

Research Review

An integrative review of sensory marketing: Engaging the senses to affect perception, judgment and behavior[☆]

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Abstract

I define “sensory marketing” 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). Given the gamut of explicit marketing appeals made to consumers every day, subconscious triggers which appeal to the basic senses may be a more efficient way to engage consumers. Also, these sensory triggers may result in consumers' self-generation of (desirable) brand attributes, rather than those verbally provided by the advertiser. 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. It is quite apparent from the review that there still remains tremendous need for research within the domain of sensory marketing—research that can be very impactful.

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Keywords: Sensory marketing; Smell; Taste; Touch; Grounded cognition; Embodied cognition

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Sensory marketing as applied sensory perception: a review

Hershey's milk chocolate can be presented in a plain slab or as a Hershey's Kiss—the two are identical in formula but have very different personalities (see Fig. 1 below). The Kiss is unfurled using its “flag” akin to a present, it feels like a tear-drop melting on the tongue, the individual wrapping of small pieces allows one to have several treats without guilt, the name makes one feel like one is being kissed—all in all, a

very indulgent experience; the slab is simple—basic chocolate made by a reputable company.

In Krishna (2010: 2), I define sensory marketing as “marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their behaviors.” This could even be broadened so that *sensory marketing implies “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 define consumer perceptions of abstract notions of the product (e.g., its sophistication, quality, elegance, innovativeness, modernity, interactivity)—the brand’s personality. It can also be used to affect the perceived quality of an abstract attribute like its color, taste, smell, or shape.

From a research perspective, *sensory marketing implies an understanding of sensation and perception as it applies to consumer behavior.* Why does a Hershey's Kiss feel like a present—is it because one “unwraps” it? Does a hidden object have more mysterious appeal? What haptic interactions lead to perceive better taste? How is the feeling of greater indulgence created? What is the interaction between sensory satiety and guilt?

The arena of sensory marketing offers many questions to explore for managers and for researchers. According to Peck and



Fig. 1. Hershey's — two different sensory experiences.

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