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How Taste and Sight Impact Brand Loyalty in Sensory Marketing

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How Taste and Sight Impact Brand Loyalty in Sensory Marketing:

INTRODUCTION:

An argument can be made that marketing is easily one of the most important deciding factors for consumers to purchase food products. With both the various and copious amounts of companies contending for the loyalty of an exponentially growing population of consumers, it is important for food companies to understand what draws people to their products. A large amount of research has been conducted into the effectiveness of different marketing techniques (Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen, 2014). With food marketing, it is not merely enough for companies to sway consumers to purchase their food products by solely spouting out marketing jargon. Rather, studies have shown that consumers actually prefer to be able to see that the foods that companies are trying to sell can actually deliver on their respective product promises (De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck, 2013). Therefore, it behooves marketers to find solutions that actively engage consumers in the food selection process. Sensory marketing is a relatively new discipline of marketing that embodies the idea of activating some if not all of the five senses which include sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Triggering these senses can prove to be extremely powerful tools for marketing because they can greatly sway consumers on whether or not they will purchase certain items. Food companies are actively searching for ways to manipulate the senses in order to alter the perceptions of what prospective customers will experience. Within the discipline of sensory marketing, there are a variety of methods that food companies employ to activate the senses. One of the ways food companies use visual stimuli

include altering the outward appearance on packaging like General Mills frequently does to its cereals. Another sensory marketing technique that engages a consumer's sense of sight is by making certain product brands very visible, so that it is the only product that a consumer would consider to purchase as Coca Cola frequently does with its sodas in many convenient stores. Likewise, food companies also attempt to appeal to a customer's sense of smell by using techniques that trigger salivation in consumers. In fact, some food companies use artificial scents to mimic the taste of the food that they sell, causing customers to form associations between the scent and the food product. Sensory marketers also utilize auditory stimuli. Some of these techniques can take on many forms that can range from music to onomatopoeias to catchy slogans. In this way, food companies are able to set themselves apart from other brands. Similarly, food vendors such as Sam's Club and CostCo attempt to appeal to people's sense of taste by allowing people to sample food products in stores form a variety of sample stations before buying them. Some food companies also strive to engage consumers' sense of touch by allowing people to be able to touch their products directly. Some companies have even begun to change the tactile qualities of the materials that the store is made up of when they replace old materials with products such as wood, linoleum, marble, and much more. With the different themes of sensory marketing that many food companies have to choose from, it is interesting to gain insight into the roles that each sense plays in it. This begs the question, which aspects of sensory marketing are the most effective?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

In spite of the emerging studies being conducted on the effectiveness of sensory marketing, the specific aspects of what make it so effective remain relatively unclear. Some sensory marketers believe that one sense dominates over the other four. In contrast, other food

companies acknowledge that while some senses take more precedence in sensory marketing than others, other senses also need to be activated in order to produce a positive and lasting impact on consumers.

Many researchers focus on how sight and touch are useful in sensory marketing. Professor Charlene Davis reveals how many food have established long- lasting brand loyalties within consumers by making their logos more visible to them. Likewise, Moss (2013) discusses the way in which cereal companies alter certain aspects of their logos to be more versatile and accommodate the new, growing preferences of the public. Asioli et al. (2011) describe how consumers of organic products pay a greater degree of attention to the shape of a product than its color. Because the subjects in this study define organic food as having characteristics such as “naturalness,” it is no surprise that that consumers of organic foods look for pictures that are symbolic of nature such as natural phenomena and that vary as plants do in nature. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) also note the connection between sight and touch regarding the importance of marketing for consumers. They discuss how some studies support the idea that the way the body perceives sensory information influences the way that a person will react. For instance, visual cues trump claims made by word- of mouth. The authors cite a study that shows how a picture of a handle on a cup activates bodily engagement by triggering the human response to grasp it. Likewise, a picture of a cake with a fork next to it that is tilted towards the dominant side of the hand elicits the human response to grasp the fork, increasing the likelihood that a person will want to consume the cake. The authors also explain how humans have a proclivity for liking products that have a glossy qualities like water. Cooper (2013) describes how the taste buds are linked to the other four senses. She focuses on sight when she explains how the sensory marketers of Heinz Beans are attempting to include sensory information that mimics what the

brand strives to represent in a specific product. Cooper provides evidence of this idea when she discusses how Heinz Beans Cheddar Cheese is packaged in a yellow, waxy, circular bowl that resembles the traditional shape of a block of cheese.

