

Chapter 29

Multisensory Brand Experiences and Brand Love: Myth or Reality?

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author examines the most important research in the field of sensory marketing, brand equity and brand love, that has been published over the past thirty years. Firstly, the author accounts for the significance of the five senses and sensory marketing which is regarded as a new marketing paradigm for the 21st century. Secondly, brand equity is discussed as a multidimensional concept, highlighting the pivotal role of emotional and sensory associations in creating a positive brand image and strong brand equity. Thirdly, brand love is analysed as an emerging brand-relationship concept in the field of experiential consumption. Fourthly, the significance of multisensory brand experiences is discussed as a means of making brands stand out in a competitive environment and inducing feelings of love towards a brand. Finally, brand sensoriality is pointed out as central to conveying experiential brand values through multisensory brand experiences, in several encounters.

INTRODUCTION

Many of the world's top 100 brands, such as Coca Cola, Apple, Starbucks, L'Oreal, Mercedes, among others, describe themselves as highly experiential, and advocate that brand experiences are important means of engaging consumers emotionally. Collectively, these brands invest millions of euros developing appealing and unique products, services, marketing campaigns and retail spaces to project themselves as brands that continuously stimulate consumer senses and add value to their daily lives.

Consumers interact daily with thousands of products and services in their lives, but very few “fall in love” with a small subset of brands. Indeed, brand love might predict consumer willingness to make financial sacrifices (e.g. pay a premium price) and their commitment to a specific brand (e.g. brand loyalty). Moreover, brand love plays a pivotal role in positive word-of-mouth, since passionate consumers

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9282-2.ch029

tend to become brand advocates and gather in brand communities. Indeed, brand love facilitates social relationships, since it is closely related to a sense of social belongingness resulting from brand experiences when consumers seek pleasure from brand consumption.

Nevertheless, a question remains from both theoretical and managerial points of view. What mechanisms are able to turn an ordinary brand into a loved one? How can brands keep this feeling alive in the long run?

Multisensory brand experiences and brand love have been a focus of branding theory over the last two decades. Emotional and sensory branding have prompted both marketing practitioners and academics to seek innovative ways to go beyond the expectations of great *performance* in relation to products and services, and meet consumer needs for multisensory gratification, any time brands interact with consumers. Taking into account its potential, brands have realized that they need to be re-engineered and infused with unique and appealing experiential attributes, so that they are able to co-create and manage compelling multisensory brand experiences.

At this stage, there is no doubt that the myth is becoming a reality, and brands which have successfully developed a strong brand sensoriality, are already converting their stakeholders into brand lovers, and the companies in question are gaining market share and increasing their profits. As shown by a pioneering study conducted in the USA, surveying 20,000 consumers on a weekly basis, company performance is closely linked to brand love, and that brand love is an indicator of superior company performance (Barker et al., 2015).

In this chapter, the author examines the most important research in sensory marketing, brand equity and brand love, that has been published over the past thirty years. Firstly, the author accounts for the significance of the five senses and sensory marketing, a new marketing paradigm for the 21st century. Secondly, brand equity is discussed as a multidimensional concept, highlighting the pivotal role of emotional and sensory associations originated by multisensory experiences in creating a positive brand image and strong brand equity. Thirdly, brand love is analyzed as an emerging brand-relationship concept in the field of experiential consumption. Fourthly, the significance of multisensory brand experiences is discussed as a means of making brands stand out in a competitive environment and inducing feelings of love towards a brand.

Finally, brand sensoriality as a concept is defined for the very first time in branding literature. Additionally, it is pointed out as central to conveying experiential brand value through multisensory brand experiences, in several encounters with consumers, and a gateway to turn an ordinary brand into a loved one.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FIVE SENSES AND SENSORY MARKETING

Over the last few decades, marketing has evolved dramatically from an essentially transactional to an experiential approach, in which multisensory brand experiences have started to play an important role in the value-generating process (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2011). Nowadays, brands are highly similar in functional terms and, therefore, functional values have become less sustainable as a form of differentiation (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Delgado-Ballester & Sabote, 2015). Moreover, consumers are aware and informed as never before and take for granted that brands should be trustful and maintain quality standards and functionality.

Nevertheless, consumers are eager for experiences that add value to their lives by bringing fun, amusement and fantasy (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) to the consumption and buying process. In other

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