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Note on Sensory Marketing: Shaping Consumer Perception and Behavior

This conceptual note describes what sensory marketing is, why it is useful for managers, and how it can be used by a firm. Since sensory marketing depends on how consumers behave, this note also discusses research in cognitive psychology that shows why these managerial suggestions are scientific and also logical. The field of sensory marketing is growing and has been shown to be pertinent for a vast majority of industries including food and drink, health and beauty, consumer packaged goods in general, durable goods including automobiles, transportation in general, and financial services — and it applies in both online and brick-and-mortar environments.

This note can be used in conjunction with the case “Uncharted Waters at Ventoso Ship Supply: A Sensory Marketing Dilemma A, B, and C.”ⁱ

What is Sensory Marketing?

Let’s start with my classic example. 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 **Figure 1**). Unfurling the Kisses flag and foil feels like unwrapping a present, and eating it is a completely different and indulgent experience compared to eating the slab on the left. The haptic sensation of the Hershey’s Kiss in your hand and on your tongue is different from eating the basic milk chocolate because of its shape; it can be rolled around in your mouth and, if left to melt in the mouth, it feels like a teardrop melting on your tongue. The individual wrapping of small pieces also allows you to have several treats without guilt. Besides the shape and packaging, the name “Kiss” makes it sound much more romantic and appealing, almost like you are being kissed. And: Hershey’s does not need to tell the consumer any of this—the product does that by itself!

This is what sensory marketing is all about—designing products and packaging with subconscious cues that tell a consumer what the product stands for and provide a desired consumer experience.

ⁱ Cian, Luca, Jenny Craddock, Aradhna Krishna, and Sara Cervai. “Uncharted Waters at Ventoso Ship Supply: A Sensory Marketing Dilemma A, B, and C.” *Darden Business Publishing*, 9 July 2018, <http://store.darden.virginia.edu/uncharted-waters-at-ventoso-ship-supply-a-sensory-marketing-dilemma-a>. Accessed 21 Jan. 2019.

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