

A Study on Sensory Branding in Organised Retail Stores in Kerala

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Abstract: *New brand failure rates are alarming. Campaigns worth sizeable dollars have become ineffective in breaking the clutter. Companies are bombarding our eyes and ears with brand communications. The remaining three sense organs viz skin, nose and tongue of the customers are equally potent in receiving stimuli; but brand marketers either underestimate the power of these remaining senses or are yet to devise effective brand communication tools to seduce these senses. Sensory branding or multisensory branding is a marketing domain in which brands appeal to all the five sense organs of customers in a unique, synergistic and integrated manner. This study is on the potential of sensory branding in organized retail outlets. Sensory branding draws heavily from the disciplines of environmental psychology and neuro-marketing. The study investigates variables which could potentially appeal to the five sense organs, in retail context. A model connecting sensory branding and retail success measures is presented. Futuristic research areas in the domain are suggested as well. Ambiguous sub domains like sixth sense are excluded from in this study.*

Keywords: Sensory Branding, Multisensory Branding, Organised Retail Branding, Vision, Audition, Olfaction, Gustation, Haptics

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

An overwhelming majority of the human breed could recognise and recall the presence/memory of his/her mother by any one or a combination of her pampering 'touch', signature 'taste', unique 'smell', lovable 'sound', or a distant 'sight' of even her shadow. Sensory branding is a type of marketing whereby brands attempt to forge lasting emotional associations in the customers' minds by appealing to their senses through visual (sight), auditory (sound), olfactory (smell), gustative (taste) and tactile (touch) appeals. In neuro marketing book, 'Brand Sense - Build Powerful Brands through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound', author Martin Lindstrom stresses that brands that appeal to multiple senses will be more successful than brands that focus only on one or two. In this context, sensory branding may be termed as Five Dimensional (5D) branding, which implies marketing techniques that aim to seduce the five sensory dimensions of the customers and influence their feelings and behavior. Two rapidly growing disciplines called neuromarketing, which studies consumers' sensorimotor, cognitive and affective response to marketing stimuli, and environmental psychology, which examines the interrelationship between environment and human affect, cognition and behavior, have rarely been applied to retail environment, which interested the researcher to the domain.

1.2 Rationale of the research

Think of the given fixed/constant sum scaled question regarding the role of your senses in perceiving the external world.

Senses	Points
Sight	
Sound	
Smell	
Touch	

Taste

Total **100**

The more points you assign to a sense signifies its relative significance. Total of all points shall be 100.

Paradoxically, sensory marketing researchers have approximated that the percentage marketing spend against the said senses by Fortune 500 companies are 83.2, 12.1, 1.9, 0.9 and 0.9 respectively.

From the twin aforesaid instances, it becomes clear that majority of all brand communications over the years focused on sight and sound only. Advertisements are hardwired for television and mostly confined to appeals using visuals and jingles. The other three senses which customer consider as equally potent are being under tapped by brands.

Research studies around sensory branding in Indian context has miles to go, and is still confined to 2D branding of vision and audition. Researcher feels strongly that there exists a research gap in this rather untapped area of sensory branding or 5D branding, and deserves a descriptive research study to add to the knowledge base.

1.3 Objectives

The research question may be framed as:

What might be the impact of Sensory branding of organised retail outlets on customer satisfaction & retention, and brand loyalty, awareness & equity and, retail stores' sales revenues?

The stated research question in mind triggered the researcher to formulate the following objectives for study.

The objectives of the article could be enumerated as;

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- 1) To understand the current level of multi sensory experiences delivered by the organised store retail sector in Kerala.
- 2) To study the potential independent variables influencing sensory branding in organised retailing.
- 3) To develop a model connecting sensory branding, sales revenue, customer satisfaction & loyalty, and brand awareness & equity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Branding

Brand is name, term, sentence, sign, design, symbol, or a combination used to identify products or services of one firm and to differentiate them from competitors. Brand identity answers the questions - What do the brand stand for and How do the brand want to be looked upon by others. Branding includes all ways of translating this self identity into a brand image sought to be imprinted in customer minds. Brand personality answers the questions - Who will the brand be, if it becomes a person and What will be his/her major personality trait. Branding includes all ways of associating the brand with the wished for human personality trait. Goal of branding is accumulation of brand equity, the differential effect that brand knowledge has on customer response to the brand's communications. David Aaker brand equity ten model uses 10 measures grouped under 5 categories to measure brand equity. Brand architecture is the mechanism by which the existing equity is leveraged to brand extensions. Customer Loyalty towards branded store A reflects the unlikelihood of customers switching to a competitor B, in event of a change in price or other marketable features of A /B / both.

