The Sensory Stimuli Model; Engage with the Consumer Senses for Brand Distinguishes

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Abstract: Most of the models that are presented in the area of marketing and branding in particular, show that there is qualitative and quantitative relationships that always have been used in marketing studies. This article presents a model of Stimulate consumer senses for remembering and distinguishing in choice brand that integrates empirical studies and individual constructs (such as consumer senses, sensory stimuli, brand categorization, brand affect) into a comprehensive framework. The model distinguishes five levels of consumer engagement (senses stimuli, consumer senses, consumer memory, object centered, and five processes of brand). Pertinent psychological constructs and empirical findings are presented for the constructs within each process.

Keywords: Sensory Stimuli, Consumer's Senses, Distinguish Brand.

Introduction

During the last decade human senses have received more and more attention, emphasizing their meaning for consumers’ experience and behavior (Hulten, 2011). Explained by Brakus et al (2009) the purpose of using the human senses in marketing is to provide consumers with excitement, satisfaction and pleasure, where the sensory experience is on focus. Each of the five senses -smell, sound, sight, taste and touch- and all the senses together, also form the foundation of what is called the “Sensory experience”. A sensory experience is the result of the reactions of the senses to different elements or triggers in marketing, called stimuli. The human senses are of vital importance to our experience of our existence, and without the senses no impression could be formed. It would not be possible to understand, feel, learn or think without senses. They give invaluable information about different objects through smell, sound, sight, taste and touch. The five human senses are of crucial importance for an individual’s experience of different purchase and consumption processes. It is through the senses that every individual becomes conscious of firms, products and “brands”. Because of this, further knowledge about the human senses might make a firm’s marketing more successful and an individual’s experience more pleasure. Academic research and Empirical studies has shown that different sensory impressions impact consumer behavior 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). The sense of sound is linked to emotions and feelings and this sense impacts brand experiences and interpretations about it. Impressions of smell have been discussed by Goldkuhl and Styfven (2007). The sense of touch is the tactile one, related to information and feelings about a product through physical and psychological interactions. Pay Attention to brand
by stimulating the human senses, become to one of the most important issues in recent marketing. Branding is an effective differentiation strategy that enables an state of identification for the product, the firm, and the consumer. Understanding that brands constitute a form of identity suggests brands hold more than the functional value of the product. Thus Building strong brands is a management priority (Kapfere, 2008). To build a strong brand, the right knowledge structures must exist of the minds of actual or prospective customers so that they respond positively to marketing activities and programs in these different ways (Keller, 2009). Brands are one of the most important tools in today’s global business. They have a value of nearly one third of the world’s wealth. Five senses play key role at human life and according to ever-growing increase of brands, therefore more applications of senses for establishing brand has gained great importance. Because the lack of a general framework on the consumer senses, Emotions and psychology of brands, we do not know how to answer empirical questions that would enrich our understanding of brands, significantly beyond what we know already. Indeed, many important conceptual ideas were proposed first, or developed significantly, in such brand equity (Keller, 1993); and brand architecture (Aaker, 1996) writings. Most of these models, however, do not take a consumer senses, Emotions and psychology angle. This article presents a consumer-psychology model of brands that integrates empirical studies and individual constructs (such as consumer senses, sensory stimuli, brand categorization, brand affect) into a comprehensive framework.

**Model Codification**

The sensory memory allows us to store received information through the senses for a very brief period of time. Provided information captures the person’s attention – a strange sound, a pleasant smell, a smooth texture, a different color or a tasty gift – it will be retained for further processing and transferred to short-term and subsequently to long-term memory. Brand information conveyed frequently through multi-sensory stimulation. The model presented here account for these essential characteristics of brands. The structure of the model also reflects this understanding that consumers have different levels of psychological engagement with brands.

