Marketing in India

India's diversity in language, geography, music, food, art and religion appeals to the senses to such an extent that foreigners have often talked about a "sensory overload" when they visit India. Our culture is such that gratification of all our senses is an essential part of our way of living and we have imbibed the five senses into our culture and traditions. Our places of worship would be the best case study to explain this phenomenon.

Take a visit to any temple or gurudwara and you will notice a subtle feel good factor that creeps in when you enter the gates. This feel good factor arises as a result of excitation of all our senses. The sensory experience starts as soon as we take off our shoes and wash our feet. The feel of cold water instantly rejuvenates us and stepping on the cool marble floor takes away all the tiredness. Stepping inside, the sweet “religious smells” of dhoop, agarbattis, kapur and other materials fills our nostrils and totally captivates us. The sounds of ringing bells, chants and gurbani make the whole experience what it is. Take note that ringing of bells and blowing of the shankh are important rituals before starting the prayer (aarti). To top it all, the idols are decorated meticulously for hours every day with expensive gold ornaments so that the whole “darshan” experience appeals to the senses. A thought is given to the fact that we leave the premises with a good taste and feeling, literally. For this, the “prasad” given after the darshan consists of dry fruits/sweets or the tastiest of halwa/aloo ki sabzi one has ever had. Thus, we can say that religious experiences have always been so appealing because in addition to providing peace to the mind, they cater to and stimulate all our senses. And if we can draw an analogy between religion and business, which in fact is happening today, then we can say that religious places have been the biggest sensory marketers ever.

Brands in India have been aware of sensory marketing for a long time and have been using the same effectively. Here are a few examples –

- Mr. Kishore Biyani confesses in his book “It happened in India” that it does not give the feeling of “Sabse Sasta”, unless customers in Big Bazaar do not feel crowded enough. Thus, the stores are designed in such a way that customers rub shoulders with each other. The music in the stores is far from subtle; in fact popular Hindi film music is played to give a bazaar-like feel to customer. Also, the customer can touch and feel the vegetables, fruits, pulses and sugar etc. before buying the same. Thus, Big Bazaars provide the customer with the sensory experience of shopping in a traditional market.
- Multiplex chains have taken the sensory route in opening “Business Class Theatres” like the Cinema Europa at PVR Gurgaon. These have facilities to stimulate all human senses; of touch with upholstery, seat size, legroom space; of sight with colors, picture quality; of sound with quality sound equipment and of taste and smell with quality food.” Companies are going at a fast pace with one company having set up a 6-D cinema located near Taj Mahal in India.
- When you step into any of the eight Le Meridian Hotels in India, you should be able to smell

almost as soon as you enter into the lobby, a peculiar scent of old books and parchment in a library. The scent machines in the lobby, not always visible except to the most discerning of the guests, are there to get you in the “right frame of mind” in sync with the hotel chain’s positioning as a destination for “guests who seek out a new perspective and cultural discovery in their travel experience”.

- Detergent companies have realized that ‘fragrance’ in detergents is an important factor of delight for the home-maker in her daily laundry chore. Thus, we have different brands selling detergents with fragrances of Rose (Ariel Spring Clean), Jasmine (Ariel Fresh Clean) and Lemon (Wheel).
- In a reverse direction of sorts, the deodorant brand Axe has given olfactory stimulation a new direction by launching AXE Dark Temptation, which combines the subtle aroma of chocolate with fresh gourmet scents (hot chocolate).
- The Great India Place, Noida, the biggest shopping mall in India, has replaced its music system with real musicians who play live music on piano and violin to enthrall the audience. By this, it has added sight and touch to the already existing auditory experience for the shoppers.
- Even the Delhi Government has understood the need to stimulate all the senses to give a holistic enjoyment to its citizens and thus it had set up The Garden of Five Senses. It is an attractive park where the sight of the plants and flowers, the sound of the melodious wind chimes, the aroma and taste of different cuisine and the feel of the sun-warmed rocks and stone benches in the amphitheatre leave our senses feeling pleasantly fulfilled.
- In an attempt to showcase its “talking ads” initiative to advertisers, Pioneer Book Co. Pvt. Ltd sent out “Meri Saheli” magazines that play the Meri Saheli theme audio each time they are opened. Around 1,500 such magazines were sent out, mostly to advertisers and media buying agencies. The magazines acquired a voice through a chip inserted in the centerfold. The group has also been working closely with ink manufacturers to see if it can insert another chapter to the brand story—scent.

In addition to these cases where brands have used sensory experiences to attract customers, there are also cases where brands have suffered because they have not kept this aspect in mind. Savlon is an example.

- Savlon was proved by laboratory tests to be better than its competitor (Dettol), was backed by one of the most reputed business houses in the world (Johnson & Johnson) and had many product advantages over its competitor but failed to make an impact in the market. It was

promoted as a non-stinging, non smelling antiseptic. However, consumers, in India, believed that the stinging sensation is a proof of the effectiveness of the antiseptic. So, if it does not hurt, it is not effective. Over the years consumers had started to associate an antiseptic with the smell of Dettol. Thus, we can say that Savlon failed to make much of an impact in the Indian market as it could not appeal to the senses of the consumers.

Conclusions

As brands in India are realizing the importance of sensory marketing, it is bound to grow over time. It stands to reason that as technology makes sensory integration more practical and affordable; marketers will be looking to it as the logical new frontier. For brands struggling to compete in today's crowded marketplace, strategic use of sensory information will provide a critical advantage. Touch, smell, taste, sound, and the look of a product all play an important role in our perceptions, attitudes and consumption of a product. Understanding those roles provides a valuable advantage in today's marketplace.

But it is extremely important to understand how the consumer experiences and interacts with your brand category because multi-sensory branding may not be the best option for all the brands. As brand owners ponder the possibilities and the pitfalls of sensory marketing, businesses should remember that in branding, the sixth sense – COMMON SENSE, should decide how the other five senses are catered to!!!

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