

# Sensory Branding: Multisensory Experience

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**Abstract**—Human senses are an incredible information collection system. The human senses have long been unnoticed, despite their responsiveness being of great importance. The five human senses are of great importance for an individual's experience of different purchase, frequency of purchase and consumption process. It is through the human senses that a customer can differentiate one brand from similar brands. Marketers have to market their brand or the dedicated point of sale (POS) along with the sensory attributes like touch, taste, smell, sight and sound that will generate the activation of emotions that make customers desire a given product. This is called "Sensory Branding". Multi sensory brand experience when more than one of the five senses contributes to the perception of sensory experience and how an individual reacts when a firm interacts. Multisensory convergence zones in the human brain indicate that one sense can be affected by relations with other senses. Recently emerging behavioral economists have begun addressing this need for sensory marketing, which emphasizes the sensory impression that usually accompany optimal emotional responses to cause changes in purchasing behaviour.

**Keywords:** Sensory Branding; Human Senses; Perception; Emotion; Point of sales; Purchase; Multi-sensory experience.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sensory Branding is a bonding/ companionship/ love/ attachment a consumer develops towards a product. A strong emotional connection between the target market and the brand can increase customer loyalty, increase sales, increase profits and revenue generation. In the current day scenario brands are increasingly being forced to choose between two positions: discount brand with little emotional connection and premium brand (niche market-which is more of experience based) with a lot of connection like the hedonic products (E.g. Coffee, beer). Emotional Branding can be established through emotional connection which in turn is done by targeting the consumer's senses (five human senses-Sight, Smell, Sound, Taste and Touch). Emotional connection is a powerful way to link the heart of the target market with the soul of the brand. The extent to which connection made is the degree to which the customers care about the particular/specific brand beyond its rational attributes. It's more unconscious than conscious and more psychological than logical. Emotional Branding/connection can make a big impact on the business altogether. According to a 10 year study, brands that evoke a stronger emotional response are able to sell in greater

volumes, create higher customer loyalty and charge 20% to 200% more than their competitors across many business categories, from dog food to household appliances. Researchers have concluded that brands are now being forced into two distinct categories: (a) low-priced commodities or (b) brands you will pay more because you care about them. Brands that are in the middle of the road will get run over, either by low-price leaders or by the brands people love. Many businesses operate on the assumption that their customers make decisions consciously and rationally and this assumption is largely false. No human being is immune to the influence of their unconscious emotions and that's because of the structure of the brain. According the rule of thumb among cognitive scientists, 95% of all the human behaviour is unconscious. Strategic questions any business should ask are: (1) how much emotional intensity does our category and brand merit? (2) Which emotion/sense can we own? (3) Can we trigger the other senses too, if yes then what are the critical touch points and the crossmodal correspondences? Almost any business decision can be tailored to maximize the appropriate emotional connection. Creating synergy across the senses should be the ultimate goal (Lindstrom 2005).

## 2. NEED FOR SENSORY BRANDING

Sensory Branding is defined as the purposeful design and deployment of the interaction between the senses in order to stimulate a consumer's relationship with a brand and to foster a lasting emotional connection that optimizes purchasing and brand loyalty (Kahn 2007). Sensory branding provides the following benefits to marketers:

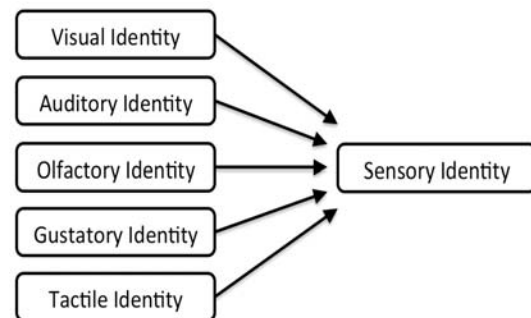
- Stimulates relationship with the brand
- Emotional engagement: match between perception and reality
- Builds a strong, positive and loyal bond between the brand and consumer.
- Offers different dimensions of a single brand
- Allows emotional response to dominate over rationale thinking.

