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SENSORY MARKETING: THE CONCEPT, ITS TECHNIQUES AND ITS  
APPLICATION AT THE POINT OF SALE

*Marketing sensorial: el concepto, sus técnicas y su aplicación  
en el punto de venta*

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**ABSTRACT**

Sensory marketing contains a set of strategic decisions focused on the sense's stimulation in the public. When these decisions are taken on the point of sale, the public accomplish a full experience that brings them close to the product that they are evaluating, motivating in this way the final purchase. Hence, the establishments that apply in an appropriate way this kind of techniques strengthen a highly satisfactory purchase experience, focusing on the subconscious level related to the sense. Nevertheless, a few considerations need to be taken into account when applying these techniques to get the desired objectives, being aware of the neuroscience advances. In this text, an exploration of sensory marketing concept is carried out, pointing out its various typologies and application possibilities. Firstly, the potential of the five senses as means of leaving a memory in the consumer is described. After that, measuring techniques and implementation guidelines are specified, and finally, the customer's buying process in the establishment is detailed, indicating how the final purchase could be stimulated with a senses-focused strategy.

**KEY WORDS:** sensory marketing - neuromarketing - point of sale - merchandising - communication - branding - advertising.

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## RESUMEN

El *marketing* sensorial comprende una serie de decisiones estratégicas dirigidas a la estimulación de los sentidos en el público. Cuando estas decisiones se toman sobre el propio punto de venta, el público logra una experiencia completa que le acerca más aún al producto frente al que se sitúa, fomentando de este modo su compra final. Por ello, los establecimientos que emplean de manera adecuada este tipo de técnicas consiguen consolidar una experiencia de compra altamente satisfactoria apuntando al nivel subconsciente de los sentidos. No obstante, se deben tener en cuenta una serie de consideraciones a la hora de implementarlas para conseguir los objetivos deseados, teniendo presente los avances en el ámbito de la neurociencia. En el presente texto se realiza una exploración en el concepto de *marketing* sensorial, señalando sus distintas tipologías y posibilidades de aplicación. Se describe, en primer lugar, el potencial de los cinco sentidos como vías a través de las cuales dejar un recuerdo en el consumidor. Luego, se especifican las técnicas de medición y las pautas de implantación del *marketing* sensorial y, finalmente, se detalla el proceso de compra que sigue el cliente en el establecimiento, indicando cómo podría estimularse la compra final con una estrategia que se dirigiese a los sentidos del consumidor.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *marketing* sensorial - neuromarketing - punto de venta - *merchandising* - comunicación - marca - publicidad.

## MARKETING SENSORIAL: O CONCEITO, SUAS TECNICAS E SUA APLICAÇÃO NO PONTO DE VENDA

### RESUME

O *marketing* sensorial compreende uma series de decisões estratégicas dirigidas a estimulação dos sentidos no público. Coando estas decisões tomadas sobre o próprio ponto de venda, o público logra uma experiência completa que o aproxima ainda mais ao produto fomentando deste modo sua compra final. Por isso, os estabelecimentos que empregam de maneira adequada este tipo de técnicas conseguem consolidar uma experiência de compra altamente satisfatória apontando ao nível subconsciente dos sentidos. Não obstante, se devem ter em conta uma serie de considerações na hora de implementa-las para conseguir os objetivos desejados, tendo presente os avances no âmbito da neurociência. No presente texto se realiza uma exploração no conceito de *marketing* sensorial, assinalando suas distintas tipologias e possibilidades de aplicação. Em primeiro lugar, se descreve o potencial dos cinco sentidos como vias através das quais deixar uma lembrança no consumidor. Logo, especificam as técnicas de medição e as pautas de implantação do *marketing* sensorial e, finalmente, se detalha o processo de compra que segue o cliente no estabelecimento indicando como poderia estimular a compra final com uma estratégia que se dirija aos sentidos do consumidor.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** marketing sensorial - neuromarketing - ponto de venda - merchandising - comunicação - marca - publicidade.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Sensory marketing and its typologies

Sensory marketing, also called sense marketing, can be understood in a general way, as Krishna describes it, as marketing that addresses the senses of consumers and affects their behavior (2010, p. 2). This implies studying sensation and perception as ways that modify consumer behavior (Krishna, 2012, p. 333).

More specifically, sensory marketing at the point of sale will be understood as the one that addresses the five senses looking for their stimulation to try to create a pleasant environment, so that the customer increases the purchase time in the establishment. This concept is included in the science called neuromarketing, in charge of studying the mental processes of consumers related to perception, memory, learning, emotion and reason, based on the idea that, underlying a conscious response in the consumer, there are deep motives (Manzano *et al.*, 2012, p. 72). Authors such as Stanton, Sinnott-Armstrong and Huettel define it as “the use of psychological and neuroscience research techniques to gain affectivity in consumer behavior, in their preferences and in their decision-making” (2017, p. 800. Self-translation). Thus, neuromarketing “tries to explain the factors that influence and affect your thoughts, feelings, motivations, needs and desires, to ultimately understand what defines your shopping behavior ” (Manzano *et al.*, 2012, p. 72).