These levels of engagement are represented in model by five layers. These layers (from outside to inside) are: The outer layer represents senses stimuli. The second layer represents consumer senses that Contains: sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch. The middle layer represents consumer memory that Contains: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory. The Fourth layer represents object centered, functionally-driven engagement; that is, the consumer acquires information about the brand with the goal of receiving utilitarian benefits from the brand that Contains: Brand categorization, Multi-sensory perception, Brand concept, Brands as informational cues, Brand attitude. The innermost layer represents the model distinguishes regarding five brand-related processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signaling and connecting with the brand.
Sensory stimuli engage with consumer senses: It is obvious that consumers as shoppers experience brands, products and service scopes through vision, sound, smell, touch and taste, which highlights the significance of sensory cues and stimuli. It has been suggested that the use of subconscious sensory triggers in sensory marketing might be an efficient way to engage consumers and influence their behavior and perceptions (Krishna, 2011). Sensory stimuli engage Process with consumer senses, is such an important issues that should be more considered.

Visual stimuli engage with the sense of sight: Researches has documented that visual stimuli impact on consumer behavior when it comes to judgments and purchase decisions related to product choice, purchase quantity or consumption (Krishna, 2011). Brand logos, colors, graphics, names, packages and product design are examples of visual stimuli that could be part of any branding strategy. Moreover, it has been shown that visual stimuli are more important in the absence of verbal material about a product. The reason is that the stimuli provide a quality perception, creating strong associations with a brand, and the use of graphic information might make it easier to create attention around a product. This is especially so in a competitive clutter, where a positive influence on consumer judgment and purchase decision might result in a possible purchase decision. Studies have also confirmed that consumers may be either positively or negatively affected by visual stimuli without having access to other information. The use of graphics can enhance an aesthetic response to a certain product and visual stimuli may create an emotional response, besides drawing attention. A common opinion is also that cognitive as well as non-cognitive reactions are based on visual stimuli, such as product design in relation to aesthetics. It is also evident that a human’s product preference is based upon product design, that is, form or layout, instead of its functionality or brand name. Moreover, the form of a product creates an effective response, but the quality is related to cognitive evaluation. Altogether, design as visual sensory stimuli, might influence shopper approach and touch behavior at the point-of-purchase. In addition, studies have confirmed the significant effects of color on individual affective and cognitive evaluations of products and store environments. Color has been emphasized as an important visual stimulus and it is through color that the sense of sight allows us to detect a store environment. In making a color more intense or through the contrast of colors, it becomes possible for an object or a product to be more conspicuous among other sensory distractions.

Auditory stimuli engage with the sense of hearing: Most theories of music and emotion have focused on the representational features of music that enable listeners to perceive emotions. However, perception of emotions is primarily a sensory or cognitive process that does not necessarily say anything about what the listener himself or herself is feeling, since perception of emotions may well proceed without any emotional involvement (Gabrielsson, 2002). Hence, induction of emotions must be studied in its own right. Several studies have suggested that the most common goal of musical experiences is to influence emotions: People use music to change emotions, to release emotions, to match their current emotion, to enjoy or comfort them, and to relieve stress (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Different kinds of sensory expressions (jingles, voices, music, atmosphere theme and advertency, sound brand and signature sound) can all facilitate a sound experience and can be applied consistently throughout a firm’s sensory marketing, so as to achieve differentiation. The human sense of sound is second to be developed of our senses (Gallace and Spence, 2010) and is vital for communication and learning and is the only sense that can provide us with warning signals from all positive directions. The frequency of the human hearing is tremendous, with a range of more than nine octaves, topping the otherwise remarkable range of vision. Being so sensitive and being able to pick up such a range of frequency, the ear is a remarkable psychological mechanism where the sense of sound cannot be shut off and instead humans are living in symbiosis with the sounds around them. Sound helps to generate mood by creating feelings and emotions. It has “an immediate and, to a large extent, cognitively unmediated effect on recall and emotions” and can thus be used as a trigger for creating desired reactions when building an emotional attachment to a brand. Together with sight, sound is used as the traditional element in brand-building process. The combination of these is referred to as audiovisual branding and it is the ground of marketing efforts for most of the companies today.