Paasovaraa, Harri, Terhi, and Sandell (2012) bring forth the idea of self- congruity theory, the belief that consumers have a preference for brands that can be reflected onto a homologous self-representation of themselves. In other words, people seek out brands that have qualities that resonate with certain aspects of themselves. Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen, (2014) discuss how changing the color on the walls affects the possibility that a consumer will purchase a product by triggering a wide range of emotional experiences. The final sensory aspect that the source explains appeals to a consumer's sense of touch. According to the authors, studies have proven that consumers are more likely to purchase goods after touching it. In fact, after a supermarket in Britain, Asda, removed the covering from its food products, sales dramatically increased. Likewise, De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) discuss how visual stimuli takes precedence over verbal cues. Therefore, it is important to the authors that marketers use models to show consumers exactly what the product will look like and the texture that it will have.

Many studies demonstrate the effectiveness of using auditory stimuli to appeal to the sense of hearing in consumers in sensory marketing. Cooper (2013) describes how advertisements for Heinz Beans Curry Flavour experience feature a spoon with a built- in MP3 Player that plays a mini music strip of cultural Punjabi music as it enters the mouth of the actor. In this way, people can associate the music with the flavor of the beans. Likewise, Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) delve deeper into the notion of audio branding when they describe it as a key component in the larger role of store atmospherics. According to the

source, the presence of music can positively augment to a consumer's experience in a store. Slow-tempo, background music has been proven to be more effective at keeping customers in stores longer, increasing the likelihood that they will buy more products. The source also describes that while slow music has been shown to be preferred more by the average customer over music that is quickly paced, young females tend to have a liking for music that is fast-paced.

The final category is constructed based on the roles that smell and taste play in sensory marketing. Logue (1998) discusses how the evolutionary influence of taste impacts the preferences that people have for certain foods. Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) demonstrate how using smell to market food products is being used to link people with different products. In fact, some food companies are beginning to use smell to form connections with consumers to associate their products with specific holidays. According to the authors, around holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day, the smell of chocolate becomes more prevalent in stores. Where Kotler (1974) claims that taste is not a significant tool in store atmospherics, De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) discuss the importance of taste in sensory marketing. Sampling is a common tool used in many markets to give consumers the opportunity to trial unfamiliar foods before purchasing them. The authors also explain the primacy effect in sampling, a phenomenon where people prefer the first of a series of food options. Paasovaraa, Harri, Terhi, and Sandell (2012) discuss how branding can affect the way people perceive certain foods to taste like. Taste is also important for consumers when they purchase products that are "healthy" and claim to be low in fat with fewer amounts of calories. Likewise, Sidali, Obermowe, and Spiller (2013) agree with De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) when they claim that people do not prefer the taste of the low fat versions of

products over the original fat content levels in food items. This work also draws from other studies to explain the value of taste in sensory marketing.

Why Taste and Sight are the Most Valuable Aspects of Sensory Marketing:

There are many opinions regarding which aspects of sensory food marketing are the most important. It can be argued that the most valuable facets of sensory marketing are the techniques that appeal directly to consumers' senses of taste and sight. Taste can influence sight and vice versa. The taste of a food item can conjure up a mental image of what is being eaten. Likewise, the mere sight of a food product can trigger the memory of the way that food tastes like.

Branding is an extremely important marketing tool because it helps consumers form loyalties to specific food companies, decreasing the likelihood that consumers will purchase products from other brands. It has been proven to influence the way people perceive certain foods to taste like. According to De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013), taste is valuable because it helps consumers form loyalty to a brand. Paasovaraa, Harri, Terhi, and Sandell (2012) cite different studies to prove that branding influences the palatability of different products. In a study where identical sets of food were packaged in two different types of wrapping- one unbranded and the other covered in wrapping from McDonalds, higher ratings were shown from those enveloped in packaging from McDonald's. Another instance of this concept is revealed when Coca Cola attempted to outcompete Pepsi in sales by formulating a new flavor of Coca Cola called New Coke. New Coke was rated to be desired more by participants in a taste blind experiment, a study where the brand name of what is being consumed is unknown. However, upon realizing that the drink that they preferred was New Coke, the participants claimed that the original Coca Cola recipe tasted better.

Because the ability for taste to influence brandy loyalty is so strong, it is no wonder why stores feature a series of different samples scattered throughout them to sway consumers to purchase food products from certain brands. Samples provide a way for people to trial specific foods before purchasing them. Sampling can prove to be especially instrumental to sensory marketers in events where consumers are undecided or unfamiliar with certain products.