Sensory marketing has acquired a determining importance in recent years in many sectors, since it is the best way to connect the brand or product with the lifestyle of our customers, adding value to their environment, appealing to their feelings, their senses and reason. Thus, in the words of Lindstrom (2012, p. 4), it is about “achieving an emotional commitment with the consumer so that he can remember the brand and, in order to remain in his memory, it must touch the fiber of his feelings; that is why you have to create a story with which he can identify and commit”. Therefore, the customer no longer chooses a product or service only because of the cost-benefit ratio but because

of the experience offered by said product and service, or because of the perception the client may have of it. At this point, it is important to note that, although there are behaviors that are managed by the culture in the subconscious, others, on the other hand, are cultural.

For the company to succeed through the use of sense marketing, it is necessary that the strategy be integrated. That is, use everyday techniques in which all the senses somehow influence to try to sell more (Valenti and Riviere, 2008). It is not enough to see or talk about the product; it is necessary that it be experienced and associated with a specific lifestyle. Sensory integration is of the utmost importance since, otherwise, the effects on consumers can be counterproductive and therefore will result in confusion and, far from improving perception, would bring negative results: this would result in antimarketing.

Therefore, you can define, first of all, the senses managed by sensory marketing, a previous step to propose a strategy consistent with the brand image. Thus, olfactory, tactile, sound and gustatory marketing can be distinguished.

Regarding olfactory marketing, it is highly significant to note that humans remember 35% of what we smell (Díaz, 2012). In addition, the nose is able to distinguish more than a trillion olfactory stimuli, a fact proven by the team of Andreas Keller (Bushdid *et al.*, 2014), the nose being one of the most sensitive and emotional senses, with a great ability to associate certain odors with specific situations. In fact, studies related to neuromarketing affirm that 75% of our emotions are related to odors (Jiménez-Marín, 2016), hence odors are likely to impact the buying behavior of consumers. In this sense, several pieces of research conducted by SOSI (Sense of Smell Institute) indicate that, while humans are only able to remember, after three months, 50% of the things they have seen, in the case of odors that percentage can increase up to 65% after one year (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 1294).

Touch, on the other hand, favors brand identity, since it involves a double interaction of customers with the product. "We run our hands through the product to access its properties, read it tactilely and generate a perception or a feeling" (Manzano *et al.*, 2012, p. 181). Touch can be considered a means to control the "unconsciousness of consumers, their perceptions, feelings and preferences" (Lobato, 2005, p. 11). Touch marketing can be used on different occasions of approach between consumers and products (brands). We refer to the product's own qualities (texture, size, materials, etc.) and also to the point of sale itself. In fact, the sense of touch within the establishment becomes vitally important, for example, in textile products, since it offers the possibility of interacting with the garments, thus differentiating itself from online sales (Jiménez-Marín, 2017).

The ear, in turn, is the second most used sense, after the sense of sight, and serves to arouse emotions and feelings that influence the relationship of consumers with brands.

Although specialized studies affirm that people remember 2% of the sounds we hear (Díaz, 2012), the truth is that this type of marketing uses a percentage substantially lower than other senses. However, music is one of the key elements for the creation of the image of the point of sale and the identity of the brand, since it can be used to help establish a brand image in the minds of users, in addition to influencing their buying habits at the point of sale. Related to this, the rhythm of the music as a buying environment helps in the objectives of the establishment with well-differentiated guidelines (Jiménez-Marín, 2016). Slow music, on the one hand, helps to relax and therefore to make purchases more calmly, increasing the possibilities of purchase. Fast music, on the other hand, helps the action and therefore to make purchases more efficiently, not increasing the purchase possibilities but helping to avoid bottlenecks and, therefore, increasing the purchase satisfaction of the client.

Finally, in relation to gustatory marketing, the sense of taste is related to emotional states, so it can contribute to changes in attitude and brand perception. In addition, for the product to come into contact with this sense, it must go through the rest of the senses, since they act as filters (Manzano *et al.*, 2012, p. 159). It is the most complex sense, since “no other requires the complement of all the other senses to fulfill its function and send complete sensory reports to the brain”; therefore, the integration of taste as a sense generates “richer and more complete emotions, which manage to even move us directly in time through memory, and remember other flavors” (Manzano *et al.*, 2012, p. 159). Thus, taste is usually one of the main claims of the hospitality and food segment: from bars or restaurants (which offer foods with a recognizable taste) to supermarkets (which try to attract the attention of potential buyers with taste food) or even brands of small appliances.

Sensory marketing, in short, and as Castanyol (2014) expresses, tries to establish new links with potential audiences through the senses. The goal is to arouse emotions that are much stronger than our rational part when choosing a product or service. In this sense, authors such as Haase and Wiedmann have developed a scale of perceptions and sensations that the consumer can experience through sensory marketing: it is the SPI (sensory perception item), which identifies 20 adjectives to enhance (2018). The SPI is materialized in a table that associates four adjectives to each sense (such as “comfortable”, “handy”, “soothing” and “well-shaped” for the haptic sense), prepared by the authors after a review of the literature, an interview with experts and a field study conducted at a point of sale. In this piece of research, Haase and Wiedmann determine that the attitude towards the product, the mouth-ear recommendation and the intention of purchase have a significant relationship with the SPI, so it can be used to determine the effects of sensory marketing (2018, p. 11).

## **1.2. Some key concepts in sensory marketing**

When making purchasing decisions, it is necessary to clarify two key concepts such as somatic markers or implicit attention. Thus, we assume that consumers can use

mechanisms that are only emotional and unconscious, built around the so-called somatic markers. In fact, and based on the two great ways of communication and persuasion, rational and emotional, cited by Ramos *et al.* (2007) by which “the rational way tries to convince by offering reasons or arguments, while the emotional one tries to attract the receiver from fascination” (Ferrés, 1996, p. 70), we could affirm that the percentage of purchase decisions that are taken on the basis of emotional issues surpasses the rational ones (Ramos *et al.*, 2007).