Tactile stimuli engage with the sense of touch: A general opinion in the literature is that consumers gather information about products by touching them. Studies have also shown that people have different needs for touch and that the effects vary between individuals. It has also been shown that those store environments that allow consumers to physically inspect products by picking them up and touching them are preferred. Therefore, allowing shoppers to interact and touch the products should be a competitive advantage for retailers (Grohmann et al., 2007). Consumers have a need to physically interact with products (Citrin et al., 2003), where touching have been found to have a positive impact on customer attitudes as well as intentions to purchase a product. Grohmann et al (2007) emphasizes that tactile input will have a positive impact on the consumer response as well as their perception of product quality. The sense of touch has further been identified to have an influence on customers’ impulse purchasing where the encouragement to physically interact with a product have been proven to be effective in regards to number of purchased products. The need to touch a product will vary from one individual to another where some will be satisfied with touching a product while placing it in their shopping
carts, others will need more time to use their hands to better explore a product before making the decision to purchase it. People with a high need to touch are more likely to be positively impacted by marketing that incorporates touch.

**Olfactory stimuli engage with the sense of smell:** Smells are useful as a marketing tool as they are so closely linked to our memory which in turn connects to emotions. Branding plays on emotions at large. Scent marketing can be used to sell all types of products and services and help enhance experiences and associations in all kind of contexts. Some areas of use are more conventional than others, but with some imagination the areas of use are almost unlimited. Smell 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. A scent is persistent, long-lasting and will still be familiar even a long time after experience. As mentioned previously, odor preferences are learned and impact our hedonic perception by a process of associative learning. This is a phenomenon by which individuals associate an odor to an emotion, due to their prior exposure to this scent, their past experience. The impact of smells on customer’s behavior has been widely certified. First, searches proved the positive impact of a smell on the evaluation of a product. It is difficult in the way that perception of smells is different from a person to another, and there are plenty individuals variants that markers have to take in account.

**Taste stimuli engage with the sense of taste:** Taste sensations have an important role in human lives, on a physical, survival, social and even emotional level. Eating and drinking are associated to happiness and positive memories, which stress that taste aspects should not be neglected by marketers. Moreover, adding taste or offering food or drink in a store increases the value and the perceived benefits by customers, which differentiate the brand positively in their mind. In this extend, gustative marketing is a fruitful area which is promptly growing. The brand name plays an important role in the taste preferences. This illustrates the fact that when a brand is known and learned, people tend to have preferences, although without knowing the brand they would find any difference. To strengthen the perception of a brand all the senses should ultimately be included, but there are 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 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 cafes and restaurants within a store, which create a pleasant atmosphere around the brand resulting in the consumers feeling more relaxed.

**Consumer memory**

To fully understand human behavior, it is important to create knowledge about the human. Research on consumer psychology has demonstrated how sensory stimuli and cues are evaluated and guided by our perceptions which are linked to previous experiences. Through the sensory organs, individuals collect information in an active process that is coordinated to form a perceptual pattern which is stored in the memory. It is commonly accepted that our memory consists of three components: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory.

**Sensory memory:** Our memory are consistent of many different processes, where one of them is our sensorial memory, which becomes activated when our sensory organs receives knowledge through stimuli. The sensory memory is usually exposed to stimuli that only last for a couple of milliseconds. Our experiences are throughout life registered in our memory, meaning that previous experiences that have ended up in our sensory memory can be of tremendous meaning for future experiences and how we will react and respond to them.

**Short-term memory:** In comparison with our sensory memory, which only holds information for a very brief time, our short-term memory can hold information somewhat longer. Instead of a millisecond to a second this memory has the capacity to hold a memory for seconds up to minutes. It is well established and agreed upon that our short-term memory has the primary task of a temporary storage for information. Once the information has been treated by the sensory memory, information of interest is picked and forwarded to our short-term memory. This memory is also referred to as our working memory that allows us to remember newly received information at the same time as we perform other tasks. Our short-term memory can also be viewed as an explicit memory, meaning that it is a process where we consciously can get stored information from our memory.