### 3. THEORETICAL BUILDING

The marketplace of today has undergone a significant change, where we have gone from selling and promoting products and services to selling and enticing customers through experiences (Joy and Sherry, 2003). 99 percent of all brand communication currently focuses on only two of the senses – sight and sound (Broad sensory branding, Journal of product and Brand management, Martin Lindstrom, 2005). Companies should appeal towards customer feelings, enabling faster responses (Pham et al, 2001). When it comes to sight “only a small 19% of consumers worldwide believe the look of an item of clothing is more important than how it feels. Whereas a good half of them place the emphasis on feel rather than appearance” (Brand Sense, 2005). Goldkuhl and Styven (2007) mentioned that vision and sound seem to be only two things that were used prevalently. The human senses have been identified as important factors in consumer behaviour, where they have been acknowledged as powerful cues influencing our emotions, perception and behaviour (Peck and Childers, 2008). It is also emphasized that tactile input will have a positive impact on the consumer response as well as their perception of product quality (Grohmann et al. 2007). Krishna et al. (2010) discusses the need to include a combination of sensory inputs to provide the customer with an experience that can be enjoyed in full force and they state that sensory pleasure is a result of a combination of sensory inputs. Rodrigues et al. 2011) highlights that sensorial strategies can be possible for a company to use as a differentiation factor, but also as a means to impact consumers’ behaviour in their purchase and consumption process by testing the individual mind. If the marketer use sensory stimuli in appropriate way, it is able to influence decision – making and hence the propensity to spend (Soars, 2009). Sensory marketing is found in every industry especially in the service industry (Goldkuhl & Styven, 2007).

Businesses like restaurant, hotel and departmental store use marketing activities through sense of the customer for example, the colour of the sign, the song played in the store, scent of bakery, sampling of the snack, packing and representation and even the feel of the fabric. In service industries, if the service can use scents that can trigger memories of pleasant emotions, it could be the powerful tool in order to create loyalty to a brand or service (David et al., 2003). Brenda Soars (2009) explained that sensory stimuli could influence environments, improve the shopper experience and change the nature of behaviour in ways beyond our consciousness and she also mentioned that if the sensory tool is used appropriately, it can influence the decision – making and also have positive attitude and approach from customers. The desire to consider the store environment as a multidimensional concept made up of music, scents, colors, lights, design, etc., are critical to reach its customers (Kotler, 1973-1974; Baker, 1986; Berman & Evans, 1995; Bitner, 1992; Skandrani et al., 2011). Sense of sound is linked to

emotions and feelings and the sense impacts brand experiences and interpretations. Impressions of smell have been discussed by Goldkuhl and Styfve´n (2007) and Fiore et al. (2000). The sense of smell is related to pleasure and well-being and is closely connected to emotions and memories. Taste impressions have been analyzed empirically by Biedekarken and Henneberg (2006) and Klosse et al. (2004). The sense of taste is the most distinct emotional sense and often interacts with other senses. Finally, touch impressions have been discussed by Peck and Wiggins (2006) and Citrin et al. (2003), among others. The sense of touch is the tactile one, related to information and feelings about a product through physical and psychological interactions.



Source: Bartholmé & Melwar, (2009), p. 164

Fig. 1: Sensory Identity

### 4. AUDITORY

Music lovers are aware that sound can be incredibly powerful in creating emotional connections and triggering memories. The ping of Intel, growl of Harley Davidson engine, the tune of Britannia, jingle of blackberry (we are blackberry boys), etc. The companies are trying to make a strong relationship between their customers and brand through its sound identity so that the particular sound remains in the customer’s mind and whenever the customer comes across that sound he/she is able to associate that sound to the particular brand. Additional studies approve a direct connection between the type of music played and the overall satisfaction (Morrison, Gan, Dubelaar, & Oppewal, 2011). Eg: Sunburn concerts and various other concerts happening all around the world. The anatomy and connectivity of the auditory system is very complex with multiple stages of processing, which involves complex interactions between inputs and existing memory and experiences as well as with other sensory systems. Music helps influence mood and it has been proven to affect the shopping pace and the actual time spent in the store. The use of English in advertising has come to suggest a social stereotype that symbolizes modernity, sophistication, progress and a cosmopolitan identity (Krishna, 2011).

## 5. VISUAL

The first and foremost is sight when it comes to identifying a brand (logo) so it dominates over the other four and it is the most seductive sense of all. Vision is the sense that helps us to know what is where and these functions in the brain are called the ventral pathway (what) and dorsal pathway (where). The brain processes visual features such as colour, orientation, motion texture and stereoscopic depth (perception of depth and 3-D structure obtained on the basis of visual information deriving from two eyes). Sight is the most relied upon and important sense for most humans and often drives a first impression. "Vision is all about light. As early as the fifth century BC the Greeks recognized the link between the eye and the objects seen. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Aristotle rejected the idea that a visual fire emanated from the eye, reasoning that is vision were produced by fire in the eye, we would see in the dark. The difference between our day and night vision is that our night vision is colour-blind" (Martin Lindstrom, 2005).