In this sense, Damasio (1994) already hinted that emotions and reason are not extremes but stretches of a scale that help buyers make their purchase decisions. This theory is fundamental when it comes to understanding consumer behavior, because it raises the way in which emotions are related to attention and memory, among others, thus influencing reactions and responses to products and services and to advertising and marketing stimuli.

This author used the term 'somatic markers' to denote the elements (sensations and emotions ) that impact the perception, evaluation, decisions and behavior of consumers when making a potential purchase. It is, basically, the existence of an emotional mechanism to make decisions based on the traditional learning model that has already been proposed by the AIDA model (Sánchez, 1999). This author conceives that experiences evoke certain feelings and, therefore, certain reactions through the automatic nervous system. These sensations and emotions are stored as somatic markers and have consequences in the decision making of buyers. This way decisions are made through an emotional mechanism, without having to go through rational thinking (Santos, 2018).

Likewise, attention in purchasing decisions also plays an important role because “attention, together with memory and motivation, are the three basic learning devices” (Llinás, 2003, p. 27). And this is where we highlight the concept of implicit attention, which is unconscious and involuntary. And contrary to explicit attention, which is conscious and can be managed cognitively. Implicit attention is directly related to the so-called SARA: Reticular Ascending Activator System, which functions as a first filter for stimuli entering the brain of the potential consumer, filtering, about 95% of the information (Serrano & De Balanzó, 2010). Thus, he values each stimulus and only allows the passage of what happens to be especially striking and poses to be pertinent. This is, as Stanton *et al.* (2017) put forward: Colors, sounds, odors or striking movements.

### **1.3. From the Unique Selling Proposition to the Me Selling Proposition**

Advertising in the future will not be based on the conscious, but on the subconscious. In this line, according to Lindstrom, “85% of the decisions we make daily depend on our subconscious” (2012, p. 10). Consumers, as Debans reflects, “are sensory beings that

need to relate to the product from innovative angles, participate in the search and unveiling of the brand and the essence of it”, since “the world is experienced through senses and it is through them that knowledge enters our brain” (2005).

That is why the tastings of certain food products are increasingly common at the points of sale, while the packaging design works with materials and textures that are pleasant to the touch.

Sensory marketing tries to go further and break the barrier of audiovisual advertising. Now it is intended to reinforce the values and different characteristics of certain products, services or even events, as contributed by Guerra and Gomes-Franco (2017). In this sense, decoration, lighting, textures of materials and the aromatization of spaces are elements used to create unique experiences in certain stores, shopping centers, airports and hotels (De Garcillán, 2015). Clear examples of this are the odor of coffee when entering a cafeteria, music according to the style of the consumer in an establishment, the purchase of products with a special touch, etc. We can highlight the case of the iPad, which has been tremendously successful because it has included new sensations for the consumer, mainly touch. Thus, brands that appeal to multiple senses will be more successful than those that focus only on one or two (Haase and Wiedmann, 2018).

Thanks to neuroscience combined with marketing, brands can follow increasingly sensory patterns. For this reason, they are now moving from a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategy, focused on the product, to a Me Selling Proposition (MSP) strategy, focused directly on the consumer and very in line with the concept that Roberts (2005) already proposed about love marks. With the MSP, love for a brand, product or establishment is enhanced; personal affinity with a good is enhanced, putting first the subject, the self, the ego, as the backbone of any strategy, of any campaign. Thus, the consumer feels he is the owner of the brand, protecting it and developing it (Rowley, 2004, p. 134). Far from conceiving the product sales strategy in the characteristics of the product, we begin to conceive it by thinking about what matters most to the consumer: himself and his hedonistic experience. That is where the target goes from wanting to loving brands. In that sense, the MSP works to enhance this self-interference, and for this purpose it often uses sensory marketing.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this text is the study of sensory marketing as a phenomenon to know the possibilities offered in its application at the point of sale and thus detail the way in which the public can respond thanks to it. Thus, through a theoretical review, the main objective is broken down into three:

1. Review the concept of *sensory marketing* through a tour of the main characteristics of the five senses and their mode of stimulation.

2. Study the possibilities of implementing sensory marketing at the point of sale.
3. Study the way in which sensory marketing stimulates the senses and emotions of the public.

### 3. THE SENSES: RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS FOR SENSORY MARKETING

In line with the contributions by Hulten (2011) and Jimenez-Marin and Elias (2018), taste and smell are the most primitive senses: they provide limited and inaccurate information about the outside world and are fully interconnected; in a way, we taste with the nose and smell with the mouth. Our sense of smell has become a support for other organs that were evolutionarily more necessary for the survival of the species (Gómez, 2012). The same happens to the touch. This way, touch, taste and smell do not allow us to obtain temporary space information by themselves. However, vision and hearing allow us to have real and more optimal temporal space information. In this sense, the primary aspect is the sense of sight, since the human ear has limitations in terms of the spectrum of sound frequencies that it is capable of perceiving.