**Long-term memory:** Besides having a sensory and short-term memory, humans also have a long-term memory. Just as the name indicates, the long-term memory allows us humans to remember information for a longer period of time, which can include a couple of hours or days but also up till several years. Thanks to our long-term memory, we can remember things that happened last week, but we can also remember specific events that occurred during our childhood. It is explained by Bear et al (2001) that not all information or memories end up in our long-term memory, where we sift through the information and might exclude information like what we had to dinner last week.
Distinguish brand

Contemporary consumers seek new consumption experiences in their everyday lives and the consumption process has been affected by the constant need for novelty, imagery, emotion and fun. This relation is dynamic and formed by physical and psychological and sensorial elements of the product and the signs of brand identity (Kapferer, 2008). It is clear that these cognitive and emotional needs can only be fulfilled if brand personality is built congruently on sensorial strategies that generate unique and unforgettable multi-sensory brand-experiences. In model developed in this study, the innermost layer represents object centered, functionally-driven engagement; that is, the consumer acquires information about the brand with the goal of receiving utilitarian benefits from the brand. Most importantly in outer layer, the model distinguishes five brand-related processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signaling and connecting with the brand. As part of identifying, a consumer identifies the brand and its category, forms associations, and compares the relations between brands. Experiencing refers to sensory, affective and participatory experiences that a consumer has with a brand. Integrating means combining brand information into an overall brand concept, personality and relationship with the brand. Signifying refers to using the brand as an informational cue, identity signal and cultural symbol. Finally, connecting with the brand includes forming an attitude toward the brand, becoming personally attached to it and connecting with the brand in a brand community.

Identifying: The process of identifying refers to searching for, being exposed to and collecting information about the brand, its category and related brands. Depending on a consumer's level of psychological engagement, the identification process concerns primarily categorization, associations with the brand, or interbrand relations.

Brand categorization: When consumers engage with a brand in an object-centered way, they are mostly concerned with the brand, its product category and how the two are related. The primary task is linking a brand (its name and logo) to a product category, or, for corporate brands, industry category. Stimulus or memory-based categorization is a prerequisite for pursuing a brand-related goal; that is, a consumer must know at least the name and category to purchase a brand. At times, this may be enough: awareness of the link between a brand and its category may directly lead to choice. Depending on the stimulus type, the categorization of a brand to a category may be established verbally (e.g., Kellogg's Corn Flakes) or visually through physical proximity (the brand name appears on the product packaging or web site), through temporal proximity (the name appears soon after a product shot in an ad), or through design. There can be dilution effects, for example, when the distinction between brand names is blurred through similarity of the name or logo of a new brand to an existing brand. Brand awareness is an important memory-based categorization task in which a consumer recalls a specific brand name when presented with the category. Memory depends on retrieval cues. Retrieval cues may be self-generated or externally-generated. Two key retrieval cues that have been extensively studied are the product category and other brands. In addition, recall and recognition of a brand may be enhanced by linguistic characteristics and retrieval cues in communications and through lexical relations between the ad copy and brand name.

Experiencing: The experiencing process includes sensory perceptions of the brand, brand affect, and the participatory experiences that a consumer may seek with a brand. Research has conceptualized experiences as multi-dimensional, including sensory, affective-cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Brakus et al., 2009).

Multi-sensory perception: At various contact points (or “touch points”) 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, functional way, they pick up the multi-sensory stimuli of a brand (its logo, brand characters, verbal or auditory slogan) as presented in a store or on TV, in print or banner ads rather mindlessly. At times, one sensory modality may dominate (think of paint, surround sound systems, fragrances, massage services, and ice cream brands). In perceiving most brands, however, more than one sense is involved: think of the roles that sight, sound, and touch play in evaluating a car brand. At consumption, many brands involve all five senses. Moreover, sensory cues within an environment can affect a brand; for instance, ambient scents can improve brand memory. Although the human perceptual apparatus results in multi-sensory perceptions, most research in psychology and consumer psychology has been on the study of individual senses. Research has just begun to explore “cross-modal correspondences”-for example, how auditory cues while biting potato chips can affect the perception of crispiness or staleness of a potato chip. Psychophysicists have demonstrated that a person's memory for sensory attributes (e.g., intensity of light, depth of a color) decays very rapidly. However, when consumers are provided with a method to encode the sensory attribute meaningfully (e.g., Coca Cola Red, Tiffany Blue), memory for a sensory attributes improves drastically. Finally, there are also implicit sensory effects in the verbal information presented about brands. Consumers can use sound symbolism to infer product attributes and evaluate brands.

Integrating: During the integration process, consumers combine brand information and summarize it in an overall brand concept, personality or relationship with the brand.