2.2 Neuromarketing

Neuromarketing is an area of marketing which uses medical technologies such as Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to study the responses of brain to marketing stimuli. Researchers use tools to measure change in activity levels of the brain and to decode consumer behavior and decision making. Neuromarketing uses brain imaging, scanning, or other similar measurement technology to measure customer responses to product variables, packaging, advertising appeals, or other marketing stimuli. Neuromarketing measure neurological reactions of customers to brands. Thus, companies could assure appeal and profits. When we think of something, our brain impulses travel to the motor cortex and makes our articulators respond so fast that the EEG can capture every impulse. During the time our brain receives stimuli, and before it reacts, there's something entirely neurological happening, that is, subconscious. The EEG promptly reads electrical waves, relates them to memory, emotions and attention according to the activity in the appropriate areas of the brain. Mapping tools gives an accurate insight of how a person feels when experiencing an Ad or marketing content.

2.3 Environmental psychology

According to the Journal of Environmental Psychology, the field can be defined as the scientific study of the transactions

and interrelationships between people and their physical surroundings. Environmental psychology focuses on the interplay between individuals and their surroundings. The term environment may broadly include natural environments, social settings, built environments, learning environments, and informational environments. In the transactions between customer and organisational atmospheric setting, behaviour and totality of experience are influenced by the environment. The Journal of Environmental Psychology lists the the sub domains of the field as perception and evaluation of facility and it's natural landscape, cognitive mapping of customers in an atmospheric setting, ecological and physical design of the location, the leisure feel and behavior in relation to the atmospheric settings, psychological and behavioral interplay between customer and environment, the customer perceived environmental risks and stressors, and social meanings of crowding and personal space.

2.4 Retailing

Retailing involves all activities involved in selling goods/services to final customers for personal, non - business use. Organised retailing refers to the trading activities undertaken by licensed retailers, those who have registered for taxes.

The demand drivers of organised retailing includes rising income levels and standard of living, increased urbanisation, growing aspirations of people and the desire to experimentations and credit availability with retailers. The supply drivers include expansion plans of existing retailers, potential new entrants, better infrastructure and, emergence of new retail formats and categories. As per AT Kearney (2015) Tech Sei Analysis, India ranks seventh in FDI confidence index, which assesses the impact of political, economic and regulatory changes on FDI performances. Organised store and non - store retail formats include discount stores, super markets, department stores, hypermarkets, franchises, malls, category killers, vending machines, QR code stores and e - tailing. The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Retailers Association of India (RAI) published a report titled 'Retail 2020: Retrospect, Reinvent, Rewrite', highlighting that India's retails market is expected to touch US\$ 1 trillion by 2020.

3. Research Methodology

There are different types of scholarly literature, some of which require original research (primary literature) and some that are based on other published work (secondary literature). This is a short article of the latter category, a review article cum a perspective piece which narrates a comprehensive summary of prior research on the topic "sensory branding" and a perspective on the current state of the field and where it is heading. This article provides a constructive analysis of existing published literature in the domain of sensory branding; identifying specific gaps and recommends niches for future research.

4. Elements of Sensory branding

4.1 Sight

This is one of the five basic physical senses by which light stimuli received by the eye are interpreted by the brain and constructed into a representation of the position, shape, brightness, and usually color of objects in space. It takes 45 milliseconds for humans to detect a visual object. 80% of all the information collected by us is through sight. In this era of close matching of properties and price, consumers are likely to prefer visually aesthetic products. Sight often overrides other senses and has the power to persuade us against even common logic or sense. Did you know that Santa Claus traditionally wore green until Coca-Cola began to promote him heavily in the 1950's? (Lindstrom, 2005).

4.2 Sound

Heart beat of mother might be the first auditory appeal felt by a human being. The ear consists of a collection of tiny bones, tubes and membranes which process the sound and send it to the brain. Sound activates the emotional part of the human brain, instead of rational. So it can be effective to create emotional branding. Yalch and Spangenberg suggest that classical music evokes higher price perception. Millman suggests that classical lead customer to spend more money and stay longer. While Ambercrobie and Fitch uses loud upbeat music to convey youthfulness, Victoria's Secret plays music appropriate to signal upscale exclusivity. Research indicates that the four-toned Intel jingle, the wave, is as identifiable as its logo. Microsoft is missing a trick in realizing the Sonic potential of its start-up notes, by not extending the same across product platforms. What if the Royal Enfield extended its signature sound into its web pages - potential opportunities gone begging.