#### 3.1. The ear

It is one of the senses that most influence purchase decisions. The so-called auditory contamination (unwanted, loud or inappropriate sounds or noises) can affect the mood of customers, consciously and unconsciously, which can negatively affect sales; On the contrary, adequate sounds can help increase sales, as stated in the 2016 POPAI Report (Popai, 2016). In this sense, we highlight that the so-called *music branding*, sound marketing or sonotypes (Gustems, 2005) create a genuine predisposition base for potential buyers.

And it is that hearing is, without a doubt, a prerequisite for communication between company and target. Therefore, from the point of view of neuromarketing, the distinction between hearing (perceiving sounds through the ear) and listening (paying attention to what is heard) is very important. Auditory memory is a dynamic brain process that encodes and stores information related to experiences. At this point, we can ask ourselves what this storage of sound information depends on, or why sometimes we perfectly remember some sounds and completely ignore others. The previous emotional state of the listener, the personality, as well as the interests of the individual influence in part, but there is already much research that is managing to locate the area of the brain that is responsible for memorizing the songs. Thus, as Braidot (2011) points out in a study carried out with a sample on musical sound stimuli, the researchers proposed to the participants to listen to different songs, among them, *Satisfaction* (Rolling Stones) and the music of the Pink Panther. It was observed that the degree of brain activity varied if the music was lyrical or only instrumental, and that songs like *Satisfaction* remained in memory for a long time.

Sounds, in general, produce changes in some of the neurotransmission systems and in the client's predisposition to get a product or to enter an establishment. Because music generates neurochemical changes that have a great influence on behavior. When listening to music, brain activity starts up. There are even studies that suggest that different types of music activate different parts of the brain, including the frontal and temporal lobes (related to the emotions that make us cry, laugh and arouse sexual pleasure) (Popai, 2016). In this sense, it is worth noting that different styles of music influence blood pressure levels, increasing or decreasing it, as well as energy levels and the hormonal secretion process (Braidot, 2011). Thus, classical or new age music causes positive moods, music with few changes in rhythm and tone generates states of calm and pleasure, and music with high changes in rhythm, tone and volume causes feelings of anger or sadness (Braidot, 2011).

### 3.2. Taste

Taste is the result of processing the flavors through the almost 10,000 taste buds that humans have in their mouths. It acts by contact of soluble chemical substances with the lingual organ and is able to perceive a very wide range of flavors, textures or temperatures. There are four primary sapid sensations: acid, sweet, bitter and salty<sup>2</sup>. However, and following Gómez and García (2012), a person can perceive hundreds of different concrete flavors, which are the combinations of the four sensations by multiple combinations. The papillae sensitive to sweet and salty flavors are concentrated on the tip of the tongue, those sensitive to acid occupy the sides, the back of the tongue being for bitter flavors.

The sense of taste is a sense with certain limitations when using it for its own characteristics: we cannot taste an undershirt or a shoe. However, in those products that can be savored, tastings or test samples give very good results, increasing sales levels by up to 95% (Popai, 2016). Likewise, people remember approximately 15% of what we taste, so it is a much higher retention level than the one offered by the other senses. Therefore, the sense of taste is one of the main claims of the hospitality and food sector.

Taste is likely to be influenced by external stimuli, such as brand name, product compound information<sup>3</sup>, packaging or advertising (Allison and Uhl, 1964; Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé, 1994; Lee, Frederick and Ariely, 2006; Levin and Gaeth, 1988; Wansink *et al.*, 2000; Mukherjee, 2015; or Nenkov, *et al.*, 2018). In this line, the sense of

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<sup>2</sup> However, Professor Kikunae Ikeda of the Imperial University of Tokyo identified an appreciable fifth taste in asparagus, tomatoes, cheese and meat, and called it umami, which means "tasty" (Manzano *et al.*, 2012 p. 160).

<sup>3</sup> The flavors of drinks are very influenced by their color. Fruit juices carry dyes to enhance the association with their flavor, and the vast majority of colas are brown by a dye. However, there is a trademark in Peru, *Inca Cola*, much more natural than the big brands, whose color, not using dyes, is intense yellow and fluorine.

taste, in addition, can be worked not only through direct contact of the product with the consumer but also through the suggestion, that is, through an appropriate visual presentation and text. For this, taste must be harmoniously combined with the rest of the senses. In this sense, the research of Krishna, Cian and Sokolova stands out, who demonstrated that, when an advertising piece about food referred to the rest of the senses in addition to taste, the product was perceived as tastier (2016, p. 144).

The relationship between certain flavors and sensations is usually also a matter of popular knowledge, such as the direct union between chocolate and pleasure, for example. These known relationships can be used in other types of non-gastronomic products or establishments not directly related to the hotel and catering industry.

### **3.3. The sense of smell**

An odor causes many emotions, and, in addition, we are faced with the sense that has a more direct connection with memory (Krishna, 2012). However, olfactory marketing is a very new tool, but it has aroused a lot of interest throughout the world for the capture of various aromas in order to leave memories in the final consumer. One of the pioneers in applying olfactory marketing was Walt Disney, who impregnated his amusement park with a scent of freshly made popcorn (which resulted in a sharp increase in the sale of popcorn in Disneyland's street kiosks and trolleys). In fact, olfactory marketing in food establishments is key. Recent research has shown, for example, that prolonged exposure to the smell of a food processed in the establishment leads to a minor purchase of that type of food (Biswas and Szocs, 2019).