Kotler (1974) disagrees with the notion that taste should be considered important in regard to store atmospherics within the discipline of sensory marketing. In fact, in his article, he excludes taste from being considered at all for the role that it plays in a consumer's overall sensory experience. He reasons that palatability is insignificant because people can experience sight, smell, touch, and hearing within a store, but they cannot experience taste. It is important to note that Kotler's work was published in 1974, so the food store options available today could be markedly different than the stores that were prevalent over forty years ago. It is possible that there were not as many food items for customers to sample prior to purchasing them. Moreover, there is also a possibility that there were no samples offered to customers from the stores that he selected to write his work on. Therefore, it is understandable that Kotler would assume that people could not utilize taste in a store environment. He weakens his argument when he acknowledges that the presence of certain items within a store can trigger the memory of the way specific food items taste, but continues on the tangent that taste is unimportant.

Taste also takes on an important evolutionary role in the way people rate the flavors of food that claim to be healthier alternatives. Louge (1998) explains how people have preferences for foods that are sweet, salty, and high in fat. People have an innate predilection for foods that are sugary. In fact, in babies that are as young as three days old tend to desire sweet substances over those that are unsweetened. In nature, fruit provided a convenient and fast way for people to

ascertain foods that were high in sugar. Sugar breaks down to form glucose, which provides energy for the body to function. Therefore, humans prefer sweet foods because they pack a lot of energy. Likewise, people also enjoy foods that are salted. Salt is vital for the body to operate suitably. There is a certain amount of salt that should be present in the bloodstream that is necessary for the body to carry out its daily functions. As a matter of fact, if an individual's body lacked enough salt, his or her body would eliminate its water stores to retain it. This could result in dehydration and could even prove to be fatal. Salt is not easily accessible in nature, making it necessary for the body to crave salt, so that people will look for foods that contain it. The body craves fat for many reasons. One is because it is a viable source of energy and calories. Another reason is that it has double the amount of calories than carbs and proteins do. Therefore, taste is a key deciding factor in food products that claim to be low in fat.

De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) claim that people value taste over the nutritional benefits from a particular food item's product promise. In other words, in spite of the low calorie, low fat, or healthy labels claims that food companies associate their product with, consumers will not purchase them if they are not appetizing. Likewise, Sidali, Obermowe, and Spiller (2013) explain how consumers dislike the taste of food products that are low in fat. People believe that foods low in fat lack the flavor that the original merchandise contains because they understand that to reduce fat means that the fattening ingredients that give the product its taste are taken out and substituted for less savory ingredients. Seeing that most people attach the stigma that low fat food choices lack flavor, it is understandable that people place a great deal of value on palatability over products like these. Similarly, De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) assert that taste is also key with food products that are relatively inexpensive.

Much like taste plays an important evolutionary role in consumers' dislike regarding foods that have lower amounts of salt, sugar, and fat, it is also integral the way that individuals form food preferences. If the food from a specific brand is palatable to consumers, then they will continue to purchase more products from them. In contrast, if a client has an unsavory experience with a specific food item, the likelihood that he or she will continue to purchase food from that vendor is not likely. Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) discuss how people can form taste aversions to particular foods after negative experiences with it. Logue (1998) explains how taste aversions are important for evolutionary survival. People and animals avoid foods that are bitter and that can cause stomach ailments. This proved useful in helping hunter-gathers avoid foods that were harmful and potentially lethal. Food aversion can be the result of different events such as food poisoning or consuming certain food products during a bout with the stomach flu. It can have a powerful impact on the way people perceive food. Negative occurrences with a specific food item can cause a person to feel nauseous at the mere sight of it. In more severe cases, a glance at the offending food item can trigger vomiting. In fact, it only takes one negative episode with food to produce a long-term avoidance of the food altogether. Likewise, it can also cause a person to apply this specific aversion and generalize the situation and steer clear from other foods that share common characteristics with the food that caused the taste aversion.

De Pelsmaeker, Dewettinck, Gellynck (2013) demonstrate usefulness of taste as a sensory marketing tactic when they discuss how in the German National Survey II, taste holds as the most influential characteristic in sensory marketing. This claim is supported when the authors mentions that another study states that taste serves as the biggest influence on consumers regarding the purchase of organic food products.