4.3 Smell

Every other sense organ must send a signal to thalamus and ask permission to connect to the rest of the brain. John Medina in his *Brain Rules* discovers that smell signals bypass the thalamus and go right to their brainy destinations. Martin Lindstrom quotes "You can close your eyes, cover your ears, refrain from touch, and reject taste, but smell is a part of the air we breathe". Smell has strong impact on memory and nostalgia. There are approximately about 10000 different scents in the world out of which 1000 are primaries and the rest are combinations. Smell is a prime determinant of brand loyalty, since it has quick effect on limbic cortex system (Harrop, 2007). Tie-ups are emerging between fragrance companies and multiplex theatres to infuse complementary brand smell as and when an audiovisual content is played. The chemical engineered new car smell is a determinant in showroom purchase decisions. Lindstrom reports instance of the sales of a floor cleaner brand falling by 27 percent, as the company changed familiar pungent smell of a powerful chemically potent one to those of roses.

4.4 Taste

Tongue houses many taste buds, spread over the entire tongue surface. Each taste bud (receptor) count 50 to 100

taste cells (Krishna & Elder, 2010). After analysing the temperature, quality and various signals sensed by receptors, humans distinguish between four tastes - Sweet, Sour, Bitter and Salty. A fifth taste, 'Umami' has been discovered lately. Girls in fact have more taste buds and experience the sense better.

Saravana stores, a retail giant in T Nagar, Tamilnadu has mastered the art of free sampling as compelling sales weapon and reaped rich monetary rewards. The heralded delicious snacks of the new gen mould are horribly bland prior to flavouring process. Restaurant patrons have attributed their return mostly to some signature dish and its extensions by the master chef. Tourism in God's own country, Kerala owes much to the taste of spice rich preparation style.

4.5 Touch

Humans have more tactile receptors in little fingers alone than our entire back. When we encounter a pleasant touch, brain releases a hormone called oxytocin, leading to feelings of wellbeing and calm. Touch (haptic) sense can be applied in different ways, such as to judge hardness - we exert pressure, to estimate temperature - we touch with a large skin surface and remain steady, to guess the weight - we are hefting the object repeatedly. The act of judging an object by rubbing it results in judgment - Smooth, Fluffy or Silky texture.

Ages of 'Do not touch' signages have gone by. Touch and feel of steering and upholstery could come in handy in Auto showroom choices made by customer. It is now widely accepted that touch experience can create a positive affective response and a perception of ownership in shoppers, particularly in electronics retailing. Nearly 59 percent of consumers prefer Coca-Cola with glass bottle rather than plastic bottle or, sense of touch is very important (Lindstrom, 2005).

5. Sensory Branding in organised store retail sector.

Roger Doolie writes about Coles supermarket's retail sensory branding basics as follows.

- Sight: Open store layouts allowing for clear view of complementary departments. Well-lit, very attractive displays of products, where customers can see bakers and butchers live at work.
- Touch: Placing products in close access to the shopper with no hurdles against touch and handling.
- Sound: Fishmongers, bakers, and butchers are encouraged to be noisy in hawking their wares.
- Smell: Aromatic products are placed in the open. And unique scents are pumped into the air ducts to match product portfolio.
- Taste: Product sampling is encouraged by staff, and hassle-free access do exist.

The strategy is based on the idea that a customer whose senses are fully engaged is likely to stay long and buy more.

5.1 Vision and branding

Dependant variable – Visual appeal of retail store.

Potential independent variables include store theme, color pattern, interior layout, glare of lightning or floor, signage, display of products and merchandise density, public areas like lounge and play area, employee attire, look of furniture and equipments, graphics, aisle width, brightness and glare of lighting, type of flooring and ceiling, retail exterior or neighbourhood or surrounding area, store marquee, landscaping, store front (elevation), design of parking lots, visual crowding and, window displays.

5.2 Audition and branding

Dependant variable – Auditory appeal of retail store.

Potential independent variable include familiarity, tempo and type of music played, in store announcements, warmth and courteously in voice of service providers, noise levels inside store, penetrable neighbourhood voices, and product related sounds like pouring wine.

5.3 Gustation and branding

Dependent variable – Gustative appeal of retail store.

Potential independent variables include spiciness, sweetness, temperature & familiarity of private label brands and free drinks or snacks or samples served by the store.

5.4 Olfaction and branding

Dependant variable - Olfactory appeal of retail store.

Potential independent variables include product's scent/odor, scent or perfume applied by retailers, smell of fuel or gas or chemicals or infrasound, external permeable odors, perfumes of employees, and fellow customers, and departmental smell zoning.

5.5 Haptics and branding

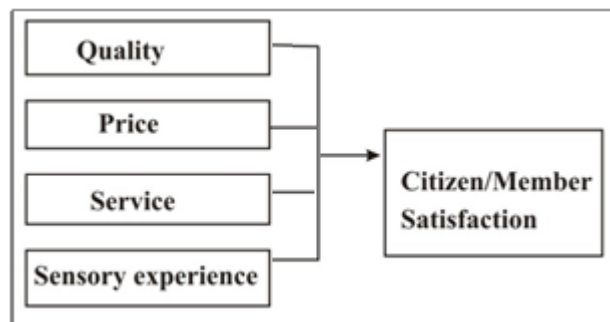
Dependant variable – Haptic appeal of retail store.