Brand concept: Brand concept is a psychological construct consisting of the integrated information associated with a product brand or corporate brand. Brand concepts facilitate functionally-driven goal pursuit. The integrated information is usually stored in the form of a superordinate concept (e.g., as a “quality,”
“innovative,” or “lifestyle” brand). The overall brand concept (or “image,” or “core”) has been considered an integral component of brand equity and has been widely employed in management-focused writings. The information integration that results in a brand concept may be the outcome of some sort of cognitive algebra that, following Anderson's information integration theory, weights the brand-related information acquired and stored in memory. Also, certain information, particularly the information resulting from multi-sensory perceptions, may be more or less salient which affects its incorporation into the brand concept. Finally, the information may be overall more or less well integrated. One methodology to elicit brand concepts from consumers is to create “Brand Concept Maps”. The methodology allows researchers to determine how important brand associations are, whether they are direct or indirect associations, and how interconnected they are within a brand concept.

**Signifying:** Semiotic ally, brands may be viewed as signifiers that transfer meaning. Depending on the consumer's engagement, a brand may act as an informational cue, personal identity signal or cultural symbol. Signifying may occur heuristically, without the need for extensive processing.

**Brands as informational cues:** The accumulated information and knowledge about a brand can be used in a functional–rational way as informational cues. Price and quality of a brand are the most widely used types of informational signals, signifying that a brand is a value, premium or luxury brand. In a competitive marketplace, brands can be used by firms to inform consumers about product positions in the marketplace (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Brands can do so especially well when the signal that they convey is clear and consistent, and, most importantly, credible (that is, truthful and dependable).

**Connecting**

Finally, the model distinguishes three psychological constructs to indicate various ways of connecting with a brand that differ in strength and affect the consumer's interaction with a brand: brand attitude (resulting from object-centered engagements with brands), brand attachment (resulting from self-centered engagements), and brand community (resulting from interpersonal and socio-cultural engagements).

**Brand attitude:** Brand attitudes are psychological tendencies to evaluate objects along a degree of favor or liking. Attitudes toward brands, or ads, have been central constructs in consumer psychology for a long time. Recently, following dual-processing theories in psychology, a distinction has been drawn between implicit and explicit attitudes (Gawronski and Bodenhausen, 2006). The basis of implicit attitudes is seen in associative processes that are activated automatically with little cognitive capacity or explicit intention to evaluate an object. For brands, they may be the result of a classical conditioning process, e.g., by pairing sensory images with brands (Grossman and Till, 1998). Explicit attitudes, in contrast, are evaluative judgments that are derived through a reflective system and the resulting propositions are subject to syllogistic inferences that assess their validity. Positive attitudes express a relatively weak connection with a brand. They are generalized dispositions to behave toward a brand, and they may lead to simple preference and purchase intention. But attitudes are often not stable over time, and the attitude–behavior link is weak and subject to numerous moderator effects.

**Conclusion**

Human senses are an incredible information collection system. Through them, we create and recreate images and, based on that information, intuitively and instantaneously process sensory information to make imminent decisions. Consumers review and evaluate each piece of information (i.e. company, product and ads) through the stages of exposure, attention, and comprehension, arriving at a final judgment: purchase intention. A stimulus is detected in sensory registers and transmitted to short-term memory, where it is attended to and comprehended through the process of encoding, storage, and retrieval from long-term memory. In this perspective, it is important not only to understand the role of senses in information processing but also to develop new consumer decision making models based on the senses or emotion-based models. The understanding of how our senses work is especially important in branding. Making a sensory, emotional, and rational connection with consumers can stimulate their senses and appeal to them, thereby rendering marketing plans far more effective. Five senses help us understand the world through recall of the resident information stored in our memories. Therefore, sensory systems play an important role in encoding, retrieving, and reconstructing information. Such information is useful for firms to develop marketing plans germane to sensory appeals in brand communications. The past literature brand effectiveness has investigated, in addition to sensory appeals, luxury products, and product type as potential factors affecting purchasing behavior. In light of these findings, the research presented here explores the mechanism in which sensory appeal affects brand attitude by employing senses stimuli engage with the senses and brand to develop a sensory branding model. Results of this study to develop a new model, in the field of marketing and especially sensory marketing, could be considered by marketers.
Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest

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