A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR SENSORIAL MARKETING

In this paper, we look to the future of sensorial marketing which aims to seduce consumers by designing and delivering pleasurable and memorable sensory experiences. We outline a research agenda for marketing theorists and other professionals interested in the influence of the senses on consumers’ responses to various elements of the marketing mix. This research agenda includes three interrelated components: (1) mapping the sensory experience, (2) communicating the sensory experience, and (3) understanding consumer characteristics that impact the sensory experience. We discuss emerging research that can inform future inquiries in these areas, and identify research questions related to each component.

First, we address the need for research describing the content, structure, and unfolding of sensory experiences associated with consumption behavior. More than a simple naming or labeling exercise, descriptive research could produce a richer understanding of the phenomenology of sensory experiences, including the language describing them. We believe this to be an essential step toward the development of appropriate measurement scales and tools to assess not only the intensity of sensory experiences, but also the nature of the experience itself. Further, such research could shed light on the gestalt of sensory experiences and thus assist in the nascent dialog between neuroscience and marketing. Furthermore, we propose that there is a need for experimental studies linking objective sensory cues to subjective consumer experience. As there is an alarming lack of research on the interaction of sensory modalities, we highlight the importance of exploring interference and enhancement effects caused by combination of sensory factors in a peripheral sense (e.g., in retail atmospherics) and as central aspects of consumption (e.g., visual and taste experiences related to food consumption).

We then address the challenges marketers face when they wish to communicate sensory experience. This is an especially salient problem for internet marketers who are at a loss when attempting to convey olfactory, taste, and tactile information. We propose that in order to grasp the different means by which sensory experience can be communicated to consumers, it is crucial for sensory marketers to understand how sensory experience is acquired.

Finally, we discuss some consumer characteristics that are of importance to the investigation of sensory experience. These include cultural and sex differences, differences in consumer knowledge, and other individual difference variables. We highlight the need for the development of reliable and comprehensive segmentation approaches, resulting in hedonic profiles useful for market segmentation and targeting.