Potential independent variables include seating comfort (like softness of fabric, warmth of wood, coldness of metal or rubberiness of a cushion), temperature (air conditioning), humidity, air quality, ventilation, natural breeze and direction of flow, touch of service providers, wall texture (which customers may touch and feel), crowding inside the store, vertical transportation ergonomics (availability of lift and escalators against steep stairs), packaging materials and texture of gift wrap, que, layout of interiors (loop layout may sweat the customer), the texture of brochures and menu cards and the responsiveness of interactive screens.

6. Conceptual Frameworks for Sensory Branding

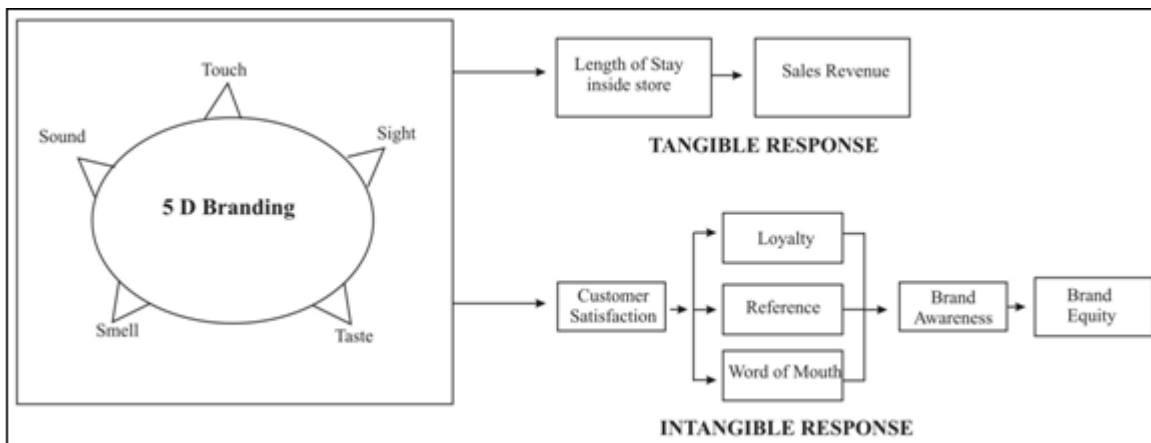
6.1 Not - for - profit retailing

Government and co - operative retail outlets don't operate primarily for profit, but for service to citizens and members respectively. So, it may not be appropriate to include a model with financial implications.



6.2 For - profit retailing

In the case of 'for profit' private retails outlets, Sensory branding stimuli have tangible and intangible responses on customers.



7. Conclusion

The current level of sensory experience delivered by the organised retail stores is limited to islands of sight and

sound. Need for integration of the water tight sensory compartments is quite obvious. There exists disparity in the application of sensory branding across for profit and not for profit retails stores, with latter in a nascent stage.

This study suggests sensory marketing as a differentiating trigger to enhance total advertising and marketing impact. Independent variables which could impact the five sense organs of customers in retail context are enumerated in the article.

A conceptual model depicting the relation between sensory branding efforts, length of stay inside stores, retail revenue, brand equity and loyalty is also presented in this article.

The study establishes sensory marketing as a potent enough marketing weapon to transform the destiny of brands and shows us the way ahead.

8. Future Research

When nose suffers from a gentle cold, sense of taste suffers dearly, an 80 percent loss.

Sensory interlinkages remains largely untapped. Cross modal interactions across various sensory perceptions needs further exploration. It's an accepted fact that smell activates taste senses. The scents of pine, cinnamon, and mulled cider join with sounds of carolers, traditional hymns and pope holiday tunes create Christmas holiday season in many minds (Eric & Bianca & David). Aradhna Krishna did a study on haptic related characteristics of product containers and suggests that touch affects taste. Charles Spence & Qian Wang empirical researches on wine and beer is in this direction. Chilliness of beer can be interpreted by the pitch of pouring sound (viscosity dependant) and the visual bubbiness; the opening fizz sound indicates degree of carbonation. The effect of background music on taste of wine by Dr Adrian also suggests cross modal interaction of senses.

Three future research areas in the discipline of sensory branding are suggested below.

- 1) Studies on potential measures to integrate and synergise the islands of senses.
- 2) Studies on incorporating multi sensory appeals in emerging e - commerce businesses.
- 3) Studies on strategic sensory positioning of brands.

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