As stated by Gulas and Bloch (1995), Vroon (1999) or Bushdid *et al.* (2016), smell plays an important role in brand recognition, as well as hearing and sight, since through the brain a physical link is created between the olfactory system and the limbic system of the brain, which can produce a strong pleasure (Toller and Dodd, 2013). In olfactory marketing, two qualities of aromas come into play to evaluate their use: pleasure and congruence. Pleasure gathers the intrinsic experience of the odor, while congruence connects the odor with the context: store, product or brand.

Several studies, such as those by Gulas and Bloch (1995) or Gómez (2012), highlight the following qualities in odors: the affective quality of the odor, the stimulating character and the intensity. As for the first, pleasure is responsible for the odors to be pleasant or unpleasant. In turn, pleasantness (or not) is marked by the tone, the essence of the aroma, the intensity, the degree of concentration and familiarity. On the other hand, the stimulating character refers to whether the odors arouse a physiological response. And the intensity points to whether the odor is strong or soft. This was demonstrated in a recent study Bushdid *et al.* (2016).

Taking advantage of the abilities offered by smell, there is ongoing work on the creation of effective odotypes<sup>4</sup> capable of transmitting aromas. Thus, in line with the contributions of Biswas & Szocs (2019), the objective generated by all this aroma marketing is that emotional contact with the consumer can be achieved so that he remembers the brand and identifies himself with it.

If we look at the data provided by the Toller & Dodd study (2013), we can affirm that in all fragrances there are three phases of olfactory perception. In the *base*, the base notes reaffirm the identity of the perfume and grant its character. It is the base of the perfume and these notes are perceived after two hours. It is usually related to dark colors and grave musical notes. On the *top* are the output notes: it is the first impression of the perfume when it is sprayed. The output of a fragrance is formed by the most volatile components. It usually does not last more than fifteen minutes and begins to be perceived within 30 seconds of the application of the fragrance. This first perception is very important when choosing a fragrance, since, in an almost instantaneous way, the perfume pleases or is unpleasant. The output notes are usually related to light colors and high-pitched musical notes. And, in the *central zone*, there are heart notes. This area has the main ingredients of the fragrance and determines the real spirit of the perfume, constituting its personality. The aroma is appreciated minutes after application and can last up to four hours. It is usually related to intense colors and medium-pitched musical notes. It is endorsed in texts such as those provided by Jiménez-Marín and Elías (2018).

### 3.4. The sense of touch

The haptic sense (of touch) comprises the perception of mechanical stimuli (application of a force on a surface) that include contact, pressure and bumping on the skin. Under the skin there are a series of nerve endings that cause stimuli through the dermis to be interpreted in various ways by the human brain, since, in line with the statements of Peck, Barger & Webb (2013), each nerve end is a different experience that can be reflected in marketing. Thus, and although touch is one of the senses that is least taken into account due to its difficulty of implementation, it is also true that it plays a fundamental role in purchasing decisions: it acts as a bridge to action when a customer is motivated to make the purchase (Petit, Velasco & Spence, 2019). Because haptic perception relies on the forces experienced during contact and can be used to appreciate the final qualities of a product or to make the potential customer interact with the product itself. That direct contact that the client has with the product also implies an enhancement of the feeling of ownership (Peck, Barger and Webb, 2013; Shu and Peck, 2011; Peck and Shu, 2009), which is directly related to the concept of *Me Selling Proposition* (MSP) mentioned above.

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<sup>4</sup> An odotype is the odor that identifies and characterizes an establishment or specific brand, designed to evoke and provoke mental items to be considered for sensory marketing such as: Sensations, perceptions, emotions, feelings, thoughts or performances whenever it is perceived by the target.

Despite its difficulty of implementation and its dependence on the type of product and establishment, the sense of touch has proven to be decisive when evaluating even online experiences, where consumers have felt closer to the product through a touch screen than by using the mouse (cf. Petit, Velasco and Spence, 2019, p. 49).

### 3.5. Sight

Sight is a brain function that transforms the information impregnated in the retina into images. It allows the human being to interpret the information received, connecting it with other sensory systems such as memory. Thus, together with other senses such as the ear, sight can move the consumer to external contexts with which the product relates, even enabling moral judgments, as demonstrated by Nenkov *et al.* (2019).

Sight is the sense that sells the most. In fact, the discipline of visual merchandising arises to enhance the visible elements of the commercial establishment. In this sense, we can affirm that 90% of the information that our brain perceives is visual, the visual characteristics, in a large number of cases, being responsible for the final sales. Thus, as Santos (2013) states, color is the main attribute of the recognition of a brand for 80% of consumers and it is, in 85% of customers, the trigger in the purchase decision. In addition, in the same way that some foods are associated with certain sensations, or music with moods, there is a wide range of meanings attributed to color in Western culture<sup>5</sup> (yellow and joy, red and passion, green and nature...), which can be implanted in the product and the establishment to raise certain feelings.

The options offered by the fact of addressing the consumer's sense of sight are almost endless and, undoubtedly, the most exploited at the point of sale as compared to the rest of the senses. The setting of the establishment is perceived at first through the sense of sight, and then completed by the ear, smell and touch. Thus, working with shapes and colors in line with the brand image involves studying the ways to excite or impact the consumer from the sight. In this sense, the possibilities offered by the use of art in the establishment stand out, affecting purchase behavior through sight (Bellido-Pérez, 2017).