A recent Turkish survey found 84.7 % of consumers say colour is the primary reason they buy a product. And while that makes sense when shopping for clothes or cars, colour often triggers subconscious spending decisions, too. The survey articulates the purchasing decision is made within 90 seconds of seeing a product and that 62 to 90 % of the judgment made is influenced by colour alone rather than other variables such as price, quality and texture. Colours can affect the spending habits.

## 6. OLFACTORY

Studies on olfactory show that odours can be used as an asset to change consumer's mood, by making them feel more comfortable and relaxed (Solomon, 2009, p. 9- 11). Relating back to Proustian effect, it's named after the Marcel Proust, the brilliant author who wrote novel and essays way back in 1900s and he is often considered as the father of modern novel and he was the first one to state that our smell is linked to our memory. A study states that school children show a better performance when exposed to a positive scent. Singapore Airlines in 1990 took a step forward in creating a multidimensional brand experience by having its own patented scent created (by Stefan Florida Waters) for the cabin crew, employees and infused it in the hot towels given to the travellers. In 1991 the company made a profit of \$153 million which was higher than the previous year. Martin Lindstrom reports that the scent is now seen by travellers as distinctly Asian and feminine, and remind travellers of smooth comfortable journeys, reflecting the effectiveness of this sensory branding ploy. British Airways have also come out with a new scent. It's not only the airline industry that uses scent but also the Hotels (Peninsula Hotel Group). Scent enhances the product distinctiveness, which helps customers remember it down the line. It's believed that scent could bring a powerful impact on consumers' behaviour. It can contribute

a favourable perception of the services (Chebat & Michon, 2003). The smell sense is closely related to our emotional life and the scents can have a strong impact on our emotions and that's because olfactory nerve goes straight in to the limbic system (where emotions reside) and especially close to amygdala. So, it has direct connection to the emotions. On an average a human being can remember more than 10,000 scents and the sensitivity of a scent experienced in the past is enough to associate with earlier memories. Scents can add to sensory experiences that create long lasting memory pictures in the customer's intellect and build awareness and create an image of a brand both short term and long term. The \$35 billion fragrance market is growing fastest in the BRICs. Celebrity fragrances have proved to be successful at attracting new and younger customers.

## 7. GUSTATORY

The sensation of taste like all sensations resides in the brain and Humans detect taste with taste receptor cells. The five primary taste sensations are salty, sour, sweet, bitter and umami (savory flavour-found in mushrooms, soya sauce, sea foods, etc.). The food industry is highly mastered and exploited to adapt to regional preferences. The oral sense and somatosensory are closely related. Studies show that there is a direct connection between perceived food quality and consumers intentions on becoming regulars. It is important that restaurants make it very clear what consumers can expect. Because if consumers have different dining motivations, it is most likely that they assess the experience differently, this finally might lead to dissatisfaction (Jin, Lee, & Huffman, 2012, p. 545). Another study explains that all consumers have particular favourite meals, and that they tend to link them with fine memories from the past, meaning that if restaurants start serving these dishes they automatically becomes a part of these personal evocative memories (Baker, Karrer, & Veeck, 2005). Singapore Airlines are also known for their special flavor food like chicken rice that gives a taste of Asian food.

## 8. TACTILE

Feel/touch of a product is the major drive for its sales. Apparel industry drives on this fact. Many people don't prefer online shopping (apparels) is because of one major reason and that they cannot feel/touch the fabric. Psychology research has shown that after consumers have felt a product, they experience a small sense of ownership, making them more likely to buy it (Brick & Mortar, 2007). Amazon gained reputation in online shopping because they cater to books only and that does not require feeling the product. The feeling of the smooth, silky surface of an ad in a magazine, no doubt, generates an emotional bond with the advertised brand. Some disagree that our growing thirst for extreme flavour is being determined by an aging population who are looking for taste sensations to pep up taste buds and olfactory nerves. Taste thresholds continue to get bigger, particularly in the food and beverage category, where previously intense (sour, spicy,

bitter) or exotic flavours have been agree to by the mainstream. U.S. spice company McCormick has reported a 70% increase in sales of its extra-hot chipotle pepper since its commencing five years ago. Transmission of information from the receptors passes via sensory nerves through tracts in the spinal cord and in to the brain (Baars & Gage, 2010).

