

# The power of sensory marketing in advertising

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This article discusses the role of sensory marketing in driving advertisement effectiveness. First focusing on vision, we discuss the effect of mental simulation and mental imagery evoked by ad visuals on ad effectiveness. Second, we review findings on gustation, zooming in on the effect of multi-sensory stimulation on taste perceptions. Third, we elaborate on the role of actual and imagined touch in shaping consumer evaluations and behaviors. Fourth, we discuss olfaction as a driver of ad recall and responses to ads. Finally, we review the role of auditory sense in advertising, focusing on the effect of music on consumers' memory for and evaluations of ads. Directions for future research in the domain of sensory marketing and product advertising are discussed.

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In the last few decades, marketing has changed drastically, evolving from unidirectional communications from companies to consumers, into dialogs between companies and consumers. Today, marketing communication is characterized by multidimensional conversations with products finding their own voices and consumers responding viscerally and subconsciously to them (Krishna, in [1]). Attention to how to reach consumers through the five senses has consequently been growing exponentially, in the corporate world as well as in academia. Sensory marketing can be defined as ‘marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior. 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)’ ([2], p. 332). Krishna and Schwarz [3<sup>••</sup>] place sensory marketing within a broader framework and show its relationship to embodied cognition — another emerging

field highlighting the idea that feeling guides thinking (or that sensory perception affects cognition).

In this review, we will focus on how sensory marketing can influence advertisement (ad) design and effectiveness. We begin by discussing ad visuals and the role of mental simulation and imagery. We then focus on how to activate sensory stimulation via ad copy. We next describe the interrelation of ads with the other senses: haptics, smell, and hearing. We conclude with ideas for future research.

## Visuals and imagery in advertising

Visual aesthetics have long been recognized as key determinants of ad effectiveness [4–10]. In this review, we focus on how ad visuals can lead to spontaneous generation of imagery in the viewer’s mind with stimulus orientation [11] and perceived movement [12<sup>••</sup>] affecting the amount and the type of imagery generated. The content of these images, in addition to how the images are formed, plays a large role in affecting evaluations toward the ad and the product.

## Stimulus orientation and mental simulation

Can the position of a product in an ad (e.g. to the right or to the left) affect how the viewer imagines using the product? Elder and Krishna [11] demonstrated that changing a product’s visual depiction leads viewers to imagine interacting with that product and can thereby increase purchase intention. Specifically, they showed that a match between handedness and product orientation (e.g. a right-handed person views a picture of a bowl of soup with a spoon on the right; see [Figure 1](#)), vs. a mismatch (e.g. a right-handed person sees a picture of a bowl of soup with a spoon on the left), increases the mental simulation of product interaction. In other words, a match between handedness and object orientation facilitates the mental simulation of interacting with the object. Enhanced mental simulation, in turn, increases purchase intentions. However, when the product appears unappealing, a match between product orientation and handedness enhances the simulation of a negative experience, consequently decreasing purchase intentions. [Figure 2](#) shows the effects of an enhanced mental simulation (match) on purchase intentions using an appealing product (soup with asiago cheese) and an unappealing product (soup with cottage cheese). Finally, Elder and Krishna [11] have shown that mental simulation requires resources similar to those involved in actual perception — if right-handed subjects are holding a clamp in their right hand, purchase intention does not increase.

Figure 1



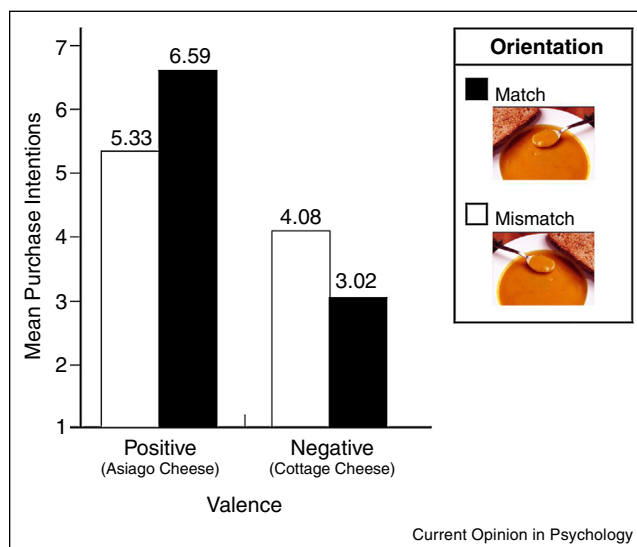
Two different ads used in Elder and Krishna [11] (p. 1001).

### Dynamic imagery

In addition to product orientation, another visual characteristic able to evoke an automatic imagery response is perceived movement [7,12<sup>••</sup>]. For example, imagine being in a museum and seeing a painting evoking a great

sense of dynamism and movement. In a marketing context, we can find similar examples when observing logos and pictures in ads. What, then, are the consequences of this perceived movement? Cian *et al.* [12<sup>••</sup>] focused their research on the ability of a static visual to convey movement without actually moving (what they called 'dynamic imagery'). They showed that dynamic imagery allows for images within the mind to continue in motion, creating a higher engagement for the viewer. For instance, in one of their studies, they created two versions of an ad for a fictitious brand, EE Watches. The only difference between the two ads was the dynamic imagery evoked by the logo (lower vs. higher dynamism, see Figure 3). In this study, Cian, Krishna, and Elder used an eye tracker to measure engagement (testing for gaze duration and number of fixations) and found that the more dynamic logo leads participants to spend more time gazing at the ad. Higher engagement with the ad led, in turn, to more favorable attitudes toward the brand.

Figure 2



Effects of an enhanced mental simulation (match) on purchase intentions using an appealing (positive valence) and unappealing (negative valence) product; Elder and Krishna [11], p. 997. Note that images are for a right-handed participant; match and mismatch would be reversed for a left-handed participant.

### Advertising copy, sensory stimulation, and perceived taste

Ad copy has a fundamental role in completing and expanding the message conveyed by the visual [13]. In ad copy, the message is usually simple and brief [14], often focused on one sensation or sense. When advertising food, for example, most companies use ads focused only on the taste of the food. Elder and Krishna [6] showed, however, that an ad results in better taste perception by mentioning multiple sensations rather than taste alone. Because multiple senses (sight, smell, texture, and sound) together generate taste [15<sup>••</sup>,16], ads that

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