## 4. APPLICATION OF SENSORY MARKETING: BENEFITS, LIMITS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

With the boom of new technologies, the possibilities to make marketing actions in the company more effective every day are greater, and therefore the perfect action is constantly sought, the one that takes the company to a next level. Martin Lindstrom (2012) points out that consumers have become immune to the stimuli of traditional advertising, and that is why it is necessary to use neuroscience to create new marketing strategies.

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<sup>5</sup> Differences in meanings around the same color in different countries of the world must be taken into account (cf. Aslsm, 2006).

Thanks to their knowledge of consumers, companies can motivate them to buy certain items through sensory stimuli. However, as Lindstrom points out, there are ethical limits (2012). Some of those limits have been reviewed by Stanton, Sinnott-Armstrong and Huettel, who reflect on the widespread fear that neuromarketing can predict all consumer behaviors, something that could not occur (2017, p. 803), or, even more, the fear that neuromarketing can influence buying behavior (2017, pp. 803-804). The same authors also point out the benefits of this science, such as the understanding of the needs of the consumer, the treatment of addiction or the perfection of public health campaigns (2017, p. 809).

In this sense, the Dirección General de Tráfico (DGT), for example, with its campaign *You choose*, intends to place the viewer in the role of the one who suffers an accident at the wheel due to a dismissal or an infraction. Thus, through virtual reality equipment consisting of glasses and headphones, the user puts himself in the shoes of a driver in three similar scenes, but with different outcomes, which are projected successively. "Shocking", "it is very real", "when they put the blanket over you they make your hair stand on end" or "this initiative aims to convey the drama and hardness of the very serious consequences that bad practices can have behind the wheel", are some of the comments that the organization itself claims to have received as responses after exposure to this campaign (Ramiro, 2017).

Knowing, then, the force that the stimulus of the senses has on the consumer, counterproductive effects can also occur. As authors such as Hernández (2005), Gómez-Ramírez (2012) or, more recently, Nenkov *et al.* (2018) stated, a simple change in the color or taste of food, the appearance of a strange odor or a texture different from the usual one are variations of a product that could be detected by the consumer and cause them to decrease their acceptance or to reject the product. In this sense, we can affirm that consumers are aware that the products have, in addition to their technical or intrinsic characteristics, certain sensory characteristics that imply fundamental aspects of them. Thus, in recent years, sensory quality is having an increasing influence on product marketing, so that many food and personal care products are differentiated by their sensory characteristics, and they are the ones that largely determine whether the product is bought again (Ferrada, 2013). This entails the inclusion of the sensory characteristics in the product specifications with the aim of making the sensory quality maintained in all products alike and throughout the life of the product, as other physicochemical and nutritional parameters are kept.

#### **4.1. Mental items to be considered for sensory marketing**

To properly manage the conception of the marketing strategy through sensory marketing, the five mental and brain items that exist before the purchase and during

consumption should be identified, in order to choose the one that suits the business objective (Jiménez-Marín, 2016):

1. *Sensations or perception.* It is about satisfying the consumer through the senses, creating experiences through sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. It is important to define very well how this sensory impact is going to be generated and it must be clearly differentiated from the competitors to achieve that exceptional motivation by adding value to the brand, product or service.
2. *Emotions and feelings.* In this case, the emotions and feelings of current and potential consumers should be appealed during the process of selling and using the product. Belonging, joy or pride are some of the feelings that link positively and emotionally with brands, so you should know the buyer very well to choose a path that generates empathy through the right stimuli.
3. *Thoughts.* At this point, creative and positive thinking towards the product must be reinforced, creating cognitive experiences that solve problems and attract customers. Surprise, intrigue, doubt and provocation will arouse interest and creativity in its use.
4. *Action-Performances.* It focuses on generating experiences related to lifestyles, behaviors, bodily and interpersonal actions that enrich the life of the target, teaching him different alternatives to do the same actions. A clear example is the models, such as celebrities, athletes or actors.
5. *Relationship.* Generally, this last item contains the aforementioned modules such as sensations, feelings, thoughts and actions. Relationships involve group experiences that generate a network where company values are recreated<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.2. Sensory Quality Control Program

In order to maintain the sensory quality necessary to achieve the objectives, it is mandatory to implement a quality control program from the sensory point of view. This program, based on the study of Hernández (2005), entails: (1) the establishment of specifications, (2) the selection of a sensory method for evaluating compliance with these specifications, and (3) a sampling program.

As for the necessary resources, a qualified staff responsible for sensory analysis is required first. They are professionals who select the type of sensory test necessary and who advise on the sensory quality control of products. Next, the most appropriate type of sensory test must be selected by combining criteria for obtaining the maximum critical information and at the lowest economic cost. Then, we must have a physical space to evaluate the samples. This tasting room should be comfortable and quiet, free of noise and odors and well lit. And, lastly, a measurement team meets together at the sensory level (panel of tasters). Thus, a group of people with certain sensory abilities and availability to carry out the controls must be selected. The tasters get to obtain a

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<sup>6</sup> For complete information on this idea, see the work of Fernández and Gordillo (2015).

valid precision or reproducibility for fast and effective decision making in quality control. At first, they are usually influenced by their personal tastes and opinions, but quality control is achieved thanks to training, the correct choice of the sensory test and its tuning under standardized conditions.