**9. THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING**

	Transaction marketing	Relationship marketing	Sensory marketing
Marketing	Goods logic Exchange perspective Transaction marketing	Service logic Relationship perspective Relationship marketing	Experiential logic Brand perspective Sensory marketing
Strategic marketing	Product focus Customer acquisition Transactional strategics	Customer focus Customer retention Relational strategics	Multi-sensory focus Customer treatment Sensational strategics
Tactical marketing	Persuasion and promotion One-way communication Production technology	Interaction and interplay Two-way communication Information technology	Dialogues and on-line interactivity Multi-sensory communication Digital technology

Source: Hulten (2011).

**Fig. 2: From transaction and relationship to sensory marketing.**

Martin Lindstrom highlights the different approaches to branding

**USP** (Unique selling proposition) – where no two products are alike

**ESP** (Emotional selling proposition) – where products were perceived as different primarily because of an emotional attachment

**OSP** (Organizational selling proposition) – where the organization or corporation behind the brand in fact become the brand

**BSP** (Brand selling proposition) – where the brand was stronger than the physical dimension of the product

**MSP** (Me selling proposition) – which saw consumers taking ownership of their brands

The future of branding will be

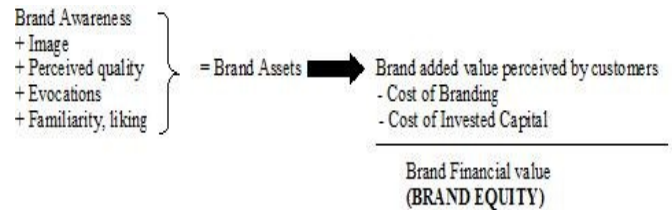
**HSP** (Holistic selling proposition) – which not only anchor themselves in tradition but also adopt characteristics of religious sensory experience to leverage the concept of sensory branding as a holistic way of spreading the news

**10. BRAND EQUITY**

Brand equity is a key marketing asset (Ambler 2003; Davis 2000), which can engender a unique and welcomed relationship differentiating the bonds between the firm and its stakeholders (Capron and Hulland 1999; Hunt and Morgan 1995) and nurturing long term buying behavior. Financial measures such as sales and profit provide only partial indicators of marketing performance due to their historical orientation and typically short term horizon (Mizik and Jacobson 2008). Understanding the dimensions of brand equity, then investing to grow this intangible asset raises competitive barriers and drives brand wealth (Yoo, Donthu and Lee 2000). For firms, growing brand equity is a key objective achieved through gaining more favorable

associations and feelings amongst target consumers (Falkenberg 1996).

**11. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF BRAND ANALYSIS, ACCORDING TO KAPFERER (1997), IS SUMMARIZED BELOW**



Source: Kapferer 1997, p. 37

**Fig. 3: Brand Assets to Brand Equity**

**12. MULTI SENSORY PERCEPTION**

At various “touchpoints” with consumers, brands provide multi-sensory stimulations through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. When consumers are engaged with a brand in an object-centered way, they pick up the multi-sensory stimuli of a brand (its brand characters, logo, verbal or auditory slogan) as presented in a store or on print, TV or banner. Sensory cues within an environment can affect a brand; for instance, ambient scents can improve brand memory (Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). Research has just begun to explore “cross-modal correspondences” for example, how auditory cues while biting potato chips can affect the perception of staleness or crispiness of a potato chip (Zampini & Spence, 2004). Psychophysicists have demonstrated that a person's memory for sensory attributes (e.g., depth of a colour, intensity of light,) decays very rapidly (Algom & Cain, 1991; Hubbard, 1994). However, when consumers are provided with a method to encode the sensory attribute meaningfully (e.g., Tiffany Blue, Coca Cola Red), memory for a sensory attributes improves drastically (Shapiro & Spence, 2002).

**13. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of sensory branding is to provide a systematic integration of the senses. Lindstrom (2005) mentioned that if the consumer’s senses are more involved, it more strongly connect with the brand which means that it can increase the willingness to pay more. Sensory interplay gives the consumer a deeper holistic sensory experience (Hultén, Broweus, & Dijk, 2009, p. 37). Consumers have become visually sophisticated and consciously selective, creating new challenges in branding. Goods or services, not only in a physical or functional sense, but also in an emotional sense, should conform to an individual’s personal and social-life context (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2000). This will stimulate and intensify the bond between the brand and consumer. Brands that lack sensory appeal fail to connect with human extensions in to the product or services. The main reason

behind creating a brand based on sensory appeal is because they are memorable, unique, instantaneous and support human-centered design. Sensory branding is not about the masses or the segment, it is about the individual. An advertising experience is not the same as sensory experience for the individual. It is necessary for firms to come closer to the five human senses to allow a sensory marketing approach to become more profitable and successful.

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