Sight is another one of the more valuable facets of sensory marketing that facilitates the formation of brand loyalty for consumers. Paasovaraa, Harri, Terhi, and Sandell (2012) claim that a person develops loyalty to a brand when he or she can draw significant value from a brand that is identical to his or her own image. In other words, people want to be able to see parts of themselves in the products they purchase. Therefore, it is important for large food companies to be adaptable in the way that they use sight to market their food products to the public. Cereal companies understand the importance of the self-congruity theory and use it to expand on the demographics of their consumer bases. This is the case with Cocoa Puffs, a popular product from General Mills. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Cocoa Puffs commercials solely used Caucasian characters in its commercials. Around the 1990s, the ads began to incorporate other races such as African Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanic Americans. Companies have also begun to manipulate consumers through their sense of sight by altering certain aspects of their logos. According to Moss (2013), some cereals that included "Sugar Corn Pops, Sugar Frosted Flakes, Sugar Smiles ..." removed the word "sugar" from the names of their cereals to make people believe that they were consuming less sugar, though the sugar content remained relatively the same. In this way, these companies employed the proverb, "out of sight out of mind." Likewise, food companies constantly alter the appearance of their products to accommodate the new preferences of a growing population and to outcompete other cereal companies. Around Halloween, Oreo sells cookies with orange icing instead of the traditional white color because the color orange is associated with Halloween. Correspondingly, during Christmas time, Oreo features cookies with red icing rather than the standard white one because the color red is symbolic with the holiday.

Sensory marketers also employ people's sense of sight to help people form brand loyalties in with many other methods. Many food companies have largely succeeded in that people are able to recognize small fragments of logos and apply it to the overall picture of the logo. In this way, their logos are more visible and easier for consumers to quickly recognize. In fact, according to Davis (2015), only a small portion of a company's logo is necessary for a person to be able to place the fragment with a certain food company. People can identify small section of the Golden Arches on the McDonald's logo and be able to place it with the restaurant. This tactic helps shoppers establish stronger and quicker brand loyalties to specific food companies. It also facilitates the identification of different food companies from one another in settings and situations where their logos cannot easily be seen. This could prove useful in scenarios when a person is driving by too quickly or if a person is too distracted with other task to pay attention to a food company's logo in its entirety.

Food companies also make their products more noticeable to consumers when they present their characters in a way that falls directly into a shopper's visual field. Professor Charlene Davis explains that to account for the height difference, many cereal companies such as General Mills and Kellogg's position the bodies of the animated characters to be slanted, so that the character can be at the eye level of younger children. In a similar fashion, cereal companies that market to adults situate the actors on the cereal box in such a way that the character is looking directly at the mature consumers.

Sight is also used by sensory food marketers by placing emphasis on the symbols that go into the overall image of a specific product. Asioli et al. (2011) directs research to show the link between certain symbols and how people identify organic products. Consumers associate organic food products with pictures that resemble the visual qualities of nature. Some of these pictures

could be images of plants, natural phenomena like rainbows, and the sun. Drawing more on the import of nature, consumers of organic food believe that they should not be “standardized” like non- organic food is. Rather, they should vary as plants and animals do in the natural world. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) augment to the idea of using images as an effective sensory marketing technique when they assert that certain images are able to trigger specific reactions in people.

Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) apply this concept to the way that a store’s setting can be an effective tool in sensory marketing. A study reveals increasing the illumination of the lighting in a specific area of a store increased the amount of patrons in that specific space. Similarly, modifying the colors on the walls had an impact on the sentiment that people experienced. The authors draw from other studies to reveal that customers prefer blue lighting over red lighting. This preference persists because blue lighting imbues consumers with a feeling of relaxation, which prompts them to spend longer amounts of time in stores, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will purchase more items.

Smell is another theme of sensory marketing. Some companies have begun to periodically spray their stores with fragrances similar to the food products that they sell. According to Krishna and Schwarz (2013), around specific holidays like Christmas and Valentine’s Day, some food stores spray the stores with the scent of chocolate so that consumers can associate the item with the holidays.

However, the use of scents appears to have more drawbacks than benefits. Determining the optimal stimulation, the amount of stimulation that is neither too much for a consumer to bear nor too low for someone to be able to recognize, is difficult to determine for scents. This idea is proven when Krishna and Schwarz (2013) describe how the use of floral fragrances can

have both negative and positive effects on consumers. In an experiment testing consumer purchasing habits in the presence of floral scents, sales increased when the fragrance was used. On that same tangent, studies show that older shoppers tend have a proclivity for associating floral scents with funerals. The authors suggest to sensory marketers that they develop signature scents that are similar to the products that they are trying to sell.

The disadvantage with determining the optimal stimulation go hand in hand with the difficulty of deciding how to properly diffuse scents. Food companies are tasked with the responsibility of diffusing scents in such a way that it is uniformly distributed throughout the store. However, it is costly to both purchase equipment to disperse the smell evenly and formulate a scent that is unique to a specific food brand. This is because in stores, the surrounding olfactory stimuli typically operate outside of a person's conscious realization. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) draw from lab experiments to show that the smells that people are unable to pinpoint have the greatest power in influencing consumer purchasing habits that to smells that are easily perceived by consumers. The source then goes on to say that people find it tasking to characterize fragrances- even those that they have been around for long periods of time. A scent can be identified with positive connotations such as enjoyable or pleasurable, but research has shown that not much else can be said about them. On the other hand, those people find it more facile to classify foods as edible or unsuitable to eat. It appears that a large amount of effort has to be put forth to distribute odors in such a way that a person is able to clearly identify that a scent is present, but on the same note, not consciously perceive it.