#### 4.3. Neuromarketing measurement techniques applied to sensory marketing

That marketing began to go hand in hand with science involved an in-depth study of the branch of market research that uses biometric measurement systems. This is essential in any quality control of correct and objective sensory marketing techniques. Proof of their relevance are the more than 200 companies worldwide dedicated exclusively to the development of these techniques for their post-marketing application (Plassmann, Ramsay and Milosavljevic, 2012). These measurement techniques in neuromarketing are the following (Monge and Fernández, 2011; Stanton, Sinnott-Armstrong and Huettel, 2017):

- *Electroencephalography*. It is one of the most widely used electrodiagnostic techniques in medical practice and in neuromarketing consulting companies. It consists of the recording of the electrical activity of the brain by means of electrodes applied to the scalp. These electrodes are placed on the areas corresponding to the different areas of the brain to detect and record patterns of electrical activity and verify the presence of anomalies, disruptions or effects after the application of sensory tactics. It is not satisfied with the verbal statements of the subjects but aims to go further, unraveling the effect of the unconscious and emotions in decision making. However, electroencephalography “has a very limited spatial resolution (depending on the number of electrodes, from two to several hundred) and does not offer data on the internal parts of the brain” (Monge and Fernández, 2011, p. 23).
- *Magnetic resonance imaging*. The studies with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) use a large magnet and radio waves to observe organs and structures that are inside the body. Health professionals use these images to diagnose a variety of conditions, from ligament ruptures to tumors. Magnetic resonance imaging is very useful for examining the brain and spinal cord. In sensory marketing, magnetic resonances are used to, again, observe behavioral anomalies of individuals after the application of odors, flavors or sounds, among others.
- *Galvanic skin response*. Galvanic response measurement techniques are also used in neuromarketing as another indicator of the subject's status while undergoing stimuli (usually advertising). Since the increase in skin conductivity represents an activation of the “fight or flee” system of the organism, skin conductance is an excellent measure of activation/stimulation. However, it does not offer information on the direction or valence of the emotion (if it is positive or negative). Therefore, you can usually use the galvanic response to know that

there is an emotional activation but other techniques are necessary to determine if it is desire, fear, anger...

- *Eye tracking*. It is the process of correctly and objectively evaluating the point where the gaze is fixed, or the movement of the eye in relation to the head. This process is used in research in visual systems, in psychology, in cognitive linguistics and in product design. Also in the development of web architecture of online stores. There are various systems to determine eye movement. The most popular variant uses video images from which the eye position is extracted; other methods use search coils or are based on electrooculograms. This technique needs to be combined with others such as electroencephalography, “to know exactly what is causing the brain reactions” (Monge and Fernández, 2011, p. 25).
- *Heart rate*. Heartbeat is usually measured in terms of time between beats and it has been found that short-term decelerations are usually related to increased attention, while longer-term accelerations usually correspond to the negative emotional arousal (defensive response)<sup>7</sup>.

## 5. THE CONSUMER AT THE POINT OF SALE: HOW TO POWER THEIR SENSES AND EMOTIONS

### 5.1. The Attention-Interest-Desire-Action process according to sensory guidelines

The most widespread learning model in the buying behavior of a consumer is a recurring theme in advertising effectiveness (Sánchez, 1999; Martí, 2012). Thus, the models AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) or AMBER (Attention-Motivation-Brand Engagement-Response) reflects the various stages through which the human being passes when his attention is focused on a product (or a brand) and finally gets to buy it (or not). With the *attention* variable, we try to attract the attention of the potential client, capture it through one of the five senses to try to stimulate the next variable, the *interest* in the brand product. Attention is attracted, for example, by attacking the sense of smell through the perfume of an establishment, through a visual and creative showcase or through a tasting. If it is possible to create that interest in the product or brand, this moment should be used to explain the benefits offered by said product or brand. Thus, it is about activating in the brain the sensory part that allows the potential client to want to know more. Touching the product, for example, can be a true reflection of that interest. To move on to the next item, *desire*, what is intended is that the customer wants the product over another, whether substitute or not, of the competition or not. The moment the attention of the potential client is attracted is when it is necessary to persuade (or convince) him that the product is “his product”. If, with these three

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<sup>7</sup> It is a hypothetically-based term that describes the processes controlling alert, wakefulness and brain activation to certain stimuli.

variables, the foundations have been laid, the potential customer will be predisposed for a purchase *action*.

In this induced individual psychological process, sensations, perceptions and emotions play a great role. Throughout the tour, if it has been possible to make the client feel, get excited and enjoy, an immediate sale action will have been achieved.

## 5.2. The consumer faced with sensory stimuli

In the first place, the terms stimulus, sense, sensation and perception must be distinguished, as already indicated by Castanyol (2014). Because, let us differentiate: A stimulus is any kind of energy that can be responded to; A sense is a particular physiological path by which one can respond to a specific type of energy; and, for its part, the sensation is the feeling that is experienced in response to the information received through our sensory organs. Thus, perception is the way in which our organism organizes those feelings to interpret them, that is, it is the recognition of objects that come from combining sensations with the memory of previous sensory experiences.

In line with this, it is also interesting to know the concept of absolute threshold which, to Valenti & Riviere (2008) is the smallest intensity of a stimulus that can be perceived. Thus, studies like those by Schiffman and Kanuk (2005), Hulten (2011) or Haase & Wiedmann (2018) have shown that, under ideal conditions, the human senses are able to perceive stimuli as subtle as the equivalent ones estimated life real. The expression "under ideal conditions" is already significant that the sensitivity of our senses depends on the background level of the stimulation. On the other hand, the differential threshold is the smallest difference in intensity required so that a difference can be perceived between two stimuli. This relationship between the original stimulus and any increase or decrease is known as Weber's law (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2005), who was the first to notice that the greater the stimulus, the greater the change so that it can be perceived.

At this point, we can talk about the different sensations and experiences that a consumer can have at the points of sale. That is, how the consumer reacts to sensory stimuli through (Braidot, 2014):

- *Adaptation*. Sometimes you are not aware of certain variations in the stimuli because you have undergone an adaptation to them. The consumer's mind has become accustomed to a certain level of stimulation and no longer responds to it consciously. To adapt, therefore, is to decrease the response levels of sensory receptors undergoing continuous stimulation.
- *Attention*. When living surrounded by stimuli, a person cannot perceive all of them at once. But if you focus on one of them in particular, it goes to the

foreground of your consciousness. Occasionally, stimuli are difficult to ignore, thus causing a Stroop effect<sup>8</sup>.

- *Sensory systems.* The sensory system is part of the nervous system and responsible for processing the information that is captured through the various senses. It consists of sensory receptors and parts of the brain involved in sensory reception. The main sensory systems are the five senses, but they are not the only ones. Other senses come into play such as the vestibular, responsible for warning us if we go up or down, the proprioceptive, which notes the position of the limbs, the cenesthetic, responsible for muscle tension and balance, or the interoceptive, which gives information about internal organs.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In short, we can contribute that, converting the act of purchase into a pleasant experience and provoking a positive and lasting memory in the consumer is possible thanks to the concepts that have been detailed in this text. The truth is that all businesses try to win customers through sight, hearing, etc., but there are few that exploit or can exploit other techniques that, although they do not replace others, can complement them and thus create in the customers' subconscious an environment conducive to consumption. In this line, we can affirm that, to be successful, marketing should cover all the senses. The view through the logo, product design, color, font...; that of the ear through the type of music or the sound of the product; that of taste through the taste of the product, gifts or edible gifts; that of the smell with an environmental fragrance or with the aroma of the product; and that of touch through the surface and shape of the product, marketing materials or environmental surfaces.

In a world where an average of 2,500 advertising impacts are received per day, of which only 1% achieves its objective (Ferrada, 2013), it is necessary to include new strategies making it possible to capture the attention and heart of the buyer and uniting him to our brand. Companies rely on traditional marketing mix strategies, based on the generation of reactions in potential customers through the influence of the 4p's of the marketing mix (*product, price, place, promotion*). Since this combination aims to capture the attention of customers, it is no coincidence that the new tools used to build loyalty are oriented towards the emotions and senses of the buyer, since 95% of purchase decisions are made unconsciously and, in most cases, decisions are made from the emotional side and justified from the rational side (Cruz, 2012).

Thus, as a result of our experience, we can contribute a series of aspects to cultivate the sensory experience:

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<sup>8</sup> The *Stroop* effect is a semantic interference in the processing and reaction time of a particular task. The best known example is to write a word like 'blue' in red ink. With this situation, there is a delay in the processing of the color of the word, which increases the reaction time to the stimulus.

- At the visual level, you can work on the arrangement, setting, hierarchy and lighting. Management is essential, since a disorderly establishment sells 5% less (Popai, 2016). The setting, meanwhile, must be consistent with its positioning: upon entering, the customer has to understand the store immediately by making a visual tour. The space, in addition, must be hierarchized so that the customer is not lost at the store. An optimal hierarchy is that which starts from the creation of scenarios, product families, identifying colors, and products from more rotation to less rotation. Regarding lighting, it is vitally important to have the store very well lit, especially if they are deep stores. The client does not have to feel that he is locked or in a dark place, since it produces rejection.
- At the sound level, the music must be according to the product and the target audience, and sound setting must be modified according to the time of day and depending on the day of the week, as well as different seasons.
- At the olfactory level, it is advisable to have a scented environment. Numerous studies guarantee that the application of olfactory marketing in shops increases sales considerably. The reactions caused by the use of olfactory marketing techniques have a scientific explanation directly linked to the functioning of our brain. However, there are few establishments that use this technique consciously.
- At the haptic level, it is recommended that clients be allowed to touch the products and test their use, as well as to play with textures and materials in the architecture of the establishment, which can help attract attention.
- Lastly, at the taste level, it is advisable to taste the gastronomic or culinary products and also enhance their odors. Although here we refer to the sense of taste, the truth is that taste buds are also activated by the sense of smell.

In conclusion, just as Hultén proposed his “*multi-sensory brand-experience concept*” (2011), that is, an interactive brand that integrates the experience of all senses and did so through sensory marketing, we propose, in the same line, a multi-sensory establishment, which makes the customer's shopping experience a unique and vital experience. The potential of sensory marketing is unquestionable, whether applied to a specific product, a brand or an establishment. The ways of contact the consumer has in advance, that is, the five senses, suppose immediate paths to reach the emotion and, therefore, remain in the memory of the client. A person apprehends the world through the senses, and it is in the harmonious and pleasant combination of all of them where unforgettable experiences are built. Recreating specific environments or situations, such as a trip to India or a family Christmas dinner, is relatively simple by working with certain odors, melodies, flavors, textures and colors, thus facilitating the direct association of a product, brand or establishment to a certain environment. But there are also infinite sensory combinations to create new experiences, to develop new conceptions that light up in the mind of the consumer. Creating and implementing an appropriate sensory marketing strategy is, in short, the key to access memories.

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