Audition is another theme of sensory marketing for food. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) describe how the sounds or music present in an environment can affect consumer purchasing tendencies. Fast tempo music can trigger intense emotions that can either sway or dissuade

consumers from purchasing products. With teenage girls, playing fast- tempo music is shown to be a more successful marketing tactic. They also cite research which demonstrates that in general, low- tempo, background music has proven to be more effective than music that is quickly paced in most cases. Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) point out that the type of music preferred by people generally varies not only with the person, but more importantly with the degree of absorption that a person experiences while in a food store. The source states that if the decision that a shopper is trying to make does not require much concentration, then the use of music is not an issue. On the other hand, if a patron is in the process of making a complex decision, then the presence of music can serve as an unwelcome nuisance.

According to Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014), music is less of a complicated sensory marketing tool to manipulate than smell is. Though music is easier to control and can be cheaper than purchasing the equipment to diffuse fragrances for many reasons like its accessibility from a number of devices such as cell phones and computers, visual cues tend to dominate people's over auditory stimuli. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) point out that studies show that visual stimuli carries more weight than verbal cues with the way the body perceives specific stimuli.

Sensory marketers also appeal to people's sense of touch in sensory marketing. Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) highlight the different ways that consumers can be impacted by interactions with touch. Touch in food stores can take on forms such as temperature, the feel of furniture, or the texture of the food product itself. Krishna and Schwarz (2013) mention how the sensation of warmth can cause people to experience intense emotions and can also affect the probability that consumers will purchase certain items. The source describes how

Asda, a supermarket in Britain, succeeded in increasing sales by removing the outer wrapping from its products. Therefore, people are more likely to purchase products after touching them. In fact, the source also claims that people would be willing to pay higher prices to be able to touch objects before buying them. However, this notion can be reversed.

Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) mention that while consumers enjoy being allowed to touch their food products prior to purchasing them, they also tend to avoid picking up products that other people have touched. For instance, when choosing apples at a grocery store, some shoppers will try to reach for the ones that have not been touched by other patrons. The authors describe this behavior as “tactile contamination.” Likewise, exposing food to outside conditions from people that could be or are sick from illnesses that can range from the common cold to the stomach flu can pose serious health risks to the public. It can also be argued that removing the packaging and outer coverings from certain products makes it easier for people to be able to steal them from stores.

While there exists different benefits of touch that can both greatly impact a customer’s experience in a store and drive up sales, Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) acknowledge that there is not a sufficient amount of research to form any substantial conclusions about the true value of touch in the discipline of sensory marketing. This would explain why the authors believe that touch is often “underutilized” by many food companies.

CONCLUSION:

Taste and sight are the most valuable tools of sensory food marketing. Taste helps consumers establish brand loyalty, especially with products that are cheaper than conventional goods and with brands that are not familiar with certain consumers. Sampling stations at stores

give consumers the opportunity to be able to trial different food items before purchasing them. Taste also has a large role in evolutionary psychology. It has helped people form their food preferences and explains why people value the way things taste over food products' claims of nutritional value. Taste was also important in deciding if food was edible or poisonous when it causes people to form taste aversions to foods that are harmful to them. Much like taste facilitates the formation of brand loyalty for consumers, sight also helps customers build strong loyalties to specific brands. Tools like symbols and logos that represent the brand help people associate images with a company. Likewise, sensory marketers also propagate the popularity of specific company logos to make it easier for consumers to easily recognize bits of a logo to form the overall picture of what the logo is supposed to look like. Because sight is such an important marketing tool, companies are modifying the appearance of their brands to accommodate the preferences of a growing generation of people. Both taste and sight have more dominance over smell, hearing, and touch. Smell is too difficult to diffuse uniformly with ease and the equipment is a large monetary investment. People pay more attention to visual stimuli than to auditory cues. While consumers are more likely to purchase items after touching them, they also tend to avoid food products that have been touched by other individuals. This research is limited in that it does not include studies that show the effect that each theme of sensory marketing has on the brain. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore and observe how each of the five senses can affect the brain by using advanced equipment such as MRI or PET scans. With such an emphasis on this type of marketing, it is no wonder why Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) suggest that malls can begin to charge entrance fees at malls based on the sensory aspects that they can provide to consumers alone.

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